

dress shook the rolling pin at Maata. 'No' she said, 'you shan't kiss me. Don't come near me, you bad girl. You've broken your promise—you said you'd come early. Get away, go and play with Maisie in the dining room. We won't speak to you will we Jenny.' But Maata gave a dive forward—caught her round the waist and hugged her. 'Oh you blessed angel, I'm glad to be here. I've been such a cross grumpy miserable pig all day.' Maata sat on the doorstep, 'and put my towel over my head and cried before coming in this evening. Be nice to me, give me a little bit of the apple before it's cooked.' She looked round the room, a bright colour grew in her cheeks. I *love* this kitchen. I'm all cured.

And she believed it. The tide had turned with a swing that threw her up breathless. She looked at the big black stove, shedding so bright a light from behind the open bars—at all the homely cooking things on the table, at the blue dinnerset on the dresser, at Jenny, peeling potatoes, with a penny book of fortune-telling propped against the water bowl, at everything, so real and simple and human.

'Perhaps you've caught a little chill on the liver' suggested Mrs Close, dusting the squat lump of dough with the flourcaster and kneading it smoothly, with her quick lithe hands. 'A nice hot dinner will put you right, won't it Maisie. Now Jenny my girl hurry up with the spuds, and hide your book before Miss Maata gets hold of it or we won't have a word more out of her. . . . What have you been doing all day dearie. . . . Maisie—take a peep at the joint. Use the ovencloth child.'

'T—Maata sat on the table edge and nibbled her quarter of apple. I have done nothing at all she reflected except go deeper and deeper. Aloud: 'Oh working out a story, dabbling and worrying my foggy little brain. . . . Is Father in?' 'No, he and Hal have gone for a walk—they won't be back till seven. I made the boy take the old man out for an airing—they were both getting so snappy, but he did not want to go because you were coming.' 'Bless his heart. How many miracles has he performed since yesterday.' 'He finished his quintet, this morning' cried Maisie. 'And you know who he's dedicated it to—you and Philip!' 'Not really, Maisie!'

At his name, spoken so carelessly, her heart quivered in her breast. 'True as death'. Pip said it was an en-ig-matical honour. What does that mean mummy?' 'Don't know dear—ask Maata. Maata, you mustn't sit about in your coat. Go upstairs and take your things off in my bedroom—there is a peep of gas and a clean brush on the dressing table.'

'I'll go with you and turn it up' said Maisie. Half way up the stairs Mrs Close called to the child. 'Come back here, Maisie. You haven't time. You must set the table, there's a good girl. You'll have Maata all the evening.' 'Oh mother—' 'Do as you're told darling' whispered Maata, only half wondering why she did not plead for the child. 'Well, well don't be long. I've got such lots to tell you.'