

A FINAL CHANCE

By Carol Sandford

Will noticed that Deanna hadn't been the same since Tom had left the Enterprise to take up position on the USS Ghandi leaving her behind, yet again... Time after time, he wondered who she was thinking about when she quite often, quietly watched him. He could see the longing in her eyes, sometimes the misery, and sometimes the passion. He also knew that the passion wasn't for him. If only it was...

Without a shadow of a doubt, Will knew that he loved her, and often wanted to tell her so, although he was sure that she knew it anyway. But for some reason, other than not wanting to spoil the beautiful friendship that they had forged between them, Deanna Troi didn't seem to want a relationship with him.

Some nights, he would answer his door to find her standing there, her face desperately seeking understanding, her body crying out for a comforting cuddle. He gladly gave them to her, and more, if she'd have wanted it...she never did.

Thomas Riker had not even bothered to keep in touch with Deanna. Will cringed at the thought that he might have behaved just like that if the situation had been reversed...He was glad it wasn't.

Then suddenly, out of the blue, nine months after he left the ship, Deanna came to his quarters. As he opened the door to her, Deanna leapt into his arms, happiness radiated throughout her body as tears of joy cascaded down her face. 'Oh Will...He's coming back for me...Tom's coming!'

As she embraced his body, Will's thoughts screamed at him, and her, *Oh No, you can't leave me Imzadi!*

Deanna stilled in his arms as Will's terrified cries surged through to her very soul. She tried to disengage herself from his arms to look at him, he wouldn't let her. He hugged her so fiercely she thought she was going to break in two. Will nestled his face into her hair, trying to rein in the emotions that were spiralling out of control. Never in his entire life had he felt how he felt right as this minute, the desolation was indescribable. Hands pulled at his heart, threatening to rip it out from his chest as his body began to shake with the shock of her words. And he knew he was beginning to choke as he found himself holding back tears that threatened to fall.

Deanna was frightened. She had never seen, or felt Will this distraught before. She desperately wanted to comfort him, but he wouldn't release her from his vice-like grip. She had no choice but to let her mind and body relax, hoping that the action would in some way, help to calm him. She lightly stroked his back, like a mother would her child until she felt him quieten. Eventually he loosened his hold enough for Deanna to gently push away from him, but still held onto his arms to keep the contact that she knew he needed. Her heart broke when she saw the despair etched across his handsome face.

His eyes...for as long as she lived, she would never forget the look in his eyes. The raw emotion made them sparkle with the tears that he refused to let fall. Her own eyes filled as she

reached to gently cup his face within her tiny hands, forcing him to look at her. Every ounce of his love could be read within the depths of those vivid blue eyes, and his shame at his own weakness made him try to break the contact, but she wouldn't let him go.

Now it was her turn to make him listen,

' Will...Will, look at me...I love you Will. With everything I have, you gave me everything... You made me Will, without you I wouldn't exist. You are my entire life...but I need more of you Will, but only Tom can give it to me now, only he can fill the emptiness that you can't.'

Her eyes begged him to understand. She watched as a solitary tear slipped from the pool within his eyes, and as he blinked, the tears ran down his face, her thumb stopping their travel as she gently wiped them away.

' I do love you Will...I will always love you... you do know that don't you...Don't you Will?'

He took a deep breath, nodding gently as he did so. Reaching out, he wrapped his arms around her body, drawing strength from her to finally speak, 'Yes Imzadi, I know you love me, and I you. I wish it were me who could fill the void, but I know I can't...I'm sorry.'

Suddenly, he stood upright, holding Deanna away from his body enough to look straight over her head as he gained the nerve to look back down to her upturned face, smiling as he did so, his words making her swell with pride at the courage she knew that it took to say,

' So...When's he coming to whisk you away from us?' He couldn't bring himself to say his name.

Smiling, she took herself from their embrace to wander over to the port-hole to gaze out at the passing stars, ' Two weeks..He'll be here in two weeks...'

~~~~~

## Chapter two

Thomas Riker shimmered into life before her very eyes, barely waiting for the transporter to finish its job before rushing off, straight into his beloved's waiting outstretched arms. They briefly gazed longingly into each others eyes before Deanna grasped the back of his head to pull him down for a long awaited, almost desperate kiss. Tom's heart soared as he delved deep into her mouth, feeling the moan rise up within him. Crushing her body close to his, he couldn't help himself as he swung her round in a complete circle, before gently replacing her feet back on the floor.

Will watched the couple from a few feet away, and was surprised to find that he wasn't jealous. But the feeling that invaded his very being was one of loneliness, and he didn't like it at all. The heaviness of his heart made him wish that he was jealous. Anything but this awful feeling. He would have done ' anything' to have got out of this meeting, but Picard had insisted that he welcomed his ' brother' aboard. So here he was, watching his entire universe crumble before his very eyes...

Two very happy faces finally turned to face Will, and before anything was said, he stuck out his hand to greet his greatest adversary, managing to keep the bitterness out of his voice, and

aided with an over-bright smile he welcomed him back, ' Hello Tom...good to see you again. How' s life back on the Ghandi? Enjoying being back among the stars?'

Tom warily took his brothers hand, relieved that Will had taken the first step. He knew it was going to be awkward, and he also knew Will was putting on a huge front for Deanna' s benefit he suspected.

As he plastered his own similar grin across his face, barely keeping his pride from his voice, he' d won Deanna' s hand over Will' s and right at this moment he was gloriously self-satisfied. ' Hi Will... Life is just great. I' m chief of security now, and best of all, I' ve got everything I' v always wanted...nearly'

Will again watched the look between the two lovers as Tom pulled Deanna close to his side, his arm fixing around her tiny waist. His own heart sank again as Deanna' s hand came to lightly caress his cheek, adoration shone from her eyes. And once again he sadly reminded himself that she' d once had that look for him.

God, it hurt.

He unconsciously sighed, and turned away before they saw the pain that he was sure showed in his eyes. But seconds later, he looked down in surprise as Deanna linked her arm in his, threw him a tremendous smile, and all three of them, arm in arm, set off down the corridor. Members of the crew doing a double take at the comical sight...

Will managed to excuse himself as they reached Deanna' s quarters. The hurried pace between the two as they all neared their own private sanctuaries, gave him the unwelcome thought of what was going to happen as soon as the door closed on them. Will' s steps grew heavier with each step as he visualised the frantic removal of clothes. The frenzied hands reaching out to touch everything. Whispered words of lovers desperate to reunite.

By the time Will had reached his own quarters, the erotic thoughts that assaulted him, reduced him to a heap on the floor. His head fell to his hands, as he tried to shut them out, his own cries joining in...

' You can' t do this to me Imzadi...I Love You...Please!...Don' t do this.'

~~~~~

Along the corridor, Deanna stilled as Will' s anguished cries filtered through the sexual haze of Tom' s own sensual thoughts. She sat up, still intimately locked to the man beneath her. Tom reached for her breasts, but she pushed him away. Tom looked up to her face when she stopped his movements.

He watched her face crumple before she burst into tears. Tom sat up, still embedded within Deanna' s body, and enveloped her within his arms. Assuming that she was crying from the sexual relief like he knew some women did, he whispered loving endearments that he thought she' d want to hear after, what he' d considered to be his best sex since...well, since the last time he' d made love her. Before he' d left to join the Ghandi.

' Shush, Dee, it' s okay sweetheart, I' m here. It' s going to be okay.' He fell back with shock she pushed him away and climbed off, her words cutting him to the core

' Oh my God Tom, I can' t do this ...'

As it dawned that Will had managed to come between them... again, his rising anger made her jump as he snapped, ' Oh, just great..I' m screwing you, and your thinking about HIM!

Deanna turned startled, horrified eyes to him, the tears continued to run unchecked down her face at his brutal remark, ' How could you Tom?, after everything that' s happened, how could you be so cruel?'

Tom swung his legs round to sit beside her, his anger now radiating throughout his body, he snarled 'I got cruel being dumped on that lousy planet with only your undying love to keep me sane. Only to find that HE was playing ' happy families' instead of me, and he hadn' t even got the balls to take up where we' d left off on Betazed!...What a wimp!'

By the time he' d finished his tirade, he was shouting and pacing around the room, butt naked. Deanna watched him with a growing sense of dread as she began to realise what a mistake she had made. Tom being stuck on that planet for eight years had turned him into a bitter version of his counterpart,. He obviously resented everything that Will had become. And the fact that the friendship between herself and him had indeed become better than the intimate relationship that Tom so desperately wanted, now she seriously began to wonder if it was just spite.

Deanna quietly rose, picking up her dressing gown as she did so. The need to cover herself up became paramount. She now felt invaded. This wasn' t Will making love to her, and finally as the cloud lifted, she knew where she belonged. And it wasn' t with this stranger...

With his hands on his hips, still naked, he watched her cover herself up. When she went to leave, he instinctly knew where she was going. With a roar, he rushed to block her path. ' NO! Your not going to him!'

Deanna looked up into his face, she wasn' t afraid. She knew he would never hurt her, but she desperately wanted to see Will, ' Let me go Tom, I don' t belong with you.'

Tom took a step towards her. He went to reach for her hand as his anger had turned to desperation, knowing that he' d blown it once again, ' Please Deanna..can we at least talk about it...Please!'

They both turned to the door as it hissed open, surprise clear on their faces. Will stepped in, quickly assessing the situation to make sure no harm was being done, his posture ready for anything that might have happened when he made himself known. ' I think the lady wants to leave.'

His voice held a veiled threat that Tom knew only too well. No one in there right mind tackled a Riker when it involved a woman, especially when that woman was Deanna Troi...

Deanna edged around Tom, never taking her eyes from his face. Will took her hand and pulled her the rest of the way towards him. He gave her a gentle nudge to indicate for her to go ahead without him. She carried on walking, nervously watching over her shoulder as Will re-entered her quarters and closed the door...

Both men stared at each other for some time, before Will finally quietly and deliberately dished out his orders, ' I want you off this ship before 0900hours tomorrow...you will never, ever, come on board again, and don' t EVER try to take Deanna away from me again. I think she has made it very plain which Riker she wants to be with...and it isn't you!'

As Will turned to leave, Tom flew at him with the howl of an injured man, ' You Son of a Bit....!'

But before he had finished cursing, Will had swung round and landed the hardest punch he' d ever hit anyone with on his jaw. The last thing he wanted was a fight with himself as his opponent! Will looked down at Tom as he fell backwards to the floor, clutching his chin, sure he saw admiration in his eyes as Tom looked back to him now in a different light. No words were said, just an understanding look between the two men before Will turned and walked out of the doors, without looking back once.

Deanna was waiting around the corner, her worried look turning to one of relief when she saw her Imzadi walk towards her, with no obvious physical damage. Will barely halted as he reached her. She fell in step beside him and he casually slung his arm across the top of her shoulders, giving a quick hug to reassure her, both lost in their own thoughts and recriminations. And for once, the first in a long time, both felt a sense of peace.

Once they had entered Will' s quarters, both stood uncertainly in the middle of the room, both sensing each others thoughts, both saying exactly the same thing, together. ' I' m sorry..'

Smiling at the irony of the situation, they walked into each others waiting arms. Time ceased as the fated couple finally came to realise what they both missed, wanted and cherished. Will voiced the question they both were desperate to ask, ' So, What do we do now?'

Deanna pulled back and looked up to his face, now seeing it in a totally different light. Her realisation that everything she ever wanted was standing here, right in front of her, and had been all along, made the tears spring to her eyes once again, ' Oh Will, how could I have been so stupid. I love you so much...can we start over again?, properly this time.'

Will gently kissed her nose, his love radiating through the very essence of her being. As his arms enveloped her, he hoarsely groaned, 'Oh Deanna, you don' t know how long I' ve waited for you to say that...'

As they tentatively touched each other' s lips, not knowing if the spark they needed to re-ignite the fire they needed to make them become one again. Only time would tell. Breaking the gentle kiss, they looked deep into each others eyes, seeing the love that shone from their depths was more enough to cause that spark. And as they finally opened their souls once more, they knew that they had been given yet another chance...