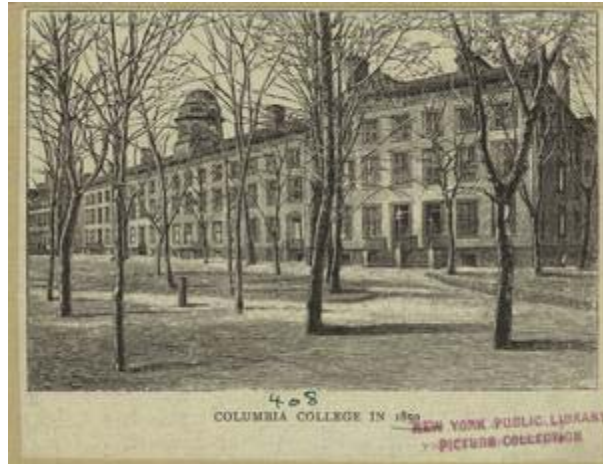


Part II Chapter 45 Great Expectations 1851

“Are you leaving already?” Will stopped Lena as she was coming out of Mrs. Jones’ room one late afternoon in the early spring. “I was hoping to have tea with you and Grandma. We scarcely ever have a chance to talk.” Lena and Will had resumed their acquaintance after a four year hiatus. He had grown up during that time and was enrolled at Columbia, studying history and government in preparation for the law, like his father. His first-year studies consumed him, and he spent much of his time at home in their library, or at his father’s. He had adopted an attire like his father’s, complete with a tight-fitting fancy shawl collar vest, fitted jacket, starched wide cravat and even a top hat. His plaid trousers were the new fashion, Lena saw.



“Are you appearing in court today?” Lena laughed, following him down into the library..

“I’ve come from Papa’s. His tailor is fitting me for a frock coat.”

“Ooooooh, a frock coat!”

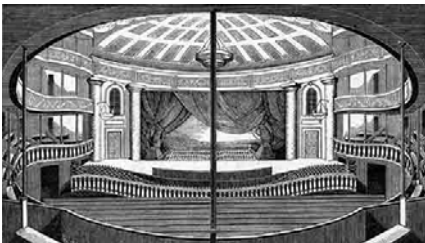
“Seeing his tailor is his excuse for getting me to visit him.”

“Do you need an excuse to visit your own father?”

“Mama doesn’t like me going over there. She says that actress might be there--. He calls her his ‘Portia.’ It’s sickening. So I have to have an excuse.”

“You’re not jealous of Portia, are you? Is Portia her real name?”

“No, of course not. I don’t want to tell you her real name. She’s a well-known



English actress, famous for her Shakespeare plays. Papa first saw her as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* at the Park Theatre—over on Chatham Street, near City Hall Park. He went to see the “play about the law” with some lawyer friends, so they could “judge the case for themselves’. He said he was surprised at how

quickly he was persuaded by the reasoning of the woman lawyer who argued against Shylock's getting his pound of flesh."

"Wasn't he persuaded by Shakespeare's words, rather than by the actress?"

"Perhaps he couldn't tell the difference—he was captivated. After the play he and his friends visited her dressing room to congratulate her. They kept calling her "Portia" and wouldn't be satisfied until she agreed to dine with them. They must have been had a lot to drink because they admitted her as a fellow member of the bar. She's completely different from Mother, he says and blames her for never going with him to the theatre or out into society. 'Portia' likes me, he says, and wants to get to know me better. Ugh He wants me to dine with them."

"Do you want to dine with them?"

"Mama says that would hardly be suitable for me at seventeen."

"What do you think?"

"Father makes me feel like I'm missing something. He tells me that with Mama I will never grow up, but will 'remain a spoiled child.' He wants me to go out with him into society and to meet some interesting people."

"Are you a "spoiled child"?"

"Not really. Actually, I used to be but not now. Mama doesn't spoil me any more. She is too busy with her reforms. Anyway, I would like to go out—I don't like being supervised by a lot of women!"

"Perhaps you should have gone away to college?"

"I wanted to go to Paris, but everyone insisted I remain here. Mama claims she 'needs a man' in the house, but I think she is afraid I might become wild in Paris. Father might have let me go, but now that we've moved out, he wants me to stay here. He is the one who decides my future, my education, my life. What can I do?"

"What do *you* want to do? Who do *you* belong to?"

"I wish I could belong to myself. Who is Will? Right now he's torn in two between Mama who 'needs' me but really doesn't, and Papa who says I've got to get out from under her control."

He changed the subject. "How can you stand doing nothing but reading to Grandma all day?"

“Oh, your mother has me answering some of her correspondence as well, and I ‘supervise’ the children—but they’re so well-behaved they scarcely need anything but to be kept apart so they don’t fight. As to the reading, thanks to your mother, I have become acquainted with Mr. Emerson. I find him very inspiring. He might cheer you up. ”

“Listen to this.” Some of the passages she knew by heart, having read them again and again. “*No law can be sacred to me but the law of my own nature.*’ You’re going into law, Will; isn’t that bold and brave? He says there’s a higher law, a higher education, a higher call....” Lena held her head high, as if listening to some far off strain of music,

“Ah, yes, dear Emerson.” Will mimicked her pose, raising his eyes to the heavens and reciting as if it were a bardic incantation—“There I was—

*“‘Standing on the bare ground,
my head bathed by the blithe air, and
uplifted into infinite space, all mean egotism vanishes.
I become a transparent eyeball.
I am nothing; I see all;
the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me-
I am part or particle of God.’”*

He rolled his eyes and lolled his head about as if in a trance.

“Go back to your tailor,” Lena teased. “Tell him to furnish you with fine clothes, since you won’t furnish your mind with fine thinking.”

“It’s all a lot of gibberish, if you ask me. Besides, Mama doesn’t care what nonsense you read as long as you keep Grandma occupied in her rooms, away from meddling downstairs with her lady friends, and their crazy plans for abolition and women’s rights.” Will shook his head.

Lena wasn’t surprised at his words; she had figured out for herself that she was keeping Mrs. Jones out of Mrs. Daly’s hair. But she was surprised at his tone.

“Don’t tell me you oppose your mother’s fondest dreams?” Until that point, Lena had been enjoying their talk; now she raised her eyebrows in surprise.

“Oh, silly Mama. She’s naïve and foolish. I do love her dearly, though.”

“Oh, really. Isn’t that indulgent of you? Boys are shameless! I would never dare call my parents foolish or naive.”

“I’m no longer a boy, Lena. I’m a man—with expectations! I want you to take me seriously.”

To Lena he sounded suddenly ridiculous. “How can I take you seriously? You don’t know what you want, except to seem all grown up. What are your expectations based on-- your attendance at Columbia College or your frock coat and top hat?”

“All these will help. I’ll have a career in the law and to become a judge someday, like Papa. You’ll see.”

“Well, I hope you get an open mind when you’re a judge. Right now you’re very closed minded, Will—opposing social reforms, and mocking Emerson!”

“And you, Lena, are you so superior from having read a few passages of Emerson?” he retorted.

“Are you opposed to reforms because you’re jealous that your mother doesn’t spend all her time doting on you anymore and devotes herself instead to noble causes?”

“Are you saying all this because you envy me that I’m going to college and hope to have a career?”

“Well, I don’t envy someone whose expectations seem to be based on family connections and fine wardrobe! Clothes do not make the man!”

“Well, they certainly help! You might benefit from a few new clothes yourself.”

Lena was really hurt by this comment. “I thought you were trying to be a man, Will. That was a juvenile remark that would make both your parents ashamed of you.”

But he was not listening. He had stomped out the door, leaving Lena with the feeling that she may have just lost a good friend.

Lena and Will studiously avoided each other after their quarrel. He spent most of his time in the library. “He has to read all the classics and the New Testament,” his mother apologized to her guests for his not putting in an appearance. “Most of his classes seem to be in Greek and Latin.”

“Putting on airs of a dedicated scholar?” Lena was ready to ask him, but he didn’t give her the chance, avoiding her. She retaliated by shunning the library and his environs and devoted herself to Mrs. Jones, who basked in the attention.

The longer they ignored one another the more afraid to speak she grew. She was afraid to expose her words to his mockery. What *did* she know, after all?

Only what she had learned in secondary school or in the few other books she had been able to read. Besides, he would only say that all her ideas were borrowed. If all her ideas were borrowed from writers, all his assumptions were borrowed from his father. She was certain it was Mr. Daly who had put those distressing thoughts about Mrs. Daly's causes into Will's mind. No doubt his father was against women's rights and abolition. Lena was all the more determined to support such noble causes herself, and all the more devoted to Emerson and other writers who inspired such noble thoughts in her.

By late June, 1851, Will's mother and grandmother were ready to take the family to the shore for the summer, where they liked to celebrate Independence Day. The city was dusty and noisy, and even with all the windows open, unbearably hot. Mrs. Jones hoped that by the time they returned in September, her divorce might be final and she might have been awarded her own house in the settlement. Lena would have a "nice vacation," Mrs. Daly told her, reassuring her that Mrs. Jones would continue to need her, even when they had moved back home.

Lena needed the time to herself, she thought, to get over lingering hurt feelings. She couldn't do anything about repairing their friendship, but she could at least improve her wardrobe. Will's remark about her clothes had upset her. She had only two dresses—a house dress and a visiting dress, which she had been wearing to work. Her mother had been meaning to make her a new good dress for work, but had never gotten around to it, so Lena determined that she could make a lovely dress for herself. Ladies dresses looked lovely, in so many patterns, with fitted bodices and necklines ranging from high to low. Of course, hers would have to be high, or perhaps she might have a skirt with a fitted blouse. She had so many ideas, and asked for money to buy some material. Managing, with the little money her mother could spare, to buy just enough material for a skirt and blouse as well as a dress. Bridget agreed to help, as it offered a chance to visit the Learys for advice on the tailoring.

Visiting the Learys offered the additional opportunity for Lena to see Nell and Brian's new baby daughter, Susan. Lena had seen and held many babies, mostly her own younger siblings, but this was the first born to one of her own friends. Nell's wedding in 1847 had prompted dreams of Lena's own wedding. Now, watching Nell dote on Susan, Lena dreamed of holding her own baby one day, and all her resolutions against marriage faded.

Bridget would enjoy the opportunity to work on fine material again, and found time to make Lena two white blouses—one with lace ruffles, "in case you go to a party," and one with formal tucks, "for work." With so many fast-growing children needing new shoes and clothes for school and church, Bridget had little time left for sewing, except the occasional shirt to sell.

The three to five dollars a week Lena brought home was the extent of their supplementary income. What Tom earned from carting went toward rent and what Lena earned went to groceries and other necessities. They would miss her income over the summer.

Lena had not much time that summer to spend making new dress or nursing injured feelings. Once again she found herself caught up in the demands of her large family. Rosie and Lizzie were in fourth grade now and she wished to share with them her favorite teachers and stories, but neither one of them was serious. They were always laughing and made a game out of everything. Bridget had been forced to turn over to them some of Lena's duties. As they were all working in the back, Lena doing the laundry, the twins peeling vegetables, Bridget nodded toward them. "They never stop jabbering," Bridget laughed. "It takes two of them to do anything you or I could do alone." James was eight. He wanted to hang around older boys, like Dan. Dan was five years older and didn't want to be bothered with him, preferring to work at his father's side. The two toddlers, Tommy and George, had each other, and Bridget to keep an eye on them. Lena and John became inseparable. He spent most of the summer by her side, helping her with the work that her mother could only trust to her.

Within a few days, Lena had forgotten her upset feelings.

Word came from Chicago in July that Mark and Maggie and their son John had settled in with Mike and his wife, for the time. "He'll stay there as long as Mike'll let him, you can be sure," Tom said. Mike had a child, now, as well, Mark's letter told them. Mike wasn't much for keeping in touch, and they could hardly expect the rich widow he had married, to communicate his good fortune to a brother she had never met.

"God bless them all," Bridget said. "Someday we'll have to go visit." Tom wished she meant it. He longed to leave New York, where the many famine immigrants were driving down the wages of laborers in the city. The prejudice against the Irish was increasing to the point that he was finding it more difficult to get carting jobs and continued to complain that so many immigrants were taking all the jobs. "What the slogans say is true—'Immigrants Depress Wages.' My only advantage is having Jack. Without him, I'd be lost. He's getting old and slowing down. He's the same age as Lena—sixteen. Dolly was about that age---."