

The man
by Carol Sandford

I wanted to run and hide, but I couldn't. I wanted to scream at you with my thoughts to go away, but I couldn't do that either. I couldn't do anything as you came towards my table with 'her'.

I sometimes wonder if you ever really cared about me at all. You seemed to go out of your way to rub it in that we weren't a couple and that you were going to go all out to prove it.

But this one seemed to be holding your attention. This one had been more than a date. This one had been your constant companion for the past 3 weeks. A lifetime for you!

But what could I do? He was my friend and he wanted me to be happy for him. He wanted us 'all' to be friends, and I had to just 'grin and bare it'.

And so I did. I found myself plastering on that infamous Troi smile and welcoming the two of them to my table.

Will's deep voice spoke softly to me, almost like he was silently begging me to allow the intrusion, "Hi, Deanna, mind if we join you for a while? You know Mel of course."

I smiled wider. Not sure how, but I did it. "Hi yourself, of course I know Mel, Hello, Please...sit down."

He signalled to the barman for a round of drinks as they settled themselves down. I tried to think of something, 'Anything!' to say to the woman, "How are you liking it on board, Mel?"

I soon kicked myself after when the two of them looked lovingly at each other and grinned like lovesick teenagers, "Oh, its been wonderful! Everyone has been so nice to me."

{I'll bet they have!} The sour thought filled my mind but luckily never left my lips. "Thats good, we are renowned for making new people feel at home." {Especially when they've jumped straight into a senior officers bed!}

{{Commander Riker, please report to the bridge.}}

He groaned, but not as much as I, as I knew what was going to happen next. "On my way, Captain. Sorry ladies, gotta run. Can you look after Mel for me, Deanna, I shouldn't be long?"

WHY did I say, "Of course!"

We both watched his ass stroll out of the lounge, and I wondered amused if she realised what was going through my mind. I tried real hard to hide the smirk, but not too hard.

"Will tells me you two are close friends."

I humiliated myself by spluttering into my cocktail. Oh Lord, what had he told her?!

"I...I, Yes, we are close friends, we've known each other a long time."

I looked around nervously, everywhere and anywhere but at her.

"Before you came aboard the Enterprise?"

I nodded non-committedly, "Uh huh."

Now she nodded thoughtfully, "I see...Did you go out with him?"

What could I say? "We were very young, it was a long time ago."

I hoped that would throw her off. I hoped she would think we were too young to have a relationship that defied all rhyme and reason. I hoped she never knew about Betazoid's. I hope she never knew about Will's humongous reputation.

And God help me, I hope she never knew how much we loved each other.

She went on, "I did ask him about you, but he didn't say much other than that you were good friends and he thought a lot of you."

I almost fell through the floor when she continued,

"But he's my man now."

Aaaaah...so thats how it was. What could I do, what could I say?

"Well, I know that, you have nothing to fear from me. I

t is true, he was my man, and he was my man before he became your man. And to be honest, if you left the scene, he would most certainly become my man again."

I leaned forward so that she could truly understand my point. "You see, Mel. The man that you have now, is the man that I made. That man means more to me than any other man in the universe, I'm just letting other people have fun with him once in a while, it does his ego good you see. He is a man after all."

I pushed myself to a stand, but leaned onto the table and stared her down. I give her credit, she held her ground, but at least I had reduced her to silence. "Yes, Will Riker is your man for now. You can play with him, amuse him, make him feel like a million dollars. Hell, you can continue to f*** him! But...BUT remember, he will never love you. There is only one man that will ever love me, and that is your man."

I walked out of there in a darned sight better mood than I went in, thats for sure!