

CHAPTER LXX
The Revelations in the Vaults

The object of Sir Richard Blunt was, of course, to make the cook hear him, but no one else. With this aim he took a crown piece from his pocket and tapped with the edge of it upon the stonework which at that place protruded from the wall to the extent of nearly a foot. The stone shelves upon the other side were let into the wall in that fashion. The monotonous ringing sound of the coin against the stone was likely enough to reverberate through the wall, and that the cook was rather a light sleeper, or did not sleep at all, was soon sufficiently manifest, for a voice, which the magistrate recognised as his, cried from the other side —

“Who is there? If a friend, speak quickly, for God knows I have need of such. If an enemy, your utmost malice cannot make my situation worse than it is.”

Sir Richard placed his mouth close to a crevice, and said —

“A friend, and the same who has spoken to you before.”

“Ah! I know that voice. Do you bring me freedom?”

“Soon. But I have much to ask of you.”

“Let me look at the daylight, and then ask what you will, I shall not tire of answering.”

“Nay, the principal thing I have to ask of you is yet a little more patience.”

“Patience! Patience! It seems that I have been years in this place, and yet you ask me to have more patience. Oh, blessed liberty, am I not to hail you yet?”

“Can you forget that you have another object — namely, to bring to the just punishment of the law those who have placed you and others in this awful position?”

“Yes — yes. But —”

“But you would forego all that to be free, a few short hours before you would be free with the accomplishment of all that justice and society required?”

“No — no. God help me! I will have patience. What is it that you demand of me now? Speak.”

“Your name?”

“Alas! — Alas!”

“Surely you cannot hesitate to tell one, who has run some risks to befriend you, who you are?”

“If, by my telling that, I saw that those risks were made less, I would not hesitate; but, as it is, London, and all that it contains now, is so hateful to me, that I shall leave it the instant I can. Falsehood, where I most expected truth, has sunk deeply, like a barbed arrow, into my heart.”

“Well, I certainly had hoped you would have placed in me that amount of confidence.”

“No. I dare not.”

“Dare not?”

“Yes, that is the word. The knowledge of my name spread abroad — that is to say, my real name, would inflict much misery for all, I can just now say to the contrary, upon one whom I yet wish all the happiness that God can give his creatures in this world. Let it be thought that I and the world have parted company.”

“You are a strange man.”

“I am. But the story I have to tell of the doings in this den of infamy, will come as well from a Mr. Smith as from any one else.”

“I wish you now, in a few words, to relate to me what you know, fully and freely.”

“Anticipating that a statement would be wanted, I have, with no small amount of trouble, manufactured for myself pens and ink, and have written all that I have to say. How can I give you the document?”

“There is a chink here in the wall, through which I am addressing you. Can you pass it through?”

“I will try. I see the chink now for the first time since my long and painful residence here. Your light upon the other side has made it quite apparent to me. I think, by folding my paper close, I can pass it through to you.”

“Try it.”

In about half a minute Sir Richard Blunt got hold of a piece of folded paper, which was pushed partly through the chink. He pulled it quite through, and handed it to the secretary, who, with a nod, at once put it in his pocket.

“And now for how long,” said the cook, “am I to pine for freedom from this dreadful place? Recollect that each hour here has upon its passing wings a load of anxieties and miseries, such as I only can appreciate.”

"I have brought a letter for you," said Sir Richard, "which will contain all the intelligence you wish, and give you such instructions as shall not only ensure your safety, but enable you to aid materially in bringing your persecutors to justice. Place your hand to the crevice and take it."

"I have it."

"Well, read it at your leisure. Have you any means of knowing the time of day in your prison?"

"Oh yes. There is a clock in the bakehouse, by which I am forced to regulate the different batches of pies."

"That will do. Have you had any more threats from Mrs. Lovett?"

"None. As long as I perform my loathsome duty here, I see no one and hear of no one."

"Be of good cheer, your desolate condition will not last long. It is not easy under present circumstances to enter at large into matters which might induce you to declare who you really are, but when you and I meet in the bright sunshine from which you have been debarred for so long, you will think very differently from what you do now upon many things."

"Well, sir, perhaps I shall."

"Good night to you. Take what rest and refreshment you can, my good friend, and believe that there are better days in store for you."

"I will strive to think so. — Good night."

There was such a mournful cadence in the voice of the imprisoned young man, as he said "Good night," that the secretary remarked in a low voice to Sir Richard —

"Would it not be a mercy now to let him free, and take him away with us?"

"I don't like his concealing his name, my lord."

"Well, it is not the thing exactly."

"His imprisonment now will be of very short duration indeed, and his liberation is certain, unless by some glaring act of imprudence he mars his own fortune. But now, gentlemen, I have a sight to show you in these vaults that you have come to see, and yet, that I think it would have been wise if you had left unseen."

"Indeed!"

“Yes. You will soon agree with me in opinion.”

Sir Richard, bearing the lantern in his hand, led the way for a considerable distance back again, until they were fairly under the church, and then he said —

“A large vault belonging to a family named Weston, which is extinct I fancy, for we can find no one to claim it, has been opened near this spot.”

“By whom?”

“That you will have no difficulty in guessing. It is that vault that I wish to show you. There are others in the same condition, but one will be enough to satiate your appetites for such sights. This way, gentlemen, if you please.”

As the light from the two lanterns fell upon the faces of Sir Richard Blunt’s companions, curiosity and excitement could be seen paramount upon their features. They followed him as their guide without a word, but they could not but see that he trod slowly, and that now and then a shudder crossed his frame.

“Even you are affected,” said the secretary, when the silence had lasted some minutes.

“I were something more or less than human,” replied Sir Richard Blunt “if I could go unmoved into the presence of that sight, that I feel it to be my duty to show to you.”

“It must be horrible indeed.”

“It is more horrible than all the horrors your imagination can suggest. Let us go quicker.”

Apparently with a desperate feeling of resolution, such as might actuate a man who had some great danger to encounter, and who after shrinking from it for a time, should cry “Well, the sooner it is over the better,” did the magistrate now quicken his steps, nor paused he until he arrived at the door of the vault of which he had spoken.

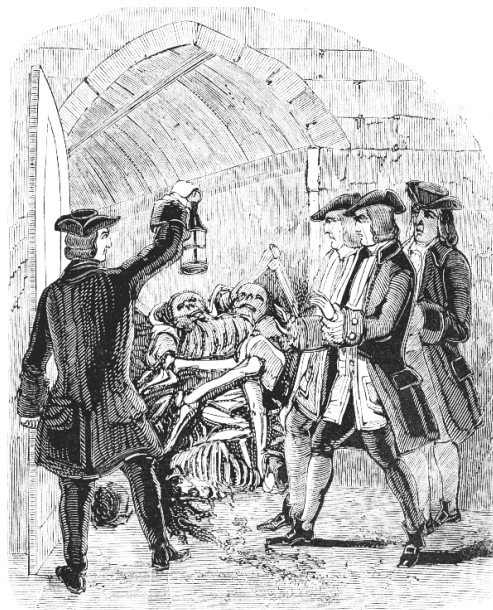
“Now, Mr. Villimay,” he said. “Be so good as to hold up your lantern as high as you can, at the same time not to get it above the doorway, and I will do the same by mine. All that we want is a brief but clear view.”

“Yes, yes. Quite brief,” said the secretary.

Sir Richard Blunt laid his hand upon the door of the vault, which was unfastened, and flung it open.

“Behold!” he said, “One of the vaults of old St. Dunstan’s.”

For the space of about a minute and a half no one uttered a word, so it behoves us to state what that vault contained, to strike such horror into the hearts of bold educated men. Piled one upon each other on the floor, and reaching half way up to the ceiling lay, a decomposing mass of human remains. Heaped up one upon another, heedlessly tossed into the disgusting heap any way, lay the gaunt skeletons with pieces of flesh here and there only adhering to the bones. A steam — a fetid steam rose up from the dead, and upon the floor was a pool of corruption, creeping along as the declivities warranted. Eyes, teeth, hands half denuded of flesh — glistening vermin, shiny and sleek with the luxurious feeding they there got, slipped glibly in and out of the heaped up horror.



Todd's Victims in the Vaults of old St. Dunstan's Church.

"No more — no more!" cried the secretary.

"I sicken," said his friend, "I am faint."

Sir Richard Blunt let go the door, and it slammed shut with a hollow sound.

"Thank God!" he said.

"For — for what?" gasped Mr. Villimay.

"That you and I, my friend, need not look upon this sight again. We are all sufficient evidence upon our oaths that it is here to see."

"Yes — yes."

"Come away," said the secretary. "You told me something of what was to see, Sir Richard Blunt, but my imagination did not picture it to be what it is."

"I told you that likewise, my lord."

"You did — you did."

With hurried steps they now followed the magistrate; and it was with a feeling of exquisite relief that they all found themselves, after a few minutes, fairly in the body of the church, and some distance from that frightful spectacle they had each thought it to be their duty to look upon.

"Let us go to the vestry," said the secretary, "and take something. I am sick at heart and stomach both."

"And I am everything, and hungry too," cried a voice, and the Lord Mayor popped his head up from the churchwardens' pew.

No one could help laughing at this, although, to tell the truth, those men, after what they had seen, were in no laughing mood, as the reader may well imagine.

"Is that our friend, the King of the City?" said the secretary.

"It is," said Sir Richard.

"Well, I must say that he has set a good example of bravery in his dominions."

"He has indeed."

"Gentlemen — gentlemen," added the Lord Mayor, as he rolled out of the churchwardens' pew, "don't think of going into the vestry without me, for it was I who gave a hint to have refreshments put there, and I have been dying for some of them for this last half hour, I assure you."

CHAPTER LXXI
Returns to Johanna

We return to Johanna Oakley.

* * * * *

“What is the meaning of all this?” said Sweeney Todd, as he sat in his shop about the hour of twelve on the morning following that upon which Johanna Oakley and her friend Arabella had concerted so romantic a plan of operations regarding him. “What is the meaning of all this? Am I going mad?”

Now Todd’s question was no doubt a result of some peculiar sensations that had come over him; but, propounded as it was to silence and to vacancy, it of course got no answer. A cold perspiration had suddenly broke out upon his brow, and, for the space of about ten minutes, he was subject to one of those strange foreshadowings of coming ills to him, which of late had begun to make his waking hours anything but joyous, and his dreams hideous.

“What can it mean?” he said. “What can it mean?”

He wiped his face with a miserable looking handkerchief, and then, with a deep sigh, he said —

“It is that fiend in the shape of a woman!”

No doubt he meant his dear friend, Mrs. Lovett. Alas! What a thorn she was in the side of Sweeney Todd. How poor a thing, by way of recompense for the dark and terrible suspicions he had of her, was his heaped up wealth? Todd — yes, Sweeney Todd, who had waded knee deep — knee deep do we say? — lip deep in blood for gold, had begun to find that there was something more precious still which he had bartered for it — peace! That peace of mind — that sweet serenity of soul, which, like the love of God, is beautiful, and yet passeth understanding. Yes, Todd was beginning to find out that he had bartered the jewel for the setting! What a common mistake. Does not all the world do it? They do; but the difference between Todd and common people merely was that he played the game with high stakes.

“Yes,” added Todd, after a pause, “curses on her, it is that fiend in the shape of a woman, who

‘Cows my better part of man,’

and she or I must fall. That is settled; yes — she or I. There was a time when I used to say she and I could not live in the same country; but now I feel that we cannot both live in the same world. She must go — she must lapse into the sleep of death.”

Todd rose, and stalked to and fro in his shop. He felt as if something was going to happen: that undefinable fidgety feeling which will attack all persons at times, came over him, and yet it was not a feeling of deep apprehension that was at his heart.

“Oh,” he muttered, “it is the recollection of that dreadful woman — that fiend, who, with a seeming prescience, knows when there is poison in her glass, and baffles me. It is the dim and shadowy thought of what I must do with her that shatters me. If poison will not do the deed, steel or a bullet must. Ah!”

Some one was trying the handle of the shop door, and so timidly was it tried, that Todd stood still to listen, without saying “Come in,” or otherwise encouraging the visitor.

“Who is it?” he gasped.

Still the handle of the door lock only shook. To be sure, it was a difficult door to open to all who did not know it well. Todd had taken care of that, for if there was anything more than another which such a man as he might be fairly enough presumed to dislike, it would be to be glided in upon by the sudden opening of an easygoing door.

“Come in,” he now cried.

The person without was evidently anxious to obey the invitation, and a more strenuous effort was made to unfasten the door. It yielded at length. A young and pretty looking lad, apparently of about thirteen or fourteen years of age, stood upon the threshold. He and Sweeney Todd looked at each other in silence for a few moments. If a painter or a sculptor could have caught them as they stood, and transferred them to canvas or to marble, he might have called them an idea of Guilt and Innocence. There was Todd, with evil passions and wickedness written upon every feature of his face. There was the boy, with the rosy gentleness and innocence of Heaven upon his brow. God made both these creatures! It was Todd who broke the silence. A gathering flush was upon the face of the boy, and he could not speak.

“What do you want?” said Todd.

He rattled his chair as he spoke, as though he would have said, “It is not to be shaved.” The boy was too much engaged with his own thoughts to pay much attention to Todd’s pantomime. He evidently, though, wished to say something, which he could not command breath to give utterance to. Like the “Amen” of Macbeth, something he would fain have uttered, seemed to stick in his throat.

“What is it?” again demanded Todd, eagerly.

This roused the boy. The boy, do we say. Ah, our readers have already recognised in that boy the beautiful and enthusiastic Johanna Oakley.

“There is a bill in your window — ”



Johanna Applies to Todd to Become his Errand Boy.

“A what?”

Todd had forgotten the announcement regarding the youth he wanted, with a taste for piety.

“A bill. You want a boy, sir.”

“Oh,” said Todd, as the object of the visit at once thus became clear and apparent to him. “Oh, that’s it.”

“Yes, sir.”

Todd held up his hand to his eyes, as though he were shading them from sunlight, as he gazed upon Johanna, and then, in an abrupt tone of voice, he said —

“You won’t do.”

“Thank you, sir.”

She moved towards the door. Her hand touched the handle. It was not fast. The door opened. Another moment, and she would have been gone.

“Stop!” cried Todd.

She returned at once.

“You don’t look like a lad in want of a situation. Your clothes are good — your whole appearance is that of a young gentleman. What do you mean by coming here to ask to be an errand boy in a barber’s shop? I don’t understand it. You had different expectations.”

“Yes, sir. But Mrs. Green — ”

“Mrs. who?”

“Green, sir, my mother-in-law, don’t use me well, and I would rather go to sea, or seek my living in any way, than go back again to her; and if I were to come into your service, all I would ask would be, that you did not let her know where I was.”

“Humph! Your mother-in-law, you say?”

“Yes, sir. I have been far happier since I ran away from her, than I have been for a long time past.”

“Ah, you ran away? Where lives she?”

“At Oxford. I came to London in the waggon, and at every step the lazy horses took, I felt a degree of pleasure that I was placing a greater distance between me and oppression.”

“Your own name?”

“Charley Green. It was all very well as long as my father lived; but when he was no more, my mother-in-law began her ill usage of me. I bore it as long as I could, and then I ran away. If you can take me, sir, I hope you will.”

“Go along with you. You won’t suit me at all. I wonder at your impudence in coming.”

“No harm done, sir. I will try my fortune elsewhere.”

Todd began sharpening a razor, as the boy went to the door again.

“Shall I take him?” he said to himself. “I do want some one for the short time I shall be here. Humph! An orphan — strange in London. No one to care for him. The very thing for me. No prying friends — nowhere to run, the moment he is sent of an errand, with open mouth, proclaiming this and that has happened in the shop. I will have him.”

He darted to the door.

“Hoi! — Hoi!”

Johanna turned round, and came back in a minute. Todd had caught at the bait at last. She got close to the door.

“Upon consideration,” said Todd, “I will speak to you again. But just run and see what the time is by St. Dunstan’s Church.”

“St. — St. who?” said Johanna, looking around her with a bewildered, confused sort of air. “St. who?”

“St. Dunstan’s, in Fleet Street.”

“Fleet Street? If you will direct me, sir, I dare say I shall find it — oh, yes. I am good at finding places.”

“He *is* strange in London,” muttered Todd. “I am satisfied of that. He is strange. Come in — come in, and shut the door after you.”

With a heart beating with violence, that was positively fearful, Johanna followed Todd into the shop, carefully closing the door behind her, as she had been ordered to do.

“Now,” said Todd, “nothing in the world but my consideration for your orphan and desolate condition, could possibly induce me to think of taking you in; but the fact is, being an orphan myself — (here Todd made a hideous grimace) — I say, being an orphan myself, with little to distress me amid the oceans and quicksands of this wicked world, some very strong sense of religion — (another hideous grimace) — I naturally feel for you.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Are you decidedly pious?”

“I hope so, sir.”

“Humph! Well, we will say more upon that all-important subject another time, and if I consent to be your master, a — a — a — ”

“Charley Green, sir.”

“Ay, Charley Green. If I consent to take you for a week upon trial, you must wholly attribute it to my feelings.”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Have you any idea yourself as to terms?”

“None in the least, sir.”

“Very good. Then you will not be disappointed. I shall give you sixpence a week, and your board wages of threepence a day, besides perquisites. The threepence I advise you to spend in three penny pies, at Mrs. Lovett’s, in Bell Yard. They are the most nutritious and appetizing things you can buy; and in the Temple you will find an excellent pump, so that the half hour you will be allowed for dinner will be admirably consumed in your walk to the pie shop, and from thence to the pump, and then home here again.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You will sleep under the counter, here, of a night, and the perquisites I mention will consist of the use of the pewter washhand basin, the soap, and the end of a towel.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You will hear and see much in this place. Perhaps now and then you will be surprised at something; but — but, master Charley, if you go and gossip about me or my affairs, or what you see, or what you hear, or what you think you would like to see or hear, I’ll cut your throat!”

‘Charley’ started.

“Oh! Sir,” he said, “you may rely upon me. I will be quite discreet. I am a fortunate lad to get so soon into the employment of such an exemplary master.”

“Ha!”

Todd, for a space of two minutes made the most hideous and extraordinary grimaces.

“Fortunate lad,” he said. “Exemplary master! How true. Ha!” — Poor Johanna shuddered at that dreadful charnel house sort of laugh.

“My God,” she thought, “was that the last sound that rung in the ears of my poor Mark, ere he bade adieu to this world for ever?” Then she could not but utter a sort of groan.

“What’s that?” said Todd.

“What, sir?”

“I — I thought some one groaned, or — or sighed. Was it you? No. — Well, it was nothing. See if that water on the fire is hot. Do you hear me? Well — well don’t be alarmed. Is it hot?”

“I think.”

“Think! Put your hand in it.”

“Quite hot, sir.”

“Well, then, master Charley — Ah! A customer! Come in, sir; come in, if you please, sir. A remarkably fine day, sir. Cloudy, though. Pray be seated, sir. Ahem! Now, Charley, bustle — bustle. Shaved, sir, I presume? Damn the door!”

Todd was making exertions to shut the door after the entrance of a stout built man, in an ample white coat and a broad brimmed farmer looking hat; but he could not get it close, and then the stout built man cried out —

“Why don’t you come in, Bob — leave off your tricks. Why you is old enough to know better.”

“It’s only me,” said another stout built man, in another white coat, as he came in with a broad grin upon his face. “It’s only me, Mr. Barber — Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Todd looked quite bland, as he said —

“Well, it was a good joke. I could not for the moment think what it was kept the door from shutting, and I always close it, because there’s a mad dog in the neighbourhood, you see, gentlemen.”

Crack went something to the floor.

“It’s this mug, sir,” said Charley. “I dropped it.”

“Well — well, my dear, don’t mind that. Accidents, you know, will happen; bless you.”

Todd, as he said this, caught up a small piece of Charley’s hair in his finger and thumb, and gave it a terrific pinch. Poor Johanna with difficulty controlled her tears.

“Now, sir, be seated if you please. From the country, I suppose, sir?”

“Yes. A clean shave, if you please. We comed up from Berkshire, both on us, with beasts.”

“You and your brother, sir?”

“My cousin, t’other ’un is; ain’t you Bill?”

“Yes, to be sure.”

“Now, Charley, the soap dish. Look alive — look alive, my little man, will you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You must excuse him being rather slow, gentlemen, but he’s not used to the business yet, poor boy — no father, no mother, no friend in all the world but me, sir.”

“Really!”

“Yes, poor lad, but thank God I have a heart — Leave the whiskers as they are, sir? — Yes, and I can feel for the distresses of a fellow creature. Many’s the — Your brother — I beg pardon, cousin, will be shaved likewise, sir? — Pound I have given away in the name of the Lord. Charley, will you look alive with that soap dish. A pretty boy, sir; is he not?”

“Very. His complexion is like — like a pearl.”

Johanna dropped the soap dish, and clasped her hands over her eyes. That word “pearl” had for the moment got the better of her.

CHAPTER LXXII
Takes a Peep at Arabella

We regret to leave Johanna in such a predicament, but the progress and due understanding of our tale compel us briefly to revert to some proceedings of Arabella Wilmot, a short detail of which can nowhere come in so well as at this juncture. Up to the moment of parting with Johanna, when the latter went upon her perilous interprise, Arabella had kept up pretty well, but from that moment her spirits began to fail. All the romantic feelings which had at first prompted the advice that concentrated Johanna's expedition to Todd's, evaporated before the hard truthful fact that she, Arabella, had led her young friend into a situation of the greatest peril. Each moment added to the mental agony of the young girl; and at length her sufferings became too acute for further dallying with, and wringing her hands, all she could ask herself was —

“What shall I do to save her? — What shall I do to save her?”

Arabella felt that it would kill her to endure the suspense of one hour instead of four and twenty; but to whom was she to turn in this sad condition of her feelings? If she went to old Mr. Oakley, what could she expect but the greatest reproaches for leading one so dear to him into such a path of danger; and those reproaches would not be the less stinging on account, probably, of their being only implied, and not spoken. If she appealed to her own friends, it would only be a kind of second-hand mode of appealing to Mr. Oakley, for they, of course, would go to him.

“Oh, wretched girl that I am,” she cried, as she wrung her hands. “What shall I do? — What ought I to do?”

It was very improbable that, in the midst of such a state of feeling as this, Arabella Wilmot should think of the wisest and best thing to do; and yet strange to say, she did. By mere accident the name of Sir Richard Blunt came to her mind. She had heard Colonel Jeffery speak of him; and from common report, too, she knew he was a man who, of all others, was likely, from inclination as well as power and duty, to aid her. The idea of going to him gained strength and consistency each moment in her mind, as good ideas will.

“Yes — yes!” she exclaimed, as with frantic eagerness she arrayed herself for the event, for she had gone home after seeing Johanna on her way; “Yes — yes! I will go to him — I will tell him all. He shall know what a silly, foolish, wicked girl I have been, and how by my mad — mad council, I have perhaps destroyed Johanna. But he will save her — oh, yes, he will save her from the consequences of the visit to Todd, and save me from madness.”

Now, a more decidedly prudent resolve than this could not possibly have been aimed at by Arabella, had she been as cool and collected; as, on the contrary, she was nervous and excited, and it had all the effect upon her mind; for it was astonishing how the mere feeling that she was about to take a good course

calmed her down. She had the prudence to interpose no delays by speaking to any one of her intention; but hastily getting into the street, she ran on for some time without reflecting that she had but a very vague idea of where Sir Richard Blunt was to be found. It is astonishing how, under the passions of extraordinary circumstances, people will boldly do things which ordinarily they would shrink from. It was so with Arabella Wilmot. She walked into a shop, and at once asked if they could tell her the exact address of Sir Richard Blunt, the magistrate.

“Yes, it is at No. 6, Essex Street, Strand.”

Off she went again. Fleet Street was passed. True, she lingered a little opposite to Todd’s shop, and the idea came across her of rushing in, and saying, “Johanna, come away.” But she controlled that feeling, from a conviction that she was doing better by going to the magistrate, who, if it were necessary to take that course, could take it much more effectually than she could. Essex Street was gained, and Arabella’s trembling hand sounded an alarm upon the knocker.

“Is Sir Richard within?”

“No. But if you particularly want him, he is at his private office in Craven Street.”

To Craven Street then she sped. The number she had been told was 10, and upon the door of that house being opened, she asked a man who was big enough to block up all the passage, and who did so, for the magistrate.

“Yes, but you can’t see him. He’s busy.”

“I must.”

“But you can’t, my dear.”

“I will.”

The man whistled.

“Will is a short word, my dear, for you to use. How do you mean to do it, eh?”

A door opened, and with his hat on, ready to go out, Sir Richard Blunt himself appeared. Another minute and Arabella would have missed him, and then God knows where, for the next twelve hours, he would be.

“What is this, Davis?” he said.

“Here’s a little ‘un, says she will see you, Sir Richard.”

"Ah, thank God!" cried Arabella, rushing forward and catching a tight hold of the magistrate by the arm. "Yes, I will see you, sir; I have a matter of life and death to speak to you of."

"Walk in," said Sir Richard. "Don't hurry yourself in the least, Miss. Pray be composed; I am quite at your disposal."

Arabella followed him into a small room. She still kept close to him, and in her eagerness she placed her hand upon her breast, as she said —

"Sir — sir. You — and you only. Todd, Todd — oh, God! He will kill her, and I am more her murderer than he. Johanna — Johanna, my poor Johanna!"

Sir Richard slightly changed colour at the sound of those names; and then he said, calmly and slowly —

"I don't think, unless you can assume a greater command of your feelings, that you will ever be able to tell me what you came about."

"Oh, yes — yes."

"Be seated, I pray you."

"Yes — yes. In a moment. Oh, how calm and unimpassioned you are, sir."

"It would not do for us both to lose our judgment."

Arabella began to feel a little piqued, and that feeling restored her powers to her, probably quicker than any other could have possibly done. She spoke rapidly, but distinctly.

"Sir, Miss Johanna Oakley has gone to Sweeney Todd's to find out what has become of Mr. Mark Ingestrie, and I advised her to do so; but now the knowledge that I did so advise her has driven me nearly mad. It will drive me quite mad!"

Sir Richard rose from the arm chair into which he had thrown himself, and said —

"'Miss Oakley?' said you? Why — why — what folly. But she has gone home again."

"No, she is disguised as a boy, and has taken the situation that Todd put a placard in his window about, and she will be found out of course, and murdered."

"No doubt of it."

"Oh, God! Oh, God! Is there no lightning to strike me dead?"

"I hope not," said Sir Richard Blunt; "I don't want a thunder storm in my parlour."

"But, sir — "

"But, Miss Wilmot. Is she there now?"

"She is — she is."

"When did she go?"

"About two hours since. Oh, sir — you must do something — you shall do something to save her, or I will run into the streets, and call upon any passenger I meet, that has the form of a man, to aid me; I will raise the town, sir, but I will save her."

"That course would be about as wise as the original advice to Miss Oakley to go upon the expedition at all. Now answer me calmly what I shall ask of you."

"I will — I will."

"What is the prime cause of action that Miss Oakley projects as the result of this disguised entrance into Todd's shop, provided he be deceived by it?"

"To search the place upon the first opportunity for some relic of Mark Ingestrie, and so put an end to the torturing suspense regarding his fate."

Sir Richard Blunt shook his head.

"Do you think that Sweeney Todd would leave such relics within such easy acquisition and inspection? Is he the sort of man, think you, to expose himself to such danger? Oh, Miss Wilmot, this is indeed a harebrained scheme."

"It is — it is, and I have come to you for aid, and — "

"Hush! Is the secret of this expedition entirely confined to you and to Miss Oakley?"

"It is — it is."

"Will her friends not miss her?"

"No — no. All has been arranged with what now I cannot help calling a horrible ingenuity. She is like one led to slaughter, and she will pass away from the world, leaving the secret of her disappearance to you and to me only. Sir, I am young, and there are those in this great city who love me, but if Johanna be not saved, I will no longer live to be the most wretched of beings. If there can be found a poison that will let me leave the world, to cast myself at the feet of God, and of Johanna in another, I will take it."

Sir Richard looked at his watch.

“An hour and a half, you say?”

“More than that. Let me think. It was twelve — yes, it was twelve. More you see, sir, than that. Tell me, sir. Tell me at once what can be done. Speak — oh speak to me. What will you do?”

“I don’t know, Miss Wilmot.”

With a deep sigh Arabella fainted.

* * * * *

It was seldom indeed that, even amid his adventurous life, the magistrate found a circumstance that affected him so strongly as that which Arabella Wilmot had related to him. For a short time, even he, with all his powers of rapid thought, and with all the means and appliances which natural skill and practice had given him to meet any emergency, could not think of any mode of escape from the peculiarly awkward position into which this frightfully imprudent step of Johanna had plunged him.

“My good girl,” he said. “Oh, she has fainted.”

He rung a handbell, and, when a man appeared in answer to the summons, he said —

“Is Mrs. Long within?”

“Yes, Sir Richard.”

“Then bring her here, and tell her to pay every attention to this young lady, who is a friend of mine; and when she recovers, say to her that I shall return in an hour.”

“Certainly, Sir Richard.”

In a few moments a matronly looking woman, who acted in that house as a sort of general manager, made her appearance, and had Arabella removed to a chamber. Before that, the magistrate had hastily put on his hat, and at a quick pace was walking towards Fleet Street. What he intended to do in the emergency — for emergency he evidently thought it was — we shall see quickly. Certain it is that, even by that time, he had made up his mind to some plan of proceeding, and our readers have sufficient knowledge of him to feel that it is likely to be the very best that could be adopted under the circumstances. Certainly Johanna had, by the bold step she had taken, brought affairs to something like a crisis, much earlier than he, Sir Richard Blunt, expected. What the result will be remains to be seen.

CHAPTER LXXIII
Returns to Johanna

We left Johanna in rather an awkward situation. The two graziers were in Todd's shop, and she — at the pronunciation of the word "pearl," which had too forcibly at the moment reminded her of the String of Pearls, which no doubt had been fatal to Mark Ingestrie — had dropped the soap dish, and covered her face with her hands.

"What is this?" cried Todd.

"What, sir?"

"What is that, I say? What do you mean by that, you stupid hound? If I only — "

He advanced in a threatening attitude with a razor in his hand; but Johanna quickly saw what a fault she had committed, and felt that, if she were to hope to do any good by her visit to Todd's shop, she must leave all such manifestations of feelings outside the threshold.

"I have broken it," she said.

"To be sure you have; but — "

"And then, you see, sir, I was overcome at the moment by the thought that as this was my first day here, how stupid you would think me."

"Stupid, indeed."

"Poor little chap," said one of the graziers. "Let him off this once, Mr. Barber — he seems a delicate little lad."

Todd smiled. Yes, Todd admirably got up a smile, or a something that looked like a smile. It was a contortion of feature which did duty for a piece of amiability upon his face; and, in a voice that he no doubt fully intended should be dulcet and delightful, he spoke —

"I'm quite a fool to my feelings and to my good nature," he said. "Lord bless you, gentlemen, I could not hurt a fly — not I. I used at school to be called Affectionate Todd."

"In joke?" said one of the graziers.

"No, gentlemen, no; in earnest."

"You don't say so! Well, my boy, you see no harm will come to you, as your master forgives you about the soap dish, and we are in no sort of hurry."

"Well," said Todd, as he bustled about for another article in which to mix the lather. "Well, do you know, sir, I'm so glad to hear that you are in no hurry."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir; because, if you are strangers in London both of you, it will give you an opportunity of seeing some of the curiosities, which will do for you to talk of when you get home, you know."

"Why, that would take too much time."

"Not at all, sir. Now, for example — Charley, my dear, whip up that lather — there's the church of St. Dunstan's, which, although I say it — Now, Charley, look sharp — is one of the greatest of London curiosities. The figures at the clock I allude to more particularly. I think you said the whiskers were to be left just as they are, sir?"

"Yes."

"Well then, gentlemen, if you have never seen the figures in the front of old St. Dunstan's strike the chimes, it's one of those things that it's quite a pity to leave London without watching narrowly. They may talk of the Tower, sir, or of the wild beasts at Exeter Change; but give me for a sight where there is real ingenuity, the figures striking the chimes at old St. Dunstan's."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Let me see. Ah, it's just a half hour nearly now, and your friend can go, although you are being shaved, and then by the time you are comfortably finished off, the next quarter will be getting on. Charley?"

"Yes, sir."

"Put on your cap, and go with that gentleman to St. Dunstan's. You must cross over the way, and then you will soon see the old church and the two figures, as large as life, and five times as natural."

Johanna took up the cap she had worn in her disguise, and stood by the door.

"Why don't you go, Bill?" said the grazier who was being shaved.

"Why, the fact is," said the other, "I would not give a pin's head to see it without you. Do you know, Mr. Barber, he makes such comical remarks at anything, that it's worth one half the fun to hear him? Oh, no, I can't go without him."

“Very good,” said Todd, “then I’ll finish him off, and you shall both go together in a few moments, though I am afraid you will miss this time of the chimes striking.”

There was now a silence of a few moments’ duration in the shop; but nothing in the shape of rage or disappointment was visible in the manner of Todd, although both of those passions were struggling at his heart.

“Now, sir,” he said at length, and with a whisk he took the cloth from under the grazier’s chair. “That will do; I thank you, sir. Towel and plenty of water in that corner, sir.”

“Thank you.”

“No, I shall do,” said the other grazier, in reply to a mute imitation from Todd to sit down in the shaving chair, “I shall do pretty well, I thank you, till tomorrow.”

“Very good, sir. Hope I shall have the pleasure of your patronage another time, as well as your recommendation, gentlemen.”

“You may depend,” said the grazier, who had been shaved, “that we shall do all we can for you, and shall not lose sight of you.”

Todd bowed like a Frenchman, and the graziers left the shop. No sooner was the door closed upon them, than his countenance altered, as if by magic, and the most wofully diabolical expression came over it, as with eyes flashing with rage, he cried —

“Curses on you both! But I will have one of you, yet. May the bitterest curse of — but, no matter, I — ”

“What, sir?” said Johanna. “What do you say, sir?”

“Hell’s fury! What is that to you? Do dare you, you devil’s cub, to ask me what I said? By all that’s furious, I’ll tear out your teeth with red hot pincers, and scoop your eyes from their gory sockets with an old oyster knife. Damn you, I’ll — I’ll flay you!”

Johanna shrank back aghast. The pure spirit of the young girl, that had been used to little else but words of love and kindness, started at the furious and brutal abuse that was launched at it by Todd.

“Did I not tell you,” he continued, “that I would have no prying — no peeping — no remarking about this or the other? I’ll crush the life out of you, as I would that from a mad dog!”

A strange howling cry at the door at this moment came upon the ears of Todd. His countenance changed, and his lips moved as though he was still saying something, but he had not power to give it audibly. At length, somewhat mastering his emotion, he said —

“What — what’s that?”

“A dog, sir.”

“A dog! Confound all dogs.”

Another howl, and a violent scratching at the door, was farther and most conclusive evidence of the canine character of the visitor.

“Charley,” said Todd, in quite a soft tone — “Charley.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Take the poor dog something to eat — or — or to drink, rather I should say. You will find a saucer in yon cupboard, with some milk in it. If — if he only, bless him, takes one lick at it, I shall be satisfied. You know, Charley, God made all things, and we should be good to his creatures.”

“Yes, sir,” said Johanna, with a shudder.

She went to the cupboard, and found the saucer, in which there seemed to be a drop of fresh milk. She walked to the door, while Todd, as though he did not feel by any means sure of the pacific intentions of the dog, at once rushed into his back parlour, and locked himself in. Todd had a peephole from the back parlour into the shop, but he could not see further than the shop door. Moreover, Johanna’s back was towards him, so he could only guess at what was going on if the dog did not actually come across the threshold. That the milk which Todd was so solicitous should be given to the dog was poisoned, occurred to Johanna in a moment; and just before opening the door, she threw it into a corner, upon some loose shavings, and odds and ends of waste paper, that were there. Johanna then opened the door. In an instant Hector, the large dog of the unfortunate Thornhill, whose identity with Mark Ingestrie appeared to be so established in the mind of Johanna, sprang upon her with an angry growl. It was only for one brief moment, however, that Hector made any such mistake as fancying Johanna to be Sweeney Todd; and then he, with an affectionate whine, licked the hands of the young girl.

“Pison! Pison!” cried a loud voice, and in another moment, the ostler, from the coach office opposite, rushed to the door, and caught the dog around the neck.

“Ah, there ye is agin. Why, what a goose of a feller you is, to be sure, Pison. Don’t you know, now, as well as I do, that that barber will do you a mischief

yet, you great blockhead you? Come home, will yer? Come home, now. Come along wi' yer!"

"Yes — yes," said Johanna. "Take him away — take him away."

"Won't I, that's all. I suppose you are a young shaver? Only let me catch you interfering with Pison, that's all, and won't I let you know what's what, young feller."

The ostler having uttered this most uncalled for threat to poor Johanna, took Pison in triumph over the way. Johanna closed the door.

"Is he gone?" said Todd.

"Yes, sir."

"And the milk? Is that gone, likewise?"

"Every drop of it."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Well — well. Only to think, now. Ha! Ha! I hope that milk won't disagree with the noble animal. How fond I am of him! How often he has been over here, in his little pretty playful way, to try and bite pieces out of my legs. Bless him. If now that milk should give him a stomach ache, what a pity it would be. Did I hear a man's voice?"

"Yes, sir; some man came and called the dog away."

"How good of him, and what a pity it would have been if he had called the noble animal away before the milk was all consumed. Dear me, some people would grudge a creature a drop of milk. Ahem — Charley?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am going out."

Johanna's heart beat rapidly.

"If any one should come, you can say it is of no use their waiting, for I am gone to shave and dress a whole family, at some distance off, and may not be back for some hours; but, Charley, for your own private information, let me tell you that I may look in at any moment, and that, although I shall be busy, I shall be able to come in for a minute or so, when I am least expected."

Todd gave an awful leer at Johanna as he spoke.

"Yes, sir," she said.

Todd carefully locked the parlour door.

“Charley. How do you like your place?”

“Very well, sir; and I think in a little time I shall like it better.”

“Good lad! Good lad! Well, well. Perhaps I ought not to say too much so soon, but if you merit my esteem, Charley, I shall do as much for you as I did for the last lad I had. After some term of service with me, I provided him with an independant home. A large house, and a garden. Ha!”

“How very kind.”

“Yes. Very.”

“And is he happy?”

“Quite, in a manner of speaking, notwithstanding human nature is prone to be discontented, and there are persons, who would sigh, if in Paradise, for some change, even if it were to a region supposed to be its opposite zone. Charley, however, I think will be of a different mind; and when your time comes — which it certainly will — Ha! — To reap the fruits of your service with me, I am sure that no one will hear you complain.”

“I will not be ungrateful sir.”

“Well, well, we shall see; and now while I am gone let there be no peeping or prying about. No attempts to open doors or force locks. No scrambling to look upon shelves or raking in odd corners. If you do — I — Ha! Ha! I will cut your throat, Charley, with the bluntest razor I have. Ha!”

Todd had got on his gloves by this time, and then he left the shop. Johanna was alone! Yes, there she was, at last, alone in that dreadful place, which now for days upon days had been food for her young imagination. There she was in that place, which her waking thoughts and her dreams had alike peopled with horrors. There she was between those walls, which had perchance echoed to the last despairing death cry of him whom she had loved better than life itself. There she was in the very atmosphere of murders. His blood might form part of the stains that were upon the dingy walls and the begrimed floor. Oh, it was horrible!

“God help me now! God help me now!” said Johanna, as she covered her face with her hands and wept convulsively.

She heard a faint sound. It was the chiming of St. Dunstan’s clock, and she started. It put her in mind that time, her great ally, now was fleeting.

“Away tears!” she cried as she dashed the heavy moisture from her long eyelashes. “Away tears! I have been strong in purpose. I have already waded through a sea of horrors, and I must be firm now. The time has come. The time

that I looked forward to when I thus attired myself, and thought it possible to deceive this dreadful man. Courage! Courage! I have now much to do."

First she crept to the door and looked out into the street. A vague suspicion that Todd, after all, might only be watching near at hand, somewhere, took possession of her. She looked long and anxiously to the right and to the left, but she saw nothing of him. Then she fastened the door upon the inside.

"If he should return very suddenly," she said, "I shall have notice of it by his efforts to open the door. That will give me a moment for preparation possibly."

Then with such an anxious look as no language could do justice to in its delineation, Johanna looked round the shop. Where was she to begin her investigation? There were drawers, cupboards, chests, shelves. What was she to look at first? Or was she in dread of some contrivances of Todd's to find out that she had looked at all, yet at this the last moment, forego the risk and rush into the street and so home?

"No, no! I am in God's hands," she said, "and I will not flinch."

And yet, although she felt that she was quite alone in that place, how cautiously she trod. How gently she touched one thing and then another, and with what a shudder she laid her hand for a moment to steady herself, upon the arm of the shaving chair. By so leaning upon it she found that it was a fixture; and upon a further examination of it, she found that it was nailed or screwed to the floor firmly. It was an old fashioned massive chair, with a wide deep reclining seat. A strange feeling of horror came over her as she regarded it.

CHAPTER LXXIV The Mysterious Letter

What was there in the chair that Johanna should for some few moments, now that she had begun to look at it, not be able to take her eyes off it? She tried to shake it, but it was as fast as a rock, and for all she knew it was quite usual to have a shaving chair fixed to the floor. In all likelihood it was in the best position for light which the dingy shop afforded. She left the chair at last, and then a large cupboard in one corner of the room attracted her attention. It was locked. In vain did she try to force it open. It would not yield. She tried, too, the parlour door without effect. That was quite fast; but as she turned the handle of the lock, she fancied she heard, or she really did hear something move in the room. A faint feeling came over her for a moment, and she was glad to hold by the wall, close at hand, to support herself.

"It must have been fancy," she said faintly. "I am learning nothing, and the time is flying fast."

A kind of counter ran parallel to the window, and beneath it was a space covered in by doors. Todd surely had forgotten that, for one of the doors was open. Johanna looked in and beheld quite a collection of sticks and umbrellas. Some clothing too lay upon the lowest shelf. With trembling hands, Johanna pulled at the sleeve of some article and found it to be a jacket, such as a sailor of the better sort might wear, for it was exquisitely fine, and had no end of silver buttons upon it. Her sight was dimmed by tears, as she said to herself —

"Oh, God! Was this his?"

She held the jacket up to the light, and she found the breast portion of it stained, and all the buttons there tarnished. What was it but blood? The blood of the hapless wearer of that article of dress, that produced such an effect; but yet how was she to prove to herself that it had been Mark Ingestrie? Then it was that the thought struck her of how ill conceived had been that undertaking, which might, in the midst of all its frightful dangers, only end in furnishing her with more food for the most horrible surmises, without banishing one sad image of her imagination, or confirming one dreadful dream of the fate of her lover.

"'Tis' all in vain!" she gasped. "All in vain! I shall know nothing, and only feel more desolate. It would be a mercy if that were to kill me! Ah! no. Not yet — not yet!"

Some one was trying the handle of the shop door. With frightful energy Johanna hid the jacket, but not in its proper place, for she only thrust it beneath the cushion of a chair close at hand, and then shutting the door of the receptacle beneath the counter, she rose to her feet, and with a face pale as monumental marble, and her hands clasped rigidly, she said —

"Who — who is there?"

“Hilloa! Open the door!” said a voice.

Some one again tried the handle, and then kicked vigorously at the lower panel.

“Patience,” said Johanna, “patience.”

She opened the door.

“Is Mr. Todd at hand?” said a lad.

“No — no.”

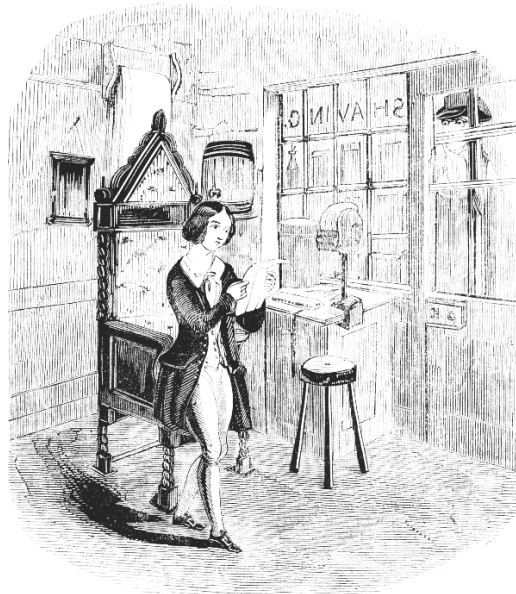
“You are his boy, are you not?”

“I am.”

“Then take this.”

The lad handed a sealed letter to Johanna, and in a moment left the door. She held the letter in her hand scarcely looking at it. Of course she thought it was for Todd, but after a few moments her eyes fell upon the superscription, and there, to her surprise, she read as follows —

“To Miss Oakley, who is requested to read the enclosed quickly, and secretly, and then to destroy it.”



Johanna Receives a Mysterious Letter in Todd's Shop.

To tear open the letter was the work of a moment. The sheet of paper tumbled in Johanna's hands as she read as follows —

“From Sir Richard Blunt to Miss Oakley.

“Miss Oakley, the expedition upon which you are at present says much more for your courage and chivalrous spirit than it can ever say for your discretion or the discretion of her who permitted you so far to commit your life to such chances. You should, considering your youth and sex, have left it to others to carry out such schemes; and it is well that those others are aware of your position, and so, in a great measure, enabled to shield you from, perhaps, the worst consequences of your great indiscretion, for it cannot be called anything else.

“Your young friend, Miss Wilmot, herself awakened, when, thank God, it was not too late, to the utter romantic character of the office, and communicated all to me. I blame both you and her very much indeed, and cannot speak in too strong language of the reprehensible character of your expedition; and now, my dear girl, do not be under any kind of apprehension, for you are well looked after, and Sweeney Todd shall not hurt a hair of your head.

“If you should find yourself in any danger, seize the first small heavy article at hand and throw it, with all the strength you can, through the shop window. Assistance will immediately come to you.

“And now, as you are where you are, I pray you to have confidence in me, and to remain until some one shall come to you and say ‘St. Dunstan,’ upon which you will know that he is a friend, and you will follow his directions.

“God bless you. —

“RICHARD BLUNT.”

Every word of this letter fell like sunshine upon the heart of Johanna, and she could not help mentally ejaculating —

“I am saved — I am saved! Yes — yes? I am not deserted. Strong, bold, good men will look to me. Oh! what kindness breathes in every sentence of this letter! Yes — yes; I am not forsaken — not forsaken!”

Tears came into the eyes of the young girl, and she wept abundantly. Her overcharged heart was relieving itself. After a few moments she began to be more composed, and had just crumpled up the letter and cast it into the fire for fear of accidents, when a shadow darkened the doorway, she saw Todd looking in above the curtain that was over the upper half of the door, and partially concealed some panes of glass that were let into it. As soon as Todd saw Johanna’s eyes upon him, he entered the shop.

“What’s that?” he said, pointing to the burning letter.

“Paper, sir.”

“What paper?”

“A bill that a boy left. Something about Churchwardens, sir, and the parish of St. Brides, Fleet Street, and how things mean to — ”

“Bah! Any one else been?”

“No, sir.”

Todd stood in the middle of the shop, and cast his eyes slowly round him, to see that all was as he had left. Then in a low growling tone, he added —

“No peeping and prying, eh? No rummaging in odd corners, and looking at things that don’t concern you, eh?”

“Certainly not, sir.”

Johanna crept close to the counter upon which lay a tolerably large piece of stone used for grinding razors upon. She thought that would do very well to throw through the window, and she kept an eye upon it with that intent, if such an act should by a trick of Todd’s appear to be necessary. Todd took the key of the parlour door from his pocket, and placed it in the lock. Before he opened the door, though, he turned the handle, and as he did so Johanna thought that he inclined his head and listened attentively. She threw down a chair, which made a lumbering noise.

“Confound you,” roared Todd.

He passed into the parlour; but in a moment, with a glance of fury, he looked out, saying —

“You tried this door?”

“I, sir?” said Johanna, creeping closer still to the sharpening stone.

“Yes, villain, you. At least, I think so — I am pretty sure; but mark me, if I were quite sure, you should suffer for it.”

He closed the door again; and then when he was alone, he placed his two hands upon his head for a few moments, and said —

“What does it mean? A boy brought him a letter; I saw him come and go. At least it looked like a letter. Could it be the bill he spoke of, and then the sudden upset of that chair, which prevented me from hearing if the piece of cat-gut I had fastened to the handle of the door had been moved, before I touched it or not. I will kill him. That is safe. It is the only plan; I will kill all who is now in my way. All — all. Yes, I will, if needs be, wade up to my neck in blood to the accomplishment of my wishes.”

Todd went to a cupboard and got out a large knife, such as is used by slaughtermen in the shambles, and hid it under the table cover, but in such a place that he could lay hold of it and draw it out in a moment.

"Charley," he cried, "Charley."

"Yes, sir."

"Step in here a moment; I want you, my boy."

"Shall I or shall I not," thought Johanna. "Is this danger, or only the appearance of it? Heaven direct me now! Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Charley? Are you coming, my boy?"

"Yes, sir, I — I am coming. God protect me!"

"The barber at home?" cried a voice at the door; and in another moment a man with a ruddy, jolly-looking countenance, made his appearance in the shop. "Barber at home, eh? my little lad?"

"Yes — yes."

Johanna heard a bitter execration come from the lips of Todd; and then with quite a serene smile upon his face, as though he were in the most unruffled mood possible, he made his appearance.

"Could you make me a wig?" said the man, taking off his hat, and showing that his hair was closely cropped.

"Certainly, sir. If you will sit down and allow me to measure your head, I shall have great pleasure — Charley!"

"Yes, Sir."

"You can go to Lovett's, in Bell Yard, and get your dinner now. There's twopence for you, my lad, and if you have not yet tasted Mrs. Lovett's pies, you will say when you do, that they are the most delicious things in the whole world of cookery."

"Shaved, if you please," said another man, walking into the shop, and pouncing down upon a chair as though it were his own property. "Ah dear me, I'm tired rather. Don't hurry yourself, Mr. Todd, I can wait while you are doing what you have to do for that gentleman."

"Charley," said Todd, with quite a sweet expression of face. "You need not go just yet; I want the hot water. See to it."

"Yes, sir."

Todd then, in the most careful and businesslike manner, proceeded to take the measure of the gentleman's head for a "real head of hair," and when he had finished, he said —

"Now, sir, if you will leave it all to me, I will match your hair to a shade."

"Match it?"

"Yes, sir."

"But that's just what I don't want. I have had my hair all cut off, and am going to wear a wig, for the sole reason that I have got tired of the old colour."

"Well then, sir, what colour do you propose now?"

"A few shades lighter than my own. But pray shave this gentleman, and I will tell you how I wish it to look at my leisure."

The man took a seat and crossed one leg over the other with the most home sort of look in the world; and the one who had come in to be shaved plumped into the shaving chair, and gave his chin a rub as though he would say "I don't care how soon you begin."

Todd smiled.

"Charley, the lather."

"Yes, sir. Here it is."

"Here, my little man," said the gentleman in want of a wig. "If you can tie a bow, just make one in front of my cravat. — A small one."

The gentleman slipped a small piece of paper into Johanna's jacket pocket.

CHAPTER LXXV
Another Victim

Johanna started.

“St. Dunstan’s,” said the stranger.

“What?” said Todd.

“St. Dunstan’s last Sunday, I don’t think was so highly scented with the flavour of the grave as usual.”

“Oh,” said Todd.

Johanna trembled, for certainly Todd looked suspicious, and yet what could he have seen? Literally nothing, for he was so situated that the slight action of the stranger, in putting the slip of paper into her jacket pocket, must have escaped him with all his watchfulness. She gathered courage. Todd glanced at her, saying —

“What is the matter, Charley? you don’t look well at all, my lad.”

“I am not very well, sir.”

“How sorry I am; I think, do you know, Charley,” — Todd was lathering the man’s face as he spoke — “that one of Mrs. Lovett’s hot pies would be the thing for you.”

“Very likely, sir.”

“Then, I think I can manage now to spare you.”

As he said this, Todd bent an eagle glance upon the gentleman who had ordered the wig, and it seemed as if he doled out his words to Johanna with a kind of reference to the movements of that personage. The gentleman had found a hat brush, and was carefully rubbing up his hat.

“I do hope,” he said, “that the wig will be as natural as possible.”

“Depend upon it, sir,” said Todd. “I’ll warrant if you look in here, and try it on some day when there’s no one here but you and I to set you against it, you will never complain of it.”

“No doubt. Good morning.”

Todd made his best bow, accompanied by the flourish of his razor, that made the man who was being shaved shrink again, as the reflected light from its highly polished blade flashed again in his eyes.

“Now, Charley, I think you may go for your pie,” added Todd, “and don’t hurry, for if anything is wrong with your stomach, that will only make it worse, you know.”

“You are a good master to the lad,” said the man who was lathered ready for shaving.

“I hope so, sir,” said Todd. “With the help of Providence we all ought to do our best in this world, and yet what a deal of wickedness and suffering there is in it too.”

“Ah, there is.”

“I am sure, sir, it makes my heart bleed sometimes to think of the amount of suffering that only twenty four hours of this sad workaday world sees. But I was always of a tender and sympathetic turn from my cradle — yes from my cradle.”

Todd made here one of his specially horrible grimaces, which the man happened to see in a glass opposite to him, the reflective focus of which Todd had not calculated upon; and then as the sympathetic barber stropped his razor, the man looked at him as though he would have speculated upon how could such an article looked in a cradle.

“Now, sir, a little to this side. Are you going, Charley?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That will do, sir. I’ll polish you off very shortly, indeed, sir. Are you going, Charley?”

Johanna darted from the shop, and the moment she got clear of it, she by natural impulse drew the little slip of paper from her pocket, and read upon it —

“Miss O. do not if you can help it leave any one alone in Todd’s shop, as circumstances may prevent us from always following his customers in; but if you should be forced to leave while any one is there, knock at No. 133 Fleet Street. This is from your friend R. B.”

“133?” said Johanna, as she glanced around her, “133? Ah, it is close at hand. Here — here.”

The number was only a short distance from Todd’s, and Johanna was making her way to it, when some one stopped her.

“From Todd’s,” said a voice.

“Yes — yes. A man is there.”

“Alone?”

“Yes, and —”

Before she could say another word the stranger darted from her, and made his way into Todd’s shop. Johanna paused, and shrinking into a doorway, stood trembling like an aspen leaf.

“Oh, Heaven!” she ejaculated, “into what a sea of troubles have I plunged. Murder and I will become familiar, and I shall learn to breathe an atmosphere of blood. Oh, horror! Horror! Horror!”

The crowd in that dense thoroughfare passed on, and no one took heed of the seeming boy, as he wept and sobbed in that doorway. Some had no time to waste upon the sorrows of other people; — some buttoned up their pockets as though they feared that the tears that stood upon that pale face were but the preludes to some pecuniary demand; — others again passed on rapidly, for they were so comfortable and cosy that they really could not have their feelings lacerated by any tale of misery, not they. And so Johanna wept alone.

Ding dong! Ding dong!

What is that? Oh, St. Dunstan’s chimes. How long has she been from the shop? Shall she return to it, or fly at once and seek for refuge from all the sorrows and from all the horrors that surround her, in the arms of her father?

“Direct me, oh God!” she cried.

Some one suddenly clasps her arm.

“Johanna! Johanna!”

It was Arabella Wilmot.

“Johanna — dear, dear Johanna, you are safe — quite safe. Come home now — oh, come — oh, come — come.”

“You here, Arabella?”

“Yes, I am mad — mad! — at least, I was going mad, Johanna; in my agony to know what had become of you, and notwithstanding I have told Sir Richard Blunt, I had no faith in the love and the courage of any one but myself. I was coming to Todd’s.”



Johanna Disguised as a Boy, is Found Weeping by Arabella, near St. Dunstan's.

"To Todd's?"

"Yes, dear, to Todd's. I could no longer exist unless I saw with my own eyes that you were safe."

"What a fatal step that might have been."

"It might. Perhaps it would; but God, in his goodness, has again, my dear Johanna, averted it by enabling me to meet you here. Come home now — come at once."

"Yes, I — I think —"

"Come — come; — you have done already much. Let, for the future, your feelings be, that for Mark Ingestrie you have adventured what not one girl in a million would adventure."

At this mention of the name of Mark Ingestrie, a sharp cry of mental agony burst from the lips of Johanna.

"Oh, I thank you, Arabella."

"Thank me?"

"Yes, you have recalled me to myself. You have, by the mention of that name, recalled me to my duty, from which I was shrinking and falling away. You have told me in the most eloquent language that could be used that as yet I have done nothing for him who is, dead or alive, my heart's best treasure."

"Oh, Johanna, you will kill me."

"No, Arabella — no. Good bye. Go home, love — go home, and — and pray for me — pray for me!"

"Johanna, for mercy's sake! what are you about to do? Speak to me. Do not look upon me in that way. What are you about to do, Johanna?"

"Go to the shop."

"To Todds?"

"Yes. It is my place — I am in search of Mark Ingestrie. If he be living, it is I who must clear that man who is suspected of his murder. If he be no more, it is I, who weak and fragile as I am, must drag him to justice."

"No — no — no."

"I say yes. Do not stay me if you love me."

Arabella clasped the arm of Johanna, but with a strength that only the immense amount of mental excitement she was suffering from could have given her. Johanna freed herself from the hold of her friend, and dashing from the doorway, was in another moment lost to the sight of Arabella in the barber's shop.

"What now?" cried Todd, fiercely, as Johanna bounded into the shop so hurriedly.

"Nothing, sir — only the dog."

"Bolt the door — bolt the door."

"Yes, sir."

Todd wiped his brow.

"That infernal dog," he muttered, "will be the death of me yet; and so, Charley, the malignant beast flew at you, did he? the savage will attack you, will he?"

"Yes, sir, so it seems."

"We will kill it. I should like to cut its throat. It would be a pleasure, Charley. How strange that strong poisons have no effect upon that dog. Curses on it!"

"Indeed, sir."

"None whatever. It is very odd."

Todd remained in a musing attitude for some time, and then suddenly starting, he said —

“Charley, if that man come again after his wig, get him into talk, will you, and learn all you can about him. I have to go a little way into the city just now, and shall speedily return. I hoped you liked the pie?”

“Pie, sir?”

“Yes, Lovett’s pie.”

“Oh, yes — delicious.”

“Ha! Ha! He! He! Ho!”

Drawing on a pair of huge worsted gloves, Todd walked out of the shop without saying another word. The moment he was gone, Johanna passed both her hands upon her breast, as if to stay the wild beating of her heart, as she whispered to herself —

“Alone — alone once more.”

It was well that she had only whispered that much, for in the next moment Todd gently put his head into the shop. She started.

“Oh, sir — oh, sir, you frightened me.”

“Beware!” was all he said. “Beware!”

The frightful head, more terrifying to Johanna than would have been the fabled Medusa’s, was withdrawn again, and this time Johanna resolved to be certain that he was gone before she gave the smallest outbreak to her feelings, or permitted herself to glance around her in any way that could be construed into prying curiosity. She made a feint of clearing up the place a little, and, with a broom that had about six hairs only left in it, she swept the hobs of the little miserable grate in which a fire was kept for the shaving water. This occupied some little time; but still not feeling sure that Todd was really gone, she then went to the door, and looked right and left. He was not to be seen; and so, when she went back, she bolted the shop door upon the inside again, and really felt that she was alone once more in that dreadful place. That poor Johanna was now in a great state of mental excitement is not a matter of surprise, for the events that had recently taken place were decidedly of a character to produce such a mental condition. The interview with Arabella had, no doubt, materially aided in such an effect. With trembling eagerness she now began again to look about her, and her great aim was by some means to get into the parlour, for if anywhere, she thought that surely there she should find some traces of that lost one who occupied, since the suspicions of the foul usage he had met with, a larger place in her affections than before. Feeling how surrounded she was by friends, probably Johanna was a little more reckless as regarded the means she adopted of carrying out her intention. The parlour door was quite fast; but surely in the shop she thought she might find some weapon, by the aid of which

it could be burst open; and even if Todd should suddenly return, it was but a rush, and she would reach the street; and if he intercepted her in that, as God knew he might, she could take the means of summoning assistance pointed out to her by Sir Richard Blunt, and cast something through the window into the street. Full of these thoughts and feelings, then, and only alive to the mad wish she had of discovering some traces of her lover, Johanna hunted the shop over for some weapon with which to attack the parlour door. She opened a cupboard. A hat fell from within at her feet! One glance at that hat was sufficient; it was of a peculiar colour — she remembered it. It was the hat of the man whom she had left being shaved when she was sent ostensibly to purchase a pie at Mrs. Lovett's, in Bell Yard. Johanna's hurry was over. A sickening feeling came over her as she asked herself what was the probable fate of the owner of the hat.

“Another victim! — Another victim!” she gasped.

She tottered back overpowered by the thought that there had been a time when, opening that cupboard door, the carelessly cast in hat of Mark Ingestrie would have fallen to her feet, even as did that of the stranger, who, no doubt, now was numbered with the dead. She sank almost in a state of fainting into the shaving chair.

“Oh, yes, yes,” she said. “This is horribly, frightfully conclusive. My poor Mark. You have gone before me to that home where alone we may hope to meet again. Alas! Alas! That I should live to feel such a truth.”

She burst into tears, and sobbed so bitterly, that any one who had seen her would have truly thought her heart was breaking in that wild paroxysm of grief. What a mercy it was that Todd did not come in at such a moment as that, was it not? The sobs subsided into sighs. The tears no longer flowed in abundance; and after about five minutes Johanna arose, tottering and pale. She drenched her eyes and face with cold water, until the traces of the storm of emotion were no longer visible upon her face; and then she knelt by the shaving chair, and clasping her hands, she said —

“Great God, I ask for justice upon the murderer!”

She rose, and felt calmer than before; and then, sitting down by the little miserable fire, she buried her face in her hands, and tried to think — to think how she should bring to justice the man who had been the blight of her young existence — the canker in the rosebud of her youth. You would have been shocked if you could just for a moment have looked into Sweeney Todd's shop, and seen that girl in such an attitude, without a sigh and without a tear, while all her dearest hopes lay about her heart in the very chaos of a frightful wreck.

CHAPTER LXXVI

Startling Events

Business at Mrs. Lovett's was brisk. During the whole of that day — that most eventful day upon which the fair Johanna Oakley had gone upon her desperate errand to Sweeney Todd's — the shop in Bell Yard had been besieged by customers. Truly it was a pity to give up such an excellent business. The tills groaned with money, and Mrs. Lovett's smiles and pies never appeared so perfect as upon that day. At about half past twelve o'clock, when the Lord Chancellor suddenly got up from his chair, in the great hall of Lincoln's Inn, and put on his furry looking hat, and when the curtain which shuts in his lordship from invidious blasts was withdrawn with a screaming jerk, and a gentleman was stopped in the middle of an argument, what a rush of lawyer's clerks there was to the pie shop in Bell Yard. Then was it that the anxious solicitor's fag, who must know something, and have some brains, smiled at the prospect of the luxurious repast he was about to have, and jingled the twopence he had kept in a side pocket for only one pie, and grudged it not out of his hard-earned pittance. Then was it that the bloated barrister's clerk, who had grown shining and obese upon fares, and who is not required to know anything but the complete art of insolence to his brothers, nor to have any more brains than will suffice him to make up his book in the long vacation, smacks his lips at the thought of Lovett's pies, and sends the expectant boy of the chamber — the snob of a snob — for three twopennies. Lean and hungry looking young men start into Bell Yard from the Strand, producing crumbled pieces of paper, bag their twopenny, and retire to eat it in some corner of the old Temple. All is bustle — all is animation, and the side counter — that one, you know, which ran parallel to the window — was lined by clerks, who sat eating and driving their heels against the boarding, and joking, and laughing "Ha! Ha!" how they did laugh! And then what stories they told of their "Governors;" and how such an one was going out of practice; and how such another one was a screw, and so on, to the great delight of the mere boys, who hoped one day to wear their hair long and grey, and to dress in an outrageous caricature of the mode! As the machine that let down at the back of the counter, to bring up the pies, went down for the one o'clock batch, it was noticed that Mrs. Lovett looked a little anxious. The fact was, that the cook had been so prompt upon that day in his movements, that she began to think there must be, as folks say, "Something in it," and she was beginning to terrify herself with the idea that he had some scheme of redemption for himself in view, that might most unseasonably develop itself before the customers.

"Ah, Mrs. Lovett," said one young gent, while the gravy ran down the sides of his mouth from the pie he was consuming. "You don't seem at all yourself today. Indeed you don't."

"Who do I seem, then?"

"Ha! Ha! Upon my life that's good!" roared another.

A small amount of wit did for Lovett's pie shop. It was like the House of Commons in that particular, and "loud laughter" was sure to welcome the smallest joke. Mrs. Lovett's eyes were bent upon the abyss, down which the trap had descended but a moment before.

"Ain't they a coming, mum?" said one.

"Oh, don't I sniff 'em," said another, working his nose like an ex-chancellor. "Don't I sniff 'em."

"De — licious!" cried another.

A feeling of relief was visible upon the face of Mrs. Lovett as the trap slowly ascended, bringing with it the one o'clock batch, in all their steaming glory. The whole shop was in a moment filled with the fresh appetite-giving aroma of those bubbling hot pies; and as the French newspapers say, when a member of the extreme right, or half way to the left, or two degrees from the centre, swerves, there was "a sensation." Five minutes — only five minutes — and the whole batch was cleared off, not one was left!

"Another batch of one hundred, gentlemen, at two," said Mrs. Lovett, with a bland look.

"At two, mum?" cried a customer. "Why, what's to become of the half past one batch?"

"We are rather short of — of meat," said Mrs. Lovett, with one of her strange metallic smiles.

"The devil you are! Ain't there butchers enough?"

"Oh, dear, yes; but we could not get such meat as we put in our pies, at the butcher's."

"You kill your own, mum, then, I suppose?"

"We do," replied Mrs. Lovett, with another smile, more metallic than the former.

"And where is your farm, mum?"

"Really, sir, you want to know too much. I appeal to those gentlemen if any of them know where my farm is."

"No — no. Damn it, no, nor don't care," said all the lawyer's clerks. "Don't know anything about it."

"And don't care," said another. "Sufficient for the day is the pie thereof."

“Very good — Ha! Ha! — Very good.”

The crowd gradually dispersed. Mrs. Lovett put a placard in the window, announcing —

“A hot batch at two o’clock.”

She then closed the shop door, and retired to the parlour. She cast herself upon a sofa, and hiding the light from her eyes with one of her arms, she gave herself up to thought. Yes, that bold bad woman was beginning to have her moments of thought, during which it appeared to be as though a thousand mocking fiends were thronging around her. No holy thoughts or impulses crossed her mind. Solitude, that best of company to the good and just, was to her peopled with countless horrors; and yet there must have been a time when that woman was pure, and her soul spotless — a time when it was free from

“The black engraved spots”

which now deformed it. And yet who, to look upon her now, could fancy that she was ever other than what she seemed? Who could bring themselves to think that she had not been placed at once by the archfiend as she was upon the beautiful world, to make in the small circle around her a pestilence, a blight, and a desolation? There are persons in the world that it would be the greatest violence to our feelings ever to attempt to picture to our imaginations as children; and as such, surely were Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett. Was she ever some gentle little girl, fondly clinging to a mother’s arms? Was he ever a smiling infant, with pretty dimples? Was there at his or her birth much joy? Did a mother’s tears ever fall upon his or her cheek, in sweet gratitude to God for such a glorious gift? No — no. We cannot — we will not believe that such persons as Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett ever came into this world otherwise than readymade man and woman! Any other belief, concerning such fiends in human shape is too repugnant. But we are forgetting that Mrs. Lovett is upon the sofa all this while, and that her metallic smile has quite vanished, giving way to such a look of utter abandonment of spirit, that you would have shuddered to have cast but one glance upon her. She could bear the quietude of the attitude she had assumed but for a very short time, and then she sprang to her feet.

“Yes,” she said, “it must, and it shall come to an end!”

She stood for some few moments trembling, as though the dim echo of that word end, as she had jerked it forth, had awakened in her mind a world of horrifying thoughts. Again she sank upon the couch, and speaking in a low, plaintive voice, she said —

“Yes. I have need of the waters of oblivion, one draught of which shuts out for ever all memory of the past. Oh, that I had but a cup of such nectar at my lips!”

Not a doubt of it, Mrs. Lovett. It is the memory of the wicked that constitutes that retribution, which is assuredly to be found in this world as day follows night.

"I — I must have this," she muttered. "Let Todd be dead or alive, I must have it. I am going mad — I feel certain. That I am going mad, and the only way to save myself, is to flee. I must collect as much money as I can and then flee far away. If I cannot quite obliterate the past from my memory, I can at least leave it as it is, and add nothing to it. Yes, that man may live. He seems to bear a charmed life. But I must flee."

She rested her head upon her hands, and in a softer voice, said —

"Let me think — let me think of the means, now that I have yet a little time. What do I dread most? The man below? Yes. He is at work for his deliverance. I feel that he is, and if he succeed before I flee from here, all is lost — all is lost! I must speak to him."

Filled with this idea, and with an unknown dread of what the discontented cook might do, Mrs. Lovett stepped into the shop first, and made the door fast by slipping a bolt at the back of it. It was not very often that immediately after the disposal of a batch of pies any customers came in, and if they should attempt to do so for the purpose of purchasing any stale pies, she was by far too intent upon what she was come about, and considered it by far too important to heed what they might think or say upon finding the door fast. She then opened the seeming cupboard in the parlour, which conducted to the strong iron door, with the small grating at the top of it. She reached that point of observation with great rapidity, and peered into the cavernous dungeon-like bakehouse. At first she could see nothing by the uncertain light that was there, but as her eyes got accustomed to the absence of daylight, she could just see the figure of the cook sitting upon a stool, and apparently watching one of the fires.

"It is a long — long time."

"What is a long time?" cried Mrs. Lovett.

The captive cook sprang to his feet in a moment, and in a voice of alarm, he said —

"Who spoke? Who is that?"

"I," replied Mrs. Lovett. "Do you not know me?"

"Ah," said the cook, directing his eyes to the grating above the door, "I know you too well. What do you want with me? Have I failed in doing your bidding here? Have I disappointed you of a single batch of those execrable pies?"

"Certainly not, but I have come to see — if — if you are quite comfortable."

“Comfortable! What an insult!”

“Nay, you wrong me.”

“That is impossible. This is the commencement only of some new misery. Speak on, madam. Speak on. I am helpless here, and condemned to suffer.”

Notwithstanding these words of the cook there was a certain tone of hilarity about him, that Mrs. Lovett might well be surprised at, and she asked herself what does he hope. The fact is that much as he wished still to enact the character of a man full of despair, the cook could not get out of his head and heart the promises of Sir Richard Blunt — promises which still rung in his ears, like a peal of joy bells.

“Come, come,” said Mrs. Lovett, “you are getting reconciled to your fate. Confess as much.”

“I reconciled? Never.”

“But you are not so unhappy?”

“Worse — worse. This apathetic condition that I am now in, and which to you may look like the composure of resignation, will end, in all likelihood, in raging madness.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes, madam, I feel already the fire in my brain.”

“Be calm.”

“Calm — calm! Ha! — Ha! Calm. It is all very well for you upon that side of the iron door to talk of calmness, madam, but upon this side the words sound strange.”

“It will not sound so strange when I tell you that I have absolute compassion upon you, and that the cause of my present visit was to talk to you of some means by which the worst portion of your fate here might be in some measure ameliorated, and your existence rendered tolerable.”