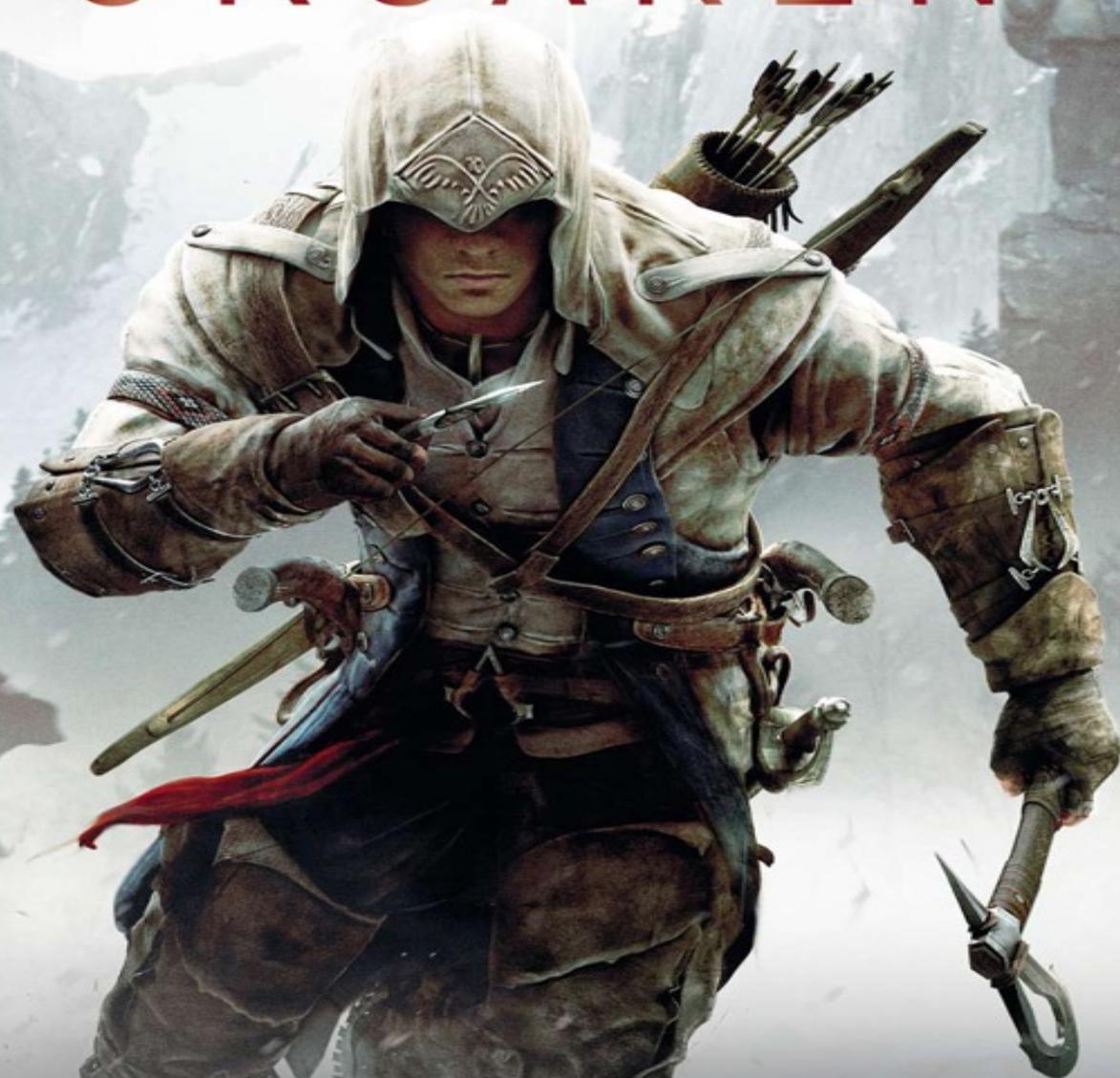


# ASSASSIN'S CREED®



## FORSAKEN



OLIVER BOWDEN

AN ORIGINAL NOVEL BASED ON THE  
MULTIPLATINUM VIDEO GAME FROM UBISOFT

## FIRST BLOOD

He spat and beckoned me forward with one hand, rolling the blade in the other. “Come on, Assassin,” he goaded me. “Come be a warrior for the first time. Come see what it feels like. Come on, boy. Be a man.”

It was supposed to anger me, but instead it made me focus. I needed him alive. I needed him to talk.

I leapt over the branch and into the clearing, swinging a little wildly to push him back but recovering my stance quickly, before he could press forward with a response of his own. For some moments we circled one another, each waiting for the other to launch his next attack. I broke the stalemate by lunging forward, slashing, then instantly retreating to my guard.

For a second he thought I’d missed. Then he felt the blood begin to trickle down his cheek and touched a hand to his face, his eyes widening in surprise. First blood to me.

“You’ve underestimated me,” I said.

His smile was a little more strained this time. “There won’t be a second time.”

“There will be,” I replied, and came forward again, feinting towards the left then going right when his body was already committed to the wrong line of defence.

A gash opened up in his free arm. Blood stained his tattered sleeve and began dripping to the forest floor, bright red on brown and green needles.

“I’m better than you know,” I said. “All you have to look forward to is death . . .”

*Ace titles by Oliver Bowden*

ASSASSIN'S CREED: RENAISSANCE  
ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD  
ASSASSIN'S CREED: THE SECRET CRUSADE  
ASSASSIN'S CREED: REVELATIONS  
ASSASSIN'S CREED: FORSAKEN

# ASSASSIN'S CREED®

F O R S A K E N

OLIVER BOWDEN



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**ALWAYS LEARNING**

**PEARSON**

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## PROLOGUE

I never knew him. Not really. I thought I had, but it wasn't until I read his journal that I realized I hadn't really known him at all. And it's too late now. Too late to tell him I misjudged him. Too late to tell him I'm sorry.

**EXTRACTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF HAYTHAM E. KENWAY**

**PART I**

**1735**

6 DECEMBER 1735

i

---

Two days ago I should have been celebrating my tenth birthday at my home in Queen Anne's Square. Instead, my birthday has gone unremarked; there are no celebrations, only funerals, and our burnt-out house is like a blackened, rotted tooth among the tall, white brick mansions of Queen Anne's Square.

For the time being, we're staying in one of Father's properties in Bloomsbury. It's a nice house, and though the family is devastated, and our lives torn apart, there is that to be thankful for at least. Here we'll stay, shocked, in limbo—like troubled ghosts—until our future is decided.

The blaze ate my journals so beginning this feels like starting anew. That being the case, I should probably begin with my name, which is Haytham, an Arabic name, for an English boy whose home is London, and who from birth until two days ago lived an idyllic life sheltered from the worst of the filth that exists elsewhere in the city. From Queen Anne's Square we could see the fog and smoke that hung over the river, and like everybody else we were bothered by the stink, which I can only describe as "wet horse," but we didn't have to tread through the rivers of stinking waste from tanneries, butchers' shops and the backsides of animals and people. The rancid streams of effluent that hasten the passage of disease: dysentery, cholera, typhoid . . .

"You must wrap up, Master Haytham. Or the lurgy'll get you."

On walks across the fields to Hampstead my nurses used to steer me away from the poor unfortunates wracked with coughs, and shielded my eyes from children with deformities. More than anything they feared disease. I suppose because you cannot reason with disease; you can't bribe it or take arms against it, and it respects neither wealth nor standing. It is an implacable foe.

And of course it attacks without warning. So every evening they checked me for signs of measles or the pox then reported on my good health to Mother, who came to kiss me good night. I was one of the lucky ones, you see, who had a mother to kiss me good night, and a father who did, too; who loved me and my half sister, Jenny, who told me about rich and poor, who instilled in me my good fortune and urged me always to think of others; and who employed tutors and nursemaids to look after and educate me, so that I should grow up to be a man of good values and of worth to the world. One of the lucky ones. Not like the children who have to work in fields and in factories and up chimneys.

I wondered sometimes, though, did they have friends, those other children? If they did, then, while of course I knew better than to envy them their lives when mine was so much more comfortable, I envied them that one thing: their friends. Me, I had none, with no brothers or sisters close to my age either, and, as for making them, well, I was shy. Besides, there was another problem: something that had come to light when I was

just five years old.

It happened one afternoon. The mansions of Queen Anne's Square were built close together, so we'd often see our neighbours, either in the square itself or in their grounds at the rear. On one side of us lived a family who had four girls, two around my age. They spent what seemed like hours skipping or playing blind man's bluff in their garden, and I used to hear them as I sat in the schoolroom under the watchful eye of my tutor, Old Mr. Fayling, who had bushy grey eyebrows and a habit of picking his nose, carefully studying whatever it was that he'd dug from the recesses of his nostrils then surreptitiously eating it.

This particular afternoon Old Mr. Fayling left the room and I waited until his footsteps had receded before getting up from my sums, going to the window and gazing out at the grounds of the mansion next door.

Dawson was the family name. Mr. Dawson was an MP, so my father said, barely hiding his scowl. They had a high-walled garden, and, despite the trees, bushes, and foliage in full bloom, parts of it were visible from my schoolroom window, so I could see the Dawson girls outside. They were playing hopscotch for a change, and had laid out pall-mall mallets for a makeshift course although it didn't look as if they were taking it very seriously; probably the two older ones were trying to teach the two younger ones the finer points of the game. A blur of pigtailed and pink, crinkly dresses, they were calling and laughing, and occasionally I'd hear the sound of an adult voice, a nursemaid probably, hidden from my sight beneath a low canopy of trees.

My sums were left unattended on the table for a moment as I watched them play, until suddenly, almost as if she could *sense* she was being watched, one of the younger ones, a year or so my junior, looked up, saw me at the window, and our eyes locked.

I gulped, then very hesitantly raised a hand to wave. To my surprise she beamed back. And next she was calling her sisters, who gathered round, all four of them, excitedly craning their necks and shielding their eyes from the sun to gaze up at the schoolroom window, where I stood like an exhibit at a museum—except a moving exhibit that waved and went slightly pink with embarrassment, but even so felt the soft, warm glow of something that might have been friendship.

Which evaporated the moment their nursemaid appeared from beneath the cover of the trees, glanced up crossly at my window with a look that left me in no doubt what she thought of me—an ogler or worse—then ushered all four girls out of sight.

That look the nursemaid gave me I'd seen before, and I'd see it again, on the square or in the fields behind us. Remember how my nurses steered me away from the ragged unfortunates? Other nursemaids kept their children away from me like that. I never really wondered why. I didn't question it because . . . I don't know, because there was no reason to question it, I suppose; it was just something that happened, and I knew no different.

## ii

---

When I was six, Edith presented me with a bundle of pressed clothes and a pair of silver-buckled shoes.

I emerged from behind the screen wearing my new shiny-buckled shoes, a

waistcoat and a jacket, and Edith called one of the maids, who said I looked the spitting image of my father, which of course was the idea.

Later on, my parents came to see me, and I could have sworn Father's eyes misted up a little, while Mother made no pretence at all and simply burst out crying there and then in the nursery, flapping her hand until Edith passed her a handkerchief.

Standing there, I felt grown-up and learned, even as I felt the hotness in my cheeks again. I found myself wondering if the Dawson girls would have considered me rather fine in my new suit, quite the gentleman. I'd thought of them often. I'd catch sight of them from the window sometimes, running along their garden or being shepherded into carriages at the front of the mansions. I fancied I saw one of them steal a glance up at me once, but if she saw me, there were no smiles or waves that time, just a shadow of that same look worn by the nursemaid, as though disapproval of me was being handed down, like arcane knowledge.

So we had the Dawsons on one side; those elusive, pigtailed, skipping Dawsons, while on the other side were the Barretts. They were a family of eight children, boys and girls, although again I rarely saw them; as with the Dawsons, my encounters were restricted to the sight of them getting into carriages, or seeing them at a distance in the fields. Then, one day shortly before my eighth birthday, I was in the garden, strolling along the perimeter and dragging a stick along the crumbling red brick of the high garden wall. Occasionally I'd stop to overturn stones with a stick and inspect whatever insects scuttled from beneath—wood lice, millipedes, worms that wriggled as though stretching out their long bodies—when I came upon the door that led on to a passage between our home and the Barretts'.

The heavy gate was padlocked with a huge, rusting chunk of metal that looked as if it hadn't been opened for years, and I stared at it for a while, weighing the lock in my palm, when I heard a whispered, urgent, boyish voice.

"Say, you. Is it true what they say about your father?"

It came from the other side of the gate although it took me a moment or so to place it—a moment in which I stood shocked and almost rigid with fear. Next, I almost jumped out of my skin when I saw through a hole in the door an unblinking eye that was watching me. Again came the question.

"Come on, they'll be beckoning me in any minute. Is it true what they say about your father?"

Calming, I bent to bring my eye level with the hole in the door. "Who is this?" I asked.

"It's me, Tom, who lives next door."

I knew that Tom was the youngest of their brood, about my age. I'd heard his name being called.

"Who are you?" he said. "I mean, what's your name?"

"Haytham," I replied, and I wondered if Tom was my new friend. He had a friendly-looking eyeball, at least.

"That's a strange sort of name."

"It's Arabic. It means 'young eagle.'"

"Well, that makes sense."

"How do you mean, 'makes sense'?"

"Oh, I don't know. It just does somehow. And there's only you, is there?"

“And my sister,” I retorted. “And Mother and Father.”

“Pretty small sort of family.”

I nodded.

“Look,” he pressed. “Is it true or not? Is your father what they say he is? And don’t even think about lying. I can see your eyes, you know. I’ll be able to tell if you’re lying straight away.”

“I won’t lie. I don’t even know what ‘they’ say he is, or even who ‘they’ are.”

At the same time I was getting an odd and not altogether pleasant feeling: that somewhere there existed an idea of what constituted “normal,” and that we, the Kenway family, were not included in it.

Perhaps the owner of the eyeball heard something in my tone, because he hastened to add, “I’m sorry—I’m sorry if I said something out of turn. I was just interested, that’s all. You see, there is a rumour, and it’s awfully exciting if it’s true . . .”

“What rumour?”

“You’ll think it’s silly.”

Feeling brave, I drew close to the hole and looked at him, eyeball to eyeball, saying, “What do you mean? What do people say about Father?”

He blinked. “They say he used to be a—”

Suddenly there was a noise from behind him, and I heard an angry male voice call his name: “*Thomas!*”

The shock sent him backwards. “Oh, bother,” he whispered quickly. “I’ve got to go, I’m being called. See you around, I hope?”

And with that he was gone and I was left wondering what he meant. What rumour? What were people saying about us, our *small* family?

At the same time I remembered that I had better get a move on. It was nearly midday—and time for my weapons training.

7 DECEMBER 1735

**i**

---

I feel invisible, like I'm stuck in a limbo between the past and the future. Around me the grown-ups hold tense conversations. Their faces are drawn and the ladies weep. Fires are kept lit, of course, but the house is empty apart from the few of us and what possessions we saved from the burnt-out mansion, and it feels permanently cold. Outside, snow has started to fall, while indoors is a sorrow that chills the very bones.

With little else for me to do but write my journal, I had hoped to get up to date with the story of my life so far, but it seems there's more to say than I'd first thought, and of course there have been other important matters to attend to. Funerals. Edith today.

"Are you sure, Master Haytham?" Betty had asked earlier, with her forehead creased in concern, her eyes tired. For years—as long as I could remember—she had assisted Edith. She was as bereaved as I was.

"Yes," I said, dressed as ever in my suit and, for today, a black tie. Edith had been alone in the world, so it was the surviving Kenways and staff who gathered for a funeral feast below stairs, for ham and ale and cake. When that was over, the men from the funeral company, who were already quite drunk, loaded her body into the hearse for taking to the chapel. Behind it we took our seats in mourning carriages. We only needed two of them. When it was over I retired to my room, to continue with my story . . .

**ii**

---

A couple of days after I'd spoken to Tom Barrett's eyeball, what he'd said was still playing on my mind. So one morning when Jenny and I were both alone in the drawing room together, I decided to ask her about it.

Jenny. I was nearly eight and she was twenty-one, and we had as much in common as I did with the man who delivered the coal. Less, probably, if I thought about it, because at least the man who delivered the coal and I both liked to laugh, whereas I'd rarely seen Jenny smile, let alone laugh.

She has black hair that shines, and her eyes are dark and . . . well, "sleepy" is what I'd say although I'd heard them described as "brooding," and at least one admirer went so far as to say she had a "smoky stare," whatever that is. Jenny's looks were a popular topic of conversation. She is a great beauty, or so I'm often told.

Although not to me. She was just Jenny, who'd refused to play with me so often I'd long since given up asking her; who whenever I picture her was sitting in a high-

backed chair, head bent over her sewing, or embroidery—whatever it was she did with a needle and thread. And scowling. That smoky stare her admirers said she had? I called it scowling.

The thing was, despite the fact that we were little more than guests in each other's lives, like ships sailing around the same small harbour, passing closely but never making contact, we had the same father. And Jenny, being more than a decade older than I, knew more about him than I did. So even though I'd had years of her telling me I was too stupid or too young to understand—or too stupid *and* too young to understand; and once even too *short* to understand, whatever that was supposed to mean—I used to try to engage her in conversation. I don't know why, because, as I say, I always came away none the wiser. To annoy her perhaps. But on this particular occasion, a couple of days or so after my conversation with Tom's eyeball, it was because I was genuinely curious to find out what Tom had meant.

So I asked her: "What do people say about us?"

She sighed theatrically and looked up from her needlework.

"What do you mean, Squirt?" she asked.

"Just that—what do people say about us?"

"Are you talking about gossip?"

"If you like."

"And what would you care about gossip? Aren't you a bit too—"

"I care," I interrupted, before we got on to the subject of my being too young, too stupid or too short.

"Do you? Why?"

"Somebody said something, that's all."

She put down her work, tucking it by the chair cushion at the side of her leg, and pursed her lips. "Who? Who said it and what did they say?"

"A boy at the gate in the grounds. He said our family was strange and that Father was a . . ."

"What?"

"I never found out."

She smiled and picked up her needlework "And that's what set you thinking, is it?"

"Well, wouldn't it you?"

"I already know everything I need to know," she said haughtily, "and I tell you this, I couldn't give two figs what they say about us in the house next door."

"Well, tell me then," I said. "What *did* Father do before I was born?"

Jenny did smile, sometimes. She smiled when she had the upper hand, when she could exert a little power over someone—especially if that someone was me.

"You'll find out," she said.

"When?"

"All in good time. After all, you are his *male heir*."

There was a long pause. "How do you mean, 'male heir'?" I asked. "What's the difference between that and what you are?"

She sighed. "Well, at the moment, not much, although you have weapons training, and I don't."

"You don't?" But on reflection I already knew that, and I suppose I had wondered why it was that I did swordcraft and she did needlecraft.

“No, Haytham, I don’t have weapons training. No child has weapons training, Haytham, not in Bloomsbury anyway, and maybe not in all of London. Nobody but you. Haven’t you been told?”

“Told what?”

“Not to say anything.”

“Yes, but . . .”

“Well, didn’t you ever wonder why—*why* you’re not supposed to say anything?”

Maybe I had. Maybe I secretly knew all along. I said nothing.

“You’ll soon find out what’s in store for you,” she said. “Our lives have been mapped out for us, don’t you worry about that.”

“Well, then, what’s in store for you?”

She snorted derisively. “*What* is in store for me? is the wrong question. *Who* is in store? would be more accurate.” There was a trace of something in her voice that I wouldn’t quite understand until much later, and I looked at her, knowing better than to enquire further, and risk feeling the sting of that needle. But when I eventually put down the book I had been reading and left the drawing room, I did so knowing that although I had learnt almost nothing about my father or family, I’d learnt something about Jenny: why she never smiled; why she was always so antagonistic towards me.

It was because she’d seen the future. She’d seen the future and knew it favoured me, for no better reason than I had been born male.

I might have felt sorry for her. Might have done—if she hadn’t been such a grumbler.

Knowing what I now knew, though, weapons training the following day had an extra frisson. So: nobody else had weapons training but me. Suddenly it felt as though I were tasting forbidden fruit, and the fact that my father was my tutor only made it more succulent. If Jenny was right, and there was some calling I was being groomed to answer, like other boys are trained for the priesthood, or as blacksmiths, butchers or carpenters, then good. That suited me fine. There was nobody in the world I looked up to more than Father. The thought that he was passing on his knowledge to me was at once comforting and thrilling.

And, of course, it involved swords. What more could a boy want? Looking back, I know that from that day on I became a more willing and enthusiastic pupil. Every day, either at midday or after evening meal, depending on Father’s diary, we convened in what we called the training room but was actually the games room. And it was there that my sword skills began to improve.

I haven’t trained since the attack. I haven’t had the heart to pick up a blade at all, but I know that when I do I’ll picture that room, with its dark, oak-panelled walls, bookshelves and the covered billiard table which had been moved aside to make space. And in it my father, his bright eyes, sharp but kindly, and always smiling, always encouraging me: block, parry, footwork, balance, awareness, anticipation. Those words he repeated like a mantra, sometimes saying nothing else for an entire lesson at a time, just barking the commands, nodding when I got it right, shaking his head when I did it wrong, occasionally pausing, scooping his hair out of his face, and going to the back of me to position my arms and legs.

To me, they are—or were—the sights and sounds of weapons training: the bookshelves, the billiard table, my father’s mantra and the sound of ringing . . .

Wood.

Yes, wood.

Wooden training swords we used, much to my chagrin. Steel would come later, he'd say, whenever I complained.

### iii

---

On the morning of my birthday, Edith was extra specially nice to me and Mother made sure I was given a birthday breakfast of my favourites: sardines with mustard sauce, and fresh bread with cherry jam made from the fruit of the trees in our grounds. I caught Jenny giving me a sneering look as I tucked in but paid it no mind. Since our conversation in the drawing room, whatever power she'd had over me, slim as it had been, had somehow been made less distinct. Before that I might have taken her ridicule to heart, maybe felt a little silly and self-conscious about my birthday breakfast. But not that day. Thinking back, I wonder if my eighth birthday marked the day I began to change from boy to man.

So no, I didn't care about the curl of Jenny's lip, or the pig noises she made surreptitiously. I had eyes only for Mother and Father, who had eyes only for me. I could tell by their expressions, tiny little parental codes I'd picked up over the years, that something else was to come; that my birthday pleasures were set to continue. And so it proved. By the end of the meal my father had announced that tonight we would be going to White's Chocolate House on Chesterfield Street, where the hot chocolate is made from *solid blocks of cocoa* imported from Spain.

Later that day I stood with Edith and Betty fussing around me, dressing me in my smartest suit. Then the four of us were stepping into a carriage at the kerb outside, where I sneaked a look up at the windows of our neighbours and wondered if the faces of the Dawson girls were pressed to the glass, or Tom and his brothers. I hoped so. I hoped they could see me now. See us all and think, "There go the Kenway family, out for the evening, just like a normal family."

### iv

---

The area around Chesterfield Street was busy. We were able to draw up directly outside White's and, once there, our door was opened and we were helped quickly across the crowded thoroughfare, and inside.

Even so, during that short walk between the carriage and the sanctuary of the chocolate house, I looked to my left and right and saw a little of London: the body of a dog lying in the gutter, a derelict retching against some railings, flower sellers, beggars, drunkards, urchins splashing in a river of mud that seemed to seethe on the street.

And then we were inside, greeted by the thick scent of smoke, ale, perfume and of course chocolate, as well as a hubbub of piano and raised voices. People, all of whom were shouting, leaned over gaming tables. Men drank from huge tankards of ale; women, too. I saw some with hot chocolate and cake. Everybody, it seemed, was in a

state of high excitement.

I looked at Father, who had stopped short, and sensed his discomfort. For a moment I was concerned he'd simply turn and leave, before a gentleman holding his cane aloft caught my eye. Younger than Father, with an easy smile and a twinkle that was visible even across the room, he was wagging the cane at us. Until with a grateful wave, Father acknowledged him and began to lead us across the room, squeezing between tables, stepping over dogs and even one or two children, who scrabbled at the feet of revellers, presumably hoping for whatever might fall off the gaming tables: pieces of cake, maybe coins.

We reached the gentleman with the cane. Unlike Father, whose hair was unkempt and barely tied back with a bow, he wore a white powdered wig, the back of it secured in a black silk bag, and a frock coat in a deep, rich red colour. With a nod, he greeted Father then turned his attention to me and made an exaggerated bow. "Good evening, Master Haytham, I believe that many happy returns of the day are in order. Remind me please of your age, sir? I can see from your bearing that you are a child of great maturity. Eleven? Twelve, perhaps?"

As he said this he glanced over my shoulder with a twinkly smile and my mother and father chuckled appreciatively.

"I am eight, sir," I said, and puffed up proudly, as my father completed the introductions. The gentleman was Reginald Birch, one of his senior property managers, and Mr. Birch said he was delighted to make my acquaintance then greeted my mother with a long bow, kissing the back of her hand.

His attention went to Jenny next, and he took her hand, bent his head and pressed his lips to it. I knew enough to realize that what he was doing was courtship, and I glanced quickly over to Father, expecting him to step in.

Instead what I saw was he and Mother looking thrilled, though Jenny was stone-faced, and stayed that way as we were led to a private back room of the chocolate house and seated, she and Mr. Birch side by side, as the White's staff began to busy themselves around us.

I could have stayed there all night, having my fill of hot chocolate and cake, copious amounts of which were delivered to the table. Both Father and Mr. Birch seemed to enjoy the ale. So in the end it was Mother who insisted we leave—before I was sick, or they were—and we stepped out into the night, which if anything had become even busier in the intervening hours.

For a moment or so I found myself disorientated by the noise and the stench of the street. Jenny wrinkled her nose, and I saw a flicker of concern pass across my mother's face. Instinctively, Father moved closer towards us all, as if to try and ward off the clamour.

A filthy hand was thrust in front of my face and I looked up to see a beggar silently appealing for money with wide, beseeching eyes, bright white in contrast to the dirt of his face and hair; a flower seller tried to bustle past Father to reach Jenny, and gave an outraged "Oi" when Mr. Birch used his cane to block her path. I felt myself being jostled, saw two urchins trying to reach us with their palms out.

Then suddenly my mother gave a cry as a man burst from within the crowd, clothes ragged and dirty, teeth bared and his hand outstretched, about to snatch my mother's necklace.

And in the next second I discovered why Father's cane had that curious rattle, as I saw a blade appear from within as he span to protect Mother. He covered the distance to her in the blink of an eye, but before it cleared its scabbard, he changed his mind, perhaps seeing the thief was unarmed, and replaced it, ramming it home with a thump and making it a cane once again, in the same movement twirling it to knock the ruffian's hand aside.

The thief shrieked in pain and surprise and backed straight into Mr. Birch, who hurled him to the street and pounced on him, his knees on the man's chest and a dagger at his throat. I caught my breath.

I saw Mother's eyes widen over Father's shoulder.

"Reginald!" called Father. "Stop!"

"He tried to rob you, Edward," said Mr. Birch, without turning. The thief snivelled. The tendons on Mr. Birch's hands stood out, and his knuckles were white on the handle of the dagger.

"No, Reginald, this is not the way," said my father calmly. He stood with his arms around Mother, who had buried her face in his chest and was whimpering softly. Jenny stood close by at one side, me at another. Around us a crowd had gathered, the same vagrants and beggars who had been bothering us now keeping a respectful distance. A respectful, *frightened* distance.

"I mean it, Reginald," said Father. "Put the dagger away, let him go."

"Don't make me look foolish like this, Edward," said Birch. "Not in front of everybody like this, please. We both know this man deserves to pay, if not with his life, then perhaps with a finger or two."

I caught my breath.

"No!" commanded Father. "There will be no bloodshed, Reginald. Any association between us will end if you do not do as I say this very moment." A hush seemed to fall on everybody around us. I could hear the thief gibbering, saying over and over again, "Please sir, please sir, please sir . . ." His arms were pinned to his sides, his legs kicking and scraping uselessly on the filth-covered cobbles as he lay trapped.

Until, at last, Mr. Birch seemed to decide, and the dagger withdrew, leaving a small bleeding nick behind. When he stood, he aimed a kick at the thief, who needed no further encouragement to scramble to his hands and knees and take off into Chesterfield Street, grateful to escape with his life.

Our carriage driver had recovered his wits and now stood by the door, urging us to hurry to the safety of our carriage.

Father and Mr. Birch stood facing one another, their eyes locked. As Mother hurried me past, I saw Mr. Birch's eyes blazing. I saw my father's gaze meet him equally, and he offered his hand to shake, saying, "Thank you, Reginald. On behalf of all of us, thank you for your quick thinking."

I felt my mother's hand in the small of my back as she tried to shove me into the carriage, and craned my head back to see Father, his hand held out to Mr. Birch, who glared at him, refusing to accept the offer of accord.

Then, just as I was bundled into the carriage, I saw Mr. Birch reach to grasp Father's hand and his glare melt away into a smile—a slightly embarrassed, bashful smile, as though he'd just remembered himself. The two shook hands and my father