

Two Times Riker Accidentally Called Picard "Dad"

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by [jamaharon](#)

Summary

...and one time he did it on purpose.

Riker was barely conscious when they beamed him out of the alien hospital. Half-dried blood crusted a gash across his forehead and over his eye, and beneath the shock blanket, there was a primitive alien medpatch covering the left side of his torso from his waistband all the way up over his ribs. Picard walked at a brisk pace alongside the stretcher, near Riker's head, one hand on the stain-proof fabric.

He should have kept his eyes up, on the hallway, he knew. But he couldn't help it, and there were other people to steer the stretcher to medbay. He kept his gaze fixed to Number One instead, his hand so close to Riker's head that he could feel the soft brush of hair against his knuckles with every jostling step. Riker's eyes, dark-lashed and a pale piercing blue, fluttered open now and then to fix, unfocused, on Picard's face.

Each time, Picard mustered up a smile. Each time, Riker stared at him, brows knit in confusion, and then faded back into unconsciousness again. By the time they reached the medbay doors, those fainting spells had mostly resolved, and Riker was aware but groggy, still trying to formulate the perfect joke to announce that he was awake.

"...ad?" he murmured, lips barely moving, voice thick.

"Hush now," said Picard. He brushed Riker's hair back from the open gash on his forehead. "Save the wisecracking for later, Number One."

Riker's eyes slid over to land on Picard's face. "Daddy?" he said, more clearly now.

The lieutenant at the foot of the stretcher stumbled.

"No, your dad's not here," said Picard loudly, fighting back a blush. He could feel it creeping up to his ears anyway. Seven hells. Where the hell had that come from? Don't focus on it, Jean-Luc. Keep a blank face. "You're on the Enterprise," said Picard, pure professionalism. "In the medbay."

Riker grunted and let his eyes slide closed again. On the other side of the stretcher, Worf was giving Picard some serious side-eye.

"He's confused," said Picard, still blushing.

"Clearly," said Worf.

It was a quiet day on the bridge. Picard pretended to like these kinds of days; he made sure to note in his captain's log that peace and safety were greater than any scientific discovery they might make ... but privately, he disagreed, just a little. In his boredom, he'd taken up the age-old pastime of chatting on the job, first wrangling Worf and Data into a stiff-backed argument over Klingon semantics, then calling in Geordi's opinion, then soliciting Ensign Crusher, until the resulting cacophony drew in Riker, Beverly, and Deanna, each of them poised to provoke or toss in a curveball when the debate died down.

It was in the middle of all this good-natured teasing and lively discussion that it happened.

"No sane man would interpret the texts as such," Worf insisted.

"Oh?" said Riker, eyes dancing. "Well, I believe at least one sane man has. You're familiar with the Klingon ethnologist K'saz Vrakum?"

“Yes,” said Worf begrudgingly.

“If you consult his seminal text on semantics I think you’ll find he and young Ensign Crusher are in perfect agreement,” Riker said, and Data pulled up the text in question at once, reading through it at a rapid pace.

“Why, Number One,” said Picard, amused. “I didn’t know you took such an interest in ethnology.”

“Klingon studies seemed rather relevant to me, for some reason,” Riker said, darting a glance at Worf.

“Well, indulge an old man in his pride,” Picard said, and he meant it genuinely, even if you could barely hear him over Data’s flat-toned recital. “It’ll be nice to discuss the finer details of alien societies with another officer of the bridge.”

Riker gave him a crooked smile, one eye narrowing into almost a wink. “Thanks, Dad,” he said cheerfully.

Everyone except Data went quiet. Riker turned to them, glancing from one face to the other, evidently unaware of what he’d said.

“What did I miss?” he asked.

Beverly and Deanna looked at Picard. Everyone else found something interesting to stare at or mumbled amongst themselves. Slowly, Riker turned and gave Picard a puzzled look.

“What did I say?” he asked.

“Nothing, Number One,” Picard assured him, his chest squeezing tight. “I believe we missed a rather clever Klingon joke, that’s all.”

“K’saz Vakurn has a sense of humor?” Riker asked.

Behind him, Beverly opened her mouth to say something and Deanna reached for Riker’s hand. Picard gave them both a quelling look, more for his own sake than for Riker’s.

“Notorious sense of humor,” he said, so severely that Riker just looked more confused. “Mr. Worf, if you don’t mind repeating the joke?”

And while Worf kindly but awkwardly invented a joke on the fly, Picard massaged his chest and tried to figure out why it felt like liquid fire had settled in his lungs.

“You’re kidding,” Picard said, amazed.

Immediately, he regretted it. Riker had a good poker face, but now there was a faint embarrassed flush on his cheeks, and he dipped his head a little to stare at the floor.

“I shouldn’t have said that,” Picard corrected himself. He put a gentle hand on Riker’s arm and squeezed. “Well, of course you don’t know, if no one taught you. It’s only natural.”

“Right,” Riker agreed, still blushing a little. He followed Picard deeper into his quarters, to the wardrobe where Picard kept his civilian clothes and ready-made disguises for planet-side events. “Well, it’s not just…” Riker started. He swallowed his own words, eyes darting around Picard’s quarters, and started again. “There aren’t many black-tie events in Alaska.”

“I suppose not,” Picard said. Then again, most black-tie events wouldn’t invite a child, either, and Riker had only had 13 years to learn before his father went away. “Well, let’s see,” Picard said, examining his clothes. “Here. This’ll do.”

He tossed one of his old-fashioned collared shirts Riker’s way.

“It’ll be too small for me,” said Riker, amused.

“Don’t worry about that. All you need is a collar to practice on; whether the buttons close is no matter.”

Riker shrugged the shirt on over his uniform and adjusted the collar. The shirt tails hung loose, down to his belt; the lapels curved in over his stomach, hanging in a way that totally altered his silhouette. Picard found himself strangely entranced by the sight; he had to force himself to turn back to the closet and find a tie.

“There we are.” He pulled it from the rack, silky and smooth fabric running through his fingers. “Watch me first, then I’ll show you what it looks like from your point of view.”

Riker nodded. The look on his face was so solemn Picard had to smile; it was the same expression he wore his first day on the Enterprise, when Picard tested him with that manual docking. And remembering how coldly he’d congratulated Riker that day, Picard’s smile disappeared. He turned his attention to the tie instead.

“This is called a Windsor knot,” he said, his voice low.

Riker nodded again, completely silent.

“You put the seam side down,” Picard said, flipping the tie over to show Riker the flat line going up its middle. “And you adjust it like so, with the thin end resting just above your rib cage.”

Riker’s eyes were narrow and dark, set firmly on Picard’s long fingers as he made an X with the tie and pushed the thick end through the hole — behind the hole — through again — the knot growing thicker and thicker, with a little tug at the end of each step to tighten it up.

When he was done, with a graceful flourish, Picard pulled on the skinny end of the tie until the knot was tight and high, the wine-dark fabric flushed against his skin. Riker's eyes were stuck on the column of Picard's throat now.

"You see?" Picard said.

"It seems simple enough," said Riker, his voice difficult to read. "I suppose I could have reverse-engineered it from the finished product."

"Confident as ever, Number One," said Picard with a smile. He shucked the tie off his neck and crossed the room, immediately struck by the surge of body heat through Riker's clothes as he grew close. "Now, from your point of view..." Picard said.

He stood behind Riker, chest-to-back. This way, Riker could see the tie around his own neck, the movements as they would appear on his own hands. He kept his chin angled slightly down, his breath ghosting Picard's knuckles, and from behind Picard could see the curve of Riker's cheekbones and the dark shadow of his eyelashes, but nothing more. He tied the knot slowly, hyper-aware of every time his hands brushed Riker's chest or throat, the touch of bare skin electric.

Then the knot was done, and Picard stepped away.

"Now you try," he said, voice rough. "Practice makes perfect."

Riker obliged with a half-smile. His first Windsor knot was fast, skilled, and almost obnoxiously prim. He squared his shoulders when he was done and gave Picard a smug look, and even tapped his heels together cadet-style for extra measure.

"How'd I do, Dad?" he asked brightly.

"Phenomenal," said Picard, voice dry.

This time, he was pretty sure Riker said 'dad' on purpose.

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