

Two Halves, One Soul

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Summary

Will's got a secret.

Deanna's got a secret, too.

And Lwaxana is a very talented telepath.

“My mother’s not like me,” Deanna said with a wrinkling of the nose.

“Oh?” Will couldn’t help but smile at her. He was so lost in the cuteness of that expression, the warmth of her arm hooked through his, the beauty of violet starlight playing off her eyes, that he almost missed her next words.

“She’s a full telepath,” Deanna said. “A very strong one, too.”

She slid her hand over Will’s, running her thumb gently over knuckles he’d scraped on their hike here. The sting of it pulled him back in time — the way he’d chased her, both of them laughing, until she fainted and led him straight into that thorn-bush. The way she’d tutted and cooed sarcastically over his ‘battle wounds’ and kissed the blood away, her lips trailing down to the tips of his fingers, her warm tongue teaching him, promising to take him in. But the memory brought him no warmth now. Will’s hand twitched in Deanna’s, his whole body flushing cold, and she looked at him in alarm.

“Will?” she asked, eyes narrow.

He suppressed a shiver.

“You don’t have to meet her if you don’t want to,” Deanna said, but now she looked concerned — not suspicious, and his chest thawed at that realization. Just concerned. “Or I could go with you,” she offered.

“No,” Will blurted. He squeezed Deanna’s hand to distract her from his spike of alarm. He clambered to his feet; the beauty of the lookout point seemed distant now, and adrenaline was buzzing in his veins. “I’ll go alone,” he said. He made an effort to soften his voice. “I know you don’t like her very much...”

“Still.” Deanna held out her hand, a silent request for Will to help her to her feet. He pulled her up and let her slide against him, until she clasped her hands at the small of his back and forced him into a hug. “You’re sure?” she asked.

He forced the fluttering in his stomach to subside. He boxed up his emotions, the same way he’d learned to as a cadet at his first command — and this time he had Deanna’s Betazoid tutoring to help him. Her expression smoothed out, the concern fading as Will’s emotions died down to a low roar.

“I’m sure,” he said with a smile.

He wasn’t sure.

He was this close to running back to Starfleet, actually. Will stood at the front step to the Manor of the Fifth House, an impressive old-world fortress with luscious purple flowers crawling up the stone walls. He rubbed his thumb against his forefinger in an old nervous tic.

A full telepath. A mind-reader, like the rest of Betazed. Only the rest of Betazed wasn’t Deanna’s mother. The rest of Betazed didn’t feel

obligated to tell her what they all knew — what Lwaxana would soon find out. Will swallowed against a tight throat and turned on his heel. He made it all of one step before his legs stopped working and he ground to a halt.

He rubbed the back of his neck. Stubble grazed his palm, and he took a ridiculous amount of comfort in that. With one hand over his stomach to quell the queasiness, he turned back and rang the bell.

Don't think about it, he told himself. *Don't think about it. Don't—*

The door opened. Lwaxana Troi, with her sharp-toothed smile and arms flung wide in welcome, emerged from within.

“You must be William,” she said, taking his sweaty hands in hers. “Deanna’s new pet!”

Hell. He was thinking about it. His jaw locked tight and he swallowed convulsively unable to answer. He thought of Elisabeth Riker passing her name on to a baby girl. He thought of a daughter stomping her foot, age two, and demanding to dress like Dad. He thought of Kyle Riker helping him reel in a fish on that stupid pink-colored fishing pole, acting like Will didn’t have the strength to do it alone.

Lwaxana blinked. Her smile faltered — fixed — became too bright, too lavish.

“You must come inside,” she said.

She detached herself from Will with all the slimy grace of a parasite easing off a moray eel. He stood frozen on the doorstep for a moment, his limbs tensed and his stomach heaving, and mopped the sweat from his face. Kyle sitting him down at the kitchen table and telling him, *You know, you don't have to prove you're not her. I know you're not her. Why don't you grow your hair out again?* And Will taking the airbus into Fairbanks at fifteen, seeing a doctor on his own, that first stinging hypospray to the thigh...

In the foyer, Will could hear Lwaxana’s footsteps leading him to the living room. But he couldn’t see her. His vision was broken up by sunspots. He tilted his head back and rubbed hard at his closed eyes.

He saw Deanna lacing their fingers together, marveling at how much larger his hands were. He saw her locking her arm with his on a walk, sizing up the men who passed by, not-so-secretly emanating smugness when Will towered over them. He saw her playing with his chest hair, tugging at the little curls, lying her head against his heart to listen to his deep voice reverberate as he spoke.

“William?” Lwaxana called.

Will followed her to the living room like a man walking toward the execution chamber. He accepted a book she handed him without seeing it and took the seat she directed him to. His eyes roamed aimlessly around the walls, staring at everything but her.

William, said a commanding voice in his head.

He met her eyes. Lwaxana crossed her legs and rearranged her sheer robes around her with all the delicacy of a queen. She tilted her chin up a little. A strange gesture, Will thought dully. Then he realized she was gesturing imperiously toward the book in his hands.

Open it, darling, Lwaxana said. *Before you empty your stomach on my Targinian carpets.*

Oh. What was the point of going through the motions? She would tell Deanna — maybe already had, telepathically. But with a shrug, Will opened the book. A scrapbook. Photos and letters, certificates in the native tongue — his translator couldn’t parse the handwritten Betazoid text, but he guessed these were letters from Ian Troi. Love notes. He flipped through them, winced a little at the wedding photos, stared at the baby shower with dull eyes.

Keep going, said Lwaxana lightly, absently.

Will turned the page. Deanna as a baby, dark-eyed, with tufts of unruly hair sticking up from her head. His nerves faded a little, replaced by a helpless wash of affection so fierce it almost overwhelmed him.

Keep going, Lwaxana said, and Will turned the page again.

And there was Lwaxana, younger, with Ian at her side, and a tiny dark-haired child sitting between them — a boy with short curly hair and wide expressive eyes and a delicate nose Will had seen a million times before.

Deanna.

Will glanced up and caught Lwaxana smiling at him.

Before she was 'Deanna,' she confirmed. Her smile pinched inward at the ends, affection mixed with condescension, like Deanna had always complained about. *Now go to your Imzadi, you stupid man*, Lwaxana said.

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