

10¢ DIME MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Number One

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Give Me Your Soul!

by
MINDRET LORD



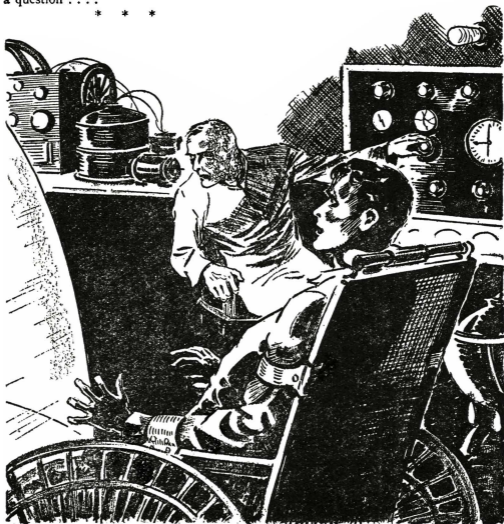
EERIE NOVELETTE OF THE FORBIDDEN WORLD!

*Out of a nameless, unremembered past, she came to him,
bringing with her a strange, new happiness—and a terror
sufficient to warp and shrivel the soul!*

IF, in this account, you expect a half hour's idle amusement, put it down. This is not meant for you. Herein you will find none of the story-teller's tricks to interest, to delight, to frighten. Indeed, this is no story. Hopeless though it may be, it is a direct and anguished appeal to whom chance brings these words. It is a question . . .

* * *

In 1931 I took my doctor's degree at the Sorbonne and returned to England. I found a little house in the quiet village of Bushey Heath in Hertfordshire where, for the next year or two, I intended to live while I devoted myself to the study of abnormal psychology, for it was in this field that I desired to make my pro-



fessional career. I was to come into contact with such abnormality as even Freud or Kraft-Ebing never dreamed of. Monsters of abnormality can be found in the case-records of such scientists, but they are nothing to compare with that creature of mad horror, Dr. Abram Blystein.

At about eleven o'clock one night, some six months after I had taken my house in Bushey Heath, I was suddenly startled by a furious banging at my door. I hastened to open it and found there a number of villagers who carried among them two young women; both apparently badly injured. I had them carried in and laid on couches in my living room and as I started to examine them, one of the men explained that there had been an automobile accident on the Great North Road.

One of the young women was unconscious from what I assumed to be a fracture of the skull. The other, however, though weak was entirely conscious and quite astonishingly calm. So calm, in fact, that for a moment I was inclined to think that the blood which soaked the sleeve of her jacket and dripped from her hand must be that of her companion. It was not until I cut off the sleeve that I discovered that a large artery in her arm had been severed. The blood was flowing in the spurts characteristic of such wounds and it was all too evident that already she had lost much more blood than she could afford.

"How long ago did this happen?" I asked.

"About half an hour," answered one of the men. "We had some trouble getting them out of the wreck."

When I had bound a tourniquet tightly about the arm above the elbow, I asked the girl, "Do you know if you have been hurt elsewhere?"

She replied in a tone of casual, polite conversation. "I rather think you will find my leg is broken."

It took only a moment to ascertain that her fears were justified.

"Can you stand the pain?" I asked. "Would you like me to give you an injection of morphine?"

She smiled. "Don't bother. It is a nuisance—but I'm able to put up with it for a while, at least."

It is not an uncommon occurrence that one who has been injured in a violent and shocking manner feels no pain until a quieter nervous condition has been restored, and this is what I supposed the case to be. It was not until some months later that I discovered how wrong I was.

I now turned my attention to the unconscious girl upon the other couch and quickly realized that there was nothing to be done. She had been so badly mangled that I knew she could not live many minutes more, so, aware of the futility of any effort in her behalf, I returned once again to her companion. A hasty examination convinced me that without an immediate blood transfusion she, too, would very shortly die.

I turned to the villagers who were huddled together at one end of the room with helpless, sickly expressions on their faces and explained the situation. One of them, a lad of twenty or so, hesitantly agreed to the donation of some of his blood.

I proceeded with the operation at once. As I connected the necessary apparatus, my patient asked, "Is she dead?"

I shook my head.

"Will she live?"

"No," I said. "I'm sorry." I glanced at her face to see how she had taken this news and was astonished to observe that she was smiling. It seemed a strange expression in such a situation.

When the transfusion was completed I sent the lad into my bedroom to lie and rest for awhile. Though I would have liked to have kept her quiet, my patient insisted that I tell her exactly what was

her position. As gently as I could I informed her that she could not be moved for at least a fortnight and that she might not be up for over a month.

SHE closed her eyes and seemed to be considering her plight. When she looked up again she had apparently arrived at some decision. "I think I'll accept your offer of morphine, Doctor," she said. "I suppose you'll want to set my leg, now, anyway?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then before you give me the hypodermic," she continued, "you can save me a lot of bother by letting me give you the information the police will want. I don't wish to be annoyed by them now or later. My name is Aline Ross. I live at 9 Cambridge Gate, Regent's Park, London. I am twenty-one years old, British, and without known relations."

I was making notes of what she told me.

"About the girl with me, I know nothing, whatever. I picked her up on the roadside in St. Albans. She told me she had been waiting for a Green Line bus to London. Further than that we didn't talk. I never saw her before and know absolutely nothing concerning her. I think that is as much as I can offer to satisfy official curiosity. Now, if you please, Doctor, the morphine."

As I made the injection I found myself wondering again at the almost super-human calm of the girl and I was conscious of an uneasy feeling that there was something here that was not quite right. Something subtle but vitally important that I could not isolate. If in that moment of doubt I had been able to perceive that power of tragedy and horror which motivated my patient, from what vile torments could I have saved us both!

If you are to understand how I became entangled in the web which was being

spun by that spider, that tarantula among men, Dr. Blystein, I must make this record detailed and complete. In the first place, the physical beauty of Aline Ross was by no means an accidental part of the scheme. She was a decoy—a lure. In repose, her face made one think of Helen of Troy, as, in outline, she has been represented by Flaxman. Yet I do not mean that her expression held the hard, cold dignity of a Grecian statue, for in spite of the halo of golden curls that framed her face; despite the deep, still blue of her eyes, there was a vital warmth about her which reminded me of Mary receiving into her arms the body of her Son descended from the Cross.

It was a mingling of pain, resignation and *intention*—as of one who moves not for himself, but to do the bidding of his master.

Aline's poor passenger had died before the police arrived. When they came Aline had lost consciousness and while I busied myself with the setting of her broken leg I passed on to them the information she had given me. As she had foreseen, this seemed to satisfy them and presently they left, carrying with them the dead girl.

Only by looking back on the three months that followed can I see the peculiarities of that period; for the changes which took place before my eyes were very gradual. In perspective, however, it is possible to observe much that goes unnoticed at the time.

Aline's return to health was slower than I had hoped, and I had to continue the blood transfusions until a total of six quarts had been pumped into her heart, all of it from the one, original donor who was a strong vigorous lad. Once he had discovered that he suffered no ill-effects from the experience, he had been more than willing to let me drain additional quantities from his veins as I perceived Aline's need. I say that he suffered no

ill-effects, and by this I mean that *physically* it did him no apparent harm. But in another way, the boy was completely transformed.

From being a simple, likable village lad, he became so mean and cruel that even his dog abandoned him and attached itself to Aline, refusing to leave her side for an instant. At the time, it seemed to me that the change in the boy was no affair of mine, and even in the light of after events—only one of which was his conviction and hanging for the brutal murder of his mother—I still must hold myself innocent, except in so far as I was the unconscious instrument of Dr. Abram Blystein.

JUST as great a change was noticeable in Aline. That cold, dispassionate calm that, at first, had been so marked in her actions and appearance, gradually diminished. She became so ethereally sweet, so gracious and so devoted that I counted myself the luckiest of mortals to have captured her affections, for she had agreed to be my wife so soon as her health and strength were fully restored.

Often talked of our lives before our meeting. Now, in these conversations I achieved a thorough understanding of both the trivial and vital circumstances of her life, up to January, 1930. At first I was not aware of the peculiarity that none of her reminiscences continued beyond this period; but what, in the beginning, I took for coincidence, slowly assumed a mysterious, towering importance.

Thus, when I would ask concerning the present whereabouts of some friend whom she had been describing, I would always find her ignorant of any detail after the date I have mentioned. At last I arrived at the conclusion that her reticence concerning that period must be actuated either by a complete lapse of memory or by a desire to keep the whole

of that time a secret. Finally, when I asked her flatly if there were any single thing, any incident or person or experience, which she could remember after January, 1930, she was much more surprised than I to discover the complete blank in her memory.

Besides my natural scientific desire to restore the lost year to her memory, it became imperative for me to do so when I considered that in that forgotten period she might have been married to another man. So I was forced to begin an investigation which led to the ultimate horrors of a living nightmare. Would God I had let well enough alone!

For several weeks I labored to restore Aline's memory to her, but my attempts were totally unsuccessful. Finally it was Aline who suggested that I interview the estate agents from whom she had leased her apartment in town. Also, she gave me a key to the place and asked me to go through whatever papers or records I found there.

Early the next morning—it was May twenty-ninth—I drove to London and began my quest. Her estate agents could tell me nothing helpful, so I went on to her apartment at Cambridge Gate. I examined the richly decorated rooms with great care, but until I opened her desk I had brought to light nothing which could further my purpose. There lay a small, black leather memorandum book. Except for one page, which was filled with names and addresses, the rest of the leaves were empty. And this was all that the entire apartment offered that might be of any conceivable use to me.

As a drowning man clings to a straw, so did my despairing hopes clutch at the contents of that little book. On the page were ten names, seven feminine. The addresses were widely scattered over London and its suburbs and, so far as I knew, seemed mostly to be in the poorer dis-

tricts. I called Aline on the telephone and read to her the list of names. But try as she might, she could recall nothing concerning them, and was even ventured that the book was not hers, but had been left in her apartment by some forgotten visitor.

I hung up and sat staring at the open book. Suddenly I was convinced that two of the names were familiar to me. I racked my brains to think how. And then in a paralyzing flash of memory, the tragic context in which I had seen those names returned to me. Jane Murray and Diana Welford were the names of two girls who had disappeared from their homes in the same week, in the summer of 1930. It had caused a newspaper sensation and accusations had been made that a white slavery business was being conducted under our very noses. But in spite of the hue and cry, no trace of the girls was ever found.

Though sick at heart, I decided to go on with my investigation. I visited three of the addresses which lay in the general direction of Bushey Heath. I learned only that the people I sought had given up or abandoned their rooms in the Fall of 1930. They had all been strangers in London and no one had been particularly curious about their vanishing.

It was in a state of black foreboding that I drove up to my door. After dinner I showed Aline the book, and she readily admitted that the names and addresses were written in her hand. But she still denied any knowledge of the book and its contents!

Knowing Aline as I did, I felt absolutely certain of her innocence in whatever thing it was that I had unearthed. I asked myself what it was. Simple kidnapping for ransom? Hardly, considering the probable financial state of the people I had visited and the absence of grieving relatives and friends. White slavery?

Then what of the three men on the list? Some peculiar kind of espionage? Pure coincidence? My thoughts led nowhere.

CHAPTER TWO

The Faceless One

AT DAWN I arose feeling more tired than I had when I went to bed. There was no sound in the house, as Aline and my servant were probably still asleep. I decided to take a walk across the field before breakfast and chose from my closet an old tweed coat which I had not worn since the last time I had wandered over the countryside, a couple of months before. As I drew it on, I felt something hard in the inside breast pocket. It was a stamped envelope addressed to a Dr. Abram Blystein in the handwriting of Aline. I frowned, puzzled. Then suddenly I remembered. Following the accident, when I was starting out on just such a walk as I now planned to take, she had given me this letter to mail for her, but I had returned to the house without having seen a post box and had hung up my coat without remembering the envelope it contained.

So far as I knew it might be the only existing link between Aline's present and the year just past, unless Dr. Blystein might turn out to be an acquaintance of before that time. But my observation had convinced me that Aline's aphasia had come upon her early in her convalescence.

When I returned I found Aline awake and immediately showed her the letter, explaining how it was still in my possession. Her attitude bore out my theory concerning the beginning of her loss of memory, for she insisted that she had no faintest recollection of writing the letter, or of the person to whom it was addressed. This, of course, was exactly what I had hoped. At last I had the name and address of someone with whom she was actually in touch during the forgotten

period. Together we opened the envelope and read the single sheet it contained:

DEAR DR. BLYSTEIN:

It is just over a week since you last heard from me and I hope that the delay I may have caused in your work has not been a serious inconvenience.

After having spent several unsuccessful days in St. Albans, I finally made contact, but I had an automobile accident while I was bringing her down to Penzance, with the result that she is dead and I have a broken leg and various other minor injuries.

However, the incident may not be so bad as it seems, as I am the patient of a man who answers your requirements in every detail. He lives alone, has no relatives in England (or elsewhere, so far as I know) is intimate with no one, has no dependents and no practice. If he conducts any correspondence, I have so far seen no evidence of it. You will find his name and address below.

The doctor tells me I shall not be able to be of any use for between two and three months, but, of course, if you should decide to utilize my host I may be able to provide some assistance in spite of my temporary invalidism.

Please let me hear from you by return post.

Very truly yours,

P. S. In the accident I lost a lot of blood and had to have a transfusion. Very soon afterward I began to feel my memory was growing hazy. Could there be any connection? I can't quite understand it, because I seem to remember things that happened ages ago more clearly than I have in a long time. But I actually had to think to remember your address. I wonder why?

When we finished reading I saw in Aline's troubled gaze only innocent wonder. Without asking, I knew that she remembered nothing concerning it; that, very possibly, she was even more in the dark than I. I was now certain that both she and Dr. Abram Blystein were definitely connected with the disappearances of the people I had vainly tried to find.

I provided evasive, reassuring answers

to Aline's questions, and then, leaving her with the dog I started off on my interrupted walk. I tried to consider the problem from every possible angle and finally came to the realization that, outside of the bare fact of the disappearances, there was no smallest bit of evidence to indicate either purpose or motive. My very ignorance reassured me. For, while there was nothing to show that Dr. Blystein and Aline had not kidnapped the missing persons for some obscure, terrible reason; there was also nothing to show that they had not vanished of their own free will, and that Aline's connection with them had not been greatly to their benefit.

I imagined all sorts of ways in which a kindly, rich old doctor might make it his hobby to help and provide for friendless strangers, and felt that I was not far from an accurate appraisal of the whole business.

I RETURNED home in high spirits and asked Aline if she felt equal to coming with me to pay Dr. Blystein a visit. Aline seemed delighted at the prospect of meeting Dr. Blystein immediately. She hoped and believed that the sight of this person whom she had known in the period of her lapse of memory would restore to her all the details of that time. So, with love in our hearts and a high confidence in the future, we blithely started off on our disastrous mission.

In Penzance when we came in view of the old, rambling, stone structure, set in the middle of spacious grounds, Aline stopped and surveyed it with a worried expression. I asked her if she recollected ever having seen it before. She did not answer at once, but continued to gaze in silence and I had to repeat my question.

"No," she finally answered, "I don't actually remember anything about the place; but—I am terribly afraid."

"Afraid?" I inquired, "Of what?"

"I don't know," she said hesitantly; "but let's go away. I don't want to go into that house." In spite of the warm afternoon sun, I saw she was shivering.

"But what is there to be afraid of?" I protested. "What they may be able to tell us means so much to us. We can't afford not to go and I am sure there is no cause for fear. Don't forget I shall be there by your side—in case there is anything."

She smiled at me apologetically and took my arm. "I suppose I am silly," she said. "Come on, then!"

The door was opened by a tall, powerful looking man in a white linen coat. As he glanced at Aline I thought I saw a flicker of interest or recognition flash across his cold, impassive face. I gave him my card and told him that we wished to see Dr. Blystein. He ushered us into the hall and left us, saying that he would see if the doctor was not engaged.

Aline, I realized, was having difficulty in controlling her nerves. Her apprehension had visibly increased. I encouraged her as best I could until the doctor's assistant returned. The doctor was busy in his laboratory, and anyhow could not break his rule to see no one except by appointment. I hastened to explain the reason for our visit.

"She doesn't remember Dr. Blystein, then?" asked the assistant.

"No," I said, "but I hope she will when she sees him."

"If that is so," said the assistant, "would you mind telling me what proof you have that the young lady is known to Dr. Blystein?"

I was somewhat annoyed by the insolence of the assistant's question. Anger made me do what otherwise I should never have done. I pulled Aline's letter from my pocket and threw it across the table.

"There," I said, "is a letter Miss Ross wrote to Dr. Blystein three months ago. I forgot to mail it. It is self explanatory. It introduces me and I insist upon knowing the reason why."

With a sudden change of manner, he picked up the letter and glanced at it. Then, without a word, he hurried from the room. In a very few moments the door re-opened to admit Dr. Blystein, immediately followed by his assistant who, as the doctor walked forward to meet us in the middle of the room, remained standing by the door.

I DON'T know what picture I had built up in my mind of how I expected Dr. Blystein to look; but no matter how ghastly I might have imagined him my vision must have fallen far short of reality. There is something about a face that has been burnt or crushed or eaten by disease out of all semblance to itself which inspires the observer with a thrill of horror and, peculiarly, embarrassment.

It is not enough to say that the entire left side of his face and head had been burnt with fire—it had been consumed. In that fraction of time before I had been able to turn my eyes away, I had been unable to avoid observing the twisted and tortured scar tissue that partly covered the vacant eye socket, that corner of the mouth from which the lips had vanished, leaving in their place a grinning hole. And somehow more shocking still was the entire absence of any sign that an ear had ever grown on that side . . .

Instinctively I reached for Aline's hand.

"I am Dr. Blystein," he said to Aline. "Have you forgotten me? I would not have thought it possible that anyone could do so."

In spite of her trembling Aline forced herself to look at him. In her expression I read fear and sympathy for a cruelly

wounded creature, but no recognition. "No," she finally whispered, "I don't remember."

I said, "At least you remember Miss Ross, doctor?"

For a long moment he continued to gaze at Aline; then slowly he turned to me. "Very well, indeed. Miss Ross has been one of my most interesting patients." His voice was deep and calm with a faint Russian accent. It was a soothing voice, almost hypnotic in its confidence and consciousness of power.

"Then," said I, "perhaps you will be kind enough to tell me a number of things which I have a right to know, both in my capacity as the lady's doctor and her fiancé."

Dr. Blystein bowed. "Allow me to congratulate you, sir. Here in Penzance I am something of a hermit and I welcome the opportunity to discuss so interesting a case with a colleague. But"—he lowered his voice—"perhaps Miss Ross would be bored by a medical discussion? And I should have to refer to some notes which I keep elsewhere."

I realized that he did not wish to discuss Aline's case in her presence. "I would be very interested to see more of your house," I said, "but Miss Ross is tired and I am sure she wouldn't mind waiting."

Dr. Blystein looked at his assistant, who still stood at the door. "Unfortunately," he said, "there is work awaiting me in my laboratory which I cannot delay. If you would be kind enough to be my guests at dinner this evening I think I can provide you with the information you desire."

We accepted.

"I think you will be interested in my library," said Dr. Blystein. "Heinrich will take you there. And now, I regret having to leave you until dinner." He turned and slightly bowed to Aline, "With

your permission." Abruptly, he left the room and as he passed the assistant, I noted that he was even taller than the man whom he had called 'Heinrich'.

I took Aline's arm and followed our guide through a long and sombre hall to the library, lined from floor to ceiling with open book shelves. When we had seated ourselves on a comfortable couch, Heinrich returned to the door through which we had entered.

"You'll be safer if the door is locked—on account of the patients, you know." With a quick motion he went out and closed the door after him. I heard the bolt click.

I ran to the door and tried it and called to Heinrich to open it, but there was no answer. I returned to Aline with so much assurance in my manner as I could muster.

"I have been thinking it over," she said, "and I am afraid we have come on a wild goose chase. In spite of Dr. Blystein and my letter, I am certain that nothing possibly could have wiped out the memory of having seen that man before."

It would have been cruel of me to explain to her that his very ugliness might have been instrumental in causing the aphasia, for his was an image that the mind would eject, if it could. "I am very much inclined to agree with you," I lied, "but since we are here I suppose it will do no harm to hear the doctor's story."

CHAPTER THREE

The Rack of Souls

I FELT far from easy in the locked library of this strange old house. So, quietly, lest I disturb the sleeping girl, Aline, who had fallen into a doze, I stole to the only other break in the walls besides the single door. Heavy velvet por-

tierras hung in front of what I had hoped might be the doorway to another room, but I pulled them back only to discover a small window. Through its opaque glass filtered the feeble rays of the dying day.

Heavy iron bars outside cast parallel shadows on its surface. I let the curtain fall back in place. This room in which we were so securely held might have been any oubliette of the Bastille. It was not a comfortable thought.

I walked toward the shelves of books and examined them first with idle interest, then with mounting consternation. The first book I had opened was Foxe's *Early Christian Martyrs*. Amused, I returned it and chose another volume in an ancient binding: *A Hystorye of Satanyisme, Together with some Account of ye Black Masse*. Another book, I found, greatly to my surprise, was a French novel of a type which may not be imported to any other country. It pretended to deal with the career of the bloodthirsty Marquis de Sade, but only a casual inspection would disclose the fact that it was merely cheap, salacious fiction, obviously designed for the consumption of sadists—those neurotics who take their name from the mad author of *Justine*.

As I continued my tour of the library, in the back of my mind there was slowly being formed a theory which connected and explained the wide variety of books. But I finally realized that the one thing common to them all was that each was concerned with the sensations of pain or fear, or both.

My chilling speculations were suddenly interrupted by a scream from Aline. Until that second I had not known how nervous I had become. I rushed to her side and found her violently trembling.

"What is it?" I asked, "What has happened?"

She took my hand between her own and held tightly. "I'm sorry," she said,

"it was only a dream—but it seemed so terribly real. It was about Dr. Blystein." Her manner became pleading. "Need we stay to dinner? Mayn't we go now? We could come back again tomorrow."

"But why not stay a little longer now?" I asked, "And then not ever come back."

"Because—because nobody knows we are here. We didn't tell anyone—and we should have!"

I felt instinctively that she was right. "What!" I said, "That sort of thing simply doesn't happen—not in England, at least. We would be traced," I added lamely.

"How?" she asked.

"Exactly. Well—there are ways, I expect." And it was a shock to me to realize that already I anticipated the necessity of being traced.

In a moment the door opened and Dr. Blystein and his assistant stood revealed in the dim illumination of the hallway. The assistant bore a tray of cocktails, which he served us.

The drinks were mild enough tasting, but I no sooner had finished my glass than I felt dizzy. I dimly remember trying to walk to a chair, and then blackness closed in about me and there was nothing but the rushing tide of unconsciousness blotting out everything . . .

WHEN I awoke I found myself sitting stiffly and uncomfortably in a chair, and when I tried to move I found that I could not. Then, in a flash, full consciousness returned to me. I discovered that I was fastened to an elaborate kind of wheel chair by a number of metal clamps; two around each arm and leg, one around my waist and one around my neck. Held in this way it was impossible to make any movement, whatever.

I looked about and found that I was in a tremendous gray room. The walls and ceilings were entirely covered with

what looked like thick cloth padding. There were no windows, but the room was brilliantly lighted. Dr. Blystein entered and drew up a chair facing me.

"So," he said, "my patient is beginning once more to take an interest in life!"

Immediately, of course, I began to protest heatedly and demanded to know the meaning of this outrage. With a gesture, Dr. Blystein stopped my flow of words. "Please save your breath," he said. "You will need it later, I assure you. It is the first time I have had the opportunity to discuss my experiments with a colleague." His manner was calm and serious. "To begin at the beginning, the experiments I mention are revoluntarily in theory and in effect, and for you to appreciate them fully you will have to forget much that you have learned at the Sorbonne."

"And why should I be interested?" I asked.

"If for no other reason," he answered. "because both you and Miss Ross are shortly to become the objects of my experiments."

"And what makes you think that the police won't interfere with your little plan? How long do you think it will take them to find us here?"

Dr. Blystein smiled. "Forever. I may have forgotten to mention that there is a highly sensitive microphone in the library. You were ill-advised in discussing the fact that you had told no one of your intention to visit me." He rose and moved around to the back of my chair, dismissing the subject as a matter of no importance. "As I expound my theories I will take you for a tour of inspection of my equipment. You are sure to be interested."

He started to push my wheel chair, without interrupting his conversation. I fully realized the futility attempting to escape and therefore I concentrated my

attention on the doctor's conversation, hoping to gain some true insight into my predicament. He stopped my chair in front of a dynamo and then leaned against it, facing me.

"This," he said, "supplies most of the power for my work here; the machinery of my laboratory is necessarily cumbersome, but quite efficient, as you shall see. But before we continue our tour I must give you a resumé of the reasoning which led to my discovery.

"You may think me crazy when I tell you that I have succeeded in separating the soul from the body. But, I am going to present you undeniable proof. I maintain that I am the first person to effect the divorce of the body and soul in a sure, scientific manner. And, except for the stupid and erroneous ideas of the clergy, I am the first person to be able to give the soul any actual definition."

I thought it best to humor my captor. "And what," I asked, "is the method of procedure?"

"I am coming to that," said Dr. Blystein. The tone of his voice was academic and gave the impression of a professor addressing his class. "In the past the soul has often been known to leave the body before death. I will give you an instance: Probably you know that in the ancient days of the church, no inquisitorial chamber was complete without some member of the witch-pricking profession. The theory was that it could be determined whether a woman was a witch by discovering that place on her body which had been touched by the devil. It was characteristic of such devil-touched spots that they were anaesthetic—dead to all feeling. So, of necessity, we had the witch-pricker whose sole equipment was a long, sharp needle.

"The subject would be stripped and stretched before him on a table and he would bury his needle in those places

which seemed most likely to have attracted Satan's attention. If the subject screamed and showed signs of suffering, the spot had not yet been found. However, in time, the probe was almost sure to find a place where no pain was felt and so the woman was proved a witch and was sent to the stake, forthwith."

"**B**UT," I protested, "that has been explained long ago. If the nervous system is too violently treated it becomes insensible to pain. It is simply hysteria."

"And what," asked Dr. Blystein, "is hysteria? That is the great fault of medicine—that when you cannot understand a thing you give it a name and let that satisfy you. I have found that hysteria is usually the result of the temporary separation of body and soul. You will understand that is part of my theory that pain may be an extremely useful agent in causing such a separation, for the reason that the soul inhabits the body only so long as the body is habitable. And that is to say that the soul is definitely influenced by the physical condition of the body and remains within it only provisionally."

Dr. Blystein seemed to become more preoccupied, more intent upon the exact exposition of his thesis. He went on: "Now I will make a statement which will surprise you. So far as I know it has never been made before; yet it is so simple and it explains much that has heretofore been mystery—mystery into which only charlatans have dabbled. What I am about to tell you is this: The soul is a thinking parasite that leads an intelligent existence, completely independent of the body from which it derives its nourishment!"

Almost my interest conquered my terror. "With what evidence do you support such revolutionarily statements?" I asked.

"Shortly you are to become a link in my chain of evidence," Dr. Blystein replied. "At the moment I will not trouble you with the manner in which I have been able permanently to take every vestige of soul from persons who otherwise became perfectly normal. Suffice it to say that I have done so. And, because in these persons there is absolutely no sign of instinct: love, hate, morals or, in fact, volition, I have come unavoidably to the conclusion that all feeling and all desire are merely expressions of the will of that separate-thinking thing: the soul!"

As you can imagine, during all this time Aline had been foremost in my thoughts; but I had not mentioned her, partly because I was afraid to hear the reply and partly because I did not wish to run any risk of angering the doctor. Now, however, I could no longer refrain from introducing the subject. "Where," I asked, "is Miss Ross? And what do you intend to do with her?"

"Oh yes," he said, "I had intended to show you the equipment. That will be a good place to begin. I will take you to her. But, before I do so, I must thank you for having conducted an experiment collateral with mine, which interests me very much—I mean Miss Ross. You may have guessed that she was one of the successful products of my laboratory? When she first came to you she was completely without soul, but she regained it in the course of the blood transfusion. Not, you understand, her own soul but particles of those of whomever were the donors of the blood. I know, as well as you, that her lapse of memory was due to the return of soul which would not allow her to remember what she had experienced."

Somehow, I was not surprised. I felt that I had anticipated all this, though actually, of course, I had not done so. I made a great effort to be calm. "But, Doctor," I said, "when I first saw Aline I

certainly recognized no excessive sign of hysteria."

"Have I not told you," exclaimed Dr. Blystein, "that the people turned out by my laboratory are perfectly normal, otherwise? Day after day I drive out their souls with pain, renewed and intensified, until that thinking soul abandons all hope of re-inhabiting the body it has deserted. Then, I treat the patient's physical condition—health is restored—and I have created the robot! The servant without morals, without impulse, without any volition of his own. The perfect servant who knows no demand! My reply to the world's crying need!"

DR. BLYSTEIN beckoned to his assistant. "Push the chair, Heinrich," he said. "We will go to see Miss Ross, who is now in the primary stage of the process which will expel her soul for the second time."

My chair was rapidly wheeled about, and, with Dr. Blystein walking at my side, we traversed the length of the laboratory. One thing in particular I noticed was an enormous glass bell, fully eight feet in diameter and ten in height, similar in shape to those one may see covering cheeses in delicatessen shops. Just outside it was a large, motor-driven pump with pipes which led to the interior of the bell.

There is certainly a limit to the ability of the human mind to accept ideas and impressions foreign to its experience. I know that in my case I had already arrived at a curious state of detachment in which I simply did not believe what was happening. It was as if something had severed two parts of my brain, and one half busied itself with the observation of an unreal hideousness while the other, sick and stupefied though it was, refused to become alarmed at such obvious absurdity.

We left the laboratory by a heavy iron door, which clanged to behind us.

You may think it strange that I can describe in cold details what I saw in the little stone room which we had entered. Perhaps I was already mad—perhaps I went mad there. It would have been surprising if I had not. But, I know from this moment and in the monstrous days that followed, I felt neither horror nor hate nor even sympathy for Aline, though I knew her lost to me forever.

The whole of my being was concentrated in one desire—escape. I became an inhumanly cold and calculating machine, with the sole purpose of remembering and analyzing every tiniest thing I saw and heard, for only thus would I be able to form a plan.

Dispassionately and accurately, then, I can describe what I saw.

We were in a small, white-tiled room, without windows. The floor, too, was of tile which sloped toward the middle, where was a sunken pool some two or three inches in depth. In this pool stood Aline's nude body. Her arms were suspended by cords from the ceiling and metal bands around her ankles secured her feet beneath the water. From overhead a fine spray deluged her shining skin. Her eyes were covered by a black band. As we entered, two curiously dressed persons had suddenly sprung away from Aline's side and now stood, apparently awaiting some word from Dr. Blystein.

For the moment he ignored them and turned to me: "Let me explain this treatment," he said. "It is really quite ingenious and is composed of the combination of two agents—beating and electric shock. You will see that my two helpers are clothed completely in rubber. That is because the paddles which you see in their hands are made of extremely flexible metal and connected by wires to an electric circuit, completed by a wire which

makes contact with the pool in which the patient stands. The liquid which sprays her is, of course, salt water—an excellent conductor. So, when the paddles touch her skin an electric charge passes through her body and she experiences both the sting of the blow and a very satisfactory shock. But, perhaps you would like to see the device in operation?"

At a gesture from the doctor the two rubber-lad figures approached the suspended girl, and took up positions one on each side of her. The instruments which they held were composed of a thin plate of metal about the size of a saucer, which was attached to a wooden handle by means of a strong spring about fifteen inches in length. From these "paddles," heavily insulated wires ran to a switch board which stood at a little distance.

UNTIL now, I had hoped that Aline was unconscious, for apparently she was relaxed in the lines which held her up. Her beautiful head lay against one arm and only the deep, sobbing exhalations of her breath attested to the fact that life's spark still glowed in that glorious glistening statue. Now, at a word from him, Dr. Blystein's soulless servants raised their fiendish instruments and struck Aline, one on the breast and one on the thigh. Such an instant and terrible reaction I have never seen.

Her head jerked back and my ears were pierced by a cry of mortal agony. Beneath her satin skin I could see each muscle tensely quiver, yet outside of a slight reddening which, before the next stroke descended, I noticed on her gorgeously molded breast, no visual evidence remained of the violence that had been done her.

"Follow the usual procedure," said Dr. Blystein. He turned to me and explained: "For a period of three hours she will alternately be treated for ten minutes and

rest for ten minutes. Now we will go on with our tour."

We left the room and re-entered the laboratory, and, as the door closed, the screams of the suffering Aline were instantly cut off. We stopped in front of the glass bell which had already drawn my curiosity.

"This," said Dr. Blystein, "has proved a particularly efficient invention. You will have noticed this pump. With its use I can create inside either tremendous pressure or almost absolute vacuum. This is the way in which I use it: First, with the patient inside, I slowly build up quite a remarkable pressure. Then, after a sufficient lapse of time, I abruptly release it. As you may know, the result—one of the most painful sensations it is possible to undergo—is comparable to tetanus in that every muscle and nerve in the body is affected—and the effects last for some days. Overdone, of course, it would be dangerous, if not fatal. But, I am careful. I have not yet had a patient fail to recover—eventually."

My last memory of that day was of Dr. Blystein's sudden interruption of his monologue when he felt my pulse. I must have fainted then. When I awoke I was again in the same chair, but this time in a small bedroom. I had been undressed and, glancing at the bed which had been slept in, I guessed that I had been put there in a drugged condition. For the imprint of a body was still visible upon it.

A few moments after my waking, a young woman entered my room carrying a breakfast tray. One glance at her cold, expressionless eyes was enough to tell me that she was another of Dr. Blystein's soulless creatures.

"Your breakfast," she informed me. "Dr. Blystein has said I am to feed it to you." In silence she prepared morsels of food and raised them to my lips. I tried to question her, but all attempts at

conversation failed. At the end of the meal, which I ate with the utmost difficulty, the girl gathered up her tray and left me alone again in the bare little windowless cell.

In this identical fashion I consumed nine successive meals, served over what I suppose was a period of three days. I forced myself to take the nourishment because I knew that if I were able to devise some plan of escape I must have the strength to execute it. Each evening meal that I was served must have contained some sleeping potion, for during this time I had no memory of being put to bed, of sleeping or of being re-strapped in the chair.

No scheme was so fantastic that it was not considered and re-considered. At every appearance of the servant who had been assigned to me, I tried some new means of winning her to my cause. And, in the end, I realized that every hope I could conceive was fore-doomed to failure. Yet, to my three days in that cell, I owe the fact that I am now able to write this account.

As a student at the Sorbonne I had been extremely interested in the study of hypnotism and had made a number of varyingly successful experiments in the field. I had been interested to discover that I, myself, could enter into a state of hypnotic trance with comparative ease. The method which I had used was the usual one of fixing my gaze upon some bright object. Sometimes in so doing I had commanded myself to awaken at a definite moment and always my unconscious brain had heeded the order. The only illumination in my cell was one electric bulb in the middle of the ceiling. . . .

ON the morning of the fourth day I woke in my usual place, but this time in the presence of Dr. Blystein. "I have just been examining you, young

man," he said, "and I am delighted to find that you are well enough to take an interest in your surroundings." As he spoke, he began to push my chair. "You have missed three days, you know—it's a pity. I did want you to see the whole process. But, no matter; I can tell you what's happened."

He continued his uninterrupted speech as we entered the laboratory. He placed my chair just outside the big glass bell and next to a small switch board, on which were a number of dials. In front of this he drew up a chair and sat down.

"While we are waiting for Heinrich to bring our patient, I will give you some idea of her progress. Her first day, you saw. On the next she was allowed to rest—there is always at least one day of rest after each day of treatment. On the following day she was placed beneath this bell and air was pumped inside it until the pressure was sufficient to our purpose. Then, after she had spent an hour or so inside, it was quickly released. The results were entirely satisfactory.

"Her condition is now at least as painful as the last stages of spinal meningitis or tetanus, and is caused by very much the same contraction of the muscles, characteristic of the latter disease. By the way, I must say that her reactions, this time, are quicker and more definite than they were before. I do not know if it is because this is her second experience, or whether it is due to her somewhat lowered vitality. Now I will raise the bell and prepare for the reception of our client."

He threw the largest knife switch on the board and somewhere a winch began to revolve, winding in a cable which, running through a pulley overhead, was attached to a heavy ring at the top of the dome of glass. The bell rose to a height of about five feet and, stooping, Dr. Blystein entered its interior. Here he ar-

ranged a heavy plank so that it faced my chair and was only three or four feet from it which leaned back at an angle of forty-five degrees and was attached to a frame-work on wheels. At the sides of the plank were clamps, similar to those that held me in my chair.

Dr. Blystein emerged, saying as he passed me: "We will have a good view!" He returned in a moment, carrying a metal diver's helmet. From its top trailed two long rubber tubes. The helmet he attached at the head of the plank by means of a bracket; and then he placed the ends of the rubber tubes over two nozzles in the floor. He came out and stood before me, rubbing his hands together. "At last we are ready—and not, I see, a moment too soon."

Into my line of vision Heinrich wheeled a long surgical table, on which Aline lay strapped. She was still entirely nude and the bandage, which she had worn around her eyes when I had last seen her, had been removed. When they came to the edge of the bell, Dr. Blystein, himself, pushed the table inside, while Heinrich took up a position by one of the outside pumps. Methodically, the doctor released the straps that bound the girl. Then, stepping back a pace, he said, "Get up!"

At first Aline made no movement, but remained lying stiff and straight. Dr. Blystein repeated his command and then, with a low moan of pain, she made a feeble effort to rise.

He assisted her off the table and onto her feet and, completely unresisting as she was, he half-dragged, half-led her to the plank, where he fastened her by her arms and legs in such a way that she could not slide down onto the floor.

Now, he took the diver's helmet in his hands. Before he placed it over Aline's head there was one moment in which we were face to face. Our eyes met and

spontaneously I called her name. But neither my voice nor the sight of me evoked the slightest sign of recognition. Her wide, beautiful eyes no longer belonged to an intelligent human being, but were those of a hunted, tormented animal.

When the helmet was fixed over her head to the doctor's satisfaction, he motioned to Heinrich to attend to the pump and rejoined me. He threw over the double switch he had previously used and, with surprising speed, the great glass bell sank to the floor.

He turned to me and said: "Except for the pump, which supplies the helmet with air, this switch board governs all the conditions inside that chamber. With the turn of a knob I can create pressure or vacuum, heat or cold. Truly, if that is a world in itself—and I feel that you will come to think that it is—I am the God of that world! It is my own creation and those who have inhabited it are, at least, my re-creations. Let us commence our experiment."

He twisted a knob on the instrument panel, and suddenly the laboratory was full of the resonant sound of heavy machinery working. "The pumps are now withdrawing air from the bell, but it will be a little while before the patient feels any effect. At first, I suppose, there is a rather mild and pleasant sucking sensation at all of the pores of the body. For the moment, as you can see, she is comparatively quiet. Though gradual, the change is not so slow as to be boring."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Final Question

IN that brilliantly lighted laboratory I watched the transformation in Aline as if my life depended upon it. The terrifying vision attracted me as a snake attracts a bird. She was so close to me that, if my arm had been free and no wall

of glass between us, I might have touched her. I could not turn my eyes away . . . and this is what I saw:

Feebly, at the beginning, then madly, she twisted and struggled against the cruel clamps that held her. Quickly her strength seemed to ebb and she lay back again with her chest heaving, as if she were having difficulty in drawing breath. This, I realized, was not the case. On the contrary, because she was breathing air at normal pressure in the helmet and because outside pressure was already considerably lowered, she was having difficulty in expelling breath. Soon a confirmation of this fact appeared, for, as more and more air was pumped away, a considerable increase in the size of her chest was noticeable and this enlarging increased as the difference grew between the pressure in her lungs and the exterior.

Within a short while other changes could be seen. Her flesh began to swell and her white skin took on a pinkish glow. Her breasts, her abdomen and her thighs seemed to become at least twice their normal size. Presently I saw that those veins which are closest to the skin were becoming more and more marked. It was almost as if the blood vessels themselves were rising to the surface. Here and there ruby drops began to appear. . . . The poor, swollen body was crimson. . . .

Suddenly an exclamation of Dr. Blystein cut through the throbbing drone of the pumps. He went to the glass and peered intently through it, then hurriedly returned to the switchboard. The motors whined to a stop and I heard the squeal of the winch take their place. The bell began to rise and beneath its edge was sucked inside, with a noise like the filling of a tremendous bottle, the air which had been pumped out. Before my eyes, Aline's tortured flesh collapsed like a pricked balloon. Instantly, Dr. Blystein

rushed inside and removed the helmet from her head. He examined her closely and then looked at me. . . .

Again I must have fainted for when I awoke I was in my room once more. Blystein was seated on the bed. "How absurd of you, a doctor," he said, "to be so squeamish!"

"Is Aline dead?" I asked.

"No," said the doctor. "She will live to finish my treatments. Of course, at the moment she doesn't feel particularly well." He laughed in self-appreciation of his cruel wit. "As a matter of fact," he continued, "the vacuum treatment had a little more serious affect on her than I had expected—she must have been weaker to begin with than I had supposed. But anyhow, it was successful, and her soul is now expelled from every part of her body except her brain."

"And how can you separate the soul from the brain?" I asked.

"Oh, that," said Dr. Blystein suavely, "That is a matter of comparatively simplicity. The patient is first hypnotized and then informed that he is dead. The brain believes it and the soul departs this last stronghold. And so the treatment is completed."

My fingers itched to be at his throat, but I refused to allow my mind to cloud with rage. At that moment I held nothing in life so dear that I would not have given it gladly for the power to take Dr. Blystein's scarred neck between my hands. Perhaps he sensed my wish, for with a mocking smile on his hideous face, he got up and walked to the door where he paused, facing me. "You will be interested," he said before leaving, "to hear that your treatment will begin tomorrow. Until then—pleasant dreams!"

I realized that the last frail hope lay in my making a desperate play for freedom while some particle of soul still clung to my brain. I was sure that any ordi-

nary person would emerge from Blystein's tortures with a broken will and mind. I knew that it was hopeless to try to evade the physical suffering. I prayed that I would be more successful with the mental part.

To this end I intended to hypnotize myself by concentrating my gaze on the lamp in the middle of the ceiling, at the same time commanding myself not to recover consciousness until I was unbound and free in the presence of Dr. Blystein. You can imagine the super-human determination which I brought to bear upon my auto-hypnotic attempt. I think that never in history has a man had such awful incentive to success.

I WOKE to consciousness abruptly, though it is not usual in hypnotic cases, probably because that sense of self-preservation, which is at the core of every living thing, had been telling me in the days that had passed what I must do. I found myself where I had thought I would: lying on a surgical table under the raised glass bell.

As with Aline, Dr. Blystein had released my bonds and, with his back to me, was adjusting the helmet which he intended me to wear. Without thinking, without mental process of any kind, without feeling—I executed what I had planned. With the speed of desperation I jumped to the floor, ducked under the edge of the bell and reached the switch on the instrument panel which I had seen Dr. Blystein use to lower the heavy glass dome.

In the few seconds it took in its descent I lived through untold agony of suspense. Not until it reached the floor did Dr. Blystein know of his imprisonment. Then, with an expression of incredulous surprise, he turned toward me and shouted, but no sound penetrated the

glass. I turned a knob and the pumps began to throb.

Heinrich had looked around when he heard the bell descend and, in a glance, he must have seen the turn events had taken. I had expected that even should my plan against Blystein be successful, I would still be likely to lose my life at the hands of his assistant. But I had forgotten that Heinrich, being without soul, was also without allegiance. Slowly he walked to my side and sat down.

It took Dr. Blystein a long time to die. We watched his struggles and his efforts to break the glass grow weaker and weaker. We saw him sink to the floor, gasping for breath, tearing at his collar. We saw the buttons fly off his clothes as his body expanded. We saw his eyes pop from his head and finally we saw him explode, exactly as if a charge of dynamite had been detonated inside of him. . . .

I have said that what has gone before is a question; not a story.

Dr. Blystein is dead. His shattered remains have been burnt in his own electric furnace. His establishment is scattered to the four winds. Somewhere his servants are living or dying without hope, without emotion, without soul.

And Aline and I remain. All but that soul which has clung to our brains, to our imaginations, has fled. We are, in a sense, people with only memory of soul. As for me, I would far rather that all my soul had gone. . . .

AND this is my question: Someone among you who read this history knows that he is soon to die. Will such an one be so heartless as to withhold from us that soul which is soon to abandon his body? Will it be so bad to relinquish only a few hours of life and let that soul-imbued blood flow into our veins?

Will you give us your soul?