

# The Social Pirates :-

Plot by George Bronson Howard

Novelization by Hugh C. Weir :: Copyright Kalem Company

## Story No. 1—Little Monte Carlo

"I'm glad to get back, at that," said Monty Hartley to her chum, Mary Burnett.

The two girls were leaning over the rail of a steamer that was being warped into its dock by tugs. They had been having a vacation trip, and though that was over now, and they faced the necessity of replenishing the store of money, heavily drawn upon for the trip, they looked happy.

"See it," said Mary. "I was tired when we went away."

Mona laughed. These two girls, so well dressed, so fashionable in their appearance, had no visible means of support.

They had become embittered some time before by the experience of some close friends who had suffered at the hands of unscrupulous leeches of society, black-mailers and parasites.

They had therefore decided to conduct a campaign against this class of men and make them suffer, especially financially, in what the two girls considered a partial retribution for their misdeeds.

They had planned themselves to select for their victims only those whose disposable and contemptible actions had already marked them as belonging to the pack of black wolves of society, and in this way the two girls considered that they merely collected the bill of expense due them for conducting this crusade against such individuals, and the will to which they were obliged to resort were simply a minor detail in this process of collection.

A few minutes later they were ashore. For some reason they did not secure one of the first flights of taxis, and had to wait while another was summoned. And while they waited they strolled to the end of the pier, to look at the passing river traffic. Suddenly Mary clutched Mona's arm.

"Look at that girl, Mona!" she said. "What do you suppose is the matter with her? I'll swear she is trying to jump in!"

Mona looked and saw a young girl who was so distraught that she was not aware that anyone was watching her. With a quick leap Mona sprang toward her, and was just in time to assist her as the girl gathered up her determination and stepped out to drop into the water. Mary was not a moment behind her chum, and together they held her.

"Look here," said Mona, as the girl struggled to free herself. "There is no sense in that. There's a sense in that. There's nothing so bad that it cannot be mended."

In a moment the girl stopped struggling and stared dully at them.

"You don't know," she said. "There's nothing else for me. I've made up my mind—and now heaven knows if I'll get up my courage again."

"Perhaps you won't need to," said Mary. "Come on Mona—bring her along. I see a cab waiting for us."

The girl went with them unreluctantly, dully. In a few minutes they reached the furnished apartment they had taken before they left the city, and in a few minutes more they had the girl's story and her name—Stella Worth.

"You poor kid!" said Mona sympathetically. "In the chorus, were you? And someone introduced you to this Charles Holbrook? He said he'd marry her as soon as he could fix things up with his father? And you were foolish enough to believe him?"

It was a pathetic little story, conventional enough. Stella had been innocent, ignorant, in reality. She had believed Holbrook's promises. And then—the awakening. He had tired of her—a curt note had come one day in the mail, telling her that things had developed so that he could not see her again, and she had better make some arrangement for herself.

Her desperate appeals to him had gone unanswered. And now that the mischief was done there were plenty to warn Stella.

"Why—you silly child—I believe you're in love with him still!" said Mary.

"Oh, I am—if he'd only marry me!" wailed Stella.

Mona and Mary exchanged pitiful glances. And suddenly it seemed that Mona had an idea.

"You say he's rich, Stella?" she asked. "Ever and ever so rich?"

"Well—don't you know yet?" said Mona. "There may be a way to help you. You'll promise not to do anything silly—as you were going to when we saw you?"

"I'll promise," said Stella, tearfully. "You're awfully good to me!"

"Look here," said Mary, sharply, after Stella had gone. "We can't do a thing for that poor kid, and you know it! Why did you go and raise her hopes that way?"

"Well—because she had to be cheered up," said Mona. "And I'm not so certain we can't do anything for her, anyhow. I don't know yet, but I've got a sort of a plan. Look here!"

She lifted her skirts to her knees and executed a little dance.

"Do you think I could get a job in the chorus?" she asked.

"Anywhere?" said Mary. "But why?"

"I think I want to meet Mr. Charles Holbrook on his own ground," said Mona, vehemently. "I think look's comes our way. Mary—that's what I think! I think we'll enjoy collecting a little bill from Mr. Holbrook, just as much as we did our experience with old Hilda!"

"Oh!" said Mary. "I'm stupid, Mona! I do begin to see now, too! Not how we can do anything for Stella—but how we can punish Mr. Holbrook, anyhow!"

"You'll have to see something," said Mona. "Because I haven't got anything except what some of your racing friends would call a hunch. A hunch, you'll have to be the one to work out the details. You try to score up an idea while I go and see about my job. There's a new show opening at the Palace—that's where Stella was. I imagine it'll be a sort of heaven for chappies like this Holbrook, too."

"Yes, you'll have no trouble getting me. You've been had experience, haven't you? I forgot you used to be in the chorus before."

"Yes, I've had experience," said Mona, rather grimly. "The chorus is all right if you have independent means, as I have now. But it didn't seem to be intended, in my time, for girls who had to live on their salaries—and I didn't like the ways that were suggested for securing my income."

Stella sat out, she found that her life was not so bad as she had feared. At the stage door a hired young man waited for her, and she made her way to the stage, where applicants

for places in the chorus of the new show were being examined. A man sat at a table, with a book before him.

"Look all right in short skirts?" he asked.

Mona proved to him that she would. He entered her name and address—she gave false ones, naturally. Then her voice was tried, and in five minutes she was engaged and instructed to report for rehearsal next morning.

"And God help those who aren't quick," the producer told them. "We've got to put this show on in two weeks, and that means some work!"

Mona knew it and wasn't thankful. Yet she was glad, too, that the public performances would begin so soon. It meant that there would be less time to wait before she could begin the execution of her plan against Charles Holbrook, whom, as yet, she hadn't even seen.

For the next two weeks it was a tired Mona who came home, night after night—morning after morning, rather, since rehearsals often lasted into the small hours. She was not entirely free from annoyance during this period, but her utter weariness at the end of rehearsals protected her a good deal, and she managed to escape with nothing worse than a reputation among the hangers-on of the theater, among whom Holbrook did not appear, of being stuck-up of having too good an opinion of herself and her charms.

At last the time came for the opening performance. Mona's beauty and her real cleverness had earned her a front row position—she was, indeed, one of a group that was made particularly prominent in some of the big concerted numbers. This served her purpose very well, and it was certain that she was conspicuous enough to attract Holbrook's attention. She had made Stella show her a photograph of him, and so was able to recognize him, sitting in a stage box on the opening night. She made eyes at him deliberately once or twice, and had the satisfaction of knowing that she had attracted his attention.

He let her along that first night. But on the second evening he came behind the scenes between the acts—the management being glad to extend that privilege to certain rich men—and was introduced to her. And later he was waiting for her when she emerged from the stage door.

"Hello, bright eyes!" he said. "How about a little to eat?"

"Oh, no, thanks!" she said. "But—if you'd like to walk home with me—I'm rather nervous in the street at night."

He laughed delightedly and fell into step beside her. Here was something new, he thought—a real chorus girl who wasn't hungry all the time.

At a boarding house she stopped. "I live here," said Mona. "Thanks for seeing me home!"

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"Can't I come in?"

"Oh, no!" she said, pretending to be shocked. "Not tonight!"

He laughed, well satisfied, as she hurried in. He did not know that she only waited in the vestibule until he was out of sight.

For several nights Mona let Holbrook walk "home" with her, but she declined all invitations, and she would never yield to his requests to permit him to enter the house when she did. As she had been certain would be the case, the difficulty he was experiencing proved simply an added attraction. When he found she would not drop into his hand, like a ripe apple, he redoubled his efforts to win her.

"Oh, he's getting very enthusiastic!" Mona told Mary. "How about your plan? Have you really got one?"

"I certainly have!" said Mary. "Look here! I've been making a little bit of progress."

And she took Mona into their spare room where several packing boxes had been placed. Mona cried out in enthusiastic approval at what they revealed. A roulette wheel—all the other paraphernalia of gambling.

"We can turn this apartment into a perfect model of a gambling house at an hour's notice!" said Mary. "I think that is going to be the proper way to hook your little friend."

"Well—he's awfully careful—he doesn't care for gambling himself," said Mona. "He's told me so."

"You like it, though, don't you?" "Ah—I see! Yes—I'm crazy about it! Mary, I believe you're a genius!"

"Don't be too sure—there's a wise proverb about not counting your chickens before they're hatched, my dear. I haven't worked out the details at all yet—I thought we'd better not, in a case like this, on the spur of the moment."

"I think so, too. Well—there are a few things we can decide. Suppose you turn up at Curate's on New Year's eve. I think he may persuade me to have supper there with him that night."

And, to his delight, Mona did yield to Holbrook's pleading to that extent. She had foreseen that he would make a special point of it on that night, the great occasion of the whole year for those who flock, like moths, about the white lights of the theatrical district.

"Well—just for this once," she conceded at last.

"You're a queer kid," he said. "Sometimes I think you're wise—and then again I'm not sure I'm not all wrong about you."

"I'm wise enough, Charles boy," she told him, meaningly. "Maybe I ought to want to get along."

"Well, I'm thankful for small favors," he said.

So the beginning of the plot was laid. The two girls had a table in Curate's, and it was not long before Mary, stunningly dressed, passed their table.

"Hello, Betty!" she said, using Mona's assumed name. "I haven't seen you in an age."

"My friend, Mr. Holbrook, Miss Dean," said Mona. "Aren't you going, are you?"

"This is getting slow," said Mary. "I'm off for some real fun. Little Monte Carlo for mine."

A spasm of envy distorted Mona's features.

"I wish I could go, too!" she said. "I don't know how long it is since I had money enough to watch the little ball rolling with some of my money backing it!"

"Come on—be a sport," said Mary. "Bring your friend along."

"No use—I can't afford it," said Mona. "Sure you can," said Holbrook. "I'll stake you."

"That's the way to talk," said Mary. "There you are, Betty! You've got a live one in low tonight."

Holbrook hung eagerly on her answer. He was sure that now, by a lucky chance, he had come upon Mona's weakness.

"Well—I don't know!" said Mona, doubtfully, but making it seem that she was greatly tempted.

"We'll be along," said Holbrook. "You look for us in about an hour, Miss Dean. I'll guarantee to persuade her."

"All right—I'll leave her to you," said Mary.

And at last, though reluctantly, Mona consented.

"I'll go and look on," she said. "But I won't be going to let you stake me! I wouldn't be under obligations to you or any other man!"

"Oh, don't talk foolishness!" said he. "I'd be tickled to death to give you a chance to have some fun! You know I'm willing to do anything I can for you at any time you give the word!"

When the hour was up she led him to the apartment she shared with Mary—which had been transformed into "Little Monte Carlo."

Mona herself scarcely knew the apartment. So skillfully had it been transformed into the semblance of one of the cozy and luxurious gambling dens that cater to the patronage of rich and fashionable people, and especially women, that it amazed her. A suave and smiling man came forward to welcome them, and pretended that he knew Mona well, though she had never laid eyes on him before.

He was the "proprietor," Mona had to admit Mary's cleverness.

There were several other super-a-water, two or three croppers and dealers, and a number of players, well dressed people, who paid no attention to the newcomers.

"Awful glad to see you, Betty," said Mary, coming up to them. "But I was sure you'd persuade her, Mr. Holbrook!"

"He didn't—altogether. I'm not going to play," said Mona.

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