

# The Social Pirates :-

Plot by George Bronson Howard  
Novelization by Hugh C. Weir :: Copyright Kalem Company

## No. 13—In the Service of the State

"Mary," said Mona Hartly, in a low tone, to her chum, Mary Burnett, "don't look over at once. But there is a man across the street who will be following us for ten minutes. I've seen him before, but I can't place him."

Mary laughed. She leaned close to Mona. "I'll look in a minute," she said. "And then: 'I know him! His name is Jones—he's a United States secret service man.'"

"Well," said Mona, flatly. "Mary—what has a secret service man to do with us?"

"That's the secret of it, I suppose!" said Mary. "At any rate, we're likely to find out. You know, Mona—there are people who would say that our way of getting along was very far from being what it should be."

"You're right, of course," said Mona. "I'm nervous, I think—that's all!"

"Well, get over it! He's coming over, and he's going to speak to us. I'm sure! Don't act as if you thought there was anything odd—"

The next moment, indeed, Jones was beside them, hat in hand, beaming.

"Miss Hartley, Miss Burnett!" said Jones. "You don't know how glad I am to see you! I have not seen anything of you—"

"We must be getting old, Mona," said Mary, with a laugh. "If it takes an effort to recognize us—"

"You're unkind," said Jones, reproachfully. Then, all at once his manner changed. "Seriously," said "I am extremely anxious to have a talk with you. This is a matter of the gravest importance, in which, I believe, you, and you only, can help me. I wonder if you would come in here with me—and have some tea, perhaps, while we talk?"

And so, a few moments later, they were sitting with him at a secluded table. They gave their order; he waited until the tea things had been brought, and then he leaned toward them, speaking in a low, confidential tone.

"It's my business, as you must know," he said, "to be aware of a good many things. I understand, I know that you have no incomes—that the comfort in which you live you must supply yourselves. It will be simpler if you will believe that I could, if I chose, give you a very complete summary of everything that you have done for a good many months!"

"I think you had better come to the point, Mr. Jones," said Mary.

"I agree!" said Jones. "I will be frank, then. You have been able more than once to get the best of men who have fancied themselves extremely clever. I want you to undertake the task once more—and this time, if you succeed, you will place me under the heaviest of obligations—and you will, what is far more important, do a great service to the United States—a service so important that it would be impossible to over-estimate it!"

"This country, as you must know," he said, "depends for its security against attack, in a very large measure, upon its coast defenses. To put the matter briefly, a secret that is vital seems about to fall into the hands of a foreign power—and that foreign power, moreover, which is most likely to use its knowledge against us!"

"Oh!" said Mona. "But how could we help—?"

"What has happened is this," said Jones. "A man named Hawkins, let us say, was in a position to make tracings of certain drawings—plans, and so on. He was trusted—he betrayed his trust. He made the tracings; he has sold them to a man whom I shall call Mr. X. Mr. X occupies a position of responsibility. It would be impossible to bring a charge against him without proof of the most definite sort. I am sure of my facts—but I cannot prove them. I know that X is a spy of the most dangerous sort, but I am almost alone in my knowledge."

"Where is he?" asked Mary.

"I am telling you everything," said Jones. "He will be on his way to Halifax within a few hours. He will sail from there on a liner that makes a call at Rotterdam. I am certain of this—and that the plans will be with him. Now—I want you to sail on the same steamer, as I shall do myself. I want you to help me recover those plans."

"Let's do it," said Mary. "We'd be doing something for our country, Mona! Wouldn't that be worth while?"

"I thought you would feel so!" said Jones, triumphantly. "But there will be a more substantial return than that of knowing that you have done a patriotic act. I will promise you that the reward will be adequate—there is a large contingent fund, for which no accounting need be made."

"Not!" said Mona, with decision. "I'd never accept pay."

"Nor!" echoed Mary. "Our expenses—but no more. We'll go gladly, on those terms, Mr. Jones."

"That shall be as you choose, of course," he said. "Can you start tonight? You had better travel separately, and on the steamer it would be well if you failed, or to strike up the customary ocean acquaintance-ship—if you let it appear that you disliked one another. I shall be on board but I will know neither of you officially."

The girls nodded understandingly.

"You want to expose Mr. X, don't you?" said Mary. "Isn't it true that he has such a position that he is very fully trusted?"

"Yes. My warnings are laughed at. There is no reason why he should not execute this mission, return, and continue his work. He has covered his tracks so cleverly that he appears to be entirely immune from suspicion. But if I can prove that he has those papers—and, of course, get them from him—his usefulness as a spy will be at an end, in this country at least. And I can tell you that I will regard that as the best piece of work I have ever done."

"You can count on us," said Mona. "I only hope we will really be able to help! Come, Mary—if we're going to start on such short notice we must hurry home. It takes time to pack."

It was a matter of moments only to complete the few arrangements still to be made. Jones furnished them with tickets; he had reserved several state rooms on the liner, he explained. "I try to be prepared for emergen-

cies," he said. "I knew I would need help—I didn't know at all who would be with me. But there will be no delay. I shall not see you again until we meet as entire strangers."

"Does Mr. X know you?" asked Mary.

"I think not," said Jones with a good deal of satisfaction. "His people are very fond of laughing at our secret service—but we manage to turn a trick ourselves once in a while."

Even in the bustle of sailing it was not difficult for the two girls to make a guess as to which of the passengers was Mr. X. They both fastened upon a man who was booked as Mr. Armstrong. He appeared to be bored, instead of excited, by the incidents of departure. His manner indicated that it was all an old story to him. And the deference that was paid to him by the office of the distracted purser, revealed his importance.

Mary, without any real plan in her mind as yet, still determined to waste no time. She was really well versed in the routine of travel, but from the moment she went on board she played the part of a helpless traveler, unaccustomed to the most ordinary things of shipboard life. She haunted the office of the distracted purser, and he seemed to be entirely willing to give up his time to her. He answered her questions, promised to see to her chair, her seat at table, all the other things.

"You're so good to me, Mr. Shelley!" she told him, in wide-eyed innocence. "I must be a frightful nuisance!"

"Nuisance—not a bit of it, Miss Burnett!" he assured her, gallantly. "I know how strange it must seem the first time you cross. Just you leave everything to me—I'll see that you have such a comfortable trip that you'll never cross on any other boat. You'll understand, won't you, if I have to run away and leave you constantly? There are all sorts of things that I have to attend to—people who don't like their cabins, and cranks of all sorts."

"Of course—you mustn't let me bother you!"

"You could never do that! Once we're off I'll have much more time—you must let me show you the ship then!"

Jones, as a secret service man naturally would be, was an amused witness of Mary's dealings with the purser. And that night, when they were at sea, he contrived an opportunity to see the two girls.

"I've found out a few things," he said. "Our man, just as I expected, has taken the state cabin, as they call it—a regular suite, really—two state-rooms, brass bed, private bath—all the sort of luxury. No wonder—his Government has to pay! He's planning to keep to himself pretty well, we'll find."

"A man traveling with such dangerous baggage would, I fancy," said Mona.

"Right! I'm almost sure he has no suspicion that he has been followed. He looked over all the passengers pretty carefully—he was one of the first aboard, you know. I made myself conspicuous as I could, you noticed?"

"You certainly did!" said Mary, with a laugh. "While I was trying to find out things from the purser you were simply brutal in your interruptions! I couldn't have the man to myself for five minutes. He's thoroughly convinced that you're a very important newspaper correspondent, and he's going to see that you give a good report of the line!"

"I saw what you were doing!" laughed Jones. "Well, you simply anticipated my suggestion. It's going to be very important for one of you to be on good terms with the purser. I think he'd do a good deal for me, but I won't take chances by asking too much. He didn't offer to show you the state suite, did he?"

"No," said Mary, regretfully. "I never thought to ask!"

"I managed that," said Jones, complacently. "He showed me over the whole ship. Awful bore it was, too—I crossed in her half a dozen times before he got his berth, and I imagine I know things about her he hasn't even suspected yet! But I wanted a look at Mr. X's cabin—and I got it. There's a small safe in there—and Shelly explained to me that he and the passenger occupying the suite are the only ones who have the combination. It's changed for every voyage—and even the captain doesn't know it!"

"He'll keep his papers there, of course?" said Mona.

"We don't have to worry so much about where he's hidden those valuable papers. Unless all signs fail we know that what we've got to do is to get that safe opened, by one of the two men who can do it. If he'd turned his stuff over to the purser for safe keeping I'd be a lot more dubious—because a purser's strong room is the real thing. And Shelly is rather stupid—and very faithful and conscientious. I couldn't have done anything with him."

"Just what do you expect to do as it is?" asked Mona.

"One of you—and Miss Mary has started, so that she'd better be the one—will have to make friends with Shelly. The other will have to see if there's a human side to X. There must be, you know—he must be susceptible in some way."

"I don't like his looks," said Mona. "And I doubt very much whether he'll see anything in me."

"You'll have to try," said Mary.

"Oh, I'll do that," said Mona.

Mona lost no time in attempting to arouse the interest of the mysterious Mr. X. It seemed to be well understood on board that Armstrong was not his real name; that he was some important, and probably, official personage, who chose to travel under an assumed name. He excited a good deal of curiosity, but there was no attempt to intrude upon his evident desire to be alone.

On an American ship it might have been different. But on this vessel were passengers much more accustomed to the peculiar ways of an official caste. Armstrong's privacy was rather pointedly respected. He took no part in the common life of the ship. He was never in the smoking room; the chance games of cards, when tables were made up, on the spur of the moment for bridge or poker, never claimed him. He seemed to see no fun in throwing rope quoits at a stick, and he passed the devotees

of shuffleboard with a tolerant smile. He made no friends at meals, for he was careful to take his meals always at the table; and this, when he did not eat in the solitary state of his own state rooms.

So Mona saw herself deprived of the aid of all the pleasant cultivators of acquaintanceship that so abound on a ship. On the ocean the conversations are relaxed; introduction are dispensed with more often than not. But though plenty of the men among the passengers found excuse for talking with her, for joining in her walks about the wind-swept decks, Mr. X. held aloof. If he noticed her at all he gave no sign, and Mona, though she might have managed it skilfully enough, was afraid to resort to the crude stratagem of boldly beginning the acquaintance herself.

She did as much as she thought was safe. One day, when she saw that he was coming toward her, she stood at the rail, peering out over the waves. Calculating her time to a nicety, she dropped the case that contained her marine glasses. They fell at the feet of the self-styled Armstrong; in a moment, she was in hand, he was bowing before her.

"Permit me," he said, handing her the case.

"Oh, thank you, so much!" said Mona prettily confused. "What a clumsy thing to do! I'm so afraid they're broken—"

Gravely he took the case from her, drew out the glasses, and inspected them.

"You are fortunate," he said. "They are quite unimpaired. I congratulate you!"

He restored them to her then, and she had, perforce, to look through them at a distant gull. And when she turned, expecting to find him at her side, he had gone. She bit her lip; a certain chagrin at her failure to arouse his interest, that was wholly personal, sent the color into her cheeks. It was a feeling distinct from her disgust at the effect of his action upon the more important phase of her work, but it promised to rankle. It was a long time since any man whom Mona had deigned to notice had turned away from her. She turned to go back to her chair, and saw X. regarding her, speculatively, faintly amused, from a spot a little distance away.

"Beast!" she said to herself. "He's perfectly sure I dropped those glasses intentionally—for him to pick up! I wonder—am I getting clumsy, or is he preternaturally wise and experienced? He looks like the sort of man that women are supposed to find irresistible!"

But though Mona's determination to succeed was only sharpened by this incident, she was obliged to admit to herself, after a few more days, that she had met a man at last who was entirely impervious to her charms.

The two girls had followed the suggestion of Jones; they contrived without resorting to anything obvious, to give the ship the impression that they disliked one another. Like all the women on board, they spoke, but each was cold and distant. It seemed that they were of opposite and instinctively antagonistic types.

Meanwhile, though Mona had failed in her part of the undertaking, Mary's triumph was complete. Her subjugation of the purser was the talk of the ship. The two took long walks about the decks; heads nodded as they passed, and there were many smiles and whispers about the budding romance. Shelley found Mary captivating; it was difficult for her to keep his ardor within bounds at all. He sighed, talked of his wretched work, that almost forbade him to marry; confided to her that he intended as soon as he could, to find work ashore.

"This sort of thing is all very well for a time," he told her. "But when a chap begins to think of marrying and settling down—why, the sea's no place for him, then!"

"Oh—oh!" said Mary, innocently. "Why, when I first came aboard, you told me that you loved your work, Mr. Shelley!"

"Oh, well—one says lots of things one finds one was mistaken about, when one has time to think!" he said fatuously.

Shelley was far gone, indeed; there could be no doubt about that. And Jones, taking note of everything, was well satisfied, on the whole. He knew that Mona had failed, but he had never built very strong hopes upon the outcome of her attempt to penetrate the shell of Mr. X. He knew very well that in the spy he was opposed by an antagonist who would require the very best efforts of any who opposed him. And his determination to recover the plans was not one whit daunted by the increasing darkness of the outlook.

The day before the steamer was to dock saw the three conspirators again in consultation.

"By Jove—it looks pretty bad!" said Jones. "Now, if we were on an American liner, going into New York, I'd have no difficulty! I'd have that safe opened in a jiffy on the plea that she was a smuggler—and get the chance to search things!"

Mary started.

"Wait a minute!" she said, suddenly. "I believe I've got an idea—it's terribly risky—but, if there was any real trouble, you could get us all out of it, sooner or later, couldn't you?"

"As soon as I could reach the nearest American minister, with my credentials," said Jones. "But that sort of thing is frowned on—the State department doesn't want to have to get its agents out of trouble very often."

"Oh, I don't really believe it would come to that," said Mary. "I was just thinking it would be well to have an anchor to windward that's all. When I've told you the whole idea you'll see why."

"Go ahead—don't keep us in suspense," said Mona. She spoke rather sharply; she was still irritated and disturbed by her failure. It had touched her pride—and it was because she realized that that she was angry.

"There'll be festivities of some sort tonight," said Mary. "Mr. Shelley is full of the plans. A quite wonderful dinner—the captain's dinner, you know. And music afterward, and a chance to dance, perhaps. All the women are to bring out their very prettiest gowns—we're to be very stunning!"

"Well!" said Jones.

"Listen!" said Mary. And she unfolded her plan. They listened in the

growing excitement, but it was not long before Mona clapped her hands softly.

"Oh, that's splendid, Mary!" she laughed.

"Well—will it work?" Mary asked Jones, when she had finished.

"I believe it will!" he said, drawing a long breath. "My hat is off to you—I believe you've hit upon the way out of our difficulties! Win or lose—you've given us the gambler's chance, that all we have a right to expect! And if we win—oh, it's worth trying, a thousand times!"

"You see the risk don't you?" said Mary. "There's no use letting our selves think that it will be easy. We've got to work together—and yet not let a soul on board suspect that we're doing anything of the sort."

"Oh, of course," said Mona. "How lucky that we arranged to stay apart through the voyage as we did! I couldn't see just why that was necessary when we arranged it—and yet, if we had not, there would have been no chance even to try this plan of yours, Mary."

"Well—to work then!" said Mary. "You both understand? You won't be at the dinner, Mr. Jones?"

"I'm dreadfully sorry," he said, in mock distress. "But I feel one of my terrible headaches coming on, and I'll have to see the ship's surgeon and ask him to get me a little relief—and incidentally, establish a bit of evidence that may come in handy later on!"

"It's too bad you have to miss all the fun," said Mona, mockingly.

"I think I'll be able to bear up," he said, with a grin. "I rather suspect I'll be cured—tonight! And I'll eat a big lunch to make up for the dinner I shall have to miss. On second thought, I'll wait until after lunch before I see the doctor!"

Mona and Mary were both radiant, for when they appeared at the captain's dinner. Both were superbly dressed; those who knew of the coolness between them whispered to one another that each had evidently determined to outshine the other.

It would have been hard to say which of them had succeeded. Indeed, honors between them appeared at first glance, to be even. But it was not long before all eyes were drawn to a superb necklace of diamonds that Mona wore. It dimmed the luster of every other jewel, although several of the other women wore ornaments of unusual brilliancy and beauty. And it was impossible for any one who could not take the necklace and examine it closely to see that it consisted, not of diamonds, but of imitation stones so cleverly wrought that any but an expert eye must have been deceived.

Mary started with well feigned jealousy when she saw the stones. She turned to the purser, and, intending as it seemed, that only he should hear her, but speaking loudly enough for the others at the table to catch her meaning, said:

"Don't you think that such a display of jewels is very bad taste? A few simple rings—but for a young girl to wear such a string of huge stones as that! Well, I was brought up not to believe in so much display!"

"I say—it is rather startling!" admitted the purser. "Still I suppose she likes to show them off! It isn't everyone who can wear such a for-

ture as that around her neck!"

"Perhaps everyone doesn't want to," said Mary, icily.

And her eyes went back to the jewels, time and again, throughout the dinner, and later, when dancing began. The great main saloon had enclosed a part of the deck, too, for those who wanted the air. And in the brilliant confusion of the scene no one saw Mona stealthily appropriate a tiara from one dancer; a jeweled ornament of another sort from another.

"Here!" said Mona. She had come straight from the dancing floor; her booty wrapped in a handkerchief; she handed it to Jones, who was waiting for her in the empty and deserted corridor near the state room in which he was supposed to be trying to find relief from his headache in sleep.

"Good girl!" said Jones, taking it eagerly. "That's the part that has worried me most! I was afraid you would be caught in the act—and we would have had a frightfully difficult time in explaining that!"

"I was frightened myself," said Mona. "But I had to make up in some fashion for the way I failed with Mr. X."

"Hurry back—you mustn't risk any delay," said Jones. "I'll be waiting anxiously."

As Mona went back she unfastened her necklace and held it in her hand. Her brief absence had not been noticed; she found a partner waiting eagerly for her, and was swept into the maze of dancers at once. As she passed, Mary, dancing with the purser, she nodded slightly, and a moment later, Mary, as if by accident, brushed against her. In the momentary contact Mona slipped her necklace into Mary's corsage.

And five minutes later, as she passed a mirror, she screamed suddenly.

Instantly every woman in the room felt for her own jewelry, and two more added their outcry to Mona's.

"Ladies—be calm!" said the captain. He had stopped the music; he spoke quietly, but sternly. "Rest assured that it is impossible for you to lose your property on this ship. The thief cannot get away. I shall ask everyone present to submit to a search—suspecting no one, but thus giving the innocent a certain way to prove their innocence!"

No one objected; to do so would have seemed like a confession of guilt. Men and women divided to submit to the search. And Mona's necklace was found when Mary's turn came!

"There—there's some horrible mistake!" gasped Mary. "I never took it! How can anyone suspect me of such a thing?"

She burst into hysterical sobbing. Shelley indignantly took her part; some one, he insisted, must have played a trick on Mary. But the captain brushed aside their protests; he spoke sternly and with the weight of authority, to the purser.

"I cannot go behind the evidence!" he said, gravely. "The young woman must be confined in her cabin until we land; it will then be a matter for the attention of the shore police."

"This is my necklace—but where are the other jewels that were taken?" asked Mona. She was following the captain and Shelley, who were escorting Mary to her cabin.

And then, in the corridor, they encountered Jones, who appeared, coatless, and showing evidence of having been asleep. He demanded an explanation of the odd scene from Shelley. And when he had it he looked grave.

"Perhaps I may be able to throw some light on this terrible affair, captain," he said. "I think you have made a terrible mistake!"

"I cannot admit that, Mr. Jones!" said the captain. "But I shall be glad to hear what you have to tell."

"It will not take long, captain. As you know, I was unable to attend the dinner on account of a severe headache—which is only just beginning to yield to the doctor's medicine. During the evening I lay in my berth, with my door open, and my light out. I saw Mr. Armstrong, as he calls himself, go into his room—first looking about to make sure that he was not observed. This aroused my curiosity and I looked in upon him."

"I thought, I suppose, that my room was empty. I saw him take some jewels—a tiara and some other ornaments—from his pocket and place them in his safe!"

"I knew it!" cried Mary, hysterically. "He must have placed that necklace on me to throw suspicion against me!"

"That is a very serious charge," said the captain.

"You can prove its truth by having the safe opened—the purser, here, has the combination, I understand," said Jones. "Captain, suppose you stay here with Miss Burnett. Let Mr. Shelley and Miss Hartley, one of the victims, examine the safe. I will undertake to keep Mr. Armstrong away."

The captain hesitated, but yielded, in the end. And now Jones covertly returned the jewels to Mona, and held them as she went with the purser to the room of Mr. X. He knelt by the safe; just as she heard the tumbled fall at the opening, Mona cried out:

"Someone is coming—Mr. Armstrong, I'm afraid!"

Shelley rushed to the door, and peered out. In a moment Mona

reached the safe, drew out a package of papers and threw in the jewels. And when the purser came back only the jewels were in the safe! His delight knew no bounds. He rushed off at once to carry the good news to Mary. And Mona, at Jones's door, knocked. At once he reached out his hand and took the plans—and she heard the striking of a match. A minute would be enough to burn the drawings that, in the hands of a hostile power, might have worked incalculable injury to the United States!

The captain was profuse in his apologies to Mary. And she assailed Mr. X., for whom a steward had been sent, with the uttermost bitterness.

"This is—madness!" he burst out angrily. "To accuse me of a crime—of a vulgar theft! You say the jewels were placed in my safe! I will disprove that by opening it before your eyes!"

"It has been opened already, sir," said the captain. "The jewels were found!"

"By whom?" asked Mr. X., his face pale.

"By my purser, sir—and by this lady, one of your intended victims!"

And then, as he looked at Mona, a look of understanding came into the spy's eye. There was hatred in his eyes, too—but he knew that he was powerless. To tell the truth would be to expose himself anew.

"Unless the victims of your intended crime insist, I shall not cause your arrest," said the captain. The jewels have been restored—I shall ask these ladies to spare my ship a scandal!"

And urged by Mary, who magnanimously forgave the suffering he had caused her, Mona and the others allowed themselves to be persuaded not to press the charge against Mr. X.!

While exerting itself to meet an imperative order from France at the beginning of the Franco-Prussian war, a factory at Lion, N. Y., made 1,200 complete military rifles in a single day, besides transforming 300 muzzle-loaders into breech-loaders.

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The manufacturers have such confidence in Bon-Opto that they guarantee it will strengthen the eyesight 50 per cent in one week's time in many instances, or they will refund the money. Since the above article has been published, the demand for Bon-Opto has been so great that the Sherman & McCoskey Drug Company alone in Omaha has been kept busy filling orders for it.

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