

Shadow Love
by Carol Sandford

Sickbay was silent apart from the two machines before her, each emitting a comforting, steady bleep. One was telling her the man on the bio-bed was alive, the other was telling the first bleep that everything was functioning normally.

It was the middle of the night, and the private cubicle that was her patients temporary home for at least another two days, was lit only by the soothing overhead illumination, just enough for her to watch him covertly from the shadows, not enough to disturb him.

Will Riker was in her care again. The situation was fast becoming a running joke with some members of the Enterprise crew. Some said that he was having a secret affair with the luscious doctor and this was the only way he could get to see her.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Their lives since Odan had visited, had left an impact and had gone again. Life had taken on an almost ethereal existence. Like he hadn't existed. Like they hadn't been lovers. Like they were living in a vacuum of denial, just to get through the turmoil that he had left behind.

Up to now it had worked. Will had his command position to tend to and she had her patients. Feelings got squashed deep down inside and life drifted on.

That's what Beverly was telling herself as she run the tricorder over Will's inert body, the colourful readings telling her that he was deeply asleep. She'd decided that in two days time, he would be fit enough to be discharged from her care. The healing left to do was mostly his own now, she could do no more.

She was going to miss him, deeply. It had taken a lot of will-power to keep her professional facade up when the rest of her team, and Deanna were around, but at night, this was her time. This was when she dropped her invisible mask and let her be herself. The self that still mourned the loss of Odan.

Beverly found comfort in being around Will Riker, especially in the twilight hours when he was sleeping and his guard was down. He looked younger, the strain of being the second in command temporarily on hold as his broken body repaired itself once more. Why he continued to lead the away teams, Beverly would never know.

It never bothered her before Odan had stepped into their lives, or more appropriately, stomped. Will was just another member of the senior staff, insistent on protecting his commanding officer. But since Odan, it had become a problem for her. It had become ~personal~ She wasn't quite sure why, not really. He was still her friend. He was still her senior officer. He was still the cantankerous pain-in-the-butt patient he'd always be. But now he knew ~her~

Will turned his sleep, spreading his long body flat on the bio-beds soft surface, oblivious to the haunted eyes that watched him in the dimness. Nor did he feel the warm hand that settled gently upon his naked chest. The room was warm, but he was warmer. Even though the sickbay coverlets weighed barely an ounce it seemed, they held a lot of heat, heat he did not need as he'd unconsciously shoved the shiny material down to his waist, revealing a body begging to be touched.

Beverly barely hesitated before settling her hand upon him, and the relief of allowing herself the tiny moment of pleasure washed over her, making her body wilt with content.

"Oh, God, " she whispered, and again when Will's chest pushed towards her touch, "Oh, God." her hand began to tremble as the potency of her wayward thoughts filled her mind at the touch of his skin, and the pulse beneath its surface, but she didn't want to remove her hand, she wasn't ready to let go yet. Instead she watched as she minutely, lightly, reverently, moved her fingers downwards, feeling Will's body unconsciously respond to the intimate touch.

But Beverly was past noticing what her hand was doing. she was lost, in a time past, in a moment that she pined for, time and time again, "If only I could hear you tell me that you loved me one more time, Odan. I would do anything to hear those words fall from your lips again, anything." The tragic, almost bitter whisper slipped from her mouth, but she was oblivious. Beverly's mind, and her heart was filled with the dream that never was.

It was a desperate craving, born from a need of seeing, and feeling Odan's presence again. Will's body was as familiar to her as Odan's had been, even though they had been as different as night and day. Odan had wove his magic around her soul with his words. Will had given her only shadow love, love that was hidden behind ignorant eyes and blind declarations.

But even though Odan was gone, he had left behind an everlasting torture. It ate away at her soul to know that deep, deep inside Will, lie Odan's love for her, and she didn't know what to do about it.

Beverly's fingers continued to blaze a trail along the hard, hair covered planes of Will's inert torso. She circled one tiny nipple, aching to take it into her mouth and gently graze it with her teeth like she had done not so long ago. But that was out of the question now. Will wouldn't understand. Will wouldn't want her to. Not now.

"Am I still there, within Will, Odan? I need to know, I have to know. I can't spend the rest of my life knowing that you can still love me through Will's soul." Silent tears sprung to her eyes, blurring her vision as she blindly continued to touch Will's body.

But she hadn't realised that the hand that was barely brushing him had increased its pressure along with her pain, nor did she notice Will's surprised intake of breath as he registered that the soothing hand that caressed him was real, and the tearful words that fell from her lips were full of pain, pain that he somehow knew he had caused.

But Will was too late, Beverly was already pushing her weary, unhappy body to a stand, using the hand that so lovingly wove magic over his battered body moments ago. She turned away from him, slipping her tricorder into her pocket, her shoulders heavy with the weight of her loss.

Will's blue eyes followed her as she made her way towards the door. His voice, husky and raw, was hardly audible as he opened his mouth and spoke in a valiant effort to stop her. To tell her what she wanted to know. To lift some of that burden from her delicate frame, but he was too late.

Too late.

The heavy sickbay doors hissed open, the unnatural sound shattering the now silent room, echoing a second or two later as Beverly disappeared from view, his own heart slamming shut in her wake, but his hoarsely whispered, "You're still within me, Beverly." managed to slip through the steel hulks, caressing the air that followed her home.

When the morning came, everything would be back to normal; Beverly would be fussing around him, ribbing him about his lousy choice of sleeping quarters, and he would be pretending that tonight had never happened. That he had never heard the chaotic, desperate, pleading of a woman who's heart had been smashed to smithereens, not only by Odan, but his shadow self, and that Will felt as guilty as hell.

But one day he would tell her. One day things would come full circle and Will could open his heart and reveal the secrets within.

One day.