

Summary: Admiral Janeway reveals her regrets. This story was part of the JDI Challenge of February 2005.

REGRETS

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I lay here in the darkness beside her, hating myself and loving her, both more deeply, and more fiercely with every passing breath.

It was her anniversary. Not ours. Hers. And his. Their one year wedding anniversary.

So here she sleeps, in my bed. Her hair splays across my Starfleet blue cotton sheets, her ageless features in peaceful repose.

She came in the night, as she had so many times before, seeking my advice. A present for him.

She asked me what to get her husband, to 'commemorate properly the passage of a year.'

I had been trying to forget that very thing actually, already half gone on a bottle of Zeldan whisky. So my tongue slipped around my thoughts and I mumbled, "A different wife."

Later, stone cold sober I recalled how nasty I sounded.

She thought that I was criticizing her with the comment.

Nothing could have been further from the truth, and my loosened tongue begged her forgiveness, and then cursed him in the next breath.

Then my liquid brain poured out my secrets, my soul. To my horror, I told her how I had gritted my teeth -- she seemed so happy -- and performed the ceremony all the while silently pleading for a Delta Quadrant enemy -- there were so many after all, where was one when you needed one -- to blow a hole in the bulkhead and strike me dead.

I cried then. She had never seen me do so, she said, considerably alarmed.

At first I stiffened when she moved to pull me into a comforting embrace. Me, stalwart captain. Lonely.

"I cry too," she said. "He doesn't know."

My darling, my Seven, why would you cry, I asked. My fingers stroking over her face already beginning to streak with tears.

"Because despite having access to my emotions now, I feel nothing when he touches me."

Her eyes told me then her lips, how much she felt right then in detailed contrast.

The joining of our lips was a heart-stopping moment. I had never guess it would feel so... complete. For me. Not for her. She, whom I had guided through so many human rituals, guided me now through her imagination, and mine, and into making the reality of our dreams.

I had known for a long time that I loved her. Dreams weren't forbidden to sex-starved captains after all. But I was not prepared for her touches on me, and mine on her, and the utter fulfillment they would bring.

We made love far into the early hours.

Now I lay awake praying dawn never comes, knowing I can have no other nights with her.

She is his.

After all, I gave her to him.

* * *

The alarm roused her. She kissed me before I could speak my resolve. I clutched her tightly, convulsively, clinging before I moved away, oh so slowly.

My voice broke as I spoke. "Good bye, Seven."

"I wish you to terminate my marriage," she said.

"I can't."

"You are the only one who can. I will not live a lie."

Her words haunt me now. I will not live... But then I wrapped my duty around me. "I can't," I repeated.

"We will discuss this when I return," she said, her voice matching mine in its coolness.

We never did get to that discussion.

* * *

Seven took the science station position on a survey shuttle mission that day. A plasma feedback overloaded the containment field. Plasma fire erupted where she stood.

She was beamed directly to sickbay. I'm quite certain my voice was louder than Chakotay's though we both barked the order.

Chakotay held her as the Doctor worked to save her life.

In the end he failed -- one of the very few times in his photonic existence.

As I stepped over the threshold into sickbay, the antiseptic smells, the perfect cleanliness of the place, I found it suddenly cloying. My gaze sought out the sight, my heart thudding double-time. She was talking with Chakotay.

Her voice was halting. Already she was dying. The Doctor stood nearby giving the husband and wife their space to say their good byes. I strode up quickly, angrily. The Doctor held me back.

Her eyes were unfocusing even as she turned, aware of my arrival. Her final words were rough and fading. And for me.

"I... loved." The vitality faded then from her ice blue eyes. My own pulse slowed in time with the one in her throat that I tried to will to strengthen, to continue as I watched.

However, my will was not strong enough. Or maybe hers was no longer willing to fight. I only know that I wished my heart had stopped beating when hers did.

Chakotay's jaw hardened to granite. His eyes met mine. Dead like mine. Dead like hers.

And things were never, ever the same again.

THE END