

The Tears I Cry
by Carol Sandford

You would think that I, Deanna Troi, working on the infamous Enterprise D, with a responsible job, a personal insight to everyone on board, and I mean everyone, would be able to get a man. I've never considered myself to be stunningly beautiful, but, I'm okay - I think.

I have the perfect opportunity with every single male species that I chose to make a closer acquaintance with, to move on to the next natural step in a blossoming relationship. To take the bull by the horns and take on what ever races through their minds whenever they see or speak to me. That's the advantage of being an empath. It is also the bane of my life at times.

You would be stunned at the images that fill the brain of the average male, but, it didn't take me long to realise that it wasn't just me who inspired those thoughts. it was just the female race in general - and sometimes, they were aimed at other men, and other cultures.

But on the whole, its girls that cop the carnal desires of men, and thats okay if you are looking for the same. But what if you aren't? What if like me, you don't want that kind of relationship? Don't get me wrong, I like men, in fact I would go as far as saying I adore men, but I want more than what the average man can give me.

I had it once. I had more, but lost it to a past full of regrets and a future full of friendship, and right now, that friendship suits me just fine. But sometimes, just sometimes I want a little more, but I can't have it with my friend. My best friend. Not yet.

So I have to look elsewhere.

I tried George Jaradis not so long ago, what a disaster that was. He spent the entire evening trying to get one up on me. I wondered if he even realised I was an empath along side being intelligent. And I am, I know I am. But he thought he was smarter. He was dumb compared to me. He was also a lousy kisser.

Quite a few men have kissed me in my time, and I know a decent kiss when I get one. I also know what a plunger feels like when it unblocks a sink. I had been kissed by a plunger!

Before that it was Carran from engineering. I thought only octopuses had eight arms. Well, I discovered (too late I might add) that there is a rare species of male that also have eight arms, albeit that six of them are invisible. If we had had an audience, they would have sworn I was having some kind of fit. It was hard work defending my most vulnerable parts from limbs that moved so quick they actually did become invisible.

I got my own back though. I made him visit Beverly for a thorough evaluation and he's now under the care of one of the other Counselors on board. A male Counselor.

I was still smirking when I felt Will's presence just before he slipped into the seat in front of

me. I groaned silently but still managed to keep smiling, even if it was just because Will had taken the time to seek me out and find out how I was faring, and not because the nosy tyke wanted to dig into my personal life.

"Hi, you're looking very pleased with yourself. Anyone I know?"

I laughed out aloud at the comical face Will pulled as his eyes met mine, laughter turning them a beautiful sapphire blue rather than the azure shade that normally adorned his handsome face.

"Actually, yes. Tonight I am dining out with Lieutenant Spresh, remember him, the one you had a run in with a couple of weeks ago?"

The sapphire eyes turned stormy grey, "Yeah, I remember him. Insubordinate son of...sorry, that wasn't fair of me, I'm sure he's a really nice guy."

I watched Will squirm in his seat as the idea of Spresh going out with me clearly rankled. But then every man I dated rankled Will Riker. But heck, if I took any notice of him, I'd be living like a nun.

Perhaps that's what he wants.

Tough.

I pushed myself to my feet and Will pushed himself back into his seat as he continued to watch my face. I smiled widely at him, hoping to dispel not only his unease, but my own too. Will Riker was the last person I wanted to show my fear to. I hated first dates. I hated the unknowing. I hated the unspoken lust that surged through men when they thought they were going to get lucky. I sometimes hated having Will as a friend.

But that was what we wanted. That was what we agreed on, and that's how it will always be.

Didn't mean I liked it though, but I sure as hell wasn't going to tell him that.

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"So how did it go then?" he asked as he ran to catch up with me on the way to the turbolift. It was 7.55 in the morning. I was tired and I was cranky, and the last thing I wanted was Will interrogating me about something that he almost certainly knew about anyway. But it didn't stop him zooming in on the dark shadows beneath my eyes, or the fact that I didn't seem all that thrilled to see him.

My short, "Fine." spoke volumes.

His chuckle spoke even louder ones, and I had to halt my steps and stare at him rather indignantly as he slowed his own pace and came to a stand in front of me. He didn't lose the grin though and I knew I was doomed to tell all before we could take another step if I let him.

I didn't.

Huffing dramatically, I reached out my arm, pushing him aside so that I could at least proceed to the turbolift. He allowed that, even letting me get into the lift before rounding on me again.

I could only stare at him beseechingly, but I knew that look. I knew that stance. I knew I'd lost. "Okay...we had a meal - a very nice meal I might add, and then he took me to the holodeck."

The silence was deafening as he waited for me to continue. When he realised I wasn't going to, he shifted foot and tried again, only with his arms folded this time. "And?..."

I shrugged, but he caught the feint hue that rushed to my cheeks. But luckily for me, and to my relief, the turbolift reached its destination and I made a step to exit it. I stopped dead in my tracks when Will requested the doors to close until he commanded otherwise.

He tried again, but I noticed the look in his eyes had changed. Gone was the curiosity. Now they only showed concern and tenderness. I wasn't sure which was worse, "And?..."

Will felt my embarrassment rather than saw it, and I heard him suck in his breath before voicing his fears, "He didn't?..."

I could only shake my head in denial, lowering my face to stare at the floor. I couldn't look at him. I couldn't let him see what was happening to me. God, this was going to be hard.

But I looked up again when I heard his relief and wondered slightly at its meaning. Did it mean he was relieved that Carran hadn't laid a finger on me because he was concerned for my well-being? Or was he relieved that another man had failed to get past the go sign, again? Or was he relieved because he was jealous?

I had to believe it was the first one. I just had to. I liked that Will cared enough to care. I hated knowing that he was probably right on the second one. And jealousy? Never!

But it still didn't alter the fact that I was stuck in a turbolift with a man, who was intent on an answer, no matter how embarrassing it was. And God, was it.

I gave up, "Okay, I confess. Carran didn't like me coming on to him. It freaked him out." I knew I had gone scarlet, and I knew I had to get out of there. Coming to my full authoritative height, I dared him to drag out the agonizing moment, "Release the damn door, Will, we've got a job to do."

By the time I had stepped around his stunned figure, the door was open and I was practically running onto the bridge. But for the rest of the day, all I felt was his eyes on me, and I knew his mind was running around with the intriguing concept that I had tried to seduce a member of the crew.

And had failed. Miserably.

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The last person I wanted to see that evening was William Riker. But then knowing him as well as I did, I should have known that he would have come, he always did when I was upset, or even when I was happy. Or when I needed to talk, and sometimes when I needed none of those things and just wanted some company. He was always there. He always knew.

But tonight I just wanted to be alone. To be able to lick my wounds, and to regain some momentum on my strange life, and why it was so strange. There were times when I truly felt like an alien, and now was one of those times, and I was not in the mood to listen to calm logic.

But I knew I was going to get it anyway, one way or the other. All I had to decide on was whether I wanted to listen to it on this side of the door or the other. Either way, I knew Will wouldn't go away until I was 'normal' again.

I let him in.

He only came far enough into my cabin to allow the door to shut. I'd kept the lights low hoping that it would defuse not only my features, but also the situation at hand. Unfortunately, Will Riker looked even better in the half-light and I struggled to keep my errant hormones at bay.

But whereas I was battling to keep my body at bay, Will seemed to only show concern for my well being, "You okay?"

I had to lighten the mood, because I knew if I didn't, I would end up blubbering all over his tunic and I would end up in his arms, right where I wanted to be if I was honest with myself. And, I would have to endure and wallow in the tiny kisses upon my hair that he couldn't seem to stop himself from giving.

I had to believe that was just the way he was. It was a tender action. It was an action for a friend. A friend in need. A desperate friend. I groaned as I pushed myself to a stand, making my way behind the couch, feeling the need to put something, anything in between us before I uttered another word.

I used the same word as before. I even tried to make it sound the same, "I'm fine." but it came out in a croak, a croak that told a whole different story. A croak that brought him nearer to me. A croak that had me stepping back against the cool wall.

I forced myself to step back to where I was, conscious that he was watching me closely. I cleared my throat and repeated my statement, a little more convincingly this time, "I'm fine, Will. Really, there was no need for you to check up on me. I did something silly. I behaved inappropriately. I can accept that, and I can learn from it. Now I just want to forget it and move on."

My voice swindled off lamely, and I felt the surge of the tears that I had managed to keep at bay rise to my throat, and then horror upon horrors, I felt one sneak out and trickle down my cheek.

I swiped it away angrily, cross at it for revealing my true turmoil, and even more cross that Will now watched me with pain in his eyes.

Damn, I didn't want him to feel this way about me. I didn't want what I knew now would happen now. And it did. Will stepped slowly around the couch, his arms already reaching out for me.

They were like a magnet, along with the pleading in his eyes. I couldn't stop myself from moving into his embrace any more than I could stop the love I felt for him at that moment. It was there, it was always there, just tucked away for eternity. But every so often, it popped out for an airing, a moment like now, and Will seemed to soak it up with relish.

I fobbed it off as pity, I had to otherwise I would be telling him just how I felt, and I didn't want to, and I know Will didn't want to hear it either. The love I had for Will was destined only for precious moments like this. It was enough to show him how much he still meant to me after all this time, and it was wonderful to return back to friends when that moment had passed.

It was what we wanted.

I didn't realise how much I had cried until I felt myself hiccup and pulled back slightly so that I could thank him for being there for me, again. I stared at the huge wet patch, knowing that Will had glanced down at it too. He responded by pulling me back into his arms, and began swaying me side to side gently, rather like an infant that needed to be soothed.

I felt the rumble in his chest as he spoke gently, "Feel better now?" noticing how he didn't release his grip as he said it.

I sniffed, reaching up to wipe the moisture from my cheeks. My throat still hurt from crying so I just nodded. I'm not sure what I did, but I was surprised when Will groaned and moved me none to gently from his body.

My surprise must have still shown in my eyes as they looked up and met his. But the precious moment had passed; I felt it go. I was hugely disappointed when Will stepped away, his voice a little strangled as he spoke, "I think we'd better get some sleep. Are you sure you're okay now?"

I could only nod. Stepping away, I watched him walk away from me. I thought I saw something akin to disappointment in his eyes. But he hid it quickly; instead he had leant down and gave me a light kiss upon my cheek before turning away.

What could I say? I wanted to say so much. I wanted him to stay with me. I wanted him to hold me, and love me. Make love to me. I gasped as the thought entered my mind. Will must

have heard me as he glanced over his shoulder just before the door opened. He momentarily paused his steps long enough to search my face. For what?

I obviously didn't give him the answer he wanted because seconds later he was gone, and it hurt so much I cried out loud, the gut-wrenching wail swallowed by the palm of my hand as I forced it against my mouth.

I don't know how long I stood in the middle of my room. I'm not even sure if I even did that. I'm certain I must have circled the room at least a hundred times before coming to a stand still again. Each time I had circled, a different reason against us being together popped up. And then it was a different excuse. And then it was another different reason for us not to be a part of one another's lives, until at last I had ground to an exhausted halt when I had suddenly realised what was missing from the scenario.

Will.

I looked back upon moments of our friendship and wondered if there had been as much in what he was not revealing. What if I was missing the obvious? Maybe he wanted more than what our current relationship was offering.

But then again, maybe he didn't.

The thought of him not wanting me as much as I wanted him hurt more than I ever dreamed. I couldn't help wondering what would happen if I ever actually asked him. Would he say no? Even though we had agreed to not continue what we left behind on Betazed, it didn't wipe away what we'd had. And we really had something special.

Something profound.

Something precious.

Something eternal.

I knew that, but did he?

I had to ask him.

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I was surprised to find him still dressed when I found myself on his doorstep a few minutes later. I was even more surprised when he appeared to be slowly and surely getting stoned from the bottle of liquor he swung precariously from his hand.

But I wasn't as surprised as he was when he saw me there. He almost growled my name, "Deanna?" He seemed annoyed to see me and I squelched down how it made me feel. I had questions to ask and I was going to ask them, tonight, whether he liked it or not.

I threaded my fingers together to hide my nervousness, but it didn't hide the wobble in my

words when I spoke, "Can I come in for a minute, Will?"

I thought he was going to refuse me at first. I could see the uncertainty in his eyes, I could feel it in his mind, but only for a fraction of a moment. Using the bottle, he swung his arm wide and allowed my admittance.

By the time I had sat myself on the edge of his couch, he had disposed of the bottle, and had made his way to the other end of the couch, sitting just as chastely as I did. I never lost my resolve when Will spoke, "This isn't such a good idea, Deanna."

But it gave me the opening I needed instead of pouring out the thoughts that had been running through my mind for the past half hour, "Why?"

I felt sorry for him as I watched him rake his hand distractedly through his hair, struggling to put his answer into words, "Because..."

I waited for him to continue, but he didn't. I felt compelled to push him, "Because what, Will?"

I watched him rub his hands along his thighs, a sure sign he was nervous, "Because right now I'm not myself, and I don't like you seeing me like this."

My surprise must have shown across my features when I blatantly asked the obvious, "Like what?"

I thought he was going to answer me, but instead he shuffled forward and took my hands. He felt hot against my coolness, but I didn't notice, I was too busy watching his face for any sign that I was in trouble.

I was.

"Deanna, I...I'm in love with somebody on board this ship. I want to tell her but I'm too afraid. I'm too scared it's going to go wrong, and I lose her."

It really threw me. I mean REALLY threw me. It was the last thing I expected, or wanted to hear. I had never considered that Will was even dating let alone in love with someone. I racked my brains trying to remember Will's latest conquest, but I came up stumped. Actually when I think about it, I haven't seen Will with a woman for quite a while now.

That was worse. That meant he'd fallen for someone whom he wasn't currently seeing. That meant he was in love.

That meant that both he and I were in serious trouble.

But we were friends. Above everything else, we were friends, and I had no choice but to swallow my despair and be there for him, just as he'd always been there for me. I felt my

heart pounding in my chest and wondered if he could hear it too. I also wondered if he could sense my shattered dreams, because at that moment they were exploding into a trillion particles inside my head.

How could I have been so stupid and blind? I knew exactly how. I was too wrapped in myself to notice that Will had a life too. It hurt to know that that life didn't include me. I swallowed the rising tears and tenderly kissed his knuckles, putting my pain away for the time being and prepared myself for the worst moment of my life,

Gently, I said, "Do you think she feels the same way, Will?"

I watched him swallow and knew how much pain it gave him. I know because I did exactly the same. I felt him squeeze my fingers as he tried to put into words how he felt,

"I...I hope so. Every time I see her I hope and pray that she does. I try...I really try not to push her into something that she might not want, but its so hard, Deanna. It's so damned hard. It's killing me to see her. To be with her and not tell her how I feel."

That was it. His last heartfelt words brought the tears to the surface. Tears that I didn't want him to see. Tears that I didn't want anyone to see. Tears for him. He realised he'd hurt me and he quickly shuffled nearer still and pulled me against his shoulder. I clung on for dear life, even when his whispered words filtered through the gulping sobs, "Sssh, its okay, baby, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

I didn't notice that when Will had pulled me onto his lap until my own position felt more comfortable and I found myself snuggling against his neck. His arms had wound themselves around my waist, and he was lightly kissing the top of my head.

It was now or never. I had to tell him. I had to let him know that I loved him; That I couldn't deny it any longer. I felt awful doing it at probably the worst moment of his life, but I had to do it. I had to let him know.

But I had to be clear in my head and in my words. It was many moments before my wails had subsided to sniffles. It was a fraction or two after that when I allowed my body respond to the closeness of his.

I felt him grow still as lips that were only moments ago were twisted in pain began to nuzzle against his throat. As I lifted my hand to place it against his pounding heart, my lips rose to his ear, breathing in the very essence of him in, drowning in the wave of desire that poured from his stunned soul.

His voice cracked as he whispered, "Deanna?" against my own ear, I lifted my hand higher and wove my fingers into his hair, pulling my face away far enough to be able look into his. I wanted him to see how I felt about him. I wanted him to understand how I felt about him.

Everything stood still as I opened my heart, mind and soul, looked deep into his blue eyes and whispered as clear as crystal, "I love you, Imzadi."

He took our sacred name into his breath as I touched my mouth to his. We both opened our lips together letting our tongues meet and entwine as though by some miracle it was what we both wanted. Both needed.

I was surprised when Will kissed me as though it was me he loved instead of someone else. I was even more surprised when he shifted my body so that I sat astride his lap, not breaking the kiss that had now turned into something more. Something carnal. Something sensual. Something desperate.

But when I felt him fumbling for the clasp on my tunic, I knew I had to stop him. I knew I had to stop what was about to happen. It was wrong. It felt wrong. I couldn't let Will use my body as a substitute for someone else's. Not because I didn't want him to, but because I loved him too much to suffer the consequences after.

I hated breaking away from his mouth even more than I hated severing my mind and soul, knowing that it would be leaving a gaping hole that would take more than an eternity to mend. But I had to. For us.

He didn't let me go. He didn't seem able to. Nor did he seem to want to. As he clung to my waist for dear life, I held either side of his head, and as I looked long and deeply into his eyes, I couldn't miss the desire, or the desperate need within their depths and at that moment, I wondered if I had a chance. I wondered if I had the power to take Will away from the woman he loved.

My eyes fell to his moistened lips as he struggled to control his erratic breathing. I couldn't help leaning forward one last time and kissing his waiting mouth with every ounce of my love. By the time I had pulled away again, Will could taste the saltiness of my renewed tears that had begun to flow when I thought about what I was about to lose.

I thought he would let me go. I thought he would realise that this was my way of saying goodbye. But when I tried to move from his lap, I found myself held fast. It was then that I stopped long enough to look into the face of the man I loved and see something that I never thought I would again.

Desire, passion and love, and it was all for me. Every ounce of what he was feeling, what he was saying with his eyes, and his heart was for me. I held my breath asking him silently if it was true. He answered me with words.

"I love you too, Imzadi, I've only ever loved you. Didn't you know that?"

For the third time that day, as he made love to me, Will became saturated with my tears, but this time they were against his bare skin and they were tears of happiness. For now and forever more, the tears I cry will be a celebration between us.