

Stay

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/751) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/751>.

Rating: [Mature](#)
Archive Warning: [No Archive Warnings Apply](#)
Category: [F/M](#)
Fandom: [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#)
Relationship: [Deanna Troi/William Riker](#)
Character: [Deanna Troi](#), [William Riker](#)
Additional Tags: [Hurt/Comfort](#), [Telepathic Bonds](#), [Fluff](#), [Friends to Lovers](#), [Voyeurism](#), [Whump](#)
Language: English
Stats: Published: 2022-10-24 Words: 2,542 Chapters: 1/1

Stay

by [jamaharon](#)

Summary

Five times Deanna secretly spied on Will's mind.

One time she let him know.

It was a cold, rainy, miserable planet, but Will Riker seemed to like it. The sun still wasn't up yet when Deanna woke. She wasn't sure at first what woke her; then she heard the quiet rustle of a tent — not her own, but one of the men's tents nearby — and near-silent footsteps whisking by in the frosty grass. She knew who it was, of course. She could sense Will's mind, awake and irritatingly lively. Their old bond was rusty, almost non-existent sometimes, but it was always strongest when Deanna had just woken, like her mind sought his out in her sleep. She could sense the bitter cold biting at his nose and knuckles, the worse-than-usual ache of his old spinal injury. But still, unmistakably, he was excited.

And there weren't any enticing young ladies on this planet, so Deanna had to find out why.

She pulled her boots on and wrapped herself in a warm winter parka. Unlike everyone else, she'd taken it upon herself to line her winter gear with luxurious loxen fur. It didn't matter. It was so cold when she stepped outside her tent that Deanna nearly bowled over backwards and rolled back inside. She wrapped her arms around her stomach and took off after Will at a trot.

"Which way?" she called softly when she was out of earshot of the tents.

In the darkness, Will waved at her, making his shadow stand out from all the rest. She changed direction slightly and hurried afterward.

"Careful," he said as the ground sloped. "It's—"

The wet grass slid beneath her feet. A mix of slushy snow and cold water soaked her boots. Deanna lost her balance and would have fallen backward if Will hadn't caught her, one arm around her waist, his face close and his body breathtakingly warm.

"—slippery," he said with a smile. Deanna swatted his arm and he let her go, but gently, making sure she had her footing first.

"So tell me — what calls you down to this slimy mudhole so early in the morning?" she asked, looking out over the pond. The surface was dark and glassy, scrimmed with ice. Water reeds poked through the snow banks on the edges and a stench of algae and dead 'spinies' — as they called the local sea-life — filled the air.

"Just stretching my legs," Will said.

His tone, as ever, was light. His eyes were smiling. He thrust his hands in his pockets and looked out over the water, shoulders relaxed. But he was hiding something, Deanna could tell. She stood next to him, close enough to steal some of his body heat, and the longer they stood, the closer she got — until he slung one arm around her shoulders and pulled her close, her back to his chest. Warm.

He must have still been sleepy, too, because when Deanna closed her eyes, his mind reached out to hers. Lazy and slow, it unfolded. He was ten years old, and the sun wouldn't be up for hours, but he sneaked out of bed as quietly as he could and dressed with the lights off. Galoshes and a fishing vest, a waterproof wax jacket over top. The clothes weren't enough to keep him warm, but they would do. Anything to get out of the house before Dad woke up — to get some peace and quiet down by the lake before school. Away from the bickering. From the criticism of his grades, his mouth, his attitude, his diligence, his skill at everything from anbo-jytsu to manners to cooking and cleaning to...

Well, to fishing. Which was why he liked to go alone, to watch the fish break free of the water's surface and the golden glow of sunrise on the lake. Peaceful, calm, no one looking over his shoulder to tell him all the many ways he'd gone wrong.

But no one to keep him warm, either, Deanna thought, and she wrapped her fingers around Will's arm and held him close.

It was an unusual arrangement.

They'd talked about this when both of them were young. But it never came to pass, and over the years, Deanna let the fantasy go — along with their relationship. Even now, they weren't exactly back together. Just friends. But they were fulfilling the fantasy nonetheless.

“You sure about this?” asked Consultant Biers, who sat in Deanna's favorite armchair with his trousers unbuckled.

“Deanna?” asked Will, who was currently kneeling between Biers' legs.

“Proceed,” said Deanna. She lounged on the bed, watching them with her chin resting on her hand and a slight smile tugging at her lips. She could sense Will's puppy-dog excitement — a shadow of what it used to be when their bond was full, but a feeling she knew well. He always got like this when he had something new to try: eager to please, to experiment, to gauge her reaction. Always hopeful that she would love it. Usually right.

Across the room, Will pulled Consultant Biers' half-hard cock from his trousers and lowered his head. His lips parted over the tip, and from her angle, Deanna could see the blush of arousal high on his cheeks, the dark red of his tongue pushing against Biers' slit. Dimly she heard Biers gasp and saw his hands clench on the chair's arms, but she paid him little attention. He was more Will's type than hers: willowy, androgynous, sensitive.

And Will enjoyed giving. And he had a clever tongue. And as Biers twisted his fingers in Will's hair and pulled him closer — as Will took Biers' cock deep in his throat and swallowed — Deanna decided she rather liked to watch.

She brushed his mind with hers. All she meant to do was get a glimpse of his pleasure, use it to enhance her own. She'd done that before when they were young; he felt pleasure so fully, so innocently, that it was intoxicating. But perhaps before, when she did this, her mind had been clouded by her own arousal, because now she saw clearly what she'd never seen before. What should have been obvious.

That he liked making other people feel good.

He liked it more than anything in the world.

“What is that?” Deanna asked.

Will gave her an innocent look as he stirred his tea. On the saucer before him were two individually wrapped, luscious-looking candies — dark and creamy, with a distinct chocolate and coffee fragrance.

“Oh, did you want one?” Will asked.

Deanna bit back a smile and put her hands on her hips. “If you're offering.”

His faux-innocent look faded into something more genuine, eyes crinkling with delight. “I got them especially for you,” he admitted. “When I was planetside with the Ossorians, they took me through the market square. One of the Senators has a cousin who specializes in Earth-style truffles.”

“What's the flavor?” Deanna asked, plucking one from the saucer.

“That one's coffee, as you can probably tell. The other one's rum.”

Deanna popped it into her mouth. Rich, subtle, notes of vanilla to make the chocolate and coffee filling really pop. Her eyes fluttered closed.

“Chase it with this,” Will said, and Deanna reached out before she even opened her eyes, knowing his hand would meet hers halfway. His teacup pushed into her palm. Their fingers brushed, electric, warm, utterly familiar.

And his mind unfolded, as it did sometimes. When he was sleepy. When he was hurt. When they were touching. And Deanna took a sip of his tea and tasted him on the rim of the cup, and in his mind she saw a heart-squeezing earnest desire to be as likable as possible, to bring her these small gifts, to keep her laughing. To keep her coming back.

Not romantically, she realized, and her heart melted. Just as a friend. The realization, paradoxically, made her blush.

“Let me try the other one,” she said.

The alien guide was named Jalole. His children, who tackled him with shrieks of joy at the doorway, were named Jarrop, Jadolily, Blojid, Blubjis, and Jadaobb. Deanna was still muttering them under her breath to try and memorize them when Jalole led his guests to the dining room.

“Welcome,” said his mate Hina, an enormous and gender-neutral creature who looked like an entirely different species. “Jalole has told me much about you.”

“The lovely Hina,” Will said, voice warm. He stood on tiptoe to kiss Hina’s multi-jointed knuckles while everyone else searched for a place to sit. When he was done, he pulled Deanna’s chair out for her — returned her smile — and then grew flustered and pulled out Worf’s chair, too, as if to prove his chivalry was non-romantic.

The net effect was that Hina and Jalole assumed all three of them were together.

“Your mates are lovely,” said Jalole politely.

Deanna hid a smile. Worf bristled.

“They are,” Will agreed. “But they’re not my mates. Only my friends.”

Worf grunted and kept his eyes on his plate. Luckily Hina started dishing out the food at that moment, and they all had an excuse to change the subject and lose themselves in the joyous, ear-splitting raucousness of Jalole and his children. The kitchen was warm and softly-lit, the smell of home-cooked food filling the air, and at every plate there was a glass of throat-burning golden liquor that left Deanna feeling loose-limbed and giggly as the evening wore on.

“Are you really an alien, or are you just another species?” one of Jalole’s children demanded of Will.

“I suppose both,” said Will with a grin. “I am from outer space, if that’s what you mean.”

“I *told* you so,” said the child called Blubjis.

“If you’re an alien, does that mean you can shoot venom from your mouth?” asked Jadolily. Deanna spotted the wily grin on Will’s face and elbowed him before he could lie.

“No,” he admitted, rubbing his sore ribs.

“Can you fly, though?” asked Jadolily.

“Er, no, not without a machine,” Will said.

“Well, can you breathe underwater?”

“I’m starting to feel inadequate,” Will said to Deanna.

“Jado, darling, stop pestering the guests,” said Jalole with affection in his voice. “They may not fly, but I’ve heard they eat little kids who ask them too many questions.”

Jadolily stared Will down. The other siblings just giggled, but the laughter died down a little when the heaping serving platters reached them and Hina helped them fill their plates with seconds. Beside Deanna, Will followed every movement with a half-smile still lingering on his lips and a dazed look in his eye. It was certainly a lot to take in, Deanna supposed. They were a large family, jubilant and outgoing. The air practically sang with their love for one another. It showed in every movement, every joke, every gentle word.

She brushed Will’s mind with her own and saw that he’d never experienced this before. Two parents, happy and healthy. A dinner table where the children ate alongside loving family members, and no one expected them to prepare their own food. Free conversation, un-self-conscious, without the constant worry that someone might say something wrong and set off their father’s temper. Will watched them all with shining eyes.

And then he turned those shining eyes on Deanna. He studied her face, his lips parted, his expression soft.

I could have this someday, he thought to himself, swallowing his smile, and Deanna heard it as clearly as if he’d spoken the words aloud.

The breaks in his ribs were bad, but the drugs were worse. He didn’t feel like *Will* at all when Deanna entered the medbay. His presence had soured, like a bitter smell filling the air, and it was only when she was close enough to touch that she realized — with relief — it was artificial, alien.

“What did they do to you?” she asked, brushing his hair back from his forehead. “You look terrible.”

Will could barely open his eyes. He groaned and leaned into her touch. “You really hate the beard that much?” he said, voice weak.

Despite herself, Deanna choked back a laugh.

“They drugged me,” Will admitted. He forced his eyes open so he could study her face. “A paralytic agent. Beverly’s working on it — look.”

With the utmost effort, he managed to wiggle his fingers. Just a little.

“Masterful,” said Deanna. “Do the cat’s cradle next.”

“Please. That’s child’s play. With fingers this fast, I could—”

A young-looking medic walked their way and Will clammed up, giving Deanna an innocent look. This was their favorite game to play in times of crisis: one joke after the next, each trying to be the funniest, to laugh the tension away. He was a natural at it, but neither of them could keep a straight face for long. Deanna settled into a plastoid chair at his side and ran her hand over his chest to feel his heartbeat.

“I heard it was bad down there,” she said.

The column of his throat shifted as he swallowed. He couldn't muster the energy to turn his head, so he just kept staring at her, his face open and his eyes soft.

“It was alright,” he said. “But next time I'll probably get a different hotel.”

“Bad room service?” Deanna asked. She'd seen the footage of the homemade bombs, the windows shattering, the walls of flames shooting out of the hotel lobby. She'd watched until her stomach tied itself into knots.

“Sub-par,” Will said. “Thin walls. Kind of noisy.”

He'd been wounded trying to rescue a child. That's when they caught him, Worf said. They'd stuck him in the neck with that paralytic agent and he'd watched, helpless, as they finished the job, eradicated all the injured civilians. Deanna probed his mind as they talked, their voices quiet and light-hearted, and she sensed everything she expected to find: grief and survivor's guilt, horror and waves of emotional numbness, pain and fear that he would never recover. Not fully.

But more than that there was an urgent need to make Deanna smile, to stay strong for her and everyone else in medbay. To prove himself competent and dignified and worthy of command. Because if he didn't — if he slipped — if they found him lacking—

Will, two years old, curled up to his mother's dead body — fifteen years old and waking up alone in an empty house, his father gone — entering an abandoned space station and finding a clone of himself there, abandoned, un-searched-for, unmissed.

Will trailed off. Maybe he saw something in Deanna's face that made him go quiet; maybe he was just tired of pretending.

“They might ask you to leave soon,” he said, his voice impossible to read, his emotions wide open. “If you're here past visiting hours, I can't protect you from Beverly's wrath.”

Deanna smiled a little, her lips trembling. Will studied her face, his own features composed and blank — his poker face. Perfectly neutral even as his emotions swelled inside his chest and howled in Deanna's ears, demanding to be heard. And that professional expression didn't break even when Deanna took his hand and squeezed it tight.

“I'll stay,” she said.

Will searched her eyes. He asked a question without words. She squeezed his hand again, palm to palm, their fingers interlaced.

“I'll stay,” she said again.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!