

Sweeney Todd

Anonymous



Summary

The story is about a barber, Sweeney Todd, in eighteenth century London, who murders his customers. He then gives the bodies to his associate, Mrs Lovett, who has a pie shop nearby, and she puts the meat into her popular and delicious pies. They plan to end their profitable business and disappear abroad. However, Todd poisons Mrs Lovett and is then caught by the police and hanged.

Chapter 1

The year is 1785 and we are in Fleet St, London. Sweeney Todd, a loud, ugly and rather strange man, has a successful barber's shop in the street. He employs a boy called Tobias Ragg, who he mistreats. One day, Mr Thornhill, who has a dog called Hector, enters the shop for a shave. He tells Todd that he is on a sad errand to deliver an expensive pearl necklace to a girl called Miss Johanna Oakley and to inform her that her lover, Mr Ingestrie, has died at sea. Todd sends Tobias out of the shop. He goes into his sitting room and there is a loud noise. When he returns to the barber's chair, Mr Thornhill has disappeared. The dog runs into the shop and runs out again with Mr Thornhill's hat. It swims out to a ship with the hat, which the captain and the officer, Mr Jeffery, recognise as Mr Thornhill's. The dog leads them to Todd's shop. Todd admits that Thornhill had had a shave but had left and got involved in a street fight.

Chapter 2

At lunchtime, everybody in the area goes to buy the delicious meat pies that Mrs Lovett sells in her shop. Tobias returns to work and comments that a customer has left his hat and walking stick. Todd threatens to expose the boy's mother as a thief if he ever talks to anyone about it. Mr Jeffery meets Johanna Oakley and

tells her that Mr Thornhill had sailed on the same ship as Mark Ingestrie, that the ship had sunk, and that Thornhill had been picked up by Jeffery's ship. He also tells her that Thornhill has disappeared. Later, Mr Jeffery relates the story of Thornhill's disappearance to his friend Captain Rathbone. The men decide to visit Todd's shop, pretending to be a couple of jewellers requiring a shave. They let Todd know they sell jewellery in an attempt to coax him into mentioning the pearl necklace. Todd doesn't believe they are jewellers.

Chapter 3

Jarvis Williams, a poor man, arrives at Mrs Lovett's pie shop asking for a job. She tells him to come back in a couple of hours. Mr Skinner, Mrs Lovett's present pie man, is murdered soon afterwards and Williams gets the job. Johanna tells her friend Arabella that she believes Mr Thornhill is actually Mark Ingestrie in disguise. In order to spy on Todd, Arabella suggests that Johanna dresses as a boy and applies for a job in the barber's shop. Todd goes to see John Mundel, a money lender. Mundel lends Todd 8,000 pounds and Todd leaves the necklace in Mundel's possession. While Todd is away, Tobias searches the shop. He finds a large quantity of men's clothing and jewellery. Then he goes to his mother's house, says goodbye and leaves. Todd returns to find the shop in disorder.

Chapter 4

There is a terrible smell of dead bodies coming from near the church next to Mrs Lovett's shop but nobody can find the source. Todd kidnaps Tobias when he returns to his mother's home and takes him to a mental asylum. He tells the owner, the wicked Mr Fogg, that Tobias has gone mad and keeps calling him a murderer. Todd pays for Tobias to be kept in the asylum for a year on the understanding that he will die during this period. In the cellar of Mrs Lovett's pie shop, Jarvis Williams is beginning to wonder where the meat that goes into the pies comes from. He finds some writing on a wall warning him he will never leave the cellar, and then a note telling him he is a prisoner.

Chapter 5

Mr Jeffery and Captain Rathbone wait near Todd's shop hoping to talk to Tobias. They see Todd return from his trip to the asylum. Then a man goes in for shave and does not come out again. They decide to talk to Sir Richard Blunt, a High Court judge and friend of Captain Rathbone and he confirms their suspicions of Todd. They also tell him about the smell coming from the church. He goes to

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the church and discovers the cause of the horrible smell and plans to inform the police. Tobias awakes in his dark room to the sound of a girl singing. Mr Watson, Mr Fogg's assistant, beats the girl and then Tobias. Later that day, a very old doctor visits the hospital to make his yearly inspection. He is shown a lot of clean patients and given wine to drink. Tobias tells him Todd is a murderer but this just convinces the doctor that Tobias really is crazy. Tobias escapes from his room and hears Watson and Fogg discussing their plan to murder him in the morning. He enters the room of a young woman patient who tells him she has built a tunnel to the outside. Tobias goes through the tunnel and escapes.

Chapter 6

Johanna, disguised as a boy, gets a job in Todd's shop. A customer, Mr Wrangle, enters the shop and tells Todd he has been asked by Mr Mundel to value a pearl necklace, and that he has it in his pocket. Johanna, while giving Todd a razor, accidentally makes a cut on the barber's chair. Todd sends her out of the shop. When she returns, Mr Wrangle has gone but his hat is still there, and the barber's chair has no cut on the arm. Todd is planning to leave England but first he is going to poison Mrs Lovett. While he is on his way to kill Mrs Lovett, Sir Richard Blunt and two police officers enter his shop. The officers hide in the cupboard. Sir Richard leaves the shop but returns pretending to be a farmer in need of a shave. Todd says he needs another razor from the other room and leaves to get it. Sir Richard jumps out of the chair and hides in a corner. The chair disappears, to be replaced with another. Todd returns to the room and is arrested. The puzzle of what happened to Todd's customers is solved. They fell to their death on the floor below and were cut up to make Mrs Lovett's pies. Later, Jarvis Williams escapes from the cellar in a tray of pies and explains to everyone the true source of the meat. Mrs Lovett drops dead from the poison Todd had given her. Jarvis is revealed to be Mark Ingestrue, who had been under the impression his sweetheart, Johanna, had left him for another man. He and Johanna marry and Todd is hanged.

Background and themes

Greed: The pursuit of money leads many of the characters to commit horrific crimes. Todd kills his customers, takes their valuable clothes and jewellery and then gives their bodies to Mrs Lovett so she too can make money. Together they have formed a terrible alliance.

Forced on by his insatiable appetite for money, Todd kills his partner. In the end, his greed amounts to nothing as he is hanged. Greed is represented too, in the portrayal of the pie men. They are at first very happy to eat all the pies they can, but later begin to doubt if this dubious perk is really worth their working conditions. The girl in the hospital is there because the greed of her parents drove them to rob her of her inheritance and conveniently get rid of her without actually committing murder.

Mental hospitals at the time: Todd disposes of his workers by admitting them to what is called a hospital, but is really a sort of prison and extermination camp for unwanted, troublesome, relatives and workers. It is well documented that this was common practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Detective story: Much of the book reads like an old-fashioned detective story with a judge, a couple of friends and a young girl all joining forces to discover the reason for Mr Thornhill's disappearance and to solve the mystery that surrounds Sweeney Todd's shop.

Disguise and pretence: Many of the characters adopt disguises of some kind. Mr Thornhill and his friend pretend to be jewellery sellers when they go to Todd's shop, and Sir Richard wears farmer's clothes. Todd pretends to be rich client to impress Mr Mundel. Johanna pretends to be a boy to get a job in the shop, and Mr Ingestrue changes his name to Jarvis Williams. The owner of the special hospital, when visited by the inspector, makes sure the hospital patients have an appearance of health and contentment.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Discuss:** Put the students in small groups and ask them to think about how life was different in London in 1785 compared with life today. Ask them to consider the following: *What was the food and drink like? Did people eat more or less than today? What types of transport did they use? What type of houses did they live in? How did they communicate over distances with each other? What did they do for entertainment? What types of work did they do?*

Chapter 1

While reading (p. 2, after 'One day you'll have a good profession as a barber.')

- Write and game:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to make a list of all the professions they can think of in English. Put their answers on the board

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and add some of your own. Then play the twenty questions game. Student A thinks of a profession. The rest of the class ask him/her questions to guess their profession. Student A can only respond yes, no or sometimes. The class can ask twenty questions. If they can't guess in twenty questions, student A has won. See Discussion activities key for possible questions.

- 3 Discuss** (p. 6, after 'But I had a terrible dream last night.'): Put students in small groups to discuss the following questions: *Do you usually remember your dreams? What kind of dreams do you have? Can you remember any bad dreams? Do you ever have the same dream again? Do you think dreams have a meaning?*

After reading

- 4 Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *poem, fear, glasses, leg, fortune, dream*. Have the students talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in Chapter 1

Chapter 2

While reading (p. 16, after 'They were full of hope and very excited about their trip.')

- 5 Discuss:** Put the students in groups of four and ask them to think about an exciting trip or holiday they have been on. Tell them to think about the following questions: *Where did you go? How did you travel? Who did you go with? What happened on the trip? Were you excited/frightened/worried/angry about anything? Where did you stay? Was it expensive? What was the food like?*

After reading

- 6 Research:** Remind the students that the ship, in which Mark Ingestræ was travelling, sank. Ask them to look for information on the Internet about real accidents that have happened to forms of transport or films that have a transport accident as the main theme. Each student then does an oral presentation of what they have found out.

Chapter 3

While reading (p. 26, after 'Well if you have the right skills, you'll be a good pie man.')

- 7 Role play:** Put the students into pairs. Tell them that student A is Jarvis Williams and student B is Mrs Lovett. Then the students act out a job interview. Student A must tell student B why he/she is the right person for the job, and student B must ask student A questions. See Discussion activities key for an example start to the conversation.
- 8 Discuss** (p. 28, after 'I've read a lot of detective stories.'): Ask the students to think of all the types of books or films they can and put them on the board. Add some of your own. Then ask them to discuss which type of book or film they like the best and to give examples of the ones they have read or seen.

After reading

- 9 Write and ask:** Write *What did the man hit Mr Skinner with?* on the board and elicit the answer (A heavy metal bar.). Ask students to write another question about something in Chapter 3. Now have students stand up and walk around the class, asking and answering each other's questions.

Chapter 4

While reading (p. 47, after 'The secret is')

- 10 Write and discuss:** Write on the board: *a secret life*. Remind the students that Todd is living a secret life. In his non-secret life he is a barber but in his secret life he is a murderer. Put the students into small groups and ask them to write down all the things that can be secret. See Discussion activities key for suggestions. Then ask them to discuss the following: *What is the secret to a long life / happy life / healthy life? What is the secret to winning computer games? What is the secret to passing exams / speaking English well?*

After reading

- 11 Write and guess:** Put students in pairs and ask them to choose a short paragraph from Chapter 4. Tell them to write it again, making five changes to words in the text. Students then read out their paragraphs to the other students, who have to identify the mistakes.

Chapter 5

While reading (p. 52, after 'So I couldn't put Todd in prison.')

- 12 Role play:** Put the students in pairs and tell them they are going to act out a court scene between Richard Blunt and Sweeney Todd. Sir Richard asks Todd where he got the ring and other questions about his shop and Todd has to try and answer. See Discussion activities key for an example start to the conversation.

After reading

- 13 Write and guess:** Write *The businessman was carrying a small box.* on the board. Elicit which word is wrong from the students (suitcase not box). Now students choose a sentence from Chapter 5 and rewrite it changing one word. Students interact with each other, reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.
- 14 Write:** Tell students to write a diary entry as if they were Tobias when he was in the hospital. Encourage them to describe the place, the people and Tobias's feelings.

Chapter 6

After reading

- 15 Game:** Divide the class into teams and get them to write five questions about the book. The teams then take turns to ask their questions to the other teams, who have to write down the answer. The team with the most correct answers in the end wins.