



Graphic by [Steph](#)

Rating: PG

Classification: vignette

Spoilers: "People vs. SECNAV"

Disclaimer: If I had any rights to this show, I would declare a do-over on this episode.

Author's Notes: I've always heard that if I can't say anything nice, I shouldn't say anything at all ... well, it's a little late for that, but I won't comment further on either the A or B plots of "People vs. SECNAV." Instead, I'm focusing on the slight strangeness of Harm's "What would I do without you?" line to Jen. Before you all freak out on me, let me state up front that I do not for a minute believe that TPTB are heading down Fraternization Lane with these two. I'm just playing around with the situation a little.

"Never miss an opportunity to think."

When the admiral made that comment a little while ago, I almost smirked in his face. Not thinking before speaking is one thing. Not thinking before acting is a whole other level of stupid. I've been guilty of that more than a few times, but I was fairly convinced that the Navy had cured me of that problem. I'm not so sure anymore.

I *did* think before agreeing to move in down the hall from my senior officer and become roommates with his almost-daughter. But did I think it through *right*? I needed to get out of my old place, and I never would've been able to afford a decent apartment in D.C. by myself. And I really like Mattie -- as it turned out, both of us needed a sister in our lives more than we realized. I'm not at all sorry that I made this call. I just didn't expect things to be so ... strange.

Not a whole lot of foresight going on there, I guess.

I don't know the first thing about shepherding a teenager through high school. I didn't exactly approach that period of my own life with the highest ambitions. Mattie, on the other

hand, is gifted. She's only been in school here for a few weeks, but already they're talking about moving her up to trigonometry, a subject I'll never be able to help her with. Sure, Commander Rabb always seems to be one step ahead of her -- he checks her homework and reminds her of Annapolis's academic standards whenever she complains. When he's around, they're a sweet little family unit that restores all my faith in society. It's just that he's not always here.

I know it's not his fault. I know he wishes he didn't have to leave so often. The fact is, we took the oath, and we go where duty calls. And when you're as good at your job as Commander Rabb is, duty keeps the phone ringing off the hook. Being a single parent in the military is a spectacularly rough gig, so I try to pick up the slack for him whenever I can. It's really the least I can do after everything he's done for me. The admiral's comments at Christmas notwithstanding, I do still feel indebted to him for insisting that I get a second chance two years ago, when no one, me included, was sold on the idea. I'm grateful for the opportunities he's given me to stretch my wings, like when I clerked for him last year. I'm relieved that he refused to feel betrayed by my testimony at his trial, and also that he chose to come back to the Navy when it must have been difficult for him. Most importantly, I admire the way he cares for Mattie, because I know I could have used someone like that in my life ten years ago.

So I'm happy to do what I can. The thing is, me giving Mattie guidance on much of anything is pretty much the blind leading the blind. Simple issues like how late she stays up somehow manage to get away from me. What happens when she comes home with stories of friends smoking pot or having sex? What am I supposed to say to that? Go talk to your guardian? Right, that'll work. Especially if he's an ocean away.

I can't help but feel at least a little responsible for her, but at the same time, I'm terrified of that responsibility. Commander Rabb doesn't seem to see that, though. He trusts me far more than he should. It's a nice feeling, to hear him say things like "What would I do without you?", but it's also intimidating, and it's ...

And there's the other problem. Or maybe it's part of the same problem. I don't know.

More and more, I'm finding it hard to know how to act around the commander. The three of us have dinner together a lot, and sometimes we'll rent movies on weekends, neither of which are activities I'm used to doing with officers. At first I thought they were just including me to be polite, but Mattie went out of her way to make it clear that she felt I belonged there, and Commander Rabb didn't make any attempt to pull her back from that assertion.

I never expected to have to juggle so many different views of the same person: as a senior officer, as a sort of rescuer, and ... what? Not just a neighbor, really, and not a friend. Definitely not a brother, because when I'm truly being honest, I realize that I have the tiniest hint of a crush on him. I never used to give it any thought, because I always saw him first and foremost as a senior officer -- a very, very senior officer, out of my league in more ways than one. But over the past year or so, I've been obliged to see him more as a complete person, to recognize his flaws and feelings, and I think I actually admire him more for having seen those. In realizing that he's just a man doing his best to do the right things, I realized that he's not wildly different from me or anyone else.

Problem is, he was a lot easier to deal with when he was entirely out of reach.

Oh, Christ, listen to me. He's *still* out of reach, moron. The moment either of us allows ourselves to doubt that will be the moment both our careers come to a screeching halt.

Besides, it's not like I actually believe that he has any interest in me whatsoever. I can deal with occasionally thinking he's cute. I just don't think I could handle him thinking / am.

Which is why that long look the other day, just before he left for Europe, freaked me out a little.

Of course, no one truly knows how to read him, least of all me, so I really shouldn't be reading anything into that one moment. It's just ... I feel like he's depending on me now, more so than I would have thought possible for him. And it's created this constant, nagging fear in the back of my mind that I'll somehow let him down, that I'll let Mattie down. For the first time in a long time -- maybe the first time ever -- my choices are going to affect someone besides me, and I'm not quite sure how I feel about that.

So, to put it simply, I'd better not miss any more opportunities to think.

*** THE END ***