

# The Social Pirates

## The Disappearance of Helen Mintern

Plot by George Bronson Howard, Novelization by Hugh C. Weir

(COPYRIGHT BY KALEM COMPANY.)

**HELP! HELP!**  
Such a cry is associated with a gloomy day, or dark country lane at midnight. To connect it with a taxicab in a crowded city street in broad day-light 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 voice 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 towards 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 taxi-cab standing in front of Madame 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 taxi-cab and its occupants, but which ought to give you just the evidence you want about Madame 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.

Mary was to remain in the background for the present, but there was every indication that when she was needed in the little drama of Mona's planning her role would be no small one.

There was a definite reason behind the dinner appointment of Mona and Carson. The Metropolitan Cafe was one of the establishments most patronized by Slatern, and where his appearance was the signal for every unoccupied waiter in the house to quicken into activity. Carson led the way through the glaringly lighted doorway, with a mental register of protest at the character of his surroundings, but Mona concealed her feelings cleverly, and none of the diners would have suspected from her attitude of unaffected enjoyment that she was counting the moments before their task would be done, and they would be free to depart. The two found a table in as retired a position as possible, and from which both could command a view of the door.

Slatern had just 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 sauntered in, escorting a very blonde, overly-dressed 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 meal so that they could retain their chairs without arousing suspicion. It was evident that Slatern recognized Carson. Daring 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 angrily.

"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!"

With head high, and eyes flashing, she crossed to an empty taxi-cab, and jumped in, leaving Carson staring after her. Slatern nudged his companion with a chuckle, and then, reaching down quickly, picked up a small face handkerchief from the walk, 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 imperative for me to have your report of Suro's place at once. Please rush it!" On the reverse side of the card was the engraved name, "Casper Carson." Slatern's eyes gleamed with sudden satisfaction. He thought he had made a discovery.

Later the next afternoon Mona emerged from a taxi-cab before Madame 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 Madame Suro appeared.

"You wish to see me?"

Mona nodded. "I wish to see you very much—privately."

Madame Suro raised her eyebrows. "I am very busy."

"I fancy that my errand is well worth your time and attention," rejoined 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 conductress through the portieres, and down a narrow corridor, giving into a series of thinly-partitioned booths, in which she caught glimpses of women customers in various stages of "beautifying." 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.

"And now what is it?" she demanded.

"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.

"Go on!" she snapped.

"Carson has double-crossed me," said Mona, in as vicious a 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,

ridor, 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—as soon as I heard the girl's story."

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



THEY CARRIED HER LIMP FORM INTO THE SECRET PASSAGE.

and spoke the last words almost into her ears. She could feel the thrill of alarm, which coursed through the Madame's trim body. For just an instant the other hesitated, and then she stepped to the telephone on her desk, and called a number into the transmitter.

"Wait here, please," she said, with a trifle more cordiality in her voice. Mona dropped into a chair, affecting not to be interested in the conversation over the wire. She could hear a man's voice through the receiver, and then the Madame, lowering her voice, spoke rapidly and nervously, and evidently to such purpose that a moment later she hung back the receiver with a sigh of relief.

"A friend of mine is coming over, who would like to hear your story, my young friend. If you can convince him of its truth, perhaps you have not done so badly after all!"

"I don't care for that part of it," said Mona, carelessly, guessing at once that the "friend" in question was Dan Slatern. "All that I am interested in is getting back at Carson. I told him I would make him sorry, and I want to make my promise good!"

"Just so! Just so!" nodded the Madame, absently. She stepped to the door. "If you don't mind waiting for just a moment, I have an urgent customer waiting outside—"

"Not at all," said Mona, pleasantly. She heard the key turn on the other side of the door, and smiled to herself. Evidently the Madame was not disposed to take any chances!

The girl strolled to the one window of the room, and parted the curtains. It opened on a rear alley, just across from which loomed the outlines of a rear house, fronting on the next block. The alley, itself, was deserted. She dropped the curtains, and turned back to a survey of the room. If the plans of Casper Carson had gone through without a hitch, his men even now were assembling for the raid on the Beauty Parlors, which had been agreed upon at dusk. That it was a "plant," without either the knowledge or assistance of the district attorney's office, would, of course, not be known until later—and Carson's wealth and influence were such that he would answer any legal inquiries, if, indeed, any should be made. He knew that Slatern was well aware of the reform crusade, of which, he, Carson, was the prime mover—and that the young millionaire had been sworn in as a special deputy by the district attorney's office, which was engaged in one of its periodical fights with the police department. That such a raid should be ordered without warning from the district attorney's office was more than probable—and Carson knew it would not be a difficult task to convince Slatern of its genuineness.

While Mona was busy with these 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 told Madame Suro. Slatern heard her through without comment.

"And when is this raid to take place?" he asked abruptly, after she had finished.

"It is scheduled for—" The girl's sentence was interrupted by a sound of a scuffle outside, and a vigorous hammering at the street door. Slatern, with an oath, sprang back into the cor-

ridor, 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—as soon as I heard the girl's story."

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 suppressed 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, although she was straining her ears 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 taxi-cab? 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?"

"Oh, 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 pinning on her hat, 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, plugging 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 grunted. "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 we can 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 after 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 marked her introduction to Madame Suro, and of the success which had so far attended her efforts as amateur detective.

"I am so glad to see Slatern in the morning," she finished. "I have an idea that he is going to suggest that I enter his employ in the same capacity in which he thinks I worked for you, Mr. Carson."

She was right. When she called on the political boss next day he was plainly much taken not only with the cleverness of his visitor, but with her charms, and made it clear that he considered himself much the gainer and Carson the loser by her change of masters.

"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.

Slatern winked. "So that you can keep me informed of his plans. Don't you see my drift? If you can make him think you are devoted to his reform plans, you can let me know in advance of anything in the wind."

"Gee, but you are smart!" cried Mona admiringly.

"Oh, they will have to get up early to get ahead of Sam Slatern!" admitted the Boss, putting his chest.

Mona promised to meet him at Madame Suro's place for a little informal luncheon at noon, and hurried back to her apartment, where she found Mary waiting for her.

"Quick!" she commanded. "The time has come for you to take your part. Are you ready?"

"Try me!" said Mary, impatiently. A few minutes later the two separated, Mary to repair to a job printer's, and Mona to make her way leisurely to Madame Suro's. Slatern was punctual, and a few moments after noon found the trio gathered around a cosy table in Madame Suro's own room, enjoying a really delicious menu.

Slatern was obliged to leave hurriedly before the colored maid served the dessert, but he remained long enough to give further evidence of the high admiration he was beginning to have for Mona. In fact, Madame Suro, after his departure, patted the girl on the shoulder, and told her confidentially, "If you keep up, dearie, you will have Dan Slatern eating out of your hand!"

Mona laughed, and her confusion was covered by a call for the proprietress of the establishment. Mona followed, for she had a very definite idea as to the identity of the new customer. It was Mary. Mona did not show herself during the interview that followed—an interview having to do with an appointment for the first of a series of facial massages. Mary took her departure, with a promise to return for her treatment in an hour. As the door closed behind her, Mona sprang into the waiting-room, and called to Madame Suro.

"Who was that woman?" she demanded.

The Madame gave her a neatly printed card, which Mary had left, and on which Mona read the name, "Mrs. Reginald Travers Wentworth." She looked up with a gasp.

"She is putting one over on you," she snapped. "Her real name is Doris Greene—and she is a detective for Carson."

Madame beckoned the girl back to her private office, and got Slatern on the telephone. The Boss swore at this new evidence of Carson's persistence, and asked to talk to Mona.

"Can you follow the woman and discover what she is up to?" he asked.

"Surest thing you know!"

"Then do it! I'll be there when she comes back!" And Slatern hung back the receiver with a jerk. Mona hurriedly told Madame Suro of Slatern's instructions, and made a quick exit, leaving Madame to revolve gloomily the prospect of another "raid."

Mona found no difficulty in picking up Mary's trail. In fact the other girl was waiting for her at a corner drug store, and the two enjoyed a pleasant hour's chat, while waiting for the time of Mary's appointment at the Beauty Parlors.

When the two girls separated, Mary made her way back leisurely to Madame Suro's, and Mona followed a short distance in her rear to maintain the deception. Mary found the proprietress awaiting her with a smiling cordiality, and she was conducted at once to one of the private booths, where the Madame insisted on giving her the first treatment with her own hands.

Hardly had Mary taken her departure, with a promise to return the next day for another treatment, when Madame Suro darted again to the telephone. Mona, returning to Slatern's office, reached the desk of the political boss just as the proprietress called him on the wire.

"The new girl is right! That woman is a detective. I watched her spring around the place when she thought I was out! What shall I do?"

Slatern pondered the question for a moment. "We'll have to get her out of the way! If she comes back tomorrow, we'll take care that she doesn't leave!"

He hung back the receiver, and from a drawer of his desk took a small phial of whitish powder. He tapped it with a wink.

"This is halodrone," he explained. "A little of this will put our friend out of commission more quickly than chloroform!"

Mona shuddered, as she recalled the tales she had heard of the powers of the drug, and realized the effects—if the slightest hitch occurred in her daring plans. She compressed her lips tightly as she took her departure. They were playing with a desperate and cunning foe—one whom they would have to fight with their own weapons if they hoped for success!

Carson heard Mona's report of the conversation with a plainly worried air. "I don't like it!"

"You traitress!" hissed Dan Slatern.

he said emphatically. "Suppose that something goes wrong—"

"But nothing is going wrong!" protested Mona. She brought out an envelope from her hand bag, and dusted a few grains of a whitish powder onto Carson's desk. "Oh, you needn't be afraid of that!" she laughed. "That is nothing more deadly than sugar! I shall be on hand tomorrow at the Suro place—with this substitute for halodrone!"



"YOU TRAITRESS!" HISSED DAN SLATERN.

Carson brightened. "And I shall make it a point to have the place surrounded by men from the district attorney's office—ready for instant action! There will be no pretence this time!"

He took a police whistle and a skeleton key from a drawer in his desk.

"If there is any suggestion of danger, don't wait, but blow this whistle! We'll get into the place if we have to break the building down!" And he looked as though he meant it!

Mona reached Madame Suro's place ahead of Mary so as 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 booth when Mary was finally ushered into a compartment for her second "treatment." Madame Suro kept in the background, leaving the details of the massage 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 carefully to dust the supposed drug on a hot towel, and held it over Mary's face. Instantly the girl in the chair broke into a fit of violent sneezing, 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 overcome.

Instantly Madame Suro called a male attendant from the gambling house across the alley, and the two carried Mary's limp form into the secret passage away. Mona concealing herself behind a curtain in the corner of the room. At the two reappeared, in the corner of the room, a spring, and stole into the shadowy aperture, holding her breath as she made her way cautiously forward. She reached the exit, and passed through into the other house without discovery. She found herself in the room, where Slatern had conducted her before. Making her way through the doorway, she entered a wide hall way, running the full length of the building. She saw a stairway at her left, leading below, and remembering the shriek she had heard on her previous visit had emanated from the direction of the basement, she picked her way down the stairs until she reached a lower hall.

At this moment she heard a low cry from a locked door midway before her. Daring forward, she fumbled at the lock, as she heard Mary's voice from within.

"I have found her!" called Mary excitedly.

"But, oh, dear, she is in a stupor, and I can't rouse her! The scoundrels! What have they done to the poor thing?"

Mona glanced around her desperately, seeking for some method to open the door. As her eyes fell on the stairway, she fell back with a gasp of dismay. Madame Suro and the attendant were halfway down the stairs—and escape was impossible! The same instant the proprietress of the Beauty Parlors caught sight of the girl, and raised her voice in a shrill command. "There is the girl, Sam! Grab her while I call Dan!" She darted back up the stairs, while the man, springing toward Mona, caught her arm in a vice-like grip. As Mona staggered back, the door, behind which she had heard Mary's voice, swung open, with the aid of the skeleton key from Carson, and Mary sprang into the hall, pulling after her the fainting form of a young woman of about twenty, who stared about her helplessly.

The attendant, Sam, swore at the sight, and raising his voice in a call for reinforcements, thrust Mary back, with her companion, and caught Mona before she could reach the stairs. Two more attendants from the upper rooms appearing at that moment, Mona was hurried down the hall to a room at the extreme end, and heard the door bolted behind her as she was shoved within.

It was a moment when every second counted. With a wild thought of her police whistle, she darted across to the window. Before she could reach it, the door behind her opened again, and Dan Slatern sprang into the room.

"You traitress!" he snarled. "So you thought you could put one over on me! I'll teach you not to try a trick like that again!"

Mona struggled in vain to free herself from his embrace. The two staggered back and forth across the room, the girl fighting like a wild cat as she saw the desperate odds against her. A table fell over with a crash, and Slatern tripped against it with an oath. At the opportunity, Mona sprang toward the window, seized a heavy water pitcher from a shelf, and sent it crashing through the panes. There was a shattering of glass, and then as she thrust the police whistle to her lips, Slatern's arms caught her again, and the struggle commenced anew. But it was of only short duration.

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 glistening, slipped through the door-way, and 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-prisoner 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 Mintern—a renegade grafter 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."

Mona whirled. "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 women! 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 Mintern tenderly, 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.

