

Needs of the lonely
by Carol Sandford

"Beverly?"

"Will. I..."

Will took her cool fingers within his warm ones and led her towards his couch. Lowering his own body, he gently tugged, pulling her to sit beside him, even though she was barely perched on the edge. She felt it was much like her own life, but on the edge of what? Was she about to find out?

"What's wrong, Beverly?"

Sky blue eyes searched azure ones. His soft and curious, hers scared and lost. Will tenderly cradled her slender hand within his, his thumb caressing the sensitive palm, sending tiny shock waves through her.

"Beverly?"

"I...I need to ask you a favour, Will."

"Name it."

"Don't be so hasty, you don't know what it is." She chuckled nervously, her cheeks pinking with a private memory.

"Hey, after what we've just been through together, I think I can handle anything you can throw at me. Name it, Beverly."

She shifted uncomfortably on the seats edge and Will knew that it was nothing to do with the couch, but her own inability to voice her request. Will held her hands tighter, unwittingly halting her flight away from him,

"Is this about Odan, Beverly?"

Startled eyes scuttled away from his before he could see the spark of shame that flared in their depths, "Yes," she whispered, "it is."

Silence. Heavy, remembering silence echoed around the room, wrapping the couple in an intimate blanket, pulling them closer, bringing to the surface the raw pain that they had both hidden from one another. Pain that Will wasn't prepared for, it echoed in his words,

"Tell me, Beverly!"

As quickly as her shame led her eyes away from him, they just as quickly turned and held his, urging him to see the importance of her question within their shining depths,

"It...it wasn't only Odan that desired me, was it, Will?"

Will blinked away his surprise, and the tiny flare of something more. Silent seconds drifted away, each one capturing an intimate image that each one of them absorbed and cherished. A touch, a kiss. A word, a telling glance. Each one a treasure memory recalled from a private corner of their souls.

Will wasn't 'quite' sure what Beverly was asking. One half of him surged into life at the prospect of revealing his true feelings towards her, feelings that he never thought he would surface again. But the other half of him, the half that belonged to the only other woman that he gave a damn about, squirmed as it fought to resist the wave of emotion that threatened to engulf him, and say something, anything, that would defuse the rising tide of warmth that was temporarily holding his tongue captive.

Beverly watched Will's face closely, the need to see his reaction to her bold question was as important to her as taking the next breath, albeit a painful one. The decision to approach Will had taken two long days of torment and two nights of tears and questions, questions that needed answers.

But as his eyes stared into hers, she was no nearer to getting her answer, that was until she dropped her gaze to his throat and saw his pulse beating as though it had a race to run. Beverly rose her eyes to his again and this time she saw more.

Much more.

"No."

One word. One simple, shocking and somehow predictable word; 'No.' slipped from between his lips and with it came release. Freedom. A chance.

Beverly's breath shuddered free from her body. It had been held hostage in her throat as she waited for Will's admission, but now he had revealed the truth, she was unsure where to go next.

Will's eyes dropped to her mouth as her tongue slipped out and moistened her dry lips sending an explosion of heat throughout his loins.

Will released one of her hands and lifted it to her face, pulling her chin around to level with his, forcing her to face him, head on. She trembled beneath his fingers, but the trembling came from deep within as his intense eyes implored hers to search his for the truth in his statement.

Beverly swallowed the sudden moisture in her mouth, her tongue snaking out again as the action dried her lips once more. But before she could withdraw its pink tip, Will leaned forward and gently but swiftly, touched his tongue to hers, and as quickly as it happened, he pulled away again wanting her to see the effect the action had had on him.

His whispered words were husky as he stared, first at where he had brazenly kissed her and then back to her wide eyes, "Do you believe me now, Beverly?"

Her eyes fluttered shut with resignation as she nodded minutely, until Will's fingers tightened painfully on her chin wrenching her eyes back open to face his again, only this time Will's held a hint of menace. A hint of possession. A hint of hope as he spoke,

"Do you want something from me, Beverly Crusher. Something that you thought you could only get from Odan?" He edged closer and closer until she could feel his hot breath upon her face, see the fire bubbling beneath the surface, "Ask me, Beverly!"

She asked him with a kiss, a kiss that took them both by surprise. It took a second or two to register, but when it did, it became an explosion. The days and weeks of recovering from what Odan had left behind in his wake had finally, suddenly and violently brought the desperate pair to this moment; the moment of truth.

Will dragged Beverly's body closer to his, circling her slender frame with his arms until her upper torso was touching his. The kiss belied belief as they vied for more, turning this way and then the other, trying to deepen the contact. His husky groans drowned out her feminine whimpers as they struggled for supremacy over one another, but Will won when he roughly pulled Beverly upon to his lap, her knees clinging onto his thick thighs as his fists

threaded themselves into her coppery hair, taking command of her head, her mouth and her senses.

As suddenly as it all began, it stopped, dead. Who wrenched away from who, neither could say, but it appeared to be a unanimous decision between them both at exactly the same time. The rush of cool air finally had a chance to squeeze between their heated bodies, allowing it to give them the moment to take stock of what was happening between them.

Gazes locked, hands stilled and hearts thumped as they volleyed for spent breath and words to say, but when Beverly did speak it was words that stupefied Will into shocked silence.

"This...this isn't what I want, Will."

Will's eyes, still glazed with unspent desire could only stare into his colleague's face as he tried in vain to comprehend what Beverly was telling him. The seconds ticked by and Will tried a tentative half smile, but when he only received tear filled eyes and quivering lips in return, the smile disappeared.

Will's heart began to thump with a new sensation; one of trepidation as he harshly whispered, "Just what 'do' you want, Beverly?"

Unable to sit and unable to be so close to Will anymore, Beverly got to her feet and prowled restlessly back and forth across Will's living quarters. It was several moments before she straightened out her muddled thoughts enough to put them into words.

"Before Odan was removed from inside of you, do you remember what you said?"

Will pushed himself back onto his seat, his fingers linking together to hide one half of his unease while his face unsuccessfully tried to hide the other as he tried to recall a time that he'd rather forget, "No, I don't think I do. I'm sorry."

Her face, still half turned away from him broke into a sad smile, her voice sounded strangely out of sorts, "I do. I remember exactly what you said." She turned to face him head on, "You said nothing, nothing at all."

Puzzlement and resentment etched his features as he pondered her words, "And I should have. Is that it? Is this what this is all about, Beverly, because I didn't say anything to you as I struggled to live within your hands!?"

"No! Yes!..." She took a deep calming breath before saying anything more, realising that she had already said too much in the two short, bitter words that had sprung from the dark depths of her heart, but those words had already conveyed everything and it was too late to take them back.

"Yes."

Silence prevailed the room as her honest, and obviously painful admission hung between them. Will's stunned eyes followed her agitated movements around the room. He didn't know what to say, or what to do, but the enormity of Beverly's grief was written all over her tired features, something he hadn't really noticed before.

Or had he? Had he taken the coward's way out of addressing not only her problem, but his own too? A problem that he had conveniently buried deep. Deep enough to hide, but not deep enough to forget. He'd never forget.

But memories got pushed aside as Beverly, now free of her guilty word, felt compelled to reveal her most innermost pain.

"I'm sorry, Will, I shouldn't be taking this out on you. I know that Odan was controlling your thoughts, and your words, but...but, I thought...I hoped..."

Her voice trailed off as the memories washed over her soul again. They were never far away and mostly it was the good moments that she wallowed in. But as time wore on, those were getting pushed into the past and being replaced by tormenting replays of a moment that should have happened, and words that should have been said.

Beverly was stuck in limbo and it was driving her beyond wretchedness.

"I think I know why Odan never said the words that you wanted to hear, Beverly."

Will's quiet, toneless voice held a strength that he would never understand where it had gathered from. He had made himself a silent vow that he would never tell her about the last few minutes of his shared connection with Odan, but life, and circumstances had a habit of ripping them out of you, kicking and screaming. Things that are better left unexposed.

Beverly had stopped pacing, just for a moment, but moments later, after she had stared at Will, long and hard, she began again, her linked hands, churning her agitation, around and around. Will watched the gentle sway of her hair, first hiding and then revealing her pale, frightened face. Her tall graceful body, a body that he remembered only too well, almost paraded back and forth in front of him, until she came to a decision and halted.

The terror in her eyes captured Will's gaze even before she spoke, "I don't think I want to know, Will. I don't think I could stand knowing that...that he really..." She broke off with a sob that brought Will quickly to his feet. He pulled her into his arms and held her trembling body close.

Beverly held onto Will as though it was their last moments together, breathing in his scent and his strength. His huge hands blazed a trail along her spine as he tried to ease her sorrow, but he knew that only words could do that. "He loved you, Beverly, don't ever doubt that." he whispered softly.

Will held away from him far enough to be able to look into her face. Her eyes shimmered with tears as they looked into the depths of his, and as he brought his hand up and traced her jaw, he held her eyes as he huskily whispered, "But he knew that I was falling in love with you too."

Beverly gasped audibly and tried to break free from Will's embrace, but he wouldn't let her go. His eyes turned to fire again, his words full of remorse, "That's why Odan didn't say any more than he felt he needed to, Beverly. He knew I was falling for you. He had to leave and I was going to be the one left behind to pick up the pieces. I hoped that, maybe someday, that this moment would come, and you would seek 'me' out and give me a chance to love you like Odan did."

He let her absorb his declaration for a moment before continuing, "You asked me if I desired you, Beverly, but you didn't ask me if I loved you. I do love you Beverly Crusher, more than you'll ever know, but I won't do anything about it until you feel the same way. I'm a patient man, I can wait."

He dropped his face closer to her, but settled his lips against her tear stained, peach soft cheek. Beverly pushed her face against the heat of his mouth, desperately needing the contact and the comfort that he was offering. Did she love Will Riker?

How could she when she had given her heart and soul to Odan.

But he had gone, and left behind was another man willing to love her in the same way. Did she take the chance? Was she ready to take the chance too?

No, she wasn't, but she needed 'something'. The something that had brought her to his quarters in the first place. Slowly Beverly turned full circle in Will's arms, and the impact of the motion told Will everything he wanted to know; She didn't love him, but there was 'something' there. Something that he was going to hang onto, no matter how small. Having a tiny piece of her was better than nothing at all.

Cradling her against the solid wall of his chest, he lifted his arms to enfold her, her own hands climbing to hold onto his forearms, sighing and smiling gently at the action, remembering how Odan had held her in the same way just before he'd first taken her to bed.

Beverly arched her throat, urging the memory to continue, and somehow Will knew what she was asking and willingly trailed a heated path along her ear with his tongue, his breath teasing her senses and her loins with promise.

Beverly felt Will's arms shift until his hands encased each breast and she gasped with aching as his palms tenderly kneaded her. She groaned with pleasure as she allowed herself once more to be lost in another memory. She could feel his own response to the act against her buttocks, and with an instinct born with a need to touch him, she dropped one hand and moved it between their fused bodies and cupped him intimately, mimicking his hands movements with her own.

Will growled low in his throat as he gently bit her soft earlobe. Dear God, what was she doing to him? Was it because she wanted him, or was she simply re-enacting a private moment with her previous lover? He had to know. Before he took anything any further, he had to know.

But even as he asked, he was moving his hands to the back of her tunic and sliding down the zipper, "Is it me you're making love to, Baby, or is it Odan?" As he pushed the material off her shoulders and down to her waist, he kissed a trail along the top of her shoulder, "Did he do this to you, Beverly?"

The whispered, "Yes." was torn from her throat, releasing a fresh wave of tears that pricked her eyes, forcing them tightly shut. She should have stopped this, right now, but she couldn't. She knew what was going to happen and she wanted it. It wasn't about Odan, or Will anymore, it was about what was missing from her life, and it was this; feeling like a wanted woman. Feeling desired. Just ~feeling~.

Since Odan had gone, she had felt empty inside. Bereft, and it had taken two men with one connection barely a fraction of her miserable life to show her that she needed more than what she'd got. She needed attention. Affection. The feeling of being needed. Sex.

God, she needed the sex and she'd found it, right here, in Will Riker's arms. She had been shocked when he'd uttered his feelings towards her. She was aware that he had desired her, but to hear from his own lips that he loved her, had thrown her for a loop. Beverly Crusher did not want his love, nor did she even want a relationship. She wanted his body for one thing, and one thing only; sex. Pure unadulterated, no strings attached, sex.

The more of Beverly's body he revealed, the more Will's own indecisions faded to be replaced by carnal need. It wasn't too often that he succumbed to a naked, willing body, but when he did, he didn't turn it down. Beverly was no exception.

She didn't love him, fine, he could cope with that. Beverly wanted his body and not his heart, he decided he could cope with that too, and as he shoved the now offensive tunic down past her hips, along with her panties, he pushed every lingering doubt about what was wrong and what was right with the immediate situation, out of his mind. And as Will freed his own engorged, pulsating piece of flesh from his pants, he placed the other palm in between her shoulder blades and shoved firmly, forcing her to bend over.

Beverly hardly had a second to grasp not only Will's intention, but something firm to hang on to before she felt, and welcomed him into her eager and already heated, moist body. She didn't realise how much she wanted this moment until she felt him hit heaven and begin to move, clinging onto her slender hips.

But as Will began to rock her with the age old movements, he felt his anger begin to surface again. With each thrust, he poured a little of his anger into her, his nails biting into her soft skin. His face, drenched with perspiration, was contorted as he struggled to hold onto, not only her body, but his cascading emotions, but even so, he couldn't stop the hated questions from slipping through his tense lips, "Did he do this to you too, Beverly, was it this good?"

Her, "Oh, God! yes! yes! yessss!" sent Will over the edge as he rage soared to its apex, forcing his release prematurely. Damn, damn damn! This wasn't how he wanted it to end. His dream of them coming together in a unity of closeness and rationality went haywire as he violently pulled out of her, thrusting away from her as he turned away and tried desperately to reign in his scattered mind and his tortured, spent and throbbing body.

Beverly slipped to the floor as her knees buckled under not only the enormity of what had just happened but her immense shame of allowing herself to let it happen, even though it was what she had wanted, above all else. She glanced nervously over her shoulder at the man who now stood staring out of his porthole, jerkily putting his exposed anatomy away. She could feel his anger right across the room, but wasn't sure if it was aimed at himself or her.

Pushing her hair away from her face, she trembled as she pushed herself to a stand, reaching out for the support that only moments ago aided her as she went wild, needing it now to steady her. Slowly she pulled her clothing back into place, her eyes never leaving the tall mans back.

What happened now? Did she say, 'Thanks for a good time, Will', or, 'it was you, not Odan I just made love to', or did she say nothing at all? She opted for nothing at all, but as she walked towards his door she found herself quietly saying, "I'm sorry."

She got as far as the door before Will hastily moved, halting her already faltering steps with a firm hand upon her shoulder, turning her around to face him in the same movement. Beverly expected him to be livid. To be beside himself that she had used him in the worst possible way, but when she had the courage to finally look into his handsome face, she was surprised to find tenderness there.

"Why are you saying sorry, Beverly. What are you saying sorry for; making love to me and wishing I was Odan, or because you didn't give a damn about how I felt about you, or for using me because you needed a man?"

Beverly swallowed noisily. Embarrassed. Had she really been that transparent? But as she looked deeply into his eyes she saw understanding. Taking the bull by the horns, she bravely and without hesitation, stepped forward and touched her lips to his, causing his eyes to flare with surprise and desire, "I do care about you, Will."

But as she went to step back away from him, Will suddenly gasped her by the back of her head and pulled her hard against his body, forcing her mouth to his once more. Only this time, he took control. The kiss was brutal as he plunged his hot tongue in to dance with hers, his fingers curling painfully into her hair, holding her still as he plundered and ravaged her unwilling mouth.

But the unwilling turned itself about as the desire from his attack began to lick at her inner body, releasing the hot scent of their frenzied moment of madness. Beverly found her own hands, trapped against the hard unforgiving planes of his broad chest began to flex in a desperate plea to move and caress.

And then as he ripped her away from him using her hair as a leverage, Will sex-infused eyes locked with hers, his breathing as harsh as hers and equally fraught with unspent passion ground out, "Take that back to your quarters, Doctor Crusher and think about how much you care for me, and when you have, you know where I'll be. You started this, you finish it."

He spun on his heels and headed for his bedroom, every muscle in his body, rigid with wasted longing and aching needs, effectively, and simultaneously shutting Beverly out as he closed the door on her.

The click of the door jerked Beverly back to life as she silently, and regrettably watched Will walk away from her. Spinning on her own heels, she exited his quarters as though the devil himself was chasing her. But as she rushed through the corridor towards her own quarters, tears and sobs that had emerged with the closing of his door, shutting her out, shutting off every chance of dealing with whatever it was between them, Beverly came face to face with the one person on the Enterprise that she did not want to see; Will's true love. Will's only love.

Deanna Troi.

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Six feet apart, face to face, both women came to a halt. If Deanna was surprised to see her best friend standing before her with tears streaming down her cheeks, she didn't show it, and in that moment, Beverly knew that Deanna was aware that there was unfinished business between herself and the commander, and it appeared that their business had just been resolved, and it hadn't gone the way she had planned.

Deanna took two steps towards her, one arm outstretched in offering along with one word of question, "Beverly...?" But she was too raw, too empty inside to take what her friend was offering her. Instead, she pushed on past and scurried away like the scared rabbit that she knew she was, Deanna's worried gaze following her until she turned the corner.

For a full minute, Deanna stood where she was and allowed the very private waves of anguish filter through her blockade, the torment and the pain making her sway with its force. She felt Beverly's blame, blame for being the holder of Will's heart, and for not being the one able to hold the creature she had given her heart to. and she felt Will's contempt at being used by a woman that he had grown to love more than her.

She was torn which way to turn even though Beverly's eyes had screamed for her to stay away. She badly wanted to go to her friend, but she wanted to see the man hiding behind the closed doors more, and it was that final choice that made up her mind.

Deanna pressed the admittance button on Will's door not expecting him to answer it, and he didn't. Using her rank as a senior officer, she overrode the security code and admitted herself.

The room smelt of intimacy, and a wave of envy rippled through her as her eyes surveyed the room, wondering where they had made love. Whether it had been an act of madness or one of tenderness. But going by the rigid strength of Will still trying to hold on to what was left of his torture, and his dignity, Deanna knew it was madness.

Taking a deep breath, Deanna stepped towards the closed bedroom door and turned the handle slowly, letting it swing gently open. The lighting was dimmed, but Deanna could make out his shadowy form standing before a porthole as he stared out at the streaking stars.

"Will?" she whispered, barely loud enough for him to hear.

"Are you here in a professional capacity or as my friend, Counselor?"

"I'm whatever you want me to be, Commander. Something has happened between yourself and Beverly and I want to help if I can. If you find it easier to think of me as your counselor, then that's okay. If you want me to be your friend then I have the right to hold you in my arms and be what you want me to be."

Without turning his body, Will looked enquiringly over his shoulder at the slight woman filling his doorway, her eyes full of understanding, her heart full of compassion. Did he want her holding him? Did he want her telling him that everything was okay?

He sighed as he turned away from the porthole, resigned to talking to her, one way or the other. "No, I think counselor will do me just fine, thank you, Deanna."

As they both sat on the bed, he one side, she the other, Will released a rush of pent up air from his lungs, part of him relieved to have someone to talk about his situation with the doctor, the other embarrassed at having to reveal his true feelings towards her, especially to Deanna.

But she was here, and she wasn't going to go away without some answers.

Deanna waited while Will sorted out in his mind what and how he wanted to tell her about what had happened, and in the end, he simply shrugged, "I don't know where to start, it's all such a mess."

Deanna reached over and lightly touched his forearm, searching his pained eyes, "How about at the beginning, Will. why did Beverly come to see you?"

Will's eyebrows rose as he straightened and eventually stood, "That's just it, I don't know. I never found out. She wanted to ask a favour, but never actually asked." he went silent as he remembered the moment, guiltily turning away from Deanna's knowing eyes as he spoke, "Things got out of hand after that."

Will was thankful that she never asked what had happened, but then he blushed as he realised that she didn't have to ask. She would know what had transpired in his living quarters without either of them saying a word, so to say he was surprised when she did ask was an understatement,

"What -did- happen here today, Will?" she watched his surprise and amended her choice of words, "I know -what- happened, Will. What I meant was, what happened -after-?"

Will flopped his long body back onto the bed only this time, he threw himself backwards, putting his head on the pillow and covering his weary eyes with his arm. "Nothing happened," he moaned, "nothing at all, and that's the problem. She said she was sorry and left, just like that."

"Just like that?" Deanna said incredulously.

"Just like that. I tell her I love her, we have the most mind blowing sex and then nothing."

Will didn't think about the sentiment that just slipped unheeded from his mouth until afterwards, but by then it was too late. Despite their past; their bond, their friendship, Deanna knew the score. Will had relationships and so did she, but even he knew that making love to Beverly Crusher stepped over that boundary. Falling in love with her was a whole different circumstance.

She couldn't help herself as she asked quietly, "You love her?"

The question hung between them in the dimness of the room. Heartbeats stopped, consequences vanished as she waited for his answer. Will slowly sat up. Leaning on one arm he reached for her, pushing aside her hair so that he could see her face. Her ebony eyes glittered as they met his, her breath suspended in her chest as she waited.

And waited.

Until finally he hoarsely whispered, "I didn't mean to." he moved his hand around to her chin, lifting it so that she was forced to look into his blue eyes, her own filling with moisture, "Do you believe me, Deanna?"

She dropped her eyes, nodding just once, the action setting free her tears, and then she looked back into his face and asked, "Can I be your friend now, Will?"

Will knew what she was asking and as he pulled her into his arms, he crooned, "Sure, come here." Deanna slipped her legs across the bed and fell into his embrace as naturally as it was to breath. Each soaked up each others strength, the private caress born of need and comfort only.

It was several minutes before she heard Will's voice rumble in his chest, the words caressing her hair, "Tell me what to do, Deanna, I'm lost here."

Deanna moved away enough to look up into his face, almost hidden by the shadows surrounding them, "What do you want to do, Will?"

He lifted his shoulders in a shrug again, "I want whatever she wants. If she doesn't want my love then I'll have to deal with it. If she wants something else," he shrugged again before continuing, "then I guess I'll have to make do with that."

"How long have you known...that you were in love with Beverly?" She hated to ask, but had to know.

"Will's arms tightened on her slight form as he drifted back in time, "Within minutes of Odan being planted in my body. I...I have always been mildly attracted to Beverly, but never enough to let it show, or to do anything about it. I never intended to hurt you, and you were far too important to me to let me pursue someone who could become a problem between us. When I had Odan inside of me, it released those attractions."

"Did Odan know?"

Will smiled grimly, "Yes, he knew. I think that was one of the reasons why he struggled against my inner workings, so that he could get out of me before I did something stupid. He knew I was after his woman, and he wasn't happy about it. He was gutted when Kareel turned out to be his new host. he knew he'd lost her forever then and had almost handed her to me on a plate."

Deanna nodded, "I know. Somehow I knew that the feelings I was sensing weren't just Odan, It was like Jekyll and Hyde; two people, one mind and one goal. I knew the goal was Beverly but I never understood why you were fighting against each other. I thought Odan had total control over your mind, I never realised you had emotions of your own."

They were silent for a moment as they absorbed all the information, but it was Deanna who spoke up next, "Why didn't you go after her once Kareel had gone?"

He shrugged again, "Because I didn't want her to know, and, I didn't want to hurt you. You're still too important to me to risk losing."

Deanna reached up and planted a feather-light kiss upon his cool lips and whispered, "You would never have lost me, Imzadi, no matter what. I saw the way you used to look at her when Odan was inside of you. I knew it wasn't all him, not really. I admit, it might have took a while to have gotten used to the idea of you and Beverly together, but I would have accepted it. Your happiness is more important to me than that. We had our chance, Will, a long time ago. We chose not to take it further, and I could not deny you the chance to find someone else, even if it is my best friend."

Will grinned in the darkness as he soaked up her words, "You, are amazing, Deanna Troi. What did I ever do to deserve you?"

Deanna chuckled, "You got me away from my mother, I think that was enough to forgive practically anything you did."

Will pulled her closer, squeezing her tighter still, "Thank you, Deanna." leaving a loud kiss on top of her curls.

Deanna breathed in his scent before pulling herself out of his arms and to a stand. looking down at him she smiled, "You're welcome. Now, Commander Riker, what are you going to do about that woman that went sprinting down the corridor like a bat out of hell?"

Will pushed himself up, instantly filling the room with his bulk, "I guess I'd better go and apologise, otherwise the next time I find myself in her sickbay, she might think twice about saving my life, or she'll give me a lobotomy and screw around with my head for good."

They both laughed as Will guided Deanna out from his bedroom, through his living area and out into the corridor. By mutual understanding, they both came to a halt outside Beverly's quarters. Deanna squeezed Will's fingers in the hope of injecting a little courage and a lot of hope into him. Reaching up on tip toe, she kissed him softly and whispered against his throat, "Be gentle with her, she's been through a lot." Moments she was gone and Will was left alone, facing the steel doors.

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Beverly tugged at the tangled mass of hair with her hairbrush hard enough to bring tears to her eyes. That was her excuse anyway. In truth the ripping out of her hair just happened to release the latest barrage of tears that she had managed to contain whilst she was in the shower. But now she was out of it and sitting in front of the mirror staring at herself, she felt, and saw how her face looked; devoid of life, pale and worn out. Tired. Beverly was absolutely exhausted.

She flatly refused to let her liaison with Will Riker consume her thoughts, or dwell on what he did to her body that still throbbed with pleasure, but even so, she couldn't help but slide her hand down and touch her tender hip bone and remember where his overly strong hands had gripped her tight. Just remembering the intimate touch was enough to make her eyes glisten, but this time, not with pain, but with aching need.

Staring into the mirror watching a solo tear trail down her cheek, Beverly whispered as she swiped the errant tears away, "Damn you, Od..." The door chiming turned her head in alarm and dismay, her unladylike curse slipping from her lips as though she said them every day, "Oh, crap!"

It was Deanna, it had to be. Deanna had talked to Will first and got his side of the story and now she had come to her. What the hell was she going to say to her!? 'Sorry, but I f***** your Will, and it was very nice too, but you can have him back now.'

She snorted as she unwillingly walked towards her door, her belligerence oozing out from every pore. She did not want this conversation, nor did she want to be analysed and pitied. Beverly hit the access panel. and folding her arms protectively across her chest, she propped herself against the doors frame and watched as the heavy doors slid open.

Her eyes rose to meet clear blue puzzled eyes, an once again she found herself cursing a murmured, "Oh, crap." before pushing herself to a weary, resigned stand and walking away from Will in the slight hope that he would get the hint and go away.

Like hell did he.

Will followed her in, his hand reaching out to her in a pleading gesture, his voice holding a hint of that same plea, "Beverly, let's talk about this, please. I didn't mean what I said, and I didn't mean to hurt you."

Beverly pivoted on the spot so quickly, Will stopped and stepped back as the wave of not only air, but anger too, caught him by surprise. "What's the matter, Will, did Deanna make you realise how crappy you treated me. Did she tell you to come and apologise to me? After all, everything has just got to be running nicely and smoothly on the great ship, Enterprise!" she stormed, "Damn it, Will! When are you going to make some decisions for yourself!?"

As the last word ricocheted around the room, both Will and Beverly stood with their mouths dangling open, their eyes wide, wondering what part of hell the bitter words had come from.

When Will began to move, it was like a cat prowling his prey; getting ready to pounce and devour, but instead of hunger in his heart, he had steely intent. He had fire in his eyes, and he had his temper firmly under control. The woman that was slowly backing away from him had pushed him to the brink of his sanity and he was going to not only tell her a thing or two about their relationship - whatever category 'that' came into, he was going to show her a

thing or two too.

He clamped her upper arms with just about the last of his restraint, the remainder slipped through his lips, "~I~ made a decision to come here, to you, Beverly. Me, not Deanna, not ships protocol, nor my ego. Me. I know there is something special between us, and I'm aware that you are fighting against what I am offering you."

He stepped closer, his hands easing their grip as his eyes feasted on her upturned face, her sweet, rapid breath kissing his skin, making him ache with need. Will's thoughts were racing away with him, making him forget his purpose, and his aim. He couldn't break his eyes away from her sultry wanton gaze, a gaze that held fear, but not of him, but of what could be.

But she was too scared to take the risk and the chance, of the humiliation of facing the captain, the one person whom she had been connected with from day dot. Why wasn't it Jean-Luc that was standing before putting his heart on his sleeve and his destiny in her hands?

His voice dropped as he voiced the question once more, "I'm asking you again, Beverly, what ~do~ you want from me?"

Beverly couldn't break her eyes away from the mesmerising, hypnotic gaze. Will had her pinned, and all sound except her thumping rhythmic heartbeat, drifted away. Was it Will she wanted, or was it Odan? Could she live without Odan's love and take what Will was offering?

Did she love Will enough?

As soon as she asked herself the question, the ~no~ answer jumped through her veins, her heart and mind with such clarity that it made her gasp. Will watched the emotional drama on her face with fascination. He didn't need to look anywhere else other than her beautiful clear blue and very expressive eyes. Beverly didn't want him, but she wanted ~something~ from him, but why was it so hard to voice her needs?

Even though she was standing still, Beverly felt herself drifting inch by inch towards Will. He felt the pull too, and as he got closer, his lips automatically formed to accept the kiss that she wanted, his head tilting slightly to perfectly meld to hers, his heart unconsciously beginning to beat in time with hers.

Just one more kiss, that was all he wanted. Will had seen the light die in her eyes as she considered, and declined having a relationship with him. He knew the reasons why; Deanna, the captain, Wesley, the Enterprise, even because purely and simply, it was ~him~. All he accepted, and all he agreed with. All he wanted from her was an honest answer. An end.

They hovered, barely a breath between them, their eyes dropping to each others mouths, waiting. Beverly whispered so quietly, Will barely heard her, "Why did you make love to me?"

Will's voice was equally quiet as he answered her, but his was laden with memories, "You needed me, and I needed you, nothing more, nothing less. You can use my body, Beverly, but I can't allow you to abuse my heart, its not strong enough anymore. I need to know where I stand with you, Beverly. I need to be able to move on, one way or the other."

The distance between them closed further, only will power separated them now, the sheer force of denial raged between them, "Can you make love to me, Will without loving me, without having a relationship with me?"

Will's eyes darted around her features, taking in, memorising every minute detail as he huskily answered her, "Sure I can, I'm a Riker, remember?" His attempt at humour fell short and he felt compelled to dispel the glib words, "I have needs too and we're good together, Beverly, real good. Better than good."

It was on those final words that melted the last of their resistance and allowed themselves the kiss that had waited

patiently in the wings. It was gentle, but oh, so deep. As their arms snaked around each other, they felt one another's bodies tremble with the kiss' power.

But as they swept each other's mouths with fevered tongues, something else was happening. The ~something~ that had hung between them ever since Beverly had stepped into his quarters;

A new level of friendship. One deeper than before. One treasured more than ever. Complete understanding. And when the kiss ended and Will pulled away from Beverly's arms, they were both smiling. As he turned and walked towards the door, his light-hearted, 'cya.' was echoed by a smiling Beverly, her own, 'Bye.' drifting out with him.

They had both finally come to accept the situation they were tied to. If Beverly needed him, she knew where to find him. If he needed her, all he had to do was turn up on her doorstep with a twinkle in his eye and the acceptance that maybe, one day, she might need him just a little bit more.

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