

FORBIDDEN LONGINGS

BY CAROL SANDFORD

The crowded room buzzed with a variety of noises. Some people whispered between themselves. Some voices were playful as giggles frequently broke through the steady, comfortable atmosphere.

It was a place for relaxing. That's why everybody on board frequented the Ten Forward lounge. To relax and catch up with friends and loved ones at the end of a shift.

All except her.

Everyone ignored the red-head that sat at the bar, but not unkindly. She had arrived on her own, and seemingly wanted to remain that way, because she made no move to approach anyone.

Beverly Crusher sat with her back against the bar, quietly surveying the occupants of the room. She had been in the lounge for near on an hour, and had lost count of how many drinks she had consumed.

She had told the barman in no uncertain terms, to keep her glass filled, 'with the real stuff... I need to get drunk' !, and she was slowly, but surely... and blissfully, beginning to feel it's effects.

Beverly was heart-achingly lonely. The first man that she had fallen in love with since Jack had died, was gone. Her Odan had gone, and it hurt like the devil.

Draining the dregs of her glass, she indicated for more. The barman reluctantly half filled it with the amber liquid before discreetly moving away. Beverly took another healthy swig of her drink, grimacing as it burned the back of her throat, silently welcoming it's pain.

Propping her elbow on the bar's edge, Beverly once more intently watched the flow of personnel come and go. Lost in her own misery, she thought it was amusing to know that anyone who glanced her way, found her grinning. It was painfully obvious that she was tipsy, and she did not give a hoot. In fact, the situation amused her even more.

The glass dangled precariously from her fingers, but she did not notice. She did not even care. The sound of the door opening roused her enough to glance at the newcomer. Beverly's heart jumped to her throat as a giant of a man stepped over the threshold.

It was the last person Beverly wanted to see, but in retrospect, she was bound to, and she silently wondered if he really was who she was perversely waiting for.

//

Will Riker casually strolled through the lounge doors. He was looking forward to some company other than his immediate senior crew, and his eyes swept around the tables.

Maybe, just maybe, his luck was in and he would get close enough to an available female to spend the rest of the evening with. Maybe the night too...if he was lucky enough.

A smile tugged at his mouth as Will silently gloated to himself, he was always lucky. No-one yet had resisted his charm, a fact that he was immensely proud of.

//

Spotting no likely candidates at the tables, his eyes went to the bar, and swept along the scattered bodies that were propped along it's length.

Will's eyes briefly met Beverly's and carried on along the line, oblivious to the turmoil that surrounded her, but within a fraction of a second, his eyes found hers again as his senses picked up the strange vibes that emanated from her.

Moments later he found himself standing before her, not quite believing what he was seeing. Beverly was drunk.

The chief medical officer was sitting in front of him with glassy eyes, and a silly smile upon her face, and if she had moved an inch, she would have been in a heap on the floor.

Once more, his eyes met hers. Everything else in the room faded out of sight and became just two people. One concerned, the other desperate. Will quietly broke the silence.

"Beverly...Are you okay?"

She giggled and raised the glass in front of her face, and Will wondered what she was toasting.

"Hello Will...Well, as you can see I' m a little tipsy, but, I' m having a ball, don' t you worry about me, I' m perfectly happy on my own."

Her last comment raised a frown from him. Now Will knew she was drowning her sorrows.

"Beverly, I' m sorry, can I help?"

He reached out to gently touch her arm, but she shied away from his touch. Will let his arm fall to his side, realising that he was probably the last person she would want help from. His heart felt heavy as he apologised quietly.

Ever since he had been the temporary host to Odan, her lover.

Ever since Beverly had finally accepted Odan' s love once he was within Will's body.

Ever since they had shared an intimacy that only lovers normally partook in, Beverly had avoided him like the plague.

As time wore on after their final parting, Beverly became increasingly subdued. Odan had touched her like no other, and she missed his presence, and his love, like a death.

Worse than a death. Odan was still alive and kicking, within a woman' s body, and that hurt her even more.

//

Beverly turned away from Will' s intense stare.

"Leave me alone Will, please...I' m not ready for this"

Will continued to study her, but moments later he found himself staring at her back. He was loathe to leave her, but Beverly had given him no choice. He reached out to lightly touch her shoulder, his whisper barely reached her ears.

"Okay Beverly, I' m sorry...forgive me."

Beverly silently wondered just what he was asking her to forgive.

He turned away and made his way over to a table occupied by a couple of young ensigns from engineering. Sitting astride the chair, he positioned himself so that Beverly was within his sights. He was worried about her. More so since they had been intimate.

Will had gotten to know another side of the doctor that had surprised him, and now he felt an enormous need to be there for her, but she rebuffed him with every attempt of help that he had offered.

But not only him, Deanna had been unable to help her either. Maybe given time she would have eventually opened to her, but Deanna had left the ship for a training programme. It was the lousiest of timing, and one that could not be helped, but day by day Beverly deteriorated, and Will was worried about her.

//

Beverly continued to drink, but as the barman had filled her glass once more, Beverly turned back around to face the lounge. She had noticed where Will was sitting and smiled to herself. It was obvious that he was keeping an eye on her, even if he did rapidly look away when she caught his eye.

Will continued his conversation with the youngsters. For the time being he had pushed Beverly' s plight to the back of his mind until a lull in the conversation made him take stock of

something that had began to prick at his senses.

Frowning, he looked around trying to locate it's source. As his eyes travelled around the room, they finally reached hers, and his heart skipped a beat.

Beverly watched him intently. Her baby blue eyes smouldered and Will felt a rush of something that he had not felt in a long while.

Longing, sexual longing. It surged through his veins causing his heart to thump painfully. His mouth suddenly went dry as he found himself rising to his feet, the officers somewhat surprised at the suddenness of his departure. He uttered no goodnight, no see you later. They weren't even sure if the commander was aware that he had left them.

Seconds later Will found himself standing back in front of the doctor. A thousand questions bounced between them, but not one was asked until Will hoarsely and questioningly, whispered her name.

"Beverly?"

Time stopped as her eyes begged him to understand. Will watched as her quiet plea fell from her quivering lips.

"Will...I need you. Make love to me...Please!."

The air was alive with emotions that raged on between the two friends. Will did not know what to say. This felt so wrong, and his mind raced through every logical reason why this should not be happening.

Why this could not happen.

"Bev...I..."

But before he could utter another word, Beverly choked on the rapidly rising sobs as she quietly pleaded to him to help her.

"Will, get me out of here, please."

Her plaintive cry finally broke through Will's dazed stupor and he stepped forward to help her off the stool, but before he managed to do just that, Beverly's foot slipped and she found herself grasping wildly at him to stop herself falling in an undignified heap at his feet.

Her nervous and embarrassed chuckle drew the attention of the lounge visitors, and Will found himself looking back at them with an apologetic grin.

"The lady's had a bad day."

The onlookers faces rapidly turned from mild curiosity to ones of pity, before turning away and resuming their own conversations.

Will steadied the smaller woman before holding her close to his side and making their way out of the lounge, they entered the turbolift without any mishaps.

Will barked out the appropriate deck number and the lift silently began to move, slowly taking them to their destination.

Beverly was still propped against Will's chest, and he thought she had nodded off as she had become silent. But as he bent slightly to look into her face, he was mortified to find her quietly crying.

Cradling her closer still, Will held her tightly against him, whispering comforting sounds as the lift finally reached the required floor.

As the door opened, Will swung Beverly into his arms and carried her to her door. Over-riding the admission code, he stepped into her domain and carried her straight into her bedroom and laid her on top of the bed.

But as he went to stand, Beverly pulled him back towards her, her hands locking behind his head.

Will searched her face. But what he saw made him swallow painfully. Her eyes, still misty with unshed tears, looked directly into his. Will recognised the longing. Beverly had looked at

him in the same way when he had the symbiant inside of him.

When she had finally relented and accepted Odan' s love through Will.

But this was now, and Odan was long gone. This was wrong, and Will gently tugged at her arms, his voice regretful as he laid her hands back upon her own body.

"Don' t do this Beverly, we' ll both regret this if it happens."

Beverly sobbed, her tears falling freely again as she tried to make him understand.

"I need you Will, I need Odan, pretend to be Odan again for me, just for tonight, please."

Will slowly shook his head and stood up "No Beverly, I' m not what you need"

Will watched her reach for the fastening on her tunic and he stepped back unsure of what to do next. He searched her face again. Gone were the tears. Now her face wore the determined look of a desperate woman.

"Don' t you desire me Will?. Don' t you want this to happen again?... I think you do, I' ve seen you looking at me. I know you remember how it was between us. It was not all Odan, was it Will. It was you who made love to me, wasn' t it Will?"

He stepped further back away from the telling gaze.

She knew.

She knew that he had enjoyed their union.

She knew that it was not just Odan making love to her.

She knew that he had often thought about how good it had been between them.

And she knew that he would made love to her again in a minute, if things were different.

Beverly Crusher was a beautiful woman and she had been an exquisite lover. That had surprised him.

Beneath him, she had come alive. It would be long time before he forgot her image as he had sank himself into her time and time again.

Her red hair that splayed across the pure white pillow.

Hidden freckles that he had discovered as he explored every inch of her creamy skin.

She had been insatiable, and he had been almost sorry when Odan had been removed from his belly. He had had no excuse to continue on with the affair. And besides, there was another factor.

Deanna...

Will would never jeopardize what he had with Deanna Troi, and he knew that he would if he had a relationship with Beverly.

Beverly was different. Beverly would want a full relationship, marriage, the works. She deserved nothing less and Will respected that.

But Will' s heart and soul belonged to Deanna.

It was one thing to have shallow one night stands with other women. They both needed shallow one-nighters, but Beverly was different.

She was special.

Will could not...would not have an affair with her, no matter what. His head pounded with the phrase over and over, however, his body was struggling with the decision. He had to put some space between them before it was too late.

Beverly' s voice brought him back to the present.

"Will?"

Turning about, he began to walk out of her bedroom,

"I' m sorry Bev, I can' t give you what you want. I won' t do that to Deanna"

Beverly was incensed. Sitting up abruptly she almost shrieked as Will stepped into her lounge.

"Deanna...!, You don' t give a damn about Deanna when your screwing every other female aboard this ship Will Riker. You don' t give a damn if your screwing some bloody alien that' s got green skin and ten arms!. As long as it' s got a female anatomy, you' ll screw it, so don' t give me that crap!...Why can' t you look at me in the same way, Will, why?"

Will stepped back to the bedroom doorway, not trusting himself if he went any closer, he propped himself against the jamb as he tried to explain his dilemma, his hands flailed helplessly.

"Beverly, this is different, you know it' s different. Your our friend, one of our closest friends. I can' t make love to you now, Deanna would never forgive me, I would never forgive me"

Will turned to leave, his voice was low as he made his way out of her quarters,

"Please don' t do this to yourself Bev"

But as he stepped outside the doors her scream reached his ears making him stop in his tracks.

"I don' t care anymore. I want you and I will have you again and if Deanna doesn' t like it, TOUGH!"

Will heard her plaintive wail through the still bulk of the door as he stood and regained his senses. She had really knocked him for six, but instead of walking away like he should have done, he tried to find a way of keeping everyone happy. But as he seriously considered on going back in there, the phrase forgotten as a new one went round and round, Could he get away with just one night?

Will hated to admit it, but at this minute, he wanted to be in there, with her, giving her the loving that she desperately needed, and hell, he needed it too. All it had taken was one look across a crowded lounge to remind him how good it had been between them. He groaned as his body reacted to the erotic memories that washed over him.

Torn between the desire to go back in, and his feelings for Deanna, Will visibly jumped when he heard an almighty thump from within her cabin.

Fate had it' s own way of dealing with situations, and it seemed fate had destined him to go back in.

That' s what he told himself as he waited for the door to re-admit him.

Stepping hastily into the gloom, Will searched for her. Beverly had left the bed, and now lay in a heap on the bathroom floor, out cold.

A quick indifferent perusal of her body found the source of her unconsciousness. A small lump on her forehead was beginning to make itself known, Beverly had obviously knocked herself out on the doorjamb. In her drunken and miserable state, she had probably blundered her way to the bathroom and missed.

Scooping Beverly off the floor, Will lay her gently back on the bed. Taking off her shoes, and easing her upper body from her jacket, he deliberated upon calling sickbay. Slapping her lightly on the face, he tried to rouse her before calling in the medics.

"Beverly...Bev, can you hear me, are you okay?"

Moments later, her eyelids fluttered open. Matching blue eyes cautiously looked into his before filling with tears.

Will gut twisted as he watched her lips began to quiver and she began to cry quietly. Will totally enfolded her within his arms and let her cry. It was what she needed, he knew that, and he was glad that he was here for her. At least he partly understood her loss.

Will knew intimately how much Odan had loved her. There was no denying it, he had adored her, and she him. Will was just sorry that it had ended for her.

And for them. Will rocked her gently for some time, the calming motion having a lulling effect on both of them. So much so that Will did not notice the change in her until it registered that her hands were trailing a sensuous path down his body. Drawing lazy circles over his

back, she edged lower to lightly caress his buttocks.

Pushing himself up onto his elbow, he looked down onto her face. The desire was unmistakable, but what was also unmistakable was the desire in him. Their names slipped from each others lips,

"Will?"

"Beverly?"

As Will' s lips touched hers and withdrew just as quickly. their eyes met once more, feeling the need to confirm that this what they both wanted...both needed.

It was.

This time when their lips met, there was nothing standing in the way. No illicitness. No questions. No answers, and No Deanna Troi.

Will plundered her mouth with a savagery that left them gasping for breath. This kiss was one born out of desperation.

This kiss was designed to rid him of the guilt that surfaced as soon as their tongues collided. Will needed to remove Deanna' s image that swam throughout his senses. Being ruthless with Beverly somehow dispersed her beautiful face. He would never have kissed Deanna in this brutal way, but Beverly seemed to welcome it and within minutes she was tugging at his clothes, needing his naked skin against hers. Needing him within her.

Needing to give herself totally to the man beside her.

The only man that could now give her what she wanted. A link to her lost love.

As Will entered her, he kissed her deeply, capturing the guttural moan. Embedding himself to the hilt, he pushed himself up. He needed to see her. He needed to see who he was making love to.

Pinning her hands beside her head, Will watched Beverly lose herself to the magical moment. He watched the tiny beads of sweat form on her skin.

He watched as tears began to trickle from her eyes and make a trail to her temple.

And as he steadily loved her, he closed his eyes and lost himself in the intimate joining.

Moments later, absorbed in their own private ecstasy, and agony, driven beyond all sense of reason, and control, they both reached the pinnacle of their desire. Both reached the edge of the waterfall.

Both fell over it' s edge, together.

Both cried out in unison as the emotional turmoil took over giving them the most soul-destroying, heart-wrenching experience either had ever had.

"Odan!..."

"Imzadi!..."

Time stopped as soon as the fateful words had been spoken. The only sounds to be heard were the two lovers breathing as they gasped for air.

Gasped for the reverence.

Gasped for forgiveness.

Will propped himself up onto his elbows, his fingers lightly brushed the hair away from her face. The tender gesture tugged at Beverly' s conscience and she began to cry again, bitterly, "Oh Will, what have we done?...I think I' ve fallen in love with you because I can' t live without Odan."

Will kissed her lips tenderly, Beverly' s admission took a lot of guts to admit, but he did not know what to do, or to say, and he told her as much.

"I don' t know what to say Bev. I can' t be Odan for you, you know that"

She nodded sadly, already surmising that they were in an impossible situation,

"I know, I'm sorry Will, I should never have done this to you...To Deanna."

Her voice trailed off. The last thing they needed to be reminded of was the tiny Betazoid that meant the world to both of them.

Especially to him.

Will manoeuvred his way to the edge of the bed, carelessly draping the sheet across his lap, effectively severing the intimate setting that they were still in.

Watching Will cover up his lower body, Beverly instinctly went to pull the sheet to her own chest. Will followed the movement, suddenly embarrassed. They were both embarrassed. It was Beverly who broke the tense silence.

"What are we going to do?"

Will sighed heavily, glancing at her face then back to his hands that dangled between his knees.

"We could always talk to Deanna...I mean, I think I'm going to have as much difficulty dealing with this as you are, maybe she'll have a solution, for all of us."

Beverly looked sceptical, and scared.

"Do you really think so?"

Will nodded positively. If anyone could help them, it would be her.

"Yes, I do"

Beverly sighed, finally admitting that he was right.

"Alright... She's not due back for another four days Will, what are we going to do in the meantime?"

Will stood and began to put his clothes on,

"In the meantime, I think we need to be very careful around each other. But I don't want you to do this alone anymore, it's destroying you. I'm here for you now Beverly, I'm glad you've finally let me in, and I'm sure between the three of us, we can get through this, okay?"

Reaching down he gently touched her face, forcing her to acknowledge him.

"Okay?"

Beverly nodded quietly and as Will leaned down and kissed her cheek, he reluctantly stepped away.

"I'll see you tomorrow, get some rest, you look beat."

With one last concerned look. Will left Beverly's quarters and slowly headed back to his own.

It was going to be a very long four days before Deanna was back, he just hoped and prayed things could hold off until then.

Something told him they would not.

===#===

Life had its funny quirks on board a ship as large as the Enterprise. Highlighted by their plight to discreetly avoid each other, Will and Beverly found totally the opposite happened. At every turn, something seemed to push them together, even if it was just accidentally bumping into each other in a corridor. Their eyes would lock, and a tell-tale blush would make itself known.

Meetings were the hardest.

Having to sit opposite one another and pretend to the universe that nothing was amiss was sheer torture.

Will watched the red headed beauty across from him as she battled with the conflict that battered her from every side. Her tell-tale posture betrayed her emotional turmoil, and he

could do nothing to comfort her.

Beverly's surprised eyes flew to his when she felt Will's foot lightly stroke hers. Will was staring at her intently, asking her with those intense blue eyes if she was alright.

His tender concern touched her and she found herself struggling to hold back her tears, but she smiled tentatively to assure him that she was. All she needed was to get out of there.

Captain Picard noticed the gesture and frowned. It was not the first time that he had noticed that something was not quite right between his First Officer and the Doctor.

As he dismissed the crew he gestured for Will and Beverly to remain behind. The air was tense as they waited for the doors to close behind Geordi, all eyes turned to their captain and waited.

Had he guessed?

"Is everything alright Number One, Doctor?"

Will glanced at Beverly before clearing his throat and addressing his Commanding Officer.

"Er...yes sir, we are just looking forward to the Counselor's return tomorrow"

The Captain smiled warmly, remembering the tiny brunette's vitality whenever she was around. He had missed her, but obviously not as much as his First Officer.

"Ah yes, 2100 hours isn't it?. I am sure she will look forward to getting back on board...Very well Will, Beverly, that will be all"

Both Will and Beverly stood to leave, but no-one could miss the atmosphere that increased tenfold at the mention of the Counselor's return. Something was not right.

As soon as the door closed behind them and he considered that he had allowed enough time for Beverly to leave the bridge, Picard summonsed Will back to the ready room.

Squaring his shoulders, and yanking his tunic jacket down, Picard waited for Will to step in. He watched the tall man come to a stand before him, a puzzled frown upon his handsome face. But Picard also recognised a guilty look, and Will looked guilty.

Both men silently faced each other before Picard broke the uneasy moment.

"Commander, I want to know what is going on between you and Doctor Crusher."

Will expelled the breath that he had been holding.

Not wanting to lie to him, but not wanting to reveal something that could be nothing either, Will hedged around the situation. Not quite a lie, but not quite the whole truth either.

"Well sir, you know that Beverly was particularly upset when Odan, 'left'?. Well she has been having some difficulty dealing with his loss, and as you know, I stepped in for him temporarily, so I understand some of that loss, and it seemed sensible for me to help until the Counselor comes back and can give her the proper counselling that she obviously needs."

Will trailed off as he let the Captain digest the conversation. He watched him nod quietly, and just as quietly he spoke,

"Why didn't she come to me Will?, we are close friends, I could have helped. I know he meant a great deal to her, but I thought we were close enough to have shared her loss together."

Will felt like a heel. Picard was far closer to Beverly than he was, but it was not just a listening ear that she needed.

She needed a physical touch.

She needed Odan's touch, and Will was the nearest thing to him.

"Perhaps sir, this was just a little too embarrassing for her. Like I said, I was him for a while, so I've known what to say to her when she's been upset."

Picard nodded, "Yes, your probably right Number One. Thank you, that will be all."

Will left him sitting there, lost in his thoughts, he did not want to walk away, but staying meant revealing more than necessary, and Will had other things on his mind.

Deanna was coming home tomorrow.
Tomorrow everything could change.
Tomorrow he could lose his Imzadi, forever.

===#===

As the shuttle touched down, Deanna rose and waited for the hatch to open. It felt good to be back, she had so much to tell everyone. She was on a high and it showed.

The first person she spied as she stepped onto the ramp was Will, complete with a huge grin. Hastening her step, she stepped into his embrace and hugged him tight.

"Hello Will, I am so glad to see you, I've missed you"

"Hi Deanna, welcome home"

Deanna looked around his shoulder, her disappointment evident, she pouted,

"I was hoping Beverly would be here, I have got some new from a professor that she knows."

Deanna did not feel Will's body stiffen at the mention of her name, and she missed the flare in his eyes, and she did not sense the betrayal that flitted through his body either.

Turning about, she linked her arm through his and set off towards her cabin. Will feebly explained that Beverly was tied up in sickbay.

Deanna grinned and added cheekily, "I am glad to see I was not the only one working. What have you been up to, anything exciting?"

And it was then that Deanna picked up on his discomfort, compounded more so, when he told her, "Oh, nothing, you know, usual stuff."

She pulled him to a halt in the middle of the corridor and faced him head on. One look into his eyes told her everything,

"Will, what's wrong?"

Will sighed as he tried to worm his way out of the situation,

"Nothing, I'm just a little tired, I have been pulling a few double shifts, that's all."

He was lying and Deanna knew he was lying, and he knew that she knew. Will apologised.

"I'm sorry Deanna, can we talk about this later?."

She nodded sadly and watched him walk away from her, effectively severing any further conversation.

Deanna sighed with relief when she finally entered her quarters, still a little shaken by the sudden change in Will.

He was hurting, she could sense that, but that was all he would allow her to sense, he effectively blocked out any other probing, and that bothered her. Normally Will was an open book to her. They shared almost everything together.

Something had happened and she was worried.

Replicating herself a drink, Deanna sat and picked up following day's appointments padd, relieved to get some order of normality, but frowned when she saw who her first appointment of the morning was.

It was Beverly Crusher.

===#===

Nothing could have prepared Deanna for the sight that greeted her when she stepped into her office the following morning. She had been so engrossed in the information on her padd that she missed the wave of misery that was being played out on her sofa.

Deanna stopped suddenly at the doorway as she surveyed the scene before her. Beverly was sitting on the sofa's edge, clearly upset. Will was sitting opposite her, perched on the edge of the small coffee table. He was gently holding Beverly's hands, trying to comfort her, and Deanna could hear his low, soothing voice as he tried to calm her down.

It was now that the full impact of their grief slammed home, and as the tidal wave of emotion assaulted her senses, Deanna gasped out loud.

It was enough to bring the couple out from their private moment. But when Deanna saw the pain in his eyes, she was shocked. Rooted to the spot, her eyes drifted to Beverly's. What she saw made her heart ache, but what it did to Beverly was try to make her escape. She was not ready for this confrontation.

Flying to her feet, Will leapt up with Beverly and enfolded her within his arms to stop her leaving. By now she was crying. Her wails ripped at Deanna's soul and she stepped forward to reach out and touch her.

Help her.

But she stopped short when she looked into Will's face again. His bright blue gaze begged her, pleaded with her to understand. And it was then when realisation dawned, when Deanna knew.

Her two closest friends had become lovers again.

And as Beverly's cries raged on, the rest of the universe came to a standstill as Deanna came to grips with her new found knowledge. Eventually Will whispered brokenly to her.

"Help us Imzadi."

===#===

It was several minutes before the traumatic moments passed and they could all sit down. Beverly could not even look at her friend. Deanna sensed her shame, and guilt, and her embarrassment.

Deanna tried to hold onto Beverly's hand, to let her know that she wanted to help. Beverly cried harder, trying to pull away, but Deanna would not let go.

"Talk to me Bev... I want to help. Please let me help."

Beverly shook her head and Deanna looked to Will for an answer.

"Dee...Beverly has placed her love for Odan onto me, it seems to be the only way we can cope with the situation."

Deanna blinked a few times as she let the information sink in, but her heart began to pump painfully and she had to know.

"Beverly loves you!?"

Will nodded.

It went very quiet as Deanna asked the next painfully obvious question.

"Will...Do you love Beverly?"

Will looked deep into Beverly's eyes before turning his face back to hers. Deanna died a little as he slowly answered.

"I think so... I mean...I know I have deep feelings for her, but I know it is not the same kind of love that we have, and I know it can never work between us. But at this moment, it feels right, and I want to be here for her."

Sighing with relief, Deanna understood what he was trying to say and she smiled gently at him. Reaching out to touch his arm, her eyes relayed her understanding.

"Will, I understand, but I think Beverly needs to understand also what this relationship is."

Both sets of blue eyes turned their full attention to her, intrigued. Deanna smiled, pleased that Beverly was finally listening.

"Beverly, what you had with Odan was exceptionally special, and his loss was like no other that you have experienced, not even Jacks, because Will was here to step into Odan's shoes, as it were, so he was, and still is, very much alive."

Deanna paused to make sure that they were following her drift. She continued,

"Technically, your relationship has not run its course. It needs to end like any other, but it cannot because the Odan you love, is not here, so Will is the natural choice...I think you two should continue to see each other until you Beverly, can get over Odan, and you Will, can exorcise the legacy that Odan has left behind."

Deanna watched as they both looked at each other. As they finally understood just what she was saying.

Just what she was implying.

"You don' t mind me seeing Will!?"

Deanna smiled. Having put every ounce of trust onto her two friends, she had no doubts that things would sort themselves out, and Will would come back to her, where he belonged, and Beverly, well Beverly would probably find another, in time...

"Of course not. I know that you need him, and in his own way, Will needs you. Use each other to get through this."

As they all came to a stand Will pulled the two women into his arms. Deanna felt the change within them. She had managed to make things right.

As they went to leave, Will briefly stopped and touched her face with his hand. His gratitude shone from his eyes, and Deanna could do no more than offer him a watery smile.

Turning away he put his arms around Beverly' s shoulders and left the office. Deanna watched them go, and for a long time, she stood and stared at the closed door. It was not until she felt a salty teardrop touch her lip that she realised she had begun crying.

"Oh Imzadi."

===#===

Two months later Deanna knew it was going to be hard, but not this hard.

Every relationship that Will had had with other women, had never bothered her. Not even when he had fallen in love with Soren. But this one was killing her.

This relationship was slowly tearing her apart.

Day by day, she had to sit and watch her two best friends become closer and closer. This one was different and it showed no sign of dissipating. In fact it seemed to be getting stronger.

It was odd seeing Will and Beverly as a couple.

Oh, you never saw them, Deanna had to give them credit, they were very discreet. They never ventured from either of their quarters. Were never seen in public, and never gave any indication that there was a relationship between them. Nobody knew of their affair except herself and the Captain.

Deanna still visibly blushed when she recalled the conversation between herself and Picard.

//

"Are you trying to tell me Counselor, that my First Officer and the Doctor, are having a relationship?"

Deanna knew exactly how he felt. The situation seemed preposterous, but it was happening and Picard seemed to find it as hard to deal with it as herself was.

"Yes sir, they are. Beverly needs Will' s emotional support at this time, and it involves Will to be ' intimate' with her.

Deanna almost gagged on the word intimate. The bile rose to her throat as the image of them together plagued her night and day. But she could do nothing about it. She had given them her blessing, and now she had to sit and wait it out.

And the waiting was driving her insane.

Picard pondered on her words for a moment before quietly asking her.

"But what if they fall in love Counselor...What if they go public with their relationship. What

then Counselor?"

Deanna's senses swam as the implications of what he was suggesting slammed home. She fought for the breath that somehow floundered in her ribcage, and it hurt.

"No...no that will not happen, it cannot happen. Will and I are destined to be together in the future, he cannot fall in love with Beverly."

The surroundings went black and Deanna had to sit down before she passed out when Picard asked her, his voice troubled,

"But how are you going to stop it Deanna?, nobody can stop the path of love, not even you."

//

From that day on, Deanna changed.

Before, she had remained far in the background. She had never said anything to Will to discourage his relationship with Beverly. She had been a silent angel in disguise, and Will had loved her dearly for it.

But Will's relationship with Beverly was a different matter.

Every day Will had discovered something new about her, and as the days wore on, he could not imagine a day without her.

Will Riker was slowly, and surely, falling in love with Beverly Crusher.

In bed, she was insatiable, and he was getting to like having a regular partner to wake beside. To make love to whenever he chose.

To have cosy, intimate evenings with. And with every day that passed, he thought less and less about when it was going to end.

Since Will had been intimate with Beverly, Deanna had purposely closed her mind to him. But now, on occasion, he could sense her. Usually as he lay in bed, before he drifted off to sleep.

Imzaaadi

Tonight it was persistent. Beverly was deeply asleep beside him. Flat on her back with her hair splayed everywhere. The cover pushed down to her waist. He smiled at her form, watching the gentle rise and fall of her breasts.

Will heard her again.

Imzadi, can you hear me?

Will knew it was wrong, but he could not help himself. He missed this side of their relationship. He sometimes missed her, but she was not very far away from his thoughts and he was content with that.

Until now.

Opening his mind, Will let her in. He felt the warming sensations flood through him and he smiled in the darkness. But her next words made him gasp aloud.

Come back to me my beloved

His gasp caused his sleeping partner to stir, and Will instinctively reached out and placed a tender hand upon her shoulder. He grinned as she took the hand and moved it to her heart. Well, he thought it was her heart.

Beverly groaned as she turned and snuggled up close. Bringing her leg up over his, Will moaned as the moist juncture of her thighs brushed against his hip.

Dragging her body on top of his, Will heard the husky chuckle as she manoeuvred herself onto his rapid growing hardness, and seconds later Deanna was forgotten as they lost themselves to the passionate embrace.

Deanna was devastated. Will had pushed her thoughts aside. Pushed her aside, and made love to Beverly.

The remainder of night was spent with her weeping. Her loss growing more and more with each passing day.

Will spotted Deanna on her way to the bridge and he jogged to catch her up. Halting her with a hand upon shoulder, he was taken aback when she swung around with a huge smile upon her delicate face.

"Hi Will!, what can I do for you?"

It was several seconds before Will remembered just why he had stopped her. Mesmerized by sparkling eyes that were full of mischief, he shook himself as he spoke.

"About last night, why did you send to me Deanna?"

Will was taken aback when Deanna laughed openly at him, her apology sounded false.

"I am sorry Will, I must have been dreaming about you, I seem to be doing that a lot lately, I really do not know why, but I will try not to let it happen again."

Will was dumbstruck as she left him standing in the middle of the corridor with his mouth wide open.

By the time Deanna had turned the corner, out of sight, she was crying silently.

Will was woken many times by Deanna' s thoughts. Sometimes they were just everyday endearments. Sometimes they were not so innocent, and as time wore on, not only did she send to him when he was awake, she started to invade his dreams too.

Tonight' s was exceptional.

Tonight they were back at Janaran Falls. They were lying naked on the shoreline. Their love-making had taken on a mind of its own, and it had reached its peak.

This was the day that they had given themselves to each other.

This was the day that they had earlier become Imzadi.

Beverly woke from her sleep, instantly alert as Will thrashed about beside her. Her medical mind immediately thought that he had a fever, but as she touched his chest, it became apparent that he did not.

But what he did have was a huge erection. Beverly went cold as she recognised what was happening, his face confirmed it. He was making love to someone.

Was it her?

Of course it was.

Beverly smiled as she began to join in his movements. Her hand slid down his damp torso, and she gasped when he took her hand and forced it to his rock hard member, groaning aloud, his fingers indicated just what he wanted her to do.

Pushing his hand away, she continued the motion, until she could no longer resist the temptation. Climbing on top, she hovered briefly before coming down on him, in one, fell, swoop.

Will felt possessed.

Still locked in the dreamworld, He gasped out loud as Deanna sank onto him. And as he began to move, he felt her surround and embrace every live nerve ending. Every thought, right to the very depths of his soul.

And as he began to climb the stairway to oblivion, he had to call out her new found name.

The name that earlier in the day had sealed their destiny.

He cried out to her.

For her.

And only her.

' Imzadi...'

But even before the words left his mouth, Beverly had realised that Will was not dreaming

about her, he was dreaming about Deanna.

Will began to stir from his dream, but as he slowly opened his eyes and came face to face with a mass of tumbled red hair, he knew he had made a fatal mistake.

Not quite sure if what had happened, really happened, and he desperately hoped that it had not, Will whispered to the liquid blue eyes that stared at him. His hand gestured to the two of them.

"Did we just make love?"

His heart fell as she shook her head. His one word said it all.

"Oh."

It was the last thing he should have said.

Incensed, Beverly climbed off and huddled under the bedclothes. Seething, she attacked him with words.

"Oh!!...You dream of making love to HER, You call out that damn word, and all you can say is, Oh!!."

Will closed his eyes as his world fell apart before him. Beverly did not deserve this. He tried to apologize.

"I am so sorry Beverly, I do not know what is happening to me."

She looked at him with disbelief,

"This has happened before??"

He nodded.

Now she was angry.

"You mean to tell me Will, that while your laying next to me, your... dreaming about Deanna!"

Dejected, he nodded again.

"Your making love to Deanna?"

Will looked away, ashamed at having to admit his betrayal, even if it was not entirely his fault.

"Its not my fault Bev, she must be sending to me. I can block her out during the day, but at night, I can't control it"

As Will watched her leap out of bed and roughly put her robe on, he realised that he' d said the wrong thing again. Beverly turned on him.

"You mean she is doing this in the daytime too!?", Will nodded shamefacedly.

Beverly swore.

"Shit!...Why is she doing this to us Will?, I thought we were okay with her. I thought she understood."

Beverly stomped into the lounge area, needing to put some space between them, but Will followed her out, dragging the sheet with him, attempting to make a sarong out it to cover up his nudity.

"Maybe we should think about how Deanna feels for a minute... Maybe she is having trouble letting me go, like you experienced with Odan...Maybe she feels its time for us to end our affair."

The fight went out of Beverly as she listened to him speak. After a moment, she looked at him, standing in front of her, trying his best to defend Deanna' s actions.

"Do you want to let her go Will?...Do you want us to finish so that you can go back to how you were with her?" Beverly snorted before she continued, "Whatever that was...I' m still not sure if you two are a couple or not!."

Will' s eyes pleaded for her to understand. He reached out to comfort her, but she stepped

away. His hand fell away.

"Don' t do this to us Beverly. I do not want to lose you, but you must understand what it is between Deanna and I."

Will's eyes pleaded with her to listen.

"We are linked by a bond and nothing can change that. Most other Imzadi couples marry, have families, live happily ever after, but it' s not what we want at this moment in time. Maybe later our priorities will change, but until then, we are free agents...We may love each other Beverly, but that is all... At this moment I am with you...I choose to be with you."

Will stepped towards her again, this time she did not step away. Taking her in his arms, they stood in the darkness. Healing hurts that had no right to hurt.

Along the corridor, Deanna smiled cat-like in the darkness. She had begun the rift.

#

The following morning Will made his way to Ten Forward. He knew he would find who he was looking for there.

As he entered, his eyes zoomed in on the solitary figure that propped up the bar. Her hands hugging a cup of, and he had no doubts to it' s contents, hot chocolate, her celebratory drink. Walking directly up to her, Deanna smiled wide as she spotted him beside her. He stormed in before she had a chance to even say hello.

"Good morning Counselor. How did your date go last night?"

She looked at him puzzled,

"Date...what date?, I didn' t have a date last night."

A cold chill shot through her body as he spoke loud enough for the entire lounge' s occupants to hear.

"Sure you did..I could hear you having a good time all the way down the corridor!"

Deanna stared at him open-mouthed before glancing around to see if anyone had heard. They had, but as she turned back to Will to defend herself, she only came face to face with his retreating back as he stormed away from her, leaving her to smile apologetically at the interested audience and to get up off the stool and walk out with her dignity still in tact.

Once she had cleared the doors, Deanna stopped to steady herself. Will had never, ever spoken like that to her in public before, and it shook her to the core. And now she had to face him on the bridge, in ten minutes.

Her heart pounded with dread at the prospect. How on earth was she going to cope.

One thing she was certain of...This had got to stop.

Will watched Deanna walk onto the bridge. Her head held high, and her mind firmly closed. She greeted the Captain politely enough, but barely uttered ' Commander' . to Will' s steady gaze. Will did not even manage to answer her.

She sat in her chair for all of two minutes before rapidly standing.

"Captain...may I speak with you in private please sir?"

Picard raised his eyebrows, but rose and pointed the way,

"Of course Counselor, after you."

Will watched them go, hoping with all his heart that she was not going to do what he thought she would.

"Please, sit down Counselor"

Deanna smiled stiffly and made her way over to the sofa. Perching on its edge, Picard watched the beautiful woman that sat before him. He had not missed her agitation.

Knowing her well enough to recognise the signs. The clasped hands. The crossed legs, and the brave face that she was trying her hardest to portray to him, he waited.

Pushing himself back in the chair, he watched her face, knowing that his own mirrored the same concerns, until he finally broke the uneasy silence,

"How are you holding up Deanna?"

He spotted the tell-tale flush as soon as he had spoke. He frowned when he saw her blink several times until her eyes finally fell to her lap. When she looked at him again, her eyes shimmered with fresh tears. She shook her head sadly, too choked to answer him coherently. She did not have to say anything. Her face said it all. Picard's knowing voice was low when he spoke.

"Your not holding up at all...are you?"

Her face crumpled as she buried the miserable features in her hands and sobbed bitterly.

Picard instantly made his way to her side and held her close, but within moments she pulled away and tried frantically to compose herself.

"I am sorry sir, that was unforgivable of me, I should not have let my personal feelings get in the way, it will not happen again"

Picard sighed, disturbed that she had reacted in that way, as had many others before her. Was he really that rigid?

He didn't like the answer his inner voice hurled at him.

Getting back on his feet, he made his way over to the porthole and stared out at the distant stars, allowing Deanna the privacy to collect herself.

Picard continued to watch the outer view, even when he heard her husky apology. Without turning, he seemingly spoke to the void.

"But what can we do about the... 'situation', Counselor?"

Picard spoke the word as if it was dirty. The 'situation' was becoming dirty. It was destroying her, and it was destroying him. It ate him alive every time he pictured them together.

Pictured them making love.

Heaven knows how Deanna had coped for this amount of time. He had witnessed the undeniable affinity between herself and Riker, and had marvelled at the strength that it must have taken to have took the giant step backwards to allow Beverly and Will to have this strange relationship that at this moment in time, did not appear to be floundering.

But the strange relationship had gone on long enough. There was a growing concern that if their relationship continued, he was going to lose some very valuable members of his staff, and that was the last thing he wanted.

Things had to change, one way or the other.

"I would like your permission to contact the Trill homeworld sir."

Surprised, Picard turned to face Deanna once more. Her tears were gone, but he could see that they were not far away, but she was back in control. Picard did not think he had heard her right, and asked her to repeat her request.

He watched her take a deep breath and asked him again.

"I want your permission to contact the Trill homeworld. I would like to find out if Odan is still being hosted by Kareel"

Picard sat back at this desk, puzzled by her unusual demand.

"What do you hope to achieve Counselor?. Doctor Crusher made her feelings very plain to Kareel. I would not have thought it was a wise move to 'resurrect' what could turn out to be, an absolute disaster. We could make the situation a whole lot worse, especially for Beverly"

Deanna nodded, understanding his dilemma, but she still wanted to try.

"I know that sir, that is why I am asking your permission to do this without their knowledge. I remember when I spoke with Odan that the symbiants change hosts quite frequently, and it is

a long shot, but I would like to find out if Odan is still being hosted by Kareel."

Deanna paused as she let Picard digest what she said, but before he had a chance to comment, she ploughed on,

"Sir, I know we are due at Star Base within the next few days, and I am hoping to have Odan join us there"

Deanna held her breath as she watched Picard ponder over her request. His fingers tapped his lips for several moments before at last, finally, he looked directly into her eyes.

Deanna felt and saw his uncertainty. She knew that if Odan was back within a male host that Beverly was likely to stay behind, probably either go to Earth with him, or his domain. Either way, he was going to lose her.

Picard sighed, but Deanna was quietly surprised, and priveleged when he opened his heart to her.

"I know that She and I will never likely become a couple like you and Commander Riker, and I envy you for having the courage to have taken that final step. But I like to think that we have a close relationship, and that it is almost as satisfying as being a couple, but managing to keep our own identities. Our own careers. We were both content with that."

They smiled tenderly at each other, both fully understanding what he was saying. Deanna let him continue,

"But, I also know that without Odan, Beverly is...incomplete, and if it is my last duty as her Captain to seal her happiness by rejoining her with..her soulmate, then I cannot stand your way. Permission granted Counselor, but under no circumstances must Beverly know what we are planning, this could go horribly wrong and it will be entirely our fault, and Beverly would never forgive us...me."

"I could never forgive me."

As they both came to a stand, they remained silent for a few moments as they contemplated that what they were about to do, could change their lives forever.

#

Will made his way along the corridor that housed the senior staff' s quarters. It had been a long, tedious day.

The incident with Deanna had haunted him through every miserable hour. Will knew he should apologise. It was unforgivable for what he had said to her in Ten Forward. And very childish, but she had steadfastly avoided him, all day.

After Deanna's meeting with the captain this morning, they had both emerged smiling. But it was a smile that held a secret, and it had plagued him, all day.

Will glanced at Deanna' s door as he approached it on his way to Beverly' s quarters, but as he went to pass, the doors opened.

Expecting Deanna to stroll through them, he held his breath for the confrontation. But it never came, and nor did she.

Hesitating on its threshold, Will peered into the dimness. A candle flickered on the small table, its scent filled his nostrils. He hesitantly called out to her,

"Deanna...Are you o.k.?"

He was greeted with silence.

Will took another step inside. His heart pounded hard within his chest. His footsteps were silent on the plush carpet, but at this moment, Will wished he made enough noise to wake the dead.

He felt uncomfortable stepping into Deanna's domain, almost like he had no right to be there. The hairs stood up on his neck as he came to a hesitant halt at her bedroom doorway. Will began to feel as if he was walking into a trap, but before he could take one step back, he felt

her hand lightly trail up his back.

Deanna's breathless whisper was close enough to tickle the skin around his ear.

"You came Imzadi, I knew you would come back to me"

Will's eyes fell shut as her intimately suggestive words triggered the dormant desire that he'd had for her long ago but had pushed to one side for Beverly. Only Beverly had filled his thoughts for the past few weeks. Only she had managed to stir his loins.

Will's sensually drugged eyes flew open when he felt a finger nail touch his lips and he realised that Deanna had moved to stand before him.

Deanna watched Will's eyes widen as he took in her appearance. Her eyes were heavily made up. Somehow she had managed to make them look even larger with the black kohl outline. They looked sexy and she knew it, and judging by Will's reaction she had succeeded in looking exotic and sultry.

She watched as Will's mouth fell open when his eyes reached her own mouth. The bright, blood red lipstick she wore glistened in the candlelight, and as the tip of her tongue moistened them further, she heard him groan.

Will's insides ached with a longing for her that he had not felt since their time on Betazed. He knew he had to step away before he would be tempted to touch her, because once he did, he did not think he would be able to control what would happen.

Sensing Will's withdrawal, Deanna reached to unclasp the clip upon her shoulder. The simple, long shift she wore fell to a pool at her feet, revealing her nakedness. She stepped nearer to Will before he had time to react and laced her arms around his neck.

Her lips were barely millimetres away from his, but she still felt Will's resistance. Threading her fingers into his hair, Deanna pulled his mouth to hers. The instant their lips touched broke the last of his resolve.

Will had stood like a statue as Deanna had revealed herself to him, somehow telling himself that if he did not make the move, then he was blameless. But he could not have moved away, even if his life had depended on it.

But once her lips had touched his, once he had felt her tongue circle them with exact precision, Will was lost.

The combination of Deanna's luscious form pressing against him, and her hands holding his head firm as she doubtlessly began to kiss him, smashed through Will's resolution, throwing it out of the door as he in turn began to plunder the deepest recesses of her mouth, crushing her to him as he fiercely held her against his own traitorous reaction. The combined heat burning a trail right to their very souls.

It seemed like hours later, but in reality was barely minutes as the intimately locked couple devoured every ounce of feeling and emotion that they each had to offer, but when Will finally heard Deanna's whimpered plea to make love to her, it was enough to make him stop and take stock of what he was doing.

Deanna felt Will's withdrawal as she uttered the words that she thought would seal their reunion. Deanna knew that if Will had made love to her he would have never have gone back to Beverly, his betrayal would have been to great.

If Deanna knew anything about Will, it was his fidelity to one woman, and she was certain that she would have won, but Will's next words shook Deanna to her very centre.

"No Deanna, I'm sorry, I'm going back to Beverly."

Will staggered from Deanna's quarters feeling sick to his stomach as every ounce of Deanna's anger, horror, shame and guilt surged through him. As he steadied himself in the corridor, it was a while before Will could blot out the emotions that raged on the other side of the wall. His hands flew to his ears as Will heard something slam against the door and shattered into a

billion pieces. Pushing himself wearily from the wall, he made his way along to Beverly's quarters.

As Will entered Beverly's cabin, she was preparing for bed. Turning back the covers, she spoke before facing him.

"Hi!, did you get lo..."

Beverly's words died on her lips as she turned to question Will. Even without the tell-tale red lipstick smeared around his mouth, or the stench of Deanna's very distinctive perfume, Beverly knew Will had been with her.

Blue eyes silently locked as a million questions raged through their stunned senses, but it was Will who finally broke the hushed quietness.

"I am so, so sorry Beverly, but I swear to you, I did not make love to Deanna"

Unable to utter a single word, Beverly continued to stare at him, until he spoke again. Will could see the mistrust in her eyes, could feel her pain. His hoarse whisper broke as he tried to justify himself once more.

"Bev, please, I would not lie to you"

At last Beverly fell from the daze as his tactless remark hit her raw nerves. Her eyes blazed as she hammered Will into the floor with every hurtful, cutting word that she could muster.

"Lie Will?!...Our whole relationship is a lie. Haven't you realised that this relationship is one, big, hopeless charade. It can never work between us Will, I cannot believe you have not seen that yet."

Will trembled as the impact of her words chilled him. But it was not until Beverly had spoken the cruel words that he dimly realised just how much she had meant to him.

"But Beverly...I...I think I love you, I want to be with you. I need you."

He did not like the tiny sneer that crept into her flawless features, her voice was quiet when she added even more salt to his wounds.

"You don't need me Will. Why would you need me, or love me, when you have Deanna. You are supposed to Imzadi after all. No woman, or man is supposed to be able to prise an Imzadi couple apart, why are you trying to kid yourself otherwise Will?."

Beverly's voice softened as the impact of her words slowly destroyed the tall man that visibly shrunk before her. The man who had probably saved her sanity.

"You belong to Deanna, Will. I know that, and she knows that, When are you going to realise it?."

Will heard the change in her tone. The bitterness had gone, but now she appeared to be telling him something else.

"What are you saying Beverly?"

Beverly stepped towards him until she was close enough to have to crane her head to see into the eyes that had taken her to heaven and back. Had stripped her bare and revered in their discoveries. Had cherished her heart, and had slowly, but surely, fallen in love with her.

As much as it hurt Beverly to let Will go, she knew it was time.

"What I am saying Will is, it's time to end this. I realised some time ago that I had got over Odan. I can cope on my own now Will, thanks to you. I'm sorry Will, but I don't love you, I am very, very fond of you, but your heart belongs to another, and so does mine. You have a chance to win Deanna back, and I have some very fond memories to keep me going."

As Beverly spoke, Will had taken her in his arms. Most of her words were lost in his shoulder, but he understood what she was telling him, maybe it was time. Maybe she was ready, but was he ready? He wasn't so sure. Right at this moment, he felt like he had lost everything.

Beverly broke the close contact, and Will released her reluctantly. Beverly could see the turmoil in his eyes as he tried to take in what she was saying. She didn't miss their tell-tale

sparkle.

Touching his face lightly, Beverly smiled gently at Will and left him standing in the middle of the room as she made her way out of her quarters. Will didn't turn to watch her go, or to stop her.

#

In orbit at Starbase... Captain Picard took his time as he looked around to each one of his senior officers, his heart heavy at the obvious turmoil radiating from almost every one in the room. His close knit family, and that is what they were to him, were falling apart at the seams, and it was down to him to rectify it.

The atmosphere in the ready room was fraught with tension, and it was clear that nobody wanted to be there. Sullen faces stared into laps that hid hands that would have betrayed the host of emotions in the fidgeting fingers.

Downcast eyes also hid the traitorous raw feelings. Some of misery, some were embarrassed. Some were angry, and amongst all of that, was an underlying sexual longing that electrified the air.

Picard sighed as he slumped back in his chair and crossed his legs. He knew he was the only one left to change the miserable situation, even though some of that misery emanated from him.

"I am aware that this mission has been a somewhat tiresome one, and I for one, am glad that it is over. We have 72 whole hours to ourselves, and I intend to try and forget every lousy minute of it."

A nervous chuckle went around the room, along with a slightly guilty look as it became apparent that Picard was aware of the spiralling disquiet that they had caused. Picard continued,

"I am also aware that moral has hit rock-bottom and I do not intend the next mission to start as the last one ended. So, in our honour, Star Fleet has arranged a consortium for our benefit on our last evening here. I expect you all to be there, dress is formal, and I would greatly appreciate it if you could all turn up with a smile on your face."

Looking around at the finest crew he had ever served with, Picard's eyes settled on the doctor. Trying to hide the painful knowledge that he was soon likely to lose a very close friend, he offered her a small smile. He was rewarded with a similar smile, but it held a hint of shyness. If Picard had been in any other position other than captain, he would have made his feelings for Beverly known. He would have happily pursued an intimate relationship with her. But being captain, meant just that.

He was captain, of the Federation flagship. The responsibilities alone were too much to allow a full and complete relationship with a woman, any woman, least of all, one he loved dearly. He simply could not commit to her 100%, and anything less was a waste, and an insult, to her.

So they had remained friends. Picard would watch Beverly leave the ship the same way that she had boarded. Ignorant of the fact that he loved her, deeply.

Shaking himself out of his emptiness, Picard stood to leave, dismissing his crew as he did so, but hesitated when no-one stood with him.

"Are there any questions?"

Everyone appeared to look at one another, each hoping someone would say < Do we have to attend?>. No one wanted to go to the party, but no one had the nerve to say so.

No one spoke up.

#

The evening was in full swing when the last few of the Enterprise crew passed through the huge ornate doors. The room was already crowded and Will's eyes scanned the sightless faces looking for Deanna, or maybe he was looking for a blaze of red. He mentally kicked himself for doing so. Geordi's voice sounded in his ears.

"Well, its nice to see one couple kiss and make up."

Will's eyes followed Geordi's and he spotted that blaze of red that had had occupied his thoughts only moments before. His stomach churned painfully when he spied the familiar bald head of his captain escorting her.

The black ball gown she wore was extremely low cut and Will found himself mentally kissing the freckles that adorned her shoulders. But as their eyes caught briefly, he swore silently and turned away, shaking off the intimate image as he did so.

But moments later, Will felt the familiar sensations flutter through his senses and he found his eyes drawn to the doors once more as Deanna made her entrance.

Will held his breath as he took in her appearance. His heartbeat pounded in his ears and he dizzily swayed, he found himself blindly reaching out for Geordi's shoulder to steady himself. He had never seen Deanna dressed in such an evocative, breath-taking way before, and it completely blew him away.

Deanna looked stunning. The off the shoulder midnight blue gown hugged her already slender figure to perfection. The tight bodice pushed up her bustline so that her breasts almost fell out of the plunging neckline. Tiny silver beads encased the entire dress like a web, and every move became a shimmering glow.

Will's eyes dragged themselves from the delights of her body up to her head, and he remained shocked into silence.

Her hair, free of any tethers cascaded not in tight ringlets, but gentle waves, the effect being that it was almost twice as long as her usual style. As Deanna turned her head, her hair fell forward, covering the front of her dress, almost to the waist.

Will was enchanted. He had always adored her hair, but this, this was something else. He imagined his fingers running freely through it without them getting tangled in the riotous curls, and his stomach somersaulted as he envisioned it splayed across his pillows.

His betraying thoughts finally caught Deanna's attention and her eyes sought his, and locked. The surrounding room's occupants faded into the distance as it became solely him, and her, only her. Just like it used to be, a long, long time ago.

A time when love was all that mattered. When love overtook sanity, logic and reasoning.

When love so intense it invaded your very soul and turned it into something more precious. A unity that could defy everything and anything, even death.

Will had to go to her.

He made one small step in her direction, but stopped as not only her attention was caught by her companion, but also Will's. He had not even noticed her escort until now, and his heart stopped beating when he did not recognise the tall, fairly handsome man attached to her arm.

And that bothered him. It meant that Deanna had manage to get involved with someone in the short space of time that she had been here.

That hurt.

Will watched her laugh at something that her companion had said, and he felt his spirits fall to the floor. He simply could not stand still and watch her with another man, not any more.

He had done some long hard thinking about his relationship with Deanna Troi. It did not take him long to understand the love that he had had for Beverly was one born out of need.

The need for something more solid than an occasional roll in the sack.

The need for something more than a comfortable friendship.

Will had, at long last realised that the need he was seeking was a wife. Someone to come home to every night. Someone to bear his children. And there was only one woman who would ever fill the empty void that had left him with that same desolate feeling, and that woman was Deanna Troi.

Will could never even consider anyone but Deanna.

His very own Imzadi.

Unable to watch the scene before him any longer, Will turned to escape, but Deanna had second guessed his actions and hurriedly made her way towards him and her fellow comrades, dragging her guest along with her. Her voice stopped Will in his tracks.

"Don't you dare run away, Will Riker!"

Still turned away from her, Will collected his scattered feelings before facing her once more, but as he turned he caught the flash of red, he inwardly groaned as Beverly and the captain joined the group.

Looking rather sheepish, Will took a deep breath and smiled gamely at the twosome who stood before him.

"Deanna, you look radiant, as always."

Deanna smiled sweetly at him, she did not miss the slight shake in his voice.

"Thank you Will, I'd like to introduce you all to Jarel, Jarel please meet my closest friends, Will, Geordi, Data, Worf, Captain Picard and, Beverly."

Jarel made his way around the circle, warmly shaking their outstretched hands, until he came to Beverly.

Lifting her hand, Jarel lightly kissed the back of her fingers, his eyes never leaving her face. But when he spoke, Beverly very nearly crumpled to the floor.

"An absolute pleasure. Would you care to dance, Doctor Beverly?"

Beverly's quick intake of breath resonated around the group as the few that were still in the dark, in turn slowly realised just who Jarel was.

Jarel stepped backwards without releasing Beverly's hand, forcing her feet to follow him onto the dance floor. All eyes watched as the reunited couple fell together as if they had never been apart.

The captain watched silently from the sidelines. His heart, ricocheting back and forth with his own loss and happiness for his one, true lost love. He found himself whispering to the disappearing form of Beverly as Jarel moved among the other dancers,

"Goodbye Doctor Beverly Crusher, I shall miss you mon amie, mon amour"

Anger radiated from Will as he watched Beverly and Jarel move off with the foray of dancers that moved in time with the music.

Needing to distance himself from his comrades, Will moved away as the other members of the senior crew watched in awe as Beverly and Jarel renewed their acquaintance.

Deanna missed his presence immediately. Searching the room, she spotted his tall retreating back as he made his way towards an uncrowded corner of the hall.

She followed him. Will knew that she would. What he had to say to her did not need others ears.

Deanna came to a halt barely a foot away from him. Will was transfixed as he watched the tiny beads slow to a stop. Another day, it would have been the luscious cleavage that would have caught his attention, but not today, or tonight. Tonight he was in too much pain, and for the life of him, he was not quite sure why.

Will's steady gaze drifted to Deanna's face when her voice captured his attention.

"I love you Will."

His eyes searched hers, but what he was searching for within them was a mystery. Will felt at this moment in time like his whole life was a mystery, but even so, he answered her with the one answer that he knew was certain.

"And I love you Deanna, I always have."

Deanna's eyes glistened, her smile tremendous, Will felt her relief.

"I know Will, I know, but where are we going to go from here?, we can't go back to how we were."

Will let go a long sigh as he thought about her question. He was sure in his own heart where he wanted them to go, Will wanted it all. But did she?

His gut instinct told him that she did, but his mind refused to imagine the possibility of marriage, babies and total happiness. It was down to Deanna and he was petrified of her possible refusal, but his prayers were answered when Deanna steadily spoke.

"Its what I want too Imzadi, Its what I've always wanted, haven't you understood that?. All this time, I have been waiting for you, I thought you knew, but weren't ready."

Will nodded, uncomfortable with the thought that it was him that was playing the waiting game, and for what?. It was only a matter of time before they ended up right here, doing something that they could have done years ago.

"Your right, I'm sorry, I'm sorry for everything, especially keeping you as a friend when I should have realised that we could have still been best friends and lovers. I have wasted so much of what could have been, I could have lost you Deanna..."

Deanna closed the gap between them, sinking into his embrace felt like she had come home. It felt so right, they were so right. And at last, the time was right.

Reaching out to caress his face, Deanna lovingly looked into his eyes, they held the promise of everything that she felt and desired. The gentle kiss after she uttered her final words washed away all the past.

"You would have never lost me, Imzadi. Didn't you know, we were destined to be together always. Always."