

Amazing Stories, August, 1926

HIGH TENSION

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A Wonderful Surgeon—As Irritable as Able

“WHAT is the matter, Madge?” The grave-featured head nurse stopped in front of the weeping girl as she asked the question

“I just can’t stand that Dr. Carter,” the girl gasped. “Here I’ve been working for him in the operating room the last six months, and he abuses me worse than if I were an apprentice. I didn’t do anything wrong, but I couldn’t work fast enough to suit him. It was, ‘hurry up nurse—ligature...needle-holder, why the deuce do you have to finger over everything before you can find what I want?’ If I had had four hands instead of two I couldn’t have worked fast enough to suit him. He raved at his assistant all through the operation, and no one could do anything fast enough to please him.”

“Yes, I know, my dear,” the head nurse comforted, “Dr. Carter is a very hard man to work for, but you must remember that he is a wonderful surgeon and works under great nervous tension.”

“He may be” the girl sobbed, “but he might act like a human being as the rest of the doctors do, anyway.”

“My dear, you must remember that Dr. Carter is different from other doctors. Really, he is uncanny in his ability. He does things no other surgeon would even think of attempting, and his knowledge of brain surgery is remarkable. Dr. Bryan was telling me just now that Dr. Carter is the greatest living authority on brain-centers and their action.”

“That may be true,” replied the nurse, “but he isn’t human. There are times when I think he isn’t just right. His face is so flushed and red when he works, and he looks like a man with a burning fever, his eyes are so bright and piercing. And he always wears that head lamp when he works. He never leaves it off for a minute, and Heaven save anyone who

touches it.”

“Yes, my dear,” the head nurse soothed. “He is a queer man, but we have our duty to perform. You must try to do your best, even if it is hard and disagreeable at times.”

With this copy-book comfort the head nurse continued on her morning round of inspection, leaving the still weeping and irate nurse to compose herself as best she could.

Dr. Reginald Carter and His Life Described

DR. REGINALD CARTER was a queer man. He came from the East unheralded and unknown, and in the brief space of a few years had risen to the position of chief surgeon of the hospital, and a commanding position in the medical profession. About his antecedents nothing was known, and being of a very reticent disposition, he made few acquaintances, except among medical associates. No one could claim the position of friend with him.

Lean and wiry of figure, with dark eyes and rather swarthy complexion, his personality was that of the student and dreamer—such a one as nature seemed to have designed to tread the pathways of life alone.

The little that could be learned of his past was very unsatisfying to the curious. He had served in the army, and was stationed in a large hospital in Paris. This much was known from the reports of soldiers that were patients in the hospital. His reputation for surgical ability was known there, and his work was the wonder of the hospital. He made no friends, even there, and a soldier-patient was to him merely a problem which had to be dropped as soon as convalescence was established. On his location in the city the American Legion asked him to join their body, which he did, but he never even attended a meeting. No lodge could claim him as a member.

He lived in an apartment in the upper part of the city—alone—except for a single

man-servant. Like his master, the servant was a taciturn, reticent type.

With the single exception of Dr. James Bryan, Dr. Carter's relations with the staff of the hospital was strictly formal. He would occasionally unbend enough with Dr. Bryan to briefly discuss an unusual or interesting case.

Such an attitude and such a personality would indubitably have spelled failure for anyone else. But his weird, and supernormal skill in diagnosis, and his uncanny ability as a surgeon, kept him supplied with work. Brain cases that seemed hopeless, were referred to him. Time and again he had achieved the seemingly impossible, and had restored unfortunates to life and well-being. Their words of gratitude left him untouched, and his anger with and answer to one of the nouveaux-riches who tried to patronizingly offer him an excessive fee, was the talk of the hospital for days.

"My dear sir," the doctor said, "You were a very interesting case. You are well now and therefore of no further interest. Our relations were of a purely business nature and call for no payment beyond the bill I have rendered you."

Gasping like a fish, the-patient hastily paid his bill, and without further attempts, left the hospital.

Dr. Carter's gruffness seemed uncalled for.

Dr. Carter's Head-Lamp

TO the nurses and interns of the hospital Dr. Carter was a never-ending source of conversation, tinged with respect and fear as it was. To work with him in the operating room was a task that daunted the stoutest-hearted nurse or intern. Dr. Carter demanded more of them than any other surgeon of the hospital. He himself worked with lightning-like speed, his deft hands moved with the skill and grace of the practiced musician, and with no more

lost motion or hesitancy than a well-oiled machine.

No assistant, however capable, could keep up with his demands, let alone anticipate his wishes, and the doctor's biting and sarcastic words made the careless or laggard assistant and nurse wish they were somewhere else.

One thing peculiarly noticeable about the doctor was the head lamp that he always wore while working. A head lamp is needed to illuminate the deeper recesses of an operative wound, but it is scarcely necessary to wear in the operating room all the time.

This head lamp was of a distinctive pattern, and current was supplied to it by a small battery that the doctor carried in his hip pocket.

As soon as Dr. Carter arrived at the hospital in the morning, he went to the dressing-room and donned a gown, and affixed the head lamp. Then he was ready to see whatever patients were referred to him.

With his brilliant shining eyes and his nervous intense manner he was a unique figure, and caused a great deal of comment among his associates. There was a suspicion that Dr. Carter used drugs, but the cleanliness and poise of the man's life forbade such a belief.

His nearest—one might say his only acquaintance—was Dr. James Bryan. To Bryan the surgeon would occasionally unbend, and there were times when his conversation even approached cordiality. Bryan on one or two occasions had tried to make some friendly advances. Once he asked Dr. Carter to lunch with him. Carter's refusal was courteous, but final, and Bryan did not try again.

The Chief of Detectives Has an Interview with Dr. Bryan

THE loud insistent ringing of Dr. Bryan's telephone awoke him early one morning.

It was the chief of detectives calling. Dr. Bryan had at times helped out the police department, and his keen perception and active brain had more than once put them on the right track in some mysterious case. The chief of detectives often said that Bryan had missed his calling and should have been a detective instead of a surgeon.

During the war Bryan had in fact served in the intelligence department of the army and had received the warm commendations of his superiors for his capable work.

When Bryan walked into the chief's office he was met by a worried and distraught officer.

"Doctor, I am sure glad you came. We are in a mess and you are probably the only man who can help us out."

"Flattering," replied Bryan. "You folks give me credit for capabilities I don't possess."

"Do you suppose, Doctor, that we called you here just to pass the time of day? We know all about your capabilities, and we surely need your help."

"Well, tell me your troubles," the doctor grinned, "and I'll see what I can do."

"It is more serious than you think," the detective gravely replied. "This is a case of murder, and a peculiarly baffling one, too."

"Ah! a murder," the doctor replied. "What are the features that make this case so baffling?" He was all interest now, as with glowing eyes and intent expression, he questioned the chief.

"Well, to begin with, Doctor, we can only find one mark of violence on his body. The coroner has examined the body carefully and can give no cause of death. Don't you think it would be well if you came to look the body over?"

"Surely, surely," the doctor replied. "Will you ride in my car, chief?" They hastened out to the waiting car and rapidly

drove to the morgue.

"Who is the man?" Bryan asked, after they were ushered into the room and stood beside the murdered victim.

The chief referred to his notebook. "We have the name as Ivan Kronsky. This name was found on letters in his pockets and the initials I. K. are marked on his linen. We were called last night by the janitor of the Earling Apartments where he roomed."

Kronsky had told the janitor to call him at six o'clock because he had to catch a train. The janitor receiving no answer when he rang, thought that he had not been awakened by the 'phone and went up to his room. The door was ajar, and he entered. He found the body sprawled on the floor of the bed room. He called the police at once.

"I went up to the Earling to look things over," the chief continued. "I tell you, doctor, there was no clue or trace of the murderer in that room. The only mark we can find is this bruise on the wrist."

The detective pointed to a ringlike bruise encircling the dead man's wrist. "Ah!" said the doctor, as he examined the arm, "both bones broken by direct violence. Now, how could a man come by a circular bruise like that? It looks as if his wrist had been squeezed in a vise. Queer...very queer. Let's turn the body over and look at his back."

On turning the body over, the head fell back in a strange manner that at once attracted the doctor's attention. "See here, Chief," he exclaimed excitedly, as he pointed out a dark bruised area, the size of a half dollar, at the hair-line on the back of the neck, "the neck is broken. See how it rolls around when I move the head."

"What on earth could break a man's neck and not leave any mark bigger than that, doctor?"

"That's the puzzle, Chief. It looks as if some giant had pressed his thumb down there, but what kind of a being could have sufficient

strength to break the neck of a burly man with the pressure of a thumb?" The doctor turned the body back on the table and asked to see what had been found in the man's clothing.

A little heap of articles were turned over to him. They were the usual things found in men's pockets. A roll of bills, a knife, and a few keys made up the collection.

"I found this on the floor," the detective interjected, handing the doctor a small flat-headed screw. "Looks as though it might be out of a watch."

"Yes," said the doctor absent-mindedly. Then with sudden interest, "Where did you say you found it?"

"On the floor near the body. Can you attach any significance to that?"

"I don't know," the doctor mused. "Let me keep it. It may help us." He carefully placed the screw in an envelope and put it into his pocket. "Let's go up to the apartment, Chief, and see what we can find."

The Scene of a Murder

A SHORT drive brought them to the Earling—one of those modern monstrosities, the homes of so many of our city dwellers. They were accompanied to the apartment by a scared janitor of Irish persuasion, who, however fearless they are of the living, have a wholesome respect for the dead.

"Shore Mr. Kronsky was a foine man. 'Tis many the tip he gave the byes."

"When did you find him, Casey?" the chief asked.

"Just a little after six, Chief."

"You say the door was wide open?"

"Shore 'twas. I was surprisoid to foind it thot way as Kronsky was always careful to kape it locked."

Dr. Bryan, who had been carefully examining the lock, looked up with sudden questioning eyes. "See, Chief, this is a spring

lock. It works only from the inside. This door was opened from the inside and left open."

The doctor, without awaiting the chief's reply, hurried into the room and opened the window. The room was on the fourth floor of the apartment and a bare expanse of wall devoid of pipes or fire escape greeted the doctor's eyes.

"The fire escape is at the end of the hall," the chief answered the doctor's unspoken question. "See here, doctor, no one could climb that wall. I've seen human flies, but I never saw one that could climb a sheer wall like that."

"Don't be too sure, Chief. There are ledges where a man, if he had nerve enough, could get a grip. Anyway the person or thing that could break a man's neck with his thumb might be active enough to climb the side of this wall."

He turned from the window and started a careful search of the room. Look as he might, it bore out the chief's contention. It was barren of the slightest trace of evidence. The man had simply died at the hands of some assailant who had come and gone as silently and mysteriously as the evening shadows.

"Chief, we are up against a tough one. According to the story books the criminal always leaves some clue, always forgets something, or slips up in some way that lets the astute investigator find his trail. You and I know that this idea is pure bunk. If it were not, then why so many unsolved crimes?"

"I'm afraid you're right, doctor," sighed the chief. "The newspapers will give me the merry razz on this case."

"Never mind, Chief, we all have our left-handed friends. I'll think this thing over and see if there isn't some way.

"Smoke up, Chief," he said, handing the detective a fat cigar. "This may make things look brighter."

The Flat-Headed Screw

DR. BRYAN was busy at his professional work for the rest of the day and did not have time to give any thought to the murder. But in his room that evening he settled down for a period of intense concentration and study of the meager details that he possessed. He laid the little screw out on the table and studied it from every angle. It was a peculiar screw, short and flat-headed, and resembled one of the screws from a watch, as the chief had suggested.

In the meantime the chief had put in a busy day tracing the history of the murdered man. This was as barren of results as was the search of the apartment. The man was unknown outside of the apartment in which he lived, and the bank where he had his account. He seemed plentifully supplied with money on deposit, and his safety deposit box disclosed a large investment in Liberty bonds and a considerable collection of unset diamonds.

Days passed into weeks and still the mystery remained unsolved. To the chief the doctor briefly explained, "When I examine a sick man I must find a few symptoms or signs before I can make a diagnosis. A murder case is the same. Unless we have something to work on we are helpless. I think this case will be solved by chance, and chance only."

Chance indeed at last gave him a clue; but his wildest stretch of imagination could not have shown him the strange denouement it was to bring forth.

Dr. Bryan was unusually busy at the hospital for some weeks, and had come in contact with Dr. Carter more frequently than in the past. A series of brain injuries brought them together on many occasions. To Bryan it seemed that Carter was slightly more affable,—though he still held himself aloof.

The two associates were standing in a corridor and discussing a recent case when they were startled by the screams of a nurse. She came running down the hall, wringing her hands....then, at the sight of them she cried

out: "Oh! come quick, please! A man got stuck in the elevator. Oh! hurry, please," she sobbed.

Hurrying down the hall they were met by an appalling sight. The janitor of the hospital had brought the freight elevator to the second floor and left the door open while he unloaded some articles. Familiarity with the elevator had developed dangerous habits. He always reached in to the starting lever, turned on the power, and then stepped inside the car. Nothing ever happened. This time, however, his foot slipped as he stepped through the door and he fell on his face across the sill. The heavy elevator came down with resistless power and pinned him to the floor.

The look of agony on the man's face was enough to appall even the doctors inured to sights of suffering as they were.

"My God! Carter, how can we get him out," Bryan cried. "Someone run downstairs and shut off the power."

"Just a moment, Doctor." Dr. Carter stepped up and grasped the edge of the elevator top in his hands. "Just get the man's shoulders and pull him out as I lift."

Wondering at the apparent insanity of the request, Bryan mechanically obeyed. With a heave of his slender shoulders Dr. Carter lifted the elevator and Bryan drew the body of the dying man out on the floor.

Stunned at the tremendous feat of strength, Bryan could only stand there breathless. Then the arrival of an orderly with a cart distracted his attention and the care of the injured man drove all thoughts of it from his mind for the time being.

A Strange Interview Between Dr. Bryan and Dr. Carter

IT was only in the quiet of his room that he had time to think over the surprising incident of the day. Carter had left the hospital without comment. There had been no

opportunity to talk with him and ask an explanation of the mystery. Mystery it was....his whole life was a mystery. Bryan was being fully supplied with mysteries of late. A sudden thought struck him.... "If he can lift an elevator he can do other things!" Then, with a flash of recollection... "That screw is part of a headlamp!" He remembered now that Carter had been wearing it at the time. He called for his car and rapidly drove to Dr. Carter's apartment.

His plan of action was not exactly clear in his mind. How could he confront Carter with such a meager bit of evidence as a little flat-headed screw. The man would think him insane, or drunk. With his mind still in a state of confusion he arrived at Carter's rooms.

He was ushered in by the taciturn manservant. Dr. Carter looked up at him in surprise. "To what am I indebted for this call, doctor?" he asked.

Looking him squarely in the eye, Bryan advanced to the table and threw down the screw. "I just called to give you this screw out of that pet lamp of yours," he replied.

For a fleeting moment a look of surprise, not un-mixed with fear, flashed in Dr. Carter's eyes. It was gone in an instant, however, and he smiled. "Surely, my dear fellow, you haven't come out at this time of night to deliver such a paltry object as this."

"Not so paltry, Carter, as you think. This screw was found in the Earling apartment under peculiar circumstances."

The smiling, suave look disappeared from Carter's face, and it took on instead a grim and stern expression of understanding tinged with menace.

"Oh, yes, I remember now. You do a little dabbling in detective science, don't you? Well, what of it, my dear fellow? Use your judgment. Do you think you could go before any jury in this land of the free and convict me with one little screw as your evidence?"

"Men have been convicted on less," Bryan answered coldly.

"Yes, in the story books, but not in courts of law. Go ahead, my dear sir, and do your little best. Do you think I have failed to make preparations for eventualities?"

A Direct Accusation of Murder

CARTER was right, and Bryan knew it. He knew enough of the law to realize that it would be absolutely foolish to attempt to lay a charge against Carter and have the slightest hope of even getting it a respectable hearing before a grand jury. In the present state of the case it would be impossible even to show a motive for the crime, let alone to produce a scrap of evidence that would connect the slenderly built Carter with the iron-muscled being who had broken a burly man with no other weapon than his hands.

Carter silently sat watching the changing expressions of the other's face, evidently reading accurately the thoughts that passed through Bryan's mind.

"Don't you think, Doctor Bryan, that it would be better if I were to be allowed to make some sort of an explanation? Surely one has a right to give his reasons."

"Yes, if one can give a reason for murder," Bryan retorted.

"You use rather harsh terms, Doctor, do you not? Please wait until you know the facts," Carter replied. "Doctor, while you were in the intelligence department service in France did you ever, by any chance, hear of Serge Ivanoff?"

"Ivanoff?" Bryan started to his feet. "You mean to say that that man was Serge Ivanoff? That devil of the Russian revolution?"

"No other," Carter replied. "Now you understand why I objected to the harsh term of murder that you applied. No one could murder that man. Justifiable homicide is the only term

that could be applied to his taking-off. How did you happen to run across his trail?"

"I had no personal experience with the man," Bryan replied; "but one of my lieutenants entered Russia and fell into his hands. I had always liked the boy and the thought of his murder, for that was what it was, has always grieved me."

"My experience was of a decidedly personal nature," Carter grimaced. "See here, Bryan, ... I can't bear to go into complete details as to the past. Some things are too painful to speak of even after the lapse of years. It may help you to understand when I tell you that my family was of the old nobility of Russia. We tried to escape the country, but were apprehended. You wonder why I have not made friends? I tell you, Bryan, it was the man whom I considered my closest friend who betrayed us. My old Father, my Sister..." a spasm of pain distorted his clear cut features. "See here, Bryan, I can't go on. I can only say that that devil was the cause of it all. I was thrown in a filthy cell. Every day he used to call and manhandle me. He wanted me to tell where our family jewels were hidden. I refused to tell, for I knew that it would mean my death as soon as he knew.

"I won't trouble you with details, but I escaped. That escape is a horrible memory to me. I dream of it in the night sometimes, and wake wringing with perspiration.

"I came to this country to repair my shattered health and plan for vengeance. Friends of mine informed me that Ivanoff had been proscribed by the Soviet government. He was even too gross for them. Imagine my feelings when I was informed by secret agencies that he was in this very city. I made my preparations and entered his apartment. When I stepped into the room and stood before him he laughed at me. 'Ah! my little doctor,' he cried, 'You have come for another beating I see. This one shall be the last, for this country's laws allow one to kill a burglar.'

Can I ever forget the look on his face when I gripped his wrist with my fingers and broke the bones? For once in his wicked life he had fallen into the hands of one stronger, immeasurably stronger than he. Devil as he was, I could not find it in my heart to torture him. I broke his neck with my hands and then quietly walked out of the room and down the stairs. No one saw me and I came to my room with a feeling of duty well done. You can call this murder if you like, but I can not feel that it is."

"Your explanation is very clear," Bryan replied. "There is just one thing I cannot understand. How could you, who are not at all muscular or strong, do as you have said?"

Explanation from Dr. Carter—Why He Wore the Head-Light

"**T**HAT requires an explanation," said Carter, "that will be rather hard to believe. In fact, if it weren't for that episode at the hospital, I think you would put me down for the most monumental liar living. I don't think anyone could blame you either. I must go back to my earlier student days to give you a fair idea.

"I was not always a student of medicine. In fact I started out to be an electrical engineer, but changed to medicine at the request of my father. Electricity has always been a fascinating study to me. It has so many and varied manifestations. In the ultimate I feel that we are going to find that the controlling principle of the universe is some form of electrical manifestation. Your great surgeon, Crile, has practically demonstrated that the body cell is in the final analysis, an electrical element.

"I have been especially interested in high frequency currents, their effects are so totally unlike the currents of lower voltage and lesser frequency. You know how we make use

of them in electrical treatments. Well, I experimented along this line, and finally I was able to produce a current with a frequency rate far beyond any known. Also its effects were totally unlike any therapeutic current that is used. I found that I was able to focus the effect of this current on a definite area in the tissues. The apparatus was small and noiseless, and could easily be carried in one's pocket. It was only by chance that I discovered some of its properties. During the war I was injured in the back of the head by a shell fragment. The surgeon removed part of the fractured bone and left a small area of bony defect which did not heal over. This scar at times caused me pain, and it was in trying to relieve this pain that I made a startling discovery. You know, Doctor, that the human brain and body have capacities far in excess of what we daily use. Physiologists have determined that muscle tissue has capacities enormously in excess of what a man's nerve force is able to utilize. For instance, why is it that a baboon who weighs less than a man has over eight times the strength of a strong man? His muscles are, of no better substance than the man's. The baboon is able to make them work to better advantage, that is all.

"Well, I found that when this high frequency current of mine was concentrated on a certain area of my brain, I not only had a greatly increased mental capacity, but I could also make use of the inherent power in my muscles. There were draw-backs, however, that I was unable to overcome. I found that the heating effect which raised my body-temperature to around one hundred degrees Fahrenheit, also caused a mental irritation, which you have noticed, and which has made me heartily disliked by all who came in contact with me. I couldn't help it. It was impossible not to be impatient at the apparent slowness of their mentalities.

"Again, it was a serious problem to get sufficient nutrition into my body to make up

for the tremendous tissue waste that ensued from driving the engine at excessive speed. I could never eat enough, nor could my digestive organs handle what I did eat. It was only by injecting nutriment solutions intravenously that I was able to hold even. At that I have come to the end. The human body seems made to undergo a slow evolution, and I have stepped centuries ahead of my time. I am going away to try to rebuild my shattered health. Needless to say, my invention goes with me.

"I climbed the side of that building as easily as a baboon could because I was stronger than any baboon. Shall I give you a final demonstration?"

The End of Dr. Carter

TOO dazed to reply Bryan only stared at Carter while he produced from a drawer the head lamp that he was in the habit of wearing. He opened the small case which he carried in his pocket and showed a peculiar coil made of wire of hair-like fineness. Attached to this was apparently a minute condenser of innumerable plates.

"I can't go into a technical explanation," he said, as he adjusted the lamp to his head. "The light is merely a blind, and derives its current from a small battery of the usual flashlight type. Now," he said, as he adjusted the lamp. "Do you want a demonstration? Ask me to give you the cube root of some number of six figures. Or read me a page from that book. I will repeat it word for word. Or would a feat of strength be better?" He reached into his pocket, drew out a silver dollar, and with a twist of his fingers, bent it double.

As Carter straightened to his feet and tossed the crumpled dollar upon the table, his arm struck the reading-lamp and knocked it over. The globe caught in the trailing wire of his apparatus and burst. There was a flash of

bluish flame, and Carter sank limply to the floor. Springing to his feet, Bryan rushed to his side; but the deadly current had done its work. In some unexplainable way it was carried deep into the brain, and death was instantaneous.

When Bryan later examined the coil and condenser, he found them burned beyond

any hope of discovering their construction.

The coroner's verdict was "death from accidental electrocution." Bryan still keeps the mutilated dollar and occasionally looks at it to assure himself that he is still sane.

And the chief of detectives is still looking for the murderer.