



Graphic by [Steph](#)

Rating: **PG-13** for a little violence and language

Classification: Vignette, Angst

Spoilers: "Salvation"

Author's Notes: Okay, I've really got to stop getting sidetracked into these episode-reaction pieces. But after realizing that "Salvation" marks the second time that someone's had a vision of Harm on the losing end of a gunfight - well, you know what they say about idle minds. I wanted to make this as realistic as possible, so I apologize if it gets intense. This story picks up directly after the scene at the railroad tracks (won't make sense if you didn't see the ep), and proceeds as if there had been no vision to prevent the future events: in other words, the ambush DID occur. And you know what that means. Just trust me. P.S. This is pro-shipper, but not blatantly so.

"... there but for the grace of God go I ..."

2337 EST

Somewhere outside Baltimore ...

The pain wasn't as bad as he'd expected it to be. There was something strangely peaceful about lying here, staring up at the stars, even as his life drained away. It was truly over - nothing short of a miracle could change his fate now. There would be no last-minute heroics this time. As dire as it was, that knowledge had not been difficult to accept. So he simply watched the stars.

He didn't know how many times he'd been hit: it was all finished before his awareness could catch up. The backup he'd arranged had never arrived, and when the first shots rang out, all he could do was aim his service pistol against an automatic rifle. He hadn't even gotten a single shot off before a hail of bullets slammed him to the ground. He'd felt the burning agony then - four, maybe five, all to the chest - but now it had all blurred into a dull, chilling ache over his entire body, and a growing weariness that threatened to overtake his mind as well. His life wasn't flashing before his eyes. He wasn't angry that Palmer had won, or frustrated that he'd failed, or scared that he and three other good men were dying. None of it mattered now that he'd lost the strength to move, lost the feeling of the rough gravel

beneath him, lost the bizarre sensation of his own blood forming a shallow pool around him. The only things that pervaded his consciousness with any clarity at all were the steadily-slowing pulses of his weakened heart ... and those stars.

The stars had been there before him, and they would remain long after. Something about that unwavering light gave him comfort. As the sirens grew nearer, as his eyes fell closed, he imagined he could still see them shining serenely in the distance. And he was at peace.

0214 EST
Georgetown

Mac sat up in bed, not sure if she'd been awakened by the persistent ringing of the phone or by the eerie feeling that had settled over her. Only one could be easily rectified, so she stumbled across the apartment in search of the phone. "Mackenzie," she mumbled, still waking up.

"Mac?"

She recognized the voice, but not the tone. "Admiral? What's wrong?"

For the first time in her memory, A.J. Chegwiddden sounded completely uncertain. Lost, even. And it was 'Mac', not 'Colonel'. Something had happened.

"Is Brumby there with you?"

She glanced up. Mic was leaning against the bedroom doorframe, half-asleep but concerned. "Yeah, he's right here. Sir, what - "

"I need you both to come down to JAG right away. Don't worry about uniforms or anything - just come. All right?"

Now she was definitely worried. But the Marine in her didn't question. "We'll be there in fifteen, sir."

Mic, bless him, didn't question, either. The drive was a haze in her mind: suddenly she was standing in the Ops bullpen in her worn-out OCS sweats, with no recollection of how she'd gotten there. Bud and Harriet were sitting on Harriet's desk, just as disheveled and worried. Little A.J. was fast asleep on his mother's shoulder.

When the admiral emerged from his office, all of them were shocked by his haggard appearance. This man, who'd seen the horrors of war from the front row, now looked utterly defeated. His uniform jacket and tie were gone, his collar open in a very non-regulation manner, and his eyes seemed empty. Whatever awful news he'd received had aged him ten years in a matter of hours.

"Admiral, what's happened?" Bud asked in a hushed voice.

He shook his head. "Not until everyone's here. I don't know if I can do this more than

once.”

Mac started to remind him that Harm was down in Baltimore, on that ridiculous stakeout with Krohn and Palmer, but she stopped herself. Right now, her C.O. knew more than she did.

The waiting was mercifully short. Nevertheless, she'd been ready to scream when the glass doors opened; and the group looked up to see Renee Peterson.

Harm's girlfriend had never before set foot in JAG HQ without looking entirely put-together. Tonight, she was makeup-less, and her hair was pulled into a careless ponytail. In an obviously-borrowed Navy T-shirt, she looked more ... normal, more like someone Mac could actually picture her partner dating. But Harm wasn't here.

And in a flash of terrible inspiration, Mac knew why they were there.

She sank into a chair, unable to breathe. *Please, God, let me be wrong.*

The admiral's grim words sounded hollow and faraway in her ears. "I wanted you all to hear this from me, not from the news. Commander Rabb's mission tonight was set up by Clark Palmer. Somehow he contacted other DSD agents from inside Leavenworth, and they ambushed the van. Harm was ..." He faltered for a moment, but pushed ahead. "Harm was shot multiple times. The paramedics did everything they could to save him, but he ... he was gone before they even reached the hospital."

There was an unearthly silence in the room. Renee stared into nothing, her features crumbling. "He's dead?" she whispered, the tears already springing to her eyes. "No, he can't be, he's - oh, god ..."

She dissolved into quiet sobs, leaning against the wall for support. Admiral Chegwidden moved to take her in his strong arms, not knowing how else to console her. She had no one else. Harriet was crying freely in her husband's embrace, and Bud just kept shaking his head, his own eyes bright. Even Mic looked stunned. But Mac shook her head, disbelieving.

"That can't be true," she stated bluntly. "Palmer wouldn't just kill him. He's tricking us again, with some switch-around. He could have taken Harm and left someone else, or maybe ..."

"Sarah - "

"No, damn it!" she shouted, flinging herself away from Mic's gentle touch. "Harm is *not* dead!"

"Mac, it was him," the admiral said softly. "They called me to Baltimore General to identify the body. There was no switch. Could the DSD have duplicated his fingerprints? The scars from his crash?" At a loss, he swallowed a few times before feeling steady enough to continue. "I know he always seemed invincible, but we have to accept it. Even Harm couldn't have survived this - he never had a chance."

She looked at him with unseeing eyes. "No," she choked out, stumbling blindly toward Harm's office. Mic moved to follow, but the admiral held him back with a silent shake of his

head.

"Not yet. Give her some time."

Barely hearing them, she collapsed to her knees in the office, desperate to feel some of his spirit somewhere, anywhere. A framed picture on his bookshelf caught her eye, and she seized it with a trembling hand. The four of them at Bud and Harriet's wedding, smiling broadly as if no sorrow could ever reach them. She traced his perfect smile with a finger, ignoring the tears that dripped onto the glass. Could it really be? If Harmon Rabb, the quintessential Hollywood hero, could fall, was there anything left to believe in?

"How could you?" she demanded, her voice low and tortured. "How could you leave us like this?"

It was a good twenty minutes before the admiral approached the doorway, waiting patiently. She lifted her head and spoke tonelessly. "How's Renee?"

"The same as the rest of us. Numb." He moved into the room. "How are you?"

"Angry, I think." Mac gestured, unsure how to explain. "It wasn't supposed to happen like this. If he had to die, he shouldn't have been alone - we never got to say goodbye ..."

She swiped at the tear tracks on her cheeks. "Does his mother know?"

"I called the chaplain's office at Miramar." Behind his steely gaze, a deep ache lingered. "Right now, two men in uniform are walking up to her door, and she already knows why they're there, because she remembers the way it happened thirty years ago. Except this time, she doesn't have her son to hold on to. This time, they're coming to tell her that her only child is never coming home."

She didn't know how she'd gotten here, either. Hours and days had begun to swirl together into one continuous experience, and she found herself going through the motions of life without seeing or feeling. If she allowed herself to pause and look around, there would inevitably be something that reminded her that her best friend was gone, and the realization cut deeper each time.

Now, as she stood in his apartment in her dress blues, memories washed over her. Countless evenings spent hashing out their cases over whatever food was available, countless shared glances that had always given her an inexplicable comfort. She'd always felt secure here. But she'd never once been here without him, and without him, it was no more than an empty space.

"Where are you from, anyway?"

"Where friends don't sandbag friends."

"That's somewhere in Ohio, isn't it?"

Despite herself, she smiled wistfully. She'd been a regular here even before she really knew just who and what Harmon Rabb, Jr., really was. His flawless record and effortless charm hadn't won her over: it was the little things, like the mineral water he stocked just for

her, or the way he could navigate the chaos of her office without disturbing a single file. And the not-so-little things, like his unyielding passion for truth at any price. Somewhere in those first few months, she'd realized that this was a friendship worth fighting for, and more. So she'd followed him to the ends of the earth, putting everything on the line, just as he had for her. But this time, she hadn't been there, and that fact would haunt her forever.

"It's time, dear."

Patricia Burnett stepped inside and held out a hand to her. "The service starts in half an hour."

Mac had never met Harm's mother before this week, but the two women had felt a connection immediately. They both understood the other's pain in a way that no one else could. "I don't know how you did it, Trish," she said with quiet awe. "You lost your husband, your son's father - and you kept going."

"I didn't do it alone." Trish moved toward her with the measured pace of one who knew all too well how to keep her grief. "I had a very brave little boy who helped me remember all that was good about life. Now, I take solace in believing that they're together, somewhere, and that somehow there's a reason for all this."

Mac shook her head. "I stopped believing in reasons a long time ago," she replied softly.

Trish watched her for a moment. "You know he loved you, don't you?" Her head whipped around, and an unmistakable expression of anguish flickered across her features. The older woman continued, forestalling her protests. "I know. Renee's a lovely girl, and I know you've got someone else as well ... but if you could have heard his voice when he told me what he'd done in Australia, you'd understand. He never really forgave himself for that."

"We left a lot unsaid, didn't we?" Mac sighed, forcing back tears for the hundredth time.

"Don't hold on to regrets, dear. He'd want you to go on with your life. Just like his father wanted for me." Trish grasped her hand tightly. "Come on. It's time to say goodbye."

Walking into the church was like stepping into the past. Dozens of people whose lives Harm had touched, close friends and passing associations alike. Clayton Webb, Jack Keeter, Kate Pike, Meg Austin, Tom Boone, Annie and Josh Pendry, Bobbi Latham, Teresa Coulter, Elizabeth Hawkes ... none of these were surprising. Less expected were Corporals Sibley and Tesla of the Recon Marines - Commander Rice from the *Coral Sea* - Captain Alexandr Volkonov - and many others whose names had long since fled her memory.

Trish and Frank were already standing near the front, with Renee and the admiral. Most of the JAG crew was hovering nearby, drawing close to each other for comfort. Mac almost didn't dare advance. Every step toward them was a step closer to the casket, and she simply wasn't ready to see him. Until she did, there was still a way to deny it all, to pretend that he was off on an investigation or out flying. After that, there would be no going back.

Mic tightened his grip on her elbow, offering silent support. She steeled her nerves

and moved down the aisle. *Just keep breathing.*

As she approached, Trish attempted a watery smile. "It's harder than I thought," she said, a tremble in her voice. "Before, there was no funeral, because we didn't know ..."

"It's for the best," Frank soothed, a protective arm at her waist. "You won't have to wonder this time. There's closure here. He can rest."

Mac watched Harm's stepfather struggle with his own emotions, and realized just how much he'd cared for the once-resentful young man who'd come to accept him at last. He'd lost the only son he'd ever known. "Frank's right," she said quietly. "It's good for all of us, to see all these people who loved him."

"I know. I just ..." Trish brushed uselessly at her eyes. "It's so hard."

The chaplain appeared at her elbow and gently suggested that they say their goodbyes before the service began. She nodded, and Harm's closest friends moved to the altar to pay their final respects.

Mac's heart pounded as she neared, and she prayed silently to be somewhere far away from this tragic place. "I - can't," she gasped, turning to flee. "I can't do this."

"You can do anything, love," Mic urged, holding her steady. "And you'll regret it if you don't."

With her fiancé's hand gripping hers, she stepped up to the casket.

He still looked handsome, his dress whites and gold wings still pristine. And peaceful, she reflected, in spite of the violent manner in which his life had ended. But it all felt so *wrong* ...

A soft cry escaped her lips, and Mic gathered her in his arms. She was determined, though, to do this. For herself, and for him. "Goodbye, flyboy," she whispered brokenly. "You'll always be with me."

Then she allowed Mic to guide her toward one of the pews, as the last person in line reached the front.

Trish leaned down to kiss her son's forehead. "You're safe now, darling," she said tenderly. "I hope you know how many people are here for you today. You really made a difference in this world. I love you, sweetheart." Standing proudly straight, she raised her eyes and spoke reverently. "Harmon, take care of our little boy."

Mac squeezed her eyes shut and forced herself to be calm. There were enough tears here already. She knew death: it was familiar to her in a way that few others ever understood. But this death had claimed a truly good man, a man who'd dedicated his life to protecting the innocent. The world wasn't right today. Maybe it never would be again.

Admiral Chegwidden moved to the lectern and cleared his throat. "On behalf of Harm's family, I'd like to extend my sincere gratitude to all of you for coming to celebrate his life. It was an honor to be asked to speak today, but I'm certain that this will be one of the

hardest things I've ever had to do. So I ask for your patience.

"Commander Harmon Rabb, Junior, was a hero in every sense of the word. I don't say this lightly: I honestly believe it. It was my privilege to be his commanding officer for most of the past five years, and I can state without hesitation that he was one of the finest and most dedicated officers I have ever served with." The admiral smiled slightly. "I'm sure a lot of you are finding that hard to believe, given the number of times I've had to pull him out of trouble. But sometimes the world we live in doesn't conform to the rules that we set for ourselves, and Harm never let any concern for his own safety or career stand in the way of seeing justice done. That's a tough choice to make; yet he did it time and again without question. It's difficult to make sense of his loss, but I tell myself that he died the way he lived much of his life - in pursuit of the truth.

"Harm learned very early about the sacrifices we make in the name of duty. Losing his father at six years old forced him to grow up all too fast, but instead of making him doubt what he knew, it drove him to follow his father's path. He pushed himself to achieve his dream of becoming a naval aviator, and he quickly became one of the best. When that was taken from him, he could have left the service, but he didn't. He still felt bound by duty to protect those in need, and this time he did it with the law. Sometimes his methods were what you'd call unorthodox: when I heard he'd fired a weapon in the courtroom, I almost threw him in the brig myself. But I'd rather have an officer with that intensity any day over one who gives less than everything he or she has. And in five years, I have never seen Harmon Rabb surrender even an inch to anyone or anything not deserving.

"A lot of people who came through JAG thought he was larger than life. He wasn't. For every one of his passionate closing arguments or adventurous investigations, there was a wisecrack at staff call or a paper airplane sailing through the bullpen. He had run-ins with just about everyone, because that kind of thing is inevitable when you hold firm to your beliefs. Very few people could ever stay mad at him for long, though. Harm's sense of duty meant even more when it came to his friends. He would go to hell and back for any one of them, and I consider myself very fortunate to be counted among that number. I will forever be grateful for the risks he took for my daughter and me. I'd recently ripped him apart on a case, but when I needed help, he was there without a second thought. I think there are quite a few people who still have their lives simply because Harm was their friend."

The admiral wiped at his eyes for a moment before continuing. "The Navy lost a hero this week, and justice lost a champion. More importantly, a mother lost her son, and a little boy lost a godfather whom he'll never even know. But until I saw this church today, I had no idea just how many people lost a dear friend. I know we'll all remember Harm in our own ways, but I'll remember him as someone who, when he saw that he could help, never said no and never gave up.

"I'm not as familiar with the Bible as perhaps I should be, but I once saw this verse on a statue of an aviator from ages past. I think it captures Harm's spirit better than my words ever could. From Isaiah: 'Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" And I said, 'Here I am. Send me.' "

Mac felt the wind on her face and the ground beneath her feet, but she still wasn't sure she was really there. The service had been difficult, but now that she stood here at Arlington National Cemetery, it had all become so surreal, as if she were watching her life unfold from some far distant place. When she'd first started to comprehend that Harm was gone that awful night, it was as though one world had ended and another began. And she

realized that she didn't have the first clue what to do with herself in this new, colder world.

Around her, the solemn honor guard carried out their duties, but it scarcely registered in her mind. She dimly heard the admiral's words: "On behalf of the President of the United States ... in honor of your son's service ... with the thanks of a grateful nation." She saw Trish accept the folded flag with surprisingly steady hands. The rifle squad barely made her flinch. But when the roar of the jets sounded overhead, she lifted her eyes to the heavens, and saluted her friend one last time.

Where do I go now, Harm? How do I do this without you?

The assembled crowd began to disperse before she even noticed it was over. A hand on her shoulder brought her swiftly back to herself, and she looked up into Renee's tormented eyes.

"I loved him," she said quietly. "I hardly knew him, but I loved him just the same. So I can't imagine how hard it must be for you."

Before Mac could ask what she meant, Trish was in front of her, pressing a small object into her hand. "He wanted you to have these. Don't try to argue - it was the first thing in his will. You were everything to him, Sarah."

She looked down, already knowing what she held; his wings. And with that, her last defenses crumbled. The overwhelming grief broke through her Marine facade, and she fell to her knees by his grave and wept.

"I can't, Harm," she sobbed, not caring who could hear. "I can't let you go like this. I see you everywhere - I hear your voice in the halls ... Don't you understand? Someone like you isn't supposed to die! It destroys all the faith I ever had in - God, in everything. And there's nothing I can do. I can't do a damn thing about any of it ..."

Oh, but you can. The thought rose unbidden in her mind. This hadn't been a random act. Harm's killer had a name and a face, and he was out there somewhere. In that moment, she knew that whatever it took, she would find Clark Palmer and bring the fury of hell itself down on him. For her own sanity, and for her fallen partner. This one last thing she would do for him.

"Sarah? What are you doing?"

Mac jumped a little, startled by Mic's disoriented voice. He wandered out into the living room, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "It's three a.m., love. Please don't do this to yourself."

She looked down at the files and charts strewn across her desk, trying to remember what had compelled her to come back to this right now. "I - couldn't sleep," she answered distractedly. "I think I might have a lead on the weapons they used. I just have to track the supplier."

"Sarah, this can't go on." He sat down next to her and spoke gently but firmly. "Palmer is long gone. He and his friends are very good at making themselves invisible. You're

only going to drive yourself mad if you keep up this hunt.”

“You don’t understand. Palmer - ”

“ - is not your responsibility,” he finished. “Defense Intelligence and the FBI are working on it, and you know that Clayton Webb will move heaven and earth to bring him in. You’re letting this become an obsession, and it’s tearing you apart.”

She smirked faintly. “Funny. I used to accuse Harm of the same thing.”

“Then you understand why I can’t bear to watch you destroy yourself this way.” He reached out to take her hand, and found that she’d been clutching Harm’s wings, so tightly that they’d left angry red marks across her palm. His expression wavered between hurt and pity. “Sarah, you can’t help Harm now. He won’t come walking through the door on Monday, no matter what you do or don’t do about Clark Palmer. Even if you succeed with this chase - even if you stare the bastard down at gunpoint, it won’t make a difference to Harm. The only way to get your life back is to let him go.”

The words immediately took her to another place, more than a year ago ...

“You still can’t let go?”

“Not yet.”

And suddenly she understood. She felt that same despair that had driven him to the edge on a rainy night in Norfolk, three years before.

“Maybe I don’t want my life back,” she replied in a dull, lifeless voice.

Comprehension flashed in Mic’s dark eyes. “You really loved him.”

She echoed Harm’s words from that night so long ago. “I didn’t realize how much until he was gone.”

He nodded silently, then abruptly left the room. When he returned, he was dressed and holding his coat. With a jolt, Mac realized that he wasn’t just leaving for the night. “Mic, no,” she begged, a catch in her voice. “Yes, I loved Harm, but what does it matter now? We weren’t going to be together, even if - even if he’d lived. It doesn’t mean that I don’t love you. I know how that sounds, but ... please don’t go now.”

He shook his head in resignation. “I know you love me, Sarah, at least as much as you can. But I can’t watch you do this, and I know I can’t stop you from doing it. If you ever find what you’re looking for, maybe we can try again. But until you do ... this is goodbye.”

She didn’t even move as he kissed her cheek and walked out the door. Maybe she didn’t really want to go after him. It was probably safer for him to walk away from her with only his heart broken. God knew, the rest of the men in her life hadn’t been so lucky. Harm had been different - he’d always been different - but her curse had found him just the same.

If she’d had any tears left, she would have cried for the hopelessness of her life. Instead, there was nothing. Without conscious thought, she left the desolate apartment and drove aimlessly until something told her to stop. Recognizing the forbidding gates of Arlington,

she sighed. Whatever force was guiding her right now clearly wasn't going to let her go just yet.

Among the hundreds of rows of bleak white markers, she found her way without faltering. The night was cool, but she didn't feel it as she knelt by the still-new stone.
Harmon Rabb, Jr. Commander, United States Navy. 1963-2001.

Mac brushed her fingers over the carved insignia of the Distinguished Flying Cross. "Hi, sailor," she said softly. "It's me. I'm starting to understand you more every day. You went to the Wall ... I come here. I don't know why. It's not like I believe you can hear me better here than somewhere else. I'm not sure I believe you can hear me at all. But I don't have anywhere else to go. I can't make anyone else understand - I can't even make myself understand. I just know that this wasn't supposed to happen. Not like this."

She closed her eyes and willed the ever-present ache in her chest to go away. "This is going to send your ego through the roof, but now that you're gone, I don't even know which way is up. I end up places without knowing how I got there - it's all been running together in my head. I can't think straight. I can't face anyone at JAG - they treat me either like a china doll or a ticking bomb. Did everyone except me know how much I needed you? Did *you* know? I don't think you did. If you had, maybe we would have done some things differently ... maybe you'd still be here, and I wouldn't be so screwed up ..."

"Nah, you'd still be screwed up."

At that voice, her heart went cold with instant hatred. She turned slowly. "Come back to admire your handiwork, Palmer?"

"Something like that." The agent-turned-mercenary-turned-fugitive was leaning against a tree with a self-satisfied grin. "Harm was bright, I'll give him that. But he tended to let emotion get in the way of good judgment. Can't believe it took me this long to get him."

"Congratulations," Mac spat out.

"Don't get bitchy, Colonel. It's not your style." Palmer folded his arms. "You're more suited to the hard-ass, semper-fi thing. Especially seeing as you're armed and all."

With a start, she felt the cool grip of her service weapon against her palm. Had she brought it with her? It didn't make sense, but instinct kicked in, and she whipped it up toward him.

Before she could even aim, she was looking directly into Palmer's own pistol. He chuckled. "Now it gets interesting. What makes a girl bring a gun to her friend's grave? You weren't planning to end it all, were you, 'Mac'?"

Her name sounded hideous in his mocking tone; so unlike the way Harm had always said it, with a quiet familiarity. She narrowed her eyes. "Only for you, asshole."

"Wow, you're a few steps above spunky, aren't you? How come your Boy Scout partner wasn't this much fun?"

In response, she only clicked back the hammer, and his sneer grew colder. "Think it through, sweetheart. You can shoot me, but my reflexes are pretty freaking good. Do you

really think I won't get you, too?"

"Do I look like I care?" she shouted, letting her fury take over. "I don't give a damn what happens to me, you son of a bitch! It doesn't matter anymore, none of it! It hasn't mattered since the night Harmon Rabb died!"

"Then what are you waiting for??"

With a cry of both rage and anguish, she pulled the trigger -

- and sat bolt upright in bed, gasping for breath.

Next to her, Mic rolled over, bewildered. "What's wrong, love?"

She stared at him as if he were a stranger. What the hell was going on? Mic had left - hadn't he? Had she only dreamed that? Had she dreamed the confrontation with Palmer, too? It was all jumbled in her mind. It *had* seemed surreal somehow, but if that had been a nightmare, was it possible that some of the other things had been, as well? Could it be -

Hope surged through her. If everything since that phone call had been a part of this twisted scene ... *Harm might still be alive ...*

Mac flung herself out of bed and rushed to the phone, not daring to let herself believe. She'd been in that church - she'd felt his wings in her hand. Was this some cruel cosmic trick? Her hand trembled as she dialed the numbers. *Please, God, I'll do anything if you'll just make this right ...*

There was a click, and with one word, Sarah Mackenzie's life began again.

"Rabb."

She choked on unshed tears, reveling in the warm tenor of his voice. "Harm," she managed to croak out.

The weariness on the other end immediately turned to concern. "Mac? What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she whispered. For once, everything was right. "Are you okay?"

"Sure. We got 'em, Mac. Palmer led us right to his buddies, and all three of them are coming back to Leavenworth with us. It was the weirdest thing, though. Sergeant Major Krohn knew we were headed into an ambush, and he warned us off. If we'd crossed those tracks without backup ... well, I'd rather not think about it too hard. Suffice it to say that I think we got lucky tonight."

"Doesn't sound like luck to me, flyboy," she responded, smiling through the tears that coursed unnoticed down her cheeks.

"Maybe not." She could almost hear him smile back. "We're getting on a plane back to Kansas in forty minutes. What did you call for, anyway?"

"Nothing important," she lied. "I just ... I needed to hear your voice."

There was a pause. "Mac, are you all right?"

"Yeah. I'm okay."

"Because if you need me, I can hand these guys off to the MPs. They can do without me back at Leavenworth. I could be out there in an hour."

She was tempted to take him up on it, just to see with her own eyes that he was alive and well. "The admiral would kick you squarely in the six."

"I'd risk it. Just say the word, and I'm on my way."

The sincerity that radiated through his voice sent her flying. "No, I'm fine. I'll have it together by the time you get back tomorrow. Go put that bastard back where he belongs."

"With pleasure. Good night, ninja-girl."

"Harm, wait."

"Yeah?"

"When you get back ... we need to talk."

**** THE END ****

Okay, okay, stop throwing things at me already ... I know it's cheesy this way, but I didn't have the heart to actually kill Harm. He's just too damn hot. I figured this way would force Mac to make a move - cruel, yes, but the closer they get to this wedding thing, the more drastic the break-up will have to be. And there WILL be a break-up, believe me you. Also, there wouldn't have been much of an ending to the whole thing if she'd just killed Palmer. If you're wondering - the Bible verse is Isaiah 6:8, and the statue on which it is posted stands on the campus of Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. I think when it comes to duty, that pretty much says it all. Anyway, hope you enjoyed it - now I'm going back to the other story I was in the middle of, damn it ...