

You'll Be In My Heart

—MinervaDeannaBond

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I owe this story entirely to dorthekirsten, who made a very special request. In "Thursday's Child," we saw something that rarely happened on the show: Jessica hurt so badly that she wept. dorthekirsten made an excellent point to me in wondering how Seth would have reacted to the whole story if Jessica had told him - and them being so tight, I believe she would have. Maybe she would've had her reservations, but only Seth can get her to talk about what's really on her mind. I imagined this deleted scene as follows: yes, Jessica would have been stung by the possibility of infidelity, but also by something much deeper and more emotional than that. Thanks again to dorthekirsten - I owe you one for this.

P.S. Read this story and then listen to Phil Collins' amazing song "You'll Be In My Heart." It's a perfect song for Jessica and Seth's relationship, if you ask me.

What is eating at you, woman? What are you holding back now?

Normally, Seth Hazlitt could read his best friend like a book. He and Jessica Fletcher had known each other for so long that there were virtually no secrets between them – and considering the line of work that Jessica often found herself involved in, that was saying something. They confided in and offered comfort to each other on a level of intimacy that would have been perceived as odd by outsiders... but for the citizens of Cabot Cove, who had known the two of them almost as long as they had known each other, they knew that there was a special bond between Jessica and Seth, one that could not be severed by wind, rain, or broken hearts. Between Seth's brutal honesty and Jessica's gentle but firm forthrightness, there was nothing that the friends held back from one another.

At least, that's what Seth thought up until now. He'd picked Jessica up from the airport as he always did whenever she came back from a book tour or another trip of the kind. Normally, these were moments he looked forward to. Typically, he arrived at the terminal in Portland just in time to witness

Jessica's plane touch down, and the second she managed to push her way through the coming and going crowd, she threw her arms around him and gave him a hug. That hug always told him how glad she was to be home at last, to be among friends, to see him. Then, after waiting for what seemed an eternity by the luggage carousel for her bags, they made their way to his car, loaded her things in the back, and headed for Cabot Cove, talking a mile a minute and making up for lost time.

This time, however, things were so different that he knew something was wrong. Jessica had indeed made her way through the crowd and given him a hug, but with none of her usual joy. This hug was much more reserved – rather than saying *I'm so glad to see you*, it was saying *I feel obligated to do this*. Her heart just wasn't in it, nor was it in their following conversation. They talked, sure, but Jessica's chatter was a little too lively, if you asked Seth. But the too-perky talking was not the main reason that Seth knew something was wrong with Jessica. He always knew when she was genuinely happy by looking in her eyes. As unbelievably corny as it sounded, it was the truth. When Jessica was happy, her big blue eyes sparkled sapphire with the joy she'd been blessed with. Now, that sparkle was gone in spite of the smile on her face, which gave Seth a niggling, worrisome feeling in his gut. Something had happened to her on that trip, and whatever that something was must have been pretty terrible, because only something truly awful could take the light out of Jessica's eyes. *What's wrong, Jess? Why won't you tell me?*

All the way back to Cabot Cove, Seth wanted nothing more than to ask Jessica what was on her mind, but every time he opened his mouth to ask her the pertinent question, she would bring up some innocuous topic of conversation, like the weather or the latest scrape Sam Booth had gotten himself into. The doctor carried on the steady flow of talk as though nothing was wrong, but inside, he was ready to burst. *She doesn't want to talk, that much is obvious. But darned if I'm gonna let her keep it bottled up inside. As much as she's pestered me about what's on my heart over the years, it's high time I pestered her. I want to know what's taken the smile off her face, 'cause this isn't the Jessica I know.*

She won't like it if you push her like that, a little voice whispered in his brain.

Nobody asked you, Seth shot back at his conscience. *That's the only way to get through to her, stubborn as she is. If I leave her alone, she'll let this*

eat her alive. If I give her a good push, on the other hand, she'll talk. I know her, far better than anyone else in this town. She'll talk to me.

His conscience laughed. *Good luck.*

Shut up.

By the time they arrived at Jessica's house on Candlewood Lane, the sun was beginning to set and a cool evening breeze began to blow, making the trees clap and whistle in a nighttime song. Yet for all of this peace, a tension hung between Jessica and Seth, so thick that one could cut it with a machete. She got out of the car and strode up the front walk to open the door, while Seth unloaded her two bags and carried them up to the house. Once he'd set them down near the foot of the stairs, he waited on the threshold for her to speak. Normally, this was the time when she'd ask him what their dinner plans were. They always had dinner together after he picked her up. *Come on, Jess. Don't tell me you're gonna cancel dinner on me.*

"Seth?" Jessica gazed at him with a *why-are-you-still-here* expression on her face. "Did you need something?"

Seth's heart sank, only to be replaced by anger that had been steadily blooming from his injured feelings all the way to Cabot Cove. "For crying in a bucket, Jess, you ought to know why I'm standing here. What do we always do whenever I pick you up from the airport and drive you all the way home?"

Jessica shook her head. "I'm sorry, Seth, but I just don't feel like having dinner tonight."

"Uh-huh. Translation, you don't feel like having dinner with *me*."

Blonde brows came down over blue eyes. "Now, Seth..."

"Don't you *now* Seth me, woman." Seth was careful to keep his voice under control, yet the ire he felt clearly bled through every word. "What is bothering you?"

"Nothing, Seth. There's nothing bothering me!"

"Bull. I have known you for over thirty years, and I know when something's eating at you. Your hug earlier when I picked you up was colder than an Arctic breeze, you ducked the subject better than a Georgia politician whenever I tried to ask you about something deeper than the weather, and now you're ready to kick me out of your house and cancel our traditional homecoming dinner. Out with it. What's wrong?"

Jessica's eyes frosted over, but not in time to mask the pain that flashed within them. "I think you need to leave, Seth. This conversation is over."

That tore it. Seth stomped over to Jessica, took her by the arm, and frog-marched her into the living room, where he sat her down on the sofa and took a seat right next to her. "This conversation is *far* from over, Jessica. What happened to you on that trip of yours? Were you robbed? Was a friend of yours killed? Whatever it is, spill it. If you don't talk about it, this is gonna consume you until there's nothing left, and that is the last thing I want to see happen to you. Now what is it?"

Astonished though she was at the urgent anger in his voice, Jessica shook her head and looked down at her hands, which were interlocked in her lap. "I never thought something like this could ever happen to me," she said quietly, the catching of her voice a hint of a lump forming in her throat. "I never imagined I would be hurt so badly."

Fear suddenly riddled Seth's stomach as a nasty thought shot to the forefront of his mind. "Oh God... Jess, you weren't raped, were you?"
Please, God, don't let it be true...

Jessica shook her head again, more furiously this time. "No, Seth, of course not. I wasn't hurt physically. Emotionally..." Her voice trailed off and she closed her eyes.

Seth's heart clinched when he saw tears leaking out from under her closed lids and he took her hands in both of his. "What happened?"

A few heartbeats passed before Jessica spoke again. "I received a phone call from a woman named Nancy Landon. She said that she had been following my career for some time and wanted to meet with me. When we finally did meet for lunch, she asked for my help. Her son wasn't doing very well in his business and they were struggling financially..."

"And she figured since you were a celebrity in town, she could beg you for a quick buck," Seth said disgustedly.

"Not quite. She did ask me for money, but not because I'm famous. She..." Another tear trickled down Jessica's cheek and she wiped it away. "She said that she knew Frank when they were stationed together in Korea. Then she told me that Frank promised to help her in any way he could because..." More tears came and she drew in a shaky breath. "Because Frank was the father of her son."

Seth's jaw dropped open. "*What?*" He felt like he'd just been walloped in the gut with a baseball bat - about five times. Frank Fletcher, who'd only had eyes for Jessica, had not only cheated on her, but fathered a son with another woman? Unthinkable! "She did not!"

Jessica nodded through her tears. "I'm afraid so. I didn't want to believe her at first and I did some digging of my own, even contacting Frank's old army buddies to get the truth. They couldn't give me a straight answer, and then Nancy showed me a letter from Frank - and yes, it was real, it was his handwriting - promising to do whatever he could to take care of her and her son. It was dated the year after he returned home from Korea, which would have coincided with the birth of Nancy's son Steven." She covered her eyes with one hand. "Seth, I didn't know what to think or what to do. It was horrible... like someone was trying to tear my heart right out of my chest."

"That woman just as good as did that with what she told you," Seth growled, shock and anger roiling in his gut. "Was it true, or was she just trying to manipulate you into helping her with her financial difficulties?"

Jessica nodded again. "That's exactly it. Just before I left, Nancy told me the truth. Another pilot was the father of her son, but Frank had promised to help her because they were friends... and because it was just out of the goodness of his heart." She sniffled and smiled through her tears. "She told me I was a lucky woman, and that Frank was a wonderful man."

Seth snorted. "Probably the nicest thing she said to you all that time." He let go of her hands and clenched and unclenched his. "I'm not one for murder at all, but I could kill that woman for what she did. She used you just for your money without giving a thought to how deeply she could have and did hurt you." He punched one fist into the palm of his other hand.

"Back in *my* army days, we would've had two different names for a woman like that. The first name is Jezebel. The second one starts with a B and rhymes with *witch*."

Jessica sighed and wiped another tear away. "For once, I'm inclined to agree with you. On one hand, I feel sorry for her because she was a struggling single mother, but... how can I forgive what she did?"

"I know. Making you think Frank would ever cheat on you. He was crazy for you, Jess. There was no one else in the world for him but you."

"It's not just that, Seth." Jessica looked up at him, her blue eyes awash with fresh tears. "Infidelity would have been bad enough, but the possibility that Frank had fathered a child..." She closed her eyes again and sniffed; Seth handed her a Kleenex, which she accepted with a nod. "That was what hurt the most. Frank and I could never have children because I was infertile. Before I found out the truth, I had this awful thought that Frank had an affair because he wanted what I couldn't give him: a baby. I could never bear his children, so he turned to another woman instead. And when I finally met Steven, I couldn't help looking at him and thinking, 'What if he had been mine?'" She inhaled again and dabbed at her eyes. "I was so hurt that I actually began to think that Frank was unfaithful to me, not because he didn't love me... but because I couldn't have a baby. All because I couldn't have children!" With that, she finally broke down, burying her face in her hands and weeping, all of the heartache and pain she had endured cutting open fresh wounds.

Seth felt like crying himself. When she told him the story, he knew it was bad... but never did he think it was this bad. He hated to see her hurt and especially to see her cry, which only made him want to throttle Nancy Landon all the more. But now was not a time for anger. His dearest friend was in pain and he needed to comfort her... and so he did. Reaching out for her, Seth gathered Jessica into his arms and pulled her close until her head was resting against his shoulder and her body was turned flush to his; relief sang through his bones when she wrapped her arms around him and held on for dear life. "Shh, it's all right," he murmured softly as she continued to sob into his shoulder. "You've been hurt, so you go ahead and cry. Those tears will heal you better than anything else." Gently, he began to rock her in his arms, as though she were a baby. "I'm here for you, Jess. I'll always be here."

He felt her head nod against his shoulder. Seth had known Jessica for so long that he knew exactly what every nod, every touch, and every smile meant, all without saying a word. This nod said *I know* plainer than if she had spoken. But speak she did, through the tears she cried. "I love you, Seth."

The precious words only made him clutch her even tighter against his heart. "I love you too, Jess." *So much. God, this woman, this precious woman... how could anyone want to hurt her like this? If anyone else ever does this to her, I'll knock them into the middle of next week.*

No further words were spoken by either one of them for a long time. Seth held Jessica and rocked her in his arms while she cried, letting the pain flow out with her tears. When she didn't have any tears left, she dried her eyes and offered Seth a watery smile. "Thank you, Seth. I didn't realize how much I needed to let the pain go... or how much I needed the comfort of a friend."

Seth reached out and caught one stray tear that was still meandering down her cheek. "Jess, the last thing I want is to see you hurt. I'm always here for you, no matter how hurt you are. If you need to be held, these arms of mine'll keep you safe. You can count on it."

Jessica wrapped her arms around him once more. "Seth, you're an angel. Do you know that? An absolute angel."

Seth chuckled softly and embraced her, taking comfort of his own in the soft presence of her body and the steady beat of her heart against his chest. "If I were an angel, I'd heal you of all this pain for good."

"You already are. Just... don't leave. I need to know you're here."

"No chance of me leaving. I'm never gonna let you go."

At long last, Jessica smiled. Resting her head against Seth's shoulder, she said quietly, "You know... deep in my heart, I always knew that Frank wouldn't be unfaithful to me. It wasn't because of my own vanity. It was because I knew his love for me was unconditional. He loved me in spite of the fact that we couldn't have children, even though it hurt both of us to know that. I think it made our love even stronger."

"I know it did. You two weathered some pretty nasty storms together, but you always came out stronger." His hand gently stroked her hair, running the silky golden waves and curls through his fingers. "I know you and I have weathered some storms of our own. We sure weathered one tonight."

"And emerged stronger?"

"Ayuh. If there's one thing I'm sure of, Jess, it's that nothing can break the bond between us."

"Nothing. And there's one thing I'm sure of, too."

"What's that?"

Jessica kissed his cheek and rested back into his arms, giving thanks for her dear friend, the bond that could never be broken, and the love that kept them strong. "That you will always be in my heart. Always."