



CLASSICS TO GO

**THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S
EVIDENCE
OR, CLEVER BUT CROOKED
NICHOLAS CARTER**

The Photographer's Evidence

Or, Clever but Crooked

Nicholas Carter

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CHAPTER I. A DOUBTFUL CLIENT.

“Mr. Carter, can I trust you?”

It was in the great detective’s own house that this question was asked.

“Well,” was Nick’s quiet answer, “if you had any doubt on that matter, why did you come to me?”

His caller looked nervously at the floor.

“There’s no use in talking to me,” Nick went on, “unless you do trust me. A detective can do nothing for a client who does not give him his confidence absolutely.”

“Of course,” the other assented; “I did not mean to offend you.”

“You haven’t offended me.”

“I am so disturbed by it, you see. So much depends on secrecy. It is so terribly important that I found it difficult to make up my mind to consult anybody on the matter; and yet I know by your reputation that you are a perfectly trustworthy man. There is nobody in the States more so.”

While the man was speaking Nick was studying him.

In fact, the detective had been doing that from the moment the man entered.

He was apparently about fifty years old; a well-dressed, prosperous-looking man, who might be a merchant, or a lawyer, or a banker.

Nick did no guessing. The man might be anything else. He had given his name as George Snell, but he had not sent in his card, and he had not said where he belonged.

Word had simply been taken to Nick by a servant that a Mr. George Snell wanted to see him on “most important business.”

“He isn’t an American,” was Nick’s only conclusion from what had been said thus far. “An American would not have spoken simply of ‘the States,’ as he did.”

There had been a pause after the caller’s last remarks.

“Well,” he exclaimed then, “I’m not coming more than two-thirds of the way across the continent for nothing. I set out to consult you, and I will do so.”

“That’s better,” said the detective; and, willing to help him tell his story, he asked: “What kind of a case is it, Mr. Snell?”

“I suppose you’d call it kidnaping; but there’s robbery combined with it, and—and also—also blackmail.”

Mr. Snell hesitated and stammered a little at the end of this speech.

Nick merely nodded.

“To begin with,” continued Mr. Snell, “I come from Wenonah. You may not be aware that the Government of England has made a large section of Western British America into a province and called it Wenonah.”

“Yes,” said Nick, “I am aware of that.”

“You are a well-informed man. Few Americans would know the fact, for the province is so young that it isn’t down on the maps yet. You know, also, I suppose, that the capital of the province is a town called Manchester?”

“Yes.”

“That is where the crime was committed. It happened a month ago. The governor of the province, Bradley is his name, gave a party at his house. All the prominent families of the town and country around attended. There was dancing till a late hour.

“Then, when the guests were going away, it was discovered that the governor’s daughter, Estelle, was missing. She has not been seen since.”

“How old is the child?” asked Nick.

“Child?” echoed Mr. Snell, in apparent astonishment. Then he seemed to understand, and added: “It is natural that you should use that word, but the girl is twenty.”

“Oh!”

“She’s the governor’s only daughter, and heiress, therefore, to his property, which is very great.”

“Has nothing been heard from her?”

“Indirectly, yes. Her captors have offered to restore her for a ransom.”

“Has there been any attempt to deal with her captors?”

“Yes, but nothing has come of it. There is doubt now whether she is really in the hands of kidnapers.”

“Ah! what then?”

“I haven’t told you the whole story, Mr. Carter.”

“Go on, then.”

“The day after she disappeared it was found that a considerable amount of jewelry had gone also.”

“Did she wear it at the ball?”

“Some of it, most of it, in fact. But that was not all. There were also missing certain State papers and some private documents belonging to the governor. These are extremely important. They must be recovered at any cost.”

“Are they more important than the recovery of Miss Bradley, Mr. Snell?”

“No, I wouldn’t say that, but they complicate the case badly. An offer has been made to restore them.”

“And the girl?”

“No. That is, there was one offer to restore the girl and another to deal for the return of the papers and jewelry. There seems to be a double gang of villains at work.”

“Possibly. What about the blackmail you mentioned?”

“That,” answered Mr. Snell, hesitating, “has to do with the stolen papers.”

“Something shady in the governor’s past?”

Mr. Snell looked at the floor.

“I wouldn’t like to say,” he replied. “Some people might think so.”

“Evidently the robbers do think so, eh?”

“Yes, for they put a big price on the papers.”

“I suppose the matter has been investigated by the police of Manchester?”

“No.”

“Then how did you communicate with the robbers?”

“I didn’t say that I had communicated with the robbers!” exclaimed Mr. Snell, hastily.

“No, but I supposed it was you. Never mind that for a moment. Tell me more about the disappearance of Miss Bradley.”

“There isn’t much that I can tell. She must have left the house soon after midnight, but she wasn’t missed till three hours or more later.”

“Was she engaged to be married?”

Snell looked sharply at the detective.

“You’re a keen one,” he said. “No, she wasn’t engaged, and that is another complication.”

“Well, it is known that she was in love with a young fellow who wasn’t liked by her father. Naturally he wasn’t at the ball. It is thought possible that she eloped with him, and that the offer of the robbers to restore her was a bluff.”

“Was her lover a rich man?”

“Decidedly not.”

“Then you think she may have taken the jewelry to sell for her own use.”

“It’s possible, yes. I’ve thought of it.”

“And that the robbery of the papers simply happened to come at the same time.”

“That might be.”

“Has Miss Bradley’s lover been seen since she disappeared?”

“Yes.”

“What does he say?”

“Nothing.”

“Indeed! I should suppose he would say a good deal.”

“He goes about his business as usual, but he is under constant watch. It’s plain enough that there is something on his mind.”

“I should think there might be, in any case. What is his name?”

“Cecil West.”

“And what is your relation to the affair, Mr. Snell?”

The visitor seemed startled.

“My relation to it?” he echoed.

“Certainly. Do you come here as the representative of Governor Bradley?”

“Oh, no! not at all! the governor didn’t send me.”

“Who did, then?”

Snell looked uncomfortable.

“Do you need an answer to that?” he asked.

“Of course I do. I must know whom I am dealing with.”

“But I gave my name——”

“It is not enough.”

The detective spoke rather sharply.

Mr. Snell hesitated and then said:

“Mr. Carter, I cannot see why I should be dragged into the matter at all——”

“But,” interrupted Nick, coldly, “nobody has dragged you that I am aware of. I certainly didn’t.”

“You are trying to do so now, Mr. Carter.”

Nick arose.

“There is no need that we should talk longer,” he said.

Snell also stood up, and he looked very much troubled.

“I see that I have offended you,” he said. “I didn’t mean to. You see, Mr. Carter, a great scandal might come of this. It is very important that there should be none. The governor’s position might be lost——”

“At this moment,” said Nick, “I care nothing for the governor’s position. You have given me some facts in a case that might be interesting, but I don’t propose to tackle it unless I know what I am about.”

“We want you to look for the girl and the stolen papers.”

“Who are we?”

Snell hung his head.

“Excuse me a moment,” said Nick; then: “I think I heard the telephone ring. When I return I hope you will have made up your mind to trust me. If you haven’t we can’t do business.”

He bowed and left the room, but he did not go to the telephone.

Instead he went to a room where Patsy, one of his assistants, was reading and gave him a few rapid instructions.

Then he wrote a telegram and sent it to the nearest office by a servant.

Patsy got his hat and went downstairs.

“Now, Mr. Snell,” said Nick, when he returned, “are you ready to tell me what I want to know?”

“I can only say that I want you to act in behalf of the governor.”

“Does he know that you came to New York to ask this?”

Snell did not answer.

“We are wasting each other’s time,” said Nick.

Snell made a last appeal.

“I may be doing wrong,” he said, “but I beg you to look into this matter. You can’t help seeing how important it is.”

“Well,” replied Nick, “usually I have nothing to do with a case where any facts are concealed from me——”

“I am concealing no facts.”

“Pardon me, you refuse to answer one of the first questions a detective would ask. I was going to say, Mr. Snell, give me a few hours to think it over and come again. Will you call to-morrow morning?”

“I will.”

“Very well, till then.”

The detective went with his visitor to the door.

Mr. Snell said “good-evening,” politely, and started down the street.

A short distance behind him went Patsy.

CHAPTER II. MR. SNELL IN TROUBLE.

Nick had not taken time to tell Patsy very much about Snell.

"There's something up," he said to his assistant. "I have no idea what it is, but I want you to shadow this man and see what becomes of him."

"Do you think he's a crook?" asked the young man.

"Not yet. He may be. If so, it won't be the first time that a crook has tried to throw me off the track by calling on me. I simply feel that there's something queer in this, and I'd like to find out about it. So I shall ask this man to call again unless he makes up his mind to tell me all the facts."

Snell refused to tell all the facts, and so Patsy slipped out after him.

He had not gone far from the house when the young detective became convinced that another man also was following Snell.

This made his work very difficult, for he had to look sharp against betraying himself not only to Snell, but the other man.

Snell went into a drug store and bought a cigar.

The man who seemed to be following him loafed on the opposite corner.

Patsy turned down a street, and dropped into a doorway, where he made a swift change in his appearance.

He was at Snell's heels again when the man from Wenonah went on.

The other man seemed to have disappeared.

"I was mistaken," thought Patsy, "or the second chap is a better shadow than I am."

For some blocks he kept up his chase, never losing sight of Snell, and seeing nothing more of the other.

Meantime Snell was apparently wandering around aimlessly.

He would stop at a corner and wait a full minute before he made up his mind which way to go.

Often he changed his direction.

In this way he got into a neighborhood which was very quiet in the evening.

Part way down a block he stopped suddenly, stood still for a moment and then went close to a building.

He was then in such deep shadow that Patsy could not see him.

"Somebody spoke to him," reasoned the detective.

He went cautiously closer, and before he could see anybody he heard the sounds of voices in conversation.

What they said it was impossible to make out.

The detective dared not get close enough than that for fear of attracting the attention of the men.

There seemed to be two of them.

Presently he heard one voice say:

"I won't do it."

One of the men started away.

"It will be the worse for you, then," growled the other.

The first man hastened his steps.

As he came from the shadow, Patsy saw that it was Snell.

The other man was darting after him on tiptoe.

He had one arm drawn back.

“Great Scott!” thought Patsy, “he means murder!”

He gave up trying to conceal his actions then.

Running forward as fast as possible, he shouted:

“Look out!”

Snell turned quickly.

The other man was close to him, and let his hand fall.

With a great leap Patsy was up to him just in time to catch his arm.

But it was too late to stop the blow entirely.

A slungshot in the man’s hand slipped from it and struck Snell a glancing blow on the head.

“Ah!” he cried, and staggered.

Patsy dashed to assist him, and caught hold of him in time to prevent him from falling against an iron fence, which probably would have broken his head.

The would-be murderer was dashing down the street.

Patsy could not be in two places at once.

He wanted to chase the unknown criminal, but his first business was with Snell.

This was not only because Nick had sent him out to shadow Snell, but because the man seemed to be badly injured.

He was groaning and trembling so that he would have fallen if the detective had not held him up.

“Better sit down a minute,” Patsy suggested, “and let me see if there’s anything serious the matter.”

Snell sank to a doorstep, and Patsy made a quick examination of his head.

“That was a nasty blow,” he said, “but I think your skull is sound. Aren’t you feeling better?”

“Yes,” Snell replied, “I am. I was more frightened than hurt, perhaps. I am greatly obliged to you.”

“Don’t mention it. Let me help you to your house. Do you live near?”

Snell laughed a little.

“Near!” he repeated, “I should say not.”

“Will you have a cab called to take you home?” asked Patsy.

Again Snell laughed.

“It would be too long a journey,” he said. “I am a stranger in New York, and I am staying at the Fifth Avenue. That isn’t very far away, I believe.”

“No, and you can get a car at the next block, if you want to.”

“I’d rather walk.”

He got up, and Patsy held his arm till they came to the corner.

“I don’t suppose your friend will tackle you again,” said the detective, then: “but I haven’t anything to do, and if you like I’ll walk with you to the hotel.”

“You are very kind,” Snell responded; “suppose you do. I confess that I am very nervous.”

“He had it in for you, I suppose,” remarked Patsy.

“Yes.”

“Don’t you want to speak to this policeman about it?”

An officer was approaching.

“No! no!” exclaimed Snell, hastily; “I have my reasons for keeping the matter quiet. Don’t for Heaven’s sake, say a word.”

“All right. It’s no business of mine, but if any fellow had thumped me like that I should want him put where he couldn’t try it again.”

“I don’t think he will try it again; at least, not in New York. I’d rather not talk about it.”