



Graphic by [Steph](#)

Rating: G

Classification: Vignette

Spoilers: "Ghost Ship"

Author's Notes: Warning! This will make no sense whatsoever if you haven't seen "Ghost Ship". Then again, if you're reading this, that's probably not an issue. This is a short little nothing, but I figured I should post it anyway because it was my first JAG story. (Awww...) I think this episode was pretty important, and I saw it soon after I rediscovered the show. In other words, before I became a die-hard shipper. Okay, okay, there may be hints of that, depending on your point of view, so my apologies to any non-believers. Anyway, it's not much, but it's mine, so enjoy.

Aboard the "ghost ship," USS Hornet ...

Sirens wailed from the dock below as fire crews swarmed onto the deck. For all her Marine training, Major Sarah Mackenzie wanted nothing more than a shower and a comfortable bed. Their narrow escape, compounded by the impact of what they'd just learned - it was too much to process right then. The only thing that kept her in duty mode was her concern for her partner.

Lieutenant Commander Harmon Rabb, Jr., looked awful. Under the streaks of ash, he was deathly pale, and he leaned heavily on the rail for support. His expressive eyes were rimmed with red, tears trailing silently down his cheeks. From the smoke, Mac guessed, but if she were in his place, she'd cry too. "Harm?" she asked quietly, taking hold of his arm. "You still with me, sailor?"

"I ... Yeah. I'm okay." He lifted his gaze to the upper decks, and she could tell that whatever he'd seen there was now gone. "The book - ?"

"Right here," Detective Falcon gave them a confident, reassuring smile. "I'll have to take it down to the station first, but once we're done cataloguing it, it's all yours."

Harm nodded, and some of the tension in his frame eased. His eyes momentarily lost their focus, and Mac tightened her grip. "It's over," she said. "You really need to see a doctor."

His reply was listless. "I know." At that, she paused. For him to admit needing help, things must be bad. "Mac ... what happened in there? Did I ... how ..."

She thought about the bizarre path that had led him to the book; his father's tapes, the lieutenant's quarters, and - what had it been? She shook her head. "I don't know, partner," she replied. "I really don't."

Suddenly, he slumped forward, into her arms. She lowered him gently to the deck and knelt down, cradling his motionless body protectively. "Not so tough now, are you?" she murmured, brushing the soot and tears away from his face. Falcon had already gone, but a team of paramedics was heading toward them. Mac surrendered Harm to their care, squeezing his hand briefly before watching them slide him onto a stretcher. Then she stood up, wearily, and followed them down the gangplank. At the bottom, she turned and looked back at the still-smoldering tower of the USS Hornet. *I'm sorry*, she told the carrier silently. *You deserve better.*

The noble ship's role in the case was finished. So, really, was the case itself: the mystery was solved. But it had opened another, deeply personal mystery, and she knew that her friend would not have peace until he found the truth.

In the Alameda naval hospital, Mac took a few minutes to clean herself up as best she could. A kind nurse had lent her a hairbrush, and she scrubbed the smoke dust from her face and hands. Her jacket was beyond repair, but the blouse underneath it was relatively unscathed. She retrieved her ribbons and insignia from the lapels and tossed it aside.

"Might want to do the same with this." The doctor appeared in the waiting area and handed her Harm's uniform shirt.

"Thanks. He gets pretty pissed when he loses a ribbon. I wouldn't want to be around if he ever lost his wings." Mac looked up. "How's he doing?"

"He's not conscious yet, but he'll be fine in a day or two. That's a hell of a concussion he's got, plus a whole assortment of nasty bruises. I'm not sure how he stayed on his feet as long as he did."

"He's kind of stubborn that way."

The doctor hesitated. "Far be it from me to tell a Marine what to do, but he'll probably sleep for most of the next twenty-four hours. You could run back to the VOQ and grab a shower. I'll keep an eye on him - it's my job."

"Thanks, but I want to be here when he wakes up. This case really hit close to home for him." *Quite literally.* She offered a tired smile. "Can I sit with him?"

"Go right ahead." He held open the door, and she went to sit in the chair by his bedside.

"Hi, Harm," she said softly to his still form. "Just wanted to let you know I'm here." Impulsively, she leaned over to kiss his forehead. "Get better, flyboy. I'm getting lonely out here."

She settled back in the chair with a long sigh. His handsome features weren't quite relaxed, but at least some of his color had returned. Remembering the ruined uniform in her hand, she busied herself removing Harm's collar rank pins, two rows of ribbons, and finally his gold wings. With the corner of her blouse, she polished away the soot from the small insignia and set them carefully on the table.

At that moment, seemingly out of nowhere, an image rose in her mind, and she flashed back to that horrible chain of events on board the Hornet - had it only been a few hours ago? It felt as if days had passed. She remembered her growing fear as they'd searched deck by deck for Harm; seeing the open hatch in the crew quarters; and then, the terror she'd felt, seeing him lying on the cold deck. For one paralyzing moment, with all the questions they'd faced that day, she hadn't known whether her best friend was alive or dead.

Now, seeing it all in hindsight, that thought stunned the iron-willed officer. Was that really how it had been? *Of course it was*, she told herself. *He is my best friend. He knows me better than anyone else, and he's there for me before I even have to ask. And I could have lost him today.* If circumstances had been different - if she'd returned to find him, not passed out from a concussion, but shot through the heart by that scavenger Lonegro, or ...

She realized she was holding back tears, and she forced herself to pull it together. Over-dramatizing the ordeal did no one any good. He wasn't dead; he was right there, he was going to be fine, and after all they'd learned, he would need her more than ever.

"Mac ..."

She started. Harm had dragged his eyes open and was struggling to focus on her face. With a smile, she reached over to take his hand. "Hey, sleepyhead. How are you holding up?"

"Okay, I guess ... How come you still look like a recruiting poster when I feel like hell?"

As a stress reliever, it worked. She laughed out loud. "Because I watch my step," she answered smoothly, and was rewarded with the barest hint of his dazzling grin. It faded quickly into uncertainty, though.

"Mac ... everything I remember is so jumbled. I don't - I don't know what was real and what was in my mind ..." His voice was weak, lost. "I didn't really see him, did I?"

She sighed, unsure whether he meant the dead lieutenant or his missing father. Either way, she had no explanation for whatever had led to their surreal discovery - or their escape. "I wish I knew," she said honestly. "But - I don't think so."

He closed his eyes, but not before she saw his anguish, his dread at the next question. "And the list?" he whispered. "Was it a dream, too?"

"No, Harm. It's real. And he's on it."

His hand tightened in hers, but his expression never wavered. Already the mask of control was in place. Mac knew better - she'd seen the tremble in his hand and voice when he'd opened up that book to the name *Harmon Rabb*. His life had been irrevocably altered in that instant, and try as he might, he would never be able to hide that from her.

"So what now, Mac?" he asked simply. "Where do I go from here?"

"Don't worry about that right now - "

"How? How can I put it out of my mind? I know nothing's changed. I still have no idea if he's alive or not. But this could tell us what happened to him. For the first time in almost thirty

years, there's the slightest chance that we could find him. I just don't know what I'm supposed to do. I don't know how to feel ..."

He moved to sit up, but sank dizzily against the pillow. "Damn," he gasped. "Remind me to *never* do this to myself again."

Mac gave him a sympathetic smile. "Just relax. When we're back in Washington, we'll have a nice long chat with our friend Webb, and we'll go from there."

"We?"

"Yeah, Harm, 'we'. I know how important this is. Hell, it's beyond important. There is no way I'm going to let you do it alone. That's a promise."

Harm shook his head slowly. "I am really lucky to have you around, you know that?"

"Now I know you've gotten a knock on the head." Her lips twisted in a wry grin, but it wavered slightly as he reached out to catch her arm. There was a sincerity in his clear blue eyes, and suddenly he wasn't hiding anything. The transformation was startling, and she was moved to see him let down his guard.

"Thank you, Mac," he said softly. "For not giving up on me. I don't know what I'd do without you."

Almost embarrassed by his unabashed honesty, she laid her hand over his, their fingers entwined. "You're the one who didn't give up. I just watch your six."

There was a long silence as the partners looked into each other's eyes and souls. Finally she tore her gaze away, knowing that he'd seen and understood her feelings. "Your mom's been trying to get a hold of you. I told her you'd call her tomorrow."

"Thanks ..." The realization dawned almost immediately, and he raised his head. "Oh, God. What am I going to tell her?"

Mac bit her lip. "If you want my opinion - "

"You know I do."

" - I don't think there's much to tell at this point. To get her hopes up with nothing more than a name on a list ... Harm, I want to believe that your father is out there. I'll follow you to hell and back to help you find him. But if you want to protect your mother, don't tell her until we know more."

"You're right. As always." He ran a hand through his short, dark hair, frustration and fatigue edging into his voice. "I've never kept anything from her before. This is going to be one of the hardest things I've ever done."

"I know. But you've never been one to back down. You have more to hope for today than ever before. Hold on to that." She squeezed his hand and stood up. "I have to go wrap some things up with the admiral. You going to be okay on your own?"

"I'm going to be asleep before you even hit the door," he answered ruefully, and she believed him. "Just don't leave me here and head back to D.C. without me."

"You should be so lucky. Our caseload's probably tripled since we left. Good night, flyboy."

"Night, Mac ..."

At the door, she paused and looked back. Harm's eyes had drifted closed, and his chest rose and fell in the gentle rhythm of sleep. His strong, proud features still held the evidence of his inner and outer struggles, but he seemed more at peace than before. If nothing else, she was grateful for that.

On the front steps of the hospital, she stopped for a moment and reached into her pocket. Withdrawing the tape recorder that Harm had dropped on the Hornet, she pressed 'play' and listened to the voice of Harmon Rabb, Sr.

"...I think about you all the time. I wonder what you'll be like when you grow up. Will you be a doctor, or a lawyer, or - God forbid - an aviator like your old man? Wouldn't that be something? The two of us dogfighting over the desert at Miramar? Well, maybe. But the point is, you can be whatever you want, because you have people who believe in you. It's all up to you, Harm. I can't wait to see it. I love you, son. Take care."

Sarah Mackenzie shut off the tape and brushed away a tear. *Be proud of your son, Mr. Rabb. Wherever you are.*

*** THE END ***