

Along The Creek

by Sheila Luecht

It was a lovely spring, not too cold, more sunny than not, a good time to be out from under winter's spell. The trees were still bare but there was a hint of life on them. Green was her favorite color. She always noticed the nuances of the different shades and wondered how many greens there really were in nature, she could only guess. The oil pigments that she was so fond of using, had many hues of green, but she mixed up even more. She was sure that green was an endless of array of life, so that in each simple stroke of the brush making its way home to the canvas, something fresh could be born.

Green meant fresh, new life and growth. All good things.

The best part about the creek in the park woods, was its own greenness. It was some kind of moss or some reflection, but it was tinged a green. It reminded her of her first home in Chicago, when they dyed the Chicago River green for St. Paddy's Day. That green had some blue in it though, this green had some yellow in it. It was almost pushing olive in different lights.

One morning she was out on her walk and happened to come near the creek. Amazed as she was by the landscape, she was unprepared for the creek to look dark. The sky was blue, the sun was shining, the trees budding and yet below, in the water, it seemed dark. Her mind could not leave the glance alone. It found its way closer to have a better look. Was that blue in there, what blue, how could it look so brown, so different? No, it must be a red, red and green, make brown. As her mind told her how the colors were mixed to make a brown shade, she seemed to stop, transfixed by the thought.

How could the creek be brown, some red got into the green? Stealing herself nearer she made her way closer and closer to the creek. It was long and slender, winding its way among the young trees. She found herself looking straight down into it. There was a reflection, she saw a face. It was not her own.

Surprised she stepped back, then forward again to have another look. No, it was another face, the face of a young woman, pale and white, poking just under the surface of the brown water. Tinged ever so slightly with a green cast, circled ever so gently with red. Bright red. Her eyes closed, she looked asleep, so tenderly like she was just having a nap. The creek was normally moving a bit, swelling from spring rains and carrying itself forward with a good pace, the current usually bumping past small rocks and sometimes a fallen branch or two. Here it seemed still.

Here there was a face, and more; a body, a clothed body. While she pondered this, she thought of getting a stick to poke the water with. Without warning, a big, black dog came running up. He was without a master, but with a leash. He jumped onto the front of her jeans and pushed her off her feet, away from the creek and the mysterious face. He barked, then he ran around in circles. He was trying to tell her something.

Soon a man came along, he was calling the dog by name. The dog stopped, looked at her laying there in the fresh mud, bewildered, and gave her face a lick. The man was upon them both and gathering up the leash.

"I am sorry for Rudy's bad behavior! He has been running up to this creek all day today, and way off our usual path. I don't know what has gotten into him!"

"Oh, that is okay. I am not really too much of a mess. If you could just give me a quick hand up."

While he leaned over with his free hand to give her something to steady herself on in the mud, the dog pulled him in the opposite direction nearly into the creek. The man was straining himself to stay on his feet. He gave her a tug up and Rudy a tug in.

"Damn it Rudy, just what is your problem?"

She struggled to stand and finally stood. She then walked closer to the creek. The dog slammed into her legs again almost knocking her over. He seemed to be trying to keep her away from the creek, from the woman she saw lying in there.

"Rudy!" The yelping the dog was being yanked by its owner away from the creek.

She finally said, "No, it's all right. He is trying to help I think. I saw something in the creek and I am just trying to check and see what it is. A reflection or something." Again she walked forward, this time the man walked with her, together they looked down. The dog stood, but whimpered and fussed, he was now on a very short leash and seemingly unable to break free again.

"I don't see anything. Not even my own reflection. The creek looks kind of muddy today, must be a fast current." the man said.

She looked and squinted and strained her eyes to see something, but nothing was there. Nothing. The water was moving slowly, the color a mucky brown, not unlike the mud covering her back side.

"I guess I don't see anything either." Though silently she was thinking to herself, "I do have an imagination, I am artistic, my mind must have just pushed the envelope on this one, there is some sun here, some reflection...."

Rudy was now very calm and sniffing around the creek bank. He seemed disinterested in the water, as if whatever had been there was now gone.

The man apologized again, offered to pay a cleaning bill for her pants at least, and when she refused, offered to take her for a coffee.

"That sounds good. I think I need some, I don't know where I can go dressed like this, though." she exclaimed showing her muddy fanny. The man laughed and said, "Well there is a chestnut stand at the edge of the park and they sometimes have coffee."

They walked away together laughing. About half way down to the stand, Rudy turned back, just in time to see a red haired woman sit up in the creek and make a face at him. He snarled and turned on his heel, suddenly wagging his tail happily.

Score: Rudy (1) Lady in the Creek (0)

