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She did not come the following day.

Miserable, blaming myself, I ached to see her. I felt the longing of heartbroken youth for death. I imagined everything. I passed the whole day hating myself, looking in vain for her.

The next day she was there. Casually, as if nothing had ever happened, she said,

‘Sorry about yesterday. I couldn’t come.’

‘I was going out of my mind, worried and imagining all sorts of things. I thought I would never see you again. That you were angry and hated me. I looked for you everywhere.’

‘You dear misguided boy! I just couldn’t come.’ But she looked pleased that I had worried. She never told me why she’d not come; not until much, much later. And then very obliquely. In giving up her virginity, she had ‘torn something inside’, and so she had to wait for it to pass.

Now began the happiest, most carefree days of our lives. We made love every day on the banks, in the same way as at the beginning. Later she kept me inside her, saying we shouldn’t worry, that she had a secret thing from a friend that protected her and with it nothing could ever happen. And she was right. Month after month we came, frolicked in the water, often making love right there, then frolicked on the bank, freely touching and exploring, with her always laughing. It always made her laugh, making love. And nothing ever happened, as she’d said.

It was a time when one leaps headlong – as into a living novel.

When one is carried along by the force of its stream. Astonished at the good fortune. Unable to resist, unbelieving in a way, yet joyful in the irresistibility of it all.

It was a time to erect a fountain and surround it with rich earth, to strew boulders on the soil and set wild flowers out. To plant great trees, great cedars from the mountains of Lebanon. A time for Bathsheba to bathe openly in its stream.

I watched her bathing there, and she was very beautiful to look upon.