

The yearning
by Carol Sandford.

I stood outside the sickbay doors listening to the sounds beyond. Doctor Pulaski's sure, sharp orders drowning out almost everything else that was happening. Data's intrusive, and so totally innocent questions, aimed at the woman in the chair, completely at ease with what was happening, embarrassment not even entering his head at what he was about to witness.

And then there was Worf and the security team, waiting and watching something that they had no right to be watching. But what could he do? Picard had set his orders, and Worf, being the true obedient servant that he was, did his duty, no matter how much it pained him to be witnessing such an intimate moment.

I could hear Deanna panting through the contractions. It was a beautiful sound, a sound that I'd never thought I'd hear fall from her lips, and I wanted so much to be a part of the scene. To be the one in Data's place, holding her hand, breathing along with her. Watching my child slip from her loins into my eagerly waiting hands.

I feel Deanna's excitement increase ten-fold and my own goes up with it until suddenly amongst the organised chaos I hear those words, "It's happening!" she cried, and my heart leaps into my throat. I had to go in. I had to be in there with her, to watch, I just had to.

My footsteps were silent amongst the chaos surrounding the new mother-about-to-be, just as I planned them to be. I didn't want them to know I was there, watching and waiting in the wings, silently wishing that I could barge my way in, push Data out of the way and take my rightful place at her side.

I guess I could have done, but the sight of her stopped my feet from moving any further than the archway. She couldn't see me, nor did she seem to sense me either. Her focus was entirely spent on the child, leaving me to watch the miracle before me unfold.

She sat in the birthing chair looking totally serene, and heartbreakingly beautiful. I'd seen women about to give birth before and was surprised, and proud of how Deanna appeared compared to them. I could still visibly remember the cries of terror, and the sweat-drenched hair, but Deanna couldn't have looked more different. If it wasn't for the swollen belly and the quiet, controlled breathing, one could almost imagine that she was simply sitting doing something that she did every day in her life.

But when the doctor's movements become more focused as she prepared to catch the new life that was being guided effortlessly from Deanna, I felt the tensions rise within the room, including my own. But when I first caught sight of the baby's head, I felt something that I had never felt before; yearning. I had never truly considered settling down, having a family, holding a child of my own in my arms, watching it grow. Being a family.

But, God, I wanted it now. I felt a wave of emotion sweep through me and I found myself swallowing several times to subdue the building sob that I knew would choke me if it reached my mouth. I didn't want my fellow crew mates to witness me falling apart at the sight of a baby being born, even if the mother was Deanna.

They're all aware of the relationship that we both keep sheltered, and they are equally aware that just one word from either of us and that relationship would resume from wherever it left off.

They also knew how much I love her. And I do, God help me, I do, even more so as I watch her cradle her son with tears streaming down her cheeks, love already pouring from her soul for the very precious gift that she had been bequeathed.

Only when the security team and Data had left did I let the feigned restraint go, allowing myself to do what I've

wanted to do since the first moment I'd arrived.

Her smile was radiant as she finally realised that I was there, and had been right from the word go. I wanted so much to sweep her into my arms and tell her everything that had been racing through my mind, but this wasn't the time. No one knew how long the boy was going to be around for, or why. Maybe it was just for a couple of days, and maybe it was for a lifetime. But if it was, I was ready to become the father that I wanted to be. That Ian would need me to be, and that Deanna would want me to be.

I was ready. I didn't realise I was ready for this until I watched a miracle being born, and wanted to be a part of that miracle.

There was still time for us, one day. But for right now, this was Deanna's time, and I could wait for just a little longer.