

Saying No

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/753) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/753>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Star Trek: The Next Generation
Relationship:	Jean-Luc Picard & William Riker
Character:	Jean-Luc Picard , William Riker
Additional Tags:	Flirting , Angst , Sex Addiction
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2022-10-23 Words: 444 Chapters: 1/1

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by [jamaharon](#)

Summary

Riker has a problem with saying no.

“Do you ever say no, Number One?” Picard asked him.

His tone was light, humorous. They’d both had a little bit to drink, and the lights in this alien bar were low, and with the band playing in the background, it was easy for Riker to miss the serious intent behind the question.

Almost.

“Who did I say yes to?” he asked casually, dragging his eyes away from the waiter.

“I suspect you wanted to,” Picard said with a twinkle in his eye, “if your captain weren’t here.”

“The implication is that you’d judge me for a planetside dalliance,” said Riker, “and I know that isn’t true. Besides—“ with a shrug and a smirk. “—he’s the one flirting with me.”

In a flash the waiter was back again, clad in a sparkly barely-there ensemble that left his muscles bare-skinned and bulging. He brushed a hand over Riker’s shoulder as he bent down to refill his drink. Riker and Picard maintained straight faces until the waiter retreated.

“Will you go to him, then, when I retire for the night?” asked Picard.

He’d never been this nosy before, and though his tone was still light, it was starting to make Riker self-conscious. He shrugged again and poked at the lush pink-and-orange flower left in his drink, floating among the ice cubes.

“It’s just that I’ve never seen you say no to anyone,” said Picard softly, “and I’m starting to wonder if you’re capable.”

“Consider my inhibitions intact, if somewhat loose,” Riker said. “I only say no when I’m late to the bridge.”

Picard smiled and accepted that the conversation was over. They turned to less tense subjects — history, archaeology, and of course the places they’d been — but the whole time Riker searched Picard’s face and heard those questions echoing in his mind. Why wouldn’t he be able to say no? That was the question. Because he needed it. Because he wanted to be touched so bad he didn’t care who it came from. If Deanna were here she’d make a few pointed comments about abandonment and touch starvation and searching for love. His mother, dead before he hit preschool. His father, gone before Riker’s voice even changed. But you couldn’t find a substitute for that kind of love through one-night stands and illicit engagements at local bars. Could you? Or could you love someone whole-heartedly, just for one night, and leave feeling like your effort was worthwhile?

When Picard finally retired for the night, Riker stayed in the bar alone, nursing his drink under the low lights. And when the waiter came back, off shift, Riker was no longer in the mood.

But he said yes.

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