



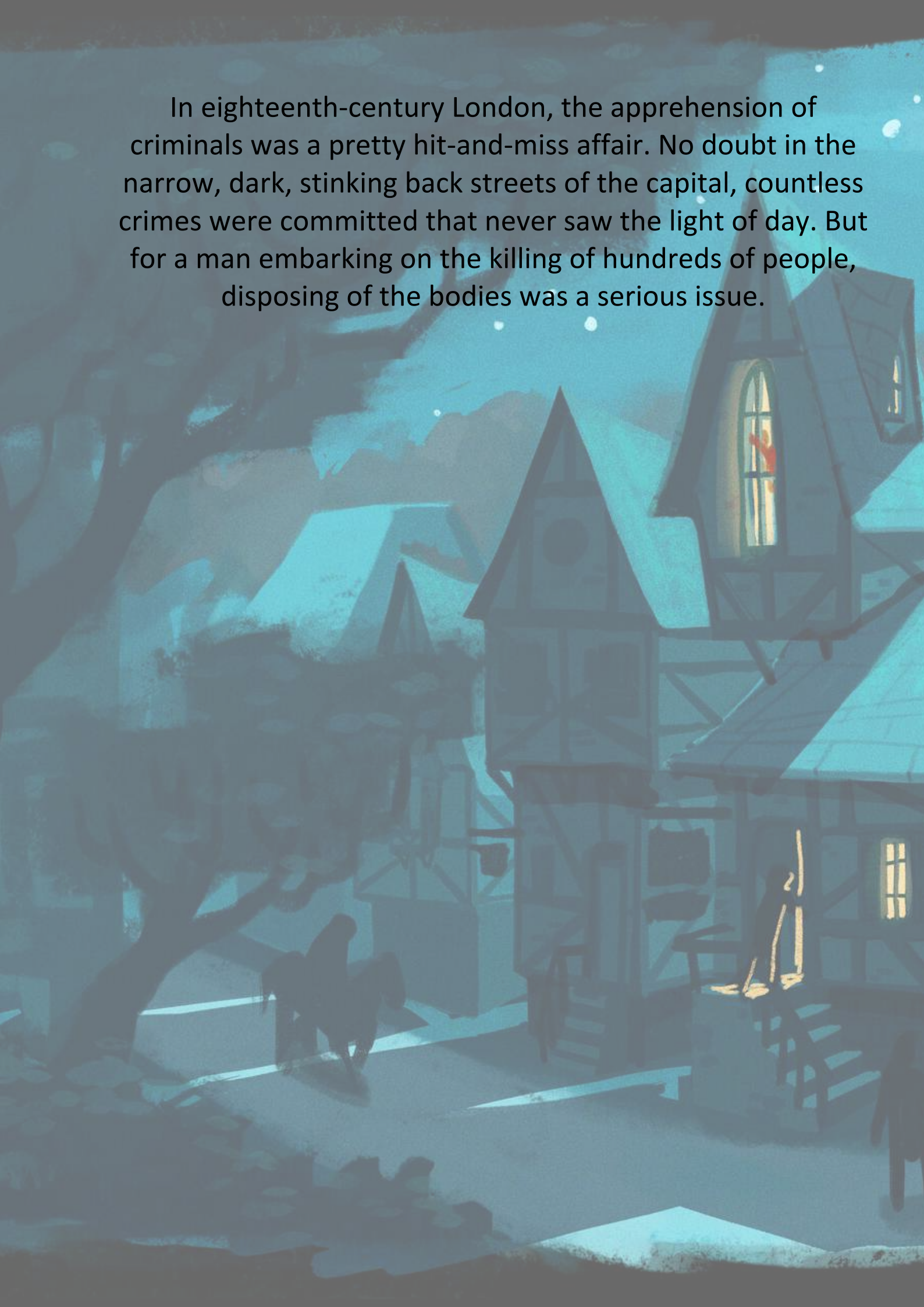
# Terrifying Tales

# The Barbarous Barber

Retold By Nicola Baxter



In eighteenth-century London, the apprehension of criminals was a pretty hit-and-miss affair. No doubt in the narrow, dark, stinking back streets of the capital, countless crimes were committed that never saw the light of day. But for a man embarking on the killing of hundreds of people, disposing of the bodies was a serious issue.



Such a man was Sweeney Todd, a barber in Fleet Street.  
His solution was effective and horrifying.



Todd had a rough upbringing and was in prison before he was twenty. Later, he set himself up as a barber and eventually bought premises in Fleet Street. Whether he did so because of their “original features” is not known.



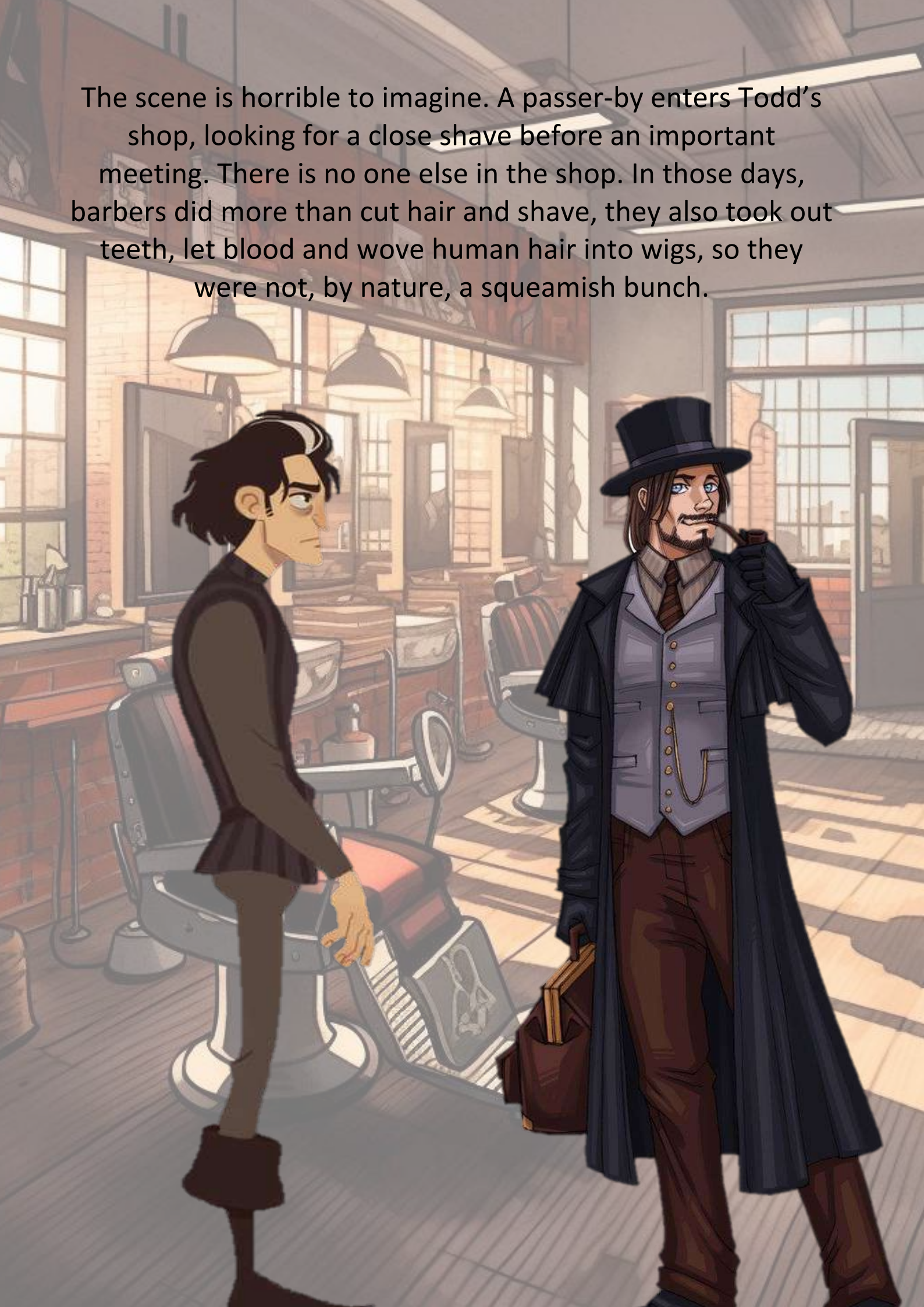
Below Todd's barber shop was a basement. From this dark, damp hole, Todd could gain access to the crypts and tunnels beneath nearby St Dunstan's Church, and from these, he could gain access to another shop, run by a certain Mrs Lovett.



It was a bakery shop, famous for the quality of its meat pies.



The scene is horrible to imagine. A passer-by enters Todd's shop, looking for a close shave before an important meeting. There is no one else in the shop. In those days, barbers did more than cut hair and shave, they also took out teeth, let blood and wove human hair into wigs, so they were not, by nature, a squeamish bunch.



The barber's client settles down in the chair and leans back comfortably. Like hairdressers all over the world, Todd, a pale-faced little sprite of a man, engages the client in small talk. Has he come far? What is his line of work?





In such a situation, customers tend to talk. In this case, it is a big mistake. The man confides that he is a sailor, newly arrived, and on an important mission to take something of importance to his master. Do Todd's eyes gleam for a moment?



He looks towards the door to make sure that no one is about to enter, then, in a swift move, he presses a lever with his foot. Clang! The chair swings down as a trapdoor revolves. The other side of the trapdoor comes to the top, and it, too, has a barber's chair upon it. Within a second, all is as normal in Todd's shop, but someone has disappeared from the face of the earth.



Todd doesn't waste a second. The drop to the floor of the basement below is quite far, but men have been known to survive more. Quickly, he grabs a lamp and runs down the stairs, making sure to take his sharpest straight-bladed razor with him.



The basement is foul. By the flickering light, a heap in the middle of the floor is revealed as the body of the unfortunate sailor. Was that a groan?



Todd passes the razor swiftly across the man's neck.



All is certainly silent now.  
But Todd still has work to do.



Quickly, he searches the man (and finds the valuable pearls he was carrying), then he strips him.

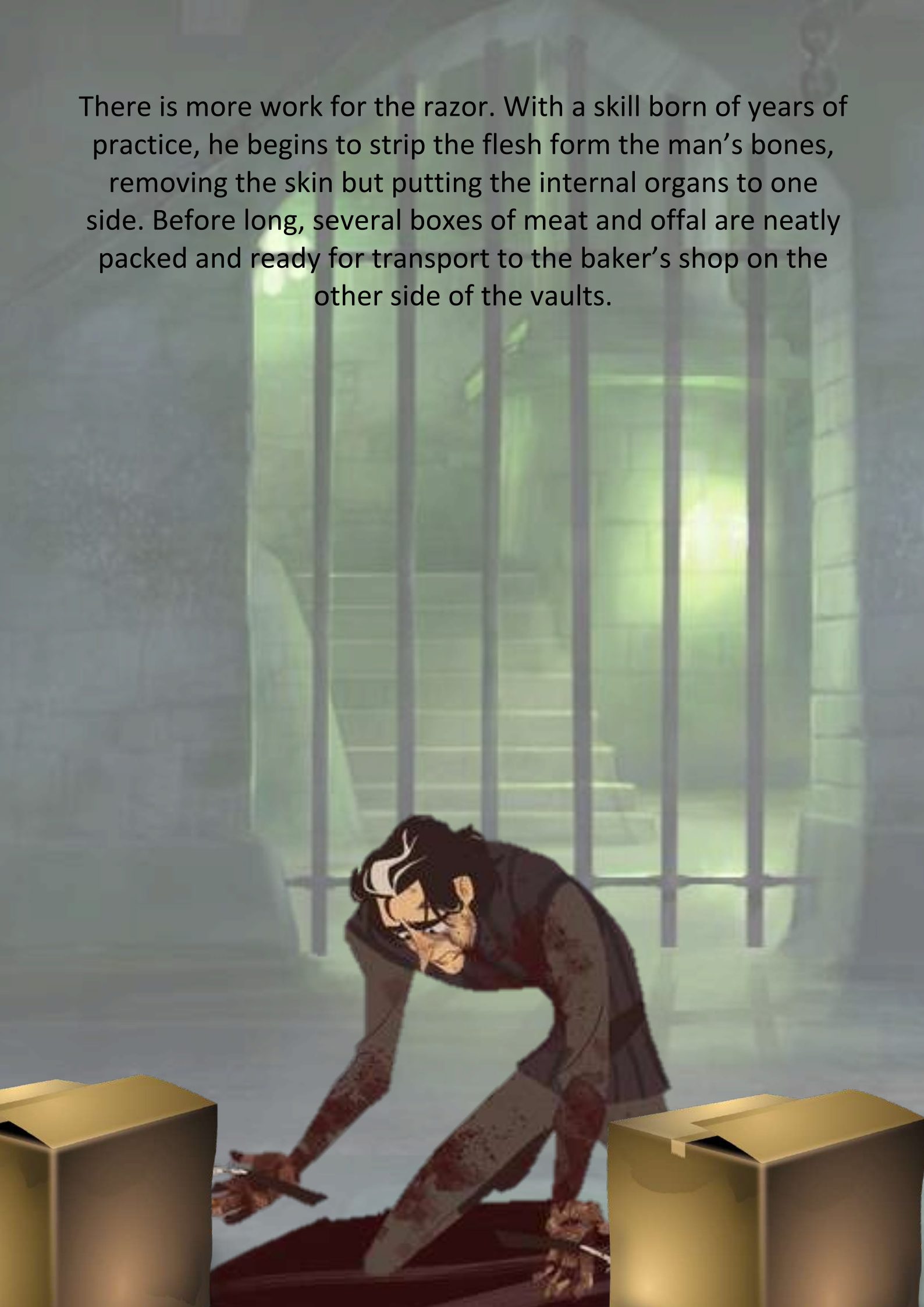


Next, he drags the body into the vaults of St Dunstan's. No one will disturb him here, for they were sealed years ago.





There is more work for the razor. With a skill born of years of practice, he begins to strip the flesh from the man's bones, removing the skin but putting the internal organs to one side. Before long, several boxes of meat and offal are neatly packed and ready for transport to the baker's shop on the other side of the vaults.



Only one problem remains. A pile of bloody bones, skin and a horrifically mutilated skull remain on the floor. Todd searches for a hiding place. Most of the monuments down here already have rotting remains tucked behind them, although the original burials were long, long ago.



Todd pushes aside the lid of an ornate coffin. Inside, the shroud had long since caved into the desiccated chest of the occupant. There is plenty of room. Todd piles in these latest remains of his own and pushes on the lid.



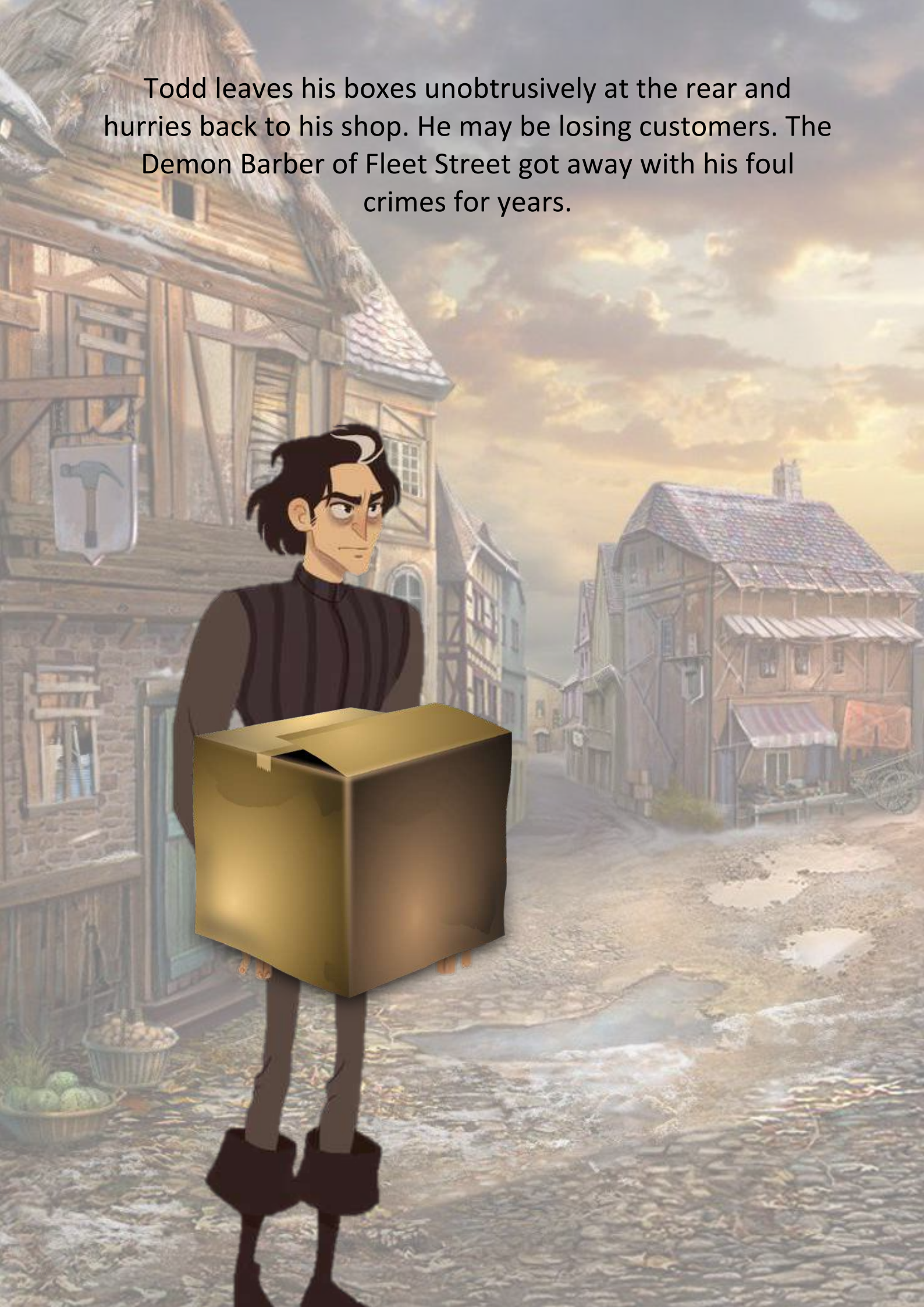
At the pie shop of Mrs Lovett, a woman after Todd's own heart, the midday rush has just begun. Mrs Lovett's pies are renowned on both sides of the river. The flesh is delicate and well-seasoned. The gravy is rich and succulent.



At noon, when the first batch comes out of the oven, there is always a queue.



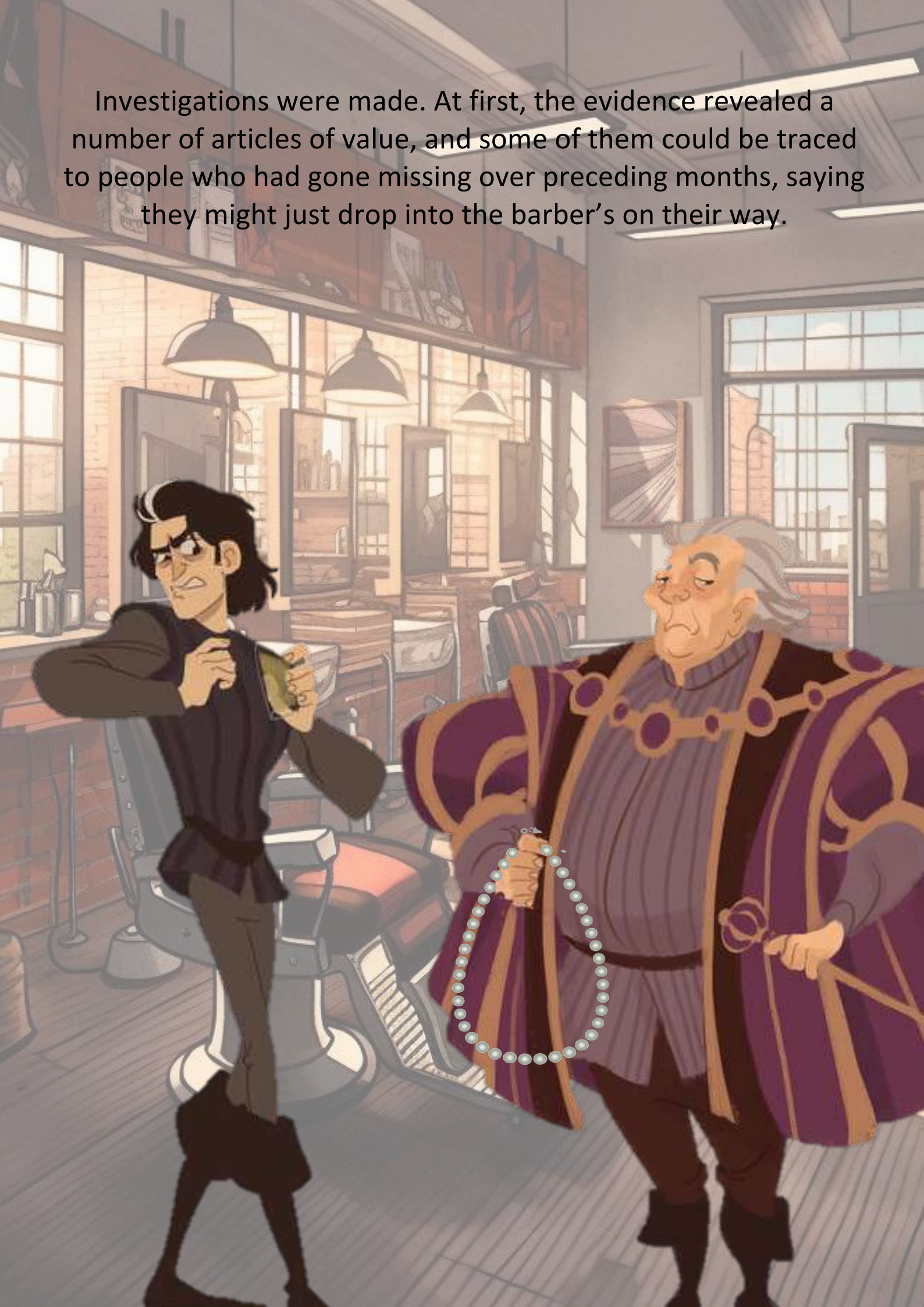
Todd leaves his boxes unobtrusively at the rear and hurries back to his shop. He may be losing customers. The Demon Barber of Fleet Street got away with his foul crimes for years.



Several circumstances led to his eventual downfall. Stories began to spread around the streets that more customers entered a certain barber's shop than ever left it. Then there was the smell in St Dunstan's church. Even the vicar had to hold a handkerchief to his nose as he gave his sermon, Investigations



Investigations were made. At first, the evidence revealed a number of articles of value, and some of them could be traced to people who had gone missing over preceding months, saying they might just drop into the barber's on their way.





Todd's trial made front-page news. Mrs Lovett, however, decided not to await the hangman's attentions. She poisoned herself in prison.

## THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

# THE NATIONAL POLICE GAZETTE

THE LEADING ILLUSTRATED SPORTING JOURNAL OF THE WORLD.™

London Monday, 1 December 1883

From a correspondent

**LUDGATE CIRCUS** Mister Sweeney Todd of 186 Fleet Street next to St. Dunstons Church is wanted by Scotland Yard for his alleged involvement in a string of murders precipitated at his tonsillar parlor inspectors have found on the premises a trap-door under Todd's Barber chair and a lever whereby his victims may have been posited in the cellar below. It is presumed Mr. Todd either cut his patrons throat before sending them down, or else sent them down to break their necks or skulls and then "polished them off with a straight razor.

Also implicated in this grisly caper is Mrs. Nellie Lovatt, widow of the late Mr. Albert Lovatt also of Fleet Street. Mrs. Lovatt is the proprietor of a pie shop and is suspected of having disposed of Mr. Todd's victims by cutting them up and serving them to her customers, this handily dispos



ing of the bolilies at a profit. Inspector Aberdeen of Scotland Taril has been assigned to the ease and tasked with finding the suspects whose whereabouts remain unknown. Mr. Todd, we are told, may have taken his own life upon discovery or perhaps murdered his accomplice. Mrs. Loratt's Pie Shop and Todd's Tonsillar Parlor share a connecting wall. More information shall be forthcoming

## SWEENEY TODDS TONSILLARY OF TERROR

The jury took only five minutes to make up his mind. Todd was sentenced to death and hanged in 1802.



Many people felt safer that night, but they did not rest easy. They could never forget quite hoe many of Mrs Lovett's delicious pies they had enjoyed in the past.



Sweeney Todd's success as a murderer was largely because he had means and opportunity. It must have seemed to him as if victims positively offered themselves up to him as they lay back in his chair. He had a motive, too – greed.



Todd grew up in the filthy slums of London. His parents were alcoholics who, one cold winter's night, went out in search of gin and never returned. They probably froze to death, too drunk to understand the danger.



But not everyone who grew up in those conditions became a mass murderer. It's a problem that remains with us to this day. Exactly why do some men turn to good and others to evil?





# THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY

