THE TABLE

BY

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Freeditorial

The Table

CHAPTER I

THREE times within three minutes Dinkie Lane looked at his watch. The watch was characteristic of Dinkie Lane. It was small, jewelled, fastened to his wrist by a thin gold bracelet, and was just a little too ornate and too delicate not to look out of place on a man's wrist.

In the same way, everything about Dinkie Lane just missed being right. His trousers were a shade too full and too beautifully creased. The shoulders of his coat were a trifle too square, and the waist just a little too emphasised. The diamonds in his gold ring and tie-pin were too large, and the hair in front of his ears was trained to grow just a little too far down his cheekbones. He had small, delicate hands, rather too well manicured, and there was something effeminate about his thin, sallow face beneath his black hair, which was brushed straight back from his forehead and dressed with rather too much brilliantine.

Dinkie might have been taken for anything except the one thing for which he wished to be taken. No one in the lounge of the Grand Hotel, Dinneford, where Dinkie Lane was seated at a table, nervously fingering a glass of whisky and soda, could possibly have mistaken him for a gentleman.

Lorna Sherwood, who lounged in a chair beside him, might also have been taken for almost anything, and in her twenty-four years of life had been a good many things: shop assistant, mannequin, artist's model, dancing partner. At the present moment, as she sat smoking a cigarette and watching Dinkie Lane, with the hint of a smile on her lips, she might have passed equally well as a member of any one of these professions. As in the case of Dinkie, everything about Lorna gave the impression of being just a little overdone. Her hair was too perfectly golden for anyone—at least for any woman—not to suspect peroxide. Her lips had been treated just a shade too lavishly with lipstick that was a little too vivid, and the red varnish on her long, pointed nails was slightly too bright.

None the less, Lorna Sherwood was a beautiful woman, with a face and figure at which most men looked at least twice.

She took her cigarette from between her lips, and her smile, as she gazed at Dinkie Lane, suggested an amused tolerance.

"What's biting you, Dinkie?"

The young man, who had been staring at his glass, glanced up at her and shrugged.

"Nothing's wrong with me, Lorna. Why?"

"You don't seem able to keep your eyes off your watch, that's all. You're getting nervous, Dinkie, that's your trouble. Perhaps it's the district."

Dinkie Lane frowned.

"I don't get you, Lorna. What's the district got to do with it? It's all this hanging about—waiting. Why the devil can't we get a move on?"

Lorna glanced at her watch.

"Twelve o'clock was the time arranged, Dinkie," she said, "and that doesn't mean five minutes to twelve or five minutes past. You can't expect me to alter my programme just because you're getting jumpy. The truth is, my lad, you're not cut out for this game. You're too sensitive and highly strung, and there's no knowing when your nerves may get the better of you. Unreliable, Dinkie, that's what you are. And this part of the country seems to make you ten times worse than you usually are."

Dinkie emptied his glass and set it down on the table.

"You said that before, Lorna, and I don't get you."

"Princetown," smiled Lorna—"Dartmoor. It's only ten miles from here, and I've an idea you don't like getting even as close as this."

Dinkie lighted a cigarette.

"Dartmoor means nothing in my young life," he said.

"No? Well, it may mean a good deal before your life's much older. I wouldn't forget it if I were you. Whenever you think of Dartmoor, just remember Mickey Stone. Remember, he may be in Dartmoor now, but he won't be there always; and when he comes out, I'll be sorry for anyone who's tried to double-cross him."

"Who's tried to double-cross him? Not me!"

"No? Listen, Dinkie; I'm giving you a straight tip. Last night, someone tried the door of my room. If it happens again, Mickey's going to hear of it. Don't get wrong ideas about things, that's all. Mickey's the only man who matters in my young life, and I'm not accepting any substitute. Get that clear."

Dinkie Lane grinned.

"Oh, come off it, Lorna. That sort of talk cuts no ice. When a fellow and a girl run around together the same as we've been running around—"

Lorna suddenly leaned towards him. Her eyes had lost their look of amused tolerance.

"Get things straight, Dinkie, once and for all. I've let you run around with me because it suited me, because I could make use of you, because I had to have a partner of some sort—you can't get far in this racket without a

partner. You've done your job and you've been paid for it in hard cash, but if you think there's any more to it than that, the sooner you get rid of the idea the better."

"Oh, all right," said Lane sullenly. "There's no need to work yourself up about it."

He glanced at his watch again. Lorna leaned back in her chair with a smile.

"There's still ten minutes to go, Dinkie, so you'd better use them to get a grip on yourself. I don't want any mistake this time."

"Mistake?"

"I don't want any shooting—see? Shooting isn't safe in this country. That last affair at the filling station might have landed us both in a nasty jam, just because you lost your head and fired. If you'd kept cool and done as I told you we'd have got clean away with no fuss."

Dinkie made no reply. He tipped some whisky into his glass and was just raising it to his lips when Lorna took it from his hand and emptied the contents into her own glass.

"That sort of thing won't help you. You're having no more until the job's finished."

The man flushed angrily and his fist clenched. Then, with a shrug, he lolled back in his chair and lapsed into silence. For five minutes neither spoke. Then suddenly Dinkie sprang to his feet.

"For God's sake, Lorna, let's get the job done!" he exclaimed. "I'm not like you—you've got no nerves—and this waiting gets me down. Let's go and get it finished!"

The girl consulted her watch.

"It's five minutes to twelve," she announced calmly, "so perhaps we'd better be moving."

Outside the door of the Grand Hotel a long, low two-seater coupe stood by the curb. Lorna got into it, seating herself at the wheel. Dinkie Lane got in beside her and a moment later it glided off.

Lorna drove slowly along the High Street. Halfway along it, as they passed a building on the other side of the road, with windows which bore the lettering: "Devon and District Bank," Lorna gave it a prolonged stare.

"It looks dead easy, Dinkie," she said. "There are no cars outside and not much traffic in the street. But remember—no shooting. We've just got to walk in, show a gun, take what we want and walk quietly out, and we'll be well away before anyone gets wind of what's happening."

Lane, sitting with his hands clasped together, staring through the windscreen, nodded.

"All right, Lorna. I understand," he said irritably. "I'm not going to let you down."

"You won't mean to, but I'm not so sure you won't do it," replied the girl. "I fancy we'd be safer if I took away your gun. But I suppose I must risk it. We'll take the next side street and come back into the main road on the same side as the bank."

She swung the car round the corner. A few moments later it reappeared in the High Street, travelling in the opposite direction. Outside the Devon and District Bank it pulled up.

Lorna consulted her watch again.

"It's just on twelve," she said. "But we won't be in a hurry."

"Hang it, Lorna, two or three minutes can't make any difference—"

"Two or three minutes can make all the difference," interrupted Lorna. "This isn't my first job, Dinkie, and I know what I'm doing. The bank messenger goes to lunch at twelve o'clock and I'm waiting until he's out of the way. He's got a desk near the entrance, and I'd rather know that desk's empty. Keep an eye on the door and tell me when he leaves."

For two or three minutes Lane sat, twisted round in his seat, his gaze fixed on the door of the bank. Then, as the door swung open and the messenger came out and went off along the street, he turned to the girl.

"He's gone."

She nodded.

"Then push off and do your job."

Dinkie got out, hesitated a moment, and then turned to put his head through the window of the car.

"Leave the engine running, Lorna."

She smiled.

"You think of everything, don't you, Dinkie? As a matter of fact, I meant to stop the engine and lose the ignition key. Get busy—and if you let off that gun of yours I'll let off mine in your direction." Dinkie turned away, crossed the pavement, and, pushing open the swing door of the bank, went inside. A few moments later Lorna got out of the car, took a swift glance up and down the street, and then, at a leisurely pace, followed him into the bank.

The Dinneford branch of the Devon and District Bank was not a very large one. Its counter accommodated three cashiers behind the brass grille. At the

end of the counter, farthest from the door, was a small office partitioned off with frosted glass, which housed the manager. Close to the door was a small, high desk, with a stool behind it, at which the messenger sat.

As Lorna entered she saw that the two cashiers farthest from the door were engaged with customers, and that Dinkie was standing at the counter beside the first cashier, who was absorbed in counting a thick wad of notes.

Moving slowly forward, she paused about three yards from where Dinkie was standing, her back towards the frosted window that faced the street, the door on her left and Lane on her right.

The man glanced round, saw her standing there, slipped his right hand inside his coat and rested his left arm on the counter, so that his back was towards the customers who were farther along it.

"Say, you!"

The cashier looked up with an expression of surprise on his face. Cashiers of the Devon and District Bank were not accustomed to being addressed in that way, and he gave Dinkie a look which clearly conveyed is disapproval.

"I beg your pardon?" he said politely.

"There's no harm in doing that," said Lane quietly. "And now just do as I tell you."

The cashier raised his eyebrows.

"I beg your pardon?" he repeated.

"Take a look at my breast-pocket," said Dinkie, "and then do as I tell you."

The cashier's eyes travelled from Dinkie's face to his breast-pocket. There they paused, opening very wide, while the cashier's hands gripped the edge of the counter and a queer sort of feeling ran down his spine, almost as though someone had poured cold water on it.

Just beside Dinkie's breast-pocket he saw a little slit in the coat, and, thrust through the slit, with no more than half an inch of it showing, was the blue-black muzzle of a revolver.

Now, the cashier knew exactly what he ought to do. He had been fully instructed as to his conduct, if he should ever find himself facing a revolver across the counter of the bank, and he had been perfectly certain that, if ever such a crisis should arise, he would act in strict accordance with his instructions.

Just beneath the counter was a bell-push; he had only to press it and his duty as a loyal and devoted servant of the Devon and District Bank would have been fulfilled.

But he always imagined, too, that if ever the crisis arose he would go far beyond the mere execution of his duty. Not one gunman in a hundred, as he had often explained to his fellow employees, would fire if it came to the point, therefore the right way to deal with such ruffians was to call their bluff, press the alarm button and then leap over the counter to grapple with them.

But somehow, with that half-inch of blue-black barrel pointing at him, leaping the counter and grappling with the ruffian seemed to need far more nerve than he had imagined. Moreover, he had an uncomfortable feeling that if he tried to discharge his duty by pressing the alarm button the thin, sallow- faced youth on the opposite side of the grille might discharge his revolver first.

"Push that money under the grille—quick—and keep your hands on the counter!"

The cashier's hands did not move. He glanced along the counter at the other clerks, who were busily engaged with customers, glanced quickly at the desk where the messenger sat when on duty, and at the glass-partitioned office of the manager. Then he looked back at Dinkie.

"Work fast. Push them under! Do you hear?"

Still the cashier hesitated, staring at Dinkie as though unable to believe that he was actually face to face with a gunman who was calling on him to hand him the contents of his till. But Dinkie was real enough.

"Be quick, or be dead!"

The muzzle of the revolver came out another inch. There was something so menacing in the movement that the cashier forgot completely his duty to the bank and his preconceived notions as to how to deal with a gunman; with his gaze still fixed on Dinkie's threatening eyes, he slowly pushed the pile of notes across the counter and under the grille.

A quick movement of his left hand, and Dinkie had snatched the notes and stuffed them in his pocket. As he did so, the cashier suddenly ducked beneath the counter and the next instant a bell rang noisily.

Dinkie swung round, pulling his revolver from inside his coat. For a few seconds customers, clerks and cashiers gazed at him, motionless. Then one of the customers, a big, burly man who looked like a farmer, moved towards him.

"Stay quiet, you!" came Lorna's voice. "One step more and I'll drop you!"

The big, burly man stood still, and again, just for a few seconds, every figure was motionless, as if the Dinneford branch of the Devon and District Bank were filled with waxworks.

Lorna, revolver in hand, was smiling faintly as she surveyed them.

"Come on, Dinkie. Let's beat it."

Slowly they backed towards the door, their guns still covering the clerks and customers. Then, just as they reached it, the door of the manager's office was flung open, a man stepped quickly out and raised his hand, and there came in rapid succession the crash of two shots.

"Come on, Dinkie—quick!"

Lorna turned, dashed through the swing-door and ran towards the car. Glancing back, she saw her confederate burst through the swing-door of the bank. A moment later came the crack of another shot, a gasp, and, turning her head, she saw Dinkie collapse on the pavement. She paused, and was about to go back to him when she saw him raise himself on an elbow.

"Beat it, kid! Beat it!" he shouted, and fell backwards.

Lorna sprang to the car, wrenched open the door and flung herself into the driving seat. The next moment the car was speeding along the High Street, with gears screaming and smoke pouring from its exhaust.

The manager, flourishing his revolver, ran into the middle of the road and fired a couple of wild shots after the car. Then, as, gathering speed, it disappeared round the bend in the road, he turned and thrust his way through the crowd that had gathered round the entrance to the bank.

Lying on the pavement, bleeding freely from a wound in the neck, lay Dinkie. His eyes were closed, his face curiously twisted. His hand still grasped his revolver. Beside him, gazing at him with a look of utter bewilderment, was a policeman.

"What's all this, sir?" began the constable. "This young man's been shot."

The bank manager, going down on his knees, began to unfasten Dinkie's collar.

"Yes, I shot him, constable," he said. "It's a hold-up. He was getting away with several hundred pounds. You'd better 'phone for the ambulance—use my telephone."

As the policeman went into the bank a large coupe drew up by the curb, and a man got out and thrust his way through the crowd. He was a striking-looking figure, tall, broad-shouldered, erect, with strong, clear-cut features, and just the hint of greyness showing about his temples. His eyes were steel-grey and his lips hard, rather cruel. In his left eye he wore a monocle, which enhanced his air of authority and aloofness. Inside the circle of onlookers he paused, gazing down at Dinkie and the manager kneeling beside him.

"Can I be of any assistance?"

The manager looked up.

"There's been a hold-up," he said agitatedly. "This man got shot. We want a doctor."

"I am a doctor—Dr. Raymond Allerman. You may have heard of me."

The manager nodded.

"Yes, of course. This is a very dreadful business, Dr. Allerman. I shot him—I had to. My duty to the bank—"

"Quite," interrupted Dr. Allerman calmly. "Get him inside and I'll have a look at him."

The manager got to his feet, and, with the help of one of the cashiers, picked up Dinkie, carried him into the bank and laid him on the table in the manager's sanctum.

Allerman followed them in, removed his hat, hung it on the manager's hat-peg and proceeded to the leisurely removal of his gloves. After a careful inspection of his finger-nails he turned his attention to the wounded man.

The examination did not take him very many seconds.

"There's nothing much to be done for him," he said. "He's almost gone."

"For God's sake, doctor," began the manager, "you must do something. I shot him, and I shall never be able to forgive myself—"

Dr. Allerman cut him short with a gesture.

"No matter what I did," he said, "he wouldn't last many minutes. It's better to leave him as he is. So you shot him, did you? Well, there's no need to let that distress you. If you hadn't shot him he would have shot you or someone else." He smiled rather grimly. "And I imagine that a Devon and District Bank manager is a more valuable member of the community than this kind of blackguard. Was he alone?"

"No; there were two of them—this man and a girl. The girl got away."

Dinkie moved and gave a low groan; then his eyelids fluttered and opened and his gaze wandered from the manager to Allerman.

"Say, are you a doctor?"

Allerman nodded.

"How long have I got?"

Not a muscle of Allerman's face moved. He was staring at Dinkie as though he were watching some interesting specimen under the microscope.

Lane tried to struggle to a sitting position but got no further than resting on an elbow.

"Damn you! How long have I got?" he repeated angrily.

A faint smile touched Allerman's lips.

"Five minutes at the most."

The dying man stared at Allerman incredulously.

"Five minutes! For God's sake, doctor, can't you do something? You can't let me lie here and die and not do a damned thing...."

He sank back and lay still for a few moments with his eyes closed. Then he opened them again.

"You didn't get Lorna, did you?"

The doctor shook his head, and a smile of satisfaction spread over Dinkie's face.

"She's a swell kid, Lorna," he said weakly, and suddenly went limp.

Allerman turned away, put on his hat, and, with a cynical smile on his lips, began drawing on his gloves.

"That's one less for the State to keep," he said.

CHAPTER II

PAUL BARLOW would not have been particularly surprised if, when he reached the front door of Dr. Allerman's house, he had found it separated from the drive by a moat and protected by a portcullis. After the high fence, topped with barbed wire, which surrounded the place, and the massive nail-studded gate which stood at the entrance to the drive, he had expected to find that the house itself was more or less in keeping with the approach to it.

But there was nothing extraordinary about the house. It was a big, rambling place, solidly built and with rather a gloomy appearance, which had at one time, no doubt, been a farm-house, but there were no signs of any such elaborate precautions against intruders as he had remarked when he entered the grounds.

Walking up the two steps that led to the portico, he dumped his bag on the ground and pulled the massive wrought-iron handle that hung beside the front door. He heard a bell clang inside the house, and, while he waited for the door to be opened, turned his attention to the garden. He noted that it was overgrown with weeds and totally uncared for, and decided that, if Dr. Allerman had no objection, he would employ some of his leisure in doing some digging, and thus at the same time keep his muscles from getting flabby and create for Dr. Allerman a garden which would be less like an African jungle. Probably the doctor had not noticed that grass grew thick on the gravel paths and the borders were a riot of groundsel and chickweed. From what he had heard of Allerman, he lived with an eye glued to a microscope and never noticed anything that lay outside the field of vision of his lens.

As no one had opened the door, Paul set the bell clanging again. This time, after a few moments' silence, he heard footsteps approaching and stooped to pick up his bag. As he straightened himself, the door was opened, and it was all Paul could do to smother an exclamation of surprise as he saw the figure that stood framed in the doorway.

It was the figure of a man of massive proportions, unusually tall, with the shoulders of a bullock and the chest of a prize-fighter. He wore a white uniform jacket buttoned right up to his chin, and it seemed to Paul that at any moment it might burst under the strain imposed on it by the gigantic mass of bone and muscle which was confined within it. The man had enormous hands, with thick, gnarled fingers, a bullet head with a close-cropped thatch of grey, bristly hair, and quite the most repulsive face which Paul had ever seen. The general impression of the face at first glance was that it was an utterly expressionless mask, but a moment later Paul realised that the enormous mouth, with its pendulous lower lip, the broad snub

nose, the small, deep-set eyes, the prominent cheek-bones, the low forehead and the huge lobeless ears that seemed to be permanently cocked forward, combined to produce an expression of brutality and cunning such as he had never before seen on any human face.

For some moments Paul could only stare in astonishment at this grotesque caricature of a man. Then with an effort, he pulled himself together.

"Is Dr. Allerman in?" he enquired.

The man's beady eyes scrutinised him keenly, but he made no reply.

"Dr. Allerman's expecting me," added Paul. "My name's Barlow. I'm his new assistant."

For several seconds the man continued to stare at him. Then he stepped back, and, opening the door wide, signed to Paul to enter.

The visitor stepped inside and the man, closing the door, turned, and without a glance at Paul set off along the hall. Paul, undecided for a moment whether to stay where he was or follow the man, saw that he had paused outside a door and was signing to him to go forward. Placing his bag on the floor, he crossed the hall. As he reached the door the servant flung it open and waved him into the room.

It was a large apartment, beautifully furnished, with a thick, soft carpet and deep arm-chairs. Against one wall was a grand piano. There was an air of restful comfort about the place, and it struck Paul that, however uninviting might be the outside of Dr. Allerman's house, there was no fault to be found with the inside.

He walked across to the fireplace and turned, to find the servant standing rigidly at attention by the door.

"Tell Dr. Allerman I'm here, please."

For the first time, in a deep, throaty voice, the grotesque creature spoke.

"The master's out."

"You expect him in soon?"

"Yes."

"Then as soon as he comes in please tell him I'm here."

"Yes."

"Barlow is the name—Dr. Barlow."

"Barlow," repeated the man in a mechanical voice. "And in the meantime," added Paul, "you might tell Miss Fayre that I'm here."

"Yes."

The man stood motionless for some seconds, his gaze fixed on Paul. Then, as the latter took no further notice of him, he suddenly performed a quick military about-turn, clicked his heels together smartly and strode from the room.

Paul stared after him in astonishment. If that was a fair specimen of Dr. Allerman's servants his household must be a queer outfit. He was more like some hideous mechanical figure than a man—the sort of grotesque, unnatural creature which might result if some crazy scientist had tried to create a man and had failed in the attempt. No wonder Dr. Allerman had not taken the trouble to dig a moat and erect a portcullis: with a monstrosity like that about the place he need have no fear of intruders.

The young doctor wandered round the room, inspecting the few pictures on the walls and the pile of music on the piano—Chopin, Brahms, Delius, Chopin—and that repulsive creature that had opened the door to him! Allerman must be a queer mixture. He had, of course, that reputation. Among the medical students of the hospital he was always referred to as "queer," though no one seemed to know what form his eccentricity took; but he was recognised, not only by medical students but by the whole medical profession, as a surgeon of outstanding genius, a man whose skilful fingers could do things which no other surgeon would venture to attempt.

Paul, during his time at hospital, had more than once seen Dr. Allerman operate, and had been amazed at the man's uncanny skill and the cool, calm, detached way in which he attempted the seemingly impossible and brilliantly succeeded.

It had always seemed to Paul that there was something inhuman—superhuman, perhaps—about the white-clad figure whose hands wielded the instruments with such unerring precision, such confidence, such calm, unhurried assurance. But even more than his hands it had been Allerman's eyes that had arrested Paul's attention when he had been present at one of the famous surgeon's operations. Never once had he seen Allerman's eyes betray the slightest hint of any emotion. They were cold, hard, perhaps a little cruel, and had always made Paul think that, instead of using a knife on some delicate organ of the human body, where the least slip or misjudgment must mean death to the patient, Allerman might well be using a spanner on the mechanism of his car.

And never once during an operation had he heard Allerman speak. The man's whole mind, when he was working, seemed to be one-pointed, concentrated on the spot where his knife touched, and he appeared to be utterly unaware of the presence of others in the theatre, except when he laid aside an instrument and, without raising his head, held out a hand for another.

He had been amazingly lucky to get this job with Allerman within a few months of becoming qualified. Few of the men who had qualified at the same time would not have been glad to change places with him.

As Paul stood staring thoughtfully through the window at the overgrown garden the door behind him opened and Jeanette Fayre came slowly and quietly into the room. Closing the door silently behind her, she moved across the floor towards the young man at the window. She walked with the aid of a stick, limping slightly. She moved listlessly, as though the effort of crossing the room were hardly worth making.

Rather tall, slim, with a face that was unnaturally pale, and hair which would have been gold if it had not been so lustreless, a casual observer would have seen nothing beautiful in the face of Jeanette Fayre; but one who looked more closely would have seen that, in spite of her thin cheeks and the drawn look about her eyes, the loveliness was there—in the gentleness of her eyes and the wistful tenderness of her mouth. Half-way across the room she paused.

"Paul!"

The young man turned, saw her standing there smiling at him, and went eagerly to her and took her hand.

"It's wonderful to see you again, Jeanette."

She squeezed his hand and nodded.

"It's wonderful to see you, Paul, after all this time. But why are you here?"

"Don't you know?"

She shook her head.

"Hasn't Allerman told you?"

"I didn't even know, Paul, that you knew Dr. Allerman."

Paul took her arm.

"Come and sit down, Jeanette, and I'll tell you myself."

He led her to the settee and sat down beside her.

"I always thought confidential secretaries knew everything, Jeanette. Do you really mean to tell me that Allerman didn't let you know I was coming?"

"He has never mentioned you to me, Paul. But he doesn't tell me everything. I've been his secretary for three years now, but there are still a great many things I don't know about Dr. Allerman."

"Didn't he tell you he was engaging an assistant?" She glanced at him quickly.

"Yes, he did mention that. But, Paul, you don't mean that you—"

"I am the assistant, Jeanette. Dr. Meredith managed it for me. He's a friend of Allerman's, and he thinks I'm a coming young man and all that sort of thing, so when he heard that Allerman was looking for an assistant to help him with his experiments he mentioned my name to him. I saw Allerman last week and fixed it up—-and here I am."

The girl was gazing at him with a troubled, rather frightened expression in her eyes.

"Aren't you glad, Jeanette?"

"I wish I had known, Paul—sooner."

"Why?"

"Because I wouldn't have let you come. I wouldn't have let you take the job. I'd have warned you—"

"Warned me? Good heavens, Jeanette, you don't seem to realise! This is the biggest bit of luck that could possibly have come my way. Why, there are hundreds of men who would give their right hand for a chance like this. Allerman's the greatest surgeon in the country—-probably in the world. I shall learn more here, working with him, in six months than I should learn in ten years anywhere else. It will absolutely be the making of me."

Jeanette shook her head.

"I wish you hadn't come."

"But why? You must see it's a chance that I couldn't possibly afford to miss. Allerman is known all over the world, and the man who's lucky enough to work with him—"

She cut him short with a gesture.

"You mustn't work with him, Paul. You mustn't stay here. You must tell him you've changed your mind and he must get some other assistant. You must, Paul."

She was terribly in earnest and Paul gazed at her in bewilderment.

"I don't understand, Jeanette," he said. "I thought you'd be delighted that I'd got the job. I thought you'd understand that it's a job in a million."

She smiled faintly.

"A job in a million! Yes, it probably is that."

"Yet you want me to turn it down?"

"You must turn it down, Paul." And then, as he began to protest again: "Oh, don't ask me why. I can't explain. It's just that I have a feeling that you

shouldn't take the job—that you wouldn't be happy here—that later on you would wish you'd never got mixed up with Dr. Allerman and his experiments."

"But—" he began.

"I know. He may be all you say he is, Paul—a genius—the greatest surgeon in the world—a man who succeeds where other doctors wouldn't even have the courage to try. But I have a feeling—oh, I don't know. It must all sound vague and silly and unreasonable, but I don't want you to take the job. You'd be far happier doing what you always intended to do—setting up in practice on your own—"

"Curing mumps and measles and chicken-pox?" smiled Paul. "Removing tonsils and adenoids and an occasional appendix?" He shook his head. "I'd die of boredom, Jeanette. I'm not cut out for that sort of thing. I've always meant to specialise, to go in for research work. I'm an explorer, a pioneer, and I'd be a fool to chuck away the chance of going exploring with Allerman. And apart from that, there's the money. Allerman's paying me well—a thousand a year to begin with. It would be a long time, Jeanette, before I made a thousand a year out of mumps and measles."

"But there's no hurry, Paul. You don't need a thousand a year now, and you'd much better wait—"

The young man laid his hand on hers.

"That's just where you're wrong, my dear. I do need a thousand a year now, and I'm tired of waiting. I've kept you waiting long enough; with a thousand a year there's no need for us to wait any longer. I shall talk to Allerman. The arrangement was that I should live here, but I don't suppose he'd insist on it if I told him that I was getting married. I could find a little house somewhere near by—"

She raised a hand to stop him.

"Paul, please!" she begged. "Don't let's start that all over again. We've talked of it so often—"

"And now we've done with talking about it, Jeanette. We're going to get married."

She shook her head.

"We're going to get married," repeated Paul. "No, don't say anything, dear, because I know all the stupid things you're going to say, and not one of them can make the least difference. You've said them all before, and none of them has ever made the least difference. I still want to marry you just as much as I ever did." He smiled. "And you still want to marry me, Jeanette, don't you?"

She shot him a smiling glance.

"Does it matter what I want, Paul? If I wanted to marry you more than anything else on earth, that wouldn't make the least difference, would it? You know it wouldn't. It's dear of you, Paul, but you know it's not possible."

"I don't know anything of the sort, Jeanette. Listen, dear. If you were strong—"

"But I'm not strong, and that makes all the difference. I know what you were going to say: if I were strong and healthy like other girls, if I didn't have to hobble about with a stick, I would not refuse to marry you. That's quite true, Paul. It wouldn't be the least use denying it, because you know it's true. I'd marry you and thank God for making life so beautiful. But I'm not strong." Again she smiled at him and her fingers touched his cheek. "And I'm not going to let you play the chivalrous knight for my sake, Paul."

"It's not a question of chivalry."

"Then it simply means that you don't realise what you would be undertaking—and missing. But you would realise later on, and when that happened you'd be bound to regret. No, Paul, I'm not risking it. If I were beautiful—"

"You are beautiful, Jeanette."

"If I had a beautiful body—strong and healthy and able to give you children—But why talk about it? It's hopeless, and we're only hurting ourselves."

"I don't agree," replied Paul. "I don't believe it's hopeless, Jeanette. I don't believe there's any reason why you shouldn't have a body just as strong and healthy as anyone else. Nowadays doctors can do so much, and now I've got money I'm going to do what I have always wanted to do: scour the country—the world if necessary—for someone who can make you as strong and healthy and beautiful as you want to be. There must be someone. I'm going to talk to Allerman about it and see if he can help."

She drew her hand away sharply.

"Oh, no, Paul—please—not Dr. Allerman."

"Why on earth not? He's marvellous! I've seen him at work, and it's hard to believe there's anything he can't do."

She shook her head.

"Not Dr. Allerman," she repeated. And then, as Paul gazed at her with a puzzled look: "It wouldn't be the least use troubling Dr. Allerman any more. He has examined me several times and has told me that he can do nothing. If Dr. Allerman can't cure me, nobody can. Don't let's talk about it any more.

Just do as I ask and give up this job—go away somewhere and try to forget—"

"I'm not going away, and I'm not going to give up the job and try to forget. I'm staying here as Dr. Allerman's assistant, and I'm going to spend every spare moment I get trying to make you change your mind. That's all settled, so we won't argue about it. Now tell me one or two things. Who's the animated gargoyle who let me in?"

"You mean Stark? Oh, he's the servant—the only one except the cook."

"Seems a queer sort of fish."

"If you really mean to stay here, Paul, you'll find that lots of things are queer. Stark is only one of them."

"But where on earth did Allerman find him? I expected the door to be opened by a butler, or something pretty smart in the servant line, and when I saw that monstrosity I nearly turned tail and ran away."

"He's a wonderful servant," Jeanette told him. "Dr. Allerman trusts him absolutely, and I've never known Stark do a single thing wrong since I've been here. He's like a perfect machine that never makes a mistake. He's rather uncanny really. And he's utterly devoted to the doctor. I don't know for certain, but Dr. Allerman once hinted to me that Stark is the result of one of his successful experiments. If he hadn't happened to come across Stark," he said, "Stark would have been dead years ago."

"If that's so, no wonder the man's attached to him. But I can't say I like the look of the brute. He seems hardly human. And now, tell me, Jeanette, since you're Allerman's secretary, what lines is he working on? What's he trying to get at with his experiments?" Her eyes met his gravely.

"Don't you know, Paul?"

"Well, of course, I've a rough sort of idea. I know he's a brain specialist."

"And without knowing what sort of work he's doing you've accepted the post of assistant to him?"

"You bet I have! Allerman's name is good enough for me, and whatever he's doing is bound to be interesting. But I suppose he doesn't talk to you about his experiments and you can't tell me much more than I know already?"

Jeanette sighed.

"I can't tell you anything at all."

There came a sharp knock. The door opened and Stark stepped quickly into the room, clicked his heels together and stood stiffly at attention.

"The master comes," he announced.

CHAPTER III

AS the car roared along the Dinneford High Street Lorna crouched forward over the wheel, gripping it so hard that it hurt her hands, and steering it, when steering was necessary, with quick, jerky movements that set the machine swaying dangerously. Once she glanced back through the rear window, caught a glimpse of the crowd that was beginning to collect outside the bank, saw the figure of a man run into the middle of the road, his arm raised, heard the crack of a revolver, and, again instinctively hunching her shoulders, bent over the wheel and stared steadily at the road ahead.

Had there been any considerable traffic in the street Lorna's erratic steering must have landed her into trouble; but the roadway was almost deserted, and as she sped along it at more than forty miles an hour the worst thing that happened to her was that the policeman at the cross-roads stuck his hands on his hips and stared after the car with a wealth of official disapproval in his stare.

Once she was free of the town, she felt, she would be fairly safe. She could dump the car somewhere in the country and have a good chance of getting clean away. If they took it into their heads to give chase—well, she wouldn't worry about that: this 'bus could do ninety, and she had enough petrol on board for a hundred miles' run.

She glanced at the petrol gauge on the dashboard, saw that it registered five gallons and was thankful that she had taken the precaution of having the tank filled that morning.

She was soon clear of the town, and, as the houses disappeared, she settled back in her seat and pressed the accelerator. She knew the country well, and, with that precise attention to detail which had so irritated Dinkie Lane, had already mapped out what route she would take if things went wrong at the Devon and District Bank and she had to make a dash for it. She had calculated that before she could reach the next town news of the raid would have already got there, so that the only safe course would be to avoid any town so long as she was in the car. She had accordingly planned a route which lay along the side roads and country lanes.

She was to take a turning to the right, about ten miles out of Dinneford. At the speed at which she was travelling—just under sixty—she should reach the corner in ten minutes, and then, to all intents and purposes, she would be safe.

Glancing at her speedometer to assure herself that she was maintaining her speed she noticed the petrol gauge. It registered rather less than three gallons now. Her forehead puckered into a frown. A few moments ago, when she had looked at it, she had thought that it stood at the five-gallon mark.

She must have misread it, she supposed. She couldn't have used two gallons in the few minutes since she had set out from the bank. It was of no consequence in any case: three gallons would take her far enough.

A minute later, however, as she took another look at the petrol gauge her frown deepened and her eyes grew anxious. It registered well under two gallons now. Either the gauge was crazy or something was seriously wrong. It must be the gauge: engines didn't drink petrol at that rate.

As she drove on she glanced at the gauge every few seconds and each time she glanced she saw that it had sunk a little lower. One gallon—half a gallon—a quarter of a gallon—and there wasn't a garage this side of the turning which she planned to take.

Damn Dinkie! She should have known better than to let him in on a job like this. She might have known he would let her into some sort of a mess. She should have held up the cashier herself and let Dinkie cover the others. They wouldn't have shot at her, because they wouldn't have believed that she would shoot at them....

The engine spluttered. Glancing at the gauge again, she saw that it registered an empty tank. She pressed the accelerator down until it touched the floor-boards, and realised that the car not only failed to go faster but was actually slowing down.

She stopped, got out, raised the bonnet and tried to flood the carburetor. But no petrol was coming through, and she hurriedly closed the bonnet and strode to the back of the car. There was a petrol gauge on the tank and, bending down, she rubbed off the dust with her finger and consulted it. It agreed with the dashboard gauge that the tank was empty. But there had been five gallons in the tank only a few minutes ago and it couldn't be empty. She took off the cap, peered inside but could see nothing.

She stood upright, biting her lip. Turning, she broke off a small branch from the hedge, thrust it into the tank and withdrew it. It was quite dry, and she tossed it aside impatiently.

Then, as she replaced the cap on the tank, she suddenly saw what had happened: at the bottom of the tank was a small round hole from which every now and then a drop of petrol dripped on to the ground.

That fool with his revolver! She must have been trailing petrol behind her all the way from Dinneford without realising what was happening.

For a time she stood with her hands on her hips, staring at the hole, undecided what to do. As she caught the sound of an engine, she glanced up to see a car coming towards her at a leisurely pace from the direction of

Dinneford. Instantly she made up her mind. It was a big risk, but it was the only way out and she must chance it.

As the machine drew near she stepped into the middle of the road, her hand upheld. The car stopped. Lorna caught a glimpse of the face of a man with a monocle in his left eye, staring at her through the windscreen. She ran to the side of the car, wrenched open the door and jumped in.

"Quick!" she exclaimed. "Get a move on!"

Dr. Allerman turned his head and gave her an expressionless stare.

"Did you hear what I said? Get a move on and step on it!"

Still Dr. Allerman stared at her without replying, and Lorna suddenly sat upright in her seat.

"Say, are you deaf as well as dumb? I said fast and I meant it." She pulled out her revolver, pointing it towards him. "Get her moving, mister, and don't argue, or you'll have me trying to score a bull through your monocle."

Dr. Allerman slowly lowered his gaze to the revolver. Then, with a faint smile, he turned his head away and set the car in motion.

Lorna sat watching the speedometer needle as it gradually crept round. At twenty miles an hour it became stationary and she glanced quickly at Allerman.

"Faster!" she ordered.

Allerman kept his gaze fixed on the road ahead.

"I find twenty miles an hour a very comfortable speed," he said. "It enables one to admire the country."

"I'm not saying it doesn't, but I'm not interested in admiring the country, and you're going to do as I tell you—see? You're going to rev her up to fifty."

Slowly the speedometer needle moved to twenty-five, and there it paused again.

"That," said Allerman, "is the utmost concession which I am prepared to make. If you are still dissatisfied—"

"I am. This car will do seventy and you're going to make her do it."

Allerman glanced at her out of the corner of his eye.

"You seem to be in a hurry," he said.

"You bet I am!"

Allerman nodded.

"You were in that hold-up in Dinneford, weren't you?"

"You're a good guesser, aren't you? Yes, I was in it, and now I'm in another." She glanced quickly over her shoulder, through the back window of the car, and then turned again to Allerman. "Can't you go faster? You can't kid me—I know. This car will do seventy."

"Eighty," corrected Allerman calmly.

For a few moments Lorna frowned thoughtfully at Allerman's expressionless face as though trying to probe his mind.

"Here, what's the game?" she exclaimed suddenly. "Trying to be clever, are you? Waiting for the police to catch us up so that you can hand me over? Well, that game isn't going to work, I give you my word. They've got Dinkie, but they're not going to get me. There's six bullets in this gun, and if the police turn up there'll be one for you and five for them. So the nearer you get to eighty the more chance you've got of staying alive."

The car still travelled at the same leisurely speed.

"Dinkie, I presume," said Allerman calmly, "is the young man who helped you in the hold-up?"

"That's right."

"Then if it's any consolation to you I don't mind telling you that the police haven't got him."

"They haven't?"

"No part of him that's likely to interest them. Dinkie's dead."

"Dead! My God! That crazy swine with his revolver—"

"But I shouldn't waste any pity on him," added Allerman. "Dinkie was a particularly low type of degenerate and is better dead than alive. What was he to you—your husband?"

"No, he wasn't," replied the girl sharply.

"I beg your pardon," said Allerman. "Merely a fellow degenerate was he? It may interest you to know that he thought you a 'swell kid.' That delightfully sentimental utterance was his last. Are you interested?"

"I'm interested in going faster!" exclaimed Lorna. She waved a hand towards the road ahead. "You see that fork?"

Allerman nodded.

"Yes, I see that fork."

"Well, you're taking the left road and you're taking it at fifty miles an hour. I guess I'm tired of talking. The left fork at fifty—see?"

"I'm taking the right fork," replied Allerman, "and I'm taking it at twenty-five."

Suddenly the girl turned in her seat and jabbed the muzzle of her revolver against his ribs.

"Listen, you!" she exclaimed. "Don't get the idea that I've got a gun which I don't dare use I I'll use it all right if I have to. If you want to stay alive you'll take the left fork. I mean what I say, and when I say left I mean left."

For a few seconds Allerman made no movement. Then suddenly his left hand shot back, grabbed her hand, wrenched the revolver from her fingers, transferred it to his right hand and slipped it into the pocket of his coat.

Lorna half rose to her feet.

"I'll teach you—you swine—"

She got no further. Allerman's left arm shot out. His hand gripped her throat and flung her back violently into her seat.

"When I say right, I mean right," he said quietly, turned the wheel slightly and sent the car along the right-hand road.

Again Lorna half rose to her feet, raising her hand to strike him, but as her arm swung forward Allerman's left hand gripped her wrist and gave it a quick twist. With a sharp cry of pain she sank back#on to the seat.

"You beast!"

She struggled furiously to free herself, wrenching, twisting, beating at his face with her free hand, but all to no purpose: Allerman sat unmoved, gazing steadily at the road ahead, his fingers still gripping her wrist like a steel trap. Suddenly she leaned forward and buried her teeth in the fleshy part of his arm. But the doctor did not even wince, and the car did not swerve an inch out of its course.

Lorna sat up and stared at him in astonishment.

"Aren't you human?" she demanded.

A cynical smile showed on Allerman's thin lips.

"Superhuman," he replied. "As much above the average of mankind in general as you are below it. Inhuman, if you like."

"You're strong. Damn you, don't you know how strong you are? Leave go of my wrist: you're hurting me."

"Are you going to sit quiet?"

"Suppose I'm not—what then? You can't hold me here for ever, can you?"

"There are other things I might do."

"Such as?"

"We shall be entering the woods shortly. I could leave you there."

"That'll suit me fine."

"But before I left you I should take the precaution of severing an artery in your arm. You'd be dead within a few minutes—long before anyone could get to you—even if anyone should happen to hear you about. And it'd probably be weeks before anyone came across your body. People don't frequent the woods very much."

Lorna's eyes searched his face, but they had lost their look of challenge and defiance now: they were uneasy, doubting, and a little scared. Allerman, who could let her bury her teeth in his arm and give no sign that he had even felt it, was something beyond her experience. She would have understood it if he had snatched his hand away, sworn at her and knocked her senseless with his fist; but his calm indifference had her guessing and gave her an unpleasant feeling of insecurity.

"Here, what's the idea, you big sap?" she demanded. "Give me back my gun."

"Even you can't be fool enough to believe I shall do that. Sit still and try to behave yourself. We're just coming to the woods."

He turned the car off the road into what was little more than a cart track, and Lorna, gazing through the windscreen, frowned as she saw the dark mass of the woods some little way ahead.

"Are you going through those woods?"

"Into them at any rate. Through them—that depends. You'd better tell me the truth. Was that boy they killed your husband?"

"He wasn't killed," exclaimed Lorna passionately. "You're lying to me—the same as you've been doing all along. He wasn't killed, I tell you."

"Was he your husband?"

"No, he wasn't, if you must know."

"Just one of your lovers?"

"No, he wasn't my lover. I haven't got a lover—see? What would I want with a lover?"

"Then where is your husband?"

"I tell you I haven't got a husband. And who the hell are you, anyway?"

"All alone in the world, eh? No one to miss you if you disappeared?"

Lorna made no reply. Once again she lapsed into silence, her gaze fixed on the woods as the car slowly bumped along towards them over the rough

track, every now and then stealing a quick glance at Allerman's inscrutable face. But Allerman, intent on keeping the car's wheels out of the deep ruts, seemed to have forgotten her, except that his hand still gripped her wrist like a steel trap.

It wras just as the car was entering the woods that he turned his head and for some moments stared intently at her face.

"You're pretty," he remarked.

She turned sharply towards him.

"Here, what's the game?"

The doctor's glance swept over her appraisingly.

"You're pretty," he repeated. "If one removed the make-up and allowed your hair to return to its natural colour one might even discover that you were beautiful. You've a good figure, too—"

Lorna suddenly made another desperate attempt to free herself.

"So that's the game is it?" she exclaimed. "I see it now, you devil! But if you try any monkey business with me I swear to God I'll kill you if I have to do it with my bare hands. I'm not that sort—see? I'm straight. I've always been straight. There isn't a man living or dead who's ever laid a hand on me, and if you've got the idea you're going to be the first—well, try it and see! There's only one man alive who's good enough for me, and it isn't you and it never will be you, so don't go kidding yourself. He's going to marry me—see? Mickey Stone's his name. There you are"—holding out her hand and displaying a fine diamond ring—"that's the ring he gave me. That shows you I'm straight."

Allerman smiled indulgently.

"You're amusing," he said. "If your mind were of the same quality as your body you would be interesting. If one could find some method of preventing your talking your physical perfection might even make you attractive."

With a sudden wrench Lorna freed her wrist, grasped the handle of the door, flung it open and was almost out of it when Allerman's fingers closed over her arm and he jerked her roughly back on to the seat.

"Shut the door," he ordered.

She hesitated, meeting his glance defiantly for a moment. Then her gaze wavered and fell, and with a gesture of resignation she leaned forward and shut the door.

"All right—you win," she said listlessly. "Where are you taking me?"

"I'm taking you to my house."

"You're not taking me to the police?"

"I'm taking you to my house."

"What for?"

"Because I have an idea that you may prove useful to me. You can be delivered at the police station instead if you would prefer it. But I imagine this affair at the bank isn't the only hold-up for which you're wanted, and things might go rather hard with you. You'd be wiser to come with me—provided you come quietly. Make up your mind."

For several minutes Lorna sat huddled in her seat, sullen and silent. Then:

"If I come with you, what—what are you going to—do to me?"

"You must leave that to my discretion and take a chance."

She shrugged.

"All right—I'll take a chance—damn you!"

She neither spoke nor moved again until, as the car rounded a bend, they came in sight of a high fence topped with barbed wire and a heavy nail-studded gate. Then she suddenly sat upright.

Showing above the fence, to the right of the gate, was a large white notice-board with black lettering, and Lorna, leaning forward, peered up at it through the windscreen. The notice ran as follows:

Dr. Allerman's Experimental Farm.

Danger.

Slowly, with a look of terror in her eyes, the girl turned her head and glanced at Allerman.

"Is this your place? Are you Dr. Allerman?"

He nodded.

"What does that notice mean?"

"What it says."

She looked again at the notice-board and then back at Allerman's face.

"Danger!" she repeated in a queer, strained voice. "What's the danger?"

Allerman brought the car to a standstill outside the nail-studded gate.

"What's the danger?" asked Lorna again.

"Asking questions," replied Allerman.

CHAPTER IV

AS the car came to a standstill at the gate Allerman t sounded the horn three times in quick succession. There was a pause of about five seconds, and then the gate slowly swung open. Lorna, watching, gave a sneering smile.

"What's this—a conjuring trick?"

"Merely efficient service," replied the doctor. "I dislike inefficiency. An inefficient person or an inefficient thing has no right to existence, and a gate that requires me to get out of my car and open it is an inefficient gate."

He drove the car into the drive, and Lorna, glancing back through the rear window, saw the gate swing to behind them. It was a long, winding drive, flanked by thick bushes and trees whose branches, meeting overhead, shut out the sunlight and created the impression that one was approaching the house through a gloomy tunnel. As the car bumped its way along the uneven track the girl's gaze shifted uneasily from one side to the other. When it rounded the last bend and the house came in sight Allerman, watching her out of the corner of his eye, saw that she was gazing at it with a look of sullen defiance in her eyes, and that her teeth were nervously gnawing her lower lip.

"Is this where you live?"

He nodded.

"Cheerful-looking place, I must say. Reminds me of a prison."

"Hence, no doubt, your instinctive antipathy."

"Looks as if it might be haunted."

"It is."

The doctor brought the car to a standstill at the portico, got out, walked round to the door on Lorna's side and flung it open.

"Come out."

The girl shrank back in her seat, staring at him with eyes like those of a cornered animal, her lips slightly drawn back and showing her teeth, her hands clenched.

"No! I'm not coming out."

"Come out—at once."

She shook her head. She was breathing quickly, and her breath made a slight hissing sound between her teeth. She crouched back still further in her seat, thrusting her chin forward and hunching her shoulders, almost as if she were a cat gathering herself for a spring. Allerman stood watching her,

his face betraying no hint of annoyance: he had rather the air of a man who was absorbed in studying an interesting specimen.

"For God's sake stop staring at me!" exclaimed Lorna nervously. "I can't bear it—see? I can't bear those beastly eyes of yours." Suddenly she lost control of herself. "I'm not coming out!" she shouted in a high-pitched, hysterical voice. "I keep telling you I'm not coming out and all you do is to stand there and stare and stare. Why the hell don't you say something? But I'm not coming out of this car. I'm not going into that house. I'm scared. There you are—that's flat. I'm scared of the house. And I'm scared of you—of what you're going to do to me. You've got some low-down idea in the back of your mind, but you're not going to get a chance to use it. You can do what you like, but you won't get me into that house. Call the police if you like—I don't care. You can't force me into the house if I don't want to go—"

Allerman took a step forward and, bending down, gripped her arm.

"You're coming out of the car and you're coming into the house," he said, and pulled her roughly towards the door.

She fought back furiously, striking at his face with her clenched fist and making frantic efforts to free herself. But his fingers were biting into her flesh, and there was no resisting the strength of his arm as it drew her relentlessly from the seat.

Suddenly she relaxed.

"For God's sake," she gasped, "let go. I can't stand it. You're breaking my arm!"

The pain in her arm became a little less acute, but Allerman's hand was still gripping her, forcing her towards the door of the car. She could make no further resistance; she could not face a renewal of that terrible, searing pain in her arm, and she got out of the car.

Allerman led her up the steps into the portico, through the front door, which he opened with a latchkey, across the hall and into a room at the far end of it. Only when he had shut the door behind him did he release her arm, and then he pushed her from him with a rough gesture of distaste, as though he were relieved at not having to touch her any longer. He seated himself at the massive writing-desk that stood at the far end of the room.

Lorna glanced swiftly round. The apartment was a very large one, half library and half laboratory. One wall was a mass of books, almost up to the ceiling Against another was a long table with Bunsen burners, racks filled with test tubes and the general paraphernalia of a laboratory. There was a big, old-fashioned fireplace, above which were several hunting trophies, a couple of shot-guns and a whip. The comfortable arm-chairs, the big divan

and the magnificent skin rugs that lay on the polished parquet floor were certainly more in keeping with a library than with a laboratory, but the steel and glass cabinet filled with surgical instruments, the mounted skeleton that stood in the corner, and the two microscopes, each under its glass bell, that were on the writing-desk, were an indication that Dr. Allerman used the room for other purposes than relaxation.

Seated at his desk, Allerman kept his keen eyes fixed on Lorna as she stood in the middle of the room, glancing nervously around her. He noticed that as her gaze reached the case of surgical instruments it rested there for a few seconds, and he did not fail to note the flickering of her eyelids and the sudden crisping of her fingers. From the case of instruments her gaze went to the skeleton and paused again. Then, after a quick, furtive glance at the man, her eyes went to the door and she took a step towards it.

Allerman smiled.

"That would be inadvisable," he said quietly. "I'll show you why."

He pressed a button on his desk. Almost instantly the door was opened and Stark strode in, clicked his heels and stood at attention. Lorna, as she saw him, started backwards with a little gasp of horrified surprise.

"This lady is not to leave the house, Stark."

The servant turned his head, subjecting Lorna to a prolonged stare. Then he faced Allerman again.

"The lady is not to leave the house," he repeated mechanically. "Yes, master."

The doctor made a sign with his hand. Stark performed his about-turn and went from the room.

"Stark is the perfect servant," remarked Allerman.

"He is as near to a machine as any human being can be."

"Human? My God! You don't call that brute human, do you?"

"And he has enormous strength—particularly in his arms. I have seen him twist a steel bar an inch in diameter as though it were a bit of wire. He is an excellent watch-dog. I have a theory about Stark—that he may possibly be a reincarnation of Cerberus. But I don't suppose you've ever heard of Cerberus."

"If he's anything like that foul-faced gorilla, I don't want to."

She crossed to the case of instruments and stood peering at them through the glass.

"So you really are a doctor, are you?"

He nodded.

"A surgeon. More precisely the surgeon—the only surgeon who really matters."

"Got a good opinion of yourself, haven't you?"

"I am merely stating a fact. Even my colleagues in the medical profession are reluctantly compelled to admit that I have attained heights which they can never hope to reach. It's largely a question of courage, and that is where I am fortunate. When I have a knife in my hand and a body on the table I don't know what fear is. I have succeeded in doing things to human bodies.... Come here and let me look at you."

Lorna drew in her breath sharply and took a step backwards.

"No!" she exclaimed. "You're not going to do anything to my body! You're not going to get me on your table and use your knife on me. I'm all right as I am, see? There's nothing wrong with me, and if you try playing any monkey tricks—"

Allerman rose from his chair and walked slowly across to where she was standing.

"I shall do to you exactly what I choose," he said, gazing into her eyes. "You are my property and I shall make use of you as I think fit. If I wish to change you, I shall change you. I have an idea that I might be able to make you into something much better than you are."

"You're not going to touch me! My body's my own—it's not yours. And it never will be. Just you try any of your funny business on me and you'll see what will happen. My gang'll get you—they'll get you good and proper."

Allerman's lip curled contemptuously.

"Your gang! A gang of degenerates—like your friend Dinkie—too lazy to work, too unintelligent to earn an honest living—useless junk that should be thrown on the world's scrap-heap. Give them a gun against an unarmed man and they're in their element. And you, you poor little fool, fancy you can frighten me with threats that your pitiful gang of decadents will 'get me good and proper'! Don't you realise that there's more intelligence in my little finger than in the so-called brains of all your mob put together?"

"All the same, you're not going to start messing about with me. If you want to look at me—all right, look. But just be careful to keep your hands to yourself or—"

As Allerman's hand went forward to grasp her arm she stepped quickly aside, wrenched open the glass door of the instrument case and grabbed a knife from the shelf. The next instant, as he took a quick step towards her,

she sprang at him, slashing at his throat. The doctor's hand shot out and, gripping her throat, he flung her from him. As he did so he staggered backwards, grasping at the back of a chair to steady himself. Before he could regain his balance she sprang at him again. Swinging back her hand, which still grasped the surgical knife, she sent it sweeping forward towards his throat, but before the point touched him her wrist was seized, jerked violently backwards, twisted.... With a gasp of pain she released the knife, which fell with a metallic clink on the polished floor.

She wrenched her arm free and spun round—to find herself face to face with Paul Barlow.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

Paul glanced at Allerman, who was staring at him as though he were wondering the same thing.

"I just came into the room, Dr. Allerman," said Paul. "I knocked, and as you did not answer—"

Allerman turned away, picked up the knife, crossed the room and carefully replaced it in the instrument case. Then, returning to Lorna, he grasped her shoulder, spun her round and held her so that she faced him.

"As an animal," he said slowly, regarding her intently, "you would be a splendid specimen. But as a human being, with such a beautiful human body and all the instincts of a wild beast—"

With a gesture eloquent with disgust he flung her away from him. She slipped and fell in a crumpled heap on the floor. Instantly she raised herself on an elbow, gazing up at Allerman as he stood over her, with eyes that blazed with hatred.

"I'll get you for this, you swine! You see if I don't! I'd have got you then if this fool hadn't interfered. But I'll still get you some time."

Allerman turned away and, crossing to the fireplace, took down the whip. Then he returned to his former position.

"Get me for this, too, then," he said, and brought the whip swishing down across her shoulders.

The girl screamed, and Paul stepped quickly forward.

"For God's sake, Dr. Allerman—" he began, and then paused in confusion as Allerman turned towards him with a cold, disconcerting stare.

"I must trouble you, Barlow, to mind your own business," he said frigidly.

Again he sent the lash cutting across Lorna's shoulders, and again she screamed. He tossed the whip aside.

"There is only one way to teach an animal obedience," he said, "and your disobedience compelled me to adopt it. Get up."

Lorna's face was a mask of hate, and except for the rapid fluttering of her eyelids she made no movement.

"Get up when I tell you!"

Slowly, her eyes fixed on Allerman's face, the girl rose to her feet.

"Evidently you are not entirely without intelligence," said Allerman.

Taking her by the arm, he flung her on to the divan. She fell across it and lay still, her face buried in her arms.

Allerman, without another glance at her or at Paul, crossed the room, seated himself at his desk and pressed a bell-push. Within a few seconds the door was opened and Stark appeared.

"Come closer, Stark."

The servant took four quick paces forward and halted.

"Look on the divan."

Stark turned his head and stared fixedly at the motionless figure of Lorna. It was almost as though the girl felt his gaze, for she raised her head and glanced towards him. As her eyes lighted on his grotesque face she caught her breath sharply and a little shudder shook her body.

"This one, I think, will do, Stark," said Allerman.

"Yes, master."

"I doubt if I could have found a more suitable subject."

"For the workers, master?"

The doctor shook his head.

"No, Stark. It would be a pity to waste such promising material on the workers."

"For the table, master?"

"Yes, Stark—for the table."

Suddenly Lorna sat upright. Her eyes were wild and there was a look of utter terror on her face.

"Here, what do you mean—the workers ... the table?" she demanded. "What's the game? What's this ugly devil got to do with me, anyway?"

"Control yourself," said Allerman sharply. "Stark is not going to eat you. He may be many things, but he hasn't cannibalistic tendencies." He turned to the servant again. "Beautiful, eh, Stark?"

"Beautiful, master."

"A beautiful body, Stark, but entirely without intelligence. Three parts prostitute and one part paranoiac."

Lorna sprang to her feet, livid with fury.

"Here, you mind what you're saying, damn you! There's nothing like that about me. I'm straight, and you've got no right—"

"Sit down!"

"You've got no right to start calling me—"

"Very well," interrupted Allerman. "If the diagnosis offends you we will insert the word 'potential.' Now sit down."

The girl sank back on to the divan. Allerman turned to the servant.

"I want my secretary at once, Stark. Fetch her."

"Yes, master."

Turning, Stark strode from the room.

For some moments, while Lorna and Paul both watched him, Allerman was absorbed in a document that lay on his desk, and appeared to have forgotten them. Then, as Jeanette came in and paused by the door, hesitating, he glanced up.

"Come in, Jeanette," he said. He waved a hand towards the divan. "This is Lorna. She will be staying here. I want you to look after her. And I want you to tell me, Jeanette, if you think she is beautiful."

Jeanette walked slowly towards the divan and stood for some moments gazing at Lorna. Then she turned to Allerman.

"Yes, doctor," she said; "she is beautiful."

Lorna was staring at Jeanette with a look of unmistakable repugnance on her face.

"Yes, look at her, my friend," said Allerman, "but don't make the mistake of despising her. She has a poor, weak, misshapen body, but the mind and soul of a great lady. You, Lorna, have in your body all the loveliness of her soul, and she in her body has all the ugliness of your soul. Nature is not very intelligent. Sometimes she is guilty of terrible mistakes and it is only a very few of them that we can put right. I'm glad you think her beautiful, Jeanette."

Jeanette glanced at him sharply.

"Doctor, you don't mean—not for the workers? You couldn't give her—"

Lorna, suddenly terrified again, sprang to her feet.

"Here, what the hell do you mean by the workers? What is this racket? You're not going to do anything to me—"

Allerman made a sign to Stark, who was standing by the door.

"Take her to No. 6, Stark."

Stark strode smartly forward and halted in front of Lorna, but she backed away from him, and he glanced at Allerman as if for further instructions.

"Go with Stark, Lorna," he ordered.

"Go with that?" exclaimed Lorna. "Not me! You don't catch me trusting myself with that damned gorilla—"

"Then take her, Stark."

The servant stepped towards her, and as he raised his huge hands to grasp her she gazed at him for a few seconds as if fascinated and unable to move. Then she suddenly turned and with a scream rushed to Paul and clung to his arm.

"For God's sake—don't let him take me—don't let him touch me! I don't know who you are, but you're the only one here who isn't against me, and I'm scared—scared stiff. They're going to take me away—-and do something to me—but I'm not going—I daren't go—you mustn't let them take me—"

Paul turned to Allerman.

"I don't profess to understand, Dr. Allerman," he said, "but the woman is obviously terrified. If I may suggest—"

"Precisely, Barlow," interrupted the doctor coldly. "You don't understand and are therefore not qualified to make any suggestion. I should have thought you would be well enough acquainted with the symptoms of hysteria to recognise them when you see them." He signed to Stark. "Take her, Stark."

Stark stepped quickly forward and his enormous hands gripped Lorna's arms. She gave a piercing scream and struggled like a mad woman, but Stark lifted her as easily as if she had been a doll, performed his about-turn and strode from the room.

Allerman was lost in thought for several moments.

"An interesting case," he murmured. Then, glancing at Jeanette: "Leave us now, please, Jeanette. I have a few things to say to Mr. Barlow."

CHAPTER V

AS the door closed behind Jeanette, Allerman waved a hand towards a chair in front of his desk.

"Sit down, Barlow."

Paul seated himself and waited for a full minute while Allerman, toying with a pencil, gazed at him searchingly. It was a disconcerting stare, neither friendly nor unfriendly—the same sort of stare that Allerman had given him when he had interviewed Paul as his prospective assistant. It gave Paul a queer sensation that he was some interesting specimen on a microscopic slide, and that Allerman was examining calmly and critically through a microscope.

He was particularly anxious to create a good impression on Allerman, and he was undecided whether he would create a better impression by appearing unaware of the Doctor's prolonged scrutiny, or by making an effort to meet the gaze of his cold, piercing eyes without allowing his own gaze to waver. He tried the latter plan, but after a few seconds abandoned it and looked, with as convincing an air of unconcern as he could manage, at the microscope under the glass bell that stood on Allerman's desk. He was annoyed with himself for having so quickly surrendered to Allerman's masterful eyes, but there was something behind those eyes, an enormous strength, a tremendous personality, an irresistible determination, a ruthless will, and he had not been able to help himself.

He suppressed a start when at last Allerman spoke. "If you are to remain here as my assistant, Barlow, there are one or two points which it is essential for you to remember. No man is of the least use to me who is not capable of implicit and unquestioning obedience."

"Of course, I understand that, sir."

"I require unswerving loyalty and absolute confidence. Any man who is to share my work with me must co-operate with me whole-heartedly. Grudging service is of no use to me, and if you are not prepared to give me the kind of service I require it is no use your staying here."

"I am ready to give you the best service of which I'm capable, sir."

The older man nodded.

"I believe you are capable of giving me very valuable service, Barlow," he said. "If I didn't believe that, you wouldn't have interested me. But I want you to realise that in the work which I am doing I tolerate no interference and no criticism. You may see things here which will, perhaps, shock you, but I shall expect no comment. Whatever happens here you will accept with complete confidence in me, and if I do anything of which you may

disapprove you will keep your disapproval to yourself and not allow it to interfere with the efficiency of your work."

"You need have no fears on that score, sir," said Paul. "I consider myself extremely fortunate to have the chance of working with you."

Allerman raised his eyebrows.

"Yet just now, Barlow, when you came into the room and saw me treating a patient in a rather unorthodox way your confidence in me was shaken. No, don't trouble to contradict me. I happen to have very acute powers of observation and I could see that when I struck that woman with the whip you were shocked and horrified. You thought me a callous brute, and just for an instant you wondered whether you would not be wise to refuse the position of assistant to me. Is that correct?"

Paul smiled.

"Quite correct, sir. Just for a moment I did feel that."

"Good!" said Allerman. "You are not afraid of the naked truth, and that is a very valuable quality. Very well, we will take it that in future, no matter how shocked you may be, you will keep to yourself any repugnance you may feel and make no attempt at interference or criticism. You will accept what I do as right—and I can assure you, Barlow, that it will be right—right from the scientific view-point, even though it might not seem right to an unscientific sentimentalist. Nature is cruel, and if nature is to be conquered it is sometimes necessary to use against her methods which appear cruel to those who possess less knowledge than I possess."

"I understand, sir," said Paul. "A sentimentalist could never become a great surgeon. But I don't think I am a sentimentalist."

"I'm not so sure," smiled Allerman. "But I give you credit, Barlow, for being able to keep your sentimentalism decently under control. And now there are one or two other points I want to impress on you. No matter what you may see in this house, you are strictly forbidden to mention it outside the house. You are not even allowed to discuss with any inmate of the house any matter connected with my work. You will be living here, and I must ask you, as long as you remain with me, to avoid contact with anyone outside. Personally, I know no one in the district, and I want you to keep yourself as detached and inaccessible as I am."

"I know no one at all in the district, sir."

"Good! Actually there is no one in the district worth knowing," said Allerman, "and if I had not been convinced that you are not the type of young man to be interested in the puerile amusements and the flabby sort of minds which are all my neighbours can offer you, I should certainly not

have invited you to come here. My assistant must be a young man whose whole mind and body are completely concentrated on his work and who has not the least inclination to waste his time on such trivial frivolities as bridge, or tennis, or dancing."

"As long as I get a little exercise, sir," said Paul, "I can do without amusements."

"Ten minutes night and morning with a pair of dumb-bells, and a brisk walk in the afternoon, will supply all the exercise that is necessary to keep your body healthy and your mind alert, Barlow. This fetish of exercise is all very well if one's object is merely to become as nearly as possible a perfect animal, but for a man whose aim is to develop and use his mind it is not only unnecessary but a definite hindrance. The man who sets out to conquer nature must be prepared to make sacrifices."

"I am prepared for that, sir."

"But the sacrifice, Barlow, in your case, will not be without compensation. You will have the advantage of working with me, and if you care to make use of your opportunities there is nothing to prevent your becoming one of the greatest names in your profession. And apart from mere material advantages, you will gain knowledge which few men in the world possess—knowledge, perhaps, which no one possesses at the moment but myself. I can do things which no other surgeon has ever dared to attempt. That may not sound very modest, Barlow, but when modesty contradicts truth I prefer the truth. I am perfectly well aware that as a surgeon I am a few hundred years ahead of any other member of the profession, and it would be absurd of me to pretend that I don't know it. The profession knows it"—he smiled faintly—"and the profession doesn't like it any more than mediocrity ever likes genius. In comparison with me, Barlow, the average surgeon is a clumsy, muddle-headed fool, working by rule of thumb, hidebound with tradition, a mere imitator, for the simple reason that he has neither the brains nor the courage ever to become anything else. I am satisfied that you have the brains, and that under my instruction you can develop the necessary technical skill. It remains to be seen whether you can also develop the necessary courage."

Paul smiled.

"I don't suffer from nerves, sir."

"There are other kinds of courage, Barlow, than the mere physical self-control which is needed in the operating theatre. The surgeon who is a pioneer, blazing new trails through the jungles of ignorance and prejudice, must have the courage to press on in the face of a thousand emergencies and failures. He must have the courage to defend himself, to face abuse and

ridicule and slander without allowing them to hurt him and make him waver. He must be able to trust himself when all men doubt him, as Kipling puts it. In fact, Barlow, if you want to become a great surgeon you would do well to read Kipling's 'If' every morning before you start your day's work. And now, if you have any questions to ask, ask them."

"I should like to know, sir," said Paul, "what lines you are working on—what particular trend your experiments are taking."

"As to that, Barlow," replied Allerman, "I cannot give you much information at the moment. For years I have seen my goal clearly ahead of me and have been advancing slowly towards it. What that goal is you will learn in due course; but I prefer that you should come to the knowledge of it gradually. You can take my word for it that it is a goal which, when I reach it, will mean an enormous betterment of the human race. It will mean that nature's gold can be separated from nature's dross. But you will understand better later. I have already advanced a long way. Over a period of many years I have made countless experiments—some failures, some successes—and each success has taken me one step nearer to my goal. Stark is one of my earlier successes."

He saw Paul's quick glance of surprise and smiled.

"Naturally, Barlow," he said, "you find it hard to accept Stark as a success, but that's only because you didn't know him as he was before I treated him surgically. If I tell you about Stark, it will give you some idea of the lines on which I am working. When he came into my hands Stark was as low a type of perverted degenerate as it is possible to conceive—no mind worth mentioning, with the worst instincts of a brute coupled with the worst instincts of a human being; not merely incapable of rendering any useful service to society but actually a positive menace to it. I could hardly have found a less promising subject for experiment, and I consider him one of my most brilliant early successes."

"He seems an extraordinarily efficient servant, sir—almost like a machine."

Allerman nodded.

"Stark is not a beauty to look at," he said, "but he is as near to the perfect machine as a human being can be. That's what I have done for Stark: I have transformed him from a dangerous degenerate into a useful member of society. I have taken away all that was bestial in him and made him a harmless, useful member of the community. And I did it, Barlow, on my operating table."

"It sounds immensely interesting, sir, but—"

"That's all I can tell you at the moment. My experiments are continuing. In fact, I am hoping to make an experiment very soon which will prove beyond all question that I have reached my goal. The woman, Lorna, whom you saw here just now, will probably feature in it. What the experiment is, I don't propose to explain, because at the present moment you are quite incapable of understanding. Your work, at first, will be less practical than theoretical. You will have a room of your own in which to work, and you must understand that unless I invite you to come to this room or to my operating theatre, you are forbidden to enter either of them. Anything that I wish you to see, I shall invite you to see, but I do not wish you to make any attempt to discover anything for yourself. No one enters this room without my permission."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Paul. "I didn't realise that. Miss Fayre told me that I might find you here—"

"Miss Fayre should have known better. She knows the rules of the house. But I'm saying nothing about that, Barlow: I'm only warning you that if you wish to remain here and work with me, I expect implicit obedience, and however much you may disapprove or fail to understand anything I do, neither interfere nor criticise. I want your definite assurance on that point."

"You have it, sir," replied Paul.

Dr. Allerman nodded and got up from his chair.

"Then come with me, Barlow," he said, "and we will test the value of your promise."

CHAPTER VI

AT first, as Stark carried her from the room, Lorna struggled furiously, but he had not taken many paces before she realised that with Stark's enormous arms gripping her struggling was useless. Whatever Stark intended doing with her, she could do nothing to prevent it. She would have more chance against a gorilla than against this inhuman brute that was carrying her, tucked under one arm, and was no more disturbed by her struggles than if he had been carrying an obstreperous puppy. She had a feeling that he had only to tighten his arm a little to break her ribs, and it suddenly dawned on her that if Stark should take it into his head to resent her struggles, the consequences might be terrible, and that safety lay in quiet submission. She suddenly gave up struggling and lay limply in his arm.

"Here, you!—Stark's your name, isn't it?—Put me down!"

Stark, without glancing at her, shook his head.

"No."

"I'll go quietly. I won't try to run away."

"No," repeated Stark.

"Where are you taking me?"

"No. 6," replied Stark. "Master's orders. Lady not to leave the house."

He carried her to the end of the corridor. There, pushing open a door with his free arm, he went down a flight of stone steps, at the foot of which ran a flagged passage.

Lorna noticed, as he earned her along, several doors, all bolted on the outside. At one of them Stark paused, took a key from his pocket, thrust it into the lock and slid the door back. Then, putting her on her feet, he placed himself so that his immense bulk completely blocked the narrow passage and waved a hand towards the open door.

"You go in."

The girl glanced from Stark's impassive face to the open door, but made no movement to enter the room.

"Here, what's the idea?" she demanded. "You're not going to keep me down here. If I've got to stay in this house, I'm not staying in a cellar, and that's flat. You can go and tell your master so."

Again Stark motioned her towards the door.

"You go in," he repeated. "Master's orders." And then, as she hesitated: "You go in or I carry you in."

Resistance was out of the question, and, with that massive brute blocking the passage on one side and a blank brick wall on the other, it was of no use thinking of escape. Lorna bit her lip and wished she had her gun. If only she had her gun she'd soon shoot Allerman and his pet gorilla. But she had not, and the pet gorilla was standing between her and liberty, frowning and showing his yellow teeth in evident displeasure at the delay. With a shrug, Lorna turned and stepped through the doorway into the room.

Stark followed immediately after her and shut the door behind him. Lorna glanced quickly round. It was a small apartment, about twelve feet square, the walls distempered a cheerful yellow. There was no fire-place, and the only window was a small one, not more than a foot square, close to the ceiling. The room was no doubt part of the cellars, and the small frosted window was probably on the ground level. There was a bed against one of the walls, over the head of which was a small ornamental niche, with a half-bowl coming from the wall, as though it were designed to hold flowers. In the wall to the left of the door, breast-high, was a long sliding shutter, about four feet in length and three feet high, fastened by a hasp. In another wall was a small door, which stood ajar. The room was comfortably furnished, with a thick carpet, an arm-chair and a small table.

Stark waved a massive paw towards the bed. "Bed," he announced.

Lorna glanced at him over her shoulder.

"All right, I'm not blind. What are you waiting for, anyway? Your master told you to bring me here but he didn't tell you to wait."

Stark, for all the notice he took, might not have heard her.

"Chair," he said, pointing to it. "Table." Lorna turned and faced him.

"What's the great idea? Making an inventory? Don't worry. If I get out of this hole I shan't be taking the furniture with me."

"Very comfortable," said Stark; and then, pointing to the small door: "Bathroom."

"Fine!" said Lorna. "It reminds me of the Ritz. If I fancy a cocktail, I suppose I just ring for it, do I?"

Stark pointed to a button in the wall.

"Bell," he said.

Lorna took a cigarette from her pocket, lighted it, and inhaled deeply two or three times, gazing thoughtfully at Stark's unprepossessing face. And then the look of antagonism left her eyes, and she went closer to him.

"Listen, Stark," she said. "This isn't the first time this sort of thing has happened in this house, is it? I mean, I expect there've been others in this

room before me. You've seen them come—you've probably brought them here the same as you brought me—and you must know all about it. What's happened to them?"

The man's face might have been carved in stone. "Come on, Stark," she urged; "be a sport and tell me. What's happened to them? What's he done to them—Allerman, I mean? He's done something to them when he's brought them here, hasn't he? He means to do something to me, too, doesn't he? But what does he mean to do? He's got something in his mind—I can see he has, the way he looks at me—something bad—something wicked—something horrible—and I've got to know what it is—-see?" Her voice again held the shrill note of hysteria; her hands were nervously clasping and unclasping, and her lips twitched. "I've got to know! You must tell me! If I don't know I'll go crazy—see? I can't stand it. I've got as much guts as anyone, but this is getting me down—this waiting and wondering and not knowing what's coming to me next, and him hinting things all the time.... Damn you, Stark! If you don't tell me I'll smash your ugly face—"

She paused abruptly, making a tremendous effort to control herself.

"Sorry, Stark," she said more quietly. "I didn't mean to go off at you. But for God's sake tell me—say something—don't stand there like a stuffed gorilla saying nothing and never moving and acting as if you weren't human. What's he got in his mind? What's he going to do with me?"

The man was staring fixedly at the wall behind her. "I say nothing," he announced in his toneless, mechanical voice. "Master's orders. I say nothing."

"You must, Stark. You've got to forget your master's orders just for once and tell me. He won't know—I'll never let on that you told me—honest to God I won't! I'll never let him know so as he'll get back on you for it. You can trust me—I'm on the level. Just tell me what Allerman's game is—"

"I say nothing."

She went close to him and laid a hand on his arm.

"You've got feelings, haven't you, Stark? God knows, you don't look like it, but you must have feelings of some sort. You're not like that swine Allerman. He's got no feelings. He's a cold, cruel, unfeeling devil. You know that's true, Stark—you've only to look at his eyes to know it. He's been cruel to you, hasn't he? It's his nature to be cruel. He wouldn't be happy if he wasn't hurting somebody, frightening somebody. He's been cruel to you, and you're scared of him—the same as I am. But you've got nothing to be scared of. Allerman can't hurt you unless you choose to let him. If he laid a hand on you, you could pick him up the same as you did me and break his back with your two hands. You're strong, Stark."

"I'm strong. Yes."

"Then why don't you do it? To Allerman, I mean. Why do you let him go on treating you the way he does? He treats you like a dog, and if I had half your strength you wouldn't catch me standing for it. It's only because he knows you're scared of him that he treats you that way. If you stood up to him he'd soon climb down, and if you had half the guts I've got you'd have broken his rotten neck for him long ago. Why don't you?"

Watching Stark closely, she saw his eyes light up, as though they had caught sight of something which pleased and excited him; but almost instantly their brightness disappeared and they became dull and lifeless again.

"Why don't you, Stark?" she persisted. "You could do it as easy as kiss your hand—just walk into his room, pick him up in those big hands of yours and break him across your knee."

Stark's mouth was working. His tongue passed quickly across his lips.

"Big hands," he said. "I'm strong. Yes."

"He'd never be cruel to you again then, Stark, and you'd never have to be scared of him any more. You'd be free of him for good—free to do as you like and go where you like instead of living shut up here, slaving for Allerman and being treated like dirt. You could get away from here and—listen, Stark: you could get away from here—to-day—at once—and take me with you. I'd see you all right once we got outside. I've got money—plenty of it; and I've got pals—-good pals—who'd look after you, Stark. There's nothing they wouldn't do for you if I told them you'd given me a break. But you've got to get rid of Allerman first. We'd never get clear with that devil alive. He wouldn't let us go. You've got to kill him, Stark. Do you understand?—-kill him!"

"Kill him," repeated Stark. "Big hands. Strong. Yes."

He raised his hands and stared at them, turning them this way and that, with a look of deep interest, and a leering smile spread over his face.

"Kill him," he said again. "Yes."

Lorna nodded, smiling at him.

"That's right, Stark. You've got the idea. And then we'll get away together. Kill him soon, Stark—to-day—before he has a chance to do anything to either of us, before he can be cruel to you again."

The man showed his yellow teeth in a wide grin.

"Kill him. To-day. Yes."

The door was opened, and Allerman, with Paul following close behind him, entered the room. At the sight of him Lorna shrank away and stood with her back against the wall, watching him with scared, alert eyes as he advanced to the middle of the room and paused.

"I hope you are satisfied with your quarters," said Allerman.

Lorna's gaze shifted from Allerman to Paul and back to Allerman.

"What have you come for?" she demanded. "What do you want? Why the hell can't you leave me alone?"

"I've come to see if Stark has carried out my instructions."

Lorna's gaze went to Stark. He was standing behind his employer, staring at the doctor's back, his huge hands clenching and unclenching, his lips drawn back, his eyelids fluttering.

"Well, he has," replied Lorna. "He always does, doesn't he? Stark always carries out your instructions—because he's scared to do anything else, because he knows that if he didn't you'd treat him the same as you treated me—use a whip on him—and he hasn't got the courage to stand up to you."

She saw Stark raise his hands and noted that his eyes were bright with excitement again and his lips twitching.

"But if I was Stark you wouldn't get away with it," she went on truculently. "If I had Stark's strength and big hands like he's got, I'd use them. I'd use them on you! I'd pick you up and smash you across my knee—"

"Look out, sir!"

It was Paul's voice, urgent and compelling. Instantly Allerman spun round, to find Stark crouching, ready to spring, with teeth showing and huge gnarled fingers curved like claws. And instantly, as Allerman's eyes met his, Stark's hands relaxed, his arms fell to his sides, he stood stiffly at attention and his face became once more as expressionless as a block of wood.

For some seconds Allerman stared intently into the servant's eyes.

"Stark!"

"Yes, master."

"Just now, when I turned round, what were you going to do?"

Stark's lips worked convulsively, but no sound came from them.

"Answer me. Stark: what were you going to do?"

"Kill you, master."

"Why were you going to kill me?"

Stark's gaze shifted to Lorna.

"She told me to kill you. Yes, master."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Lorna.

Allerman turned to her and cut her short with a gesture.

"It's the truth," he said. "Stark can't help telling me the truth." He turned to Paul. "That is one of the points where my treatment was entirely successful, Barlow," he said. "Stark is absolutely incapable of lying. At other points, as you see, the treatment only partially succeeded. Stark suffers from an occasional recrudescence of his brutal instincts. But, as I told you, he was one of my earlier experiments, before I was working on the lines I am following now, and at the time he marked a big step forward. Some day, when I am less busy, I may see if I can remedy the defects left by my former treatment, but at present I have more important work on hand, and when Stark is threatened with one of these attacks I stave it off by administering an antidote."

He took from his pocket a tiny bottle, uncorked it and placed it on the table. Then, producing a small leather case, he opened it, took out a hypodermic syringe, filled it from the bottle, and turned to Stark. "Pull up your sleeve, Stark."

The man glared at him, but made no movement.

"The stimulus supplied by this girl's incitement to kill me, Barlow," said Allerman, "has produced serious reactions. Stark is even trying to disobey me, which is most unusual. But he will have to obey me, and he knows it. Pull up your sleeve, Stark!"

Stark obviously made a desperate effort not to obey; but slowly his left arm was raised and his right hand pulled back the sleeve of his white jacket. Allerman stepped forward, thrust the needle into his wrist and withdrew it.

"Now go," he ordered.

"Yes, master," replied Stark, and, turning, strode from the room.

"In future," said Allerman to Lorna, as he replaced the syringe in its case, "you will please refrain from upsetting Stark. The consequences might be serious—to yourself. If his primitive instincts were to get the better of him, you would very much regret having roused them. Moreover, I require you for other purposes. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't. I want to know what you're keeping me down here for. I want to know what you've got in your mind—"

"You can have anything you want," interrupted Allerman, "except information on that point. If you need anything, ring the bell. Miss Fayre will look after you."

"Where is she? She's not here, and I want her here. I don't want to stay here alone—"

"She will come whenever you need her. You have only to ring the bell."

"I want her here—now, I tell you. I don't want to be left alone. I'm not going to be left alone—see? If you leave me here on my own I'll smash the door down—"

"You'll not do anything of the kind."

"Won't I? You just try me and see!" Allerman crossed to the wall with the sliding shutter and undid the hasp.

"This will interest you, too, Barlow," he said. "Come and look, both of you."

Paul and Lorna crossed the room to where he was standing, and Allerman slid back the shutter. Behind it was a row of perpendicular iron bars. Allerman waved a hand towards them.

"Look," he said.

Paul, stepping close to the bars, peered through into the semi-darkness beyond. He could see shadowy figures moving about and could hear the shuffle of feet on a stone floor. He saw some of the figures move towards the bars, and as they stepped close enough for him to see them clearly he could not suppress a gasp of horror.

They were men, dressed in a sort of overall of some dark blue material—men, if such they could be called, with faces in comparison with which Stark's was almost beautiful; faces with loose, slobbering mouths, inane grins, sagging jaws and an expression of bestial vacancy; foul, repulsive faces that sent a shudder of disgust through Paul and made him instinctively take a step backwards.

"These are my workers," explained Allerman in a matter-of-fact voice. "They can make no claims to beauty, Barlow, but they are none the less interesting. There are about twenty of them all told—the results of my earlier experiments, some more successful than others."

"They're horrible!" murmured Paul.

"You think so? I can assure you, Barlow, that they are far less horrible than they were when they came into my hands. They are now at least capable of useful work. But I have made immense strides since these experiments, and you must not judge my work by my early efforts."

Some of the workers, catching sight of Lorna, came close to the bars, peering at her, mouthing and jabbering and thrusting their hands through, trying to claw her. She started back with a scream, and stood staring at them with a look of terror on her face. Allerman smiled.

"If you want company, my pretty friend," he said, "there it is. You have only to draw aside the shutter if you are feeling lonely and you'll have all the company you want."

Lorna could only stare at him, dumb with horror.

"But you will be wise," added Allerman, "if for the next few days you are satisfied with your own company. Even your gang of degenerates couldn't help you if those bars broke."

"It's foul—filthy—loathsome!" gasped the girl. "My God, and you did it! You made them like that! You made them into those horrible beasts. You did it, damn you! And that's what you want to do to me. But you shan't do it—you shan't, do you hear? I'll kill myself first. You shan't touch me. I won't let you—"

Flinging herself on to the bed, she buried her face in the pillow, sobbing.

Allerman took a dog whip from his pocket, slashed at the faces that were pressed close against the bars, and, as the workers, snarling and screaming, fell back, closed the shutter.

"I presume, Barlow," he said, as he slipped the whip into his pocket and crossed towards the door, "that your promise still holds good?"

Paul made no reply.

CHAPTER VII

FOR several days Paul saw neither Jeanette nor Lorna. Allerman had placed at his disposal a large, airy room with big windows as his workroom. Communicating with it was a smaller room, comfortably furnished as a bedroom, and, except for the hour's walk which he took every afternoon, Paul spent the whole of his time in his own quarters. He was supposed to be working. Allerman had given him a mass of research work, enough to occupy him for many weeks, and every morning at nine o'clock visited him to enquire how he was getting on and answer any questions he might wish to put. Actually, however, Paul did very little work. He spent a great deal of his time sitting at his desk staring out of the window, or restlessly pacing the room, trying to come to a decision.

When he had arrived at Dr. Allerman's house he had been convinced that Allerman was the outstanding genius of the whole medical profession and that in securing a post as his assistant he had been immensely lucky and had taken the first step along the road which would eventually lead to fame and fortune. He had been prepared, as he had assured Allerman, to trust him completely and give him implicit obedience. Now, however, he was not so sure. First Jeanette's veiled warning and her eagerness that he should refuse the job, and then the sight of those pitiful wretches behind the iron bars in the cellar, had shaken his confidence. At first he had no more than an uneasy feeling that he might be mistaken in his estimate of Dr. Allerman and that Jeanette had been right when she had urged him to decline the position of assistant—a feeling which he promptly dismissed.

It was absurd to doubt Allerman. He was recognised everywhere as an outstanding genius, and, even if his methods were somewhat unorthodox, that was no reason for losing faith in him. Allerman himself had warned him that he would see things in his house which might puzzle and even shock him, that he would need courage to see the job through, that unless he was prepared to accept, in a coldly scientific spirit, without comment or criticism, whatever he might see, he had better not undertake the work at all, and on those terms he had eagerly undertaken it. Yet now, at the first test of his courage and confidence in Allerman's genius, he was failing miserably, allowing his sentimentality to get the better of him, actually entertaining the possibility that Allerman might be an inhuman monster or a crazy crank, and displaying the weakness and vacillation and muddle-headed narrow-mindedness which were the sure signs of the mediocrity which his employer so heartily despised. He decided that he would never again allow a doubt of Allerman to enter his mind.

But it was difficult to keep his resolution. The seeds of doubt had been sown, as Allerman had been aware, when he had entered the doctor's

private room and witnessed his treatment of Lorna; and from that moment this doubt, despite all his efforts to annihilate it, had increased.

His mind seemed determined not to leave the subject alone, and every time he dragged it away from it and forced it to concentrate on his work, it slipped back to thoughts of Allerman and Stark and Lorna and the repulsive caricatures of human beings that he had seen in the cellar.

The more he thought over all he had seen and heard since he had come to Allerman's house, the more dimly he saw the doctor as a man of outstanding genius who was seeking truth for the betterment of his fellow men, and the more vividly he saw him as a sadistic lunatic whose crazy notions were leading him into blasphemous abominations. If Allerman were really the great genius he was supposed to be, could he have created those repulsive creatures in the cellar? And even if he were a genius, was he justified in creating them?

Paul did not know. He could not decide whether, if he threw up the job, as Jeanette had begged him to do, he would be throwing away fame and fortune and everything that association with Allerman promised for the future, or cutting loose from a dangerous madman, a share in whose inhuman brutalities must inevitably lead sooner or later to disaster and disgrace.

He was desperately anxious to discuss the matter again with Jeanette. She had been terribly urgent that he should not accept the job, and evidently knew a good deal more than she had been prepared to tell him. More, perhaps, than she had dared to tell him.

She knew, perhaps, what he at the moment only suspected. She could not have been here in the house, acting as Allerman's secretary, for nearly three years without learning a good deal about him; and when they had discussed the matter on the day of his arrival she had obviously been keeping something back.

Jeanette, he realised now, would not have urged him to refuse the job unless she had had some very good reason. If he could have another talk with her he might induce her to tell him what that reason had been. He was quite sure that it had been something more than the one she had given him—that he would be happier doing the work of a general practitioner. Jeanette knew that he had always intended to specialise, and she knew also that as Allerman's assistant at a salary of a thousand a year he would have the one job in the world which could give him everything he wanted.

No, that had not been Jeanette's real reason. He must see her and make her realise that he had a right to know what her real reason was.

But seeing Jeanette seemed to be no easy matter. He had imagined that he and Allerman and Jeanette would meet at any rate at meal times, and that there would be some sort of social intercourse in the evenings; but he had been quickly disillusioned. His meals were brought to him in his room by Stark, who seemed to combine in his unattractive person the functions of butler, housemaid and general factotum; and Allerman, on his first visit to Paul's room, had made it abundantly clear that, except for the purpose of his walk in the afternoon, he was expected to remain in his room, and that the other rooms of the house were closed to him except on Allerman's invitation. And so far no such invitation had been tendered.

He had hoped that he might see Jeanette when he left his room for his daily exercise; but though he had dawdled as much as possible on his way in and out of the house, he had never caught a glimpse of her. When he had ventured to suggest to Allerman that, as an old friend of Jeanette, he would like to see her sometimes, Allerman had assured him that she was extremely busy all day and that by the time she had finished her day's work she was far too tired to care to do anything but go to bed. He somehow contrived to convey the impression that if Paul did not feel equally ready for bed at the end of his day's work he was not working as hard as he should be.

Actually, he was not. Apart from his constantly nagging suspicions, he found that the solitude got on his nerves and made him restless and depressed. And he could not get away from a persistent sense of disappointment. He had been under the impression that as Allerman's assistant he would take an active part in the doctor's experiments; that he would be present and possibly help at the operations; that he would be admitted to Allerman's confidence and treated more or less as a colleague.

But nothing of the sort had happened. So far Allerman had kept him fully occupied with research work, tied to his desk, reading and making notes, which Allerman duly collected and took away; and though he told himself repeatedly that he must not be impatient, that he could not reasonably expect Allerman to open out to any extent until they were better acquainted, and that he must learn to walk before he could run, he was none the less disappointed and dissatisfied.

And every hour his doubts increased and multiplied, and his restlessness and uneasiness grew.

He was standing at the window of his room one morning, watching the "Workers," as he watched them every morning, being marched off by Stark to the fields for their day's work, when there came a knock at the door and he turned to see Jeanette entering the room. She seemed to be paler than when he had last seen her and to move more listlessly as she crossed the room towards him. He went eagerly to meet her.

"This is great, Jeanette," he said with a smile. "I was beginning to think I wasn't ever to be allowed to see you. Allerman gave me a pretty broad hint that I was expected to keep to my own quarters, and I thought that until I got to know him a bit better it might be wiser to take the hint."

She nodded.

"And do you know Dr. Allerman any better now than you did, Paul?"

"Well, so far I've not seen much of him—"

"But you've seen—other things."

"I haven't seen you, Jeanette, and that's what has been getting me down. It struck me as rather queer that Allerman shouldn't give me a chance of seeing you. I told him we were old friends, but even then he didn't jump to it. But why didn't you come along and see me?"

"For the same reason that you didn't come to see me, Paul—because Dr. Allerman had forbidden me to. He said you were much too busy during the day, and much too tired when your work was done to do anything but go to bed."

"For a genius," smiled Paul, "Allerman isn't very versatile. But you've come to see me now, Jeanette."

"Oh, yes—with Dr. Allerman's permission. In future you're to be free to go anywhere in the house—except of course into his particular rooms—and we can see each other as often as we like. There's no risk in that now."

Paul frowned.

"Risk? I don't understand. What risk is there for anyone in letting us see each other?"

"Of course, you don't understand, Paul," she answered. "If you had understood—if you hadn't refused to let yourself understand—if you hadn't let yourself be carried away by the idea that Dr. Allerman is a great genius and that therefore everything he does and says must necessarily be right—but you wouldn't listen to me, Paul. You were so sure that you'd got a wonderful job, and you wouldn't take any notice of me when I begged you to refuse it and go away and have nothing to do with Dr. Allerman. And it's too late now."

All Paul's doubts came surging back into his mind. He stood for some moments frowning at the girl's pale, troubled face. Then he took her elbow in his hand and urged her towards a chair.

"Come and sit down, dear," he said. "I want to talk to you."

He led her to an armchair and seated himself on the arm. As he did so he noticed her cheek. As she had stood talking to him, that side of her face had

been away from the light and he had seen nothing amiss; but now, as the light from the window fell on the other side of her face, he saw the thin, red weal that crossed her cheek from ear to chin.

"What's this, Jeanette?" he asked, touching her cheek with a finger. "What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Oh, that's old history now, Paul."

"But how did you do it?"

"I didn't do it. A whip did it—Dr. Allerman's whip."

Paul sprang to his feet.

"Jeanette!"

"Does that shock you?"

"Jeanette, I can't believe—he wouldn't dare—if I thought he'd been swine enough to do that—"

"He did it, Paul—yesterday—because he was annoyed with me for asking if I might be allowed to see you. It's not the first time I've felt his whip, Paul."

He stared at her, speechless.

"My God!" he exclaimed at last. "If that devil did that to you—"

"You saw him treat Lorna in the same way, Paul, didn't you?"

"That was different. Lorna was hysterical—absolutely beside herself. She'd tried to stick a knife into him, and it was probably the best way to bring her to her senses. But you! Damn the swine! Where is he—in his room? I'll soon show him that two can use a whip—"

He started towards the door, but the girl caught his arm.

"No, Paul—please!" she pleaded. "You'll do no good."

"Hang it, Jeanette, you can't expect me to stand for that sort of thing. I'll cut the hide off him—"

"You'll do no good," she repeated, "and you may do a great deal of harm. It's not worth making a fuss about." She sighed. "If only you had listened to me, Paul, and gone away as I asked you to—"

"I shouldn't have known anything about it. Is that what you mean? Then thank God I didn't listen to you! Has he ever struck you before?"

"Oh, yes—sometimes."

"And is that why you were so anxious that I shouldn't stay here—because you didn't want me to know? But it doesn't matter—I know now, anyway,

and for every time that brute has struck you I'll give him the best thrashing."

"You mustn't do anything of the sort, Paul. It's nothing to make such a fuss about. Dr. Allerman doesn't often lose his temper with me. He's—very fond of me, really."

"It looks like it!"

"Fond of me, Paul. But he hates my body. He can't stand anything that's—well, inefficient. It repels and angers him, and sometimes his anger gets the better of him and he forgets that it isn't my fault that my body is inefficient. He doesn't mean to be cruel to me. You heard what he said to Lorna, didn't you?—that I had a poor, weak, deformed body, but the mind of a great lady."

"That's all very well, but to strike you, to use a whip on you—the man's a brutal devil, and if I'd had any idea that this sort of thing was going on I'd have had you out of it long ago. But now I do know, you're not staying in this house another hour. Go and pack up your things. I'll see Allerman and tell him that you're leaving at once."

Jeanette shook her head.

"It's no use thinking of that, Paul. I can't leave."

"You can't stay," replied Paul; "that's obvious. You shouldn't have stayed here so long. As soon as you discovered what Allerman was, you should have packed up and cleared out. I can't understand why you didn't."

She shrugged.

"And have you discovered what Allerman is, Paul? Do you still think he's the wonderful genius who's devoting his life to working for the sake of humanity, and do you still think yourself the luckiest man in the world to have got a job as his assistant?"

Paul began pacing the room restlessly.

"I wish to God I knew, Jeanette! I wish I knew what to think! Those poor devils down in the cellar—"

"The workers? Then you've seen the workers, have you?"

He nodded.

"They're horrible, Jeanette—terrible. If they're specimens of what Allerman does with his experiments—I don't know. I can't make up my mind. He's either a genius or a devil, and I don't know which."

"You've seen the workers, Paul, and you've seen Stark, and you've seen the way he treated Lorna—"

"Yes, I know, my dear, and I've seen this—"

He touched her cheek with his finger. "But Allerman—the greatest surgeon in the country—a man who is respected and admired by the whole medical profession—a man who can do the marvellous things in the operating theatres that I've seen him do. I simply can't believe that he's nothing more than a crazy, brutal devil."

"You have to believe it, Paul. It was no use my trying to tell you when you came here. You wouldn't have listened to me. You would have thought I'd lost my senses. But you've seen for yourself now. Dr. Allerman may be a genius; he may be the wonderful surgeon that everyone believes him to be; he must be a wonderful surgeon to do the things he has done. But that doesn't mean that he can't be a devil at the same time. If any other man than Dr. Allerman had done the fiendish things which he has done, you wouldn't hesitate to think him a devil. It's just because it's Dr. Allerman—"

"Yes, I know," said Paul. "If he were anyone else than Dr. Allerman, I'd say that he was a dangerous, perverted, degenerate maniac, and that his horrible experiments should be stopped. But it is Dr. Allerman, and it's just possible that these experiments of his are justified; that he really is getting at something so tremendous that almost anything, however horrible it may seem, would be justified if it will help him to reach his goal. After all, vivisection is pretty horrible, but we don't kick at it, provided we are satisfied that it is going to lessen human suffering and teach us how to cure some disease. It may be the same with Allerman's experiments."

Jeanette smiled faintly.

"But you don't believe all that, Paul. You are only trying to persuade yourself that it might be true because you want it to be true. Deep down inside you, you know as well as I do—and, God knows, I've reason for knowing it—that whatever else he may be, Allerman is a cruel, brutal fiend, that he's doing things that no man has any right to do. And you—-you're going to help him do them!"

"I don't know what I'm going to do, Jeanette. But never mind me for the moment. I'm thinking of you. You can't stay here."

"I can't leave," she said again.

"But that's absurd. There's nothing to prevent your leaving. There's no reason why you shouldn't walk out of the house now. As a matter of fact, that's the best thing for you to do."

She shook her head.

"You seem to forget, Paul," she said, "that if I walk out of the house I have nowhere to go, no friends or relations. And I should have no job, no means of earning my living. It isn't easy for me to find a job that I can do, or anyone

who would give me a job, even if I could do it. I was lucky to get this one with Dr. Allerman and I can't afford to throw it away."

"You're willing to stay here after the way he has treated you? After all you've said about him? Even though you believe he's a brutal fiend who is doing things that no man has any right to do, you're still willing to stay here and help him—the very thing you blame me for doing."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Beggars can't be choosers, Paul."

He took two or three paces up and down the room and then stood still.

"Listen, Jeanette," he said. "I'll tell you what we're going to do. You're going to leave at once and I'm going with you. I'm going to chuck up the whole thing. You were quite right—whatever Allerman is, I shan't be happy here. I don't trust him and I should never be happy working with him. We'll both leave and I'll do as you wanted me to do—set up in practice on my own. I shan't have a thousand a year, but I've got a bit of money and we'll get married and rub along somehow. Go and pack your things while I see Allerman."

Again the girl shook her head.

"I can't leave, Paul. It's no use. You might persuade me to promise to go away with you, but I know very well that I shouldn't keep my promise. I shouldn't be able to."

"Afraid of Allerman?"

"Yes, perhaps. But it's not only that. If Dr. Allerman tells me to do a thing, I can't help myself. I have to do it. Somehow I don't seem able to resist him, he's so terribly strong—his will, I mean—and if ever I try to make the least resistance, I just crumple up. Dr. Allerman would never agree to let me go and I should never be able to go if he forbade it. That may sound pitifully weak and contemptible, Paul, but it's the truth."

"It's absolute nonsense, Jeanette! If I want to take you from this house, neither Allerman nor anyone else can stop me. Leave it to me—I'll see him at once." He went towards the door, and glanced back as Jeanette called his name.

"Please don't, Paul!" she begged. "Please don't go to Dr. Allerman. It's too late now. I can't leave, nor can you."

Paul came back and stood in front of her chair.

"What exactly do you mean by that, Jeanette?"

"You don't understand," she answered. "You don't know Dr. Allerman as I do. If you did, you'd realise that he won't allow you to leave now. It's too late.

You know too much to be allowed to go outside and tell other people what you have seen here. You've seen the Workers. You've seen Lorna here. As soon as I heard that Dr. Allerman had let you see the Workers, I knew it was too late. You've got to stay here now."

"But, good heavens, Jeanette, the whole thing's preposterous! If I wish to leave the house I shall leave it."

She shook her head.

"You won't, Paul. Don't try. Something terrible will happen if you try. It has happened before—last year—there was another assistant. He hadn't been here long before he discovered what you've discovered. He wanted to go—insisted on going. But he didn't go. He's still here, Paul, in the cellars—one of the Workers—and that's what would happen to you if you tried to get away against Dr. Allerman's will. But you won't try. Dr. Allerman knows that now. That's why he's letting you go where you like about the house—why he's letting you see me."

"That's just where he's wrong, Jeanette. If I wish to leave—"

"He's clever," she interrupted. "Far too clever for you or me. He sees everything and seems to know just what you're thinking and feeling. He knows now what he didn't know when you first arrived here—that you're fond of me. He asked me this morning and I told him the truth. I never can tell a lie to Dr. Allerman, and I told him you loved me and wanted to marry me. That was why he used his whip. Just for the moment he thought I might leave, but he soon realised that he need have no fear of that. That's why you're given permission to go where you like, Paul. Dr. Allerman knows that I can't leave him, and he knows that as long as I'm here you won't leave him."

"He's right there, Jeanette, but I don't intend that either of us shall stay here. There's nothing to be afraid of in Allerman, and you've got to make an effort. If you stand up to him and insist on going away with me, he will never dare—"

The door opened and Dr. Allerman came into the room.

"What is it Dr. Allerman will never dare?" he repeated, as he crossed the room towards them. He smiled. "You still have a lot to learn about me, Barlow, if you haven't yet realised that in the cause of science there's nothing I wouldn't dare. Courage, Barlow, as I have already told you—indomitable courage and an inflexible will are the two essentials for the man who sets out to conquer nature. But I didn't come here to discuss myself: I came here to tell you that from now onwards the rigid restrictions which I thought it wise to impose on you at first will be relaxed. No doubt Jeanette has already told you that you are free to go wherever you please, and in

future the three of us will take our meals together." His gaze was fixed on Paul's eyes. It seemed to Paul, as he struggled to meet it steadily, that Allerman was reading his mind as easily as if it were an open book. "But I have no wish to intrude," added Allerman. "As old friends, you and Jeanette no doubt have a good deal to say to each other. We shall meet again at lunch-time." He went towards the door.

"Dr. Allerman!" It was Paul's voice, but so strained and unnatural that he hardly recognised it as his own.

The doctor paused at the door and glanced back.

"You have something you wish to say to me, Barlow?"

"Yes, sir, I have. You told me just now that I was free to go wherever I liked."

"Quite correct. And so?"

"Does that mean, sir, that I am free to give up my work here as your assistant and leave the house?"

"Certainly, Barlow. You are at liberty to go whenever you wish to go." The hint of a smile appeared on his thin lips. "But you won't go," he added, and went from the room.

CHAPTER VIII

PAUL stood frowning at the door through which Allerman had gone.

"You see, Paul?" said Jeanette. "He's far too clever for you or me. He knows you won't go." Paul turned towards her.

"It depends on you, Jeanette," he said. "If you'll come with me—"

She shook her head.

"You're not really sorry that I won't, Paul," she said. "You're still not sure about Dr. Allerman; I could see that when he was talking to you. You still can't bring yourself to believe that he isn't the great scientist working to conquer nature for the benefit of mankind." She smiled. "I don't blame you, Paul. I know how hard it is to believe anything which he doesn't want you to believe when Dr. Allerman is with you, staring into your eyes. He sort of swamps you with his personality and makes you feel almost as much confidence in him as he has in himself. It's only when you're away from him that you can think your own thoughts." She rose and went to him, laying a hand on his arm and smiling at his anxious face. "Don't worry, Paul. Even if I could go with you, he wouldn't let us go. There's nothing to be done now but stay here and carry on with your work, hoping for the best."

"I wish I knew what to believe. I don't want to make a fool of myself—throw away the chance of working with Allerman—"

"You can't now, Paul. You've got to stay here. The best thing is to go on with your work in the usual way and give Dr. Allerman no reason to suspect that you're not sure about him. You'll be sure before long, and then—" She shrugged her shoulders. "Then it won't make any difference; you'll still stay on. But don't let's waste our time talking about it. We shall be able to see each other now—"

"It's you, Jeanette. I can't forget that Allerman struck you—"

"That's nothing. He did it in a fit of temper and was terribly penitent about it afterwards. I shall feel better really now you're here. If ever I get frightened—"

"Frightened? That's just what I want to get at, Jeanette. What are you frightened of?"

She shook her head.

"I can't tell you. Perhaps I'm being silly and imagining things."

"Of course," said Paul, "things are pretty queer here. Stark is enough to scare anyone. But I can't believe there's any actual danger. I can't help feeling that perhaps you're exaggerating. You know what I mean, dear: living

here all this time and working for a man like Allerman—it's bound to get on your nerves."

"You've just seen Dr. Allerman, Paul: that's why you're talking like that. He was-only here a few minutes, but it was long enough for your real thoughts and feelings to be swamped. Yet you don't believe me when I say that I couldn't leave if he didn't want me to—-and I've been here with him for nearly three years—being swamped all the time. It's always the same."

"But really, Jeanette, that's nonsense—"

"Oh, no, it isn't. Look at Stark—he has absolutely no mind of his own. And now there's Lorna. She has a good deal more will-power than most people, but even she is beginning to knuckle under. But you mustn't let that happen to you, Paul. You mustn't let Dr. Allerman influence you as he does everyone else. If there's ever to be an end of this dreadful business for either of us, you must be able to think clearly and see things as they really are—not as Dr. Allerman wants you to see them. You must try to believe me, Paul, and disbelieve Dr. Allerman—"

There came a knock at the door and Stark appeared. "Lunch," he announced.

It was a trying meal. When Allerman was not talking, pouring contempt on the muddle-headed medical profession and dilating on his own theories, he sat there with a cynical smile on his lips which somehow made Paul feel that he was a naughty child whose naughtiness had been discovered and was being magnanimously overlooked.

But most of the time Allerman talked.

"A new humanity, Barlow," he said. "That is what is needed, and that is what science will eventually give to the world—men and women with none of the faults of the present men and women and with all their virtues magnified a hundredfold. We shall develop them in the same way as we develop a more beautiful plant—-selecting, grafting, gradually eliminating the undesirable qualities and intensifying the desirable ones. Look what we have done with roses—hundreds of exquisite types with every variety of form and colour, yet all we had to work on in the beginning was the common wild rose. If it can be done with roses, it can be done with human beings. Don't you agree?"

"It might be possible, sir," admitted Paul. "But I think it's open to doubt whether it is desirable or not. After all, most of the roses which have been produced, though they may have form and colour, have very little scent. I'm not sure that in sacrificing the perfume to colour and shape we haven't made a bad bargain."

"The scent will come. It is merely a question of time."

"And as I see things," continued Paul, "the same applies to human beings. It's the personality, the intangible something which distinguishes one individual from another apart from mere outward appearance—the scent, in other words—that is a person's chief charm. It might be possible to produce a new humanity with perfect bodies by the same methods as have been used to produce the different varieties of the original wild rose, but I don't see how science can hope ever to produce a humanity with perfect souls. It comes down to a question of souls, sir."

Allerman smiled.

"And what, Barlow, is the soul? But that, perhaps, is a rather profound question to discuss at lunch. It's as well, however, to remember that the soul is not necessarily the intangible thing it is generally believed to be. Science may one day discover that the soul is no less material than the body, and no less amenable to surgical treatment. When that day dawns, Barlow—and it may be nearer than you think—the new humanity, the perfect humanity, with all that is bad excised and all that is good intensified, will be well within sight. The soul may eventually be found to be nothing more than a gland."

"That's a pretty horrible thought, sir."

Allerman shook his head.

"Truth is never horrible," he said. "Only half-truths—the result of inefficient thinking—are horrible." After lunch Paul went out for his walk. He had hoped that the new regime would permit Jeanette to go with him, but Allerman announced that he would need her in his study for the whole of the afternoon.

He had a lecture to prepare, which he wished to dictate.

"You and Jeanette must continue your reminiscences some other time, Barlow," he said. "We are writing history in this house—the history of the future—and reminiscences must wait."

Paul set out alone, striking across the fields which lay behind the house and formed part of Dr. Allerman's property. He wanted to think, and he had a feeling that he would think more clearly somewhere away from the house. He wanted to stand back from the situation and take a good look at it. He had an uneasy feeling that inside the house, with Dr. Allerman under the same roof, in an atmosphere which was impregnated with the doctor's overwhelming personality, he had been unable to get the situation into focus and see it clearly.

The rush of doubts which he had experienced when Jeanette had talked to him had to a large extent subsided. The girl, he told himself as he strode across the fields, was exaggerating things, letting her imagination run away with her. She was not strong, and Allerman worked her pretty hard—she had had no holiday since she had gone to him nearly three years ago. She was obviously in an overwrought, nervous condition.

Allerman's house was not the place for an impressionable girl, and it was almost inevitable that anyone who did not understand the work on which he was engaged should come to the conclusion that he was an inhuman monster. It was absurd to expect a woman to look on Stark and the Workers from the same viewpoint as that of Allerman. To Jeanette they were horrible and nothing more; to Allerman, though they might be horrible, their brutishness was a quite unimportant detail: they marked definite steps in his advance towards his goal, and, though these repulsive by-products were probably inevitable, his ultimate results might justify their production. That, of course, was the right attitude—-the scientific attitude. He must not allow his love of Jeanette to stampede him into doubting Allerman. He must keep his mind clear, uninfluenced by her doubts and fears...

He gave a rather wry smile. It was all very well to talk of keeping his mind free, but was he sure that it was free now? All these reassuring thoughts—-were they really his own, created by his own mind, or had they come to him as a result of the half-hour which he had spent talking with Allerman at lunch? He had an uncomfortable feeling that the latter might be the case, that he was thinking in the way Allerman had wished him to think, that his mind was obeying some outside influence, repeating like a parrot ideas which had been thrust into it. Allerman had a tremendously forceful personality. He swamped you, Jeanette had said. Paul wondered if he, too, had been swamped.

When he reached the gate that led from the field into the lane, Paul found it occupied. Perched on top of it was the tweed-clad figure of a man, who sat with his elbows resting on his knees, thoughtfully gazing at the pipe in his hand. In spite of the hint of greyness about his temples, his face, as he glanced up at Paul's approach, was the face of a man of about thirty, a clean-cut, well-tanned face, with a pair of very blue eyes.

He welcomed Paul with a smile, and flourished his pipe.

"I've been staring at my pipe for twenty minutes," he said, "wondering whether it was worth walking into the village to get a match."

Paul produced a box of matches and handed it to him. The stranger lighted his pipe, offered Paul a cigarette and waved a hand towards the gate.

"Take a seat," he invited, edging along to make room for Paul.

The latter perched himself on the gate beside him. "My name's Delane," announced the stranger. "I've got a little place—a cottage—just the other side of the village. Are you staying down here?"

"I'm staying with Dr. Allerman," replied Paul. Delane glanced at him sharply, and then became absorbed in prodding his pipe with the blade of a penknife.

"You're a friend of his?"

"I'm his assistant."

"H'm! Know much about him?"

"I know what everybody knows—that he's a marvellous surgeon."

"'Dr. Allerman's Experimental Farm—Danger,'" said Delane. "That's a rum sort of notice to put up, isn't it? What's the danger?"

"I've no idea," smiled Paul. "I fancy that's only Allerman's way of keeping trespassers off his property."

"Queer sort of cuss, isn't he? There are all sorts of rumours about him down here, you know. He's the prime subject of conversation in the village pub. Everybody seems scared of him, but I can't find out why. And no one will come near his farm at night. I've asked several people about it. It seems that one James Puddefoot crossed one of Allerman's fields one night and had a rather unpleasant experience. The story is that just as he turned through a gap in one of the hedges there was a growl and something sprang at him. Puddefoot seems a bit vague as to what it was that sprang at him: the nearest he can get to a description is that it was a gorilla, only it wasn't a gorilla because the creature spoke—shouted 'Master! Master!' as if he were calling to someone. James Puddefoot's considered opinion is that it was a man with the face of a gorilla, and the view of the local wiseacres is that Allerman was responsible—that he got hold of some man and did something to him, making him into the semi-human beast that sprang out at Puddefoot and chivvied him across the fields until he jumped the gate into the road and rushed across to the local pub, where he had to swallow three pints of beer before he could give an account of what had happened to him."

Paul smiled.

"And my opinion, for what it's worth," he said, "is that James Puddefoot had had a good many pints before he crossed the field."

Delane gave a shrug.

"Local gossip may exaggerate, of course," he said, "but there's usually some truth behind that sort of tale. Colour is lent to Puddefoot's story by the reports from the tradesmen who call at Allerman's house. They say he has a

servant who is much more like a gorilla than a man—Shark or Spark or some such name."

"Stark," said Paul. "Stark is no beauty, but he's quite human and a most efficient servant. Dr. Allerman keeps very much to himself, and he is perhaps rather—eccentric, and that sort of thing's bound to set tongues wagging in a place like this. But it's all moonshine. He's an extraordinarily gifted man who's devoting his life to scientific research and experiment."

"What kind of experiment?"

"I've only a vague idea of the lines on which he's working—you see, I've not been here more than a few days. In any case, even if I knew, I certainly shouldn't feel at liberty to broadcast the information."

Delane smiled.

"You're very loyal, aren't you?"

"And you're very curious, aren't you?" smiled Paul.

"About Allerman? Yes—very. That's why I've been pumping you. There are lots of things about Allerman which you could probably tell me if you would, but I see it wouldn't be the least use asking you. Never mind: I'll find out in due course. There's no hurry; I've got the cottage on a three-years lease." Paul gazed at him curiously as he sat puffing his pipe and staring at the horizon.

"Do you mean that you've rented a cottage and come down here to live simply to satisfy your curiosity about Allerman?"

Delane nodded.

"There are certain questions to which I'm anxious to find the answers, and I've an idea that this is the spot to find them." He was silent for some moments, and then turned to face Paul.

"No offence meant," he said, "but you've a very high opinion of Allerman, haven't you?"

"The whole medical profession has."

"And that includes you? It's you I'm talking about at the moment. You've taken this job as Allerman's assistant. You no doubt think that it's a marvellous opportunity and that Allerman is a tin god. Naturally you would think that: Allerman has an amazing power of projecting his own thoughts into other people's minds. He always had. It's a wonderful gift if used in the right way, but a pretty deadly one if it isn't. You say that you've a very high opinion of Dr. Allerman—but are you quite sure it really is your own opinion?"

It was an echo of Paul's own doubt, and he stared at Delane with a puzzled frown. The latter seemed to know a good deal about Allerman, and in a different way he was saying exactly what Jeanette had said....

"What I'm getting at," went on Delane, "is this. You've taken on this job as assistant to Allerman, probably because you think it will lead to something pretty good in the future. But are you quite sure you're not backing a wrong 'un?"

"In an indirect sort of way," said Paul, "you're slinging a good deal of mud at the doctor, aren't you? And as far as I can see it's all made up of silly chatter in a local pub."

"Not quite." He smoked for some moments in silence, and then glanced again at Paul. "Obviously, it's none of my business," he said, "and you're quite old enough to look after yourself, but I think I'll tell you, all the same. You can't say then that I didn't warn you when I had the chance. If you took my advice, you'd chuck the job and leave Allerman at once."

"Why?"

"Well, I can't give you any very convincing reason, except that I've a hunch that Allerman is a wrong 'un. There was a case some years ago in which he was mixed up—I remember hearing my father talk about it at the time. He's a sawbones, too. Allerman performed some operation on a child and the child died."

"That's nothing against him. A doctor isn't necessarily a wrong 'un because one of his patients dies under an operation."

"The point in this case, as far as I remember, was that there was no need for the child to die. The operation was quite a simple one. But it was discovered—by some other doctor—that the simple operation hadn't been performed, and it was perfectly clear that Allerman had been experimenting, trying out one of his new-fangled theories on the kid, and had made a mess of it. Either the theory was wrong or he wasn't clever enough to carry through what he was trying to do. Anyway, the kid died, when there was absolutely no need for it to die, and there wasn't the least doubt that Allerman had been up to some stunt. But it was all hushed up. The child's parents were poor people, Allerman is an immensely wealthy man, and that was that."

"It's all fairly vague, isn't it?" said Paul. "You can't expect me to throw up my job if you've nothing more than that as evidence against Allerman."

"I have—a good deal more. A few years ago my brother came down here as Allerman's assistant. Like you, he thought he was on to a good thing. For a whole year we never saw him, and heard from him only at very rare

intervals. My governor was uneasy about him—said he didn't like the tone of his letters: they were unbalanced—hysterical—the sort of letters he would never have expected young Bill to write. He eventually wrote to Allerman asking him if Bill was all right. Allerman replied—by telegram. Bill, he said, had thrown up his job the day before and left the house. For a week we couldn't get any news as to what had become of him, and then we found him. He was out of his mind—utterly and hopelessly mad. He never recovered his reason. He died about six months later."

"And you believe that Allerman was in some way responsible?"

Delane nodded.

"Bill raved a good deal," he said. "A lot of it was incoherent nonsense, but not all of it. I heard enough to put me on the right track. He kept on shouting Allerman's name, begging him not to do something, to leave the poor devil alone. He kept on saying: 'It's ghastly—it's horrible—it's making a man into a beast' and that sort of thing, and then begging Allerman not to insist on his helping him. I gathered that he wanted to chuck the job and clear out, but Allerman wouldn't let him. Anyway, without going into everything I heard, I can assure you that it was enough to satisfy me that young Bill lost his reason because of something he saw here at Allerman's place, because of something which he was forced to do—something foul and beastly—and in that case Allerman murdered him as surely as if he had put a bullet through his brain."

He struck a match and relighted his pipe.

"We could get nothing out of Allerman. Naturally. Bill had thrown up his job and left the house, and had been perfectly normal then; if anything had occurred to upset his mental balance, it had occurred between the date of his leaving Allerman's place and our finding him. But I'm sure Allerman was lying. My own opinion is that when the governor started getting restive Allerman kicked Bill out because he couldn't afford to have his father turning up and finding him here in that state. He might have demanded explanations which Allerman was anxious not to give."

"And that's why you're down here?"

Delane nodded.

"Something happened in Allerman's house," he said impressively, "which turned young Bill into a raving madman—something for which Allerman was responsible, and for which I'm going to make the swine pay. Allerman killed young Bill, and I'm going to get him for it if it takes me ten years. Something pretty damnable is taking place on this experimental farm of his, and I'm not going to rest until I've discovered what it is." He smiled. "Don't say I didn't warn you, anyway. I don't know why I did it—except that I'd hate to

see another man go the same way as young Bill went. And now I suppose you'll go straight back and tell Allerman there's a bloke sitting on his gate who's vowing to have his blood!"

Paul shook his head.

"I shan't do that."

"It's your duty to Allerman."

Paul was silent for some moments, lost in thought. Then:

"I've no time now," he said. "Allerman will be expecting me back. But I'd like to meet you again. Perhaps I can help. ... I'm not at all satisfied—one or two things have made me wonder. ..."

Delane thrust a scrap of paper into his hand.

"My address," he said. "Call and see me as soon as you can."

He got off the gate and went striding along the lane. Paul, slipping the paper into his pocket, returned across the fields to the house.

He was sure about Allerman now. Listening to Delane's story, conviction had come to him. He could guess what it was that had driven young Bill out of his mind. If Allerman had compelled him to assist in the production of those half-human brutes in the cellar, it was small wonder that his reason had snapped.

And that, or something on much the same lines, was doubtless what lay ahead of himself. The time would come when he would be called upon to take a hand in the doctor's experiments, and there was only one thing to be done. He must resign and leave at once. But if Jeanette refused to go with him....

CHAPTER IX

PAUL had scarcely entered his work-room when Stark brought him a message that Dr. Allerman wished to see him immediately. Accordingly he made his way to the doctor's library, where he found Allerman seated at his desk. For some moments he stood waiting while the doctor toyed with his pencil, absorbed in thought.

Suddenly Allerman glanced up at him.

"What did Delane tell you, Barlow?"

He saw Paul's start of surprise and smiled rather grimly.

"Perhaps I am asking too much," he said. "I don't wish to place you in an awkward position, and no doubt you would find it a little embarrassing to tell me that Delane accused me of being the murderer of his brother. That bee is always buzzing in poor Delane's bonnet. Is that what he told you?"

"He certainly seems to blame you for his brother's death, sir."

Allerman nodded.

"I guessed as much when I saw him sitting on the gate and talking to you. You are not the first person to whom he has made that slanderous statement. It is, I understand, generally accepted in the village now that I am some sort of inhuman monster who was in some way responsible for young Delane losing his reason, and I understand that this brother of his is letting it be known that he has come down here to get to the bottom of the matter and exact a terrible penalty from me. I need hardly tell you, Barlow, that Delane's story is a very garbled version of the facts. It is just an example of the sort of thing you must expect if you venture one step from the path which is trodden by the mediocrities of the medical profession."

Paul avoided his eyes. Something told him that if he met Allerman's gaze he would believe everything he was saying, and he did not want to believe. He believed Delane, and he believed Jeanette, and this time at any rate he did not intend to be swamped by Allerman.

"If Delane is spreading slanderous statements about you, sir, there's always the legal remedy," he said.

The doctor shook his head.

"To take legal action would make it appear that I attach far more importance to his statements than I in fact do. What the general public thinks of me does not interest me, but if you are to work with me it is essential that you should trust me implicitly, and that is why I am troubling to explain. The truth is that young Delane, when he came to me, was mentally an extremely unstable young man, the last man in the world who should have taken up

surgery—particularly the sort of work on which I was engaged. I saw from the first that he would be useless to me, but he was recommended to me by an old friend of mine whom I was anxious to please, so I allowed him to stay here. I allowed him to take no part in my experiments and he really did very little but amuse himself."

Here Paul could not repress a chuckle. The idea of anyone "amusing" himself in Allerman's establishment struck him as distinctly funny.

"But he gradually grew worse," went on the doctor. "He became nervous, hysterical, subject to sudden outbursts of uncontrollable temper, until at last I was compelled to dismiss him. I was not in the least surprised when I heard a little later that he had lost his reason: he was a border-line case when he came to me; but to blame me for his insanity is utterly preposterous. Those are the true facts, and if Delane persists in his refusal to believe them, that is not my fault. I should, however, prefer that you didn't make a friend of Delane, and I must ask you not to engage in any further conversation with him."

He eyed Paul keenly for several moments.

"You believed what Delane told you, Barlow, didn't you? Don't trouble to deny it—I know you did. You were at any rate tempted to believe it, which simply goes to prove that you still haven't the absolute faith in me which you must have if you are to work with me on my experiments, as I wish you to. Perhaps that is partly my own fault: I haven't taken you, it may be, sufficiently into my confidence. You have no very definite idea as to what kind of experiments I am conducting, and that leaves you open to imagine all sorts of ridiculous things and to accept any absurd account of my work that may come to your ears."

"I should certainly like to have a clear idea of what you're aiming at, sir, and of how you're trying to reach it."

Allerman nodded.

"That is what I propose to give you," he replied. "To-morrow I have been summoned to appear before the Medical Council. That means, Barlow, that these muddle-headed gentlemen have taken exception to the tone of my last lecture to the students at the University, and I am to appear and answer for my misdeeds. I propose to take you with me and let you hear me explain to them just what I am aiming at and just how far behind the times they are. By the time I have finished with the Medical Council—well, I can't hope to pierce their shell of tradition and project a new idea into their minds, but I fancy I shall have told you sufficient to make you eager to join me in the work."

"I shall be immensely interested, sir."

Allerman nodded.

"All right—to-morrow. And now please send Jeanette to me; I have to prepare my speech to the muddle-heads."

Paul left him, and a few moments later Jeanette entered the room. She seated herself on the chair beside Allerman's desk.

"I want you to take down some notes," he said. Jeanette, however, did not open her notebook.

"Dr. Allerman," she said, "I must speak to you. About that girl—Lorna."

Allerman raised his eyebrows.

"Well?"

"I've just left her. She's in a shocking state—terribly frightened. It's not surprising. She has been kept down in that room, shut away from everyone, wondering what is going to happen to her, and she won't be able to stand much more of it."

"Has she been complaining?"

"Really, Dr. Allerman, it's not surprising if she has, is it? To keep her shut up down there, knowing what is on the other side of that shutter—"

The doctor made a gesture of impatience.

"Lorna has nothing to complain of. She should be grateful to me. If I had not brought her here she would have been occupying far less comfortable quarters. Her room may not be the acme of luxury, but it is at any rate better than a prison cell. You need waste no pity on Lorna, Jeanette. She has a low type of criminal mind—"

"But that makes no difference, Dr. Allerman. She has feelings, and she's terribly frightened. To keep her shut up like this without telling her how long she is to stay there or what is going to happen to her—"

"Even that is, I imagine, preferable to knowing that she is definitely in prison for five or perhaps ten years—where she would certainly have been if I hadn't helped her to escape from the police."

"But what are you going to do with her?" Allerman frowned.

"My dear Jeanette," he said "how often have I told you that I dislike being questioned?"

He picked up a letter from his desk and began to read it.

"What are you going to do with her?" repeated Jeanette. "You can't intend—not for the Workers—you couldn't—"

Allerman glanced at her over the top of the letter. "No, not for the Workers. I have another use for Lorna Sherwood." He laid aside the letter and rested his elbows on the desk. "Listen to me, Jeanette. I am going to attempt the greatest experiment I have ever made. It is going to be my most brilliant success."

"And you want Lorna for the experiment?"

He nodded.

"Lorna—and you."

Fear sprang into her eyes.

"Me?"

Again he nodded.

"You have a beautiful mind, Jeanette—a beautiful soul. But your body—" He shrugged. "Nothing can be done to give you a beautiful, healthy body, Jeanette. Even I can do nothing. I'm telling you nothing which you don't already know when I say that at the most you have three or four years to live. The cruelty of nature, Jeanette! You—at your age—with only three or four years of life in front of you—simply because you have a slight fault in your body which we haven't yet discovered how to put right."

"I've got used to the idea, Dr. Allerman, and it doesn't worry me now."

"But you would rather live than die," said the doctor. "Even if living meant a mere existence in your inefficient body, you would still prefer to live. But suppose I could supply you with a new body—provide a new home, a beautiful home, for your beautiful soul?"

Jeanette stared at him, a look of horror on her face. "A new home?" she repeated slowly. "I—I don't understand."

"A new body," said Allerman—"a beautiful body. Think what that would mean to you, Jeanette. Suppose I could take your soul from your weak, diseased, deformed body and put it into a strong, healthy, beautiful body?" He brought his fist crashing down on the desk. "I can do it!" he exclaimed. "And I am going to do it! It will be my greatest achievement—the final triumph—the ultimate conquest of nature."

His eyes were alight with excitement. Jeanette could only stare at him in horrified amazement.

"I am going to take your soul out of your diseased body, Jeanette, and put it into the beautiful body of Lorna Sherwood. A beautiful body for a beautiful soul. I can do it—I will do it."

"For God's sake, Dr. Allerman—"

"I will do it!" he exclaimed. "That is why I am keeping Lorna Sherwood—because I want her beautiful body for you."

"But it's horrible—"

"It's horrible, perhaps, for Lorna Sherwood, but not for you, Jeanette. Lorna Sherwood does not matter. Her soul is an ugly, deformed, diseased soul, and your ugly, deformed, diseased body is good enough for her. She can have it and live out what little time it will last. I will transfer her soul to it in the same way as I shall transfer your soul to her body—"

"Dr. Allerman—for God's sake—you mustn't try—"

"I shall try and I shall succeed."

"But I don't want her body. I'd rather keep my own body and die if I must. I'd a hundred times rather die than have you experiment on me. It's murder—the foulest kind of murder! To rob a soul of its body—"

"It will have a body—the body it deserves—the body into which it would have been born if Nature had not made one of her colossal blunders. But with my knife and my forceps I shall remedy Nature's blunder—"

"I'd rather die—I'd rather kill myself here and now. I'd sooner face death than the risk of becoming what you've made those poor creatures in the cellar."

"I have turned those poor creatures, as you call them, into useful members of society."

"You've turned them into beasts. I've seen them before—and after. I've seen them come to the door—boys asking for work, tramps asking for food, ragged, dirty, down-and-outs, the dregs of society, perhaps, but still human, with intelligent eyes and normal human feelings. I've seen them on the table and what you did to them. Horrible! Inhuman! And I've seen them when you've finished using your knife and forceps on them—beasts, brutes, with the eyes of dumb animals, gibbering, brainless, repulsive. You can kill me, Dr. Allerman, but you shan't do that to me."

"There is no risk of that, Jeanette. Those were merely my early experiments."

"You've taken thinking, feeling human beings and turned them into beasts. You've murdered them—murdered their souls—and if God doesn't damn you for it, then God isn't just."

He was quite calm again now.

"My dear Jeanette, you're becoming hysterical. I have a certain cure for hysteria—"

Instantly she made a tremendous effort to regain her self-control.

"No—I'm all right—I'm not hysterical. I don't need anything."

"Then please try to control yourself. You don't seem to realise that I am paying you a great compliment in wishing to preserve all that is best in you and free you from all that is ugly and useless and a burden to you. You should be full of gratitude. No doubt you will be when you have had time to think it over and understand what it will mean to you. It will mean that you will have as perfect a body as any human being can have—a body that will give you many years in which to enjoy life. You will be able to live the life which every woman is intended to live—to marry and bear children, to love and be loved." He paused and smiled. "And there will be no need for you to say 'No' to Paul Barlow again."

Jeanette's hands were trembling; there was a singing in her ears, and she saw Dr. Allerman's face through a sort of throbbing haze.

"For the sake of Paul Barlow, Jeanette, I fancy you will agree."

She shook her head.

"Dr. Allerman, I couldn't—even for Paul I couldn't agree."

Allerman shrugged his shoulders.

"Such is love," he said. "But whether you agree or not, Jeanette, you will do it."

CHAPTER X

IT struck Paul very forcibly that Dr. Blumenthal, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, bore no outward sign of being the muddle-headed old fool that Dr. Allerman seemed to think him, and the same was equally true of the dozen or so men who were gathered round the table when he followed Allerman into the room. Dr. Blumenthal was tall, white-haired, with a clear-cut, intellectual face and a pair of eyes almost as piercing as Allerman's, and with the same suggestion of a strong, masterful will behind them.

When he had shaken hands with Allerman he glanced enquiringly towards Paul.

"This is Dr. Barlow, my assistant," explained Allerman. "I have brought him along to listen and learn."

Dr. Blumenthal raised his eyebrows.

"Surely, Allerman, on such an occasion—in view of the nature of this meeting—it is rather unusual—"

"The occasion is unusual," interrupted Allerman. "I wish Barlow to be present."

With a shrug, Dr. Blumenthal surrendered. Waving Paul to a chair by the fire-place, he took his seat at the head of the table, and Allerman seated himself on his left.

"First round to Allerman," thought Paul, and settled himself to listen. This meeting, he had decided, was to settle the matter once and for all. He would listen to Allerman, learn what experiments he was conducting and what goal he was trying to reach, and make up his mind definitely whether it was a goal towards which he could travel with him. If it was, he would finally dismiss all doubts of Allerman from his mind and settle down to work; if it was not, he would resign immediately, leave Allerman's house and somehow persuade Jeanette to go with him. One way or other his present state of indecision and uncertainty must end.

"There is no need for these proceedings to be lengthy, Allerman," began Dr. Blumenthal.

"I agree," smiled Allerman. "Since every gentleman here is losing heavily in fees for every minute he spends here, agreement on that point is no doubt unanimous."

"Let me preface my remarks," continued Dr. Blumenthal, "with the statement that all of us recognise you, Allerman, as a very brilliant pathologist." Allerman bowed slightly.

"Charming," he smiled; and Paul noticed the look of cynical amusement in his eyes. "And now that you have handed me the bouquet, Dr. Blumenthal, I am ready for the bite of the asp that lies hidden in it. 'I am a very brilliant pathologist, but?'"

"Frankly, Allerman, everyone of us here disapproves both of your operative and your theoretical work." Allerman glanced round the table, as though weighing up the strength of the opposition.

"Science," he said, "can only progress by experiment. New worlds are only discovered by the explorer. The whole of truth is not contained in the textbooks."

"Possibly not, Allerman. But you will agree that before a man whose word carries weight, and whose opinions and theories are likely to have a profound effect, ventures to proclaim something as true, he should be extremely careful that there is no possibility of his being mistaken, that his imagination is not running away with him, that his theories are not getting out of control and leading him into exaggeration, that he is not, in fact, deluding both himself and his audience."

"My dear Blumenthal," smiled Allerman, "time is too precious to waste on platitudes, and there is no need for this tactful skimming of the surface. Let us get right down to the bedrock of my misdeeds."

"Very well, Allerman," replied Dr. Blumenthal. "Quite bluntly, your last lecture to the students of the university was eminently unsatisfactory. You made statements which, as a responsible member of the profession, you were totally unjustified in making." There came a murmur of assent from the others. Paul, watching Allerman's face intently, saw the smile fade from his lips and his eyes grow hard.

"That statement, at any rate, Blumenthal," he said, "is one that cries aloud for justification."

"I propose to justify it. You made a very definite suggestion in your lecture that the soul is a material thing which has its existence in the crypto-thyroid gland. You can hardly have made such a suggestion inadvertently, and you can hardly fail to realise that, coming from you, the suggestion would attract a good deal of attention. It has, as a matter of fact, roused the churches to vehement protest and stirred up a storm of antagonism against the medical profession. Once again the cry has been raised that science and religion are at loggerheads, and when that cry is raised it is science that is going to get the worst of it."

"Truth can never get the worst of it."

"Perhaps not," agreed Blumenthal. "We like to think so, at any rate. But where you and I differ, Allerman, is in what we accept as truth. Candidly, the Council regard your suggestion that the soul is some material substance which exists in the crypto-thyroid gland as utterly fantastic and incapable of demonstration."

Allerman glanced round the table again.

"And is that the charge against me, gentlemen?" Again came the murmur of assent. With a shrug Allerman took out his pocket-book, opened it, drew from it a small microscopic slide and laid it on the table in front of Blumenthal.

"Look at that, please," said Allerman. Then, as Blumenthal picked up the slide and inspected it: "On that slide, gentlemen, there is a tiny speck—-so tiny as to be practically invisible to the naked eye. The speck is the egg of a dragon-fly, and contained within it are two beings, each with its own separate life—an ugly thing that crawls in the water and a gorgeously beautiful creature that shimmers in the sunlight.... Two distinct and separate lives, gentlemen, in that tiny speck on the microscopic slide. Need I go on?"

"At the moment, Allerman," said Dr. Blumenthal, "the connection between this slide and your preposterous statement to the students of the university is not very obvious."

"I should have thought it was perfectly obvious," replied Allerman. "If in that tiny speck of matter is life—two lives—individuality, character, accomplishment, beauty—is it so preposterous to assume that in the recesses of some gland of the human body is to be found the same controlling influence, the very soul of the body?"

Blumenthal shook his head.

"You were not invited here, Allerman," he said, "to deliver a lecture on bio-chemistry. There is nothing to be gained by prolonging the discussion. If these are your views, then they are totally unacceptable to the Faculty, and we have decided that your course of lectures shall be cancelled."

Allerman gave a cynical smile.

"I bow to the superior wisdom of the Faculty."

Dr. Blumenthal did not strike Paul as looking particularly comfortable. He frowned, cleared his throat, and handed back the microscopic slide with an air which suggested that he was handing Allerman a plaything which was too childish to interest him.

"There is another matter, Allerman," he said. "This experimental farm of yours. Certain rather disturbing rumours about it are getting abroad. There

have even been several paragraphs in the newspapers of a kind which are not calculated to maintain the dignity of the profession or preserve public confidence."

"My dear Blumenthal, don't try to hold me responsible for the newspapers. I am only concerned with truth."

"Making due allowance for sensationalism, Allerman, the Council feel that there must be some substratum of truth in these rumours, and we are, I think, entitled to some sort of assurance that the experiments which you are conducting are not likely to prove as injurious to the prestige of the medical profession as are your lectures. On what are you experimenting?"

"Plant life—animal life—all that is likely to contribute to my knowledge. More particularly I am interested in the crypto-thyroid gland."

Blumenthal shook his head with an air of despair.

"We do feel, Allerman," he said, "that in allowing yourself to become obsessed by these gland theories of yours you are going very seriously wrong."

"Wrong?" exclaimed Allerman. "How can I go wrong? Is Voronoff wrong? Hasn't he taken the aged and made them young again by the mere transference of a gland? Surely you realise that in every hospital in the world, morons and mental deficients are being turned into intelligent people by gland transfer? Is every doctor going wrong who transfers a gland?"

Allerman's eyes lighted up and he brought his fist crashing down on the table.

"I am not wrong!" he exclaimed. "I cannot be wrong. I have proved to myself scores of times that I am right. I will tell you gentlemen something: I can take a subject without a single decent instinct—a pervert, a degenerate, a depraved, degraded creature that is little more than a beast—and I can develop in him or her an intellect as great as that of any one of you who are sitting around this table."

The learned gentlemen seated around the table smiled indulgently.

"Oh, you may smile, gentlemen," continued Allerman. "It is easy to smile. Only a few years ago, if I had told you that I had just been listening to an orchestra in New York or Melbourne, you would have smiled in the same pitying way—and you would have been as wrong as you are to smile now." He paused, and himself smiled rather grimly. "You smile, gentlemen, because you have still to realise that the man who strays off the beaten track and gets free of the ruts of Harley Street may still find his way to the truth, that he may, in fact, and in all probability will, discover a much shorter route to it. But you will not always smile. The time will come when

you will wonder—though you will never admit it—how you could ever have been stupid enough not to realise what will then seem so obvious to you. When that time comes, gentlemen, I hope you will have the grace to blush in secret at the recollection that you once sat around this table and had the temerity to smile at the theories of Raymond Allerman."

He was silent for some moments, lost in thought. Then:

"So you wish to know, gentlemen, what I am experimenting with at my farm. Very well; I will tell you and give you another chance to smile. I am experimenting with souls—human souls—tiny specks, microscopic atoms, smaller than the egg of the dragonfly, invisible except under the microscope, yet having in them all the brilliance of thought, all the beauty of mind, all the accomplishments of civilisation."

He rose and stood surveying his audience with a look of amused contempt.

"Souls, gentlemen," he repeated—"human souls. As Voronoff can transfer a gland, so can I transfer a soul. That is my triumph, gentlemen, my supreme achievement. Some day, perhaps, I may demonstrate it to you, but for the moment I prefer to wish you good day and leave you to smile."

He strode to the door.

"Come, Barlow!"

Back in his work-room, Paul spent several hours thinking over all he had heard. So that was the great experiment to which Allerman was devoting his life! It was terrific, marvellous, terrifying! The nerve of the man! And if he had really reached the point at which he could actually transfer a human soul, what a stupendous achievement! "As Voronoff can transfer a gland, so can I transfer a soul."

"Yes," thought Paul—"—but whose soul?"

CHAPTER XI

LORNA dragged the small table across the room and placed it against the wall immediately under the little window. Climbing on to the table, she reached upwards, found that her hand was still a foot below the lower edge of the window, and gave a gasp of impatience. Getting down to the floor, she placed the chair on the table and carefully climbed on to the unsteady erection. She could reach the window comfortably now, and could see that it had no hinges and no fastener. Obviously it was not intended to be opened. It had no doubt been fitted merely to admit light into the room, which received its supply of air through two small ventilators further along the wall.

She wasted several minutes, and broke several of her finger-nails trying to open it. Then she remained for a time staring at it sullenly. It was, she calculated, just large enough for her to squeeze through, if only she could get it open.

Again she descended carefully to the floor, went through the small door that led into the bathroom and returned a few moments later carrying a thick bath-towel. She wrapped this carefully around her hand, so that it was protected by the towel, like a thickly padded boxing-glove. Mounting again, she steadied herself by placing her left hand against the wall, drew back her right arm and drove her padded fist hard against the frosted glass of the window.

The glass fell outside with a faint tinkle, and Lorna glanced eagerly at the opening. Immediately the eagerness left her eyes and her arms fell limply to her sides. Across the window on the outside were two stout iron bars.

She thrust her left hand through, gripped first one and then the other and tried to shake them. Neither of them gave by the fraction of an inch.

She caught the sound of footsteps in the passage, glanced quickly at the door, and then, scrambling down from her perch, tossed the towel on to the bed and dragged the table back to its usual position. When, a moment later, the door was opened and Stark entered the room, she was sitting on the chair, resting her elbows on the table, with her chin cupped in her hands.

She stared at Stark resentfully.

"Well, what do you want?"

The man made no reply.

"I wonder you've got the nerve to show your ugly face here," she went on. "I'd be ashamed if I were you. All that talk about your big hands and what you could do to Allerman if you wanted to! And then, when you get the chance to

do it, you haven't got the guts. 'Yes, master.' 'No, master.' 'I was going to kill you, master.' You make me sick!"

Stark stared at her, with fluttering eyelids, but still made no reply.

"Nice and quiet and well-behaved now, aren't you!" sneered Lorna. "What's he been doing to you? Sticking his needle in your arm again? You let him do a thing like that and call yourself a man! Let him try sticking his needle in my arm, that's all! You won't catch me saying 'Yes, master'—"

Stark turned and stood aside, and Jeanette, carrying a tray, came into the room.

As she set the tray on the table, Stark went out, closing the door. On the tray were a glass of milk and a few biscuits on a plate. Lorna eyed them scornfully.

"What's this?" she demanded.

"It's your supper," said Jeanette. "Dr. Allerman has ordered that this evening you're to have milk and biscuits."

Lorna glanced at her suspiciously.

"Here, what's the great idea—milk and biscuits! Does he think I'm slimming? You can take that lot back to him. If I can't have a proper meal, I'll have nothing."

"I shouldn't do that if I were you," said Jeanette. "There's nothing to be gained by annoying Dr. Allerman, and he's very easily annoyed if people go against his wishes. If you refuse the milk and biscuits, I'm afraid you'll have to go hungry."

"So that's his latest, is it—starving me! What's he want to starve me for?"

She turned away from the table.

"But it doesn't matter. I'm not hungry anyway. You can take that stuff away."

Jeanette shook her head.

"The doctor gave definite instructions that you were to drink the milk—"

Lorna sprang to her feet.

"The doctor!" she exclaimed hysterically. "Damn the doctor! He can't treat me this way! He's got no right. He's not the Lord Chief Justice of England, is he? He can't keep me shut up here and starve me the same as if I was in prison. He'd get ten years for this if the police knew about it. What's he keeping me here for, anyway? What's he going to do to me? You know, don't you? You can tell me if you want to."

"I can't tell you anything," said Jeanette.

Lorna went to her and seized her arm.

"Listen," she said. "You're a woman the same as I am. He's got something in his mind—something horrible. But you know him pretty well, and he might listen to what you say. You can talk to him and persuade him not to do anything to me. You must! You can't leave me here for that devil to fool about with, without trying to stop him."

"Dr. Allerman pays no attention to what I say, Lorna."

"But you can think of something, can't you? You're clever. So am I in some ways, but not in the same way as you. You've been decently brought up, you have. Been to a ladies' school and all that; but I've never had no schooling and I know I can't deal with a man like Allerman the same as you can. You could do something if you tried. You could go to the police, couldn't you—telephone them if you like—and tell them Allerman has got me shut up here in his cellar."

Again Jeanette shook her head.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I can't do anything to help you. I wish I could."

"But what's he going to do to me?" exclaimed Lorna. "Why doesn't he tell me? Nobody tells me anything. You know and you won't tell me. Stark too, damn him! He knows and I can't get a word out of him."

She gave a quick, nervous glance at the shutter in the wall.

"He's not going to do that to me, is he—turn me into one of those filthy brutes? The table, he said. I heard him. He said it to Stark. He wants me for the table—" She paused abruptly and a look of abject terror spread over her face. "My God! That's what he wants me for. He wants me for the table—the operating table. I see now. That's why he's starving me. I know what they do in hospital before they put you on the table!"

"You must try not to upset yourself, Lorna," said Jeanette quietly. "After all, Dr. Allerman is the finest surgeon in the country—"

"But there's nothing wrong with me. I don't want a surgeon. He's just going to experiment—get me on his table—cut me!"

"Dr. Allerman won't hurt you, Lorna. You may be sure of that."

Lorna clung to her arm.

"He mustn't touch me!" she exclaimed. "You mustn't let him touch me! If he touches me I'll go crazy mad. I'm scared. Listen, you!—Jeanette, aren't you?—I've got a boy—Mickey Stone. He's doing a stretch and you can't get at him. But he's got pals, and if they knew I was in this fix they'd soon do something about it. You could let them know, couldn't you? There's a little

cafe in Brick Street, Soho—Gonelli's the name. You could go along there and ask for Lennie. Everybody knows Lennie. You could get away on some excuse, couldn't you? Just tell Lennie where I am and how things are, and he'll come right along with some of the boys—"

The door opened. Stark came in and fixed his eyes on Jeanette.

"Master says come," he announced.

Jeanette turned towards the door, but Lorna clung desperately to her arm.

"You'll do it, won't you?" she begged. "Promise me you'll tell Lennie."

Jeanette shook her arm free.

"I can't promise you anything, Lorna," she said, and hurried from the room. Stark followed her and the door was closed and locked.

Lorna stood for a time staring at the door. Then, turning, she stared at the window. With a shrug, she lighted a cigarette, flung herself on the bed and stared resentfully at the milk and biscuits. Milk! What did he take her for anyway?

She must have dozed off, for she suddenly realised that her cigarette was no longer between her fingers, and she sat up with a start. She found the stub on the floor beside the bed, where it had burnt a small hole in the carpet. She glanced at her watch and found that she must have been asleep nearly half an hour.

She lay back again on the pillow and closed her eyes. After all, she might as well sleep. There was no sense in lying awake wondering what was going to happen next, starting at every little sound, in case it might be the sound of Allerman's footsteps as he came to fetch her. It would be quite safe to go to sleep. She'd be bound to hear the door open if Allerman did come, and then he wasn't going to have things all his own way. He wasn't going to get her on his operating table without a struggle. If only she had her gun! She wouldn't have much chance without a gun against Stark and Allerman. They'd get her on the table in the end and then Allerman would clap something over her nose and mouth and she'd go clean out, and he would be able to do exactly what he pleased with her. It might be a good idea to go quietly when Allerman came to fetch her—put him off his guard—let him think he was going to have everything his own way. And then, if she could grab a knife again from his case of instruments, let him have it—in the throat—before he could touch her....

A faint, rasping sound caused her to open her eyes. But she promptly closed them again. She had heard that sound before. It had been going on at intervals most of last night, and she had come to the conclusion that the cellar was probably infested with rats, and had tried to pay no attention to

it. She tried again now, but it seemed louder this evening and came more frequently. Every time she reached the borderland of sleep that sound brought her back to full consciousness.

For a while she lay listening, trying to decide from which direction the noise came. And then she sat up and stared at the shutter in the wall. The noise seemed to come from over there, from behind the shutter; and as she listened to it intently, she realised that no rat could be causing it. It was a regular, rhythmic, metallic rasp, and every now and then came a short, sharp squeak that set her teeth on edge.

That room beyond the shutter was perhaps the Workers' work-room. They were sawing something by the sound of it....

She put her feet to the ground and sat on the edge of the bed, gazing at the shutter. Then she went quickly across the room and stood with her ear pressed against it, listening. The noise was very clear now: it seemed to come from just the other side of the shutter. Shuffling footsteps, too, could be clearly heard, and every now and then Lorna thought she could detect the sound of quick, laboured breathing.

There came a sharp rap against the shutter, and the girl sprang away from it, stifling a scream, and again stood staring. The rasping noise ceased; she heard the clang of metal, as though a tool had been dropped on the stone floor. The shutter moved, as though someone were pressing against it on the other side.

Lorna stood motionless, unable to drag her eyes away. Again the shutter moved, bending slightly inwards; the next instant there came a crack, the wood splintered across, and the shutter fell in two pieces to the floor.

She screamed and took a quick step backwards. Then, as she glanced again at the place where the shutter had been, she became rigid, rooted to the spot, incapable of movement.

Behind the iron bars, with huge, clawing hands thrust through, was one of the Workers. She saw the thick, loose, sagging lips, the squat, brutish nose, the dull, fish-like eyes, as he pressed his face between the bars, gibbering, showing his teeth in a horrible leering grin, and making queer, guttural noises.

Suddenly she noticed the bar and realised the meaning of that harsh, rasping sound. About halfway up the bar was a shining scar, where the file had bitten into the steel and parted it. Almost before she had fully realised the significance of that small spot of shining steel, she saw the massive hands of the Worker grip the bar on each side of it and wrench the two sections apart. The next instant, gripping two of the remaining bars and swinging himself on to the ledge with the agility of an ape, the creature

stood still, grinning at her, and then, very deliberately, began to force its way through the gap.

Lorna watched, fascinated, helpless. But the next instant, as the Worker, with a grunt of satisfaction, forced himself through the gap and sprang down to the floor of her room, she suddenly regained control of her limbs. With a scream of terror, she turned, ran across the room and pressed her thumb against the bell-push.

"Stark!" she screamed. "Stark—quick! He'll kill me!"

Slowly, half crouching, the creature began to advance towards her. Suddenly, when he was within a couple of yards of her, she took a quick step sideways, grasped the chair by its back and swung it above her head.

"Keep off!" she screamed. "Keep off, d'you hear? Come one step further and I'll smash your ugly face!"

The Worker paused, grinned and came steadily on.

Lorna took a step backwards, and with all the strength that she could muster swung the chair in the direction of the creature's face. But before it reached his face, a huge hand shot up and, catching the leg of the chair, wrenched it from her grasp.

For a few moments he gazed at it, as if wondering what it was, and then, as easily as if it had been matchwood, he broke it across his knee, tossing the pieces aside. And again in the same leisurely, relentless way, he moved towards her.

Lorna, backing away from him, desperately wanting to scream yet unable to utter a sound, felt her shoulders touch the wall. She saw the Worker's grin grow broader, saw his eyes rolling and his tongue pass across his lips, saw an immense hand raised, and the next instant felt thick, rough-skinned fingers grip her throat.

CHAPTER XII

JEANETTE, when she left Lorna's room, went upstairs to the drawing-room. Allerman was there, sitting in an arm-chair, with a cigar between his lips.

"You sent for me, Dr. Allerman?"

He waved a hand towards the piano.

"I want you to play to me."

She crossed to the piano and seated herself. But she did not at once begin to play. She sat gazing across at Dr. Allerman with an anxious, questioning look in her eyes.

Only rarely did the doctor ask her to play to him, and it was just as rare for him to indulge in the luxury of a cigar. She knew the meaning of these symptoms: Dr. Allerman was about to make another of his experiments. Always, before performing one of his daring operations, he would sit in the drawing- room, smoking a cigar and listening to her playing. It steadied his nerves, he said, quietened and soothed him, cleared his mind and gave his hand just that little extra skill which turned failure into success.

As she remembered this, Jeanette felt a sudden rush of fear. Dr. Allerman was going to perform another operation—soon—to-morrow, probably. He was going to attempt, perhaps, his greatest experiment of all, in which he had warned her that she was to play a part. He was going to take her soul and put it into the body of Lorna Sherwood. The mere thought of it made her feel sick with terror and disgust. Some-how she must prevent his doing it. Somehow she must find the strength to brace up to him, defy him, to refuse to lend herself to this outrage on nature. Perhaps, if she were to tell Paul ...

"You are not playing, Jeanette."

With a sigh she turned to the keyboard and began to play. But her thoughts were not on the music. She could not tell Paul. Paul, after he knew the truth, would insist that she should leave the house instantly. He would go to Allerman, resign his job and tell him that he was taking her away with him. But Allerman would never agree to that. Paul would never be allowed to go. She had known from the first that his only chance was to throw up the job before Allerman had admitted him into his confidence. He knew far too much now to be allowed to go free and tell others all that he had seen in this house. Allerman would sacrifice him to his crazy ambition ruthlessly, and there would probably be one more added to that herd of repulsive creatures in the cellars.

"You are not playing very well, Jeanette," came Allerman's voice. "You are nervous, worried, and your thoughts are not on what you are doing. You are playing like a mechanical piano and that isn't what I want."

"I'm sorry, Dr. Allerman."

"Aren't you feeling well?"

"I have a slight headache and I'm feeling rather tired."

She was playing as she spoke. Allerman rose from his chair and for some moments stood beside the piano, watching her as she played; then he leaned forward, gripped her wrists and took her hands from the keys.

"Your poor, weak body, Jeanette!" he said. "It gets tired so soon, doesn't it? It's always giving you pain, refusing to let you do the things you want to do, cramping and hindering and crippling." He smiled. "But we're going to put an end to all that, Jeanette. We're going to give you a strong, healthy body."

She wrenched her hands from his grasp.

"No!"

Allerman frowned.

"Don't you trust me, Jeanette? Don't you believe that I can do it?"

"It isn't that."

"Then why do you hesitate?"

"The whole idea repels me, Dr. Allerman—my soul and Lorna Sherwood's body. I don't want her body. I want my own body. I should never be able to forget that the body I was using was not my own—"

"You would never be able to remember, Jeanette. You would never know that the body you would be inhabiting had not always been your own. I can promise you that."

"I can't believe it. I should never feel the same. I should never even look the same."

"Not just at first, perhaps. But gradually, Jeanette, your new body would grow more and more like your old one. In appearance, I mean. Your thoughts and feelings would mould it. They would imprint the same expression on your face as it wears now, and put the same look in your eyes. Voice, gesture, every little detail of you would be reproduced, and everything that was not you would disappear. That is the work of the soul and the mind, Jeanette. What we appear to be outwardly is the result of what we have thought and felt inwardly. We cannot change our habits of thought without effecting a change in our outward appearance, and when you, inhabiting Lorna Sherwood's body, begin to think in it as you now think, and feel as you now feel, the body will be remoulded until at last no one would ever guess that it was not your original body, except that your original body was weak and diseased and your new body would be strong and healthy."

The girl shook her head.

"All that may be true, Dr. Allerman, but I could never do it. There's Lorna to be thought of."

"Lorna?"

"What is to become of her? What right have I to rob her of her beautiful body and condemn her to live in one which I know will die in three or four years' time? To me that's simply murder."

"To me, Jeanette, it is merely rectifying one of Nature's mistakes."

"Dr. Allerman, I don't believe that Nature makes mistakes. I believe that if I have a weak, diseased body, it is because I was intended to have it, and I'd a thousand times rather make the best of it and die when I'm intended to die than prolong my life by committing the horrible crime you want me to commit. Nature doesn't makes mistakes. It's just that we're so appallingly ignorant that we don't see that what look like mistakes of Nature aren't really mistakes at all. All your genius. Dr. Allerman, is really nothing but colossal ignorance."

The doctor's mouth hardened.

"You're very frank, Jeanette. And very obstinate."

"Yes."

"I have means of dealing with obstinacy. Do you really believe that I shall allow your foolish fears and unreasoning prejudices to stand in my way? I shall make my experiment, and if I need you, then I shall use you. The progress of science is not going to be checked through the whims of a silly woman—an ungrateful woman."

"Dr. Allerman, I'm not ungrateful."

"Ungrateful," he repeated harshly. "Why do you imagine I have kept you here? Because you were invaluable to me? I could have got a girl to do your work twice as well as you do it for half the salary I pay you. I kept you here because I was sorry for you, because I knew that if I dismissed you, you would find it almost impossible to get other work; and now, when I ask for some little service in return for all I have done for you, you refuse. Isn't that ungrateful?"

"I'll do anything else, Dr. Allerman, to show my gratitude, but I can't do this. You can't make me do it."

"We shall see."

"And you'll never get Lorna Sherwood to agree. You'll never persuade her to lie down on your table and let you experiment on her. She's half crazy with

fear already, and if you attempt to force her you'll drive her out of her senses."

"Perhaps. But I have been very good to Lorna Sherwood: I have saved her from a long term of imprisonment, and she owes me something in return for that."

"She will never do it—never!"

"That, too, we shall see."

"You'll never get her into the operating theatre. She's terrified of what you're going to do to her, and she'll kill herself before she'll let you take her there."

Allerman smiled.

"Other men and women who have occupied that room in the cellar have felt just the same about it, Jeanette, but in the end they have come quietly enough. Lorna Sherwood, when I am ready for her, will do the same." He went to the door and paused.

"But Lorna Sherwood is of no use to me without you, Jeanette."

As Allerman went from the room, she began softly playing, letting her hands wander over the keys without conscious direction by her brain. Was she being ungrateful to Dr. Allerman? No, she could not bring herself to believe that. Whatever he might have done for her in the past, he had done nothing which gave him the right to expect that she should surrender herself to him for the sake of satisfying his thirst for scientific knowledge. Besides, he had only belittled her work and exaggerated his kindness to her because he had wanted to hurt and humiliate her—as he so often wanted to do. It gave him a sense of power, she supposed, to know that he could make her wince, and it was all part of his technique of domination. Gratitude did not enter into the question.

But was she being foolish? After all, she did not really doubt Allerman's ability to work the miracle which he had claimed to be able to work. Dr. Allerman did not make claims which he was not prepared to substantiate, and if he could really give her a strong, healthy body, was she being quixotic in refusing to let him? Wasn't it possible that he was right when he said that Nature had made a mistake, that Lorna's soul did not deserve the beautiful body it inhabited, that Jeanette's weak, crippled body was good enough for Lorna's ugly, stunted soul? She could not somehow bring herself to believe that.

But there was Paul to be thought of—Paul, who loved her so much that he was eager to marry her, crippled as she was, a useless burden, a poor makeshift of a wife who could never give him children. If she could go to Paul, strong, healthy, beautiful, fit to love him and be loved by him, to be a

real wife and a mother—was she wrong in refusing? Did Lorna Sherwood matter? Did right or wrong or anything else in the world matter? Wouldn't it be worth any risk, any sacrifice, any sin, to gain that happiness?

She heard the door opened, and though she did not raise her head she knew that Paul had entered the room and was coming towards her. She was aware that he had paused and was watching her as she played. But she did not look up to meet his eyes. With those thoughts in her mind it was safer not to meet Paul's eyes.

"Jeanette!"

"Yes, Paul?"

"You're beautiful."

She shook her head.

"You're beautiful, Jeanette, and I want you to marry me."

"Chivalrous Paul!"

"I want to throw up all this, Jeanette, and take you away and marry you. What does Allerman matter? He may be the greatest surgeon in the world; he may be able to teach me things which will one day make me as great as he is—but even that doesn't matter. I want you, Jeanette, not greatness."

She smiled.

"You want both, Paul."

"Perhaps. But if I can't have both, then I choose you."

"Not as I am now, Paul."

"As you are now."

She stopped playing and glanced up at his serious face.

"You know that's impossible, Paul."

"Only because you think it's impossible. You can make it possible."

"Don't you know, Paul, that I would give anything in the world to make it possible—that I'd give my very soul—" She paused abruptly and was silent for some moments. "Listen, Paul," she said at last. "I've been talking to Dr. Allerman. About myself.. I've often talked to him before, but he has always said that there was absolutely nothing to be done. But I think he has changed his mind. His latest experiments have given him reason to believe, he says, that he might be able to do something for me. If I'm willing to let him try—"

"No!"

She glanced at him quickly, surprised at his vehemence.

"No!" he repeated. "Allerman is not to touch you. For God's sake, Jeanette, if you're thinking of that, put the idea right out of your mind. Allerman's not going to experiment on you. I don't trust his experiments. He can try them on anyone else in the world, but I won't have him touching you. You must promise me, Jeanette, that you'll never consent—"

An electric bell jangled noisily. The next instant came Stark's hoarse, guttural voice:

"Master! Master!"

Jeanette sprang to her feet.

"Paul—quick! That's Lorna's bell. Something is happening—"

Paul strode across the room and out into the hall. Stark, gesticulating wildly, came running towards him.

"Master! Master!"

Paul grabbed his arm.

"What's wrong, Stark?"

"The Workers—downstairs—the lady's room—"

Paul released his arm.

"Fetch your master," he ordered, and ran across the hall down the steps into the cellar and along the passage.

The door of Lorna's room stood wide open. Just for an instant, as he reached it and glanced inside,

Paul hesitated. Against the opposite wall, her eyes wide open with terror, her body rigid, stood Lorna. Facing her, with his back towards the door, was one of the Workers. With one huge hand he was gripping Lorna's throat, holding her against the wall, and with the other he was clumsily stroking her cheek, making queer crooning noises as though trying to express his pleasure.

He must have heard Paul's footsteps, for he suddenly turned his head and looked at him. Then, as Paul stepped quickly forward, he took his hand from Lorna's throat and slowly turned to face him.

For a few seconds they stood eyeing each other. Then the Worker crouched, hunching his shoulders and crisping his fingers. The next instant, with a snarl like that of an enraged animal, he sprang.

Paul's fist shot out, meeting the creature's jaw with a crack. But nothing could stop that furious spring. Huge fingers clutched Paul's throat, he staggered backwards, crashed to the floor with the Worker on top of him, gripped his wrists and struggled desperately to drag the hands clear of his throat. But the creature's muscles were like steel, and though Paul strained

until it seemed that his arms must crack, the fingers dug deeper and deeper into his neck. The room reeled round him, waves of vivid red surged in front of his eyes, and his head seemed on the point of bursting.

Quick footsteps sounded in the passage and Allerman strode into the room. A swift glance round and he stepped up to the Worker as he knelt on Paul's chest, snarling and gibbering, took a small white capsule from his pocket; held it close to the Worker's face and crushed it between his finger and thumb. Instantly the Worker went limp, toppled over and lay still, and a faint acrid smell pervaded the room.

Allerman helped Paul to his feet.

"All right, Barlow?"

Paul nodded, and waved a hand towards the prostrate figure of the Worker.

"He was attacking Lorna. When I arrived he turned on me."

Allerman swung round to Stark, who was standing in the doorway.

"Fix that broken bar," he said, "and get the shutter put right."

"Yes, master."

"And keep them all working all night."

"Work all night. Yes, master."

Allerman turned and stirred the unconscious Worker with his foot.

"Something wrong here," he said. "You'd better put him on the table and I'll have a look at him. Has he given trouble before?"

"Yes, master. Always trouble. No good for work."

"I see," said Allerman thoughtfully. "One of my less successful efforts, Barlow. Well, there's only one thing to do when a machine becomes inefficient—scrap it and make another." He turned again to Stark. "Put him on the table. Stark, and then take a couple of Workers out to the long field and let them dig a hole."

He crossed to where Lorna was still standing against the wall, limp, with closed eyes, stared at her intently, lifted one of her eyelids, felt her pulse, and then, gripping her arm, led her to the bed.

"Get to bed," he ordered. "I'll send you something and you'll be all right in the morning."

Signing to Paul to follow him, he went from the room; in the hall they found Jeanette, rather pale, waiting.

"Is anything wrong, Dr. Allerman?"

"Nothing serious, Jeanette. One of the Workers attacked Lorna, but I was in time to prevent his doing her any damage." He smiled. "It would have been a great pity if Lorna's beautiful body had suffered any injury. Go to bed, Jeanette; you look tired, and we have an arduous day in front of us to-morrow."

She wished them good night and went upstairs.

"I've work to do before I go to bed myself," said Allerman. "Before I finally dispose of that Worker, I'm going to have a good look at him. There's a flaw somewhere and I'm going to see if I can discover it. If you would care to come and watch—"

"Thanks, sir, but I'm feeling a bit shaken and would rather go to bed if you've no objection." Allerman nodded.

"Good night, Barlow. I may be able to show you something still more interesting to-morrow."

Paul went up to his room, got into pyjamas and dressing-gown and settled himself in an arm-chair with a cigarette and a book. But he was restless and uneasy, and after a few minutes he tossed the book aside, moved his chair to the window and sat gazing out across the country-side. In the brilliant moonlight it was like a fresco of black and silver.

He must have sat there for some considerable time, lost in thought, for when at last he got up from his chair and went towards his bedroom he heard the faint notes of the church clock as it struck twelve.

He had just reached the door of his bedroom when he heard the regular tramp of feet on the stones of the courtyard and a sharp guttural word of command. He went quickly to the window and looked out.

Two of the Workers in their dark blue overalls were slowly crossing the yard, one behind the other. They were carrying a long, dark bundle, one of them at each end, and seemed to be finding it heavy. Behind them went Stark. Resting on each of his shoulders, in the "slope" position, was a spade.

Paul turned away from the window with a sickening feeling of disgust. "Dig a hole," Allerman had said. Good God!

CHAPTER XIII

THE next morning at breakfast Jeanette did not put in an appearance, and as Allerman volunteered no information about her, Paul ventured on no enquiry. He knew that if the doctor wished to give him any information he would give it without being asked, and that if he did not wish to give it no amount of questioning would extract it from him.

Paul noticed a difference in Allerman this morning. If the word had not seemed so inappropriate as applied to the doctor, he would have said that he was excited. His eyes did not seem so hard and cold, and when he smiled, as he did far more than was his habit, his smile seemed to lack the usual hint of cynicism. He was less aloof, more human, and chatted with Paul in the friendliest way during breakfast. But somehow, though Paul did his best to kill the thought with ridicule, he could not rid his mind of the idea that there was something sinister in the doctor's change of manner.

When breakfast was over and Paul was about to go to his work-room, the doctor called him back.

"Jeanette is resting this morning, Barlow," he said. "I fancy last night's affair with the Worker rather upset her, and as she is not available I should like you to give me a hand."

He led the way upstairs to the top floor of the house. Pausing outside the door, he took a key from his pocket, opened the door, signed to Paul to follow him and went into the room. It was a spacious apartment with a large skylight in the roof, and was fitted as an operating theatre.

"Take a look round, Barlow," said Allerman. "I doubt if there's a hospital in the world that has a more perfect theatre than this. You'd shudder if I told you how much I'd spent on it." He smiled. "But the results have more than justified its cost. Dr. Blumenthal and his muddle-headed colleagues would call me a raving madman if I told them all that has happened in this room. Miracles have happened here, Barlow—at least that's what Blumenthal would call them—but there's no such thing as a miracle. There are laws of Nature, rigid and immutable laws, and if I have performed what Blumenthal would call a miracle, it merely means that I have discovered some new law of Nature or some new method of controlling a known law."

Paul, when he had inspected the room, agreed that it was the most perfectly equipped operating theatre he had ever seen.

"To-night," continued Allerman, "I am going to perform another so-called miracle, the greatest I have ever performed, so seemingly impossible to a cramped, unimaginative mind such as Blumenthal's, that if he knew I was about to attempt it, he would probably have me certified as a lunatic. But I shall succeed. I haven't the faintest shadow of doubt about my ability to

achieve what I am going to attempt. Perhaps, Barlow, I may invite you to watch me work the miracle, but I haven't yet decided. In any case, I want you to help me make the necessary preparations. As a rule Jeanette has helped me—she has sometimes even been present at my experiments—but as she is indisposed, I must ask you to spare me an hour of your time."

For the next hour Paul remained in the theatre, helping Allerman with his preparations. Two operating tables were placed in position under the hanging lamps, with a space of about a yard between them. Paul remarked on this as being an unusual arrangement.

"You will find a good deal that is unusual, Barlow, with my methods," replied Allerman. "To-night I shall have two patients. One of them will be willing and the other unwilling, but their willingness or otherwise is of no importance; the experiment will be made and it will succeed. I will tell you later whether I shall need your assistance."

Paul left the theatre and spent the rest of the morning in his own work-room, trying to become absorbed in his work. He lunched with Allerman, who was still in his excited, almost jubilant mood, and again Paul got the impression that his high spirits had some sinister significance—an impression which a meeting with Delane, during his afternoon walk, did not tend to dissipate.

He found Delane, as he had found him on the first occasion, seated on the top of the gate, smoking, and as soon as he caught sight of him he changed his course, aiming for the stile in the corner of the field. But Delane had seen him, gave a shrill whistle and waved his hand, and Paul, since it was no use keeping up the pretence that he had not seen him, turned and went reluctantly in his direction.

"I've been expecting to see you," said Delane, "down at my cottage. As you didn't turn up, I thought I'd chance finding you here."

"Allerman keeps me pretty busy," replied Paul rather sheepishly. "I get precious little time for social visits."

Delane smiled.

"Not so bad, Barlow; but the real reason is that Allerman has forbidden you to see me. I can understand that. He probably has a shrewd idea that I told you a few things the other day. Did he question you about seeing me, and what I'd said to you?"

Paul nodded.

"I must say, Delane, that he gave me a very reasonable explanation of the whole affair, and I can't help feeling you may have got hold of the wrong end of the stick."

"You can't help feeling," repeated Delane. "That's the exact truth, Barlow. You can't help feeling it, because Allerman wishes you to feel it—is making you feel it—is projecting his own thoughts and feelings into you. If you got away from him for a few days, you'd feel very differently."

Paul shrugged a shoulder.

"The man's amazing," he said. "He seems to know every thought one has. He knew, for instance, that I'd been talking to you the other day, but how he knew it I can't even start to guess."

"There's nothing mysterious about that," said Delane. "I can tell you how he knew. James Puddefoot, whom I mentioned to you the other day, has a brother, who, amongst other things, is a mender of broken windows. He was once called in to mend the window in that turret arrangement on Allerman's house. Allerman, he says, has a man always up in the turret, watching the country-side through a pair of field-glasses, and if anyone comes within a mile of his place it's reported to him immediately. It was no doubt reported to him that I was sitting on the gate of this field, talking to his assistant. I hope it annoyed him."

"I fancy it did," smiled Paul. "But that means we're probably being watched now, and as I have been forbidden to speak to you—"

Delane jumped down from the gate.

"Come the other side of the hedge," he said. "I've something to tell you."

They went through the gate and paused under the hedge.

"It's about James Puddefoot's gorilla man," said Delane. "I've got proof that it was not an alcoholic vision—the best possible proof: I've seen the brute myself. I've been roaming around a bit at nights—around Allerman's fields—and last night I had a rather gruesome experience."

"You saw Stark?"

"Stark may have been one of them. I don't know. I saw three of them—awful-looking brutes. I was walking along by the hedge in that long, narrow field, when I saw three of them step into the moonlight. They were the other side of the field but I could see them quite clearly. Two of them were carrying something—a bundle of some sort—and the other had a couple of spades."

Paul remembered the tramp of feet on the stones of the courtyard and the grim procession he had seen from the window of his workroom.

"They dumped the bundle on the ground," continued Delane, "took the spades from the other brute and began digging. I thought I'd get a bit nearer to see what they were up to, but I hadn't taken many steps when the one who was not digging suddenly spun round and stood stock still, with his

head thrown back, just as if he were some animal that had got scent of me. And then, with a sort of snarl, he set off at a run, coming straight towards me. I didn't wait to talk to him. I did exactly the same as James Puddefoot did in similar circumstances: I turned and bolted—ran all the way home and didn't feel really better until I'd drunk two pints of beer."

He was silent, watching Paul's face keenly.

"What the devil is going on in that house, Barlow?" he said at last. "You're living there and you must know something."

"As a matter of fact, Delane," replied Paul, "I really don't know any more than you do. That must have been Stark you saw; but the fact that Allerman has a servant with a face like a gorilla doesn't necessarily mean that he's a blackguard."

"I see," said Delane thoughtfully. "So Allerman's got you, has he, Barlow, and you'll tell me nothing?"

"There's nothing to tell."

Delane gave a shrug.

"All right. But I shall find out for myself, that's all," he said, and went striding off along the lane.

At dinner that evening Jeanette again did not appear, and Paul, at the risk of a snub, ventured to enquire after her.

"Jeanette is better," he was informed. "I have just seen her. She prefers to remain in her room until after dinner, but she has promised to come down a little later and play the piano for us. She is a wonderful pianist."

"I know that," smiled Paul. "I have always said that if she had taken up music professionally she could have made a great name for herself."

"She has the soul of an artiste, Barlow—a beautiful soul. If only she had a body which equalled it in beauty—but she hasn't—and for that reason, Barlow, she would never have made a great name for herself. The public demands beauty, and the soul of an artiste need not be so very beautiful, provided she has a beautiful body."

They found Jeanette in the drawing-room, already seated at the piano, and Paul, as he entered the room, was quick to notice the unusual pallor of her cheeks and the feverish brightness of her eyes.

She smiled at him as he went towards her, but before he could speak, Allerman was offering him a cigar and waving him to an arm-chair.

"Play, Jeanette," he ordered.

For fully half an hour they sat in silence, smoking their cigars, while Jeanette played, Allerman with his eyes closed and Paul with his gaze fixed on the girl's face. But never once did she look at him: she sat with her head bent slightly forward, and Paul got the impression that she was doing it deliberately, and that for some reason she did not want to meet his gaze. She ceased playing and Allerman rose.

"Thank you, Jeanette. You are inspired to-night. I have never heard you play so beautifully," He smiled faintly. "If I didn't know you so well, Jeanette, I should be tempted to think that you must be in love." He glanced at his watch. "If you will excuse me, I have a professional call to make. Miss Lorna Sherwood is expecting me. But I shan't be many minutes, and then you can play to us again." He went from the room. As soon as the door was closed Paul rose quickly from his chair.

"Jeanette, what's the matter?"

She raised her head to look at him, but made no reply.

"Something's wrong, Jeanette. I can see there's something wrong. What is it?"

Her voice was hardly more than a whisper.

"Paul, I'm frightened."

"Frightened of what?"

She shook her head helplessly.

"I don't know—of Dr. Allerman, of Stark, of this house, of everything. I'm frightened of myself, of what I may do.... Paul"—her hand suddenly clutched his arm—"I can't stay here. Take me away—now—to-night. Take me away. Don't let Dr. Allerman touch me. Don't let him come near me. Keep him away from me, Paul. Don't let him speak to me or look at me, because if he looks at me I shan't be able to help myself, and I'm frightened, terribly frightened—"

Paul's hand covered hers.

"Listen, dear," he said: "there's no need to be frightened. Dr. Allerman shan't come near you."

"You must take me away, Paul, and you mustn't tell Dr. Allerman. If you tell him, he won't let us go. But we must go—right away—somewhere where he can't find us. Promise me that you will take me to-night, no matter what happens."

"I promise you, Jeanette. And now, try to pull yourself together, dear. Allerman will be back at any moment, and if you don't want him to know we're going—"

"He mustn't know."

"Then don't let him see that you're upset. I'll talk to you again later, when Allerman has gone to his room. Make some excuse and get up to your room. Say you're tired and want to go to bed. Pack up anything you want to take and wait until I tap on your door. Do you understand?"

She nodded.

"But it won't be any use, Paul. We shan't get away. How can we?"

"I'll fix it somehow, Jeanette, don't worry. I've a friend down here—a man called Delane. As soon as I get a chance I'm going to ring him up and get him to bring his car to the gate. He'll be glad to do it. Just get ready and leave the rest to me."

The door was opened and Allerman came in. Behind him came Stark, carrying a tray with coffee. He set it on the table and at a nod from Allerman sprang to attention and marched from the room.

Pouring out a cup of coffee, Allerman crossed to Jeanette and handed it to her.

"Drink that, Jeanette," he said, "and then you shall play to us again."

Jeanette set the cup down on the piano.

"I'm feeling very tired, Dr. Allerman," she said, "and if you wouldn't mind—"

"The coffee will refresh you," he interrupted. "Drink it and play to us for ten minutes, and then you shall go to bed."

The girl glanced at the coffee and shook her head.

"I'll play, Dr. Allerman," she said, "if you wish it, but I'd rather not have any coffee. It will keep me awake for hours."

He took up the cup and handed it to her again, gazing intently into her eyes.

"Drink it, Jeanette," he said. "It will do you good. As your medical adviser, I'm telling you to drink it."

Her fingers closed round the handle of the cup, but still she hesitated.

"Drink it!" exclaimed Allerman sharply.

Very slowly, with her gaze still fixed on Allerman's eyes, she raised the cup to her lips and emptied it.

"That's better," smiled the doctor, took the cup from her and replaced it on the tray. "And now, just for ten minutes, Barlow and I will listen to your playing."

He waved Paul to a chair, handed him a cup of coffee, and as Jeanette began to play again, leaned back in his own arm-chair and closed his eyes.

Paul, watching the girl closely, again received the impression that she was anxious not to meet his gaze. He noted, too, that she was playing listlessly, as though the effort were too much trouble. He noticed a false note, and, a moment later, another; and then her hands slipped from the keyboard. She raised one of them and passed it across her eyes. The next moment her whole body relaxed and she pitched forward and slithered to the floor.

Paul sprang to his feet, but Allerman was before him, kneeling beside her.

"Quick, Barlow—on the desk in my room there's a box of capsules."

Hurrying from the room, Paul crossed the hall and into Allerman's library. There was no box of capsules on the desk, and he made a quick tour of the room in search of it. But it was nowhere to be seen. Upon the desk, however, was a carafe of water, some of which he hastily poured into a glass, and hurried back to the drawing-room.

As he stepped into the room, he came to a sudden halt. Jeanette was stretched on the couch. Kneeling beside her was Dr. Allerman. The sleeve of her dress was thrust back as far as the elbow, and the bare arm lay in Allerman's left hand. In his right hand he held a hypodermic syringe. Before Paul had fully realised what was taking place, he saw Dr. Allerman plunge the syringe into the girl's arm.

"Dr. Allerman! What in God's name are you doing?"

Withdrawing the syringe, Allerman stood up and glanced at him.

"As a medical man, Barlow," he said, "you should know a hypodermic syringe when you see one."

Paul strode forward, placed the glass of water on the table and stood for a few moments gazing searchingly at Jeanette.

"Why have you injected?" he demanded.

"Because it was necessary."

Paul turned and faced him.

"You know as well as I do, Dr. Allerman, that it was quite unnecessary. Jeanette had fainted, and all she required was a little fresh air and a glass of water." He leaned over the girl, raised one of her eyelids and inspected the pupil. When he faced Allerman again there was a dangerous look in his eyes. "What have you injected?"

Allerman smiled.

"Has it struck you, Barlow, that you are behaving in a most extraordinary manner? I am not accustomed to having my actions questioned by a half-fledged medical student."

"What have you injected?"

Allerman frowned.

"I have injected what was necessary, and I must ask you, Barlow, not to interfere."

Paul's glance lighted on a little phial that lay on the table. He picked it up, glanced at the label and slowly turned again to Allerman.

"So that's what you've given her! You swine!"

Allerman's hands clenched.

"I've given her what is necessary," he said harshly. "This—necessary—for a simple fainting fit? I may be a half- fledged medical student, but I know better than that. This drug—"

"Will keep her in a state of unconsciousness for at least six hours," interrupted Allerman. "I did not say it was necessary to cure her fainting fit: I merely said that it was necessary. So it is. Since you take such an interest in Jeanette, Barlow, I don't mind telling you that some such injection was necessary because to-night she is to undergo a somewhat serious operation. I may add that it is being done at her own request."

"That's a lie!" exclaimed Paul. "She would never agree. She was terrified of letting you touch her—"

"Naturally she was a little nervous, Barlow, but nervousness is not an unusual symptom in a patient who is faced with an operation, and for that reason I treated her as considerately as possible. In case she might be nervous of the injection, I administered a little something in her coffee. But I don't know why I'm troubling to explain all this to you. Your extraordinary behaviour hardly invites my confidence, and I shall be glad if you will please go to your own room and leave me to get on with my work."

Paul went a step nearer to him.

"Listen, Dr. Allerman," he said. "I think I understand now. Those two tables in the theatre—Lorna Sherwood downstairs—"

"And Jeanette, here," said Allerman. "Precisely, Barlow. I congratulate you on your powers of logical deduction. Lorna and Jeanette are the two patients I mentioned to you. I am going to operate on them to-night. I am going to make the greatest experiment of my whole career, and I am going to succeed." His eyes were bright with excitement. "I am going to succeed so brilliantly that Blumenthal and his muddle-headed colleagues will be ready to lick my boots."

"You're not going to touch her!"

The doctor ignored him.

"Success! Triumph! The final conquest of Nature!" he exclaimed. "And I shall be the conqueror! Souls, Barlow—human souls! Can surgical skill go further than that? I shall take the soul of Jeanette—her beautiful soul—and place it in the beautiful body of Lorna Sherwood; and into the deformed and diseased body of Jeanette I shall place the deformed and diseased soul of Lorna. I can do it, and I shall do it!"

"You're mad, Allerman!"

"Mad? No, not mad, Barlow—inspired. A genius. The greatest surgeon the world has ever known. That's what it means, Barlow. In a few hours, when I have done my work, Jeanette will be altogether beautiful—a beautiful soul in a beautiful body. And I shall have made her. She will be mine. Mine—do you understand, Barlow? Not yours. Mine, to worship, to love—" He paused, and when next he spoke his voice was as calm and unemotional as ever. "You heard what I said: I said mine—to love."

"Yes, I heard," replied Paul. "But you're not going to do it. You may be Dr. Allerman, the world's greatest surgeon, who has made Stark and those poor brutes downstairs, and I may be only a poor, ignorant fool like Blumenthal and the rest of them; but I'm telling you, Dr. Allerman, that you're not going to operate on Jeanette. You're not going to experiment on her body. Even if you can do it, you're not going to soil her soul with your touch. And you're not going to love her!"

The doctor's eyes seemed to glitter.

"And who, Barlow, is going to prevent me? All this is very noble and chivalrous, but I fail to see what concern it is of yours."

"It concerns me, Dr. Allerman, because I love Jeanette—because I am going to marry her—-because I'd rather have her as she is, with her crippled body, without risking letting you touch her with your knife."

"Very pretty sentiments, Barlow, but I'm afraid you will never make a great surgeon: you haven't the scientific outlook."

"Damn the scientific outlook!" exclaimed Paul furiously. "I say you're not going to touch her. I won't let you touch her! I'd rather kill you, here and now. My God, Allerman, I warn you that if you dare to lay a finger on Jeanette—"

Allerman's hand went to his waistcoat pocket, and as he saw the movement there flashed into Paul's mind a recollection of having seen that movement before. For a fraction of a second he seemed to see a vivid picture of himself lying on the floor of Lorna's room, with the Worker kneeling on his chest, pressing his fingers into his throat, and of Allerman standing beside him. He saw Allerman's hand make just the movement he was making now, the

small white capsule between his finger and thumb, the Worker rolling limply on to his back....

As Allerman's hand reached his pocket, Paul swung back his arm and drove his fist at the doctor's cynically smiling face. But he was too late. There came a quick movement of the doctor's hand; he was conscious of an acrid, pungent smell, and then the room spun round and he felt himself sinking to the floor.

CHAPTER XIV

LORNA had a poor opinion of Jeanette's taste in pyjamas. As she surveyed herself in the small rectangular mirror that hung on the wall of her room, she made a wry face, partly because the pyjamas which Jeanette had lent her were mauve, and mauve always made her look seasick, and partly because among the furnishings of the room it had not occurred to Dr. Allerman to include a long mirror in which she might see the whole of her charming person at the same time. She slipped into a dressing-gown—another mauve abomination lent by Jeanette—and consulted the mirror again; but the result was evidently no more satisfactory, for with a shrug of resignation she turned away.

She stood in the centre of the room, thoughtfully surveying the door. Stark, she told herself, was probably just outside it, and she'd never sleep a wink if she knew that gorilla could open the door and walk into the room at any moment. Stark, if she had her way, would wear a muzzle and be chained up every night. But the door had no bolt on the inside, and Stark had the key, and there was no way of stopping him coming in if he took the idea into his head.

And Stark wasn't the only one: there was Allerman. He was up to some funny business, curse him! And there was no knowing when he might take it into his head to make a start. That other fellow, too—Barlow, Allerman had called him. Soft about the girl, Jeanette, he was, but he was pretty thick with Allerman, and she wouldn't trust him further than she could see... .

She dragged the table across the room, placing it so that its edge was touching the door, stood the chair on top of it, and on the seat of the chair put the tray with a glass of milk and a few biscuits which Stark had brought an hour ago and she had sulkily refused to touch. Stepping back, she inspected the barricade and gave a smile of satisfaction. No one would manage to get into the room now without her knowing.

She glanced nervously at the shutter in the wall. It had been repaired that morning and a new steel bar had been fitted behind it. That was a comfort, anyway. She didn't want last night's business all over again. Not that it could happen again. She'd know the significance of that rasping noise if it came again, and she'd ring the bell and tell Allerman as soon as she heard it. All the same, with that pack of brutes within a few yards of her there was no knowing what might happen. She touched her throat with her fingers and a little shudder shook her body. That filthy brute pawing her cheek, grinning at her with his thick, slobbering lips—she'd been scared stiff he was going to kiss her. She'd have passed clean out if he had....

She went to the shutter, tiptoeing across the room, and pressed her ear against it. All was quiet on the other side; to-night she could not even hear the usual shuffling footsteps. She made a careful inspection of the sliding shutter and the hasp, and then, crossing to the bed, she sat on the edge, opened her handbag and took out a steel nail-file about eight inches in length. She tested the point against the palm of her hand, holding the file like a dagger, and smiled. She could do a bit of damage with that, anyway, if it came to a rough house, and if Allerman tried any funny business on her it would come to a rough house all right. She made a few quick stabs at the air with the file, slipped it under her pillow, got into bed and lighted a cigarette.

For the best part of an hour, half-sitting and half-lying against the pillow, she smoked cigarette after cigarette, staring at the wall opposite, absently lighting a fresh cigarette from the stub of the one she was smoking, and tapping the ash on to the floor. Once or twice, as she thought she heard a sound, she sat upright and turned her head sharply; and then, when the sound was not repeated and neither door nor shutter moved, she sank back on to the pillow and continued to smoke.

At last she pressed out her cigarette, lay down, felt for the switch that hung above the bed, and put out the light. For a few moments she lay quite still in the darkness, but, as she thought she heard a sound, her hand groped frantically for the switch again and the room was flooded with light.

She glanced quickly around and smiled. She was behaving like a kid—afraid to sleep in the dark. But who cared, anyway? She wasn't sleeping with the light out to-night. Not in this house. Not with Allerman hanging around....

It was about half an hour after Lorna had pressed out her cigarette and decided against sleeping with the light out, that Dr. Allerman got up from his desk in the library, went down the steps into the cellars and stepped noiselessly along the paved passage.

Outside the door of Lorna's room he paused and stood still, listening. For fully five minutes he stood there in the darkness, but no sound reached him save the girl's regular breathing. He decided that she was fast asleep. He took a couple of steps along the passage and paused again. Running his hand over the surface of the wall, he found the little metal disc for which he was feeling, and slipped it aside, revealing a small circular hole, about the size of a shilling, through which a jet of light spurted from within the room. Leaning forward, Allerman applied his eye to the hole and looked through.

The hole was in such a position that he had an uninterrupted view of the bed. For a time he kept his eye to it, watching Lorna intently. She was lying on her back, with her lips slightly parted and the faintest suggestion of a

smile on her face, sleeping peacefully. One rounded bare arm lay outside the bed-clothes, and Allerman smiled as he noticed the nail-file held dagger-wise in her hand. There was an aggressive look about that hand with its long, pointed, scarlet nails which was utterly at variance with the look of serenity on her face.

Allerman straightened himself and switched on the light in the passage. Close to the wall stood a heavy metal cylinder of the type used for the storage of oxygen, and attached to it was a length of rubber tubing. Allerman grasped the tube and went down on one knee. Projecting from the wall about three inches, and at about the same distance from the floor, was a pipe, half an inch or so in diameter, with a nozzle fitted at the end. Carefully pressing the rubber tubing on to the nozzle, Allerman stood upright and again peered through the small circular aperture.

Lorna had not moved. He turned to the metal cylinder, grasped the tap between finger and thumb and gave it a twist. There came a sharp hissing sound. Allerman, removing his hand from the tap, again applied his eye to the hole.

For several seconds nothing happened. Then from the half-basin fixed to the wall in the niche above the head of the bed a fine white vapoury mist began to rise. It reached the edge of the basin, flowed over it and drifted slowly down towards the bed. It reminded

Allerman, as he watched it, with a grim smile on his lips, of a foaming waterfall seen in slow motion. It drifted over Lorna's face and seemed to cling to it; then continued its leisurely downward progress, gliding over the bedclothes and sinking towards the floor.

The girl did not move; but gradually, as the white vapour grew denser about her face, her breathing became rapid and stertorous and her face went greyish white. For ten minutes Allerman kept his eye to the hole. Then he turned, and gave the tap of the cylinder a twist. The hissing sound ceased abruptly. Taking a key from his pocket, he thrust it in the lock, turned it and pushed the door opened.

There came a crash as tray and chair and table toppled over, and Allerman glanced quickly at Lorna. But she did not stir, and with a smile at the wreckage of her barricade Allerman crossed to the bed, raised her eyelids, felt her pulse and gave a nod of approval. Taking the nail-file from her hand, he tossed it aside and went to the door of the room.

"Stark!"

The man came hurrying along the passage and halted.

"Yes, master?"

Allerman waved a hand to the figure on the bed.

"Pick her up, Stark."

Stark crossed to the bed, raised Lorna in his arms as easily as if she had been a doll, and glanced at the doctor for further instructions.

"Take her up, Stark."

"Upstairs, master?"

Allerman nodded.

"Upstairs, Stark—to the table."

CHAPTER XV

PAUL awoke to find himself in darkness. His head was throbbing, and he felt weak and disinclined to make any effort. He was aware of a faint, rather sickly smell, and spent several minutes wondering what it could be. Then slowly, step by step, starting from that faint smell, his mind led him back through the incidents of the evening. He remembered drawing back his arm and driving his fist straight towards Allerman's cynically smiling face, that quick movement of Allerman's hand, the room spinning round him, that terrible weakness, and then darkness.

Feeling with his hands, he decided that he was lying on a bed. He sat upright and put his feet to the floor. Fumbling in his pocket, he found a box of matches, struck one, held it above his head and glanced round. He was in his own bedroom.

He got to his feet and groped his way unsteadily across the room, found the switch of the electric light beside the door and pressed it down. Then he stood for a few moments with his hands pressed against his temples, straining after accurate memory. It came with a rush: Jeanette lying on the couch—Allerman kneeling beside her—the needle entering her arm—Allerman's triumphant voice as he told him of what he was about to do. A sudden spasm of fear shot through him. Allerman, perhaps, while he had been lying there helpless on the bed, had perpetrated the horrible outrage, had taken Jeanette up to the theatre, placed her on the table, used his knife on her....He turned, flung open the door and strode out on to the landing. It was in darkness, and he stood still, straining to catch the least sound. No sound came but the regular tick of the clock in the hall below. He went downstairs, gripping the hand-rail to steady himself, annoyed that the queer weakness in his legs would allow him to travel no faster.

Opening the door of the drawing-room, he switched on the light. The room was empty. The coffee things were still on the table, and he noticed the stub of his cigar in the ash-tray where he had placed it before rushing from the room in search of the box of capsules; he saw also that the cushion on the couch was still slightly hollowed where Jeanette's head had lain.

He crossed to the electric radiator and laid a hand on it. It was quite cold. The room, then, had been empty for some time, and a glance at his watch told him that he must have been unconscious for the best part of two hours. Again a spasm of fear went through him. Two hours! God only knew what Allerman might have done in those two hours.

He hurried from the room, flung open the door of Allerman's library, switched 011 the light and glanced round. There was no one there and he hesitated, undecided where to look next.

His strength was coming back to him quickly, and he almost ran up the stairs and along the corridor to the door of Jeanette's bedroom. Very gently he tapped on it, tapped again; and then, as he got no reply, he opened the door and pressed down the light-switch.

The room was empty; the bed had not been disturbed. Again he stood irresolute, while a sense of sickening horror crept over him. Perhaps he was too late. Perhaps Allerman had already begun his fiendish work. Perhaps now, at this very moment, Jeanette was lying on the table and Allerman's knife was cutting into her flesh....

He ran to the stairs that led to the top storey of the house and began to mount them, two at a time. Halfway up, as his eyes reached the level of the upper landing, he saw a thin line of brilliant light beneath a door. He knew which door it was: it was the door of Allerman's operating theatre. He reached the landing and was striding towards the door of the theatre, when he caught a glimpse of something white, and the next moment he saw Stark, his white uniform coat looking unreal and ghost-like in the darkness, step in front of him and stand still, barring his way.

Paul halted.

"Stark, where is your master?"

"Master busy. No one can see master."

"Where is he?"

"Master working."

"Is he in there—in the theatre?"

Stark nodded his massive head.

"In there—yes." And then, in a burst of loquacity, he added: "Lady there too—-beautiful lady."

"You mean Lorna?"

"Lorna—yes."

"Where is Jeanette—Miss Fayre?"

Stark blinked his eyes and made no answer.

"Damn you, Stark, answer me! Where is Jeanette? She's not downstairs and she's not in her bedroom."

"Not downstairs," repeated Stark mechanically. "No."

"Is she in the theatre too?"

Again Stark nodded.

"In theatre—yes. On table. Master's orders."

"My God!" gasped Paul, stepped forward and tried to thrust his way past Stark's gigantic figure.

But Stark did not move, except to raise a huge hand and grip Paul's arm.

Paul tried to wrench his arm free, but Stark's hand merely tightened its grip and a searing pain shot up into Paul's shoulder.

"Damn you, Stark! Let me go. I've got to see Allerman, your master. I've got to see him instantly."

"Master busy," repeated Stark. "Nobody go in."

"I've got to go in, Stark! Let go of my arm, do you hear? If you don't—"

Stark's grip tightened again, and with a sudden movement he jerked Paul back in front of him, released his arm and stood there motionless, like a huge rock that blocked the way.

"I am going past, Stark. You can't stop me. If you don't stand aside and let me pass—"

Paul suddenly realised that talking would do no good. He swung back his arm and sent his fist crashing against Stark's jaw.

The man's eyelids flickered, but that was all. For all the effect his fist had produced, Paul might have driven it against the side of the house. He swung back his arm again, but before he could strike, Stark stepped forward and flung his huge arms round him, crushing him against his chest like a bear. Paul struggled desperately to free himself, but his arms were pinioned to his sides, and Stark was gripping him so tightly that only the slightest movement was possible. He put a foot behind Stark's leg and, exerting every ounce of strength, tried to fling himself forward in an effort to send Stark crashing on his back. But he might as well have tried to trip the Colossus at Rhodes. Stark's legs remained firmly planted and his body did not yield an inch, and the next moment Paul felt himself lifted from the ground.

Stark began to descend the stairs. Paul, as Lorna had done in similar circumstances, realised the futility of struggling. Without further resistance, he allowed Stark to carry him down the stairs into the hall and thence into the cellars. He felt himself placed on his feet, and while one massive arm still gripped him, Stark took a key from his pocket, unlocked a door, opened it and dumped him inside.

"Master's orders," said Stark's voice, and the door shut.

Paul found that he was in a room which was similar to Lorna's, except that there was no sliding shutter in the wall. Like Lorna's, it was furnished as a bedroom, and when Paul had made an inspection of it and realised that

there was no possible chance of escape from it, he flung himself down on the bed.

He tried not to think. If he allowed himself to think of what was taking place upstairs, of Jeanette unconscious, utterly at the mercy of Allerman and his crazy ideas, he felt that he would lose all control of himself. There was nothing to be done but wait. He could expect no help from Stark. Even if he could find some means of opening the door. Stark, no doubt, was on the other side of it.

He realised now that his attack on Allerman had been a bad mistake, but when he had understood what Allerman had done to Jeanette and what he intended to do, he had struck at him instinctively, without caring what the consequences might be. He had done nothing to help Jeanette and had landed himself in this hopeless position.

For some hours he alternately lay on the bed and restlessly paced the room, wondering what Allerman's next move would be, trying to persuade himself that, now he knew of the experiment which Allerman intended to make on Jeanette, the doctor might abandon or at any rate postpone it. But he knew in his heart that Allerman was not the man to be afraid to take a risk, that he would almost certainly carry out his experiment. If Paul proved an embarrassment to him, he would find some effective way of ridding himself of the inconvenience.

At last he must have fallen asleep, for the next thing of which he was conscious was that he was lying on the bed, gazing at a little patch of sunlight on the wall of the room. He sat up and glanced at his watch. It was nearly eleven o'clock: he must have been asleep for the best part of ten hours. He must have slept soundly, too, for on the table was a tray with coffee and toast, brought there, no doubt, by Stark, without awaking him.

Allerman's dope must have made him sleep far more soundly than usual.

He got off the bed, poured out a cup of coffee, drank it and lighted a cigarette. A few moments later he heard the sound of the key in the lock, the door opened and Allerman came in.

For several seconds they faced each other without speaking.

"Well, Barlow," said Allerman at last, "I trust you have recovered from your little indisposition of last night. I regret that I had to treat you as I did, but in the circumstances—"

"Oh, for God's sake, Allerman, don't deliver a lecture. Where is Jeanette!"

"In the circumstances," continued Allerman calmly, "I had no choice but to send you to sleep for a little while. You were clearly not quite yourself, and your symptoms—"

"I've never been more myself in my whole life. There was nothing whatever the matter with me, Allerman. I was absolutely normal and you know it. But I don't want to argue about it: I want to know what you have done with Jeanette."

"You hardly acted like a normal man, Barlow. A man in his normal state would, I think, have realised that it was hardly the time to make a savage attack on me. Jeanette was under the influence of a very powerful anaesthetic. I am one of the very few men who know how to use that particular drug, and if your attack on me had been successful, things might have gone very hard with Jeanette."

"You had no right to administer the drug. You did it without her consent, without her knowledge—doped her coffee—"

Allerman cut him short with a gesture.

"Wild statements will get you nowhere, Barlow. You had no means of knowing whether Jeanette had consented or not. I can only give you my word that she did consent."

"That's a lie!"

Allerman shrugged a shoulder.

"In any case," he said, "Jeanette's consent or refusal wouldn't have made the least difference. I admit that. I intended in any case to make my experiment and did not propose to be thwarted by the foolish fears of a highly strung woman, the ignorant prejudices of men like Blumenthal or the sentimentality of a half-fledged medical student. I intended to make my experiment and I have made it, in spite of Blumenthal and everyone else." He frowned. "Especially in spite of you, Barlow. Stark has told me what occurred last night. I rather anticipated that you might take some such rash step, and for that reason gave Stark instructions that he was on no account to allow you to enter the theatre. You must surely realise, Barlow, that if you had had your way and burst into the theatre when you tried to, the consequences would probably have been fatal to Jeanette. The slightest interruption, the slightest failure of concentration on my part, the slightest unsteadiness of my hand would have made all the difference between life and death. You must try to forgive me, Barlow. In fact, I think we had better mutually forgive each other. I will forgive you for your very extraordinary behaviour last night, and you will forgive me for the rather rough treatment which I have no doubt you received at the hands of Stark."

"I'm not interested in all this, Allerman. I want to know where Jeanette is."

"She is upstairs, Barlow, in her bedroom. You have no cause to worry about Jeanette."

"I want to see her."

"A little later, Barlow, you shall certainly see her, but for the moment you must take my word for it that her condition is quite satisfactory. She stood the operation extremely well, and I have not the least doubt that within a few days she will be herself again. For a little while she will need careful watching, and there are certain injections which must be given her regularly. But these are minor points. The great point, Barlow, is that I have done what I said I would do, what I knew I could do. I have taken the soul of Jeanette and given it a new home in the strong, healthy body of Lorna Sherwood."

Paul stood staring at him, speechless. Allerman smiled indulgently.

"You are as big a doubter as Blumenthal and the rest of them," he said. "Even now, though I give you my word it is true, you can't bring yourself to believe that I have succeeded. But I shall soon convince you. Upstairs in Jeanette's bed is the body of Lorna Sherwood, but very soon, when Jeanette can speak to us, when we get a glimpse of her personality, her thoughts, her feelings, you will realise that it is Jeanette's soul that inhabits it."

"It's incredible," said Paul in an awed voice. "It's terrible."

"It's neither the one nor the other, Barlow. It's true and it's wonderful. It's only because it's strange, something you've never met with before, that you rather fight shy of it."

Paul shook his head.

"It's unnatural, Allerman."

"Unusual," corrected the doctor, "but not unnatural. Bear in mind what I said to you about miracles, Barlow, and you will see there's nothing unnatural about it. It's merely a case of having discovered a new method of making use of natural laws. But I can't expect you to believe me for the moment. All I can do is to assure you that Jeanette is alive and well—far better than she has ever been."

"And Lorna Sherwood?"

Allerman gave a shrug.

"Perhaps I hoped for too much, Barlow," he said. "I believed that I could effect an exchange of bodies without either of the bodies suffering any ill-effects. I have not the least doubt in my own mind that it can be done, but I am forced to admit that I have not yet accomplished it. The soul of Jeanette is safe in the body of Lorna, but Jeanette's body died before I had finished the operation. Another time it will not happen. I shall improve my technique. But in this case I was half prepared for it. Jeanette's body was in reality not fit to withstand the shock of the operation, and if Lorna's soul had been of

the least value, if a continuance of her life would in any way have benefited society, I shouldn't have taken the risk of transferring it to an unsuitable body such as Jeanette's."

"So Lorna Sherwood is dead?"

Allerman nodded.

"Lorna's soul and Jeanette's body have been thrown on Nature's scrap-heap, where they belong. But don't let that distress you, Barlow. Think of Jeanette, with her beautiful body and the long years of life in front of her. I don't know if Jeanette ever told you—I fancy she didn't—but if I had not performed this operation, she had, at the very outside, four years to live. Even I could do nothing to cure her. And now, Barlow, what have you to say to me?"

"I don't know," replied Paul. "It's overwhelming—so utterly beyond all experience that I don't know what I think or feel about it. But I want to see Jeanette."

Allerman glanced at his watch.

"You shall see her in half an hour," he said. "You look rather a scarecrow, Barlow, and I suggest that you use the half-hour to make yourself a little more presentable. I don't want my patient frightened. Come to me in the library in half an hour's time and I will take you to see Jeanette."

Thirty minutes later Paul entered the library and found Allerman seated at his desk.

"I am relying on you, Barlow," said the doctor, "to say and do nothing in the presence of Jeanette to excite her in any way. As a medical man you will realise the importance of that, and unless you can give me your word that you will control your feelings—"

"I can promise you that."

Allerman nodded.

"It may not be so easy as you imagine, Barlow. You will see what to all outward appearances is Lorna Sherwood, and you will be asked to believe that it is not Lorna at all but Jeanette. That will impose something of a strain on your confidence in me, and I cannot risk a repetition of the sort of scene which you precipitated last night. The effects on the patient would be disastrous."

"Anything I may have to say, I will reserve until we are out of the room."

"When I shall be more than ready to listen to you," smiled Allerman. "I must also ask you not to speak to her. I want no strain of any sort imposed on her until another twenty-four hours has passed. If you can curb your

impatience until then, I fancy I shall be able to satisfy you that it is really Jeanette, but you must not make any attempt to convince yourself on that point by asking her questions this morning."

"Very well," agreed Paul.

"The reason is," continued Allerman, "that I am not sure to what extent memory will be found to have survived. If my theory is correct, Jeanette will have forgotten practically everything that occurred in her life before the operation. The slate, so to speak, will have been wiped clean, and she will be starting again to accumulate a fresh store of memories. It is, however, possible that memory may not be entirely eliminated and that certain details of her past which have been very deeply impressed may still persist, even if only faintly, and I am anxious that nothing should be said or done to cause her to strain after recollection."

"I understand," said Paul. "And supposing all this is true, Allerman, and not just a fantastic delusion of yours, will Jeanette remember who she is?"

"Frankly, I don't know. My belief is that she will. But I am pretty well convinced in my own mind that she will remember little else. That, at any rate, is what I am hoping. The success of the experiment really depends on that. If this discovery of mine is ever to be of benefit to mankind, it is essential that the soul should be unaware that it is inhabiting a different body. You will see the point of that. Body and soul are so intimately connected that a soul which knew itself to be inhabiting the body of someone else might never overcome its feeling of repugnance, its sense of disgust at being linked to a body that was not its own, and the consequences of that would probably be serious. The average man and woman, Barlow, has not a scientific mind, and cannot look on a body as nothing more than an instrument through which the soul contacts the physical world. To the ordinary man his body is himself, and the realisation that he had changed bodies would probably impair his reason."

"In that case, Allerman, you've taken a terrible risk."

The doctor shrugged.

"If you want to make big money, Barlow, you must play with high stakes."

"You should also, if you're honest, Allerman, only stake what belongs to you. Jeanette's life and sanity and future happiness did not belong to you."

"Perhaps not," agreed Allerman. "But against that fact, Barlow, you must set the fact that if my experiment has succeeded, as I believe it has, her future life and health and happiness will be entirely of my making. Jeanette's life, as I told you, had only a few years to run, and I was not risking taking very

much from her in comparison with what I felt confident that I could give her."

"Whatever you may say, Allerman, it was a damnable thing to do—both to Jeanette and to Lorna. Lorna is dead—murdered—"

Allerman raised a hand.

"We won't start a discussion on the ethics of the case, please, Barlow. That is a matter for my own conscience. 'Murdered,' in any case, is hardly the word—"

"Murdered," repeated Paul. "It's the right word, Allerman—murdered to satisfy your insane ambition, your desire for notoriety—"

"Knowledge, Barlow. Notoriety means nothing to me, knowledge everything. But don't let us begin an argument."

"I'm not going to begin an argument," replied Paul, and his voice was as cold and hard as Allerman's, "but I'm going to give you a warning. I warn you that if you have murdered Jeanette—"

He paused, and his hand clenched.

"Well?" enquired Allerman. "If I have murdered Jeanette?"

"I'll see that you hang for it, Allerman."

The doctor nodded, and rose.

"And now, as soon as you have composed yourself, you shall see Jeanette."

"I'm ready," said Paul.

Allerman led the way upstairs. Outside the door of Jeanette's room he paused.

"Remember, Barlow—nothing to excite her."

Paul nodded, and Allerman, quietly opening the door, stepped into the room and beckoned to Paul, who followed him.

Standing at the foot of the bed, Paul gazed steadily at the motionless figure that lay in it. It was Lorna. Her throat and right shoulder were swathed in bandages, her cheeks were pale, and she lay with closed eyes; and as Paul stared at her face and realised that beyond all doubt he was looking at the face of Lorna Sherwood, there swept through him a feeling that the whole affair was a monstrous absurdity, a colossal farce, the crazy delusion of a warped, distorted mind. Allerman was mad—a deluded maniac. This was Lorna Sherwood, and Jeanette was dead—killed by a mad, inhuman fiend....

He saw Allerman move to the bedside, and made an effort to control himself. He must keep his promise and make no scene here in the bedroom. He

continued to stare at the pale face against the pillow. He was aware that Allerman placed his fingers on the pulse and gave a nod of approval, but he did not actually look at him. His whole attention was concentrated on Lorna's face.

There was a look of serenity on it which he had never seen on the face of Lorna Sherwood. The hardness, too, had gone from the mouth, and there was a suggestion of wistful gentleness about it. It seemed to Paul, as he gazed, that the face had undergone some subtle change which he found it difficult to express in words. It was as though, since last he had seen Lorna, some mysterious influence had been at work, refining and purifying and softening....

He was aware that Dr. Allerman was standing beside him at the end of the bed.

"Jeanette," said Allerman's voice quietly.

Paul made no reply. He could not drag his eyes away from that lovely face. Yes—lovely. Lorna's face was lovely now....

"Do you still doubt, Barlow?"

Paul gave no sign that he had heard.

"There is a change already. Do you notice it? The face is—different. There is a delicacy about it, a look of refinement. The beautiful soul of Jeanette manifesting its presence. But I am amazed that the transformation should begin so soon."

Her eyelids fluttered, she moved her head slightly, and the next moment she opened her eyes. For fully half a minute she lay motionless, gazing steadily at Paul's face, and then she gave the faintest little smile.

"Paul!" she whispered, and closed her eyes again.

Allerman laid a hand on Paul's arm.

"She called you Paul."

Paul nodded.

"Did Lorna Sherwood know that your name is Paul?"

Paul, still gazing wonderingly, shook his head.

"Then what further proof do you want?"

Suddenly Paul's hands covered his face.

"God in heaven!" he murmured. "If only it is true!"

CHAPTER XVI

THERE were many points of similarity between Mickey Stone and Dinkie Lane. Both had dark, over-brilliantined hair and were inclined to be sallow; both had a weakness for coats with square shoulders and pronounced waists; both of them were anxious to be mistaken for gentlemen. The most noticeable difference between them was that Dinkie Lane was dead and Mickey Stone was not.

But Stone at the moment did not appear to be finding life a particularly joyful experience. For that fact, no doubt, we must hold the Home Secretary partly to blame. Prison discipline is not designed to engender joy in the disciplined, and his taste of it had perhaps sapped Mickey Stone's natural cheerfulness. But the photograph which he was holding in his hand seemed to be contributing to some extent to his joyfulness. He was scowling at it ferociously.

It was the photograph of the head and shoulders of a girl, who was gazing at Mickey with a bewitching smile, which showed to the best possible advantage her small, regular teeth. The photograph was rather crumpled, as the result of long months spent in Mickey's pocket, but it was just possible to make out the inscription scrawled across the bottom right-hand corner; "With love, Lorna."

From the expression on Mickey's face, it seemed possible that the love had become as bedraggled as the photograph; but he was utterly absorbed in scowling at it, and when the door opened and the Reverend Francis Boyle stepped into his cell, he did not even turn his head.

The Reverend Francis Boyle was a pale, aesthetic young man, whose doleful expression suggested that the task of ministering to the spiritual needs of the guests of His Majesty had sapped his cheerfulness no less than prison discipline had sapped the cheerfulness of this member of his flock. He crossed to where Mickey was seated and laid a delicate white hand on his shoulder.

"How are you, Mickey?"

Stone continued to stare at Lorna's bewitching smile and made no reply.

"You will be leaving us in a few days, Mickey. The Governor tells me that your time is up next Thursday."

Mickey lowered the photograph and glanced up at him.

"You're telling me!"

Mickey Stone had been to the States and had brought back with him, in addition to a wallet stuffed with notes which his dexterity in the manipulation of cards had transferred there from the wallets of first-class

passengers on the boat, a supply of picturesque idioms which he was doing his utmost to embody in the English language.

"On Thursday next, Mickey, you will once more be a free man."

"Yeah!"

"Yeah," replied the Reverend Francis Boyle.

"That is to say, yes. You will be able to make a fresh start and become, I hope, an honest, useful member of society. I want to impress on you, Mickey, that you must grasp this opportunity with both hands—"

Mickey cut him short.

"Listen, you—what's your name?"

"Boyle. The Reverend Francis Boyle."

"Boyle, is it? Well, I guess that's something that gives me a pain in the neck. Hop it!"

The Reverend Francis Boyle did nothing so undignified, but stood his ground manfully.

"Try to realise, Mickey," he said, "that I'm your friend and am anxious to do anything I can to help you. While you have been here I have done my best to help you with my thoughts and my prayers. Never once since you came to us have I retired at night without remembering you in my prayers."

"Yeah? Well, I guessed there was something wrong. I've been sleeping badly."

The Reverend Boyle sighed. Mickey was a difficult case—-hard, unapproachable, suspicious of every effort to make friends with him. But he must persevere. Even at the risk of being considered a boil on the neck he must persevere.

"When you leave this place on Thursday," he said, "you will be going back into a world where you will have an uphill fight. Most men will be against you, and you will need friends, help, encouragement, if you are to break away from your old associations and make a fresh start. If you have made no plans—"

"I've made plans all right."

"I'm very glad to hear it. But you'll need a job, Mickey—work to do."

"I've got a job to do all right."

"Splendid!" smiled the Reverend Boyle. "There's nothing like honest hard work, Mickey. It makes a man—er—-a man. Some day, perhaps, when you have rehabilitated yourself in the eyes of society, you will find some good woman, who will be a wife to you."

"I've got a woman. There you are—" He thrust the photograph into the parson's hand. "That's her—Lorna."

The Reverend Boyle gazed at the photograph and then glanced at Mickey.

"Your wife?"

"No."

The clergyman's face clouded and he sighed.

"I hope, Mickey," he said gravely, "that as soon as you're free your first act will be to make an honest woman of her."

Mickey snatched the photograph from his hand.

"What dirty minds you people have got!" he said. "Lorna's straight, see? At least I thought she was. Everything's always been on the level, and when I came inside she swore she'd wait for me. We'd get married, she said, as soon as I got out. I believed her. All the time I've been here I've been counting on Lorna. If I hadn't had that to look forward to, I'd have gone scatty."

The Reverend Francis Boyle nodded.

"The power of a good woman's love," he breathed. "Good!" exclaimed Mickey. "You called her good, did you? Well, I don't! She's a lousy, treacherous—"

Mr. Boyle raised a hand.

"Please," he pleaded.

Mickey Stone sprang to his feet.

"I thought she was on the level," he said bitterly. "I thought Lorna wasn't like the rest of 'em. I thought she'd play straight with a fellow. That shows you the kind of sap I am, doesn't it? Trusting a woman! I should have known better, and I guess I deserve what's come to me."

Boyle opened his mouth to speak, but Mickey hurried on.

Running around with another fellow—that's what she's been doing. I've heard. Dinkie Lane—the little rat! But they won't get away with it—neither of 'em. You'll see. Nobody's going to double-cross Mickey Stone and get away with it. I'll find 'em all right, and then you'll see."

"This is terrible," sighed the chaplain. "Terrible. If you go out into the world with these thoughts of hatred in your heart—"

"Hate! Sure I hate her." He held up the photograph. "Look at her. She's pretty, isn't she? Got a nice smile, hasn't she? I know Lorna. That's the way she'll look at me when I find her. Smile at me—look pretty—try to kid me she's been waiting for me all this time, with her heart aching. But she won't get me that way. I'm not falling for that stuff this time. If I swing for it, she

and Dinkie Lane are going to get what's due to them. I'll smash her pretty face so as her own mother wouldn't know her. That's the job I've got to do—see? And no one is going to stop me."

The Reverend Francis Boyle shook his head. Violence in any form always gave him a queer sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach and this furious outburst of primitive passion had definitely made him feel sick.

"Now you know," said Mickey, a trifle more calmly. "That's the job, and praying for me isn't going to stop me doing it. Now hop it."

Mr. Boyle turned and went slowly to the door.

"I shan't be seeing you again, Mickey," he said, "but I do beg of you to think many, many times before you allow your jealousy, your injured pride, your terrible uncontrolled passion, to lead you into yet another crime. Even now I shan't give up hoping for you, Mickey. I shall go on praying for you."

Mickey Stone jerked a thumb towards the door.

"Scram," he said tersely.

CHAPTER XVII

JEANETTE, seated in a low arm-chair in her bedroom, closed her eyes and pressed the palms of her hands against her temples. For fully a minute she sat like that, and then her hands fell on to her lap. "Nurse!"

The grim-visaged woman in nurse's uniform who stood staring out of the window turned her head.

"How long have I been ill, nurse?"

"I've been here a week."

"And am I really better?"

"You're well enough to look after yourself. So the doctor says, and he ought to know. Anyway, I've got my marching orders; I'm leaving to-morrow, and I'm not sorry. This house gets on my nerves."

She turned again to stare through the window, and again Jeanette's hands pressed her temples.

"If only I could remember, nurse! But I can't. It's all a sort of haze. What has been the matter with me?"

"You'd better ask Dr. Allerman."

Jeanette shook her head.

"I've asked him, but he tells me nothing."

"Then I shouldn't waste my breath asking him. If he doesn't want to tell you, dynamite won't blast it out of him. He's like that."

"He keeps telling me to wait until I'm stronger. I shall remember then, he says. But I'm much stronger than I was, and I still can't remember. At least, I can remember very little."

"Just as well, perhaps," said the nurse sourly. "But it's no use trying to pump me. I know nothing, and what I guess is my own affair. And if I knew anything I wouldn't dare tell you without the doctor's permission."

"I wish you were staying here, nurse."

"I don't."

"I suppose it's silly of me, but I'm—afraid." She was silent for some minutes. Then: "Is Paul still here, nurse?"

"Mr. Barlow? Oh, yes. Why?"

"I wondered. I haven't seen him. I've asked to see him several times, but Dr. Allerman has always refused to let me."

"Well, I expect he knows best. It's not Mr. Barlow's fault that he hasn't seen you: he has asked often enough. He tried to get round me yesterday to let him pay you a visit, but I had my orders and didn't dare go against them."

Jeanette smiled, and at that moment the door was opened and Dr. Allerman came into the room.

"Well, nurse, how did she manage?"

"Quite well, doctor. She dressed herself and she has been walking about the room without any help." Allerman nodded.

"Then leave us, please, nurse."

When the nurse had gone from the room Allerman drew up a chair in front of Jeanette and sat down facing her.

"Listen, my dear," he said gently. "I want to ask you a few questions and you must do your best to answer them."

"I'll try."

"Do you know who I am?"

Jeanette smiled.

"Why, yes—of course. You're Dr. Allerman. You told me so."

"And you are Jeanette?"

"Of course. You told me that too. But I believe I knew that before you told me. That's one of the things I can just remember. Jeanette—yes, I'm sure I remember that. But there's so much I can't remember—where I am—how I got here—what has happened to me—"

"You mustn't let that worry you, Jeanette," interrupted the doctor. "You have been very ill—you've undergone a serious operation—and I'm not in the least surprised that you've forgotten. But you will remember later on—everything that matters. I am going to help you remember. You're strong enough now to make the effort. You have remembered that you are Jeanette and that I am Dr. Allerman, and those are two of the most important facts. But there is one other which is equally important." He leaned forward and laid his hand on hers. "Do you remember, dear, that before you were ill you promised to marry me?"

She gave him a quick, startled glance and withdrew her hand.

"I promised—-to marry—you?"

He nodded.

"You can imagine, dear, how terribly anxious I have been during your illness, when I feared you might not get better, and saw all my happiness slipping away from me."

"Yes—of course." She was gazing at him with bewildered, troubled eyes. "It must have been terrible for you. But I can't remember—"

"I am helping you to remember, Jeanette. But the past is less important than the future. Think of what the future holds for us. Soon—as soon as you are well and strong again—you will be my wife."

"Your wife?" she repeated in a low voice. "It seems so strange—I can't remember—"

"You don't remember that I love you, Jeanette?"

She shook her head.

"But you believe me now when I tell you that I love you, that you are going to be my wife?"

"Yes—of course—if you tell me so."

"I am telling you so. Don't you remember anything about me?"

She shook her head.

"I've tried—terribly hard, but I can't remember anything clearly. Once or twice, when I've been dreaming.... Last night I had a dream. About you. It was such a strange dream—a horrible dream. There was a whip—and you were striking me with it—across my face—"

Allerman smiled indulgently.

"My dear, that's not the kind of dream to have. Can you imagine me striking you?"

She shook her head.

"No. But it was so very vivid. I woke up, terrified. And when I fell asleep again I dreamed that I was a cripple. I had to use a stick to walk about—"

"There's no truth in that dream, anyway," smiled the doctor. "Nurse says you're walking splendidly, and I want to see for myself. Come for a walk with me as far as the drawing-room."

He held out his hand to help her to her feet, and she took it and got up from her chair. Allerman laid a hand on her shoulder.

"There's something you used to let me do, dear, before you were ill."

She glanced at him with puzzled eyes.

"This," said Allerman, slipped his arm around her shoulders, drew her towards him and stooped to kiss her.

She started, thrust him away and took a quick step backwards.

"Oh, no—please—I couldn't—"

Allerman raised his eyebrows.

"You're going to be my wife, Jeanette, and you refuse to let me kiss you?"

She nodded.

"Yes. I'm sorry. But it's all so strange—I can't realise—"

"Very well, my dear; I've no wish to hurry you. I'll wait as patiently as I can until you do realise. Let's take our walk."

He gave her his arm and led her from the room. As they crossed the landing, the door of Paul's room opened and he came out. Jeanette paused, gazing at him earnestly, and then a radiant smile spread over her face.

"Paul!" she said.

Allerman frowned slightly and signed to Paul to come to them.

"This is Mr. Barlow, my assistant, Jeanette," he said. "Do you remember him?"

"Of course I remember Paul. Why haven't you been to see me, Paul?"

"Because I gave instructions that no one was to see you," replied Allerman. "It would have been dangerous to excite you, my dear. We are making a little tour, Barlow. You had better come with us and see how my patient has improved."

Without a word Paul followed them down the stairs. In the hall Jeanette paused, disengaged her arm and gazed around her, with a slight pucker between her eyebrows.

"It all seems vaguely familiar," she said. "That room"—pointing to the door of Allerman's library—"I'm sure I've been in there—"

She went forward, opened the door and passed into the room, Paul and the doctor following. Again she paused, and stood in the middle of the room gazing around her. Then she went slowly to the fireplace, paused again and stood frowning at the whip that hung on the wall above the mantelpiece. Reaching up, she took the whip from the wall and inspected it thoughtfully. Paul, watching her every movement and every change of expression, saw her hand raised and her fingers touch her left cheek as though she were feeling for something. She turned to Allerman. "This whip," she said. "I remember it. It's the one you used in the dream—"

Allerman stepped quickly forward, snatched the whip from her hand and replaced it on the wall.

"That's easily explained, my dear. You've seen this whip many times, and when you dreamed your absurd dream you already had the memory of this whip in your mind."

Jeanette passed a hand across her forehead. "There was someone else," she said—"a girl, wasn't there?"

Allerman shook his head, and the girl smiled.

"I must have been very ill," she said. "I imagine so many things—and forgot so many."

Allerman took her arm and led her to a chair.

"Sit down, Jeanette, and let us see how much you have remembered." He glanced at Paul. "This will interest you, Barlow, as a medical man who know's the facts of the case. And it may possibly convince you that my theory is correct. Tell me, Jeanette: do you remember a young man called Dinkie?"

She shook her head.

"Do you remember anything about a bank?"

"A bank? No—nothing."

"Or a man named Mickey Stone?"

"No."

"You remember what a policeman looks like?"

"Why, of course."

"Suppose a policeman were to walk into this room now, would you be frightened?"

She smiled.

"Why should I be frightened of a policeman? What strange questions you ask!"

"Just one more strange question," said Allerman. "Do you remember ever having a revolver?"

"A revolver? I don't think I've ever had one in my hand. I'm sure I haven't."

"Or heard one fired?"

"Never."

Allerman shot a triumphant glance at Paul.

"That seems fairly conclusive, Barlow."

Paul made no reply; he did not even glance at the doctor. His gaze was riveted on Jeanette's face. Was it—could it be Jeanette? Had Allerman really

worked this amazing miracle? Proof was being added to proof, yet it seemed so fantastic, so utterly unbelievable....

"Come into the drawing-room," said Allerman. The drawing-room, too, she said, was vaguely familiar. She wandered to the big French windows and looked out into the garden, but turned away with a shake of her head. By the piano she lingered, gazing at it thoughtfully. She seated herself on the seat and stared at the keyboard, frowning slightly; then she smiled, placed her hands over the keys, hesitated a moment and began to play.

"So you remember that, Jeanette," smiled Allerman. "Oh, yes, I remember this. I've not forgotten how to play."

As she played she seemed gradually to gain confidence: the hesitation vanished and the look of doubt left her eyes. She was playing one of Chopin's valses—the one she had played when she had last sat at the piano on the night of the operation while Paul and Allerman listened, smoking their cigars. Suddenly, in the middle of a bar, her hands stopped and her face clouded. She glanced across at Allerman, frowning.

"I was sitting here," she said slowly. "Paul was over there—in that big chair. He was smoking a cigar. I remember that, because I had never seen Paul smoke a cigar before. He always smoked cigarettes. I remember thinking that he must be smoking it because he didn't want to offend Dr. Allerman, and I hoped it wouldn't upset him."

She was talking more to herself than to them, and seemed to have forgotten that they were in the room.

"Dr. Allerman went from the room, and Paul came to the piano," she went on. "He stood just there—resting his elbow on it—and told me—asked me—" She paused and shot a quick glance at Allerman. "Then Dr. Allerman came back," she continued, gazing at the keyboard again. "He offered me a cup of coffee. I didn't want to drink it. But he made me drink it. I was terribly afraid—"

Allerman went to her and took her arm.

"That was the evening when you were taken ill, Jeanette," he said. "Don't try to remember any more now; you've done enough for to-day and you mustn't over-tire yourself. I'll take you back to your room."

She rose from the seat and went with Allerman to the door. There she paused, glanced back at Paul and gave him another radiant smile.

"Au revoir, Paul!"

"Au revoir—Jeanette!"

As they went from the room, Paul turned to the window and stood looking out into the garden. His mind was in a tumult. How could he possibly believe that this was really Jeanette? Yet how could he possibly deny the evidence of his own senses and refuse to believe it? That radiant smile she had given him—hadn't that been Jeanette's smile? She had remembered him, too—had clearly recalled how he had stood by the piano that night and begged her to go away with him and marry him. And she had not forgotten that their plans must not be confided to Allerman. That quick glance at the doctor and her sudden hesitation had convinced him of that. And Lorna had known nothing of their plans—had not been in the room that evening when the incident of the coffee had occurred which had been so vividly recalled.

The whip, too, in Allerman's library: she had recognised that, and her hand had gone to her cheek in search of the weal. What further evidence could he reasonably demand? Besides, it was not entirely a question of reason. There was something beyond reason, deeper than mere logic: that intuitive knowledge that, inexplicable as it might seem, against all experience as it certainly was, this was indeed Jeanette. It was Lorna Sherwood's body, but the body was a mere outer covering, an instrument, as Allerman had said, to contact the physical world; and within it, using that instrument, was the soul of Jeanette. Already that soul was re-moulding the body; there was a new look on the face, a new gentleness in the eyes, a refinement which Lorna Sherwood had never possessed. Lorna Sherwood might have been able to play the piano—he didn't know—but he was sure she could never have played it with that exquisite feeling. And why should Lorna Sherwood play that particular Chopinvalse which was a favourite with Jeanette? It was incredible, but true. Allerman had achieved the impossible, and that beautiful woman, beautiful of soul and beautiful of body, was Jeanette. And Jeanette loved him. ...

He heard the door open and turned to see Allerman coming towards him across the room.

"Well, Barlow, are you convinced? But I can answer that question: you are convinced, but, being of the stuff of which doctors are made, you dislike admitting it. It goes against all your preconceived ideas of what is surgically possible; it shatters your cosmos; it makes you wonder whether you're on your head or your feet; it makes you feel that you don't know where you are—which for a medical man is a most humiliating experience. But you know in your heart that you are convinced." He smiled. "I am looking forward to seeing Blumenthal and his colleagues floundering as you are floundering now, Barlow. It will be an amusing spectacle. How they will twist and turn and wriggle and try to escape the fact that is staring them in the face!"

"In a case like this," said Paul, "you can hardly blame anyone for being cautious."

"On the contrary, Barlow, I commend your caution. A scientist should be cautious of accepting facts, but bold in going out in search of them. But what further proof do you require? You have seen Jeanette, and you cannot have failed to notice the change which is already taking place in her body. Her soul is at work on it, deleting the last traces of Lorna Sherwood's personality and impressing it with her own. It is Jeanette's soul that looks out at you through the eyes, Jeanette's soul that speaks to you through the mouth. You must admit the differences."

"Yes, I admit that."

"And you must admit the evidence—the overwhelming evidence—of the memory. Things are turning out much as I expected. Lorna's memory has entirely disappeared—-gone with her soul—and what memory remains is the memory of Jeanette. There is not a great deal; only those incidents which impressed her very strongly still linger. She will never remember that she once possessed a different body. But there is enough memory there, Barlow, to convince you of Jeanette's identity—memory of facts and incidents with which Lorna Sherwood could not possibly have been acquainted. I have succeeded even better than I dared to hope. Jeanette remembers, and that is the unanswerable proof of my success."

"Yes, Jeanette remembers," echoed Paul slowly. "She remembers the whip, Allerman."

Allerman shrugged his shoulders.

"She remembers the whip across her cheek."

"She remembers a dream," replied Allerman, "in which that whip figured. She dreamed that she was being struck with a whip; she had seen that whip hanging in the library, and in her dream the two ideas became associated. It is a quite usual phenomenon in dreams. I am more interested in the fact that she can still play the piano. There was only one memory that is more vivid than her memory of her music—her memory of you. That is extremely interesting."

"We're very old friends," said Paul, "and if she remembered anyone she would be most likely to remember me."

"Such close friends as that?" He smiled. "Then, as her close friend, Barlow, you will be interested to know that Jeanette has consented to marry me."

Paul started, and then stood gazing at Allerman, meeting his challenging, triumphant eyes without wavering.

"My God, Allerman, if that's true—"

"It is true."

"You unutterable swine! Do you think I don't understand? Now—when Jeanette is straining to remember, when she is ready to believe everything you tell her about the past because she believes you are helping her to remember, you have told her—"

"That before she was taken ill she had promised to marry me," said the doctor calmly. "Quite correct, Barlow. And as soon as she has fully recovered she is going to marry me."

His smile vanished and his mouth became grim.

"In case you should take it into your head to attempt any interference, Barlow," he said, "it is as well for you to understand the position. Jeanette, at least for a time, will be entirely dependent on me, and if you have any idea of persuading her to run away with you, you had better reconsider it."

He went towards the door and paused.

"There are certain injections which Jeanette must have at least for a time," he said. "If she does not have them, she will die. What those injections are, Barlow, is my secret. Unless you want to kill her you won't take her away from me."

Paul's fist clenched and he took a quick step forward. "And to murder me, Barlow, as you would so very much like to do, would be equally fatal to Jeanette," he said, and went from the room.

CHAPTER XVIII

ALLERMAN glanced up from his desk and subjected Jeanette to a critical scrutiny.

"Better every day, Jeanette," he said. "You're doing splendidly. It's only just a fortnight since the operation and you're almost your old self." He smiled. "Shall we say a new and a better edition of your old self?"

"I've never felt better in my life," smiled the girl.

"Thanks to me."

She nodded.

"Yes, I realise that. I can't ever thank you enough, Dr. Allerman."

He frowned slightly.

"As my future wife, Jeanette, you really must try to call me by my Christian name. I have reminded you of that many times during the last week. You always used to call me Raymond."

"I'm sorry," said Jeanette penitently. "But it's so difficult to remember. Somehow it doesn't seem right to call you Raymond."

"I wish you to do it."

"I'll try."

He nodded.

"You came to ask me something?"

"Yes. I'm so tired of sitting in the garden. Is there any reason why I shouldn't go out for a walk? I'm quite strong again now, and I've never been further than the gate. Paul could take me—"

"Barlow has work to do. But there's no reason why you shouldn't have a walk. Don't go far—not out of sight of the house. Stark will go with you."

"Stark? But I don't want Stark. He's—horrible. I shouldn't enjoy my walk in the least—"

"Stark will go with you," repeated Allerman, and rang the bell on his desk.

Stark entered and stood to attention.

"Miss Jeanette is going for a walk, Stark. You will look after her."

"Yes, master."

"She is not to go near the fields."

"Not near the fields, master."

"Anywhere else you like, Jeanette," said the doctor, picking up his pen and beginning to write, "but don't over-tire yourself."

With a sigh she turned away and went from the room. Leaving the house, she went through the garden and set off in the direction of the woods, which lay about a quarter of a mile away, on the opposite side of the house to that on which were the fields that belonged to Allerman's estate. Glancing back, she saw that Stark, about a dozen yards behind her, was following. She had not gone many yards when the tweed-clad figure of Delane stepped from the shelter of the hedge and came striding towards her.

"If I'm trespassing, I apologise," he smiled. "Am I?"

Jeanette's glance swept over him appraisingly. Evidently she found him satisfactory, for she smiled back at him.

"You may be trespassing or you may not be," she said. "I've no idea."

Delane jerked his head in the direction of the house.

"I thought I saw you come out of the gate."

"Yes, I did."

"You live there—at Dr. Allerman's?"

"Yes."

"And you can't tell me if I'm trespassing?"

She shook her head, smiling.

"I've been very ill," she explained, "and I'm afraid I've forgotten a good many things. I've really no idea where Dr. Allerman's property ends."

Delane was studying her face intently.

"Do you know Barlow?"

"Paul? Why, of course. We've known each other for years—"

"I'm a friend of his—Delane's my name—and I'm wondering if that's sufficient introduction. The fact is, I'm rapidly dying of thirst. There's a leak in my water-bottle, and when I opened it I found it empty. It's several miles to the nearest house—"

"Why, of course," smiled Jeanette. "Come up to the house, Mr. Delane, and I'll get you some water."

He glanced towards Stark, who was standing a few yards away, glowering.

"Does that belong to you?"

"He's one of Dr. Allerman's servants. I'm supposed not to be very strong yet, and the doctor sent him to keep an eye on me."

"As long as he won't bite!" smiled Delane, and they set off together towards the house.

She led the way into the hall and turned to Stark, who was following close behind.

"Bring something to drink, please, Stark—to the drawing-room. You'd like some whisky, wouldn't you, Mr. Delane?"

"Thought-reader!" he smiled.

As he sat in an arm-chair drinking his whisky and soda, Delane studied Jeanette's face carefully.

"Am I staring too much?" he enquired. "Please forgive me if I am, but the fact is that I can't get it out of my head that I've met you somewhere before. But I can't for the life of me think where."

"My name's Fayre—Jeanette Fayre," she told him. "Does that help?"

He shook his head.

"Have you ever lived in London?"

"Never."

"And you've no recollection of my handsome face?"

"None at all, Mr. Delane. I'm quite sure I've never seen you before. Unless I've forgotten." She sighed. "Since my illness I seem to have forgotten so much." He nodded and again became absorbed in studying her face.

"I believe I've got it!" he said at length.

"You've remembered where you met me?"

"No. But I've remembered where I met the person whom you very much resemble. It's quite a striking resemblance. She was a girl—I say, you're sure you won't be offended?"

"Why should I be?"

"Well, the young person I have in mind wasn't a very pleasant young person. As a matter of fact, she was a criminal." He pointed to his chin. "You see that scar? That's an example of her handiwork." He saw Jeanette's puzzled expression and smiled. "I'm a barrister," he explained, "and barristers sometimes knock up against pretty awful people. Lorna Sherwood—that was her name—was one of the pretty awful ones—pretty and awful. She was mixed up in a smash-and-grab raid, and I was prosecuting counsel. I'm afraid she took a dislike to me. She pretended to faint when I was examining her, and when they gave her a glass of water she shied it at me and caught me on the chin."

"And I remind you of her?"

"Very much. In face, I mean. You're the same height, too, and your hair's the same colour."

"We're all supposed to have our doubles, aren't we, Mr. Delane? What happened to this girl? Did she go to prison?"

"No, she got off. We couldn't actually prove anything against her and we had to let her go. But she was a bad hat all right. There was a hold-up at the Dinneford Bank a little while back. I expect you heard of it. A fellow called Dinkie Lane got shot. He was a pal of Lorna Sherwood, and the police suspect that she had something to do with that affair. But she has disappeared and they've failed to trace her. They found her car—a stolen one—just outside Dinneford, but she seems to have vanished into thin air. But the police will get her sooner or later. Crime isn't a paying proposition in this country, Miss Fayre. Eventually the criminal usually comes to a sticky end."

"And I'm really so very much like this Lorna Sherwood?"

"Very much indeed." He leaned forward suddenly, staring at her.

"I say, Miss Fayre, I'm sorry," he said, as he straightened himself. "You must think I have pretty dreadful manners, but this is really amazing. That little mole—just behind the lobe of your ear—"

Jeanette raised her hand and touched the spot with the tip of a finger.

"I didn't know I had a mole there, Mr. Delane."

"Perhaps not. The lobe of the ear would hide it when you look in the mirror. But it's there all right, Miss Fayre, and it's really an extraordinary coincidence. Lorna Sherwood had a mole in exactly the same spot. There was some question of identification at the trial, and there was quite a lot of talk about that mole."

"But how queer! Are you quite sure—"

She paused, turned her head and saw Allerman standing in the doorway. He was frowning, his thin lips were pressed tightly together, and there was a steely glint in his eyes. As she became aware of him, he strode quickly forward, paused and glanced enquiringly from Jeanette to Delane.

"Who is this gentleman, Jeanette?"

"This is Mr. Delane," smiled the girl. "I found him dying of thirst on my way to the woods and brought him in here to revive him. This is Dr. Allerman, Mr. Delane."

Delane nodded.

"I've heard of you, Dr. Allerman."

"I have never heard of you, Mr. Delane," replied Allerman frigidly.

"And I've always wanted to meet you."

"Your wish is gratified."

"As a matter of fact," added Delane easily, "I've called once or twice, but your handsome butler has always declared that you were not at home."

"When I am here, Mr. Delane, I am at work, and visitors are not welcome. Unless you have some matter of special importance to discuss with me—"

"I have."

Allerman glanced at his watch.

"Very well; I can spare you five minutes. Leave us, please, Jeanette."

Jeanette rose, bestowed a smile on Delane and went from the room.

"Well, Mr. Delane? Please waste no time in coming to the point."

"I don't propose to," said Delane quietly. "I've waited a long time for this opportunity, and now I've got it I don't propose to waste time. You know who I am, don't you? I'm Bill Delane's brother."

"Your family tree is of no interest to me," sneered the doctor.

"I've always wanted to tell you to your face, Allerman, that I know you to be a liar, and I know you to be the foulest swine—"

Allerman went livid with fury.

"You've said enough, Delane," he exclaimed. "You've said more than enough—"

"I haven't finished yet," interrupted Delane. "My brother died a raving madman, and it was you who turned him into that. You killed him as surely as you killed that child years ago when you tried out some of your crazy notions on the operating table and sacrificed that kid to your mad ambition. You've two murders to pay for, Allerman, and I mean to make you pay for them."

The doctor made a supreme effort to control himself. "You'd better go, Delane. I warn you that you had better go—"

"It won't be easy, Allerman," continued Delane. "I know that. But I'm going to make you pay before I'm through with you if it takes me ten years. I'm going to smash you and make you suffer as you've made other people suffer. There was another man who came here as your assistant, wasn't there? I've found that out. Young Carson—one of the most promising men of his year, so I'm told. But he came here and nothing was ever heard of him again. He

left you and said he was going to America, so you said, but he never reached America, and you know as well as I do that he never started. What happened to him? I don't know, but I can guess. People who discover what's going on in this house and then want to leave, can't be allowed to leave, can they, Allerman?"

"I advise you to leave my house immediately. There are limits to my patience—"

"What devilish work you're doing in this house I don't pretend to know, but I intend to find out; and when I do find out I fancy I shall have discovered why young Bill lost his reason and young Carson disappeared. And then I shall enjoy the spectacle of watching you suffer, and my only regret will be that the law provides for no slower and more painful method of killing you than hanging."

Allerman was ominously calm now.

"If you believe all this, my friend," he said, "I suggest that you should immediately inform the police. And what would happen if you did? They would laugh at you. I am Dr. Allerman, the greatest surgeon the world has ever known, and you—"

He snapped his fingers contemptuously. "And now, if you've finished, perhaps you'll be good enough to leave before I call my servant and have you thrown out."

"I've almost finished," said Delane. "But there's just one more thing I've always promised myself if ever I managed to get you to face me."

"Well?"

"This!" said Delane, and sent his fist crashing against Allerman's jaw.

The doctor staggered backwards, gripped at the table in an effort to save himself, and fell sprawling on the floor.

Delane turned and went to the door.

"As regards the police, Allerman," he said, pausing and glancing back as the doctor got to his feet, "I may possibly take your advice."

"Go to the police!" exclaimed Allerman furiously. "Go to the police and be damned to you! They'll laugh at you!"

"No," said Delane, "I don't think they'll laugh at me—not if I tell them that Dr. Allerman has Lorna Sherwood in his house."

He went from the room, closing the door behind him. For a good minute Allerman stood staring at the door, frowning; then he crossed to the door, flung it open and strode out into the hall.

"Stark!"

The man appeared.

"Yes, master?"

"Tell Miss Jeanette to come to the library immediately."

"Yes, master."

He entered the library, planted himself by the fire-place and waited. A few moments later the girl entered.

"You sent for me, Dr. Allerman?"

"Raymond!" exclaimed Allerman furiously. "You are to call me Raymond! I've told you a dozen times and still you disobey me. And that man—Delane—I've told you a hundred times that I will not have strangers in this house, and again you disobey me. You invite him in here—actually into my house—"

"But I didn't know—"

"Don't lie!" stormed Allerman. "Don't try to excuse yourself. You invited him here deliberately. What did you tell him? What did he say to you? What damned lies did he tell you about me?"

"He told me nothing—he asked me nothing. And I didn't mean to disobey you. I don't remember your forbidding me to invite people into the house. I must have forgotten. I've forgotten so much—"

"You will not forget again," exclaimed Allerman grimly. He turned and took the whip from the wall. "You will not forget again, Jeanette. People do not disobey me twice. I know how to cure them of disobedience."

He raised the whip, but she gripped his wrist with both hands and clung to it.

"No—please for God's sake—don't do it!" she begged desperately. "Don't do it—again!"

He lowered the whip and gazed at her keenly. "Again? You're imagining things, Jeanette. I have never struck you in my life." He tossed the whip aside. "Very well," he said more calmly; "this time I will overlook it. You had better go to your room."

His hands were shaking and his lips twitching. "But remember, Jeanette," he said, as she turned and went towards the door, "that I intend to be obeyed, and if ever you should be tempted to disobey me again—"

He strode to her and gripped her shoulders.

"Without me you cannot live," he said. "Do you realise that? Without my injections you would die in three days. Bear that in mind if you are to

disobey me again. Disobey me once more and I shall let you die." He thrust her roughly from him. "Go to your room," he said, "and stay there until I give you permission to leave it."

She gave him a quick, terrified glance and hurried from the library.

CHAPTER XIX

PAUL was working late. At least, he was trying to work. Sitting at the window of his room, he had a book on his knees and was jotting occasional notes on a slip of paper; but most of the time he was gazing out of the window at the moonlit landscape. He had been aware of the clock of the village church striking twelve, and a little later he had heard Dr. Allerman come up the stairs and go into his room, which was at the far end of the corridor. He had seen the patch of light thrown on to the courtyard from the doctor's window as he switched on the light, and had noticed when a few minutes later it had disappeared; but he still remained seated at the window, gazing at the landscape and from time to time dragging himself out of his absorption and making an effort to concentrate on the book.

He heard a faint tap, glanced round, decided that he had imagined it, and raised his book again. There came another tap, slightly louder than the first. He got up, laid down his book, crossed to the door and opened it. The corridor was in darkness, and before he had time to realise what was happening the figure of Jeanette slipped into the room.

"Shut the door, please, Paul—quietly."

He closed the door and turned to her, a look of amazement on his face.

"Paul, I must talk to you."

"Wouldn't it be wiser to wait until the morning? If Dr. Allerman knew—"

"He won't know. He has gone to bed. I didn't dare come until I'd heard him go to his room. I've been waiting—all the evening."

She saw the doubt in his eyes.

"Paul, I must talk to you—I must!"

He smiled.

"If it's so terribly urgent—"

"It is."

"Very well, Jeanette. Come and sit down."

He led her to the couch and seated himself beside her. She glanced quickly around the room.

"The light, Paul," she said. "If Dr. Allerman should see the light—"

"I'll put it out."

He switched off the light and returned to his seat on the couch.

"And now, my dear, what have you to say to me that's so terribly urgent?"

For some moments she made no reply. She sat, her hands folded on her lap, gazing at the window; and as he saw her sitting there, with the moonlight on her face, conviction came to him. This was Jeanette. He knew it now beyond all possibility of further questioning. The expression on her face, the look in her eyes, the sound of her voice, that trick she had of puckering one corner of her mouth when she was deep in thought—each little detail added its testimony until the sum of proof was overwhelming. And if he needed still further proof, he had it in that deep, intuitive, unchallengeable knowledge that this was Jeanette, that awareness of her presence, that invisible link joining his consciousness to hers, that sense, which he had always experienced when he was with her, that he and she were perfectly attuned.

It was true: Allerman had worked the miracle. It did not matter now how he had worked it: all that mattered was that here, sitting beside him, was

Jeanette—beautiful, strong, no longer living in the shadow of death and forced to limp about with the help of a stick, no longer obliged to forego everything that made life worth living, to turn her face away from wifehood and motherhood....

"Jeanette!"

She turned her head and faced him.

"You're beautiful, Jeanette."

She smiled at him—Jeanette's smile, tender and a little wistful.

"You've said that to me before, Paul."

"Often."

She nodded.

"I remember. It used to make me very happy to hear you say that. Sad, too—though I can't think why it made me sad. But lately—since I've been ill—you haven't said it."

"I haven't had much chance, Jeanette. Dr. Allerman has almost kept you under lock and key."

"Or is it because I'm not so beautiful now?"

"You're more beautiful than ever, Jeanette."

She was silent for a time, lost in thought. Then:

"It's funny, Paul," she said. "I've forgotten so much, but I can remember almost everything about you. But I suppose it isn't funny really. Love is such a big thing that it couldn't ever be forgotten—and there never has been anything, Paul, that mattered so much as your love."

He leaned forward and laid a hand on hers.

"And is that still true, Jeanette?"

"Why, of course."

"You remember that I always said that I was going to marry you?"

"Of course."

"And you always wanted to marry me, too, didn't you, Jeanette?"

"Always. I can't think why we didn't get married long ago. Was it my fault?"

"It was nobody's fault."

"But there must have been some reason—"

"There was never any real reason."

"And now that I'm well and strong again, there isn't any reason, is there?"

"I'll marry you to-morrow, Jeanette, if you're willing."

She nodded.

"I am."

His hand closed over hers, and his arm went round her shoulders; but she withdrew' her hand, frowning slightly.

"That's what I came to ask you, Paul," she said. "I couldn't remember clearly and I simply had to know. But I don't understand. Dr. Allerman says that before I was ill I promised to marry him."

"You must take no notice of what Dr. Allerman tells you, Jeanette. You didn't promise to marry him."

"I can't help taking notice. Somehow, when he tells me to do anything, I can't help doing it. He frightens me, I think. I believe he always has frightened me. But I couldn't marry him. I don't love him—I never have loved him. I believe I hate him. I hate him and Stark and the house—everything. Why am I here? Why can't I go away?"

"You can, dear—very soon. As soon as you're really well again."

"I am well."

"Nearly, but not quite," he smiled. "Dr. Allerman says that for a little while he must have you under his care to complete the cure—"

"But I am well," she insisted. "I don't want to stay under Dr. Allerman's care. I want you to take me away. That's what you always wanted to do. Paul—I remember that. You wanted to take me away and marry me. Why shouldn't you take me now? You must, Paul. I can't stay here any longer. That's what I really came to tell you. I want you to take me away—now—to-night—before Dr. Allerman can stop you."

"How can I possibly take you now, Jeanette?"

"If we don't go now, Paul, we shall never go. Dr. Allerman won't let us. I can be ready in ten minutes—"

"It's five miles to the station, Jeanette, and I've no car—"

"We can walk. I shan't mind walking as long as we get away. You don't understand, Paul. Dr. Allerman—to-day—because I invited Mr. Delane into the house and gave him a whisky and soda—"

"You should have known better than that, Jeanette. You know that no one is ever invited here."

"But I didn't know. Perhaps I knew—before I was ill—and had forgotten. I didn't realise at any rate that I was doing wrong. But Dr. Allerman was furious because I had disobeyed him. He took down the whip and was going to beat me, and—Paul, I'm terrified. I may do something else—I may forget again—"

"If ever he dares to lay a hand on you—"

"He will, Paul. You don't know him, perhaps, as well as I do. Perhaps you've never seen him when he has lost his temper. He's terrible—doesn't know what he's doing—like a madman. He was like that to-day and he may be like it again. You must take me away at once—"

"Listen, Jeanette," said Paul quietly. "There's nothing I long for so much as to take you away and marry you and devote myself to making you happy. But just at the moment it can't be done, dear. For your own sake it can't be done. There's your treatment—the injections which Dr. Allerman gives you every day. I don't know what the injection is, and you can be quite sure that Allerman won't tell me. But he told me that for several weeks they would be absolutely essential and if you don't have them all the good work he has done will be undone."

"But there are other doctors, Paul—"

"There's no other doctor quite like Dr. Allerman, dear. No other doctor in the world could have performed the operation Allerman performed. I know that's true, and when Allerman tells me—as he did—that the injection is a drug which no other doctor in the country has even heard of, I daren't risk disbelieving him. If I took you away, Jeanette, you might die."

The girl sighed and made no reply.

"It's a question of trying to be patient, dear," continued Paul. "Allerman says you'll only need the injections for a few weeks, and we must try to hold out somehow until they're no longer necessary. If I knew what drug he's using,

I'd take you away instantly; but I don't know, and I can't find out. I've asked him a dozen times, but he refuses to tell me, and I can't force him."

"But some other doctor, Paul—"

"I daren't risk taking you to another doctor. If you understood what the operation was that Allerman performed, you'd realise that. No other doctor would touch the case without referring to Allerman: he wouldn't dare to take the risk; and if Allerman knew that we had gone behind his back and consulted someone else—well, you can guess what he'd be like. I wouldn't answer for the consequences. He's quite capable of refusing to give you any further treatment." She nodded.

"He has already threatened that, Paul—if I disobey him again."

"He would. And he'd do it. And that rules out any chance of leaving, Jeanette, until you're quite independent of his treatment."

She sighed again.

"I suppose you're right, Paul. Perhaps it's silly of me to be frightened. But I am frightened. When Dr. Allerman looks at me—it's horrible; I feel I must do exactly as he says. I seem to have no will of my own—"

"That's because you've been ill, dear, and aren't very strong yet, whatever you may say. That will all pass, and in the meantime you must try not to be frightened. There's nothing to be afraid of. I shall be here, and if there's any kind of trouble—"

"I'll try, Paul," she promised.

"And now, dear, you'd better slip back to your room and get some sleep. This is not time for an invalid to be up."

She nodded and rose from the couch. As Paul stood up she turned to him and laid a hand on his sleeve.

"You do still love me, Paul?"

His arms went round her and drew her close.

"Love you!" he said, and pressed his lips against hers.

There came a click, the room was flooded with light, and Paul, releasing Jeanette and turning his head sharply, saw Allerman standing in the doorway. His face was unnaturally white, his eyes bright and his hands shaking. He strode to where they were standing together and paused, staring at them.

"Very pretty!" he said in a voice that shook with anger. "Very romantic. And to whose suggestion are we indebted for this sentimental episode? To yours,

I presume, Barlow? The initiative in such affairs usually lies with the gentleman—"

"Oh, no; Paul had nothing to do with it," began Jeanette. "I was frightened—and I came along and knocked at his door—"

"And Paul in his own inimitable way supplied the necessary comfort," sneered Allerman. "But supplying comfort to my lady patients is not part of my assistant's duties. Even in these lax days, Barlow, there are certain proprieties to be observed, and one o'clock in the morning is hardly the hour to entertain a lady in your room. Without wishing to appear puritanical—"

"You're detestable, Allerman!" exclaimed Paul angrily. "Jeanette came to me because she was frightened, and there's no reason why she shouldn't."

"And in order to soothe and reassure her, Barlow, you thought it your duty to take her in your arms and kiss her?"

"I kissed her because I have every right to kiss her. She and I are going to be married."

Allerman had got a grip on himself now and gave his usual cynical smile.

"We shall see," he said. "I have an idea that you're wrong, Barlow. I have been under the impression for some time that it is I whom Jeanette is going to marry, and it might be as well to settle the matter once and for all. I have no wish to persuade Jeanette to marry me if she does not wish to, nor, I presume, have you."

"Certainly not. But Jeanette needs no persuading." Allerman turned to her.

"Look at me, Jeanette!"

She raised her head and looked into his face.

"You're going to marry me, aren't you?"

Her lips moved, but she uttered no word.

"Answer me, Jeanette. I say that you love me and are going to marry me. Is that true?"

Slowly she nodded her head.

"Yes, Raymond."

He laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Then get back to your room, my dear," he said, "and we will forget to-night's foolish escapade." Without a glance at Paul she went from the room.

Allerman closed the door behind her.

"To-morrow, Barlow," he said, "I am taking Jeanette to London. I intend to announce our engagement, and the marriage will take place as soon as she is fully recovered. You will stay here and continue your work."

"And suppose I refuse?"

He gave a shrug.

"You won't refuse. And in any case your refusal would not help matters. You will not be allowed to see Jeanette, and I strongly recommend you not to try. And if you have any wild idea of persuading her to run away with you, I advise you to dismiss it from your mind. You might possibly manage to get away with her and get married, but she wouldn't live to be your wife for many days. Jeanette's life depends on the contents of a small box of pellets, and the box is safely locked in my safe."

He stepped close to Paul and stared into his eyes. "What a fool you are, Barlow!" he sneered. "What a sentimental, conceited fool! Did you really imagine that Jeanette would refuse to marry me for the sake of your callow love-making? Did you really persuade yourself that, if I wished to marry her, you could prevent my doing so? And did you really believe that I am so much of an altruist that I made Jeanette what she is so that you might have her? I gave her health, strength, a beautiful body—but not so that she might throw them away on someone else. I'm not that sort of fool, Barlow. I made Jeanette beautiful, and her beauty belongs to me, and I warn you that if ever again you dare so much as to touch her—Damn you, Barlow! Her lips are mine, not yours! Her eyes, her hair, her lovely limbs, her whole beautiful body is mine—"

Paul turned away.

"For heaven's sake, Allerman, get out!" he exclaimed. "You're foul!"

The doctor went to the door.

"You will come to the library at ten in the morning, please, Barlow," he said, "and I will then give you instructions as to your duties during my absence. Jeanette and I will be leaving about eleven."

"And while you're away, Allerman," said Paul, "remember one thing: if anything happens to Jeanette—if you force her to marry you, as I realise you probably can—I shall go to the police and tell them all I know."

Allerman smiled.

"Not very clever," he said. "You can't have fully considered the results of such an action. I admit that you might succeed in making things a little embarrassing for me, but they would be hardly less embarrassing for yourself. Remember that you are my assistant, that you were present at the operation which unfortunately proved fatal to Lorna Sherwood—that you

actually took part in it, and that if any blame attaches to anyone, you will be hardly less responsible than I—"

"Oh, for God's sake get out!" said Paul, then strode into his bedroom and shut the door.

At ten o'clock the next morning, when Paul went to the library for his instructions, Allerman was not there. At a quarter past ten the doctor was still absent, and Paul rang for Stark.

"Where's your master, Stark?"

"Master gone."

"To London?"

"London—yes." He handed Paul a sealed envelope. "Master's orders—for you."

"When did he go?"

"Very early."

"And where's Miss Jeanette?"

Stark grinned.

"Lady gone, too," he said. "Pretty lady—yes—gone with master."

CHAPTER XX

ANTONIO GONELLI rested his fat arms on the marble-topped counter, and a smile of satisfaction spread over his fleshy face as he surveyed the cafe through the gap between two steaming urns. The cafe was full. Almost every one of the marble-topped tables was occupied: a fact which, no doubt, accounted for Gonelli's obvious satisfaction. Gonelli evidently cared little for the quality of his patrons, provided they were there in sufficient quantity, and no doubt, from a business point of view, he was right. The proprietor of a subterranean cafe in Brick Street, Soho, who was too fastidious as to the quality of his patrons at two o'clock in the morning, would soon be out of business: either he would have no patrons or a wrecked cafe.

Gonelli, smiling at his customers through the thick haze of tobacco smoke that filled the badly lighted room, heard the swing doors of the cafe flung open, took his fat arms from the counter and moved from the shelter of his shining urns to attend to the newcomer. When he saw who it was, his smile expanded still further.

"Why, look who's arrived!" he exclaimed genially. "How do, Mickey!"

He offered a soft, flabby hand across the counter, and Mickey Stone took it.

"How do, Tony!"

"A cup of coffee, Mickey?"

Stone nodded.

"Hot and strong—with something in it." Gonelli's right eye shut and opened.

"Milk, eh?" he chuckled, picked up a cup and saucer and retired behind his urns. A few moments later he reappeared and set a cup of black coffee on the counter. Mickey took it up, smelt it, gave a nod of approval and tossed a half-crown on to the counter. Gonelli handed him the change and then replaced his arms on the marble slab, obviously prepared to gossip.

"How's things, Mickey?"

The other gave a shrug.

"So you're out again!"

Stone took a drink of his coffee and set down the cup.

"Seen Dinkie Lane around here?" he asked.

Gonelli slowly shook his head.

"Haven't you heard?"

"Sure I've heard. That's why I'm asking."

A sentimental look spread over Gonelli's face.

"He was a nice boy, was Dinkie," he said sadly. "Free with his money, too. Many a time he's been in here—"

Mickey made a quick gesture of impatience.

"Where is he?"

"Why, haven't you heard, Mickey?" Gonelli pursed his lips and shook his head. "He's dead. Got mixed up in a bank hold-up and stopped a bullet. It seems the bank manager had a gun and poor Dinkie got a packet."

"Huh!" grunted Mickey. "That rat never was cut out for that kind of stuff. Anyone with him?"

His eyes were fixed on Gonelli's, and the latter seemed to find their steady gaze embarrassing. He picked up a cloth and began to wipe the counter.

"I didn't hear particulars. The boys don't talk much. I just heard that Dinkie had caught a packet—"

"You can lay off that stuff, Tony. Who was with him—Lorna?"

Gonelli redoubled his activities with the swab.

"Well, yes, Mickey. As a matter of fact I did hear some talk about Lorna being with him, but you don't have to believe everything you hear—"

"Did they get her?"

Gonelli shook his head.

"According to what I heard, Mickey, she got clean away. They found her car, that's all; she'd dumped it by the roadside. There was a hole in the tank, so they say, and she must have run out of juice. But they didn't get Lorna. They wouldn't. She's a smart kid, Mickey."

Stone showed his teeth.

"Sure, she's smart."

"She's fond of you, too."

"Sure she is. She's pining for me. Where is she?"

"I don't know—"

"Yes, you do, Tony. You know all right. Has she been in here?" And then, as Gonelli hesitated: "Where is she, Tony? You know, and if you don't tell me I'll smash your ugly face. When did you see her last?"

"Quite a long time ago. Six weeks or more. She came in here with Lennie. But I've not seen her since."

"Has anybody seen her?"

Gonelli leaned confidentially across the counter.

"Well, as a matter of fact, they have, Mickey, but I didn't want to tell you. You've had a bad time and I didn't want to make things worse for you. Some of the boys have seen her—running around in a swell car, dressed like a million pounds."

"Alone?"

"Well, no, Mickey, she wasn't alone. There was a fellow with her. A grey-haired fellow—with a monocle. The boys didn't know who he was."

Mickey nodded and was silent for some moments.

"Maybe the boys were wrong," he said. "Maybe it wasn't Lorna. Running around with a sugar daddy isn't Lorna's style."

"Lennie saw her," said Gonelli, "and Lennie wouldn't make a mistake. It was Lorna all right. But you don't need to worry, Mickey. She's a good girl, is Lorna; she wouldn't let you down. She had no time for any of the boys except you, and all the time you've been inside she's been saying that as soon as you came out you was going to get married. You mustn't get wrong ideas about Lorna, Mickey."

Stone showed his teeth again.

"Maybe I've had 'em. Maybe I've had 'em all along."

Again the door was opened, and a tall, broad-shouldered man lumbered in. "Lumbered" is the correct word to describe the slow, ponderous progress of Detective-Inspector Preston. He moved as if the whole weight of the law were in his boots. As he saw Mickey Stone standing at the counter, he went up to him with a genial smile.

"So you're out again, eh, Mickey?"

"You're the second guy that's noticed that, Preston," replied Mickey. He smiled grimly. "But there'll be a few more noticing it before long."

"The same old Mickey!" smiled the Inspector. "You always think everyone's double-crossing you. But don't worry: I'm not looking for you this trip."

"You've got nothing on me, Preston."

"Quite right, my lad. But you've only been out a couple of days, and there's plenty of time. How's the world treating you?"

"Grand."

"That's good. Have a cup of coffee with me?"

"Coffee?"

The Inspector turned to Gonelli.

"Two of what Mickey's just had," he ordered; and when Gonelli placed the two cups on the counter, he picked one of them up, sniffed it and gave a nod of approval. "I'd like to know where you buy your coffee, Gonelli," he smiled. "Come and sit down, Mickey. I want to talk to you." He carried the cups to a table and they both sat down. "How's Lorna?"

"O.K."

"Haven't seen her around for a long time."

"I guess she hasn't missed much, Preston. But don't waste your time: I'm not talking. I know nothing about Lorna."

"I noticed she wasn't at Paddington to meet you when you came off the train."

"No? Well, I guess you're paid to notice, Preston. Maybe you've noticed I'm telling you nothing."

"I have," smiled the Inspector. "Perhaps I could tell you something, Mickey. They say Lorna's been running around with another fellow while you've been inside. I'm surprised, because Lorna isn't that sort. She'd be a treasure of a wife for someone if she'd only drop the crooked business. It's tough luck on you, though, if it's true."

Mickey got up from the table.

"I guess it's going to be tough for someone else, Preston. I'll be going."

The Inspector laid a hand on his arm.

"What's the rush, Mickey?"

"I've got a date, and I never did like policemen, anyway. And listen, Preston, I don't want any of your boys trailing me around. If they try it, someone'll be found in the gutter with his face looking funny."

"All right, Mickey; I'll try to remember. Tell Lorna, when you see her, I'd like to meet her again, won't you? I was hoping she'd be along here to-night."

"Yeah! Well, maybe I was hoping the same myself," said Mickey, and strode towards the door of the cafe.

Inspector Preston got up from his chair, rested an arm on the counter and watched him as he crossed the room. Taking a box of matches from his pocket, he struck a match, realised that his cigar was already alight and blew the match out. The next moment a man who was seated at a table with a girl, and who had been watching the Inspector closely since his entrance into the cafe, got up, strolled to the counter and stood beside him.

"You want me, Inspector?"

Preston's eyes were still fixed on the door which Mickey Stone had just reached.

"That man who is just going out," he said quietly. "Follow him and don't let him out of your sight."

CHAPTER XXI

PAUL BARLOW was staring at the Marble Arch. On and off he had been staring at it since half-past two; and although it was now almost a quarter-past three, to all intents and purposes he knew no more about the Marble Arch than when he had begun his scrutiny. His thoughts were elsewhere. He was wondering if Jeanette would come. But of course she would! If she had not been certain that she would be able to meet him, she wouldn't have sent him that message—that little note, scribbled in pencil on a telegraph form, telling him that if he could be at the Marble Arch at a quarter-past three to-day she would be there to meet him.

He had waited for over a week for that message. Every night he had fallen asleep assuring himself that Jeanette would somehow contrive to get in touch with him and that there would certainly be a letter for him in the morning; and every morning, when no letter arrived, he had gone moodily to his workroom to spend the day racking his brains for some means of getting into touch with her, wondering what was happening to her, torturing himself with the thought that Allerman had already married her. Except that Allerman had said that he was taking her to London, he had no idea where she was, and Stark, if he knew anything, obstinately refused to give him any information.

He had paid a visit to Delane's cottage, with a vague sort of hope that Delane might be able to give him some idea of Allerman's movements. But the cottage was shut up, and, on enquiry at the village post office, he learned that Delane had called there to say that he was leaving the neighbourhood for an indefinite period and to arrange for his letters to be redirected.

Allerman himself would vouchsafe no information. Every morning and evening at nine o'clock there came a ring on the telephone, and a few moments later Stark announced that the Master wished to speak to him. But it was apparent that his sole object in ringing was to assure himself that Paul was still at the farm. He would make a few enquiries as to how he was progressing with his work, assure him that Jeanette was making excellent progress and evade or bluntly refuse to answer every question which Paul fired at him.

It had been a nerve-racking, maddening week. And then this morning that brief pencilled message had arrived, and Paul had hurried to the Marble Arch almost an hour before he was due, and had waited, glancing at his watch every few minutes, smoking innumerable cigarettes, alternately certain that Jeanette wouldn't turn up and certain that unless she had been sure of turning up she would never have asked him to take the risk of disobeying Allerman and leaving the farm.

He felt a touch on his sleeve and turned to find the girl standing beside him.

At the first glance he realised that she was more than ever Jeanette. During the few days that had passed since Allerman had taken her away from the farm, what had been hardly more than a reflection of Jeanette's personality on her face, in her eyes, in her gestures, had become much more pronounced. It flashed into his mind, indeed, as he turned and saw her smiling up at him, that it was almost impossible to believe that she had ever been other than she was and that Allerman had actually performed his amazing experiment.

She laid a hand eagerly on his arm.

"You got my note, then, Paul?"

He nodded.

"I came away at once, Jeanette, by the next train."

"I was afraid you might not be able to. I thought Stark might stop you."

"Stark?" He smiled. "I found a way of dealing with Stark, dear. He may be a machine but he has weaknesses like other human beings. I gave him a bottle of whisky, and when I left he was too gloriously drunk to care what I did. Why didn't you write before, Jeanette?"

She slipped her arm into his.

"Take me somewhere where we can talk, Paul. I have so much to tell you and I haven't got very long. I'm supposed to be shopping—buying stockings—and I must be back by four o'clock. A teashop will do."

He took her to a teashop near by.

"Why haven't you written before, Jeanette?" he repeated, as she poured out the tea.

"I couldn't—and I couldn't 'phone you. Dr. Allerman had forbidden me to. Besides, there's nurse—-the one I had down in the country. She's always with me and everything I do is reported to the doctor. I could only write yesterday because nurse has gone away for a few days. Dr. Allerman didn't want to let her go, but her mother's ill and she insisted and the doctor had to give way. I wish I could stand up to him like she did, Paul, but I can't. I'm frightened of him, and if he tells me to do something I simply can't help doing it. If he had forbidden me to come out this afternoon, I'm afraid you'd still have been waiting at the Marble Arch, Paul, but when I asked him if I could go out he raised no objection. He is taking me to the theatre to-night, and I told him I couldn't possibly go without getting some new stockings."

"But what has happened, Jeanette? I've been worried out of my life. I didn't even know where you were."

"There's no need to worry," she assured him. "Dr. Allerman has taken a furnished flat." She took a slip of paper from her handbag and gave it to him. "That's the address, Paul, and the telephone number. He tells everybody that I'm his ward." She smiled. "But things can't go on like this, Paul; that's why I had to send for you. Dr. Allerman is getting more and more—difficult, and it's becoming terribly hard to say 'no' to him."

"You mean he wants to marry you, Jeanette?"

She nodded.

"He's always talking about it, trying to get me to let him fix things up and put a notice in the papers, and when I won't—" She gave a shrug. "Well, you can guess what happens, Paul; there's the usual sort of scene. If only I weren't such a coward and could stand up to him—"

"If ever he touches you, Jeanette—he hasn't, has he?"

"Oh, no. He sometimes threatens to. Says he'll go out and buy a whip and teach me to obey him as Stark obeys him. But I don't think he would really do it. I think he knows that I can't help doing what he tells me. And that's what scares me, Paul. It may sound silly to you, but I'm terrified in case he should make me marry him against my will, just as he has made me do so many other things I didn't want to do. I might not be able to get at you, and, even if I could, it might not make any difference. You saw what happened at the farm, when he found me in your workroom. You were there then, Paul, but when he looked at me and asked me if I was going to marry him, I had to say 'yes.' That's why I've got to do something—quickly—"

"If only I could see what to do, Jeanette! If only I dared take you away from him!"

"If only you would take me away from him, I'd be quite ready to go. But you won't. You won't let me run the risk of going without the injections, so we won't waste time arguing about that."

"If it would be the least use taking you to another doctor—"

"It wouldn't—I see that, Paul. Dr. Allerman would be bound to know and we couldn't risk that. He would almost certainly insist on marrying me at once, and I might not be able to disobey him. I don't want to do anything to make him change his mind. Two days ago, when he was trying to make me agree to marry him at once, I told him that he was not being fair to me; that if he really cared for me as he says he does, he would be ready to wait until I was really well and strong. I promised him that if he would agree to wait until I was quite cured and could do without any more injections, then I would marry him." She smiled. "Of course I won't, Paul, but it was the only way to keep him quiet. He agreed to that and promised that until he had given me

my last injection he would say no more about marriage. I want him to keep to that."

"That's something, Jeanette, but it doesn't get us much further forward."

"It gives us time, Paul—time to do something."

"But what can we do? You're bound to stay there—in the same house as Allerman. It makes me feel sick to think of it. But I can't take you away—"

"I'm coming to that, Paul."

She opened her handbag and took out a little screw of paper. Laying it on the table, she carefully unwrapped it and signed to Paul to look. He leaned forward, with a puzzled frown, and saw that lying on the scrap of paper was a tiny white pellet. He glanced at her enquiringly.

"It's the injection," she explained. "Dr. Allerman has a little green bottle full of them. He uses one each time—dissolves it in water—"

"Jeanette—are you absolutely sure?"

She nodded.

"The other day he set the bottle down on the table. He hadn't replaced the cap, and I knocked the bottle over—purposely—and the pellets went all over the floor. Dr. Allerman was furious, but I didn't mind his being furious that time; it was worth it. I helped him pick them up. But they weren't all picked up: I left one on the floor—slipped it under the edge of the carpet and picked it up when Dr. Allerman had gone, and here it is."

Paul picked up the tiny pellet, examined it closely and shook his head.

"I can't give a guess as to what it is, Jeanette."

"But you can find out."

"You bet I can! I'll take it to Sir William Chetford; he's the biggest authority on this kind of thing. He's a friend of my father and will be only too glad to do anything he can for me."

He carefully wrapped the pellet in the paper and placed it in his wallet.

"I'll see him to-day, dear—as soon as I leave you. This may mean the end of all our troubles—do you realise that?"

The girl smiled.

"Why do you suppose I slipped it under the carpet? If you can find out what the injection is, Paul, there'll be nothing to prevent your taking me away from Dr. Allerman. He won't have any threat he can hold over us then. Next week I'll meet you again and you can tell me what you've discovered. I'll

manage it somehow, and I don't think Dr. Allerman is likely to be troublesome before then. I think he means to keep his promise."

"I wouldn't put too much faith in that, Jeanette," said Paul. "The sooner you're out of that house the better. If I can find out what the injection is, you must leave at once. I'll let you know somehow. Better still, I'll call at the house and fetch you away. Allerman can't stop us. Leave it to me, anyway."

She nodded, glanced at her watch and rose.

"I must be off, Paul," she said. "It's the first time I've been allowed out by myself, and I don't want to spoil my chance of getting out again by being late." She laid a hand on his arm. "Try not to worry dear," she said. "I'm quite safe for the present."

His hand covered hers and squeezed it.

"It's been wonderful seeing you again, Jeanette." They went out on to the crowded pavement and walked along together, each of them reluctant to say the word that would be the prelude to their parting. Suddenly Jeanette stood still and her fingers dug into Paul's arm.

"Paul! Over there—on the other pavement!" she gasped. "It's Dr. Allerman!"

Paul glanced across the road. It was Dr. Allerman, sure enough; there was no mistaking that erect, dignified figure with the pale face and the thin lips and the monocle screwed into his eye. He was walking slowly in the same direction as they had been walking, lost in thought and apparently unaware of his surroundings, never deviating either to right or left, but seeming to take it for granted that the crowds on the pavement would part and let him through.

"If he has seen us, Paul—"

"He hasn't. There's nothing to be scared about."

"But I am scared. It's all very well to talk, Paul, but I can't help being scared. If he has seen us—if he knows that you've left the farm and come up to town—"

"Don't worry about that, my dear; I can look after myself. And you've nothing to fear. You can get into a taxi and be home long before he gets there." He shot an anxious glance at the girl. "You're trembling, dear. Listen—I'll come home with you, shall I? Allerman has absolutely no right to prevent our meeting, and I'll tell him—"

"Oh, no, please! Call me a taxi, Paul; that's best. We don't want any trouble. Not now. It might spoil everything."

"You're sure?"

She nodded, and Paul, hailing a passing taxi, helped her into it and shut the door.

"When do we meet again, Jeanette?"

"I'll let you know. Don't worry, Paul: I'll let you hear from me somehow. Tell him to drive fast." She squeezed his hand and sat back in her seat. A few moments later, as the taxi disappeared among the traffic, Paul turned on his heel and set off towards the house of Sir William Chetford.

CHAPTER XXII

IT was well past four o'clock when Jeanette reached the flat, but Allerman had not yet returned, the maid informed her, and with a sigh of relief she hurried to her bedroom, took off her hat and settled herself in an arm-chair.

Now that she had actually seen Paul and handed him the pellet, she felt that an immense weight had been lifted from her shoulders. Ever since she had picked it up from under the edge of the carpet and hidden it in her handbag, she had had an uneasy feeling that Allerman was perfectly aware of what she had done, and that before she could give it to her lover the doctor would in some way interfere to prevent her. She had not been able to rid herself of the sensation that he was watching her with an amused interest, waiting to see what use she would make of the pellet now that she had it, ready to step in and assert his authority at the first hint that his plans were in danger of being upset.

She could hardly believe that she had actually succeeded in seeing Paul and handing the pellet to him without Dr. Allerman's knowledge, that she had been clever enough to trick him. It was difficult to realise that if Paul succeeded in discovering what drug the doctor was using for the injections they would have gained the upper hand and would be free to do as they pleased without the least fear of the doctor being able to stop them.

And Paul, of course, would discover. In a few days' time they would meet again, and he would tell her that he had found out the nature of the drug and that they could be married straight away. Paul would arrange all that. The safest plan would be for them to slip away without telling anyone, so that Dr. Allerman would know nothing about it until they were actually married. After that, it wouldn't matter what he did—and he couldn't do very much. Paul, of course, would be dismissed, but that wouldn't matter; he would be much happier working on his own....

She heard Allerman come in, and a few moments later the maid tapped on the door and informed her that she had taken tea to the drawing-room. She got up from her chair, inspected herself in the mirror, decided, after a prolonged stare at her reflection, that she looked just the same as usual and that Dr. Allerman couldn't possibly guess from her face that anything out of the ordinary had happened, and made her way to the drawing-room.

Allerman, sitting in an arm-chair, greeted her with a smile.

"Well, Jeanette, did you enjoy your outing?"

"Very much," she told him, seating herself on the settee and beginning to pour out the tea. "It was quite a pleasant change not to have nurse trailing round with me. She's not a particularly cheerful companion."

"She's extremely efficient, Jeanette."

"As a watchdog?"

The doctor frowned slightly.

"That's not a very generous thing to say, my dear, when I've just allowed you to spend an afternoon by yourself. If nurse has spent a great deal of time with you, it has only been because I was anxious that every possible care should be taken of you."

"But I don't need all that care any longer, Raymond. You've told me that to all intents and purposes I'm cured now."

"So you are, Jeanette. You will only need the injections for about another month. Perhaps not for so long."

"Then is there any reason why I shouldn't go out alone whenever I wish to?"

"I would rather you didn't do that, Jeanette."

"Because I'm not to be trusted?"

He shrugged.

"That is a question which you are best qualified to answer. Tell me about this afternoon. Did you buy your stockings?"

Jeanette suppressed a start. Until that moment, in the excitement of meeting Paul, she had completely forgotten that her ostensible object in going out had been to buy a pair of stockings.

"Oh, yes, thank you, Raymond," she said.

"Where did you go for them?"

"Where? Oh, some shop in Oxford Street; I didn't notice the name."

Allerman raised his eyebrows.

"Isn't that rather—peculiar?"

She shook her head.

"Not for me," she laughed. "If I see something I like in a shop window, I never think of looking for the name. I just go in without worrying about what shop it is. I haven't got the scientific mind, Raymond, and little things like that don't worry me."

"No, you haven't the scientific mind, Jeanette. The scientific mind is essentially a precise and accurate mind, a mind which concerns itself only with the truth. Yours certainly does not do that. What colour are the stockings?"

"You seem terribly interested in my stockings, Raymond."

"I am—terribly."

"But why?"

"Because you bought no stockings, Jeanette."

She glanced at him quickly, sudden fear showing in her eyes.

"I don't understand—"

"You do understand!" He sat upright in his chair. "You do understand," he repeated. "You bought no stockings. You're lying to me."

"Raymond!"

He sprang to his feet and stood over her, his eyes blazing with anger, his hands clenched, his thin nostrils twitching.

"Do you think I don't know?" he exclaimed furiously. "You're lying! You bought no stockings. You never intended to buy stockings. You lied to me then as you're lying to me now."

She shrank back into the corner of the settee, trembling, speechless, dumbfounded by his sudden onslaught.

"You thought that I believed you, didn't you? That you'd tricked me, that I was fool enough not to see through your pitiful little deception. You thought that I trusted you, that because you had promised to become my wife you had become above suspicion, that you could practice all a woman's cheap little deceptions on me and I shouldn't doubt you. But you were wrong. I have never trusted you—never believed you. I have known all the time that if you could sneak away to your lover you would sneak away to him and laugh with him over the easy way you had deceived the poor fool of a man whom you had promised to marry—sneer at him—chuckle over your cleverness. That's a woman's idea of honesty and fair dealing! You're liars, hypocrites, all of you, with nasty little minds—cunning, contemptible—with nothing to commend you to any man but your pretty faces and alluring bodies."

"Raymond—please—you don't understand—"

He silenced her with a gesture.

"Paul Barlow!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "A nobody, a nonentity, brawn without brains, sentimental as a schoolgirl, without courage of thought, devoid of imagination—a fifth-rate general practitioner stamped out to pattern with thousands of others, a mass-produced mediocrity! And that's the man for whose sake you think yourself justified in deceiving me! Me—Raymond Allerman!—the greatest surgeon in the country—the man whose hands can do things that no other surgeon would dare to attempt! That's the man to whom you offer your love rather than to me. That's the man on

whom you lavish your kisses, to whose room you sneak in the middle of the night—"

"Raymond—you beast!"

"Does that shock you? Does that offend you? More hypocrisy! More play-acting! You've no more sense of shame than any other woman, and there never was a woman whose modesty wasn't a sham."

"If you'll let me explain, Raymond—"

"There's nothing to explain. I have the evidence of my own eyes. You thought I trusted you, that I believed you when you told me that you were going out to buy stockings. But I knew you were lying, I suspected where you were going, and I followed you. I saw you meet him and smile at him and touch his hand as if it were the hand of a god; and I saw him gazing at you with the eyes of a love-sick yokel, oozing sentiment. Pah! And that's the man you love!"

"You know I love him, Raymond. I have never denied it. You know that I can never love you as I love Paul. If you had any real love for me, if your love wasn't utterly selfish—"

"I should sacrifice myself and let you go to him? Do you really suppose I should ever do that? Give you to Paul Barlow? Throw you away on a brainless young fool—"

"If I'm so worthless, Raymond, if I'm as cheap and contemptible and unfaithful and deceitful as you think I am—"

Again he cut her short with a gesture. The violence of his anger was under control now, transformed into a cold, ruthless fury.

"Deceit and unfaithfulness are faults that can be cured, Jeanette," he said grimly. "I have taught obedience to others, and I can teach it to you. If you are unsatisfactory, I can change you—as I have changed others. And now listen to me. I shall never give you to Paul Barlow—remember that. If you imagine that I am capable of that sort of sacrifice, you don't know me. Barlow has no right to you—I have every right. I have a right because it was I who made you what you are—with my skill, my knowledge, my courage—when no other living man could have done it. I gave you your health, your beauty, your very life. All that you are, all that you have, all the happiness that lies ahead of you, you owe to me."

"I realise that, Raymond. And I am grateful."

"Grateful because I have given you health and beauty so that you may waste them on a nonentity like Paul Barlow? But I shall not allow them to be wasted. An artist is free to do as he chooses with his own creations,

Jeanette, and I shall not throw my masterpiece on the scrap-heap. Come here!" Jeanette made no movement.

"Come here, Jeanette!"

Slowly she got to her feet and stood facing him.

"I am going to marry you, Jeanette," he said. "I am going to marry you at once."

She glanced up at him quickly.

"But, Raymond, you promised—"

"When one party to a contract breaks it, the contract becomes void. You have broken the contract, and I am no longer bound by my promise. I am going to marry you at once. Our engagement will be announced immediately."

"But, Raymond, you can't—I don't love you—I can never love you—"

"Look at me!" he ordered.

She hesitated, and then suddenly turned away and covered her face with her hands.

"Raymond, don't—I can't bear it—"

He seized her wrists and drew her hands from her face.

"You're going to be my wife, Jeanette, and you are very beautiful. You have lovely lips—red lips—soft and warm—kiss me, Jeanette!"

She stood motionless, with bowed head.

"Kiss me, Jeanette!"

Still she made no movement. Suddenly he snatched her to him and pressed his lips hungrily against hers.

Just as suddenly he released her. For a moment she stood, swaying, with closed eyes; then, turning quickly from him, she sank on to the settee and buried her face in the cushions.

CHAPTER XXIII

SIR WILLIAM CHETFORD had a genial smile and, behind the lenses of his horn-rimmed glasses, a pair of grey eyes that had a twinkle in them. He was inclined to pinkness and plumpness, but his broad, intellectual forehead was a more than adequate set-off to his somewhat exaggerated waistline. He beamed at Paul across his massive mahogany desk and shook a chubby finger at him.

"A pretty problem you set me with your little white pellet, Barlow," he said. "If it hadn't been for the fact that your father's an old friend of mine, I'd have lost it."

"Sorry if I've given you a lot of trouble, Sir William," smiled Paul.

"You certainly have. I've spent a great many hours on it, and if I sent you a bill for what you really owe me you'd have a nasty shock. And now tell me—how did you come by the thing?"

"I'd prefer not to tell you that, Sir William."

The older man glanced at him sharply.

"Eh?"

"The pellet was handed to me by a friend, and I'm not at liberty to say who that friend was."

"Mystery upon mystery," smiled Sir William. "Well, it's not the sort of thing you could buy at a chemist's. I doubt if there's a firm in the country that could supply it." He was thoughtful for some moments, gazing at his heavy gold ring as he twisted it round his smooth, chubby finger. "You're working with Allerman, aren't you?" Paul nodded.

"At his experimental farm in Devonshire?"

"Something of a queer fish, isn't he?"

"A little eccentric perhaps," admitted Paul, "but an amazing man, Sir William. He's years ahead of his time."

"Then why didn't you take your little pellet to him? I've no doubt he could have told you what it is and you wouldn't have put me to all this trouble."

"I couldn't very well. You see, Dr. Allerman—well, I'm only his assistant and he's a very busy man—"

"And I'm not, eh? Did Allerman give you the pellet?"

"No, it wasn't Allerman."

"Some other doctor?"

Paul smiled.

"If you charge for the cross-examination, Sir William, your bill will be colossal."

"So you won't tell me, eh? Well, I suppose it's none of my business, but I'd be interested to know how this particular drug came into your possession."

"It's as rare as all that, is it?"

"It's one of the rarest drugs in the world, my boy. I'm supposed to know something about drugs, and only once before, in the whole of my career, have I come across a specimen of this one. I don't suppose one medical man in a hundred has ever heard of it, and not one in ten thousand has ever used it. All things considered, that's probably just as well. It's difficult to imagine a case in which a medical practitioner would be justified in using that drug on a patient."

Paul's eyes grew anxious.

"What is the drug, Sir William?"

"I'm willing to bet you ten pounds to a penny, my boy, that you've never heard of it. You can search all the textbooks and you wouldn't find it mentioned. When you brought it to me, you brought it to one of the very few men in the country who had the least chance of being able to tell you what it was. It's a drug called Orchidin."

"Orchidin?" repeated Paul and shook his head. "You're right—I've never heard of it."

"Then you owe me a penny," smiled Sir William. "As I said, it's an extremely rare drug. It's obtained from the tubers of an orchid which is only found in certain swampy areas in the heart of Central Africa. The plant itself is extremely rare and it's practically impossible for a white man to get possession of it. It's regarded by the natives as a sacred plant, owing, no doubt, to the peculiar properties of the drug obtained from it, and a white man who ventured into the district where the orchid is found would probably be despatched to a higher sphere by means of a poisoned arrow. Plants have, of course, occasionally been secured, but if the value of the drug were measured by the risk incurred in getting it, I imagine that an ounce of this stuff would be worth many thousands of pounds." He smiled. "All of which, my boy, is information which you wouldn't find in an encyclopaedia."

"Thanks very much, Sir William," said Paul. "And what are the properties of the drug?"

"There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, my lad," smiled Sir William, "and among those things which your philosophy does not dream of are certain practices which are indulged

in in the heart of Central Africa, so-called religious practices—magic, spells, witchcraft—and a whole lot of it depends for its success on the medicine man's knowledge of how to make use of certain drugs which he extracts from tropical plants. I have seen something of it myself. You probably won't believe me, Barlow, but I have seen a medicine man take hold of a man's hand, look him in the eyes and tell him to die, and the man promptly died—a strong, healthy man, mind you, and when I examined his body I could find absolutely nothing to account for his death. Now call me a liar!"

"I don't doubt your word, Sir William, but I don't see where Orchidin comes in."

"I don't say it did come into that case, though quite conceivably it might have done. Orchidin has an extraordinary effect on the person who takes it. It causes a definite deterioration of the will-power."

"Good God!" gasped Paul.

"Does that surprise you?"

"Please go on, Sir William."

"A definite deterioration of the will-power," repeated the scientist. "The person who takes it loses to a large extent the control of his will and thus becomes almost completely subservient to the will of any other person who chooses to impose it on them."

"A dangerous sort of drug," commented Paul.

"In the hands of an unscrupulous person, an extremely dangerous drug, and one which I have not the least doubt the medicine man finds particularly useful. The effect of the drug is not of long duration—an hour or so, I believe—with the result that a person to whom it has been administered might be compelled by the will of another person to perform some action and a few hours later be utterly at a loss to understand how he had come to do it. Does that tell you all you want to know?"

"Not quite, Sir William. One dose, or even a few doses, would, I imagine, produce no permanent effect, but what would be the result if the drug were administered regularly?"

"It is hard to say, but I imagine there would be a gradual and cumulative loss of will-power, until the point was reached where the patient, to all intents and purposes, had no will of his own. I have a shrewd idea that something of the sort had happened in the case of the man who fell dead when the medicine man told him to. His will had completely atrophied, with the result that the medicine man's will took its place. But the process of deterioration would be very gradual, and I think that the drug would have to be administered regularly for a period of a good many months before the will

became permanently impaired. And now, tell me where you got the dam' thing."

"I'm sorry, Sir William, but I can't tell you that."

"Have you any more, because, if you have, I'd like some? I'm interested."

"I gave you the only one I had," replied Paul. "There's just one other point, sir, before I go. Can you conceive of any illness, any condition of the human body, in which the administration of Orchidin would be essential? Is it possible for a person to be in such a condition that she—or he—could not live in perfect health without the administration of this drug?"

"Bless me, no. Of course there isn't. You're talking through your hat, my lad."

"Can I rely absolutely on that?"

Sir William glanced at him keenly.

"You're mighty serious about it."

"It's a serious matter. I can't explain, Sir William, but it's tremendously important that I should know whether I can rely implicitly on what you have just told me."

"H'm!" said Sir William. "Well, if it's as serious as all that, I'd rather you didn't rely too explicitly on what I've told you. I'd like to look into things a little more closely before I commit myself. You shall hear from me within a couple of days. I don't think I've misled you, but I'll look into it again, make quite sure, and put my opinion in writing."

Paul thanked him, wished him good-bye and left the house, with his mind in a turmoil. If the scientist was right, Allerman's whole scheme was all too clear. No wonder Jeanette was afraid of him and felt that she couldn't avoid doing whatever he might tell her to do. Her daily dose of Orchidin made it impossible for her to disobey. Under the influence of the drug, Allerman's will became her will. It was horrible, terrible! Suppose Allerman were to insist that she should marry him....

CHAPTER XXIV

"BELFRAGE isn't a man with whom I could ever be friendly," said Dr. Allerman. "He has money and little else, and I have braced myself to face a definitely boring evening."

Jeanette, seated beside him in the big Daimler car, sighed.

"Then why are you going, Raymond?"

"Partly for your sake, Jeanette, and partly for my own. I thought you would enjoy an evening with people of your own age and be glad of the opportunity to dance."

"I should love to dance, but it's eleven o'clock already, and it hardly seemed worth while getting dressed to come at this time."

"I have a definite object in coming," Allerman told her, "quite apart from my desire to give you a pleasant evening. Belfrage's parties are famous. Everyone who matters least will be there—everyone who has too much money and too little brains—and as I am, socially, a person of some importance, I decided to take the opportunity of setting the tongues of society wagging by taking you to to-night's affair. I don't always bury myself in the country, and as my wife, you'll have social duties to perform, so it's as well that you should begin to mix a little in society. People will expect to meet the woman who is to become Mrs. Raymond Allerman, and to-night at Belfrage's party I shall take the opportunity of announcing our engagement,"

"Oh, Raymond—-must you?"

"And we shall be married almost immediately—as soon as I have made the necessary arrangements." She glanced quickly at his white, impassive face, and realised that this was no moment to plead with him. In any case, pleading would produce no effect. She had already worn herself out with pleading, but it was like pleading to a lump of granite. Allerman had remained unmoved, obdurate, unshakable in his determination to marry her with the least possible delay. Everything seemed to be moving relentlessly towards that inevitable climax, and she felt that she was helpless to stay the current of events.

Since that terrible scene with Allerman, when he had announced his intention to marry her immediately and had asserted his rights by forcing his kisses on her, she had begun to realise that escape was out of the question and to give up hope. She couldn't get at Paul. The nurse had returned, and, acting, no doubt, under Allerman's instructions, never allowed her out of her sight, except when she handed her over to the care of the doctor himself. No message from Paul had come to her, and she felt ill with anxiety.

This unexpected turn of events had upset all their calculations. She had counted on Allerman keeping his word and not pressing her to marry him until she had no further need of injections. She had hoped that in the meantime Paul might discover what drug was contained in the small white pellet which she had given into his care, that it might be a drug which he could obtain, and that she should be able to leave Allerman and marry Paul before the question of marriage with the doctor became a pressing one. But everything had gone wrong, and, unless some miracle happened, it seemed inevitable that within a few days she would be Raymond Allerman's wife.

"I hope, Jeanette," said Allerman's voice, "that you won't expect me to take you away on a honeymoon. I have heard it described as an island of emotion in a sea of expense, and I can think of no more apt description. I fail to see why, because two persons have made a legal contract to share the same home, the signing of the contract should be followed by an orgy of sentimentality in a continental hotel."

"Just as you wish, Raymond," said Jeanette.

"I'm not fond of London," continued the doctor, "and I'm anxious to get back to my work. I propose, as soon as we are married, to return to the farm. Devonshire, I believe, is a favourite spot for a honeymoon, so you will have no cause to complain."

She made no reply, and he glanced at her out of the corner of his eye.

"You don't seem elated at the prospect, Jeanette."

"I'm not," said Jeanette. "I don't want to go back to the farm; I'd rather go anywhere than there. I hate the place. I couldn't possibly live there, Raymond. Just you and I and Stark—"

"You prefer to live in London?"

"Much."

Allerman frowned slightly.

"This is a development I didn't expect," he said. "But perhaps we could arrive at a compromise. I can't undertake to spend a great deal of time in London. My work lies at the farm, and I can't allow even a charming wife to lure me from my work; but I'll take a fiat in town and we'll come here occasionally. I can't see what objection you can possibly have to spending most of your time at the farm."

"It's the loneliness, Raymond—-partly. If I am never to see anyone but you and Stark, if I am forbidden to invite anyone to the house, I couldn't stand it!"

He smiled faintly.

"Barlow will be there, Jeanette. That should be some consolation to you."

She shot him a quick, incredulous glance.

"Paul will be there?"

"I see no reason why he shouldn't be there, and a good many reasons why he should. I shan't be afraid of any repetition of the incident which occurred before I brought you away. When you are my wife, Jeanette, you will obey me; I shall teach you to obey me. I shall so change you, if necessary, that it will be impossible for you to disobey me, like Stark. Stark is utterly incapable either of disobeying me or of telling me a lie." Again he smiled. "You will be the perfect wife, Jeanette."

"Raymond, you couldn't be so cruel—so inhuman—"

She paused abruptly and sighed. He could be cruel. His face, hard and cold as though carved out of marble, was cruel; his eyes were cruel; his thin lips were cruel. He was cruelty incarnate, callous, ruthless, incapable of feeling, and it was useless to appeal to him. Nothing that she could say would make the least impression on him—soften his heart or touch his gentler feelings. He was armour-plated with cruelty.

She was silent for a time, shrinking back in the corner of the car away from him, gazing steadily ahead, with her lips pressed tightly together and a little pucker showing between her eyebrows. Then she turned to him and laid a hand on his sleeve.

"Raymond!"

Slowly he turned his head to glance at her.

"I thought you had gone to sleep."

"Raymond, why can't you let me be happy?"

"You have every cause to be happy indeed, Jeanette. A good many women would consider themselves extremely fortunate to be in your position. Plenty of women who will be there to-night will be envying you as the future wife of Raymond Allerman."

She shook her head.

"Neither of us will be happy," she said. "I don't love you—I can never love you. How can we possibly be happy?"

"Am I so utterly incapable of arousing the least feeling of affection in you?" he asked.

"I don't love you," she repeated, a note of desperation in her voice. "I respect you—tremendously. And I'm grateful to you for what you've done for me—

more grateful than I can ever tell you. But I'm afraid of you. I shall always be afraid of you."

"Fear can be cured, Jeanette, as well as disobedience. And I am inclined to think that a lack of affection might be amenable to treatment. It would be an interesting experiment. If our emotions are the result of the functioning of certain glands, it might be possible to graft on—"

"Raymond, for God's sake, be human! It's not a question of a surgical operation—it's a question of love. I don't love you, and I'm asking you to let me go free, not to force me into marrying you, not to announce our engagement this evening—"

"You have promised to marry me, Jeanette, and I intend to hold you to your promise."

"I promised because you made me do so!" she exclaimed. "I didn't want to promise."

"Nevertheless, you did so."

"Oh, yes, I know. But you were looking into my eyes and telling me to promise, and when you look at me like that and tell me to do something I don't seem able to refuse. It's horrible! I feel as if my mind weren't my own, as if you'd taken possession of it, as if all my own thoughts were crushed out of me and your thoughts had taken their place. That's what happened when I promised to marry you, and that sort of promise is worth nothing."

"If I can make you promise, Jeanette, it should not be beyond my power to make you keep your promise."

"Perhaps you can. But not even you have the power to make me love you. You've done your best; you've tried terribly hard to make me stop loving Paul and love you instead, but you've not succeeded, and you never will succeed." Again she turned to him and laid a hand on his arm. "Raymond—please—don't try to force me. Don't announce our engagement this evening. Leave it any rate for a little while—just for another month, until I'm really well again—"

Suddenly she stopped speaking and leaned back in her seat with a sigh. Allerman had picked up his newspaper and was reading it.

Any hope Jeanette may have had that Allerman might relent was promptly shattered when they arrived. He introduced her to Belfrage as his future wife, and within a few minutes she wras aware that the news had spread throughout the crowd of guests. One after another they came and congratulated her, and Jeanette thought what a wonderful evening this would have been if only she had been in love with Allerman. As it was, she wanted to scream, to shout out the truth, to tell them all that she didn't love

Allerman and didn't want to marry him, but that she'd rather die. She felt that if only she could find the courage to do that, she would wake up and discover that it had all been no more than a horrible nightmare. But with the doctor standing beside her, watching her, smiling his cynical smile, listening to every word she said, she could not find the courage. She smiled when they congratulated her, and thanked them, and behaved as nearly as possible as she would have behaved if they had been congratulating her on her engagement to Paul Barlow.

Allerman gave her a smile of approval.

"You're doing splendidly," he said. "You will be a wife to be proud of." And when another guest—a girl—had tendered her congratulations and passed on: "You see, Jeanette? There is hardly a woman in the room who doesn't feel envious of your good fortune and who would not gladly change places with you. That particular young woman was feeling sick with jealousy."

Jeanette ignored the remark. The man's vanity was colossal, but nothing was to be gained by remarking on it.

"Am I allowed to dance, Raymond?"

"Certainly, my dear, provided you excuse me from partnering you. When I was a young man I was too busily engaged in training my mind to have time to waste on the education of my feet. But there are dozens of brainless young men of the Paul Barlow type eating their hearts out to dance with you—"

"Good evening, Miss Fayre!"

Glancing up, she saw Jack Delane smiling down at her.

"This dance is mine," he announced, and turned to Allerman. "I've just heard the news, Allerman. Congratulations!"

"Thank you, Delane."

Jeanette noticed that a faint touch of colour had appeared in his cheek and that the vein in his temple was swollen.

Delane turned again to the girl.

"Ready, Miss Fayre? Speaking as one fox-trotter to another, this tune is too good to be missed." Jeanette rose and slipped her hand into the crook of his arm.

"Delane!"

Allerman's voice was cold, hard, with a cutting edge to it. Delane glanced back at him over his shoulder.

"You have not congratulated Jeanette."

Delane smiled.

"Quite right; I haven't. But I'm going to tell her what I think of you while we're dancing."

He saw Allerman's angry scowl, and then, slipping his arm around Jeanette, stepped off into the fox-trot.

They went half-way round the room before either of them spoke. Then:

"I'm afraid I've done the wrong thing, Miss Fayre."

"How?"

"In asking you to dance."

"Speaking as one fox-trotter to another, Mr. Delane, I'm glad you did. You're a beautiful dancer."

He grinned.

"Meaning, no doubt, that my dancing is beautiful. I have no illusions about my face—except perhaps that it's far too good a face for Allerman to bash. That's what he was aching to do when I asked you to dance with me. But he can't expect to keep you entirely to himself just because you've promised to marry him. That's an idea which died in the year eighteen hundred and something, and we can't have even Dr. Raymond Allerman exhuming corpses. By the way, as one who dances beautifully, may I say that you're a beautiful dancer?"

Jeanette smiled.

"According to you, Mr. Delane, I have the face of a criminal. You told me so down in Devonshire. Do you still think I'm like that girl—what was her name—Lorna?"

"Lorna Sherwood. Yes, I still think you're like her. Not as much as you were, though. Since I saw you that day in Devonshire, you've changed."

"For the better?"

"If you weren't engaged to Allerman," he smiled, "I should say that wasn't possible,"

She wrinkled her forehead.

"As bad as that, or as good as that?"

"As beautiful as that."

They danced in silence for a time. Then:

"Are you really going to marry Allerman?"

She glanced at him in surprise.

"Isn't that rather an unusual sort of question?"

"Oh, it's all right," he grinned: "I'm not making love to you. I'm going to be married myself soon and I'm what is commonly known as quite 'safe.' But I can't somehow picture you married to Allerman, living down at that farm of his, with a danger signal outside and a gorilla for a servant—"

He felt her fingers tighten on his shoulder.

"I'm not going to the farm," she said quickly. "I couldn't face it—I'm frightened—"

"Frightened? Of course you're frightened. Anyone could see that. And you're not at the farm now. What are you frightened of? Allerman?"

She did not answer that question. She gave a swift, nervous glance around the room before she turned a troubled face to him.

"Mr. Delane," she said, "down in Devonshire you told me that you were a friend of Paul Barlow. Are you?"

"I like Barlow. I think he's a fool to work for Allerman, but I like him."

"Well enough to do something to help him—and me?"

"Of course."

"Then take me somewhere where we can talk—somewhere—"

"I know. You needn't say it. Somewhere where Allerman can't see us. He's over there by the door, talking to Belfrage. We shall be quite safe anywhere at this end of the room."

He led her to a corner and seated himself beside her on a settee.

"Well, Miss Fayre, what can I do for you? With the possible exception of murder, you can count on me for anything."

She opened her handbag, took out a sealed envelope and thrust it quickly into his hand.

"It's for Paul Barlow," she told him. "I want you to post it for me."

He glanced at her with a hint of amusement in his eyes.

"And is that all?"

"That's all, Mr. Delane."

"And in order to ask me to post a letter for you, you get me to hide you in a corner where Allerman can't see you—"

"Please post it," she begged. "It's terribly urgent. I've been carrying it about with me for two days, but I've had no chance to post it and it's frightfully important that Paul should have it—"

"No chance to post it?" He frowned. "I see. You mean that Allerman hasn't given you a chance? Doesn't he ever let you out of his sight?"

"I can never go out alone. I've been very ill, you know, and Dr. Allerman insists that I must never be left alone."

"And you don't want Allerman to know that you're writing to Barlow—is that it?"

"Yes."

"And there's no one you can trust even to post a letter for you?"

"I'm trusting you, Mr. Delane."

He slipped the letter into his pocket.

"That's good enough for me, Miss Fayre," he said. "Of course, I'll post it. But it's too late for to-night's post, and if it's urgent—"

"It is—terribly urgent."

"Then I'll tell you what: I'll take it to him, shall I?"

"Oh, could you—possibly?" she exclaimed eagerly. "Paul's in Devonshire—at the farm—"

"I can do it in six hours and he'll have it in time for breakfast. My car's outside and I'll leave at once. Don't worry any more, Miss Fayre: the letter's as good as delivered."

"It's terribly kind of you—"

"Not at all," he assured her. "As a matter of fact, I'd rather like to pay a visit to the farm while Allerman's out of the way." He smiled at her. "So it's Barlow, after all, and not Allerman, eh?"

She nodded.

"Does Allerman know?"

"Yes."

"And in spite of that he has announced his engagement to you! I think I understand. I understand enough, anyway. Allerman's trying to force you to marry him and for some reason or other you're afraid he may get his way. Is that right? It's not idle curiosity, Miss Fayre; I want to help you if I can."

"Yes, that's quite right, Mr. Delane."

"Then the sooner I leave for Devonshire the better. I'll take you back to Allerman and start at once." They rose and walked to the edge of the dance floor. "There's just one thing I want to say, Miss Fayre."

"Yes?"

"No matter what happens, you mustn't give way. You'd be happier dead than married to Allerman. I know what I'm saying."

She nodded.

"I know."

"Then as one good friend to another, Miss Fayre, I suggest that you keep smiling and count on me if I can help. They're playing a waltz; let's dance it and then I'll be off."

They began to dance, but they had scarcely travelled the length of the room when the music stopped. It stopped suddenly—as suddenly as when one switches off the wireless. For a few seconds the swish of feet on the polished floor continued, and then that too stopped; the murmur of conversation died away; and the next moment a voice broke the silence:

"Stand still, everybody!"

No one moved, but every head was turned in the direction from which that sharp command had come. Standing just inside the room, with his back to the door, was a man. He was rather short, rather slim, and he wore a soft felt hat pulled well down over his eyes and a coat with a waist that was a little too much emphasised. Across the lower part of his face a handkerchief was tied. In his hand, thrust threateningly forward, was a gun. Beside him stood another man, who was almost an exact replica of his companion. Detective-Inspector Preston, had he been there, would have had no difficulty, in spite of the handkerchiefs across their faces, in recognising both Lennie and Mickey Stone.

The latter stepped forward, leaving Lennie by the door.

"Keep quiet, folks," he said. "Shouting means shooting."

He took a swift glance round the room.

"All you men stick your hands up!"

Quickly in most cases, more slowly in others, the men raised their hands.

"And now stand back—off the dance floor."

He stood watching the guests as they moved to the edge of the floor and formed a ring round it.

"Nobody's going to get hurt," he announced, "unless somebody starts the funny business. Keep your hands up and don't try to interfere, and you'll all be dancing again in ten minutes."

He took off his hat and, holding it in his left hand, advanced to the nearest couple.

"Put 'em all in there, please, lady," he said, holding out the hat, "and be quick about it. Make a start with your necklace."

The girl slowly took off her necklace and dropped it into the hat.

"And the rings, please."

The rings followed the necklace. Mickey leaned slightly forward to inspect the diamond bracelet on her wrist.

"Paste," he said. "You can keep the bracelet, lady."

He passed on to the next couple and the performance was repeated, except that a ring was rejected and a bracelet added to the contents of the hat, and so he progressed round the ring of guests.

As he reached the spot where Delane, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his trousers, was standing with Jeanette, Mickey frowned.

"Didn't I tell you to put your hands up?" Delane, gazing intently at Mickey's face, kept his hands where they were.

"In spite of the handkerchief," he said, "I fancy I recognise Mr. Mickey Stone."

"Stick your hands up—quick! I'm having none of your funny business, Delane."

"So the recognition is mutual! I remember you very clearly, Mickey. I once prosecuted you and got you sent down for a nice long stretch. No malice, I hope?"

"Put your hands up, damn you!"

Delane ignored the request.

"It was the time when they roped in Lorna Sherwood, Mickey. But she was lucky enough to get away with it. I was prosecuting—"

Quickly and expertly, transferring the hat to his right hand, Mickey's left hand ran over Delane's person.

"If you try any funny business you'll not be prosecuting any other guy, Delane." He replaced the hat in his left hand. "O.K. You're safe," he said and turned to Jeanette. "Now, lady, I'll trouble you—"

The sentence was never completed. Mickey suddenly stepped back and stood staring at Jeanette as if unable to believe his eyes.

"Lorna!" he exclaimed.

Jeanette gazed at him in bewilderment.

"You're making a mistake," she said. "My name isn't Lorna, and I don't know you—"

Mickey whipped the handkerchief from his face.

"Now do you know me?"

She looked at him steadily and shook her head.

"I've no idea who you are."

"No idea, haven't you?" exclaimed Mickey furiously. "You don't know me, don't you—not Mickey Stone! Never seen me before, have you?"

"I—I don't know what you mean—"

"You're going to see a hell of a lot of me from now on, that's what! I've heard. Ducked me, didn't you? Thought I was safe inside and wouldn't hear about it! But I heard all right. I heard what you were doing—running around with another fellow—double-crossing me—giving me the go-by for a dirty little rat like Dinkie Lane—"

Delane grasped his arm.

"You'd better go steady, Mickey—"

Mickey wrenched his arm free.

"You keep out of this, Delane. I know my own business, and if you don't want your face smashed you'll keep out of it." He swung round to Jeanette again. "You're not getting away with this lot, Lorna. You're being too smart this time and you're not getting away with it. I've got things to say to you and you're coming along right now—"

He grabbed Jeanette's arm and jerked her roughly towards him, but, as he did so, Delane's fist was smashed against his jaw. Mickey staggered backwards, crashing to the floor, and his gun went slithering across the polished surface.

Instantly he was on his feet. He made a wild rush in Delane's direction, but again a fist found his jaw and sent him sprawling. At the same instant the door behind Lennie was flung open, arms grabbed and held him and the gun was wrenched from his hand. A few seconds later, Mickey, struggling furiously, was in the safe hands of a couple of policemen. They urged him, fighting desperately, towards the door.

"Listen, you!" he shouted. "If you take me, take her! She's wanted. She's Lorna—Lorna Sherwood. She's wanted for that hold-up—the Dinkie Lane business. I guess I ought to know her—she's my girl. She's wearing my ring—the one I gave her. If you don't believe me, look inside it—her name's there. I got it done for her at Rubinstein's—"

They dragged him through the door and Delane's glance went to the small gold signet ring on the little finger of Jeanette's left hand. He slipped his arm

into hers and drew her through the crowd of guests to the corner of the room.

"Miss Fayre, quick—show me that ring!"

She gazed at him in surprise.

"Quick!" he repeated, and, clasping her hand, drew the ring from her finger and inspected it.

Inside were engraved the words: "Lorna from Mickey." He hesitated a moment, looking at her curiously, and then slipped the ring into his pocket.

"I'll keep that, Miss Fayre."

"But why?"

"Well, it's not your ring, is it?"

"Of course it's my ring."

"Where did you get it?"

She puckered her forehead.

"I think I've always had it. I can't remember ever not having it. I never take it off, but I don't know who gave it to me or where I got it. I've forgotten so much, you know, since my illness."

"I'll keep it, anyway," said Delane.

Before Jeanette could make any further protest, Allerman came up to them.

"Thank you, Delane," he said frigidly. "The fellow seems to be suffering from some peculiar hallucination and you dealt with him in the only possible way."

He turned to the girl.

"Come with me, Jeanette. I'm afraid the affair has distressed you a good deal, and I shall take you home immediately."

Delane watched them thoughtfully until they disappeared through the door. Then, after a brief conversation with a certain Inspector Gould, he made his excuses to his host and hurried from the house. Half an hour later, his long, low two-seater sports car was roaring along the Great West Road.

CHAPTER XXV

DURING the drive back to the flat Allerman did not speak to Jeanette, but sat frowning and drumming his knee with his fingers. Several times, after a glance at his watch, he leaned forward, tapped the window and instructed the driver to go faster. It seemed to the girl that he was nervous and worried. If anyone else had behaved as Allerman was behaving, she would have said that he was frightened; but "frightened" was a word which it seemed absurd to apply to Dr. Allerman. She could not imagine his being frightened of anything or anybody.

When they reached the block of flats, Allerman paused and stood talking in a low voice to the driver of the car. Jeanette hurried in and went straight to her bedroom. She had just taken off her cloak and thrown it aside, when there came a knock on the door. Opening it, she found Allerman standing in the corridor.

"Come to the drawing-room, please, Jeanette. I wish to talk to you."

As soon as she had entered the drawing-room he closed the door and turned to her.

"Listen to me, Jeanette. We are leaving London at once. I have arranged with the driver of the car to be back in half an hour. He has gone to fill up with petrol and I want you to be ready by the time he returns."

"Leaving London, Raymond? To-night?"

"At once. Go and change your dress, and pack anything you want to take with you."

"But why? Where are we going? I don't understand—"

"I'm taking you back to the farm. Please don't make any trouble about it. I have excellent reasons for leaving London as quickly as possible. Go and change your dress."

The girl did not move. She stood facing him, her hands clenched and an obstinate, mutinous look in her eyes.

"Raymond, I'm not going to the farm. I can't—I daren't."

He frowned.

"More disobedience, Jeanette?"

She avoided his eyes.

"I can't help it," she said. "I'm not going. This time you won't frighten me into obeying you."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that, Jeanette. It's chiefly for your sake that I'm arranging this rather hurried exodus from London."

"How can it be for my sake? I don't want to go."

"Perhaps not," said Allerman. "But you must take my word for it that it will be very much to your advantage to obey me and go."

She shook her head emphatically.

"I hate the farm!"

"You will none the less be well advised to go there. Surely, Jeanette, the fact that Paul Barlow, brimming over with emotion, will be there to receive you should go some way towards tempering your hatred of the place!"

Again she shook her head.

"It's no use talking, Raymond. I'm not going."

He gave the slightest shrug.

"Then, what, may I ask, do you propose to do?"

"I can stay here; I shall be quite safe. Nurse can stay with me if you're afraid I shall run away. If you've work to do on the farm I don't see why I should be forced to go there with you. Why don't you want me to stay here?"

He gave his faintly cynical smile.

"I can assure you, Jeanette, that if you did stay here you would very much regret it."

"I'll take that risk."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Allerman sharply. "I can't afford to allow you to take the risk. There's risk for me as well as for you, and I certainly don't intend to take it. You only talk as you do because you don't realise what would certainly happen to you if you did stay here."

She shot him a quick, apprehensive glance.

"But what could possibly happen to me?"

He selected a cigar from the box and lighted it carefully.

"I had intended not to tell you, Jeanette," he said. "I wished to avoid distressing you. But since you're being so obstinate, you leave me no choice. The truth is that if you stay here you will certainly be arrested by the police."

"Arrested?" For a moment there was panic in her eyes, and then she laughed lightly. "You're only trying to frighten me, Raymond. How could the police arrest me? I've done nothing they could possibly arrest me for."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that. You have done a good many things in your life, Jeanette, which you can't recall since your illness. How can you be sure

that you have done nothing for which the police can arrest you? You can't be sure."

"You're trying to frighten me," she repeated. "I've done nothing—I'm certain I've done nothing. If I had really done anything for which the police could arrest me, I feel sure I should remember—"

She paused abruptly and passed a hand across her forehead. Could she be sure? That woman Lorna—-Mr. Delane had said that she was like her—even the mole behind her ear. To-night, too, at the dance—-that man with the gun, who had recognised her....

"You are not sure, Jeanette," said Allerman's voice. "You are only pretending to be sure. After what occurred to-night at Belfrage's, some sort of doubt must have entered your mind. You must have wondered, when that man claimed to know you—"

"Raymond, who was he? I don't understand. I can't remember ever having seen him—"

"You can't remember," repeated the doctor. "That is the whole point, Jeanette. I hoped you never would remember, that it would never be necessary to tell you. However, it is necessary. What that man said was true. There's no need to go into details, but some time ago, before you were ill, you were guilty of a crime—"

"It isn't true! I don't believe it! I couldn't—"

"You were guilty of a crime," continued Allerman relentlessly, "by which you made yourself liable to a long term of imprisonment. Fortunately I was able to save you from that, but if once the police arrest you. I shall not be able to save you again. That is the truth, Jeanette, and that is why, after what occurred this evening, you must be taken from London immediately. Now do you understand?"

She gazed at him helplessly, speechless, as if stunned by what he had just told her.

"Go to your room and change your dress," ordered Allerman. "The car will be here in a few minutes."

Her hands fluttered up to her face and covered it, then they fell limply to her sides, and she turned and went slowly from the room.

Allerman remained for several minutes lolling against the mantelpiece, thoughtfully smoking his cigar. Then, going into his bedroom, he began methodically packing a bag. If he was anxious, he showed no sign of anxiety. His face was as expressionless as ever, his whole air one of unhurried composure.

He heard a car stop outside the flats, went to the window, pulled aside the blind and glanced down into the street. The car, a big, dark saloon, was standing by the kerb just outside the entrance to the block. It struck Allerman that it was not the same car as had taken him to Belfrage's house. The man, perhaps, in view of the long journey to be made, had decided to use some other car; or it was possible, of course, that the fact that he was viewing it from above might explain the difference which he thought he detected in its appearance.

He was about to turn away from the window when the door of the car was opened. A man got out and ran up the steps of the block of flats; and a few moments later, as Allerman turned away from the window and began to strap his bag, there came a ring on the bell. The doctor stiffened and stood still, frowning. The bell rang a second time, and with a slight shrug he went from the room, walked quickly along the corridor and tapped quietly on the door of Jeanette's room. She made no answer, and he tapped again. Then, as the front door bell rang again, he opened the door of the room.

It was in darkness. He switched on the light and glanced round. Jeanette, still fully dressed, lay on the bed with her face hidden in the pillow.

"Jeanette!"

She raised herself on an elbow and looked at him.

"I'm not going!" she exclaimed rather wildly. "I'm not going to the farm. What you told me isn't true. It can't be true. You're just trying to frighten me into going with you—"

He silenced her with a gesture.

"If you doubt my word," he said, "you will soon have an excellent opportunity of testing it. I fancy the police are at the door."

She sat upright.

"The police?"

He nodded.

"If you are so sure of your innocence, I suggest that when I let them in, as I propose doing in a moment, you come into the drawing-room and meet them, when they will no doubt apologise for their regrettable error. But if you are not sure of your innocence—"

"Raymond, I don't know—I can't remember—I can't be sure—"

"Then pull yourself together and do as I tell you," he said sharply.

The bell sounded again. She started and shot a quick, nervous glance towards the door.

"There is nothing to be alarmed at if you do as I say," said Allerman calmly. "While the police are here, you will on no account leave this room. Lock your door and keep quiet, and I think I can promise that you will not be disturbed. You will not open your door until I knock on it and tell you to. Is that clear?"

She nodded, and Allerman went from the room, closing the door quietly behind him. He waited until he heard the key turned in the lock, and then went quickly to the front door and opened it. Outside stood a short, thick-set man, who had about him that indefinable something which proclaims a policeman in plain clothes as clearly as if he wore a ticket marked "Policeman" in his hat.

"Sorry to trouble you at this time of night, Dr. Allerman," he said. "I'm Inspector Gould."

Allerman opened the door wide and stood aside.

"Come in, Inspector. I half expected you. As a matter of fact, I've been sitting up and enjoying a cigar on the chance of your calling."

He led the way into the drawing-room and waved the inspector to a chair.

"I shan't detain you many minutes, Dr. Allerman," said Gould, seating himself and carefully placing his bowler hat under the chair. "It's about that affair at Mr. Belfrage's this evening."

Allerman nodded.

"Whisky, Inspector?" He poured some into a glass and raised the glass to the siphon. "Neat or ruined?"

"Just slightly ruined, thank you, Dr. Allerman," smiled the inspector.

Allerman splashed in some soda and handed him the glass.

"That was a smart piece of work this evening, Inspector," he said. "Your men arrived in the nick of time. The fellow would have cleaned out everyone and been away within ten minutes. It was a daring thing to attempt—the sort of thing one looks for in America rather than in law-abiding England."

"Mickey Stone's daring enough," said Gould. "He's only just finished serving a sentence for a similar sort of affair, and he might have known we should be watching him. But criminals aren't clever, Dr. Allerman—not many of them. We had him watched from the moment he left prison, and we had a pretty shrewd idea of what was in the wind. Mickey Stone's a tough customer."

"A pathological case, I should imagine," replied Allerman. "He seems to be suffering from some queer hallucinations. That extraordinary outburst, for

instance, when he saw Miss Fayre. I understand that he declared that they were old friends."

"He did, Dr. Allerman. He's still declaring it round at the station; that's what I've called to see you about. Mickey Stone has made a statement in which he insists that Miss Fayre isn't Miss Fayre at all. He says she's a woman called Lorna Sherwood."

Allerman raised his eyebrows.

"And who may Lorna Sherwood be?"

"She's a girl he used to run around with before he went inside. They did several jobs together. She has been convicted twice and served short sentences, and we want her now in connection with something rather more serious. That bank hold-up at Dinneford—I dare say you read about it. She gave us the slip after that affair, and nothing has been heard of her until this evening when Mickey Stone made his statement. In the circumstances, Dr. Allerman, we've no choice but to make a few enquiries."

"Anything I can tell you, Inspector."

"If you've no objection, I should like the opportunity of asking Miss Fayre a few questions."

Allerman stared at him in surprise.

"Am I to understand, Inspector, that the police are taking seriously the suggestion that Miss Fayre, my fiancee, is in fact not Miss Fayre at all but some criminal?"

"Well, no, I can't say we're taking it seriously, Dr. Allerman. But the statement has been made, and it's our duty to investigate it. It's more a matter of form than anything. But we've been instructed to interview Miss Fayre, and I should like to see her."

"To-night?"

"The sooner the better, doctor."

Allerman shook his head.

"While I admire the zeal and efficiency of the police, Inspector," he said, "I'm afraid I must ask them to curb it just a little on this occasion. Miss Fayre has been seriously ill—even now she has not completely recovered—and after this evening's affair she is extremely tired and a good deal upset. She has gone to bed, and as her doctor I must refuse absolutely to have her disturbed. If she were dragged out of bed now and subjected to a string of questions by the police, I would not answer for the consequences to her health."

"H'm!" said the Inspector. "Of course, if you, as her doctor, take that attitude—"

"I do—definitely. Miss Fayre is in no fit condition for that sort of thing—certainly not at this time of night. The police must be reasonable about it, Inspector. After all, there is no urgency about the matter. The whole affair is rather ridiculous. If Miss Fayre is to be under suspicion and put to the inconvenience and discomfort of being questioned—"

"We have our instructions, Dr. Allerman, and we've got to carry them out."

"It's absurd."

"Between ourselves," smiled the inspector, "I don't mind admitting that I agree with you. But I'm obliged to ask Miss Fayre a few questions—"

"Then you must ask them at some more reasonable time, Inspector. If you insist on interviewing Miss Fayre, I suggest that you do it in the morning. I will undertake to bring her to the station myself."

"Very good, Dr. Allerman," said Gould, rising and setting down his glass. "In the circumstances I think I'm justified in agreeing to that. Shall we say ten o'clock?"

"Twelve," said Allerman. "Miss Fayre is an invalid. But I wish it to be understood that she will come under protest. The whole thing is so preposterous."

"Most people who come to the station come under protest," smiled the inspector. "I'm really sorry to have to trouble you, Dr. Allerman, but it's the quickest way to settle the matter beyond dispute. If Miss Fayre will come to the station we can disprove Mickey Stone's statement in a very few minutes. We shall have Lorna Sherwood's photograph and finger-prints in the morning, and there's no getting past fingerprints."

Allerman glanced at him quickly, with a slight frown.

"Finger-prints?"

"We can take Miss Fayre's finger-prints and compare them with Lorna Sherwood's. Even Mickey Stone will have to admit he's been lying then."

Allerman nodded, smiling.

"Yes—of course—I hadn't thought of fingerprints," he said. "That will settle the matter beyond question. Expect us at twelve, Inspector."

As soon as Inspector Gould had left, Allerman hurried to the door of Jeanette's room and knocked.

"Open the door, Jeanette!"

The key was turned and the door opened, and he went into the room. Jeanette gazed at him with anxious, questioning eyes.

"Have the police gone?"

He nodded.

"I got rid of the Inspector, Jeanette, by promising that you should attend at the police station at twelve o'clock to-morrow."

"The police station?"

"Don't distress yourself, Jeanette. We shall not be there; we shall be leaving at nine o'clock for Devonshire. It was really very considerate of the police to call, as we are now relieved of the necessity of going to-night, and you can have a good sleep. But be ready by nine in the morning."

She went to him and gripped his arm.

"Raymond, for God's sake tell me the truth!" she begged. "If I've really committed some crime, I'd rather face it out. I'd rather let myself be arrested. I'd rather face anything than go back to the farm."

He made a gesture of impatience.

"I can't afford to let you be arrested," he said.

"Can't you imagine the headlines: 'Arrest of Dr. Raymond Allerman's fiancée?' Perhaps that hadn't occurred to you? I can assure you it has occurred to me. But I'm quite capable of dealing with the police, and you have nothing to fear provided you do as I tell you. I don't propose to argue any more about it, Jeanette, and I don't propose to allow you to indulge your longing for martyrdom. You will go with me to-morrow to the farm. I shall expect you to be ready to start at nine o'clock."

He went to the door, but paused as she called his name.

"Well?"

"Don't you see, Raymond?" she exclaimed desperately. "It won't be the least use going to the farm."

"That is for me to decide, Jeanette. I have my plans."

"But if I've really done something, going to the farm won't help. The police will be sure to find me. You can't keep me hidden away for ever; they'll come down there and arrest me—"

Allerman was shaking his head.

"I can promise you one thing, Jeanette," he said grimly: "The police will never arrest you."

CHAPTER XXVI

PAUL BARLOW had just glanced at his watch and discovered, to his surprise, that it was already nearly one o'clock in the morning and that he had been working for a stretch of almost five hours, when there came a knock at the door. He opened it to find Stark outside. The servant thrust a letter into his hand. It was addressed to Paul, who glanced at the man with a puzzled frown.

"It's a funny time to deliver letters, Stark. When did this arrive?"

"To-night," said Stark.

"And you've just remembered to give it to me?"

"Just remembered—yes."

"All right."

He shut the door and returned to his chair. It was no use reprimanding Stark for his forgetfulness. After all, the sole object in keeping Stark supplied with whisky since Allerman had left the farm had been to make him more forgetful and less vigilant. There was no knowing when it might be necessary for Paul to leave, and he wanted no interference from Stark, who was consequently spending a considerable portion of each day in a semi-comatose condition, induced by Paul's liberality with his employer's whisky.

Paul slit open the envelope and drew out the letter. It was from Sir William Chetford, and a glimpse of the signature set Paul eagerly scanning the dozen or so typewritten lines. The gist of it was that Sir William, after further careful investigation, had found no reason to modify in any way the opinion he had expressed when Paul had called on him. The effect of the drug Orchidin, as he had stated, was a temporary lessening of will-power; only a prolonged use of it over a period of perhaps a year would be likely to cause serious permanent damage, and Paul could take it as a definite fact that there was no condition of the human body in which the administration of Orchidin or any similar drug could possibly be essential.

Three times Paul read the letter; and then, with a sigh of relief, he put it into his pocket. That settled it. It was quite clear now what Allerman's game had been. All along he had intended to marry Jeanette, he had known that in her normal condition she would refuse to marry him, and he had used this horrible drug on her, so weakening her resistance to his will that when she was under its influence she would give him implicit obedience, even to the extent of agreeing to marry him. It was an ingenious plan. Allerman had known that both he and Jeanette would accept his word without question when he said that her life depended on a continuance of the injections. That

threat had made it certain that Jeanette would not leave him and that Paul would make no attempt to take her away.

But all that was done with now. Jeanette was free—free to leave Allerman and come to him—Paul. There was no reason why she should stay another day under the same roof as Allerman. He would go to London straight away, call at the doctor's flat, demand to see her, and, no matter what Allerman might say or do, bring her away with him.

He rose from his chair, went downstairs to the hall, where he knew a time-table was to be found, and hurriedly consulted it. His hands were shaking with excitement as he turned the pages. There was a train from Exeter at 1.50. That was no use; it was past one o'clock already, and at this time of night there was no means of getting to Exeter in time. Even if he 'phoned through to Dinneford and ordered a car, he could not hope to make it. The next train was at 7.20, and there was nothing for it but to wait for that one.

He tossed the time-table aside, returned to his room, and, because he felt the urgent need of doing something, began to pack a bag. But with almost six hours to wait before he could be on his way to Jeanette, the time occupied in packing a bag was insignificant. When it was impossible to make the task last any longer, he lighted a cigarette and began restlessly pacing up and down the room. Three cigarettes he smoked and was still pacing the room; but, as he was about to light a fourth, he checked himself, replaced the cigarette in his case and smiled. This was absurd. He was working himself up into a fever of excitement, and if he kept on like this, he would be good for nothing in the morning. He must try to get a few hours' sleep.

He flung himself on his bed, repeated to himself a dozen times that he must wake not later than six o'clock, and fell asleep. But it was a fitful sleep. Every half-hour or so he awoke and consulted his watch; and at five o'clock, deciding that further sleep was out of the question, he got off the bed and lighted yet another cigarette. It was almost dawn, and he was toying with the idea of going downstairs in search of a cup of tea when there came a rattle of stones against the window. He stopped suddenly in his pacing, crossed to the window, flung it open and looked out. He could just discern a shadowy figure standing in the courtyard below.

"Who's that?" he called.

"Hullo! Is that you, Barlow? It's Delane. Come down and let me in."

Paul hurried downstairs and opened the front door. Delane stepped quickly inside.

"What's wrong, Delane?"

"Lots of things. Where can we talk? Is the gorilla man about?"

"He's probably asleep. I've been doping him with whisky. Come upstairs." He led the way into his room and closed the door.

"I didn't ring the bell as I didn't want to rouse Stark," explained Delane. "We don't want any trouble. Here—I've brought this for you." He thrust Jeanette's note into Paul's hand. "It's from Miss Fayre. She couldn't post it and it's urgent, so I brought it along."

"She's all right, Delane, is she?"

"She was when I saw her a few hours ago. But read the note."

Paul tore open the envelope and pulled out the slip of paper inside. The message ran as follows:

"Be quick. Dr. Allerman insists on marrying me at once. He saw us when I met you. Be quick, Paul—I'm frightened."

Paul glanced at Delane, who was watching his face closely.

"That's to ask you to go to her, is it, Barlow?" Paul nodded.

"Then the sooner you get there the better. I saw Miss Fayre last night—met her at a party. Allerman was there too. It was a big affair at Belfrage's. There was a hold-up—a fellow walked in with a gun and started helping himself to the ladies' jewellery. To cut a long story short, when he came to Miss Fayre, he claimed to know her—said she wasn't Miss Fayre but a woman called Lorna Sherwood, a crook. Mickey Stone's the fellow's name—a nasty bit of work. It seemed he had been running around with Lorna Sherwood and had got the idea that while he had been in quod she had been carrying on with some other fellow. He made the devil of a scene when the police came in and collared him—kept shouting out that Miss Fayre was Lorna Sherwood and they should arrest her too. He grabbed her arm—tried to make her go with him—and I had to hit him. She had given me that note just before it all happened and I promised to bring it to you." He paused and lighted a cigarette, watching Paul's face keenly. "I'm not being curious, Barlow," he said, "but what is Miss Fayre to you?"

"Pretty well everything, Delane. I'm going to marry her."

Delane nodded.

"I gathered as much from her. You know Allerman intends to marry her?"

"Yes."

"He broadcast their engagement last night. I don't pretend to understand things, Barlow, but I do know that if I were in your shoes I'd rather put a bullet in Miss Fayre's brain than let a swine like Allerman marry her. She'd rather do it herself, I think. She's scared—terrified—and that affair last

night was just about the finishing touch. Allerman of course took her home, but I've an idea, Barlow, that we've not heard the last of that episode. Mickey Stone intends to make trouble. That will mean a good deal of unpleasantness for Miss Fayre—even if there's nothing in his story that she's really Lorna Sherwood."

Paul glanced at him sharply, but there was nothing to be read from his face.

"What exactly do you mean, Delane—'even if there's nothing in his story?'—You don't really suppose there is?"

Delane thoughtfully inspected the glowing end of his cigarette.

"You're very loyal, aren't you?"

"Loyal? I don't understand."

"You don't feel inclined to tell me the truth?"

"Once again, Delane, I don't understand."

"I think you do," smiled the other. "And I think you would be wise to confide in me, Barlow. I'm no friend of Allerman's, as you know, and that means, as I see things, that you and I and Miss Fayre should be friends. We'd all three like to put it across Allerman if we could, but we can't do it if we don't trust one another. Why not be frank with me?"

"What do you want to know?" asked Paul.

"Who is Miss Fayre? Is she really Miss Fayre or is she Lorna Sherwood? There's no need to hesitate. I give you my word that if you tell me she's Lorna Sherwood, the police won't ever hear of it from me."

"What makes you think that she might be Lorna Sherwood, Delane? Apart from what Mickey said, I mean."

"She's like her—very like her. I've seen Lorna—prosecuted her once—-and I can understand Mickey making the mistake. If it was a mistake."

For several moments Paul was silent, scrutinising Delane's face as though trying to look into him and see what kind of stuff he was made of.

"All right, Delane," he said. "I'm going to trust you. In one way Mickey Stone was right; in another he was wrong. He didn't recognise Lorna Sherwood: all he recognised was Lorna Sherwood's body."

He saw the puzzled expression on the other's face and laid a hand on his arm.

"No, I'm not mad, Delane," he said. "Come and sit down. I'm going to tell you everything."

For nearly half an hour they sat side by side on the couch, while Paul told his amazing story. Delane listened in silence, except when, from time to time, he asked a brief, pointed question. He heard of Jeanette with her poor, crippled body and her beautiful soul; of Lorna with her depraved, degenerate soul and her lovely body; of Allerman's amazing experiment and its almost complete success; of the little white pellet of Orchidin and its terrible powders; of Stark and the herd of gibbering semi-human creatures in the cellars.

"That's the truth, Delane," said Paul, in conclusion, "whether you believe it or not. Miss Fayre is Jeanette—the real Jeanette, the soul of Jeanette. Lorna Sherwood is dead. Now tell me I'm mad." Delane got up and looked at his watch.

"Thanks, Barlow," he said. "I think I understand more or less. I understand enough, anyway. Lorna Sherwood is dead; and that being so, the sooner you get to Miss Fayre the better." He held out his hand and Paul gripped it. "Count on me, old man."

"Thanks, Delane."

"And now to work," said the other briskly. "I've got my car outside. With any luck we can be in town by midday—"

"Train," said Paul. "It will be quicker. There's one from Exeter at 7.20; I was going to catch it anyway."

Delane nodded.

"All right, I'll run you in to Exeter. What about Stark? Will he try to cause trouble?"

"I'll give him a couple of bottles of whisky," said Paul, "and then he'll only cause trouble to himself."

They were half-way to London and the train was just crossing a bridge over a stream, when Delane suddenly got to his feet, took a small gold signet ring from his pocket and flung it into the water.

"That's the safest place for that," he said.

CHAPTER XXVII

FOR the second time Paul pressed the bell-push outside the door of Dr. Allerman's flat. He could hear the bell ringing inside, but no reply came, and again he placed his thumb on the bell-push and kept it there.

"Nothing doing," said Delane, who was standing beside him. "Wearing out the battery won't help us. We'll find the porter."

They went down the stairs to the ground floor, saw a notice which bore the word "Porter," and an arrow pointing down a flight of stairs that led to the basement, hurried down the stairs and knocked at the door of the porter's quarters. The door was opened by that official himself, who gave them an unfriendly stare.

"There's no flats to let," he announced.

"We're looking for Dr. Allerman," explained Paul. "We can get no answer at his flat. Can you give us any information as to where we shall find him?"

The porter stroked his waxed moustache.

"Allerman?" he repeated.

"Dr. Allerman and his ward—Miss Fayre."

"Him as had Flat Number Three?"

"Yes," said Paul impatiently. "Can you tell us anything about him?"

"You mean the tall gentleman with the eye-glass, who kind of looks you up and down as if he didn't like the smell of you? Yes, I know the fellow you mean."

"Can you tell us anything about him?" repeated Paul. "We're in a hurry." The porter shook his head.

"No, I can't tell you anything about him. He's none of my business no longer. He's gone."

"When?"

The porter scratched his head.

"Well, let me see. I was on the front door steps at the time, cleaning the brass hand-rail. Allerman came out and I remember thinking it was early for him to be about. Perhaps he hadn't slept, I thought. Had something on his mind, I shouldn't wonder."

"What time did he leave?"

"Well—it would be about nine o'clock this morning, as near as I can say. He went off in a car—a big Daimler. Took his baggage with him. Meaning his

luggage, sir, not the young lady. But she went, too. Kind of upset, I thought she seemed—a bit white about the gills—looked as if she'd been crying."

"Do you know where they were going?"

"Well, according to the chauffeur, sir, they were going to Devonshire. I asked him, and he said Dinneford or some such name. It was just as well to ask, I thought. You get some rum people in these flats—slip off without paying their rent—"

His flow of speech stopped abruptly as Paul thrust half-a-crown into his hand and disappeared with Delane up the steps. Outside, on the pavement, they paused.

"Looks like another trip to Devonshire, Delane." The latter nodded.

"But first we'll see Gould. He's the police inspector who arrested Mickey Stone last night. He told me he'd be seeing Allerman later, and he might be able to tell us something. I'm rather a pal of his and he will if he can. We'd better collar a taxi."

Ten minutes later they were at Grape Street Police Station. Delane handed his card to the constable at the door.

"I want to see Inspector Gould," he said. "Tell him it's urgent."

The constable disappeared through a door and a few moments later reappeared and signed to Paul and Delane to enter the room. Inspector Gould was seated at his desk. Standing in front of it, with a policeman on each side of him, was Mickey Stone.

"Come in, Delane," said the Inspector. "You may be able to help us. Who's your friend?"

"This is Mr. Barlow, Inspector," said Delane. "He's a more or less interested party. He's Dr. Allerman's assistant."

Inspector Gould nodded and turned to Mickey Stone.

"Well, we caught you red-handed this time, Mickey," he said. "I'm afraid it will go hard with you. You ought to have known better than to try that sort of stuff in this country."

"Sure," said Mickey. "I'm the big sap. You don't have to tell me."

"We're taking your prints, Mickey, as a matter of routine," said Gould, "though I fancy we'd know you all right if you hadn't any hands."

A man in plain clothes, but blatantly a policeman, came into the room and placed an ink pad on the inspector's desk, and began carefully inking it with a small rubber roller.

"All right, Smart," said the Inspector. "I'll call you when I want you." As the plain-clothes man went from the room, he turned again to Mickey. "Now about this other business, Mickey. Do you still persist in your story that this lady, Miss Fayre, Dr. Allerman's fiancee, is Lorna Sherwood?"

"That's her—Lorna Sherwood," said Mickey. "I guess I ought to know Lorna Sherwood when I see her—the little—" He turned and flung out a hand in the direction of Delane. "He knows it's Lorna all right. He knows Lorna Sherwood as well as I do. I guess you ought to, eh, Delane? Slung a glass at you once, didn't she, and cut your face open?"

Inspector Gould glanced at Delane.

"Is that so?"

Delane nodded.

"It's more or less correct," he said. "I once prosecuted a woman named Lorna Sherwood, and she certainly flung a glass at me. For a woman, Inspector, she was a remarkably good shot." He pointed to the scar on his chin.

"And you know Miss Fayre?"

"Yes, I know Miss Fayre, and you can take it from me, Inspector, that our friend Mickey is making a mistake. I have a very clear recollection of Lorna Sherwood."

"That's it—start lying!" exclaimed Mickey furiously. "That's your job, Delane—lying! You know that was Lorna all right, but you're going to lie about it. Any man will tell lies for Lorna if she likes to be nice to him. Go on—tell your lies—I'm listening!"

"Mickey Stone is making a mistake," repeated Delane calmly. "I admit that there's a very strong resemblance between Lorna Sherwood and Miss Fayre. There are also very definite differences between them, and nobody who knows Miss Fayre as well as I do could possibly mistake one for the other. If Mickey hadn't got so terribly excited last night, he would have realised his mistake."

"He's lying!" repeated Mickey. "Just because he's fallen for Lorna—"

The Inspector cut him short.

"You can cut that out, Mickey. Miss Fayre is engaged to be married to Dr. Raymond Allerman."

"So that's the guy, is it? He's the sugar daddy, eh? I've heard of him. He's the guy that's got that farm out beyond Dinneford. Dinneford—that's how he got her. She was in that bank hold-up. She made a getaway, and Allerman picked her up—"

"And according to Mickey Stone, Inspector," said Delane's calm voice, "changed her by some miracle from the sort of woman who would associate with Mickey Stone and his gang, into the refined, cultured, charming woman I know Miss Fayre to be."

"That's it—changed! You said it, Delane!" shouted Mickey. "I've heard about him. That's what he does—changes people. I've heard them talk about him down at Dinneford. That's what he does on his farm. Anyone will tell you if you go down there. He was in a jam once over that sort of stuff—started messing about on a kid when he was operating—"

Again Inspector Gould cut him short.

"And what have you to say, Mr. Barlow? I understand that you're Dr. Allerman's assistant."

"That's quite correct, Inspector," replied Paul. "I've been down at his farm in Devonshire, and I've seen a good deal of Miss Fayre. She's Dr. Allerman's secretary and assistant. She has been, I believe, for three years or so."

"And what do you say about this Lorna business?"

"The whole thing's preposterous," replied Paul. "As a matter of fact, Inspector, I can give you absolute proof that Miss Fayre is not Lorna Sherwood. You remember the hold-up at Dinneford Bank?"

"Well?"

"Lorna Sherwood is supposed to have had a hand in it, isn't she?"

"The police are quite sure that she did it, Mr. Barlow."

Paul nodded.

"In that case, I can dispose of Mickey Stone's story once and for all, because on the day of the Dinneford Bank hold-up I went to Dr. Allerman's farm to take up my new job as his assistant. The hold-up took place at twelve o'clock—I distinctly remember reading about it—and at twelve o'clock on that day I was actually talking to Miss Fayre in the drawing-room of Dr. Allerman's house."

"Another liar," sneered Mickey. "You can't let 'em get away with that lot, Inspector. It's a put-up job between them."

"Well, we shall soon know, Mickey," said the Inspector. "I'm expecting Miss Fayre here any moment now. Dr. Allerman's bringing her along." He glanced at the clock above the door.

"As a matter of fact she should have been here by now. Twelve o'clock was the time." He pressed a bell on his desk and a sergeant came into the room. "Ring up Dr. Allerman's flat," said the Inspector, "and enquire if he's on his way. Say I'm waiting for him and Miss Fayre."

The sergeant went out.

"What's the idea, Inspector?" enquired Delane. "Why do you want them down here?"

"It's the simplest way out," replied the Inspector. "I suggested it to Dr. Allerman last night and he agreed that it would be the best way to dispose of Mickey Stone's story. Miss Fayre will allow us to take her finger-prints."

Paul started, and he and Delane exchanged glances. "That means," said Delane, "that you've got the finger-prints of Lorna Sherwood?"

The Inspector opened the drawer in his desk, took out a card and handed it to Delane.

"There they are," he said. "It's the only copy we've got of them, so treat it gently. We've only to compare Miss Fayre's finger-prints with those, and Mickey Stone will have to eat his words."

"Like hell I will!" exclaimed Mickey. "You'll see. That suits me. Get her down here and take her finger-prints, and then you'll see who's lying!"

As Delane tossed the card on to the Inspector's desk, the sergeant re-entered the room.

"I've rung Dr. Allerman's flat, sir," he announced. "There was no reply."

"All right, sergeant. He's probably on his way."

"No, sir. When I got no reply from the flat I rang the porter. He says that Dr. Allerman and Miss Fayre left by car for Devonshire at nine o'clock this morning."

"Very good, sergeant," said Gould, and the sergeant went out.

"There you are!" exclaimed Mickey triumphantly. "They've bolted. That shows you! Take her finger-prints, would you? Trust Lorna not to let you do that! She's smart, Lorna is. She got away with it at Dinneford and she's got away with it again. But there's a guy here who's not going to get away with it, and that's the guy who got me my last stretch by lying and making other people lie. You got away with it that time, Delane, but you don't get away with it this time!"

He suddenly sprang forward and drove his fist towards Delane's face, but the latter stepped quickly aside, deflecting the blow with his arm, and the next moment Mickey Stone was struggling with Delane, two constables and Inspector Gould, who had sprung up from his seat and joined in the mêlée.

Paul, standing beside the Inspector's desk, was wondering whether he ought to lend a hand, when his glance fell on the card that bore the finger-prints of Lorna Sherwood. Close to it lay the inked pad, with the little rubber roller He

shot a quick glance at the mass of struggling men, and then, taking up the roller, he ran it across the inked pad.

Again he glanced quickly at the combatants. No one was watching him. He placed the roller on the card, ran it quickly across it three or four times, until the finger-prints were completely blotted out. Replacing the roller, he picked up the card and had just dropped it into the waste-paper basket, when the hubbub subsided. Inspector Gould returned to his seat and Mickey Stone was marched out of the room.

"It seems to me, Inspector," said Delane, "that if we want to see Allerman we've got to go to Devonshire."

"Looks like it," agreed the Inspector.

"In which case, good morning, Inspector. Come along, Barlow. We've got to get a move on." They left the station, and Delane hailed a taxi. "Hop in, Barlow."

"My God, Delane, it's awful! It will take us hours to get there, and God knows what may happen in the meantime. If Allerman thinks the police are going to discover about Jeanette—"

"Don't worry, old man. If they've gone to Devonshire we shall be in time."

"We can't hope to do it in much under four hours, even if there's a train."

"Train?" said Delane. "Ever heard of aeroplanes?" He turned to the driver. "Drive like hell," he said, "but stop at a jeweller's somewhere." He saw Paul's puzzled expression, and smiled. "I want to buy a ring," he explained, as he got into the taxi—"—a small gold signet ring."

It was ten minutes after Paul and Delane had left the police station that Inspector Gould noticed that the card of Lorna Sherwood's finger-prints had slipped from his desk and fallen into the waste-paper basket. He picked it out, turned it over, saw the thick band of ink that ran across it, entirely obliterating the finger-prints, and frowned. He touched the ink with his finger, found it was already quite dry, and smiled rather grimly.

"That lets out Lorna Sherwood," he muttered. "I wonder which of them did that!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE car went slowly down the drive. Allerman, taking a key from his pocket, opened the front door and motioned to Jeanette to enter. He followed her into the hall and closed the door.

"Stark!" he called.

The man did not appear, and Allerman scowled.

"Stark!"

Still getting no reply, he pointed to the door of the drawing-room.

"Wait for me in there, Jeanette."

He went down the stone steps that led to the cellars and flung open the door of the small room which Stark occupied. Stark was there—lying on the floor, with his eyes closed and his mouth wide open, snoring noisily. Lying on the floor with him were five or six empty whisky bottles.

Allerman strode up to him and kicked him brutally in the ribs.

"Stark! Get up, do you hear?"

Evidently Stark could neither hear nor feel, for he remained exactly as he was, and not even the rhythm of his snoring was broken. With an exclamation of disgust Allerman strode from the room. He went upstairs, saw that the door of Paul's room was wide open, and walked in. A quick glance round and he crossed to the door of the bedroom, saw that the bed had not been slept in and with a shrug turned and went downstairs to the drawing-room.

"It seems we are to spend the evening alone, Jeanette," he said with a grim smile. "Barlow has gone."

"Paul—gone?" There was dismay in her voice.

"Paul—gone," he repeated. "But we will endeavour to bear up under the blow. Take off your coat, Jeanette."

She took off the heavy motoring coat which she had worn for the journey and tossed it over the back of a chair. He seated himself on the couch, took her hand and drew her down beside him.

"We have never had an evening to ourselves, Jeanette, since your illness. It should be an interesting experience." He slipped an arm around her shoulders. "Do you realise, my dear, that since your illness you have become very beautiful?"

He drew her towards him and was about to kiss her; but she suddenly thrust him away from her and sprang to her feet.

"Raymond—please!"

He raised his eyebrows.

"As my future wife, Jeanette—"

"I'm not your future wife!" she exclaimed passionately. "I'm not going to marry you."

He felt in his pocket and produced the leather case that contained his hypodermic syringe.

"You're inclined to be hysterical, my dear," he said, "and I'm afraid it's my fault. I've not given you your injection to-day. If you will just pull up your sleeve—"

"No!"

He glanced up at her in surprise.

"You're not going to give me an injection, Raymond. You're never going to give me an injection again."

"Have you taken leave of your senses? I have explained to you that unless you have the injections regularly, at least for a time—"

"I shall die? Very well, Raymond—I'd rather die. I'd a thousand times rather die than go on like this—always afraid, always wondering what is going to happen next, living in that awful place, never seeing anyone but you and Stark—"

Allerman was filling his syringe.

"Pull up your sleeve, Jeanette."

She stepped backwards.

"No! You shan't do it! You shan't touch me!" He rose, syringe in hand, and took a step towards her, but she suddenly stepped forward to meet him, struck his wrist and sent the syringe flying from his grasp.

"Raymond—I hate you!"

"Possibly," he said. "But you will none the less do as I tell you."

She shook her head.

"Never again. I don't trust you."

"You will either have to trust me or take the consequences."

"Then I'll take the consequences."

"You say that because you don't realise what the consequences will be. Listen to me, Jeanette. Since you refuse to be reasonable, you compel me to

tell you the truth. You are not Jeanette Fayre: you are Lorna Sherwood—a crook, a criminal, wanted by the police—"

"It isn't true!"

"It is true. You are wanted by the police in connection with a hold-up at the Devon and District Bank in Dinneford, and the fact that you've not been arrested long ago is entirely due to me. I found you trying to get away after the hold-up, brought you here and told nobody. The police imagined that you had somehow managed to make good your escape. You owe your freedom to me—you owe everything to me—yet now you tell me that you don't trust me, that you hate me, that you'd rather die than keep your promise to marry me."

"It can't be true," she repeated. "How can I be sure it's true?"

"Wasn't last night's episode enough to make you sure? That man—Mickey Stone—recognised you, didn't he?"

"He said he did, but—"

"And the police called at the flat to question you. You know that. Do you know what they wanted to do? They wanted to take your finger-prints and compare them with those of Lorna Sherwood. There would have been no escape for you if they had done that, because the finger-prints would have tallied. But I prevented them from doing it. I brought you here—"

"But they may come here, Raymond. They're bound to come here—"

"So you're beginning to believe me at last? Let them come here if they like, Jeanette. Let them take your finger-prints if they want to. I have made my plans. Finger-prints can be changed; it is quite a simple matter. I am going to change yours—quite a slight operation, which I shall perform at once. You will then spend a short time in a nursing home, and if the police should come to look for you, they will be told that you have left and I don't know where you are. A little later, when you come out of the nursing home, they can take your finger-prints as often as they like. They won't be the finger-prints of Lorna Sherwood. But if I am to do all this for you, you must obey me implicitly."

"I see," said the girl in a low voice. "Then I am Lorna Sherwood! That man was right when he said so last night. Of course, I should have known he was right. When he recognised my ring—"

"Ring?" There was a rasp in Allerman's voice. "Which ring?"

"The one I was wearing. I had it on last night, and the man noticed it. Didn't you hear what he said?"

"What did he say?"

"That he had given me the ring, that Lorna Sherwood's name was engraved inside it—"

"Where is the ring?"

"Mr. Delane has it."

"Delane? You gave it to Delane?" All his calm self-possession had suddenly vanished. There was fury in his eyes and his clenched hands were shaking.

"He asked me for it—"

"And you gave it to him—to Delane! Because he asked you for it, you handed it to him—Lorna Sherwood's ring—with Lorna Sherwood's name inside! You fool! You crazy, half-witted fool! Delane, who hates me, who would give all he possesses to ruin me, who has told me to my face that his one object in life is to smash me, disgrace me, bring me into contempt! And you meekly hand him the one bit of evidence that will make it possible for him to do it!"

"I didn't know, Raymond—"

"Don't you realise what you've done? It will sound well, won't it? Dr. Raymond Allerman, the most distinguished figure in the medical profession, engaged to be married to Lorna Sherwood, a crook, a criminal, an associate of men like Mickey Stone and Dinkie Lane, a thief, a prostitute! I shall be the laughing-stock of the whole country. Delane will see to that, damn him! He won't miss this chance. It's the opportunity he's been waiting for, and he's not the man to miss it. He'll inform the police—you'll be arrested—the whole story will come out—damn it, it shan't come out! Delane shan't get the better of me. Let him do his worst! He won't succeed with his dirty game. He won't succeed, do you hear? He can't succeed unless the police arrest Lorna Sherwood, and I don't intend to let her be arrested. When Lorna Sherwood threatens my good name, my career, my work, my whole life, then she must disappear. Understand that, Jeanette—she must disappear!"

"I don't understand, Raymond."

"You don't understand? Then listen. There are two things I can do with you now—get you out of the country or get you out of the world."

"You can let me go, Raymond. Let me go back to London. I'll never trouble you again. I'll keep away from you and—"

"Get you out of the world," repeated Allerman, speaking to himself rather than to her. "That would be very simple, Jeanette—very simple and very safe. The Workers! Have you ever seen the Workers, Jeanette? Perhaps you don't remember them. There are twenty of them—like Stark. But not so human as Stark. There's more of the beast in them and less of the man. They would be very glad to see you, Jeanette."

She was staring at him with her eyes wide open with horror.

"It would all sound so natural and convincing when the police came to arrest you. 'Miss Fayre went out of the room some time ago and I haven't seen her since.' They would search for you, and they would find you—in the cellars—in the Workers' room—all that would be left of you. I should say that you must have opened the wrong door and the Workers had got you. They couldn't prove that wasn't true. They couldn't prove anything against me. I should be very cut up about it—prostrated with grief for the woman who was to have married me. Everyone would sympathise and condole with me over the terrible accident, and the name of Raymond Allerman—"

He stopped abruptly and stood, frowning, with his face turned towards the window. It seemed to Jeanette that he was listening, straining to catch some sound. He stepped to the window and flung it open. Again he seemed to be listening, and Jeanette thought she could detect a faint droning sound. Allerman leaned out of the window and glanced up at the sky; as he did so, Jeanette ran to the door, seized the handle and flung the door open. But before she was through the doorway Allerman's hand gripped her arm and dragged her back into the room.

"Let me go!"

"Where were you going?"

"Anywhere away from here. Let me go, Raymond!"

"To Paul Barlow?"

"Yes. Because I love Paul. Because I hate you. I was going to Paul—to be to him everything I could never be to you, to give him everything I could never give you."

Allerman's face was distorted with fury.

"You were going to Paul Barlow, were you? Well, you will see him in a few minutes if I'm not mistaken." He forced her to the open window and pointed up at the sky. "Do you see that?"

Jeanette, glancing up, saw an aeroplane circling over the fields.

"I have an idea Paul Barlow is in that 'plane," said Allerman. "Others, too, perhaps, but certainly Paul Barlow. He has come to fetch you, Jeanette, to take you away from me, to hold you in his arms and press his lips against yours and love you. But he will never hold you in his arms, never kiss you. Do you hear what I say—never!"

The roar of the aeroplane's engine ceased abruptly and the machine swooped, touched the ground, taxied and stopped. Instantly two figures

scrambled over the side, jumped to the ground and set off at a run towards the house.

"There he is, Jeanette!" exclaimed Allerman. "There's your Paul! Take a good look at him, Jeanette. It's your last chance. You will never see him again."

He gripped her wrist and gave her arm a sharp twist. A searing pain shot up her arm.

"For God's sake, Raymond—"

He gave her arm another twist, and she could not stifle the scream that sprang to her lips. Allerman, dragging her after him, strode to the door, flung it open and hurried towards the steps that led to the cellars. She tried to struggle, but the agonising pain in her arm made it impossible, and she had no choice but to follow him. She screamed again, and Allerman laughed—a horrible, ghoulish laugh.

"The Workers!" he chuckled. "They're fine fellows, the Workers, Jeanette! Such perfect gentlemen! So polite! So courteous to a lady! You shall see how courteous they are to a lady!"

He dragged her, moaning pitifully, down the steps and along the passage. At the end of the passage he flung open a door, thrust her inside and followed her. Huddled forms lay on the floor and crouched in the corners, motionless; others lolled against the walls; others were pacing the room like caged beasts.

"The Workers, Jeanette," said Allerman. "Allow me to introduce you to the Workers. Charming, aren't they? Look, you brutes—wake up and look what I've brought for you!"

The huddled forms stirred, figures rose to their feet, and twenty faces were turned in their direction—twenty faces, unnaturally pale, each with its loose pendulous lips, its tiny eyes, its receding, chinless lower jaw. Jeanette gave a gasp of horror and covered her face with her free hand.

"Come nearer, my friends," invited Allerman. "Come nearer and look at her!"

Some of them took a few, hesitating paces forward and stood staring at her, their eyes suddenly alight, their lips drawn back in a leering smile.

"Beautiful, isn't she?" said Allerman. "Her hair, her eyes, her arms, the whole of her lovely body! And it's all for you. Do you hear me?—it's for you! Why don't you take her? What are you afraid of?"

One of the creatures, more venturesome than the rest, came slowly forward, his gaze fixed on Jeanette, his huge hands clenching and unclenching, his loose lips working. Jeanette turned to Allerman, gripping his arm and pressing herself against him.

"Raymond—for God's sake!—I'll do anything you tell me. I'll never disobey you again. But don't let them touch me—take me away—don't let them get near me—"

With a sudden jerk Allerman flung her forward.

"Take her!" he snarled.

Jeanette staggered and fell to the floor. Huge, bony hands gripped her. She caught a glimpse of one of those foul faces close to her own, and shut her eyes.

There came the sound of footsteps and Allerman spun round. As he did so, Paul rushed past him into the room, struck in blind fury with his fists at the faces that surrounded him, then stooped and lifted Jeanette in his arms.

The next instant Delane's fist crashed against Allerman's jaw. He staggered backwards and fell, and instantly, snarling like wild animals, the Workers sprang towards his prostrate form....

"Quick, Barlow—-upstairs!"

Paul, with Jeanette in his arms, ran from the room, along the passage and up the stairs to the drawing-room. He placed her gently on the couch.

"Jeanette!"

She opened her eyes, stared at him as though trying to recall who he was, and then smiled.

"It's all right, Jeanette. You're quite safe."

She was trembling violently, and he placed an arm around her shoulders, drawing her to him. But she pushed him almost roughly away.

"No, Paul! You mustn't. You don't understand. I'm not Jeanette. I'm Lorna Sherwood—a criminal. Dr. Allerman told me—"

"Listen, Jeanette," said Paul gently. "Dr. Allerman was only trying to frighten you, trying to force you to marry him. You mustn't believe a word of what Allerman told you: you must believe what I tell you. I tell you that you are Jeanette, that you have never committed a crime, that the whole story was Allerman's invention. I know for a fact that Lorna Sherwood is dead. Allerman killed her."

She gazed at him doubtfully.

"Don't you believe me?"

She hesitated.

"But the ring, Paul—"

Delane came striding into the room.

"After a discreet pause I now enter," he smiled. "What's that about a ring?"

"That man last night—Mickey Stone," said Jeanette. "He said that Lorna Sherwood's name was inside my ring. You remember, Mr. Delane. You took the ring!"

Delane felt in his waistcoat pocket, took out a small gold signet ring and handed it to her.

"There's the ring, Miss Fayre. I forgot to give it back to you. But Mickey Stone was imagining things: there's nothing engraved inside it."

Jeanette examined the ring carefully and looked at Paul with an expression of relief in her eyes.

"Paul—Mickey Stone was wrong! There's no name inside the ring!"

He smiled.

"Well?"

"Then it's all just a terrible nightmare. I'm not Lorna Sherwood—"

"You're Jeanette," said Paul.

"May I suggest," remarked Delane, "that the sooner we leave this benighted place the better?"

Paul and Jeanette got up from the couch, and all three moved towards the door. As they reached it and were about to step into the hall, there came the sound of hurrying feet, and queer, guttural grunts and growls.

Instinctively they paused. The next instant, through the doorway at the top of the cellar steps came the Workers, gibbering, showing their teeth, clawing at the struggling figure of Allerman clasped in the massive arms of Stark, who was staggering and reeling drunkenly across the hall with his burden. Stark turned into the library, the rest following him.

Paul and Delane, stepping in front of Jeanette, stood watching, fascinated.

"Poor devil!" murmured Paul. "But there's nothing to be done."

Delane shook his head in agreement.

Stark flung Allerman across the writing desk, and several of the others sprang forward, gripped his arms and legs and held him there. Others rushed to the case of surgical instruments and thrust their hands eagerly inside. Knives, forceps, gouges were seized and the Workers advanced, chuckling and jabbering, towards the writing desk.

"Good God!" gasped Delane. "Get out, Barlow—quick!"

Paul took Jeanette's arm and urged her towards the front door. As he opened it, there came a scream from the library—a long-drawn scream of terror. Jeanette, catching her breath sharply, paused and looked back.

Paul placed an arm around her shoulders and urged her firmly forward.

"Don't look behind you, my dear," he said gently. "Look into the future—Jeanette!"

THE END