

prepared to follow her. Sonia was lying with closed eyes, but, as I moved, she raised herself and beckoned with one hand.

"Mr. Stornaway! Just one moment before he comes back! They want to take my baby away. I know I asked them to, but that was *before*. . . . You won't let them, will you? He's mine, mine! David thinks I'm saying it because I ought to, because everybody would expect me to, but I'm not! On my honour I'm not! I'd go through it again rather than let them take my baby away."

"He won't be taken away, if you want to keep him," I promised her. "Good-night, my dear Sonia. Go straight off to sleep and don't worry about anything. If you want your child, David won't try to steal him. You're sure you want him?"

"David?"

"I meant the boy."

A smile dawned on her tired face.

"I want so much! I always have. . . . Oh, I know you despise me, and you're quite right. I despise myself. But I *must* be loved, I can't get on without it. And I've been, oh! so lonely!"

She gave a little sob. I felt a hand on my arm and turned to find Lady Loring shaking her head and pointing to the door.

"Tell me anything I can do to help you, Sonia," I said, "and I'll do it. Now good-night. You've got to go to sleep, and I shan't let David even say good-night to you."

I met O'Rane in the passage and carried him off to the library.

"Lady Loring wants to get her off to sleep," I explained. "You and the child between you have rather excited her. If you will take my advice, you'll go back to Melton by the first train to-morrow. The two of you are wearing each other out. I'll do whatever's necessary here."

"But I can't leave her yet."

"You can and must. You've got your work to do. O'Rane, you may remember that I've advised you a good