

conspiracy between it and the heart it beats over. What have you been doing all day?' She turned slightly away from him. She meant to speak quite lightly, to prevaricate. But the truth trembled against the gates of her lips, forced its way through. 'I—have been unhappy.' 'So have I' he spoke very simply. 'I knew you had been.' The words came from her in a breathless broken voice. 'You know sometimes I feel I'm possessed by a sort of Fate—you know—by an impending disaster that spreads its wings over my heart, or maybe only the shadow of its wings—but it is so black and terrible . . . I can't describe it. Sometimes I think it is [?], forboding, telling me that what I am facing—the future—is—' she shrugged her shoulders—'just *darkness*.'

His hand on the table lay still. He clenched it. She saw the thin pale hand and to that she spoke as though it had her in its grip and found from her. . . . 'It seems so ridiculous, so childish to say with the countless thousands—I am misunderstood—and that is . . . my youth I suppose. There the fact is. I feel like a prisoner condemned to penal servitude, without the option of—anything more sudden. I do not know who has condemned me, tried me, and so I, to all intents and purposes, walk abroad with people who love me and are good to me—*miserable* myself. Whenever I remember that I am quite quite apart from them, the real me I mean, Pip—there aren't any words. I can't explain myself.' He got up, leaned against the window frame and looked down at her. 'Don't trouble' he said. 'I can tell you—in your words in my own expression—"a lonely prisoner"—that is what I am, that is what you are.' She nodded 'but' she said, comforted, inexpressibly comforted by him, 'don't think I always feel this way. I think that when I am happy I am more happy than anybody. The rareness of my depression does not make it any the less terrible though.' 'I know, I know Maata.'

In the pause that followed she felt that their speech had sunk into a deep unknown gulf that had been separating her from him—that the confused words had filled up the gulf. The door burst open. Hal came in, flicking his table napkin in his hand. 'Dinner bell's rung three times. Jenny has called you. Mother is in a wax. Meat's cold. What are you two birds doing? Out with it, Pip, you sly dog.' 'Oh I must fly down' said Maata 'No—no.' Hal spread out his arms to catch her. 'Not until I know what you two have been up to.' 'Don't be absurd Hal. Let me go. Pip, your hair's wild even in this light—they'll be so angry.' 'Not so fast, my sweet sister.' 'Don't be a fool Hal' said Philip, laughing. 'We've been looking at the trees on the house wall opposite—that's all.' 'What!' laughed Hal. 'The ones that Maata said yesterday were holding each other's hands in the dark. Shame on you. Go down to your betters miss.' 'Oh you baby' she scorned, running down the stairs. Hal went up and nudged Pip in the ribs. 'Lucky fellow' he said and shouted after them all the way to the dining room 'I *knew* it, I *knew* it.'