



CLASSICS TO GO

**THE GREAT
DIAMOND SYNDICATE
OR, THE HARDEST CREW ON RECORD**

NICHOLAS CARTER

The Great Diamond Syndicate

Or, The Hardest Crew on Record

Nicholas Carter

CHAPTER I. A DARK NIGHT'S WORK.

"Your uncle murdered! It seems incredible!"

Nick Carter leaned back in his chair and looked at his visitor, dismay showing in his face.

"It is too true, old friend, Uncle Alvin was murdered in his bed last night, and diamonds to the value of half a million dollars stolen from the house."

The speaker, Charley Maynard, was greatly excited. He was a young man who had arrived at legal age only a few months before. Almost from boyhood he had been a friend of the man of whom he now sought sympathy and advice.

"Half a million in diamonds!" echoed the detective. "I was not aware that Alvin Maynard possessed diamonds to that value."

"They were mine," replied the young man.

"The day is full of surprises," said Nick. "When and how did you become owner of such a wonderful collection of precious stones?"

"They were delivered to me yesterday, at the residence of my uncle, up the Hudson," replied Charley. "I heartily wish I had never set eyes on them."

"A present?" asked Nick.

"My inheritance from my father," was the reply. "As you know, he was a globe trotter from his youth up. It seems that during a visit to South Africa he became the possessor of the gems which were stolen last night. How he came by them I have no idea. I only know that there are some very

fine stones in the collection, and that they were delivered to me yesterday afternoon. Now they are gone, my uncle lies dead in the house, my aunt is prostrated with grief, besides suffering severely from a blow dealt by a brutal assassin, and my cousin, Anton Sawtelle, lies wounded in his bed. It is a sad house this morning, Mr. Carter."

"There was a struggle, then?" asked Nick. "The robbers were discovered at their work and fought for the booty?"

"That is the strangest part of the case," said the young man. "The diamonds were stolen from a trunk in my room on the second floor of the house, and yet I heard nothing of the struggle which must have taken place. It seems that the burglars entered by way of Anton's room and searched the entire floor. Why they should have visited the apartments of my uncle and aunt is more than I can understand. I am not a heavy sleeper, yet I heard nothing of the affair until this morning."

"Was no one able to give the alarm until this morning?" asked Nick. "Where were the servants? Surely they must have been aroused."

"They were not," was the reply, "and the first intimation I had of the murder of my uncle and the loss of my diamonds was when informed by Anton of the happenings of the night."

Nick walked the floor of his room for a moment.

"What did Anton tell you?" he finally asked.

"He said that he heard a noise during the night and arose from his bed. As he stepped out in the direction of the door opening into the hall, he was struck a savage blow, from the effects of which he did not recover until after daylight."

"And your aunt?"

"She, too, says that she heard a noise and stepped to the door of her chamber. It was dark in the hallway, but her figure was outlined against a window in the wall at her back.

While standing there, listening, she was struck on the forehead and rendered unconscious until morning.”

“And you were asleep on that floor?”

“Yes, sir, directly across the hall from the room occupied by my aunt. Uncle slept in a room at the front of the house. Anton in a room at the rear. The two rooms between these were occupied by my aunt and myself, as I have already stated.”

“The diamonds were in your trunk?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Was the trunk locked?”

“No, sir, it was not. You see, we have never been molested before up there. I was not as cautious as I might have been. However, if the trunk had been locked, it would have been all the same, I imagine.”

“You might have been awakened by the forcing of the lock,” said the detective. “It is strange that you did not hear the sound of the blows which killed your uncle and left your aunt unconscious.”

“I wonder at that,” said the young man, “for I am not usually a heavy sleeper. But I hope you can come out to the house at once. The sheriff and two deputies are there, but no one save the coroner has been admitted to the second floor. Can you come now?”

“Certainly,” was the reply.

“And, another thing,” said the young man, hesitation in his voice, “I wish you to act as my personal representative in the search for the diamonds. This may seem to you a selfish request, with the murderer of my uncle still at large, but it is a matter of great importance to me. The diamonds constitute my sole inheritance from my father. Nothing can bring my uncle back to life, but the diamonds, recovered,

will make my future life both useful and happy. Besides, the recovery of the diamonds must point to the murderer.”

“That does not necessarily follow,” replied Nick. “However, I will do the best I can for you. You were at your uncle’s yesterday afternoon?”

“Yes; I have been stopping there for a month, at his special request.”

“When and where were the diamonds delivered to you?”

“At uncle’s, at three o’clock. They were brought up from the city by a special messenger, who took a receipt and returned on the first train south.”

“When did you open the package containing the diamonds?”

“Immediately.”

“Where did you open them?”

“In the parlor on the first floor.”

“Who was present?”

“Uncle, aunt, Anton, Bernice, aunt’s maid, and myself.”

“Anton is your cousin by marriage only?”

“He is a son of my aunt by a first marriage.”

“I see. Where was he born?”

“In Paris. He has lived there nearly all his life.”

“Were there any servants about when the diamonds were shown? Did the servants see the diamonds at all?”

“No, sir.”

“Was the arrival of the gems talked of before the servants?”

“To some extent, yes.”

“You were about the grounds in the afternoon?”

“Yes, sir. I remember now that I sat on the side porch a long time, looking over the lawn and garden on that side of

the house.”

“You observed no strangers about?”

“No, sir. Say! Two men came up from the station and passed the house shortly after the departure of the messenger who had delivered the diamonds. They passed on about two hundred yards, and then turned toward the depot. I did not see them again.”

“What sort of appearing men were they?”

“I remember now that their dress and manner gave me the impression that they were sailors.”

“The sheriff has charge of the case, I presume?”

“Sheriff Walton is there in person. He was notified quite early this morning at Anton’s request.”

“What direction is his investigation taking?”

“He has made a study of the grounds, and was at the railroad station when I came away, questioning the agent and the night watchman, who had been sent for.”

“I am glad he has been kept out of the house,” said the detective.

“I can’t get the thing through my head,” said the young man. “One man murdered, two persons assaulted and left unconscious, my own room entered and robbed, and I the only one on the floor not aroused by the noise. It seems a strange case.”

“Now about the murder of your uncle,” said Nick. “How was the death wound inflicted?”

“He was struck on the temple with some blunt instrument. He was in his pajamas and lying across the bed when found. It looks as if he had arisen to a sitting position when awakened, and was then seized by the throat. There are marks as though a struggle had taken place.”

“And your aunt?”

“There is a cut over the left eye.”

“Not a serious one?”

“Oh, no. It is difficult, however, to imagine what sort of a weapon made the cut. It seems to be three-cornered.”

“And Anton?”

“There is no question but that he was struck with a pair of iron knuckles. The wound shows that plainly enough.”

Nick remained silent for some moments. He was puzzling over the fact that the gems had been so soon located in the house by the thieves.

“By whom were the diamonds delivered?” he finally asked.

“By a messenger from the American Express office.”

“Who paid the duty?”

“The express company.”

“It must have been a heavy one.”

“It was,” answered the young man. “It took all my little fortune.”

Nick entered the telephone booth and called up the American Express office. In a few moments he learned that the diamonds had arrived in New York the previous day at noon on an ocean liner, and that they had remained in charge of the company only an hour before the departure of the messenger. No one in the employ of the company, except the man who had paid the duty and the manager, knew of the valuable contents of the package.

While the detective was puzzling over the case, Chick entered and was soon in possession of its main features as known to his chief.

“Where were the diamonds shipped from?” he asked.

“Originally from Cape Town,” replied the young man, “but direct from Liverpool.”

Chick looked at his chief with a smile on his face.

“It is a pretty case, I imagine,” he said. “The gems must have been followed from Cape Town.”

“Well, in that case,” said young Maynard, “the man who did the following made quick work of it after they arrived in this country. Of course, the route to the hiding place of the murderer must be discovered by tracing the diamonds. Don’t you think so?” he added, turning to Nick.

“It will, I think, prove easier to find the murderer than the diamonds,” said Nick. “The gems may be passed on from hand to hand, or separated and scattered to the end of the world, while the murderer cannot halve his crime with any one.”

Nick ordered his automobile, and the three were soon on their way to the country house on the Hudson where the murder had been committed.

When they reached their destination they found a crowd of curious suburbanites gathered about the gate, which had been closed and locked by the sheriff.

The house stood some distance from the road in a grove of elm trees. A handsomely kept lawn swept down to the iron fence which shut in the grounds. It was a fine old mansion, with many gables, porches, and odd corners. The dull red walls were overrun with English ivy.

The detectives ascended at once to the upper floor. The stairs brought them to a long hallway running just west of the tier of rooms at the front of the house.

Entering the front room, they found the body of the dead man lying on the bed. Nick at once bent over it. His impression was that it had been placed on the bed after the deathblow had been struck, but the coroner had gone away for a time, and he could ask no questions of him.

“It is worth looking up,” thought Nick.

As the detectives were beginning their work, Sheriff Walton called out to them from the lower hallway:

“I am going away for a time,” he said, “but I’ll be back. Two suspicious men took a rig from a local stable last night, and have not returned it. I think that perhaps they are the men who were here. You will find that the burglars gained entrance by way of the west room, and passed on to the front of the house. On the way they got the diamonds from the trunk in Charley’s room.”

Nick smiled as the sheriff closed the door and took his departure.

“He seems to have solved the case already,” said Chick. “I presume he has the murderer in sight now. Good luck to him, say I.”

“Here’s something to begin on,” continued Chick, pointing to footprints in the hallway. “See! There’s been a good deal of travel about here, and in bare feet. I don’t quite understand this, chief. I can’t see what it means. We have been told that Mrs. Maynard and Anton lay unconscious until morning, so I don’t see who did all this walking about. I don’t believe people came up here barefooted.”

The prints of naked feet led from door to door, and in some places were quite numerous. They passed from the north room to the south room, back again, and from the east room to the north room and back again. The south room was occupied by the owner of the diamonds, the north room by his aunt, and the east room by Alvin Maynard, who lay dead there at the time of the visit.

West of the doors of the side rooms, which were exactly opposite each other, the hall was narrower, and led only to a west room, occupied by Anton Sawtelle. The marks here were not those of naked feet. The person in the stockings seemed to have made two trips to the front room. The other marks might have been made after the discovery of the crimes of the night.

One thing about the stocking marks struck the detectives as peculiar. In each instance the outgoing marks were close together, the incoming marks far apart.

“This chap was in a mighty hurry, coming back,” said Chick reflectively. “He made the return trips in long jumps. Must have got scared in the front room.”

“Anton might have visited his father’s room before dressing,” said Nick, “and discovered the dead body on the bed. That would naturally give him a fright.”

“But he seems to have gotten two frights,” said Chick, with a grin.

As Chick bent over the tracks Nick moved cautiously toward the front of the hall. He was certain that he heard footsteps there, that some one was watching their movements—noting the course their investigation was taking.

Finally he made a little rush to the front, and was just in time to see a mass of dark hair disappearing down the stairs. The wearer of the hair looked back, and Nick saw a pair of handsome black eyes.

“We were watched,” he mused, turning back to the tracks. “The burglars, we are told, entered by way of Anton’s room.”

The detectives passed down the hall and entered the rear room, after it had been unlocked from the inside. The young man who had unlocked the door was already back in bed when the detectives entered. His head was bandaged and his face was pale as death. His eyes glared unnaturally from under heavy brows. He was a remarkably handsome man, although his face, even with the pallor of suffering upon it, showed signs of dissipation. His features were regular, his hair black and waving, and his figure slender and muscular.

"I called to you when you were at the door a moment ago," he said, "but you did not answer. I presume you are Nick Carter? Yes. Well, I am glad to see you. Hope you will find the murderer, and also the brute who gave me this bump on the head. My poor father! He was always a father to me!"

"All in good time," said Nick. "We are about to make an examination of the premises, but would like to ask you a few questions, provided you are well enough to engage in conversation."

"I am very much better," was the reply, "and perfectly able to tell you all I know about this wretched affair."

"What time did you go to bed last night?" was the first question.

"About ten o'clock," was the reply. "We keep early hours up here in the country, you see," he added, with a wan smile.

"Did you retire for the night as soon as you came upstairs? What I mean is, did you move about your room or the hall?"

Sawtelle's face became flushed, and he hesitated. Although Nick's eyes were seemingly not fixed on his face, he noted every change of expression. What Nick appeared to be looking at was the gravel roof of a one-story lean-to attached to the building at the west.

CHAPTER II. CONFLICTING CLUES.

Once the young man opened his lips to reply to the question, but he changed his mind, evidently, and remained silent for a time.

“Give me time to think,” he said, after a pause. “I don’t seem to remember.”

“Did you come up here before your mother and Mr. Maynard came up for the night?”

“Oh, yes; I heard them come up and go to their rooms.”

“Did they engage in conversation?”

“They did not,” was the hesitating reply. “To tell the truth, they were not on good terms with each other last night. That makes this affair all the more terrible for mother.”

“Do you know the nature of their quarrel?”

“I do not.”

“Did you leave your room for any purpose after they came up here?”

“I did not.”

“Until when?”

“This morning.”

“Then you went to Mr. Maynard’s room?”

“I went to mother’s room first. You see, I had been attacked, and my first idea on regaining consciousness was that some one else might have been wounded.”

“That was quite early?”

“Just after daylight.”

“Where did you find your mother?”

“Lying on the floor. I placed her on the bed and went on to Mr. Maynard’s room. I found him dead, as you know.”

“Did you move the body?”

“I did not.” This with a shudder of horror.

“Were you dressed?”

“I was not. I had just tumbled off the bed, where I had fallen, or been thrown by the robbers. I think I had my trousers and socks on, that is all. You must understand that about this time I was hardly myself, and was laboring under strong excitement. I hardly know what I did after that. I remember of going to Charley’s room, and of hearing him cry out that the diamonds had been stolen. You know I had lain in an unconscious condition all night from this wound on my head. I asked that Sheriff Walton be sent for, and again became unconscious.”

“Did you succeed in arousing your mother from her stupor?”

“I called to the servants to assist her.”

“How was she dressed?”

“In a nightrobe.”

“How about her feet?”

“They were bare.”

“Where was she taken, then?”

“Directly downstairs.”

“She was not able to walk about?”

“Oh, no, she was carried down.”

Young Sawtelle closed his eyes as if from weariness, and, quick as a flash, Nick lifted something from under the edge of the bed and thrust it into his pocket.

“Now, about the burglars,” said the detective. “Do you know about what time it was when they entered?”

"I have no idea."

"What was the first sound you heard?"

"I thought I heard a window rattle, and arose to a sitting position."

"And then?"

"I could see that there was some one in the room, and I sprang out of bed to get a revolver which I keep in the closet."

"You did not reach the closet?"

"No. I met an iron knuckle and dropped to the floor."

"Did you visit the closet at all last night?"

"No; I am sure that I did not."

"You caught no parting glimpse of the intruder's face?"

"No. There were two."

"How do you know that?"

"I could see two forms outlined against the window."

"You heard them moving about the room?"

"Only for a moment."

"Did they make much noise in moving about?"

"Very little."

Nick now turned to the windows opening on the roof of the lean-to to the west. The structure was covered with a gravel roof, and during the rain of the night of the murder little pools of water had formed. Into these sand had been swept. Nick examined every one of these closely. In a moment he called Chick to his side.

"Here is the autograph of one of the burglars," he said, pointing to an impression in one sandy pocket of the roof.

"Rubber shoes," said Chick.

"Exactly, with a tear in the sole of the right shoe. It ought to be easy enough to follow this fellow."

Chick made a circuit of the little roof and came back to his chief.

“The cut in the shoe which shows there,” he said, “was made after the robber got to the roof. The tin strap which supports the eave trough at the west, where the ladder was raised, is broken, and Mr. Burglar stepped on the sharp, upturned edge.”

Nick descended the ladder, which remained as the robbers had left it, and walked about the grounds for a few moments, after which he returned to the west room.

“They came from the orchard,” he said, “and after the rain.”

“The rain fell at two o’clock,” said Chick.

Nick turned to Sawtelle.

“It is your notion that you were knocked down as soon as the thieves entered the room?” he asked.

“Of course.”

“Isn’t it remarkable that Charley was not awakened?”

“He is a heavy sleeper.”

“What did he say in the morning?”

“I don’t remember.”

The young man was becoming nervous and impatient, and Nick and his assistant left the room, first asking permission to return later and search for further traces of the burglars. In five minutes’ time, however, the young man passed them in the hall and went downstairs.

The detectives looked at each other in silence for a moment.

“He lies!” said Chick. “Mr. and Mrs. Maynard did walk in the hall last night after they were ready for bed, and he knows it, for he was not asleep. I say he was not asleep because he came out after them. Notice that the marks

leading from his door are over the ones made by naked feet, and were therefore made last.”

“That looks all right on the face of it,” replied Nick, “but he says he passed through the hall this morning.”

“I overlooked that point,” said Chick, “but, anyhow, he lied about the old people not moving about.”

“He might have been asleep,” said Nick. “Don’t jump at conclusions, my son.”

Chick bent over the floor.

“What is it?” asked Nick.

“I am looking for the marks made by the burglars in passing from the rear room to the front one,” was the reply.

An inscrutable smile appeared on the face of the detective.

“Look sharply,” he said. “Perhaps you may be able to find what you are looking for.”

Chick arose and faced his chief with excitement showing in his manner.

“They are not here,” he said. “What does it mean?”

“There are the marks of stockinged feet,” suggested Nick.

“But these two sets of tracks are the same,” said the assistant, “and were, of course, made by Anton. You have, I think, the socks he wore last night in your pocket,” added Chick, with a smile. “Suppose we compare them with the tracks?”

“You saw what I took from under the bed, then?”

“Certainly. I had had my eyes on them for some time.”

Nick took the socks from his pocket. They fitted the tracks exactly.

“You see,” said Chick, “the burglars never left that back room. Now, who murdered Alvin Maynard? Who stole

Charley Maynard's diamonds?"

What Chick stated was the truth. There were no indications that the burglars had left the threshold of Anton's room. And yet the old man had been murdered at the other end of the hall and the diamonds had been stolen from a room which could be reached only by way of the hall!

Nick made no reply. Instead, he turned from the hall and entered the room from which the gems had been stolen. Everything was in order there. The diamonds had been taken from a trunk, and this stood near the head of the bed, the cover swung back against the wall.

In the compartment at the right end of the till was a casket, the one in which, under coarser covering, the diamonds had been shipped to New York. Nick took out his glass and inspected the packing. Then he placed some of the cotton and some of the paper in his pocketbook.

The trunk was of metal surface, and at the top of the box the iron had been worn through to the wood. Jagged edges of metal showed all along the edge of the box. On one of these edges Nick found a shred of pink wool, which he placed in his pocket with the other articles.

Nick now entered the room which had been occupied by Mrs. Maynard, going directly to the dresser.

"What do you find?" asked Chick.

"Record of last night's proceedings," was the reply. "It is as plain as if written in ink. I have heard it said," continued the detective, "that no person can enter a room without leaving some evidence of the visit. This may be putting it too strongly, but I am convinced that no person can commit a crime without leaving behind a record of the deed, as plain as printing, if we only know how to read the language in which it is written."

"That has often been proven," said Chick.

The little right-hand drawer of the dresser stood half open, disclosing a collection of rumpled handkerchiefs of fine texture. The top of the dresser was half covered with toilet articles. There were powders and liquid preparations for the face and hands, and many other articles designed to keep the marks of advancing years from showing too plainly. Nick picked up a jar of yellowish paste and turned his glass on it. Then he took the pieces of packing from his pocket.

“See here,” he said, “the woman went to Charley’s room last night, after all was still in the house, and took the diamonds and brought them to this room.”

“Impossible!” cried Chick. “That silver-haired old lady a thief—never.”

“I did not say that she stole the gems,” said Nick. “I said that she brought them to this room. First, how do I know that she took them from the trunk? Notice this jar of toilet paste. When she got ready for bed she used that on her hands and face—a common thing for women to do. Then, after her light was out, and after Charley was in bed and asleep, she entered his room and took the diamonds from the casket.”

Chick listened, with wonder showing in his eyes.

“I presume you know where all this points?” he said.

“I know that she extinguished the light before she left her room, because she groped her way in the darkness and felt along the door for the knob. She left traces of this toilet paste on the panels. She did the same thing in Charley’s room—groped her way in the darkness. More traces of the toilet paste on the door and on the trunk. This shows that Charley was not only in bed, but asleep. Lastly, she left traces of the paste on the packing from which she removed the gems.”

“Poor old woman!” said Chick.

“Wait a moment,” said Nick. “There is no knowing what her motive was. She brought the diamonds here and placed them in that little drawer at the right of the dresser. See, some of the packing clung to them, and it is still in the drawer.”

“It seems to be a clear case,” said Chick.

“But the diamonds did not remain in the drawer for any length of time,” said Nick. “Did you know Alvin Maynard in his lifetime?”

The assistant shook his head.

“Then you do not know what an inveterate snuff taker he was. Well, he came in here last night, after the return of his wife, and removed the gems from that drawer. His fingers were soiled with snuff at the time, and he left traces of it on the handkerchiefs in the drawer. The handkerchiefs are also crumpled, showing that the diamonds were not taken out in a calm manner.”

“I see,” said Chick, more surprised than ever.

Nick now went to the old lady’s closet, which opened from the sleeping room, and came out with a pink nightrobe thrown over his shoulder. He attempted no explanation until they both stood in the front room, by the side of the bed whereon the dead man lay.

“It is certain that the old lady followed her husband to this room,” Nick said, then, “and that a quarrel took place here. Observe how the gathers are torn out at the neck of this nightrobe. It all ended in her being pushed down or falling in a faint. At any rate, the woman received her wound in this room, and not in the doorway of her own chamber, from the fist of a burglar, as she is said to claim.”

Nick walked over to a couch which stood by a front window. The head of the couch was composed of a straight, sharp-cornered piece of quarter-sawed oak, without