

## Hands

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## Hands

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### Summary

Deanna doesn't know how to bridge-shuffle.

Riker teaches her how.

“You don’t know how to bridge?” Riker said.

“You sound so surprised,” said Deanna dryly. “When have you ever seen me at the poker table, Will?”

“Well, you’re here now.” He had that cheeky ‘gotcha’ grin on his face, entirely undeserved. Deanna folded her arms on the table and leaned forward to study the cards.

“What are you doing?” she asked. “Not solitaire.”

“No. It’s an old card trick. My dad invented it when he was young.”

Deanna gave the cards a doubtful look. It didn’t look much like a ‘trick’ to her. Just piles of cards sorted into houses. Ones here, eights there. Other piles that made less sense, like sequences of 2-4-6-8, all gathered together.

“You want to see it?” Riker asked, waggling his eyebrows.

“I feel as though I’ve been lured into a trap,” Deanna complained. “You had the same look on your face when you coerced me into that trombone concert.”

“You liked it,” said Riker with too much self-confidence. “Okay, we’ll run through this first, since I’ve already got it set up. Then I’ll teach you how to bridge.”

“A skill that will surely come in handy over the course of my career,” Deanna said.

“Too right!” Riker organized the piles at a rapid pace into one singular deck. Then, with a flourish, he revealed the top card.

A three of clubs.

“This is Little Nico,” Riker said. The next card he revealed was a three of spades. “And this is Big Nico. Little Nico and Big Nico are having a party.”

“This doesn’t seem like a trick so much as a bedtime story,” Deanna noted.

“Big Nico says to Little Nico, we need to invite some guests. Little Nico says, I know where to find some guys. Big Nico says, do they play cards? Little Nico says, oh yeah, they’re loaded to the hilt and ready to party.”

Deanna quirked an eyebrow. Riker scooped the two cards back into the deck and slid it over to Deanna.

“Cut it,” he said softly.

“I’m sorry?”

“Cut it anywhere you like,” he said, eyes sparkling.

Deanna studied him suspiciously. She cut the deck at a deliberately uneven angle and watched, flummoxed, as he cheerfully slapped the deck back together without even taking the time to study it first. He slid a handful of cards off the top and slapped them down on the table, face-up.

“Little Nico goes down one block—”

Another handful of cards slapped into place.

“Two blocks—”

Another.

“Three blocks—”

Another.

“Four blocks—”

And Little Nico shot out of the deck to land at Deanna’s fingertips.

“And then he comes back,” said Riker. “Big Nico says, you got the guys? And Little Nico says, oh yeah, just like I said. Four guys rich as kings.”

Four kings spilled out of the deck at Riker’s touch.

“You’ve arranged this deck very carefully,” said Deanna with a smile.

“That’s the important part,” Riker admitted. “Well, and memorizing the story so you don’t flub your lines.”

“It isn’t a very complex story so far.”

Riker took her through the next few stanzas — the street address where Little Nico found these kings filed out in cards, signified by numbers. The alcohol Little Nico collected for the party was represented by a handful of aces. Cash was exchanged between Big Nico and Little Nico and change was counted out by fives and tens. Queens and Jacks showed up to join the fun. By the time Little Nico revealed his age (again, represented by the cards, this time a 5 and a 2), Deanna had figured out the trick — there was an 8 of hearts placed at the bottom of the deck, so it would always be right before Little Nico no matter how many different ways Deanna cut the cards. Everything else was just a matter of stacking the cards to fit the story, and not forgetting any steps along the way.

Gradually she stopped paying attention to the cards. Instead she watched Riker’s graceful hands. The long fingers whipped over the deck with ease; his broad palms worked the cards like they were an extension of his body, and the little scar on his thumb where he’d gotten a fishing hook stuck in the flesh as a boy flashed silver in the light. The knuckles shifted beneath his skin as he neared the end of the deck.

And finally Riker finished out the sordid little story of parties and girls and gambling with an ironic bow.

“Your father taught you that?” asked Deanna, amused.

“Oh, no,” Riker said. “He didn’t *teach* me. He showed off to me — when I was very young, maybe five years old. And then I asked him how he did it and he told me to figure it out by myself.”

“And you did,” Deanna said, touching the cards nearest to her with a fingertip.

“I did,” said Riker with a little grin. “He wasn’t happy about that. He said I must have cheated.”

Deanna just snorted.

“He wouldn’t teach me to bridge, either,” Riker said, gathering the cards back together. He tapped them into a neat little pile. “Or most games. He only let me play after I studied the rules myself out of his little book of card games. I spent hours one afternoon holed up at the house, just bridge-shuffling until my fingers bled. All it takes is practice, really. Here.”

He cut the deck with practiced ease and slotted the two sides together, arching them in the middle to form a bridge. The cards flicked into place with a satisfyingly fast *brap brap brap*. Deanna had to admit there was an attractive elegance to it; it didn’t just look *professional*, it looked *fun*.

“Now you try,” Riker said, and he passed the cards to Deanna and at the same time stood, crossing the table to stand behind her chair. The heat of his body warmed her. His hands came down on either side of her shoulders, not touching her, but close enough that he could, if she wanted him to. He studied her face for a moment, asking a question without words.

Deanna nodded.

Gently, he cupped her hands in each of his own, his palms warm against her knuckles, his hands dwarfing hers. He manipulated her fingers until she was holding the cards correctly. Slowly, with care, he angled her wrists so she could form the bridge and rubbed his thumb against hers, and Deanna’s face heated and her heart pounded, and Riker rubbed her thumb again... until she got the hint and hitched her breath and let the cards go.

They scattered everywhere. Cards sprayed over the table and into Deanna's lap. The ace of spades flew up to smack Riker in the face and he turned his head away with a startled laugh. The whole time, his hands stayed in place over hers, warm and soft, gripping her in a gentle squeeze.

They stared at the mess of cards in silence.

"Well, it *was* your first try," Riker said.

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