

# THE MASTERS OF SILENCE

## PART ONE

### CHAPTER I

From the moment the needle is pushed into my skin I stay lying on my back, not moving, observing the gradual fading of my physical sensations. On the fundamental level of “consciousness” there suddenly opens up, opens wide, the arcana of my memories and details layered upon details with terrifying sharpness and precision. So, I close my eyes and the film of recent events starts rolling, like being inside a giant kaleidoscope, with the strange sensation of melting away in a whirlwind of colors and movements.

This is how it began. With a giant statue in the middle of a big rectangle of light.

Stone toads move around the base, crawling up the purple tunic, in and out of the folds and pleats, slipping up the bronze skirt to reach the blouse and disappear in the architectural twists and turns of a proudly aggressive chest.

A strange sun shines its red rays over this source of nightmares through the serrated gaps of a distant wall.

Everything is coming to life, little by little. The circus clown with starry eyes wriggles inside his bottle. His head rolls from right to left and left to right like a giraffe sticking out of a glass barrel at the end of a long reptilian neck.

A repulsive monkey hangs from the pendulum of a gigantic clock that slices through the air like a steel blade. As it swings through the air its long hands snatch up the naked children encircling the weird machine whose face is nothing but a round, gaping mouth of blackness. And one by one the children disappear inside the clock, swallowed up by the insatiable mouth, swept away by the flow of time.

The statue has lost its face and I feel as if I am the one refusing to see it. The face is that of an angel or a demon whose distant smile is that of Helen of Troy ordering the high towers of Ilium to burn.

“Make a little effort, Valerie, we’re entering the second level.”

“I’m afraid... Oh!... Greg... Please... Stop, I can’t take anymore...”

“Simple depressive reaction... It’s nothing.”

“I don’t want to, Greg. I don’t want to...”

“Gently... Make a little effort... We’re on the way, Valerie, we’re on the way...”

The light dances and vibrates like in the heart of summer.

Big, black flies buzz around the infernal ballet, others plunge into the black, gangrenous stone.

Invisible hands throw sand that plugs up the deep openings so that cries for help rise from of the huge steel bars that flood into the rectangle of light.

“No, Valerie... No, not that... Free yourself... Free yourself...”

“I can’t. I don’t want to...”

“Remove that bar...”

“Greg!”

The gate collapses on a deserted square. And from the crenellated wall greedy fingers dig out the sand plugging the cracks. Long, monstrous fingers, with gold and emerald rings, scratching the walls gnawed away by saltpeter, enlarging the openings that become grottoes, caves exhaling dying gasps.

A black flame shines in the dark and it looks like in the icy fire a road appears, narrow, leading to a tunnel open onto the infinite. A round mouth, slightly agape as if for a kiss.

“Greg... no... It’s not possible... I don’t want to...”

“We’re reaching the third level...”

“Greg...”

The mouth gets bigger, becomes huge, ready to swallow the emptiness and dark, embracing and menacing, like some monstrously vast sea of flesh.

“Greg...”

All of a sudden, the gate slams shut, locked up tight with a huge chain and padlock... The stone wall springs up from the darkness... The colors fade, blur and disappear... Nothing remains but the screen, empty, covered with a spectral glow.

“Cut!”

And Professor Greysson’s finger pushes a button and the normal light once again shines in the “viewer.”

## CHAPTER II

The rest appears to me with unbelievable clarity through the veil of my memories, as I gradually sink into the nebulous void. The film continues.

I hear Greysson's voice saying to me, "Well, Mr. Milland, what's your conclusion?"

I am surprised by the question. I nod my head, embarrassed. "I'm not a psychiatrist. Not even a bad psychologist, but..."

"But?"

"But they seem pretty obvious Freudian symbols, especially in the interpretation of... well, of this voluntary confinement of Valerie Watson where the symbolism is in the clown bottle, the glass barrel, the clock orifice, the wall, the gate and the chain. In my opinion it's her unconscious refusal to pursue this stupid dream."

"It's not a dream, Mr. Milland." And he hastens to add, "Not a normal dream! It's the cenesthetic reactions of the unconscious that interests us since Gregory Watson's daring experiment is very disturbing to us. Can you swear on your honor that Professor Watson never confided in you at all about his psychophysiological work?"

Like the clown in the bottle I shake my head from right to left and left to right.

All four of them are here in front of me, examining me with obvious interest. I can describe them each in turn:

First, Professor Anthony Greysson, the director of the psychophysiological center of Boston. He is tall, thin and bald, his skull in the shape of a dome. He is a dynamic psychologist with a great reputation. Big horn-rimmed glasses sit on his slightly hooked nose.

Next to him I see Ludovic Aymes, a respected pharmacologist. The small, nervous man who cannot stop playing with his skinny fingers, continually cracking his knuckles. His skin is dark and his beady eyes expose his constant alertness.

As for Fred Lindsay and Herbert Dayton they are both world famous psychiatrists. For many long years they have been friends with Gregory Watson and they are like two inscrutable beings, keeping their comments to a strict minimum; two men of science who are methodical and reserved. The more I watch them the more I think they look like two big, articulated puppets.

The four men come and go in and out of Watson's house where they have lived for the past three days. That is where I found them an hour ago when I rang at the gate bringing a personal invitation from Professor Watson. I explained everything to them very briefly.

My name is Robert Milland. I am American and I have worked in Melbourne at a center for electronics for many years, that is since I quit General Motors. I never knew Gregory Watson, nor Adam nor Eve, and when I received his invitation by way of Graham Whiley, I could not have been more surprised.

I had been chosen, apparently, out of a list of 200 technicians to assist Professor Watson in his work in the field of electronics. That is all I could say about it, except that I was motivated to accept by the princely sum offered for my work.

Unfortunately I arrived too late, with the feeling of throwing myself body and soul into a weird and totally incomprehensible adventure. At least it was like this until now, given the scanty revelations that they gave me and which had completely devastated me.

Mrs. Watson had killed her husband during a fit of insanity and they had found her a few hours later in the laboratory, a wreck, completely unconscious, curled up, lost in some inner dream, escaping the consequences of her action as well as grim reality.

But now Greysson has decided to start everything over from scratch. The man disturbs me though I cannot say why.

"Let's see where we're at," he tells me. "We're going to need your services, Mr. Milland. As long as you know the whole situation. Mrs. Watson has not been charged and the police are blaming her actions

on pure insanity. Furthermore, the information we've got about the marital relations of the Watsons is totally normal, despite their age difference. We also have a complete report on Valerie Watson."

Greysson opens a file and scans a typed page. He speaks with the solemnity of a judge. "Age, 32. IQ, 135. No mental defects. Emotional sensitivity a little higher than average. Only a slight systolic heart murmur, unquestionably functional. No schizophrenic problems and the constant report of her..."

He will not read further. He closes the file and nods. "But this report dates back before Professor Watson experimented on Valerie, so it doesn't matter anymore. You've seen the encephalography report and noticed the appearance of certain Freudian reflexes due to the regressive reactions of her nervous character. Watson went too far with Valerie, there's no question about it, and in probing the chambers of her soul he triggered a shock. He's the one responsible for it."

He stops talking to let Lindsay finish the presentation. "However, one thing is certain and Watson hinted at it to us the day before his death. He had made an extraordinary discovery that could destroy everything we know in the field of depth psychology. Our only hope of finding this important discovery is to somehow break through the defenses of this morbid state in which Valerie continues to shut herself away. And that's why we're here."

"Where is Valerie Watson?"

Ludovic Aymes points to the floor above us. "In an experimental room. We're trying to use the reanimation methods used by Watson himself and with his own machines. A few days from now, if we fail, we'll resort to other methods."

I take a deep breath to hide my confusion. Because none of this explains why Professor Watson invited me here.

After I mention this Herbert Dayton shakes out of his indifference. He starts fidgeting in his chair and suddenly looks human. In his opinion, it is very simple: Watson needed a highly specialized technician to build an electronic device before moving on to new experiments.

I accept the idea because it is sound, logical and rational. But why did he have to search so far afield? Why all this mystery, all these precautions, all this discreet overkill by this man? This is the question that crosses my mind but that I prefer to keep silent in order not to complicate matters further because right now I am getting drawn in. And I do not really know why.

This affair is becoming more and more fascinating to me as Greysson places his hand on a big machine the size and shape of a chest on the wall. Above it is a rectangular, plastic screen, slightly curved on either end. It is the encephalography unit designed and built by Gregory Watson. It is used to record the auditory and visual stimulations of the most hidden circuits of the memory.

"A dream recorder, in a way?" My question makes him smile.

"Much more than that, Mr. Milland," Lindsay corrects me in a calm voice. A dream, properly speaking, is located in the first level of subconscious functions. It provides man with a release as well as fulfilling a certain psychological need for escape. But the second level is connected with the cenesthetic sensations in the cortex, which is completely foreign to our conscious mind. It's the unknown and mystifying region whose seat is in the parietal convolutions that Watson was exploring with this machine. In other words, a new dimension."

"I don't think I really understand."

Greysson shrugged his shoulders. "It doesn't matter," he said. "Anyway, We don't put much faith in Watson's theory, which is a little hazy in our opinion. In truth, according to the information that Watson was willing to give us, his work was focused on the time sacrificed to sleep every day. He thought that with the right method, two hours a night was enough for an average person to recharge his batteries, so to speak. The elimination of repressive dreams and certain cultural barriers, without any mental constraints, can help empty the mind, thus allowing the mind-body entity to realize its full potential. This prospect offers humanity two important possibilities. First to eliminate the dead time devoted to sleep and then to allow every individual to replace these neutral periods with some activity. In a word, to take full advantage of life during the time we have here on earth. Quite a tempting project, isn't it?"

I nodded in agreement. "Of course, this is the secret you're hoping to get out of Mrs. Watson?"

“We think so. Although there’s certainly a lot to do to get such results. Mrs. Watson’s psychological accident confirms our fears, but we’re ready to pursue the work of our colleague and review the formulae that we found in his files. They concern the ‘psychedelics’ used in the experiment.”

“Do you mean hallucinogenic drugs?”

“Not exactly. The LSD<sup>1</sup>-based substances used by Watson are brain accelerators that aim to modify the states of consciousness. Unfortunately, the phenomenon in the brain depends on the potential of redox or oxidation-reduction, and we fear that the product used by Watson might be harmful over time, causing lesions in Valerie’s brain due to this reduction of oxygen consumption. This, in our opinion, would account for her homicidal madness, purely accidental though it might be.”

At that instant a red light blinks on a board and Greysson cuts short his explanations. He waves me after him and says, “Come on.”

I follow him. We leave the research room to the other professors, who dive back into their dusty files. I do not like these people. It is funny, I think they are weird, creepy, with little human about them. They are like characters in a dream, bland, insipid, insignificant. Everything is mechanical and rigid. Too severe. I feel like...

Yes, of course, the injection! That soft couch... that feeling of floating in the void...

I sink into the dream little by little... Maybe that is what distorts my judgment in a reversal of values... Yes, maybe... But things keep unfolding clearly and precisely... So, let’s see where the story goes...

I see us walking inside the house. Greysson and I pass through a tastefully decorated hall... We climb the stairs to the second floor on a wooden staircase covered with a thick, wool carpet. A landing. In the back, several doors.

I see two nurses walking down the hallway. One of them comes to meet Greysson, holds out a white smock. He puts it on and takes me into a round room, perfectly round; its walls are painted white.

Strange machines hum quietly in the obscurity. The room is deadly silent except for this. While Greysson prepares a hypodermic needle, my gaze falls upon the relaxing couch. Motionless, dead still under the white sheet, I see the most gorgeous, the most ravishing creature that exists in the world. Only a little paleness dulls the radiance of her face whose features are of the rarest purity... a doll’s face, angelic and supernatural, that belongs only to dreams.

Here is one of them, the face of Valerie Watson!

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<sup>1</sup> Lysergic Acid Diethylamide, derived from ergot, a grain fungus that grows on rye.