

WEIRD TALES

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

EDWIN BAIRD, Editor

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TWO TWO-PART STORIES
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THE SCAR

A Thrilling Novelette

By CARL RAMUS, M. D.

THANKS for the lift, Edwards. Come in for a minute, won't you?"

"No. I was up nearly all last night, and must get some sleep."

"To be sure! But you've time for a nip before you go."

"Well—since you put it that way, and in these arid times——"

"Good! Come along."

Dr. Herbert Carlson opened the door of his office on the first floor with his latch key, snapped on the lights, and entered with his colleague, Dr. Clark Edwards. Carlson hung up his overcoat and hat, and Edwards threw his own over a chair, and then Carlson produced from an inner room a bottle, two glasses, and a siphon of carbonic.

"Like the good old days," smiled Edwards, sipping his glass. "How do you get it?"

"A voluntary donation from a grateful patient, a second steward on board the—but that would be telling."

Edwards took another sip. "I wish I had one or two patients like that!"

"You're not likely to get them as long as you stick to your specialty."

"I suppose not—Hello! What's all that shouting for?"

Both men listened. Newsboys were yelling an "Extra." Carlson opened a window, leaned far out, and drew up a paper.

"Just another bank robbery. They're so common now as to be hardly worth mentioning."

"Exactly. Anything new in the Holden case?"

"Let's see. . . . O yes! Here it is: 'Father of Ina Holden gets another threatening letter.'"

Edwards' jaw set. "If I had my way," he said, "every kidnapper would go to the chair!"

"I'll go you one better. If I had my way, they'd get the Georgia treatment!"

"What's that?"

"Lynching!"

Edwards was silent.

"The trouble is," Carlson went on, "that we have too much legal red tape, too much politics, too many lawyers, and too little real law."

"I suppose so," said Edwards. "When we haven't children of our own, it takes some special circumstance to bring home to us the meaning of a damnable crime like kidnapping. This Holden case brings it home to me."

"Indeed?"

"Very much so. It has to do with an unusual surgical case, which I believe was reported in the *International Journal of Surgery* or *The London Lancet* by Professor Meyerovitch."

"I don't remember reading it. Please tell me about it."

"I will. It was when I was house surgeon at the Presbyterian Hospital in Chicago. One night a child of seven was brought in with all the signs of fulminating appendicitis. That child was Ina Holden."

"Ah!"

"It was a private case of old Meyerovitch's, and he decided on immediate operation. Now Meyerovitch was one of the few really good surgeons who wouldn't use either the McBurney or Kameron incision for appendicitis. He just cut down over the trouble and through everything in one line."

"Fool!"

"Most of us thought so then, but somehow Meyerovitch always got good results—*always*."

"Pure accident."

"Perhaps so. But, anyhow, when little Ina was under the anaesthetic, and Meyerovitch had his knife in one hand—his left, by the way—and was testing the tension of the abdomen with the other hand, he said, 'I will need plenty of room here.' And then he surprised us all by making a reversed Senn incision."

"I don't seem to remember that incision," said Carlson, after a slight pause. "What is it?"

"An S-shaped incision devised by Nicholas Senn when he was Professor of Surgery at Rush Medical College. You young fellows in New York don't as a rule know about that incision."

"But, Edwards, as I remember, Senn recommended the McBurney method in his book."

"Yes, for appendicitis. He only used the S in neck operations. And so when Meyerovitch used it on Ina Holden, it was the first time on record for appendicitis, and probably the last."

"Most likely. And how did the case get along?"

"Better than any of us expected. It was a drainage case, of course, and took some time to dry up. But the wound finally healed perfectly, with no suggestion of weakness, and left a large scar like a reversed S."

"Meyerovitch's bull luck."

"Yes. I saw the child every day for more than a month and got much attached to her. She wouldn't let anyone else dress the wound, and

after she went home, the family often invited me to the house."

"They're very rich, aren't they?"

"They are, now, but they weren't then. Mr. Holden owned some manganese land in California, and when the Western Pacific laid its tracks over a corner of his property, he was a rich man."

The colleagues silently finished their illegal glasses. Then Edwards looked at his watch and rose from his chair.

"Good night, Herbert, and many thanks for the drink."

Carlson, alone, looked at a memorandum that his sister had left on his desk.

"Nothing more for tonight, thank God," he thought with relief.

He closed and fastened the windows, bolted the door, and was passing into his bedroom, when the telephone rang.

"Damn! Why didn't I muffle it?"

He put the receiver to his ear.

"Well?" he said abruptly.

"Doctor Carlson speaking?"

"Yes."

"Can you come at once to a very sick case?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't. My car is out of order, and I'm not very well myself tonight."

"But this case is extremely urgent, sir, and we don't want anyone else but you."

"Thank you, but——"

"Please listen, Doctor. I'll have a car for you in five minutes, and take you home afterwards, if you'll only come."

"Try another doctor first."

"We *have* tried, but can't find one of the only other two we have confidence in. Money is no object. Please do reconsider, Doctor."

"Who recommended me to you? Do I know you?"

"I do not know you personally. But you are highly recommended by the Brooklyn Hospital. Once more

let me say that your fee can be as large as you like."

Carlson did not answer for a while.

"All right, I'll go," he said at last. "What is it—a medical or surgical case?"

After a short silence, the voice replied: "Medical, I think. But you had better come prepared to do whatever is necessary."

"Very well. I'll be ready when you call for me."

Carlson placed his medical and surgical bags on the table, put on his overcoat and hat, and sat down to wait.

In less than five minutes he heard the *honk-honk* of an automobile under the window, and he picked up his two bags, snapped off the lights, and went down to the waiting car, a large limousine.

As Carlson emerged from the house, the chauffeur got out of his seat and opened the car door. He wore a wide slouch hat, the brim of which hung down and so shaded his face from the corner electric light that Carlson could not make out his features. All he was sure of was a long heavy moustache. The lower part of the man's face was concealed in a muffer. He opened the door and stood as if at attention.

When Carlson was inside with his bags the man closed the door silently, got into the driver's seat, and the car was soon rushing up the street. It turned at the second corner, and after that made so many sharp turns among small and narrow and dark streets that Carlson began to feel uncomfortable.

At last they came to a long stretch of vacant lots, and went faster for half a minute or so, and then slowed down again. The chauffeur sounded three *honks*—one long and two short. Carlson bent forward and peered ahead, but could see nothing.

He did not like it at all, and he regretted that he had not brought his revolver. He was wondering what he

had got into, when, suddenly, the car slowed down with a loud grinding of the brakes, and stopped with a jerk that threw Carlson violently forward.

A moment later both doors opened together, and he realized that masked men stood on either side of the car, covering him with revolvers or magazine pistols.

Then came a few moments of the most eloquent silence that Carlson had ever experienced. He said nothing and waited.

"Don't be afraid, Doc," said a thick voice, obviously disguised. "Just do as you are told and you'll be O. K. But if you try any stunts—T. N. T. for you. Do you get me?"

"Yes. What do you want me to do?"

"You'll be told later. My partner'll sit by you now, and I'll sit facing you. So——"

They got inside and shut the doors, and the car started forward at high speed.

"Sorry, Doc, but we'll have to blindfold you," said the masked man.

And then a heavy muffer was wound about his face.

II

AS THE car rushed on, Carlson sat still with his captors in a kind of stupefied silence. Only that morning he had been wishing that his life was more eventful, less commonplace. Well, here was adventure with a vengeance.

He was only twenty-seven and he had been two years in the city. The first year and a half had been slow and discouraging, as often happens with young doctors. But in the last six months patients had begun to come, in steadily increasing numbers, until now he had about all he could handle. He was five-feet-eleven, well-built and athletic. He had clear hazel eyes with a very direct look, and thick and wavy brown hair, which was much admired by his women pa-

tients. All this, with good and strong features and a pleasant expression, made an ensemble which expressed health, confidence and efficiency.

And now what was he in for? It was hardly reassuring, especially when blindfolded, to know that at least one gun was probably pointed at him all the time, and that any involuntary move of his might bring a bullet into his brain.

Yet, for all that, he did not feel exactly fear; it was more like strained interest, a burning curiosity to know where the adventure was to lead.

For a long time—or so it seemed—the car sped on what might have been an isolated suburban road. Occasionally another car passed, going in the opposite direction, but otherwise there were no other sounds than the rolling of the limousine.

At last they slowed down and turned off to the right, and from then on, for perhaps five minutes, the car went slowly over rough ground, turning so frequently that Carlson lost all idea of direction.

Presently they were on a good road again, and once more traveled very fast. More and more automobiles passed them, and they went slower and slower, until Carlson knew they were in a town again. Once they had to stop for a minute or two, as it seemed, at a crossing, and he distinctly heard a policeman's voice allowing them to make a turn to the left on a side street. After that interruption they moved for the most part rapidly for another five minutes or so, making several turns and passing many machines, until they slowed down and came to a full stop.

Carlson could hear people passing to and fro on the sidewalk, talking and laughing. He sat still, careful not to make any movement that might alarm his captors, feeling that their weapons were leveled at him.

When at last the voices and footsteps had become almost inaudible, the voice spoke again.

"Now, Doc—no fooling."

He put his own slouch hat on Carlson's head and drew the brim far down over his face. Then he opened the door toward the curb stone and got out.

"Come along, Doc, give me your hand."

Carlson took the hand and got out of the car. The man put his hand within his arm and drew him across the sidewalk. Carlson heard the other man open an iron gate, and close it again after they had passed through. A few steps more, and another stop.

He heard a key turning in a lock, and a door open, and he was led into a warm room. The door *clicked* after them. A woman's harsh voice impatiently exclaimed:

"I thought you'd *never* come."

"Shut up!" said Carlson's guide. "Here's the Doctor. Take him upstairs. Step lively, will you! Keep right hold of my arm, Doc."

Carlson counted three flights of stairs, then he heard a key turned just beyond the head of the stairway, and he was led into a room.

"Shut the door!"

It was done.

"Now take off the blinder!"

Carlson's eyes blinked as the muffler was removed. But as soon as his eyes got accustomed to the light, he realized that the room was only dimly lighted.

Two men and one woman, all masked, stood nearby. One of the men had come with him in the car. The other was a huge man, a giant. The woman was short and rather scrawny-looking, to judge from her hands and neck.

"Now, Doc, a word with you alone," said one of the men. "Come here!"

He stepped into a small dressing room and Carlson followed.

"Shut the door!"

Carlson obeyed.

"Now, here's the proposition. We've got a sick woman on our hands—damned sick! But she's got in trouble with the law and the police are after her. Get me?"

"Yes. Go on."

"Well, that's why she dasn't go to a hospital, and that's why we had to get you. Get me?"

"Go on."

"Very good! Now your job is just this: Look at her and find out what in Hell is the matter with her, and write out a prescription—No! That won't do, either. Somebody might get on to it. You've got your medicines with you, have you?"

"I have some medicines in my bag."

"Good! You'll give me the dope she needs, and then get out and away from here as fast as you can and keep your mouth shut. You'll be taken home safe, and you'll get your money all right. Do you get me?"

"I understand."

"Good! Just one other thing. You can't see her face, and there can't be any talking, not one word. You understand?"

Carlson felt that the time had come for him to say something, and he said it:

"You damned fool! What kind of an examination do you think a doctor can make if he can't see his patient or hear her talk? Have you never been to a doctor yourself?"

The man hesitated, fingering his automatic.

"Open that door!" he commanded, after a pause. Carlson did as he was told.

"Teresa!"

She appeared so quickly that Carlson was sure that she had been listening behind the door.

"The doctor will have to ask her a few questions, and she will have to answer. Go and tell her. And tell her from me—that if she says anything she doesn't have to say—T. N. T. for her! Do you get me?"

"All right, Boss, I'll tell her."

She spoke with a cruel chuckle that all but made Carlson shudder. While he waited for further orders from his captor, he tried to get a line on the mystery he was involved in. But nothing came to him. Was the sick woman he was about to visit a fugitive or a captive? Probably the latter; and if so, why?

He furtively inspected the dressing-room and its contents. It was richly and beautifully furnished—like the large bedroom it adjoined, as far as his very brief glance had discovered. It was on a corner and had two windows, with curtains tightly drawn. At the end, farthest from the door of entrance, was another door, standing half open and showing a glimpse of a lavatory and bathtub. Nothing hopeful thus far.

Then he noticed a small black box on the wall nearest the corner, with a green cord leading from it and disappearing behind a screen. Not until his anxious glance had shifted elsewhere did Carlson realize the possible significance of that green cord. Surely, what else could it mean but a telephone behind that screen! A *telephone*.

The masked woman suddenly appeared at the door.

"She's ready for the doctor," she snapped out viciously.

Carlson looked at his masked companion for orders.

"Go with her," he said. "And don't ask her no questions that are none of your damned business! If you do, you'll go out of this house in two or three suit cases! Get me?"

Carlson did not answer, and followed the woman to a darkened bedside. The man also followed, and stood at the foot of the bed.

III

IN THE dim light of a shaded table-lamp Carlson saw a large double bed of massive and antique construction. At the head was a high and projecting portion of carved woodwork which overhung like a canopy. On the bed he saw the outline of a human body through the coverings.

The head showed a mass of thick dark-brown hair, unbound and falling about the shoulders. The upper part of the face was hidden by a wide bandage wound several times around the head. The arms were bare and lay outside the coverlet. They were well rounded, and the hands were small and beautiful.

Carlson stood silently beside the bed at first, watching the patient's deep and rapid breathing, and assembling his professional manner. The hand nearest him was trembling slightly. As he took it up, to feel the pulse, the arm jerked and the whole body shook, as if under profound nervous tension. A thrill of compassion and pity ran through him as he held the trembling little hand.

"Don't be afraid, Madam," he said rather huskily. "I'm the doctor. I want to feel your pulse."

Instantly the trembling stopped and her fingers tightened about his. He noted the pulse rate with his other hand, and found it rapid, about 120. The hand and wrist were burning hot.

He let go of the hand and took a thermometer from his vest pocket. After shaking it down several times he placed it in her mouth and closed her lips with his fingers, saying:

"Hold it that way for five minutes, please."

Again he took her hand, pretending to count the pulse beats by his wrist watch, but in reality thinking as hard as he could. The thermometer was actually a one-minute thermometer, but he wished to gain as much time as possible. When at last he took it from her mouth and held it to the

light it registered 105. Involuntarily he whistled. Here was a very sick woman, indeed!

"How long have you been sick?"

"Three days." The voice was soft, but deep and sweet.

"Is your throat sore?"

"No."

"Do you cough?"

"No."

"Have you pain anywhere?"

"I hardly know. I feel sick all over."

Carlson thought for a minute. Three days sick, and now a temperature of 105! About time for a skin eruption to begin to show, if it was one of those diseases. He turned to the masked virago who stood beside him.

"I must have more light," he said abruptly.

The woman hesitated and looked toward the man.

"What about it?" she jerked out.

"What's the matter with this light?" the man snapped angrily.

"Just that it isn't enough for me, that's all! She may have typhus or smallpox—"

"Hell!" The man jumped backward so quickly that he upset a small table and chair.

"Damn her!" screamed the woman, retreating to the wall.

Carlson, being a doctor and often in contact with contagious and loathsome diseases, had not counted on the terrifying effect of the word "smallpox" on the criminals he was for the moment associated with. But he instantly realized the advantage it gave him, and decided to capitalize it to the limit in the mysterious woman's interests.

After a short but tense silence he said impressively:

"Yes, it may be smallpox. But I cannot say for certain in this light."

The masked man waited a few uneasy seconds, then went to the chandelier and raised a hand to the light key.

"Teresa. See that the bandage is

tight over her face before I turn on more light." His voice was surly.

"I won't touch her again if she has smallpox!" Teresa's strident voice shook.

"Yes, you will, or I'll brain you." He took a step toward her.

The woman muttered, but obeyed, though her hands shook as she fumbled with the bandage. Crossing herself, she said with shaking voice:

"All safe," and stepped back again to the wall. The light was turned on, and Carlson bent down to look more closely at his mysterious patient.

A deep, feverish flush was over the arms, neck and the strip of forehead above the bandage. But Carlson's trained fingers could not feel even a suggestion of the "shotty" feeling which goes with the first rash of smallpox.

"What do you make of it, Doc?" asked the man impatiently.

"Highly suspicious, but I cannot tell certainly until I have finished my examination. Madam, may I listen to your lungs and heart with my stethoscope?"

"Yes," she faintly murmured.

Carlson looked around at the man.

"I am not in the habit of examining women in the presence of strange men," he said sharply.

The man mumbled a curse and turned his back. Carlson then looked at the masked woman.

"Turn down the bedclothes and open her nightgown!"

"Do it yourself! I won't touch her again!"

Carlson took his stethoscope from his pocket and bared the patient's chest. The nightgown was coarse and cheap, but the form within it was rounded and beautiful. The sleeves of the garment had apparently been roughly hacked off with scissors.

Carlson's examination of lungs and heart found absolutely nothing to account for the very high fever. Then

he thought of appendicitis or peritonitis.

"Now, please let me examine the abdomen for a moment."

She lay still while he delicately arranged the clothing. The light from the chandelier showed obliquely, so that the lower part of the abdomen was in the shadow cast by the rolled-down bedclothes. Carlson felt and carefully sounded, but she gave no sign of pain or involuntary resistance.

As his sensitive fingers passed over the place under which the appendix is located, he felt something that broke the smoothness of the perfect skin. It was a surgical scar. That fact alone should almost certainly rule out a present attack of appendicitis!

"So you have had appendicitis?"

"Yea."

"It must have been a bad case—to judge from the size of the scar."

She did not answer, and he drew the covering a little lower and brought the scar out of the shadow into full view. Then he started, and, involuntarily, a gasp escaped him.

The large surgical scar was in the form of a perfect reversed letter S.

IV

SO MUCH had happened to Carlson that night that his mental receiving instrument was somewhat dulled, and did not immediately register the momentous significance of what his eyes now saw. That curious scar—that reversed S—symbol of the great Senn. Great God! Vow he remembered. The only case on record in which that Senn S-incision had been made for appendicitis was the case of Ina Holden.

He heard the masked man muttering in angry impatience, and then his brain began to work again. The Holden child. Edwards had spoken of her as "little Ina."

Though the papers had been full of accounts of the Holden kidnapping case for the last five days, he, Carlson, had read nothing but the headings, and his impression from them and from Edwards' talk was that Ina was a small girl, quite a child. And yet this was a woman, or a well-grown girl of 16 or 17 at the least. He looked up at her bandaged face.

"How long ago did you have this operation?"

"I—when I was a child."

"How long ago was that?"

"About eight or nine years ago."

"Ah——"

"You're takin' a hell of a long time, doc. Has she got smallpox?" The man still stood with his back to the foot of the bed, but Carlson realized that he could not temporize much longer.

"Just about a minute more and I can tell you," he said, as nonchalantly as he could say the words.

How could he get rid of the kidnapers and telephone for the police? Then came an idea—a wild, forlorn hope; but he would try it.

"I will have to examine her throat," he said, with professional voice.

He walked to the table where his medical bags were and took out a circular mirror with an aperture in the center, a small electric bulb, and a black elastic band with a buckle in it. Next, he detached a connecting-plug from a cell battery in the bottom of the bag, being careful to conceal the battery from the gimletlike eyes of the two men and the woman. With the plug hidden in his hand he crushed the two contactors together.

Then he adjusted the elastic band and mirror to his forehead, connected the two wires with the small bulb on the head mirror and deliberately unscrewed the bulb from the table lamp. He drew a deep breath; then quickly inserted the crushed battery plug into the lamp socket.

Flash! The room was in complete darkness. Carlson had short-circuited the current and fulminated the fuse, probably for the whole house.

"Damn it!" he exclaimed, ostentatiously. "What am I going to do now?"

Almost instantly the beam of a pocket flashlight came from the hand of the "boss."

"Take this, doc," he said, holding it toward Carlson.

He took it, asked the girl to open her mouth, and looked within.

"No good at all. I *must* have the electric light. Where is the fuse box?"

The "boss" looked at Teresa.

"It's in the cellar with the meter," she said.

"Go down and put in a new fuse."

"I don't know how. You'll have to come with me."

The man hesitated. He glared at Carlson through his mask, and at the sick girl on the bed, and then at the giant near the door.

"Tony!"

"Huh?"

"Come here!"

The giant slouched nearer.

"Where's your flash-light?"

He produced it.

"Good! Now stay right here till we come back. If the doctor tries to leave this room, or if he talks to the girl—you know what to do."

Tony grunted, and showed a magazine pistol in his other hand. The other man and Teresa left the room. The man slammed the door and locked it on the outside.

Carlson felt almost overcome by a feeling of powerlessness and despair. He and the girl were alone with the giant Tony, who sat stolidly by a table in the center of the room, flashlight in one hand, the automatic pistol in the other. His narrow, piglike eyes gleamed through the mask and seemed never to relax their sinister gaze.

Carlson's plan was completely frustrated by the baleful presence of this Frankenstein Monster.

Suddenly he heard the blindfolded girl give a sob, and he saw her shoulders trembling. As the sound of that despairing sob a new impulse to action surged through him. Her only hope lay in him. He would not fail her. He would save her or die in the trying.

He took her nearest and burning hand in both of his.

"There, there. Everything will be all right."

As her fingers gripped his convulsively, a horrible snarling sound, as from an angry hippopotamus, came from Tony. Carlson disengaged the girl's hand and faced the giant.

"Tony!" he said commandingly.

"Huh?"

"Help me to fix up this head light of mine. Bend those points out straight—so!"

Carlson had seen some remarkable demonstrations in hypnotism in Zurich, and he had been told by Professor Jung that he had exceptional personal power in that line, if he chose to develop it. He remembered that advice now, and he was trying it on Tony.

The giant hesitated, but at last obeyed the imperative and hypnotic voice of the young doctor. He laid the pistol and flash-light on the table, but just within reach of his hand, and then held out one hand for the electric plug.

"There—twist them out again, right there," said Carlson in a slow, monotonous voice. As he spoke, his other hand closed over a heavy glass paper weight that lay at the farther end of the table. Tony put the plug on the table and bent his face over it.

Carlson felt that he could soon have Tony completely under his own hypnotic power. But time was too precious to wait for that. The "boss" might return any minute.

There was only one thing to do, and Carlson did it.

He raised the paper weight slowly, and just beyond Tony's field of vision and then—he brought it down on the giant's head with all the force he could put into the blow.

Tony dropped the electric plug and swayed to one side, only slightly stunned by a blow that would have fractured the skull of another man. But before he could recover, Carlson dealt him a second, and then a third blow, the last on the angle of the jaw.

Tony crumpled up and fell face downward across the table. But Carlson, to make sure, gave him a final and terrible blow, which seemed to give back a crushing sound.

V

HE rushed to the door and bolted it; then back to the bedside.

"Are you Ina Holden?"

"Yes!"

"Then get out of bed instantly. I'm going to save you."

As she started up, he seized her in his arms, lifted her out bodily, and plumped her into the nearest upholstered chair.

"Take off that bandage as quickly as you can!"

He flew back to the huge bed and began dragging it toward the door. It was heavy as a safe, and incredibly hard to move. Suddenly it became easier, and to his amazement he saw that the girl was helping him. When they had placed it so that the head completely blocked the door, Carlson ran to Tony.

"Help me drag this carcass against the foot of the bed. Take the feet—so! That will brace the bed better. Now take this pistol. You know how to use it?"

"O, yes!"

"Fine! Watch that beast while I telephone the police. If he moves, shoot him."

Carlson rushed into the smaller room, kicking two small chairs out of his way and looked behind the screen. Praise be to God! It was a telephone. He jerked the receiver to his ear and began jiggling the instrument frantically. After a few interminable seconds came the blessed words:

"Number, please!"

"Listen, operator—this is a case of life and death. First take down this number—Cartwright 872. . . . Yes. . . . No! No!!—for God's sake don't call it. This is it. Now listen. Have you got this number written down?"

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Listen, I tell you!"

"I am listening!"

"Ina Holden is a prisoner in this house, with telephone Cartwright 872. Do you know who Ina Holden is?"

"You mean the kidnapped girl?"

"Yes. Now get me police headquarters at once. Then, while I am talking with them, you look up Cartwright 872 and phone the police station nearest this place. Quick, for God's sake!"

Another agonizing wait; then—

"Police headquarters speaking."

"Ina Holden is in a house with phone number Cartwright 872. Mark it down."

He heard the voice of the officer dictating "Cartwright 872. Ina Holden." Then. "What else, sir?"

"There are at least four armed men in the house, and one woman."

"Where is the house?"

"I don't know. I'm a prisoner with her myself. Send enough men at once to surround the house. Look it up in the numerical index."

Carlson could hear the officer giving rapid orders, and, more faintly, their repetition being shouted out through the station.

"All right, sir. We've located the house, and it will take us about twenty minutes to get to you. I'm sending out a general alarm, and

maybe some of our men out there can arrive sooner. How are you fixed?"

"I knocked out one of the men. I and the girl are barricaded in a third floor back room, and we'll try to hold out until your men come."

"Good! Stay at the 'phone as long as you can and keep me informed to the last possible moment. Good luck to you!"

"I'll put the girl at the 'phone, and stand guard myself. Ina!"

"Yes, doctor." She came in quickly, the pistol in her hand.

"Please sit down here and hold the 'phone. The police are on the wire. I'll call out to you how things go, and you report to them. Has Tony moved?"

"No. He doesn't seem to breathe."

Carlson left Ina at the 'phone and went to Tony. He lay absolutely still, just as they had placed him at the foot of the bed. Carlson tore off the mask and turned the face around and listened with his ear to the mouth. Not a sound! Then he used his stethoscope over the heart. Silence! Tony was dead!

Carlson picked up Tony's automatic, turned off the light plug in the large bed room, and went back to Ina. She was at her post, her elbows on the little table, the receiver at her ear. She looked up at him with a grave smile.

"The police have been asking me a lot of questions. How about the man in the next room?"

"Dead. I'm sorry I killed him, but there was nothing else to do. Anyway," said Carlson, "it makes our work easier. We won't have to watch him, and his body will help hold the door a little longer."

He looked quickly around the room.

"And now for our plan of defense until the police come. The barricade in the bedroom may hold till then. But, if it doesn't then we will have to barricade ourselves again in here. We ought to be able to hold out easily."

And then Carlson began dragging furniture from the bedroom into the dressing room until the latter was nearly full.

"I guess that'll be enough," he said. "They're taking a long time fixing that fuse, but they can't be too long for us." He stood beside Ina once more, having done all that could be done for the present.

"Yes," she said slowly, "and their bungling delay probably means our salvation. Anyhow, there's nothing for it but to wait—for what is to come."

Carlson had been looking at Ina Holden while they were talking, and he thought he had never seen a more charming girl. Her thick dark hair was unloosed and uncombed and fell over her shoulders. She was clad only in the coarse, sleeveless, night garment, which showed beautifully rounded arms to the shoulders. Her feet were bare. Her eyes were a pure and brilliant blue, shining under heavy but well arched brows. Her features were almost faultless, but the strong jaw and firm though adorable lips expressed unusual force and will power for a woman. A woman worth going through hell for—Carlson thought grimly.

Her face, neck and arms were deeply suffused as with the flush of high fever. But her manner and movements were not those of a very sick person. Carlson was puzzled.

"I confess I don't know what to make of your fever," he said frankly.

She half smiled as she replied:

"Of course. I should have thought of that before. It isn't a *real* fever, but what the Italians call an *impresione*."

"What's that?"

"An effect of a shock."

"But no mere shock can cause actual fever!"

"That's what many doctors have said. But the fact is that it *does* with me. I was always that way. There's something abnormal in my

constitution. I can even bring on a fever by willing it. I'm ashamed to say that when I was a child I would sometimes play sick in that way in order to get what I wanted. But I hadn't done it for so long that I'd almost forgotten about it—until this horrible thing happened, and then I remembered and tried it. But they wouldn't call a doctor for three days, not until they got badly scared and thought I might die on their hands. And that is why they brought *you* here."

"I never heard of such a case before," said Carlson. "Never! To be sure, there are a few cases on record where the heart and pulse rate were under the control of the will to some extent; but certainly *not* the temperature."

He then asked: "How does it happen that the kidnapers have a house like this?"

"This house belongs to a wealthy family named Carriello. They are traveling in Europe, and have left the house in charge of an Italian and his wife."

"The woman Teresa?"

"Yes. The two are black-handers, and their gang figured that the police would never suspect that I might be hidden in such a place."

Suddenly the lights flashed out. The fuse was repaired at last. The kidnapers would be at the door in a few moments!

Carlson gripped Tony's automatic a little harder, and his left hand fell almost involuntarily on the girl's shoulder. They waited thus, tensely, hardly breathing, and with quickened heart-beats, until they heard footsteps hurrying up the stairs. Then Carlson drew a deep breath, and whispered:

"They are coming now—but don't be afraid."

She said nothing, but raised both her hands and clasped them over his for a moment.

He stepped softly into the darkened bedroom, just as a key turned in

the lock. The knob was turned, the door tried—then shaken. There was a short silence. Then, from the "boss":

"Open the door, you fool!"

Carlson was silent.

"Tony!"

Silence.

"Tony! What the hell's the matter with you?"

Silence.

A whispered consultation outside the door. Then:

"Tony! Doctor! Open that door or, by God! I'll——"

More whispering, then a short silence.

"Doctor!"

Silence.

Whispering again; then footsteps running down the stairs; then another and longer silence. Carlson put his ear as near as he could to the door. Soon he heard the footsteps returning, but they stopped at the second floor. A voice called faintly from below:

"I can't find anything but a hatchet."

Smothered cursing told that the "boss" was still on the other side of the door. Then he also seemed to run down stairs. Presently Carlson heard hammering or pounding, far below, and at last a crushing and crumbling sound, as if something heavy had given way. *What* were the scoundrels doing?

Then footsteps again, coming up the stairs, but more slowly this time. And as they came, there was an occasional bumping sound, as if they were carrying some bulky object which now and then struck the walls or stairs.

When they were opposite the door, something heavy hit the floor. Then, once more, the sullen voice of the "boss."

"Listen, Doc! I don't know what you've done to Tony, and what's more I don't give a damn, if you open the door now."

Silence. Carlson thought he could hear their heavy breathing. As a psychologist he knew that his own silence, and that of Tony, had a horror about it that was telling severely, even on their hardened nerves.

"This is your last chance, Doc! If you open the door now, you can go, and take your fee, and be damned. But if you won't open, I'm going to break down the door, and then—you'll leave here in a couple suit cases. Do you get me?"

Silence! After about a quarter of a minute, the "boss" said:

"Now then! All together!"

Carlson braced himself. But suddenly the woman screamed, "Stop!"

"Shut up! You——"

"I won't. Listen!" And though she spoke lower, Carlson could hear her say something about the doctor and Tony's pistol!

"I know that," muttered the man, "but we've got to risk it!"

Another voice, Carlson thought that of the man who sat beside him in the auto, half whispered:

"Wait, Boss! I don't like this! What did the doc do to big Tony? I wouldn't go into that room again if you killed me! I've lost my nerve, let's chuck this job and make a get-away!"

"No, I won't! and none of you won't by God! We've gone too far to go back. We'll win together, or go to the Chair together! I'll shoot the first——"

"But——"

"Take that, will you, and shut up!" a blow, a fall, and a groan, as if from the level of the floor.

A few seconds of dead silence, then the voice of the "boss":

"Now, get together and smash that door!"

More shuffling of feet and the dragging of something heavy, then the muffled voice of the woman:

"Maybe he found the phone——"

"Quick! Bust in that door!"

Carlson held his breath.

CRASH!

A terrific blow, as of from a battering ram, shook and shivered the strong oak door. But door and bolt still held. Carlson knew from the impact of the blow that some ponderous solid object had been driven against the door. And he knew also that a few more such blows would shatter it, leaving only the bed and an overturned chiffonier and Tony's body as a barricade.

So he quickly began dragging more chairs, tables and what not into the small dressing-room.

CRASH! The door fell inward against the head of the massive bed.

Carlson dragged a Javenport into the little room, and then closed its door, locking and bolting it.

CRASH!

The devastating sound that followed told that the heavy overhanging canopy of the bed had fallen inward. Carlson kept steadily working away barricading the second door.

"Thank God *this* door opens outward!" he said to Ina. She was still at her post at the telephone.

"Hello!" she said calmly. "They have just smashed in the outer door and are climbing in over the ruins of the bed and furniture. We have retreated into a smaller room, and the doctor is piling furniture against it—" She looked at Carlson.

"The police want to know how long we can hold out!"

"Perhaps another five minutes."

"Five minutes more—what? O, I hope so!"

CRASH! This time on the inner door. It held perfectly!

"They are attacking our inner door, Inspector—you heard it?"

CRASH! A panel cracked, all the way down.

CRASH! The panel flew in splinters. One splinter struck the girl in the face, making a small wound on the forehead, and blood trickled down into her eyes, but she did nothing more than to wipe it off with the back of her right hand.

Carlson readjusted the shifting barricade, and glanced at Ina.

"You are hurt!"

"It's nothing."

"Into the bathroom, quickly!"

CRASH! Another panel cracked!

She got up calmly, and wiped the blood out of her eyes again with the handkerchief Carlson pressed against her face: then, his arm around her, she walked into the bathroom.

Carlson forced Ina into a chair and knelt beside her, indifferent to everything now but the bleeding cut on her face.

"Let me look at it!"

"It's nothing at all, I tell you! Go back and attend to the door. We must barricade ourselves in here in another minute."

CRASH! The center of the door fell inward against the barricade. As Carlson ran to pick up a heavy chair for the bathroom defense, a hand and pistol came through the breach in the door and a shot rang out. He felt a stinging pain in his side, but kept on with his work. Before he realized it, Ina was in the room again, dragging another chair into the bathroom.

The barricade crumbled still more, and another shot was aimed at Carlson, but did not hit him. Ina deliberately crossed the little room to the telephone and turned off the light.

"They won't shoot *me*—not yet, anyway," she said.

The barricade fell to pieces. There was not a moment to lose. Carlson and Ina rushed into the bathroom and locked and bolted the door and began stacking the chairs and tables and one small chiffonier against the door.

Carlson felt blood soaking his clothing. He and Ina crouched together in one corner. He held Tony's pistol in his right hand, and both of Ina's hands in his left.

"Listen, Ina! When they force this door, I will try to pick them off one by one. If I fall, be ready to snatch the pistol and shoot carefully.

Don't waste a shot! The police should be here any moment."

CRASH! The lock and bolt snapped, and the door itself was pressed inward several inches, but rebounded by the pressure of the barricade.

CRASH! This time the door yielded more than a foot, and in the opening Carlson could see a man's form. He fired, and a shriek followed. Four or five shots were aimed at Carlson, but did not reach him in his protected corner angle. Suddenly a voice yelled from the outer room:

"The Cops! They're around the house!"

"Damnation! Get the Girl, at all costs!"

When the next rush brought a man into view Carlson fired, and he knew by the scream that he had hit once more. The pistol dropped from his hand, and his body swayed. But the girl realized everything in an instant. Quick as thought she snatched up the pistol with her right hand as she knelt beside him, and her other arm went around him.

At that instant a perfect fusillade of shooting sounded from the outer room, followed by screams, yelling and groaning. Then a masked man with a pistol in his hand bounded wildly into the half-opened door of the bathroom. But Ina fired from their darkened corner before he saw them, and he fell backward among the debris.

Carlson felt everything growing dark.

"Ina?"

"Yes, dear; we've won the fight!"

His head sank against her breast, just as two policemen appeared in the doorway.

She dropped the pistol and put both arms about him.

VI

"**M**ISS HOLDEN?" asked one of the officers, turning his bull's-eye lantern on them.

She did not answer, but looked

long and tensely at Carlson's white unconscious face. Then she pressed a kiss on his forehead.

"He saved me!" she said, looking up at the officers. "I owe everything to him. Please send for a surgeon and have him taken to my home immediately."

"The police surgeon will be here in a moment, Miss Holden. Let us take him into another room."

As they took him from her arms they saw that her garment was soaked with his blood.

"Who is he?" asked the lieutenant.

"I don't know. He was brought here by the kidnappers when I seemed to be very sick. We had no time for anything but defense."

The lieutenant took off his overcoat and placed it over Ina's shoulders, and then they both followed the two officers who carried the unconscious Carlson out through the wreck of the dressing-room and larger bedroom.

And what a scene of ruin and blood! They had to pick their way through masses of broken furniture. One masked dead man lay just outside the bathroom—the man Ina had shot. Another man, his mask torn off, sat propped up against an overturned chiffonier on the floor of the large bedroom. He was groaning and trying to wring his manacled hands, as two officers knelt beside him and searched his pockets.

The mammoth carcass of Tony lay where Carlson and Ina had first dragged it, but it was now half covered by the mattress and debris of the bed. At least a dozen policemen in the rooms. The woman Teresa stood sniveling in a corner, unmasked and handcuffed.

But there was a sudden silence as Ina Holden appeared, her face bloody, her feet bare, and her form covered by the officer's overcoat. All eyes were fixed on the girl, whose name and picture had been in every newspaper from Maine to California for the last five days.

They carried Carlson through the devastated rooms, into another room and laid him on a bed. The police surgeon arrived at almost the same moment. After a glance at the unconscious man on the bed, the surgeon said:

"But where is the girl?"

"I am Ina Holden," she said quickly, "but never mind *me*. Look at *him!*"

"Who is he?"

"The man who saved me. They shot him just before the police came."

The surgeon quickly tore open the blood-soaked shirt and found the bullet wound in the right side. He listened a moment to his heart; then looked up gravely.

"Very serious! There seems to be severe hemorrhage into the pleura. He must be rushed to the nearest hospital for immediate operation."

"Doctor," asked Ina, with shaking voice. "Is he—will he recover?"

"I am sorry to say, Miss Holden, the chances are against him. Quick, boys! The stretcher. One of you telephone Mercy Hospital to have the operating-room ready."

And then another man burst like a whirlwind into the room—a large, bearded man of about fifty—a man of commanding presence, before whom everyone made way.

"Ina!—my Girl!—"

Slowly Ina turned her eyes from Carlson and looked at her father. Then she stood up and held out her arms, and was gathered into his embrace.

"Father, dear!" she panted, as soon as his joyful greetings would allow; "Listen! I am all right. But that man lying there saved my life. If he had not come—"

"Yes, my girl! Go on!"

"He was shot defending me before the police could get here. And now—he may be—*dying!*—" Her voice broke.

Two men entered with a stretcher, just as the surgeon gave Carlson a

hypodermic of some powerful heart stimulant. Deftly they moved him from bed to stretcher. Mr. Holden drew the surgeon aside and they exchanged a few earnest words.

"We'll do our best, sir, that's all I can say. Good night, sir! Good night, Miss Holden!" He hurried down stairs after the stretcher.

"Where's the telephone?" said Holden.

Ina took him to it, and then he called the hospital and several famous surgeons, telling them that the man who had saved his daughter *must* be saved! *Must be saved!*

"What is it, Lieutenant?"

"I have found his name, sir. It's on his surgical bag. He is Dr. Herbert Carlson of New York."

"Thank you very much! Please find his 'phone number and I will call his wife and tell her what we are doing for him."

As her father was calling Carlson's telephone number, Ina listened with strained attention. *His wife!* Somehow, it had never occurred to her that he might be married!

"Hello! Is this Dr. Carlson's residence? Yes, yes, I know he's not there now. May I speak with his wife? What's that? *Not married!* O, I beg your pardon! His sister?—yourself? Thank you! Now listen to me, please!"

Ina did not try to analyze her feelings when her father's words at the telephone seemed to prove that Carlson was unmarried. But then she suddenly remembered, as with a stab at her heart, what the police surgeon had said! Yes: As her father had ordered, He *must* be saved! Nothing else mattered!

At 2:53 A. M. the telephone at the Holden residence rang for at least the hundredth time that fateful night. The butler had instructions not to call Mr. Holden except for communications from the police or the hospital. Ina and her mother, in Ina's bedroom.

heard the muffled buzzer in the study below, and looked at each other anxiously. Ina snatched up the extension receiver at her bedside and listened.

"Hospital speaking. I have a message for Mr. Holden."

It was the second message from the hospital. The first had told the hopeful news that Dr. Carlson had been successfully operated on, that hemorrhage had been checked, and that his

heart had responded to stimulants. Mr. Holden, at his desk, lifted the receiver.

"Mr. Holden speaking. Quick! What's your message?"

"Dr. Carlson slept until five minutes ago. Then he woke up suddenly and asked: 'Is Ina all right?' We told him that Miss Holden was safe at home, and he said: 'Thank God!' and went to sleep again."

