



# *At the River*

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Romance

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Once there lived a little girl named Pauline, and she was considered to be the prettiest girl in her village. She had golden curls and playful blue eyes, both traits that were envied by every other girl in the village. The boys all longed to belong to her, and fought for her attention constantly.

Pauline grew up to be even prettier still, and one day she looked in the mirror on the wall at sixteen years old and was amazed to see that she had blossomed into a rather beautiful young lady. This mattered very little to her though; the girls could be petty and deceitful, but there were a few girls who were still loving and chummy with her; Angeline Lovasky, Hannah Terrill, Maria Prunes. In Pauline's eyes, boys were merely possible comrades as well, and thought nothing more of them than that. She was, in fact, completely oblivious that every boy in the village was fighting hard for her hand, though she was less immune to the other girl's whispering about her:

"She pretends she doesn't know she is pretty."

"She acts like she couldn't care less about having every last boy in the village tied to her apron string."

"She makes like boys don't exist."

Pauline often escaped her village and went on long walks through the forest beyond the river (she'd row a flat across it), and enjoyed herself most here. There were several dear childhood spots to her that she visited quite often, and one particular day, she decided to visit one of these old haunts.

She packed herself a picnic and then left the house, not imagining what would happen later that very day.

William Jones was a seventeen year old young man who belonged to a very poor family; his father was a mere wood cutter who had never been to school, and all four of his sons had followed him in this fashion, except for William, who was the youngest son. He could barely read or do sums, but he longed to one day be a doctor or lawyer or perhaps a college professor. This was the height of his ambitions, and he WOULD achieve it, at all costs. Until then, he made the same journey every day to the village (for he lived with his father and mother deep in the forest) to scrape some money together, all which went towards his future education. One fine day, he started out earlier than usual, and followed the same path he walked on every single day, unaware of what would happen later that day...

Pauline had just reached the deep, splendid river. The water was crystal clear, and, despite it's depth, she could easily gaze upon the rock covered bottom. She had just untied the flat and stepped into it when a rather handsome but strange young man (though she took no notice of his good looks) stepped into sight, and startled her so that she slipped out of the flat and flew into the water.

You have never been to the Swift River, which was named very well, because of it's strong current, so although you can read about how strong it is, you cannot actually know just how strong until you are there and can behold it yourself. Pauline had always taken her safety on the water for granted, and therefore was quite shocked at this unexpected dip. She never had learned how to swim, either, and the river was not at all shallow, so she found herself flailing wildly about, screaming for help. Water went up her nose and into her mouth so that she found herself choking, and panic seized her.

"Help..." She gasped, one final time, before fading into unconsciousness.

Where had the William been this whole time? (For, in case you have not figured it out, it was he who had startled Pauline at the river.) He had been standing on the bank, quite frightened himself, but trying desperately to throw out a rope to the beautiful damsel drowning in the water, but she soon had disappeared

from sight.

“I have caused deep distress upon the lovely lady who I know not,” said William to himself, sorrowfully. “So it is I who must find her, and rescue her, dead or alive. I will go to the ends of the earth if necessary!” Having made this vow, he went off.

It wasn't till the following morning that Pauline's body was found, washed up on the shore, her damp skirts clinging to her, her honey colored hair strung with drops of water, like dew on grass. And she was not dead. William nearly cried to see her unconscious, shivering body. It had been Chance that had saved her live.

William carried her back to her village, where she was at once put into dry clothes and tucked into a warm bed to recover, and William was paid handsomely for saving her and returning her home. But William said: “I want not these coins, though they could do me good. I wish to have Pauline's hand in marriage.”

Pauline awoke and found a strange man staring at her, and felt him vaguely familiar, though she knew not why that was so. He had a warm smile and kind eyes. She liked him at once, and felt a strange fluttering feeling in her chest that she had never felt before when looking at anyone before. “Hello,” she said.

“Hello.” The man's voice was quiet, but gentle and kindly. He looked into her eyes. “I didn't save you, once, but I want to always be there for you again.”

“I don't know, but perhaps,” Pauline said, shyly, “I might like that.”

And so they were joined together happily in marriage, and because Pauline had such a nice wealthy family, William could now afford to go to college, and become a doctor.

And so, they lived happily ever after.

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