

BLOOD WILL TELL
Or, NICK CARTER'S PLAY IN POLITICS

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I. THE WOMAN FOUND DEAD.

CHAPTER II. THE HEADQUARTERS MAN.

CHAPTER III. NICK TAKES A CHANCE.

CHAPTER IV. NICK'S CAPITAL WORK.

CHAPTER V. NICK CARTER'S ANALYSIS.

CHAPTER VI. A PIECE OF PLASTER.

CHAPTER VII. A BLOW FROM BEHIND.

CHAPTER VIII. DRIVEN TO THE WALL.

CHAPTER IX. THE CLOSED DOOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE WOMAN FOUND DEAD.

The telephone communication was from Arthur Gordon, the prominent New York banker and broker, then a candidate for election to Congress on the Fusion reform ticket—a communication so sensational in character and so imbued with alarm and anxiety on the part of the speaker, that it evoked only the following terse, decided response from Nick Carter, to whom the frantic appeal had been made:

“I will go right up there, Mr. Gordon. I will be there in ten minutes.”

“What’s the trouble?”

The inquiry came from Chick Carter, the celebrated detective’s chief assistant, when Nick arose from his swivel chair and hurriedly closed his roll-top desk.

“A murder has been committed, or said to have been,” he replied.

“A murder—where?”

“Columbus Avenue,” Nick said tersely. “Arthur Gordon is under arrest for the crime. The woman’s body was found by—but we’ll get the details later. You had better go with me. Luckily Danny is at the door with the touring car. We will lose no time.”

Both detectives were leaving Nick’s Madison Avenue residence when the last was said, hurriedly putting on their

overcoats while entering his powerful motor car. In another moment both were seated in the tonneau and speeding north through the crisp air of the October morning. It then was nine o'clock.

Nick had hurriedly given Danny, his chauffeur, the Columbus Avenue address of the house in which the murder was said to have been committed, and he remarked, a bit grimly to Chick, while they settled back on the cushioned seat:

“By Jove, it's strange how Gordon repeatedly gets into trouble.”

“I should say so.”

“He certainly is up against it good and hard. It's less than a year since we pulled him out of that scrape in which he was suspected of having killed his stenographer—that double-dyed rascal, Mortimer Deland, who fooled him so completely in female attire.”

“Yes, I remember,” Chick nodded. “But what is he now up against? What did he tell you?”

“I did not wait to learn many of the details,” Nick replied. “He has just been arrested by a plain-clothes man and a policeman. The latter was sent to his house by Detective Phelan, who evidently had learned enough to warrant his arrest.”

“Great guns! is it possible?”

“Gordon yielded submissively, of course, and was allowed to telephone to me.”

“Was he at his home in the Bronx?”

“No. He has been living with his parents in Riverside Drive during his present political campaign. His wife and her uncle, Rudolph Strickland, are with them. It is more convenient for Gordon to be in town while making his political fight, than at his Bronx residence.”

“By Jove, this comes at a bad time for him, Nick, if there really is any serious evidence against him,” Chick said gravely.

“A bad time, indeed.”

“We are almost on the eve of election. Gordon has put up a splendid fight against Madison, his Congressional opponent on the Democratic ticket. His election, though the possibility was ridiculed at first, now is conceded in many quarters, and it looks to me like a cinch—unless this affair turns the tide of public opinion,” Chick added, more seriously.

“That suggests something,” Nick replied.

“You mean?”

“That this affair may be a frame-up, a dastardly scheme designed to have just the effect you mentioned. In other words, Chick, to throw Gordon down at the last moment and so insure Jack Madison’s election.”

“But Madison would not do such a beastly trick as that, nor even connive at it.”

“Don’t be so sure of it,” Nick said dryly. “Men with political ambitions, some men, at least, are capable of infernally wicked work. Madison is very anxious to carry this election, and so is the party machine. There is much depending on it.”

“That’s very true,” Chick allowed. “But I cannot believe Madison capable of such knavery, to say nothing of murder. Who is the victim?”

“Matilda Lancey.”

“The deuce you say! Her reputation is infernally bad in circles where she is well known.”

Both detectives had seen her occasionally and were aware of her shady reputation. She was a frequenter of the theaters, the best hotels and the fast restaurants, with a capacity for wine that made her, in one respect at least, a desirable patron, though in public she never went beyond certain discreet points.

Tilly Lancey, in fact, as she was familiarly known, enjoyed friendly relations with a small legion of fast society chaps and men about town, and was equally distinguished for her striking beauty, her fine figure, her costly jewels, and beautiful gowns. That she had met her death at the hands of a man of Arthur Gordon’s type seemed utterly incredible.

“Tilly Lancey, eh?” Chick muttered audibly. “So she has come to the end of her career. It has been hinted by some of the mud-slinging stump speakers, Nick, that Madison has been quite as friendly with Miss Lancey as the law allows, in view of the fact that he has a wife and family.”

“Still another reason, perhaps, why my suggestion has feet to stand on,” Nick replied. “There is nothing in speculating upon it, however, before we have learned just what has been done and what evidence has been found. Let her go lively, Danny.”

There was little occasion for the last. Danny then was running nearly at top speed up Fifth Avenue, guiding the flying car with the eye and hands of an expert.

Policemen on the crossings stared amazedly till they caught a glimpse at the face of the famous detective, and, when instantly recognized, they made no attempt to stop him. They knew that only an emergency case would take him at that high speed through the most fashionable New York thoroughfare.

Less than ten minutes had passed when Danny swerved to the curbing near the home of Miss Matilda Lancey. A taxicab was standing directly in front of the house.

It was a brownstone dwelling occupying a corner lot, one of a block of five, the house having three flats accessible through a single front door and entrance hall.

A policeman was standing on the steps. He was talking with a slender man in a plaid business suit, a man with an intellectual, or professional type of countenance, with wavy hair, a pointed beard, and gold-bowed spectacles. He had a wad of "copy paper" and pencil in his hand, and he turned quickly when Nick and Chick ascended the steps, asking politely:

"Do you object to my going in with you, Mr. Carter? I am a city news man. I will be very discreet as to the story I turn in, or will be governed entirely by your wishes. I happened to be passing and saw Officer Gilroy on the steps. He told me a murder has been committed."

"How did you happen to recognize me?" Nick inquired, pausing briefly and eying the man a bit sharply.

“I did not recognize you,” smiled the other. “Gilroy mentioned your name when your car stopped at the curbing.”

“Well, I don’t know myself just what has been done here,” said Nick. “I prefer not to grant your request immediately. You may wait here until I have looked things over, if you like, and if I then have anything to give you for publication, I will inform you.”

“Very well, sir. Thank you for that.”

“Which flat, Gilroy?”

“The first one, Mr. Carter,” said the policeman. “Detective Phelan is in there. Wait in the vestibule, Mr. Hawley, if you like,” he added to the reporter. “Mr. Carter will not forget you.”

Nick heard these added remarks, including the reporter’s name, while he entered the house with Chick. He noticed that there were several drops of dry blood on the polished, uncarpeted floor near the door of the first flat.

A polished stairway led up to the second floor. There were three women in mourning gowns seated on the upper stairs; with pale and awed gaze they turned upon the two detectives.

Nick found the door of the first flat ajar, and he entered without knocking. A large dark man about fifty years old was seated in one of the armchairs in the handsomely furnished front parlor, but he at once arose when the two detectives entered.

“I have been waiting for you, Nick,” said he, after a word in hearty greeting. “Gordon telephoned to me after his arrest, stating that you were coming here at his request, and asking me not to disturb things before you arrived. I have done very little in that line,

so I decided to wait for you. That's equivalent to admitting, you see, that I realize your head to be longer than mine."

"Thanks, Phelan," said Nick, smiling faintly.

"I'm thinking, however, that this job won't require a very long head," Phelan quickly added. "The truth sticks out all over it."

"Involving Arthur Gordon?"

"I feel so sure of it that I sent a policeman, Jim Kennedy, to arrest him."

"As convincing as that, is it?"

"That's what, Nick, and there's no telling what a man might do who has done a job of this kind. I thought I'd better get him without delay."

Nick glanced around the room, noting a few drops of blood on the thick Wilton carpet, a scattered trail leading through a broad, curtained doorway into an adjoining room. One curtain of the portière was partly torn from its pins and was hanging awry from its walnut rod.

"Step in there and have a look," said Phelan. "Nothing can be done for the woman, so I've not called a physician. She was dead and gone long ago."

Nick drew aside the portière and entered the adjoining room. It evidently had been used for a living room, or a library. In the middle of it stood a table covered with newspapers, books, and magazines.

A desk between two windows overlooking the side street, the roller shades of which still were drawn down, had been broken open and some of its contents were scattered over the floor.

Against the wall of an adjoining bedroom, accessible from a passageway leading to a dining room and kitchen, stood a sofa, on which were several handsome silk pillows. Two of them were bespattered with blood.

On the floor near one end of the sofa lay the lifeless form of the woman. She was clad in a handsome evening dress. Her bare neck and shoulders were covered with blood. Her luxuriant auburn hair was in disorder, matted with blood that had flowed from several gashes in the scalp. The skull had been beaten in with a heavy bludgeon of some kind.

She was lying on her left side, with her head nearly touching the baseboard of the wall, from which her right hand appeared to have fallen after a desperate effort to reach it, or to continue doing so.

In confirmation of this there was a coarse, angular, irregular scrawl on the wall paper, several words evidently written with a tremulous hand by the woman, and inscribed with the tip of her forefinger dipped in her own life's blood—a scrawl ending abruptly with a direct downward stroke toward where her right hand was then lying. It was as if she had expired, or lost consciousness, at least, while making a desperate effort to write more, enough to tell in full the tragic story.

The several slanting, irregular words were legible, however, and there was no mistaking their fateful significance.

They read:

“Arthur Gordon did this to get the——”

That was all save the last downward stroke left by the falling hand.

Was it enough?

Was it all that would be required to convict, to send her assassin over the same dark river?

These were the first questions that arose in the mind of Nick Carter.

CHAPTER II. THE HEADQUARTERS MAN.

Nick Carter took in with a few swift glances those important features of the scene already mentioned. Instead of immediately beginning a more careful inspection, however, he turned to the headquarters man and said:

“Am I to understand, Phelan, that things are about as you found them?”

“Yes. Nothing has been disturbed, Nick, of any importance.”

“Was the woman lying in that position?”

“Yes. I have not touched the body. I saw that writing on the wall, and——”

“One moment,” Nick interposed. “Who discovered the crime?”

“A girl who lives in the second flat. She came down about eight o’clock to go out to work, and she saw spots of blood on the hall floor near the door of this flat.”

“I noticed them when I entered.”

“She tried the door, and found it locked. It has an automatic lock. She then rang repeatedly, being acquainted with Miss Lancey, but she could get no response.”

“Does this woman live alone here?”

“Yes, so I am told, except when entertaining her friends.”

“I see.”

“The girl then called her mother, and they hunted for Gilroy, who is on this beat. He entered through the kitchen window, forcing it open, and he then saw what had occurred. I happened to be in the precinct station when he telephoned,” added Phelan, pointing to a telephone on a stand in one corner. “I came here with Kennedy, taking temporary charge of the case, and I soon found evidence enough to warrant sending him to arrest Mr. Gordon.”

“You mean that writing on the wall?”

“Yes, partly.”

“What else?”

“I found this letter in the wastebasket,” said Phelan, taking it from his pocket. “It must have been written by Gordon, for it is on a letter sheet bearing his business heading, as does the envelope in which it came.”

“Let me see them.”

“It was mailed at two o’clock yesterday. It contains only a single line addressed to Miss Lancey, stating that Gordon would call to see her here at eleven o’clock. That must have been eleven o’clock last evening.”

Nick glanced at the brief pen-written letter. He was familiar with Gordon’s writing, and he immediately recognized it. The letter seemed to corroborate all of Phelan’s statements.

“Did you think that was evidence enough to warrant arresting Gordon?” Nick again inquired.

“I thought it enough for a starter, Nick, at least,” Phelan bluntly asserted. “I reckon I have not shot very wide of the mark.”

“Why so?”

“Because Kennedy has phoned me of other facts.”

“Namely?”

“He met Dennis Regan, a detective from the precinct station, just before he arrived at the Gordon residence,” Phelan proceeded to disclose. “He told Regan what had occurred and whom he was after. Regan decided he would not butt in, knowing I was on the case, but he waited in the grounds south of the house while Kennedy went in to see Gordon.”

“Well?”

“While he was out there, pacing up and down the gravel walk, he noticed that one of the small branches of a clump of shrubbery was partly broken off and hanging down, as if something had recently been thrown in among the shrubs, disturbing the dry leaves that had fallen from them.”

“He went to examine them, I infer.”

“That’s what. He found under the dry leaves a double-jointed jimmy. It was parted at the socket each section being about eight inches long, and both were badly stained with blood.”

“Quite a remarkable discovery,” Nick observed, with brows knitting slightly. “Anything more?”

“Well, as far as that goes, this desk evidently was forced open with just such a jimmy,” Phelan continued, turning to the desk.

“Here are marks on the wood, showing plainly where the curving, wedge-shaped point was forced under the top to pry it up and break the lock.”

“I see,” Nick nodded. “That’s very evident, Phelan, indeed.”

“The jimmy found by Regan has just that kind of a point.”

“Still more evidence, eh?”

“I think so, Nick. It’s a safe bet, too, that this woman’s head was broken with the same jimmy. The fractures and gashes show plainly that a bludgeon of that kind was used.”

“I agree with you,” said Nick, crouching to inspect the several terrible wounds. “Both the fractures and gashes could have been caused only with a bludgeon having one or more edges. The jimmy is probably octagonal in shape.”

“Very likely. I did not inquire about that.”

“Well, what followed?”

“Regan then decided to dip into the case,” Phelan continued. “He went into the house and found that Kennedy had discovered other evidence.”

“What kind of evidence?”

“To begin with, Nick, Gordon refused to say where he was at eleven o’clock last night. Kennedy then told him about the murder and placed him under arrest. To make a long story short, for I have not all of the details, Gordon’s evening suit, which he admits having worn last night, was found spattered with blood.”

“H’m, is that so?”

“There are stains of blood in one pocket of his overcoat, also, as if the jimmy was disjointed and thrust into it after the murder. You can see for yourself that the weapon used by the assassin is missing.”

“Yes, so I have noticed.”

“In the other pocket of Gordon’s overcoat was a disguise, a false beard and mustache. They——”

“One moment,” Nick interrupted. “Gordon saw all of this evidence, I suppose.”

“Yes, certainly.”

“What did he say about it?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“He refused positively to make any statements whatever,” Phelan explained. “He said he would not do so until after he had conferred with you. Regan then allowed him to telephone to you, and, while waiting for Gordon to get ready to accompany him, he phoned these facts to me.”

“Where is Gordon now?”

“On his way to police headquarters, if not already there,” said Phelan. “Both Regan and Kennedy went with him.”

“Taking the evidence mentioned.”

“Yes, certainly.”

“And that’s all you know about the case?”

“Isn’t that enough?” Phelan asked bluntly. “What more would you have? It tells the story plainly enough.”

“What story?” inquired Nick tentatively. “What is your theory?”

“It can be told with a breath,” Phelan declared. “Gordon came here to get something from this woman. His letter shows that he had an appointment with her at eleven last night. She refused to give him what he wanted, evidently something which he knew was in this desk. He came prepared to get it at any cost.”

“I follow you,” Nick nodded.

“When he found that she would not give it up, he killed her with the jimmy and then broke open the desk with it. Here are stains of blood on the desk, showing that it was forced after the murder was committed.”

“That appears probable,” Nick allowed.

“Gordon probably found what he wanted, and then fled,” Phelan went on. “The woman afterward revived sufficiently to realize the situation, also that she was near her end. She must have been too weak to rise, or to make herself heard. But she dragged herself near enough to the wall to write these few words on it with the tip of her finger, dipped in the pool of blood. The smooches of blood on the carpet show plainly that she dragged herself over the floor. She evidently died, or fainted, before she could complete what she would have written. That’s my theory, Carter.”

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