



Graphic by [Steph](#)

Rating: PG

Spoilers: in a big way -- "The Princess and the Petty Officer". Okay, and technically "Gypsy Eyes".

Author's Note: In my opinion, TPTB missed the boat when they completely glossed over the Roberts baby's death. This was a traumatic event, and all it got was a tag at the end of the episode. I know they're still dealing with it (kind of), but I think there was an opportunity for some major character insight that got missed in favor of a lame plot. (Sorry, I just call 'em as I see 'em.) So Part I is a scene that might have been good between this episode and "A Separate Peace". As for Part II - well, the main point of it actually got covered when Harriet went to Harm's apartment in "ASP, Part II". But I'd already written most of it, and I hate to waste anything. Great minds occasionally think alike ...

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Part I: directly following "The Princess and the Petty Officer"

**0020 EST**

**Rosslyn, Virginia**

Sarah Mackenzie stood outside the Roberts' door, feeling a deeper weariness than she'd ever known. It had been a hellish night, and she wanted nothing more than to walk through that door and lose herself in all the happy memories of this place. It wasn't possible, though. It would never be the same after this night.

The evening had started off so perfectly. The case of the princess and the petty officer - in any other time and place, she would have laughed at the fairy-tale sound of it. True love wins in the end, and all that. She'd called Mic to come over, because the whole bizarre affair had made her think about a lot of things. About sacrificing so much for love ... about everything he'd sacrificed for her. It wasn't exactly an apology, but he'd been grateful all the same. She'd been out of her uniform for exactly eighteen minutes when there was a knock at the door, and the unmistakable voice of her partner on the other side. Mic had been less than thrilled, and as she trudged to the door, a dozen sarcastic comments came to mind. They all died on her lips when she saw him.

This man, who'd flown combat missions and held his ground with world leaders, now stood before her looking utterly lost. His rumpled khakis and faded VF-218 *Raptors* T-shirt appeared to have been split-second choices, and the lines of fatigue around his eyes made him look all of his thirty-seven years. In half a decade of friendship, she'd never seen Harmon Rabb, Jr. so defeated.

And then he'd told her about the admiral's call ... about baby Sarah. Mac hadn't believed it at first. There had been so much sorrow in their lives already. Harriet and Bud - how could this happen to them? Without a second thought, she'd grabbed her jacket and headed for the car, Mic close behind. While Harm went to pick up little A.J. from the sitter, they went directly to Bethesda.

Her heart had shattered when she saw Bud slumped in a chair in the hallway, staring into nothing. They'd given Harriet something to help her sleep, so for the moment, he was left to face his child's death alone. But not entirely alone; the admiral was standing by his junior officer like a sentry. Mac had hugged him, not knowing what else to do. "We're here for you," she'd whispered. "Whatever you need, we'll do it."

He'd looked up at her with dull, lifeless eyes, and replied, "Thank you, ma'am, but right now I don't know what I need."

Soon, the doors at the end of the corridor opened, and Harm carefully set A.J. Roberts on his feet. The two-year-old ran unsteadily into his father's waiting arms. Poor A.J. didn't understand why his daddy held him so tightly, or why there were tears falling on his Mickey Mouse jumpsuit. He didn't know that for six minutes, he had been a big brother. At that moment, Mac had envied his innocence. It would be stolen from him all too soon.

There was nothing they could do, really. After a couple of hours, the admiral had taken charge and directed her and Mic to go home, promising to stay with the grieving couple. Harm volunteered to take A.J. home with him, but Harriet had been distraught, knowing their toddler would be frightened of the unfamiliar place. The senior attorney quickly offered to stay at their home for the night. He was more composed now, and Mac knew he'd do anything for that little boy. With heavy hearts, they all went their separate ways, knowing that the world would look very different in the morning than it had the morning before.

Now, she stood outside their door, hesitating. She and Mic hadn't talked much on the ride home, and he knew her well enough to know that she didn't want him to stay. She'd gone upstairs with every intention of falling into bed, but somehow her feet had propelled her to the car, and it had driven itself over to the Roberts' home. Harm didn't need her help, she told herself. He'd proven to be wonderful with A.J., surprising everyone. A.J. didn't know anything was wrong. He would be fine, at least for tonight. But his caretaker would not be able to erase the memory of his friends' pain. She knew, because she saw Harriet's misery

every time she closed her eyes.

Mac knocked and received no answer. She let herself in, and the first thing she heard was a voice singing softly.

"A dream is a wish your heart makes, when you're fast asleep ..."

She smiled despite herself. They made a perfect picture. Harm stood by the window, rocking A.J. against his chest. The blond-headed boy was just starting to drift off to sleep, comforted by his godfather's warm baritone. She stood in the doorway for a minute and just watched them, wishing desperately that this situation could be anything but what it was.

He turned slightly, sensing her presence, and offered an empty version of his irresistible smile as he finished the song. "... no matter how your heart is grieving, if you keep on believing, the dream that you wish will come true."

"The fearless pilot knows Disney," she said. "Wish I had a camera."

"It's the best I could come up with," he answered, somewhat embarrassed. "You okay?"

"Not really." She stepped into the room and stroked the child's hair. "I think your lullaby did the trick."

"Well, what do you know." Harm laid him down in his crib and kissed his forehead tenderly.

They left him to sleep and went into the living room to talk.

"You're so good with him. How do you do that?"

"Blind luck. He's a good kid. Bud and Harriet are doing great with him. They're such good parents ... God, Mac, this isn't happening, is it?"

"No, it's not happening. It *has* happened. She's gone." She sank onto the couch and tossed her coat over the arm. "It just isn't fair. She would have been so loved - she *was* loved. But she never had a chance."

"I know." He gestured around the room. "There are things that would have been hers all over the place. Teddy bears, and little pink dresses ... Every time I put one away in her room, I find something else. I finally gave up, because I figured that nothing I did would take away all of the reminders. They'll be everywhere." He shook his head. "I can't remember the last time I felt so powerless."

Mac nodded silently, and he turned to look at her. "Did you come here because you wanted to talk, or because you knew I would?"

"I don't know. Both, I think." She drew her legs up under her, curling up protectively. "I guess I thought neither of us should be alone."

Harm was surprised, but didn't let it show. She wouldn't have had to be alone. Hadn't she just been with Brumby? He let it pass, choosing instead to sit down beside her on the couch.

"I never thought something like this could happen. Not to Bud and Harriet."

"Yeah, I thought between the two of us, we'd have the office quota for tragedy pretty much covered." She offered a humorless smile. "You'd think whoever's in charge would notice that and give people around us a break. But instead, the two sweetest, most caring people we know get hurt. Makes you wonder about a lot of things."

Sensing the tremble in her voice, he reached for her hand. "Mac ..."

"Maybe it's my curse," she continued distantly, not hearing him. "She was going to be named after me. God, everyone I touch -"

"You don't really believe that," Harm stated firmly.

"No, I don't." Her eyes flooded with tears. "But I don't know what to believe in anymore."

Without a word, he took her in his arms and held her as she cried: for baby Sarah, for the wonderful family she'd never know, for all of them. The proud Marine buried her face in her partner's shirt - after all this time it still smelled vaguely of the flight deck, she noticed with a strange detachment - and was grateful for the knowledge that he would not judge her for anything she had said or done. He would simply be there for her, and that gave her comfort.

"Thanks, flyboy," she said quietly. "I needed that."

He didn't respond, and slowly she realized that her friend's shoulders were shaking. "Harm, are you -"

"Yeah," he said, his voice husky. She pulled back slightly, shocked to see the tears streaming down his handsome face. He spoke haltingly, not bothering to disguise his pain. "Great minds really do think alike."

Her own tears forgotten, she brushed at his cheek with her hand. She'd only seen him really cry once before, after he'd finally found the truth about his father. He'd stood there, gazing out to where the Taiga River disappeared into the mist, knowing that the man he'd searched all through Russia to find was buried somewhere in the vastness before them. And when he'd thought the two women were out of sight, he'd knelt down and wept brokenly for his lost hero, his lost childhood.

Now, it was different. She was right there to witness his torment, and yet he didn't try to hide it from her. If she had ever needed proof that he trusted her as much as she trusted him, it was now lying before her, as bare as his soul.

"Admit it," he said, attempting vainly to lighten the mood. "You expected me to play tough guy again. Alpha male, and all that."

"Sailor, you are the classic alpha male. Most of the time." The cheerful façade lasted only a matter of seconds, and she rested her hand on his shoulder. "When you showed up at my door tonight, you looked like your world had ended. But then you were so strong for Harriet at the hospital, and A.J., and I thought that maybe you were just better at dealing with it than the rest of us. But I'm asking you now. How do you feel?"

"Honestly? Empty. I feel hollow, like everything I thought I knew has been turned all around." Harm closed his eyes. "In my experience, when someone gets hurt, it's usually because someone else hurt them. We deal with that kind of injustice every day, and I think there's something strangely reassuring about being able to put a face to a crime. Makes us feel more in control, I guess. I don't often get a case where the only explanation for the events is 'sorry, that's the breaks sometimes'. There's no face here. There's nowhere to look for answers, and that kills me. Does that make any sense?"

"Sure it does. You just want to know why."

His lips twisted wryly. "Did you just sum up my entire convoluted thought process into one word?"

"It's a talent. We all want to know why, Harm, but I don't think there's an answer out there. Did you ever find any answers after your crash? Was there ever a face to blame there?"

"Other than my own? No. But we're not going there." He pushed a hand through his dark hair and spoke so softly that she had to lean in. "I couldn't wait to meet her, Mac. I wanted to see her in hair ribbons and one of those dresses that just bursts with ruffles. I wanted to see her first dance recital. I wanted to be the one she ran to when her parents wouldn't let her wear makeup or stay out past nine o'clock." Suddenly aware of her incredulous gaze, he dropped his eyes to the floor. "That sounds selfish now, doesn't it?"

"That's not what I was thinking at all." She shook her head. "I never would have guessed.

You don't just want a child, Harmon Rabb. You want a daughter."

"Maybe I do. Is that such a surprise?"

"I guess not. I just expected you to want a son, another aviator like his father. Like your father."

"Why, Mac, are you suggesting that a girl couldn't be a Top Gun?"

"Oh, I think there are plenty of good flygirls. Especially a Rabb girl. Heaven help the Navy."

She was rewarded with a smile; not a genuine flyboy grin, but close. "And you? If you had to choose, would the next generation of the Corps be getting a male or female Mackenzie?"

She smiled back, a little surprised that they were talking so easily about this. Somehow it was clear, if unspoken, that he wasn't picturing Renee Peterson as his child's mother ... and as Mac saw her family, she suspected that the man wasn't Mic Brumby. "If I get my way? Both."

"Yeah, that sounds pretty good to me. One of each."

"Maybe. Someday." Suddenly breaking the reverie, she glanced over at him with an unreadable expression. "What exactly are we agreeing on, partner?"

"I have no idea. Let's talk about something that makes more sense, okay?" The spell was broken, and reality came flooding back. He sighed heavily, drawing a weary hand across his face. "Then again, the future is the only thing that isn't hopelessly depressing right now."

"Good point." Impulsively, she lay down across the couch and rested her head in his lap. He responded by reaching over her and pulling off her shoes.

"If you're going to stay, you might as well be comfortable," he explained. "You *are* going to

stay, right?"

"Of course I am." She snuggled closer as he swung his legs around. The slight adjustment made it so that they were lying together, his strong arms encircling her. "Harm?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you think Disney got it right?"

"Got what right?"

"The part about 'no matter how your heart is grieving, if you keep on believing'?"

He was silent for a moment, remembering that fateful call from the admiral, and the feeling of complete despair that had settled over all of them with no release in sight. He remembered all the moments throughout his life that had tested his faith. But as he held her close, feeling her faith in him, he answered softly. "Yeah, I do. We'll get each other through it, Mac. All of us."

"Yeah, I guess we will. Good night, flyboy."

"Good night, ninja-girl."

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Part II: Five weeks later

**1315 EST**

**JAG Headquarters**

Harm strode through the bullpen toward the conference room, his attention focused on the file in his hand. "Mac, have you seen the Jenkins deposition?"

"I left it with you, remember? After we wrapped up at Norfolk last week, I put it on your desk, and you said you wanted to check it against the duty roster."

"Right. Where would I be without you?"

"Very lost."

He rolled his eyes at her, and paused by Harriet's desk. "Lieutenant, could you help me out here?"

"Anything, Commander. What do you need?"

She was smiling, he noticed with relief. It had been over a month since Harriet and Bud Roberts had lost their baby girl at birth, and since then the office had been a more subdued place. They seemed to be doing better now, returning slowly to a hint of their former brightness, but the senior officer knew better than to believe the wounds were healed. These wounds were too deep to ever fully disappear.

"I'm due in a meeting, and I need to track down the Jenkins deposition. Would you look through my top desk drawer and see if you can find it for me?"

"You want me to go through your desk, sir?"

"I don't keep secrets, Lieutenant. Although if you happen to find FlightSim in my CD-ROM case, I'll deny it."

"Aye, sir. It'll be in your inbox when you get back. The deposition, that is, not your game."

"Calling FlightSim a mere 'game' is practically an insult, but I'll let you off this time. Thanks, Harriet."

After a twenty-minute meeting which produced very few results, the annoyed attorney stalked back into his office. "God, I hate budget assignments. Any luck yet, Lieut -"

He stopped short when he saw her, sitting at his desk with a stunned expression. "Harriet, what's wrong?"

She jumped and started to rise. "I'm sorry, sir, I didn't -"

"Don't get up." He crossed the room in three long strides. "What is it?"

The flustered lieutenant shook her head helplessly. "I didn't find the file in your top drawer. So I looked in the second drawer, and ... I found this." She gestured toward a small pink-wrapped box on his desk. "It was supposed to be for her, wasn't it."

The color drained from his face, and he could only nod. Her eyes filled with tears, but he sat down on the edge of the desk and took her hands. "Harriet, I am so sorry. I completely forgot that was in there. I didn't know what to do with it - I just didn't have the heart to give it away, but ..."

He trailed off, uncertain.

"It's all right, sir. It's not like I don't ever think about her. It's just - I'm usually pretty safe

at work.” Harriet quickly dried her eyes and met his gaze. “What is it?”

“What is what? The present?”

“Well, you said you didn’t want to give it away. I was just curious.”

“Go ahead. Open it.”

With a trembling hand, she tore off the paper and opened the little velvet box. Immediately she caught her breath. “Oh, Commander ...”

The delicate gold locket had leapt out at him when he’d first walked into the store. On the front of the tiny heart, a script ‘S’ was engraved. She ran her fingers over it with a heartbreaking smile. “It’s beautiful. You’re so wonderful to us, sir.”

“Harriet, you’ve been one of my closest friends for four years. How about pretending for a little while that we’re not at JAG, so you don’t have to call me ‘sir’?”

“I’ll do my best.” She shook her head. “Harm, sometimes I don’t know what to feel. Every day it hurts a little less, but the thing is, I don’t know if that’s good or not. I want to remember her, but I don’t know how. She was my baby, and I never even got to hold her before she died. I’m so afraid that someday it’ll be like she never existed.”

“I think that’s the only part of this whole awful thing that you can control. You can choose to keep her memory alive, even if you didn’t have a chance to really know her. After all, she was the best of you and Bud. Just like A.J.”

“Thank you. That’s a nice way to put it.” How brave she was, he thought. “That’s not all, actually. I’ve wanted to thank you for everything you did for us. I mean, from the very beginning, you and the colonel - Mac - dropped everything to help with A.J., and here at work. I just wanted you to know that even though it was all kind of a blur, we did notice, and we’re very grateful.”

“You’re more than welcome. I wish we could have done more.”

She heard a slight catch in his voice and looked up. In his ice-blue eyes, she could see that it wasn’t a cliché. He truly wished he could do something, anything to change the past. Harmon Rabb was a man of action, and being unable to cure his friends’ grief was tearing at his soul. So he did the only thing he could think of to do.

Taking the locket out of its box, he fastened it around her neck. “To remember,” he said gently. “I wanted to see her wearing it when she was old enough, but I knew she’d be beautiful. I always pictured her looking just like you.”

This time, the tears were too powerful to hold back. “God, Harm, I miss her so much.”

He knelt by the chair and embraced her, feeling her tears on his crisp white uniform and silently praying for some way to ease her anguish. Mac stopped in the doorway, questioning, but he waved her off. Understanding, she closed the door to give the young mother her privacy.

After a few minutes, the door opened again, and Harriet emerged, heading back to her desk without a word. She was perfectly composed, and there was a calm in her eyes that hadn’t been there before. It didn’t camouflage the pain, but it was a start. Mac watched her for a moment, then stepped into her partner’s office.

“Is she going to be all right?” she asked in a low voice.

Harm nodded distantly. “Not today. But eventually.”

“You’re a good friend, sailor.”

“I’m just doing the best I can.”

“Well, it’s enough.”

\*\* THE END \*\*