

Together, they roamed the woodlands near their home by the foothills of Apenninus Mons, close to the town of Interamna, where dense forests surrounded their village. They moved like untamed spirits, their laughter echoing among the trees as they darted through the undergrowth. She glided through the forest with the ethereal grace of a nymph from ancient myths, her laughter blending with the melody of her movements. At times, her voice lifted in songs of love, sweet and pure. Meanwhile, he dashed from one imagined battle to the next, wielding his wooden sword with the fervor of a seasoned warrior, each swing full of boundless enthusiasm.

“To the river, Bear!” Rose sang out as she ran across a log.

“The hour grows late!” he cautioned, his voice high with youthful concern.

“The time matters not! A dip in the waters awaits us!” Rose urged, racing ahead, always taking the lead. Other girls stayed at home and dared not escape to play in the woods, but Rose was different.

Upon reaching the river’s edge, they wasted no time shedding their tunics and sandals, eager to immerse themselves in the cool embrace of their favorite swimming hole. They leaped into the river with joyful shouts, sending droplets flying in all directions as they splashed and frolicked like carefree spirits.

As they played in the river that late summer day, new feelings quietly began to emerge, marking the end of their childhood innocence and the beginning of something deeper.