Bye, Bye, Love by timbo6mel

**Summary:** Website: NA
Permission to archive: yes
Fandom(s): NCIS
Genre (general, hetero or slash): Slash
Pairing/Characters: Gibbs/DiNozzo
Rating: PG, so far
Summary: What happens when your mouth works independent of your brain?
Warnings: Angst
**Rating:** FRT - young teen ★★★
**Fandoms:** N.C.I.S, slash fiction
**Characters:** Gibbs/DiNozzo
**Genres:** Slash
**Tags:** Angst
**Challenges:** None
**Series:** None
**Published:** 05/31/06
**CoAuthor #1:** ---NONE---
**CoAuthor #2:** ---NONE---
**CoAuthor #3:** ---NONE---
**CoAuthor #4:** ---NONE---
**Updated:** 02/11/10

**Index**

[Chapter 1: Chapter 1](#)
[Chapter 2: Chapter 2](#)
[Chapter 3: Chapter 3](#)
[Chapter 4: Chapter 4](#)
[Chapter 5: Chapter 5](#)
[Chapter 6: Chapter 6](#)
[Chapter 7: Chapter 7](#)
[Chapter 8: Chapter 8](#)
[Chapter 9: Chapter 9](#)
[Chapter 10: Chapter 10](#)
Chapter 1

"Uh, Tony . . . I'm not sure . . . ."

Not the first words you want to hear from the man to whom you just declared your love. The pole-axed look on Gibbs's face was a pretty clear indicator that all those signals I'd thought he'd been giving off had actually been my own wishful thinking. Dammit. What the hell had possessed me to think he'd want someone like me in the first place? I should have known better. I DID know better. I'd just let Abby's enthusiasm and my own stupid hopes cloud my better judgment. And now I'd just blown it in a big, bad way.

"No, Boss. I'm sorry. I thought . . . well, never mind what I thought. How about we just forget this conversation ever happened, huh?" Smiling my most winning smile, I prayed he'd just agree and allow me to crawl back home and wallow in my mortification. The confusion and discomfort on his face signaled that wouldn't be the case, though. Sighing inwardly, I waited for his reaction.

"I'm not certain that's possible. This is . . . a pretty significant conversation, don't you think?"

"Not really. I mean, nothing has really changed between us, right? It's not like we've decided to embark on a relationship or anything. You're still the boss and I'm still your favorite field agent. The rest we can just write off as the wine talking." Please, oh, please - agree with me so this nightmare can come to an end. I wasn't sure how much longer I could sit here pleasantly before I started howling in pain. 'Foolish, foolish, DiNozzo. You never stick your neck out unless you either A) are certain it won't get chopped off or B) don't really care if it does. When you forget the rules, you certainly do so in the grandest of styles. Dammit.'

"Tony, I just don't think that's the case. How could things not be different between us? You just told me. . . ." Gibbs looked around nervously and lowered his voice. "You just told me that you're in love with me. How can that NOT change our working relationship?"

"Look, Gibbs, the feelings quite obviously aren't mutual, so nothing more needs to come of this. I'm sorry for shocking or disgusting you; that was never my intent."

"I'm not disgusted, DiNozzo. You should know I don't have problems with homosexual relationships so long as everything is consensual. It's just . . . unexpected." The cornered expression he wore belied his assertion. Homosexual lust was one thing in the abstract; it was entirely another when it was directed at you personally.

"I am sorry, Boss. Is there going to be any way for us to get past this?" If not, I wasn't certain what I would do. Seeing him everyday was the one bright spot in my life. If I no longer had that, my existence would once again be as bleak as it had been back in Baltimore. My fear must have showed on my face because Gibbs's expression suddenly cleared and he nodded his head decisively.

"You're right, DiNozzo. Nothing has to change; I have faith we can be adults and continue to work together." Gibbs paused and exhaled a long breath. "I'm sorry the evening didn't work out like you had hoped, DiNozzo."

Christ, the last thing I wanted from him was pity. 'Poor Tony, stupid enough to believe for a minute that a
decent guy like Jethro Gibbs could ever love a loser like you. So sad, living in such a delusion.’ Yeah, I was already clear on that; I really didn't need external confirmation from the man I loved, albeit unrequitedly.

"Hey, no prob, Boss. Like the Stones said - you can't always get what you want." Shrugging as nonchalantly as I could under the circumstances, I avoided eye contact with Gibbs and reached for the check laying next to my plate on the table. "I'll go ahead and take care of the tab, Boss. You don't have to stick around."

"No, Tony. Let me pay my half." Pulling out his wallet, Gibbs quickly threw down some bills on the table. "Uh, the meal was very good. If you don't mind, I think I will head out. Tomorrow's an early day; I've got a meeting with the Director first thing."

So, he didn't even want me to buy his dinner. Too much like a date, I supposed. And Gibbs obviously needed to make it perfectly clear to me that this was NOT that. "Sure. Sorry to have taken up so much of your evening, actually. I didn't realize it was so late already." Handing my credit card to the waiter who had just appeared at the table, I again looked anywhere but at Gibbs. "See you tomorrow, then."

"Yeah. I'll see you, DiNozzo." And with that, Gibbs pushed away from the table and hurried from the building. Watching him go, I knew that nothing between us would ever be the same. I could only hope that we were still able to work together. But I wasn't going to count on that. First thing tomorrow, I would dust off my resume and start looking for my next gig, just in case. As much as I wanted to stay, I seriously doubted it would be possible. I certainly knew how to fuck up a good thing. Guess my father was right after all.

TBC
"McGee, you're with me. We've got a location on our missing witness. David, you've got til we reach her to find out everything you can about the man she's staying with, a Carl Hasbeck."

With that, Gibbs strode purposely to the elevator, not checking to see if his underlings were following his orders. I didn't even flinch at being pointedly ignored yet again. In the three weeks since the debacle at the restaurant, I had been personally given exactly two orders by Gibbs - and both had been during the first week. Contrary to popular opinion, I really was not an idiot. I knew my NCIS days were numbered. I had simply been waiting for an offer to come along. Now that it had, I would be taking my under-utilized self and starting over yet again. Not that it wouldn't rip my heart out to do it, but I really could see no alternative. I loved Jethro too much to continue making his life uncomfortable - and, frankly, being ignored by someone I cared about so deeply was getting too painful to handle.

With McGee and Gibbs out, and Ziva scurrying around trying to gather the info Gibbs requested, this was the perfect opportunity to put an end to my life here. I had packed up my personal belongings last weekend, so that was not an issue. All I needed to do was turn in my resignation to Gibbs - with a copy to Madame Director, of course - and that would be that. The end of an era for me, in some ways. This was the first time I'd stayed at a job longer than two years, and it was the first time I'd ever been in love with someone. It was somewhat ironic that what had made this job so good for so long was now the one thing making it unbearable.

I KNEW that Gibbs could do better than me, would want better than me, should have better than me. But I'd jumped to some foolish conclusions, stuck my heart out on my sleeve for him to see, and fated myself to living a life without him. The fact that he couldn't even look me in the eye and make certain he was never alone with me put paid to any thought I may have had of working out our "issues." His point was crystal clear - there was no way he could or would ever want one Tony DiNozzo - and the thought of Tony DiNozzo wanting him was exceedingly distasteful.

"Tony!"

Jerking from my reverie, I realized that Ziva had been attempting to get my attention for some time. "What's up, Agent David?"

Ziva peered at me suspiciously, but luckily did not ask questions as to where my thoughts had been. "I've been summoned to the Director's office, so I'm going to be out for a bit. Figured you'd want to know where I was when you finally came to yourself."

Smirking slightly, I nodded solemnly at her. "Yes, ma'am. I would indeed have been most concerned, seeing as you simply cannot take care of yourself." I rolled my eyes and smiled genuinely to lessen any sting. "Seriously, thanks for telling me. I may not be here when you get back. I've got plans for lunch." No need for her to know that those plans included starting a cross-country drive to a new life.
"Well, then, see you later, lizard."

"Uh, I think you mean 'alligator,' but I get your point. Take it easy, Ziva."

I watched her until she disappeared down the hall. 'No time like the present, I guess.' Hitting 'SEND' on my resignation e-mail made short work of such a momentous step. Powering off my computer, I grabbed up my backpack and pushed my chair back from my desk. Looking over to Gibbs' desk almost made me lose my nerve, but then I remembered the way he avoided any contact with me and that he would really prefer I wasn't here. With a sigh, I stood, sketched a half-ass salute in the desk's direction, and headed for the elevator. Nothing like leaving behind everything you've ever loved to bring you down and make you wish you actually drank. But I was tough; I would get through this. I might never be happy, but at least I wouldn't have to see Gibbs' discomfort when I was around. It had been a good life, but now it was over. I'd have to learn to live with that.

tbc
"Where in the hell is DiNozzo?" Gibbs demanded. "David. When did you see him last?"

Glancing up in confusion, Ziva thought back. "I spoke to him right before going to see the Director. He said he had plans for lunch. Maybe they just ran long."

"He better hope to god he's got a better excuse than a nooner, let me tell you. I'm in NO mood for his foolishness today." Still grumbling, Gibbs grabbed his coffee mug and headed for the break room and some much-needed caffeine.

McGee spoke up once Gibbs was out of earshot, "I think something's up with Tony. He's been really down the last couple of weeks. And Gibbs won't even speak to him. Did Tony say anything while we were out? Where he was going at lunch? Anything??"

"Nothing outside of mentioning he had plans. Maybe he's got something written down in his planner." With that, Ziva headed to Tony's desk and began rummaging around on top. "Funny, I thought he always kept that planner book right here. I don't think I've ever seen him put it in a drawer or take it home - but it's not here now. Wonder if he's got something to hide?" With an evil smirk, she started pulling open drawers in a search for the planner.

"Uh, maybe you should leave that alone, Ziva. I know he's got some personal stuff in there that he might not be too happy you were digging through."

"What personal stuff? There's nothing in here but office supplies and old memos. Not even any girlie magazines! I'm disappointed in him."

McGee was up and standing next to her in an instant. "What? I know for a fact he keeps a change of underclothes in here . . ." Opening the bottom drawer and discovering it empty seemed to trigger panic mode in McGee. "Oh, crap. I think Tony walked out! For good, I mean. There's nothing in here that should be here. Gibbs is going to . . . ."

"Gibbs is going to what, McGee?" The senior agent spoke brusquely as he returned to his desk. "Something you needed out of DiNozzo's desk?"

"Boss, you might want to check your e-mail." McGee swallowed heavily before continuing, "I think Tony might not be coming back from lunch after all."

"What the hell are you talking about, McGee?" But Gibbs was moving to his computer even as he spoke. A bad feeling shivered across him as he thought of the last few weeks and his behavior towards Tony. Had he pushed him into doing something stupid??
The quiet 'ding' indicating a new mail message pulled him from his thoughts. There it was - a new, untitled message from Anthony DiNozzo. Fighting off the sick sensation in his stomach, Gibbs double-clicked on the e-mail.

'Dear Special Agent Gibbs,
Please accept this as my official resignation from the Naval Criminal Investigative Services. This resignation is effective immediately.
I apologize that I was unable to give sufficient notice, but I must leave due to personal reasons. I have enjoyed my time with NCIS and learned a great deal from you. . . .'

All the breath in his lungs escaped him in a rush and Gibbs felt slightly light-headed. Tony was gone - and Jethro knew he had been the one to drive him away.

TBC
Chapter 4: Chapter 4

Website: NA
Permission to archive: yes
Fandom(s): NCIS
Genre (general, hetero or slash): Slash
Pairing/Characters: Gibbs/DiNozzo
Rating: PG, so far
Summary: Where's Tony?
Warnings: Tiny bit of angst
Even more transitional stuff. Please forgive my lack of knowledge re police procedure/jurisdiction. Any mistakes are purely unintentional - and it's just a story, after all! Hope you enjoy.

Bye, Bye, Love
Chapter 4

Houston, TX

I threw the frisbee and watched with a grin as Clarence took off like a shot after it. Catching it in the air and showboating a little on the way down, the Newfoundland pup marched proudly back to me, tail in the air and frisbee clenched tightly in his mouth.

"Good boy, Clarence! Let Daddy have it and I'll throw it again."

It took a little playful wrestling before the dog surrendered his prize, but I was finally able to seize the toy and fling it as far as I could again. As Clarence ran off once more, I shook my head in amusement. 'He's got more energy in one of his paws than I have in my whole body! Good thing he brings that thing back; I wouldn't have it in me to go get it myself every time.'

Just as Clarence trotted back over to me, my pager began vibrating. Pulling the device off of my belt loop, I glanced at the display and groaned when I saw the '911' displayed on the screen. "Sorry, boy. I know I promised an afternoon of play, but it's time to head to work."

The shaggy dog's head drooped in disappointment. "You get to go, too, so don't give me that 'poor-me' attitude!" At that news, Clarence's head and ears sprang up and his long tail began wagging furiously.

 '"So much energy! Did I ever have that?"

The thought that I had indeed possessed that puppy-dog spirit while working for one Leroy Jethro Gibbs came unbidden. I squashed the rumination brutally. Nothing good could come out of heading down that particular road. That part of my life had been over for almost a year now. I refused to sacrifice what little peace I'd attained by entertaining memories like that. It certainly did me no good, and it made my nights even more sleepless than they already were. Not like I could afford less sleep; I was usually running on fumes as it was. 'Enough of this crap. Get over it and act like a man, Tonio.'

"Come on, Clarence. Let's go find some folks."

****

From the street, the collapsed building didn't look all that intimidating. Once Clarence and I got closer,
though, the sheer volume of steel and concrete still wobbling dangerously overhead became clear - and it caused a shiver of apprehension to rush through me. From the sudden alertness in the dog beside me, Clarence felt the ominous vibe, too.

"Hey, Lieu - the SAR guy's here." One of the local police had noticed us approaching. Having worked with him before, I nodded and smiled slightly at him.

"Looks like you tore down the whole block, Jackson. I always told you that one day you'd get angry enough to shake the world. That calm exterior harbors some deep-seeded hostilities."

Sgt. Jackson snorted at my comment and threw me an amused glance. "Whatever, DiNozzo. I maintain my zen-like calm despite your attempts to annoy the hell out of me. Besides, I don't have enough C-4 sitting around to do all this damage." His expression darkened and he shook his head sadly. "What kind of bastard blows up a building right next to an old folks' home? That's just cruel."

"It takes all kinds, Jack. That's what keeps you in business." I exchanged solemn nods with the sergeant before moving to speak to his lieutenant.

"DiNozzo. Glad to see you're the guy they sent. We need someone with your talent, even if it means putting up with your smart mouth."

"I'll go ahead and take that as the compliment I'm certain you intended, Lieu." Glancing at the hulking mass of building debris, my tone became all business. "So, what's the situation?"

"Looks like there were at least 20 residents and 5 staff in the nursing home at the time of the explosion. We've already gotten 22 of them out - 9 of those were bodies. We believe the office building was completely empty, seeing as it's the weekend. Plus, no family members have called to inform us that anyone was working, and we haven't heard or seen any movement from that side of the pile." Shaking his head, the lieutenant removed his glasses to rub his eyes in an expression of utter exhaustion. "HFD has been here for the past 5 hours trying to put out all the fires that continue to pop up. Looks like they've pretty well got them controlled now, though."

I could hear the weariness and sorrow in the older man's voice. "When do you think Clarence and I can get started? We don't want to get in your way but the sooner, the better." I hesitated before continuing, "Have you been able to verify the cause of the explosion?"

Some of the lieutenant's exhaustion was replaced with anger as he answered, "I guess some bastard thought he'd blow up some old folks - or at least bury 'em. It appears this was some sort of IED. You'd think this was goddamn Iraq or something." Gathering himself, he was able to answer my original question more serenely. "You'll have to get the go-ahead from the feeb's - they've decided to take this over from an operational oversight standpoint. Let me get with them and see what's what. I'll give you the high sign once it's clear for you two to get in there."

I nodded as he walked off in search of the FBI guy in charge. 'Hurry up and wait - just like usual.' Beside me, Clarence fairly vibrated with the need to go searching through the rubble. "Hold your horses, buddy. We'll be in there soon enough," I murmured to him under my breath. Nothing like good old-fashioned tragedy to take your mind off your own troubles.

TBC
Chapter 5

Glaring at the man got him nowhere; the fool never even realized that Gibbs was looking at him at all. How could he use his patented death stare on a subordinate when said subordinate was too ignorant to feel eyes drilling into him? DiNozzo would have been on him like a duck on a junebug to find out what his problem was, but not Torrance. Gibbs was sometimes surprised that his new agent found his way to the office in the mornings. How someone so dense could ever make it into NCIS, much less remain there for the last five years, was beyond him. Apparently, Torrance's father had enough influence to make that happen. It insulted Gibbs, really, to serve alongside someone so unqualified to protect the interests of the country. And it shook his faith in the organization, right down to the core.

Come to think of it, though, his disillusionment had started in earnest the day Tony left. Ever since then, something had been off-kilter in his world and in particular his work. The place just seemed empty without DiNozzo's humor and colorful presence to fill it up. Not even working on the boat in the evenings could compensate anymore. It had been a long time since woodworking couldn't soothe him, right around the time he lost Kelly, actually . . .

"Agent Gibbs, a moment of your time, please?" Director Shepard's voice broke into Gibbs' thoughts, tearing him back to the present. Glancing up at her, he could see the gleam in her eye and resigned himself to spending some "quality time" fending off her advances. He wished he could remember what ever attracted him to her so many years ago. Maybe he really had been shallow enough back then to overlook her shortcomings and see only the red hair and good body. 'Shallow' he could live with; 'stupidly taken in by her' was something else all together. Shaking away his thoughts, Gibbs pushed back from his desk and headed up to Jen's office.

****

"Jethro, please have a seat."

Jen 's voice seemed very deliberately calm, immediately raising red flags in Gibbs' mind. What was she trying to pull now? Dropping into one of the chairs opposite her desk, Gibbs braced himself for whatever foolishness she was about to offer up. It was getting harder every day not to roll his eyes every time she opened her mouth.

"What can I do for you, Jen?"

"Jethro, I got a call from a friend of mine in the FBI." She hesitated before continuing, "It appears there's been a bombing, and - "
"Terrorist? I'll get my team together and be out there ASAP. Where -"

"Jethro, stop. You didn't let me finish. They don't believe at this point that it is terrorist in nature."

"So why are you telling me then? Are there Marines involved?" Gibbs was confused. Case assignments normally came directly to him rather than through the Director. Clearly, her inter-agency contacts were screwing with his traditional case protocol. Just as he was about to lambaste her for this bureaucratic time-wasting, she continued speaking.

"Apparently, a bomb went off in an empty office building in Houston, Texas. The building is located next to the Houstonian assisted living facility. This, I'm given to understand, is where your mother currently resides."

The news fell like a ton of lead into Gibbs' stomach, dropping it down to his lower extremities. "Oh, my god. Is she all right? I've got to get out there." Rising quickly and heading to the door, Gibbs was stopped by a gentle hand on his arm.

"Jethro, she hasn't been found yet. She's one of three people still missing. Apparently, they have one of the best search-and-rescue specialists in the South looking for her and the other two victims." Walking back to her desk, Jen retrieved a sheaf of papers and returned to hand them to Gibbs. "Here's a ticket into Houston Hobby; I know that's the closest airport to the location of the center. An agent from the FBI field office in Houston will meet you there and get you to the site immediately. I'm sorry, Jethro. I hope everything works out. Please keep me apprised of the situation."

A knock on the door sounded before a stunned Gibbs could thank her. "Come in."

"You wanted to see me, Director?" McGee's confused face appeared in the doorway.

"Yes, Agent McGee. Please take Agent Gibbs home to pack and then to the airport. He has a flight to catch in less than two hours."

"Um, certainly, ma'am." Turning to the older man, McGee looked at him expectantly. "Boss, you ready to go?"

"Yeah, McGee. Just - thank you, Jen. I appreciate this. I'll let you know as soon as I find anything out."

"Be sure you do. Until then, your team will stand down from field duty and you'll be on personal leave. Now you'd better get going."

Nodding briskly at her, Gibbs pushed past a curious McGee and headed for the elevator. "You coming, McGee?"

"Uh, sure thing, Boss. Right behind you."

TBC
Chapter 6: Chapter 6

Tugging harshly at my gloves, I growled slightly in frustration. Steel mesh-reinforced gloves were a bitch at the best of times; in 90-degree weather, though, they became almost intolerably uncomfortable. Add in the Houston humidity and I was about ready to say to hell with the damn things all together. I could continue searching without them. Just as I had decided to strip them off, Clarence let loose with a mournful howl.

Good, he'd found a scent.

Forgetting completely about the discomfort surrounding my hands, I moved gingerly over a small pile of building debris to where Clarence stood. Gazing up at me soulfully, the pup chuffed quietly and whined deep in his throat. Closing off my mind to the continuing emergency-vehicle noises, I strained my ears to listen for any telltale sounds of survivors. The eerie quiet was broken by the groaning of over-stressed steel beams, making me wonder not for the first time how much longer Clarence and I could chance being on this particular mound of rubble.

A weak cough penetrated my consciousness, and Clarence began "whuff"-ing excitedly. Looked like there was at least one victim still alive. We'd already found the remains of the other two missing folks, so any sign of life was most definitely welcome at this point. "Hello, can you hear me?" I called out quietly. I knew from experience that yelling out to the victims too excitedly oftentimes scared them even more than they already were. As my SAR instructor had been fond of saying, "They ain't going anywhere, so don't freak 'em out to make yourself feel like you're doing something. You'll get to 'em when you can get to 'em safely."

"Hello." *Cough.* A tinny female voice reached me and Clarence immediately scampered carefully to its source. "I'm under here. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am. We're right here. Can you tell me if you're hurt anywhere?" Moving up beside Clarence, I waved a small red flag to alert the other workers of my find before cautiously lying on my stomach atop the debris. Peering into the dark abyss of steel and concrete, I fell back on my training to ask the questions I needed answered.

"I'm not sure. It's a little hard to breathe, and it feels like my legs are pinned under something." Not surprising, given her current location. *Sneeze.* "Young man, could you move your dog away from here? I'm allergic to them and I don't think sneezing my head off is going to help my situation any."

Well, shit. True, Clarence had basically done his duty already, but I liked having his solid presence beside me. "Yes, ma'am. I'll send him down right away."

"My name's Tony, ma'am. Mind if I ask yours? I imagine we're going to be spending quite a little bit of time
"It's Ellenor, Tony. Thank you for getting rid of the dog. I love the creatures, but my system simply can't tolerate them. It was always a disappointment to my son that we could never have one as a pet."

"No problem, Ellenor. Let's see what we can do about getting you out of here. First of all, can you see the sunlight at all? I mean, is there a clear path of vision so that you can see the sky?" My brain started chanting, 'Please say yes, please say yes.' She would be much easier to find and reach if there was already a path defined.

"I'm sorry, Tony, I can't. It's pitch black in here, to tell the truth. I can't even see my hand in front of my face."

Of course it wouldn't be easy. Story of my SAR life. Damn it all.

"That's fine, Ellenor. I'm just going to start moving some of the top layer of rubble away. Maybe that will help matters." Using painstaking caution, I began moving blocks of cement with rebar tentacles away from the area I suspected she was in. Inasmuch as all my instincts screamed at me to hurry, my trained brain knew that I had to move slowly and steadily so as not to cause further collapses that could potentially kill Ellenor.

After a half-hour of effort and with sweat running down my face, I decided that this dig was going to require a little more manpower than I could manage alone. Shifting my weight carefully, I was turning to ask the lieutenant for some help when I heard a loud noise and the world suddenly tilted crazily. With little time to react, I found myself falling backwards, and the pile of rubble welcomed me into its confines with open arms. I felt a sudden immense pain, and then everything went dark.

***********

Waking to the taste of dust and the sight of total darkness did not bode well for the rest of my day. Coughing slightly to clear some of the chalky residue in my mouth, I felt a burning pain begin in my back and travel through my chest. 'Must have hit something on the way down. Hopefully, it's just a broken rib.' I very carefully turned my head left and then right, straining my eyes to pick up the slightest hint of light. None. Dammit.

"Tony?" A very weak female voice reached me, and I remembered Ellenor and my efforts to rescue her. Great job I did on that one. I must have seriously screwed up to put myself in this position. 'Way to go, Tonio. Like dear old dad always said, you could fuck up a wet dream.'

"I'm here, Ellenor. Are you okay?"

"Actually, whatever happened seems to have unpinned me some. I can move around some now, but it doesn't look like we're going anywhere anytime soon. Are you injured?"

Not wanting to scare her anymore than she already was, I allowed myself a little fib. "I'm fine, Ellenor. Just had the wind knocked out of me." And that was true, on one level - I was indeed finding it uncomfortable to breathe right about now.

"Never bullshit an old woman, Tony. You sound hurt - so don't play the stoic hero for my benefit." There was a pause and I could hear shuffling from the direction of her voice. "Now that I can move, I believe I can reach - yes! I always keep a flashlight beside my bed, something my son suggested I do. Let me see here." More shuffling and then I was able to see a faint glow on my right.

"Remind me to thank your son when we get out of here, Ellenor. I believe you can use that light as a means
of letting the other folks know where we are." Panting slightly, I felt my head swimming and my chest aching even more. Finally allowed a little bit of illumination thanks to Ellenor's flashlight, I glanced toward my feet only to have my gaze halted by the three inches of rebar poking out of my chest. Stunned, I could only stare in dismay at the bloody post. This did not look good.

"I certainly will remind you. He is the dearest boy, you know. Such an honest, good man. It's a shame he hasn't been able to find the right person to settle down with, but I'm sure he'll find them someday. Tell me, Tony, do you have a special someone?"

Still distracted by the sight of my impaled self, I somehow managed to answer, "Just Clarence, my dog. He's my best friend."

"Silly, that's not what I mean, of course. Are you married? Seeing someone special?"

By now the swimming sensation in my head had progressed to outright lightheadedness and my mouth spoke without direction from my brain. "No, ma'am. I'm not cut out for having anyone special. That part got left out of my general make-up, apparently." I couldn't withhold a pained moan as I finished speaking. The pressure and pain in my chest were becoming much more noticeable, and I hoped not for the first time that the rescuers would be able to see Ellenor's light. I may have failed her, but hopefully she could still be rescued, preferably before she had to listen to me die. That would have to be a hard thing to handle; knowing you were trapped next to the dead body of someone to whom you'd just been speaking.

"Ellenor, could you . . . just, if anything happens, would you make certain my dog is taken care of? He's just a puppy, but he's smart and sweet and deserves a good life."

"Well, for heaven's sake, Tony. You're going to be fine! And I'm sure, once you get out of here, you'll have women lined up around the block to meet someone so heroic. Who knows - you might just find that special someone that way."

"Don't want a woman. I already found the person for me; he just didn't want me back." Even I could hear the slurring of my words in that answer. My tongue was feeling swollen and dusty, such that I found it an effort to swallow. Clearly, too, my brain function was less than optimal since I had just imparted this personal information to a complete stranger. "He's a decent guy, too. Can understand why he wouldn't want to be with someone like me. Besides, he doesn't even like me."

"Well, then, he's a fool. You seem like a lovely young man, and any man would be lucky to have you." Ellenor paused and then, "Oh, believe I hear someone! Over here! We're over here!! Can you hear me?!?"

A distant rumble sounded and then, blessedly, the blackness overtook me and washed away all the pain.

tbc
Watching the rubble collapse further was one of the scariest moments of his life - and one of the most frustrating. Seeing it in person, he might have been able to take some action. Witnessing it on the news in mid-air while en route to Texas meant he was powerless, not a position in which he liked to find himself. Add to that the anguish of not knowing if his mother was even still alive, and Jethro Gibbs was one sullen passenger. Luckily for everyone, the flight wasn't crowded and the flight attendants wisely kept their distance from him.

It was times like these that Jethro allowed himself to think about Tony. The younger agent would somehow have known just what to say to keep him from going too far over the edge. Or he would have simply sat by Jethro, offering silent support and comfort, letting him know that he would be there - no matter what. Jethro knew it was his own fault that he was denied Tony's presence. If he hadn't been so uptight after their conversation, Tony would never have felt the need to leave. But Jethro just hadn't been able to put aside his own latent prejudices long enough to see what he was doing to the other man - and to realize what a mistake he'd made in turning Tony down. Jethro had called himself ten kinds of fool in the ensuing months, and his heart still ached with the knowledge that he'd both hurt and, ultimately, lost Tony. In one way, this loss was worse than the loss of Kelly and his baby girl; this one, he had done to himself.

The pilot's announcement that they were beginning their descent into Houston broke Jethro from his morose thoughts. Shaking himself slightly, he refocused his attention on what lay ahead - the unknown.

********

Skirting around the travelers meandering aimlessly around the concourse, Gibbs strode purposely to the passenger pick-up area. He assumed this is where his FBI driver would be meeting him, and, if he couldn't find the guy, he'd simply grab a cab himself. The bright sun and oppressive humidity hit him immediately upon exiting the airport. After stopping a moment to adjust to the change in light and temperature, Jethro looked around and quickly spotted a young man in a dark blue suit holding a handmade sign stating simply "GIBBS." Good, he wouldn't have to worry about the cab.

Gibbs walked up to the intent young man and spoke quietly, "I'm Gibbs."

An expression of pure relief washed over the agent's face. "Thank god. I just got here and thought I'd missed you. My boss would have had my hide." Sobering at the impassive look on Gibbs' face, he continued, "I'm Special Agent Donovan, sir. I'm very sorry to meet you under these conditions. If you want to get your bags, we can get out of here ASAP."

Motioning to the duffle slung over his shoulder, Gibbs told Donovan, "This is it, Donovan. First lesson in the Marines - always travel light. Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to get out there and find my mother."

"Certainly, sir. The car's right over here . . . ."
Up to this point, the car ride had been completely silent. But Donovan had finally worked up the courage to offer up some information to Gibbs. "Um, I'm not certain if you've heard, sir, but they have found one survivor. Apparently, Search and Rescue is attempting to extricate that person."

Gibbs stared at Donovan as though he'd grown an extra head. "Was that before or after the rubble collapsed again? From those images on CNN, it'd be a minor miracle for anyone to have survived the first collapse much less a second."

The look on the FBI agent's face would have been comical under other circumstances, but Jethro wasn't feeling all that amused at the moment. "I'm so sorry, sir. I hadn't heard about the second collapse. But the SAR teams around here are excellent; if anyone can get folks out of there, they can."

"I hope so, Donovan. For my mother's sake, I certainly hope so." But secretly, Jethro doubted very seriously that there would be any good news when he reached the blast site.

**********

Like Tony before him, Gibbs gazed at the dusty pile of a former building with trepidation. The sight was disheartening, to say the least. How could anyone survive this kind of destruction, much less an elderly woman with medical problems? He reluctantly told himself to face the truth; there was little chance his Mama was going to be pulled from this devastation alive.

Donovan cleared his throat beside him. "Sir? I believe the lieutenant in charge and the SAR supervisor are just over here. I imagine you'd like to speak with them."

"Yes, I would. Maybe someone can tell me what the hell's being done."

With that, Gibbs strode purposely toward the figures Donovan had pointed out to him. He addressed the police lieutenant first, "Lieutenant, I'm Jethro Gibbs with NCIS. My mother is . . . was one of the residents of this facility. Can you tell me what the plans are for search and recovery?"

Turning toward the special agent, the lieutenant answered tiredly, "Frankly, we haven't really made that determination yet. We're still working on search and rescue at the moment. One of the SAR guys has been trapped in there along with the victim he was attempting to retrieve. Jim - I mean, Captain Tate here can probably give you more details; he's in charge of the SAR outfit."

Glancing meaningfully at the SAR supervisor, the lieutenant turned away from the two other men. "If you'll excuse me, I've got to go throttle, I mean mollycoddle, some feebs."

As the policeman walked away, Capt. Tate shook his head woefully. "They're sure running ol' Tom through the mill on this. Don't really want to take over but don't want to give up too much control. Makes a man count down the days to retirement." Shifting his attention to Gibbs, Tate offered his hand. "Jim Tate. I'd say it was nice to meet you, but it seems inappropriate."

Appreciating the man's forthright nature, Gibbs relaxed slightly and shook the proffered appendage. "Jethro Gibbs. So - one of your guys is trapped in there now? How the hell did that happen?"

"Well, Tony's a little more gung-ho than is strictly good for his own health. He made it here before anyone else and went ahead into what was left of the building. Did I mention he's a little impulsive, too? Regardless, he'd managed to find a survivor when a gas tank on a reserve generator blew." Tate smirked in private amusement. "I might be more worried about him if I didn't know what a survivor he is. He's gone through
enough in his 34 years that I know, if anyone can make it out of there, he can."

Gibbs nodded his head in understanding, thinking of his own Tony and his propensity for getting himself out of sticky situations. "One of my folks is like that. Must be something that's in their blood."

Tate seemed to contemplate that for a moment before replying. "Well, then, I need about a hundred more DiNozzo's in my outfit."

Jethro's mouth fell open in shock at those words. He was about to question the captain further when a commotion from the rubble pile distracted both men. Another of the SAR team shouted over to Tate, "Hey, boss! We've got signs of life!"

tbc
A searing stab of pain tore me from my sanctuary of unconsciousness. Gasping in agony, I realized that, even though I was awake, there was utter darkness around me. What the hell? My attempt to turn and look around reminded me quickly - and painfully - of the situation in which I found myself. Closing my eyes, I ran back through the events that brought me here - the pile of rubble, the discussion with Ellenor. I couldn't hear any noise or movement around me, leaving an unsettling silence that, if not for the pain, would have convinced me I was dead.

'Well, Tonio, another fine mess you've gotten yourself into.' Mentally shaking myself out of the stupor I seemed to be in, I focused again on the mission that had brought me here to begin with.

"Ellenor? Can you hear me?"

Even that little effort was enough to wear me out. Panting again, unable to catch my breath fully, I lay still until the swimming in my head subsided. No response was forthcoming from Ellenor, and I feared that she had not survived the last cave-in. This sucked all around. Not only had I failed to rescue a sweet old lady, I'd sentenced myself to death, too. A bitter laugh escaped my mouth. Failure certainly seemed to be the theme of my life, didn't it? How had Gibbs put up with me for as long as he had? It was certainly no wonder that he'd had no interest in me outside of the office. Gibbs liked and respected strong, capable people. I seemed to prove over and over that I was neither of those, so there was no reason for me to expect anything more than toleration.

Feeling my breath coming even shorter, I knew that I had to do something if I was to have any chance at survival. I remembered suddenly the small pocket flashlight I always carried, primarily because it had been drilled into me by Gibbs to always have the proper tools. Moving slowly, I reached down to the pocket of my cargo pants, working clumsily to rip open the Velcro closure. I felt a pathetic thrill of triumph when I finally succeeded in breaching the pocket and grasping the slim light within. Switching it on provided a sliver of light in the pitch black surrounding me. Forgetting for a moment, I twisted slightly to get a better look at my situation - and almost threw up from the agony that ripped through my chest. The pain was so sudden and severe that the flashlight dropped from my nerveless hand and I didn't even care. All I wanted at that moment was for the pain to stop.

Mercifully, a haze descended over my brain and blurred my perception of the fire in my chest. The tiny glow from the flashlight lying near me cast a surreal aura over my little prison of debris, and I knew without a doubt that I was dying. I wondered fuzzily if Gibbs and the rest of the team would find out, or if they'd even care. What had my father been so fond of saying? Oh, right - "Tony, you're a goddamned waste of space." I'm sure Gibbs felt the same way and was glad I had removed myself from his space. It was just another irony in my life that the man who had made my life worth living for so long probably wouldn't know, and certainly wouldn't care, that I was dead. If I wasn't involved in it, I'd probably laugh myself silly at the thought.
I wished not for the first time that I had been able to keep in touch with Abby and Ducky. I'm sure my disappearance had hurt and confused them, but I just couldn't bear hearing about Gibbs and whoever his current redhead might be. The fact that Abby knew about my feelings for Gibbs also meant she would try anything in her power to get the two of us together, even though Gibbs had made it clear he was not interested. Avoiding them all was the best route for everyone concerned: Gibbs didn't have to deal with Abby's unwanted matchmaking efforts, and I could - maybe, finally - find some solitude and peace.

As I thought of Gibbs, I wondered if he had found someone to love. I hoped so. He deserved happiness after so much grief. As painful as they had been, the last ten months without Gibbs in my life had allowed me to shore up the walls around my heart and block out those pesky little things called emotions. Based on my prior history, it was clear that I was meant to be alone. Learning to accept that had taken a long, arduous road, but I had finally accomplished it.

As I felt the life slowly leaving my body, the emptiness I felt was almost welcome. No one would grieve for me; no one would cry out for me at night and find me not there. When I was gone, it would be as though I had never existed. Closing my eyes, I let the beauty of oblivion take me to a peaceful place without pain.

end part 8
The quiet hum of unidentifiable equipment was the only sound in the room as Jethro stood staring blindly out the window at the parking lot below. So much had happened in the last two days that he could barely comprehend it all. His exhausted brain was refusing to fire on all synapses, and he knew he needed to rest. But there was just too much for him to do for that to happen.

A soft moan came from the bed behind him. Turning quickly, Jethro moved to stand beside the prone figure.

"Mama? Can I get you anything?"

"Oh, Lee, I'm fine. Just because I'm old doesn't mean I'm made of glass." She paused. "Have you heard anything yet about Tony? I've been so worried about him."

Jethro hesitated before answering, "Tony's in intensive care, Mama. He was lucky that the rebar didn't pierce his heart, but it's still touch and go." He drew a steadying breath before continuing, "Mama, I need to talk to you about Tony. Are you up to it?"

He wasn't certain how much he wanted to share with his mother at this point, but Jethro needed her to understand that he would be splitting his time between her bedside and Dinozzo's. Both needed emotional support, but Gibbs knew Tony's need was far greater than his mother's right now. Dinozzo needed a reason to keep fighting, and Jethro intended to give him one.

"Of course, Lee. What about him?"

"Firstly, I knew – know - Tony. He was my Senior Field Agent for several years. Still would be, if I wasn't an ass."

Ellenor sighed. "What did you do to the poor boy? He seemed like a fine young man to me. I'd bet he was very good at his job, but you didn't appreciate him. Is that what happened?"

Jethro withstood the urge to squirm under his mother's intent scrutiny. "Well, partially. Tony... told me something, and I reacted badly to it. It was completely my fault; I know that now. But that's not the point."

"Then what is the point, Lee? I must say I'm a little confused."

Jethro sighed heavily before replying, "Tony hasn't woken up. The doctors aren't certain why, but I think I know. I think he... he may not want to wake up." He raised a hand to forestall any potential disagreement. "From what I've been told, he's been pretty isolated since he's been here, spending most of his time alone with Clarence. And I – I hurt him pretty badly. I think he believes he's better off where he is rather than coming back to me – us."

Ellenor eyed her son critically. "Well, then, you just need to convince him he has a lot waiting for him when he wakes up. I assume he told you he was in love with you, and you acted like an ass?"

The blush on his face and chastised expression confirmed Ellenor's hypothesis. She shook her head in consternation at the blindness and obstinacy of her offspring. She hadn't even seen the two men together, but she could tell that Jethro was hopelessly in love with the other young man. 'Young and dumb,' as her mother would have said.
Jethro tried to cover his reaction with surprise. "What makes you say that? Why would you think Tony told me he was in love with me?"

"Because that nice young man told me that he had found the one for him, but `the one' didn't want him back. He also told me how honorable this man was. Who's more honorable than my boy?" She rolled her eyes at him. "Or more dense?"

"Mama –"

"Oh, hush now. That boy needs you more than I do at the moment, so what are you still doing here? You know I only want what's best for you, and by the looks of it, that's Tony. So, scoot – go see our young man and make sure he understands that you need him just as much as he needs you."

Shooting her an uncharacteristically endearing grin, Jethro hugged and kissed his mama before heading off to see about waking up one Tony DiNozzo.

end part 9
Chapter 10: Chapter 10

Author's Notes: I know, I know - I've been horribly remiss in my updating. I write angst better than happiness; trying to work out whether to get the boys together (and how) has been tough! It's a short chapter, but I'm hoping it gets me writing again. Thanks for your patience during my struggles :-) 

Gibbs watched the respirator force air into the lungs of the man he had finally conceded he loved. Tony wasn't breathing on his own, and he looked pale as milk lying there so still. Jethro dropped down into the uncomfortable chair beside the bed and took the younger man's hand in his. Nothing had prepared him for the sight of the normally exuberant Tony unconscious and very near death. Even when he'd been afflicted by the plague, Tony had never given up, responding immediately to Jethro's order to live. Now, Gibbs wasn't certain any amount of ordering would work.

Taking a deep breath and shoring up his courage, Jethro leaned his elbows on the bed and spoke to his senior agent. "Tony, it's me; it's Gibbs. You're in the hospital, and the docs say you don't want to wake up for -em." He cleared his throat of its sudden tightness before continuing, "Listen, DiNozzo, you can't do this to me, all right? I need you to come back to me. Things may seem bleak to you, but they're not. Okay? You have to wake up so I can apologize, tell you all those things I should have told you months ago."

Gibbs knew he sounded uncharacteristically needy; in this instance, though, he was needy. He needed the opportunity to talk to this man who had become so important to him. He needed the chance to apologize over and over again for his foolishness. He needed . . . Tony. That's what it came down to - one simple truth that Jethro had tried long and hard to deny. But his denial didn't stand a chance when he looked at Tony in his hospital bed.

Grasping Tony's hand gently, Jethro felt a calm steal over him just from the touch of the younger man's too-cold hand. "Don't make me get Ducky and Abby here. They'll yammer at you until you have to wake up out of pure self-preservation. They haven't been the same since you left; none of us has. This would give everyone the opportunity to give you all the grief they've been shoring up over your leaving us."

The tongue-in-cheek threat didn't so much as merit a twitch from Tony. Not knowing what else to do, Gibbs continued speaking. "That woman you found today - that's my mother, Tony. And she's doing good, barely a scratch on her. Seems like a miracle, if you believe in that kind of thing.

"Tony, I know I hurt you that night . . . and for weeks afterward. I - I didn't know how to handle it. There you were, telling me that you - another man - were in love with me. That's just never been something I'd consciously considered. It threw me for a loop, let me tell you." Jethro stopped abruptly and drew a harsh breath. "But you know that already. There's no good explanation and no excuse at all for the way I treated you. All I can do is ask for your forgiveness - and for another chance."

One of the machines monitoring DiNozzo's vitals suddenly began beeping alarmingly. As medical personnel swooped into the room, Gibbs was pushed aside abruptly, losing his grip on Tony's hand and feeling the loss in his very soul. -Come on, Tony. Don't do this to me. Hell, I know I deserve it, but you don't. You deserve to live - with me, if you'll still have me.'

"Mr. Gibbs, we're going to be taking Mr. DiNozzo back into surgery. It appears that some of the internal sutures have ruptured and he's bleeding internally." The doctor's blunt words were like a slap in the face to Jethro, jerking him from his mental pleadings and back into reality.

"What caused the rupture? And what are his chances?" Jethro almost choked on the last question, but he needed to know.
"If we've caught it in time, this shouldn't greatly impact his recovery process. That doesn't mean that he'll be out of the woods, just that he won't be that much worse off. He will, however, be weaker, which could lead to complications. " The surgeon ran a hand through his hair before continuing, "Now, I've got to get scrubbed in. We'll let you know his status as soon as possible."

With that, the room emptied and Jethro was left alone to wait and worry.