

## SWEENEY TODD

### THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

#### SYNOPSIS

##### Act I

Victorian London, a mighty industrial city, the heart of a great empire: **The Ballad of Sweeney Todd** begins, setting the scene for the awful tale about to unfold.

Down at the docks, two men disembark and greet their native city. For Anthony Hope, after years overseas, **There's No Place Like London**. Sweeney Todd echoes that sentiment but for different reasons: London is a hell hole, a black pit in which all the vermin of the earth are gathered. As they part, a deranged Beggar Woman pathetically offers herself to them. Todd is cruelly abusive, to the surprise of Anthony, who has only known him as kind and gentle. Now, he seems embittered and hateful. But London can do that. Todd relates the sad story of **The Barber and His Wife** - and the rich, powerful man who desired her.

Leaving the docks, he makes his way to Fleet Street and Mrs. Lovett's shop, wherein are sold **The Worst Pies In London**. There are lodgings above, difficult to let since a nasty incident a while back: there was a nice gentlemanly barber who worked and lived there with a young daughter and a pretty little wife who attracted the attentions - **Poor Thing** - of a corrupt Judge and his Beadle. They had the barber unjustly transported, lured his sweet naive wife to the Judge's house, where she was raped and her beautiful child taken from her. The barber was never seen again, the wife took poison, but the girl Johanna still lives with the Judge. Even as she tells the tale, Mrs. Lovett knows to whom she speaks: Sweeney Todd has returned to have his revenge. She hands him the tools of his trade, carefully kept by her since the day he was convicted. **My Friends**, murmurs Todd, caressing his razors. "I'm your friend, too," adds Mrs. Lovett. He takes the lodgings and sets up business as a barber.

Outside Judge Turpin's house, a Birdseller's **Green Finch and Linnet Bird** are serenaded by another helpless caged creature from the highest window in the house: Johanna. Passing by, Anthony buys a bird and offers it to the young lady (**Ah, Miss**), but the Judge warns him to keep away from his "daughter". Too late: Anthony is in love and determined to rescue **Johanna**

In St. Dunstan's Place, a rival barber, Pirelli, is demonstrating the remarkable properties of **Pirelli's Miracle Elixir** - much mocked by Todd, who challenges the mountebank to a shaving competition. The eager crowd enlists the help of Beadle Bamford, who umpires **The Contest** and pronounces Todd the winner. Business booms in Fleet Street, but the obsessed Todd awaits only the Beadle's custom. **Wait**, Mrs. Lovett advises: vengeance will be his.

Unaware of Todd's return, the Judge has decided to marry his "daughter" himself. Johanna is distraught, until Anthony climbs up to her room. **Kiss Me**, they cry, and plan their escape. With his wedding looming, the Judge is persuaded by the Beadle that **Ladies in Their Sensibilities** like a man freshly shaved and pomaded. They make their way to Fleet Street, and, as the lecherous Judge gleefully expounds on the subject of **Pretty Women**, he little suspects that Todd's last visitor now lies lifeless in the barber's trunk. Pirelli had recognised the returned convict and foolishly attempted a little blackmail. But, just as Todd is about to dispatch the Judge too, Anthony bursts in, gushing about Johanna and their elopement. Judge Turpin leaves, swearing that boy and barber are obviously in league. Todd rages at Anthony, at Mrs. Lovett, and, experiencing his own mad **Epiphany**, vows revenge on all humanity. Mrs. Lovett is more practical: what about Pirelli? Seems a shame to waste such fine, plump flesh. What with the price of meat, maybe she and Mr. Todd could be of mutual assistance. After all, her pies could do with some new flavours - Italian barber, Royal Marine and maybe **A Little Priest**.

##### Act II

Mrs. Lovett's distinctive pies are the talk of Fleet Street. **God, That's Good**, belch the patrons of her thriving new ale garden. With such a harmonious business partnership, Mrs. Lovett is keen to put relations with Mr. Todd on a more intimate footing and hints flirtatiously how happy they'd be down **By the Sea**. But Todd's mind has been twisted by hate and he thinks only of Judge Turpin and Johanna, now incarcerated in a madhouse.

Mrs. Lovett's new help, Tobias, is fearful of Todd, but no-one will harm her, he promises, **Not While I'm Around**. Suspicious that he suspects something, she locks him in the bake-house. Upstairs, Beadle Bamford has arrived and is playing **Parlour Songs** on the harmonium. He has come because there have been complaints about an unpleasant smell from the bake-house, and he'd like to take a closer look - which Todd arranges by slitting his throat. The smoke from the chimneys has also drawn the attention of the crazy beggar woman, who shrieks her warning of **City on Fire** as Todd's scheme races to its conclusion: Johanna is rescued by Anthony, the Judge joins the Beadle in the furnace, as does the foolish madwoman.

Only then does Todd recognise her: his wife, his beloved Lucy, the one person in the world his poisoned heart still loved. And, because Mrs. Lovett lied and made him think Lucy was dead, he has killed her. He takes his twittering landlady in his arms, they dance and he flings her in the furnace before he, in turn, is killed by Tobias. When Johanna, Anthony and the police arrive, the boy is grinding the mincer: the gruesome finale to **The Ballad of Sweeney Todd**.