

Great Expectations
by
Charles Dickens

Chapter 18

It was in the fourth year of my apprenticeship to Joe, and it was a Saturday night. There was a group assembled round the fire at the Three Jolly Bargemen, attentive to Mr. Wopsle as he read the newspaper aloud. Of that group I was one.

A highly popular murder had been committed, and Mr. Wopsle was imbrued in blood to the eyebrows. He gloated over every abhorrent adjective in the description, and identified himself with every witness at the Inquest. He faintly moaned, "I am done for," as the victim, and he barbarously bellowed, "I'll serve you out," as the murderer. He gave the medical testimony, in pointed imitation of our local practitioner; and he piped and shook, as the aged turnpike-keeper who had heard blows, to an extent so very paralytic as to suggest a doubt regarding the mental competency of that witness. The coroner, in Mr. Wopsle's hands, became Timon of Athens; the beadle, Coriolanus. He enjoyed himself thoroughly, and we all enjoyed ourselves, and were delightfully comfortable. In this cozy state of mind we came to the verdict Wilful Murder.

Then, and not sooner, I became aware of a strange gentleman leaning over the back of the settle opposite me, looking on. There was an expression of contempt on his face, and he bit the side of a great forefinger as he watched the group of faces.

"Well!" said the stranger to Mr. Wopsle, when the reading was done, "you have settled it all to your own satisfaction, I have no doubt?"

Everybody started and looked up, as if it were the murderer. He looked at everybody coldly and sarcastically.

"Guilty, of course?" said he. "Out with it. Come!"

"Sir," returned Mr. Wopsle, "without having the honour of your

acquaintance, I do say Guilty.” Upon this, we all took courage to unite in a confirmatory murmur.

“I know you do,” said the stranger; “I knew you would. I told you so. But now I’ll ask you a question. Do you know, or do you not know, that the law of England supposes every man to be innocent, until he is proved – proved – to be guilty?”

“Sir,” Mr. Wopsle began to reply, “as an Englishman myself, I—”

“Come!” said the stranger, biting his forefinger at him. “Don’t evade the question. Either you know it, or you don’t know it. Which is it to be?”

He stood with his head on one side and himself on one side, in a bullying interrogative manner, and he threw his forefinger at Mr. Wopsle – as it were to mark him out – before biting it again.

“Now!” said he. “Do you know it, or don’t you know it?”

“Certainly I know it,” replied Mr. Wopsle.

“Certainly you know it. Then why didn’t you say so at first? Now, I’ll ask you another question;” taking possession of Mr. Wopsle, as if he had a right to him. “Do you know that none of these witnesses have yet been cross-examined?”

Mr. Wopsle was beginning, “I can only say—” when the stranger stopped him.

“What? You won’t answer the question, yes or no? Now, I’ll try you again.” Throwing his finger at him again. “Attend to me. Are you aware, or are you not aware, that none of these witnesses have yet been cross-examined? Come, I only want one word from you. Yes, or no?”

Mr. Wopsle hesitated, and we all began to conceive rather a poor opinion of him.

“Come!” said the stranger, “I’ll help you. You don’t deserve help, but I’ll help you. Look at that paper you hold in your hand. What is it?”

“What is it?” repeated Mr. Wopsle, eyeing it, much at a loss.

“Is it,” pursued the stranger in his most sarcastic and suspicious manner, “the printed paper you have just been reading from?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Undoubtedly. Now, turn to that paper, and tell me whether it distinctly states that the prisoner expressly said that his legal advisers instructed him altogether to reserve his defence?”

“I read that just now,” Mr. Wopsle pleaded.

“Never mind what you read just now, sir; I don’t ask you what you read just now. You may read the Lord’s Prayer backwards, if you like – and, perhaps, have done it before to-day. Turn to the paper. No, no, no my friend; not to the top of the column; you know better than that; to the bottom, to the bottom.” (We all began to think Mr. Wopsle full of subterfuge.) “Well? Have you found it?”

“Here it is,” said Mr. Wopsle.

“Now, follow that passage with your eye, and tell me whether it distinctly states that the prisoner expressly said that he was instructed by his legal advisers wholly to reserve his defence? Come! Do you make that of it?”

Mr. Wopsle answered, “Those are not the exact words.”

“Not the exact words!” repeated the gentleman, bitterly. “Is that the exact substance?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Wopsle.

“Yes,” repeated the stranger, looking round at the rest of the company with his right hand extended towards the witness, Wopsle. “And now I ask you what you say to the conscience of that man who, with that passage before his eyes, can lay his head upon his pillow after having pronounced a fellow-creature guilty, unheard?”

We all began to suspect that Mr. Wopsle was not the man we had thought him, and that he was beginning to be found out.

“And that same man, remember,” pursued the gentleman, throwing his finger at Mr. Wopsle heavily; “that same man might be summoned as a jurymen upon this very trial, and, having thus deeply committed himself, might return to the bosom of his family and lay his head upon his pillow, after deliberately swearing that he would well and truly try the issue joined between Our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar, and would a true verdict give according to the evidence, so help him God!”

We were all deeply persuaded that the unfortunate Wopsle had gone too far, and had better stop in his reckless career while there was yet time.

The strange gentleman, with an air of authority not to be disputed, and with a manner expressive of knowing something secret about every one of us that would effectually do for each individual if he chose to disclose it, left the back of the settle, and came into the space between the two settles, in front of the fire, where he remained standing: his left hand in his pocket, and he biting the forefinger of his right.

“From information I have received,” said he, looking round at us as we all quailed before him, “I have reason to believe there is a blacksmith among you, by name Joseph – or Joe – Gargery. Which is the man?”

“Here is the man,” said Joe.

The strange gentleman beckoned him out of his place, and Joe went.

“You have an apprentice,” pursued the stranger, “commonly known as Pip? Is he here?”

“I am here!” I cried.

The stranger did not recognize me, but I recognized him as the gentleman I had met on the stairs, on the occasion of my second visit to Miss Havisham. I had known him the moment I saw him looking over the settle, and now that I stood confronting him with his hand upon my shoulder, I checked off again in detail, his large head, his dark

complexion, his deep-set eyes, his bushy black eyebrows, his large watch-chain, his strong black dots of beard and whisker, and even the smell of scented soap on his great hand.

“I wish to have a private conference with you two,” said he, when he had surveyed me at his leisure. “It will take a little time. Perhaps we had better go to your place of residence. I prefer not to anticipate my communication here; you will impart as much or as little of it as you please to your friends afterwards; I have nothing to do with that.”

Amidst a wondering silence, we three walked out of the Jolly Bargemen, and in a wondering silence walked home. While going along, the strange gentleman occasionally looked at me, and occasionally bit the side of his finger. As we neared home, Joe vaguely acknowledging the occasion as an impressive and ceremonious one, went on ahead to open the front door. Our conference was held in the state parlour, which was feebly lighted by one candle.

It began with the strange gentleman’s sitting down at the table, drawing the candle to him, and looking over some entries in his pocket-book. He then put up the pocket-book and set the candle a little aside: after peering round it into the darkness at Joe and me, to ascertain which was which.

“My name,” he said, “is Jaggers, and I am a lawyer in London. I am pretty well known. I have unusual business to transact with you, and I commence by explaining that it is not of my originating. If my advice had been asked, I should not have been here. It was not asked, and you see me here. What I have to do as the confidential agent of another, I do. No less, no more.”

Finding that he could not see us very well from where he sat, he got up, and threw one leg over the back of a chair and leaned upon it; thus having one foot on the seat of the chair, and one foot on the ground.

“Now, Joseph Gargery, I am the bearer of an offer to relieve you of this young fellow your apprentice. You would not object to cancel his indentures, at his request and for his good? You would want nothing for so doing?”

“Lord forbid that I should want anything for not standing in Pip’s way,” said Joe, staring.

“Lord forbidding is pious, but not to the purpose,” returned Mr Jagers. “The question is, Would you want anything? Do you want anything?”

“The answer is,” returned Joe, sternly, “No.”

I thought Mr. Jagers glanced at Joe, as if he considered him a fool for his disinterestedness. But I was too much bewildered between breathless curiosity and surprise, to be sure of it.

“Very well,” said Mr. Jagers. “Recollect the admission you have made, and don’t try to go from it presently.”

“Who’s a-going to try?” retorted Joe.

“I don’t say anybody is. Do you keep a dog?”

“Yes, I do keep a dog.”

“Bear in mind then, that Brag is a good dog, but Holdfast is a better. Bear that in mind, will you?” repeated Mr. Jagers, shutting his eyes and nodding his head at Joe, as if he were forgiving him something. “Now, I return to this young fellow. And the communication I have got to make is, that he has great expectations.”

Joe and I gasped, and looked at one another.

“I am instructed to communicate to him,” said Mr. Jagers, throwing his finger at me sideways, “that he will come into a handsome property. Further, that it is the desire of the present possessor of that property, that he be immediately removed from his present sphere of life and from this place, and be brought up as a gentleman – in a word, as a young fellow of great expectations.”

My dream was out; my wild fancy was surpassed by sober reality; Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune on a grand scale.

“Now, Mr. Pip,” pursued the lawyer, “I address the rest of what I have to

say, to you. You are to understand, first, that it is the request of the person from whom I take my instructions, that you always bear the name of Pip. You will have no objection, I dare say, to your great expectations being encumbered with that easy condition. But if you have any objection, this is the time to mention it.”

My heart was beating so fast, and there was such a singing in my ears, that I could scarcely stammer I had no objection.

“I should think not! Now you are to understand, secondly, Mr. Pip, that the name of the person who is your liberal benefactor remains a profound secret, until the person chooses to reveal it. I am empowered to mention that it is the intention of the person to reveal it at first hand by word of mouth to yourself. When or where that intention may be carried out, I cannot say; no one can say. It may be years hence. Now, you are distinctly to understand that you are most positively prohibited from making any inquiry on this head, or any allusion or reference, however distant, to any individual whomsoever as the individual, in all the communications you may have with me. If you have a suspicion in your own breast, keep that suspicion in your own breast. It is not the least to the purpose what the reasons of this prohibition are; they may be the strongest and gravest reasons, or they may be mere whim. This is not for you to inquire into. The condition is laid down. Your acceptance of it, and your observance of it as binding, is the only remaining condition that I am charged with, by the person from whom I take my instructions, and for whom I am not otherwise responsible. That person is the person from whom you derive your expectations, and the secret is solely held by that person and by me. Again, not a very difficult condition with which to encumber such a rise in fortune; but if you have any objection to it, this is the time to mention it. Speak out.”

Once more, I stammered with difficulty that I had no objection.

“I should think not! Now, Mr. Pip, I have done with stipulations.” Though he called me Mr. Pip, and began rather to make up to me, he still could not get rid of a certain air of bullying suspicion; and even now he occasionally shut his eyes and threw his finger at me while he spoke, as much as to express that he knew all kinds of things to my disparagement, if he only chose to mention them. “We come next, to mere details of arrangement. You must know that, although I have used

the term “expectations” more than once, you are not endowed with expectations only. There is already lodged in my hands, a sum of money amply sufficient for your suitable education and maintenance. You will please consider me your guardian. Oh!” for I was going to thank him, “I tell you at once, I am paid for my services, or I shouldn’t render them. It is considered that you must be better educated, in accordance with your altered position, and that you will be alive to the importance and necessity of at once entering on that advantage.”

I said I had always longed for it.

“Never mind what you have always longed for, Mr. Pip,” he retorted; “keep to the record. If you long for it now, that’s enough. Am I answered that you are ready to be placed at once, under some proper tutor? Is that it?”

I stammered yes, that was it.

“Good. Now, your inclinations are to be consulted. I don’t think that wise, mind, but it’s my trust. Have you ever heard of any tutor whom you would prefer to another?”

I had never heard of any tutor but Bidley and Mr. Wopsle’s greataunt; so, I replied in the negative.

“There is a certain tutor, of whom I have some knowledge, who I think might suit the purpose,” said Mr. Jaggers. “I don’t recommend him, observe; because I never recommend anybody. The gentleman I speak of, is one Mr. Matthew Pocket.”

Ah! I caught at the name directly. Miss Havisham’s relation. The Matthew whom Mr. and Mrs. Camilla had spoken of. The Matthew whose place was to be at Miss Havisham’s head, when she lay dead, in her bride’s dress on the bride’s table.

“You know the name?” said Mr. Jaggers, looking shrewdly at me, and then shutting up his eyes while he waited for my answer.

My answer was, that I had heard of the name.

“Oh!” said he. “You have heard of the name. But the question is, what do you say of it?”

I said, or tried to say, that I was much obliged to him for his recommendation—

“No, my young friend!” he interrupted, shaking his great head very slowly. “Recollect yourself!”

Not recollecting myself, I began again that I was much obliged to him for his recommendation—

“No, my young friend,” he interrupted, shaking his head and frowning and smiling both at once; “no, no, no; it’s very well done, but it won’t do; you are too young to fix me with it. Recommendation is not the word, Mr. Pip. Try another.”

Correcting myself, I said that I was much obliged to him for his mention of Mr. Matthew Pocket—

“That’s more like it!” cried Mr. Jaggers.

- And (I added), I would gladly try that gentleman.

“Good. You had better try him in his own house. The way shall be prepared for you, and you can see his son first, who is in London. When will you come to London?”

I said (glancing at Joe, who stood looking on, motionless), that I supposed I could come directly.

“First,” said Mr. Jaggers, “you should have some new clothes to come in, and they should not be working clothes. Say this day week. You’ll want some money. Shall I leave you twenty guineas?”

He produced a long purse, with the greatest coolness, and counted them out on the table and pushed them over to me. This was the first time he had taken his leg from the chair. He sat astride of the chair when he had pushed the money over, and sat swinging his purse and eyeing Joe.

“Well, Joseph Gargery? You look dumbfounded?”

“I am!” said Joe, in a very decided manner.

“It was understood that you wanted nothing for yourself, remember?”

“It were understood,” said Joe. “And it are understood. And it ever will be similar according.”

“But what,” said Mr. Jaggers, swinging his purse, “what if it was in my instructions to make you a present, as compensation?”

“As compensation what for?” Joe demanded.

“For the loss of his services.”

Joe laid his hand upon my shoulder with the touch of a woman. I have often thought him since, like the steam-hammer, that can crush a man or pat an egg-shell, in his combination of strength with gentleness. “Pip is that hearty welcome,” said Joe, “to go free with his services, to honour and fortun’, as no words can tell him. But if you think as Money can make compensation to me for the loss of the little child – what come to the forge – and ever the best of friends!—”

O dear good Joe, whom I was so ready to leave and so unthankful to, I see you again, with your muscular blacksmith’s arm before your eyes, and your broad chest heaving, and your voice dying away. O dear good faithful tender Joe, I feel the loving tremble of your hand upon my arm, as solemnly this day as if it had been the rustle of an angel’s wing!

But I encouraged Joe at the time. I was lost in the mazes of my future fortunes, and could not retrace the by-paths we had trodden together. I begged Joe to be comforted, for (as he said) we had ever been the best of friends, and (as I said) we ever would be so. Joe scooped his eyes with his disengaged wrist, as if he were bent on gouging himself, but said not another word.

Mr. Jaggers had looked on at this, as one who recognized in Joe the village idiot, and in me his keeper. When it was over, he said, weighing in his hand the purse he had ceased to swing:

“Now, Joseph Gargery, I warn you this is your last chance. No half measures with me. If you mean to take a present that I have it in charge to make you, speak out, and you shall have it. If on the contrary you mean to say—” Here, to his great amazement, he was stopped by Joe’s suddenly working round him with every demonstration of a fell pugilistic purpose.

“Which I meantsay,” cried Joe, “that if you come into my place bull-baiting and badgering me, come out! Which I meantsay as sech if you’re a man, come on! Which I meantsay that what I say, I meantsay and stand or fall by!”

I drew Joe away, and he immediately became placable; merely stating to me, in an obliging manner and as a polite expostulatory notice to any one whom it might happen to concern, that he were not a going to be bull-baited and badgered in his own place. Mr. Jaggers had risen when Joe demonstrated, and had backed near the door. Without evincing any inclination to come in again, he there delivered his valedictory remarks. They were these:

“Well, Mr. Pip, I think the sooner you leave here – as you are to be a gentleman – the better. Let it stand for this day week, and you shall receive my printed address in the meantime. You can take a hackney-coach at the stage-coach office in London, and come straight to me. Understand, that I express no opinion, one way or other, on the trust I undertake. I am paid for undertaking it, and I do so. Now, understand that, finally. Understand that!”

He was throwing his finger at both of us, and I think would have gone on, but for his seeming to think Joe dangerous, and going off.

Something came into my head which induced me to run after him, as he was going down to the Jolly Bargemen where he had left a hired carriage.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Jaggers.”

“Halloa!” said he, facing round, “what’s the matter?”

“I wish to be quite right, Mr. Jaggers, and to keep to your directions; so I

thought I had better ask. Would there be any objection to my taking leave of any one I know, about here, before I go away?"

"No," said he, looking as if he hardly understood me.

"I don't mean in the village only, but up-town?"

"No," said he. "No objection."

I thanked him and ran home again, and there I found that Joe had already locked the front door and vacated the state parlour, and was seated by the kitchen fire with a hand on each knee, gazing intently at the burning coals. I too sat down before the fire and gazed at the coals, and nothing was said for a long time.

My sister was in her cushioned chair in her corner, and Biddy sat at her needlework before the fire, and Joe sat next Biddy, and I sat next Joe in the corner opposite my sister. The more I looked into the glowing coals, the more incapable I became of looking at Joe; the longer the silence lasted, the more unable I felt to speak.

At length I got out, "Joe, have you told Biddy?"

"No, Pip," returned Joe, still looking at the fire, and holding his knees tight, as if he had private information that they intended to make off somewhere, "which I left it to yourself, Pip."

"I would rather you told, Joe."

"Pip's a gentleman of fortun' then," said Joe, "and God bless him in it!"

Biddy dropped her work, and looked at me. Joe held his knees and looked at me. I looked at both of them. After a pause, they both heartily congratulated me; but there was a certain touch of sadness in their congratulations, that I rather resented.

I took it upon myself to impress Biddy (and through Biddy, Joe) with the grave obligation I considered my friends under, to know nothing and say nothing about the maker of my fortune. It would all come out in good time, I observed, and in the meanwhile nothing was to be said, save that

I had come into great expectations from a mysterious patron. Biddy nodded her head thoughtfully at the fire as she took up her work again, and said she would be very particular; and Joe, still detaining his knees, said, “Ay, ay, I’ll be ekervally partickler, Pip;” and then they congratulated me again, and went on to express so much wonder at the notion of my being a gentleman, that I didn’t half like it.

Infinite pains were then taken by Biddy to convey to my sister some idea of what had happened. To the best of my belief, those efforts entirely failed. She laughed and nodded her head a great many times, and even repeated after Biddy, the words “Pip” and “Property.” But I doubt if they had more meaning in them than an election cry, and I cannot suggest a darker picture of her state of mind.

I never could have believed it without experience, but as Joe and Biddy became more at their cheerful ease again, I became quite gloomy. Dissatisfied with my fortune, of course I could not be; but it is possible that I may have been, without quite knowing it, dissatisfied with myself.

Anyhow, I sat with my elbow on my knee and my face upon my hand, looking into the fire, as those two talked about my going away, and about what they should do without me, and all that. And whenever I caught one of them looking at me, though never so pleasantly (and they often looked at me – particularly Biddy), I felt offended: as if they were expressing some mistrust of me. Though Heaven knows they never did by word or sign.

At those times I would get up and look out at the door; for, our kitchen door opened at once upon the night, and stood open on summer evenings to air the room. The very stars to which I then raised my eyes, I am afraid I took to be but poor and humble stars for glittering on the rustic objects among which I had passed my life.

“Saturday night,” said I, when we sat at our supper of bread-and-cheese and beer. “Five more days, and then the day before the day! They’ll soon go.”

“Yes, Pip,” observed Joe, whose voice sounded hollow in his beer mug. “They’ll soon go.”

“Soon, soon go,” said Biddy.

“I have been thinking, Joe, that when I go down town on Monday, and order my new clothes, I shall tell the tailor that I’ll come and put them on there, or that I’ll have them sent to Mr. Pumblechook’s. It would be very disagreeable to be stared at by all the people here.”

“Mr. and Mrs. Hubble might like to see you in your new genteel figure too, Pip,” said Joe, industriously cutting his bread, with his cheese on it, in the palm of his left hand, and glancing at my untasted supper as if he thought of the time when we used to compare slices. “So might Wopsle. And the Jolly Bargemen might take it as a compliment.”

“That’s just what I don’t want, Joe. They would make such a business of it – such a coarse and common business – that I couldn’t bear myself.”

“Ah, that indeed, Pip!” said Joe. “If you couldn’t abear yourself—”

Biddy asked me here, as she sat holding my sister’s plate, “Have you thought about when you’ll show yourself to Mr. Gargery, and your sister, and me? You will show yourself to us; won’t you?”

“Biddy,” I returned with some resentment, “you are so exceedingly quick that it’s difficult to keep up with you.”

(“She always were quick,” observed Joe.)

“If you had waited another moment, Biddy, you would have heard me say that I shall bring my clothes here in a bundle one evening – most likely on the evening before I go away.”

Biddy said no more. Handsomely forgiving her, I soon exchanged an affectionate good-night with her and Joe, and went up to bed. When I got into my little room, I sat down and took a long look at it, as a mean little room that I should soon be parted from and raised above, for ever, It was furnished with fresh young remembrances too, and even at the same moment I fell into much the same confused division of mind between it and the better rooms to which I was going, as I had been in so often between the forge and Miss Havisham’s, and Biddy and Estella.

The sun had been shining brightly all day on the roof of my attic, and the room was warm. As I put the window open and stood looking out, I saw Joe come slowly forth at the dark door below, and take a turn or two in the air; and then I saw Biddy come, and bring him a pipe and light it for him. He never smoked so late, and it seemed to hint to me that he wanted comforting, for some reason or other.

He presently stood at the door immediately beneath me, smoking his pipe, and Biddy stood there too, quietly talking to him, and I knew that they talked of me, for I heard my name mentioned in an endearing tone by both of them more than once. I would not have listened for more, if I could have heard more: so, I drew away from the window, and sat down in my one chair by the bedside, feeling it very sorrowful and strange that this first night of my bright fortunes should be the loneliest I had ever known.

Looking towards the open window, I saw light wreaths from Joe's pipe floating there, and I fancied it was like a blessing from Joe – not obtruded on me or paraded before me, but pervading the air we shared together. I put my light out, and crept into bed; and it was an uneasy bed now, and I never slept the old sound sleep in it any more.