

BARNABY RUDGE

By CHARLES DICKENS

"There Ned will act exactly as he pleases," returned the other, sipping his wine, "that's entirely his affair. I wouldn't for the world interfere with my son, Haredale, beyond a certain point. The relationship between father and son, you know, is positively quite a holy kind of bond—Won't you let me persuade you to take one glass of wine? Well! as you please, as you please," he added, helping himself again.

"Chester," said Mr. Haredale, after a short silence, during which he had eyed his smiling face from time to time intently, "you have the head and heart of an evil spirit in all matters of deception."

"Your health!" said the other, with a nod. "But I have interrupted you."

"If now," pursued Mr. Haredale, "we should find it difficult to separate these young people, and break off their intercourse—if, for instance, you find it difficult on your side, what course do you intend to take?"

"Nothing plainer, my good fellow, nothing easier," returned the other, shrugging his shoulders and stretching himself more comfortably before the fire. "I shall then exert those powers on which you flatter me so highly—though, upon my word, I don't deserve your compliments to their full extent—and resort to a few little trivial subterfuges for rousing jealousy and resentment. You see?"

"In short, justifying the means by the end, are, as a last resource for tearing them asunder, to resort to treachery and—lying," said Mr. Haredale.

"Oh, dear, no. Fie, fie!" returned the other, relishing a pinch of snuff extremely. "Not lying. Only a little management, a little diplomacy, a little—troubling, that's the word."

"I wish," said Mr. Haredale, moving to and fro, and stopping, and moving on again, like one who was ill at ease, "that this could have been foreseen or prevented. But as it has gone so far, and it is necessary for us to act, it is of no use shrinking or regretting. Well! I shall second your endeavors to the utmost of my power. There is one topic in the whole wide range of human thought on which we both agree. We shall act in concert, but apart. There will be no need, I hope, for us to meet again."

"Are you going?" said Mr. Chester, rising with a graceful indolence. "Let me light you down the stairs."

before the fire. "Good-night! Barnaby, my good fellow, you say some prayers, before you go to bed, I hope?"

Barnaby nodded. "He has some nonsense that he calls his prayers, sir," returned old John, officiously. "I'm afraid there ain't much good in 'em."

"And Hugh?" said Mr. Chester, turning to him.

"Not I," he answered. "I know his—pointing to Barnaby—"they're well enough. He sings 'em sometimes in the straw I listen."

"He's quite a animal, sir," John whispered in his ear with dignity. "You'll excuse him, I'm sure. If he has any soul at all, sir, it must be such a very small one, that it don't signify what he does or doesn't in that way. Good-night, sir!"

The guest rejoined "God bless you!" with a fervor that was quite affecting; and John, beckoning his acquaintances to go before, bowed himself out of the room, and left him to his rest in the Maypole's ancient bed.

CHAPTER XIII. If Joseph Willet, the denouced and proscribed of prentices, had happened to be at home when his father's courtly guest presented himself before the Maypole door—that is, if it had not perversely chanced to be one of the half-dozen days in the whole year on which he was at liberty to absent himself for as many hours without question or reproach—he would have contrived, by hook or crook, to dive to the very bottom of Mr. Chester's mystery, and to come at his purpose with as much certainty as though he had been his confidential adviser. In that fortunate case, the lovers would have had quick warning of the ill that threatened them, and the aid of various timely and wise suggestions to boot, for all Joe's readiness of thought and action, and all his sympathies and good wishes, were enlisted in favor of the young people, and were staunch in devotion to their cause. Whether this disposition arose out of his old prepossessions in favor of the young lady, whose history had surrounded her in his mind, almost from his cradle, with circumstances of unusual interest; or from his attachment towards the young gentleman, into whose confidence he had, through his shrewdness and alacrity, and the rendering of sundry important services as a spy and messenger, almost imperceptibly glided, they had their origin in either of these sources, or in the constant badgering of his venerable parent, or in any hidden little love affair of his own which gave him something of a fellow-feeling in the matter, it is needless to inquire—especially as Joe was out of the way, and had no opportunity on that particular occasion of testifying to his sentiments either on one side or the other.

It was, in fact, the twenty-fifth of March, which, as most people know to their cost, is, and has been time out of mind, one of those unpleasant epochs termed quarter-days. On this twenty-fifth of March, it was John Willet's pride annually to settle in his hard cash, his account with a certain vintner and distiller in the city of London; to give into whose hands a canvas bag containing its exact amount, and not a penny more or less, was the end and object of a journey for Joe, so surely as the year and day came round.

This journey was performed upon an old grey mare, concerning whom John had an indistinct set of ideas hovering about him, to the effect that she could win a plate or cup if she tried. She never had tried, and probably never would now, being some fourteen or fifteen years of age, short in wind, long in body, and rather the worse for wear in respect of her mane and tail. Notwithstanding these slight defects, John perfectly gloried in the animal; and when she was brought round to the door by Hugh, actually retired into the bar, and there, in a secret grove of lemons, laughed with pride.

"There's a bit of horseflesh, Hugh!" said John, when he had recovered enough self-command to appear at the door again. "There's a comely creature! There's high mettles! There's bone!"

"And do you suppose he minds such things as crocuses?" demanded John. "I don't know, and to say the truth, I don't care," said Joe. "Come, father, give me the money, and in the name of patience let me go."

"There it is, sir," replied John; "and take care of it, and mind you don't make too much haste back, but give the mare a long rest—Do you mind?"

"Ay, I mind," returned Joe. "She will need it, Heaven knows." "And don't you score up too much at the Black Lion," said John. "Mind that too."

"Then why don't you let me have some money of my own?" retorted Joe, sorrowfully; "why don't you, father? What do you send me into London for, giving me only the right to call for my dinner at the Black Lion, which you're to pay for next time you go, as if I was not to be trusted with the shillings? Why do you use me like this? It's not right of you. You can't expect me to be quiet under it."

"Let him have money!" cried John in a drowsy reverie. "What does he call money—guineas? Hasn't he got money? Over and above the tolls, hasn't he one and sixpence?"

"One and sixpence!" repeated his son contemptuously. "Yes, sir," returned John, "one and sixpence. When I was your age, I had never seen so much money, in a heap. A shilling of it is in case of accidents—the mare casting a shoe, or the like of that. The other sixpence is to spend in the diversions of London; and the diversion I recommend is going to the top of the Monument, and sitting there. There's no temptation there, sir—no drink—no young women—no bad characters of any sort—nothing but imagination. That's the way I enjoyed myself when I was your age, sir."

To this Joe made no answer, but beckoning Hugh, leaped into the saddle and rode away; and a very stalwart, manly horseman he looked, deserving a better charger than it was his fortune to bestride. John stood staring after him, or rather after the grey mare (for he had no eyes for her rider), until man and beast had been out of sight some twenty minutes, when he began to think they were gone, and slowly re-entering the house, fell into a gentle doze.

The unfortunate grey mare, who was the agony of Joe's life, floundered along at her own will and pleasure until the Maypole was no longer visible, and then, contracting her legs into what in a puppet would have been looked upon as a clumsy and awkward imitation of a canter, mended her pace all at once, and did it of her own accord. The acquaintance with her rider's usual mode of proceeding, which suggested this improvement in hers, impelled her likewise to turn up a by-way, leading—not to London, but through lanes running parallel with the road they had come, and passing within a few hundred yards of the Maypole, which led finally to an enclosure surrounding a large, old, red-brick mansion—the same of which mention was made as the Warren in the first chapter of this history. Coming to a dead stop, in a little copse thereabout, she suffered her rider to dismount with right good-will, and to tie her to the trunk of a tree.

"Stay there, old girl," said Joe; "and let us see whether there's any little commission for me to-day." So saying, he left her to browse upon such stunted grass and weeds as happened to grow within the length of her tether, and passing through a wicket gate, entered the grounds on foot.

The pathway, after a very few minutes' walking, brought him close to the house, towards which, and especially towards one particular window, he directed many covert glances. It was a dreary, silent building, with turrets, and a whole suite of rooms shut up and mouldering to ruin.

The terrace-garden, dark with the shade of overhanging trees, had an air of melancholy that was quite oppressive. Great iron gates, disused for many years, and red with rust, drooping on their hinges and overgrown with long rank grass, seemed as though they tried to sink into the ground, and hide their fallen state among the friendly weeds. The fantastic monsters on the walls, green with age and damp, and covered here and there with moss, looked grim and desolate. There was a sombre aspect even to that part of the mansion which was inhabited and kept in good repair, that struck the beholder with a sense of sadness; of something forlorn and falling, whence cheerfulness was banished. It would have been difficult to imagine a bright fire blazing in the dull and darkened rooms, or to picture any gayety of heart or revelry that the frowning walls shut in. It seemed a place where such things had been, but could be no more—the very ghost of a house, haunting the old spot in its outward form, and that was all.

Much of this decayed and sombre look was attributed no doubt, to the death of its former master, and the temper of its present occupant; but remembering the tale connected with the mansion, it seemed the very place for such a deed, and one that might have been its predestined theatre years upon years ago. Viewed with reference to this legend, the sheet of water where the steward's body had been found appeared to wear a black and sullen character, such as no other pool might own; the bell upon the roof that had told the tale of murder to the midnight wind, became a very phantom whose voice would raise the listener's hair on end; and every leafless bough that nodded to another, had its stealthy whispering of the crime.

Joe paced up and down the path, sometimes stopping in affected contemplation of the building or the prospect, sometimes leaning against a tree with an assumed air of idleness and indifference, but always keeping an eye upon the window he had singled out at first. After some quarter of an hour's delay, a small white hand was waved to him for an instant from this casement, and the young man, with a respectful "low," departed, crossing under his breath as he passed his horse again, "No errand for me to-day!"

But the air of smartness, the cock of the hat to which John Willet had objected, and the spring nosegay, all betokened some little errand of his own, having a more interesting object than a vintner or even a locksmith. So, indeed, it turned out; for when he had settled with the vintner—whose place of business was down in some deep cellars hard by Thames street, and who was as purple-faced an old gentleman as if he had all his life supported their arched roof on his head,—he had settled the account, and taken the receipt and declined, tasting more than three glasses of old sherry, to the unbounded astonishment of the purple-faced vintner, who, gimlet in hand, had projected an attack upon at least a score of dusky casks, and who stood transfixed, or morally gimletted as it were, to his own wall—when he had done all this, and disposed besides of a frugal dinner at the Black Lion in Whitechapel; spurning the Monument and John's advice, he turned his steps towards the locksmith's house, attracted by the eyes of blooming Dolly Varden.

Joe was by no means a sheepish fellow, but, for all that, when he got to the corner of the street in which the locksmith lived, he could by no means make up his mind to walk straight to the house. First, he resolved to stroll up another street for five minutes, then up another street for five minutes more, and so on until he had lost full half an hour, when he made a bold plunge and found himself with a red face and a beating heart in the smoky workshop.

"Joe Willet, or his ghost?" said Varden, rising from his desk at which he was busy with his books, and looking at him under his spectacles. "Which is it? Joe in the flesh, eh? That's hearty. And how are all the Chigwell company, Joe?"

"Much as usual, sir—they and I agree as well as ever."

"Well, well!" said the locksmith. "We must be patient, Joe, and bear with old folks' foibles. How's the mare, Joe? Does she do the four miles an hour as easily as ever? Ha, ha, ha! Does she, Joe? Eh!—What have we there, Joe—a nosegay?"

Table with columns: DAY OF MONTH, DAY OF WEEK, COLOR OF VESTMENTS, and June 1905 SACRED HEART. It lists liturgical events for the month of June, including Ascension of Our Lord, Trinity Sunday, and Second Sunday After Pentecost.

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"Migs," said Mrs. Varden, "you're profane."

"Begging your pardon, mim," returned Migs, with shrill rapidity, "such was not my intention, and such I hope is not my character, though I am but a servant."

"Answering me, Migs, and providing yourself," retorted her mistress, looking round with dignity, "is one and the same thing. How dare you speak of angels in connection with your sinful fellow-beings—mere—"

"You'll have the goodness, if you please," said Mrs. Varden loftily, "to step up-stairs and see if Dolly has finished dressing, and to tell her that the chair that was ordered for her will be here in a minute, and that if she keeps it waiting, I shall send it away that instant—I'm sorry to see that you don't take your tea, Varden, and that you don't take yours, Mr. Joseph; though, of course, it would be foolish of me to expect that anything that can be had at home, and in the company of females, would please you."

This pronoun was understood in the plural sense, and included both gentlemen, upon both of whom it was rather hard and undeserved, for Gabriel had applied himself to the meal with a very promising appetite until it was spoiled by Mrs. Varden herself, and Joe had as great a liking for the female society of the locksmith's house—or for a part of it at all events—as man could well entertain.

But he had no opportunity to say anything in his own defence, for at that moment Dolly herself appeared, and struck him quite dumb with her beauty. Never had Dolly looked so handsome as she did then, in all the glow and grace of youth, with all her charms increased a hundred-fold by a most becoming dress, by a thousand little coquettish ways which nobody could assume with a better grace, and all the sparkling expectation of that accursed party. It is impossible to tell how Joe hated that party wherever it was, and all the other people were going to it, whoever they were.

And she hardly looked at him—no, hardly looked at him. And when the chair was seen through the open door coming blundering into the work shop, she actually clasped her hands and seemed glad to go. But Joe gave her his arm—there was some comfort in that—and handed her into it. To see her seat herself inside, with her laughing eyes brighter than diamonds, and her hand—surely she had the prettiest hand in the world—on the ledge of the open window, and her little finger provokingly and pertly tilted up, as if it wondered why Joe didn't squeeze or kiss it! To think how well one or two of the modest snowdrops would have become that delicate bodice, and how they were lying neglected outside the parlor window! To see how Migs looked on all this loveliness was got up, and of being in the secret of every string and pin and hook and eye, and of saying it ain't half as real as you think, and I could look quite as well myself if I took the pains! To hear that provoking precious little scream when the chair was hoisted on its poles, and to catch the transient but not-to-be-forgotten vision of the happy face within—what torments and aggravations, and yet what delights were these! The very chairmen seemed favored rivals as they bore her down the street.

