

## Rebuilding Broken Bridges by Carol Sandford

Looking down, I checked my body, my hands automatically smoothing the already smooth lines of my uniform, feeling pleasure as my palms ran over my flat stomach, fingers trailing down my hips searching for any trace of a bulge. I found none. I inwardly grinned to myself, knowing that the reason for the lack of bulge was due to the fact that I had been making love practically non-stop with him, with Michael, for the last eight days.

His image swam before my eyes before I closed them indulgently and lost myself to the last few moments that I was with him, was it really only ten minutes ago?

He had pinned me up against the turbo lift's wall, mischievousness lit up his rich brown eyes, the grin matched the mirth as he closed the gap between our faces. Before he had even reached my lips, they were open, waiting for his tongue to plunder mine, igniting that ache that seemed to be forever present these days, bursting into flame whenever he so much as looked at me, and when he touched me...

I moaned, I couldn't help myself. There, outside the door, I was falling apart with an infusion of erotic images when I should have been mentally preparing myself to face the man on the other side of the door.

I licked my lips, centred my chaotic mind, calmed my breathing back down to near normality, but I still found myself taking a huge breath before reaching out to press the button on the panel. I watched my finger shaking as it neared the metallic control, I found myself letting out the shaky breath as I tried to calm the butterflies that decided to take flight within my stomach. I tried talking to myself.

\*It's only Will, he'll understand, we aren't together anymore, so what does it matter, I can be with another man if I want to, why should I feel guilty?\*

I nearly turned and ran when Will's deep voice boomed through the intercom, "Come!", It was sheer terror that forced me to remain where I was until the doors slid open and it was an automatic reflex action that made me step into his cabin. The door opened, you walked through it, simple as that, so it seemed.

But as I stepped through, I knew I had made a terrible mistake. My own happiness had overshadowed everything else, including Will...especially Will, so coming face to face with my one true love, my first true love and if I was brutally honest with myself, my only true love, sitting in the semi-darkness...waiting.

I felt like I was on trial, even though I was pretty sure that Will was not aware that I was 'involved' with one of the guests that were en route to the treaty meeting on Salomon three in the Tralosse system in a week's time. My heart plummeted to the pit of my stomach when I thought of how many days that we had left together, but I had to worry about that later.

My first priority was getting Will' s blessing. It was like a religious ritual between us, and it also showed just how deep our feelings were for each other too. Neither of us truly understood why we had to do this, other than a mutual respect and yes, love played a major factor in the game. Two people, joined at the heart for life, joined at the soul for eternity, searching for...that certain something that is clearly missing, that something that we only seem to find with others...for a short while, until we are irrefutably left with each other once more.

Like two weeks ago.

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The Briar Patch had rejoined us with an intensity that left me breathless, spinning us back into a time when love was new, passionate, romantic...and fun, God, we had so much fun in the Briar Patch. We were like teenagers again but with the full experiences of adulthood. Mind blowing sex, the teasing, the taunting, the all consuming intensity of an affair that had been previously starved of everything, but now that everything had free reign. A non-stop roller-coaster ride that left us giddy, drugged almost.

Oh, it was good, believe me, it was so good to recapture those long, past, but never forgotten, memories of Betazed. Of promises made, and broken. Of bonds, forged forever, recalled and re-tightened...until we left the Briar Patch.

We tried so hard to keep it alive, but with each passing day and each mile that we moved further and further away from the magical properties that the Bandi fought so hard to keep for their own, it became increasing and painfully obvious that we were back to how we were before. It was a day of many tears when we decided, mutually but miserably, to go back to being ' just good friends' .

I shall never forget that day for as long as I live. I think it was the day that we finally realised, finally accepted, that we would never, ever be a couple. Never settle down to married life, never have a family together, and that hurt most of all. All my life, I had visions...dreams, of us, of Will and I being together, being parents, I could never envisage any other man as the father to my child, I still can' t.

So where did that leave us?

It left us facing one another again, in a situation that was rapidly becoming common place. I needed to hear him say that it was okay to be intimate with another. I need to see his eyes as he said those words, \*It' s okay Deanna, enjoy yourself, live for the moment, I don' t mind...I love you Imzadi, whatever you want to do is fine by me\*.

Deep inside of me, I' ve often wondered what would happen if he suddenly turned and said, \* No Deanna, your mine, you belong to me, please don' t\*...I wonder what I would do?

Of course he has no right to say those words, he has relationships too, more often than I do, he would not dare deprive me finding a little happiness, even if I can only find it in a shallow romance that will probably end before it has begun.

But part of me does wonder...

I had been appointed the liaison officer to prepare the four delegates for the upcoming treaty. They had welcomed me with open arms. The Enterprise had left me behind along with a female ensign, an escort, to make sure that I came to no harm. I laughed at that, but the Captain was adamant, but not as much as Will Riker.

In some ways, I welcomed the escape from my home, from the stress of ending the all consuming, intense relationship that had reached stalemate between Will and I, but I had the consolation that we had parted friends, we were 'back to the way we were' . But then I met Michael.

I could not believe how quickly I fell for the charms of the Salmonian delegate, within hours we were sharing an intimate dinner for two, in his quarters. Its funny when you meet someone new and it just ' clicks' , I think it was his eyes that captured me, I liked the way they almost smouldered when he watched me. I liked the tiny smile that played across his lips whenever he spoke in that rich, husky slightly alien voice. He spoke quietly, barely a whisper, I had to lean towards him to hear what he was saying, so , so quiet.

Thats what happened when Michael first kissed me. So intent on listening to his words, I didn' t notice his mouth coming towards mine. The movement was so smooth that when his lips tentatively touched mine I had already been imagining the moment, it felt so natural, so right.

I was ready. Within minutes we were naked.

Sinking to the couch, he made sweet, slow, sensuous love to me. No words were said, other than the tiny gasps of delight that fell from my mouth. Lost to the dizzy heights that threatened to consume, overwhelm and make me shatter into a million and one delicious shudders as he took me to heaven and back, time had no meaning, no questions and no answers to what was happening within the confines of small room, and I didn' t care.

Right at that moment, I didn' t care about the Enterprise, my position, or the man that I had broken up from barely twenty four hours ago. I wanted him.

I had got him.

Chapter Two.

I saw Will smile in the dimness, he was pleased to see me, Will was always pleased to see me. But this time he didn' t rise to give me a hug like he usually did. I could sense the turmoil within him. I watched him shift his long body further onto the seat, spreading his arms along the back. He watched me intently.

I felt my one ounce of courage begin to desert me as Will nervously studied me, my own voice failed me just when I needed it most, just when I needed to be in control of the situation, my heart plummeted again when Will took my chance away from me.

"Hello Deanna, you look....radiant."

He knew.

My mind raced through every moment since I had been back on board. This had been my first encounter with Will since I had materialised in the transporter room, I was certain Will hadn't met Michael, even on a professional level. Uncharacteristically, Will hadn't been among the welcoming committee when we had returned. At the time I thought it was odd, not unusual, but odd, I didn't pay any heed to it at the time, I figured he was tied up elsewhere.

But what did strike me was that he hadn't made any effort to seek me out to welcome me back. I had been gone for two long weeks, Will had never missed my homecoming, ever. The silence stretched out between us, his eyes still searched mine, I wondered what he was looking for. An apology, guilt? I found myself opting for the first one.

"I'm sorry."

I expected him to stand and say, \*It's okay Deanna, I understand.\* I didn't expect him to say it in a voice that held the hint of tears.

"How could you Deanna?"

I found myself blinking stupidly, at a loss of how to respond. It was then that Will pushed himself wearily to a stand, taking the few steps to place himself within arms reach, but his heart and mind were a thousand miles away.

Now he was so close, I could make out the dark circles beneath his eyes, but it was those eyes that would remain uppermost in my mind.

Haunted.

Why?...why was he being affected like this?. I have had lovers before, I have fallen \*in love\* before, this was no different, he knows that in another week, my liaison with Michael will be over and we will be back to how we were, friends...close friends. Special friends.

But looking at him now, I wasn't even so certain of that anymore, I have never seen Will so...hurt before, I'm scared, more for him than me. Why didn't he say something when we agreed to stay the way that we used to be?...Why now? I know I was frowning openly at him but I had to know.

"What do you mean Will, what have I done?"

He turned away from me and went and stood beside the window, for all intent and purposes he appeared to be looking for something, I knew he was searching his heart for the right words.

"I called you Deanna, on your first night away...I called you, you weren't there."

He didn't need to add that he had tried to reach me countless times, and probably called during the night too. I felt the heat in rise to my cheeks, I was glad he was facing away from me, but even so, the words stuck in my throat. The phrase popped into my head again, \*he knew\*. It was then that he turned back to me, deeply puzzled, deeply hurt.

"It was only one day after we had decided to call it quits Deanna, one day...how could you sleep in another man' s bed, make love to another man so soon...did I really mean so little to you Deanna...Imzadi?"

His final word triggered the tears that had built within me with each damning word that fell from his lips. They burned a trail from my very soul, spilling down my cheeks in a torrent that left me gasping with sobs. What had I done to him...to us?

My feet found themselves moving towards him, and this time, thank God, Will didn' t stop me from pulling him into my arms, and together, we cried, but I couldn' t stop whispering,

"I' m sorry, I' m sorry, forgive me, I love you Will, you are my life, without you, I am lost, please forgive me, he means nothing to me."

He squeezed me tighter, I could hardly breathe, I tried to pull away a little, we needed to talk, but I was taken by surprise when Will' s desperate mouth found mine and he began to kiss me frantically...deeply...brutally. Forcing his tongue deep into my mouth, I bit back the rising panic and began to struggle. He held me fast, the kiss went on and on. He was oblivious, intent on only ridding himself of the pain and desperation that engulfed his entire being.

I couldn' t deny him that freedom, not now, not ever. I began to kiss him back until, at last, he released his vice-like hold on me, moving his hands up to my face, holding it firm within the huge palms. Breaking away from my lips that I could already feel the swelling making itself know from the savage onslaught. Will began to rain tiny, desperate kisses all over my face, my name fell from his mouth over and over again,

"Deanna, Deanna, my Deanna"

I don' t know how long it was before I felt his mind, and body shift gears. I felt my own change too as his body pushed against mine, I could feel his hardness pushing against my waist, his breathing became ragged as he fought against the building urge within him.

I felt my own desire building, how could something that was so wrong feel so right, right for this moment in time, right for us, for me, and for him... especially for him.

I felt myself being lifted within his strong arms and carried towards his sleeping quarters. If he had said nothing, that would have been okay, the urgency had now a mutual longing, Will had reduced me to a quivering mass of need, I needed him, but the words that he whispered made me soar.

"I' m taking you back, I' m making you mine again Imzadi."

Moments later, everything and everyone was forgotten as we came together again. The missing link in the chain. The two lost souls reunited...re-connected. Nothing felt so right, nothing felt so good, and as we cried out with release, our hearts and minds collided with an infusion of emotion that left us gasping.

Will pulled me close to his body, holding on tight as he fought to steady his pounding heart. His breath rasped against my ear and I found myself waiting...

What was he going to say? Was he going to tell me he loved me?, was he going to ask me to stay? I tried to lever myself from his warm body, still slick with sweat, I don't know if it was his or mine. I instantly felt the rapid resistance from his arms as he halted my departure, his words stopped me in my tracks.

"Your going back to him?"

I didn't know what to say. Should I tell him the truth, that Michael was waiting for me, in my cabin, waiting to give me more of what I had just had, or should I lie. I didn't want to do either. This time when I pushed myself from his body, he let me go. I had already answered him with my silence.

The only noise in the dark room was the rustle of my clothes as I dressed, but I could feel his eyes boring into me, into my soul, I couldn't wait to get out of there. Despite what had just happened, despite how I felt, how I felt about Will, In the cold light of day I knew we were wrong to do this. I was a fool to have let my bodily needs take over my heart, despite how much I loved him, and I do, desperately.

I couldn't go without saying something even if I did know that nothing that I said right now would be what he wanted to hear, so I uttered the only thing that swam over and over in my mind.

"I'm sorry Imzadi."

As I stepped through the steel doors, I heard him, I heard the low wail of a man who's heart had been shattered into a million pieces, and I ran, I ran like a coward before I gave myself the chance to go back in and make things even worse than they already were. By the time I had reached my quarters, I was crying bitterly.

I stopped dead as I entered. The room was dim, only a tall candle flickered on a table set up for an intimate dinner for two. How could I have forgotten Michaels words as I had stepped dishevelled from the turbo lift. 'I'll be waiting', the words heavy with sexual intent and tension.

He stepped from the bathroom, freshly showered and he looked as sexy as hell. He didn't seem to notice my agitated state until he came up close. As he reached out his arms to embrace me, his hands stopped in mid air when he saw my face.

"Deanna, what's wrong?"

I saw no point in explaining, I had kept my relationship with Will to myself, and I intended to keep it that way. A few more days and Michael would be gone, along with whatever we had between us. I had no illusions that he wouldn't be the last man in my bed, that was the way it was. A meaningless relationship spawned from a need to have someone to make love to, to have fun with once in a while. Will was there for keeps, it just didn't work for us to be

' together' .

I took a deep cleansing breath and stepped into Michael' s embrace. I hugged him tight, I could feel his confusion, I told him that I was going to have a shower, walking away before he had a chance to ask me another question.

Stepping into the steaming jet of water, I let it wash away the previous hour. But as it washed away the scent of Will, it left behind an inner torment that I simply could not remove, I wondered if I really wanted it to.

What had I done? Had I really dismissed what I felt for Will that easily? No, I loved him, with all my heart, didn' t I?...Didn' t I?

The water pounded on my head, on my face, if Michael had walked in now, he wouldn' t have been able to tell that I had tears pouring down my face. Maybe I didn' t care if he did, I had just destroyed the only thing that ever mattered to me, and it wasn' t the man waiting in the lounge.

It wasn' t the man waiting in the lounge.

As my head said it, my heart and soul agreed with such clarity that I laughed aloud.

It wasn' t the man in the lounge.

I belonged to William Riker. Whatever I' d had with Michael was over, it had run its course. Now I needed to my life...Our life back on its even course, back to the way we were.

I had been wrong to do what I did, I can see that now. I made a mistake, a dreadful, heart-breaking mistake, at my Imzadi' s expense. I had to make it right, I had to go and see him.

But first I needed to deal with Michael.

The shower had worked its magic. Stepping back into the lounge after dressing was surprisingly hard. Michael was patiently sitting, looking at a book, but he placed it down when I walked into the room. A smile spread across his face until he saw the steely determination in my eyes. He spoke my name.

"Deanna?"

I wanted to turn away from him, but I had done running, it seemed that I had spent my whole life running, but from what? I found myself apologising again,

"I' m sorry Michael...I can' t do this anymore."

Michael was so stunned that he took a step backwards. His handsome face broke into an unsteady grin before disappearing as he studied my features, saw that I was telling the truth, for once.

"Why Deanna?, we were so great together, we were enjoying what we had, we both know that within a week I' ll be gone, why now, why not wait until I' m gone?"

I found myself shaking my head as I looked steadily at him, he was confused and he had every right to be. We had made no commitments, no bedroom promises, this relationship was based on lust, pure, unadulterated lust, but I had got it wrong, I had timed it all wrong. maybe in a few months time things could have been different, but I hadn' t put Will' s feelings first and I had hurt him, unbearably, and he was more important than any two bit relationship, he was worth everything to me. I just hoped I hadn' t left it too late.

"No, I' m sorry, it' s not you, its me, I have feelings for another, and my relationship with you has caused him a great deal of upset, and I will not risk losing that relationship with him any further, he' s too important to me."

"Do you love him?"

I didn' t hesitate with my answer, nothing in my entire life was as certain as how I felt about Will,

"Yes...yes I do, very much."

"I see."

"Michael, you have to understand what it is between us, between Will and I, a long time ago, when we young we were bonded, he is my Imzadi, there will never be anyone to replace him, there couldn' t, its just the way it is."

"So...what did we just have?"

"What we had was something special that I shall always treasure, I shall never forget you, and I hope you never forget me Michael."

Curiously he looked sad as he answered me, curious and baffled.

"No...no I' ll never forget you."

He appeared to make up his mind and pointed towards the door.

"Go...go and make it right."

I couldn' t believe it, he was letting me go!, but I couldn' t move. I stood like an idiot, grinning up at him, I' m sure he could see the relief in my eyes, hell, he would have to be blind not to see!

Michael laughed before taking my arm and lead me to the door, "Go." and before I knew it, I was heading back towards Will' s quarters.



Here I was again, standing outside his door, wiping my clammy hands down my hips, only this time I didn't admire my firm figure, or recall the last intimate moment with Michael. I had one man in my mind and he was on the other side of this door. I tried to reach out to him with my mind, but he had his firmly closed, but he couldn't hide the misery that shrouded him.

I reached out to press the communication button again, but halted half way. I knew Will wouldn't answer my hail, no matter how many times I pleaded. Deciding that surprise would be the best action, I spoke aloud the authorisation code allowing me immediate access to his own personal space.

The doors hissed open and I quickly stepped inside. The place was in darkness, but I knew he was there, I could feel him. Retracing my steps towards his bedroom, I could see his still form on the bed, huddled up in a foetal position.

He knew I was there, I could feel his eyes burning into me from across the room. I felt the pull, I had to go to him. Moments later, I was kneeling down beside his bed, and his hand was holding mine. The silence was eerie, neither one of us wanted to speak, neither wanted to hear what the other was going to say.

We were both so scared.

But it was Will that finally broke the silence.

"Can we call it quits Deanna?, I should never have behaved that way with you, it was unfair after what I did to you on Betazed all those years ago, I never realised until now just how much my actions must have hurt you and if it was anything like how I feel right now, you must have gone through hell...I am so sorry Deanna."

It was the last thing I expected him to say. Never in a million years would I have compared today's miseries with what had happened with Wendy Roper. But now, now that I think of it, he's right, he is absolutely right. The pain I went through was indescribable. Making love to Wendy Roper within hours...damn, within minutes probably, almost destroyed my faith in love forever, until I came on board the Enterprise, until I came face to face with Will once more.

All the old feelings came flooding back, the good feelings. The bad ones were dismissed in an instant when I first saw him, when I first saw the love that shone in his eyes, and that love was for me, all for me.

I pulled his fingertips to my lips, my teardrops fell upon his knuckles as I kissed them. Will tugged at my hand, his eyes beseeching me to go to him. How could I deny him?, I didn't want to deny him. No matter what happened in the cold light of day, tonight we needed each other to wipe away each other's tears, to rebuild broken bridges.

To strengthen our Imzadi bond to its former glory.

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