

CHAPTER CIV
Todd Takes his Last Walk up Fleet Street and to Bell Yard

The twelve o'clock batch of pies went up, and down came the little missive of Mrs. Lovett respecting the four o'clock lot to the cook; but no Mrs. Lovett made her appearance, to relieve Mrs. Stag from her duties in the shop.

"Ah," said that elongated lady, "it's all very well of Mrs. L. to say she would pay me for the day. I suppose she means to make a day of it, and that's the reason. Now, young man, what's for you?"

"A pork with a nob of veal in it to give it a relish," was the reply of the young scion of the law, to whom Stag had addressed herself.

"Go along with you, I don't want none o' your impertinence."

"Now, ma'am, look alive. Two veals if you please. One pork — five porks — four veals. Do you make half a veal?"

"No we don't."

"A hot pork — three porks — two porks — eight veals. Don't be pushing in that way — four porks — smash. There, now, I've dropped mine, and it's all along of you."

"Do be quiet," said Stag, "gentlemen do be quiet; 'patience,' says Paul, 'and I'll soon serve you all.' What are you laughing at, you little jackanapes? You ought to be ashamed of yourself to be making faces at a female twice your age."

"And three times your size," said a voice.

There was a great roar of laughter at this, but by degrees poor Stag got through the business of the twelve o'clock batch, and sat down with a sigh, to console herself, by eating two or three of the most luscious looking that remained.

"It ain't to be denied," said Stag, "but they are good. I never met with such gravy in all my life as is in 'em. Yes, they are first-rate. I'll just put one in the crown of my bonnet, for there's no knowing a minute now when Mrs. L. may pop in upon one at unawares like. It's a comfort to have one of these pies, promiscuous like, at one's hand, to lay hold of just in this sort of way, and pass in one's mouth in this kind of way. Oh, heart alive, but this is a good one. I declare the gravy is running out of it like water from a plug, when there's no house on fire, and it ain't wanted."

Mrs. Stag would have done very well indeed if she could but have got something to drink. That certainly was a drawback, that at first the lady's

ingenuity did not present any means of speedily overcoming; but as necessity is the mother of invention, Mrs. Stag at last hit upon a plan.

“There’s plenty of money in the till, of course,” she said, “and suppose I stand at the door, and wait, till some wretch of a boy passes, and then give him a halfpenny for himself, just to run to the corner and get me a drop of something warm and comfortable.”

Mrs. Stag had no sooner started this “suppose,” than she felt a burning desire to carry it out; and accordingly, history says, that at a quarter to one she might have been seen at the door of Mrs. Lovett’s pie shop, with a shilling in one hand, a halfpenny in another, and a bottle concealed in her pocket, looking like an ogress at every boy who passed, and who looked as though he wanted a halfpenny, and consequently would go upon the secret message, for the purpose of earning one there and then.

Presently one came along the centre of Bell Yard, who seemed just the sort of person.

“Boy, boy!” cried Mrs. Stag.

“Well, old ’un,” he replied, “what do you bring it in — Wilful Murder with the chill off, or what?”

“Don’t be owdacious. If you want to earn a penny — I mean a halfpenny — honestly, take this shilling and this bottle, and go to the corner, and get a quartern of the best.”

“The best what?”

“Oh, you foolish boy. Gin, of course; but remember that my eye is upon you.”

It was well that Mrs. Stag spoke in the singular regarding her optical organ, for she had but one. The boy professed a ready acquiescence, and away he went, with the bottle and the shilling. Alas! Mrs. Stag was left lamenting. He came not back again, and from thenceforward Mrs. Stag lost the small amount of faith she had had in boyhood. The well concocted scheme had failed, and there she was, with countless halfpence in the till, and so thirsting for strong water, that she was half inclined to make a grand rush herself to the nearest public house, and chance any one in the interim helping themselves to the pies *ad lib*.

But she was not reduced to that extremity. Suddenly the window was darkened by a shadow, and through one of the topmost panes an immense hideous face, with an awful grin upon it, confronted Mrs. Stag.

The good lady was fascinated — not in an agreeable sense, but in quite the reverse — she could not take her eyes from off the hideous gigantic face, as it placed itself close to the frame of ill-made greenish glass, in order to get a good view into the shop.

“Goodness gracious, it’s *Luficer* himself!” said Mrs. Stag. “I’m a lost woman. Quite a lost woman. I’m undone. It’s *Luficer* himself, I’m sure and certain!”

Probably the hideous eyes that belonged to the hideous face, conveyed the impression to the brain behind them that Mrs. Stag was in a state of apprehension; for suddenly the face was withdrawn, and Todd — yes, Todd himself, for to whom else could such a face belong? — made his way into the shop.

Mrs. Stag groaned again, and in a stammering voice, said —

“If you please, sir. I — I ain’t ready yet.”

“Ready for what?” said Todd.

“To go to — to — the brimstone beds, if you please, sir. I haven’t done half enough yet.”

“Pho!” said Todd. “My good woman, you don’t surely take me for the devil? I am an old friend of Mrs. Lovett’s, and a neighbour. I have just stepped in to ask her how she does to day.”

Mrs. Stag drew a long breath of relief as she said —

“Well, really, sir, I begs your parding. It must have been the pane of glass that — that — that — ”

“Threw my face out of shape a little?” said Todd, making one of his most hideous contortions, and finishing it off with a loud “Ha!”

Mrs. Stag nearly fell off her chair. But it was not Todd’s wish to frighten her, although he had, in the hilarity of his heart, yielded, like Lord Brougham, to the speculative fun of the moment. He now tried to reassure her.

“Don’t be at all alarmed at me, madam,” he said. “Mrs. Lovett laughs often at my little funny ways. Is she at home?”

Todd knew what sort of home he had provided Mrs. Lovett with, and this visit to Bell Yard was one partly of curiosity and partly of triumph, to ascertain how she had left things in her absence from her establishment.

“No, sir,” said Mrs. Stag, replying to the question of Todd; “she is not at home, sir.”

“Dear me, I thought she was always in at this time of the day. When, madam, do you expect her?”

“Leastways,” said Mrs. Stag, “I don’t know, sir.”

"Were you here, madam, when she left home?"

"Yes, I *were*."

"Oh, and did she leave any message, madam, in case Mr. Todd from Fleet Street should call? Pray recollect yourself, my dear madam, as it may possibly be important. I do not say that it is, but it may be."

"No, sir," replied Mrs. Stag; "oh dear, no. All she said was, that she was going to a christening."

"A christening? Ha! She has been christened!"

"Sir!"

"I only said she had been christened, and no stint of the water, that was all, madam; but I perfectly understand you. Mrs. Lovett has gone to the christening of some one of those sweet little innocents, all perfume and flabbiness, that take one's heart completely by storm. Ah, my dear madam, when one looks at the slumbering infant, how one feels an irresistible desire to smother it."

"Lor', sir!"

"With soft kisses, my dear madam. Only fancy me now a baby!"

Todd made so awful a contortion of visage contingent upon this supposition that poor Mrs. Stag, in the nervous condition which the whole adventure had thrown her into, nearly fainted right away. Indeed, the only thing that recovered her was hearing her visitor say —

"I am really very thirsty today. How do you feel, madam?"

These were delightful words.

"Oh, sir," she said, "how very odd. I am thirsty likewise."

"Well, that is remarkable," said Todd. "Now, my dear madam, I don't make a common thing of saying as much to anybody, but you, who are a lady evidently of refined taste and intellectual capabilities, I am sure, will understand me, and make allowances for my feelings when I say that I prefer to anything else — gin!"

"You don't mean it, sir?"

"Indeed, but I do."

“Oh, how could I mistake you for anything but a very nice man indeed, and a perfect gentleman. It’s one of the most singular things in all the world, but I never do hardly take anything, yet what I do take is — is — ”.

“Gin?”

Mrs. Stag nodded and smiled faintly.

“Well, my dear madam, I don’t see why we should not have a drop while I wait for Mrs. Lovett. Don’t you trouble yourself, my dear madam. Now really do not. I know that you will like to have to say to that good, delightful, Mrs. Lovett, that you have not left the shop since she was absent; I will get it. They will lend me a bottle, and I have capacious pockets.”

“But for you, sir, to — ”

Todd was gone.

“Well, really, he is a very nice sort of conversable man,” said Mrs. Stag to herself, “when you come to know him, and he ain’t near so ugly as he looks after all. I do hope Mrs. Lovett won’t trouble herself to come home for the next half hour, since Mr. Todd has been so good as to call and to make himself so very agreeable about the — the gin.”

Todd went into Fleet Street for the gin, and he returned by the dark archway leading into Bell Yard. It was darker then than it is now, and in the deepness of an ancient doorway, he paused to drop into the gin — not a deadly poison — but such a potion as he knew would soon wrap up the senses of Mrs. Lovett’s substitute in oblivion.

This narcotic he took from a small phial he had in his breast pocket.

He did not say anything, but he gave one laugh, and then he walked on to the pie shop, where he was eagerly and warmly welcomed by Mrs. Stag, who very assiduously placed a chair for him, saying, as she did so, that “Mrs. Lovett would quite stare if she were to pop in just then, and see them enjoying themselves, in a manner of speaking, in so delightful a manner.”

“I should stare!” said Todd.

“You would, sir?”

“Yes; I rather am inclined to think that that christening business will detain her. By this time she has got into the thick of it, my dear madam, you may depend, although I am quite certain she will be strictly temperate, and take nothing but water.”

“Do you think so, sir?”

"I am sure of it. Can you find a glass, madam? I have not the happiness of knowing your name."

"Stag, if you please, sir. I have one glass here without a foot. It's an odd thing, but Mrs. Lovett shuts up the place when she goes out, as if we were all thieves and murderers."



Todd Performs an Operation on Mrs. Stag.

"Does she really? Well — well, we will manage with one glass, my dear Mrs. Stag. It is the first time we have had a drop together, and I have only to hope that it will not be the last. I ought not, perhaps, to say it before your face, but you are the most entertaining company that I have met with for a long time. — Drink, madam."

"After you, sir."

"No — no, I insist."

Mrs. Stag drank off the full glass that Todd presented her with, and then affecting to pour one out for himself, but dexterously keeping the bottle between him and the lady, he only carried the empty glass to his lips. Now, Mrs. Stag was a decided connoisseur in gin, and she suddenly assumed a thoughtful air, and looked up to the ceiling as she slightly moved her lips.

"Rather an unusual taste after it's down, don't you think, sir?" she said.

"Has it? Well, I don't know. Perhaps you have been tasting a pie, madam, and that may have influenced the flavour. Try it again. You never can tell the taste of a glass of gin, in my opinion, until you have taken two at least. Try this, Mrs. Stag."

"Really I — I. Thank you, sir."

Off went a second glass, and then Todd glared at her with the eyes of a fiend, as he said, placing the bottle upon the counter, "That ought to be a dose, I think."

"Sir?" stammered Mrs. Stag. "I — I — God bless me — I — sir — gin — I — that is lots of pies — gin — gravy. Mrs. Lovett — in the crown of a bonnet — I — my dear, my dear — Bless us all. Lock it all up — no — no — no. Gin — I — good again — pies — gravy."

Todd caught her by the throat or she would have fallen; and then, as she became quite insensible, he thrust her under the counter.

CHAPTER CV

Todd makes Himself quite at Home in Bell Yard

“Idiot!” said Todd, as he spurned the insensible form of Mrs. Stag with his foot. “Idiot! I would kill you, but that it would not do me any good. The narcotic you have taken in the gin may or may not carry you off for all I care. It don’t matter to me one straw.”

He glared around him for a few moments with the fierceness of an ogre, and then walking to the shop door, he deliberately locked and bolted it, so that no one could get in, even if they were expiring for a pie.

“Humph,” he said. “This is a time of day when it is not likely the shop will be troubled with many customers. It is between the batches, I know, so I am safe for an hour; and during that time if I do not make some discoveries here, it will surely be my own fault.”

Again he glared around him with the ogre like aspect, and he ran his eyes carefully over the whole shop, from corner to corner — from floor to roof, and from roof to floor. At length he said —

“Where now, if I were hiding anything, would I select a place in this shop?”

After putting this question to himself Todd again ran his eyes over the shop, and at length he came to the conclusion that it was not there he should seek for any hiding place at all, and he certainly paid the sagacity of Mrs. Lovett one of the highest compliments he possibly could by concluding that she would do as he would under like circumstances.

“No,” he said. “The shop is no hiding place for the secret store of my late friend Mrs. Lovett. No — no. I must seek in the very centre of her home, for that which I would find. Let me think — let me think.”

Todd felt himself quite at home in Bell Yard. He was in truth the landlord of the house. It had not been safe to make the extensive underground alterations in the place if Mrs. Lovett had been the tenant of a stranger merely; so Todd had purchased the freehold, and such being the case, and his tenant, the charming Mrs. Lovett, being as he firmly believed, at the bottom of the Thames, who should feel at home in the place if he, Sweeney Todd, did not?

He felt that he had time, too. There was no hurry in life, and he quite smiled to himself, as he said —

“How often I have longed for a rummage among my dear departed friend Mrs. Lovett’s goods and chattels, and now how many happily and singly circumstances have changed about to enable me to gratify my inclination. Ha!”

Todd, in the security of his bad heart, uttered one of his old laughs — but then for the whole of that day he had been unusually happy. His good terms with himself shone out even of his eyes, horrible eyes.

“Yes,” he said, “yes, she is dead — dead — dead. Ha! Ha! Mrs. Lovett — clever, fascinating creature — how muddy you lie tonight. Ha!”

It was not prudent, however, to waste time, although he had plenty of it — it never is; so up rose Todd, and proceeded to the parlour. How fast locked the door was!

“Now really,” he said, “it is a thousand pities that poor dear Mrs. L. has gone down to the bottom of the Thames with her keys in her pocket. It would have made no manner of difference in the world to her to have let me have them. It would have saved me some little trouble, and the doors some little damage.”

With a malicious grin, as though he delighted in the mischief he had made, he dashed himself bodily against the parlour door, and burst it open with a crash.

“That will do,” he said. “To be sure, the party who, when my absence gets noised about, comes to take possession of this house, would rather that the doors were whole; but what of that? Ha! I have mortgaged it twice over for its full value, and they may fight about it if they like. Ha! Ha! How they will litigate, and I shall read the pleasant account of it in the papers.”

By this time Todd was in Mrs. Lovett’s parlour, and folding his arms across his breast, he gazed about him with a feeling of marked satisfaction, as he said —

“For five years she has been making, of course, a private purse for herself, the dear creature, as well as looking to the share of the money in the bank; and for the last few weeks, since our agreement together has not been quite so perfect, she has kept all her takings herself; so reasoning upon that, she must, bless her provident spirit, have a tolerable sum laid by somewhere, which I, as her executor, will most assuredly pounce upon.”

At this moment some one clamoured for admission at the shop door, rapping at it with a penny piece in a manner that sounded very persevering.

“Curses on you,” muttered Todd, “who are you?”

“A twopenny — a twopenny — a twopenny!” cried a boy, who was at the door, in a singsong sort of voice — “I want a twopenny — a twopenny.”

Rap, rap, rap! went one of the penny pieces against the upper half of the shop door, which was of glass. Rap, rap, rap! Todd felt quite convinced that that boy would not go without some sort of answer being given to his demand, so he slunk round the shop, crouching down, until he came close to the door, and

then assuming one of his most hideous faces, he suddenly rose up, and from within half an inch of the boy's face upon the other side of the glass, he confronted him.

So horrible and so completely unexpected was this face to the boy, that for a moment or two he seemed to be absolutely paralysed by it, and then, with a cry of terror, he dropped the penny piece with which he had been rapping the window, and fled up Bell Yard as though the evil one himself were at his heels.

"That will do," said Todd.

He went back to the parlour and glared round him again in the hope of finding something there, but the only cupboard which he observed was fast locked. One blow with the poker, using it javelin like, forced it open, and Todd began flinging out upon the floor the glass and china, with which it was well enough filled, without any mercy. What cared he for such matters? Would he not before twelve hours now be miles and miles away? What, then, was glass and china to him? Nothing — absolutely nothing.

He was disappointed, though, for he did not find the supposed concealed hoard of Mrs. Lovett behind the other things in this cupboard.

"Be it so," he said. "No doubt she fancies her bedroom is the safest place, after all, for her money — that is easily sought. Bless you, Mrs. Lovett, I will find your gold yet!"

With this view, Todd, by the aid of the poker, broke open another door, namely, the one which led from the parlour to the staircase, that would enable him to ascend to the upper part of the house. Truly, Mrs. Lovett was great in the locking up way — very great indeed.

Todd was now getting out of patience just a little, but only a little, that was all. He naturally enough in his own house wanted to make discoveries a little quicker than he was making them, that was all; and so he felt put out of his way a little, as any gentleman might under such circumstances. He swore a little, and was not so polite in his mention of the deceased Mrs. Lovett as he might have been.

He ascended the stairs three at a time.

"I wonder," he said, when he reached the top of the first flight; "I wonder where the wily wretch slept. She never would let me upstairs since she occupied the house."

The locking up propensities of Mrs. Lovett did not continue past the ground floor; and Todd found all the doors upon the floor he was now on readily enough yield to his touch. The second one he went into was undoubtedly the room he sought. It was rather elegantly furnished as a bedchamber; and as Todd stood in the centre of the floor, he chuckled to himself, and muttered —

“Ha! When she rose this morning, she did not quite fancy she was taking her last look at this chamber. Ha! Ha! Well, my dear Mrs. L., you had some taste, I will admit, for this room is very nicely got up. It is a world of pities you had not sense enough to be my slave, but you must try to be my equal, which in your poor vanity you thought I could permit. No — no — no! — That was impossible. Why should I single you out of all the world, Mrs. Lovett, to be just to?”

This, in Todd’s estimation, was a very conclusive argument, indeed. Whether it would have been so to Mrs. Lovett is another thing.

And now the arch villain commenced a search in the chamber of his victim of the most extraordinary character for minuteness that could possibly be conceived. It was quite clear that there he expected to find something worth looking for, and that if he were foiled, it should not be for want of due diligence in the investigation.



Todd Destroys Mrs. Lovett’s Furniture.

In the course of ten minutes, the trim and well-kept bedroom was one scene of confusion and disorder. The dressing glass was thrown down, and, being in his way once, was kicked to the other end of the room, and smashed to fragments. The bedclothes were tossed hither and thither in the most reckless manner. Boxes were burst open and ransacked, but all in vain. Not one penny piece could Todd discover.

“Confound her!” he said, as he wiped his brow with a lace cap he picked off the dressing table; “Confound her! I begin to suspect that what she had of her own she put in her pocket this morning, and it has gone down to the bottom of the river with her! How infernally provoking!”

He peeped up the chimney, and got nothing by that motion but a flop of soot in his eye.

He stamped and swore and cursed in the most horrible manner that can possibly be conceived.

Feeling that Mrs. Lovett in the matter of her little private savings had been one too many for him, he looked rather hopelessly through the other rooms of the house. They were all completely vacant, and from the appearance of the dust upon the floors of them did not seem to have been entered for years past. He gave up the search in despair, and gloomily walked down stairs to the parlour again.

"It is lost," he said. "It is lost. Well, I must even be content with that which I have: I don't think any one will be the richer for what is here. No, no. It could not have escaped my search, and if it has done so by a miracle, or next thing to one, it will remain until the house falls to pieces years hence, perhaps, and fall into the hands of someone when I am de — No — no — what puts that word *dead* into my mouth? I hate to think of it! I am young in constitution, and shall live many — many years yet; oh, yes, I — I need have no fear of death."

Todd glared round him as though he expected that the very impersonification of the grim King of Terrors would rise up before him to take vengeance for being treated so slightly; but all was still.

He wiped his brow again with the lace cap of Mrs. Lovett, which he had mechanically retained when he left the bedroom, and then he began to ask himself what should be done with the shop.

"For a few hours yet," he said, "a few short hours, there must be no disturbance and no commotion in this neighbourhood with which my name may possibly be connected. After that, they may do what they like and say what they like, but now all must be peace and silence. What shall I do with this confounded shop, now? I wish I had not given so strong a dose of the narcotic to you, old woman, left in charge by Mrs. Lovett. Ah, what is that?"

The sound from the shop as of some one being violently sick, came upon Todd's ears.

"Ah," he said, "so the narcotic has taken that effect, has it, upon Mrs. Lovett's representative? Well, well, she will recover from it much sooner than I thought she would, and that will now be all the better, for it absolves me of my difficulty about the shop for the next few hours."

He walked into the shop and found Mrs. Stag sitting up behind the counter, and in rather a dubious condition as regarded the peace of her stomach.

"Well, ma'am," said Todd. "How are you now?"

"The Lord have mercy upon us!"

"Amen! But how came you in this state, ma'am?"

"The pies, sir. The pies. You really have no idea of how very rich they are, sir. It's all along of the pies, that's all, sir; but I am getting better, though my head is none of the best."

"Yes," said Todd. "Of course it was the very rich pies. It could not have been what you drank."

"Oh, no, no. Oh, dear no. That wasn't enough to hurt an infant, sir, as you ought to know. What a mercy it is that Mrs. Lovett has not come home, for she is rather a violent woman at times. It's really quite a mercy."

"She won't be home just yet, I think," said Todd. "You will have time to get completely to rights before you see her, and when you do see her I would advise you to make your peace with the other world as quickly as you can!"

Todd closed the parlour door; and as it was only the lock that had given, it did not show much symptoms of what had happened to it; as that in all likelihood Mrs. Stag, supposing that it was fast as she had first found it, would not pay any attention to it or scrutinise it sufficiently to be aware that it had been at all tampered with by any one.

"Only a few hours after all," muttered Todd, "and then I don't care what anybody thinks or says about this shop and its affairs, or about me in connection with them. Ah, I had quite forgotten. I wonder what Mrs. Lovett's cook is about?"

Todd paused, and gave some few moments' thought to the cook. He had an idea of going down to the oven cellar, and killing him, so that he might feel quite certain he was out of the way of perpetrating any mischief; but a second thought determined him in the other way.

"No — no," he said. "What can he do? No doubt the house will be shut after a time, and then he will starve to death. Ha!"

CHAPTER CVI
Takes a Slight Glance at Tobias and his Intended

The idea of the cook being starved to death, had quite reconciled Todd to the notion of leaving him alone; so he left the shop, and proceeded to his own domicile in Fleet Street, and as nothing of great moment has occurred during his absence, we will take the liberty of conducting the reader to the house of Colonel Jeffery, and taking a slight peep at our old friend Tobias, whom we left in rather a critical position.

Tobias had been in so delicate a condition, prior to the last outrage of Todd at the colonel's house, that one might suppose such a thing would go far towards terminating his mortal career, and so indeed it did; but in youth there is such a tenacity to life that we may fairly look for the most extraordinary things in the shape of clinging to the vital principle, and in the way of getting over injuries. Poor Tobias was, to be sure, thrown back by Todd's attack, but he was not destroyed. The medical man gave it as his opinion, that the mental shock was by far worse than the physical injury, and he said to the colonel —

"Some means must be devised to make him believe that he is quite free from any further attack upon the part of Todd, or he will never recover. He will awaken, it is true, from the trance he is now in, but it will be to all the horrors and dread of some expected fresh attack from Todd."

"But I will assure him of my protection," said the colonel. "I will in the most positive manner tell him that he shall here be perfectly safe from that man."

"Excuse me, colonel," replied the surgeon, "but all that was done before, and yet Tobias has found that Todd reached him, even in one of the rooms of this house. You will find that he will be very sceptical regarding your powers to protect him now from that bold and infamous man. I hope I am not offending you, colonel, by my plain speaking?"

"Not at all my dear sir, not at all. Do not think of such a thing. Plain speaking, when it is dictated by friendly feeling, is one of the most admirable things in all the world, and no one can possibly admire it more than I do. I feel, too, the full force of what you have said, and that to the ears of Tobias it would sound like a farce for me to offer to protect him from the further assaults of Sweeney Todd."

"But something may be done that is quite of a decisive character upon the subject, colonel."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that to sick folks I say anything that I think will tend to their recovery, even although I may feel that I am a little transgressing the bounds of truth. We must consider what we say to people in the position of Tobias, as so much medicine artfully administered to him."

"I quite agree with you, and I feel that you have some important suggestion to make to me regarding Tobias. What is it?"

"Then, colonel, if I were you, I should not hesitate for one moment to tell him that Todd was dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes, that is the only thing that will thoroughly convince Tobias he has nothing further to fear from him. I think it not only one of those delusions that are in themselves harmless, but I think it a justifiable dose of moral medicine."

"It shall be done," said the colonel. "It shall be done. I do not hesitate about it for a moment. I thank you for the idea, and if that will do Tobias any good, he shall have the full benefit of it at my hands. Shall we seek him now?"

"Yes, I hope that he is in a state to fully comprehend what is said to him, and in that case the sooner we say this from which we expect such good results, the better it will be. I am most anxious to witness the effect it will have upon his mind, colonel. If I mistake not, it will be one far exceeding anything you can suppose."

Upon this they both went up stairs to the chamber in which poor Tobias lay. The boy was upon a bed, lying to all appearance bereft of sense. His breathing was rather laborious, and every now and then there was a nervous twitching of the muscles of the face, which bespoke how ill at ease the whole system was. At times too he would mutter some incoherent words, during which both the medical man and the colonel thought they could distinguish the name of Todd.

"Yes," said the surgeon, "that is the spectre that is ever present to the imagination of this poor boy and we must speedily get rid of it from him, or it will assuredly kill him. I would not answer for his life another twenty four hours, if his fancy were still to continue to be tortured by an expectation of the appearance of Todd."

"Will you, or shall I, speak to him?"

"You, if you please, colonel; he knows your voice better no doubt than he does mine."

Colonel Jeffery bent his head close down to Tobias's ear, and in a clear correct voice spoke to him.

"Tobias, I have come to say something very important to you. It is something which I hope will do you good to hear. Do you comprehend me, Tobias?"

The sufferer uttered a faint groan, as he tossed one of his arms uneasily about upon the coverlet.

“You quite understand me, Tobias? Only say that you do so, and I shall be satisfied to go on, and say to you what I have to say.”

“Todd, Todd!” gasped Tobias. “Oh, God! Coming — he is coming.”

“You hear,” said the surgeon. “That is what his imagination runs upon. That is proof conclusive.”

“It is, poor boy,” said the colonel. “But I wish I could get him to say that he fully comprehends my words.”

“Never mind that. I would recommend that you make the communication to him at once, and abruptly. It will, in all likelihood, thus have more effect than if you dilute it by any great note of preparation before it reaches his ears.”

The Colonel nodded his acquiescence; and then, once more inclining his mouth to Tobias’s ear, he said, in clear and moderately loud accents —

“Sweeney Todd is dead!”

Tobias at once sprang up to a sitting posture in the bed, and cried —

“No, no! Is it really so?”

“Yes,” added the colonel. “Sweeney Todd is dead.”

For a moment or two Tobias looked from the colonel to the surgeon, and from the surgeon to the colonel, with a bewildered expression of countenance, and then burst into tears.

“That will do,” said the surgeon.

“It has succeeded?” whispered the colonel.

“Fully. It could not do better. He will recover full consciousness now when those tears are over. All will go well with him; but do not, by word or look, insinuate the remotest doubt of the truth of what you have told him. It would be better to say the same thing to any of the servants that may come about him.”

“I will — I will; and particularly to his master, whom I would as soon trust with a secret as I would with the command of a regiment of cavalry.”

Tobias wept for the space of about ten minutes, and then he looked up with a face in which there was a totally different expression to what it had borne but a short time previously, and with a faltering voice he spoke —

“And so Todd is gone at last?”

“He has,” replied the colonel; “and, therefore, you may now, Tobias, make your mind quite easy about him.”

“Oh, quite — quite!”

By the long breath that Tobias drew, it was evident what an exquisite relief it was to him to be able to feel that the man who had been the bane of his young life was no more. No assurance of protection from him could have come near the feeling of satisfaction that he now felt in the consciousness of such a release. But Todd being dead, settled the affair at once. There was no drawback upon his satisfaction.

“Oh!” he said, “I do indeed feel that life is with me again, and that I can be happy. Where is Minna?”

“She cannot remain here always,” replied the colonel; “but she will be in the house shortly, upon a visit to your mother, and you shall yourself have the pleasure of communicating the welcome news of Todd’s death to her — news which to her bears as great a significance as it does to you.”

“Oh, yes,” replied Tobias. “Minna will be pleased. We ought not to rejoice at the death of any one; but then Todd was so very, very bad a man, that his dying is a good thing, as it keeps him from loading his soul with more wickedness.”

“That,” said the medical man, “is the proper view to take of the matter, Tobias; but now you will permit me to say to you that you should not talk too much, nor overtax your young strength. I will darken the room, by closing the shutters; and it is highly desirable that you should enjoy a few hours calm sleep, which now, with the conviction that Todd is dead, I do not see any difficulty in your doing.”

“Oh, no — no,” said Tobias, with quite a bright expression upon his face. “Oh, no. I shall sleep well now. Quite well, for what have I to fear now?” These few words were spoken in such a tone of calm composure, that the colonel had every reason to rejoice in the experiment he had tried, upon the advice of the medical man. The latter closed the shutters of the room all but one, so that there was but a soft and chastened light in the room; and then, with a smile upon his face, Tobias — after hoping that they would arouse him when Minna should come, and receiving a promise that way — turned his face to his pillow, and composed himself to the first pure rest he had had since the attack that the villain Todd had made upon him in the colonel’s house.

“It is not much of a deception,” said Colonel Jeffery to the surgeon, when the latter was leaving the house, “for I believe now that Todd’s hours are indeed numbered. He will be arrested tonight.”

“I am glad to hear it,” replied the surgeon. “Such a notable villain ought to be as quickly as possible put out of the world.”

“He ought, indeed; and from what I hear from Sir Richard Blunt, I believe that before twenty four hours are gone over my head, the whole of London will ring with the name of Todd, and the story of his frightful criminality.”

Tobias slept quietly, and securely for four hours, during which space of time he was twice visited by Minna Gray, who had arrived while he was in that state of repose. The colonel, although he felt the danger of letting Mrs. Ragg know that the report to Tobias of the death of Todd was premature, felt no such scruple with regard to Minna. Indeed he considered that it would have been an insult to her judgment not to have told her exactly how the case stood.

When she heard it all, and upon visiting Tobias’s bedroom, found what a sweet sleep he was in, and what a quiet gentle smile was upon his face, she tearfully acknowledged what a good thing the innocent deception was which had produced such a result.

“It will save him,” she said.

“It will,” replied the colonel; “and be sure that you keep sufficient guard over yourself to keep from betraying the secret.”

“Oh, sir, trust me, I will.”

“And remember that in this house, Minna, it is known only to you and to me. If Tobias should ask you anything about it, you had better know nothing, for I promised him that he should have the pleasure of making the communication to you himself, therefore you cannot be puzzled by any questions regarding particulars when he is your informant.”

Minna joyfully concurred with all that the colonel said upon this head; and then, after a long talk with Mrs. Ragg in the kitchen — that good lady having the most implicit faith in the story of the death of Todd, and the profoundest hope that she should soon hear the full particulars of that event — she betook herself to the bedside of Tobias, there to await his awakening.

When he did open his eyes, they were clear and bright, and the fever had left his brow and cheeks. The first object his eye rested upon was Minna, and the first words he said were —

“Todd is dead!”

“Ah, then, Tobias, you have nothing now to fear, for you have not an enemy in the world.”

“No,” he cried, “I have now nothing to fear — but, my Minna, my own, my beautiful! how much I have to love! We shall be now, Minna, very, very happy, indeed, and God will bless me for your dear sake!”

CHAPTER CVII
Mr. Lupin has a Singular Interview with Mrs. Oakley

Amid all the exciting circumstances that it has been our duty to relate — amid the turmoil of events consequent upon the wild villainy of Todd, and the urgent attempts of Mrs. Lovett to get her accounts audited — we have very much lost sight of Mrs. Oakley.

Perhaps the reader has not been altogether unwilling to lose sight of a lady who, we will admit, was not calculated to make great advances in his esteem.

But yet one thing must be recollected, and that is that Mrs. Oakley is Johanna's mother! That we opine is a fact which she should be given some degree of attention for; and insomuch as the bright eyes of the fair and noble-minded Johanna might be dimmed by an additional tear if anything very serious was to become of Mrs. Oakley, we will go a little out of our way just now to see what that deluded parson-ridden woman is about.

The outgoings and the incomings of Mrs. Oakley for a long time past had been so various and discursive, that the poor spectacle maker had long since left off considering that he had anything in the shape of a domestic establishment. Certainly, Johanna was always at hand, until lately, to attend to her father's comforts — but the wife never. There was either a prayer meeting, or a love feast, or some congregation or another assembled to hear or to see Mr. Lupin; so that if the wife and the mother went to such places to learn her duties, it was pretty evident that the lesson occupied the whole of her time.

But still at times she did come home. At odd seasons she was to be found groaning and snuffling at the fireside in the little dark parlour at the back of the shop; but now for some few days she had totally disappeared.

Mr. Oakley was alone.

* * * * *

Up a dingy court in the City, not a hundred miles from the dingy purlieus of Monkwel Street, there was a dingy conventicle, upon the front of which the word "Ebenezer" announced its character, or its would-be character. The upper part of this chapel was converted into a dwelling place, and there luxuriated Mr. Lupin.

The flock (geese, of course!) of the reverend gent rented the edifice, so that there he was rent free, and there he was in the habit of inviting to tea such of the females of his congregation who either had money of their own, or whose husbands had tills easily accessible, or pockets into which the wife's hand could be dipped at discretion; and dipped it generally was at in-discretion; — for folks, whether they be wives or not, when they can dip into other folks' pockets, do not always know how much to take just and no more.

Now Mr. Lupin had established a Three-days-two-hours-and-general-subscription-saving grace-prayer, which consisted of praying every two hours for three days and three nights, and at each prayer making an offering in hard cash for the use of the church and the gospel, he (Mr. Lupin) being both the church and the gospel.

Alas! What will not human folly in the name of religion stoop to! There were women — mothers of families, who came to Mr. Lupin's house above the chapel with what plunder they could get together, and there actually stand the three days and three nights, the reverend gent making it his duty to keep them awake at the end of every two hours at least, as he pretended to pray, and sending them away completely placid, but with the comfortable conviction, as they themselves expressed it, that their "souls were saved alive."

Mrs. Oakley was one of these dupes.

Now, although these proceedings were very profitable to Mr. Lupin, he found that it was very irksome to get up himself in the middle of the night to awaken the sinners to prayer, so he used to introduce brandy and water after he had pretty well tired out his devotee, and ascertained the amount of money he was likely to get, and in the confusion of mind consequent upon that gentle stimulant, the time went on very glibly.

"Sister Oakley," said Lupin, on the evening of the first day of Mrs. Oakley's residence beneath his highly spiritual roof. "Sister Oakley, truly you will be a great brand snatched from the burning — How much money have you got?"

"Alas!" said Mrs. Oakley, "Business must be bad, for I only found in the till three pounds eleven and sixpence."

Mr. Lupin groaned.

"But I will from time to time take what I can, and let you have it, for the welfare of one's precious soul is above all price."

"Truly, Sister Oakley, it is, and you may as well give me the small instalment now if it shall seem right unto thee, sister. I thank you in the name of the Lord! Humph — only three pounds eleven and sixpence. Well, well, we shall do better another time, perhaps, sister. Rest in peace, and I will from time to time come in and awaken thee to prayer. Truly and verily I have a hard time of it always."

It was on the second night that fatigue had had a great effect upon Mrs. Oakley, and upon the reverend gent likewise that he brought her a tumbler of hot brandy and water, saying as he placed it by her —

"Truly I have had a dream, and the Lord told me to give you this. I pray you take it, Mrs. O., and may it put you in mind of the glory of the world that is to come — Amen!"

Mr. Lupin retired, and as the stimulant was not at all an ungrateful thing to Mrs. Oakley, she was about to raise it to her lips, when a stunning knock at the chapel door made her give such a start, that she dropped glass, and spirit, and spoon to the ground. No doubt, a repetition of the knock at the moment, prevented Lupin from hearing the crash, which the fall in spirits produced. Mrs. Oakley heard him open the window of his room, and in a voice of stifled anger cry —

“Who is there? Who is there?”

“It’s me, Groggs, and you know it,” said a female voice. “Come down and open the door, or I will rouse the whole neighbourhood.”

“Come, you be off. I have some one here.”

“What, another idiot? Ho! — Ho! — Ho! Why, Groggs, they will find you out some day, and limb you. If they only knew that you were Groggs the returned transport, how they would mob you to be sure. But I have come for money, old fellow, and I will have it. I ain’t drunk, but I have had enough — just enough, mark me old boy, and you know what I am capable of when that’s the case. I am your wife and you know it. Ho! Ho!”

Dab came the knocker again upon the chapel door.

“Do you want to be my ruin?” said Lupin. “Stay a moment and I will throw you out five shillings; but if you make any noise you shall not have one farthing from me.”

“Shall I not? Ha! — Ha! Shall I not? Five shillings indeed!”

The lady upon this, feeling no doubt that both her wants and his powers of persuasion were made very light of, commenced such a tremendous knocking at the door, that the terrified Lupin at once descended to let her in, uttering such terrible curses as he went that Mrs. Oakley was petrified with dismay.

Foolish woman! Did she expect that her idol would turn out to be anything but a common brazen image?

In the course of a few moments she heard the couple coming up stairs again, and when they reached the top, she heard Lupin say, “Confound you, you always will come with your infernal demands at the very worst and most awkward times and seasons to me. Did you not take ten pounds some time ago, and promise to come near me no more?”

“Ha! — Ha! Yes, I did. But I am here again you see. You thought I would drink myself to death with that amount of money, and that you would get rid of me, but it did me good. Ho! — Ho! — Ho! The good stuff did me good.”

"You are a fool," said Lupin. "I tell you, woman, you will be my ruin, my absolute ruin; and then where will your supplies come from I should like to know? Why I have an idiot only in the next room, of whom I hope to make a good thing; and if you had only come in five minutes sooner you would have been heard by her, and I should have been done up here."

"And why don't she hear you now? Have you cut her throat like you did the woman's by Wapping?"

"Hush! — Hush! you devil! Why do you allude to that?"

"Because I like, my beauty. Because I know you did it. And whenever I do mention it, the gallows shines out in your face as plain — ay, as plain as this hand; and I like to see you quake and change colour, and be ready almost to fall down with your fears. Ho! — Ho! I like that. Yes, it's as good to me as a drop of drink, that it is."

"I only wish your throat was cut, that is all."

"I know you do. But you won't try that on upon me. No — no. You won't try that on. Look at this, my beauty. Do you think I would step into a place of yours without something in the shape of a friend with me? Oh — no — no — "

The lady exhibited the handle and point of the blade of a knife, as she spoke, at which Mr. Lupin staggered back, and then in a faltering voice he said —

"I will go and see how my portion has worked with the idiot I mentioned. I gave her a good dose of laudanum in a glass of brandy and water."

It may be imagined with what feelings Mrs. Oakley heard this interesting little dialogue. It may be imagined, if she had at the bottom of her heart any lingering feelings of right or wrong, how they were likely to be roused up by all this — how her thoughts were likely to fly back to the house she had made wretched, and virtually deserted for so long a period of time. And now what was to become of her? Had she not heard Lupin denounced by one who knew him well as a murderer — an allegation which he had not even in the faintest manner denied?

Mrs. Oakley went down upon her knees in earnest, and wringing her hands, she cried —

"God save me for my poor husband and my child's sake!"

We will suppose that if any appeals at all reach Heaven, that this was one of those that would be sure to get there. Hastily pushing aside with her hands the fragments of the broken glass, Mrs. Oakley flung herself upon the floor, at the moment that Lupin with a light in his hand entered the room.

"Hilloa!" he said.

All was still. Mrs. Oakley did not move hand nor foot. She scarcely dared to breathe, for she felt that upon his belief that she had swallowed the narcotic her life rested. When he saw her lying upon the floor, he gave a short laugh, as he said —

“I thought she could not resist the brandy and water. The laudanum has done its work quickly indeed. It’s well that it has, for if it had not — Well, well! If I only now had the courage to take a knife to my wife, and get rid of her once and for all, I should do well. Sister Oakley, you will not awaken for many hours, and when you do, you will be by far too much confused to know if you have said all your prayers or not. I shall make a fortune out of these women.”

Mrs. Oakley felt upon the point of fainting, and if he had but touched her, she was certain that she must have gone off; but he felt so satisfied with the powerful dose of laudanum that he had given her in the brandy and water, that he did not think it worth while in any way further to interfere with her.

“Old and ugly too!” he muttered, as he left the room.

Perhaps these last words cut Mrs. Oakley to the soul more quickly than all he had previously said. If she was not from that moment cured of what might in her case be called Lupinism, it was a very odd thing indeed.

The Rev. gent had been gone more than ten minutes before Mrs. Oakley gathered courage to look up, and to listen to what was taking place in the next room. Then she found that Lupin was speaking. She was still too much overcome by terror to rise, but she managed to crawl along the floor, until she reached the wall between the two rooms.

It was a flimsy wall that, composed only of canvas, for the rooms above the chapel had been got up in a very extemporaneous kind of way.

Nothing could take place in the way of conversation in the next room, that might be distinctly enough heard in the one that Mrs. Oakley was in. As we have said, Lupin was speaking. Mrs. Oakley placed her ear close to the canvas, and heard every word that he uttered.

“Listen to reason,” he said, “listen to reason, Jane. Of course, I will give you as much money as I can. I do not attempt to deny your claim upon me, and what is to hinder us working together, and making a good thing of it? Ah, if I could only persuade you to be a religious woman.”

“Gammon!” said Jane.

“I know that very well,” said Lupin. “That’s the very thing. I know it is gammon as well as you do. What’s that?”

Mrs. Oakley had made a slight noise in the next room.

CHAPTER CVIII

Mrs. Oakley Sees a Strange Sight, and Thinks there is no Place like Home

“What’s that, eh?” added Lupin.

Mrs. Oakley sank flat upon the floor in a moment; she thought that now surely her last hour was come.

“I thought I heard a noise. Did you, Jane?” added Lupin.

“I didn’t hear anything,” said the woman. “It’s your conscience, old boy, that makes you hear all sorts of things. You know you are a hard one, and no mistake. You know, there ain’t exactly your equal in London for a vagabond. But come, hand out the cash, for I ain’t particularly fond of your company, nor you of mine, I take it.”

“It must have been imagination,” muttered Lupin, still alluding to the noise he had heard or fancied he had heard. “It must have been imagination, and the wind at night does certainly make odd noises in the chapel at times, know.”

“Bother the noises. Give me the money, and let me go, I say. Come, be quick about it, or else I shall think of some way of helping myself, and you know when I begin, that I am apt to be rather troublesome.”

“A little,” said Lupin. “Just a little. But as I was saying, Jane — you and I together might make a fortune quite easily. You are a clever woman.”

“Am I really? When did you find that out, you old rogue?”

“Really, Jane, it is difficult to talk with you while you are in such a humour. Come, will you take something to drink? Say you will, and you shall have the very best I can get you. Only you must promise to take it in moderation, and not get much the worse for it, Jane.”

“Do you think now that I am such an idiot as to take a drain of anything in your place? No! I am not quite so green as that. Give me some money and I’ll fetch something, and as long as I have got my hand on the bottle, where I will take good care to keep it, I shall know that I am safe from you, but not otherwise. You would like to give me a drop of the same stuff you have set the woman in the next room to sleep with, wouldn’t you now, my beauty?”

“No, Jane. Not you. You are not such a fool as to be taken in as she is. Such poor tricks won’t do for you, I know well. There is money, and there is an empty bottle. Go and get what you like for yourself, as you wish not what I may happen to have in the place. I will let you in again, so you need not be afraid of that, Jane.”

“Afraid? Afraid? That’s a likely thing, indeed. I afraid of being kept out by you? No, old boy, if you did keep me out one minute longer than my patience lasted, and that would not be very long I think, I would raise such a racket about your ears, that you would wish yourself anywhere but where you are. How did I get in before, when you would have given one of your ears to keep me out? Why, by frightening you, of course, and I’ll do it again. Give me hold of the bottle. I afraid of you, indeed? A likely thing.”

The lady left the room with the bottle and half a guinea in her hand, while Lupin, with affected solicitude, lighted her to the door of the chapel, and lingered until he heard her footsteps die away right up the dismal dingy-looking court.

While Lupin was lighting his wife down the stairs, Mrs. Oakley found a small slit in the canvas that the division between the two rooms, and she industriously widened it, so that she was enabled to see into the adjoining apartment. She then waited in fear and in trembling the return of Lupin.

The arch hypocrite was not many minutes in making his appearance. He set the candlestick down upon the table with a force that nearly started the candle out of it, and then in a fierce voice he cried —

“Done — she is done at last! Ha! ha! Jane, you are done at last! I kept that bottle for an emergency. It seemed empty, but smeared all around its inner side is a sufficient quantity of a powerful narcotic to affect the very devil himself if he were to drink anything that had been poured into it. You think yourself mighty clever, Jane; but you are done at last. Now what a capital thing it is that I have sent that old fool, Mrs. Oakley, to sleep, for otherwise I should certainly be under the necessity of cutting her throat.”

Mrs. Oakley could hardly suppress a groan at this intelligence; but the exigences of her situation pressed strongly upon her, and she did succeed in smothering her feelings and keeping herself quiet.

Lupin paced the room anxiously waiting for his wife’s return; and in the course of about five minutes, a heavy dab of a single knock upon the chapel door announced that fact. He immediately snatched up the candle and ran down stairs to let her in, lest according to her threat she should get to the end of her very limited stock of patience. They came up the stairs together — Jane was speaking —

“Brandy!” she said; “I have got brandy, and I mean to keep my hand on the bottle, I tell you. Ah, I know you — no one knows you better than I do. You may impose upon everybody but me. You won’t find it so very easy a thing to get the better of me; I’ll keep my hand on the bottle.”

“How very suspicious you are,” said Lupin, “It’s quite distressing.”

"Is it? Ho! ho! Well, I'll have my drop and then I will go. If you are civil to me whenever I choose to come it will be better for you; but I am not the sort of person to stand any nonsense, I can assure you."

"No, Jane, I never said you were," replied Lupin; "and I hope that tonight will see the beginning as it were of a kind of reconciliation and better feeling between us. I am sure I always thought of you with kindness."

By this time they were in the room, and the lady half drew the knife she had before exhibited from the bosom of her dress, as she said —

"Look at this — look at this! I distrust you all the more when you talk as you do now, and I tell you that if I have any of your nonsense, I will pretty soon settle you. You mean something, I know, by the twinkle of your eye. I have watched you before, and I know you."

"Now, really, this is too bad," said Lupin, as he wiped his face with a remarkably old handkerchief; "this is too bad, Jane. If I am kind and civil to you, that don't suit; and if I am rough and rather stern, you fly out at that too. What am I to do? Will nothing please you?"

"Bah!" said Jane. "Hold your nonsense. How much money am I to have when I have finished the brandy? That is the question now."

"Will three guineas be enough, Jane, just for the present occasion?"

"No, I must have five, or if you don't produce them, I'll make you."

"You shall have them, Jane. You see how complying I am to you. But won't you give me a drop of the brandy? You don't mean to take it all?"

"Yes I do. It's only half a pint, and what's that? You can drink some of what you said you had in the place. I didn't go out to buy for you. Besides, I won't trust it a moment out of my hands. You would put something in it before I could wink."

"Really, really! What a strange woman. But won't you have a glass, Jane, to drink it out of? Let me get you a glass now?"

"No, you would put something in that too. Oh, I am up to your tricks, I am, old boy. You won't get the better of me. Very good brandy it is, too. Ah! Strong rather."

Jane took a hearty pull at the bottle, so hearty a one that two thirds of the mixture vanished, and then with her hand on the neck of it, she sat glaring at Lupin, who was on the opposite side of the table, with an awfully satanic grin upon his ugly features.

"It has an odd taste."

“An odd taste?” cried Lupin. “It’s a capital thing that you bought it yourself, and kept your hand over the bottle. I’m very glad of that, old woman.”

“But I feel odd — I — I — ain’t the thing. I don’t feel very well, Lupin.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I — I feel as if I were dying. I — I don’t see things very clearly. I am ill — ill. Oh, what is this? Something is amiss. Mercy, mercy!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I — I — shall fall. Help! The room swims round with me. I am poisoned. I know I am. Mercy! Help! Murder! Oh, spare me.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Lupin rose and went round the table. He caught hold of the wretched woman by the head, and applying his mouth close to her ear, he said —

“Jane! There was something in the bottle, and I intend to cut your throat. I hope the knife you have got with you has a good edge to it?”

She tried to scream, but an indistinct, strange, stifled cry only came from her lips. She tried to get up, but her limbs refused their office. The powerful narcotic had taken effect, and she fell forward, her head striking the table heavily, and upsetting the bottle with the remainder of the drugged brandy in it as she did so.

“Done!” said Lupin. “Done at last. Oh, how I have watched for such an opportunity as this. How often I have pleased myself with the idea of meeting her in some lonely place when she was off her guard, and killing her, but I never thought that anything could happen half so lucky as this. Let me think. I am quite alone in this building, or as good as alone, for Mrs. Oakley sleeps soundly. I can easily drag the dead body downstairs, and place it in one of the vaults underneath the chapel, to which I have the key. I will wrench open some coffin if that be all, and cram her in on the top of the dead there previously. Ah, that will do, and then I defy any circumstances to find me out. How safe a — mur — I mean a death this will be to be sure. How very — very safe.”

Mrs. Oakley shook in every limb, but she kept her eyes steadfastly fixed at the small hole in the canvas, through which she could see into the room, and by a horrible species of fascination, she felt that if she had ever so much wished to do so, she could not then have withdrawn it. No! She was as it were condemned as a fiat of destiny, as a punishment for her weak and criminal credulity regarding that man, to be a witness to the dreadful deed he proposed committing, within the sphere of her observation.

It was dreadful. It was truly horrible. But it was not now by any means to be avoided.

Lupin disappeared for a few seconds into a room where he usually himself slept. From thence he returned with a washhand basin in his hand, which he placed upon the floor. He then fumbled about the clothing of his wife until he found the knife that she had twice so threateningly exhibited to him. He held it up to the light and narrowly scrutinised it.

“It will do I think,” he said.

He tried its keenness upon the edge of the sole of his shoe, and he was satisfied that it had been well prepared for mischief.

“It will do well,” he said. “Well, nothing can be better. From this night I shall be free from the fears that have haunted me night and day for so long. This woman is the only person in all London who really knows me, and who has it in her power to destroy all my prospects. When she is gone, I shall be perfectly easy and safe, and surely never was such a deed as this done with so much positive safety.”

Mrs. Oakley felt sickened at what she saw, but still she looked upon it with that same species of horrible fascination which it is said — and said truly, too — prevents the victim of a serpent’s glittering eye from escaping the jaws of the destroyer. She saw it all. She did not move — she did not scream — she did not weep — but as if frozen to the spot, she, with a statuesque calmness, looked upon that most horrible scene of blood. She was the witness appointed by Heaven to see it done, and she could not escape her mission.

Lupin twined his left hand in the hair at the back of the head of the wretched woman, and then he held her head over the washhand basin. There was a bright flash of the knife, and then a gushing, gurgling sound, and blood poured into the basin, hot, hissing and frothing. The light fell upon the face of Lupin, and at that time so changed was it, that Mrs. Oakley could not have recognised it, and, but that she knew from the antecedents that it was no other than he, she might have doubted if some devil had not risen up through the floor to do the deed of blood.

He dropped the knife to the floor.

The murdered woman made a faint movement with her arms, and then all was over. The blood still rolled forth and filled the washhand basin. Lupin caught the cover from the table, throwing everything that was upon it to the floor, and wrapped it many times round the head, face, and neck of his victim.

“It is done!” he said. “It is done!”

He still held the body by the hair of the head, and dragging it along the floor, he dropped it near the door opening on to the staircase. He then went to a

cupboard in the room, and finding a bottle, he plunged the neck of it into his mouth, and drank deeply. The draught was ardent spirit, but it had no more effect upon him at that moment than as though it had been so much water from a spring. That is to say, it had no intoxicating effect. It may have stilled some of the emotions of dread and horror which his own crime must have called up from the bottom even of such a heart as his. He was human, and he could not be utterly callous.

Leaning against the cupboard door for a few seconds he gasped out —

“Yes, it is done. It is quite done, and now for the worst. Now for the body, and the vaults, and the dead. Can I do it? can I do it? I must. Yes, I must. There is no safety for me if I do not. I shall come else to the scaffold. I think already that I see the hooting crowd — the rope and the crossbeam. Now they hold my arms. Now they tell me to call upon God for mercy to my wretched bloodstained soul. Now the mob shouts. The hangman touches me — I feel the rope about my neck. They draw the cap over my face, and so shut out the world from me for ever. I die — I struggle — I writhe — I faint — God — God — God help me!”

He fell heavily to the floor of the room.



Lupin Drugs his Wife, and then cuts her Throat.

CHAPTER CIX

Mrs. Oakley Escapes, and Takes a Different View of Things in General

Mrs. Oakley nearly fainted herself at this juncture, but she felt that her life was in jeopardy, and by a strong mental effort, such as she could hardly have supposed herself capable of making, she sustained herself, and preserved her senses.

Lupin lay for some minutes quite insensible upon the floor, but he did not lie long enough for Mrs. Oakley to take advantage of his temporary swoon and leave the place. Had she perhaps been very prompt and resolute, and self-possessed, she might have done so, but under the whole of the circumstances, it was not to be supposed that such could be her state of mind; so the slight opportunity, for, after all, it was only a slight one, if one at all, was let slip by her.

She was just beginning to ask herself if there was a chance of getting away before Lupin should recover, when he uttered a hideous groan, and moved slightly.

After these indications of recovery, Mrs. Oakley was afraid to move; and certainly, the slightest indication of her being otherwise than in the state of insensibility which Lupin believed to be her condition, there is very little doubt it would have been the signal for her death.

The man who commits a murder for the attainment of any object of importance to him, will not scruple to commit another to hide the first deed from the eyes of the world.

And now Lupin slowly rose to a sitting posture, and glared around him for a few moments in silence. Then he spoke.

"What is this?" he said. "What is all this? What is the meaning of all this? Blood! — Blood! Is this blood upon my hands? No — no — yes, it is — it is. Ah! I recollect."

He held his bloodstained hands to his eyes for a few moments, and then as he withdrew them, he slowly turned his eyes to where the body lay. With a shudder he dragged himself along the floor further off from it, gasping out as he did so —

"Off — off, horrible object! — Off — off!"

His distempered imagination, no doubt, pictured the body as following him. Is there not, indeed, a prompt retribution in this world?

"Off — off, I say! No further! — Not dead? — Not dead yet? How much blood have you in you now to shed? Off — off!"

He reached the wall. He could get no further, and thus pursued still by the same wild insane idea, he sprung to his feet, and uttering a loud cry, he caught up a chair and held it out at arm's length before him, shouting —

“Keep away — keep away! Keep off, I say — I — I did not do it. Who shall say I did it? Who saw me do it?”

He slowly dropped the chair, and then in a more composed voice he said —

“Hush! Hush! I am mad to raise these cries. They will alarm the court. I am mad — mad!”

Mrs. Oakley had hoped that his ravings would reach some other ears than hers, and that his apprehension, with the bleeding witness of his crime close at hand, would follow as a thing of course, and then how gladly would she have flown from her place of concealment, and cried out —

“He did it! I saw him! That is the man!”

But such was not the case. Either he really did not call out loud enough to make himself heard, or the inhabitants of the court were too much accustomed to all sorts of sounds to pay any attention even to the ravings of a murderer!

No one came. No one even knocked at the chapel door to know if anything was amiss, and when she saw him calm, and in a measure self-possessed again, her heart died within her.

“Murder! Murder!” he said; “I have done murder! Yes, I have steeped my hands in blood — again — again! It is not the first time, but one does not become familiar with murder. I did not feel as I feel now when I took a life before. Oh, horror! Horror!”

He shook, but soon again recovered himself.

“The vaults! The vaults!” he said. “They will hide the dead. Who will look for this woman? What friends has she? Is there one in all the world who cares if she be alive or dead? Not one. Is there one who will stir six steps to find out what has become of her? Not one.”

Again he solaced himself with a draught of brandy, and then he set about making his preparations for disposing of the dead body of his slaughtered victim.

From a drawer in the room he took a large sheet, and spread it upon the floor. Then he kicked and pushed the dead body with his feet on to it, and then he deliberately rolled it up round and round in the sheet, and at each fold feeling that it was further removed from his sight, he seemed to breathe more and more freely.

He spoke in something like his old tones.

“That will do — that will do. The vaults will be the place. Was there ever such a cunning place for murder to be done in as a chapel, with its ready receptacles of the dead beneath it? There let her rot. She will never come up in judgment against me from there. It is done now. The deed that I often thought of doing, and yet never had the courage, nor the opportunity at the same time, to accomplish until tonight. The vaults — the vaults. Ay, the vaults!”

He lit a lantern that he took from the cupboard, and then he opened the door that communicated with the staircase terminating in the chapel. He listened as though he fancied that some one might be below listening to the deed of blood above.

“All is still,” he muttered, “so very still. It is providential. It is the will of Heaven that this woman should die to night, and after all I am but the instrument of its decrees — nothing more. That is comforting.”

He now dragged the body to the door he had opened, but he did not carry it. When he got it there he overbalanced it, and let it fall down. Mrs. Oakley, even from where she was, heard the horrible smash with which it reached the bottom of the stairs.

Lupin followed with the lantern.

And now it would seem as if another opportunity had presented itself to Mrs. Oakley to escape. The staircase down which Lupin had gone communicated with the chapel. It was another flight that led to the ordinary door through which any one passed who might be coming to the private part of the house. That staircase of course she expected to reach without going through the room in which the murder was committed, as her room and the adjoining one both opened upon its landing as well as into each other.

Mrs. Oakley slowly rose from her knees.

“God help us,” she said, “and give me strength to make an attempt to leave this frightful place. There will surely be time while Lupin is in the vaults. Oh, yes, there will surely be time.”

She tottered along with as little strength as though she had been lying for weeks upon a bed of sickness, so completely had she been unnerved by what she had seen.

She touched the handle of the door. Even that was support. And then, she turned it. The door did not open. It was locked!

Mrs. Oakley felt as if at that moment all her chance of escape was gone. She felt as though she were given over by providence to Lupin to be murdered. Why

had he locked the door, but that if by any rare chance she should awaken from the lethargic sleep into which he supposed her to be plunged, she should have no outlet but through the room in which he would be? But he was not there now, and the door of communication between her room and that in which the murder had been done might not be fast.

To try it was the work now of a moment; Mrs. Oakley felt a little more self-possessed with the knowledge that Lupin was not close at hand, and she opened the door. It yielded readily enough to her touch.

She was in the room of murder — in the very atmosphere of blood. She glanced around her, and, although she had seen all through the opening in the canvas partition, yet she was horrified to find herself closer to the spot upon which the fearful deed had been done. Lupin, when he had lit his lantern with which to go to the vaults, had not extinguished the ordinary light that burnt in his room. That had a long spectral looking wick; but it gave sufficient light to enable Mrs. Oakley to see the blood upon the floor.

She sickened at the sight.

But if she were to escape, it must be done at once. Lupin would not be likely to linger longer by one brief moment in the vaults than was absolutely necessary; and he might return before she had effected her purpose yet.

She flew to the door of his room, which opened on to the landing. She made an effort to open it. Alas! it was in vain; it, too, was locked, and the key was gone!

"I am a prisoner!" said Mrs. Oakley, as she clasped her hands; "I am a prisoner to this dreadful man!"

For some few moments now she felt completely overwhelmed by this misfortune. The only outlet from the room that was not fast, was that which Lupin himself had taken, and which led to the chapel. Should she venture that way or not? — that was the question. Could she resolve upon staying where she was, and trusting to an escape in the morning? No, no; she told herself that would be too horrible. She would have, then, to look at Lupin in the face, and to talk to him.

"No — no — no! I cannot do that," she said. "I will go down the staircase that he has gone down — I will pass through the chapel — I will try to open the chapel door, and then I will rush out with the cry of murder upon my lips."

It was a trembling anxious thing to follow the murderer and his victim down that staircase; but having found all other mode of egress denied to her, Mrs. Oakley attempted it.

Slowly she went, step by step; and ever and anon she paused to listen for any sound that should be indicative of Lupin's whereabouts — but she heard nothing.

"He must be deep beneath the chapel," she said, "among the vaults — that is where he must be. I shall be safe if I hasten now. Oh, so safe — quite safe!"

She did hasten, and another moment brought her to the foot of the stairs. A door in the chapel wall terminated them. That was the door against which Mrs. Oakley had heard the dead body strike with such a frightful crash when Lupin had cast it down the stairs. It was swinging open now.

Another moment and she was in the chapel.

From out of the aperture, occasioned by the lifting up of a large square trapdoor in the centre of the chapel floor, there came a faint stream of light. Mrs. Oakley knew that that trapdoor led to the vaults. She knew that a flight of steps was immediately beneath it which lead to the loathsome receptacles of the dead, where the pious members of Mr. Lupin's flock were laid when they and this world had bidden each other adieu. She knew that he derived no despicable revenue from letting such lodgings to the dead.

And he was down there with his victim — the first person that he ever permitted to lie there without a fee!

Mrs. Oakley, to reach the chapel door, must needs pass quite close to the open trapdoor; and as she neared it, a terrible curiosity took possession of her — it was to see what Lupin was doing below — it was to ascertain in what way he disposed of his victim's body. She thought that she ought to see that. She thought, then, that she could tell all, and bring the hounds of justice to the very spot where the murdered woman lay.

She paused for a moment upon the brink of the trap, and then, by an impulse that at the moment seemed, and was, irresistible, she began the descent among the vaults.

These vaults were quite dignified by being so called. They were nothing but cellars — nothing in the world but damp gloomy cellars — and Lupin made as much of them as he did of the chapel overhead. The corpses lay there thick and threefold. A ghostly company! And yet Lupin had many underground lodgings to let.

What cared he if the fumes from the dead came up, and made havoc upon hot Sundays among the living? What cared he what mischief the charnel house beneath the planks did to the old and to the young? His own constitution, he had a strong impression, could be fortified by copious libations of brandy. Probably he was wrong in his practice, but he had faith in his remedy, and that was a great thing — a very great thing, indeed.

Mrs. Oakley slowly crept down the steps leading to the vaults. She was guided by the faint light of Lupin's lantern, which was she knew not where. Twice she paused to listen if he were coming, as in such a case she would have flown back upon the wings of terror, but she heard nothing, and she passed onward.

Twelve steps led to the lowest depth upon which the vaults were situated. Then there was a kind of passage, upon which were flag stones very roughly and clumsily laid down. Right and left of this passage the vaults were. It wound completely round the chapel, but she had not to go very far to ascertain where Lupin was at work. The light of the lantern guided her to the half open door of the vault, within which he was at work.

CHAPTER CX
Mr. Lupin Finds Himself in an Awkward Predicament

Mrs. Oakley peeped into the vault, but she held herself in readiness to fly at a moment's notice, and then she thought she could easily hide among the pews in the chapel. Nothing, she thought, could be very well easier than such a course. Could she not hide in the very pew that she had for a long time called her own? And then by watching Lupin, she should have the advantage of seeing in a moment when he had done his work, and there would then be little trouble in eluding him.

On tiptoe, Mrs. Oakley advanced to the half opened door of the vault, and peeped in upon the man, who thought himself so very safe. The eye of heaven, he must have thought, saw him; but he would have staked his life forthwith upon the fact, that no human observation was bent upon his actions; and yet there was some one for whom he entertained the greatest contempt — one whom he would have defied to injure him, gathering up evidence to hang him.

Go on, Lupin. Bury your victim. But don't think yourself so very safe just yet. It is an old saying, that "Murder will out." Do you think that yours will prove the exception?

From a recess in the wall Lupin had dragged a coffin. It was an old one and rather rotten, so that by the aid of a small crowbar that he had there — what use did Lupin find for a crowbar in the vaults beneath his chapel? Was it to rip open the coffins and rob even the dead? Well, well — by the aid of this crowbar, he soon forced open the lid of the coffin.

He stood in it then, and stamped down the remains with his feet to make room for the murdered body.



Mr. Lupin Crushes the Corpse to Make Room for his Murdered Wife.

Mrs. Oakley sickened at this; she had not quite expected to see such a horror as that. It appeared to her at the moment, to be worse than the murder above stairs. She really felt quite faint as she saw him.

When he had flattened the nearly decayed body in the coffin as much as he could, he lifted the corpse of his victim from the floor of the vault. It was still closely enveloped in the large sheet, although at one part the blood had begun to make its way through all the folds upon folds of that wrapper, and he threw it into the coffin. It more than filled it.

Poor Mrs. Oakley shut her eyes; she knew what he was going to do. She knew it from what he had done, and she saw it in his eyes. He was of course going to tread down the dead body of her he had murdered, in the same way that he had already trodden down the half decomposed one in the coffin.

Strange companionship! How little the very respectable defunct, who had been expensively placed in one of the vaults, could have imagined that she — it was a female — that she should be trodden down as flat as any pancake, to make room for the Reverend Josiah Lupin's murdered wife!

“To what base uses may we come as last.”

Mrs. Oakley heard him treading and stamping, and then she opened her eyes, and she saw him fitting on the lid of the coffin again. He had made it hold its double burden.

And now she had surely seen all that she came to see, and yet with a frightful fascination she lingered as though spellbound to the spot. She thought that she had plenty of time. Of course Lupin would put the coffin into its recess again, and that would take him some time. It would, with its additional weight, certainly be no easy task, but he set about it, and it is astonishing what herculean labours people will perform, when their necks are to answer for any delay or dereliction of the duty. Lupin dragged the coffin to its receptacle on a low shelf, and fairly hitched one end of it in the aperture made for its reception.

By the assistance of the lever he pushed it fairly in, and then he paused and wiped his brow.

“It is done,” he said.

He leaned heavily against the damp wall.

“It is done — it is done. This will be one of the undiscovered murders that are done in London. I am safe now. Nobody will miss her — nobody will look for her — nobody will dream that this vault can possibly conceal such a crime; and now that the terror of it, and the horror of doing it, is all over, I feel like a new man, and am much rejoiced.”

“Rejoiced,” thought Mrs. Oakley with a shudder.

“She was the torment of my life,” added Lupin. “I knew no peace while she lived. Success had no charm for me. Go where I would, think of what I would, do what I would, I always had the dread of that woman before my eyes; but now — now I am rid of her.”

He took up his lantern from the floor of the vault.

Now it was time for Mrs. Oakley to fly. She turned and hastily ran up the staircase of the vault. The idea took possession, and it was after all only a fancy, that Lupin was pursuing her with the crowbar in his hand. But how it urged her on. What wings it gave her, but confused her the while, so that instead of hurrying to the chapel door, and making a bold effort to open it as she had meant to do, she only sought the door in the wall, and the staircase down which she had come to the chapel, nor did she pause until she found herself in the murder room.

Then with a heart beating so wildly, that she was fain to lay her hands upon it in the hope of stopping its maddening pulsation, she stopped to listen.

It was only fancy. It was a delusion. No Lupin was pursuing her from the vaults.

“Thank Heaven!” she said. “Thank Heaven! but oh, why am I here? Why have I come here again, instead of making my escape by the chapel door? This is a fatal error. Oh, Heaven save me! Is there yet time? Does he linger yet sufficiently long in the vaults, to enable me to take refuge among the pews?”

These were questions which the stillness in the chapel below seemed to answer in the affirmative, and once more Mrs. Oakley approached the staircase to descend it. She got three steps down the stairs, and then she heard a footstep below. It was too late. Lupin was coming up. Yes, it was too late!

He approached with a heavy and regular footfall. That heaviness and regularity were sufficient evidences that he had not heard her, and had no suspicion that she nor any one else had been a witness to his crime. So far she was comparatively safe, but the blessed chance of escape without any meeting with him was gone.

Up — up, he came! Mrs. Oakley retreated step by step as he advanced. She passed into the chamber, which may for distinction’s sake be called her own room, and there she cast herself upon the couch, and closed her eyes shudderingly.

She had a presentiment that Lupin would come to look at her to see that she still slumbered. She was right.

He had not been in the room where the deed of blood had been committed many minutes, when he opened the door of communication between the two apartments, and came in not with the lantern, but with the candle he had left burning upon the table. He did not come above three steps into the room, and then he spoke —

“Sister Oakley it is time to pray.”

Mrs. Oakley moved not — spoke not.

“Sister Oakley, will you be so good as to rise, and go to the corner of the next street on a little errand for me?”

How tempting this was! But Mrs. Oakley had the discretion to imagine the wolf in the sheep’s clothing now; she saw in all this only a clear mode of ascertaining if she were awake or not, and she would not speak nor move.

This was, in truth, a wise policy upon the part of Mrs. Oakley. That it was so, became abundantly apparent when Lupin spoke again.

“All is right,” he said. “The opiate has done its work bravely, I feel easy now, and yet I don’t know how I came for a moment to feel otherwise, or to imagine for a moment there was danger from this woman. If I only had any proof that there was, I would soon put it beyond her power to be mischievous. But, no — no, she has slept soundly and knows nothing.”

It required, indeed, no ordinary nerve during this speech of Lupin’s, for Mrs. Oakley to preserve the stillness of apparent deep sleep; but we none of us know what we can do until we are put to it; after all, what a just punishment to Mrs. Oakley was all that she was now going through. She had had more faith in that bold, bad, mountebank of a parson than in Heaven itself, and she was justly punished.

Having then made this trial of her sleeping state, Mr. Lupin retired with the candle again, quite satisfied — at least one would have thought so; and as he had talked of the amazing ease of mind he felt now that he had, murdered his wife, it was rather surprising that he did not go to bed and sleep serenely instead of pacing his room to and fro for more than four hours mumbling disjointed words and sentences to himself as he did so, for Mrs. Oakley heard him, but she did not dare to move.

Suddenly he flung open the door between the two rooms, and in a startling voice he cried —

“Fire! Fire!”

It was truly a wonder that upon this Mrs. Oakley did not jump up, it sounded so very alarming; but it was not to be, and with a presence of mind that surely was not all her own, she yet remained profoundly still.

“Fool that I am,” muttered Lupin, “to be continually assailed by dread of this woman, when everything assures me that she has been in a sound sleep caused by a powerful narcotic, during the whole night; but the morning is now near at hand, and she will soon awaken. I have already got what money I can, from her, and I must give her breakfast and then send her off. It would be useless to kill her.”

The manner in which Lupin pronounced these last words was very alarming for it implied rather that he was asking himself the question whether it would be useless to kill her or not, than the expression of a decided opinion; but still Mrs. Oakley moved not.

Lupin, suddenly, as though he had quite made up his mind not to trouble himself about her any more, slammed to the door of communication between the two rooms.

Mrs. Oakley breathed freely again — that is, comparatively freely; and yet what a shocking agonizing idea it was that she might have to breakfast with that dreadful man. What should she say to him? — how should she look at him?

The dawn was coming, and she shook with apprehension to find that such was the fact, and Lupin had said that she would soon awaken; so, effect to awaken she must, in order to keep up the delusion; but how should she manage then to deceive the suspicious vigilance of such a man?

But all this had to be encountered. How was it to be avoided? She could do nothing but arm herself with such fortitude as she could call to her aid.

Oh, how she wished herself in her own parlour behind the shop, and upon her knees asking the pardon of her husband for all that she had done, and for all that she had not done! What would she have not given even to have seen the honest face of big Ben, the beefeater!

The light of the coming day grew each moment stronger, and at length Mrs. Oakley thought it would be prudent to seem to wake up, and calling out “Mr. Lupin! Mr. Lupin!” she rose from the couch.

Lupin opened the door of communication between the two rooms, and glared at her.

“Did you call, sister Oakley?”

“Yes, reverend sir, surely I have been sleeping, and have forgotten some of the prayers.”

“No; truly, sister Oakley, I have watched for you, and I can assure you that you will enter into the kingdom always, provided that you are regular in your

contributions to the chapel, for at the last that of a surety will be demanded to be known of you, sister Oakley.”

“I have been thinking of that, brother Lupin,” said Mrs. Oakley, “and this day week I will manage to bring two pounds.”

“Only two?”

“I will make it three, if I can, brother Oakley; but my head feels quite confused and giddy. It is very strange.”

“Ah,” whispered Lupin to himself. “That is the natural effect of the narcotic. It has worked well. Then,” he said aloud, “sister Oakley, I pray you to walk in to this room, and I will provide for you what the profane world call the breakfast, for although food for the soul is in alway preferable to food for the body, yet we must not always neglect our earthly tabernacle.”

“I am much obliged to you,” said Mrs. Oakley. “You may depend upon my regular offerings to the chapel.”