

BARNABY RUDGE

By CHARLES DICKENS

CHAPTER XLIV.

When the concourse separated, and, dividing into chance clusters, drew off in various directions, there still remained upon the scene of the late disturbance, one man. This man was Gashford, who, brushed by his late fall, and hurt in a much greater degree by the indignity he had undergone, and the exposure of which he had been the victim, limped up and down, breathing curses and threats of vengeance.

It was not the secretary's nature to waste his wrath in words. While he vented the froth of his malevolence in these effusions, he kept a steady eye on two men, who, having disappeared with the rest when the alarm was spread, had since returned, and were now visible in the moonlight, at no great distance, as they walked to and fro, and talked together.

He made no move towards them, but waited patiently on the dark side of the street, until they were tired of strolling backwards and forwards and walked away in company. Then he followed, but at some distance, keeping them in view, without appearing to have that object, or being seen by them.

They went up Parliament street, past Saint Martin's church, and away by Saint Giles' to Tottenham Court Road, at the back of which, upon the western side, was then a place called the Green Lanes. This was a retired spot, not of the choicest kind, leading into the fields. Great heaps of ashes, stagnant pools, overgrown with rank grass and duckweed; broken turnstiles, and the upright posts of palings long since carried off for firewood, which menaced all heedless walkers with their jagged and rusty nails, were the leading features of the landscape, while here and there a donkey, or a ragged horse, tethered to a stake, and cropping off a wretched meal from the coarse stunted turf, were quite in keeping with the scene, and would have suggested (if the houses had not done so, sufficiently, of themselves) how very poor the people were who lived in the crazy huts adjacent, and how fool-hardy it might prove for one who carried money, or wore decent clothes, to walk that way alone, unless by daylight.

Poverty has its whims and shows of taste, as wealth has. Some of these cabins were turreted, some had false windows painted on their rotten walls; one had a mimic clock upon a crazy tower of four feet high, which screened the chimney; each in its little patch of ground had a rude seat or arbor. The population dealt in bones, in rags, in broken glass, in old wheels, in birds, and dogs. These in their several ways of stowage, filled the gardens, and shedding a perfume not of the most delicious, in the air, filled it besides with yelps, and screams, and howling.

Into this retreat the secretary followed the two men whom he had held in sight, and here he saw them safely lodged, in one of the meanest houses, which was but a room, and that of small dimensions. He waited without until the sound of their voices, joined in a discordant song, assured him they were making merry, and then approaching the door, by means of a tottering plank which crossed the ditch in front, knocked at it with his hand.

"Muster Gashford," said the man who opened it, taking his pipe from his mouth, in evident surprise. "Why, who'd have thought of this here honor! Walk in, Muster Gashford—walk in, sir."

Gashford required no second invitation, and entered with a gracious air. There was a fire in the rusty grate (for though the spring was pretty far advanced, the nights were cold), and on a stool beside it Hugh sat smoking. Dennis placed a chair, his only one, for the secretary, in front of the hearth, and took his seat upon the stool he had left when he rose to give the visitor admission.

"What's in the wind now, Muster Gashford?" he said, as he resumed his pipe, and looked at him askew. "Any orders from headquarters? Are we going to begin? What is it, Muster Gashford?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," rejoined the secretary with a friendly nod to Hugh. "We have broken the ice, though. We had a little spurt to-day—eh, Dennis?"

"A very little one," growled the hangman. "Not half enough for me."

"Nor me neither!" cried Hugh. "Give us something to do with life in it—with life in it, master. Ha, ha!"

"Why, you wouldn't," said the secretary, with his worst expression of face, and in his mildest tones, "have anything to do with—with death in it?"

"I don't know that," replied Hugh. "I'm open to orders. I don't care; not I."

"No! I!" vociferated Dennis.

"Brave fellows!" said the secretary, in as pastor-like a voice as if he were commending them for some uncommon act of valor and generosity. "By-the-by—and here he stopped and warmed his hands; then suddenly looked up—who threw that stone to-day?"

Mr. Dennis coughed and shook his head, as who should say, "A mystery indeed!" Hugh sat and smoked in silence.

"It was well done!" said the secretary, warming his hands again. "I should like to know that man."

"Would you?" said Dennis, after looking at his face to assure himself that he was serious. "Would you like to know that man, Muster Gashford?"

"I should indeed," replied the secretary.

"Why, then, Lord love you," said the hangman, in his hoarsest chuckle, as he pointed to his pipe to Hugh. "there he sets. That's the man. My stars and halvers, Muster Gashford," he added in a whisper, as he drew his stool close to him and jogged him with his elbow, "what a interesting blade he is! He wants as much holding in as a thoroughbred bulldog. If it hadn't been for me to-day, he'd have had that 'ere Roman down, and made a riot of it, in another minute."

"And why not?" cried Hugh in a

surly voice, as he overheard this last remark. "Where's the good of putting things off? Strike while the iron's hot; that's what I say."

"Ah!" retorted Dennis, shaking his head, with a kind of pity for his friend's ingenuous youth; "but suppose the iron ain't hot, brother? You must get people's blood up afore you strike, and have 'em in the humor. There wasn't quite enough to provoke 'em to-day, I tell you. If you'd had your way, you'd have spoilt the fun to come, and ruined us."

"Dennis is quite right," said Gashford, smoothly. "He is perfectly correct. Dennis has great knowledge of the world."

"I ought to have, Muster Gashford, seeing what a many people I've helped out of it, eh?" grinned the hangman, whispering the words behind his hand.

The secretary laughed at this, just as much as Dennis could desire, and when he had done, said, turning to Hugh—

"Dennis's policy was mine, as you may have observed. You saw, for instance, how I fell when I was set upon. I made no resistance. I did nothing to provoke an outbreak. Oh dear no!"

"No, by the Lord Harry!" cried Dennis with a noisy laugh, "you went down very quiet, Muster Gashford—and very flat besides. I think to myself at the time it's all up with Muster Gashford! I never see in that place, ever of the children, could be idle, and he had no companions of his own kind. Indeed there were not many who could have kept up with him in his rambles, had there been a legion. But there were a score of vagabond dogs belonging to the neighbors, who served his purpose quite as well. With two or three of these, or sometimes with a full half-dozen barking at his heels, he would saunter forth on some long expedition that consumed the day, and though on their return at nightfall, the dogs would come home limping and sore-footed, and almost spent with their fatigue, Barnaby was up and off again at sunrise with some new attendants of the same class, with whom he would return in like manner. On all these travels, Grip, in his little basket at his master's back, was a constant memory of the party, and, when they set off in fine weather and in high spirits, no dog barked louder than the raven."

"We are very pleasant here, so very pleasant, Dennis, that but for my lord's particular desire that I should sup with him, and the time being very near at hand, I should be inclined to stay, until it would be hardly safe to go homeward. I come upon a little business—yes, I do—as you supposed. It's very flattering to hear this. If we ever should be obliged—and we can't tell, you know—this is a very uncertain world!"

"I believe you, Muster Gashford," interposed the hangman with a grave nod. "The uncertainties as I've seen in reference to this here state of existence, the unexpected contingencies as have come about—Oh, my eye! Feeling the subject much too vast for expression, he puffed at his pipe again, and looked the rest."

"I say," resumed the secretary, in a slow, impressive way, "we can't tell what may come to pass, and if we should be obliged against our wills, to have recourse to violence, my lord (who has suffered terribly to-day as far as words can go) consigns to you two—bearing in mind my recommendation of you both, as good stout men, beyond all doubt and suspicion—the pleasant task of punishing this Haredevil. You may do as you please with him or his, provided that you show no mercy, and no quarter, and leave no two beams of his house standing where the builder placed them. You may sack it, burn it, do with it as you like, but it must come down; it must be razed to the ground, and he, and all belonging to him, left as shelterless as new-born infants whom their mothers have exposed. Do you understand me?" said Gashford, pausing and pressing his hands together gently.

"Understand you, master!" cried Hugh. "You speak plain now. Why, this is hearty!"

"I knew you would like it," said Gashford, shaking him by the hand. "I thought you would. Good-night! Don't rise, Dennis; I would rather find my way alone. I may have to make other visits here, and it's pleasant to come and go without disturbing you. I can find my way perfectly well. Good-night!"

He was gone, and had shut the door behind him. They looked at each other, and nodded approvingly; Dennis stirred up the fire.

"This looks a little more like business," he said.

"Ay, indeed!" cried Hugh; "this suits me!"

"I've heard it said of Muster Gashford," said the hangman, "that he'd a surprising memory and wonderful firmness—that he never forgot, and never forgave. Let's drink his health!"

Hugh readily complied, pouring no liquor on the floor when he drank this toast—and they pledged the secretary as a man after their own hearts in a bumper.

CHAPTER XLV.

While the worst passions of the worst men were thus working in the dark, and the mantle of religion, assumed to cover the ugliest deformities, threatened to become the shield of all that was good and peaceful in society, a circumstance occurred which once more altered the position of two persons from whom this history has long been separated, and to whom it must now return.

In a small English country town, the inhabitants of which supported themselves by the labor of their hands in plaiting and preparing straw for those who made bonnets and other articles of dress and ornament from that material, concealed under an assumed name, and living in a quiet poverty which knew no change, no pleasures, and few cares but that of struggling on from day to day in one great toil for bread—dwelt Barnaby and his mother. Their poor cottage had known no stranger's foot since they sought the shelter of its roof five years before, nor had they in all that time held any commerce or communion with the old world from which they had fled. To labor in peace, and devote her labor and her life to her poor son, was all the widow sought. If happiness can be said at any time to be the lot of one upon whom a secret sorrow preys, she was happy now. Tranquillity, resignation, and her strong love of him who died it so much, formed the small circle of her quiet joys;

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and while that remained unbroken, she was contented.

For Barnaby himself, the time which had flown by had passed him like the wind. The daily suns of years had shed no brighter gleam of reason on his mind; no dawn had broken on his long, dark night. He would sit sometimes—often for days together—on a low seat by the fire, or by the cottage door, busy at work, not that he had learned the art his mother plied, and listening, God help him, to the tales she would repeat as a lure to keep him in her sight. He had no recollection of these little narratives; the tale of yesterday was new upon the morrow; but he liked them at the moment, and when the humor held him, would remain patiently within doors, hearing her stories like a little child, and working cheerfully from sunrise until it was too dark to see.

At other times, and then their scanty earnings were barely sufficient to furnish them with food, though of the coarsest sort, he would wander abroad from dawn of day until the twilight deepened into night. Few were in that place, even of the children, could be idle, and he had no companions of his own kind. Indeed there were not many who could have kept up with him in his rambles, had there been a legion. But there were a score of vagabond dogs belonging to the neighbors, who served his purpose quite as well. With two or three of these, or sometimes with a full half-dozen barking at his heels, he would saunter forth on some long expedition that consumed the day, and though on their return at nightfall, the dogs would come home limping and sore-footed, and almost spent with their fatigue, Barnaby was up and off again at sunrise with some new attendants of the same class, with whom he would return in like manner. On all these travels, Grip, in his little basket at his master's back, was a constant memory of the party, and, when they set off in fine weather and in high spirits, no dog barked louder than the raven.

Their pleasures on these excursions were simple enough. A crust of bread and scrap of meat, with water from the brook or spring, sufficed for their repast. Barnaby's enjoyments were, to walk, and run, and leap, till he was tired, then to lie down on the long grass, or by the growing corn, or in the shade of some tall tree, looking upward at the light clouds as they floated over the blue surface of the sky, and listening to the lark as she poured out her brilliant song. There were wild flowers to pluck—the bright red poppy, the gentle harebell, the cowslip, and the rose. There were birds to watch, fish, ants, worms, hares or rabbits, as they darted across the distant pathway in the wood and so were gone; millions of living things to have an interest in, and lie in wait for, and clap hands and shout in memory of when they had disappeared. In default of these, or when they were tired, there was the merry sun-light to hunt out, as it crept in aslant through leaves and boughs of trees, and laid far down—deep, deep, in hollow places—like a silver pool, where nodding branches seemed to bathe and sport; sweet scents of summer air breathing over fields of beans or clover, the perfume of wet leaves or moss, the life of waving trees, or shadows always changing. When these or any of them tired, or in excess of pleasing tempted him to shut his eyes, there was slumber in the midst of all these soft delights, with the gentle wind murmuring like music in his ears, and everything around melting into one delicious dream.

Their hut, for it was little more—stood on the outskirts of the town, at a short distance from the high road, but in a secluded place, where few chance passengers strayed at any season of the year. It had a plot of garden-ground attached, which Barnaby, in fits and starts of working, trimmed, and kept in order. Within doors and without, his mother labored for their common good; and hail, rain, snow or sunshine found no difference in her.

Though so far removed from the scenes of her past life, and with so little thought or hope of ever visiting them again, she seemed to have a strange desire to know what happened in the busy world. Any old newspaper, or scrap of intelligence from London she caught at with avidity. The excitement it produced was not of a pleasurable kind, for her manner at such times expressed the keenest anxiety and dread, but it never faded in the least degree. Then, and in stormy winter nights, when the wind blew loud and strong, the old expression came into her face and she would be seized with a fit of trembling, like one who had an ague. But Barnaby noted little of this, and putting a great constraint upon herself, she usually recovered her accustomed manner before the change had caught his observation.

Grip was by no means an idle or unprofitable member of the humble household. Partly by dint of Barnaby's tuition, and partly by pursuing a species of self-instruction common to his tribe, and exerting his

powers of observation to the utmost, he had acquired a degree of sagacity which rendered him famous for miles round. His conversational powers and surprising performances were the universal theme, and as many persons came to see the wonderful raven, and none left his exertions unwarded—when he condescended to exhibit—which was not always, for genius is capricious—his earnings formed an important item in the common stock. Indeed, the bird himself appeared to know his value well, for though he was perfectly free and unrestrained in the presence of Barnaby and his mother, he maintained in public an amazing gravity, and never stooped to any other gratuitous performances than biting the ankles of vagabond boys (an exercise in which he much delighted), killing a fowl or two occasionally, and swallowing the dinners of various neighboring dogs, of whom the boldest held him in great awe and dread.

Time had glided on in this way, and nothing had happened to disturb or change their mode of life, when, one summer's night in June, they were in their little garden, resting from the labors of the day. The widow's work was yet upon her knee, and strewn upon the ground about her, and Barnaby stood leaning on his spade, gazing at the brightness in the west, and singing softly to himself.

"A brave evening, mother! If we had, clunking in our pockets, but a few specks of that gold which is piled up yonder in the sky, we should be rich for life."

"We are better as we are," returned the widow with a quiet smile. "Let us be contented, and we do not want and need not care to have it, though it lay shining at our feet."

"Ah!" said Barnaby, resting with crossed arms on his spade, and looking wistfully at the sunset, "that's well enough, mother, but gold's a good thing to have. I wish that I knew where to find it. Grip and I could do much with gold, be sure of that."

"What would you do?" she asked. "What! A world of things. We'd dress finely—you and I, mean, not Grip—keep horses, dogs, wear bright colors and feathers, do no more work, live delicately and at our ease. Oh, we'd find uses for it, mother, and uses that would do us good. I would I knew where gold was buried. How hard I'd work to dig it up!"

"You do not know," said his mother, rising from her seat, and laying her hand upon his shoulder, "what men have done to win it, and how they have found, too late, that it elicits brightest at a distance, and turns quite dim and dull when handled."

"Av, ay; say so, you think," he answered, still looking earnestly in the same direction. "For all that, mother, I should like to try."

"Do you not see," she said, "how red it is? Nothing bears so many stains of blood, as gold. Avoid it. None have such cause to hate its name as we have. Do not so much as think of it, dear love. It has brought such misery and suffering on your head and mine as few have known, and God grant few may have to undergo. I would rather we were dead and laid down in our graves than you should ever come to love it."

For a moment Barnaby withdrew his eyes and looked at her with wonder. Then, glancing from the redness in the sky to the mark upon his wrist as if he would compare the two, he seemed about to question her with earnestness, when a new object caught his wandering attention, and made him quite forgetful of his purpose.

This was a man with dusty feet and garments who stood, bareheaded, behind the hedge that divided their patch of garden from the pathway, and leaned meekly forward as if he sought to mingle with their conversation, and waited for his time to speak. His face was turned towards the brightness, too, but the light that fell upon it showed that he was blind, and saw it not.

"A blessing on those voices!" said the wayfarer. "I feel the beauty of the night more keenly when I hear them. They are like eyes to me. Will they speak again, and cheer the heart of a poor traveller?"

"Have you no guide?" asked she, winking after a moment's pause.

"None but that," he answered, pointing with his staff towards the sun; "and sometimes a milder one at night, but she is idle now."

"Have you travelled far?"

"A weary way and long," rejoined the traveller as he shook his head. "A weary, weary way. I struck my stick just now upon the bucket of your well—be pleased to let me have a draught of water, lady."

"Why do you call me lady?" she returned. "I am as poor as you."

"Your speech is soft and gentle, and I judge by that," replied the man. "The coarsest stuffs and finest silks are—apart from the sense of touch—alike to me. I cannot judge you by your dress."

"Come round this way," said Barnaby, who had passed out at the garden gate and now stood close beside him. "Put your hand in mine. You're blind and always in the dark, eh? Are you frightened in the dark? Do you see great crowds of faces now? Do they grin and chatter?"

"Alas!" returned the other. "I see nothing. Waking or sleeping, nothing."

Barnaby looked curiously at his eyes, and touching them with his fingers, as an inquisitive child might, led him towards the house.

"You have come a long distance," said the widow, meeting him at the door. How have you found your way so far?"

"Use and necessity are good teachers, as I have heard—the best of any," said the blind man, sitting down upon the chair to which Barnaby had led him, and putting his hat and stick upon the red-tiled floor. "May neither you nor your son ever learn

TENTH MONTH 31 DAYS **October** THE ROSARY THE HOLY ANGELS

1905

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost

1 Su. w. Most Holy Rosary.
2 M. w. Angels Guardian.
3 T. w. S. Anselm.
4 W. w. S. Francis of Assisi.
5 T. w. S. Gallia.
6 F. w. S. Bruno.
7 S. w. S. Mark, Pope.

Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

8 Su. w. Maternity of B. V. Mary.
9 M. r. S. Denis and Companions.
10 T. w. S. Francis Borgia.
11 W. w. B. John Leonard.
12 T. w. S. Basil the Great.
13 F. w. S. Edward, King.
14 S. r. S. Callistus, Pope.

Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost

15 Su. w. Purity of B. V. Mary.
16 M. w. B. Victor III., Pope.
17 T. w. S. Hedwig.
18 W. r. S. Luke, Evangelist.
19 T. w. S. Peter of Alcantara.
20 F. w. S. John Cantius.
21 S. w. S. Bernard.

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

22 Su. r. All the Holy Roman Pontiffs.
23 M. w. Most Holy Redeemer.
24 T. w. S. Raphael Archangel.
25 W. w. S. Boniface I., Pope.
26 T. r. S. Evaristus, Pope.
27 F. v. Vigil of SS. Simon and Jude.
28 S. r. SS. Simon and Jude, Apostles.

Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

29 Su. g. Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost.
30 M. g. Of the Feria.
31 T. w. Vigil of All Saints. Fast. S. Siricius, Pope.

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under them. They are rough masters."

"You have wandered from the road too," said the widow, in a tone of pity.

"Maybe, maybe," returned the blind man with a sigh, and yet with something of a smile upon his face, "that's likely. Handposts and milestones are dumb, indeed, to me. Thank you the more for this rest, and this refreshing drink."

As he spoke, he raised the mug of water to his mouth. It was clear and cold and sparkling, but not to his taste nevertheless, or his thirst was not very great, for he only wetted his lips and put it down again.

He wore, hanging with a long strap round his neck, a kind of scrip or wallet, in which to carry food. The widow set some bread and cheese before him, but he thanked her, and said that through the kindness of the charitable he had broken his fast once that morning, and was not hungry. When he made her this reply he opened his wallet and took out a few pence, which was all it appeared to contain.

"Might I make bold to ask," he said, turning towards where Barnaby stood looking on, "that one who has the gift of sight, would lay this out for me in bread to keep me on my way? Heaven's blessing on the young feet that will bestir themselves in aid of one so helpless as a sightless man!"

Barnaby looked at his mother, who nodded assent; in another moment he was gone upon his charitable errand. The blind man sat listening with an attentive face, until long after the sound of his retreating footsteps was inaudible to the widow, and then said, suddenly, and in a very altered tone—

"There are various degrees and kinds of blindness, widow. There is the congenital blindness, ma'am, which perhaps you may have observed in the course of your own experience, and which is a kind of willful and self-bandaging blindness. There is the blindness of party, ma'am, and public men, which is the blindness of a mad bull in the midst of a regiment of soldiers clothed in red. There is the blind confidence of youth, which is the blindness of young kittens, whose eyes have not yet opened on the world; and there is that physical blindness, ma'am, of which I am, contrary to my own desire, a most illustrious example. Added to these, ma'am, is that blindness of the intellect, of which we have a specimen in your interesting son, and which, having sometimes glimmerings and dawns of the light, is scarcely to be trusted as a total darkness. Therefore, ma'am, I have taken the liberty to get him out of the way for a short time, while you and I confer together, and this precaution arising out of the delicacy of my sentiments towards yourself, you will excuse me, ma'am, I know."

Having delivered himself of this speech with many flourishes of manner, he drew from beneath his coat a flat stone bottle, and holding the cork between his teeth, qualified his mug of water with a plentiful infusion of the liquor it contained. He politely drained the bumper to her health, and the ladies, and setting it down empty, smacked his lips with infinite relish.

"I am a citizen of the world, ma'am," said the blind man, corking his bottle, "and if I seem to conduct myself with freedom, it is therefore. You wonder who I am, ma'am, and what has brought me here. Such experience of human nature as I have, leads me to that conclusion, without the aid of eyes by which to read the movements of your soul as depicted in your feminine features. I will satisfy your curiosity immediately, ma'am, immediately. With that I slaped his bottle on its broad back, and having put it under his garment, as before, crossed his legs and folded his hands, and settled himself in his chair, previous to proceeding any further.

This change in his manner was so unexpected, the craft and wickedness of his deportment were so much aggravated by his condition—for we are accustomed to see in those who have lost a human sense, something in its place almost divine—and this alteration bred so many fears in her

whom he addressed, that she could not pronounce one word. After waiting, as it seemed, for some remark or answer, and waiting in vain, the visitor resumed—

"Madam, my name is Staggs. A friend of mine who has desired the honor of meeting with you any time these five years past, has commissioned me to call upon you. I should be glad to whisper that gentleman's name in your ear—Zounds, ma'am, are you deaf? Do you hear me say that I should be glad to whisper my friend's name in your ear?"

"You need not repeat it," said the widow, with a stifled groan; "I see too well from whom you come."

"But as a man of honor, ma'am," said the blind man, striking himself on the breast, "whose credentials must not be disputed, I take leave to say that I will mention that gentleman's name. Ay, ay," he added, seeming to catch with his quick ear the very motion of her hand, "but not aloud. With your leave, ma'am, I desire the favor of a whisper."

She moved towards him, and stooped down. He muttered a word in her ear, and, wringing her hands, she paced up and down the room like one distracted. The blind man, with perfect composure, produced his bottle again, mixed another glassful, put it up as before, and drinking from time to time, followed her with his face in silence.

"You are slow in conversation, widow," he said after a time, pausing in his draught. "We shall have to talk before your son."

"What would you have me do?" she answered. "What do you want?"

"We are poor, widow, we are poor," he retorted, stretching out his right hand, and rubbing his thumb upon his palm. "Poor!" she cried. "And what am I?"

"Comparisons are odious," said the blind man. "I don't know, I don't care. I say that we are poor. My friend's circumstances are indifferent, and so are mine. We must have our rights, widow, or we must be bought off. But you know that as well as I, so where is the use of talking?"

(To be Continued.)

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