

Safe and Sound

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by [jamaharon](#)

Summary

Geordi receives a subspace message from William Riker...

...six months too late.

Will must have forgotten to cancel the transmission.

That was the only reason Geordi could come up with – the only thing to explain why months after the U.S.S. *Titan* escaped the nebula, with his daughter Sidney home on leave, he received a message from Will Riker saying Sidney was dead.

Not in so many words. Not so harshly.

It started with an apology:

“Geordi...” Will’s eyes were strained in a way Geordi wasn’t used to, and his first thought – even though he saw the stardate on this comm, knew how old it was – was, *Really? After all those long conversations with Deanna, after all that foolish adventuring he did with Jean-Luc, he’s back in uniform again?*

“Geordi...” With a sigh, Will dry-washed his face. When he lifted his head again, he was the consummate Starfleet captain, a little pinched, but perfectly composed. “Your daughter, Sidney La Forge, is on my ship,” said Will heavily. “And we only have four hours of life support left.”

No.

Geordi paused the comm. He stared at the stardate in the bottom corner until it burned into his eyes. He *knew* this was old; he knew Sidney was fine. But still. Silently, he stood and paced down the dark hall to the guest room where Sidney stayed every time she visited.

“Life signs,” he said softly, not wanting to disturb her.

The door’s display screen lit up. Sidney La Forge was in bed, fast asleep, heart rate normal, blood pressure a little low. Nothing to be alarmed about, but Geordi read the signs over and over, just to reassure himself, and then reluctantly, he turned back to his desk, to the death message waiting for him.

He listened to Will’s apology for killing his daughter. He listened to every hitch and subtle break in Riker’s voice. He remembered the day of Thaddeus’ funeral, when Geordi and Jean-Luc sat alone in Will’s kitchen, Worf pacing just outside, and Deanna and Will and Kestra nowhere to be seen.

A private burial, Will explained. Betazoid custom.

But they all knew it wasn’t. Will just didn’t want his grief to be seen. He claimed he felt nothing: had to be strong for Deanna, couldn’t let his feelings leak through, could never allow his own pain to affect Kestra. Living alone with two empathes, what else could he do? Geordi, if he could bear to, if he had to, might have done the same.

He watched the rest of the message. He listened to Will Riker apologize for killing Geordi’s daughter, a daughter sleeping safe and sound in the other room. He watched the perfect facade of an emotionless captain crack. He watched the guilt pour out, all because of what Will imagined he had done to Geordi, because of the pain he thought he had put his old friend through. The same pain he’d been burying since the private burial where his friends waited alone in a sunlit kitchen for a version of Will Riker that would never really return.

He watched Will grieve.

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