

At the corner of the staircase the plaster figure of Penelope holding the red gas globe in her hand. The face seemed to be smiling at Maata, seemed to guess her secret, to know quite well why she wished to run upstairs alone. And in the bedroom with the flickering gaslight on wall and ceiling Maata smiled too—the blind smile of the plaster figure—she saw the resemblance in the glass. Why not? She would surprise him just for the moment, would say ‘good evening’ and run down to the others. Louder now the voice of the violin from the room above and miles away the warm bright kitchen, the staircase a dark journey separating her from the others leading him up to her. Even in that moment alone her sorrow returned, she saw herself playing a game with Maisie and the mother, she knew that under her laughter, give it one moment’s being, her heart still cried and was lonely. Lightly, on tiptoe she crept up the stairs, she stood a moment outside his door, she heard him pacing slowly up and down as he played, she turned the handle of the door, slipped in, stood her back against it. Philip started, she heard his quick breath, then he nodded and went on playing a moment—never looking at her. The wailing music filled the room. There was no light except a pale gleaming from the window space, and his long shadow on the ceiling, like a cross. She could see the outlines of the pictures on the dark walls, some flowers in a glass on the mantelpiece. With the frightened eyes of a little captive child, with the eager eyes of a lover, she strained to see more of the room. The violin case lying open on the white bed was like a little coffin. On the table by the window she saw his books heaped. She was leaning against his coat that hung on the doorpeg. All these vague things seemed clearer than his figure—he was just the shadow of herself, pacing up and down, the shadow she had lost or never found that cried her sorrow. Suddenly he took his violin from his chin, wrapped it in a silk handkerchief, laid it in the case, slipped the bow through the loops, locked it up and stood the case in a corner. He came over to her, running his hands through his hair as though to free his thoughts and stood before her smiling. Still she did not speak or move. He fingered her coat, and his smile deepened. ‘I thought you were a real ghost-girl’ he said. ‘Come over to the window and sit down.’ ‘Pip have I disturbed you?’ ‘No—I’ve finished. Have you been here long.’

She sat down, leaned her elbows on the table and cupped her chin in her hands. He took a pillow from the narrow bed, propped it behind him, and sat down, knees crossed, one hand on the table beating a finger exercise. They were quiet again. She looked out at the dark street and the tree branches that grew along the wall of the house opposite and seemed to grow outwards instead of upwards as though they strained to hold one another in the dark. She heard the ticking of his watch in his waistcoat pocket and at that she looked up at him and laughed. ‘What a very loud watch.’ ‘Only just now’ he said gravely. ‘There’s a sort of secret