

Dare

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Dare

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Summary

The crew of the Enterprise decides to play a primitive Earth game in Ten Forward one day, with plenty of synthelhol thrown in to spice things up.

“What did you call it?” asked Geordi, his head tilted to the side.

“Truth or dare,” said Data levelly. “A primitive game from 20th Century Earth. The rules are simple. A roll of the dice determines our first participant, who chooses another participant of his or her liking. This second participant must choose either ‘truth’, in which case they must answer any question of the asker’s choosing with complete honesty, or ‘dare’, in which case they must do whatever the asker orders of them.”

“Simple,” said Riker with an impish smile. Across the table, Troi raised her eyebrows at him, and he quickly schooled his face and looked away, pretending he hadn’t been aiming the words at her.

“I have read that synthelhol much enhances the process,” said Data.

“That sounds about right. A shot for everyone, then,” said Riker, and they all toasted each other before downing the drink. By the time the dice roll went to Worf, they were all feeling the effects (voluntarily, of course). Everywhere Riker looked, he found flushed cheeks and dark, wide pupils. Even Data had accepted the effects.

“Looks like I’m up first,” said Geordi when they’d all rolled. “Let’s see... Data, truth or dare?”

“I believe the logical choice would be truth,” said Data, “as I have nothing to hide.”

A wolfish grin took over Geordi’s face. “Alright, then. You’re a ‘fully functional’ android, Data. Have you ever taken advantage of those functions, fully, with a human being?”

Everyone groaned.

“It is possible I do not understand the question,” said Data. “I endeavor to function fully at all times. Otherwise my performance would be markedly less than optimal. Now it is my turn.”

“Hang on a second—”

Data turned to Ensign Crusher. “Truth or dare, Ensign,” he said.

“Dare,” said Wesley at once with a grin.

“I dare you to recite the entire Starfleet officer’s code while performing a handstand,” said Data drily.

More groans. This time they held a definite note of protest, but Wesley jumped to his feet and got right to it.

“This is going to take forever,” Lieutenant Hoxley complained.

“It is a variation of standard dares from the historical record,” Data said.

"Maybe use your discretion on the next one," Riker advised. "Adjust your questions and dares to fit the mood."

"Understood, sir. And what is the mood?"

Riker glanced around the table and grinned. "Fun, flirty, and brief," he said.

"Flirty?" said Geordi. Troi raised another eyebrow.

"Well, I've played this game a few times myself," said Riker, his grin getting wider. "Let's just say most people don't walk away fully clothed, or un-kissed."

Murmurs of discontent — or interest, depending on the person — filled the room, broken only by the constant background noise of Wesley's recital. When he finished, he bounced back to the table, his face still flushed from all the blood rushing to his head.

"Commander Riker," he said breathlessly. "Truth or dare."

"Dare," said Riker with the utmost confidence. "Let's keep things moving."

Wesley's lips tugged into a smile. "Okay. If you say so. I'm just gonna get this out of the way, since I know everybody's dying to say it. In fact, I imagine we've all been dying to say it for years."

Oh no. Suddenly Riker's chest was tight. And the grin on Wesley's face was just getting more sinister. Slowly, he said:

"I ...dare you...to kiss..."

Riker's own pounding heartbeat drowned out the rest of the sentence. He got the impression that Wesley was still talking. He could faintly hear the voice, as warbly and hard to decipher as the sounds his trombone made when he was cleaning it. And he could see Wesley's lips moving, first with a smile, then with a confused frown, but he couldn't make out a single damn word. Then Wesley stopped. Around the table, everyone looked at Riker curiously to see what he would do.

I dare you to kiss, he heard in his head, his heart racing. *I dare you to kiss...*

Who?

"Could you repeat that?" he asked politely.

"You heard me," said Wesley.

"I'm afraid I didn't."

"You were looking right at him, Commander," Geordi said, exasperated. "You're not fooling anyone."

"I really didn't hear," said Riker, flustered now.

"And why didn't you?" asked Troi.

Her face was blank. Her voice was carefully moderated. Her mind was closed, giving nothing away. Oh, God, what did that mean? Who had Wesley ordered him to kiss? He couldn't read her. Panicking a little, and striving not to show it, Riker looked at Lieutenant Hoxley, who stared back at him in blatant surprise, as if she couldn't believe he was really looking at her.

And what did THAT mean??

"Stalling does not make for a 'fun, flirty, and brief' game, Commander," Data told him. "I advise you to either follow the dare or forfeit."

"I..." He looked around the table once more. Now *Troi* was staring at him in confusion, like she couldn't believe it was taking so long, and if he waited a second longer, maybe that confusion would turn into hurt. The words 'I forfeit' died on Riker's tongue. Who the hell was he supposed to kiss? He didn't know. He stared down at his own hands, feeling sick.

"Commander," Wesley prompted.

"I can't do it," said Riker, suddenly miserable. Was it his own misery, or was it leaking from Troi's mind into his? He couldn't tell.

"So you forfeit?"

"I only mean it's an unreasonable dare," Riker said, and Geordi scoffed. Face burning, Riker insisted, "It is! It's inappropriate. I'm the second-in-command. I can't—"

"You can," said Troi archly, and her voice pierced right through Riker's heart. "You're just a coward."

A coward.

He supposed he was.

He'd been on this ship, on the *Enterprise*, for six years. And she'd been with him every second, every step of the way. And a million times, he'd almost told her how he felt — almost let himself admit it — and always, he'd hung back. He was her commander; they were stationed together; he wasn't good for her; they'd chosen other paths; all of these and a hundred reasons more, why he shouldn't stick his neck out, shouldn't ask her, go to her, expose all his feelings in their raw form, risk rejection all over again.

He *was* a coward. But he didn't have to be.

Palms sweating, face blank, Riker stood. He adjusted his uniform jacket with a tug. He pushed his chair into the table. His stomach was quaking; his knees felt watery and weak. With a few faint, stumbling steps, he crossed to the other side of the table and stood before Counselor Troi. A thousand memories flitted through his mind. The first time he ever saw her and the first time she smiled at him. The first time they touched each other's souls ... and the day he left Betazed, when both of them failed to say goodbye. It took all his courage to just work up the nerve to touch her face, his palm against her cheek, her eyes wide and beautiful and fixed on him.

Her lips parted, like an invitation, and her brows were furrowed in a delicate look of confusion and longing.

And Riker kissed her — like he'd always wanted to — gentle and long, with a thousand unspoken apologies folded into his touch.

When he pulled away, everyone around the table looked puzzled.

"There," said Riker, feeling like he might cry, or faint, or throw up all over the table. He realized he was trembling slightly and crossed his arms tight over his chest. "Are you happy now?"

Deanna put a hand on his arm to comfort him. "Oh, Will," she said softly, her voice full of warmth. And affection. And *amusement*. Riker blinked down at her, getting the impression that he'd somehow made the wrong move, and her lips stretched into a mischievous little smile.

"Data," she said, "play back Wesley's dare."

Data obliged. Wesley's voice came out of a speaker in Data's chest compartment.

"I dare you," he said, "to kiss Captain Picard. Right on the ass." And then, after a beat of silence, where Riker didn't respond, Wesley said, "No offense, Commander, it's just that everyone always said you were a kiss-ass, and... Commander?"

Deanna squeezed his arm and sent a wave of sympathy his way. Riker stared blankly at Data, then at Wesley. Then at Geordi. Then at Hoxley. Then at the empty glasses of synthehol, looking for something to blame. He swallowed hard.

"I forfeit," he said.

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