

Sunrise by Xanthe



Story archived: <http://www.xanthe.org/sunrise/>

Story Notes:

This fic was inspired by a conversation with [tejas](#). I'm actually in the middle of writing two much longer stories, but got sidetracked into writing this one so blame her!

Abby's lab was filled with balloons and a little gathering of people, making it seem much smaller than it had these last too-many-years-to-count. Gibbs leaned against the far wall and munched on a sandwich, watching the proceedings with a slightly bemused expression on his face.

"Hey!" Abby threw herself at him and hugged him tight - a little too tight - her very pregnant belly digging into him. "You should be mingling," she scolded him. "Anyone would think you'd never been to an office party before!"

Gibbs raised an eyebrow. "I haven't. Don't do office parties, Abs. Never have."

"Really? Never?" She thought about it. "What about Christmas 2008?"

"Nope." He shook his head.

"You weren't at Tony's 'It's a Wonderful Life' party in MTAC?" she frowned.

"Nope." He shook his head again.

"Hmmm. Well, what about Ziva's leaving party?" she demanded. "We went to that bar, and Jimmy got drunk and threw up all over Tony's new shoes."

"Ah, so *that's* why Jimmy went through that phase of leaving chocolate bars on Tony's desk every day. I did wonder," Gibbs mused. "Thought he just had a thing for him."

"Idiot." Abby thumped his arm playfully. "Tony did forgive him eventually," she added with a wink.

"Only took the contents of an entire Hershey factory."

"Well, you know how Tony is about his shoes!" Abby laughed. "Hey, Tony – did you ever manage to clean those shoes after Jimmy puked up over them that time, or did you have to...?" She trailed off with a frown, looking around.

"He isn't here, Abby," Gibbs told her softly.

"He isn't?" She scanned the room anxiously. It didn't take long; she'd only invited people he had a close working relationship with, so the party wasn't exactly heaving. Gibbs was proud of that. He had never been in this job to make friends, and it was his idea of hell to hang around after work making small talk with Margaret in Accounts and Simon in HR. "Why isn't Tony here, Gibbs?" Abby asked forlornly.

"Maybe he's upstairs moving all his stuff over onto my desk," Gibbs replied. "I guess he's the boss now." Not that it had been officially confirmed, but Tony had spent several long hours ensconced in Leon's office over the past few weeks so Gibbs figured it was a done deal. Abby stared at him for a moment, and then launched herself at him for a hug.

"Why did you have to go and *retire*, Gibbs?" she asked, burying her face in his shoulder.

"It was time, Abby," he replied, wrapping his arms around her and holding her tight. She snuffled against his shirt for a bit and surreptitiously wiped her eyes on the collar. He grinned down at the mascara stain she left there.

"Why do things have to change!" she wailed at him, drawing back.

"You tell me." He put his hand on her rounded belly and raised an eyebrow at her. "You won't be around for long enough to miss me, Abs. In a couple of months you'll be taking on a whole new job."

"I know. But..." She sighed. "Promise me you'll at least come back for the christening."

"Promise me that you'll at least put that baby to sleep in a proper crib and not one shaped like a coffin," he retorted.

She grinned at him. "I'll promise if you will, Bossman!"

"It's a deal then." He glanced around the room again, grimacing. "So, how long before I can leave?"

"Gibbs! It's your party!" she scolded.

"Yeah – the party I expressly remember telling you that I didn't want!" he retorted.

"You mad at me?"

He laughed out loud. "Never." He kissed her cheek. "But I really do hate parties, Abs – even my own."

"I know. And I also know that you like the idea of being on your own - but won't you be lonely?" she asked quietly. "I mean, I get that you have this dream of hitting the ocean and taking some time out with no more responsibilities, but...are you sure it's what you really, really want?"

"I'm sure." He nodded firmly.

In truth, he didn't know how it would pan out, but he did know that it was time to leave NCIS. He'd taken one bullet too many, had one argument with the top brass too many, and chased down one bad guy too many. He'd woken up one day and realised that he was tired of it all. No – not just tired - *exhausted*, with a weariness that went bone deep.

Ducky had retired a few years ago; Gibbs had dinner with him every couple of weeks, but it wasn't the same.

Then Ziva had returned to Israel at her father's behest. Gibbs knew she hadn't been thrilled about it, but, dutiful daughter that she was, she'd gone anyway. She called him sometimes, when she wanted his professional opinion – or a favour. He hoped she was happy; it never had been easy to tell with Ziva.

He still saw McGee around the place – he was head of the Cyber Unit and making quite a name for himself. That was where all the glory was these days – not out in the field, getting your hands dirty and chasing after men with guns. McGee had trained up a whole taskforce of mini-McGees. Gibbs even had one of them on his team; eager young kid, able to give him, in ten seconds, the kind information that would have once taken a team of agents ten months. It was progress. There was no denying that everything was faster, easier, maybe even better than in the old days. He just felt like such a dinosaur.

Gibbs and Tony had trained up a handful of new probies, but each time they took on someone new he saw the same look in Tony's eyes that he knew was in his own. Whenever they looked at these eager new recruits, he knew that they both saw Kate, Cassidy, Ziva, McGee, Langer, Lee and so many others reflected back.

They knocked the rough edges off their new recruits, as they had done so often before. They whipped them slowly into shape, and taught them everything they needed to know in order to do their jobs and stay alive. They chewed them out occasionally, kicked them around sometimes, picked them up, dusted them down, allowed them five seconds to cry on their shoulders, and then threw them back out into the field again. Eventually they all moved on. Gibbs figured it was time he did the same.

Even Tony's heart didn't seem to be in it any more. He did his job efficiently enough, but the

teasing lacked conviction these days. Gibbs noticed that he only ever called their new team members by their last names – not their first, and never, ever "probie". He never took them out for a drink, or poked his nose into their personal lives, and he sure as hell never allowed them to catch a glimpse of his. Gibbs wondered when the class clown had turned into the class teacher but somehow it had happened, somewhere along the way.

"I really have to go," Gibbs whispered into Abby's ear. "I have an early start tomorrow."

"Send postcards," she whispered, grabbing his arm fiercely. "Promise."

"I will."

He'd already said his private farewells to Ducky, McGee, and Vance. Tobias Fornell had found a bottle of bourbon sitting on his desk with a note stuck to it. There was only one person left who really mattered, and Gibbs had no idea where the hell he was.

"Bye, Abs." He pulled her close, kissed her firmly on the cheek, and then walked towards the door.

"Gibbs!" she called him back as he reached the door. "You didn't make a speech!" He raised a disbelieving eyebrow, and she grinned. "No speech then?" He knew she was trying to keep him here for just one second longer – and he understood. Letting go was hard.

"No speech. Hey – Abs - looks like someone left something for you out here," he said, before heading in the direction of the elevator.

She followed him, a curious expression on her face. He watched from the open elevator door as she stepped into the hallway and found the elegant, beautifully crafted, wooden crib. There was a single blue ribbon tied around it, knotted into a big bow at the front.

"Whatever you do, don't call that poor kid Jethro," he told her.

She turned towards him, her green eyes luminous. The elevator doors started to close.

"Goodbye, Gibbs," she whispered.

"Goodbye, Abby."

He waited until the elevator was between floors and then reached out to snap the emergency switch with his hand, one last time. The elevator came to a halt, and he took a deep breath and squared his shoulders, steeling himself. Saying goodbye to Abby had been hard, but he knew that this final farewell would be the hardest of all.

He thumped his hand onto the switch to resume his journey and stepped out into the squad room a few seconds later. To his surprise, the place was deserted. There was no sign of Tony – he hadn't started moving his stuff over, as Gibbs had expected. His Mighty Mouse stapler was still on his desk. Gibbs picked it up and glanced around, the sounds of many long years echoing around the empty room.

"Come on, people, saddle up..."

"I hate to say it, but that was actually smart, Tony"

"I didn't know your nickname was Honey Buns."

"I knew this girl once. She squeaked. She made this little squeaking..."

"With me, Elf-Lord."

"Why doesn't Tony just sleep with her? It's a viable interrogation technique."

"For the last time, Deep Six is fiction."

The sounds faded. Gibbs replaced Tony's stapler back on his desk.

"Good times, Tony. Good times," he said softly.

Tony was ready to take over. Hell, Tony had been ready for years. Gibbs had often wondered why he hadn't been offered a team of his own; then Leon had let slip that he had – more than once - starting way back with Jenny, years ago. Tony had always turned it down.

"My loyal St Bernard," Gibbs murmured, gazing at Tony's empty desk.

He grabbed a pen and wrote a note. He wasn't entirely sure what to say. How did you sum up so many years of working together? How did you put all that into a couple of lines? What could he say that would even begin to express what they'd been through together?

In the end, he knew it wasn't possible. He scribbled down a few words that would have to do instead.

"Atta boy, Tony. So long. Jethro."

Maybe it was a good thing that Tony wasn't around. Gibbs wasn't great in any kind of emotionally charged situation. Neither was Tony, come to that. It was probably all for the best that they were both spared the excruciating formality of a final handshake and a gruff "take care then".

Gibbs turned and left the squad room without looking back. He was done here.

He went home, grabbed a few hours sleep, and got up in the dark small hours to find a tearfully incoherent text message from Abby on his cell phone. There were a few others: Ducky had sent him a "Bon Voyage", and McGee had texted a cheerful "Happy Sailing, Boss!" Even Ziva had sent him one final message, instructing him to sail his boat down to her neck of the woods one day.

There was nothing from Tony.

Gibbs grabbed his duffle bag and took a cab down to the marina. It was still dark; the sun was just a faint, glowing promise in the distance. Gibbs slung his bag over his shoulder and walked slowly down the quay to where the Kelly was berthed. She was beautiful, this final

boat of his; built with all the love and care in his hands to carry him off into his retirement. He'd been spending the past few months getting her kitted out for this day. She was fully supplied and ready to sail, bobbing happily on the water in front of him. And she wasn't alone.

There was a man sitting on the quay beside her.

Gibbs's heart skipped a beat. He walked past the waiting man, threw his bag onto the Kelly, and jumped onboard. He moved around the boat; adjusting the sails, untying the ropes, getting her ready for her maiden voyage. The man just sat there, watching him. He was dressed in jeans and a thick sweater, and there was a fat, over-stuffed bag at his feet. Gibbs ignored him.

Finally, he was done. It was time. The sun was now a little burning ball hovering on the horizon, and daylight had broken through the darkness. Gibbs glanced at his watch, and then at the man sitting on the quay. The man gazed back at him, unspeaking, a question in his green eyes. Gibbs wondered how the hell he hadn't seen this coming. Then again, maybe he had.

"Isn't there someplace else you're supposed to be, DiNozzo?" he asked. "Like leading your team?"

Tony shook his head. "Not my team."

"Vance offered?"

"Several times. I turned him down." Tony shrugged. "Haven't needed the money since Dad died and left me his millions against his better judgement. Only stayed for one reason."

"Yeah?" Gibbs raised an eyebrow. "What's that?"

Tony rolled his eyes. "For a trained investigator, you sure as hell ask some dumb questions."

Gibbs ran a thoughtful hand over his stubbled chin, pondering that. Not that he hadn't known of course - just that neither of them had ever spoken about it.

"You know how to sail?" he asked eventually.

"Nope. I'm a quick learner though."

"It's hard work and there are no free berths on my boat. I don't take any freeloaders."

"Like you ever did," Tony snorted. "And like I ever was."

Gibbs gave a wry grunt at that. "Gonna be a long trip."

Tony shrugged. "Didn't have any other plans for the rest of my life."

They were silent. Gibbs stared at Tony, and Tony stared back.

Then Gibbs sighed and jerked his head, almost imperceptibly, at the boat.

"Well come on then, if you're coming."

Tony's face broke into a big grin. "Aye, aye, Skipper!" he said, tossing off a careless salute in Gibbs's direction. He got up, picked up his bag, and threw it onboard. Then he followed on behind, jumping onto the deck with a clumsy kind of grace.

Gibbs pushed the boat away from the quay and took his place at the wheel, guiding the Kelly out towards the open water.

Tony ran down the few steps into the cabin, and dumped his bag. He emerged a few seconds later.

"There's only one bunk," he said.

Gibbs glanced at him over his shoulder. "That a problem?"

Tony face broke into another of those big grins. "Hell no!"

Gibbs went back to steering. A few seconds later, he felt an arm slide around his waist. He moved his head to say something but didn't get that far. Next thing he knew he was being kissed on the mouth. Somehow, he wasn't surprised that it felt so good. He kept one hand on the wheel and his other hand on Tony's hip. Tony finished kissing him and drew back a little way.

"Atta boy?" he grumbled. "That's all you were going to leave me with, after all these years?"

Gibbs shrugged. "What more did you want?"

"You."

"Well, now you've got me."

"Yeah. Now I do. Finally."

Gibbs gazed straight ahead, at the newly dawning day, a little grin curving at the corners of his mouth. The wind whipped up, making Tony's hair stand on end. They leaned into it, Tony's arm still wrapped firmly around Gibbs's waist. It felt like it belonged there, warm and heavy, keeping them both anchored as they sailed off together, into the sunrise.

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