

**THE CALL OF
DEATH**

Or NICK CARTER'S CLEVER
ASSISTANT

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I. A CURIOUS LETTER.

CHAPTER II. THE MISSING RECTOR.

CHAPTER III. UNEXPECTED CLEWS.

CHAPTER IV. NICK CARTER'S RUSE.

CHAPTER V. PATSY TURNS CROOK.

CHAPTER VI. THE MAN WHO DIED.

CHAPTER VII. TAKING LONG CHANCES.

CHAPTER VIII. PATSY'S CLEVER WORK.

CHAPTER IX. THE LAST CALL.

CHAPTER I. A CURIOUS LETTER.

“There’s no question in my mind, inspector, as to who did the job,” said Nick Carter.

“You feel sure of it, then?”

“As sure as water runs downhill. I refer, of course, to the mechanical part of the work. I looked it over on the morning following the burglary, every part of the looted vault, and I am as sure of the cracksman’s identity as if I had seen him getting in his work. Only one yegg in the business has the mechanical genius to crack a vault as that was cracked.”

“James Nordeck?”

“Surely. I have seen Nordeck’s work before, and I know it when I see it. It is invariably stamped with his mechanical ingenuity. Jim Nordeck is in a class of his own at that business.”

“Here is his mug, front and profile, chief, also his record. Have a look at them.”

The last came from Chick Carter, the celebrated detective’s senior assistant, and the remarks of both were addressed to Inspector Mallory, then head of the detective force identified with the New York police department.

They were discussing the recent burglary of a savings bank up in Westchester County, a crime committed about a week before, in which the remarkably skillful drilling of the vault for the use of explosives, as well as other details of the felonious work, plainly showed it to have been that of professional cracksmen.

As may be inferred from the remarks he had just made, it revealed something more to Nick Carter—the identity of one of the criminals, at least, with certain characteristics of whose skillful work along such infamous lines the detective was already familiar.

Though discovered before having completed their work, the burglars had succeeded in getting away with nearly two hundred thousand dollars in cash, bonds, and negotiable securities; but not until one of their number had been seriously wounded with the revolver of a citizen who had heard and pursued them, as was evidenced by a trail of blood, to the motor car in which they escaped with their plunder.

None of it had since been recovered. Negotiations with the crooks had been undertaken by the bank officials through the newspapers, with a view to recovering part of the stolen funds, and a liberal reward had also been offered for information leading to the discovery and arrest of the thieves. All of these endeavors, however, had proved entirely futile.

The trail of the crooks had, in fact, been hopelessly lost. Nor was there any clew to their identity, aside from the opinion expressed by Nick Carter on the day following the crime, when he had been called upon to inspect the work of the burglars, despite the fact that he had declined to take the case in conjunction with the police and detectives already employed on it.

Nick's views had been mentioned to Inspector Mallory, and this had occasioned his visit that morning, and the discussion then in progress in the business office of the detective's Madison Avenue residence, then occupied only by the three persons mentioned.

Inspector Mallory took the card tendered by Chick Carter with the remarks above noted. It had been taken by Chick from a large cabinet of drawers containing the Bertillon signaletic cards of thousands of other crooks, and it contained two photographs and the criminal record of the man then under discussion.

The face that met the inspector's gaze was not a prepossessing one. It was that of a man of fifty—a hard and sinister face, with a low brow and narrow eyes, a hooked nose, like the beak of a bird of prey, a square jaw, and thin lips, drawn downward at the corners—a more evil and cruel face than one often viewed.

“He looks like a bad egg, indeed, Chick,” said Inspector Mallory, grimly inspecting the two photographs.

“His looks flatter him,” Chick replied. “He's the worst in the business.”

“His record corroborates you,” said the inspector, while he read the criminal career noted on the card. “He appears to have been extraordinarily lucky, however, in eluding arrest and doing time.”

“Lucky is right,” Nick put in. “He has been peculiarly fortunate in that respect, Mallory, but very unlucky in others.”

“How so, Nick?”

“I happen to know something about the inside history of the rascal,” Nick explained. “I got it from one of his old pals, Darby Moore, who died in Matteawan less than a year ago.”

“I knew him,” Inspector Mallory said.

“Aside from his legitimate trade as a machinist, at which Nordeck is an expert, he has absolutely no head on his shoulders,” Nick proceeded. “He could not frame up and pull off a job of any size, to say nothing of this savings-bank break, if his life depended upon it. He can work to advantage only when guided by a capable leader. Take it from me, Mallory, this Westchester job was directed by such a man, not by Jim Nordeck. There was a much bigger man than he behind the gun.”

“Do you know him, Nick?” questioned Mallory, with sharper scrutiny.

“I do not.”

“Or suspect his identity?”

“No.”

“What do you mean by Nordeck’s having been peculiarly unfortunate?”

“In that he has been repeatedly cheated by his confederates out of most of his share of the plunder,” Nick explained. “He has been an easy mark in that respect ever since his wife died, something like a dozen years ago. She was a shrewd Englishwoman, but thoroughly unscrupulous, who looked after his interests and handled his money. Since her death, however, though he is known to have had a hand in numerous profitable jobs, Nordeck has been hard up most of the time.”

“Through having been victimized by his confederates?”

“Exactly. He now fights shy of trusting them, even.”

“You got all this from Darby Moore?”

“Yes. I had an interview with him on the day he died. I know he told me the truth.”

“This card states that Nordeck has a daughter, who is also a crook.”

“That is correct.”

“Do you know her, or anything about her?”

“I have seen her,” Nick replied. “I saw her less than a month ago, in fact, which is another reason why I feel sure that Nordeck had a hand in this burglary.”

“She sticks to him, eh?”

“That’s what! They never have been separated. I knew the moment I saw her that Jim Nordeck was in these parts, and that something was likely to come off.”

“Why didn’t you track the girl to cover?”

“It was impossible, Mallory, under the circumstances.”

“Why so?”

“She was in an elevated train going north, and I was in another going south,” smiled Nick. “Both trains had stopped at a station, and I saw her through one of the windows. I could not wish myself from one train to another.”

“True,” Inspector Mallory admitted, laughing. “Have you seen the girl since then?”

“No.”

“How old is she?”

“Not much over twenty,” said Nick. “Her name is Nancy Nordeck, though I guess she uses an alias most of the time.”

“Yes, no doubt,” Mallory dryly allowed.

“She looked very seedy, as well as I could judge through the car window,” Nick added. “This savings-bank break may replenish her purse, however, and put Jim Nordeck in funds. If his pals don’t bunco him, he ought to be well heeled for some little time—unless some of your men succeed in rounding up this gang. I infer that there is no immediate prospect of it.”

“No, I am sorry to say,” Inspector Mallory admitted.

“I see that the bank directors have offered a reward of ten thousand dollars for the recovery of the plunder.”

“Yes. They can well afford to pay that for it.”

“And then some,” put in Chick pointedly. “I doubt that any of the gang who did that job will squeal, however, for it smacks of crooks who keep their traps closed under any and all circumstances. If they——”

“Stop a moment!” Nick interposed. “What is wanted, Joseph?”

The office door had been opened by Nick’s manservant, who then paused respectfully on the threshold.

“Detective Vallon is here, sir,” he replied. “He wants to see Inspector Mallory.”

“Vallon here!” exclaimed Mallory surprisedly. “Let him come in, Nick. I’ll see what he wants.”

“Show him in, Joseph,” Nick directed.

He entered a moment later, a plain-clothes man, from police headquarters, with whom both Nick and Chick shook hands cordially, while he was briefly stating his mission.

“I’ve got a special delivery for you, inspector,” said he. “It is marked private and rush, and I reckoned it might be very important. The lieutenant said I’d be likely to find you here, so here I am—and here’s the letter.”

Inspector Mallory took it and glanced at the superscription. It was addressed with a lead pencil, in a somewhat coarse, irregular hand, which, with the misspelling of several words, plainly evinced the writer’s lack of education. Prominent in the lower corners of the envelope were the two words—rush and private.

“Humph!” Mallory grunted, with a puzzled expression. “Mailed this morning in Harlem. I don’t know the hand. Never saw one quite so scrawly. It may be important, nevertheless, Vallon, as you say.”

Chief Mallory broke the seal while speaking, then drew out the inclosed sheet of paper.

A folded bank note slipped from it and fell to the floor.

“By Jove, chief, that’s a good beginning!” said Chick, laughing.

“I believe your story,” Mallory replied, bending to pick up the bank note. “Hello! Fifty bucks, too, and a brand-new bill. I could stand a gift of this kind every day in the year.”

It was, indeed, a crisp, brand-new bank note for fifty dollars.

Nick Carter eyed the inspector more narrowly when he opened and read the letter, noting his gradual change of expression.

“By thunder, here’s a curious case!” Mallory exclaimed, looking up. “It cannot be a hoax, not with fifty simoleons backing up the story. Have a look, Nick. Read it aloud.”

Nick took the letter and read it aloud, as directed, a penciled, illiterate scrawl, as follows:

“MR. INSPECTOR MALLORY: There be a ded man up in number aity to P—— Street, Harlem. I want him planted rite, but I ain’t got no time to tend to it. I know you are ded square when it comes to a show-down, so I send you the coin to foot the bills with, and I ax you to tend to him. Git him a good box with black cloth on the outside of it and silver grips. I would ax you to git a silver plait, to, only I can’t tell you his monaker. I thank you beforehand, knowing you will tend to him. Please have a praer sed for him.”

Nick Carter read this rude scrawl indifferently at first, then glanced at it again more carefully.

Mallory, watching him, detected a sharper gleam deep down in his more serious eyes. He straightened up and inquired abruptly:

“What do you think of it?”

“It’s on the level,” said Nick. “The woman means what she says.”

“Woman?” questioned Mallory quickly. “How do you know a woman wrote it? It isn’t signed.”

“True.”

“And the writing looks like a man’s?”

“True again.”

“Why do you think, then, that a woman wrote it?”

“Sentiment,” said Nick tersely. “It appears between the lines, illiterate though they are. We very seldom find it in men of the class in which the writer of this evidently falls.”

“A fallen class, evidently,” remarked Detective Vallon.

“Possibly,” Nick allowed. “She has a high opinion of you, Mallory, all the same. Very properly too.”

“Thanks!” blurted the chief a bit gruffly.

“You had better go up there and look into the case. Fifty dollars will more than foot the bills. It’s quite remarkable, by the way, where the writer raised that amount, and—let me see the bank note, Mallory.”

“It looks all right,” said the inspector, complying.

“True,” said Nick. “It is not a counterfeit, but evidently is fresh from— Yes, by Jove, you had better go up there,” he abruptly digressed. “If you think well of it, Mallory, I’ll go with you.”

“I shall be more than pleased,” declared Mallory, with a look of surprise.

“I’ll have my chauffeur bring around the touring car,” added Nick, touching an electric button on his desk. “There will be room for you, Chick, and for Vallon, also, if he cares to go.”

“I’m hooked,” Vallon quickly nodded. “Count me in.”

As the four detectives were descending the steps of Nick’s residence five minutes later, however, at which his touring car then was standing, a rapidly driven limousine approached and swerved to the curbing near by.

Nick paused instinctively, then approached to meet a handsome, fashionably clad young woman, who had hurriedly alighted and drawn nearer.

“You were going away, Mr. Carter, and I am just in time,” she said quietly yet in some excitement. “You must postpone it. I must see you alone immediately—no, no, don’t refuse! I’ll not take no for an answer. I really must see you. It’s a case of life or death.”

“What is the trouble, Miss Farley?” Nick gravely inquired, noting her paleness.

“I cannot tell you here—not here!” she whispered. “Do please give me your time. Money is no object, Mr. Carter, and——”

“Hush!”

Nick turned to the men in the touring car.

“I must cut out the visit to Harlem, inspector,” he said significantly. “Chick will go with you, however, and—— Well, you understand.”

“Certainly, Nick, certainly!” Inspector Mallory assured him. “There is nothing involved in it. Chick will inform you later of all the facts. No apology is necessary.”

“Let her go, Danny,” Chick directed, when Nick turned to rejoin the waiting woman. “No. 82 P—— Street, Harlem. Eat it up lively!”

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSING RECTOR.

Nick Carter had more than one reason for complying with the request of the young lady who had arrived at his residence just as he was departing.

Nick was influenced not only by her manifest anxiety and agitation, but also by the fact that her wealthy father, Archibald Farley, who had died about a year before, leaving her something like five millions, had been a personal friend, and had frequently entertained him in his magnificent Westchester mansion.

Nick knew, moreover, that Harriet Farley was a remarkably sensible, level-headed girl, and that she would not thus have appealed to him without very serious occasion. He conducted her into his library, therefore, instead of to his business office, that he might suffer no interruption.

“Take an armchair, Miss Farley,” said he, placing one for her. “Compose yourself, too, for I see that you are quite nervous. What is the trouble?”

“I ought not to have come in here, Mr. Carter, for I want you to go with me,” she replied. “It may be just as well, however, if I first tell you the cause of my anxiety.”

“I think so,” said Nick, taking a chair near her.

She was a very beautiful girl, in the twenties, of light complexion, and with wonderfully blue, expressive eyes. Her features were of a refined and classic cast, evincing culture and strength of character. Her head was finely poised and crowned

with an abundance of wavy auburn hair. She was above medium height, with a supple, graceful figure, the attractive lines of which were accentuated by her close-fitting, fashionable garments.

“You must not think my fear is foolish. Mr. Carter, nor my interest in this matter presumptuous,” she said earnestly, replying to the detective’s remark. “I have serious reasons for both, and I shall insist upon your investigating the matter immediately, if I can prevail upon you to do so.”

“Your father and I were very good friends, Miss Farley,” Nick replied. “I would be very glad to be of service to you.”

“I felt sure of it, Mr. Carter, thank you.”

“What is the matter to which you refer?”

“It relates to the disappearance of quite a noted young clergyman, the Reverend Austin Maybrick, rector of St. Lawrence Church, which I attend. I know that he has met with evil of some kind.”

“I know Mr. Maybrick very well by reputation,” said Nick. “He is fast becoming noted for his eloquence, his advanced ideas, and his charitable work among the lowest classes. He has a very wealthy parish, I believe?”

“Yes, very; it includes some of the richest residents of Westchester County.”

“You say that Mr. Maybrick is mysteriously missing?”

“Yes.”

“Since when?”

“Since nine o’clock last evening.”

“But that is not long,” said Nick significantly. “Surely, Miss Farley——”

“I know what you would say, Mr. Carter, but it would have no weight with me,” she hurriedly interposed. “I am absolutely sure that he is the victim of knavery of some kind.”

“But why are you so sure of it? Have you any definite reasons?”

“Yes, many.”

“Tell me,” said Nick, “what are your reasons, and the circumstances in connection with his disappearance.”

Miss Farley drew up in her chair. A wave of red appeared in her cheeks and dispelled her paleness. She met Nick’s grave scrutiny with outward composure, however, and replied with characteristic frankness:

“I must begin, Mr. Carter, with telling you of my relations with Mr. Maybrick. He has been very kind to me since my father died a year ago, leaving me very wealthy, but deplorably alone in the world. Mr. Maybrick called often during my father’s illness, and his visits have been even more frequent since his death. They have given rise to rumors, Mr. Carter, that Mr. Maybrick and I are in love, and likely to be married.”

“Is there any truth in them?” Nick inquired.

“Yes.”

“Are you engaged to Mr. Maybrick?”

“I am, Mr. Carter, though the engagement has not been announced,” said Harriet. “I have been in mourning for a year, you know, discarding it only a week ago.”

“I understand,” said Nick.

“I have been very careful during my period of mourning that nothing should be said about my engagement, and I know that Mr. Maybrick has not disclosed it by so much as a hint. He is absolutely reliable.”

“No doubt.”

“The truth is suspected, nevertheless, and bitterly resented.”

“Resented by whom?”

“By a woman with whom Mr. Maybrick was on terms of friendly intimacy before falling in love with me,” said Miss Farley, coloring again. “He assures me that their friendship was entirely proper, which I fully believe, but the woman evidently intends to take advantage of it, and make trouble for him. She has threatened him with a lawsuit, to say nothing of other vengeful proceedings, unless he ends his relations with me and consents to marry her.”

“Who informed you of her feelings and intentions?” Nick inquired.

“Mr. Maybrick.”

“How does he regard her threats?”

“He has ignored them, Mr. Carter, and very properly, too,” said Miss Farley. “He knows that she has been stealthily watching him,

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

