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### HALF HOUR PORTRAITS OF DICKENS' GREATEST CHARACTERS

VII—Miss Havisham; Dickens' Most Fantastic Character.

The fantastic has a real and important place, some of the masterpieces in all languages are purely fantastic. Even in comparatively unskilled hands, the fantastic usually succeeds in making an appeal to the readers because it satisfies the human desire for something that will divert the mind from the every-day concerns of life. But the fantastic rarely appeals for any reason other than because it is fantastic. We do not, for instance, imagine that there ever were such beings as those who supply Poe's wonderful fantasies. We do not expect ever to meet such people. It is the same with Colbridge's creations, with the exception of the Ancient Mariner. However it may thrill us, a fantastic story rarely succeeds in making us deem it a part of our own world. It remains

in her intense human sympathy over old wounds in her mind. Instead of the world, in her craving for revenge, and in her miserable agony of repentance when she sees that revenge fulfilled. Rarely has any writer painted better the great truth—that revenge re-creates itself on no one so surely as on the one who wreaks that revenge. And his magnificent sanity and directness are shown nowhere more clearly than in this his most fantastic story; for it strikes one of the most straight and true and direct blows ever struck at the colossal folly of hugging dead wrongs and griefs and setting them up to blast the present and the future. Instead of letting them become a softening memory of sorrows past and gone, The name of the great house was

any wish possibly might be a moral rapier. None ever taught her that haughtiness and impudence of restraint were sails that chained and dis- tated. That those who were truthful and sinners should turn away from her and their place should be taken by facturers and lawyers in ever mounting numbers was, of course, a morose and logical. That every one of the self-seekers should spoil her as the shortest way to get whatever they wanted from her was, of course, inevitable. The mournful part of it was that they spoiled and distorted a woman whose heart had rare powers for great and true devotion and constancy, and in spoiling her nature they spoiled that heart of any hope of guidance. The time came when it needed that



"WHEN YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME," SAID ESTELLA, "I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, AS A FORM OF WORDS; NOTHING MORE."

ghostly, and the actors in it remain ghosts. When Charles Dickens wrote "Great Expectations," he conceived a prodigiously fantastic figure, a ghost. He wrested that ghost from the fantasies of dream, and set it, alive and terribly real, into the living world. That living ghost is Miss Havisham. To all who read the story, she remains forever a spectral, frightening shape; but she remains real. She is a ghost, but not the "ghost of clothes." She is a ghost that we all know. We have all seen such ghosts move among us in flesh and blood, with hearts and minds long dead and buried. "Miss Havisham" is a remarkable example of Dickens' almost unique ability for combining the very extremes of romance and realism. He never troubled himself about whether he was a romanticist or a realist. He saw the romance in every reality and the reality in every romance. He saw, and showed, that every human being has a romance in him and that every romance has a human being in it. Neither a modern realist or a modern romanticist could have made anything out of Miss Havisham. She could be created only by a man who was both. Only Dickens could have made her what he did—a

Satis House. It had been so named by its proud and happy builder to show that he had attained all his desires, that whoever owned and dwelled in it could wish for nothing more. However well or ill he may have been satisfied after he had finished it, he had to satisfy Death when Death appointed the time. Others of his race succeeded as heirs to house and tomb. Perhaps more than one of them discovered that the word "Satis" was a little ironical, given over the portals of the house, and might much more appropriately have been carved over the portals of the family tomb. Still, Satis House presented a laughing front to the world, rich with gardens by day and bright with lights by night, and, like the people who dwelled in it, made a brave show of its happiness and kept its troubles, if it had any, to itself. Not till it came into the hands of the last of the race did Satis House become an open irony; not till Miss Havisham, the spoiled beauty, met her tragedy, was Satis House transformed from a house to a grave, like a creature of Eastern enchantment, suddenly petrified. When she succeeded to the family possessions, it seemed that happiness never could turn its back on her or the house. She was young, beautiful and rich. From infancy she had not known what it is to have a desire unfulfilled. There was none near her

guidance; and she was blind. Of all the many who had wooed her—the honest men whose love she had tossed aside like any other preferred gift of no value, and the mercenary ones whom she had escaped by being coldly indifferent—there probably had not been one so unworthy in every degree as the man who won her. He was a handsome man. She did not perceive that he was a little too handsome. He was a polished man of the world. She did not see that he was too polished and too much of the world. In station and habit and environment he was what is known technically as a gentleman. She did not perceive that he was a little too much of that kind of gentleman. His name was Compeyson. Even at that time there was some shrugging of padded shoulders in genteel clubs in London when "Compeyson" was uttered. There were people who could have warned Miss Havisham that this was a man who had nearly run his race, and was coming in loser, and presently would be running races against the police. But Miss Havisham had long since barred her doors against advisers who might give such advice. So deep was her devotion to him, so boundless were her pride and joy and confidence, that he hardly had to lead her to play into his hands. They

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"MISS HAVISHAM, ESTELLA, TIT AND JOE GANCERY." From the original Dickens illustration by P. A. Fraser.