

# IT!

By E. M. SAMSON

IT BEGAN in France.

I was, at the time, leaning over the operating table upon which lay an unconscious officer, not seriously wounded, but needing immediate attention: And the guard standing stiffly by the door indicated he was a prisoner of much more than ordinary importance. Indeed, it was no secret to those of us in the room that the brain hidden within that closely cropped skull was responsible for more allied reverses than the combined brains of the entire General Staff, and, if given the smallest of opportunities, he would slip through our fingers and vanish.

Behind me stood Major Selwyn Morris, of the Intelligence Department, and it was he who leaned forward and whispered:

"All is fair in love and war, Horace! Now is your chance to test your theory and rid us of a dangerous foe!"

For an instant I stared incredulously at the speaker, then turned with a shudder of repugnance to complete the work before me. An expression of disgust clouded the major's face, and regret flickered in his gray eyes as he followed the patient from the room.

"A wonderful chance!" he murmured. "And you lost your nerve, Horace!"

At that instant was sown the first seed of discord in a friendship of years' standing, intimacy as seldom ever exists even between brothers!

I, Horace Tremaine, and Selwyn Morris had gone through college together, inseparable companions, sharing reverses as well as joys, and when I took up the study of medicine, he began law. Nor did graduation separate us or bring about any change in our relations; for we took an apartment in the city and shared quarters as before.

As an attorney-at-law Selwyn was mediocre, but I at once leaped to the front in my chosen profession. Endowed by nature with the keen brain, uncanny judgment, and long, supple fingers—the surgeon's hand, a very few years sufficed to establish me as one of the country's leading operators. With

an insatiable passion for research and plenty of money, I set up a laboratory in our apartment, far removed from any possibility of disturbance, and there performed the work which soon made me the leading authority on brain surgery.

As for Selwyn, he could not have been more delighted and enthusiastic had the success been his own; and, sharing as he did my entire confidence, knowing my hopes and my dreams, he was aware of my wonderful discovery—the exact location in the brain of a center which I named temporarily the "Memory center." It was a complex ganglion, and I confidently believed that, with the living human brain to work upon, I could isolate the component centers, thus making possible by operation the complete extirpation of all criminal tendencies!

That was my hope, the ambition which spurred me on!

Upon one occasion only did I have the opportunity to try the experiment, and though it did not result exactly as I anticipated, it proved my theory to be correct without a shadow of a doubt. One night, while tramping the lower city as had been our habit, we caught a murderer red-handed. Like a flash, the same idea came to both of us, and we saved him from the law by smuggling him into our apartment where, believing the end justified the means, we compelled the frightened wretch to submit to the operation.

Without a trace of egotism I say that operation was a beautiful and delicate piece of work; but instead of removing the criminal tendency, it served to locate what I called the "center of personal recollection." That man, though he retained all the intelligence he ever possessed, lost every shred of personal remembrance! Every thought, every incident which would serve to identify him was gone! And what was most remarkable, *he did not know he had forgotten anything!* To continue the experiment, I placed him in a state of partial anesthesia, then related a fictitious personal history, complete in details—all of which he later repeated as fact and *believed it himself!*

IT WAS shortly after this the war came, and both Selwyn and I went over—he, in the Intelligence Department, and I, in the medical.

In charge of my own hospital I gave proof of my aptitude by taking up reconstructive surgery and producing results so miraculous that surgeons of all nations came to study my methods. Today, many men with "Tremaine faces" are passed on the streets without attracting a second glance because of disfigurement.

Then came the suggestion that I debase both myself and my profession by robbing a fellow being of more than his life—his family, position, home, his entity! It mattered not that he was an enemy who would not hesitate to take my life should we meet in the open—that he might escape and do incalculable harm to our cause—such an action was unthinkable! And Selwyn Morris not only counseled it, but attempted to justify it with the old—"All is fair in love and war"! It revealed a moral depravity, a perversion of soul hitherto concealed from me, which nauseated and made me wonder at our long friendship.

Fortunately my work kept me so busy I saw little of him, for with each day my aversion increased, and though I tried to conceal it because of our years of intimacy, it was growing beyond my control.

It was also in France that I met Margaret Thomas.

Having baffled the plans of many ambitious and designing mothers, I had come to consider myself immune, and fully expected to end my days a bachelor; but such was the lure of her beauty and attractiveness, I surrendered without a struggle. Though I had not declared myself, I felt that she understood and returned my love; and I dreamed of the day when, the war ended, I could take her back home as my wife. Then without warning, my dream was shattered! I encountered her with Selwyn Morris, and was informed of the ceremony that had just been performed! The world suddenly went black, I staggered, and out of the darkness I heard him murmur:

"Buck up, Horace! All is fair in love and war!"

Within twenty-four hours I had asked for and obtained the transfer which caused so much surprise and comment—for I was afraid I would kill him if I remained near him.

Arriving home, I threw myself heart and soul into the work of reconstruction—the building up of features destroyed, which made me world famous. But what cared I for notoriety or honors! With a strength and concentration of effort almost beyond my own understanding, the wonderment of my colleagues, I worked feverishly with little or no rest—I did the work of a dozen men—and little did they suspect I was working to save my reason!

My life was a hell! Ugly black thoughts constantly tortured my brain when I was idle, and my sleep of exhaustion was a succession of frightful nightmares, in which the tormenting demon invariably took the likeness of Selwyn Morris! I had to work, work or succumb!

Upon several occasions, distorted vision showed him to me in the street crowds; and once I followed for hours to locate his abode—only to learn upon cautious inquiry that he was still in France. At another time, the face upon which I was working suddenly became his face, and for the first time in my life my nerve almost deserted me—I finished by will power alone.

I knew these were delusions, fantasies of a mentality striven almost to the breaking point, and I feared the time when I should have to face him—the outcome made me shudder, even though my heart was filled with hatred.

With the end of the war came news of Selwyn's return, and from that hour I dared not trust myself on the public streets. I motored from my apartment to the hospital, there to remain until evening; then, behind drawn curtains, I rode home and shut myself up until midnight. At that hour, when there was no likelihood of meeting him, I walked for one hour in a place he had never been known to frequent—the park. As time passed, I gradually lost my fear—I felt it would be possible to avoid him forever—then, upon a secluded path, in the pale, ghostly moonlight, I met him.

Facing each other, separated only by a few feet, he smiled and extended his hand. I was astounded to find my mind clear and my nerves quiet—that I experienced none of the feelings I had anticipated.

"Horace, old man," he said with deep feeling, "I heard that you took your exercise here every night, and I have come to ask your forgiveness."

"For what?" I asked calmly.

"For—for—" he faltered, then exclaimed: "Truly, old man, I knew nothing of your interest in Margaret until I had asked her to marry me! Do you believe me?"

"Of course I do, Wyn!" I cried, clasping his hand warmly. "I'll admit I was pretty hard hit at first. But she never told me she cared for me, so there was nothing in the way of her accepting you. I've buried it, Wyn, and I wish both of you every happiness!"

"Gad, Horace! That's the best news I've ever heard!" he exclaimed joyously. "We were dreadfully cut up about you, and now you have removed the only drawback to our complete happiness! How glad she will be! She's an angel, Horace, if there ever was one on earth!"

For a moment emotion choked me, and I was thankful the shadow of the shrubbery hid the shudder which convulsed me.

"I know she is, old fellow," I managed to say a trifle hoarsely. "But come, you are going home with me—I've a little old Scotch left, and I haven't forgotten how you like it!"

**T**HOUGH he protested at the lateness of the hour, I led him away to the apartment we had for several years shared in common.

As I saw him seated in the chair which had once been his favorite, a great wave of joy surged over me, and I turned hastily to prepare his drink, lest he notice my agitation. As I added the white crystals which were to place him entirely in my power, my hand shook; but I steeled myself, and when I faced him, there was no outward sign of the fierce fires burning within me.

"To her, Wyn!" I cried, raising my glass. "May she live long to enjoy her happiness!"

We drank, and I seated myself, my eyes fixed gloatingly upon him. He was mine—mine! My heart sang it—the little clock on the mantel ticked it. Mine—mine! Mine—mine! Mine—mine! No power of heaven or hell could tear him from me!

"—like old times!" I heard him murmur drowsily, attempting to arise. "Wish I could stay, old chap—pretty—late. Retta will wonder—I—I—feel little queer—better go—come back—come—come—"

His voice died away like a clock running down, and he sank back in the chair.

"At last—at last!" I grated, looking down at him. "You and I are going to have a long delayed settlement, Selwyn Morris!"

Stripping off my coat, I took the limp form in my arms as though he was a child and half ran through the rooms to the distant laboratory. My plans had long been worked out to the smallest detail, so there was no hesitation now. Hastily removing his clothing, I strapped him to the table and made my preparations with the sureness and care I would have observed in the hospital.

Little anesthetic was necessary, and I was soon at work. A few well-placed sutures gave his eyes a slight oriental slant; one here, one there, and his curved eyebrows were almost straight; an incision and a little careful moulding made the nose decidedly aquiline; a small portion of cuticle removed, and a running stitch gave a cleft to the chin; two stitches in just the right place made the ears stand from the head; and, then, my crowning feat!

After long experiment upon the lower animals, I had succeeded in injecting, by means of a specially made hair-like hypodermic needle, pigment into the retina, thereby changing the color of the eye! This I now did on my first human patient, and rejoiced when the gray changed to seal brown!

Deftly applying adhesive dressing, I placed him in bed and threw myself into a chair by his side, where I remained the rest of the night and the succeeding day, holding him every minute under the influence of the benumbing drug. The moment I had prayed for, planned and waited patiently for had come at last! I reveled in a delirium of ecstasy, without any sense of drowsiness or fatigue! At times I could scarcely believe, and many times reached out to touch the plaster-strapped face, to convince myself it was not a dream!

For three days I kept him unconscious, snatching sleep in the chair by the bedside; and every one of those days I laughed at the uproar I knew his disappearance must be causing! I could imagine the theories of the police—foul play, suicide, accident! And all the time he was snoring away in his old bed! Is it any wonder I laughed! I would laugh still more when I had finished with him and turned him out into the world! This would be my masterpiece, and what a pity no one would ever know!

On the fourth day, I removed the dressing and strapped him once more to the table; then I allowed his consciousness to return—for I would not deprive him of his personality without giving him some of the hideous mental torture he had caused me. To see his fear, terror, and despair! To hear him rave! Oh, that would be music to my ears!

At last, his eyes opened, and he looked wonderingly around; then he saw me and stared. A flicker of recollection came into those strange brown eyes, and he gasped hoarsely:

"What has happened, Horace? Why am I here?" at that moment, he discovered the straps, and shrank before the wild gleam in my eyes. "Horace!" he cried, horror in his tone. "Horace, you—you—"

He paused as I silently held a mirror before him. For a moment, he stared in bewilderment at the face reflected, every feature of which was strange to him; then the terrible realization stunned him—he understood my revenge!

"You fiend—you fiend from hell!" he mouthed through hard, dry lips.

Oh, the unspeakable joy of that moment! I was repaid for all my suffering! If he was horrified now, how would he feel when he knew the rest? I must tell him!

"Just a small payment on the debt I owe you, Wyn, dear boy!" I laughed uncontrollably. "You snatched me from heaven to cast me into hell, so why shouldn't I be a fiend?" Then my laughter ceased, and I glared with hate. "I loved you as a brother, yet you tore out my heart and trampled upon it! You sent me to hell—you made me a fiend—you suggested that I use for my own ends the discovery I hoped would make the world better, and now, by God, you will be the first to undergo it! Do you hear?" I shrieked, and he seemed to shrink within himself. "Do you hear? I am going to relieve you of your personality!"

The result of my announcement far exceeded my fondest hopes! With the scream of a madman, he wrenched and tore at the straps which bound him; then, finding this fruitless, he raved and cursed—all of which I thoroughly enjoyed until I realized he was about to escape me! The light of insanity gleamed in his eyes—the bloody froth which flecked his lips warned me his reason was going!

With the anesthetic crushed to his face, I watched his struggles grow less wild and finally cease. Five minutes later, I had him prepared, and in half an hour, he was back in the bed. In the

meantime, I had dissected out the center which I knew, from my operation on the criminal, to be the one which controlled personal recollection.

IT WAS done! My revenge was complete and beyond recall! No other living man knew of the existence of my ganglion, and, even I, if I ever so wished, could not replace that which I had removed! It was gone forever—removed by an operation which I, alone of all men, could perform!

With my lust for revenge satiated, I sat beside him to await returning consciousness; and when it came, I repeated in his ear a personal history—that his would not be a blank. I chuckled at its plausibility, for it was that of a man—not unlike him in build—who had told me his story in France, then—died. With what I told him, Selwyn Morris could take up the life of Anthony Jones, and the substitution never be suspected.

I had no doubt as to the result—it could not fail, yet I was overjoyed when, in answer to my question later in the day, he repeated the words I had impressed upon his semi-conscious brain, and asked if I would help him to find employment! Imagine my satisfaction when he accepted my offer and became my man-servant!

\* \* \*

Two weeks have elapsed since the operation, and gradually I am reaching the conviction that it was not a complete success—that I removed something more than personal recollection. As Anthony Jones, he appears perfectly normal, yet I feel there is something—*something* lacking. There is no life, no fire in his eye—it is dull and expressionless. He takes no interest in anything, is stolid, devoid of emotion, and mechanical (that expresses it exactly) in all his actions. He obeys orders to the letter, and has given no cause for the uneasiness I feel; yet he is getting on my nerves—so much so, I am beginning to fear him! Why? I do not know.

\* \* \*

HORRIBLE! Inconceivable! A few minutes ago, Betsy, my little fox terrier, angered by a kick from—Jones, snapped at his leg. Then followed a scene so brutal, so disgustingly fiendish that my soul revolted, and I crouched in terror behind my chair! With a quick grab, Jones seized the little animal and deliberately twisted the head from the body! Nauseated as I was by the sight, I saw something which made me shudder with loathing for *myself* and my crime!

As he stood there, the dripping carcass in his hands, I saw there was no anger—no resentment—no excitement—*there was absolutely no expression whatsoever in his eyes!*

Then I *knew!* And the knowledge almost crazed me! Like Frankenstein, I had created a monster who would destroy me with as little compunction as he had taken the life of the helpless little animal!

God forgive me! No man ever sinned as I! I had robbed him of that something men call a *soul!*

To my half crazed brain, he appeared in his true light, as he was—a man—no, not a man—a *Thing* without a soul! A hideous monstrosity!

Fixing those vacant eyes upon me, he advanced—slowly—nearer and nearer until I lost control of myself and sprang up to cover behind the table!

"No—no! Don't touch me—go away!" I screamed in a frenzy, then collapsed half fainting when he turned and strode mechanically from the room!

Only for a moment did my terror allow me to lie there! I staggered to my feet—it was his life or mine! I knew the outcome if he attacked me, unless—unless I could take him unaware!

With throbbing heart and quaking limbs, I stole softly after him. Leaning from a window which opens on the narrow, well-like air shaft, I found him; and from his attitude, I knew he had just tossed poor Betsy's body down the shaft. If I could only reach him before he discovered me! What an opportunity! Sick with dread lest he turn about, I crept forward as stealthily as ever a starving tiger stalked a doe! Surely the terrible pounding of my heart would arouse him! No—he still gazed downward! Nearer—nearer I crept until my outstretched hands almost touched him, I gathered my strength and leaped! Claspng his knees, I shot him out into the darkness, in spite of the grip he obtained on the sill!

Leaning out perilously, I listened; then my brain whirled, and I staggered back to my chair! An icy hand seemed to grip my throat—chills coursed my spine!

In God's name, what was it I had hurled from the window? Not a cry—not a sound of impact on the stones below! I had listened, but no sound came up! Could he have caught something and stayed his plunge down these four stories?

The thought sent me running, and a moment later I was again leaning from the window examining the shaft with

my flashlight. Ah-h! there he was—a crumpled, shapeless mass! Never again would he trouble me!

But why had I not heard him strike the stones? I shuddered—I must get a grip on myself, or something would break! Rest—sleep—that was what I needed. A mild sleeping draught, and I crawled shivering into bed, comforting myself with the knowledge that—It would never molest me.

For hours, it seemed, I tossed and thought—cursing my nerves, the impotent drug, and It. Sleep! Sleep! I must have it or go mad! The draught was not strong enough—I would double the dose!

Swinging my feet to the floor, I was about to arise, when a sound from the hall outside my door—a sound as though some heavy body was being dragged along the floor—brought back all my terror! With ears straining and eyes wide with dread, I stared at the door—it moved slowly—slowly—jerkily—half open—then—I saw—*It!* Humping—slithering—like a monstrous worm, a hideous, gruesome mass of broken, twisted flesh, It rolled in and started for me!

Loathsome—repulsive—It flattened out with each awkward lurch—quivered sickeningly—then, swelling with waves of snaky contractions, arose for another

plunge! And all the while, from the face, crushed out of all human semblance, two shiftless eyes—two eyes absolutely expressionless—dead—stared at me! Pent up terror suffocated me! I could not move—I could not cry out—I could not tear my fascinated gaze from those two fish-like eyes!

Nearer—nearer! One of the bloody hands reached out, clutched my ankle, and began to fumble upward!

A horrible scream broke the spell—I tore myself from that awful hand and sprang upright on the bed! With eyes unblinking and purpose unchanged, It grasped the bed and began to draw itself up! Higher—higher! The shapeless head was on a level with my feet! Another heaving hunch—It hung a moment—then lost its hold and slumped down almost to the floor!

Freed from that cold, relentless gaze, my paralysis left me! I leaped over It—fell—scrambled to my feet and rushed wildly into my study! Quick as I was, I saw It flop out of my bedroom as I slammed and locked the study door!

With my back against the door, my pounding heart choking me, and that slithering slump in my ears, hopeless despair seized me! Then in that moment of panic, the training of years of research brought a thought which sent me stumbling to my desk! My colleagues—

the world must know of this horrible, unreal, unbelievable consequence of my operation! It must not be lost!

It is the end! I feel it! There is no escape from that relentless, soulless monster! I hear it now! It is at the door—pushing—sliding—

IT WAS almost daylight, when Detectives Gibbons and O'Mara, responding to a wild, incoherent telephone call, entered the apartment of Dr. Horace Tremaine, the eminent brain surgeon, and were greeted by the noisy, excited barking of a little fox terrier.

Sprawled across his desk, a revolver grasped in his hand and a bullet hole in his right temple, lay Dr. Tremaine; and, upon the desk beneath him, they found a heap of closely written sheets—all clear and legible except the last page, which was scrawling and irregular, plainly indicating a terrible mental stress.

The officers reported the facts, and, the air shaft revealed nothing, and upon the operating table in the laboratory was the accumulated dust of weeks of disuse.

The officers reported the facts, and, when inquiry brought the reply that Major and Mrs. Selwyn Morris were still in France, the weird story of the manuscript was attributed to mental aberration and pigeon-holed, where I found it.

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