

The Tentative Touch
by Carol Sandford

'I can't stand it. I can't stand being so near her all the time and not able to touch her. Not how I'd like to anyway.

Its been so long since I'd touched her - really touched her, and yet it is all but a breath away. A heartbeat away. A look away. A memory away.

Like the way her breath caught when I put my fingertip upon her breast. The way she trembled when I slowly moved that fingertip, teasing her along its journey to a nipple that became alive with the prospect of being held between my fingers.

Like the way her eyes melted like warmed chocolate as that touch set off a tidal wave of longing right to the very heart of her. Right to her feminine core. Right where she wanted my body to be.

I ache to kiss her. To touch my lips to hers, tasting her sweetness, hearing her moan against my mouth as my tongue searched for hers and on finding it, letting it mimic what our bodies craved.

My body screams out in the night for her, when I'm alone in my room with only memories to cling on to. I need her touch. On my skin, my heart and especially on my soul.

I miss it. I miss her.

Occasionally I feel her mind brush mine. But it is the touch of a friend. A 'hello', or a 'you okay?'. Occasionally it is a little more, when something has reminded her of us long ago, and it those touches that I cling to and savour.

Its going to be hard working with her tonight, but its a job that has to be done. A job that we do once a month without fail, and it is done in my quarters, alone.

Normally its not a problem. Normally after our work is done, we treat ourselves to a glass of wine, some gentle music and some quality time to catch up as friends.

But I don't think I can do it tonight. I don't think I can sit beside her without touching her. I just don't think I can. But I've got to, for her.

But it is going to be hard.

~*~

'What is she doing!?' I wonder silently as she deliberately settles back against the couch, lifting my arm and settling it around her shoulder.

I try hard not to let my hand settle against her breast that is all but a millimetre away from it. But I gasp as she purposely grabs my hand and flattens it against the firm mound, gently curving my tense fingers around it, patting it lightly with satisfaction when it becomes obvious that I'm not going to jerk it away as though it on fire.

It is, but its a nice kind of heat. A heat that I can live with, for now. She rests her head against my chest and I can hear the laughter in her voice as she begins chatting about an incident that had happened in her office earlier in the day.

But I know that the laughter is not about that. Its about me and my fear. Damn right I'm afraid, more so because the heat in my hand is beginning to make it want to move, and if I move I am going to be lost.

As suddenly as Deanna starts talking, she falls silent, and still. She senses my inner fever, and confusion. And I am confused. What is it she wants from me?

Did she put my hand there because it was more comfortable for me? Did she put my hand there in the hope that it would kick-start my libido into doing something more?

What?

WHAT?

So intent on my own question, it took a few moments to realise that her own hand was touching me. At first she had rested it on my leg - she must have felt my own trembling as I shook like a leaf at what could be happening. What I hoped would happen.

But then she started to move that hand and the air suddenly became charged with sexual tension. Or was it longing? Both.

I had to stop her. I had to. I didn't want to, but I had to. Just as her fingers began to burn a trail towards my still stunned loins, I rapidly placed my hand upon hers, my silent plea screaming out to her.

As I tried to reign in what Deanna was doing to me, my head fell back against the couch's edge. But it soon snapped back upright when she suddenly launched herself from beside me to straddle my hips.

I saw the passion in her eyes. I saw the way her body was responding to the closeness of mine. I saw the tremble. I saw what she wanted.

And she wanted me.

I think.

Normally I wouldn't have hesitated. If it had been any other woman, we'd have been making love by now. But this wasn't any other woman. This was Deanna Troi. My Imzadi. My friend. A friend that had not so long ago wanted anything more than friendship.

Until now.

What had changed?

I watched her face break into a shy smile and my heart melted a little more. But it was what I saw in her eyes that made me catch my breath. It was the look of long ago, when we had first become one. When we had given our hearts bodies and souls to each other.

When we'd first fallen in love.

She leaned forward and settled her warm lips against mine. The kiss was slow, light and experimental, and before I could deepen it, she broke away, leaving me hanging somewhere between heaven and hell.

I opened my eyes and looked back into hers, only this time when she smiled, I smiled along with her.

Reaching up, she traced my jawline, studying its travel with her eyes, forging what she wanted to say, and I could do nothing more than wait.

I didn't have to wait too long.

"I'm proud of you, Will."

I didn't hide the surprise as her eyes found mine again, nor did I hide the questions that evidently bounced between us. I didn't say anything but she knew the answers even so.

"Because, my love, you have proved to me that you have grown. For the past few years I have watched as you have continued to love me with as much passion, and intensity that we had back on Betazed. But in all the time since, you have not only managed to control how you feel about me, but you have managed to hide it from me too."

She chuckled, "But not all the time."

I blushed when I remembered some of those things that I'd tried to hide from her. It was true, I had tried to hide my feelings from her, and it was true that it had taken a great deal of effort on my part, and for the most part, I had succeeded, except for obviously on the odd occasion and I suspected those occasions were when I was sleeping.

I could only humbly apologise, "I'm sorry, I never meant..."

Her finger pressed against my lips halted my words, "Shhhhh, don't apologise. I understand, Will, I truly do, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for never losing faith in me, or never giving up on us."

My response came out harsher than I intended, "Never, Imzadi, never!" but the prick of tears to my eyes caught me by surprise and I found myself rapidly trying to blink them away as I reiterated my promise, "I could never give up on us even if I could never touch you again."

I watched as her own eyes grew moist at my honest admission, but along side that, I witnessed a transformation within her when she huskily whispered, "Do you want to touch me, Will?"

Time stopped.

Everything stopped, just for a moment while the allusion of her bold request swirled around between us. But even though there were so many questions and ramifications to be considered, I didn't even hesitate for a moment when I answered her,

"Yes."

This time when she lifted my hand to her breast, placing it over it and holding it so tightly against her, I could feel the power of her heartbeat beneath my fingertips. I could feel her love for me pouring into my soul.

We made love that night, and for the first time since a steamy unforgettable moment in the Jalara Jungle, I let her in. I let her into my mind to see what she still meant to me, even after all these years. I let her become mine as much as I become hers, only this time, this time, it was for eternity.