



Graphic by [Steph](#)

Rating: R (language)

Classification: vignette, angst

Spoilers: "A Tangled Webb II"

Disclaimer: The characters are most definitely not mine. Right now, I wouldn't take them if you paid me.

Author's Notes: Well, here's how my premiere night went. I watched the ep. Cursed at the TV a little. Rewound the tape to check a couple of lines. Discovered that my new VCR doesn't change the taping channel when you change the channel you're watching, so I got an hour of the History Channel. Cursed some more. Realized that the documentary on the SR-71 was probably better television than the JAG premiere, so the cursing stopped. Had so many things to say that I couldn't take the time to run up the stairs to my computer. Pulled a pad of engineering paper out of my briefcase and started scribbling. Stopped an hour and a half later with this piece of concentrated fury.

For the record, I realize that Harm has his share of blame in this debacle. But this is from his point of view, so it's obviously going to be slanted in his direction.

Also for the record, I don't think shipperdom is dead. Dismantling things in order to reassemble them later is a reasonable tactic. I'm just disgusted with the way they went about reaching this point, because trying to care about these inconsistent characters is beginning to look more and more like masochism. I don't watch this show to get blasted by negativity, so I hope for everyone's sake that things start to look a little more positive soon.

I'm so numb right now. I didn't realize it was possible to feel this god-damn numb.

And the thing that kills me is that it could have been so different. All it would have taken, in retrospect, was one or two little things done differently, and things might have taken another turn.

For example, a simple "thank you" would have made all the difference in the world.

It didn't have to happen right away. I can appreciate the fact that she'd just come out of a horrendously traumatic experience, with no real end in sight. I didn't need her to fall at my feet in gratitude the second I freed her from the torture rack. It would have been just as meaningful after her little farewell to Clay -- actually, it would have gone a long way at that point.

It would even have helped after the crash -- yes, I do realize that it was a fucking

crash, all right? I would have liked to have seen her face when I came to, even if she'd said nothing. Instead, she was gone, and there was nothing at all, except for a sense of disorientation that's slowly morphed from the physical to the psychological. What happened to "leave no man behind," Mac?

I'll admit that finding a vehicle was important. I'm not a complete idiot; though I think she'd argue that point at the moment, if only because arguing is all we've been able to do. It started right then, when she suddenly launched into a much deeper conversation than I was prepared to have in the middle of nowhere, and it didn't let up. We've been at it ever since. She accused me of being impossible, even of not being happy to see her. As if after all I'd done to get to her, I somehow couldn't be bothered anymore. Jesus Christ. I know the symptoms pretty well by now, so I'm fairly sure I had a fucking concussion. What's *your* excuse, Mac?

Why does it have to be like this, anyway? Why is it that when she verbally tears my soul into shreds, it's witty repartee, but when I open my mouth, it's treason? I made one comment about the men in her life, and immediately it made me ill. I had to take it back before it suffocated me. Yet she looked me straight in the eye and said that every woman in my life has run away screaming, and that I wreck everything I touch. How is it that she doesn't feel any remorse for that? She's not really that cold -- I know she isn't. Even in jest, she would never say things like that to anyone but me. What does that mean, Mac? Do you really not see how deep that cuts, or have you reached the point where you don't care, as long as you get a reaction? Either way, how am I supposed to even call you a friend?

I recognize that I'm a difficult person to care about. If I'm honest, I even recognize that a lot of that is by my own design. I'm hardly ever truly open, even to her, and God knows I didn't make any great strides toward it on this little adventure. I should have explained Catherine Gale from the start, rather than making it into a reprisal for the way Mac left on this assignment. Though the symmetry of it all was damn near artful, if I do say so myself. And I should have told her up front that I'd resigned, even if I didn't have the first clue how to break it to her. At least then she would have understood from the start what I'd done, what I'd given up. After all, isn't that what she'd wanted to hear two years ago? What I'd give up? Apparently, the answer is: all I have. Those were her very words in the hotel room, with far more indignation than gratitude in her voice. "It's all you have." And she seemed to understand that I'd done it for her -- but what did that understanding get us? God, Mac, how can you be *surprised* that all this was for you? Don't you know me at all?

Maybe she doesn't. She said that she wants very little, and that I've just never figured that out. Man, does she ever have that wrong. I've figured out a hell of a lot more than she'd ever give me credit for -- I just can't give it to her, not the way she wants it. Things are simple like that in her world, but she seems to want me to be simple, too. And more than anything, that's the one thing I can never be.

You've known me for eight years, Mac. In all that time, I've never been the kind of man who could bring a girl flowers to match her dress before a night of dinner, dancing, and confessing our innermost secrets. That's never going to be me, no matter how much anyone tries. Surely you must have noticed that as you watched all those women run screaming away from me. Did you really expect me to be able to kick down that door, blow your captors away, and then tell you in eloquent terms just why I'd done it? Didn't the act itself tell you anything at all about how I feel?

No, she needs me to say it, to lay it out in concrete terms she can evaluate. And that wouldn't be too much to ask of anyone else. It's not her fault I'm this screwed up. So I tried. I swear to God, for one brief instant I dropped all pretense and said something absolutely, wrenchingly honest.

I told her that I'd forgotten how beautiful she was.

Obviously that worked like a charm.

She's been open about Webb, at least. I don't know exactly how she feels about him, but that's only because she doesn't know either. Of course she was right that I was jealous, but I can't figure out for the life of me why that should come as a surprise anymore. Not that it matters now. I don't have the energy for jealousy, because that would require more energy over and above what it would take to feel something for her at all, and right now I'm still too

numb for even that. Most likely that will change -- it always does -- but not yet.

Or maybe it won't this time. She used the word "never" in reference to us for the first time, and as much as that word burned, it's hard not to see her point. They say that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. I'm beginning to think that we could both use some time in a padded cell. Just not the same one.

The Navy is "all you have," she said. At that moment, I realized how right she was. Now I just have to hope that I do still have that, at least. If not ... well, I've had my way of life obliterated before. My pain threshold is pretty high. Either way, the shields I carry are practically automated by now. They started to creep back up as soon as I saw her with Webb, and Christ knows they're not coming down anytime soon. And do you know the saddest thing about it all, Mac? After all this time, after everything we've done, you still don't understand why.

You said our problem is that we both want to be on top, but that's not quite true. I never wanted to be "on top" -- I only wanted to be in a position where I could finally feel secure. There's a big difference between the two. All of this has shown me yet again that my heart has never been truly secure in your hands.

It's tragic, in the most basic, Shakespearean sense of the word. Because I know that somehow, some way, it all could have been different.

*** THE END ***