



Graphic by [Steph](#)

Rating: PG

Classification: Vignette, Romance (H/M)

Spoilers: "Yeah, Baby", "Port Chicago"

Author's Notes: Not much to say, really. Just a little idea I had, proving once again that I can turn just about anything into a shipper moment. But if you haven't seen "Port Chicago", you'll need to know that Harriet decided to buy a house -- with Harm's help -- and conveniently forgot to mention it to Bud. Ouch.

"Harriet..."

"Sir, you don't have to say anything. It was awful of me not to tell Bud, and it was awful of me to mislead you into thinking I had, and..."

"Harriet, I was only going to ask you to hand me the wrench." Harm ducked his head out from underneath the kitchen sink, and Harriet flushed, embarrassed.

It was Saturday afternoon, and after the events of the week, she'd been reluctant to approach the commander for anything. Then, of course, her garbage disposal had broken. Mac had rolled her eyes when Harm again volunteered his services, which had only strengthened his determination. Like everything else, it had become a point of contention. Finally, Mac had issued a challenge: if Harm couldn't fix the disposal by the time she showed up to take them all out to dinner, he'd have to buy. Otherwise, it was her treat. By now, Harriet knew better than to get between the partners, but she was a little wary of facing either of them after the house-buying debacle.

"I'm sorry, sir - "

"Harriet," he broke in for the third time. "At the moment, I'm your repairman, not your senior officer. Would you try using my given name for a change?"

She sighed. "Harm, I am sorry. I've been trying to apologize to you since Thursday. What I did was dumb, and I know it. I wanted the house so much -- I *want* the house -- but I never should have dragged you into it."

"It's all right. I'd appreciate it, though, if you'd leave me out of it when you discuss it with your husband." Harm pulled himself out from under the sink and dried his hands on his T-shirt. "Try it now."

She flipped the switch, and the disposal whirred to life. "Wow! That was fast."

"Hey, Mac forgets sometimes that I practically put my whole apartment together solo. I just don't get along with refrigerators." He flashed a grin and accepted a hand up from the floor. "Looks like the Marine's buying dinner."

Harriet smiled back, as little A.J. wandered into the kitchen. Upon seeing his

godfather, his eyes lit up. "A-plane!" he said brightly.

"Hey, buddy." Harm picked the toddler up and swung him around. "I swear, he thinks my name is 'airplane'."

"Can you really blame him?" Harriet replied sweetly, earning a long-suffering look. They closed up the toolbox and went into the living room, where A.J. delightedly showed Harm each of his toy cars.

The commander sat down on the floor and stretched the complaining muscles in his back. "Seriously, Harriet. You *have* talked to Bud by now, right?"

She nodded, taking a seat on the couch. "It wasn't pretty. I think he was more depressed than angry, really. But he understands that it was important to me, and ... we'll be okay, I think. Thank you."

He raised an eyebrow. "For aiding and abetting?"

"For being a friend," she said simply.

A.J. was working on a large pile of plastic blocks, and he tugged on Harm's shirt. "Help, Unca Harm," he directed.

"Hey, you do know my name. All right." He picked up a block and attempted to brace the towering stack. "What are you building, A.J.?"

"Ship," the two-year-old informed him matter-of-factly. "Daddy's ship."

Harriet's eyes immediately filled with tears. Harm glanced up and reached over to squeeze her hand. "You're doing fine," he said quietly. "Just hang in there."

It was because of A.J., really, that she worried so much. It was concern for her son, not herself, that tended to keep her awake at night. A.J. couldn't read his father's messages on the computer. He wasn't old enough to really know Bud as a person, so he wasn't fully aware of what was missing from his life. By the time they were a family again, he might be reading, and learning to hit a tee-ball ... and Bud would be seeing it in pictures. He'd watch his son grow in fragments, captured moments, for months at a time.

As she left Harm reading 'The Hungry Caterpillar' to his godson and went to fold the laundry, she thought once again that they were actually rather lucky. She had a whole office of friends and colleagues willing to help her with A.J. The admiral would be putting a ball glove in his namesake's hands before long, and Sturgis had proven to be an excellent babysitter. Mac loved to spoil him, and Harm...

Harm had grown up without his father, she suddenly realized anew. He'd seen him between deployments for a while, and then at six years old, he'd been left with nothing but a photograph and a box of letter tapes. Was that why he was being so attentive to her and A.J.? Because he knew the life? Or was it just that helping them was something pure and uncomplicated, with no questions attached? The office had been so busy lately, and she

wasn't sure she'd seen him truly relaxed since --

Her train of thought swiftly ended when she re-entered the living room. Stretched out on the couch, Harm was lying with A.J. curled up on his chest. Both were fast asleep. The scene was so perfect that she couldn't help but stand there and watch them for a moment. If the man would only wise up and figure himself out, he'd make a terrific father. As it was, she just grateful to have him around right now, for A.J.'s sake.

She went to the closet to retrieve her camera, but sighed in disappointment when she discovered no film in it. An idea came to her, and she quietly picked up the phone and dialed.

"Mac? Hi, it's me. I was wondering if you could come over a little early. Like, say, now. There's something you just have to see ... And by chance, if you have any extra film lying around, could you bring it along?"

Mac had puzzled over Harriet's call most of the way to Rosslyn. She wondered idly if Harm had managed to utterly destroy the garbage disposal by now. But even if he had, she didn't see any point in documenting his humiliation on film. And what was with the whispering?

When she knocked on the door, though, Harriet was smiling impishly, and the kitchen looked to be in working order. "So did he fix it, or what?"

The lieutenant nodded with a small shrug. "Guess he did know what he was doing."

"He usually does. I just like to mess with him." Mac handed over the film she'd brought, surprised when Harriet snatched it up with glee. "What's going on?"

"Come see for yourself."

Mac followed her into the living room, and the sight of her self-assured partner sharing A.J.'s nap sent her heart into somersaults. Sometimes he could look so damn innocent ... *What if she has your looks and my brains?* floated unbidden through her mind, and all the questions she'd been trying to ignore suddenly returned in full force. "That might be the cutest thing I've seen in months," she finally said, trying to mask her reaction and failing. "Quick, get that camera loaded."

Harriet quirked an eyebrow, watching her friend's attempt at nonchalance. "You know, the realtor seemed to think that Harm and I were, quote, 'a perfect couple'. Hysterical, isn't it? Can you imagine?"

"Hmm," Mac responded vaguely, from somewhere far distant. Quickly, though, she snapped back to the present and motioned with a mischievous smile. "Come on. Take it before one of them wakes up."

She managed to get two shots off before the clicking of the camera brought Harm awake with a start. Slightly disoriented, he squinted up at the two women looking down at him adoringly. "What are you two trying to do to me?" he grumbled, being careful not to disturb A.J.

"Aww, do big sailors need napttime too?" Mac cooed, receiving a glare of disapproval from her partner.

"Give him a break. He's been playing handyman for me all week." Harriet moved to take her son out of his arms, but he waved her off.

"It's all right. I've got him." Harm swung his long legs to the floor and stood up from the couch. He carried A.J. into his room, gently laying the still-sleeping toddler down on his bed. Mac followed, almost without being aware of her action. When he turned around, the look in her dark eyes took him by surprise. "What is it, Mac?" he questioned.

"You're doing a really good thing here," she said, not entirely answering the query. "Being around for Harriet, and for A.J. It's obviously a big help."

"I'm not the only one. Dinner was your idea, after all." He returned her unflinching stare, a self-conscious flush beginning to creep up his neck. "Why are you looking at me like that?" he asked quietly.

"Like what?"

"Like I've changed, or something."

She shook her head. "I don't think you've changed so much," she replied just as quietly, stepping fully into the room. "Maybe I'm just seeing you differently."

It occurred to her that he might try to back away from this kind of conversation, given their track record. This time, for some reason, he didn't. "After all this time, I thought we'd seen each other in just about every way possible."

"Just about." She reached down to stroke A.J.'s soft hair. "But it's not every day the big, bad pilot lets himself be charmed by a two-year-old."

"I do have feelings, Mac." He looked away after speaking: he hadn't meant to sound so hurt. But her response stopped him cold.

"Then why do you try so hard to ignore them?"

His head jerked up, but it was a moment before he could trust himself to reply. "What does that mean?"

"It means invincibility is overrated. People like you better like this, when you let your guard down every once in a while."

"What people? You?"

"For a start."

He took a deep breath, wondering how they'd managed to find their way to this topic yet again. "Mac, if I let my guard down completely, I'm not sure you'll like what you see."

"That's a risk I'm willing to take." She hoped that her assertion sounded more confident than it felt. If the full, honest truth was that he didn't feel the same way she did,

maybe she really didn't want to know. But something told her that this wasn't going to end the way that night on the admiral's porch had. So many things were different now -- everything, it seemed, except this insistent, enduring bond between them. "Don't you trust me?"

He met her gaze, and his expressive eyes were solemn. "There's no one I trust more," he said softly. "You know that."

"Then this shouldn't be so hard." She moved closer, her intensity almost visible. "Let me in. Show me what you won't let anyone else see."

His voice was almost too low to be audible. "I think it's too late to do any good."

"Let me be the judge of that. Tell me, Harm. Tell me what you're thinking right now."

Something in her eyes, her stance, forced him to surrender. "Right now ... I'm thinking that I wish this were my life - that I had something to come home to at night that made me feel as content as I do when I'm just playing with A.J. And I'm thinking that I've already ruined too many chances with the one person I truly want to be with to ever get to that life."

He tried to turn away from her, but she grabbed his shoulder and physically prevented him from doing so. Without pausing to doubt her instincts, she kissed him, hard, before he could even react. "No, you haven't," she said firmly, her eyes boring into his in an attempt to get her message through. "Why do you always give up so easily?"

His mind reeling, he could offer nothing except the plain, unvarnished truth. "Because I'm terrified that I don't deserve you," he whispered -- and suddenly, magically, Sarah Mackenzie's world made sense again. There had always been a scrap of doubt clinging fiercely to her soul, telling her that her past had made her unworthy of real love. It mocked her with her father's voice, and Chris's, and sometimes even Mic's: and although she'd never allowed it to fully take root, some part of her always wondered if Harm ever saw her that way, too. Never had it crossed her mind that he might honestly think she was too *good* for him.

It was probably the greatest compliment she'd ever received, but at the same time, it broke her heart.

"How can you say that?" she asked in disbelief. "After everything we've pulled each other through, how could you possibly think that we're anything but two of a kind?"

"Mac, I can't even count the number of times I've managed to hurt you..."

"Do you think that's all that matters? I know we've made more than our share of mistakes, but if we never open ourselves up to the possibility of getting hurt, we're never going to get anywhere. Harm, I'm here. I'm right in front of you, and I'm telling you that I trust you not to hurt me. Kiss me again and then try to tell me that this isn't worth fighting for."

With that, something seemed to lock into place, and he pulled her into his arms and kissed her deeply, longingly. She wrapped her arms around his neck, holding on with all the power she possessed. Neither of them heard the faint *clicks* coming from the hallway, as Harriet stealthily snapped a picture and then disappeared into her bedroom to compose herself. She hadn't heard anything said -- there was a distinct difference between being

curious and being nosy -- but this was just too good an opportunity to pass up.

"I'm tired of fighting this," he whispered against her cheek. "I'm so tired of trying not to need you..."

"So stop doing it," she implored him, not letting go. "Give yourself a chance to be happy for once. Give *us* a chance."

Their lips met again, in a kiss that seemed to open up the world. Without a word, it was somehow clear that from here on, things would be very different. Finally, Harm drew back, and the relief and wonder shining from his handsome features was like nothing she'd ever seen from him before. "How the hell did we end up here?" he asked, honestly perplexed.

She shrugged with a smile. "Law of averages, maybe?"

"Huh?"

"Well, we've had this conversation so many times that we had to get it right sooner or later."

With a laugh, he took her hand and gently brought it to his lips. "We've got some more things to talk about, though. Tonight? My place?"

"After dinner with A.J. and Harriet." With a start, both officers remembered where they were and glanced down at little A.J., who had woken up and was watching them curiously. "Oh, lord. We just gave him quite a show, didn't we?"

"Hiya, Aun Mac!" the toddler said cheerfully. "Tiss me, too?"

Sheepishly, Mac bent down to place a kiss on his cheek. "Hi, honey. Do you think you can keep a secret?"

"Oh, that is so not going to work," Harm warned, choosing to be amused rather than mortified.

"Quiet, you. What do you say, A.J.? Don't tell Mommy that Aunt Mac and Uncle Harm were kissing?"

The point of the question was lost on A.J., but he understood a few words and gave a brilliant smile. "Mommy take picture."

The partners exchanged a glance.

"You don't think..."

"She wouldn't..."

In an instant, both were off like a shot. "*Harriet!!*"

*** THE END ***

