

## Belonging

by Carol Sandford

Deanna sat with her back against the very old, gnarled tree. It had taken her a while to find a comfortable niche amongst the tangle of exposed roots to be able to sit with her legs out-stretched so that the man's head could rest comfortably in the shallow nest of her exposed thighs.

Watching the sun play across his handsome features as he soaked up the hazy rays of the rapidly setting sunset, creating minuscule shadows that flickered along with her heartbeat. Smiling tenderly into his eyes, even though they were lightly closed, Will didn't need to see her to know her thoughts. The gentle smile told her that he felt the same way.

Deanna reached into the wicker basket beside her, picking out another large, luscious, deliciously scented strawberry and dangled it lazily beneath his nose, tempting him...tormenting him.

Will opened his mouth to accept the tantalizing morsel, but Deanna deprived him of his reward for thinking up this perfect moment - this perfect setting - this perfect reunion between him and the woman he loved. The woman that he was allowed to love again, only this time, nothing was going to step in between them. Life had at last shown him that heartbeats could stop in an instant, but feelings could not. And their feelings refused to be pushed aside any longer.

Will opened his eyes with surprise. "Hey! no fair!"

But he was moved to silence as the angelic, tinkling laughter of his Imzadi echoed through the leaves as he watched her put the strawberry between her own lips and slowly bite down, her eyelids fluttering shut as the sensuous taste of the fruit tickled her tongue. Will reached up close to her face, snaking out his tongue to lick the juice from her now pink tinged and glistening lips.

A groan made its way up from the very pit of his stomach as those same lips opened to allow his tongue to slip in and caress hers, drinking the fruit's juices along with her. Will moved to his knees, intent on moving nearer to her, needing to get closer, inside and out. His huge hand pushed its way into the ebony mane of hair, as he clung to her as though his life depended on it.

Until now, he hadn't realised just how much he needed her, not only beside him but in every aspect of his life. Joined once more, Will felt lost without her. Will ~was~ lost without her. Every thought, every dream was filled with her, only her. Everything he did, he did for her and only her. Deanna had become, at last, the other side of him - the better side. The side that was for her, only ever for her, and Will was the happiest man alive again.

Something hit Will on his back and they broke apart with shock until they spied the attacker. An apple, a huge green apple had broken away from its anchor to join the few already scattered around. As Will picked it up, he sat beside Deanna and studied the fallen fruit with

interest.

Deanna pouted, her eyes alight with mischief, "Aw Will, you didn't get to pluck this one."

Their eyes locked as the meaning of her words bounced between them, a lazy grin spread across his handsome face, his eyes lightening up with the opportunity to tease came to chance.

"No fun in having something that just falls in your lap. A challenge is much more rewarding don't you think?"

Deanna rose to the bait, "Oh...so you think I was a worthwhile challenge? Maybe I didn't want to be considered a challenge. Maybe I really didn't want you to hunt me down, or batter down my defences just to make love to me. Maybe I didn't want you to rescue me from the clutches of the Sindarin raider. Maybe I wanted him to be the one to show me the meaning of intimacy. Maybe I rather liked the idea of someone dangerous, someone who didn't care about my feelings. Someone who wasn't going to become my Imzadi on my first physical encounter with the male form. Maybe I wanted to 'sleep around'... Experiment... Live life like a normal, young, vibrant, red-blooded woman."

Each word that fell from her lips was met with puzzlement, surprise and then unease. Did she really feel like that. Did she really regret that he was the first man to 'pluck the fruit of her youth'?

He suddenly felt guilty. How long was it before she let another man invade her body after he ran out on her all those years ago? A few days...weeks...months...years!? He was ashamed to admit that he had never considered what he had done to her.

Oh, he knew he'd treated her in the worst way imaginable. He had taken her heart, tucked it into his pocket like a prized medal and left. No explanation, no letter, no apology, nothing. The worst he ever felt of himself was a heel. He hadn't even had the manners to set her free.

As he studied the beautiful woman in front of him, Will suddenly began to look deeper. Sure he had taken her innocence. Sure he had shown her the pleasures of womanhood, and sure she had enjoyed every tantalizing moment along with him.

But making love to Deanna Troi had sealed his fate - their fate. And he had left, leaving her suspended. Having given her body, her heart and her very soul to him, and knowing that he had felt the same. Felt that same wonder, that same unity. That very same realisation that they would be forever locked together, or until they crossed paths and beds once more.

And then he had left, without a word. Tucking their liaison into his back pocket and walking away with a barely a bruise.

Only it didn't occur to him that he was leaving her with those same feelings, exposed and raw, and devastated. And it didn't occur to him that when they came face to face again, that time for her would start moving again. That they would be together again. That the Imzadi bond would be as strong as it was all those years ago.

God, he had been a fool. A heartless, callous, stubborn fool. It had taken him years to finally stop and take another look at his relationship with Deanna Troi. But she had never stopped looking...and waiting. She had waited for twelve, long years for him to finally stop and take a second look at her and his life.

Will was ashamed. Ashamed of being that heartless, callous fool.

Will rolled away from her, his mind effortlessly cutting her off. How many times had he done that to her when it suited him? When he thought he was falling into those obsidian eyes, and losing himself to their depths. Falling into that cosy routine like couples do when they strolled home hand in hand after a poker game.

How many times had he stopped himself falling in love with her again?

Until now.

Her quiet admission broke the silence, "I'm sorry..."

Deanna had moved to sit on her knees facing the man she loved, her own unease radiating from her, her eyes apologetic. Gone was the look of lust as she sat before him. The creamy shoulders, the vast expanse of breast, her dress hanging low from when Will had unplucked each pearly button, one by one, freeing her body for him to devour with his eyes, and eventually he had planned, her body. Her hair, wild, free, and totally abandoned, barely covered her nakedness. Neither one of noticed now.

Will studied her with intent at first, trying to gauge her sincerity, but then gave her a shadow of a smile as he turned his head away.

"Why...why are you sorry? In amongst your words were truth Deanna, you can't deny telling the truth, least of all to me."

"But its not true Will, I swear it."

He looked sadly back at her. "Yes Deanna, it is."

Silence hung between them, heavy with thoughts, heavy with misery and even worse, heavy with realisation.

Deanna was surprised when Will reached his hand toward her, trailing one finger along her smooth jawline, his eyes never leaving hers. The spirit-blue gaze looked almost tearful, but they stayed dry...for now.

Deanna sighed and moved her face out of reach. "Yes...it is..."

Will' s hand suspended in thin air, like the moment. Hovering...waiting. Heartbeats thumped in unison as the time of revealing swam between them like a tormenting hurricane, waiting to do its ultimate damage.

Will' s husky whisper, swallowed up and swirled before them, teasing...testing. "Tell me..."

Deanna looked away, ashamed of her feelings, of feeling the way that she had. Worried that the man who she had worshipped from the moment she had set eyes on him all those years ago in the small chapel on Betazed would think that she was little more than a tramp for the erotic thoughts that had plagued her off and on all her adult life.

But she had blamed William T. Riker for leaving her with those feelings. Leaving her craving for more, desperate for more. Desperate to spread her wings and take the passions that had been offered to her on a plate so many times, she had lost count. Time and time again her body had let her down. Her heart had let her down.

Her Imzadi had let her down.

Will had left her unable to feel for any other man. Time and time again as she had lay beneath the body of another, Will' s presence stopped her from satisfying her most primal needs. The need to feel love. The need to make love, to feel what she had with him, with her Imzadi.

For twelve, long years, and numerous fruitless affairs, Deanna' s heart, soul and body belonged to the man before her. She' d had no choice but to wait, aching and wanton and insane for Will' s touch to satisfy her soul, and her body.

Will watched the tears form within her huge eyes as she battled with her innermost emotions, acutely aware that he' d been right all along. He didn' t know how he knew, but he did. Deanna had been unable to build other relationships, make love, live normally since they' re last heart-stopping, mind-blowing union in the Jalara jungle.

But he needed to hear her say it, to tell him the truth.

"Devinoni Ral?..."

Deanna shook her head, her voice heavy with shame, "No...I...I tried. He came close, but..."

Will held his breath as he almost growled the next name. "And Worf?..."

Will watched the tear break free and trickle down her porcelain cheek. She only nodded.

He was perplexed. That was good, she made it with Worf, even if it did make the bile rise in his throat. He went to tell her that he was pleased until he saw and felt the pain ebbing from her. He found himself shuffling towards, somehow knowing that within seconds he was going to have her within his arms.

"Deanna...?"

Her name brought the tightly held back gasps of a woman who was hurting. Of a woman about to fall to pieces. Her wail ripped through him and he crushed her to him as her heart

broke. For many long moments he let her release her torment until he heard the first hiccup and dared to ask again.

"Tell me..."

Deanna clung to Will's body, her tears soaked his shirt, but he didn't care about any of it. All he wanted was to understand. To try and make things right. To allow her to forgive him...if she could.

"Tell me Deanna..."

She went very still in his arms, her silence was un-nerving until at last, he heard her whisper hoarsely.

"Everytime Worf made love to me, it felt like he was raping me, like he didn't belong there...within me. He hurt me so much Will, and I had to hide it from him...from you, from Beverly...from everyone who cared about me. I didn't want you all to know that I'd failed again. I wanted to get you out of my system Will, I really did. I could see you getting involved with other people and I wanted to do the same..."

She pulled away to look him in the face, silent tears still streamed down her face. Will tried to wipe them away, but it was pointless, the more he tried, the worse it become. "Oh Deanna..."

"I wanted to be set free, but I couldn't...I couldn't let you go, Imzadi..."

"What can I do Deanna, what can I do to help?"

Will had pulled the still weeping woman onto his lap and hugged her tight for so long that from afar, the couple appeared to be locked together, not even a breath could slip between them. One man, one woman, one heart, each feeling each others pain, both riding the tide of misery, together.

Deanna went silent for a while, but Will could sense her feelings, that she wasn't about to fall to pieces again. In fact, he was surprised about the intensity of her emotions as they took on a different course.

Deanna pushed herself back onto her knees to face Will once more. Her eyes were alight with desire, the kind of desire that could scorch with just one look. She reached across and dragged the pink pearly tipped nail down the centre of his chest, coming to rest in the barrier of his waistband.

Will's eyes found hers as he tried to understand the change. The sudden switch from the woman that was falling apart in his arms barely minutes ago, to the sensuous witch that purposely allowed her dress to slide even lower, exposing her upper body to its full glory for his eyes to feast on, and for the throb that began to pulsate throughout his loins to make itself known.

Leaning forward, her breasts straining to reach his chest so they too could be tormented by the soft cotton that covered his broad chest, Deanna touched her lips to his, pulling back as quickly as they had met. Will's eyes, drugged from the heady scent of her lazily opened, only to find hers, equally drugged barely inches away from him, hovering, waiting.

This time it was he who stretched to cover the tiny distance, only for her to pull back away from that final union, a union that could only escalate into something they both wanted desperately. Will felt the surge to his loins, the passionate flair of anger lit up his eyes as her intent over powered his senses. The intense need to tell her, show her that she belonged to him now rushed through his soul, and before Deanna had been given a chance to back away from what was about to happen, Will had grabbed a handful of her luscious hair and pulled her hard up against him, so hard she couldn't stop herself from falling across his lap.

His head followed hers, his eyes never leaving hers as his desire and challenge poured from his depths. His growl was low, so low, Deanna could barely hear his words, "I'm glad. I'm glad no other man managed to do what I did. I'm glad, Deanna. Its proved that you belong to me."

His mouth ground against hers in a deliberate demand for submission. He didn't know why he felt the need to do it, even before he felt her struggle against him, Will had felt her acceptance, but he wanted to hear her say the words. His mouth broke away and they both gasped for precious air. Her eyes sought his in a hopeless moment of realisation, "Yes, yes, I belong to you. I love you, I've always loved you. I'm yours, Will, forever."

Her tender but eager resignation was all Will wanted to hear. She was his, she always had been, but he'd needed to hear, and feel the words fall from her own lips. He tenderly wiped away the tears that began to trickle down her temples, watching the movement as he tried, and failed to reign in his own tears that her revelation triggered.

She loved him as much as he loved her. He had been a thorn in her side from the moment they had met, and she still loved him after all this time and after everything that had happened in their seperate lives. The numerous failed affairs, the feigned friendship that had managed to keep their true feelings hidden away from each other for years.

If only he had known. If only he had realised that the one woman he wanted to be with was suffering as much as he. But they had been given another chance to put the wrongs to right, only this time they were both ready, both prepared, both committed.

Both now belonged to each other.