

The challenge set:

OK picture Will Riker in sickbay. He's been there for three weeks after a bad shuttle accident that left him badly injured. Probably fatal.

He was poisoned by the planet's atmosphere, where he crashed, causing severe damage to most of his organs along with a few other scrapes and broken bone things that were fixed. His lungs, heart, kidney's could fail him again at a moment's notice due to the cellular poisoning. This means that his body isn't up to Starfleet regs to continue space duties.

He can go back to work after a lot of rest, but not in the capacity of first officer on board the ship. What would be his first thoughts after Beverly and the captain tell him this?

Would he dwell on the fact that he missed a full captaincy due to his injuries? Or would other things be on his mind?

What would Will end up doing? Leave the fleet all together or become a desk man?

What would Deanna do?

Feel free to make this a monologue, dialogue or whatever.

feel up to it? I'm curious to see what you guys out there could do with this. And make it emotional. The man's basically failed to meet his first important stage, captaincy.

I hope someone takes this up. Love to see what can be done without my usual, give 'em angst angle.

Sarajayne

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Challenge.

Tears of Hope  
by Carol Sandford

"How do you feel Will?"

The sultry eyed Betazoid sat across from her patient, her posture relaxed but one could *feel* the fear that surrounded her. Not only from Deanna, but from the large prone man stretched out on the bed before her.

Deanna did not think he was going to answer her. One arm lay across his eyes, shielding himself from everything but the woman that he could never hide anything from, even if he'd wanted to.

Will inwardly groaned, feeling slightly annoyed for feeling that way. Damn, she was only doing her job. But right now, right at this minute, Will wished she was across the other side of the quadrant, far enough away from his lousy mood, and far enough away to know that he was about to lie through his teeth. "I'm fine Counselor, you don't have to worry about me. I'm a Riker remember?"

His attempt at sarcastic humour fell on deaf ears. The famous Riker glib did not even raise as much as an eyebrow from the woman that still studied him intently, silently...patiently. Will sighed, "I'm sorry."

Deanna barely moved as she asked the same question once more. But this time, not as a Counselor, but as his lover, his wife...his Imzadi. "Will...tell *me* how you feel...please."

Angrily, Will pushed himself up onto his elbow so that he could see directly into her eyes. If he had not of said another word, Deanna could have read how he felt in that one look. But on a rasping breath, brought on by the sudden force that his body had used to manoeuvre himself to his current position.

Will spoke bitterly, every word going through her, like a knife through her heart. "I wish I had died Deanna. Nothing short of death could possibly make me feel any better than how I feel right now, right at this minute."

Stunned, Deanna's wide eyes followed as Will's body collapsed back on to the bed, setting off the various alarms that surrounded him, and within seconds, a team of medical staff had unceremoniously pushed her out of the way and began working on the now unconscious man.

Seconds later, Deanna's closest friend stepped in and calmly but efficiently, began her own assessment of Will's sudden decline. Her impersonal perusal of Will's body, his sudden pallor and the tell tale blue tinge of his lips told her what she already suspected.

Pressing the hypospray to his neck, she began to bark out her orders. "His heart is failing, we need to get him stabilised until Doctor Pulaski can get here and perform the transplant. Nurse, prepare the neural calipers, we're going to have to keep him comatose until she arrives, it's the best I can do."

It was then Beverly turned around and saw Deanna, huddled on the floor in the corner, Deanna's eyes searched hers as the tears ran freely down her face, but she remained eerily silent.

Beverly knelt before her and pulled into her arms, her heart breaking along with her friends. "He's okay Deanna, he's holding his own. He'll be okay until Doctor Pulaski gets here in the morning."

Deanna's heart-wrenching wail that finally found its voice when Beverly said that Will was okay broke free, "Can't she get here any sooner Beverly!?"

Beverly rubbed Deanna's arms, offering her comfort that she knew wasn't being received, but

she offered it anyway. "She's coming as fast as she can Dee."

Deanna's fingers suddenly dug painfully into Beverly's shoulders, her eyes wild with fear and hope, "Can't you do it Beverly, please! Can't you try, for me...for Will!?"

Beverly's heart fell along with her eyes as she pushed herself to a stand. Deanna followed her up already knowing her answer, this had been the third time that Deanna had begged for Beverly's help. "You know I can't Deanna, we don't have a replacement heart on board, its coming with the only woman who can fit it with a 99% success rate. Deanna, even if I did have a heart, my limited knowledge would almost certainly be Will's demise, and you don't want that do you? You don't want second best, Will's life is far to precious to warrant anything less than the best we can get for him."

Beverly turned away, intent on returning to her patient, but Deanna's quiet, precise words halted her steps. "He doesn't want to live Beverly. He told me he wished he was dead, and I believe him."

Beverly slowly turned and stared silently at the tiny Betazoid. Gone were the tears, and gone was the terror that only moments ago threatened to turn into full scale hysterics. Now Deanna stood, defiant, her inner strength emanated from deep within. "His life was over, down there, on that planet. He has lost everything, his every purpose for existing. If you give him back his life, you will be condemning to something even worse. The man that we all know and love will cease to exist, do you want to watch him become something that is no better than a walking corpse? Will has absolutely nothing left to live for, and he know's that."

Everything stood still within the confines of the sickbay, except the bleep of the machines that were keeping the deeply unconscious man from slipping into eternal sleep.

Beverly took a step towards Deanna, but stopped as it became apparent that Deanna did not want her to comfort her. Beverly tried with words. "But what about you Deanna? Will has you, he would want to live, for you."

Deanna shook her head, Beverly was faintly surprised when a small smile touched her lips, "No Beverly, I am only a small part of what makes William Riker. For him, to live, it has to be the whole picture. The Enterprise, his job, his chance at captaincy, his friends, his own capacity to function in the only way that Will knows how. And on top of all of that, there is me, and me alone would not be enough."

Beverly knew she was right, nothing she said or did what change the impossible situation, she knew that, Deanna knew that and most of all Will knew it too.

But maybe there was something. Deanna saw the glimmer of hope in her eyes. "What is it Beverly?"

Beverly's mind turned over and over as she slowly made her way back to Will's side and stared at his handsome features, now back to they're healthy pink hue curtesy of the various machines keeping him alive. She felt Deanna beside her as she spoke more to herself than the woman waiting for a miracle. "There may be a way..."

The two women's eyes met, one with uncertain hope, the others begging for any hope at all. "His first option is to undergo the immediate extensive replacements that as you say, will give him no life at all, not within his own mind..."

Beverly sighed heavily before continuing on, "Or...we could leave Will's body to regenerate on its own, but it would take a long, long time, possibly...probably years. Naturally he would be forced to leave Starfleet for an indefinite period. And he would endure countless, painful, regenerative correctional surgery, but in the end, he should be able to return to active duty, certainly First Officer level. I don't think he'll make Captaincy, but his position as Number One is almost as good as. I think he would settle for that, don't you Deanna?"

Deanna nodded as she reached for Will's limp hand, the tears beginning to cascade down her cheeks once more, but this time, they were tears of hope.

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