

HIS IRON NERVE

By JANUS MAYNE

An ideal story for a warm summer afternoon, when you want something to read—something funny. What is it all about? A big, stern, blustering surgeon in a great hospital, where he terrifies everyone except the head nurse. He tells you that he is a "mass of iron, sans nerves, sans feelings, sans weakness," yet when an accident happens which causes him a little pain, he creates a scene quite worthy of any ordinary human being.

DR. HARVEY RAND was consulting with his head nurse, previous to performing one of the marvelous operations which had made him famous.

Famous, but not popular. For a high-gear, man-eating motor-truck, in full executive session, possessed mannerisms that were mush-and-milky compared to those of the skilled surgeon.

The growly gruffness of his deep bass would have been terrifying, even in ordinary conversation, if he had ever used any of that kind. But he was a very superior surgeon, with a nerve like iron, and with no superfluous sensitiveness to weaken his hand.

It has become such a fixed habit of nature to conceal within rough, bristly crusts, nice little possibilities like the diamond, or the chestnut, or the oyster-hidden pearl, that this rugged *brusquerie* of Dr. Rand's was supposed to cover a tender, loving heart. There was no doubt about its being well covered, if it existed. As to that, witnesses there were, who thought they could prove an alibi for that same heart. That it existed, however, was quite in accordance with the above-mentioned law of nature. Such an iron-clad surface *must* cover a soft interior.

This law of nature, like most laws, has an occasional exception. Was Dr. Harvey Rand one of the rare exceptions? Was he iron clear through from crust to crust? Was it not possible for any one to creep gently under the bristling crags and happen upon a soft, smooth beach?

The head nurse at St. Uncas's Hospital understood him better than most, but she had not reached this understanding by gentle, insinuating means. She used her tongue, much as the surgeon used his knife, plunging it straight through his mental epidermis without a tremor. For Miss Wing was the one person about the hospital who was not in awe of the great surgeon. So this day of the operation, when Rand growled at her, "Where's that young woman one of the governors brought here a few months ago? The one with the hair?" the head nurse snapped back, "It may have escaped your notice, but *none* of us is actually bald."

"Well some of you women are mighty close to it when you take off your 'rats.'"

"And some of you men are closer to it when you take off your hats," retorted Miss Wing, fearlessly. The surgeon liked her nerve, and he laughed ruefully at her little stab. Rubbing his hand over the smooth top of his head, he replied:

"You got me there, Miss Wing."

"Well, you got me, with your remark, so we're even. I was intending to speak to you about this Miss Merrivale. She's been gifted by nature not only with an inordinate amount of conspicuous hair, but with a hampering overplus of sympathetic temperament. Now you know, none better, that while a nurse may seem sympathetic, she must be as hard as nails. 'Laugh, and the world laughs with you; weep, and you weep alone,' but Miss Merrivale's patients do not weep alone—she joins right in. She has no nerve—she is liable to go all to pieces when a patient is being hurt."

"I know—I've seen her dropping tears on them—the fools seem to like it too, but it won't do. That's the very thing I wanted to talk with you about. That young woman needs *hardening*. I'll talk to her. In the first place, she ought to moult that hair. I *hate* it!" Miss Wing looked at him in amazement. "I've seen hair like that—it never goes with anything good," he went on. "Let her get a sickle and mow it—and then run a lawn-mower over it."

"Time will gladly lend his sickle, as he has so officiously done to us 'bald' ones," said Miss Wing. "Miss Merrivale's hair is beautiful,—if I had had such a crown of glory in my youth, I shouldn't have become a hardened old nurse. I'd have married a millionaire and made him—"

"Miserable," growled the surgeon. Then Miss Wing recalled that he had been married once, years ago, but had recovered entirely (after an operation), and that no symptoms of a return of the malady

had ever appeared again. So she switched back to the nerveless nurse, with the question:

"What particular make of bomb are you intending to burst in your soothing way, against Miss Merrivale's pretty head?" and the doctor answered:

"I'll tell her plainly that self-control is the first requisite of a nurse, and that if she can't acquire it, she'd better be a waitress in a boarding-house,—she can weep with the boarders and no harm done."

"Now, Doctor, don't scare the wits out of the poor young thing," said the head nurse, who was really a degree less hard than the nails; "as it is, she regards you as a machine of iron, sans nerves, sans feeling, sans weakness of any kind."

"That's what I am, I guess. I've cut open so many people that I believe I could be cut open myself, from stem to stern, without an anesthetic or a quiver. Pain is nothing to me, scarcely an impression."

"Have you ever been operated on, Doctor?" Miss Wing asked, slyly, and he gruffed back:

"Yes,—had my heart cut out, twenty years ago. Get along better without it. Surgeon doesn't need a heart—just nerve. We must see if we can't pound a little nerve into Miss What's-her-name. I'll have her assist me in operating on that young millionaire, Manning, this afternoon. You'll be present, and it's not a dangerous operation. Besides, these millionaires are hard to kill,—takes a 'Titanic' to do it. While I'm operating on him, I'll incidentally operate on this girl—remove a few lachrymal glands, and introduce a bit of nerve. She shall see how a mass of iron, 'sans nerves, sans feelings, sans weakness,' conducts itself under a test."

Miss Wing, who had once been operated on, wondered if the surgeon knew anything about the awful after-sensations,—the burning thirst, which was only aggravated by the teaspoonful of warm water once in two hours—the feeling of hopeless depression that gripped the soul as the effect of the anesthetic wore off, and other joys. It is so easy for those to sneer at pain who have never felt it. But the head nurse lost no time in thought.



Then she tenderly held the bruised fingers—and said in sweet, sympathetic tones, "Oh, how dreadfully they must hurt!"

are made of," as if showing the stuff she was made of wasn't the very thing Mona feared! For she was made of love and sympathy and sweetness and delicacy and charm, with no trace of rigid iron in her whole lovely composition!

Yet she had possessed enough strength of will-power to run away and hide from her millionaire lover, Wilfred Manning, after her actress mother, divorced from one husband, had deserted a second, to elope with a third man, sans any formality!

There had been nothing weak about Mona's decision to save the man she loved from the disgrace of marrying the daughter of her mother! It had not been easy for tender Mona to do this, but it seemed easier to her than to go through this awful operation with the gruff surgeon, the iron man, who knew no feeling, whose very glance scared her.

And if Mona's sympathies were aroused so intensely by the sufferings of total strangers in the wards, picture, if you can, her state when she entered the operating room and saw that the patient lying so still in artificial sleep, awaiting the knife, was the lover she was hiding from,—the young king of finance, Wilfred Manning!

Dr. Rand had deeply impressed on her the necessity for calm control and a steady hand. Calling every particle of will-power to her aid, Mona did her part. She watched the iron man with fear, horror, admiration in her heart—did as he told her, did not tremble.

Then, when it was nearly over, the assistant physician handed the surgeon a metal instrument. As he used it, a part of it bore down on Mona's wrist, and she gave a quick start, for it was burning hot! The surgeon savagely roared at her the lie:

"If you do that again you may kill this man!"

For the fearful space of sixty seconds, that burning hot metal bore down on the soft, white, little wrist, but the girl did not start, or moan, or faint. Only when it was over, and her unconscious lover was carried from the room, did Mona raise her arm, look in a dazed way at the angry red scar, and then topple over against the head nurse.

Dr. Rand burst out with:

"Good Heavens! Of course she had to keel over. What a nerveless creature! She'll have to go—deliver me from people who can't stand anything!"

"Oh, but Doctor Rand, see here,—your hot instrument was burning her wrist," and the head nurse, who had forgotten all about her nail-hard make-up, tenderly held up for his inspection the little, limp, white wrist with its red scar, while another nurse applied restoratives to the half-fainting Mona.

Now the iron man suddenly found the room intensely hot, and rushing to a window, tried to raise the sash. Then happened one of those little things, bordering on the ridiculous, yet having often unsuspected results.

The sash stuck, and he hit it a violent blow with one hand. The upper sash, breaking its cords, came down with a bang on the four fingers of his other hand, holding them crushed tight between the upper and nether millstones, so to speak.

If the gentle restoratives applied by the nurse had not already brought Mona to full consciousness, the bellow and roar of the surgeon's big voice would surely have done so. His ineffectual attempts to lift up the outer sash and release his jammed fingers, combined with the noise of his roars for help, brought both the head nurse and her assistant to his side, leaving Mona lying back in her chair. Neither of the nurses was tall enough to reach over and raise that sash, and the surgeon said things to them.

But Mona,—the weak, nerveless Mona, brought to herself completely by this ridiculous spectacle of the iron man, sans feeling, etc., howling like a schoolboy (of the past) being whipped—Mona instantly lost all fear of this terrible man, and springing up, carried her chair to the window, jumped up on it and lifted the sash.

Then she tenderly held the bruised fingers in her

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