

Nest

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Summary

“I do not think undressing is necessary, Number One,” said Picard, looking hostile.

“Sir, I’m not gonna sleep in my pants. These things pinch enough during the day.”

“Pinch?” asked Data, head cocked.

“Figure of speech,” Geordi told him, tossing his own uniform jacket over the back of a nearby chair. He deactivated his VISOR and shook his head, like he could drum the headache away. “It means Commander Riker is too big for his britches.”

“Too big for his—?”

“Goodnight,” said Picard loudly.

Chapter 1

It was an unusual way of sleeping, but Troi had seen worse. Across the room, Riker caught her eye with one of his crooked smiles, the one he always got when he was trying not to laugh, and through their connection, Troi felt his wide-eyed delight — as ever. Bright and sparkling, so much more enthusiastic than other humans when they were amused.

“I don’t like it,” said Picard flatly.

“It’s diplomacy, sir,” said Riker, wiping his smile away for an innocent look. “I think the Urtonok might be offended if we say no.”

“Easy for you to say, Number One,” Picard snapped. “Shared sleeping quarters is your dream.”

“And co-ed, too,” said Data helpfully.

Picard grumbled to himself and picked his way around the large, comfortable-looking nest. A rounded mattress covered most of the floor, the cushions rising at the edges of the circle to form a wall that pushed the inhabitants together. A veritable mound of blankets — silky or fluffy, heavy and light — filled the nest. And pillows of all shapes and sizes, and luxurious eyemasks to block out the light.

“The Urtonok are communal sleepers,” Data informed the group.

“Yes, Lieutenant Commander, I had guessed as much,” said Picard waspishly. He picked a spot far away from everyone else and lay down, legs tight together and arms crossed over his chest. He looked for all the world like he was waiting for a mortician to sling him into a coffin. Behind Troi, Riker lost his battle for self-control and laughed aloud.

“Dibs on the body pillow,” he said, shrugging out of his uniform tunic.

“I do not think undressing is necessary, Number One,” said Picard, looking hostile.

“Sir, I’m not gonna sleep in my pants. These things pinch enough during the day.”

“Pinch?” asked Data, head cocked.

“Figure of speech,” Geordi told him, tossing his own uniform jacket over the back of a nearby chair. He deactivated his VISOR and shook his head, like he could drum the headache away. “It means Commander Riker is too big for his britches.”

“Too big for his—?”

“*Goodnight*,” said Picard loudly, his eyes squeezed shut. “I expect everyone to behave themselves with unquestionable Starfleet comportment! There will be *no* pillow talk, no late-night *giggling*, and *absolutely* no—”

Riker lowered himself into the nest, lost his balance, and clutched at Troi’s arm. She toppled over on top of him, both of them gasping and laughing, leaning into each other.

“Commander Riker!” said Picard, scandalized.

“Sorry,” Troi laughed, rolling off Riker’s chest. “Sorry, Captain. That was my fault.”

He gave her a beady-eyed look. Slowly, the nest filled up, with Data and Geordi lying next to each other on one end of the circle, Picard on the other, various ensigns and lieutenants awkwardly filling in. Riker curled up happily in the middle, clutching the body pillow against his stomach, and Troi studied him for a moment before she laid down at his side. She slung an arm over his waist, letting him be the little spoon, and resisted the sudden, backwards urge to kiss his neck, where he was ticklish.

He chuckled and flinched, one shoulder raised to ward her off, like he could feel it anyway. *Imzadi*, Troi thought, full of fondness. *I didn’t even touch you*. And then she imagined kissing the back of his neck longer, gentler, just a ghost of her breath against his skin, and even though it was only imaginary, Riker gasped and squirmed away from her with another breathless laugh.

“For God’s sake,” said Picard in a grumble, “is it too much to ask for *no giggling*?”

Chapter 2

The nest was, to Picard's irritation, the height of luxury. The cushions beneath him might as well have been the softest clouds. The blankets were heavy but cool, made of a special fabric that seemed to hit his brain right in the relaxation node. The pillows were, if he might be permitted a touch of fantasy, a bit like marshmallows. Soft and supportive, like sleeping on air.

It would have been the perfect place to sleep, if not for the agonies happening three people over.

"S-stop," Riker said under his breath, half-laughing.

"*COMMANDER.*" Picard's voice rang out at the first sign of wakefulness, making everyone around him stir and grumble. "**BEHAVE.**"

Riker didn't even respond, and Picard half-suspected his first officer had rolled his eyes. Around the nest, everyone settled back into sleep. Breathing evened out and bodies relaxed. A low snore started up from the other edge of the nest where Data and Geordi were sleeping.

"Who is that?" Picard snapped.

"It's Data, sir," said Geordi.

"*Data?*"

"He initiated a snoring protocol, sir. He said he wanted the full sleepover experience."

"Wake him up this instant and disable the protocol, La Forge. *Now.*"

Picard sat ramrod straight until he saw that Geordi had obeyed. The snoring ceased abruptly and Picard lowered himself back onto the cushions. Silence. Blissful. Most welcome after a long day of diplomacy and strange alien customs. He closed his eyes.

And heard Deanna Troi gasp out a breathless moan.

"*Counselor,*" Picard hissed through gritted teeth. "Is there some problem?"

"No, sir," she said unconvincingly. Picard rolled over to glare at Troi and Riker. They were spooning — which almost embarrassed him enough to look away — and they looked mostly innocent, with Riker's eyes closed and his face buried in his pillow, both of them fully clothed. But there was a tiny smile tugging at the corner of Riker's lips, and Troi's face was distinctly flushed, and both of them appeared a tad...

...sweaty.

"No touching," Picard ordered, his eyes narrowed.

Riker cracked open an eye. "We're just cuddling, sir," he said, his voice perfectly professional.

"Well, stop!" Picard rolled back over and punched his pillow into submission. Behind him, there was a low whisper, a soft laugh, and a rustle of blankets as Riker and Troi moved apart. When everything was silent again, Picard surreptitiously lifted his head and took a peek. Riker's body pillow now lay between him and Troi, providing a wall. Riker lay on his back, eyes closed and hands folded over his stomach.

Good. Satisfied, Picard closed his eyes once more. He let his thoughts drift. In the middle of the nest, there was a shift of weight, like hips rocking against the cushioned floor. A soft sigh. A cut-off grunt. A shuddering gasp, barely audible. Picard squeezed his eyes so tightly closed that they became thin puckered lines in his head. He tried his damndest to ignore it all.

...He heard Riker's sharp intake of breath and nearly lost his shit.

"Commander Riker, must I separate you and Counselor Troi like a pair of handsy teenagers?"

"We're not doing anything," Riker said innocently, and indeed, his hands were still folded and the pillow was still between them.

"What's that between your legs?" Picard asked.

Troi reached over and helpfully adjusted Riker's blanket to hide his erection.

"Nothing," Riker said. "My phaser."

"Separate sides of the nest," Picard ordered, his voice rumbling in his chest. "*Now.*"

Like sulky children, Riker and Troi picked themselves up and shuffled to opposite corners. They were awfully touchy-feely about it, Picard noted with some disgruntlement. They helped each other up, grasped each other's hands; Troi's palm skimmed down Riker's chest, and Riker kept hold of her fingers until she was too far away to reach. Then Riker flopped down between Data and Geordi. Troi delicately inserted herself into a sleeping pile of ensigns. Both of them let out irritated sighs, but Picard really didn't care if they were angry with him. This was a matter of decorum, and he wouldn't have his officers getting handsy in a shared nest.

Grinding his teeth, he laid back down to sleep. Occasional small noises reached his ears. Sharp breaths. Quiet, shaky sighs. The rustle of blankets as muscles tensed and relaxed. All of them were small enough, and Riker and Troi were far enough away from each other, that Picard chalked them up to the ordinary everyday sounds of a large group trying to sleep. He kept his eyes closed and didn't notice when Geordi sat

up, his face twisted into a scowl.

On one end of the nest, Troi buried her face in her pillow and muffled a cry of pleasure, her face beet-red. On the other end of the nest, Riker's hips jerked and he bit down hard on his own knuckles to stifle a sudden, shuddering groan. Data sat up too, his head cocked quizzically to the side.

"Commander," he said, his voice making Picard's eyes pop open again. "You appear to have made some kind of ... seminal emission in your pajamas. Is this normal for a human being of your age?"

Goddammit all. Picard covered his face with his pillow and groaned, trying to drown out Riker's muffled laughter. This was a nightmare. This whole time they'd been playing a game of 'I'm not touching you'...

...and he'd forgotten they could read each other's minds.

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