



HENRY DUNBAR

MARY ELIZABETH
BRADDON

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THE STORY OF AN OUTCAST

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THE FLOATING PRESS

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DEDICATION

THIS STORY IS INSCRIBED TO
JOHN BALDWIN BUCKSTONE, ESQ.
IN SINCERE ADMIRATION OF
HIS GENIUS AS A DRAMATIC AUTHOR
AND POPULAR ACTOR.

Chapter I - After Office Hours in the House of Dunbar, Dunbar, and Balderby

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The house of Dunbar, Dunbar, and Balderby, East India bankers, was one of the richest firms in the city of London—so rich that it would be quite in vain to endeavour to describe the amount of its wealth. It was something fabulous, people said. The offices were situated in a dingy and narrow thoroughfare leading out of King William Street, and were certainly no great things to look at; but the cellars below their offices—wonderful cellars, that stretched far away underneath the church of St. Gundolph, and were only separated by party-walls from the vaults in which the dead lay buried—were popularly supposed to be filled with hogsheads of sovereigns, bars of bullion built up in stacks like so much firewood, and impregnable iron safes crammed to overflowing with bank bills and railway shares, government securities, family jewels, and a hundred other trifles of that kind, every one of which was worth a poor man's fortune.

The firm of Dunbar had been established very soon after the English first grew powerful in India. It was one of the oldest firms in the City; and the names of Dunbar and Dunbar, painted upon the door-posts, and engraved upon shining brass plates on the mahogany doors, had never been expunged or altered: though time and death had done their work of change amongst the owners of that name.

The last heads of the firm had been two brothers, Hugh and Percival Dunbar; and Percival, the younger of these brothers, had lately died at eighty years of age, leaving his only son, Henry Dunbar, sole inheritor of his enormous wealth.

That wealth consisted of a splendid estate in Warwickshire; another estate, scarcely less splendid, in Yorkshire; a noble mansion in Portland Place; and three-fourths of the bank. The junior partner, Mr. Balderby, a good-tempered, middle-aged man, with a large family of daughters, and a handsome red-brick mansion on Clapham Common, had never possessed more than a fourth share in the business. The three other shares had been divided between the two brothers, and had lapsed entirely into the hands of Percival upon the death of Hugh.

On the evening of the 15th of August, 1850, three men sat together in one of the shady offices at the back of the banking-house in St. Gundolph Lane.

These three men were Mr. Balderby, a confidential cashier called Clement Austin, and an old clerk, a man of about sixty-five years of age, who had been a faithful servant of the firm ever since his boyhood.

This man's name was Sampson Wilmot.

He was old, but he looked much older than he was. His hair was white, and hung in long thin locks upon the collar of his shabby bottle-green great coat. He wore a great coat, although it was the height of summer, and most people found the weather insupportably hot. His face was wizen and wrinkled, his faded blue eyes dim and weak-looking. He was feeble, and his hands were tremulous with a perpetual nervous motion. Already he had been

stricken twice with paralysis, and he knew that whenever the third stroke came it must be fatal.

He was not very much afraid of death, however; for his life had been a joyless one, a monotonous existence of perpetual toil, unrelieved by any home joys or social pleasures. He was not a bad man, for he was honest, conscientious, industrious, and persevering.

He lived in a humble lodging, in a narrow court near the bank, and went twice every Sunday to the church of St. Gundolph.

When he died he hoped to be buried beneath the flagstones of that City church, and to lie cheek by jowl with the gold in the cellars of the bank.

The three men were assembled in this gloomy private room after office hours, on a sultry August evening, in order to consult together upon rather an important subject, namely, the reception of Henry Dunbar, the new head of the firm.

This Henry Dunbar had been absent from England for five-and-thirty years, and no living creature now employed in the bank, except Sampson Wilmot, had ever set eyes upon him.

He had sailed for Calcutta five-and-thirty years before, and had ever since been employed in the offices of the Indian branch of the bank; first as clerk, afterwards as chief and manager. He had been sent to India because of a great error which he had committed in his early youth.

He had been guilty of forgery. He, or rather an accomplice employed by him, had forged the acceptance of a young nobleman,

a brother officer of Henry Dunbar's, and had circulated forged bills of accommodation to the amount of three thousand pounds.

These bills were taken up and duly honoured by the heads of the firm. Percival Dunbar gladly paid three thousand pounds as the price of his son's honour. That which would have been called a crime in a poorer man was only considered an error in the dashing young cornet of dragoons, who had lost money upon the turf, and was fain to forge his friend's signature rather than become a defaulter.

His accomplice, the man who had actually manufactured the fictitious signatures, was the younger brother of Sampson Wilmot, who had been a few months prior to that time engaged as messenger in the banking-house—a young fellow of nineteen, little better than a lad; a reckless boy, easily influenced by the dashing soldier who had need of his services.

The bill-broker who discounted the bills speedily discovered their fraudulent nature; but he knew that the money was safe.

Lord Adolphus Vanlorme was a customer of the house of Dunbar and Dunbar; the bill-brokers knew that *his* acceptance was a forgery; but they knew also that the signature of the drawer, Henry Dunbar, was genuine.

Messrs. Dunbar and Dunbar would not care to see the heir of their house in a criminal dock.

There had been no hitch, therefore, no scandal, no prosecution. The bills were duly honoured; but the dashing young officer was compelled to sell his commission, and begin life afresh as a junior clerk in the Calcutta banking-house.

This was a terrible mortification to the high-spirited young man.

The three men assembled in the quiet room behind the bank on this oppressive August evening were talking together of that old story.

"I never saw Henry Dunbar," Mr. Balderby said; "for, as you know, Wilmot, I didn't come into the firm till ten years after he sailed for India; but I've heard the story hinted at amongst the clerks in the days when I was only a clerk myself."

"I don't suppose you ever heard the rights of it, sir," Sampson Wilmot answered, fumbling nervously with an old horn snuff-box and a red cotton handkerchief, "and I doubt if any one knows the rights of that story except me, and I can remember it as well as if it all happened yesterday—ay, that I can—better than I remember many things that really did happen yesterday."

"Let's hear the story from you, then, Sampson," Mr. Balderby said. "As Henry Dunbar is coming home in a few days, we may as well know the real truth. We shall better understand what sort of a man our new chief is."

"To be sure, sir, to be sure," returned the old clerk. "It's five-and-thirty years ago,—five-and-thirty years ago this month, since it all happened. If I hadn't good cause to remember the date because of my own troubles, I should remember it for another reason, for it was the Waterloo year, and city people had been losing and making money like wildfire. It was in the year '15, sir, and our house had done wonders on 'Change. Mr. Henry Dunbar was a very handsome young man in those days—very handsome, very aristocratic-looking, rather haughty in his manners to strangers, but affable and free-spoken to those who happened to take his fancy. He was very extravagant in all his ways; generous and open-handed with money; but passionate and self-willed. It's scarcely

strange he should have been so, for he was an only child; he had neither brother nor sister to interfere with him; and his uncle Hugh, who was then close upon fifty, was a confirmed bachelor,—so Henry considered himself heir to an enormous fortune."

"And he began his career by squandering every farthing he could get, I suppose?" said Mr. Balderby.

"He did, sir. His father was very liberal to him; but give him what he would, Mr. Percival Dunbar could never give his son enough to keep him free of gambling debts and losses on the turf. Mr. Henry's regiment was quartered at Knightsbridge, and the young man was very often at this office, in and out, in and out, sometimes twice and three times a week; and I expect that every time he came, he came to get money, or to ask for it. It was in coming here he met my brother, who was a handsome lad—ay, as handsome and as gentlemanly a lad as the young cornet himself; for poor Joseph—that's my brother, gentlemen—had been educated a bit above his station, being my mother's favourite son, and fifteen years younger than me. Mr. Henry took a great deal of notice of Joseph, and used to talk to him while he was waiting about to see his father or his uncle. At last he asked the lad one day if he'd like to leave the bank, and go and live with him as a sort of confidential servant and amanuensis, to write his letters, and all that sort of thing. 'I shan't treat you altogether as a servant, you know, Joseph,' he said, 'but I shall make quite a companion of you, and you'll go about with me wherever I go. You'll find my quarters a great deal pleasanter than this musty old banking-house, I can tell you.' Joseph accepted this offer, in spite of everything my poor mother and I could say to him. He went to live with the cornet in the January of the year in which the fabricated bills were presented at our counter."

"And when were the bills presented?"

"Not till the following August, sir. It seems that Mr. Henry had lost five or six thousand pounds on the Derby. He got what he could out of his father towards paying his losses, but he could not get more than three thousand pounds; so then he went to Joseph in an awful state of mind, declaring that he should be able to get the money in a month or so from his father, and that if he could do anything just to preserve his credit for the time, and meet the claims of the vulgar City betting fellows who were pressing him, he should be able to make all square afterwards. Then, little by little, it came out that he wanted my brother, who had a wonderful knack of imitating any body's handwriting, to forge the acceptance of Lord Vanlorme. 'I shall get the bills back into my own hands before they fall due, Joe,' he said; 'it's only a little dodge to keep matters sweet for the time being.' Well, gentlemen, the poor foolish boy was very fond of his master, and he consented to do this wicked thing."

"Do you believe this to be the first time your brother ever Committed forgery?"

"I do, Mr. Balderby. Remember he was only a lad, and I dare say he thought it a fine thing to oblige his generous-hearted young master. I've seen him many a time imitate the signature of this firm, and other signatures, upon a half-sheet of letter-paper, for the mere fun of the thing: but I don't believe my brother Joseph ever did a dishonest action in his life until he forged those bills. He hadn't need have done so, for he was only eighteen at the time."

"Young enough, young enough!" murmured Mr. Balderby, compassionately.

"Ay, sir, very young to be ruined for life. That one error, that one wicked act, was his ruin; for though no steps were taken against him, he lost his character, and never held his head up in an honest situation again. He went from bad to worse, and

three years after Mr. Henry sailed for India, my brother, Joseph Wilmot, was convicted, with two or three others, upon a charge of manufacturing forged Bank of England notes, and was transported for life."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Balderby; "a sad story,—a very sad story. I have heard something of it before, but never the whole truth. Your brother is dead, I suppose."

"I have every reason to believe so, sir," answered the old clerk, producing a red cotton handkerchief and wiping away a couple of tears that were slowly trickling down his poor faded cheeks. "For the first few years of his time, he wrote now and then, complaining bitterly of his fate; but for five-and-twenty years I've never had a line from him. I can't doubt that he's dead. Poor Joseph!—poor boy!—poor boy! The misery of all this killed my mother. Mr. Henry Dunbar committed a great sin when he tempted that lad to wrong; and many a cruel sorrow arose out of that sin, perhaps to lie heavy at his door some day or other, sooner or later, sooner or later. I'm an old man, and I've seen a good deal of the ways of this world, and I've found that retribution seldom fails to overtake those who do wrong."

Mr. Balderby shrugged his shoulders.

"I should doubt the force of your philosophy in this case, my good Sampson," he said; "Mr. Dunbar has had a long immunity from his sins. I should scarcely think it likely he would ever be called upon to atone for them."

"I don't know, sir," the old clerk answered; "I don't know that. I've seen retribution come very late, very late; when the man who committed the sin had well nigh forgotten it. Evil trees bear evil

fruit, Mr. Balderby: the Scriptures tell us that; and take my word for it, evil consequences are sure to come from evil deeds."

"But to return to the story of the forged bills," said Mr. Austin, the cashier, looking at his watch as he spoke.

He was evidently growing rather impatient of the old clerk's rambling talk.

"To be sure, sir, to be sure," answered Sampson Wilmot. "Well, you see, sir, one of the bills was brought to our counter, and the cashier didn't much like the look of my lord's signature, and he took the bill to the inspector, and the inspector said, 'Pay the money, but don't debit it against his lordship.' About an hour afterwards the inspector carried the bill to Mr. Percival Dunbar, and directly he set eyes upon it, he knew that Lord Vanlorme's acceptance was a forgery. He sent for me to his room; and when I went in, he was as white as a sheet, poor gentleman. He handed me the bill without speaking, and when I had looked at it, he said—

"Your brother is at the bottom of this business, Sampson. Do you remember the half-sheet of paper I found on a blotting-pad in the counting-house one day; half a sheet of paper scrawled over with the imitation of two or three signatures? I asked who had copied those signatures, and your brother came forward and owned to having done it, laughing at his own cleverness. I told him then that it was a fatal facility, a fatal facility, and now he has proved the truth of my words by helping my son to turn forger and thief. That signature must be honoured, though I should have to sacrifice half my fortune to meet the demands upon us. Heaven knows to what amount such paper as that may be in circulation. There are some forged bills that are as good as genuine documents; and the Jew who discounted these knew that. If my son comes into the bank this morning send him to me."

"And did the young man come?" asked the junior partner.

"Yes, Mr. Balderby, sir; in less than half an hour after I left Mr. Percival Dunbar's room, in comes Mr. Henry, dashing and swaggering into the place as if it was his own.

"Will you please step into your father's room, sir?" I said; 'he wants to see you very particular.'

"The cornet's jaw dropped, and his face turned ghastly white as I said this; but he tried to carry it off with a swagger, and followed me into Mr. Percival Dunbar's room.

"You needn't leave us, Sampson,' said Mr. Hugh, who was sitting opposite his brother at the writing-table. 'You may as well hear what I have to say. I wish somebody whom I can rely upon to know the truth of this business, and I think we may rely upon you.'

"Yes, gentlemen,' I answered, 'you may trust me.'

"What's the meaning of all this?' Mr. Henry Dunbar asked, pretending to look innocent and surprised; but it wouldn't do, for his lips trembled so, that it was painful to watch him. 'What's the matter?' he asked.

"Mr. Hugh Dunbar handed him the forged bill.

"This is what's the matter,' he said.

"The young man stammered out something in the endeavour to deny any knowledge of the bill in his hand; but his uncle checked him. 'Do not add perjury to the crime you have already committed,' he said. 'How many of these are in circulation?'

"How many!" Mr. Henry repeated, in a faltering voice. 'Yes,' his uncle answered; 'how many—to what amount?' 'Three thousand pounds,' the cornet replied, hanging his head. 'I meant to take them up before they fell due, Uncle Hugh,' he said. 'I did, indeed; I stood to win a hatful of money upon the Liverpool Summer Meeting, and I made sure I should be able to take up those bills: but I've had the devil's own luck all this year. I never thought those bills would be presented; indeed, I never did.'

"Henry Dunbar,' Mr. Hugh said, very solemnly, 'nine men out of ten, who do what you have done, think what you say you thought: that they shall be able to escape the consequences of their deeds. They act under the pressure of circumstances. They don't mean to do any wrong—they don't intend to rob any body of a sixpence. But that first false step is the starting point upon the road that leads to the gallows; and the worst that can happen to a man is for him to succeed in his first crime. Happily for you, detection has speedily overtaken you. Why did you do this?'

"The young man stammered out some rambling excuse about his turf losses, debts of honour which he was compelled to pay. Then Mr. Hugh asked him whether the forged signature was his own doing, or the work of any body else. The cornet hesitated for a little, and then told his uncle the name of his accomplice. I thought this was cruel and cowardly. He had tempted my brother to do wrong, and the least he could have done would have been to try to shield him.

"One of the messengers was sent to fetch poor Joseph. The lad reached the banking house in an hour's time, and was brought straight into the private room, where we had all been sitting in silence, waiting for him.

"He was as pale as his master, but he didn't tremble, and he had altogether a more determined look than Mr. Henry.

"Mr. Hugh Dunbar taxed him with what he had done.

"Do you deny it, Joseph Wilmot?" he asked.

"No," my brother said, looking contemptuously at the cornet. "If my master has betrayed me, I have no wish to deny anything. But I dare say he and I will square accounts some day."

"I am not going to prosecute my nephew," Mr. Hugh said; "so, of course I shall not prosecute you. But I believe that you have been an evil counsellor to this young man, and I give you warning that you will get no character from me. I respect your brother Sampson, and shall retain him in my service in spite of what you have done; but I hope never to see your face again. You are free to go; but have a care how you tamper with other men's signatures, for the next time you may not get off so easily."

"The lad took up his hat and walked slowly towards the door.

"Gentlemen—gentlemen!" I cried, "have pity upon him. Remember he is little more than a boy; and whatever he did, he did out of love for his master."

"Mr. Hugh shook his head. 'I have no pity,' he answered, sternly: 'his master might never have done wrong but for him.'"

"Joseph did not say a word in answer to all this; but, when his hand was on the handle of the door, he turned and looked at Mr. Henry Dunbar.

"Have you nothing to say in my behalf, sir?" he said, very quietly; 'I have been very much attached to you, sir, and I don't want to think badly of you at parting. Haven't you one word to say in my behalf?'

"Mr. Henry made no answer. He sat with his head bent forward upon his breast, and seemed as if he dare not lift his eyes to his uncle's face.

"No!" Mr. Hugh answered, as sternly as before, 'he has nothing to say for you. Go; and consider this a lucky escape.'

"Joseph turned upon the banker, with his face all in a crimson flame, and his eyes flashing fire. 'Let *him* consider it a lucky escape,' he said, pointing to Mr. Henry Dunbar,—'let *him* consider it a lucky escape, if when we next meet he gets off scot free.'

"He was gone before any body could answer him.

"Then Mr. Hugh Dunbar turned to his nephew.

"As for you,' he said, 'you have been a spoilt child of fortune, and you have not known how to value the good things that Providence has given you. You have begun life at the top of the tree, and you have chosen to fling your chances into the gutter. You must begin again, and begin this time upon the lowest step of the ladder. You will sell your commission, and sail for Calcutta by the next ship that leaves Southampton. To-day is the 23rd of August, and I see by the *Shipping Gazette* that the *Oronoko* sails on the 10th of September. This will give you little better than a fortnight to make all your arrangements."

"The young cornet started from his chair as if he had been shot.

"Sell my commission!" he cried; 'go to India! You don't mean it, Uncle Hugh; surely you don't mean it. Father, you will never compel me to do this.'

"Percival Dunbar had never looked at his son since the young man had entered the room. He sat with his elbow resting upon the arm of his easy-chair, and his face shaded by his hand, and had not once spoken.

"He did not speak now, even when his son appealed to him.

"Your father has given me full authority to act in this business,' Mr. Hugh Dunbar said. 'I shall never marry, Henry, and you are my only nephew, and my acknowledged heir. But I will never leave my wealth to a dishonest or dishonourable man, and it remains for you to prove whether you are worthy to inherit it. You will have to begin life afresh. You have played the man of fashion, and your aristocratic associates have led you to the position in which you find yourself to-day. You must turn your back upon the past, Henry. Of course you are free to choose for yourself. Sell your commission, go to India, and enter the counting-house of our establishment in Calcutta as a junior clerk; or refuse to do so, and renounce all hope of succeeding to my fortune or to your father's.'

"The young man was silent for some minutes, then he said, sullenly enough—

"I will go. I consider that I have been harshly treated; but I will go."

"And he did go?" said Mr. Balderby.

"He did, sir," answered the clerk, who had displayed considerable emotion in relating this story of the past. "He did go, sir,—he sold

his commission, and left England by the *Oronoko*. But he never took leave of a living creature, and I fully believe that he never in his heart forgave either his father or his uncle. He worked his way up, as you know, sir, in the Calcutta counting-house, and by slow degrees rose to be manager of the Indian branch of the business. He married in 1831, and he has an only child, a daughter, who has been brought up in England since her infancy, under the care of Mr. Percival."

"Yes," answered Mr. Balderby, "I have seen Miss Laura Dunbar at her grandfather's country seat. She is a very beautiful girl, and Percival Dunbar idolized her. But now to return to business, my good Sampson. I believe you are the only person in this house who has ever seen our present chief, Henry Dunbar."

"I am, sir."

"So far so good. He is expected to arrive at Southampton in less than a week's time, and somebody must be there to meet him and receive him. After five-and-thirty years' absence he will be a perfect stranger in England, and will require a business man about him to manage matters for him, and take all trouble off his hands. These Anglo-Indians are apt to be indolent, you know, and he may be all the worse for the fatigues of the overland journey. Now, as you know him, Sampson, and as you are an excellent man of business, and as active as a boy, I should like you to meet him. Have you any objection to do this?"

"No, sir," answered the clerk; "I have no great love for Mr. Henry Dunbar, for I can never cease to look upon him as the cause of my poor brother Joseph's ruin; but I am ready to do what you wish, Mr. Balderby. It's business, and I'm ready to do anything in the way of business. I'm only a sort of machine, sir—a machine that's pretty

nearly worn out, I fancy, now—but as long as I last you can make what use of me you like, sir. I'm ready to do my duty."

"I am sure of that, Sampson."

"When am I to start for Southampton, sir?"

"Well, I think you'd better go to-morrow, Sampson. You can leave London by the afternoon train, which starts at four o'clock. You can see to your work here in the morning, and reach your destination between seven and eight. I leave everything in your hands. Miss Laura Dunbar will come up to town to meet her father at the house in Portland Place. The poor girl is very anxious to see him, as she has not set eyes upon him since she was a child of two years old. Strange, isn't it, the effect of these long separations? Laura Dunbar might pass her father in the street without recognizing him, and yet her affection for him has been unchanged in all these years."

Mr. Balderby gave the old clerk a pocket-book containing six five-pound notes.

"You will want plenty of money," he said, "though, of course, Mr. Dunbar will be well supplied. You will tell him that all will be ready for his reception here. I really am quite anxious to see the new head of the house. I wonder what he is like, now. By the way, it's rather a singular circumstance that there is, I believe, no portrait of Henry Dunbar in existence. His picture was painted when he was a young man, and exhibited in the Royal Academy; but his father didn't think the likeness a good one, and sent it back to the artist, who promised to alter and improve it. Strange to say, this artist, whose name I forget, delayed from day to day performing his promise, and at the expiration of a twelvemonth left England for Italy, taking the young man's portrait with him, amongst a lot of other unframed canvases. This artist never returned from Italy, and

Percival Dunbar could never find out his whereabouts, or whether he was dead or alive. I have often heard the old man regret that he possessed no likeness of his son. Our chief was handsome, you say, in his youth?"

"Yes, sir," Sampson Wilmot answered, "he was very handsome—tall and fair, with bright blue eyes."

"You have seen Miss Dunbar: is she like her father?"

"No, sir. Her features are altogether different, and her expression is more amiable than his."

"Indeed! Well, Sampson, we won't detain you any longer. You understand what you have to do?"

"Yes, sir, perfectly."

"Very well, then. Good night! By the bye, you will put up at one of the best hotels at Southampton—say the Dolphin—and wait there till the *Electra* steamer comes in. It is by the *Electra* that Mr. Dunbar is to arrive. Once more, good evening!"

The old clerk bowed and left the room.

"Well, Austin," said Mr. Balderby, turning to the cashier, "we may prepare ourselves to meet our new chief very speedily. He must know that you and I cannot be entirely ignorant of the story of his youthful peccadilloes, and he will scarcely give himself airs to us, I should fancy."

"I don't know that, Mr. Balderby," the cashier answered; "if I am any judge of human nature, Henry Dunbar will hate us because of that very crime of his own, knowing that we are in the secret, and

will be all the more disagreeable and disdainful in his intercourse with us. He will carry it off with a high hand, depend upon it."

Chapter II - Margaret's Father

*

The town of Wandsworth is not a gay place. There is an air of old-world quiet in the old-fashioned street, though dashing vehicles drive through it sometimes on their way to Wimbledon or Richmond Park.

The sloping roofs, the gable-ends, the queer old chimneys, the quaint casement windows, belong to a bygone age; and the traveller, coming a stranger to the little town, might fancy himself a hundred miles away from boisterous London; though he is barely clear of the great city's smoky breath, or beyond the hearing of her myriad clamorous tongues.

There are lanes and byways leading out of that humble High Street down to the low bank of the river; and in one of these, a pleasant place enough, there is a row of old-fashioned semi-detached cottages, standing in small gardens, and sheltered by sycamores and laburnums from the dust, which in dry summer weather lies thick upon the narrow roadway.

In one of these cottages a young lady lived with her father; a young lady who gave lessons on the piano-forte, or taught singing, for very small remuneration. She wore shabby dresses, and was rarely known to have a new bonnet; but people respected and admired her, notwithstanding; and the female inhabitants of Godolphin Cottages, who gave her good-day sometimes as she went along the dusty lane with her well-used roll of music in her hand, declared that she was a lady bred and born. Perhaps the good people who

admired Margaret Wentworth would have come nearer the mark if they had said that she was a lady by right divine of her own beautiful nature, which had never required to be schooled into grace or gentleness.

She had no mother, and she had not even the memory of her mother, who had died seventeen years before, leaving an only child of twelve months old for James Wentworth to keep.

But James Wentworth, being a scapegrace and a reprobate, who lived by means that were a secret from his neighbours, had sadly neglected this only child. He had neglected her, though with every passing year she grew more and more like her dead mother, until at last, at eighteen years of age, she had grown into a beautiful woman, with hazel-brown hair, and hazel eyes to match.

And yet James Wentworth was fond of his only child, after a fashion of his own. Sometimes he was at home for weeks together, a prey to a fit of melancholy; under the influence of which he would sit brooding in silence over his daughter's humble hearth for hours and days together.

At other times he would disappear, sometimes for a few days, sometimes for weeks and months at a time; and during his absence Margaret suffered wearisome agonies of suspense.

Sometimes he brought her money; sometimes he lived upon her own slender earnings.

But use her as he might, he was always proud of her, and fond of her; and she, after the way of womankind, loved him devotedly, and believed him to be the noblest and most brilliant of men.

It was no grief to her to toil, taking long weary walks and giving tedious lessons for the small stipends which her employers had the conscience to offer her; they felt no compunction about bargaining and haggling as to a few pitiful shillings with a music mistress who looked so very poor, and seemed so glad to work for their paltry pay. The girl's chief sorrow was, that her father, who to her mind was calculated to shine in the highest station the world could give, should be a reprobate and a pauper.

She told him so sometimes, regretfully, tenderly, as she sat by his side, with her arms twined caressingly about his neck. And there were times when the strong man would cry aloud over his blighted life, and the ruin which had fallen upon his youth.

"You're right, Madge," he said sometimes, "you're right, my girl. I ought to have been something better; I ought to have been, and I might have been, perhaps, but for one man—but for one base-minded villain, whose treachery blasted my character, and left me alone in the world to fight against society. You don't know what it is, Madge, to have to fight that battle. A man who began life with an honest name, and fair prospects before him, finds himself cast, by one fatal error, disgraced and broken, on a pitiless world. Nameless, friendless, characterless, he has to begin life afresh, with every man's hand against him. He is the outcast of society. The faces that once looked kindly on him turn away from him with a frown. The voices that once spoke in his praise are loud in his disfavour. Driven from every place where once he found a welcome, the ruined wretch hides himself among strangers, and tries to sink his hateful identity under a false name. He succeeds, perhaps, for a time, and is trusted, and being honestly disposed at heart, is honest: but he cannot long escape from the hateful past. No! In the day and hour when he is proudest of the new name he has made, and the respect he has won for himself, some old acquaintance, once a friend, but now an enemy, falls across his

pathway. He is recognized; a cruel voice betrays him. Every hope that he had cherished is swept away from him. Every good deed that he has done is denounced as the act of a hypocrite. Because once sinned he can never do well. *That* is the world's argument."

"But not the teaching of the gospel," Margaret murmured. "Remember, father, who it was that said to the guilty woman, Go, and sin no more."

"Ay, my girl," James Wentworth answered, bitterly, "but the world would have said, 'Hence, abandoned creature! go, and sin afresh; for you shall never be suffered to live an honest life, or herd with honest people. Repent, and we will laugh at your penitence as a shallow deception. Weep, and we will cry out upon your tears. Toil and struggle to regain the eminence from which you have fallen, and when you have nearly reached the top of that difficult hill, we will band ourselves together to hurl you back into the black abyss.' That's what the *world* says to the sinner, Margaret, my girl. I don't know much of the gospel; I have never read it since I was a boy, and used to read long chapters aloud to my mother, on quiet Sunday evenings; I can see the little old-fashioned parlour now as I speak of that time; I can hear the ticking of the eight-day clock, and I can see my mother's fond eyes looking up at me every now and then. But I don't know much about the gospel now; and when, you, poor child, try to read it to me, there's some devil rises in my breast, and shuts my ears against the words. I don't know the gospel, but I *do* know the world. The laws of society are inflexible, Madge; there is no forgiveness for a man who is once found out. He may commit any crime in the calendar, so long as his crimes are profitable, and he is content to share his profits with his neighbours. But he mustn't be found out."

Upon the 16th of August, 1850, the day on which Sampson Wilmot, the banker's clerk, was to start for Southampton, James

Wentworth spent the morning in his daughter's humble little sitting-room, and sat smoking by the open window, while Margaret worked beside a table near him.

The father sat with his long clay pipe in his mouth, watching his daughter's fair face as she bent over the work upon her knee.

The room was neatly kept, but poorly furnished, with that old-fashioned spindle-legged furniture which seems peculiar to lodging-houses. Yet the little sitting-room had an aspect of simple rustic prettiness, which is almost pleasanter to look at than fine furniture. There were pictures,—simple water-colour sketches,—and cheap engravings on the walls, and a bunch of flowers on the table, and between the muslin curtains that shadowed the window you saw the branches of the sycamores waving in the summer wind.

James Wentworth had once been a handsome man. It was impossible to look at him and not perceive as much as that. He might, indeed, have been handsome still, but for the moody defiance in his eyes, but for the half-contemptuous curve of his finely-moulded upper lip.

He was about fifty-three years of age, and his hair was grey, but this grey hair did not impart a look of age to his appearance. His erect figure, the carriage of his head, his dashing, nay, almost swaggering walk, all belonged to a man in the prime of middle age. He wore a beard and thick moustache of grizzled auburn. His nose was aquiline, his forehead high and square, his chin massive. The form of his head and face denoted force of intellect. His long, muscular limbs gave evidence of great physical power. Even the tones of his voice, and his manner of speaking, betokened a strength of will that verged upon obstinacy.

A dangerous man to offend! A relentless and determined man; not easily to be diverted from any purpose, however long the time between the formation of his resolve and the opportunity of carrying it into execution.

As he sat now watching his daughter at her work, the shadows of black thoughts darkened his brow, and spread a sombre gloom over his face.

And yet the picture before him could have scarcely been unpleasing to the most fastidious eye. The girl's face, drooping over her work, was very fair. The features were delicate and statuesque in their form; the large hazel eyes were very beautiful—all the more beautiful, perhaps, because of a soft melancholy that subdued their natural brightness; the smooth brown hair rippling upon the white forehead, which was low and broad, was of a colour which a duchess might have envied, or an empress tried to imitate with subtle dyes compounded by court chemists. The girl's figure, tall, slender, and flexible, imparted grace and beauty to a shabby cotton dress and linen collar, that many a maid-servant would have disdained to wear; and the foot visible below the scanty skirt was slim and arched as the foot of an Arab chief.

There was something in Margaret Wentworth's face, some shade of expression, vague and transitory in its nature, that bore a likeness to her father; but the likeness was a very faint one, and it was from her mother that the girl had inherited her beauty.

She had inherited her mother's nature also: but mingled with that soft and womanly disposition there was much of the father's determination, much of the strong man's force of intellect and resolute will.

A beautiful woman—an amiable woman; but a woman whose resentment for a great wrong could be deep and lasting.

"Madge," said James Wentworth, throwing his pipe aside, and looking full at his daughter, "I sit and watch you sometimes till I begin to wonder at you. You seem contented and most happy, though the monotonous life you lead would drive some women mad. Have you no ambition, girl?"

"Plenty, father," she answered, lifting her eyes from her work, and looking at him mournfully; "plenty—for you."

The man shrugged his shoulders, and sighed heavily.

"It's too late for that, my girl," he said; "the day is past—the day is past and gone—and the chance gone with it. You know how I've striven, and worked, and struggled; and how I've seen my poor schemes crushed when I had built them up with more patience than perhaps man ever built before. You've been a good girl, Margaret—a noble girl; and you've been true to me alike in joy and sorrow—the joy's been little enough beside the sorrow, poor child—but you've borne it all; you've endured it all. You've been the truest woman that was ever born upon this earth, to my thinking; but there's one thing in which you've been unlike the rest of your sex."

"And what's that, father?"

"You've shown no curiosity. You've seen me knocked down and disgraced wherever I tried to get a footing; you've seen me try first one trade and then another, and fail in every one of them. You've seen me a clerk in a merchant's office; an actor; an author; a common labourer, working for a daily wage; and you've seen ruin overtake me whichever way I've turned. You've seen all this, and

suffered from it; but you've never asked me why it has been so. You've never sought to discover the secret of my life."

The tears welled up to the girl's eyes as her father spoke.

"If I have not done so, dear father," she answered, gently, "it has been because I knew your secret must be a painful one. I have lain awake night after night, wondering what was the cause of the blight that has been upon you and all you have done. But why should I ask you questions that you could not answer without pain? I have heard people say cruel things of you; but they have never said them twice in my hearing." Her eyes flashed through a veil of tears as she spoke. "Oh, father,—dearest father!" she cried, suddenly throwing aside her work, and dropping on her knees beside the man's chair, "I do not ask for your confidence if it is painful to you to give it; I only want your love. But believe this, father,—always believe this,—that, whether you trust me or not, there is nothing upon this earth strong enough to turn my heart from you."

She placed her hand in her father's as she spoke, and he grasped it so tightly that her pale face grew crimson with the pain.

"Are you sure of that, Madge?" he asked, bending his head to look more closely in her earnest face.

"I am quite sure, father."

"Nothing can tear your heart from me?"

"Nothing in this world."

"What if I am not worthy of your love?"

"I cannot stop to think of that, father. Love is not mete out in strict proportion to the merits of those we love. If it were, there would be no difference between love and justice."

James Wentworth laughed sneeringly.

"There is little enough difference as it is, perhaps," he said; "they're both blind. Well, Madge," he added, in a more serious tone, "you're a generous-minded, noble-spirited girl, and I believe you do love me. I fancy that if you never asked the secret of my life, you can guess it pretty closely, eh?"

He looked searchingly at the girl's face. She hung her head, but did not answer him.

"You can guess the secret, can't you, Madge? Don't be afraid to speak, girl."

"I fear I can guess it, father dear," she murmured in a low voice.

"Speak out, then."

"I am afraid the reason you have never prospered—the reason that so many are against you—is that you once did something wrong, very long ago, when you were young and reckless, and scarcely knew the nature of your own act; and that now, though you are truly penitent and sorry, and have long wished to lead an altered life, the world won't forget or forgive that old wrong. Is it so, father?"

"It is, Margaret. You've guessed right enough, child, except that you've omitted one fact. The wrong I did was done for the sake of another. I was tempted to do it by another. I made no profit by it myself, and I never hoped to make any. But when detection

came, it was upon *me* that the disgrace and ruin fell; while the man for whom I had done wrong—the man who had made me his tool—turned his back upon me, and refused to utter one word in my justification, though he was in no danger himself, and the lightest word from his lips might have saved me. That was a hard case, wasn't it, Madge?"

"Hard!" cried the girl, with her nostrils quivering and her hands clenched; "it was cruel, dastardly, infamous!"

"From that day, Margaret, I was a ruined man. The brand of society was upon me. The world would not let me live honestly, and the love of life was too strong in me to let me face death. I tried to live dishonestly, and I led a wild, rackety, dare-devil kind of a life, amongst men who found they had a skilful tool, and knew how to use me. They did use me to their heart's content, and left me in the lurch when danger came. I was arrested for forgery, tried, found guilty, and transported for life. Don't flinch, girl! don't turn so white! You must have heard something of this whispered and hinted at often enough before to-day. You may as well know the whole truth. I was transported, for life, Madge; and for thirteen years I toiled amongst the wretched, guilty slaves in Norfolk Island—that was the favourite place in those days for such as me—and at the end of that time, my conduct having been approved of by my gaolers, the governor sent for me, gave me a good-service certificate, and I went into a counting-house and served as a clerk. But I got a kind of fever in my blood, and night and day I only thought of one thing, and that was my chance of escape. I did escape,—never you mind how, that's a long story,—and I got back to England, a free man; a free man, Madge, *I* thought; but the world soon told me another story. I was a felon, a gaol-bird; and I was never more to lift my head amongst honest people. I couldn't bear it, Madge, my girl. Perhaps a better man might have persevered in spite of all till he conquered the

world's prejudice. But *I* couldn't. I sank under my trials, and fell lower and lower. And for every disgrace that has ever fallen upon me—for every sorrow I have ever suffered—for every sin I have ever committed—I look to one man as the cause."

Margaret Wentworth had risen to her feet. She stood before her father now, pale and breathless, with her lips parted, and her bosom heaving.

"Tell me his name, father," she whispered; "tell me that man's name."

"Why do you want to know his name, Madge?"

"Never mind why, father. Tell it to me—tell it!"

She stamped her foot in the vehemence of her passion.

"Tell me his name, father," she repeated, impatiently.

"His name is Henry Dunbar," James Wentworth answered, "and he is the son of a rich banker. I saw his father's death in the paper last March. His uncle died ten years ago, and he will inherit the fortunes of both father and uncle. The world has smiled upon him. He has never suffered for that one false step in life, which brought such ruin upon me. He will come home from India now, I dare say, and the world will be under his feet. He will be worth a million of money, I should fancy; curse him! If my wishes could be accomplished, every guinea he possesses would be a separate scorpion to sting and to torture him."

"Henry Dunbar," whispered Margaret to herself—"Henry Dunbar. I will not forget that name."

Chapter III - The Meeting at the Railway Station

*

When the hands of the little clock in Margaret's sitting-room pointed to five minutes before three, James Wentworth rose from his lounging attitude in the easy-chair, and took his hat from a side-table.

"Are you going out, father?" the girl asked.

"Yes, Madge; I'm going up to London. It don't do for me to sit still too long. Bad thoughts come fast enough at any time; but they come fastest when a fellow sits twirling his thumbs. Don't look so frightened, Madge; I'm not going to do any harm. I'm only going to look about me. I may fall in with a bit of luck, perhaps; no matter what, if it puts a few shillings into my pocket."

"I'd rather you stayed at home, father dear," Margaret said, gently.

"I dare say you would, child. But I tell you, I can't. I *can't* sit quiet this afternoon. I've been talking of things that always seem to set my brain on fire. No harm shall come of my going away, girl; I promise you that. The worst I shall do is to sit in a tavern parlour, drink a glass of gin-and-water, and read the papers. There's no crime in that, is there, Madge?"

His daughter smiled as she tried to arrange the shabby velvet collar of his threadbare coat.

"No, father dear," she said; "and I'm sure I always wish you to enjoy yourself. But you'll come home soon, won't you?"

"What do you call 'soon,' my lass?"

"Before ten o'clock. My day's work will be all over long before that, and I'll try and get something nice for your supper."

"Very well, then, I'll be back by ten o'clock to-night. There's my hand upon it."

He gave Margaret his hand, kissed her smooth cheeks, took his cane from a corner of the room, and then went out.

His daughter watched him from the open window as he walked up the narrow lane, amongst the groups of children gathered every here and there upon the dusty pathway.

"Heaven have pity upon him, and keep him from sin!" murmured Margaret Wentworth, clasping her hands, and with her eyes still following the retreating figure.

James Wentworth jingled the money in his waistcoat-pocket as he walked towards the railway station. He had very little; a couple of sixpences and a few halfpence. Just about enough to pay for a second-class return ticket, and for his glass of gin-and-water at a London tavern.

He reached the station three minutes before the train was due, and took his ticket.

At half-past three he was in London.

But as he was an idle, purposeless man, without friends to visit or money to spend, he was in no hurry to leave the railway station.

He hated solitude or quiet; and here in this crowded terminus there was life and bustle and variety enough in all conscience; and all to be seen for nothing: so he strolled backwards and forwards upon the platform, watching the busy porters, the eager passengers rushing to and fro, and meditating as to where he should spend the rest of his afternoon.

By-and-by he stood against a wooden pillar in a doorway, looking at the cabs, as, one after another, they tore up to the station, and disgorged their loads.

He had witnessed the arrival of a great many different travellers, when his attention was suddenly arrested by a little old man, wan and wizen and near-sighted, feeble-looking, but active, who alighted from a cab, and gave his small black-leather portmanteau into the hands of a porter.

This man was Sampson Wilmot, the old confidential clerk in the house of Dunbar, Dunbar, and Balderby.

James Wentworth followed the old man and the porter.

"I wonder if it *is* he," he muttered to himself; "there's a likeness—there's certainly a likeness. But it's so many years ago—so many years—I don't suppose I should know him. And yet this man recalls him to me somehow. I'll keep my eye upon the old fellow, at any rate."

Sampson Wilmot had arrived at the station about ten minutes before the starting of the train. He asked some questions of the porter, and left his portmanteau in the man's care while he went to get his ticket.

James Wentworth lingered behind, and contrived to look at the portmanteau.

There was a label pasted on the lid, with an address, written in a business-like hand—

"MR. SAMPSON WILMOT,
PASSENGER TO SOUTHAMPTON."

James Wentworth gave a long whistle.

"I thought as much," he muttered; "I thought I couldn't be mistaken!"

He went into the ticket-office, where the clerk was standing amongst the crowd, waiting to take his ticket.

James Wentworth went up close to him, and touched him lightly on the shoulder.

Sampson Wilmot turned and looked him full in the face. He looked, but there was no ray of recognition in that look.

"Do you want me, sir?" he asked, with rather a suspicious glance at the reprobate's shabby dress.

"Yes, Mr. Wilmot, I want to speak to you. You can come into the waiting-room with me, after you've taken your ticket."

The clerk stared aghast. The tone of this shabby-looking stranger was almost one of command.

"I don't know you, my good sir," stammered Sampson; "I never set eyes upon you before; and unless you are a messenger sent after me

from the office, you must be under a mistake. You are a stranger to me!"

"I am no stranger, and I am no messenger!" answered the other. "You've got your ticket? That's all right! Now you can come with me."

He walked into a waiting-room, the half-glass doors of which opened out of the office. The room was empty, for it only wanted five minutes to the starting of the train, and the passengers had hurried off to take their seats.

James Wentworth took off his hat, and brushed his rumpled grey hair from his forehead.

"Put on your spectacles, Sampson Wilmot," he said, "and look hard at me, and then tell me if I am a stranger to you."

The old clerk obeyed, nervously, fearfully. His tremulous hands could scarcely adjust his spectacles.

He looked at the reprobate's face for some moments and said nothing. But his breath came quicker and his face grew very pale.

"Ay," said James Wentworth, "look your hardest, and deny me if you can. It will be only wise to deny me; I'm no credit to any one—least of all to a steady respectable old chap like you!"

"Joseph!—Joseph!" gasped the old clerk; "is it you? Is it really my wretched brother? I thought you were dead, Joseph—I thought you were dead and gone!"

"And wished it, I dare say!" the other answered, bitterly. "No, Joseph,—no!" cried Sampson Wilmot; "Heaven knows I never

wished you ill. Heaven knows I was always sorry for you, and could make excuses for you even when you sank lowest!"

"That's strange!" Joseph muttered, with a sneer; "that's very strange! If you were so precious fond of me, how was it that you stopped in the house of Dunbar and Dunbar? If you had had one spark of natural affection for me, you could never have eaten their bread!"

Sampson Wilmot shook his head sorrowfully.

"Don't be too hard upon me, Joseph," he said, with mild reproachfulness; "if I hadn't stopped at the banking-house your mother might have starved!"

The reprobate made no answer to this; but he turned his face away and sighed.

The bell rang for the starting of the train.

"I must go," Sampson cried. "Give me your address, Joseph, and I will write to you."

"Oh, yes, I dare say!" answered his brother, scornfully; "no, no, *that* won't do. I've found you, my rich respectable brother, and I'll stick to you. Where are you going?"

"To Southampton."

"What for?"

"To meet Henry Dunbar."

Joseph Wilmot's face grew livid with rage.

The change that came over it was so sudden and so awful in its nature, that the old clerk started back as if he had seen a ghost.

"You are going to meet *him*?" said Joseph, in a hoarse whisper; "he is in England, then?"

"No; but he is expected to arrive almost immediately. Why do you look like that, Joseph?"

"Why do I look like that?" cried the younger man; "have you grown to be such a mere machine, such a speaking automaton, such a living tool of the men you serve, that all human feeling has perished in your breast? Bah! how should such as you understand what I feel? Hark! the bell's ringing—I'll come with you."

The train was on the point of starting: the two men hurried out to the platform.

"No,—no," cried Sampson Wilmot, as his brother stepped after him into the carriage; "no,—no, Joseph, don't come with me,—don't come with me!"

"I will go with you."

"But you've no ticket."

"I can get one—or you can get me one, for I've no money—at the first station we stop at."

They were seated in a second-class railway carriage by this time. The ticket-collector, running from carriage to carriage, was in too great a hurry to discover that the little bit of pasteboard which Joseph Wilmot exhibited was only a return-ticket to Wandsworth. There was a brief scramble, a banging of doors, and Babel-like

confusion of tongues; and then the engine gave its farewell shriek and rushed away.

The old clerk looked very uneasily at his younger brother's face. The livid pallor had passed away, but the strongly-marked eyebrows met in a dark frown.

"Joseph—Joseph!" said Sampson, "Heaven only knows I'm glad to see you, after more than thirty years' separation, and any help I can give you out of my slender means I'll give freely—I will, indeed, Joseph, for the memory of our dear mother, if not for love of you; and I do love you, Joseph—I do love you very dearly still. But I'd rather you didn't take this journey with me—I would, indeed. I can't see that any good can come of it."

"Never you mind what comes of it. I want to talk to you. You're a nice affectionate brother to wish to shuffle me off directly after our first meeting. I want to talk to you, Sampson Wilmot. And I want to see *him*. I know how the world's used *me* for the last five-and-thirty years; I want to see how the same world—such a just and merciful world as it is—has treated my tempter and betrayer, Henry Dunbar!"

Sampson Wilmot trembled like a leaf. His health had been very feeble ever since the second shock of paralysis—that dire and silent foe, whose invisible hand had stricken the old man down as he sat at his desk, without one moment's warning. His health was feeble, and the shock of meeting with his brother—this poor lost disgraced brother—whom he had for five-and-twenty years believed to be dead, had been almost too much for him. Nor was this all—unutterable terror took possession of him when he thought of a meeting between Joseph Wilmot and Henry Dunbar. The old man could remember his brother's words:

"Let him consider it a lucky escape, if, when we next meet, he gets off scot free!"

Sampson Wilmot had prayed night and day that such a meeting might never take place. For five-and-thirty years it had been delayed. Surely it would not take place now.

The old clerk looked nervously at his brother's face.

"Joseph," he murmured, "I'd rather you didn't go with me to Southampton; I'd rather you didn't meet Mr. Dunbar. You were very badly treated—cruelly and unjustly treated—nobody knows that better than I. But it's a long time ago, Joseph—it's a very, very long time ago. Bitter feelings die out of a man's breast as the years roll by—don't they, Joseph? Time heals all old wounds, and we learn to forgive others as we hope to be forgiven—don't we, Joseph?"

"*You* may," answered the reprobate, fiercely; "I don't!"

He said no more, but sat silent, with his arms folded over his breast.

He looked straight before him out of the carriage-window; but he saw no more of the pleasant landscape,—the fair fields of waving corn, with scarlet poppies and deep-blue corn flowers, bright glimpses of sunlit water, and distant villages, with grey church-turrets, nestling among trees. He looked out of the carriage-window, and some of earth's pleasantest pictures sped by him; but he saw no more of that ever-changing prospect than if he had been looking at a blank sheet of paper.

Sampson Wilmot sat opposite to him, restless and uneasy, watching his fierce gloomy countenance.

The clerk took a ticket for his brother at the first station the train stopped at. But still Joseph was silent.

An hour passed by, and he had not yet spoken.

He had no love for his brother. The world had hardened him. The consequences of his own sins, falling very heavily upon his head, had embittered his nature. He looked upon the man whom he had once loved and trusted as the primary cause of his disgrace and misery, and this thought influenced his opinion of all mankind.

He could not believe in the goodness of any man, remembering, as he did, how he had once trusted Henry Dunbar.

The brothers were alone in the carriage.

Sampson watched the gloomy face opposite to him for some time, and then, with a weary sigh, he drew his handkerchief over his face, and sank back in the corner of the carriage. But he did not sleep. He was agitated and anxious. A dizzy faintness had seized upon him, and there was a strange buzzing in his ears, and unwonted clouds before his dim eyes. He tried to speak once or twice, but it seemed to him as if he was powerless to form the words that were in his mind.

Then his mind began to grow confused. The hoarse snorting of the engine sounded monotonously in his ears: growing louder and louder with every moment; until the noise of it grew hideous and intolerable—a perpetual thunder, deafening and bewildering him.

The train was fast approaching Basingstoke, when Joseph Wilmot was suddenly startled from his moody reverie.

There was an awful cause for that sudden start, that look of horror in the reprobate's face.

Chapter IV - The Stroke of Death

*

The old clerk had fallen from his seat, and lay in a motionless heap at the bottom of the railway carriage.

The third stroke of paralysis had come upon him; inevitable, no doubt, long ago; but hastened, it may be, by that unlooked-for meeting at the Waterloo terminus.

Joseph Wilmot knelt beside the stricken man. He was a vagabond and an outcast, and scenes of horror were not new to him. He had seen death under many of its worst aspects, and the grim King of Terrors had little terror for him. He was hardened, steeped in guilt, and callous as to the sufferings of others. The love which he bore for his daughter was, perhaps, the last ray of feeling that yet lingered in this man's perverted nature.

But he did all he could, nevertheless, for the unconscious old man. He loosened his cravat, unfastened his waistcoat, and felt for the beating of his heart.

That heart did beat: very fitfully, as if the old clerk's weary soul had been making feeble struggles to be released from its frail tabernacle of clay.

"Better, perhaps, if this should prove fatal," Joseph muttered; "I should go on alone to meet Henry Dunbar."

The train reached Basingstoke; Joseph put his head out of the open window, and called loudly to a porter.

The man came quickly, in answer to that impatient summons.

"My brother is in a fit," Joseph cried; "help me to lift him out of the carriage, and then send some one for a doctor."

The unconscious form was lifted out in the arms of the two strong men. They carried it into the waiting-room, and laid it on a sofa.

The bell rang, and the Southampton train rushed onward without the two travellers.

In another moment the whole station was in commotion. A gentleman had been seized with paralysis, and was dying.

The doctor arrived in less than ten minutes. He shook his head, after examining his patient.

"It's a bad case," said he; "very bad; but we must do our best. Is there anybody with this old gentleman?"

"Yes, sir," the porter answered, pointing to Joseph; "this person is with him."

The country surgeon glanced rather suspiciously at Joseph Wilmot. He looked a vagabond, certainly—every inch a vagabond; a reckless, dare-devil scoundrel, at war with society, and defiant of a world he hated.

"Are you—any—relation to this gentleman?" the doctor asked, hesitatingly.

"Yes, I am his brother."

"I should recommend his being removed to the nearest hotel. I will send a woman to nurse him. Do you know if this is the first stroke he has ever had?"

"No, I do not."

The surgeon looked more suspicious than ever, after receiving this answer.

"Strange," he said, "that you, who say you are his brother, should not be able to give me information upon that point."

Joseph Wilmot answered with an air of carelessness that was almost contemptuous:

"It is strange," he said; "but many stranger things have happened in this world before now. My brother and I haven't met for years until we met to-day."

The unconscious man was removed from the railway station to an inn near at hand—a humble, countrified place, but clean and orderly. Here he was taken to a bed-chamber, whose old-fashioned latticed windows looked out upon the dusty road.

The doctor did all that his skill could devise, but he could not restore consciousness to the paralyzed brain. The soul was gone already. The body lay, a form of motionless and senseless clay, under the white counterpane; and Joseph Wilmot, sitting near the foot of the bed, watched it with a gloomy face.

The woman who was to nurse the sick man came by-and-by, and took her place by the pillow. But there was very little for her to do.

"Is there any hope of his recovering?" Joseph asked eagerly, as the doctor was about to leave the room.

"I fear not—I fear there is no hope."

"Will it be over soon?"

"Very soon, I think. I do not believe that he can last more than four-and-twenty hours."

The surgeon waited for a few moments after saying this, expecting some exclamation of surprise or grief from the dying man's brother: but there was none; and with a hasty "good evening" the medical man quitted the room.

It was growing dusk, and the twilight shadows upon Joseph Wilmot's face made it, in its sullen gloom, darker even than it had been in the railway carriage.

"I'm glad of it, I'm glad of it," he muttered; "I shall meet Harry Dunbar alone."

The bed-chamber in which the sick man lay opened out of a little sitting-room. Sampson's carpet-bag and portmanteau had been left in this sitting-room.

Joseph Wilmot searched the pockets in the clothes that had been taken off his brother's senseless form.

There was some loose silver and a bunch of keys in the waistcoat-pocket, and a well-worn leather-covered memorandum-book in the breast-pocket of the old-fashioned coat.

Joseph took these things into the sitting-room, closed the door between the two apartments, and then rang for lights.

The chambermaid who brought the candles asked if he had dined.

"Yes," he said, "I dined five hours ago. Bring me some brandy."

The girl brought a small decanter of spirit and a wine-glass, set them on the table, and left the room. Joseph Wilmot followed her to the door, and turned the key in the lock.

"I don't want any intruders," he muttered; "these country people are always inquisitive."

He seated himself at the table, poured out a glass of brandy, drank it, and then drew one of the candles towards him.

He had put the money, the keys, and the memorandum-book, in one of his own pockets. He took out the memorandum-book first, and examined it. There were five Bank of England notes for five pounds each in one of the pockets, and a letter in the other.

The letter was directed to Henry Dunbar, and sealed with the official seal of the banking-house. The name of Stephen Balderby was written on the left-hand lower corner of the envelope.

"So, so," whispered Joseph Wilmot, "this is the junior partner's letter of welcome to his chief. I'll take care of that."

He replaced the letter in the pocket of the memorandum-book, and then looked at the pencil entries on the different pages.

The last entry was the only memorandum that had any interest for him.

It consisted of these few words—

"H.D., expected to arrive at Southampton Docks on or about the 19th inst., per steamer Electra; will be met by Miss Laura D. at Portland Place."

"Who's Laura D.?" mused the spy, as he closed the memorandum-book. "His daughter, I suppose. I remember seeing his marriage in the papers, twenty years ago. He married well, of course. Fortune made *everything* smooth for him. He married a lady of rank. Curse him!"

Joseph Wilmot sat for some time with his arms folded upon the table before him, brooding, brooding, brooding; with a sinister smile upon his lips, and an ominous light in his eyes.

A dangerous man always—a dangerous man when he was loud, reckless, brutal, violent: but most of all dangerous when he was most quiet.

By-and-by he took the bunch of keys from his pocket, knelt down before the portmanteau, and examined its contents.

There was very little to reward his scrutiny—only a suit of clothes, a couple of clean shirts, and the necessities of the clerk's simple toilet. The carpet-bag contained a pair of boots, a hat-brush, a night-shirt, and a faded old chintz dressing-gown.

Joseph Wilmot rose from his knees after examining these things, and softly opened the door between the two rooms. There had been no change in the sick chamber. The nurse still sat by the head of the bed. She looked round at Joseph, as he opened the door.

"No change, I suppose?" he said.

"No, sir; none."

"I am going out for a stroll, presently. I shall be in again in an hour's time."

He shut the door again, but he did not go out immediately. He knelt down once more by the side of the portmanteau, and tore off the label with his brother's name upon it. He tore a similar label off the carpet-bag, taking care that no vestige of the clerk's name was left behind.

When he had done this, and thrust the torn labels into his pocket, he began to walk up and down the room, softly, with his arms folded upon his breast.

"The *Electra*, is expected to arrive on the nineteenth," he said, in a low, thoughtful voice, "on or about the nineteenth. She may arrive either before or after. To-morrow will be the seventeenth. If Sampson dies, there will be an inquest, no doubt: a post-mortem examination, perhaps: and I shall be detained till all that is over. I shall be detained two or three days at least: and in the mean time Henry Dunbar may arrive at Southampton, hurry on to London, and I may miss the one chance of meeting that man face to face. I won't be balked of this meeting—I won't be balked. Why should I stop here to watch by an unconscious man's death-bed? No! Fate has thrown Henry Dunbar once more across my pathway: and I won't throw my chance away."

He took up his hat—a battered, shabby-looking white hat, which harmonized well with his vagabond appearance—and went out, after stopping for a minute at the bar to tell the landlord that he would be back in an hour's time.

He went straight to the railway station, and made inquiries as to the trains.

Chapter V - Sinking the Past

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The train from London to Southampton was due in an hour. The clerk who gave Joseph Wilmot this information asked him how his brother was getting on.

"He is much better," Joseph answered. "I am going on to Southampton to execute some important business he was to have done there. I shall come back early to-morrow morning."

He walked into the waiting-room, and stopped there, seated in the same attitude the whole time: never stirring, never lifting his head from his breast: always brooding, brooding, brooding: as he had brooded in the railway carriage, as he had brooded in the little parlour of the inn. He took his ticket for Southampton as soon as the office was open, and then stood on the platform, where there were two or three stragglers, waiting for the train to come up.

It came at last. Joseph Wilmot sprang into a second-class carriage, took his seat in the corner, with his hat slouched over his eyes, which were almost hidden by its dilapidated brim.

It was late when he reached Southampton; but he seemed to be acquainted with the town, and he walked straight to a small public-house by the river-side, almost hidden under the shadow of the town wall.

Here he got a bed, and here he ascertained that the *Electra* had not yet arrived.

He ate his supper in his own room, though he was requested to take it in the public apartment. He seemed to shrink from meeting any one, or talking to any one; and still brooded over his own black thoughts: as he had brooded at the railway station, in the parlour of the Basingstoke inn, in the carriage with his brother Sampson.

Whatever his thoughts were, they absorbed him so entirely that he seemed like a man who walks in his sleep, doing everything mechanically, and without knowing what he does.

But for all this he was active, for he rose very early the next morning. He had not had an hour's sleep throughout the night, but had lain in every variety of restless attitude, tossing first on this side and then on that: always thinking, thinking, thinking, till the action of his brain became as mechanical as that of any other machine, and went on in spite of himself.

He went downstairs, paid the money for his supper and night's lodging to a sleepy servant-girl, and left the house as the church-clock in an old-fashioned square hard by struck eight.

He walked straight to the High Street, and entered the shop of a tailor and general outfitter. It was a stylish establishment, and there was a languid young man taking down the shutters, who appeared to be the only person on the establishment just at present.

He looked superciliously enough at Joseph Wilmot, eyeing him lazily from head to foot, and yawning as he did so.

"You'd better make yourself scarce," he said; "our principal never gives anything to tramps."

"Your principal may give or keep what he likes," Joseph answered, carelessly; "I can pay for what I want. Call your master down: or

stay, you'll do as well, I dare say. I want a complete rig-out from head to heel. Do you understand?"

"I shall, perhaps, when I see the money for it," the languid youth answered, with a sneer.

"So you've learned the way of the world already, have you, my lad?" said Joseph Wilmot, bitterly. Then, pulling his brother's memorandum-book from his pocket, he opened it, and took out the little packet of bank-notes. "I suppose you can understand these?" he said.

The languid youth lifted his nose, which by its natural conformation betrayed an aspiring character, and looked dubiously at his customer.

"I can understand as they might be flash uns," he remarked, significantly.

Mr. Joseph Wilmot growled out an oath, and made a plunge at the young shopman.

"I said as they *might* be flash," the youth remonstrated, quite meekly; "there's no call to fly at me. I didn't mean to give no offence."

"No," muttered Mr. Wilmot; "egad! you'd better *not* mean it. Call your master."

The youth retired to obey: he was quite subdued and submissive by this time.

Joseph Wilmot looked about the shop.

"The cur forgot the till," he muttered; "I might try my hand at that, if—" He stopped and smiled with a strange, deliberate expression, not quite agreeable to behold—"if I wasn't going to meet Henry Dunbar."

There was a full-length looking-glass in one corner of the shop. Joseph Wilmot walked up to it, looked at himself for a few moments in silent contemplation, and then shook his clenched hand at the reflected image.

"You're a vagabond!" he muttered between his set teeth, "and you look it! You're an outcast; and you look it! But who set the mark upon you? Who's to blame for all the evil you have done? Whose treachery made you what you are? That's the question!"

The owner of the shop appeared, and looked sharply at his customer.

"Now, listen to me!" Joseph Wilmot said, slowly and deliberately. "I've been down upon my luck for some time past, and I've just got a bit of money. I've got it honestly, mind you; and I don't want to be questioned by such a jackanapes as that shopboy of yours."

The languid youth folded his arms, and endeavoured to look ferocious in his fiery indignation; but he drew a little way behind his master as he did so.

The proprietor of the shop bowed and smiled.

"We shall be happy to wait upon you, sir," he said; "and I have no doubt we shall be able to give you satisfaction. If my shopman has been impertinent—"

"He has," interrupted Joseph; "but I don't want to make any palaver about that. He's like the rest of the world, and he thinks if a man wears a shabby coat, he must be a scoundrel; that's all. I forgive him."

The languid youth, very much in the background, and quite sheltered, by his master, might have been heard murmuring faintly—

"Oh, indeed! Forgive, indeed! Do you really, now? Thank you for nothing!" and other sentences of a derisive character.

"I want a complete rig-out," continued Joseph Wilmot; "a new suit of clothes—hat, boots, umbrella, a carpet-bag, half-a-dozen shirts, brush and comb, shaving tackle, and all the et-ceteras. Now, as you may be no more inclined to trust me than that young whipper-snapper of yours, for all you're so uncommon civil, I'll tell you what I'll do. I want this beard of mine trimmed and altered. I'll go to a barber's and get that done, and in the meantime you can make your mind easy about the character of these gentlemen."

He handed the tradesman three of the Bank of England notes. The man looked at them doubtfully.

"If you think they ain't genuine, send 'em round to one of your neighbours, and get 'em changed," Joseph Wilmot said; "but be quick about it. I shall be back here in half an hour."

He walked out of the shop, leaving the man still staring, with the three notes in his hand.

The vagabond, with his hat slouched over his eyes, and big hands in his pockets, strolled away from the High Street down to a barber's shop near the docks.