

BARNABY RUDGE

By CHARLES DICKENS

It was remarkable in the raven that during the whole interview he had kept his eye on his book with exactly the air of a very sly human rascal, who, under the mask of pretending to read hard, was listening to everything.

They were to return by the coach. As there was an interval of full two hours before it started, and they needed rest and some refreshment, Barnaby begged hard for a visit to the Maypole.

Here again the raven was in a highly reflective state; walking up and down when he had dined, with an air of elderly complacency which was strongly suggestive of his having his hands under his coat-tails; and appearing to read the tombstones with a very critical taste.

It was a quiet, pretty spot, but a sad one for Barnaby's mother; for Mr. Reuben Haredale lay there, and near the vault in which his ashes rested, was a stone to the memory of her own husband, with a brief inscription recording how and when he had lost his life.

Barnaby, who had been sleeping on the grass, sprung up quickly at the sound; and Grip, who appeared to understand it equally well, walked into his basket straightway, entering society in general (as though he intended a kind of satire upon them in connection with churchyards) never to say die on any terms.

It went round by the Maypole, and stopped at the door. Joe was from home, and Hugh came sluggishly out to hand up the parcel that it called for. There was no fear of old John coming out. They could see him from the coach-roof fast asleep in his cosy bar. It was a part of John's character. He made a point of going to sleep at the coach's time.

She dropped her veil as Hugh climbed up, and while he hung behind and talked to Barnaby in whispers. But neither her nor any other person spoke to her, or noticed her, or had any curiosity about her; and so, an alien, she visited and left the village where she had been born, and had lived a merry child, a comely girl, a happy wife—where she had known all her enjoyment of life, and had entered on its hardest sorrows.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"And you're not surprised to hear this, Varden?" said Mr. Haredale. "Well! You and she have always been the best friends, and you should understand her if anybody does."

"I ask your pardon, sir," rejoined the locksmith. "I didn't say I understood her. I wouldn't have the presumption to say that of any woman. It's not so easily done. But I am not so much surprised, sir, as you expected me to be, certainly."

"I have seen, sir," returned the locksmith with evident reluctance, "I have seen in connection with her, something that has filled me with distrust and uneasiness. She has made bad friends, how, or when, I don't know; but that her house is a refuge for one robber and cut-throat at least, I am certain. There, sir! Now it's out."

"And you made no effort to detain him?" said Mr. Haredale quickly. "Sir," returned the locksmith, "she herself prevented me—held me, with all her strength, and hung about me until he had got clear off."

This dialogue was held in a low tone in the locksmith's little parlor into which honest Gabriel had shown his visitor on his arrival. Mr. Haredale had called upon him to entreat his company to the widow's, that he might have the assistance of his persuasion and influence; and out of this circumstance the conversation had arisen.

"I forebore," said Gabriel, "from repeating one word of this to anybody, as it could do her no good and might do her great harm. I thought and hoped, to say the truth, that she would come to me, and talk to me about it, and tell me how it was; but though I have purposely put myself in her way more than once or twice, she has never touched upon the subject—except by a look. And indeed," said the good-natured locksmith, "there was a good deal in the look, more than could have been put into a great many words. It said among other matters, 'Don't ask me anything so impudently, that I did not ask her anything. You'll think me an old fool I know, sir. If it's any relief to call me one, pray do.'"

The locksmith shook his head, and looked doubtfully out of the window at the falling light. "She cannot have married again," said Mr. Haredale.

"Not without our knowledge, surely, sir." "She may have done so, in the fear that it would lead, if known, to some objection or estrangement. Suppose she married incautiously—it is not improbable, for her existence has been a lonely and monotonous one for many years—and the man turned out a ruffian, she would be anxious to screen him, and yet would revolt from his crimes. This might be. It bears strongly on the whole drift of her discourse yesterday, and would quite explain her conduct. Do you suppose Barnaby is privy to these circumstances?"

"Quite impossible to say, sir," returned the locksmith, shaking his head again; "and next to impossible to find out from him. If what you suppose is really the case, I tremble for the lad—a notable person, sir, to put to bad uses."

"It is not possible, Varden," said Mr. Haredale, in a still lower tone of voice than he had spoken yet, "that we have been blinded and deceived by this woman from the beginning? It is not possible that this connection was formed in her husband's lifetime, and led to his and my brother's?"

"Good God, sir," cried Gabriel, interrupting him, "don't entertain such dark thoughts for a moment. Five and twenty years ago, where was there a girl like her? A gay, handsome, laughing, bright-eyed damsel! Think what she was, sir. It makes my heart ache now, even now, though I'm an old man, with a woman for a daughter, to think what she was and what she is. We all change, but that's with Time; Time does his work honestly, and I don't mind him. A fig for time, sir. Use him well, and he's a hearty fellow, and scorns to have you at an advantage. But care and suffering (and those have changed her) are devils, sir—secret, stealthy, undermining devils—who tread down the brightest flowers in Eden, and do more havoc in a month than Time does in a year. Picture to yourself for one minute what Mary was before they went to work with her fresh heart and face—do her that justice—and say whether such a thing is possible."

"You're a good fellow, Varden," said Mr. Haredale, "and are quite right. I have brooded on that subject so long, that every breath of suspicion carries me back to it. You are quite right."

"It isn't sir," cried the locksmith with brightened eyes, and sturdy, honest voice; "it isn't because I courted her before Rudge, and failed, that I say she was too good for him. She would have been as much too good for me. But she was too good for him; he wasn't free and frank enough for her. I don't reproach his memory with it, poor fellow; I only want to put before you as she really was. For myself, I'll keep her old picture in my mind; and thinking of that, and what has altered her, I'll stand her friend, and try to win her back to peace. And damme, sir," cried Gabriel, "with your pardon for the word, I'd do the same if she had married fifty highwaymen in a twelvemonth; and think it in the Protestant Manual too, though Martha said it wasn't, tooth and nail, till doomsday!"

If the dark little parlor had been filled with a dense fog, which, clearing away in an instant, left it all radiance and brightness, it could not have been more suddenly cheered than by this outbreak on the part of the hearty locksmith. In a voice nearly as full and round as his own, Mr. Haredale cried, "Well said!" and bade him come away without more parley. The locksmith complied right willingly; and both getting into a hackney-coach which was waiting at the door drove off straightway.

They alighted at the street corner, and dismissing their conveyance, walked to the house. To their first knock at the door there was no response. A second met with the like result. But in answer to the third, which was of a more vigorous kind, the parlor window-cash was

raised, and a musical voice cried,—"Haredale, my dear fellow, I am extremely glad to see you. How very much you have improved in your appearance since our last meeting! I never saw you looking better. How do you do?"

Mr. Haredale turned his eyes towards the casement whence the voice proceeded, though there was no need to do so, to recognize the speaker, and Mr. Chester waved his hand and smiled a courteous welcome. "The door will be opened immediately," he said. "There is nobody but a very dilapidated female to perform such offices. You will excuse her infirmities? If she were in a more elevated station of society, she would be gouty. Being but a hewer of wood and drawer of water, she is rheumatic. My dear Haredale, there are natural distinctions, depend upon it."

Mr. Haredale, whose face resumed its lowering and distrustful look the moment he heard the voice, inclined his head stiffly, and turned his back upon the speaker.

"Not opened yet?" said Mr. Chester. "Dear me! I hope the aged soul has not caught her foot in some unlucky cobweb by the way. She is there at last! Come in, I beg!"

Mr. Haredale entered, followed by the locksmith. Turning with a look of great astonishment to the old woman who had opened the door, he inquired for Mrs. Rudge—for Barnaby. They were both gone, she replied, "ragging her ancient head, for good. There was a gentleman in the parlor who perhaps could tell them more. That was all she knew."

"Pray, sir," said Mr. Haredale, presenting himself before this new tenant, "where is the person whom I came here to see?"

"My dear friend," he returned, "I have not the least idea." "Your trifling is ill-timed," retorted the other in a suppressed tone and voice, "and its subject ill-chosen. Reserve it for those who are your friends, and do not expend it on me. I lay no claim to the distinction, and have the self-denial to reject it."

"My dear, good sir," said Mr. Chester, "you are heated with walking. Sit down, I beg. Our friend is—" "Is but a plain honest man," returned Mr. Haredale, "and quite unworthy of your notice."

"Gabriel Varden by name, sir," said the locksmith bluntly. "A worthy English yeoman!" said Mr. Chester. "A most worthy yeoman, of whom I have frequently heard my son Ned—darling fellow—speak, and have often wished to see. Varden my good friend, I am glad to know you. You wonder now," he said, turning languidly to Mr. Haredale, "to see me here. Now, I am sure you do."

Mr. Haredale glanced at him—not fondly or admiringly—smiled, and held his peace.

"The mystery is solved in a moment," said Mr. Chester; "in a moment will you step aside with me one instant. You remember our little compact in reference to Ned, and your dear niece, Haredale? You remember the list of assistants in their innocent intrigue? You remember these two people being among them? My dear fellow, congratulate yourself and me. I have bought them off."

"You have done what?" said Mr. Haredale.

"Bought them off," returned his smiling friend. "I have found it necessary to take some active steps towards setting this boy and girl attachment quite at rest, and have begun by removing these two agents. You are surprised? Who can withstand the influence of a little money! They wanted it, and have been bought off. We have nothing more to fear from them. They are gone."

"Gone!" echoed Mr. Haredale. "Where?" "My dear fellow—and you must permit me to say again, that you never looked so young, so positively boyish as you do to-night—the Lord knows where; I believe Columbus himself wouldn't find them. Between you and me they have their hidden reasons, but upon that point I have pledged myself to secrecy. She appointed to see you here to-night. I know, but found it inconvenient and couldn't wait. Here is the key of the door. I am afraid you'll find it inconveniently large; but as the tenement is yours, your good-nature will excuse that, Haredale, I am certain!"

Mr. Haredale stood in the widow's parlor with the door-key in his hand, gazing by turns at Mr. Chester and at Gabriel Varden, and occasionally glancing downwards at the key as in the hope that of its own accord it would unlock the mystery; until Mr. Chester, putting on his hat and gloves, and sweetly inquiring whether they were walking in the same direction, recalled him to himself.

"No," he said, "our roads diverge—widely, as you know. For the present, I shall remain here."

"You will be hipped, Haredale; you will be miserable, melancholy, utterly wretched," returned the other. "It's a place of the very last description for a man of your temper. I know it will make you very miserable."

"Let it," said Mr. Haredale, sitting down; "and thrive upon the thought. Good-night!"

Feigning to be wholly unconscious of the abrupt wave of the hand which rendered this farewell tantamount to a dismissal, Mr. Chester returned with a bland and heartfelt benediction, and inquired of Gabriel in what

direction he was going. "Yours, sir, would be too much honor for the like of me," replied the locksmith, hesitating.

"I wish you to remain here a while, Varden," said Mr. Haredale, without looking towards them. "I have a word or two to say to you." "I will not intrude upon your conference another moment," said Mr. Chester with inconceivable politeness. "May it be satisfactory to you both? God bless you!" So saying, and bestowing upon the locksmith a most refulgent smile, he left them.

"A deplorably constituted creature, that rugged person," he said, as he walked along the street; "he is an atrocity that carries its own punishment along with it—a bear that gnaws himself. And here is one of the inestimable advantages of having a perfect command over one's inclinations. I have been tempted in these two short interviews, to draw upon that fellow fifty times. Five men in six would have yielded to the impulse. By suppressing mine, I would him deeper and more keenly than if I were the best swordsman in all Europe, and he the worst. You are the wise man's very last resource," he said, tapping the hilt of his weapon; "we can but appeal to you when all else is said and done. To come to you before, and thereby spare our adversaries so much, is a barbarian mode of warfare, quite unworthy any man with the remotest pretensions to delicacy of feeling, or refinement."

He smiled so very pleasantly as he communed with himself after this manner, that a beggar was emboldened to follow him for alms, and to dog his footsteps for some distance. He was gratified by the circumstance, feeling it complimentary to his power of feature, and as a reward suffered the man to follow him until he called a chair, when he graciously dismissed him with a fervent blessing.

"Which is as easy as cursing," he wisely added, as he took his seat, "and more becoming to the face.—To Clerkenwell, my good creatures, if you please!" The chairmen were rendered quite vivacious by having such a courteous burden, and to Clerkenwell they went at a fair round trot.

Alighting at a certain point he had indicated to them upon the road, and paying them something less than they had expected from a fare of such genteel speech, he turned into the street in which the locksmith dwelt, and presently stood beneath the shadow of the Golden Key. Mr. Tappertit, who was hard at work by lamp-light, in a corner of the workshop, remained unconscious of his presence until a hand upon his shoulder made him start and turn his head.

"Industry," said Mr. Chester, "is the soul of business, and the keystone of prosperity. Mr. Tappertit, I shall expect you to invite me to dinner when you are Lord Mayor of London."

"Sir," returned the apprentice, laying down his hammer, and rubbing his nose on the back of a very sooty hand, "I scorn the Lord Mayor and everything that belongs to him. We must have another state of society, sir, before you catch me being Lord Mayor. How do de do, sir?"

"The better, Mr. Tappertit, for looking into your ingenious face once more. I hope you are well."

"I am well, sir," said Sim, standing up to get nearer to his ear, and whispering hoarsely, "as any man can be under the aggravations to which I am exposed. My life's a burden to me. If it wasn't for wengeance, I'd play at pitch and toss with it on the losing hazard."

"Is Mrs. Varden at home?" said Mr. Chester. "Sir," returned Sim, eyeing him over with a look of concentrated expression,—"she is. Did you wish to see her?"

Mr. Chester nodded. "Then come this way, sir," said Sim, wiping his face upon his apron. "Follow me, sir.—Would you permit me to whisper in your ear, one-half a second?"

"By all means."

Mr. Tappertit raised himself on tip-toe, applied his lips to Mr. Chester's ear, drew back his head without saying anything, looked hard at him, applied them to his ear again, again drew back, and finally whispered—"The name is Joseph Willet. Hush! I say no more."

Having said that much, he beckoned the visitor with a mysterious aspect to follow him to the parlor door, where he announced him in the voice of a gentleman-usher. "Mr. Chester."

"And not Mr. Edward, mind," said Sim, looking into the door again, and adding this by way of postscript in his own person; "it's his father."

"But do not let his father," said Mr. Chester, advancing hat in hand, as he observed the effect of this last explanatory announcement, "do not let his father be any check or restraint on your domestic occupations, Miss Varden."

Table with 4 columns: DAY OF MONTH, DAY OF WEEK, COLOR OF VESTMENTS, and August THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY 1905. Lists feast days and saints for the month.

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Wherefore she desired that Dolly would be kissed immediately, on pain of her just displeasure, at the same time giving her to understand that whatever she saw her mother do, she might safely do herself, without being at the trouble of any reasoning or reflection on the subject—

which, indeed, was offensive and unedifying, and in direct contravention to the church catechism. Thus admonished, Dolly complied, though by no means willingly; for their was a broad, bold look of admiration in Mr. Chester's face, refined and polished though it sought to be, which distressed her very much.

"Ah!" sighed Mrs. V., shaking her head. "Ah!" echoed Miss Miggs. "Is that the case?" said Mr. Chester, compassionately. "Dear me!"

"Master has no intentions, sir," murmured Miggs as she sidled up to him, "but to be as grateful as his nature will let him, for everything he owns which it is in his powers to appreciate. But we never, sir—said Miggs, looking sideways at Mrs. Varden, and interlarding her discourse with a sigh—"we never know the full value of some wines and figures till we lose 'em. So much the worse, sir, for them as has the slighting of 'em on their consciences when they're gone to be in full blow elsewhere."

And Miss Miggs cast up her eyes to signify where that might be. As Mrs. Varden distinctly heard, and was intended to hear, all that Miggs said, and as these words appeared to convey in metaphorical terms a presage of foreboding that she would at some early period drop beneath her trials and take an easy flight towards the stars, she immediately began to languish, and taking a volume of the Manual from a neighboring table, leant her arm upon it as though she were Hope and that her Anchor. Mr. Chester, perceiving this, and seeing how the volume was lettered on the back, took it gently from her hand, and turned the fluttering leaves.

"My favorite book, dear madam. How often, how very often in his early life—before he can remember—" (this clause was strictly true) "have I deduced little easy moral lessons from its pages, for my dear son Ned! You know Ned?"

Mrs. Varden had that honor, and a fine affable young gentleman he was. "You're a mother, Mrs. Varden," said Mr. Chester, taking a pinch of snuff, "and you know what I, as a father, feel, when he is praised. He gives me some uneasiness—much uneasiness—from a roving nature, ma'am—from flower to flower—from sweet to sweet—but his is the butterfly time of life, and we must not be hard upon such trifling."

He glanced at Dolly. She was attending evidently to what he said. Just what he desired! "The only thing I object to in this little trait of Ned's is," said Mr. Chester,—"and the mention of his name reminds me, by the way, that I am about to beg the favor of a minute's talk with you alone—the only thing I object to in it, is that it does partake of insincerity. Now, however I may attempt to disguise the fact from myself in my affection for Ned, still I always revert to this—that if we are not sincere, we are nothing. Nothing upon earth. Let us be sincere, my dear madam!"

"—and Protestant," murmured Mrs. Varden. "—and Protestant above all things. Let us be sincere and Protestant, strictly moral, strictly just (though always with a leaning towards mercy), strictly honest, and strictly true, and we gain—it is a slight point, certainly, but still it is something tangible; we throw up a groundwork and foundation, so to speak, of goodness, on which we may afterwards erect some worthy superstructure."

Now, to be sure, Mrs. Varden thought, here is a perfect character. Here is a meek, righteous, thorough-going Christian, who, having mastered all these qualities, so difficult of attainment; who, having dropped a pinch of salt on the tails of all the cardinal virtues, and caught them every one; makes light of their possession, and pants for more morality. For the good woman never doubted (as many good men and women never do), that this slighting kind of profession, this settling so little store by great matters, this seeming to say, "I am not proud, I am what you hear, but I consider myself no better than other people; let us change the subject, pray"—was perfectly genuine and true. He so contrived it, and said it in that way that it appeared to have been forced from him, and its effect was marvellous.

(To be Continued.)

Not Yet, My Soul. Not yet, my soul, these friendly fields desert, Where thou with grass, and rivers, and the breeze, And the bright face of day, they dalliance hadst; Where to thine ear first sang the enraptured birds; Where love and thou that lasting bargain made, The ship rides trimmed, and from the eternal shores Thou hearest airy voices; but not yet Depart, my soul, not yet a while depart. Freedom is far, rest far. Thou art with life Too closely woven, nerve with nerve entwined; Service still craving service, love for love, Love for dear love, still suppliant with tears. Alas, not yet thy human task is done! A bond at birth is forged; a debt doth lie Immortal on mortality. It grows—By vast rebound it grows, unceasing growth; Gift upon gift, aims upon aims, unreared, From man, from God, from nature, till the soul amazed. Leave not my soul, the unfoughten field, nor leave Thy debts dishonored, nor thy place desert Without due service rendered. For thy life, Up, spirit, and defend that fort of clay, Thy body, now beleaguered; whether soon Or late she fall; whether to-day thy friends Bewail thee dead, or, after years, a man Grown old in honor and the friend of peace. Contend, my soul, for moments and for hours; Each is with service pregnant; each reclaimed Is as a kingdom conquered, where to reign As when a captain rallies to the fight His scattered legions, and beats ruin back. He, on the field, encamps, well pleased in mind. Yet surely him shall fortune overtake. Him smite in turn, headlong his ensigns drive; And that dear land, now safe, to-morrow fall. But he, unthinking in the present good. Solely delights, and all the camps rejoice. —Stevenson.

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