

CHAPTER CLII
Shows how Todd had a Very Narrow Escape Indeed

There was something in the tone of Crotchet that made the magistrate confident he suspected something very peculiar, and he followed him without a word.

The track or trail upon the ground was very peculiar, it was broad and defined, and had turned in the direction that it went every little weed or blade of grass that was within its boundaries. A number of decayed leaves from the forest trees had likewise been swept along it; and the more any one might look at it the more they must feel convinced that something heavy had been dragged along it.

What that something heavy was, Mr. Crotchet had his suspicions, and they were right.

"This way, your worship," he said, "this way; it goes right into this hedge as nicely as possible, though the branches of these bushes are placed all smooth again."

As he spoke, Crotchet began to beat the obstructing branches of a wild nut tree and a blackberry bush, that seemed, by their entwining arms, to have struck up a very close sort of acquaintance with each other; and then he suddenly cried out —

"Here it is, sir."

"What, Crotchet?"

"The dead 'un."

"Dead! You don't mean to say that one such is here, and that the dead body of Todd is in the thicket?"

"Come on, sir, I don't think it is him. It don't seem long enough; but here's somebody, as safe as possible, sir, for all that. Push your way through sir: it's only prickles."

The magistrate did push his way through, despite the vigorous opposition of the blackberry bush; and then — lying upon its face — he saw the dead body of a man.

The readers of this narrative could have told Sir Richard Blunt what that body had been named while the breath of life was in it; but neither he nor Crotchet could at first make up their minds upon the subject.

"Do you know him?" said Sir Richard.

"I guess only."

"Yes, and you guess as I do. This is Lupin, Todd's prison companion, and the companion in his escape."

Crotchet nodded.

"I went to Newgate," he said, "and had a good look at him, so that I should know him, sir, dead or alive; so I'll just turn him over, and have a good look at his face."

With this, Crotchet carefully — by the aid of his foot — turned over the body, and the first glance he got at the dead face satisfied him.

"Yes, your worship," he said, "Lupin it is, and Todd has killed him. You may take your oath of that."

"Not a doubt of it: such is the result of the association of such men. Todd has found him, or fancied he should find him, an encumbrance in the way of his own escape, and has sought this wood to take his life."

"That's about it, sir."

"And now, Crotchet, we may make certain of one thing, and that is, that Todd is not in this wood, nor in this neighbourhood either. I should say, that after this deed, the first thing he would do would be to fly from this spot."

"Not a doubt of that, your worship; but the deuce of it is to find out which way he has gone."

"We must be guided in that by the same mode of inquiry, Crotchet, that brought us here. We were successful in tracing him to this wood, and we may be equally successful in tracing him from it. We must go into the village of Hampstead, and give information about this dead body; and we will make there what inquiries we can."

They were neither of them very anxious to remain in Caen Wood, after discovering how it was tenanted; and in a very short time they were mounted again, and went along the lane until they emerged upon Hampstead Heath, and so took the road to the village, where Sir Richard gave information to the authorities concerning the finding of the body of Lupin.

There, too, he heard that a man answering the description of Todd had passed through the village, and refused to partake some questionable brandy, at a public house, on its outskirts. This man was evidently proceeding to London. Crotchet heard this information with great attention; and when he and Sir Richard Blunt were alone, he said —

"I tell you what it is, sir — the country will never suit Todd."

"How do you mean, Crotchet?"

"I mean, sir, that, in my opinion, he has gone back to London again. The country, sir, ain't the sort of place for such men as he is. You may depend upon it, he only came to the little wood to get rid of Lupin, and he has gone back to try and hide in London till the row is over."

"You really think so?"

"I do, sir; and if we want to find him, we must go, too."

"Well, Crotchet, of one thing I am pretty well convinced, and that is, that he is not in this part of the country, for after the murder in the wood, which he will be in continual fear of being discovered, it is not likely he would stay about here; and so, as we have traced him a little on the road to London, we may as well, for all we know to the contrary, assume that he has gone there at once."

"Come on, then, sir," said Crotchet; "I feel's what you call's a sort of a — oh, dear me, what is it? A presentment —"

"A presentiment, Crotchet."

"Ah, sir, that's it. I feel that sort of thing that old Todd will try and hide himself in some old crib in London, and not at all trust to the country, where everybody is looked at for all the world as though he were a strange cat. Lord bless you, sir, if I had done anything and wanted to hide, I should go into the very thick of the people of London, and I ain't quite sure but I'd take a lodging in Bow Street."

Sir Richard Blunt was himself very much of Crotchet's opinion regarding Todd's proceedings, for his experience of the movements of malefactors had taught him that they generally, after their first attempt to try to get away, hover about the spot of their crimes; and it is a strange thing, that with regard to persons who have committed great crimes, there is a great similarity of action, as though the species of mind that could induce the commission of murder from example, were the same in other respects in all murderers.

To London, then, with what expedition they could make, Sir Richard Blunt and Crotchet went, and although they made what inquiry they could, they found no news of Todd. And now we must leave them for a while, thrown completely out in all their researches for the escaped criminal, while we once more proceed to the house in Fleet Street, where we left Todd in rather an uncomfortable situation.

It will be recollected that, locked in the grasp of the officer, Todd and that individual had gone down with the chair through the opening in the floor of his shop.

This was the first time that Todd had undertaken that mode of getting into the cellars of his house; and when he found the chair going, he gave himself up for lost, and uttered a cry of horror. It seemed to him at that moment as if that were the species of retribution which was to come over him — death by the same dreadful means that had enabled him so often to inflict it upon others.

No doubt Todd's anticipations of being dashed to destruction upon the stones below would have been correct had he gone down alone, or had there been no one already immediately beneath the trapdoor in the shop flooring; but as it was, he fell, fortunately for him, uppermost, and they both, he and the officer, fell upon the other man who had gone down only a short time previous. That saved Todd; but he was terribly shaken, and so was the officer, and it was a few moments before either of them recovered sufficiently to move a limb.

The lives of those two depended upon who should recover his strength and energies first. Todd was that man. Hate is so much stronger a passion than every other, and it was under the influence of that feeling that Todd was the first of the two to recover; and the moment he did so, the yell of rage that he uttered really might have been heard in Fleet Street. It was very indiscreet of Todd, but at that moment he thought of nothing but revenge. His own safety became a secondary consideration with him.

He grasped the officer by the throat!

At the moment that, by the feel only, for that place was in the most profound darkness, Todd felt sure that he had the officer by the throat, he knew that his triumph was certain. It would have been as vain a thing to attempt to escape the chances of destiny, as to dream of avoiding the grasp of that iron hand that now closed upon the throat of the unfortunate officer.

It was just then, though, that the officer began to recover a little from the shock of his fall. It was only to recover to die. Better for him would it have been had he slept on in insensibility to the pangs that were awaiting him; but that was not to be.

"Ah, wretch!" shrieked Todd, "So you thought you had me? Down — down to death! — Ha! — Ha!"

The officer struggled much, and dashed about his feet and arms, but all was in vain.

"Ha! — Ha!" laughed Todd, and that hideous laugh awakened as hideous an echo in the dismal place. "Ha! — Ha! I have you now. Oh! But I should like to protract your death and see you die by inches! Only that my time is precious, and for my own sake, I will put you quickly beyond the pale of life."

The man tried to cry out; but the compression upon his throat of those bony fingers prevented him. He had his hand at liberty, and he caught Todd by the head and face, and began to do him as much mischief as he could. There was

for a few seconds a fierce struggle, and then Todd, keeping still his right hand clasped about the throat of his victim, with the left laid hold of as much of his hair on the front of his head as he could, and raising his head then about six inches from the stone floor on which it had rested, he dashed it down again with all his might.

The officer's arms fell nerveless to his sides, and he uttered a deep groan.

Again Todd raised the head, and dashed it down, and that time he heard a crashing sound, and he felt satisfied that he had killed the man.

There was now no further use in holding the throat of the dead man, and Todd let him go.

"Ha! — Ha!" he said. "That is done. That is done — Ha! Now am I once more lord and master in my own house — once again I reign here supreme, and can do what it may please me to do. Ha! This is glorious! Why, it is like old times coming back to me again. I feel as if I could open my shop in the morning, and again polish off the neighbourhood. It seems as if all that had happened since last I stropped a razor above, had been but a dream. The arrest — the trial — the escape — Newgate — the wood at Hampstead! All a dream — a dream!"

He was silent, and the excitement of the moment of triumph had passed away.

"No — no," he said. "No! It is too real — much too real! Oh, it is real, indeed. I am the fugitive! The haunted man without a home — without a friend; and I have this night nor any other night any place in which I may lay my head in safety. I am as one persecuted by all the world, without hope — without pity! What will now become of me?"

A low groan came upon Todd's ear.

He started, and looked around him. He tried hard to pierce with his half-shut eyes the intense darkness, but he could not; and muttering to himself — "Not yet dead — not yet dead?" he crept to an obscure corner of the cellar, and opened a door that led by a ladder to the floor of the back parlour, where there was a trapdoor, under which the large table usually stood, and which he could open from below.

In the parlour Todd got a light, and feeling then still disturbed about the groan that he had heard below, he armed himself with an iron bar that belonged to the outer door, and with this in his right hand, and the light in his left, he crept back again to the cellar.

A glance at the two men who lay there was sufficient to satisfy him that they were no more; and after then taking from them a couple of pairs of pistols, and a small sum of money, he crept back again to the parlour. As he did so, he heard St. Dunstan's clock strike the hour of four.

“Four!” he said. “Four. It will not be light for nearly two hours yet, and I may rest myself awhile and think. Yes, it is necessary now that I should think; for I have time — a little time — to do so, and much, oh, so much to think of. There’s some of my own brandy, too, in the parlour, that’s a comfort.”

The fire was still burning in the parlour grate. Todd raked the glowing embers together with the iron bar, and then he took a good draught at the brandy. It revived him most wonderfully, and he gave one of his old chuckles, as he muttered —

“Oh, that I could get a few whom I could name in such a position as I had yon man in in the cellar a short time since. That would be well, indeed. Ha! I am, after all, rather lucky, though.”

A sharp knock come, at this moment, at the outer door of the shop, and Todd sprang in alarm to his feet.

CHAPTER CLIII

Todd is in Great Peril in the Early Morning in London

The silence that ensued after that knock at his door, for he had become to consider it as his again, was like the silence of the grave. The only sound that Todd heard then, was the painful beating of his own heart.

The guilty man was full of the most awful apprehensions.

“What is it?” he said. “Who is it? — who can it be? Surely, no one for me. There is no one who saw me. No — no! It cannot be. It is some accidental sound only. I — begin — to doubt if it were a knock at all. — Oh, no, it was no knock.”

Bang! Came the knock again.

Todd actually started and uttered a cry of terror, and then he crouched down and crept towards the door. He might, to be sure, have made his escape from the premises, with some little trouble, by the way he had got into them; but he was most anxious to find out who it was that demanded admittance to the old shop in Fleet Street, with all its bad associations and character of terror; so he crept towards the door, and just as he reached it, the knock came again.

If the whole of his future hopes — we allude to the future that might be for him in this world only, for Todd had no hopes nor thoughts of another — had depended upon his preserving silence and stillness, he could not have done so, and he gave another start.

“Hush — hush!” he then said. “Hush! I must be very cautious now — very cautious, indeed. Hush — hush!”

He then, in a tone of voice that he strove to make as different as possible from his ordinary tone, and which he was very successful indeed in doing, he said —

“Who is there?”

“It’s me,” said a voice, in defiance of all probability or grammar. “It’s only me.”

“Oh! What a mercy,” said Todd.

“Open the door. Is it you, Joe? Why didn’t you come home, eh? You might have got away easy enough. I have brought you something good to eat, old fellow, and some news.”

“Ah, what news, my boy?”

“Why, they say that old Todd is in London.”

Todd fell to the floor in a sitting posture, and uttered a deep groan.

It was some few moments before he could summon strength and courage to speak to the man again. But he began to feel the necessity of doing something, for the man began to hammer away at the door, and the very worst thing that could happen to Todd, just then, would have been that man going away from the door of the shop with an impression that all was not right within it, and spreading an alarm to that effect.

"I will open the door just wide enough," muttered Todd, "and then I will drag him in and cut his throat, and throw him down into the cellar along with the two others. That will only make three this morning — yes, this morning, I may say, for it is morning now."

Acting upon this resolve, which certainly was diabolically to the purpose, Todd spoke to the man again, saying in the same assumed tone in which he had before addressed him —

"All's right — all's right. I'll open the door."

"That's the thing; but you seem to have a bad cold."

"So I have — so I have. A very bad cold; and it has affected my voice so that I can hardly speak at all."

"So I hear."

Todd slowly undid the fastenings of the door, and an infernal feeling of joy came over him at the idea of murdering this unhappy man likewise. It quite reconciled him to the danger in which he was, for he could not but know that the daylight was rapidly approaching, and that each moment increased his peril.

"Yes," he muttered, "he will make three this morning, three idiots who fancy they are a match for me; but I will soon convince them of the contrary, I will soon put him out of his pains and anxieties in this world. Ha! He shall be an independent man, for he shall have no wants, and that is true independence."

Todd drew the last bolt back that held the door.

"Come, Joe, are you coming?" said the man.

"Soon enough, my dear friend, soon enough," said Todd. "You will find me quite soon enough. Come in."

Todd felt quite certain that if the man caught but the slightest glance at him, it would be sufficient to convince him that it was not Joe, and, therefore, he only now opened the door wide enough to let him slip into the shop, and kept himself back partially behind it, so as to be, with the exception of one arm, quite out of sight.

The man hesitated.

"Come in," said Todd. "Come in."

"Why, what's the matter with you," said the man, "that makes you so mighty mysterious, eh? What is it, old fellow?"

"Oh, nothing. Come in."

The man stepped one foot across the threshold, and put his head in at the shop door.

"Come, now," he said. "None of your jokes, Joe. Where are you?"

Todd felt that that was a critical moment, and that if he failed to take advantage of it, the least thing would give the man the alarm, and he might draw back from the door altogether, and so stop him from executing that summary proceeding against him which he, Todd, thought essential to his interests.

"No, old fellow. There's no trick. Come in."

"Oh, but I — "

The man was drawing back his head, and Todd saw that the moment for action had come. Darting forward, he stretched out his right hand and caught the man by the throat, saying as he did so, in the voice of a demon —

"In, wretch — in, I say!"

The man's cravat came away in the hand of Todd, who rolled upon his back on the floor of the shop. The man finding himself free from the terrific grip that had been laid upon him, fled along Fleet Street, crying —

"Help — help! Thieves! — Murder! Todd! — Help! Fire! Murder — murder!"

Todd lay upon his back with the cravat in his hand, and so utterly confounded was he by this accident, that for a few moments he felt disposed to lie there and give up all further contest with that fate that never seemed weary of now persecuting him after the long course of successful iniquity he had been permitted to carry on.

He heard the loud cries of the man, and he knew that even at such an early hour how those cries would soon rouse sufficient assistance to be his destruction. He yet did not like to die without a struggle. Newgate, with its lonely cells, came up before his mind's eye, and then he pictured to himself the gibbet; and with a positive yell, partly of rage and partly of fear, he rose to his feet.

“What shall I do?” he said. “Dare I rush out now into Fleet Street, and by taking the other direction to that in which this man has gone, try to find safety?”

A moment’s thought convinced him of the great danger of that plan, and he gave it up. There remained then nothing but the mode of retreat through the church; and no longer hesitating, he took the light in his hand and dashed open the little door that communicated with the narrow stairs that would take him underneath the shop.

Before descending them he paused to listen, and he heard the cries and shouts of men afar off. He found that his foes were mustering in strong force to attack him; and clenching his double fist, he swore the most horrible oaths. This was a process that seemed to have some effect upon the spirits of Todd. The swearing acted as a kind of safety valve to his passion.

He descended the staircase, and when he reached the foot of it he paused again. The noise in the street was not so acute. It had sobered down to a confused murmur, and he felt that his danger was upon the increase. Shading the light with one hand, for there was a current of air blowing in the cellars and secret passages, he looked like some fiend or vampire seeking for some victim among the dead.

“They come,” he said. “They come. They think they have me at last. They come to drag me to death. Oh that I had but the power of heaping destruction upon them all, of submitting them all to some wretched and lingering death, I would do it! Curses on them — how I should revel in their misery and pain.”

He went on a few paces past the dead bodies of the two men, and then he paused again, for he could distinctly hear the trampling of feet upon the pavement near to the house; and then, before he could utter a word, there came such a thundering appeal to the knocker of the outer door, that he dropped his candle, and it was immediately extinguished in the start that he gave.

It was quite evident that his foes were now in earnest, and they were determined he should not escape them by any fault of theirs, for the knocking was continued with a vehemence enough to beat in the door; but so long as it did continue, it was a kind of signal that his enemies were upon the outside.

“I may escape them yet,” he said, tremblingly. “Oh, yes, who shall take upon them to say that I may not escape them yet? I can find my way in the dark well — quite well. I am sufficiently familiar with this place to do so.”

That was true enough; but yet, although Todd was, as he said, sufficiently familiar with the place to find his way through it in the dark, he could not make such good progress as when he had a lamp or a candle to guide him.

He heard a loud crash above.

“They have broken open the door,” he said, “but yet I am safe, for I have a wonderful start of them. I am safe yet, and I am well armed, too. I hold the lives of several in my hands. They will not be so fond, from their love of me, to throw away their lives. Ha! I shall beat them yet — I shall beat them yet.”

With his hands outstretched before him, so that he should not run against any obstacle, he took his way through the gloomy passages that led to the vaults beneath St. Dunstan’s church. The distance was not great, but his danger was; and yet such was his insatiable desire to know what was going on in his house, that he paused more than once again to listen.

From what he heard, he felt convinced that many persons had made their way into the shop and parlour, and he anticipated a thorough search of the house.

“Let them,” he said, “let them. There is nothing there now that it can interest me to keep secret — absolutely nothing. Let them search well in every room. It will give me the more time.”

He struggled on in the dark a little further, and then he suddenly paused. A thought had struck him.

“Oh, what a glorious thing,” he said, “if I could only now fire the old house, and so scorch some of those idiots, who are no doubt running from room to room full of mad delight at the opportunity to do so, and at the prospect that they may light upon me, and so share the money among them that is offered for my blood. It is a tempting thought.”

Todd felt in his pocket for the matches that had been supplied to him by his departed friend, Mr. Lupin, and he found that he had some of them left, although all the little bits of wax ends of candles were gone.

“A match will do as well as a torch to set fire to a house. I will chance it, for afterwards I shall most bitterly repent not having done so. Oh, yes, I will go back and chance it. I know how to do it; and if that Sir Richard Blunt, whom I yet hope to see in death, has not removed the materials I placed for the firing of the house, I can do it easily. Oh, that will be most capital! I think it will make me laugh again! Ha! — ha! yes, it will make me laugh again!”

He stood for the space of time of about two minutes in deep thought, with his hands compressed upon his brow; and then he muttered —

“Yes, there is no difficulty. If I can but reach the flooring of that cupboard beneath the parlour, it will do.”

He rapidly made up his mind to attempt this most perilous act of setting fire to his old house, after all; notwithstanding it was now to his knowledge filled with his enemies, and that his returning was a matter of the greatest danger to himself.

He crept back by the way he had gone, and soon reached the cellar again under his shop. That cellar ran partially under the parlour likewise; and it was upon that circumstance, well known to him, that Todd based his hopes of being able, with safety to himself, to fire the old house.

He shook a little as he reached the cellar underneath the shop. It was a natural thing that he should do so; for he knew that he was doing the very reverse of what impulse would have prompted him to do, namely, fly from his enemies. The mode of getting into that cellar might, for all he knew to the contrary, be found out at the most inopportune moment for him that could be conceived, and he might find himself surrounded almost at any moment by his foes.

No wonder Todd shook a little.

He quite forgot that the bodies of the two men were there — his two latest victims; and as he went crawling along with excessive care, the first thing he did, was to fall over them both, and measure his great length upon the floor of the cellar. It was quite astonishing how Todd controlled his temper, when he had any object in view which an ebullition of rage would have had the effect of jeopardising in any way. At another time, his oaths upon the occasion of such a fall would have been rather of the terrific order; but now he uttered not a word, but gathered himself up again with all the calmness and serenity of an ancient martyr, who feels that he is suffering for some great and good cause, dear to the interests of humanity.

Sweeney Todd, however, was very anxious to discover if in his fall he had made noise enough to alarm those who were above; but he was soon satisfied that such was not the case, and that the lower part of the house was quite deserted, while they had made their way to the upper, intent upon searching in all the rooms for him (Todd). Ah! They little knew the piece of obdurate cunning that they had pitted against them there!

"I shall do it! — I shall do it!" muttered Todd, "I shall easily do it. There is no one to prevent me. Ha! — Ha! I do believe that I shall smother some of them, before they can possibly find the means of getting downstairs. That would be quite a mercy of providence — oh, quite!"

CHAPTER CLIV

Todd Sets Fire to his House, and then Hides in the Church

Immediately beneath the parlour, where a portion of the cellar went, there was a quantity of old lumber. Perhaps if that lumber had been looked very carefully over, among it there might have been found some fragments of old, and some of new coffins from St. Dunstan's; for with the rich, who had vaults of their own, it was the arrogant fashion to adorn the last sad and narrow home of humanity with silver plates and nails; and Todd had despoiled the grave of some of those costly trappings.

Upon the heap of rubbish he scrambled, and that just enabled him comfortably to reach the floor of that parlour. That portion of the floor went under a cupboard in one corner, and in the floor of it three or four coarse round holes had been drilled with a centrebit. Todd had had his own motives for drilling those holes in the cupboard floor.

He now put his finger through one of the holes, and when he did so, he gave a chuckle of delight, for he was convinced that the contents of that cupboard had not been in any way interfered with; and that, as a consequence, he should find no difficulty in firing the house completely.

"So," he said, "this is the cleverness of your much vaunted Sir Richard Blunt. He has left a cupboard as crammed with combustible materials as it well can be, to the mercy of the first accident that may set fire to them; and now the accident has come. Ha!"

Again Todd listened attentively, and was still further satisfied that all was profoundly still in the parlour, although he heard the racket and the banging of doors in the upper part of the house.

"This is good," said Todd. "This is capital. All is well now. The fire will have made most excellent progress before they will discover it, and I will warrant that if once it takes a firm hold of the woodwork of this old house, it is not a trifle that will stop its roaring progress."

With this, Todd ignited one of his matches and thrust it alight through one of the holes in the floor of the cupboard.

A slight cracking noise ensued immediately.

"That will do," said Todd, and he withdrew the match and cast it upon the ground. The crackling noise continued. He turned and fled from the place with precipitation.

In the lower portion of that cupboard there was a quantity of hay, upon which oil and turpentine had been poured liberally. High up upon a shelf was a wooden bowl, with eight pounds of gunpowder in it, and Todd did not know a

moment when the flames might reach it, when a terrific explosion would be sure to ensue.

“It is done now,” he said. “It is done, and they do not know it. More revenge — more revenge! I shall have more revenge now, and there will be more death.”

He knew that there was only one thing that could by any possibility prevent the gunpowder in the wooden bowl from becoming speedily ignited, and that that would be in consequence of the hay being packed too close to do more than smoulder for a little time before bursting into a flame; but that it must and would do so eventually, there could be no possible doubt, and it was in that hearty conviction that Sweeney Todd now most fully gloried.

And now, as he had done before, he kept his arms outstretched before him to prevent him from injuring himself against any of the walls or the abrupt turnings in the passages between his own house and old St. Dunstan’s. He stooped, likewise, in order that he might not strike his head against the roof at in places where it was very low, and rough, and rugged.

Once only Todd got a little bewildered, and did not well know his way, and then he ignited one of the matches, and by its small light he saw in a moment which way he was to go.

“All is well,” he said, and he rushed on; but yet he began to be a little surprised that he heard no noise from the house — no sound of the explosion; and inclining his ear to the ground, he stopped in one of the old vaults to listen.

A low moaning sound came upon his ears like the muttering of distant thunder, and then a report as though some heavy piece of timber had fallen from a great height to the earth. He fancied that the vault in which he was shook a little, and in terror he rushed forward. The gunpowder had exploded in the cupboard, and Todd’s imagination was left to revel in the thought of the mischief which it had done to the house and to all within it.

In five minutes more he reached the foot of the little flight of stone steps that led to the church. All was profoundly dark still, as he thought; but he had not got up above six of those steps when he became conscious that the light of early dawn had already found its way through the windows of the church, and was making everything within it dimly visible. Todd recoiled at this. He and daylight were decidedly not upon good terms with each other by any means.

“It is morning — it is morning!” he exclaimed. “What will become of me now? It is light.”

He staggered right back into the vaults again, and there gave himself to painful thought for awhile; as he did so, he heard loud shouts in the streets — shouts that awakened echoes in the old church; and if anything could have given to Todd, at such a time as that, very great satisfaction, it was to hear that

those shouts were all commingled with the one prevailing cry of — “Fire — fire — fire!” That was a joy, indeed, to him.

“It burns — it burns!” he said; “but I am here a prisoner; I dare not go out into the daylight; but the old house, with all that it contains, is wrapped in flames, and that is much — much! It is now everything. Oh, that I could hear the cries of those who find themselves wrapped up in the unappeasable element, and have no means of escape! They would, indeed, be music to my ears.”

This state of mental exultation passed away very quickly, as it was sure to do, and gave place to the most lively fears for his own personal safety; for, after all, that was the great thing with Todd — at least it was while any portion of his deep revenges remained yet to be accomplished.

“What shall I do?” That was the question that he kept repeating to himself. “What shall I do?” He advanced now right up the steps into the body of the church. There, at least, he knew that he was safe for the present; and as he stood and listened, he thought that in the bustle and in the confusion that men’s minds were in regarding the fire, he might emerge from the church and no one notice him, and fairly get away without observation. If he only got a few streets off it would be sufficient, and he should be able to tell himself that he had indeed and in truth escaped.

With these thoughts and feelings, he approached the church door.

The nearer he got to the old doors of St. Dunstan, the more appallingly and distinctly there came upon his ears the cries and the shouts of the people who were hurrying to the fire, and he muttered to himself —

“Ah, it must be blazing briskly now — very briskly. It must be quite a sight to the whole of London to see the old den burning so bravely.”

An engine came rattling on, and with a roar and a crash went past the church door.

“Capital!” said Todd. “Upon my word this is capital!”

Another engine, with the horses at a mad gallop, went by, and Todd quite rubbed his hands at the idea of the scene of confusion that he had by his own unaided efforts succeed in making in old Fleet Street.

“They did not think,” he said, “when they closed the gates of the old prison upon me, and told me I should die, that there was one half the mischief in me yet that they now find there is. Ay, and there is much more yet, that they dream not of, but which they shall know some day.”

He laid his hand upon the lock of the church door. A long ray of the faint early gray light of dawn streamed through the massive keyhole, and at the

moment Todd laid his hand upon the lock that ray of light vanished. It was obstructed by some one on the outside. He recoiled several steps, and then from the outside he heard a voice say —

“Lor’ bless us, yes, it’s that old villain Todd’s house, gentlemen, in course. It’s come to a bad end, like its master will come to, if he hasn’t. When I saw the flames and heard ’em a-roaring, I said to my missus ‘Convulsions!’ says I, ‘if that ain’t Todd’s house in a blaze.’ ”

“You are right, Mr. Beadle,” said a voice in reply.

“Yes, gentlemen, perhaps I says it as oughtn’t to say it, but I is commonly right in my way, you know, gentlemen; and so, as I says, ‘Convulsions! It’s Todd’s house a-fire.’ ”

“And you think,” said another voice, “we shall get a good view of it from the old church tower?”

“Yes, gentlemen,” replied the beadle, whom the reader will not fail to recognise as our old acquaintance. “Yes, gentlemen. I’ll warrant as you will get a capital view from the top of the old tower, where I will take you. Lor’ a *mussy*, how it is a-roarin, that fire! I know’d it was Todd’s house, and I said to my missus, ‘Convulsions!’ says I, ‘that’s old villanous Todd’s house a-fire!’ ”

Todd ground his teeth together with rage as he listened to this; but he felt that if he would provide for his own safety, there was indeed now no time to lose, and he rapidly retreated into the body of the church.

His first thought was to hide himself in one of the pews, but the divisions between them were not so high as to prevent a person of very moderate height indeed from looking over one of them, and there was quite light enough now for any one in such a case to have seen him, if they had chosen to glance into the pew in which he might take shelter. The case was urgent, however, and he had not much time for thought, so being close to the pulpit he ran up its steps, opened the little door, and ensconced himself within it in a moment.

There, at all events, he felt that he was hidden securely from any merely casual observation.

The church door was opened almost before he could get the pulpit door shut; but he did manage to close it, and he was satisfied that he had done so without exciting the attention of those who were entering the church. Todd could, of course, from where he was, hear, with the greatest clearness and precision, every word that they said to each other, as they walked up the aisle.



Todd Sets Fire to his House, then hides Himself in St. Dunstan's Pulpit.

One of the persons who were coming with the beadle to view the fire from the tower of the church went on speaking to his companions.

“And so,” he said, “I think, if no one be hurt, and the fire can be kept just within the limits of Todd’s house, it will be no bad thing to have a place that is such a continual reminder of atrocious guilt, swept from the face of the earth.”

“Yes,” said the other, “the only pity is, that Sweeney Todd is not in it to go with it. Then the good thing would be complete.”

“It would, gentlemen,” said the beadle. “Oh, when you comes to think of what he did and what he might have done — Oh, it makes my hair stand o’ end, and my parochial blood curdle, to think of what he might have done, gentlemen.”

“He could not do worse than he did.”

“Not *wus*? not *wus*? Oh, — oh!”

“How is it possible? He committed a number of murders, and if you can find me anything worse he could have done, I shall indeed be very much surprised.”

“Gentlemen, he might have polished *me* off. That’s what he might have done, for he has actually had me hold of by the nose. Oh, convulsions! if I had only then thought that there was a chance of his polishing off, as he used to call it, a parochial authority, I should have — I should have — ”

“What, Mr. Beadle?”

“*Flewed* through the window, sir, that’s what I should have done, and told the world at large what had happened.”

“Well, certainly, that would have been something.”

“Everything,” said the other gentleman, in a tone of voice that showed how much he was inclined to enjoy a joke at the expense of the beadle. “It would have been everything. But how plain you can hear the roaring of the flames now, even in this church, with the door shut.”

“You can, indeed,” said the other. “Ah, there dashes past another engine. Come, Mr. Beadle, the sooner we get on this tower the better.”

“In a minute, gentlemen; but now as you is here arter the blessed old church has been shut up all night, I jest ask you to say if it has the *orrid* smell as it used to have, which offended the holy nose of the bishop when he came to confirm the people.”

“I smell nothing.”

“Nor I.”

“Very good; then that’s so far satisfactory. Cos you see, sirs, only yesterday Sir Christopher Wren and two gentlemen come and left in the church a pailful of chemists, for the express purpose of taking away the smell.”

“A what?”

“A pailful of chemists.”

“Of chemicals, you mean, I suppose, although that would be a singularly inappropriate term. But come on, Mr. Beadle, we are very anxious to get on the tower.”

“This way, gentlemen, if you pleases. This will lead you nicely and fairly up those little stairs and right on. Oh, what a world we does live in, to be sure!”

With this general philosophical remark, the beadle, opening a little door at the extremity of the south aisle, pushed his friends up a narrow staircase that led to the top of the tower of old St. Dunstan’s, and from which certainly a very good view of the surrounding streets and of the Temple could be obtained; and in the clear light of early morning, before the million fires in London were lighted, that view was seen to be a tolerably distinct one.

Todd muttered the bitterest maledictions upon them, as he heard them go up the little stairs.

There he was, certainly, to all appearance, safe enough; and he might, for all he knew, be safe enough until the next Sunday; but how was he to live in a pulpit even for the whole of a day? It might be that he would have to wait there until the dim shadows of the night should come again, and wrap up the whole church in gloom; but how many weary hours must pass before that time would

come, and what infinite danger there was, that he might drop into sleep after all his fatigues, and so forget his caution, and discover himself!

Already the great fatigues he had passed through, and the many hours he had been debarred from rest, began to tell upon him; and it was with difficulty that he kept himself from dropping into slumber. He began to get fearfully alarmed at his situation.

“What shall I do?” he said, “I must escape — escape! Yes. How the fire roars! I will not sleep. Oh, no — no! It is done now; the old house is gone — gone!”

Todd fell fast asleep in the pulpit.

CHAPTER CLV
Shifts the Scene to One of Quiet Goodness and Serenity

The necessities of our story force us for a short space of time to leave Sweeney Todd in the pulpit of St. Dunstan's Church, and his house in process of demolition by fire, while we take the reader back again to Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, where the Ingestries resided in such loving and pleasant union.

The communication that Sir Richard Blunt had made to them, had had the effect of disturbing the serenity of Mark Ingestrie to a much greater extent than he would have liked to admit, or than he was at all likely to let Johanna know.

She, too, the fair and gentle Johanna, felt an acute pang as she thought on the stern, revengeful character of Todd; and began to fancy, that if he wished to work her any woe, he would take a means of doing so which would touch her much more severely than as if he aimed at her own life, by attacking that of her husband, to whom, after so many perils, she was at length so very happily united.

"Oh, Mark," she said, "you will, you must promise me that you will depart at once from here."

"We will be gone directly, Johanna. But who have we here? Why, there is an arrival already. I will go and see who it is. It is some one in a coach."

"Oh, no — no, Mark, do not go."

"Not go?"

"No. You do not know but it may be some horrible scheme of that fiend in the shape of man, Todd, to lure you to the door, and kill you. I am full of fears, Mark, and cannot bear to let you go from my sight a moment."

"Oh, Johanna, this is unlike you, indeed. There now, look from the window, dear, and you will soon see how little you have to fear. Why, it's your father and your mother. Do you not see them, or does your tears, and your fears together, blind you?"

"A little of both, Mark," said Johanna, with a faint smile; "but I see that my dear father is there, and my mother, too. I will fly to welcome them. They have heard of the escape of Todd, and cannot endure to have us out of their sight."

As Johanna spoke, she hurried to the door to receive Mr. and Mrs. Oakley. The old man caught her in his arms, as he said —

"Oh, my own dear child! Thank God I see you safe again!"

"Safe, father?"

"Yes, my darling. You know that dreadful man? — That — that — oh, I don't know what to call — "

"The horrid Todd," put in Mrs. Oakley, as she kissed Johanna. "He has escaped, my dear, from Newgate; but, of course, Sir Richard Blunt has been here to tell you, as he said he would; so you know all about it."

"Oh, yes — yes. Come in; I am so glad you have come."

"And so am I," said Mark Ingestrie, making his appearance in the hall; "for here is Johanna starting at every little noise, and I do believe if a mouse were now to run across the floor she would fancy that it was that old rascal, Sweeney Todd."

"Ah! But, my dear boy," said Mr. Oakley; "you really don't seem to have any idea of what a dreadful man he is — you don't, indeed."

"I don't care either, father; but I only wish one thing, and that is, that he would be so good as to trust himself, for about half a minute, within arm's length of me, that's all."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Mrs. Oakley. "My dear son, you don't know he used to — to — what did he call it, Johanna?"

"Polish people off, ma."

"Ah, to be sure."

"Well, it's no use talking," said Mark; "but if ever I get hold of him, I'll polish him off to some purpose. But you have just come in time for me to say a very serious thing to you, mother, indeed."

"Oh, what is it?" cried Mrs. Oakley.

"Don't agitate us," said old Mr. Oakley, putting on his spectacles upsidedown. "Don't agitate us, my boy, but tell us at once what the dreadful thing is."

"Why, pa," said Johanna, "Mark did not say it was a dreadful thing he was going to say."

"Well, then, my dear, what is it?"

"Ah, that, indeed, I don't know; but I would wager — yes, I would wager anything, that it is something not dreadful at all. Come, Mark, what is it? — Speak out."

"Then, it's just this," said Mark. "We are going out of London, and I want you both to come with us, for I know very well if you don't, that you will be as

miserable as possible, thinking of Johanna, and that Johanna will be in much the same state thinking of you, and that you will dream every night of Todd."

The old couple looked at each other with surprise and gratification. Mr. Oakley took off his spectacles, and said —

"My dear boy, do you know, I was just going to say that — that —".

"That, in fact," put in Mrs. Oakley, "we would be glad to go with you, if you would let us, for Sir Richard said he would advise you both to go out of London, and leave him to find out and hang Todd at his leisure, you know."

"Yes, that was it," said the old man. "That was the very thing that brought us over here, my dears; so if you will only be so good —".

"Come, come," said Mark, "it is, you must be so good. I asked you first, you know, so you do us the favour. Is not that it, Johanna? Of course it is."

"You are very, very good and kind, Mark."

"Oh, stuff! Not at all; I say what I like, that's all, and when I say that it would please me mightily to have your father and mother with us, Johanna, where we are going, I mean it from my heart, as you know well."

"I know you do, Mark. And poor Tobias, father, is to be with us likewise. You have heard all about poor Tobias?"

"Oh, yes — yes."

"Well, then, Sir Richard Blunt told us that it would be the death of the poor lad if he should be in London and hear that Todd has escaped from Newgate. So we gladly agreed to take him with us, for he — more than any one — has suffered deeply from Todd's wickedness."

"Hilloa!" cried Mark, as he glanced from the window. "If here is not another coach at the door!"

"Oh, who is it?" said Mrs. Oakley. "It's Todd, of course, come to kill us all!"

"I hope it is," said Mark. "I'll soon set you all at rest about him. But only look! If it ain't the colonel, and Arabella, and Tobias. Well, if Todd wants to be down upon us all at once, now is his time certainly to do so."

In a few moments, the colonel and Arabella were shown into the room, and they were quite surprised to see the Oakleys there; but while Johanna and Arabella were embracing each other, Mark Ingestrie went up to the colonel, and pointing slightly to Tobias, he whispered —

"Does he know?"

“Oh, no — no.”

“Very good; but he had better, I am convinced, for it will be sure to slip out in conversation, some time or another, and then the poor lad will think much more of it than as if it were told to him in a quiet manner by his friends, for he will think that there is more to conceal than there really is. I am convinced that such will be the case.”

“Then we will take an opportunity of telling him, but not just now. I want to speak to Johanna.”

“There she is, then.”

“And what does he want to say to me?” said Johanna, as she shook hands with the colonel.

“Why, a — the fact is that — that, in fact, Sir Richard told me he would advise you to go out of town; and as I am pretty well aware that you set sufficient store by his advice to follow it, I think it is very likely you will go out of town.”

“And so, dear,” put in Arabella, “and so, dear, in a word, we want to go with you, if you think that such an arrangement will not be disagreeable to you.”

“Now, that is the unkindest thing you have said, Arabella, for a long time. How could you suppose that it would be other than most agreeable to me to have with us such valued friends?”

“There, I told you that,” said the colonel. “Of course it will be all right, and we shall make quite a merry party, I’ll be bound; so that’s as good as settled, and a very satisfactory thing it is, and the sooner we all set off the better. Here’s Tobias quite delighted with the idea of his little excursion.”

“Ah, yes,” said Tobias, “and it is so kind and good of you, colonel, and of all of you; but you know I leave my heart in London still, let me go where I may.”

“Never mind, Tobias,” said Johanna. “I feel quite sure that you will find it in good keeping when you do come back again; so now we will make preparations at once for departure, and I hope we shall be quite delighted with where we are going. It is one of the pleasantest places, they tell me, on the coast, and will in time be a place of great importance.”

“Well,” said the colonel, with a laugh, “it’s quite a pleasant thing to hear that it is on the coast, for that is something towards a knowledge of where it is.”

“Ah, my dear — By-the-by,” said Mrs. Oakley, “I should like to know where you really intend to take us all.”

“To the little fishing village of Brighthelmstone, for it is nothing more; but then it lies pleasantly between the hills, and you can see the Channel opening fairly before you, and there is an air upon the Downs that is full of life and joy. You will be sure to like it, mother, and so will you, father, and you, colonel, and you, my dear Arabella.”

“You don’t mention me,” said Mark.

“Oh, that is because you know you are of no sort of consequence at all. You are nobody.”

“Thank you!”

“Well now, my dears,” said Mrs. Oakley, “don’t begin to quarrel now, I beg of you, for that is the worst thing you can do; and so long as we get out of the way of having all our throats cut by that horrid Todd, I don’t care where I go to or how many inconveniences I put up with, so long as it is a great way off; and I do hope that Sir Richard will soon catch him again, and regularly hang him, as he deserves, the wretch, that I do.”

A complete silence followed the utterance of the indiscreet speech of Mrs. Oakley’s, which, if it did not at once open the eyes of poor Tobias to the real reason of the sudden journey, nothing would. All eyes were bent upon the lad; and rising from the seat which Johanna had made him take, he looked about him with dismay.

“Oh, tell me, some one,” he then said, “what does it all really mean? Believe me, my kind and dear friends, that I shall suffer less from the truth than as if I were left to make myself mad by thought. Oh, tell me all!”

“You shall know all,” said the colonel.

“Oh, mother — mother,” said Johanna. “Why did you —”

Mrs. Oakley sat looking the picture of dismay, and Colonel Jeffrey added —

“This is an accident that I don’t think is to be much lamented. Tobias must have known at some time, and it is better that he should know now that he is surrounded by his friends. Give me your hand, Tobias. You see that I smile, so it cannot be of great moment after all.”

“Oh, tell me — tell me!”

“I will. Todd has made his escape from Newgate, that is all; but he is friendless and penniless, and it will be quite impossible that he can remain many days at large, as Sir Richard Blunt is already upon his track. Let me beg of you not to be in the least alarmed at this intelligence. It ought not to alarm you. Todd will have too much to do to look after his own affairs to enable him to give a thought to anybody else.”

“You will save me?” said Tobias.

“I will. We will all stand between you and any harm; but, I repeat, I do not apprehend any danger to you.”

They all spoke to Tobias cheerfully, and in the course of half an hour they got him into quite a different state of mind; and then, as he was to form one of the party, it was quite a relief to them all that they did not feel compelled to keep a guard upon their tongues in his presence. In the evening of that day they were all at Brighton.



Johanna and Company leave Chelsea to avoid the Vengeance of Todd.

CHAPTER CLVI

Todd has some Further Adventure in Fleet Street

We left Todd in the pulpit of St. Dunstan's Church, while his old house was rapidly burning down. A perilous position for Todd!

Perhaps, if he had courage sufficient to have made the attempt, he might have escaped at several junctures, but the dread of the consequences of capture was so strong in his heart and brain, that while he felt that he was undiscovered in the pulpit, he preferred remaining there to making any precipitate means of escape.

It will be remembered how the beadle had taken up several gentlemen to the roof of the church, in order that they might get a good view of the fire; and it was during that time that Todd thought of escaping, but the rapid approach of daylight daunted him.

"Oh, that I had remained in the wood at Hampstead, or anywhere but here in London, where the hands of all men are raised against me! Oh, I was mad — mad to come here. But I am not quite lost. If I thought that, my senses would go from me this moment. Oh, no — no, I will be calm now again; I will not believe that I am quite lost yet."

Of a truth, Todd felt that if he really gave up in despair, that he might commit some extravagance which would at once draw down upon him his enemies; and there he lay in the pulpit, his gaunt form huddled up so as completely to hide himself in it, and dreading to stay as much almost as he dreaded to leave.

He heard still the loud shouts of people at the fire, and at times he thought he heard even the flames that were rapidly consuming the old den of iniquity in which he had committed so many crimes. The regular clank, clank, too, of the engine pumps came upon his ears, and he muttered —

"No, no, you may try your hardest, but you will not subdue that fire. It will blaze on in spite of you. You will not — you cannot, I say, subdue it. The house is too well prepared. I had a care for that before I left home. It will burn to the very ground — ay, and below the ground, too; and the spot of earth only will remain that held the foundation of my old house. Would that all whom I hate were at this moment writhing in the flames! Then I might feel some sort of satisfaction with myself, and even this place of peril would be for the time quite tolerable to me."

No doubt it would have been a vast satisfaction to Todd to have all that he hated in the flames of his burning house; but as yet he could only tell himself that the puny vengeance he had achieved had been upon the most inferior tools of those who had wreaked his ruin, while the principals remained untouched and most completely unscathed.

What had he yet done to Sir Richard Blunt? What to Tobias? What to Johanna? What even to the dog that had played no inconsiderable a part in his final conviction of the murder of its master? Little, indeed; and the thought that his revenges were all to do, scared his imagination, and filled him full of rage as well as terror.

He heard the sound of the footsteps of the people who had gone to the roof of the church with the beadle to see the fire, coming down again, and he shrunk still closer into the bottom of the pulpit.

“Oh,” he said, “if they could but for one moment guess that I was here, what joy it would give them to drag me forth to the light of day! To once again cast me into the condemned one’s cell, and then to hoot me to the gallows! But, no — no; I will not die a felon’s death. Rather by my own hands will I fall, if my fortune should reach such a wretched extremity. Hush! — oh, hush! Why do I speak? They come — they come.”

“Well, gentlemen, as you say, the old house is gone at last,” said the beadle, “and I must say, though fires always gives me a turn, and, as a parish authority perhaps I ought not to say it, I think it is a very good job.”

“A good job, Mr. Beadle?” said one. “How do you make that out?”

“Why, sir, who would have lived in it? Who would have paid rent, and rates, and taxes, and given his Christmas box to the beadle like a Christian, in Todd’s old house, I should like to know?”

“Well, you are right there.”

“I know I is, sir. The fact is, that house would have been like a great blot, sirs, in the middle of Fleet Street; no one would have taken it for love or money; and it a very good thing as it’s gone at last.”

“You reason the matter very well, Mr. Beadle,” said another, “and I for a certainty subscribe to your opinion, that it is a good thing it is gone at last, and I only hope that its late owner will soon be in the hands of justice. Somebody is trying the door of the church.”

The beadle went to it, and upon opening it two persons entered the church. One of them spoke at once, saying —

“Is the beadle of St. Dunstan’s in the church?”

Todd knew the voice. It was Sir Richard Blunt, and he shook so that the pulpit creaked again most ominously, so that if the attention of any one had chanced to be directed towards it, they might have felt a kind of suspicion that it was occupied. Luckily for Todd, no one looked up, nor in any way noticed the pulpit.

“Lor’, sir, yes,” said the beadle. “Here I is, and if I don’t make a great mistake, sir, you is Sir Richard Blunt.”

“I am.”

“Lor’ bless you, sir, that’s the way with me. If I sees a *indiwidal* once, and knows ’em, I knows ’em again.”

“It’s a capital faculty, Mr. Beadle. But my friend, Mr. Crotchet, here, will just go down with you through the vaults to make sure that the fire in Todd’s house has in no way connected with this. We don’t want to burn down the church.”

“Burn down the church, sir? Oh, convulsions! Me go down into the vaults with this gentleman? Bless you, sir, I should only *obstructify* him in the discharge of his duty. I couldn’t think of doing it, I assure you, sir. He can go by himself, you see, and then he will have the advantage of nobody to contradict him.”

“I’d rather go without him, Sir Richard,” said Crotchet, who was the gentleman. “He’s only a idiot!”

The beadle marched up to Crotchet, until he got within about two inches of that gentleman’s nose, and then slowly shaking his head to and fro, he said —

“Did you call me a *hidiot*?”

“Yes, I did.”

“You did? Now, young man, mind what you say, because if you call me a hidiot, I shall be bound to do —”

“What?”

“Nothing at all. I see you are rather a low fellow, so I shall treat you with the same contempt as I did the very common person that pulled my nose last week — Silent contempt! That’s how I serve people. I despise you, accordingly.”

“Werry good,” said Crotchet. “That’s by far the safestest way, old feller. So now I’ll go down into the vaults.”

“No news of Todd yet, Sir Richard?” said one of the gentlemen, walking up to the magistrate.

“Oh, Sir Christopher Wren, I beg your pardon,” said the magistrate. “I did not see you at the moment. I am sorry to say that although we have some news of Todd, we have not yet been able to catch him. But we must have him, England is not so very large a place after all, and I don’t think he has any means of getting away from it.”

"The sooner the rascal expiates his crimes upon the scaffold the better. I never before heard of a criminal in whose whole career there was nothing found that could excite the faintest feeling of compassion."

"He is a desperate bad fellow, indeed," said Sir Richard Blunt, "but I hope that he will not long trouble society. I have determined to give up all other pursuits until I take him, and I have a *carte blanche* from the Secretary of State to go to any expense, and to do what I please, in the way of capturing him."

Todd's heart sunk within him at these words. Had they come from any one else, he would not have heeded them much but from him they were of fearful import.

"Oh, that I could kill that man," he muttered, "then I should know some peace; but while he lives and while I live, we are like two planets in one orbit, and cannot long exist together."

"I wish you every success," said Sir Christopher Wren.

"I am obliged to you, Sir Christopher. The fact is, that Todd left his house pretty full of combustibles, and my men were unwise enough, contrary to my positive orders, to let them be there; and I am afraid that he may have contrived some mode of blowing up the church by a train or some other equally diabolical means, as he had such free and unrestrained access to it for so long."

"What!" cried the beadle. "What did you say, Sir Richard?"

"I merely said that I was apprehensive Todd might have concocted some means of blowing up the church, that is all."

"And me in it! And me in it! Convulsions!"

The beadle did not pause for another moment, but rushing to the door, he flew out of the church as if a barrel of gunpowder had been rolling after him, nor did he stop until he got right through Temple Bar and some distance down the Strand.

"I am afraid I have frightened away our friend, the beadle," said Sir Richard Blunt.

"And I don't wonder at it," replied Sir Christopher Wren. "I should not like exactly to be blown up along with the fragments of old St. Dunstan's Church myself, so I will go."

"Ah, I am sorry I mentioned it."

"Are you though? I am very much obliged to you for so doing. Excuse me, Sir Richard, for bidding you good morning rather abruptly, if you please."

Sir Richard Blunt laughed as he bade Sir Christopher and his friend good morning — by-the-by, the friend had already made his way outside the church door, and was waiting for Sir Christopher in no small degree of trepidation.

“For God’s sake,” he said, “come along at once, or we may all be blown up together.”

“Well,” said Sir Richard Blunt, as he paced up the aisle of the old church, “I would risk a little scorching, if at the end of it I could only lay my hand upon the shoulder of Sweeney Todd. What on earth can have become of the rascal? But I must be patient — yes, patience will do it, for that we shall come face to face again, I feel to be as established a fact for the future, as that of my own existence now.”

“Oh,” thought Todd, “if I now only dared to shoot him! If I only dared do it! And I would if it were not for the other one in the vaults — that wretch they call Crotchet. And yet I have a pistol here. If I thought that after shooting him through the head or through the heart, I could by one bold rush get out of this church, what a glorious piece of work it would be! This Sir Richard Blunt is the only man that I dread. Were he no more, I should feel completely at peace. I could shoot him now.”

Todd took a pistol from his pocket and presented it through the little crevice of the very slightly open door of the pulpit. The door would open a little in spite of him.

“Yes, oh, yes, I could shoot him now; but the report of the pistol would perhaps bring that other villain they call Crotchet from the vaults, and then who shall say what would happen? And yet I have another pistol, and could shoot him too. Oh, how glorious, if I could take the lives of both these men! It would indeed be a good work.”

The magistrate paced to and fro waiting for Crotchet, and little suspecting that Todd was so near to him, and with a pistol aimed at him! If he had only guessed as much, he would have freely risked the shot, and would soon have been in the pulpit along with Todd. But it was not to be. Sir Richard Blunt had not any supernatural power by which he could tell of the proximity of Todd from no evidence of that fact at all.

“Yes,” said Todd suddenly, “I will shoot him. I will risk all and shoot him now. If I die for it, I shall have, at least, had a great and glorious revenge! I will shoot him now, when he turns and walks up the aisle again.”

Todd felt calm and pleased now that he had actually made up his mind to shoot Sir Richard. He projected the barrel of the pistol about an inch or so through the crevice caused by the spring of the door, and he calmly waited for the opportunity of sending its deadly contents into the heart of the magistrate.

The aisle down which Sir Richard had slowly paced was rather a long one, and he had walked down it some half dozen times, in deep thought, and waiting for Crotchet. There was no reason on earth why he should not come up it again, and so expose himself to the deadly aim of Todd.

He did commence the walk up it. If he had taken twenty steps he would have been a dead man; but chance, or providence — it is not for us to say which — had it otherwise. After going about ten paces, he turned abruptly to the left, and made his way down a long narrow passage between the pews to the opening that led down to the vaults, where Crotchet was pursuing his inquiries.

Todd was foiled.

He drew back with a deep sigh.

“He is saved!” he said. “He is saved! It is not to be!”

Quite unconscious of the serious danger he had so narrowly escaped, Sir Richard went to the mouth of the opening to the vaults, and called out —

“Crotchet! Crotchet!”

“Here you is, sir,” replied Crotchet; “I was just coming. It’s all right. The old wagabone hasn’t done nothing, sir, to spread the fire out of his own blessed premises, as I can see. The church isn’t in danger, sir, I take it.”

“Very good, Crotchet; then we need not remain here any longer. I cannot, for the life of me, think what has become of our man that we left in Todd’s house. In all the riot and racket of the fire, no one seems to be at all aware of what has become of him. Is he a steady sort of a man, Crotchet?”

“Why yes, Sir Richard, he is. But if the truth must be told, he has got the fault of many. He is fond of the — ”

Here Crotchet went through expressively the pantomime of placing a glass to his lips and draining it off, after which he rubbed his stomach, as much as to say — “Isn’t it nice!”

“I understand, Crotchet: he drinks.”

“Rather, Sir Richard.”

“Ah, that is the case of all — or of nearly all — men in his class of life. I should not wonder now, at all, if he has not been taking a glass of something, in consequence of feeling lonely, and so set fire to the old house.”

CHAPTER CLVII

Todd Astonishes the Beadle, and Escapes from St. Dunstons

“Oh!” groaned Todd to himself. “Oh, if I had but shot the villain before the other one came up from the vaults, and all would have been well; but I cannot shoot them both at once. It is not often that I lose anything by procrastination, but I have now — Oh, yes, I have now! It is maddening! — It is quite maddening! and I could find in my own heart almost to turn this pistol against my own life, only that I hope yet to live a little while for vengeance.”

A smart tap came against the church door.

“Open the door, Crotchet,” said Sir Richard. “We are alone in the church now, for the beadle was too careful of himself to remain after he found that there was some little danger.”

“Oh, sir,” said Crotchet, with an expression of disgust in his face, “beadles is humbugs, sir; and this beadle of St. Dunstan’s is the very worst of the worst of beadles. Didn’t you notice, sir, what an old humbug he was before, when we was a-coming here on the hunt about Todd and that beautiful creature Mrs. Lovett? Then, sir, we found out what sort of a beadle that was. I rather think I despises beadles, sir; I does, your worship.”

Tap came the knock at the church door again.

“You forget, Crotchet,” said Sir Richard, pointing to the door.

“Lor’, yer worship, so I did. I begs his blessed pardon whosomever it is. Come in. There’s nobody but the right sort here, whoever it is. Hilloa! it’s our friend, Green.”

“Ah, Green, are you looking for me?” said Sir Richard.

“I was, sir.”

“Then you have news. What is it?”

“Todd is in the neighbourhood, sir, or was an hour or two ago, I am well assured.”

“Todd?”

“Yes, sir. He was in his own house. A man came to the door of it to see the person minding it, and the door was opened a little way, and Todd tried to pull him in, and would have pulled him in, but his neckcloth gave way, and then the fire broke out directly after. The man has been in too great a fright till just a little while ago to venture into the street again.”

"You have seen him?"

"I have, sir."

"Bring him here, Green."

Green immediately left the church, and Mr. Crotchet set up a long and melancholy whistle.

"In my heart I thought this might be," said Sir Richard, "and yet having no evidence to justify the suggestion of my fancy, I did not like to nurse the idea. Todd in this neighbourhood — Todd in his own house! Oh, what a chance!"

"Your worship," said Crotchet, shaking his head and speaking slowly, with an appearance of great wisdom. "Your worship, it's mostly always the case. There's a special providence that always brings back folks as has done a murder back again to the place where they has done it; and the next time I'm on the lay for a cove as has done a slaughtering job, I shall sit myself down, yer worship, in the room where he did it and wait for him. It's a special thing of Providence, it is, sir, I feel as sure as though I did it myself, as isn't Providence at all, but just Crotchet, and no sort of mistake."

"You are right, Crotchet, as far as examples go. We will only just listen to what this man that Green has gone for has got to say, and then we will be off and do our best."

"Yes, yer worship, we will; and here he is."

Green, the officer, now brought into the church the very man with whom Todd had had the little adventure at the door of his shop; and notwithstanding the time that had elapsed since that little incident, the man was still in a state of terror, which was quite manifest in every feature of his face.

"Why, what's the matter with you?" said Crotchet, as he dealt the man a blow on the back that nearly took all his breath away. "You look as scared as if you had just seen a ghost, old fellow, that you do."

"It was worse than a ghost."

Sir Richard Blunt stepped up to the man, and said —

"Do you know me? I am Sir Richard Blunt the magistrate."

"Oh, yes, sir, I know you."

"Answer me then, clearly and distinctly, for much may depend upon it. Who was it opened the door of Todd's house for you, and strove, as I hear, to drag you into it?"

“Sweeney Todd, sir.”

“Are you quite sure? Do you know him well by sight?”

“Oh, yes, sir, I could swear it.”

“And you thought it very natural that he should be there, and if anybody there had so laid hold of you in the dark, you would, of course, at once have naturally concluded that it must be Todd?”

“Oh, dear no, sir, I hadn’t an idea that it could be him, sir; and if I hadn’t seen his face, that I know quite well, I couldn’t possibly have believed it to be him.”

“That is enough. I will not trouble you any further. I am much obliged to you for your information.”

“You are very welcome, Sir Richard; and I do hope you may catch the rascal soon. I shall never forget his having hold of me, for the longest day I have to live.”

Still shaking at the bare remembrance of the danger that he had run, the man left the church; and peeping over his shoulder every now and then as he went, for fear Todd should be close at hand, he took his route to quite a different quarter of the town, where he fancied he should feel more secure; for he could not make up his mind to anything but that Todd must have some special desire to lay hold of him, and add him to the already formidable muster roll of his victims.

When he left the church, Sir Richard Blunt turned to Crotchet, and said —

“Crotchet, you may depend, now, that Todd is in London, and fancies that among its crowds will be his greatest chance of safety. I will take measures at once to discover him. Come along with me to Craven Street, and you too, Green, and I will explain to you both what I think will be the best plan to adopt.”

“All’s right, sir; we’ll have him,” said Crotchet.

“I think we shall,” said Green, “for, large as London is, I rather think we know how to search it as well as most folks. I attend you, sir, and I will run any risk in the world to take the scoundrel prisoner.”

“And so will I,” said Crotchet.

“I know you both well,” said Sir Richard, “and I cannot desire to be aided by better men than you both are. Come on. I will not speak further of any plans or projects except in my own office, where I know that there are no spies or eavesdroppers.”

"This blessed church is pretty safe," said Crotchet. "It ain't very likely that anybody is on the listening lay in it. It would be rather cold work, I take it. But, howsomedever, there's nothing like being on the right side of the hedge, and in one's own crib, that one knows all the ins and all the outs of, after all."

They both followed Sir Richard Blunt from the church, and Todd felt that he was once again alone within that sacred edifice, the very atmosphere of which was profaned by the presence of such a wretch, so loaded with crimes as he was.

"Gone," said Todd, looking up put of the pulpit, "and may all —"

We cannot repeat the maledictions of Todd. They were additionally awful, spoken in such a building, and from such a place in that building. It was dreadful that the roof of a place reared to the worship of God, should be desecrated by the raving curses of such a man as Todd.

He was silent after he had satisfied his first ebullition of rage, and then he was afraid that he had gone too far, and endangered his safety by making an appearance at all above the level of the pulpit, or by speaking. How did he know but that Sir Richard Blunt might, after all, have some sort of suspicion that he was not far off, and be listening close at hand?

As this supposition, wild and vague as it was, and quite unsupported by any evidence, found a home in the brain of Todd, the perspiration of intense fear broke out upon his brow, and again he shook to the extent of making the old pulpit creak dreadfully.

"Oh, hush! Hush!" he moaned. "Be still — be still. I am safe yet. There is no one here. I am safe, surely. There is no one in the church. Why do I suffer more, much more, from what does not happen, than from what does?"

Still the notion clung to him for a little while, and he remained at the bottom of the pulpit quite needlessly for the next half hour, listening with all his might, in order to detect the slightest noise that might be indicative of the presence of a foe. But all was as still as the grave, and by slow degrees Sweeney Todd got more assured.

"I breathe again," he said. "They do not suspect that I am here. It is much too unlikely a place for them to dream of for a moment. Even Sir Richard Blunt, with his utmost prescience, does not think of looking for me in the pulpit of St. Dunstan's Church. I am safe — I am safe for the present."

He agreed with this feeling that he was quite alone in the church, and he was right. He looked over the edge of the pulpit. How still and solemn the place looked!

The morning had advanced quite sufficiently now to shed a dim light into the church, and the noise in the street contingent upon the fire had nearly passed

away. The fact was, that the firemen had, after making a few efforts and finding them of no use, let Todd's house burn to the ground, and turned all their efforts towards saving the edifices on either side. In that object they were successful, so that the conflagration was over, and nothing remained but the frail wall of Todd's house.

And so the clank of the engine pumps no longer sounded in his ears, but he could yet be certain that there was a great crowd in Fleet Street, for he heard the hum of voices, and occasionally the trouble that ensued when a vehicle tried to force its way through the dense mass of people that blocked up the thoroughfare, which at the best of times was none of the clearest.

"Is there a chance now of escape," said Todd, "if I could only make up my mind to it? I do not forget that I am disguised — I ought not to forget that. Who will know me? and yet that man knew me — that man that I missed killing at the old place. Yes, he knew me. He said he could swear to me. Confound him! I wish I could have sworn to his dead body. I wonder if they have left the church door open, or, rather, only upon the latch? I — I will descend from here, and make a bold attempt."

He opened the pulpit door, and had got about three steps down the little ornamental flight of winding stairs that led from the pulpit to the body of the building, when the church door was suddenly opened, and he fled back with a precipitation that made some noise, when he might have done so in perfect quietness, for it was not very likely that any one would have looked up to the pulpit immediately upon their entrance to the building.

A glance towards the door convinced Mr. Todd that it was the beadle.

"Oh, dear, I thought I heard something," said the beadle, as he closed the door after him. "But I suppose it was only fancy, after all. Now they say that all the fire is out, and that it is quite impossible for the church to be blowed up, I suppose I may come in without any danger. Lor' bless us, that Sir Richard Blunt, I do believe, would think no more of blowing up a beadle, than he would of eating a penny bun, that's my opinion of him."

"Curses on your head!" muttered Todd.

"Bless me, what a world we live in," said the beadle.

"Wretch — beast," muttered Todd; "what does he want here at this time of day?"

"Yes, tomorrow's Sunday," said the beadle, as if pursuing a train of thought that had found a home in his brain. "How the weeks do run round, to be sure, and one Sunday comes after another at such a rate, that it seems as if there was weeks and weeks and weeks of 'em, without any of the other days at all. I wish I hadn't to come here."

Todd uttered faintly some dreadful imprecations, and the beadle continued talking to himself to keep his courage up, as was evident from his nervous and fidgety manner.

“Ah, dear, me. Convulsions! I tried to persuade my wife to come and dust the communion table and the pulpit cushions for tomorrow, but she politely declined; she needn’t have thrown the bellows at my head though, for all that.”

“Dust the pulpit cushions!” thought Todd. “The wretch is coming up here! I shall have to cut his throat, and leave him at the bottom of the pulpit for the parson to tread upon the first thing he does tomorrow, upon coming up here to preach.”

As Todd spoke, he took a clasped knife out of his pocket, and opened it with his teeth. “Oh, yes, my old friend, I shall, I see, be under the painful necessity of cutting your throat, that I shall, and I shall not hesitate about it at all.”

“Yes,” added the beadle, “I mean to say that to throw the bellows at the man is like adding insult to injury, for it is blowing him up in a kind of way that’s anything but agreeable. Lor’, how cold and rum the church does feel. Rum? Why did I say rum and put myself in mind of it? Oh, don’t I like it, rather! If I only now had a glass of real fine old Jamaica rum at this moment, I’d be as happy as a bishop.”

“Oh, I’ll rum you!” growled Todd.

“Eh? Eh?”

The beadle turned round three times, as though he were going to begin a game at blind man’s buff, and then he said —

“I thought I heard something. Oh dear, how shivery I do get to be sure, when I’m alone in the church. I’ll just get through the dusting job as quick as I can, and no mistake. Amen! Amen! I’m a miserable sinner — Amen!”

CHAPTER CLVIII
Details the Perilous Situation of the Beadle

Todd had heard all this with anger and impatience rankling at his heart. He began to have the most serious thoughts of sacrificing the beadle — indeed, if any good could have been got to himself by so doing, he would not have scrupled to do so with the greatest speed. As it was, however, he could not concoct any plan of proceedings quickly which would benefit him, and so he was compelled to remain an auditor of the beadle's private thoughts, and a spectator of what he was about, when he chose to peep over the edge of the pulpit.

"Well, it's astonishing," continued the beadle, "what a fever that fellow Todd has kept me in for I don't know how long, one way or another: me and Fleet Street have been regularly bothered by him. First of all, I was in all sorts of doubts and uncertainties about the matter before they took him and tried him, and was agoing to hang him, and then I did think that he was as — good — as done — for —".

As he uttered these last words, the beadle was banging one of the cushions of the communion table, so that he was compelled for want of breath to utter them at intervals.

"Oh, confound you!" muttered Todd, "if I only had hold of you, I would throttle you, and then think of what to do afterwards."

Todd's great difficulty arose from the fact that he thought if he tried to descend from the pulpit, the beadle might see him and get the start of him in leaving the church, in which event the alarm that he would raise in Fleet Street would be such, that any attempt to escape would be attended by the greatest hazard.

"There is nothing for it but to wait," said Todd to himself gloomily. "I can do nothing else; but woe to him when I do catch him!"

"This dusting job on a Saturday," said the beadle, "does seem to me to be one of the most disagreeable of all that has to be done with the church. I don't mind one's duty on a Sunday, but this is horrid. On a Sunday there's lots of people, and the old place has a sort of cheerful look about it, but now I don't like it, and I've a good mind to get one of the charity boys of the blessed parish to keep me company."

"I will kill him, too, if you do," muttered Todd.

The beadle paused upon this thought concerning the charity boy; but as he had finished the communion table, he did not think that for the mere dusting the pulpit and its cushions, it was worth while to make any fuss.

“It will soon be over,” he said, “very soon. I’ll just pop up and settle the pulpit, and then get home again as quick as I possibly can. I do wonder, now, if that old Todd will be caught soon? The old wretch!”

The beadle began the ascent of the pulpit.

“It’s my opinion,” he said, “that Todd — as he had other folks made up into pies — ought to be made into one himself, and then given to mad dogs for a supper — Ha! Ha! That’s a very good thought of mine, and when I go to the ‘Pig’s-eye, Tooth, and Tinderbox,’ tonight, I will out with it, and they will knock their pots and glasses against the table beautifully, and cry out — ‘Well done, bravo! — Bravo!’ I rather think I’m a great man at the ‘Pig’s-eye, Tooth and Tinderbox.’ ”

By this time the beadle had got quite to the top of the pulpit stairs, and had his hand on the door. Todd was crouched down at the bottom of the pulpit, waiting for him like some famished tiger ready to pounce upon his prey. He fully intended to murder the unfortunate beadle.

“Well, here goes,” said that most unhappily situated functionary, as he stepped into the pulpit.

Todd immediately grasped his legs.

“If you say one word, you are a dead man!”

The shock was too much for the nerves of the poor beadle of St. Dunstan’s, and on the instant he fainted, and fell huddled up at the bottom of the little place.

Todd immediately stood upon the prostrate form of the parochial authority.

“Ha! Ha!” he laughed, “I have him now, and I shall be able to leave St. Dunstan’s yet.”

He trampled as hard upon the beadle as he could, and then he took the clasp knife from his pocket, and said —

“It will be better to kill him. Rise, idiot, rise, and tell me if you can, why I should not cut your throat?”

The beadle neither moved nor spoke.

“Is he dead?” said Todd. “Has the fright killed him? It is strange; but I have heard of such things. Why it surely must be so. The sudden shock has been the death of him, and it would be a waste of time for me to touch him. He is dead — he must be dead!”

Todd, full of this feeling, retreated two or three steps down the little winding staircase of the pulpit, and then reaching in his hand, he caught hold of the poor beadle by the hair of his head, and dragged him sufficiently out of the pulpit to be enabled to look him in the face. The eyes were closed, the inspiration seemed to be stopped, and there was, in truth, every appearance of death about the unfortunate functionary of the old church.

“Yes, dead,” said Todd; “but it will be better for me. He will be found here, and as no violence will show upon him, the doctors will learnedly pronounce it a case of apoplexy, and there will arise no suspicion of my having been here at all. It is much better, oh, much, than as if I had killed him.”

With this feeling, Todd pushed what he considered to be the dead body of the beadle back into the pulpit again, and then himself rapidly descended the little spiral flight of stairs.

The clock of St. Dunstan’s struck the hour of ten, and Todd carefully counted the strokes.

“Ten,” he said. “A busy hour — a hour of broad daylight, and I with such a price upon my head, and the hands of all men lifted against me, in one of the most populous streets in the City of London! It is a fearful risk!”

It was a fearful risk, and Todd might well shudder to find that his temerity had brought him into such a position; but yet he felt that if anything were to save him, it would be boldness, and not shrinking timidity. One great cause of dread had passed away from Todd when Sir Richard Blunt left the church. If in any way Todd had had to encounter him, he would have shrunk back appalled at the frightful risk.

When he gained the body of the church, he glanced again up to the pulpit, but all was there profoundly still; and the fact of the death of the beadle appeared to him, Todd, to be so very firmly established, now, as to require no further confirmation.

Although the beadle had closed the church door, he had placed the key, most probably for security, in the inner side of the lock, and there Todd found it. He thought it would be a good thing to put it in his pocket, and he did so accordingly; and when the key was removed, he placed his eye to the keyhole, and peeped out into Fleet Street.

Todd could see the people passing quickly, but no one cast a glance towards the old church, and he began to reason with himself, that surely there could be no difficulty in getting into the street quite unnoticed, if not quite unobserved. Again he told himself that he was well disguised.

“I dread no eye,” he said, “but that of Sir Richard Blunt, and he is not here to look upon me. There is not one else, I think, in London that would know me through this disguise. There was never but one who could do so, and she is

dead. Yes, Mrs. Lovett might have known me, but she is no more: so I will venture. Yes, I will venture now."

His heart failed him a little as he placed his hand upon the lock of the church door. It well might do so, for the risk he run, or was about to run, was truly fearful. He was on the point of sallying out among a population, the whole of whom were familiar with his name, and to whom he was as a being accursed, who would upon the slightest hint of identity be gladly hunted to the death.

Truly, Todd might well hesitate.

But yet to hesitate was perhaps to be lost. How could he tell now one moment from another when some one might come to the church door? And then he would be in a worse position than before. Yes, he felt that he must make the attempt to leave, whether that attempt should involve him in destruction or not, for to stay were far worse.

He opened the door and coolly closed it again, and marched into Fleet Street.

We say he did this coolly, but it were better to say that he acted a coolness that he was far from feeling. A very tempest of terror was at his heart. His brain for a moment or two felt like a volcano, and he reeled as he felt himself in the broad open light of day in Fleet Street among the throng of the population, and yet in that throng was in truth his greatest safety.

"Ain't you well, sir?" said a man.

Todd started and placed his hand upon the knife that he had handy in his pocket; and then he thought that after all it might only be a civil inquiry, and he replied —

"Oh, yes, thank you — thank you, sir. But I am old."

"I beg your pardon, sir."

The man passed on.

"Oh, curse you! I should like to settle you," said Todd to himself as he passed through Temple Bar; but what a relief it was to pass through Temple Bar at all! To leave that now frightfully dangerous Fleet Street behind him. Oh, yes, that was a relief indeed; and Todd felt as if some heavy weight had been taken off his heart upon the moment that he set foot in the Strand.

"Am I safe?" he muttered. "Am I safe? Oh, no, no. Do not let me be too confident."

He was superstitiously afraid of pluming himself upon the fact of having got so far in safety, lest at the moment that he did so, malignant destiny might be

revenged upon him, by bringing in his way some one who might know him, even though his capital disguise; so he went on tremblingly.

Todd did not like large open thoroughfares now, and yet, perhaps, if he had set to work reasoning upon the subject, he would have come to the conclusion that they were quite as safe, if not a few degrees safer for him, than bystreets but there was something in the glaring publicity of such a thoroughfare as the Strand that he shrunk from, and he was glad to get from it into the gloomy precincts of Holywell Street.

That street then, as now, was certainly not the resort of the most choice of the population of London, but Todd liked it, and he was wonderfully attracted by a dirty looking little public house which was then in it. A murder was committed in that house afterwards, and it lost its licence, and was eventually destroyed by fire.

“Dare I go in here?” said Todd. “I am faint for want of food, and if I do not have something soon I feel that I shall sink, and then there will be a fuss, and who knows what horrible discovery might then take place? This house is dark and gloomy, and in all likelihood is the resort of gentlemen who are not in the habit of having any superfluous questions asked of them; so it will suit me well.”

He dived in at the narrow doorway, and found himself in one of the smallest and darkest public houses that he had ever beheld in all his life, for although he had lived so long in Fleet Street so close at hand, he had never ventured into that den.

“A nice parlour to the right, sir,” said a rather masculine looking specimen of the fair sex in the bar.

“Thank you, madam.”

Todd went to the right, and opening a little door, which, in consequence of having a cord and pulley attached to it, made a great resistance, he entered a little grimy room, the walls of which were of wainscot, but so begrimed with tobacco smoke were they, that they were of the colour of the darkest rosewood, and the ceiling in no way differed from them in tint. A fire was burning in a little wretched grate, and the floor was covered with coarse sand, which crackled under Todd’s feet.

The furniture of this little den, which certainly had the name of ‘Parlour’ from courtesy only, consisted of the coldest looking rigid wooden chairs and tables that could be imagined. Two men sat by the fire trying to warm themselves, for a cold wind was blowing in the streets of London, and the season was chilly and wintry for the time of the year.

Todd, when he found the parlour had some one in it, would gladly have effected a retreat; but to do so, after he had made his way into the middle of the room, would have only aroused suspicion, so he resolved to go on, and carry

the affair through; and for greater safety, he put on a very infirm aspect, and appeared to be bent double by age and disease.

He coughed dreadfully.

"You don't seem to be very well, sir," said one of the men.

"Oh, dear me, no," said Todd. "When you are as old as I am, young man, you won't wonder at infirmities coming upon you."

"Young man, do you call me? I am forty."

"Ah, forty! When I was forty, and that was thirty years ago, I thought myself quite a youth. Oh, dear me, but what with the gout, and the lumbago, and two or three more little things, I am nearly done for now. Oh, dear me, life's a burthen."

"What would you like to have, sir?" said a girl who waited upon the parlour guests, and who came in for Todd's order.

"Anything, my dear, you have in the house to eat, and some brandy to drink, if you please."

"Sit by the fire, sir," said one of the men; "you will be more comfortable. We ought to make way for age."

"Oh, dear no, I thank you. I must be somewhere where I can rest my poor back at times, so I like this corner." It was a dark corner, and Todd preferred it. "It will do very well for me, if you please. Oh, dear me; don't disturb yourselves, gentlemen, on my account, I beg of you. I am an old broken-down man, and have not long to live now in this world of care and sorrow."