

through it all Maata had laughed. 'I shall always be the same, Rhody—I can't help it. Don't be angry with me. It's just at the last moment anything makes one happy—just at the moment of jumping you aren't frightened any more—only terribly happy. Happy. And I'm coming back. Listen,' she put her little warm hands on Rhoda's shoulders. 'I'm coming back. Yes, believe me. I'll be back in two years—you *do* believe me.' And she had answered 'I have faith, beloved, but I can't believe. I'm too broken just now.' Remembering that, Rhoda struck her right palm with her clenched fist. 'Fool! What weakness.'

She got up from the floor and dressed in the grey and white clothes and braided her hair round her head, burning with scorn for herself. 'And I've forgotten to shut the window—the floor is soaking. Oh, well—it doesn't matter.' She hesitated, stepped to the window, stopped and turned to the door. 'No—it's no matter. Little, little trivial things. And besides, why shouldn't rain come in through the windows. It has as much right as wind or scent, surely, surely.'

All the way down the gloomy stairs, past her mother's bedroom door, past the deserted silent rooms, she carried the silly thought as a weapon against her dread. In the breakfast room the clock pointed to half past eleven. So late! She hovered over the untidy breakfast table and wished as she always wished that she had the courage to ask for some fresh tea. But it was unreasonable to be two hours late. 'I will drink all the milk instead,' she decided, 'and *eat*. Yes—eat.' She cut some rounds of bread, buttered them thickly and spread them with jam, and ate, stuffing her mouth full, washing it down with milk. 'Dare I go on, dare I?' The same battle was fought each morning between her violent bodily hunger and a wavering sense of shame. 'I wonder why I have to eat so much. I suppose it is because I am so big and heavy. I never have enough to eat—never.' She dropped some lumps of sugar in the milk jug and ate them with a spoon. 'Now I shall just have one more round of bread and butter to take away the taste of the sugar.' As she finished the last crust the housemaid came in. 'Telegram for you, Miss Rhoda.' 'Thank you Nellie.' She tore it out of the envelope. 'Pouring with rain. Arrive Charing X 4.30. Love. Maata.' A-ah! It had come [it made the waiting bearable]. How like her to have put pouring with rain first. Just like her. She read and re-read it, walking up the stairs, thrust it into her blouse, took her hat and gloves and purse and walked out of the house to spend the day buying flowers for Maata's new room and walking about idly and slowly, slowly dragging through the hours until it was time to go to the station.