

Imzadi

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by [jamaharon](#)

Summary

Eight years ago, Will Riker was left for dead on Nervalva IV. He was never stationed on Betazed; he never became the first officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise.

But in time, the Enterprise finds him, nonetheless. And so does Deanna Troi.

None of them were expecting a survivor on Nervalva IV, but here he was. Blue-eyed, gaunt, and mostly nonverbal, he sat in Beverly's office, submitting to a medical exam. Records indicated his name was Will Riker – a lieutenant, presumed dead when his ship passed through here eight years earlier.

“Presumed *dead*?” he said.

“That’s what it says here,” Counselor Troi confirmed. She tapped the screen of her PADD. “You were even given a *posthumous* award for heroism.”

He made a noise that might have been a laugh. No smile, but his eyes crinkled a little. Striking eyes. Cat-like.

“Guess that explains why no one came back for me,” he said. He held out his maimed right hand for Beverly to examine. There were only two fingers left. A mess of scar tissue had sealed the wounds and turned his palm into a deformed lump.

“Can I ask what happened?” Beverly asked, scanning his missing fingers.

Will Riker went silent. He watched the scanner, blank-faced, like he hadn’t heard. There was visible discomfort in the line of his shoulders.

“Will?” Deanna said gently.

“Uh, animal attack,” he said almost sheepishly. “I got this terrible infection from it. Thought I would lose my arm.”

“Are you in pain?” Beverly asked.

Again, no answer. Will bowed his head, letting his hair cover his eyes.

“You were in Ops before?” Deanna asked, checking her PADD. “We can proctor a skills test, if you like. If you’re interested in resuming active duty, we have a position open in Ops.”

Will hesitated. There was a gleam of hope in his eyes, guarded, like he couldn’t quite allow himself to believe her. But finally he nodded a little. “That would be nice.”

He’d have to learn how to speak to other people first, Deanna thought. He couldn’t work active duty if the only person he could talk to was her. He kept sneaking looks at Deanna from beneath his eyelashes as Beverly looked him over. A hypospray to the neck, a plastiseal over an open wound, and still, those pale blue eyes sought her out. It made Deanna’s stomach flutter.

“Will,” she said, “would you be interested in a prosthetic? I’m sure Beverly can work up some movable fingers for you.”

Will’s face lit up. “Oh, yes,” he said, and there was a sparkle in his eyes that made Deanna shift in her seat. “I need as much dexterity as I can get.”

“For working a phaser, I assume,” said Deanna sternly, turning scarlet.

“For my trombone,” said Will to Deanna, almost sincere and *practically* innocent. “I’m a musician.”

“And that’s all you meant?” asked Deanna shrewdly. “*Just* your trombone?”

The smile he gave her said it all. Deanna laughed again, unable to help herself, and Will smiled a little, too, and Beverly abruptly pocketed her hypospray and put her hands on her hips.

“Okay, you two,” she said. “What’s so funny?”

“*Beverly*,” Deanna said, too embarrassed to explain the joke. Besides, she was certain Beverly understood. She’d made dirtier jokes plenty of times. “I was just . . . well, you heard him.”

“No, I most certainly didn’t *hear* him,” said Beverly, staring at Deanna like she’d grown a second head.

“The trombone remark,” said Deanna helplessly.

“The *trombone* remark?” Beverly whipped out her medscanner and aimed it at Deanna’s head, eyes narrowed. Deanna gently pushed it away.

“The comment Will made,” she explained, “about his fingers.”

Will waggled his eyebrows, but Beverly was not amused. She lowered the medscanner and said, voice low,

“Deanna, Will hasn’t said a word. He *can’t* say a word. You two have been making weird faces and laughing to yourselves, but you sure as hell haven’t been *talking*.” She flipped the medscreen over so Deanna could see the scarring to Will’s vocal cords, the damage done by inhaling toxic gas years ago. Deanna stared at the screen, her face growing pale.

“But—” she started, and she met Will’s eyes, uncertain what to say.

But what? he said, head cocked.

And:

Oh, Deanna thought, her heart dropping. She knew this voice in her head, in her heart. She knew what it meant to hear him.

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