



Graphic by [Steph](#)

Rating: PG

Classification: Vignette, angst

Spoilers: "Adrift, Part II"

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You know what? The hell with it. I can't even think coherently anymore. The past two weeks have shattered whatever order I once saw in the universe. Things certainly weren't a bed of roses before, but right now I'd give anything to be back in that peaceful state of ignorance, where I could convince myself that if I fought hard enough, things would go my way. I know better now. It doesn't matter what I do - fate can still find a way to smack me right between the eyes.

I thought I was doing so well. I only lost my cool once during that awful wait, and of course it was with poor Bud, who'd swallow tacks before he'd intentionally hurt anyone. But we got past it, because my flyboy somehow managed to beat every dismal prediction in the book. I told myself that nothing else would matter as long as Harm was alive, and for a while, that was what sustained me. I even managed to clamp down on my urge to throttle Sarah Mackenzie a couple of days later. That condescending smile and oh-so-calm voice, politely suggesting that I try to be strong for Harm. As if I was going to fall apart upon the very sight of him. I suppose she probably considers herself an expert on the subject of hiding feelings. That's yet another thing they have in common.

Of course, she was mostly right. When I saw him lying in that bed, it took everything I had to hold myself together. I know he's not perfect, not invincible - in some ways, I know that better than anyone. But sometimes I still see the image before I see the man, and this time, that was simply impossible. They've all tried their damndest to sugarcoat what happened, after the fact, but the cold truth is that he very nearly died, and that's not something that can be wished away.

And then he opened his eyes and looked up at me, and - Christ ...

I didn't think there was anything in the world that could hurt that much. It was a slow realization, seeing the emptiness in his gaze and understanding that he felt absolutely nothing for me at that moment. Awkward doesn't even begin to describe that first conversation. Before long, I knew I had to get out of there, or risk breaking down completely and proving Mac right yet again. The doctors all wore the same sympathetic face, explaining that memory loss

was common and most likely temporary ... 'Most likely?' When the man you love barely recognizes you, when he has no memory of an entire year of days and nights spent falling for each other, how can 'most likely' be any comfort?

Jesus, God in heaven - how could he remember her and not me?

It was temporary, of course: a couple of days later, I walked in and saw exactly what I'd been desperate to see in his eyes. There was more than that, though, and it wasn't just the embarrassment of knowing what he'd said to me, and to his friends. He'd started to realize something, too, but in his usual way, he was holding back. So finally, when they let him leave the hospital, I called him on it. Mistake. It only caused him to withdraw even more. I don't know what kind of answer I expected, really, so it wasn't too difficult to surrender and live to fight another day. We'd gotten through the worst of it, somehow. I was sure things were going to be all right.

And then my phone rang ... and the world stopped again.

I swear, I'm going to get those damn things outlawed. It seems like every time a cell phone rings around me, something is waiting on the other end to crush the very life out of me. This one struck even harder and faster than the first. I wasn't even certain I was breathing until I somehow managed to pull off the road - and then it all came flooding over me. Dad couldn't be gone. I'd just been out to see them last month. They were so happy in the new condo, and he was all excited about the little garden out back ... he kept asking about 'that sailor of yours', wondering when they'd ever get to meet Harm ... probably wondering if they'd ever get any grandkids. I stalled them like I always do, talking about my lifestyle and not being ready to settle down, but I think Dad knew ... God, even if I ever do get married, he won't be there to give me away ...

That was the thought that ended it for me. I just sat there and sobbed for what felt like hours, because I didn't know what else to do. There was only one place to go, of course, and the car steered itself up past Union Station without any conscious direction from me. What was or wasn't going on between us didn't matter anymore - I needed him like I'd never needed anyone before. I don't remember going inside or upstairs: I only remember pounding on the door and falling into his arms, crying and stumbling over my words until the whole story was out. Harm silently guided me over to the couch and just held me for the longest time, and I realized with some surreal detachment that he'd dropped his cane by the door the moment I arrived.

There was another knock at the door a little later, but it barely registered in my mind. I heard him talking, and some part of me assumed it was Mac, but the thought never went any further than that. I could only face so much at once, and right then, all I could think about was Mom, all alone for the first time in forty-five years. What would she do? What should I do? I can't move back there ... can I? What would I really be leaving behind?

Harm was great through the funeral - he's always been good at being strong for other people. It was a lot to ask of him, so soon after everything that had happened to him, but there were times when I'm sure I would have collapsed if he hadn't been there to hold me up. And in some bizarre way, having him there was a momentary escape for a lot of us. No matter how quietly he tells it, the tale of a fighter pilot injured while ejecting from a doomed aircraft is pretty exciting stuff, and my parents' friends hung on every word. Everyone thinks he's wonderful. He *is* wonderful. We're just not wonderful together. Damn it.

I'm so sorry, Daddy - I'm sorry I wasn't here, and I'm sorry I couldn't tell you about everything that's been going wrong lately ... I'm sorry that I'm a thirty-six-year-old woman

whose biggest contribution to society is a twenty-second recruiting commercial. I'm sorry that I'm not a doctor, or a teacher, or even a housewife with five screaming kids, even though you never said you wanted me to be any of those things. Most of all, I'm sorry that I haven't been strong enough to take my life into my own hands, rather than letting it all play out around me according to a script I never authorized. If nothing else, I wanted you to be able to be proud of me for who I was, and lately I haven't been very proud of myself.

But all of that is going to change.

When we get home, I'm going to get some answers from 'that sailor of mine', and it doesn't matter what direction they take. The rest of it I'll take as it comes. Starting now, I'm going to find out where I stand in this world, and if I don't like what I see ... I'll do something about it. Even though the very thought scares the hell out of me.

Wish me luck, Daddy.

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