

A Daughter of the Fifth House

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A Daughter of the Fifth House

by [Beatrice Otter](#)

Summary

I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I intended to be.--Douglas Adams

Notes

You know that thing where you stumble across a fic in your WIP folder, like it but have no idea where it was going, re-write most of it, and then decide since you can't remember where you were going with it it must be good enough as-is, and decide not to bother with getting it betaed?

Yeah. This is that fic.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Deanna gritted her teeth, shielded her mind, and stared down at the class work on the PADD in front of her with as much focus as she could muster. The other girls were laughing at her again. She didn't know what they were saying—of course they didn't broadcast their mocking directly *at* her—but she could feel the slimy pointed mockery of their emotions just fine. There was no point in confronting them about it; Mother would tell her to confront them (*You are a Daughter of the Fifth House! They are well-born, but nothing to you, and should be put in their place if they trouble you!*), but nobody ever told Mother that she was a disgrace who should have been aborted or abandoned at the Federation Embassy as a child. And there was no point in getting a teacher; the other girls would have changed the subject by the time the teacher got here, and then what proof would she have?

She'd learned the hard way that the teachers would smile patronizingly at her and say something along the lines of *I know you're sensitive, child, and it's so very hard to be left out, but you can't blame them for forgetting about you, and it is wrong to try to get them in trouble because you can't keep up—oh, of course your empathy couldn't possibly be able to sense that they are making fun of anyone, and without hearing their thoughts, you couldn't possibly know it was aimed at you, dear*. And she'd long since learned that telling her mother made things better for a few days and worse in the long run. No. There was nothing to be done but pretend she really was as oblivious as they thought she was, and beg Mother to take her with her on her next offworld diplomatic mission.

She glanced at the clock. Almost two hours to go before she could leave the tutoring studio and return home. She was done with her homework, and had pulled up a psychology text. It was so *fascinating*. Not that there was any point, her studying psychology on Betazed, since she was too handicapped to ever be able to *do* anything with it. She sighed. Maybe there was still a chance—all the others had had their full telepathy bloom, but it wasn't *completely* out of the realm of possibility that her empathy might only be a precursor to a full telepathic awakening, as her mother reminded her regularly. She could be a therapist, then.

And if it didn't, well, there wasn't much point in studying *anything*. She wouldn't even be able to get a job in a shop, because who would want to buy from someone who couldn't look into your mind, see exactly what you wanted, and take you to it?

She almost threw the PADD across the room. A burst of ugly humor from the other girls brought her up short. She shielded her mind and worked on calming techniques. She did *not* want to give them any encouragement, or any sign they were getting through to her.

Maybe Mother would take her along, next time. Maybe it would be a long mission. She had all her books, and Mr. Homn could tutor her.

Maybe they wouldn't have to come back.

Humans don't understand this, unless she explains, which she seldom does. They see her empathic abilities as a gift, a strength. Betazoids see her empathy as defective telepathy, proof that no matter how much you may *like* offworlders, you shouldn't marry them. On Betazed, she is severely handicapped. On Earth, she is gifted.

He's handsome enough, I suppose, Mother said into her mind as Deanna chatted with Lieutenant Riker at a garden party at the Embassy, *but hardly suitable for anything serious. You're still a girl, darling, you know you can't—why don't you go chat with Javana's son, what's his name, Lon? You never know, you might—*

He's busy right now, Deanna said, hoping her irritation with her mother didn't show on her face. Even if Lon had had more emotional range than a housepet, there was no point in showing interest in him if he had none in her. And while he was a decent young man—not a boy, anymore, since he and Ilirra were together two years ago—he couldn't hide the discomfort he felt having to project directly to her instead of 'speaking' normally. Not from Deanna, at any rate, though apparently he'd hid it from Mother, who would *not* have taken it lying down. Mother meant well, she reminded herself.

"I'm sorry if I said anything wrong," Lieutenant Riker said.

"Oh, no, it's not you," Deanna said, putting a hand on his arm and broadcasting warmth at him. He probably couldn't "feel" it—and certainly not on a conscious level—but there was no harm in it. "My mother was speaking to me, and I didn't care for her advice."

"Ah," Riker said with a smile. "Parents. Now, *that* is a subject I am more than willing to commiserate about."

"Honestly, I'd rather forget about her for the moment," Deanna said. And Lon, and Ilirra, and the whole *planet*. She didn't even have any trips offworld to look forward to—Mother didn't want to take her away from Betazed, in case she might meet someone here.

"Would you care for a stroll in the gardens, then, put some distance between you and her?" Riker said. "They're very pretty, though I don't know any of the names of your local flowers."

"She'll still be able to reach me—Mother's range is quite large—but I'd be happy to tell you about our Betazoid flowers," Deanna said. "It seems a shame for you to be here for a while and only get to know our diplomatic staff."

"It does, doesn't it?"

They made their way to the door, only to be stopped by Ambassador Oxila. "I see you two will be enjoying the gardens?"

"Yes, Ambassador, they're quite fine," Riker said politely. "Ms. Troi has volunteered to teach me a little about your plants."

"As long as you don't teach *her* anything," Ambassador Oxila said, raising an eyebrow at Deanna, along with a whiff of censure.

"I'm sure that the lieutenant is here to study, not teach," Deanna said, sending back a firm sense that it was none of the ambassador's business even if she *was* a daughter of the Fourth House, and thus senior to even Deanna's own mother.

Deanna's annoyance hadn't faded by the time they reached the gardens, and she took a deep breath, letting her emotions out on the exhale.

"Pardon me for asking, but are you younger than you look, Ms. Troi?" Riker asked.

"What?" Deanna paused. Of course; humans considered it rude to ask women their age, and also they judged adulthood and accountability by dates on the calendar. "Oh. No. I'm twenty-one." She noted his relief. He *did* have some interest in her, then. "But we Betazoids judge maturity on one's telepathic development, not by age. To be an adult, you have to have formed a telepathic bond with someone at least once."

"And you haven't?"

"No," Deanna said. "And there's a good chance I never will. I'm half-human, and my telepathy is ... almost non-existent. I can only hear what a telepath sends, and speak into a mind that is telepathically receptive. I'm an empath, which is rare on Betazed, but it's not the same."

"So, because you're half-human, you may never be considered an adult no matter how old you are or how mature you are?" Riker shook his head. "That doesn't seem fair."

"It isn't." Deanna's heart leapt. He felt sincere—he really *meant* it. No arguments about tradition, about the joys of *imzadi*, about *anything*.

"And judging maturity by telepathic ability—what if someone is precocious and develops early?" He felt ... slightly uneasy, for some reason. Did Humans have taboos about youth? She'd have to look it up.

"If the mind is mature enough, the body generally is, too," Deanna said. "It makes more sense to judge biologically and psionically than by a calendar—everyone matures at different rates, which even humans will agree, I believe."

"I suppose," Riker said. "And if it works for your people, that's great. But judging a non-telepath the same way doesn't make much sense."

Deanna laughed and broadcast agreement. "Try telling that to my mother."

"I thought we came out here to get away from her?"

"Right you are, Lieutenant." Deanna glanced around to get her bearings and spot her favorite plants to show him.

"Please, call me Will," he said.

"And I'm Deanna," she said with a smile.

By the time she met Will Riker, all she wanted was to get *away*. Away from the telepathic conversations she could only catch snatches of unless they were specifically aimed to include her, away from the pity almost everyone (including her mother, sometimes) aimed at her without realizing she could feel it. Will Riker may have provided a little extra incentive to actually defy her mother for the first time, but he wasn't the reason she did it.

(She did wonder, later, if part of the reason she fell so hard for him in the first place was how receptive he was to her empathy. Imzadi doesn't just mean beloved, it doesn't just mean first love. Your Imzadi is the one with whom you form your first telepathic link, open your mind to and vice versa, the one you become an adult with. She'd been terribly afraid she'd never find anyone with whom she could link, that her lack of true telepathy would keep her a child forever. When she'd realized she had formed a link with Will, she'd been so relieved that she'd tried to attach herself to him at the hip. He'd felt smothered, panicked; she felt it, but was too caught up in her own happiness to pay it much attention. When he missed their rendezvous without even sending a message of apology, Deanna was terribly hurt. But she was also slightly relieved, because she'd known neither of them were ready for anything more long-term.)

Are you sure, little one? You're an adult now, you could do anything here on Betazed!

"Anything except be a therapist," Deanna said as her mother paced in front of her, skirts rustling. She was practicing using her voice—Betazoids could go months without using them, and they got so rusty. She was going to have to use her voice a lot more than she ever had, once she got to the Academy for OCS and grad school in psychology, and she didn't want a sore throat.

"And who says you have to be a therapist, anyway?" Mother continued aloud, following her lead. "There are so many opportunities for you here. You've always been creative—you could be a writer, or a programmer! And if you *really* want to be a therapist, you could be a civilian therapist on Earth. I'm on Earth so regularly, and you could come home often for vacation, we could see each other quite a lot."

Deanna tried not to cringe. Much as she loved her mother, that was one of the *high* points of Starfleet—that she would be far away from Mother, for good or ill. "I want to see the galaxy, not just one planet," she said. "And counseling on a starship will give me a lot more scope for my talents than sitting on a planet."

"It's that *Riker*, isn't it," Mother said, throwing up her hands. "You want to look for *him*. I know he broke your heart, little one, but Wyatt is still here. And we know you like Humans, now, so *that's* good. He'll be a wonderful father to your children and take such good care of them while you're off being a therapist—if you want to travel, I'm sure you could find a planet that would suit both of you."

"Mother, I'm not doing this because of Will," Deanna said. "That's over. Yes, I was hurt, but I got over it. Nobody joins Starfleet because they're looking for a lost love—Starfleet only takes the best, the people who truly want to be in space and are suited for it!"

"Then it's because of his adventure stories," Mother said. "Yes, they sound wonderful, and I *loved* the stories your father would bring home from his travels, but remember, crawling through mud while pinned down by a wild animal you've never seen before, or hoping you can repair your ship's life support before the raiders come back, is a lot less fun in person than it is in stories!"

This was probably true, Deanna thought privately, though she was careful not to let her mother hear it. Even as only a lieutenant, Will had had some wonderful stories. Almost as wonderful as the stories of the father she could barely remember. But many of them must have been frightening or unpleasant to live through. Even so, it would be better to have adventures than not, and if it was too much she could ask to be transferred to a Starbase or something. "Mother, they *want* me," she said. "I'm an *asset* to them, a gift!"

"Well, of *course* they want you," Lwaxana said. "You are my daughter. A daughter of the Fifth House. They'd be lucky to get you!"

"I'm not a cripple to be pitied or protected from life, I'm *powerful*. Talented. I can *do something*. I can help!"

"Oh, Deanna," her mother said, and her lips pinched together. That was the end of the conversation.

Starfleet was perfect for her. For the first time, nobody was talking over her head. For the first time, she was valued as herself instead of as a daughter of the Fifth House. For the first time, she wasn't handicapped. She loved it. More, she loved having a purpose, a mission, and she understood for the first time that her father had spent so much time away from home not because he was running away from Betazed (and Mother, and her), but because he was running *to* something.

By the time she met Will Riker again, on the bridge of the Enterprise, she'd grown up enough to realize she didn't need him as anything more than a friend. She didn't need him or anyone else to complete her. Their history was just that: history. A shared past, with no need to dominate their present. The last childish fantasy had faded without her knowledge, and it was good. (She knew her mother well enough, however, not to tell her she and Will were stationed on the same ship until she absolutely had to.)

Over the years that passed, as each focused on their own career and the occasional passing fling, a funny thing happened. When neither of them depended on the other, they could meet as equals. They could build a friendship without smothering, without desperation, without ambition getting in the way. And if that friendship led to something deeper and stronger than Deanna could have imagined when she first looked at Will and realized they'd done it, they'd formed an *imzadi* bond, well, that was far from the strangest thing Deanna had seen on the *Enterprise*.

End Notes

I'm also on [dreamwidth](#) and [tumblr](#).

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