

For Decades To Come

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Rating: PG

Summary: One year was enough. Enough to convince him that something had changed. He, his life. His feelings. And especially those feelings demanded yet another change.

Disclaimer: Let's see... I think CSI:NY is legal property of CBS, Anthony E. Zuiker and his writers, as well as Polydor. Hope I haven't forgotten anyone. And I guess some credit also goes to Gary Sinise and Melina Kanakaredes and their great chemistry.

A/N: Without knowing what is happening at the moment in S7, and certainly without any knowledge about what is planned for the season finale, here's my idea of how it could (should) end.
Written particularly for all frustrated Mac/Stella shippers out there.

A/N, 2: It's been around 18 years since I've last taken the plane. I did some research; but still, I'm sorry for any errors concerning check-in procedure and all that stuff.

No one really paid attention to the man jogging through one of the wide terminals of JFK airport. Everyone tended to their own business, and one single person running past them was nothing unusual.

New York had a hell of traffic and sometimes reaching the airport in time was an almost impossible task, no matter how early one set off. In a city like the *Big Apple*, hours sometimes turned into minutes, as minutes turned into hours, and neither ever happened at the right time. It was like the city had its own time zone - one the airport didn't belong to.

He, however, wasn't going to let time win. He needed to make it.

The man only carried a duffel bag with him, thrown over his shoulder, as he made his way through the halls. Occasionally he would almost run into someone or something suddenly appearing in his way, but years of practice when just another suspect decided to try their luck and sprint away as soon as they had a badge flashed at them made him good at running fast and still skillfully avoiding obstacles. He wasn't a Detective 1st Grade for nothing.

Eager not to disturb his breathing pattern that prevented him from being out of breath before he reached his destination, he kept himself from sighing in relief as he finally spotted his check-in.

He could still make it. There was enough time left.

He breathed in deeply when he finally came to a halt in front of the counter. Luckily, there weren't many people taking the same flight as him - or maybe they had already checked in - and he didn't need to wait long till a kind looking older woman behind the counter smiled at him and asked for his passport. It was only a matter of minutes now before he would walk the last meters to the plane that would bring him to the place he'd longed to be for nearly a whole year now.

"Here you go, Mr. Taylor. Have a good time," the woman behind the counter said friendly when she gave him his boarding pass. For just a brief moment he wondered if she knew what the reason for his trip was, because her eyes and this smile of hers looked so knowing. And that especially since he himself wasn't all so sure what he expected out of this journey - besides the obvious of plain and simply meeting someone. But those thoughts were lost momentarily as he stepped up to security control. The check was done quickly, and just as he had assumed, he found himself on the way to his plane only a short while later.

Finally entering the cabin, his seat in sight already, was pure bliss. The adrenaline from his sprint and the fear not to reach the check-in in time was slowly wearing off, and suddenly, he felt exhausted. Again. After he'd packed away his bag, he practically fell into his seat, allowing his tense muscles relax into the soft cushions and himself to let out the relieved sigh he had held back earlier.

The noisy quiet of people settling into their seats and getting comfortable, of flight attendants helping parents with their children and other passengers with their baggage, and of everyone around him chatting away happily, was somehow calming him. Although there was so much noise, it summed up to the humming of life - and as someone who was surrounded by death on a daily basis, this was something he appreciated.

As he waited for the plane to take off, Mac Taylor, Head Investigator of the NYPD's CSI team, found himself taking up his train of thoughts from earlier. He had put some good while of consideration into that step; that trip. Not that it was a big thing. It was only a visit; the visit to a former colleague and still-friend. His best friend. And yet it seemed to him that there was more to it than he was able to predict now.

She had left about a year ago, the woman who'd been his second-in-command and the person he relied on and trusted most - and this not only professionally, but first and foremost personally. She was so close to him like no one else, and it had been hard for him to take her leaving New York and his team to go to New Orleans and become the head of the crime lab there.

Not that she didn't deserve it.

But lately, as work was getting to him more and more and he felt this far-too-familiar exhaustion he'd last felt about ten years ago creeping up his body and mind, he had had to realize that what he was really missing wasn't sleep, or some time off. It was her. He feared admitting it, but even the mere prospect of seeing her again soon had helped a lot, had strengthened him enough to survive these past weeks.

Stella Bonasera was more than a friend, more than a confidant. She was the one and only person who was able to stop the waves of doubts and sorrow whenever he was in danger of getting overwhelmed by them. As pathetic as it sounded - she *was* his strength. And sometimes, just sometimes, he wondered how he'd survived the past year. A year without her laughter, her reassuring words and touches, her intelligence and wit; simply her presence, and the knowledge that she was there should he need her. For over a decade, he had taken her for granted, and only now that she wasn't around every day anymore, wasn't around at all, he realized how much he had come to rely on her.

As much as they'd tried to stay in touch, their irregular work schedules had made it almost impossible. They had spoken a few times during this year, and had also written some lone emails, but it was nothing compared to what they had shared before.

So as summer was eventually arriving, a much anticipated season after winter had made their lives harder for several months, he decided that it was time to make use of all these days off and the incredible amount of overtime he had. And not long after that decision, he now found himself sitting in a plane to New Orleans. Three and a half hours, and he would see her again. And he was tempted to count every single minute till he would arrive.

When he had gone into planning the trip, he had contemplated surprising her, but knowing that she had just as much work as him and fearing that she would probably have no time when he got there, he had informed her so she could take some time off as well. And now she would wait at the airport for him. After a year of - subconsciously - waiting and at first not being able to define what he was missing, they were only another three and a half hours apart.

After the departure was finally announced, the plane took off into a clear blue, sun filled sky, and Mac felt like it was promising something good to come.

This is how I would expect the ending on the show; if they did it, if they sent him to New Orleans to visit Stella, I somehow think they would leave it open, but still with enough shippiness as Mac is flying to her. However, originally I didn't intend on letting it end there, so in the following you'll find "my" ending that of course is a bit more romantic (but also a bit more OOC ;)). It's very short, though.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we are now beginning our final descend towards Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport. Please make sure your seat backs and tray tables are in their full upright position. Make sure your seat belt is securely fastened and all carry-on luggage is stowed underneath the seat in front of you or in the overhead bins. Please turn off all electronic devices until we are safely parked at the gate. Thank you."

Mac looked up in surprise when he heard the voice via the comm system. He had been so caught up in his reading - a book Stella had once given him - that he hadn't paid any attention to time that obviously had literally flown by.

Being in one of the front rows and having only a small bag allowed him to be one of the first passengers to leave the airplane. He was, however, not the very first, much to his regret - and the people walking in front of him in the small hallway took their time. He had to resist the urge to quickly walk past those people, and instead forced himself to slow down his normally fast pace as he followed them towards the arrival lounge.

The first thing he noticed was that the air of New Orleans was strangely different from New York. The light breeze that met him in the lounge was refreshing, and the sunshine that had bid him farewell a few hours ago now also greeted him warmly.

As did the smile of the woman who suddenly stepped from the crowd of people awaiting the arrival of their loved ones and walked straight towards him.

"Stella," he said quietly, his voice speaking of happiness when they greeted each other with a tight embrace.

"Mac," she replied, her voice as low as his, and buried her face in the crook of his neck before adding, "I missed you." She said nothing else but those four words, heavy with meaning and filled with tears of joy. They vibrated against his skin and in his ears, and left his heart beating a little bit faster. And for just a moment he forgot to breathe. It was a sensation he wasn't used to anymore; something he hadn't experienced in over a decade.

And then she pulled back slightly and kissed his cheek, reminding him at once of all the times she had done this in all those years of their friendship - and with this assured him of a feeling he hadn't yet dared to admit to himself.

Suddenly, there was no doubt in what he had to do. Suddenly, he was hit with clarity, knew what had lead him here, and why he had felt the need to see her again - other than just because she was his closest friend. So he didn't hesitate another second to release her body and instead frame her face with his hands, lovingly caressing her cheeks with his thumbs and noticing her smile and the hint of longing in her eyes before closing the distance between their faces.

He kissed her. He, Mac Taylor, kissed Stella, his best friend and the most important person in his life, because suddenly, he knew how to define the feeling that was warming every fiber of his body.

Because suddenly, he knew that he loved her. And he would love her - for decades to come.

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