

BARNABY RUDGE

By CHARLES DICKENS

The locksmith shook his head—perhaps in some doubt of the creature's being really nothing but a bird—perhaps in pity for Barnaby, who by this time had him in his arms, and was rolling about, with him, on the ground. As he raised his eyes from the poor fellow he encountered those of his mother, who had entered the room, and was looking on in silence. She was quite white in the face, even to her lips, but had wholly subdued her emotion, and wore her usual quiet look. Varden fancied as he glanced at her that she shrank from his eye! and that she busied herself about the wounded gentleman to avoid him the better.

It was time he went to bed, she said. He was to be removed to his own home on the morrow, and he had already exceeded his time for sitting up, by a full hour. Acting on this hint, the locksmith prepared to take his leave.

"By-the-by," said Edward, as he shook him by the hand, and looked from him to Mrs. Rudge and back again, "what noise was that below? I heard your voice in the midst of it, and should have inquired before, but our other conversation drove it from my memory. What was it?"

The locksmith looked towards her, and lit his lip. She leaned against the chair, and beat her eyes upon the ground. Barnaby too—he was listening.

"Some mad or drunken fellow, sir," Varden at length made answer, looking steadily at the widow as he spoke. "He mistook the house, and tried to force an entrance."

She breathed more freely, but stood quite motionless. As the locksmith said "Good-night," and Barnaby caught up the candle to light him down the stairs, she took it from him, and charged him—with more haste and earnestness than so slight an occasion appeared to warrant—not to stir. The raven followed them to satisfy himself that all was right below, and when they reached the street-door, stood on the bottom step drawing cork out of number.

With a trembling hand she unfastened the chain and bolts and turned the key. As she had her hand upon the latch, the locksmith said in a low voice—

"I have told a lie to-night, for your sake, Mary, and for the sake of bygone times, and old acquaintances, when I would scorn to do so for my own. I hope I may have done no harm, or led to none. I can't help the suspicions you have forced upon me, and I am loath, I tell you plainly, to leave Mr. Edward here. Take care he comes to no hurt. I doubt the safety of this roof, and am glad he leaves it so soon. Now, let me go."

For a moment she hid her face in her hands and wept, but resisting the strong impulse which evidently moved her to reply, opened the door—no wider than was sufficient for the passage of his body—and motioned him away. As the locksmith stood upon the step it was chained and locked behind him, and the raven, in furtherance of these precautions, barked like a lusty house-dog.

"In league with that ill-looking figure that might have fallen from a gibbet—he listening and hiding here—Barnaby first upon the spot last night—can she who has always borne so fair a name be guilty of such crimes in secret!" said the locksmith, musing. "Heaven forgive me if I am wrong, and send me just thoughts; but she is poor, the temptation may be great, and we daily hear of things as strange—Ay, bark away, my friend. If there's any wickedness going on, that raven's in it, I'll be sworn."

CHAPTER VII.

Mrs. Varden was a lady of what is commonly called an uncertain temper—a phrase which being interpreted signifies a temper tolerably certain to make everybody more or less uncomfortable. Thus it generally happened, that when other people were merry, Mrs. Varden was dull; and that when other people were dull, Mrs. Varden was disposed to be amazingly cheerful. Indeed the worthy housewife was of such a capricious nature, that she not only attained a higher pitch of genius than Macbeth, in respect of her ability to be wise, amazed, tempered and furious, loyal and neutral in an instant, but would sometimes ring the changes backwards and forwards on all possible moods and flights in one short quarter of an hour; performing, as it were, a kind of triple bob major on the peal of instruments in the female belfry, with a skillfulness and rapidity of execution that astonished all who heard her.

It has been observed in this good lady (who did not want for personal attractions, being plump and buxom to look at, though like her fair daughter, somewhat short in stature) that this uncertainty of disposition strengthened and increased with her temporal prosperity; and divers wise men and matrons on friendly terms with the locksmith and his family, even went so far as to assert that a tumble-down some half-dozen rounds in the world's ladder—such as the breaking of the bank in which her husband kept his money, or some little fall of that kind—would be the making of her, and could hardly fail to render her one of the most agreeable companions in existence. Whether they were right or wrong in this conjecture, certain it is that minds, like bodies, will often fall into a pimply ill-conditioned state from mere excess of comfort, and like them, are often successfully cured by remedies in themselves very nauseous and unpalatable.

Mrs. Varden's chief aider and abettor, and at the same time her principal victim and object of wrath, was her single domestic servant, one Miss Miggs, or as she was called, in conformity with those prejudices of society which lop and top from poor handmaidens all such genteel exercises—Miggs. This Miggs was a tall young lady, very much addicted to patterns in private life, slender and shrewish, of a rather uncomfortable temper, and though not absolutely ill-looking, of a sharp and acid visage

As a general principle and abstract proposition, Miggs held the male sex to be utterly contemptible and unworthy of notice, to be fickle, false, hazy, sordid, inclined to perjury, and wholly undeserving. When particularly exasperated against them (which, scandal said, was when Sim Tappertit slighted her more; she was accustomed to wish, in great emphasis that the whole race of women could but die off, in order that the men might be brought to know the real value of the blessings by which they set so little store; nay, her feeling for her order ran so high, that she sometimes declared, if she could only have good security for a fair, round number—say ten thousand—of young virgins following her example, she would, to spite mankind, hang, drown, stab, or poison herself, with a joy past all expression.

It was the voice of Miggs that greeted the locksmith, when he knocked at his own house, with a shrill cry of "Who's there?"

"Me, girl, me," returned Gabriel. "What, already, sir!" said Miggs, opening the door with a look of surprise. "We was just gettin on our nightcaps to sit up,—me and mistress. Oh, she has been so bad!"

Miggs said this with an air of uncommon candor and concern; but the parlor door was standing open, and as Gabriel very well knew for whose ears it was designed, he regarded her with anything but an approving look as he passed in.

"Master's come home, mim," cried Miggs, running before him into the parlor. "You was wrong, mim, and I was right. I thought he wouldn't keep us up so late two nights running, mim. Master's always considerate so far. I'm so glad, mim, on your account. I'm a little sleepy here Miggs simpered—"a little sleepy myself, I'll own it now, mim, though I said I wasn't when you asked me. It ain't of no consequence, mim, of course."

"You had better," said the locksmith, who most devoutly wished that Barnaby's raven was at Miggs's ankles, "you had better get to bed at once then."

"Thanking you kindly, sir," returned Miggs, "I couldn't take my rest in peace, nor fix my thoughts upon my prayers, otherways than that I knew mistress was comfortable in her bed this night; by rights she should have been there, hours ago."

"You're talkative, mistress," said Varden, pulling off his great-coat, and looking at her askew.

"Taking the hint, sir," cried Miggs, with a flushed face, "and thanking you for it most kindly, I will make bold to say, that if I give offence by having consideration for my mistress, I do not ask your pardon, but am content to get myself into trouble and to be suffering."

Here Mrs. Varden, who, with her countenance shrouded in a large nightcap, had been all this time intent upon the Protestant Manuel, looked round, and acknowledged Miggs's championship by commanding her to hold her tongue.

Every little bone in Miggs's throat and neck developed itself with a spitefulness quite alarming, as she replied, "Yes, mim, I will!"

"How do you find yourself now, my dear?" said the locksmith, taking a chair near his wife (who had resumed her look) and rubbing his knees hard as he made the inquiry.

"You're very anxious to know, ain't you?" returned Mrs. Varden, with her eyes upon the print. "You, that have not seen near me all day, and wouldn't have been if I was dying!"

"My dear Martha!"—said Gabriel. Mrs. Varden turned over to the next page; then went back again to the bottom line over leaf to be quite sure of the last words, and then went on reading with an appearance of the deepest interest and study.

"My dear Martha," said the locksmith, "how can you say such things when you know you don't mean them? If you were dying? Why, if there was anything serious the matter with you, Martha, shouldn't I be in constant attendance upon you?"

"Yes!" cried Mrs. Varden, bursting into tears. "Yes, you would. I don't doubt it, Varden. Certainly you would. That's as much as to tell me that you would be hovering round me like a vulture, waiting till the breath was out of my body, that you might go and marry somebody else."

Miggs groaned in sympathy—a little short groan, checked in its birth, and changed into a cough. It seemed to say, "I can't help it. It's wrong; from me by the dreadful brutality of that monster master."

all night, but for the voice of Mrs. Varden, which, after a pause of some five minutes, awoke him with a start. "If I am ever," said Mrs. V.—not scolding, but in a sort of monotonous remonstrance—"in spirits, if I am ever cheerful, if I am ever more than usually disposed to be talkative and comfortable, this is the way I am treated."

"Such spirits as you was in two, mim, but half an hour ago!" cried Miggs. "I never see such company!"

"Because," said Mrs. Varden, "because I never interfere or interrupt, because I never question where anybody comes or goes; because my whole mind and soul is bent on saving where I can save, and laboring in this house,—therefore, they try me as they do."

"Martha," urged the locksmith, endeavoring to look as wakeful as possible, "what is it you complain of? I really came home with every wish and desire to be happy. I did, indeed."

"What do I complain of?" retorted his wife. "Is it a chilling thing to have one's husband sulking and falling asleep directly he comes home—and a heartiness, and throwing cold water over the fireside? Is it natural, when I know he went out upon a matter in which I am as much interested as anybody can be, that I should wish to know all that has happened, or that he should tell me without my begging and praying him to do it? Is that natural, or is it not?"

"I am very sorry, Martha," said the good-natured locksmith. "I was really afraid you were not disposed to talk pleasantly; I'll tell you everything, I shall only be too glad my dear."

"No, Varden," returned his wife, rising with dignity. "I dare say—thank you! I'm not a child to be corrected one minute and petted the next—I'm a little too old for that, Varden. Miggs, carry the light. You can be cheerful, Miggs, at least."

Miggs, who, to this moment, had been in the very depths of compassionate despondency, passed instantly into the liveliest state conceivable, and tossing her head as she glanced towards the locksmith, bore off her mistress and the light together.

"Now, who would think," thought Varden, shrugging his shoulders and drawing his chair nearer to the fire, "that that woman could ever be pleasant and agreeable? And yet she can be. Well, well, all of us have our faults. I'll not be hard upon hers. We have been man and wife too long for that."

He dozed again—not the least pleasantly, perhaps, for his hearty temper. While his eyes were closed, the door leading to the upper stairs was partially opened, and a head appeared, which, at sight of him, drew hastily back again.

"I wish," murmured Gabriel, waking at the noise, and looking round the room, "I wish somebody would marry Miggs. But that's impossible! I wonder whether there's any madman alive, who would marry Miggs!"

This was such a vast speculation that he fell into a doze again, and slept until the fire was quite burnt out. At last he roused himself, and having double-locked the street door according to custom, and put the key in his pocket, went off to bed.

He had not left the room in darkness many minutes, when the head appeared, and Sim Tappertit entered, hearing in his hands a little lamp.

"What the devil business has he to stop up so late?" muttered Sim, passing into the workshop, and setting it down upon the forge. "Here's half the night gone already. There's only one good thing has ever come to me, out of this cursed old rusty mechanical trade, and that's this piece of ironmongery, upon my soul!"

As he spoke, he drew from the right hand, or rather right leg pocket of his smalls, a clumsy large-sized key, which he inserted cautiously in the lock his master had secured, and softly opened the door. That done, he replaced his piece of secret workmanship in his pocket; and leaving the lamp burning, and closing the door carefully and without noise, stole out into the street—as little suspected by the locksmith in his sound deep sleep, as by Barnaby himself in his phantom-haunted dreams.

CHAPTER VIII.

Clear of the locksmith's house, Sim Tappertit laid aside his cautious manner, and assuming in its stead that of a ruffling, swaggering, roving blade, who would rather kill a man than otherwise, and eat him too if needful, made the best of his way along the darkened streets.

Half pausing for an instant now and then to smite his pocket and assure himself of the safety of his master key, he hurried on to Barbican, and turning into one of the narrowest of the narrow streets which diverged from that centre, slackened his pace and wiped his heated brow, as if the termination of his walk were near at hand.

It was not a very choice spot for midnight expeditions, being in truth one of more than questionable character, and of an appearance by no means inviting. From the main street he had entered, itself little better than an alley, a low-browed doorway led into a blind court, or yard, profoundly dark, unpaved, and reeking with stagnant odors. Into this ill-favored pit, the locksmith's vagrant 'prentice groped his way; and stopping at a house from whose defaced and rotten front the rude effigy of a Lottie swung to and fro like some gibbeted malefactor, struck thence upon an iron grating with his foot. A response to his signal, Mr. Tappertit became impatient, and struck the grating thrice again, and a further delay ensued, but it was

not of long duration. The ground seemed to open at his feet, and a ragged head appeared. "Is that the captain?" said a voice as ragged as the head.

"Yes," replied Mr. Tappertit, haughtily, descending as he spoke, "who should it be?"

"It's so late, we gave you up," returned the voice, as its owner stopped to shut and fasten the grating. "You're late, sir."

"Lead on," said Mr. Tappertit, with a gloomy majesty, "and make remarks when I require you. Forward!"

This latter word of command was perhaps somewhat theatrical and unnecessary, inasmuch as the descent was by a very narrow, steep, and slippery flight of steps, and any rashness or departure from the beaten track must have ended in a yawning wa'er-but. But Mr. Tappertit being, like some other great commanders, favorable to strong effects, and personal display, cried "Forward!" again, in the hoarsest voice he could assume; and led the way, with folded arms and knitted brows to the cellar door below, where there was a small copper fixed in one corner, a chair or two, a form and a table, a glimmering fire, and a trundle-bed, covered with a ragged patchwork rug.

"Welcome, noble captain!" cried a lanky figure, rising as from a nap. The captain nodded. Then, throwing off his outer coat, he stood composed in all his dignity, and eyed his follower over.

"What news to-night?" he asked, when he had looked into his very soul.

"Nothing particular," replied the owner, stretching himself—and he was so long already that it was quite alarming to see him do it—"how come you to be so late?"

"No matter," was all the captain deigned to say in answer. "Is the room prepared?"

"It is," replied his follower. "The comrade—is he here?"

"Yes, and a sprinkling of the others—your hear 'em?"

"Playing skittles!" said the captain, moodily. "Light-hearted revellers!"

There was no doubt respecting the particular amusement in which these heedless spirits were indulging, for even in the close and stifling atmosphere of the vault, the noise sounded like distant thunder. It certainly appeared, at first sight, a singular spot to choose, for that or any other purpose of relaxation, if the other cellars answered to the one in which this brief colloquy took place; for the floors were of sodden earth, the walls and roof of damp bare brick tapestried with the tracks of snails and slugs; the air was sickening, tainted and offensive. It seemed from one strong flavor which was uppermost among the various odors of the place, that it had as its storehouse for cheeses; a circumstance which, while it accounted for the greasy moisture that hung about it, was agreeably suggestive of rats. It was naturally damp besides, and little trees of fungus sprung from every mouldering corner.

The proprietor of this charming retreat, and owner of the ragged head before mentioned—for he wore an old tie-wig as bare and frowzy as a stunted heath-broom—had by this time joined them; and stood a little apart, rubbing his hands, wagging his hoary bristled chin, and smiling in silence. His eyes were closed; but had they been wide open it would have been easy to tell, from the attentive expression of the face he turned toward them—pale and unwholesome as might be expected in one of his underground existence—and from a certain anxious raising and quivering of the lids, that he was blind.

"Even Stagg hath been asleep," said the long comrade, nodding towards this person.

"Sound captain, sound!" cried the blind man; "what does my noble captain drink—is it brandy, rum, usquebaugh? Is it soaked gunpowder, or blazing soil? Give it a name, heart of oak, and we'll get it for you, if it was wine from a bishop's cellar, or melted gold from King George's mint."

"See," said Mr. Tappertit, haughtily, "that it's something strong, and comes quick; so long as you take care of that, you may bring it from the devil's cellar, if you like."

"Holdy said, noble captain!" rejoined the blind man. "Spoken like the 'Prentices' Glory. Ha, ha! From the devil's cellar! A brave joke! The captain joketh. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll tell you what, my fine feller," said Mr. Tappertit, eyeing the host over as he walked to a closet and took out a bottle and glass as carelessly as if he had been in full possession of his sight, "if you make that row, you'll find that the captain's very far from joking, and so I tell you."

Table with 3 columns: DAY OF MONTH, DAY OF WEEK, COLOR OF VESTMENTS. Includes dates for May 1905, such as 1 M. r. S. S. Phillip and James, Apos. S. Athanasius. Finding of the Holy Cross. S. Monica. S. Pius V., Pope. S. John before the Latin Gate.

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in the same breath with wine, that's rather too much. Here, take the glass, Benjamin, lead on. To business!"

With these words, he folded his arms again; and frowning with a sullen majesty, passed with his companion through a little door at the end of the cellar, and disappeared; leaving Stagg to his private meditations.

The vault they entered, strewn with sawdust and dimly lighted, was between the outer one from which they had just come, and that in which the skittle players were diverting themselves; as was manifested by the increased noise and clamor of tongues, which was suddenly stopped, however, and replaced by a dead silence at a signal from the long comrade.

Then, this young gentleman, going to a little cupboard, returned with a thigh-bone, which in former times must have been part and parcel of some individual at least as long as himself, and placed the same in the hands of Mr. Tappertit; who, receiving it as a sceptre and staff of authority, cocked his three-cornered hat fiercely on the top of his head, and mounted a large table, whereon a chair of state cheerfully ornamented with a couple of skulls was placed ready for his reception.

He had no sooner assumed his position, than another young gentleman appeared, bearing in his arms a huge clapped book, who made him a profound obeisance, and delivered it to the long comrade, who advanced to the table, and turning his back upon it, stood there Atlas-wise. Then, the long comrade got upon the table too; and seated himself in a lower chair than Mr. Tappertit's, with much state and ceremony, placed the large book on their mute companion as if he had been a wooden desk, and prepared to make entries therein with a pen of corresponding size.

When the long comrade had made these preparations, he looked towards Mr. Tappertit; and Mr. Tappertit, flourishing the bone, knocked nine times therewith upon one of the skulls. At the ninth stroke, a third young gentleman emerged from the door leading to the skittle-ground, and bowing low, awaited his commands.

"'Prentice!" said the mighty captain, "who waits without?"

The 'prentice made answer that a stranger was in attendance, who claimed admission into that secret society of 'Prentice Knights, and a free participation in their rights, privileges, and immunities. Thereupon Mr. Tappertit flourishing the bone again, and giving the other skull a prodigious rap on the nose, exclaimed "Admit him!" At these dread words the 'prentice bowed once more and so withdrew as he had come.

There soon appeared at the same door, two other 'prentices, having between them a third, whose eyes were bandaged, and who was attired in a bag-wig, and a broad-skirted coat, trimmed with tarnished lace, and who was girded with a sword, in compliance with the laws of the Institution regulations the introduction of candidates, which required them to assume this courtly dress, and kept it constantly in lavender, for their convenience. One of the conductors of this novice held a rusty blunderbuss pointed toward his car, and the other a very ancient sabre with which he carved imaginary offenders as he came along in a sanguinary and anatomical manner.

As this silent group advances, Mr. Tappertit fixed his hat upon his head. The novice then laid his hand upon his breast and bent before him. When he had humbled himself sufficiently, the captain ordered the bandage to be removed and proceeded to eye him over.

"Ha!" said the captain thoughtfully, when he had concluded this ordeal. "Proceed."

The long comrade read aloud as follows: "Mark Gilbert. Age, nineteen. Round to Thomas Curzon, hosier. Golden Fleece. Aldgate. Loves Curzon's daughter. Cannot say that Curzon's daughter loves him. Should think it probable. Curzon pulled his ears last Tuesday week."

against the name Curzon." "So please you," said the novice, "that's not the worst—he calls his 'prentice idle dog, and stops his beer unless he works to his liking. He gives dutch cheese, too, eating Cheshire, sir, himself, and Sundays over, are only once a month."

"This," said Mr. Tappertit gravely, "is a flagrant case. Put two black crosses to the name of Curzon."

"If the society," said the novice, "an ill-looking, one-sided, shambling lad, with sunken eyes set close together in his head—'if the society would burn his house down—for he's not insured—or beat him as he comes home from his club at night, or help me to carry off his daughter! and marry her at the Fleet, whether she gave consent or no!"

Mr. Tappertit waved his grizzled truncheon as an admonition to him not to interrupt, and ordered three black crosses to the name of Curzon.

"Which means," he said in gracious explanation, "vengeance, complete and terrible. 'Prentice, do you love the Constitution?"

To which the novice (being to that end instructed by his attendant sponsors) replied, "I do!"

"The Church, the State, and everything established—but the masters!" quote the captain.

Again the novice said, "I do." Having said it, he listened meekly to the captain, who, in an address prepared for such occasions, told him how that under that same Constitution (which was kept in a strong box somewhere, but where exactly he could not find out, or he would have endeavored to procure a copy of it), the 'prentice had, in times gone by, had frequently holidays of right, broken people's heads by scores, defied their masters, nay, even achieved some glorious murders in the streets which privileges had gradually been wrestled from them, and in all which noble aspirations they were now restrained; how then they were unquestionably attributable to the innovating spirit of the times, and how they united therefore to resist all change, except such change as would restore those good old English customs, by which they would stand or fall. After illustrating the wisdom of going backward, by reference to that sagacious fish, the crab, and the not unfrequent practice of the mule and donkey, he described their general objects; which were briefly vengeance on their Tyrant Masters (of whose grievous and insupportable oppression no 'prentice souls entertain a moment's doubt) and the restoration, as aforesaid, of their ancient rights and holidays; for neither of which objects were they now quite ripe, being barely twenty strong, but which they pledged themselves to pursue with fire and sword when needful. Then he described the oath which every member of that small remnant of a noble body took, and which was a dreadful and impressive kind, binding him at the bidding of his chief, to resist and obstruct the Lord Mayor, sword-bearer, and chaplain; to despise the authority of the sheriffs; and to hold the court of alderman as naught; but not on any account, in case the fulness of time should bring Bar, which was strictly constitutional, a general rising of 'prentices, to damage or in any way disgrace Temporal and always to be approached with reverence. Having gone over these several heads with great eloquence and force, and having further informed the novice that this society had had its origin in his own teeming brain, stimulated by a swelling sense of wrong and outrage, Mr. Tappertit demanded whether he had strength of heart to take the mighty pledge required, or whether he would withdraw while retreat was yet within his power.

(To be Continued.)

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