

Professor Dowell's Head

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Chapter 1. The First Meeting

"Please sit down."

Manfred Kern pointed to a chair.

"Professor Sabatier speaks well of you. I think you will suit me. I understand, you have a degree in medicine. But I have one condition."

He paused, studying the visitor's face.

"Can you keep a secret? Women seldom can. You're a woman. It is bad enough. You're beautiful. That makes it even worse."

"I'm afraid, I don't understand," answered Marie Loran.

"Never mind. You must be as silent as a fish. About anything you see or hear within these walls."

"I accept your condition," said Marie Loran.

Kern nodded.

"Just one more thing. I hope you're not easily frightened?"

"No."

"Good. John will show you the laboratory."

He pressed a button. The door opened, and a young black man entered the room.

"This way, Miss," said the young man opening the door to another room.

Marie looked around. For a moment, her eyes rested on a large operating table. Next to the table there was a glass box. In it Marie saw a human heart. The heart was beating.

Marie turned round and saw something that made her jump back in horror. In front of her, on a glass plate supported by four metal legs, there was a human head. Just a head without a body.

The head raised its heavy eyelids to look at the girl. There was no doubt: the head was alive. Separated from the body, it seemed to live its own life.

The head looked very much like that of the famous surgeon, professor Dowell, who had been dead for some time. Marie had been present at some of his experiments with human organs and now thought she recognized the high forehead, the gray hair, and the blue eyes of the famous professor. But certain things looked different: the lips were thinner, the cheeks had sunk in, the skin was dark yellow like that of a mummy.

Their eyes met again, and the head moved its lips as if it wanted to say something. Marie felt that she was going to faint.

“Is it really...?”

She didn't finish.

“The head of professor Dowell? Yes, it is,” said Kern who had been watching the girl from the doorway. “I have returned it to life. Unfortunately, that was all I could do. Poor Dowell suffered from an incurable illness. To the very end he said that he chose to serve science even in his death rather than become food for worms. So when he died and I had his body delivered here, I was only carrying out his last will. I brought his mind back to life so that his brain could continue what his hands had begun.”

“I would rather die than live like this,” said Marie.

“I understand what you're saying. Professor Dowell may not feel very comfortable. What's more, he cannot appear in public in his present state. That's why we keep this experiment secret. Professor Dowell and I.”

“Does that mean that the head can speak?”

“No, the head cannot speak,” answered Kern, trying not to meet the girl's eyes. “But it can hear and understand, and even let me know its answers by moving the facial muscles.”

Then, changing the subject, he said, “I'll be expecting you tomorrow at nine o'clock. And remember: not a word to anybody.”

Chapter 2. The Mystery of the Forbidden Container

Marie had been working for professor Kern for two weeks. The young woman had already got used to the head. They had even become friends. When

she entered the laboratory in the morning, the head greeted her by making its eyelids tremble. It could not speak, but they had worked out some sort of a language. When the head wanted to say “yes”, it closed its eyes. When it meant “no”, it looked upward. After some time Marie learned to read its lips.

“How are you feeling today?” asked Marie.

The head smiled the shadow of a smile and sank its eyelids: “Thank you, I’m all right.”

“How did you spend the night?”

Same answer.

In the meantime, Marie performed her duties: took the head’s temperature and pulse, washed its eyes, nose, mouth. Then the head read the journals Marie had brought with her. The girl only turned the pages and marked some of the lines if the head gave her a sign to do so. Then she returned the journals to Kern.

Once Marie asked the head why they were marking the articles. The head looked at the cylindrical container with a thick tube that led to his throat, and raised the eyebrows twice. The sign was a request. The head wanted her to turn on the container.

Marie shook her head.

“No, no! I cannot do it. It will kill you!”

On her first day in the clinic Kern had told her that if she touched that container, the head would die.

The head raised its eyes to the ceiling, then quickly closed and reopened them three times.

“No, no, no! I will not die,” understood Marie.

She hesitated. She thought the head of professor Dowell wanted to be killed. She couldn’t let it happen. In spite of her pity for the poor professor.

The head moved its lips, and it seemed to Marie that it was saying, “Do it. Please. I beg you.”

Finally, Marie made up her mind. She felt that there was some mystery behind all that. And the key to the mystery was inside that cylindrical container. Her hands trembled when she turned the cylinder head.

She heard a hissing noise, and then a weak trembling voice saying, “Thank you!”

The next moment she heard another sound – the sound of approaching footsteps. Marie hurried to turn off the forbidden container. The hissing stopped.

Professor Kern entered the room.

Chapter 3. The Head Talks

A week had passed since Marie solved the mystery of the forbidden container. The young woman and the head of professor Dowell had become even closer. When Kern left for the University, Marie turned on the container, and they talked.

Once Marie asked the head if it had dreams.

“Dreams,” answered the head in a low whisper. “Yes, I have dreams. I dream of my wife, of the days we first met. Bettie addressed me as a patient. After her fourth visit I suggested that she have a look at the picture of the girl I was going to ask to marry me. The picture was on the desk, I said. She went up to the desk and saw a small mirror. A week later she became my wife. Bettie died here in Paris. After her death I decided not to return to America. Last night I dreamed of my son. I miss him very much. But it would be cruel to let him see me like this. He thinks I’m dead.”

“How old is he? Where is he now?” asked Marie.

“He is about your age, maybe a little older. He is a biologist, fresh out of the University. At present he must be staying in England, at his aunt’s place.”

The head gave a sad sign, then continued, “I wish I didn’t have any dreams. But there is one more thing that troubles me. Strange as it may seem, I sometimes feel my body. I even feel pain in my left foot. But when I look down, the only thing I see is the stone floor. Sometimes I feel like I’m going to have another attack of asthma. At those moments I’m almost happy that I’m dead.”

When Marie came home that evening, Mrs Loran noticed that her daughter looked very upset. The girl didn’t touch her supper. She just had a cup of tea with lemon, and hurried upstairs to her room.

“You look upset, Marie,” said Mrs Loran. “Problems at work?”

“No. I’m just tired and have a headache. I will go to bed early and sleep it off.”

Mrs Loran didn't hold the girl back. But she was worried. Her loving heart told her that her daughter was hiding something from her. Since Marie began working for professor Kern, she had changed. When Mrs Loran asked her about the new job, the girl avoided straight answers and changed the subject. Could it be that Marie was hopelessly in love with professor Kern, thought the old woman. But no, that was probably not it. Marie would have told her. It was something else. But what? The old woman asked around, but didn't discover anything she didn't already know: Professor Kern had a private clinic for some medically interesting patients, just a few cases, and her daughter looked after them.

Chapter 4. Natural Death or Murder?

Once Marie was looking through some medical journals and saw an article by professor Kern about new scientific discoveries. Kern referred to other scientists working in the same field. The young woman recognized the passages she had marked for professor Dowell.

The next time she was alone with professor Dowell, she asked him, "Did you know that professor Kern had been publishing all these articles under his own name?"

"I suspected as much," answered the head.

"But why do you let it happen?"

"What can I do? I'm just a head without a body. Admit that it would be funny if I claimed copyright. As for money, I don't need any. Fame? I'm famous enough. Besides, if any of this becomes known, it will be the end of our experiments."

Marie was not satisfied with the answer.

"Something tells me that professor Kern will stop at nothing to get what he wants," she said after a while. "When I just started working here, he told me that you had died of an incurable illness. He also told me that in your last will you had left your body to him for medical experiments. Is that true?"

"It is and it isn't," answered the head. "Shortly before my death, I was conducting some very interesting experiments. The purpose of the experiments was to make a human head live on after it had been separated from the dead body. Kern assisted me. I was sure of success and was going to make the results public.

Before the last experiment I handed the manuscript to Kern and asked him to take it to the Surgical Journal. The next day I had a bad asthma attack. Kern gave me an injection of adrenaline. Maybe the dose was too big. I don't know. Anyway, it killed me."

"And what happened then?"

"I woke up from severe pain in the neck. The first thing I heard was Kern's voice, 'I see you've come to. I'm glad to see you alive.' He was standing by the operating table, and on it I saw a dead body. It looked very familiar. But I still didn't understand what it meant. 'You do recognize your body, don't you?' asked Kern. 'Your asthma will trouble you no longer'. He looked very pleased with himself. He didn't lie to you. I did want my body to be used for anatomic purposes. But I never expected it to be used for this very experiment. It is just that Kern turned out to be cleverer than I thought he was."

Marie was shocked.

"And after that you keep working with him! He is a criminal, a murderer!"

"I suppose I have no choice. Besides, Kern is a very good surgeon. If there is anyone who can continue what I had begun, it's him. We need each other. I want to see my work finished."

Chapter 5. The New Inhabitants of the Laboratory

A few days later Kern told Marie that the time had come to go public. He was anxious to share the results of the experiment with other scientists.

"Two dead bodies will be delivered to the clinic tomorrow, and we shall turn them into two speaking heads."

And indeed, when Marie arrived the next morning, she found two fresh bodies on the operating table. One of the bodies had only a little while ago belonged to a young man of about 30 who had been killed in a car accident.

Professor Kern, Marie and John bent over it.

"There were several bodies, but just these two suited our purpose. This young man and that night beauty," he pointed to the other body. "A singer from a night club. Was killed in a shooting. The bullet hit the heart."

Professor Kern worked fast. He seemed very confident in what he was doing. Minutes later, the heads were placed on high glass tables.

“Well,” said Kern, rubbing his hands with great satisfaction. “Now you can turn on those containers, Marie. Go ahead. The cylinders contain nothing but compressed air. He-he!”

He laughed. But the next moment his face became serious, “With the exception of one. That of professor Dowell contains poison. Don’t turn it on – ever. If you do, there will be trouble.”

Marie knew that he was lying, but she just nodded. She approached the cylinders and turned them on.

The man’s head was the first to come to. Its eyelids trembled, and it looked curiously at the three doctors.

“Where am I?” asked the head.

“In a hospital, my friend,” answered Kern.

The head looked down and saw empty space.

“Where are my legs? Where are my arms? Where is my body?”

“You have no body. We had to cut it off. We could only save your head. Do you remember what happened to you?”

“I had an accident. But what am I to do now? No body – no work. One has to eat, one has to drink.”

“What is your name?” interrupted him professor Kern.

“Thomas. Thomas Bussiere.”

“Listen, Thomas. You have nothing to worry about. We’re not going to let you die of hunger. Moreover, you will become famous.”

Kern looked at the other head. It showed no signs of life.

“What is that?” asked Thomas. “Another head without a body?”

“Yes, to keep you company,” answered Kern, and then, turning to Marie, “Turn off the container, miss Loran, our patient is asking too many questions.”

At last, the other head, too, came to life.

“Ah!” cried the former singer when she realized where she was, “A woman without a body! It is even worse than a man without a head! I want you to give me a new body! You must be able to do that. If you can make a head live separate from the body, you must also be able to sew another body to the head.”

“I will think about it,” promised Kern.

And he did.

The more he thought about it, the more he liked the idea. Day after day, he locked himself in with the head of professor Dowell (the head had been moved to a separate room) discussing the details of the new experiment.

Chapter 6. House Arrest

Now Marie had another reason to hate professor Kern. She thought that it was very wrong of him to give Bridget (that was the woman's name) a new body and not to give one to professor Dowell. She was so sick with hatred that she found it difficult to hide her feelings from Kern. He must have suspected something because one day he asked her, "You have not been talking to professor Dowell, have you?"

Marie felt her toes turn cold. Kern put two fingers under the girl's chin and raised her face.

"Don't lie to me," he said. "I know you have. John overheard you."

Marie was silent.

"I just want to find out how much you know."

"I know everything," answered Marie.

"I see."

Kern frowned.

"And what are you going to do with this information? Hand me over to the police?"

"I have thought about it," answered Marie boldly.

"At least you're frank with me. Now tell me, my dear lady, what I'm supposed to do with you now. I hope you realize that it is in my power to make you both disappear from the surface of the earth?"

The girl nodded.

"Let us leave it the way it is. I will not tell anyone what I know," she said loud.

To herself, she added, "Not yet."

"I'm afraid I cannot take your word for it," answered Kern who seemed to read her thoughts. "Sit down."

He placed a piece of paper and a pen in front of the young woman.

“Write:

‘Dear mother,

I will not be able to leave the clinic for a few weeks. I have to look after several patients who need my full attention. Professor Kern was very kind to offer me a room in the hospital. He has also raised my salary. Don’t worry about me. I’m going to be all right. And don’t come to visit me. Professor Kern does not allow any visitors’.”

“Now sign the letter,” said Kern when Marie finished writing.

“How long am I going to stay at the hospital?” asked Marie.

“Until the end of the experiments. Then I will need neither you nor professor Dowell. The head will be destroyed and you will be free to return to your mother or go to the police if you choose. You won’t be able to do me any harm. Nobody will believe you.”

He paused for a moment. When he spoke again, his words came softer.

“John will show you your room. You will like it. It is a beautiful room with a view over the garden. And I didn’t lie about your salary. I’m going to double it. If you need something, tell John. You can go now.”

The room John had taken her to was on the third floor. Marie looked out. The window was too high above the ground. But even if she could escape, she knew she wouldn’t do it. She couldn’t leave professor Dowell.

Chapter 7. Bridget Gets a New Body

Bridget was impatient.

“Do you have my body?” she asked every time professor Kern entered the laboratory.

“Not yet,” answered Kern. “A new body is not a new dress. You cannot order it from a tailor. It is very difficult to find one that would suit us both. You don’t want to be short and fat, do you?”

“No, no!” cried out Bridget, shocked at the idea. “I’ll wait. I want a tall body. And make sure it has beautiful legs. I used to have very beautiful legs.”

“Don’t worry, I will,” promised Kern.

It was also in his own interest to find a beautiful body. A beautiful woman was likely to make a much better impression on the audience, even if it was an audience of scientists most of whom were past middle age. Every day he visited the city morgue to take a look at the new arrivals. Once he even found a suitable body, but the dead girl's relatives refused to give the body away.

That night Kern went to bed early. He was very tired. He had spent all day at the morgue.

He had not slept for 10 minutes when the telephone on his night table went off.

"Hello! Professor Kern speaking. What? A train crash? Lots of dead bodies? I'm coming! Thank you."

"John, get the car ready!" he cried to his assistant, getting up and dressing hurriedly.

Ten minutes later they were racing through the dark streets.

All the tables and even the floor of the morgue were covered with dead bodies. Most of them were badly damaged. But Kern didn't lose hope as the bodies kept on coming.

"Show me that one," he said to a morgue attendant who was carrying a body of a woman dressed in gray. The woman must have died of an injury to the head. The hair was covered with blood. But the dress was not torn. That meant that the body could not have suffered much damage. The woman was strongly built. Bridget is probably not going to like it, thought Kern, but better this one than nothing.

"And what is that?"

Kern bent over another body, and saw a beautiful woman with an aristocratic face. He couldn't believe his luck. The woman had a deep wound over the right ear. Her black silk dress was torn at the shoulder and Kern noticed a birthmark. He measured the girl's neck. Just the right size.

“I’m taking this one,” said Kern to the attendant. “But since there is no time for a careful examination, I’ll take that one too.” He pointed to the other body.

He had to hurry. News of the tragedy was beginning to spread, and he didn’t want to run into relatives of the two girls who could come at any minute now to claim the bodies.

In the clinic everything was ready for the surgery. There wasn’t a moment to lose. Both bodies were washed and placed on the operating table. Kern examined them again, this time more carefully. The body with the birthmark was very beautiful. Kern was sure that Bridget was going to choose that one. He himself would prefer the other. It was big-boned and a little awkward, but it was strong. There was also another thing that worried him. The beautiful body had a small cut on the right foot. Nothing serious, but he wished it were not there.

When Bridget saw the bodies, she gave a loud cry as if she had burnt herself. Her eyes went wide with fear. One of those bodies was going to become her own. She seemed to have second thoughts about getting a body.

“What is wrong?” asked Kern.

“I’m afraid,” whispered Bridget. “I didn’t realize it was going to be so terrible. No! I don’t want a body!”

“Then so be it. If you refuse, I will give one of the bodies to Thomas. Thomas will become a woman.”

“Wait!” cried Bridget. “I have changed my mind. I want that body with the birthmark on the shoulder.”

“And I suggest you choose the other one. It may be not very beautiful but it is without a scratch.”

“I’m not an office-cleaner, I’m an actress!” answered Bridget’s head proudly. “I want a beautiful body. And a birthmark on the shoulder.”

“As you wish,” said Kern, putting an end to the argument.

But when the head was placed on the operating table next to its future body, it again got into a panic.

“No! Please don’t! I would rather die! Oh, I’m so frightened!”

“Shut her up, Marie,” said Professor Kern, “she is making me nervous.”

Marie turned off the container with compressed air. Bridget tried to protest, but no sound came from her lips. Her eyes begged Kern to stop. But after

some time the eyes closed – the anesthetic she had been given before the surgery began to take effect.

Kern got started. Now and then, the silence of the room was interrupted by his short orders. His long fingers of a surgeon moved very fast. The head of professor Dowell is right, thought Marie. Kern may be a criminal, but he is second to none in his field.

Two hours later Kern said, “I have almost finished. See if she has any pulse.”

With a feeling she would not be able to describe, Marie took the arm that only three hours ago belonged to a dead body. The arm was warm!

Chapter 8. Escape

Five days later Bridget could already move her toes, which was a very good sign. But it was not after another ten days that she was allowed to speak. Her voice still sounded a little uneven, but Kern comforted her that it, too, would mend.

Bridget tried to sing. Marie classified her voice as lyric soprano, and was surprised when Bridget suddenly took several low notes. Bridget sang in two different voices! Could this beautiful low voice belong to the body? Marie also noticed that Bridget’s face looked a bit different. It looked younger. Marie became curious.

Not saying anything to Bridget, she began to look through the newspapers which brought lists of people killed in the accident. She found a short story about Italian actress Angelica Galli who had also been on the train and whose body was still missing. That explains everything, thought Marie. The beautiful contralto, the much younger skin. Angelica Galli was only 22.

Then the great day came. Bridget was allowed to leave the bed. Supported by Marie, she made her first steps. Kern was worried by the small cut on her right foot. It healed slowly. But after some time Bridget could step on the foot without feeling pain. She was very pleased with her new body. But for the scar on her neck, it would have been perfect. She would have to cover the scar with a velvet ribbon, she thought.

Bridget asked Marie to get her the latest fashion magazines, and spent hours talking about the style of her new dresses and hats. She was wearing a new dress of grey silk when professor Kern invited her to his office.

He offered her a seat.

“I’m very grateful to you, professor. You have done so much for me,” said Bridget. “I wish I knew how to repay you.”

“You don’t need to. I’ve already got my reward,” answered Kern.

“Can I leave the hospital now?” asked Bridget.

“Leave?” Kern didn’t seem to understand.

“Yes. Leave. Go home. Just imagine the faces of the girls in the club when they see me!”

“I cannot let you go. Not yet. You will have to stay for another several days. You’re still too weak.”

“But I feel great.”

“You may get worse.”

“If I get worse, I will come back.”

“I’m afraid you don’t understand, Bridget. It is for me and only for me to decide when you’re going to leave the clinic. You have no say in the matter. And now go back to your room. It is time for supper.”

Bridget rose and, without looking at Kern, left the room.

“Professor Kern said he was not going to let me go home for several more days,” she said to Marie who was waiting for her in the dining room. “He thinks I’m his property. But I’m not.”

Bridget sat down opposite Marie and made a graceful gesture with her right hand. Marie had noticed this gesture before and had been wondering whether it belonged to the body of Angelica Galli or to Bridget.

“I’m not the sit-at-home sort,” continued Bridget. “I’m used to loud music, flowers, champagne. Instead, they give me chicken soup.”

She made a grimace of disgust. Then she rose, went up to the window and looked out. There was a drop of eight feet from the window to the ground. A plan was taking shape in her head, but she was not going to share it with Marie.

“Good night, Miss Loran,” she said. “Don’t wake me tomorrow. I won’t have breakfast. I’m sick and tired of chicken soup”.

That night Marie didn't sleep well. She turned from side to side, thinking about the future. Her future. Will Kern ever let her go?

Bridget didn't seem to sleep either. Marie heard her move about the room. "The girl is probably trying on her new dresses," thought Marie. At last, she fell asleep. Through her sleep she heard a soft cry, then everything was quiet again. "My nerves must be playing tricks on me," thought Marie, and went back to sleep.

Next morning Bridget didn't join her for breakfast. At ten o'clock Marie knocked at the girl's door, but there was no answer. Marie looked inside. The room was empty. The bed looked as if it had not been slept in. Bridget had run off.

"It's all your doing!" shouted Kern. "You helped her escape."

Marie had never seen him that angry.

"I didn't know anything about her plans," she said firmly.

"I will deal with you later," answered Kern. "Now we must find that stupid girl before she has told everyone in this town about what she has seen here. We'll have to address a private detective agency. The police cannot be involved."

The agent he hired knew his business. "Give me 24 hours," he said. "By tomorrow afternoon I will bring her back, or my name is not Claude Limier."

Two days later the detective had to admit to himself that this time his nose had failed him. The girl had disappeared without a trace.

Chapter 9. Going South

Bridget climbed over the fence and called a taxi.

"Take me to Père-Lachaise," she told the driver.

But before they reached la Place de la Bastille, she changed to another taxi and went to Montmartre.

It was four o'clock in the morning. The taxi stopped near a small café that was still open. Bridgette paid the driver from the money she had stolen from Marie's purse (that was a sin she had to take upon her soul), and walked to cabaret Chat Noir where a deadly bullet had cut off her merry song a month ago.

Bridget entered the hall, went past the sleepy doorman and disappeared through the side door which led to the dressing-rooms. The doorman didn't seem to recognize her. The first person Bridget met was Red Martha, her best friend. Martha gave a loud cry and locked herself in her dressing-room.

"Hello, beautiful," said a man's voice behind Bridget's back. "And we thought you were dead."

The voice belonged to a tall handsome man.

"Hello, Jean!" answered Bridget. "I'm afraid, the news of my death was slightly exaggerated."

Bridget decided not to tell anybody about the operation, not even to Martha or her husband Jean. She was afraid that the relatives of the girl whose body she had received might take it away from her. So she went on lying.

"Everyone thought I was dead, and they took me to the morgue. I was lucky. There was a medical student examining the bodies. He put a mirror to my lips and saw that I was breathing. It seems the bullet went close to the heart but didn't touch it. They sent me to the hospital, the doctors patched me up, and here I am!"

There was a gentle click, and the door of the dressing-room opened. Martha, who had been listening behind the door, took Bridget in her arms.

"You look different," she said taking a step back and studying Bridget's new body. "Thinner and taller."

For a moment Bridget didn't know what to say. Martha's curious look confused her.

"I... I have lost weight. They gave me nothing but chicken soup. Chicken soup for breakfast, chicken soup for lunch and chicken soup for supper."

"And your height?" asked Martha suspiciously.

"I bought new shoes with high heels. As simple as that."

But Martha was not convinced. She felt that Bridget was not telling the truth. At least, not the whole truth.

"And your face? What did you do to your face? You look ten years younger."

"I do? I didn't notice," lied Bridget. She had been spending several hours a day studying herself in the mirror and watching her wrinkles disappear. "I guess it is the hospital. No wine, no cigarettes, and lots of sleep."

“Hum!” answered Martha, giving her friend another suspicious look. “And what are you doing here at this late hour?”

“I have run away from the hospital.”

Jean gave a gentle whistle.

“I think we’d better get inside,” said he.

When the door behind them closed, Bridget explained, “I got sick and tired of the chicken soup. I thought I could drown in it. But the doctor wouldn’t let me go. He wanted to show me to his students. When he finds out that I have run away, he may send the police after me. I cannot go home. I thought I might stay at your place. Or even leave Paris. But I don’t have enough money.”

“Leave Paris. Hmm! I think it is a very good idea,” said Jean, lighting a cigarette. “A change of air will do us good. We could go to Riviera, the three of us. I haven’t seen the sun for two months, and I’m beginning to forget what it looks like.”

Bridget knew that hiding from the police was Jean’s primary occupation. When he was not working, he was hiding. Few of his friends knew how Jean earned his living. He had the money to pay for their drinks, and that was all that mattered.

“You’re a darling!” said Martha kissing her husband. “When are we going?”

“As soon as you have packed the suitcases.”

Chapter 10. A Chance Meeting

It was 7 o’clock when Arman Laret entered the casino. In spite of the early hour, people were crowding around the gambling tables.

“Ladies and gentlemen, place your bets,” said the croupier at the nearest to Arman roulette table.

“Let us see if the old saying is right,” thought the young man approaching the table. If the saying did not lie and the unlucky in love were lucky in the games of chance, he was supposed to win. He placed a hundred francs on red – and won. Then he placed two hundred francs on black – and won again.

“It looks like it is correct after all,” thought Arman, but it didn’t make him feel any better.

The young man wasn't just unlucky. He was very, very unhappy.

The news of the train crash reached Arman Laret in London. He had parted with Angelica in Calais, from where she had taken a train to Paris. He had returned to Dover, and from there to London, to his unfinished painting. (Arman Laret was an artist.) And now Angelica was dead.

Arman refused to accept it. He kept looking out for her on the streets of Paris. Had it not been for Arthur Dowell, his old friend and classmate, he would have lost his mind. Arthur had not left his side ever since they learned about the train crash. It was his idea to go to Nice. He thought that a trip to the south of France might distract Arman, take his mind off the sad thoughts. But it didn't help very much. Arman could not find any peace.

He rose from the table and looked around. He didn't know what he was doing among these dressed-up people. He hated this place.

He made a few steps toward the door, then suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. His eyes were fixed on the three people who had just entered the casino – a man and two women. One of the women made a graceful gesture with her right hand. He knew this gesture only too well. Arman shook his head like someone who believes that he is seeing things. The woman was still there, talking to her red-haired companion. He was sure that he had never seen her before. The three crossed the room and entered the restaurant. Arman followed them.

At 4 o'clock in the morning someone knocked on the door of the hotel room. Arthur Dowell opened his eyes, still half-asleep. Another knock. The young man got up, slipped a shirt over his bare shoulders and opened the door.

Arman Laret walked into the room and sank into the armchair. He looked sick.

"What happened?" asked Arthur.

"I saw her. I saw Angelica."

"You went to the morgue?"

"No. I was at the casino. But I saw Angelica's body. It had the head of another woman."

"Poor fellow!" thought Arthur. "He is going to drive himself into madness."

But he just shook his head and didn't say anything. A smile touched Arman's lips.

"I know how it sounds," he said after a small pause. "You must be thinking that I'm out of my mind."

"Never mind what I think. Just tell me what happened," answered Arthur.

And Arman told his friend how he had been walking aimlessly about the streets of Nice until he had finally landed in the casino and run into a man accompanied by two women.

"I followed them into the restaurant and ordered a coffee. From where I was sitting I had a good look at all three of them. The man had an unnaturally pale and yellowish face. It was the face of someone who spends too much time indoors. The woman to his right looked rather vulgar with her red hair and a loud voice. But the other... The other looked different. It is difficult to describe her. Her face was rather pretty but it was a commonplace face. Anyhow, it was not the face that made me almost lose my mind but the body. Because it was Angelica's body."

"Accidental resemblance. There are many people who look alike."

"I agree, there are. But listen what happened next. They were drinking wine and talking. Then the red-haired woman began to sing. The other woman joined in. She had a beautiful low voice. A contralto. Dowell, I recognized the voice at once. It was Angelica's voice."

"It could have been a hallucination. You know how it works. You expect to hear something and you think you hear it. Or see it."

"But not in this case. I'm an artist, and artists see things differently. I have painted Angelica so many times. I know every detail, every curve of her beautiful body."

"What are you trying to say, Arman? Do you mean this mysterious woman actually has Angelica's body?"

"I'm not trying to say anything. I'm just telling you what I saw. And there is one more thing. The woman was wearing a dress which left her shoulders open. When they were leaving, they passed near my table, and I noticed a birthmark on the woman's right shoulder. Angelica had such a birthmark. On her neck the woman wore a velvet ribbon. It was at least three centimetres wide. It looked like a bandage."

"What you're saying sounds like madness. Angelica is dead."

“We don’t know that for sure. Her body has not been found.”

Dowell rose and started walking up and down the room. If his father were alive, he could have allowed for a minute, just one minute, that there might be something in Arman’s story. But his father was dead. Besides, his father had worked with individual organs. Could it be that one of his assistants had gone further and now knew how to bring back to life a whole body? It seemed very unlikely. But even if that were the case, was it possible to make one person out of two dead ones? No.

“What are you going to do next?” asked Dowell.

“I’m going to find these people, make friends with them and learn the woman’s secret.”

Chapter 11. Bridget’s Secret

Several days later Arman invited his new friends to a pleasure trip on a sailboat. He didn’t hide his interest in Bridget. After some time he offered to show her the boat. It had a small kitchen and two cabins. They went below decks. In one of the rooms there was a piano. Bridget touched the instrument and began to sing in a low voice.

“What a strange voice you have,” said Arman. “It is as if it belonged to two different people.”

The remark took Bridget by surprise, and for a moment she didn’t know what to say.

“I ... I have a cold,” was all she could think of.

Arman did not believe her. Without taking his eyes off the girl’s face, he said, “Your contralto reminds me of a woman I once knew. She died in a train crash. Her body is still missing. If I didn’t know that it was impossible, I could have sworn that you have her body. They are so much alike.”

Bridget felt cold sweat break out on her forehead. Why did he say that? Did he suspect her of having stolen that woman’s body?

“There are people who look very much alike,” she said, her voice trembling.

“But not that much,” answered Arman. “And your gestures... They, too, remind me of Angelica.”

Bridget rose, trying not to meet his eyes. She was afraid that her eyes might give her away.

“I can’t stay here any more. I ... I feel sea-sick. It is too hot in here. Let us join the others.”

She turned to go, but he put his hand on her shoulder trying to stop her. As if by accident, his fingers touched the lock on her velvet ribbon, and it opened.

His mouth went dry. For a moment, all he could do was look at the fresh scar on the girl’s neck. She, too, looked at him, her eyes wide with fear.

“Please, have mercy! Don’t hurt me,” whispered Bridget.

“No one is going to hurt you. All I want is the truth. It isn’t your body, is it?”

Bridget shook her head. Tears were running down her cheeks. She wiped them absently with her right hand.

“Please, have mercy!” repeated the girl through her tears. “It isn’t my fault. I was killed. Then suddenly I was alive again. But just the head on a little glass table. It was terrible. Thomas’s head was also there. I don’t know how it happened. Professor Kern... I asked him to give me a body. He promised. And then one day he brought this.”

The girl’s face showed something close to disgust when she looked down at her arms and legs. She swallowed hard to hold back the tears and continued, “When I saw the dead body, I was shocked. I told them I had changed my mind. I said I didn’t want a body any more. I begged them for mercy. But professor Kern wouldn’t listen. You can ask Miss Loran. She is his assistant. When I woke up after the operation, I was already like this. I didn’t want to stay at the clinic and escaped to Paris. Then Jean brought me here. I knew that Kern would hire somebody to follow me. Don’t kill me, I beg you, and don’t tell anybody. I don’t want to be just a head without a body any more. I’ve got used to this body. It has become part of me. I’ve never felt so full of energy. Just the right foot aches a little. I must have danced too much. But the pain will go. I don’t want to return to Kern.”

Arman listened to the girl’s confused story without interrupting. When she finished, he said, “Stop crying and listen to me. I will help you. I know a place in Paris where you can hide. But you must not repeat your story to anyone. It may be dangerous. Do your friends know?”

Bridget shook her head.

“Very good. Keep it that way. But you will have to repeat your story to Arthur Dowell. I’m sure he is going to find it very interesting. I will now go upstairs and send him down. Sit down at the piano and play something merry. Your friends must not suspect anything.”

Bridget obeyed. Playing calmed her down, and when she was telling her story to Arthur Dowell, she sounded less confused and added a few more details.

“You said there was one more head besides yours and Thomas’s,” said Arthur. “Can you describe it?”

“It was the head of an old man. I only saw it once. It was kept in another room. After the operation Kern took me there to show me to the head. To boast, I think. The head congratulated Kern on his success. Kern looked very pleased. I noticed that the man’s opinion mattered very much to him. Could it have been another scientist? What is it? Are you unwell? You look so pale.”

“I’ll be alright,” answered Arthur, struggling to overcome a sudden feeling of sickness. It seemed that not only his mind, but his stomach refused to accept the idea that was making its way through his head.

He took a few unsteady steps and sank in the armchair. Was it possible that Kern had brought his father’s head back to life and was now hiding it at his place? Taking advantage of his father’s helpless condition? Picking his brains?

Bridget felt that something was wrong.

“Did my story upset you? Who is that man?” asked she.

“I don’t know,” said Arthur. “But I will.”

Chapter 12. Bridget’s Illness

The next day Arthur, Arman and Bridget were on a train travelling north. Only in Paris they could find the answer to the mystery.

Bridget was part of the mystery, living proof of professor Kern’s wrongdoings. They decided to hide the girl in a small house which belonged to Arman’s father. No one would look for her there.

The pain in Bridget’s right foot was getting worse. She did not complain, but Arman noticed that she was limping. The foot was red and swollen.

“We need to show you to a doctor. I know one we can trust,” he said.

The doctor came.

“Well?” asked him Arman when the doctor joined him in the sitting room after having examined Bridget.

“So far, nothing serious,” answered the doctor. “I have ordered cold compresses and absolute rest. Get a nurse to sit with the patient. I will drop in every other day.”

“Is she suffering?” asked Arman.

“Yes. An injury like this usually causes a lot of pain.”

“Poor girl! She never once complained,” thought Arman.

When the doctor was gone, Arman entered the girl’s room.

“How do you feel?” he asked.

“Better,” answered Bridget. “The doctor gave me an injection to ease the pain.”

Without realizing what he was doing, Arman took the girl’s hand and stroke it gently. “After all, the hand had once belonged to Angelica,” he thought after the fact, trying to find an excuse for his action.

Bridget smiled.

“You’re so kind,” she said. “The other day, on the boat, you frightened me. But now I’m no longer afraid of you.”

Arman studied the girl’s face. It had changed. Now she looked no more than 20. And much more beautiful.

He rose to go. Then, all of a sudden, he bent and kissed the girl on the forehead. This time he didn’t ask himself whom he was kissing – Angelica or Bridget. He just did it.

Bridget closed her eyes. She felt that something new had just entered her life. Cabaret, loud music, attention of drunken guests – nothing mattered any more. Her ideas of happiness had changed. She was reborn into new life. A better one. If only she could recover!

Chapter 13. Arthur Dowell Gathers Information

“Missis Loran?”

“Yes.”

“Is your daughter home?”

“My daughter?” Mrs Loran sized up the young man. “Does she know you? Who are you?”

“My name is Radier. I’m a doctor. I work in hospital in Toulon. May I come in?”

The old woman stepped back letting the visitor in. They entered a small tidy sitting-room.

“Your daughter?” asked the stranger pointing at a picture on the bookshelf.

The woman nodded.

“I learned from a friend that Miss Loran worked for professor Kern,” said the visitor taking the offered seat.

The woman became suspicious.

“Has Kern sent you?” she asked nervously.

“No. But I would like to meet him. The thing is that we work in the same field of medicine. I’ve been told that professor Kern keeps himself very much to himself, and it is very difficult to get in touch with him. I thought that your daughter might help me to contact him.”

“I’m afraid my daughter cannot help you.”

Mrs Loran looked at the picture on the bookshelf, and her eyes filled with tears.

“She is in hospital,” she whispered.

“In hospital?”

Mrs Loran could not bear it any longer. All this time she had been alone with her grief. She forgot about caution and told the young man all she knew. She told him that she had not seen her daughter ever since she received a letter in which Marie wrote that Kern kept her so busy that she had to sleep at the clinic; she told him about her unsuccessful attempts to visit her daughter at her place of work; she also told him how worried she was when Kern informed her that Marie had suffered a nervous breakdown and had to be taken to a mental hospital.

“I hate that man,” said the old woman, wiping her tears. “He has worked my daughter into mental illness. She used to be such a quiet girl. I don’t know what she was doing at that clinic, but since she started working there she became very nervous. I could hardly recognize her. She began to talk in her sleep, which had never happened before. She had bad dreams. Always the same. Some talking head she had to protect from professor Kern.”

“Did she mention any names?” asked the visitor, leaning forward.

“Just two. Kern and Dowell. She spoke of the talking head as the head of professor Dowell. The head seemed to be in danger. And the danger came from Kern.”

The young man grew pale, but the woman, wrapped up in her sad story, didn't seem to notice.

“Kern keeps sending me my daughter's salary. But I don't want the money. I want my daughter back,” she said, and again burst into tears.

Arthur decided not to hide the real purpose of his visit from the poor woman. He said, “Mrs Loran, I see that I can be frank with you. I, too, have every reason to hate Kern. I came here in the hope that your daughter might help me to get even with this ... this criminal, help me unmask him and uncover his crimes.”

“Crimes!” cried out Mrs Loran.

“Yes, crimes. But don't worry, I'm sure your daughter has nothing to do with it.”

“I know she doesn't,” answered the woman proudly. “My daughter would rather die than do something dishonest.”

“I was going to ask Miss Loran for assistance. Now I see that she herself needs help. I have reason to believe that your daughter is not mad. I think Kern wanted her out of the way.”

“But why?”

“Because, as you said, your daughter would rather die than do something dishonest. She might have become dangerous. She probably knows too much. Do you have any idea which hospital she was taken to?”

“Yes. He told me. But not before I had threatened to bring a complaint against him. It is a private hospital in Sceaux. I went there. It looks like a prison, with a high wall all around the place. They didn't let me in. They don't allow any visitors. So I was told. Not even parents. The visits produced a bad effect on the patients, they got too excited, said the doctor I talked to.”

“I will try to get in touch with your daughter. I cannot promise anything, but I will do my best to set her free,” said Arthur rising from his seat.

He didn't say it just to comfort the woman. He needed to talk to Marie Loran. She seemed to know so much that Kern thought it necessary to put her away in a mental hospital. And there was one more thing. The girl got into trouble trying to protect his father from Kern. Now it was Arthur's turn to help the brave girl. He felt that he owed her that much.

Chapter 14. Bridget Disappears

Marie Loran lived near la Gare d'Austerlitz. It was just a twenty minutes' walk from where Arman was hiding Bridget, and Arthur decided to pay a visit to his friends. He had not seen much of them since they returned to Paris.

He ran into Arman in the doorway. The artist looked very upset.

"What happened?" asked Arthur.

"She has run away."

"Who?"

"Bridget, who else?"

"But why? Why would she run away? Can you speak clearly?"

But Arman could not. He kept running up and down the room, with his hands to his temples, sighing loudly. Ten minutes passed before he spoke.

"Yesterday Bridget complained of growing pain in the foot. I took a look at it. It was badly swollen and blue in color. I called the doctor. He examined the foot and said that things had become worse. Gangrene had started, and an operation was necessary. He said that Bridget had to be taken to hospital immediately. But Bridget refused. She was afraid that doctors in the hospital would notice the scar on her neck. She kept crying and saying that she had to return to Kern. Professor Kern had warned her about the complications, but she wouldn't listen, and now she was punished. She said she trusted Kern. He was a good surgeon. If he had been able to give her a new body, she said, he might also be able to cure her foot. I tried to reason with her, to talk her into going to hospital, but in vain. So I decided to change my tactics. I told her that I was going to take her to Kern myself. I wanted to outwit Bridget, but she outwitted me. I couldn't just take her to any hospital, so I left her for an hour and went to discuss the matter with the doctors I knew. When I came back, the cage was empty. But there was a note."

Arman handed his friend a piece of paper.

"Please forgive me," read Arthur, "I have to go back to Kern. He will cure me. It is comforting to know that one day we may meet again."

The note was not signed.

"Look at the handwriting," said Arman. "It is Angelica's hand."

“Hum,” said Arthur absent-mindedly.

He was thinking about the unexpected complication. Bridget’s disappearance made things more difficult for them. Besides, Bridget might talk. She knew about their plans to unmask Kern. What if she warned him? She could do it out of gratitude. Arthur shared his doubts with his friend.

“I don’t think she will give us away,” said the artist. “She gave me her word, and I have reasons to believe her.”

Arthur knew what reasons his friend was referring to. Arman’s growing interest in Bridget had not escaped him. Most likely, the girl returned his feelings. He felt sorry for his friend. It was the second time the poor fellow was losing Angelica, now in the shape of another woman.

“Let us hope she will keep quiet,” said Arthur. “If she talks, we won’t be able to take Kern by surprise. He’s been on guard ever since Bridget escaped. For the same reason we cannot go to the police. Kern may panic and destroy all traces of his crimes. He will kill my father’s head. He may even kill Bridget, because she, too, is living proof of his criminal experiments.”

At these last words the artist grew pale. Arthur noticed it, and hurried to calm his friend.

“But we must not despair. Nothing is lost yet. It seems we have a friend in the enemy’s camp,” and he told Arman about his conversation with Mrs Loran.

“Let us go and talk to the girl right away,” said the artist.

“I wish it was as simple as that. I’m afraid the girl is held prisoner. And from what I have learned, the place is a fortress. It is difficult to get in, and even more difficult to get out. Besides, it would be unwise for us to appear there under our own names. We will put the entire plan at risk. I wish we could find someone who could do it instead of us.”

“I know just the man,” said Arman.

Chapter 15. Jeremy Shelton’s Story

Jeremy Shelton was a young man of 25. He had arrived from Canada only a few months ago, and there was little chance that he might run into an acquaintance in Sceaux. The fact that Shelton was an artist could also be turned to

their advantage. The painter's case excused his appearance in the little town. With a bit of luck, he might even gain access to hospital workers and bribe one of them.

Shelton seemed to be eager for adventure, and didn't ask many questions. He calculated to be back in three days. But he miscalculated. He was back the next evening.

"I'm afraid I haven't been able to find out very much," he said. "But I have found out something. The hospital belongs to a doctor who calls himself Ravino. Nobody knows what goes on behind the high walls of the hospital. But there is a rumour that the hospital is sort of a prison for wealthy people, a place where impatient relatives can put away their rich aunts, uncles, wives or husbands who don't seem to be in a hurry to die. Ravino gets good money for his services. The hospital staff are loyal to him. He pays his people very well. But that is not the only reason for their silence. They are forbidden to leave the hospital or talk to strangers under pain of death. For the most part, these are lonely people or people who have problems with the law. Not long ago one of the male nurses ran away. The next day his dead body was found not far from the hospital. When I arrived at Sceaux, I didn't know any of this, and tried to get over the wall. But before I could jump down on the other side, I was attacked by several huge dogs."

He demonstrated his torn trousers.

"I quickly climbed back. Had I not been fast enough, the dogs would have torn me to pieces."

"I'm sorry I have failed you," finished Shelton.

"You have not," answered Dowell. "Now we know much more and can work out a plan of action."

Chapter 16. Professor Kern Carries Out His Threat

A small room. White walls. A white table, two white chairs. A white bed covered with a gray blanket. A window with a view of the garden.

Marie Loran is sitting at the window. Her face is very thin, with dark rings around the eyes.

Quiet sound of music fills the room. When Marie heard the sad melody for the first time, she liked it. But the music didn't stop. It went on and on. Marie

stopped her ears, but it didn't help. After an hour she was almost sure that the music existed only in her head. I'm beginning to hear things, thought the girl.

"Soon I will be one of them," she said to herself, looking at the other patients out in the garden. "That's all I've managed to achieve."

The memory of her last meeting with Kern made her close her fists.

"Do you remember our first conversation in this very room when you came here looking for a job?" asked Kern.

Marie nodded.

"You promised to keep quiet about everything you see or hear within these walls. Did you not?"

"So I did."

"Well, repeat your promise, and you can go and see your mother."

"I'm afraid I cannot do that. When I gave you the promise, I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know what I was letting myself in for. If I did, I wouldn't have given you my word. You didn't tell me the whole truth. You chose to keep me in the dark."

"Does that mean you consider yourself free of your promise?"

"Yes."

"And you will report me to the police the moment you get a chance to do so?"

"Yes."

"Well, at least you're frank with me. It makes things much easier."

That night Marie didn't sleep very well. She turned from side to side thinking about her conversation with the doctor. Perhaps the head of professor Dowell was right and she should have kept her intentions to herself. It was not very clever of her to speak her mind. But what was done, was done.

Suddenly Marie heard some noise. It came from behind the wardrobe. "Mice?" thought the girl. She raised her head, listening. And then, before she could turn on the light, two strong hands pressed her head against the pillow, and she felt the smell of chloroform.

"That is the end," thought Marie, and lost consciousness.

When she came to, she was in the hospital. Professor Kern had carried out his threat, remaining unpunished.

Chapter 17. A Difficult Case

Doctor Ravino had been studying Marie Loran for some time. The girl looked quiet and easy to control, but the doctor knew that appearances could be deceptive. "It is going to be a difficult case," he thought. He liked difficult cases. He didn't doubt for a minute that in the end he would break the girl's will. He knew how.

"How are you feeling?" he asked the girl during one of his rounds.

"I'm fine, thank you."

"We do all we can for our patients," continued the doctor, "but unusual environment can make some people very unhappy. They feel lonely and depressed."

"I'm used to loneliness," answered the girl.

"To tell the truth, there is nothing wrong with you. You're just tired from overwork and a little depressed. Professor Kern told me that you had assisted him in his medical experiments."

He paused waiting for a comment. But Marie was silent.

"Your boss placed you here so you could have a rest," continued Ravino.

"I'm very grateful to professor Kern," was all he heard from the girl.

"Why don't you go and take a walk in the garden?"

"They don't allow me to leave this room."

"I think doctor Bush misinterpreted my recommendations. A walk in the garden cannot do you any harm."

Marie suspected that for some reason Ravino had cancelled his earlier recommendations, but she decided not to give it another thought. She would do better to follow the doctor's advice before he changed his mind.

She left her room and went down a long gray corridor. From behind the closed doors she heard loud cries and laughter of madmen. For some time the music in her head became silent, but as soon as she entered the garden, it came back. She looked around. Do other patients hear it too, she wondered.

Suddenly a figure in a gray hospital gown blocked her way.

"Those are happy who don't know of the unknown," said the figure.

Marie raised her eyes and saw that the gray gown belonged to a tall young man with a handsome aristocratic face. Before she could cry for help, the young man said in a whisper, "I know you. You're Marie Loran."

Marie looked closer. There was something familiar in the young man's face, but she was sure that she had never seen him before.

"Who are you?" whispered the girl.

"I'm Napoleon Bonaparte. You will ask me what I'm doing here. Well, I don't mind telling you that," said the young man loud.

Marie looked around and saw a male nurse whose duty was probably to listen to the patients' conversations and then let on to Ravino.

"My wife Josephine is not quite right in the head," continued the young man. "She thinks that my name is not Napoleon but —" he again lowered his voice to a whisper, "but Dowell. Arthur Dowell."

Marie cried out. The nurse took a few steps in their direction. The madman left the girl's side, turned and ran after another patient who happened to pass by. The nurse ran after them.

After some time Marie heard a voice calling out to her from behind a tree.

"Miss Loran, I need to talk to you," said the voice. "Don't be afraid. I'm not going to hurt you."

Marie stopped. She took off her shoe and shook it, as if trying to shake out a little stone that had got in.

"I'm Arthur Dowell, the son of professor Dowell, and I'm not mad. I'm here to help you escape. Be ready tonight."

It was the longest night Marie had spent in the hospital. The minutes crawled, endless and dull, like the quiet music that filled the room. It didn't stop even at night.

Marie nervously walked up and down the brightly lit room. The light in the rooms never went off. It was part of Ravino's "treatment". Suddenly Marie stopped and listened. She thought she heard footsteps. Somebody was moving quietly down the corridor. Marie felt her pulse quicken. But it was only the night nurse.

Marie slipped under the blanket and pretended to be fast asleep. And a strange thing happened: the moment her head touched the pillow the tired girl

sank into a restless sleep. She must have slept for half an hour when she felt a hand on her shoulder. Arthur Dowell was standing at her bed and shaking her gently.

“Quick,” he said in a whisper, “the nurse is in the western wing.”

He took her by the hand, and she followed him down the long corridor and from there into the dark park. They made several steps when Dowell suddenly pulled her down.

“Duck! Quick!” he whispered.

Marie did as she was told, and the next moment saw a watchman. The man went by only a meter from their hiding place.

“That was close,” said Arthur when the watchman was out of hearing distance.

No sooner had he spoken these words that Marie saw a huge dog. She froze with fear.

“Don’t be afraid,” said Arthur. “The dog will not attack us. I have been feeding the hospital dogs ever since I arrived here.”

And indeed, having recognized Dowell, the dog approached them wagging its tail in a friendly way and let the young man stroke its neck.

“You’ve been here long?” asked Marie.

“A week.”

They reached the wall without further incidents.

“Now we have to climb over the wall, and we’re safe. Our friends are waiting for us on the other side. Come, I will help you.”

Dowell leaned against the wall and helped Marie to climb up. At that moment one of the watchmen noticed them and sounded the alarm.

“Jump! Quick!” shouted Dowell.

But Marie hesitated.

“And what about you?”

“Jump!” repeated his order Dowell, and Marie jumped. Strong hands caught her up on the other side of the wall.

Arthur was about to follow the girl but two male nurses seized his legs and tried to pull him down. The young man was so strong that he almost lifted the two nurses in the air. But then his hands slipped and he fell, right down on his opponents.

Chapter 18. A Hard Nut to Crack

Dowell was put in a straightjacket and taken to a small room without windows. The walls of the room were covered with mattresses. Dowell had heard of such rooms. They were meant for violent patients.

The nurses threw him on the floor and left. After a moment the door opened again and Ravino entered the room. The doctor looked down at the helpless man, and a nasty grin appeared on his face.

“You’re a good actor, I’ll give you that,” he said. “But you could not cheat me. I saw through you the day you were brought here, and I have been watching you. I failed to outguess your intentions, though. You and Miss Loran will pay dearly for your little trick.”

“Not half as dearly as you,” answered Dowell.

Ravino laughed.

“What do you intend to do? Report me to the police? I’m sorry to disappoint you, my friend, but you will not be able to report anybody.”

“I have friends.”

“Your friends cannot help you. When the police arrive, it will be too late for you. They will not find you here. Not a single trace of your presence. By the way, Du Barry is not your real name, is it? What is your real name?”

“Arthur Dowell. I’m the son of professor Dowell.”

Ravino was surprised.

“Pleased to meet you,” he said, trying to hide his embarrassment and not quite making it. He gave the young man another look, then turned and left the room. It was pointless to continue the conversation. His inquisitorial talents, so effective on other patients, would be wasted on a man like Dowell. To break him, he needed more than just words.

Hours went by, but nothing happened. Ravino seemed to have forgotten about his prisoner. But the young man knew that they were watching him. When Ravino had gone, Arthur made an attempt to loosen the knots of the straightjacket, and he almost succeeded. But when he was about to set his arms free, the two nurses entered the room and tied him up again.

Soon he felt hungry. But nobody brought him any food.

“They want me to starve to death,” thought Arthur.

He could ask for food, but he decided not to. If they wanted him to die of hunger, it was no use begging for food or drink.

Dowell didn't know that Ravino was testing him. To the doctor's great disappointment, the prisoner passed the test. The doctor didn't know then that he was in for another, even greater, disappointment. After some time Dowell fell asleep. Neither the bright light, nor the doctor's musical experiments seemed to make an impression on the young man. Arthur Dowell slept like a log.

The sound of gunshots woke him up. It came from the corridor. Then Ravino's voice cried, “What are you looking at? Get them into straightjackets! Don't be deceived by their uniforms. They are impostors!” There was the sound of a fight, followed by another gunshot. Somebody gave a cry of pain. Then a familiar voice said, “Open the door, doctor!”

The doctor seemed to put up resistance because another minute passed before the key turned in the lock and two policemen entered the room. One of them was pushing Ravino in front of him. The doctor struggled to set himself free, but the policeman held him tight.

“Why don't you get a dose of your own medicine, doctor?” said the policeman. “It will do you good.”

He untied Arthur and the two policemen put the straightjacket onto the struggling doctor.

Arthur silently watched his friends, too surprised to speak.

“Sorry we couldn't come sooner, buddy,” said Arman searching the doctor's pockets for the key to the restraint room. “We had to think of another plan. Your imprisonment took us by surprise. We were not ready for such turn of events. Luckily, I have some friends in theatrical circles. They let us borrow these two costumes. I never expected that the police uniform would suit me that well. Perhaps I have missed my vocation – I should have become a policeman.”

“Where is Miss Loran?” asked Arthur.

“She is safe,” answered Arman. “And sound enough to give evidence in a court of law – when it comes to that.”

He gave the doctor a meaningful look.

“So long, doctor! I hope you don't feel too lonely here.”

With these words he locked the doctor in, and put the key in his pocket.

Chapter 19. Again Without a Body

Professor Kern was so happy to see Bridget that he even forgot to scold her. Perhaps he just didn't want to add insult to injury. It was clear that the girl was suffering. John had to carry her in – she could hardly walk.

“Forgive me, doctor,” said Bridget when she saw Kern. “I didn't listen to you.

“And punished yourself,” answered the doctor helping John to put her in bed. “Let me see your right leg.”

The leg was swollen up to the knee and was dark in color. Kern shook his head.

“I danced too much”, confessed Bridget, “and the little wound opened. I didn't give it another thought.”

“And continued dancing?”

“No. It hurt too much. But I played tennis for another few days.”

“Hum! Tennis. Who did you play with?”

Bridget felt confused.

“With a young man.”

“With a young man. I see. Aren't you going to tell me what happened to you after you ran away from me?”

“I was at my friend's place. She was very surprised to see me alive. I told her that my wound had not been fatal and that the doctors had patched me up.”

“You didn't mention me or the heads to any of your friends?”

“Of course not. It would be a strange thing to do. They would think I was mad.”

Kern was relieved to hear that.

“It was clever of you to keep quiet. But you shouldn't have played tennis. Now we'll have to amputate your leg.”

“Amputate? What does it mean?”

“It means that we'll have to cut it off.”

Bridget's eyes went wide with fear.

“Cut off my leg! My leg! No! I don't want to lose my leg!”

Neither did Kern. He didn't want to disfigure the beautiful body he had brought to life at such cost.

"All right," he said. "Let us wait till tomorrow."

But in the night Bridget became worse. Her body temperature rose rapidly, she broke out in a cold sweat and talked feverishly in her sleep. The gangrene was progressing. There wasn't a moment to lose.

"Get her ready for the surgery," said Kern to John.

At two o'clock Bridget was on the operating table. She was conscious and looked at Kern the way people sentenced to be hanged look at the hangman.

"Please, have mercy," whispered the unhappy girl.

"I'll do my best. But if anything goes wrong, you will have only yourself to blame," answered Kern, and gave John a sign to put the anesthetic mask on her face.

It was almost noon when Bridget came to. She sat up in bed and looked at her leg. It was cut off at the knee.

Kern entered the room.

"What shall I do now without my leg?" asked him Bridget.

"Don't worry. I will give you another, a better one," comforted her Kern, wishing there was somebody to comfort him. Because he, too, was worried. The red above the knee was spreading, and the girl was still a little feverish.

In the evening the fever rose to 40.6 degrees. Kern cursed. It was clear to him that blood poisoning had started. But if he acted fast, he could still save the head. For the second time, he told John to take Bridget to the operating table.

Bridget was unconscious and didn't feel the cold steel of the surgical knife touch her neck, just above the scar left by the previous operation.

In the morning, Bridget's head was already standing in its former place on the glass table. Its eyes were still closed. It is time the head came to itself, thought Kern. And indeed, after some time the head opened its eyes and looked at the professor. It didn't seem to understand where it was. But then it looked down and

a hissing sound escaped its lips. Now the head could only hiss because the vocal cords were cut much higher than the first time.

“Again without a body,” hissed the head, and its eyes filled with tears.

“Don’t despair,” answered Kern. “I will give you another body. Just be patient.”

Bridget looked towards the other glass table. It was empty.

“Where is Thomas?” asked she. “Did you give him another body?”

“Yes,” lied Kern.

He didn’t want to upset the girl by telling her the sad story of Thomas’s death, the more so that he himself didn’t know what had actually happened. One morning he found the head dead. For some unknown reason the life support tubes got disconnected, and that fool John didn’t notice anything. Was probably fast asleep.

“And where is Miss Loran?” asked Bridget.

“She is sick,” answered Kern.

At that moment his office telephone rang, and Kern hurried out of the room, relieved that he didn’t have to answer further questions.

Chapter 20. Another Enemy

The call was from doctor Ravino.

“I have sent you a letter. With a messenger. He must have delivered the letter by now,” said Ravino.

Kern went down and took the letter out of the letter box.

Ravino wrote that Arthur Dowell, the son of professor Dowell, had managed to get into the hospital and make off with Marie Loran.

It was bad news. Arthur Dowell meant trouble. The young man would stop at nothing. Something had to be done, and fast. But what? Kern could destroy the head of professor Dowell. It could be done within a minute. But he might still need the head. No, he will not kill it. Not yet. He will cheat his opponents. He knew how. If they bring the police to search the house, they won’t find anything. And he had to speed up the demonstration of Bridget’s head. Cause a sensation. Success is never blamed. It will be easier for him to fight his enemies when he is famous and generally recognized.

Kern picked up the receiver and called the secretary of the scientific society asking him to come to his place to discuss the arrangements for a special meeting of the scientific society at which Kern was going to demonstrate the results of his latest experiments. Then he called the largest newspapers and asked them to send their interviewers.

“The more publicity, the better,” thought Kern. “The general public must know about the great discovery of professor Kern. A sensational discovery. The demonstration can take place in three days when Bridget’s head recovers from the shock and gets used to the idea that it was just a head without a body. Well, and now...”

Kern stepped into the laboratory, opened one of the glass cabinets, took out a syringe, several balls of cotton wool, a Bunsen’s burner, a small box with the word ‘paraffin’ written on it, and went to visit the head of professor Dowell.

Two days later Arman Laret came to see Arthur Dowell and Marie Loran who were hiding in his father’s house. The artist looked very pale.

“Here,” he said, handing Dowell a newspaper. “Read this.”

Arthur Dowell unfolded the newspaper and read:

Sensational Discovery of Professor Kern

Demonstration of a live human head

“What is it?” asked Marie who was watching Dowell’s expression.

“An announcement,” answered Dowell.

“What about?”

“Kern is going to make a report before the Paris scientific community.”

“When?”

“Tomorrow night.”

“The announcement says Kern is going to demonstrate a human head,” said Arman. His voice was shaking.

“Do you think...” started Marie, and gave Arman a terrified look.

“We can only guess,” stepped in Dowell. “Bridget told me that beside my father’s head there was another one. It once belonged to a fellow called Thomas.”

On the same page there was a short article signed by Kern. In simple terms Kern wrote about years of experiments which finally led to success. The name of professor Dowell was not mentioned.

“It is simply shocking!” cried out Marie after reading the article. “Kern is going to take full credit for your father’s work. We cannot allow it! Not after what he had done to me, to your father, to Bridget.”

“What are you saying?” asked Dowell.

“We must spoil the triumph for him. We will go to the demonstration and throw our accusations right in his face. Kern is a thief and a murderer. He wants fame. We shall make him famous. The whole world will know about his crimes.”

For a moment the young men were silent. They were surprised to see Marie so excited. It was not like her. Her cheeks reddened, and she looked very beautiful.

“I’m not sure that it is such a good idea,” said Dowell at last. “It is too risky.”

“I don’t care if it is,” answered Marie. “I’m going. This may be our only chance to unmask the impostor.”

“You can’t go alone,” said Arman. “We’re coming with you.”

He looked questioningly at Arthur Dowell.

“Well,” said Arthur, “I guess I’m outnumbered. We shall all go.”

Chapter 21. Spoilt Triumph

The large room looked like a concert hall on the night of the first performance. Huge chandeliers threw their bright light on the bald heads of the men of science and the diamonds decorating the necks and ears of their wives. At least a dozen cameramen were bustling about their TV cameras, getting ready to broadcast the meeting all over the world.

Marie Loran, Arthur Dowell and Arman Laret were sitting in the first row, pretending not to know each other. Marie was wearing an evening dress and a hat which she had pulled down low on her forehead so that Kern, should his glance fall upon the woman, would not recognize her. Arthur Dowell and Arman Laret had disguised themselves as elderly men. But not even a thick layer of makeup could hide Arman’s paleness. He tried not to look at the stage. He thought if he

did, he would faint. There, on a high platform, stood a woman's head. Skillfully applied makeup made the head appear fresh and attractive, and softened the painful impression the head without a body might produce on the unprepared audience. The head smiled sadly into the hundreds of opera glasses pointed at it.

Next to the platform with the head there was another. It was meant for professor Kern.

When at 8 o'clock sharp he appeared on the stage, the audience received him with a deafening applause. Then Kern began to speak. It was a brilliant speech. Kern did not fail to mention the scientific effort of his former colleague professor Dowell, but he did it so cleverly that no one in the audience had any doubts as to who took the credit for the great discovery. Several times his speech was interrupted with applause.

Then Kern gave a sign, and John turned on the container with compressed air that was standing near the platform. Now the head could speak.

"How do you feel?" asked someone from the audience.

"Thank you, I feel very well," answered the head.

The head sounded hoarse and dry, but the effect it produced on the audience was impossible to describe. For once Bridget was a sensation. Former Bridget would have been on cloud nine had she met with such enthusiastic reception. But the head only dropped its eyelids. It felt nothing but tiredness.

One after another, the greatest men of science climbed onto the platform. They spoke of the world-shaking discoveries, of knowledge being power, of victory over death, and the honour of being contemporary with such a great scientist as professor Kern.

Marie listened with feverish excitement. She could hardly hold back her anger. Suddenly, she jumped up from her seat and ran onto the platform. She almost knocked down an elderly scientist who had just finished singing praises for his brilliant friend professor Kern. With a voice almost as hoarse and dry as that of Bridget, eyes burning, she began her passionate and confused speech.

"Don't believe him," cried the girl pointing at Kern. "He is a thief and a murderer. He stole the work of professor Dowell. He killed professor Dowell. Now he is trying to make the head of professor Dowell work for him, and gives the other man's discoveries out for his own. Professor Dowell told me that Kern had poisoned him –"

Kern made a step towards the girl as if going to stop her, but then changed his mind. Instead, he turned to John and whispered something into his ear. John slipped out.

The audience was shocked and disoriented. Then confusion gave way to panic. Several people jumped up from their seats.

Only Kern seemed to be calm. He stood there, a little smile on his face. Then, turning to the ticket collectors at the door, he ordered, "Take her away! Don't you see that she is out of her mind?"

The ticket collectors obeyed. But Laret and Dowell were quicker. Before the ticket collectors could get to the young woman, they ran up to her and led her out of the room. Kern looked suspiciously at the small group as it was making for the door. His eyebrows drew together. But the next moment he was in full control of himself.

He returned to the platform and apologized for the sad incident.

"Miss Loran has been under a lot of stress lately. The time spent in the company of a head without a body made her emotionally unstable. She broke down."

The audience listened to him in absolute silence, but Kern could feel that the atmosphere in the room had changed. When he finished, some tried to clap but were hissed down. Several people rose and left the room not waiting for the end of the meeting. The remaining speakers raced through their speeches, and the meeting closed. Kern's day of triumph was hopelessly spoilt.

Chapter 22. The Last Meeting

At eleven o'clock next morning a group of people appeared at the door of the private clinic.

"Professor Kern doesn't receive anybody," said John through the half-opened door.

"Police inspector Jerard," introduced himself one of the visitors. "I have a warrant to search the house. These people are with me."

John recognized Marie Loran. Next to her, there stood two young men he had never seen before and two policemen in uniform. John stepped aside and let them in.

Professor Kern received the visitors in the laboratory. He didn't look surprised. What is more, he was prepared. He silently bent his head to Laret and Dowell, completely ignoring Marie. But the girl was too occupied with her own thoughts to notice his neglect. The familiar environment had stirred too many memories.

Bridget's head stood in its usual place on a small glass table. Without makeup, it looked like a mummy. It saw familiar faces and smiled. Laret turned away. On weak legs, he followed Kern into the next room.

There they saw a bald head of a old man with a very big fleshy nose. Its eyes were hidden behind very dark, almost black glasses.

"The bright light hurts his eyes," explained Kern.

Arthur looked very disappointed. His father was no longer there. Kern must have got rid of him. They came too late.

The small group was about to leave the room when Marie suddenly stopped them: "Wait!"

She returned to the big-nosed head that was noiselessly moving its lips, as if trying to say something, and asked, "Who are you?"

The head kept moving its lips but no sound came. Marie turned on the container and repeated her question.

"Who are you?"

"I used to be professor Dowell," hissed the head.

"But what happened to you face?"

"My face? An injection of paraffin, and I have lost my face also. All that is left of me is my brain, but it, too, is dying. I'm dying. Please take off the glasses. I want to look at you. Don't be afraid. Bright light cannot hurt me. It is a little trick of professor Kern. He is afraid that my eyes may give me away."

Marie took off the glasses. Her hands were shaking.

"I'm very happy to see you, Miss Loran. Kern told me you had left the country."

Suddenly the head saw Arthur who was standing two steps away, unable to move, and said happily, "Arthur, my son!"

"Father! My dear father!"

Arthur took two unsteady steps towards the head. He was crying.

"What did they do to you?"

“I have never expected that I would see you after my death,” hissed the head. “Kiss me on the forehead, my son, if you don’t find me too... too disgusting.”

Arthur bent and kissed his father.

“It felt good,” said the head. “Thank you.”

The head dropped the eyelids.

“Professor Dowell”, said the police inspector, “can you tell us about the circumstances of your death?”

For some time the head was silent. It didn’t seem to understand the question. Then it cocked the eyes at Marie Loran.

“I... I told her. She knows.”

Suddenly, the lips stopped moving, and a strange, glassy look came into the eyes.

“It is the end,” said Marie.

For some time no one spoke. The inspector was the first to break the heavy silence.

“I guess you will have to accompany me to the police station,” he said turning to Kern.

“You can wait for me downstairs. I will join you in a minute,” answered Kern.

When the door closed behind Kern and the three policemen, Arthur went on his knees before the dead head of his father.

“Poor, poor father!” he said, burying his face in his hands.

Marie put a comforting hand on his shoulder.

A sound of a gunshot made them start. It came from Manfred Kern’s office.