

## EPISODE

### A. *The Child in Love*

She arrived at the house at half past six. T. sat at the piano striking vague empty chords with the soft pedal down and watching with narrowed brilliant eyes like a malicious elf. She pushed open the iron gate that jarred on the loose pebbles as it swung back. The house was in darkness, but standing on the doorstep she heard the faint voice of T.'s violin. Sadder than her heart the sound, and like her heart speaking so faintly from behind closed doors in a darkened house. She paused on the step her hand touching the doorbell. Even then it was not too late to run away—yes it *was* too late. He might not love her, might not have need of her, but she loved him—she had terrible need of him, he understood. By his presence and quiet gestures, by that almost tragic dignity that wrapped his youth in its folds, by that mysterious vibration in his quiet voice, by his childish laughter and his quaint delight and wonder in the simplest things, by his hair and hands, his very clothes—oh God, by everything about him, every atom, every particle. What on earth was she doing? She looked up at the dark house shivering. How long had she been standing there. What was the use of this absurd litany? Had anybody seen her. Had she spoken aloud? She rang the bell sharply. Oh believe me he does not care for you, you are nothing to him, now or ever. Grant your sorrow worthy in accepting it with dignity. Be brave—courage! So the poor child, standing pale and cold in the gathering dusk, all the youth drained out of her face.

Jenny opened the door smiling and [?], and at the same moment Maisie danced into the hall, her wild curls flying about her, and flung herself into Maata's arms. 'You're late, you're late, you bad wicked child. You said you'd be here at five and I'm angry and offended with you, you darling.' Maata felt half suffocated by the strain of the child's little eager body, her smothering kisses, her fumbling hands, and yet it comforted her. . . . It was something real and human and safe.

'I couldn't get here any earlier' she said. 'Oh Maisie how wonderful your hair is dear. You've been washing it.' The child flushed with joy, urged at a little blue ribbon and shook her curls into wilder confusion. 'I washed it this afternoon and it's not dry yet. I'm finishing it by the kitchen fire—come downstairs, mummy's there, she's making an applepie for dinner, and I'm going to prick your name in the pastry with a fork. Can't take your arm going down the stairs, it is too narrow. I'll go first though—it's one of my *flying* days. I can jump for steps at a time in the dark even.' 'Oh be careful' said Maata. The child's happy laughter answered her.

In the bright hot kitchen Mrs Close, an apron tied over her black