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[Authors](#)
[Contact](#)

[Great Expectations](#)

[Charles Dickens](#)

This Book:
[Contents](#)
[Previous Chapter](#)
[Next Chapter](#)

Chapter 29

BETIMES in the morning I was up and out. It was too early yet to go to Miss Havisham's, so I loitered into the country on Miss Havisham's side of town -- which was not Joe's side; I could go there to-morrow -- thinking about my patroness, and painting brilliant pictures of her plans for me.

She had adopted Estella, she had as good as adopted me, and it could not fail to be her intention to bring us together. She reserved it for me to restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a going and the cold hearths a blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin -- in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess. I had stopped to look at the house as I passed; and its seared red brick walls, blocked windows, and strong green iron clasping even the stacks of chimneys with its twigs and tendons, as if with sinewy old arms, had made up a rich attractive mystery, of which I was the hero. Estella was the inspiration of it, and the heart of it, of course. But, though she had taken such strong possession of me, though my fancy and my hope were so set upon her, though her influence on my boyish life and character had been all-powerful, I did not, even that romantic morning, invest her with any attributes save those she possessed. I mention this in this place, of a fixed purpose, because it is the clue by which I am to be followed into my poor labyrinth. According to my experience, the conventional notion of a lover cannot be always true. The un-qualified truth is, that when I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. Once for all; I knew to my sorrow, often and often, if not always, that I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be. Once for all; I loved her none the less because I knew it, and it had no more influence in restraining me, than if I had devoutly believed her to be human perfection.

I so shaped out my walk as to arrive at the gate at my old time. When I had rung at the bell with an unsteady hand, I turned my back upon the gate, while I tried to get my breath and keep the beating of my heart moderately quiet. I heard the side door open, and steps come across the court-yard; but I pretended not to hear, even when the gate swung on its rusty hinges.

Being at last touched on the shoulder, I started and turned. I started much more naturally then, to find myself confronted by a man in a sober grey dress. The last man I should have expected to see in that place of porter at Miss Havisham's door.

‘Otlick!’

‘Ah, young master, there's more changes than yours. But come in, come in. It's opposed to my orders to hold the gate open.’

I entered and he swung it, and locked it, and took the key out. ‘Yes!’ said he, facing round, after doggedly preceding me a few steps towards the house. ‘Here I am!’

‘How did you come here?’

‘I come here,’ he retorted, ‘on my legs. I had my box brought alongside me in a barrow.’

‘Are you here for good?’

‘I ain't here for harm, young master, I suppose?’

I was not so sure of that. I had leisure to entertain the retort in my mind, while he slowly lifted his heavy glance from the pavement, up my legs and arms, to my face.

‘Then you have left the forge?’ I said.

‘Do this look like a forge?’ replied Orlick, sending his glance all round him with an air of injury. ‘Now, do it look like it?’

I asked him how long he had left Gargery's forge?

‘One day is so like another here,’ he replied, ‘that I don't know without casting it up. However, I come here some time since you left.’

‘I could have told you that, Orlick.’

‘Ah!’ said he, drily. ‘But then you've got to be a scholar.’

By this time we had come to the house, where I found his room to be one just within the side door, with a little window in it looking on the court-yard. In its small proportions, it was not unlike the kind of place usually assigned to a gate-porter in Paris. Certain keys were hanging on the wall, to which he now added the gate-key; and his patchwork-covered bed was in a little inner division or recess. The whole had a slovenly confined and sleepy look, like a cage for a human dormouse: while he, looming dark and heavy in the shadow of a corner by the window, looked like the human dormouse for whom it was fitted up -- as indeed he was.

‘I never saw this room before,’ I remarked; ‘but there used to be no Porter here.’

‘No,’ said he; ‘not till it got about that there was no protection on the premises, and it come to be considered dangerous, with convicts and Tag and Rag and Bobtail going up and down. And then I was recommended to the place as a man who could give another man as good as he brought, and I took it. It's easier than bellowing and hammering. -- That's loaded, that is.’

My eye had been caught by a gun with a brass bound stock over the chimney-piece, and his eye had followed mine.

‘Well,’ said I, not desirous of more conversation, ‘shall I go up to Miss Havisham?’

‘Bum me, if I know!’ he retorted, first stretching himself and then shaking himself; ‘my orders ends here, young master. I give this here bell a rap with this here hammer, and you go on along the passage till you meet somebody.’

‘I am expected, I believe?’

‘Burn me twice over, if I can say!’ said he.

Upon that, I turned down the long passage which I had first trodden in my thick boots, and he made his bell sound. At the end of the passage, while the bell was still reverberating, I found Sarah Pocket: who appeared to have now become constitutionally green and yellow by reason of me.

‘Oh!’ said she. ‘You, is it, Mr Pip?’

‘It is, Miss Pocket. I am glad to tell you that Mr Pocket and family are all well.’

‘Are they any wiser?’ said Samh, with a dismal shake of the head; ‘they had better be wiser, than well. Ah, Matthew, Matthew! You know your way, sir?’

Tolerably, for I had gone up the staircase in the dark, many a time. I ascended it now, in lighter boots than of yore, and tapped in my old way at the door of Miss Havisham’s room. ‘Pip’s rap,’ I heard her say, immediately; ‘come in, Pip.’

She was in her chair near the old table, in the old dress, with her two hands crossed on her stick, her chin resting on them, and her eyes on the fire. Sitting near her, with the white shoe that had never been worn, in her hand, and her head bent as she looked at it, was an elegant lady whom I had never seen.

‘Come in, Pip,’ Miss Havisham continued to mutter, without looking round or up; ‘come in, Pip, how do you do, Pip? so you kiss my hand as if I were a queen, eh? -- Well?’

She looked up at me suddenly, only moving her eyes, and repeated in a grimly playful manner,

‘Well?’

‘I heard, Miss Havisham,’ said I, rather at a loss, ‘that you were so kind as to wish me to come and see you, and I came directly.’

‘Well?’

The lady whom I had never seen before, lifted up her eyes and looked archly at me, and then I saw that the eyes were Estella’s eyes. But she was so much changed, was so much more beautiful, so much more womanly, in all things winning admiration had made such wonderful advance, that I seemed to have made none. I fancied, as I looked at her, that I alipped hopelessly back into the coarse and common boy again. O the sense of distance and disparity that came upon me, and the inaccessibility that came about her!

She gave me her hand. I stammered something about the pleasure I felt in seeing her again, and about my having looked forward to it for a long, long time.

‘Do you find her much changed, Pip?’ asked Miss Havisham, with her greedy look, and striking her stick upon a chair that stood between them, as a sign to me to sit down there.

‘When I came in, Miss Havisham, I thought there was nothing of Estella in the face or figure; but now it all settles down so curiously into the old--’

‘What? You are not going to say into the old Estella?’ Miss Havisham interrupted. ‘She was proud and insulting, and you wanted to go away from her. Don’t you remember?’

I said confusedly that that was long ago, and that I knew no better then, and the like. Estella smiled with perfect composure, and said she had no doubt of my having been quite right, and of her having been very disagreeable.

‘Is *he* changed?’ Miss Havisham asked her.

‘Very much,’ said Estella, looking at me.

‘Less coarse and common?’ said Miss Havisham, playing with Estella’s hair.

Estella laughed, and looked at the shoe in her hand, and laughed again, and looked at me, and put the shoe down. She treated me as a boy still, but she lured me on.

We sat in the dreamy room among the old strange influences which had so wrought upon me, and I learnt that she had but just come home from France, and that she was going to London. Proud and wilful as of old, she had brought those qualities into such subjection to her beauty that it was impossible and out of nature -- or I thought so -- to separate them from her beauty. Truly it was impossible to dissociate her presence from all those wretched hankerings after money and gentility that had disturbed my boy-hood -- from all those ill-regulated aspirations that had first made me ashamed of home and Joe--from all those visions that had misled her face in the glowing fire, struck it out of the iron on the anvil, extracted it from the darkness of night to look in at the wooden window of the forge and flit away. In a word, it was impossible for me to separate her, in the past or in the present, from the innermost life of my life.

It was settled that I should stay there all the rest of the day, and return to the hotel at night, and to London to-morrow. When we had conversed for a while, Miss Havisham sent us two out to walk in the neglected garden: on our coming in by-and-by, she said, I should wheel her about a little as in times of yore.

So, Estella and I went out into the garden by the gate through which I had strayed to my encounter with the pale young gentleman, now Herbert: I, trembling in spirit and worshipping the very hem of her dress; she, quite composed and most decidedly not worshipping the hem of mine. As we drew near to the place of encounter, she stopped and said:

‘I must have been a singular little creature to hide and see that fight that day: but I did, and I enjoyed it very much.’

‘You rewarded me very much.’

‘Did I?’ she replied, in an incidental and forgetful way. ‘I remember I entertained a great objection to your adversary, because I took it ill that he should be brought here to pester me with his company.’

‘He and I are great friends now.’

‘Are you? I think I recollect though, that you read with his father?’

‘Yes.’

I made the admission with reluctance, for it seemed to have a boyish look, and she already treated me more than enough like a boy.

‘Since your change of fortune and prospects, you have changed your companions,’ said Estella.

‘Naturally,’ said I.

‘And necessarily,’ she added, in a haughty tone; ‘what was fit company for you once, would be quite unfit company for you now.’

In my conscience, I doubt very much whether I had any lingering intention left, of going to see Joe; but if I had, this observation put it to flight.

‘You had no idea of your impending good fortune, in those times?’ said Estella, with a slight wave of her hand, signifying in the fighting times.

‘Not the least.’

The air of completeness and superiority with which she walked at my side, and the air of youthfulness and submission with which I walked at hers, made a contrast that I strongly felt. It would have rankled in me more than it did, if I had not regarded myself as eliciting it by being so set apart for her and assigned to her.

The garden was too overgrown and rank for walking in with ease, and after we had made the round of it twice or thrice, we came out again into the brewery yard. I showed her to a nicety where I had seen her walking on the casks, that first old day, and she said, with a cold and careless look in that direction, ‘Did I? I reminded her where she had come out of the house and given me my meat and drink, and she said, ‘I don’t remember.’ ‘Not re- member that you made me cry?’ said I. ‘No,’ said she, and shook her head and looked about her. I verily believe that her not remembering and not minding in the least, made me cry again, inwardly -- and that is the sharpest crying of all.

‘You must know,’ said Estella, condescending to me as a brilliant and beautiful woman might, ‘that I have no heart -- if that has anything to do with my memory.’

I got through some jargon to the effect that I took the liberty of doubting that. That I knew better. That there could be no such beauty without it.

‘Oh! I have a heart to be stabbed in or shot in, I have no doubt,’ said Estella, ‘and, of course, if it ceased to beat I should cease to be. But you know what I mean. I have no softness there, no -- sympathy -- sentiment -- nonsense.’

What was it that was borne in upon my mind when she stood still and looked attentively at me? Anything that I had seen in Miss Havisham? No. In some of her looks and gestures there was that tinge of resemblance to Miss Havisham which may often be noticed to have been acquired by children, from grown persons with whom they have been much associated and secluded, and which, when childhood is passed, will produce a remarkable occasional likeness of expression between faces that are otherwise quite different. And yet I could not trace this to Miss Havisham. I looked again, and though she was still looking at me, the suggestion was gone.

What was it?

‘I am serious,’ said Estella, not so much with a frown (for her brow was smooth) as with a darkening of her face; ‘if we are to be thrown much together, you had better believe it at once. No!’ imperiously stopping me as I opened my lips. ‘I have not bestowed my tenderness anywhere. I have never had any such thing.’

In another moment we were in the brewery so long disused, and she pointed to the high gallery where I had seen her going out on that same first day, and told me she remembered to have been up there, and to have seen me standing scared below. As my eyes followed her white hand, again the same dim suggestion that I could not possibly grasp, crossed me. My involuntary start occasioned her to lay her hand upon my arm. Instantly the ghost passed once more, and was gone.

What was it?

‘What is the matter?’ asked Estella. ‘Are you scared again?’

‘I should be, if I believed what you said just now,’ I replied, to turn it off.

‘Then you don’t? Very well. It is said, at any rate. Miss Havisham will soon be expecting you at your old post, though I think that might be laid aside now, with other old belongings. Let us make one more round of the garden, and then go in. Come! You shall not shed tears for my cruelty to-day; you shall be my Page, and give me your shoulder.’

Her handsome dress had trailed upon the ground. She held it in one hand now, and with the other lightly touched my shoulder as we walked. We walked round the ruined garden twice or thrice more, and it was all in bloom for me. If the green and yellow growth of weed in the chinks of the old wall had been the most precious flowers that ever blew, it could not have been more cherished in my remembrance.

There was no discrepancy of years between us, to remove her far from me; we were of nearly the same age, though of course the age told for more in her case than in mine; but the air of in- accessibility which her beauty and her manner gave her, tormented me in the midst of my delight, and at the height of the assurance I felt that our patroness had chosen us for one another. Wretched boy!

At last we went back into the house, and there I heard, with surprise, that my guardian had come down to see Miss Havisham on business, and would come back to dinner. The old wintry branches of chandeliers in the room where the mouldering table was spread, had been lighted while we were out, and Miss Havisham was in her chair and waiting for me.

It was like pushing the chair itself back into the past, when we began the old slow circuit round about the ashes of the bridal feast. But, in the funereal room, with that figure of the grave fallen back in the chair fixing its eyes upon her, Estella looked more bright and beautiful than before, and I was under stronger enchantment.

The time so melted away, that our early dinner-hour drew close at hand, and Estella left us to prepare herself. We had stopped near the centre of the long table, and Miss Havisham, with one of her withered arms stretched out of the chair, rested that clenched hand upon the yellow cloth. As Estella looked back over her shoulder before going out at the door, Miss Havisham kissed that hand to her, with a ravenous intensity that was of its kind quite dreadful.

Then, Estella being gone and we two left alone, she turned to me, and said in a whisper:

'Is she beautiful, graceful, well-grown? Do you admire her?'

'Everybody must who sees her, Miss Havisham.'

She drew an arm round my neck, and drew my head close down to hers as she sat in the chair. 'Love her, love her, love her! How does she use you?'

Before I could answer (if I could have answered so difficult a question at all), she repeated, 'Love her, love her, love her! If she favours you, love her. If she wounds you, love her. If she tears your heart to pieces -- and as it gets older and stronger, it will tear deeper -- love her, love her, love her!'

Never had I seen such passionate eagerness as was joined to her utterance of these words. I could feel the muscles of the thin arm round my neck, swell with the vehemence that possessed her.

'Hear me, Pip! I adopted her to be loved. I bred her and educated her, to be loved. I developed her into what she is, that she might be loved. Love her!'

She said the word often enough, and there could be no doubt that she meant to say it; but if the often repeated word had been hate instead of love -- despair -- revenge -- dire death -- it could not have sounded from her lips more like a curse.

'I'll tell you,' said she, in the same hurried passionate whisper, 'what real love is. It is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter -- as I did!'

When she came to that, and to a wild cry that followed that, I caught her round the waist. For she rose up in the chair, in her shroud of a dress, and struck at the air as if she would as soon have struck herself against the wall and fallen dead.

All this passed in a few seconds. As I drew her down into her chair, I was conscious of a scent that I knew, and turning, saw my guardian in the room.

He always carried (I have not yet mentioned it, I think) a pocket-handkerchief of rich silk and of imposing proportions, which was of great value to him in his profession. I have seen him so terrify a client or a witness by ceremoniously unfolding this pocket-handkerchief as if he were immediately going to blow his nose, and then pausing, as if he knew he should not have time to do it before such client or witness committed himself, that the self-committal has followed directly, quite as a matter of course. When I saw him in the room, he had this expressive pocket-handkerchief in both hands, and was looking at us. On meeting my eye, he said plainly, by a momentary and silent pause in that attitude, 'Indeed? Singular!' and then put the handkerchief to its right use with wonderful effect.

Miss Havisham had seen him as soon as I, and was (like everybody else) afraid of him. She made a strong attempt to compose herself, and stammered that he was as punctual as ever.

'As punctual as ever,' he repeated, coming up to us. '(How do you do, Pip? Shall I give you a ride, Miss Havisham? Once round?) And so you are here, Pip?'

I told him when I had arrived, and how Miss Havisham had wished me to come and see Estella. To which he replied, 'Ah! Very fine young lady!' Then he pushed Miss Havisham in her chair before him, with one of his large hands, and put the other in his trousers-pocket as if the pocket were full of secrets.

'Well, Pip! How often have you seen Miss Estella before?' said he, when he came to a stop.

'How often?'

'Ah! How many times? Ten thousand times?'

'Oh! Certainly not so many.'

'Twice?'

'Jiggers,' interposed Miss Havisham, much to my relief; 'leave my Pip alone, and go with him to your dinner.'

He complied, and we groped our way down the dark stairs together. While we were still on our way to those detached apartments across the paved yard at the back, he asked me how often I had seen Miss Havisham eat and drink; offering me a breadth of choice, as usual, between a hundred times and once.

I considered, and said, 'Never.'

'And never will, Pip,' he retorted, with a frowning smile. 'She has never allowed herself to be seen doing either, since she lived this present life of hers. She wanders about in the night, and then lays hands on such food as she takes.'

'Pray, sir,' said I, 'may I ask you a question?'

'You may,' said he, 'and I may decline to answer it. Put your question.'

'Estella's name. Is it Havisham or --?' I had nothing to add.

'Or what?' said he.

'Is it Havisham?'

'It is Havisham.'

This brought us to the dinner-table, where she and Sarah Pocket awaited us. Mr Jiggers presided, Estella sat opposite to him, I faced my green and yellow friend. We dined very well, and were waited on by a maid-servant whom I had never seen in all my comings and goings, but who, for anything I know, had been in that mysterious house the whole time. After dinner, a bottle of choice old port was placed before my guardian (he was evidently well acquainted with the vintage), and the two ladies left us.

Anything to equal the determined reticence of Mr Jaggars under that roof, I never saw elsewhere, even in him. He kept his very looks to himself, and scarcely directed his eyes to Estella's face once during dinner. When she spoke to him, he listened, and in due course answered, but never looked at her, that I could see. On the other hand, she often looked at him, with interest and curiosity, if not distrust, but his face never showed the least consciousness. Throughout dinner he took a dry delight in making Sarah Pocket greener and yellower, by often referring in conversation with me to my expectations; but here, again, he showed no consciousness, and even made it appear that he extorted -- and even did extort, though I don't know how -- those references out of my innocent self.

And when he and I were left alone together, he sat with an air upon him of general lying by in consequence of information he possessed, that really was too much for me. He cross-examined his very wine when he had nothing else in hand. He held it between himself and the candle, tasted the port, rolled it in his mouth, swallowed it, looked at his glass again, smelt the port, tried it, drank it, filled again, and cross-examined the glass again, until I was as nervous as if I had known the wine to be telling him something to my disadvantage. Three or four times I feebly thought I would start conversation; but whenever he saw me going to ask him anything, he looked at me with his glass in his hand, and rolling his wine about in his mouth, as if requesting me to take notice that it was of no use, for he couldn't answer.

I think Miss Pocket was conscious that the sight of me involved her in the danger of being goaded to madness, and perhaps tearing off her cap -- which was a very hideous one, in the nature of a muslin mop -- and strewing the ground with her hair -- which assuredly had never grown on *her* head. She did not appear when we afterwards went up to Miss Havisham's room, and we four played at whist. In the interval, Miss Havisham, in a fantastic way, had put some of the most beautiful jewels from her dressing-table into Estella's hair, and about her bosom and arms; and I saw even my guardian look at her from under his thick eyebrows, and raise them a little, when her loveliness was before him, with those rich flushes of glitter and colour in it.

Of the manner and extent to which he took our trump into custody, and came out with mean little cards at the ends of hands, before which the glory of our Kings and Queens was utterly abased, I say nothing; nor, of the feeling that I had, respecting his looking upon us personally in the light of three very obvious and poor riddles that he had found out long ago. What I suffered from, was the incompatibility between his cold presence and my feelings towards Estella. It was not that I knew I could never bear to speak to him about her, that I knew I could never bear to hear him creak his boots at her, that I knew I could never bear to see him wash his hands of her; it was, that my admiration should be within a foot or two of him-- it was, that my feelings should be in the same place with him -- *that*, was the agonizing circumstance.

We played until nine o'clock, and then it was arranged that when Estella came to London I should be forewarned of her coming and should meet her at the coach; and then I took leave of her, and touched her and left her.

My guardian lay at the Boar in the next room to mine. Far into the night, Miss Havisham's words, `Love her, love her, love her!' sounded in my ears. I adapted them for my own repetition, and said to my pillow, `I love her, I love her, I love her!' hundreds of times. Then, a burst of gratitude came upon me, that she should be destined for me, once the blacksmith's boy. Then, I thought if she were, as I feared, by no means rapturously grateful for that destiny yet, when would she begin to be interested in me? When should I awaken the heart within her, that was mute and sleeping now?

Ah me! I thought those were high and great emotions. But I never thought there was anything low and small in my keeping away from Joe, because I knew she would be contemptuous of him. It was but a day gone, and Joe had brought the tears into my eyes; they had soon dried, God forgive me! soon dried.