

Misunderstandings

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Summary

If Beverly's sure of one thing, it's that she doesn't like the future first officer of the Enterprise one bit.

...But when Will Riker shows up in her sickbay with a private request, Beverly might change her mind.

She'd only known him for a short time, but Beverly was 99% convinced she didn't like Commander William Riker.

Like her, he was stationed temporarily on Deneb IV, waiting to transfer to the Enterprise. She would be the Chief Medical Officer; he would be the first officer, and whenever Beverly looked at him, she saw a boy playing dress-up in an officer's clothing. Arrogant and overconfident and just a tad smarmy, convinced he could handle everything life threw his way.

Jack had been like that once. Gentler, wiser, with more to lose. And he'd died anyway.

So no, Beverly didn't care for William Riker. Unfortunately, *Wesley* did, so she saw the damn fool all the time. She'd caught him teaching Wesley how to play poker — and another time, she'd been furious to catch them at a bar, downing cocktails, and for a moment she'd seen red (mollified only slightly when she tested Wesley's drinks and discovered they were alcohol-free). Riker had taken an almost brotherly role with Wesley; they could be found jogging together in the morning or practicing the warm-up moves of some no-doubt-dangerous martial art — or they might be spotted in the hangar bay, with Wesley in the cockpit of a grounded vehicle and Riker's too-tall form standing on tiptoe to show him the controls and walk him through the start-up procedure.

A brotherly influence, certainly. Not necessarily a good one. When Wesley wasn't around, Beverly kept a close eye on Riker, and she kept tabs on what she saw.

One bar fight with a local. Having won it, Riker slunk off to treat his bruised jaw on his own, deliberately avoiding sickbay.

Seven and a half dalliances with local women, most of whom he seemed to meet the same night he bedded them, and made an effort to never see again.

Flirtatious, cocky, and obnoxiously macho, Riker was everything Beverly *didn't* want Wesley to grow up to be. As a Starfleet officer, he was competent enough, and he had plenty of brains, but he seemed more inclined to flash his baby-blues at his adversaries rather than put those brains to good use. Worse still, no matter how frosty she was, Riker never seemed to take the hint. He seemed affably convinced that she just needed to get to know him better, and all her animosity would wash away.

Well, he was wrong about that. Beverly watched him break hearts in the local bar; she watched him corrupt Wesley one day at a time; and she started to dread her stint on the Enterprise, already counting down the years until it ended.

...And then Will Riker showed up in her sickbay.

"Bev!" he said, as if startled to see her. He froze in the doorway, arms akimbo, and looked her up and down with a visible swallow. He'd just started to turn on his heel when Beverly snapped,

"You can call me Doctor. What do you need, Commander?"

He hesitated mid-turn. Slowly, he faced her, rubbing his thumb hard against his index finger and tapping one foot. That was another thing she couldn't stand about this man: so damn fidgety. But there was an unmistakable nervous edge to his face, so she kept her exasperation intact.

"Something personal?" she asked, softening a little.

Riker's suave poker face wavered. "You could say that, I guess. Is there anyone else here?"

"Not at the moment," Beverly said. She made a concerted effort to relax her shoulders and look more friendly. Riker couldn't quite meet her eyes — or at least, couldn't hold her gaze once he did. He glanced around the sickbay instead, one shoulder hitched up high. His eyes were narrow, his cheeks a little flushed.

Embarrassed, Beverly realized.

STI, she realized immediately after that.

"Alright, let's hear it," she said in a sigh. "And don't make me hunt for the poor girl's name. She needs to know, too."

Riker whipped his head around to stare at her, his eyebrows furrowed. "What girl?" he asked, even as he rubbed his palms together in a nervous tic.

"I'm a doctor, Will," said Beverly, using his given name for the first time. "I've seen it all. There's no need to be embarrassed."

"What girl?" he repeated, his voice a little harder now. When Beverly just crossed her arms and gave him The Look, he went through a subtle change. No longer nervous (well, maybe a little), he squared his shoulders and let his chest swell in a deep breath. "May I see your padd?" he asked a little stiffly.

Beverly handed it over. From his uniform pocket, Riker produced a datachip and stuck it in the slot. The padd screen flickered and resolved, showing a form Beverly was very familiar with — it was the Starfleet medical request form for non-emergency surgeries. Eyebrows furrowed, she leaned closer and scanned the lines. Everything was already filled out ... except Beverly's signature.

"What is this?" she murmured. Riker was close at hand, his body heat warming her arm. So close she could sense that he wasn't really breathing, and she looked up at him in concern. The hard expression on his face fractured a little.

"It's a request," he said, his voice guarded.

"I can see that."

"I need you to sign off on it."

"I can see that, too." Beverly checked the code he'd put in instead of writing out what the surgery was for. She'd never seen anyone do that, unless they were a med tech themselves. And she wasn't familiar enough with the code to translate it off the top of her head. She grabbed her handheld from the counter and started to punch it in.

"Bev..." said Riker softly, sounding wounded.

"Commander, I can't sign off on a surgery unless I know what it's for," said Beverly strictly. "For all I know you've requested Klingon forehead implants or penis enlargement—"

Riker bristled just as Beverly finished typing in the code. The result flashed on her screen.

"Penis enlargement," she read in disbelief. Beside her, Riker looked like he might cry. Then Beverly blinked and read the screen more carefully. "Penis ... *implant*?" she said. She turned to face him. "Will—"

He looked like he wanted nothing more than to grab the chip back and run away, but he held firm, meeting her eyes with the stony expression of a Starfleet diplomat. Beverly scanned down his body. She'd never had him in sickbay before, so she'd never scanned him — wasn't familiar with his medical history, though she could guess some things by looking at him. Chronic back pain, for one. Now, moving slowly and telegraphing her movements so he could stop her if he wanted to, Beverly raised her scanner and pointed it at him.

The muscles in Riker's cheeks tightened. He held still, waiting for it to be over. In silence, Beverly read the results. There was evidence of major cosmetic surgery to Riker's chest — and confirmation of the old spinal injury she'd suspected — and between his legs there was an advanced bio-electric prosthetic, one of the finest she'd ever seen. The evidence tallied up.

"You're *female*," she said.

"No," said Riker, his voice rough but firm. Beverly blinked, confused at first — then her brain caught up and she flushed a light red, embarrassed by the misstep.

"No, of course not," she corrected herself. "I'm sorry, Will. Most people transition in childhood. I've never..."

His eyes darkened, but he gave her a stiff, understanding nod. "Wasn't an option," he said, voice clipped. He gestured to the surgical request form, lifting one finger just a little to indicate it; Beverly got the impression, from that muted gesture, that he was finding it difficult to move at all. "I want to get this done before I join the Enterprise," he said.

"Of course." Beverly searched for a light-pen, her mind reeling. Gender transition was, for her, mostly theoretical. She'd never been a pediatrician, so it had simply never come up. For someone to make it all the way to adulthood without receiving the necessary medical care ... it was a case of neglect so extreme it made her head spin. She signed her name, amazed that her hand stayed steady.

She handed the chip back to Riker when she was done. Her fingers brushed his — broad and rough and so masculine she never would have known, if he hadn't told her. She hesitated, searching his eyes — the grim expression on his face, so guarded, so wary.

"Wesley..." Beverly started.

Riker's hard gaze flickered, softened a little. "I know. He told me."

"Did you tell him?"

Reluctantly, Riker let his stony expression melt a little. He gave Beverly a weary half-smile. "He's one step ahead of you, Doc. He clocked me somehow, the first day we met."

Her shoulders relaxed. "*That's* why he latched onto you," she said, almost exasperated at himself. "Of course. I should have known."

Riker shrugged his lopsided shrug. "What, you thought it was my charming personality?" His eyes sparkled a little. As if he could read Beverly's mind — as if he'd been reading her this entire time — he said, "I'll do my best not to turn your son into a hooligan, Bev."

Beverly compressed her lips into a thin line. "I never thought—"

"And I'm not trying to replace Jack," Will said, his eyes unbearably soft. Beverly's protest caught in her throat and turned into a mortifying gasp, choked back. Her cheeks heated; her voice died; she stared down at her feet, unable to look him in the eye. One broad hand touched her shoulder and gave her a gentle squeeze. "No one could replace Jack," Will promised.

She couldn't muster up a reply. Her vision was still swimming, her hands covering her eyes, as Will turned and left. The sickbay was damnably silent without him. All Beverly could hear was her own strained breathing and the occasional sniff as she kept herself under control. With a fresh new sinus headache, she blinked the moisture from her eyes and turned back to her padd so she could download the scan results and get Will's official medical file started.

He *was* overconfident, she decided. Or at least he pretended to be, and he faked it so well nobody could tell the difference. And he was too flirtatious, and a bit smarmy, and almost certainly he would influence Wesley into all kinds of mischief. But the old injuries and medical neglect in his file painted a very different picture from the man she'd initially seen, from the commander she didn't like one bit.

She'd misjudged him, Beverly realized. She'd misjudged him terribly, and he'd been kind enough to forgive her for it; she could tell from the way he comforted her before he left, the kind words about Jack, the way he guided Wesley and made him feel at home in his own skin. She'd come to all the wrong conclusions about Will Riker; now she knew better; now she understood, at least a little, why he and Wesley got along so well.

And suddenly, those long years waiting for her on the Enterprise didn't seem so bad.

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