

mine. I am almost beautiful I look—I look—’ and she parted her hair, holding it tight to her face with her large hands—‘like a Botticelli. Very nearly worthy of you. I have changed very much. I think, my soul, I am more what you would have me—a strong, silent force of Love.’

A picture of Maata stood on the writing desk and before it a shell with some incense dust. Rhoda kneeled down, her arms along the desk, her chin in her hands. ‘Good morning, beloved,’ she whispered, rocking to and fro on heavy unbreaking waves of love. ‘Why-so-sad? There is a shadow on your brow and eyes, and your mouth’ she said, drawing her lips along the backs of her hands, ‘has kissed sorrow.’ She crouched back. ‘Maata has never kissed me on the mouth, but I know what her lips feel like—they feel like carnations. I can see them’ she fluttered her eyelids—‘exquisite—exquisite—every little curve. Do not be sad, my darling. Let me keep away from you everything that is not beautiful and fitting. You are perfection. How can you help being hurt by this world Maata. It is my destiny to serve you. I was dead when you found me and without you I am nothing. Let me serve.’ While she pleaded a strange sensation of blind, tireless strength filled every particle of her. ‘Yes, Yes,’ she stammered, ‘I know you are near me, beloved. And I am here, waiting. Let me serve. Oh, Maata, I can tell you now. There is only one thing left that has any terror for me . . . it is that you have grown too strong to need me. You are so terribly strong.’

She cringed before the picture and opened her hands [like a beggar]. ‘I cannot follow you on to the heights. Stoop sometimes to me. I know you cannot belong wholly to me—the great world needs you—but I am all yours.’ She sat quiet while the ecstasy ebbed away, leaving her cold and hungry, with all the long hours to wear through somehow until the late afternoon when Maata would arrive. ‘I *must* go and find the time’ she decided. But she did not move. [I see you Rhoda. Now you look like your normal self and you will sit there a long time making up your mind to dress and go slowly down all those gloomy stairs into the breakfast room.]

‘I don’t feel strong enough to bear the ordinary world today—I shrink from it. Not until I have seen you again, Maata. You see, Maata, it’s two years. What a long breath of you I had to take to last me for two whole years!’ Her slow mind began rebuilding the parting with Maata. They had taken a four-wheeler to the station because of the luggage. Maata’s voice: ‘The old ramshackle, Rhody. It’s like sitting on the lap of an old clothes woman.’ It had been a long day. Virginia Creeper moved over the houses. ‘Look at my flags, Rhody, all bloody.’ And a great many people at the station—crowds and crowds—such noise and confusion. And