

Starless

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by [nostalgia](#)

Summary

In the dimness of the half-lit room she reaches for him, her face expressionless and her voice flat. She tells him that she needs to feel something, anything. He'd have hoped he meant too much to her for her to demand something like this from him. Apparently he does not.

But he doesn't reject her advances, and he doesn't resist when she pulls him towards her bedroom. He doesn't know how to turn her down, even like this. In some ways he's weaker than her, and he knows it.

She knows it too.

There are no stars.

There are no stars and worse than that there's no captain. She's still locked away in her quarters with the lights turned down, and he still can't get her to tell him why she's doing it. Something's wrong, but he doesn't know what it is and that means he can't help fix it. It frustrates him.

There are whispers, everywhere – that she is sick, that her mind has finally cracked, even that she's dead.

She's not dead. She could be sick. He's worried that she might be going mad.

He walks towards her quarters with a mixture of hope and trepidation. These visits are starting to feel futile, but he has always leaned towards optimism and he's forcing himself to stick to that. Maybe this time she'll step out of the darkness a little, maybe this time she'll finally want to talk.

Maybe, maybe, maybe.

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She doesn't want to talk. She wants to do something else entirely. It's a bad idea. It's a terrible idea. And he isn't good enough not to go along with it.

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It isn't like he has imagined, like he wanted. These are not ideal circumstances and, worse, they're taking advantage of each other. There's only so much either of them can expect from this encounter.

Even so, it disappoints. It's quiet, and awkward, and strangely formal. A new distance appears between them even as they finally intertwine, and reality is far less romantic than even his least tender fantasies of being with her. They move gracelessly, trying to outrun inevitable regret. It's not terrible, but it isn't the stuff of poetry either.

He calls her "Captain" when he comes.

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Afterwards she gets out of bed and stands by the window, sheet wrapped around her like a shroud. “I thought it might help,” she says, very quietly, almost inaudible.

“Did it?” he asks, and she looks at him, surprised, like she had forgotten he was there.

She turns back to the window, to the endless depths of the Void. “I don’t know.”

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The second time it happens he is struck by the tragedy of getting what you wanted but not how you wanted it. To have craved something – someone – for years and when you finally touch them all you get is emptiness.

But the second time is better, because he has given up his hopes. It isn’t quite as awkward, it feels less like being with a stranger. It’s almost good.

This time he calls her “Kathryn,” but it doesn’t make a difference – she still won’t talk.

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He lies at her side for half an hour, waiting for the conversation that never begins, but finally he has to move, because it’s late, and he’s tired, and sleeping the night away in the captain’s bed is simply not an option. She has to be above reproach, even if half the crew currently think she’s lost her mind. She can’t be caught in bed with her first officer, and yet she still hasn’t told him to leave. He starts to wonder if she’s using him as a means of self-destruction.

He dresses slowly, loitering, in case she calls him back to bed, in case she finally wants to talk. When there’s nothing left to put on he turns to say his goodbyes and finds that she has fallen asleep, curled on her side, hair half-covering her face. She looks like a different person. She doesn’t look like his captain. She doesn’t look like she could snap him in two with a few harsh words. She does, however, look peaceful.

He doesn’t wake her.

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After the third time he hates her a little, because she still won’t talk and he feels more useless than ever. Something has broken her, and fucking the pain away obviously isn’t working. Maybe if he were more tender, or if maybe if he were rougher, or maybe if he were someone else. Maybe if... but he doesn’t think any of these options would change a damn thing.

He hates himself more, though, because he has given in to her when she’s vulnerable – again – and when all of this is over neither of them will be able to forget that. He is achingly aware of how rarely he actually says no to her, about anything.

Why does it have to be him? Why does it have to be her?

“This was the last time,” he tells her, as he gets ready to leave.

“I don’t believe you,” she says.

He can’t blame her – he doesn’t believe himself either. He turns away from her and stares out into the Void, looking for illumination, an insight, anything.

But there are no stars.

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