

CHAPTER XLVIII
Tobias's Heart is Touched

Tobias is no worse all this time. But is he better? Has the godlike spirit of reason come back to the mind-benighted boy? Has that pure and gentle spirit recovered from its fearful thralldom, and once again opened its eyes to the world and the knowledge of the past? We shall see. Accompany us, reader, once again to the house of Colonel Jeffery. You will not regret looking upon the pale face of poor Tobias again. The room is darkened, for the sun is shining brightly, and an almond tree in the front garden is not sufficiently umbrageous in its uncongenial soil to keep the bright rays from resting too strongly upon the face of the boy. There he lies! His eyes are closed, and the long lashes — for Tobias, poor fellow, was a pretty boy — hung upon his cheek, held down by the moisture of a tear. The face is pale, oh, so pale and thin, and the one arm and hand that lies outside the coverlet of the bed, show the blue veins through the thin transparent skin. And all this is the work of Sweeney Todd. Well, well! Heaven is patient! In the room is everything that can conduce to the comfort of the slumbering boy. Colonel Jeffery has kept his word. And now that we have taken a look at Tobias, tread gently on tiptoe, reader, and come with us downstairs to the back drawing room, where Colonel Jeffery, his friend Captain Rathbone, the surgeon, and Mrs. Ragg are assembled. Mrs. Ragg is “crying her eyes out,” as the saying is.

“Sit down, Mrs. Ragg,” said the colonel, “sit down and compose yourself. Come, now, there is no good done by this immoderate grief.”

“But I can't help it.”

“You can control it. Sit down.”

“But I oughtn't to sit down. I'm the cook, you know, sir.”

“Well, well; never mind that, if you are my cook. If I ask you to be seated, you may waive all ceremony. We want to ask you a few questions, Mrs. Ragg.”

Upon this Tobias's mother did sit down, but it was upon the extreme edge of a chair, so that the slightest touch to it in the world would have knocked it from under her, and down she would have gone on to the floor.

“I'm sure, gentlemen, I'll answer anything I know, and more too, with all the pleasure in life, for, as I often said to poor Mr. Ragg, who is dead and gone, and buried accordingly in St. Martin's, as he naturally might, and a long illness he had, and what with one thing and — ”

“Yes! Yes! We know all that. Just attend to us for one moment, if you please, and do not speak until you thoroughly understand the nature of the question we are about to put to you.”

“Certainly not, sir. Why should I speak, for as I often and often said, when — ”

“Hush, hush!”

Mrs. Ragg was silent at last, and then the surgeon spoke to her calmly and deliberately, for he much wished her clearly to understand what he was saying to her.

“Mrs. Ragg, we still think that the faculties of your son Tobias are not permanently injured, and that they are only suffering from a frightful shock.”

“Yes, sir, they is frightfully shook.”

“Hush! We think that if anything that greatly interested him could be brought to bear upon the small amount of perception that remains to him he would recover. Do you now know of anything that might exercise a strong influence over him?”

“Lord bless you — no, sir.”

“How old is he?”

“Fifteen, sir, and you would hardly believe what a time of it I had with Tobias. All the neighbours said — ‘Well, if Mrs. Ragg gets over this, she’s a woman of ten thousand;’ and Mrs. Whistlesides, as lived next door, and had twins herself, owned she never —”

“Good God, will you be quiet, madam?”

“Quiet, sir? I’m sure I haven’t said two words since I’ve been in the blessed room. I appeal to the *kernel*.”

“Well! Well! It appears then, Mrs. Ragg, you can think of nothing that is at all likely to aid us in this plan of awakening, by some strong impression, the dormant faculties of Tobias?”

“No, gentlemen, no! I only wish I could, poor boy; and there’s somebody else wasting away for grief about him; poor little thing, when she heard that Tobias was mad, I’m sure I thought she’d have broke her heart, for if Tobias ever loved anybody in all the world, it was little Minna Gray. Ah! It’s affecting to think how such children love each other, ain’t it, sir? Lord bless you, the sound of her footstep was enough for him, and his eyes would get like two stars, as he’d clap his hands together, and cry — ‘Ah! that’s dear Minna.’ That was before he went to Mr. Todd’s, poor fellow.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, sir, oh, you haven’t an idea.”

"I think I have. Who is this Minna Gray, who so enthralled his boyish fancy?"

"Why, she's widow Gray's only child, and they live in Milford Lane, close to the Temple, you see, and even Tobias used to go with me to drink tea with Mrs. Gray, as we was both *bequeathed* women in a world of trouble."

"You were what?"

"Bequeathed."

"Bereaved you mean, I suppose, Mrs. Ragg; but how could you tell me that you knew of no means of moving Tobias's feelings. This Minna Gray, if he really loves her, is the very thing."

"Lor', sir. What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean that if you can get this Minna Gray here, the possibility is that it will be the recovery of Tobias. At all events, it is the only chance of that kind that presents itself. If that fails, we must only trust to time. How old is this girl?"

"About fourteen, sir, and though I say it —"

"Well, well. Do you now, as a woman of the world, Mrs. Ragg, think that she has an affection for poor Tobias?"

"Do I think? Lor' bless you, sir, she dotes on the ground he walks on, that she does — poor young thing. Hasn't she grizzled a bit. It puts me in mind of —"

"Yes, yes. Of course it does. Now, Mrs. Ragg, you understand it is an object with our friend the colonel here, that no one but yourself should know that Tobias is here. Could you get this young girl to come to tea, for instance, with you, without telling her what else she is wanted for?"

"Dear me, yes, sir; for, as I used to say to Mr. Ragg, who is dead and gone, and buried in St. Martin's —"

"Exactly. Now go and get her by all means, and when she comes here we will speak to her, but above all things be careful what you say."

"I think Mrs. Ragg is already aware," said Colonel Jeffery, "that her son's safety, as well as her own, depends upon her discretion in keeping his whereabouts a profound secret. We will instruct this young girl when she comes here."

Colonel Jeffery, when he heard that the medical man was of opinion that the experiment of awakening the feelings of Tobias, by bringing Minna Gray, was worth trying, at once acquiesced, and urged upon Mrs. Ragg to go and see Minna. After many more speeches, about as much to the purpose as those which we have already formed, Mrs. Ragg got herself dressed and went upon

her errand. She was instructed to say that she had found herself unequal to being a laundress in the Temple, and so had thought it was better to return to her own original occupation of cook in a gentleman's family, and that, as she had the liberty to do so, she wished Minna Gray to come and take tea with her. Thus forewarned of the part she was to play, Mrs. Ragg started upon her mission, in which we need not follow her, for the result of it is all that we particularly care about, and that consisted in her bringing Minna in great triumph to the colonel's house. Colonel Jeffery, and Captain Rathbone, who was staying to dine with him, saw the young girl as she came up the garden path. She was one of those small, delicately beautiful young creatures, who seem specially made to love and be loved. Her light auburn hair hung in dancing curls down her fair cheeks, and her beautifully shaped lips and pearly teeth were of themselves features that imparted much loveliness to her countenance. She had, too, about her face all the charm of childish beauty, which bespoke her so young as to have lost little of that springtide grace, which, alas, is so fleeting. Add to all this a manner so timid, so gentle, and so retiring, that she seemed to be an inhabitant of some quieter world than this, and you have Minna Gray, who had crept into the boyish heart of poor Tobias, before your eyes.

"What a gentle quiet looking little creature," said the captain.

"She is indeed; and what a contrast!"

"Between her and Mrs. Ragg, you mean? It does indeed look like an elephant escorting a fawn. But Mrs. Ragg has her good qualities."

"She has, and they are numerous. She is honest and candid as the day, and almost the only fault that can be laid to her charge is her garrulity."

"How do you mean to proceed?"

"Why, Rathbone, I mean to condescend to do what, under any other circumstances, would be most unjustifiable — that is, listen to the conversation of Mrs. Ragg with Minna Gray; I do so with the concurrence of the old lady, who is to lead her to speak of Tobias, and it is solely for the purpose of judging if she really loves the boy, and making a proper report to the surgeon, that I do so."

"You are right enough, Jeffery; the end in this case, at all events, sanctifies the means, however defective such a system of philosophy may be as a general thing. May I likewise be an auditor?"

"I was going to ask you to so far oblige me, for I shall then have the advantage of your opinion; so you will do me a favour."

There was a small pantry called a butler's pantry close to the kitchen, into which Mrs. Ragg had taken Minna Gray. A door opened from this pantry into the kitchen, and another on to the landing at the foot of the kitchen stairs. Now Mrs. Ragg was to take care that the door opening to the kitchen should be just ajar, and the colonel and his friend could get into the pantry by the other mode

of entrance. Colonel Jeffery was a gentleman in the fullest sense of the term, and he kept no useless bloated menials about him, so the butler's pantry had no butler to interfere with him, the colonel, in his own house. In the course of a few minutes Jeffery and Rathbone were in the pantry, from whence they could both see and hear what passed in the kitchen. To be sure there was a certain air of restraint about Mrs. Ragg at the thought that her master was listening to what passed, and that lady had a propensity to use hard words, of the meaning of which she was in the most delightful state of ignorance; but as it was to Minna Gray's conversation that the colonel wanted to listen, these little peculiarities of Mrs. Ragg upon the occasion did not much matter. Of course, Minna thought she had no other auditors than her old friend. Mrs. Ragg was quite busy over the tea.

"Well, my dear," she said to Minna, "this is a world we live in."

Mrs. Ragg, no doubt, intended this as a discursive sort of remark that might open any conversation very well, and lead to anything, and she was not disappointed, for it seemed to give to the young girl courage to utter that which was struggling to her lips.

"Mrs. — Mrs. Ragg," she began, hesitatingly.

"Yes. My dear, let me fill your cup."

"Thank you; but I was going to say —"

"A little more sugar?"

"No, no. But I cannot place a morsel in my lips, Mrs. Ragg, or think or speak to you of anything else, until you have told me if you have heard any news of poor — poor —"

"Tobias?"

"Yes — yes — yes!"

Minna Gray placed her two little hands upon her face and burst into tears. Mrs. Ragg made a snuffling sort of noise that, no doubt, was highly sympathetic, and after a pause of a few moments' duration, Minna gathered courage to speak again.

"You know, Mrs. Ragg, the last you told me of him was that — that Mr. Todd had said he was mad, you know, and then you went to fetch somebody, and when you came back he was gone; and Mr. Todd told you the next day that poor Tobias ran off at great speed and disappeared. Has anything been heard of him since?"

"Ah, my dear, alas! Alas!"

“Why do you cry alas? — Have you any more sad news to tell me?”

“He was my only son — and all the world and his wife, as the saying is, can’t tell how much I loved him.”

Minna Gray clasped her hands, and, while the tears coursed down her young fair cheeks, she said —

“And I, too, loved him!”

“I always thought you did, my dear, and I’m sure, if you had been an angel out of Heaven, my poor boy could not have thought more of you than he did. There was nothing that you said or did that was not excellent. He loved the ground you walked on; and a little old worsted mitten, that you left at our place once, he used to wear round his neck, and kiss it when he thought no one was nigh, and say — ‘This was my Minna’s!’ ”

The young girl let her head rest upon her hands, and sobbed convulsively.

“Lost — lost!” she said, “and poor, kind, good Tobias is lost!”

“No, my dear, it’s a long lane that hasn’t a turning. Pluck up your courage, and your courage will pluck up you. Keep sixpence in one pocket, and hope in another. When things are at the worst they mend. You can’t get further down in a well than the bottom.”

Minna sobbed on.

“And so, my dear,” added Mrs. Ragg, “I do know something more of Tobias.”

The young girl looked up.

“He lives! — He lives!”

“Lor’ a mussy, don’t lay hold of a body so. Of course he lives, and, what’s more, the doctor says that you ought to see him — he’s upstairs.”

“Here? — Here?”

“Yes, to be sure. That’s why I brought you to tea.”

Minna Gray took a fit of trembling, and then, making great efforts to compose herself, she said —

“Tell me all — tell me all!”

“Well, my dear, it’s an ill wind that blows nobody good, and so here I am, cook in as good a place as mortal woman would wish to have. I can’t tell you all the rights of the story, because I don’t know it. But certainly Tobias is upstairs

in bed like a gentleman, only they say as his brains is — is something or another that makes him not understand anything or anybody, and so you see the doctor says if you speak to him, who knows but what he may come to himself?”

With an intuitive tact that belongs to some minds, and which Minna Gray, despite the many disadvantages of her social position, possessed in an eminent degree, she understood at once the whole affair. Tobias was suffering from some aberration of intellect, which the voice and the presence of one whom he loved fondly might dissipate. Would she shrink from the trial? — Would her delicacy take the alarm and overcome her great desire to recover Tobias? Oh, no; she loved him with a love that far outstripped all smaller feelings, and, if ever there was a time when that love took complete possession of her heart, it was at this affecting moment, when she was told that her voice might have the magic power of calling back to him the wandering reason that harshness and ill-usage had for a time toppled from its throne.

“Take me to him!” she cried — “take me to him! If all that is wanted to recover him be the voice of affection, he will soon be as he was once to us.”

“Well, my dear, take your tea, and I’ll go and speak to the *kernel*.”

It was now time for Colonel Jeffery and his friend, the captain, to retire from the pantry, where we need not say that they had been pleased and affected listeners to what had passed between Mrs. Ragg and the fair and intelligent Minna Gray, who, in beauty and intelligence, far exceeded their utmost expectations.

CHAPTER XLIX
Tobias Recovers his Intellect

In the course of a quarter of an hour the surgeon was sent for, and then Mrs. Ragg tapped at the drawing room door, to give the colonel an account of the success of her mission; but he at once said to her —

“We know all, Mrs. Ragg. We merely wish to see Tobias first, so that the medical gentleman may see exactly his condition, and then if you will bring Minna Gray here I will speak to her, and, I hope, put her quite at her ease as regards what she has to do.”

“Certainly, sir, certainly. Hold fast, and good comes at last.”

The surgeon and the two gentlemen went to Tobias’s chamber, and there they found him in the same lethargic condition that, with only occasional interruptions, he had continued in since he had been in the colonel’s house. These interruptions consisted in moaning appeals for mercy, and at times the name of Todd would pass his lips, in accents which showed what a name of terror it was to him. The surgeon placed his hand upon Tobias’s head.

“Tobias!” he said, “Tobias!”

A deep sigh was his answer.

“Tobias! Tobias!”

“Oh, God! God!” cried Tobias, feebly. “Spare me — I will tell nothing. Oh, spare me, Mr. Todd. — Repent now. There, there — the blood! What a crowd of dead men. Dead — dead — dead — all dead!”

“No better?” said the colonel.

“Not a bit. On the contrary, the longer he remains in this condition, the less chance there will be of his recovery. I shall lose hope, if this last experiment produces no good results. Let us go and speak to the young girl.”

They all descended to the drawing room, and Minna Gray was summoned. Colonel Jeffery took her kindly by the hand and led her to a seat, and then he said to her —

“Now, Miss Gray, remember that all here are friends to you and to Tobias, and that we all feel deeply for him and for you. You are very young, both of you, but that is no reason on earth why you should not love each other.”

Minna looked up at him through her tears, as she said —

“Is he very — very ill?”

"He is indeed. We suspect — indeed, I may say we know, that his mind has received so severe a shock that, for a time, it is deranged; but we hope that, as that derangement, you understand, has not arisen from any disease, pleasant and agreeable impressions may restore him. What we want you to do is to speak to him as you, no doubt, have been in the habit of doing in happier times."

"Yes, yes, sir."

"I think you know exactly what we mean?"

"I do, sir — indeed I do."

"Oh, bless you, sir, she understands," said Mrs. Ragg. "A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse, you know, gentlemen. Handsome is as handsome does — as I used to say to the late Mr. Ragg, who is naturally dead and gone, and accordingly buried in St. Martin's —"

"You can tell us that another time, madam," said the surgeon. "At present, you see we are rather busy. Now, Miss Gray, if you will have the goodness to come with me, we will see what can be done for our young friend above stairs."

Poor Minna Gray! How her colour went and came like the sunlight of an April day, as she accompanied the three gentlemen and Mrs. Ragg upstairs to Tobias's chamber. How she trembled when they reached the landing; and what a faintness came over her when the door was opened, and she saw that dimly lighted room.

"Courage," whispered Colonel Jeffery to her. "This is a holy errand you are upon."

"Yes, yes."

"Cut your coat according to your cloth," said Mrs. Ragg, who, provided she thought of a proverb, was not very particular with regard to its applicability to the circumstances under which she uttered it. "Keep your feet to the length of your sheet."

"Pray, madam," said the surgeon, who seemed to have quite a horror of Mrs. Ragg. "Pray, madam, oblige me by being silent."

"A still tongue makes a wise head."

"Good God, colonel! Will you speak to her?"

"Hush, Mrs. Ragg!" said Colonel Jeffery. "Hush! You will perhaps be the means of spoiling this important effort for the recovery of your son if you are not perfectly quiet."

Thus admonished, Mrs. Ragg shrank into the background a little, and the colonel went to the window and let in a little more light. The surgeon conducted Minna Gray to the bedside, and she looked upon the boy who had won her childish heart through a world of tears.

"It is — it is — Tobias!"

"Is he much altered?"

"Oh, yes; much — much. He — he used to look so happy. His — his face was like a piece of sunshine!"

She sank upon a chair that was by the bedside, and sobbed.

"This will never do," said the surgeon.

"Wait — oh, wait a little," she whispered. "Only wait a little. — I shall be better soon."

The surgeon nodded; and then stepping back to the colonel and the captain, he said —

"This burst of grief must have its way, or it will mar all. We must have patience."

They all hid themselves behind the folds of the bed furniture, and Mrs. Ragg sat down in an obscure corner of the room, working her knee up and down, as though she were nursing an imaginary baby. Gradually the sobs of Minna Gray subsided, until all was still. She then gently took one of the thin wasted hands of poor Tobias in her own, and looked at it. Oh, how changed it was. She then bent over him, and looked in his face. What permeative lines of care were there, battling with rounded muscles of early youth! Then she summoned all her courage to speak. She placed her lips close to his ear, and in the soft sweet accents that had long before sank deep into his heart, she said —

"Tobias! — My Tobias!"

The boy started.

"Dear Tobias, it is I. Minna!"

He opened his eyes, which had been closed and seemingly cemented by tears.

"Tobias! Tobias, dear!"

A smile — a heavenly smile. It was the first that had played upon his lips since he set foot in the shop of Sweeney Todd, now broke like a sunbeam over his face.

"I am mad — mad!" he said, gently, "or that is the voice of my Minna."

"It is your Minna. It is — it is, Tobias; look at me."

He rose up in the bed — he cast one glance at the well-known and dearly remembered face, and then, with a gasping sob of joy, he clasped her in his arms.

"It's done," said the surgeon.

"Thank God!" said Colonel Jeffery.

Mrs. Ragg drew her breath so hard through her nose that she made a noise like some wild animal in the agonies of suffocation.

"You really know me, Tobias?"

"Know you, dear? Oh, why should I not know you, Minna? God bless you!"

"May He bless you, Tobias."

They wept together; Minna forgot that there was anybody in the world but herself and Tobias, and parting the long straggling masses of his hair from before his face, she kissed him.

"For my sake, Tobias, now you will take care of yourself, and recover quickly."

"Dear — dear Minna."

He seemed never tired of holding her hands and kissing them. Suddenly the surgeon stepped forward with a small vial in his hand.

"Now, Tobias," he said, "you are much better, but you must take this."

The look of surprise and consternation with which Tobias regarded him was beyond description. Then he glanced at the bedstead and the rich hangings, and he said —

"Oh, Minna, what is all this? Where am I? Is it a dream?"

"Give it to him," said the surgeon, handing the vial to Minna. She placed the neck of it to his lips.

"Drink, Tobias."

Had it been deadly poison she had offered him, Tobias would have taken it. The vial was drained. He looked in her face again with a smile.

"If this is indeed a dream, my Minna, may I never awaken — dear — dear — one — I — I —"



Tobias Restored to his Senses by Minna's Assistance.

He fell back upon the pillow. The smile still lingered upon his face, but the narcotic which the surgeon had had administered to him had produced its effect, and the enfeebled Tobias fell into deep sleep. Minna Gray looked rather alarmed at this sudden falling off of Tobias from waking to sleeping, but the surgeon quieted her fears.

"All is right," he said. "He will awaken in some hours wonderfully refreshed, and I have the pleasure of now predicting his perfect cure."

"You do not know," said Colonel Jeffery, "what pleasure that assurance gives me."

"And me," said the captain.

Minna looked all that she thought, but she could not speak, and Mrs. Ragg, still kept up the mysterious noise she produced by hard breathing with her mouth close shut.

"Now, madam," said the surgeon to her, "our young friend must be left alone for some hours. It is now six o'clock, and I do not expect he will awaken until twelve. When he does so, I am very much mistaken if you do not all of you find him perfectly restored and composed, although very weak."

"I will take care to be at hand," said the colonel. "Miss Gray, perhaps you will call and see how he is tomorrow, and all I can say is, that you will be quite welcome to my house whenever you think proper, but let me impress upon you one thing."

“What is it, sir?”

“The absolute necessity of your keeping Tobias’s place of abode and anything concerning him a most profound secret.”

“I will do so.”

“If you do not, you will not only endanger the cause of justice, but in all probability his life, for he has an enemy with great resources, and of the most unscrupulous disposition in the use of them: I say this much to you, because the least indiscretion might be fatal.”

“I will guard the secret, sir, as I would guard his life.”

“That will do — now come downstairs, and let us have a glass of wine to drink to the speedy restoration to perfect health of Tobias. Come, Rathbone, what do you think? Shall we be one too many yet for Todd?”

“I begin to think we shall.”

“I feel certain of it. So soon as we see that Tobias is sufficiently well to make any statement, it will be necessary to send for Sir Richard Blunt.”

“Certainly.”

“And then I hope and trust that we shall get at something that will elucidate the mystery that is still attached to the fate of poor Thornhill.”

“Ah, I fear he is gone!”

“Dead?”

“Yes. That fatal string of pearls has heralded him to death, I fear; but, perhaps we shall hear something concerning that yet from Tobias.”

They all sat down in the drawing room, and with tearful pleasure Minna Gray drank a glass of wine to the health of Tobias, after which Mrs. Ragg saw her home again to Milford Lane, and no doubt all the road from this colonel’s house to there did not want for a prolific subject of conversation. How happy Minna felt when she put up to Heaven her simple prayer that night, previous to seeking repose.

CHAPTER L
Johanna Makes a New Confidant

We left the spectacle maker and his family rather in a state of confusion. Big Ben the beefeater had had his revenge upon both Mrs. Oakley and the Saint, and it was a revenge that really did them no harm, so that in that respect it had turned out well. The Rev. Josiah Lupin did not return to the house, but Mrs. Oakley, in a terrible state of prostration from the effects of the sickness that had come over her, staggered again into the parlour. She looked at Mr. Oakley, as she said —

“If you were half a man you would take the life of that villain for treating me in the way he has; I have no doubt but he meant to take the life of the pious Mr. Lupin, and so add him to the list of martyrs.”

“My dear,” said the spectacle maker, “if Mr. Lupin intrudes himself into my house, and any friend of mine turns him out, I am very much obliged to him.”

“Perhaps you would be equally obliged to this monster, whom you call your friend, if he would turn me out?”

Mr. Oakley shook his head as he said —

“My dear, there are some burthens which can be got rid of, and some that must be borne.”

“Come — come, Mother Oakley,” said Ben. “Don’t bear malice. You played me a trick the last time I came here, and now I have played you one. That’s all. It wasn’t in human nature not to do it, so don’t bear malice.”

Mrs. Oakley, if she had been in a condition to do so, no doubt would have carried on the war with Big Ben, but she decidedly was not, and after a shudder or two, which looked as though she thought the toad was beginning again to oppress her, she rose to leave the room.

“Mother,” said Johanna, “it was not a real toad.”

“But you are!” said Mrs. Oakley, sharply. “You have no more feeling for your mother than as if she were a brickbat.”

Feeling now that at all events she had had the last word at somebody, Mrs. Oakley made a precipitate retreat, and sought the consolations and solitude of her own chamber. Mr. Oakley was about to make some speech, which he prefaced with a sigh, when some one coming into the shop called his attention, and he left Johanna and Big Ben the beefeater together in the parlour. The moment they were alone, Ben began shaking his head and making some very mysterious signs, which completely mystified Johanna. Indeed she began to be afraid that Ben’s intellects were not quite right, although an ordinary observer

might have very well supposed there was something the matter with his nether garments, for he pointed to them repeatedly, and shook his head at Johanna.

“What is the matter, cousin?” she said.

“Oh, dear! — Oh, dear! — oh — oh — oh!”

“Are you ill?”

“No, but I only wonder as you ain’t. Didn’t I see you in Fleet Street with these here on? — Oh! — Oh! — Not these here exactly, but another pair. These would be a trifle too large for you. Oh, dear-a-me! My heart bled all for to see such a young and delicate little puss as you a taking to wear the thingamies so soon.”

Johanna now began to understand what Ben meant, namely, that he had seen her in Fleet Street disguised in male attire, with her young friend Arabella Wilmot.

“Oh, Ben,” she said, “you must not think ill of me on that account.”

“But — but,” said Ben, rather hesitatingly, as if he were only putting a doubtful proposition, “wasn’t it rather unusual?”

“Yes, Ben, but there were reasons why I put on such garments. Surely it was better to do so than — than — to — ”

“Than to go without any?” said Ben.

“No — no, I did not say that — I mean it was better for me to forget a little of that maiden delicacy which — which — than to let him — ”

She burst into tears.

“Holloa!” cried Ben, as he immediately folded her in an immense embrace, that went very near to smothering her. “Don’t you cry, and you may wear what you like, and I’ll come and help you to put ’em on. Come, come, there’s a nice little dear, don’t you cry. Lord bless you! You know how fond I am of you, and always was since you was a little tottering thing, and couldn’t say my name right. Don’t you cry. You shall wear ’em as often as you like, and I’ll go behind you in the street, and if anybody only so much as says half a word to you, I’ll be down upon ’em. Fetch ’em now and put ’em on, my dear.”

Johanna must have laughed if her life had depended upon her gravity, for all that Ben said upon the subject was uttered in the sheer simplicity of a kind heart, and well she knew that in his rough way he doted on her, and thought there was not such another being in the whole world as she. And yet he looked upon her as a child, and the imperceptible flight of time had made no difference in Ben’s ideas concerning Johanna. She was still to him the sweet little child he had so often dandled upon his knee, and brought fruit and sweetmeats to,

when such things were great treasures. After a few moments he let her go, and Johanna was able to draw breath again.

“Ben,” she said, “I will tell you all.”

“All what?”

“How I came to put on — the — the —”

“Oh, these here — very good. Cut on, and let’s know all the particulars. I suppose you felt cold, my dear, eh?”

“No — no.”

“No? Well then, tell it quick, for I was always a mortal bad hand at guessing. Your father is fitting an old gentleman with a pair of spectacles, and he seems hard to please, so we shall have lots of time. Go on.”

“Your good opinion is of such moment to me,” said Johanna, “for I have very few to love me; now that you have seen me in such a disguise, I should feel unhappy if I did not tell why I wore it.”

Ben lent the most attentive ear to what she said, and then Johanna briefly and distinctly told him all the story of Mark Ingestrie, and how he had, as she thought, mysteriously disappeared at the barber’s shop in Fleet Street. It will be seen that she still clung to the idea that the Thornhill of the arrived ship was no other than her lover. Ben heard her all out with the most fixed attention. His mouth and eyes gradually opened wider and wider as she proceeded, partly from wonder at the whole affair, and partly from intense admiration at the way in which she told it, which he thought was better than any book he had ever read. When she had concluded, Ben again folded her in his arms, and she had to struggle terribly to get away.

“My dear child,” he said, “you are a prodigy. Why, there’s not an animal as ever I knew comes near you; and so the poor fellow had his throat cut in the barber’s for his string of pearls?”

“I fear he was murdered.”

“Not a doubt of it.”

“You really think so, Ben?”

The tone of agony with which this question was put to him, and the look of utter desolation which accompanied it, alarmed Ben, and he hastily said —

“Come, come, I didn’t mean that. No doubt something has happened; but it will be all right some day or another, you may depend. Oh, dear! — Oh, dear! The idea of your going to watch the barber with some boy’s clothes on!”

"Tell me what I can do, for my heart and brain are nearly distracted by my sufferings?"

Ben looked all round the room, and then up at the ceiling, as though he had a hope and expectation of finding some startling suggestion written legibly before his eyes somewhere. At length he spoke, saying —

"I tell you what, Johanna, my dear, whatever you do, don't you put on them things again. You leave it all to me."

"But what will you do? — What can you do, Ben?"

"Well, I don't know exactly; but I'll let you know when it's done."

"But do not run into any danger for my sake."

"Danger? Danger? I should like to see the barber that would interfere with me. No, my dear, no; I'm too well used to all sorts of animals for that. I'll see what I can do, and let you know all about it tomorrow, and in the meantime, you stick to the petticoats, and don't be putting on those thingamies again. You leave it to me — will you now?"

"Until tomorrow?"

"Yes, I'll be here tomorrow about this time, my dear, and I hope I shall have some news for you. Well, I declare, it's just like a book, it is. You are quite a prodigy."

Ben would have treated Johanna to another of the suffocating embraces, but she contrived to elude him; and, as by this time the old gentleman in the shop was suited with a pair of spectacles, Mr. Oakley returned to the parlour. Johanna placed her finger upon her lips as an indication to Ben that he was to say nothing to her father of what had passed between them, for, although Mr. Oakley knew generally the story of his daughter's attachment to Mark Ingestrie, as the reader is aware, he knew nothing of the expedition to Fleet Street in disguise. Ben, feeling that he had now an important secret to keep, shut his mouth hard, for fear it should escape, and looked so mysterious, that any one more sharp-sighted than the old spectacle maker must have guessed that something very unusual was the matter. Mr. Oakley, however, had no suspicions; but as this state of things was very irksome to Ben, he soon rose to take his leave.

"I shall look in again tomorrow," he said, "Cousin Oakley."

"We shall be glad to see you," said Mr. Oakley.

"Yes," added Johanna, who felt it incumbent upon her to say something, "we shall be very glad to see you indeed."

“Ah,” said her father, “you and Ben were always great friends.”

“And we always shall be,” said Ben. Then he thought that he would add something wonderfully clever, so as completely to ward off all suspicions of Oakley’s, if he had any, and he added — “She ain’t like some young creatures that think nothing of putting on what they shouldn’t. Oh dear, no — not she. Bye, bye. I’ll come tomorrow.”

Ben was quite pleased when he got out of the house, for among the things that he (Ben) found it difficult to do, was to keep a secret.

“Well,” he said, when he was fairly in the open air, “if I ain’t rather nonplussed at all this. What shall I do?”

This was a question much easier asked than answered, as Ben found; but, however, he felt an irresistible desire to go and have a look at the shop of Sweeney Todd.

“I can easily,” he said, “go to Fleet Street, and then, if I find myself late, I can take a boat at Blackfriars for the Tower Stairs, and after all get in to dinner comfortably enough.”

With this conclusion, Ben set off at a good pace down Snow Hill, and was soon at the beginning of Fleet Street. He walked on until he came to Sweeney Todd’s shop, and there he paused. Now we have previously remarked that there was one great peculiarity in the shop window of Todd, and that was that the articles in it were so well arranged that some one always was in the way of obtaining any view from the outside into the establishment. Todd was therefore secure against the dangers arising from peeping and prying. Big Ben placed himself close to the window, and made an attempt, by flattening his nose against the panes of glass, to peep in; but it was all in vain. He could not obtain the smallest glimpse into the inside.

“Confound it,” he cried, “what a cunning sort of animal this is to be sure — he won’t let one peep through the bars of his cage, that he won’t.”

Now Sweeney Todd became aware, by the additional darkness of his shop, that someone must be quite close to the window, and therefore, availing himself of a peephole that he had expressly for the purpose of reconnoitering the passing world without, he took a long look at Big Ben. It was some moments before Ben caught sight of a great eye in the window of Sweeney Todd glancing at him. This eye appeared as if it were set in the centre of a placard, which announced in glowing language the virtues of some condiment for the hair or the skin, and it had a most ferocious aspect. Big Ben looked fascinated and transfixed to the spot, and then he muttered to himself —

“Well, if that’s his eye, it’s a rum ’un. Howsomedever, it’s no use staying outside: I’ll pop in and get shaved, and then I shall be able to look about me. Who’s afraid?”

As Ben turned round, he saw a plainly attired man close to his elbow; but he took no notice of him, although from his close proximity to him it was quite impossible that the plain looking man could have failed to overhear what Ben said. In another moment Big Ben was in Todd’s shop.

“Shaved or dressed, sir?” said Todd.

“Shaved,” said Ben, as he cast his eyes round the shop.

“Looking for anything, sir?” said Todd.

“Oh, no — nothing at all. Only a friend of mine, you see, said this was such a nice shop, you understand, to be shaved in.”

“Was your friend finished off here, sir?”

“Well, I rather think he was.”

“Pray sit down. Fine weather, sir, for the season. Now, pussy, my dear, get out of the way of the hot water.” Todd was addressing an imaginary cat. “Are you fond of animals, sir? Lord bless me, I’m fond of all the world. God made us all, sir, from a creeping beetle to a beefeater.”

“Very likely,” said Big Ben, as he seated himself in the barber’s chair.

“And so,” added Todd, as he mixed up a lather, and made the most horrible faces, “we ought to love each other in this world of care. How is your friend, sir, who was so kind as to recommend my shop?”

“I should like to know.”

“What, is he in eternity? Dear me!”

“Well, I rather think he is.”

“Was it the gentleman who was hung last Monday, sir?”

“Confound you, no. But there’s somebody else who I think will be hung some Monday. I tell you what it is, Mr. Barber, my friend never got further than this infernal shop, so I’ve come to enquire about him.”

“What sort of man, sir?” said Todd, with the most imperturbable coolness.

“What kind of man?”

“Yes, sir. If you favour me with his description, perhaps I may be able to tell you something about him. By the bye, if you will excuse me for one moment, I’ll bring you something that a gentleman left here one day.”

“What is it?”

“I will satisfy you directly, sir, and I’m quite certain your mind will be at rest about your friend, sir, whoever he was. Remarkable weather, sir, for the time of year.”

Todd had got only half way from the shop to the parlour, when the shop-door opened, and the plain looking man walked in — the very same plain man who had stood so close to Big Ben at Todd’s window.

“Shaved,” he said.

Todd paused.

“If, sir, you will call again in a few minutes, or if you have any call to make and can conveniently look in as you come back — ”

“No, I’ll take a seat.”

The plain looking man sat down close to the door, and looked as calm and as unconcerned as any one possibly could. The look with which Todd regarded him for a moment, and only one moment, was truly horrible. He then quietly went into his back parlour. In a moment he entered with a common kid glove, and said to Ben —

“Did this belong to your friend? — a gentleman left it here one day.”

Ben shook his head.

“I really don’t know,” he said. “Come, Mr. Barber, finish the shaving, for that gentleman is waiting.”

Ben was duly shaved; while the plain looking man sat quietly in the chair by the door, and when the operation was finished, Ben looked in Todd’s face, and said, solemnly —

“A string of pearls.”

“Sir,” said Todd, without changing countenance in the least.

“A string of pearls. — Murder!”

“A what, sir?”

Ben look staggered. He well knew that if he had cut any one's throat for a string of pearls, that such words said to him would have driven him frantic, but when he saw no change in Todd's face, he begun to think that, after all, the accusation must be unfounded, and muttering to himself —

"It must be nothing but the child's fancy after all," he hastily threw down twopence and left the shop.

"Now, sir," said Todd, to the plain looking man.

"Thank you."

The plain looking man rose, and as he did so he seemed just to glance through the door into the street as it was opened by Ben. Immediately his face was full of smiles, as he cried —

"Ah, Jenkins, is that you? Ha, Ha! I missed you this morning. — Excuse me, Mr. Barber, I'll look in again. My old friend Jenkins has just gone by."

With this, out he flew from Todd's shop like a shot, and was gone towards Temple Bar, before the barber could move or lay down the shaving cloth which he had in his hands all ready to tuck under his chin. Todd stood for a few moments in an attitude of irresolution. Then he spoke —

"What does all this mean?" he said. "Is there danger? Curses on them both, I would have — ; but no matter, I must be wrong — very wrong. That string of pearls may yet destroy me. — Destroy! No — no — no. They must have yet more wit before they get the better of me, and yet how I calculated upon the destruction of that man. I must think — I must think."

Todd sat down in his own strong chair, and gave himself up to what is popularly denominated a brown study.



Todd and the Beefeater have some Words.

CHAPTER LI
The Vaults of St. Dunstons

A ponderous stone was raised in the flooring of St. Dunstan's church. The beadle, the churchwarden, and the workmen shrunk back — back — back, until they could get no further.

"Ain't it a *norrid* smell," said the beadle.

Then the plain looking man who had been at Sweeney Todd's advanced. He was no other than Sir Richard Blunt, and whispering to the churchwarden, he said —

"If what I expect be found here, we cannot have too few witnesses to it. Let the workmen be dismissed."

"As you please, Sir Richard. Faugh! What an awful — Fuff! — stench there is. I have no doubt they won't be sorry to get away. Here, my men, here's half a crown for you. Go and get something to drink and come back in an hour."

"Thank yer honour!" cried one of the men. "An' sure, by St. Patrick's bones, we want something to drink, for the stench in the church sticks in my blessed throat like a marrow bone, so it does."

"Get out," said the beadle; "I hates low people, and *hirish*. They thinks no more of beetles than nothink in the world."

The workmen retired, laughing; and when the church was clear of them, the churchwarden said to Sir Richard Blunt —

"Did you ever, Sir Richard, smell such a horrid charnel house sort of stench as comes up from that opening in the floor of the old church?"

Sir Richard shook his head, and was about to say something, when the sound of a footstep upon the pavement of the church made him look round, and he saw a fat, pursy looking individual approaching.

"Oh, it's Mr. Vickley, the overseer," said the beadle. "I hopes as yer is well, Mr. Vickley. Here's a horrid smell."

"God bless me!" cried the overseer, as with his fat finger and thumb he held his snub nose. "What's this? It's worse and worse."

"Yes, sir," said the beadle; "talking of the smell, we have let the cat out of the bag, I think."

"Good gracious! Put her in again, then. It can't be a cat."

“Begging your pardon, Mr. Vickley, I only spoke *anatomically*. If you comes here, sir, you’ll find that all the smell comes out of this here opening.”

“What! An opening close to my pew! My family pew, where I every Sunday enjoy my repose — I mean my hopes of everlasting glory? Upon my life, I think it’s a piece of — of damned impudence to open the floor of the church, close to my pew. If there was to be anything of the sort done, couldn’t it have been done somewhere among the free sittings, I should like to know?”

“Mr. Vickley,” said Sir Richard, “pray be satisfied that I have sufficient authority for what I do here; and if I had thought it necessary to take up the flooring of your pew while you had been in it, I should have done it.”

“And pray, sir,” said Mr. Vickley, swelling himself out to as large a size as possible, and glancing at his watch chain, to see that all the seals hung upon the convexity of his paunch as usual — “who are you?”

“Oh, dear — oh, dear,” said the beadle. “Convulsions! — Convulsions! What a thing it is to see authorities agoing it at each other. Gentlemen — gentlemen. Convulsions! — Ain’t there lots of poor people in the world? Don’t you be agoing it at each other.”

“I am a magistrate,” said Sir Richard.

“And I am an over — seer. Ah!”

“You may be an overseer or an underseer, if you like. I am going to search the vaults of St. Dunstan’s.”

The churchwarden now took the overseer aside, and after a while succeeded in calming down his irascibility.

“Oh, well — well,” said Mr. Vickley. “Authorities is authorities; and if so be as the horrid smell in the church can be got rid of, I’m as willing as possible. It has often prevented me sleeping — I mean listening to the sermon. Your servant, sir — I shall, of course, be very happy to assist you.”

The beadle wiped his face with his large yellow handkerchief as he said —

“Now this here is delightful and affecting, to see authorities agreeing together. Lord, why should authorities snap each other’s noses off, when there’s lots o’ poor people as can be said anything to and done anything to, and they may snap themselves?”

“Well, well,” added Mr. Vickley. “I am quite satisfied. Of course, if there’s anything disagreeable to be done in a church, and it can be done among the free seats, it’s all the better; and indeed, if the smell in St. Dunstan’s could have

been kept away from the respectable part of the congregation, I don't know that it would have mattered much."

"*Convulsions!*" cried the beadle. "It wouldn't have mattered at all, gentlemen. But only think o' the bishop smelling it. Upon my life, gentlemen, I did think, when I saw the Right Rev. Father in God's nose a looking up and down, like a cat when she smells a bunch o' lights, and knowed as it was all owing to the smell in the church, I did think as I could have gone down through the floor, cocked hat and all, that I did. *Convulsions* — that was a moment."

"It was," said the churchwarden.

"Mercy — mercy," said Mr. Vickley.

The beadle was so affected at the remembrance of what had happened at the confirmation, that he was forced to blow his nose with an energy that produced a trumpetlike sound in the empty church, and echoed again from nave to gallery. Sir Richard Blunt had let all the discourse go on without paying the least attention to it. He was quietly waiting for the foul vapours that arose from the vaults beneath the church to dissipate a little before he ventured upon exploring them. Now, however, he advanced and spoke.

"Gentlemen, I hope I shall be able to rid St. Dunstan's of the stench which for a long time has given it so unenviable a reputation."

"If you can do that," said the churchwarden, "you will delight the whole parish. It has been a puzzle to us all where the stench could come from."

"Where is the puzzle now?" said Sir Richard Blunt, as he pointed to the opening in the floor of the church, from whence issued like a steamy vapour such horrible exhalations.

"Why, certainly it must come from the vaults."

"But," said the overseer, "the parish books show that there has not been any one buried in any of the vaults directly beneath the church for thirty years."

"Then," said the beadle, "it's a very wrong thing of respectable parishioners — for, of course, them as has waults is respectable — to keep quiet for thirty years and then begin stinking like blazes. It's uncommon wrong — *convulsions!*"

Sir Richard Blunt took a paper from his pocket and unfolded it.

"From this plan," he said, "that I have procured of the vaults of St. Dunstan's, it appears that the stone we have raised, and which was numbered thirty, discloses a stone staircase communicating with two passages, from which all the vaults can be reached. I propose searching them; and now, gentlemen, and you, Mr. Beadle, listen to me."

They all three looked at him with surprise as he took another letter from his pocket.

"Here," he said, "are a few words from the Secretary of State. Pray read them, Mr. Vickley."

The overseer read as follows —

"The Secretary of State presents his compliments to Sir Richard Blunt, and begs to say that as regards the affair at St. Dunstan's, Sir Richard is to consider himself armed with any extraordinary powers he may consider necessary."

"Now, gentlemen," added Sir Richard Blunt, "if you will descend with me into the vaults, all I require of you is the most profound secrecy with regard to what you may see there. Do you fully understand?"

"Yes," stammered Mr. Vickley, "but I rather think I — I would as soon not go."

"Then, sir, be silent regarding the going of others. Will you go, sir?" to the churchwarden.

"Why yes, I — I think I ought."

"I shall be obliged to go. I may feel the want of a witness. We will take you with us, Mr. Beadle, of course."

"Me — me? Convulsions!"

"Yes — yes. You go, you know, *ex officio*."

"Ex, the deuce, I don't want to go. Oh convulsions! Convulsions!"

"We cannot dispense with your services," said the churchwarden. "If you refuse to go, it will be my duty to lay your conduct before the vestry."

"Oh — oh — oh!"

"Get a torch," said Sir Richard Blunt, "and I will lower it down the opening in the floor. If the air is not so bad as to extinguish the light, it will not be too bad for us to breathe for a short space of time."

Most reluctantly, and with terrible misgivings of what might be the result of the frightful adventure into which he was about to be dragged, the beadle fetched a link from the vestry. It was lighted, and Sir Richard Blunt tying a string to it, let it down into the passage beneath the church. The light was not extinguished, but it burnt feebly and with but a wan and sickly lustre.

“It will do,” said Sir Richard. “We can live in that place, although a protracted stay might be fatal. Follow me; I will go first, and I hope we shall not have our trouble only for our pains.”

CHAPTER LII
The Descent to the Vaults

Sir Richard commenced the descent.

“Come on,” he said. “Come on.”

He got down about half a dozen steps, but finding that no one followed him he paused, and called out —

“Remember that time is precious. Come on!”

“Why don’t you go?” said the churchwarden to the beadle.

“What! Me go afore a blessed churchwarden? Conwulsions — no! I thinks and I hopes as I knows my place better.”

“Well, but upon this occasion, if I don’t mind it — ”

“No — no, I could not. Conwulsions — no!”

“Ah!” said Sir Richard Blunt. “I see how it is; I shall have to do all this business alone, and a pretty report I shall have to make to the Secretary of State about the proceedings of the authorities of St. Dunstan’s.”

The churchwarden groaned.

“I’m a-coming, Sir Richard — I’m a-coming. Oh dear, I tell you what it is, Mr. Beadle, if you don’t follow me, and close too, I’ll have you dismissed as sure as eggs is eggs.”

“Conwulsions! Conwulsions! I’m acoming.”

The churchwarden descended the stairs, and the beadle followed him. Down — down they went, guided by the dim light of the torch carried by Sir Richard, who had not waited for them after the last words he had spoken.

“Can you fetch your blessed breath, sir?” said the beadle.

“Hardly,” said the churchwarden, gasping. “It is a dreadful place.”

“Oh, yes — yes.”

“Stop — Stop. Sir Richard — Sir Richard!”

There was no reply. The light from the torch grew more and more indistinct as Sir Richard Blunt increased his distance from them, and at length they were in profound darkness.

"I can't stand this," cried the churchwarden; and he faced about to ascend to the church again. In his effort to do so quickly, he stretched out his hand, and seized the beadle by the ankle, and as that personage was not quite so firm upon his legs as might be desired, the effort of this sudden assault was to upset him, and he rolled over upon the churchwarden, with a force that brought them both sprawling to the bottom of the little staircase together. Luckily they had not far to fall, for they had not been more than six or eight steps from the foot of the little flight. Terror and consternation for a few moments deprived each of them of the power of speech. The beadle, however, was the first to recover, and he in a stentorian voice called —

"Murder! Murder!"

Then the churchwarden joined in the cries, and they buffeted each other in vain efforts to rise, each impeding the other to a degree that rendered it a matter of impossibility for either of them to get to their feet. Mr. Vickley, who was waiting in the church above, with no small degree of anxiety, the report from below, heard these sounds of contention and calls for help with mingled horror. He at once made a rush to the door of the church, and, no doubt, would have endangered the success of all Sir Richard Blunt's plans, if he had not been caught in the arms of a tall stout man upon the very threshold of the church door.

"Help! Murder! Who are you?"

"Crotchet they calls me, and Crotchet's my name. London my birthplace, is youn the same? What's the row?"

"Call a constable. There's blue murder going on in the vaults below."

"The devil there is. Just you get in there, will you, and don't you stir for your life, old fellow."

So saying, Mr. Crotchet, who knew the importance of secrecy in the whole transaction, and who had been purposely awaiting for Sir Richard Blunt, thrust Vickley into a pew, and slammed the door of it shut. Down fell the overseer to the floor, paralysed with terror; and then Mr. Crotchet at once proceeded to the opening in the floor of the church, and descended without a moment's hesitation.

"Hilloa!" he cried, as he alighted at the bottom of the stairs upon the churchwarden's back. "Hilloa, Sir Richard, where are you?"

"Here," said a voice, and with the torch nearly extinguished, Sir Richard Blunt made his appearance from the passage. "Who is there?"

"Crotchet, it is."

“Indeed. Why, what brought you here?”

“What a row.”

“Why — why, what’s all this? You are standing upon somebody. Why bless my heart it’s — ”

Out went the torch.

“Fire! — Help! — Murder!” shouted the beadle, “I’m being suffocated. Oh, convulsions! Here’s a death for a beadle. Murder! Robbery. Fire — oh — oh — oh.”

The churchwarden groaned awfully.

“Ascend, and get a light,” said Sir Richard. “Quick, Crotchet, quick! God only knows what is the matter with all these people.”

Both Crotchet and Sir Richard Blunt scrambled over the bodies of the churchwarden and the beadle, and soon reached the church. The churchwarden made a desperate effort, and, shaking himself free of the beadle, he ascended likewise, and rolled into a pew, upon the floor of which he sat, looking a little deranged.

“If you don’t come up,” said Sir Richard Blunt, directing his voice down the staircase, “we will replace the stone, and you may bid adieu to the world.”

“Convulsions!” roared the beadle. “Oh, don’t — convulsions!”

Up he tumbled, with the most marvellous celerity, and rolled into the church, never stopping until he was brought up by the steps in front of the communion table, and there he lay, panting and glaring around him, having left his cocked hat in the regions below. Sir Richard Blunt looked ghastly pale, which Crotchet observing, induced him to take a small flask from his pocket, filled with choice brandy, which he handed to his chief.

“Thank you,” said Sir Richard.

The magistrate took a draught, and then he handed it to the churchwarden, as he said —

“I’ll fill it again.”

“All’s right.”

The churchwarden took a pull at the brandy, and then the beadle was allowed to finish it. They were both wonderfully recovered.

“Oh, Sir Richard,” said the churchwarden, “what have you seen?”

“Nothing particular.”

“Indeed!”

“No. You can have the stone replaced as soon as you like, over the opening to the vaults.”

“And you have seen nothing?” said the beadle.

“Nothing to speak of. If you have any doubts or any curiosity, you can easily satisfy yourself. There’s the opening. Pray descend. You see I have escaped, so it cannot be very dangerous to do so. I will not myself go again, but I will wait for either of you, if you please. Now, gentlemen, go, and you will be able to make your own discoveries.”

“Me?” cried the beadle. “Me? Oh, convulsions! I thinks I sees me.”

“Not I,” said the churchwarden. “Cover it up — cover it up. I don’t want to go down. I would not do so for a thousand pounds.”

A covert smile was upon the lips of Sir Richard Blunt as he heard this, and he added —

“Very well; I have no objection, of course, to its being at once covered up; and I think the least that is said about it, will be the better.”

“No doubt of that,” said the churchwarden.

“Convulsions! Yes,” said the beadle. “If I was only quite sure as all my ribs was whole, I shouldn’t mind; but somebody stood atop of me for a good quarter of an hour, I’m sure.”

Some of the workmen now began to arrive, and Sir Richard Blunt pointed to them, as he said to the churchwarden —

“Then the stone can be replaced without any difficulty, now; and, sir, let me again caution you to say nothing about what has passed here today.”

“Not a word — not a word. If you fancy somebody stood upon your ribs, Mr. Beadle, I am quite sure somebody did upon mine.”

The workmen were now directed to replace the stone in its former position; and when that was completely done, and some mortar pressed into the crevices, Sir Richard Blunt gave a signal to Crotchet to follow him, and they both left the church together.

“Now, Crotchet, understand me.”

"I'll try," said Crotchet.

"No one, for the future, is to be shaved in Sweeney Todd's shop alone."

"Alone?"

"Yes. You will associate with King, Morgan, and Godfrey; I will stand all necessary expenses, and one or the other of you will always follow whoever goes into the shop, and there wait until he comes out again. Make what excuses you like. Manage it how you will; but only remember, Todd is never again to have a customer all to himself."

"Humph!"

"Why do you say humph?"

"Oh, nothing partickler; only hadn't we better grab him at once?"

"No; he has an accomplice or accomplices, and their discovery is most important. I don't like to do things by halves, Crotchet; and so long as I know that no mischief will result from a little delay, and it will not, if you obey my instructions, I think it better to wait."

"Very good."

"Go at once, then, and get your brother officers, and remember that nothing is to withdraw your and their attention from this piece of business."

"All's right. You know, Sir Richard, you have only to say what's to be done, and it's as good as done. Todd may shave now as many people as he likes, but I don't think he'll polish 'em off in his old way quite so easy."

"That's right. Good day."

"When shall we see you, Sir Richard?"

"About sunset."

By the time this little conversation was over, Sir Richard Blunt and Crotchet had got through Temple Bar, and then they parted, Crotchet taking his way back to Fleet Street, and Sir Richard Blunt walking hastily to Downing Street. When he got there he entered the official residence of the Secretary of State for the Home Department, and being well known to the clerk, he was at once conducted into a little room carefully hung round with crimson cloth, so as to deaden the sound of any voices that might be raised in it. In the course of a few minutes a small door was opened, and a shabby looking man entered, with a hesitating expression upon his face.

"Ah, Sir Richard Blunt," he said, "is that you?"

“Yes, your lordship, and if you are disengaged for a few minutes, I have something to communicate.”

“Ah, some new plot. Confound those Jacobin rascals!”

“No, my lord, the affair is quite domestic and social. It has no shade of politics about it.”

The look of interest which the face of the secretary had assumed was gone in a moment, but still he could not very well refuse now to hear what Sir Richard Blunt had to say, and the conference lasted a quarter of an hour. At its termination, as Sir Richard was leaving the room, the secretary said —

“Oh, yes, of course, take full discretionary powers, and the Home Office will pay all expenses. I never heard of such a thing in all my life.”

“Nor I, my lord.”

“It’s really horrible.”

“It is even so far as we know already, and yet I think there is much to learn. I shall, of course, communicate to your lordship anything that transpires.”

“Certainly — certainly. Good day.”

Sir Richard Blunt left the Secretary of State, and proceeded to his own residence, and while he is there, making some alteration in his dress, we may as well take a glance at Crotchet, and see what that energetic but somewhat eccentric individual is about. After parting with Sir Richard Blunt at Temple Bar, he walked up Fleet Street, upon Sweeney Todd’s side of the way, until he overtook a man with a pair of spectacles on, and a stoop in his gait, as though age had crept upon him.

“King,” said Crotchet.

“All right,” said the spectacled old gentleman in a firm voice. “What’s the news?”

“A long job, I think. Where’s Morgan?”

“On the other side of the way.”

“Well, just listen to me as we walk along, and if you see him, beckon him over to us.”

As they walked along Crotchet told King what were the orders of Sir Richard Blunt, and they were soon joined by Morgan. The other officer, Godfrey, who had been mentioned by the magistrate, was sent for.

“Now,” said Crotchet, “here we are, four of us, and so you see we can take it two and two for four hours at a stretch as long as this confounded barber’s shop keeps open.”

“But,” said Morgan, “he will suspect something.”

“Well, we can’t help that. It’s quite clear he smugs the people, and all we have got to do is to prevent him smuggling any more of ’em you see.”

“Well, well, we must do the best we can.”

“Exactly; so now keep a bright look out, and hang it all, we have been in enough rum adventures to be able to get the better of a rascally barber, I should think. Look out — look out; there’s somebody going in now.”

CHAPTER LIII
Johanna Rushes to her Destiny

Johanna had enough confidants now. Her father — Colonel Jeffery — Big Ben — and Arabella Wilmot, all knew

“The sad story of her love.”

It will be a hard case if, among so many councillors, she hits upon the worst — a most truly hazardous course of proceeding; but then it is a fault of the young to mistake daring for ability, and to fancy that that course of proceeding which involves the most personal risk is necessarily the most likely to be successful. Colonel Jeffery was, of all Johanna Oakley’s advisers, the one who was most likely to advise her well, but unfortunately he had told her that he loved her, and from that time, with an instinctive delicacy of feeling which no one could have to greater perfection than Johanna, she had shunned him. And yet the reader, who knows the colonel well, knows that, quite irrespective of the attachment that had sprung up in his bosom for the beautiful and heartstricken girl, he would have played the part of a sincere friend to her and stood manfully between her and all danger. But it was not to be. From the moment that he had breathed to her the secret of his attachment, a barrier was, in her imagination, raised between them. Her father evidently was not one who could or who would advise anything at all energetic; and as for Big Ben, the conversation she had had with him upon the subject had quite been sufficient to convince her that to take him out of the ordinary routine of his thoughts and habits was thoroughly to bewilder him, and that he was as little calculated to plot and to plan in any emergency as a child. She would indeed have trembled at the result of the confidential communication to Big Ben, if she had been aware of the frightfully imprudent manner in which he had thrown himself into communication and collision with Todd, the consequences of which glaring act of indiscretion he was only saved from by Sir Richard Blunt entering the shop, and remaining there until he (Ben) was shaved. Under all these circumstances, then, Johanna found herself thrown back upon her old friend Arabella Wilmot. Now, Arabella was the worst adviser of all, for the romantic notions she had received from her novel reading, imparted so strong a tone to her character, that she might be said in imagination to live in a world of the mind. It was, as the reader will recollect, to Arabella Wilmot that Johanna owed the idea of going to Todd in boy’s apparel — a measure fraught with frightful danger, and yet, to the fancy of the young girl, fascinating upon that very account, because it had the appearance as though she were doing something really serious for Mark Ingestrie. To Arabella, then, Johanna went, after Ben had left her, and finding her young friend within, she told her all that had occurred since they last met.

“What shall I do?” she said. “I tell my tale of woe, and people look kind upon me, but no one helps me.”

“Oh, Johanna, can you say that of me?”

“No, no. Not of you, Arabella, for you see I have come to you again; but of all others, I can and may say it.”

“Comfort yourself, my dear Johanna. Comfort yourself, my dear friend. Come, now — you will make me weep too, if I see those tears.”

“What shall I do? — what shall I do?”

“There, now, I am putting on my things; and as you are dressed, we will go out for a walk, and as we go along we can talk of the affair, and you will find your spirits improve by exercise. Come, my dear Johanna. Don’t you give way so.”

“I cannot help it. Let us go.”

“We will walk round St. Paul’s Churchyard.”

“No — no. To Fleet Street — to Fleet Street!”

“Why would you wish to add to your sorrows, by again looking upon that shop?”

“I do not know, I cannot tell you; but a horrible species of fascination draws me there, and if I come from home, I seem as though I were drawn from all other places towards that one by an irresistible attraction. It seems as though the blood of Mark Ingestrie called aloud to me to revenge his murder, by bringing the perpetrators of it to justice. Oh, my friend — my Arabella, I think I shall go mad.”

Johanna sunk upon her knees by a chair, and hid her fair face in her hands, as she trembled with excess of emotion. Arabella Wilmot began to be really alarmed at the consequences of her friend’s excited and overwrought feelings.

“Oh, Johanna — Johanna!” she cried, “Cheer up. You shall go when you please, so that you will not give way to this sorrow. You do not know how much you terrify me. Rise — rise, I implore you. We will go to Fleet Street, since such is your wish.”

After a time, Johanna recovered from the burst of emotion that had taken such certain possession of her, and she was able to speak more calmly and composedly to her friend than she had yet done during that visit. The tears she had shed, and the show of feeling that had crept over her, had been a great relief in reality.

“Can you pardon me for thus tormenting you with my grief?” said Johanna.

“Do not talk so. Rather wonder how I should pardon you if you tell your griefs elsewhere. To whom should you bring them but to the bosom of one who, however she may err in judgment regarding you, cannot err in feeling.”

Johanna could only press her friend's hand in her own, and look the gratitude which she had not the language to give utterance to. It being then settled that they were to go to Fleet Street, it next became a matter of rather grave debate between them whether they were to go as they were, or Johanna was to again equip herself in the disguise of a boy.

"This is merely a visit of observation, Johanna; I will go as I am."

"Very well, dear."

They accordingly set out, and as the distance from the house of Arabella Wilmot's father was but short to the shop of Sweeney Todd, they soon caught sight of the projecting pole that was his sign.

"Now be satisfied," said Arabella, "by passing twice; once up Fleet Street, and once down it."

"I will," said Johanna.

Todd's shop was closed as usual. There was never an open door to that establishment, so that it was, after all, but a barren satisfaction for poor Johanna to pass the place where her imagination, strengthened by many circumstantial pieces of evidence, told her Mark Ingestrie had met with his death; still, as she had said to Arabella before starting, a horrible sort of fascination drew her to the spot, and she could not resist the fearful attraction that the outside of Todd's shop had for her. They passed rather rapidly, for Arabella Wilmot did not wish Johanna to pause, for fear she should be unable to combat her feelings, and make some sort of exhibition of them in the open street.

"Are you content, Johanna?" she said. "Must we pass again?"

"Oh, yes — yes. Again and again; I can almost fancy that by continued looking at that place I could see what has been the fate of Mark."

"But this is imagination and folly."

"It may be so, but when the realities of life have become so hideously full of horrors, one may be excused for seeking some consolation from the fairy cave. Arabella, let us turn again."

They had got as far as Temple Bar, when they again turned, and this time Johanna would not pass the shop so abruptly as she had done before, and any one, to see the marked interest with which she paused at the window, would have imagined that she must have some lover there whom she could see, notwithstanding the interior of the shop was so completely impervious to all ordinary gazers.

“There is nothing to see,” said Arabella.

“No. But yet — ha! — Look — look!”

Johanna pointed to one particular spot of the window, and there was the eye of Sweeney Todd glaring upon them.

“We are observed,” whispered Arabella; “it will be much better to leave the window at once. Come away — oh, come away, Johanna.”

“Not yet — not yet. Oh, if I could look well at that man’s face, I think I ought to be able to judge if he were likely to be the murderer of Mark Ingestrie.”

Todd came to his door.

“Good God, he is here!” said Arabella. “Come away. Come!”

“Never. No! Perhaps this is providential. I will, I must look at this man, happen what may.”

Todd glared at the two young girls like some ogre intent upon their destruction, and as Johanna looked at him, a painter who loved contrast, might have indeed found a study, from the wonderful difference between those two human countenances. They neither spoke for some few moments, and it was reserved for Todd to break the silence.

“What do you want here?” he cried, in a hoarse rough voice. “Be off with you. What do you mean by knocking at the window of an honest tradesman? I don’t want to have anything to say to such as you.”

“He — he did it!” gasped Johanna.

“Did what?” said Todd, advancing in a menacing attitude, while his face assumed a most diabolical expression of concealed hatred. “Did what?”

“Stop him! Stop him!” cried a voice from the other side of the street. “Stop Pison, he’s given me the slip, and I’m blessed if he won’t pitch into that ’ere barber. Stop him. Pison! Pison! Come here, boy. Come here! Oh, lor’, he’s nabbed him. I knew’d he would, as sure as a horse’s hind leg ain’t a gammon o’ bacon. My eyes, won’t there be a row — he’s nabbed the barber, like ninepence.”

Before the ostler at the Bullfinch, for it was from his lips this speech came, could get one half of it uttered, the dog — who is known to the readers by the name of Hector, as well as his new name of Pison — dashed over the road, apparently infuriated at the sight of Todd, and rushing upon him, seized him with his teeth. Todd gave a howl of rage and pain, and fell to the ground. The whole street was in an uproar in a moment, but the ostler rushing over the way, seized the dog by the throat, and made him release Todd, who crawled upon all

fours into his own shop. In another moment he rushed out with a razor in his hand.



Hector's Attack on Sweeney Todd.

"Where's the dog?" he cried. "Where's the fiend in the shape of a dog?"

"Hold hard!" said the ostler, who held Hector between his knees. "Hold hard. I have got him, old chap."

"Get out of the way. I'll have his life."

"No you won't."

"Humph!" cried a butcher's boy who was passing. "Why that's the same dog as said the barber had done for his master, and collected never such a lot of halfpence in his hat to pay the expenses of burying of him."

"You villain!" cried Todd.

"Go to blazes!" said the boy. "Who killed the dog's master? Ah, ah! Who did it? Ah, ah!"

The people began to laugh.

"I insist upon killing that dog!" cried Todd.

"Do you?" said the ostler; "Now, this here dog is a partickler friend of mine, so you see I can't have it done. What do you say to that now, old stick-in-the-mud? If you walk into him, you must walk through me first. Only just put down that razor, and I'll give you such a wolloping, big as you are, that you'll recollect for some time."

“Down with the razor! Down with the razor!” cried the mob, who was now every moment increasing.

Johanna stood like one transfixed for a few moments in the middle of all this tumult, and then she said with a shudder —

“What ought I to do?”

“Come away at once, I implore you,” said Arabella Wilmot. “Come away, I implore you, Johanna, for my sake as well as for your own. You have already done all that can be done. Oh, Johanna, are you distracted?”

“No — no. I will come — I will come.”

They hastily left the spot and hurried away in the direction of Ludgate Hill, but the confusion at the shop door of the barber did not terminate for some time. The people took the part of the dog and his new master, and it was in vain that Sweeney Todd exhibited his rent garments to show where he had been attacked by the animal. Shouts of laughter and various satirical allusions to his beauty were the only response. Suddenly, without a word, Todd then gave up the contest and retired into his shop, upon which the ostler conveyed Pison over the way and shut him up in one of the stables of the Bullfinch. Todd, it is true, retired to his shop with an appearance of equanimity, but it was like most appearances in this world — rather deceitful. The moment the door was closed between him and observation he ground his teeth together and positively howled with rage.

“The time will come — the time will come,” he said, “when I shall have the joy of seeing Fleet Street in a blaze, and of hearing the shrieks of those who are frying in the flames. Oh, that I could with one torch ignite London, and sweep it and all its inhabitants from the face of the earth. Oh, that all those who are now without my shop had but one throat. Ha! Ha! How I would cut it.”

He caught up a razor as he spoke, and threw himself into a ferocious attitude at the moment that the door opened, and a gentleman neatly dressed looked in, saying —

“Do you dress artificial hair?”