

CLASSICS TO GO

THE TWIN MYSTERY



NICHOLAS CARTER

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Nicholas Carter

CHAPTER I.

THE BROWN ROBIN.

“MR. NICK CARTER: I have come to town to do business. I give you notice before I begin, because I am quite certain you will be informed immediately after I commence operations. It really makes little difference; you cannot reach me. Really, my dear Nick, I have a contempt for the so-called detective ability. You, with your Ida, Chick and Patsy, are a little better than the rest, but you are in the same running when you undertake to stop me.

“THE BROWN ROBIN.”

This letter Nick Carter found in his mail one morning a short time ago, on coming to his breakfast table.

He read the letter with some interest, noting that it had been mailed late the afternoon before, and in the sub-district in which he lived.

Tossing it over to his wife, Edith, to read, he said:

“That might be taken for a challenge, I suppose.”

Edith read it, and replied that she should take it for an impertinence.

“Who is the Brown Robin?” she asked.

“Ah! That is the great mystery,” answered Nick.

“A woman?” asked Edith.

“When you ask that question in that way,” replied Nick, “you mean to make the statement that you believe it to be a woman.”

“Well, yes; I judge the writer of this is a woman.”

“Why?”

“The writing, in the first place.”

“That will hardly do. It might be taken for the writing of a woman a little more masculine than is usual, or of a man a little more feminine than is usual. I carefully examined the writing before I gave you the letter, and could not determine satisfactorily to myself which it was.”

Edith again examined the letter, and said that she should be afraid, after a second look, to stand on either side.

“The truth is, Edith,” said Nick, “it is an assumed hand, not the natural one of the person who wrote it, and is not always employed by that person. That is my belief.”

Again Edith studied the letter.

“There is something about the whole thing,” she said, “that impresses me with the notion that the writer of this is a woman. But if you were to ask me why, I could not tell you.”

Nick laughed.

“It is the same old story of puzzling mystery.”

“Then you know something of the Brown Robin?”

“I know that the Brown Robin puzzled and mystified the police of Chicago two winters ago. I was appealed to then to go to Chicago, take up the case, and ferret out the mystery,

but then I was engaged in an important matter here and could not go.

“Suddenly the Brown Robin disappeared from Chicago and turned up in Boston, where the police were put at their wits’ end in an endeavor to detect the person.

“As suddenly he, she or it flitted to Philadelphia, with a like result, and then back again to Chicago. Now it would seem that the Brown Robin is making New York its roosting place.”

“But who is the Brown Robin, and what does it do?”

“As I said, who the Brown Robin is—whether a he, she, or it—is a mystery. What the Brown Robin does is to extort money from various kinds of people, and most successfully, by blackmail.

“The Brown Robin moves about so skillfully and shows up in so many guises, that he, she or it has always escaped detection, and has left the police of each place where it has operated in doubt whether it is a man, or a woman, or a lot of men and women, moving under the directions of a very skillful person.

“That is all I can tell you, for I have not looked deeply into the matter.”

“This is a direct challenge to you.”

“Yes, but I shall not accept it, unless I am retained by a victim of the Brown Robin’s arts, and then only if the victim will consent to be guided wholly by me in the matter.”

He tossed the letter aside and finished his breakfast. He had hardly time to open his morning paper, when the servant

entered with a note, which, she said, had been brought by a messenger boy.

Opening it, Nick read:

“MY DEAR CARTER: Very shortly after receiving this you will have a call from Mr. Alpheus Cary. He is my first victim in New York. I should judge by this experience that New York is very easy to work. The incident afforded me a good deal of amusement, for Mr. Alpheus Cary hates to give up.

“He was in a panic when he did, but regretted it a minute after. Indeed, my operation came perilously near robbery, for his hesitancy began before he really handed the money over.

“The only regret I have is that the sum was so small. In that sense it was not a brilliant beginning in New York. But you can complete the operation by getting a stiff retainer out of him. Then, if you choose to “whack up,” why, you can send me half. That proposition is the reason why I write.

“Really, Carter, there is quite a stroke of business to be done by us in this way. I know you pose as an honest man, but, pshaw! let there be no nonsense between us.

“THE BROWN ROBIN.”

The first sensation Nick experienced on reading this letter was that of anger. Then the audacity of the writer excited his sense of humor.

“You thought the other letter was impertinent,” said he, handing the last one to Edith, “but what do you think of this one?”

Edith read it with flushed face, but, inspired by an idea, she said:

“Nick, if I were you I would capture that person, no matter what I did to accomplish it.”

“What would you do?”

“I’d pretend to enter into a bargain with the Brown Robin, such as is here proposed.”

Nick did not reply at once. When he did, he said:

“Do you know, Edith, I am under the impression that this is an impudent and audacious beginning of an effort to blackmail me.”

“Nick Carter!”

“Yes, a trap is being laid for me to walk into, of which this is only one of the strings.”

“But why should they attempt to blackmail you?”

“I suppose my money is as good to them as that of any other person. But what a triumph it would be to have the boast that Nick Carter had been trapped that way!”

“True.”

“Edith, let me warn you to be prepared for any trick. Whether I will or not, the Brown Robin has thrown down the gauntlet.”

“Do you know Mr. Alpheus Cary?”

“I only know that there is a person of that name, who is a man of wealth and the president of a bank in this city—a

man of some prominence, but that is all I do know of him.”

“Where does he live?”

“Somewhere in Central Park West, but just where I don’t know. What are you thinking of?”

“I was thinking that perhaps the Cary whom you are told will call on you might be the Brown Robin made up, and that it would be well to send Chick or Patsy to find if he is at home.”

“Good, Edith,” cried Nick, with a laugh, “you are getting to be a great detective. Well, I shall act on your suggestion, only I shall send Ida to Mr. Cary’s house, for she is near by.”

He went to the ‘phone and rang up Ida, and received an immediate response. But Edith, closely watching, saw him start as a look of deep suspicion came over his face.

He made a quick signal to his wife. Asking through the ‘phone whether he was talking to Ida, he received an answer which brought again the suspicious look to his face. But he continued, as usual, though his message was a surprise to Edith. He said:

“As soon as you can, Ida, I want you to go to Herman Hartwig, and, giving him the word ‘Passen,’ tell him to give you his report. Then bring it to me. Do you understand?”

Waiting for a response, he said:

“Then repeat what I have said.”

He listened, and, as he did, a broad smile came over his face. He hung up the ‘phone and rang off, turning to his wife with a queer light in his eyes.

“Why, Nick,” asked Edith, “who is Herman Hartwig?”

“I don’t know.”

“And what is the word ‘Passen?’”

“Never heard of it before.”

“Then what is the meaning of your message?”

“Nothing. It was diamond cut diamond. That was not Ida on the other end of the line.”

“Who, then?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps the Brown Robin. The wires have been tampered with in some way. It was not Ida for, if it had been, she would have wanted to know where Herman Hartwig was to be found, since she had never heard of him before, because I invented the name at the moment.”

“Then your suspicions were excited at once?”

“Yes; it was a good imitation of Ida’s voice, but a certain trick of Ida’s speech was wanting, and I was watching for it.”

Nick thought a moment; then, hastily stepping to the ‘phone, he cut the connecting wires.

“It is the safest way,” he said. “Now, Edith, hurry to the drug store on the corner and send for Chick, Patsy and Ida.”

As Edith went out, Nick sat down to his paper again, but he had read a short time only when the servant entered with a card, saying that a caller was in the parlor.

He read the card. The name on it was Mr. Alpheus Cary.

Bidding the servant to tell the gentleman that Mr. Carter was engaged for the present, but would see him presently, he continued to read his paper.

His intention was not to see his caller until his aids should arrive, for he meant that Chick should be present at the interview, and Patsy should shadow the caller when he left.

He was thus engaged when Edith returned.

She bore in her hand a card and note, and, as she entered the room, she was about to speak, but Nick checked her with a gesture.

She handed Nick the card and note. Reading the card, Nick looked up with surprise and compared it with one he had just received. It was the same exactly.

Tearing open the note, he read:

“DEAR MR. CARTER: I beg you will call on me at the Zetler Bank, on a matter of importance, at your earliest convenience. I do not call on you for the reason that I fear the call would become known to a person I desire to keep in the dark. Respectfully,

ALPHEUS CARY.”

“Where did you get these?” whispered Nick.

“At the drug store,” returned Edith, also in a whisper. “I was about going out when the druggist called me by name. An elderly gentleman, standing near, started and spoke in a low tone to the druggist, asking if I was Nick Carter’s wife.

“Being told that I was, he came to me, handing me his card and this note, with the request that I should give it to you.

“He said that he had intended to call, had even driven past the door, but, on second thought, believed it were not best, and had gone to the drug store, where he was known, and had written the note there.”

“And you came directly back with it?”

“Directly.”

“Where did Mr. Cary go?”

“He got into a cab and drove down Columbus Avenue.”

Nick thought a moment, and said, in a whisper:

“This must have occurred about the time my caller handed in the other card.”

He sprang to his feet and hurried to the parlor.

But it was empty. The waiting caller had left without a word.

Nick, calling the servant, inquired if she had seen the caller leave, but she had not, nor could she give any information.

Pursuing his inquiries, all that he could learn was that a moment after Mrs. Carter was seen to enter the front door an elderly-appearing man had darted from it and had gone down the street, hastily, to the west.

Satisfied that a spurious Mr. Cary had called on him that morning, and that the genuine Mr. Cary had accosted his wife in the drug store, Nick returned to his room to await the arrival of his assistants, Chick, Patsy and Ida.

CHAPTER II.

THE WAY OF THE ROBIN.

Nick's passage to the Zetler Bank to see the real Mr. Alpheus Cary was in the nature of a procession.

He had been impressed with the idea that the caller who had announced himself as Mr. Alpheus Cary, had, by some means, come to know that the real Mr. Cary was in the neighborhood, and had fled because of that.

His fleeing seemed to Nick to suggest that in some way this person was either the Brown Robin or some one connected with that person.

The audacity of the effort to impersonate Cary in an interview with Nick further suggested that the person had much confidence in his own skill, and was rather conceited about it.

He thought it probable that he would be put under observation in his next attempt to leave the house.

So he directed Chick to go out and post himself so that he could shadow Nick and see whether he was followed. And, having respect for the skill of this Brown Robin, he sent Patsy out charged with the duty of following Chick, and Ida later to follow Patsy.

Thus it was that when, an hour later, he went out into the street, his passage to the Zetler Bank was in the nature of a procession.

Nick's passage, however, was not direct, for he received a signal from Chick that the latter thought a person was on the track of his chief.

Consequently he took a devious route, turning into many strange places, doubling on his track and doing a number of strange things.

All this time he paid not the slightest attention as to whether or not another person was doing these strange things, for he was relying upon Chick to determine whether any one was on his track.

"Gee!" said Patsy, when, in these doubling turns, he came upon Ida, "what is this game we're getting this morning?"

However, Chick had seen a young man about twenty-five or six, who had made his appearance only as Nick had shown on the street, and whose route was the same as that of the chief.

When Nick had taken to his devious ways on hearing a peculiar huckster's cry behind him, which he knew to be from Chick, this young man had taken to the same devious ways.

When Nick started straight for the bank, this young man had followed, and Chick saw him walk to the very door of the Zetler Bank to watch Nick enter.

Summoning Patsy by signal, he sent him on the trail of this young man, while he awaited the appearance of Nick from the bank.

The wait was a long one.

When Nick presented his name, Mr. Cary came forward in such excitement that Nick thought he would betray himself to every one within hearing.

“I am glad to see you, Mr. Carter,” he said. “My business is most important, yet I have been warned——”

“I know,” said Nick, calmly, “the Brown Robin. You have been told not to dare to talk to me.”

“Why,” exclaimed Mr. Cary, “how do you know that?”

“I guessed it,” said Nick, with a smile. “But take me somewhere where we can talk aloud and unheard.”

Mr. Cary led the way into an inner room, closing the door after him.

“Now,” said Nick, “there are certain things I know of this case, but I want you to tell me everything, concealing nothing, not even when it tells against yourself. I shall regard it as a confidential communication. Make neither excuses, nor apologies, but tell the plain truth.”

“But I have been warned not to talk to you at all.”

“By whom?” asked Nick.

“By some one who signs the letter ‘The Brown Robin.’”

“Let me see that letter,” demanded Nick.

“Well, I don’t know that I ought.”

“Now, Mr. Cary,” said Nick, sternly, “you were blackmailed last night; indeed, it was more nearly like robbery, for the money was taken from your hands while you were hesitating whether you would pay it over or not.”

“You know that? How?” asked Mr. Cary.

“Never mind how I know,” replied Nick, sternly. “It is my business to know a great many things. But I want to say this: I mean to investigate this matter to the bottom. If you help me by giving me all the information in your possession, so much the better, but whether you do or not I shall find all out. Now choose which you will do.”

“Well, I had intended to retain you, but this letter——”

“Let me see it,” demanded Nick, in a decided tone.

Mr. Cary yielded, and, taking the letter from his breast pocket, handed it to Nick.

At a glance the famous detective saw that it was the same handwriting, on the same kind of paper, as the two letters he had received in the morning. It read:

“DEAR PAPA CARY: I want to warn you against a very bad man. His name is Nick Carter. You will only get yourself into trouble if you don't take my warning. You are in a good deal of trouble now, for you stand in danger of exposure. Fie! Such a naughty Papa Cary! But you must not talk to Nick Carter. You must not talk to him of our pleasant experiences last night. And, Papa Cary, you must come again, and bring some more of the stuff that makes the mare go. I shall tell you when and where. And you must, or there will be pretty photographs sent to Mamma Cary and the little Carys, and to the bank officials, and so there will if you talk to Nick Carter.

“THE BROWN ROBIN.”

Nick folded up the letter and placed it in his pocket, saying:

“This letter will be safer with you than with me. Now tell me how you met the woman.”

“How do you know——”

“I would rather you would answer my question,” interrupted Nick, sternly, “and please waste no time with questions. You met a woman last night. Where? How? When?”

“Well, it was in the Rideau restaurant—that is a——”

“I know—in Fourth Avenue. How came you to be there?”

“Some business took me on the East Side yesterday afternoon, on which I was delayed beyond my own dinner hour. I had heard of this place and thought I would like to visit it. So I went there to dine. It was crowded, few seats being vacant.

“As I passed down the rows of tables I came to one at which was seated a young woman of attractive appearance, dressed like a lady, in brown, on whose hat was a robin.

“The seat opposite her was vacant, and, bowing, I asked if I could occupy it. She consented by saying that she could not prevent me, as it was free to any one to take.

“Seating myself, it was not long before I was in conversation with her.”

“I see,” said Nick. “Did she know who you were?”

“Why, no.”

“Then how did she come to know?”

“That is where I was a fool. I told her.”

“On her inquiry?”

“No, confound it. A bottle of wine and a pretty woman let loose my tongue, and I babbled like an infant.”

Nick had difficulty in keeping a straight face over this frank confession and the disgusted face that accompanied it.

“Of course you didn’t know her?” asked Nick.

“No; she told me she was but recently from Chicago; that she was married; that her husband had been detained at the last moment, but would soon follow her.”

“Well, what then?”

“It ended in my paying for her supper, and we arose from the table together, leaving the restaurant together.

“In the street I asked her direction, and proposed to accompany her as far as her door.”

“It would seem as if, then, you took the lead in this thing.”

“That is true in a way, yet she encouraged every step.”

“Of course. Go on.”

“She took me into Seventeenth street, and toward the east, to a respectable-looking house, which she said was one in which she was staying, and asked, indeed coaxed, me to enter.

“Well, like a fool, I consented. She took me into the front parlor, and, asking me to be seated, went off, saying that she would return in a moment.”

“She did, having changed her street dress for a flowing wrapper. Seating herself, she began a series of questions about myself that I, fool that I was, answered.

“Suddenly, and without intimation of her purpose, she arose, and, coming to me, threw her arms about my neck, seating herself on my lap.

“I was so astonished at this for a moment I was helpless, and in that moment there was a flash of light that blinded me.

“The woman laughed gayly, and, jumping up, ran into the other room. A moment later she returned, saying:

““Come, Papa Cary. I don’t give my pleasant company for nothing. You’ve enjoyed my society for two or three hours. You must pay for it. Come! Shell out!”

““What is this?” I cried, ‘blackmail?’

““Some unpleasant people call it that, I believe,’ she said. ‘But whatever it is, you must submit.’

““Not by any means,’ I said. ‘You have attacked the wrong person.’

“Again she laughed, and, springing up, ran into the next room, to return in a moment, bringing with her a photograph plate.

““You may look at that,’ she said, holding it up before me. Over the rim she pointed a small revolver.

“I looked to see that a photograph of myself, with her on my lap, her arms about my neck, had been taken.

“I fairly staggered back in alarm, and with a merry, mocking laugh, she hurried with the plate into the other room. When she came back, she said:

“‘I’m a business woman, Papa Cary. A short horse is soon curried. Out with your money, or, as soon as these photos are printed they will be sent to decorate your home and your office.’

“In my first fright over this threat I took some money from my pocket, but the thought came that payment wouldn’t end it, and that I ought to bargain with her in a way that would secure me.

“While I hesitated, thinking what to do, by a quick movement she snatched the money from my hand, crying, with a laugh: ‘Thank you.’

“I protested—demanded its return. But she said:

“‘Oh, no! You have given me this, and it will not be the last that you will give me, either. This is only the beginning. And I will pay you for it by always keeping those photographs.’

“All this time she was laughing, but I could see in her right hand her revolver. I suddenly jumped forward to seize her revolver arm, when she sprang back and in an instant everything was dark. The lights went out.

“Then I was pushed forward and out of the room by more than one, through a hall and into the street.

“In my anger I threatened that I would put you, Mr. Carter, on her track, and when I was in the street I rushed about, trying to find a policeman.

“By and by, however, my common sense came uppermost, and I saw that by appealing to a policeman I should only make public what I should, in my own interests, keep quiet.

“So, determining to see you as soon as I could, I went home.

“This morning, on reaching the bank, I found the letter which you now have in your possession.”

“How much money did she take?”

“A little less than a hundred dollars—I cannot tell exactly; between ninety and a hundred.”

“Did you see any one else then?”

“No.”

“You could go again to that house?”

“No doubt of it.”

“Have you told me everything that occurred?”

“Everything, reserved nothing. Now, I want those photographs, Mr. Carter. I want you to get them. I’ll pay for them; but I won’t be blackmailed.”

Nick was silent a moment or two, thinking. Then he said:

“On your recital it seems to be merely a vulgar panel game. But I think there is more back of it than that. However, I will take the case. I will think it over. Do nothing, however, until you see me again. I shall probably be back again in an hour or two, possibly with my plan of action worked out.”

Nick left the banking house, and, going into the street met Chick and Ida.