

Chapter LXIX

It was the dead of night, and very dark, when Barnaby, with his stumbling comrade, approached the place where he had left his father; but he could see him stealing away into the gloom, distrustful even of him, and rapidly retreating. After calling to him twice or thrice that there was nothing to fear, but without effect, he suffered Hugh to sink upon the ground, and followed to bring him back.

He continued to creep away, until Barnaby was close upon him; then turned, and said in a terrible, though suppressed voice:

'Let me go. Do not lay hands upon me. You have told her; and you and she together have betrayed me!'

Barnaby looked at him, in silence.

'You have seen your mother!'

'No,' cried Barnaby, eagerly. 'Not for a long time - longer than I can tell. A whole year, I think. Is she here?'

His father looked upon him steadfastly for a few moments, and then said - drawing nearer to him as he spoke, for, seeing his face, and hearing his words, it was impossible to doubt his truth:

'What man is that?'

'Hugh - Hugh. Only Hugh. You know him. HE will not harm you. Why, you're afraid of Hugh! Ha ha ha! Afraid of gruff, old, noisy Hugh!'

'What man is he, I ask you,' he rejoined so fiercely, that Barnaby stopped in his laugh, and shrinking back, surveyed him with a look of terrified amazement.

'Why, how stern you are! You make me fear you, though you are my father. Why do you speak to me so?'

- 'I want,' he answered, putting away the hand which his son, with a timid desire to propitiate him, laid upon his sleeve, - 'I want an answer, and you give me only jeers and questions. Who have you brought with you to this hiding-place, poor fool; and where is the blind man?'

'I don't know where. His house was close shut. I waited, but no person came; that was no fault of mine. This is Hugh - brave Hugh, who broke into that ugly jail, and set us free. Aha! You like him now, do you? You like him now!'

'Why does he lie upon the ground?'

'He has had a fall, and has been drinking. The fields and trees go round, and round, and round with him, and the ground heaves under his feet. You know him? You remember? See!'

They had by this time returned to where he lay, and both stooped over him to look into his face.

'I recollect the man,' his father murmured. 'Why did you bring him here?'

'Because he would have been killed if I had left him over yonder. They were firing guns and shedding blood. Does the sight of blood turn you sick, father? I see it does, by your face. That's like me - What are you looking at?'

'At nothing!' said the murderer softly, as he started back a pace or two, and gazed with sunken jaw and staring eyes above his son's head. 'At nothing!'

He remained in the same attitude and with the same expression on his face for a minute or more; then glanced slowly round as if he had lost something; and went shivering back, towards the shed.

'Shall I bring him in, father?' asked Barnaby, who had looked on, wondering.

He only answered with a suppressed groan, and lying down upon the ground, wrapped his cloak about his head, and shrunk into the darkest corner.

Finding that nothing would rouse Hugh now, or make him sensible for a moment, Barnaby dragged him along the grass, and laid him on a little heap of refuse hay and straw which had been his own bed; first having brought some water from a running stream hard by, and washed his wound, and laved his hands and face. Then he lay down himself, between the two, to pass the night; and looking at the stars, fell fast asleep.

Awakened early in the morning, by the sunshine and the songs of birds, and hum of insects, he left them sleeping in the hut, and walked into the sweet and pleasant air. But he felt that on his jaded senses, oppressed and burdened with the dreadful scenes of last night, and many nights before, all the beauties of opening day, which he had so often tasted, and in which he had had such deep delight, fell heavily. He thought of the blithe mornings when he and the dogs went bounding on together through the woods and fields; and the

recollection filled his eyes with tears. He had no consciousness, God help him, of having done wrong, nor had he any new perception of the merits of the cause in which he had been engaged, or those of the men who advocated it; but he was full of cares now, and regrets, and dismal recollections, and wishes (quite unknown to him before) that this or that event had never happened, and that the sorrow and suffering of so many people had been spared. And now he began to think how happy they would be - his father, mother, he, and Hugh - if they rambled away together, and lived in some lonely place, where there were none of these troubles; and that perhaps the blind man, who had talked so wisely about gold, and told him of the great secrets he knew, could teach them how to live without being pinched by want. As this occurred to him, he was the more sorry that he had not seen him last night; and he was still brooding over this regret, when his father came, and touched him on the shoulder.

'Ah!' cried Barnaby, starting from his fit of thoughtfulness. 'Is it only you?'

'Who should it be?'

'I almost thought,' he answered, 'it was the blind man. I must have some talk with him, father.'

'And so must I, for without seeing him, I don't know where to fly or what to do, and lingering here, is death. You must go to him again, and bring him here.'

'Must I!' cried Barnaby, delighted; 'that's brave, father. That's what I want to do.'

'But you must bring only him, and none other. And though you wait at his door a whole day and night, still you must wait, and not come back without him.'

'Don't you fear that,' he cried gaily. 'He shall come, he shall come.'

'Trim off these gewgaws,' said his father, plucking the scraps of ribbon and the feathers from his hat, 'and over your own dress wear my cloak. Take heed how you go, and they will be too busy in the streets to notice you. Of your coming back you need take no account, for he'll manage that, safely.'

'To be sure!' said Barnaby. 'To be sure he will! A wise man, father, and one who can teach us to be rich. Oh! I know him, I know him.'

He was speedily dressed, and as well disguised as he could be. With a lighter heart he then set off upon his second journey, leaving Hugh,

who was still in a drunken stupor, stretched upon the ground within the shed, and his father walking to and fro before it.

The murderer, full of anxious thoughts, looked after him, and paced up and down, disquieted by every breath of air that whispered among the boughs, and by every light shadow thrown by the passing clouds upon the daisied ground. He was anxious for his safe return, and yet, though his own life and safety hung upon it, felt a relief while he was gone. In the intense selfishness which the constant presence before him of his great crimes, and their consequences here and hereafter, engendered, every thought of Barnaby, as his son, was swallowed up and lost. Still, his presence was a torture and reproach; in his wild eyes, there were terrible images of that guilty night; with his unearthly aspect, and his half-formed mind, he seemed to the murderer a creature who had sprung into existence from his victim's blood. He could not bear his look, his voice, his touch; and yet he was forced, by his own desperate condition and his only hope of cheating the gibbet, to have him by his side, and to know that he was inseparable from his single chance of escape.

He walked to and fro, with little rest, all day, revolving these things in his mind; and still Hugh lay, unconscious, in the shed. At length, when the sun was setting, Barnaby returned, leading the blind man, and talking earnestly to him as they came along together.

The murderer advanced to meet them, and bidding his son go on and speak to Hugh, who had just then staggered to his feet, took his place at the blind man's elbow, and slowly followed, towards the shed.

'Why did you send HIM?' said Stagg. 'Don't you know it was the way to have him lost, as soon as found?'

'Would you have had me come myself?' returned the other.

'Humph! Perhaps not. I was before the jail on Tuesday night, but missed you in the crowd. I was out last night, too. There was good work last night - gay work - profitable work' - he added, rattling the money in his pockets.

'Have you - '

- 'Seen your good lady? Yes.'

'Do you mean to tell me more, or not?'

'I'll tell you all,' returned the blind man, with a laugh. 'Excuse me - but I love to see you so impatient. There's energy in it.'

'Does she consent to say the word that may save me?'

'No,' returned the blind man emphatically, as he turned his face towards him. 'No. Thus it is. She has been at death's door since she lost her darling - has been insensible, and I know not what. I tracked her to a hospital, and presented myself (with your leave) at her bedside. Our talk was not a long one, for she was weak, and there being people near I was not quite easy. But I told her all that you and I agreed upon, and pointed out the young gentleman's position, in strong terms. She tried to soften me, but that, of course (as I told her), was lost time. She cried and moaned, you may be sure; all women do. Then, of a sudden, she found her voice and strength, and said that Heaven would help her and her innocent son; and that to Heaven she appealed against us - which she did; in really very pretty language, I assure you. I advised her, as a friend, not to count too much on assistance from any such distant quarter - recommended her to think of it - told her where I lived - said I knew she would send to me before noon, next day - and left her, either in a faint or shamming.'

When he had concluded this narration, during which he had made several pauses, for the convenience of cracking and eating nuts, of which he seemed to have a pocketful, the blind man pulled a flask from his pocket, took a draught himself, and offered it to his companion.

'You won't, won't you?' he said, feeling that he pushed it from him. 'Well! Then the gallant gentleman who's lodging with you, will. Hallo, bully!'

'Death!' said the other, holding him back. 'Will you tell me what I am to do!'

'Do! Nothing easier. Make a moonlight flitting in two hours' time with the young gentleman (he's quite ready to go; I have been giving him good advice as we came along), and get as far from London as you can. Let me know where you are, and leave the rest to me. She MUST come round; she can't hold out long; and as to the chances of your being retaken in the meanwhile, why it wasn't one man who got out of Newgate, but three hundred. Think of that, for your comfort.'

'We must support life. How?'

'How!' repeated the blind man. 'By eating and drinking. And how get meat and drink, but by paying for it! Money!' he cried, slapping his pocket. 'Is money the word? Why, the streets have been running money. Devil send that the sport's not over yet, for these are jolly times; golden, rare, roaring, scrambling times. Hallo, bully! Hallo! Hallo! Drink, bully, drink. Where are ye there! Hallo!'

With such vociferations, and with a boisterous manner which bespoke his perfect abandonment to the general licence and disorder, he groped his way towards the shed, where Hugh and Barnaby were sitting on the ground.

'Put it about!' he cried, handing his flask to Hugh. 'The kennels run with wine and gold. Guineas and strong water flow from the very pumps. About with it, don't spare it!'

Exhausted, unwashed, unshorn, begrimed with smoke and dust, his hair clotted with blood, his voice quite gone, so that he spoke in whispers; his skin parched up by fever, his whole body bruised and cut, and beaten about, Hugh still took the flask, and raised it to his lips. He was in the act of drinking, when the front of the shed was suddenly darkened, and Dennis stood before them.

'No offence, no offence,' said that personage in a conciliatory tone, as Hugh stopped in his draught, and eyed him, with no pleasant look, from head to foot. 'No offence, brother. Barnaby here too, eh? How are you, Barnaby? And two other gentlemen! Your humble servant, gentlemen. No offence to YOU either, I hope. Eh, brothers?'

Notwithstanding that he spoke in this very friendly and confident manner, he seemed to have considerable hesitation about entering, and remained outside the roof. He was rather better dressed than usual: wearing the same suit of threadbare black, it is true, but having round his neck an unwholesome-looking cravat of a yellowish white; and, on his hands, great leather gloves, such as a gardener might wear in following his trade. His shoes were newly greased, and ornamented with a pair of rusty iron buckles; the packthread at his knees had been renewed; and where he wanted buttons, he wore pins. Altogether, he had something the look of a tipstaff, or a bailiff's follower, desperately faded, but who had a notion of keeping up the appearance of a professional character, and making the best of the worst means.

'You're very snug here,' said Mr Dennis, pulling out a mouldy pocket-handkerchief, which looked like a decomposed halter, and wiping his forehead in a nervous manner.

'Not snug enough to prevent your finding us, it seems,' Hugh answered, sulkily.

'Why I'll tell you what, brother,' said Dennis, with a friendly smile, 'when you don't want me to know which way you're riding, you must wear another sort of bells on your horse. Ah! I know the sound of them you wore last night, and have got quick ears for 'em; that's the truth. Well, but how are you, brother?'

He had by this time approached, and now ventured to sit down by him.

'How am I?' answered Hugh. 'Where were you yesterday? Where did you go when you left me in the jail? Why did you leave me? And what did you mean by rolling your eyes and shaking your fist at me, eh?'

'I shake my fist! - at you, brother!' said Dennis, gently checking Hugh's uplifted hand, which looked threatening.

'Your stick, then; it's all one.'

'Lord love you, brother, I meant nothing. You don't understand me by half. I shouldn't wonder now,' he added, in the tone of a desponding and an injured man, 'but you thought, because I wanted them chaps left in the prison, that I was a going to desert the banners?'

Hugh told him, with an oath, that he had thought so.

'Well!' said Mr Dennis, mournfully, 'if you an't enough to make a man mistrust his feller-creeturs, I don't know what is. Desert the banners! Me! Ned Dennis, as was so christened by his own father! - Is this axe your'n, brother?'

Yes, it's mine,' said Hugh, in the same sullen manner as before; 'it might have hurt you, if you had come in its way once or twice last night. Put it down.'

'Might have hurt me!' said Mr Dennis, still keeping it in his hand, and feeling the edge with an air of abstraction. 'Might have hurt me! and me exerting myself all the time to the very best advantage. Here's a world! And you're not a-going to ask me to take a sup out of that 'ere bottle, eh?'

Hugh passed it towards him. As he raised it to his lips, Barnaby jumped up, and motioning them to be silent, looked eagerly out.

'What's the matter, Barnaby?' said Dennis, glancing at Hugh and dropping the flask, but still holding the axe in his hand.

'Hush!' he answered softly. 'What do I see glittering behind the hedge?'

'What!' cried the hangman, raising his voice to its highest pitch, and laying hold of him and Hugh. 'Not SOLDIERS, surely!'

That moment, the shed was filled with armed men; and a body of horse, galloping into the field, drew up before it.

'There!' said Dennis, who remained untouched among them when they had seized their prisoners; 'it's them two young ones, gentlemen, that the proclamation puts a price on. This other's an escaped felon. - I'm sorry for it, brother,' he added, in a tone of resignation, addressing himself to Hugh; 'but you've brought it on yourself; you forced me to do it; you wouldn't respect the soundest constitutional principles, you know; you went and violated the very framework of society. I had sooner have given away a trifle in charity than done this, I would upon my soul. - If you'll keep fast hold on 'em, gentlemen, I think I can make a shift to tie 'em better than you can.'

But this operation was postponed for a few moments by a new occurrence. The blind man, whose ears were quicker than most people's sight, had been alarmed, before Barnaby, by a rustling in the bushes, under cover of which the soldiers had advanced. He retreated instantly - had hidden somewhere for a minute - and probably in his confusion mistaking the point at which he had emerged, was now seen running across the open meadow. An officer cried directly that he had helped to plunder a house last night. He was loudly called on, to surrender. He ran the harder, and in a few seconds would have been out of gunshot. The word was given, and the men fired.

There was a breathless pause and a profound silence, during which all eyes were fixed upon him. He had been seen to start at the discharge, as if the report had frightened him. But he neither stopped nor slackened his pace in the least, and ran on full forty yards further. Then, without one reel or stagger, or sign of faintness, or quivering of any limb, he dropped.

Some of them hurried up to where he lay; - the hangman with them. Everything had passed so quickly, that the smoke had not yet scattered, but curled slowly off in a little cloud, which seemed like the dead man's spirit moving solemnly away. There were a few drops of blood upon the grass - more, when they turned him over - that was all.

'Look here! Look here!' said the hangman, stooping one knee beside the body, and gazing up with a disconsolate face at the officer and men. 'Here's a pretty sight!'

'Stand out of the way,' replied the officer. 'Serjeant! see what he had about him.'

The man turned his pockets out upon the grass, and counted, besides some foreign coins and two rings, five-and-forty guineas in gold. These were bundled up in a handkerchief and carried away; the body remained there for the present, but six men and the serjeant were left to take it to the nearest public-house.

'Now then, if you're going,' said the serjeant, clapping Dennis on the back, and pointing after the officer who was walking towards the shed.

To which Mr Dennis only replied, 'Don't talk to me!' and then repeated what he had said before, namely, 'Here's a pretty sight!'

'It's not one that you care for much, I should think,' observed the serjeant coolly.

'Why, who,' said Mr Dennis rising, 'should care for it, if I don't?'

'Oh! I didn't know you was so tender-hearted,' said the serjeant. 'That's all!'

'Tender-hearted!' echoed Dennis. 'Tender-hearted! Look at this man. Do you call THIS constitootional? Do you see him shot through and through instead of being worked off like a Briton? Damme, if I know which party to side with. You're as bad as the other. What's to become of the country if the military power's to go a superseding the civilians in this way? Where's this poor feller-creetur's rights as a citizen, that he didn't have ME in his last moments! I was here. I was willing. I was ready. These are nice times, brother, to have the dead crying out against us in this way, and sleep comfortably in our beds arterwards; wery nice!'

Whether he derived any material consolation from binding the prisoners, is uncertain; most probably he did. At all events his being summoned to that work, diverted him, for the time, from these painful reflections, and gave his thoughts a more congenial occupation.

They were not all three carried off together, but in two parties; Barnaby and his father, going by one road in the centre of a body of foot; and Hugh, fast bound upon a horse, and strongly guarded by a troop of cavalry, being taken by another.

They had no opportunity for the least communication, in the short interval which preceded their departure; being kept strictly apart. Hugh only observed that Barnaby walked with a drooping head among his guard, and, without raising his eyes, that he tried to wave his fettered hand when he passed. For himself, he buoyed up his courage as he rode along, with the assurance that the mob would force his jail wherever it might be, and set him at liberty. But when they got into London, and more especially into Fleet Market, lately the stronghold of the rioters, where the military were rooting out the last remnant of the crowd, he saw that this hope was gone, and felt that he was riding to his death.