



Contretemps

Rating: PG

Classification: vignette

Spoilers: "Lawyers, Guns and Money," "Pas de Deux"

Author's Notes: Okay, believe it or not, I was in fact a halfway serious dancer way back when. But I was never that well educated in ballet, so I'm taking the title from an online ballet dictionary. Hope it's accurate. *Contretemps* = Contrary step; a step from one direction that quickly changes to the other. Basically, I'm going for the idea that Harm's mission to find Mac took an abrupt detour during this episode, and will just as abruptly detour back next week. At least, I sure hope so.

P.S. Points to the episode writers for a subtle little metaphor: when Catherine was trying to get the ring off her finger, Harm pointed out that it had slipped on easily. Easy to get into, not so easy to get out of ... hmmm, methinks there's a larger comment being made here ...

As soon as she heard the door open, Harriet hurried to greet her husband, immediately reaching into his pocket without offering a 'hello.' "You've still got it, right?"

"Harriet, did you think I would lose your wedding ring?" Bud set his keys and cover on the kitchen table, slightly amused. "More importantly, did you think I would actually come home if I had?"

"Well, it's not something that's out of my sight very often, you know?" Harriet shrugged, placing a kiss on his cheek as she retrieved the ring. "So did you actually do it?"

He nodded, spreading his hands in a gesture of disbelief. "Can you believe it? Of all the weird things that I've been ordered to do, posing as a minister and pretending to marry a friend off to a CIA agent has got to rank right up there with the best of them."

"Did it make her mother happy?"

"It sure seemed to." Bud moved into the living room and sat down on the couch, his wife following suit. He shook his head. "It was so ... dishonest, though. And that's really not Harm's style."

"Well, helping someone in need definitely *is* his style," Harriet pointed out. "And it's kind of sweet, in a way. They made an old woman's dying wish come true."

"Makes you wonder what kind of cosmic paybacks are coming their way if there's such a thing as an afterlife." Bud smiled a little, but it faded quickly into confusion. "It was just so strange, hearing him say all that stuff and go through the motions. And the kiss - it was actually convincing! I'm telling you, it felt like an alternate universe."

"Because the woman was a near-total stranger?" Something struck Harriet then. "Or because it wasn't ...?"

"Yeah." His gaze was rueful. "I guess I always thought, in the back of my mind, that if he was ever going to go through all that, it would be with *her*. What kind of a sap does that make me?"

"The same kind of a sap as everyone else in our office, probably." She played with the ring on his left hand, gently twisting it around. "And there's nothing to say that we're all wrong, is there? I mean, the entire reason he went to Ms. Gale in the first place was to get information on Mac's assignment, right? He went pretty seriously out of bounds to try and track her down. That ought to mean something."

"Sure. But you didn't see that kiss, sweetie. There was something really weird going on. From both of them." Bud leaned back against the cushions, looking up at the ceiling for answers.

Harriet was silent for a minute, considering. Finally, she theorized, "It was an attractive illusion."

"Apparently."

"What I mean is, maybe the charade got them thinking more about the concept of settling down in general, and it was that idea that they were getting into, rather than each other."

"For Ms. Gale, maybe, but we're still talking about Harmon Rabb here, aren't we? Can you really see him suddenly going all mushy on the idea of family life?" When his wife didn't respond right away, Bud turned to her in surprise. "Wait a minute. You actually can, can't you?"

A flash of guilt flickered across Harriet's face. "I had lunch with him a couple of days ago," she began, by way of an explanation. "He was so nice about listening to all my gripes, but I could just tell that he was having a hard time, presumably because of Mac being gone. I told him he looked exhausted, and he admitted that he hadn't been getting much sleep. And then he said something strange, about not being able to stop rethinking his choices ... I didn't want to ask him what he meant. Then he just smiled and said to me, 'You and Bud are so smart, you know that? You knew what you wanted, and you made it happen.' After that, we wandered off the subject and talked about the baby some more, but something about the way he said that one part ..."

Bud frowned, having difficulty picturing his friend and mentor in that particular frame of mind. "You really think this has to do with Mac?"

"Well, she's off God-knows-where, doing God-knows-what, right? Is it a coincidence that he started acting differently after she left? I don't know. Maybe it is. I'm just saying that it could be more, that's all."

"You're right as usual." Bud rubbed his eyes wearily. "I just wish she'd come back so everything could get straightened out. Whatever it is."

Harriet hugged her arms close to her body, suddenly struck with a sense of dread. "She's all right, though, don't you think?"

“Yeah, honey. I’m sure she’s fine.”

*** THE END ***