



corridors, several curious eyes followed him out.

Slamming through the outer doors, he came to a halt, frantically scanning the area, desperation creeping in when he realised he' d lost her. But from a terror born deep inside him and before he knew what he' d done, before he' d considered where he was, he shouted, out loud.

"DEEEAAANNNA..."

But even as he shouted, Will had known that she would not have come back even if she had heard him. He had to tell her, had to find her, and he wasn' t going to stop until she had promised to go with him, if not now, then one day, even if meant the Hood leaving without him...

How long Will stood in the doorway of the art museum, he didn' t know, people filed past him, some curious, some sympathetic, some with enough pity to reach out and gently touch his arm, or his shoulder, he felt and saw no-one. Eventually, with a sigh he dejectedly headed off to his quarters, but as he entered the door, his eyes fell on the still rumpled bed. The memory of Wendy, sprawled naked across it, soon got pushed away as Deanna' s horrified face replaced the image. He groaned aloud, first with shame, then despair, then from deep inside of him came an anger that he hadn' t experienced for a long, long time. Without warning, like a volcano, it erupted, spewing out his misery, his loss, despair and agony. Turning he stared at the door which he' d just entered through, torn between running after her, and torn with the need for solitude to lick his wounds. The door found itself being slammed shut with such a force, it bounced back open again, Will kicked it with a howl. His eyes blazed as he watched it finally close, The echoing silence filtered through, and slowly his anger abated and became replaced with an ache, an ache so deep, it physically hurt. Falling to his knees, he clutched at his chest, the feeling overwhelming him, and it was then... then that he finally knew, he was, without a shadow of a doubt, deeply and hopelessly in love with Deanna Troi...

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Peering into the darkened room, Sergeant Tang found Will some time later, sitting on the floor, huddled against the end of his bed. His knees clutched to his chin, and Tang, loathe to disturb him, knocked gingerly at his door, he didn' t expect him to answer, he didn' t. He did get a blank stare that begged to be left alone, Without a word, Tang nodded his understanding, backed out of the room, and closed the door with a resounding click.

Will listened as his footsteps retreated along the corridor and sighed heavily, the intrusion was enough to pull him out of his stupor. Letting his head fall back onto the edge of the bed he stared up to the ceiling, searching for...what? mercy, pity, condemnation, answers, help...

"What have I done?...what can I do? Oh my god Deanna, I want you so much, I am so, so sorry...forgive me please"

Will closed his eyes, forcing the scalding tears to fall. Hugging his own body with his arms, a loneliness crept over him and seemed to swallow him whole, along with the painful throb of his breaking heart, he murmured her name, over and over "Deanna, Deanna, Deanna..."

## Chapter 2

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Deanna hurried out of the building, she was sure Will wouldn' t follow her, but as she turned the building' s corner she heard him scream her name. Tears sprang to her eyes as she heard the pleading tone echo throughout the peaceful lawns and through to her very soul. Her hands flew to her ears to block out the sound. Her heart beat thumped painfully, along with the ache that had steadily built as she had walked silently away from what she had thought was her destiny, her new life. Her Imzadi...

She heard footsteps approaching, and thinking it was Will, she ran. She wasn' t ready for on

the onslaught of Will' s emotional state. Her heart still heavy with saying goodbye, no, she corrected herself, they didn' t say goodbye, she couldn' t bring herself to say the words. saying goodbye meant forever to her, she didn' t want to say that to him because last night, in the corridor, after she had ran from him, the first time, after she had almost, foolishly thrown herself at him, she had known that they were not ready for the total commitment. Life for them was incomplete, life still had to be lived, to the full. When she was ready, and when he was ready, fate would find them again and reunite them, Of that she was certain.

But not right now...

She found herself on her best friends doorstep. Chandra opened the door, her eye' s already knowing what was wrong, no words were spoken as Chandra gently pulled the traumatised woman into her embrace. The action was all Deanna needed, and as soon as Deanna felt Chandra' s shoulder on her face, she began to cry in earnest, great sobs racked her tiny frame, Chandra hugged her closer still, Deanna clung to her for dear life, Chandra' s heart broke along with her friends. To a Betazoid, losing your Imzadi was probably, by far, the worst thing in the world, and her friend had just lost hers...

Eventually Deanna quieted to an eerie silence, Chandra could no longer read her thoughts and knew she had shut down her mind to block out the pain, and the memories. Guiding her to her spare room, she eased Deanna onto the bed, Deanna stared unseeing into her face, reaching out she painfully clutched her hands, desperation for her to stay with her filtered through. Chandra lay down beside her. and using Deanna' s mother' s affectionate term, made her way in through Deanna' s subconscious.

\*Hush I' m not going anywhere, sleep little one, it will help, please sleep\*

Within moments, Chandra felt Deanna' s body relax, her breathing became even and she knew she had fallen into a deep slumber...

### Chapter 3

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Tang didn' t bother knocking this time when he approached Will' s quarters. Entering the gloomy room, the first thing he noticed was that Will had dragged himself on the bed and appeared to be asleep. He crept over to the bed with the intent of covering him up, pleased that he had finally settled down, knowing that sleep worked wonders for a fragile mind. He reached down to pull the coverlet over him, jumping when he heard Will' s subdued voice.

"I' m not a child Tang"

Tang flushed, glad that the room was in darkness, "Sorry sir, I thought you were asleep"

"Would you be asleep if you' d just lost your whole universe?"

Tang sighed, "No sir, probably not, but you know what they say, sometimes answers come in your dreams, you never know, they might hold the solutions..."

Will pushed himself wearily up onto his elbow, running his hand through his hair, dropping the hand loudly onto the bed, he growled at the equally tall man,

"Sit down Tang, your giving me a headache looking up to you"

Tang cautiously sat on the edge of the bed "Yes sir, sorry sir"

After a few moments silence, Will flopped down onto his back, lacing his hands behind his head, he spoke to the ceiling.

"I don' t know what to do, My ship is due to leave in a few hours, but I can' t go...I just can' t go without making things right, but she doesn' t want to listen right now, I don' t have enough time..."

His voice trailed off, along with his mind as he recalled for what seemed to be the thousandth time their final conversation. "I can' t leave her Tang..."

Tang considered the young man's dilemma, he liked Lieutenant Riker enormously, he also understood this strange Imzadi bond that ruled this planet, so his suggestion although totally unorthodox, seemed to be the only solution.

"Disappear for a few days..."

Will's eyes found Tang's in the darkness, "What are you saying Tang?"

The air around them stood still as the expectancy, the uncertainty of his suggestion began to filter through the fog, along with a new found hope.

"I could say that due to depression, you've gone A.W.O.L sir, nobody needs to know, it'll give you the chance to talk the little lady around, and when the things have been resolved, you turn up again, out of the blue, a happy chappy, we just call the Hood to come and get you... if that's what you want..."

Will swung his legs around, excitement glowed in his eyes. Afraid of being overheard, he whispered.

"Do you think it will work Tang, will Starfleet fall for it?"

Tang shrugged, "I can't see why not, it's easy to disappear on this planet, Hell, you've got a jungle that could swallow you up within a few feet of entering it, and when your ready, when you've worked out what your going to say to Miss Troi, I can arrange you to meet with her, or...I could bring her to you...If you want sir..."

Seconds later, Will's mind was made up, plans were drawn up between the two friends, now they just needed to execute that plan...

#### Chapter 4

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The captain of The Potemkin's face looked incredulous. "What do you mean, he's missing, Where is my first officer Sergeant Tang?"

Tang coughed nervously, squared his shoulders and spoke back to the viewscreen, "I mean sir, Lieutenant Riker has gone missing"

Realisation dawning, DeSoto asked him, "He did survive the Sindereen attack didn't he?, your report did say that he had returned with the hostage" Tang nodded "Yes sir, he did return, but he er...he did suffer some distress, perhaps sir, he just needs a little longer to clear his head..."

DeSoto stared at the man for several moments as he contemplated his position., His decision made, he sighed. "O.k. We have a short surveillance survey to attend to that should take three to four days, I'll give Lieutenant Riker the benefit of the doubt, I'll allow him the extra time, we'll hopefully pick him up on our return. If he is indeed missing, then obviously we'll look into it, but until then, I'll leave everything in your capable hands Tang, to get my first officer back on track" Tang nodded, trying to keep the relieved look from his face. "You can count on it Captain, I shall do my very best, thank you sir. Tang out"

Tang breathed a thankful sigh as he severed the connection, he muttered to himself, "Well, that went better than I thought, now it's up to you William Riker..."

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Retracing his steps, Will slowly made his way through the dense forest, Tang had filled a rucksack with everything that he would possibly need for a short spell in the humid jungle, including a communicator. Will unconsciously patted the pocket which held the life line, happier knowing that all he needed was to call and he would be there...she would be there...if she wanted to come...

Will strode with a purpose, he knew where he was headed, and for the first time in hours he began to feel at peace. Everything he wanted to know, everything he needed to think about, feel, and resolve, would happen there. Janaran Falls beckoned him rather like a woman would,

like Deanna would. Memories of their union made him grow warm, inside and out. He felt the tightening in his loins, the familiar ache in his heart whenever her face, appeared like a mirage in front of him and moaned out loud with only the birds to hear him. He was wretchedly tired, but hurried on. Only when he' d reached his destination would he rest, then he would sit and formulate his ideas. He was not going to leave this planet...her... until they had made some...any... future plans to be together, one day, some way...

## Chapter 5

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Chandra sat opposite her dearest friend, her hands tightly clasped with hers, Deanna beat her to her words, "He' s gone, hasn' t he?" Chandra hesitated for several moments, carefully weighing her answer, Deanna gasped as she read her mind, "He hasn' t has he, he hasn' t gone?" Chandra shook her head, looking into her friends eyes to gauge her reaction to the news. Her eyes were still puffy from crying so much, but now they sparkled, Chandra saw the spark that re-lit them, then just as quickly, watched them dim again. Falling back against the couch she sighed heavily, "Oh Chandra, why didn' t he just go, why is going to make this even harder than it already is, why?" Chandra couldn' t answer her, eventually Deanna picked up on the silence, a coldness washed over her at the negatives vibes that radiated from her friend. Coming to a sitting position again she asked her outright, "Chandra, where is he?" Chandra looked again into her eyes, "Nobody knows Dee...he' s vanished" Deanna audibly gasped, the sensation felt the same as being slapped. Eventually Deanna stood and began to pace. "I have to find him Chandra, I must, he might be injured, or suicidal, or severely depressed...I must go to him...Now..." Chandra also rose to a stand, and grasping her tiny friend by the shoulder, she began to steer her out of the door, "Come on, I know of only one person who' s likely to know anything..."

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Tang felt like he was standing in front of a firing squad. The determination of the two women who stood, directly in front of him, hands on hips, were intimidating, very intimidating.. "Come on Sergeant, we know you know where he is, so let' s make this inquisition short, because you are not going to move until we get some answers" Chandra threatening tone and stance almost made Tang quiver, Deanna although equally determined to find out the same information, stood silently, hopefully, beside her. And then suddenly, both women turned and walked away, Chandra threw her parting comment over her shoulder. "Thank you Sergeant Tang, that' s all we needed to know..." Tang slapped his forehead as he realised that he had given away Will' s whereabouts without saying a word.

"Dammed telepath' s"

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"No, no Chandra, I want to go alone...I must go alone, I know my way to the falls, I' ve been there hundreds of times"

"But it' s too dangerous Dee, The Sindereen might be in there looking for their leader, please let me, or let my husband take you to Will, and I promise, we' ll come straight back..."

Chandra' s voice trailed off when she spotted Tang approaching.

"That won' t be necessary miss, I will gladly escort Miss Troi to lieutenant Riker' s destination, in fact, I insist..."

Tang waited expectantly for their decision, the two women silently conversed with each other, before Deanna finally, quietly replied, "Thank you Tang" Tang grinned, bowing slightly "All part of the service M' am"

## Chapter 6

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Will sat on a huge boulder that sat like a sentinel on the lake's shoreline. Opening his ration's pack, he selected some dried fruits, shuffled his body down until he was comfortable, and began to chew quietly, watching the light play on the cascading water, his troubled mind unable to appreciate the true beauty of his surroundings.

He was torn in two, how could he have his Starfleet career AND Deanna Troi. He knew he loved her too much to let her go, but he had waited his whole life to become a Starfleet officer. and now... now he'd blown it by falling in love with most beautiful, the most frustrating, and the most incredible woman that had ever walked. Will smiled as he remembered her newly found antics in the jungle, here. It seemed a life time away, when in fact it had been very few days, had he barely known her a few measly weeks? He had never felt so comfortable, so alive, so captivated with anyone in his life, and he wasn't going to let her go, ever.

He had heard that the Federation were building a new flagship and his goal was if not Captain for a while, certainly it's first officer, but he needed to make the grade, he needed to get a few more brownie points under his belt first, and he knew he wasn't going to be able to do that with distractions. He just needed a little more time...

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Deanna became thoughtful as they began to make their way into the jungle. Until now, Tang had kept quiet, afraid of letting anything slip about the secrecy of this mission. Within moments of their decision to allow him to escort her, they had all but barrelled him out of the door, kitted up and headed out, He had not got a chance to warn Will that they were coming. "Sergeant..." Deanna's voice broke him out of his quandary, "Please...call me Tang m' am" Deanna smiled softly at him, and Tang saw what had captivated the young lieutenant's attentions. She was exceptionally pretty, but then most Betazoid's were, but Deanna Troi had an air about her, that was solely hers. One could quite easily lose themselves in the onyx eyes, that sparkled with merriment when she smiled. Before they had started out, her eyes had been almost matt in colour, now they were shining as she neared her destination. Her voice brought him out of his reverie again.

"Tang, do you know Will very well?"

Pushing back the bushes, and stepping to one side so that she could pass by without the spiky branch whacking her in the face, he smiled at her.

"Well m' am, I know that the lieutenant is an honourable man in his heart, and I know that he is very fond of you. No man behaves like he is without being in love..." Deanna stopped him in his tracks as she halted in front of him to look into his face as she thought about his comment. The seemingly ever-present tears sprung to her eyes "Then why did he sleep with Wendy Roper Tang...why?" He voice broke on her final why, and she turned her head away, embarrassed at revealing her true feelings to a near stranger, but she turned to face him again, and as he watched the tears spill down her face, she asked once more, "Why Tang?"

Tang sighed heavily, he was no expert at this and chose his words carefully, "Sometimes m' am, when your hurting badly, you reach out to clutch at anything that will give you comfort, Wendy unfortunately ' happened' to be there, she got to be his comfort..." He watched her face as she digested the information, she didn't get angry like he expected, so he tried again.

"Believe me m' am, if the lieutenant could turn back the clock, he would, but he can' t, and that' s hurting him more than anything. Y' know, he' s prepared to give up his career for you m' am..."

Deanna was stunned. That information alone shocked more than anything else she' d had to endure. "But Tang...I don' t want him to do that for me, I know how important his career is to him, it was what he was born to do, I can' t let him do that...for me"

A spark of hope flared within Tang, this was what he wanted to hear, there was hope for these two after all. Swinging her around, he clasped her by the arm and with a new spring in his step, and a new hope in his heart, they continued their journey.

## Chapter 7

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Will began to climb, needing the physical exertion, he had decided to climb the biggest tree within a few kilometre' s of the falls. Rapidly growing disappointed at the lack of communication from Tang, he was certain that he would have had some form of contact with Deanna, especially once he' d been reported missing. The thought was sobering, maybe after all, he wasn' t that important to her. The more Will pondered on the thought, the more agitated he became. Feeling the need to vent some of the frustration within him, he had climbed. The tree was huge, and it was a while before he reached strong enough branches to hold his weight.

He went higher.

Reaching a point where he could go no further. he settle back against the trunk to catch his breath, his eyes taking in the view, the silence, the peace. Time stood still as he took in the sight that spread out before him, Autumn colors of every hue lay before him like a carpet, as far, and further, as the eye could see. Will felt humbled, he was certain that no-one would have seen this sight, and more than anything, he wished she was here to witness it with him. Her image brought him back to where he' d started, Deanna Troi, future wife of William T. Riker, future mother of his children, sacred holder of his heart, Imzadi...

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Dusk was rapidly approaching, made nearer by the natural canopy of the over head trees. Unconsciously Tang hastened his pace, dragging an exhausted Deanna behind him. They didn' t have much further to go, and he wanted to be able to pass her over to safe hands before heading back alone. "Slow down Tang, please" Tang halted his race, turned and apologised to her. "I' m sorry m' am, but were nearly there, I want to make it before nightfall, but we can go slower now, it' s only around the corner"

Only around the corner...Deanna felt her pulse quicken, Soon, soon she will come face to face with him, Trepidation surged through her veins, she knew she was going to apologise to him, but was it too late? she prayed that it wasn' t...

Lost in her thoughts of what she was going to say to him, Deanna was surprised when they finally reached the clearing, the gentle sound of the waterfall became an instant reminder of her last visit, her eyes scanned the grassy banks, certain that their imprints would still be found in the soft soil, they weren' t. The disappointment washed over her. Tang made his way over to Will' s make shift camp, but there was no sign of the big man. Deanna joined him. Tang looked dismayed "He' s not here, I can' t leave you on your own" Deanna took a deep breath, and plastered a brave smile across her face. "I' m sure he' s not far, he' ll be back any minute, he wouldn' t have left his things here would he? I know you want to get home Tang, and I insist that you go.. I will be perfectly alright. Please Tang...Go"

Tang studied her face for several moments before resignedly asking her "Are you sure m' am?," I would hate for anything to happen to you, especially now" Deanna nodded, "I' m sure, now

please, go, before it get' s any darker"

Tang hesitated a moment more, before pressing a communicator in her hand and making her promise to call him if he didn' t show with half an hour. She agreed, and with a final hug, he turned and followed the same path out of the clearing.

Deanna made her way over to Will' s belongings. Aware that she was intruding on what could be a huge mistake, doubts began to creep into her mind now that she was here, about to face him once more, about to probably change her life once more, one way or the other. Tang' s words made her feel a little easier. Maybe Will did truly love her, maybe he loved his career more, maybe he really didn' t want to see her right now, maybe this really was a huge mistake...

She pulled out his sleeping bag, spreading it wide so that she could sit on it and wait. Deanna had no intentions of calling Tang back. If Will didn' t turn up tonight, she would simply sleep in the bag and return home in the morning, after all she knew the way like the back of her hand, and besides, her mother would have sent a search party out if she hadn' t returned by tomorrow night if nothing was heard from her. Deanna chuckled as she tried to envisage Chandra telling her mother what was going on, but, chances are, she already knew, but Deanna had finally grown up and knew what she wanted, and if it was William Riker, then so be it, but did he still want her?...

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Lost in his thoughts, time slipped gradually away. Will finally acknowledged that he was rapidly losing light, the journey down the tree was going to be perilous, but even he knew it was going to be worse in the dark. He inched his way back down, his mind already plotting on how to get Deanna to climb up and share the experience, one day.

Reaching the bottom branches, he swung himself down the last few feet. The soft mossy ground masking his landing. His stomach growled with hunger and as he sauntered back to his camp. He tried to make his mind up on his choice of supper, the dried stew, with dried dumplings, or the dried curry, with dried rice. He approached his belongings tossing the choices about in his head \*Stew or curry...curry or stew...\*

Coming to a halt, he spotted the humped figure that seemed to have made itself comfortable in his sleeping bag. Tiptoeing closer, he squatted down, expecting it to be Tang. It would not have surprised him to see him here, checking up on him like a father figure, Will chuckled, but when he spotted the mass of black curls, he gasped, "Deanna!"

Deeply asleep, she must have been exhausted. Will crept quietly away. Taking himself out of earshot, he called Tang on his communicator. "Tang, Tang, answer me Dammit" seconds later Tang replied, slightly breathless "Tang here sir, glad to hear your voice, I gather you' ve found your surprise" Will exploded "Surprise, that' s an understatement, you were supposed to warn me Tang" Unperturbed, Tang replied "Sorry sir, I didn' t get the opportunity" Will sighed "O.k. Tang, Thanks for bringing her, I expect we' ll be home sometime tomorrow, wish me luck...Riker out"

Cautiously making his way back, he came to a stand in front of her, how long he stood watching the sleeping form, he didn' t know, but while he did so, a myriad of thoughts and emotions played through his head. Finally he sighed, assessing the situation, and his surroundings, he muttered to himself "Now, where am I going to sleep?..."

## Chapter 8

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Dawn broke with a chorus of bird-song. Before Deanna opened her eyes, she stretched her body, that was stiff from sleeping on the hard surface. Suddenly remembering, Deanna sat bolt upright, her eyes scanning the immediate area as she did so, eventually falling on the



figure perched upon the large boulder. Their eyes met, hers taking in the whole picture, his, taking in the pleasure of watching her rouse from her sleep.

He broke the silence, "Morning" Deanna smiled nervously, tentatively at him, then blushed as his eyes feasted upon her face.

Coming to a stand, she slowly made her way to the base of the boulder. Arching her back to work out the kink, she looked up to him, pushing aside the awkwardness she felt. "Hello Will, I' m sorry I stole your bed, where did you sleep?" He nonchalantly waved one hand in the air as he replied, an easy grin on his face "Oh, I made out o.k. I' ve been keeping watch for a while" Deanna looked away, embarrassed again at the implications of his words, he' d been watching her, but inside she was glad. Smiling wide she looked up at him once more, determined to ease the tension that could be felt building between them, "So, can I make you some breakfast, being as you so kindly let me sleep, and kept me safe" Will looked at her for a moment longer, then sliding down the boulders smooth edge, to land neatly in front of her, grinned and made a lively joke about the contents of breakfast. "Sure, now let me see, we have dried eggs, dried cereal, complete with powdered milk, dried fruit and powdered coffee..." Deanna stared at him, enjoying the tease. Contemplating the variety of choice, she chewed on her bottom lip as she considered, finally settling on one option only. "Coffee" Will laughed "Good choice" He bent and rummaged around in his rucksack, eventually proudly displaying the sachets of granules. "You fill the billycan and prepare the cups, I' ll set the stove up." Rummaging some more, he found the tiny primus stove, and set it up, he' d got it lit by the time Deanna had returned from the lake with the water. A comfortable silence grew between them as they waited for it to boil. Minutes later, they both gratefully sipped on steaming cups of coffee. Draining the last few drops. Will took her cup and rinsed them out. Coming back to a stand in front of her, he held out his hand. Deanna looked up into his eyes. It was time to talk.

"Walk with me."

Reaching up to take the proffered hand, Will gently hauled her upright. Deanna expected to be pulled into his embrace, she was surprised, and disappointed when he didn' t, instead, he kept hold of her hand, turned and walked. Will saw the passion, the hope flare in her eyes when he pulled her close to him, inwardly groaning as his body reacted to her close presence, he longed to take her in his arms and lose himself in her kisses, but this was not the time, things needed to be said, things needed to be resolved...

Taking a few steps, he hesitated, looking ahead, Deanna followed his gaze, both set of eyes rested on the mossy bank, this route lead to their ' spot' . Will abruptly turned and headed in the other direction. The tension mounted within them once more.

They had been walking for some time, both stared unseeing at the breathtaking scenery before them, both unwilling to start the conversation, knowing that one had to. Eventually Deanna spoke. "Talk to me Will"

Coming to a halt, she heard him sigh,, releasing her hand, he made his way over to the nearest large tree and propped himself against it, picking up a leaf, he systematically shredded it, Deanna watched his hands, "Will?"

Glancing at her briefly, he continued to shred the leaf as he tried to explain himself, "I couldn' t say goodbye Deanna, I...I didn' t want to..."

Deanna began to scuff the ground with her boot, her hands shoved deep into her pockets to hide her nervousness, Will watched her movements with fascination, it seemed to be a very uncharacteristic thing for her do, very unladylike, but her words brought his eyes back to her face. "I too couldn' t say the words Will" Eyes locked as the emotions bounced from one to the other.

His eyes beckoned her closer, Drawn by the unspoken forces that kept the two locked souls

together, Deanna came close enough for Will to pull her into his arms, and kissing the top of her head, he brokenly asked, "What now, where do we go from here Dee?" Deanna rested her head upon his chest, closing her eyes, she whispered back, "I don' t know Will... I have my life, you have yours, were both too young to take on the responsibilities of a mature relationship" Will tightened his grip on her "But what about later, maybe in a year or so?" Deanna pushed herself away from him, turning her back on him as she tried to sort out her tumbled thoughts, "But what if we can' t wait that long Will, what if something...anything happens..." Will came to stand behind her, turning her round to meet his eyes, he tried once more how much he wanted her, "Deanna, we are Imzadi, Isn' t that supposed to account for something?" Deanna shook her head, "It' s not enough Will, it is for me, but it' s not for you, you' ve proved that" She saw the anger flare in his eyes, he turned away from her "I wondered how long it would be before you brought that up, How many times can I say I' m sorry Deanna, how many?" Now Deanna forced herself into his view, "Don' t you understand Will, sorry isn' t the issue here, I know your sorry, and I understand why you did it, you needed comfort, I wasn' t there, she was, I' ve come to understand that, but it should not have happened. If we were absolutely true Imzadi, it would not have happened.." Will walked away from her to stand at the water' s edge, after seemingly searching for answers from the turquoise lake he bitterly threw over his shoulder "What you mean is your mother shouldn' t have interfered, this is her fault, that and the damn hold she has over you"

Deanna forced herself to sit on the floor against the tree Will had vacated before she carried on the conversation. "Yes, your right, she did interfere, but she has every right to be concerned Will, I am her only daughter, she only wants what' s best for me, every mother does" Will was quiet, then finally and just as quietly he spoke "I wouldn' t know about that would I" Deanna immediately felt sorry for the thoughtless comment "I' m sorry Will, I shouldn' t have said that... but it is true, one day, when you have a family of your own, you will understand..." Will shook his head, bitterness creeping into his voice, "I will never, ever treat my child the way your mother treats you, she' s...suffocating" Deanna smiled at his choice of word. "Yes, she does have her...moments, but in my heart I know she cares, I know she loves me Will, and that is the true basis for happiness." Will stopped pacing as he contemplated her remark, eventually posing the question thoughtfully, "Are you happy Deanna?"

Deanna twiddled with a lock of her hair as she pondered her reply "I was happy, but then I met you..." Will stared at her "What' s that supposed to mean?" He sounded so indignant, Deanna laughed quietly, then just as quickly hushed again, "I mean, I was happy, I was happy with my life as it was, but then you came along and showed me a different kind of happiness... even if I have seemed to of spent a large chunk of it crying..."

Will came and sat down in front of her, the need to touch her bringing him within reach. Taking her hand, he let her continue. "Before I was happy, now I feel...complete, even though we aren' t technically together, I still feel complete...whole, you have made my life absolute Will, what you have shown me...given me, has changed my entire life, forever and I will always love you for that alone, whatever happens..." Will watched the tears form and he tenderly reached out to caress her face, tears sprang to his own eyes, she had exposed her soul to him, now it was his turn.

"I love you Deanna, I finally knew that when you walked away from me in the museum, I thought I would die when I couldn' t find you. there was no way I could have left this planet without telling you." Will watched as her tears began to fall. He forged on.

"I love you Deanna Troi, without you, I don' t exist, I can' t exist..."

Will decided to take the bull by the horns, He was certain, without no doubts that this was what he wanted.

"Will you join me later on board the Hood, we can be married on board, or if you want, here?" Deanna smiled at his sudden flurry of words, "Will, are you asking me to marry you?" Will

grinned, surprising himself "I guess I am, well, what do you say, Deanna Troi, Heir to the Holy Rings of Betazed, Holder of the Sacred Chalice of Riix, Daughter of probably the world' s worst mother, will you marry me?" Deanna laughed, but shook her head at the same time, "Oh Will, you know I can' t, please don' t ask me now, please, can we wait until we' re ju a little older, a little more responsible. We both have so much to do, so much to achieve." Will looked crestfallen, Deanna touched his face gently "Will, I' m not saying no, just..not yet" Will smiled sadly, both falling silent once more, but it was a comfortable silence that fell between them as they contemplated their future. He knew what she was saying was right, and he was secretly overjoyed at her response. This was what he really wanted, Deanna eventually, and his career. But he was confident now that they would eventually be together.

He was happy.

Deanna patted her lap, "Lay down Will" Will needed no further prompting, swinging his legs round, he placed his head upon her lap, shifting slightly to get comfortable, Deanna began to lightly play with his hair. He closed his eyes and let the peaceful feelings wash over him. He happily realised he was content, he had managed to right all his wrongs, he was as good as engaged to the most beautiful girl in the universe, and she loved him. what more could he want...

"So, How many kids are we gonna have..."

## Chapter 9

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"I guess we should be heading home" The remark brought Will out of the mutual tranquillity that had settled between them. "I guess..." but neither moved. Both were loathe to break the spell, the magic of the moment. Will turned sad eyes to hers, something flared in their depths, something sparked deep inside, Both felt it. Will reached up to touch her lip, the question fell from his. "Deanna?..."

It was all she needed to hear. Leaning over, her mouth found his. His hand wove it' s way into her hair, holding her firm, Deanna groaned, Will grasped the opportunity, slipping his tongue into her warm moistness, her tongue met his, and this time, it was he who groaned as he felt his body come alive. Deanna tugged at his shirt, she needed to feel his body, touch his skin. Her fingers finally found their quarry and Will whimpered. Pushing himself up, Deanna almost protested until she watched him remove the offensive piece of material. Will watched the hunger in her eyes, her hands reached out to touch him again. Kneeling to face her, Will closed his eyes and let the sensuous feelings wash over him. His palms flat against his thighs, he was at her mercy. He felt her breath on his chest but refused to allow his hands to move, Deanna traced every contour of his torso, every muscle shape, every dip, every dimple, Deanna touched every one. Will was enraptured. Deanna nipped at his tiny nipples, the action pulling an inner warmth deep from within his loins. Her tongue snaked out to leave a trail along his collar bone, around to gently nip at his ear. Will tried to find her lips again, he needed to kiss her, but she pulled away. His eyes flew open she was barely inches away from him, a teasing smile matched the intoxicated ebony eyes. He grinned mischievously at her, his own body drunk with desire, with want, for her.

"My turn..."

Bringing herself to her knees, she boldly faced him. Lifting her arms, Deanna silently begged him to remove her sweater. Moments later. it was thrown down beside his. Removing the lacy brazier, it too joined the mounting pile of clothes.

Falling back on his haunches, he admired the scene before him. Deanna glowed from the desire that flared once more in her eyes. she whispered, begged..."Touch me Will".

Reaching out, he traced one slender finger from her bottom lip and down her naked body, his

eyes never leaving her face. By the time he had reached her tummy button, her eyes had closed, and she silently held her breath. Pushing back up onto his knees again, he tugged at the waistband of her trousers to bring her body close to his. Her eyes still closed, Will murmured hoarsely, "Look at me Deanna, I want you to see how much I love you."

Deanna's eyes slowly opened revealing the deep hunger that flowed from every fibre of her body. Looking into Will's eyes, Deanna lost herself in the adoration that poured from the very depths of Will's soul. One arm held her close, the other hand gently lifted her chin. He Kissed her tenderly, "I will cherish you forever Imzadi, no matter where I am, what I'm doing, you will uppermost in my heart and mind until we're together again, I am in love with you Deanna, never forget that" By the time Will had finished, Deanna was weeping, but this time it was with joy. Chuckling self consciously, Deanna wiped at her eyes "See what I mean, I'm always crying" Will wrapped her within his arms and hugged her tight until the gesture sparked their desires again. Once more, they began to kiss deeply. From mouth to mouth, heart to heart, ache to ache, they became one again...

## Chapter 10

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"We really should be leaving this time Will, it'll be dark by the time we got home even if we leave right now" Deanna thoughtfully twirled the dark hairs on Will's chest as he lay completely satiated beside her, a contented, slightly smug smile upon his face. His eyes were closed as he relished in the ministrations that she rained on his naked body. He felt his ardour began to grow again, along with the uncomfortable thought that once they reached 'civilisation', it would be several months, maybe even years until they would share these intimate moments again. Deanna felt her heart grow heavy as the prospect of returning home neared. Believing fate would eventually see them together again soon, a small nagging doubt also crept in. The 'what if' that always accompanied every good feeling everybody had. As Will pulled her on top of him once more, a different kind of urgency came into their union. And as he embedded himself deep within her once more, as they became one, hearts, minds, souls joined in the oneness. The Imzadi link permanently locked for all eternity. This was their final promise to each other. No matter what, for as long as it took to be reunited, they would stay true to each others hearts. Both adult enough to know that their may be 'others' until they met again, but when the time was right, they would return to each other, with no recriminations, no questions, no doubts.

## Chapter 11

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Tang looked up from his desk when he heard the quiet footsteps approach his office. His relief clearly evident on his craggy face. Will entered the airy office and Tang gestured to the tall man to sit. Lowering his tall frame into the seat proffered, Will waited for his friend to start the inquisition.

Throwing down his padd, Tang waited for Will to relay how the reconciliation went.  
Silence.

Tang pushed back his chair, propped his foot upon the desktop, made himself comfortable, and waited...

Silence.

Will wallowed in the suspended agony that poured out from his friend.

Finally Tang could take no more and blurted out. "Aw geez!, come on sir, you owe me...something"

Will grinned, his blue eyes lit up in merriment at his friends predicament, but became serious as he appreciated just what the man before him had done. Tang had jeopardised his own career for him, for them...

"For as long as I live Tang, I will never, ever forget what you have done for me, for us.

Both Deanna and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts for giving us the necessary time to make things right."

Tang smiled, his pleasure apparent on his face. "It worked then, you got things sorted with the little lady?"

Will smiled at the fitting description of Deanna. "Yes Tang, it worked. At least I can leave now and know that she' ll be waiting for me to come back for her, and I will Tang... count on it. We' ve just got to get through tomorrow..." The statement left unfinished, the following moment of silence saying it all...

Coming to a stand, Tang joined Will on his side of the desk. Propping himself against it' s edge, he folded his arms, his face thoughtful. "Any idea when you' ll get back?" Will stood and they both began to make their way out of the office. "Well, We normally get shore leave every four to five months, and I usually either go to Earth or Risa..." Will paused when he saw the knowing look on Tang' s face, "Yeah, well, a man' s gotta have some fun..." A slight flush crept up his neck at his confession, but coughing, he brought himself back to the present, "anyway, I said I' d send her a communique when I had a definite date and destination, and she would meet me." Will came to a halt and the two men turned to face each other. Will looked directly at Tang, his eyes glowing with his new found love, his voice echoed his eyes. "I can' t believe it, thanks to you, She' s mine Tang, she' s almost mine..."

Tang nodded his understanding, and placing his large hand upon Will' s shoulder, they walked down the corridor to begin preparations for the start of his future odyssey....

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