

One Step

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Genre: Romance; Angst

Rating: NC-17 / M

Spoiler: 5x09 "Lost and Found"

Contents: Another different ending of the maybe most famous Jibbs scene from "Lost & Found" - What if Jen hadn't just silently watched Jethro leaving her house...?

Disclaimer: I don't own NCIS. Of course - or do you think that I would've let something like 'Judgment Day' happen?

"Once upon a time I would have asked you to stay and I wouldn't have taken no for an answer."

Something like hope could be heard through her last words; at least it was worth a try, although she knew the answer.

"No."

Of course. Jenny Shepard tried hard to hide the expression her face was about to make when he said this one word that was so fraught with meaning, and managed a weak smile. "What happened, Jethro?" she then heard herself asking the man in front of her, desperately searching for an answer to this one question burning on her lips for such a long time now.

"You made a choice."

"I had to do what was best for me. I still do."

Instead of answering, Jethro Gibbs turned away, on his face this little smile, the one that was speaking of knowledge and self-confidence, and that she had cursed more than once. He opened the door, ready to leave without another word and she knew he would do it. But not this time; this time she wouldn't let him go away with it. She knew she had made mistakes in the past, and she was having more than enough regrets about it. Often enough, she had seen how it could end when you were wasting chances, when you were throwing away something really good.

In Paris, she had been the one to leave something really good behind; she had destroyed the one thing in her life that had made her really happy. She had been the one who had left him nine years ago, and she had been the one who had turned him down three years ago when they'd met again.

"Jethro," she quietly called just before he was through the door, and to her surprise, he stopped. He didn't move, standing with his back to her, but she knew she had his attention.

Unfortunately, now that she had the chance to, she had no idea what to say. Great. Now that's why parents always tell their children to think first before acting, she thought, mentally kicking herself. For years, she had wanted to tell him what was bothering her since their parting, and now the right words to explain wouldn't come to her mind.

"Please," she simply said, knowing that he would understand. She didn't hear his sharp intake of breath, but she saw it.

"Not again, Jen. It's too late," he finally replied and took the next few steps, only to be again stopped by her voice.

"Don't, Jethro," she demanded, "It's not the way it works."

"It worked nine years ago when you left me," he shot back, though his voice stayed calm.

"You'll never forgive me for that, will you?" She eyed him with a sad expression; he couldn't see it, but nonetheless she was hoping that he would feel it, as he had been always able to.

"What do you want me to do, Jen?" he asked after endless seconds of silence.

"Stay. Talk. Let me try to explain."

"Don't you think you should've done this a bit earlier - nine years maybe?" He still had his back to her and it was making her nervous that she could not see his face.

"People make mistakes. Sometimes those they won't be proud of afterwards, but they do it nonetheless. That's why we're humans. We're not perfect, Jethro; even you make mistakes. Listen to me, only for half an hour." She didn't know if he turned around for her words or for tactical reasons, but he turned around, and for the moment, it was all that mattered.

"Why now?" he wanted to know, his gaze intensely on her.

"Please, Jethro, come back in, don't let us talk about this on my doorstep," she pleaded, but he was relentless.

"Why now, Jen?" he repeated, his voice low, like a warning.

She remained silent; that was not how she had planned it. Now they stood there, across from each other, both of them waiting for the other to make the first move. When she still had said nothing after some minutes, minutes of staring, waiting and thinking, he again wanted to make his way for his car, when...

"Because I miss you, Jethro." Her words were barely a whisper, but he would have been damned if he hadn't heard it. Slowly, he walked back to her, pushed her carefully into the house and closed the door behind them, as he did with the study's door after they had stepped into the room.

"So, talk."

Three hours of talking, discussing and arguing had made them sensitive for every wrong word. Obviously it had been just about time to talk about what had happened so many years ago, and about the things they'd done after meeting again.

"You can't blame me for taking chances!" she insisted fiercely, sitting in the leather chair next to the fireplace, her whole body tense, and her hands clasping the arms of the chair.

"No, but for hurting me. Jen, you left me, you turned me down, and I never really understood why. At least an explanation would have been nice. Just leaving me behind definitely hasn't been."

Shepard didn't trust her ears. Leroy Jethro Gibbs had just admitted that he had been hurt - what meant that he had just showed weakness.

"You didn't want to listen! I tried to tell you, tried to explain, but you just ignored the reality!"

"When exactly did you try to explain?"

"The night before I left," she simply said, watching his reaction, knowing that he would remember.

"Yeah, of course, maybe you should have done it...," he started, but trailed off when his memory hit him. She was speaking of the night after her return from a few days' absence, the night he had wanted nothing but one thing, and that hadn't been talking...

"I see, you remember, Jethro," she stated, ignoring his stare.

"I don't understand it. Why couldn't you just...?"

"I had wanted to tell you that I was going to leave, that they'd given me the chance to take another step on my job ladder. When I came back after those three days talking had been the last thing you had wanted to do. You wouldn't have listened to me and it had been our last night, Jethro. I had wanted it to be a night to remember," she silently explained, the pictures of said night more than vivid in her mind. It had been one of the most exciting nights of her life, but it had felt like a good bye, too; at least to her.

"A few words, Jen. Only a few words. That would have been enough," he told her, pacing around the room.

"You know full well that it wouldn't. A few words never worked for you. I know you; we'd spent four years together and had been so close, and believe it or not, you're not the big secret to me you might be to others. I just didn't know about your first wife. You remember the question I had once asked you?" she asked, watching him from her sitting position; his pacing made her nervous and she was thankful when her words made him stop.

He stood in front of the window and was looking out into the dark night. "If it would have made a difference if you had known about them?" he answered, remembering all too well.

"Yes, Jethro. It would have made a difference. When I had to decide whether to leave or to stay with you, I was forced to think about the future. All I knew was that you'd been divorced twice after short periods of marriages. I hadn't wanted to be the third ex-wife."

"Oh, come on, Jen, what makes you think we would have married? And don't tell me knowing about Shannon would have made you stay!" he snapped.

"It would have. Because I would have been able to understand what you've been looking for. This special thing of course not every woman is able to give, especially not those who don't know about your past and your family. And why you weren't able to... love anymore," she explained, ignoring his words about the possible or obviously more impossible marriage.

"I have loved again," he stated, his voice deadly calm. His words were like a knife that bore into her heart; he was right, she knew that he had loved her, as she had loved him. If this hadn't been love, these four years they had worked together, spent nearly every day, every hour with each other, she really would have had to ask herself about the meaning and definition of love.

"Yes, you have," she admitted, before adding sadly, "unfortunately you've never really showed it."

"So what would you've wanted me to do? No, what else would've wanted me to do? Shower you with gifts? Buying you flowers every day?"

"Being honest. Telling me what you feel. Three little words. It's not that hard, Jethro. And it would've been enough."

"You know I'm not the one for words. I've never been."

"Well, maybe that's the reason Hollis left you," she commented, more speaking to herself.

"Oh, shut up now!" he shouted, not caring about Carson anymore, and that he maybe would hear their argument. He walked up to her, who now also stood at her full height, the furious fire in her eyes matching his.

"How dare you talk to me like this, Jethro!?"

"How dare I? I could ask you the same question! Hollis is not your concern!"

"Not my concern? It became my concern when you two played teenagers in love!"

"Are you-" He suddenly looked very confused. "Wait a moment – you're not blaming me for being with Hollis, are you?"

"No, I'm blaming you for doing something right in front of my eyes that you knew was hurting me!"

"So I'm not allowed to be happy as long as it isn't with you, though you are the one who wouldn't want to be with me?" he concluded, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"That's not the point and you know it; but your behavior had been more than that of a man in love. You wanted me to get hurt. You wanted me to see you happy with another woman, when I knew I couldn't have you!"

"You couldn't have me? I told you that I've missed you, right on your first day as director; you had every chance to get me back. But obviously, that, again, didn't fit into your career plans!" It had been one of the things Gibbs simply couldn't understand. She had turned him down when he had offered her a second chance, against better knowledge, and her only words concerning this had been that there would be no 'off the job'.

"It never came to your mind that there might have been some initial uncertainty in me, for I've been and still am the first female Director of a Federal Agency? And, moreover, that it had been my first day as Director? Couldn't you understand that I haven't wanted to risk everything I had achieved, I had fought for?"

"And that's the reason? That's the reason you turned me down, twice, because you, again, were afraid of bothering your career? You're more than egoistic."

She frowned at his words, for a moment caught off guard; when had he gotten this unfair? "I'm egoistic, because I hadn't the intention to stay an agent, because I wanted to make something of my life?"

"That's your excuse for stopping at nothing?" He laughed humorless. "So you hurt the people who love you for your success. How noble, Jen."

"That's enough, Jethro," she hissed, "I don't think you know what you're saying." With this, she wanted to step aside and leave the intimidating position he had her in, but was stopped with his hand grabbing her arm.

"Leave it, Jethro, I'm not going to-"

She was cut off when he pulled her to him and crushed his mouth down to hers. At first, she was struggling against him and his hold on her; but soon she just gave up, unwilling to fight anymore - against her feelings and the longing she had felt for so long now.

His emotions a mixture of love and passion, anger and despair, he kissed her mindless, senseless, till her bones turned to jell-o, and her legs gave in. He laid her down onto the floor in front of the fireplace and freed them from their clothes, and when they finally felt each others bodies, bare skin on bare skin, it was like a release; the tension that had been built up over the time leaving their bodies.

He needn't to test her; he knew she was ready, with her hips pressing up against him, and her legs wrapping around him; he could feel the heat radiating from her. Slowly he slid into her; as much as his body screamed for release, for making this fast and passionate, he wanted to remember the sensation of being one with her again. But he wasn't able to restrain himself very long; when she bit down on his shoulder, and dug her fingernails into his back, forcing him to move, it was a request he couldn't refuse.

He was thrusting hard, yet she was begging for more, never getting enough of him, his touch and his kisses, his wandering hands all over her body, and the move of his hips. Her eyes were closed, and her face was a picture of pure pleasure; moans and little screams escaped her lips. It was a picture he wanted to remember; a picture of a woman so beautiful who was, at least for this moment, all his.

His mouth on hers muffled her scream when she reached her climax, taking him with her as her muscles contracted around him, massaging and stimulating him beyond the bearable.

Somehow he managed to keep himself from falling on top of her, his arms supporting him, but only for a short moment; he felt that his arms weren't able to hold him anymore, so he let himself fall on the ground next to her, pulling her with him; he didn't want to let her go.

"Remind me to buy a bearskin; it would be more comfortable to lie on," she whispered breathless, and her words made him chuckle.

"Next time, I'll take you upstairs, first. Promise," he replied as breathless as her, then kissing her softly.

"So, does that mean...," she began, but feared ending the sentence.

"I don't know, Jen. I think we're both hurt; and one night won't be able to fix that last nine years. Let's wait what the future brings. But I promise you we'll try it."

"I have no intention to leave you again. I won't make the same mistake twice," she assured him, and her eyes showed the honesty her voice was speaking with.

"Wouldn't let you go anyways," he answered, smirking, making her smile, too.

"Jethro, what I said about Hollis, I didn't mean to..."

"Yeah, I know, Jen. It's okay. I, too, didn't mean to offend you. I was just-"

"As angry as me. That's the problem with rage. You say and do things you'll regret afterwards."

"About regretting the things you do...," he began, but was silenced by her lips.

"Let's not talk about this anymore now. Take me home, Jethro," she whispered against his mouth, repeating the words she had said so many years ago after a day of real horror, when she needed him to just hold her in his arms. He wrapped her up in a blanket, made sure that Carson was still in his room or at least not in the hall, and carried her upstairs to her bedroom.

Carefully he laid her down, and together they slipped between the sheets. When he spooned up behind her, pulling her close and encircling her in his arms, she had already fallen asleep with the feeling of being secure in his embrace.

He was sure that there would be enough time to discuss the past; and with that thought, he kissed her cheek gently, whispered "I missed you too, Jen." and then, too, fell asleep.

FIN

About the clothes in the study... well, let's hope Carson won't be the first to get up in the morning. ;)