



**CLASSICS TO GO**

**THE MAN WITHOUT  
A CONSCIENCE  
OR, FROM ROGUE TO CONVICT  
NICHOLAS CARTER**

# **The Man Without a Conscience**

**Or, From Rogue to Convict**

**Nicholas Carter**

## **CHAPTER I. AN INQUISITIVE CLERK.**

“Bureau of Secret Investigation.”

Nick Carter glanced at the above sign over the door, an unpretentious and somewhat faded reminder of better days, while he descended the flight of stone steps leading into the basement offices of the Boston police department.

The sunlight lay warm and bright in Pemberton Square at ten o'clock that May morning, shedding over the magnificent new court-house a golden glory consistent, no doubt, with the wise dispensation of justice, yet in monstrous anomaly with some of the dreadful experiences and grim episodes sometimes enacted within those splendid sunlit walls.

Nick turned to the right in the main corridor and entered the adjoining office, quite a commodious room, in which the general business of this secret service branch of the local police department was conducted.

The enclosure back of the chief clerk's high desk, which also was topped with a brass grating, happened to be vacant when Nick entered. In one corner of the room, however, a subordinate clerk was busily engaged in attempting to repair a slight leak in the faucet of the ice-water vessel, and to this young man the famous New York detective addressed himself.

“Has the chief been in this morning?” he asked.

The clerk bobbed up from his work as if startled, drying his hands with his handkerchief, and stared sharply at Nick

for several moments. But he saw nothing familiar in the stranger's grave, clean-cut features.

For all that this clerk knew, or surmised, Nick might have been an ordinary or very humble citizen, who had quietly dropped in there for want of something better to do.

"Chief Weston?" he returned inquiringly, still sharply scrutinizing Nick.

"There is no other chief in this department, is there?" was Nick's reply, with a subtle tinge of irony.

"Well—no."

"Chief Weston, yes," bowed Nick. "Is he in his office?"

"I believe so."

"Busy?"

"I reckon he is, just now."

"Reckon, eh? Don't you know?"

"Yes, sir, he's busy," the clerk now said, a bit curtly, flushing slightly under the detective's keen eye and quietly persistent inquiries.

"He's not too busy to see me, I think," replied Nick, with dry assurance. "Go in and tell him I'm here."

"Who are you?"

"Never mind who I am."

"I'll take in your card."

"No card," said Nick tersely.

"Your name, then?"

"Nor any name."

"But——"

"Merely tell the chief that his friend from New York is here."

The expression in the eyes of the irritated clerk lost none of its searching interest, yet they now took on a rather

different light, as if he had been suddenly hit with an idea. Yet he still frowned slightly and said:

“If you object to having your name mentioned——”

“I do object, young man,” Nick now interrupted, with ominously quiet determination. “Your chief may possibly have persons in his office before whom I do not care to have my name announced. Now, you go to him and deliver my message just as I gave it to you, neither more nor less, or you’ll very suddenly hear something drop—providing you still retain your senses.”

Now the clerk laughed, as if amused by the cool terms of the quiet threat, and then he turned quickly and vanished into a short passageway between the outer room and Chief Weston’s private office.

Nick gazed after him with a rather quizzical stare—a slender chap of about twenty-five, with reddish hair, thin features, a sallow complexion thickly dotted with freckles, and a countenance lighted by a pair of narrow gray eyes, that greenish-gray sometimes seen in the eyes of a cat.

“I wonder what use they have for him around here?” Nick said to himself, while waiting. “If I were chief in this joint, it’s long odds that that red-headed monkey would get his walking-ticket in short order.”

The subject of these uncomplimentary cogitations returned in less than a minute.

“You are to walk right in, sir—this way,” he glibly announced, with much more deference.

At the same time he opened the way for Nick to pass into the enclosure, and through the passage mentioned.

“Thank you,” said Nick, with half a growl.

“Don’t mention it,” grinned the clerk. “Straight ahead, sir. Chief Weston is at his desk.”

Nick heard, meantime, the tramp of men through a corridor adjoining the opposite side of the outer office, and he knew that Chief Weston had immediately dismissed them, to receive him in private.

“So, so; the business is important,” he rightly conjectured.

The door closed behind Nick of itself, but the snap of the catch-lock hung fire until after the hearty voice of the Boston chief of detectives, as he arose and gripped Nick by the hand, had sounded through the room.

“How are you, Nick?” he cried cordially. “I’m a thousand times more than glad to see you, Carter, on my word.”

“Same to you, Weston,” laughed Nick. “Some time has passed since we met.”

“Too long a time, eh?”

“That’s right, too.”

“Have a chair.”

Now the catch-lock snapped lightly.

A finger between the door and the jamb had been withdrawn.

A reddish head drew away from the panel, a pair of ears ceased their strained attention, a light step retreated through the passage, and two narrow gray eyes like those of a cat indicated that their owner had now satisfied his inquisitive yearning, and learned the name of the visitor who so peremptorily had issued his commands.

As Nick accepted a chair near that taken by Weston at his desk, he carelessly jerked his thumb toward the door by which he had entered.

“Where’d you get him, Weston?” he asked dryly.

“Get whom?” queried the chief, with inquiring eyes.

“The clerk.”

“Hyde—the one who announced you?”

“The same.”

“Oh, he’s been at work on the books out there for about a year. He’s only an assistant clerk.”

“Ah, I see.”

“Why did you ask?”

“For no reason.”

“Nonsense! You must have had some reason, Nick.”

“None of consequence,” smiled Nick. “I asked about him, in fact, only because I had to fairly drive him in here when I declined to send in a card or mention my name.”

Chief Weston threw back his head and laughed.

“That’s easily explained,” said he, still chuckling. “I growl at him roundly at regular intervals, Nick, for annoying me with visitors whom I neither know nor wish to see. I am getting him by degrees, however, so that he requires the whole pedigree of a caller before announcing him, which is about as bad a fault, I imagine. Sandy is all right, though, in his own peculiar way.”

“Sandy, eh? That’s a nickname, I take it, because of his red hair?”

“No, not exactly. His name is Sanderson Hyde.”

“Ah, just so.”

“I took him in to oblige a journalist friend,” added Weston, smiling. “It’s always well to stand ace-high with the press, you know.”

“That’s right, too,” nodded Nick, now willing to digress. “You sent for me to come over here from New York, Weston. What do you want of me?”

“You got my wire?”

“Certainly.”

“Did Chick come with you?”

“No,” replied Nick, at this reference to his chief assistant. “I came over alone.”

“Are you busy in New York just now?”

“I’m always busy, Weston.”

“Too busy to undertake a little work for me?”

“Where?”

“In and about Boston.”

“What’s the nature of it?”

“There is nothing in giving you all of the details, Nick, unless you are in a position to accept an offer and help me out,” Chief Weston gravely rejoined. “First of all, Nick, may I count on you?”

The brows of the celebrated New York detective knit a little closer over his keen gray eyes. He drew up a bit in his chair, remarking gravely:

“Your business is important, Weston, or you would not have sent for me.”

“Very important.”

“A serious matter?”

“Decidedly.”

“Have your own men tackled it?”

“Yes, the very best of them.”

“With no results?”

“None but absolute failure.”

“Are they now at work on the case?”

“Some of them.”

“And you wish me to take a hand in the work?”

“I certainly do.”

“If I consent to do so, Weston, I shall impose one condition,” said Nick decidedly.

“I expect it.”



“You do?”

“Certainly,” nodded the chief. “Am I not familiar with your methods? You will require me to order all of my men off the case and give it entirely to you.”

“That’s the condition,” said Nick bluntly.

“I will accept it.”

“And leave the matter to me alone?”

“Precisely. In no way whatever shall you be interfered with.”

“Very good.”

“You will undertake the work for me?”

“I will hear of what it consists,” replied Nick, with his curiosity stirred. “If it is all that your remarks imply—well, Weston, you may then count on me to give it an argument.”

“Capital.”

“Now, cut loose and give me the facts of the case.”

Chief Weston opened a drawer of his desk and took out a batch of papers and documents, among which was a neatly mounted photograph about five inches square, such as may be taken with a small portable camera, or a kodak.

While he placed the papers on his desk, he handed the photograph to Nick Carter, saying impressively:

“First examine this, Nick, and tell me what you make of it.”

## **CHAPTER II. MODERN HIGHWAYMEN.**

While the Boston chief sat silently regarding him, Nick Carter studied the photograph attentively for several moments.

"H'm!" he presently grunted. "The picture is quite plain. Two automobiles appear to have met in a lonely woodland road."

"Precisely."

"Only part of one of them is visible in the picture," continued Nick, commenting upon the various details. "The picture was evidently taken by an occupant of one of the cars."

"Correct."

"In the road near the other machine stands a very tall woman, closely veiled, who is pointing a revolver, evidently at the occupants of the other car."

"Exactly."

"They are not visible in the picture, however, except the extended hand of one of them, obviously the hand of a woman. She is passing a purse, two watches, and what appears to be several pieces of jewelry, to a masked man, who is standing near the woman holding the leveled revolver."

"Those are the main features of the picture, Nick," nodded Weston. "Now, what do you make of it?"

Nick glanced up and replied:

"It looks to me like a hold-up."

“That’s just what it was.”

“When and where?”

“Near the Brookline suburb, about a week ago.”

“Is this the case on which you wish to employ me?”

“One of them.”

“There are others?”

“Fifty, Nick, within the past two months.”

“Whew!” whistled Nick, with brows lifting. “I have read in the newspapers that you have had numerous highway robberies about here, but I did not imagine them to be so frequent as you state.”

“Because only a small part of them have been given publicity,” replied Weston. “I have suppressed many, Nick, in the hope of thereby getting some traceable clue to the crooks.”

“Yet you are all still in the dark?”

“Never more so, Nick,” was the grave rejoinder. “In the past two months there have been, as I have stated, upward of fifty of these highway robberies.”

“Early and often, eh?”

“Decidedly so. These hold-ups have been committed, moreover, with a boldness and daring that invests them with a peculiarly mysterious character. Whether they are the work of two or three professional crooks, or that of a larger organized gang of them, is hard to say. At all events, Nick, we have been absolutely unable to get any traceable clue to the identity, haunts, or headquarters of the rascals.”

“Have two of these hold-ups ever been committed at precisely the same time?”

“Not that have been reported.”

“If that had occurred,” explained Nick, “it would indicate that a considerable gang is at work.”

“Two hold-ups in one evening is the nearest approach to it,” said Weston.

“In the same locality?”

“Within a mile of one another.”

“Were the crooks in an automobile?”

“Yes, in both cases.”

“Then both jobs may have been done by the same persons.”

“I feel quite sure of that, Nick, for the same description of the thieves and their automobile was given me by the victims of both outrages.”

“Do these crooks always work from an automobile?”

“In the majority of the cases reported,” bowed Weston. “Yet at times they have appeared on horseback, and on several occasions afoot. The work, Nick, is that of two or more men and a woman, as nearly as I can judge, and all of them are possessed of extraordinary nerve, boldness, and sagacity. They have committed these crimes at all hours of the day and night, frequently in quite public places, yet they have thus far completely evaded detection and pursuit. They invariably do their rascally job with a decisiveness and despatch that completely awe their victims, who are usually so alarmed——”

“Stop a moment,” said Nick quite abruptly. “I’d like to ask you a few questions, Weston.”

“Very well.”

“If I decide to look into this case, I shall then have some few points already settled, and will need to waste no time in seeking the information myself.”

“Exactly,” nodded the chief. “What do you wish to know?”

“First, about the crooks themselves,” said Nick. “What have you in the way of descriptions of them?”

Chief Weston laughed.

"A variety, Nick, to fit any type of man except a humpback or one dismembered," he replied.

"The descriptions vary, eh?"

"I should say so."

"Possibly the robbers use a different disguise for each job."

"Very likely."

"Or, as nearly always is the case," said Nick, "the victims of the robbers were so frightened or excited at the time that they retain only vague and exaggerated impressions of their assailants."

"Precisely."

"To illustrate that," added Nick, "I know of a case of a noted prize-fighter, who was held up and robbed of his watch and money in broad daylight, and within fifty yards of Central Park. He declared that the thief was six feet tall, weighed one hundred and eighty pounds, and was backed by two confederates, whom he could not quite recall. We got the crook next day."

"Yes?"

"He was under five feet, weighed one hundred and thirty pounds, and did the job entirely alone."

"Quite a difference!" exclaimed Weston, laughing heartily.

"Rather," smiled Nick. "As a matter of fact, the prize-fighter was so scared when he saw a revolver thrust under his nose that the crook loomed as big as a house. Probably thinking that such a job would not be attempted single-handed, he afterward got it into his head that he saw the two confederates, and was so thoroughly convinced of the imaginary fact that he really believed it. I could cite numerous similar cases."

“So could I, Nick.”

“Descriptions are not at all reliable, as you imply, yet they sometimes help one a little.”

“That’s true.”

“In a general way, then, you think there are at least two men and one woman in this gang?”

“The cases reported convince me of that,” bowed Weston. “That picture shows the woman, moreover, though two men are mentioned in the majority of robberies reported.”

“Are the men always masked?”

“No, not always. The woman is invariably veiled, however, and the descriptions of the men indicate a frequent change of disguise.”

“That is to be expected,” said Nick. “Now, about the automobile used by the knaves. Have any attempts been made to follow it or to trace it?”

“Repeated attempts, Nick, all of which have proved futile.”

“Has none of the victims been able to report its registered number?”

“We have had a dozen different numbers reported,” replied Chief Weston; “but investigation showed that all of them were fictitious.”

“Yet the crooks might be located, chief, if the make of the automobile were known,” suggested Nick. “That should have been easily learned by some of these people.”

Chief Weston shook his head.

“That would be true, Nick, providing the scamps always used the same machine,” said he. “Half a score of different automobiles have been reported as having been used by these knaves at the time of the numerous hold-ups.”

“H’m!” grunted Nick, with a shrug of his broad shoulders. “Evidently, then, these crooks have considerable money invested in their rascally enterprise.”

“It certainly appears so.”

“How about the horses ridden by them?” Nick next inquired. “Can the owner of none of them be discovered?”

“In the few cases in which persons have been held up by a horseman,” replied Weston, “the highwayman has usually been alone. According to the description given, moreover, he has as many horses as automobiles, for he has appeared on grays, bays, blacks, and sorrels.”

Nick laughed at the glibness with which the last was said.

“It seems a bit odd to me, Weston, that none of your men have been able to get on the track of these desperadoes,” he presently rejoined. “It is not often that a gang of highwaymen can long escape detection and arrest, when at work in and about a city like Boston.”

“They are not ordinary knaves, Nick,” emphatically declared Chief Weston. “If they were, we should have landed them long ago.”

“Where do these robberies usually occur?”

“Generally in some lonely part of a suburban road, though several have taken place in the evening, right in the heart of Brookline, Cambridge, and Newton,” replied Weston. “It is evident that the crooks select their victims from the more wealthy suburbs, presumably with a view to obtaining the more plunder.”

“How do they usually proceed?”

“In various ways, Nick, according to my reports. At times they block the road with their car and hold up the first automobile-party that appears, which, of course, is obliged to stop. Having relieved the travelers of their property, the crooks then forced them to turn their machine about, under

the muzzles of leveled revolvers, and depart at full speed. If the frightened victims return in a few moments, as once or twice has been the case, they reach the scene, only to find that the knaves have fled."

"Naturally," said Nick smilingly.

"They have adopted, in fact, innumerable methods for holding up an automobile-party," added Weston, "and they invariably intimidate their quarry and get away with the goods."

"Of what does their plunder usually consist?" inquired Nick.

"Money and jewelry. They take all that their victims have, and the most of them give up readily rather than take any chances of being shot in cold blood."

"Have you been able to locate any of the stolen property in the pawn-shops?"

"Not a piece of it."

"Judging from your reports, Weston, what is the value of the property thus far secured by these highwaymen?"

"Thousands of dollars, Nick. Close upon fifty thousand, at least."

"Have there been house burglaries about here of late?"

"Very few."

"It looks, then, as if these knaves were confining themselves to this road work."

"I think so," bowed Weston.

Nick glanced again at the photograph, which he still retained in his hand.

"This was one of these hold-ups, was it?" said he.

"Yes."

"It occurred in Brookline?"



“In a lonely road leading into Brookline,” replied Weston. “The victims were Brookline people, and were robbed of some five hundred dollars’ worth of diamonds and jewelry, including what money they had with them. The victims were two ladies, taking an afternoon ride in a Stanley machine.”

“Did they have a chauffeur?”

“No.”

“How was that?”

“One of the women, Mrs. Badger, is an expert driver, and frequently rides without a chauffeur.”

Nick glanced again at the photograph—little dreaming at that moment, however, how important a clue he then held in his hand.