

HALF-HOUR PORTRAITS OF DICKENS' GREATEST CHARACTERS

(Continued from page three.)

had not been long engaged when she had got to turn over to him, under his

The wedding feast was spread in Satis House. The wedding guests had been invited, and were on the way. She was sitting before her golden mirror, dressing for the wedding, when a letter was delivered to her.

It was from him. He wrote, quite coldly, brutally brief, that he was a married man, and had courted her simply to gain what he had gained.

The letter fell from her hands. A gilt clock in front of her pointed to twenty minutes to nine.

It was the last conscious knowledge she had for a long long time. She returned to consciousness, but unable to rise, for though she lived, her life had stopped on her wedding day, and in her wild passion she decreed that it should know no time beyond that hour.

Satis House went blind and stark. It did not fall into decay slowly, through the monotonous work of sad years. She had it laid waste over night. She smote it, as she had been smitten. Its happy builder's happy zeal in making it beautiful was not one thousandth part as great as Miss Havisham's furious zeal for blighting it.

The gardens were made desert. The great doorways were sealed with bolts and spikes and chains. The windows were walled up, or barred with heavy iron. The rooms were dismantled and given over, like the great, airy corridors, to dust and rats and echoes.

What few servants were indispensable were exiled to a remote part of the house, and forbidden to show themselves to her. What she might desire was to be brought to the doors of the rooms into which she withdrew, and left there. What messages there might be were to be delivered through these closed doors.

The rooms in which she thus hid herself were her dressing room and the others of the suite that had been decked for the wedding. They were the only part of Satis House that was not touched by the destruction that she had worked. But a laid on them a curse far worse than the wildest destruction would have been. She shut out the sunlight from them forever and kept them in every detail as they had been when the letter reached her. Where any changes had been made during her illness, she restored them.

In the room where the feast had been spread, the great table was arranged again, as if it were waiting for the guests. The candelabra and silver and cut glass were placed. The wedding cake and the mass of confections were gathered and put on in their room.

In her dressing room the half-packed trunks and splendid dresses were left scattered as they had been. On her dressing table with the great gilded looking glass, were placed the jewels that she had not yet put on. Her handkerchief, gloves, and the prayer book were heaped before the mirror. Even the flowers, withered now, were laid where they had been.

In those rooms, illuminated henceforth only by candles, Miss Havisham lived from that day, never again seeing the light. She garbed herself in her bridal gown, to the very veil that flowed down from her hair, in which she placed the withered bridal wreath. On her neck and hands she put the jewels that had sparkled there. When the letter came, she had not quite finished dressing. One white satin shoe was on her foot, the other was lying on the table. She arranged herself so. The unused shoe remained unused.

There were many clocks in the rooms, beside the little gilt clock on her table, and her watch. She turned the hands of each to twenty minutes to nine, and stopped them.

Still, she was not mad, by any means, as the world defines—madness. Her greedy relatives soon found this out by the care she took to entrust her wealth—still very great despite the fortune that had been stolen by

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her false lover—into the hands of an extremely capable lawyer, who saw to it that she was not molested.

The wedding cake and the decks of the table gradually crumbled away or were devoured by mice and rats. Cobwebs shrouded the great silver chalice in the center, and what showed of its metal was black. The table cloth became yellow. Dust and mould dropped on everything. Everything was dead, except spiders and other crawling things.

The silks and satins and laces became yellow, the bridal gown faded like the withered flowers, the stocking on the shoeless foot was trodden to rags and soon the hair under the bridal veil was snow-white. The dress that had been put on the round figure of a beauty hung loose on a figure shrunken to skin and bone, a figure that was as the figure of a phantom, except for the unfading brightness of the sunken eyes.

She lived in this completely lonely desolation for five years. Then she adopted an orphan girl, had her educated, and lavished money on her to make her charming and attractive.

For the first time since her living burial, there came to her something like joy when she saw the girl grow yearly in beauty—a malignant joy, but still a joy. She lost no opportunity

of telling her that she was beautiful and innocently with jealous patience, she taught her to be haughty, warned her that she could protect herself from the world only by hardening her woman's heart, made her to see the world as she saw it, a distorted, evil thing that was to be fought only with the own weapons of coldness and selfishness.

She knew that she was to be sent into the world to wreak Miss Havisham's revenge on men. She was to let men love her, invite them to love her, and then to cast them aside. She was to use men for ends as a man had used Miss Havisham.

Before she sent Estella away on her mission, Miss Havisham, hungry to see something of her revenge in the making, sent for a boy on the plea that she wanted to play cards with her and wheel her around the rooms in a wheeled chair. The agent whom she charged with it sent her an orphan lad who was living with his brother-in-law, Joe Gargery, the village blacksmith. His name was Philip Pirrip, shortened to Pip.

Miss Havisham ordered Pip to play cards with Estella. She said, "Why, he is a common laboring boy," but she played with him in a contemptuous, insolent way, that hurt him worse than if she had refused. "Is she very pretty, Pip?" asked Miss Havisham, gloatingly, before she dismissed him.

He never had been ashamed of his coarse hands and coarse clothes, before. He had admired Joe Gargery to be the best and most admirable man that lived. He had thought that the glowing forge was the bravest of places, and had longed for the time when he was to be apprenticed. But when he went home that evening he thought only of Estella. Her contemptuous, beautiful face was before him. He hated his coarse clothes. He wished that Joe were a gentleman. He thought, "What if Estella saw me working at the forge?"

He had been a simple, innocent boy, with a heart of faithful love for Joe, who loved him as simply in return, when he entered the hurt Havisham's sick presence that day, and he left it, poisoned. As surely as a physical contamination waits for him who enters an infected place of plague, so surely had the contamination of her black and evil purpose fallen on the boy.

She had ordered him to return in a week, and he went eagerly, though he had hard work to keep back his tears when he thought of Estella's scorn. Week after week he came, and Miss Havisham watched them both, watched the boy grow to a youth and Estella grow to the age when she might go for a bride.

It took her some time to blight the lad, he had brought something of innocence and youth into her life. His humility of love for the cruel, scornful young beauty touched Miss Havisham, almost without her consciousness. She had fixed her purpose, but even while she made the lad a victim, her revenge began, unknown to herself, to punish her.

One day, when Pip, now growing to be a young man, came into her presence, she said with eyes burning, "You are looking for Estella? She has gone, Pip. She is a lady; prettier than ever, admired by everybody. Do you feel that you have lost her?"

She said it with malignant exultation, and dismissed him.

And now her punishment began to work its slow, sure course. Pip felt into a great fortune. He went to London, and got an education and polish, and lived in a cultured world, and his dream of becoming a gentleman came true. He was glad of it only because it made him worthy of Estella. He knew now, with adult wisdom, what she was, but he could not help loving her.

He loved her all the more, it seemed to him, because of his open eyes. He knew that he loved her against all reason, against self-respect, against hope of happiness with her even if he won her. But he loved her. Miserably, with no sweetness in the love, he loved her.

In his good fortune, he did not forget Miss Havisham. He visited her at regular intervals and sat with her in her candle-lit tomb. He told himself that it was gratitude. Miss Havisham had made many generous gifts to him for his old services. Once, when he was the old Pip, it would have been gratitude, indeed, but it was not now. It was his desire to hear about Estella, the hope of seeing her, that brought him there. He never went to visit Joe, who had been good to him.

Pip was poisoned, but he was not ruined. Though he neglected Joe, and was ashamed of him, he still had the virtue in his heart of being more ashamed of his ingratitude. Though his love for Estella had made him false to his old friend, it kept him true at bottom, because it was a true love. Miss Havisham, despite her distorted mind, came to love him.

And when, one day, Estella announced that she was going to marry a man whom Pip knew, and he pleaded with her, that she should marry him, not to throw herself away on a creature so debased, so brutish, as this man was known to be, then Miss Havisham awoke as from a dreadful dream and looked at the two young creatures with a dawning terror of what she had done.

"I love you, Estella," said poor Pip. "I've loved you ever since I saw you first in this house."

Miss Havisham put her hand on her heart and held it there.

"When you say you love me," said Estella, "I know what you mean, as a form of words; nothing more. I don't care for what you say at all. I have tried to warn you of this; have I not?"

"Yes," he answered, miserably. "But surely it is against nature—you, so young, untried and beautiful, Estella."

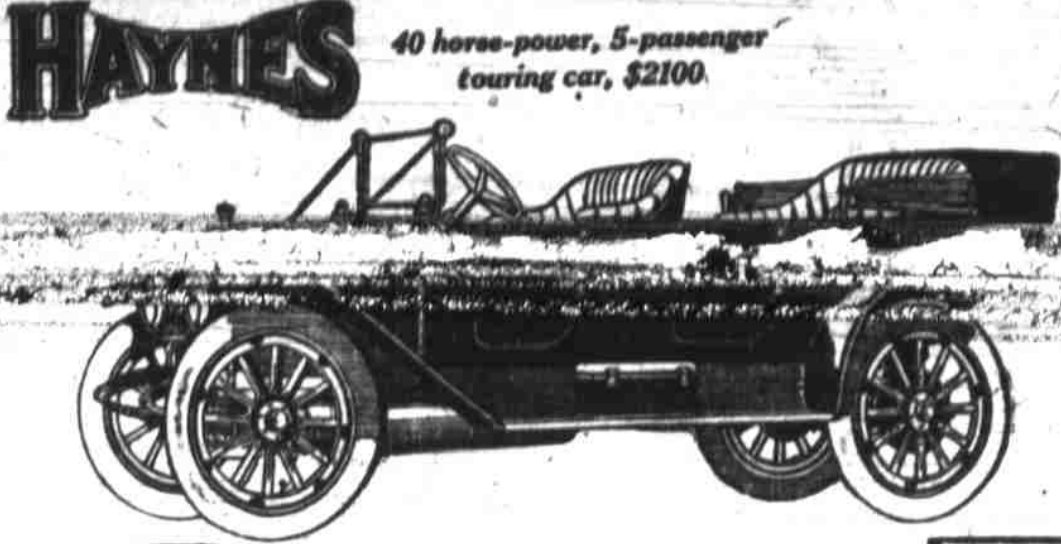
"It is in my nature," she replied. "It is in the nature formed within me. I make a great difference between you and other people, Pip, when I say so much. I can do no more."

He dropped his face in his hands. When he looked up again, there was so ghastly a look on Miss Havisham's countenance, that it impressed him even in his own grief.

"Estella, dearest, dearest Estella," he cried. "Put me aside—put me aside forever—but bestow yourself on a wretched person, than this creature, Miss Havisham, gives you to give me the greatest slight she can do to all other men."

"The expression awoke a wonder in her that seemed to be touched strange with something like compassion. But he saw, too clearly, that she would not be moved from her purpose."

"God bless you! God forgive you!" he said, and fled. But even as he went, he saw the spectral figure of Miss Havisham, her hand still covering



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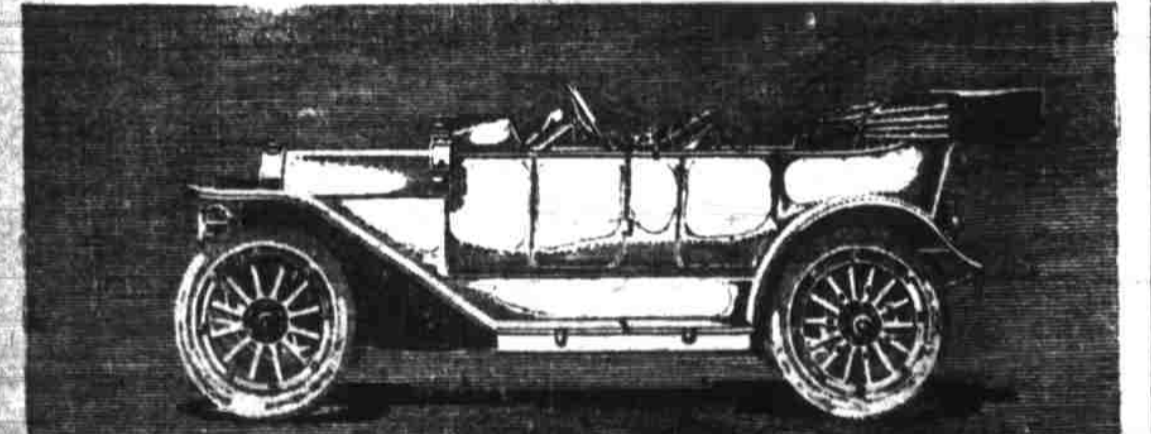
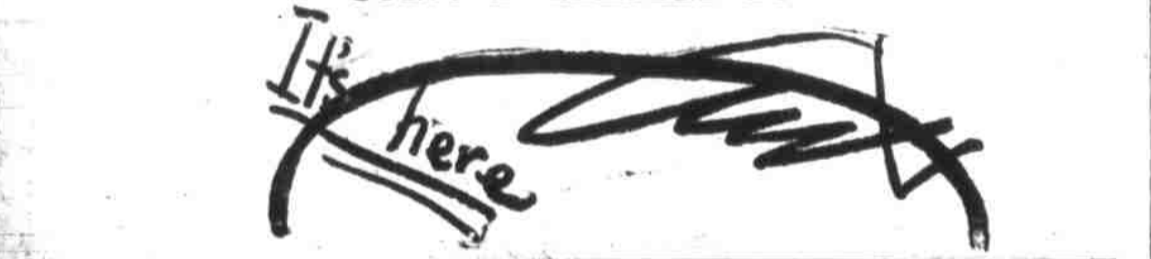
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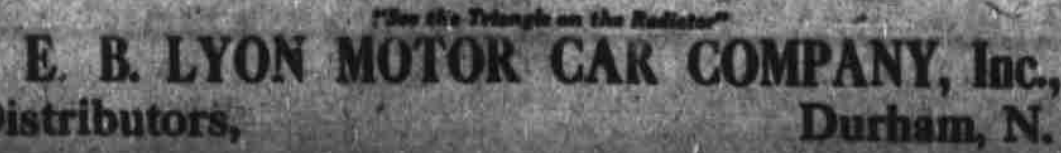
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