

The Dark Dream
By Carol Sandford

"He's back, Doctor"

Nurse Ogawa moved away from Will's prone form so that the first thing that Will saw when he opened his heavily drugged eyes was his friend, Beverly Crusher, and the first words he would hear would be hers telling him that he was alive.

She moved closer, leaning over him so that her face was close to his; Her hand lay lightly upon his chest, feeling its comforting beat. She watched his eyes moving beneath his still closed lids as they struggled to open.. She smiled warmly as he lost the battle, but she wasn't concerned; He had been so heavily sedated that she was even surprised that he had managed to even come to let alone look up at her with those beautiful piercing eyes.

Why couldn't he open his eyes? Will struggled against the force that kept him in the darkness. he wanted to wake. He wanted to see the sun in the sky; the grass on the ground; the salmon leaping the falls on their doomed travel home.

But it all eluded him. He felt the sting to his neck and wished he could splatter the infuriating bug that had left its poison to fester beneath his skin. But barely seconds later, he felt the fog begin to lift; the darkness fade away as the light filtered through his still closed lids.

{{Wow, what kinda bug was that!?!}} His hazy brain flicked through the memorised catalogue of insect life indigenous to Alaska, but came up blank to a bug that cured rather than ailed. {{Hey, maybe I've just discovered a cure or something!}}

His brow furrowed as he pondered on the thought, {{Does that mean I have something?}}

"Commander....Will, come on, open those eyes, I know you're in there. Come on."

Beverly watched Will's forehead wrinkle when she spoke to him. She knew he could hear her, but was troubled by the lack of recognition.

"Will, its Beverly...do you know where you are?"

Will heard a strange bleeping noise by his ear, but didn't recognise the unusual sound. God, he wished he could open his eyes, but they were so heavy, just so damned heavy. And that voice, who was it. Who was Beverly. Why was she here, in his home? He'd only fallen over and banged his head, God dammit! Although he must admit, he didn't remember the fall.

He heard 'her' voice again, "I know he's in there and he's conscious, but I can't understand why he won't open his eyes."

Will figured that she was a doctor. But what happened to old Doctor Franklin? Damn the old

man must be in his eighties by now. He was the first man that ever gave Will a whack on his ass. Oh, he'd never forget Doctor Franklin! Will wondered if he'd died. He hoped not.

Will was abruptly brought back to the moment in time when he felt one of his eyelids being forcibly pushed open, but he couldn't focus on the face before him, she was too close. But damn, she sure smelt nice. He tried to lift his arm to push her hand away, but it wouldn't work. He felt as if he had been tied down.

He felt the panic begin to rise within him. The doctor must have seen the fright in his eye, for she quickly released the eyelid and hushed him with a very feminine whisper, her breath, cool against his lightly fevered skin. "Shhhhhh, its okay."

Will felt the woman move away from him as she began to speak to the nurse, "I think its time we let Deanna know that the Commander is conscious. Maybe she can revive him the rest of the way, he may respond to her."

Will heard a feint tap before the doctor began speaking, presumably to thin air, "Crusher to Counselor Troi, can you come to sickbay please, we have a resident that is in need of a warm hello."

Will heard the distant response, noticing the excitement in the sultry, slightly foreign voice, "I'm on my way, Beverly."

But who was Counselor Troi. Is she my girlfriend. Do I even have a girlfriend? Heck, I must have. I'm Will Riker, the hottest f*** in highschool. Will inwardly sniggered. Yeah, course I've got a girlfriend. And I bet she's a blonde and got the longest legs in town. With that accent she could even be European, a Swede maybe. Swedes were hot. Yeah, that sounds like my babe.

So lost in his meandering, erotic thoughts, he physically jumped when he felt the small, cool hand take his, and an even cooler moist kiss touch his knuckles. But it was the word that threw him; "Imzadi..."

Will panicked again. {{She doesn't recognise me! My face must be totally destroyed. She thinks I'm some guy called Imzadi! But I'm not, I'm William Riker. Redfern's quarterback. Highschool Jock!}}

It was then he realised he was sitting bolt upright, staring at a trio of frightened faces. One Asian looking woman, a stunning red-head that was hovering some contraption over his body that bleeped like crazy. And then his eyes settled on the woman that still clutched his hand to her breast.

She was neither blonde, nor tall. In fact, quite the opposite. Raven hair that spiralled half way down her back, and eyes as black as coal, he'd never seen anything like her before. But aside the bleep of the surrounding machines, and in the background Will could hear the feint hum of something that was clearly the life source of whatever he was in, because it rapidly became very clear that he was no longer in his cabin in Valdez, Alaska. In fact he didn't even think he was on his own planet.

Puzzled, he pondered that if they were aliens, how could they understand him? If they were aliens, how come they hadn't fixed him. Aside from what he remembered in his youth, Will Riker didn't have a clue what day it was. What time it was. Where he was, or who the beautiful young woman was that still stood before him with huge tears falling down her cheeks. He hated asking, but he had to; He had to know.

"Who are you?"

::Chapter two::

Will held his head in his hands, trying to squeeze the painful images from his mind. He felt her fingers prising his palms away, but he wouldn't let her; he couldn't. Will felt sure that his head would explode if he released it.

"Let me be, just let me be, it'll go in a minute."

Will didn't think he'd ever get used to the woman's voice that spoke so soothingly, so lovingly to him. He felt like a cretin. He felt like an interloper; Like he didn't belong. But he knew he did.

When the doctor had released him from the sickbay, the woman called Deanna, took him to a room...His room, in the hope that it would jog his memory. But it didn't.

According to Deanna and the Doctor, this was his time; This was where he belonged; on a space ship, in space. He remembered laughing at the preposterous idea so much that the doctor had stung his neck with that thing again. Now he knew it wasn't a bug. Now he knew it was a 24th century injection, and he'd been zapped into submission again, and he hated it.

In the meantime, at least three times a day, he was blasted with the most horrendous headaches he'd ever witnessed. They drove him insane with their intensity, and nothing, nothing could help him. That is anything medical. He did find however that Deanna's massaging hands and her soothing words helped, albeit a little.

And she was attempting to help him now. "Lay down, Will, let me help you."

But he hated being so dependant on a stranger even though in his heart that she most certainly was not a stranger to him, not in this lifetime. For an hour after his startling revelation when he first came to that he didn't have a clue who they were, or where he was, Deanna had tried to fill him in; tried to tell him just how important he was in her life.

But he could do nothing more than listen to her with that awful dead feeling permeating his soul knowing that it was killing her too. He could only imagine her loss, it must have been awful to face a total stranger that she loved so deeply, they had created a bond between them.

Will remembered asking her if the two of them were married, and was somewhat relieved when she had told him that they weren't, although he didn't know why he'd felt so much relief when she'd said no. He distantly wondered if he didn't really love her at all, if they were just

going through the motions like some couples do, but not having the courage to end the relationship. She had stunned him with her declaration, "You mean the universe to me, Will, and I to you. Its who we are. Its what we are to each other. We are Imzadi. It means all those things that are good between a man and a woman. Love, friendship, respect... and more."

Will lay back against the couch and let Deanna create her magic upon his head. He allowed his mind to think on that word; Imzadi. It was so strange, so alien. And yet, when he heard the word and the way Deanna spoke it to him, he felt at strangely at peace, as though the world had come to rights.

He felt the headache begin to diminish and something else begin to take over. Even though it felt good, he knew it wasn't right. Will reached up to take her hands in his and stop the movement, but instead of removing them, he hesitantly moved them lower to his neck. He felt Deanna sink to the floor behind the couch as she moved her arms around him more fully.

Her voice was husky against his neck and he felt his inside heat up just hearing her speak. How he loved her voice; her accent. "What is it, Will, do you remember something?"

He felt awful shaking his head, but compensated by taking her hands within his and squeezing them comfortingly. "I'm sorry."

He felt her disappointment radiate throughout him and he felt guilty again. But before he could act on it, she had pushed herself to a stand and was preparing to leave," Okay, not to worry, I'm sure it will come back soon...Well, I think its time I left you to rest. I'll...I'll see you tomorrow, Will."

But she was almost out of the door before he could return his good night, and as he watched the door close, he felt the weight of his loss saturate him and he wanted desperately to call her back, but the words died on his lips. But seconds later, the door re-opened and she stood hesitantly on the threshold.

They stood face to face with a hundred and one questions bouncing between them, but Will surprised himself by being the one to speak. "I know that right now, I don't have any idea who you are, or what it is that is between us. But right now, at this minute, I wish I did, because I need you, Deanna."

Deanna stepped towards him until she came close enough for him to see the passion in her eyes, the pulse at her throat that told him that she was in as much turmoil as he. Will's eyes fell to her arm that slowly rose, welcoming him; beckoning him to her. He didn't need asking twice.

Stepping into her arms felt like he had arrived home. He didn't know how or why, only that nothing felt so right. Deanna fitted against him like a well worn glove and he couldn't resist pulling her flush against his body, completely enveloping her within the circle of his arms.

Heaven, Will felt like he was in heaven. The long moments ticked by as the two of them continued to hold each other, Something passed between them that night. it wasn't anything sexual, just ~something~. Will knew now that even if he never regained his memories, he and

Deanna had a chance of a future, together. And it was that thought he clung to as he settled down in his bed, contented and at peace.

That was until the dark dream began.

::Chapter three::

She was dressed in white. Her dress shimmered in the candle light as she slowly walked along the aisle towards me. Her bouquet of crimson daisies and tiny baby's breath, so large it almost obscured the entire front of her gown. Her veil hid her face from me, but I didn't need to see her, I know she was the most beautiful woman in the universe, and she was about to become my wife.

Her shoulders were bare, revealing her soft creamy skin. I remembered the last time my face was buried against that softness and I felt my insides inflame with a heat that only she could create, purely just by me thinking about her beneath me, over me and beside me. She was my friend, my lover, and now she was my bride.

As we stood side by side, revealing our hearts to each other along with our vows, our joined hands connected our souls. Her delicate fingers within mine were solid and sure and I knew that I was the happiest and luckiest man alive.

At the end of the ceremony, I couldn't wait for her to raise the heavy veil and reveal her beautiful face to me once more. Taking the veil's edge, I began to lift, but instead of seeing the woman I adored; the woman I was about to spend the rest of life with. My Deanna. My Imzadi, I saw nothing.

Blackness

Intangible blackness.

And Will began to scream.

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Deanna felt the terror in her heart before she heard the terrified scream. Throwing back her bedcovers, she raced through her quarters without the aid of illumination. She could have found her way to her Imzadi's side blind folded, her sense of him so strong, so sure.

Letting herself into his quarters, Deanna forcibly stopped and calmed herself before moving into the bedroom area. but her serenity went out of the nearest porthole when she saw the stricken man before her, her heart crying out at his pain and confusion.

He stared out into the darkness, oblivious to his surroundings and to the woman that was now at his side, clutching his hand and stroking his hair. The woman he was supposed to love was here, comforting him and holding him like he was a child and he felt empty; blank, devoid of feeling anything but companionship towards her.

He knew she was the woman in his dream, and he knew she was an important factor in his life right now, but when was right now. Where was right now. Who was he right now. Was he a commander of a Starship like they kept telling him, or was he still at highschool, spending his days playing ball and his nights with the prettiest girls on campus?

Will Riker was lost. Utterly and totally lost.

Deanna hushed and soothed the big man's tortured mind, until at last, he fell against the pillow and closed his eyes. She watched him quietly for a moment, wishing with all her heart that Will would come back to her, the Will that she knew and loved, and who loved her equally in return. It cut Deanna to the quick to know that in her beloved's mind, she was nothing more than a blank page.

But right now, that didn't matter. Right now, her Imzadi was hurting like never before and she needed to focus on him. "Sssshhhh, its okay, I'm here now, nothing is going to hurt you."

Deanna sat with her back against the wall, pulling Will's head onto her lap. It felt so good to have him this near again, so good. But Deanna had to push away her wants and desires for the time being and offer anything that Will needed to get well. She felt his arm snake across her lap and hold onto her tightly as he allowed her to stroke and soothe away his fears and uncertainties.

She heard him whisper, "I'm sorry." into the darkness, but he didn't move. Deanna didn't want him to. It reminded her of times past when they had done the self same thing, and Deanna dimly realised that maybe Will had known, that he had remembered this part of their relationship; those intimate, quiet and reflective moments when Will had laid his head upon her lap and she had stroked his brow for seemingly hours on end as they talked, about everything and anything.

It was a start; a valuable start.

"Tell me what frightened you tonight, Will. Did you have a bad dream?" Deanna's soothing voice broke the long regenerative silence.

Will's voice was low, almost sleepy as he recalled the dream, "I had a dream. I dreamed it was our wedding day. You looked beautiful, really beautiful, Deanna, I was so proud of you as we recited our vows to each other..."

He went silent for a few moments and Deanna thought that he wasn't going to say anymore. She tried prompting him gently, "And?..."

"I lifted your veil so that I could kiss you and....and there was no face..."

Will shifted, turning on her lap so that he was looking up at her, the illumination from the stars outside glinting off his eyes as he stared up at her waiting for her response. But she didn't know what to say, but he did.

"I look at you, Deanna and I see a blank page, like I've never seen you before. But something inside me keeps telling me that I have and that we are something very special together. I'm sure if I painted a picture of you, I couldn't paint your face. Its like it refuses to imprint on my mind, Deanna, and I am so sorry for that because I know it is hurting you."

"I do know that if I could be anywhere, I know I would want to be here, with you. I know I belong here because you tell me, and in my heart I know that I do. I have to accept this is my home, and that you are part of my life."

He watched Deanna's eyes glisten, but he still wasn't sure if it was because of the insane situation that they were in or because he was spilling his guts to her. God, he wished he could remember. The doctor was continually telling him that his memory would return, in time and whatever trauma his mind had sustained, one day it would heal itself. She also believed that the headaches were part of the healing process even though they were violent and painful for him.

And Beverly was right, day after day, with each new headache came a glimmer of hope. Will had revealed to her that when he was having the attacks, sometimes, very tiny glimpses of his past came through, even intimate moments with Deanna. Just flashes that would mean nothing to others but meant the world to him as they revealed his true relationship with the woman who was his pillar of strength and the woman who he loved.

But for now, he was locked in a time warp; A time when all he thought about was when his meal was and who he was going to spend the night 'entertaining' with. He wished he'd know Deanna then, he was certain that he would have given up his fondness for the female form and his obsession with proving he was a man with a capital M.

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"AAAAAAAARGH!"

"Come on Will, fight it, fight the pain."

"I can't Deanna, it hurts too much!"

"Do you want me to call Beverly?"

"NO! no...I just need a minute.....I..."

Deanna could do nothing more than watch as the giant man clutched his head, closed his eyes and slumped to the floor in a dead faint. "WILL!!!!!!...Troj to Crusher, medical emergency in Commander Riker's quarters. Hurry!"

<I'm on my way, Deanna.>

When Beverly Crusher raced through the doors to Commander Riker's quarters, she came face to face with a nightmare. On his way to the floor, Will had inadvertently hit the floor,

hard. She could already see the blue shadow coming through at his temple. A quick scan told her that Will wasn't in any immediate danger other than the bruise. Pressing the hypo to his neck, they both anxiously waited for him to rouse.

Will heard the voices above him, ordering him to waken. He was sure he'd heard this same conversation not so long ago. maybe it was the same one. Maybe he'd fallen asleep again and they were trying to wake him up.

"Come on, Will, open your eyes, I know you're in there."

Will grimaced against the bright lights beneath his heavy eyelids and the dull ache in his head

He heard a distinctive gasp from beside him; Deanna, Deanna Troi, the woman who ruled his life with his blessing. But her words confused him, "It's Will, Beverly!" Will knew she was crying just by the tone of her voice. He listened for a few more moments, shamelessly letting them believe he was still unable to open his eyes. He relished the tender fingertips tracing his face. He wallowed in the sensuous thoughts that ran rampant through her. He mildly wondered if he had ~been~ somewhere, but he couldn't remember.

It was time to stop the charade, "Can't you ladies ever let a guy get some sleep?"

He opened one blue eye, the one that didn't hurt and stared up at the two women that hovered open-mouthed above him. He knew he was okay when his darling Doctor shot back a smart reply, "Sure, Commander, we can leave you to eat the carpet, but I want you in bed please, preferably under your own steam, you've gotten rather...heavy in your aging years."

At that he opened both eyes, indignancy poured from him, "I'll have you know I weigh exactly the same as I did when I boarded the Enterprise!"

Beverly snorted, "Yes, Commander, your ego may weigh the same, but thats about all."

But she was talking to herself. Will's eyes had found his Imzadi's and were locked in an intimate reunion. Beverly muttered as she stood, "Thats my cue to leave you guys in peace. Drop by sickbay later, Commander. Thats an order."

Will broke eye contact long enough to glance at his departing m.o. "Sure thing, Doc." before the doors had closed, the two lovebirds were drinking in each others features almost like it was the first time they'd met.

But then Deanna smiled, and he smiled back. He took her hand and kissed her knuckles, his eyes never leaving hers. "Hi."

She grinned, "Hi."

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