

Great Expectations
by
Charles Dickens

Chapter 24

After two or three days, when I had established myself in my room and had gone backwards and forwards to London several times, and had ordered all I wanted of my tradesmen, Mr. Pocket and I had a long talk together. He knew more of my intended career than I knew myself, for he referred to his having been told by Mr. Jaggers that I was not designed for any profession, and that I should be well enough educated for my destiny if I could “hold my own” with the average of young men in prosperous circumstances. I acquiesced, of course, knowing nothing to the contrary.

He advised my attending certain places in London, for the acquisition of such mere rudiments as I wanted, and my investing him with the functions of explainer and director of all my studies. He hoped that with intelligent assistance I should meet with little to discourage me, and should soon be able to dispense with any aid but his. Through his way of saying this, and much more to similar purpose, he placed himself on confidential terms with me in an admirable manner; and I may state at once that he was always so zealous and honourable in fulfilling his compact with me, that he made me zealous and honourable in fulfilling mine with him. If he had shown indifference as a master, I have no doubt I should have returned the compliment as a pupil; he gave me no such excuse, and each of us did the other justice. Nor, did I ever regard him as having anything ludicrous about him – or anything but what was serious, honest, and good – in his tutor communication with me.

When these points were settled, and so far carried out as that I had begun to work in earnest, it occurred to me that if I could retain my bedroom in Barnard’s Inn, my life would be agreeably varied, while my manners would be none the worse for Herbert’s society. Mr. Pocket did not object to this arrangement, but urged that before any step could possibly be taken in it, it must be submitted to my guardian. I felt that this delicacy arose out of the consideration that the plan would save Herbert some expense, so I went off to Little Britain and imparted my wish to Mr.

Jaggers.

“If I could buy the furniture now hired for me,” said I, “and one or two other little things, I should be quite at home there.”

“Go it!” said Mr. Jaggers, with a short laugh. “I told you you’d get on. Well! How much do you want?”

I said I didn’t know how much.

“Come!” retorted Mr. Jaggers. “How much? Fifty pounds?”

“Oh, not nearly so much.”

“Five pounds?” said Mr. Jaggers.

This was such a great fall, that I said in discomfiture, “Oh! more than that.”

“More than that, eh!” retorted Mr. Jaggers, lying in wait for me, with his hands in his pockets, his head on one side, and his eyes on the wall behind me; “how much more?”

“It is so difficult to fix a sum,” said I, hesitating.

“Come!” said Mr. Jaggers. “Let’s get at it. Twice five; will that do? Three times five; will that do? Four times five; will that do?”

I said I thought that would do handsomely.

“Four times five will do handsomely, will it?” said Mr. Jaggers, knitting his brows. “Now, what do you make of four times five?”

“What do I make of it?”

“Ah!” said Mr. Jaggers; “how much?”

“I suppose you make it twenty pounds,” said I, smiling.

“Never mind what I make it, my friend,” observed Mr. Jaggers, with a

knowing and contradictory toss of his head. “I want to know what you make it.”

“Twenty pounds, of course.”

“Wemmick!” said Mr. Jaggers, opening his office door. “Take Mr. Pip’s written order, and pay him twenty pounds.”

This strongly marked way of doing business made a strongly marked impression on me, and that not of an agreeable kind. Mr. Jaggers never laughed; but he wore great bright creaking boots, and, in poising himself on these boots, with his large head bent down and his eyebrows joined together, awaiting an answer, he sometimes caused the boots to creak, as if they laughed in a dry and suspicious way. As he happened to go out now, and as Wemmick was brisk and talkative, I said to Wemmick that I hardly knew what to make of Mr. Jaggers’s manner.

“Tell him that, and he’ll take it as a compliment,” answered Wemmick; “he don’t mean that you should know what to make of it. – Oh!” for I looked surprised, “it’s not personal; it’s professional: only professional.”

Wemmick was at his desk, lunching – and crunching – on a dry hard biscuit; pieces of which he threw from time to time into his slit of a mouth, as if he were posting them.

“Always seems to me,” said Wemmick, “as if he had set a mantrap and was watching it. Suddenly – click – you’re caught!”

Without remarking that man-traps were not among the amenities of life, I said I supposed he was very skilful?

“Deep,” said Wemmick, “as Australia.” Pointing with his pen at the office floor, to express that Australia was understood, for the purposes of the figure, to be symmetrically on the opposite spot of the globe. “If there was anything deeper,” added Wemmick, bringing his pen to paper, “he’d be it.”

Then, I said I supposed he had a fine business, and Wemmick said, “Ca-pi-tal!” Then I asked if there were many clerks? to which he replied:

“We don’t run much into clerks, because there’s only one Jaggers, and people won’t have him at second-hand. There are only four of us. Would you like to see ‘em? You are one of us, as I may say.”

I accepted the offer. When Mr. Wemmick had put all the biscuit into the post, and had paid me my money from a cash-box in a safe, the key of which safe he kept somewhere down his back and produced from his coat-collar like an iron pigtail, we went up-stairs. The house was dark and shabby, and the greasy shoulders that had left their mark in Mr. Jaggers’s room, seemed to have been shuffling up and down the staircase for years. In the front first floor, a clerk who looked something between a publican and a rat-catcher – a large pale puffed swollen man – was attentively engaged with three or four people of shabby appearance, whom he treated as unceremoniously as everybody seemed to be treated who contributed to Mr. Jaggers’s coffers. “Getting evidence together,” said Mr. Wemmick, as we came out, “for the Bailey.”

In the room over that, a little flabby terrier of a clerk with dangling hair (his cropping seemed to have been forgotten when he was a puppy) was similarly engaged with a man with weak eyes, whom Mr. Wemmick presented to me as a smelter who kept his pot always boiling, and who would melt me anything I pleased – and who was in an excessive white-perspiration, as if he had been trying his art on himself. In a back room, a high-shouldered man with a face-ache tied up in dirty flannel, who was dressed in old black clothes that bore the appearance of having been waxed, was stooping over his work of making fair copies of the notes of the other two gentlemen, for Mr. Jaggers’s own use.

This was all the establishment. When we went down-stairs again, Wemmick led me into my guardian’s room, and said, “This you’ve seen already.”

“Pray,” said I, as the two odious casts with the twitchy leer upon them caught my sight again, “whose likenesses are those?”

“These?” said Wemmick, getting upon a chair, and blowing the dust off the horrible heads before bringing them down. “These are two celebrated ones. Famous clients of ours that got us a world of credit. This chap (why you must have come down in the night and been peeping into the inkstand, to get this blot upon your eyebrow, you old rascal!) murdered

his master, and, considering that he wasn't brought up to evidence, didn't plan it badly."

"Is it like him?" I asked, recoiling from the brute, as Wemmick spat upon his eyebrow and gave it a rub with his sleeve.

"Like him? It's himself, you know. The cast was made in Newgate, directly after he was taken down. You had a particular fancy for me, hadn't you, Old Artful?" said Wemmick. He then explained this affectionate apostrophe, by touching his brooch representing the lady and the weeping willow at the tomb with the urn upon it, and saying, "Had it made for me, express!"

"Is the lady anybody?" said I.

"No," returned Wemmick. "Only his game. (You liked your bit of game, didn't you?) No; deuce a bit of a lady in the case, Mr. Pip, except one – and she wasn't of this slender ladylike sort, and you wouldn't have caught her looking after this urn – unless there was something to drink in it." Wemmick's attention being thus directed to his brooch, he put down the cast, and polished the brooch with his pocket-handkerchief.

"Did that other creature come to the same end?" I asked. "He has the same look."

"You're right," said Wemmick; "it's the genuine look. Much as if one nostril was caught up with a horsehair and a little fish-hook. Yes, he came to the same end; quite the natural end here, I assure you. He forged wills, this blade did, if he didn't also put the supposed testators to sleep too. You were a gentlemanly Cove, though" (Mr. Wemmick was again apostrophizing), "and you said you could write Greek. Yah, Bounceable! What a liar you were! I never met such a liar as you!" Before putting his late friend on his shelf again, Wemmick touched the largest of his mourning rings and said, "Sent out to buy it for me, only the day before."

While he was putting up the other cast and coming down from the chair, the thought crossed my mind that all his personal jewellery was derived from like sources. As he had shown no diffidence on the subject, I ventured on the liberty of asking him the question, when he stood before

me, dusting his hands.

“Oh yes,” he returned, “these are all gifts of that kind. One brings another, you see; that’s the way of it. I always take ‘em. They’re curiosities. And they’re property. They may not be worth much, but, after all, they’re property and portable. It don’t signify to you with your brilliant look-out, but as to myself, my guidingstar always is, “Get hold of portable property”.”

When I had rendered homage to this light, he went on to say, in a friendly manner:

“If at any odd time when you have nothing better to do, you wouldn’t mind coming over to see me at Walworth, I could offer you a bed, and I should consider it an honour. I have not much to show you; but such two or three curiosities as I have got, you might like to look over; and I am fond of a bit of garden and a summer-house.”

I said I should be delighted to accept his hospitality.

“Thankee,” said he; “then we’ll consider that it’s to come off, when convenient to you. Have you dined with Mr. Jaggers yet?”

“Not yet.”

“Well,” said Wemmick, “he’ll give you wine, and good wine. I’ll give you punch, and not bad punch. and now I’ll tell you something. When you go to dine with Mr. Jaggers, look at his housekeeper.”

“Shall I see something very uncommon?”

“Well,” said Wemmick, “you’ll see a wild beast tamed. Not so very uncommon, you’ll tell me. I reply, that depends on the original wildness of the beast, and the amount of taming. It won’t lower your opinion of Mr. Jaggers’s powers. Keep your eye on it.”

I told him I would do so, with all the interest and curiosity that his preparation awakened. As I was taking my departure, he asked me if I would like to devote five minutes to seeing Mr. Jaggers “at it?”

For several reasons, and not least because I didn't clearly know what Mr. Jaggers would be found to be "at," I replied in the affirmative. We dived into the City, and came up in a crowded policecourt, where a blood-relation (in the murderous sense) of the deceased with the fanciful taste in brooches, was standing at the bar, uncomfortably chewing something; while my guardian had a woman under examination or cross-examination – I don't know which – and was striking her, and the bench, and everybody present, with awe. If anybody, of whatsoever degree, said a word that he didn't approve of, he instantly required to have it "taken down." If anybody wouldn't make an admission, he said, "I'll have it out of you!" and if anybody made an admission, he said, "Now I have got you!" the magistrates shivered under a single bite of his finger. Thieves and thieftakers hung in dread rapture on his words, and shrank when a hair of his eyebrows turned in their direction. Which side he was on, I couldn't make out, for he seemed to me to be grinding the whole place in a mill; I only know that when I stole out on tiptoe, he was not on the side of the bench; for, he was making the legs of the old gentleman who presided, quite convulsive under the table, by his denunciations of his conduct as the representative of British law and justice in that chair that day.