



Chaos Theory

Rating: R (for one word)

Category: Vignette, humor, romance

Spoilers: any recent eps with Sergei

Author's Notes: Set right now - that is, if right now is still April of season seven. No other explanation is really required. From idea to posting, this story took a grand total of six hours, so it ain't "War and Peace." That said, I hope you like it.

Sturgis Turner stepped into the bullpen with a cautious glance in all directions. Harriet looked up from her desk and smiled brightly, a little puzzled by his behavior. "Good morning, Commander," she greeted him. "Did you have a good weekend?"

"Just fine, Lieutenant. Yourself?"

"A little quiet, but nice." Seeing that his wariness hadn't decreased at all, she hesitated. "Sir, is there something wrong?"

"I'm just on alert. You know, exploding pens, rubber snakes, anything like that." At her blank look, he frowned. "Come on, Harriet. It's April Fools Day. You're telling me that an office with Harmon Rabb in it doesn't have at least a few surprises in store?"

Understanding, Harriet laughed. "Oh, it's been a couple of years since anyone dared challenge the commander in that regard." She lifted an eyebrow with a sly expression that he wouldn't have thought her capable of. "Unless you've got any ideas, sir?"

Sturgis drew himself up to his full height. "Lieutenant, I'll have you know that I am the only one who can out-manuever Harm in the practical joke department. In fact, at Annapolis, I once had him convinced that he was going to get kicked out unless he washed the commandant's car."

Grinning, the lieutenant replied calmly, "With all due respect, sir, I'll believe it when I see it."

"Oh, you're on." And to her surprise, he walked right up to Harm's closed door and walked in without knocking. Sturgis Turner was nothing if not quick-thinking. If the object of the game was to push Harm's buttons, he knew exactly how to do it.

... This particular Monday was not shaping up well for Harmon Rabb. His computer had already crashed twice, and Mac had been less than thrilled to hear that his client had refused her offer of a reduced sentence. Now they were headed for an arduous trial that

would only delay the inevitable.

Unfortunately, his friend was aware of none of this when he walked in uninvited. "That Lieutenant Singer is a piece of work," Sturgis informed him, pacing in front of the desk. "I just overheard her talking to Sergei on the phone, all sweet and innocent-like. You won't believe what she's up to. She told him that he'd be able to stay in the U.S. if he married her! She said he'd owe her one, but - "

"Slow down before you hyperventilate," Harm interrupted, unimpressed. He had too much faith in his brother's intelligence to immediately freak out about this concept. "Singer doesn't do anything without a direct benefit. What good would this do her?"

"Well, it takes you out of her way. You'd be a lot less likely to speak out against her if she were your sister-in-law. And with Mac gone, she's got a clear shot - "

"What do you mean, with Mac gone?" Harm demanded, a twinge of fear beginning to take hold. "Where's Mac going?"

"You didn't know? She's transferring to PACFLT, at Pearl."

Harm stared at him with the look of a man who'd just watched his world blown to pieces before his eyes. "What?" he whispered. "Why?"

Slowly Sturgis began to realize the magnitude of what he'd done, and he started to backpedal as rapidly as possible. "Wait, buddy, don't turn this into another chapter in the ongoing saga..."

But Harm was far past the point of listening. In those few seconds, all the times he and Sarah Mackenzie had hurt each other by putting distance between them flew through his mind with blinding speed. He didn't know what was going on - their friendship had been going so well lately - but he knew instinctively that letting her go again would be disastrous, and the idea terrified him down to his very core.

There was no conscious decision on his part: he just knew that he had to do something. He stood up from his desk, nearly knocking the chair over, and strode past the other man toward her door. Sturgis's protests went unheard, and he helplessly watched his friend disappear into the colonel's office.

Harriet blinked, confused. "Commander, what just happened?"

Sturgis shook his head wearily. "Harriet, my grand plan may have been somewhat ill-conceived."

... Mac glanced up, startled and slightly irritated by the lack of decorum being displayed by her partner. She was already running late, and here he was barging in and slamming her door. "What the hell, Harm?" she snapped. "We used to knock, remember?"

He hung back, near the doorway, almost as if afraid of her. "Why didn't you tell me you were leaving?" he asked quietly.

"I didn't realize it mattered," she answered, surprised when he seemed to shrink a little

in front of her.

"Do you have to go?"

"You didn't give me much choice, did you?" She stood up and reached for a file from the cabinet, not seeing his stunned reaction.

"It's my fault, then?" he asked, his eyes wounded.

"Not entirely, I guess, but you could have tried a little harder." When she stepped around the desk, he blocked her path, and there was a kind of intensity radiating from him that shocked her into silence.

"Don't go," he pleaded in a low voice, their bodies only inches apart.

What on earth ... Mac swallowed audibly and asked, "Why not?"

In his mind, it was now or never. He seized her arm and pulled her in, his lips descending on hers in a moment of fevered clarity. Instantly her questions were pushed aside as she surrendered to the exquisite bliss of his assault.

"That's why not," he finally replied when they broke apart, not releasing his hold. "Because I love you, damn it, and I've been beyond stupid to ignore it all this time. If you still have to go, I can't stop you, but this time you're not leaving without knowing that."

She pulled back slightly, attempting to regain her balance. Had he really said what she thought he'd said? "Harm," she said softly, "I don't know where that came from, and you can be sure that we'll be continuing this discussion when I get back, but right now I really need to get on the road to Norfolk."

There was a pause, as he got his bearings as well. "Norfolk?" he echoed dumbly.

"Yeah, to go over the formal charges with Admiral Blake. Remember? Your client insisted on going to trial. Where did you think I was going?"

For the second time in ten minutes, he felt like he'd been sucker-punched. "Sturgis said you were transferring..."

"Transferring??"

At that moment, both realized just what was going on. Before she could say anything, he hurried to speak first. "Mac, I - I'm so sorry," he stammered, taking a step backward almost without realizing it. "I had no right to do that to you..."

"You're sorry?" she repeated in disbelief, her voice trembling. "You drop that on me, and then you say you're *sorry*?"

"I..." Suddenly it seemed as if the walls were closing in on him, and he chose to escape her accusing gaze by focusing his anger on the responsible party. Whirling, he threw the door open to reveal Sturgis and Harriet standing outside in the bullpen, looking like they expected the earth to open up and swallow them whole. "You're a dead man," he hissed

at his friend. "How could you do that to me?"

"Buddy, I didn't know you were going to take off like a bat out of hell," Sturgis defended himself lamely. "I just ... um ... April Fools?"

"April Fools?" Harm's icy stare was matched by his low, dangerous tone. "That's your idea of a joke? I just obliterated the best, truest friendship I ever had, and all you can say is April fucking Fools?"

Harriet wasn't sure she'd ever seen her son's godfather so incensed, but with a flash of insight, she recognized the fear behind his eyes. Behind him, Mac waited with the same pale, tense expression, and the junior officer decided to step in. "Sir, I should confess that I sort of dared Commander Turner to psych you - "

"Lieutenant, I strongly suggest that you stay the hell out of this."

"All of you, shut up," Mac directed, jerking Harm back into the office and slamming the door once again. Sturgis and Harriet stared after them, and it was a few seconds before the commander ventured a comment.

"What do you think happened in there?"

A light dawned in the back of Harriet's mind, and she allowed herself a small smile. "I think this might turn out better than we thought," she predicted, earning a dubious glance.

"How's that?"

"While Harm was laying into you, I was watching Mac. Don't quote me on it, but from her reaction, I think you might have just gotten him to admit something the rest of us have been wondering about for five years."

... Mac leaned against the closed door and crossed her arms over her chest, determined not to let him see how deeply he'd cut her. "So do you want to take it back? Now that you know I'm not going anywhere, I assume you want me to forget you ever said it, so that we can go back to our usual rules of engagement?"

"Mac, I..." As a dozen different avenues of retreat battled in his mind, he suddenly came to a startling conclusion. He'd already said it. He'd never even allowed himself to think it before, but he'd said it. It was out there, and it couldn't be undone: so why bother trying to reconstruct a wall that had already fallen?

"Wait a minute. No. I don't want to take it back. I meant it, and if that means things have to be different now - if I've lost my chance or whatever, then I guess I'll find a way to live with it, but I do love you."

Her eyes bright, she just shook her head. "You are such an idiot sometimes," she breathed, launching herself at him and returning the earlier kiss with abandon. "Was that really so hard?"

"Yes, damn it, it was - mmphh..." His protest was silenced by her lips on his again.

... Sturgis glanced at his watch. Eighteen minutes had passed, and so far, no signs of life from within Mac's office. He glanced over at Harriet. "If they were fighting, we'd probably be able to hear the yelling, right?" he asked tentatively.

"Undoubtedly," she replied, looking rather pleased. "Commander, as far as April Fools pranks go, I think this one blows your Academy exploits out of the water." A muffled *thunk* sounded from inside the office, sounding distinctly like a file cabinet being dented, and a flush crept up Harriet's cheeks. "Come on, sir. I'll buy you lunch."

"Lieutenant Sims, I do like your style."

*** THE END ***