

Scarred Soul

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Summary: Every now and then when he's in his basement, alone with his boat and his thoughts, a tear will appear in the corner of one eye. Implied Jibbs.

Disclaimer: And still nothing of it belongs to me. Otherwise we'd have a slightly different cast...

A/N: It's been ages since I've written a NCIS fic. I actually thought I'd left this fandom behind me; I may still watch the episodes, but ever since Jen's death, it just didn't excite me anymore. Now I suddenly had this idea in my head, due to some events in my personal life, and... well. Hope you like it.

The study in his house is only infrequently visited, and much less occupied. It is there out of habit; because it is normal to have a home office. It isn't that he needs one. He spends too much time at a desk already when he is at work; so on these rare occasions when he comes home a bit earlier to stay longer in his house than for just the few hours of sleep, he prefers to spend this precious time somewhere else. Somewhere more... familiar. Homely.

Now and then, however, he has to open the door to the room that mostly serves as storage room, and he has to sit down at his desk at home, after he has just left the one at work. He'll have to fill in some papers or finish a report, or do anything else he'd rather not do.

And every once in a while, he has to open his desk drawer - the one that keeps fresh pieces of paper - and he'll come across another sheet, neatly resting atop the virgin paper where it can't decay, can't get dirty, can't be damaged. But can, almost, be forgotten.

A piece of paper he found when he least expected it. A piece of paper reading only two words and one punctuation mark:

"Dear Jethro,"

He knows the sheet is there; he knows he'll find it every single time he opens the drawer, as seldom as it happens. He had considered putting it under the stack of new sheets; hide it from his view, and his memory. But he's never had the heart to do so. Instead he allows it to remind him from time to time - remind him of the life lost, the love wasted, the friendship gone.

Would you cry if I died tomorrow?

When she had first asked that question all those years ago, he had just smirked at her younger self and kissed her; thinking of her as naive to ask something like that. Maybe he had been the naive one, maybe he had been blinded by his fascination for her; his love. But that she would die before him simply seemed impossible, improbable... something that mustn't ever happen.

Would you miss me if I was gone?

They were partners. They were the perfect team, in every sense. They were a symbiosis, on and off the job. Had he trusted in them staying together, no matter what? Perhaps he had. Had he trusted that he could once again find happiness where he had believed it forever gone? Perhaps he had. Had he again fallen for fate's cruelty as it tried to prove to him that love and family were only an illusion? Perhaps he had.

But had he loved her? Had he craved for someone to love him again? Had he wished for someone to be at his side, to understand his work, and accept him for what he was? Without any doubt.

Will we still be together when we're old and wrinkly?

She never asked that question. And still it has been on his mind forever; sometimes in his own voice, sometimes in an indistinct one, and sometimes, just sometimes, in hers. When he remembers her voice. When he remembers *her*. When the memory of her is not only a fading moment in time.

Every now and then when he's in his basement, alone with his boat and his thoughts, a tear will appear in the corner of one eye. Unbidden, uncontrollable. He'll leave it there, or brush it away, but whatever he does, he will blame the tear finding its way to light on the sawdust, or the burning sensation of a sip of bourbon catching him unprepared.

He won't admit, to himself or the solitude surrounding him, that he's used to both of them; that working with the wood and having a drink is something he's been doing for more years than he is willing to count. He also won't admit that his favorite liquor has the capability to bring back to his mind what was once lost, and what, just sometimes, he wishes would stay that way. Not because he's detached enough from her and her death to just forget it.

Because he's still too close.

Because it still hurts too much.

Because it's with her like with his first wife and his daughter - wounds of the soul healed, but they'll forever remain as scars that reminded one of what has been lost. And because a scarred soul hurt - not every minute, not every day, maybe not even every week or month. And not as much as a freshly wounded one.

But every once in a while, the pain comes back, tearing at the core of his being, for a short while, for seconds at most, before everyday life nudges his shoulder and brings him back to the now and then, letting the pain fade away.

Then he'd brush away the tear, take a deep breath, and move on, because that is what he always does.

But he never forgets. His scarred soul will never let him. And he doesn't want to either, for the pain is a part of him.

As is his love for her.

END