



## At the River's Edge: The Chesapeake Diaries

By Mariah Stewart

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**NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER**

**Mariah Stewart returns to her beloved Chesapeake Diaries with this charming novel of small-town romance—perfect for fans of Barbara Freethy, Robyn Carr, and Susan Mallery.**

After taking stock of her life, Sophie Enright has decided it's time for a break. Between a law career that's become criminally dull and a two-timing boyfriend she's done with once and for all, Sophie desperately needs some time to think and some space to breathe. The perfect place to do both is easygoing St. Dennis, Maryland, where Sophie can visit with her brother while she figures out her options. Once in St. Dennis, she discovers a shuttered restaurant and makes a bold move that is also a leap of faith. Sophie buys the fixer-upper in order to finally pursue her dream career.

But Sophie's labor of love becomes a bone of contention for her new neighbor Jason Bowers. The local landscaper has big plans for growing his business—until Sophie scoops up the property he's got his eye on. And no amount of buyout offers or badgering from him will get her to budge. It's hardly the start of a beautiful friendship. But when they're paired up to work on a community project, they agree to put their differences aside, and sparks begin to fly. Then Sophie's cheating ex suddenly shows up, looking for a second chance—and threatening to make Jason a third wheel just when his hotheaded feelings about Sophie were turning decidedly warmhearted. All Sophie wants is a new life and a true love. But what are the odds of having both?

### Praise for *At the River's Edge*

“Everything you love about small-town romance in one book . . . *At the River's Edge* is a beautiful, heartwarming story. Don't miss this one.”—**Barbara Freethy**

“Another signature and heartwarming familial story . . . If a book is by Mariah Stewart, it has a subliminal message of ‘wonderful’ stamped on each page!”—**Reader to Reader Reviews**

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

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#### About the Author

**Mariah Stewart** is the award-winning *New York Times* bestselling author of more than thirty novels of contemporary romance and romantic suspense. A native of Hightstown, New Jersey, she lives with her husband and their dogs amid the rolling hills and Amish farms of southern Chester County, Pennsylvania, where she gardens, reads, and enjoys country life.

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Stewart / AT THE RIVER'S EDGE

#### Chapter 1

Sophie Enright stared at the two flat tires on the driver’s side of her car and wondered if she’d ever had a worse day in all her thirty-two years.

It started when both the victim and the star witnesses for the assault case she was prosecuting failed to appear in court and were nowhere to be found. The judge had given her until four o’clock to produce them, and when she couldn’t, he dismissed the case.

It was never a good day when that happened.

She opened the trunk of her car and peered inside. One spare, two flats. She slammed the lid, got into the car, called her boyfriend, Christopher, and listened while the phone rang, then went to voice mail.

“I’m on the fourth level of the parking garage with not one, but two flat tires. My case went into the tank after my victim and my witnesses failed to show and I was forced to endure a blistering tirade from Judge Palmer. I’m parked in my usual spot. Bring food.”

She disconnected the call, then dialed for roadside assistance.

“I’ll need your guy to bring a spare,” she said after being told that they had someone on the road in her area.

“Not a problem,” the dispatcher assured her. “Hang tight right there and we’ll have you fixed up in no time.”

Sophie sighed and searched her bag for the paperback novel she’d started over the weekend, grateful that she had enough gas in the tank to keep the heater running. She opened one window for a little fresh air, then settled back into her heated seat to read. After twenty minutes, she tried Christopher again. Still no answer.

Thirty more minutes passed, and she called the dispatcher once more.

“He’s on his way,” she was promised. “He’ll be there any minute.”

“Any minute” turned out to be fifteen, but once help arrived, both spares—hers and the one the driver brought with him—were changed and she was free to go.

She glanced at her watch: seven twenty. Cursing softly under her breath, Sophie turned the key in the ignition and started out of the parking lot. She drove down to the second level, which was now empty except for a black BMW sedan off by itself on the far side of the garage.

A black BMW sedan that looked uncannily like Christopher’s.

She drove slowly around one concrete post, then another, and stopped in front of the car. How many black BMW sedans—complete with a UPenn sticker on the right rear bumper—could there be in the courthouse lot at this hour?

Sophie figured that Christopher—also an assistant district attorney—must be working late. She started to dial his number once again, then decided to surprise him in the office. She parked next to him and got out, slammed her car door, and had taken three steps in the direction of the stairwell when she heard voices coming from the BMW. Without thinking, she walked around the car and looked into the backseat.

“Oh, crap.” Christopher’s voice.

“What?” a woman asked. “What is it? Chris, where are you going?”

The back passenger-side door opened and Christopher—her Christopher—emerged, his shirt un- buttoned, one hand zipping his pants and the other slamming the door to keep whoever was inside, inside.

“Sophie, I . . . I can explain . . . ,” he stammered.

“No, actually, you can’t.” Sophie’s stomach knotted and her mind went blank. She took several steps back, then got into her car and poked the key into the ignition with shaking hands.

“Sophie, wait . . . wait . . .” Christopher’s voice trailed behind her as she pulled away.

“You asshole!” Tears rolling down her face, she yelled as loudly as she could, even though he couldn’t have heard. “You are a total and complete asshole.”

She slammed a hand on her steering wheel for emphasis. Her phone began to ring and she knew who it was without looking at the caller ID.

“I’m only answering because I want you to know what a dickweed I think you are.”

He sighed heavily as if exasperated. “Dickwad.”

“What?”

“I think the word you want is dickwad.”

Funny, but that professorial tone that she used to think made him sound intellectual suddenly seemed obnoxious.

“Whatever,” she snapped.

“Sophie—”

“Can it. We are so done.”

She hung up.

She blew the red light at the corner and felt a momentary touch of relief when she realized there were no cars coming from the opposite direction and no police officers to flag her down. Since starting at the DA’s office seven years ago, she’d been careful not to do anything that might cause her embarrassment when she had to face the cops in court. Getting stopped for running a red light would be one of those things . . . especially at that moment when she knew her mascara was running and her face was a blotchy mess from crying. Hardly the professional image she’d worked so hard to create.

The street in front of her condo was slick with the cold rain that had been falling since early afternoon, and she was lucky to find a parking spot close to her door. She hopped out and dodged puddles. Water splashed up on her legs and her skirt anyway, but she barely noticed.

The red message light was flashing on her phone, but she ignored it. She dropped her briefcase near the door and kicked her shoes halfway across the room. Then she went straight into the bathroom, turned on the shower, peeled off her clothes, and tossed them back into her bedroom, where they landed on the floor.

“Bastard!” She stepped into the steam and cursed softly under her breath as the hot water stung her back, stood under the steady stream until her skin began to pucker.

Reluctantly, she got out, dried off, and pulled on her oldest sweats—gray fleece washed so thin the fabric was almost see-through in places—and an oversized navy tee. She went into the spare bedroom, where she stored things she either had no immediate use for or didn’t have time to deal with, and found a large box that had delivered a down comforter back in November. She’d been filling the box with clothes she planned on taking to a thrift shop, clothes which she now dumped unceremoniously onto the floor.

She dragged the box into her bedroom and tossed in all of Christopher’s belongings that he’d left at her place. She opened her closet and tossed in his robe along with a few extra shirts, then added clothes from the dresser drawer she’d been happy to empty to make room for his jeans, underwear, and a few sweaters. She spied a book that rested on the table next to his side of the bed—a political thriller—and tossed it in. It landed spine out, the pages splayed atop his jeans. She hesitated, fighting the urge to smooth the creases and close the book, but she resisted after reminding herself that she’d been the one to recommend it to him.

She was tempted to remove a few key pages so he’d never know who the bad guy was and how he’d set up the hero, but even her wrath wouldn’t permit her to deface a book.

“You’re lucky I have a conscience,” she muttered.

She tossed in a pair of sneakers she found under the bed, then returned to the bathroom for his toothbrush, shaving stuff, and the body wash he preferred over hers. Her apartment stripped of everything that was his,

she pushed the box into the back hall, then dragged it down one flight of steps. She opened the back door and shoved the box out, positioning it so that it sat directly in front of the trash cans.

Sophie trotted back up the steps, phone in hand, texting as she climbed:

Your stuff is in a box behind my building. The trash men come at nine.

She hit send just as she arrived at her door.

She'd hoped that the purging of her apartment would make her feel a little better, but she still had that huge lump in her throat and that gnawing pain in the pit of her stomach. She considered calling a friend, thinking that maybe some sympathy would make her feel better, but she stopped midway through dialing the number. She couldn't face the actual telling of what happened, couldn't bring herself to speak the words. It hurt too damned bad.

I caught Chris with someone . . .

She frowned. She'd been so focused on him that she'd ignored his partner. Now she found herself wondering who that someone might have been. Was it someone she knew?

She tried to recall the voice she'd heard coming from the backseat—had it been familiar?—but in her shock, she hadn't paid close enough attention. Though she gave it her best effort, she couldn't make the voice play back in her head.

The phone rang again, and Christopher's voice filled the apartment for the fourth time. This time she sat and listened. This was the man who only two nights ago had declared his undying love for her. The man she thought she was in love with. The man she might even have built a life with.

She listened to his words of apology—at one point she even thought he might be shedding a few tears—and his sworn oath that “she” meant nothing to him. That it hadn't been planned, that it had just happened.

“The way your car ‘just happened’ to be parked in the darkest, most remote part of the garage?”

She rolled her eyes in disgust and left the room before he finished his message. She had reports to write explaining that day's debacle in the courtroom. Her heart might be burning and her insides in an uproar, but there was still work to be done.

It had been a long, rough night, and the morning found Sophie feeling almost as angry and hurt as she had the night before. She awoke with a massive headache, killer circles under her eyes, and a grumbling stomach. She scrambled an egg and forced herself to eat it, then popped a few Advils.

“This is no day to spare the concealer,” she murmured as she applied her makeup in front of the bathroom mirror.

She put on a red cashmere sweater under her gray suit, and while ordinarily red heels would have been frowned upon in her ultraconservative office, today she felt they were a necessity. She brushed her black hair from her forehead and popped gold discs into her ears. She might feel like crap, but she was determined to look like a million dollars.

There was something about looking good that always made her feel better. And she did. Right up until the minute that she walked into the conference room for an early morning meeting and saw the smirk on the face of one of her co-workers.

The smirk was like a shot to Sophie's gut.

Anita Hayes. I should have known.

Sophie glanced away as if she hadn't noticed, and she kept her gaze on the memo she'd been handed even when Christopher entered the room and Anita moved over to give him a place to stand next to her. Sophie continued to act the professional, listening attentively though an ocean's roar of pain filled her head and she could feel Chris's eyes on her the entire time. Finally—mercifully—the meeting ended, and though she wanted nothing more than to bolt from the room, she walked leisurely to her office and closed the door, pretending not to notice the looks of sympathy from several others as she passed. But once the door was closed behind her, Sophie leaned back against it, squeezed her eyes tightly shut, and wished that the roof would fall on her head.

It took less than two minutes for her desk phone to buzz. She debated the possibility of ignoring it, but it could have been someone important. Like her boss.

“Soph, it’s Gwen.” Sophie’s best friend in the office apparently hadn’t been blind to what was going on.  
“What the hell?”

“I’ll tell you at lunch.”

“It’s my day in district court,” Gwen reminded her. “I won’t be here. Tell me now.”

“Christopher and Anita were . . .” Sophie sighed. “I caught them together in the backseat of his car. In the parking garage.”

“In the parking garage? Chris and Anita Hayes?” Gwen all but gasped. “Is he nuts? She’s the office skank.”

“Apparently he didn’t get that memo.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to pretend I don’t know either one of them. What else can I do?”

“You’ve got more balls than I do. If George did that to me, I’d be off and running for some nice quiet corner where I could nurse my broken heart and suck my thumb in peace. Right after I sent him screaming into the night with a fork in his eye.”

“Running away doesn’t solve anything, and while I do love the image of Chris with something sharp painfully protruding from his face, I’ve prosecuted enough domestic violence cases to know I don’t want to go where they send you.”

“There is that,” Gwen agreed. “But either way—running or incarcerated—at least you wouldn’t have to look at him or her every day.”

Gwen had a point, Sophie considered, one that was driven home when she left the confines of her office around eleven and saw Christopher go into the library, followed within seconds by Anita, who closed the door behind her.

Yeah, Gwen definitely had a point.

“Of course you can come for a visit. Stay as long as you want.” Sophie’s brother, Jesse, had sounded pleased when she called to ask if the following week would be convenient for her to visit. “We never get to spend time together since I moved.” Jesse paused. “But is everything all right?”

“Everything’s fine.” Sophie swallowed hard. “Well, except that Christopher and I did break up.”

“I thought the two of you were getting serious.”

“Apparently that was only one of us.”

“What happened?” Jesse asked.

“I don’t feel like going into it right now, if that’s okay.”

“Sure, but if you ever feel like talking . . .”

“I know. Thanks, Jess. I’ll see you on Saturday.”

“Can’t wait, kiddo.”

Jesse was three years older than Sophie, and he was now making his home in St. Dennis, Maryland, a small town on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay. He’d gone there to join their grandfather’s law firm and had found the love of his life. Jesse and his Brooke would be married in a few months, and Sophie thought their love story had “happily ever after” written all over it. She couldn’t be more pleased for her brother—he’d always been a good guy and if anyone deserved to be happy, it was Jesse. She smiled, recalling how he’d always taken his role as big brother very seriously. On the phone, she downplayed the situation with Chris because she could imagine Jesse’s reaction and she didn’t want to deal with any more drama this week. She just wanted to put Christopher out of sight. With any luck, out of mind would eventually follow.

When Sophie asked Joe, the district attorney, for the week’s vacation she’d been floating, he’d readily agreed. That she had no trials on the docket for the next several weeks made it easy for him to say yes. Somehow she made it to the end of the week without breaking down in the office or losing it in court. If anyone in the office—including Chris and Anita—thought she was running away, well, let them. It might very well have been the truth.

On the other hand, Sophie decided she’d rather think of this trip as running to than running from. After all, who wouldn’t love a week away in an idyllic little Bay town with nothing to do but relax, visit with a favorite relative, and eat glorious food? If at the same time a broken heart began to mend, so much the better.

## Users Review

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