

## Once

Author: CK

Rating: P6

**Spoiler:** 6x02 "Agent Afloat" (not really, but to avoid anyone complaining afterwards... ;) ) and with that, of course, 5x18-19 "Judgment Day"

Contents: Not only the living have to say goodbye. No one will "rest in peace" automatically...

Disclaimer: Nothing mine and I'm afraid that it will never be... otherwise I would have already made sure that Jenny was remembered and not only forgotten!

Author's Note: Title inspired by the song "Einmal" (what is "once" translated) from the musical revue "Hexen" (witches).

I was told that Jenny, or shall I say, Tony dealing with her death resp. his fault, was mentioned in the new episode. And watching the scenes with Tony and Ziva gave me the idea for this story.

The silver light went unnoticed by everyone around. It wasn't a light to be seen by the living - but a portal for those who wanted to make sure one last time that their beloved ones were alright.

Two figures stepped out of the light; then it was gone. Silently, they watched the scenery around them for half an eternity; just observing, just checking. They felt the seconds and minutes flying away, out to the world, leaving them and showing them that nothing could be stopped, especially not time. After endless minutes that eventually turned into hours, the male one of the two figures rose to speak.

"What are you so afraid of?" he asked the other figure, the female one. "Look at them. Sense their emotions. They are still thinking of you. They will never forget about you. They love you. Always will."

"But I don't want their guilty conscience be their only reminder. As it is Tony's. I wish I could tell him that it wasn't his fault." She became silent for a few moments. He could see her mind working while her eyes were fixed to the scenery they were watching. "I haven't been good for them. I've only brought them problems. And I never got the chance to explain myself."

"Trust me, blaming yourself won't bring you anywhere. You need to find your peace. You *deserve* to finally rest in peace," the older man next to her told her, his one hand lying on her shoulder. Her eyes that spoke of so much sadness closed for a moment.

"I know. I know that, one day, I have to. I just don't know if I already have the strength to. I never told them goodbye, you know? And I never told them how much they mean to me. How much..." She stopped and swallowed hard, before continuing, her voice barely audible, "I love them, all of them."

"My little girl," the man said gently and laid an arm around her, "I know how you feel. I never got the chance either. But... you learn to cope with it, as hard as it might be. I've been watching you and your mother so often... and then someone came to me and told me to let go. I didn't want to; didn't want to leave you two alone. You've been so sad and you can't imagine how often I have been longing to have only a short moment to take you two into my arms and tell you that everything is alright. But then I had to realize that you had managed to go on all by yourself. And I *knew* that everything was going to be alright."

"Not everything, dad. We have been missing you badly, but mum and I had a life to live that wasn't going to wait for us. You know, we've always felt your presence. We always knew you were there."

"I know, little one, it was the intention. And as you knew that I was there for you although you couldn't see me, your friends will also know. You may be gone, but you will never be forgotten; they care far too much for you to just forget you. And they will remember you because they care, not because they blame themselves for your death."

Standing on the gallery as she had been used to during her time as director, Jenny Shepard looked down to Jethro Gibbs' team. Ziva was hugging Tony, telling him quietly and for the hundredth time that it wasn't his fault. Somehow, it must have gotten something like a ritual for her, although she hadn't seen Tony for months.

They were standing there together with Abby and Tim, quietly celebrating that Tony was back and with him, the team was finally together again. Abby had linked arms with Tim, cuddling a bit to him, like she needed to be comforted, too.

Jenny knew those scenes; whenever Gibbs was away or not watching, they tried to comfort each other. They had done it before Tony and Ziva had left four months ago, and they did it now. She didn't know why they avoided letting their boss see it; maybe because he wanted to forget her, or maybe because the pain was too great. She only knew that it was the same every time. Whenever Gibbs was leaving for a coffee or a talk to Director Vance, or anything else, his Gibblets allowed themselves some moments to remember and to console each other.

Unfortunately, the gallery above the bullpen - and the big office itself - was the only place she was able to visit. It was the only place where she could stand and watch them.

And this time, she observed some unusual difference. Because this time, Gibbs was watching them. He was standing around an edge, out of sight, silently observing the scene. At first Jenny thought he would go and interrupt, as he had done it so often in the last time. But nothing happened. Instead, he looked up to the gallery she was standing at, with a hint of tears in his eyes and a sad look that made her want to take him into her arms. It was like he was looking at her, though she knew he couldn't see her.

"They are really *missing* you, Jenny," her father assured her quietly, taking her attention away from the man she loved, "And now that they are all back together..."

"It's good that Jethro has brought them back. They need each other. They are like a family," Jen stated and Jasper nodded.

"A family you'll always be a part of," he again told her, reading her thoughts. "Come on now, Jenny. It's about time."

"Give me... one last minute please. I'd like to do something before I leave."

She descended the stairs, walking towards the team that was standing next to Gibbs' desk. Their boss was among them now, and they were talking about what had happened in the last months. It was a simple chat in a not so simple and easy atmosphere.

Slowly Jenny approached each one of them; her ghostly form hugged Abby and Ziva, padded Tony's and Tim's cheeks, and finally gave Jethro, with her hands resting on his chest, a gentle kiss on his lips.

After looking at all of them thoroughly again, to keep at least a mental picture of them, she walked back towards her father who was now waiting for her at the windows.

"You're ready?"

"Will I ever be?" Her father smiled fondly, and took her hand.

"Guess it would be bad if you would. Our souls and hearts are not made for dying and leaving. But it's what the world has made our bodies for. And the world has never claimed to be perfect."

Jenny sighed, then squeezed her father's hand.

"Let's go?"

Again, a silver light appeared, and they both stepped into it - and were gone.

Suddenly, the team looked up irritated.

"Did you feel that, too?" Tony asked, looking confused. "It was like..."

The others nodded, sharing Tony's confusion, but didn't have an explanation. Only a statement from Gibbs that showed nothing of confusion or surprise irritated his team even more.

"Jenny."

FIN