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Every morning for months we met at that spot to bathe. She refused to see me anywhere else or to tell me about herself. Unclothed, alone, we played and splashed and laughed, but never once laid hands upon each other. And every morning the sight of her undressing aroused my manhood, and she would turn and laugh at it. And when she left, for she left always ahead of me, she waved good-bye . . . but to it, she threw a kiss and said,

‘Now just relax, dear Tommy.’

But it was beyond control. Aroused, it lasted long after she’d left and would return whenever I remembered her.

She was there every day at daybreak, except for four days each month, when she could not come. As the weather got warmer (for I had first met her at the end of February) we began to sit afterwards on the bank of the stream – she, bundled in a blanket that she’d brought, me, struggling to keep a fire of damp wood alight – and talked. She had such huge eyes after she had bathed.

But still she told me nothing of herself.

Until one day . . .

‘Why can’t we see each other like most couples do?’ I asked.

‘Because we aren’t a couple, we’re just . . . just like childhood friends,’ she said.

‘You have another lover, I suppose.’

‘“Another” suggests you’re one, and that’s not so.’

‘I know you better than any lover could.’

‘Just because you see me uncovered, the outside of me.’

‘Is that such a small thing, after all?’

‘Isn’t it enough for you?’

‘I just thought that—’

‘You’re a silly, cheeky, selfish boy, like all the rest, and you want to please yourself. And yes, I have another lover, as every girl my age does.’

I was pleased she’d said “another”.

‘What’s his name?’

‘His given name’s David. His family name I’ll keep for myself. I don’t want you spying around.’

‘I had no intention of—’

‘He’s a very nice boy,’ she said, ignoring me.

‘Does he know you come here?’

‘Heavens, no! He’s never seen more of me than my ankles. He’d die if he knew about us.’

‘Then why don’t you surprise him and bring him here some time. I’d love to see his face when he sees the two of us splashing about in there.’

She gave me a stern look, mixed with some alarm. ‘He’d never believe we’ve never touched,’ she said hesitatingly.

‘I’d tell him we made wild love in the bushes.’

‘Then he’d run away crying, poor boy,’ she said, looking more alarmed. ‘You wouldn’t tease me like that if you really cared about me.’

‘I’m just jealous,’ I said softly, looking away across the water. ‘Maybe it’s my way of caring.’

And then she touched me for the first time, her hand upon my arm. ‘Oh, have I hurt you? I was only teasing. I’m just a flirty girl, and David’s nothing to me. Are you jealous, really?’

And after months of wanting her, the time of waiting was finally over. I took her tenderly in my arms and drew the blanket round us both. ‘Yes, I’m dying of jealousy,’ I whispered, shivering with fright and desire. She was still unclothed beneath the blanket. She took me in her arms, clutching me to her, pressing me to her breasts,

pressing her lips to mine. Then taking me in her hands, she guided me into her.

It was my first time with a woman. The first time for that incomparable feeling of being inside a woman, taken completely by surprise at the wonder of it, the unexpectedness, the transport, the rest of me gone, reduced to only that enveloping warmth and silky gliding.

It was the first time for her as well, but she was simply instinct and abandon. She led the way. She moved me in and out as I lay still against the bank. Abandoned to desire. I plumbed the depth of her but never touched the end. Her tongue probed at my lips. A doe lapping at a spring. And as she heard me sigh she slipped out and slid herself down and kissed and stroked with her hair and tongue and then a rising came, up from my toes, a tidal wave electrified, it rose, driving me ahead upon its crest, until it reached the centre where she was, breaking upon my fingers, snapping closed my eyes, my brain exploding out with splintered light.

She took my seed and rubbed it on her face and thighs and smiling up at me, spread it around her waist.

‘Now we’re really lovers.’ She looked up at me.

‘Real lovers,’ I repeated in a daze.

‘Now Tommy can relax,’ she giggled.

‘Will you tell me your name?’

‘Annelies. And yours?’

‘Alain.’

We both were seventeen.