

## Stains

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### Summary

Data watches as Troi helps Riker prepare for an away mission.

“I don’t like it,” said Commander Riker.

“Commander, perhaps it might help to adjust your frame of mind,” Data suggested. “Rather than viewing this mission as a rendezvous with alien royalty, you could choose to perceive it as a dangerous foray into the cutthroat world of table etiquette and foreign politics. I trust you will see this mission as more adventurous now.”

Riker gave Data a sidelong glance while Troi helped him with his new clothes. Frilly and stiffly-starched, they had to be the least comfortable uniform he’d ever worn for an away mission.

“I just wish the captain...” he started with a sigh.

“Correct me if I’m wrong,” said Troi wryly, “but weren’t you the one who told Jean-Luc he’s absolutely not permitted to beam down anymore? Even for diplomatic affairs?”

Data cocked his head to the side. “I do not believe Commander Riker is authorized to give the captain orders, Counselor.”

Riker sighed again. “Well, this time, Data, he seems to be listening. I’ve recanted a thousand times and he still insists I go in his place.”

“Perhaps he is preparing you for a captaincy of your own,” Data said.

“Well, I don’t want it.” Riker tilted his head back and gave the ceiling a long-suffering look while Troi adjusted his cravat and its many layers of lacy ruffles. “Let’s get this over with. Counselor, am I good to go?”

“One moment.” Troi took a step back and gave Riker an up-and-down look, her sharp eyes darting over every inch of his costume. “You’ve got a stain on your trousers.”

“Do I?” Riker glanced down and grimaced at the umber-colored blot on his thigh. “Oh. My coffee.”

“I’ve got it.” With brisk professionalism, Troi wet a napkin against her tongue and knelt before Commander Riker. Data watched closely as she inched up to Riker’s body and dabbed gently at the stain on his upper thigh, close to the junction where his legs came together. Riker kept his head up, glancing around the room as if he didn’t notice what Troi was doing, but there was a stiffness in his shoulders and a fidgety tension in his hands that suggested he did. And Troi, kneeling between his legs, had an increased body temperature and a hint of warmth on her cheeks that just got worse the longer she dabbed at the stain.

“There,” she said, falling back on her heels.

“Thank you,” said Riker, even though the stain looked three times larger and wetter now. “Well.” He cleared his throat, his cheeks gaining some color. “I’d better go. Commander. Counselor.”

He nodded to each of them and disappeared into Transport Room Three. Data and Troi stood together in silence.

“Counselor,” said Data finally, “may I ask a delicate question?”

Troi looked at him from the corner of her eye. “What is it, Data?”

“I am sensing high levels of arousal from Commander Riker as well as yourself. What is the significance of this ... mating ritual involving a wet napkin?”

Even Data’s advanced auditory processing couldn’t make out what Troi garbled as she turned away.

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