

The wrong side of the track
by Carol Sandford

"Oh mom, please let me go, I promise I won't be too late."

I sighed silently as I plunged my hands into the soapy water and retrieved another plate from the soapy depths. I felt myself beginning to waver a little, but heaven help me, I did not want to. So I straightened my shoulders again and studied the picturesque scene that lay before me on the other side of the window. A garden full of love and devotion from my constant nurturing. A garden to be proud of, and I was, exceptionally so.

It had been a tough decision to uplift my daughter from her birth place and bring her all the way over here purely because someone had promised me everlasting sunshine and wealth, if I wanted the opportunity to make something of myself. And I did. I intended to give my precious offspring everything I had never had; A happy home, friends and most importantly, a husband that had a healthy bank balance. And I had been promised that everything I sought, and more, was here, in America.

But not if I let Dee go to that party.

It would be a long time before I forgot that look. Dee and I had been invited to a wedding of the daughter of a well-to-do family that I had made my acquaintances with. Figuring it was a chance to step into 'the right circles', I had practically dragged Dee along, almost kicking and screaming. She outrightly refused to be part of the main hubbub of guests that had filled the church to the gills, insisting that they remained at the back, out of the way, and out of sight.

I wish to God that I had listened to her protests, because if we had not have gone, she would never have seen him.

The wedding had been well under way when I had first felt the first inkling of being watched. Or rather my daughter being watched. I remember my heart soaring with the knowledge that Dee had finally been noticed by one of the wedding guests, preferably one with some class, some decent manners and hopefully a mansion in the country. But when my eyes finally found the only head that was turned towards us, my heart hit the floor.

I don't know how I had missed him really. He towered above most of the people, his broad shoulders made to look even wider by the heavy leather jacket that he wore with careless abandon. It was then that I'd noticed how tatty that leather jacket was, and I felt the bile quickly rise to my throat and I had to swallow quickly to quell the desire to be sick. I wanted to be noticed, but not by throwing up all over the poor soul that stood directly in front of me. I would never have lived it down.

I forced my attentions back to his face. He was handsome enough, in a rugged sort of way. A shave would not have hurt, considering the occasion...considering the formality of the other guests. Top hat and tails and lines of luxurious Cadillacs was the norm, and I knew that if I had stepped outside, I would have found a beat up old pick-up truck, or something as equally worse. I shuddered as I imagined my girl, my darling, precious daughter inside or on the undoubtably smelly contraption, with the shabby creature that stood staring at her, barely 30

feet away from us.

I wanted to show him just how I felt about his unwelcome attentions, purely by the evil look that I was sure I could conjure up. But he had not even glanced at me. In fact, I might as well had not been there because his eyes, and I give him that, he did have nice eyes, were trained on one thing, and one thing only, my daughter.

I silently prayed that Dee hadn't noticed him and I was almost to scared to look at her. I was surprised that she had even stayed, and I don't think she would have if I had released her arm from the vice-like grip that I had on her. I eventually dared a sideways glance, and almost swayed with the spiralling sensations that shook me to my core as the look that emanated from the man was mirrored in my own daughters eyes.

Feigning sickness, I managed to escape the rest of the wedding celebrations by insisting that Dee took me home. I wasn't surprised when she changed her mind about leaving, her whispered protests creating ripples of interest around us. Of course she wanted to stay, she wanted to meet the owner of those eyes.

Over my dead body!

But living in a small town with an equally small community, I knew it wouldn't be long before the stranger would come to the surface. He clearly knew someone at the wedding. Lord forbid if he was related, it would have been just my luck for Dee to fall in love with the black sheep of the family. The renegade, the trouble-maker. Grief!he might have even been in prison! Maybe that would explain his sudden arrival and his undesirable appearance.

I am just glad that I was with Dee when we saw him again the next day in the gas station. I don't know who was more surprised, him or us. I couldn't get out there fast enough. I left without even filling up, but not quickly enough to avoid the longing looks that passed between my passenger and the solitary man that stood beside a large gas container that he had now ceased to fill as he too stared longingly at I hoped, my rear tail lights.

Dee's silence on the return journey home said it all. I tried making it right, tried to ram home some facts to her.

"He's no good for you honey, he'll bring you nothing but misery, poverty, and he'd probably keep you indoors and constantly pregnant."

I remember screeching to a halt at her answer. "But what if that's what I want, mom?"

I was determined that she would never see him again after that. And that's why I was fighting her all the way today.

"Mom, please, you know how much I've wanted to go to the party. You've got to trust me sometime, I'm not a child anymore, mom."

I succumbed a little more as I turned around and looked into her pretty features. I had always

thought she looked like me, but I knew in my heart that she was her daddy' s daughter, through and through. The only thing she seemed to inherit was my dark eyes and the uncanny ability to know what I was about to say or do, and right at this minute, Dee knew that I was floundering for an excuse.

"He won' t be there you know, mom. He' s never been seen in town, and he' s never been seen in the stores or bars. I' m sure he' s gone, I think he just came for the wedding."

It was the tone of her voice that made me suspicious. How did she know, had she been asking around? Oh Lord, who had she been asking? I knew I had paled when she stepped towards me with concerned eyes.

"I wasn' t the only person there, mom and nor was he, and you' ve got to admit, he did stick out from the crowd. I' ve heard other people talking about him."

I didn' t really want to know, but the compulsion TO know forced the words past my lips.

"What did they say, where did he come from, who is he?"

Dee shrugged enigmatically and turned away, telling me that I was only going to get the partial story, but something was better than nothing, so I let it go and listened intently for the clues between what she was willing to tell me. The rest I would find out myself, my own way.

"He' s a nephew of the brides father. He was in the area passing through, so he paid his respects. I think they said his name was Phil..or Bill, or something like that, I' m not sure."

She knew more, a whole lot more, enough to send a shiver of dread up my spine and even though I hated doing it, her evasiveness gave me that final voice of authority to shatter her illusions and hopefully, dreams of the stranger.

"No Dee, you' re not going, and that' s the last I want to hear about it."

The wrong side of the track

part 2

Dee stared out at the twinkling stars. Darkness had fallen rapidly as it always did at that time of year. It was comforting to hear the sounds that accompanied nightfall; Peace. But peace was anything that Dee felt at that moment. Tormented by the harsh restrictions of her mother and tormented by blue eyes that never left her dreams. Not just torment, but a new feeling, a feeling that was new to her.

One that had surfaced when her eyes had met his across that packed church. She chuckled quietly at that old cliché, never believing that it could really happen in real life. But it had and she was the living, breathing result of it. Love across a crowded room.

Love. She tested the word in her mind, and spoke the word aloud, "Love." Is this how love felt? Dee felt the pain that zipped through her abdomen coming to settle in a place that

brought a faint blush to her cheeks, along with an excitement that bubbled from that very same place.

Sighing audibly, Dee stared out into the shadowy twilight, regret etched upon her flawless, olive features. In her heart, she had known that 'he' was going to be at that party tonight. She didn't know how she knew, but an instinct born out of something that was still alien to her, told her that tonight should have been her first step towards her destiny, her future.

And her mother had taken it away from her. She didn't know what hurt more. Her mothers denial to let her live her life as she wanted it, or meeting the stranger that held her fate within the palm of his hand.

Dee knew which she wanted it to be.

The feeling that was new and raw to her, invaded her soul with an ache that visibly shook Dee. She had to get out of the house, away from that closed in feeling that was adding to her anguish. Swinging the heavy cardigan over her shoulders, Dee slipped out into the darkness, half waiting for her mothers inquisition, and half waiting for the step that would take her out of calling distance. One by one, her footsteps took her away from the dark worried eyes that followed her departure from behind the drapes. Dee knew that she was watching, but right at that moment, she didn't give a damn. She'd missed the party, and if she hadn't, it now wasn't worth the effort.

Dee understood her mothers reasoning. She didn't like it, but she understood it. But her own curiosity ate away at her insides, wondering what would have happened if they had met, and made contact, or had been given the chance to light the skies with the electricity that had blatantly sizzled between them.

What if they had kissed?

A chill shot through her along with another erotic after-shock that punched at the juncture of her thighs, and she groaned aloud as she hugged her slight form with her arms, drawing the warm cardigan around her body to hold in the warmth that now invaded her.

Living on the outskirts of town put Dee into the open space within minutes of leaving home. Her breath left her mouth in heavy puffs as she made her way upwards to the crest of Tarler hill where she intended to do nothing more than lay on her back and star-gaze. It was a magical place for her, a place where you could almost reach out and touch the heavens, whilst the open plains below, stretched out forever. No mans land. But for Dee, where she sat, there was peace.

But not tonight. Within moments of arriving, Dee heard the faint buzzing sound in the valley beyond. It was a sound she had never heard before and it fired up her imagination along with the desire to locate its source. But she could make nothing out in the darkness, even though it was a clear night and she had a soft moonlight to guide her way. Her courage to seek out this strange, new exciting noise rapidly dissipated along with the blackness that descended with the night, and the mystery that lay beyond the crest of the hill that Dee had made her own

personal boundary.

Dee sat and stared out at the nothingness for an eon until the world went silent. Settling back on the grassy bank, she lost herself to her thoughts, and a little piece of her heart, to her dreams. Not so long ago it was dreams of getting her degree, leaving home and travelling, maybe back to her old home town, back to her roots. But since she had seen 'him', life had come to a full stop. The stranger had occupied her every waking moment, and every dream.

She didn't know why her feelings for him overtook every sane thought, or why the compulsion to get out there and find him was becoming so urgent. But then she rationally concluded that it was purely because she wanted to hear what he had to say to her. If he truly felt the way that she did; like nothing else in the universe existed except him, and her, then she wanted to know. She wanted to feel that. And she wanted to be face to face, and heart to heart, when those magical words were whispered.

Feeling lower than she had felt for a long time, Dee slowly made her way home. Her footsteps echoed in the emptiness of the night, her slight form creating long shadows that guided her home, but she was unafraid. The pretty streets were well lit, with no lonely alleys and no dodgy characters skulking in the corners, and minutes later, Dee was indoors dressed in her nightclothes and sitting back at her window, sleep refusing to come to her. It was a pattern that was replayed for the next three nights...

Dee listened for the now familiar buzz. She had come to the hill top earlier hoping to see what made the curious noise. Dusk was just setting in and as she listened to the comforting hum, she allowed her eyes to soak up the startling array of colours that splashed across the landscape as the sun began its journey down, leaving a sky suffused with almost every shade of red imaginable.

Dee heard the small motor - she had deduced that that was what the sound was, a small engine attached to...something, and it was the something that was driving her crazy with curiosity and with just as many romantic connotations. She had visions of someone trying to reach for the skies in a little home made plane, racing up and down the runway trying to get the wind beneath his wings to get him off the floor. She had chuckled to herself as she toyed with idea of telling whoever it was to try her hill and that he was sure to get off the ground from there. But she didn't, mostly because she rather enjoyed the relaxing sound that accompanied her in the lonely evenings.

Her mother was beginning to worry about her. Dee could see it in the knowledgeable eyes as the older woman watched her prowl around the house, searching for an excuse to escape. Until at last, the right time came and Dee could tell her that she was going to watch the sun set from Tarler Hill.

And so, here she was again, listening...

Part 3

"Damn!" The muttered curse was the last of a stream of colourful language that had left Will's lips within the last five minutes. His patience was all but spent and he was getting close to

giving up. But he knew deep in his heart that he wouldn't. He was determined to get this machine in the air, even if it killed him, and it nearly had on too many occasions to recall.

Reaching for the oily rag that was tucked into the back pocket of his matching oily jeans, Will wiped the river of moisture that ran freely down his rugged features, leaving a smear of grease that circled his face. A healthy shadow of stubble made his features even blacker than they already were leaving the penetrating blue gaze the only clear thing on his handsome face.

Will was aware that his frustrations were not only aimed at the hunk of machine that hovered above like a stalking praying mantis. The two solid chrome engine cases shone down on him like two great beady eyes. The tangle of wires and hoses twitched and throbbed like legs and antennae. But the image turned when those hunks of chrome became two brooding chocolate pools of ecstasy, and the rubbery tentacles became slender arms reaching out to stroke his hair, and his face. Will's eyes fluttered shut as he lost himself in the dream until he felt something hit his chin, bringing him back to earth with a painful clunk as his forehead hit the chassis with shock.

"Shit!" the last expletive exploded from his lips as he brusquely dabbed at the offending splodge with his finger tip and discovered it was oil. Shuffling his long form out from under the handmade micro-light, his frown slowly turned to a grin as he realised that the leak was the answer to the puzzle that had been plaguing him for the last three days. He had obviously had a leak, and now that it had finally shown its face as it were, he could deal with it.

With a new bounce in his step, Will ambled over to his trailer, come camp, come home, and began raking in the massive toolbox that was almost his best friend. Everything he wanted in life, was in that box, or so he once thought, until he came here. Until he saw her.

Will didn't know whether to curse the day he had arrived or consider it his saviour. Up to the moment when his eyes had met hers in that damn church, Will had always thought he'd had it all; Freedom, his bike, his hobby and his looks if he wanted a 'little light entertainment' on the road. He was always on the road, searching for that perfect stretch of emptiness to get his machine where he wanted it to go. Up there, amongst the stars.

Not the clouds, Will wasn't interested in the clouds, he wanted to fly at night. He didn't know why, but the burning desire to get up there was all he wanted to do in his life, or so he thought. As soon as he had pulled into the quaint little town he felt...something. He thought it was because he had found the perfect runway just a couple of miles away. Somewhere he wouldn't get any hassle about the noise being in the middle of nowhere and being near enough to civilisation for supplies.

The added bonus was having a not so close relative that he could bum a bath off occasionally and a decent free meal. Unfortunately he had turned up, out of the blue in the middle of preparations for the biggest wedding that the town had seen for a long time.

His uncle had been overjoyed to see him, even if he had managed to hide his distaste at the foul aroma that clung to his nephew like a swarm of gnats. The mixture of burnt oil, old clothes, worn leather and body sweat had hit his nostrils the moment he had opened the door.

Well, he didn't really even open the door. It had been propped open since the crack of dawn as the constant stream of people, deliveries and general mayhem had filtered through it non stop. And then this giant of a man had stepped through. He looked like he wanted to anywhere but there as he systematically rotated the goggles in his huge hands. A mixture of acute embarrassment, unease and fatigue etched his features. But even beside all that James Riker knew who the boy was as soon as he saw him.

William Riker, only son of his only brother, the son of a bitch that he was. Upped and left the boy before he had even left school. But when he had turned up at his home in the boonies he got a surprise at just how independent and proud the youngster was. He had flatly refused to come back home with him and threatened that if he did, he would have been gone by the following morning. He recalled the moment like it was yesterday when William stood tall and proud before him and told him in no uncertain terms that, 'he needed nobody and when he did, he would go out there and find somebody.'

James could only turn away leaving the boy with the assurance that when ever he needed someone, their door would always be open for him. He made himself a bet that Will would turn up within the month. He lost the bet.

But here he was, on his doorstep, on his daughters wedding day. James didn't give the young man the chance to turn and run. He wanted to get to know him a little, find out what he had been doing with his life. So before Will could change his mind, James had drawn him into the barely controlled chaos, fed him, asked him if he had any tidy clothes and promptly shooed him off upstairs for a bath. One hour later, William had nervously walked down the stairs in a pair of newish black jeans, and a white T shirt with the words, 'Reach for the stars' emblazoned across his massive chest, and his leather jacket casually slung over his shoulder.

And that was how Will found himself in church, right in the middle. He had tried to hang back so that he didn't stick out like a sore thumb, but his uncle had other ideas, pushing him right into the heart of the melee. But short of being rude, Will had no choice but to keep shaking the constant flow of hands that appeared out of nowhere, which even he suspected were people only curious to find out who he was. One look at those eyes told most of them that he was a close relation to the infamous Riker family.

It had been a long time since Will had been around so many people, in fact he didn't think he ever had. He felt his inner panic begin to surface. He had to get out of there. Turning, he sought his escape route, but instead of his eyes finding the door to freedom. they settled on just about the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

In an instant, the church and its occupants had disappeared leaving only him and her. Two souls reached out for home and found it in each others hearts that had opened to let one another in.

Home.

All their lives they had searched for something...someone, and here it was, here they were. If

Will could have reached out and touched her, he would have, but he had no chance of moving from his spot. He was trapped, but he didn't care any longer. Reaching out with his mind, he let his thoughts do the caressing, let his dreams give her the kiss that he so desperately wanted to give. Let his eyes show her the love that poured freely from his heart.

But seconds later, she was snatched away by the woman beside her, he guessed it was her mother. The rest of the wedding jollities passed in somewhat of a blur. Wanting to do nothing more than leave, maybe trawl the streets until he hopefully saw her, Will could do nothing as he had

travelled to the wedding in one of the other guests cars, leaving his beloved possessions parked out of sight in his uncles garage. He wasn't going anywhere in a hurry.

By the time Will had finally left, it was dark. He had work to do. Tonight he was taking 'The Spirit of Free Enterprise', that was what he had called his project- his baby, for its first serious trial run. Tonight he was going to be able to get it to its maximum speed and hopefully get it off the ground.

Tonight his dream was going to come true.

After three days, Will was beginning to lose faith. Three days of struggling with a lousy second hand engine, a tyre that refused to stay up and a motor problem of some sort, was beginning to take its toll on his sanity. It was the motor problem that was worrying him. He had no way of buying another engine, he had already sold everything he owned, except his motorcycle, his trailer and its few meagrely contents. Selling his home had brought those, he remembered handing over the key with a sneer that he wished his father could have witnessed.

Every good thing that he wanted to remember about his birth place was tucked away in his heart and in his head. His only request to the new owners was that his mothers resting place would never be desecrated in any way. They had given him their solemn word that they wouldn't and Will was content with that. He had to be because he didn't ever intend going back.

Scratching about in the deepest recesses of the tool box, he at last found what he was looking for; One solitary piece of gum, the answer to his prayers. Will even kissed it because without it, he was doomed. Shuffling his lean body back under his machine, he made good the tiny slit in the hose, then sat back against the trailer wheel and waited for the gum to harden.

Taking a long drink from his water canteen, Will tipped a little into his hand and wiped it over his face and around the back of his neck, chuckling gleefully as he realised that he had smeared even more oil on him than before. He ruefully figured that he'd have to visit the small lake a while away to take an impromptu bath a little later, after dark.

Will dozed a while as the last of the days heat turned to a more acceptable level. When he woke, his eyes, and his attention fixed on the hilly outcrop a mile or so away. To the outskirts of town, her town. God, he wished he had finished filling his fuel can the other day so that he

could have followed her, found out where she lived. Every part of him ached to see her, to talk to her...To love her, but he knew it was a lost cause...that he was a lost cause. He was the last person that she should have got tangled up with. A man with no home, no money, no future, nothing. Except the dream that sat barely twenty foot away from him.

No, he had to stay away. That's why he turned down his cousins invitation to the party. He would not have fitted in, and chances are, 'she' would have been there, and as much as he needed to see her again, to talk to her, if only for a minute, he knew that he couldn't. Shouldn't.

But heaven help him, he wanted to. He imagined her sitting up on that hill top, watching him, watching him take his first flight. Watching him make his own dream come true. And it was with her in mind that he fired up the engine and taxied to the furthest point of the runway and hit the accelerator.

Part 4

It sounded different tonight. Dee strained her ears against the sounds from behind her for the sound that she only wanted to hear; The buzz. Only tonight it was more. Tonight it sounded like...she pursed her lips as she tried to connect the sound with an object...a plane. Less than an annoying blue bottle and more like a plane. Whoever it was down there was trying to get a plane in the air.

She listened to the comforting sound as it raced up and down the stretch of the valley, back and forth, back and forth. Dee's heart soared along with the knowledge that whoever was down there must have been feeling that same elation as she, and the engine sound changed again, she realised that the machine had left solid ground and was now airborne. He had done it.

Flying...Dee had never considered flying. Oh, she'd seen the pictures, she had heard the stories and the future whimsical ideas of reaching the moon one day, but aeroplanes were still pretty new, so most of those ideas were simply dreams. But what a dream.

Dee stared up at the night sky, at the stars as they twinkled just out of reach as the soothing throaty sound of the engine continued to purr in the darkness, until suddenly, everything came to land with a sickening jolt.

Dee held her breath as she heard the splutter, but seconds later, breathed a sigh of relief when the familiar noise continued. But her relief was short lived when moments later, everything went silent. The chirp of the crickets, the feint whoosh of distant cars, even the air seemed to go silent until it came; the sickening crunch of metal hitting dirt, over and over. One didn't have to see it to know that the machine had tumbled on and on after the impact.

Dee flew to her feet as she futilely searched the starlit dimness. Every nauseating thought raced through her mind as her heart pounded in her chest. Was he hurt, was he laying down

there wounded, maybe badly. Was he alone, did he need her to get help...Was he alive?

She didn't know what to do, but she knew she had to do something. But what? But as she was racing the question through her frantic mind, the image of the vehicle sitting in her mothers drive loomed before her. Before she gave herself the chance to change her mind, Dee raced home.

The house was in darkness except for the front porch light and the tiny lamp that glowed softly in her bedroom waiting for her to sneak in like she did most evenings. But that was the least of her concerns. She had one goal; the keys that were hanging in the kitchen on a hook. Tiptoeing across the cold stone tiles, Dee gingerly took the keys into her shaking fingers and tiptoed back out of the house.

Taking a huge calming breath, Dee slipped behind the wheel of her mothers pride and joy, silently thanking her for parking it so that it could be driven straight out. Familiarising herself with the controls once more so that she could gun the engine and leave immediately, Dee readied herself for one of the most daunting challenges of her life. Because not only was it the fourth time that she had actually driven a car, she had to venture out past her own personal boundary; out to no mans land, in the dark for a someone she had never met. It was truly a journey into the unknown.

Going at a snails pace to the edge of town, Dee crunched and shunted the car until she reached a point on the open road where she could relax her vice like grip on the steering wheel and pick up speed a little. Drawn by an inner force, Dee ploughed on mile after mile as the dark empty void that spread out before her seemed never ending.

Using the distant shadowy outline of the hills as her guide, Dee managed to keep her route until at last, she finally spied an odd shape in the bright headlights of her car. Not daring to go any nearer in case he had been thrown clear, or if there were any sharp pieces of debris scattered around, Dee slowed the car to a shuddering halt and scanned the area around her, but it was too dim to make anything out other than the mangled wreck that sat in the headlights wide beam.

Her heartbeat pounded in her ears as she summoned the courage to step from the safe confines of the car to the unexpected outside.*God, I hope he's not too mangled, I can't stand the sight of blood.* she muttered to herself.

Taking a huge breath, Dee stepped out of the car, but jumped back in when the car moved slightly. Pulling hard of the handbrake, she chuckled nervously, but at least it lightened the tense moment. A mixture of fear and trepidation raged through her as she hesitantly stepped towards the tiny aeroplane. But as she got nearer she could see its fragility, the flimsy wing frame, which lay shattered into numerous pieces around her like a torn butterfly wing, and the machines axle had clearly snapped as one wheel stuck out at an awkward angle. But it was the still figure in the seat that Dee could not steal her eyes away from.

Dee felt like she had jumped a mile in the air as the figure suddenly sparked into life and lurched from the tangle of framework and landed in an ungainly heap on the ground. An almighty 'Humph!' fell from his mouth followed by a spluttering cough as he choked on the

billowing mass of dust as his large bulk hit the dried out earth.

Dee made her way cautiously over to his body and knelt down on one knee beside him. Her hand hovered over the top of him unsure of what to do. He still had his leather helmet on and his goggles, along with a thick bulky flying jacket. His now mostly black silky scarf lay draped in the dust and it was that that Dee moved first before finally finding her voice.

"Are...are you okay?"

Dee watched the man attempt to raise his hand to his face, but it fell back amongst the dust. It was then he uttered his first words and Dee felt herself grow warm as the rich baritone voice sent a ripple of anticipation through her. "Goggles...please."

Dee studied his face before she gently eased the plastic frames from his face. His face was dirty, really dirty, a mixture of black grease and dust. She couldn't decide whether he had the healthy start of a beard or just couldn't be bothered to shave. Kneeling over, Dee removed the goggles and sat back on her haunches as the man blinked rapidly before covering his eyes with a shaky hand. Dee was instantly scared for him.

"What's wrong with your eyes, can't you see?"

"Yeah, I just got some oil in them, I need a clean rag and some water."

Dee looked around her, before his voice told her that he had some in the trailer, pointing vaguely with a weary arm somewhere off to her right. Dee got to her feet and began walking away from him and the wreckage, and it was several moments before she came across a mean looking motorcycle with a trailer attached behind it.

It was several minutes more before Dee located what she was searching for. Loathe to rifle through the man's personal belongings, she picked up most things between one finger and her thumb. Everything was tainted with oil. Every canister she opened contained a chemical of some sort, and none appeared to contain water. Sniffing cautiously at the last bottle that she could see, Dee dropped it with a scream when she heard the muffled groan as the stranger collapsed to the floor just a few feet behind her.

The stranger writhed around in the dust, the grimace on his dirty face now show tiny beads of sweat and he was clearly in a lot of pain. Dee just didn't know what to do for him. Back on her knees beside him, her tiny hands flailed above him as she questioned her inadequate thoughts as to where to check. She had never been this 'close' to a man. Eventually she decided to try and help him sit up, and tucking her arm behind his head, Dee went to elevate him, but the low groan that slipped through his tightly closed lips soon made her change her mind.

Chastising her own stupidity for not considering that he may of had a back or a neck injury, she gently eased his head back to the ground, which emitted another agonising groan from him. *Prop his head* the words slipped into her mind and she found herself hurrying back to the trailer and grabbing the first lump of material that touched her fingers. But it wasn't until she went to arrange the item into a pillow shape that she realised just what she was holding in her hand.

It was the leather jacket...His' leather jacket.

Time came to a full stop. Dee, still on her knees beside the groaning body, stared anew at the face that had been disguised by the dirt and grime. It was now that she noticed the shadowy stubble that outlined his strong jaw. It was now she noticed the tufts of dark hair that escaped the helmet.

And it was now that she saw the blue eyes that sparkled as the moonlight shone down on them, only them. Eyes that stared at her as intently as she him. Eyes that she would remember her whole life. Eyes that promised her everything. Peace, happiness...Love.

And eyes that begged for help.

Part 5

"But...why can't I see him? I only want to see if he's okay...Please, just for a minute."

The nurse felt sorry for the pretty girl that had tried her utmost to get in to see the handsome patient beyond the double doors. But she had been given strict orders not to allow her entrance, so she continued to bar her way with the decisive shake of her head.

It was strange. Barely two hours ago, this woman had struggled through the town's only emergency department doors, seemingly dragging a barely conscious man that was almost twice her size. They clearly knew one another, in fact she originally thought they were sweethearts, purely because of the obvious chemistry that sparked between them. The tender touches to his face, the way they looked into each others eyes. Yes, they seemed to be lovers.

But as soon as the tall man had got into the emergency room and the staff had started assessing his injuries, he had requested that the woman that had brought him in be kept away from him.

And so, here she was, doing her best to restrain the tiny tornado from dodging around her.

"I'm sorry miss, Mr. Riker has had a nasty accident and he needs his rest, he is strictly no visitors, certainly for the rest of tonight...Why don't you come back tomorrow. Maybe when he's had some sleep and his medication has begun to work ,he'll consider a visitor for a few minutes, okay?"

Dee stared past the woman's shoulder into the tiny frosted glass window frame that let her see everything, but nothing. Every shadowy movement was a blur blocking her line of sight to the bed, but the bed was a blur too.

Why was he doing this to her, why didn't her want to see her? Didn't he know how much she was hurting inside? Dee sighed, but it was a sigh of frustration. A sigh of bitterness. Towards him, and the nurses that continued to bar her way.

Bar her way. The thought hurt her heart, bringing to the surface the tears that had been forced

back since Dee had first seen his crumpled form in that flying machine. She was physically exhausted and mentally drained, and all she wanted to do was cry, but she wanted to cry with his strong arms around her, and his shoulder to lean against. She wanted his lips to kiss her tears away. All Dee wanted to do was to be with him...just for a little while, but he was denying her.

Denying her.

Denying her. Born from somewhere deep within her, dragged up along with her fatigue, misery and sheer desperation, those two words brought a spark of anger to her soul and before she could stop the flow of bitter words spilling from her lips, she found herself shouting at the solid doors.

"I helped you...Without me you would have died!, I saved your life, you big oaf and you don't even have the decency to talk to me, not even for a minute...Damn you!"

Pulling free of the worried nurses hands who had reached out when she realised what was about to happen, Dee ran away from her nightmare, sobbing as her heart broke in two.

"Are you alright sir?"

The nurse stopped her hand moving, the bandage she was holding became suspended midair as she looked down at her patient. His one good arm lay across his eyes and had done so since she had began wrapping the bandage around his rib cage. He had managed to break two of his ribs and his arm, and it was his arm that she now worked on as she listened to the tragedy unfolding on the other side of the door.

The nurse had been watching his lower face for any signs of distress, and other than the odd grimace of pain, he had remained unusually quiet. But he was listening, and with each word that the girl he had arrived with spoke, he become more and more withdrawn. And then she had begun shouting.

She watched his chest rise and fall as he struggled to hold himself in check. But along with the pain in his body, there was clearly a deeper pain in his heart that he had to let go. It came in huge, almost silent gasps and her twelve years of experience told her that this man needed some time

alone. With barely a rustle of her stiff uniform, the nurse quietly left him to release the huge dam that had built since his whole world had fallen apart, in more ways than one it seemed. With one final pitying glance from the doorway, she left the big, baby blue eyed giant to cry.

Will felt her anger. He had felt her anger from the very moment that he had refused her entry into the trauma room. But it was more than that, He didn't know how, or why he could almost...feel her. It wrapped around him like a huge, comforting blanket. And it felt good. Too good. The connection between them was strong, so strong that he could almost reach out, touch and soak up her healing powers. But it was the last thing he wanted to do, even he did desperately ache for her.

Of everything he had done in his life; trying to fly, trying to fulfil his dream, mountain climbing, racing the rapids on some of the wildest rivers in Alaska, everything, Will knew that letting Dee Annalee Troi get close to him would be the most dangerous thing that he could ever do.

Once the initial shock of who his rescuer was, time had crept along in slow motion, but in reality, it was barely an hour. And in that hour he had been dragged by her, hugged by her, tenderly stroked by her, and Lord, he had been shouted at by her when he had all but given up, when he had refused to move another inch. When the pain had made his stomach churn so much that he needed to take a few deep breaths before humiliating himself before her eyes. But she was not having any of it. She pushed and pushed, and yelled. She barely paused when the entire measly contents of his tender stomach hit the back of the drivers seat as she physically threw him inside.

Will had never met a power house like her, she was amazing. He had lost count of how many times she had screamed and sobbed in frustration. Not at him, but her lack of brute energy to help him. Lord knows how she had got him in her car, but she did it.

The journey to the hospital had been long, slow and bumpy and not just from the roads. The way she crunched her way through every gear change rapidly told him that she was a novice. It also told him how much she had risked her neck to come to his aid and he silently thanked anybody who wanted to listen that she hadn't hit anyone, or anything.

Blissfully, Will had drifted in and out of consciousness, unable to cope with the waves of pain that tore through his battered body. He was aware that he had busted a couple of ribs, and probably his arm too, which put him an awkward spot. He couldn't simply walk away, he was going to need care. Will had to ditch his pride and let his uncle run his life for a short while, just until he could get away from this town. Just until he could get away from her.

The room was bathed in a soft glow when Will woke up a while later. Distant sounds of the hospital echoed through its pristine corridors. The clatter of a trolley and the faint, pitiful wail of an infant somewhere passed over him as he blankly stared at the lamp overhead, his thoughts stepping back in time as he lost himself in her last caress.

God, he had wanted so much to pull her head down to his, to taste her lips, to feel that connection, just for a second. That's all, just for one precious second. And she had wanted it as much as he. Will didn't need to hear any words, it was there, in her eyes, and the way her lips had hovered above his. So close. So, so close.

The badly timed spasm that had ripped through his torso right at that precious, ethereal moment rapidly brought them both back to the present, back to the emergency situation. Will didn't know whether to be sorry or grateful, but whatever he felt, it hurt like hell.

It still hurt like hell.

A movement as the door creaked open, bringing with it a shaft of light that initially brought a moment of terror as all he could see was a shadow, until he heard the tell tale swish of the starched uniform. Barely a second later, Will was looking up into a pair of smiling eyes that

perused him with a certain degree of professional concern as she checked over his obvious physical signs. But there was also a touch of genuine, personal care that shone through that invisible shell that nurses used as a survival suit.

"Hello, how do feel?"

Will pondered the question momentarily before answering her with surprise, "Beat."

The nurse studied her watch as she checked his pulse. It was then that Will had noticed that his arm was fully bandaged. He must have really been out for the count.

She read his mind, "You were quite heavily sedated. Some were pain killing medication, and some were to relax you. You were a little...overaught."

Will felt his body heat with embarrassment as his eyes flickered everywhere but at the curious gaze of the woman standing over him. He felt that he needed to apologize, but she had already second guessed his thoughts and she held her finger up to silence him.

"Hey, its okay, we understand. You've had a nasty shock and you were in a lot of pain, you needed the release. It helps, believe me, I know it helps."

But Will knew that the fitting excuse wasn't the true reason for his breakdown, and he knew that she knew that too. She compounded it as she continued. "She's still here you know."

Somehow Will knew that she was. He still felt the pull, her presence, and her worry. "I know."

The red-headed nurse studied him intently as her adept fingers checked his dressings. "Want some advice?"

Will knew what she was going to say. She was going to tell him to talk to her. She was going to tell him that things couldn't be resolved by running away or by ignoring one another. Will wondered if she was going to tell him to kiss and make up. He found himself smiling grimly,

"Would you be surprised if I told you that we have never spoken to each other...never kissed. Never made love..."

Her initial look of shock was quickly masked as she pondered his words. Her response moments later was simple. "So."

Will blinked in surprise before repeating her odd choice of word. "So?"

The nurse moved around to the other side of the bed and began preparations to take his blood pressure. Slipping the cuff up his one good arm, she pulled it tight, making Will wince with the pressure. She began pumping until Will felt his arm begin to go numb. He watched her intently, waiting for an explanation, but she ignored him until she had finished concentrating on the gauge before her.

Releasing the pressure, she didn't speak until she snapped the cuff undone. "I have seen a lot of people pass through these doors in the twelve years that I've been here, and I don't think I have ever seen such an obvious example of blatant love and sexuality radiate from two people like it did from you two. Now, I don't know the circumstances of course, but I do know that somehow, you need to walk away from this relationship with some personal things resolved, otherwise you are going to walk this Earth for the rest of your lives with some mighty big regrets that will just eat you alive."

Will understood instantly. With each word that she uttered it became more and more apparent that they 'had' to talk. 'Had' to give themselves that one moment of sweet torture. That one moment to say goodbye...properly.

The nurse watched him nod thoughtfully, inwardly sighing with relief. After she had left him last night, she had gone straight to see the equally distraught girl that had fled to the bench outside. But the best she had managed was getting her back inside and regretfully having to leave her with a cup of coffee cradled in her cold hands while she carried on with her duties. But hopefully, within an hour, these two desperate souls could resolve their plight and go on with their lives.

Part 6

After an excruciating visit to the bathroom, a dressing check, a medication top up, and a brief top and tail wash, The nurse tucked Will back into bed and generally fussed about him before finally straightening up to watch him intently.

Will knew what she was going to say, but he couldn't bring his eyes to meet hers. Her quiet voice broke the heavy silence that fell between them. "Are you ready to talk to her, Mr. Riker?"

Will's eyes locked with hers as his heartbeat began to pulse harder. He felt the rush of tension wash over his body, the adrenalin kick into overdrive, and he knew it was time to face her. He had thought about nothing else since dawn had broke. He took a shaky breath before giving her a stiff nod and one even shakier, solitary word, "Yes."

The nurse tapped Will's hand gently, her smile gentle. "Okay, I'll send her in and make sure your not disturbed, but I'm only a buzz away okay?"

Will nodded his thanks, and took a huge breath as he watched her disappear through the squeaky-hinged door.

Will had made up his mind what he was going to say to her. He had thought about nothing else as he had lay in the semi-darkness, but as soon as her slight figure stepped cautiously into the room, all this thoughts, his plans, his words and his dreams flew out of the window.

Despite looking desperately dishevelled, dirty and tired, the woman that stood barely three feet away from him never looked so utterly gorgeous. Her big scared, almost black eyes stared

at him, waiting...waiting for a sign, any sign. He gave it moments later by holding out his hand to her as his eyes pleaded for understanding, and forgiveness.

Dee's heart melted as she took that last final step forward and slipped her shaking fingers into his large comforting hand that immediately enveloped her tiny fingers, pulling her nearer until he'd manoeuvred her to sit on the edge of the bed, close to him. Close enough to reach across and tuck a straggly strand of ebony hair away from her cheek. Dee's eyes slowly fell shut as the warmth of his finger briefly touched her jaw line, and she missed it instantly when he let his hand recapture her hand. Her eyes sprung open when he spoke.

"I shouldn't have agreed to this, you shouldn't be here, I will only cause you more pain."

Dee's heart thumped against her chest as she began to panic. Surely he wasn't going to send her away again, not now. "But..why, why won't you let me in. Why can't you accept that there is something between us?"

"There is no point. I'm not who you think I am. I'm a bum, I live on the road, I live my life trying to reach the stars. I live with with my fingernails permanently stained black from the oil that I love to wallow around in. I love my life, Dee, I don't want to settle down in some pretty little town, with a pretty little wife, having babies, and a yard with a dog in it. I don't want that, Dee and I know that you do."

Dee studied those dirty fingernails and she found herself unconsciously trying to scrub off some of the grime with her fingertips. But when it didn't budge, she knew that he was right.

"How do you know what I want, Will. Don't you think I have dreams of my own? Don't you think I want to travel, see the world, maybe even see the stars with you one day? What makes you so special, Will?"

Fiery eyes met his slightly startled ones. It was the last thing he expected. He expected her to beg him to stay and become the perfect partner...father...lover. He didn't expect her to have a dream similar to his own.

"I don't have a home, Dee. I don't have any money. I sleep under the stars, and if its raining, I sleep under my trailer. Don't you understand, Dee, I have nothing. Nothing."

"You have a dream, Will."

Will dimly realised that she did understand. She did know what his driving force was, and how important it was to him, and what he had sacrificed to get him to this point. His mind flicked back to the wreck that he had left behind. There lay his dream; a large mangled unrepairable wreck. He was going to have to start again, from scratch. Or maybe it was time to accept the offer of a scholarship that his uncle James had tried his hardest to entice him with.

Maybe he could have both. After his run in with the ground, maybe it was time to go to college, learn engineering, learn how to build a plane properly. Maybe he could get a part time job at the airfield that was not too far from the campus. After all, he had his motorcycle, he

had a sponsorship...if he wanted it. He had the chance. It was up to him.

Maybe it was time to live in the real world, even if it was only for a little while. But he didn't tell her any of this. It had been a long time since he had lived with people, he wasn't even sure if he could. But if he couldn't, he needed to escape and leave it all behind. Including her.

Dee watched as the various emotions flickered over his face, but before he had even opened his mouth, she'd known what his answer was going to be. Before she had a chance to back down and before he had a chance to refuse her, Dee quickly leaned forward and settled her lips against his.

If there was anything that she would later regret, she didn't want it to be this moment. Breaking away long enough to better position herself, she kissed him again. Dee felt his resistance, felt his inner struggle, so she emptied her mind and filled it with him, only him. Her pleasure, her need, her desperate need to show him how much she wanted him. How much she loved him.

Will couldn't deny himself any longer, he soaked up everything she was offering and gave back more in return. He allowed the kiss to deepen by gently nudging her lips apart with his tongue. With a sigh, Dee gladly let him in. Will moved his one good arm so that he could hold her head tenderly while he devoured the sweetness of her mouth. This vision had been a long awaited moment since he had spotted her across that crowded church, and with a sigh, Will realised that one of his dreams had just come true.

Dee stayed with Will a while longer, until the nurse popped her head around the door and told them that the doctor was doing his rounds. Will finally got her to go home and get some rest, and so with one last, lingering kiss, Dee left the hospital.

Moments after she had left, the red-headed nurse came back into his room and stood beside Will's bed and studied him gently, "Does this mean that you have resolved your differences, Mr. Riker?"

Will looked long and hard at the woman that had quickly become his friend in the space of a few short hours and spoke with a final clarity that shook him as much as her. "Yes, we have and I'm checking out of here, right now."

Within the hour, Will was dressed, checked out and in a taxi on his way to his uncle James where he made final arrangements to pick up the relevant information he needed to begin his new life as a student and part time mechanic in San Francisco, California.

Part 7

I watched her walk up the path. Dee had attempted to back the car in, driving over my prized petunia's as she did do, and left the bumper resting against the picket fence that surrounded the garden. But I didn't consciously notice any of it. All I noticed was her; the state of her clothes, the blood that was smeared on various parts of her apparel, the way her head hung low as she dragged her feet towards the house. But most of all, I noticed the pain in her face.

I didn't even have to ask to know that she had been with 'him' all night. I watched her step into the hallway and throw the keys onto the ornate table. I didn't care that she had probably took a chunk out of priceless piece of antique furniture, and I didn't care that she blatantly ignored me as she continued on past me and headed into the kitchen. I knew what she was going to do. Dee was a creature of habit. She walked in, she got a tall glass of ice cold milk and drank it down without stopping until the last drop was drained.

But she surprised me when she simply sipped at it and stared out of the pretty kitchen window. The window that faced the hills. The hill that she'd taken herself off to on more times that I could count. Propped against the door jamb, I spoke softly to her. "Dee, are you alright, honey?"

The slow sway of her head and the tell tale shake of her shoulders told me she was crying, I didn't have to see her tears to know that. I know my daughter better than I know myself, and right now, she was hurting...badly. Slipping my arms around her from behind I held her close and let her cry. I know she would feel better once she'd done that and sure enough, a few minutes later, Dee took a loud sniff and blew her nose on the tissue I handed her, but she still didn't turn to face me.

I stepped away from her a little before I asked. I had to know, I think I had a right to know. "What happened last night, Dee?"

It was several moments before she answered. "He's a pilot. He built his own flying machine and was testing it out over in the valley past the hills. Tonight, he...he had an accident, and I heard it, mom, I heard that awful sound and I had to go to him, I had to see if he was alright, mom."

It was then Dee turned around to face me and the full impact of her night's horrors stared back at me, they were etched over every inch of her pretty face, but she had begun speaking again.

"I'm sorry, mom, I took the car." she hastily added as an after thought, "But I didn't damage it, I swear."

Smiling, I stepped towards her and took her in my arms again as I assured her that I didn't care about the car. I did, but now was not the time, and it least she had got it back home without a dent. Dirty...but not dented. "Its okay, sweetheart, I know it was important to you...was he...was he hurt?"

She pulled away from me a little so that she could look up into my face. My heart broke as I watched her tears build again. " Oh, yes, mom, he was all busted up. I had to take him to the hospital, that's where I've been. I waited to see if he was okay."

I watched her eyes fall as she tried to hide the rest of the story from me. Something had happened between them. I don't know what, but something had, but as I pieced the story together from what she had already told me, it was clearly nothing sexual had happened. But something had. My baby had had her first experience of love, and heartbreak, all on the same day.

Damn the boy! Damn him for coming into our lives and damn him for not being what I wanted him to be. He would have been every mother's dream come true if he'd have come from the other side of the tracks. All a mother ever wanted was for her daughter to fall in love with a man on the right side. A man whose love for that daughter was evident within his eyes. Like his were, for Dee.

Damn him for being on the wrong side.

But Dee didn't want to hear my opinion, not right now, maybe later though...when he had gone. Oh, I know he was going to go, men like him always did, and I guess I should be grateful to him for that. I inwardly shuddered at the prospect of him courting my daughter, turning up at my doorstep in that...crate! Having her come home stinking of oil and other unsavoury things. Watching her become everything that we had run away from.

Becoming just like him.

My blood ran cold just at the thought, and I silently prayed that if he was half the man that I hoped he was, he was long gone. I had some stalling to do, if he was going to run, he was going to do it as soon as Dee was out of sight. I figured two hours would be ample before she would make her way back to the hospital. Two hours...Piece of cake, it took Dee two hours just to dry her hair!

"Why don't you take yourself off upstairs and have a nice long soak in the bathtub, get all that...mess off you. And then if you like, I'll take you back to the hospital myself."

Lord! What was I saying? Even Dee looked at me rather startled, but it soon turned to one of suspicion. "What are you up to, mother?"

She called me mother. It was then I knew I had blown it. Dee stepped quickly away from me, but her eyes never left my face, I give her credit, she was quick. "You don't think he's going to be there, do you?"

I had to think even quicker than she did. I laughed. "Of course he will be darling. Heavens, the man has been badly injured, where on Earth would he go. He can hardly ride his...motor thingy can he?"

Dee pondered that, but within moments she had made up her mind. "I'm just going to change and then I'm going back...on my own."

My heart fell as I watched her hurry out of the kitchen and thunder up the stairs, two at a time. I can't believe I failed. My daughter was fast beginning to understand the art of deviousness, either that, or she had learned to read my mind!

I was waiting by the car when Dee came outside fifteen minutes later. She came to a halt when she spotted me, putting her hand on her hip as she gave me 'that look'. I ignored her face but couldn't help notice what she was wearing. Dee had on her favourite dress, it was

long a very pretty turquoise blue, and fitted her to perfection, showing off her young womanly curves. A dress that she normally wore for special occasions. Like a date.

Then I noticed her face. Make up! my daughter was wearing make up!...For him!! She never wore make up, in fact, I didn't even realise that she had any. In that instant, I realised that maybe I didn't know her as well as I thought. I couldn't describe how I felt right at that moment, but I know it wasn't pleasant. In fact it hurt...it hurt a lot.

I also realised that maybe I had underestimated just how far their relationship had progressed. Maybe he was going to stick around, and maybe that, on the strength of the obvious affinity that they shared, he figured it was worth sticking around. Well, I needed to find out, and there was only one way I was going to do that. "I'm coming with you, Dee, whether you like it or not...and I'm driving."

Opening the drivers door, I went to sit behind the wheel, until the stench hit my nostrils, and I found myself staggering back from the impact. "Oh my God, Dee!, what have you done to my car?!"

Dee did no more than go to the other side, open the door, wind down the window and get in, slamming the door with finality, "Sorry, I'll sort it out later. Just open the window, hold your breath and drive."

Slamming the door shut, she waited rather impatiently for me to follow suit. I balked at the idea, but I only had two choices, and letting her go on her own was not one of them. Taking a deep breath, I climbed into the drivers seat, not daring to look at where I was sitting...just in case.

I have never had a journey quite like it. Dee seemed to be oblivious to the smell, but by the time we had reached the hospital grounds, I think I had pulled over to hang my head out of the door at least three times. You would not believe how close I came to making an even bigger mess in the car.

I had barely pulled up in the hospital's parking lot before Dee flung open the door and raced out of the car. She'd known that it was going to take some time to find a parking space, and she'd known that I couldn't just 'dump' the car to chase after her. Knowing I was certain that he would not be there, I didn't even bother, I sat with the car idling until she came out. I don't think I even managed to count to 100 before she stepped out of the immense double doors.

I didn't know whether to be overjoyed at her discovery, or sorry for what my poor little girl was going through. It was an odd sensation, dismay and elation at the same time, to laugh or to cry. But for her sake, I decided that pity was the best option. That was until she got back in the car.

"You knew didn't you, you knew all along that he wouldn't be here?"

I studied her profile long and hard as I tried to think of something to say to her, to make it right somehow. I could only think of two words. Two words that could cover everything, I

hoped. "I'm sorry."

Dee turned her face to look into mine. I knew what she was looking for. Was my apology sincere, or was I ridiculing her pathetic plight. I didn't like the way her shoulders slumped, or the way that she turned away from me to stare blindly out of her window. Or the tone of her voice when she answered me. "No your not."

And she was right, I wasn't sorry. I wasn't sorry that I had stopped her ruining her life. And I wasn't sorry to see the back of that hopeless low-life, nor was I sorry that I had put my only daughter through this amount of pain. I know her misery was down to me. If we had've stayed at that wedding, they might have been together by the end of the evening. If I had stopped at the gas station, they may have gotten together then. If I hadn't been such a snob maybe Dee could have had a chance of happiness...of true love, that one of a kind true love that was so rare. So precious.

Was I sorry? No, I wasn't.

I turned the car back towards home, the silence was thick within its confines, along with the awful stench. Funny how I'd gotten used to it. First thing tomorrow it was going to the garage for a total service. Tomorrow.

Tomorrow, life began again.

Hardly surprisingly, Dee disappeared up to her bedroom as soon as we stepped indoors. I watched her ascend the stairs, and with each step, I watched the spark leave her already unhappy body. I ached to comfort her, to hold her in my arms, but right now, I was the last person she wanted near, and surprisingly, I didn't blame her...not this time.

Part 8

"That'll be 75 cents, mister."

Will pulled his eyes away from the hill as the wiry man's voice filtered through his faraway thoughts. Reaching clumsily into his jacket pocket, Will counted through the few coins that fell into his palm, grimacing when he saw that all he'd have left was a nickel after he'd paid the cab fare. Shoving the change into the cabbies waiting hand, Will struggled to get out of the back door, instantly forming droplets of perspiration with the spent energy that he'd used to perform the normally simple task.

Before Will had even stood his full height, the cab had begun pulling away. Will mumbled as his eyes followed it disdainfully, "Thanks for nuthin' you mutt." screwing up his handsome features as a waft of dust blasted him in the face.

Will's intent and hopeful eyes scanned across the hilltops that spread out before him, looking for 'her' hill. He must have been mad to be doing this. He was mad, and sorry, and lonely...and desperate. He tried to define his own meaning of the word, coming up with every nuance but the real one, the one that was important.

Desperate...desperate to see her face just one more time. Desperate to hold her, kiss her, tell her what he wanted to say. Desperate to say sorry for everything that he had done and what he was going to do. Desperate to see the love that shone in her eyes...for him, only him. Desperate to prove that he wasn't the coward that the whole world deemed him to be. Will was just simply desperate, but he didn't really know what for.

And that's why he was standing at the bottom of Tarler Hill.

The mild breeze whipped around Dee's solitary form. She drew her knees up to her chest with one hand while the other gently removed the errant lock of spirally hair from her eyes that stared out forelornly across the vast expanse that spread out before her, listening to the silence.

In all the times that she had sat up on top of the hill and looked out over towards the horizon, Dee had never done it in quite the same frame of mind that she was doing now. It was the first time she had felt the gnawing pangs of loneliness, of emptiness...of longing.

Meeting Will had forced Dee to take a long, hard look at her life and what she had wanted from it, what she had expected and more so, what she was going to do. Will had released her soul but now her soul sought a new home. A home with him maybe?

As much as Dee craved to be with Will, another part of her balked at what he was offering her. Or rather, the lack of what he was offering. Only one thing shone out from all the doubts, the terror...and the excitement. Freedom.

Will was offering her freedom, or so she believed...what she wanted to believe. But in truth, he hadn't offered her anything. So why did she still feel his pull? Why had he unsettled her in a way that no other had? Where was he when she needed him most? Even if it only was to answer some of the questions that tore at her heart.

Dee felt the rise of tears as the question churned over and over. Why, why, why? Until she had to let it go,

"WHY WILL, WHY!?"

Her tortured voice carried across the vast emptiness in front of her. The wind catching it and carrying it on further, echoing like a whisper rippling through the trees, uncaring if anyone heard, uncaring if anyone saw the tears that streamed down her face.

"Don't do this to yourself."

Dee's heart stopped in her chest just for an instant but soon began again, pounding harder and louder than she had ever heard before. Swallowing painfully, she turned slightly, just enough to show him that she'd heard him. Lord, he looked so different, so...normal. Black jeans that hugged his long legs, turned up a little at the hem, revealing shiny, but well worn winkle picker style boots. Her misty eyes travelled up his torso to a plain white T shirt, but even that couldn't disguise obvious power in the muscles that rippled beneath its softness.

Dee's eyes drifted briefly to the arm that was held close to his chest by a large triangle of material that was tied up behind his neck. Her eyes travelled higher, hiding her surprise at the clean shaven, strong jawline, exposing the dimple for all to see. It was several moments before Dee could raise her eyes to meet his.

Blue met black. Intent met wary. Love met love, there was no denying that emotion, it was there, for the whole world to see, except the two people who steadfastly refused to acknowledge it.

Will watched her closely. More than anything he wanted to kneel down beside her, talk to her and set things right, but his hopes were crushed when her eyes turned away, her words bitter.

"What do you care?"

He wanted to move, but his feet felt like they were encased in concrete. Maybe this was God's way of punishing him...them. If Will couldn't use his physical presence then he would have to it all with words. "I care, more than you'll ever know. "

Dee spun around on the spot, dragging her skirt around with her, keeping her slender legs hidden from his traitorous eyes. She wrapped her arms around her knees as she studied him like a curiosity. she barely hid the sneer in her voice,

"You...care..for me?"

She saw the spark flare, "Yes, dammit, I care. I care enough to get out of your life before ruining it more than I already have."

Dee smiled grimly as she continued to study him. "Oh, you do...Then would you care to tell me why your here, and why you find it necessary to torture me me even more than you already have. Why you came into my life in the first place, and why I should give a damn what you think?"

At last Will moved his feet and made what felt like a gigantic step towards her, until she held a shaky hand up to halt his approach. Will's heart fell.

"No...no. Please, don't come any nearer."

Will needed to sit. He had been on his feet for too long, his side was aching even more than his heart at that moment. He didn't think that would ever be possible, this woman had got to him, but the ache went deeper than that. It was living with the knowledge that this was the end for them.

The end before the beginning. And she was aware of it too.

Dee warily watched him drop unsteadily to his knees. Momentary guilt nearly brought her to his aid until she saw the look in his eye. She dropped back to her original position and waited.

Will needed to gather his wits before approaching Dee again. He looked over the brow of the hill, out towards the valley where he had nearly lost his life. Where she had saved his life. Will owed her big time. He owed her the truth.

Reaching across, Will took her fingers in his. He felt her try to pull away, but he wouldn't release her. His eyes beseeched her to allow him this closeness. Dee sensed the urgency of the moment, the time for understanding had arrived. The time to say goodbye was finally here. She thought she'd be clever and beat him to it.

"I know why you came..."

Will's heart pumped faster at her final acceptance, but he had to ask her, he had to know, "But you're glad I came though aren't you...aren't you...You're glad I came...?" Everything stood still as Will's eyes searched hers. Everything seemed to hinge on her reply.

Dee studied Will intently. She had not seen him this close, this clean. She liked what she saw, but even so, she missed the rugged, raw, hunk of a man that had touched her like no other. Dee liked the feel of the masculine stubble upon his jaw, the smell of oil that she would always associate with him. And those eyes, Lord, she would never, ever forget those blue eyes.

And it was those eyes that held her captivated when she answered him quietly with a tender smile, "Yes...I'm glad you came."

Will's heart soared. Shifting his body so that he could sit beside her, he gently placed his one good arm along her shoulders and together they watched the sun begin to set. Two souls, united for a while, even if it was just a short time. A time to sit and ponder their lives, their dreams, their future's. Did they have a future?

Voices whispered along with the breeze, hushed, revered, melancholy words flowed from the solitary couple as they learned about one another, listened to one another, and fell in love with one another, and then made a promise.

A promise for a future...Their future, in another time, another place. When each have more to offer than dreams. When Will could offer her a life on the right side of the tracks. One day.

"It's time to go, I have a train to catch." Will pushed himself uneasily to his feet, wincing at the unaccustomed stiffness. They had been sitting in the same spot for hours, a time that Will would never forget.

Dee silently rose with him, and Will pulled her into his embrace, kissing the top of her head as her words reverberated against his tender chest, "I know, I know. I don't want you to go, but I know you have to."

Will cursed his broken arm as he struggled to pull her as close as he dared, but it wasn't close enough, but Dee seemed to understand, and she wrapped her arms around his waist and they stood and hugged, nothing more, but it meant everything. The love flowed freely from one to the other as their heartbeats began to beat in perfect time. Time stopped for a while until Dee heard his whisper against her hair. "Kiss me."

Elation rocked Dee to her soul, this was what she wanted, this was what she was waiting for. Moving away from Will's body just enough to raise her face to his, it was barely a second before their lips met and fused together, drinking the very essence that existed within their hearts. The kiss was long, sweet, and full of promise. The promise of things to come...but not today.

They were both shaking when the kiss ended mutually. Will reached up to gently caress her cheek before breaking apart from her warmth and turning away. Dee silently watched him stride painfully down the hill, he hadn't said goodbye, but somehow it comforted her. Goodbye was such a final word, and one day, she knew they would be together again, it was their destiny.

"I love you..." The three words fell from her lips, carried off by the breeze, Dee was sure they never reached his ears until Will reached the bottom. He stopped and turned. Dee didn't have to hear him say the words, his love was there, written in his eyes, for the whole world and her to see.

A strange mixture of emotions washed over them both. One of loss, one of elation and surprisingly, one of trust. Raising her arm, Dee waved. Will grinned in return, and raising his one good hand to his face, he kissed his fingertips and waved back to her, mentally photographing the image before him. Her long dark hair billowing in the breeze, her skirt whipping around her shapely thighs. Her smile. Will would never forget her smile.

Dee watched Will walk out of sight, sighing aloud as the last fraction of his shadow disappeared. Her shoulders drooped along with her cataclysmic assortment of emotions. She already missed him.

Turning, Dee sat back down and stared out across the valley again. But this time, it felt good, she was content. Not happy, but content. She closed her eyes and let the wind fill her senses, until she heard it, the faint distant hum of an engine. Dee laughed out loud, as long as she could hear that sound, she'd know that Will was still with her, he would always be with her.

"You've been a long time little one." I looked up from the intricate tapestry piece that I had been working on for the last three years. I didn't initially notice her face when she first walked through the door. It was dark, she had been gone for a large chunk of the day, I guessed she had been up to Tarler Hill again, I couldn't see what the fascination with the place was, and it was the last place I expected her to go to today, especially today. She startled me with her chirpy response.

"Yes, I know...I've been talking to Will."

It was then I took a closer look at her face, noticing the glow, the swollen lips, the smile. I felt my heart quicken its pace. Oh lord, don't tell me she's been and done something stupid. I surprised myself for glancing over her body looking for signs of their love making. Could one tell just by looking? I shook the daft notion off and managed to speak without betraying my inner panic.

"Oh...Oh, I thought he had gone, I thought you weren't going to see him again, sweetheart."

She flopped down onto the couch, but I noticed she still grinned like a Cheshire cat. "We decided that we needed to resolve some things, things that were important to us, mom."

I felt the dread wash over me. "What...things?"

Dee turned coy on me as she soaked up my terror for all it was worth, "Oh, things like our future, our dreams, you know, that sort of thing."

My heart stopped, "Future...?"

Dee nodded matter of factly, "Uh huh, future. You know, like marriage, babies, learning to fly. Aaand he's going to teach me to ride....Mother!"

I didn't hear her cry my name, I didn't get past the word marriage before slipping into a dead faint.

Dee tapped her mothers face before sitting back on her heels exasperated, "Jeez! She couldn't even wait for me to tell her about going to college in San Francisco...!"

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