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## Remorse

by Garf Collins

As he prepared to brief his latest PhD student, Professor Robert Tyler picked up a paper entitled, 'Agnostic remedies for cancers.' Instead of his usual careful reading he was startled as he recognised the author's name – Dr Nicola Evans.

He was immediately back nearly twenty years when she was his research assistant. He took her on as a newly qualified PhD with experience in immunotherapy. She wasn't conventionally beautiful – indeed that was far from his mind when he made the selection. But she had a vivacity and enthusiasm which penetrated his usual quiet absorption. He increasingly came to depend on her enthusiasm and encouragement.

He remembered the crucial night of their project. They returned to assess whether the drug they had added to a cancer cell sample had worked. Looking down the high powered microscope Robert shouted, "Nicola. Come and look. We've done it. I'll project the image. The cancer cells are being destroyed."

He remembered seeing the excitement in her eyes as she looked at the screen. Then in the elation which accompanies such rare peaks of achievement they hugged each other. The hug turned into an embrace and as he drew his head away she kissed him lightly. Another kiss. More urgent this time and he felt her body against his. She leaned against the bench as he pressed against her -the lines of the cell image making camouflage on the back of his lab coat. They took their coats off and she began urgently thrusting against him. He was now overwhelmed by the fervent embrace. More breathless kissing and fumbling with buttons then suddenly she pushed him away. "Stop. Security will be here soon. We mustn't be caught out. The conference in Berlin is only a month away. We'll have to wait until then."

He remembered only the frustration of the wait but no feelings of guilt towards his wife or Nicola's partner.

At the conference they became passionate lovers and in the succeeding weeks they managed to find opportunities to continue their relationship. He remembered their last rendezvous. Nicola spoke of a friend who wanted her lover to divorce and live with her. He was married with two young children. She asked Robert for his opinion. They both knew that this was a coded plea. His answer was,

"She should think carefully about it. Divorce can be very messy and leaves nobody better off."

Soon after this Nicola moved to Canada to pursue her research. Robert was glad in one way. It had removed a major problem for him. But it was as if the temperature in the lab had fallen. Work was much less fun.

He thought of his wife, Mary, and how he had never confessed his affair. Their marriage had been quietly successful and their children had grown up well. He was very grateful to her. But his guilt was not for her it was for Nicola. She had left thinking he had been just an opportunistic lover. Now he knew where she was, he would make up for that. He chose a card with a medical theme and wrote anonymously 'I always loved you.'

"She will know who sent it," he thought. "I'll address the card at the lab tomorrow." Now he felt less remorseful about disrupting Nicola's life but guilty of once more being unfaithful to his wife.

Mary came across the card that evening. She said, "Thanks for the card, love. There was no need. I knew you loved me when you didn't leave us all those years ago."