



Graphic by [Steph](#)

Rating: PG

Classification: vignette, romance (H/M)

Spoilers: "The Four-Percent Solution"

Disclaimer: Despite my asking Santa for them numerous times, the characters do not belong to me.

Author's Notes: Not much to say. I had a mini-idea while TDY this past week and was planning to turn it into a flashfic, but it ended up fitting in here rather conveniently. I haven't done an episode-reaction story in ages, and if any ep deserves one, this ep does. Happy holidays to all.

Directly following the end of the episode ...

Sensing Mac's fatigue, Harm squeezed her hand once more and released it. "Go ahead and sleep. I need to give Sturgis a call and tell him why we won't be at church."

Offering a small, grateful smile, Mac let her eyes close. She was exhausted, certainly, but not to the point of dropping off immediately. A few seconds later she felt, rather than heard, the man in the chair next to her slump forward, and she tentatively opened her eyes again.

Harm's elbows were braced on his knees, and his head was bowed low, almost to his clasped hands. It was as if the tension that had been holding him upright had been released in an instant. She found it hard to reconcile this image with the one she'd had only moment before; he'd been a rock, radiating calm and compassion. "Harm?" she murmured, not knowing how to ask the question.

He lifted his head, and she saw through to the man underneath the layered façade, the boy who'd seen his life fall apart on Christmas Eve once before. "I've had some scary phone calls before, Mac," he said quietly, "but tonight ..."

"I'm sorry I scared you."

"Don't be sorry. Just get some rest. I'll be here."

And she knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he would. Feeling more secure than she had in weeks, she allowed herself to sleep.

When she awoke, the first glimmers of sunlight were peeking through the window blinds. Feeling no less achy but a little more aware of herself, Mac turned her head toward the chair by her bed. Harm was asleep in the recliner, his collar open and his shoes missing. His uniform jacket and tie were hung neatly on a hanger in the corner, and upon further inspection, she noticed that his shoes sat on the floor below them.

A scene flashed across her mind's eye; coming home after a long day to a house that belonged to the two of them, shrugging out of uniforms and making dinner and just being together ... That comfortable kind of life was so foreign to her that she'd all but written off the possibility of ever achieving it. Then he'd said all those things at the admiral's Dining Out, things that had opened entirely new doors -- doors she hadn't been ready to walk through, or so she'd told herself. But Commander McCool hadn't bought that explanation, or many of the others; and in forcing Mac to dig deeper, she'd brought other possibilities to light.

I owe that woman a fruit basket or something, Mac thought wryly.

Harm stirred and raised his head, coming awake immediately. "Hey. How are you feeling?"

"Okay." She shifted slightly in the bed, wincing. "I have a bad track record with trees. First in that rickety airplane, then in my car -- the trees won both rounds."

"Oh, I don't know. You came out of it with no real permanent damage -- I don't know if you can say the same for either of the aforementioned trees." He leaned forward and picked up a cup from the nearby table. "The nurse left you some orange juice. Want some?"

Mac nodded and lifted a hand toward the cup, but Harm shook his head, scooting forward on the chair and moving the straw to her lips himself. She took a few swallows, moistening her dry throat. "Thanks. How long am I going to have you for my personal slave, anyway?"

He shrugged. "I can think of worse things to do with my holiday leave time." With a grin, he set down the cup and picked up a brightly-colored gift bag from the floor. "Want to open your present?"

"You had my present with you?"

"No -- your real present's at home. But this being Christmas and all, I could hardly let the day pass without a present of some type, so I hit the gift shop downstairs."

Amused and touched, Mac reached into the bag as he held it next to her. She withdrew a stuffed dog with downy-soft fur and a heart-studded collar. Inexplicably, sudden tears pricked at her eyes. Harm's smile wavered, but he masked it with a joke. "Should've gone with the teddy bear, huh?"

"Of course not ... it's ..." She waved her hand, helpless to explain.

"Mac, the last thing I wanted to do was upset you --"

"Why are you here?" she asked without preamble, catching him off-guard.

“What?”

“You said you’d always be here, and I’m grateful for that -- more than you can possibly imagine -- but I don’t understand *why*. I don’t understand why you didn’t give up on me when you had every right to. I don’t understand why you said you’d wait, when I was never strong enough to wait for you ...” She didn’t bother trying to hold back the tears; it would be difficult and ultimately a futile effort. “I’ve been pushing you away for so long now -- I flat-out told you ‘never.’ I wish to God I hadn’t, but I said it, and I thought you believed it ... why didn’t you?”

His smile had faded completely away now, but the compassion remained. “For a long time, I did,” he answered simply. “Then, for some reason, things started to change.”

Looking away for a moment, he rose from the chair and moved to the window, where the sunlight was gaining ground. “Federal Aviation Regulations define night as the time between the end of evening civil twilight and the beginning of morning civil twilight. Problem is, nobody really knows what the hell civil twilight is.”

That statement had her thoroughly bewildered. “I don’t understand --”

“Night flying. See, I’ve heard ‘never’ before. They told me I’d never fly at night again, and for eight years that was a truth I had to accept. It was over -- no chance of ever going back. And then one day I found out it *wasn’t* over. Things had changed.” He turned away from the window to look at her. “Some truths endure longer than others. Some things we think we’ve lost aren’t lost forever. The word ‘never’ has no more power than any other word.”

“Oh,” she said dumbly, still not sure she understood.

Harm crossed the room and sat down on the edge of her bed. “Mac, I don’t know what you need right now, and even if I did, I don’t know if I’d be able to give it to you. But I don’t give up on things that are important to me, and you’re the most important ...” He trailed off for a moment, but gathered himself and pressed on. “Maybe it’s a long shot, but my life has basically been one long shot after another. So I’m willing to take that risk now -- I’m willing to stake everything on the belief that one of these days, we’re going to get it right.”

Mac closed her eyes, feeling a rush of immense relief. No, that wasn’t right; calling it relief seemed somehow inaccurate. Joy, perhaps. And wasn’t it the day for joy?

“Four percent,” she whispered.

Harm blinked -- now he was the one lost. “I’m sorry?”

“You reminded me of something my therapist told me a while ago. Four percent isn’t as long a shot as you’d think.” She favored him with a watery smile, hoping he’d recognize the tears as happy ones. “You were wrong, you know.”

“About what?”

“Back in May, when you said Clay made me happy, and that was something you hadn’t been able to do ... You were wrong. I realized a while ago that there are no conditions, no circumstances ever devised under which I could be happy *without* you.”

And despite his consummate control, she saw in his eyes a reflection of the same flood of emotion she'd felt moments ago.

"That's nice to hear."

She reached a hand toward him. "Come here?"

He hesitated, concerned. "I don't want to hurt you."

"It'll be all right. I just want you closer."

As she raised the head of the bed, he cautiously moved to sit next to her and opened his arms. She settled against him and closed her eyes, feeling his lips brush against her forehead.

A soft but spirited Christmas carol floated in the air, having originated in the hallway outside. After a few minutes, a nurse wearing a Santa hat poked her head into the room with a cheery smile. "Anything I can get you, Colonel?"

"Thanks, but I've got pretty much everything I need right now."

*** THE END ***