

THE SOCIAL PIRATES

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Plot by George Bronson Howard
Novelization by Hugh C. Weir

Story No. 12

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HELEN MINTERN

Two American girls, Mona Hartley and Mary Burnett, set about punishing the "Wolves of Society" through their check books. This is the story of their twelfth adventure.

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HELP! HELP!" Such a cry is associated with a gloomy alley, or dark country lane at midnight. To connect it with a taxicab in a crowded city street in broad daylight requires an elastic imagination—but to the two young women, who had heard the smothered cry, it was both very real and very poignant. For a moment they stood, dumb with amazement, staring after the curtained motor, from the recesses of which the curious appeal had emanated. Then simultaneously they whirled, and faced each other, asking mutely the same question.

It was Mona Hartley who found her first. "You heard it, too? A woman's voice! Are we awake, or dreaming?" In answer Mary Burnett caught her companion's arm, and hurried her toward a tall, serious faced young man.

"Mr. Carson!" she cried. "You are just in time! Where is your car? A woman is in trouble in that taxi!" Casper Carson, the young millionaire social worker and reformer, was a man accustomed to think and act quickly. Without another word he sprang across the walk, and threw open the door of a dark blue, up-to-date touring car. As Mary and Mona jumped into the machine he threw in the clutch. For blocks they chased the taxi until it mysteriously and to the disgust of the trio disappeared down a side street.

"I took down the license number, anyway," said Mary.

Later the girls saw the same taxicab standing in front of Mme. Suro's beauty parlors, and while they watched it Daniel Slatern, the political boss of the upper Tenderloin, came out. Then the girls remembered that Carson had openly charged that these beauty parlors, under political protection, were often used for gambling dens and other purposes. The girls informed Carson of their discovery. In the discussion that followed Mona said:

"I have an idea—which will get us not only the information of the taxicab and its occupants, but which ought to give you just the evidence you want about Mme. Suro and Slatern." She then unfolded the plan. "What do you think of it?" she asked. Carson and Mary agreed and an appointment was made for him to meet Mona the next evening at the Metropolitan Cafe—an establishment frequented by actresses, chorus girls and men about town.

There was a definite reason behind the dinner appointment of Mona and Carson. The Metropolitan Cafe was a place where Slatern, and where his appearance was the signal for every unoccupied waiter in the house to be quickened into activity. Carson led the way through the glaringly lighted doorway, with a mental register of the politeness of the character of his surroundings, but Mona concealed her feelings cleverly.

The two found a table in an retired position as possible, and from which both could command a view of the door. Slatern had not yet appeared, and Mona was beginning to worry for fear that he might vary his routine of habit on this occasion when the political boss entered in, escorting a very blond, overdressed young woman, who showed obvious pride in her "conquest."

Slatern and his companion were ushered to a table in a prominent position, and Mona and Carson delayed their chairs without arousing suspicion. It was evident that Slatern recognized Carson, darting a scowling glance at the young millionaire, the political boss whispered to his companion, and also directed her attention to the other table. Mona and Carson, however, continued their meal as though unconscious of the scrutiny. When Slatern and his companion finally left the cafe, Mona and Carson were just behind them.

The two couples reached the walk at almost the same moment. As the door closed Mona broke away from Carson's arm, and raised her voice sharply.

"I am done with you—for good!" Carson took a step toward her and tried to regain hold of her arm. But she shook him off. "You are a tight-wad, a disgusting tight-wad!" She saw that her voice had reached the ears of Slatern, and that the other was looking over his shoulder curiously. "I don't want any more of your promises. I am through—from this moment!"



"YOU TRAITORS," HE SNARLED, "SO YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD PUT ONE OVER ON ME!"

With head high and eyes flashing she crossed to an empty taxicab and jumped in, leaving Carson staring after her. Slatern nudged his companion down quickly, picked up a small lace handkerchief from the floor, which Mona had dropped from her bag. With the handkerchief was a business card, on the back of which was a hastily scribbled line of writing. Slatern held it to the light and read. "It is imprudent for me to have please rush it!" On the reverse side of the card was the engraved name, "Casper Carson." Slatern's eyes gleamed with sudden discovery. He thought he had made a discovery. Late the next afternoon Mona, engaged from a taxi cab before Mme. Suro's establishment, ascended the steps, and was ushered by the liveried colored attendant at the door into a handsomely appointed waiting room. In a moment or two Mme. Suro appeared.

"You wish to see me?" Mona nodded. "I wish to see you very much—privately." "I am very busy," said Mme. Suro, raising her eyebrows. "I fancy that my errand is well worth your time and attention," said Mona, coldly. "However," she started to walk indifferently toward the door, but the other caught her arm.

"Step this way, please," she conceded grudgingly. Mona followed her down a narrow corridor, giving into a series of thinly-partitioned booths, in which she caught glimpses of women conducting various stages of "beautification." At the end of the corridor the Madame opened a door and conducted her visitor into a small room, which evidently served the purpose of a private office.

"My name is Jenkins—May Jenkins," began Mona, boldly. "For several months I have been in the employ of Casper Carson. Do you know him?" "Perhaps," was the enigmatic response. "And what of it?" "I have been assisting him to gather evidence against certain establishments like yours," said Mona, directly. "You may know, perhaps, that he believes you're running a gambling house."

Madame Suro's face flushed. "Carson has double-crossed me," said Mona, in a vicious tone as she could muster. "He gives nothing but promises—and I have broken with him, and told him he would be sorry to let me go! I intend to make him sorry! That is why I have come to you—to tell you certain matters which may be of interest to you."

"I don't know what you mean," Madame Suro scanned the girl's face shrewdly, and her manner perceptibly stiffened. "I mean that you are to be raided at almost any hour!" Mona stepped closer to the other and spoke the last words almost into her ears. She could feel the thrill of alarm, which

while Mona was busy with those thoughts, the key turned in the door again, and the Madame reappeared, with a man whom the girl at once recognized as Dan Slatern. That he recognized her also and recalled the incident of her quarrel with Carson the previous night was obvious. With a smile he stepped toward her. "I understand you have something to tell me."

Mona met his appraising glance boldly, and repeated the story she had finished. "It is scheduled for a sound of a scuffle outside, and a vigorous hammering at the street door. Slatern, with a oath, sprang back into the corridor, followed by Madame Suro and Mona. It was evident that the raid was already in progress. Slatern turned swiftly to Madame Suro, and she met his mute question with a nod.

"Everything has been cleared away," she said. "I took care of that." Slatern sprang through a hidden door, pulling Mona after him, and shutting the concealed door, just as the sounds from the front of the building showed that Madame Suro had admitted the presumable officers of the law. After a reasonable length of time Slatern returned to ascertain if the officers had gone. In a few moments he was back at Mona's side.

"They have gone," he said. "And I rather fancy that your friend Carson is almost convinced that he was on a blind trail!" He lighted a fresh cigar with a chuckle. At that moment a woman's scream rang through the building, to be smothered the next instant.

Slatern threw away his match with a curse, but Mona pretended to be unconscious of anything out of the ordinary. She took care of that fact in the hope of a repetition of the cry. It had come apparently from a room below, and there was no doubt that a rough hand had silenced the mouth from which it had burst. Was it the same woman who had called in vain from the covered taxicab? She saw that Slatern was watching her covertly out of the corner of his eye, and tried to smile.

"Shall we be going back?" she asked. "Or shall I leave from this house?" "The coast is clear enough now," said Slatern rather absently. He led the way back through the tunnel, and again into the Beauty Parlors. Madame Suro was plainly and evidently preparing to go out for dinner. Except for the splintered street door, there was no sign of the "raid," which had threatened to disturb the serenity of the place and the liberty of its occupants.

"I think we are under obligations to Miss Jenkins," said Slatern, giving Mona the name she had offered to Madame Suro. "What do you think your services are worth to us?" he asked, plunging his hand into his pocket. "The girl made a gesture of protest. 'Not a dollar! I told you I was not doing it for money—but to get back at Carson! I rather think he will be sorry before he is through!'" Slatern grinned. "Have it your way! But just the same I am not a man to forget a favor. Suppose you call at my office in the morning? It is just possible that she will be of mutual benefit to each other."

"I'll come," promised Mona, as Slatern led the way to the street door. She smiled a farewell and made her way down the steps and to the street, conscious that Slatern and Madame Suro were staring at her.

Mary and Carson were anxiously waiting for her when she reached her apartment. The two listened in amazement as she told of the exciting events that had unfolded and introduction to Madame Suro, and to the success which had so far attended her efforts as amateur detective.

"I am to be of much help to me," he went on. "As a first step, make up your differences with Carson." "Why should I do that?" asked Mona. "You can be of much help to me," he went on. "As a first step, make up your differences with Carson." "Why should I do that?" asked Mona.

The two staggered back and forth across the room, the girl fighting like a wildcat. A table fell over with a crash, and Slatern tripped against it with an oath. Mona sprang toward the window, seized a heavy water pitcher, and sent it crashing through the panes. As she thrust the police whistle to her lips, from above came the sound of a battering ram against the outside door, and a hoarse command to open in the name of the law.

the fainting form of a young woman about twenty, who stared about her helplessly.

"If there is any suggestion of danger, don't wait, blow this whistle!" she cried. "If we have to break the building down!" And he looked as though he meant it.

Mona read Madame Suro's place ahead of Mary so to be on hand when her friend arrived. Still keeping up the deception which she had maintained so successfully, she evinced keen interest in the preparations to take care of Mary when the other put in an appearance. So cleverly did she play her part that she managed to keep a position in the adjoining room when Mary was finally ushered into a compartment for her second "treatment." Madame Suro kept in the background, leaving the details of the message to an attendant.

Mona watched the attendant through a crack in the partition and saw the other step back to take the prepared drug from a stand in the rear of the booth. Unconscious of the substitution of the harmless sugar which Mona had managed to place in the drug, Madame Suro stepped softly into the room, followed by Mona. Mary lay back against the head rest of the chair, apparently sleeping, sinking back finally in a sort of stupor, as she judged would be the case had she inhaled the fumes of the drug. Madame Suro stepped softly into the room, followed by Mona. Mary lay back against the head rest of the chair, apparently sleeping, sinking back finally in a sort of stupor, as she judged would be the case had she inhaled the fumes of the drug.

From above there came the sound of a battering ram against the outside door, and a hoarse command to open in the name of the law. Slatern threw Mona from him, and made for the door. But he was too late.

"Hands up!" called a sharp voice, and Casper Carson, with two deputies at his shoulders, faced the Boss with a drawn revolver.

"Where is Mary?" called Mona, weakly. "Here I am!" And Mary Davenport, with her hair loosened and her eyes glowering, slipped through the door into the other's arms.

Before Mona could ask for her story, however, Mary dragged her back into the hall, and into the room where she had found the unknown girl, brother of the establishment. The young woman was lying on a rude bed, with the same vague stare in her eyes.

"I have heard enough from her to send Slatern to the penitentiary for life!" said Mary, excitedly. "Her name is Helen Minter—a stenographer in Slatern's office. Slatern discovered that she had found out too much about his methods and that she was apt to be dangerous—so he kidnapped her bodily."

"Where is Slatern?" she demanded. Casper Carson answered the question, grimly, as he stepped into the room. "He is on his way to the District Attorney's office with Madame Suro and the other occupants of this den; I congratulate you, young woman! You have done what I tried to do for months and couldn't! And now, if you are able, we will take the poor girl you have found to your apartment until we can discuss the situation more thoroughly. I don't imagine you will be sorry to see the last of this place!"

In answer Mona stopped and raised Helen Minter's hands, while Casper Carson sprang to her side to aid her.

"You are a wonder!" he said in a low tone. "Do you think so?" she returned, demurely.

(To Be Continued)



SLATERN ABDUCTS HELEN MINTERN.



THEY CARRIED MARY'S LIMP FORM INTO THE SECRET PASSAGE.

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