A NEW TALE will appear in *ALL THE YEAR ROUND*,

To be continued from week to week, and completed within Two Months, entitled

**A DARK NIGHT'S WORK**

By the Authoress of "MARY BARTON."

**Chapter 1- Discussion Extract 1**…The certain shire was but a small county, and the principal town in it contained only about four thousand inhabitants; so in saying that Mr. Wilkins was the principal lawyer in Hamley, I say very little, unless I add that he transacted all the legal business of the gentry for twenty miles round.  His grandfather had established the connection; his father had consolidated and strengthened it, and, indeed, by his wise and upright conduct, as well as by his professional skill, had obtained for himself the position of confidential friend to many of the surrounding families of distinction.  He visited among them in a way which no mere lawyer had ever done before; dined at their tables—he alone, not accompanied by his wife, be it observed; rode to the meet occasionally as if by accident, although he was as well mounted as any squire among them,…But in general he knew his place; as his place was held to be in that aristocratic county, and in those days…

 In the opinion of all the shire, no society had more reason to consider itself select than that which met at every full moon in the Hamley assembly-room, an excrescence built on to the principal inn in the town by the joint subscription of all the county families.  Into those choice and mysterious precincts no towns person was ever allowed to enter; no professional man might set his foot therein; no infantry officer saw the interior of that ball, or that card-room.  The old original subscribers would fain have had a man prove his sixteen quarterings before he might make his bow to the queen of the night; but the old original founders of the Hamley assemblies were dropping off; minuets had vanished with them, country dances had died away; quadrilles were in high vogue—nay, one or two of the high magnates of ---shire were trying to introduce waltzing, as they had seen it in London, where it had come in with the visit of the allied sovereigns, when Edward Wilkins made his *début* on these boards.

**Chapters 1 and 2 Discussion Extract 2**…He was a son to be proud of, and right down proud was old Mr. Wilkins of his handsome, accomplished, gentlemanly lad.  For Edward was not one to be spoilt by the course of indulgence he had passed through; at least, if it had done him an injury, the effects were at present hidden from view.  He had no vulgar vices; he was, indeed, rather too refined for the society he was likely to be thrown into, even supposing that society to consist of the highest of his father’s employers.  He was well read, and an artist of no mean pretensions.  Above all, “his heart was in the right place,” as his father used to observe….

Yet Edward was fully aware, if his fond father was not, that of all the young ladies who were glad enough of him as a partner at the Hamley assemblies, there was not of them but would have considered herself affronted by an offer of marriage from an attorney, the son and grandson of attorneys.  The young man had perhaps received many a slight and mortification pretty quietly during these years, which yet told upon his character in after life.  Even at this very time they were having their effect.  He was of too sweet a disposition to show resentment, as many men would have done.  But nevertheless he took a secret pleasure in the power which his father’s money gave him.  He would buy an expensive horse after five minutes’ conversation as to the price, about which a needy heir of one of the proud county families had been haggling for three weeks.  His dogs were from the best kennels in England, no matter at what cost; his guns were the newest and most improved make; and all these were expenses on objects which were among those of daily envy to the squires and squires’ sons around.  They did not much care for the treasures of art, which report said were being accumulated in Mr. Wilkins’s house.  But they did covet the horses and hounds he possessed, and the young man knew that they coveted, and rejoiced in it.

**Discussion Extract 3: Chapter 4-Dunster....**And thus the sad events of the future life of this father and daughter were hardly perceived in their steady advance, and yet over the monotony and flat uniformity of their days sorrow came marching down upon them like an armed man.  Long before Mr. Wilkins had recognised its shape, it was approaching him in the distance—as, in fact, it is approaching all of us at this very time; you, reader, I, writer, have each our great sorrow bearing down upon us.  It may be yet beyond the dimmest point of our horizon, but in the stillness of the night our hearts shrink at the sound of its coming footstep….

And yet daily Mr. Wilkins was sinking from the intellectually to the sensually self-indulgent man.  He lay late in bed, and hated Mr. Dunster for his significant glance at the office-clock when he announced to his master that such and such a client had been waiting more than an hour to keep an appointment.  “Why didn’t you see him yourself, Dunster?  I’m sure you would have done quite as well as me,” Mr. Wilkins sometimes replied, partly with a view of saying something pleasant to the man whom he disliked and feared.  Mr. Dunster always replied, in a meek matter-of-fact tone, “Oh, sir, they wouldn’t like to talk over their affairs with a subordinate.”

**Discussion Extract 4:Ralph and Livingstone Chapters 4 &7**…Ralph Ch. 4 …  her lover began to be jealous of the possible admirers her striking appearance and piquant conversation might attract, and thought it a good time to make the success of his suit certain by spoken words and promises….He needed not have alarmed himself even enough to make him take this step, if he had been capable of understanding Ellinor’s heart as fully as he did her appearance and conversation.  She never missed the absence of formal words and promises.

Livingstone Ch 7….He came a step or two nearer, as if he longed to take her in his arms and comfort and shelter her; but she stiffened herself and arose, and by an effort walked towards the fireplace, and there stood, as if awaiting what he would say next.  But he was overwhelmed by her aspect of illness.  He almost forgot his own wishes, his own suit, in his desire to relieve her from the pain, physical as he believed it, under which she was suffering.  It was she who had to begin the subject.

“I received your letter yesterday, Mr. Livingstone.  I was anxious to see you to-day, in order that I might prevent you from speaking to my father.  I do not say anything of the kind of affection you can feel for me—me, whom you have only seen once.  All I shall say is, that the sooner we both forget what I must call folly, the better.”

She took the airs of a woman considerably older and more experienced than himself.  He thought her haughty; she was only miserable.

“You are mistaken,” said he, more quietly and with more dignity than was likely from his previous conduct.  “I will not allow you to characterise as folly what might be presumptuous on my part—I had no business to express myself so soon—but which in its foundation was true and sincere.  That I can answer for most solemnly.  It is possible, though it may not be a usual thing, for a man to feel so strongly attracted by the charms and qualities of a woman, even at first sight, as to feel sure that she, and she alone, can make his happiness.  My folly consisted—there you are right—in even dreaming that you could return my feelings in the slightest degree, when you had only seen me once: and I am most truly ashamed of myself.  I cannot tell you how sorry I am, when I see how you have compelled yourself to come and speak to me when you are so ill.”

She staggered into a chair, for with all her wish for his speedy dismissal, she was obliged to be seated.  His hand was upon the bell….His eyes, bent upon her with a look of deep anxiety, touched her at that moment, and she was on the point of shedding tears; but she checked herself, and rose again.

**Discussion Extract 5 The Murder**…No! there was the swell of voices coming up through the window from her father’s study: angry voices they were; and her anger rose sympathetically, as she knew that her father was being irritated.  There was a sudden movement, as of chairs pushed hastily aside, and then a mysterious unaccountable noise—heavy, sudden; and then a slight movement as of chairs again; and then a profound stillness.  Ellinor leaned her head against the side of the window to listen more intently, for some mysterious instinct made her sick and faint.  No sound—no noise.  Only by-and-by she heard, what we have all heard at such times of intent listening, the beating of the pulses of her heart, and then the whirling rush of blood through her head.  How long did this last?  She never knew.  By-and-by she heard her father’s hurried footstep in his bedroom, next to hers; but when she ran thither to speak to him, and ask him what was amiss—if anything had been—if she might come to him now about Mr. Livingstone’s letter, she found that he had gone down again to his study, and almost at the same moment she heard the little private outer door of that room open; someone went out, and then there were hurried footsteps along the shrubbery-path.  She thought, of course, that it was Mr. Dunster leaving the house; and went back for Mr. Livingstone’s letter.  Having found it, she passed through her father’s room to the private staircase, thinking that if she went by the more regular way, she would have run the risk of disturbing Miss Monro, and perhaps of being questioned in the morning.  Even in passing down this remote staircase, she trod softly for fear of being overheard.  When she entered the room, the full light of the candles dazzled her for an instant, coming out of the darkness.  They were flaring wildly in the draught that came in through the open door, by which the outer air was admitted; for a moment there seemed no one in the room, and then she saw, with strange sick horror, the legs of some one lying on the carpet behind the table.  As if compelled, even while she shrank from doing it, she went round to see who it was that lay there, so still and motionless as never to stir at her sudden coming.  It was Mr. Dunster; his head propped on chair-cushions, his eyes open, staring, distended.  There was a strong smell of brandy and hartshorn in the room; a smell so powerful as not to be neutralized by the free current of night air that blew through the two open doors.  Ellinor could not have told whether it was reason or instinct that made her act as she did during this awful night.  In thinking of it afterwards, with shuddering avoidance of the haunting memory that would come and overshadow her during many, many years of her life, she grew to believe that the powerful smell of the spilt brandy absolutely intoxicated her… But something gave her a presence of mind and a courage not her own.  And though she learnt to think afterwards that she had acted unwisely, if not wrongly and wickedly, yet she marvelled, in recalling that time, how she could have then behaved as she did.  First of all she lifted herself up from her fascinated gaze at the dead man, and went to the staircase door, by which she had entered the study, and shut it softly.  Then she went back—looked again; took the brandy-bottle, and knelt down, and tried to pour some into the mouth; but this she found she could not do.  Then she wetted her handkerchief with the spirit, and moistened the lips; all to no purpose; for, as I have said before, the man was dead—killed by rupture of a vessel of the brain; how occasioned I must tell by-and-by.  Of course, all Ellinor’s little cares and efforts produced no effect; her father had tried them before—vain endeavours all, to bring back the precious breath of life!  The poor girl could not bear the look of those open eyes, and softly, tenderly, tried to close them, although unconscious that in so doing she was rendering the pious offices of some beloved hand to a dead man.  She was sitting by the body on the floor when she heard steps coming with rushing and yet cautious tread, through the shrubbery; she had no fear, although it might be the tread of robbers and murderers.  The awfulness of the hour raised her above common fears; though she did not go through the usual process of reasoning, and by it feel assured that the feet which were coming so softly and swiftly along were the same which she had heard leaving the room in like manner only a quarter of an hour before.

Her father entered, and started back, almost upsetting some one behind him by his recoil, on seeing his daughter in her motionless attitude by the dead man.

“My God, Ellinor! what has brought you here?” he said, almost fiercely.

But she answered as one stupefied, “I don’t know.  Is he dead?”

“Hush, hush, child; it cannot be helped.”

She raised her eyes to the solemn, pitying, awe-stricken face behind her father’s—the countenance of Dixon.

“Is he dead?” she asked of him.

The man stepped forwards, respectfully pushing his master on one side as he did so.  He bent down over the corpse, and looked, and listened and then reaching a candle off the table, he signed Mr. Wilkins to close the door.  And Mr. Wilkins obeyed, and looked with an intensity of eagerness almost amounting to faintness on the experiment, and yet he could not hope.  The flame was steady—steady and pitilessly unstirred, even when it was adjusted close to mouth and nostril; the head was raised up by one of Dixon’s stalwart arms, while he held the candle in the other hand.  Ellinor fancied that there was some trembling on Dixon’s part, and grasped his wrist tightly in order to give it the requisite motionless firmness….

All in vain.  The head was placed again on the cushions, the servant rose and stood by his master, looked sadly on the dead man, whom, living, none of them had liked or cared for, and Ellinor sat on, quiet and tearless, as one in a trance.