

River

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River

by [jamaharon](#)

Summary

She's been sensing his heartache all day, and now that their shifts are over, Troi finds Riker in the holodeck.

She found him in the holodeck, and as soon as she saw what he'd programmed, she wrinkled her nose and asked the replicator for a winter coat. With the down trapping her body heat and the snow boots protecting her feet, Deanna braced herself and entered the whipping ice-cold wind of Valdez, Alaska.

It was a fishing port. He'd told her about it briefly, when they were younger, but she'd never understood just how frozen in time this little town was. It was like stepping back into the 20th Century — like a movie set — and if Deanna hadn't seen the time stamp on the holodeck computer, she'd have assumed Will wanted it that way, that he'd keyed specifically for a point four centuries in the past.

But Will wasn't all that historical, really. Too focused on the future. On action. He liked to program the holodeck for extreme sports — battle simulations — adventures — but not for costumed romps backward in time.

And not to the sleep town he grew up in, either. Not usually. Deanna expected to find him skiing somewhere, maybe mountain climbing, maybe fishing. But she found him by the river instead, with his knees pulled up to his chest and a slosh of ice and snow pushing past on the current. His eyes were distant and glassy, but his mind wasn't fully closed to her. Not like it usually was aboard the Enterprise. She could feel the slow churn of his thoughts, sense his mood: a confused swirl of feelings, none of them particularly happy.

"Mind if I join you?" Deanna asked, and she watched surprise and pleasure melt the sadness away.

"I didn't hear you come in," Will said. He scooted over a little and cleared the snow away so she could sit.

"I was being sneaky," Deanna said. She curled up next to him and watched a slab of ice dislodge from the river bank. It floated past them, crashing into rocks beneath the water and breaking into little chunks. "What season is it?" Deanna asked.

"It's springtime," Will said. He tossed a snow-damp twig into the water. "Look on the other side of the river. There's a little white bundle of spring violets shooting up through the snow."

So there was. Deanna could barely make out the pale blossoms against all the ice, but they were there. And beneath the water she could see a sluggish school of fish shaking themselves as if they'd just woken up from a long winter.

She didn't know why Will had come here. She'd sensed that heartache hanging over him all day. A subtle soreness in his gut, a type of hunger that couldn't be sated. If it was anyone else, she could identify exactly what he needed in a heartbeat. But for some reason, with Will, it was impossible. Maybe that was because he didn't know himself, couldn't tell her why he ached or what for, what would make it better. He could be thinking about his mother; maybe she died around this time of year. It could be an unopened message to his father, still waiting for a response. He could be remembering, against his will, a mission gone wrong — a crewman lost — his fault; his burden to bear.

Or he could be thinking about...

"You're cold," Will said without looking at her, and Deanna realized she was shivering.

"A little."

“Come here, then.” He edged closer to her, just enough to open his arms so she could slot herself against his body if she wanted to. And she wanted to. She remembered how warm he ran — hot like a furnace, no matter how cold it was outside — and Deanna leaned into him without thinking, secured his arm around her shoulder like it belonged there. Like she belonged against his chest.

Like they belonged together, watching the river rush by.

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