

## The Pain

by Carol Sandford

Picard watched his first officer with unease. It hadn't been the first time that he had had to watch Will grimace with pain, bending slightly at the waist as the pain obviously emanated from his stomach region. "Are you alright, Number One?"

Will flushed a little as he gathered decorum once more, standing up so straight, Picard had to elevate his eyes even further than usual. "I'm fine, sir, thank you."

Jean-Luc Picard, unflappable captain of the USS Enterprise D followed Will's back as he moved away from his probing eyes towards the porthole, propping his weight against the hull and stared unseeing out at the stars.

Picard had nothing to lose as he made his way to quietly stand beside his comrade, and his friend, always his friend. He had no uncertainty revealing that not only to himself but to anyone who cared to ask. "Have you been to see Doctor Crusher? This looks like a case for her expertise."

Will snorted derisively, as the humorous smirk lit up his features briefly, "Its bad enough fighting off her ministrations when I'm injured, I sure as heck am not letting her near me for just a twinge."

"Twinges have a habit of escalating into something far more serious, Will. Better to let her nip it in the bud."

Will smiled tightly, unable to fully meet his superior's eyes. "I'm fine sir, honestly. But, if it gets any worse, I will go to see Beverly. You have my word."

Picard released a muffled 'Hurmph' as he moved away, already knowing that unless he was at death's door, no way was Beverly Crusher getting near Will's body.

Will continued to stare out into the darkness willing himself not to let his mind drift, knowing that if he did, the pain would punch him inside out again, and each time it happened, it got worse.

Will felt another one coming along with the groan that made its way up from his heart. God, it hurt. It hurt so much he didn't know how much more he was going to be able to take. He fidgeted nervously, his whole aura screeched ~leave me alone!~

But he knew it wouldn't go away, not until he had been treated. But seeing Beverly was not an option. Not yet.

Later at the poker game, it happened again, in front of his comrades. In front of Beverly. He felt numerous pairs of eyes fall upon him as his face screwed up briefly with the pain, along with the ever-present groan that erupted with it.

The men stared in quiet concern, but of course it gave Beverly the ideal opportunity to switch into doctor mode. "Will?"

His eyes met hers, very briefly, he even recognised the plead within them as he silently begged her to not make a scene. "I'm fine, Bev, just a touch of indigestion...really."

A quick glance around the table told him that they didn't believe him. It had been happening too often for too long. But Will's defiant words ceased the silent speculation that buzzed between his friends, "Are we playing poker tonight, or what ?!"

But somehow the rest of the evening didn't quite finish in the same jovial manner it started, and with some relief, it finally ended with some sympathetic 'g'night's' and 'hope you feel better's' as they all filed out of his suite. All except Beverly Crusher.

Somehow he knew she wouldn't leave with the others, and he rapidly stepped and turned away from her when he saw her pull her tricorder out of her pocket.

"There's nothing wrong with me, Beverly, you can put that thing away."

He inwardly sighed as he heard its bleep indicating that she had indeed closed it down. "Thank you." he whispered quietly.

He began to collect up the scattered chips that were still strewn across the table. Will knew that Beverly was standing silently behind him, waiting. He didn't want to talk, he couldn't. This was something he needed to work out on his own. He didn't really have a choice. The object of his discomfort had gone, in a cloud of misery and tears, and he had let her go, He had let Deanna leave the ship.

He felt the pain rise again.

But it stopped midway as Beverly's voice broke through the barrier. " I love you Will, your my friend, and I want to help. Please talk to me."

The pain came back again as he leaned heavily onto the table, his head hung low as he gathered himself enough to face her. This was the hard part. The part where he had to open his heart to let others see just how much he was hurting and how much their kind words meant to him.

Turning slowly, he sat on the table's edge, his eyes downcast, his arms folded across his vast chest. But right now he seemed so small and helpless and Beverly wanted to do nothing more than take him in her arms and give him a heart-warming hug. The hug of a friend.

"I want her back, Beverly, its as simple as that."

"Its not that simple, Will. I don't know what happened between you two, but it was ~not~ simple. Deanna would ~not~ have left if it had. You know her as well as I do - better, and she

would ~not~ have left if had been simple."

She took a few steps towards him, and his eyes finally rose to meet hers. He sighed loudly, "Your right, it wasn't. Telling Deanna that she had no right to have an affair with another man was possibly the most stupidest thing I have ever done. I don't blame her for leaving. I was being arrogant, and obnoxious...and jealous...and spiteful, and, and...hell, you know me, Beverly."

Beverly smiled gently as her eyes lit up with tenderness and amusement. "You love her, Will, you had every right to feel those things - to say those things."

Will shook his head dispassionately, "I had ~no~ right, Beverly. Not once, not ever, did Deanna ever say those things to me when I had an affair, not once. She deserved better from me."

Beverly nodded knowingly, "Your right, she didn't deserve those words. But do you know why she never said similar things to you?"

Will could only shake head, not believing for a moment that it was simply because Deanna loved him. Beverly stepped another pace towards him - near enough for Will to have to look up to her equally blue eyes.

"Because Will, She always hoped that one day, you would be strong enough to turn away the woman that you were about to bed for her. Until you had the strength to refuse your carnal desires for her, and solely her, Deanna didn't want you to stop what she considered to be normal for a single human male."

Will was stunned, "But Beverly, I have always wanted her, always! All she had to do was say the word and I would have dropped everything and everyone to have done so. But she never did, Beverly. She never did!"

He was surprised when Beverly turned and began walking to the door and realised that she was walking out on him without finishing the conversation that ~she~ had forced upon him. He couldn't stop himself as he leapt to his feet and grabbed her arm. Firm enough to halt her leaving but not enough to cause her physical pain. But he was cross. "Answer me, damnit, Beverly! What can I do to get her back? I want her back."

"Stop behaving like a man that doesn't give a damn. Stop pretending that Deanna means nothing more to you than someone you had a one night stand with. Stop assuming that Deanna doesn't care. Stop behaving like William T Riker, stud."

With that she shook free of his grasp and left him standing alone in his quarters with a pain that was far worse than the one he started with.

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The shuttle landed barely yards from her front door. He wanted to take her by surprise, quickly enough for her not to escape out of the back door. Numerous calls had been fruitless, she had no intentions of speaking to him. So he did the next best thing. He commandeered a

shuttle and headed for her home.

He found her in the garden, away from the knowing eyes within the house, sitting with her feet drawn up and her arms wrapped around her legs, her chin upon her knees. She looked at peace, but Will could feel her misery clear across the expanse of lawn. It drenched his soul and he wanted nothing more than to make it right once more. But what if she no longer wanted that. What if he had used up all his chances? His pain came back with a vengeance and almost doubled him over with the thought of never having her close to him, loving him. Just being with him ever again.

Her quiet, sad voice broke his steps towards her. "What are you doing here, Will?"

Will stood and studied her from afar, drinking her in, quenching a thirst that had plagued him for it seemed forever. She was his life force, he knew that, but until that moment, he hadn't realised how much so. Until Beverly's condemning words had finally made him stand still long enough to think about him.

Her.

Them.

"Is it true, Deanna. Are you really waiting for me to get down on my bended knee and accept that it is you I love and want to be with, above all others?"

She turned her head and looked at him then. "Yes." That was it, that was all she said.

Will walked slowly towards her, his heart on his sleeve, his love in his eyes, his soul out for the universe to see. "But you only had to say, Deanna. I never knew, I never understood. Why didn't you tell me, Deanna?"

She pushed herself away from her legs, releasing her death grip hold on them. The breeze caught her hair, whipping around her head like a mini whirlwind, her shaking hand struggled to tame it, but failed miserably.

"Because I wanted...I needed you to realise on your own, Will. I needed you to finally look at me and see who I truly was. I was your Imzadi, Will, but you never seemed to acknowledge it."

Will bit back his anger, but dimly realised it was too late to hide the emotion when he saw her stiffen slightly. He tried replacing the rogue thought with one of tenderness. "I know your my Imzadi, Deanna. I know how important it is. The word, the relationship. Us."

Now Will felt the impact of her bitterness as she flew to a stand, her arms tight to her side as she restrained herself from flying at him in the rage that was rapidly becoming out of control. "Just why did you come here, Will. Was it to see me cry, or maybe rub a little more salt into my wounds. Or is it that you've come to say you love me and that you'll be a good boy and never be with another woman again, only me?!"

Deanna hadn't realised she had advanced on the man before until she felt his warm breath upon her face. Until his arms had captured hers, holding her barely a heartbeat away from his desire ridden body. Until his eyes fluttered shut and his lips met her trembling ones in a kiss that was tender, so feather-light, Deanna wasn't even sure it had happened and only knew it had by her racing heartbeat and the love that drenched through to her soul along with his words, "I love you, Deanna. I'm going to be a good boy and never look another woman again. From now on its you, only you, I swear."

Deanna looked deeply into his eyes, looking for everything that she wanted to see. She found it, and more. He was surprised when she spoke again. "I heard you had a pain."

Will lightly kissed her again, and again in between speaking, "Uh huh, it had red hair, bluer eyes than mine and held a lethal weapon. I swear that damn tricorder of hers will be death of me."

He felt Deanna's smile against his lips, grasping the opportunity to deepen the kiss by slipping his hot, desperate, longing tongue inside the sweet welcoming recess of her mouth. She let him in, gladly, falling against his body like she had never been away.

Breaking away breathless many moments later, Will squeezed her body against, revelling in its familiarity, its rightness, happiness surging through them both. As Deanna kissed his chest taking in the familiar scent that was solely his, Will drank in the fragrance of her hair that too was purely hers. "Oh, Deanna, I wish you'd done this years ago."

Seeking out his lips again, Deanna could only say, "What, and miss a reunion like this! Not a chance, Imzadi, not a chance..."