

# **The Mystery of the Crossed Needles**

## **Table of Contents**

CHAPTER I. TWICE IN THE HEART.

CHAPTER II. THE MAN WITH THE SCARS.

CHAPTER III. TRACING THE CRIME.

CHAPTER IV. THE NEEDLES AGAIN.

CHAPTER V. IN AND OUT.

CHAPTER VI. PATSY'S STILL-HUNT.

CHAPTER VII. CHICK FINDS HIS MAN.

CHAPTER VIII. CHICK MAKES DISCOVERIES.

CHAPTER IX. THROUGH DEVIOUS WAYS.

CHAPTER X. NICK CONFIRMS A THEORY.

CHAPTER XI. THE LETTER.

CHAPTER XII. AVENGED.

## CHAPTER I. TWICE IN THE HEART.

The electric bell from Andrew Anderton's study rang sharply. It was close to the ear of the butler dozing in his little room off the hall at the back of the main staircase, and he awoke with a start.

"Lord love 'im!" exclaimed that functionary, stalking to the door with as much haste as his dignity would permit. "Why doesn't 'e stop ringing? I 'eard 'im the first time, without 'im keeping the blooming bell going all the time." Then, as he reached the door and made for the stairs, he continued grumblingly: "All right, Mr. Anderton. I 'ear you. You certainly are a most impatient gentleman. I never seed anything like you for 'urrying a man, not even in the old country. Though the Marquis of Silsby—my last master before I left England—was a 'asty sort of gentleman, too. This was the way 'e always acted. Wanted me to be right on the spot as soon as he touched the bell, although 'e knew very well I was two floors below 'im. My word! That bell's still ringing. I can 'ear it from up 'ere."

The butler, by this time, was on the second floor of the handsome house in upper Fifth Avenue, where Andrew Anderton, the millionaire traveler and Oriental student, lived. He pushed open the door of the study.

"Did you ring, sir?"

He had these words out, from force of habit, before he even looked around the room. When he did, he gave utterance to a shout

that brought a maid, who had been passing along the hallway, surging in, white-faced and round-eyed, to see what was the matter.

Andrew Anderton, in the handsome, velvet, embroidered dressing gown he generally wore when alone in his study, was lying across the floor, face down. His body, pressed on the electric foot button, kept the bell below ringing continuously.

“What’s the matter with him, Ruggins?” whispered the maid.

The butler knelt by the side of the still figure and gently turned it over. The face of the student was white—the awful gray white of a corpse—and the eyes were closed. The expression was peaceful. There was nothing in it to suggest that he had died a violent death, or even that he had suffered as he passed away.

“Heart disease, I should say,” murmured Ruggins. “Telephone for Doctor Miles, Amelia.”

The girl took up the desk telephone on the large, heavy table that Andrew Anderton had been writing at when stricken, and called up Doctor Theophilus Miles, who had been a lifelong friend of the dead man, as well as his physician.

As she telephoned she pointed mutely to a pen that evidently had dropped from the fingers of the master at the moment of his collapse, for it was still wet with black ink, and there was a smudge of it on the white paper of the letter he had been inditing.

“Yes, I see,” nodded Ruggins. “It was awfully sudden. ’E must ’ave been took all at once. I wonder whether it *was* ’eart disease, after all.”

He opened the front of the velvet dressing gown—which was not fastened, but had fallen together—and gave vent to a mumbled ejaculation, as he saw that the waistcoat was open.

“And ’is shirt is the same way,” he went on. “You can see ’is bare flesh. ’Ello! What’s this?”

Something glittering had caught his eye. A closer look revealed two long needles, crossed and welded together in the center, where they were in contact with each other.

“Save us!” muttered the butler. “This is murder!”

The points of both needles were deeply embedded in the flesh on the left side, and Ruggins knew at once that they pierced the heart!

His first impulse was to pull the needles away. Then some vague recollection of something he had heard about the illegality of touching a body until it had been viewed by a coroner held his hand.

“I’ll wait till the doctor comes, anyhow. My poor master’s dead. It wouldn’t do ’im any good to take out the needles. ’Ave you got the doctor, Amelia?”

“Yes. He will be here in five minutes. His automobile is all ready at his door, and he will come right along.”

It was less than five minutes when Doctor Theophilus Miles—a rather gruff, although good-natured, man of sixty—came into the room, and, with a nod to Ruggins, knelt by the side of the stiffened form upon the floor. He opened one of the eyes with a calm,

professional finger, felt for a pulse, and then pulled aside the dressing gown to put his hand over the heart.

He started as he saw the needles. Carefully he pulled them out, gazed at them in silence for nearly a minute. Then he told Ruggins and the maid to go out of the room.

“And don’t say anything about what has happened in this room to the other people in the house until I tell you. If they have found out anything, tell them Mr. Anderton is sick. Understand? And, whatever you do, don’t mention these needles.”

“Don’t you want any ’elp, sir?” asked Ruggins, who did not like to be thus dismissed.

“I’ll get all the help I want in a few minutes. I’m going to telephone for it. A gentleman will come here soon—probably in less than a quarter of an hour. If he says his name is Carter—Mr. Nicholas Carter—bring him up at once. That’s all.”

He waved them both from the room. Then he shut the door and took up the telephone. Soon he had a response to the number he had called, and he asked whether Mr. Carter was on the wire. A reply came, and he went on:

“Oh, all right, Carter! This is Andrew Anderton’s house. You know where it is. Can you come at once?... Yes, very important... You will? Ten minutes? All right! I’ll wait for you.”

As he hung up the receiver, he soliloquized: “That’s one good thing about Carter. He doesn’t bother you with a lot of questions over the telephone. He knew that if I had anything to tell I would have said it. I wish everybody I have to deal with was like that. I’d have a much easier life. So they got him! The Yellow Tong! This

is the second time I've seen their work. I believe some of those people on the Yellow Sea must get their devilish ingenuity from the Evil One himself."

He had placed the crossed needles on the white letter paper, which had only the date line written upon it, and covered the face of Anderton with a newspaper. Now he sat down in the big swing chair from which the stricken man had fallen, to stare at the needles.

Soon he dropped into a doze, for he was a busy man, with a practice that kept him out a large part of his time, and his sleep was a thing he had to take when he could get it. He had acquired the ability to drop off anywhere so long as he could sit down, and a short nap always did him good.

He was brought to himself by the announcement of Ruggins, at the door, as he ushered in a visitor:

"Mr. Carter!"

The great detective looked at the doctor—who jumped from his chair, wide awake, at the first sound of the butler's voice—and then glanced at the figure stretched across the floor, with a newspaper over the face. A frown drew his heavy brows together. He stooped and removed the newspaper.

"Poor Anderton!" he murmured. "Ah, well! I'm not surprised. How was it, doctor?"

For answer, Doctor Miles pointed to the white paper on the table.

“The crossed needles!” whispered the detective, in an awed tone. Then, sternly: “The Yellow Tong is at it again. This is the second.”

“Yes, Carter. The other one was that poor hobo they got in a Bowery lodging house. It was the same thing, you remember. But I was coroner at that time, and I believed the ends of justice would be served by not letting any one know what I found inside his shirt. I have those crossed needles locked up in my laboratory now.”

“You’ve examined them, haven’t you?” asked Nick Carter.

“Of course. They are poisoned. Not that *that* is necessary,” replied the doctor. “When an inch of steel pierces the heart in two places, it is quite likely to prove fatal, without introducing poison. Still, the poison hurries the crime. Of course, when a victim dies on the instant, as he does with these needles, it may save the murderer some inconvenience. Poor Anderton! This is the penalty he pays for falling foul of the tong.”

“Will there be an inquest?” asked Nick quietly. “Or can you avoid it by certifying that he died of natural causes? I suppose you couldn’t do that—although, in one sense, he did die that way. It is quite natural for a human being to pass away when two poisoned needles are in his heart,” he added, in a thoughtful tone.

“That’s good logic, Nick,” admitted the doctor, with a slight smile. “But it wouldn’t do. In cases of sudden death, there must be an inquiry by the proper officer. But I can keep the crossed needles out of sight. I will cause the inquest to be entirely perfunctory, by certifying that poor Anderton came to his death at the hands of some person or persons unknown, without going too much into details. It will be passed up to the police, of course, and I shall



have to show the weapon to the man in charge of the case from headquarters. But I can prevent its going any further.”

“That’s what I want,” answered Carter. “You know, as well as I, that this rascally gang from China, who call themselves the Yellow Tong, intend to fairly honeycomb this country with secret avenues for bringing in their people, if they can, and that, when they are ready, they will commence a series of crimes that will give the government, as well as the police of all the big cities, more trouble than the average citizen dreams of as possible.”

“Yes, I know that,” agreed Miles.

“Poor Anderton was a warm, personal friend of mine,” said Nick Carter, with a sobbing catch in his voice, “just as he was of yours. If I haven’t expressed much grief since coming into this room, it is because I feel that it is more important to avenge him than to mourn over his remains.”

Doctor Miles put out his hand and grasped the firm, strong fingers of the detective.

“I know you, Carter,” he returned. “You need not explain.”

“There is more than that,” went on Nick. “This is the first serious blow they have struck. I don’t count the poor fellow in the Bowery so much, because he was an unimportant person. If he had never accidentally come across some of their secrets in China, when he was a seaman on board that tramp steamer, they never would have troubled to wipe him out. But Andrew Anderton is different.

“Yes, of course. He is a member of several scientific associations, a wealthy New Yorker, and he has the confidence of

the United States government. He has done notable work in China for Washington, and I have no doubt he has submitted a valuable report to the department of state, with papers to verify it, that no other man could have given to it. It is because he is so well informed a man that he has been cut off by the Yellow Tong. There can be no doubt about that.”

“Not the slightest,” assented Nick Carter. “By the way, can you have this room fastened up, so that there is no danger of anybody disturbing it? I should like to go through it alone after the coroner has been here.”

“I’ll fix that, of course,” was the doctor’s ready promise. “The coroner is Doctor Farrell. I’ll call him up and get him to make his preliminary investigation right away. When do you want to come back?”

“Let me see,” answered Nick, consulting his watch. “It is now nearly nine. I’ll come back at ten. The coroner will be through by that time?”

“Long before,” replied Miles confidently. “I will be here with him, to tell him all he wants to know. He’ll bring a jury with him in the morning, and they’ll reach a verdict very soon. Do you want me here when you get back at ten?”

“Not unless it is convenient to you. I should like to have you present, of course. But, if you——”

“I’ve got half a dozen calls I ought to make to-night. I shall try to cover some by telephone. But, anyhow, I have enough to keep me out of bed till one in the morning, and I’m rather tired.”

“Don’t say a word,” interrupted Nick. “I’ll look through the room by myself. I shan’t even bring my assistant with me. Good night, if you are not here when I come back.”

They shook hands again—for each respected the ability and sterling qualities of the other—and Nick Carter went out.

The detective was sharp-eyed, and it was seldom that any detail escaped him. But he did not see an ugly yellow face, with black, oblique-set eyes, in the narrow slit between the heavy brocaded curtains that covered one of the windows. Yet that yellow face had been there from the first—even when Ruggins was involuntarily summoned by the murdered man when he fell from his chair with the crossed needles in his heart.

## CHAPTER II. THE MAN WITH THE SCARS.

When Nick Carter went out of the home of Andrew Anderton, he stood for a moment in the shadow of the front entrance, looking sharply about him. Particularly his gaze rested upon the blackness of the park on the opposite side of the avenue, and he tried to make out whether anybody might be lurking in the deep obscurity of the shade trees.

It was his experience, as a detective, that where there had been an unusual crime committed, some of those concerned were pretty sure to linger in the vicinity. Always they were anxious to know what direction suspicion would take.

“I believe I see something moving over there,” muttered Nick.

With an abrupt turn to the left, as he walked off the stone steps of the mansion, it seemed as if he were going to make his way on foot down the avenue, notwithstanding that a taxicab was waiting for him half a block up the thoroughfare. But this was only a ruse. As he got to a dark spot, where big trees overshadowed the roadway, he suddenly darted across to the other side.

“I thought so,” he remarked, behind his closed teeth. “But he’s inside the park railings. By the time I got to a gate he’d be far away, and the fence is too high to climb over—unless there were an absolute necessity. Even if I were to climb, it would take me too long to get that fellow.”

Nick Carter continued his stroll toward downtown, in the hope of deceiving the watcher, whoever he might be. Then, swinging around, he ran back. So sudden was this move, that he actually got to the railings and found himself close to the eavesdropper before the latter had time to get away.

As the detective reached the spot, he turned on a strong white light from his electric flash lamp, full on the lurking figure inside the park.

He saw a man in the blue blouse, loose trousers, and felt-soled slippers of an ordinary Chinese laundryman. But he could not see the man's face. It was obscured by the shrubbery, and the fellow was cunning enough to keep it there while the light was turned on him.

“Who are you?” demanded the detective sharply, in the Chinese tongue.

The man was taken aback at hearing a Caucasian address him in his own language, and he blurted out a Mongolian oath of dismay.

Nick Carter took no notice of this—although he understood its purport well enough. Instead, he asked the Chinaman if his name wasn't Pon Gee. This was the first name that came to his tongue, and he merely wanted to get the fellow into conversation.

But the wiles of the Chinese coolie have been proverbial ever since—and before—Bret Harte wrote his famous poem. The man did not reply. He put up one arm, so that the long, hanging sleeve of his blouse completely covered his face, and ran away into the blackness.

Nick Carter could not follow him with the light, and he knew it would be waste of time to hunt in the park for such an elusive object as a Chinese laundryman. So he shut off his flash and walked thoughtfully across the road to his waiting taxi.

“I knew it was the work of the crossed-needles gang, anyhow,” he reflected. “That fellow was only a look-out. The Yellow Tong has hundreds of such men in New York—fellows who do not understand what they are doing for the organization, or why. He was told to watch Anderton’s house, of course, and to report if the murderers of my poor friend were interfered with. Poor Anderton! He was too good a man to be done to death in that ghastly fashion.”

Andrew Anderton was a bachelor. He never had had time for marriage, he said. His explorations in foreign countries would not have fitted well into married life, either. So he had lived his own life in his own way, and, being a wealthy man, had been able to go where he would, and study with every advantage at his finger ends.

“I waited for you, Mr. Carter,” remarked the driver of the taxi, as the detective stepped in. “I knowed you’d want to go home some time. Where to, now?”

“Home!” replied the detective laconically.

This taxi driver was a man who often was employed by Nick Carter, and who never made any comment on what he might see or hear. The detective had many such assistants about New York. More than once this particular driver had helped him out of a tight place, by putting on speed, without asking questions, and without delay. Incidentally, it may be explained that he was always well paid for his services.

Once in his own comfortable library on the second floor of his Madison Avenue home, Carter told his principal assistant, Chick, to give him volume ten of the “International Records.”

“Anything on, chief?” asked Chick, as he brought out the book from the steel-lined, fireproof closet. “I heard what you said at this end of the telephone, you know.”

Chick was an alert young man, and was so thoroughly in the confidence of the great detective that he was privileged to ask this kind of question.

“I was called to Andrew Anderton’s house by Doctor Miles,” replied Nick, opening the book and turning to a certain page. “Mr. Anderton is dead.”

Chick started and an expression of mingled sorrow and horror came into his face. But he said nothing, and Nick Carter continued:

“He was killed by the Yellow Tong.”

“The crossed needles?” gasped Chick.

“Exactly. He was found dead just as that man was in the lodging house. What was his name? Brand—something or other.”

“Brand Jamieson,” supplied Chick. “He had been a deck hand on a tramp steamer in the China trade, and found out too much about the tong. But Mr. Anderton? How did they get at him? He never goes out without somebody with him, and he has enough people in his house to keep strangers away from him.”

“All that is true enough, Chick,” returned Carter. “But the men in the Yellow Tong are not ordinary rascals. They have some of the brightest minds in the world among them. You know

something about the Chinese, Chick. You have been with me on more than one case among those people. They are not fools, whatever else may be said against some of them.”

“Fools?” ejaculated Chick. “I should say not! I’d back a chink—especially an educated one—against any other citizen on this round earth, when it comes to plain, natural smartness—and cussedness.”

“Here it is,” broke in Nick Carter, running his finger down the close typewriting on the page he had picked out in the large volume. “Yellow Tong. Death method—crossed needles. Poisoned. Poison a secret mineral, brought from the country bordering on the Yellow Sea. Very deadly. Object of tong—to establish gigantic criminal and political organization in United States, which may eventually even terrorize American government.”

“Gee!” broke in another voice. “That’s great hokum. As if chinks had any show to pull off such a scheme as that.”

“Never mind, Patsy!” said Nick. “We won’t question whether they can do it. We’ll only take care they don’t.”

It was Patsy Garvan, Nick Carter’s second assistant, whom he addressed. Patsy had been in the room all the time, but he had been busy at his particular desk, and the detective had not disturbed him. The young man was entirely in the confidence of his chief, however, and Nick was quite ready to answer any questions he might put.

“Andrew Anderton killed,” murmured Chick. “It seems impossible. Why, it was only two days ago that I went up there to



see him about this Yellow Tong, and he laughed at the bare idea that he was in danger from the organization.”

“Anderton was a brave man,” commented Nick Carter.

“Three parts grit, and the rest of him nerve,” added Patsy.

“If we could only get our hands on Sang Tu,” mused Chick, half aloud. “That fellow is as slippery as a greased pigtail.”

“He is in New York, I know,” declared Nick. “I have no doubt he was close behind this murder of Anderton. But nobody has seen him here. The last glimpse of him I had was at Shanghai, and then only for a moment. He was coming to America then, I feel sure, but I never was able to trace him.”

“That’s proof enough that he’s a smooth guy,” interjected Patsy soberly. “If he hadn’t been slicker than most men, he wouldn’t have got away from you then.”

“Well, there’s nothing more to be said just now. “But I want you two to get to work on this case.”

“Good enough,” ejaculated Patsy, grinning his delight. “What am I to do, chief?”

“Find me a laundryman with a burned finger on his right hand and a white scar on his right ear. Looks as if he had been burned at some time. That is all the help I can give you, except that the man is middle size, and I should judge him to be about thirty years old, from his shape and movements. I did not see his face.”

“You’ve told me enough,” responded Patsy. “I reckon I’d better put on some clothes that will make the chinks think I’m all

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