

The Plot That Failed

**OR,
WHEN MEN CONSPIRE**

**BY
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CHAPTER I.

TAMBOURINE JACK'S MESSAGE.

"I feared you would not come."

The speaker, a beautiful woman of two or three and thirty, half reclined on a sofa, in an elegant apartment.

A gentleman, rather old, had entered the room.

He was what he looked to be—one of New York's money kings.

"It is for the last time, Louise," he said, toying with his watch guard.

"And why for the last time?"

For a second the woman appeared downcast, and then, rising to her feet, she said, pleadingly:

"You swore that you would always love me."

"Yes," he thundered, "but then I was not aware that the shy and modest Louise Calhoun was a common adventuress. Truly, you would be a nice woman to grace my home and be a second mother to my orphan children!"

"I shall force you to keep your promise!" The woman's eyes blazed and she clinched her hands until the nails sank deep into the flesh.

"Force me—you will force me!" exclaimed the gentleman.

"Those were the words I used, Hilton Field."

“Why, you are a criminal.”

She buried her face in her hands, and, as she began to sob, dropped upon her knees.

The banker was moved; he had loved this woman, who had introduced herself to him as the daughter of a New England clergyman, and said that she had come to New York with the intention of supporting herself by giving music lessons. Indeed, she bore letters of introduction from a man Mr. Field knew to be trustworthy.

He had helped the stranger along and often called to see her, the outcome of which visits resulted in a proposal of marriage, which was eagerly accepted, as he thought.

He was deceived.

Louise Calhoun could not marry the banker, and none knew this better than herself.

Her whole body seemed to shake with the emotions born of her grief as she knelt at Mr. Field's feet.

When she removed her hands the old man saw that the face upturned to his was tear-stained and pale.

“How could you, oh, how could you?” she moaned.

“Compose yourself, Louise.”

“Would you be composed if such an accusation was made against you?” she asked, “by one you dearly loved?”

“My information comes from a detective,” Mr. Field said.

“He told you a falsehood! Would you not take my word before his?”

The banker hesitated.

Far better would it have been for him if he had not.

“Perhaps,” he said, “the man was wrong. Do you mind if I bring him face to face with you to-morrow?”

“You will persist in doubting me;” and, as she spoke, the girl appeared to be highly displeased.

“Louise, I owe a duty to my family,” Mr. Field said; “no one can come in contact with them whom even the breath of suspicion might rest on.”

“What is the name of the man who dares to injure my good name?” she asked, her eyes fastened on him as she awaited the answer.

“His name is Nicholas Carter,” replied the banker.

“Nick——”

She suddenly placed her hand over her mouth.

“Yes, Nick Carter. You seem to know him.”

“Only from reading of him in the newspapers. I read of a bold capture of his only this morning,” she replied.

Mr. Field was lost in thought for a second.

Then he raised the young woman from the floor and seated himself beside her on the sofa.

“Tell me you don’t doubt me.”

Her left arm was thrown around his neck, while her right hand fumbled about in her pocket.

Louise Calhoun was all smiles now, as she drew the banker to her so that his head rested upon her shoulder.

Then quickly did she tighten her grasp, drawing a handkerchief from her pocket and applying it to his nostrils.

Mr. Field struggled, and succeeding in breaking away, staggered to his feet.

Then he fell to the floor.

The drug had done its work.

Louise touched the prostrate man with her tiny foot, and assured herself that he was insensible.

“The old fool!” she exclaimed, and her laugh rang shrilly through the apartment, “marry him? I guess not!”

“Louise, you are a trump!”

The speaker, a young man who would be known anywhere for what he was, a sport and gambler, emerged from behind a heavy curtain, where he had been hid.

“How was my emotional acting, Elmer?” she asked.

The fellow kissed the woman, saying:

“Your husband is proud of his wife.”

His praise seemed to please her.

“Where are your men?” she asked.

“They will be outside at half-past eleven”—he pulled out his watch and glanced at it—“why, it is that time now!”

Elmer, as Louise called him, drew a long piece of thin rope from his pocket and pinioned the old man.

When he had completed the job, he said:

“This night’s work will pay handsomely or I’ll eat my head; then for Europe with the swag, sweetheart.”

The rascal left the house and soon returned with two brutal-looking fellows, who awkwardly removed their hats.

Two more villainous-appearing gentlemen in the yeggman line it would be hard to find.

“You, Mackrell, get the old gent by the head,” said one of them, “and I’ll collar his feet.”

“All right, Skip.”

They carried the banker from the house and placed him in a grocery wagon that was in waiting, and drove rapidly off.

This move was accomplished without discovery.

Investigation into some cases of the disappearance of rich persons would establish the fact that they were kidnaped.

The gentlemanly rascal did not accompany his friends.

He could trust them; he had often done so before and found that they would not go back on the man who paid them well.

The pair were members of the gang that Elmer had organized, and without taking active part in their crimes, he was their acknowledged leader.

It seems strange that an organized gang of nearly two hundred ruffians could exist long in the great metropolis, but Elmer Greer's did until they were—but that is anticipating.

Returning to the apartment where he had left his wife, he said:

"Louise, you must leave here."

"Why?"

"It is probable that the banker's friends knew he was coming here."

"What then?" she remarked; "they know he often calls here; there can be no suspicion cast on me."

"He spoke about Nick Carter," said Greer.

"Well?"

"Perhaps he might have come with the old chap and is now waiting for him."

"Elmer, never until now did I believe you to be an idiot," said the woman, "but your words force that conviction upon my mind. If Nick Carter were outside do you suppose they would ever be able to carry the old fellow out?"

“I am a fool; I spoke thoughtlessly,” replied Greer.

There was a sharp knock on the door which caused both the guilty pair to start.

The man hid himself in his former place of concealment.

“Come in,” said Louise, faintly.

The door opened and a huge dog sprang into the room, followed by its master.

The woman screamed.

“Don’t be afraid, miss, it is only me and Crackers. We won’t hurt her, will we, Crackers, old boy?”

Louise was not so much afraid of the evil-looking cur as she was of the monstrosity that accompanied it.

The newcomer was not over four feet in height, although his body seemed to have been intended for a man at least two feet taller.

He wore a pair of pants at least a dozen sizes too large and his coat hung about him in folds.

His head was very large, and the heavy shock of red hair that covered it seemed to add to its size.

“Don’t come near me,” cried Louise, as the creature approached the sofa.

“I won’t harm you.”

“Who are you?” exclaimed Elmer Greer, issuing from his hiding place.

“Don’t you know me?”

“No,” replied the villain. “Come, be quick, answer my question.”

The fellow began to laugh and his laughter seemed more like the scream of a hyena than anything else.

“I’m Tambourine Jack,” he said, at length, drawing a tambourine from under his coat and jingling it, at which the dog Crackers set up a dismal howl.

Greer caught the fellow, but released his hold when he felt the dog’s teeth grasp his leg.

“Down, Crackers, down,” cried Tambourine Jack, shaking himself free.

Elmer drew his pistol and pointed it at the cur.

“Don’t shoot, you’ll be sorry,” said the owner. “I have business with you. Come nearer; I must not let the lady hear it.”

The rascal stooped to enable Tambourine Jack to whisper to him.

When he had received the other’s communication, Elmer Greer became deathly pale.

“Great Heaven!” he cried, “what you tell me cannot be true! How do I know you speak the truth?”

“Give me your hand and I will convince you,” said Tambourine Jack, stretching out his grimy fist.

Greer took the proffered hand, and when he released it his pallor deepened.

“Do you believe me now?”

“I do,” replied the rogue. “You are one of us and dare not lie.”

“Come, Crackers, come; we have finished our business here.”

The dog made a snap at Elmer as he passed him, for which he was rewarded with a kick from his master.

When the door closed upon the strange individual and his four-footed companion, Greer said:

“Prepare for the worst, Louise. I fear we stand on the brink of a volcano!”

CHAPTER II.

THE YEGGMEN'S LEAGUE.

At the foot of one of the uptown streets, East River, is, or was, a tumble-down shed, once used as a wholesale oyster depot.

At high tide the water came up under the shed to within a few feet of the street.

Seated around the room, the night following that of the abduction of the old banker, were seven or eight men, while at a rude table in the middle of the shed were two others engaged in playing cards, and on the table between them were several black bottles.

They were a brutal set, the occupants of the place, and more than one of them had received free board and lodgings at Sing Sing.

"I say, you, Jack Frost, that game ought to be about finished," said the man called Skip. "I'm thirsty, I am, and the bottles are empty."

"You lose, Dick Denton," said the fellow addressed as Jack Frost, arising from the table. "Who will go and get the bottles filled? Two quarts, Dick, you know."

"I'll go myself," said the unfortunate gambler, picking up two of the bottles and leaving the shed.

"For Heaven's sake, don't be long! I am dying for a drink," remarked the thirsty Skip.

Dick Denton had not been gone long when there came a double rap upon the door.

The whole gang were on their feet instantly.

“Go to the door, Ben Baker,” said Skip, who seemed to be a leader among them.

“Who is there?”

“Blue!” was the answer.

“Green!” exclaimed Baker.

“Yellow!”

The rough had locked the door when he went to it, but now he drew the bolt.

“It’s Old Man Moses,” cried several, as an old Jew hobbled into the room, and they all laughed heartily.

The newcomer joined in their mirth, with a succession of sounds something like those of a bagpipe with the quinsy.

“You are very glad to see me, my children,” said he, as he rubbed his hands together.

“Of course we are,” said Skip Brodie. “Got anything for us to do?”

Dick Denton rapped on the door, and the Jew started at the sound.

Raising both his hands above his head, he hoarsely whispered:

“Do not open the door.”

“It’s Dick Denton,” said one.

Once more Ben Baker went to the door.

The usual formula was gone through with.

“Blue!”

“Green!”

“Yellow!”

“Stop!” The Jew caught Ben Baker’s arm as he was about to open the door.

“Are you crazy?”

“No! no!” cried the Jew. “Tell me, do you know the voice?”

“As well as I do my own. It is Dick Denton.”

“You are sure?”

Baker admitted Dick.

“Hello, old Shylock!” remarked Mr. Denton.

“Very glad to see you, Dick.”

“You always are, I know, when I have any swag.”

“Say, Moses,” said Ben Baker, “why were you so anxious about my not opening the door unless I recognized the voice? Don’t you know we have hundreds of members I never saw, and I am an old hand?”

"I know all the boys, and they all know old Moses."

"There is no doubt of that," remarked Ben Baker, "especially if they ever had any dealings with you. But, come, that is not answering my question."

They all had gathered around the table, now, and were engaged in helping each other to empty the bottles.

"Boys!" cried the Jew, "you must leave here. You have been betrayed. Detective Nick Carter knows of this place, and may be down on it at any moment."

"Betrayed!" shouted the brutes, in chorus.

"Tell me, who was it betrayed us?" Skip caught Moses roughly by the arm. "They must have set no value upon their life."

"Was it Tambourine Jack?" suggested Mackrell.

"No; not him."

"Who, then?" shouted several of the ruffians.

"Speak, you old screw, speak!" said Skip, tightening his grasp upon the other's arm.

"You will not strike me?"

"No."

"It was Dell Ladley."

"You lie, Jew, the girl is as true as steel; I don't go much on giving secrets to women, but she is different to the rest."

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