



Graphic by [Steph](#)

Rating: PG

Classification: vignette, romance

Spoilers: "What If," minor ones for "A Girl's Best Friend"

Disclaimer: Not mine - just borrowing them to keep myself occupied while stuck on extended TDY, and for a while afterward.

Author's Notes: You know, this is the most shipper-hopeful thing I've written in months. Scary. This almost ended up with the title "Coin Checks, Fortunes, Choices and Fate" - but that was a major mouthful, so instead you got another plain-and-simple title. I started this ages ago, while still off at class, but I couldn't figure out where to go with it until "What If" aired, so hopefully this doesn't read too much like two separate stories smashed together. Oh, and since I'm sure someone will ask after reading this, my USAF coin collection now stands at sixteen, and I have only ever failed one coin check.

---

**0124 EST**

**North of Union Station**

"You'd better wake him up."

"Why me? He's *your* guardian."

"Yeah, but I don't want him to think I'm a wimp."

"You? You're fifteen -- I'm in the Navy! I've been in Afghanistan, and I'm right here with you, so which one of us do you think he's gonna laugh at more?"

The two female voices had started out at a whisper level, but were slowly gaining in intensity. They eventually broke into Harm's consciousness, dragging him reluctantly toward wakefulness. As he gained his bearings, he propped himself up on one elbow. "Did it occur to you ladies that arguing over which one of you should wake me up might actually accomplish the task by itself?"

A pajama-clad Mattie appeared in his bedroom doorway with his spare key in hand, looking slightly guilty in the dim light. "Um, hi," she offered tentatively. "Are you decent?"

He shot her a 'very funny' look, still squinting a little. "What's going on?"

Jen stepped up behind her roommate, also dressed for bed and equally embarrassed. "We're really sorry to bug you, sir."

"Jen, you're standing in my apartment at oh-dark-thirty, so I think you'd better find a way to forget protocol for a while." Harm swung his legs over the side of the bed. "Did something break over at your place?"

"Not exactly." Mattie squirmed. "There's a bat."

"A bat? I'm assuming not one of the baseball variety?"

"Um, no. Specifically, there was a bat up in the crawl space, and now it's flying around our apartment. And we were really trying to get rid of it ourselves, because we know you've got court first thing in the morning, but the fact is, we're both totally freaked out."

Harm shook his head and stood up, reaching for a pair of sneakers. "All right, I'm coming. And for the record, I'm not laughing at either of you, but that's mostly just because I'm not fully awake."

He followed them down the hall and opened the door to hear a quiet, persistent flapping sound traversing the apartment. The bat brushed by, very close behind his ear, and he ducked instinctively as it continued back and forth from wall to wall. "Okay, let's see what we have to work with. Do you guys have a garbage can with a lid?"

"You're going to try to catch it in a trash can?"

"Unless you have a better idea."

"Not really, I guess." Mattie scampered off and returned with a plastic garbage can from their kitchen. "Where'd it go now?"

They listened for a moment, but the wing-flapping seemed to have stopped. Harm started toward one of the bedrooms, the two girls creeping along behind him at an amusingly anxious pace. They located the bat in a high corner of Jen's bedroom, wings closed up around itself so that it was only a fraction of the size it had previously appeared to be. Harm studied the situation. "Amended plan. Got a broom handy?"

Jen quickly located one, and he motioned her over. "Take the trash can and stand up on this chair. I'm going to reach out with the broom and sweep him down into the can, and as soon as I do, I want you to clap the lid on. Deal?"

"Got it." The petty officer nodded resolutely, although her expression wasn't nearly as confident. She stepped up on her desk chair, and Harm wasted no time in sweeping the little creature down into the trash can. Jen shrieked a little but swiftly closed the lid, and he took the can from her and headed for the window. Opening it wide, he stuck the can outside and took the lid off, freeing the bat into the darkness.

When the window was securely closed again, he turned around and faced two relieved neighbors. "Was that so bad?"

"Yes," they chorused, trading a shaky laugh. Jen shook her head. "Sorry, sir, but I woke up to that thing flying right past my face. That really gets your blood going, y'know?"

"I suppose it would."

A wicked gleam came into Mattie's eye, and she caught her guardian's gaze, lifting a finger to her lips. Harm rolled his eyes skyward, but kept quiet as she eased closer to an unsuspecting Jen, who had started rifling through her purse.

"Sir, I just remembered I've still got the spare key to your SUV from the grocery run yesterday -- aaahh!"

The purse hit the floor, and Mattie soon followed it, giggling hysterically. She'd gotten in close enough to tickle her roommate's neck, approximating the close call with the bat, and now Jen glared at her, picking up a couch cushion and throwing it at her.

"Not funny!" Jen turned to Harm and was dismayed to find him suppressing a grin. "You're encouraging this?"

"At this time of night, my sense of fair play might be a little iffy."

"Sorry, Jen -- I'll try to work on my impulse control." Mattie rolled to her knees and started to gather up the scattered contents of the purse. After a moment, something unfamiliar that caught her eye. "Hey, cool coin. What is it?"

Harm glanced over her shoulder and smiled. "It's an RMO. Right, Jen?"

Jen recognized an opportunity for a little payback and nodded. "You bet, sir."

"RMO?"

"Long-standing military tradition," Harm replied. "It's not really something that we talk about outside of work."

Mattie looked miffed. "Oh, come on. It's not like there are secret codes inscribed on this thing." Harm and Jen traded a glance, which only heightened her curiosity. "Come *on*, you guys! Do I look like a tattletale?"

"I don't know," Harm hedged. "What do you think, Jen?"

"It's your call, sir," Jen deadpanned.

Slowly, the teenager began to suspect that she was being had, and she narrowed her eyes. "RMO doesn't even stand for anything, does it?"

"Round Metal Object," they told her in unison.

"Arrgh! You're both total dorks." Mattie flopped onto the couch, then fixed an accusing stare on a smirking Harm. "You're a practical-joke mercenary now? Playing both sides?"

"Once again, I remind you that it's oh-dark-thirty." He caught her fist as she moved to punch his shoulder. "If you must know, coins like this are kind of a unit identifier. In some places, they really do call them RMOs, because some units discourage coins in order to discourage coin checks."

"Coin checks?"

Harm took the coin from her and examined it. The enameled crest of the USS Seahawk was emblazoned on one inch-and-a-half diameter face, while the symbol of the Fifth Fleet was on the other. He cocked an eyebrow. "I've got one like this. A little older, obviously. Anyway, to do a coin check, a challenger pulls out their coin and smacks it down on the table." He gave a demonstration on the coffee table. "Everybody around who's military has to do the same. Everyone who does gets a drink of their choice from the challenger, and everyone who can't produce a coin within ten seconds owes the challenger a drink."

"Even though the rules don't specify alcoholic drinks, you can see how things could get out of hand," Jen added. "But most people don't really hold to any of the rules. The coins are more like a morale thing, to show that you belonged to such-and-such or served with so-and-so. I've seen some pretty impressive collections of them -- people who've been everywhere and done everything twice."

At that, Mattie turned to Harm. "So do you have a whole bunch of coins stashed somewhere?"

The commander shrugged. "I've got more than a few," he allowed.

"Can I look at them?"

"At sometime other than the middle of the night, sure." Harm flipped the coin back to its owner, and Jen handed him the spare car keys she'd been hunting for. Mattie grabbed the last few items from Jen's purse off the floor. Coming upon a small slip of paper, she read aloud.

"Your hidden desire is the road not taken. Take it." The teenager rolled her eyes. "Give me a break. You saved this?"

"Hey, shut up. That's from my promotion party." Jen took the fortune from her and stuffed it back into a pocket of her purse. "Nobody said I had to actually believe it. Right, sir?"

Harm started; the sight of the fortune had briefly taken him back to a thought he'd been trying to shake for the past few days. He blinked and nodded firmly. "Absolutely. I'm going back to sleep, so I suggest you two do the same. I'll see you in the morning, all right?"

"Thanks, Harm." "Thank you, sir ..."

Harm let himself out of their apartment, shaking his head. Getting up in the morning - okay, later in the morning - was not going to be pleasant. Especially if the remaining hours of darkness continued to bring forth mental images of all the roads not taken.

---

### **The following evening Same location**

Mac could hear animated voices coming from inside Harm's apartment as she approached the door. Her knock was answered with an "I'll get it!" from Mattie, followed by a

"Check the peephole" warning from Harm. Mac smile inwardly. Some parental aspects just seemed to come naturally to her partner.

Apparently she'd been deemed safe, because the door swung open. "Hi, Mac," Mattie greeted brightly. "Come on in. We were just about to raid Harm's closet."

"Um, okay." Mac stepped inside, and Harm nodded at her over the kitchen island. "I brought the police reports from Cassel's previous DUI," she reported, holding up a file folder.

"Thanks." He gestured toward the boiling pot and the fresh pasta sauce on the stove. "Want to stick around for dinner? There's plenty."

Mac glanced toward the dining area, where Jennifer Coates was setting the table. She still hadn't quite gotten used to seeing the petty officer in and around Harm's apartment, but the arrangement seemed to be more or less working out. "You guys don't need me crowding in." she automatically demurred.

Harm gave her a look that said 'oh, please,' and Jen spoke up. "No, ma'am, really, you should stay. Then I won't feel as bad about once again taking advantage of the commander's cooking skills."

"I think it's my duty as a senior officer to intervene when I see you nuking a frozen burrito," Harm tossed toward the young woman.

"Hey, those burritos are good," Mattie objected, causing Harm to shoot a mock glare at Jen.

"You're corrupting her now?"

Mac watched the three of them bat teasing remarks back and forth and wondered idly if this was what a happy family, be it traditional or not, was meant to look like. "I guess if you don't mind," she relented. "Thank you."

Jen beamed and started toward the cupboard for another plate. Refocused on her original task, Mattie went into Harm's bedroom and opened the closet doors. "Where in here are they?"

"Um, in a box on the upper shelf, I think." Harm didn't look up from his cutting board as he deftly chopped a handful of basil leaves.

"There's nothing but shoe boxes up here."

"Well, a shoe box qualifies as a box, doesn't it?"

Mattie rolled her eyes in the manner of all teenagers who find their parents' behavior inexplicable. Dragging over a chair and climbing up on it, she poked through the shoe boxes until she found one that clinked. "Jeez, this is heavy. How many of these things have you got?"

Harm only shrugged. "A lot."

Mattie pulled the selected box down from the shelf and carried it over to the living room, Jen quickly finishing her task in order to join her. Mac folded her arms and sat down on the arm of the couch, curious. "What've you got there?"

"Harm's coin collection," the teen informed her, sitting cross-legged on the floor.

Mac raised an eyebrow. "RMOs, or Indian-head nickels?" Harm fixed her with a long-suffering look, and she raised her hands in surrender. "Hey, how am I supposed to know? You never mentioned collecting anything."

"I wouldn't call it a collection, exactly -- "

"Wow, I would." Mattie had lifted the lid of the box and was now gaping at the stacks of coins. "Holy crap, Harm!"

He pointed at her with the spoon in his hand. "Eloquence like that must have your English teacher turning cartwheels."

"There's like a hundred coins in here!"

"I doubt it's quite that high, but you're welcome to count."

Fascinated, Mattie started to spread the assortment out on the floor. There were larger and smaller ones, in various tones of antiqued gold, silver and bronze; some were older and plainer, while some had brightly-painted symbols. When she had them all laid out in front of her, she counted them up. "Sixty-three. I repeat: holy crap."

"Have you got one from every ship you've ever set foot on, or what?" Jen asked, finally leaving off the customary 'sir' in her disbelief.

"Not every single one, but I pick one up whenever it's convenient." Harm set the sauce to simmer and came over to join them. "I do, however, have one from every squadron I've ever flown with, even if it was just one flight. Plus various other places I've been on investigations."

Mac looked down at the jumble of little disks and realized that they offered almost as much insight into her friend's career as his service record. Probably more, in some cases. She turned to him, a question in her gaze. "I don't ever remember seeing you hunting these down when we were on assignments."

"It's no big deal. I never went out of my way for any of them. Just one of those little quirks I have that you all find so charming." Harm flashed a quick, only slightly sardonic grin.

"I want to hear stories on all of them," Mattie announced, still exploring the collection.

"Have you got a week or two?"

"I didn't say I wanted all of them right now. But there's nothing wrong with getting started." Mattie leaned forward to scan for a good starting point, her hair falling in a thick curtain in front of her face. "Hey, let's put 'em in chronological order."

Harm chuckled at her ambition and shook his head. "Tell you what -- you get started. Mac can help you with a lot of them. I'll fill in the blanks when you're done."

It hadn't occurred to Mac that she had been an eyewitness to a large portion of the tales that accompanied the collection, but of course it was true. With a somewhat changed perspective, she looked on as Mattie swept all the coins to the side to begin her self-appointed task.

"Okay, first one. USS Watertown, 'Strength from below.' That's kinda cheesy."

Mac felt the less-than-pleasant memory wash over her, and to cover her reaction, she ducked her head to study the coin. "When did you manage to pick this up? The first half of the trip, we were chasing down a nutcase, and the second half you couldn't talk!"

"One of my myriad secrets," Harm tossed back.

"USS Coral Sea," Mattie read off next. "Before or after Watertown?"

"Before," Mac answered with certainty. "Don't know when his first time aboard was, though."

"Same as yours," Harm said. "The Tomcat that went missing in the -- "

"Bermuda Triangle, right." Mac had to smile, remembering Bud's slightly odd viewpoint on the investigation. She picked up another coin. "SEAL Team Two. You get this from Rivers after your little Hell Week adventure?"

"No, that would be -- let's see, this one." He skimmed through the pile and selected one marked 'NSWC Coronado.' "That one I earned by doing a HA-LO jump with the team, about a million years ago. It did help us solve a case, believe it or not."

"HA-LO means high altitude, low opening parachute jump," Mac explained to Mattie and Jen, who looked appropriately impressed. "I had no idea. Does Admiral Chegwiddden know about that one?"

Harm snorted. "He's the one who ordered me."

That sent Mac's eyebrows straight up to her hairline. As she moved that coin to the front, Jen reached for another. "USS Suribachi," she read.

Immediately a chill descended on Mac, and she pointed to a place near the end of the line. "Not one of my favorite at-sea memories," she admitted.

"You're telling me. I thought I was going to get pneumonia from standing in that water for so long."

Mattie's eyes went wide. "Did the ship flood?"

"Just his little area of it, predictably." Mac drew her arms tighter around herself. "The chief told us you were dead," she said quietly, watching him.

"Yeah, but you didn't really believe him, right?" Her silence caused him to glance up, surprised. "You did, didn't you?"

"Not fully, and not for long. But like I said, not a fond memory."

Their gazes locked for a moment, before an oblivious Mattie spoke up again. "This one looks like it's in Greek!"

Mac tore her gaze away and examined the coin. "Russian, actually. It says 'Vladivostok.'" She cocked an eyebrow.

Harm smiled. "From Alex Volkonov, as penance for dragging me into that whole mess."

Mac placed it on the end of the line, while Mattie correctly placed the one marked VF-218 Raptors. Jen picked up one that said 'Navy Fighter Weapons School,' recognizing it only upon seeing the 'Top Gun' logo on the other side. After placing the easiest one of all, the one bearing the symbol of the U.S. Naval Academy, Mattie reached into the slowly diminishing pile and frowned. "Whoa. What happened to this one?"

Mac saw the crest -- VF-43 Tigers -- and the rough gouge that scarred the coin's slightly deformed face. She suspected that she already knew the answer, and studied her partner's reaction carefully, ready to redirect the conversation if necessary.

Harm didn't flinch, though. "That one is pretty unique," he said quietly. "It survived the crash of a Tomcat into the deck of a carrier. God knows not much else did."

Mattie opened her mouth, then closed it again, uncertain. He must have told her at least something about his ramp strike, Mac guessed. Harm wandered back to the kitchen, ostensibly to check on the pasta. "I almost threw that one away so many times," he said, half to himself. "It was just another reminder, and I had too many of those. But somehow I could never actually do it. And now that you've got them all laid out like that, it kinda fits. I guess it belongs there just like the rest of them."

He looked over at them, eyes clear. "You can come back to that later. Food's ready."

After a lively dinner conversation, in which many of the coin-related stories were told, Harm and Jen handled the dishes while Mattie and Mac went back to their project. Within a few minutes, they had identified and placed coins from the Force Recon School at Camp Pendleton and the USS Stanley Dace, among others. A few more, such as the one from the Seatac Naval Base, required some assistance from the dishwashers. At last, Mattie stepped back and surveyed her handiwork with satisfaction. "Seriously, Harm, this is pretty impressive. It's like a timeline of everything you've done since you joined the Navy."

Harm gave a half-shrug. "Not everything," he replied, his voice unreadable.

While his broad back was turned to her, Mac watched him, wondering just how much she should read into that comment. Certainly a look at this collection didn't tell the full story of their experiences, separately or together. Especially together. There was no pocket-sized memento that would ever capture the hours they'd spent outside sickbay waiting for word on Bud, or the night she'd stayed on his couch and cleaned his sidearm ... or the spring evening on the admiral's porch.

"You've got a lot to be proud of here, flyboy," she said, hoping her sincerity would outshine her hesitancy.

At that, he turned toward her, still betraying precious little emotion. "Do I?"

Mac suddenly felt trapped by his gaze, completely at a loss. Clearly a discussion of some type was necessary, but where exactly was it heading?

She cleared her throat. "Listen, Mattie, uh ...why don't you and Jennifer go grab us a board game or something?"

Mattie and Jen exchanged a look, sensing that the current in the room had just shifted. "Actually, there was something I wanted to watch on TV tonight ..." Mattie suggested halfheartedly, climbing to her feet and planting a quick kiss on Harm's cheek.

"Yeah, um, the new Trading Spaces is on," Jen immediately jumped in. "Thanks again for dinner, sir -- ma'am, I'll see you tomorrow."

"Good night, you two." As the roommates disappeared into the hallway, Mac eased herself up onto one of the kitchen stools. "You've been pretty quiet at work lately," she remarked cautiously.

Harm offered a half-shrug as he reached for the dish soap. "Maybe I've been thinking a little more about the 'roads not taken.'"

The meaning of that phrase wasn't lost on her. "You never did read your fortune aloud. Did you get the same one the others did?"

He cocked an eyebrow at her. "I'll tell if you will."

Somehow, that signaled to her that she was caught; he'd seen her fortune when they left the restaurant. "So everybody did get the same one. Bit of a mix-up at the fortune-cookie factory, you think?"

"Probably. Hasn't stopped me from wondering, though."

The idea seemed unnatural coming from him, and so it took her a moment to fully realize what he'd said. "You're buying into all that now?"

"I didn't say that. It just got me thinking, that's all." He turned to drain the sink. "I hadn't looked at those coins in ages, until Mattie found one of Jen's and started bugging me about them. I assume you noticed that there aren't any from the past year or so."

"I did," Mac allowed. "I didn't really want to speculate on why."

"I'm not sure I could say for sure. Having those reminders of all the things I've done ... I think in a weird way it was a tangible measure of my success as an officer. I don't have any new ones because I'm trying not to measure my life's success by my success as an officer. You can thank Mattie for that." Harm leaned forward, standing behind the kitchen island, and she thought idly that he might be unconsciously shielding himself from her. When had he started doing that? Longer ago than she wanted to admit, it seemed. "The thing is, even though I'm very glad for some of the choices I've made recently, there are some I haven't been all that proud of, too. I'll admit that I'd like to forget a lot of what was said in Paraguay, and certainly what I said to you at Christmas."

"You weren't exactly alone in any of that."

"Maybe not, but I don't really consider that justification. Still, it's done, and at the risk of waxing philosophical, there might be an upside to it all."

Her brow creased as she tried to interpret his meaning. "I'm a little lost here."

"What I mean is that the bad stuff shapes us just as much as the good stuff, if that makes any sense. Every experience, every choice, is part of what gives us our identity." He wandered over to the rows of coins and picked up the scarred VF-43 one. "I wish to God I hadn't gone up that night, but if I hadn't, I'd be a different person now."

Something about that philosophical thought just struck Mac wrong, and her response was harsher than she would have liked. "I hope you're not trying to tell me that I should *appreciate* what happened with Sadik."

His eyes flew open wide. "I would never suggest that. Just because things shape us, that doesn't mean we have to like them. I was ..." His drive seemed to falter then, and he turned slightly away. "I was thinking more about various choices we've made ... I've made. Things like ferry rides in Sydney Harbor."

There was a clear undertone of regret in his voice, and it shocked her out of her defensive posture. In a purposely lighter tone, she commented, "Hate to interrupt your one-man show, but your choices aren't the only factor. Other people's choices have an impact on our lives as well."

"One choice can have a lot of repercussions, though."

"Are you saying now that Sydney shaped everything that's happened over the past four years?" As the words left her mouth, she considered them a little more carefully. "Maybe it did, in a way. I don't know. But I'm not going to let you do this *mea culpa* thing and say you want to turn back the clock, because the fact is, we're here now. I don't apologize for any of my choices. I don't consider them all good ones, certainly, but I don't apologize for them, and you shouldn't apologize for yours. We're *here* now."

"Yeah, we are." He raised his gaze to hers. "I can't speak for you, Mac, but I don't think I'm the same person I was on that ferry, or even in Paraguay. Leaving the Navy, finding Mattie - all of that made a few things clearer for me."

"You finally grew up?" Mac suggested nonchalantly, her face falling as she saw a flash of hurt in his eyes. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to imply that your outlook was wrong before. You had different priorities, that's all."

"Something like that. You can't force those kinds of changes, I think - they just happen when they're meant to happen. If I'd met Mattie a few weeks earlier or later than I did, I don't know if we would have been able to help each other as much as we have ... I guess what I'm trying to say is that surprisingly enough, where we are isn't all that bad."

Mac thought about the way things stood with Clay, and the uphill battle she still faced regarding the aftermath of Paraguay. Then she thought about being here, having this conversation, with this man whose trust she'd once thought she'd lost. "I agree," she said softly.

Harm leaned forward, his features guarded but earnest. "Maybe we've taken all those detours for a reason. Maybe we needed them to get us to the right place at the right moment."

Her breath caught, and she inwardly cursed herself for the overt reaction. "So what's your conclusion?"

"What you said at that taxi stand was your choice, and accepting it was mine. I could have pushed, but I didn't, because to me, fighting it would have implied that I didn't respect your decision. Regardless of how or why, we both chose to back away, and those choices eventually landed us here, a little older and probably a lot wiser. What I'm saying is that it's possible that this was intended."

"When did you start believing in fate?"

"I'm not sure I have. But a couple of months ago, I thought I'd burned the last bridge we had, and instead you gave me Mattie. So if I do believe, it's entirely your fault." At her expression of surprise, a hint of a smile flickered in his eyes, but it was quickly doused. "Look, I'm not presumptuous enough to assume I have any clue what you want anymore. Just know that whatever your choices are from here on out ... I'm here. Even if it may have looked like I wasn't for a while, I am now, and I'm not going anywhere anytime soon."

"And where is 'here'?"

"That depends on where Webb stands," he answered, in a more cautious tone. "I may have found myself a clue, but that doesn't mean I'll get in the middle of that."

*You've always been in the middle of that*, she wanted to say, but of course she refrained. "There are problems," she acknowledged. "Substantial ones. His, and mine, and ours together."

"Okay. I'd offer a friendly ear, but biased information probably wouldn't be of much use."

"You? Biased about somebody I'm seeing? Go on," she teased, a little nervously.

"Hey, I'm not the one who coined the phrase 'video princess.'" He sobered quickly. "It seems like we're just back around where we started again, but I don't think we are. Before, I didn't know what I wanted or how to go after it. Now, I do."

"Do you?" she asked, suddenly aware that she'd moved closer to him without noticing.

In response, he leaned down and kissed her cheek softly, gently. As he pulled back, he paused just long enough for her to read the look in his ever-changing eyes. "It's taken a lot, but I think we're both closing in on figuring ourselves out. When we're both there -- when we both have a fix on exactly what it is we want, we'll talk again. Deal?"

"Deal," she whispered.

He stepped away then, moving back toward the rows of coins Mattie had left out on the living room floor. "I'd better find a way to pick these up in order, or Mattie'll kill me for wrecking up all her hard work."

"And I should get going." Mac picked up her purse and smiled at him, the most open smile she'd given anyone in weeks. "You know, we went through that whole collection, but you never said which one you carry in case of coin checks."

Harm smiled back and reached into his pocket. Retrieving the coin in question out of his wallet, he flipped it to her, and she examined it.

The enamel was starting to wear, and there were a few minor nicks in the metal, but the seal was clearly readable: Department of the Navy, Headquarters, Judge Advocate General.

She looked up, surprised; she'd expected something from one of the carriers. "After everything that's happened, JAG is still the place you identify yourself with most?"

He only shrugged. "After everything that's happened, I'm still here. That counts for something."

Mac shook her head, somehow touched by that concept. "Harm -- thank you. For dinner, and ... just thanks."

He nodded in acknowledgement, and she slipped out the door, feeling buoyed by the promise of days to come.

---

## **Two weeks later JAG Headquarters**

Harm strolled into his office at 0800 sharp, having dropped Mattie off at school a few minutes earlier. The moment he entered the small room, something drew his attention. A large, wrapped package sat on top of his file cabinet, an envelope attached. The outside of the envelope said "Open the present first," in Mattie's distinctive handwriting.

Mystified, he tore off the paper to reveal a beautifully-crafted display case, containing all of his coins. Taken aback by the gift, Harm opened the card.

"We decided that all these incredible things you've done ought to be on better display. Be proud of them -- we are. With love from 'the girls.' "

Mattie and Jen had both signed the card, but it was the note up in the corner that immediately caught his eye. In familiar script, most likely added after Mattie and Jen had signed, it read:

"Maybe you're right -- all those twists and turns were meant to land us at the right place at the right moment. I'm here now. Come talk to me. Mac."

\*\*\* THE END \*\*\*

---

Trivia time -- how many episode references did you catch here? See if you can identify all the episodes referenced by the coins mentioned in this story (don't worry about the ones that don't refer to a specific ep), and can put them in chronological order the way Mattie does here.

(Shouldn't be terribly tough if you have access to an episode list, but a couple of them might not be too obvious ...)

Check your list against mine (and see how others did) [here](#).