

she said to herself. You have her. She is here. 'Ah' breathed Maata, lying back and folding her hands. 'It's good to be here at last—Rhody. I love the sun shining. Has it been raining all day?' 'I'm not quite sure. I think it has.' Rhoda frowned at herself but Maata did not seem to notice the stupid reply. She went on questioning Rhoda. Had Rhoda found her a nice room, was there a piano, how much did it cost, was the landlady pleasant, what did it look out on? And her manner and voice were so composed—almost languid—that Rhoda became calm. Her heart lifted and began to feed on joy. She wanted to be out of the hansom with Maata in her room, to help Maata off with her coat and hat, to do all the little things for her, to see her, to watch her move. All the while she drank that lovely voice. 'We are nearly there now. Look, here is the river', as though she had put the river there so that Maata might care for it. 'Your sitting-room faces the river. In the winter the birds come right up to the window—sometimes they fly through, so Mrs Banks your landlady told me.' Maata said, 'I like rivers'. The hansom slowed down before a big grey stone house. 'This is your key,' said Rhoda. 'Your rooms are on the first floor. Will you go straight up and let me settle with the man and see about the luggage?' Maata gave Rhoda her purse. On the first floor, when she had finished with the boxes she knocked at the sitting-room door. 'Come in.' Maata stood at the window. She had not even raised her veil or taken off her gloves. 'You—you do not like it,' stammered Rhoda. 'You're disappointed.' For answer Maata stepped forward and laid her hands on Rhoda's shoulders. 'Thank you, my friend,' she said. The sitting-room was a studio, scantily furnished, with brown paper walls and black paint. It was very pleasant in a detached uncluttered way. A little fire burned in the grate and some pots of flowering heath, pink and white, gave it a still, chaste charm. A bedroom, a kitchen [a lavatory] completed the tiny flat. Each bore evidence of Rhoda's devotion. There was even hot water in the wash basin covered in a pink and white towel, and a tea tray was ready in the kitchen and the kettle sang on a pinch of gas. 'Yes, oh yes,' said Maata, waltzing about, 'I shall be happy here. This is quite right Rhody. It's all lovely. And when I have my piano in the studio and cover the couch and have my books and pictures about, it will be a good room to work in. There—take my bags—undo the lock and give me what I want. I'm going to wash and change into that green dress near the top.' Rhoda knelt on the floor and handled her darling possessions as though these were all—every one—more precious than gold. Then she crouched back watching Maata step out of her grey skirt, slip off her blouse, and, standing before the mirror, let down her torrent of black silky hair. There was not very much light in the bedroom and Maata's skin flamed like yellow