

BARNABY RUDGE

By CHARLES DICKENS

Dennis, with a wink and a nod, un- wound the cord from about his per- son, and raising his eyes to the ceiling, looked all over it, and round the walls and cornice, with a curious eye, then shook his head.

"Move, man, can't you!" cried Hugh, with another impatient stamp of his foot. "Are we to wait here till the cry has gone for ten miles around, and our work's interrupted?"

"It's all very fine talking, broth- er," said Dennis, stepping towards him; "but unless"—and here he whis- pered in his ear—"unless we do it over the door, it can't be done at all in this here room."

"What can't?" Hugh demanded. "Why, the old man can't." "Why, you weren't going to hang him?" cried Hugh.

"No, brother?" re-urned the hang- man, with a stare. "What else?" Hugh made no answer, but snatching the rope from his companion's hands, proceeded to bind old John himself, but his very first move was so bungling and unskillful, that Mr. Dennis retreated, almost with tears in his eyes, that he might be permit- ted to perform the duty. Hugh con- senting, he achieved it in a twink- ling.

"There!" he said, looking mourn- fully at John Willet, who displayed so more emotion in his bonds than he had shown out of them. "That's what I call pretty, and workmanlike. He's quite a picter now. But, Broth- er, just a word with you—now that he's ready trussed, as one may say, wouldn't it be better for all parties if we was to work him off? It would read uncommon well in the newspapers, it would indeed. The public would think a great deal more on us!"

Hugh, inferring what his compan- ion meant, rather than his gestures than his technical mode of expressing himself (to which, as he was ignorant of his calling, he wanted the clew), rejected this proposition for the se- cond time, and gave the word "For- ward!" which was echoed by a hun- dred voices from without.

"To the Warren!" shouted Dennis as he ran out, followed by the rest. "A wondrous house, my lads!" "A loud yell followed, the whole throng hurried off, mad for pillage and destruction. Hugh lingered be- hind a few moments to stimulate himself with more drink, and to set all the taps running, a few of which had accidentally been spared; then, glancing round the despoiled and plun- dered room, through whose shattered window the rioters had thrust the Maypole itself—for even that had been sawn down—lighted a torch, clapped the mute and motionless John Willet on the back, and waving his light above his head, and uttering a fierce shout, hastened after his compan- ions.

CHAPTER LV.

John Willet, left alone in his dis- mantled bar, continued to sit start- ing about him; awake as to his eyes, certainly, but with all his powers of reason, and reflection in a sound and dreamless sleep. He looked around upon the room which had been for years, and was within an hour ago, the pride of his hear, and not a muscle of his face was moved. The night, without, looked black and cold. Through the dreary gaps in the casement, the precious liquids, now nearly leaked away, dripped with a hollow sound upon the floor; the May- pole peered ruefully in through the broken window, like the bowsprit of a wrecked ship; the ground might have been the bottom of the sea, it was so strewn with precious frag- ments. Currents of air rushed in, as the old doors jarred and creaked up- on their hinges; the candles flickered and guttered down, and made long, winding sheets; the cheery deep-red curtains flapped and fluttered idly in the wind; even the stout Dutch kegs, overturned and lying empty in dark corners, seemed the mere husks of good fellows whose jollity had de- parted, and who would kindle with a friendly glow no more. John saw this desolation, and yet saw it not. He was perfectly contented to sit there, staring at it, and felt no more indignation or discomfort in his bonds than if they had been robes of honor. So far as he was personally concern- ed, old Times lay snoring, and the world stood still.

Save for the dripping from the bar- rels, the rustling of such light frag- ments of destruction as the wind af- fected, and the dull creaking of the open doors, all was profoundly quiet; indeed, these sounds, like the ticking of the death-watch in the night, only made the silence they invaded deeper and more apparent. But quiet or noisy, it was all one to John. If a train of heavy artillery could have

come up and commenced ball practice outside the window, it would have been all the same to him. He was a long way beyond surprise. A ghost couldn't have overtaken him. By and by he heard a footstep— hurried, and yet cautious footstep— coming towards the house. It stopped, advanced again, then seemed to go quite round it. Having done that, it came beneath the window, and a head looked in.

It was strongly relieved against the darkness outside by the glare of the guttering candles. A pale, worn, withered face; the eyes—but that was owing to its gaunt condition—unnat- urally large and bright; the hair, a grizzled black. It gave a searching glance all round the room, and a deep voice said: "Are you alone in this house?"

John made no sign, though the question was repeated twice, and he heard it distinctly. After a mo- ment's pause the man got in at the window. John was not at all sur- prised at this, either. There had been so much getting in and out of win- dows in the course of the last hour or so, that he had quite forgotten the door, and seemed to have lived among such exercises from infancy.

The man wore a large, dark, faded doak, and a slouched hat; he walked up close to John, and looked at him. John returned the compliment with interest. "How long have you been sitting thus?" said the man. "John considered, but nothing came of it.

"Which way have the party gone?" Some wandering speculations rela- tive to the fashion of the stranger's boots, got into Mr. Willet's mind by some accident or other, but they got out again in a hurry, and left him in his former state. "You would do well to speak," said the man; "you may keep a whole skin, though you have nothing else left that can be hurt. Which way have the party gone?" "That!" said John, finding his voice all at once, and nodding with perfect good faith—he couldn't point; he was so tightly bound—in exactly the opposite direction to the right one.

"You lie!" said the man angrily, and with a threatening gesture. I came that way. You would betray me." It was so evident that John's im- perturbability was not assumed, but was the result of the late proceed- ings under his roof, that the man stayed his hand in the very act of striking him, and turned away. John looked after him without so much as a twitch in a single nerve of his face. He seized a glass, and holding it under one of the little casks until a few drops were collect- ed, drank them greedily off, then, throwing it down upon the floor im- patiently, he took the vessel in his hands and drained it into his throat. Some scraps of bread and meat were scattered about, and on these he fell next, eating them with voracity, and pausing every now and then to lis- ten for some fancied noise outside. When he had refreshed himself in this manner with violent haste, and raised another barrel to his lips, he pulled his hat upon his brow as though he were about to leave the house, and turned to John.

"Where are your servants?" Mr. Willet indistinctly remembered to have heard the rioters calling to them to throw the key of the room in which they were, out of window, for their keeping. He therefore re- plied, "Locked up." "Well for them if they remain quiet and well for you if you do the like," said the man. "Now show me the way the party went."

This time Mr. Willet indicated it correctly. The man was hurrying to the door, when suddenly there came towards them on the wind, the loud and rapid tolling of an alarm bell, and then a bright and vivid glare streamed up, which illuminated, not only the whole chamber, but all the country.

It was not the sudden change from darkness to this dreadful light, it was not the sound of distant shrieks and shouts of triumphs, it was not this dread invasion of the seren- ity and peace of night, that drove the man back as though a thunder- bolt had struck him. It was the Bell. If the ghastliest shape the hu- man mind has ever pictured in its wildest dreams had risen up before him, he could not have staggered backward from its touch, as he did from the first sound of that loud iron voice. With eyes that started from his head, his limbs convulsed, his face most horrible to see, he raised one arm high up into the air, and holding something visionary back and

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down, with his other hand, drove at it as though he held a knife and stabbed it to the heart. He clutched his hair, and stopped his ears, and travelled madly round and round, then gave a frightful cry, and with it rushed away; still, still, the Bell tolled on and seemed to follow him— louder and louder, hotter and hotter yet. The glare grew brighter, the roar of voices deeper, the crash of heavy bodies falling shook the air; bright streams of sparks rose up into the sky, but louder than them all— rising faster far, to Heaven—a million times more fierce and furious— speaking the language of the dead—the Bell—the Bell!

What hunt of spectres could sur- pass that dread pursuit and fight? Had there been a legion of them on his track, he could have better borne it. They would have had a begin- ning and an end, but here all space was full. The one pursuing voice was everywhere; it sounded in the earth, the air; shook the long grass, and howled among the trembling trees. The echoes caught it up, the owls hooted as it flew upon the breeze, the nightingale was silent and hid herself among the thickest boughs; it seemed to roar and urge the angry fire, and last it into nee- ness; everything was steeped in one prevailing red, the glow was every- where; nature was drenched in blood, still the remorseless crying of that awful voice—the Bell, the Bell!

It ceased; but not in his ears. The knell was at his heart. No work of man had ever voice like that which sounded there, and warned him that it cried unceasingly to Heaven. Who could hear that bell, and not know what it said! There was murder in its every note—cruel, relentless, savage murder—the murder of a confi- dence, by one who held his every trust. Its ringing summoned phan- toms from their graves. What face was that, in which a friendly smile changed to a look of half incredulous horror, which stiffened for a moment into one of pain, then changed again into an imploring glance at Heaven—and so fell idly down with upturned eyes, like the dead stags he had often peeped at when a little child, shrinking and shuddering—there was a dreadful thing to think of now!—and clinging to an apron as he look- ed! He sank upon the ground, and grovelling down as if he would dig himself a place to hide in, covered his face and ears; but, no, no, no— a hundred walls and roofs of brass would not shut out that bell, for in it spoke the wrathful voice of God, and from that voice the whole wide universe could not afford a refuge!

While he rushed up and down, not knowing where to turn, and while he lay crouching there, the work went briskly on indeed. When they left the Maypole, the rioters formed into a solid body, and advanced at a quick pace towards the Warren. Rumor of their approach having gone before, they found the garden doors fast closed, the windows made secure, and the house profoundly dark, not a light being visible in any portion of the building. After some fruitless ringing at the bells, and beating at the iron gates, they drew off a few paces to reconnoitre, and confer upon the course it would be best to take.

Very little conference was needed, when all were bent upon one desper- ate purpose, infuriated with liquor, and flushed with successful riot. The word being given to surround the house, some climbed the gates, or dropped into the shallow trench and scaled the garden wall, while others pulled down the solid iron fence, and while they made a breach to enter by their own weapons of war. The house being completely encircled, a small number of men were despatch- ed to break open a tool-shed in the garden, and during their absence on this errand, the remainder contented themselves with knocking violently at the doors, and calling to those within, to come down and open them on peril of their lives.

No answer being returned to this repeated summons, and the detach- ment who had been sent away, coming back with an accession of pick- axes, spades, and hoes, they—togeth- er with those who had such arms already, or carried (as many did) axes, poles, and crow-bars—struggled in- to the foremost tank, ready to beset the doors and windows. They had not at this time more than a dozen lighted torches among them, but when these preparations were com- pleted, flaming links were distributed and passed from hand to hand with such rapidity, that in a minute's time, at least two-thirds of the whole roaring mass bore, each man in his hand, a blazing brand. Whirling these about their heads they raised a loud shout, and fell to work upon the doors and windows.

Amidst the clattering of heavy the cries and execrations of the mob, blows, the rattling of broken glass, and all the din and turmoil of the scene, Hugh and his friends kept to- gether at the turret door where Mr. Haredele had last admitted him and old John Willet; and spent their united force on that. It was a strong old oaken door, guarded by good bolts and a heavy bar, but it soon went crashing in upon the narrow stairs behind, and made, as it were, a platform to facilitate their tear- ing up into the rooms above. Almost at the same moment, a dozen other points were forced, and at every one the crowd poured in like water.

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A few armed servant-men were posted in the halls, and when the rioters forced an entrance there, they fired some half a dozen shots. But these taking no effect and the con- course coming on like an army of devils, they only thought of consult- ing their own safety, and retreated, echoing their assailants' cries, and hoping in the confusion to be taken for rioters themselves, in which strat- egem they succeeded, with the ex- ception of one old man who was never heard of again, and was said to have had his brains beaten out with an iron bar (one of his fellows re- ported that he had seen the old man fall), and to have been afterwards burned in the flames.

The besiegers being now in complete possession of the house, spread them- selves over it from garret to cellar, and piled their demon labors fiercely. While some small parties kindled bon- fires underneath the windows, others broke up the furniture and the flames, the fragments down to feed the flames below, where the apertures in the wall (windows no longer) were large enough, they threw out tables, chests of drawers, beds, mirrors, pictures, and flung them whole into the fire, while every fresh addition to the blazing masses was received with shouts, and howls, and yells, which added new and dismal terrors to the conflagration. Those who had axes and had spent their fury on the no- vables, chopped and tore down the doors and window-frames, broke up the flooring, hewed away the rafters, and buried men who lingered in the upper rooms, in heaps of ruins. Some searched the drawers, the chests, the boxes, writing-desks, and closets, for jewels, plate, and money; while others less mindful of gain and more mad for destruction, cast their whole contents into the court- yard without examination, and called to those below to heap them on the casks, rushed to and fro stark mad, setting fire to all they saw— often to the dresses of their own friends—and kindling the building in so many parts that some had no time for escape, and were seen with drooping heads and blackened faces, hanging senseless on the window-sills to which they had crawled, until they were sucked and drawn into the burning gulf. The more the fire cracked and raged the wilder and more cruel the men grew, as though moving in that element they became fiends, and changed their earthly na- ture for the qualities that give de- light in hell.

The burning pile, revealing rooms and passages red hot, through gaps made in the crumbling walls; the tri- butary fires that licked the outer bricks and stones, with their long forked tongues, and ran up to meet the glowing mass within; the shining of the flames upon the villains who looked on and fed them, the roaring of the angry blaze, so bright and high that it seemed in its rapacity to have swallowed up the very smoke, the living makes the wind bore, rapidly away and hurried on with the fire a storm of fiery snow, the noiseless breaving of great beams of wood, which fell like feathers on the heap of ashes, and crumbled in the very act to sparks and powder, the lurid tinge that overspread the sky, and the darkness, very deep by contrast, which prevailed around; the exposure to the coarse, common gaze, of every little nook which usages of home had made a sacred place, and the destruc- tion by rude hands of every lit- tle household favorite which old as- sociations made a dear and precious thing, all this taking place—not among pitying looks and friendly mur- murs of compassion, but brutal shouts and exultations, which seemed to make the very rats who stood by the old house too long, creatures, with some claim upon the pity and regard of those its roof had sheltered—com- bined to form a scene never to be forgotten by those who saw it, and were not actors in the work, so long as life endured.

And who were they? The alarm- bell rang—and it was pulled by no faint or hesitating hands—for a long time, but not a soul was seen. Some of the insurgents said that when it ceased, they heard the shrieks of wo- men, and saw some garments flutter- ing in the air, as a party of men bore away no unresisting burdens. No one could say that this was true or false, in such an uproar, but where was Hugh? Who among them had seen him, since the forcing of the doors? The cry spread through the body. Where was Hugh!

"Here!" he hoarsely cried, appear- ing from the darkness, out of breath, and blackened with the smoke. "We have done all we can, the fire is burn- ing itself out, and even the corners where it hasn't spread, are nothing but heaps of ruins. Disperse, my lads, while the coast's clear; get back by different ways, and meet as usual!" With that, he disappeared again, contrary to his wont, for he was always first to advance, and last to go away—leaving them to follow homewards as they would.

It was not an easy task to draw off such a throng. If Bedlam rates had been flung open wide, there could not have issued forth such maniacs as the frenzy of that night had made. There were men there who danced and trampled on the beds of flowers as though they trod down human enemies, and wrenched them from the stalks, like savages who twisted human necks. There were men who cast their lights

ed torches in the air, and suffered them to fall upon their heads and faces, blistering the skin with deep unseemly burns. There were men who rushed up to the fire, and paddled in it with their hands as if in water, and others who were restrained by force from plunging in, to gratify their deadly longing. On the skull of one drunken lad—not twenty, by his looks—who lay upon the ground with a bottle to his mouth, the lead from the roof came streaming down in a shower of liquid fire, white hot, melting his head like wax. When the scattered parties were collected, men—living yet, but singed as with hot irons—were plucked out of the cellars and carried off upon the shoulders of others, who strove to waken when as they went along, with ribald jokes, and left them, dead, in the passages of hospitals. But of all the howling throng not one learned mercy, or sickened at these sights, nor was the fierce, besotted, sense- less rage of one man gluted.

Slowly, and in small clusters, with hoarse hurrahs and repetitions of their usual cry, the assembly dropped away. The last few red-eyed strag- glers reeled after those who had gone before, the distant noise of men call- ing to each other, and whistling for others whom they missed, grew fainter and fainter; at length even these sounds died away, and silence reign- ed alone.

Silence indeed! Glare of the flames had sunk into a fitful flashing light; and the gentle stars, invisible till now, looked down upon the blacken- ing heap. A dull smoke hung upon the ruin, as though to hide it from those eyes of Heaven; and the wind forebore to move it. Bare walls,

roof open to the sky—chambers, where the beloved dead had, many and many a fair day, risen to new life and en- ergy, where so many dear ones had been sad and merry, which were con- nected with so many thoughts and hopes, regrets and changes—all gone. Nothing left but a dull and dreary blank—a smouldering heap of dust and ashes—the silence and solitude of utter desolation.

(To be Continued)

When we were children the infinite lay beyond the next mountain be- cause it was the unknown. We grew up and we got knowledge; and knowledge destroyed our dreams, and left us only commonplace. It is the unknown and unlimited that still ap- peals to us—the something behind the dawn, and beyond the sunset, and far away athwart the black line of that horizon, that is forever calling, call- ing and beckoning to us to go thither.—Rev. P. A. Sheehan.

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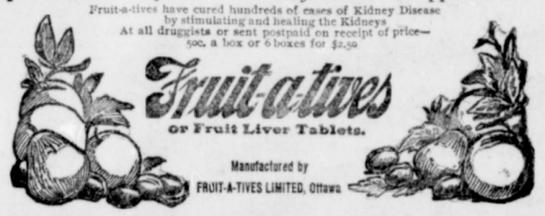
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Table with 4 columns: DAY OF MONTH, DAY OF WEEK, COLOR OF VESTMENTS, and FEASTS. It lists the days of the month from Dec 1 to Dec 31, including the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Sundays of Advent, and the Octave of Christmas.



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