

“You Will Be”  
by Sophie Katz  
based on characters from the TV show *Doctor Who*

River Song awoke with a strangled cry, staring wild-eyed at the gray ceiling of her Stormcage cell. She tried to sit up but found that she couldn't; something had a tight grip on her legs. She was trapped down.

She panicked, kicking and tearing at her restraints. It wasn't until she heard it tear and saw the crumpled fabric in her hands that she realized that the restraint was merely her blanket, which had gotten tangled around her legs during the night.

River drew her legs up to her chest and sat huddled on her bed, breathing hard. Although she had only one heart, it felt like it was beating for two. A part of her wanted to run, but there was nowhere to run to, and she had tried running away from her nightmares before. They only got worse when she did that.

She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to relax, but she quickly opened them again, because that was where the nightmare was, in the darkness behind her eyelids. That was where it always had been. She was no stranger to nightmares; she couldn't remember many nights of sleeping well as a little girl in Leadworth, haunted as she was by things that she still only partially remembered. Cold, pale creatures that were always just outside of her vision. The woman with the eyepatch, whispering to her, telling her about the horrors of life and the man she must kill.

Of course, now she was older, and she had names for the creatures and woman. The Silence. Madame Kovarian. She knew who they were. And she had beaten them, hadn't she? They had sent her to the lake, but the Doctor had not died, and the Silence were clueless of the fact. River had won; she had escaped.

So why did the nightmares remain? Why, when she slept, did she find herself running again through the dark corridors of Graystark Hall, fleeing the spaceman? It always caught up with her, every time she slept, no matter how hard she tried to escape. It would take her and eat her, and then Kovarian's voice would start to whisper in her ear.

*"Tick tock, Melody Pond. Time to kill the Doctor."*

And then she would rise out of the lake, fighting the motion of the spacesuit, begging with the voice in her head to let her go. But she was never let go. She would always watch in horror as her hand rose and shot the Doctor. She would try again to escape, to go to him, to save him as she had once before, but the voice held her still.

*"You cannot escape me. I made you, Melody Pond. You are the woman who kills the Doctor."*

And then she would see the second blast, the one that really killed the Doctor. She would watch him fall, that man she so loved, who so loved the woman she would be. And she would scream, held helpless inside the spacesuit. She would cower from the thing that she had done.

And the voice would taunt her as she screamed.

*"This is what you do, Melody Pond. This is how it is. You kill the Doctor. You will never be loved."*

That was when she awoke.

River was squeezing the scraps of fabric in her fists so tightly that her knuckles had gone white.

The Doctor had not died. She had not killed the Doctor; she had married him. She knew this. She knew this.

And yet the voice was still there, in her head, invading her waking hours now.

*"You kill the Doctor, Melody Pond. You kill the Doctor, and you will never be loved."*

River pressed her fists to her ears, but that did nothing to stifle the voice.

But shortly there was another sound, and she tentatively lowered her hands to hear it more clearly.

That sound. The TARDIS landing sound. It was an unnecessary, annoying sound, but that night it was welcome, because it meant that the Doctor was coming. And there it was, the large blue box, materializing in the middle of her cell.

It wouldn't do for her to be seen in this state. River slowly peeled her fingers free of the scraps of fabric, letting them fall onto the bed. She took a deep breath, and then another, trying to calm the pounding in her chest, but she couldn't quite seem to manage it. Frustrated, she pushed away from the bed, trying to leave her nightmare behind too as she strode determinedly across the room.

*"You will never be loved."*

River pressed her hands against the wooden door of the TARDIS to steady herself.

"Enough," she said, but her voice sounded weak even to her.

She pushed gently at the door, and it opened. Inside, everything was warm and bright, and she could hear the whirring of machinery, a calming sound. River quietly closed the door behind her and looked up the stairs, where she could see the Doctor dancing around the TARDIS console, cheerily working the controls.

"There you are!" the Doctor exclaimed when he saw her. "Good. I didn't pick an outfit for you this time, so you'll have to go to the wardrobe and choose one yourself, which shouldn't be a

problem because you usually do so anyway since you never actually wear the outfit that I choose.

"Nevertheless!" he continued, clapping his hands together excitedly. "I've got a special treat for us tonight. There's an asteroid belt around the outer reaches of the Abudantia system. Of course, an asteroid belt is just a bunch of rocks orbiting a sun and nothing interesting ever occurs other than the occasional collision, but! According to legend, once every four hundred and twenty-three years, hundreds of Volatibellus, loners by nature, form one enormous flock to soar amongst the asteroids. You know the Volatibellus? They're like pterodactyls, only massive and shiny and..."

The Doctor's chatter trailed off as he looked at River, who was still standing by the door. She saw the smile fade from his face and his brow furrow with concern. Was it that obvious, how shaken she was? But then, how could it not be, when she could still feel the cold embrace of the spacesuit and hear that horrible voice in her mind?

*"You are mine, Melody Pond. You kill the Doctor. You will never be loved."*

"River?" the Doctor said softly, coming around the console to stand at the top of the stairs. "River, is something wrong?"

He was here, asking for River, wanting to take her away for a night of adventure. River Song, the woman he had begged for while he was dying. River Song, who he loved.

*"You will never be loved, Melody Pond."*

It was all too much.

She rushed forward, taking the steps two at a time and throwing herself at the Doctor, holding him, kissing him, trying to remind herself that she was River Song, and she was loved. But even as he put his arms around her, even as she kissed him again and again, she could not convince herself that it was true, and her face became cold and wet with tears.

She needed reassurance.

"Tell me I'm loved," she pleaded, pressing her face into his shoulder.

"River—"

"Those words. 'You are loved.' Say them!"

"You are loved," the Doctor said.

But it wasn't enough.

"Tell me again."

"You are loved." The Doctor tightened his embrace. "You are loved. Oh, River, you are loved."

It seemed to work. Her shoulders gradually stopped shaking and the tears slid to a halt. All she could hear were the soft noises of the TARDIS and the calming, regular beats of the Doctor's hearts. The voice was merely a memory once more.

When she felt steady enough, she shifted, and the Doctor released her, but slowly, keeping his hands on her arms until she was firmly on her feet.

"River Song finds love, then, does she?" she said, trying to wipe away some of the wetness on her face with the palm of her hand.

"Of course she does," the Doctor replied, smiling at his wife. "River Song has two parents who miss her terribly. River Song has the TARDIS, whose doors are always open for her. And she has a husband who always, always comes when she calls."

"God knows what I'm going to have to do to earn that," River said, trying to smile back at him but not quite managing it.

"You don't have to do a thing."

"But I'm not River Song. Not really. I use that name, but truthfully..." River sighed. "I still feel like Melody Pond. I'm still that little girl they stole and built into a psychopath. I'm not as good or as strong as River Song."

"Don't you believe that for a moment," the Doctor scolded.

"Does River Song ever come crying to you like this?" River challenged.

The Doctor hesitated.

"Not... Usually, no," he admitted. "But she's a complicated person."

River shook her head, not convinced.

"People change," the Doctor said with a little shrug. "People grow. You might not completely be River Song yet, but believe me, you will be her. You're well on your way. You're already as stubborn as she is, that's for sure."

"And stubborn is good?"

"Oh, River, River, River," he said, flashing her that smile that always warmed her heart. "Stubborn is great."

"Now," he continued, extending a finger and lightly tapping her on the nose. "You hurry on back and find something comfortable. We've got a flock to catch."

This time, River Song smiled back at her husband.