

Moneybags and Son

by A Retired Member of the Detective Police [William Russell]

Chapter I

ONE morning—it is a good many years ago—I received a hasty summons from old Moneybags, the wholesale grocer of Broad Street. I promptly obeyed the summons, and upon entering the counting-house I saw a feeble old man, with palsied head and hands, seated before a long desk, covered with piles of gold, silver, banknotes, checks, bills, &c., which he was counting and assorting.

It was a melancholy spectacle to see this frail piece of humanity, for whom the grave must have been yawning, so deeply absorbed with the dross of life. All his faculties—and they were not many—seemed centered in the contemplation of his money. He was so deeply absorbed in his idolatry that he did not perceive my entrance. I paused, without making a noise, to contemplate the singular spectacle of an old man, verging on eighty, gloating over that for which, perhaps, he had sacrificed every thing a rational being would prize in life, and from which he must, however reluctantly, so very soon be called upon to part.

I made a slight noise to arrest his attention. He looked up, at the same moment spreading out his arms so as to cover and embrace his treasures, and in agitated voice inquired,—

“What do you want here? Mr. Barton,” calling to his managing clerk, “why do you let people come in here?”

“This is Mr. Barker, sir, whom you desired me to send for.”

“Oh, Mr. Barker! Ha! yes; I think I do want him. I think I do, indeed. Take a seat, Mr. Barker. I will attend to you directly. O dear me!”

I took a seat as directed, and the old man resumed his task. It seemed a mortal struggle with him to tear himself away from his favorite occupation of counting his money, and he very soon appeared to forget my presence altogether.

Growing impatient, I made a shuffling noise with my feet.

“In a minute, Mr. Barker, in a minute.”

It was a very long minute. However, he managed at last to tear himself away from his darling occupation, and came and seated himself in a chair opposite to where I was seated.

“Would you mind shutting that door and locking it?”

I did as he desired, and resumed my seat.

“You must know, Mr. Barker, I have been robbed.”

“Very sorry to hear it, sir. What is your loss?”

“Impossible to tell, sir. It has been going on a long time.”

“What have you lost, sir?”

“Money, sir, money! You see that iron chest outside there? Well, sir, as I thought lately that the banks were not over safe, I have kept a deal of money there, all in gold, to provide for a rainy day. I locked up one drawer full, and was filling another; but today, when I opened that drawer to see if it was all safe, I found it nearly empty. I shall be ruined, sir! I always said I should die in the workhouse, and now it is inevitable.”

I could hardly repress a smile. Croesus in the workhouse—that would be a sight worth seeing.

“Not so bad as that, sir, I hope.”

“Ah! you don’t know all. I must have lost twelve hundred dollars. Isn’t that enough to ruin any man?”

“It would ruin me, sir, without doubt; but as for you, Mr. Moneybags, the world knows you are very rich.”

“The world’s a fool, sir; the world’s an ass, sir; it knows nothing at all about it.”

“Well, sir, what do you wish me to do in the matter?”

“Get me my money back, and punish the rogue; that is all I ask of you. Can you do that?”

“That depends, sir, very much upon who is the thief. Will you show me how the robbery has been effected?”

“There’s the iron safe, and there’s the drawer in which the gold was kept. They have been opened, sir, but without violence.”

“Perhaps with your own keys, Mr. Moneybags.”

“That’s impossible. I always lock the safe up, and take the keys home with me, and never let them out of my sight.”

I carefully examined the safe and the locks, and then observed,—

“It must be somebody in the establishment, depend upon it, sir. No one could have opened that safe while you are absent except with your key, or its duplicate.”

“But do you think so, Mr. Barker? Do you really think so?”

“It must be so, sir, as no burglary has been committed.”

“But some one may have had false keys to the outer door.”

“That is true; but, as no violence has been employed, I must think it is some one belonging to the establishment.”

“Impossible! Mr. Barton, only think—Mr. Barker says this robbery must have been committed by some one in the establishment.”

“I think so myself, sir.”

“You do, do you? Then why didn’t you say so before?”

“I did not like to encourage my own suspicions till they occurred to another person. Since Mr. Barker is of that opinion, I have now no hesitation in saying I think as he does— it is some one in the establishment.”

“That is really very dreadful. Only to think— But you have not told me whom you suspect.”

“Nor shall I, sir. That will be Mr. Barker’s business to find out.”

“Well, Mr. Barker, lose no time in finding me the thief, and do not fail to bring me back my money. Bring me the money, remember.”

I had a little confidential talk with Mr. Barton, upon which I formed my plans.

“Of course, Mr. Barton,” I said, “you will keep this robbery quite secret for the present. My success depends entirely upon things going on as usual in your establishment, without the slightest suspicion that the robbery has been discovered.”

That night I was on the watch. The house opposite being uninhabited, I took possession of it. The rats resented the intrusion. Nothing unusual transpired that night, nor the next.

Sunday night came. At about a quarter-past twelve o’clock, as I was looking through the window, I saw a tall, gentlemanly young man walking slowly up and down in front of the premises, and then let himself in.

I let myself out quietly, and took up my position in the dark recess of the doorway, patiently awaiting the reappearance of the visitor to old Moneybags’ warehouse.

In about half an hour he came out, and locked the door after him; then proceeded up Broadway toward the Park, followed at a prudent distance by your humble servant.

He took a cab. I did the same. Passed along Broadway to the corner of Canal Street. There he alighted, and I followed his example. Proceeding up the block about half way, he stopped and knocked at a door. A panel was opened by a girl to reconnoiter; a password being given, the door was then opened, and the gentleman admitted. I was so close upon his heels that I passed in with him unchallenged, being taken, I presume, for an associate.

I found myself in a very strange place. The inmates were mostly foreigners, engaged in smoking, drinking, fiddling, and dancing. Such a pandemonium I have rarely seen. It was Sunday night, remember, or rather Monday morning.

My gentleman seemed quite at home there. He was "hail fellow" with most of the company, and seemed to be a great favorite with the ladies present, most of whom were of a very slippery sort. He was liberal withal, and treated the company all round *ad libitum*. It was very easy to see that he had never worked for the money he spent so freely.

The debauch was kept up till five in the morning. My gentleman had much ado to free himself from the drunken embraces of the two or three ladies who were not helplessly intoxicated. It was only by ordering them fresh liquor that he managed to get into the street unattended by them.

He staggered a little upon attaining the open air. In Broadway he called a cab, and ordered it to drive to Fourteenth Street. Of course I stuck to his heels, and, to my utter astonishment, I saw him, after he got out of the cab, go up to the door of Moneybags' private residence and let himself in.

"So, then," I thought, "this is a family affair after all. Moneybags, senior, is robbed by Moneybags, junior." There could be no mistake in this affair; the prodigal son was only squeezing the senior's sponge, helping himself to what he probably thought his own by right of inheritance.

Had it been a mere matter of feeling, I should have proceeded no farther in the business; but I had a duty to my client to perform, and I resolved to discharge it.

My first step was to communicate with Mr. Barton, and ascertain his views as to the course I ought to adopt. He was not in the least surprised when I informed him of what I had seen.

He thought I ought to see more, and suggested that I should follow up the junior for a week or two.

"At present," I said, "I cannot say that he is actually the thief, as I have not seen him in the act. He *might* have visited the warehouse with other objects than plundering the iron safe."

"Very true; then perhaps you had better be quite satisfied. Conceal yourself in the warehouse next Sunday night. I will arrange to let you in."

"That's the plan. I think about ten o'clock will be the right time."

I consequently arranged to be concealed in the warehouse on the following Sunday night; for that, I concluded, would be the night selected for the prodigal's next visit.

Accordingly, the next Sunday night saw me duly ensconced behind a tall pile of chests of tea, where I could have a clear view of the iron safe without any risk of being seen myself.

Very shortly after the neighboring church clock had struck twelve, I heard the door of the warehouse opened, closed again, and locked. Then a match was struck, and a wax taper lighted, the light being shaded by the hat of the intruder—young Moneybags.

He walked straight to the iron chest, applied a key, and opened it. Then he opened one of the drawers containing gold, looked in, then opened the other. From this latter he took a handful of gold, and dropped it into a little canvas bag. Judging from the sound, I should say there were two hundred dollars. He then relocked the drawers and the safe, and prepared to retire.

I don't know how it happened—never could tell; but perhaps, in my eagerness to survey every movement, I pressed too heavily against the lofty pile of tea chests. They reached to the ceiling, and were rather top heavy; but over they went, and three or four of the top ones came down with a crash on the floor—down on the floor, just within a few inches of the iron safe, as suddenly and with almost as loud a report as if a gun had been fired.

Out went the light, of course. I heard the hat fall upon the floor, accompanied with a sudden exclamation of fright and terror—then a silent pause.

“My God! what can that be?”

All was then as still as death for at least fifteen minutes. I scarcely breathed, but waited patiently for the *dénouement*.

I concluded young Moneybags was more frightened than hurt, for I could hear his loud breathing, mingled with an occasional sigh. His fright I could not wonder at; for I was frightened myself—never more so in my life.

After the lapse of about a quarter of an hour—certainly the longest fifteen minutes I ever passed—I heard a slight movement on the part of young Moneybags.

“What a villain I am! If that's the devil it just serves me right. I deserve it, I do. To rob my poor old father! Might have waited till he was in his grave—couldn't have had to wait long, at all events.”

This soliloquy was uttered in a tremulous voice, occasionally interrupted with sobs. Mr. Moneybags, junior, was in a repentant mood.

“What had I best do? suppose the d—d police is alarmed, and listening at the keyhole, and when I go out he'll take me into custody; and tomorrow I shall have a public audience with the recorder, and the papers will be full of a case of 'Shocking Depravity.' Very respectable, really!

Well, I am in a d—d scrape! It was a good job the whole warehouse did not come down on my head. I should have been buried in the ruins; and then—coroner’s inquest—how puzzled they would have been—thought me a second Samson—pulled the old warehouse down on my own head—capital.”

By this time young Moneybags had recovered his composure. He sought his matchbox, struck a light, and, pulling out his cigar case, coolly commenced blowing a cloud.

I was half afraid he would commence an investigation among the tea chests, so I crouched down behind some that had not been overturned. Those that had fallen formed a sort of barricade between us. I could see him seated on a chair, puffing his cigar, soliloquizing: —

“By Jove, though, only think if one of those d—d things had come down on a fellow’s head! narrow escape, I must confess! Well, I dare say I deserved no better fate. This ought to be a warning to me. I’ll take it as such, and be a good boy for the future. Curse the gold, I say! What good have I ever done with it? and what good has it ever done me? All squandered away upon a set of reps. What could I have been thinking of?”

Thus the hours passed away in puffing and soliloquizing till the clock struck five.

“Five o’clock!” he said. “Well, I think it is about time I made a move.”

He then got up and cautiously let himself out.

After waiting about half an hour I followed his example. Next day I sent a message to Mr. Barton, requesting that he would meet me at Palmo’s coffee house in the evening.

Before I related to him what I had seen, he informed me of the *great fall in tea*, expressing his astonishment at so unusual an accident. He eagerly inquired what was the state of things at the time of my visit to the warehouse.

When I told him of the scene that had taken place at young Moneybags’ visit, he laughed immoderately.

“I hope it will have the effect of reforming him,” said he. “His nerves are shaken by dissipation, and are not over strong; and I have no doubt this accident has shaken them still more, for he has not been at business today. The old man is in a dreadful way, in consequence of losing the key of his iron chest.”

A day or two afterward I received another summons from old Moneybags, who, thinking that enough time had elapsed to enable me to discover the depredator, was getting impatient. I did not consider it advisable to inform him of what I then knew, as I was desirous of learning a little more of young Moneybags’ pursuits. I satisfied him, however, by telling him that I [thought] I was on the track of the thief, but that to succeed in my efforts, it would be prudent not to divulge any thing at present.

“Do you know, Mr. Barker,” he said, “I have lost the key of my iron safe. What shall I do? This is very unaccountable, very mysterious. What had I best do?”

“I think, sir you had best have your iron safe opened, and your money removed to a bank. Don’t you consider the Chemical Bank safe enough for you, sir?”

“I must consider what you say. Oh, this loss will be the death of me!”

Chapter II

It was summer time. In the evening I strolled up Broadway, and into the Park. In passing one of the seats I observed it was occupied by two persons, male and female, engaged in earnest discourse. The woman appeared to be making a very strong appeal to her companion’s feelings. I do not commonly play the eavesdropper, but here was something that instinctively roused my curiosity, for I felt convinced a scene in a domestic tragedy was being enacted; so I leaned against a neighboring tree, where I could hear and see without being seen.

“O, Edward, consider the shame you will bring upon me—on me, who have sacrificed every thing for you. Do have some pity, some feeling of honor.”

“Don’t be a fool! What would you have a fellow do? Comply with your whims, and offend the old man, who will then leave all his money to charities, and cut me off with a shilling? Nonsense! preposterous!”

“But, Edward, consider my family—my father—my brothers. What must be the consequence when the truth becomes known! I dread the hour, and it cannot be long. Even now I suspect that my mother’s suspicions are aroused!”

“Can’t you go away for a while? Go in the country—anywhere till things are right again.”

“But how can I? You know I should not be allowed to go away alone; and then if I am accompanied by whoever it may be, why of course the truth will become known; and then what difference will it make whether the discovery be made here or there? The consequences will be just the same.”

“Well, it’s an infernal mess, and I don’t know what’s to be done. Can’t you think of something yourself? You women are always fertile in expedients.”

“There is but one way, as I have often told you.”

“Impossible! Don’t mention it again, or you will make me angry.”

“Then you have no honor—no feeling! Were I a man, I would sacrifice every prospect of gain to sustain a woman’s reputation. You know when that is lost, all is lost for her.”

“Fiddle-de-dee! if you were a man you would do as a man does.”

“You are young—have health, strength, talent. Many men have begun the world penniless, and risen to fortune and distinction. Why should not you?”

“I wish to spare myself the trouble. My nest is feathered: why should I build another?”

“This discussion is idle. You know what risk I have run to meet you here. I will not go away unsatisfied. The suspense is killing me. O, Edward! if you loved me as you have so often said you did, you would not treat me thus.”

“Love! That sort of thing is all very well in its place; but when it stands in the way of half a million of money, why then it’s quite *another* thing.”

“I see what it is; you will leave me to my shame—to brave the anger of my father—the revenge of my brothers, and—my mother. O, God! what a fool—what a wretch I have been!”

“You should have thought of all this before.”

“I did; but I thought too much of you. Well, I deserve this punishment. The scales have fallen from my eyes. I now see that I have thrown myself away upon a man who cares nothing for me, who cannot see the value of such a sacrifice, but weighs his filthy gold in the scale against the honor, the happiness of her he pretended to love, but only to betray. I have heard that the warmest love turns to the bitterest hatred, and I feel it now—the poison is creeping through my veins. Think, Edward, think again, before it be too late.”

“Hush! Consider where we are. Don’t get up a scene here in public, for heaven’s sake.”

“A scene! What do you mean? Can I be as cold-blooded as you are? A scene! Ah! there will be scenes yet, such as I dare not contemplate. Now, Edward, let me ask you once more—it shall be the last time: will you be honorable and act like a man? You know my father is rich—not so rich as yours, it is true; but he will give us enough to begin the world with, and what need we fear? Oh! do not cast me away to shame and misery—to shame worse than death! I cannot endure the thought, Edward. *I* am the suitor now, not *you*; and I sue—for what? For the fulfillment of a promise so often made unsolicited. There is no time for dallying. I expected you would have come tonight prepared to act. I told you what I expected; but you seem inclined to do nothing but leave me to my fate.”

The man rose to his feet.

“There is no use continuing this discussion. You had better go home; you will be missed, and then—”

“No, Edward, I will never return to that home until you have given me your solemn promise to make me your wife within one month.”

“Impossible! Come away, it’s getting late.”

“Too late for me. You can go; I have nowhere to go to.”

“Haven’t you a home, foolish girl?”

“No home for *me* any longer, but a hell, where I suffer every torment of the damned. Go, Edward; you had *better* go. I shall never trouble you again.”

“Well, I really must go. I have an appointment, and if you won’t come along, why I must leave you here, which I am loath to do.”

“Loath to leave me here? Is it worse to leave me here than to leave me to the shame and scorn of the world? No; here no one will harm me; but when I walk into the daylight—Oh, villain! go! go! go!”

“Well, if I must, I must; so goodnight, Henny.”

Saying this, the gentleman coolly walked away, leaving the lady motionless on the seat. In a minute or two she raised her head to see if he were really gone.

“Cold-hearted villain! Cursed fool, I, to believe him!”

My indignation was roused. I followed in the footsteps of the recreant wretch to see if I could recognize him. Under the full glare of a gas-lamp I saw his face.

It was that of young Moneybags.

Upon making the discovery I turned slowly back to the seat where he had left the lady sitting, and I seated myself at the opposite end.

She sat unmoved. My proximity seemed to make no impression upon her.

I could sympathize with her feelings at that moment. I knew full well that no consolation I could offer would avail; but still I lingered on the seat, as much to protect her from insult as any thing.

Thus we sat for nearly half an hour, when she uttered a suppressed groan, and gave a convulsive shudder. Lifting up her head, she seemed for the first time to be aware of my proximity. Straining her neck forward to catch a nearer view of my face, she exclaimed,—

“Edward?”

“It’s not Edward,” I replied.

“Ah, no! I forgot; he’s gone. Curse him for a villain!”

“Shall I call him back?”

“No; let him go. I have done with *him* for ever, and with everybody. Oh, my poor heart, how it burns! Ah me!”

As well as the darkness permitted I endeavored to look in her face. Suspicion flashed across my mind that she had probably taken poison. The shudder was repeated again and again, intermingled with groans.

“Are you ill, madam?” I asked.

“Past all cure. Oh, if I could but see my poor mother!”

“Where does she live? Shall I call assistance—a doctor?”

“Nothing. I want nothing more in this world but to die in peace. God forgive me! I’ve been very sinful.”

A laboring man passing by at the moment, I beckoned him.

“Run!” I said. “Tell the first policeman you meet to bring a stretcher here—a lady’s dying.”

The man hastened away, and in a few minutes returned with what I required, accompanied by a couple of policemen.

We laid the now helpless lady gently on the stretcher, and went out at the gate where we found a cab. Putting her into it, we drove to the City Hospital.

Here she received every attention. The stomach pump was applied. It then became evident that she had taken laudanum.

There was no clue on her person by which we could discover who she was; consequently it was impossible to communicate with her friends, and in her state of unconsciousness it was useless to question her. As she was in good hands, and my presence of no avail, I quitted the hospital; somewhat cut by this tragic feature in the Moneybags’ case. I strolled listlessly down Broadway, and dropped into a certain notorious house in — Street, thinking I might find something to divert the current of my gloomy thoughts, and perhaps pounce upon some of my black sheep.

The room was nearly filled with the reckless and dissolute of both sexes. Wishing to avoid observation, I quietly seated myself in a corner, from whence, unobserved, I could see what was passing.

The scene was not very edifying. It served but to show what a beast human nature can make of itself by “a base abandonment of reason.” Drunkenness, profanity, thinly-disguised indecency, blasphemy—such were the talents displayed by these wanton imbeciles, who, under the flimsy plea of “seeing life,” were groveling in a sewer of moral filth.

My attention was directed, by the noise they made, to a group behind where I was seated, whom I had not noticed when I entered the room. I did not wish to turn my head, lest I might attract their attention; so I listened.

Their table was liberally supplied with the usual paraphernalia of debauchery—cigars and brandy. Their conversation was at first carried on in low tones, heightened occasionally with a blasphemous oath. Gradually they became excited, and their talk grew louder, till it became quite audible to me where I was seated.

“Don’t spare the liquor, boys; the gov’nor pays.”

I thought I recognized the voice that uttered this: it was like the one I had so lately heard in the Park. Placing a newspaper before my face as a screen, I was enabled to make a survey of the party without my design being observed.

I soon recognized among the noisiest of the trio the actor of the scene in the Park—young Moneybags. He appeared laboring under a degree of excitement which I could not attribute entirely to the drink he had imbibed.

“Come, fill your glass, Ned, and give us a toast. Of course it will be the incomparable Henrietta.”

“Hush, for God’s sake! Not tonight—don’t breathe her name! I feel wretched about her, as if something serious were going to happen to her.”

“Whew! what’s up, my heart of oak? Has little Henny grown jealous? found out your tricks, Master Ned? Oh! fie, true blue in courtship, say I.”

“Cheer up!” said another; “cheer up, Neddy, boy: though Venus frowns today, she’ll smile again tomorrow. Fickle, fickle toys—source of all our smiles and joys! Take another pull, Ned, and cheer up. Here’s a toast for you, if you won’t give us one yourself—‘Absent friends.’”

“Curse your tongue!” growled young Moneybags. “Do I need to be reminded of absent friends, think you? Villain as I am, I cannot drink that toast. Absent friends! Were they present, they would make cowards of us all. There’s poor Isabella and Marianne! Absent friends—absent, but not forgotten: wish that I could forget *them*—one in a madhouse, the other an outcast. There’s—”

“What do you propose doing with little Henny, friend Ned? Is she to swell the list of your vic—I won’t say that—your conquests, eh, my invincible charmer?”

“Your remarks sound like insults, sir,” exclaimed young Moneybags. “I will thank you to use less freedom with me and my actions.”

“Oh, to be sure, my dear fellow. No offence, of course; we know each other—have done so a long time; and many’s the d—d scrape we’ve helped each other out of. You remember that little affair with Julia and Lizzie, don’t you, Ned?”

“Ah, what was that?” chimed in number three.

“Why, you must know that Master Ned and myself, eager for a night’s spree, called upon Julia and Lizzie, expecting to be invited to supper. We were very jovial and merry, when all at once we were informed that the house was on fire. The cook had been too liberal with the coals, and the chimney was blazing away at a fine rate. We rushed out into the garden in front of the house, but when we reached the gate we could not open it: some rascal had fastened a chain round it to the railings, and locked it, and there we were exposed to the jests of the mob which had assembled in front.”

“And what of Julia and Lizzie?”

“Sly jades, both.”

“With an enormous appetite for diamond earrings, coral necklaces, moire antique dresses, and such-like trifles.”

“Ay, and deuced expensive all that, as you must have found out to your cost, Ned.”

“Oh, d—n the expense: what’s the odds to us?”

“I must confess myself puzzled, Ned, to know who’s your banker; your drafts must have been very heavy.”

“And I, for my part, have often wondered by what process you raised the wind to supply your expensive divertissements. Give us your secret, Ned; it may be useful to both of us, provided the process be safe, and the law does not make us accessories.”

“As for that, why, you know, we sometimes have rich uncles.”

“Oh, as for that, why, so have I, and be hanged to them!”

“No, I do not mean those with the golden balls, but real uncles by kindred, fellows with their plums, who will relax their purse-strings sometimes to save the credit of the family, in case of a nephew’s making a wrong calculation or a slip of the pen, taking other men’s names in vain, or other financial errors of that sort. Family honor or family pride might melt even old Moneybags himself.”

These words were scarcely uttered when I heard the sound of falling glass. I involuntarily raised my head, when I saw that a conflict had arisen among this estimable trio. Young Moneybags was on his feet in a defensive attitude, while one of his companions was crouching under the table, amid the glass which had been aimed at his head and got broken.

“Come out of that, you scoundrel!” roared young Moneybags. “Let me punish you for the insult you have offered to me!”

The gentleman thus forcibly addressed slowly raised himself into view. As he did so, young Moneybags seized another tumbler, and would have hurled it at the head of his companion, had not his arm been seized and forcibly held.

The offending party, upon regaining his erect position, looked a picture of flaming wrath. Mad with drink, he rushed upon young Moneybags, and they were soon engaged in a deadly struggle, in the course of which the latter fell among the broken glass, striking his head against the corner chair as he fell.

There he lay, apparently senseless; those around lifted him up; his face was covered with blood, and he was also bleeding profusely.

The uproar was very great. I stepped forward, and authoritatively demanded that a cab should be sent for, and the wounded man be conveyed to the hospital.

In a few moments a cab arrived, and the man, still senseless, was lifted into it. It was not until we arrived at the hospital that I recognized it was the same to which, a short time previously, this patient's victim had been also carried in a state of insensibility.

Being there, however, I thought I would ascertain how the fair patient was getting on; so I proceeded, in company with one of the nurses, to the ward where she had been placed.

A large room, that looked gloomy in the feeble light by which it was illuminated, was lined with beds, most of which appeared tenanted. Near one bed there was more light than at the others: toward this we directed our steps. The occupant seemed in the last agonies of death. The doctors and nurse looked on in silence. I approached nearer, until I could scan the features of the unhappy creature. She seemed aware of my approach, and fixed her eyes steadily upon me, and made a slight motion with her hand, which was extended outside the bedclothes; the motion of her lips showed that she desired to speak words, which she vainly endeavored to articulate. I interpreted the motion as an invitation to approach nearer, and the nurse and others who were standing around the bed made way for me.

I drew near to the bed, and knelt down so as to place my ear close to her mouth. Her struggles to speak were fearful. She raised her hands to her throat, pressed them on her chest, as if she would widen the issues of life to enable her to utter her last wishes. The effort seemed fruitless, till at length she lay passive, as if completely overcome with the exertion. In a short time she appeared to rally, and anxious to renew her attempt to speak, and looked earnestly in my face.

I again placed my ear close to her mouth, so that I might not lose a syllable of what I felt sure would be her last words. Her lips frequently moved when no sound was audible, and I feared that death would triumph in the struggle, and bury her wishes with her in the grave.

Suddenly, as if by a convulsive effort, she put her arm around my neck and drew herself up in the bed, and heaved a deep sigh, and again essayed to speak.

“My mother, my poor mother!”

“Tell me who is your mother,” I said. “We do not know who you are, and cannot communicate with your friends, and it is proper they should know.”

“Ah! you know —, do you not?”

“I do, well.”

“That’s my father. I am—his lost daughter.” Saying this, she fell back on the pillow as if exhausted with the effort. It had cost her the little spark of life that remained, and she was now silent for ever.

All present were painfully affected by the simple scene they had witnessed. Even the nurses, whom familiarity with such scenes of death must have hardened—whose feelings must have become somewhat blunted—dropped a tear of sympathy at the fate of their unhappy sister. I withdrew from the room, with the doctors and the nurse; and after a short conversation with them, in which I carefully refrained from mentioning the name the poor girl had whispered into my ear, I quitted the hospital, and betook myself to the residence of her parents in G— Street.

Upon entering the house I could at once perceive that a commotion prevailed in the establishment. The head of the family was absent, and the lady was in deep affliction—so I was informed.

I urged that I had very important business, which must be at once entered upon. Being asked my name, I enclosed my card in an envelope, and handed it to the servant to convey to her mistress. She soon returned with a message.

“Will you be so kind as to wait, sir, till master comes in? He will not be long.”

It was now past twelve o’clock, and I had business elsewhere at that hour. I wanted to fall in with a very clever artist in the precious metals, who, I was given to understand, had been in Philadelphia, making large purchases of base coin, and was expected to return to town that night. I was in hopes of meeting with him at one of his usual haunts, and could not afford to lose my chance. One o’clock struck. The servant, upon some excuse, came into the dining-room where I was seated.

“Do you know where your master is gone?” I inquired.

“Gone, I believe, to look for Miss Henrietta.”

“Is Miss Henrietta lost, then?”

“She went out at six o’clock this evening to go to the circulating library, as she said, and has never returned. Her father and mother are very anxious about her. They are afraid something has happened to her.”

“What do you suppose can have happened to her?”

“I really do not know what to think. She has been very low-spirited lately, and I fancy she may have made away with herself.”

“Do you know the cause of her trouble?”

“I suspect it is owing to a worthless fellow she has been in love with. I am sure he means her no good. I have told her as much. I am quite certain he does not care for her a bit.”

“What makes you think so?”

“Why, he don’t act like a gentleman at all. I know the difference, although I am but a poor ignorant girl.”

“But what makes you think ill of him?”

“Oh, he is not open and straightforward; he does things clandestine-like—things he does not want master and mistress to know, and wants to bribe me not to tell. But I won’t touch his filthy money—not I; it would do me no good.”

“Does Miss Henrietta think much of him?”

“She thinks *too much* of him—idolizes him; and *he* does not care a straw for her, I am sure.”

“Can’t you give me your reasons for thinking so?”

“I can. Why, she has to sue to him—what for I don’t know; but isn’t it shocking?”

I was about to assent to this opinion, when our conference was cut short by a loud knock at the hall door.

“There’s master!”

Soon a tall, portly gentleman entered the room, evidently in a state of great bewilderment. He did not recognize me.

“Whom have I the honor of addressing, and what, pray, may be the nature of your business? It is very late. It must be something of unusual importance.”

I have a very strong objection to pronouncing my name—it almost always blows people into a state of consternation; so I took out my card, and handed it to him.

He held it close to the candle, but could not read it. He then took out his spectacles, and made another attempt. This time he was more successful.

“God bless me! what can have brought *you* here? The very person I wished of all others to see. Excuse me if I did not recognize you. But one candle, you see, and my sight is not so good as it once was.”

“I am, I regret to say, the bearer of very painful intelligence. The duty has quite unexpectedly devolved upon me, and I must discharge it. You have a daughter?”

“Do not keep me in suspense. What do you know of her? We are most anxious about her. I have just returned from seeking her, but cannot find a trace of her movements since she left this house at six o’clock, promising to be back in a quarter of an hour.

“I know where she is.”

“Thank God! my mind is relieved. Where is she, then?”

“I left her at the City Hospital about an hour ago.”

“What? has any accident happened to her?”

“There has—a fatal one, I fear.”

He staggered to a chair that stood near, and sank into it in an agony of terror and alarm. He had no power to speak, so completely was he overcome.

It has often fallen to my lot to be the bearer of fatal tidings; yet I have not made up my mind as to the best mode of proceeding in communicating them—whether to tell the *whole* truth at once, or to gradually prepare the mind to receive it. It must come at last, and then the shock seems to me to be quite as great as when you seek to prepare the mind to receive it, which I think but prolongs the agony. Perhaps the mode of proceeding should be adapted to different dispositions and natures.

In the present case I acted as I have usually done. I endeavored to palliate the effects of what I knew would prove a dreadful shock to the father’s feelings. I cannot congratulate myself upon my success.

“I must go to her immediately. Perhaps you will be so kind as to accompany me?”

“Certainly, sir; but I would suggest that you wait a little while until you recover yourself. Your daughter has been well cared for, and wants for nothing now.”

He looked at me inquiringly, as if he would have asked for further explanation, but dared not hear it. I could not summon up resolution to tell him the whole truth at once.

In a few minutes he rose from his chair, and staggering to the sideboard, took out two decanters of wine. He made a sign to me to help myself. Pouring out a tumbler of port for himself, he swallowed it at a draught.

“I am ready to go with you now,” he said.

Then ringing the bell, when the servant answered it, he requested her to inform her mistress that he was going out with the gentleman who had called, and that he would be back as soon as possible.

Upon reaching the street he took my arm, and we proceeded together slowly along.

“We have been in the greatest distress about my daughter. Her absence was wholly unaccountable. Perhaps you will favor me by telling what you know about her?”

I thought this a good opportunity to break the sad truth to him, so I minutely described all I had witnessed on that eventful evening:—the scene in the Park between his daughter and young Moneybags, her sudden illness, my conveying her to the hospital, the discovery that she had taken poison, my reencounter with young Moneybags, his accident, and admission into the same hospital as contained his victim.

“It seems like a dream,” he said, and then made me repeat the whole story over again.

Still I could not summon up the courage to tell him his daughter was dead, although I gave him no hopes of seeing her again alive. But he clung to the idea of her possible recovery so tenaciously, that I could not be guilty of the cruelty of destroying his hopes.

But I did not want him to go to the hospital at that unseemly hour. I doubt even if he would have been admitted. I explained this to him, and so far prevailed as to induce him to defer his visit until the morning. He promised compliance, upon condition that I would make inquiries at the hospital as to the state his daughter was in. I knew such inquiry was useless, although I pretended to make it. When I returned to him I said his daughter was in a deep sleep, from which she could not be disturbed.

“And did you inquire how that villain Moneybags was?”

“I did not. I do not think his injuries very serious.”

But they were more serious than I had imagined: in falling upon the broken glass he had divided an artery, and well nigh bled to death.

“It is too late for you to go home tonight; go and take a bed at my house, and we will come again to the hospital the first thing in the morning.”

I saw no objection to this, so I complied, and accepted his invitation.

The servants had all gone to bed when we returned; but he let himself in, and soon placed before me a good supper of cold sirloin and pickles.

By this time he had somewhat recovered his equanimity, and could converse calmly on general topics. He was very curious to learn if I knew any thing about young Moneybags.

I did not consider it advisable to communicate *all* I knew of that gentleman's proceedings, so I contented myself with remarking that I thought he was giving himself up to dissipation.

“A rich man's son, sir, and, like all such, spoilt—irretrievably ruined. He has never known the pleasure and satisfaction of working for money, and considers only how he can spend it. He has talents. Had he been a poor man's son he would have made his way up to a good position in society; as it is, he is but a drone in the hive, no good to himself nor to others, abandoned to sensuality and indolence. I never approved of my daughter's attachment to him, although I did not wish to oppose her inclinations. I gave her my unbiased opinion of the man of her choice, so that she made it with her eyes quite open.”

Next morning, after an early breakfast, we proceeded again to the hospital—he to recover his lost child, I to bring away her corpse.

I sought the head nurse to explain to her my dilemma, and to consult with her as to what should be done about the deceased young lady, provided her father persisted in seeing her.

The good woman smiled while I was speaking. When I had concluded, she said: —

“Lor' bless you, sir, she's not dead.”

“What do you say—not dead? Do you know who I mean?”

“Certainly I do. The young lady you brought in last night poisoned.”

“Exactly. Why, I saw her dead myself last night.”

“You *thought* you did; so did we all. She was very low, and we thought she was gone; but she only swooned, and this morning she is quite nicely and comfortable like.”

“Well, you do surprise me. I am quite rejoiced, I assure you.”

Leaving the father to the enjoyment of his interview with his daughter, I proceeded to ascertain the condition of young Moneybags.

He was in a much worse condition than his victim. Completely prostrated by loss of blood, together with his constitution shattered by dissipation, it would be a long time before he could leave his bed. He was safe for a few weeks at least.

I had yet a duty to perform to my client, old Moneybags, as I could now venture to give him an account of his son. I bent my steps during the morning down to Broad Street. Upon arriving at the warehouse, I was surprised to find it closed.

Knocking at the door at a venture, without any expectation of its being opened, it was answered by Mr. Barton.

“How is this, Mr. Barton? No business today?”

“No, sir. The old gentleman died this morning.”

“Old Moneybags dead?”

“Dead, sir, and we cannot find his hopeful son anywhere.”

“You can find him any day for the next month at the City Hospital.”

Thus ended my mission with Moneybags and Son. I learned quite accidentally, some months afterward, that the son, now become the principal in consequence of his father’s death, had reformed, and was married to Henrietta. He may prove an exemplary husband. I hope he may for her sake.

Russell, William. *Strange Stories of a Detective; or, Curiosities of Crime*. New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1863. 154-65.

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