

CHAPTER LXXVII
Big Ben Creates a Sensation

The cook was so surprised at these words from Mrs. Lovett that for some moments he made no answer to them.

“Pray, speak again,” he said at length, when he could find words in which to express himself.

“I repeat,” she said, “that I am desirous, as far as lies in my power, to ameliorate your condition, of which you so much complain.”

“Indeed!”

“Ah, you are too suspicious.”

“Humph! I think, madam, when you come to consider all things, you will hardly think it possible for me to be too suspicious.”

“You are wrong again. I dare say now, in your mind, you attribute most of your evils to me.”

“Well, madam, candidly speaking, should I be far wrong by so doing?”

“You would be quite wrong. Alas! Alas! I — ”

“You what, madam? Pray, speak up.”

“I am the victim of another. You cannot suppose that, of my own free will, I should shut up in these gloomy places a person of your age, and by no means ill looking.” — “I have him there,” thought Mrs. Lovett; “what human heart is proof against the seductions of flattery? Oh, I have him there.”

The cook was silent for some few moments, and then he said, quite calmly, as though the tribute to his personal appearance had not had the smallest effect —

“Pray go on, madam, I am quite anxious to hear all that you may have to say to me.”

This composed manner of meeting her compliments rather discomposed Mrs. Lovett; but after all, she thought — “He is only acting an indifference he is far from feeling.” With this impression she resolved to persevere, and she added, in a kind and conciliating tone of voice —

“I grant that circumstances are such that you may well be excused for any amount of doubt that you may feel regarding the honesty of my words and intentions towards you.”

"I quite agree with you there, madam," said the cook.

"Then all I have to do is, by deeds, to convince you that I am sincere in my feelings towards you. As I have before said, I am in the power of another, and therefore is it that, contrary to my nature, I may seem to do cruel things at which my heart revolts."

"I cannot conceive anything so distressing," said the cook, "except being the unfortunate victim as I am of such a train of circumstances."

"That is what I am coming to."

"Are you? I wish you were."

There was a tone of irony about the enforced cook which Mrs. Lovett did not at all like; but she had an object to gain, and that was to fully persuade him that the shortest way to his freedom would be to remain profoundly quiet for a day or two, and then she would be able to make her own arrangements and be off without troubling either him or Todd with any news of her departure or her whereabouts.

"You still doubt me," she said. "But listen, and I think you will soon be of opinion that although I have wronged you as yet, I can do something to repair that wrong."

"I am all attention, madam."

"Then, in the first place, you are quite tired of eating pies, and must have some other kind of food."

"You never said a truer thing in all your life, madam."

"That other food, then, I will provide for you. You shall, within an hour from now, have anything to eat or to drink that you may please to name. Speak, what is it to be?"

"Well," he said, "that is kind indeed. But I can do without food further than I have here, for I have hit upon a mode of making cakes that please me. Nevertheless, if you can bring me a bottle of brandy, in order that I may slightly qualify the water that I drink, I shall be obliged to you."

"You shall have it; and now I hope you will be convinced of the sincerity of my desire to be of service to you."

"But my liberty, madam, my liberty. That is the grand thing after all that I must ever pant for."

“True, and that is what you shall have at my hands. In the course of two, or it may be three days, I shall have perfected some arrangements which will enable me to throw open your prison for you, and then — ”

“Then what?”

“May I hope that you will not think so harshly of me as you have done?”

“Certainly not.”

“Then I shall be repaid for all I do. You must believe me to be the victim of the most cruel circumstances, of which some day you may be informed. At present, to do so, would only be to involve both you and myself in one common destruction.”

“Then don’t mention it.”

“I will not. But beware of one thing.”

“What is that?”

“Simply this, that any attempts upon your own part to escape from here previous to the time when I shall have completed my arrangements to set you free, will not only derange all that I am planning for you, but end in your utter destruction; for he who has forced me into my present cruel situation will not for one moment hesitate at the murder of us both; so if you wish to be free in a few days you will try nothing, but if on the contrary you wish to destroy both yourself and me, you will make some attempts to rescue yourself from here.”

Mrs. Lovett waited rather anxiously for his answer to this speech.

“I dare say you are right,” he said at length.

“You may be assured I am.”

“Then I consent.”

Mrs. Lovett drew a long breath of relief, as she muttered to herself —

“It will do — I have him in the toils; and come what may, I am free from the torturing thought that he may achieve something that may have the effect of delivering me up to the hands of justice. When I am gone, he may remain where he is, and rot for all I care.” — “You have done wisely,” she said aloud, “and if anything could more powerfully than another incite me to the greatest exertions to liberate you, it would be the handsome manner in which you have placed confidence in me.”

“Oh, don’t mention it.”

Again there was that tone of sarcasm about the cook's voice, which created a doubt in the mind of Mrs. Lovett if, after all, he was not merely playing with her, and in his heart utterly disregarding all that she said to him. It is quite questionable if this doubt was not in its bitterness worse than the former anxieties that had preyed upon the mind of the lady; but she found she could do nothing to put an end to it, so she merely said —

"Well, I feel much happier now; so I will go at once and get you the brandy that you ask for." "I hope he will drink it freely — it will aid him in drowning reflection."

"Thank you," said the cook, "I shall expect it with impatience." — "Confound her, she can't very well put anything queer in the brandy. I will take care to taste a very small portion of it first; for Sir Richard Blunt has cautioned me particularly to be careful of poison."

"I am going," said Mrs. Lovett.

"Goodbye, madam; I only hope you will be able to carry your benevolent intentions into effect — and," added the cook to himself, "that I may some fine morning have the pleasure of seeing you hanged."

"Farewell," said Mrs. Lovett; and she, too, had her *aside* as she ascended the stairs, for she muttered — "If I were only a little better assured than I am that you meditated something dangerous, I would steal upon you while you slept, and with a knife soon put an end to all trouble regarding you."

Now, it happened that when Mrs. Lovett reached her shop, she saw three people outside the window. The actions of these people attracted her observation. One was a big stout man, of such a size as was rarely seen in the streets of London. The other was a young girl, nicely attired, but with a look of great grief and agitation upon her countenance. The third person of the group was a gentlemanly looking man, attired in a greatcoat which was buttoned up to his chin. The big stout man was making a kind of movement towards the door of the pie shop, and the gentleman with the greatcoat was holding up his hand and shaking his head, as though forbidding him. The big stout man then looked angry; and then Mrs. Lovett saw the young girl cling to him, and heard her say —

"Oh, no — no; I said I wanted nothing. — Come away."

Then the gentleman with the greatcoat pulled his collar down a little; upon which the young girl sprang towards him, and, clasping his arm, cried in tones of intense interest —

"Ah, sir, is it indeed you? Tell me is she saved — oh, is she saved?"

"She will be," was the reply of the gentleman in the greatcoat. "Come away."

The big stout man appeared to be getting rather furious at the idea of the gentleman with the greatcoat dictating what he and the young girl should do; but she by a few words pacified him; and then, as if they were the best friends in the world, they all walked away towards the Strand, conversing very seriously and rapidly.

“What does this mean?” said Mrs. Lovett.

Terror overspread her countenance. Oh, conscience! Conscience! How truly dost thou make

“Cowards of us all!”

What could compensate Mrs. Lovett for the abject terrors that came over her now? What could recompense her for the pang that shot across her heart, at the thought that something was amiss in the fine drawn web of subtlety that she and Sweeney Todd had drawn? Alas! Was the money in the Bank of England, upon which she expected to enjoy herself in a foreign land, now any set-off against that shuddering agony of soul with which she said to herself —

“Is all discovered?”

Her strength forsook her. She quite forgot all about the cook, and the brandy she had promised him — she forgot even how necessary it was, in case any one should come, for her to keep up the appearance of composure; and tottering into the back parlour, she sunk upon her knees on the floor, and shook as though the spirit of twenty agues possessed her. So it will be seen that Todd was not quite alone in his sufferings from those compunctious visitations, which we have seen at times come over him in his shop. But we will leave Mrs. Lovett to her reflections, hoping that even she may be made a little wiser and a little better by those soft

“Whisperings of awakened sense;”

and that she may find some one among the invisible hosts of spirits of another world who may whisper to her —

“Repent! Repent! — It is not yet too late.”

Let us look at those three persons whose mysterious conduct at the shop windows had, like a match applied to gunpowder, at once awakened a fever in the breast of Mrs. Lovett, which she was scarcely aware slumbered there. These folks made their way, then, into Fleet Street; and as the reader has probably guessed already who they are, we may as well make a merit of saying that the big one was our old friend Ben, the beefeater — the gentlemanly looking man was Sir Richard Blunt, and the young lady was no other than Arabella Wilmot. Poor Arabella! Of all the personages concerned in our *dramatis personae*, we have no hesitation in saying that your sufferings are the greatest. From the moment that Johanna had started upon that desperate expedition to Sweeney

Todd's, peace left the bosom of her young friend. We have already traced the progress of Arabella to Sir Richard Blunt's office, and we have seen what was the result of that decidedly judicious movement; but notwithstanding she was assured over and over again subsequently by Sir Richard that Johanna was now well protected, she could not bring herself to think so, or to leave the street. It was by her lingering about in this way that she became in the company of our friend Ben. The fact was, that the kind of statement or confession that Johanna had made to Ben on that occasion of his visit to her father's house, when she found herself alone with him in the parlour, had made such an impression upon the poor fellow, that he described it himself in the most forcible possible language, by saying —

“It interferes with my meals.”

Now, everything that had such an effect as that, must to Ben be a matter for the most serious consideration indeed. He accordingly, finding that

“The peace of the Tower was fled,”

so far as he was concerned, had come into the City upon a sort of voyage of discovery, to see how matters were going on. As he was proceeding along Fleet Street, he chanced to cast his eyes into the entrance of a court, nearly opposite Sweeney Todd's, and there he saw a female form crouching. There was something about this female form which Ben thought was familiar to him, and upon a close look, he felt certain it was Johanna's friend, Arabella Wilmot. Full of surprise at finding her there, Ben paused, and stared at her so long, that she at last looked at him, and recognising him, immediately flew to his side, and grasping his arm, cried —

“Oh, pity me, Mr. Ben. Pity me!”

“Hold!” said Ben, who was not, as the reader is aware, the fastest thinker in the world. “Hold. Easy does it.”

Ben tried to look very wise then.

“Oh, you will hate me, Ben.”

“Eh?”

“I say you will hate me, Ben, when you know all.”

Ben shook his head.

“Shan't do any such thing,” he said. “Lord bless your pretty eyes, I hate you? I couldn't.”

“But — but —”

“Come, come,” added Ben, “just take your little bit of an arm under mine. Easy does it, you know. Always think of that, if anything goes amiss. Easy does it; and then you will find things come right in the long run. You may take my word for it.”



Mrs. Lovett Alarmed at the Strange Faces at her Window in the Pie Shop.

CHAPTER LXXVIII
Colonel Jeffery Opens his Eyes

Arabella was weeping, so that for some little time she could say nothing more to Ben; and he did not, in the profundity of his imagination, very well know what to say to her, except now and then muttering the maxim of "Easy does it," which Ben thought singularly applicable to all human affairs. But this was a state of things which could not last; and Arabella Wilmot, nerving herself sufficiently to speak in a few minutes, said to Ben in a low self-deprecatory tone —

"Oh, sir, I — I — have done something very wrong."

"Eh?" said Ben, opening his eyes to their utmost.

"Yes," added Arabella, "very wrong, indeed."

"Humph!"

"You would not probably have expected it of me, Mr. Ben, would you now?"

"Well, ahem!" said Ben. "Easy does it."

"I am a wicked — wicked girl."

"Oh, dear — oh, dear!" said Ben.

"You cannot guess, Mr. Ben, what I have done; but I feel I ought to tell you, and it will be quite a relief to me to do so."

Ben shook his head.

"I tell you what it is, my dear," he said. "Your best plan is to go and tell your mother, my dear. That's the proper person to tell. She is sure to find it out somehow or another; and you had better tell her at once, and then — easy does it."

"My mother? Tell my mother? Oh, no — no — no!"

"Well, if you have got any respectable old aunt now, who is a good, kind old soul, and would not make too much fuss, you had better tell her; but goodness gracious, my dear, what puts it into your head to tell me?"

"Because I think you are kindhearted."

"Well, but — well, but —"

“And, then, of course, as you are mixed up, you know, Mr. Ben, in the whole transaction, it is only proper that you should know what has happened at last.”

Ben turned fairly round, and looked down into the face of Arabella Wilmot with such a coarse expression of alarm upon his face, that at any other than so serious a time she must have laughed.

“Me?” he cried. “Me?”

“Yes, Mr. Ben.”

“Me mixed up in the — the — oh dear!”

“Ah, Mr. Ben, you know you are by far too kind not to be; and so I feel as though it would be quite a relief to me to tell you everything.”

“Everything?”

“Yes, all — all.”

“Not all the particulars, surely. Come — come. I ain’t an old woman, you know, my dear.”

“An old woman, Ben?”

“No, my dear, I say I ain’t an elderly female, so I don’t think I ought to listen to all the particulars, do you know. Come — come, you go home now, and say no more about it to me. Easy does it, you know; and keep your own counsel. I won’t say a word; but don’t you, because you are in such a state of mind as you hardly know what you are about, go on blubbering to me about all the particulars, when perhaps tomorrow you’ll give one of your pretty little ears that you had not said a word to me about it.”

“Alas! — Alas!”

“Pho! Pho! Easy does it.”

“Who am I to cling to but you?”

“Cling to me? Perhaps you’ll say it’s me?”

“What’s you, Mr. Ben? Explain yourself. How strange you talk. What do you mean, Mr. Ben?”

“Well, that’s cool,” said Ben.

“What’s cool?”

"I tell you what it is, Miss Arabella W., I'm disappointed in you; ain't you ashamed to look me in the face?"

"Ashamed?"

"Yes, positively ashamed?"

"No, Mr. Ben. I may regret the indiscretion that is past; but I cannot see in it anything to be ashamed of."

"You don't?"

"Indeed, Mr. Ben, I do not."

"Then, Miss A. W., you are about the coolest little piece of goods I have met with for some time. Come — come, easy does it; but haven't you been telling me all this time about something you have been about, that — that — was rather improper, in a manner of speaking?"

It might have been the tone in which Ben pronounced the word improper, or it might have been the sagacious shake of the head which Ben accompanied his words with, or it might have been that Arabella was drawing a conclusion from the whole transaction; but certain it is, that she began to have a glimmering perception that Mr. Ben was making a great mistake.

"Oh, heaven!" she said. "What are you saying Mr. Ben? I am speaking of the advice I was foolish enough to give Johanna."

"Advice?"

"Yes, that is all. Into what mischief could you have tortured my meaning? I am much mistaken in you, sir."

"What? Then, it isn't — ahem! That is to say, you haven't — dear me, I shall put my foot in it directly. What a fool I am."

"You are, indeed," said the now indignant Arabella, and a slight flush upon her cheeks showed how deeply wronged she was by the unworthy construction Ben had put upon her innocent words.

"Goodbye, Miss A. W.," added Ben. "Goodbye; I see I am out of your books; but if you fancy I meant any harm, you don't know me. God bless you. Take care of yourself my dear, and go home. I won't stay to plague you any longer. Goodbye."

"Stop! Stop!"

Ben paused.

"I am sure, Mr. Ben, you did not mean to say a single word that could be offensive to a friendless girl in the street."

"Then, then? — Easy does it."

"Let us be friends again then, Mr. Ben, and I will tell you all, and you will then blame me for being so romantic as to give Johanna advice which has induced her to take a step which, although my reason tells me she is now well protected in, my imagination still peoples with horror."

Ben's eyes opened to an alarming width.

"You recollect meeting us in this street, Ben?"

"Oh, yes."

"When Johanna was disguised?"

"Yes, Miss A. When she had on them, ahem! You may depend upon it, my dear, there's no good comes of young girls putting on pairs of thingamys. Don't you ever do it."

"But, Mr. Ben, hear me."

"Well — well. I was only saying. You stick to the petticoats, my dear. They become you, and you become them, and don't you be trusting your nice little legs into what-do-you-call-'ems."

"Mr. Ben?"

"I've done. Easy does it. Now go on and tell us what happened, my dear. Don't mind me. Go on."

"Then Johanna, in boy's clothes, is now — "

"Now? Oh, the little vixen. Didn't I tell her not."

"Is now filling the situation of errand boy at Sweeney Todd's, opposite. Can I be otherwise than wretched, most wretched!"

"Arrant boy?"

"No, not arrant boy. Errand boy."

"At Todd's — opposite — in — boys — clothes? Oh — oh — just you wait here, and I'll soon put that to rights. I'll — I'll. Only you wait in this doorway, Miss A. W., just a moment or two, and I'll teach her to go and do such things. I'll — I'll — "

“No — no Ben. You will ruin all, you will, indeed. I implore you to stay with me. Let me tell you all that has happened, and how Johanna is protected. In the first place, Ben, you must know that Sir Richard Blunt the Magistrate has her under his special protection now, and he says that he has made such arrangements that it is quite impossible she can come to any harm.”

“But —”

“Nay, listen me out. He says that nothing can now expose her to any danger, but some injudicious interference. I ought not, you see, to have told you, Mr. Ben; but since I have, I only ask of you, for Johanna’s sake, for her life’s sake, to do nothing.”

Ben looked aghast.

“And — and how long is the little lamb to be left there?” he asked.

“Only a few hours I think now, Ben — only a few hours. Where are we now, Mr. Ben?”

“Why, this, my dear, is Bell Yard we have strolled into; and that is the famous pie shop of which they talk so much. They say the woman has made an immense fortune by selling them.”

As Ben made a kind of movement towards Mrs. Lovett’s window, it was then that Sir Richard Blunt, who had followed him and Arabella Wilmot from Fleet Street, and who had, in fact, overheard some portion of their conversation, stepped up in the manner that Mrs. Lovett had remarked from within the shop.

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We have before stated that the three personages, consisting of the magistrate, Big Ben the beefeater, and Arabella Wilmot, walked to Fleet Street together from Bell Yard. Sir Richard Blunt shook his head at Arabella Wilmot, as he said —

“Miss Wilmot, I cannot help saying that it would have been better in every respect, and possibly much more conducive to the safety of Miss Oakley, if you had gone home quietly, and not lingered about Fleet Street.”

“I could not go, sir.”

“But yet a consideration for Miss Oakley’s safety should have induced you to put that violence upon your own feelings.”

“I felt that when once you, sir, had pledged yourself for her safety, that safe she was; and that my weeping perchance in a doorway in Fleet Street could not be so important as to compromise her.”

"I am fairly enough answered," said Sir Richard Blunt, with a slight smile. "But what say you to coming with me to the Temple?"

"The Temple?"

Arabella cast a lingering look towards Todd's shop, which Sir Richard at once translated, and replied to it by saying —

"Fear nothing for your young friend. She knows she is protected; but even she does not know the extent to which she is so protected. I tell you, Miss Wilmot, that I pledge my own life for her safety — and that, although to all seeming she is in the power of Todd, such is not the case."

"Indeed?"

"I have a force of no less than twenty five men in Fleet Street now — one half of whom have their eyes upon Todd's shop. By Heaven! I would not have a hair of that young and noble girl's head injured for the worth of this great kingdom!"

"Bravo!" cried Ben, as he seized Sir Richard by the hand, and gave it a squeeze that nearly brought the tears into the eyes of the magistrate; "Bravo! That's what I like to hear. All's right. Bless you, sir, easy does it. You are the man for my money!"

"Will you both come with me, then?"

"To be sure," said Ben; "to be sure; and as we go along, I'll tell you what a sad mistake I made about Miss Arabella here. You must know that I met her crying in Fleet Street, and she — "

Arabella shook her head, and frowned.

"And — and — and — she — nothing."

"Well," said Sir Richard, "I must confess I have heard anecdotes with a little more point to them."

"You don't say so!" said Ben.

"I think I will go home," said Arabella, gently.

"If you will," replied the magistrate, "of course, I cannot say anything to stay you; but I think it will be a great disappointment to Colonel Jeffery not to meet with you today."

"Colonel Jeffery!" exclaimed Arabella, while her face became of the colour of a rosebud; "Colonel Jeffery?"

There was just the ghost of a smile upon the face of Sir Richard Blunt, as he calmly replied —

“Yes; I am on my way to meet that gentleman in the garden of the Temple; and I am sure he would be glad to see you.”

“Glad to see me?”

“Yes, as so true a friend of Johanna’s, he will be more than glad; he will be delighted.”

“Delighted?”

“Do you doubt the Colonel’s friendly feeling towards you?”

“Oh no — no. I — no — certainly not.”

“Then let me beg of you to come.”

“No. Not now; I will go home. It will look particular for me to go to the garden to meet him.”

“It will look much more particular to refuse, I think, Miss Wilmot. You are with me, and with your old friend, and Johanna’s relative, Mr. a — a —”

“They calls me Ben.”

“Mr. Ben; and so you cannot refuse,” he said, “to go to meet Colonel Jeffery, you know. Come, come, I pray you come. Indeed, I know the Colonel wishes to speak to you; and as it would be obviously out of order for him to call upon you, I think you ought, seeing that you’re not alone, to give him, as a gentleman of wealth and honour, this opportunity of doing so.”

“You say, he wishes to speak to me?”

“He does, indeed. What do you say, Mr. Ben? Don’t you think Miss Wilmot might as well come with us?”

“Easy does it,” said Ben, “and that’s my opinion all the world over.”

“Then allow me to look upon it that we have prevailed with you, Miss Wilmot. Pray do me the favour to take my arm.”

Arabella trembled, but she did take the arm of Sir Richard Blunt, and made no further opposition to proceeding to that Temple Gardens, where already such affecting interviews had taken place between the Colonel and poor Johanna. The gardens appeared to be empty when they reached it, but from behind some shrubs Colonel Jeffery in a moment made his appearance, for Sir Richard, in

consequence of his meeting with Ben and Arabella, was considerably behind his time.

CHAPTER LXXIX
Arabella and the Colonel

If any one had been looking at the face of Arabella Wilmot at this particular juncture, and if the party so looking had chanced to be learned in reading the various emotions of the heart from the expression of the features, they might have chanced upon some curious revelations. It was only one glance that Arabella gave to the Colonel, but that was sufficient. A word slightly spoken, and in due season, may say more than a volume of preaching; and so one transient glance, fleeting as a sunbeam in an English April, may, with most eloquent meaning, preach a sermon that would puzzle many a divine. But we have become so familiar with the reader, and put ourselves upon such a cordial shake hands sort of feeling, in particular with you, Miss, who are now reading this passage, that we will whisper a secret in your ear, and the more readily, too, as to whisper we must come particularly close to that soft downy cheek, and almost be able to look askance into those eyes in which the light of Heaven seems dancing, — Arabella Wilmot is in love!

Yes, Arabella Wilmot is in love with Colonel Jeffery; and small blame to her, as they say in Ireland, for is he not a gentleman in the true acceptation of the term? Not a manufactured gentleman, but one of nature's gentlemen.

You will have promised, my dear what's-your-name, that Arabella, to herself even, has hardly confessed her feelings; but still they are creeping upon her most insidiously as such feelings somehow or other will and do creep.

To be sure, if any one were to stop her in the street or any where else to say, "Arabella, you are in love with Colonel Jeffery," she would say — "No, no, no!" many times over.

But yet it is true.

"You read it in her glistening eyes,
And thus alone should love be read:
She says it in her gentle sighs,
And thus alone should love be said."

After this, who will be hardy enough, my dear, to dispute the fact with you and I?

And now we will watch her, ay, that we will, and see how she will behave herself under such trying circumstances.

Colonel Jeffery advanced, and as in duty and gallantry called upon, he, after slightly bowing to the gentlemen, spoke to Arabella.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Wilmot," he said. "I hope I see you well. Here is a seat close at hand. May I have the pleasure of conducting you to it?"

"Johanna is — is — is — " stammered Arabella.

“Well, I hope,” interposed the colonel.

“Oh, no — no — that is, yes.”

The colonel looked puzzled. He was not a conjurer, and so might look puzzled, if he looked like any ordinary man, who hears any one say no, and yes in the same breath, without any injury to his reputation.

“Mr. Ben,” said Sir Richard Blunt, “I have something for your private ear, if you will just step on with me.”

“My private ear?” said Ben with a confused look, as if he would have liked to add, “which is that?”

“Yes. This way if you please.”

Ben walked on with the magistrate, and Colonel Jeffery was alone with Arabella Wilmot. Yes, alone with the one person who insensibly had crept into her affections. Alas! Is the pure love of that young creature scattered to the winds? Is she one of those who drag about them in this world the heavy chain of unrequited affection? We shall see. Arabella had permitted the colonel to hand her to one of the garden seats near at hand. How could she prevent him? If he had chosen instead to hand her into the river it would have been just the same, and she would have gone. He led her by that wreath of flowers which in old Arcadia was first linked by Cupid, and which, in all time since, has wound itself around the hearts of all the boy god’s victims.

“Miss Wilmot,” said the colonel, and now his voice faltered a little, “I have much wished to see you.”

“Very fine, indeed,” said Arabella. “You said something about the weather, did you not?”

“Not exactly,” he said; “I had much wished to see you.”

“Me?”

“Yes, and to begin at the beginning, you know I — I — loved Johanna Oakley. Yes, I loved her.”

“Yes — yes.”

“I loved her for her beauty, and for the gentle and the chivalrous devotion of her character, you understand. I loved her for the very tears she shed for another, and for the very constancy with which she clung to the memory of his affection for her. I saw in her such childlike purity of mind, such generosity of disposition, such enchanting humanity of soul, that I could not but love her.”

“Yes, yes,” gasped Arabella. “Yes.”

“Will you pardon me for saying all this to you?”

“Oh yes. Go on — go on, unless you have said all?”

“I have not.”

“Then, then you have only to add that you love her still?”

“Yes, but — ”

Arabella’s heart beat painfully.

“Ah,” she said, “has true love any reservations? You love her, and yet you have something else to say.”

“I have. I love her still. But it is not as I loved her. She has convinced me of her constancy to her first affection, that — that — ”

“Yes, yes.”

“That being so convinced, I now love her, but with that love a brother might feel for a dear sister, and I almost think it was a kind of preparation to try to awaken in the smouldering fires of her lost love a new passion. She has made me feel that the love of woman once truly awakened is an undying passion and can know no change — no extinction.”

“True. Oh, how true!”

“I have learnt from her that when once the heart of a young and gentle girl — one in whom there are no evil passions, no worldly failings nor earthly varieties — is touched by the holy flame of affection, it may consume her being, but it never can be extinguished.”

Arabella burst into tears.

“Love,” added the colonel, “may be trodden down, but like truth it can never be trodden out!”

“Never! Never!” sobbed Arabella. “Let me go now! Oh, sir, let me go home now?”

“One moment!”

She trembled, but she sat still.

“Only a moment, Arabella, while I tell you that man’s love is different from this. That man can reason upon his affections, and that when the first beauty

and excellence upon which he may cast his eyes is denied to his arms, he can look for equal beauty — equal excellence — equal charms of mind and person in another, and —”

Arabella tried to go, but somehow she felt spellbound and could not rise from that garden seat.

“And,” added the colonel, “with as pure a passion, man can make an idol of her who can be his, as he approached her who could not. — Miss Wilmot, I love you!”

“Oh, no, no — Johanna.”



Colonel Jeffery Declares his Love for Arabella.

“I do not shrink from the pronunciation of that name; I have said that I loved Johanna. If she had been fancy-free and would have looked upon me with eyes of favour, I would have made her my wife; but such was not to be, and for the same qualities that I loved her I love you. I am afraid I have not explained my feelings well.”

“Oh, yes. That is, I don’t know.”

“And now, Miss Wilmot, will you allow me to hope that what I have said to you may not be all in vain? That — ”

“No, no.”

“No?”

“Allow me to go, now. My mind is too full of the fate of Johanna even to permit me to reject in the language taught — ”

“Reject?”

“Yes,” she said, “reject. I wish you all the happiness this world can afford to you, Colonel Jeffery.”

“Then you will be mine?”

“No, no, no. Farewell.”

She rose, and this time the colonel did not attempt to detain her. He stepped back a pace or two, and bowed, and then rose and walked a pace or two away. Then she turned, and holding out her hand, she cried —

“We may — may be friends.”

The colonel took the little hand in silence, but the expression of his face was one of deep chagrin.

“Goodbye,” said Arabella.

How courageous she had become all of a sudden, as it were.

“And is this all?” said Jeffery.

“Yes, all. When I see Johanna I will remember you to her.”

The colonel bowed again, as he replied —

“I shall be much beholden to you, Miss Wilmot, for that kindness.”

“And — and I hope you will find — find — that is, meet with some one, who — who don’t chance to know that your love is a kind of second hand — that is, I don’t mean that, but a — a — yes, that is all.”

Arabella was saying too much. The colonel replied gently —

“I am truly obliged for the highly explanatory speech just uttered by Arabella Wilmot, whom I have the honour to wish a very good day.”

Arabella trembled.

“No, no. Not thus, Colonel Jeffery. We are friends, indeed.”

“Remarkable good acquaintances,” said the colonel, as he walked away towards Sir Richard Blunt and Ben. Arabella walked hastily on, having but one idea at the moment, and that was to leave the garden, but she could not find the gate, and Ben ran after her as well as he could, calling —

“Miss A. W. — Miss A. W., where are you agoing? Don’t you go yet. I’ll take care of you and see you all right, you know, or perhaps you’d like to take a wherry here at the Temple stairs, and go to the Tower, and see the animals fed?”

“Yes, no — that is, anything,” replied Arabella. “I will go home now, I am so very — very wretched!”

“What, wretched? Here, Colonel thingumy, she says she — ”

“If you dare!” said Arabella, as she placed her hand upon the arm of Ben. “If you dare!”

“Lor’!” said Ben, as he looked down from his altitude upon the frail and beautiful young creature. “Lor’! Easy does it!”

The voice of Ben, however, had brought both the colonel and Sir Richard Blunt to the spot. During that brief time that had elapsed since the colonel had last spoken to Arabella, Sir Richard had told him of the perilous position of Johanna, and the look of anxiety upon his face was most marked. Arabella heard him say —

“Make use of me in any way you please, Sir Richard. Regard my safety or even my life as nothing compared to her preservation.”

Arabella knew what he meant.

“Ben,” she said, “will you come with me, and see me a part of my way home?”

“Yes, my dear, to be sure. Then you won’t come and see the criturs fed to-day, I supposes?”

“No, no.”

“Very well. Easy does it. Come along, my dear — come along. Lord love you! I’ll take care of you. I should only like to see anybody look at you while you are with me, my duck. Bless your little bits of twinkling eyes!”

“Thank you — thank you.”

“Lor’! It’s enough to make a fellow go mad in love, to see such criturs as you, my dear; but whenever I thinks of such things, I says to myself — ‘I’ll just pop in and see Mother Oakley,’ and that soon puts it all out of my head, I can tell you.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes. You should go in at feeding time some day, and see her acoming it strong with fried ingins.”

“Fried what?”

“Ingins — ingins; round things. Ingions — ah! that’s it.”

“Onions?”

“Very like — very like. But come on, my dear — come on. Easy does it! Always remember that whenever you gets into any fix. Easy does it!”

Did Arabella think the colonel would run after her and say something? Yes she did; but he came not. Did she think he would be loath to part with her upon such terms as they had seemed to part? Yes, yes. Surely he could not let her go without some kinder, softer, word that he had last spoken to her? But he did. He only watched her with his eyes; and when Sir Richard Blunt, who, it would appear, knew something of the colonel’s feelings, said to him —

“All right, I suppose, Colonel Jeffery?”

He only shook his head.

“What, anything amiss?”

“She has rejected me!”

“Oh, is that all?”

“All? And enough too.”

“Phoo! She was sure to do that. Don’t you know the old adage, that —

“Woman’s nay still stands for nought.”

“Why, man, ‘No’ comes as naturally to the tip of a young girl’s tongue when she means ‘Yes’, as ‘Don’t’ when she expects to be kissed. I tell you, she loves you. She adores the very ground you walk on.”

“And yet she taunted me with my passion for Johanna, and called me a second hand lover.”

“Did she, though? Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Upon my life that was good — was it not?”

CHAPTER LXXX
Mrs. Lovett Visits the Bank and Todd

Mrs. Lovett, Mrs. Lovett, we are neglecting you! Excuse us, fascinating piece of wickedness. We are now in Bell Yard again. It will be recollected what a mental ferment the appearance of Ben, and Arabella, and Sir Richard Blunt, at the window of her shop had put her in. Not that she knew any of those parties — nor that she connected any of them in any way with her feelings, except so far as their attitudes might at that moment lead her to suppose. The attitudes certainly were such as to create suspicion. All this, joined to the previous state of mind of Mrs. Lovett, did not tend to produce that heavenly calm, which philosophers tell us is such a remarkably nice thing. On the contrary, the mind of Mrs. Lovett rather resembled a raging torrent, boiling and bubbling to some destruction which was afar off, and which could only be reached through the perils and dangers of some stormy passage. She was sighing for peace. She had begun to sicken for the results of her life of iniquity — not those results which an indignant and outraged public would have visited her with, but those results which she and all persons, who deliberately and systematically commence a career of guilt, picture to themselves. Criminality is never engaged in for its own sake. There is always some ultimate object in view, which makes the retrospect less horrible, and the prospect dim and dubious, though it may be yet a thing of pleasurable anticipation. Of course, we are only reasoning upon those minds that reflect. There are many who lead a life of criminality, who do so as the manifestation of an intellect that can picture nothing else. But the reader knows that Mrs. Lovett was not of such an order. She was to some extent an educated, and to a considerable extent a clever woman. Hence, then, she had always pictured to herself wealth and retirement, respect and power, as the ends for which she was striving with such unscrupulous means. But of late, with a shuddering horror, she had begun to dread that all she had hoped for was getting only more distant. She had contracted a strong notion of the bad faith of Todd, and if such were really the case, all was indeed lost. If he allowed his cupidity just to induce him to commit the crime that would be one too many, destruction must fall upon them both. If likewise, he instantly made an effort to take to himself all the profits of the unholy traffic that they were mutually engaged in, all would be lost to both; for was she a likely woman to crouch down in silence under such a blow? No! The scaffold prepared by her instrumentality for Todd, would be scarcely less a triumph to her than she herself would share it with him. He ought to have known better than he did. How clear and longsighted we find people upon subjects that from this distance may be supposed to present difficulties, and yet how shallow they are upon what is close to them. One would have thought that such a man as Todd could easily have said to himself, with regard to Mrs. Lovett, “I dare not tamper with the objects of that woman”, and he would have said it with truth; but on the contrary, he only looked upon her as a convenient tool, which was to be thrown aside when it had served all the purposes for which he intended it. There could not have been a more fatal mistake upon the part of Todd as concerned his safety. But to return to Mrs. Lovett. The brandy she had promised to the prisoner was quite forgotten. She sat revolving in her mind, how she could put

an end to the state of horrible doubt and perplexity in which she was. There were some little difficulties in the way of Mrs. Lovett emerging from her present condition. It has been before hinted at, that Todd and the fair lady of the pie shop had between them accumulated a large sum of money, and that the money was duly deposited in the hands of a stockbroker, who was by no means to part with it to either of them, except upon an order signed by both. So far all looked fair enough; and as they were likewise bound together by such a bond of mutual guilt, it did not look likely that either would make an endeavour to get the better of the other. Suppose there was £40,000 in the hands of the stockbroker, it did not seem, we say, under all the circumstances likely that Todd — being fairly entitled as between them, to £20,000 — would peril the safety of both their necks, by getting up a quarrel about the division equitably of the spoil. The same reasoning will apply to Mrs. Lovett. But these unlikely things are the very things that do come to pass to upset the finest plans. Todd never from the first — whenever that was — meant that Mrs. Lovett should share with him; no, he thought that he, as the superior genius, the greater villain, would manage to cheat her, and that she would, for her own safety's sake, be obliged to put up with what he chose to give her. That would have been only such a pittance, as to keep her constantly in a state of dependance upon him. Now, to do Mrs. Lovett justice upon the old equitable principle of giving the devil his due, she never had any intention, until she saw symptoms of bad faith in Todd, of attempting to act otherwise than fairly by him. She loathed him; and all she meant to do, was when the division of the spoil should take place, to ascertain where he was going, and then to get as far off him as possible. Of late, however, finding that Todd was getting lucky, and feeling quite convinced that he aimed at her life, other views had dawned upon her, as we are already well aware. She did not so much care for all the money as she would have liked in her retirement, wherever it was, to have felt sure that Todd was not

“An inhabitant of the earth;”

and hence she had taken the pains, all of which had been frustrated, to put him into another world. But a feeling, superstitiously consequent upon her failure, had started up in her mind that he bore a charmed life; and hence she bethought herself of flying from England; but the money — how was she to get the money to do so? How was she, without his cognisance, to get her share of the funds which had been placed in the hands of a stockbroker? Now, since she had begun to feel uncomfortable regarding the faith of Todd, Mrs. Lovett had kept what cash she saved at home; therefore some weeks had elapsed since she had paid a monetary visit to the city. If she had gone as usual, she might have got some news. To a woman of lively and discursive imagination like Mrs. Lovett, a plan of operation was not long in suggesting itself. Why, she asked herself, should she hesitate to put Todd's name to the document necessary to get her half of the money from the stockbroker? What a natural consequence from this question it was to ask herself another, which was — “If I am forging Todd's signature at all, might I not do it for the whole amount as for half, and so take the only revenge upon him which he would feel, or which I dare offer myself the gratification of exacting from him?” When such a question as this is asked, it is practically answered in the affirmative. Mrs. Lovett felt quite decided upon it.

She was a woman of courage. No fainthearted scruple interposed between the thought and the execution of a project with her. The recent scene that had taken place in front of her window decided her. "Now or never!" she told herself. "Now or never is the time to escape. I have nothing to encumber myself with. Let Todd keep his jewels and trinkets. All I want is the money which is in the hands of Mr. Anthony Brown, the stockbroker, and that I will have forthwith." Mrs. Lovett did not know the exact amount; but as it was a joint account, such an amount of ignorance need not appear at all surprising to the stockbroker; so she drew up an order for the money, and signed it with both Todd's name and her own, leaving a blank for the amount. She then carefully locked up all doors but that of the outer shop, and having procured the services of a young girl from a greengrocer's shop in the vicinity, to mind the place for an hour, as she said, she considered she was all right. The girl had attended to the shop before for Mrs. Lovett at times when no batches of pies were expected from the regions below, so she did not feel at all surprised at the call upon her services.

"I shall be an hour," said Mrs. Lovett. "You can take a pie or two for yourself if you feel at all hungry; and if Mr. Todd should come in, say I'm gone to call upon a dressmaker in Bond Street."

"Yes, mum!"

Mrs. Lovett left the shop. At the corner of Bell Yard she turned and cast a glance at it. She hoped it was a farewell one — she shuddered and passed on; and then she muttered to herself —

"If I am — which assuredly I shall be — successful in the city, I will take posthorses there at once for some seaport, and from thence reach the Continent, before Todd can dream of pursuit, or find out what I have done, or where bestowed myself."

She was not so impudent as to pass Todd's shop, but she went down one of the streets upon the opposite side of Fleet Street, and came up another, which was considerably past the house which was so full of horrors. A lumbering old hackney coach met her gaze. It was disengaged, and Mrs. Lovett got into it.

"To Lothbury," she said; and after swaying to and fro for a few moments, the machine was set in action, and duly steering up Ludgate Hill.

The impatience of Mrs. Lovett was so great, that she would gladly have done anything to induce the horses to go at a faster rate than the safe two miles and a half an hour to which they were accustomed, but she dreaded that if she exhibited any signs of extreme impatience she might excite suspicion. To the guilty, any observation of a more than ordinary character is a thing to dread. They would fain glide through life gently, and not at all do they sigh to be —

"The observed of all observers."

But the longest journey even in the slowest hackney coach must come to an end. As Ben the beefeater would have said — “Easy does it”; and as Mrs. Lovett’s journey was anything but a long one, the gloomy precincts of Lothbury soon loomed upon her gaze. After the customary oscillations, and wheezing and creaking of all its joints and springs, the coach stopped.

“Wait” said Mrs. Lovett with commendable brevity; and alighting, she entered a dark doorway upon the side of which was painted, in letters that had contracted so much the colour of the woodwork that they were nearly illegible, “Mr. Anthony Brown.”

This was the stockbroker, who held charge of the illgotten gains of that pair of unworthies, Mrs. Lovett and Sweeney Todd. A small door, covered with what had been green baize, but which was now of some perfectly original brown, opened into the outer office of the man of business, and there a spruce clerk held dominion. At the sound of the rustling silks of Mrs. Lovett, he raised his head from poring over the cumbrous ledger; and then seeing, to use his own vernacular, it was “a monstrous fine woman,” he condescended to alight from his high stool, and he demanded the lady’s pleasure.

“Mr. Brown.”

“Yes, madam. Certainly. Mr. B. is in his private room. What name shall I have the pleasure of saying?”

“Lovett.”

“Lovett? Yes, madam. Certainly — ahem! Pray be seated, madam, if you please.”

Mrs. Lovett made a gesture of dissent, and the clerk went upon his errand. He was scarcely absent a moment, and then holding open a door, he said, with quite a chivalric air —

“This way, if you please, madam. — A monstrous fine woman,” he added to himself.

The door closed after Mrs. Lovett, and she was in the private room of Mr. Anthony Brown.

“Ah, Mrs. Lovett. Pray be seated, madam. I am truly glad to see you well. Well, to be sure, you do look younger, and younger, and younger, every time I have the pleasure of a visit from you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Brown, for the compliment. My visits have not been so numerous as usual of late.”

“Why, no ma’am, they have not; but I hope we are going to resume business again in the old way?”

“Not exactly.”

“Well, my dear madam, whatever it is that has procured me the honour and the pleasure of this visit, I am sure I am very glad of it, and shall not quarrel with it. He! He! Nice weather, Mrs. Lovett.”

“Very.”

“Ah, madam — ah, it was a world of pities to disturb the investments. It was indeed. But ladies will be ladies.”

“Sir?”

“I — I merely said ladies will be ladies you know. And indeed — he! He! — I fully expected the interesting ceremony had come off before now, I did indeed; and I should have wagered a new hat.”

“Mr. Brown, what are you talking about?”

“About?”

“Yes, what do you mean?”

“Why, a — a — that is — the — a — a — about — concerning — the — my dear madam, if I have inadvertently trodden upon your sensibilities, I — I really —”

“You really what?”

Mr. Brown looked perplexed. Mrs. Lovett looked a little furious.

“Sir,” she said, “before I explain the cause of my visit to you, I insist upon knowing to what all your mysterious hints and remarks allude. Speak freely and plainly, sir.”

“Well then, madam, when Mr. Todd was last here, he said that you had at last consented to reward years of devotion to you by becoming his, and that the ceremony which was to make him a happy man by uniting him to so much excellence and beauty, was to come off almost immediately, and that that was the reason you had both agreed to withdraw all the money I had in such snug and comfortable safe investments for you both. He! He! He!”

CHAPTER LXXXI
Mutual Defiance

Be so good, reader, as to picture to yourself the look of Mrs. Lovett. We feel that one brief moment of imagination will do more to enable you to feel and to see with

“Your mind’s eye”

her aspect, than as if we were to try a paragraph upon the subject. How that “He! He! He!” of Mr. Brown’s rung in her ears. It was at any time almost enough to provoke a saint, and we need not say that this time of all others was not one at which Mrs. Lovett’s feelings were attuned to gentleness and patience. Besides, she certainly was no saint. A rather heavy inkstand stood upon the table between Mrs. Lovett and the stockbroker. The next moment it narrowly escaped his head, leaving in its progress over his frontispiece a long streak of ink down his visage.

“Wretch!” said Mrs. Lovett. “It is not true.”

“Murder!” cried Mr. Brown.

Mrs. Lovett covered her face with both her hands for a moment, as though, to enable her to think clearly, it were necessary to shut out the external world; and then starting up, she advanced to the door of the room.

“Murder!” said the stockbroker again.

“Silence!”

“A constable.”

“If you dare to say one word of this interview, I will return, and tear you limb from limb.”

Mrs. Lovett opened the door of the private room with such a vengeance that the nose of the clerk, who had been listening upon the other side, was seriously damaged thereby. He started back with a howl of pain.

“Fool!” said Mrs. Lovett, as she passed him, and that was all she condescended to say to him; — not by any means an agreeable reminiscence of his last words with a lady to a gentleman who prided himself upon his looks — rather!

Mrs. Lovett reached the street, and walked for some distance as though street it was not. She was only roused to a sense of the world in which she was, by hearing the sound of a voice calling —

“Mum — mum! Here yer is — mum — mum! Wool!”

She turned and saw the coach in which she had come to the stockbroker.

“Going back, mum?” said the man.

“Yes, yes.”

She stepped into the vehicle, looking more like an animated statue than aught human. The man stood touching what was once the brim of a hat, as he said —

“Where to, mum?”

Mrs. Lovett looked at him with an air of such abstraction that it was quite clear she did not see him, but she heard the question, that came to her like an echo in the air.

“Where to, mum?”

“To Fleet Street!”

Wheeze — creak — wheeze — creak — sway — sway, and the coach moved on again. Mrs. Lovett sunk down among the straw with which the lower part of the vehicle was plentifully strewed; and then, with her head resting upon the seat, her throbbing temples clasped in her hands, she tried to think. Yes — she called upon all that calmness — that decision — that talent or tact, call it which you will that had saved her for so long, not to desert her now in this hour of her dire extremity. She called upon everything for aid but upon Heaven! And then, to ease her mind, she cursed a little. Somebody says —

“Swearing when the passions are at war,
And light the chambers of the brain with angers flash.
Has an effect quite moral — a kind of safety valve,
Sparing what might be a tremendous crash!”

and so Mrs. Lovett got cooler, but not a whit the less determined, as the crazy vehicle conveyed her to Fleet Street. She fully intended now to measure conclusions with Todd. The distance was so short that even a hackney coach performed it with tolerable promptitude. Mrs. Lovett did not wish to alight exactly at the door of Todd’s shop; so she was rather glad upon finding the coach stop at the corner of Fleet Street by the old Market, and the driver demanded what number?

“This will do.”

She was in the street in another minute. It took a minute to get out of a hackney coach. It was like watching the moment to spring from a boat to the shore in a heavy surf. And yet, oh much vilified old hackney coach! How much superior wert thou to thy bastard son, the present odious rattling, bumping,

angular, bone dislocating, horrid cab! The driver received about double his fare, and a cabman of the present day would have gathered a mob by his vociferations, and blackguarded you into a shop, if you had treated him in such a way. Nothing less than three times what he's entitled to ever lights up the smallest spark of civility in the soul of a modern cab driver, but the old hackney coachman was always content with double; so upon this occasion Mrs. Lovett got a "thank ye, mum;" and a long straw that had taken an affection for the skirt of her dress was arrested by jarvey and restored to the coach again.

Mrs. Lovett walked to all appearance composedly up Fleet Street. Alas! In this world who can trust to appearances? She had time, before reaching the shop of Sweeney Todd, to arrange slightly what she should say to that worthy. Of course, he could know nothing of her visit to the City — of her interview with Mr. Brown, and she need not blurt that out too soon. She would argue with him a little, and then she would be down upon him with the knowledge of his knavery and treachery. She reached the shop. No wonder she paused there a moment or two to draw breath. You would have done the same; and after all, Mrs. Lovett was mortal. But she did not hesitate for long. The threshold was crossed — the handle of the door was in her hand — it was turned, and she stood in Todd's shop. Todd was looking at something in a bottle, which he was holding up to the light; and Mrs. Lovett saw, too, that a pretty genteel looking lad was poking about the fire, as if to rouse it.

"Ah, Mrs. Lovett!" said Todd, "how do you do? Some more of that fine grease for the hair, I suppose, madam?" Todd winked towards the lad (our dear friend Johanna), as though he would have said — "Don't appear to know me too well before this boy. Be careful, if you please."

"I have something to say to you, Mr. Todd."

"Oh, certainly, madam. Pray walk in — this way, if you please, madam — to my humble bachelor parlour, madam. It is not fit exactly to ask a lady into; but we poor miserable single men, you know, madam, can only do the best we can. Ha! Ha! This way."

"No."

"Eh? Not come in?"

"No. I have something to say to you, Mr. Todd; but I will say it here."

And now Mrs. Lovett gave a sidelong glance at the seeming boy, as much as to say —

"You can easily send him away if you don't want him to listen to our discourse."

Todd saw the glance; and the diabolical look that he sent to Mrs. Lovett in return would indeed have appalled any one of less nerve than she was

possessed of. But she had come to that place wound up firmly to a resolution, and she would not shrink. Todd had no resource.

“Charley,” he said, “you can go and take a little turn — here is a penny to spend; get yourself something in the market. But be sure you are back within half an hour, for we shall have some customers, no doubt.”

“Yes, sir.”

Johanna did not exactly know whether to think that Mrs. Lovett came in anger or friendship; but, at all events, she felt that it would be hazardous to remain after so marked a dismissal from Todd, although she would gladly have heard what the subject of the conversation between those two was to be. Neither Mrs. Lovett nor Todd now spoke until Johanna had fairly gone and closed the door after her. Then Todd, as he folded his arms, and looked Mrs. Lovett fully in the face, said —

“Well?”

“The time has come.”

“What time?”

“For the end of our partnership — the dissolution of our agreement. I will go on no further. You can do as you please; but I am content.”

“Humph!” said Todd.

“After much thought, I have come to this conclusion, Todd. Of course, let me be where I may, the secret of our road to fortune remains hidden here (she struck her breast as she spoke). All I want is my half of the proceeds, and then we part, I hope, for ever.”

“Humph!” said Todd.

“And — and the sooner we can forget, if that be possible, the past, the better it will be for us both — only tell me where you purpose going, and I will take care to avoid you.”

“Humph!”

Passion was boiling in the heart of Mrs. Lovett; and that was just what Todd wanted; for well he knew that something had gone amiss, and that as long as Mrs. Lovett could keep herself calm and reasonable, he should stand but a poor chance of finding out what it was, unless she chose, as part of her arrangement, to tell it; but if he could but rouse her passion, he should know all. Therefore was it that he kept on replying to what she said with that cold insulting sort of “humph!”

“Man, do you hear me?”

“Humph!”

“You villain!”

“Humph!”

Mrs. Lovett took from a side table an iron, which, in the mystery of hairdressing, was used for some purpose, and in a cool, calm voice, she said —

“If you do not answer me as you ought, I will throw this through your window, into the street; and the first person who comes in, in consequence, I will ask to seize Todd, the murderer, and offer myself as evidence of his numerous atrocities — contrite evidence — myself repenting of my share in them, and relying upon the mercy of the crown, which, in recompense for my denouncing you may graciously pardon me.”

“And so it has come to this?” said Todd.

“You see and hear that it has.”

It was rather a curious coincidence, that Mrs. Lovett had threatened Todd that she would awaken public attention to his shop by the same means that Sir Richard Blunt had recommended to Johanna to use in case of any emergency — namely, throwing something through the window into the street. If Mrs. Lovett had been goaded by Todd to throw the iron through a pane of his glass, the officers of Sir Richard would quickly have made their appearance to hear her denunciation of the barber. Unhappy woman! If she had but known what the future had in store for her, that act which she threatened Todd with, and which to her imagination seemed such a piece of pure desperation, would have been the most prudent thing she could have done. But it was not to be! There was a few moments silence now between them. It was broken by Todd.

“Are you mad?” he said.

“No.”

“Then, what, in the name of all that is devilish, has got possession of you?”

“I have told you my determination. Give me twenty thousand pounds — you may profit by the odd sum — give me that amount, and I will go in peace. You know I am entitled to more; but there is no occasion for us to reckon closely. Give me the sum I seek, and you will see me no more.

“You take me by surprise. Just step into the parlour, and — ”

“No — no.”

“Why not? Do you suspect — ”

“I suspect nothing; but I am sure of much. Now, for me to set foot within your parlour would be tantamount to the commission of suicide, and I am not yet come to that — you understand me?”

Todd understood her. His hand strayed to a razor that lay partially open close to him. Mrs. Lovett raised the iron.



Mrs. Lovett and Todd Quarrel.

“Beware!” she said.

Todd shrunk back.

“Pho! Pho! This is child’s play,” he said. “You and I, Mrs. Lovett, ought to be above all this — far above it. You want your half of the proceeds of our joint business, and I must confess, at the moment, that the demand rather staggered and distressed me; but the more I think of it, the more reasonable it appears.”

“Very well. Give it to me, then.”

“Why, really now, my dear Mrs. Lovett, you quite forget that all our joint savings are in the hands of Mr. Brown.”

Todd glared at her as though he would read her very soul. She felt that he more than suspected she knew all, and she adopted at once the bold policy of avowing it.

“I do not forget anything that it is essential should be remembered,” she said; “and among other things, I know that, by forging my name, you have withdrawn the whole of the money from the hands of Brown. It is not worth our while to

dispute concerning your motives for such an act. Let it suffice that I know it, and that I am here to demand my due.”

“Ha! Ha!”

“You laugh?”

“I do, indeed. Why, really now — Ha! Ha! — This is good; and so it is this withdrawal of the money from Brown that has made all this riot in your brain? Why, I withdrew it from him simply because I had certain secret information that his affairs were not in the best order; and from a fear, grounded upon that information, that he might be tempted to put his hand into our purse, if he found nothing in his own.”

“Well, well; it matters not what were your reasons. Give me my half. It will be then out of your custody, and you will have no anxiety concerning it, while I can have no suspicions.”

“In a moment — ”

“You will?”

“If I had it here; but I have reinvested the whole, you see, and cannot get it at a moment’s notice. I have moved it from the hands of Brown to those of Black.”

CHAPTER LXXXII

Mrs. Lovett Finds that in this World there is Retribution

"Black?" said Mrs. Lovett.

"Yes, Black."

"Do you think me so —" green, she was going to say, but the accidental conjunction of the colours — brown, black, and green — suddenly struck her as ludicrous, and she altered it to foolish. "Do you think me so foolish as for one moment to credit you?"

"Hark you, Mrs. Lovett," pursued Todd, suddenly assuming quite a different tone. "You have come here full of passion, because you thought I was deceiving you."

"You are."

"Allow me to proceed. It is, I believe, one of the penalties of all associations for — for — why do I hesitate about a word? — Guilty purposes that there should be mutual distrust. I tell you again, that if I had not moved the money from Brown, we should have lost it all."

"But why not come to me and get my signature?"

"There — really — was — not — time," said Todd, dropping his words out one by one, with a *staccato* expression.

"That is too absurd."

Todd shrugged his shoulders, as though he would have said — "Well, if you will have it so, I cannot help it;" and then he said —

"I was in the City. I heard the rumour of the instability of Brown. I flew into a shop. I wrote the order like a flash of lightning. I went to Brown's like an avalanche, and I brought away the money, as if Heaven and earth were coming together."

There was not the ghost of a smile upon Todd's face as he made use of these superlatives. Mrs. Lovett began to be staggered.

"Then you have it here?"

"No, no!"

"You have. Tell me that you have, and that this Mr. Black you mentioned is a mere delusion."

“Black may be no colour, but it is not a delusion.”

“You trifle with me. Beware!”

“In a word then, my charming Mrs. Lovett, I dreaded to bring the money here. I thought my house the most unsafe place in the world for it. I and you stand upon the brink of a precipice — a slumbering volcano is beneath our feet. Pshaw! Where is your old acuteness, that you do not see at once how truly foolish it would have been to bring the money here?”

“Juggler! Fiend!”

“Hard words, Mrs. Lovett.”

She dashed her hand across her brow, as though by that physical effort she could brush from her intellect the sophistical cobwebs that Todd had endeavoured to move before it, and then she said —

“I know not. I care not. All I ask — all I demand — is my share of the money. Give it to me, and let me go.”

“I will.”

“When?”

“This day. Stay, the day is fast going, but I will say this night, if you really, in your cool judgment, insist upon it.”

“I do. I do!”

“Well, you shall have. This night after business was over and the shop was closed, I intended to have come to you, and fully planned all this that you have unfortunately tortured yourself by finding out. I regret that you think of so quickly leaving the profits of a partnership which, in a short time longer, would have made us rich as monarchs. Of course, if you leave, I am compelled.”

“You compelled?”

“Yes. How can I carry on business without you? How could I, without your aid, dispose of the — ”

“Hush, hush!”

Mrs. Lovett shuddered.

“As you please,” said Todd. “I only say, I regret that a copartnership that promised such happy results should now be broken up. However, that is a matter for your personal consideration merely. If I had thought of leaving, and being content with what I had already got, of course it would have compelled

you to do so. Therefore I cannot complain, although I may regret your excuse of a right of action that equally belonged to me."

"If I only thought you sincere — "

"And why not?"

"If I could only bring myself to believe that the money was once more rightly invested —"

"You shall come with me yourself, if you like, in the morning to Mr. Black the broker in Abchurch Lane, No. 3, and ascertain that all is right. You shall there sign your name in his book, so that he may know it, and then you will be satisfied, I presume?"

"Yes, I should then."

"And this dream of leaving off business would vanish?"

"Perhaps it would. But — but —"

"But what?"

"Why did you say to Brown that our union was to take place?"

"Because it was necessary to say something, to account for the sudden withdrawal of the money; and surely I may be pardoned, charming Mrs. Lovett, for even in imagination dreaming, that so much beauty was mine."

The horrible leer with which Todd looked upon her at this moment made her shudder again; and the expression of palpable hatred and disgust that her countenance wore, added yet another, and not the least considerable, link to the chain of revenge which Todd cherished against her in his cruel and most secret heart. While he was philosophising about guilty associations producing a feeling of mutual distrust, he should have likewise added that they soon produce mutual hatred. For a few moments they looked at each other — that guilty pair — with expressions that sought to read each other's souls; but they were both tolerable adepts in the art of dissimulation. The silence was the most awkward for Todd, so he broke it first by saying —

"You are satisfied, let me hope?"

"I will be."

"You shall be."

"Yes, when I have my money. Henceforward, Todd, we will have much shorter reckonings, so shall we keep much longer friends. If you keep, in some secret place, your half of the proceeds of our — our —"

“Business,” said Todd.

Mrs. Lovett made a sort of gulf of the word, but she adopted it.

“If you, I say, keep your half of the proceeds of our business, and I keep mine, I don’t see how it is possible for us to quarrel.”

“Quite impossible.”

He began to strop a razor diligently, and to try its edge across his thumb nail. Mrs. Lovett’s passion — that overwhelming passion which had induced her to enter Todd’s shop, and defy him to a species of single combat of wits — had in a great measure subsided, giving place to a calmer and more reflective feeling. One of the results of that feeling was a self-question to the effect of, “What will be the result of an open quarrel with Todd?” Mrs. Lovett shook a little at the answer she felt forced to give herself to this question. That answer was continued in two words — mutual destruction! Yes, that would be the consequence.

“Todd,” she said in a softened tone, “if I had forged your name, and gone to the city and possessed myself of all the money, what would you have thought? Tell me that.”

“Just what you thought — that it was the most scandalous breach of faith that could possibly be; but an explanation ought to put that right.”

“It has.”

“Then you are satisfied?”

“I am. At what time shall we go together, tomorrow morning, to Mr. Black’s in Abchurch Lane?”

“Name your own time,” said Todd with the most assumed air in the world. “Black lives at Balham Hill, and don’t get to business until ten; but any time after that will do.”

“I will come here at ten, then.”

“So be it. Ah, Mrs. Lovett, how charming it is to be able to explain away these little difficulties of sentiment. Never trust to appearances. How very deceitful they are apt to be.”

There was an air of candour about Todd, that might have deceived the devil himself. Notwithstanding all his hideous ugliness — notwithstanding his voice was of the lowest order, and notwithstanding that frightful laugh, and that obliquity of vision that seemed peculiar to himself in its terrible malignancy, there was a plausibility about his manner, when he pleased, that was truly

astonishing. Even Mrs. Lovett, with all her knowledge of the man, felt that it was a hard struggle to disbelieve his representations. What must it have been to those who knew him not?

"No," said Mrs. Lovett, "it don't do to trust to appearances."

She still held the iron in her hand.

"Nor," added Todd, giving the razor he had been putting an edge to, a flourish, "nor will it do to listen always to the dictates of compassion; for if we did, what miseries might we inflict upon ourselves. Now, here is a cure in point."

"Where?"

"I allude to this little affair between us. If you had flown to Bow Street, and there, to spite me, made a full disclosure of certain little facts, why, the result would have been that we might both have slept in Newgate tonight."

"Yes, yes."

"And then there would have been no recall. You could not have freed us by telling the police that you had made a mistake. Then the gallows would have risen up in our dreams."

"Horrible!"

"And it being easily discovered that it was no love of public justice or feeling of remorse, that induced you to the betrayal, they would have shown you no mercy, but you would have swung from the halter amid the shouts and execrations of —"

"No, no!"

"I say yes."

"No more of this — no more of this. Can you bear to paint such a picture — does it not seem to you as though you stood upon that scaffold, and heard those shouts? Oh, horror, horror!"

"You don't like the picture?"

"No, no!"

"Ha! Ha! Well, Mrs. Lovett, you and I had far better be friends than foes; and above all, you ought by this time to feel that you could trust me. The very fact that to all the world else I am false, ought to prove to you that to you I am true. No human being can exist purely isolated, and I am not an exception."

"Say no more — say no more. We will meet tomorrow."

"Tomorrow be it, then."

"At ten."

"At ten be it, and then we will go to Black. Come now, since all this is settled, take a glass of wine to our —"

"No, no. Not that. I — I am not very well, A throbbing headache — a — a. That is, no!"

"As you please — as you please. By-the-by, did Black give me a receipt, or did he say it was not usual? Stay a moment, I will look in my secretaire. Sit down a moment in the shaving chair; I will be with you again directly."

"We will settle that tomorrow," said Mrs. Lovett; "I feel convinced that Black did not give you a receipt. Good day."

She left the shop, unceremoniously carrying the iron with her. Todd breathed more freely when Mrs. Lovett was gone. He gave one of his horrible laughs as he watched her through the opening in his window.

"Ha! Ha! Curses on her; but I will have her life first, ere she sees one guinea of my hoard!"

He saw Charley Green crossing the road.

"Ah, the boy comes back. 'Tis well. I don't know how or why it is, but the sight of that boy makes me uneasy. I think it will be better to cut his throat and have done with him. I —"

Todd was suddenly silent. He saw two women pass, and as they did so, one pointed to his shop and said something to the other, who lifted up her hands as though in pious horror. One of these women was Mrs. Ragg, poor Tobias's mother. The other was a stranger to Todd, but she looked like what Mrs. Ragg had been, namely, a laundress in the temple.

"Curses," he muttered.

Johanna entered the shop. Todd caught up his hat.

"Charley?"

"Yes, sir."

"I shall be gone five minutes. Be vigilant. If any one should come, you can say I have stepped a few doors off to trim Mr. Pentwheezle's whiskers."

"Yes, sir."

Todd darted from the shop. Mrs. Ragg and her friend were in that deep and earnest course that is a foe to rapid locomotion, so they had not got many yards from Todd's door. He was rarely seen, however, for either to —

“Paint a moral or adorn a tale”

Mrs. Ragg turned suddenly and pointed to the shop, and then both the ladies lifted up their hands as though in horror, after which they resumed their deep and all-absorbing discourse as before. Todd followed them closely, and yet with abundance of caution.