

**AINSWORTH
WILLIAM
HARRISON**

JACK SHEPPARD. VOL. 3

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William Harrison Ainsworth Jack Sheppard: A Romance, Vol. 3 (of 3)

CHAPTER XI. DOLLIS HILL REVISITED

About an hour after the occurrences at Newgate, the door of the small back-parlour already described at Dollis Hill was opened by Winifred, who, gliding noiselessly across the room, approached a couch, on which was extended a sleeping female, and, gazing anxiously at her pale careworn countenance, murmured,—“Heaven be praised! she still slumbers—slumbers peacefully. The opiate has done its duty. Poor thing! how beautiful she looks! but how like death!”

Deathlike, indeed, was the repose of the sleeper,—deathlike and deep. Its very calmness was frightful. Her lips were apart, but no breath seemed to issue from them; and, but for a slight—very slight palpitation of the bosom, the vital principle might be supposed to be extinct. This lifeless appearance was heightened by the extreme sharpness of her features—especially the nose and chin,—and by the emaciation of her limbs, which was painfully distinct through her drapery. Her attenuated arms were crossed upon her breast; and her black brows and eyelashes contrasted fearfully with the livid whiteness of her skin. A few short, dark locks, escaping from beneath her head-dress, showed that her hair had been removed, and had only been recently allowed to grow again.

“Poor Mrs. Sheppard!” sighed Winifred, as she contemplated the beautiful wreck before her,—“Poor Mrs. Sheppard! when I see her thus, and think of all she has endured, of all she may yet have to endure, I could almost pray for her release from trouble. I dare not reflect upon the effect that her son’s fate,—if the efforts to save him are ineffectual,—may have upon her enfeebled frame, and still worse upon her mind. What a mercy that the blow aimed at her by the ruffian, Wild, though it brought her to the brink of the grave, should have restored her to reason! Ah! she stirs.”

As she said this, she drew a little aside, while Mrs. Sheppard heaved a deep sigh, and opened her eyes, which now looked larger, blacker, and more melancholy than ever.

“Where am I?” she cried, passing her hand across her brow.

“With your friends, dear Mrs. Sheppard,” replied Winifred, advancing.

“Ah! you are there, my dear young lady,” said the widow, smiling faintly; “when I first waken, I’m always in dread of finding myself again in that horrible asylum.”

“You need never be afraid of that,” returned Winifred, affectionately; “my father will take care you never leave him more.”

“Oh! how much I owe him!” said the widow, with fervour, “for bringing me here, and removing me from those dreadful sights and sounds, that would have driven me distracted, even if I had been in my right mind. And how much I owe *you*, too, dearest Winifred, for your kindness and attention. Without you I should never have recovered either health or reason. I can never be grateful enough. But, though *I* cannot reward you, Heaven will.”

“Don’t say anything about it, dear Mrs. Sheppard,” rejoined Winifred, controlling her emotion, and speaking as cheerfully as she could; “I would do anything in the world for you, and so would my father, and so would Thames; but he *ought*, for he’s your nephew, you know. We all love you dearly.”

“Bless you! bless you!” cried Mrs. Sheppard, averting her face to hide her tears.

“I mustn’t tell you what Thames means to do for you if ever he gains his rights,” continued Winifred; “but *I may* tell you what my father means to do.”

“He has done too much already,” answered the widow. “I shall need little more.”

“But, *do* hear what it is,” rejoined Winifred; “you know I’m shortly to be united to your nephew,—that is,” she added, blushing, “when he can be married by his right name, for my father won’t consent to it before.”

“Your father will never oppose your happiness, my dear, I’m sure,” said Mrs. Sheppard; “but, what has this to do with me?”

“You shall hear,” replied Winifred; “when this marriage takes place, you and I shall be closely allied, but my father wishes for a still closer alliance.”

“I don’t understand you,” returned Mrs. Sheppard.

“To be plain, then,” said Winifred, “he has asked me whether I have any objection to you as a mother.”

“And what—what was your answer?” demanded the widow, eagerly.

“Can’t you guess?” returned Winifred, throwing her arms about her neck. “That he couldn’t choose any one so agreeable to me.”

“Winifred,” said Mrs. Sheppard, after a brief pause, during which she appeared overcome by her feelings,—she said, gently disengaging herself from the young girl’s embrace, and speaking in a firm voice, “you must dissuade your father from this step.”

“How?” exclaimed the other. “Can you not love him?”

“Love him!” echoed the widow. “The feeling is dead within my breast. My only love is for my poor lost son. I can esteem him, regard him; but, love him as he *ought* to be loved—that I cannot do.”

“Your esteem is all he will require,” urged Winifred.

“He has it, and will ever have it,” replied Mrs. Sheppard, passionately,—“he has my boundless gratitude, and devotion. But I am not worthy to be any man’s wife—far less *his* wife. Winifred, you are deceived in me. You know not what a wretched guilty thing I am. You know not in what dark places my life has been cast; with what crimes it has been stained. But the offences I *have* committed are venial in comparison with what I should commit were I to wed your father. No—no, it must never be.”

“You paint yourself worse than you are, dear Mrs. Sheppard,” rejoined Winifred kindly. “Your faults were the faults of circumstances.”

“Palliate them as you may,” replied the widow, gravely, “they *were* faults; and as such, cannot be repaired by a greater wrong. If you love me, do not allude to this subject again.”

“I’m sorry I mentioned it at all, since it distresses you,” returned Winifred; “but, as I knew my father intended to propose to you, if poor Jack should be respited—”

“*If* he should be respited?” repeated Mrs. Sheppard, with startling eagerness. “Does your father doubt it? Speak! tell me!”

Winifred made no answer.

“Your hesitation convinces me he does,” replied the widow. “Is Thames returned from London?”

“Not yet,” replied the other; “but I expect him every minute. My father’s chief fear, I must tell you, is from the baneful influence of Jonathan Wild.”

“That fiend is ever in my path,” exclaimed Mrs. Sheppard, with a look, the wildness of which greatly alarmed her companion. “I cannot scare him thence.”

“Hark!” cried Winifred, “Thames is arrived. I hear the sound of his horse’s feet in the yard. Now you will learn the result.”

“Heaven support me!” cried Mrs. Sheppard, faintly.

“Breathe at this phial,” said Winifred.

Shortly afterwards,—it seemed an age to the anxious mother,—Mr. Wood entered the room, followed by Thames. The latter looked very pale, either from the effect of his wound, which was not yet entirely healed, or from suppressed emotion,—partly, perhaps, from both causes,—and wore his left arm in a sling.

“Well!” cried Mrs. Sheppard, raising herself, and looking at him as if her life depended upon the answer. “He is respited?”

“Alas! no,” replied Thames, sadly. “The warrant for his execution is arrived. There is no further hope.”

“My poor son!” groaned the widow, sinking backwards.

“Heaven have mercy on his soul!” ejaculated Wood.

“Poor Jack!” cried Winifred, burying her face in her lover’s bosom.

Not a word was uttered for some time, nor any sound heard except the stilled sobs of the unfortunate mother.

At length, she suddenly started to her feet; and before Winifred could prevent her, staggered up to Thames.

“When is he to suffer?” she demanded, fixing her large black eyes, which burnt with an insane gleam, upon him.

“On Friday,” he replied.

“Friday!” echoed Mrs. Sheppard; “and to-day is Monday. He has three days to live. Only three days. Three short days. Horrible!”

“Poor soul! her senses are going again,” said Mr. Wood, terrified by the wildness of her looks. “I was afraid it would be so.”

“Only three days,” reiterated the widow, “three short short days,—and then all is over. Jonathan’s wicked threat is fulfilled at last. The gallows is in view—I see it with all its hideous apparatus!—ough!” and shuddering violently, she placed her hands before her, as if to exclude some frightful vision from her sight.

“Do not despair, my sweet soul,” said Wood, in a soothing tone.

“Do not despair!” echoed Mrs. Sheppard, with a laugh that cut the ears of those who listened to it like a razor,—“Do not despair! And who or what shall give me comfort when my son is gone? I have wept till my eyes are dry,—suffered till my heart is broken,—prayed till the voice of prayer is dumb,—and all of no avail. He will be hanged—hanged—hanged. Ha! ha! What have I left but despair and madness? Promise me one thing, Mr. Wood,” she continued, with a sudden change of tone, and convulsively clutching the carpenter’s arm, “promise it me.”

“Anything, my dear,” replied Wood, “What is it?”

“Bury us together in one grave in Willesden churchyard. There is a small yew-tree west of the church. Beneath that tree let us lie. In one grave, mind. Do you promise to do this?”

“Solemnly,” rejoined the carpenter.

“Enough,” said the widow, gratefully. “I must see him to-night.”

“Impossible, dear Mrs. Sheppard,” said Thames. “To-morrow I will take you to him.”

“To-morrow will be too late,” replied the widow, in a hollow voice, “I feel it will. I must go to-night, or I shall never behold him again. I must bless him before I die. I have strength enough to drag myself there, and I do not want to return.”

“Be pacified, sweet soul,” said Wood, looking meaningly at Thames; “you *shall* go, and I will accompany you.”

“A mother’s blessing on you,” replied Mrs. Sheppard, fervently. “And now,” she added, with somewhat more composure, “leave me, dear friends, I entreat, for a few minutes to collect my scattered thoughts—to prepare myself for what I have to go through—to pray for my son.”

“Shall we do so?” whispered Winifred to her father.

“By all means,” returned Wood; “don’t delay an instant.” And, followed by the young couple, who gazed wistfully at the poor sufferer, he hastily quitted the room, and locked the door after him.

Mrs. Sheppard was no sooner alone than she fell upon her knees by the side of the couch, and poured forth her heart in prayer. So absorbed was she by her passionate supplications that she was insensible to anything passing around her, until she felt a touch upon her shoulder, and heard a well-known voice breathe in her ear—“Mother!”

She started at the sound as if an apparition had called her, screamed, and fell into her son’s outstretched arms. “Mother! dear mother!” cried Jack, folding her to his breast.

“My son! my dear, dear son!” returned Mrs. Sheppard, returning his embrace with all a parent’s tenderness.

Jack was completely overcome. His chest heaved violently, and big tears coursed rapidly down his cheeks.

“I don’t deserve it,” he said, at length; “but I would have risked a thousand deaths to enjoy this moment’s happiness.”

“And you must have risked much to obtain it, my love. I have scarcely recovered from the shock of hearing of your condemnation, when I behold you free!”

“Not two hours since,” rejoined Jack, “I was chained down in the Condemned Hold in Newgate. With a small saw, conveyed to me a few days since by Thames Darrell, which I contrived to conceal upon my person, I removed a spike in the hatch, and, with the aid of some other friends, worked my way out. Having heard from Thames that you were better, and that your sole anxiety was about me, I came to give you the *first* intelligence of my escape.”

“Bless you for it. But you will stay here?”

“I dare not. I must provide for my safety.”

“Mr. Wood will protect you,” urged Mrs. Sheppard.

“He has not the power—perhaps not the will to do so. And if he would, *I* would not subject him to the annoyance. The moment my escape is known, a large reward will be placed on my head. My dress, my person will be minutely described. Jonathan Wild and his bloodhounds, with a hundred others, incited by the reward, will be upon my track. Nay, for aught I know, some of them may even now have got scent of me.”

“You terrify me,” cried Mrs. Sheppard. “Oh! if this is the case, do not stay an instant. Fly! fly!”

“As soon as I can do so with safety, I will return, or send to you,” said Jack.

“Do not endanger yourself on my account,” rejoined his mother. “I am quite easy now; receive my blessing, my dear son; and if we never meet again, rest assured my last prayer shall be for you.”

“Do not talk thus, dear mother,” returned Jack, gazing anxiously at her pale countenance, “or I shall not be able to quit you. You must live for me.”

“I will try to do so,” replied the widow, forcing a smile. “One last embrace. I need not counsel you to avoid those fatal courses which have placed you in such fearful jeopardy.”

“You need not,” replied Jack, in a tone of the deepest compunction. “And, oh! forgive me, though I can never forgive myself, for the misery I have caused you.”

“Forgive you!” echoed his mother, with a look radiant with delight. “I have nothing to forgive. Ah!” she screamed, with a sudden change of manner; and pointing to the window, which Jack had left open, and at which a dark figure was standing, “there is Jonathan Wild!”

“Betrayed!” exclaimed Jack, glancing in the same direction. “The door!—the door!—death!” he added, as he tried the handle, “it is locked—and I am unarmed. Madman that I am to be so!”

“Help!” shrieked Mrs. Sheppard.

“Be silent,” said Jonathan, striding deliberately into the room; “these cries will avail you nothing. Whoever answers them must assist me to capture your son. Be silent, I say, if you value his safety.”

Awed by Jonathan’s manner, Mrs. Sheppard repressed the scream that rose to her lips, and both mother and son gazed with apprehension at the heavy figure of the thief-taker, which, viewed in the twilight, seemed dilated to twice its natural size, and appeared almost to block up the window. In addition to his customary arms, Jonathan carried a bludgeon with a large heavy knob, suspended from his wrist by a loop; a favourite weapon, which he always took with him on dangerous expeditions, and which, if any information had been requisite, would have told Sheppard that the present was one of them.

“Well, Jack,” he said, after a pause, “are you disposed to go back quietly with me?”

“You’ll ascertain that when you attempt to touch me,” rejoined Sheppard, resolutely.

“My janizaries are within call,” returned Wild. “I’m armed; you are not.”

“It matters not. You shall not take me alive.”

“Spare him! spare him!” cried Mrs. Sheppard, falling on her knees.

“Get up, mother,” cried Jack; “do not kneel to him. I wouldn’t accept my life from him. I’ve foiled him hitherto, and will foil him yet. And, come what will, I’ll balk him of the satisfaction of hanging me.”

Jonathan raised his bludgeon, but controlled himself by a powerful effort.

“Fool!” he cried, “do you think I wouldn’t have secured you before this if I hadn’t some motive for my forbearance?”

“And that motive is fear,” replied Jack contemptuously.

“Fear!” echoed Wild, in a terrible tone,—“fear! Repeat that word again, and nothing shall save you.”

“Don’t anger him, my dear son,” implored the poor widow, with a look of anguish at Jack. “Perhaps he means well.”

“Mad as you are, you’re the more sensible of the two, I must say,” rejoined Jonathan.

“Spare him!” cried Mrs. Sheppard, who fancied she had made some impression on the obdurate breast of the thief-taker,—“spare him! and I will forgive you, will thank you, bless you. Spare him! spare him!”

“On one condition I *will* spare him,” returned Wild; “on one condition only.”

“What is it?” asked the poor woman.

“Either he or you must return with me,” answered Jonathan.

“Take *me*, then,” replied the widow. And she would have rushed to him, if she had not been forcibly withheld by her son.

“Do not go near him, mother,” cried Jack; “do not believe him. There is some deep treachery hidden beneath his words.”

“I *will* go,” said Mrs. Sheppard, struggling to get free.

“Attend to me, Mrs. Sheppard,” said Jonathan, looking calmly on at this distressing scene, “Attend to me, and do not heed him. I swear to you, solemnly swear to you, I will save your son’s life, nay more, will befriend him, will place him out of the reach of his enemies, if you consent to become my wife.”

“Execrable villain!” exclaimed Jack.

“You hear that,” cried Mrs. Sheppard; “he swears to save you.”

“Well,” replied her son; “and you spurn the proposal.”

“No; she accepts it,” rejoined Jonathan, triumphantly. “Come along, Mrs. Sheppard. I’ve a carriage within call shall convey you swiftly to town. Come! come!”

“Hear me, mother,” cried Jack, “and I will explain to you *why* the villain makes this strange and revolting proposal. He well knows that but two lives—those of Thames Darrell and Sir Rowland Trenchard,—stand between you and the vast possessions of the family. Those lives removed,—and Sir Rowland is completely in his power, the estates would be yours—HIS! if he were your husband. Now do you see his motive?”

“I see nothing but your danger,” replied his mother, tenderly.

“Granted it were as you say, Jack,” said Wild;—“and I sha’n’t take the trouble to contradict you—the estates would be *yours* hereafter.”

“Liar!” cried Jack. “Do you affect ignorance that I am a condemned felon, and can inherit nothing? But do not imagine that under any circumstances I would accept your terms. My mother shall never degrade herself by a connection with you.”

“Degrade herself,” rejoined Jonathan, brutally. “Do you think I would take a harlot to my bed, if it didn’t suit my purposes to do so?”

“He says right,” replied Mrs. Sheppard, distractedly. “I am only fit for such as him. Take me! take me!”

“Before an hour you shall be mine,” said Jonathan advancing towards her.

“Back!” cried Jack fiercely: “lay a finger on her, and I will fell you to the ground. Mother! do you know what you do? Would you sell yourself to this fiend?”

“I would sell myself, body and soul, to save you,” rejoined his mother, bursting from his grasp. Jonathan caught her in his arms.

“Come away!” he cried, with the roar of a demon.

This laugh and his looks alarmed her.

“It *is* the fiend!” she exclaimed, recoiling. “Save me!—save me!”

“Damnation!” vociferated Jonathan, savagely. “We’ve no time for any Bedlam scenes now. Come along, you mad jade. I’ll teach you submission in time.”

With this, he endeavoured to force her off; but, before he could accomplish his purpose, he was arrested, and his throat seized by Jack. In the struggle, Mrs. Sheppard broke from him, and filled the room with her shrieks.

“I’ll now pay the debt I owe you,” cried Jack, tightening his grip till the thief-taker blackened in the face.

“Dog!” cried Wild, freeing himself by a powerful effort, and dealing Jack a violent blow with the heavy bludgeon, which knocked him backwards, “you are not yet a match for Jonathan Wild. Neither you nor your mother shall escape me. But I must summon my janizaries.” So saying, he raised a whistle to his lips, and blew a loud call; and, as this was unanswered, another still louder. “Confusion!” he cried; “something has happened. But I won’t be cheated of my prize.”

“Help! help!” shrieked Mrs. Sheppard, fleeing from him to the farthest corner of the room.

But it was of no avail. Jonathan again seized her, when the door was thrown open, and Thames Darrell, followed by Mr. Wood and several serving-men, all well armed, rushed into the room. A glance sufficed to show the young man how matters stood. He flew to the window, and would have passed his sword through the thief-taker’s body, if the latter had not quickly interposed the person of Mrs. Sheppard, so that if the blow had been stricken she must have received it.

“Quilt!—Mendez!—Where are you?” vociferated Wild, sounding his whistle for the third time.

“You call in vain,” rejoined Thames. “Your assistants are in my power. Yield, villain!”

“Never!” replied Jonathan.

“Put down your burthen, monster!” shouted Wood, pointing an immense blunderbuss at him.

“Take her,” cried Jonathan; and, flinging the now inanimate body of the poor widow, who had fainted in the struggle, into the arms of Thames, he leapt through the window, and by the time the latter could consign her to Wood, and dart after him, he had disappeared.

“Pursue him,” cried Thames to the attendants, “and see that he does not escape.”

The order was promptly obeyed.

“Jack,” continued Thames, addressing Sheppard, who had only just recovered from the blow, and regained his feet, “I don’t ask *how* you came here, nor do I blame your rashness in doing so. Fortunately, ever since Wild’s late murderous attack, the household has all been well armed. A post-chaise seen in the road first alarmed us. On searching the grounds, we found two suspicious-looking fellows in the garden, and had scarcely secured them, when your mother’s cries summoned us hither, just in time to preserve her.”

“Your arrival was most providential,” said Jack.

“You must not remain here another instant,” replied Thames. “My horse is at the door, saddled, with pistols in the holsters,—mount him and fly.”

“Thames, I have much to say,” said Jack, “much that concerns your safety.”

“Not now,” returned Thames, impatiently. “I cannot—will not suffer you to remain here.”

“I will go, if you will consent to meet me at midnight near the old house in Wych Street,” replied Jack. “By that time, I shall have fully considered a plan which occurs to me for defeating the schemes of your enemies.”

“Before that time you will be captured, if you expose yourself thus,” rejoined Thames. “However, I will be there. Farewell.”

“Till midnight,” replied Jack.

And imprinting a kiss upon his mother’s cold lips, he left the room. He found the horse where Thames told him he would find him, mounted, and rode off across the fields in the direction of town.

CHAPTER XII. THE WELL HOLE

Jonathan Wild's first object, as soon as he had made good his retreat, was to ascertain what had become of his janizaries, and, if possible, to release them. With this view, he hurried to the spot where he had left the post-chaise, and found it drawn up at the road-side, the postilion dismounted, and in charge of a couple of farming-men. Advancing towards them, sword in hand, Jonathan so terrified the hinds by his fierce looks and determined manner, that, after a slight show of resistance, they took to their heels, leaving him master of the field. He then threw open the door of the vehicle, in which he found his janizaries with their arms pinioned, and, leaping into it, ordered the man to drive off. The postilion obeyed, and dashed off as hard as his horses could gallop along the beautiful road leading to Neasdon and Willesden, just as the serving-men made their appearance. Arrived at the latter place, Jonathan, who, meanwhile, had contrived to liberate his attendants from their bonds, drew up at the Six Bells, and hiring a couple of horses, despatched his attendants in search of Jack Sheppard, while he proceeded to town. Dismissing the post-chaise at the Old Bailey, he walked to Newgate to ascertain what had occurred since the escape. It was just upon the stroke of nine as he entered the Lodge, and Mr. Austin was dismissing a host of inquirers who had been attracted thither by the news,—for it had already been extensively noised abroad. Some of these persons were examining the spot where the spike had been cut off; others the spike itself, now considered a remarkable object; and all were marvelling how Jack could have possibly squeezed himself through such a narrow aperture, until it was explained to them by Mr. Austin that the renowned housebreaker was of slender bodily conformation, and therefore able to achieve a feat, which he, Mr. Austin, or any man of similar dimensions, would have found wholly impossible. Affixed to the wall, in a conspicuous situation, was a large placard, which, after minutely describing Sheppard's appearance and attire, concluded thus:—“*Whoever will discover or apprehend the above JOHN SHEPPARD, so that he be brought to justice, shall receive ONE HUNDRED GUINEAS REWARD, to be paid by MR. PITT, the keeper of Newgate.*”

This placard attracted universal attention. While Jonathan was conversing with Austin, from whom he took care to conceal the fact of his having seen Sheppard since his escape, Ireton entered the Lodge.

“Altogether unsuccessful, Sir,” said the chief turnkey, with a look of disappointment, not unmixed with apprehension, as he approached Wild. “I’ve been to all the flash cases in town, and can hear nothing of him or his wives. First, I went to Country Tom’s, the Goat, in Long Lane. Tom swore he hadn’t set eyes on him since the trial. I next proceeded to Jenny Bunch’s, the Ship, in Trig Lane—there I got the same answer. Then to the Feathers, in Drury Lane. Then to the Golden Ball, in the same street. Then to Martin’s brandy-shop, in Fleet Street. Then to Dan Ware’s, in Hanging Sword Court. Then to the Dean’s Head, in St. Martin’s Le Grand. And, lastly, to the Seven Cities o’ Refuge, in the New Mint. And nowhere could I obtain the slightest information.”

“Humph!” exclaimed Wild.

“Have you been more successful, Sir?” ventured Ireton.

Jonathan shook his head.

“Mr. Shotbolt thinks he has a scheme that can’t fail,” interposed Austin; “but he wishes to know whether you’ll be as good as your word, in respect to the great reward you offered for Jack’s capture.”

“Have I ever broken my word in such matters, that he dares put the question?” rejoined Jonathan sternly. “Tell Mr. Shotbolt that if he, or any other person, takes Jack Sheppard before to-morrow morning, I’ll double it. Do you hear?”

“I do, Sir,” replied Austin respectfully.

“Two hundred pounds, if he’s lodged in Newgate before to-morrow morning,” continued Wild. “Make it known among your friends.” And he strode out of the place.

“Two hundred pounds!” exclaimed Ireton, “besides the governor’s offer—that’s three hundred. I must go to work again. Keep a sharp look out, Austin, and see that we lose no one else. I should be sorry if Shotbolt got the reward.”

“Devilish hard! I’m not allowed a chance,” grumbled Austin, as he was left alone. “However, some one *must* look after the jail; and they’re all gone but me. It’s fortunate we’ve no more Jack Sheppards, or I should stand but a poor chance. Well, I don’t think they’ll any of ‘em nab him, that’s one comfort.”

On quitting the Lodge, Wild repaired to his own habitation. Telling the porter that he would attend to the house himself, he bade him go in search of Jack Sheppard. There was something in Jonathan’s manner, as he issued this command, that struck the man as singular, and he afterwards recalled it. He, however, made no remark at the time, but instantly prepared to set out. As soon as he was gone, Jonathan went up stairs to the audience-chamber; and, sitting down, appeared for some time buried in reflection. The dark and desperate thoughts that were passing through his mind at this time will presently be shown. After a while, he raised his eyes; and, if their glance could have been witnessed at the moment, it could not have been easily forgotten. Muttering something to himself, he appeared to be telling upon his fingers the advantages and disadvantages of some scheme he had in contemplation. That he had resolved upon its execution, whatever it might be, was evident from his saying aloud,—

“I will do it. So good an opportunity may never occur again.”

Upon this he arose, and paced the room hastily backwards and forwards, as if further arranging his plans. He then unlocked a cabinet, opened a secret drawer, and, lifter ransacking its contents, discovered a paper he was in search of, and a glove. Laying these carefully aside, he restored the drawer to its place. His next occupation was to take out his pistols, examine the priming, and rub the flints. His sword then came in for his scrutiny: he felt at, and appeared satisfied with its edge. This employment seemed to afford him the highest satisfaction; for a diabolical grin—it cannot be called a smile—played upon his face all the time he was engaged in it. His sword done with, he took up the bludgeon; balanced it in his hand; upon the points of his fingers; and let it fall with a smash, intentionally, upon the table.

“After all,” he said, “this is the safest weapon. No instrument I’ve ever used has done me such good service. It *shall* be the bludgeon.” So saying, he slung it upon his wrist.

Taking up a link, which was blazing beside him, he walked across the room; and touching a spring in the wall, a secret door flew open. Beyond was a narrow bridge, crossing a circular building, at the bottom of which lay a deep well. It was a dark mysterious place, and what it was used for no one exactly knew; but it was called by those who had seen it the Well Hole. The bridge was protected on either side by a railing with bannisters placed at wide intervals. Steps to aid the descent, which was too steep to be safe without them, led to, a door on the opposite side. This door, which was open, Jonathan locked and took out the key. As he stood upon the bridge, he held down the light, and looked into the profound abyss. The red glare fell upon the slimy brick-work, and tinged the inky waters below. A slight cough uttered by Jonathan at the moment awakened the echoes of the place, and was returned in hollow reverberations. “There’ll be a louder echo here presently,” thought Jonathan. Before leaving the place he looked upwards, and could just discern the blue vault and pale stars of Heaven through an iron grating at the top.

On his return to the room, Jonathan purposely left the door of the Well Hole ajar. Unlocking a cupboard, he then took out some cold meat and other viands, with a flask of wine, and a bottle of brandy, and began to eat and drink voraciously. He had very nearly cleared the board, when a knock was heard below, and descending at the summons, he found his two janizaries. They had both been unsuccessful. As Jonathan scarcely expected a more satisfactory result, he made no comment; but, ordering Quilt to continue his search, and not to return until he had found the fugitive, called Abraham Mendez into the house, and shut the door.

“I want you for the job I spoke of a short time ago, Nab,” he said. “I mean to have no one but yourself in it. Come up stairs, and take a glass of brandy.”

Abraham grinned, and silently followed his master, who, as soon as they reached the audience-chamber, poured out a bumper of spirits, and presented it to him. The Jew swallowed it at a draught.

“By my shoul!” he exclaimed, smacking his lips, “dat ish goot—very goot.”

“You shall finish the bottle when the job’s done,” replied Jonathan.

“Vat ish it, Mishter Vild?” inquired Mendez. “Shir Rowland Trenchard’s affair—eh?”

“That’s it,” rejoined Jonathan; “I expect him here every minute. When you’ve admitted him, steal into the room, hide yourself, and don’t move till I utter the words, ‘You’ve a long journey before you.’ That’s your signal.”

“And a famoush goot shignal it ish,” laughed Abraham. “He hash a long journey before him—ha! ha!”

“Peace!” cried Jonathan. “There’s his knock. Go, and let him in. And mind you don’t arouse his suspicions.”

“Never fear—never fear,” rejoined Abraham, as he took up the link, and left the room.

Jonathan cast a hasty glance around, to see that all was properly arranged for his purpose; placed a chair with its back to the door; disposed the lights on the table so as to throw the entrance of the room more into shadow; and then flung himself into a seat to await Sir Rowland’s arrival.

He had not to wait long. Enveloped in a large cloak, Sir Rowland stalked into the room, and took the seat assigned him; while the Jew, who received a private signal from Jonathan, set down the link near the entrance of the Well Hole, and, having made fast the door, crept behind one of the cases.

Fancying they were alone, Sir Rowland threw aside his cloak, and produced a heavy bag of money, which he flung upon the table; and, when Wild had feasted his greedy eyes sufficiently upon its golden contents, he handed him a pocket-book filled with notes.

“You have behaved like a man of honour, Sir Rowland,” said Wild, after he had twice told over the money. “Right to a farthing.”

“Give me an acquittance,” said Trenchard.

“It’s scarcely necessary,” replied Wild; “however, if you require it, certainly. There it is. ‘Received from Sir Rowland Trenchard, 15,000£. —Jonathan Wild: August 31st, 1724.’ Will that do?”

“It will,” replied Trenchard. “This is our last transaction together.”

“I hope not,” replied Wild.

“It is the last,” continued the knight, sternly; “and I trust we may never meet again, I have paid you this large sum—not because you are entitled to it, for you have failed in what you undertook to do, but because I desire to be troubled with you no further. I have now settled my affairs, and made every preparation for my departure to France, where I shall spend the remainder of my days. And I have made such arrangements that at my decease tardy justice will be done my injured nephew.”

“You have made no such arrangements as will compromise me, I hope, Sir Rowland?” said Wild, hastily.

“While I live you are safe,” rejoined Trenchard; “after my death I can answer for nothing.”

“Sblood!” exclaimed Wild, uneasily. “This alters the case materially. When were you last confessed, Sir Rowland?” he added abruptly.

“Why do you ask?” rejoined the other haughtily.

“Because—because I’m always distrustful of a priest,” rejoined Jonathan.

“I have just parted from one,” said Trenchard.

“So much the worse,” replied Jonathan, rising and taking a turn, as if uncertain what to do.

“So much the better,” rejoined Sir Rowland. “He who stands on the verge of the grave, as I do, should never be unprepared.”

“You’re strangely superstitious, Sir Rowland,” said Jonathan, halting, and looking steadfastly at him.

“If I were so, I should not be here,” returned Trenchard.

“How so?” asked Wild, curiously.

“I had a terrible dream last night. I thought my sister and her murdered husband dragged me hither, to this very room, and commanded you to slay me.”

“A terrible dream, indeed,” said Jonathan thoughtfully. “But you mustn’t indulge these gloomy thoughts. Let me recommend a glass of wine.”

“My penance forbids it,” said Trenchard, waving his hand. “I cannot remain here long.”

“You will remain longer than you anticipate,” muttered Wild.

“Before I go,” continued Sir Rowland, “I must beg of you to disclose to me all you know relative to the parentage of Thames Darrell.”

“Willingly,” replied Wild. “Thinking it likely you might desire to have this information, I prepared accordingly. First, look at this glove. It belonged to his father, and was worn by him on the night he was murdered. You will observe that a coronet is embroidered on it.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Trenchard, starting, “is he so highly born?”

“This letter will inform you,” replied Wild, placing a document in his hand.

“What is this!” cried Sir Rowland. “I know the hand—ha! my friend! and I have murdered *him!* And my sister was thus nobly, thus illustriously wedded. O God! O God!”

And he appeared convulsed with agony.

“Oh! if I had known this,” he exclaimed, “what guilt, what remorse might have been spared me!”

“Repentance comes too late when the deed’s done,” returned Wild, bitterly.

“It is not too late to repair the wrong I have done my nephew,” cried Trenchard. “I will set about it instantly. He shall have the estates. I will return to Manchester at once.”

“You had better take some refreshment before you start,” rejoined Wild. “*You’ve a long journey before you.*”

As the signal was given, the Jew, who had been some time in expectation of it, darted swiftly and silently behind Sir Rowland, and flung a cloth over his head, while Jonathan, rushing upon him in front, struck him several quick and violent blows in the face with the bludgeon. The white cloth was instantly dyed with crimson; but, regardless of this, Jonathan continued his murderous assault. The struggles of the wounded man were desperate—so desperate, that in his agony he overset the table, and, in the confusion, tore off the cloth, and disclosed a face horribly mutilated, and streaming with blood. So appalling was the sight, that even the murderers—familiar as they were with scenes of slaughter,—looked aghast at it.

During this dreadful pause the wretched man felt for his sword. It had been removed from the scabbard by the Jew. He uttered a deep groan, but said nothing.

“Despatch him!” roared Jonathan.

Having no means of defence, Sir Rowland cleared the blood from his vision; and, turning to see whether there was any means of escape, he descried the open door behind him leading to the Well Hole, and instantly darted through it.

“As I could wish!” cried Jonathan. “Bring the light, Nab.”

The Jew snatched up the link, and followed him.

A struggle of the most terrific kind now ensued. The wounded man had descended the bridge, and dashed himself against the door beyond it; but, finding it impossible to force his way further, he turned to confront his assailants. Jonathan aimed a blow at him, which, if it had taken place, must have instantly terminated the strife; but, avoiding this, he sprang at the thief-taker, and grappled with him. Firmly built, as it was, the bridge creaked in such a manner with their contending efforts, that Abraham durst not venture beyond the door, where he stood, holding the light, a horrified spectator

of the scene. The contest, however, though desperate, was brief. Disengaging his right arm, Jonathan struck his victim a tremendous blow on the head with the bludgeon, that fractured his skull; and, exerting all his strength, threw him over the rails, to which he clung with the tenacity of despair.

“Spare me!” he groaned, looking upwards. “Spare me!”

Jonathan, however, instead of answering him, searched for his knife, with the intention of severing his wrist. But not finding it, he had again recourse to the bludgeon, and began beating the hand fixed on the upper rail, until, by smashing the fingers, he forced it to relinquish its hold. He then stamped upon the hand on the lower bannister, until that also relaxed its gripe.

Sir Rowland then fell.

A hollow plunge, echoed and re-echoed by the walls, marked his descent into the water.

“Give me the link,” cried Jonathan.

Holding down the light, he perceived that the wounded man had risen to the surface, and was trying to clamber up the slippery sides of the well.

“Shoot him! shoot him! Put him out of his misery,” cried the Jew.

“What’s the use of wasting a shot?” rejoined Jonathan, savagely. “He can’t get out.”

After making several ineffectual attempts to keep himself above water, Sir Rowland sunk, and his groans, which had become gradually fainter and fainter, were heard no more.

“All’s over,” muttered Jonathan.

“Shall we go back to de other room?” asked the Jew. “I shall breathe more freely dere. Oh! Christ! de door’s shut! It musht have schwung to during de schuffle!”

“Shut!” exclaimed Wild. “Then we’re imprisoned. The spring can’t be opened on this side.”

“Dere’s de other door!” cried Mendez, in alarm.

“It only leads to the fencing crib,” replied Wild. “There’s no outlet that way.”

“Can’t we call for asshistanche?”

“And who’ll find us, if we do?” rejoined Wild, fiercely. “But they *will* find the evidences of slaughter in the other room,—the table upset,—the bloody cloth,—the dead man’s sword,—the money,—and my memorandum, which I forgot to remove. Hell’s curses! that after all my precautions I should be thus entrapped. It’s all your fault, you shaking coward! and, but that I feel sure you’ll swing for your carelessness, I’d throw you into the well, too.”

CHAPTER XIII. THE SUPPER AT MR. KNEEBONE'S

Persuaded that Jack Sheppard would keep his appointment with Mr. Kneebone, and feeling certain of capturing him if he did so, Shotbolt, on quitting Newgate, hurried to the New Prison to prepare for the enterprise. After debating with himself for some time whether he should employ an assistant, or make the attempt alone, his love of gain overcame his fears, and he decided upon the latter plan. Accordingly, having armed himself with various weapons, including a stout oaken staff then ordinarily borne by the watch, and put a coil of rope and a gag in his pocket, to be ready in case of need, he set out, about ten o'clock, on the expedition.

Before proceeding to Wych Street, he called at the Lodge to see how matters were going on, and found Mrs. Spurling and Austin at their evening meal, with Caliban in attendance.

"Well, Mr. Shotbolt," cried the turnkey, "I've good news for you. Mr. Wild has doubled his offer, and the governor has likewise proclaimed a reward of one hundred guineas for Jack's apprehension."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Shotbolt.

"Read that," rejoined Austin, pointing to the placard. "I ought to tell you that Mr. Wild's reward is conditional upon Jack's being taken before to-morrow morning. So I fear there's little chance of any one getting it."

"You think so, eh?" chuckled Shotbolt, who was eagerly perusing the reward, and congratulating himself upon his caution; "you think so—ha! ha! Well, don't go to bed, that's all."

"What for?" demanded the turnkey.

"Because the prisoner's arrival might disturb you—ha! ha!"

"I'll lay you twenty guineas you don't take him to-night," rejoined Austin.

"Done!" cried Shotbolt. "Mrs. Spurling, you're a witness to the bet. Twenty guineas, mind. I shan't let you off a farthing. Egad! I shall make a good thing of it."

"Never count your chickens till they're hatched," observed Mrs. Spurling, drily.

"My chickens are hatched, or, at least, nearly so," replied Shotbolt, with increased merriment. "Get ready your heaviest irons, Austin. I'll send you word when I catch him."

"You'd better send *him*," jeered the turnkey.

"So I will," rejoined Shotbolt; "so I will. If I don't, you shall clap me in the Condemned Hold in his stead. Good-bye, for the present—ha! ha!" And, laughing loudly at his own facetiousness, he quitted the Lodge.

"I'll lay my life he's gone on a fox-and-goose-chase to Mr. Kneebone's," remarked Austin, rising to fasten the door.

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Mrs. Spurling, as if struck by a sudden idea. And, while the turnkey was busy with the keys, she whispered to the black, "Follow him, Caliban. Take care he don't see you,—and bring me word where he goes, and what he does."

"Iss, missis," grinned the black.

"Be so good as to let Caliban out, Mr. Austin," continued the tapstress; "he's only going on an errand."

Austin readily complied with her request. As he returned to the table, he put his finger to his nose; and, though he said nothing, he thought he had a much better chance of winning his wager.

Unconscious that his movements were watched, Shotbolt, meanwhile, hastened towards Wych Street. On the way, he hired a chair with a couple of stout porters, and ordered them to follow him. Arrived within a short distance of his destination, he came to a halt, and pointing out a dark court nearly opposite the woollen-draper's abode, told the chairmen to wait there till they were summoned.

“I’m a peace-officer,” he added, “about to arrest a notorious criminal. He’ll be brought out at this door, and may probably make some resistance. But you must get him into the chair as fast as you can, and hurry off to Newgate.”

“And what’ll we get for the job, yer hon’r?” asked the foremost chairman, who, like most of his tribe at the time, was an Irishman.

“Five guineas. Here’s a couple in hand.”

“Faix, then we’ll do it in style,” cried the fellow. “Once in this chair, yer hon’r, and I’ll warrant he’ll not get out so aisily as Jack Sheppard did from the New Pris’n.”

“Hold your tongue, sirrah,” rejoined Shotbolt, not over-pleased by the remark, “and mind what I tell you. Ah! what’s that?” he exclaimed, as some one brushed hastily past him. “If I hadn’t just left him, I could have sworn it was Mrs. Spurling’s sooty imp, Caliban.”

Having seen the chairmen concealed in the entry, Shotbolt proceeded to Mr. Kneebone’s habitation, the shutters of which were closed, and knocked at the door. The summons was instantly answered by a shop-boy.

“Is your master at home?” inquired the jailer.

“He is,” replied a portly personage, arrayed in a gorgeous yellow brocade dressing-gown, lined with cherry-coloured satin, and having a crimson velvet cap, surmounted by a gold tassel, on his head. “My name is Kneebone,” added the portly personage, stepping forward. “What do you want with me?”

“A word in private,” replied the other.

“Stand aside, Tom,” commanded Kneebone. “Now Sir,” he added, glancing suspiciously at the applicant “your business?”

“My business is to acquaint you that Jack Sheppard has escaped, Mr. Kneebone,” returned Shotbolt.

“The deuce he has! Why, it’s only a few hours since I beheld him chained down with half a hundred weight of iron, in the strongest ward at Newgate. It’s almost incredible. Are you sure you’re not misinformed, Sir?”

“I was in the Lodge at the time,” replied the jailer.

“Then, of course, you must know. Well, it’s scarcely credible. When I gave him an invitation to supper, I little thought he’d accept it. But, egad! I believe he *will*.”

“I’m convinced of it,” replied Shotbolt; “and it was on that very account I came here.” And he proceeded to unfold his scheme to the woollen-draper.

“Well, Sir,” said Kneebone, when the other concluded, “I shall certainly not oppose his capture, but, at the same time, I’ll lend you no assistance. If he keeps *his* word, I’ll keep *mine*. You must wait till supper’s over.”

“As you please, Sir,—provided you don’t let him off.”

“That I’ll engage not to do. I’ve another reason for supposing he’ll pay me a visit. I refused to sign a petition in his behalf to the Recorder; not from any ill-will to him, but because it was prepared by a person whom I particularly dislike—Captain Darrell.”

“A very sufficient reason,” answered the jailer.

“Tom,” continued Kneebone, calling to the shop-boy, “don’t go home. I may want you. Light the lantern. And, if you hear any odd noise in the parlour, don’t mind it.”

“Not in the least, Sir,” replied Tom, in a drowsy tone, and with a look seeming to imply that he was too much accustomed to odd noises at night to heed them.

“Now, step this way, Mr. What’s-your-name?”

“Shotbolt, Sir,” replied the jailer.

“Very well, Mr. Slipshod; follow me.” And he led the way to an inner room, in the middle of which stood a table, covered with a large white cloth.

“Jack Sheppard knows this house, I believe, Sir,” observed Shotbolt.

“Every inch of it,” replied the woollen-draper. “He *ought* to do, seeing that he served his apprenticeship in it to Mr. Wood, by whom it was formerly occupied. His name is carved upon a beam up stairs.”

“Indeed!” said Shotbolt. “Where can I hide myself?” he added, glancing round the room in search of a closet.

“Under the table. The cloth nearly touches the floor. Give me your staff. It’ll be in your way.”

“Suppose he brings Blueskin, or some other ruffian with him,” hesitated the jailer.

“Suppose he does. In that case I’ll help you. We shall be equally matched. You’re not afraid, Mr. Shoplatch.”

“Not in the least,” replied Shotbolt, creeping beneath the table; “there’s my staff. Am I quite hidden?”

“Not quite;—keep your feet in. Mind you don’t stir till supper’s over. I’ll stamp twice when we’ve done.”

“I forgot to mention there’s a trifling reward for his capture,” cried Shotbolt, popping his head from under the cloth. “If we take him, I don’t mind giving you a share—say a fourth—provided you lend a helping hand.”

“Curse your reward!” exclaimed Kneebone, angrily. “Do you take me for a thief-catcher, like Jonathan Wild, that you dare to affront me by such a proposal?”

“No offence, Sir,” rejoined the jailer, humbly. “I didn’t imagine for a moment that you’d accept it, but I thought it right to make you the offer.”

“Be silent, and conceal yourself. I’m about to ring for supper.”

The woollen-draper’s application to the bell was answered by a very pretty young woman, with dark Jewish features, roguish black eyes, sleek glossy hair, a trim waist, and a remarkably neat figure: the very model, in short, of a bachelor’s housekeeper.

“Rachel,” said Mr. Kneebone, addressing his comely attendant; “put a few more plates on the table, and bring up whatever there is in the larder. I expect company.”

“Company!” echoed Rachel; “at this time of night?”

“Company, child,” repeated Kneebone. “I shall want a bottle or two of sack, and a flask of usquebaugh.”

“Anything else, Sir?”

“No:—stay! you’d better not bring up any silver forks or spoons.”

“Why, surely you don’t think your guests would steal them,” observed Rachel, archly.

“They shan’t have the opportunity,” replied Kneebone. And, by way of checking his housekeeper’s familiarity, he pointed significantly to the table.

“Who’s there?” cried Rachel. “I’ll see.” And before she could be prevented, she lifted up the cloth, and disclosed Shotbolt. “Oh, Gemini!” she exclaimed. “A man!”

“At your service, my dear,” replied the jailer.

“Now your curiosity’s satisfied, child,” continued Kneebone, “perhaps, you’ll attend to my orders.”

Not a little perplexed by the mysterious object she had seen, Rachel left the room, and, shortly afterwards returned with the materials of a tolerably good supper;—to wit, a couple of cold fowls, a tongue, the best part of a sirloin of beef, a jar of pickles, and two small dishes of pastry. To these she added the wine and spirits directed, and when all was arranged looked inquisitively at her master.

“I expect a very extraordinary person to supper, Rachel,” he remarked.

“The gentleman under the table,” she answered. “He *does* seem a very extraordinary person.”

“No; another still more extraordinary.”

“Indeed!—who is it?”

“Jack Sheppard.”

“What! the famous housebreaker. I thought he was in Newgate.”

“He’s let out for a few hours,” laughed Kneebone; “but he’s going back again after supper.”

“Oh, dear! how I should like to see him. I’m told he’s so handsome.”

“I’m sorry I can’t indulge you,” replied her master, a little piqued. “I shall want nothing more. You had better go to bed.”

“It’s no use going to bed,” answered Rachel. “I shan’t sleep a wink while Jack Sheppard’s in the house.”

“Keep in your own room, at all events,” rejoined Kneebone.

“Very well,” said Rachel, with a toss of her pretty head, “very well. I’ll have a peep at him, if I die for it,” she muttered, as she went out.

Mr. Kneebone, then, sat down to await the arrival of his expected guest. Half an hour passed, but Jack did not make his appearance. The woollen-draper looked at his watch. It was eleven o’clock. Another long interval elapsed. The watch was again consulted. It was now a quarter past twelve. Mr. Kneebone, who began to feel sleepy, wound it up, and snuffed the candles.

“I suspect our friend has thought better of it, and won’t come,” he remarked.

“Have a little patience, Sir,” rejoined the jailer.

“How are you off there, Shoplatch?” inquired Kneebone. “Rather cramped, eh?”

“Rather so, Sir,” replied the other, altering his position. “I shall be able to stretch my limbs presently—ha! ha!”

“Hush!” cried Kneebone, “I hear a noise without. He’s coming.”

The caution was scarcely uttered, when the door opened, and Jack Sheppard presented himself. He was wrapped in a laced roquelaure, which he threw off on his entrance into the room. It has been already intimated that Jack had an excessive passion for finery; and it might have been added, that the chief part of his ill-gotten gains was devoted to the embellishment of his person. On the present occasion, he appeared to have bestowed more than ordinary attention on his toilette. His apparel was sumptuous in the extreme, and such as was only worn by persons of the highest distinction. It consisted of a full-dress coat of brown flowered velvet, laced with silver; a waistcoat of white satin, likewise richly embroidered; shoes with red heels, and large diamond buckles; pearl-coloured silk stockings with gold clocks; a muslin cravat, or steen-kirk, as it was termed, edged with the fine point lace; ruffles of the same material, and so ample as almost to hide the tips of his fingers; and a silver-hilted sword. This costume, though somewhat extravagant, displayed his slight, but perfectly-proportioned figure to the greatest advantage. The only departure which he made from the fashion of the period, was in respect to the peruke—an article he could never be induced to wear. In lieu of it, he still adhered to the sleek black crop, which, throughout life, formed a distinguishing feature in his appearance. Ever since the discovery of his relationship to the Trenchard family, a marked change had taken place in Jack’s demeanour and looks, which were so much refined and improved that he could scarcely be recognised as the same person. Having only seen him in the gloom of a dungeon, and loaded with fetters, Kneebone had not noticed this alteration: but he was now greatly struck by it. Advancing towards him, he made him a formal salutation, which was coldly returned.

“I am expected, I find,” observed Jack, glancing at the well-covered board.

“You are,” replied Kneebone. “When I heard of your escape, I felt sure I should see you.”

“You judged rightly,” rejoined Jack; “I never yet broke an engagement with friend or foe—and never will.”

“A bold resolution,” said the woollen-draper. “You must have made some exertion to keep your present appointment. Few men could have done as much.”

“Perhaps not,” replied Jack, carelessly. “I would have done more, if necessary.”

“Well, take a chair,” rejoined Kneebone. “I’ve waited supper, you perceive.”

“First, let me introduce my friends,” returned Jack, stepping to the door.

“Friends!” echoed Kneebone, with a look of dismay. “My invitation did not extend to them.”

Further remonstrance, however, was cut short by the sudden entrance of Mrs. Maggot and Edgeworth Bess. Behind them stalked Blueskin, enveloped in a rough great-coat, called—appropriately enough in this instance,—a wrap-rascal. Folding his arms, he placed his back against the door, and burst into a loud laugh. The ladies were, as usual, very gaily dressed; and as usual, also, had resorted to art to heighten their attractions—

From patches, justly placed, they borrow'd graces,
And with vermilion lacquer'd o'er their faces.

Edgeworth Bess wore a scarlet tabby negligée,—a sort of undress, or sack, then much in vogue,—which suited her to admiration, and upon her head had what was called a fly-cap, with richly-laced lappets. Mrs. Maggot was equipped in a light blue riding-habit, trimmed with silver, a hunting-cap and a flaxen peruke, and, instead of a whip, carried a stout cudgel.

For a moment, Kneebone had hesitated about giving the signal to Shotbolt, but, thinking a more favourable opportunity might occur, he determined not to hazard matters by undue precipitation. Placing chairs, therefore, he invited the ladies to be seated, and, paying a similar attention to Jack, began to help to the various dishes, and otherwise fulfil the duties of a host. While this was going on, Blueskin, seeing no notice whatever taken of him, coughed loudly and repeatedly. But finding his hints totally disregarded, he, at length, swaggered up to the table, and thrust in a chair.

“Excuse me,” he said, plunging his fork into a fowl, and transferring it to his plate. “This tongue looks remarkably nice,” he added, slicing off an immense wedge, “excuse me—ho! ho!”

“You make yourself at home, I perceive,” observed Kneebone, with a look of ineffable disgust.

“I generally do,” replied Blueskin, pouring out a bumper of sack. “Your health, Kneebone.”

“Allow me to offer you a glass of usquebaugh, my dear,” said Kneebone, turning from him, and regarding Edgeworth Bess with a stare so impertinent, that even that not over-delicate young lady summoned up a blush.

“With pleasure, Sir,” replied Edgeworth Bess. “Dear me!” she added, as she pledged the amorous woollen-draper, “what a beautiful ring that is.”

“Do you think so?” replied Kneebone, taking it off, and placing it on her finger, which he took the opportunity of kissing at the same time; “wear it for my sake.”

“Oh, dear!” simpered Edgeworth Bess, endeavouring to hide her confusion by looking steadfastly at her plate.

“You don’t eat,” continued Kneebone, addressing Jack, who had remained for some time thoughtful, and pre-occupied with his head upon his hand.

“The Captain has seldom much appetite,” replied Blueskin, who, having disposed of the fowl, was commencing a vigorous attack upon the sirloin. “I eat for both.”

“So it seems,” observed the woollen-draper, “and for every one else, too.”

“I say, Kneebone,” rejoined Blueskin, as he washed down an immense mouthful with another bumper, “do you recollect how nearly Mr. Wild and I were nabbing you in this very room, some nine years ago?”

“I do,” replied Kneebone; “and now,” he added, aside, “the case is altered. I’m nearly nabbing *you*.”

“A good deal has occurred since then, eh, Captain!” said Blueskin, nudging Jack.

“Much that I would willingly forget. Nothing that I desire to remember,” replied Sheppard, sternly. “On that night,—in this room,—in your presence, Blueskin,—in yours Mr. Kneebone, Mrs. Wood struck me a blow which made me a robber.”

“She has paid dearly for it,” muttered Blueskin.

“She has,” rejoined Sheppard. “But I wish her hand had been as deadly as yours. On that night,—that fatal night,—Winifred crushed all the hopes that were rising in my heart. On that night, I surrendered myself to Jonathan Wild, and became—what I am.”

“On that night, you first met me, love,” said Edgeworth Bess, endeavouring to take his hand, which he coldly withdrew.

“And me,” added Mrs. Maggot tenderly.

“Would I had never seen either of you!” cried Jack, rising and pacing the apartment with a hurried step.

“Well, I’m sure Winifred could never have loved you as well as I do,” said Mrs. Maggot.

“*You!*” cried Jack, scornfully. “Do you compare *your* love—a love which all may purchase—with *hers*? No one has ever loved me.”

“Except me, dear,” insinuated Edgeworth Bess. “I’ve been always true to you.”

“Peace!” retorted Jack, with increased bitterness. “I’m your dupe no longer.”

“What the devil’s in the wind now, Captain?” cried Blueskin, in astonishment.

“I’ll tell you,” replied Jack, with forced calmness. “Within the last few minutes, all my guilty life has passed before me. Nine years ago, I was honest—was happy. Nine years ago, I worked in this very house—had a kind indulgent master, whom I robbed—twice robbed, at your instigation, villain; a mistress, whom you have murdered; a companion, whose friendship I have for ever forfeited; a mother, whose heart I have well-nigh broken. In this room was my ruin begun: in this room it should be ended.”

“Come, come, don’t take on thus, Captain,” cried Blueskin, rising and walking towards him. “If any one’s to blame, it’s me. I’m ready to bear it all.”

“Can you make me honest?” cried Jack. “Can you make me other than a condemned felon? Can you make me not Jack Sheppard?”

“No,” replied Blueskin; “and I wouldn’t if I could.”

“Curse you!” cried Jack, furiously,—“curse you!—curse you!”

“Swear away, Captain,” rejoined Blueskin, coolly. “It’ll ease your mind.”

“Do you mock me?” cried Jack, levelling a pistol at him.

“Not I,” replied Blueskin. “Take my life, if you’re so disposed. You’re welcome to it. And let’s see if either of these women, who prate of their love for you, will do as much.”

“This is folly,” cried Jack, controlling himself by a powerful effort.

“The worst of folly,” replied Blueskin, returning to the table, and taking up a glass; “and, to put an end to it, I shall drink the health of Jack Sheppard, the housebreaker, and success to him in all his enterprises. And now, let’s see who’ll refuse the pledge.”

“I will,” replied Sheppard, dashing the glass from his hand. “Sit down, fool!”

“Jack,” said Kneebone, who had been considerably interested by the foregoing scene, “are these regrets for your past life sincere?”

“Suppose them so,” rejoined Jack, “what then?”

“Nothing—nothing,” stammered Kneebone, his prudence getting the better of his sympathy. “I’m glad to hear it, that’s all,” he added, taking out his snuff-box, his never-failing resource in such emergencies. “It won’t do to betray the officer,” he muttered.

“O lud! what an exquisite box!” cried Edgeworth Bess. “Is it gold?”

“Pure gold,” replied Kneebone. “It was given me by poor dear Mrs. Wood, whose loss I shall ever deplore.”

“Pray, let me have a pinch!” said Edgeworth Bess, with a captivating glance. “I am so excessively fond of snuff.”

The woollen-draper replied by gallantly handing her the box, which was instantly snatched from her by Blueskin, who, after helping himself to as much of its contents as he could conveniently squeeze between his thumb and finger, put it very coolly in his pocket.

The action did not pass unnoticed by Sheppard.

“Restore it,” he cried, in an authoritative voice.

“O’ons! Captain,” cried Blueskin, as he grumblingly obeyed the command; “if you’ve left off business yourself, you needn’t interfere with other people.”

“I should like a little of that plum-tart,” said Mrs. Maggot; “but I don’t see a spoon.”

“I’ll ring for one,” replied Kneebone, rising accordingly; “but I fear my servants are gone to bed.”

Blueskin, meanwhile, having drained and replenished his glass, commenced chaunting a snatch of a ballad:—

Once on a time, as I’ve heard tell,
In Wych Street Owen Wood did dwell;
A carpenter he was by trade,
And money, I believe, he made.
With his foodle doo!

This carpenter he had a wife,
The plague and torment of his life,
Who, though she did her husband scold,
Loved well a woollen-draper bold.
With her foodle doo!

“I’ve a toast to propose,” cried Sheppard, filling a bumper. “You won’t refuse it, Mr. Kneebone?”

“He’d better not,” muttered Blueskin.

“What is it?” demanded the woollen-draper, as he returned to the table, and took up a glass.

“The speedy union of Thames Darrell with Winifred Wood,” replied Jack.

Kneebone’s cheeks glowed with rage, and he set down the wine untasted, while Blueskin resumed his song.

Now Owen Wood had one fair child,
Unlike her mother, meek and mild;
Her love the draper strove to gain,
But she repaid him with disdain.
With his foodle doo!

“Peace!” cried Jack.

But Blueskin was not to be silenced. He continued his ditty, in spite of the angry glances of his leader.

In vain he fondly urged his suit,
And, all in vain, the question put;
She answered,—“Mr. William Kneebone,
Of me, Sir, you shall never be bone.”
With your foodle doo!

“Thames Darrell has my heart alone,
A noble youth, e’en *you* must own;
And, if from him my love could stir,

Jack Sheppard I should much prefer!"
With his foodle doo!

"Do you refuse my toast?" cried Jack, impatiently.

"I do," replied Kneebone.

"Drink this, then," roared Blueskin. And pouring the contents of a small powder-flask into a bumper of brandy, he tendered him the mixture.

At this juncture, the door was opened by Rachel.

"What did you ring for, Sir?" she asked, eyeing the group with astonishment.

"Your master wants a few table-spoons, child," said Mrs. Maggot.

"Leave the room," interposed Kneebone, angrily.

"No, I shan't," replied Rachel, saucily. "I came to see Jack Sheppard, and I won't go till you point him out to me. You told me he was going back to Newgate after supper, so I mayn't have another opportunity."

"Oh! he told you that, did he?" said Blueskin, marching up to her, and chucking her under the chin. "I'll show you Captain Sheppard, my dear. There he stands. I'm his lieutenant,—Lieutenant Blueskin. We're two good-looking fellows, ain't we?"

"Very good-looking," replied Rachel. "But, where's the strange gentleman I saw under the table?"

"Under the table!" echoed Blueskin, winking at Jack. "When did you see him, my love?"

"A short time ago," replied the housekeeper, unsuspectingly.

"The plot's out!" cried Jack. And, without another word, he seized the table with both hands, and upset it; scattering plates, dishes, bottles, jugs, and glasses far and wide. The crash was tremendous. The lights rolled over, and were extinguished. And, if Rachel had not carried a candle, the room would have been plunged in total darkness. Amid the confusion, Shotbolt sprang to his feet, and levelling a pistol at Jack's head, commanded him to surrender; but, before any reply could be made, the jailer's arm was struck up by Blueskin, who, throwing himself upon him, dragged him to the ground. In the struggle the pistol went off, but without damage to either party. The conflict was of short duration; for Shotbolt was no match for his athletic antagonist. He was speedily disarmed; and the rope and gag being found upon him, were exultingly turned against him by his conqueror, who, after pinioning his arms tightly behind his back, forced open his mouth with the iron, and effectually prevented the utterance of any further outcries. While the strife was raging, Edgeworth Bess walked up to Rachel, and advised her, if she valued her life, not to scream or stir from the spot; a caution which the housekeeper, whose curiosity far outweighed her fears, received in very good part.

In the interim, Jack advanced to the woollen-drapers, and regarding him sternly, thus addressed him:

"You have violated the laws of hospitality, Mr. Kneebone, I came hither as your guest. You have betrayed me."

"What faith is to be kept with a felon?" replied the woollen-drafter, disdainfully.

"He who breaks faith with his benefactor may well justify himself thus," answered Jack. "I have not trusted you. Others who have done, have found you false."

"I don't understand you," replied Kneebone, in some confusion.

"You soon shall," rejoined Sheppard. "Where are the packets committed to your charge by Sir Rowland Trenchard?"

"The packets!" exclaimed Kneebone, in alarm.

"It is useless to deny it," replied Jack. "You were watched to-night by Blueskin. You met Sir Rowland at the house of a Romisch priest, Father Spencer. Two packets were committed to your charge, which you undertook to deliver,—one to another priest, Sir Rowland's chaplain, at Manchester, the other to Mr. Wood. Produce them!"

“Never!” replied Kneebone.

“Then, by Heaven! you are a dead man!” replied Jack, cocking a pistol, and pointing it deliberately at his head. “I give you one minute for reflection. After that time nothing shall save you.”

There was a brief, breathless pause. Even Blueskin looked on with anxiety.

“It is past,” said Jack, placing his finger on the trigger.

“Hold!” cried Kneebone, flinging down the packets; “they are nothing to me.”

“But they are everything to me,” cried Jack, stooping to pick them up. “These packets will establish Thames Darrell’s birth, win him his inheritance, and procure him the hand of Winifred Wood.”

“Don’t be too sure of that,” rejoined Kneebone, snatching up the staff, and aiming a blow at his head, which was fortunately warded off by Mrs. Maggot, who promptly interposed her cudgel.

“Defend yourself!” cried Jack, drawing his sword.

“Leave his punishment to me, Jack,” said Mrs. Maggot. “I’ve the Bridewell account to settle.”

“Be it so,” replied Jack, putting up his blade. “I’ve a good deal to do. Show him no quarter, Poll. He deserves none.”

“And shall find none,” replied the Amazon. “Now, Mr. Kneebone,” she added, drawing up her magnificent figure to its full height, and making the heavy cudgel whistle through the air, “look to yourself.”

“Stand off, Poll,” rejoined the woollen-drapeer; “I don’t want to hurt you. It shall never be said that I raised my arm willingly against a woman.”

“I’ll forgive you all the harm you do me,” rejoined the Amazon. “What! you still hesitate! Will that rouse you, coward?” And she gave him a smart rap on the head.

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