

CHAPTER CLIX

Todd gets the Better of the Sharpers, and Takes a Boat

The girl brought Todd a plate of roast beef, a loaf, and some brandy, with which he regaled himself tolerably well; but he was uncomfortably conscious that the two men were looking at him all the while.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “it’s a very odd thing, but my appetite continues good notwithstanding all my infirmities. I eat well, and I drink well, and the doctors say that that is what keeps me alive.”

“I should not wonder,” said one of the men drily.

“Yes,” said the other, with a laugh, “you are like us, old gentleman; we live by victuals and drink.”

“Ah, I didn’t mean that,” said Todd; “you young people are so fond of your jokes. Dear me, when I was young I used to be fond of my joke, likewise, but now I am so old, that what with my winter cough, and the gout, and all that sort of thing, my joking days are long since gone by. I lost my poor wife, too, a little while ago — bless her heart! Ah, me!”

Todd had the greatest inclination in the world to make up one of his old diabolical faces at this juncture; but he restrained himself, for he felt the danger of doing so; and then affecting to wipe away a tear, he added —

“But I find my consolation in religion. There’s where, gentlemen, an old man may look for comfort, and that strength of heart and soul, which in this world is denied to him.”

“Very true, sir — very true.”

“Ah, gentlemen, it is true; and there’s nothing in all the world like an easy conscience. That’s the sort of thing to make a man feel serene and happy in this world, while he is preparing for the joys of the next.”

“How delightful it is, sir,” said one of the men, “for us to meet with a gentleman who has the same opinion as ourselves. Will you join us in a glass, sir, if you please?”

“Oh, yes — yes, with pleasure. What a shocking bad fire, they tell me, has been in Fleet Street.”

“Yes, it’s the notorious Todd’s house.”

“In — deed!”

The man who had proposed the social glass rang the bell, and ordered three tumblers of brandy and water, and then he said —

“Ah, sir! If you or I could only lay hold of Sweeney Todd it would be rather a good day’s work.”

“Oh, dear, God forbid!” said Todd. “He would soon lay me low if I were to try to lay hold of him, with, as I may say in a manner of speaking, one foot in the grave. I am not, in the natural order of things, long for this world, gentlemen, and it is not for me to lay hold of desperate characters.”

“That’s true, sir; but do you know the reward that is offered for him by the Secretary of State?”

“No! Is there really a reward for him?”

“Yes, a thousand pounds clear to any one who will lodge him in any jail. A thousand pounds! Why, it makes a man’s mouth water to think of it. One might retire, Bill, mightn’t one, and give up all sorts of —”

Bill gave his enthusiastic comrade rather a severe cautionary kick under the table, and it seemed to have the effect of stopping the word ‘thieving’ from coming past his lips quite at unawares — at least that was the way Todd translated it. He had not the smallest doubt but that the public house was a very indifferent one, and that the two men whom he was in company with in it were two of the most arrant thieves in all London.

Todd resolved to act accordingly, and he did not let them see that he had the least suspicion of them; but he kept such a wary eye upon their movements, that nothing they did or looked escaped him. They little supposed that so keen an observer watched them as Sweeney Todd was.

The brandy and water that had been ordered soon made its appearance; and Todd, while perpetrating a very well acted fit of coughing, saw one of the men just slightly wink at the other, and take a little way from his waistcoat pocket a small bottle.

“Oh!” thought Todd, “my brandy and water will be prepared, I see; and if I do not look sharp, these fellows will rob me of all that I have run so much risk, and took so much trouble to get out of the old house.”

After a moment’s thought, he rose and said —

“I will only go and pay for what I have had at the bar, and you must permit me likewise to pay for this.”

“Oh, no — no!”

“Oh, yes, but I will — I will! I dare say that I have the most money, after all, for I have been very careful in my time, and saved a trifle, so you must permit me.”

The two thieves were so delighted at getting rid of him for a few moments, that although they declared it was too bad, they let him go. The moment he was gone, one said to the other, with a grin —

“Bill, put a good dose into the old chap’s glass. He has got a rare gold watch in his pocket, and there’s a ring on his finger, that if it isn’t a diamond, it’s as near like one as ever I heard of. Give him a good dose.”

“Well, but you know that even a few drops will settle him?”

“Never mind that. It’s all right enough; pour it in.”

They put enough of some deadly drug into the glass of brandy and water that stood next to where Todd had been sitting to kill a horse; and then he returned and sat down with a groan, as he said —

“It’s quite a funny thing! There’s a man at the bar inquiring for somebody; and he’s got a red waistcoat on.”

“A red waistcoat!” cried both the the thieves, jumping up. “Did you say a red waistcoat?”

“Why, yes; and I think he is what they call a Bow Street thingamy — Lord bless my old brain! What do they call them —”

“A runner?”

“Ah, to be sure, a Bow Street runner, to be sure.”

Both the thieves bundled out of the parlour in a moment, and Todd was not idle while they were gone. The first thing he did was to decant his own brandy-and-water — which had been drugged — into an empty glass. Then he filled his glass with the contents of one of the thieves’ glasses. After that, he half filled that glass with the drugged spirit, and filled it up from the other thief’s glass, and that again he filled up with the drugged spirit.

By this means, each of them had half from the glass they had — as they thought — so very cleverly drugged for him, to drink from; and as they had not scrupled to put in an overdose, it may be fairly presumed that there was in each of their glasses quite enough to make them very uncomfortable.

They both returned.

“There’s nobody there now,” said one. “Are you sure you saw him, sir? We can’t see any one.”

“Didn’t I tell you he was going away when I saw him? It was only the latch of the door catching his topcoat that made me see his red waistcoat; and it was a wonder then that I saw it, for I am not very noticeable in those things. Oh, dear, how bad my cough is.”

“Take some of your brandy and water, sir,” said one of the thieves, as he winked at the other. “It will do you good, sir.”

“Not a doubt of it,” said the other.

“Do you think so? Well — well, perhaps it may. Here’s my friendship to both of you, gentlemen; and I hope we shall none of us repent of this happy meeting. I am much pleased, gentlemen, to see you both, and hope the brandy and water will do us all a world of good. I will give you a toast, gentlemen.”

“Ah, a toast! — A toast!”

“But mind gentlemen, you must take a good draught, if you drink my toast — Will you?”

“Will we? Ay, to be sure, if you will.”

“I promise, gentlemen; so here’s the toast — It’s to the very cunning fox who laid a trap for another, and caught his own tail in it!”

“What a droll toast!” said the two thieves. They paused a moment, but as they saw their new friend drink at least one half of his brandy and water in honour of the toast, they did the same thing, and looked at each other quite contented and pleased as possible that the drugged spirit, at the very first pull, had been so freely partaken of — for they had found, by experience, the victims they would have made perceived a disagreeable taste, and would not drink twice.

“Hilloa!” said Todd.

“What’s the matter, old gentleman?”

“Do you know, this is very good brandy and water?”

“Glad you like it.”

“Like it? — I couldn’t be off liking it. It’s capital! Let’s finish these glasses, and have others at once.”

As he spoke he finished his glass, and the two thieves were so delighted that he had taken it all, that they at once finished theirs likewise; and then they looked at him, and then at each other, until one said to the other, as he made a wry face —

"I say, Bill, I — I don't much like my glass. How did yours taste, eh, old fellow?"

"Very queer."

"How strange," said Todd; "mine was beautiful! I hope, gentlemen, you have not made a mistake and put anything out of the way in your own glasses instead of mine?"

"Oh, dear. Oh — oh! I am going, Bill."

"And so am I. Oh, murder! My head is going round and round like a humming top as big as St. Paul's."

"And so is mine."

"Then, gentlemen," said Todd, rising, "I shall have the pleasure of bidding you good day, and I hope you have just sense enough left to appreciate the toast of the 'cunning fox that laid a trap for another, in which he caught his own tail,' and I have the further pleasure of informing you that I am Sweeney Todd."

The two thieves, quite overcome by the powerful and death dealing narcotic they had placed in the liquor, fell to the floor in a state of perfect insensibility, and Todd very calmly walked out of the public house.



Todd turns the Tables on the two Sharpers, and Escapes.

"This will not do," he said, when he reached the west end of Holywell Street. "I must not run such risks as this. I must now be off. But where to? That is the question. Out of London, of course. The river, I think — ay, the river. That will be the best. I will house myself until night, and then I will hire a boat and go to Gravesend. From there I shall not find much difficulty in getting on board some foreign vessel, and with what I have in my pockets I will bid adieu to England

for a little while, until I can sell my watches and jewels, and then I will come back and have my revenge yet upon those whom I only live now to destroy."

Full of these thoughts, Todd went down one of the narrow streets leading to the Thames, and as he saw a bill in a window of lodgings to let, he thought he should be safer there than in a house of public entertainment. He resolved upon taking a lodging for a week at any cost, and then leaving it in the evening after he should have had some rest at it, which he might do for the remainder of the day, provided the people would take him in, which he had very little doubt of them doing, as he did not intend to object to their terms, and he did intend to pay in advance.

Todd knocked at the door.

It was answered by a woman of the true landlady species, who, upon hearing that it was the lodging Todd was after, was all smiles and sweetness immediately.

"I have come up from the country, madam," said Todd, "and my luggage is at an inn in Gracechurch Street. I intend to send for it in the morning; and as I am weary, if you can accommodate me with a lodging, as I have some business to transact for my son, the Deacon, in London, I shall be much obliged."

"Oh, dear, yes sir; walk in. We have every accommodation. The drawing room floor, sir, at three guineas and a few extras."

"That will just do," said Todd. "Will you be so good as to show me the rooms, madam?"

Todd saw the rooms, and of course admired them very much; and then he said, in the blindest manner —

"I think the rooms very cheap, madam, and will take them at once, if you please. The reference I will give you, is to the Principal of Magdalen College, Oxford, the Reverend Peter Sly, madam. My own name is Bones, and my son is the Reverend Archdeacon Bones. I will pay you now a week in advance; and all I have to beg of you is, that you do yourself justice as to charges. I will lie down and rest for a few hours, if you please, madam."

"Oh, dear, sir! Yes, certainly, Mr. Bones. There shall be no noise to disturb you, and anything you want, if you will be so good as to ring for, I will supply you with the greatest pleasure."

"Thank you, madam."

Thus then was it that Todd secured himself what appeared to be a wonderfully safe asylum until night. He got into the bed with all his clothes on; for he did not know how sudden the emergency might be that might induce him

to rise; and he soon fell into a deep sleep, for he had undergone the greatest fatigues of late.

CHAPTER CLX

Sir Richard Blunt is very near Taking his Prisoner

We left the poor beadle in anything but a pleasant situation in the pulpit of St. Dunstan's Church.

Now it so happened that the beadle was particularly wanted at home; and as he did not make his appearance, his wife repaired to the church to search for him; but it was locked by Todd, who had swung the door shut after him, and as he had taken the key with him, she could not make her way into the sacred edifice.

As she stood at the door, however, she distinctly heard deep groans issuing from some one within the church; and in a state of great alarm, she ran off to one of the churchwardens, who had a duplicate key, and related what she had heard.

The churchwarden not being one of the most valorous of men, rather, upon the whole, declined to go into the church with no other escort than the beadle's wife; and as he, too, upon listening at the keyhole, heard the groans distinctly, he called upon the passers-by to assist, and got together quickly enough about twenty people to go into the church with him.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I don't know what it is, but there's groans; and in these horrid times, when, for all we know, Sweeney Todd is about the neighbourhood, one can't be too cautious."

"Certainly," said everybody.

"Then, gentlemen, if we all go in together when I open the door, it will be the very best plan."

This was duly agreed to; and the churchwarden, with a trembling hand, turned his key in the lock, and opened the door. He then stepped aside, and let all the crowd go in first, thinking that, as he was a man in office, the parish could not afford to lose him, in case anything serious should happen.

"Well, gentlemen," he cried, "what is it?"

"Nothing," said everybody.

"Then I will soon let nothing see that I, a churchwarden, am not to be frightened with impunity — that is to say, when I say frightened, I don't exactly mean that, but astonished, I mean. Come, come — if any one be here, I call upon them to surrender in the king's name!"

A deep groan was the only response to this valorous speech; and the moment the churchwarden heard it, he bolted out of the church, and ran right across the way into a shop opposite.

For a moment or two, this precipitate retreat of the churchwarden had something contagious in it, and the whole of the men who had been induced to stop and go into the church with him were inclined to retreat likewise; but curiosity detained some three of four of them, and that gave courage to the others.

“What was it?” said one.

“A groan,” said another; “and it came from the pulpit.”

“The pulpit!” cried everybody.

“Who ever heard of a pulpit groaning?” cried a third.

“You stupid!” cried the second speaker: “might it not be some one in the pulpit? — And — oh Lord — there’s a head!”

At this they all took to flight; but at the door they encountered a man, who called out —

“What’s the matter? Can’t you tell a fellow what the blessed row is — eh?”

This was no other than our old friend Crotchet, who was returning from a conference with Sir Richard Blunt at his private office in Craven Street.

“Oh, it’s a ghost! A ghost!”

“A what?”

“A ghost in the pulpit, and there is his head.”

“You don’t say so?” said Crotchet, as he peered into the church, and shading his eyes with his hand, saw the beadle’s head just peeping over the side of the pulpit in a most mysterious kind of way. “I’ll soon have him out, ghost or no ghost.”

Courage is as contagious as fear, especially when somebody else volunteers to run all the risk; and so when Crotchet said he would soon have the somebody out of the pulpit, the whole crowd followed him into the church, applauding him very greatly for his prowess, and declaring that if he had not then arrived, they would soon have had the ghost or no ghost out of the sacred building, that they would. But they kept within a few paces of the door for all that, so that they might be ready for a rush into Fleet Street, if Mr. Crotchet should be overcome in the adventure.

That was only prudent.

But Crotchet was not exactly the man to be overcome in any adventure, and with an utter oblivion of all fear, he marched right into the middle of the church, and commenced the ascent of the pulpit stairs.

“Come — come,” said Crotchet. “This won’t do, Mr. Ghost, if you please; just let me get hold of you, that’s all.”

“Oh!” groaned the beadle.

“Oh, yer is remarkably bad, is yer? But that sort of thing won’t answer, by no means. Where is yer?”

Crotchet opened the pulpit door, and reaching in his hand, he caught hold of the beadle by the leg, and fairly dragged him out on to the little spiral stairs, down which he let him roll with a great many bumps, until he landed in the body of the church all over bruises.

“Why, goodness gracious!” cried the beadle’s wife, “It’s my wretch of a husband after all!”

The beadle had just strength to assume a sitting posture, and then he cried — “Murder! — Murder! — Murder!” until Mr. Crotchet, seizing a cushion from a pew, held it up before his mouth, to the imminent danger of choking him, and said —

“Hold your row! If you wants to be murdered, can’t you get it done quietly, without alarming of all the parish? If you has got anything to say, say it; and if you has got nothink, keep it to yourself, stupid.”

“Todd!” gasped the beadle, the moment the pew cushion was withdrawn from his mouth. “Todd — Sweeney Todd!”

“What?” cried Crotchet.

“Here! — he has been here, and I’m a dead man — no, I’m a beadle. Oh, murder! Murder!”

“Don’t begin that again. Be quiet, will you? If you have got anything to say about Todd, say it, for I’m the very man of all the world as wants to hear it. Speak up, and don’t wink.”

“Oh, I’ve seen him. He’s been here. I came to dust the bellowses, you see, after my wife had thrown the pulpit at my head, for asking her to come with me.”

“Oh, he’s a-raving gentlemen,” said the wife. “As I’m a sinner, it was the bellowses as I throwed at his stupid head, and not the pulpit as never was.”

“Go on,” said Crotchet. “Confound the pulpit and the bellows too. It’s about Todd I want to hear. Drive on, will you?”

“Oh, yes. I’m a coming to that; but it curdles my blood, and makes my wig stand on end. I had dusted the communion table, and banged the cushions, and up I goes to the pulpit, meaning to do for that as soon as I could, when who should be there but Sweeney Todd!”

“In the pulpit!” cried everybody.

“In the pulpit,” said the beadle.

“Why didn’t you nab him at once?” roared Crotchet.

“Because, my good friend, he nabbed me at once. He laid hold of me by this leg — no, it was this — no it wasn’t. It was this — that is — no — ”

“Confound both your legs! Where is he now?”

“Why, really I can’t exactly say, for after stamping upon my inside for about half an hour, he left me for dead, and I was about half gone that way, and I have been a groaning ever since, till now. I am going fast — very fast, and there will be an election for beadle again in this here parish. Oh dear — oh dear! Murder — murder — mur — ”

“What, you is coming that agin, is you,” cried Crotchet, as he again caught up the pew cushion. “I shall be obligated, after all, for to push this down your blessed throat. Hold your noise, will you, Mr. What’s-your-name.”

The beadle was so terrified at the idea of the pew cushion again nearly smothering him, that despite all his injuries, he sprang to his feet and bolted out of the church.

“Well, did yer ever know sich a feller?” said Crotchet. “Why, one would think he was afraid of Todd.”

The spectators thought that nothing was more probable; and as Mr. Crotchet considered that he had got all the information he was at all likely to get from the beadle, he did not at all trouble himself to go after him, but after considering for a few moments, decided upon seeking Sir Richard Blunt, and telling him that he had heard some unexpected news of Todd.

Crotchet knew where to pitch upon Sir Richard at once; and when he related to him what had taken place, a look of great chagrin came over the face of the magistrate.

“Crotchet,” he said, “I have missed Todd, then, by what may be considered a hair’s breadth. He must have been in the pulpit while I was in the church alone.

Oh, that I could but for a moment have guessed as much! You, if you recollect, Crotchet, were in the vaults, and I was waiting for you.”

“To be sure, Sir Richard.”

“And so the rascal was almost within arm’s length, and yet escaped me.”

Sir Richard Blunt paced to and fro in an agony of impatience and regret. To be so near apprehending Todd, and yet to miss him, was truly terrific.

“Lor’, sir,” said Crotchet, “what’s the use of fretting and pining about it? That won’t bring it back, sir, I can tell you. After all, sir, you can’t do better than grin and bear it, you know, which is the out and outest policy on all these here occasions, you know, yer worship. I wish as I’d a-knowed he’d been in the church as much as you do; but you don’t see me a-*cussin* and a-knocking my own head about it, no how.”

“You are right, Crotchet, but in good truth it is most desperately provoking. You will proceed as I have directed you, and I will run down to Norfolk Street river, for fear Todd should try to escape us that way. You will be so good, Crotchet, as to be as vigilant as possible. You know how to find me if you want me.”

“Rather, sir.”

At this moment, and just as Crotchet was upon the point of leaving the room, an officer brought in a little slip of paper to Sir Richard Blunt, upon which was the word “Ben.”

“Ben — Ben?” said Sir Richard, “who is Ben? Oh, I think I know. Pray show him in at once. It is my friend the beefeater, from the Tower.”

“Easy does it,” said Ben, popping his head in at the door of the room. “Easy does it.”

“So it does, Ben. Come in. I am glad to see you. You can go, Crotchet. Pray be seated, Ben, and tell me how I can serve you in any way, my good friend, and you may be assured that I shall have exceeding pleasure in doing so, if I possibly can in any way.”

“Lord bless you,” said Ben, “I hardly knows. There’s ups and downs in this here world, and ins and outs.”

“Not a doubt of it, Ben.”

“And retreats within retreats, Sir Richard, and foxes, and laughing hyenas, as you can’t concilliorate no how, if you wollop ’em till you can’t wollop ’em no more.”

“Precisely, Ben. If I were a hyena, I don’t exactly think, do you know, that such a process would conciliate me.”

“Oh, dear yes — it’s the only way. But what I’ve come about, Sir Richard, is what I call a delicate affair. Oh, dear yes — I try to take it easy but I can’t — I’m — I’m —”

“What, Ben?”

“I’m in love! Oh!”

“Well, Ben, there is no great wonder in that. I have been in love myself, and I believe very few indeed escape the soft impeachment. I hope your love is prosperous, Ben?”

“Thank you kindly, Sir Richard, thank you; but, you see, I thought you might tell me if there was any vice or natural kicking running in the family, and that’s why I came here.”

“I tell you, Ben? Why I don’t even know the name of the family.”

“Yes, you do, Sir Richard. The young woman as I fell in love with, is Miss Julia Hardman, and her father is one of those chaps as nabs the bad ’uns for you, you know, Sir Richard.”

“One of my officers?”

“To be sure he is.”

“Does he reside in Norfolk Street, Strand?”

“Does he? Ay, he does; and that’s how I came to know the little morsel of a creature as has made for the first time an impression upon my heart. Oh, Ben, Ben, little could anybody think as you was a marrying sort of person, and here you is in love with Miss Julia!”

“It does seem to me a little extraordinary, Ben, for I must confess I have heard you say some rather severe things against the married state.”

“I have — I have; and if it hadn’t been for all the marrying set out with those two girls, Johanna and Arabella, I never should have got such an idea in my head. Howsomedever, there it is, and there it is likely to remain. It’s an aggravation, but there it is!”

“And how did you get acquainted with Julia Hardman?”

“Oh, dear! There’s a public house at the corner of her street, and after I had been to Cousin Oakley’s, I used to go there at times and get a drink of something, you see, and then she used to come tripping in with a mug for the

family beer, you see; and once it rained, so I took her up and carried her home beer and all, and that was how we got acquainted, you see, Sir Richard.”

“A very natural way too, Ben. All I can say is, that I know her father to be a very worthy man indeed, and I believe the daughter is a good and virtuous girl.”

“You don’t say so? Then as there’s no vice and kicking, I do believe I shall have to marry her out of hand.”

CHAPTER CLXI

Todd Finds that he has got out of the Frying Pan into the Fire

After this little explanatory conversation between Ben and Sir Richard Blunt, the reader will probably guess that Todd's evil fortune had actually carried him to that very house in Norfolk Street, Strand, occupied by the Hardman family, to which he, Sir Richard, talked of going to, to give instructions to his officer, and in which resided the identical Julia, that Ben had carried home, beer and all, in the shower, and to whom his large heart had become so deeply attached.

Todd could hardly have fairly expected to be waylaid by such a conjunction of events; and certainly when he laid himself down so comfortably and easily in the bed at the lodging house for the luxury of a few hours' sleep, for which, if sleep he could, he had paid the moderate price of three guineas, he little dreamt that his enemies were rallying, as it were, around that house, and that in a short time their voices would be actually within his hearing.

Truly it seemed as though there were henceforth to be no peace in this world for Todd; although, by circumstances little short of absolutely miraculous, he did continue to avoid absolute capture, near as he was to it at times.

The great fatigue he had undergone, combined with the little refreshment he had taken at the public house in Hollywell Street, induced a feeling of sleep in Todd's frame; and after he had lain in the bed at the lodging house for about a quarter of an hour, and found the house perfectly still, and that the bed was very comfortable, he pulled the clothes nearly right over his face, and fell fast asleep.

Nothing but sheer fatigue could have given Todd so unbroken a repose as he now enjoyed. It was for an hour or more quite undisturbed by any images calculated to give him uneasiness; and then he began — for there was some noise in the house — to dream that he was hunted through the streets of London by an infuriate mob; and by one of those changes incidental to dreams, when the reason sleeps and imagination ascends the mental throne, he thought that the heads of all the mob were armed with horns, like those of cattle, and that they come raging after him with a determination to toss him.

This was not a dream upon which any one was likely to be very still for any length of time, and Todd groaned in his sleep, and tossed his arms to and fro, and more than once uttered the word — "Mercy! — mercy!"

Suddenly he started wide awake as a knock came at the door and roused him. Todd blessed that knock at the moment; for by waking him it had rescued him from the dream of terrors that had been vexing his brain.

He sat up in bed, and for a moment or two could hardly collect his scattered senses sufficiently to assure himself that it was all a dream, and that he was in the lodging house in Norfolk Street; but the brain rapidly recovers from such

temporary confusions; and Todd, with a long breath of immense relief, gasped out —

“It was, after all, but a dream — only a dream! Oh, God! But it was horrible!”

He fell back upon the pillow again; but sleep did not again come to him, and he began to feel a vague kind of curiosity to know who it was that had knocked at the door; and yet, he told himself, that it could not matter to him, for that in a house like that, of course, there must be plenty of people coming and going, and that, although the persons who kept it might control noises within the house, they could not possibly have any influence upon the knocker.

“Oh, it’s all right,” said Todd. “It’s all right. I will sleep again — I must sleep again; for it yet wants hours and hours to the night, when I may, at least, make the attempt to get off from — from England for ever!”

A faint sort of doze — it could not be called a sleep — was coming over Todd, when he suddenly heard the sound of voices; and he was startled wide awake by hearing his own name pronounced. Yes, he clearly heard some one say — “Todd!”

In a moment he sat up in bed, and intently listened. He held his breath, and he shook again, as his imagination began to picture to him a thousand dangers.

There were footsteps upon the staircase, and in a few moments he heard persons go into the next room — that is to say, the front one to that in which he lay, the room that he had paid for a few weeks’ occupation of, and which was only divided from that in which he lay by a pair of folding doors, that he knew were just upon the latch, and might, at any moment, be opened to discover him.

He then heard a female voice say —

“I do wish you would be quiet, Mr. Ben.”

“Ah,” said another voice, “keep him in order, Julia, for he has been quite raving about your beauty as we came along the street, I can tell you. Do you think the servant will be able to find your father?”

“Oh yes, Sir Richard. If ma were at home she could have said at once where he was; but Martha will find him, I dare say.”

Todd threw the bedclothes right over his head. It was no other than Sir Richard Blunt who was in the front room of that diabolical lodging house, and Todd looked upon himself as all but in custody. His sense of hearing seemed to be preternaturally acute, and although the bedclothes covered up his ears, and he could not be said to be exactly in his usual state, inasmuch as terror had half deprived him of his reasoning powers, yet he heard plainly, and with what might be called a perfect distinctness, every word that was spoken in the front room.

Perhaps, even in the condemned cell of Newgate, Todd did not suffer such terrors as he was now assailed with in that lodging, where he thought he was so safe, and which he had, as he fancied, managed so cleverly.

“Will you be quiet, Ben!” said the girl’s voice again.

“Make him — make him, Julia,” said Sir Richard.

“Lor’ bless your little bits of eyes,” said Ben. “Do now come and sit in my lap, and I’ll tell you such a lively story of how the leopard we have got at the Tower lost a bit off the end of his tail?”

“I don’t want to hear it.”

“You don’t want to hear it? Come — come, my lambkin of a Julia — when shall we be married? Oh, do name the day your Ben will be done for for life. I want it over.”

“Well, I’m sure,” said Julia, “if you think you will be done for, you had better not think of it any more, Mr. Benjamin.”

“It won’t bear thinking of, my dear. It’s like a cold bath in January: you had better shut yer eyes and tumble in.”

“Upon my word, Ben,” said Sir Richard, laughing, “you are anything but gallant; and if I were Julia, I would not have you.”

“Not have me? Lord, yes, she’ll have me. Only look at me.”

“Ah,” said Julia, “you think, because you are a great monster of a fellow, that anybody would have you; but I can tell you that a husband half your size would be just as well, and I only wonder, after you have made all the neighbours laugh at me, that I have a word to say to such a mountain of a man, that I do, you wretch!”

“Laugh!” cried Ben, “Why, my duck, what do they laugh at? I should like to catch them laughing.”

“Why, you know, you wretch, that that day it rained as if cats and dogs were coming down, you took me up as if I had been a baby, you did, and carried me home, and me with a jug of porter in my right hand, and the change out of a shilling in my left, so that I could not help myself a bit, and all the street laughing. Oh, I hate you!”

“She hates me!” said Ben. “Oh!”

“But she don’t mean it, Ben,” said Sir Richard.

“Do you think she doesn’t, sir?”

“I am sure of it. Do you, now, Julia?”

“Yes, Sir Richard, indeed I do, really now, for he is quite a horrid monster, and I only wonder they don’t put him in one of the cages at the Tower along with the other wild beasts, and make a show of him. That’s all that he is fit for.”

“Oh, you aggravating darling,” said Ben, making a dart at Julia, and catching her up in his arms as you would some little child. “How can you go on so to your Ben?”

“Murder!” cried Julia.

“Oh, if you are going to have a fight for it,” said Sir Richard, “I will go and wait downstairs, Julia.”

Bang came a knock at the street door.

“Oh, Ben, there’s ma or pa,” said Julia. “Let me down directly. Do Ben — oh, pray do. Let me down, Ben.”

“Do yer love your Ben?”

“Anything you like, only let me down.”

“Very good. There yer is, then, agin on yer little mites of feet. Lor’ bless you, Sir Richard, that girl loves the very ground as I walks on, she does, and she has comed over me with her fascinations in such a way as never was known. Ain’t she a nice ’un? — sleek and shiny, with a capital mane. But you should see her at feeding time, Sir Richard, how nice she does it — quite delicate and pretty; and you should see her —”

The door of the room opened, and Hardman, the officer, made his appearance.

“Your humble servant, Sir Richard. I hope I have not kept you waiting long? I was only in the neighbourhood.”

“No, Hardman, thank you, it’s all right. I have not been here above a quarter of an hour.”

“I am glad of that, sir. How do you do, Mr. Ben?”

“Pretty well,” said Ben, “only a little hungry and thirsty, that’s all; but don’t trouble yourself about that, Mr. Hardman; I always do get hungry when I look at Julia.”

"I hope, Mr. Ben, that don't mean that you will dine off her some day when you are married?"

"Oh, lor', no. Bless her heart, no. She loves me more and more, Mr. Hardman."

"I am glad to hear it, Ben — very glad to hear it. But I presume, Sir Richard, that you have some orders for me?"

"Why, yes, Hardman. There's that rascal Todd, you know, still continues to elude us. What I want you to do is, to take charge entirely on the river, and to make what arrangements you like at the various quays and landing places, and with all the watermen, so that he shall not have a chance of escaping in that way."

"Certainly, sir; I will set about it directly."

"Do so, Hardman. Expense in this case is of no object, for the Secretary of State will guarantee all that; but of course I don't wish you to be extravagant on that account."

"I quite understand you, Sir Richard, and will do my best."

"That I am sure you will, Hardman; and now I will go. I shall feel no peace of mind until that man is dead, or in the cell again at Newgate."

Todd popped his head out from under the clothes, and making the most hideous face, he shook one of his clenched fists in the direction of the front room. It would have been some satisfaction to him to have given a loud howl of rage but he dared not venture upon it; so he was forced to content himself with the pantomime of passion instead of its vocal expression.

"I do hope, sir, we shall soon have him," said Hardman. "It seems to me to be next thing to impossible he should escape us for long. Do you think he has any money, sir?"

"He cannot have much, for all he has, if any, must be but the produce of depredation since his escape from Newgate. He certainly has not extensive means, Hardman."

"Then he must fall into our hands, sir. Julia, is that your mother just arrived, do you think?"

"Yes, pa, it is ma's step. She has been out to get something or another, but I don't know what, as I was out myself all the morning; but it is ma, I know."

Mrs. Hardman came into the room, looking very red and flushed, and with a large basket on her arm. She looked from one to the other of the assembled guests with surprise and horror.

“What’s the matter?” said her husband. “Why wife, you look panic stricken. What has happened?”

“Oh, gracious! Where’s the gentleman?”

“The gentleman?” cried everybody.

“Yes, the lodger. The highly respectable gentleman who took the first floor only a couple of hours ago. Oh, gracious, where is he? and a capital lodger too, who paid in advance, and didn’t mind extras at all.”

“But what lodger, mother?” said Julia.

“Oh, mum, I forgot — I forgot,” said Martha, suddenly coming into the room, “I forgot to tell Miss Julia, mum, that an old gentleman had taken the first floor, mum, and gone to bed in the next room.”

“In bed in the next room?” said Sir Richard Blunt.

“I am lost!” thought Todd. “I am lost now, I am quite lost! and the only thing I can do is to kill as many of them as possible, and then blow my own brains out.”

“Do you mean to say, ma,” said Julia, “that there’s a gentleman asleep in the next room in the bed?”

“Lor!” said Ben, “you don’t mean to say that, Mrs. Hardman?”

“He may be in bed, but if he is asleep,” said Sir Richard, “he is a remarkable man; of course if we had had the least idea of such a thing, we should not have come up here; but here we were shown by the servant.”

“Oh, yes, it’s all that frightful Martha’s fault. I’ll — I’ll kill — no — I’ll discharge that odious hussy without a character, and leave her to drown herself! For Heaven’s sake go downstairs all of you, and I’ll go and speak to the old gentleman, and apologise to him.”

“Let me go,” said Ben, “and roll on him on the bed, and if that don’t settle him I don’t know what will.”

“Shall I apologise to him?” said Sir Richard.

Todd nearly fainted when he heard this proposition; but when Mrs. Hardman rejected it, and insisted upon going herself, he felt quite a gush of gratitude towards her, and breathed a little more freely once again.

CHAPTER CLXII
Todd's Fearful Adventures on the River

"Shall I lay hold of her," thought Todd, "and choke her the moment she comes into the room, or shall I answer her, and let her go again? Which will be the safest course? I suppose I must let her go, for she might possibly make a noise. Ah! How I should like to have my hand upon all their throats!"

Mrs. Hardman came into the room on tiptoe, leaving the folding door just a little ajar.

"My dear sir," she said, "are you awake?"

"Oh, go to the deuce," said Todd.

"What did you remark, my dear sir?"

"Go along — go along — Eugh! — Eugh! Oh, dear, how bad my cough is. I dreamt that no end of people were talking and talking away in the next room; but that can't be, as I have paid for it. Oh, dear! — Oh!"

Mrs. Hardman took her cue from this; and she was at once resolved to pass off the disturbance in the next room as merely a dream of her new lodger.

"Dear me, sir," she said in the blandest possible accents; "have you indeed had a dream? What a singular thing!"

"Eugh! Is it? I don't think so."

"Well, sir, when I say singular, of course I mean that it's very natural. I always dream when I sleep in a strange bed, do you know, sir, and sometimes the most horrid dreams."

"Oh, go along."

"Yes, sir, directly. Would you like anything got for you, sir? A nice mutton chop for instance, or — or —"

"No — no! Good God, why don't you go?"

"I am going, sir. Thank you. There will be a very quiet house here, I assure you, sir."

With these words, Mrs. Hardman was about to leave the room, flattering herself that it was all passing off quite comfortably as a mere dream, when Ben, thinking it incumbent upon him to do something civil, suddenly popped his head into the room, and in a voice that sounded like the growl of some bear for his food, he said —

"Take it easy, old gentleman. You'll find that easy does it all the world over; and if so be as you ever comes near the Tower, just you ask for Ben, and I'll show you the beasteses, all gratis, and for nothing. Feeding time at four o'clock."

"Oh, you great ugly wretch!" cried Mrs. Hardman, dealing Ben a sound box on the ear. "How dared you interfere, I should like to know, you monster in inhuman shape?"

"Oh, lor!" said Ben, "I only hope another of the family ain't so handy with her front paws."

"Oh — oh!" said Todd. "No peace! — No peace!"

Mrs. Hardman at once closed the door of communication between the two rooms; for she quite despaired now of being able to make any apology to her lodger, and she seemed much inclined to execute further vengeance upon Ben, but Sir Richard Blunt interfered, saying —

"Come — come, Mrs. Hardman, you should recollect that what Ben said was with the very best of motives, and any one, you know, may go wrong a little in trying to do good. Let us all adjourn downstairs, and be no further disturbance to this old gentleman, who, taking everything into consideration, has, I think, shown quite an exemplary amount of patience."

Todd heard those words. They seemed to him quite like a reprieve from death.

"I will come downstairs, of course," said Mrs. Hardman, in an undertone; "but for all that, this great monster of a Ben ought to be put in one of his own cages, at the Tower, and there kept as a warning to all people."

"A warning o' what, mum?" said Ben.

Mrs. Hardman was not very clear about what he would be a warning of, so she got out of the difficulty by saying — "What's that to you, stupid?" — and as Ben was rather slow in explaining that it did rather concern him, she walked downstairs with a look of triumph that was highly amusing to Sir Richard Blunt, as well as to Mr. Hardman, the officer.

How Todd listened to the footsteps as they went down the stairs! How his heart beat responsive to every one of them! And when he felt for certain that that immediate and awful danger had passed away, he peeped out from amid the mass of bedclothes, with his eyes almost starting from his head.

"Gone! Gone!" he gasped. "He has really gone. My mortal enemy — the only man who can make me tremble, that terrible Sir Richard Blunt! That he should be within half a dozen paces of me; that he should hear me speak; that he should only have to stretch out his hand to lay it upon my shoulder, and yet that I should escape him! Oh, it cannot be real!"

Todd heard some accidental noise in the house, and he immediately dived his head under the bedclothes again.

“They are coming again! — They are coming again!” he gasped.

The noise led to nothing, and after a few moments, Todd became convinced that it had nothing to do with him, so he ventured, half suffocated, to look up again.

“I must listen — I must listen,” he said, in a low anxious tone. “I must listen until he has gone. When I hear the street door of the house shut, I shall think that they have let him go and then I shall be able to breathe again; but not before. Oh, no — no, not before — hush — hush! What is that?”

Every little accidental sound in the house now set the heart of Todd wildly beating. If one had come into the room, and said — “You are my prisoner” — the probability was, that he would have fainted; but if he did not, it is quite certain that he could not have offered any resistance. A child might have captured him then, during the accession of terror that had come over him in that house, whither he had slunk purposely for safety and for secrecy.

At length he heard a noise of voices in the passage, and then the street door was opened. As he lay, he could feel a rush of cold air in consequence. Then it was closed again, and the house was very still.

“He has gone! He has gone!” said Todd.

The manner in which Todd pronounced these few words it would be impossible to describe. No shivering wretch reprieved upon the scaffold, with the rope round his neck, could feel a greater relief than did Todd, when he found that the door of that house was really closed upon Sir Richard Blunt.

And then he began to felicitate himself upon the fact that, after all, he had come to that place; “for now,” he thought, “I know that, although I have been in great danger, it has passed away; and as Sir Richard Blunt has transacted all his business in this house, he is not likely to come to it again.”

That was a pleasant thought, and as Todd dashed from his brow the heavy drops that intense fear had caused to assemble there, he almost smiled.

A very profound stillness now reigned in the house, for Mrs. Hardman was resolved to make up to her lodger — as well as she could — for the noise and disturbance that had been so unwittingly caused in her front room. She had made Ben go away, and as her husband had likewise gone, in pursuance of the orders of Sir Richard Blunt, to take measures lest Todd should make an escape by the Thames, the place remained as calm and still as if no one were in it but herself.

Todd closed his eyes, and wearied nature sought relief in sleep. Even Sweeney Todd, with more than twenty mortal murders on his conscience, slept calmly for no less than six hours of that, to him, most eventful day.

Twice during this long sleep of her lodger's had Mrs. Hardman stolen into the front room to listen, and been quite satisfied by the regular breathing, that, at all events, her lodger was not dead; and she kept herself upon the alert to attend to him whenever he should awake from that deep sleep.

The long shadows of the houses on the other side of the street had fallen upon the windows of the Hardmans' abode, and a slight fog began to make itself perceptible in London, when Todd awoke.

"Help — help! Oh, God, where am I?" he cried.

He sprang half out of the bed, and then the full tide of recollection came back to him, and he fully comprehended his situation in a moment.

"Hush! — Hush! — Hush!" he said; and he listened most intently to hear if his sudden exclamation had attracted any attention.

He heard a footstep on the stairs.

"Hush! — Hush!" he said again, "Hush — who is it? I must be very careful now! — Oh, very!"

The footstep paused at his door, and then he heard it in the next room, and Mrs. Hardman advancing to the folding doors, said, in the blindest of accents —

"Are you awake, sir, if you please?"

Todd at once assumed the tone in which he had formerly addressed her, and replied —

"Yes, madam, yes. I am awake!"

"And how do you feel now, sir, if you please?"

"Oh, a great deal better, ma'am, a great deal better. Indeed, I feel quite refreshed. I will come out directly, my dear madam. Pray have the goodness to take this guinea. I shall want a cup of tea at times, and I think I could take a cup now, my dear madam. You can get it out of that, and keep the change, you know, till I want something else."

"Oh, really, sir," said Mrs. Hardman, as she put her hand through a small opening of one of the folding doors and took the guinea. "It is quite delightful to have so pleasant a lodger as yourself — oh, quite. — I will get the tea directly, my dear sir, and pray make yourself quite at home, if you please."

“Yes, ma’am, I will — I will.”

“Do, sir. I should be really unhappy now, if I did not think you were comfortable.”

“Oh it’s all right, ma’am. Eugh! Oh, dear! I do think my cough has been better since I have been here.”

“How delightful to hear you say that!” exclaimed Mrs. Hardman, speaking in quite a tremulous voice of sympathetic emotion. “I will get the tea, directly, sir.”

She left the room, and as she went down the stairs, she said to herself —

“What a pearl of a lodger, to be sure! He pays for everything over and over again. I should not, now, in the least wonder but the dear old gentleman will quite forget the change out of this guinea; if he does, it is not for me to vex him by putting him in mind of it. I know well, that old people never like it to be supposed that their memory fails them; so if he says nothing about it, I am sure I shall not. Oh, dear, no!”

“Wretch!” muttered Todd, as he crept out of the back room into the front. “Wretch, I find that money will purchase anything in this house; but am I surprised at that? Oh, no — no. Will not money purchase anything in this great world? Of course it will. Why, then, should this house be an exception to the rule so general? No — no. It is no exception; and I may be very safe for a few guineas well spent; and they are well spent, indeed. Oh, so well!”

Todd then, as he flung himself into the depths of an easy chair, that was really easy for a wonder, considering that it was in a lodging house, began to arrange in his own mind his course of proceeding for the night.

“Let me think — let me think,” he muttered. “I am now very much refreshed indeed, and feel quite strong and well, and equal to any emergency. That sleep has done me a world of good, and it is strange, too, that it has been the calmest and the quietest sleep I have enjoyed for many a month. I hope it is not prophetic of some coming evil.”

He shuddered at the thought. Todd was each day — ay, each hour, becoming more and more superstitious.

“No — no. I will not think that. I will not be so mad as to disarm myself of my courage, by thinking that for a moment. I will take my tea here, and then I will sally forth, telling this woman that I will soon return, and then, after a dose of brandy, I will hire a boat and take to the river. What is that?”

The wind with a sudden gust came dashing against the windows, giving them such a shake, that it seemed as if it were intent upon getting into the room to buffet Todd.

He immediately rose, and going to the window, he placed his hideous face close to one of the panes, and looked out.

The sky was getting very black, and huge clouds were careering about it. The wind was evidently rising, and there was every appearance of its being most squally and tempestuous. Todd bit his lips with vexation.

“Always something!” he said. “Always something to annoy me, and to cross me. Always — always!”

“The tea, sir, if you please.”

Todd turned round so suddenly, that he almost upset the servant with the tea equipage.

“Oh, very well. That will do — that will do. You are the servant of the house?”

“If you please, sir.”

“Ah, you will then have to attend upon me while I am here, my dear, I presume?”

“Yes, sir, if you please.”

“Very good — very good. You are a very nice young woman, and there’s half-a-guinea for you. Eugh! I shall give you that sum every week while I stay here, you know.”

“Lor’, sir, will you?”

“Yes, yes. You can go now. Is the tea all right?”

“Oh, dear, yes, sir. You are very good indeed. Misses said as you was a very good lodger, which I knowed to mean as you didn’t be *petikler* about your money, and now I sees you ain’t. Thank you, sir, for me. I’ll get up in the night if you want anythink.”

CHAPTER CLXIII
Todd Makes a Vigorous Attempt to Reach Gravesend

The servant was so profuse in her acknowledgments for the half guinea, that she seemed as if she would never get out of the room, and Todd had to say —

“There — there, that will do. Now leave me, my good girl — that will do,” before she, with a curtsy at every step, withdrew.

“Well,” she said, as she went down stairs. “If I tell misses of this, I’m a Prussian. Oh, dear, I keeps it to myself and says nothing to nobody, excepting to my Thomas as is in the horse guards. Ah, he is a nice fellow, and out o’ this I’ll make him a present of a most elegant watch ribbon, that he can put a bullet at the end of, and let it hang out of his fob all as if he had a real watch in his pocket.”

“Humph!” said Todd. “I have bought her good opinion cheap. It was well worth ten and sixpence not to have the servant watching me, with, for all I know to the contrary, eyes of suspicion — well worth it.”

It was not very often that Todd indulged himself with a cup of tea. Something stronger was commonly more congenial to his appetite; but upon this occasion, after his long sleep, the tea had upon him a most refreshing effect, and he took it with real pleasure. Mrs. Hardman, in consideration of the guinea she had received beforehand, had done him justice, as far as the quality of the tea was concerned, and he had it good.

“Well,” he said, after his third cup, “I did not think that there was so much virtue in a cup of tea, after all; but of a surety, I feel wonderfully refreshed at it. How the wind blows.”

The wind did, indeed, blow, for all the while that Todd was taking his tea it banged and buffeted against the window at such a rate, that it was really quite a fearful thing to listen to it.

A couple of candles had been lighted and brought into the room, but the gale without soon laid hold of their little flames, and tossed them about so, that they gave but a dim and sepulchral kind of light.

Todd rose again, and went to the window — again he placed his face close to the pane of glass, and shading his eyes with his hands, he looked out. A dashing rain was falling.

“They say that when the rain comes the wind moderates,” he muttered; “but I see no signs of that, yet, it is almost a gale already.”

At that moment there came such a gust of wind howling down the street, that Todd mechanically withdrew his head, as though it were some tangible enemy come to seek him.

“Always something to foil me here,” he said; “always something; but out I must go. Let it look as strange as it may, I cannot stay a night in this house, for if I were to do so, that would involve the staying a day likewise; and it would be this time tomorrow before I dared venture abroad; and who knows what awful things might happen in that space of time? No, I must go tonight. I must go tonight.”

He could not help feeling that his going out while the weather was in such a state would excite a great amount of wonder in the house; but that was a minor event in comparison to what might possibly ensue from remaining, so he put on his hat.

Tap — tap! Came against the panel of his door.

Todd muttered an awful oath, and then said, —

“Come in.”

Mrs. Hardman entered the room.

“I hope I don’t intrude upon you, sir, but I was so very anxious to know if the tea was just as you like it, sir?”

“Oh, yes — yes. I am going out a little way, my good madam. Only a little way.”

“Out, sir?”

“Yes, and why not? — Why not? Oh, dear me! How bad my cough is to be sure, tonight. Eugh! — eugh!”

“Goodness gracious! My dear sir, you will not think of venturing out tonight? Oh, sir!”

“Why not, madam?”

“The wind, sir — the rain, sir — and the wind and the rain together, sir. Oh, dear! It isn’t a night to turn out a dog in, not that I like dogs, but I beg, sir, you won’t think of it. Only listen, sir. How it does blow, to be sure!”

“Madam!” said Todd, putting on a solemn look, “I must go. It is my duty to go.”

“Your duty, sir?”

“Yes. Whenever the wind blows and the rain comes down, I put a quantity of small change in my pocket, and I go out to see what objects of distress in the streets I can relieve. It is then that I feel myself called upon in the sacred name of heavenly charity to see to the wants of my poorer fellow creatures. It is then that I can find many a one whom I can make happy and comfortable for a brief space, at all events; and that’s the way that I am always, you see, madam, with a bad cold.”

“Generous man!” said Mrs. Hardman, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron.

“Not at all, madam, not at all. It is one’s duty, and nothing else. I feel bound to do it. But I shall want a little something for supper. A nice boiled chicken, if you please, and you will be so good as to get it for me, madam. Take this guinea, if you please, and we can talk about the change, you know, when I want anything else, my good madam.”

“My word!” thought Mrs. Hardman. “He is a wonderful lodger, for he forgets all about his change. I feel that it would only vex the poor old gentleman to remind him of it, and that I do not feel justified in doing. Ahem! Yes, sir. Oh, certainly, I will get the finest chicken, sir, that can be had.”

“Do so, madam, do so. Now I’m going.”

“Oh, Lord! There’s a gust of wind!”

“I like it — I like it.”

“And there’s a dash of rain!”

“So much the better. Delightful, delightful, my dear madam, I shall find plenty of poor objects to relieve tonight. Under gateways, I shall find them, crouching upon doorsteps, and shivering on spots where a little shelter can be found from the inclemency of the weather. This is my time to try and do a little good with that superfluous wealth which Providence has given me.”

Mrs. Hardman made no further opposition to the benevolent intentions of a lodger who continually forgot his change, and Todd fairly left the house.

Little did the landlady think, while she was grasping at the guineas, that there was a reward of a thousand pounds for the apprehension of her lodger, and that it would every penny piece of it have been duly paid to her at the Treasury, if she could but have managed to lock him in a room until the officers of justice could be sent for, to pounce upon him and load him with irons, and take him off to prison.

But poor Mrs. Hardman had really no idea of how near she was to fortune; and when the street door closed upon Todd, she little suspected that she shut out such a sum as one thousand pounds sterling along with him.

“That is managed so far,” said Todd, as he shrank and cowed before the storm laden gale that dashed in his face the rain, as he reached the corner of the street.

There Todd paused, for a new fear came across him. It was that no waterman would venture upon the river with him on such a night; and yet after reasoning with himself a little time, he said —

“Watermen are human, and they love gold as much as any one else. After all, it only resolves itself into a question of how much I will pay.”

Full of this idea, which, in its way, was a tolerably just one, he sneaked down the Strand until he got right to Charing Cross. He had thought of going down one of the quiet streets near that place, and taking a boat there; but now he considered that he would have a much better chance by going as far as Westminster Bridge; and, accordingly, despite the rain and the wind, he made his way along Whitehall, and reached the bridge.

A few watermen were lounging about at the head of the stairs. They had little enough expectation of getting a fare at such a time, and upon such a day. One of them, however, seeing Todd pause, went up to him, and spoke —

“You didn’t want a boat, did you, sir?”

“Why, yes,” said Todd, “I did; but, I suppose, you are all afraid to earn a couple of guineas?”

“A couple of guineas?”

“Yes, or three, for the matter of that; one more or less don’t matter to me; but it may to you.”

“Indeed, it does, sir. You are right enough there. But where do you want to go to sir? Up or down?”

“To Greenwich.”

Todd thought if he mentioned Gravesend, he might frighten the man at once.

“Greenwich? Whew!” The waterman perpetrated a long whistle; and then, shaking his head, he said — “I’m very much afraid, sir, that it isn’t a question of guineas that will settle that; but I will speak to my mate. Halloo Jack! — Jack! I say, old boy, where are you?”

“Here you are,” said an old weatherbeaten man coming up the steps. “I’ve only been making the little craft fast. What is the row now, Harry — eh?”

“No row, old mate; but this here gentleman offers a matter of three guineas for a cruise to Greenwich.”

“Ay, and why not, Harry?”

“Why not? Don’t you hear how it’s blowing?”

“Yes, I do, Harry; but it won’t blow long. I’ve seen more gales than you have, lad, and I tell you that this one is all but over. The rain, in another quarter of an hour, will beat it all down. It’s fast going now. It will be a wet night, and a dark night; but it won’t blow, nor it won’t be cold.”

“If you say as much as that, Jack,” said the younger waterman, “I will swear to it.”

The old man smiled, as he added —

“Ah, dear me, yes, and so you may, Harry. I haven’t been so long out of doors that I don’t know the fancies of the weather. I can tell you a’most what it’s a going to do beforehand, better than it knows itself. There, don’t you hear how it’s coming in puffs, now, the wind, and each one is a bit fainter nor the one as comed afore it? Lord bless you, it’s nothing! We shall get a wet jacket, that’s all; and if so be, sir, as you really do want a cruise down to Greenwich, come on, and Harry and me will soon manage it for you.”

These words were very satisfactory to Todd. He had no objection in the world to its being rather a bad night on the river; but he certainly had a great objection to risking his life. Discomfort was a thing that gave him no concern. He knew well that that would pass away.

“If you are willing,” he said, “let us, then, start at once, and I will not hold you to your bargain if the weather should happen to turn very bad. We can, in such a case, easily, I dare say, put in at some of the numerous stairs on one side or other of the river.”

“There will be no need of that, sir,” said the old waterman. “If you go, and if you choose to go all the way, we will put you on shore at Greenwich.”

“How about London Bridge?” said the younger man, in a tone of some anxiety.

“Better than usual,” said Jack. “It is just the time to shoot it nicely, for the tide will be at a point, and won’t know exactly whether to go one way or the other.”

“It’s all right, then?”

“It is.”

Todd himself had had his suspicions that the passage of old London Bridge would be one of no ordinary difficulty on such a night as that, but he knew that if the tide was at that point which the old man mentioned, that it might be passed with the most perfect safety, and it was a matter of no small gratification to him to hear from such a competent authority that such was the fact just then.

“Let us go at once,” he said.

“All’s right, sir. Our wherry is just at the foot of the stairs, here. I will pull her in, Harry.”

The old man ran down the slippery stairs with the activity of a boy, and as Todd and Harry followed him, the latter said, in quite a confidential tone of voice —

“Ah, sir, you may trust to his judgment on anything that has anything to do with the river.”

“I am glad to hear it.”

“Yes, sir, and so am I. Now I thought I knew something, and I shouldn’t have ventured to take you, or if I had, it would have been with rather a faint heart; but now that the old man, sir, says it’s all right, I feel as comfortable as needs be in the matter.”

By this time they had reached the foot of the steps, which was being laved by the tide, and there the old man had the boat safely in hand.

“Now for it, sir,” he said. “Jump in.”

Todd did so, and the younger waterman followed him. He and his aged companion immediately took their places, and Todd stretched himself in the stern of the little craft.

The rain now came down in absolute torrents as the boat was pushed off by the two watermen into the middle of the stream.



Todd Encounters Great Perils on the River Thames.

CHAPTER CLXIV
The Police Galley on the Thames, and its Fate

What an anxious and protracted glance Todd cast around him when he found that he was fairly upon the river. How his eyes, with foxlike cunning, glistening like two lead coloured stars, were here, and there, and everywhere, in the course of a few moments. Then he contrived to speak, as he thought, craftily enough.

“There are but few boats on the river.”

“No, sir,” said the young waterman. “It isn’t everybody that cares to come on the water in such weather as this.”

“No — no. But I have business.”

“Exactly so, sir. That’s it.”

“Yes,” added Todd, in quite a contemplative tone of voice, “the fact is, that I have just heard that at Gravesend there resides a family, with whom I was once intimate, but had lost sight of. They have, as I hear, dropped into poverty, amounting to destitution, and I could not rest until I had gone after them to relieve them.”

“Did you say Gravesend?” said the old man.

“Why, yes; but I don’t ask you to go so far. I will try and find a conveyance on land at Greenwich; but — if — you like to pull all the way to Gravesend, I don’t mind paying, for I prefer the water.”

“Couldn’t do it,” said the old man.

“Certainly not,” said the young one.

Todd felt mortified that his plan of getting to Gravesend, by the aid of the boat, was thus put an end to; but he could not help feeling how very impolitic it would be to show any amount of chagrin upon such a subject, so he spoke as cheerfully as he could, merely saying —

“Well, of course, I don’t want you to do it; I merely offer you the job, as I am so fond of a little boating, that I would not mind a few guineas more upon such an account.”

“No use trying it,” said the old man, sententiously. “There’s several turns in the river, and we should be down one at this time before we could get there. Gravesend is quite another thing.”

“So it is,” said Todd.

He felt perfectly certain by the tone and the manner of the old man, that it would be of no use urging the matter any further; and the great dread he had of exciting suspicion that he was a fugitive, had the effect of making him as cautious as possible regarding what he said. In stern and moody silence, then, he reclined in the stern of the boat, while it cleaved through the black water; and, as the old boatman prophesied, the wind each moment went down until it left nothing but a freshness upon the surface of the water, which, although it was bitterly cold, in no way effected the progress of the boat.

But a slight rain now began to fall, and every moment the night got darker and darker still, until the lights upon the banks of the river looked like little stars afar off; and it was only when they got quite close to it, that they became aware of the proximity of Blackfriars Bridge. It was Todd that saw it first appearing like some gigantic object rising up out of the water to destroy them. He could not resist uttering an exclamation of terror, and then he added —

“What is it? Oh, what is it?”

“What — what?” said the young waterman, shipping his oars and looking rather terrified.

The old man gave his head a slight jerk as he said —

“I fancy it’s Blackfriars.”

“Oh, yes, yes,” said Todd, with a feeling of great relief. “It’s the bridge, of course — it’s the bridge; but in the darkness of the night, it looked awful and strange; and as we approached it, it had all the effect as if it were something big enough to crush the world rising up out of the water.

“Ay — ay,” said the old man. “I have seen it on all sorts of nights, and was looking out for it. It’s all right. Easy with your larboard over there. That will do — there we go.”

The boat shot under one of the arches of the old bridge, and for a moment, the effect was like going into some deep and horrible cavern, the lower part of which was a sea of ink.

Todd shuddered, but he did not say anything. He thought that after his affected raptures at sailing, that if he made any sort of remark indicative of his terrors at the passage of the bridge, they would sound rather inconsistent.

It was quite a relief when they had shot through the dim and dusky arch, and emerged again upon the broad open water; and owing to the terrible darkness that was beneath that arch, the night upon the river, after they had passed through it, did not seem to be nearly so black as it had been before, thus showing that, after all, most of our sensations are those of comparison, even including those dependant upon the physical changes of nature.

"This is cheering," said Todd. "It is lighter now upon the river. Don't you think it is?"

"Why," said the old man, "perhaps it is just a cloud or two lighter; but it's after coming through the arch that it makes the principal difference, I take it."

"Yes," said the other, "that's it; and the rain, to my thinking, will be a lasting one, for it comes down straight, and with a good will to continue. Don't you think so?"

The question was addressed to the old man, who answered it slowly and sententiously, keeping time with his words to the oars as they made a slight noise jerking in the rollocks.

"If it don't rain till sunrise, just ask me to eat the old boat, and I'll do it!"

"That's settled," said the young waterman.

The weather, in so far as rain or not rain was concerned, was not to Todd a matter of much concern. So long as there was no stormy aspect of the elements to prevent him from speeding upon his journey, he, upon the whole, rather liked the darkness and the rain, as it probably acted as a better shield for his escape, and he rather chuckled than not on the idea that the rain would last. Besides, it was evident that as it fell, it smoothed the surface of the river, so that the oars dipped clear into the stream, and the boat shot on the better.

"Well — well," he said, "we can but get wet."

"That's all," said the old man, "and I hold it to be quite a folly to make a fuss about that. If you sit still, the rain will, of course, soak into your clothes; but if you go on sitting still, it will in time give you up as a bad job, and begin to run out again. So you have nothing, you see, to do, but take it easy, and think of something else all the while."

"That is very true, my friend," said Todd, in a kind and conciliatory tone; "but you get wet through in the process."

"Just so. Pull away."

The younger man, for the last five minutes, had glanced several times through one of his hands along the line of the surface of the river, and the injunction to pull away was probably on account of his having been a little amiss in that particular. The old man had spoken the words rather sharply than otherwise.

"Yes — yes," said the other. "I'll pull away; but there's another craft upon the river, in spite of the rain, and they are pulling away with a vengeance rather. Look, they're in our wake."

"It's no use me looking. You know that well enough. I ain't quite so good with my eyes as I was a matter of twenty years ago. I suppose it's the police craft. Of late, you know, they have taken to cutting along at all times."

"Yes, it's them!"

Todd stooped in the boat, until his eyes went right along the line of the water's edge, and there he saw coming on swiftly a biggish bulky object, and as the oars broke the water, he could see that there were five or six of them on each side. It looked altogether like some great fish striking through the water with a number of strange looking fins.

The coward heart of Todd smote him, as well it might, when he saw this sight. For a moment or two he sat bewildered, and he thought that he should faint in the stern of the boat, and then that nothing in the world could save him from capture, if that were in reality the police boat. It was, perhaps, only the rain falling upon his face that revived him, as it came upon him with its cold, refreshed splash. To be sure he was well armed for one individual, but what could he do against some dozen of men? Suppose that he did shoot two or three of them, that would be but a poor recompense for his capture by the others. He was bewildered to know what to do. He spoke in a low, anxious tone, —

"Are you, from your knowledge of the river, quite sure that that is a police boat?"

"Ah, to be sure."

"Do you, then, think likewise that that is upon our track? Answer me that. Answer it fairly."

"Our track!" said the old man, as he almost ceased rowing. "Hilloa! There's something more in this affair than meets the eye. It won't exactly pay us to be overhauled by the police, after a chase. Who and what are you, my friend? If you are afraid of the police boat, we are not, and you ain't quite the sort of customer to suit us exactly, I should say."

"I have both their lives," thought Todd, as in the dark he felt for his pistols. "I have both their lives, and if they show any disposition to give me up, they shall not live another five minutes. I will shoot them both — cast their bodies into the river, and land myself at the first stairs I come to."

"Listen to me," he said, in a mild tone of voice. "It would only tire you, and, besides, it would take too long to tell why I have a fear of the police. But I have such a fear. I assure you, that I am quite innocent of what they accuse me. But until I can get from Hamburg the only witness who can prove my innocence, I do not want to fall into the hands of my enemies. I implore you not to sacrifice me!"

"Humph!" said the old man, "What have you done?"

“Nothing — nothing! as Heaven is my witness!”

“But what do they say you have done?” said the young waterman.

“Ay!” said the other, “That’s the question!”

“Why, they say that I was wrong in helping a poor lad, who certainly had done some wrong thing, to escape from the country; but then it would have broken his poor mother’s heart if they had hanged him. It was for forgery only, and it was all owing to bad company he did it. Alas! I did not think it a crime to aid the poor boy to get away. What good would his death have done to any one?”

“Was that all?”

“Yes; that was all. But it appears in law, you see, a very serious offence to aid and abet, as they call it, a felon. Poor boy! — Poor mother!”

“Oh, hang it, we won’t give you up to the bloodhounds of the law for that,” said the old man; “but, hark you, sir, it’s out of the question that we two should be able to hold our way against the police galley, with six young fresh rowers; so all we can do is to put you ashore somewhere, and then you can shift for yourself the best way you may. I don’t see what else we can do for you.”

“Nor I,” said the young waterman; “and in a few moments it will be best to do that. Is there a stairs close at hand?”

“Not one,” said the old man. “It’s a done thing. We can’t land you, except in the water, if that can be called landing you at all. I don’t know what to be at.”

“Oh, save me!” said Todd.

“But how can we?”

“Yes,” said the young waterman, “there’s one way of managing that, I think, will do it, and do it well, too.”

“Oh, how can I thank you?”

“Don’t mention it. Suppose we put him on to the first craft we come alongside of in the river, that is moored, and has got no one on board? It won’t be noticed, like our putting into a landing would, you know. They would be sure to say we had put some one on shore. But if we just ease the boat for a moment as we pass some craft, our fare can scramble on board, and we can go right on, and let the police overtake us, and overhaul us in due course. I’ll be bound that by this light there’s not a man on board of yonder craft can take upon himself to say whether there’s one, two, or three people in our wherry.”

“Yes,” said the old man, “that will do if anything will, and if that don’t do, nothing will.”

“It will do,” said Todd; “it will do. I thank you from my heart for the suggestion. It will do well. All you have to do is to let me board the craft in the river, upon the side furthest removed from the police boat. Oh! You will have the prayers of the widow and the fatherless, for this kind act.”

“Never mind about that. Pull away.”

“And — and when the police boat is past, will you then come and take me off again?”

“That’s awkward,” said the old man.

“We will, if we can,” said the young one; “but don’t depend upon us. We don’t know, as yet, what the police may say to us. For all we know, they know more than we would wish them, of your being in our boat; and all we can say, then, is, that we put you ashore; but they may keep a watch upon us after that, and if they do, it will be only to give you up to them that we could push off to you.”

“Yes — yes, I understand,” said Todd. “I thank you, and will take my chance of all that may happen.”

“You must.”

“There’s something ahead,” said the old man. “What is it?”

“It’s the pile-driving barge. They are mending up the bank of the river. I know that the men leave that all night, as there is nothing to take from it that any one can lift. Will you go on board that, sir?”

“Yes, yes,” said Todd, “That will do.”

“Be quick, then, about it,” said the old man, “for they gain upon us.”

“Boat ahoy!” cried a voice over the river.

CHAPTER CLXV

Todd Reaches Gravesend, and duly Embarks for Holland

Todd, when he heard that voice, quite sank down into the bottom of the boat, and felt as though his last hour were come.

“Don’t answer,” said the old man. “Pull away for the pile-driving barge as hard as you can.”

“Oh, yes, pull — pull!” cried Todd. “Save me!”

“If you make that noise,” added the old man, “we may as well be off at once, for the river, when it is as smooth as it is now, carries voices well.”

“Boat ahoy!” cried the voice again.

“We must answer them now,” said the old waterman. “Ay, ay! Is it here? Boat ahoy!”

“Ay, ay!” came the voice from the police galley.

At that moment the two watermen succeeded in reaching the broad stern of the barge, in which was centred the pile-driving machinery, and the young man said to Todd —

“Now clamber in, and good luck attend you. If we don’t come to you in the course of an hour, don’t expect us, that’s all.”

Todd was not very young and supple in his joints, but the sense of present and serious danger has an effect upon every one, and in a moment he seized the side of the pile-driving barge, and drew himself in.

“All right,” said the old man.

“Oh, yes — yes,” said Todd, as he crouched down with his chin touching the side of the barge.

“Good night, then.”

“Good night! You will come for me if you can?”

“Yes, but don’t expect us. Pull, now, as hard as you can, and get out into the stream. Pull! pull!”

By the strenuous united exertions of the two men, the boat shot along at good speed, and soon got to a considerable distance from the barge in which Todd had taken refuge. It was then that the police galley hoisted a strong light that shed a bright glare through the rain, and over the surface of the river.

“Am I saved?” said Todd. “Am I saved, or am I not?”

He sank quite down into the body of the barge. There was a sort of platform over one half of it, and upon that platform he felt the mass of iron, weighing about a couple of hundredweight, or more, which was used for driving piles into the bed of the river, and which, when liberated from a height, and allowed to fall upon the end of the pile, comes with a most tremendous force.

That piece of metal so used is called “the monkey.”

“They come — they come!” said Todd. “Oh, if they only chanced to see the boat place me here, I am lost. Quite lost! What will become of me, then, with nothing but the cold, cold river all round me? Death, indeed, now stares me in the face!”

Truly, the situation of Todd now was rather a critical one. There was no saying how far the men on board the police galley might not think themselves justified in boarding any craft that was moored upon the river; and, indeed, if they were searching for him, and had really any idea that he was trying an escape by the Thames, it was highly improbable that they would omit to have a good look in the barge where he was. There was another great danger, too, that suddenly flashed across his mind, and drove him nearly mad.

“If the police, when they overtake the wherry,” he thought, “should mention who it is they are in pursuit of, may not the two watermen at once, upon finding that their sympathy has been excited for me, declare where I am, and even aid in my apprehension?”

This idea, either because it was the last one that came into his head, or because it really was the one that seemed most full of real dangers, clung to him with desperation; and more than once the thought of ending all his miseries by a plunge into the river, crossed his mind. But it is not such men as Sweeney Todd who commit suicide.

“They come — they come!” was all he could now say.

The light from the police was, by the aid of a revolving reflector, capable of being cast pretty strongly in any direction that those who had the care and control of it chose; and for a moment it rested upon the barge where Todd was. He felt as if, at that moment, he could have crept right through the bottom of the barge, and taken refuge in the Thames.

The broad beam of light was then shifted off the barge on to the little wherry, which was at rest upon the water waiting for the approach of the police galley.

And now, with vigorous sweeps of its six oars, that galley made its way right past the barge. Oh! What a relief it was that it went past! It did not follow that all danger was gone because the police barge had gone past; but it was a

sufficient proof that the glare of light they had sent in that direction, by the aid of the reflector, had not had the effect of discovering him to them.

"That is something," muttered Todd.

He then slowly permitted his eyes to peer over the side of the barge in order, as far as he could, to watch the interview that was about to take place between the police and the two watermen in the wherry where he had been so lately a passenger. Upon that interview, now, he thought that his fate depended.

"Hilloa!" cried one of the police. "Why did you not wait for us when we first called to you?"

"We did," said the old man, "as soon as we saw your light, and knew what you were; but there are so many jokes played off upon the river, that if we were to rest oars to everybody who call — 'Boat ahoy,' we should have enough to do."

"Who are you?"

"A couple of registered watermen. Here we are. You can overhaul us at once, if you like."

"You have no passenger?"

"No. I only wish we had. Times are very bad."

"Well, it's all right. But we are placed here by the orders of Sir Richard Blunt the magistrate, who suspects that the notorious murderer, Sweeney Todd, may try to escape by the Thames."

"Sweeney Todd!" cried the young waterman in a tone of horror. "What, the fellow that killed all the people in Fleet Street, and made them into pies?"

"The same."

"It's coming now," thought Todd. "It's coming now. They will tell him where I am."

The next words that were spoken, were uttered in a tone of voice that did not reach his ears. It was the old man who had spoken, and he did not utter his words so clearly as his younger companion; and although he tried his utmost to hear what he said, he could not possibly make it out, and he remained in a perfect agony of apprehension.

"Very well," said the officer in the police barge, who had conducted the brief conversation. "It is a miserable night. Give way, my men. Steady there. Put the light out."

In an instant the light was lowered and extinguished, and the darkness that reigned upon the surface of the Thames was like a darkness that could be felt. It was difficult to conceive that it was not really tangible.

“Are they coming back?”

That was the question that Todd asked of himself, as he grasped, to steady himself, the heavy piece of iron that belonged to the pile-driving machine. He listened most intently, until it was positively painful to do so, and he began to fancy all sorts of strange noises in the air and from the water. In a few moments, though, an actual splashing sound put to route all imaginary noises, and he felt convinced that the boat with the police was slowly returning towards the barge in which he was concealed.

There was, to be sure, still a hope that they would pass it; but it was only a hope.

Oh, how awfully full of apprehension was each passing moment now. It might be that the police galley was only going quietly back to its proper station, after overtaking the wherry; but then it might be quite otherwise, and the doubt was terrific. While that doubt lasted, it was worse than the reality of danger.

And now it was quite evident to the perception of Todd that the police boat was close to the barge, and he heard a voice say —

“Is that the pile-driving barge?”

“Yes, sir,” replied some one.

“And they leave it, I suppose, as usual?”

“No doubt, sir.”

“Well, pull alongside, and a couple of you jump in and see if all is right. People leave their property exposed to all sorts of depredations, and then blame us for not looking after it. Mind how you go, my men. Don’t run foul of the barge.”

“No, sir. All’s right.”

From the moment that this conversation had begun, Todd had remained crouching down in the barge, like a man changed to stone. He heard every word — those words upon which hung, or seemed to hang, his life, and his grasp upon the massive piece of iron tightened.

The police boat gradually advanced, and finally just grated against the side of the barge.

A sudden thought took possession of Todd. With a yell, like that of a madman, he, with preternatural strength, moved the heavy mass of iron, and in one moment toppled it over the edge of the barge.

Crash it went into the police galley. There was then a shriek, and the men were struggling in the water. The piece of iron had gone right through the boat, staving to pieces. It filled and sank.



Todd and the Police Galley.

“Help — help!” cried a voice, and then all was still as the grave for a few moments.

“It is done,” said Todd.

“Help! Mercy!” said a voice again, and a dark figure rose up by the side of the barge, clinging to it.

Todd drew one of his pistols. He levelled it at the head of the figure. He was upon the point of pulling the trigger, when it struck him that the flash and the report might be seen and heard from the shore. The pistol was heavily mounted with brass at the butt end of it.

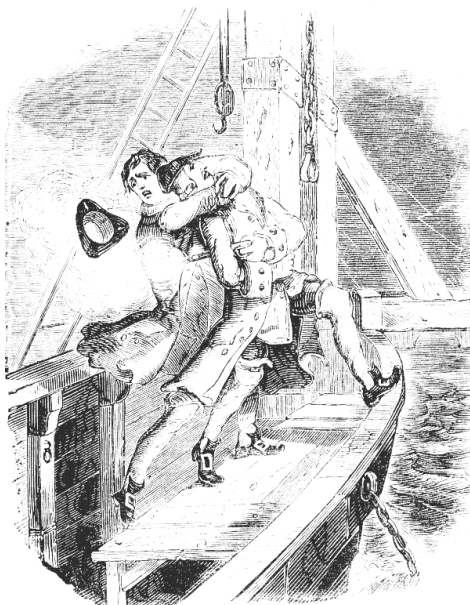
“Down!” said Todd. “Down!”

He struck the clambering, half drowned man upon the head, and with a shriek he fell backwards into the water and disappeared. In another moment Todd felt a pair of arms twining round him, and a voice cried —

“Murderer, I have you now! You cannot shake me off!”

Todd made an effort, but, in truth, those wet and clinging arms held to him like fate.

“Fool,” he said. “You will find drowning the easiest death for you to meet.”



The Murder on the Thames — Todd's Narrow Escape.

“Help — help! Murder!” shouted his assailant.

The pistol was still in Todd's grasp. With a devilish ingenuity, he thrust the barrel of it under his arm and felt that it touched his assailant. He pulled the trigger, and then he and the man who held him fell to the bottom of the barge together.

Todd kicked and plunged until he got uppermost, and then he felt for the throat of the other, and when he got a clutch of it he held it with a gripe of iron.

“Fool,” he said. “Did you think that one driven to such desperation as I am, would be conquered so easily?”

There was no reply. Todd lifted up the head of the man, and it hung limply and flaccidly from the neck. He was quite dead. The pistol bullet had gone through his heart, and death was instantaneous.

“Another one,” said Todd, as he sprang to his feet and stood upon the dead body. “Another one sacrificed to my vengeance. Let those only interfere with me who are tired of life.”

He placed his hand to his ear now, to listen if there were any indications of others of the boat's crew stirring; but all was still. No sound, save the lazy ripple of the tide past the old barge on which he was, met his ears.

“It is over,” he said. “It is quite over now. That one great danger is past now.”

The rain began to fall quicker, and splashed upon the half deck of the barge. Todd felt that he was thoroughly wet through; but all minor ills he could now laugh at, that he had escaped the one great peril of capture. He felt that his life had hung upon a thread, and that only the recent accident had saved him; for to be captured, was to him equivalent to death.

“All gone!” he whispered. “They are all gone! Well — well! They would have dragged me to a prison, and then to a scaffold! Self-defence is a sound principle, and for that I have fought!”

A sudden gust of wind got up at that moment, and came howling past Todd, and ruffling upon the surface of the river; but all was still around the barge. There was now no cry for mercy — no shout for help — no bubbling shriek of some swimmer, who was yet sinking to death, as the waters closed over him.

“Yes,” said Todd, as his long hair blew out like snakes in the wind, “I am alone here now. They are all dead, and I could do it again if it had to be done.”