

Imzadi - The Lost Chapters

The Waiting Game

by Carol Sandford

Chapter 1

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"For God's sake Deanna, answer me dammit!..." Will swore profusely as yet again, she had refused to answer his hail. Determined to speak to her, he had tried again and again. repeating the hail for hours, the constant chirp would have driven anyone crazy, but she still did not answer him. He had left countless messages, asking... pleading Deanna to call him.

She ignored every single one.

Once, out of sheer desperation Will had tried her mother, Bad move. Stunned that from out of a woman with her prestigious upbringing, could come some of the worst verbal abuse that Will Riker, man of the world, Mr. Unshockable, had ever heard.

It had been nearly three months before Will had returned from deep space. As soon as he'd got within communicate range, he had tried to call her. Assuming that she was not in her room, he had left a cheery message, expecting an even more cheery message back later on in the day. He had been mystified when he'd received nothing. For four days on the trot, he left a message, morning, noon and night. Then he had stayed silent for a week, figuring that maybe, just maybe, she'd gone on leave, then he'd tried again, morning, noon and night, until it had finally sunk in that Deanna Troi had got the right royal pip.

It was also then that he realised that maybe, just maybe, she hadn't got his message that he'd left with Tang...

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Tang was up to his ears in paperwork when he heard the familiar chirp on his console. Tang stared silently at it for a few seconds as he read the data that was informing him of the communique's origin. It was the Hood.

It was Will Riker.

Taking a few seconds to bolster up the courage to face him, he unconsciously sat up straight in his seat, as he finally punched the answering button. Will's face swam into view, and Tang noticed how much he had changed. Staring back at him was a man that had been in one to many wars and seen one too many deaths. He also recognised a face that was desperate for information of his loved one. He wanted to know what had happened to Deanna Troi...

"Hello Tang, it's been a while, it's good to see you man..." Tang smiled at the anxious face before him.

"Hello Lieutenant Commander Riker..."

Will laughed at the formal title. "Yes, yes very funny Tang, cut the crap, Will will do perfectly well thank you..." Tang grinned "O.k. sir...anyway, it's still good to see you" An expectant moment's silence followed as they both plucked up the courage to approach the much needed information. Tang got in first.

"Sir...Will...I didn't manage to get your message to Miss Troi...I was out on patrol...I didn't get back until five days later..."

Tang silently watched as Will digested the news.

Watched as his eyes told him how much his information had hurt.

Watched as his hand came up to his head and almost covered the handsome face in his despair.

Tang felt helpless. He had let his friend down in the worst possible way, and all he could offer him was his heartfelt apologies. "I'm sorry Will...If there is anything I can do..."

Tang watched as Will shook his head, removing his hand to show him just what the news had done to him. Tang's gut twisted with remorse, he hoarsely whispered to the pain-etched face. "Christ, I am so sorry..."

Will shook his head as he began to rationalise that it was nobody's fault, just an accumulation of bad luck. He also knew that he needed to release Tang of his guilt. "It was not your fault Tang...it was no one's fault...you could not have known, you could not have prevented any of this..."

Will drifted off again as he thought about how to solve his dilemma. Finally he turned to the screen, the question in his eyes. "I take it you haven't tried to contact her on Earth?..."

Will was surprised when he nodded his head. "Yes sir, I did, but I got no response, the little lady did not want to listen. "

Will sat up expectantly. "You mean you actually spoke to her?" His expectancy died as quickly as it arose as he watched Tang shake his head.

"No sir, I did not, nor did she answer the message I left asking her to contact me".

Will nodded slowly as he muttered. "She was sure pissed at me wasn't she?..." the question didn't need an answer, Tang didn't offer one.

Moments later, Will resignedly accepted that for the moment, nothing could be done. But as an afterthought occurred to him, Tang saw a spark of life brighten the sky blue eyes. "O.k. I'm done chasing, but will you do me a favour Tang?"

Tang nodded warily, no longer confident in his ability to uphold any sort of favours, or promises, but needed to somehow make amends in any way that he could. he nodded more forcefully. "If I can sir..."

"Will you keep me informed of how she's keeping, and her whereabouts?...Just because she thinks I don't give a hoot about her doesn't mean I have to stop caring, she's too important to me..."

Tang smiled sadly, relieved that what he wanted was relatively simple to achieve. He didn't work for Starfleet without having some pull, and if that was all Will wanted of him, then that was what he'd get. "No problem sir" The two men's eyes locked as they conveyed the unspoken understanding, and their respect for each other. Will gave him a tight lipped salute as he severed the connection...

Chapter 2

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Two Years later

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Deanna pushed back her chair with a sigh. She'd had enough for one day, feeling slightly guilty as she almost welcomed her last patient's exit.

Letting her body slump low in the luxurious soft leather chair, her head fell back, her eyes closed and she let her mind empty of the days events. But as she tried to fill her mind with sights that not so long ago she had considered therapeutic, now only held sad memories for her. Her mind focused on the abstract picture that hung in the museum, the large concentric swirls once reminded her of peace, tranquillity...love. Now when she thought about the painting, his face appeared in its place. The colours swirled and fused together to make up the outline of him, his words echoed in her head. *I'm coming for you, be ready. I love you Deanna...*

Deanna's eyes snapped open along with the spark of anger that flared within them. Her derisive outburst followed again as it did whenever she tried to shut him out her mind.

"Love...love...you don't know the meaning of the word Will Riker. you would never have left

me if you truly loved me...* Knowing that she sounded like a spoilt brat, she quietly added * You could have least have tried...*

Deanna's eyes caught the newly framed diploma that graced her newly acquired office wall. Coming home to Betazed to begin her counselling career amongst familiar surroundings, her old friends, and her mother, had been the only thing that Deanna focused on. Graduating from the Starfleet Academy in only two years still made her swell with inner pride. Her previous training at her home university had already sent her well on her way, plus the added bonus of being empathic, seemingly forged her path with a silver lining. Passing the exam with honours, the only blight on the horizon was that the one person who she wanted to share her joy with was no where in sight, she began to wonder if he was ever likely to be.

Deanna's mind wandered back to the earlier times, the time when she had to face the humiliation of returning to Earth, to the questions, the sympathetic stares, and the ' I told you so' conversation with her mother.

For that alone she didn't think she would ever forgive Will.

Getting back into the swing of Academy life was harder than she ever imagined, her heart was shattered, along with her spirit. More than once she had packed up and prepared to return home, but the one person who made her stop, stay and grow up was her mother.

Of all the people she had expected sympathy, and welcoming arms from was Lwaxana Troi, but she was decidedly put out to find her quite forcefully discouraging Deanna to ' give in' . But Deanna's biggest nightmare was the prospect of Will's return to Earth, of actually seeing him, face to face. One day.

But it never happened.

Deanna was never quite sure if it was a blessing in disguise, or a deliberate evasion on his part.

Her heart ached for him, but that very same ache told her to step back and give it time...lots of time.

Now was the time to make a career for herself. Some day, one day she would meet Will again, but this time, it would be on her terms. Along side the ache that she doubted would ever leave her, was a determination to show Will Riker that she could, and would survive without him. She was going to prove to him, her mother, and to herself that she, Deanna Troi, could do something with her life, on her own...

But it still hurt.

A knock on her door took her by surprise and she physically jumped, bringing her out of her reverie. "Come in"

The door swung open quietly and Deanna craned her head to see who it was, because they made no move to enter. She was surprised to see Sergeant Tang standing there. In full uniform, but nervously twisting his beret around in his huge hands. Deanna watched the hypnotic motion for a few moments before raising her eyes to his face. He looked very nervous, but it was not the emotion that Deanna felt from him, it was shame.

Deanna tentatively smiled at him, unsure of his reason for the visit. "Hello Tang, this is a pleasant surprise, please, come in.."

Tang stepped into the room enough to close the door and to resume his nervous twirling. Deanna sensed that he had and needed to say something, so she stayed silent. It was several moments before he glanced up at her face, then away to the window, before clearing his throat. "Hurrumph...I' m sorry miss for not getting Lieutenant Riker' s message to you on time... Believe me, if I' d have known, I would have done my utmost to have got that message to you, but I was away on patrol...I' m sorry Miss Troi".

Deanna wasn't sure if it was the words ' Lieutenant Riker, or ' message' when her heart stopp

beating, but when it started again, she was sure that Tang must have heard it' s thump.

"Message Tang...What message?"

Once more Tang shifted restlessly, Deanna reached out to touch his arm, her voice calming...begging...

"What message Tang?"

Sadly as he relayed the message to her, he watched her eyes well. "The day that Will was supposed to meet you on Risa, he sent a communique to me just before he went into deep space that he would not be able to make the rendezvous and for you to return to Earth and wait for word from him there...Nothing would have stopped him coming for you miss if he could' ve, it was out of his control..."

His next words forced the tears that had built to spill down her now pallid cheeks. "He said...he said, tell her that I love her...". Tang had no difficulty saying the fragile words to the delicate woman that stood before him, knowing of their importance, and knowing that it was the only chance he had of making things right.

Time stopped as Deanna absorbed his words. Tang took a step towards her, his eyes, and arms beckoning. Feeling the need to be a father figure for her, but not quite sure if she would welcome the gesture. He gently pulled her into his arms, offering any comfort that he could.

At first she was stiff and unwieldy, but he could feel her sorrow seeping through him, unconsciously he began to gently rock, rather like lulling a small child off to sleep, and eventually he felt her body posture began to relax, until he heard her sniff. He realised it was her way of asking him to release her, and he did so, stepping back to give her the space.

He gruffly asked her, "Are you alright?" relieved when she offered him a watery smile, she nodded. "Yes...yes thank you Tang, I' m sorry about that, it' s been a long time, I think I must have been storing it up, even if I did promise myself that I wouldn' t cry over him anymore ..."
Tang smiled as he tried to reassure her "It' s o.k. ma' am, I' m glad I was here to help, even if it was mostly my fault that this has happened..."

Deanna cut him off, "No...No Tang don' t say that. I have come to realise that it was probably the best thing that happened. We were both too young, we both had too many dreams that needed us to be individuals to achieve them. You probably did us the biggest favour, so don' t ever, ever blame yourself Tang..."

Tang became nervous again as he posed his next question to her. "Do you think you will ever get together again Miss?"

Deanna grinned at him, her eyes still bright with unshed tears. Feeling the need to set his mind at ease, she spoke with every conviction that her heart could muster, "Absolutely, when the time is right for both of us, we will be together, of that I am certain..."

Tang frowned, "Why didn' t you answer any of your communiques? I' m sure Will tried to contact you many times, as did I"

Deanna stepped back, and turned away, her face thoughtful. "By the time I had arrived back to Earth, I' d realised that Will not coming had been the best thing for both of us, I saw no point in resurrecting the relationship, it would have been unbearable, and pointless at that time, so I severed any contact, including from you Tang, and it seems to have worked hasn' t it?. I' ve qualified from Starfleet Academy, and Will...well, Will is out there, doing what Will does best. He couldn' t have done it with me in tow. I know it, and I' m sure he knows it too..."

I made a conscious effort to wipe Will from my life, and it hurt Tang, the pain was an experience that I never want to go through ever again, and I know I would have if he' d have come to Risa. He would have left me again Tang, and what would I have been left with?... No Will... no career and absolutely, no self esteem, no self respect..."

No Tang, what I did, I did for the best, for both of us..."

She turned back to face him, feeling that she had made peace within herself once more, She

smiled gratefully at him. "Thank you again Tang for everything"

Tang smiled and turned to leave her office, but Deanna' s voice, low with underlying doubt of what she was about to ask of him, stopped him in his tracks as he turned to face her once more.

"Tang...could you keep me posted of what Will' s doing?..." Tang smiled knowingly, his eyes twinkled with pleasure as he whispered hoarsely "Of course ma' am..."

Chapter 3

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Deanna watched Gart Xerx stir his coffee, but as he spoke, her mind snapped to attention. "I hear that the new Federation' s Flagship is almost ready to sail..."

Deanna glanced up at his face to find him quietly watching her, waiting, gauging her reaction. Deanna' s heart pumped harder, she was certain that the table' s other occupant must of heard it and her eyes flew to each of her closest friend' s, searching for something, she didn' t know what to say. Deanna found herself staring into Chandra' s rich brown eyes. the silent message bounced between them. Deanna didn' t need to say his name.

\*Do you think he' ll be commissioned to it?\*

\*I don' t know, last I heard he' d been offered captaincy of The Drake\*.

\*No...No, I heard that it had been destroyed at a planet called Minos\*.

Gart spoke aloud, breaking the silent communication between the two girls. "I also heard that they intend having a full time Counselor aboard...I put your name forward Deanna..."

Open mouthed, Deanna blinked several times as she took in what her dear friend and mentor was telling her. She didn' t quite believe what she was hearing. "Excuse me"

Gart' s professional mode kicked in as he repeated his statement. "I recommended you for the post. you would be perfect for it Deanna, and I might add, it' s just what you' ve been waiting for..."

Chandra reached over to grasp Deanna' s fingers, Deanna looked at her dearest friend with a mixture of disbelief, trepidation, excitement, and terror. Once more the two friends minds linked.

\*But what if he' s serving on that ship?\*

\*Honey, your going to bump into him sooner or later, but until then, you' ve got to do what you want to do. You' ve waited this long, you can wait a little longer, and besides, he made his choice Deanna, Will chose his career over you, now it' s his turn to wait.\*

Deanna sighed \*Your right, I' ve got to do this, for me. If Will Riker wants me, he' s going to have to do the chasing, we' ll see if I' m ready to be caught when he finally catches up with me...\*

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"It' s a shame about the Drake, sir. I heard that she was a great ship in her heyday..."

Will nodded absent-mindedly. but then chuckled at the irony. "Yeah. I finally get the chance to become Captain, and look what happens..."

Tang tried to reassure him with a little perceptiveness. "Maybe sir it was for the best...maybe your destiny lies elsewhere..."

Will looked long and hard at his friend. "Are you talking about The Enterprise?"

Tang nodded. Will pulled a face as he thought about his options...hell, he had no options now, his chance of captaincy had just been blown into a million and one particles. How long it would be before another chance came up? How long was it going to be before he was in a position to offer Deanna a life with him?. He had decided long ago that he was not going to pursue her until he had achieved his single minded goal. To be captain. She deserved the best,

and in his mind, the best was Captain' s wife.

"It' s not what I had in mind Tang..."

Tang shrugged, unable to see the younger man' s logic. "What have you got to lose? The Federation' s Flagship is nothing to be scoffed at. Only the best of the best will be picked to serve her. Being First Officer on the USS Enterprise would be a privilege sir. You should not think of it as anything else but a privilege..."

Tang waited while Will pondered on his remarks, but what Tang had purposely kept from him was that the ship was to be the first to have a Counselor, and only two days ago Deanna had informed him that she had applied for the position. Tang was finally, at long last able to see the light at the end of their very long tunnel. Deanna Troi and William T. Riker were to be reunited on the best ship ever to grace the universe and beyond. The waiting game was soon to be over, and nobody was happier than he was.

Chapter 4

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One month later, Will' s ship arrived at the planet Deneb 4, home of the newly constructed Farpoint Station, the Federation' s latest Starbase. The base had been under attack by an alien life-force since it' s completion, but by the time The Hood had arrived, things had reached crisis point. Starfleet had dispatched the USS Enterprise and the USS Starseeker to join forces against the alien. But it wasn' t until the Starseeker had been destroyed that it came to light that the attacking alien was trying to free it' s mate that had been captured by the planets inhabitant' s, the Bandi. It had eventually taken the ships newly appointed Counselor to sense the Bandi' s deception and to free the trapped alien.

Will returned to his own ship, tired, battle worn and in desperate need of some R & R, so was surprised when he was summonsed to his Captain' s ready room.

Will stood before the man who he had come to greatly admire, puzzled at the smug smile that was upon the older man' s face. "You wanted to see me sir..."

DeSoto grinned at his first officer and indicated him to sit. "At ease Will, I have some news for you..."

Instantly Will was suspicious. "Oh...and what may that be sir...?"

DeSoto decided to wind him up a little. "Your being transferred..."

Will cautiously looked at his senior officer. "Oh...and where am I being transferred to if I might ask?"

DeSoto smirked, "Farpoint Station..."

Will simply stared at him before exploding with disbelief. "Planetside! Jesus Christ Robert, I joined Starfleet to zoom around the galaxy in Starship' s, not to get my bloody ass planted on solid ground again!..."

Robert DeSoto began to quietly chuckle before falling about with laughter at Will' s expression.

Will was not amused. "I hardly find it funny sir, it' s not you being stuck on some god-fore-saken ball of dirt, that hasn' t even got any decent looking women!" As soon as he' d said the statement out loud, he found himself silently adding, \*and she isn' t there\*

Another burst of laughter finished Will off. With an unaccustomed coarse word that told his Captain just exactly what he thought of his new mission, he made to leave the room. Robert DeSoto' s laughter choked off as he realised that Will thought he was being serious, he promptly called him back.

"Will...Will, come back, I was kidding you."



her to meet the latest recruit.

"Over here...I've asked the Counselor to join in this meeting. May I introduce our new first officer, Commander William Riker...Commander Riker, this is our ship's Counselor, Deanna Troi"

Will turned his gaze to the newcomer, for an instant, barely an instant, the name didn't register.

Until he felt her presence surround and embrace him.

Until his heart pumped so hard even she must have been able to hear it.

Until his feet refused to move as the shock moved in sending his body into an embarrassing statue mode.

Until his eyes met hers.

It was her...it was his Imzadi. After all this time, he had finally come face to face with his one true love.

The other half of him.

His destiny.

Everything in the universe came to a standstill as the two souls re-connected for a moment.

Will's startled eyes met dark, sultry, confident ones. It rapidly became obvious that Deanna had known he was commissioned to the ship, if only he'd been given the opportunity to know that she was also assigned. He would have been more prepared for this moment.

His heartbeat ceased as he felt her mind connect with his.

\*Do you remember what I taught you Imzadi?... Can you still sense my thoughts?\*

But her mouth said, "A pleasure commander"

As his heart resumed its steady beat, he knew he had to somehow answer her, coherently.

But he inwardly cringed as he replied, "Likewise Counselor"

But Picard was talking to him, he couldn't answer her...he couldn't ask her what he wanted to know. His mind raced through a myriad of silent questions.

\*I wonder if she knows how much I want to take her in my arms, right now\*

\*I wonder if she still loves me after all this time, after all what's happened\*

\*I wonder if we can continue where we left off\*

\*I wonder if she knows that I couldn't say goodbye\*

But as they entered the turbo lift, Picard was animated when he realised that they knew each other, insisting that it was excellent that his key officers knew each other's abilities. Both Will and Deanna hid the small smile as Deanna answered, "We do sir"

Will's heart swelled as he heard her once more, "I too could never say goodbye Imzadi"~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

Maybe, just maybe she had forgiven him and let bygones be bygones, but he had a long wait until they could be alone to find out.

Working beside her for the next six or seven hours had been the longest, most frustrating time of Will's life. Watching her feel the intense pain from the trapped life force and the anger from its mate, Will wanted nothing more than to take her in his arms and fight it along with her, but with everyone around, he could do no more than offer her comforting words, comforting thoughts, and a gentle touch when ever he could.

But both were conscious that they had to talk.

They so desperately needed to talk.

The agonising wait for their respective shifts to end brought with it an intense relief when they finally arrived.



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Deanna paced her floor, her arms crossed protectively in front of her as she waited. She halted as she felt his arrival at her door. she took a deep, shaky breath and spoke through the solid metal.

"Come in Will..."

The door hissed open, The sight that greeted him stopped in his tracks. Stopping on the threshold, Will simply stood, and looked.

Once more, time stood still as they faced each other again. Will' s eyes swept down her body, taking in the transformation.

Gone was the starchy, unflattering uniform.

Gone were the hair restraints.

Gone was the barrier that held her traitorous emotions.

Before him stood a girl that had grown from a shy, highly intellectual teenager into possibly the most beautiful creature that he had ever set eyes on. Her hair was free, although slightly shorter than it used to be, it still cascaded past her shoulders in a ripple of never-ending ebony waves. Her dark peacock blue dress moulded her figure that had matured to delicious perfection.

But it was her eyes that captured him.

It wasn' t the dark make-up that transformed them into exotic midnight pools.

It wasn' t even the obvious pleasure of seeing him. It was more than that.

Deanna Troi had grown up.

He was now looking at a fully grown, mature woman.

A woman who knew what she wanted.

A woman who had got what she wanted.

Why did he suddenly think that he wasn' t it.

Deanna was disappointed.

Her eyes fell from his face down his body. He still had on his uniform, and in that instant, she realised that Will Riker was pure Starfleet, through and through.

She had made a huge effort for her first private confrontation with him, and he had turned up in his uniform. But it was more than that and she could clearly see it as her eyes rested once more upon his face.

He hadn' t changed. At all. He still looked exactly the same as he did when he was a brash, cocky lieutenant on her home planet.

And she was disappointed.

Will hesitantly stepped into her domain and the door quietly closed behind him.

He took another step closer to her.

On his way to her quarters, he had imagined Deanna running into his arms as soon as he' d gotten to her room, She would be crying with joy at their long awaited reunion.

But she neither ran, nor did she cry.

This wasn' t going at all like he had hoped.

He tentatively held one arm out to her, his eyes begged her to come to him, his mind pleaded.

But it wasn' t until he uttered the one word that broke down her now rigid posture. "Imzadi...?"

It was all Deanna needed to hear and she stepped into his waiting embrace with a sigh.

Closing her eyes as she wrapped her arms around his waist, she let her mind empty of all the negative thoughts. She didn' t want to remember her heartbreak on Risa, or the seven long

years of waiting. But at that moment, the last thing she wanted to think about was her decision to not resume their intimate relationship.

Instead she lost herself in the magical feelings that washed over her as he in turn cradled her within his own heartfelt embrace. They felt so right together, fitted so right together, perfect even, but perfection had its flaws and it was these minute flaws that filled Deanna's senses as she summoned up the strength to do what she had to do.

Things had gone too far now, they both had achieved their own personal goals. Both had worked long and hard, with their own assortment of miseries and troubles. Life had dealt them with some cruel blows, their relationship had been the cruellest of them all.

But they had each come out the other end of it, older and wiser. But this was as far as they were going.

Will sensed the upheaval, the inner misery, and the finality. He had to make her see...to understand. He hugged her tighter as he whispered the agonising words that brought her back to the present and halted her breathing.

"I love you Deanna, I have never stopped loving you, not for a minute..."

Deanna gasped with dismay and tried to leave the circle of his arms, but he held on fast.

It was then he knew that things weren't going to go back to the way they were.

He knew.

He knew what she was going to say, but right at this moment he did not want to hear it. He felt an urgency build up within him, he needed to make her understand how much she meant to him before the years of waiting... wanting... aching, went flying out of the nearest porthole.

Forcing her chin up with one hand as he kept her body still with his other, he tentatively kissed her. Relieved that she didn't pull away, he kissed her again. And again, until he felt her slowly begin to melt into him. He deepened the kiss, circling her lips with his tongue before delving into the sweetness of her mouth. Two groans became one, as their very essences coupled once more. Time went backwards to a magical moment in the Jalara jungle, when two lost souls found each other for all eternity. A time when everything felt right to give each other the precious gift.

A bond.

A bond that bound them together, no matter what happened in their lives, or however far apart, even in death, the Imzadi bond would keep their hearts, bodies and souls intertwined forever.

They would always love each other.

Deanna felt the passion begin to build in the man that had once become her entire reason for living. Until she had found another reason for living...herself. And it was with the deepest sorrow that she broke the intimate embrace and stepped back. Still hanging onto his arms, her legs unsteady with the fever of desire that smouldered between them. She watched as Will's eyes found hers. Still suffused with his own ardour, the smoky blue wonderment settled on the velvety, rich brown gaze of hers, and he tried once more to make her understand,

"Do you still love me Imzadi...?"

But Will's heart soared and then crashed to the floor when she told him her answer,

"Yes, I do love you Will, with all my heart, but we must not let this ever happen again..."

Chapter 6

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Will was silent for several moments as he digested her words.

This was not what he wanted to hear.

He tried one last attempt to win her back. Speaking harsher than he intended, he found himself

almost growling, His hands holding onto her upper arms in a brutal grip, unleashed a pain that she almost welcomed to compensate for the pain that ripped through to her very soul as she destroyed the man standing before her.

"But I love you goddammit!...I'm not going to give up that easily, not after everything...not after all that we've been through together..."

Deanna's bitter laugh cut him to the quick in as she deliberately pulled herself out of his hands. "Together Will...We have done nothing together for the last seven years...seven...whole... years Will...Things have changed...we have changed..."

Deanna brokenly whispered the last few words.

Will tried again with the only word that seemed to have any effect,

"Imzadi...please..."

Will watched as the tears welled in her eyes, unhappy that he had evoked that reaction, but pleased that he could still do so. He stepped towards her again, but she held her hand up to stop him, her voice wavered as she spoke.

"No Will...I can't do this, I can't let you destroy me again, I won't let you destroy me again. If you loved me...truly loved me Will, you wouldn't do this to me again. If we're going to work together, this has got to be resolved here and now..."

Will stepped away from her and paced her floor, unsure what to say, but figuring he'd got nothing to lose, he ploughed in,

"What about me Deanna, What about what I want...? I tried to get a message to you, I really tried,, but you would not answer me. How in the hell was I supposed to talk to you, apologise to you when you wouldn't even acknowledge my communiques"

Deanna watched Will prowl around the room, he was angry, he was hurt, but hell, she was hurting too, but if things were going to work between them, and she hoped with all her heart that he would eventually understand her reasons why she was doing this to him.

To her.

To them.

She could no longer take the hurt so, somehow, the hurting had to stop here.

Quietly she whispered more to herself than him, unable to look into his eyes,

"When you didn't arrive on that last shuttle, something inside me died inside that day...I went back to Earth the next morning, and for the next seven years, I worked until I dropped, I got my diploma, in record time, I had to face my friends, my colleagues...AND my mother!...with the humiliation that I had been dumped yet again by the infamous William T Riker..." She ploughed on. "But, I can live with that now, I loved you enough to be able to put that behind me, but what will never leave me Will, is my memory of waiting for you to arrive on that last shuttle...Inside, I'm still waiting...I shall always be waiting"

Will stared silently at her as he watched the unshed tears finally trickle down her cheeks. Her voice finally broke as she sobbed in earnest. "Please Will, don't do this to me anymore..."

Will instantly pulled the broken woman back into his arms and held her tight as she cried. His own heart broke as he realised just what he done to her.

What he'd done to them.

What they'd lost.

"I'm so sorry Imzadi, please, please forgive me...I promise I will never, ever do that to you again, you have my word..."

Gently lifting her chin, he wiped away a trail of moisture and lightly kissed her lips, he made his murmured vow with a heavy heart, but along side of the pain was relief. Relief that he hadn't entirely lost her.

"I swear to you Deanna, that I'm here for you, I'll always be here for you, no matter what... If

you' ll let me, we' ll be the very best of friends, and if you want more, that' s o.k. too...but, whatever happens, I will always be here, o.k.?"

Deanna nodded as a fresh wave of tears cascaded down her face, but these were tears of joy, and she laughed,

"Thank you Will, for understanding...I can' t believe it, I' m crying over you again"

Will chuckled and pulled her in for a huge hug. And as the two rejoined soul-mates began another chapter in their lives, a wave of contentment settled between them and as he kissed the top of head, he whispered. "At long last, we' re together again and this time, I' m not leaving you Imzadi, We' re here, together, and it' s like we' ve finally come home, and right now, I fee like I' m the luckiest man on Earth..."

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