

No. 14. Cardiac Maniac.

Surely there is nothing more blood-curdling than the cry of "Murder!"

The scene was a well-kept ward in one of our English hospitals, the hour 2 a.m.—that solemn and mysterious hour before the dawn, when it behoves all night nurses to look well to their fires, and to have hot bottles and extra blankets ready to their hand. That hour, when so many weary ones, tossing between life and death, decide "after life's fitful fever" to "sleep well."

It was my first hospital; I had been there not quite three months when what I am about to narrate took place.

I was sitting by the bedside of a dying patient. Not fourteen days before he had come in, a fine well-built young fellow of a ruddy complexion and clear eyes, the picture of a temperate, well-ordered life. Now, there he lay a wasted frame with a pinched and anxious face, and feeble hands clutching at the air. On the other side of the bed sat his mother in silent grief. Thus had we watched for two nights, and this was to be our last. "Number 14 will want watching, he does not sleep," the night sister had said to me as she passed on her round at midnight, and I had watched 14 and he had watched me; he lay in the bed next to my dying patient. The sands of life had almost run through with him, so I drew the screens round him closer and shut out the world from the death agony of the son, and the supreme agony of his mother. Then there was heard the tramp of feet on the stairs, and the stretcher bearers came to bear him away, and I went with the sad little procession through the still and silent hospital to the mortuary, where we left him in the dawning.

I had hardly returned to the ward, and was clearing away the remainder of my late patient's belongings, when my blood was chilled with this awful cry of "Murder!" repeated twice.

It was from 14 it came; he was sitting up in bed, a weird spectacle of a powerfully built man, with a face as white as death and blazing eyes, his jet black beard, which accentuated the pallor of his face, reaching almost to the waist. I hastened to him and taking his hands tried to pacify him (his was a bad case of heart disease, and the doctor had forbidden him to get out of bed), but he grew terribly excited and struggled with me. Then the ward nurse came and his cries of "Murder!" roused the patients, who, one by one, kept popping up in their beds, to see what was the matter, one of the convalescents coming to our assistance,

for the man struggled like a madman, as indeed he was. We tried to calm him, and the house physician, too, when he came, tried to reason with him, but all he would say was, somewhat ironically I thought, "I did think, doctor, when I came here, that I was going to be allowed to die quietly *of the treatment*, and not be murdered." By this time he was almost exhausted, his chest heaved violently, beads of cold perspiration stood out on his forehead, and the brilliant black eyes blazed out of his ashen face. He looked like some wild beast at bay.

After some little time we got him fairly quiet, and as it was now past three o'clock in the morning, and I was still up, it was decided to put him into a small ward, with me to watch him.

This was done, and after I had made him comfortable in bed, I took up my position by the fire, in such a way as to be able to watch him without appearing to do so, for I could see he was still in a great state of excitement, starting up at every sound, and peering strangely round the room, and under the bed, as though expecting someone to be there.

Before leaving the doctor had given him a sleeping draught, saying, "Repeat it if the first does not act, he will want careful watching, nurse, and should he get violent ring this bell, and we will come to your assistance," pointing to a large bronze bell they had left for me.

When all was quiet I started, or tried to start, a letter, home. He was sitting up in bed all the time with his glittering eyes watching my every movement; I tried to persuade him to lie down and have a sleep. Presently he said: "There is a fearful draught, nurse." "Is there?" I said, "let me see what I can do," and I got up and closed one of the windows. Again I tried to write, and he watched me suspiciously as before.

By this time the second draught was due; this he refused to take, dashing the little medicine glass out of my hand. As he was now getting very excited again I did not persist but returned to my seat by the fire. Again he complained of the draught, and I shut, or pretended to shut, the window; but it was all of no avail; with one bound he was out of bed and had seized the bell. "If you don't do what I tell you, I'll kill you," he said, and ran at me with the bell raised over his head ready to fell me with it. The windows were barred down to the ground, and I knew he could not escape out of them, so I just got out of the ward in time to save myself, and held the door with my two hands so that he should not escape. I had no need to ring the bell, he was making a terrible din with it as he smashed every pane

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)