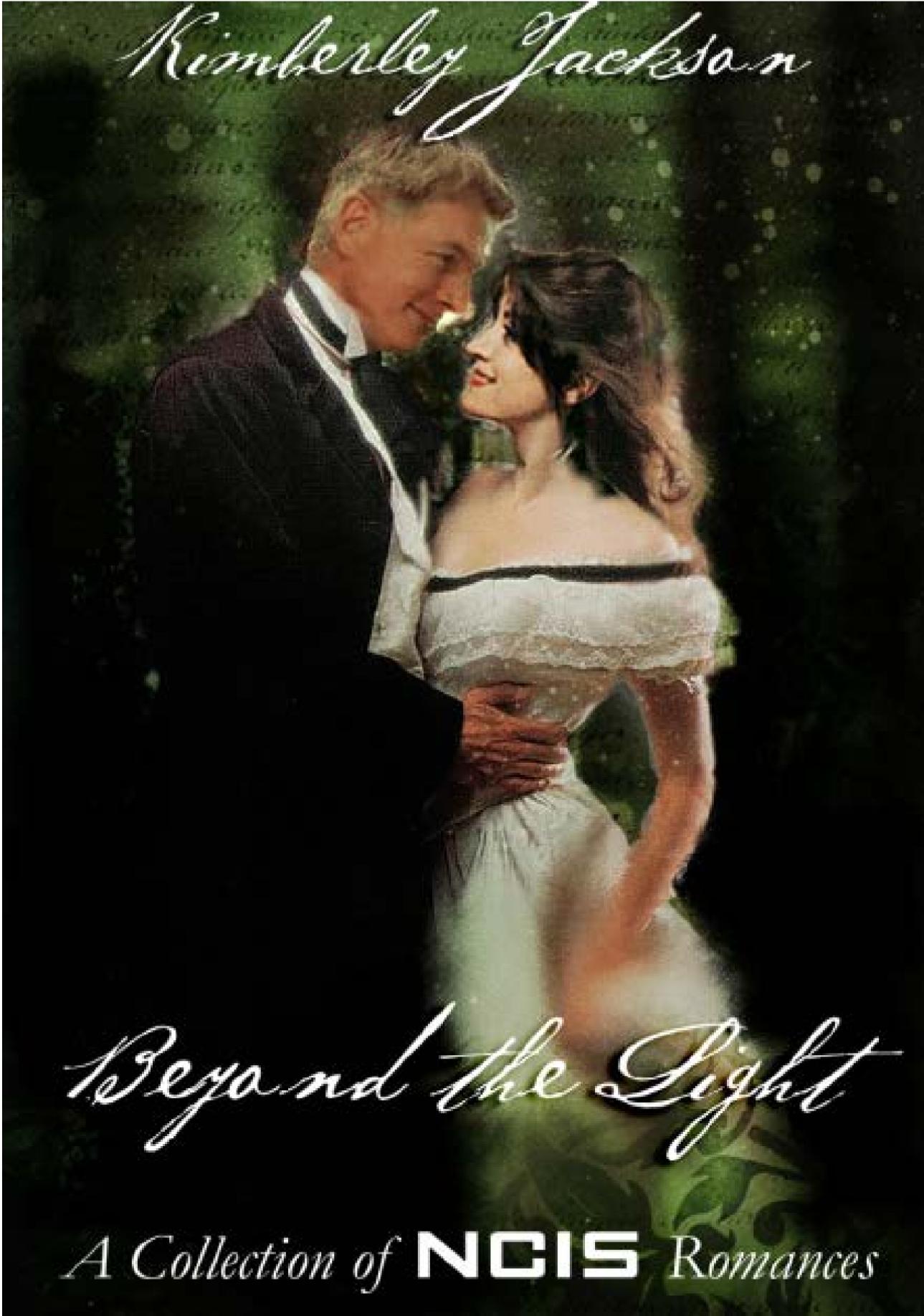


*Kimberley Jackson*



*Beyond the Light*

*A Collection of* **NCIS** *Romances*

*Kimberley Jackson*

## **BEYOND THE LIGHT**

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*A Collection of NCIS Romances*



[www.kimberley-jackson.com](http://www.kimberley-jackson.com)

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## Blue Skies

*Investigating a series of double murders brings Kate and Gibbs in fatal danger. Will the rest of the team be able to save them in time?*

Darkness... it destroys the human being's sense of time, their orientation in space and – eventually, if kept there long enough – it will destroy their spirit. Nothing is as frightening as darkness to us. Children fear the darkness, having nightmares of terrible monsters which crawl out in the shelter of the night. Even adults try to avoid darkness. The whole life has been organized around it, so that human beings have as little contact as possible with the threat of the night.

Kate had never cared whether it was day or night. Her job forced her to spend as much time in the daylight as at night at some crime scenes or in front of her personal computer, finished some report for her boss. She had never found anything particularly threatening in a dark room.

When she awoke now, that was totally different at once. She was lying on what felt like a cold stony floor. Somewhere in the complete darkness she could hear what seemed to be water dripping to the ground. Her mind was spinning and she had trouble to remember how she had gotten there – or who she was in the first place.

Carefully supporting herself on her hands, she tried to get up, her mind focused on not giving in to the dizziness in her head. Her lips tasted like dried blood and she carefully felt for injuries of her head. Fortunately, she found that her cheek was the only part of her body injured – set aside a few spots on her hip and her ribs that felt like bruises.

A little unsteady, she managed to carefully walk a few steps, her hands stretched out in front of her while she tried to feel for an exit or a door. All the while she still couldn't remember what had actually happened? How had she gotten there? Had she been on an investigation? If so, where?

She decided to use a technique which she had once learned when she had been with the secret service. Try to focus on the last memory you have, she told herself, suppressing the upcoming feeling of panic complete desertion in her stomach. Her last memory... yes, there it was...

~~~ Around 18 hours earlier ~~~

„80 percent of American women do deep inside wish for a male partner that is more dominant than they are and goes to earn money while they stay home and take care of the house and the family.“ Tony couldn't help but grinning widely when he read out those lines from the report of the latest issue of the FHM magazine.

Kate rolled her eyes, not looking away from her computer screen, where she was reviewing the report on the serial double murder cases they had been investigating the week before. „Tony, I don't think your porn magazines qualify as competent guides concerning women's wishes and thoughts,“ she dryly replied.

Tony held up the magazine, his look almost offended. „FHM does hardly qualify as porn magazine!“

„Oh please...“ Kate said, her eyes now turning from the screen to the man on the desk opposite to her. „Lots of barely dressed women and reports about how to improve you sexual techniques? What exactly is not porn magazine-ish about that?“

„It's not like it's just about that? They have interesting reports in here about... um... cars... politics. Katie-girl, you should really have a look before you judge it.“ He smiled at her in this typical Tony way where she could never know what to expect next.

„Not interested...” she replied, smiling back provocatively, „and instead of reading... whatever... you should probably start working on your report. If Gibbs arrives and finds out that you're not even half-finished he's going to kill you.“

He chuckled and leaned back in his chair relaxed. It was his way to provoke her and entice her into this kind of playful banter they always shared. He held the magazine up in front of his eyes, giving Kate a full view of the half-naked woman who was presenting herself in a very lascivious pose on the cover. „And a good amount of sixty percent of American women want their men to make important decisions. Interesting... Do you want to know about favorite sexual positions?“

„Please, spare me!“ she said with mock desperation, then louder, „Tony! The report!“

He sat up in a sudden move, throwing the magazine over onto her table. „You're right... maybe I should hand the magazine over to your trustworthy hands while I finish my report. You can read the interesting parts out loud for me, will you?“

Laughing ironically she grabbed for the magazine and turned it around. „Oh, Tony... Tony...” she remarked compassionately, while she looked at the sexy model that was stretching herself lewdly in front of the photographer. „You obviously have a pitiful private life if you need to look at this every week.“

„Not as pitiful as you think...” he leaned back again, his eyes resting on her, „...or as other members of this team. At least I do not spend my free time building on a boat which I won't even get out of my garage.“

„Yes, but I have never seen Gibbs reading one of these... I don't even know what to call them!“ she murmured, shaking her head while she read quickly over some of the so-called truths that were written there about members of her gender.

„Inspirations? Literary masterpieces? And Kate, I hate to disappoint you, but every man reads them – the more they deny, the more they have hidden under their bed.“ he smirked and folded his hands behind his head, his legs sitting on the surface of his desk.

Kate raised both her eyebrows, when she flipped through the next pages. „'Women tend to say no to whatever a man proposes when he addresses her for the first time'“, she recited, „'but what they actually mean is that they want the man to work harder to seduce them. Most women long for the sexual intercourse after their first date, so if they kiss you goodnight in front of their house, they actually want to you fight for them.' That's crap, Tony! I don't know any woman who says no when she means yes – at least not where dates are concerned! This...” she held up the magazine, „is what trains stalkers and rapists!“

Tony laughed. „Oh come on Katie! Don't tell me you never had a date and wished for sex afterwards, but kissed your flirt good-night because you thought it was inappropriate to sleep with him after just one date.“

„Well...” Kate started, recalling one or two incidents where exactly that had been the case. „But that's a totally different...”

„Ha...” Tony laughed triumphantly and jumped up on his feet. „That's exactly what they say. I bet, after a date with me you wouldn't deny...”

„Don't..." Kate interrupted him with a warning glance, „...even finish that sentence! It won't ever happen!" She shook her head in disbelief when she read over the more precarious facts about women's sexual wishes. „Every American woman has had fantasies about sleeping with a complete stranger and nearly half of them are willing to try out that fantasy, so all you need to do is go out to the streets and use that knowledge." She went on reciting the part about the most preferred sexual position and how fast a woman could reach an orgasm, a certain amusement mirroring in her voice.

Tony was half sitting on his desk, arms folded, listening to her recitations and amused comments, when suddenly, from the corner of his eyes, he saw the elevator door open. The figure of their boss with the obligatory cup of fresh coffee in his hand could not be overseen.

Tony stood up slowly and straightened out, hissing „Kate" over to the woman, who was still performing a lecture on successfully bringing a woman to orgasm. She shushed him with a sign of her hand, believing that he wanted to make another provocative remark.

Agent Jethro Gibbs walked through the large room, greeting one of the agents that passed him by and took a sip of his coffee. It was already his second cup today, but somehow the caffeine didn't seem to take the desired effect.

When he approached the desks of his team, he heard Kate's voice and slowed down. His eyes went from the highly illustrated magazine she was reading to Tony's face, that had lost two shades of color.

The younger agent cleared his throat significantly, then shrugged at his boss, sitting down on his desk again and pretending to work intensely on the still unfinished report.

Kate was oblivious to her boss who was standing right behind her, and looked at Tony. „The 30-seconds-way to bring a woman to climax? I must have been sleeping with the wrong men..." Then she noticed the way Tony amused himself, intensely staring at his computer screen, and the realization dawned on her.

She paled. „Good morning, Gibbs?"

„Agent Todd, I hope those kind of magazines are not the only literature you occupy yourself with in your spare time! I am still awaiting your report." Gibbs remarked sharply.

Kate shut the magazine and put it on her desk. „It's Tony's... he was just... and then I..." she started, feeling a blush starting to cover her cheeks. She couldn't believe that she had read out the best ways to bring a woman to climax while her boss and mentor was standing behind her.

„I swear, I have never seen that magazine before, boss!" Tony held up his hands defensively. Slapping him on the back of his head while passing, Gibbs went to his own desk. „Well, at least not that issue..." Tony added, smiling apologetically at Kate, who had narrowed her eyes in a threatening gesture and was shaking her head in disbelief over his betrayal.

„I want to have those reports lying on my desk in an hour, Dinozzo." Gibbs reminded, the warning in his voice being more than obvious.

„Yes boss... of course..."

Kate observed as Tony focused his eyes back to his computer and started working on his report as if he was the most hard-working employee in the whole building. She threw the magazine back over onto his desk with an innocent smile, ignoring Tony's revengeful expression.

The object of discussion vanished under the table in one of his drawers and Gibbs had to force back an amused smile. When Kate had joined the team, he had feared that she, being the lady she was,

would not stand a chance against Tony, but he couldn't have been more wrong. She always found her ways to deal with his little jokes and games without really going down to his level.

She was a woman where intelligence and wittiness were paired with beauty and elegance, a combination very rarely found in women her age. She was attractive without even consciously wanting it. Yes, she was definitely different from all the other women he knew. It was a shame that she spent her evenings alone at home, just like he did.

But he was different. He had his experience – three ex-wives were more than enough. Besides his manner to be in control and his way to put his job over anything private would drive every close friend or possible flirt away.

But she was still young, she should be spending her spare time out in the company of a man who knew her worth and appreciated her humor and intelligence.

In many ways Kate and he seemed to think alike – to feel alike.

Gibbs looked up at the brunette woman, who had resumed reviewing her part of the report. Sometimes he tried to convince himself, that every man in his age felt attracted to younger women. His eyes quickly grazed her slender figure, before he turned them back to the form he was filling out.

One of these days he should read over his own rules again. His scan of Kate was definitely a violation of rule number 12 – or in direction thereof. He needed to get these thoughts out of his head, but how could he when she was sitting right in front of him, practically having read him sex tips a few moments ago?

„Kate!“ he barked, not looking up. „Go down to Abby and bring me the results of the DNA test she performed last week on the victims of our psychopath. I need them for the archive.“

“But Gibbs, the report...” the woman started.

“That was not a request, Kate! Now!” His tone didn’t leave open any doubts that a discussion was absolutely out of the question. She got up, suppressing a sigh and ignoring the mocking faces Tony made.

“On my way...” With these words she hurried towards the doors of the elevator which would take her a few floors down to the laboratory of Abby, their punk analyst and computer expert.

*~~~ Around 18 hours later ~~~*

Abby... yes, Kate remembered now. After the stupid discussion with Tony and the embarrassing situation when Gibbs had walked in on them exchanged sexual advises, she had went down into Abby’s laboratory to get the report for his archive. Back then she had not been able to fight the feeling that for some reason Gibbs treated her harder than Tony.

He had been the one responsible for the situation and Gibbs knew. Being the clever man he was, Kate was sure of that, he had immediately seen through the facade of Tony’s faked innocence. Still, he had sent her to go down, not Tony.

She moaned when a wave of pain floated through her body, ending in her head. If she didn’t know better she would say that she had been under the influence of some drug. But how could that be?

She leaned against the cold wall she was standing at and tried to listen into the silence. Every now and then she believed to hear some kinds of vehicles passing by somewhere in the distance, but she wasn’t sure where she actually heard them or just imagined it in her still cloudy mind.

Aside from that she was surrounded by complete silence – and slowly becoming desperate. She had no idea where she was, nor how she had gotten there. Or if there were any other people around for that matter. Had she been investigating a case on her own? Was she a prisoner or had she fallen down somewhere and was lying somewhere under the earth?

That last option made her panic for a moment, for it might mean that no person on earth would ever find her. On the other hand, she didn't know whether the former option was any better.

She sank down to the ground against the wall, deciding to stay rested until the terrible headache vanished. Her mind got lost in the memories she was still able to recall.

Abby...

She had handed her the report of the DNA analysis and Kate had taken the document to Gibbs and continued to finish her report. The report...

There was some memory connected to it. A phone call... yes, there had been an important phone call connected with the case she was reporting about! She held on to that thought, focusing on putting her mind back into the situation in the MTAC...

*~~~ Around 15 hours earlier ~~~*

RIING.... RIING...

Kate sighed and looked over to Gibb's desk with a slightly annoyed expression in her face.

"Where is he? This constant ringing of his phone drives me nuts!" she eventually exclaimed, when the phone started to ring anew.

"I don't know... a chat with the director maybe." Tony replied and waved with his pen towards the phone. "Maybe you should answer it..."

Kate gave an ironic snort and shook her head. "No way, Dinozzo... you know what he will do if either of us dares to even touch his phone." They both looked at the black machine that disturbed the silence with another sound of its ringing. "You do it!" Kate decided and looked at Tony.

"Oh.. nonono... absolutely no!"

"Come on, you owe me anyway! And besides, Gibbs is mad at you all the time, so..." Kate reasoned and got up, slowly walking towards Tony's desk.

"And why would I owe you?" Tony asked, shooting her his casanova smile.

"Does FHM ring any bell?"

"Oh... that!" Dinozzo answered.

"Yes... THAT!"

"Come on, answering Gibb's phone is on a completely other level. He will kill me if I do that!" Tony simply stated and bend over the sheet he was scribbling on.

In a fast move, Kate took the pen out of his hand and Tony looked up with a threatening glare.

"Either Gibbs kills you... or I will!" she simply stated, giving him the choice between a rock and a hard place.

“Good point... and since Gibbs obviously is not here...” Tony nodded and got up in a smooth move, grinning at her smugly. “But just so that we’re clear, this time you will owe me!”

Kate raised her eyebrows ironically, and Tony turned and quickly walked over to Gibb’s desk. At that moment, the ringing stopped. Relieved, Tony gave a sigh and turned around to Kate.

“Thank God, it stopped all by itself!”

He had just crossed the distance back to his desk, when the phone started a whole new circle of rings. A loudly exclaimed “Damn it!” could be heard by the young agent. Kate crossed her arms and strolled over to Gibbs desk.

“Aren’t you curious at the least? Could be his girlfriend...” she mentioned in passing, casually trying to catch a glimpse at the display to identify the caller’s ID.

“And you’re going to answer it?” Tony asked almost panicked.

“I’m not stupid,” Kate smiled at him. “I just want to have a look at the caller ID.”

In the blink of an eye, Tony had jumped to her side, almost tripping over the cable of Gibb’s computer. “Why didn’t I think of that?” he murmured in some kind of joyful enthusiasm.

Expectantly, both agents bent over the phone, both eager to be the first to identify the caller – and both their faces reflected their disappointment when they saw the ID of the person calling.

“It’s Abby...” Tony stated, his voice clearly displaying his disappointment. “What a pity... well, I guess we can answer that one!” He grabbed for the receiver, but before he had even touched it, a voice thundered through the large room, coming from above.

“Touch it, Dinozzo, and you will have to live without your hands for the rest of your life!”

Tony jumped, realizing that Kate was already sitting back at her desk as if she was as innocent as an angel. Damned, payback was hell, he thought, when he saw the triumphant smile that she tried to hide while pretending to be busy writing something. He grinned apologetically at Gibbs, who stepped down the stairs slowly.

“Boss... it’s good you’re here... the phone didn’t stop ringing and... we figured... it might be something important and you would want us to...”

“Did I ask you to?” Gibb’s asked dangerously calm, not letting the younger agent finish his sentence, and Tony looked from him to Kate, who shook her head with a smile.

“No, he didn’t!” she lectured Tony, her sparkling eyes giving away her amusement.

“No, of course you didn’t. Sorry... boss...” Tony murmured, hurrying back to his desk humbly while Gibbs picked up the receiver.

“Special Agent Gibbs.”

“Gibbs, thank God you’re there! Where have you been? I’ve been trying to reach you for ten minutes...”

“Then you shouldn’t waste time and tell me what it is!” Gibbs stopped the babbling of his analyst and sat down, leaning back in his chair.

"You remember the case from last week? The one you sent Kate to get the form of earlier?" Abby started babbling excitedly. "Well, I was bored, and so, just for fun I made some random tests – you know, nothing weird... just some casual..."

"Abbs!" Gibbs rushed her, absolutely not in the mood right now for those kind of guessing games about what her techno language meant.

"Well, I was curious, so I tested every single piece that Ducky sent me... and while comparing the different blood samples, I found one that didn't match either of the victim's! It was hard to find, because it was all mixed up with the blood of the woman – you know, he practically cut her into pieces – but there was definitely a second type of blood mixed with hers. It was only very little, maybe from a finger cut. You know, those usual accident that happen in the household – you could say that it was pure chance that I found it at all..."

"Abby, what does it mean? English, please!" Gibbs snapped sharply.

"Well..." Abby babbled on hastily. "It took a while for me to extract the DNA of the unknown sample, but I did it. The interesting part is, that this second blood sample did not match the DNA of the sperm sample on the woman's body! I ran it through our database, but no match..." She stopped talking to allow him to fully understand the meaning of the information she had just given him. "Do you understand, Gibbs? Either we arrested the wrong guy or..."

"He has an accomplice..." Gibbs concluded. "Either way is bad! Thanks Abbs!" He placed the receiver back on the phone and jumped up. "Kate, Dinozzo, we have a problem! Dinozzo, get me the director on the phone! Kate, go to the archive and bring me the file from the murder case last week!"

Kate looked at him desperately. "But Gibbs, you told me to archive it down there just an hour ago!"

"And now I am telling you to get it back!" he replied impatiently, but then decided to give his agents a short summary of what he had learned from Abby. "We have a situation here – the man that we arrested as our serial murderer might not be guilty, or we are dealing with a team of two killers here. Abby found a second DNA which doesn't match any of the victim's."

Kate hurried towards the elevator and Dinozzo dialed the number of the director. With a deep sigh, Gibbs took a huge sip of his coffee, then realized that it was cold by now. This seemed to be one of these days where just everything had to go wrong.

*~~~ Around 15 hours later ~~~*

Kate rolled to her side on the cold stone floor, feeling the need to vomit in her stomach. The case of the serial double murders... yes, they had reopened it after Abby had found hints for a second psychopath.

The young woman moaned lifting herself up to her feet again. When she had steadied herself so that she could walk straightly, she stretched out her hands to feel her way along the wall, again starting to search for an exit. She had a bad feeling in her gut that she had not just had an accident.

Suddenly she could hear a sound... it was like the scratching sound of shoes on sand and stone. She turned her head towards the direction she thought the sound came from and tumbled towards it, bumping hardly against the opposite wall. She moaned in pain, but at the same time felt for something her arm had grazed while she had tried to protect herself from the impact with the wall.

It felt round and cold... like a doorknob. She moved her hands further over the material. Wood! It felt like damp wood. She laid one ear to what she concluded had to be a wooden door and listened into the silence.

No doubt... the sound she had heard earlier were steps... and as far as she interpreted, they seemed to come closer. A knot started to form in her stomach, and she moved backwards away from the door when all her memories of the past few hours flashed on her. Everything... the area around Washington they had decided to investigate... and the old house, the last one on their list...

*~~~ Around 8 hours earlier ~~~*

Special Agent Jethro Gibbs hadn't said a word during the whole drive. He had focused his eyes on the street in front of them, although here, outside of Washington on the small street of the countryside, there were barely any other cars. Kate flashed him a look from time to time, recognizing that look on his face. If there was anything that could enrage him, it was if he wasn't able to solve a case – or if a criminal managed to escape and he had no chance to prevent it.

She knew from experience, that those kind of incidents could turn his determination into something close to obsession. Sometimes she wondered if his three marriages had made him such a bitter man or if it was all the injustice and violence that he had witnessed over the years. He took his failures in his job way too personal. Maybe he should be getting a personal life, she thought – which reminded her of her own personal life, or rather, the absence of it.

Kate looked decently at the digital screen that displayed the time and sighed inwardly. Her shift was supposed to end in exactly five minutes. She could see another double shift coming, when she interpreted the determination to not give up until the case was solved in Gibbs's eyes correctly.

"Need to be anywhere, Agent Todd?" Gibbs asked in his usual tone where you didn't exactly know whether he was annoyed or not.

Of course, Kate thought. She should have known. Gibbs seemed to have eyes everywhere – even in the minds of his agents.

"No, not at all..." she said, looking out of the window and sighing. The sun had already set a few minutes ago and the darkness was starting to fall. "It would just be nice to... you know... have a normal evening every now and then."

"By normal you mean boring?" Gibbs asked, the bitter expression for a moment giving way to an amused smile. Kate leaned her head back and looked at him. Did he know that he should smile more often? It made his hard expression softer and more attractive.

Well, not that he wasn't attractive if he was not smiling, of course he was. Not that she in particular found him attractive, he was her boss after all – not to mention a considerably number of years older than she was. But for a man of his age...

She stopped thinking, wondering why she was justifying her opinion of him to herself. This was ridiculous. She returned his smile softly.

"Yes... boring. Watching TV-shows and lying on my sofa... boring would be a nice distraction every now and then though. With the schedule we have it's almost impossible to have something that comes close to a private life."

"Relationships are way overrated." Gibbs stated. "Take from the man with three ex-wives."

"Who says I was talking about relationships?" Kate asked. "I was just saying..."

"There it is!" Gibbs interrupted her, when the spotlight of his car hit the metal gate that surrounded the huge old manor.

"Spooky..." Kate murmured. "Reminds me of that Shirley Jackson novel 'Haunting of Hill House'."

Gibbs shot her a grin. "Well, then let's hope that the ghosts of this one will be more peaceful."

"Are you not afraid of anything?" Kate asked while they were getting out of the car. "I mean, this is exactly what people in horror movies do! It's dark and they hear a sound and instead of running, or calling for backup, they go in there and you know how they end up?"

"No," Gibbs answered while searching for a way to unlock the old gate.

"Dead! They all end up dead!" The woman shivered and looked around. The house itself was in a good condition, but if she considered the ivy that was ranking through the gate and along the house, she assumed that this house had been deserted for a long time. A few of the windows in the upper floors were broken and the garden looked like a jungle of trees and bushes.

"See, that's why I never watch movies," Gibbs stated, trying hard to loosen the rusty lever of the gate in order to open it. "Too pessimistic. Would you help me here?"

Kate sighed and walked over to him, giving him a hand with the lever. "Seriously, Gibbs! This house looks as if nobody has been here for ages. If we cannot open this gate, it means nobody has in a long time. Why don't we return here in the daylight?"

Gibbs looked at her. "Afraid of the dark, agent Todd?"

"Not of the dark, just of deserted houses in the darkness." She countered.

It gave a loud metal squeak when the gate finally opened. "Well, I promise you we will be out of here before it gets dark. We will just have a short look and afterwards return to the MTAC and see if Tony and Abby have had any luck."

Considering that the night was approaching noticeably quickly, Kate doubted that they would be leaving before it was completely dark, but she decided to pull herself together. She was special agent, and she didn't want to make a fool out of herself in front of her boss – especially not because of some childish fear that had been branded into her brain by the consummation of too many horror movies in her youth.

There was nothing special about this house, it was just like the others they had investigated earlier. Since they had been missing any new hint on who the second killer was, they had decided on closely investigating the area around Washington. One of the victims had had a special kind of sand under her toenails – most likely from an attempt to escape – that could only be found in this area around Washington. And since the victims had been held prisoner for some days, the place where the murders had been committed had to be a house that provided the necessary circumstances: a room to imprison people for several days, and isolation.

Nowadays, there were not many of those houses left, but especially at the East Coast, there were considerably many, originating from Colonial and Early Republic times.

The young woman examined the house again, from the beautiful colored windows under the roof to the beautiful wooden doors with the old doorknobs and figures on it and a shiver ran over her back. How anybody would voluntarily decide to live in a place like that was far beyond her understanding.

“Kate!” Gibbs had turned around and only now did Kate realize that he was waiting for her. “Do you want to spend the night standing there?”

She breathed in deeply and then hurried to follow the older agent through the high grass towards the old house, for a moment wishing she could be as rational as he was.

The wooden entrance door of the house opened unexpectedly easily, as if it had only recently been oiled. Signaling over at Kate to draw her weapon, Gibbs slowly entered the dark entrance hall, carefully releasing the safety catch of the weapon in his hands.

The last beams of daylight bathed the corridor in a dim, shadowy light. The house was decorated in an old fashioned Victorian style. Dozens of portraits of people who had been dead for a long time covered the walls, and on the ground was lying a heavy, dusty dark red carpet. It did indeed look as if this house was taken directly from a Hollywood horror movie.

Gibbs entered and Kate followed closely, focusing her mind on being absolutely professional. One little mistake or distraction could cost her partner’s or her own life in a situation like this.

“Is anyone here?” Gibbs yelled clearly into the silence, and the echo of his voice in the deserted halls sent goosebumps over Kate’s back. “We are federal agents!”

They listened for another two minutes into the darkness, slowly walking along the corridor and checking on the first rooms to both sides of the long hallway. But when there was neither a sign, nor a sound that indicated that anyone was here or had been here during the last months, Gibbs finally lowered his weapon. The furniture and windows were dust covered and he could even see his own footsteps on the ground through the dust.

“I think this is pointless. Obviously, this house has been empty for quite some time. We shouldn’t waste our time. Let’s go...”

“Thank God,” Kate exhaled, securing her weapon back in its holster. “Next time I get to pick the place for the evening walk.”

“Come on Katie, this place has its charms! Furniture from colonial times, ancient clocks and paintings. It must have been a nice place to live in, once.”

“Only if you like to live in a museum, Gibbs. These sculptures, for starters, scare the hell out of me!” She walked closer to the two small wooden faces that were carved into the pillars in the middle of the room.

Gibbs laughed and then turned. “Come on let’s go.” He left the room and looked at the portraits that he passed by while walking back to the exit door. Kate was right, he wouldn’t want to live here either. Walk through and look at, yes, but permanently see those paintings. Definitely not. Too pompous for his taste.

Kate, who had had a closer look at the angel’s faces, finally turned and found Gibbs gone.

“Hey, Gibbs, would you wait for me?” she exclaimed loudly and looked back one more time shivering, then hurrying to leave the room and follow her partner.

Suddenly, when she passed by the opened door of another room they had examined earlier, she felt herself grabbed and pulled into the dark shelter of the chamber, a wet cloth pressing to her mouth. Her shocked scream was muffled by the strong hand that was pressing the heavily scented material against her nose – a sickly sweet scent that turned her mind into a fuzzy cloud. She tried to fight, but felt her bones become weak and her head dizzy.

“Kate, are you coming?” she could hear Gibbs yell – it seemed to come from far away to her clouded mind. She tried to yell, to answer or stomp her foot – anything that would have made him aware of her situation, but she didn’t have the power nor could she feel her legs or arms anymore. And then she faded away.

*~~~ Around 8 hours later ~~~*

The steps became louder and louder, and Kate could tell that somebody was clearly coming in the direction of the room she was in. Think, she ordered herself hurriedly, going down on her knees and feeling for anything she could use as weapon.

She didn’t know what had happened after she had faded away, but she had to assume that she was still in the old house, and that the person who came closer and closer, was her attacker.

Gibbs, she thought briefly. Where was he? He had been right before her, he must have realized that something was wrong. But if he had been there, how could she have gotten in this room? Why hadn’t he prevented it? Unless...

No. She forced herself to calm down. There was no indication that anything had happened to Gibbs. Any assumption of that kind would not only be irrational, but also only serve to increase the feeling of panic in her stomach. He was probably already searching for her and would certainly find her. Maybe it was Gibbs who was coming towards the room...

Kate concentrated on the steps that approached. She could now see that there was a small space under the door, maybe one inch of height, through which an approaching light sent its weak beams. Then she could glimpse the shadows of two feet that were standing in front of the door. The sound of steps stopped.

Kate’s heart skipped a beat. There was no way that this was Gibbs, since he hadn’t called for her. How would Gibbs know that she was behind this door without calling to see from where her reaction was coming?

Hastily she looked around. The dim light that shone into the room allowed her to see a little bit of her surroundings, but to her utter desperation, the room was completely empty. There was nothing she could have used as a weapon.

She heard the metallic sound of a key being turned in the lock of her door and stood up on her feet, bracing herself to a possible attacker.

When the door opened, she had to close her eyes to the bright light that was shining directly into her eyes, blinding her.

“Look at that... the little lady is awake...” The male voice said, followed by an evil laughter. “Perfectly in time.”

Kate couldn’t see the man, nor his silhouette or anything else of him, but his voice mirrored everything that she needed to know. It was the mean voice of a psychopath with whom all reasonable talking was superfluous. The giggle that could be heard from him reflected his evil character and left no doubt, that he was a human being who didn’t react to pleas of mercy or cries of pain. Attack was the only choice she had.

And so she blindly stormed forward in direction of the light, intending to punch the man out with the weight of her body. She had had a few lessons in hand to hand combat when she had still been at the secret service, she reminded herself.

But she had not taken into consideration the still considerably high amount of sedative that was running through her bloodstream, and not only slowed her down, but also made her lose her balance and rather tumble against the man instead of knocking him down.

“Well, well...” he murmured, laughing madly, “my little girl still seems to be a little tired, isn’t she?”

He stroked her cheek and Kate blindly slapped for his arm, knocking the lamp out of his hand to the ground. That did at least serve to give her the possibility to see the face of her attacker, since the light of the lamp was not directed into her face anymore.

The man grabbed her hair and painfully pulled her head back. “Let me explain the rules to you, little bitch. You belong to me! And you will do what I want you to do! And what you did just now was a violation of those rules!”

“I don’t care for your rules,” Kate winced as he pulled harsher at her hair and forced her to her knees.

“Give me the lamp!” he ordered, and when she didn’t react instantly, he slapped her so hard that she fell to the ground. She whimpered in shock, holding her hurting cheek – but the shock of the physical violence she was confronted with also counteracted the remaining aftereffects of the drug she had been on.

“Get up,” the man yelled at her and Kate fought to regain her balance. Tears were starting to form in her eyes. What had happened? Why hadn’t Gibbs come to search for her? Focus, she told herself. She had been trained to control her emotions in situations like this. Focus on the reactions of the criminal, try to find out his weaknesses. What could she learn from his reactions? So far she could only tell that a slight misbehavior on her part enraged him to a violent amount, a fact that made him extremely dangerous.

When she couldn’t get up right away, the man pulled her forcefully up to her feet, looking at her, his face only inches from hers. “If this relationship is supposed to work, you will have to follow the rules. Tell me your name!”

Kate closed her eyes, breathing heavily in pain and disgust. She didn’t want this pig to speak out her name. “Janice...” she whispered. The next moment she could see the rage in the man’s eyes again and his hand lifting to beat her.

“Liar! I found your badge, Caitlin! This was a test and you are obviously not willing to stick to the rules.”

“No... don’t...” she whimpered, holding her arm up in front of her face to shield her still hurting cheek. Surrender seemed to be the wisest choice at the moment – at least until she had found out what he was up to or had a chance to attempt to escape. Her whole body was trembling. She had never felt so helpless and degraded in her whole life. “I... I will stick to your rules...”

“Good girl...” The man said, stroking her hair. “You will call me master... now come with me!”

He pushed her out of the room into a small dark corridor. “To the left!” Kate did as he said and they walked the long corridor for about two minutes before they came to a crossing where they could either turn left or right.

Kate waited for his direction, a plan forming in her head. The opposite direction of that which he ordered her to turn to would possibly lead her out of this darkness. Of course she was still unsteady on her legs and trembling, let alone the fact that she didn’t have light and didn’t know these corridors – whereas he obviously did well. But she had to take that chance. It was possible that this was the only chance of escape she would ever get.

“Right!” the man bellowed and that was Kate’s signal. Faster than she herself would have expected, she turned to the left and started to run, blinded with fear. She heard the man curse behind her and start to run after her. She felt herself tumble and the corridor cloudy and dark in front of her eyes, but she didn’t want to give up.

“Help me! Somebody please help me! Gibbs!” she started to yell desperately, unable to keep the panic from her voice. She was a federal agent, trained to defend herself, having received mental training to deal with dangerous psychopaths – but all that knowledge was useless once she had become a drugged victim of a violent psychopath.

Victim – the thought of that made her run even faster. There was no way that she would give in to him.

Then a wave of pain rushed through her body. She had run directly against the wall in front of her at full speed at the next ninety degree turn of the corridor – which she was unable to see in the darkness. With a painful scream, she fell back and landed hard on the ground, dazed, holding her hurting and stitching head. The pain paralyzed her for a moment – just the time the psychopath needed to catch up with her.

Furiously, he stormed towards her motionless figure and held her down to the ground.

“Oh, Caitlin, you shouldn’t have done that...” he whispered into her hair. “We could have been real friends, but now I will have to make you suffer like the others... They all didn’t know what was good for them. All I wanted was to protect you...”

He pulled a syringe out of his pocket. When Kate felt the stitching pain of the needle, she protested and tried to pull her arm away from him, but he held her with a steel grip. And then she slowly stopped fighting him, her mind drifting of to other places.

Indifferently, she looked at his face and saw him smile at her.

“This is better,” he murmured. “Come on, get up!”

She tried to follow his orders, but her legs gave way under her. He lifted her over his shoulders and carried her the way back, all the while talking to her. She could hear his voice like a melody without words, without meaning. And she didn’t even care to try to listen. She didn’t want anything at all... the drug had taken its full effect.

Somewhere behind her cloudy mind and muddled thoughts, she heard an old metal door open, then she was put down on her feet and steadied against a wall. Cold metal cuffs clicked around her wrists and then she couldn’t move anymore, just stay there, standing against the wall with her hands chained to the wall next to her body.

She felt the callous hand of her abductor ran over her cheek, then her neck and cleavage. “My beautiful Caitlin... I will be back soon, don’t worry...”

And then the light disappeared and she was surrounded by darkness again.

“No...” she murmured, in a weak attempt trying to loosen her hands from the metal cuffs that were set in the stone wall. “No... I’m a federal agent-- you can’t--!”

Tears of rage were streaming down her face and her plea turned into helpless sobs. “Damn it... somebody help me.”

“Kate!”

At first the young woman didn't react, believing that the voice came from the depths of her drugged mind, a shield reaction of her brain to keep her from going crazy from the constant darkness she was in. A darkness which didn't allow her to see where she was, nor what time of the day it was. For all she knew, she could be his prisoner for days...

"Agent Todd, are you hurt?"

Then she realized that she was not imagining the voice in her mind. It was Gibbs's voice. Gibbs... her spirits seemed to waken up. She had never been gladder to hear the bossy voice of her grumpy boss.

"Gibbs..." she murmured. "I'm here... where are you?"

"I am here, Kate. Are you hurt? What did he do to you?" She could hear the darkness in his voice, the threatening tone that he always had if somebody dared to hurt one of his agents.

"I don't know... I am drugged... I can barely keep my eyes open... and my cheek hurts, he slapped me pretty hard—and my head..." she moaned. "I want to sleep for a moment."

"Todd, keep talking to me," Gibbs ordered sharply.

"I'm sorry... Gibbs..." The rest of her sentence turned into incoherent murmurs.

"Damned," Gibbs cursed, pulling at his own chains, not caring for the red marks they left on his wrists. It was his fault. He should have never been so careless to not check the whole house. And he should have never left Kate alone behind – even if it was only a distance of twenty meters they were talking about. With his experience he should have known better – but the playful banter with her about the furnishings of the house had distracted him.

He listened into the silence, angry at himself more than anybody else – well except for the psychopath maybe.

He had been in this room for several hours and still didn't have any idea where he or who the abductor was.

The last thing he remembered was searching for Kate in the house...

*~~~ Around 8 hours earlier ~~~*

"Kate, are you coming?" Gibbs was standing in the entrance hall, turning around impatiently. If he hated one thing, it was if he had to wait for somebody – even if it was Caitlin Todd.

He opened his mouth to bark her name again, when all of a sudden his eyes fell on the ground and he froze. A third pair of footsteps - which he was sure hadn't been there ten minutes ago – could be clearly seen in the dust on the wooden part of the floor. Somebody had entered the house behind them.

"Agent Todd!" Gibbs asked clearly into the silence of the corridor, but didn't get any reaction. Slowly, he pulled out his weapon, walking back the way he had come while he scanned his surroundings carefully.

He checked the first room, but it was still empty, then the second and third. And then, in the fourth room he found his partner, lying unconsciously on the ground in the middle of the room.

"Damned," he murmured, checking behind the door for the attacker, then scanning the room. Kate had been right, they should have waited for the daylight, since he could barely see in the dark room. Slowly approaching the woman in the middle, he scanned the room with narrowed eyes.

"I am a federal agent and I arrest you for attacking one of my team members!" His voice didn't lose its dominant tone, even in a situation of danger like this one.

Gibbs bent down next to Kate, without letting the entrance of the room out of his eyes. Carefully he checked for her pulse and was relieved to find that she was only unconscious.

"Show yourself, and I promise we will talk!" Gibbs continued to reason with the unknown attacker. "You have nothing to fear if you cooperate!"

No reaction. Gibbs looked down at Kate, his weapon still cocked in his hand. Softly, he slapped her cheeks. "Agent Todd!"

When she didn't wake up, he assumed, that she had not just been knocked unconscious, but that she had been put into this condition by the use of some kind of sedative – maybe chloroform. That meant he would have to carry her out of here – which again meant that he had to put his weapon back into its holster. There was no way that he would present Kate and himself that defenseless to whoever attacked them.

Still looking around, he pulled out his cell-phone from his jacket and hit speed dial number one. He hoped that the back-up would arrive quickly, since every minute they lost gave the unknown criminal a greater chance to escape. Maybe he was long gone, but Gibbs wasn't willing to take that chance and leave Kate alone.

He listened to the ringing sound on the other end and waited impatiently. "Come on Dinozzo... hurry up just this one time..." he growled impatiently, softly stroking a strand of hair out of Kate's face.

He didn't see the blow coming – there had been no sign of it. No sound of breathing or squeaking of wood that would have betrayed another presence in the room. But still, suddenly he was there, behind him. And that was all Gibbs realized, before he felt the knock on his head and darkness took possession of his consciousness.

*~~~ Around 10 hours later ~~~*

Kate had completely lost track of time when she awoke. The first thing she felt was the pain in her arms and her shoulders from the uncomfortable position she was standing in, her head and upper body having fallen slightly forward when she had been unconscious. She wanted to stretch herself, but then realized that she couldn't move her arms. With a soft moan, she lifted her head.

A lamp was hanging at the wall next to the heavy metal door, lighting the room in a soft, warm way. It was not enough to see every detail, but at least she could have a look at her surroundings.

Her eyes wandered around until they were caught by the person who was shackled to the wall opposite to her. Gibbs was leaning his head against the stonewall behind him.

Kate wanted to address him, but her throat felt dry and so all she produced was a husky moan. The man opened his eyes instantly, when he heard the sound from her.

"Kate, are you alright?"

The woman looked down at her own wrists which were shackled to the wall. She tried to get her hands loose, but those attempts only served to increase the pain and rub her wrists raw.

"Depends..." she murmured throatily, "I am shackled to a wall and I need water."

Eventually she leaned back, looking at the dim light of the lamp. "At least it's not dark anymore."

"How are you feeling? That bruise on your forehead looks pretty bad," he asked concerned and only now became Kate aware of the dull pounding in her head.

"I can stand it," she announced and a faint smile crossed his face.

"Spoken like a marine," he tried to cheer her up, but failed to make her even smile at him.

"Where is he?" Kate asked lowly, a hint of fear reflected openly in her voice.

"Gone. He came in about half an hour ago and brought the light, but then he disappeared again and has not shown up ever since. Do you still have your cell phone?" Gibbs asked.

Kate looked down at her and thought loudly, "It was in the inner pocket of my coat, but my coat has been gone ever since I awoke. So has my weapon... Although I can still feel the knife at my ankle; it seems he didn't find that."

"You are wearing a knife at your ankle?" Gibbs asked in a tone that showed his disbelief as well as a certain amount of amusement.

"Rule number nine..." Kate murmured. "I figured it would be stupid to wear the knife with my other weapons, because then people who want to disarm me would see it instantly." She tried to lift her leg to her hand so that she could somehow reach the knife, but failed to do so. That didn't stop her from trying again, until she finally cried out in frustration.

"Kate, stop it," Gibbs ordered softly. "There's no way you can reach it in that position."

When she looked up at him, he saw the tears glistening in her eyes and felt like a knife was pushed into his heart.

"This is not supposed to happen, Gibbs. I am a federal agent, I have learned to defend myself. I've been trained to remain in control over my emotions and to overpower bad guys in hand to hand combat. Well, I am not an expert, but my skills were enough to send a NAVY commander to the ground and here..." She stopped talking, afraid that her voice would break and that was the last thing she wanted: giving Gibbs the impression that she couldn't handle a situation like this.

"It is not your fault. There was nothing you could have done. He overpowered me as well. You cannot measure your skills with those of a psychopath. Look at me." When she didn't react instantly, he spoke more forcefully. "Kate, look into my eyes."

She did as he requested.

"I will get us out of here..."

"Gibbs," Kate started, "we are shackled to a wall! What if he is the killer we have been looking for?"

"He most certainly is," The man growled back. "We may be shackled, but we still have our brains. And the advantage we have over him is the ability to see things rationally, and to analyze him. Therefore it is absolutely imperative that we remain calm, do you understand?"

"Yes," Kate nodded and inhaled deeply. Gibbs was right. It didn't help either of them to assume the worst, she should rather use her brains to think of a way to free herself from her shackles.

They both stilled when they heard steps on the outside, and then the lock of the metal door being turned. With a deafening squeak, the door opened and inside came the psychopath, his eyes wandering from Gibbs to Kate before he closed the door.

"I can see that my little angel is awake again," he touched Kate's cheek and then brushed his thumb over the bruise on her forehead. "I hope the experience of your last attempt to escape will be enough of a lesson for you."

She tried to avoid him when he lowered his lips to her face but her restraining shackles limited the range in which she could move and so all she could do when his lips laid down on the soft skin of her cheek was closing her eyes in revulsion. She felt disgusted by his presence, by his touch and his caresses. And she felt a fear inside, that had been unknown to her up to now. There was something incredibly threatening about being at the mercy of a man who was not quite right in the head, especially if you were a woman.

The man looked at her softly and then turned around.

"I can see that you are still nervous, my dear. Well, considering that we just met that is absolutely understandable. Here, I brought you food." He held a grape to her lips, silently demanding for her to eat it.

Kate's whole body was tensed and she pressed closer to the wall behind her, refusing to eat the grape out of the man's hand.

"I'm not hungry," she whispered and winced when, out of the blue, his mood changed and he furiously threw the glass plate with the fruits to the ground, where it shattered into pieces.

"What did I tell you?" he asked dangerously calm, emphasizing every word. "Who do you belong to?"

Kate took a shaking breath, pressing her lips together. She couldn't degrade herself that much, despite all reason she was supposed to use. Her pride didn't allow her to say it again. She had always been strong-willed, even when dealing with dangerous criminals. Not even Ari had managed to blackmail her into what he wanted.

"WHO?" The psychopath yelled into her face, turning her head violently and forcing her to look at him. "SAY IT NOW!"

When she didn't react instantly, he drew back his hand and slapped her into her face. She shrieked in pain, tasting blood on her lip and fisted her hands to keep herself from crying out in rage.

"HEY!" Gibbs yelled from the opposite site, drawing his attention away from the woman in front of him. "Why don't you leave her alone and tell me what you expect from us?"

"You..." The mad psychopath let go of Kate and walked slowly towards Gibbs. "I don't want anything from you..." he spit out disgustedly, then silenced for a moment. "Well, if I think about it, I want you to tell me exactly what you know about me. And don't play games, I know you are NCIS, I found your badges, Jethro!"

Interesting, Gibbs thought, that he knows what kind of institution the NCIS is.

So he was either a federal agent or a member of the army or marine corps, since no usual citizen of the United States would have ever heard of the NCIS.

"Why don't we start this conversation then with you telling me your name, so I can address you properly?" Gibbs asked and Kate felt deep respect for the calmness his whole attitude reflected. It had to be a marine thing, that they never panicked, no matter how desperate the situation seemed. Gibbs' voice didn't mirror any kind of emotion.

"Caitlin knows how to address me, doesn't she?" The psycho turned around to Kate again. "Tell him, dear..."

"I was asking you, not her," Gibbs addressed him firmly, wanting to draw the whole attention of the obviously totally crazy man to himself rather than Kate. The man didn't react to his words, but approached Kate again.

"Tell him, or do I need to refresh your mind?" he threatened lowly, and Kate cleared her throat, deciding that it was wiser to fulfill his wish than to be beaten down while shackled.

"Master..." she murmured and gasped in shock when he grabbed her sleeves, harshly pulling her close to his face.

"Louder, I don't think he quite heard what you said!"

"Master," Kate said, louder now and Gibbs nodded.

"Alright, but do you have a real name? Every master has a name to address him with, because just calling him master sounds disrespectful, don't you think?" he noted thoughtfully and observed with satisfaction how the man froze for a moment.

"Of course, we do not want to be disrespectful, which is why I am asking you how to address you properly." Addressing the psychopaths vanity would maybe help him to gain insight into his background.

Kate looked at the face of the man and saw rage, insecurity and thoughtfulness mixed there. One thing was for sure, Kate thought, Gibbs would have made a great profiler. The mind games that he was not only playing now, but also when he conducted an interrogation with a suspect, were brilliant. He had what seemed to be a naturally given aura of authority and respect around him.

"I... I..." the psychopath stuttered and turned around. "Harris... Master Harris." His eyes scanned Gibbs for a short time, before the realization dawned on him that the older man had tricked him into giving away his name. He cried out in rage, pounding on the shackled agent and punching him into his face.

Gibbs, who had underestimated the man's strength and overestimated the range in which he was free to move, was fully hit by the man's fist. He tried to duck away when he saw another blow coming and managed to at least avoid the hardest part of it by moving within the limited range his shackles confined him to.

"STOP!" Kate yelled almost panicked, afraid that the enraged criminal was going to kill her boss. "Please stop! STOP IT!" Tears of rage and frustration about her own helplessness were streaming down her face, and, when hearing her plea, the man stopped his assault and turned around. Very slowly, a wicked smile started to cross his face when he approached the young woman.

"Go on..." he whispered. "Keep on begging me for his life." His hand stroked along the lines of her chin and then he brushed her lips with his thumb. "I like it when you plead... isn't a lovers plea the most beautiful sound in the world?" He giggled madly.

"He is not my lover..." Kate hissed furiously, looking him in the eye. "He is my boss."

"I have seen them all plead for their partner's life, little Kate. All of them. It was always the same. But I showed them the truth. I awakened them from their stupid illusions." He explained in a soft and caring tone.

"What kind of illusions?" Kate asked, forcing herself to focus on what Gibbs had told her. Analyze his behavior, his thoughts, his reactions. If they found out what drove him forward, they might be able to find a way to communicate with him.

"Their stupid little illusions of love..." he hissed against her skin, then starting a mad giggle. "And in the end they all found that their love was worth nothing... nothing at all! It didn't save them – it only made them suffer. Do you want to suffer, Caitlin?"

"No," Kate replied, shaking her head with a knot in her stomach. "No I don't, - Harris."

"Yeah..." he nodded thoughtfully, his face darkening when she made use of his name, "none of them wanted." Then he suddenly let go of her and went to the door. "But there is no other way... the discovery of the truth always has to be painful... You will soon learn, but afterwards you will be free. Free from lies... free like a bird."

He shut the door behind him which a loud crash that resounded in the dim chamber.

Kate exhaled, relieved that he was gone, even if it was only for now, and then focused her attention to the man opposite to her.

"Are you alright? Gibbs, say something!"

"That bastard has a strong punch – he is lucky I wasn't able to show him mine..." A low growl could be heard and the woman was relieved. As long as Gibbs was still in the mood to threaten people, he was alright – or at least not in serious danger.

"You look like you need a doctor," she murmured and Gibbs nodded ironically.

"If you can, feel free to call one."

Kate sighed. For a man like him, who was always in control of everything and everyone around him, a situation like this had to be especially enraging. Therefore she decided to leave him alone for some time and rather spend her time reviewing in her mind the information she had just gathered about the man who held them prisoner.

He was obviously some kind of spiritual fanatic who believed that, by killing his victims, he cleansed their souls from lies and freed them. How could you argue with a person like that?

"Hey Gibbs..." she suddenly remembered, looking up at him softly.

"What?" he replied grumpily.

"Thank you... for pulling his attention towards you."

He looked at her, their eyes meeting for a moment in an intense glance. The hint of a smile crossed his face, before he shut the walls around his heart down again.

"Don't thank me yet, we are not out of here. Let's hope Dinozzo spends his time with something different than playing shooting games on a federal computer. Oh, and Kate! Next time just do what he wants for God's sake. I don't want to lose one of my agents just because of pride!" He didn't know why he had to do it. Every time she touched his heart, he had to treat her a little harsher than usual.

It was like an automatic defense reaction against any warm feelings in his heart, aiming on pushing her away before she could get too close. And it worked – too well.

“Are you telling me it was my fault that he attacked me?” Kate asked back sharply.

“Just don’t argue with him again! Leave that to me,” he repeated insistently.

They both remained silent, the pressure they were under taking its effect now in aggression towards each other. Kate couldn’t believe that he had just practically made her responsible for what had happened. She tried to calm herself, reminding herself that he was under a lot of pressure and probably feeling responsible for her safety, but still, his hidden accusation had hurt her.

Even if Gibbs would have never admitted it outloud, he had no idea how to get out of their situation. He wasn’t an expert in profiling, but he was convinced that Harris would not let them go again. All this time, he had not even bothered to hide his face from them – a dangerous sign, that showed that he trusted that they would not be able to tell anyone about his face.

He hoped that Dinozzo had been wise enough to answer the phone while it had still been ringing, that way Abby might have a chance to track the last call – but he doubted it. But then, Dinozzo, although being as childish as he could sometimes be, never failed to surprise him with his cleverness in situations where it really mattered.

He just hoped that his team would be fast... before it was too late.

~~~ *Same Time at Abby’s laboratory* ~~~

“Abbs... any word on them yet?” Tony Dinozzo stormed into the room and the black haired analyst jumped - again. She turned around growling, dark threats reflected in her eyes.

“Damn it, Tony, I would be a lot faster if you didn’t startle me every five minutes with the same set of questions!” Abby replied nervously, refocusing her attention back to screen and the keyboard she was tapping on. “Without an active connection it is not easy to trace a GPS chip in a cell phone!”

“But you can do it, right? You said it’s not easy, but it’s not impossible is it?!” Tony grabbed for her drink and took a sip before Abby snatched it out of his hand.

“Hey! Hands of my drink, Tony, before I have to smack you!”

“Sorry, just nervous! Why would Gibbs call me and then not say a word when I answer? Yell at me, yes! Bellow orders, yes! But not answer at all is just so un-Gibbs, that something terrible must have happened.” He babbled and Abby raised her eyes to the ceiling.

“Tony! Something terrible will happen to you if you keep on pacing around my desk like that! I can not concentrate!”

At that moment, another one of her many screens in the corner of the room beeped and Abby looked over to it, then at Tony.

“Hey, chicken-boy, I need you to do something! Hold Strg and H, will you do this? I need to look what’s happening over there.”

Abby pressed his fingers to the prevailing keys and looked into his eyes. “Don’t move, or I will spank you!”

“Normally I would reply with some kind of dirty joke... but...” Tony said, the concern for his two colleagues standing clearly written in his eyes.

Abby went over to the smaller table and looked at the screen. "Impossible!" she murmured and pressed some key, then she slowly turned around. "Oh damned, I know how it happened!"

"What Abbs?" Tony asked impatiently.

"Remember how the DNA didn't match? I mean the one from the sperm and the one from the..."

"Bottom line, Abby!" Dinozzo snapped impatiently.

The young woman raised her eyebrows. "You sound more like Gibbs every day... however, it didn't match, because it was placed! I ran the newly found DNA through the criminal and Navy and Marine database, but no match, and then, for fun I ran it through the database of every federal secret service of this country and I have a match!"

"What?" Tony jumped up from the chair and ran to her workstation.

"It is an NCIS agent, Tony! One of ours!" Abby continued excitedly. "He is the serial murderer! He must have manipulated the data. This says that he is one of the assistants to the laboratories. He had the possibility and the inside knowledge about the investigation! We have an ID!" She turned and looked at Tony proudly, then realized that he was standing next to her. Standing up, she folded her arms in front of her breast. "What did I tell you about pressing the keys?"

Tony shrugged and hugged her enthusiastically. "Abbs, when we have found them, you can spank me all you want! Call me immediately if you find hints on his whereabouts, I am going to inform a search team!" With these words he ran out of the room, leaving back a puzzled Abby.

*~~~ Around one hour later ~~~*

"I wish I knew what time it is..." Kate murmured into the room after a long time that had passed in total silence. She sighed and shifted uncomfortably, her wrists burning from the hard metal that was constantly rubbing over her sensitive skin.

Gibbs didn't react to her announcement and Kate sighed. "I mean, it wouldn't really help our situation..."

"Then why do you want to know?" he asked rhetorically with an undertone in his voice that would have made an agent like Timothy McGee shut up immediately. But Kate didn't feel intimidated by him at all – she never had, unless he had one of his really bad days of course.

"I just want to know... to feel better," she replied. He didn't answer. After another thirty seconds, she sighed. "You're really not a conversationalist, are you?"

He remained silent, his face not giving any signal about what he thought about her attempt to indulge him into small talk with her.

"Well, I mean, of course you have never really said much - like telling anything about you, so I should have known," she continued, "still, I would really be glad if you were a little more like Tony right now – just concerning conversations."

Gibbs couldn't help but grin quietly to himself when he mockingly asked, "You want me to tell dirty jokes?"

"Not THAT much like Tony... although telling dirty jokes is probably the only conversation he's good at." She inhaled deeply, pressing closer to the wall to release the pressure on her raw wrists. "God,

you know, I really wish I was listening to his stupid jokes right now, instead of being here, waiting for..."

She became silent, forcing back the thoughts of what was going to happen to them.

"Are you afraid?"

"What kind of question is that?" Gibbs frowned and shot her one of his typically annoyed glances.

She sighed. Of course, she should have known. Even if he was afraid, there was no way that he would ever admit it. As an agent, that was one of his good qualities, but it often also made him look cold and emotionless as person.

Her expression became serious. "I am, Gibbs. And I have no idea how we can ever get out of here again. I admire you for being so in control over yourself, I guess I am just not that tough." She gave a soft snort and looked up at the ceiling.

"Kate, we will make it," Gibbs replied, his tone soft and reassuring, "And if it helps, you are one of the toughest agents I have ever had in my team."

"Tougher than Dinozzo?" she made the weak attempt to joke, and Gibbs had to laugh.

"Yes, especially than Dinozzo."

"Wow... that is something that you better don't tell him – let me do that," Kate smiled at him, his features being relaxed and soft while he was returning her soft glance.

Their playful conversation was interrupted by the sudden sound of the metal lock and the rusty squeak of the door. Both agents tensed, as the psychopath entered the room, a can of water in his right hand.

He didn't say a word, but put the can down to the ground and then pulled two crystal glasses out of his jacket. He filled the two glasses with water and then went slowly over to Kate.

"Hello, angel... How have you been?" He touched her hair and ran his fingers through its silkiness. "I heard that you two were having a nice conversation... are you cheating on me, darling?" His question was of course more of a hidden reproach, a threat lying underneath.

Kate shot a quick glance over to Gibbs who shook his head almost unnoticeable, signaling her not to answer. She trusted his judgement and remained silent.

"No, I don't believe you would dare to do that, Caitlin. Do you want a drink?"

"Yes," Kate replied humbly, her eyes locked with those of Gibbs', silently questioning him what she was supposed to do next. It was amazing, she wondered, how easily she could just understand what he wanted from looking into his deep blue eyes – as if there was a connection between their spirits.

"Here, I brought you a glass of fresh water," Harris murmured and held it to her lips. Although she longed for a whole can of water, she took only a small sip, being well aware of the possibility that he had drugged the water.

"Thank you," Kate said after having swallowed, deliberately not addressing him as he had ordered her to. He didn't even seem to notice, but pulled off the jacket he was wearing.

"Now, Caitlin, tell me a bit about you – and your relationship with him," he gesticulated at Gibbs, "Do you feel attracted to him?"

Again, Gibbs shook his head softly, and Kate remembered what he had once taught her. Do not give information about your own person to psychopaths, rather redirect the questions back at them.

“There is not much to tell about me... I work at NCIS, that’s practically my whole life. What about you? Why don’t you tell me more about you?”

He started smiling and then shook his head, shaking his finger no. “Oh, Caitlin, I am not stupid. I know standard protocol... Don’t try your psycho games on me and think I wouldn’t notice. Or do you consider me to be stupid, Caitlin?”

When she didn’t reply, he stepped between her and Gibbs, effectively interrupting their eye contact. “Tell me, do you see yourself in a higher position than me? More intelligent, brilliant?”

Kate lifted her eyes to look directly into his, still not answering. That kind of conversation was already bad to have with a normal person – not to mention a psychopath. Since there was practically no right answer to give on a question like that, she decided on remaining silent.

“Because you are not!” Harris went on, laughing softly. “You are lying at my feet, and it is only a matter of time until you will beg me, little Caitlin.” Then he turned around, facing Gibbs, but keeping distance to him.

The expression in his eyes betrayed only a hint of insecurity, but still enough for Gibbs to notice. So that was it, the special agent thought. Not being able to control a person put him off, most likely destroyed the scenario he had created in his mind.

When he recalled the last double murders - of which all of the victims had been civilian, just the first male victim had been a member of the marine corps – he realized that most likely all victims had plead for their lives at a certain point. It was human nature to be humble when faced with a violent criminal like Harris. But what happened if they didn’t fit into his scenario?

The relationship between victim and criminal was – at least in cases that were sexually motivated – double sided. There had to be the criminal, who chose to be just that; and there had to be the victim, who submitted to the role of being the helpless subject to a crime.

If a person didn’t accept the role of a helpless victim, the world of the criminal shattered, because it didn’t fit the picture in his mind anymore. He was no longer the one in control.

It was just a question of how far he was going to take it to try to make them submit to his rules. Obviously crushing the minds of his victims was part of Harris’s game. He enjoyed seeing people break, it gave him the feeling of absolute power – a feeling of a godlike position.

So, denying him that success would either make him insecure and afraid, eventually leading to him losing interest in them – or it would make him rage and trying more forcefully to break them; after he had recovered from the initial shock of not being in control. Both ways could be able to buy them at least a few more hours of time – time that Dinozzo and the rest of the team obviously needed to find them.

“If I didn’t know better, I would say that you had a bad influence on her! She’s denying me the due respect she should pay me!” Harris stated, not leaving Gibbs out of his eyes. The two men fought a cold, silent duel with their gazes.

“What respect?” Gibbs finally asked ironically, “Respect for shackling her and treating her like a pet? In my world that’s not the way to earn a woman’s respect, Harris!”

“I have been good to her,” the man snapped, “that is how women are! Ungrateful for everything you do for them, when you only want to protect them.”

“Agent Todd is quite capable of protecting herself,” Gibbs noted annoyed.

"Obviously she is not, otherwise she wouldn't be shackled to my wall, being at my mercy, right? And not even you have been able to protect her." He snickered madly and Gibbs's features darkened.

Harris had hit his weak spot with reproaching him that he was too weak to protect any of his team's members. Those who knew him were well aware that just hinting on something like that was the declaration of a dangerous war – one of those kind that Gibbs had never lost.

"And now..." Harris smiled triumphantly. "You will call me master! Say it!"

Gibbs looked at him, the hint of an amused smile on his face. "Bite me, Harris!"

Harris let out an enraged cry and pounded on Gibbs. "Say it!" he raged, pushing his arm against the man's throat. "SAY IT NOW OR..."

"Or what? Are you going to kill me?" Gibbs asked throatily, "Fine, do it, but you will not make me surrender! I will die still being the one in control!"

"NO! NOOO! You are not the one in control!" He let go of Gibbs, his eyes sparkling with a dangerous fury, while he slowly stepped backwards. "Say it, or Caitlin will have to suffer for your inability to give up!"

Gibbs looked at Kate, who looked more frightened than he had ever seen her. Silently he prayed to the God he didn't believe in, that he was right with his assumption about how the sick mind of the psychopath worked. He wished he could tell her what his plan was, but there was no time for that – he knew she would hate him for this, but it was their only chance to buy time. Harris needed the feeling of having total control to kill and hurt people, otherwise he was insecure and weak – and unable to commit a murder.

"Go ahead," Gibbs said in a generous tone. "Do whatever you believe you need to do, but don't believe that you can make me look up to you. You will just fall deeper in my respect."

Kate couldn't believe her ears... no, it was impossible. He couldn't have said that! He couldn't possibly just practically given him the permission to hurt her! And yet he had. She felt like she had been punched right between the eyes.

Not from him – from anyone else, but never from him had she expected such a cold and heartless behavior just because he was unable to give up his pride just once.

"Poor Caitlin... did you hear what he said?" Harris whispered, as he turned towards her. "He thinks I won't do it! He thinks I am bluffing!" His hands were moving over her body greedily, while he scanned her features.

Kate pulled violently at her shackles, trying to somehow wiggle away from his touches. Her eyes started to fill with tears of rage. "He doesn't think you're bluffing..." she tried to convince him with a shaky voice, muffling her own scream by pressing her lips close, when he ripped open the blouse she was wearing. "Please don't..."

"Kate," Gibbs voice was bossy and insistent, as he ordered, "Don't plead with him! He is just a bastard who wants to prove himself that he is better than we are."

The young woman started to whimper when she felt the callous hands of the psychopath moving over the naked skin of her cleavage and her bra hastily, taking in her female body with lusty eyes.

"Don't you want to plead me for not doing this to her?" Harris asked triumphantly, still falsely assuming that Gibbs was bluffing and that he wouldn't hold out much longer.

"Gibbs..." Kate's voice broke, as she nearly begged her boss to comply, to do what Harris wanted. Hadn't he been the one who had ordered her to comply with whatever the psychopath wanted just a few hours ago?

But Gibbs remained silent. Harris pushed the blouse off Kate's shoulders violently, not caring that he ripped the material and left red marks on her skin with the brutality of his force.

"God, no!"

Her desperate outcry broke his heart, but Gibbs was determined to go through with it, therefore he forced his mind to stay focused in an absolutely professional way. Control was the only ace that they had still left up their sleeves.

Just two or three more minutes and Harris would realize that his method didn't work. Gibbs lifted his eyes to the ceiling, trying to control the blind rage that he felt when he saw the psychopath ravishing Kate's body with his touches, hearing the sobs that she was desperately trying to suppress.

When he was free again, he would personally shoot a bullet through the man's head, just for that, for making her cry – for daring to touch her.

Kate closed her eyes, leaning her head back helplessly. Her sobs died, and only silent tears ran down her cheeks, betraying her desperation about her own helplessness – and a broken heart. She pulled violently at her restraints, using her feet in attempts to push the man away from her, but she knew that it was a lost cause – that all she could do was endure what he was about to do to her.

In a forceful movement, Harris opened the button of the pants she was wearing, looking up at her face. "Don't you want to plea? Tell me to stop, Caitlin! Beg me not to rape you."

"Kate!" Gibbs barked warningly and the woman opened her eyes, screaming out in rage, frustration and desperation.

"Damn you, I hate you!" she yelled into the room. "You arrogant bastard!"

Gibbs was sure that she was not talking to Harris, although the psychopath clearly felt addressed, for he slammed her hard against the wall in reaction to her enraged outcry.

Suddenly he stopped his assault of her and turned his head to look at the shackled man behind him, at first triumphantly, but when he saw Gibbs' cold and indifferent stare, he pushed himself away from Kate and started to yell.

"YOU SON OF A BITCH! Beg me not to do this to her! NOW!"

When Gibbs still didn't react, Harris started to pace around in the room, holding his head. "This can't be happening... that never happened! You are not stronger than me!"

And then he stormed out of the room, totally out of control of himself, and not even caring to lock the door in his uncontrolled mixture of rage and panic.

Gibbs exhaled inwardly, feeling the weight of a mountain lifting off his heart, when he saw that his plan had worked. Then his eyes fell on the woman opposite to him, or rather on the expression on her face, and his heart felt heavy again.

"How could you..." she simply whispered, the streaks of her tears still visible on her cheeks. Her whole body was shaking, her face still reflecting her shock of the danger of being raped. Frantically, she tried to find a way to cover herself, but her blouse was hanging too low around her shoulders for her to reach it in her position.

“Kate, I am sorry,” Gibbs murmured, trying not to look at her in order to not humiliate her anymore, than she already felt. He was not a man who used the word ‘sorry’ on a daily basis – in fact, she was the only member of his team whom he had ever apologized to. “If I had pleaded with him, I would have done what he wanted. It was part of his scenario; he needed me to plead for your life. Not doing it was the only way to save you. If either of us had started to beg him, he would have been turned on!”

“Save me?” she hissed, her voice raging with anger now while she tore at her shackles. Her movements became forceful and she didn’t care that she hurt herself by doing so. All she wanted was to get away from this room, from this mad psychopath – and from him, Gibbs. She felt like a wounded deer, wanting to retreat to the shelter of loneliness to lick her wounds. She couldn’t stand his presence, his eyes on her, even though he tried to avoid looking at her.

When she just considered the possibility that Harris returned and might touch her again, she felt the need to vomit in her stomach. She wouldn’t stand his callous hands on her body or his lips as he forced his kisses onto her again.

She put more effort into pulling at the metal chains, crying out when it began to feel as if she tore off her own hands – but the pain only helped to increase her determination.

“Kate! --- AGENT TODD!” Suddenly, his thundering voice reached her conscious mind and she lifted her eyes to him. “Calm down!” Gibbs emphasized every word, holding her eyes with his. He was back to his old grumpy tone. “And listen to me! It will serve neither you, nor me, if you freak out on me now. All you will achieve is that you seriously hurt yourself. I understand what you have just gone through, and you are under a lot of pressure right now! I promise you can slap me later if it helps. But now, you will remain calm, professional and focused! Are we clear on that?!”

Kate knew deep inside that he was right, that freaking out would get her nowhere. But he had no way to know how she felt, how humiliated and weak. He was not a woman, so how could he possibly have the faintest idea about what it was like to be sexually assaulted when shackled - how dirty and used she felt at that very moment? Especially since she had always been a strong woman. She had taken courses to defend herself, she carried a weapon and she was a federal agent!

She closed her eyes and leaned her head back. That way she would not have to meet his eyes or react to anything he said. Because right now she needed to be alone, to retreat and lock her heart away from everybody else...

*~~~ At the Same Time ~~~*

The drumming of the bass could already be heard two floors above that one where Abby’s laboratory was. It was one of those days, her colleagues in the offices above hers were thinking to themselves, while baring with resignation the noise level of what she called music.

In the beginning they had still filed complaints to the director, who in turn, one day, had had a conversation with special agent Gibbs.

That same day, a memo had been sent around, stating that the office supplier would be glad to hand over earplugs to those colleagues who felt disturbed by the music of NCIS’ best analyst.

Nobody in the building had an idea about what Jethro Gibbs had said to the director, or how he had convinced him – and nobody actually wanted to know. They admired those persons who were tough

enough to stand one week in his team, but if he even managed to convince the director of the NCIS that easily, a conflict with him was definitely way beyond their physical and psychical ability.

Tony Dinozzo shot two of his colleagues an apologizing smile when he passed them by on his way down to the lab. He winced when he walked through the glass door to the floor and entered Abby's laboratory.

"ABBS!" he yelled loudly, but the woman didn't react – which Tony didn't wonder about considering that the sound level was enough to deafen a healthy person. He admired how anybody was still able to think straightly with such loud music in the background – not to mention perform complex analyses and calculations.

He went to the stereo box and pulled the plug out of the wall. Abby started and spun around.

"Tony," she protested in a reproaching voice.

"Seriously Abs," Tony started, waving the plug in front of him. "If I was you, I would be afraid to leave the building at night. Have you ever seen the wishes to kill you written on the faces of the colleagues who work in the offices above yours?"

"Well," Abby smiled sufficiently and pulled the plug out of his hand to re-connect her precious CD-player with the electrical circuit, "they know better than to start a fight with me. I deliberately spread the rumor that I am sleeping in a coffin – and that I know voodoo."

Tony raised his eyebrows in doubt. "Voodoo? Seriously? And they believed that crap?"

"Who said it was a lie?" Abby asked close to his face with a dangerous threat hidden in her voice, and Tony started to feel uncomfortable. Sometimes his colleague really scared the hell out of him.

"However..." he stuttered, "you wanted to talk to me?"

"Exactly," Abby was back to her old self and ran back to her computer. "I did a background check on our agent Brian Harris, and guess what I found out."

She looked at him expectantly, and Tony returned her gaze until he realized that she actually did want him to guess. "Damned, this is not 'Who wants to be a millionaire' Abbs! We're trying to save Gibbs' life!"

"In his youth, Harris was in a psychological clinic for violent behavior against his classmates in junior high-school. He was also accused of stalking and rape by one of his female classmates, but since she only talked about what happened six months afterwards, Harris was never found guilty due to lack of evidence. Therefore the incident never made it into his good-conduct certificate – which does also explain why the NCIS never suspected him to be a psychopath when he was hired," Abby summarized.

"So, where did you get that information then?" Tony asked amazed.

"I... or rather McGee had the idea to call the schools Harris visited to gain insight into his personality. You know, all the stuff about good grades, social contacts, was he more the party guy or did he spent his evening at home and so on..."

"McGee? Could it be that the geek is growing up?" This question caught Tony a slap from Abby, before she continued.

"It turned out that Harris does indeed fit the profile of a psychopath – always a loner, none or barely any social contacts, no relationships."

"Mmm... doesn't Gibbs fit in there as well?" Tony asked thoughtfully and Abby shook her head.

"Well, Gibbs doesn't run around and abducts women. He builds a boat, Tony."

Dinozzo folded his arms and shook his head impatiently. "What I mean, Abby, is: Do you have anything that does really help us to find out where he hides now? Or where he might have taken Gibbs and Kate? Or have you called me down here to read me a profile that fits on at least twenty percent of the American citizens?"

"Okay," Abby continued, slightly starting to hop up and down, "you're going to like this! When Harris was a child, he lived in XXXXXX, which is outside of Washington DC. He spent almost his entire youth there and..." She waved a sheet of paper in front of Tony's eyes. "...thanks to McGee, we have the address of an old house, which once belonged to ancestors of him. Now it is deserted, because nobody actually knows who has a right to claim it, and nobody cares, because it would take more money to repair the damages, the years have left on the house, than it would bring profit when sold. And guess what? The house is on the list of places that Gibbs and Kate wanted to search..."

Tony grabbed the sheet out of Abby's hand and read over the address. "Great Abbs!" he yelled back before he stormed out of the room.

Abby looked after him, shaking her head. One of these days she would build in an automatic door lock that reacted to her voice commands and only released her colleagues when she was finished speaking!

A few seconds later, the room was filled with the drumming sound of basses again...

~~~ *At the Same Time* ~~~

Loneliness – it was worse than darkness. Especially because she felt lonely without physically being it. It was that feeling of complete desertion in her heart, the inability to fully understand what had happened – why it had happened.

Of course, her reason could comprehend the logic behind his behavior – but her heart couldn't make sense of it. Deep inside, she was shocked about his coldness, the absolutely professional way in which he had told Harris to hurt her – to rape her - if he wanted... as if she didn't mean anything to him.

Kate suppressed a sob and opened her eyes, her head still resting against the wall. She wasn't sure that she would ever be able to forgive him, to understand him – to consider him a friend again. And the most confusing fact about the whole situation was, that it hurt her more than she would have ever thought – that she felt as if her heart was being ripped apart.

Never had she consciously realized, how much she trusted him, how much he meant to her – and how much he was able to hurt her. Maybe he had been right, relationships between agents never worked – that included friendships. Maybe she had overestimated the bond he had formed with the agents who worked under him.

He didn't know what to say to her. He had feared that his actions were beyond her understanding, but never had he seen Caitlin Todd the way she was now: silent, secluded – and hurt.

No doubt, the first thing he was going to do once he was able to lose those damned shackles was shoot a bullet through the psychopaths head. Just for her...

"Do you want to talk about it?" he asked without looking at her.

"No," she replied somewhat snappily. Just like that, no. Undoubtedly, she was mad at him. He looked at her. She was staring at the ceiling, her eyes not betraying any of her thoughts.

"Fine," he finally answered, "then I will start by explaining why..."

"Seriously, not right now," she cut him off. It was the first time that someone cut him off without being in trouble afterwards. He accepted it from her. Just because he knew what she had been through and what had to go through her mind right now.

The tension was clearly hanging between them in the air. Both remained silent again, Kate because she didn't want to talk to anybody at that moment and Gibbs because he couldn't think of any words that could ease her discomfort. Silence was probably the best way to do that, so his mind wandered off to the team again. If Dinozzo didn't hurry, Gibbs swore to himself grimly, he would be cleaning federal toilets for the rest of the year – and it was only March.

They were both startled by the sound of the door crashing hard and shattering against the stone wall of their prison. Harris paced in, his eyes gleaming darkly, a knife in his hand. That was not good, not at all. Gibbs straightened out, narrowing his eyes when they met those of the psychopath.

Harris mustered him grimly, playing with the knife, then wrapping his hand around its blade so tightly, that he cut into his own flesh without even noticing. It had been quite some time since he had stormed out of the room, and Gibbs had expected him to return at a certain point, but he had figured it to be later. The man had caught himself rather quickly – or he was determined to put an end to this right now. That was bad, Gibbs knew that.

In the last phase of a psychopath's rage, there was nothing that could possibly stop him. He became totally incalculable and Gibbs was not qualified enough to still competently have a conversation with a man as madly furious as Harris.

"Now..." Harris threatened in a low, throaty voice, "What do you say now? You know what I realized? No matter how much you deny it, I am the powerful man! I am the one in control, because you are shackled and cannot do anything against me! No matter how much you pretend otherwise, it's a lie you tell yourself! A big lie! And I am meant to purify you from the lies you believe in! This is my last test..." He lifted his eyes to the ceiling as if praying.

This was getting close, Gibbs noted mentally. Too close.

"What do you think, agent Jethro Gibbs? Whom should I purify first... you? Or your beautiful partner Caitlin..." He played with the knife again, slowly strolling over to Kate. His hand moved over her cheeks in a soft gesture, smearing his blood over her face, while he ran the cold metal of the knife over the delicate skin of her throat. "I promise, it's going to be quick," he whispered against her hair, "then you'll be free."

Kate didn't react – she was far beyond pressure, beyond panic or fear. It was a natural human shield reaction that her mind lulled her body into, an almost peaceful indifference.

"Harris," Gibbs addressed the man in his firm voice. "Me! Kill me first!"

Time! He needed time to talk to the man, but not with Kate's life at stake once he said something wrong. Every minute was precious, and maybe the few time he could buy would at least save her life.

Harris looked at him surprised, then a wide grin spread on his face. "Finally submitting to the truth, bowing to my divine power." Slowly, he let go of Kate and walked over to Gibbs.

"What makes you so sure it's divine?" Gibbs asked seriously. "How do you know it's not the devil driving you?" Obviously the man was driven by some kind of religious reason, so maybe he could be reached on that level. If he could convince Harris that he had been blinded by the false voice in his head, they might still stand a chance.

"No," Harris replied, "you are the ones sent by the devil. It's the tests God gave me to prove whether I am worthy of him! Just like he tasked Abraham to kill his son."

Kate lifted her head slowly, her eyes boring into Harris. "But God didn't allow him to go through with it. He wanted to test how much Abraham was willing to sacrifice for him, but being the merciful God he is, he saved the son."

Harris looked from Kate back to Gibbs, insecurity standing in his eyes.

"He saved him, Harris," Gibbs emphasized, pointing out how far Harris was from doing any God's work. But the man shook his head violently, the knife in his hand shaking when he wiped his forehead.

"No, no, no! He is testing me! The devil is speaking through your mouths! He wants to induce me into his world! God ordered me to..."

"To rape women?" Gibbs interrupted harshly. "Kill innocent people? Torture them?"

"NO! To purify them!" Harris screamed out in desperate fury. "For only death can purify the soul!"

"Harris, you are a murderer," Gibbs stated lowly, "You are the one who is being blinded by lies! You killed eight innocent people! And you are about to kill two more. Do you really think any merciful God would approve of this?"

"Not--- innocent---" The man growled out in a low voice, then pressed the knife against the throat of the shackled man. "You are all but innocent," he yelled into his face.

"Fine," Gibbs murmured, "those who are without fault may throw the first stone. Maybe we're not innocent – but you are guilty of abduction, torture, rape and murder. What makes you think that you are any better than we are? You raise yourself up to a divine position. As far as I see it, you are not trying to do God's work on earth. You make yourself God!"

"Shut up, SHUT UP!" Harris yelled, his hand shaking as the edge of the knife pressed harder against Gibbs's throat. "I AM PRIVILEGED! I HAVE A TASK! And you will not keep me from fulfilling it with your delusional speeches! Pray, Jethro, for then maybe your poor soul will find mercy in front of his throne!"

His last words were spoken in an obsessed determination, as his fingers clawed around the hilt of the knife. That is it, Gibbs thought.

They say, when you know you are about to die, your whole life passes before your eyes in split seconds. In retrospect he couldn't define whether that was true or not. The following events just happened too quickly for him to precisely recall any thought or memory that had gone through his mind at that very moment.

All of a sudden the sound of a gunshot echoed through the dim chamber for what seemed to be an eternity, and a second later the pressure of the knife against his throat was gone.

Instead, Harris sank forward, against Gibbs' body, looking at him in a kind of dense bewilderment, traces of blood at the corner of his mouth while he took a rattling breath. Then he fell to the ground.

Gibbs looked up to the door from where the weapon had been fired, and saw Tony Dinozzo with an expression of infinite relief on his face as he found that his colleagues were still alive. He checked the room, then hurried to his boss. Gibbs threw one of his glances at him.

"Damned, Dinozzo, it's about time! What took you so long?" he barked and when his left wrist was free, worked to free his right hand. "It's okay," he snapped when Dinozzo fumbled to help him, "I can handle it. Help Kate!" His order betrayed his annoyance, and impatiently he grabbed the gun out of Tony's hand.

The younger agent hurried over to his female colleague. "Damn, Katie-girl, what did he do to you?" he asked softly, while he carefully unclasped the metal chains that were holding her to the wall. When she was free and didn't move, he touched her cheeks softly and pulled off his own jacket to place it around her shoulders. "Are you hurt?" he then asked, pointing at the blood that was smeared over her cheeks.

"No," Kate murmured, still in shock about the sudden change of events from the previous two minutes, "That's his blood..." Her eyes fell on the man who was lying on the ground, his eyes staring at Kate while he was breathing heavily.

That was when she totally lost it. Afterwards, she recalled the scene like a cloud, the details swimming before her eyes.

With an outcry of rage, she pounded on her boss, insulting him, beating his chest and ignoring his yelled orders to stop and calm down, and his attempts to grab her wrists. She wanted to hurt him for what he had done to her, for betraying her, for not being there when she needed him – for leaving her alone.

The desperation and pressure she had been under during the last hours took their tribute now. Caitlin Todd had never used so many swear-words as in just those ten seconds, until Tony finally managed to grab her from behind and pull her away from Gibbs against his own chest, his arms closely wrapping around her shaking body as her silent tears soaked his shirt.

"Shhh, Kate, it's alright..." he soothed her, bewildered about her reaction. Nobody had ever dared to attack Gibbs like that, and Tony could see in his eyes, that, only a few more seconds, and he would have handcuffed his furious female colleague again.

Then they both jumped, when the crashing sound of another gunshot could be heard right next to them. Tony stared in disbelief at his boss, who was still pointing the gun to Harris' head, his features cold and stony when he observed the man die from the hit to his forehead.

Dinozzo pushed Kate aside and jumped forward to prevent Gibbs' from shooting again. Were his colleagues out of their minds? First Kate's totally irrational attack, then his boss nearly executing a man who was already lying on the ground.

Carefully, he took the weapon out of Gibbs' hand.

"Damn, boss!" he murmured, his eyes wide in shock. "You killed him!" His eyes scanned the dead body on the ground. Gibbs looked at him irritated for this statement of the obvious, his eyes betraying that he was not willing to discuss any of it now.

"That was for what you did to Kate," he simply told the dead body and then left the room. Tony followed him with his eyes, worried about him. He had never seen his boss so bitter and so blind with rage that he shot an already dying man in the head. 'For Kate' had he said, Tony recalled, the expression on Gibbs' face being one he had never seen before.

Tony turned his attention towards the woman in the corner, who was still, like hypnotized, staring at the dead psychopath on the ground. He placed his arm around her shoulder.

"Come on, Katie, I will get you out of here."

"I want to take a shower," Kate announced weakly and Tony smiled softly.

"That's my girl..." he joked, trying to make her smile, when some of her old spirit returned to her body.

The fact that she didn't protest him calling her 'his girl' as she would normally do, told him that she didn't only need a shower, but to go to the hospital as well.

Carefully, he guided her out of the room, out of the dark catacombs, out of the old house back into the world, where she was greeted by the sunlight and a blue sky. And Kate was sure she had never seen anything more beautiful than this blue sky in her whole life...

*~~~ Five Days Later ~~~*

Caitlin Todd felt as if she was going crazy. She had spent the whole day pacing around in her apartment like a locked up tiger who longed to be free again. She had used the last days to clean every inch of her apartment – twice – and now there was nothing left for her to do to ease the boredom caused by the involuntary vacation, she had been forced to take.

At first she had enjoyed the time off, that NCIS' psychological consultant had ordered her to take. But after two days she felt as if the walls of her own apartment were crushing her. If it had been up to her she wouldn't have visited a psychological consultant in the first place. She had been in stressful situations before, but after a good night's sleep and working overtime for the next days, she had always been able to handle it by herself.

Yet, Gibbs had asked her – no, ordered, she corrected grimly – to visit the consultant and talk to her about what had happened. She had protested, but he hadn't been willing to discuss his decision – as always – instead he had ordered Tony to escort her to the consultant's office. All the deals she had offered Tony had not convinced him to lie to Gibbs, and allow her to skip the appointment.

She was feeling alright – of course she had initially been crushed from the pressure and experiences, that she had been through. But she was a grown up woman – she had her ways to deal with experiences of that kind. And going back to work would have definitely been the best way for her to get back to the usual routine of her days.

She was looking forward to getting back to work tomorrow – although she didn't have the faintest idea of how to face Gibbs. He had not even explained his actions to her. In fact, after they had walked out of the house, he had not even talked to her. She recalled the moment five days ago. An ambulance had already been waiting, and on her way out, countless agents had passed them by to examine the place. The ambulance doctor had helped her into the car and treated her wrists and the bruises on her forehead and cheek.

Gibbs had been standing twenty meters away, talking to some officers. He waved the doctor, who wanted to treat his bruises, away grumpily.

At that moment, Kate couldn't understand him. She's didn't understand how he could remain so completely focused and professional, not even now taking a rest and letting other agents do the job.

At a certain point he had come over and asked the ambulance doctor how she was – as if she wasn't there. After the medical assistant had assured him, that she was fine and had no serious injuries, he looked at her with an indefinable look on his face.

"I expect you to visit our psychological consultant." That had been it, just like that.

"I don't need..." she had started with clear anger standing her voice, but he hadn't even let her finish.

"That was not a request, agent Todd! Dinozzo, make sure she visits the consultant!" he snapped, as the younger agent approached him from behind, starting at his grumpy tone.

"Yes, boss..." Tony had said and then looked after the older man as he walked away. "Maybe he should visit the consultant as well. Would be a great opportunity to get over his ex wives as well. Marriage therapy paid by the government," Tony half-joked and handed Kate a cup of hot tea to warm her up. He winced when Gibbs, who had obviously overheard his last remark, turned and barked.

"And if I learn that she didn't visit the consultant, Dinozzo, you can look for another job!"

The ringing of the doorbell snapped Kate out of her memories. She nearly jumped up and ran to let the visitors in. Any distraction from the loneliness in her apartment was welcome.

When she opened, she looked into the grinning faces of her colleagues Dinozzo and Abby.

"Hey," Tony greeted happily.

"Abbs, Tony! What are you doing here?" she exclaimed happily, opening the door wider and signaling them to enter.

Abby shrugged her shoulders when she stepped into Kate's apartment. "I thought you must be bored like hell, so I decided to get you a copy of my newest CD. It rocks, you have to listen to it."

"Yeah, and I accompanied her, mainly because I wanted to see what your apartment was like..." Tony joked, looking around interested, finally able to discover all the secrets, his colleague Kate Todd was hiding from him. Kate rolled her eyes and laughed.

"Oh..." Tony continued and handed her a rolled magazine, "and I brought you that – just so we have something to quarrel about tomorrow. And it helps to expand your obviously thin knowledge on certain topics."

Kate shot him a dark glare and shook her head while she looked at the latest issue of the FHM magazine.

Abby glanced at her male colleague, reproach standing in her eyes. "Tony, you lied to me! You said it was for you when we were at the newspaper shop." She smacked his shoulder and Kate had to laugh.

It was refreshing to see that between her colleagues nothing had changed. They were like her family and she couldn't even express how thankful she was for their company right now.

"Oh," Abby suddenly remembered and searched her bag for something, "Gibbs sends you these." She handed Kate her badge and her weapon, which had been missing since she had faded out in the old house. "And he told me to remind you that he expects your report on his desk tomorrow morning."

"Oh," Kate murmured, the tone in her voice becoming colder, "Of course. Reports. That's all he cares about." She threw the badge and her weapon on her sofa, slightly too forceful for Tony and Abby not to notice the anger she tried to hide when she hugged herself with her arms.

The colleagues exchanged a confused glance, then the goth analyst hugged Kate closely.

"How are you, is everything okay?" she asked worriedly.

"Perfectly fine," Kate murmured, not convincing them for her eyes spoke a different language.

"Listen," Abby started, "I don't know all the details about what happened, but I overheard Gibbs talk to one of our profilers. Whatever he did, it seems he saved both your lives. Ducky told me yesterday that he was amazed that you two had still been alive, for the other victims had all died within ten hours after their disappearance."

"Now I am supposed to thank him?!? I don't care what his intention was," Kate snapped angrily, "He was willing to sacrifice me. He is absolutely cold inside – and I trusted him to try to do his best to protect me!"

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "Well, he once told a female ATF agent, who held me hostage and threatened him with my life, to shoot me. It's just the way Gibbs handles things – he will not bend to anyone's rules, and that's what makes him such a good special agent. And besides, Katie, he would have never let anything happen to anyone of us. No matter how much he slaps me, or makes us run around to fulfill his orders – he would never admit it, but he does actually like us. Especially you..." he added, his eyes meeting Kate's.

Tony knew that it was the truth. He had often seen Gibbs' furtive looks when Kate had playfully fought with him or received a call by one of her dates. Tony had seen his face darken for a split second, his mood being a trace grumpier than before for the rest of the day. There was no doubt that his boss was feeling more for his subordinate colleague, than he was ever going to admit to her – or himself.

He was too obsessed with his own rules, Tony thought grimly and recalled the last time that Gibbs had, out of the blue, asked him to quote rule seventeen. And he remembered very vividly the rest of the day, which he had spent searching garbage for a piece of evidence as some kind of punishment for not being able to give the correct answer.

Kate gave an ironic snort. "Maybe Gibbs is a good agent, but the point is that he provoked Harris although he knew that there was no way he could have prevented him from..." she swallowed, the memory of the scene in the chamber making her uncomfortable, "...hurting me if his strategy had been wrong. And yet he didn't care for just one second."

Abby laughed. "Kate, I played poker with him once, and believe me, whatever this man does or says, he is definitely going to achieve it! I have never trusted anyone as much as I trust Gibbs."

"Well," Kate murmured with a trace of sadness in her voice. "You didn't hear his tone when he said it." Her thoughts trailed off, back to the moment in the chamber, when Gibbs had told Harris to do with her what he wanted. She recalled the cold tone of his voice, as if she was merely a casualty that had to be accepted. She forced those thoughts aside, and instead turned towards her kitchen.

"Can I offer you something to drink?" she asked, her voice faking a cheerfulness that she didn't feel inside. "Coffee? Tea?"

She couldn't tell her colleagues all the details about what she felt, how she felt betrayed and used, and most importantly why. She didn't even know herself. Rationally, she had to agree with Abby. In retrospect, it was certain that Gibbs had never lost control over the whole situation, but she was too emotionally involved to consider the happenings objectively. It had been a situation not much different from countless before and neither of them had seriously been hurt.

And yet, it made her angry how naturally he had told the criminal to take advantage of her, how controlled he had been in that situation, and how helpless she had felt. She couldn't talk about that with anybody, because deep in her heart she was unable to accept that there were situations – feelings - that she couldn't handle – despite her years of training and experience with the secret service.

~~~ *Next day* ~~~

"Morning boss!" Dinozzo greeted cheerfully when he saw the well-known figure of Jethro Gibbs step out of the elevator, two cups of coffee on a paper-tray in his hand. "Did you sleep well?"

Gibbs shot him a grumpy glance that said as much as 'Do you really want to go on my nerves this early in the morning?' and continued to walk towards his desk.

"Obviously not," Tony murmured, then louder. "Guess who is back!" He looked at Gibbs with cheerful enthusiasm, a wide grin on his face, but when Gibbs didn't even react, he decided to answer the question himself. "Right, it's Katie-girl!"

"And what makes you believe that this fact allows you to jump around me like a schoolboy instead of doing your job?" Gibbs countered annoyed and Tony's smile faded. With a murmured "Sorry boss," he ducked and hurried back to his desk. This seemed to be one of those days where he better stayed out of Gibbs' way and hoped, that the third or fourth cup of coffee would finally improve his mood.

Gibbs passed by Kate's desk, where the woman was already working, intensely looking at the screen of her computer and not paying attention to him when he walked in.

"Morning Kate," he greeted her curtly.

"Report is on your desk," she announced, even briefer than he had been, her tone cold as ice as she didn't even bother to return his friendly greeting. Gibbs frowned, mustering the report on his desk. Usually she was trying to start some time of casual small-talk. He looked over at her.

"Good job," he approached her desk and put down the second cup of coffee in front of her, then turned without comment to his own desk to complete the file of the serial killer. It was unofficially known in the whole office, that a cup of coffee was his way of showing his appreciation to one of his team members.

Tony growled. Damned, why had he never managed to earn a cup of coffee from Gibbs. All he got were slaps on the back of his head.

But what happened next was so unexpected and out of the blue that he caught his breath in his throat, silently waiting for an armageddon to come and praying that he would survive it.

For Kate got up without a word, took the cup of coffee, went straight towards Gibbs' desk and slammed it down before his eyes, not caring that drops of it spread over the sheets of papers lying there. Then she simply turned around and sat back down on her own chair, resuming her task of tapping her keys.

'Oh man,' Tony thought, one part of him anxious to see how his boss would react, the other one afraid for his life. Nobody had ever declared war at Jethro Gibbs that openly – at least nobody at NCIS had been stupid enough to do so.

And stupid it was, that much Tony could read in the eyes of his boss. He looked as if he was ready to throw Kate out of the office. Intending to prevent the worst from happening, Tony jumped up.

"Boss, Kate is..." he stuttered hastily to defend his female colleague, but Gibbs' thundering voice barking "Dinozzo" in a level that, Tony was sure of it, could even be heard by the director, shut him up at once, making him wonder for a split second what had gotten into his mind to try to defend Kate's absolutely irrational behavior and draw Gibbs' rage to himself. Quickly, he sat back down, observing with wide eyes as his boss stood up, slowly walked over to Kate's desk and leaned forward.

"Agent Todd, would you care to explain your behavior?" he asked, deadly calm, and yet his voice could be heard throughout the whole office. It became almost deafening silent as all present agents held their breaths in bewilderment, observing the scene that was taking place in front of their eyes.

"Since we obviously stopped informing each other of our motifs, I don't see a reason to do so," she countered snappily, her voice challenging while she didn't even bother to look at him, but continued to write on her computer. She was well aware that her behavior crossed all boundaries of what was appropriate to say to a superior – not to mention to Gibbs. At that very moment, she didn't care. She was determined to tell him what she thought of his stupid arrogance and yelling at him was the only way to get his serious attention. The last time she had done that, she had not been part of his team yet.

"Todd, elevator. NOW!" Gibbs pressed out, barely hiding his rage anymore, and hurried towards the doors of what had become his own personal conversation room.

Tony shook his head, as Kate got up. "Damn, Katie! He's going to fire you..." he whined, catching an aggressive glance and a muttered "Shut up, Tony!" from her as she followed her boss into the elevator.

Neither of them said a word when the elevator set into motion, until Gibbs forcefully hit the 'Stop' button. His eyes were now openly betraying his rage at her misconduct, as he approached her, intending to back her against the elevator wall. But Kate didn't move, instead she simply stayed where she was, holding his glare with the same force and rage sparkling in them, as there was in his.

"Are you out of your mind?" he barked at her and Kate folded her arms, her eyes holding his when she took the challenge.

"Am I out of my mind?" she snapped, the level of her voice matching his. At that very moment, she didn't care that he hated it if one repeated his question instead of giving him an answer right away. "I thought you were my friend! Obviously, I was wrong considering that you gave that psycho permission to ravish me without even blinking. What I expect is at least an explanation!"

Gibbs was now standing right in front of her, and she still didn't move. His eyes bore into hers with the cold intensity that she had often seen him use towards suspects. He didn't say a single word and with every second that passed, she felt the more and more urgent need to turn her eyes away from his – but she was determined to go through with it; to tell him that she was not willing to be a figure in the mind games that he played with some criminals.

"Agent Todd," Gibbs finally snapped, silently appreciating the courage she was demonstrating. No other agent had ever dared to hold his glare and still yell at him, while he was standing right in front of them. But then, Kate had already told him that she wanted to shoot him when they had first met. He should have expected nothing less from her. "I understand what you've been through was painful and degrading. But you are wrong if you think that it was any easier for me! What I still expect you to do is stop whining about what happened and do your job like a professionally trained agent! I appreciate you as member of my team, but if you ever dare to disrespect me again like you just did in the office, I will personally fill out your dismissal."

His last words were spoken dangerously calm, and with a hidden threat that left no doubt that he would do exactly what he had just announced to do. He turned and slammed the 'Stop' button again, and the elevator started moving again. For him, the discussion was over – not for Kate though.

She inhaled deeply, then made a step towards the control panel and hit the button with the same force that he had applied, which made the elevator come to an abrupt stop again. She turned to face him, ignoring the fact that Gibbs was close to throw her out right there, right then.

"Then let me tell you something, special agent Gibbs," she raged, moving so that she was standing right in front of him. "Right now I don't care whether you dismiss me or make me scrub toilets for the rest of my life. In fact I am thinking about transferring to Norfolk or doing something entirely different with my life – and you know why? Because I don't want to be killed in a chamber or... or... wherever the next place will be when you decide to risk one of your agents' life in an attempt to prove your arrogance or whatever you want to call it." Her voice was shaking now and she had to take a deep breath.

She turned her back to him and started to pace up and down the small room. "I talked to Abby... she told me that you probably saved us with what you did. But tell me, what would you have done if he had assaulted me? What was your plan B? Or would you just have let him rape me? Was that just a risk that you were willing to take?"

He didn't answer. He didn't even move. Agent Gibbs had never given any reasons for his behavior to his subordinates – and he had never been asked to. He required them to trust his judgement. And the fact that she demanded a justification of his decision now enraged and bewildered him at the same time. Especially since he refused to admit – to her as well as himself – that he did not know what he would have done if his plan hadn't worked.

"Tell me!" Kate yelled while spinning around, hitting his chest furiously, angry about how emotionless he was again – as if he didn't care at all.

Gibbs mustered her, raging at her insubordination and the way she dared to talk to him.

"Agent Todd, I have never justified any of my decisions to any of my agents, and I am not going to start doing it right now. What I did served to buy us time, which saved our lives. But if you can't trust on my judgement, I think it would probably be the better choice for both of us, if you considered a transfer to another team."

"That's your answer?" In a mixture of fury and sadness, she started to hit his chest more forcefully, angry at the tears that were starting to form in her eyes – at how he still had the power to hurt her against her will and didn't even seem to realize it.

"You arrogant idiot!" she cried out furiously, when he grabbed her wrists and effectively stopped her enraged attack by pulling her against his body and holding her hands tightly on her back.

"You think I was willing to sacrifice you?" he barked angrily at her, shocking her with his sudden outburst while she desperately tried to free herself from his strong grip. "You should know me better than that! Did I take the risk, that my plan wouldn't work? Yes, I did! Because no matter what we would have done, he would have raped and killed you anyway – and me afterwards. That's what his plan was. So excuse me if I took a risk to buy us some time!" Gibbs was in a state of fury that matched her own by now. "The point is, special agent Todd, do you want to leave or do you want to remain a member of my team. Because if you want, I expect you to act as one and trust my judgement! I expect you to follow my orders, without questioning them. And what I do not expect you to do is

attack me and demand justifications for anything I did! What just happened up there was so far across the line that I could have your badge on my desk for insubordination!”

“Orders! That’s all you care about? Your own authority?” she snapped back angrily, their faces only inches apart, while she still fought to pull her hands out of his steel grip. Gibbs nodded, his expression getting darker with every contradicting word that she threw into his face.

“Yes! Because we are professional federal agents! A professionalism which you seem to lack at the moment! What is the matter with you?”

“I am sorry if I am not as cold as you!” she snapped back ironically. “You know what? This is obviously pointless, because you are just being all ‘Gibbs’ about this and I just... I can’t be... because I...” She interrupted herself. Yes, why exactly couldn’t she just accept what had happened and move on? She looked up into his eyes, stopping her physical attempts to free herself from him. Only then did she realize how close they were standing to each other – and how oddly comfortable it felt to her. Suddenly she became consciously aware of how good he scented – a mixture of heady after shave, coffee and just Gibbs. She fought to suppress the erotic thoughts which crossed her mind and were not only completely inappropriate concerning that they were having a serious discussion, but also off limits since he was her superior – not to mention a good number of years older than her.

All of a sudden, his silence made her uncomfortable; his features didn’t show any hint of what he was thinking, he was just returning her look – and slowly she started to feel stupid.

That brought her mind back on track and her rage back. Even now, when she was right, he was just too proud or absorbed in his own arrogance to admit it.

“The fact that you don’t justify your decisions may be accepted by agents like Dinozzo or McGee, but don’t think that your grumpy character or your absolutely bossy way to bark around orders, intimidate me!” she ranted on, inhaling deeply to get ready to tell him what she thought of his unwillingness to explain himself, when suddenly, he pulled her harshly against his body, his mouth closing hers in a forceful, almost ravaging kiss that effectively interrupted her speech.

Her initial reaction was to shriek in shock, a sound that was muffled by his lips. Then her shock gave way to a feeling of arousal that seemed to take possession of her body like a wave rolling through her veins and turning her blood into molten lava. She softened, intuitively pressing herself closer against him.

When he felt her mouth open under his, he softened the almost bruising kiss by starting to nibble at her lips and seducing her into joining in the tender game.

His rage was gone – in fact it had been gone the instant his lips had touched hers and he had been lulled into the sweet taste of her lips and the pleasant scent of the soft perfume that she wore.

He let go of her wrists and instead used his hands to pull her female body closer into his own.

Not even realizing that he had let go of her hands and, theoretically, she would be able to shove him away, she moved her hands over his shoulders and finally clasped them into the material of his shirt on his chest.

A soft sigh escaped her throat when he deepened the sweet and yet forceful assault on her mouth, her tongue starting an erotic duel with his – a duel which she was more than willing to lose. The taste of coffee on his lips and the feel of his body pressed against hers were like a drug to her mind.

All of a sudden he broke the kiss and pushed himself away from her, bringing as much distance as possible between them, while he fought hard to regain control over himself again. He took a sharp

breath, his head leaning against the elevator wall while he was staring at the ceiling. “Damn,” he muttered, with a hint of new rage betrayed in his voice – rage directed at himself rather than the female agent opposite to him. What the hell was the matter with him to kiss Caitlin Todd?

Angry at himself and his absolutely inappropriate behavior, he hit the stop button forcefully which set the elevator into motion again. Being in a room with her that offered so little space was not a good idea at the moment.

Kate was still standing like frozen, staring at him, her eyes clouded and her mind lulled into the aftermath of the erotic kiss they had just shared. She touched her lips with her fingers, her consciousness unable to fully grasp what exactly had just happened.

She was no longer angry at her boss. Kate was torn between confusion, arousal and awkwardness as she reconsidered how she should ever be able to look him in the eyes again and not have immoral thoughts.

Neither of them said a word during the ten seconds until they were back on their floor. Still, the ten seconds seemed to last an eternity that was filled with awkwardness between them.

When the doors opened, Gibbs stepped out of the elevator, not looking back at her.

What had he been thinking to just drag her to him and kiss her until they were both breathless? Not only was she almost twenty years younger than him, he was also her boss. And just that fact turned the incident into sexual harassment.

“Boss,” Tony jumped up when he saw Gibbs approach. “Where is Kate? Did you fire...”

“Back to work, Dinozzo!” Gibbs barked enraged, not willing to listen to any of Tony’s crap right now. Just right after he had reproached her of being unprofessional, he recalled angrily and hit his desk with his palm. And now? Kate was nowhere at sight, so where was she? Was she crying?

Damned, he thought to himself, unable to comprehend what exactly had motivated him to act like he had done. Had it been her soft body pressed to his? Or the way that she had challenged him with her soft brown eyes? Or her female scent? Whatever it had been, he had to make sure that a slip like that never happened again.

Kate was still standing in the elevator, not moving although the doors had already closed again. He had kissed her – just like that. Totally out of the blue. She knew that she should be outraged and angry, and that the appropriate response would have probably been to push him away and slap him, but part of her had longed for this kiss without even knowing it.

Instead of pushing him away, signaling him how far beyond the line he was, she had returned the kiss; even given him permission to deepen it. With a tortured moan she leaned back against the cold wall, her hand at her forehead when she imagined what he had to think of her now.

How had this able to happen, that one second she had ranted and then she had willingly kissed him, and now... What now? How could she ever look at him again? And more importantly, prove to him that she was just as professional as he was? Being the jerk he sometimes could be, she considered it quite possible that the whole situation had been a test of her professionalism. She knew that he had always judged her for the affair she had had with her colleague when she had still been working with the Secret Service – even if he had never said anything outloud.

After another short moment, which she needed to catch herself and rearrange her clothes, she pressed the button for the elevator door to open and then stepped out. Better to start handling the

situation right now, she thought insecurely. Tony looked up, when she approached, his face showing infinite relief.

“Thank God, he didn’t kill you! Please tell me we’re still working together...” he started to babble, but Kate walked around her desk and got back to work without reacting to him.

Tony figured it wisest to remain silent – otherwise he could already see himself getting fired if he took the dark expression on Gibbs’ face into consideration.

The rest of the day passed by in awkward silence, from time to time interrupted by some discussions between Tony and McGee, but aside from that, nobody said a word.

When Kate needed Gibbs signature under a form she had filled out, she simply walked over to his desk and put it down under his nose. And he would sign it and hand it back to her without even looking up. The whole situation was of course closely observed by their two male colleagues.

Even Abby sensed the emotional tension the instant that she entered the office, and hurried to leave again as fast as she could.

It had already become dark outside, when Tony lifted from his chair and grabbed his jacket, almost relieved that the ‘day of hell’, as he would call it the weeks afterwards, was over. Only that made Kate realize that her shift ended and that the office had already emptied, only few agents remaining, who still needed to finish reports or work on active cases.

“And another wonderful evening starts with beautiful Mindy...” Dinozzo informed the people around him proudly, making a last desperate attempt to ease the tension. Normally, Kate would have made an ironic remark or asked a sarcastic question, but tonight she just remained silent. Tony sighed and shrugged, then left the office.

Kate lifted her head to look over at Gibbs, who was still, in a concentrated manner, writing and moving the sheets of paper around on his desk. After a short while of observing his actions, she got up and slowly approached him.

She had no idea what to say, and so she just stood uncomfortably in front of his desk. After some seconds, when she still hadn’t said a word, Gibbs finally lifted his head to look at her – for the first time since the kiss, their eyes met.

“I...” Kate started, lowering her eyes since she was not able to return his look for long without bringing back memories. “I wanted to know if I shall return tomorrow... or if I should report to NCIS headquarters in Norfolk.” That was not what she had actually wanted to say – in fact she didn’t even know what she had wanted to say, since she had no idea what his opinion of the whole incident was.

Gibbs looked at her thoughtfully, then resumed writing on the sheet of paper. “That’s your decision to make, special agent Todd.”

“Oh...” she murmured and nodded, inhaling deeply. “Actually, that was not... what I wanted to say. What I meant was... I am sorry, Gibbs.”

“What for?” he asked, a hint of surprise in his voice as he looked up again and laid his pen aside.

“For what I said this morning – for some of the things at least. I guess you were right, I was seeing things too unprofessionally and I assure you, something like that is never going to happen again. I was just...” She could truly say, that she had never been in a situation that had made her feel weirder in her whole life than this conversation with Gibbs did.

"Maybe we should just forget about it," he offered at her lack of words. If she didn't know better, she would have said that he was just as insecure as she was – at least she believed to read a hint of it in his eyes. Of course he would never show it openly. "We've been under a lot of stress – both of us – so maybe we should just put it behind and go back to our work."

"Yes." Kate nodded, a tiny part of her having expected something else from him; having hoped for something else. "So I am still part of your team?"

"Do you still want to be?" he asked, diverting his eyes back to his sheet of paper. They both knew what hidden question was lying underneath those simple words. Would she still be able to respect him after what had happened in the elevator? They both recalled the kiss at that very moment.

"Yes I do," Kate finally said firmly, then after another five seconds of silence, "under one condition: Next time you listen to me if I tell you that people who go into old houses at night end up dead."

She smiled faintly when he looked up at her attempt to ease the tension and returned her soft glance. He could symbolically see the weight lifting of her heart when her expression lightened up. Still smiling, she returned to her desk and grabbed her purse and her coat. "Good Night, Gibbs."

"Kate," he called when she was almost out the door. She looked back at him expectantly, when he didn't speak right away, but glanced at her with an expression on his face that she had never seen there before. "Just so you know, it would have mattered to me if Harris had hurt you."

Kate held his eyes for another second, then turned and left the office, still stunned at what he had just said. Gibbs never let his agents know that they meant something to him – except for Abby of course.

She was totally confused. Something had changed inside of her, something in her view of him. And when she thought of his smile, she could feel something in her heart that she hadn't felt for a long time.

She sighed. It was better to stop thinking about him. It was never going to happen. He was her boss, and he was a principled man who always followed his own rules – especially rule number twelve.

The kiss had been a one-time slip, there was never going to happen anything between them.

"Relationships between agents never work..." she reminded herself, sighing, and silently added a rule 12a which referred to age difference. Unfortunately, her heart wouldn't pay attention to any rules...

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Gibbs sighed when Kate had left, and leaned back in his chair. Somehow his life had become much more complicated since he had gotten up this morning. And she was the reason. What had been the matter with him to kiss her?

Now all he could think about was how sweetly she had tasted, how fragile her body had felt against his and how desperately he wanted to kiss her again and beyond – which was, of course, out of the question.

If his occasional scans of her slender body when they were working had already been a violation of his principle, then the kiss was on a whole other level in the world of violations.

Gibbs sighed and closed his eyes for a moment. He had to get her out of his head. He would not compromise his professionalism with one simple kiss.

He moaned inwardly when he remembered the kiss. She was so much younger than he was, and yet, for a moment, it had felt perfectly right to caress her lips with his. And when he had felt her move closer against him, he had, for the blink of an eye, assumed that she felt the same. A stupid assumption, he thought grimly to himself. She had most likely just been totally frightened and only returned the kiss because he was her boss – who, aside from that, had also held her hands to her back and by that refused her any possibility to free herself from him.

When he recalled her puzzled reaction and her totally confused stare, he got the awful feeling in his gut that he had simply taken advantage of her.

She would have every right to file a complaint and report his behavior to the director, and yet she obviously didn't intend to.

He decided on acting absolutely professional towards her during the next months.

After three failed marriages he should know better than to blindly fall for a woman – especially if she was so much younger as Kate was.

If he had learned anything, then it was how to close his heart away from the world. And in a few days, he was sure of that, the normal routine would have returned into their office.

And yet, in the depth of his heart, a tiny voice remained, a part of him that knew the truth. A part of him, that was too dangerous to be listened to. And yet the tiny voice kept whispering that she meant so much more to him than a colleague...

The End (Mar 18, 2007)

## After Tonight

*This is a sequel for my fanfiction "Blue Skies". The NCIS team is tasked to protect a high ranking Navy admiral on a gala after he has been threatened with his life. But things work out differently from what they all expected – in more than just one way...*

*Destiny grants us our wishes, but in its own way, in order to give us something beyond our desires.*

*At that very moment she realized that there was a profound truth to proverbs like that; that there were things in life that you couldn't deny, no matter how much you tried. Things that you had to accept just the way they were.*

*She couldn't exactly say how she had gotten here, to this point in her life. But all of a sudden it all seemed to add up. For a split second she felt, that everything had a meaning – all that she had been through, all the decisions that she had made, every problem she had been faced with. Every single one of them had led her here, to this very moment. And it had been worth it.*

*No matter how much she had denied and tried to avoid the inevitable, her heart had made its choice – long before she had even consciously realized that there was a choice to be made.*

*She opened her eyes and looked at the ceiling, which was bathed in the soft, silver light that the beams of the full moon sent through the open window of the hotel room. Her breathing had returned to normal and slowly she felt the ability to move return to her limp body.*

*He didn't say a word – neither did she. Regrets started to fill her mind as the voice of reason slowly regained control over her emotions.*

*Gone was the feeling of almost divine bliss; gone were any thoughts of that it had long been meant to be that way.*

*She shivered slightly, as a breeze of night wind, that blew softly through the open window, cooled her still sweaty body. Her mind, that had been lulled into the aftermath of the incredibly satiating lovemaking, sobered up and she turned her head to look at the thin curtains, that were swaying in the breeze in front of the window. Too many thoughts were going through her head, thoughts that it had been a mistake. They numbered all of the reasons why she shouldn't have done it and eventually replaced the feeling of satiation with an uncomfortable awkwardness.*

*Almost shyly, she covered her nakedness with one of the thin sheets, not daring to look at the man next to her.*

*They were simply lying next to each other, both thinking about how they had gotten into this situation – and both searching for ways to handle it from here...*

**~~~ Earlier That Day ~~~**

His hand was lying loosely on her back. Not that she minded it. But it distracted her to the point that she felt his warmth through the thin material of her dress as if his skin was on fire, aiming on enflaming hers as well. He didn't even seem to notice that her thoughts had drifted away from the case; or what his closeness did to her.

Special Agent Kate Todd took a sip of the glass of champagne that she was holding in her hand. She knew that it had been four months since they had kissed in the elevator – and neither of them had ever mentioned it again. Yet, she felt as if it had happened just yesterday, the memory of it being vividly preserved in the dreams she was having every night.

She had tried everything to get him off her mind, but not been successful. She had even caught herself comparing her dates to Special Agent Jethro Gibbs – a fact that hadn't even been clear to her in the beginning.

At first she had simply felt different when she was on a date; as if she was not seriously interested in the man she was sitting opposite to. But she had patiently listened to the stories the men told her – and eventually found a reason to avoid the good night kiss.

Only when, one evening during the last week, she had allowed one of her dates, Brian, to kiss her, it had dawned on her what the reason for the sudden lack of interest in men was. The kiss had been a complete disaster. Brian had been sweet and well-mannered, but kissing him felt as if she was kissing Tony. Not that she had ever kissed Tony – but it evoked the same feelings in her that the thought of kissing Tony did. It was something she didn't really want to do, because she wanted more than the sweetness and superficial heat. She wanted to feel what she had felt when she and Gibbs had kissed. This split second when she had felt as if her mind melted into that of her partner – as if they were one. This deep love and at the same time erotic seduction, that was what she longed for.

Men like Brian were not able to offer her that, because – as she had realized at that very second – she couldn't think of any other man than Jethro Gibbs anymore.

And now she was here, on a gala with him, tasked to protect a highly decorated Navy Rear Admiral.

It had started out as a rather normal murder case, until they had discovered a wider conspiracy, that aimed on assassinating Admiral Smith. The murdered Lieutenant had obviously, by chance, found out about the planned attempt on the Admirals life.

The team had been able to arrest the Lieutenant's murderer, but then learned that he had been hired and paid by a higher ranking Naval Officer. He had had no idea about the man who had ordered him to kill the Lieutenant, though – and therefore they had no idea who had ordered the assassination of the admiral.

That fact had, much to Tony's delight, earned them an investigation in Madrid, Spain, where the admiral had to speak on an international conference about the latest achievements in Iraq and the Navy's plans for the last two years.

And it was their task to protect the admiral during those three days, until tonight's gala would end the conference and every guest would return home – hopefully safely.

Initially, Tony had been assigned to act as her partner at the gala in the hall of the large hotel. But the male agent had, as usual, not been able to keep his mind focused on details that lay beyond women's cleavages, and eventually Gibbs had ordered him to return to the room that served as their temporary headquarters two floors above them – and had shown up himself ten minutes ago.

Kate hadn't been able to believe it, when he had entered the hall, looking absolutely gorgeous in the expensive suit that he was wearing. He had gallantly offered her his arm and she had taken it, questioning him about Dinozzo's whereabouts.

She had laughed, when Gibbs had informed her with a hint of anger still present in his voice that he had ordered Dinozzo to stay with McGee and keep an eye on the hotel cameras. Both of them knew that being stuck in the same room with Timothy McGee for hours was one of the worst punishments for him.

And now she was stuck with Gibbs for the rest of the evening. Not that she didn't enjoy his company – the problem was that she enjoyed it a little bit too much. Especially when they were just standing about two meters behind the admiral and he was so close to her that she could smell his after shave and feel the warmth of his body through her clothes.

"The whole evening he has done nothing else than shaking people's hands. He seems to have a lot of friends here." Kate informed her boss, mainly to put her mind back on focus. "Especially female ones."

Gibbs had to smirk, when he recalled the reputation that the admiral had among his colleagues. "Yes, I've heard rumors."

Kate shook her head, looking at the corpulent, bold man. He was neither attractive, nor charming, but rather slimy and disrespectful towards women. She recalled very vividly the remark he had made towards her about accompanying him to his bedroom tonight – as 'protective detail'.

"I don't get what women see in him," she shivered slightly. "He's unattractive and old!"

"He's two years younger than me," Gibbs noted dryly and Kate paled. Two years younger than Gibbs? That man looked like he was sixty – so either he was looking much older than he was or Gibbs looked a lot younger. She took a huge sip of her champagne and forced aside the thoughts that inevitably crossed her mind when she considered the possibility of feeling attracted to a man who was beyond sixty. Her first assignment once they were back in DC would be to find out the age of her boss. Anyway, what had she been thinking by remarking the age of the admiral in the first place?

"Yes, but you look way better than he does," she replied, too hastily for him not to notice her embarrassment. Then, when she saw his half bemused, half amused look, she started to stutter. "I mean, not that I find you attractive... I mean, I do..." she paused for a moment, thinking for a second about her words and how they had sounded completely different in her mind. "Wow... that came over totally wrong. I mean... I..."

'Shut up, Kate, just shut up before you make it worse!' she thought and took another sip from her champagne and turned her head away from him as she tried to regain her composure – which she couldn't as long as she saw the amused expression on his face. At that moment she was sure she understood why he had been married three times. There was something about him that attracted women, despite the fact that he could act like a complete asshole.

"Agent Gibbs!" The admiral approached them and Kate exhaled relieved. Saved – at least for now. What was the matter with her? Had she just told her boss that she found him attractive? She groaned inwardly.

"Where is your younger colleague?" The admiral asked and looked around, his eyes obviously searching for Tony. Gibbs shrugged.

"I had more important tasks for him." He replied dismissively, signaling that he wasn't willing to give any further details about Tony's whereabouts. Instead, he took a mouthful of the scotch he was holding in his hand. "I decided to replace him myself..."

"Understandable, with the chance of such an attractive lady by your side. That's an assignment I wouldn't reject either." He laughed indecently and Kate could swear, she saw Gibbs' expression become a hint darker.

"I admire her for her extraordinary skills as a special agent, not for the factors that you take into consideration," he informed the man gruffly and turned his head to look around. He tried to suppress the voice in him that told him what a lying bastard he was.

Of course, he hadn't decided to pull Tony off in order to see Kate in this incredibly tight dress. On the contrary! He had assigned the younger agent against his better judgement in the first place. Just this one time, he had hoped that Tony would not turn an observation assignment into a personal dating party. His hopes had been futile – he should have known that Tony, being the casanova he was, wouldn't be able to resist the temptation.

And then he had seen no other options than going in himself since McGee was too insecure and had already tripped over his own feet when Gibbs had just hinted on replacing Tony with him. Aside from that he needed the youngest agent in his team at the computer.

Ever since the incident in the elevator, he had kept a certain distance to Caitlin Todd. He had forced his eyes off her body when he had caught himself scanning her beautiful, slender figure.

He had tried not to look at her when she wore one of her sexy shirts. And it had worked. At least that was what he liked to believe. Because his other option was to admit that he, a man in his fifties, was lusting after a woman who was at least twenty years younger than he was. Which alone would be alright – every man did at a certain point in his life – but Kate was his subordinate. She considered him to be her mentor, her boss – and the fantasies that were going through his mind from time to time were enough to betray the trust that she put into him.

He had stopped counting the times when he had numbered all the reasons why his interest in her was a bad idea. They were from different worlds. She was modern, he was old-fashioned; she liked to go out, he built a boat in his spare time - to name just the top of it. The list would go on for several pages if he ever wrote all of the reasons down.

There had been some incidents, when one of them had made a flirtatious remark, just like it had been before the kiss. But he had paid attention not to deepen that conversation.

Still, sometimes when their eyes met, he felt as if the glances they exchanged had been a split second too long to be casual. Even if they had brushed arms or hands, when she gave something to him, the touch had been a little too prolonged to be accidental. Most likely it was just his own imagination.

It was as if he was drawn to her and it took all of his power – and bad memories of his three failed marriages – to keep himself from giving in to this attraction. Since his first marriage, he had not felt so fascinated by a woman – and it scared him. He liked to be the one in control over the situation – as well as his emotions. But she triggered something inside him, that seemed to cause a chain reaction which always started with shutting his rational brain functions down.

Even now he had to force himself not to look her up – and that was a challenge in itself. The dress that Abby had chosen for her was incredibly tight and formed out every curve of her slender body. It was black and long, and only a long slit at the side revealed the silky skin of her neatly shaved leg.

Damned, he thought silently. He would bet that she had not the slightest idea about how sexy she was looking in that dress; about how much he wanted to show her just how sexy she was by pressing her against the nearest wall and kiss her until she was panting and begging him for more.

He forced himself to stop thinking into that direction. He was, after all, her superior – and he himself had taught her that relationships between agents never worked.

Therefore he forced his attention back to the guests in the large hall. Most of them were politicians and higher ranking admirals and officers of national and international defense organizations. He knew most of them – mainly because he had studied the guest list and gathered detailed background information on every single person who would be present on tonight's gala.

He didn't like unexpected surprises on missions where lives were on stake.

"What do you think, agent Gibbs," The admiral finally pulled him out of his thoughts. "Did I convince them with my speech? Or was I being too dramatic?"

"Hard to say. The decision is to be made by the committee, but up to now our president has never had any problems justifying his decisions. If you would excuse us, I want to take a look around," Gibbs, who was not interested in discussing political matters with the admiral, replied.

"Sure," the admiral nodded and lifted his glass towards Gibbs, "but you could leave me agent Todd? I could use company who is as charming as she is."

Kate looked at Gibbs with what he read as an almost panicked expression written on her face, and shook his head with hidden amusement.

"No, I need her with me." He replied in his usual tone that didn't allow any kind of discussions. Softly, he placed his hand on the small of her back and led her away from the admiral.

"Thank you," she murmured, once they were out of reach. "One more second alone with him and I would kill him myself."

Gibbs chuckled and looked around, quickly scanning the faces of the persons around them. His years of experience, not only as an agent, but also as a marine, had taught him to recognize persons with one quick glance.

"If the assassin is here already, he must be among the guests – or the personnel," Kate said lowly, her eyes also wandering around. "They don't allow any more guests in, but closed the doors around twenty minutes ago."

"Most assassins show up only seconds before the attack." Gibbs informed her. "But since we have not the slightest hint on the identity of the person, who wants to see the admiral dead, we have to expect that the person is among us – that maybe we have already talked to him."

Kate thought a moment, then suddenly a question formed in her head, something that they hadn't taken into consideration yet.

"Gibbs, how do we know it's a man?"

"Because there are only very few female assassins – most of which are standing on FBI's or CIA's most wanted list. None of them is present tonight. And the person who hired our first killer was definitely a man," he noted.

"Yet," Kate replied thoughtfully, "the admiral seems to have the quality to enrage especially women. Do you seriously think that I am the only one who ever felt insulted by his behavior?"

Gibbs shot her a thoughtful look, then he activated the small microphone that was pinned to his suit. Although he didn't think that her theory was right, he knew better than to leave that possibility open.

"Dinozzo!" Gibbs said into the small device and static filled his ear. Then the insecure voice of McGee answered.

"Um...McGee here...boss..."

"McGee, where is Dinozzo?" Gibbs asked, the threat eminent in his voice as he, quite rightly, assumed that Dinozzo had decided to spend his evening with something more interesting than staring onto a screen.

"He is...um...getting food for us..." The agent stuttered. It was obvious that he had just made that reason up and Gibbs inhaled deeply. Then he decided that now was not the time to deal with Dinozzo. He would yell at him in the morning and then make sure that, once they were back in DC, he would do nothing else than write reports for a whole week.

"Fine, McGee. I want you to check every woman who is present tonight. Wives, waitresses, maids, whoever. Understood?"

"Yes, Sir... um... boss... when do you need..." The youngest agent stammered almost panicked – as he always became when Gibbs addressed him.

"One hour!" Gibbs interrupted him impatiently. "Look for any hints of a past that is connected to that of the admiral and might be the reason for some kind of rage against him."

With those words, he turned off the microphone without waiting for an answer. Just as he had the habit to hang up the phone in the middle of a sentence without listening. Kate raised her eyebrows amused, and the hint of a smile crossed her face. That did, of course not go unnoticed by him. He questioned her silently with his eyes.

"Seriously," Kate finally explained and pointed at the microphone, "that is probably why you have three failed marriages."

"What?" he asked, somewhat stunned and confused at the same time.

"That!" she pointed out, "Hanging up on people while they're talking. Or not waiting for an answer. It drives me nuts when you do that. And you do it a lot!"

She was bold – as always. But they both knew that she was the only one of his subordinates who was allowed to make that kind of playful comments on his marriages. It usually ended in an ironic remark by him and them smiling at each other. He liked to see her smile – maybe that was why he let her get away with those remarks, while Tony for example had to fear for his life.

Gibbs shrugged, smiling. "Experience teaches me that those answers will either be useless information or discussions. I don't want to hear either of it."

"Useless information as in small talk?" Kate asked with a soft chuckle. "You know, sometimes that can be fun."

"What?"

"Well," Kate shrugged, "Saying hello or goodbye for starters. People on the other end don't feel so..." She paused to search for an appropriate word, then looked into his eyes in a playfully challenge, "...insulted."

Instead of answering, he simply held her eyes in that indefinable manner that always put her off. It worked. When she was the first to break their gaze and let her eyes wander around in the room, he knew that he had won.

"You should know by now that I don't care if other people might feel insulted," he replied dryly and Kate chuckled.

"As I said... probably the reason for your divorces." She enjoyed these kind of playful banter with him. Of course she was aware that it was a privilege that he only granted her.

She remembered the moments when she had first met this hard and distant man on Air Force One. From the first moment, she had felt a certain fascination inside. He had a natural charisma of dominance around him, even when he hadn't said anything, but just sat there on his chair, taking notes.

She had never been a woman who had taken orders from other people, except superiors. That was why she hadn't accepted taking his orders – although he was obviously used to people following his orders without questioning them.

Yet, although she had been outraged by his arrogant behavior, he had also attracted her. Maybe it had been just that dominance, that had fascinated her. Recently, she had read in one of those cheap women's magazines, that women always felt attracted to dominant men – it was a genetic heritage from an earlier evolutionary state.

She didn't want to believe that the reason for her fascination was just that plain. Rather she liked to think that it was his character, the way he stood by his principles. And that he was loyal to his colleagues. She knew that, no matter what he said or how often he slapped Tony, he would stand up for them if necessary.

On more than one occasion had she seen, that his mask of coolness and distance was just his way of protecting himself. She remembered the first time when she had seen him flirt with that redhead, who had been suspected to have killed her half-brother.

Up to then, she had thought that no man was able to top Tony where hitting on women was concerned. She couldn't have been more wrong. Even Tony could have still learned something from watching Gibbs at that moment.

The memory brought up unpleasant feelings of jealousy, so Kate hurried to suppress it – as well as the thought about what she would give to have him flirt with her like that just once. She seriously doubted that any woman could deny herself to him and wondered for a moment if he was aware of that power. Most likely, if she considered his arrogance and self-assurance – and the fact that he had been married three times.

Lost in her thoughts, Kate followed one of the waitresses with her eyes. She was a thin, blonde woman whom she hadn't seen before. With an amused smile playing around the corner of her mouth, she thought about Tony and how that blonde doll was exactly his type – and how she would enjoy telling him about that woman and giving him a detailed description.

And then she narrowed her eyes. For a split second, she had seen something white shimmering in the hand of the waitress when she handed a full glass of champagne to the admiral. Something like a sheet of paper – or a folded note?

With awakened interest, Kate observed the woman more concentrated, trying to see if she behaved differently from other waitresses. But neither she nor the admiral gave any sign that would indicate, that she had indeed passed the admiral a note.

Two minutes later, she decided that it had not been a note, but possibly just a serviette. Still, there was this feeling in her gut, that pressure that she had already felt back on Air Force One, if something had been wrong...

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Nothing in their schedule and the way the case had developed had indicated how this day was going to end. And if it had – he didn't know what he would have done. Would he still have let it happen?

*He just lay there, next to her, not sure about what to say or what was going on in her mind. She was awfully silent, now that both of them came down from the heights of ecstasy, and she didn't dare to look at him – and with all the experience he had with women, he knew that that was probably not the best sign. Did she regret it?*

*He didn't dare to ask her – maybe because he was afraid that she would say yes. And maybe he was even more afraid that she would say no. He couldn't say that he regretted what had happened between them – how could he, after the incredible experience that he had just had. Yet, his reason told him that it had been wrong.*

*If it had been his choice, this would have happened differently – for starters, he probably wouldn't have slept with her in the first place. But at least he would have taken it more slowly.*

*After the four months of denial, he should have known that it was only a matter of time until the fire between them led to an explosion of heat and desire that neither of them would be able to control.*

*And he should have known that this was the night where it was going to happen when he had seen her in her incredibly beautiful dress earlier. He should have known - if he had had the slightest idea that she was feeling the same desperate need and desire inside, that he did. But up to now he had only allowed the possibility of her returning his feelings in the fantasies that he had banned from his mind – or at least tried to ban.*

*You are the greatest moron on earth, he thought to himself, when suddenly he remembered all the little things that had indicated her emotions: the glances which they had exchanged; the way that she softly brushed his fingers when she handed him a file – not a long touch, but still a softness lying in it. And then, to begin with, the fact that she had never filed any kind of complaint after the incident in the elevator where he had kissed her.*

*And tonight? In retrospect, he didn't know what had been going on in his mind when he had asked her to dance with him. It had seemed to be a good idea since it had been late and half of the guests had already left. Aside from that she had told him that she loved to dance, but rarely had a chance to do so – and for some reason he had wanted to fulfill her that wish with the possibility given.*

*He should have known that it was a bad idea when he had felt her slender, female body softly brushing against his, while they were swaying softly to the music.*

*That dance had started their problems – in more than just one respect. Not only had it heated his desire, it had also led to both of them losing focus and leaving the admiral out of their eyes. It had merely been a few minutes, but still it had been a stupid mistake...*

### ~~~ Earlier That Day ~~~

Kate didn't know why she had accepted his invitation to dance with him. She knew that, with all that she felt inside, the appropriate response would have been to tell him that she was tired or to refuse because of their mission to protect the admiral.

But instead she had taken his hand and allowed him to lead her to the middle of the room where other couples had been dancing.

At first, both of them had remained silent when he had pulled her closer and they started to move with the music.

Kate wasn't able to look at him, although she could feel his eyes resting on her. The feelings inside her were too strong and she was afraid that they were reflected in her eyes – open for him to read.

Gibbs had always had the gift of knowing exactly, what was going on in the heads of his subordinates – and what was going through her mind was something that she really didn't want him to know. It was enough to fill a feature length porn movie – an erotic, romantic one of course. Not one of those dirty ones that Tony most likely watched.

She had been so focused on not letting her guard down, that he had sensed her tension. Of course he had no idea that he was the reason for it – at least she hoped he hadn't.

When she had accidentally stepped on his foot, murmuring a hasty apology and explaining that she hadn't danced in a long time, he had eventually bend to her ear, pulling her closer.

"Loosen up, Kate. Just let me lead," he had requested softly and just that softness in his voice was the reason why she had finally looked at him, half surprised, half fascinated by this new side of him – a side she had thought she would never see.

For a moment she had still tried to fight this feeling of drowning in his eyes, then she had surrendered to his lead and given up all her control. And suddenly it had felt so easy and natural to dance with him, to follow his steps and his directions.

She had started to chat casually with him; softly and flirtatious, the way that she sometimes did and that had made him smile. She had complimented him on being an excellent dancer and he had informed her, rather dryly, that he used to dance regularly with his first wife. She knew that it meant a lot, even if it was only a tiny piece of information. For Gibbs, who never really talked about his private life, it was a huge revelation and she gratified him with a soft, open smile.

When the music had finally stopped, she had felt all dizzy and flushed – and drugged from his scent and the warmth of his body so close to her. It had taken some time for both of them to realize, that he was still holding her close, although the other couples were already making their ways back to the tables they were seated at.

Slightly embarrassed, Kate had brought distance between them and turned around to catch herself and be able to focus on the case again.

And that was when she had realized that something was wrong. At first she hadn't been able to determine what exactly disturbed her, but when she had sobered up from the dose of pheromones, that was circulating through her bloodstream, she had realized just what it was.

"Gibbs, where's the admiral?" she had asked and after a short, muttered "Damned" from his part, they had separated and started to search for their protege.

In retrospect, Kate couldn't believe that she had acted like an amateur and left the man that she was tasked to protect out of her eyes. She was angry – and every minute that she couldn't find the admiral made her more furious. At herself – and at Gibbs, who had been the reason for her unawareness.

That was exactly why she had stopped her affair with Tim when she had still been working on Air Force One. And it was why she shouldn't start something with Gibbs – one of the reasons at least. Yet, the best one to finally get him out of her head and her fantasies.

She was good at her job, mainly because she was a perfectionist. If something is worth doing, it's worth doing well, that had always been her motto. She didn't perform good in her job to fulfill Gibbs' or anybody else's expectations. Her own expectations were way higher, she didn't allow herself one tiny slip – usually.

But since their kiss, she was unable to control her fantasies about her boss and she made mistakes. It had been tiny ones like spelling mistakes in reports, but it had been enough to disturb the usual professional routine that she performed her day's work with.

And now she had lost the person that she was tasked to protect, because she had danced with the man that filled her dreams at night.

Caitlin Todd hurried through the darkened floors of the hotel, here and there catching outraged or confused glances from maids who passed her by in the areas of the hotel that were meant for staff members only.

After fifteen minutes of searching every inch of the ground floor, she finally activated her microphone and informed her boss that she had been unsuccessful in finding the admiral.

Grumpily, Gibbs ordered her to return to the room upstairs and see if they found something on the footage of the surveillance cameras of the hotel. Kate sighed when, again, he didn't leave her any chance to answer but turned his microphone off.

His voice indicated that he was just as angry as she was – she just hoped that his anger wasn't directed at her. After all it had been his suggestion to dance in the first place. And obviously she had not been the only one who had gotten distracted by the dance.

She hurried up the stairs to the second floor and entered the small room that served as their personal headquarters for the time being. Gibbs was there already, leaning on the table where the computer was standing on. Intensely he stared at the screen, where McGee replayed the footage from half an hour ago.

"No sign of him," she informed at her entry and closed the door. "It is as if he just vanished."

Tony, who was sitting on the bed, made her a hasty sign to shut up and gesticulated wildly. All that Kate could understand was, that Gibbs was obviously more than outraged, and so she decided to remain silent.

Instead she sat down on the bed next to Tony and stretched her legs. Her feet were hurting from the high heels that she had been wearing all evening, and she had to fight the need to just pull them off.

All of a sudden, from the corner of her eye, she noticed that Tony was looking at her. When she turned her head, she realized that his eyes were very indecently looking down her dress. Without warning, she smacked him hard.

"Ouch," he exclaimed indignantly, shooting her one of those looks that would have made a stranger believe that he was completely innocent.

"Watch your eyes," Kate snapped and got up to join Gibbs and McGee at the table.

Tony grinned and lifted from the bed as well, casually strolling over to the desk. Interestingly he looked at the screen, where McGee replayed the security footage and watched the scene in the hall where the admiral could clearly be seen joking with two men who were standing next to him.

"You know, what I don't understand?" he finally informed his colleagues with an amused undertone. "How could you lose him in a hall like that? I mean, even a jerk would have..."

He interrupted himself when his eyes met Gibbs', and instantly wondered what had gotten into his mind to even try mocking them right now when his boss was in a mood to kill.

Gibbs was looking at him darkly, slowly lifting himself to his full size and closing the space between his subordinate and himself.

"A jerk, Dinozzo? Did you just call me a jerk?" he asked dangerously low, looking down at his younger subordinate, and Tony started to stutter and grin stupidly.

"No boss... of course not... boss... I was just joking. I mean, I'm sure everybody could have lost him... even me!"

"EVEN you, Dinozzo?" Gibbs voice betrayed that he was absolutely not in the mood for Tony's little games. It was one of those days where Tony could swear, that his boss was ready to kill people who stepped in his way. He wondered for a moment if the change in his mood had only been caused by the fact that he had lost the admiral, or if there was more behind it.

"ESPECIALLY me, boss..." he stammered hastily and Gibbs glared at him for a few more seconds, then he turned his attention back on the screen.

Tony exhaled visibly, deciding that keeping silent and not commenting on what had happened would be the best way to survive this evening.

"There," Kate suddenly murmured and pointed at a small figure on the screen who was standing at one of the entrance doors and signaling something over to the admiral. "She gives the admiral a sign – and then, here, he looks around and leaves."

Her eyes widened when the woman turned and Kate caught a full view of her face.

"That's the blonde waitress. I've seen her before. I thought I saw her passing the admiral a note earlier, but wasn't sure about it. Obviously I was right."

"What?!?" Gibbs snapped out and both, Tony and McGee, started at his tone and brought distance between them and their boss. Kate turned her head to look at Gibbs, instantly realizing that now he would reproach her for her unawareness.

"I'm sorry, I thought it was just... I mean, I observed both of them and neither of them acted suspiciously. I assumed that she had just handed him a paper towel!" she justified her decision not to say anything, although inside she wanted to kick her own butt for having been so negligent to ignore an observation and leave a possible suspect unchecked.

"You assumed, agent Todd?" Gibbs asked, dangerously leveled, and approached her. "Rule Number 5! Don't ever assume, double check! Is there anything more that you assumed and failed to inform me about?"

He didn't wait for an answer, but checked his weapon and went to the door. Kate followed him with her eyes, shocked at his rage. Then she turned her head, when Tony approached her slowly, his expression compassionate.

"Did you drink his coffee?" her colleague asked lowly and the woman looked at him somewhat incredulously, not understanding what his question had to do with their case and the admiral's whereabouts.

"What?"

"Well, I've never seen him like that – except that one day when one of the secretaries accidentally drank his coffee."

"Kate!" Gibbs barked from the door. "Move it! Tony, stop chitchatting! McGee, I expect to know everything about that waitress within five minutes."

"Yes boss," the young computer freak nodded and turned to tap the keys and access the hotel's personnel files. When his boss was that angry, he didn't want to draw the man's rage onto himself, therefore he hacked on his keys even more hastily than usual.

As usual, Gibbs didn't turn around to check whether his subordinates were following his orders. He just knew they would, and so he stormed out of the room.

Kate hurried to follow him – a task that turned out more difficult than expected, since his speed was incompatible with the high heels that she was wearing. A fact that obviously didn't concern him at all.

"Gibbs!" she requested him to slow down and when he didn't react, louder and more aggressive, "Gibbs, where are you going?"

The man stopped and turned so suddenly, that Kate almost ran directly against his chest. "We are going to search this damned hotel from top to bottom. And this time, we just won't assume anything, but follow every lead," he growled, barely hiding his rage anymore. She held his glare for a moment, and was just about to open her mouth and apologize for her negligent behavior when he turned around and continued his way through the corridor towards the stairs.

He wasn't half as angry at Kate, as he was at himself for letting his guard down during an investigation. He should have known better than to dance with her. After all the experiences that he had with women, he should have guessed that she would distract him to a point where he wouldn't be able to think professionally anymore.

Don't ever mix your personal life with your professional one, that had always been his work ethics.

He had acted against his better judgement. And it had led to them losing their protege. The last thing he wanted to do was to explain to the NCIS director, why a high ranking admiral had been killed while protected by two of NCIS' best agents.

He had to push Kate away in order to regain his professionalism. Hiding his feelings behind a mask of distance and anger was the best way to do so. Aside from that, it would be easier to forget her smile and how her body had felt against his, when he talked himself into rage.

"We can't just search the whole damned hotel like headless chicken!" he heard her snap behind him. "We would have to enter every hotel room – illegally as I might want to add and..."

"If you have a better idea, Agent Todd, I am open for suggestions. If not, any useless discussion will cost us time which we don't have!" he replied grumpily, not slowing down. They almost ran through

the corridors for the next few minutes, lively engaged in a discussion about the usefulness of their disorganized search, when they were interrupted by the sound of static that filled their ears.

"Boss," McGee's voice could be heard and Gibbs growled impatiently.

"What's her name?" A glance at his watch showed him that his agents had taken more than five minutes and that didn't serve to improve his mood.

"Anna Fuentes, boss! She has been maid in this hotel for about three months, but before that she lived in the States." McGee informed him hastily, then he was interrupted by Dinozzo's voice.

"Guess where, boss!"

"Dinozzo!" Gibbs barked angrily, not in the mood for one of the man's guessing games.

"DC, boss. She lived in DC. And she knows the admiral, but he probably doesn't know her." Tony hurried to explain, before McGee took over again.

"Her sister was engaged to a Commander Wilson. She killed herself four months ago. I ran a background check on Wilson. He filed about a dozen complaints against the admiral, among them disrespect towards female subordinate officers and sexual harassment of females under his command. No evidence was ever found since none of the women was willing to talk. But..." The sound of sheets of paper being moved around could be heard. "...the interesting point is that the coroner, who found the body of Isabella Fuentes made a note that indicated, that she had been raped. Not at the same day, but approximately twenty-four to forty-eight hours before - which was most likely the reason for her suicide. The coroner took a DNA sample of the sperm, but never found a match. Since she had neither suspects, nor proof that Isabella had indeed been raped, the case was closed as a simple suicide by the local authorities." McGee explained.

"So, Isabella's fiancé Wilson and her sister Anna suspect that the admiral has something to do with it?" Kate asked, unable to see the connection between Anna and the admiral.

"I don't know." McGee murmured, and then hurried to go on when he realized that this was exactly one of the phrases that Gibbs never wanted to hear from the mouth of one of his agents. "But I do know that a Commander Wilson has booked a room in our hotel until tomorrow morning!"

"And how could that go unnoticed by us, Agent McGee?" Gibbs growled and the addressed started to stutter.

"Well, we focused on those guests of the hotel who had entrance to the gala room – which was not nearly all of the guests who are presently staying at the hotel. Commander Wilson wasn't invited to the gala... he didn't have access to any of the rooms."

"But his 'almost-sister-in-law' had!" Gibbs clarified. "McGee, the room number of Wilson!"

"467, sir... um... boss..." McGee replied hastily.

"Good job! Dinozzo, meet us in front of the room!" He turned off his microphone and both agents hurried to run along the corridor to the stairs.

"You think, Anna wants to take revenge for the death of her sister?" Kate asked out of breath when they were running up the stairs.

"If the admiral played a part in it, I would say it's a definite possibility." Gibbs replied, checking for his weapon.

Not even two minutes later, they were approaching the room silently.

Tony Dinozzo was already standing in front of it, his weapon drawn while he waited for his colleagues to arrive. Gibbs released the safety catch of his own weapon and approached the door.

Kate fumbled with her dress to reach her own weapon, that was clipped to her upper thigh, revealing her bare legs to the men's glances. When Tony muttered a 'wow, Katie-girl, I had no idea', he caught himself a slap on the back of his head from his boss and could swear that it was a little harder than usual.

Gibbs nodded at his agents, signaling them to go in. What came next was routine that they had gotten used to over the years. They pushed open the door while two of them immediately scanned the room for possible threats. Then they entered the room, guns drawn.

"Look at that!" Tony smirked at the situation which presented itself in front of them. "That man's a tiger!" His comment was directed at the two shocked and half-naked persons that were lying on the bed, looking rather disheveled.

"Dinozzo!" Gibbs admonished, and then focused his attention back on the two persons. "Admiral, we searched the entire hotel for you – and your guest. Now would you please get up slowly? You too, Ms. Fuentes... and please keep your hands up!"

Tony's grin grew wider when the two persons got up from the bed now and he caught an excellent view of the woman's body, that was only covered by expensive lingerie and stockings.

"Nice," he commented lewdly.

"I don't understand!" The admiral noted, somewhat outraged. "Am I not allowed to enjoy my stay here with a nice company?" He was standing half-naked next to the bed, his eyes glaring at Gibbs and silently expecting an explanation.

"No," Gibbs replied dryly and approached the woman. "Not if your company, as you put it so nicely, intends to kill you." He glared at the young woman, who was holding his eyes, putting on an innocent and incredulous expression.

"I have no idea what you are talking about!" she denied and shook her head at his accusation. "Why should I want to kill him?"

"We know everything," Kate explained dryly. "We know about your sister!"

She noticed that the expression on Anna's face darkened a little. "He did it, didn't he?" Kate asked softly and then continued, her eyes locking with those of the admiral, "He raped her and she didn't know how to live with it, so she killed herself."

Deadly silence filled the room, as the admiral looked incredulously at Kate, then at her superior, who didn't make any attempt to stop her speech. "Special Agent Gibbs, this is ridiculous. Would you get your agent under control?" he stated outraged, but Gibbs didn't move, nor did he order Kate to stop.

"Isn't that what you did, admiral?" the female special agent asked, openly holding the man's eyes.

The admiral shook his head. "I assure you, I never..."

"Shut up!" A voice suddenly started them. Tony spun around, but it was too late. He had already pressed a gun to his forehead. When he looked up at the man, he sighed inwardly as he recognized him as Commander Jeffrey Wilson. Of course, they should have known that he was around somewhere, after all the room was booked on his name and paid for with his credit card.

Gibbs shot Tony one of those looks where the younger agent wished, he could just vanish. It had been his task to search the rest of the suite, but he had been too distracted by the half-naked woman on the bed. Surely, that would earn him a slap from Gibbs later – if not worse...

Commander Wilson held Tony's gaze for a moment, then he looked at the admiral. "He is lying! Every word that leaves that bastard's mouth is a damned lie!"

"Wilson, put the weapon down!" Gibbs requested sharply, not lowering his gun which was now pointing at the Commander, while Kate kept an eye on Anna Fuentes and the admiral.

"No Sir! With all due respect, I am going to correct the mistakes that your agents did when they investigated the death of my fiancée! I told them what happened, but they declared her death to be suicide and were not interested in the reasons!" The man had now tears standing in his eyes. "He raped my girl, and then he used his position to convince the investigators that she was a liar! I want him to suffer for that!"

"Commander, the investigation was conducted by local authorities," Gibbs explained firmly, "but I assure you, NCIS will reopen the case, if you lower your weapon now. If the admiral has committed a crime he will be held responsible for it."

"No Sir! I already killed a man – there's nothing you can do for me! I am going to finish it here and now." He wiped the tears out of his eyes hastily, a split second of unawareness, that offered Tony the chance to act. He grabbed the man's hand and turned his wrist so quickly, that he had to drop the weapon and cried out in pain.

For a moment, the situation got out of control as the commander tried to fight Tony, and Kate's attention was turned from the young woman to her colleagues. It were only split seconds, but enough for Anna Fuentes to act. With an outcry, she pounded on the admiral, a syringe blinking in her hand. Kate shot, but missed her, and then didn't dare to fire again because she feared to accidentally hit the admiral.

Instead she jumped forwards to grab Anna. Both women fell onto the bed, wrestling until Anna dropped the syringe. When the young woman saw, that she was on a lost cause and there was no way that she would be able to kill the man who was responsible for the death of her sister, she slammed her elbow into Kate's stomach and pushed herself off the bed to storm out of the room.

But she hadn't expected Kate to recover so quickly and shrieked in shock when, two meters before she had reached the door, she was pulled down to the ground by the female special agent. The two women started to fight, a task that turned out difficult for Kate since, although she was trained in hand-to-hand combat, she wasn't used to the methods that Anna Fuentes applied now and that consisted of scratching and pulling her hair to a point that really hurt.

Every second that she was unable to overpower the woman made Kate more furious. That was exactly, why she hated women and rather enjoyed the company of men, she thought to herself, while she desperately tried to loosen the woman's steel grip of one of the strands of her hair.

In the meantime, Gibbs and Tony had managed to press the raging commander to the ground and hold him there, now looking in disbelief at the two fighting women only three meters away from them.

"That is like one of my fantasies coming true," Tony exclaimed enthusiastically, while Gibbs cuffed the commander's hands on his back harshly, not reacting to Tony's joyful comment and the way he literally drooled while watching his colleague in the elegant dress and the maid in lingerie fight.

Suddenly, Anna ended the fight momentarily by punching Kate directly into the face, then she jumped up and ran out of the room. Kate moaned, holding her head, and after a short moment that she needed to recover from the direct hit that had left the world spinning in front of her eyes, she started after the woman with a muttered 'bitch'. When she almost fell down due to her high heels, she muttered another, very unladylike curse. Angrily, she pulled off her shoes and stormed out of the room barefoot. Tony looked at his boss.

"I'm sure you can handle the situation here... I will go and see if Kate needs help. I just have to see this!" And with a grin on his face he stormed out of the room to follow the two fighting women.

"Dinozzo!" Gibbs yelled after him, for a moment too bewildered at the younger agent's behavior to be seriously angry. He already knew that it was futile to stop the young man the instant he yelled after him. Once Tony Dinozzo caught glimpse of a woman's skirt, there was nothing that could hold him. And with the prospect to watch two attractive women fight, he seemed to be no longer responsible for his own actions.

Gibbs shook his head, then noticed a movement in the corner of his eye. He grabbed his weapon from the ground next to him and directed the barrel at the admiral, who was about to crawl over the bed and leave the room.

"Stay just where you are," Gibbs ordered grumpily. "I want to know exactly what happened to Isabella Fuentes, and I am warning you. Do not lie to me!"

"Agent Gibbs, you can't tell me that you believe this... this murderer!" The admiral laughed ironically, but his laughter died very quickly when he saw the murderous expression on the investigator's face. "It didn't happen as he said! That little bitch flirted with me! She encouraged me in that bar. You know how those latino sluts are..."

"As a matter of fact, I don't!" Gibbs replied, his tone cold and distant now. "Enlighten me! What did she do that justifies a rape in your opinion?"

"I didn't rape her!" The admiral exclaimed, but his body language revealed to the experienced investigator that he became more and more nervous by the second. "She wanted to sleep with me! Everything in her behavior said that she did!"

"She simply talked to you," the cuffed commander at the ground hissed out. "Just as I told her to! I sent her to him, Sir," the man now addressed Gibbs. "We wanted to prove that my accusations were true. I have been trying to convict him on the sexual harassment accusations for months! It was our plan that my fiancée indulges him in a conversation and lures him to follow her outside, where I and two other commanders would run in on them. We knew he wouldn't comply if she told him to stop..." The commander stopped speaking, when he felt his voice break.

"I see," Gibbs nodded, his eyes focused on the broken man who was lying cuffed on the ground. "The plan was for you to save her and have witnesses for an attempted rape at the same time. What went wrong?"

"He disappeared with her through the back exit! Neither of us could know, and by the time we realized they were gone, it was too late! We only found her fifteen minutes later in one of the backyards near the bar. That pig just raped her and left her there!" The commander fought against the cuffs, the wish to kill the admiral standing in his eyes again. "We brought her to a hospital, but the next day she ran away from there. And when I finally found her, it was too late. She just couldn't stand the shame of having been raped and then called a liar by that man!"

Gibbs got up and pushed the admiral against the wall, cuffing his hands to his back. "Admiral, you are under arrest."

"You have got to be kidding!" The admiral snapped enraged. "You have no right to..."

"Oh, believe me, I have every right!" Gibbs replied dangerously lowly. "And I hope for your own sake, that the DNA that was found on Isabella Fuentes body and that is already in the hands of my best analyst, won't match yours. Because if it does, I will personally investigate every single complaint of sexual harassment that was ever filed against you. And I am going to question every woman that has ever served under you... and you can trust me if I tell you that then the view of the yard of Lavenworth out of a prison window is the only thing you will see of the outside world for the rest of your life."

He pushed the man onto the bed and left him there while he informed McGee of the happenings and ordered him to call the local NCIS investigators to take the two men into custody.

He was just about to leave the room and search for his other two agents, when the door opened, and a widely grinning Tony entered the room. "Hey boss," he greeted joyfully. "You have no idea what you missed!"

"No, but I have an idea about what you are going to miss while you will be writing reports for the next two weeks," Gibbs simply replied neutrally and the grin vanished instantly from Tony's face.

"Oh, come on boss, you can't do that! That's not fair!" Tony complained in a whiny tone.

Gibbs shot him an annoyed glance to prevent Tony from making nonsense justifications and expectantly asked, "Where is Kate?"

"I'm here," a voice behind Tony answered.

Gibbs had to hide his surprise, when she pushed a cuffed Anna Fuentes into the room, then ran her hand through her ruined hair to bring it back to order. His eyes went over her outfit. She looked completely disheveled, but in a very sexy way.

"Agent Todd put very physical effort into catching our refugee here," Tony informed him with folded arms, the mischievous gleam still standing openly in his eyes. He ducked his head in await of a head-slap, when Gibbs glared at him warningly.

Kate pushed the young woman towards the bed and then turned to her colleague. "Tony, if you ever dare to tell anybody, I am going to kill you..."

Tony smirked and approached her. "Oh, believe me Katie, what I saw there will be in my fantasy for a long, long, loooong time."

"You are a pig, Tony!" she informed him brusely, which drew a laugh from him.

"Oh come on, you know I can't let it go! It would be like finding the holy grail and not tell anybody about it!"

"Ok, fine..." Kate nodded and held his eyes, her face only inches from his. "You tell this story, and the whole office will learn that you kissed a guy. What am I saying, not just the office... everybody I know. And I will make sure that every woman that you will ever date..."

"Okay!" he interrupted her, pouting slightly and lifting his hands in defeat. "I get the point!" Then, after a few more seconds, his face lightened up. "But since Gibbs already knows that I kissed a man..."

“Tony!” Kate exclaimed in protest, but to no avail. She should have known that Tony wouldn’t be able to keep it to himself – just as her tattoo and her dating life were issues that he loved to discuss with the whole team.

“Boss, you remember, how I always said Kate was conventional?” Tony started and paced around the young woman, while he grinned at his boss, not caring for the annoyed expression that crossed the elder men’s features. “Well, I could not have been more wrong. I am telling you, this dress is nothing against the underwear that she is wearing underneath... I have never seen...”

“Dinozzo, what exactly in my expression does signalize you that I am interested in hearing that story?” Gibbs interrupted him grumpily and Tony shut up at once, muttering a “Sorry boss” and catching a triumphant smile from Kate, who was glad for the unexpected support from her boss. Discussing her lingerie was nothing that she was keen to do with her colleagues – especially when Gibbs was present. His opinion of her mattered a lot to her, and she was sure, the way Tony would describe her underwear would leave her more slutty than anything else.

While Tony was still pouting, undoubtedly thinking about the limited number of people that still qualified to be told the story to, the agents patiently waited for the backup to arrive. Every now and then they had to yell at the admiral or Anna Fuentes, who had started a heavy discussion and cursed at each other.

Gibbs sighed for a moment and slowly paced to the door, silently wishing for a cup of strong coffee. The amount of caffeine in his blood had become too low over the past few hours for him to be able to stand a yelling woman – that reminded him too much of his ex-wives, a thought which he could only stand with a decent dose of caffeine in his hand, or his bloodstream.

Aside from that, he slowly felt unable to focus his mind. Tony’s indication about Kate’s underwear didn’t exactly help him there. He forced aside the thoughts and the rage that swelled up in him when he imagined how much exactly Tony had seen. He would bet that the younger agent had stood next to the rumbling women without making the slightest effort to end their fight. One of these days, Gibbs decided, he would send Tony undercover into a monastery. Even if there was no reason, he would make one up – just for one month. He had to chuckle at the thought.

When the backup finally arrived twenty minutes later, all of them were relieved. It was already beyond 10pm and they all longed to finish the reports, deliver the arrested persons into the custody of the local NCIS office at the near Naval Airbase, and at least get a few hours of sleep.

Gibbs was even more relieved when McGee showed up and handed him a large cup of freshly brewed coffee. He grabbed it out of the agent’s hand and took a huge sip, not bothering to thank the young man. But McGee didn’t take it personal. He already knew that ‘thank you’ and ‘sorry’ were words rarely used by his boss. Being not snapped at was enough of a reward for him.

While Gibbs gave the orders and instructions on how to proceed to the NCIS agent in charge of the local office, Kate and Tony helped the two younger agents to drag the prisoners out of the room – a task that proved harder than expected, since Anna Fuentes repeatedly tried to pounce on the admiral.

When they were finally out of the room, taken care off by the local NCIS agents, the team closed the door and returned to their temporal headquarters, two floors below.

After McGee had unlocked the door, they entered the room.

Kate let out a relieved sigh and sank onto the bed. “Wow, what an evening...” she murmured and rubbed her ankles, that were sore from the high heels that she had been wearing all evening.

"Indeed," Tony nodded and grinned at her lasciviously.

"Damned Tony!" Kate cried out in anger and threw one of the pillows from the bed at him. "Will you let it go?"

"I will... if you tell me something!" the man said with a somewhat witty undertone, sitting down next to her and shooting her a clandestine glance. "Is that what you wear underneath every day – even in the office – or..."

"Tony!" Kate interrupted him. "I will not discuss my lingerie habits with you."

"Why, it was just a normal question... I would discuss my habits with you!" he replied with an almost offended undertone and was just about to open his mouth to further pursue the issue and get his female colleague to give him an answer, when the barking voice of his boss interrupted him.

"I don't think there is time to rest! We have to pack and finish our reports. We don't want to waste our budget longer than necessary, do we?"

"Come on, Gibbs..." Kate moaned, but before she could even start to reason with him, Tony stepped in.

"You think that staying a day longer and enjoy the pool would be a waste? Oh, boss, you should learn to enjoy the good sides in life... like a pool with dozens of women dressed in sexy bikinis and..." He shut himself up when Gibbs shot him one of the looks that usually preceded a good old head slap. "Or we just pack and enjoy our fly back home..." He hurried to add and ducked away to help McGee unplug the computers.

Kate observed him, then looked at her boss who was returning her glance, silently expecting her to get moving as well. "Gibbs, do we really need to finish those reports tonight? I mean, it's been a long day and we're all tired and still suffering from that damned jetlag anyway. Of course you don't feel the effects with that amount of caffeine that must be running through your bloodstream. Seriously, how can you drink that much and not start shaking!"

Thoughtfully, he looked at her a moment then nodded. "You're right. It's been a long day and we've done a pretty good job – most of us. We can still use the flight to write the reports. That will, at least, spare me from listening to Dinozzo's stories." He stated gruffly.

Both, Tony and Kate, gasped for air in protest – the former one insulted by his boss' comment, and Kate outraged about the 'most of us' part of his statement, that had obviously been addressed at her and the mistake that she had made when she hadn't reported the waitress.

"McGee, I expect the equipment to be packed in the morning!"

With those words, Gibbs didn't pay any more attention to his subordinates, but took a sip of his coffee and left the room. They had booked three separate rooms. One double room, the one that served as their headquarters and was shared by McGee and Tony, and two single rooms, one for Kate and one for himself.

He was already on the corridor, walking towards his own room that was on the other end of the floor, when he heard somebody follow him hurriedly.

"Gibbs," Kate addressed him, still a few meters behind him. She was wearing her shoes again, and silently promised to herself that she would throw them into the next waste container that she passed, once they were back in D.C. Although they looked beautiful, they killed her – and aside from

that, she was annoyed by the fact that she couldn't keep up with the speed of her boss while she was wearing them.

She wanted to settle their discussion now, before he would blame her for another week for having been distracted on a mission. She knew that she was a professional, and aside from that, neither of them had paid attention to the admiral, therefore to her it seemed unfair that he blamed only her.

Since he didn't slow down, she had to catch up with him. "About earlier..." she started, "I'm sorry... I know I should have reported to you and..."

"Yet you didn't!" he interrupted her matter-of-factly. "Which could have killed the admiral."

"Okay, this is just unfair!" she snapped out, her voice betraying her anger, while she ignored the threatening expression that crossed Gibbs' features. "I made one tiny slip, but I had my reasons! I didn't consider Anna Fuentes a threat at that moment. If I had..." She stopped. The point was, that she should have checked, and she knew that she failed to do that. Instead she had relied on an assumption. "You are right, I should have checked her, but I can't undo that mistake. Are you going to blame me forever, or can we now agree that I learned something, and just let it go?"

They had reached their rooms by now and Gibbs shot her a look that would have made McGee back off at once. He fumbled with the keycard, that served to unlock the door to his room – or at least should serve. He pulled it through the reader repeatedly, but the small lamp that signaled the status of the lock was still red instead of turning green.

Kate sighed and turned to her own room that was opposite to his. Her door unlocked at once and she was about to enter, when she heard him mutter a curse. She turned and saw that his door still wouldn't open. Hiding a smile, she went to him and took the card out of his hand.

"These machines really seem to hate you!" she murmured, the hint of amusement present in her voice, and he growled with hidden anger.

"That feeling is mutual. What was wrong with the good old keys?"

Kate gave a soft laugh and pulled the card through the reader. The door unlocked at once. She turned around, holding up the card with a half-amused, half-triumphant smile.

"You should try to think a little more positive! Abby once told me that computers can sense it if you hate them!"

She wanted to hand him back his card, when she realized, how close they were standing to each other. "Here," she somehow managed to murmur, her eyes locked with his. He didn't say anything, just returned her look in this mysterious way that made her feel nervous.

She waited for him to move aside, since she was standing in the frame, her back touching the wood of the door to his room, and he was blocking her way out.

"Okay, what is it? You are making me nervous. Are you going to fire me for what happened today?" she finally started, the nervousness openly displayed in her voice. "Because if you are, let me point something out. Me not reporting the behavior of Anna was not the reason why we lost the admiral. It was just a minor slip. If I may remind you, we were both distracted, otherwise it wouldn't have happened." When he didn't answer, she became even more nervous. "So, technically, it was just as much your fault as it was mine!"

What are you doing here, she wondered for a moment, shocked when she realized that she had just reproached him for losing the admiral. What really put her off, though, was the fact that he still didn't

move, but kept looking at her in that indefinable way. He had already done this once before, when he had come to the café where she bought her coffee every morning, questioning her about why she hadn't stabbed Ari when given the chance.

Before he could seriously lecture her – if that was what he intended to do, a fact which she wasn't entirely sure of – she hurried to add "I'm not blaming you... I'm just saying that it wouldn't have happened if you hadn't proposed to dance, because then I wouldn't have been distracted and..."

"Why?" he interrupted her all of a sudden, leaving her staggering for a moment, before confusion was clearly written on her face.

"Why what?" she asked, shaking her head in puzzlement, put off by his question.

"Why were you distracted?" he asked lowly and stepped closer into her personal space.

"I..." Kate started and turned her eyes away from his. Somehow this conversation had taken a direction that was very unwelcome to her. "I... You were just as distracted as I was," she replied instead of answering his question. Offense was the best form of defense, and right now she needed a really good defense. After all she couldn't just say, that she had been distracted because she always was when he was standing close to her – because his closeness provoked thoughts inside of her that would be wild enough to fill one of Tony's porn movies.

Gibbs smirked slightly. "Well, I already know why I was distracted. But I want to know why you were."

Slowly, she ran out of options. Not only mentally, but also physically, for she was already pressed with her back to the door, and he was still so close that she could smell the scent of his after-shave and feel the warmth of his body through the thin fabric of her dress.

"Kate, tell me..." he insisted, a determination underlying the softness in his voice, that told her that he would not let her go until she had given him a plausible answer.

"Please don't ask me that..." she pleaded softly, her eyes begging him to just let her retreat to her room. "Just believe me when I tell you that it won't happen again. I've learned my lesson!"

How did it happen that they were having this conversation, Kate wondered for a moment? All that she had wanted to do was resolve things with him and go to sleep. And now she was trapped between the door to his room and his body, and could not come up with a reasonable answer that would satisfy him. Her mind seemed to have shut down. Of course there were dozens of possibilities. People got distracted while dancing – even people who didn't feel attracted to their partner could lose focus. But with her initial hesitation, that was a reason he would no longer buy.

She couldn't just tell him the truth either – yet, it seemed to be the only way to make him let her go. And the way to be in need of a new job by Monday, she added silently.

She knew he reproached her for having had an affair with a colleague on Air Force One. Confessing that she felt attracted to him would only serve to convince him that she was unable to remain professional when she had to work with other men – which was just not true.

Gibbs looked at the beautiful woman in front of him, intoxicated by her closeness and the scent of her discreet, female perfume. The voice of his reason asked him for a moment what he was doing, but he didn't listen. When she had admitted to him that she had been distracted, he had been interested in the reason – merely as one of his little games. But her hesitation to tell him and her obvious embarrassment at his question now made him curious. Could it be that she had been distracted for the same reasons that he was?

He knew that, even if that was the case, it would still be wrong to pursue anything that went beyond friendship with her. Still, a small part inside of him wanted to know...

"Tell me," he requested again, still softly, but with the hint of a bossy tone in his voice.

"You really want to know why?" she finally snapped angrily, when her attempts to get past him on the right side of his body were effectively prevented by his arm. Softly she hit his chest. "You want to know why I get distracted when I am close to you? Or why I sometimes have to force myself to stop looking at you in the office?" She cut herself off, muttering a soft 'Damned'. Her expression was desperate, because inwardly, she expected to get fired instantly – a fear that was clearly standing in her eyes, along with the anger at herself for having lost control.

He just returned her look for another moment, then opened the door of his room.

"Inside!" he ordered somewhat gruffly and Kate gasped when he softly pushed her into the darkened room. She awaited to hear a lecture about her incompetence and unprofessional behavior – in the best case.

Worst case scenario was that he would throw her out of his team right there at that very moment.

"Gibbs, I shouldn't have said anything," she explained desperately, while she entered his room, trying to keep her voice from shaking, "I know what you think about that kind of relations between colleagues and I assure you I can handle it. Contrary to what you might think of me now, I am a professional! You should just forget about..."

She gasped when she felt his hand grab her wrist the instant the door shut with a click of the lock. She had no opportunity to say another word, because the next second he had her pressed with her back against the cool wall and his mouth closed over hers in a devouring kiss.

Her surprised shriek was muffled by his lips, that were tasting and nibbling, softly seducing her to open her mouth to him. She was too overwhelmed to react, the assault on her mouth having happened too quickly for her to think reasonable, therefore her body intuitively responded to his caresses without resistance.

Her hands ran up his chest while she opened her mouth to him willingly, allowing him to deepen the kiss and sighing longingly when she tasted the intoxicating mixture of coffee and scotch on his lips.

Her eyes fell close when she felt his hands move down her back, pulling her closer into him. Shivering slightly at the contact with his body, she clasped the material of his jacket with her fingers, while he devoured her mouth fiercely.

For a split second he wondered what he was thinking, pressing his subordinate to a wall and kissing her – but the thought vanished almost the instant that he felt her body move against his and a soft moan escaping her lips. He wanted her, she wanted him. It was just that simple.

No, actually it wasn't and they both knew that.

But right now he didn't want to think about the reasons that were against him kissing Caitlin Todd, not when she was pressed against him and returned his kiss with the same need and desire that he felt inside.

He broke the kiss and let his lips wander over the silky skin of her cheek and her chin to her neck, her initial protest turning into an erotic moan.

When she felt his lips at her neck, Kate softly tilted her head to reveal more of her delicate skin to him. She would have never thought, that he would turn out to be a seducer, but nothing else did he

prove by this soft assault on her neck, his lips eager to discover every inch of her already over-sensitive skin.

She couldn't believe that this was actually happening, that she was making out with Gibbs and that it was better than it had been in any of her fantasies. Gibbs – her boss.

She moaned and all of a sudden pushed him away softly, her eyes, clouded with desire, locking with his.

"We can't do this..." she whispered, reconnecting their lips in another brief, but hot kiss, before she shook her head again. "I should go."

He would have let her, if her body language had supported the words that left her mouth. But everything in her eyes told him that she wanted him as much as he wanted her.

She made a weak attempt to turn around and leave, but he melted their lips in another kiss, holding her arms to effectively prevent her from turning away. She didn't really mind – at least her body didn't. The conscious part of her reason predicted that, if they went through with this, they would both be in trouble the next morning.

Unfortunately the voice of her reason was silenced by the desire that pulsed through her veins and caused her legs to turn weak. Part of her was scared that he had this much power over her body – the other part felt thrilled by it.

"You want me to stop?" he whispered huskily against her skin, enjoying the erotic little sighs that she made while he nibbled at the sensitive spot just below her ear. In fact, he wasn't entirely sure he would be able to stop if her reply would turn out to be affirmative.

"No..." her voice was shaking and her hands grasped his shoulders tighter, as if afraid that he would break their body contact. "Don't..."

He knew that this was his downfall. Part of him had hoped, almost prayed, that she would say yes; that she would push him away and ask him what the hell was wrong with him. She was his co-worker, at least twenty years younger and they were as different as day and night. Kissing her, not to mention sleeping with her, would cause so many problems – problems that were beyond his control. And he hated not to be in control of his life. But then again, when he tasted the sweetness of her lips and felt her soft body pressing into his, all that seemed to become unimportant. A higher part of his soul seemed to whisper that it was worth losing control – that she was worth it.

"If you still have doubts you should go now, because later I won't let you... and we both know where this is going to lead," he rasped huskily into her ear, the gentleman inside him giving her one last opportunity to escape, part of him knowing that sooner or later he would cause her pain. A last attempt to protect her from becoming a hurt and broken woman – as he had seen all three of his ex-wives turning into.

Kate moved her lips over his cheek and ran her hands through his short, silver hair before devouring his lips in a fiery assault. "Good," she whispered in between two kisses, "I'm all yours."

She shrieked softly when all of a sudden he lifted her up as if she weighed no more than a feather, and carried her over to the large bed, where he dropped her onto the soft sheets, immediately reconnecting their lips while he pulled off her shoes and dropped them to the floor carelessly.

Her hands were trembling when she desperately fought with the buttons of his jacket, and finally managed to pull it off his shoulders.

All of those nights that she had been lying in bed alone, she had often thought about that one kiss they had shared in the elevator – and she had imagined whether he was a skillful kisser or not, which was hard to determine by just one kiss, shared in the heat of a moment.

But even in her wildest fantasies didn't she imagine just how much of a seducer he was. She should have assumed it probably – considered that he had been married three times, although most of the time he behaved like a bastard – but still, she hadn't believed it.

Gibbs softly pushed her into the mattress, while his kiss became more languid, before he moved his mouth down her neck and over the soft skin of her cleavage, cherishing every inch of her skin with soft caresses with his lips.

Kate closed her eyes to the overwhelming heat that consumed her body. Her hands moved through his hair and over his shoulders, and she gasped for air when his lips closed around one of her nipples. Although the material of her dress still prevented him from tasting her skin, she felt as if his touch burned her from the inside. Her breath became erratic and she arched her back intuitively, silently asking him to take more of her.

Taking time to discover every part of her, the man let his mouth wander further down her body, still making no effort to get rid of her dress. He couldn't believe that he was going to make love to Caitlin Todd, the woman which he had so often secretly admired in the office.

A lusty moan from her betrayed to him that he had found another one of those spots that made her shiver with lust. His mouth wandered over her lower abdomen while his hands played at the back of her knees, the only bare skin he could reach by now.

He pushed the silky fabric of her dress up the smooth skin of her shaved legs and grabbed the hem of her dress. She lifted willingly from the bed to help him to get rid of the disturbing barrier that prevented them from being skin to skin.

When the dress landed a few meters away from the bed in the corner of the room, their lips reconnected hungrily.

Kate pulled impatiently at the shirt that he was wearing, while she spilled playful kisses on his mouth, immediately bringing a few inches of distance between their lips when he wanted to deepen the kiss. She had always liked to challenge him and question his control, and he had always loved her doing so.

Once she was finished opening the buttons of his shirt, she pushed it down his shoulders, her fingers running appreciatively over his still well-trained muscles. When the fabric had joined the dress in the corner, she resumed her task of teasing him by grazing his lips with hers in soft butterfly kisses, while her hands moved explorative over his arms and his chest.

When she again evaded his attempt to capture her mouth in a deeper kiss, he growled lowly, which drew a soft laugh from her – a laugh that turned into a half-shocked, half-thrilled gasp as soon as he grabbed her wrists and pinned them above her head, only to unify their lips in a wild exploration of her mouth.

Enjoying her prolonged moans and the way she desperately tried to increase their body contact, he took his time, shifting the kiss from wild to seductive and then devouring again, until she had to break free from his mouth due to a lack of oxygen, panting for air.

He let go of her hands and possessively moved his fingers down the exposed skin of her slender body. She lifted her hands to his hair, and closed her eyes, reveling in the so-long awaited feel of his touch on her skin, his body pressed against hers.

Her fingers moved to play at the base of his neck, and then, all of a sudden and without warning, she flipped them around in one of her best Secret Service moves, her back stretching, while she seductively straddled his hips and pinned his hands next to his head.

“If you think that you will be the only one in control here, you are wrong,” she whispered against his mouth throatily, before teasing the skin of his neck with her tongue, provoking a groan from his throat.

“Maybe me being in control would be fun for you,” he rasped in her ear, aware that, if he had wanted to, he could have freed himself. His hot breath on her skin provoked a sigh from her, when he continued to murmur, “you have no idea what I could do to you.”

His voice was throaty as he gave her some very detailed descriptions of just what exactly was going through his mind, interrupted by soft kisses and biting to her earlobe. By the time he was finished, their heart-rates had increased by several frequencies and Kate’s breath was coming fast and shallow.

Damn, she would have never thought him to be that good of a dirty talker – neither would she have thought that it would drive her this crazy.

“Later,” she whispered, pulling all her control and strength together, while nibbling softly at his chin.

She let go of his hands and ran her fingertips over his chest, playing with the soft silver hair there. The small, round scar near his shoulder caught her attention and softly, she grazed the spot with her fingers. For a moment, a shadow clouded her expression, for she felt responsible for his pain. If she had stabbed Ari when she had the chance, he wouldn’t have had to suffer. Yet, she hadn’t, and that had been a betrayal in more than one way. She had never told him what she had felt for Ari, a man she had never seen before in her life. She had known better than to tell her colleagues how much she had felt attracted to him against all her reason – some part inside of her had been drawn to him like a moth to fire. A dark fascination with the devil.

Her eyes met his in the darkness of the room and all of a sudden she was sure that he knew. She leaned over and pressed a long, deep kiss to the mark on his skin, silently assuring him that everything was okay – that Ari was no longer a threat to her heart.

His hands ran through her long, silky hair, then over her shoulders and her back. She moved her lips down his chest, allowing him to guide her. Then, after some time, she sat up.

With shaky hands, she unbuckled the belt of the black pants that he was still wearing and that made her aware that she was already half-naked, while he was still considerably dressed.

Foreseeing that this might take some time if he left it to her, he sat up and pulled her lips to his own in a soft kiss before standing up and getting rid of his shoes, socks and pants himself – just to avoid complications like getting entangled in his pants.

Appreciatively, Kate let her eyes wander over his trained body. She realized that his eyes were traveling over her appearance as well and returned his soft smile, for a moment feeling insecure. It had not only been a while since she had last slept with a man, but it had also not really been good, to express it nicely.

And this was Gibbs, who meant so much more to her than any of her former dates. She didn’t want to disappoint him.

Scared at the thought, the expression in her face suddenly reflected her insecurity. He moved up close to her from behind and pulled her back against him, urging her to lean fully against his chest and into his embrace, while he moved her hair away from the back of her neck and placed a hot kiss on the nape.

She moved her hand behind her into his hair, holding him in place, while she relaxed into his caresses, all thoughts dissolving with his burning touches.

His hands moved over her bare arms while he changed between nibbling and biting at her skin. He had seen the expression in her face, and he was determined to replace her nervousness with something else, something much more pleasurable.

With skilled fingers, he unclasped her strapless bra and before she had even noticed, it was gone, exposing the delicate skin of her breasts to his exploring hands.

She arched her body towards his hands, her eyes falling close at the sensations that pulsed through her. "Gibbs..." she whispered in a plea, and the man smiled against her skin, enjoying the soft needy moans that escaped her throat, while he fought to control his own breathing.

After some more endless moments, that he spent just enjoying the feel of her soft skin under his hands and lips, he pulled her down into the sheets again and leaned over her, capturing her lips in a short kiss, before making his way down her body with tender caresses.

The instant she felt his hot lips closing around one of her nipples, an electrifying wave of pleasure ran through Kate's body, causing her to tremble. How much she wanted this man, how long had she dreamed of this – and how long had her body not reacted this strongly to a man's touch. She felt as if she was waking up from a long sleep, as if finding something, or rather someone, that she was destined for.

"God, I want you..." she moaned, when he increased their skin contact, by parting her legs and settling in between them.

"Good," he hissed hotly against her skin, not ceasing to pleasure her with his mouth. This was more than he had ever dared to hope for in his wildest fantasies, and one childish part inside of him felt foolishly proud of the fact that he could do this to her; that he could drive this so controlled and perfect woman crazy and make her give up all her control to him.

His lips moved further down her body. "I want to see you come for me."

If she had any protest in her mind, it was immediately silenced by his lips that pressed to the very core of her desires, the material of her black lace panties forming a very thin, yet still disturbing barrier. Dinozzo was right, Gibbs mused silently, some part inside him still angry that the younger agent had been indecent enough to catch a glimpse of the underwear of his female colleague. Kate's lingerie was definitely sexy and suiting her. Damn, how should he ever be able to work with her again, when all he pictured was what kind of underwear she was wearing underneath?

He decided that he would handle that problem later – way later, because her underwear would most likely be his slightest problem anyway then.

Softly, he pulled the thin material down her legs and discarded it, exposing her wet core to him. He grabbed her hips to hold her in place and placed a kiss to her softness, enjoying the desperate whimper that his intimate caress drew from her, and thinking that it was the most beautiful sound that he had ever heard coming from a woman. One thing was for sure, he liked her like this, fragile and female and reduced to her most primal desires.

Not that he had anything against the tough, hard-ass agent – as long as she was like this in bed for him. Only for him!

Kate closed her eyes when his mouth descended on her again, and his tongue moved over her clit in a long, thorough stroke. She bit her lips and her fingers clutched the sheets. When he repeated the move, she pushed up against his mouth with a soft scream, trying desperately, but failing to control her reactions.

“You like that?” he whispered, more matter-of-factly than an actual question, his hot breath tickling her over-sensitive skin while his fingers grazed the skin of her stomach and the sides of her body sensually.

“God yes...” she managed to reply, although she wasn’t sure how. All thoughts dissolved from her mind when he resumed his erotic, pleasurable caresses, pushing her higher and higher towards oblivion.

Somewhere in the back of her clouded mind, she realized, that the soft screams that filled the room were coming from her, but she was unable to stop them. She wanted him, she needed him with a desperation that was totally unknown to her and she wasn’t sure whether she would be able to stand his sweet torture just one second longer.

As if knowing what was going through her mind – or had she said it outloud? She couldn’t exactly recall – he stopped his assault on her clit momentarily to move her legs, so that they were resting on his shoulders, this new position opening her wider to him. At the next touch of his hot mouth to her over-sensitive clit, she pushed up against him, overwhelmed by the intensity of the feeling. Her moans became more urgent.

He could feel that she was close and that it wouldn’t take much more, therefore he intensified the contact by stilling her hips again with his hands. Relentlessly, he alternated his teasing between licking and sucking, enjoying the way she lost more and more control over herself.

It only took a few moments longer, moments that seemed like little eternities of pleasure to her, to send her tumbling over the edge, leaving her breathless and gasping for air in silent desperation. He drew out her momentary bliss as long as he could, before slowly moving upwards, his lips grazing in the slightest of touches over her abdomen and her navel. Her skin was glistening with sweat and one of her hands leisurely moved to his head and ran through his hair in the most tentative gesture.

Tenderly, Gibbs kissed his way up to her breasts and then captured her mouth in a long, deep kiss, swallowing her soft sighs and enjoying the feeling of her hot, naked breasts pressed against his chest.

Kate had been afraid to not be able to let herself go, just as it had been with the last man that she’d slept with, and now he had her climaxing before they were even really started. This man was amazing. He seemed to already know her body as well as her mind perfectly.

“Wow...” she whispered, her eyes still closed, when he disconnected from her lips to take in the sight of her face and her sexily disheveled hair.

He had to smirk softly at this comment. “Yeah, that’s what they all tell me,” he murmured against her cheek teasingly and she hit his chest playfully, her lips forming a slight smile.

“Arrogant...” she replied, still out of breath.

He stopped her insult with another hot open-mouthed kiss and grind against her, letting her know just how much exactly he still wanted her and that they were far from being finished. Feeling the heat

return instantly, Kate let her hands wander over his back, scraping his skin softly with her nails which drew an aroused moan from him.

She flipped them around, so he was lying on his back and she was covering him, before using her tongue and teeth to explore his chin and neck, alternating between soft biting and licking. Her long hair was tickling his skin when she moved down his chest, all the while running her fingers in butterfly touches down the sides of his body.

Ever so slowly, she removed his boxers and tested his patience to an almost unbearable point, enjoying the way he tried to urge her on. The cloth hit the ground somewhere in the darkness, and Kate took his hardness in her hand. Before she could take him in her mouth, he pulled her up to his face, swallowing her protest in a short kiss.

"Don't," he simply rasped close to her skin. "Or this would be over too soon."

"So little control?" she teased softly, moving her hips against him seductively, and a mischievous gleam filled her eyes. "Very impressive..." she murmured softly and then chuckled, "for a man your age."

His eyes snapped open and he saw the playful challenge standing in her eyes, before her lips moved over his and bit his lower lip, a tender declaration of war. She was bold, and cheeky, a streak of her personality which he had only seen when they had not yet been working together. He enjoyed it. With a low growl and not much effort, he turned them around, so that she was lying under him again.

"I'll show you what else a man my age is still capable off," he murmured against her lips hotly.

His hand moved down her flat stomach and between her legs. One of her hands grabbed his arm tightly to hold him in place and she moaned in anticipation, all thoughts of challenging his control instantly vanishing from her mind. When two of his fingers parted her folds and finally slipped into her wetness, she broke away from his lips to gasp for air, and her fingers clutched his arm even tighter.

"God yes..." she turned her head to the side and bit her lips while her body bent to increase the contact. His lips brushed her cheek and then her ear and she could feel him just as breathless as she was.

"You are so beautiful, Katie," he murmured throatily into her ear, and she whimpered, when his fingers hit her g-spot. "Look at me..." he demanded, and she didn't know how she gained enough control over her muscles to comply. She had no idea how he had been able to rekindle the fire in her body that strongly after she had just had an incredible orgasm.

With her vision blurred and her mind clouded from need, she turned her head to look into his eyes.

"Don't tease," she breathed against his lips in a soft plea. "Please... I need you!"

Her soft moan of protest filled the air when he removed his hand from her center, a moan that soon turned into one of anticipation, when he settled in between her legs. Not ceasing to deeply look into her eyes, he entered her with a swift, deep thrust, stilling instantly when he felt her fingers grip his shoulders.

"God, how can you be so tight," he groaned against her cheek, and she gasped for air and tried to ease her initial discomfort by stretching her back to fit him.

"It's been a while," she explained, sighing when he flicked her neck with his tongue. Her words confirmed his suspicion, for he had felt her body tense the moment he had entered her. Patiently, he

continued to intimately caress the sensitive spots that he had discovered earlier, until he felt her relax against him.

The familiar burn of lust soon replaced her initial uneasiness, slowly turning into need. Her hands ran impatiently over his back, and intuitively, she thrust up against him, gasping at the desire that started to pulse through her veins anew.

Slowly, he started to move inside her, pulling almost completely out only to thrust even deeper into her. She moaned loudly and tilted her head back in upcoming ecstasy. He buried his head at her exposed neck, softly biting her sensitive skin. Some childish part of him wanted to mark her his own, a primal instinct to show everybody whom she belonged to. The thought that she was his – and his alone – turned him on even more.

She groaned, when she felt his teeth softly biting and sucking on her neck, burying her hand in his silver hair and urging him on by her soft outcries of pleasure.

He bit her earlobe, a little harsher than intended, but that only served to turn her on. On the brink of losing control again, she turned her head to spill kisses over his cheek, her breath coming hot and fast.

He moved one of his arms down her body, while he kissed her open-mouthed, and, his hand on the back of her knee, he lifted her leg. “Move your legs around my hip,” he ordered her softly, and she complied, gasping at the sensation of the new angle, which allowed him to hit her g-spot with every stroke. Her moans turned into needy whimpers.

Grabbing one of her wrists, he entwined his fingers with hers and pinned it over her head to the mattress, his breath coming short and shallow while the room was filled with the sound of their increasing moans.

“Oh, Katie...” he managed to say close to her lips, groaning when her thrusts against him became more forceful.

“Jethro...” she whispered, and the grip on his hand tightened.

He was beyond reasonable thinking, but somewhere in the back of his hand he realized, that she had just very intimately used his forename, and the sound of his name from her lips seemed to be the most natural thing in the world – so beautiful that he could live from listening to it for the rest of his life and beyond.

He started thrusting into her faster, way beyond the point where he would be able to control his body. But the way her breathing hitched and she pushed back against him and tried to increase the skin contact, told him that it was just what she wanted – what they both needed.

“Faster...” she demanded frantically, her voice almost begging. He was more than willing to comply and buried his head at the crotch of her neck, breathing in her scent. He was close, but didn’t want to let go just yet.

“God Katie...” he groaned against her skin, when he felt her fingers dig into his back to an almost painful point – just the right amount of pain to increase his lust to an unbearable point, “come on... come for me again. Let it go...”

His voice was enough to do it for her, and with a soft scream that was muffled by his lips covering hers, she came for the second time that night. Feeling her spasm around him, he wasn’t able to hold back any longer. With one last thrust, he came inside of her, filling her with his life-giving essence.

Both of them were panting heavily and desperately trying to come down from the heights of ecstasy, their lips merely an inch apart. Kate's hand wandered from his hair over his cheek in the softest caress, her eyes still closed.

Slowly, their moans subsided and their heart-frequencies slowed down.

Afraid to crush her slender body with his weight, Gibbs rolled over to lie next to Kate, his eyes closed and their fingers still entwined.

"That was..." the woman whispered out of breath and unable to come up with an appropriate expression that would come even close to describe the wonderful feelings that were pulsing through her whole body. He chuckled softly at her lack of words.

"Yeah, definitely..." he agreed hoarsely.

Kate refused to open her eyes, afraid that the almost divine feeling of bliss would slip away. She felt as if she had caught glimpse of heaven and feared that once she let it go, reality would set in with overwhelming power and drag her into the depth of darkness.

Slowly her breathing returned to normal and she broke the contact with his hand to brush a strand of hair out of her sweaty face.

Then she opened her eyes. The room was bathed in the pale, silver light of the moon and the slight breeze that blew through the open window cooled her body – and her heart. In the distance she could hear the ocean, mercilessly crushing its waves to the shores; a sound that, for some reason, triggered a deep feeling of loneliness inside of her.

Slowly, the joyful enthusiasm that she had felt was replaced by a mixture of sadness and awkwardness. Now that her reason set in again, she felt the inevitable question about how things should go on raise inside of her. She had just had sex with her twenty-years-old boss – incredibly good sex, but still, Gibbs had made very clear to her that he would not accept relationships between agents. And she was sure that he would make no exception where himself was concerned.

With her heart torn between fear, desperation and confusion, she waited for him to say something. Anything.

When he didn't, her insecurity became unbearable and almost ashamed she covered her nakedness with one of the sheets from his bed.

Leroy Jethro Gibbs didn't know what to say – or what to do. He had made love to Caitlin Todd, the incredibly sexy woman whom he had wanted since he had first caught glimpse of her on Air Force One.

Make love, he mused silently. It was a weird term for what they had been doing, since, up to now, neither of them had spoken of any kind of emotion aside from desire. He didn't know what she felt for him. Neither did he know what he felt for her. He had loved more than one woman in the past – at least he believed that he had done – and it had always ended in betrayal or disappointment.

So for now he wouldn't admit to more than a certain affection for her – and physical attraction obviously.

Yet, he could truly say that he had never been in a comparable situation in his whole life. Surely, he had had affairs and one night stands – he even had an affair with a co-worker once, but all of those experiences had not ended very pleasantly.

And now he had slept with his subordinate, a woman who was young enough to be his daughter – maybe not quite, but the age difference was still considerable enough to have people talk about it. The fact that he was her superior would add to the rumors.

He had violated his own principles in two ways – he was sure he could even come up with a third way if he gave it enough thought.

He hated himself for that feeling of insecurity, firstly because he didn't know how Kate felt or what she was thinking. And secondly because having sex with her had turned his whole life – and not only his private life, but even more his professional life - upside down.

That was exactly why his reason had told him that this was a bad idea from the start, yet he had decided not to listen. And now here he was, having lost control of his life and unable to come up with anything appropriate to say to the woman he had just had the most incredible experience of his life with. He had never been good with words – especially not where women were concerned.

When she covered her body, he realized he should say something to ease the upcoming tension between them, but what could you say to your subordinate in a situation like this? Their professional relationship was officially ruined, that much he could determine. Taking it more slowly would probably have erased that problem in the first place, but since they had completely skipped the dating and getting to know each other better parts, they would have to deal with it now.

The kiss in the elevator had been one thing – they had been able to maintain their professionalism and not ever talk about it again. It had been some kind of silent agreement between them. Sex was on a completely different level though. There was no way they could just not talk about it. But there was also no way to talk about it and remain professional.

That, he thought grumpily to himself and sighed, is exactly the reason for rule number twelve!

Kate, who had of course heard his sigh and interpreted it as a sign of regret on his part, cleared her throat and then hesitantly sat up. All the possible consequences of the moment that they had given in to passion dawned on her at that very second. From having to transfer to having to leave the NCIS altogether; not to mention the worst of all which was that, in any case, she would have to part from her team.

Most likely Gibbs would refuse to continue working in the same team with her. He was too professional to do otherwise, because every kind of relationship between them could lead to a distraction during work.

That was why she had ended her relationship with Tim when she had still been with the Secret Service.

In their job, distraction could easily cost either their own or another person's life at one point or the other.

The desperation of her situation became unbearable to her. The feeling of bliss had turned into an increasing need to cry, and that was the last thing that she wanted to do in front of him. She knew from the few personal things that he had said during investigations that a crying woman was probably the last thing that he wanted to have next to him in bed.

Pulling all her strength together, she got up and, with still shaky legs, collected her clothes that lay spread throughout the whole room. Unable to find her panties, she finally raised to her full height, not daring to look at her boss.

"I think I should go..." she explained as calmly as she could manage.

He didn't answer.

'Say something', she begged silently, 'Ask me to stay.' One word of him, one assurance that everything was okay, and she would do anything for him.

He looked at her, although he could barely see her in the shadow.

She wanted to leave – just like that. He couldn't take her sudden retreat as anything else but a sign of regret on her part.

"Where are you going?" he asked, more gruffly than intended. He actually wanted to ask her to stay, to sleep here next to him and wake up with him in the morning. But then again, he thought bitterly, maybe that's too much to ask. Maybe all they had shared had been plain, hot sex – nothing more.

"I..." Kate started, fighting to keep her voice from shaking and betraying the tears that were swelling up in her eyes. "I should go to my room. We have to be up early tomorrow, the plane leaves around noon."

Silence. Again he preferred not to answer. The connection they had just shared only moments ago seemed to have completely broken down, and had left behind nothing but a feeling of emptiness and disappointment. Emotions that were based on misunderstandings caused by their inability to tell each other what they felt deep inside.

When he simply nodded and dismissed her with the word, "Alright," Kate turned. She didn't care that she almost fled the room, only dressed in one of the sheets that she had carelessly wrapped around herself to shield her naked body from looks. She needed to get out instantly. It was too much for her to bare.

She hadn't completely closed the door to her room, when the tears started to flow down her cheeks and she broke down in sobs. Not caring for where she was, she dropped to the ground, her back touching the cool wood of the door while her body was shaken by her helpless crying.

How could her life have turned into a disaster from one hour to the other, and most importantly by something that had been so wonderful.

"Damned," she exclaimed, unable to stop the tears from running over her cheeks, and hit the ground with her fist. She had known the consequences of an affair with a colleague, not to mention her boss.

She had known his opinion of it. But how could he be such a bastard to dismiss her just like that – as if he didn't care at all. As if she had been nothing more than a nice pass-time.

"That's what you get from sleeping with your superior," she murmured to herself bitterly and forced herself to lift from the ground. She was strong enough to handle this – to handle him. She had to be...

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Leroy Jethro Gibbs simply stared at the point from where she had vanished – just like that. No, not just like that, he reminded himself and closed his eyes with a groan. What had he been thinking to dismiss her? Couldn't he just for one single time in his life act like a caring person and not like a bastard?

There it was – he was already starting to push her away. Because he was afraid of her, or rather of himself. She threatened everything he believed in, shattered every principle that he had lived after. And the worst thing was that, the more he pushed her away, the more he seemed to want her.

Anger started to build up inside him. She was a hard-ass, why had she just left. Of course, he had told her to go, but an order from him had never prevented her from contradicting him.

"Idiot!" he growled to himself. What did he expect? He was her boss and he had shown no sign that he wanted her to stay. Their professional relationship put him in the position to act, he should have given her any indication that he wanted her to stay.

He growled. He would not just let her leave like he let his ex-wives. If she thought she could just run out on him after what they had shared, and pretend nothing had happened, she was wrong.

In the morning, they would have to face each other and then he would make very clear to her that he would not accept to be nothing more than a one-night-stand to her.

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"Time and time again  
Patiently I've waited  
For this moment to arrive  
After tonight  
Will you remember  
How sweet and tenderly  
You reached for me  
And pulled me closer  
After you go  
Will you return to love me  
After the night becomes the day  
After tonight begins to fade."  
(Lyrics Taken From Mariah Carey "After Tonight")

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It was probably the third or fourth time that morning, that Special Agent Caitlin Todd checked her appearance in the mirror. Just like the previous times, she found nothing to criticize. The cover stick and the make-up managed to perfectly hide the dark rings under her eyes, and a light scarf around her neck helped to conceal the revealing red mark.

She put on her light perfume and ran her hands through her hair, then she made a weak attempt to smile at herself at the mirror. It failed and she sighed. Her theory of feeling better after a long shower had proven wrong. The hickey and the slight soreness she felt made her awfully aware of what she had done the night before. She couldn't really say that she regretted that it had happened; what she regretted was, that Leroy Jethro Gibbs was her boss, and that they couldn't have met under different circumstances. That way her life would have been way easier, instead of having turned into this complete mess that she had to deal with now.

Repeatedly, Kate made sure that there was no way for the scarf to shift its position and accidentally give away the secret it covered, then she took a deep breath. She had hardly slept more than four hours during the previous night, and while asleep she had been haunted by dreams that shifted between erotic and threatening.

All she longed for was to go home, take a long hot bath and ban the outer world away from her consciousness for at least twenty-four hours in order to come up with a plan to handle the situation.

Kate turned and looked at her bag, which was standing fully packed on her bed. After having closed it she sat down on the bed with a prolonged sigh. It would have been a lie to claim that she wanted to

go down to the hall and have breakfast, for it meant to see Gibbs. And right now she still had no idea how to face him. What do you say to your boss with whom you had sex the night before, she asked herself bitterly, and then mused that this was probably a question which Tony would have an excellent answer to – right after asking her what the hell was matter with her to sleep with a man who was beyond fifty.

Resolutely, she got up, determined to face up to the situation. She took the key card for her room and left then, quickly making her way downstairs. Silently she prayed, that at least Tony or McGee would be there already, because worse than facing Gibbs was having to face him alone.

During countless moments, she had tried to recapitulate what exactly had caused the shift in their moods. How had the atmosphere turned from the light and cheerful banter, that they had exchanged before and during their intimate encounter, into a cold and awkward distance?

Checking for the last time whether the scarf was in place, Kate stepped outside the large glass doors on the terrace of the hotel where the breakfast buffet attracted the hotel guests. From the high point the hotel was placed on, they had a beautiful view of the ocean in the morning sun. A soft warm breeze played with the strands of her hair and she looked over the balustrade at the horizon. A few yachts were lying on the water and in the distance she could recognize a cruiser, which seemed to crawl along the water as if it had all the time in the world. She inhaled deeply, enjoying the feeling of peace for a short moment, then she turned around.

It took only a quick glance around for Kate to spot her colleagues, who were already heavily discussing. She arrived just in time to witness Tony slap McGee on the back of his head.

Thank God, Gibbs wasn't here yet – or anymore, she wasn't sure.

"Good morning," she addressed her colleagues more relaxed than she felt inside and sat down on a chair.

"Hey," Tony returned her greeting, a little bit too cheerful for her rather depressed mood, "could you please explain the difference between a tankini and a bikini to the probie?"

Kate shot him an annoyed look. She wasn't sure she would be able to take his jokes today.

"Whoa, somebody really slept of the wrong side of the bed," Dinozzo muttered to himself and took a bite of the apple he was eating while he observed her with obvious interest. Kate poured herself a cup of coffee and took a huge sip.

"And," Dinozzo continued, smiling mysteriously and winking at McGee, "somebody also had sex last night."

He almost fell backwards from jumping in his chair, when Kate choked and nearly spewed the coffee over the table. The woman coughed and then looked at him incredulously.

"Excuse me?"

Tony grinned and smiled at her triumphantly. "See, probie, that's the quality of a good investigator. Accuse and see how the accused will react."

"Tony, what makes you think..." Kate started angrily, both of them ignoring Timothy McGee's attempts to answer to the comments they directed at them. It made him feel that he, although he was addressed, was not really part of the conversation.

"The scarf," Tony explained casually, taking another bite of his apple and leaning back coolly.

"It's fashion!" Kate explained and the male agent laughed amused.

"Oh yeah! It is indeed! But not in Spain when it's beyond one hundred degrees Fahrenheit. That, my dear Katie, is a typically female way to hide a hickey."

One of these days she would shred those damned porn magazines of his and feed him with them. There she had been, thinking that the scarf was a safe way to hide the hickey from her colleagues and instead it had betrayed her right away. Well – most likely it would have worked if Tony hadn't been present, for McGee looked as if he didn't understand one single word.

"Katie, Katie," Tony said, while shaking his head with a lascivious grin on his face, "who is he?" He folded his arms and his position made clear that he enjoyed the situation. Finally he had caught his female co-worker in a compromising situation and he wouldn't let it go.

"He's nobody Tony," Kate answered, for she realized that any kind of denial was futile. Damage control was the better tactic here.

"Does Gibbs know?"

"Know what?"

"That you went to the bar yesterday after he had ordered us to go to sleep?" Tony guessed, the grin still present on his face.

"Tony, I didn't go to the bar. Stop your tactic of guessed and seeing how I react!" Kate snapped angrily, then shook her head, the lady inside her offended at his accusation. "What, you think I'd go to the bar and just sleep with the next best man?" Like practically throwing yourself at your boss was less slutty, her conscience reminded her; a thought which she hurried to suppress.

"I don't know... it's a hot image though!" The man grinned and closed his eyes, making clear that he was picturing his female co-worker in that situation. When he laughed dirtily a few seconds later, Kate smacked him hard. Then she sighed and shook her head, incredulous about his indiscretion, while taking another sip of coffee.

"Well, where did you meet him then?" Tony continued, ignoring her murderous glare. "And what's his name?"

Kate rolled her eyes, then she smiled at him sufficiently, knowing that he wouldn't believe her anyway. "Gibbs... I slept with Gibbs last night."

As expected, Tony broke out in amused laughter, and smacked McGee's arm. "Did you hear that probie? Nice try, Katie, but if you needed it that badly, why didn't you come to me first?" He stopped laughing and his face became curious again. "Seriously, where did you meet him?"

If the situation hadn't been anything but amusing, she would have broken out in whole-hearted laughter. But at that moment she didn't feel like laughing at all. She just wanted Dinozzo to shut up.

"Listen, I don't know his name," she exclaimed angrily and sighed, deciding that agreeing with Tony would end this discussion faster than contradicting him would do, "we met in the bar and I got drunk... that's it. Can we drop it now?"

"Drop it? No way...!" Tony laughed and then looked up. "Hey, Gibbs, Kate hooked up with a stranger in the bar last night, and I'm not even allowed to visit the pool! That's unfair!"

Kate tensed and looked up. Her boss approached the table slowly, in his hand a large cup containing strong coffee which he had gotten from the hotel café. It was not as strong as he normally had his

coffee, but it was better than the coffee-like broth which the hotel offered to their guests during breakfast.

Nothing in his appearance betrayed what had happened between him and Kate the night before.

For a moment, Kate let her eyes wander over his body. He looked more casually dressed than usual, most likely due to the heat. The first two buttons of his shirt were undone, allowing a perfect view of his tanned neck and his chest with the soft silver hair curling on it.

All her hope that her attraction to him would fade now that she had slept with him, vanished at that instant, because she had to admit to herself that he was the most sexy man she had ever seen.

She scanned his face, but his expression didn't signal that anything was different from usual. He took the seat next to her and sipped at his coffee, while he shot Tony an annoyed glance.

The young man grinned. "I am telling the truth, Kate confessed! She picked up a guy in the bar, whom she doesn't even know the name of and..."

"Tony!" Kate warned and was close to kicking his leg hard under the table. Then she looked at Gibbs. "He's lying, Gibbs! I didn't..."

His eyes held hers and for a split second, a hint of amusement crossed his features, then his expression returned to indifferent as usual. The young woman wondered what was going on with her.

Of course he knew that it was a lie.

Gibbs' eyes went to Dinozzo and again he took a mouthful of his coffee.

"Is all of our equipment packed?" he asked with the usual annoyance in his tone, without reacting to Tony's accusation.

"Yes, boss... all packed and ready," McGee affirmed and for a short moment, silence set in.

Then Tony, unable to let it go, leaned over to Kate. "Hey, does he know your name?"

"Who?" the woman asked confused.

"Your mysterious lover? Or did you seriously just have a passionate, meaningless one-night stand? I wonder what Brian has to say about that... I remember him calling two days before we left. Aren't you two still in a relationship or something like that?" The man grinned and it was obvious that he had fun teasing the young woman. His grin vanished instantly, when Gibbs put his cup down and pinned him with his eyes.

"Dinozzo, you want to swim back to DC?" he asked friendly, and McGee automatically ducked his head. Friendly Gibbs was more dangerous than grumpy Gibbs, he himself had experienced that.

"No, boss... but..." Dinozzo started defensively, gesticulating at Kate.

"Then stop going on her nerves... and mine!" he emphasized and Tony nodded humbly, and then sat back in his chair, pouting.

Kate gave Gibbs a furtive look, amazed at his behavior. He had actually defended her – he had never done that before. Although she was a very self-dependent woman, it would have been a lie to say that she didn't feel flattered by him stepping up for her. An odd feeling of warmth started to grow in her stomach.

"Well, didn't you want to ask Gibbs something, McGee?" Tony finally broke the silence after two minutes.

"What? Me?..." the young agent looked at his colleague with big, questioning eyes, then some kind of realization obviously dawned on him and he shook his head. "No, I didn't!"

"Yes, you did!" Tony emphasized with a growl and kicked his leg under the table, which caused McGee to grimace in pain.

"Well... boss, we thought that since... um... obviously the equipment is packed and... and... and... we still have like four hours before our flight goes... if we... um... could use the rest of the time for like... um..."

"Using the swimming pool, boss," Tony stepped in, fearing that the four hours would have passed before McGee had finally finished his sentence. The prospect that the stuttered explanations of the probie didn't help to improve Gibbs' mood added to his decision.

Gibbs looked from McGee to Tony, the former one obviously embarrassed and not really eager to go to the pool and the latter one grinning stupidly.

"For God's sake go!" he finally barked, knowing that once Tony was at the pool, he wouldn't annoy him anymore – at least not for the next four hours. Tony jumped up like a school boy, pulling McGee off his chair.

"Come on probie, hurry up! Every minute is worth a hot Spain chick in a sexy bikini!"

"Tony, I don't really..." McGee started and his tone implicated that he was not really fond of spending the next hours at the swimming pool, but Tony didn't even let him finish.

"Shut up and follow me. I will teach you a worthy lesson in hitting on women."

"Hey!" Kate yelled after them when, instead of hurrying inside to change in their rooms, they hurried straightly for the pool area. "Didn't you forget something?" She pointed at their clothing. "Like changing?"

Tony gave a triumphant laugh. "We're already wearing our trunks underneath! I know you would let us go, boss..." Then he hurried to turn and get away from Gibbs before the man could change his mind again.

Kate had to suppress an amused smile and when she looked at Gibbs, she noticed that he was hiding a soft laugh, although he would never show that to Dinozzo. It was incredible how inventive the young man could become where women were concerned.

She took another sip of her coffee, suddenly realizing that now she was stuck alone with Gibbs, and a conversation about last night hung inevitably in the air between them. Yet, he didn't seem eager to start it, considering that he concentrated on drinking his coffee and stared into some Spanish newspaper that was lying on the table. She was sure that he could neither understand the language, nor read a word with his eyesight, but decided not to comment on that.

From the corner of her eye, she observed him while she pretended to be looking at the ocean in front of her. His skin looked more tanned than it looked in the office they were normally working in and she shifted uncomfortably when she realized that her body responded to the thoughts that were inevitably crossing her mind: memories of the night before.

In her rational mind, she had tried to convince herself that, now that she had slept with Gibbs, her fascination was gone due to the fact that she had tasted the forbidden fruit, metaphorically spoken. The contrary was the case.

She realized that having to transfer wouldn't be that bad – if she had this man in her life. Having been so lost in her thoughts, she didn't even realize that she had been openly staring at him for quite some time.

He felt her eyes resting on him and looked up, his ice-blue eyes melting with hers. She wanted to say something to him, but everything she could come up with were banal phrases like "Did you sleep well". And those just didn't sound right to say to this man after last night. Therefore she just returned his look thoughtfully, before finally turning her eyes back on the ocean.

"Who is Brian?" Gibbs broke the silence all of a sudden, his voice having a somewhat dangerous undertone. Kate wished to kill Tony at that very moment for his inability to keep his mouth shut. Brian – she had completely forgotten about him. Since he had kissed her on a date two weeks ago, she hadn't called him anymore, but unfortunately, Brian hadn't gotten the message. Tony had been there a few days ago when her cell phone rang, and being the spy he was, he had grabbed the phone before she had.

"Brian is nobody," she explained, her voice firm, when his eyes pierced her almost accusingly. "It's the truth!" she explained, not caring for the fact that he was obviously making a claim on her although he had absolutely no right to – at least not as long as they hadn't talked about last night and how to proceed from here.

But she wanted to make sure that he understood that she was free for him to have – if he wanted her – which was why she decided on answering his question more detailed. "He took me out on a date two weeks ago, but I broke up with him and he didn't quite understand that I was serious and not just playing hard-to-get. Dinozzo stole my phone when he called. You know how he is! That's it."

Obviously satisfied with her explanation, he lowered his eyes to the newspaper again. Anger started to build up inside her. So he had the right to make a claim on her but she didn't? No way.

"Who is the redhead?" she asked, unable to hide the jealousy from her voice. Before she made a fool out of herself by practically throwing herself at him, she wanted to make sure that he was worth the risk. If he was just a man who had looked for a one night stand with a young woman to prove something to himself, she could as well kick his ass and move on to the next man without considerations.

"What redhead?" he asked and looked up, the undertone in her voice having caught his interest.

"The one with the fancy car. She waited for you when you offered me the job. And she was in the office several times. Did you think I wouldn't notice?" She cleared her throat when amusement crossed his features. So much for adding to his already oversized ego, she thought, angry at herself for the revelation that she had been paying attentions to the women he met. "Dinozzo told me that she still meets you on a regular basis." She hurried to continue in a subtle accusation – just the tone he had used before.

Gibbs held her eyes in this indefinable way, but she wasn't willing to back up. Instead, she leaned forward, underlining her request for an answer.

"Did Dinozzo say who she was?" Gibbs simply asked and Kate shook her head.

"No," she replied, feeling almost foolish to rely on information that was based on rumors that she had heard from Tony Dinozzo, "but he assumed that you and her..."

Gibbs chuckled softly. "He assumed? Assumptions, Kate. Always double check! And for your question, she's a friend. Nothing more."

Satisfied she leaned back in her chair, nipping at her coffee. "Double check is what I just did!" she commented dryly, her voice not giving away any hint on what she felt inside. Her eyes were fixed on the ocean again. Gibbs didn't cease to look at her, an almost invisible smile playing around the corner of his mouth.

She had obviously regained her courage. After she had left last night, he had spent endless hours reproaching himself for having given in to his desires – and for having let her leave. Ruining the friendship they had built up over the last one and a half year had been the last thing that he had wanted to do, but when he had considered the way she had fled the room he could only assume that she would avoid him from now on. Her reaction now, though, made him hope for the contrary. Usually it bothered him when a woman started to become possessive about him, but when he had heard the streak of jealousy in the young woman's voice, he had been strangely pleased.

His eyes moved over her beautiful face and her soft brown hair, which shimmered slightly red in the morning sunlight. Then his eyes fell on her neck.

"By the way... sorry for that," he suddenly stated and hinted at her scarf which he assumed to be the reason for the comments which she had been forced to endure from Dinozzo.

"What?" Kate asked, stunned that he had apologized and confused because at first she didn't understand why. Then she realized that he referred to the hickey. "Oh... that. Is it that obvious?"

"You're wearing a scarf when it's like one hundred degrees out here..." he started, but was interrupted by her low growl which caused him to smirk slightly.

Kate nipped at her coffee, making a mental note to never ever cover a hickey with a scarf again.

"Don't feel sorry," she then murmured, "I'm just as much to blame as you. I could have stopped you."

"Why didn't you?" he asked and her head turned to look at him. Her eyes burned into his and she sighed softly, her chin resting on her hand.

"Because at that moment we were both enjoying what we were doing," she replied and then looked away. "Gibbs we need to talk about it."

Without answering, he leaned back in his chair not ceasing to look at her as she continued.

"Quite frankly, I am not willing to leave your team. The chance to work at NCIS has been the best thing that has happened to me in my whole life. I am not willing to give that up – and I am not willing to transfer to another team. I know what you think about relationships between agents." She sighed, finally looking at him to get any kind of reaction from him. Disapproval, agreement, anything – but he remained neutral. "But technically last night would not qualify to fall under rule number twelve since we don't actually have a relationship, and I think we can both move on without it affecting our professionalism. What do you say?"

His eyes narrowed slightly, then he simply shook his head. "No."

"What?" Kate's voice didn't hide the upcoming panic. "Gibbs, I can be absolutely professional and I really want to remain a member of your team."

He sighed and turned his head away from her. Didn't she understand that he was not referring to her remaining part of his team? He would never even think of letting her leave, she was just too good for that. But he wasn't willing to let her get away with her feelings just that easily either. If he didn't know better, he would say that she tried to run out on him. Last night she had done it physically, and now she was trying to do so emotionally. And there was no way he was going to allow that. He himself was a master on hiding emotions and he knew that it didn't do any good – at least not when people you cared for were concerned.

"Kate, I want to keep you in my team!"

She had just been about to open her mouth and continue arguing with him, but this statement put her off and turned her arguments into a soft, surprised "Oh" sound. He chuckled slightly and folded his arms.

"You thought I would throw you out of my team?"

"Well... I... you said when you hired me that if I pulled something like that at NCIS, I wouldn't get a chance to resign." She defended herself, suddenly feeling incredibly stupid. "Anyway, I'm glad we talked about it."

"We didn't actually," he responded, intending on making clear to her that she was assuming falsely if she thought that things were settled between them and they would move on as if nothing had happened. With a determined expression on his face, he lifted from his chair. "And we will not do that here with dozens of strangers sitting around us."

"Gibbs," she started to contradict, but he left the table and crossed the terrace without even looking back at her. Kate shook her head in disbelief. "Great," she muttered and emptied her cup of coffee before folding her arms and looking at the wide ocean again. She had absolutely no idea what to expect from him. He had just practically told her that he would not throw her out of his team, but that he didn't tolerate relationships between agents either. And yet he said that things between them weren't completely settled.

They were as far as she was concerned.

She was an emotionally strong woman. Sure, she liked Gibbs, and yes, she still couldn't stop looking him up and down without picturing the hottest scenes before her inner eye – especially now that she had a detailed memory to refer to. But she had been able to live with that for the past months, she would be able to continue doing so.

During the previous night, she had thought a lot about her past – about Gibbs' past – and she knew that most likely he wasn't eager to add a fourth ex-wife to his collection, therefore she had accepted the fact that she couldn't expect to have a serious relationship with him. She had ignored the pain deep in her heart when she had made that clear to herself. Instead she pretended that she was alright with it; that it was better that way.

'Who do you think you are kidding?' a tiny voice deep inside her whispered, but she suppressed it. In her training she had learned to control her feelings, to sacrifice her own personal luck to her country. This was not much of a difference. It was all about learning to deal with and bury feelings deep inside... no matter what the cost.

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~ Nine Hours Later ~

Kate's eyes snapped open from the tickling feeling in her stomach that made her feel as if she was falling and resulted from the slight turbulence the plane was obviously flying through. She moaned and sat up, realizing that she had fallen asleep, while working on her report, her notebook lying on her knees.

"Seems, somebody had an exhausting night," Dinozzo, who was seated next to her, commented with a sly grin on his face. She gave another weak moan and although it was meant as a protest, it sounded more like a tortured sigh.

"Shut up, Dinozzo," she muttered and reached for her purse which she started to search for her small mirror. "How long did I sleep?"

"Almost four hours. I could have sworn you would only wake up after we land!" The young man teased, while Kate was busy putting her disheveled hair back to order and refreshing her face. Her eyeliner had repositioned itself to the place under her eyes, which made her resemble to a zombie or a very sick person, in her opinion. Grumbling, she fumbled for the cosmetic tissues that she always carried for situations like this.

"You could have woken me. We were supposed to finish our reports until we get back to DC," Kate murmured accusingly, while she removed the dark shadow under her eyes, and Tony leaned slightly towards her.

"I was thinking, after last night, you could possibly need every minute of sleep you could get." He bent closer until he was only inches away from her ear. "Seriously, just between you and me, who is he? I want to know who the man is that makes this perfect and controlled agent fall asleep during work."

"Dinozzo!"

The young man flinched at the sound of his boss' voice right next to him and ducked slightly in await of a head-slap. But instead, Gibbs' signaled him to get up.

"Get yourself a cup of coffee from the stewardess – and a big one for me!" he ordered slightly grumpily and Tony jumped up, part of him glad that he had escaped the slap, the other part of him confused.

"Yes boss..."

When the young man had left, Gibbs sat down next to the young woman, who, slightly embarrassed, dropped the tiny mirror back to her purse. Luckily she was almost finished. Interestingly, she suddenly cared enough for Gibbs to not want him to see her outer appearance completely ruined.

"Sorry I fell asleep," she murmured, her voice still a little sleepy, "I assure you the report will be..."

"Forget the damned report," he interrupted her in his usual dominant voice and she shut up, waiting for him to reveal the reason for why he had sent Tony away.

"Tired?" he asked, a hint of amusement present in his voice and if she didn't know better, she would have said that a flirty smile played around the corners of his mouth. His question had of course been more a rhetorical one, and he didn't wait for her to answer but leaned back in the seat. "What are you doing on Friday?"

"Um-" she started, and shook her head in confusion, trying to remember her schedule for Friday. "I'm not sure yet, I don't have..."

“Good,” he interrupted her with a nod. “My place, 8pm.” He leaned in closer when she stared at him, her face reflecting total bewilderment. “That’s 20.00 Zulu.”

“I know what time eight is...” she clarified, not sure whether her mind was still too dazed from his sleep to interpret his words correctly.

“Alright,” Gibbs nodded and got up to return to his own seat. Just like that.

“Hey,” Kate looked up at him, her eyes gleaming with curiosity. “Does that mean you are asking me for a date?”

He returned her look and then, all of a sudden chuckled mysteriously in this way that he always did when he wasn’t willing to give any more information. Kate watched him in disbelief as, still smiling, he turned to go back to his seat, which was two rows behind them right next to Timothy McGee’s.

Kate followed him with her eyes, then a soft smile formed on her face. Special Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs had just asked her out on a date. Well, he hadn’t actually been asking, but more ordering, but hey, who was she to complain?

She liked that bossy side on him. It challenged her. She had been going out with enough considerate, soft men to know that they triggered no other feelings than annoyance and boredom in her after a certain point. A date with Gibbs would definitely be a very welcome and nice distraction and, she was sure of that, prove very interesting.

“Um, boss! Your coffee!” Anthony Dinozzo interrupted her thoughts loudly and crossed the last meters to their seats, holding a large cup of coffee in front of him.

“It’s for Kate, Dinozzo. She looks like she needs one to finish that report in time!” Gibbs replied and when Tony looked at him with wide eyes, feeling slightly abused by having been tricked into fetching a cup of coffee for his female co-worker, the elder man shrugged his shoulders. “What, you think I would even take a mouthful of that weak stuff they offer here?”

Tony looked down at Kate, anger displayed on his face, when he handed her the cup.

The smile hadn’t left her face and his anger immediately turned into interest in why she was smiling all of a sudden. He sat down next to her again.

“What?”

“Nothing!” she replied, taking a sip of her hot coffee. Just what she needed now.

“Nothing? The last time I fell asleep during work I had to search a huge pond of mud for a murder weapon, and you get a cup of coffee and are smiling after a talk with the big boss!” He looked back at his boss who was sitting in his seat and reading in a file. “I wonder what’s the matter with him. He looks different from usual.”

“Really?” Kate asked, her mind too distracted to really listen to him. The only thoughts that were going through her consciousness were ‘I-have-a-date-with-the-most-sexy-special-agent-in-the-world’-related and the familiar tickle in her belly did no longer originate from flight turbulence. She knew that she was well on the way to falling in love with her boss – and there was nothing that disturbed her about it anymore, now that he had indicated that he was at the same place where she was.

“Yeah... he didn’t slap me! He always slaps me!!” Tony hissed back, still spying on his boss.

Kate forced her attention back on the report she still had to finish. She was sure that, although Gibbs had asked her out on a date, he would still not accept it if she didn’t hand in her reports in time. She

was more and more convinced that he was capable of perfectly separate personal and professional life – and she was also certain that she would learn how to do so.

When Tony poked her slightly, she looked up, about to snap at him to leave her alone, but the puzzlement on his face shut her up. Tony was shaking his head in disbelief. “I have never seen him that way.”

“Seen him how, Tony?” Kate asked, a certain annoyance displayed in her voice, and the young man sat back in his chair, looking at her as if he had just made the most revealing discovery in earth’s history.

“Happy.”

- The End (May 08, 2007)

## Previously unreleased: See You There

*This is the previously unreleased (and unfinished, although that is barely noticeable) last part of my NCIS fiction series which started out with "Blue Skies" and "After Tonight". Their first date and a few more memories they made together come to Gibbs mind when he is standing at Kate's grave...*

### *If I Ever Saw an Angel...*

Special Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs looked down at the grave which was covered with wreaths of flowers. For the second time in his life he had lost somebody; a woman whom he had loved. And again she had died because of him – as if a curse had been cast on him.

Dozens of times had the previous days passed through his mind, accompanied by inevitable questions. Would Kate still be alive if he had not started a relationship with her? Had Ari Haswari known what she had meant to him? Would things have turned out differently if, when he had met Ari in the café, he had not threatened the terrorist to not ever dare to touch Kate?

He didn't know – and most likely he would never know. Kate's funeral had been two days ago and ever since then his visions about her had stopped. Everyone had been there to grant her the last honor.

Gibbs had only exchanged a few courteous words with her parents, telling them that their daughter had died while saving hundreds of lives.

Caitlin Todd had never told them about her relationship with him.

They had both wanted to take it slow and presenting him to her parents would have indicated a rather serious relationship – which neither of them had been willing to admit. Now he wished he had not taken it so slow.

Part of him wished that he could have stood as her boyfriend at her grave and shown the world how much she had meant to him. But things had turned out differently.

Gibbs closed his eyes for a moment, sighing when he remembered how their relationship had started. A faint smile crossed his face when he remembered their first date.

In the airplane he had given her the day, Friday – but that had, as always, been prevented by a furious marine wife who had killed her husband. They had spent all three days investigating the case and searching for the woman, whom they at first assumed to have been abducted. Only later they learned that the woman was anything but a victim but had killed her husband only to run away with a man whom she had an affair with.

Gibbs had rescheduled their date to the next Friday, and smirked when he remembered that particular day which had started one of the best relationships which he had had in his whole life...

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### *~ Around Two Months Earlier ~*

It was a rather boring week. After they had concluded the case of marine major Jenkins and his wife, the rest of the week had been passed in writing reports and doing other kinds of paper work. Not

that it disturbed Caitlin Todd, that there had not been any murders or other kinds of capital crimes, but it would have made the days pass by much less slowly.

She had been incredibly disappointed not to be able to meet with Gibbs the previous Friday, and now her anticipation – and not to mention nervousness – about their upcoming date was even bigger than the first time.

For the hundredth time that day she checked her cell phone for the time. And for the hundredth time she ignored Dinozzo's half-amused, half-curious glance at her behavior. She was sure that it was only a matter of time until he would make comments about it and ask her what was wrong.

Tony Dinozzo placed his pen on the desk and got up while taking a cautious look around. There it was... Kate sighed, mentally bracing herself for another one of those 'conversations' between her and her male co-worker.

"Katie, do you have a date tonight?" he asked, indecent as always, and leaned on her desk, casually glancing over at her cell phone – as usually trying to find anything on her desk that would give away something about her private life which she kept such a mystery from her colleagues.

"Tony, if Gibbs finds you occupied with something else than work again, he is going to fire you..." she noted dryly and the male agent laughed self-securely, but then took another glance around – just to be sure his boss wasn't somewhere near. With Gibbs one could never know...

"He just said that... he would never do that... he needs me too much!"

"Yeah, Dinozzo?" A voice right behind him asked dangerously low and the young man winced. Kate giggled slightly and smiled at Tony, then at Gibbs, who was standing right behind the young man, a large cup of fresh coffee in his hand. "And what exactly do I need you for? Distracting my agents? Annoying me?"

Gibbs took a sip of his coffee and went to his desk, while Tony followed him, stuttering dozens of his illogic excuses. Gibbs sat down and ran his eyes over the reports lying on his desk and waiting to be signed by him. Tony was still babbling – somehow his talk had moved to one of his movies again, obviously with the purpose of underlining his arguments of why he was needed; Gibbs hadn't really listened to his monologue.

Eventually he looked up slightly annoyed, tired of the constant babbling, and Tony interrupted himself.

"I'm distracting you boss?" he asked, rather sheepishly and Gibbs nodded.

"Yeah!"

"Sorry boss!" The young agent practically ran back to his desk and ducked behind his computer screen. Angrily he shot a glance over to Kate who was smiling at him innocently.

"You could have warned me!" he hissed and she leaned back in her chair.

"I did," she repeated lowly. "But when you told me that you were too important to be fired, I thought why miss out the fun of you discussing that with Gibbs personally?" If they had still been in high school she would have pulled faces at him now. Considering the fact that the man whom she was dating tonight was sitting right next to her though, she refrained from doing so.

At that moment her telephone rang and, giving Tony one last sufficient smile, she picked up the phone.

“Special agent Caitlin Todd!” Please don’t let it be another case, not today, she begged silently. One rescheduled date was enough – she wouldn’t stand another week of waiting. But when she heard the voice of the caller, she almost wished that it had been a case.

Without replying to the flattering comments from the man on the other side of the line, she nearly threw the receiver back on the phone, and started to hack the keys of her computer again, slightly more forceful than before.

Tony looked at her, his mouth open, and her rather unexpected reaction had even drawn Gibbs’ attention, who had put his pen down and was looking at her intently, as if by his stare alone he would make her tell him what was going on. The men observed her tapping her keys as if nothing had happened for another ten seconds.

Then her cell-phone started to ring. She ignored it without even looking at the caller’s ID.

“Um... Katie...” Tony got up, after the phone had stopped ringing and then, five seconds later started anew. “A perfect way to stop the noise is to pick up.”

He crossed the distance over to her desk. “Or maybe you don’t want to pick up? Why would you not want to do that?”

With a quick move that would have made a snake proud, he reached over and grabbed her phone. Kate jumped up and attempted to take it out of his hand, but he evaded her grasp, turned around and read out the caller ID.

“Brian?” A broad grin started to form on his face.

“Dinozzo!” Kate exclaimed, angry at this invasion of her privacy.

“I thought you were dating Brian! But you don’t answer his calls, that indicates that he is more of a stalker... which brings up the question: with whom do you have a date tonight? A new fling?” The young man thought outloud. The phone was still ringing in his hand.

“Dinozzo, give me the phone back!”

“Tell me his name!”

“Gibbs!” Kate turned around and looked at her boss for help. Gibbs had gotten up from his chair.

“Dinozzo!” he barked angrily. It was again one of those moment where his office resembled more a high school courtyard than a federal office. The chaos didn’t exactly serve to improve his mood.

“I can answer the phone if you want!” Dinozzo offered with a smile and a furtive glance at his boss. “I could tell him I’m your boyfriend and that he should stop calling. That would prevent you from receiving any more phone calls in the future!”

“Yes, that is the best idea I’ve ever heard coming from you!” Kate exclaimed enthusiastically, a happy smile forming on her face. She stopped her attempts to get her phone back and waited for him to pick up.

Tony grinned. She had obviously forgotten that they were still at war, and that he had not yet forgotten her malicious joy when Gibbs had caught him a few minutes ago. Slowly he lowered his face to hers, a smug smile playing around the corners of his mouth. The phone rang again.

“But what do I get in return?” he asked with an obvious, sexual implication.

“Dinozzo!” Kate and Gibbs exclaimed at the same time, the first one offended by his insinuation, the second one in a furious bark. Tony froze and looked over at his boss who was glaring at him with a dark expression on his face. The fresh caffeine had calmed Gibbs to the point where he could stand a lot of Tony’s jokes and the chaos he usually caused. But if the young man made such an indecent joke towards a co-worker, even his patience was at an end.

As much as Gibbs would have liked to deny the possibility that his rage at the younger man’s comment was also of possessive nature, he couldn’t really do so. Tony Dinozzo was a rather handsome young man who, despite his immature character, seemed to attract women. And Kate was much more in his age range. When he heard his lascivious comment, Gibbs could feel a slight hint of jealousy swell up in him. Kate was his girlfriend – at least she would be soon hopefully.

“Give me that phone!” the elder man snapped and, since he was afraid to go near Gibbs, Tony threw the phone over to his boss. The man grabbed the phone and, while leaving the room, answered it gruffly.

Kate and Tony stood in the small way between their desks, their bodies still touching from the previous fight for the phone, and looked at the corridor where Gibbs had vanished. When their initial surprise was gone, Kate’s eyes fell on the man next to her and, without warning, she hit his chest and pushed him away from her.

“You are a pig!”

“Oh come on, Katie! I was kidding!” Tony grinned and sat back at his desk.

“Right, kidding!” she returned, anger still present in her voice.

Not even one minute later Gibbs returned and threw the phone back to Kate. She caught it elegantly and followed him with her eyes when he sat back down, obviously not intending to comment on the happenings.

“Well, what did you tell him?” she finally asked, and the two additional pairs of eyes from McGee and Tony Dinozzo fell on their boss expectantly. Gibbs smirked slightly, and looked up at the young woman.

“Let’s just say that he won’t call you again,” he said, almost softly – then his eyes fell on Dinozzo and McGee, and his face darkened.

“You two feel bored? Because I still have dozens of reports which need to be finished and our truck could need an overall cleaning as well!” he barked grumpily and both agents hurried to get back to work. Cleaning their truck from top to bottom was a task neither of them was eager to be ordered to do.

Smiling softly, Kate looked from Gibbs to her phone and went back to finishing the report she was writing on. She loved the way he was stepping in for her and yet not giving her the feeling that he was treating her different from the other agents. It made her believe that a relationship between them really had a chance to work...

Three hours later, when their shift was over and there was still no new case in sight, Kate inhaled relieved. She didn’t know how she had made it through the day. Now she needed the remaining two hours to drive home and take a bath, shave her legs and pick out her clothes for the evening. Only very little time for a lot to do.

She was startled by Gibbs’ voice next to her.

“See you at 9 o’clock?” He asked lowly in passing and gave her a soft, flirty smile that made her stomach tickle as if it was filled with butterflies.

“Definitely,” she managed to reply and almost dropped her PDA when she looked after him – a fact which, of course, did not go unnoticed by him and made him laugh softly. When the elevator door had closed behind him, he smirked slightly and exhaled with a soft “Wow” sound. The last time he had started an affair with a colleague had not been so much fun and - his face darkened for a second – she had not appreciated him that much either. In retrospect it seemed to him as if he and Jenny had had nothing but plain sex back then – no deep feelings involved.

With Kate it was different. She admired him and he thought she was the sexiest woman on earth. And they were obviously both looking forward to a real date. She was interested in him personally, not just in having sex – although he wouldn’t complain either if sex was all she wanted. In fact he had to constantly remind himself that tonight would not be about sleeping with her in the first place. It would be about them having a nice time and talking – a social task which he was incredibly bad at. Usually he said something which somehow offended the woman he was with – it was not that he chose to do so; it just happened, most of the time without him even noticing.

But Kate already knew that he was a bastard and she didn’t hesitate to tell him so. Therefore he expected it to become quite a good time. He just hoped that she didn’t mind ordered-in Chinese food for a date...

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Kate checked her appearance in the mirror one last time before she grabbed her keys. She ran her hands through her hair and shook her head to loosen it and make it look fuller.

She had decided on her turquoise shirt, which underlined the shape of her perfectly formed waist, and one of her tight pants. She looked more casual than in the office, but still elegant enough if his plans were to go out. Up to now he had not told her what to expect. In fact, since the night in which they had had sex, they had not touched each other. No hidden caress, no secret kiss.

At first Kate had thought that her boss had second thoughts – or that the consequences of an affair with her had dawned on him, but after he had asked her for another date after the first one had been ruined by the murder case, she had been sure that he was just being professional.

Kate left her apartment and hurried to her car. A slight rain had started and she nearly ran to cross the distance between the house that she was living in and her car in order to not get her hair completely ruined.

Twenty minutes later, she brought the car to a halt in front of the house that Gibbs was living in. She turned off the engine and looked at her clock. Five minutes early... better than too late.

She checked her appearance in the small rear mirror in her car one last time, before she opened the door. A few raindrops were still falling from the sky.

Kate took one last deep breath before she finally got out of her car. It would have been a lie to say that she felt self-secure about what she was doing. In fact, the closer that she came to his door, the more she doubted her decision. It was not too late yet. She could still turn around and leave and they could declare the incident in Spain as a one-time slip which would never happen again.

Kate sighed and looked back at her car, then at the doorbell right in front of her.

Just when she was about to ring, the door opened and took the decision out of her hands.

For a moment totally perplexed, she stared at the elder man. Gibbs smiled at her.

"Hey," he greeted and she couldn't help but to return his smile.

"Hey," she returned, eying him up and down, unsure of what to do. Embrace him? Kiss him? He obviously felt her tension, for he showed her inside.

"Come in."

"Thanks," she replied with a soft smile. She had never actually been to the apartment of her boss – only heard Tony's numerous descriptions of it. From those descriptions she had figured it to be a rather weird place, but when she had taken an initial look around, she found it very homey actually.

She followed Gibbs to the kitchen, where he handed her a glass of wine. He made sure that his fingers brushed hers and noted with satisfaction that even a slight touch like this made her tremble slightly. Their eyes were locked while both of them took a sip from the wine. They were standing about two meters away from each other, and Kate was leaning with her back against the kitchen counter.

She had no idea how to start a conversation, therefore she took another sip of her wine, almost as if with the amount of alcohol, courage would return into her. Usually her dates started with courteous banter about work, learning what the other was doing and commenting on it. That was not an option for them, obviously. They already knew a lot about each other – well, at least he knew a lot about her, and he was not willing to give away information about his private life. From his reactions to Tony's indecent questions, she felt reluctant to push him to tell her anything about himself.

"You have a nice house... I like it," she finally complimented; and at the same time realized how dull and standard-courteous-small-talk-like it sounded. Therefore she hurried to add "Not what I expected, actually."

"Well, what did you expect?" he asked interestedly.

"I don't know? I guess I didn't think it would be so homey. From what I heard from Tony it sounded more like..." She cut herself off, which made him curious.

"Like what?"

"Well... uncomfortable... like a cave or something. But it's really nice." She smiled at him and put her glass on the counter, feeling insecure when he pinned her with his eyes. "May I see your boat?" she asked almost shyly as if it was some kind of sacred, famous relict.

That question of hers, or rather the tone she had asked with, made him chuckle softly. "Sure... but only if you promise not to burn it down." He mocked her and held out his hand in a silent invitation for her to take it.

Her eyes widened, when she realized that he was referring to the comment that she had once made towards Tony, when Gibbs had tapped Tony's cap and her PDA to the shooting tables in order to teach them to stay calm in stressful situations.

"That was... a joke Gibbs! I would have never done that! Well..." Her eyes narrowed thoughtfully for a moment. "I probably would have, but then I figured that me shooting you in the arm was revenge enough." Her eyes, that were still connected with his, sparkled cheekily.

She took his outstretched hand and gasped for air when he pulled her against his hard body abruptly. After having been deprived of only the slightest touches of him for the last one and a half week, the feeling of his whole body so suddenly pressed against hers almost shocked her and caused her breath

to quicken slightly when she felt his heat through her clothes. Gibbs, being the experienced investigator that he was, noticed with delight that her pupils dilated and her breathing became shallower.

"So you shot me on purpose?" he asked playfully, his mouth only inches away from hers. He was pleased with her obviously still very present desire for him. After the long time in the office without being allowed to touch her, he needed to feel her. And if it was possible, she seemed even more beautiful and desirable to him than in the first night that they had shared.

Kate cocked her head and chuckled softly while intuitively she pressed herself closer to him.

"No..." she whispered seductively against his lips. "Although the thought was tempting – you can be a bastard sometimes."

He gave a soft laugh and she raised her fingers to stroke over the wrinkles in the corners of his eyes. They betrayed that once he must have been a man who had often laughed – nowadays he did it way too rarely in her opinion.

She returned his soft glance, her whole body waiting for him to kiss her. Their lips were merely inches apart and Kate could breathe in the intoxicating scent of coffee and bourbon mixed in his breath.

She let her hands run through his soft, silver hair. It felt so good to touch him and to be allowed to caress him – a privilege which she was denied once they were in the office.

All of a sudden, Gibbs broke their body contact, their linked hands remaining the only connection between their bodies. She failed to hide a disappointed sigh – a soft sound which did of course not go unnoticed by Gibbs - and looked at him questioning.

"Come on, I'll show you my boat." His soft smile warmed her heart, yet the sparkle in his eyes betrayed, that he wanted to kiss her just as much as she wanted him to do so.

Gibbs knew that, once his lips touched hers, he would probably not be able to stop the kiss from turning into hot, passionate love-making. And he was also sure from the way that she had reacted to his touch, that she would do anything but object.

But that was not what he wanted: kissing her and having sex with her the moment that she entered his apartment.

Although he was rather sure that tonight would end up with them sleeping together, he didn't want to give her the feeling that sex was all that he was interested in.

Softly, he pulled her out of his kitchen and to the door that led to his basement. He opened it and turned on the light.

"Be careful, the stairs are uneven," he warned her and in awe, she followed him down into what was almost a shrine to him. She looked around, surprised and amused about the chaos of tools and old cups that she found lying loosely on the tables.

Almost reverently, she approached the skeleton of what was someday supposed to be a boat.

"Amazing," she murmured and touched the smooth wood. "And you really did that by yourself? I mean, Tony told me that you don't even use electric tools."

"Nope," he confirmed and Kate shook her head in amazement.

"Wow, I would never be patient enough to do that. I mean... I'm not even patient enough to end a puzzle... oh!" she startled slightly, when she made a small step back and felt his broad chest against her back. She had not realized that he had come to stand so close to her again.

"You wanna try it?" Gibbs asked lowly right next to her ear, his hands lying loosely on her waist. When had his closeness started to cause concentration problems?

"Oh... yeah..." was all that she was able to give him as an answer, while she desperately tried to remember what exactly had been the question. She felt him let go of her and was watching interestedly as he took a new sheet of sandpaper from one of the tables at the wall.

"Now," he started to explain when he went back to her. "The important thing is for you to go with the grain." He placed the paper on the wood and gently moved it up and down systematically. "Don't use a lot of pressure, you don't need to. Just gently move it over the wood."

Kate placed her hand on his, following his movement. She liked standing so close to him that she could feel the warmth of his body at her back. In fact, she realized at that moment that it didn't matter to her what they were doing, when she was just close to him. She might even get used to work on a boat for a whole night if he would just keep on holding her that way he did.

"Did you hear what I just said?" Gibbs asked close to her ear, hiding a soft chuckle.

"Um...?" Busted.

"Just try it," the man murmured and placed the sandpaper in her hand, then moving her hand over the wood. His other arm pulled her body closer to his. Eventually he removed his hand from hers to stroke her hair away from her ear and her neck. "You smell good," he rasped and his hot breath tickled the sensitive skin below her ear.

"Oh..." Her soft sigh and her lack of intelligent words made him smile, before he brushed her skin with his mouth. It was a soft, almost innocent touch, but it caused her to tremble against him. Damn him for having so much power over her, but if he kept caressing her she might just be okay with him carrying her right to his bed.

Gibbs moved his lips up her neck, the innocent touching turning into soft nibbling and licking. When he reached her ear, Kate tilted her head to give him better access, and closed her eyes.

Momentarily Gibbs interrupted his kisses and chuckled, while his hand moved to hers again. "With the grain," he reminded her huskily.

She hadn't even been aware that she was still sanding the boat. Now however, she dropped the sandpaper and turned in his arms, looking at him with dark eyes. "Any chance I could draw your mind off that boat?" she asked and bit his lower lip softly. She was pleased to find his cheeks and chin soft and smooth. Not that she didn't like a five o'clock shadow, but she felt flattered if a man cared enough about her to shave for a date with her.

"A pretty good one actually," he affirmed and Kate couldn't help but laugh softly, when his hands moved to cover her buttocks and lift her up slightly, so that they were almost face to face. She liked this private Gibbs, he was different from the one in the office; less bitter, less grumpy and much more playful.

He captured her lips in a soft kiss, that soon turned into a more deeper and more passionate one.

God, how she had missed kissing him. She had almost forgotten how good it felt, how right. And how skilled a kisser he was.

They moaned in unison when the exploration of each other's mouth became wilder and more open-mouthed. Softly, Gibbs pressed her against the wooden planks of the boat and let her down so she could stand again and his hands were free to explore her body. Damn his principles. Damn his intentions to have conversation with her first. They could talk later – in bed maybe. He had never been the pillow talk kind of guy, but if it meant he could feel her body pressed against his right now, he was willing to change where that part was concerned.

It took a long time until the persistent, shrill ringing of his doorbell entered his conscious mind. Reluctantly, he broke the kiss and sighed tortured.

“Ordered-in food,” he explained, and willingly opened his mouth again when she reconnected their lips, not wanting to let him go.

When the shrill ringing sound reached his ears again, he touched her cheeks softly and broke away from her.

“Katie I have to let him in.” He murmured, suddenly not so sure anymore why exactly he had to do so. “I’ll be right back... don’t move.”

“Wouldn’t think of it...” she whispered, and smiled softly. Looking at her like that, her cheeks flushed, her lips swollen from his kisses and her eyes dark and clouded with desire, made him want to just let that guy, who brought the ordered-in Chinese food, wait until he was finished making love to this incredibly beautiful woman. Before he could pursue that idea, he turned and hurried up the stairs out of his basement.

Kate closed her eyes and bit her lower lip. Her hands ran through her hair while she eventually took another look around, searching for some place to sit down. She was not sure she would be able to stand any longer with her legs feeling like pudding.

She spotted a place on one of the tables and pulled herself up to sit on it, while she looked at the tools with interest. No doubt, during the last half hour, she had discovered a new respect for this mysterious man, that was her boss. It required a lot of knowledge and ability to build a boat, and she actually admired him now that she had seen his construction.

Almost startled, she turned her head when she heard the squeaking sound of steps on the old staircase that led down to the basement. Gibbs smiled at her, his eyebrows raised while he was approaching her.

“You hungry? I ordered miso soup and Chinese noodles. Unfortunately they don’t really taste good anymore once they are cold.” he announced and came to stand in front of her. His hands touched her knees softly, while he looked deeply into her eyes. She returned his gaze and lifted one of her hands to run her fingers over his chest and finally grab his sleeves.

He was caught off guard, when she pulled him towards her abruptly to connect his lips with hers in a fierce exploration of his mouth. He fought to get hold on the table and regain his balance, an effort which caused him to nearly stumble against her. She giggled against his lips softly and took advantage of the unexpected closeness of his body to hold him against her while she nibbled at his chin. A low growl escaped his throat and he bit her earlobe softly, satisfied when a surprised sigh escaped her lips.

“So do you want to eat first or do you want me to take you right here on this table?” His voice was rough and for a second she was almost shocked at his directness, then she decided to play his game.

“As tempting as that thought is, agent Gibbs...” she whispered against his ear hotly, “I think I will have to go for the food first.”

“Good, you’ll need it!” he announced dryly and she laughed softly in amusement.

“Is that a promise?”

"Damn right it is. I will make sure that you don't run out on me again. Safest way to do that is, if you're too tired to think of anything else than sleeping." He stated matter-of-factly. Kate smirked and then looked into his eyes.

"You know why I did it in Spain!" Her tone was soft, but in her following words lay a hint of reproach. "And if I remember correctly, you did or said nothing which would have held me back."

"Let's say I've never had a woman running out on me. That came kind of out of the blue," he smirked with a somewhat arrogant, cocky tone. Men, Kate thought and narrowed her eyes, deciding on taking his challenge.

"Curious," she wondered, "with three failed marriages one would expect that you are more experienced with running women." Her eyes looked innocent, but the trace of an ironic smile played around the corners of her mouth. Gibbs looked at her in stunned speechlessness. He was not used to every one of his statements being countered – especially not if his counterpart was a beautiful woman. Up to now, the women he dated had usually reacted with hurt or anger to his more challenging comments – none of them had been as tough as Kate was. Which was probably exactly the reason why this had a chance to really work, he mused.

"Rendered silent, agent Gibbs?" Kate asked amused and moved off the table to the ground, pecking one last kiss to his lips – the touch being more a new provocation than a caress.

"Not at all, agent Todd." He watched her moving slowly backwards towards the stairs and followed her, like a hunter approaching his prey. Their eyes were still locked, each scanning the other for a hint on what they were planning next.

Equal, Gibbs thought somewhat stunned, she was absolutely equal to him – yet she was willing to surrender to his control.

It shouldn't have surprised him, that, once he made a quick step towards her, she turned and fled up the stairs at a catlike speed. He couldn't exactly remember when had been the last time that he had played catching games with a woman – he believed it had been with Shannon, a long time ago. His later wives had just not been those playful types and recently he had simply considered himself too old for that kind of mating games.

Therefore he couldn't actually believe it, when he automatically raced after Kate – and actually enjoyed the light mood that she was setting up. When he finally caught her in the kitchen – or rather trapped her in front of his fridge in the corner, they were both breathless and laughing.

"Running out again, Katie?" Gibbs asked lowly while he playfully approached her; and she had never heard him speak her nickname so erotically seductively. She was sure that she would blush from now on every time he called her that in the office.

Initially, she smirked softly at his question, but that soon turned into a soft sigh when he reached her and imprisoned her in between his arms, while he tenderly started to kiss her jaw and neck. Those kisses were more serious than before, no longer meant to tease her, but to arouse her. And they didn't fail to have the desired effect. Kate fought the rush of lust that impacted on her body like a flash, since she didn't want to give him an impression of being easy. Then she realized that both of them knew anyway that they would be having sex that night. False reluctance would just spoil the fun, therefore she relaxed against his body and held on to his shoulders.

"Mmm... don't stop," she whispered in what was half an order, half a plea when he hit the sensitive spot right under her ear.

"I caught you," Gibbs murmured against her ear with a soft grin on his face, "that makes you my prisoner, and I don't take orders from prisoners."

Kate gave a soft little giggle and moved her hands through his hair to hold him in place. "Well, you gonna lock me up?" she asked mockingly with a hint of provocation lying in her voice.

"Mmm..." he hummed against her skin and pleasant shivers ran up her spine when his hot breath tickled her sensitive spots. The thought was thrilling, yet not exactly what he had in mind. "I was more thinking of tying you to my bed."

The young woman smiled cheekily when she countered "I would have guessed you would rather go for tying me to your boat."

Gibbs bit her earlobe softly, but strong enough to draw a soft shriek from her, then he lifted his head to look into her face. Her eyes were sparkling with desire and the pleasure she took from challenging him and he was sure, that she could read the exact same signals in his eyes. It was really refreshing to mock a woman who knew how to counter his teasing, and didn't just pout or start to cry or yell at him.

He had to chuckle at her boat comment. Curious that Tony Dinozzo was thinking that this woman was a catholic prude. "Sweet," he whispered softly, his hands moving slowly down her sides, "whatever works for you. I just figured being tied to my boat would prove to be a little too exhausting for you."

She blushed against her will. Damn his way to stare people down. When he did it in a seductive way, he was even more dangerous.

"Rendered silent, agent Todd?" he mocked her with the same words she had used earlier and grabbed one of her hands to softly press his lips to her pulse point. With delight, he noticed how she trembled under his touch and withdrew her hand from his lips.

"You promised me dinner," Kate noted with a look over at the table where the boxes with Chinese food were standing, "and I'm starving." She moved in close to him until their lips nearly touched. "You don't intend to let your prisoner starve, do you?"

He loved and let her out of his arms. While he opened one of the drawers of his kitchen counter, Kate moved to the table and slipped into one of the chairs.

"Chopsticks or fork?" he asked and held up a fork. Kate shrugged her shoulders and held up the chopsticks which had been delivered to them along with the food.

"These will work just fine, thanks."

Gibbs dropped the fork back into the drawer and went to the table as well, amazed by how easy-going she was.

#### ~~~~~ FUNERAL ~~~~~

He missed her. He missed her soft laughter when they woke up in bed together at the weekend, and he missed the sound of her breathing in his cellar when he worked on his boat. She had spent nights just sitting there and watching him, or writing at some report – or drawing. It had been a comfortable atmosphere and he had enjoyed every minute of it.

After all his disappointments, he had sworn to himself that he would never ever let a woman come close enough to hurt him again. He usually felt threatened by them. But with Kate he had felt nothing but comfort and safety: a comfort which he missed terribly now that she was gone.

He knew that he would finally get over her. They had only been together for two months before she was shot on the roof. He had been in too many relationships to hold on to romantically dramatic thoughts of never loving another woman again. He knew that those were clichés made up by kitschy Hollywood movies, and they couldn't be further from reality.

What he was sure of, though, was that Kate was one of the few women in his life that he would never forget; one of the persons that he had met who would always have a place in his heart.

Although she had been younger than him, they had been on the same level. Some nights they had spent in bed together, just lying in each other's arms and talking about banal things. He had never been a man of many words, but with her he had actually started to talk about what moved him and what was going through his mind. Other nights they had simply discussed a case in bed, and then again others they had just kept silent.

There had been a strange connection between them. He wouldn't go as far as Abby most likely would and think of it as spiritual, but there had been amazing incidents where they seemed to think exactly the same.

He sighed softly, going to his knees and laying a hand to the earth under which her body was lying. What wouldn't he give to see her again, just once. See her smile at him again, hear her soft laughter or taste her coffee in the morning – which hadn't even nearly be strong enough, but which he had come to like, just because she had brewed it for him. And to tell her what he had always failed to tell her. That he loved her.

All those days he had hesitated to use that really big phrase, mostly because he wasn't sure or didn't want to commit that quickly. And then he had calmed his conscience by telling himself that she knew anyway. Yet, the fact remained that he had never actually told her. One of the many things in his life that he would like to change if given the chance.

Because he was sure that he had loved her: one of the few women in his life that he had truly loved.

His eyes read the inscription on her tombstone again – for maybe the tenth time. Caitlin Todd 1972 – 2005. Then he finally got up.

His job was waiting and he was sure that Jenny Shephard, his new director was already waiting to brief him on the video conference she had had with Guantanamo this morning.

He looked at the single red rose in his hand, and placed it carefully on top of the tombstone. It looked small compared to the large bunches of flowers on her grave, yet its color almost gleamed in the bright sunlight. A single rose, not nearly comparable to the mass of flowers on her grave, and yet alone more beautiful than all of them together – an analogy to the woman that Caitlin Todd had been.

Gibbs ran his hand over the cold, rough stone for one last time, before he turned and slowly walked away to move on with his life.

A slight breeze played with his silver hair, turned into a stronger gust of wind and hurled over Caitlin Todd's grave. It played with the leaves of the flowers placed there, and the small dedication which was bound to the single rose with a thin thread loosened and was lifted up before falling into the grass a few meters away.

*"If I ever saw an angel,  
It was in your eyes."*

That was the text written on it in clear handwriting.

Only moments later, the wind grabbed the small note, played with it, turned it around and around and made it dance between the tombstones, before finally lifting it up in an almost violent breeze. Relentlessly, the wind carried it up, further and further towards the blue sky until it became smaller and smaller and finally vanished in the blinding light of the sun...

## 28 Words

*Kate is determined to prove that she has a wild side to Tony and accepts a bet. A bet, that soon takes a completely different turn from what she expected it would...*

„Katie, I bet half of my paycheck that you could not stay for more than five minutes in a swinger club before running out all blushed and embarrassed!“

That had been the exact twenty-eight words that had started the whole ridiculous bet.

In retrospect, she should just have ignored Anthony Dinozzo's comment, but some proud part inside of her was determined to prove to him that she was not the prude catholic schoolgirl he always considered her to be. Just once she wanted to show this arrogant, cocky young playboy that she was just like the women he dated; except that she was out of his reach – and she knew that this knowledge would bother him even more if he knew that she was everything his other women were.

And besides, there was nothing weird about visiting a swinger club. She had never done it of course, but that didn't mean that she couldn't! All she had to do was stay for more than thirty minutes – thirty-one would do! It was not that hard and afterwards she wouldn't only have triumph on her side, but also have a good amount of money to spend.

That had been the plan – and it did so not work out. Because who would have thought that HE would be there?

When she thought about it, it had probably been some weird plan of one of her colleagues to make the situation embarrassing for her. It was the only explanation for her boss Leroy Jethro Gibbs being there. Caitlin Todd had serious doubts that this was the kind of establishment he usually spent his weekends in.

And yet, all of a sudden, he was standing behind her, rasping “Hey stranger” into her ear.

She recognized his voice at once, and when she had recovered from the initial shock, a strange ticklish feeling floated through her whole body.

“Hey back,” she returned his greeting, joining in the playful scenario of them being strangers that he had indicated, and turned around.

He looked just like always – a casual shirt and a jeans - so Gibbs. Contrary to her, who had chosen her most sexy dress and high heels to absolutely prove her point to Anthony Dinozzo. And the way he had looked at her had already been worth it. She smirked inwardly, when she recalled the almost drooling co-worker, who was waiting in front of the club, most likely with a stopwatch in his hand.

Her last boyfriend had bought the dress for her from Victoria's Secret – and she had thought she would never find the perfect reason to wear it. It was sinful – a piece of cloth that she would have never thought of buying. Therefore she had banned it to the depths of the back of her wardrobe. But tonight, it had seemed to be the perfect possibility for a dress like that.

The short silk revealed almost the entire length of her tanned, neatly shaved legs, which looked even longer due to the black high heels she had chosen. The low cut of the cleavage didn't hide the soft skin of her décolletage – she had gone through a lot of trouble to find a bra that fit with it.

No doubt, she was looking astoundingly sexy, and she was aware of it.

Gibbs' eyes scanned her appearance appreciatively and rested a moment longer than what would have been appropriate on her breasts before returning to her soft, brown eyes, that shimmered almost black in the dim light of the club.

Kate was unsure about whether to blush or throw a cheeky comment into his face and before she was able to decide on either one, he bent to her ear and whispered "All alone in a place like this? Searching for a thrill?"

"Maybe!" she rasped back, pleased with his obvious playfulness, and their cheeks brushed in the slightest of touches. His skin was warm and soft and smoothly shaved, and he smelt like strong coffee, expensive after shave and something that was uniquely him; a combination that was incredibly irresistible.

And maybe it was true; maybe she had been searching for a thrill when she had accepted the bet. Maybe she wanted to prove something to herself; to show herself that she could be just as wild and kinky as Dinozzo always claimed to be – maybe even wilder.

That thought made her tremble slightly. She was in a club which people visited for the purpose of having wild, passionate sex with strangers; or being watched by strangers while they were sleeping with their partners.

So why not live that untamed side inside of her for one night? All of a sudden, the thought of having sex in this place aroused her.

Alright, she had to admit, she had never been wild before. The closest she had come to wild had been when she had had sex with her college-boyfriend in the middle of a forest. It had been wild – and not good. She preferred to ban it – and the bruises it had left her with for another week - from her mind.

She had no idea what Gibbs was doing in this place, all that she could think about at the moment was that he was there, right in front of her, his hands lying loosely on her waist and his lips so close to her neck that her whole body was trembling with anticipation – waiting, and at the same time fearing for him to touch her.

Part of her expected him to drag her out of the club and ask her if she was completely out of her mind. It would have probably been the most reasonable thing to do.

But he didn't. He just kept standing close to her, while his hands slowly moved from her waist over her hip to rest loosely on the point where her legs met her butt.

Which again made her suspect that he was aware of the bet. And that would raise the question about what he was planning to achieve with this soft assault on her body.

"What kind of thrill?" he asked lowly as a reaction to her former admittance.

Kate closed her eyes and breathed in his scent. What are you doing, screamed a voice inside her. He was her boss, and no matter how much he pretended to be a stranger, they would have to face each other on Monday morning in the office. So the best course of action would be to end this right there and leave the club.

When she didn't reply to his question, he gripped her hips tighter to pull her closer into his body, as if in a silent warning for her to give him an answer.

"Maybe the thrill of a fantasy..." she murmured, submitting for a moment to his strength, and laughed lowly, sexily. "But I'm sure you do already know why I am here..." Her answer was ambiguous

and he could not really be sure if by that indicated knowledge she was referring to the bet, or the purpose for which people came to a place like this: to have sex.

“Possibly,” he replied in his usual, neutral tone and chuckled softly. He had clearly underestimated this woman. Her courage fascinated him and he was interested to know how far exactly she would go. “I’m interested in that fantasy you mentioned.”

“My fantasy...” she whispered into his ear, her lips almost touching his skin. She inhaled his scent deeply, her hips intuitively pressing into his body. Two could play this game. “I don’t tell my fantasies to strangers...”

And having said those words she escaped his arms and turned with a cheeky and provocative smile to walk slowly towards the bar. She knew he would follow her; she was a profiler after all – and therefore she knew he wouldn’t be able to resist the challenge she was putting up for him.

Hitting on her boss in this subtle and very arousing way was probably wilder than she had ever intended to be. But some part of her enjoyed it and wanted him to follow her. It was just a game after all...

She made her order and smiled winningly at a younger man next to her, aware that Gibbs was following her actions with his eyes. Just when the young man was giving the impression that he was about to hit on her, Kate turned away and smiled at the bartender who handed her the “Cosmopolitan” cocktail she had ordered. Seeming oblivious of her surroundings, she took a sip of it while turning around.

“Not giving up yet?” she asked innocently, when she found the elder man standing right in front of her.

“Wouldn’t want me to, would you?” Gibbs replied with an arrogant smile, making clear that he was seeing right through her little game, and then he laughed softly. “No you wouldn’t. Now do I get to hear that fantasy of yours?”

She returned his smile and noticed that the young man next to her was still eyeing them with curiosity and obvious interest. Kate bit her lip and smiled at him flirtatiously, before turning back to Gibbs, finding that he was quite aware of her flirt – and obviously did not approve of it. Her womanly pride felt flattered that she could actually raise his jealousy.

“Only if you promise to fulfill it...” she replied to Gibbs’ question in a whispered, very sultry voice and he had to smirk at her boldness. Part of him had expected a reaction like that from her. She was not the kind of person who backed off. No doubt, tonight, she was obviously determined to prove her point to Tony as well as him.

The young woman took another sip of her cocktail and licked her lips seductively – or at least Gibbs thought it was seductive, although he was sure that it had been unconscious.

Furtively, Kate glanced at the clock at the wall behind the bar. Fifteen more minutes to go. Nothing she couldn’t handle. In fact at the moment she enjoyed herself more than she probably should.

Her eyes traveled around in the bar room. It was decorated in a very decent style, the walls being painted in a soft, dark red that fit the dim light. Here and there, some flowers were standing at the wall, that was decorated with beautiful pictures, all consisting of motifs of ancient Greek mythology – mainly depicting Aphrodite.

Although the paintings alone would have created a rather kitschy atmosphere, the rest of the club was styled so decently, that they fit the design of the furnishing and the counter perfectly without being too pungent.

In the far corners were standing huge, beige sofas, meant for people to relax and engage in conversation. Kate's eyes were caught by a young couple on one of the sofas, who were very sensually kissing each other – and probably doing more already, she couldn't be so sure of that in the dim light.

The entire atmosphere was erotically charged and the thrill of an adventure was lying in the air.

'There is no better place than a swinger club for a woman who wants to enjoy just sensual, passionate sex without commitments' one of the witnesses of their latest case had informed her during an interrogation. And, despite her initial hesitation to believe in this statement, she had to admit that it was true, now that she could see it for herself. Nobody asked for names, nobody asked for backgrounds or telephone numbers, and everybody was ready to accept a no. Of course this was most likely not the place to meet a future husband, but it was a relaxed atmosphere and the more she relaxed, the more she actually liked it – especially with her boss being present.

"Excuse me?"

Her eyes went to where the deep voice had come from and she looked directly into the eyes of the young man from before. The fact that Gibbs' hands were still touching her did obviously not disturb him the least.

"Yes?" Kate asked friendly and nipped at her glass, enjoying the fruity taste of the alcoholic liquid, that ran down her throat.

"Are you here with him... or...?" The young man asked hesitantly, obviously intimidated by Gibbs' dark expression. Kate shot a quick glance at the elder man, and then moved her eyes back to the young man. He was definitely younger than her – maybe in his early twenties. Way out of her age range, but her curiosity about how Gibbs was going to react finally succeeded.

"Me, here with him? No..." she replied friendly and felt Gibbs' stare rest on her. She chuckled inwardly. He should know by now that his way of staring people down didn't intimidate her the least.

"Great!" The eyes of the young men lightened up. "Would you dance with me then?"

"No, she won't." Gibbs stepped in with a soft, but firm voice, not even bothering to hide the threat that was lying underneath his words. "She already promised the next dance to me."

Kate shot the young man an apologizing glance, while she followed Gibbs to the dance floor, all the way trying to suppress a giggle. The young man made no attempt to follow her, obviously afraid of Gibbs. Kate couldn't help but chuckle out loud. That alpha-male charisma, that always surrounded Gibbs and that was present without him even needing to say anything, was one of the things that had always fascinated her about him.

"What was that?" Gibbs' finally requested to know in a dark, almost threatening voice, and pulled her close against his body. Kate looked up into his face innocently.

"What exactly are you referring to?" No doubt, she was amused by his reaction.

Alright, he thought somewhat grumpily. If she wanted to play with fire, she should rather be prepared to get burned – because that was what she had to expect when challenging him.

"You... flirting with this... schoolboy!" Gibbs replied, his eyes meeting that of the young man who was still observing them.

"He is not that young Gibbs!" Kate replied matter-of-factly. "And besides, that's what I'm here for – to have fun!"

The hint of a smirk played around his mouth when he looked at her.

And suddenly the expression in his eyes disturbed her – because it gave her the odd impression that, contrary to what she had been thinking up to now, she was not the one controlling this game.

"Fun." He repeated what she had said and enjoyed the way she was trembling slightly when their bodies grazed. "Alright."

She couldn't help but stare at him for a few moments, unable to put sense into his statement.

"Alright what?" she asked, completely bewildered at the only possibility for what he meant, that came to her mind.

"Alright, let's have fun." He clarified. "Tell me your fantasy..." Determinedly, he pulled her softly closer to him so that her words would be only for him to hear.

"Gibbs!" Kate exclaimed, a slight trace of panic in her voice. He could not be serious about this – he was just testing her; seeing how far she was willing to go to win their little game. He had to be!

"If you tell me your fantasy, I will fulfill it..." His voice was tender and raspy while he whispered the promise hotly against her neck.

She gasped, unable to believe her own ears. He couldn't just have agreed to...

A look into his eyes reaffirmed her that he just had! Her boss had just agreed to fulfill one of her fantasies and from what she could read in his expression, he was absolutely serious. This was no longer a game of power, or about a challenge he wanted to win. This was not even about some stupid bet anymore. This was serious! And it was definitely something she couldn't handle.

"I..." she started, and her stomach tickled with panic as well as weird excitement, that she couldn't quite define. "I don't think..."

With a shaking of her head, she nearly downed the contents of the glass, that she was still holding in her hand, and put it down on the nearest table. A game was one thing - flirtatious banter or remarks that they sometimes shared at the office - but this was totally different...

So what? Then she was not wild, who cared. Then she would have to stand the teasing of Tony Dinozzo for a month or two, it didn't matter! She just needed to leave – immediately!

Abruptly, she turned and passed by a few couples on the dance floor, almost running for the nearest exit.

Gibbs had caught up with her before she was even halfway there. Grabbing her wrist he pulled her to an abrupt stop and forced her to turn around.

"Hey..." His voice was tender, almost soothing, and his blue eyes captured hers in a soft, hypnotizing stare. "We had a deal," he reminded her seductively, his eyes showing nothing but appreciation and gentleness – an expression she had never seen in them before.

Kate took a step backwards for every step he made towards her. She was too confused by the intense feelings, his closeness, his gaze and his touches triggered in her. Feelings that caused her mind to become dizzy and her legs to turn weak.

Too late did she realize that he was manipulating her steps and slowly urging her back until she could feel the cool stone wall behind her. Trapped...

"We had no deal," she whispered, and her breath quickened. She raised her eyes to his and held his gaze. Damned, he had beautiful eyes. And a beautiful smile which she got to see way too rarely.

"We did!" he insisted softly, but firmly, and moved further into her personal space. "I asked you to tell me your fantasy, you said you would if I'd fulfill it afterwards and I agreed. So tell me..."

His eyes burned into hers and the hint of that irresistible Gibbs-smile was playing around the corner of his mouth. Kate broke the gaze first by lowering her eyes, and tried to move away from him. "I can't..."

"I want you," he informed her, when she wanted to retreat, and the statement drew a small gasp from her. "And I know you want me. You had to expect that I would react to your challenge. I may be older, but I'm a man and I am not that much in control of myself that I'd be able to resist this beautiful temptation that you've been presenting during the last half hour. Deliberately, I might want to add! And now you're afraid of your own courage."

She did neither deny nor admit to what he had just said – although, to herself, she had to confess that he was right. Deep inside she had probably thought that if she could seduce him, she would prove that she was just as seductive and wild and sexy as those women that Tony admired were. Obviously, her thoughts were written all over her face, for Gibbs leaned in to her ear. "Don't be afraid... Katie."

He was close to her, almost whispering that intimate nickname into her ear. Kate moved to the side, out of his personal space.

She shook her head slowly, her eyes searching for the next corridor to vanish into. She was glad that there were dozens of corridors that led out of the bar hall and into some smaller rooms, that offered privacy for couples who had enough of other people constantly watching them.

Now they served her to escape this man, his unbearable closeness and most of all the very disturbing feelings he managed to evoke in her belly.

Gibbs smirked when he realized that he had allowed his mind to be lulled into her scent deeply enough to offer her a chance to flee his closeness in an unexpected moment. Slowly, but relentlessly, he followed her, not leaving her out of his eyes.

Cleverly, he urged her into a corner and approached her. They were totally oblivious of their surroundings and a couple having sex about ten meters away from them.

When he had imprisoned her in between the wall and his body near the corner, Gibbs bent to her ear again. "Katie, I would never hurt you – but I want to have sex with you. Now. Here. And I know you want it just as much, otherwise you wouldn't have tried to seduce me; otherwise you wouldn't even have come here in the first place."

Her prolonged moan was swallowed by his hot mouth, while his hands roamed possessively down her body. Her mind was still screaming no, yelling at her to push him away. But her body betrayed her will. Every part of her responded to his kiss and his exploring hands. Feelings, that she had forbidden herself to have for over a year now, were being unleashed from their prison in the deepest corner of her heart.

That was so not how this bet had been meant to turn out!

Persistently, he explored her mouth with his tongue, forcing her body to react to him the way he wanted to. He was pleased when she started to return his caresses hotly, her soft moans silenced by his lips so that they were only for him to hear.

God, Abby had been so right, and he hadn't even suspected anything. All those days in the office and it had never dawned on him.

Until one of those days when Abby had talked with him about his dating life. Well, actually she had talked, and he had been forced to listen. And suddenly while she was babbling, she had made a comment about the way Kate looked at him – and immediately stopped talking when she had realized that she had given away something that was not meant for his ears.

Gibbs' kiss became languid and more seductive, while his hands moved lower. With a low groan, he pressed her soft body against his, his fingers touching the naked skin of her thighs. The material of her dress was silky and thin, and its shortness allowed easy access. Her skin felt smooth and firm, and he wanted – he needed - to feel more.

The shock of feeling his rough hands on her naked skin caused Kate to gasp in a sudden realization of unpleasant, but very present facts – like their working relationship.

Weakly, she pushed at the man's shoulders and managed to wiggle out from between him and the cold wall.

They had long crossed the line, moved from a green light into a red light zone without even passing through yellow light somewhere on the way.

Her mind had gotten dazed and blurred by their little game, and the next moment she had been pressed against a cool wall, and before she had even been able to figure out how exactly she had gotten to this point, her lips were being devoured by this incredibly handsome man like there was nothing standing between them; like they were not engaged in a working relationship; like he was not her boss. She couldn't allow that to happen.

She felt like running away from him, from herself, before they could any further ruin what they had. And at the same time she was curious and so desperate for more.

Her mind still in a haze, she slowly moved backwards away from him, not leaving him out of her eyes. Her whole body screamed for his touch, wanted her to return into his warm embrace and let him have his way with her. Yet something in the back of her clouded mind whispered that she couldn't do this. Not now, not with him, not in a place like this.

The exact reasons against it continued to slip out of her mind with every additional second that passed.

She bumped into somebody on her slow retreat and realized somewhere in her consciousness, that it was the couple that was having sex. By murmuring something that came close to an apology, she gave Gibbs enough time to close the distance between them.

She protested weakly, when he grabbed her wrists softly. He entwined his fingers with hers to hold her hands behind her back and pull her close to his body again.

A part of her condemned herself for wearing the short, spaghetti-strapped, black dress; another, more reckless part cherished that decision. Be wild, screamed this voice inside of her that was so desperate to feel more of this man; to see the paradise which she had just gotten a taste of.

"Oh God..." she breathed out, when his lips descended on her neck, where he immediately started to nibble at her oversensitive skin. Her whole body was lulled into his male scent.

He shoved her slowly along the corridor, away from the other couple, and she blindly followed his lead. Unable to understand why she didn't take evasive action immediately, she allowed him to completely control her mind, her body and her reactions. She made several attempts to wiggle her wrists out of his grip, but he was merciless, forcing her to endure whatever he decided to do to her body. And she enjoyed his caresses too much to truly mind his dominance.

In fact she was glad that he was holding her so steadily, because she had long lost any sense of balance and feared that, once he would let go of her, she would trip and fall to the ground.

He moved her so she was standing with her back against the wall again, and then licked at her earlobe.

"Your fantasy," he suddenly rasped between kisses into her ear. "Tell me..."

"The one about me and you?" she breathed back, regaining something of her usual cheekiness, and he smiled into her skin at her surrender.

"Yes." Something about the fact that she had been having fantasies involving him, pleased him incredibly. At least he was not alone in this. "Tell me what you have been fantasizing about me doing to you. All the details..."

A soft whimper escaped her lips when one of his hands grazed her breasts and his lips started to concentrate on the silky skin of her shoulders.

"I..." she started, slightly breathless. "We are having sex..."

"Not satisfying," he informed her and one of his hands cupped her breast through the material of her dress while his lips descended on the naked skin in the valley between her breasts, that was revealed to him. She whimpered softly, when he pinched her nipple, and moved her hand into his hair.

"Keep talking," he uttered against her skin hotly and she fought to concentrate on forming words – which was a challenge for her distracted mind.

"You..." she started and he looked up into her cloudy eyes. "You have tied me to your bed... and the you're seducing me and... oh, please... yes!"

His lips had closed over one of her nipples, sucking softly on it through the silk, while his hand moved to the bare skin on her upper thigh, lifting her dress a little, so he could feel the naked skin of her buttock under his hands. "Go on." He ordered softly, pressing her against his abdomen to let her feel just how much he was turned on by her.

"You're kissing me all over and... oh... you're being so soft and wild at the same time... Gibbs!"

"Mmm..." he hummed against her skin while he smirked softly. His hand explored her inner thighs, grazing her wetness and causing a gasp from her.

"Don't..." she whimpered, and moved her hands to his shoulders, weakly trying to push him away. Her body contradicted her words and attempts by intuitively opening under his touch. "We can't... I am... and you are..."

He chuckled softly at her incoherence and took both her hands into his to pin them to the wall. Her soft protest died on his lips and turned into an erotic whimper, when he again seduced her with a hot open mouthed kiss.

All of a sudden, Gibbs noticed that two men were watching them, one of them being the younger guy who had already hit on Kate at the bar. He hesitated for a moment, then smirked inwardly, determined to show those schoolboys once and for all whom Kate belonged to. Playfully, he wanted to capture her lips, but she evaded his kiss, her body tensing up all of a sudden.

"Gibbs!"

Of course, Kate had also noticed that the young men were watching them. She tried to free her hands from him and her voice betrayed a hint of embarrassment.

The man bent to her neck to scrape his teeth softly over her skin before moving to her ear.

"Don't worry... they'll just watch..."

"But I..." she started, and before she could finish, he had recaptured her lips with his anew.

"They won't get to touch you, Katie... they want to, but I will be the one who gets to take you home tonight... let's show them." He murmured playfully and for a moment she thought that he was way out of her league where wild and kinky sex was concerned.

"I don't think..." She wanted to tell him that she was not up for it. She had never been able to enjoy sex in places where she was in danger of being seen. Damn, at this point she was still struggling with herself about whether to have sex with him at all!

But again he didn't even let her finish, but placed a finger on her lips.

"Trust me," he demanded tenderly, "Close your eyes."

She looked deeply into his ice-blue eyes, and then leaned back against the wall, doing as he had commanded and knowing that from this point on there would be no going back.

"Good girl," he whispered. "I will make you come. Just let it go, beautiful." He moved his lips down her body, and although the dress was still preventing him from kissing her naked skin, she felt as if he was burning her alive. Softly he spilled long, languid kisses down her belly and her abdomen, lowering himself to his knees in front of her.

His hands moved down her thighs, playing and tickling her at the back of her knees, then moving up again to cover her butt and press her taut stomach against his face.

He spent endless moments with caressing her through the dress, making sure that she became absolutely oblivious to everything around her except for him and what he did to her.

His fingers explored every inch of her body with a tenderness he had never applied before. But then again he had also never had sex with such a beautiful woman in a place like this. The way she completely gave herself over to him fascinated him, and he was determined to make absolutely sure that she would not regret it.

His hands moved under her short dress, tenderly pulling the thong she was wearing down her legs. It vanished in his pockets. She wouldn't need it anymore tonight.

Eventually, his hands wandered to her hips and lifted one of her legs to place it on his shoulder. Softly, but steadily, he held her in place, then he let his lips kiss his way down over her abdomen to where he knew she wanted him the most.

At the first touch of his mouth to her softness through her dress, she whimpered softly, biting her lower lip at the sensation.

The benefits of a short dress, he mused somewhat humored when he pushed the fabric up, careful that he was not exposing her to anybody else but himself.

Her hand flew to his head when he made contact with her wet lips. Her fingers entangled softly in his hair, holding him in place.

"Yes..." she whispered encouragingly. "God, don't stop that..."

Not even the end of the world could have made him stop at that moment. Needing to taste more of her, he grabbed her hips more forcefully, his tongue darting out and flicking her clit. Her body jerked against him, and a surprised shriek escaped her throat. He smiled into her and repeated his action.

Her moans became more insistent, every now and then interrupted by soft pleas. For a moment he looked up at her and wondered if she was aware of how irresistible and sexy she looked at that moment.

Perfect like an ancient goddess with complete abandon written all over her face.

He resumed his task of pleasuring her with his lips and tongue, enjoying the way her pleas became more incoherent and her moans turned louder, more uncontrolled with every flick of his tongue.

Her free hand moved to his shoulder, trying to steady herself. Almost desperate, she clenched her fingers into the fabric of his shirt.

He used his fingers to spread her open for his lips, and when he scraped his teeth over the sensitive bundle of nerves that controlled her desires at that moment, she nearly lost her balance. A breathless, little scream escaped her lips and he hurried to steady her with a self-satisfied smirk.

"That's it, Katie... let it go." He hummed against her skin. "Fall... I'm here to catch you..."

He could have asked everything of her, at that moment she would have given it to him. All that mattered was his incredibly sexy caresses and words, and she wanted nothing more than to fall and for him to catch her...

The familiar tickling in her belly started and she knew that she was close.

And then he sucked at her clit hard, using his teeth at the same time, and the world started to spin in front of her eyes. When her orgasm hit her intensely and unexpectedly, she lost all sense of balance. Desperately, she grabbed his shoulder for support, unable to control her moans and soft screams.

She felt her legs starting to tremble, when the lust pulsed through her veins with all its power. In between her soft moans, she panted his name over and over again like a mantra, as if she was afraid that he would be gone once she opened her eyes.

He drew out her pleasure as long as he could, then softly dropped her leg to the ground, and kissed his way up, careful to hold her steadily against the wall.

When he was standing upright, he pulled her body that was still shaking from the aftershock of her climax against his own, burying his face in her hair.

"Gibbs..." Kate whimpered against his chest over and over again, her hand still clenching his shirt.

"More... please, I want you inside me..."

He groaned softly into her hair, feeling that he would not be able to hold out much longer. He needed to feel her naked skin against his.

But he refused to take her in this hallway with two horny spectators. He had proven his point to them and enjoyed this feeling of power. And some manly pride inside of him had also been satisfied by showing them that this beautiful and sexy woman was all his.

But he would not make love to her with them greedily devouring her naked body with their eyes. Her naked skin was something only for him to see.

Private room, he thought dizzily. There were private rooms in this club, he had seen the sign when he had entered the club.

He ran his hands through Kate's hair and then over her cheeks, pressing his lips to hers.

She could still taste herself on him and moaned into his mouth.

"Come on," he ordered huskily, and carefully moved her away from the wall, aiming on going the area with the private rooms. That was a task that proved more difficult than expected, because he couldn't find them anymore.

Eventually he found the area and softly shoved the young woman into one of the free rooms, locking the door behind them.

In the back of her mind Kate noticed, that suddenly they were alone – no other couples, nothing but silence. Just a room with a wonderfully huge bed; just them.

Yet, she was way too absorbed in the gorgeous man in front of her to really pay attention. How she had been able to work with him for over a year, and never before realizing just how sexy and handsome he was, was a puzzle to her. Of course she had thought him good looking – but every feeling beyond that had been strictly buried inside her heart.

She wanted to move to the bed, but Gibbs caught her wrist and pulled her into a deep kiss. "Not just yet," he whispered into her mouth.

She was just about to protest, when she felt the soft wall at her back. The whole room had obviously been decorated for the purpose of having sex in it. The walls were soft, coated with cushioned sheets. Normally, she would have been disgusted by only imagining a place like this, but at the moment she felt incredibly turned on.

A soft clicking sound reached her consciousness and she felt her right wrist being engulfed by something cold. She opened her eyes and turned her head to find that Gibbs had cuffed her hand to the wall, her other wrist being tightly held in his hand.

Her soft, surprised gasp made him chuckle and he started to nibble at her chin when she pulled at her restraint. "Don't fight, Katie... I promised to fulfill your fantasy and I'm going to keep it. I'm going to be soft and wild – and everything else you want... if you just let me."

If it hadn't been for the expression in his eyes, she would have been scared at this point. But his soft glance told her that he would stop at once if she felt uncomfortable or wanted him to. She relaxed

and stopped pulling at her restraint. No doubt, tonight she would beat nearly everybody where wildness was concerned...

His hand had found its way between her legs and her head fell back against the wall, when she gave in to his sweet torture. "Oh God..." she whispered. Her head turned, searching for his warmth and his kiss.

Aroused, he groaned against her cheek, when he felt the wetness that was pooling between her legs. He stroked her lips with his fingers, enjoying the way her breathing became unsteady and erratic again.

"Do you like that?" he whispered hotly into her hair and a needy whimper was the only answer he received – the only answer he needed. "Good... because I like you like this."

She opened her eyes to look at him hazily. Her lips were half-open and swollen from his kisses. "Like what?" she asked shakily.

"Needy... desperate for me..." He lowered his face to hers until his lips were only millimeters away from hers. "And I want to see you come for me again, just for me this time... will you do that?"

"Yes... yes!" she panted and her hand fought against his grip, desperate to pull him closer and guide him. But he refused to let her go. She squealed softly. "Please... I need..."

"Tell me what you need," he required hoarsely. "I will give you anything if you voice it..."

"You... inside me... please... I need..." The rest of her sentence died in a sound that was a mixture between a gasp and a whimper, when he pushed one finger into her slick wetness, then added a second one.

"Oh Katie..." he whispered against her lips, amazed at the beauty of the helpless woman in his arms. "How can you be so wet?"

She moved her head forward to taste him, and sucked softly at his lower lip. Her hot breath puffed against his chin, when he continued to torment her with the rhythmic movements of his fingers.

Needing to feel more of her, he let go of her wrist and moved his hand through her silky hair, pulling her closer to lick and taste her lips and swallow her prolonged moans.

Her free hand clasped at the material of his shirt, then grabbed his shoulder, searching for some way to pull him closer against her skin.

What he did to her felt so good... just another thrust... just some more and she would be there...

Her body was still so oversensitive from her previous orgasm, that it didn't take long for him to have her on the edge again.

And then all of a sudden he twisted his hand, changing the angle and hitting the g-spot inside her. Her eyes widened and she nearly collapsed against him with a breathless scream.

"Yeah, that's it..." he whispered with a soft chuckle. "Look at me, Katie. I want to see you..."

She looked at him through a haze, panting and moaning his name mixed with pleas.

He wasn't exactly sure how he managed not to push her up against the wall right away and thrust into her.

He wanted to do this right, he wanted her to remember and to never want any other man but him again. And he couldn't get enough of looking at her and tasting her lips, while she clung to him so desperately as if he was her only hold.

When he felt that she was close, he changed the rhythm of his fingers to softer and slower, still enough to keep her on the edge, but not nearly enough to make her come – only to push her higher again a few seconds later.

By the second time he did that, she was cursing him. When he did it a third time, she practically begged him to get her off, not caring for her pride or anything else anymore.

And he gave her what she needed, just as he had promised, being wild and soft at the same time.

He pulled her head to him, her lips colliding with his hard as he demanded entrance to her mouth, swallowing her moans when she came on his hand. When they finally broke apart, she was breathlessly gasping for oxygen, holding his face close to hers, while her dark eyes bore into his.

"Jethro..." Her fingers moved over his face, softly caressing his skin, when she hesitantly used his forename. He smiled tenderly at the intimacy she created by this address. He wanted her to see him as a man, and not as her boss – not right now. Of course, on Monday they would have to find a way to deal with things. But until then they still had the rest of the weekend.

"Katie-girl," he replied, while he freed her cuffed hand tenderly, paying attention not to bruise her. Then, totally unexpectedly, he picked her up into his arms and carried her over to the large bed, where he placed her on the soft mattress. She crawled to the middle of the bed seductively, glad that she didn't have to stand anymore. At the moment, her legs felt so weak that she wasn't sure whether they would ever carry her again.

Gibbs let himself sink onto the mattress behind her and pulled her back against his chest. She turned her head a little to face him and he bent over her, unable to hide his own lust any longer. His kisses became devouring, while he fought to open his pants.

Kate tried to help him with trembling fingers and when they had succeeded, she pulled the hem of his shirt over his head. She needed to feel him skin on skin. Her eyes trailed down to his impressive erection. She was actually going to have sex with Leroy Jethro Gibbs – her boss. How was she supposed to go to work on Monday?

It didn't matter anyway, she thought dizzily. Up to now they had crossed so many lines, that this last act of their hot love-making wouldn't actually make that much of a difference anymore.

Yes, it would, another part of her corrected. They would actually be sleeping with each other.

She moaned in a soft protest when his lips reconnected with hers hotly. Softly, she pushed him away from her, trying to keep their lips connected for just a while longer, before she finally forced herself to pull away and move slightly away from him.

Her breath was shaky. "Talk..." she murmured incoherently, "We need to... Monday we will..."

He followed her and shut her up with another kiss that she returned more than willingly. "No second thoughts," he whispered between two kisses. "Won't make a difference now anyway..."

He maneuvered them so she was lying on her belly and he could taste the skin of her neck.

"So beautiful," he whispered against her skin, while his lips planted hot open-mouthed kisses down her spine, sending pleasant shivers through her entire body. She turned them slightly to the side, so

he didn't have to be afraid to crush her with his weight and closed her eyes, when his lips and teeth nibbled at the skin right under her ear from behind.

Sighing softly, she reached back and buried her hand in his hair, holding him in place.

Before she did actually realize what was happening, he had pulled her body into the right position and entered her in a strong, deep thrust. She gasped at the unexpected feeling of him filling her, and he stilled. His face nuzzled at the crotch of her neck and then he bit her shoulders softly, causing her to moan lowly and push back at him intuitively.

He didn't move, giving her time to adjust to him so he would not accidentally hurt her. His arms stroked along her sides and over her taut stomach, pressing her closer back against his body so he could slip into her even deeper.

The silk of her dress under his touch was soft and he pushed the material of her dress up so that he could feel her smooth skin against his, before he started to move his hips against her.

Her hands grabbed the sheets for support, and she couldn't help the feelings of desire rise anew in her belly. She had already had two incredible orgasms, but nothing had felt as good as he did now when he was inside her.

"Katie..." Gibbs groaned against her skin, "God Katie... you're so tight..." His pace quickened and her head fell back against his shoulder in ecstasy. The soft needy sounds that she made turned him on to a point where he was sure he wouldn't be able to hold out much longer. "Come on!" he urged her on and looked at her soft skin that was glistening with sweat, somewhat proud that he could do this to her. "You belong to me..."

It was neither a question nor a request, but an order – a statement about something that was an inevitable truth.

"Yes... yes, yes!" she panted, afraid that she would die of exhaustion if he kept up his pace a moment longer. But then again, who cared? If she had to die at a young age, she wanted to do it in the arms of this man.

Gibbs ran his fingers over her arms and down to her hands, supporting himself on the bed so that he wasn't crushing her with his weight. Kate loosened her fingers from the sheets and moved her hands over his. Intuitively they entwined their fingers in a strong grip.

"Uh... don't stop... you feel so good..." she panted.

"You have no idea how good you feel for me... Scream for me..." he insisted hoarsely, his hot breath warming her ear. He needed to hear her, needed to feel her come undone in his arms, only belonging to him. All his for the taking.

He marked her sharply with his teeth, and Kate shrieked in a mixture of pain and need, bending her head to grant him better access.

One of his hands disentangled from hers and moved down her body to attack her clit, causing her whole body to be shaken by violent shivers.

She couldn't believe he was doing this to her. She had never experienced more than two orgasms, a second one already being exceptional. And now he was sending her straight for her third climax. She was so close... and damned, technically they were both still dressed.

Her orgasm hit her hard and intensely, sending her body into a temporally delirious state. With a loud scream of his name, she went over the edge, her body convulsing around him. It didn't take much

more for him when he felt her spasm around him. With a final groan into her hair, he came inside of her with a deep thrust, collapsing onto her body. Softly he rocked out their pleasure.

Kate felt as if there was not nearly enough oxygen to fill her lungs, when her climax began to fade. Her mind went dizzy and she tried futilely to fight the blackness that washed over her mind and turned the world to night in front of her eyes.

When she regained consciousness moments later, she felt a soft kiss on the back of her neck and sighed, deeply contented.

"Wow..." she whispered and Gibbs chuckled softly, his lips close to her ear. He had moved his weight off her body, and was leaning half over her. "I think you made me pass out for a moment." She stated in awe and Gibbs smirked cockily.

"And I made you scream," he added somewhat self-satisfied.

"Yeah you did..." Kate smiled and moved her body closer to his, searching for his warmth while her hands playfully moved over his chest. He wrapped his strong arms around her protectively and licked her earlobe.

"And I totally failed to tell you that you look absolutely awesome in that dress," he mocked her and Kate laughed carelessly. Suddenly it was so easy to be with him; to be happy in his arms.

"Yeah, I somewhat figured that out..." she mocked him cheekily.

"But I forgot to make something else clear." He said, his tone becoming serious. "Katie... This was not just about sex. I am in love with you."

He felt her gasp and then still, and for a moment he was afraid that the confession had been too heavy for the light mood they were in. Worried, he hurried to add "I just wanted you to know. I know you just came here to have fun, so I don't expect anything of you. We can walk out of this club and not ever talk about it again."

He stopped talking, when she turned around in his embrace and faced him, her eyes shimmering with tenderness.

"Don't say that," she murmured softly and at that moment she looked so fragile and vulnerable, that he pulled her closer against his skin. Hesitantly, she started to speak.

"I... I am in love with you too. To me you are the most handsome man in the office!" she confessed, which caused him to cock his head and narrow his eyes suspiciously.

"And outside of the office?"

That drew a whole-hearted laughter from her and her hands ran through his hair. "With you as boss, there is no outside the office, Gibbs!" she mocked him and shrieked softly when he bent to her neck and started to bite her teasingly.

For a few seconds they engaged in a playful fight, before he became serious again.

"I will have to thank Abby on Monday! If it hadn't been for her I might have spent this weekend working on my boat in loneliness."

That announcement confused Kate. "Abby? What does she have to do with this?"

"She indicated something about your feelings – it was enough for me to put two and two together. It's not that hard if she discusses my dating life with me and then brings up your name..." Gibbs informed her and Kate hit his shoulders playfully.

"So you came here knowing about my feelings?" she asked, and pouted slightly. "Not fair, Gibbs... you manipulated me! You could have just asked me about it!"

"Yes, but it was much more fun this way, wasn't it? Besides it helped you to win the bet. I think you have exceeded the required thirty-one minutes by..." he checked his watch, "...a little more than an hour."

She was just about to make a playful accusation about him knowing about the bet as well, when suddenly a soft beeping sound reached her ears, becoming louder and louder. She fought against the feeling of waking up, that inevitably dragged her out of her surroundings, turning them into a cloud that was destined to finally vanish in the depths of her consciousness.....

.....Kate opened her eyes reluctantly, and moaned into the light of the morning sun that bathed the interior of her room. She hit the button of her alarm clock and pulled her pillow over her head.

Just a few more moments. She wanted to remain in her dream just a few more precious moments; to feel his warm body close to hers just a little longer; and to hear him say that he loved her one more time. She knew it was never going to happen in real life – but at least she could have him in her dreams.

When eventually, she realized that there was no use in trying, that her dream was irretrievably lost and a new day had begun, she sat up with a sigh, mourning for her gone dream that had no hopes of ever coming true. Somewhat depressed, she rubbed her eyes.

Her body was sweaty, and Kate got up reluctantly. She needed a shower – a real cold one.

Maybe the case about the murder in the swinger club had entered a little bit too deep into her imagination. She would have to fight to get rid of the images, that the dream had left her with – and she would have to fight not to blush when she saw Gibbs today.

It was Friday, another day of work lay before her and she needed to be up for it. Gibbs' expected her report on the desk this afternoon and she had to double check it once again.

She opened the curtains of her sleeping room and looked out into the morning sunlight, that was warming her face with its soft beams.

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The day passed quickly, and no new case demanded their attention, therefore it was a relaxed atmosphere.

Everybody was looking forward to a long weekend off.

Anthony Dinozzo was already busy calling up on his latest dates, asking if one of them did, by any chance, have time to spend the evening with him.

Gibbs was sitting at his desk, quiet and grumpy as always before long weekends, while he silently followed the conversations his subordinates had.

McGee was working conscientiously. He wouldn't call up on people, he never did. He was sure to spend the two days off writing about the latest adventures of L.J. Tibbs – only to have Tony mocking him about it on Monday.

Kate leaned back in her chair, while she let her eyes wander over her colleagues in amusement. It was nice to know that some things would always be the same.

Suddenly, she caught Dinozzo's gaze. The young man was watching her intently. He had just laid up the phone, obviously being left without a date for the evening.

"What?" Kate asked confused.

"Nothing..." Tony shrugged, but couldn't help to tease her. "Just... you looked as if you were dreaming."

"I wasn't!" she denied immediately, putting on the usual mask of coolness that she always used around Dinozzo.

"You had a far-away look, Katie!" Tony grinned and Kate threw one of the angriest glances she was capable of over at the young man.

"Alright, maybe I was," she admitted reluctantly, refusing to give away more details. As always her mysteriousness had the effect that Tony lifted from his chair and coolly strolled over to her desk.

"Yeah? What about?"

The young woman chuckled mockingly and folded her arms. "Dinozzo, there's no way I would tell you about my dreams!"

"Maybe I know them..." he grinned cockily and acted as if he was thinking intently. "Maybe... you were thinking about those swinger clubs."

He was only trying to enrage her. There was no way that he could know about her fantasies, Kate calmed herself down.

"I was not!" she replied dryly. "Those clubs don't appeal me in the least!"

Endless seconds passed in which the two colleagues just stared at each other, the one trying to put on a determined expression, the other one having a thoughtful one. Then, suddenly, Dinozzo's face lightened up as if he had been struck by some kind of important revelation.

"You can't go there, can you?" the young man was now grinning widely. "Your morals forbid you to even come close to an establishment like that, but secretly, you do want to go there!"

"Tony!" Kate started in her usual, annoyed tone. "My refusal to visit a swinger club has nothing to do with morals. That kind of – entertainment just doesn't do anything for me! If I really wanted to, I would go there!" she emphasized, when she noticed he was still grinning and obviously not buying what she was saying.

Gibbs had to smile to himself at her self-confident statement. Usually he was getting annoyed when his subordinates had that kind of conversations, but today he decided to remain silent.

Tony Dinozzo laughed and then his eyes started to gleam the way they always did when he thought he had come up with something brilliant – or something weird. If she thought about it, there was often no difference between brilliant and weird in his case.

“What now?” Kate asked half-annoyed and Tony laughed mischievously, jumping up from her desk. Triumphantly, he looked at her. Then he inhaled mysteriously, before he finally spoke out loud.

„Katie, I bet half of my paycheck that you could not stay for more than five minutes in a swinger club before running out all blushed and embarrassed!“

~~ The End ~~

“ A dream is a wish your heart makes  
When you're fast asleep  
In dreams you will lose your heartaches  
Whatever you wish for, you keep.  
You wake with the morning sunlight  
To find fortune that is smiling on you  
Don't let your heart be filled with sorrow  
For all you know, tomorrow  
The dream that you wish will come true.”  
(Lyrics taken from “A Dream is a Wish your Heart Makes”)

## Beyond the Light

*Gibbs thoughts in the night before Kate's death...*

Inspired by the piano-instrumental "Beyond the Light" by Keiko Matsui.

Darkness surrounded them, only darkness.

Countless moments he stared at the sleeping form of the female special agent, who was lying on the ground next to his desk.

Every second turned into a little eternity as his eyes scanned her small, female body – that tiny body that held such a strong soul.

He approached her slowly, careful not to wake her up as he went to his knees in front of her. Her brown hair curled around her sleeping face, and her mouth formed a soft, peaceful smile.

She was beautiful. He had always thought that she was of a stunning beauty, but it was just that moment that it seemed to sting his eye.

Fragile like an angel beyond the light of heaven.

Slowly his hand reached out while he rearranged the blanket that kept her body warm. His fingers moved softly over her neck and her shoulders, amazed at how warm she felt.

He had never allowed himself to touch her, to come close to her or to pursue anything beyond work with her. And now, at just that second, he regretted never having done so for some reason.

She was willing to put herself at risk for him; to protect him with her own life; to sleep on the uncomfortable ground next to his desk in order to keep him safe.

'Tomorrow', his mind began to wander, 'when this is over, I will ask her out for a drink.'

He knew he would never do so. Too strong were the chains of discipline that he had forced onto himself, too deep the wounds in his heart - too wide the gorge between them.

Just at this short moment, all of that didn't seem to matter and he let her in. If she woke up now he might just tell her how beautiful she was to him, ask her out to try one more time to let a person into his heart. She never woke and the moment of truth passed by, unseen by anybody but him and swallowed by the silent darkness of the night into oblivion.

One last tender caress of her hair and he got up. Silently he stood by the large glass window, looking out over the dark city.

That was where he was; that was where he would always be, in the darkness. And he was sick of it.

'Tomorrow...' he thought one last time and took a sip from the cup of strong coffee that he was holding.

But some part deep inside of him knew that tomorrow was not meant to happen.

This was his prison.

Chained. Beyond the light.

~ The End (Aug 22, 2007)

## Redemption

*After the events of "Left for Dead", Kate feels guilty for the death of Suzanne McNeill and her boss. She goes to a bar, in order to get drunk and punish herself for her mistake, but what she finds instead is sweet redemption.*

*Inspired by the song "Somewhere Out There" by Michelle Nicastro.*

She felt his breath, that smelled like smoke and cheap tequila, on her cheek while his hand moved indecently over the round, tight shape of her buttocks. Caitlin Todd downed the contents of the glass that was standing before her on the counter, and felt the burning of the high-percentage alcoholic drink soothe the pain inside her, drowning her reasonable mind in its deadening toxin.

It was her fault. Everything had been her fault. She was responsible for nearly getting the whole team killed – and mistakes were something that she had never been good at dealing with, because she was unable to forgive herself any imperfection.

She could still very vividly remember the way Tony had looked at her, his eyes full of sympathy, while she had been sitting alone and cold, wrapped in a wool blanket, on a bench while being treated by the ambulance.

Her injuries had not been bad, and except for a few slight bruises, she had been alright. At least physically.

Her mind was unsettled and full of guilt. A look into the icy blue eyes of her boss had told her that not only did she feel responsible, but that he thought her responsible as well.

She knew that he had been against her taking Suzanne McNeill to her place. He had been the one who had warned her not to trust the woman too quickly. But she had ignored all his advises. And the moment, Suzanne had triggered the bomb, she had realized just how wrong she had been. But that moment it had been too late to save her and the man she had decided to take with her into death.

There was no redemption, nothing to release her of her guilt. She would have to deal with the responsibility for the death of two people for the rest of her life.

So tonight, she did what she had always done when she had made an unforgivable mistake. She searched for punishment.

It had started out in her first year at college. Whenever she had done something terrible, she had gone to a bar. At first she had simply gone there to get drunk. By her final college year, she had started to hook up with strange guys, allowing them to take advantage of her body, to satisfy their own needs and primal lust, while they left her with nothing but physical pain and emptiness inside.

But she preferred emptiness if guilt and desperation were the alternative. It had become her very own brutal cleansing ritual. And emptiness was what she was searching for tonight.

Kate winced at the smell of the breath of the man next to her, her spirit not yet deadened enough to ignore her own disgust.

He had been all over her ever since she had entered the bar. And she was sure that he would be the one to leave with. He would satisfy his needs by using her beautiful body in a quick fuck, and then he would vanish from her life, just like all the other men had, and leave her alone standing against some cold brick wall in a dark alley somewhere in the streets of Washington.

She had come here to search just for that – and she would be getting it. Just as she always did.

Absently, she grabbed for the glass, the man offered her. She had forgotten his name again. George? Jeremy? Something like that... names didn't matter. They never mattered. They mattered if you were in love, if you were making love. They didn't matter if you just let some random guy use your body.

The world started spinning in front of her eyes, and Kate grabbed for the counter to get a steady hold. The tequila was finally taking effect. She knew that in another five minutes, she would not even know who she was anymore. Neither would she care for the nauseating smell of the man; or for the disgusting hands that would greedily take possession of her body.

A soft sob escaped her throat when, for just a split second, she wished to find a way out of the darkness. She always made that wish – and there never was a way. There would never be one. This is what hell must be like, she thought, too drunk to really care or be disturbed by the thought. Sadness would only take possession of her the morning after...

"Hey, babe... wanna dance?" George, or Jeremy, rasped into her ear hoarsely and dragged her tiny body possessively against his own. She could feel his already very present erection pressing into her belly through the firm material of the jeans he was wearing.

No, screamed her mind; that deeply hidden part inside her that wanted to wake up from the nightmare.

"Sure," replied her mouth, her body paralyzed from the pain of guilt that she carried inside.

He nearly dragged her onto the dancefloor, where the air seemed even smokier than it had been at the bar. On a very small area, couples were nearly brushing each other with their sweaty bodies while they were dancing. Cheesy old music filled the atmosphere, coming from an old jukebox. Two old men were standing in front of it, each carrying a handful of pennies while they were quarrelling over the songs to play. Most people were too drunk to actually care for the insults they threw at each other's faces from time to time. And everybody was too drunk to actually care for the music – except for the two old men fighting over it.

Kate felt herself pulled against the man's body. He was in his thirties, maybe a couple of years older than she was. And he looked as if he had a family back home, his wife probably having started to tire him some years ago, which was why he went to bars to have a quick fuck with younger women he hooked up with there. He didn't even bother to take the ring off his finger before hitting on women.

Normally Kate would have been repelled by his behavior, but tonight she didn't actually care – in this state she was far from any moral thinking. She had become used to the disgust she felt, and had learned to take it as her punishment.

She could feel his round belly pressing into her taut stomach, when his hands moved to the small of her back to press her into him. His face was buried in her hair, but his stomach-turning breath did still reach her nostrils. Fortunately, the alcohol was lulling her mind more and more into a state of indifference and numbness.

“What do you say, babe?” the man whispered, while his hands moved greedily under her skirt and over the naked skin of her thighs. “Shall I show you a good time somewhere? Just the two of us?”

“Mmm...” she nodded affirmatively, knowing where this would lead and already hating herself for it. It was an eternal spiral that went further down with every man she hooked up with. Guilt, Pain and afterwards emptiness and hatred, which would slowly subside after two or three days, leaving her to feel dirty and unworthy.

“I know an alley right behind this bar, where the police never drives by...” he informed her huskily, his fingers grabbing her firm buttocks while he pulled her up against him, his fingers grazing her inner thigh intimately.

“Take me there,” Kate murmured, her eyes closing. She never looked at them. That way she could prevent herself from starting to hate them – or memorizing their faces. She could just let them fuck her and then vanish – like demons in the night that would take pain and guilt with them.

One silent tear made its way down her cheek, falling unnoticed by the persons in the room to the ground.

That was the moment when she felt another presence behind her, a familiar presence. She didn’t know what it was that made her notice him. Maybe it was his warmth, maybe it was his scent, or the way George - or Jeremy - suddenly tensed up. When his low voice reached her ears, a deep part inside of her felt relieved. He had come to save her.

Reality set in only seconds later when she corrected the track her romantic thoughts had taken. He would never come to save her. He was way too absorbed in his own pain to even recognize hers. Way too professional to see her as somebody else than a coworker, a member of the team he was the boss of.

“Kate, what are you doing here?” his sharp voice cut through the noisy surroundings of the bar.

She half-turned to look at the silver-haired man, whose eyes bore into hers with an indefinable expression.

“Go away, Gibbs,” Kate murmured and pushed at his chest softly to make him disappear. Wasn’t it enough that he haunted her dreams? Did he have to show up in her nightmares as well?

The fact that she was drunk made her lose balance and she nearly stumbled against him. Gibbs managed to catch her before she could land on the ground. Firmly he held her body in his arms, steadying her.

“Damn, Agent Todd, what are you doing in a place like this?” he growled, half-relieved that he had found her, but also furious about the state he had found her in.

He had wanted to visit her in the hospital, realizing that the events of the previous day must have eaten her up. He had tried to warn her about getting too emotionally involved with their Jane Doe – but she had done so anyway. He had not stepped in, because he knew that the most valuable lessons were those taught by experience. He just regretted that her lesson had turned out to be that bitter.

So he had decided to give her a ride home, and talk to her about it, planning to assure her that he did not hold a grudge against her for acting against his orders. She had done what she had believed was right – and she was willing to take responsibility for it. That was all that he expected of the members in his team – that was why he had hired her in the first place.

When he had seen her sitting on that bench, wrapped into the black wool blanket, he had felt that her world had been shattered. He had read the guilt in her eyes – and he had started to worry about her.

When the nurse at the hospital had later informed him, that she had left against the advise of the doctor, he had suspected something. And when he had not been able to reach her on her cell phone, he had become really worried.

He knew that she was a strong person, but he also knew that she shouldn't be alone in a moment like this.

So he had driven to her apartment to make sure that she was alright. She had not been there, which had caused him to drive aimlessly through the night.

After one hour of driving through the streets of Washington, he had spotted her in front of a bar, just when she had been about to enter. He had waited in the car, planning to talk to her once she came out, but after half an hour he had decided that it was probably wiser to go in and check on her.

And obviously that had been a good idea for she wasn't alright at all!

He scanned her appearance, a short skirt and a white blouse and her hair slightly disheveled. Her decent make-up managed to hide the bruises on her cheek, which, he was sure, must still hurt.

He was dragged out of his thoughts by George, who tipped his shoulders. He had, by now, realized that his possibility to have sex was literally slipping out of his arms, and wanted to prevent that from happening.

"Excuse me, man, but I think she asked you to leave!"

Gibbs' eyes shot from Kate to the man, and he eyed him up and down in a silent threat. He looked clumsy, his face reddening with the upcoming anger of having his prey for the night taken away from him.

Gibbs wondered for a moment if the young woman was blind or just too drunk to realize whom she had practically allowed to make out with her. Or was that kind of chubby, half-bald guys her type?

He decided not to pursue that thought, but focused his attention back on the unbalanced woman in his arms. "The doctors told me they wanted to keep you in the hospital for one night, but you just vanished! What were you thinking?" he accused softly, realizing that arguing with her in her state would get them nowhere.

"Leave me alone, Gibbs!" Kate mumbled once again and pushed his arms, that were lying softly on her waist to prevent her from falling, away.

The elder man's face hardened when she turned back to George, who shot him a sufficient, almost triumphant smile and silently requested him to leave.

But Gibbs was too much of an alpha-male to be intimidated by a man like George, therefore he just held his glare in a silent warning. The younger man obviously decided that fighting was just a waste of time, therefore he simply dragged Kate through the dancing couples towards the back exit. At the other end of the bar room, out of Gibbs' reach as he thought, he pulled her against his body to spill once again hungry kisses over her neck, his palms running up to greedily cup one of her breasts through the blouse she was wearing.

Kate squirmed slightly, her body writhing out of his embraces to keep their physical touches to a minimum. Her hands were lying on his shoulders without really wanting to touch him, but she

accepted his caresses, her mind getting lost once again in the touches, forgetting the guilt and the pain.

She became totally oblivious to her surroundings - until George was dragged away from her by a forceful grip.

"Hey, what's your problem?" the man snapped at Gibbs, whose face expression didn't exactly signal friendly feelings.

"My problem is your attitude! This lady is obviously drunk and doesn't know what she is doing, and you are planning on taking advantage of that! I am going to take her home now." Gibbs replied dryly in a tone that didn't allow any contradiction and made a step towards Kate who was leaning against the wall, observing in a haze the happenings in front of her.

"You are what?" George asked and laughed ironically. "Oh no, I think you are going to leave now – ALONE - before I punch your face, old man!" He gave Gibbs a forceful push with his arms. He couldn't have done Gibbs a greater favor...

Even through the nearly oblivious haze, her mind was in, Kate realized that this had been the wrong thing to say to her boss – not to mention practically attack him. She knew it before she had even seen the expression in Gibbs eyes. But her reactions were too slow to actually stop things from happening.

Before George knew what was happening, he felt himself flying to the ground, his nose stitching with pain and his mind for a moment lulled into confusion and shock.

"Gibbs, no!" Kate exclaimed and stumbled against the elder man, grabbing his arm. "Stop it... just leave, please! I'm fine! I want this!"

He just looked at her, and then, without wasting another word he grabbed her wrist and dragged her out of the bar through the back exit into the cool air of the night. It was long past midnight and the usual noise of the city had subsided to a minimum. A slow rain had set in and the streets were wet and slippery.

Kate stumbled on the cobblestones of the dark alley, having difficulties to keep up with the man's speed. Forcefully, she hit his arm to free herself from the involuntary trip out of the bar. Tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Leave me alone! Let me go!" she screamed nearly desperate.

And then, with a forceful pull of her hand, she managed to free her hand from Gibbs' grip. But there was too much alcohol running through her veins for her to correctly measure her force, which resulted in her falling backwards down onto the hard, wet ground. She shrieked in shock, barely noticing the pain that shot through her right wrist when it made contact with the hard, uneven stones. It took her a moment to realize what had happened, several seconds which she just sat there on the ground, not making any sound.

Then she started to sob unabashedly, making no attempts to get up again from the dirt.

It seemed like an eternity, before she felt a warm hand on her shoulder and Gibbs' soft voice filled the night air. He had never been good with crying women, but he could feel that his young coworker was feeling deep pain. That kind of pain that was just too familiar to him...

"Kate, I'm sorry... I didn't mean to... are you alright?"

Kate refused to look at him. She didn't deserve this! She didn't deserve his kindness and his concern. This was right where she belonged tonight, into the dirt. For endangering her colleagues, for not

trusting the judgement of the man she usually trusted the most. For nearly having him killed. This was what she deserved.

"Just go," she pleaded again weakly with a broken voice, while the rain poured down on them, soaking through her thin blouse and skirt. She didn't want him to see her like this, didn't want to cry in front of him.

"I won't," he simply replied. For moments they just remained silent. It seemed like hours passed by. The rain became stronger, and mingled with the tears that silently streamed down her cheeks.

Then, eventually the young woman lifted her head – only to find that her boss had come to sit on the street next to her. She was shivering from coldness that didn't reach her consciousness, her make-up completely ruined and her hair hanging in wet strands around her face. But she was not sober enough to care yet.

"What are you doing here Gibbs?" she muttered softer now, and crawled towards him, mumbling "You're getting all soaked. You should go home!"

"So should you," he replied dryly, amazed that her primary concern was obviously for his health instead of her own. His eyes were still resting on her. When she didn't speak, he gave a sigh. "You wanna talk about it? Or at least explain what this is all about?"

"What?" Kate asked and she could read in his face that he was slowly losing his patience.

"This!" he gesticulated with his hand, indicating the surroundings of the bar. "You." His eyes locked with hers. Kate shook her head slowly and lowered her head.

"This doesn't concern you..."

"You're nearly blown up and then flee the hospital only to visit the worst bar in Washington to get laid by one of the ugliest guys I've ever seen? Since you're one of my agents, it is my concern, whether you like it or not. What were you trying to do in there? Having cheap sex?" he asked rudely, his tone being almost cold when he faced her with the reality of her actions. Usually he didn't care for the privacy of his colleagues – but somehow Caitlin Todd was different. He always liked to chat with her, although he was not a very talkative man. And tonight he somehow felt that he had a right to know what was going on with her.

"Stop it," Kate whispered weakly, almost soundless, suddenly feeling dirty and cheap. But Gibbs continued.

"Or were you just too drunk to realize what you were actually doing?"

"Stop it, please!" The voice of the young woman was louder now, more insistent.

"Or is that kind of man just your type and you were looking forward to have him touch you with his dirty hands?" Gibbs snapped back, unable to hide the anger in his voice. In retrospect he didn't know why he had to make that last comment, maybe it was out of jealousy, he couldn't exactly define his motifs.

Kate's head snapped up and with a furious scream she started to hit his chest. "Stop it! Stop it, you damned bastard! Go! Leave me alone!"

He grabbed her wrists and pulled her face close to his, staring into her drowsy eyes. "I want an explanation!" It was neither a request, nor a suggestion, but an order for her to tell him exactly why she had been acting the way she had.

Of course, he already knew what she had been trying. Find some kind of cheap redemption – a way to get rid of the guilt and pain in her heart; just the same way as he had tried to get rid of those same emotions with scotch after his wife and his daughter had died.

But he wasn't willing to let her make the same mistake as he had and bury those feelings inside her. He wanted her to say it to his face – or yell it, if that was her choice.

Kate tried to wiggle her wrists out of his hands, soft sobs escaping her throat, but there was no way she could escape his steel grip. She cried out in frustration, while tears of rage made their way down her cheeks.

"Tell me!" Gibbs nearly yelled into her face, and Kate started to tremble. Her body was shaking with her soft, silent crying while she tried to evade his eyes, his body – his presence.

When she realized, that it was futile, she returned his stare; putting on her last defense: a mask of rage and anger.

"You want to know why? Because I nearly got you killed! And two people died. It's my fault, because I wouldn't listen! Those two people will never have a chance to come back. I don't deserve to be treated well! I should be treated like shit... like a damned..." The rest of her sentence died, but Gibbs was pretty sure that she had wanted to say the word 'whore'.

"So this is your solution? Having your body abused?" he asked, softer than before, but still a certain sharpness lying in his tone.

"You don't understand the reasons... I wouldn't expect you to..." she countered and wanted to free her hands, but Gibbs was still holding her firmly. He wanted to tell her that he could understand better than she probably thought – yet he didn't.

Kate let out a frustrated scream, which caused Gibbs to tighten the grip on her wrists again. "I won't let you go before you promise not to run back in there!"

"Why do you care? This is none of your business!" Kate screamed at him. "If I want to go in there and have the next best man fuck me against this wall, why won't you let me?"

Gibbs chuckled somewhat bitterly, but didn't give her an answer. He had realized that discussing the matter reasonably with her was obviously not leading anywhere – at least not as long as she was drunk. If she had been Dinozzo, he would have given her a good hard slap to bring her to his senses. But Gibbs had never become violent against a woman – and he would never do so.

After a moment of staring at him, she gave up fighting him. Instead she let her body sink against his chest in exhaustion. She was tired of quarrelling. She was tired of lying. And she was tired of darkness. If she just knew where the light was...

When he felt that she had given up resistance, Gibbs slowly let go of her wrists and hugged his arms around her small body. He got up from the ground and pulled her up with him. "It's alright, Kate! Come on, I will take you home."

She just stood there in the darkness, pressed against his body with her arms hanging loosely down to her sides. For a moment Gibbs was afraid that she would turn and run right back into the bar – but what she did then was far from anything he would have expected.

Her hands moved up to his neck and pulled his face close to hers, while her lips sought his mouth in a firm and desperate kiss. Her fingers threaded through his hair, then started to travel down over his chest and his firm stomach, while she kissed him fiercely.

"Kate... Kate!" Gibbs managed to mumble in between two kisses, and caught her hands before she could fumble at his pants. Damned, this was what he had always wanted. Her touch had an impact on him that made him feel as if his body had come alive from a long sleep. Yet, he knew that it was wrong. It was wrong with her, and it was especially wrong due to the state she was in. Resolutely, he broke the kiss, fighting to regain control over his voice. "You don't know what you're doing."

"I do..." she whispered against his lips, her tongue darting out to taste his salty skin. "I want you to fuck me!"

"No, you don't!" he contradicted sharply and softly pushed her away. That alone took all of his mental control. It would have been a lie to claim that he did not want to have sex with her. Part of him had wanted to drag her against him and shag her little body until she was screaming his name ever since he had first met her on Air Force One, when she had stood up to throw cheeky comments into his face instead of just succumbing to his control and taking his orders.

But serving as an instrument in her masochistic way to seek redemption was not what would lead their relationship into a hopeful future.

And as long as she was touching him, seducing him with her kisses and lulling him into her female scent, he knew he would not stand a chance to win this battle against his own body.

He ran one of his hands through his hair, trying to push aside the feelings that their intimate contact had evoked inside of him.

Kate looked at him with somehow empty eyes, then she turned away abruptly. With insecure steps, she stumbled back towards the back entry of the bar.

Gibbs reacted immediately and started after her. He managed to catch her arm and bring her to a stop before she could touch the doorknob. "Kate!"

The young woman turned to face him, tears dwelling in her eyes. "What the hell do you expect from me?"

Two customers, who left the bar just at that moment, shot them a suspicious glance, but then walked them by without interfering. When they were out of reach, Gibbs looked at the young woman in front of him.

He could read in her eyes that she was determined to go through with it and there was nothing he could do to hold her back. Nothing, except...

He pushed the idea aside. There was no way he would give her what she wanted.

The door opened and another drunken man left the bar. He did obviously belong to the two customers from before, for he tried to call after them. Then his eyes were caught by the beautiful young woman and, winking at her, he stumbled against the nearest wall. "Hey, sweetie... wanna take a short walk with me?" he slurred loudly, accompanied by a dirty laugh.

It was the way she looked at the drunk men what finally caused his decision. There was no way that he would let her give herself over to one of these heartless idiots, who would use her body as if she were a whore and then just leave her alone. If she wanted to have sex, she could as well have it with him – that way she would at least be safe.

His logic was flawed, he realized that, but logic did obviously not help at this point anyway.

Gibbs didn't let her turn away from him, but shoved her up the nearest wall and closed her mouth with a firm, fierce kiss.

"If it's either me or one of them, then me it is!" he informed her gruffly in between two kisses.

Kate sighed when his lips sought her neck and nibbled at the skin right underneath her ear. She closed her eyes and allowed him full control over her body, succumbing to his wild caresses and possessive touches.

Not even aware of her longing to feel more of his body, Kate grabbed his shoulders to pull him closer. Usually, she kept body contact to a minimum, but his warmth felt so good, so safe. Her fingers buried in his hair while his lips worked their way down over her chin and her neck.

Then, all of a sudden, he changed his caresses to slower, more languid. His kisses became more tentative, more seductive, and his hands brushed in butterfly caresses over her body.

Kate whimpered slightly, trying to urge him on by moving her hands down to his pants, but Gibbs grabbed her wrists to hold her steady.

"Too fast!" he whispered hotly against her skin. "I will not just fuck you against this wall!"

"Why not?" she asked hoarsely against his chin. She breathed in his fresh scent, a mixture of rain and coffee, something that evoked images of wildness in her brain. "Isn't that any man's dream? Sex without commitments..."

Her hand cupped his erection through his pants and he couldn't help but moan.

"Katie!" he warned, fearing to lose control over himself. But the woman didn't listen. She gave a throaty little giggle, while her hands fumbled to open his pants, and when she had succeeded, she bit his lower lip harshly. The wave of pain that rushed through his body made him lose it. With a low, primal growl, he closed her mouth with his, lifting her body up against the wall with strong arms. She steadied herself by slinging her legs around his waist and for a split second he thought that she was way too familiar with this position, wondering how often exactly she had punished herself this way.

The rain was still pouring down on them, their clothes being completely soaked through by now, but neither of them cared.

Gibbs pressed her against the wall with his hard kisses until she was left panting – whether it was due to arousal or due to lack of oxygen, he couldn't exactly say.

One of his hands reached down between them. She was not wearing panties.

Damned, if he had still been reasonable enough, he would have yelled at her, but right now he was delighted to find easy access to her female core. His fingers moved over her folds, pinching her clit sharply.

It drew a small whimper from her and she let her head fall back against the wall, her lips forming a silent 'oh'. One of his fingers dipped into her, and he felt her hands grip his shoulder.

"Yes," she whispered desperately. "More, please!"

God, she was beautiful like this. Better than in any of his dreams. Gibbs groaned into her hair, that was still smelling of smoke and her peach-shampoo; a weird combination, but an incredible turn-on for him at that moment.

"Come on," she whispered into his ear. "Do me!"

She was manipulating him to get what she wanted, he knew that – but at the moment he was too lulled into her scent, the feel of her body and the sexy sound of her voice to stop.

Part of him was aware that she wasn't physically ready yet, but her encouragement drove him crazy. Impatiently he freed his erection from its prison in his pants, and pushed himself into her slender body with a deep strong thrust, groaning into the skin of her shoulder.

Instantly, he felt her whole body tense and her hands fisting on his shoulders, and realized at that moment that he must have hurt her.

"Yes, that's it..." Kate whispered with a shaky voice against his cheek, slowly getting accustomed to the pain, and leaned her head back so that the cold rain hit her face. Gibbs leaned his forehead against the cool stone wall next to her head, his breathing uneven.

"God, Katie, I... I'm so sorry..." he murmured and wanted to let her down instantly, but she held him in place.

"It's alright!" she whispered. "Please, finish! It's what I want!" Her lips moved along his cheek and sought his in a hot open-mouthed kiss, which he soon turned into a slower one, his tongue slipping into her mouth and starting a seductive game with hers.

He started a series of slow, sensual kisses, and all the while kept their lower bodies, which were still joined, still.

She was supposed to enjoy this, and damn, he would make her do so. He was determined to make her writhe against him in need and pleasure.

Slowly, sensually, he mimicked with his tongue the movement their lower bodies would soon perform until he felt her sigh into his mouth.

He knew she was searching for redemption, some way to release the guilt inside her, but he would not help her do so by hurting her. Softly, he bent to her ear, nibbling at the lobe while he felt her relax against him more and more.

"It's not your fault." He whispered shakily into her ear, running one of his hands through her dark hair. "Suzanne deluded you, there was no way for you to know that this woman was going to kill herself and her boss." A soft sob reached his ear and she moved her hands to his neck to pull him closer. "She killed herself, Katie. It was not you who killed her..." His lips bit her neck and she moaned sensually.

"Yes, that's it." His voice was hoarse and soothing. "Stop punishing yourself. Let me love you instead, Katie."

Her body gave a soft, involuntary jerk against his, when his teeth scratched her collarbone, causing him to slip deeper into her wet folds. They moaned in unison, and with a triumphant smirk, he repeated the caress.

Weakly, Kate tried to thrust against him with a prolonged moan of arousal, but the fact that she was pinned between him and the wall didn't exactly give her much room to move.

"Please," she pleaded hoarsely and buried her face in his wet hair.

The man took up a slow and sensual rhythm, enjoying the weak moans that escaped her throat and mingled with his own. Only when she picked up the pace, he allowed himself to thrust into her faster. He noted with delight, that her breathing became shallow, and this time it was with certainty not due to pain.

"That's it, beautiful," he whispered hotly against her lips, capturing them in a short, deep kiss.

"Gibbs... more..." she panted, and it was the first time that she whispered his name, her whole being willing to remember tonight and this man who could evoke those wonderful emotions inside of her.

"More?" he asked playfully against her skin and reached between them to pinch her clit. She gave a soft scream when her body jerked involuntarily at the unexpected pleasure. "Like that?" he asked hoarsely and she moaned in reply. He kept up his rhythmic caresses of her clitoris while he thrust in and out of her, enjoying her increasing moans, that soon turned into needy little whimpers.

Eventually he lost control and thrust into her hard and fast, unable to keep up a steady pace. But the way she writhed against him told him that it was just what they both needed. He supported himself with his arms against the brick wall left and right to her head, while she had slung her arms around his shoulders. They were as close as they could get with their clothes on, and only seconds later, he came hard, spilling his hot semen inside of her.

When she felt the warmth filling her, she lost it as well, and climaxed with a surprised whimper, her walls convulsing rhythmically around him.

They were both panting heavily, when they came down from the heights of their orgasms, both reluctant to move their bodies.

Slowly, their sexually drugged minds became aware of their surroundings again. The rain was coming down hard now – not that either of them really cared.....

Eventually, Gibbs pushed himself away from the wall, carefully setting the young woman down, making sure she was standing safely before he loosened the grip around her waist.

Still trying to measure her breathing back to normal, Kate leaned back against the wall, stroking a wet strand of hair out of her face.

When the afterglow of her release subsided, she felt not only her body sober up, but also her mind. Thoughts about the consequences of her actions washed over her.

Damned, she had practically coerced her boss into having sex with her in the cheapest way there was. She gave a tortured moan and held her hand to her forehead. How should he ever respect her again?

Nearly running a few meters away from the wall, she brought distance between them.

"Hey, you alright?" Gibbs asked worried after he had rearranged his clothes. One look into her eyes when she lifted her face to him made him understand that she had just realized what she had done – what they had been doing.

"Oh God," she whispered and turned around embarrassed. "Gibbs! I didn't mean to..." she rearranged herself, desperately searching for her professional self, but it seemed gone. "I am... This was..." She stopped talking in lack of a decent apology for her behavior.

"Incredible," he offered, suddenly determined to not let her get away that easily. He had wanted her since they had first met. And now he had had her, and he still wanted her. It was not, as he had always thought, a childish longing to possess something he couldn't have. It was more.

"What?" Kate asked almost soundless, hesitating to turn around. She felt deeply satisfied from her orgasm. But also scared to her very core. This was exactly why she never slept with men she knew when she wanted to seek distraction.

Now she had slept with her boss – and behaved like a slut. "Oh God!" she moaned, and her voice betrayed that she was close to crying. "Gibbs, I can not say how sorry I am. I wasn't... I mean... you were not meant to... oh!"

She gasped in surprise, when she felt her back pulled against his body all of a sudden. "You are trembling," he whispered against her hair. "Your clothes are soaked, you will catch a cold." He pulled off his jacket and placed it tenderly around her shoulders. It was somehow futile since his jacket was just as soaked as her own clothes were, but the simple gesture warmed her heart. She turned around and looked at her feet insecurely.

"Thank you," she whispered.

He placed his hand under her chin and lifted her head so that she was looking at him. The expression in his eyes took her breath away. There was no arrogance, no triumph, no disgust and no anger. Just softness and concern.

"Come on," Gibbs murmured and rubbed her arms to keep her warm. "I'll take you to my place and brew you a hot, strong coffee."

Their glances melted for a moment, when Kate realized that he was not regarding her as a cheap slut. She didn't know how he could possibly still respect her, but decided to try and trust him – just because she always had.

"Alright." She affirmed softly, and followed him as they strolled towards the main street. Silently, they walked side by side, their hands brushing accidentally every now and then.

Eventually, Kate hesitantly touched his fingers with hers, her hand seeking for the warmth of his. And, very softly, he captured her hand in his, holding it while they were walking. A silent promise to catch her whenever she was going to fall again...

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It was already noon when Kate woke up the following day, lying on a king sized bed, wrapped into soft sheets that still carried the scent of the previous night. For a moment she did not know where she was, before the happenings of the previous night returned to her mind.

She was lying in his bed, naked. More and more details from the previous night returned to her conscious mind.

After they had reached Gibbs house, he had taken her inside, and while she had been taking a long, hot shower, he had brewed her a hot, strong coffee. She had drunken it, sitting in one of his 'go-marine' shirts that was too large for her in his kitchen, while he was taking a shower as well. By the time he returned, she had sobered up completely.

Since they had left the alley, they had not spoken one word, just looked at each other and very tentatively sought the closeness of the other.

Kate didn't know what had gone through her mind, but when he had entered the kitchen, she had gotten up and ran her hand through his still wet hair. The scent of a typically male shower gel was still surrounding him and all she had wanted to do was to touch him to feel his warmth.

And then, all of a sudden they had been standing in his kitchen, kissing languidly.

One kiss had led to another, and then to a series of hot, open-mouthed explorations. Kisses had led to touches and clothes being discarded. And eventually, they had made love again in his bed, this time soft and very slow.

They had taken hours to explore the other's skin with their lips, their teeth, their hands. And when they finally collapsed on the bed, both sweaty, exhausted and incredibly satiated, he had made her come two more times.

She didn't know how it had been possible. She had not been aiming on repeating the experience of having sex with her boss when she had agreed to come with him to his place, but then it had just happened, and neither of them had fought the emotions.

Kate stretched her sore muscles and yawned with relish.

Then her eyes fell longingly on the empty place next to her on the bed. He was gone; of course, he was an early bird. She doubted that he ever slept more than four or five hours – he most likely couldn't, due to all the coffee he drank during the day.

Slightly awkward, she sat up, covering her nakedness with one of the sheets, while she looked around in his bedroom. Finally she had a chance to take a closer look at it. It was decently furnished and didn't look as if he made use of it very often.

If she could believe what Tony had once said, then he was sleeping most of the time down in his basement on some work bench anyway. He probably was down there working on his boat right now, she thought remorsefully. She guessed there would just never be a way for a woman to take the place of his boat.

Kate got up from the bed and went to the small bathroom that was connected to his sleeping room. After she had thoroughly brushed her teeth and combed her hair, she returned to the bed.

She was just thinking about how to leave his house discreetly, when the door opened. With a hint of surprise openly displayed in her eyes, she looked at Gibbs entering the room with a glass of water and a box of aspirin in his hands. A soft smile played around the corners of his mouth when his eyes fell on her.

"Morning."

"Hi," she returned and smiled almost shyly. Before she could think of an appropriate thing to say, he had leaned down and kissed her softly on her lips. It was the most intimate gesture she could think of in a moment like this.

She felt as if butterflies were set free in her body, when her whole stomach started to tickle. With an appreciative 'mmm' sound, she closed her eyes.

"Hangover?" Gibbs asked softly against her lips after he had thoroughly rediscovered her mouth with his tongue. She nodded slightly embarrassed, and he handed her the glass of water and the box of aspirin.

"Thank you," she whispered. "Just what I need now."

"Good," he smiled and returned to the empty place on the mattress, stretching out next to her. Kate swallowed the pill and emptied almost the whole glass of water, then she turned her head to him, realizing that he had obviously been watching her. His hand reached out and moved languidly over the naked skin of her arm and her back, tracing her spine. Kate shivered slightly, much to his delight.

"You're not working on your boat?" she asked throatily, more a statement than an actual question.

"Nope." He answered and eventually pulled her down against his body. "How could I, with such a beautiful woman in my bed?"

Her heart made a jump when she heard those words. Kate closed her eyes, and rested her head on his warm chest. His arm wrapped around her naked body tenderly to keep her close to him.

Lost in her thoughts, her fingers played with the soft hair on his chest, before she lifted her head to look into his blue eyes.

He let one of his hands run through her tousled hair, and she smiled dreamily.

The sun warmed her naked back as she laid back down on his chest and closed her eyes peacefully.

"Thank you," she whispered softly. "For not just leaving me there last night."

"I could never do that," he replied seriously, "Especially not to you."

For a long time they both remained silent, just reveling in the other's touch and the feeling of the other's skin against the own. Then, all of a sudden, Gibbs broke the silence.

"How often have you done that before?"

She knew what he was referring to; and she had already expected the question to come up at one point or another.

She wanted to tell him that it had been different with him. That he meant something to her and that, contrary to other nights, she wanted to remember their night forever – but she couldn't. Not before she knew how he felt about her.

"Kate," Gibbs requested, softly forcing her to look into his eyes, when she didn't answer his question. "How often?"

"I don't know," she finally admitted almost soundlessly, embarrassed to have this conversation with him. "Maybe ten or fifteen times..."

"Why?" he asked, shocked that he had had no idea. That he had not been there those last time to protect her from hurting herself. All those times in the office she had seemed so strong, so tough. And yet she had buried all that pain inside of her.

"Because I... it... it eased the guilt inside of me." She murmured finally and evaded his eyes. "It made me feel as if I had paid for my mistakes."

"Did I make you feel like that?" he asked, almost afraid of her answer.

Her soft hazelnut eyes met his when she shook her head. Her hand went to his cheek and softly touched his skin.

"No... you made me feel as if it was okay to be flawed. As if it wasn't that bad." She admitted lowly. For an endless moment, he just looked into her eyes, fascinated by her admittance.

Then, out of the blue, he flipped them around abruptly, claiming her lips in a hot kiss full of promises.

When they parted a few moments later, they were both breathing shallowly.

"Next time," Gibbs started, while he nibbled on the skin of her cheek and her jaw line, "you feel guilty of something, don't go to a bar. Come to my house."

She squirmed when his teeth scratched the sensitive spot under her ear and her hands flew to his hair.

"I will... I definitely will," she promised, her voice hoarse with uprising desire.

“And not only if you feel guilty,” he clarified, biting her softly and enjoying the soft sighs that she made. “Whenever you feel like it...”

“Does that include tonight?” she asked and he lifted his head, his eyes expressing the mock-professional threat that she had become so used to when they were in the office.

“What exactly made you think I would let you leave my bed before the weekend is over?”

She laughed, and it was light, full of relief and joy, as she realized at that moment just how much she loved him – how much she had always loved him.

When his lips reclaimed every part of her body, she closed her eyes, enjoying his touches, his closeness and the warming light of the sun.

The darkness was gone.

~ End ~ (July 18, 2007)

## Forbidden Fascination

### *How Gibbs learned about Kate's tattoo...*

Hot water sprayed down on her tensed body after she had turned on the shower. Caitlin Todd sighed relaxed and let the warmth of the water soothe the pain in her still sore muscles and her bruised shoulder. It had been an exhausting day and staying in the training hall to work on her close combat skills after all her colleagues had already gone home had probably not been the best idea.

She already knew that she would feel her muscles ache for another two or three days.

It had been yesterday that their boss, Leroy Jethro Gibbs, had decided that, since they were not working an active case, they could as well spend the time to become fit for the qualifications next month. And he had scheduled a session of his special training for today.

Kate winced when she felt her left shoulder blade hurt. For some reason, Gibbs had decided to test her skills today. Usually he spent his time boxing with Dinozzo, and left her alone. But today it had been the other way around. And expecting any gentleness due to the fact that she was a woman would have been a false hope. Not that would have accepted any advantages due to her gender – but she hadn't expected him to give her such a hard time.

He had pointed out every single one of her weaknesses, and obviously taken pleasure in the uprising determination in her eyes, that came with every single time that she landed on the mat to his feet.

At one point she had actually managed to throw him down to the mat, but her triumph had distracted her so much that one distinct move with his arm had sent her to the ground again. She had fallen hard onto her back, hurting her shoulder and cursing at him.

Up to today she had always thought that her combat skills were good. He had shown her what she needed to improve and made her feel like a complete fool. And as far as she knew him, that had probably just been his intention.

After her colleagues had gone, Kate had remained in the hall, training herself and using everything she had learned today. She was a perfectionist, at least where she herself was concerned. Determined to never ever let him win again, she had recalled all the moves he had beaten her with, and found her way to handle them. She had only stopped when she had been so exhausted, that she couldn't even lift her leg anymore.

Looking forward to a hot shower, she had then found that the women's shower was out of order. So she had waited until the men's shower was unoccupied, taken a careful glance around and then entered it.

Up in the hall, only two or three men had been left training. Due to fact that it was already 10pm, most people had already gone home. So the danger of running into somebody was nearly non-existent.

Kate rinsed the peach shampoo out of her hair and lifted her face into the soft spray of water, when suddenly a very familiar voice reached her ears and startled her.

"I didn't know you had a tattoo!"

Kate gave a very girlish squeal, spinning around in shock, before she realized that her skin was completely exposed. That made her quickly turn around again, while she angrily bend her neck to look at the unexpected, half-naked visitor, who was eying her interestingly.

"Damned, Gibbs! What are you doing here?"

A smirk was clearly standing in his face, while, totally relaxed, he placed his towel on the towel-board and picked a shower. "The more appropriate question would be, what are you doing here? This is the men's shower after all, Kate!"

"The... um... the... the... women's shower was out of order and... I... I... thought, since there were only two... or three men..." She stared at the tiled wall in front of her, realizing that her babbling most likely only served to increase his amusement.

"I thought you had already gone home," she announced instead, keeping her eyes fixed to the white tiles.

He didn't answer. Of course he wouldn't tell her that he had observed her training all this time. He had known when he had seen the determination in her eyes, that she wouldn't go home until she had found a way to handle all of the moves he had shown her today. He had known because she wanted to be perfect in everything she did. And she had impressed him with her stamina. He had no doubts that this woman would one day turn into an excellent special agent; not that she wasn't good already – but after all it was his task to teach his subordinates the little things, the details.

Kate shut her mouth when she realized, he wouldn't answer her question. Nearly desperate, she thought of a way to reach her towel without having to pass him by completely naked. There was none.

Great, she scolded herself, next time just go home and take a bath there!

Of course she could have just asked him to hand her the towel, but somehow, she was too proud for that after all that had happened today. Fine, maybe she had taken it a little too personal. But the fact that he acted now as if she was not even present enraged her even more. Either this man did really have this secure sense of professionalism when standing half-naked next to his completely naked subordinate, or he was just plain arrogant.

Most likely the latter...

And oh god, now he lost the towel around his waist. His skin was completely exposed, while he enjoyed the warm water that cascaded down onto his body under the shower right next to her. Kate didn't exactly know whether this qualified as red-light situation. After all she was the one who was in the wrong room.

Her eyes scanned the towel-board which seemed like a mile distance away. Then her glance was caught by the man who was standing with his back to her, shampooing his hair. Its musty, fresh scent reached her nostrils.

She couldn't help but take a quick scan of the tanned skin of his back. Fascinated, she watched the play of his well-defined muscles as he rinsed the shampoo out, lifting his head into the spray of hot water. Slowly, her eyes traveled down to his firm buttocks.

His whole body was that of a well-trained marine, and Kate wondered just how often he was working out.

Damned, who would have thought that this man had a body like this. Kate had sometimes wondered what he might look like underneath his clothes. But nothing in her mind had even come close to this.

She didn't know his exact age, but she knew that he had to be around fifty. Yet his body, although looking mature, would absolutely be a match for every pin-up model.

She imagined for a moment what it would feel like to be pinned between his body and the soft mattress of her bed, while they were writhing together in sweet ecstasy, his hands on her skin and his lips claiming hers. Sometimes, when she lay in bed alone, she let her mind wander, and countless times she had wondered if he was just as good in bed as he was with everything else he did. Whatever reality was like – in her fantasies he definitely was...

All of a sudden, when her eyes traveled up his body, she realized that he was looking at her, an indefinable expression in his eyes. She bit her lower lip and quickly turned her head away, embarrassed that he had caught her watching him. Her cheeks felt hot and she was sure that she was blushing. There was no reason that would have justified her staring. Opening her mouth, she turned her face up into the spray, turning the water cold.

From the corner of her eyes, she could see that Gibbs was still watching her, and finally she turned her head.

"Enjoying your view, Gibbs?" she asked with a certain sharpness lying underneath.

"I was not the one staring," he retorted dryly and Kate's cheeks reddened even more. Of course he was right. She had no right to complain, after all she had just practically eaten him up with her eyes...

"I was not...! I mean... I was just..." she failed to find a decent apology, and turned her head away again. With closed eyes, head still turned up into the cold water, her fingers searched for the shower switch. She froze slightly, after she had turned off the water. "Could you... um... hand me my towel please?"

"Nope."

Her head snapped around to him at this very amused answer. "Gibbs!" she exclaimed outraged – a tone she had up to now only used towards Tony Dinozzo.

"I'm not done showering yet," he explained dryly and Kate rolled her eyes.

"You could act like a gentleman!"

"Not known for being one, Kate!"

He turned his head back up and started to wash his shoulders with his shower gel. Kate snorted somewhat unladylike.

"Okay, what is it?" she then snapped out of the blue and Gibbs turned to her, confusion written over his face. Kate sighed inwardly, as he was now facing her with the whole front of his body. She didn't know whether he was really oblivious to his own nakedness or just tried to test her – whatever: Moral, decency or just her general behavior.

Concentrated, she stared at the tiled wall in front of her.

"What?" he demanded her to explain.

"You have spent this evening picking out every one of my weaknesses, and now you behave like a bastard. So what did I do to you? Just tell me, so we can yell at each other and then move on." She

stated matter-of-factly, trying to keep her voice from shaking with nervousness and another strange feeling that resulted from the realization that they were standing completely naked next to each other with barely two meters of distance between them.

He remained silent for a long time, and Kate was already thinking that he had gone back to showering, when his voice reached her ears.

“Why a butterfly?”

Her head snapped around angrily, and she found him staring at her naked butt unabashedly, his eyes resting on the small tattoo there.

“Gibbs!” she accused and sighed.

He turned around again with a smirk on his face, and Kate decided that she could not stand there forever. Therefore she hurried over to the towel-board, not leaving him out of her eyes, while she wrapped her large towel around her naked body hurriedly.

When she looked up, she found Gibbs totally absorbed in his shower again.

“Well, then... see you in the office tomorrow.” She announced and turned with the intention to leave, when his voice held her back.

“Kate! You forgot your...um...stuff!” He pointed over at her shower, where her showergel and the shampoo were still standing.

With a brief glance at the man, she hurried to the shower and grabbed the two bottles, then she passed him by, heading towards the exit of the men’s shower room.

Unfortunately, she had not seen the piece of soap that was lying on the slippery, tiled ground. She gave a soft shriek when she felt her foot slip away, and her body losing balance.

Gibbs reacted instantly. Without caring for his clothing – or rather the lack thereof – he jumped forward and caught her, before she could hit the hard ground and hurt herself.

“Careful there!” he warned, and she stared up at him with widened eyes. Her hands were lying loosely on his arms, when he steadied her.

“Tha-thank you...” she murmured, and then blushed when she realized that there was only the thin layer of her towel separating them from being skin on skin. She lowered her eyes to his tanned neck, then involuntarily, they traveled over the skin of his shoulders. Fascinated, her fingers moved higher, along his biceps and then up to his shoulders, while her eyes continued their journey to his broad chest and the soft, gray hair curling there.

He did nothing to encourage her; but he also didn’t let her go, or stop her with words. His hands were still lying at her waist, holding her close against him, as if she was in danger to slip out again any second, while he was staring down into her face.

His wet skin was touching hers, and drops of water pearled from his body onto hers.

She lifted her head to meet his eyes and found him staring back at her with the same desire and forbidden fascination reflected in his face that she was feeling inside. Their eyes met, ice-blue encountered chocolate brown, and Kate bend her head a little – a silent invitation for him.

His eyes fell on her red lips, and he bend his head down to meet them with his own. Slowly, their mouths were getting closer to each other. Then all of a sudden, Gibbs broke the body contact with her and made a step backwards.

"This is wrong," he murmured hoarsely. "We shouldn't even be in this position. I am your boss! And I am too old for you."

He sounded more as if he was trying to convince himself instead of her, and abruptly turned around, away from her, to return to the spray of warm water, that was still hitting the tiled floor.

Kate looked at his back. She was still too absorbed in his touch, his closeness, to think reasonably. Slowly she approached him.

She felt him shudder slightly, when she placed one of her hands on his shoulder blade, tracing the muscles of his back. The water was soaking through her towel but she didn't care. She moved her hands over his rib cage and down his spine.

"Kate!" Gibbs warned, his voice trembling.

"You are handsome," she whispered in return, as if that was enough of an explanation for her behavior. He groaned slightly when she placed her lips on his spine in the slightest of touches. It was a primal, automatic reaction – the natural way a man reacted when an attractive woman told him he was attractive, and started spilling hot kisses down his back. There was no way he could have resisted this age-old behavior pattern.

He was a man who prided himself on his control and his strength – but everything had its limits. And the lips of Caitlin Todd pressing to the central highway of nerves in his body was definitely it.

With a low growl, he turned around and pressed her into him, capturing her lips in a searing, passionate kiss. He didn't even bother to start a soft and seductive exploration, but greedily took possession of what he wanted.

Her small gasp of surprise at the sudden change in his behavior was lost in his mouth, just as she was lost in his arms. She closed her eyes to the nearness of him and the feeling of his mouth seeking out every secret of hers demandingly.

Her towel was long dripping with water, and she didn't really mind to feel him remove it and discard it to the floor. She moaned into his mouth as her naked skin was suddenly pressed against his. He moved her with her back against the cool wall, the warm water still drizzling over them, while they discovered each other's skins with hands and lips.

For a split second, the inappropriateness of their behavior came to Kate's mind, but right at that moment she just didn't want to care. Too good did his body feel against hers.

His skin was rough and hot under her hands, and the feeling of his warmth, although so strange and new, heightened her desire to an almost unbearable point. Usually, reality was never as good as fantasies were, but in this case, she had totally underestimated the impact his closeness could have on her body.

She lifted one of her smooth, soft legs, moving it along his to press his most vital part closer into her female core. The way he groaned into her skin told her that he liked the feeling just as much as she did.

"God, I've wanted this for so long!" she whispered into his ear and gasped when his lips hit the sensitive spot right under her ear. "Don't stop."

"How long?" he rasped back, while he moved his tongue along her neck, alternating between nibbling and biting.

"Ever since I saw you on Air Force One," she confessed, "and you behaved like a total bastard." The insult made him bite her harder, and she gave a needy whimper, pulling him closer. The opposite feeling of coolness from the tiles against her back, and hotness from his body against her front drove her crazy. Lifting her head up so that the water could hit her face, she moaned at the feeling of his hands possessively moving over her buttocks.

Then all of a sudden his touches ceased and he lifted his head, panting.

"We can't do this..." he growled against her cheeks remorsefully, and Kate whimpered.

"Gibbs! Don't stop now..." she muttered desperately right before pulling him into another breath-stealing kiss. She didn't care if her plea sounded desperate to him, he couldn't just start this hot game and then let her down when it was getting closer to the good parts.

Passionately, she rediscovered his mouth with her lips, before he broke the kiss. His lips were mere inches away from hers as he fought to regain control over his breathing.

"I don't have protection," he finally panted explanatory, "And I don't want to explain to the director that I impregnated one of my subordinates. It's bad for the reputation." He tried to break body contact with her.

Kate's hands were lying on his shoulders and she closed her eyes remorsefully.

"You're right," she whispered and smiled slightly at his attempt to joke, while she was trying to suppress her desire and her body's demand to feel him inside of her. "That would be bad for my reputation as well." She opened her eyes and looked at him, her fingers still softly caressing his shoulders. "I would say that it is probably better this way, but I can't."

She buried her face at the crotch of his neck, her tongue darting out to flick his skin, which tasted like water and him.

Her touch felt too good to stop it, therefore he leaned into her again, dragging her close. His hands moved over the cheeks of her butt and then came to rest on the skin where her butt met her thighs, his fingers grazing her most intimate part. Kate writhed softly against him, trying to increase contact, while her hot breath puffed against his ear.

"I know we should stop, but I can't. I want you," she whimpered and bit his earlobe. Gibbs growled lowly, then he brought a few inches of distance between them.

"Turn around," he ordered sharply, and for a moment she stared at him in a mixture of confusion and bewilderment. When she didn't react at once, he moved her body so she was facing away from him, her eyes falling on the tiled, white wall.

"Gibbs!" Kate exclaimed with a hint of nervousness in her voice, when he took her wrists and pinned them above her head to the wall with one of his hands. She ignored the stitching ache in her bruised shoulder blade, that this new position of her arms caused. Gibbs' chest was touching her back, and she leaned her head back to rest on his shoulder, while his lips moved along her jaw.

"I will make it good," he promised. "You want me to make you feel good, don't you?"

"Yes," she panted, realizing that at this moment there was nothing on earth that she could have wanted more. She felt his free hand move down to fumble her breasts, and then lower over her belly

and abdomen to finally touch her female core. Kate caught her breath in her throat when his fingers moved over her outer lips.

"You're so wet..." Gibbs groaned into her neck and Kate responded in kind with a moan when she felt his low voice vibrate against her skin. The feeling sent chills through her whole body.

"What if somebody comes in?" she murmured suddenly, her mind dazed as she voiced the subconscious concern of being caught in a delicate situation.

"Then they will see what I can do to your body," he replied somewhat dryly and Kate gave a throaty giggle.

"Gibbs, that's not funny!"

"Stop thinking," the addressed eventually ordered sharply and Kate gasped for air when his fingers grazed her clit, stroking it firmly to increase her pleasure. The woman relaxed against him, reveling in the feeling of the warm water hitting her sensitive skin and his fingers stroking her at her most intimate part. She urged him on with soft moans and whispered 'yes' sounds, which increased in level when he entered her slick folds with one of his fingers.

Intuitively, Kate wanted to remove one of her hands and sling it back around his neck to pull him closer, but relentlessly he held her in place.

"Gibbs," Kate whimpered, turning her head against him.

"You like this?" he asked hoarsely against her skin, when he added a second finger into her wet depths.

"Yes, God! Yes! You're so good at this!" Her encouragement made him smirk self-securely.

"Yeah, so I've been told," he grinned somewhat smugly and Kate turned her head and bit his lower lip sharply, her tongue starting a new hot battle with his.

"Arrogant." She then murmured after a prolonged moan and Gibbs stilled his fingers, which had patiently been moving in and out of her up to then. Kate moved her hips slowly to get him to resume his wonderful teasing, but in her position her body was early completely restrained. She whimpered, when he didn't react to her desperate attempts. "Please, don't stop."

"I don't know, Katie... I don't like being called arrogant..." he whispered against her hair, enjoying how her desperation grew with every second.

"You're a bastard!"

"And that's not exactly a nice thing to say to somebody who is making you feel good either, is it?" he asked playfully, enjoying her little gasps, when he twisted his fingers shortly before stilling again. He loved to see her this much out of control – and that he was the one who was causing it.

"Gibbs!" Kate exclaimed and leaned her head back against his shoulder. "Please! I'm sorry..."

"Damn, you're so beautiful," he groaned into her hair and resumed moving his fingers inside of her. Her soft moans increased in level and she fisted her hands, that were still pinned to the tiled wall. His lips moved sensually along the silky skin of her neckline, that was so deliciously exposed to him. After he had kissed a way along her jaw, he moved back up and started to suck at the spot right under her ear.

Her breathing became erratic, interrupted by moans and gasps which she couldn't control anymore.

All of a sudden her wrists were free, and the hand which had been holding them was busy fumbling her firm breasts.

She could clearly feel his arousal pressing against her back and the way he was panting against her skin betrayed to her, how much he was turned on by just watching her; doing this to her.

One of her hands moved along the skin of his arm, and he growled lowly into her ear. "Katie, keep your hands on the wall!" he ordered sharply and she complied with a tortured sob.

"I want to touch you." she begged breathlessly.

"If you touch me, I won't be able to control myself..." he rasped and kissed her cheek intimately.

"Close your eyes and feel what I'm doing to you. Tell me what you need."

"You! Just you!" she replied. "Please..."

She turned her face to his neck, her tongue darting out to taste his skin.

"Please faster? Or please harder?" He groaned against her cheek.

"Faster!" she panted under her breath.

He complied and then concentrated on massaging her clit with every thrust of his hand.

Her orgasm hit her unexpectedly and hard, and she nearly collapsed against him as her legs seemed to give way. A breathless scream left her mouth and she pressed her shuddering body against his warm back while she desperately tried to get her breathing under control.

Only now did she become aware of her surroundings and the fact that they were standing in a public shower. A shaky breath left her lungs as he moved away from her.

"You should go," Gibbs said firmly, his voice indicating that he was not in the mood to discuss.

"But..." she started. He didn't let her finish.

"Kate, leave!" His voice sounded somehow gruff and Kate turned around to look at him. He had brought distance between them. Damn him and his concern for her well being. And damn him if he thought he could just order her around after they had practically jumped each other and were standing naked opposite to each other.

Without warning, she pushed him against the cool wall behind him and a low growl escaped his lips when his back made contact with the coldness. "Kate..."

"Shut up, Gibbs!"

He did, mostly due to surprise at her boldness to contradict him.

Kate leaned up to capture his lips in a long, languid kiss, while her hands moved down over his strong chest, playing in the soft hair. "I'm not going to leave after what you've just done for me. I need to touch you."

Her teeth scraped his chin playfully, before she moved her lips down his neck and over his collarbone. Her hand moved down his body, outlining his strong, masculine shape, before she firmly grabbed his erection in her hand.

She enjoyed the low growls that he was unable to suppress any longer, and the way his hands moved over her shoulders and her back, keeping her just in place.

When she started to stroke him with just the right pressure, his hips bucked involuntarily up into her hand. "Yes!" he rasped.

"Just let it go," she murmured against the skin of his chest, observing with silent fascination how the water from the shower above collected on his skin and ran in small trickles down his tanned skin.

"You know what I've always wanted you to do?" Her voice was seductive as she started to speak, bringing her lips so close to his ear that her hot breath tickled his skin when she spoke. "All this time I've observed you in the office, I imagined what it would be like to be pressed up against you..."

"Katie..." His low growl pleaded her to go on as his face buried in her wet hair, that was still smelling like peach. Usually she despised hearing people call her 'Katie', because it made her feel like a child, but from his lips it sounded incredibly sexy.

"So sometimes when we were working late..." she murmured slowly, pointing out every word, before she paused, giving him time to fantasize about her dreams, the delay increasing his need to an almost unbearable level. Yet, he was still holding back. "... I would think about what it would be like if you just came over to my desk and grabbed me, just to fuck me senseless on my desk. Or how you would hit the stop button in the elevator so we could love each other pressed up against the cold elevator wall."

His thrusts became erratic and he grabbed her buttocks firmly to press her against his hot skin. "Go on..." His voice was shaky.

"I would fantasize about what it would feel like to come with your body pressing against mine, while you are buried deep inside me. I'm sure it would feel so good... you are so good, Gibbs... come for me."

It didn't take much more to break his control and he emptied himself against her hand, groaning in release. Her soft giggle reached his ears, when he was able to think straightly again.

"Wow..." she whispered teasingly against his cheek, that was slightly stubbly from his five-o'clock-shadow. "That was easy."

"You telling me I was easy?" he asked somewhat threatening, thinking that this was a term he had never heard from one of his ex-wives in connection with him.

Kate smiled cheekily in return without giving him an answer. With a low growl, Gibbs pulled her up against his body, lifting her off the ground to press her soft skin against his and take possession of her mouth while the spray of water washed away the remnants of what they had just done.

Finally he let her down, and for a moment they were just looking at each other, before Kate picked up her totally soaked towel from the ground, looking at it somewhat helplessly as she tried to figure out what to do now.

"Take mine," Gibbs offered and handed her his large towel. "I have a second one, which will be enough for me."

"Thank you," she smiled almost shyly, as she wrapped the cloth around her nakedness.

"Listen," they both started at the same time and smiled at one another, each waiting for the other to start.

"This was great," Gibbs finally said.

"Yes, it was," Kate agreed, already sensing what was inevitably about to come. Hiding her sadness, she shook her head. She didn't want to hear it from him – rather she would be the one to say it first. "But it can't happen again."

"No it can't," he affirmed with a nod, hiding an almost regretful sigh. "Rule number twelve. Relationships between agents never work."

Kate nodded and picked up her shower gel and the shampoo, holding the towel in place with her free hand. She suppressed the slight wince when she felt her muscles ache even more now.

"So I guess I will see you in the office then. And we will never again lose a word about this..."

He nodded, and for another moment, their eyes melted. Kate turned and wanted to leave when his voice, calling out for her, held her back and made her face him one last time.

She gasped in surprise, when he was standing in front of her all of a sudden, grabbing her butt and pulling her up against him to steal one last searing kiss from her lips.

"Just so that I have something to think about while working on my boat," Gibbs then announced hotly against her mouth, and that caused her to reconnect their lips in a second, open-mouthed kiss.

"Now," she whispered when he had let her down again, "if you ever tell anybody about my tattoo, I will have to shoot you."

He smirked, feeling foolishly proud that there was this little, intimate detail of her, that only he knew. "I won't..."

"Alright," Kate replied satisfied and touched his lips with her fingers. "See you then."

And with those words she left the men's shower. Gibbs looked after her and then turned toward the spray of water to turn it cold. He was sure that from now on, every night his sleep would be filled with pictures of a beautiful, brunette special agent making love to him.

- The End (Aug 11, 2007)

## Butterfly Kisses

(“To Bleed Willingly” fic-a-thon response)

*Spoilers: Heavy for 1x12 My Other Left Foot, also a sequel for my story “Forbidden Fascination”, but since this is a ficathon response, I tried to write it so that you don't necessarily need to have read the former story.*

*“It’s not a rose?” she quoted him ironically, “What was that all about?”*

*The demand for an explanation leads to a firework of passion...*

“It's not a rose.”

Those coolly spoken words, said as if there was nothing more natural in the world than the fact that he knew exactly what he was talking about, had turned her evening into hell. It was safe to say that Special Agent Caitlin Todd was beyond angry. In fact, her mood was hard to determine, shifting between absolutely murderous and hurt that he had, in a way, betrayed her trust.

For those simple four words had caused her colleagues to ask her a whole bunch of (still-unanswered) questions. If her tattoo was not a rose, what was it then? And after only a few minutes, Tony Dinozzo had come up with an even more obvious question: How did Gibbs know so surely about her tattoo? Had he seen it? Was it in her file?

Of course it was not in her file, and Abby was the one who knew. Because when Kate had started her job at NCIS, she hadn't had the tattoo yet. It had been Abby's idea during one of these crazy girls nights. And Kate had been tipsy enough to say yes. Not that she regretted it now; the only thing she regretted was, that it had become the matter of discussion among her work colleagues.

And that she had to face dozens of indecent questions – which was partly HIS fault! Leroy Jethro Gibbs.

Kate left her car and her expression became even darker while she locked the car and then moved with quick steps towards the large house. She would hold him responsible and demand an explanation for his somewhat childish behavior.

He had simply not answered when she had requested him to tell their colleagues that he had no idea, and that he had just lied about her tattoo. Which he had not, of course.

He knew exactly where her tattoo was, because he had seen it one day after they had trained with the team in the training hall. Since the women's shower had been out of order, Kate had decided rather recklessly to make use of the men's shower instead, because she had thought there had only been three men left in the hall. But suddenly Gibbs had been in the shower as well, one thing had led to another and they had shared an erotic experience which she still relived in her dreams every single night. They had not gone all the way through, because neither of them had been prepared, and therefore they had had no protection. Fortunately, they had both still been rational enough to pay attention to that factor. And afterwards they had agreed that something like that could never happen again and that it should never come up again in a conversation, either.

And still, there was not one day that passed without her recalling the stolen moment in the shower.

It seemed to her like a dream she would have at night, so fleetingly had the moment been—so fast had it passed. And neither of them had ever mentioned it again. The day after, Kate had been insecure about how to act – and react – to his usual humorous remarks and flirtatious comments, but her awkwardness had quickly passed when she had forced professionalism into her mind.

Gibbs had treated her just as always. Just as if he had forgotten about what had happened between them. How his hands had run over her body, exploring every inch of her exposed skin. And how she had whispered hot words into his ear to turn him on, sweet secrets which she had actually meant to keep buried in her heart forever. She had shared them with him. They had shared some wonderful moments of bliss, before reality had caught up on them.

She feigned professionalism during the day when she was at work, but at night the memories would come back to her, and follow her into her dreams. And it would always end the same. With her telling him that it could never happen again. Sure, she had said it first, but only because she had seen in his eyes that it was what would inevitably come from him. In order to prevent herself from getting hurt, she had said it first.

And since then they had not spoken a word about it, or made any kind of indication, or ambiguous remark. Until today...

The whole case had been bewitched from the beginning. First she had accidentally betrayed towards Anthony Dinozzo that she had a tattoo. Then he had told everybody about it. And to top it all, Gibbs had behaved completely irrational and heavily flirted with a suspect.

The latter incident had enraged her the most, because she could have sworn he had done it well-aware of her jealousy. He had even complimented the tattoo of that redhead and Kate could swear that he had thoroughly enjoyed the pun. Even more, she was sure that he knew that she had overheard the whole conversation.

Kate inhaled deeply, and then knocked at the large wooden door in front of her. While she waited for the subject of her anger to open up for her, the images of the redhead inevitably crossed her mind again. She had been completely fake, and the way Gibbs had reacted to her had driven her just crazy. Afterwards, she couldn't keep her mouth shut, and that was also something that she was angry about now: she had let him know that she was jealous.

"Is it so hard to believe that a woman might be attracted to me?" he had asked her with obvious amusement and a hidden pun lying in his voice. And it had blown her off. Because she knew just as well as he knew that she was the last woman who would ever think of him as not attractive.

However, she could have lived with all that, could have just regarded it as some kind of playful mood he was in, if he hadn't made that last comment about her tattoo.

Anger returned, and she knocked again, harder this time, but still there was no answer.

She folded her arms with a slightly enraged scoff, then tried the door handle. The door opened easily...

Kate hesitated for just a moment, then she entered the house. It was trespassing – but he had trespassed as well earlier, so she didn't really see why she should pay attention.

With awakening interest, she looked around in the house of their teamleader. She had never before been in Gibbs' house, just heard some of Dinozzo's descriptions of it, but what she saw didn't quite fit the image her imagination had built.

The rooms were tastefully decorated, a fact that surprised Kate. She wouldn't have figured her older, and often so grumpy boss to pay such attention to details where living was concerned.

All of a sudden, she heard a sound from beneath her, and figured that Gibbs had to be working on his boat in his basement. She looked around and found a door which led to his basement.

Carefully, she opened it and looked down the stairs into the dimly lit basement room. She inhaled one last time, raised her chin and then walked down the stairs determinedly. When one stair creaked under her foot, Gibbs looked up from his boat. If he was surprised, nothing in his expression, nor his body language, gave it away. He simply stared at her for a few moments, then went back to sandpaper the side of the boat – or rather of what would someday be a boat.

"What is it?" he asked in tone, which made Kate doubt her motives for a moment. Was her anger really worth pissing her boss off? Yes, it was, she determined.

"That's what I was going to ask you!" she opened with a slightly bitchy undertone – more snappy than she had intended it to come out. "It's not a rose?" she quoted him ironically, "What was that all about?"

He lifted to his full size and looked at her for a moment, yet he didn't answer her question

Kate put her hands to her hips and approached him. "Did you need to tell everybody? Do you have any idea how Dinozzo is annoying me now by asking about what it is? And even worse, Abby poses the more obvious question about how you know! And quite frankly I have no idea how to explain, and you didn't really help either!"

He smirked and turned to get another tool from the table in the corner, then went to work on his boat again. Kate followed his actions with her eyes, expecting an answer or some kind of apology – or at least something that came close to it. But Gibbs continued working on his boat as if she wasn't even present.

And with every second that passed, Kate became more angry. Sure, Gibbs was her boss, but that was no reason for him to provoke her the way he did. She knew he liked to provoke. He had shown that at the very first day that she had met him, and back then she had felt unbelievably drawn to him – but also determined to remain his equal. And it was time to make this very clear to him.

"So, you think you can just work on that damned boat and wait it out?" she asked, folding her arms and taking place on one of the workbenches. "Didn't your three ex-wives teach you how patient women can be?"

Kate wasn't exactly sure, but she could swear that she had heard a chuckle from him.

"Hand me the hammer while you're standing over there, will you?" Gibbs eventually spoke.

When he turned around now and reached out his hand, she was sure that she saw a sparkle of amusement in his eyes. Was he enjoying this? Kate narrowed her eyes and took the hammer, balancing it in her hand while her eyes never left his. When she held it out for him, he took it, brushing her hand with his ever so slightly. This almost non-existent touch sent a jolt of desire through her, and she withdrew her hand a little too swiftly for him not to notice it.

But he didn't react, he just held her eyes. Feeling it hard to keep holding his deep stare, Kate finally lowered her eyes and turned around to walk back to the bench. She pulled herself up to sit on the rough surface, and gathered her inner balance to be able to attack again. This was going to become a hard battle, that she was sure of.

But when she looked up, she found that he had resumed working on his boat.

Her self-confidence faded a little, because she somehow felt as if she was playing his game instead of the other way around. She felt cornered, and that was a feeling she wasn't particularly fond of. It was time to face him with her rules.

"So, are you disappointed?"

"'Bout what?" he asked, not moving.

"That your little flirt turned out to be guilty – or at least partly guilty." There it was. Inwardly, Kate did a little dance of triumph, as he turned his head and looked at her, an imminent threat lying in his eyes. She wanted to strike back. When he didn't reply anything, she shrugged. "Well, I've heard from Dinozzo that she is your type, and besides you two were really getting it on in the house - word-wise."

Gibbs obviously decided to use another tactic, for he chuckled slightly and lifted to his full size. "So?"

Kate did not reply, instead she looked around in the large basement room. The interior could not exactly be called decorated. The large, unfinished boat was taking a whole lot of the room and was placed at the center of it. Tables and boards with tools were placed at the wall without particular order, and most of the furnishings looked as if they were self-made. The wooden surfaces of the tables and boards were covered with tools, used cups and old newspapers. Kate couldn't imagine how anybody would want to spend so much time in a room like this, but then again, her boss Leroy Jethro Gibbs had always been a mysterious man.

The young woman was pulled out of her observations, when, from the corner of her eye, she saw Gibbs walking up to her. She stared at him openly, when he came to stand only inches away from her body. She could already feel the heat of his body, insecure about what he was going to do. Was he going to throw her out of his house?

Her heart seemed to skip a beat, when he leaned in a little and his manly scent reached her nostrils. His body was still not touching hers, he was just leaning in, his arm placed on the wooden surface next to her thigh. "I was giving you time to search the house." He replied to her accusation, just as if nothing was wrong – as if her presence didn't affect him the least. "Didn't know that I had to justify that."

She didn't know what to say. It was as if her whole head had been emptied of any kind of language, all that she was aware of was his warmth, his scent and the feel of his breath so close to her skin. It was merely an inch between their bodies. All she needed to do was lean in, lift her hands to his shoulders and touch him.

And then she heard him take a tool from right behind her. With a mysterious expression on his face he pushed himself to his full size again and returned to the unfinished boat, but she could swear she could see a smirk on his face.

Kate stared at his back in disbelief. Manipulating bastard, she thought, angry at herself that she had that easily fallen for him; and at him for thinking that he could just have control over everything.

"Well, why didn't you just keep your mouth shut when Dinozzo mentioned my tattoo!" she came back to the actual point. "I mean, were you trying to embarrass me, or were you just being cocky?"

When he gave no sign that he was listening to her, Kate jumped off the workbench and went to the boat, forcing his attention by blocking the way to the part he was just working on. Only two seconds later she regretted her impulsive action, since, when he raised from the stool he was sitting on and lifted to his full size, she was caught in between him and the boat.

"You are not even listening to me, are you?" she asked, her voice sounding much more insecure now, a fact that she hated herself for.

"I am listening to you," he emphasized dangerously low. "Have you broken into my house and come down here to make a scene?"

"No," Kate almost whispered and Gibbs smirked slightly at her openly displayed sudden lack of self confidence.

"Then I suggest you tell me what you need to say, and then leave!" He let her go and was about to turn and grab his cup with cold coffee, when her next words put him off.

"That's always your solution, isn't it? You act all bossy so that you won't have to justify your actions! I respect that when we're at work! But today, you crossed the line and..." she jumped slightly, when he slammed his hand onto the wooden plank of his boat right next to her shoulder and lowered his face to hers.

"I believe to remember that the actual line-crossing was done by both of us two months ago." He interrupted her with a dangerous undertone in his voice. Desperately trying to think rational, Kate held his eyes.

"Yes, and I believe to remember that you explicitly told me that it can't ever happen again, and that we would never talk about it again!" She could feel her cheeks flush at the memories the nearness of him brought up again.

"Actually it was YOU telling me that. Is that it? Are you angry at me for reminding you?"

She couldn't think clearly as long as he was so close to her that all she needed to do was lean in and close the two inches of distance between their lips to kiss him again.

"No, I'm just angry that you—" she searched for an appropriate term, "embarrassed me in front of the team."

"I embarrassed you?" Gibbs asked and narrowed his eyes.

"Yes, because everybody keeps asking now about how you know about my tattoo! Dinozzo was teasing me anyway after I asked him about..." She shut her mouth when she realized that telling him that she had done research on his relationships and love-interests behind his back was probably not the best idea. But it was too late.

"Bout what?"

"Your – taste." She replied hesitantly, and wanted to smack him when she saw a cocky smile playing around the corner of his mouth. Upcoming rage was openly displayed on her face, and in her eyes, which turned a shade darker. "After you had acted so incredibly irrational by flirting with our suspect, I needed to know whether your interest in her was true or fake."

"For strictly professional reasons," the man added with an obvious streak of irony in his voice.

"Yes, of course!" Kate affirmed, the fact that she was physically imprisoned between him and his boat did not help to improve her self-confidence.

"So you practically interrogated Dinozzo about my past relationships," Gibbs assumed correctly, and Kate felt herself blush.

"Well, not all of them – but basically yes. I know what this may look like, but..."

“Why?”

His interruption put her off for a moment and she stared at him for several moments before she found the words to answer his question. “Because—I mean if you had just let your interest affect your judgment—you were pretty obvious after all—I had to make sure that—” she stuttered and realized that she probably should have thought about a possible explanation to this question earlier, and not when she was practically pinned between him and his boat. “Fine,” she finally admitted, “so I got a little bit jealous when I heard you talk to that woman! I realize that I have no right to...” Her voice trailed off and she just stared at him, waiting for a reaction. Was he angry at her? Confused? Amused? Whatever it was, his eyes did not give it away. The thought that Gibbs must be an excellent poker player crossed her mind briefly.

Then, suddenly, he closed the distance between them and before Kate knew what was happening she felt his lips on hers, her soft shriek at the sudden intrusion lost in his mouth. Her hands found his shoulders and she pushed at them weakly in initial shock, then she grasped the material of his shirt with her fingers. Willingly, she opened her mouth to allow him to deepen the kiss and sighed contentedly, when he did.

She allowed herself to get lost in the sensation of the intimate caresses, that brought back pleasant memories of the erotic encounter they had shared in the men's shower of the NCIS training hall. The kiss alternated between seductive and devouring, before Gibbs eventually broke it, which caused a little sigh of disappointment to slip over Kate's lips.

But only temporarily, for he dragged her away from his boat and urged her backwards towards his working bench. He stared deeply into her hazelnut eyes, before he leaned down to taste her chin and neck with his tongue. The prolonged moan that followed from her was enough to reassure him that she wanted this just as much as he did.

With little effort, he lifted her up, so that she came to sit on the hard wooden surface of the table. With a swift movement of his arm, he pushed the tools and screws aside so that she wouldn't hurt herself in the heat of their passion, before he leaned over her to capture her mouth in a new series of seductive and searing kisses.

She sighed into his mouth, her hands finding the firm material of the polo-shirt he was wearing. She tried to open it, and when she failed to do so due to her trembling hands, she clasped her fingers into the material instead, pulling him closer so that he was standing between her legs.

She could feel his growing arousal at the center of her body and broke the kiss with a soft moan to look at him through eyes clouded with desire.

“Kate,” he murmured, but the young woman pulled him close to reconnect their lips in a quick kiss.

“Don't,” she then whispered hotly against his mouth. “Don't tell me this can't happen.”

“Wasn't gonna,” he replied, nibbling her neck gently. “I was going to say that this is your last chance to back off, because this time I'm going all the way through.”

“Fine by me,” she murmured against his cheek, “as long as you don't tell me this can't happen again afterwards. And then I would have to see you again every day in the office, watch you flirt with redheaded bit---women.”

He chuckled at her correction of her own choice of words, knowing quite well that a far more unfriendly word had almost slipped out. “ 'S that what it was like for you the last two months?” he asked, biting her earlobe gently, while his hands moved over her back and down to cup her buttocks.

"Pretty much," she admitted frankly.

"Good," he simply stated, which caused her to push at his shoulders a little to get enough room between them that she could look him in the eye suspiciously. The expression she saw there left her speechless, as did his following words. "Because I'd hate to be alone in this."

"Wait," Kate held him back when he wanted to resume the playful kisses that he had been spilling down his neck. "You were jealous of me? But why then would you flirt so unashamedly with that redheaded suspect?"

He smirked in his typical way that signaled that he wouldn't give her more information than that. But that smirk was enough, for suddenly, the realization dawned on Kate.

"You wanted to make me jealous!" she exclaimed.

"Well, mainly I wanted to buy you time to search her house, but yeah. The jealous part was a nice side-effect. I needed to see how you would react. I didn't expect you to investigate me behind my back though." He pulled her closer against his body, letting her feel just how much she was turning him on, and was gratified by an aroused little sound from her. "I hope you and Dinozzo won't make a usual habit out of that."

"Of what?"

"Gossiping about me behind my back," he replied.

"No more than usual," the young woman replied cheekily, a mischievous gleam sparkling in her eyes.

Gibbs growled lowly and melted his lips anew with hers, this heated kiss leaving no doubt about where he wanted to head with this. Kate let herself completely drown in him. She had wanted to repeat kissing him for too long not to take her chance now. So after another series of open-mouthed kisses, she let herself fall back so that she was lying flatly on the table, her hands pulling him to lean over her. He groaned, settling in between her legs, as he leaned on his arms which were placed at either side of her slender waist to keep him from crushing her.

With trembling hands, she opened the buttons of her blouse, exposing the sensitive flesh of her décolletage to him, which he immediately took advantage of by spilling hot kisses down her neck.

"Gibbs... too many clothes..." she managed to whisper, and he broke contact for a moment to assist her in pulling his shirt over his head. With a soft thudding sound, it hit the ground somewhere in the room and was forgotten a moment later, as Kate pulled him down into another kiss.

While turning the kiss into a very slow, languid seduction, Gibbs' hands moved down the sides of her body, finding her thighs and the back of her knees. Softly, he caressed her smooth skin and Kate responded by wrapped her calves around his hips, smiling as he groaned into her mouth.

"God, Katie..."

Now it was her time to smirk softly at his response. It would have been a lie to claim that she didn't enjoy having that much control over him, because she did. Even more, it turned her on. It had already turned her on in the training hall when he had given her the order to leave, after he had pleased her. She had simply ignored it, and pushed him against the tiled wall where she started a hot seduction, that she would have never thought herself capable of.

"Enjoying yourself, are you?" Gibbs growled, and the young woman couldn't help but giggle softly.

"Payback is hell," Gibbs rasped against her mouth before biting her lower lip softly until she moaned in need. "Wait until I make you scream."

"Empty promises?" Kate teased and giggled again, when he kissed her neck in response. Her giggle soon turned into erotic moans when he started to alternate between nibbling and lick at her neck, softly marking her as his own.

In a rough movement, he pulled her black skirt up over her thighs, her position allowing him easy access to the core of her desire, all the while not stopping to mark her with his teeth.

He pulled the thin material of her silk blouse aside to reveal all of the tender skin of her belly, then he started to spill teasing kisses down her body to her navel, enjoying the way she started to writhe under his touch.

"Gibbs, please," she breathed pleadingly and he slowly moved up again to kiss her mouth before he looked into her eyes.

"Please what?" he asked with a slight smirk and Kate hit his chest softly.

"Tease!" she breathed and then arched her back when his hand, that had moved up and down the sides of her body, found the tender flesh of her inner thigh. Her lips formed a soft "oh!" and her eyes fell shut in expectation of the touch where she wanted it the most.

"Is that what you want?" he asked throatily against her chin and Kate sighed appreciatively. "Wasn't this one of the fantasies you told me about in the shower room? That I would just come over to your desk and take you right there?" He felt her shiver under him and smiled softly against her hair. The peachy scent of it seemed to enchant his senses, and he thought that he had never found a woman more erotic than her at that moment. "You know what?"

"What?" came her shaky reply, when she softly turned her head to caress his stubbly cheek with her lips.

"I really like your tattoo..."

At this unexpected revelation, she broke out in a soft, full-hearted laugh and peeked him on the cheek, well aware that those were the exact same words that he had used in his flirtations with their redheaded suspect.

"Shall we move this into my bedroom, or are you fond of tables?" Gibbs asked, his tone clearly mocking her, and she pushed him away playfully.

"Careful there, you wouldn't want me to leave now, would you?"

He laughed. For the first time she heard him laugh and she decided that she wanted to hear it more often.

Gibbs pulled her up softly, helping her to her feet. Quickly, Kate rearranged her skirt, just in case somebody was peeking in through the windows or the front door.

But she didn't really get to finish, before Gibbs grabbed her wrist and pulled her against his broad chest, taking possession of her lips. After a few endless moments, he broke the contact and pulled her towards the stairs that led out of his basement.

When they were up the stairs, they were all over each other again, their hands fondling with clothes, desperately trying to discard them.

Kate shrieked a little when Gibbs pushed her roughly into the nearest wall, devouring her lips with a fire that seemed to burn her up from the inside out. "Sorry," he muttered breathlessly, but Kate's mind was way too dazed to reply something intelligible.

Over and over again he closed her lips with his, tasting, licking, biting and devouring, until they had to break apart, both panting from being deprived of oxygen.

Breathlessly, Kate moved away from between Gibbs and the wall, taking his arm and pulling him further into the direction he had motioned. She was pleased to find his eyes as clouded with need as hers were.

Eventually he stopped her, when she was standing in front of the right room, and pushed the door open with his foot.

"Beautiful," Kate whispered when she entered the tastefully decorated bedroom with the large bed at the wall. She turned around when she heard the click of the door lock, and found Gibbs looking at her.

"Are you sure you want this?" he asked and Kate smiled softly. Then, without a warning she pushed him back against the door and pressed her body against him, her lips lingering with only a few millimeters distance to his own mouth.

"I am," she informed him hotly, and realized just how sure she was. She loved him. At this thought, she faltered for a moment, the expression in her eyes becoming softer, as she placed her hands on the man's cheeks and let them run over his skin. "Gibbs--"

For a moment she looked him directly into his eyes, wanting to tell him what she felt and what he meant to her. But then she decided against it. Too immense was the insecurity about his feelings and she also didn't want him to feel like he made some kind of a commitment by sleeping with her. Therefore she just remained silent.

A little puzzled, Gibbs returned her stare, feeling as if she had wanted to tell him something: something important, something deep.

But then the thought was lost as his attention was drawn back on the beautiful woman in front of him, who turned around and slowly walked to the bed. While she was doing so, she let the silk blouse that she was wearing, glide down her arms until it softly fell to the ground.

Gibbs simply looked at her, for a moment speechless at the beauty of her sight, then his desire took over and he followed her.

He captured her body with his hands before she had lowered herself on the bed. Tenderly, he brushed her hair away from her neck so that the skin lay exposed in front of him. Softly he placed his lips right behind her ear and enjoyed the way she automatically moved against him to increase their body contact. His hands traveled over her flat stomach and slender waist, then they moved down to open the zipper at the side of her skirt.

Kate gripped his arm with her hand, softly stroking up and down his skin while she was leaning back into him, completely giving herself over to the emotion that he evoked inside her with his soft kisses and caresses against her neck.

And then her skirt hit the ground, and she hadn't even realized how he had done it. She slipped out of her high heels and moved to turn around in his embrace, but Gibbs held her in place.

"Don't," he whispered, moving back a little until he could see the little black butterfly on her hip. "I was not kidding earlier, I really like that tattoo. Dreamed about it."

"You dreamed about it?" Kate asked with amusement in her voice. "So you have dreams about me? Tell me about them."

"Oh, believe me, they would make you blush," he replied with a slight chuckle and Kate cocked her head flirtatiously.

"Then show me," was her throaty answer, looking the handsome man in front of her up and down. God, he was handsome. She let herself sink down into the soft mattress of his bed and then moved backwards so that she was kneeling in the middle of his bed.

After he had closed the curtains in front of his window, he pulled off his shoes and then moved to sit behind Kate on the bed. She shivered slightly as his hands touched her arms and began to stroke up and down her sensitive skin, while his lips nibbled at her ear again.

"Lie down," he then whispered, and Kate did as he had asked, lying down flatly on her belly, her upper body leaning on her elbows.

"Feeling kinky," she asked and tried to hide the nervousness, but the slight shaking of her voice gave it away. She was not sure what to expect, until she felt his hands on her shoulder blades, tenderly caressing her tensed back. A prolonged sigh escaped her lips, when his hot mouth followed the trail her hands took.

He continued to kiss and massage her back until she was totally relaxed and reduced to mere sensation and the heat it created in her body, before he started to take it further. Softly, he let his thumb stroke over the little black butterfly on her hip.

Kate didn't need to look to know what he was so fascinated of and it brought a smile to her face.

"If I had known that a tattoo was all that's needed to turn you on, I would have decided getting one in a more obvious place."

There it was again, his soft, open laugh. "Well, I think this one is hotter than an obvious one," he informed her and kissed the butterfly in the slightest brush of a kiss. "because only I will get to see it."

Her heart seemed to skip a beat, when the deeper meaning of his statement reached her logical mind. Did that mean, he wanted to continue this-- whatever it was they had?

Before she could deepen that subject, he had started trailing sweet butterfly kisses along her spine, and slowly moved up her body, while his thumbs had slipped under the upper edge of her black lace panty. When he had reached her neck, he bent to her ear.

"Turn around," he whispered roughly, and Kate decided that she didn't mind bossy Gibbs in bed at the least. She complied and greeted his hungry lips with an equal passion of her own. Automatically she moved her body to assist him in opening her bra, while her hands moved down his broad chest, feeling up his still tight muscles.

A low moan left her lips, when all of a sudden, her naked breasts were pressed against his chest. The feeling of being skin on skin with him was almost too much for her already oversensitive senses and she closed her eyes at the sheer feeling of it.

Sensually, she moved her hands through his hair, when he started trailing wet kisses down her neck, and then reached the delicate skin of her breast with his lips.

When he pulled the pink nipple into his mouth, she cried out in pleasure, thinking that she could not bare much more. She needed to feel more of him. Unexpectedly, she gripped his shoulders and rolled them over in a move that would have made James Bond proud. Gibbs stared at her incredulously, and Kate smiled at him. "Secret Service," she whispered, her lips hovering close over his without touching. "There's much more that you don't know about me yet."

“Right,” he affirmed with a smile and bit her ear roughly enough to make her gasp. “Like what it feels like to be buried inside you when you come.”

“Oh...” she breathed at the pleasure that pulsed through her body at the fantasies he evoked in her by those simple words. Her hands were lying on his chest, her splayed fingers playing in his soft chest hair, while she moved to straddle his hips. Playfully, she scratched his chin with her teeth, before she sat up and moved her hips downwards to be able to open his jeans.

When she had managed to undo the buttons, she pushed the firm material down his hips and he helped her pulling it off. Carelessly, the cloth was being dropped off the side of the bed, already forgotten once lips united again.

Gibbs' hands trailed along Kate's long legs, until they found her buttocks, covering the round cheeks gently and pressing her against his erection. Unwillingly, she broke their kiss, her breath coming shallow, as she moved her hips against him.

“Gibbs...” Whatever she had wanted to say, dissolved in a foggy cloud, when he pushed up against her core, his hands tearing softly at her delicate lace panties. “If you tear them, you'll have to buy me new ones.” She warned softly and he laughed breathlessly.

“What, you think visiting a Victoria's Secret shop with you is a threat? I'm disappointed, you're really losing it.” he joked and she bit his lower lip softly, then began to trail wet kisses down his neck.

“Let's see who will be unable to form coherent thoughts first,” she challenged, the obvious implication that it would be him lying underneath her words.

Gibbs chuckled. “Never underestimate your opponent.”

“Opponent?” she breathed into his ear seductively. “And here I was believing we were playing on the same team.”

Gibbs gave a short laugh. “Rather have me in your team than against you, wouldn't you?”

“If you're implying that I wouldn't stand a chance against you, then you're wrong.” she smiled and scratched her fingernails softly over his chest, enjoying his rough moan.

“Katie, if you don't lose those panties, I will have to tear them after all,” he warned and Kate laughed throatily. She rolled on her side and removed the undergarment.

“What, you don't want to go underwear-shopping with me?” Gibbs asked, having removed his own boxers and now leaning over her.

“I'd love to,” Kate whispered, “but not at the price to let you tear those panties, they're my favorites.” They sank into another kiss while Kate pushed him onto his back again and resumed her position straddling his hips. She took her time discovering his body with her lips, allowing him to direct her with his hand that was buried in her long brown hair.

Eventually, with her lips close to his ear, she whispered “Gibbs, do you have protection?”

She hoped that he had thought of it, because she would not stand having to improvise now. She wanted to feel him inside her.

It took him a moment to process her words and give meaning to them. “Nightstand,” he replied huskily. She kissed him briefly, before reaching over and opening the small drawer. She searched for what she was looking for and eventually pulled out an unopened box with condoms, accidentally

pulling out something else along with it. The sheet of paper fell to the ground, unnoticed by both of them.

Kate opened the box and pulled a condom out, then she engaged in another hot open-mouthed kiss, while she ripped the package open.

"Give me," he whispered against her lips in between two kisses and took the condom out of her hand to roll it over his impressive erection. Kate was glad that he took the initiative, because she had always felt a little awkward doing it herself, especially when she was with a man for the first time.

She moaned, when, a little later, she felt his hands guide her, and stroke up and down her legs.

"Your touches drive me crazy," she breathed with eyes closed in delight, and Gibbs took the chance to bring her unexpected pleasure by flicking her clit with his thumb.

Her hips jerked a little as she gasped and grasped his shoulders.

"God," she exclaimed, and whimpered when he repeated the action. Another flick and her breathing had sped up. She couldn't take much more and wanted to withdraw from his caresses, but his other hand held her hips firmly in place as he continued to push her closer to the edge.

He made sure that she was ready for him, then he directed her onto his erection, moving to sit up so that he could hold her in his arms and kiss her, when he entered her. Her eyes widened at the feeling of him and her fingers dug slightly into his shoulders.

"You alright?" he asked shakily, and she nodded, adjusting to the size of him.

"You feel so good," she whispered, seeking his mouth in a quick kiss. It was interrupted by her own moan when he pushed up into her, enticing her to start a slow, soft rhythm with her hips. His hands moved along her back, while he bent his head to kiss a trail along her shoulder to her neck. When he bit her softly where her neck met her back, he was rewarded with an aroused whimper, and she moved her hands into his hair to hold him in place.

As sweet and erotic as their position had initially been, for it forced maximum body contact, they soon found that it limited their space to move to a minimum. So, eventually, when they were both shaking with need and wild passion, Gibbs broke the searing kiss they were engaged in.

"Relax," he advised her softly, making sure that he would hurt neither her nor himself in the process of rolling them over, and then carefully moved so that he was on top of her. This new position allowed him to slip even deeper into her wet core, which caused her to arch her body against him in ecstasy.

"Oh, yes..." she breathed, and enveloped him in her arms, her fingers burying in his silver hair. He made sure that she was laying comfortably, before he started moving. A low moan escaped his mouth, when she met his thrust with one of her own, eyes closing at the intensity of it all.

"Katie, you are so beautiful," he whispered, and nibbled seductively at her lower lip, her hot breath puffing against his skin. She wanted to say something, tell him that he was handsome, and that she loved him, but his next thrust reduced her to pure desire, and all that left her mouth was a sound of sheer pleasure.

"Wrap your legs around me," he commanded hoarsely, and she did as he had said without thinking. Her new position did not only allow him to bury himself completely in her, but also to hit her g-spot with every thrust. The first time he did so, an outcry of pleasure left her lips and her body bucked involuntarily beneath his. "You like this?" he rasped kind of cockily into her ear, more a statement

than an actual question. As much as she wanted to make a witty remark, all she was able to do was breathe his name.

"Jethro..." It was the first time that she said his forename, and he thought that no other woman had ever purred it more erotically. He rewarded her with another thrust, and she grabbed his shoulders, her lips forming a silent 'oh'.

When they had been in the public shower, he had not been able to look at her as he had been standing behind her while he had pleased her with his hands. But now he wanted to look at her, see what he could do to her, and kiss her when she came. This time it wasn't just sex, he could feel that. He had opened himself too far to remain emotionally uninvolved, and he wanted to make sure that she did too.

She held his eyes for a moment, returning his soft look, while her hand moved up his neck, coming to rest on his cheek. Then her eyes fell close again, when he thrust into her a little harder.

Her hand moved down between their bodies, flicking her clit to bring herself closer to the edge.

As he realized what she was doing, he replaced her hand with his own. His lips hovered over hers, tasting her quickly, before breaking off again. Just looking at her becoming more and more undone was a severe test for his own self-control as he had to fight to end it there and now. But he wanted her to come first, or at least with him – and her more and more shallow breath and her soft outcries of pleasure told him that she was quickly approaching the point of no return.

Soon he had her close to her own release, and moved his hand away, grabbing her wrist as she wanted to resume what he had stopped doing.

She whimpered almost desperately, when he pinned her hand down next to her head.

"Please..." She tried to entice him into a faster rhythm, and he moved along with her for two or three thrusts, then he slowed down again. "Tease," she accused breathlessly, and pressed her lips to his in a desperate kiss. He knew that he wouldn't hold on much longer.

He looked down at her, her skin glistening with a sheen of sweat, and he realized that it was him who did this to her. That he was the one who could shatter her control and make her writhe with pleasure. Tenderly, his thumb stroked the inside of her hand, before he let go of it to touch her cheek and brush a strand of wet hair away from her forehead.

"Jethro..." Only his name, that was all that it took to finally break his control. Involuntarily, he bucked against her, picking up a faster, more uncontrolled rhythm. Her soft moans of approval encouraged him to move faster, while his hand went again down to where they were joined, aiming on pushing her over the edge.

Their breathing quickened, and soon they had to stop kissing as the need for air became superior.

"Let it go, Katie," Gibbs panted into her ear. "Come for me."

It took only two more thrusts to send her flying over the edge. When he felt her inner muscles contract around him, he couldn't hold on much longer and followed her into a sweet oblivion.

For endless moments, they were just lying there, moving in a slow, sensual rhythm to draw out the pleasure as long as possible, until they eventually collapsed as all strength left their bodies.

They both lost track of time while they just reveled in each other's warmth.

It seemed like an hour, before Kate felt the power to move her limp muscles return. She turned her head and placed a soft kiss on his cheek, her hand moving softly through Gibbs' hair. His face was still buried at her shoulder, and she could feel his now steady breath hot on her skin. She continued to spill soft kisses on his cheek, his ear and his neck, her hands tenderly running over his shoulders and back, until, eventually, he lifted his head to look at her.

"Katie," was all he could mutter, before he kissed her deeply on the lips, and for the first time she felt as if their souls were touching, as if he really let go.

Endless moments later, he rolled to his side carefully, disposed of the used condom and then came to lie next to her.

Even after their breathings had evened out, neither of them moved, afraid to destroy the mood by awkward comments.

Kate felt deeply satisfied and at peace. And even more importantly, safe. She had never had that feeling of perfection with a man before. Sure, Gibbs as a person was far from being perfect, as was she, but she knew how to handle him. She knew and liked his bad sides as well as his good sides, and that feeling of truly knowing him gave her that feeling of perfection.

She loved him for what he was.

She loved him!

"I love you," she whispered almost soundlessly, but she knew that he had heard her as he moved a little.

"Kate," he started softly, wanting nothing more than to tell her that he loved her as well. But he didn't want her heart to be broken. He knew that this was what was inevitably going to happen. If not the next day or week, then maybe in a couple of months or a year, but it was sure to happen. "Don't love me. I'm not that charming knight who will do everything for you. I'm gruff, I'm insensitive, I will forget birthdays and anniversaries."

She smiled softly against the ceiling, thinking that he was just exactly what she had expected. "I know," she whispered. "But you're honest. Besides I can't help it... I've tried, but I can't convince my heart to stop having these feelings. I believe, I already fell for you when I first saw you."

"You mean when you told me that you were destined to shoot me?" he asked dryly, and she had to laugh at the memory.

For another two or three minutes they just lay silently next to each other, before Kate found the courage to speak again.

"If you just want this to be sexual, that's alright." He knew that she was trying to offer him a way out by her words, but he could also hear that it would break her heart. And he didn't want to break her heart. He wanted to see her smile at him like she had done before. He wanted to hear her laughter at the weekends and soothe her when she was sad or in pain. But he didn't trust himself to be capable of being the man she deserved.

They lay in silence until, eventually, Kate moved her head and spoke softly. "Do you want me to go? It's alright if you do."

Actually she expected to hear a "yes", followed by countless apologies such as reasons for why he was not good for her. The more surprised was she, when he said "Stay." instead.

Hesitantly, she turned her head to look at him. The security about what he had said was standing openly in his eyes.

"I'm not sure if I can give you what you want, or be the man you want me to be. But I want you to stay."

Very slowly, Kate moved her body closer to his.

"Gibbs... Jethro," she corrected, the use of his forename betraying how serious she was. "I don't want you to be a knight in shining armor, or carry me on your hands through life. I just want you to be you! It's you I love, with all those arrogant, cocky and grumpy ways of yours."

She rested her head on his shoulder and let her hand leisurely stroke his chest, feeling his heart beat under his skin. Softly he pulled her closer, reaching out to pull a blanket to cover them both. His hand came to rest on her shoulder where he drew lazy circles with his thumb.

He just didn't know what to say, or do – yet.

Twenty minutes later, Gibbs found the young woman fast asleep. Thoughtfully he looked at her peaceful face, stroking some of her hair away from her face. He loved her. He knew that he did. But for her own sake he had not said it. He knew that he was a bad influence on women. He had seen it three times.

But then again, Kate was right. She knew him. She knew the bastard side of him, and was able to stand up to him, which was something none of his ex-wives had been capable of. And most importantly, she did not try to change him.

Maybe she was right, maybe this had a chance to work out.

"I love you, Katie," he whispered to her sleeping form, placing an intimate kiss on her forehead. Only five minutes later, he had followed her into the peaceful land of dreams.

This night, for the first time, he slept through and was not disturbed by nightmares, but surrounded with warmth and by the wonderful scent of peaches.

#### ~~~~~EPILOGUE~~~~~

The next morning, Kate woke up to the feeling of being wonderfully relaxed and sated. Humming contentedly, she stretched her sore muscles and lifted her head to look at the still sleeping form of her lover.

With a soft smile, she kissed him gently on his neck while moving over him to go to the bathroom, careful not to wake him. Since the small room was connected to the bedroom, she had no problem finding it. Quickly, she improvised in brushing her teeth with her fingers and a little bit of his toothpaste, and afterwards tried to put her disheveled hair back to order.

When she had completed the former and completely failed in the latter, she tiptoed back to the bed to snuggle up close again to the man she loved.

On her way, her eyes fell on the small sheet of paper that she had pulled out together with the box of condoms during the previous night. She went to her knees and picked it up, realizing, as she did so, that it was a photo.

She turned it to look at it, and found the picture of a happy family: Gibbs, a woman, and a little girl sitting proudly on a bike.

Thoughtfully, she took in every detail of the picture and moved her thumb over the image of the girl. She looked cute, blonde and beautiful and resembled the woman in the photo. Gibbs' hand was lying on her shoulder as he was obviously holding her so that she wouldn't lose her balance. It was a photo that displayed happiness and a peaceful life – something that she would have never associated with Gibbs.

After a few seconds, she decided that she didn't want to invade on his private life, and looked up to put the photo back into the drawer it had fallen out of, when, out of the corner of her eye, she saw a movement.

She turned her head to find Gibbs looking at her.

Kate returned his stare for a moment, before she felt the need to explain arise. "I'm sorry... I didn't want to... it must have fallen out of the drawer when..." Her eyes fell back on the photo, then she placed it on the nightstand. "I didn't mean to overstep boundaries here." she then concluded and moved back in under the covers.

"It's alright," he said somewhat gruffly, and for a moment he saw a slight shadow clouding her eyes, realizing that his tone had indicated that it was not alright at all. There it was. He was already beginning to push her away – unless...

It was that moment that he realized that he wanted to tell her, because this time he wanted to be honest. He knew Kate would be able to deal with it.

"She was my wife, and the girl was my daughter," he murmured softly, his hand moving through her hair.

"Gibbs, you don't have to..." Kate contradicted, but he hushed her by putting his fingers against her lips.

"I know... but I want to," he replied, and Kate looked at him, her eyes full of love and understanding. And he knew that he put his trust in the right person.

He pulled her close to him. With her hand resting on his chest, and her head buried at his neck, he began to speak about the biggest secret of his life.

"They were my family. Shannon was my first wife, and Kelly my only daughter. Then, someday..."

THE END (April 26, 2008)

## **So Close (Christmas 2007)**

*On Christmas Eve, Gibbs dreams about things that could have been, and finally finds the courage to taking chances.*

### ### ###

---- „You're in my arms

*All the world is calm*

*The music playing on for only two*

*So close together*

*And when I'm with you*

*So close to feeling alive.“ ----*

She was there, standing two meters away from him in the dim night. Although it was dark and the sky was covered with clouds, the surroundings were lit by a grey-blue light that came with snowy nights and was reflected by the snowblanket that covered everything around him, and transformed the landscape into a magical winter wonderland.

He could just stand there, for endless moments, unsure to trust his own eyes. She was wearing her red tight coat, and a black scarf covered the skin of her neck, the ends playing softly in the wind. Her dark eyes looked at him in awe and a soft smile played around the corners of her red lips – those beautiful lips that he had missed so often.

„Kate...” he murmured into the cold night air, the words becoming a puffy white cloud of hot breath which seemed to dance with the thick snowflakes that were falling down from above. Her smile grew wider when he approached her. „How... how is that possible?”

His hot breath nearly touched her as he lifted his hand and played with a strand of her brown hair, observing with fascination as snowflakes landed on the silky mass and slowly turned her into an ice princess. His hand moved slowly to her face and touched her cheek. She was warm – incredibly warm.

„You're real...” he murmured as if he had made the greatest discovery on earth.

Her soft giggle filled the night air. It was the first sound he heard from her and to him it was the most beautiful music he had ever heard.

„What did you think?” Her eyes half shut as she closed the distance between them and leaned her head against his broad chest. „Oh, Gibbs... you're here... I wasn't sure you'd come.”

„Come where?” His question made her smile, but she didn't give an answer. The fresh snow under their feet scrunched as they moved slightly, as if dancing around each other. Jethro Gibbs eventually wrapped his arms around her tiny body and pressed her close to him. He bent his head and buried his face in her slightly wet hair. It smelled like snow and her, that unique smell that he had been missing for so long.

„Oh, Katie...” he murmured with an exasperated sigh, and for a moment he felt like coming home from a long, lonely journey. „I've missed you so much...”

„Shhh...” she whispered, „Don't talk tonight.”

Her eyes met his when she looked up, then they travelled down his face's features. Her fingers moved up to his cheek and trailed along the wrinkles next to his eyes. Slowly, she moved to her toes to lower the difference of body height between them, and touched her lips softly to his. He closed his eyes to the sensation of her warm and tender lips, and waves of warmth seemed to spread through his body, originating from her almost innocent kiss and finally gathering in his heart.

--- „A life goes by  
Romantic dreams will stop  
So I bid mine goodbye and never knew  
So close was waiting, waiting here with you  
And now forever I know  
All that I wanted to hold you.”

He had never been a Christmas person, because he had lived through too many disappointments, seen once too often that this often praised love and happiness that came along with a joyous Christmas were nothing more but an illusion.

But now, for the first time in years he could feel it again. The joy of happiness in his heart. With a warm glow in his eyes, he took her hands.

„Please, stay for Christmas...”

He had always wanted to ask her that, had always wanted to spend one Christmas Eve with her and wake up on Christmas morning with her warm body cuddled up close to him in his bed. Yet he had never done so. He had let the chance to fulfill his heart's wishes pass by, and had hidden behind his regulations, and his disappointments.

„I'm sorry I have never asked you before, but please... stay now! Stay here with me.”

She laughed happily, carelessly, as if there was nothing left in the world that they needed to be afraid of. Then she captured his hand in hers.

„You know what I've always wanted? I've wanted one dance. I've seen you flirt with other women, I've seen you in that beautiful suit. I've seen the photos of your wife and your daughter... and all I always dreamed of was that you would dance with me just once, so that for a split second I could pretend that I had also one tiny place in your heart.” Her eyes became somewhat sad, and shadows clouded them. „I never got that dance, Gibbs... not even that.”

„Oh Katie, I was so stupid.” he murmured into the wind, and then pressed her fingers. „I should have given you everything – but I was afraid. Afraid to lose you again, just as I had lost the persons that I loved before. And I did! It was just that due to my fear, this time I never got the chance to tell you how much you mean to me.”

His lips touched hers again, and as if their hearts had been calling out to the angels above, all of a sudden, soft music reached their ears. Gibbs broke away from her mouth and looked into the snowy nature in front of him. In the distance he could recognize the silhouette of the old oak next to his

house through the falling snowflakes , and a little behind that, the warm light that shone through his neighbor's window.

The music ebbed away and became louder again, as if it was played and carried on by the wind and the snowflakes were swirling and dancing around them in perfect rythm with the soft tunes.

„So...” Kate whispered and smiled at him dreamily. „Let's dance now. Just one last dance...”

----*“So close to reaching that famous happy end  
Almost believing this was not pretend  
And now you’re beside me and look how far we’ve come  
So far we are so close.”*----

They moved in perfect rythm with each other and the music in the distance, their hands seeking each other's closeness. Forgotten were the snowflakes, the icy wind and the cool night air. Closing their eyes, they just felt what they had so long deprived each other's hearts of, turned around and around on the soft snowy ground as if they were dancing on a white cloud, with hundreds of angels playing a melody to the beat of their hearts.

They lost themselves in the other's eyes and the melody, which became louder and louder. Slowly, very slowly, they closed the distance between their mouths and their lips touched again in a unifying kiss, while they merged completely into the other's body.

And for a moment, one single instant, it seemed as if they were not single, small parts of the world, but as if the world was build around them; as if it had been created only for them, for this short eternity. For a moment, anything was possible. A disappointed man could love again, a lost woman could dance with her true love, and two lovers, separated by the world, could find each other again in a magical winterstorm as if they had never been apart.

One kiss changed their hearts, and thereby their lives as well.

„I love you...” It was whispered in unison by both of them after they lips had separated and only their foreheads touched.

„I've always loved you,” Gibbs clarified. „And I always will.”

„I know... I've always known deep in my heart. But you have to be somewhere else now... and so have I!” Kate's eyes reflected the tender smile that was playing around her mouth.

----*“How could I face the faceless days  
If I should lose you now?  
We’re so close  
To reaching that famous happy end  
And almost believing this was not pretend  
Let’s go on dreaming for we know we are  
So close  
So close  
And still so far.”*----

„Don't go, Katie...” His voice was merely a whisper when she stepped away from him and finally their hands remained the only parts of their bodies that were still connected to the other. Their souls, though, would always be entwined.

„I won't... I will never go, Gibbs. But you have to be with her. She's waiting for you! It's Christmas Night.” The snowflakes had now almost covered all of her brunette hair, and made her look like an angel. „Don't let your chances pass by again, Gibbs. Give her the love she deserves. I will always be here for you, waiting. And someday we'll meet again. But this moment doesn't belong to me. You don't.”

Gibbs couldn't lose his eyes from the beautiful woman in front of him, the one he had always loved but never admitted to do so. He had always been so close to her, yet always kept that distance that gave him the illusion of safety: safe from being hurt. It had all been a lie, a safety that had turned into a snowflake melting in the sun. But even if snow melted, he could still have and enjoy it as long as it was winter. And he knew, it would always return with every winter, and every Christmas Eve again. He had never taken chances with Katie – but he could with Hollis.

Eventually he kissed her slim fingers one last time, their eyes drowning in each other for a final moment, and then he let go of her.

He closed his eyes in order to stop a single tear from forming. The snow around him suddenly seemed to sparkle in all colors, as if it was reflecting all the light on earth at once. It became lighter and lighter, until he had to squeeze his eyes shut. „Kate...” he murmured, trying to get a hold of her again, but she was gone – swallowed by the winterstorm and the brightness of the light.

He opened his eyes into the bright light and blinked... once... twice...

Then he sat upright, staring directly into the face of Anthony D'Inozzo, who was grinning at him. „Hey, boss...”

„D'Inozzo!” Gibbs grumbled and rubbed his eyes quickly. „Turn that lamp away from me!”

„Sorry boss!” the younger agent hurried to turn the desk lamp away from his boss, before he returned to his own desk. „What are you still doing here? I thought you said you would go home soon after we left!”

„What time is it?” Gibbs asked, ordering the papers of their latest file on his desk.

„Way past eleven. I just had to return because I forgot Jeanne's present and I want her to have it in the morning.” Tony searched through the drawers of his desk and had finally found the little, neatly wrapped package. He smiled at it for a moment with glistening eyes and then grinned at his boss. „I am so looking forward to see her face when she unwraps it, and finds out what I got her. There's nothing more beautiful than that expression of joy, happiness and love in the eyes of the woman you are in love with...” He grinned, beheld the grumpy expression of his boss and then shrugged. „Alright, I'll go home. Merry Christmas Gibbs...”

„D'Inozzo!” Gibbs got up from his desk, and the younger man slowed slightly down.

„Yes?”

Gibbs held his eyes for some moments, then his expression became soft. „For once, you are right. There is nothing more beautiful... Merry Christmas.”

Tony stared at his boss, then nodded and left, totally bewildered by the behavior of the older man. Usually he avoided any discussion about Christmas. To him it was just a pathetic reminder of his three

failed marriages and his dead wife and daughter. But, Tony thought to himself, he could have sworn that just a few moments ago, he had heard Gibbs murmur Kate's name.

Gibbs opened the drawer of his desk and looked at the silver bottle of scotch. He pulled it out and opened it, but then hesitated. Here he was sitting, trying to get drunk in order to forget that it was Christmas – just like every year. Looking around, he found that was the only one left in the office. Everyone else had gone home to celebrate the holiday with the family.

Eventually, he put the bottle back in the drawer determinedly and grabbed his coat, and his cellphone from one of the pockets. While pulling the warm cloth on, he pressed speed dial two. It rang... once... twice... then a female voice answered.

„Col. Mann here...?“ It sounded somewhat sleepy.

„It's me.“ Gibbs started and hesitated. The other end remained silent. „I'm sorry for waking you up. I know you probably have to be up early tomorrow... I was just thinking that... maybe I could come over, and we could wake up together in the morning.“

Another long silence. Then: „Sure!“

The voice of the woman sounded surprised. „But I thought you had other plans...“

„I did.“ Gibbs smiled and looked at the portrait of himself, that Kate had once drawn and that was now lying in the drawer under the bottle with scotch – a constant reminder of her. „But... well... maybe I've had ghosts convincing me that work could wait for three days.“

„Wow...“ He could hear her laugh softly. „Well, then tell those ghosts thank you from me. I'll be waiting for you...“ Her last words turned into a whisper. „Jethro... I'm glad that you changed your mind.“

„Me too.“ He replied and then smiled softly. „Holly, I love you.“ It was the first time that he was saying the words outloud. „See you in half an hour.“ She didn't even have a chance to answer anything to his revelation before he ended the call.

He hurried to grab his scarf and throw the empty paper-cup away, then he hurried to the elevators and left the building two minutes later. When he stepped outside, he was surprised to find cold snowflakes hit him in the face. It had started to snow for the first time this year. He looked up at the sky, gazing into the swirling and dancing flakes that made their long way from the sky down to earth.

When he focused his attention back to the street in front of him, his eyes fell on the tree that was standing next to his car. For a split-second he believed to see a young woman in a red coat who was standing next to it, looking at him. But then she was gone, vanished in the chaos of the white flakes that would soon have covered the earth with a soft blanket.

„I'll see you again, Katie...“ he whispered into the snowy night, before he continued his way to his car.

It was Christmas Night.

- The END (Dec 24, 2007)

*Lyrics taken from the song „So Close“ by Jon McLaughlin, part of the Disney movie „Enchanted“, which was the Walt Disney Christmas feature 2007.*



## Christmas Dreams (Christmas 2008)

*Set in the past of England. Lady Kate is frustrated to hear that a friend of her recently deceased father is coming to her home in order to take over her guardianship. Not in her wildest dreams did she imagine that he might turn out to be the man of her dreams...*

**Something else for a change: Gibbs and Kate in a different period of history. If you don't like the idea, skip to the next chapter, otherwise enjoy!**

The snow covered streets of the provincial little town were muddy and gray. It was one of those cold days in December. As a matter of fact it was the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December – not that it made any difference for him.

The tall man stood with a slightly grumpy expression on Main Street – or rather on a very, very tiny version of the Main Street he knew from London. Christmas didn't have any meaning for him. It hadn't had any ever since that fateful day eight years ago, that had changed his life and turned him into the grumpy man he was today. Well, maybe his life would have taken this turn anyway, but the betrayal of his wife had definitely hastened him to enlist in the royal army.

If the behavior of his wife had disillusioned him about romance, his experiences in the army had done the rest for life in general. Christmas was merely a name for a rather ordinary day in his opinion.

He ran his hand through his dark gray hair. He wasn't really old yet – not if you didn't count 36 to be of particular age. Yet his hair had already turned from a very dark brown to grey.

The man shivered slightly when a cool breeze hit his face, and stuck his hands into the pockets of his long, fashionable coat. It wasn't that he had a lot of time, but he wanted to warm up before renting a carriage to continue his way. So he entered the next best shop that he could find...

XXXXXXXXXXXXXX

„Well, what do you think of these?“ The young woman in the blue satin dress held up some decorations in gold and silver, and looked at the female shopkeeper, whom she obviously knew very well.

„Beautiful,“ the woman, who had to be of the same age as the other, decided after a moment.

„Well,“ the woman in blue pouted slightly and then put the decorations aside. „Then that's not it! Ziva, I'm looking for something crude and distasteful! Something that will make a person who hates Christmas flee at once!“

The man who had just entered the the store was shaking the snowflakes from his coat, when he heard the young women's words and lifted his head in puzzlement at the statement. He estimated that she was around twenty years of age.

In his years at the army, he had lost that adolescent way of looking at a woman that younger men still possessed. And yet, he immediately noticed her delightfully slender waist that was embraced by the material of her dress like a second skin. Her chestnut colored hair made a pretty contrast to the light-blue of her dress. It had been a while since he had last considered the appearance of a woman even pleasant, but this one, he had to admit, was of extraordinary beauty. One of the kind that growing age would not reduce but add to.

„Good afternoon, ladies,“ he made his presence known with a smile. He knew that he had still this way about him: a charming smile that women fell for. But these women barely noticed him, and he felt almost hurt in his pride.

„Well, how about the green one then?“ 'Blue dress' asked, and held up an awfully decorated green branch.

„If you want to turn your home into an inhospitable environment?“ the woman called Ziva replied. The other one laughed.

„You know, I don't understand why you even sell these decorations if you find them 'inhospitable'.“

„Well, a girl has to live. We can't all be of aristocratic descent and live from our inheritance!“ Ziva commented dryly and threw a colorful blanket at her. „Here, something for your table, to match the awfulness on your ceiling. What I don't understand is, why a tasteful woman like you wants her home to look like a cheap brothel on Christmas Eve!“

The man stepped forward and couldn't suppress a smile. „A very valid question!“ he interrupted the two women, and eventually caught their attention.

Ziva rushed to his side immediately to greet him, obviously embarrassed and afraid to have insulted him. The other woman simply smiled at him.

„Well, Milord, I have very good reasons, any of which would do nothing but bore you, I'm sure.“ she replied politely and smiled.

„Try me, Miss...“ he replied, pausing and waiting for her to introduce herself.

„Miss Caitlyn Todd.“ she smiled.

Fortunately his composure was well trained and so he didn't lose the soft smile, although inwardly he was completely stunned. Caitlyn Todd... interesting.

She was the reason for which he was here: the daughter of his old friend. Three weeks ago he had received a letter from his lawyer. It had informed him that his friend had passed away two years ago, and that his only possession, his house, was passed on to his only daughter. Of whom he was to be the guardian and administrator of her possessions until she was either married or reached the age of twenty-five.

He had last seen her when she had been a little girl of about eight years, a cheerful little thing who had caused a lot of trouble.

He would have never thought that she'd turn into such a beautiful woman someday. A part of him had somehow expected to find a childlike young girl – instead he found a stunningly beautiful lady who almost made him forget about his manners for a while.

„Well,“ he smiled charmingly, „I'm pleased to meet you, Miss Caitlyn.“ Amused, he noticed that she blushed slightly. „Now, why don't you tell me about those reasons of yours? I assure you, I'd be very interested!“

„Alright,“ she eventually agreed. „Maybe you can help me choose! I'm in a bit of a difficult situation. I'm awaiting a – um – visitor. Let's just say I'm not so fond of having him in my house. I know he rather dislikes Christmas, so my plan is to make my house look as merry and joyful as possible, but in the most crude way, so that it will drive him away as soon as possible.“

„I see,“ the man nodded, well aware, that by that 'visitor' she was referring to him. „so that he will leave as soon as he can?“ Luckily he had arrived today already. All of his letters had announced him to arrived tomorrow morning.

„That's the idea!“ she nodded, obviously relieved that he understood her. „By the way, you didn't even introduce yourself.“

„Oh,“ he smiled, „You can call me Gibbs if you like.“

„Gibbs?“ she arched an eyebrow in confusion – an expression that, he found, looked really charming on her.

„Yes, it's a nickname.“

„I see,“ she nodded. „So, Mr. -um- Gibbs, what do you think? Should the green one do?“

Gibbs approached her until he was standing close behind her, looking over her shoulder. He knew, that this would be absolutely inappropriate if they were strangers. But as, technically, he was part of her family, he took the liberty. Of course he didn't listen to the little voice inside of him that his interest in her did most definitely go beyond that of a protector, but was rather of sexual nature.

„If it was me,“ he said lowly, close to her ear and inhaled the flowery scent of her long curly hair, „I would go for the silvery and gold things. They yell Christmas all over the place.“

„Really?“ she thought, holding the decoration in question up to eye it skeptically.

„So, who is that person that you are bothering yourself this much for?“

„Oh, as it turns out, my dear father prearranged for something like a guardian for me before he died two years ago. I mean, it's ridiculous, I've been living for myself for two years now, and all of a sudden this man shows up and wants to take over my house as if I was a little child of twelve years! I want to get rid of him as soon as possible.“ she turned around smiling openly. „Don't think I'm living all by myself. I have my old butler, Ducky, who has served my father already. And my maid Abby, and a good handful of servants.“

He nodded, his eyes deeply connected with hers. „So you despise the idea of being regimented.“

„Indeed,“ she nodded. „I've been managing the household for two years and I'm completely able to calculate and keep my books of household accounts. My father taught me to do so. And this man... well, I've heard he's the rather morose kind of guy who likes to control things. I would just hate to be put into the place of a pretty, but brainless young lady whose only obligation is to marry a rich man.“ Then she laughed. „I don't even know why I am telling you this much about my situation. I don't know anything about you.“

„Then I should satisfy your curiosity,“ he smiled flirtatiously and pushed himself away from her, looking around in the small store. „I'm an ex-soldier, who is visiting family in town.“

„What family? Maybe I know them?“ she smiled and pulled out an ugly silvery angel from the pile of decorations.

„Oh, I doubt that. They're a rather – um – small bunch who like to keep to themselves.“ He didn't know why he was lying. No, that wasn't entirely true. He knew that if he told her the truth, she would immediately assume a rather hostile position towards him, and hostile wasn't something he wanted this woman to be. She was spirited, and somewhat different from the women he was used to, and that was refreshing.

It was obvious that she was used to saying what was on her mind, instead of pretending and putting on dozens of masks to hide her true feelings.

„So you don't come from here?“ she asked, and he didn't know if it was his imagination, but he could swear that he heard disappointment from her voice.

„No, I don't... I am considering settling down here though. A man of my age can't stay on the road forever.“

„Well, you are not that old yet,“ she contradicted and gave him an open smile that warmed his heart – a feeling entirely forgotten. His expression became somewhat serious, when he noticed her open flirtation.

„Well, Lady Caitlyn, I just hope you are not that open and coquettish with every man, otherwise a guardian might be a good idea.“ He didn't know why he said that, didn't know why he had to turn her down once she touched his heart, but something inside him just told him that he had to.

Her expression changed immediately, and she put the angel back onto the pile of decorations with a cold stare, and then turned to face Ziva. „Maybe I should leave, and come back later.“

Ziva, who had followed their conversation with wide eyes, handed her her long cape silently. Kate slung the thick, furry material around her shoulders and then walked out of the store with her head held high.

The man's comment had insulted her in the worst possible way, as by his statement he had implied that she was cultivating romantic relationships to more than one young man in the town. Walking away was the only decent thing for a proud and honorable young woman to do.

Gibbs noticed that the young shopkeeper was shooting looks at him that could have killed him if they had been able to do so.

„You know,“ she said snappily, „maybe you should work on your manners, Sir! Insulting decent young ladies is certainly not going to win you friends in this town.“

He growled angrily, mainly angry at himself for this slip in behavior. „It was a valid assumption!“

„Well, I hold to your advantage that you are new to this town, and do not know Lady Katie yet. She's one of the most honorable and decent women I've met. Sure, she usually says what's on her mind, and that doesn't win her any friends among the local aristocratic young men, but everybody in town really enjoys her presence.“ She sighed angrily. „When you started a conversation with her, I thought you might be different from all those cocky, arrogant noble men, who mistake forthrightness for slutty behavior. But I guess you're just the same as all of them... Good day, Sir!“ Said it, and turned around on her heel to vanish in the private rooms in the back of the shop.

Gibbs stood there, just staring at the curtain behind which the young shopkeeper had vanished. He truly felt like an idiot and that was a feeling he wasn't particular fond of.

Growling, he turned around on his heel to leave the shop and step on the muddy and cold street again. Thick snowflakes were falling down from the sky, and he felt as if the soft breeze from earlier on had become even more freezing.

He looked around on the street, until he had spotted the female figure in the blue dress. Hurriedly, he followed her, pulling his coat into his face. When he reached her, he grabbed her arm.

„Lady Caitlyn... wait a moment, please...“

She kept her pace up and tore her arm out of his grip. „I have nothing more to say to you.“

„I apologize for what I said in there. It was unnecessary and rude.“

„That it was indeed,“ she agreed, but still kept her pace. The bottom of her dress was already soaked from the mud and snow from the street and her brown hair was slightly covered in snowflakes. „It was insulting!“ she snapped and then looked at him. „And humiliating!“

He stopped in shock when he saw tears glisten in her eyes. Damn! He ran his hand through his hair with a sigh of self-loathing. This was just perfect. In fact, it fitted the perfection that had become tradition on Christmas over the last few years. It was either being cheated on, or being stuck in a hostile attack in a warzone, or... well... insulting a decent young woman whom he was to be the guardian of.

He set his legs into motion again, following her. „Lady Caitlyn!“ She didn't react, but sped up. „Katie!“

When she heard this familiar nickname, that only her friends used to call her, she stopped abruptly and faced him. „You are a scumbag!“ she informed him angrily.

„Fair enough,“ he nodded.

„And you are not my friend! Stop calling me as if we knew each other. It's enough that you think, I am leading a slutty life. No need to make the whole town believe it.“ she snapped, and turned to rush away again. He growled and kept up with her speed.

Alright, so he had insulted her, but not accepting his apology was completely unreasonable, and he would not accept this misdemeanor.

She turned left to cross the street, but in her hurry she didn't watch her steps. She didn't even realize what exactly happened, she just felt her feet slip away from under her all of a sudden. She was too shocked to even scream, and before she had the chance to do so, she felt strong arms catch her and pull her towards a broad chest. Only then did she let out a small shocked gasp.

„I told you to slow down,“ an all-too familiar voice murmured softly. „You could have broken your neck.“

„I-I...“ she stuttered, and steadied herself on her feet, using Gibbs' broad chest to keep her balance. „I don't know what happened.“

„You slipped.“ he told her. „And you almost hit the pavement. You don't want to spend Christmas in bed in a hospital, do you?“

„No,“ she replied shakily. „Tha-thank you.“ She rearranged her hair and pulled her cape into place, then tried to shake the snow and dirt of her dress. „Listen, I accept your apology. But you should go now. I'm sure that you have better things to do than following a clumsy young lady through the town.“

He laughed softly, „I don't actually... nothing urgent, at least. So I'd be happy to accompany you.“

He offered her his arm and after a little moment of hesitation, she placed hers in his. „I will have to take care of some more Christmas preparations though,“ she informed him. „I hope it won't disturb you.“

„Not at all,“ he replied, and gave her one of his soft smiles. She returned it hesitantly.

After she had listed all the shoppings that she still planned to do, they started for the first shop.

About three hours of conversation and six shops later, Kate was finally finished. She was giving her last instructions, and immediately, the shop servants hurried to carry all the goods she had purchased to the carriage, that Gibbs had offered.

Kate had told him that her own carriage would not return to the town until the evening, so she would have had to spend her time drinking a coffee or hot chocolate in one of the two cafés of the city. But she had gladly accepted Gibbs' offer, as it meant that she would have enough time today to start decorating the halls.

The man was waiting patiently by the carriage, silently wondering whether he and the young woman would still find a seat in between all the bags and boxes of shoppings. He smiled when the young lady eventually came out of the store, and all the goods were laden on the carriage. Kate said goodbye to Ziva, who was one of her close friends, as he had learned during the previous hours, and then smiled at the man who was waiting for her.

„I'm sorry to keep you waiting so long, but I'm afraid I won't have the chance to pay another visit to this town before Christmas, so I wanted to wish my friends a merry Christmas evening.“ she explained, „I am really grateful for your offer. I just hope that you will be able to leave my house in time. If this snow gets any worse it might turn into a snowstorm which will keep you there over Christmas.“

He simply smiled as an answer. Of course, he knew he should tell her that her house was actually his house as well, but for some reason he didn't want to destroy the friendly atmosphere yet.

„I am sure that your relatives are already awaiting your arrival with impatience,“ the young woman continued and stepped into the carriage with his help. Inside, she found a place near the window, and pushed some of the golden decorations aside.

„I do not think so,“ Gibbs replied, when he had entered the carriage, and pulled the door shut. Then he knocked on the roof twice, a sign for the coachman to start moving.

„Well, I cannot imagine any reason why they would not welcome such a charming man in their house,“ she smiled sweetly, and removed the cape from over her head, revealing her soft brown hair to him. Contrary to current fashion, she had not pinned up every single strand of her hair. Most of it was falling down freely, and only a few selected strands were pinned together. He thought again, that she was most beautiful woman he had ever seen. And at the same time, her appearance disturbed him. Her obviously rather free behavior might not only encourage him, but other men as well, and for some reason that thought outraged him.

„Excuse my curiosity, Milord, but don't you have a wife, who would like to spend Christmas with you?“ she continued, and leaned back against the backwall of the carriage. It was rumbling slowly over the uneven pavement which was covered with snow. The vats, which replaced the wheels during winter time, were not made for uneven city streets, but once they had left the city and the uneven pavement turned into the paths of the countryside, the much more even ground made their journey really comfortable.

„I had a wife once,“ Gibbs explained after a few moments.

„I'm sorry,“ Kate immediately said, assuming that the woman had died.

„I'm not,“ Gibbs returned immediately, „She cheated on me, and then decided to live with her lover. I'm surprised that you have never heard of the affair.“ It was only then that he realized she couldn't know what affair he was talking about, as he had never given her his full name.

„I wouldn't," replied the young woman to his surprise, „I usually don't stay long in places where gossip and rumor take over the conversations.“

He laughed, „Usually it's even on the balls and receptions.“

„As I said," she replied, „I don't stay in these places.“ She pulled her cape a little closer around her neck, as the motionlessness made her grow a little cold.

„You don't visit balls and receptions?" Gibbs asked and raised his eyebrows. „You should! You're still young.“

Her eyes narrowed, „So I should seek the company of men to find a suitable husband, while I'm still attractive, you mean?"

„Not what I said!"

„But that's what you thought! A young woman should marry and the younger she is, the better her chances are. It's what I have been told dozens of times. Yet, I can not bring myself to find any of these brainless scu... -um- male creatures, that you usually meet on occasions like balls attractive. They are not interested in me, or my thoughts. All they want is a pretty lady which they can show around and brag about – until she's aged and not as pretty anymore. Then they'll take a pretty young mistress in the city, and only show up at their home for reasons of courtesy.“

Gibbs smirked and looked out of the window, „You know, you're a little too grumpy for your age.“

„I'm not grumpy," Kate countered with a smile, „But I've experienced it. I've had two admirer by now. They flattered me with compliments and flowers, but as soon as we started to talk, it turned out that they didn't want to hear my opinion about the king's new strategy towards France or..."

„Well, in defense of my sex, a lady, who is interested in politics is rather uncommon.“ Gibbs interrupted her softly. „And especially young men feel a little overwhelmed when a woman shows intelligence – especially if she turns out to be more intelligent than him. I would be delighted to hear your opinions someday. I'm sure it would turn out to be a lively discussion.“ His eyes met hers and a smile crossed her face as she returned his look for several moments.

Then she turned her head away, asking almost casually, „Does that mean that you're planning to visit my house more often?"

He knew what she was really asking. Usually a man only visited a young lady more often when he started to court her. And damn, he shouldn't even be considering this possibility. He should take care that she found a suitable husband – a good match for her. That was what his dead friend would be expecting of him. And he didn't consider himself a good match for her. Sure, he was a wealthy man. He owned his own lands, and he had paid his dues to his homecountry, and served in the war – for which he had been rewarded with a seat in the parliament. He was far from being influential, because he was not really into political affairs. Still, most women considered him a very good match.

But Kate was young. She was almost half as young as he was. Of course, a marriage with an age difference of fourteen years was not at all entirely uncommon. Many young women married even older men. But Kate was the only child of his best friend, and he wouldn't betray the trust the man had put into him before his death. Which was the reason, why he should put an end to this charade and reveal his identity to her, before things would get out of hand.

„Kate, I need to tell you..." he started, when suddenly one of the coachmen on the roof yelled something, and then slowly, the carriage drifted to the side. Kate shrieked, when the whole carriage almost tipped over, but then stopped in a dangerously askew position.

Gibbs reacted with the instincts of a soldier and immediately pulled the young woman over against his body, before she could be buried under the dozens of boxes with the decorations, that were falling down to the sides. A few of the boxes fell onto them and then to the ground with a loud clattering sound. Then eventually the carriage was silent.

The young woman was pressed against Gibbs chest, and breathed heavily. She clasped the material of his coat and felt his strong muscles under the fabric. His scent enveloped her and she felt her cheeks flush when she realized how close she was to him. She had never felt the body of a man so intensely pressed against hers.

„You alright?“ The man eventually asked softly and Kate looked up at him, her face only inches away from his.

„Yes.“ She breathed in his scent and blushed even more. „I'm just... I... wow...“

„Yes,“ he chuckled, „That's what they all tell me.“

He was flirting with her! And he was so overstepping the line. She hit his chest softly, putting an angry expression onto her face.

„How dare you mock in a situation like this?“

He smirked and then looked up when one of the coachmen opened the door. „Milord, are you alright?“

„Yes, we are! What happened?“ Gibbs asked, immediately becoming serious again.

„The snow became so heavy that we couldn't see the path anymore. The carriage hit the ditch and it's too deep for the horses to pull it out. We'll have to unload the carriage and try it then.“

Gibbs' expression immediately became darker. „We have a lady in here. Do you expect her to sit in the snow for hours?“

„I'm afraid we have no other choice, Sir!“ The young man returned.

Kate saw the dangerous expression on the man's face, knowing that it was of course an impossible thing to ask of a young woman. But she had always loved to take walks in the snow, and they couldn't be far from her house anymore.

„It's alright, Milord! I'm sure these man are doing everything they can.“

He looked down into her face, and then eventually nodded. „Fine.“ Then he helped her to climb out of the carriage. The coachmen assisted as well as they could. The snow was still heavily falling down, and Kate immediately covered her head. If it kept snowing like this, the path would be impassable in a few hours. They had to hurry. She turned around and looked at the man who was just jumping down the carriage. She shielded her face from the icy breeze, that was playing with her dress. In a few hours they would be in a real snowstorm.

„My house is not far in that direction! We should walk there! If we start now, we might make it before the snowstorm hits us!“ she said loudly against the wind, and Gibbs hurried to her.

„Not an option! We would freeze in the storm!“ he returned loudly.

„But it's really...“ she started to counter, before his stare shut her up. This man was obviously used to giving orders and be the one in control.

„I am not going to risk your life. We might make it, but we might just as well be captured in the storm, or lose our way, and freeze to death. There's a forest over there! We'll go there and find shelter, until the carriage is ready to move again.“ He urged her to go over the field towards the forest. The snow had covered the whole field and reached up to her calves, soaking the lower part of her dress. Kate shivered.

„They will never be able to pull the carriage out before the snowstorm hits us!“ she tried it again, and then stopped. „Milord! I have an idea!“

„Kate!“ he said sharper now and grabbed her arm. „The forest will shield us from the most of the storm.“

„The horses!“ she yelled against the wind. „One of the coachmen can take a horse and ride back to the house! My carriage is ready to go, as it was planned to leave for the town in about an hour anyway. I'm sure my butler will immediately send it, and the coachman could show them the way! They could be here within the hour!“

Gibbs nodded. „Fine! But an hour is still a long time in an unprotected snowstorm! You will catch a cold.“

She surrendered, as his reasoning was flawless. So she followed him to a group of trees. Immediately, she had to admit that she was feeling better. The wind wasn't as sharp and cold anymore, and only a few snowflakes made their way through the trees. She shivered slightly and hugged her body with her arms.

„Stay here!“ The man ordered. „I will be back in a minute.“

With those words he hurried away. Kate looked into the dark forest and shivered slightly, then turned her head back towards the street. Although it was merely about thirty meters of field that was separating the forest from the path, she could barely see the carriage anymore. Only some vague shadows between the swirling snowflakes indicated, where the men were working.

A few seemingly endless moments later, Gibbs returned with a blanket. He placed it around the young woman's shoulders. „It's alright. One of the men will get help from your house.“ He rubbed her arms to keep her warm. „It's not sure whether the carriage will still get through though, so possibly they will just get a few horses and we'll have to ride back.“

„That's fine... I'm alright!“ She looked in the direction of the path, which she couldn't see anymore at all now.

„You should go help them!“ Kate thought. „Or at least be somewhere in sight.“

„I will not leave you alone in this forest.“ he stated clearly, knowing the reasons for which she had made this suggestion. It was absolutely unacceptable for a young, unmarried woman to be alone with a man – even if it was in a snowstorm like this. And he was sure that the coachmen would immediately talk about it once they were back in town. From experience he knew that gossip was a quick traveler. „Don't worry about your reputation, we'll take care of that later.“

This would be a great time to tell her that she needn't worry, because legally he was her custodian. True, normally circumstances like these would require a man to marry the woman in question. Ridiculous as it was to assume that any immoral actions could take place in a snowstorm, rumors spread too fast and nobody asked whether they were true. It was just assumed they were.

He would have to make a visit to all the important neighbors and introduce himself as Kate's guardian so that she would not become the sitting target for gossip in the county.

Not even one hour later, Gibbs had to admit that Kate's household had to be well organized and her servants loyal and hardworking. The carriage arrived just in time, with two extra horses and six servants to help pull the other carriage out of the ditch. It took only a few minutes to carry the boxes with the goods and shoppings into the other carriage. The servants would then follow in the second carriage which they had almost pulled out of the ditch when the carriage with Kate and Gibbs started.

They were both frozen through, and Kate was shaking from cold. They were sitting next to each other and Gibbs was rubbing her arms. Not even twenty minutes later they had reached her house. Warm light was shining through the windows into the cold snowy weather.

„I'm sorry..." Kate whispered, „It looks as if you cannot continue your journey to your relatives tonight!"

„Don't worry," he replied and opened the carriage door once the horses had stopped. „I'm just where I want to be."

He lifted her up into his arms and then hurried the few meters through the snow towards the house. The butler had already seen them arriving and opened the door. His hair was gray and his face aged, but Gibbs still recognized him.

„Ducky!" he greeted him.

„Milord!" the butler exclaimed in almost shocked surprise and bowed. „We didn't expect you to arrive that early, Sir. If I had known..."

„Don't worry," Gibbs interrupted him and let Kate down, who took a moment to understand the situation. „Tell the maids to prepare a hot bath for this young lady. And bring us some hot grog, will you? We need to warm up, before we catch a cold."

„Very well, Mylord." And with these words he hurried away.

Kate just stared at her servant and felt as if she hadn't even been present. Very slowly, her mind grasped the meaning of the old butler's behavior. She was aware of the fact that Ducky still knew her guardian in person, and the way he behaved towards the man could only mean that he was standing higher than the lady of the house. She inhaled deeply, as she became more and more angry. It wasn't possible.

„You? You... are..." she almost hissed angrily.

„Yes." he nodded. But before he had any chance to add something, Kate had turned around and rushed up the stairs, muttering very unlady-like curses. Gibbs' eyes narrowed and he followed the young woman.

„Where are you going?" he requested to know, and she turned to him. His eyes were sparking with rage.

„I am getting rid of my wet clothes and then taking a bath. Or do I need to ask permission to do all this from now on, 'Milord'?" she asked snappily, and the way she ironically pronounced his title made him angry.

She didn't care for the dangerous expression on his face and just rushed away. Gibbs looked after her somewhat incredulous. He wasn't used to people standing up to him. A part of him could of course understand her rage. But at the same time, she should be apologizing to him. She had this whole plan worked out to drive him out of his own house, and she had openly told him every detail of it. Hell, he

had even helped her buy all these things. She should be embarrassed! Instead she was mocking his title and disrespecting him. He would not accept that.

With a growl he started after her, following the maids who were carrying buckets of hot water. Without any previous warning he pushed open the door and entered the young woman's personal chambers. Kate shrieked in surprise, as her personal maid Abygail had just helped her out of her soaked dress, and she was now standing in the room wearing only her white shift dress.

„How dare you!“ she exclaimed in disbelief and grabbed a silky, thin robe from her sofa to cover her half-nakedness.

The maids in the room stood motionless, staring at the male intruder. None of them dared to move even an inch, when they saw the dark expression on the face of the older man. Kate seemed to be the only unimpressed person in the room.

„You have no right to step into my private rooms as if they were your own!“

Gibbs looked at the maids. „Leave us alone, will you?“ he ordered, and waited until the women had left the room. When the door clicked shut, he looked at the young woman in front of him again.

„Don't ever disrespect me like this again!“ he said dangerously low.

„I disrespected you?!?“ she repeated his accusation and stepped back. „You played this whole comedy. You knew who I was the whole time, and yet you preferred not to tell me about our relation! You flirted with me and played those charms of yours. I really thought that... that...“ She shut up and inhaled. „You made fun of me, and now you expect me to just smile and welcome you in my house?“ She let herself sink onto the couch and sighed in defeat. „You had your fun, Milord. Now please, allow me some privacy...“

Gibbs growled. „You had this whole conspiracy planned to drive me from this house. What's with all the Christmas decorations you bought?“

„That's because I didn't want to have you here! Because I heard what you were like!“

„And what would that be?“ Gibbs asked darkly. Kate looked up, meeting his eyes fiercely.

„A grumpy old bastard who has been disappointed by life and takes it out on the persons around him!“ she snapped and he was put off by her honesty for a moment.

„'S that what you think of me?“ he snapped back.

„Do you want to know the truth? When I met you, I would have never considered the possibility, that you could be that man. Of course you were being a bastard when you insulted me – but you were also charming and friendly. Maybe a little too arrogant, but never grumpy and mean. But now I'm thinking that I misjudged your character by that first impression.“ She had taken a few steps towards him in her anger, and when she ended her speech, they were standing close to each other and Kate was glaring into his eyes.

„I told you not to pay attention to gossip!“ Gibbs growled angrily, and Kate chuckled ironically.

„I don't! But do you expect me to thank you for embarrassing me?“ she asked, feeling the heat of his body through the thin shift dress. She couldn't care less for her clothing, or rather the lack thereof.

„Do you expect me to reward you for trying to make fun of me with the help of your whole domestic staff? I am a proud man, and I don't like to be fooled.“ he explained almost coldly, calming down slowly.

„Neither do I!“ Her brown eyes were still locked with his blue ones. Only after a while she lowered them to a point somewhere close to his neck. „When I met you and then later on in the carriage I just... I thought... I mean, I have never met a man with whom talking seemed to be so easy. I felt comfortable. You should have told me that it was all fake.“ She turned around quickly and went back to her couch.

Gibbs looked at her, instantly understanding what she was implying. At first he wanted to tell her that it had not been fake. That he had not told her who he was, because he had actually enjoyed their little banter and her playful honesty. But then he remembered their relation. He was supposed to take care of her and secure a future for her. He was to organize her household and guard her until she was safe and her husband could take over for him. His duty was to do what was best for her. Happiness and hope were two virtues which life would take as a sacrifice for experience first. And the earlier she learned that, the less painful it would be.

He ignored the sting in a part of his heart, that he didn't even know still existed, when he turned away from her, and said, „I am your guardian, no more and no less. Think about that as you want, but this will be my household from now on and you will do as you are being told.“ And then he left the room, slamming the door shut behind him.

Kate just stared through the window outside into the cold winter night. Snowflakes were still dancing down from the skies, and the edges of the windows were covered in icy crystals which were glistening in the warm light of the candle that was standing on a small table. Eventually, a sob escaped her throat and she felt tears burn in her eyes. She remembered how Gibbs had flirted with her, how warm his body had felt, when she was pressed against him in the carriage and how charming he had been. And all of that had been a lie. He had made fun of her. She had never felt this humiliated in her life.

Shivering, she let herself sink onto her knees, her chest trembling from sobs. Through tear-clouded eyes, she looked out of the window, and then started to cry. Her heart ached with a pain she had never known before and she could not even come up with a reasonable explanation for it...

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Outside of her room, Gibbs was leaning against the door, hating himself for having been so heartless. He was at an age at which one was generally considered to be experienced and reasonable. And yet, the unreasonable urge to go back into her room and apologize to her became almost overwhelming.

And then he heard her soft sobs, and he felt as if a knife bore into his heart.

It was unreasonable. He knew that what he was said had been for the best of her, and yet he felt the need to soothe her pain; to cradle her up in his arms and assure her that everything would be fine; to promise her happiness.

His face hardened and determinedly, he walked away from her room, ignoring the pain inside. The world was cold. It had been for him and it would be for her. And there was nothing he could do that would change that...

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Gibbs looked up from the papers he had been reading through, when the old door to the study room opened with a soft squeaking noise, and the old butler Ducky came in, followed by a few servants who were carrying Christmas decorations.

„I am sorry to disturb you, master, but the lady ordered to decorate the halls and rooms.“

Gibbs' eyes fell on the clock on the wall. It was still very early in the morning and the sun had not even risen yet – although dawn already announced its presence. He raised his eyebrows. „She's awake that early in the morning?“

„Yes, Sir. On Christmas Day, the lady always gets up early to organize the day. A lot needs to be prepared for the Christmas celebrations.“ The butler explained. Gibbs nodded.

„Very well, but leave this room out. I need silence for the moment.“ he ordered, and was about to turn his attention back on the calculations, when the old butler surprised him by his reaction.

„I'm sorry, Sir, but the young lady was very explicit in her orders. This is her working room, and she wants it properly decorated.“

Gibbs raised slowly from his chair. „I believe it has been made clear that my word weighs more than that of the young lady.“ he almost bellowed grumpily. Ducky mustered him for a moment, then he turned around to the servants.

„You heard the masters word. Let's move on to the main hall...“ The butler waited until the servants had left the room, then he closed the door discreetly and turned around to look at the grumpy man.

„Sir, pardon my honesty, but I have known you for a long time and you seem to have changed quite a lot.“

„It's been nine years since we last met,“ Gibbs confirmed his statement. „A lot of things have happened.“

„So I have heard,“ the butler noted dryly and rearranged some of the vases on the nearby table. It was a courteous way of referring to the rumors that had been going around. „Still, the young lady deserves a chance. Her father has been dead for two years and all this time she has managed this household her own way.“

Gibbs looked back down onto the papers. „So?“ he asked almost gruff.

„I'm just saying...“ The butler looked at the man near the desk with a somewhat displeased expression on his face. „Rumor has it, that the young lady looked as if she had cried the whole night long last night.“ Ducky mentioned and acted as if his whole concentration was on cleaning the bookshelves. „You do not by any chance know a reason why she would?“

The man at the desk sighed and put the quill aside. „I cannot act as if I was her admirer when I am supposed to be her guardian!“ He spoke these words more to himself than to the old butler, and when he raised his head, he could read from the expression of the servant that he was surprised. An emotion so openly displayed was really rare for the man, Gibbs knew that.

„Well, is there a good reason why she would think that you intended to court her, Sir?“

„There might be.“ Gibbs answered. „When I saw her I didn't know who she was, and I started to be flirtatious towards her before I even realized.“

„And why would that be, Sir?“ The old butler continued his questions. Gibbs sighed.

„I have to admit that I was captured by her natural charms. She has a way around her that I have never seen in any woman ever before.“ A vivid image of the young woman in the decoration shop came to his mind, how she had been standing in front of him with her light-blue dress, that silky brown hair and her deep, brown eyes. He growled, pulling himself out of this fantasy. „But of course, as soon as I realized who she was, I knew what my duties were.“

„Mmm...“ the man nodded thoughtfully. „With all due respect Sir, I do not see your problem. Obviously, the young lady was equally fascinated.“

„Well, she better not be!“ Gibbs retorted in a hard voice. „Life doesn't give us what we want to have. It's better she learns that early in her life, then she won't put her hopes up.“

„I see,“ Ducky nodded, having finished cleaning the room, „so you're assuming that because your wife cheated on you and left you, and life became disappointing afterwards, that it would be the same for every other person on this planet. That's an interesting world view. Have you ever considered all those couples that still live together happily married?“ He smiled inwardly at the perplexed expression of the man sitting at the desk, and bowed. „Have a good day Sir.“ With these words he left the room.

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Kate kept herself busy. She knew from experience that it was the only way to keep herself from drowning in her sorrows. So she delegated the servants, observed how they decorated the great entrance hall and the living room with holly and mistletoes, and took charge of the decoration of the great Christmas tree.

By the time they were almost finished with the tree, she had almost forgotten about the unwanted presence of her new 'guardian' in the house. She was just giggling and showering her personal maid Abby with the rest of the leaves of holly, the servants around them laughing and joking along with them, when Gibbs came down the stairs into the entrance hall, eyeing the scenario with obvious displeasure on his face.

Immediately, the servants became silent, and Kate, who was standing on a ladder to be able to reach the wall above the entrance door, turned around surprised.

„What's going on here?“ Gibbs asked, looking around.

„We're just...“ Abby started, fumbling the holly out of her hair, „...decorating the hall, Sir! We do it every year, but this year we have especially much holly. Much more than last year. Of course we...“ The young woman started to bubble, until she was interrupted by Ducky with a sharp „Abygail!“

The young maid was known for talking a little too much. Kate stepped down the ladder and stroked the dirt and leaves from her long dress. „I didn't know that I would need your permission to decorate my home.“ she informed him shortly.

From the corner of his eyes, Gibbs saw the old butler raise an eyebrow. He looked from the servants to the pretty young woman, and then nodded. „Carry on... but be careful on that ladder. Let one of the young men take care of the high decorations.“

And with that he turned around to enter the living room. Kate smiled at her servants, and murmured „Carry on!“ before grabbing the hems of her dress and following him quickly.

„I do this every year!“ she informed him brusquely, when she had caught up with him in front of the door to her living room.

He turned around, finding her standing right in front of him. „I am just concerned about your safety.“ His remark was spoken calm and almost kind.

She sighed and looked at him, taking in every detail of his face. He looked like a man who had been disappointed in life. Not that this was any excuse – or her problem for that matter – but it was Christmas, and her father had taught her to be a kind person.

„Why don't you join us, you could help us with the decorations.“ she proposed friendly and for a split second he looked surprised. Then he shook his head. „I am sorry, I have a lot of work to do. I need to look through the calculations for the last two years and...”

„But it's Christmas!“ Kate interrupted him. „I do not want to fight with you over my – our house – throughout the whole Christmas season.“

His face stayed hard and grumpily he retorted, „Some things just shouldn't be put off too long – especially not for a festivity.“

That was the moment when Abby, who was just passing them by with a beautiful bouquet of Christmas flowers, exclaimed, „The master and the young lady are standing under a mistletoe!“

Instantly, the servants were silent again, and their eyes were on the couple, who looked around rather perplexed.

Kate raised her eyes and spotted the large mistletoe which was hanging on the wall right above them.

„Who put that up there?“ she asked strictly, not remembering having ordered mistletoe to be hung up near the living room.

The old butler Ducky approached with a smile. „You need to kiss him, Miss Kate. It's tradition. Or do you want to bring bad luck over this household.“

Kate looked at the man who was standing in front of her, her heart racing. He was looking back at her with an equally stunned look. Then all of a sudden he did something that came totally unexpected for her. His expression turned soft and with the hint of a smile, he bent forward and pulled her slender body a little closer to his. She gasped, but before she could protest, she felt his warm, soft lips touching hers in a butterfly kiss. At first she froze against him, her hands lying on the fabric of his shirt near his waist. She was shocked by his sudden closeness, and the feelings he evoked with it.

Then his lips softly moved along hers, enticing her to open her lips. Before she even realized it, she was reacting to him. Her hands moved up to his arms, and she leaned into the kiss, her lips parting very softly.

Incredibly tender, and well aware of her innocence, Gibbs caressed her lips with his, before he eventually deepened the kiss. It was so natural, that neither of them thought about it. It felt right to kiss her, and for a brief eternity he thought that this was what he should have been doing his whole life.

Endlessly, he explored her mouth with his tongue, pulling her body closer against his, until her chest was pressed against his. She could feel his strength, the muscles under his clothing, while her hands moved up slowly until they were resting on his shoulders.

When eventually, Gibbs broke the kiss, the young woman sighed regretful and opened her eyes. For a moment she stared at him in complete bewilderment, before she became aware of the servants who were surrounding them, and were now starting to clap and cheer. Embarrassed, Kate touched her lips with her fingers and turned around, her cheeks flushed.

„I... we... we still have a lot of work to do until tonight...” she stuttered, putting on a strict expression when she was looking at the servants. „Let's get started...” The maids started to get back to their work, while Kate was still standing there in the room, trying to regain her composure. She turned slightly, looking at the man who was still leaning in the door frame and returning her look with a mysterious expression on his face. Feeling flushed and heated, she eventually turned and almost ran away to refresh herself.

Gibbs observed her thoughtfully. What had gotten into him? When he had bent down, he had intended to peek a short kiss on her lips and then return to his work – just to satisfy the servants. But once he had felt the softness of her lips, smelled her soft scent – a mixture of holly, cinamon and fresh winter air – and touched her warm body which seemed to melt so perfectly into his, he had not been able to stop touching her. He had been drawn to her warmth, thinking for a short moment, that she might hold in store what he had been looking for all his life. And then things had gotten out of hand. Instead of a quick kiss, he had turned it into a heated exploration of her lips which went far beyond a traditional kiss under the mistletoe.

And the way her brown eyes had looked at him in complete bewilderment told him, that her feelings were similar to his.

He sighed and straightened himself out. That was the moment in which Ducky passed him by with a mysterious smile. „You're welcome,“ he rasped, and then vanished in the hallway that led to the kitchen. Gibbs couldn't help but stare after the sneaky butler. Maybe he should feel thankful to his old friend after all...

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A few hours later, everything was prepared for the celebration. The Christmas tree was standing, and all the presents had been spread around it.

Throughout the previous years, it had become a tradition for Kate to celebrate Christmas in the midst of her servants and their families. So she was used to having more than twenty people around her on Christmas evening.

But today it was different. She had spent the whole day trying to distract herself from the disturbingly pleasant kiss, that she had shared with Gibbs – a man whom she had decided to hate about a week ago. But then she had met him in the town, not knowing who he was, and she had found him attractive and charming. Yet, he had made clear that he would never be more than her guardian.

She needed to figure out a way to deal with her very disturbing emotions, which confused her more than anything else ever had.

And that was the reason why she wished for some privacy to think.

Christmas was always very beautiful in her house. Ducky and a few other servants brought the musical instruments they knew how to play, and Abby and another young maid sang the traditional songs. Every year they surprised the present guests with a new song they had studied throughout the year. The candles on the big tree were burning while five children, three girls and two boys whose parents were among her servants, jumped up and down impatiently, waiting for the big moment when they would finally be allowed to search for their present under the tree.

It was a lovely and warm atmosphere, and not even Gibbs could elude the celebration.

Sometime during the little concert he left the study room and observed the scenery from the small balcony that the stairs formed. His eyes were resting on the young lady of the house the whole time, and with every minute his fascination with her grew. Ever since the kiss he could no longer see her as his protégé – not that he had ever done so, if he was truly honest with himself – but he saw in her a fascinating young lady with a spirit that he had lost throughout the disappointments in his life and experiences in the war; a spirit which seemed to infect him and awaken something inside of him that he had believed to be gone forever. He felt almost young again.

He smiled when Kate was admiring a little, wooden ship one of the children had made for her. It was, objectively spoken, ugly and deformed, but she thanked the child with so much joy and enthusiasm as if she had been given the crown jewels of England. She had a quality that all the women he had met until now had lacked – that included his first wife. Jennifer had always searched for more, she had never been contented with what he could offer her. Sure, their marriage had been arranged by his parents, but after a while he had learned to love her and wanted her to be happy. That feeling had obviously not been mutual. Jennifer had wanted a husband with an influential position at court, but he had always been more of a practical man. He wasn't so much interested in politics and the hypocrisy connected with it, as he was in doing things himself. Jennifer on the other hand had been a really material woman, and nothing he had done had truly made her happy.

Observing this joyful little ceremony downstairs, he suddenly got the feeling that it had never been meant to work out with Jennifer. She had not been the right woman. Whereas Kate...

Gibbs sighed and weighed the glass with whiskey in his hand. Surely he would someday go to hell for betraying his old friend like this. Instead of making sure his daughter would be safely married to a wealthy member of the county, he considered something completely selfish...

„Sir Fornell always cared more for the happiness of his daughter than for what society dictated.“

Gibbs turned around to find Ducky next to him who was handing him a glass of traditional Christmas tea. He raised his eyebrow in puzzlement, wondering if the butler possessed the ability to read his mind.

„What do you mean?“

„Every year, young Katie begged him for a huge Christmas ceremony, and one year he surprised her by holding a ceremony like this for all of his servants and their families. Ever since then, this has become a tradition in the family. The old lord never cared much for what society dictated to be best for a young woman. All he cared for was that she was happy.“ The man smiled and then rearranged the monocle on his nose. With a neutral face he turned around. „I am sure he would want you to take just the same values into consideration.“

And before Gibbs could ask him what he was trying to say, he was gone.

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Later that night, after the children had finally been put to bed, and the main part of the ceremony was finished, Kate eventually found the silence she had been wishing for the whole day. She shivered when she stepped out of the back door into the huge garden which belonged to her house. The winter air was cold and icy, and her warm breath puffed in white clouds towards the sky. Snowflakes were still falling down, and the young woman stepped through the thick blanket of snow on the ground, hugging her body with her hands.

She was only wearing her white dress which she spared for festivities like Christmas. It was a beautiful, but also rather thin dress, revealing most of her shoulders and cleavage.

Kate inhaled deeply and looked up into the sky, closing her eyes when the snowflakes hit her skin. The feeling was wonderful, and the thick flakes cooled her skin and put her mind to a peaceful rest. She gazed up into the skies, looking into the millions of dancing and twirling snowflakes.

Slowly, she strolled through the snow, until she had reached to the small fountain which made a beautiful decoration during summer and spring seasons. Oblivious to her surroundings she drew little strokes into the blanket of snow, which was lying on the stony surface that framed the fountain.

When all of a sudden she heard steps behind her in the snow, she turned around, awaiting to find her butler, who would hand her a glass of hot glogg – as he did every year.

But instead she found Gibbs approaching her position, his face turned up to look at the sky. When he reached her, he looked down at her and his eyes locked with hers, his expression soft and gentle. She immediately blushed, as she had never seen an expression like this on his face before.

„It's a beautiful night, isn't it?“ she opened up courteously, after a long moment of silence. He nodded.

„It is indeed. Winter on the countryside truly feels more intense and peaceful than it does in the city.“ he agreed and Kate smiled, her fingers playing with the cold snow. The snowflakes were starting to cover her brown hair, and paired with her white dress, she almost looked like the snow princess herself.

„Kate,“ the man eventually started, his tone more serious than before, which caught the young woman's attention. His hand touched her cheek softly, and his thumb moved over her lower lip. Her body tightened slightly in surprise at this unsuspected caress. „I know, our start was – well, let's just say it was not perfect.“

„No, it wasn't,“ the young woman agreed.

„And I behaved like... like...“

„A bastard?“ Kate helped out with a smile, which made him raise his eyebrows in a silent warning. Her smile grew wider.

„Something like that,“ he agreed with a nod, and she realized that this man was not one who often apologized for his actions. She touched his hand with hers in the softest gesture, almost afraid that he would push her away again; that he was just playing with her.

„I came here because I had received a letter by my solicitor, that my oldest friend had assigned me the guardianship of his daughter. And I was determined to find a good match for her and then return to my life as soon as possible.“ He inhaled and just looked at her for a moment. „That was before I knew you.“

„And now?“ Kate asked lowly, holding her breath in anticipation of what he was about to say.

„Now I have seen that you are more than capable of keeping the house. So, I have two options for you to choose from now. I can leave as soon as the snow starts to melt and the streets are passable again. I would then expect a written letter by you, reporting the status of the house, once a month until you turn twenty-five or get married.“

A shadow fell over her face and she retracted her hand from his. „Oh.“ She turned her eyes away from him to look at the small fountain into which the snowflakes were still silently falling. „What's the second option?“

„You allow me to court you properly. In that case I would of course have to find an apartment in the town, because we don't want to risk ruining your reputation.“

She gasped and turned her head to look at him totally stunned. For a few moments, she could do nothing but simply gaze at him, then she sat down on the stony frame of the fountain, not caring for the thick blanket of snow which she sank into. „What?“ she asked perplexed and in complete disbelief.

„As I said,“ Gibbs explained almost coolly, mistaking her bewilderment for shock at his proposal, „It is your choice to make.“

„I'm stubborn!“ she suddenly informed him and looked up. „And you are used to being in control. I'm not used to obey.“

„Yes, I figured that,“ he answered, still not conveying any kind of emotion.

„I am not like the other ladies that you have met at court.“

„Which I'm grateful for,“ he nodded, realizing slowly, that she was not considering turning him down because of himself, but because she thought she wouldn't be able to satisfy him.

„You told me that you would never be more than my guardian and...”

„Kate!“ he stopped her before she could give him another reason for not taking the second option. Softly he pulled her up from the cold surface and she almost tumbled against him. Immediately he closed his arms around her. He felt her catch her breath, her fingers clutching the material of his jacket softly, when she raised her head to look at him. Her eyes shimmered warmly, and she was just about to speak when he closed her lips with his mouth and muffled every word that she had intended to say.

This time he was not as gentle as he had been under the mistletoe. Passionately, his tongue sought hers in a fierce exploration, until she was moaning against him and her body softening under his touch. She wrapped her arms around him and returned his kiss with equal fire until he broke the kiss, but not their body contact and locked his eyes with hers deeply. „There is of course also a third option.“ He paused a moment to give her time to recover from the kiss and refocusing her concentration on what he was saying. Then he spoke his proposal. “Marry me!”

She caught her breath, just staring at him and trying to figure out whether he was mocking her or being serious. Eventually she took a step back, breaking contact with him.

The snow fell down stronger again and Kate felt a soft shiver run through her body. „Why?“ she whispered shakily.

„Katie, you shouldn't be asking for the reasons if a man proposes to you!“ he informed her in a mock-gruff tone, and she laughed at the intimate nickname that he was using.

„Also, a man shouldn't propose out of the blue!“ she countered with a soft smile and lifted her hand to run her fingers through his dark hair, which was pervaded by gray streaks.

Gibbs smirked and looked at her flirtatiously. „What about the kiss made you think that it came out of the blue,“ he countered softly. „Of course, if you accepted my proposal right away, I wouldn't have to go through the trouble of finding a suitable place in the town.“

„What if I didn't accept at all?“ she smiled playfully and he shrugged amused.

„Then I would have to throw you over my shoulders and lock you up somewhere until you couldn't think of anything but how much you love me,“ he retorted and chuckled at her almost outraged scoff. Then he added, „But... I have a feeling that this won't be necessary!“

He grabbed her hand and pulled her towards him until she fell back against his chest. His hands moved to her waist while he was looking into her eyes intently. „So, what is your answer? Marry me, or never seeing me again?“

„Well, I could certainly not live with never seeing you again.“ she whispered and trembled in anticipation when he approached her lips with his.

„So?“ he asked amused.

„So, I will marry you!“ she smiled. „But I have one condition!“

„I'm listening.“

„I will be allowed to decorate the house for Christmas every year!“ she stated seriously, and he started to laugh.

For the first time in years he felt like Christmas and had the feeling that maybe his life was not over yet. And he was sure that he wanted to remember this Christmas night forever.

„Agreed!“ he nodded, and then indulged her into a series of deep kisses amidst the twirling dance of the snowflakes that covered the world in a white blanket of beauty on Christmas Eve.

The End (Dec 24, 2008)

## In Another Dream Ep. 1: Silver Moon

***Warning: BDSM-related setting! Also angry sex!***

*This story takes place outside the NCIS universe and puts the characters into a different setting altogether: a society in which women are slaves. In this setting, Kate is a rebel, a warrior woman, who has been hiding in the woods for years. But one day she gets captured by a disturbingly handsome lord...*

*This small piece was kind of inspired by xdawnfirex's (Rainne) story "The Floods cannot drown it", which can be found on LiveJournal: <http://awordlikewater.livejournal.com/46001.html>*

The twinkle of the silver blade in the pale moonlight, which he saw in the corner of his eye, was the only warning he got. He spun around and grabbed her wrist, only to feel her other hand punch him right into his stomach. If she hadn't carried a deadly weapon in her hand and the intention to use it in her eyes, he would have laughed at the almost-softness of her punch.

„Kate!“ he barked and tried to twist her hand. She squealed, but that sound of pain immediately turned into one of blind rage.

„Bastard!“ she screamed into his face. It was his own fault, she repeated to herself over and over again. She had warned him to let her go, otherwise she would kill him. But he had just chuckled, and ordered this— this lackey of his— what was his name? Tony. He had ordered Tony to let the net down which she was captured in, and then bound her and brought her here into his hideout.

She knew the woods. Her father had raised her in them, and taught her everything she needed to know to survive and fight so that she would one day be free, not a slave to a caste of a few chosen royals.

And she had put the knowledge to good use. She had trained, and eventually been able to build up her own little resistance.

Until three days ago, everything had been fine. Until she had met him, her self-declared master.

She fell to the ground when his hand hit her face hard. For a few seconds, she was blinded by the pain, and so she could only hear the clattering sound of the dagger somewhere to her left. Blindly she reached for it, clasped the handle tightly in her hand and pounced on him again. Her anger was deep, as was her hurt. He had used her to his will, manipulated her and then simply let her down.

He had seduced her during the previous night, whispered sweet nothings into her ear and captured her heart with his mouth only to drop it into the cold of the night afterwards, leaving her lonely and shattered. And she would not forgive him. Not for capturing her, not for tricking her and most importantly not for making her giving herself up to him.

Their bodies crashed hard to the ground from the force of the pouncing of her small body against his. He groaned in surprise, their hands quickly battling for the knife before he found it pressed against his throat. Her face was just centimeters above his and her disheveled hair covered them both like a curtain.

His hand grabbed her wrist in a steel grip to drag her arm away from his throat, but that only served to make her increase the pressure of the sharp blade to his throat.

Only when a warm, salty drop hit his lips he realized the tears in her eyes. His grip softened.

„Kate, let me go.“

„No!“ she hissed into his face, her breath interrupted by soft sobs which she hated herself for. She was a warrior. She should not show fear, nor compassion – or love towards an enemy.

„Kate,“ he persisted, his voice calm and low now. „If you kill me, you will be surrounded by dozens of my soldiers, who will immediately end your life.“

„I don't care!“ she pressed out under shaky breath. „At least I would not be your slave, you lying, arrogant scumbag!“

Calmly, he stared back into her dark eyes which were filled with so much pain and heart-break.

„Did you think I would simply accept it?“ she snapped against his face, wiping the tears with the back of her hand. „A slave has no right to emotion, as she is simply a thing to play with, isn't that what you believe?“

„Kate.“ His voice became louder, an obvious warning lying in it. „Drop the knife, and I will forget what happened.“

She chuckled under tears. „Oh, you think it's that easy? You think I can forget what you did to me just as easily? You took everything away from me! My freedom, my dignity, and my heart only to crush them under that arrogant foot of yours. But you will not get to my pride. I would rather die along with you then let you get away with that!“

Their eyes had locked deeply during her passionate speech and eventually he let go of her hand. His ice-blue eyes bore into hers, when he immediately felt the steel push painfully against the skin of his throat. There was something else that he felt though, and that was the shaking of her hand. He was sure she had never killed before, and he wasn't going to make it easy on her by putting up a fight.

„Then do it, my sweet beauty. Kill me.“ His voice was calm, and almost tender, and his fingers touched her naked knee softly.

„What?“ she snapped shakily, wiping her tears again, and glared back at him. „Don't just give me permission! Fight!“

„I won't fight you, honey. If you want to kill me, you will have to do it now. Go on, you called yourself a warrior when I captured you!“

She let out a cry of frustration, and felt her body shake in confusion. „But what kind of honorable warrior kills an enemy when he's not putting up any defense?“

„You want to see me dead, kill me. But do it quick, because in about a moment I am going to disarm you and then you will be in real trouble,“ he hissed and his tone did not only send chills down her spine but made clear that he was capable of what he had just threatened to do.

She knew the procedure. Her father had trained her dozens of times on animals. She knew that she would just have to cut his throat and it would be over. It was so close... so close...

The silver dagger started to shake in her hands while she kept staring into those eyes. Eyes that had looked down at her so lovingly and tender last night while he was making sweet love to her and pushed her to heights she had never imagined to exist. She knew that weakness was a warrior's greatest flaw – and it was this moment that she realized that he was her weakness.

Sobs left her mouth and she bit her full lower lip in desperation.

„What is it?“ he teased softly, and there was the same tenderness in his voice as last night, just that now she knew that it was fake. „Do it, brave warrior.“

She growled lowly, pressing the weapon against his throat. A drop of red blood pearled onto the silvery blade and when she beheld it, her eyes widened in shock. Intuitively, she loosened her grip, primal fear to have hurt him suddenly taking possession of her. He saw the shock reflected in her eyes.

„I can't,“ she whispered almost soundlessly to herself in complete disbelief. „Why... why?“

He seized the moment, grabbed her wrist tightly, hooked his leg between hers to make her lose balance and turned them around, pinning her beneath him. Her hand which held the dagger was slammed to the ground by the force he applied and she lost her grip on the weapon, hearing its clattering sound somewhere on the floor above her head.

“Told you to hurry,” he rasped against her lips, before he closed them forcefully with his mouth, demanding entrance with his tongue. She tasted sweet and female and so fragile. But she had tried to kill him. He would teach her a lesson – a lesson in obedience.

He pinned her wrists with the strong grip of one of his hands above her head and then moved the other one down between their bodies, removing the thin silk skirt that she was wearing. His mouth devoured hers almost violently, smothering the sounds of protest that she was making.

With a forceful move, he ripped the delicate skirt off her slender waist, and then covered her female core with his hand. She wriggled against him, trying to free herself, and hated her body for betraying her again, for falling for his closeness and reacting to it. She despised the fact that he was able to arouse lust and blind desire by just a few touches of his.

He groaned when he found her core wet and ready, and quickly opened his pants. She moaned in weak protest into his mouth and managed to turn her head.

“Don't! Bastard! I will...” The rest of the sentence was reduced to another series of moans, which he swallowed in the next kiss.

He moved his hand over her without ever stopping his assault on her mouth, rediscovering every inch of her smooth skin. She was a beauty, a jewel which was almost impossible to find with a fascinating spirit to her. He wanted her to warm his bed at night, not just this once, but every night from now on. But for some reason she had decided to hate him – so he would have to deal with this hate.

His lips bit her lower lip and her chin almost roughly, while he positioned himself in between her legs. She wanted to growl in anger, but the sound was softened by the moan which escaped her.

He softened his assault on her skin with a soft chuckle and then thrust into her forcefully.

Initially, her body tensed and he knew she had to feel discomfort at his sudden intrusion, but he didn't care. He wanted to punish her for her attack by making her writhe under him again in need and passion - by making her beg him not to stop.

Slowly, he moved out of her, only to thrust back in even deeper. She screamed into his mouth and fisted her hands in his grip. He chuckled breathlessly, looking down into her face that was framed by her disheveled, brown hair. “You're mine.” he rasped against her cheek, and thrust into her again, enjoying the soft squeal that she made.

“Oh... I hate you!” Her breathing was uneven and she was writhing under him in a futile and weak attempt to offer resistance. “You're a bastard! I hate you!”

"Then why didn't you kill me, my beautiful Katie?" he whispered into her ear, his next thrust being softer and hitting just the right spot inside her. Her hips jerked and she moaned involuntarily.

"Because..." she turned her head and breathed in the scent of him, male and intoxicating. She hated him for doing it again to her – for making her love him. "Because I wouldn't kill a coward." Her breathless reply was accompanied by a soft bite into his earlobe which made him groan, and bury himself all the way inside her with his next thrust.

He breathed in her scent and smiled against her neck, "A coward? Wouldn't that rather be the person who couldn't kill an enemy?" Another thrust, followed by a high-pitched sound of hers, a mixture between desire and revolt against what he said.

"No!" she gasped, her hips involuntarily pushing back against him. How he was able to do this to her, she didn't know. "A coward is a person..." Another moan, when his free hand twitched her nipple. "...who refuses a fight." she eventually ended.

"Well... you are right in one point, Katie." he rasped, and moved his hand lower, until he found the little bundle of nerves at her center that he knew would push her higher. His thumb immediately hit the right spot and she reared up in unexpected ecstasy. He smiled, fascinated by the sight of her. "I don't want to fight you. I want to do this to you... over and over again." He pressed his lips against her neck and sucked her over-sensitive skin while continuing to teasing her clit. "I want to shackle you to my bed to keep you from running away, until everything you can think of is how much you enjoy my presence." She writhed under him, high-pitched little moans coming from her mouth. "Do you like this, my beautiful warrior?"

She opened her desire-clouded eyes and stared at him, her whole consciousness drugged by his words, his presence, his eyes. "Yes..." Her whimper came almost desperately.

She wriggled her hands in his grip and managed to free one. He was about to grab it again to keep her pinned when he realized she was nowhere near reaching for the dagger, but her hand came down to his shoulder, clutching it tightly as if he was her only hold.

He increased his thrusts, and sweetened his touches.

"Oh God..." A silent tear made its way down her cheek.

"Shhh..." he whispered against her lips, and kissed her tear away. "Let it go, Katie... come for me. I want you to shatter in my arms and scream my name tonight."

"No!" she bit her lips and fisted the hand that was lying on his shoulder. "Don't do that..."

"What am I doing, my sweet?" he teased her and nipped her earlobe with his teeth. "I want you to be mine."

Her moans turned into pants, when he thrust faster and more erratic in and out of her, drawing her with him on the road of passion. He swallowed her sounds in a series of hot open-mouthed kisses, the hand that was still pinning her wrist moving up slightly to entwine his fingers with hers. His thrusts were deep now, his rhythm quick and they were both quickly approaching the edge.

Kate struggled to free her legs from under his and when she managed to do so, she wrapped them in ecstasy around his hips causing both of them to moan at the intensity of the new closeness she created by this shift.

"Oh God, Katie..." His voice was hoarse and low, and vibrating against her oversensitive skin.

"I hate you..." she gasped, closing her eyes when he hit the right spot inside her over and over again. "Oh God!... I... I hate..." She moved her head up to kiss him desperately. Her free hand grasped his naked shoulder, and then moved up to entangle in his hair.

His hot breath made her shiver when it hit her shoulder from his soft chuckle. "That's right. Continue to hate me... if it makes you react like this. Come on... I know you're close."

"Yes," she panted and arched her back, her head falling back. He moved his lips over her throat, biting her softly where she had hurt him earlier. And then he felt her movements become erratic, her breaths become irregular and her hands clutching him and holding on to him like he was the only steady ground on earth. He moved up and sucked softly at her lower lip.

"Scream my name, Katie..."

"No..."

His teeth scratched at her lip, biting it softly and tasting blood, inducing a whimper from her. "Do it," he demanded tenderly.

And then she shattered. Her inner muscles spasmed around him and she threw her head back in unbelievable ecstasy. "Oh God! Gibbs!!" She panted his name over and over again, tears running down her cheeks as she knew that she belonged to him. Not her body, or her workforce – but her heart.

He kissed her deeply, over and over again, thrusting into her forcefully until he spilled his hot fluids inside of her. Time seemed to stop for a short moment, and turned into an eternity.

Somewhere in the back of her mind, Kate realized that her second hand was free, and she reached around his tall and well-muscled body to hug him.

"God, you will be the death of mine," he rasped eventually and lifted his head, still breathless. She opened her eyes and met his gaze, and there it was again: the closeness, the tenderness and the sweetness that only young love can know.

Kate lifted her hand and placed it on his cheek, her thumb brushing away a drop of perspiration on his nose. Then her forefinger traced an invisible way down his sweat-covered skin to his throat, where the wound from her earlier attack was still visible. She lifted her head and then tenderly licked the drops of blood away with her tongue, feeling his groan vibrate in his throat. Her hands moved into his hair to hold him in place, and when she was finished, she simply breathed in his scent.

"It doesn't have to be like this," he whispered softly, and moved his hand through her long, chestnut-colored hair. "Next time I will make love to you very slow all night-long. Wouldn't you prefer that?"

She remained silent.

"You are mine, little warrior."

With a sad expression in her eyes, she pushed him up a little so that she could wriggle out from underneath him. "Yeah," she whispered, slowly lifting herself to her knees, taking the shreds of her silk skirt with trembling fingers and sad eyes. "Yes, I'm yours."

And then she got up and walked through the room to sit down on his bed in the far corner. Tears were falling down on the delicate material of her silk skirt, and she discarded it, realizing that it was torn. She pulled one of the thin blankets around her shoulders, gazing out the window. Slowly he lifted himself and touched her shoulders from behind, placing a soft kiss on them. "You don't need to cry. I will never hurt you."

She sobbed, and the sheer desperation that was hidden in that sound tore his heart apart. Tenderly, he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her back to lean against his broad chest.

“The problem is just that-” she whispered, her head turning to look at the dagger on the ground, which was glistening whitely in the soft light of the moon that was shining in through the stony window. “-even if I am yours, you can never be mine. I'm just your slave...”

~ The End

## **In Another Dream Ep. 2: Diamond Lake of Stars**

*Warning: BDSM-related setting! Also soft bondage!*

*Summary: Sequel of my story "Silver Moon" also part of the "In Another Dream" series. This story takes place outside the NCIS universe and puts the characters into a different setting altogether: a society in which women are slaves. In this setting, Kate is a rebel, a warrior woman, who has been hiding in the woods for years. But one day she gets captured by a disturbingly handsome lord...*

He hadn't expected to find her that quickly. As a matter of fact, he had thought that it would take days. Ingeniously, she had erased all of her traces in the woods. It had taken him hours to find a clue to where she might be, and even that had been vague. In the end, he guessed, the Gods had been friendly with him and Fortuna had had her say with this.

Carefully he approached the bushes that framed the small clearance in the woods. There she was, her pretty face darkened with coal, her slender body covered with an old blanket, and her feet! He growled slightly to himself. That sneaky little creature had dared to steal one of his favorite pairs of boots. She had guts, that he had to admit. In fact, she had more than that. She was what she had told him – a warrior. Add to that a skilled one. Of course she was like an unpolished diamond. Her skills were uncoordinated, her reactions intuitive. But with the right training and supervision, she could be an asset in a few moons.

The way she had sneaked out of his fortress was brilliant. Not even one of the guards had suspected anything. It had taken hours until somebody had realized that she had ran away – the reason for which he was still curious to hear.

He had thought that they had come to some kind of agreement four days ago, after she had tried to attack him. He had not allowed her to leave his room once since then, but always kept her close to him in his bed. And she had responded to him so naturally, had returned his caresses and whispered tender words into his ears.

Either she had turned into a mistress in deceiving him – or she was deceiving herself.

He observed her, as she started a small fire with a piece of wood and a stone, and then quickly collected a few dry leaves to keep it burning. Shivering, she sat down in front of it and held her hands over the warming flames.

His eyes widened when her blanket slipped from her shoulders and he saw that she was only wearing her thin silks underneath. Why the hell had she stolen his boots and not taken some of his clothes as well? Well, at least something that she obviously hadn't thought about. He shook his head softly. She could catch a deadly cold out here. Where had she spent the previous night anyway? Did she sleep out in the open with that little to cover herself?

In his disbelief he had ceased to watch his steps, and a small branch cracked under his boots. Immediately, he ducked his head, as hers flew up and she looked around with the agility and alertness of a deer. Damned, he thought. He hadn't wanted her to become aware of his presence before he was ready. Endless moments passed without him moving even the smallest muscle in his body.

When he eventually lifted his head again, he realized with almost dumb disbelief that she was gone. Only the fire was still crackling.

He lifted himself to his full height and looked around. Again she had surprised him. He had not heard one sound, no crackling of branches or leaves. She truly was a warrior of the woods. He chuckled. But so was he. And a rushed escape left traces, so now it ought to be much easier to trace her.

It didn't take him long to find the spot where she had disappeared in the woods. A few broken branches on a bush gave her away. He followed her trace slowly and patiently, knowing that she would slow down at one point.

The sun passed on over his head, and he knew that in a few hours it would be dark again, but that didn't rush him. Slowly he moved forward, completely aware of his surroundings and the sounds of the forest around him. Somewhere left to him in the distance was a fox sniffing around in the leaves, and above his head flew an owl with a muffled 'woo-woo' sound.

And eventually he saw the figure of a woman in the distance in front of him. She was picking some raspberries from a bush. Although she seemed completely oblivious to anything else but the delicious fruit, he was certain that she was just as aware of her surroundings as he was. He continued his approach slowly and carefully, until all that separated him from her back was a bush. He grinned to himself, and moved around the bush almost nonchalantly.

"Leave some for me, will you?" he said in a tone that sounded more like an order than a request, and she spun around, her eyes wide in shock.

"Y-you... but why-how..." she dropped her berries, and drew the knife which she was carrying around her upper thigh. "I'm not going back with you!" she announced in a strong voice.

He chuckled and went up to her, picking some berries and putting them into his mouth. Then he turned, savoring the sweet taste while observing her. "You're not going to kill anyone like that," he eventually stated, which immediately caused her expression to darken.

"Try me!"

He sighed, and then, with a movement so quick that she could do nothing but stare, he had taken the knife out of her hand, grabbed her wrist and pulled her into his body, her own knifed pressed against her throat. She gasped in terror.

"See, that's what I meant," he explained lowly. "If I was your enemy, you would be dead now!" And with these words he let go of her. "Look," he then said and placed the knife in his hand. "This is how you hold it. With your thumb here. The way you are holding it, this side is your weak side and a skilled warrior will immediately notice your weakness and disarm you. If you want to prevent that, you need to have a strong hold of your weapon. Come here."

She stared at him in complete disbelief, too confused not to follow his order. He positioned himself behind her and placed the knife in her hand, his head right next to hers, as he was looking over her shoulder. "Cover this side with your thumb. You need to have a strong hold, and you will see that you don't need to apply that much force anymore. The weapon lies securely in your hand.... That's it... move your index finger a little more." He repositioned her fingers with his hand, and then nodded. "It hurts at first," he commented, "but soon your muscles will adapt to the position of your fingers. Hold your knife this way, and no opponent will be able to take your weapon from you!"

She turned her head slowly, and her long, chestnut colored locks tickled the skin at his collarbone. "What are you doing?" she asked softly, and his reply was almost cold.

"Training you, obviously."

His hand, which had been lying on hers moved up now and grabbed her wrist almost harshly. "Now, care to explain what you are doing here?"

She winced when his grip around her wrists became so hard that she was sure it would leave bruises. "I guess you wouldn't believe me if I said, I'm taking a walk."

"Cheeky there, aren't we? Well, sweetheart, you're in for a lot of trouble." His voice was low and almost kind, but there was a dangerous undertone to it, that made her tremble for a moment.

"I told you I would run away!" she justified herself, and he chuckled against her hair, his hot breath tickling her ear.

"Indeed, you did! And do you remember my answer to that threat of yours? I told you that if you tried, I would chain you up and have you flogged until you forgot your own name." With delight, he noticed her intake of breath in sheer terror. Good, at least she did respect him. "I will not flog you, as that would leave ugly scars, and I've just grown so fond of your skin, my sweet. But I might just chain you up until you beg me to release you, and swear your loyalty to me."

She was shaking slightly, and her voice didn't sound as secure as she wanted when she answered, "That would never happen."

"I wouldn't bet on that," he whispered, inhaling her scent, and then sucking her earlobe into his mouth. She started to wriggle in his grip.

"Don't do that!" she demanded, trying to turn her head away from him. "I am not your playdoll."

"That remains to be seen," he growled. "For now you are just a disloyal slave to me."

"I never was your slave!" she retorted, anger openly displayed in her voice. "You think I belong to you, but my spirit was never yours."

He chuckled amused, turned her around in his arms and pulled her face close to his. "I beg to disagree. Somewhere during those three nights in my bed, I had not only your spirit, but also your heart. I believe that I remember you begging me never to stop."

She blushed and lowered her eyes, "You are a bastard."

He smiled, lifting her chin up again and forcing her to look at him. "From today on I am going to train you to be my personal slave, as you have obviously no respect for me. Rule number one, every insult will be punished."

"Well, that doesn't sound scary, as you just said that you wouldn't flog me," she replied triumphantly, and his grip on her tightened.

"Rule number two: no trying to be clever with me. And no contradictions as we're at it. A slave's position is at her masters feet. She will only speak when spoken to, and her utmost obligation is to please."

Slowly, she realized that he was being serious and she paled a little. "I am not your slave!" she whispered, trying to wriggle her wrists out of his grasp. "You can't do that!"

"Don't try me," he said and bent down to her, "Don't think I cannot punish you. There are worse methods to punish you than flogging, believe me! I would hate to see you suffer, little Katie, but I also

hate the thought of having to watch you every minute to prevent you from either running away or stabbing me in the back..”

Her resistance faded, and she simply returned his look thoughtfully for a moment. “And if I promise to do as you say and not cause any trouble?”

“Well, that would of course remain to be seen, but your life would certainly be more pleasant and...” He nipped at her chin with his lips and then moved along her cheekbone to her ear. “...satisfying.”

She sighed, and turned her head slightly to him, inhaling his scent. His lips started to nibble at her earlobe, bit it softly and then moved down to the sensitive spot right under it. He was delighted to hear a soft moan from her. During the previous night, when she was gone, he had missed her. He had found no sleep in his bed. It seemed almost ridiculous that after only those five or six suns that he had known her, he already missed her presence when she wasn't around.

His hands let go of her wrists and moved down over her slender, yet round buttocks to pull her against his groin. Only a moment later he regretted this action, as she moved her hands to push him away forcefully, escaped his grasp and started in an almost weasel-like sprint into the bushes.

He tumbled backwards, taking a moment to realize what had happened, and then started to curse himself for being stupid enough to fall for this age-old trick of hers. But at least her reaction to him had been real. She couldn't fake the soft shudder, and the way her body had intuitively bend to offer him more of herself.

He started after her. He was over a head taller than her, but she was agile and had the advantage that she knew the woods.

Kate ran as fast as she had never done in her life before. She would never be able to stand going through the scenario that he had just described. It was true, she had grown fond of him – too fond in fact, which was why she had to leave and never see him again. In his household, she would never hold more than the position of a slave and would therefore be helpless if he decided to flirt with other women – even take them in his bed. She would just have to sit there on the ground, and smile through her broken heart. She would always be his, but he would never be hers alone.

She ran until her legs hurt and her lungs felt as if they wouldn't take any more oxygen in but she didn't stop. It was impossible to surrender to him. It seemed like an endless run, until she eventually reached her destination: the small lake, that the river formed when it cascaded down the rocks on the far end at the other side of the shore.

The young woman dropped the dirty old blanket into the high grass at the edge of the small river that flew away from the lake. Then she hastily slipped out of the heavy boots and dove head-over into the cold water. She was a good swimmer. When she had still lived in the woods, she had taken a swim daily, and she knew all of the lake's hideouts.

She swam underneath the surface, only dipping her head out of the water for a quick moment when she was desperately in need of oxygen. Eventually, she could feel the ground under her feet, and knew that she was approaching the cascade. Her hands felt the small white pebbles in the clear blue water, and she duck her head out to turn around. In the distance, she could see the man skim the lake for her, the blanket that she had dropped in his hand. Quickly she dove again, crossing the remaining few meters between herself and the cascading water. When she eventually reached it, she stood up and swiftly disappeared behind the thin wall of water. It was not a big waterfall, still it was enough to cover a little cave.

She had discovered this place a few moons ago, and had used it as a shelter in thunder and rainstorms. The ground in the cave was covered with fine sand, that felt almost soft to her naked feet. The walls were covered with old and rather stylized looking paintings of hunters, and made Kate feel as if she had company. She had spent hours studying the paintings and admiring them, trying to figure out who the people who left them had been. She had always felt comfortable and safe here.

Shivering from the cold, she sat down on one of the small rocks on the far wall, and rubbed her chest to warm herself up. She would build a small fire as soon as she was sure that Gibbs had left the lake. After all, the smoke would be seen, and she didn't want that to betray her whereabouts.

Her stomach growled loudly, and she realized that she hadn't eaten anything since yesterday – well, except for the few berries earlier. She would have to hunt for food soon as well.

Silently she just kept sitting on her stone, kneading the water from her long hair and rubbing her skin. All the while, her eyes were fixed on the cascading wall of water, as she was trying to hear any suspicious sound. That was somewhat futile though, as the splashing sound of the cascading water drowned all the other sounds.

And so she was completely taken by surprise, when, all of a sudden, the figure of a man parted the waterfall. In complete disbelief she stared at the wet, half naked form of Gibbs. His grayish hair was all soaked through and the water beaded off his muscular arms and chest in small rivulets. His skin was shimmering from the wetness, and for a moment she could do nothing but admire his figure, before her mind eventually set in and she jumped up with a shriek. She followed her instinct, which told her to turn around and run. Her flight was cut short though, as she found herself stopped by the solid wall of the cave after ten meters. There was nowhere to go, she was surrounded by solid rock and the only escape was blocked by her enemy. For a moment, she felt like just starting to cry, but her pride kept her from doing so.

Therefore she inhaled deeply and then spun around, her eyes fixed on him in blind rage.

“Cozy,” he commented, looking around while he was approaching her slowly. “Now, Katie, I think your shelter has turned into a trap.” His eyes fell on her, and then traveled down her body. She was wearing her thin silks, which consisted of a lilac bra, a slip, a transparent skirt, and pretty armbands. But the water had soaked them all through and they clung to her body like a second skin. In addition to that, the water had made the material of her bra almost transparent.

She realized that when she noted the man's amused stare, and then looked down on herself. With a growl, she covered her breasts and glared at him. “Don't stare!”

He laughed softly, his eyes locking with hers, while he was still approaching her step by step. “As you are MY slave, I may look at you as much as I like.”

“I am not...” she started to counter immediately, but stopped herself and inhaled deeply. In her position it was better to argue than to provoke a fight which she was sure to lose. “Listen, I'm sure that there are other people – women even – who will be eager to become your slaves. Why don't you just -um- let me go and I promise I will never show my face on your lands again?”

He smiled softly, “Maybe that is just what I am afraid of.”

He was only a few meters away from her now, and she retreated backwards with every step he took towards her. Fear was openly displayed on her face and she shook her head softly.

“Please! Just let me go! – Please!” Her tone was pleading, and her eyes, in which tears started to form, underlined her soft beg. His expression softened.

"You have nothing to fear from me, my sweet," he assured her, and noted how she was hitting the wall behind her. She turned left and started to run, intending to go around him somehow, but he reacted quickly and effectively blocked her way. She turned to the other side and ran, realizing too late that she was maneuvering herself into a corner by her move.

Desperately she turned around and found him standing two meters away from her. There was no way to escape. She was shaking – mainly from being cold, but her hopelessness added to it.

For a long time they just eyed each other, like two lions on a hunt. Then all of a sudden Gibbs crossed the distance between them, and pushed the young woman against the wall, engulfing her in the wet warmth of his body while his mouth sought her lips hungrily. Initially she gave an outcry of protest, but soon she surrendered to him and returned the hot kiss fervently.

Her trembling hands moved up his naked chest, played through his chest hair and then came to rest on his shoulders.

Eventually he grabbed her wrists and pinned them over her head against the wall. She moaned into his mouth when the feeling of defeat turned into a need of being taken by him. God, she enjoyed his company way too much. She should have stabbed him when she had the possibility, but now she was lost.

After an endless moment, he broke the kiss and looked at her face. She held his eyes, her cheeks flushed, and her breath coming shallow and fast. "You sure picked a cozy hideout," he whispered. "Too bad I knew about this place, my rebellious slave."

She leaned her head back, still breathless. Eventually, he let go of her hands, and reached to the belt of his pants, where he had attached a strong rope. He took it and looked at her in demand. "Give me your wrists."

"No," she refused weakly, and immediately he urged her against the wall.

"I'll give you another chance, as you gave me such a hot welcome just now. Give me your hands or I will take them by force, and then it will get a lot less comfortable for you." His voice was kind and made clear that he had no intention of harming her if she did as he ordered.

So, after a few more seconds, she reached out her hands in defeat, a soft sob escaping her lips.

"Cross them," he said, and she did. She winced slightly, when he fastened the strong rope around her tender wrists and tied it in a secure knot. "Now, we have to get you warm and dried up, or you will catch a cold. You are shaking."

He pulled her almost tenderly against his warm body, and rubbed her arms. After a while, he turned around. "Come on," he said and pulled her softly towards the exit of the cave. When the cold water from above hit her, and then covered her up to her knees when they stepped out into the cold water of the lake again, she trembled. Gibbs turned his back to her and bend his knees slightly in front of her.

"Put your arms around my neck. We'll need to get to the other side but as you can't swim in your position, I'll carry you. Don't you dare think about choking me with your arms, or I will simply let you drown, understood?"

A shaky "yes" came from her, and he nodded satisfied. Then they went into the water. After a few failed attempts, they finally found a way for her to cling on to him that would still leave him with the ability to swim, and about fifteen minutes later, they had reached the other side of the lake, and were climbing out of the water onto the sandy shore.

Immediately, Gibbs lifted the young woman up in his arms and carried her to the place where he had undressed. She was surprised to find her blanket and her -no, his- boots as well. Carefully, he put her down in the warm grass.

"Undress," he then ordered, and went to unfold the old blanket. She simply stared at him in disbelief.

"What? I..."

"Move!" he ordered and looked at her relentlessly. "You have to get out of those wet clothes. We'll hang them over a branch to dry."

Very hesitantly, she slipped the soaked skirt down her thighs. It was hard to do with tied hands, but eventually she succeeded.

"When you're done, lie down on the blanket," he commanded, after he had eventually managed to find a good spot for the blanket, and opened his pants.

She observed him and hesitated, then moved to the blanket, still wearing her bra and panties.

"All of it!" he said sharply without even turning around, and she wondered silently how the heck he had known that she was not completely nude yet.

"I'm not going to lie here all naked with you!" she contradicted slightly outraged.

"Well, you will have to!" he simply stated. "If you want this underwear to remain in your possession, you better remove it by yourself. It's soaked and will get the blanket all wet!"

She sobbed with hurt pride and turned uneasily. "I can't do it with tied hands!" she then contradicted again, and Gibbs turned around, his face betraying a slight hint of annoyance while he was looking at her for a long time. Then he went to her, his pants still dripping. Without a word, he opened the knot that tied her hands together.

"There!" he said grumpily. "Undress!"

"Would you turn around?" she asked shakily, and he smirked.

"Yeah, so that you can jump right back into that lake? I don't think so!" When she still didn't move, he growled lowly. "Don't make me help you!" he warned and the young woman gasped and jumped up from the blanket. Then she turned her back to him and started to remove first her bra, before she then slipped her panties down her legs.

Hastily, she resumed her place on the blanket on the ground and curled up, covering her intimate parts. Gibbs had to chuckle softly when he saw her, then he sighed and placed his large furry cape over her shivering body. Eventually he took the rope from the ground and went to his knees next to Kate's head.

"Your hands!" he demanded and she looked at him with pleading eyes.

"Please don't! What if I promised not to run away again..."

"I wouldn't believe you," he countered with a half smile and tied her hands up again.

Then he collected a few dry branches and wooden sticks, and put them up next to them on the sandy ground. He had picked a place under a large oak tree, where the grass turned into sandy ground, so that they could sleep on a soft surface.

Skillfully, he kindled the fire with a stone and a piece of wood. And when it was crackling and burning warmly, he moved behind the young woman on the blanket and slipped under the fur with her. Then he pulled her naked body against his. Immediately, she gave a sound of protest.

"Shh..." he whispered and stroked some wet strands away from the side of her neck, where he placed a soft, warm kiss. "We've spend the last three nights so closely together, so why are you fighting me all of a sudden? Let me just keep you warm. Come here." He wrapped his strong arm around her shivering body and pulled her closer until the whole of her back was resting against his warm chest and his legs were touching hers. Then he pulled the furry coat around them both and stroked her hair. "You must be exhausted. Where did you sleep last night?"

"I didn't," she whispered. "I figured I would freeze to death if I rested. I wanted to sleep during the day, but when I had just build the fire, a sound startled me and I thought it wiser to leave."

"Then sleep now," he whispered, a soft smile playing around the corner of his lips. She truly was an extraordinary woman. "Don't worry, I will be here, watching over you." He loosened the tied rope around her wrists a little, so that it wouldn't cut into her flesh and then snuggled up close to her, his face buried in her wet hair.

Slowly, very slowly, her body stopped shaking and her breathing became slower and more even. As much as she despised herself for it, she enjoyed the warmth of his body. His hand was resting against her waist, holding her close, and his thumb moved in lazy circles over her skin. Slowly, her mind was lulled into a dozy cloud of comfort. Her skin, which had been cold a moment before, became warm and soft and her body finally relaxed against his embrace. She was sound asleep.

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She couldn't exactly pinpoint what caused her to open her eyes. Maybe it was the distant howl of an owl somewhere in the darkness of the deep forest, that made her realize subconsciously, that she had been sleeping when she hadn't intended to fall asleep.

Stirring slightly, she shifted and by doing so became aware of the warm body behind her, and that her wrists were tied together. A moment later, she felt a warm kiss tenderly placed to the side of her neck.

The fire was still crackling next to them, keeping them delightfully warm. Of course the thick furry coat, that was covering their bodies, added to her comfort. The young woman fully opened her eyes and stared up into a black starry sky and an almost full moon looking down on the couple near the lake.

"Sleep well?" the man next to her whispered with obvious amusement against her skin and she sighed softly.

"Too well. I didn't mean to fall asleep. How long have we been lying here?"

"Well," he lifted his head from her neck, pulled her closer against his body and smiled down into her face. "In another three or so hours, the sun should rise again."

"That long?" The young woman sat up, completely oblivious to her own nakedness. When she realized that she wasn't wearing any clothes, she covered her breasts with a shocked intake of breath. Of course, she finally remembered, she had taken her clothes off since they had been completely soaked through from the water. "I think, my clothes may be dry now."

"So?" Gibbs asked, having lied back, his head resting comfortably on his elbows.

"So maybe you could get them for me, and untie me so I can get dressed?" she asked and looked back at him. He smiled, and stroked the silky strands of her hair, which had curled a little from the water in the lake, back from her skin.

"I don't think so," he replied dryly.

"But I am cold! And you could at least try to act like a nice person." she commented cheekily.

He smirked, "You're cold because you're sitting up and your back is exposed. Not that I mind, but since you're the one complaining..." His hand traveled down her spine, and then pulled her down to lie next to him. "Why the rush? It's still a lot of time until we have to make our way back."

She turned her head aside, when he tried to kiss her softly, and pushed him away with her tied hands. "You should sleep! You haven't slept at all, and I can take the watch now."

This suggestion made him laugh out loud. "Not likely! Not until I'm not one hundred percent certain that you'll neither run away, nor stab me in my sleep." He popped himself up on his elbow, and smiled down on her, his other arm resting around her waist where he drew lazy circles on her skin with his fingers.

"Besides, I would rather use the time to come to an agreement with you." His fingers moved a little higher. "I missed you in my bed the other night."

"Don't even think about..." she warned, realizing that her threat was not very threatening with her hands bound. Obviously he was thinking the same, as he gave her an amused smile. So she changed her tactics. "That's low!"

"Excuse me?" he asked, a soft warning in his voice.

"Taking a woman who is tied up and helpless is really an act only a coward would commit," she replied, ignoring the tone in his voice. She was not afraid of him, and she wanted to make sure he knew.

"True," he took up her challenge. "But first of all, we both know that you're not helpless. And secondly..." He bent down to flick her neck with his tongue. "...making her enjoy it in the progress requires skill. And we also both know that you will enjoy this."

"Arrogant!" she growled, pushing against his chest weakly with her restrained hands.

He laughed and grabbed the rope that tied her hands together, then he pulled them above her head and pressed them into the blanket, leaving her exposed to him. Her breathing quickened, and she looked up into his face with a mixture of fear and excitement. "Keep your hands there," he rasped against her mouth, while his hands moved up the sides of her slender body. "Now, I still have to punish you for this little trip that you took. Not that I didn't enjoy playing hide-and-seek with you, but you have to learn how to obey me."

She scoffed, and he raised an eyebrow.

"What was that?"

Rebelliously she stared back at him, thinking it wiser to keep her mouth shut. Not that she needed to say anything, as her eyes gave away what she was thinking.

"My, my..." he sighed, "What am I going to do with you?" He lowered his head and tasted her neck with his tongue, then pressed his lips to her pulse point and started to suck and bite softly. She squealed slightly, when he bit a little harder and arched her body against his in an attempt to

withdraw her neck from his assault. A smile crossed his features, and he moved his lips down over her collarbone to her full breasts.

"Wait!" she gasped and tried to hold him back with her hands. He grabbed her arms with a growl and pushed them back over her head into the blanket.

"Katie, I mean it! Don't make me tie you to a dowel."

"You wouldn't!" she exclaimed outraged, but his eyes told her that he would. He had said he wouldn't flog her, but that didn't mean he couldn't punish her in other ways. "Gibbs, please!"

His eyes looked softly down into hers, while his hands moved in languid caresses along her arm. He was lying in between her legs, his weight supported by his elbows, so that he wouldn't crush her with his weight. "From now on you will not call me by my name, you will call me Sir. Until I tell you to do otherwise," he explained patiently to her and he could immediately see the sparks of fury in her eyes.

"I will not!"

"Well, you can of course also choose the other option – which is being tied nakedly to a tree in the courtyard of my castle for an entire afternoon every time you use the wrong address," he replied dryly and saw her eyes widen with shock.

"You... you...!" Her body was shaking, but she bit her lips to keep herself from insulting him, knowing that this would only worsen her position in this argument.

A soft smile played around the corner of his lips, when he induced a soft and playful kiss. Very gently, his tongue flicked over her lower lip. She sighed, and opened her lips slightly in response. Then, when she became aware of what he was trying, or rather succeeding at, she turned her head away.

"Don't fight me," he whispered against her ear. "Your whole body is betraying that you want this as much as I do. Don't try to pretend you didn't miss my company as much as I missed yours." He drew a line down the sensitive skin of her neck with the tip of his finger. "I can feel you shiver when I do this..." he rasped into her ear hotly. "And I can feel your breath quicken when I do this." His tongue flicked the spot right under her ear, and then his teeth scratched her earlobe tenderly. "And I know you will moan when I do this." Unexpectedly, he bit her neck, and, as predicted, she moaned – even though she tried to muffle the sound by biting her lip. "I can make you writhe with pleasure!" he continued and let his hands move down the sides of her body. His touch was light, his fingers barely touching her skin while he rediscovered every part of her willing body.

When he had reached the hollow of her knees, he bend her legs up, so that her body was intensely pressed up against his and he could feel her warm wetness against his groin. She gave another moan at this new position and turned her head towards him until her cheek was grazing his in a tender caress.

"If I do as you say now, will you let me go then?" she asked shakily, which caused him to chuckle softly.

"No," he replied frankly. "But I will think about a solution which will satisfy the both of us. That's the best I can promise."

He bent his head down to reach the point where her neck met her shoulder, while his hands ran up her arms to pin them down into the blanket. When he bit her tender skin again, she squealed slightly, trying to writhe her arms out of his grip. She knew that he was leaving marks. That was probably what he intended to do. The sharp pain immediately vanished as his bite turned into sucking and

flicking of his tongue. She couldn't help sighing in upcoming arousal. Her breathing became irregular when he continued to caress her skin.

Eventually he bit the skin of her chin, much softer than before, and looked deeply into her eyes. "I want to taste you." He felt her hot breath puff against his skin while she returned his look somewhat confused as if she had no idea what he was talking about. Incredible, he thought, that no man before him had touched this woman. She was so perfect in every single way.

One of his hands moved along the sides of her breasts and then vanished in between their bodies. Her eyes widened when his hand found its destination and his thumb grazed her pleasure center, but she never ceased to look into his blue eyes.

"Oh God," was all that she could whisper, her hands clenching to fists. "Gibbs... don't!"

When he heard his name from her lips again, he growled lowly and pressed his lips on hers to taste her in a quick, but intense kiss. "Tell you what," he rasped, after he had broken the sweet exploration of her mouth. "We will keep doing this until you have learned to address me properly!"

Then he reunited their lips anew in a deep and passionate kiss. While his tongue sought every secret corner of her mouth, his hand continued its journey. He covered her folds with his hand, probing her wetness and then started to massage her clit again with a little more pressure. Her soft moans were smothered by his mouth that was still busy seeking hers in a series of passionate seductions. She could do nothing but take what he decided to do to her.

When he felt her body jerk softly against his touch, he parted from her lips and looked down into the face of the beautiful woman. She was gasping and whimpering, her body arching against his touch. The man smiled and grazed her cheek with his lips.

"Gibbs!" She closed her eyes in sheer pleasure and he was sure that she was unable to think reasonable for the moment which was why he didn't reproach her for using his given name again.

"Yes my sweetheart," he inquired playfully, bending his head to caress the other side of her neck. Without thinking, she moved her tied hands so that she could touch him.

"Don't," he immediately reminded her in a raspy, yet tender, voice, "I did not give you permission to move your arms yet, did I?"

She whimpered as he placed her hands back over her head. "I'm sorry..." she gasped and tilted her head back when he applied more pressure to her clit. "Oh!"

"You have no idea how pleasant your time as my slave could be."

He groaned softly when her hips started to thrust against him, and bit her lower lip softly. As if to underline his statement, he entered her with two of his fingers, finding her wet and ready for him. A high-pitched moan escaped her throat and her eyes fell close. As much as she had tried to deny it, but this was what she had missed when she had run away. A part of her wanted to belong to him, wanted to be taken and owned in that sweet pleasure that he was capable of bringing to her.

"Oh...oh..." she bit her lips and arched her body even more, her face flushed with heat and lust.

He smirked with a low groan, "Yeah, that's it."

His voice was tender, but with an edge to it that made it sound incredibly sexy to her ears. She turned her head and bit his earlobe softly, her hot breath caressing his skin. Tenderly, she moved along his jawline in licks and kisses, feeling his slightly stubbly chin and tasting his salty skin. Her breath became more and more irregular, puffing hotly against his cheek.

"Please... please!" she gasped and eventually let her head drop back onto the blanket. She closed her eyes when she felt that she was quickly approaching the point of no return. "Stop... please... I'm going to..." she murmured incoherently, wriggling her hands to free them. And then, with a twist of his hand, she came. A surprised outcry left her lips, when her whole body started shaking with pleasure while the waves of her orgasm hit her. The man continued to massage just the right spot inside of her, drawing out her pleasure until she was reduced to mere feeling and passion.

Very slowly, the waves ebbed away, leaving the young woman panting and gasping for air. Kate opened her clouded eyes, her mind still drugged with the ecstasy she had just felt.

"Oh... wow..." she whispered in disbelief. The man smiled, his hand running through her long hair, playing with the silky strands, while his other hand moved up her body in lazy strokes, allowing her to recover a little.

"Yeah, that's what I've been told," he teased her and breathed in her female scent. "I have a question for you!" His playful whisper was hot against her lips. "Have you ever tasted yourself?" He moved one finger that was covered in her juices along her lower lip, watching in fascination how she opened her lips and played with her tongue around the tip. Then she closed her lips around it and drew his finger into her mouth.

The man let out an aroused moan and pressed his lips to her cheek while she was licking his finger.

"God, Katie, you have no idea how much you turn me on."

When she heard this softly spoken statement, she let go of his finger and turned her head to meet his lips with hers. She swallowed his soft moan and dueled his tongue before she gave her control up to him. He devoured her mouth, tasting her essence on her lips. Soft moans of pleasure were lost in her mouth, while she returned his kiss fervently.

Then eventually he broke the kiss and trailed a wet path down her neck and over her collarbone with his tongue. Taking all the time in the world, he ran his lips along her shoulders and then further down. When he had reached her breasts, he paused to circle one of her nipples with his tongue, before he closed his lips around it and sucked it into his mouth. He was rewarded by a soft, aroused squealing sound of hers.

After he had given each of her breasts equal attention, he made his way further down her belly, until he had reached his destination and placed his lips on the little bundle of nerves between her legs.

She almost reared up the blanket when his tongue made contact with her still over-sensitive clitoris. Gibbs steadied her by holding her around the waist, keeping her in place. He knew that she was still exhausted from her previous climax, and that her body was still highly sensitive to any of his touches. He knew from experience though, that women were capable of feeling the heights of ecstasy more than once.

"Keep your hands just where they are," he ordered seductively. She didn't have a chance to answer, because before she could even grasp the meaning of his order, he repeated his lick. A soft scream escaped her lips.

The man smiled, observing her reaction and lazily stroking the skin of her hip until she had calmed down again. And then he buried his face against her sweet wetness, sucking, tasting and licking her, until he had her panting and screaming his name and begging him to stop. Relentlessly, he continued his sweet torture, parting her folds with his fingers and intensifying the contact.

Kate felt as if there wasn't even nearly enough oxygen for her. Her hips were bucking uncontrollably against his mouth and her gasps and outcries increased in volume with every moment. For a split second she wondered if anybody had ever died of too much pleasure, before all of her conscious thoughts were erased from her mind and she was reduced to a bundle of sensations and the only thing in the world that she was still aware of was that incredible man who managed to push her to heights that she had never known to exist.

Only a few moments later Kate went flying over the edge again. She bit her lower lip in desperation, sobbing in an ecstasy that was almost too much to bare, and clutched the blanket in her fingers.

Gibbs waited until she had come down again, softly moving his thumb in circles over the skin on her hipbone. Soothingly, he pressed a few light kisses against her abdomen and then onto her navel. She was still panting heavily, whispering his name over and over again in complete exhaustion. When her body eventually stopped shaking, he moved up until his face was hovering over hers and he could bend down to kiss her deeply.

"You taste so good," he informed her sexily, and she whimpered hoarsely in reply. Her skin was covered in a sheen of sweat, and she had drawn blood when she had bitten her lip. He flicked the spot with his tongue and tasted her blood, savoring the sweet metallic taste. Her following moan vibrated softly against his lips.

"Now," he then whispered, his hands pushing her legs up so that they were wrapped around his body, positioning her hips so that he could settle against them. Very slowly, he entered her with his cock, all the while keeping his eyes locked with hers. Her eyes widened slightly when she felt his large member fill her and she shifted slightly to adjust to his size. He allowed her time to get used to him and didn't move.

"What did I tell you to call me?" he demanded to know, while his hands were stroking along the delicate skin of her arms.

"Sir..." she whispered longingly, and was rewarded by a light smile of his.

"Good girl."

She opened her mouth willingly to his seeking tongue, when he reconnected her lips with his and then languidly began to deepen the kiss. Initially, she didn't even realize that he was untying her hands in the process, until she felt him massage her sore wrists lightly. But even when he let go of her arms, she didn't move them until he rasped into her ear, "You can move your hands to my shoulders. I want you to hold on to me." She did.

And then he started to move inside of her, pulling out almost completely only to fill her again with a slightly stronger thrust than before. Kate felt a new wave of pleasure and lust pulse through her body, and her hands tightened on his shoulders.

"Do you want to come again for me?" His teeth scratched the skin of her neck softly, when he uttered this promising question.

She gasped when she felt another thrust and her finger dug into his skin. It was incredible what he was able to do to her with just his voice and a few caresses.

"I am not... I can't..." she panted.

"Yes, you can," he contradicted. Another thrust, followed by a moan of his and a high-pitched sound from her. "Come for me again, Katie!" he encouraged her and buried his face in her hair, breathing in the fresh scent from the lake which was still lingering there.

The young woman slung her arms around his body, and when he thrust again, she matched it with a thrust of her own. They moaned in unison when he buried himself all the way inside her.

She moved one of her hands up over the back of his neck and then into his hair, whispering sweet nothings against his heated skin while her other hand was clutching his shoulder tightly. Unexpectedly, he repositioned her hips, lifting her legs even more so that he could hit that spot inside of her that he knew would drive her crazy. Her hips bucked against his at this change of angle, and she whimpered against his forehead in rekindled lust.

When he moved his body sensually against hers again, moving his shaft in and out of her body, she felt as if she was robbed of her breath. "Oh God!..." She panted and buried her fingers in his hair, when his next thrust was even more intensive. "You are... incredible."

At this desperately uttered compliment, he increased the speed of his thrusts and from the way her breathing hitched in her throat, he knew that it was just the right thing to do for both of them. Her fingers dug into his skin almost painfully and he lowly growled in his throat at the intoxicating mixture of pleasure and pain.

With every additional thrust, her cries became louder and then mixed with whines and whimpers. Holding him as close as she could, she clung to him as if she was drowning and he was the only person on earth able to keep her from doing so.

His hands buried in her hair and grabbed a handful of its silkiness, rendering her motionless for a moment – a possibility he used to nibble the side of her neck and then bite her again. She groaned in sweet agony, her body twitching against him. Softly, he soothed the spot with his tongue and then moved with his lips up, to scratch her skin with his teeth again.

She tensed slightly, and when he bit her again, she cried out, her hand on his shoulder fisting as the pain rushed through her body in waves and turned into exquisite pleasure. When he wanted to move to the other side of her neck, she sobbed softly.

"Please!"

"Please what, my sweet?" he muttered under heavy breaths, keeping up his rhythm. His skin was covered in sweat and she could see that he was trying to hold back.

"Please stop teasing," she gasped and lifted her head to coerce him by pressing a kiss to his lips. Another thrust and her following muffled cry was swallowed by his mouth. He pushed her back onto the blanket without ever breaking contact with her lips.

Trying to coerce him into increasing the speed of his thrusts, she rolled her hips against his groin and bit his earlobe sensually.

Momentarily, he lost control over himself and gave in to her, before he growled and bit her neck sharply. She squealed and her body trembled against him. His hands moved down to where their bodies were joined and he pinned her hips to the blanket, rendering her motionless and inducing a curse from her.

His soft chuckle was accompanied by another thrust and a needy moan of hers when she felt that she was still unable to move her hips.

"My beauty, you will have to get used to the fact that I am in control of games like this." Playfully he spilled kisses down her chin and her throat. Her hands flew down to his arms, trying to get him to let go of her hips. His next thrust was sensual and deep and Kate closed her fingers around his arm, gripping him tightly, while she bit her lips.

Eventually, she moved one of her hands between their bodies, touching herself. Gibbs allowed her to do so, observing her reactions in fascination while he was watching how she pushed herself higher towards another peak of pleasure.

"You're cheating," he then murmured with a grin into her ear shortly before she could reach her sweet release, and grabbed her hand, pinning it against her hip. "Incredibly sexy, but still cheating."

"And you're a bastard!" she whimpered desperately, the arousal becoming almost painful. Her breath was coming shallow, while she was looking into his eyes, her mind drugged with lust. Her free hand touched his cheek, and her thumb caressed his sweaty skin tenderly. Then she sobbed.

"Please..." Her body shook from exhaustion. "...Sir!"

The moment she spoke the address, he couldn't hold back any longer. He let go of her hips and hand and crushed her mouth with his in a deep kiss while at the same time he increased the speed of his thrusts with a moan. Her high-pitched sound was muffled by his lips and her hands flew to his shoulder.

"Oh, YES!" She rolled her hips against his with every stroke and it didn't take long until she felt the familiar tingle that told her she was quickly approaching the edge. His hands buried in her hair, he kept his pace up until he found sweet release in her body, filling her with his hot fluids. When she felt the warmth inside of her, she followed him to the heights of pleasure, breaking the kiss and panting for air. From the back of her clouded mind, she could hear loud moans and cries and realized that they were hers, before she fell into a sweet oblivion, with his body as her only steady hold.

There were stars in front of her eyes, and she felt like falling down while the entire world was spinning in front of her.

Eventually, the feeling of his hot breath, puffing against the sweaty skin of her neck brought her back. She realized that the stars in front of her eyes were real, that she was looking at the black night sky. Her hands grasped his shoulders and then her fingers moved into his hair. She tried to say something but all that left her mouth was a tiny whimper. She closed her eyes wearily, reveling in the feeling of his warmth that engulfed her. Until eventually, he shifted to lean on his elbow.

"Wow," she finally managed to whisper and he chuckled breathlessly, leaning his forehead against her cheek. His tongue darted out to lick her sweat-covered skin, and she tasted salty and wonderful.

They remained in this position for a few more moments, before Gibbs eventually slipped out of her and moved his hand through her hair. For a long time he looked down into her eyes, before her face became serious, and she tilted her head aside.

She closed her eyes for a moment when a pain so intense that it almost broke her heart took over. This man could never love her in the same way she loved him. To him all that she would always be was a possession. She on the other hand did not have the right to make a claim, so all she could do was sit by and smile once he decided that he was getting bored with her and turned to another woman. She knew, she wouldn't be able to handle that. Which was why she had to leave him now, while her emotions were still young.

"Let me go," she eventually whispered softly, but with an intensity in her voice that caught his attention. "I've been living in the woods for more than five years. You don't need me. I'm sure there are a lot of other female slaves at your court, who would be eager to warm your bed."

He looked down at her thoughtfully, noticing the weird undertone in her voice when she mentioned the other women. And suddenly it dawned on him. She wasn't hating him. It was just that she simply couldn't stand the thought of him taking other woman into his bed.

A soft smile started to form on his face. "So what if there were? Shouldn't you be relieved? Your presence would only be required once a week instead of seven times," he teased.

Angrily, she tried to punch him, but he had anticipated her move and grabbed her hands, pinning them down next to her head.

"Katie, think about it," he then said softer, and nibbled at her chin softly. "How many slaves did you meet while you were in my castle?"

That made her think, and astoundingly, she couldn't give him an answer. Come to think of it, she had not encountered one single slave. "What are you saying?" she asked weakly.

"My only slaves are the maids in the kitchen, and the personal maid of my medicine man. Of course a few of the warriors have one or two slaves. But they never shared my bed – none of them. I once owned a slave who warmed my bed regularly. She even gave birth to my child – a little girl. But we were attacked and they were both killed." The tone in his voice gave away a certain sadness while he was talking about his past, but all the while he continued his soft assault on her skin, his caresses being tamer now. "Now, how should this go on? Will you continue to run away at any given possibility? Or can we come to a peaceful agreement?"

She sighed softly, when his lips moved over a sensitive spot. "I don't understand why you can't let me go, so I can continue to live as I did?"

"Well," he smiled teasingly, "First of all, you look much prettier in silks than in self-made furs." He was referring to the moment when he had pulled her out of his trap. She had been living in the woods, and although she hadn't been dirty, she had looked rather exotic in her furry clothes. Like a cave woman.

"But," he then continued and his face became more serious, "also because you have an extraordinary spirit. I would like you to keep that. If I let you go though, you would someday walk into another trap of another lord. Maybe not tomorrow, or during the next moon, but the day would surely come. And the next master might not be as patient and kind as I am. I want to protect you! Why do you choose this bothersome life in the woods? You weren't able to sleep in a bed, you didn't have regular food, you were often cold, and always on the run. Is that really something that you miss so much?"

She sighed again, when his thumb grazed the sides of her breasts. "Surrender to me, Katie."

"But-" Her body trembled slightly. "It wouldn't be me! Slaves are not even allowed to carry weapons. A life in which my only duty was to warm your bed and to look pretty would just... I can do more than that. I need to do more..."

"I know," he nodded and smiled, his lips brushing hers tenderly, "which is why I have thought of something. You are indeed a skilled warrior. You are far from being excellent, but you are good. With the right supervision and extensive training you are sure to become an asset – and a very valuable one at that!

Times are difficult. I am a very powerful man, but power also works like a magnet to enemies. Some leaders of the tribes around us are always plotting to kill me or attack my property. My casual visits to ensure friendship and make allies are unfortunately too often superfluous. But you are a woman. You have the huge advantage that you have access to areas that I don't. You probably don't realize it yet,

but you do have a lot of power in the position of a slave. Do you know how valuable your company would be on those visits?

Men like to talk to the slaves they share their beds with, so those women are often the ones who have most information about what's going on."

"No!" she interrupted him, tears standing in her eyes as she tried to push him off of her. "You want to sell me to those men on a nightly basis? Do you know what you're asking? I will not share the bed of..."

"Not what I'm saying!" he said and grabbed her wrists to keep her from hitting his chest. "Let me finish! Only very few of these women are discreet. But I cannot talk to them without raising suspicion. Another slave on the other hand would be ideal to share their gossip with. So, a spy who would just catch a little bit of information every now and then would be incredibly valuable."

While he was speaking, she had stopped trying to hit him and her hands were lying calmly on his chest now, her fingers playing through the soft curly hair that she found there.

"You would be my warrior – disguised as a slave," he clarified.

"But..." she eventually spoke, thinking that this was probably a very good offer that he was making her. "I would still be your slave?"

"Let me come to that." A tender smile played around the corner of his mouth. "Having completed your training, I would give you the status of a member of the caste of warriors."

She gasped audibly.

"It has never been done before, and would probably only be valid on my grounds," he continued, "Therefore, in order to receive that status, you would have to take a vow with me, so that your service would be mine only. In a way, that makes you my slave – just as any other warrior of mine can be considered my slave. Just as Tony – you've met him already, haven't you? He took the vow to be of my service until I release him or he dies."

She growled. "That bastard who mocked me when you captured me?"

Gibbs chuckled amused. "That's him."

"So, you would make me a warrior, I would no longer be a slave?"

"Nope," he affirmed.

"And my duty would only be to fight for you? I would not have to share your bed anymore?"

At this question, his expression changed slightly to an indefinable one. If she hadn't known better, she would have thought that there was stealing a certain coldness into his eyes.

"No, you wouldn't," he finally affirmed.

She nodded thoughtfully, then lowered her eyes to a point somewhere at his neck. "And what if I wanted to?"

"Let's wait until that day has come," he said and stroked some strands of hair out of her face.

"Now to the most important part of the deal: until you have completed your training, you will be my slave. As far as I can tell, you don't even know how to obey, my sweet beauty, and that is something that you will have to learn. For five moons, you will be required to do what I say when I say it. You will

not discuss, you will not complain, you will not disrespect me, and most importantly, your supreme obligation will be to please me. The rules are easy: do well and you will have a nice soft bed to sleep in and a good meal. Disobey, and you will sleep on the floor, and eat nothing but bread and water. I will not ask impossible things from you. But I need to know that you know how to be a good slave – otherwise you will not be an excellent warrior.”

She shook slightly. Five moons, that was a lot of time. On the other hand, she would be free afterwards, she would be a warrior, and she would have a home: a warm place where she could find shelter and make her own decisions. And Gibbs seemed like a fair man, who would not punish her without justification.

“If I agreed,” she started slowly, “what if I made mistakes?”

He moved some strands of her long hair away from her cheek and smiled. “Don't worry, I am a patient man. I am not going to lie to you though. There will be days where you will wish you had not agreed to the deal. There will be mornings where you won't want to get up because every muscle in your body hurts. And there will be evenings where you won't make it to your bed, but just sleep on the nearest bench that you can collapse on. I set the highest standards in my training. It was hard for every warrior. I have a feeling though, that for you the more challenging task will be learning how to be a good slave,” he smirked and kissed her softly.

“One more thing. Once you agree to this, there is no going back. Try to back out by running away, and you will just be my slave for the rest of your life – no way out. A warrior needs to be trusted, and somebody who tries to run away cannot be trusted. If you really feel you need to voice a complaint, you can do so, when we are in private – just the two of us. But try to run away, and I will not give you a chance like this again.”

Kate looked up into the dark sky in which millions of stars were sparkling like little diamonds spilled out on a scarf of black silk.

Gibbs was offering her the possibility to gain the status of a free woman – which was very rare in the world they were living in. Of course she only had the option between the deal he was offering her, and being his slave for the rest of her life. So she would be HIS, one way or another. But then again, she couldn't keep running for the rest of her life. He was right, her life in the woods had been a fight for survival every day anew. And here he was, offering her a home, a future and a perspective. He was giving her the possibility to choose a husband in the future and to have a family, to sleep in a bed in a warm house and to make friends. Why was she even thinking about this?

“Alright,” she eventually said shakily. “Please make me a warrior.”

“Look at me,” he whispered softly, sensing her insecurity and her fear. She did as he had asked, and for a moment lost herself in his icy blue eyes, which were framed by soft wrinkles at the side. “You have nothing to fear. You are now part of the family. I will protect you, my beautiful Katie.” His hands moved along the sides of her body. “Now, let's seal the deal, shall we?” He closed her lips with his mouth in a deep, passionate kiss, demanding entrance into her mouth with his tongue and starting a hot exploration until she was left panting anew.

The sky was slowly starting to change color, announcing the coming dawn.

The End (Jan 01, 2009)

### Previously Unleased: In Another Dream Ep. 3 – Dawn (Interludes)

*Warning: BDSM-related setting! Also soft bondage!*

*Sequel of my stories "Silver Moon" and "Diamond Lake of Stars" and also part of the "In Another Dream" series. "Dawn" consists of a series of drabbles which insinuate on how the story progresses. Some are very coherently interlinked, others are only interlinked by a series of keywords which were input for this publication to provide you with the hint of a logical storyline.*

The door flew open and crashed loudly against the stone wall.

Kate almost immediately sat upright on her little bed of furs and cushions. Slightly disoriented from having been pulled so abruptly from her dream, she looked at the silhouette of the man who was standing in the doorframe. She blinked, as it was still dark outside and in her room, and the only light was coming from the hallway. After a few second she recognized that it was Gibbs standing in her doorframe.

Right. It was the day that her training was to begin. Gibbs -no, her Sir, she corrected herself inwardly- had allowed her to recover for two suns from her little 'trip', as he liked to refer to it. Today was the start of her training.

She yawned and stretched her body, and then pulled her blanket up to her neck, asking, "What is it?" Tiredly she sank back down into the softness of the cushions, eager to get a few more minutes of precious sleep. She had never really been a morning bird.

"What are you doing?" Gibbs asked from the door in a reproaching voice. "Get up! Move!"

"It's not even dawn outside!" Kate complained somewhat grumpily. Nobody had mentioned anything about her training beginning before the sun had even risen. When Gibbs didn't say anything for a few moments, she already thought that he had left. But then she shrieked softly when she felt her blanket being pulled away from her body, exposing her skin to the cool, fresh air of the morning. Only a second later, her deafening scream filled the halls of the house, as a bucket of icy water was emptied over her body.

In disbelief she gazed up at the man, who, after having emptied the contents of the bucket, coolly put it down.

"It's just your first day and you're already being a brat. When I say get up, you get up! And when I say it in the middle of the night, you will do it in the middle of the night without complaints," he explained dryly. "Now, get dried and dressed! And remember this lesson for tomorrow morning!"

Kate jumped up from her bed with an expression of outrage on her face. Her bed had become useless anyway, now that it was all soaked in water. It would have been nice if she had gotten a warning beforehand, instead of being showered in icy water right away. She hurried to the bowl with water where she quickly washed her face, and then dried herself.

Then she put on the silks and the armbands, along with the necklace he had given to her and nearly stumbled out of the room to his side. Gibbs was leaning at the wall, waiting, and when she stood before him, he looked at her.

"Quicker than I thought," he murmured with the hint of a smile playing around the corner of his mouth, and then scanned her appearance from head to toe. "Lose the armbands, skirt and jewelry!"

She gasped at the command audibly and moved the silky bands down her arms to drop them to the ground. Then she halted at her skirt, looking up at him.

"Pull it off!" he repeated his order. "You start from the beginning. That would normally mean no clothes at all. A slave has to earn her clothes and the right to wear jewelry. I'm being nice by allowing you to keep the top and the panties! Generally I'm not a friend of having slave girls start out naked. There are certain parts that should only be on display for her Sir." When she was still not moving, he added with a growl, "Now lose that skirt, or you will start out completely naked!"

With a soft sigh, she let the soft material slide over her hips to the ground and stepped out of them gracefully. She felt her cheeks burn in shame as she imagined having to walk through the building like this, with her skin exposed and only her most intimate parts covered by a thin layer of provocatively sexy silks.

Gibbs, who sensed her discomfort, touched her chin, and lifted it so that he was looking in her eyes.

"You have nothing to fear, and nothing to be ashamed about. On the contrary! You look radiant. Nobody but me has the right to touch you or talk to you. They know that. If there are any offenses against that rule, come to me immediately and I will deal with the person."

She returned his smile softly, but with a hint of sadness lying in her eyes. Had this really been the right decision to make?

"Another important point," Gibbs continued, "is that you will not be allowed to touch any weapon until I tell you to do so. Do you have more knives aside from those you have already handed over to me?"

"No, I gave all of them to you," she confessed heavy heartedly. She was not even allowed to touch, let alone carry, a knife anymore? In this moment she felt as vulnerable as she had never felt in her whole life.

Gibbs nodded contently. "Good girl." Then he pointed to the ground. "Down. On your knees. You never stand upright in front of me or any other man, unless you're being told to do so. From now on you will kneel in my presence."

He could read the disapproval on her face, but nonetheless, she went to her knees. He smirked slightly, and bent down in front of her.

"If you are addressed or being given orders to, you will reply with "Yes Sir!" and nothing else, understood?"

She nodded. "Yes Sir."

"Very good," he nodded satisfied. "And wipe that expression of your face that says that you'd like to jump my throat if you had a knife."

She lowered her face, biting her lips. "I'm sorry, Sir."

He smiled, knowing that if she had a knife right now, she would most certainly be using it. "Now... as this is your first day, we will keep it simple. All you have to do is follow me wherever I go. You will always be slightly behind me. When I stop somewhere, you will kneel slightly behind my legs. Never move or walk in front of my body! And do not speak to anybody unless I have given you explicit

permission to do so. That is also if somebody addresses you. Wait for my permission to answer them. Clear?"

"Yes, Sir." She muttered between clenched teeth, playing with the thought of asking him if she needed his permission to take a breath as well. But then she decided against it. He had warned her that her training would be hard, and she had come to learn enough about him to know that he liked to test people. She would go along with what he said... for now!

Gibbs was about to turn around and move, when she lifted her head. "I have a question! Do I have to kneel the whole time, or am I allowed to walk upright, when you are walking?"

"You are allowed to walk. I don't want you to bruise that pretty knees of yours. Now come. I want to introduce you to the members of our family."

She followed him, her head facing the ground. It had begun. She was his slave.

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Kate was observing, silently. As she had done for the last few suns. Nobody ever talked to her or addressed a question at her. Except maybe Gibbs. It was as he had told her. Her only duty was to please him. She had learned to properly serve him a drink on her second day as a slave and that was what she had been doing the last few days. It was also her task for tonight.

She was sitting behind him on the large cushion, while he was chatting to the other men at the table. During the past few days, Kate had gotten to know them. There was Tony, a warrior and a bigmouth as far as she could judge. He was one of the few who owned a slave. She was a pretty girl with large almond eyes and long, almost black curls, and was of an exotic beauty. Her name, Ziva, gave away that she was probably coming from another region. As far as Kate could tell, they were having the kind of tender relationship that resembled more the one of husband and wife than that of a slave and her master. Right now Tony was whispering something in her ear, while she was pressed against his back with her breasts, giggling softly.

Then there was Donald, or rather Ducky, as he was called by the people. Obviously because when he had been a young boy, he had been so scared of ducks that he had always run away from them. That nickname had stuck to him. He was the medicine man of the clan. His personal slave, a crazy girl called Abby, was a very cheerful and loud person. She was the only person who had smiled at Kate up to now. The others generally kept ignoring her – obviously due to Gibbs' orders. But Abby obviously didn't care for the warning glances Gibbs shot her whenever she casted a look at Kate, and so Kate's eyes met hers often over the table.

Then there was McGee, a young man from a region in the north. He was a warrior, although he seemed to be a rather inexperienced one, as the other men were constantly mocking him.

Jimmy Palmer was obviously some kind of trainee to Ducky. He was always busy in the garden, picking herbs for him or studying some old scribes. Or whirling around Ducky and observing while he was treating patients.

She hadn't gotten to know the other handful of men at the table, but she was sure she would make their acquaintance in time.

"Hey." She was pulled from her thoughts by the low voice of Gibbs, and looked at the man.

"Yes Sir?"

He smiled at her friendly, well aware that she had barely been spoken to during the last few days. This order of his had been on purpose, because he knew that a person learned much more about other people by observing their behavior, instead of engaging in superfluous conversation. That skill was especially necessary for a warrior in a fight. One look at the opponent had to give enough information of the best tactics to start the fight.

Still, Gibbs also noticed the absence of a smile on the young woman's face, and so he decided that it was time that she made some friends who would make her feel welcome here. He knew that she was feeling very lonely, and especially because of that he gave her a lot of credit for her obedience. He had not heard one word of complaint from her – but he also didn't want her to lose her spirit, so it was time to break the ice. Tenderly, he moved his hand through her hair, before he leaned in to whisper. "Have you learned how to dance yet?"

"I'm afraid not," she answered with her head lowered and he smiled.

"I thought so." He had noticed the way Abby had repeatedly smiled at Kate, and even waved at her – against his orders. But Abby was not a person who was afraid of him – or with whom one could be angry for a long time. He knew that she always wanted to make everybody feel welcome, and so he decided that it might be a good idea to place Kate in her hands for a few hours each day.

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"Tomorrow, you will meet with Abby. She is Ducky's assistant, but before she came here, she was also the head slave of a little dancing school. She will give you daily lessons in belly dance, starting tomorrow."

She reveled in his touch, leaning into him, as he hadn't touched her ever since they had returned from the woods. "Yes Sir," she whispered.

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Incredible, he thought to himself, while he was sitting on his cushion and observing the smooth movements of the young woman's slender body. Abby had only been giving her daily dance lessons for a little more than ten suns, and Kate was already able to make his head spin with her performance.

Either Abby was a genius, or Kate was incredibly talented. He figured that it was a little bit of both. Talent most surely was there from Kate's part. He had seen her move in the woods with the limberness of a tiger, and now she was transforming just those moves into her dance and by that formed a beautiful style that was completely unique and entirely hers.

He loved it. In fact, he wanted to grab her and make love to her right there. Damn, he should have taken her into his bed already. His body yearned for her softness and his mind yearned for her sweet voice. But he had figured that it was all very new for her, so he didn't want to overburden her.

By now she seemed to have adapted to her new life. During the first days, he had never seen her smile, but ever since he had ordered the dancing lessons, Abby seemed to have a positive influence on her. The two women were constantly chattering about something.

Well, Gibbs thought silently, at least he seemed to have good taste in women. Abby was widely known for her ability to judge people. Those whom she liked and got along with possessed character and were loyal. And Kate and Abby – although as different as day and night from their outer appearances – had already formed a bond that reminded him of those of sisters. Abby seemed to

have been able to break the ice. Gibbs was grateful for that, because it had pained him to watch Kate every day without her ever giving the slightest hint of a smile.

For some reason she despised the thought of him being her Sir, although he was sure, her life was way more comfortable than it had been before in the woods.

His eyes fell on her slim ankles with the golden anklets and then moved up her thighs. Right now she was spinning around at breathtaking speed with her upper body bent back elegantly, all the while never losing balance. It looked completely harmonious, and – hell, yes! – sexy. Her hands, which had been raised above her head during her spin, moved sensually down her curves when she changed to a slower rhythm again. Her hips swayed in a sexy rhythm and then she bent her body back to land on her palms and do a backward roll, before landing safely and elegantly like a cat on her feet again. The silky band that she was holding in her hands was swirling around her, making her look as if she was a creature from a mythical land instead of a human being. There seemed to be glitter everywhere. Every person in the room was silent and observed her dance with fascination.

When Kate was finished she dropped to her knees and bowed deeply in front of the observers, which consisted of Gibby himself, Tony, McGee, Ducky and two other warriors. It took a moment for them to grasp that her performance was over, then they all started clapping furiously. Tony even yelled a loud whoo-hoo, which didn't only catch him a warning glance from Gibbs, but also a nudge from Ziva, who was sitting slightly behind him, serving him ale.

Kate lifted graciously and resumed her position behind Gibbs, smiling broadly when she noted the jubilant gestures from Abby.

Gibbs turned around so that he could take a look at her and found her face flushed with joy, and her smiling at him.

"Did you like it?" she asked slightly breathless and he had to chuckle at her question.

"Did I like it?? Hell, yes!" he affirmed and moved his thumb over her lower lip. Her smile faded slightly and her eyes held his intensely. "Come here," he whispered lowly, and she moved in his direction. "Closer," he whispered when she had assumed a position right behind him. Her eyes widened in surprise and she crawled closer.

"How close?" she then whispered, blushing slightly and looking at the other men, who were spread on cushions in the small room.

"They're not watching us. They're busy talking to each other or their slaves." This statement was followed by a chuckle. "Obviously Tony has one hell of a time defending his woo-hoo for your dance." He urged her knees apart with his hand and pulled her closer against him, so that she was framing his back with one of her legs and his side with her other. Her breasts were touching his arm, and her face was only inches apart from his.

"So, tell me," he started, "Are you enjoying your time here?"

She swallowed and he could feel her tremble. "Right now? Here?"

He laughed softly. "I was actually referring to the last few days."

"Oh yes!" Her smile was back, he noted with delight. "Abby is a really kind person. I've never met anybody like her before."

"Yeah, she's one of a kind," he agreed. "So... no need to run away?"

"Not at the moment anyway," she countered cheekily, which made him press her arm softly.

"Careful there, my sweet. Don't tempt me!" With a half-smile he lifted the glass of ale to his mouth and took a huge sip.

She lifted her arm almost hesitantly so that her hand could play at the back of his neck and then move into his silvery hair. "Maybe that's just what I'm trying to do... Sir."

He nearly choked on the liquid at her almost purring into his ear and looked into her eyes. If he didn't know better he would say that she was trying to seduce him. All these days she had not even looked at him if she didn't have to and now she was trying to seduce him?

He narrowed his eyes slightly suspiciously and moved his hands through her hair, that had been decorated with silvery and gold strands for her performance.

"Now, what are you up to, warrior-girl?" His eyes scanned her face thoughtfully.

She sighed and her expression darkened slightly, as she interpreted his reaction as decline of her seduction. "I'm sorry, I just... may I speak openly, Sir?"

He chuckled and asked playfully, "Would you remain silent if I denied you permission?"

"No." Her reply was resolute.

"Yeah, I didn't think you would," Gibbs retorted and then nodded, "Speak freely then."

"You promised me that if I obeyed your orders, my stay here would be very delightful and -um-satisfying." She blushed slightly. "But up to now it has only been delightful. Are you not a man to keep your word?"

He raised his eyebrows completely stunned. Her eyes scanned his expression, then she withdrew her touches from him. "I am sorry. I know I am not in the position to demand. I really want to be trained as a warrior – that's why I'm here. But ever since I slept in your bed I feel somewhat discontented when I spend a night alone – let alone seventeen nights."

He grasped her around the waist to keep her from moving away. "Stay right there," he ordered and then handed her a glass with ale. She took it thankfully, having not even realized how thirsty her performance had made her, and took a mouthful of the bitter, but cold liquid. When she had gotten used to the taste, she took another sip and then another. Gibbs waited until she had quenched her thirst, and then put the glass back on the low table in front of him.

Then he let his eyes travel along her face, before he leaned in to touch his lips to hers, savoring the taste of ale on them. She sighed longingly into the kiss.

"So just to make sure I didn't misunderstand you," he teased her, his voice low and sexy while his words were vibrating against her lips. "You want to spend the night in my bed?"

"Well," Kate shrugged with an amused smile playing around her face. "Not necessarily, if that was against your wishes. Abby told me, that there are a lot of other places one can be alone for a long time."

"I think, I will have to have a word with Abby. She's putting ideas into your head," he replied with a mock indignation, that made Kate giggle.

"Ideas, which are not necessarily against your interests, Mylord," she retorted wittily, and Gibbs laughed. He let one of his hands graze the naked skin of her waist and then her hipbone, and then placed it on the cushion right between her legs to lean into her and nibble at her earlobe.

Then, when he retreated a little, he moved his hand to her pleasure center between her legs discreetly. She made a sound which was a mixture of a moan and a protest, her face flushed while she looked around.

"They're not looking," he calmed her down, "But even if they were, they couldn't see what I'm doing, as you're wearing a skirt. Of course, you'll have to keep silent."

"You know I can't," she whimpered softly, when his hand found just the right spot to rub.

"Take it as a challenge," was his playful reply. "Don't look at them, look at me. And don't make a sound..."

She turned her head to him, biting her lips, while one of her hands moved to touch his face. She drew a line down from the soft lines that framed his eyes to his lips, where she placed her fingers and gasped softly.

"You know that you look absolutely delicious?" he asked softly. "I like you needy and desperate for me. But shall I tell you a secret?"

"P-please do," she answered shakily and looked into his blue eyes.

"I am just as desperate to feel your beautiful body against mine," he rasped and bent down to bite her neck. She moaned louder, and immediately buried her face at his shoulder. He laughed hoarsely, and pushed the fabric of her panties aside. When his hand made contact with her soft flesh, they both caught their breath at the feeling. Gibbs felt her face still buried against his shoulder and when he moved his thumb to graze her clit, her body twitched and she moaned again, more urgently now.

His intention was not to embarrass her, so he stopped his sweet torture, and instead started to draw soft circles on her thighs with his fingers. His head was tilted so that he could smell her hair and his lips were right next to her ear. "Tell me, Katie," he whispered, "Did you like that?"

She nodded, but didn't say anything, her hot breath still puffing against his shoulder.

He leaned in closer to her ear. "And would you come for me now if I told you to do so?"

"Yes," she nodded and looked up with eyes that made clear that she was drugged with desire and completely oblivious to her surroundings. He did not doubt her answer for one second.

For a moment he wondered what he had done to earn this bliss that had been granted to him by the spirits of the heaven when they had sent her his way.

Tenderly, he touched her cheek, "Have you eaten already, my Katie?"

"Yes, I have," she replied.

"Good. Then go upstairs to my chambers, and wait for me in my bed. I will be there soon," he promised, and kissed her hotly until they were both moaning with arousal. Then Kate moved away and got up elegantly.

"Don't take too long, Sir," she whispered and then vanished with the discretion of a slave. Gibbs looked after her and his head spun a little. Hell, he was too old to feel this way. And yet, she seemed to somehow rejuvenate him with her spirit and her tenderness.

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The room was filled by the sound of their soft aroused moans and sighs, sometimes interrupted by the whisper of a name or a sweet caress. For hours, they had been exploring each other's bodies. Up

to now, all they had had was basically wild sex, but tonight she was surprised by his tenderness and his playfulness.

She had been aroused and ready for him when he had eventually arrived in his room. As ordered, she had been lying on his bed in her silks, sexily displaying her body. He had just stared at her for a while, while he was slowly discarding his own clothes.

Then he had climbed on the bed and crawled over her body to kiss her deeply. But instead of taking it further, they had both reveled in the intensive touch and their subtle little games of dominance. She loved his body, and what she could do to him – and what it did to her at the same time. She thought that she had never seen anything as sexy as his soft shiver when she ran her fingertips over his chest.

And now? Now, she was beyond all rational thought.

When he had entered her from behind, with her lying in his arms and her back pressed against his chest, she had felt as if her breath was robbed from her lungs. Incredibly sensually, he had started a slow rhythm, all the while continuing to caress her lips and neck and shoulders and shower them in his kisses.

He had kindled the fire of passion so cautiously that it had taken her by surprise, when he had eventually turned his kisses into more urgent explorations and increased the speed of his thrusts.

And by now she was panting his name, begging him for things she couldn't even give a name to, and clasping his fingers desperately. His soft pants and moans resounded in her head, and her own followed as an echo. Until they both reached the pleasurable heights of an oblivion of ecstasy.

He kept holding her in his arms until her soft whimpers subsided. And she kept holding onto him until she could feel his breathing even out. And then they just lay there on his bed, both exhausted from the erotic adventure they had just shared.

For the first time neither of them made a move. Neither of them withdrew from the other's warmth.

Eventually Gibbs shifted and repositioned them so that her head was resting on his shoulder and he was lying on his back. Kate turned around to lie on her belly, her body lying on his, and lifted herself onto her elbows to look down on the man. Then she started to giggle all of a sudden. Gibbs growled lowly and pulled her closer.

"Am I amusing you in some way, slave?"

"You are indeed," she nodded and pulled some of the decorations which were supposed to be in her hair out of his. "Those don't really suit you, Sir!"

"They're all over me," he informed her in a mock reproach and she smiled.

"Hey, YOU wanted me to dance! Glittery decorations are part of that." She put the few strands near the side of the bed and then turned her attention back on him. With a thoughtful expression on her face, she trailed the cute little wrinkles around his eyes in fascination. Then she let her hand play along the skin of his slightly stubbly cheek and neck.

"Let me ask you something?" he eventually broke the silence in a soft voice and she smiled at him.

"What?" was her whispered reply, while she was leaning in and spilling light kisses on his skin.

"What ever happened to you?" He asked thoughtfully, his fingers moving some of her hair out of her face. "You are everything a man can dream about so why did you ever run away from your previous master?"

Her face became cooler and she stopped her caresses. "How do you know that?"

"Know what?"

"That I had a master once?" she asked. "How did you know?"

"I figured," he replied soothingly, sensing how her whole body tensed up and she slightly moved away from him. "Although you may have difficulties with obeying, the rules of serving a master are basically known to you. You have a talent for dancing, so you must have had the basic preparations when you were a child. And when we are together I just feel that you like giving up control. So why didn't you just submit to him? What happened?"

She gazed at him for a few silent moments, her face displaying a mixture of anger, confusion, fear and panic. Then she shook her head.

"I'm... I'm... I'm sorry... I really...really... I ought to..." She pushed his hands away and nearly fled out of his embrace. She rushed out of the bed and hastily collected her clothes from the ground, nearly stumbling in the process. "I have to... to go... Abby... I'm sure she'll want these..."

"Katie," Gibbs had sat up and was now observing her rushed retreat. She was stuttering something unintelligible about returning her dancing clothes to Abby. Finally, when she was stepping backwards towards the door, her clothes and jewelry pressed against her naked body, he got up.

"Kate!" he said again, more urgently, and before she was able to open the door, he had reached her and pulled her body against his. God, he noticed with almost shock, she was trembling as if he had threatened her with her life. "Shhh," he whispered soothingly against her hair. "You can't just run through the halls all naked, my sweet. Especially after that dance earlier. I ordered my warriors not to touch you, but even they won't be able to resist the temptation that you'd be putting up."

Carefully he led her back to the bed and then took her clothes out of her hand, dropping them to the ground.

"You don't have to tell me anything just now. Let us just forget the subject for now..." His hand was running through her hair. He was in honest shock. Never before had she ever shown fear of him or whatever he threatened her with. She had never been afraid to contradict him or even run away from him. She had been angry, annoyed, sad maybe, but she had never been afraid. Yet, at the slight mention of her past, she froze into a statue that represented sheer terror.

Slowly he pulled her body back under the sheets and hugged her closely, waiting patiently until her trembling became weaker and she pressed closer against his body and his warmth.

Inwardly, he swore that, if he ever found out who did that to her, that person would have to pay.

"I'm sorry." Eventually her tiny voice sounded in the silence of the room. "I'm sorry I cannot tell you. Please don't be angry."

"I'm not," he immediately reassured and kissed the side of her neck tenderly. "I want you to know though, that you have nothing to fear. You are safe here. So if you someday decide to tell me about your reasons, I will listen."

She smiled sadly and touched his hand lightly with hers, her fingers drawing circles on the back of his hand.

"Maybe... someday..."

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Kate relaxed and leaned back in the hot water of the bath. The bathhouse for the slaves surely was a comfortable place. It allowed the women privacy and some time to chitchat with each other – which was something they couldn't do while serving their masters.

Kate winced slightly when she moved her freshly waxed body in the water and through the movement the heat seemed to intensify and burn her skin. She had pinned her hair up, but a few strands had loosened from the clip and were hanging around her face. Leisurely, Kate observed Abby, who was busy oiling her body. With interest she studied the large black picture on the skin of the back of the young woman.

“What is that creature?” Kate eventually asked and stretched her sore muscles.

“A dragon,” Abby replied with a smile. “It's a mythic creature. I read about it in a book once, when I was searching for something in the library. It is said to spit fire.”

“Creepy!” Kate exclaimed. “Why would you have something like that imprinted on your back?”

“Well, I thought it looked kind of cute! And besides it represents me. I'm well known for being able to spit fire – metaphorically.” She laughed and pinned her long black hair up. “And of course men love it! For some reason they think it is hot if a woman has body art.”

“Really?” Kate asked and lifted slowly. “You think I should get one as well?”

“Don't you dare think about it!” A male voice from the entrance to the room sounded and Abby spun around with a squeal and grabbed her towel to cover herself. Kate instantly recognized the voice of Gibbs and turned her head lazily.

“Hi!” she smiled. Abby on the other hand was not as friendly.

“What are you thinking? This is the bathhouse, it's our area! You men cannot just storm in here like it was your bedroom! Are you ever going to learn? Do I have to literally kick one of you out of here, before you take that sign outside seriously that says “Women Only”?!”

Gibbs just chuckled, unimpressed by Abby's outburst, and went to his knees at the spot where Kate was sulking in the water. “Tony often comes here to see Ziva!” he explained Abby's outbreak, when he noticed Kate's complete bewilderment, before his face became serious.

“However, what are you doing here?”

Kate looked around, “Well, what does it look like? I'm relieving the ache of my muscles which you caused last night!”

He smirked self-confidently, and she splashed a bit of water towards him. “Don't you dare laugh about me! This is not funny!”

He couldn't help but chuckle again, before he became serious. “However, I was looking for you everywhere! I have a task for you.” He looked at Abby who was sitting on the bench near the pool, shooting deathglares at him. “Dry yourself and get dressed. I'll be waiting outside, before the dragon over there kills me!” He rolled his eyes, and then lifted to leave the room.

Kate sighed and grabbed for her towel. Twenty minutes later, she left the bathhouse, smelling like a bunch of freshly picked wildflowers and smiling brightly. Gibbs growled at her lowly.

“I said, hurry!”

"I did!" she countered and came to stand in front of him. He eyed her carefully from head to toe, inhaling her seductive scent. His eyes took in her sexy silks, which formed out her perfect breasts and revealed her strong and slender legs. After having reveled in that sight for a bit, he shook his head.

"No, that won't do... first of all!" He looked at her chestnut hair that was falling down her back in flowery scented silkiness – only a few selected strands were pinned up with hairpins. He pulled the pins out of her hair, making her wince slightly.

"What are you doing?" she exclaimed slightly outraged. "It just took me most of the time to pin..."

"Shut up!" he cut her off. "You need to fix your hair somehow, so it won't fall into your face. If you can't find a way, I'll have to cut it."

This provoked a shriek by her and she stumbled backwards, away from him. "I can do it! Don't you dare touch my hair!"

"Fine... now, come with me! Heel!" He turned and hurried towards the main house. Kate followed him closely on the heel, having trouble to keep up with his large, quick steps. Eventually they had reached her room. Gibbs opened the door and pointed on the bed. "There! Put that on! From now on, this is what you will wear unless you're told otherwise or serving at our table."

"Yes, Sir!" she nodded and, while he was waiting outside, she quickly changed into the clothes. Instead of a skirt, the set consisted of something closely resembling pants, but a little wider. They were in a dark color, and slightly see-through. The piece of fabric that covered her upper body was not just a bra, but rather a top, and didn't reveal as much of her cleavage anymore. And... she gasped! Then carefully she lifted the beautiful, thin black shoes. They were very female and fitted the rest of the outfit. But up to now she had not been allowed to wear shoes. In awe she moved her fingers over the material, then she slipped one over her left foot. It fitted perfectly.

"What are you doing in there? I'm waiting!" The slightly annoyed tone from the man came from the door and Kate rolled her eyes. She wondered why he was in such a bad mood today. After all he was not the one whose muscles were aching from a whole night of passion.

"Seriously, you have to give a girl time to change!" she almost-snapped and heard the man grumble something from outside. Quickly, she pulled her hair back and used one of the bands, which were actually meant for her arm, to tie her hair back. Then she stepped out of the room. Gibbs looked at her with obvious displeasure written all over his face.

"Are you kidding me? Loose the jewelry! The necklace, the armbands, the anklet – it all has to go!"

Kate sighed and took off the anklet and the bracelets and then put them in his hand.

"Now, that should do," The man eventually nodded. "I didn't think that you would look so sexy in it though. Well, we'll try this for now."

"What are we going to try?" Kate asked completely confused, but Gibbs didn't answer. Instead he turned around and moved away. When she didn't follow immediately, he growled. "Do you need a written invitation? Come on! Move your legs, we don't have the whole day!"

She sighed. Man, he was grumpy today. He didn't even have a reason! After all she was the once who had felt all beaten up this morning in front of his fireplace. Her whole body was aching from the incredibly passionate experiences they had shared last night. Of course, at that time it had sounded like a good idea to have him take her against the wall and on the ground – in the wildest positions – but in retrospect she would protest next time. The ache in her muscles almost wasn't worth it – almost! If the sex with him just wasn't so incredibly satisfying.

Kate stumbled after the man through the house and then through a side door out of the building into a small backyard. Then they entered another house which she had never been in before.

"This is where we keep our arms," Gibbs explained. "From now on your day will start here. You will polish the blades every morning, and then afterwards you will proceed to the training ground, which I will get to in a moment."

During his speech, Kate's face had brightened up as she realized what this meant. She would finally be allowed to touch weapons! She would receive the training lessons that he had promised her! After three and a half weeks she would eventually start her new life as a warrior!

"Now, look!" Gibbs ordered gruffly. "To polish these blades, you will use a very soft cloth. Look that they are clean! If they're not you will clean them with hot water! But be sure to dry them afterwards, otherwise they'll get rusty! Now these are the blades!" Gibbs opened another door to the room full of armory and Kate's smile faded instantly.

"Are you making fun of me?" She exclaimed and looked openly at the man. "These are like two hundred swords and knives! It will take the whole day to polish all of them!"

"Yes!" he nodded. "The first few times it will, but you will get better and faster. If you want to be a warrior, you will have to start from scratch. The first step is knowing how to treat your weapon. If your weapon is not well kept, it doesn't matter how well you can fight. If your blade will break during a fight due to rust, none of your fighting skills will matter. This is step one. Do you want out?" He asked, moving behind her. His fingers played along the skin of her arm. "You still have the option to just be my slave for the rest of your life."

"No," she contradicted. "No, I'll do it! I'll just start."

"Wait," Gibbs ordered. "We're not done yet! Once you're finished with that, you will proceed to the training circle." He pushed open the large door, which led outside on the other side of the house, directly to a large muddy backyard. It was framed by a high wooden fence, and the ground was covered with muddy earth.

Just at that moment, the place was occupied by Tony and McGee who were busy fighting a sword fight. "This is our training circle. When you're finished polishing the weapons, you'll start running here. One hundred rounds, and thirty push-ups afterwards. You know what push-ups are, don't you?"

"Um... no..." she said in a tiny voice, looking at the huge area. One hundred rounds sure was a lot.

"Look." Gibbs went down on the ground, steadied himself on his arms and then started to lift his body from the ground, doing push-ups. "You lift your body, using only your arms. Make sure that every part except for your feet and your hands remains in the air. Try it," he then ordered.

Kate went to the ground as well. After the fifth push-up, she was sweating and after the tenth, she couldn't lift her body anymore and broke down with a moan.

"Thirty of them!" Gibbs announced. "Then you may go to sleep. Tomorrow you will do just the same. And the day after that. Until I tell you otherwise. Understood?"

"Ye-yes, Sir" Kate panted and the man nodded.

"Good... then start! You don't have time to lose today." And with these words he left the area, leaving the young woman standing there somewhat lonely.

This first day passed by too quickly, and when the sun had set, Kate wasn't even ready with polishing half of the weapons. When the candles were put out at midnight, she had about one quarter of the

swords left. And when the sun rose again to announce the next day, she had just finished her last push-up, lying sweaty, miserable and tired in the mud, unsure of whether she would ever be able to use her limbs again.

She had only closed her eyes for a moment, when she was suddenly put out of her short sleep by a bucket of ice water. She shrieked and jumped up, shaking from cold.

“What are you doing?” Gibbs asked, looking at her in disbelief. “The sun has risen! It's time for you to start working!”

“But!” She was almost sobbing, pointing weakly at the armory. “I only just finished! I didn't even get any sleep last night.”

“You want to sleep?” He asked, almost softly. “Well, you do have the option to sleep of course. Go to your room, get a nice hot bath, and sleep. That would put an end to your training as a warrior though!”

She was shaking from cold and hunger, as she hadn't even had the time to eat. “That's just unfair!” she complained. “At least let me get a few hours...” She shrieked when he lowered his face to hers and grabbed her wrist.

“Kate! A warrior can't just back out when he wants! You cannot just leave your position in a warzone because you want to sleep – or eat. Because the moment you do, you might end up with a knife in your heart! Now, scrub the mud out of your face. There's a bucket of water. And then get your cute little buttocks back to work at the weapons! They need to be polished!”

She sighed and trudged to the armory, where she resumed her place between the blades and started polishing those, which had been used on the previous day and were all muddy and dirty.

She sincerely hoped that it was only the first day that was this hard. But the next days should go on the same...

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Gibbs found her lying in between the blades, the old cloths as her pillow while she was sleeping tightly. She looked completely exhausted. He sighed. Women, he thought. The first day she had finished her tasks in time to get a decent amount of sleep, and she had used her additional time to visit the bathhouse instead of sleeping.

And when he had looked completely perplexed at Abby – whom he knew that fact from – she had snapped at him that it was all his fault, because she was still trying to look pretty for him.

He ran his hand through his hair with a sigh and shook his head. The he touched the young woman's hair. It was silky and soft and was still smelling of peaches from the bath oils. She was still trying to look beautiful for him – but why? He looked at her slender body thoughtfully, thinking that she had lost some weight.

Maybe he should give her a break. For the last eight days, she had done nothing but polish and work out. At the most she had gotten four hours of sleep per night. He didn't want her to break down.

Carefully, he lifted her body from the ground. She mumbled something about being ready in a minute and he chuckled. He pushed the door open with his foot and then carried her through the nightly cold to the main house. It would still be another half an hour before the dawn would break, so the house was still considerably silent.

When he had reached his own chambers, Gibbs carefully placed the young woman on his large soft bed, and pulled off her shoes. Then he covered her with the blanket and pressed a tender kiss to her forehead. When she mumbled something, he couldn't resist and pressed another kiss to her soft lips. Her whole body smelt like flowers from the bath and he felt tempted to crawl into bed with her and make love to her and sink into that flowery scent completely.

But he didn't. Because he knew that she was completely exhausted and needed sleep and a good meal. So he stroked her cheek again and then turned around to leave the room silently, allowing her all the time that she needed to make up for the lost sleep of the last days.

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Kate is training with Tony.

The two of them begin bonding and become friends (like brother and sister).

Tony begins to become protective of her like he would of a younger sister.

Tony also begins to have respect for her as a warrior.

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Her loud moan filled the room, accompanied by the soft thudding sound when her body hit the wooden wall of the weaponry. His body was pushing her against the wall, his naked chest making contact with her barely covered body. Their skins were covered by a soft sheen of sweat from their previous training fight.

Hungrily, Gibbs devoured the young woman's mouth, while he moved his hands down to fumble at her silk pants.

She gasped, her breath coming shakily, when their lips broke apart. Her fingers trailed over his shoulder and then buried in his hair, while his teeth were scratching softly over the skin of her neck. It was an outburst of sheer passion, ignited by the training he had put her through. The whole previous fight had been like a foreplay, when he had dared her to attack him in all ways possible – only to counter every attack by a defense and throw a flirtatious remark her way. It had been bound to end this way.

He pushed her body forcefully back against the wall, when she moved against him, and fumbled with his pants. Her hand flew down to his and grabbed his wrist softly. "Please wait, Sir... Too fast," she rasped into his ear, and he smirked softly.

"In that case," he murmured and bit her lip playfully, before he moved down over her chin. "I'll take care of that."

Only a few moments later, he buried his face against her core, causing her legs to buckle slightly. Her soft scream filled the room and then turned into repeated pants when he put one of her legs over his shoulder to allow him better access. Within seconds he had her panting, and whimpering and begging him for more. God, the things he did to her. He waited until she was nearly on the edge, then he lifted up to his full height and dragged her away from the wall. When she was standing in front of the staple of hay in one of the corners, he gave her a push, and with a shocked little scream, she fell backwards into the hay. Immediately he covered her body with his, reuniting their lips in a desperate kiss.

Her moan was swallowed by him when he entered her with a strong, deep thrust. He felt her shiver underneath him, and her hips buckle while her whole body melted into his perfectly. Her head fell back and her lips opened in silent amazement, while he moved in and out of her.

She wanted to say something, but all that left her mouth was a breathless scream, followed by a desperate whimper. Her fingers clasped his sweaty shoulders, while he was nibbling at her collarbone, his agitated groans mingling with her own. No doubt, they were addicted to each other. She couldn't get enough of him, and neither could he get enough of her.

And when they climaxed nearly at the same time only a moment later, both of them were almost disappointed that it was over so fast. Panting heavily, Kate couldn't help but start to giggle.

"Care to share the joke?" Gibbs grumbled into her ear, equally breathless, and bit her earlobe sharply.

"Oh, I was just thinking that maybe we should replace the usual training by this. We could stay in bed all day long."

He chuckled, "Pleasant thought. We wouldn't have to stay in bed though... or do you see a bed here?"

"No," she replied with a breathless laugh. She almost sighed in disappointment when he moved out of her and lifted himself to rearrange his clothes.

"I need a bath." He sounded almost exhausted, and she had to laugh again before she got up as well. "You don't have to laugh. You're joining me! And I'll make sure that all you do while in the water will be little moans of pleasure in my ear." He grabbed her arm and dragged her with him. She laughed under protest.

"You will be the death of mine..."

"So?" he asked. "Is there anything more beautiful for a little slave than to die happily in the arms of her master?"

She swooned slightly and then lifted herself to her toes in front of him to kiss him on the lips sweetly. "No, come to think of it, it seems indeed that there isn't."

And then they nearly ran to the bathhouse...

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Kate's training progresses, not only in the handling of weapons, but also in serving people as a slave.

Gibbs tasks her with serving him and a number of high-ranking guests.

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*SPLASH...*

The contents of the vial were dripping down from the man's face and poured over his clothes, soaking them in the slightly red color of the wine. For two seconds Gibbs was just sitting motionless, staring in what was almost complete bewilderment at the slave in front of him, who was glaring at him wildly, the empty viol from which the rest of the wine was still dripping, in her hands.

Then he slammed his fist on the wooden table and raised from the chair he was sitting on. "KATE!" His voice was loud, and the way he nearly barked the name in blind fury made the complete hall become silent. Every guest was looking in a mixture of curiosity, but also fear, at the owner of the house, whom they had never before seen that infuriated.

The young slave girl, though, didn't flinch. She kept glaring at him, neither thinking about lowering her eyes nor her body to pay him the respect she owed him.

Tony jumped up from his cushion and rushed to his leader, putting himself on the line. He knew that it was probably suicidal of him to come to stand between them – just as it was stupid to step in the way of two fighting dogs. But Tony had in a way grown fond of the young warrior woman. His endless training hours which her were fun, and she was skilled. Add to that, she was never afraid to tell him what she was thinking about his shameless hits on women and his sex talk. In short, he almost saw her as a younger sister. And the expression on Gibbs' face now made him fear for her life.

Trying to calm the man down, he put his hand on his shoulder. "Come on, boss. You had that one coming and you know it!" he whispered, well aware that everybody in the hall was watching him. "You humiliated her the whole evening."

"Get out of my way," Gibbs growled, his eyes still fixed on Kate, who was slowly starting to realize the extent of her outburst when she looked around and all eyes were fixed on her. When Tony didn't comply, but started to whisper again, Gibbs glared at him. "Out. Of. My. Way." he snapped. Tony thought it wiser to comply and stepped aside.

Gibbs wiped some of the wine out of his face, glaring at Kate again. Slowly he closed the short distance between them and came to stand right in front of her. "What was that?" he asked dangerously low, willing to give her one last way out. Of course he knew that she had poured the wine intentionally into his face, the other people present didn't though. Therefore he was offering her the chance to at least get out of this hall with the last bit of dignity before he would deal with her later.

But then he thought that he didn't trust his own ears, when she even closed the distance between them and hissed, "Bastard! How dare you talk about me as if I was..."

He shut her up by grabbing her wrist and twisting it, before she could humiliate him in front of his guests. A slave disrespecting her master in the way she was about to do yelled for only one option. To restore his dignity and show that he was capable of defending the position as a leader – and a man – she would have to be openly punished. Even killed maybe.

"Lower your eyes!" he growled. When she didn't comply, he twisted her wrist to a painful point and she winced, a soft 'ow' escaping her lips. "Lower. Your. Eyes. I am not going to repeat myself again!"

The hall was so quiet that one could have heard a pin drop, as everybody's eyes were fixed on the scenery. It seemed as if everybody was almost holding his breath to see if she would defy the order – in which case calls for an open punishment would get loud. Gibbs hated to punish. He knew that there were masters, as well as slaves, who got a kick out of the punishment. He didn't – and as far as he knew Kate she wasn't either. She was just being so damn proud, that he would have to teach her a lesson.

He twisted her hand more and she made a high-pitched noise of pain. At first he thought that she would remain on collision course, but then she obviously weighed her options and decided that her pride was not worth a broken hand.

Her head shot down with a soft sob. He eased his grip on her hand, knowing that his rough treatment would leave bruises.

"Now on your knees! And apologize to me and the whole hall for the display of your disrespect!"

"No," she whispered so that only he could hear her.

"Excuse me?" he asked loudly. Kate's voice was shaking, when she repeated her answer, louder now. Low muttering began to raise among the men in the hall, and here and there outraged comments could be heard. Gibbs growled. His eyes fell on his old friend Fornell, who was still sitting on his cushion calmly, observing him. Fortunately, most of the wine had hit himself, so he didn't have to repay a present guest.

Fornell leaned forward slightly and removed his long whip from his belt.

"Looks like you're going to need this! You should give her to me for just two weeks and I promise you, no thoughts of disrespect would ever come to her mind again." The man replied. Gibbs growled, then stretched his arm out to take the whip.

"Get down on your knees!" he then repeated, loud and with an imminent threat in his voice. "And apologize to the present men for the disruption!"

Kate was trembling and biting her lips. Tears were burning in her eyes as she felt humiliated and lonely. Again she could hear Tony step in with a soft, "Gibbs, don't!". But the older man was unapologetic.

At the first snap of the whip Kate dropped to her knees with a soft scream. It only grazed the delicate skin of her legs, but still, where the leather hit her, her skin started to burn. Tears were streaming down her cheeks openly now, but she didn't dare to look up. She was sitting on the ground, her whole body lowered and shaking with fear to be hit again. But nothing happened. Instead, Gibbs' voice reached her ear.

"Kate, apologize!"

She knew she was in no position to put up a fight, and yet apologizing would mean that she had been wrong. That he had a right to openly brag about how good she was in bed, and how beautifully slender her body was with his friends. And support their degrading comments about what they would do with her if she was their slave.

She had surrendered herself voluntarily to his command. She had entrusted him with her life, but instead of paying her the respect she deserved as a warrior, he disrespected her and talked about her no better than one would talk about his cattle. She couldn't apologize! Because that would mean that she accepted being on the same level as an animal.

"Kate!" Gibbs bellowed.

The young woman was pale with fear, her hands trembling, and she pressed her lips together tightly. Kate flinched, when some voices in the hall grew louder now.

"Whip her!"

"Is that the kind of slave you're holding these days, Gibbs? Well, I guess a man your age lost his way in dealing with the everyday things."

"If she was my slave, she would pull something like that once – and then wear the scars for the rest of her life!"

Kate sobbed, when she eventually realized what was happening: that she was pushing Gibbs into a corner. That by her behavior she was ridiculing and humiliating him. And that she left him no other choice but to eventually give in to the men's demands. It didn't take her long to outweigh her options and come to the conclusion that an open whipping would be a worse humiliation than a simple apology.

The voices grew louder and more outraged, and at first she thought nobody would even hear her, when she announced with a trembling voice. ""I am sorry Sir!" But when the hall grew silent again, she knew that she had been heard.

"What are you sorry for, slave?" Gibbs pressed her further and Kate sobbed.

"I am sorry..." She swallowed hard, and her voice was trembling. "...for disrespecting you, and..." She hated herself for openly crying now. But she couldn't stop. She felt as humiliated as she had never done before in her life. "...by my disrespect insulting every other master in this room. I sincerely apologize..."

And that was the point when she just couldn't stand it anymore. She needed to get out, or otherwise she would break. So without waiting for his reaction, she jumped up to her feet and ran out of the hall. She could hear a new uproar by the guests, and knew instantly, that she had committed another outrage.

Crying, she broke down against the nearest wall she could find, knowing that Gibbs would come after her. For a split second she considered running away But then the reasonable part inside of her took over, that told her that he would not kill her. He had promised her to treat her fairly. He wouldn't kill her. Certainly he wouldn't.

The moment she heard his steps come down the corridor though, she doubted her optimism. He didn't say a word, just pulled her up to her feet and then dragged her after him. He made his way through the corridor and then through the kitchen wing until he reached an old, heavy wooden door. He pulled it open and then dragged her down a flight of winding stone stairs into an old cellar.

He only stopped when he was standing in front of a cell. There he let go of her, and Kate immediately dropped to the ground in front of him. The soft sobs were still shaking her body.

Gibbs opened the old metal door of the cage, which squeaked loudly at the movement. "Kate, get in here!" he then barked. The young woman shook and stumbled into the dark cell. In front of him, she dropped to the ground again, whispering, "I'm sorry!" over and over again.

Gibbs didn't answer. He closed metal chains around her wrists, whose ends were fastened in the solid brickwork of the wall. Then he closed the third chain around her neck, shutting the collar with a click.

Without responding to her pleas and apologies, he pushed the cell door close and then left the cellar, leaving the young woman alone and afraid.

Kate broke down in cries. She had never felt this scared and humiliated and lonely before in her life. If only she had run away when she had had the chance to do so...

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She had lost all sense of time, when she eventually heard the lock of the cellar door open with a click. Her stomach was grumbling with hunger, and for endless moments she was thinking that he would just let her starve to death down here.

But when he came down the stairs now, he was carrying a plate of food in his hands. He opened the cell door with the old, rusty key and then entered the small room.

Kate didn't move her body. She was kneeling close to the wall – mainly because the chains only allowed her that much space to move – supporting herself against the brick wall, while she was staring somewhat paralyzed to the ground.

Gibbs sighed and eventually sat down on the old wooden bench, putting down the plate with the food next to her. His rage was gone. He had poured oil on troubled water. His guests had been satisfied with his explanation that he would deal with her later and that he had locked her up. He had proven his point and defended his credibility. Now he had to deal with her.

When he saw that she didn't touch the food, he sighed. "Eat something," he ordered dryly. "You have been in here the whole day, you must be starving!"

"I'm not hungry," she replied sadly, although her stomach proved her words lies at the same moment by grumbling loudly. Gibbs reached down to grab one of the apples and took a bite of it. Kate could hear the loud crackling of the peel as he devoured the delicious fruit with a soft sigh of enjoyment.

"Mmm... it's delicious!" he informed her loudly, and took another bite. Kate turned her head, her eyes looking at the plate with the fresh fruits. Her stomach was hurting, and she really yearned for a piece of fruit.

Determinedly, she turned her head away, pressing her lips together.

Gibbs sighed. "You know, that pride of yours almost cost you your life today," he announced, his tone gentle, but serious, and he leaned forward slightly. "Do you know what would happen if something similar occurred at another house? If we were guests somewhere and you behaved like that? As amends, I would have to give your life to the master who was most insulted by your behavior – which is always the host. That means, you would be his, and no longer mine! And do you know what most of them would do? They would kill you!" She still didn't reply. He stretched his body, his voice hard and relentless as he went on. "You want to be my warrior? Then get over your pride! How do you expect people to believe that you are my slave when you behave like a warrior in a situation like the one in the hall?"

"You insulted me," she said almost tonelessly and it was the first thing she said to him since he had come. He took it as a good sign.

"Yes, I did," he admitted dryly – although it didn't even sound so much like an admittance. There was no regret in his voice. His next statement confirmed her suspicion. "And I did it on purpose. Because that is the kind of talk you will have to get used to, Kate! You want to spy for me, then you will have to play the role of a slave. As a slave you will be disrespected, you will be humiliated, and you will be talked about as if you were not a human being, but a mere possession – a plaything. I don't treat my slaves that way – but many masters do. So you have to get used to it! Swallow your pride and smile through it. Because that is what a slave does. She wants to please."

"Well, I don't," she grumbled, and wiped over her cheek where the dark streaks of her dried tears were visible.

"No, you don't," Gibbs confirmed. "You will at least have to act as if you did, though! I hate to hurt you, Katie, and even more, I would hate to lose you and see you killed! But at this point it is what would happen! I am not doing this to get a kick out of showing you that I outrank you. That is self-evident. I want to protect you."

"You whipped me." Her words showed how deeply she was hurt, and her soft sob underlined her statement. Gibbs simply nodded.

"Yes, I did. I barely hit you though. Believe me, a real punishment would have left you screaming."

"Still, you promised not to hurt me," she continued, her voice almost breaking. "When I agreed on our deal, you promised you would never hurt me."

"As long as you were compliant." He interrupted her. "And I also warned you that there would be days where you would want out of the deal. I know you do not understand just yet that my actions today were in your own best interest. So I need you to trust me on that."

"Why?" she whispered, wiping another tear with the back of her hand. "You lied to me about not hurting me."

"What I did was the only way to prevent you from getting badly hurt. Those men up there, did you not hear their yells? The public punishment of a slave is to many a welcome distraction. They were only one inch away from grabbing you and flogging you publicly. I had to force you to apologize to have a reason to deny open punishment – at all costs! You think I hurt you? Then keep in mind that my stroke was very light. And think about how much thirty strokes which are three times as hard would hurt!"

Kate shifted slowly, and then turned her head. She was still not looking at him, but reached out for one of the apples on the plate. Deep inside she knew that he was right. She had heard the outraged cries of the men, and she knew that she had disrespected him in the worst way. Throwing wine into her master's face on purpose was probably not the most discreet way of revenge. What she couldn't get over though was, what he had said about her. All the time she had heard him talk to his old friend Fornell about her. Fornell had complimented her looks and her shape, and her slender body as if she was a cow he had bought on the nearest market. Gibbs was right, it WAS as slaves were treated and they were usually bought or traded. But she had felt hurt to hear him talk about her this way. After all they had shared, after the feelings that she had developed for him during her time with him, it had felt like a slap in the face.

While she was thinking about it, she was chewing on her apple and had to fight to swallow it down.

"May I ask a question?" she then asked softly.

He nodded, "Of course. You may always ask questions, my sweet."

"The way you spoke about me with your friend... is that how you see me? Is that how you think about me?" Her voice was shaking and for the first time she lifted her eyes to look at him. Gibbs returned her look seriously, and then replied with a hint of thoughtfulness.

"Why would that disturb you so much? It is how slaves are generally conceived and talked about."

"Yes, but I just thought..." she took a shaky breath. "You were always nice to me and besides you offered me that deal, so I was thinking... I was hoping..." She became silent, and Gibbs looked at her for a long time. At that moment he understood better than she did what she was feeling. But he didn't press her. She was still young and the whole situation overwhelmed her, so he didn't press her any longer for a confession that she was not yet willing to make. He simply shook his head.

"No," he eventually replied. "That is not how I see you – not solely at least. It is only partly true. I also respect your skills as a warrior, I value your input on problems and your ideas. If I had said those things though, your cover as a warrior would have been blown even before you completed your training. Your beauty and your dancing skills seemed to be the more obvious choices for conversation there."

"You didn't have to tell him about my being passionate in your bed though." She was being courageous, she knew that. Accusing him of choosing the wrong words after what she had done. All the more surprised was she, when he nodded.

"I admit, I could have shown more discretion. Fornell once stole one of my slaves though, so I guess I wanted to brag about you." He smirked slightly. "I didn't expect you to lose your temper."

"Maybe we could make a deal then," she offered with the hint of a smile and he leaned back, smiling at her.

"And what would that be?"

"I will try not to embarrass you again, and swallow my pride, and you will try and consider my feelings next time." She realized how impudent it was of her to even propose such a deal, and she saw how he raised his eyebrows in a soft warning. Before he could say anything, though, she lowered her head and added, "With all due respect, Sir."

He couldn't help but chuckle and shook his head slightly, "Kate, you are a real handful..." He touched her cheek softly, and then stroked her hair.

"Agreed," he then nodded as an answer to her proposal, and then got up. Carefully he released the heavy chains from her arms and her neck, and then helped her to stand up. "Just so that we are clear though. The matter is not resolved yet. For the next two weeks you will be banned from the training area. You're not allowed to touch a weapon of any kind. Instead you will spend your days scrubbing the floors of the halls. You will wear your usual silks, not your training clothes and you will not speak to anybody. Unless you're given a different order, you will do nothing but scrub, understood?" He saw desperation in her eyes and and growled. "Of course you can also chose the second option of punishment – which is being flogged. 50 strokes! Normal ones, not the light ones."

"I'll scrub!" Kate hurried to assure. "I'll scrub happily! The halls will be so clean that you won't recognize them!"

"Now, that's the enthusiasm I'm looking for," he smiled and then touched her cheek gently. "Go to the bathing house and then get some sleep. It was an exhausting day – for the both of us."

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With a soft groan of exhaustion, Kate lifted her wet hand that was holding the brush and ran it over her forehead. For the last six days she had been scrubbing every single floor in the whole property. She couldn't even count the times that she had wiped the floor of the huge main hall in which practically all of the social events took place.

She sat back up and stretched her sore back and arms for a moment. Her silks were slightly dusty and stains of dirt had imprinted themselves on the fine fabric here and there.

Gibbs hadn't spoken to her ever since the day that she had thrown the ale into his face. She liked to believe that what he had told her was true, that he held no grudge against her. And that he had simply not had the time to talk to her with all the leaders of the other clans around. But a part of her ached for his company and was desperately terrified that he was still angry and would not forgive her. That thought was what kept her awake at night.

She sighed and then resumed her task of scrubbing the floor.

She was just about to get up and splash clear water over the spot she had just scrubbed, when a voice pulled her out of her thoughts.

"My, my, what have we here?"

She lifted her head from the ground and the first thing she saw was two heavy boots. When she raised her eyes, she took in the features of a tall, muscular man. At first she couldn't see his face, as

he was standing in the light and his whole figure was reduced to a silhouette. Then slowly, his feature became clearer to her eyes. He was aged – probably not as old as Gibbs, but at least ten years older than she was. Two knives and a whip were fastened around his belt and he was wearing golden amulets on his shirt.

And then she recognized his face. It looked more defined than it had once, but he still wore that same expression. An expression she would never forget in her life. Startled, she jumped back slightly, hitting the bucket with water and spilling the wet liquid all over the ground. Finally she found her balance and stood up, her face lowered.

“Excuse me, S-sir... I ha-have a task to compl-plete.” she stuttered and wanted to turn and rush away, but he grabbed her arm and held her in place. She froze, with her head turned away from him.

“Do I know you, little pet?” he whispered lowly against her hair, inhaling her scent. She shuddered visibly in fear and disgust, trying to wriggle her arm out of his steel grip. But that only served to make him grab her tighter until his fingers bore painfully into the tender flesh of her upper arm.

“I d-do not believe so, Sir,” she hurried to assure. He turned her around and lifted her face forcefully, so that she was looking at him. Kate stared at him, feeling as if her breath was robbed from her chest. He was here – he had found her. And from the cruel expression on his face she knew that he knew exactly who she was.

“You know,” he started in an almost soft voice. She knew him too well though. She knew that this softness was part of his cruelty. That when he was speaking softly, the most cruel things were about to happen. “I once owned a little girl. You remind me of her. She was about fourteen summers old, and a real beauty. She was my pet. Do you want to know what happened to her?”

“I really have to complete my task!” Kate was almost whimpering, her voice shaking. Keep it together, she whispered to herself.

“She ran away,” the man continued without listening to her words. “She was as pretty as she was stupid for not knowing that running away from me would provoke the harshest punishments. And even in the night of her initiation.” He shook his head in obvious displeasure and touched her cheek. “There certainly is nothing more stupid. Unfortunately, I have never found her. You do not by any chance happen to know her?”

Kate was sobbing softly, when his hand made contact with her flesh, and then spun around, broke free from his grip and ran in blind fear. He had found her... she had known that her life had been too good the way it was now. Something bad had been meant to happen sooner or later.

Before she could leave the room he had caught up with her, slammed her into the wall and pressed her against the hard stones. She felt as if her breasts were crushed against the hard wall and squealed when he took a handful of her hair and pulled her head back so that she was rendered completely incapable of movement.

“Now, what is that, slave? Did your master teach you to run away when another master is talking to you?” He asked in reproach, his hot, callous breath puffing against her ear.

Kate shook her head weakly, “N-no... Sir... I'm so-sorry...”

“Would you like to know how I will punish my slave when I find her?” he rasped into her ear, and then licked along her cheek.

A silent tear made its way down the young woman's face while she was shaking her head again. “N-no... please. Let me go, Sir!”

"Well," he went on in an even softer tone now. "I won't hurt her. I will take her into my bed with me, and keep her there as long as she pleases me. And once I am finished with her... well, then I will have her flogged. You understand that, I'm sure. Misbehavior has to be punished. And afterwards I will call all of my warriors into the main yard, and then let every single one of them have his way with her. And for every time she begs me to stop, I will have her flogged again. Now does that sound too harsh?"

She was openly crying now as she felt as if her whole life was going down in front of her eyes. Through everything she knew and had seen, through all the experiences she had made, she had no doubt that he would do to her exactly what he was saying. And all of her training, everything she had put herself through, all the things she had done to convince herself that he would never be able to hurt her again – all of that had been futile, as here she was here with him, and he had just the same power as ever. He was like a demon. She would never be able to defeat him, no matter what she did. She would always be weaker.

"What's going on here?" A harsh voice bellowed through the hall, and Kate felt the hand gone from her hair, and the pressure on her body became lighter.

"Gibbs... my friend!"

"Ari," The addressed said dangerously low. He pronounced every single word in the next sentence, as if he was fighting with himself not to cut the man's throat instantly. "Is it custom at your court now to molest the slaves of other masters? Have your manners really gone further down?"

He laughed, as if Gibbs had made a joke, and let go of Kate and went to the man with open arms. "I was just fascinated by that very pretty girl of yours. Long time no see. How have you been?"

"Since you tried to poison me last time, you mean?" Gibbs asked, his eyes falling on Kate who was turning around slowly, her face smeared with tears, her clothes deranged and her hair completely muddled. "Kate, heel!" he ordered sharply, and the young woman hurried behind him and dropped to her knees, hiding her face, while she wiped her tears with the back of her hand.

"I see you're still having bad feelings about that." Ari laughed nonchalantly as if it was just a cheap joke that he had played. Gibbs laughed along with him for a quick moment before all of a sudden – Kate was in awe at the speed, which she hadn't even seen coming – his knife was pressed to the other mans throat.

"Excuse me if I'm not that humorous about an attempt on my life," Gibbs explained lowly and applied more pressure to the knife. "Now, let me make one thing clear. As long as you are a guest in my city, you will keep your hands off any slaves that are not your own, are we clear?"

"Why the hostility?" Ari croaked and tried to smile coolly, but Gibbs growled.

"I like my slaves healthy and in good shape – and everybody knows that they will no longer be when they were with you. You're known for using that whip of yours way too often, MY FRIEND." And with these words he let the man go. "I mean it! Touch her or any other girl here again and I will personally kill you!"

And with these words he turned around, motioned Kate with his hand to follow and stormed out of the room. The young woman was nearly running after him, and when they had eventually left the room, she didn't stop. Even as Gibbs slowed down. She passed him by, sobbing violently now, all the while trying to wipe her tears away with the back of her hand as if that act alone could stop the flow of tears.

"Kate," Gibbs bellowed. "I said heel!"

She started to run, unable to hold back any tears now. She ran and she ran, until she was completely out of breath and her shaky legs gave out underneath her. Then she simply crouched down into a niche, pulled her legs to her chest and remained there in her hideout for the rest of the day – and way pass the time the sun had set.

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It was almost midnight, and Gibbs was just about to go to sleep, when he heard the squeaking sound of the door to his chambers opening. He sat up and looked at the young woman who was sneaking into his room, closing the door and falling to the ground in front of it. She didn't dare to look up, she was just sitting there on her knees, her face lowered and her body trembling.

"I'm sorry," she whispered with a tiny voice. "I swear, I didn't run away." She was crying. He was shocked inwardly, but nothing in his body language gave it away. He didn't interrupt her. "I hid in a niche on the third floor. I never left the house!" She continued to assure, not daring to look up. Then, after a while, she asked: "Is he gone?"

"No, he is not gone. He is my guest here for the next few days!" Gibbs replied neutrally, and then added slightly grumpily, "You disobeyed me."

"I'm sorry!" she sobbed again, and he thought he didn't trust his own eyes when she bend her upper body down, her hands on the cold ground in the most humble position there was for a slave. "Please forgive me."

"Kate!" He got out of his bed and came to stand in front of the young woman. "Kate! What are you doing?" When her soft sobs were the only answer he got, he growled lowly. "Get up from the ground." He could feel her spirit lying in pieces in front of him. His first instinct was to cradle her up in his arms and soothe her pain – whatever it was. That was the mistake which he had always done with Shannon, though. She had been a weak person, always dependent on him and then, one day when they were attacked, she had been unable to defend herself.

Kate had to get up on her own. And she had to learn to obey him. She wanted to be a warrior, so she couldn't depend on him to save her.

"I don't want you to beg me for anything. I want you to get up now!"

Under sobs, she raised her upper body from the ground. Only when she was standing in front of him, her body trembling and her head lowered so that she was looking at the ground, he addressed her again.

"Now, give me a very good reason for not disciplining your disobedience!" He opened up gruffly, and Kate shivered.

"The man... I didn't... I couldn't... I..." she stuttered, her sentences interrupted by sobs.

"That is not a reason!" Gibbs sighed, his words softer now, while he was sitting down on the mattress of his bed. "Kate, I won't hurt you, so stop shaking like a chained deer!"

"I'm so-sorry, Sir... I can't... I couldn't..." She started again miserably, starting to cry again, frustrated as she was neither able to stop crying nor stop trembling. "I can't! I really want to... but somehow I can't!" She stared at him furiously, her fists clenched so tightly, that her fingernails were hurting her skin.

Gibbs sighed. He had seen this phenomenon. Some young warriors experienced it after their first battle – Ducky liked to refer to it as the shock syndrome.

In an abrupt movement, he pulled the young woman against his body, and then moved them so that she was lying on the bed.

“Calm down,” he eventually said, softer, and smoothed her hair out. Then he reached over to the wooden stool over which his belt was hanging. Under it, on the stool was standing a small bottle. He took it, uncorked it, and then handed it to her. “Drink,” he then ordered.

She took the bottle with shaky hands, and then sipped from the bitter liquid. Immediately, she pulled a face and wanted to put the bottle away, but Gibbs held it to her mouth. “Drink!” he said more forceful. With little screams of protest, she swallowed the mouthful, trying to push his hand away. After the second sip, her protest faded, and after the fourth sip she was drinking calmly.

Eventually Gibbs pulled the bottle away, closed it and placed it back on the stool. Then he turned to her, looking at her. Her face was smeared from tears. They had formed black streaks with the coal with which she darkened the corners of her eyes.

Gibbs eyes fell on a heavy bruise on her left forearm, and softly he touched the spot with his hands.

She just kept staring at the ceiling of his bed, that consisted of reddish and blue curtains.

“Better now?” He then asked after a moment, and she nodded without saying a word. “Good.” His hand continued to softly move over her skin, caressing her lightly. “Now, tell me what this whole situation is about!”

It was not a question, but an order. Kate took a shaky breath and then shook her head.

“You have to assure me of something first!”

“Excuse me?” He raised his eyebrows at this indignation, but Kate continued.

“You must swear to me that you will not give me away! That I am allowed to stay here!”

“This is not a deal, Kate! You are in trouble, and I am being nice by giving you the possibility to explain your actions! You are in no position to make demands.” He growled and sat up. “Besides, what you are asking is already part of a valid deal! Do you doubt my honor? Do you not believe me to keep my word?”

Kate shook her head. “I have only known you for a little more than five weeks, Mylord.”

“Is that a yes?!” He asked dangerously low and leaned in to her. “Don’t push your luck, my sweet. You are that close to spending the night chained to a wall in my cell! Now, I will not ask you again for your reasons!”

She turned her head away from him and closed her eyes. “I know master Ari... because he... he was my master before I ran away.” she eventually opened up. Gibbs' body-language showed no reaction, yet inwardly he had to grasp this information for a moment before he was willing to believe what she said. Finally, when she had paused long enough, he said “Go on.”

“Seven years ago... it was the night of my initiation... I ran away. I had been living with my mother for my whole life. Everybody knew that master Ari was cruel. I spent countless night at the bed of my mother when she returned from his chambers, her body hurt and her soul in pieces. She was just lying there in her bed, crying silent tears, not moving for hours, and I was unable to do anything.

I don't know why, but master Ari always had his eye set on me, even when I was just a little girl. So he repeatedly told my mother that he could not await my coming of age. When that day finally came, my mother kept it a secret. She helped me to hide for the few days, so nobody would see what state I was in. Then, at night, she would wash my clothes and burn the towels I had used. That went on for five moons before master Ari finally found out.

Of course he immediately realized that he had been tricked, and he beat my mother up until she confessed. I tried to stop him, but instead of making him stop, he beat me up as well. And then he set the date for my initiation, and locked my mother up. In the night before the date I sneaked up to the window of her prison, because I had no idea what was about to happen. I was scared and I wanted to know. And then she told me what was usually going on between a man and a woman. And she told me how he would hurt me. And then she pleaded me to run away. She knew that the short time after the initiation celebration, when I was to be prepared for my first night, would be the only chance for me.

That same night, my mother died. I learned the next morning that some of the guards had had fun with her and it was just too much for her to take. I had nothing left. So I decided to fulfill my mother's last wish. I was so scared and all alone and I had never been outside the house. But I had seen the men train on the fields, and so I trusted that I would be able to copy their movements and learn to fight for myself.

After the celebration, I ran away, and hid in the woods. For days I had nothing to eat, before I finally found the courage to climb off the high tree I was hiding on, and go on a hunt. It was the day my life in the woods started. And I promised to myself that I would never let anybody do anything like that again. That I would learn to fight for myself, and then someday return and kill Ari for what he did to my mother." She sobbed again. "But today... when he had me pinned against the wall... the things he said to me... I realized that I am just as terrified as I was seven years ago. It's like he is that huge monster that I cannot defeat. And no matter how much I trained, it was all useless... it was all for nothing. I'm too weak." New tears made their ways down her cheeks. "I wanted to be strong! I really did. But then, this afternoon, when we had left the hall, and I knew you would ask me what all of this was about I felt as if somebody strangled me. I felt like I couldn't breathe, and running was the only way to breathe for me. I am really sorry."

Gibbs nodded after a long time and then looked at the wall with a sigh. "We are in a difficult situation now, Kate. If you had told me about this a few days ago, I would have kept you out of Ari's sight. This is why I told you to trust me! If you cannot trust me, I cannot protect you!" He explained calmly without a sign of reproach in his voice. His hand was gently moving through her hair, and he was holding her close to his body.

"I'm sorry Sir!" Kate whispered, her fingers clutching the material of his thin shirt. "I thought that you would send me back to him, if I told you..."

"You don't have to apologize to me," Gibbs explained. "I just wish you would have trusted me earlier. You should know me better than to think I would send you back. Besides, seven years is a long time. I am not even sure Ari still has a legal basis to make a claim on you." He made a mental note to look into that, just to avoid any complications. Not that he would mind having a reason to go to war with Ari's clan. Too much had happened during the previous years, several attempts on his life being only a part of that. Some of Ari's men had kidnapped two slaves of his clan about a year ago. Luckily they had been able to track the kidnappers down and free the two women, before the men had reached their clan's ground.

And of course, now Kate's behavior made sense to him. Ari was the only master she had ever known. He had to silently admire her for her strength. She had basically been a child when she had started living in the woods. It seemed that she possessed a truly strong will and the character of a survivor by nature. She would make an excellent warrior – provided that she overcame her demons. And it was his task to supervise her training and make sure she did.

“Today, you would have had any right to defend yourself against his advances – even physically. So why didn't you?” he inquired to know in a soft voice. Kate shook her head and swallowed.

“I don't know... I saw him and I couldn't move. I couldn't breathe. And then he told me those awful things.” She took a shaky breath and bit her lip in desperation. “Maybe I'm not a warrior... maybe I am kidding myself...”

“Mmm...” Gibbs looked down at her, “You certainly aren't if you're willing to give up that easily. You learned one of your weaknesses today. That's actually good. Now, you have recognized what you cannot do yet! You have to acknowledge your weaknesses first before you can work on them. Before you can be a good warrior, you will have to overcome your fear though. What you experienced today – the feeling that you couldn't breathe – it was fear. And your reaction was to run away. The thing about running is, that once you start, you cannot stop. I understand your reasons, and I do not reproach you knowing your full story now. But we will have to work on that fear and on your weakness, because that is what holds you back.”

Kate nodded silently. She was completely calm now, and her body had stopped shaking.

Gibbs thought for a few moments, then eventually he pressed her arm softly, reassuringly, before he informed her, “Tomorrow you will serve me and the guests at the table... that includes Ari.”

Kate gasped and shrieked slightly, sitting up. “No!”

“Kate...” Gibbs started, but the young woman slapped his arm away and wanted to crawl off the bed.

“Please don't make me do that... he will see me, and... then he'll...”

“Kate!” Gibbs bellowed and held her face in between his hands forcing her to look at him. “Breathe! You're doing it again! Inhale! And exhale! Now, listen! I will be there! Tony will be there, and all the other guests as well. And I will assign Abby to help you serve tomorrow night. So you won't be alone. Even if he sees you, he cannot do anything to you! You belong to me now! Ari has no right to even touch you without my permission. You will serve him and you will smile. And if he makes advances to you, you will politely decline. If he persists in his advances, you may push him away or slap him, whatever you consider appropriate.”

“I don't think I can...” she sobbed, kneeling on her legs and trying to get away from him. Desperately she shook her head, “I'm not that strong, Sir... I'm sorry...”

Gibbs growled, “I do not want to hear that you cannot do it!” His voice was almost gruff. He knew, that when he reasoned with her they would get nowhere. “Tomorrow you will serve us! That's an order. And don't you dare think about disobeying again...”

“Sir!” Kate sobbed and grabbed his hands, “Please don't! Please...”

“Do you trust me, Katie?” he interrupted her and she just looked at him with white, teary eyes.

“I think so, Sir...” she replied, her voice shaking.

“That is good enough for now. Because you entrusted me with supervising your training. Now I need you to trust me to make the right decisions.” He explained. “I know this is one of the moments where

you want to run away. But also think of the consequences when considering that option. I will not tolerate your running away. Your training would end instantly, and you would be my slave for the rest of your life. And all because you allowed that bastard Ari to control you again – because you allowed your fear of him to overpower you. Think of all of that my sweet, before you run away.”

She couldn't look him in the eyes because he was hitting too close to home with his assumption. In a certain way it amazed her how well he seemed to know her. And deep inside, the reasonable part of her had to admit that he was true about what he said. If she ran away now, she would do so for the rest of her life. And still, running away seemed to temptingly easy...

“Return to your chambers, my sweet. Get some rest. You can have tomorrow morning to yourself – for bathing or whatever you like to do. But be there at dinner and supper to serve us.” His finger trailed her cheek tenderly, before he leaned in to place a soft kiss on her lips. “Go now...”

“Yes, Sir...” Kate whispered and got up from his bed. Silently she left the room...

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Abby didn't ask any questions, when the crying young woman crawled onto her mattress in the middle of the night. She didn't say anything, nor did she reproach Kate for disturbing her in the middle of the night. She just put her arms around around the young woman's body and held her close, moving her hand over her hair until her sobs had stopped and she had fallen asleep. Only then did Abby allow herself to follow her into the land of dreams.

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Gibbs sets a date for a duel between Kate and Ari as her final test.

Kate overcomes her fear in the duel and manages to beat Ari, and thereby winning her freedom from him.

She becomes a full warrior, and thereby wins her freedom from Gibbs as well.

On the same evening she asks him if she can continue sharing his room and his bed.

Gibbs agrees and proposes – Kate agrees.

~The End

## **Extra: Author's Notes for the Stories**

### **Blue Skies**

About the title... I chose that one very quickly, since I had absolutely no other idea, and after scrolling through my Winamp playlist, the title of the song "Blue Sky" by Coco Lee sprang into my eyes. It felt just right – and since writing is all about feeling, this became the title... (^.^)v

### **28 Words**

1: For this story I did extensive research on swinger clubs, so let me tell you a little bit about it – just in case you've never heard of it. It's a club where people - mostly couples, but more and more singles make use of it - go to in order to have sex and watch other people having sex.

Sex among strangers is common there. Contrary to common opinions, those clubs have strict dress-codes (no jeans!) and require the people who enter to be clean and to behave. That means, a 'no' has to be accepted. That makes those clubs a place where more and more people go to just relax and see what happens in the course of the evening.

Most swinger clubs offer private rooms – so-called separées – to offer couples a chance to retreat, nearly all of them consist of a bar and a place to dance. The majority also offers a whirlpool, and the most luxury ones even offer a swimming pool.

Remarkable is, that in most clubs, there is no entrance fee for single women. Couples pay about \$30-\$50 and single men up to \$100, depending on the club's reputation. Also there is a strict rule to keep the balance between men and women who enter. So if there are only ten single women, only ten single men will be allowed entrance.

Contrary to widespread opinion, those clubs are neither degrading nor dangerous to women! So, with all prejudices wiped out now, I hope you can read my story and enjoy it.

### **About the Author**

Kimberley Jackson graduated from Free University of Berlin with a degree in English Literature and Cultural Sciences, with special focus on Native American Literatures and American Television Shows of the 1990s and 2000s. She lives in Berlin, Germany.

Her stories, which have been around the internet since 2000, have gained numerous fans and subscribers on various different platforms. Her stories have an average of 400 reads each month on fanfiction.net – the biggest platform for television inspired stories on the internet.

Her works have always been published under a creative commons license, a need that first arose out of necessity, due to the nature of her work and her use of characters from television shows.

Later on, it became a statement for new and globalized copyright laws that answer to the need of the digital age. Aside of that, she believes (inspired by the Star Trek franchise in her early youth) in the principle of the collective data storage, and that everybody should be able to access stories and information, no matter their social background or wealth, free of charge.

Find out more about Kimberley, and keep up to date with her stories at

[www.kimberley-jackson.com](http://www.kimberley-jackson.com)