

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

It is a great human weakness to wish to be the same as our friends. If they are rich, we wish to be rich. If they are poor, then we don't mind being equally poor. We are not ashamed of being stupid, we are only ashamed of being more stupid than our friends. It is a matter of comparison.

It is also a matter of expectation. We don't miss things that we never expected to have. We are not disappointed at being poor if we never expected to be rich.

Pip is poor and uneducated, but so are his friends. For them, this is normal; this is what life is like. But when Pip is told that he has 'great expectations', he becomes dissatisfied. He is ashamed of his friends, and he is ashamed of himself. His expectations are in danger of ruining his life.



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Great Expectations

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PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

Pip

Joe Gargery, *the village blacksmith*

Mrs Joe Gargery, *Joe's wife and Pip's sister*

Mr Pumblechook, *Joe's uncle*

Mr Wopsle, *the church clerk, later an actor*

Biddy, *Mr Wopsle's young cousin*

Orlick, *a blacksmith working for Joe Gargery*

Abel Magwitch, *a convict*

Compeyson, *also a convict*

Miss Havisham, *a rich lady*

Estella, *adopted by Miss Havisham*

Matthew Pocket, *Miss Havisham's cousin*

Herbert Pocket, *his son*

Clara, *engaged to Herbert*

Startop, *a young gentleman*

Bentley Drummle, *a young gentleman*

Mr Jaggers, *a London lawyer*

Molly, *Mr Jaggers' housekeeper*

Mr Wemmick, *Mr Jaggers' clerk*

The aged parent (the Aged), *Wemmick's father*

Miss Skiffins, *engaged to Wemmick*

Pip meets a stranger

My first name was Philip, but when I was a small child I could only manage to say Pip. So Pip was what everybody called me. I lived in a small village in Essex with my sister, who was over twenty years older than me, and married to Joe Gargery, the village blacksmith. My parents had died when I was a baby, so I could not remember them at all, but quite often I used to visit the churchyard, about a mile from the village, to look at their names on their gravestones.

My first memory is of sitting on a gravestone in that churchyard one cold, grey, December afternoon, looking out at the dark, flat, wild marshes divided by the black line of the River Thames, and listening to the rushing sound of the sea in the distance.

‘Don’t say a word!’ cried a terrible voice, as a man jumped up from among the graves and caught hold of me. ‘If you shout I’ll cut your throat!’ He was a big man, dressed all in grey, with an iron chain on his leg. His clothes were wet and torn. He looked exhausted, and hungry, and very fierce. I had never been so frightened in my whole life.

‘Oh! Don’t cut my throat, sir!’ I begged in terror.

‘Tell me your name, boy! Quick!’ he said, still holding me. ‘And show me where you live!’

‘My name’s Pip, sir. And I live in the village over there.’

He picked me up and turned me upside-down. Nothing fell out of my pocket except a piece of old bread. He ate it in two bites, like a dog, and put me back on the gravestone.

‘So where are your father and mother?’ he asked.

‘There, sir,’ I answered, pointing to their graves.

‘What!’ he cried, and was about to run, when he saw where I was pointing. ‘Oh!’ he said. ‘I see. They’re dead. Well, who do you live with, if I let you live, which I haven’t decided yet?’

‘With my sister, sir, wife of Joe Gargery, the blacksmith.’

‘Blacksmith, you say?’ And he looked down at his leg. Then he held me by both arms and stared fiercely down into my eyes.

‘Now look here. You bring me a file. You know what that is? And you bring me some food. If you don’t, or if you tell anyone about me, I’ll cut your heart out.’

‘I promise I’ll do it, sir,’ I answered. I was badly frightened and my whole body was trembling.

‘You see,’ he continued, smiling unpleasantly, ‘I travel with a young man, a friend of mine, who roasts boys’ hearts and eats them. He’ll find you, wherever you are, and he’ll have your heart. So bring the file and the food to that wooden shelter over there, early tomorrow morning, if you want to keep your heart, that is. Remember, you promised!’

I watched him turn and walk with difficulty across the marshes, the chain hanging clumsily around his leg. Then I ran home as fast as I could.

My sister, Mrs Joe Gargery, was very proud of the fact that she had brought me up ‘by hand’. Nobody explained to me what this meant, and because she had a hard and heavy hand, which she used freely on her husband as well as me, I supposed that Joe and I were both brought up by hand. She was not a beautiful woman, being tall and thin, with black hair and eyes and a very red face. She clearly felt that Joe and I caused her a lot of trouble, and she frequently complained about it. Joe, on the other hand, was a gentle, kind man with fair hair and weak blue eyes, who quietly accepted her scolding.

Because Joe and I were in the same position of being scolded by Mrs Joe, we were good friends, and Joe protected me from

her anger whenever he could. So when I ran breathless into the kitchen, he gave me a friendly warning. 'She's out looking for you, Pip! And she's got the stick with her!' This stick had been used so often for beating me that it was now quite smooth.

Just then Mrs Joe rushed in.

'Where have you been, you young monkey?' she shouted. I jumped behind Joe to avoid being hit with the stick.

'Only to the churchyard,' I whispered, starting to cry.

'Churchyard! If I hadn't brought you up, you'd be in the churchyard with our parents. You'll send *me* to the churchyard one day! Now let me get your supper ready, both of you!'

For the rest of the evening, I thought of nothing but the stranger on the marshes. Sometimes, as the wind blew round the house, I imagined I heard his voice outside, and I thought with horror of the young man who ate boys' hearts.

Just before I went to bed, we heard the sound of a big gun on the marshes. 'Was that a gun, Joe?' I asked.

'Ah!' said Joe. 'Another convict's escaped. One got away last night. They always fire the gun when one escapes.'

'Who fires the gun?' I asked. Joe shook his head to warn me.

'Too many questions,' frowned my sister. 'If you must know it's the men in the prison-ships who fire the gun.'

'I wonder who is put into prison-ships, and why?' I asked, in a general way, quietly desperate to know the answer.

This was too much for Mrs Joe. 'Listen, my boy, I didn't bring you up by hand to annoy people to death! There are ships on the river which are used as prisons. People who steal and murder are put in the prison-ships, and they stay there for years sometimes. And they always begin their life of crime by asking too many questions! Now, go to bed!'

I could not sleep at all that night. I was in terror of the young man who wanted my heart, I was in terror of the man with the

iron chain, I was in terror of my sister, who would soon discover I had stolen her food. As soon as there was a little light in the sky outside my window, I got up and went quietly down to the kitchen. I stole some bread, cheese and a big meat pie, hoping that, as there was a lot of food ready for Christmas, nobody would notice what was missing. I did not dare take the whole brandy bottle, so I poured some into a smaller bottle to take away with me. Then I filled up the brandy bottle with what I thought was water from a big brown bottle. I took a file from Joe's box of tools, and ran out on to the dark marshes.

The mist was so thick that I could not see anything. Although I knew my way to the shelter very well, I almost got lost this time. I was near it when I saw a man sitting on the ground, half asleep. I went up and touched his shoulder. He jumped up, and it was the wrong man! He was dressed in grey, too, and had an iron chain on his leg. He ran away into the mist.

'It's the young man!' I thought, feeling a pain in my heart.

When I arrived at the shelter, I found the right man. He looked so cold and hungry that I felt sorry for him. Trembling violently he swallowed the brandy and ate the food like a hunted animal, looking around him all the time for danger.

'You're sure you didn't tell anyone? Or bring anyone?'

'No, sir. I'm glad you're enjoying the food, sir.'

'Thank you, my boy. You've been good to a poor man.'

'But I'm afraid there won't be any left for *him*.'

'Him? Who's that?' My friend stopped in the middle of eating.

'The young man who travels with you.'

'Oh, him!' he replied, smiling. '*He* doesn't want any food.'

'I thought he looked rather hungry,' I answered.

He stared at me in great surprise. 'Looked? When?'

'Just now, over there. I found him half asleep and I thought

it was you. He was dressed like you, and –’ I was anxious to express this politely ‘– he had the same reason for wanting to borrow a file.’

‘Then I *did* hear them fire the gun last night! You know, boy, when you’re on the marsh alone at night, you imagine all kinds of things, voices calling, guns firing, soldiers marching! But show me where this man went. I’ll find him and I’ll finish with him! I’ll smash his face! Give me the file first.’

I was afraid of him now that he was angry again.

‘I’m sorry, I must go home now,’ I said. He did not seem to hear, so I left him bending over his leg and filing away at his iron chain like a madman. Halfway home I stopped in the mist to listen, and I could still hear the sound of the file.



Catching a convict

All that morning I was frightened that my sister would discover that I had stolen from her, but luckily she was so busy cleaning the house, and roasting the chickens for our Christmas lunch that she did not notice that I had been out, or that any food was missing. At half-past one our two guests arrived. Mr Wopsle had a large nose and a shining, bald forehead, and was the church clerk. Mr Pumblechook, who had a shop in the nearest town, was a fat, middle-aged man with a mouth like a fish, and staring eyes. He was really Joe’s uncle but it was Mrs Joe who called him uncle. Every Christmas Day he arrived with two bottles of wine, handing them proudly to my sister.

‘Oh Uncle Pumblechook! This is kind!’ she always replied.

‘It’s no more than you deserve,’ was the answer every time.

Sitting at table with these guests I would have felt uncomfortable even if I hadn’t robbed my sister. Not only was Pumblechook’s elbow in my eye, but I wasn’t allowed to speak, and they gave me the worst pieces of meat. Even the chickens must have been ashamed of those parts of their bodies when they were alive. And worse than that, the adults never left me in peace.

‘Before we eat, let us thank God for the food in front of us,’ said Mr Wopsle, in the deep voice he used in church.

‘Do you hear that?’ whispered my sister to me. ‘Be grateful!’

‘Especially,’ said Mr Pumblechook firmly, ‘be grateful, boy, to those who brought you up by hand.’

‘Why are the young never grateful?’ wondered Mr Wopsle sadly.

‘Their characters are naturally bad,’ answered Mr Pumblechook, and all three looked unpleasantly at me.

When there were guests, Joe’s position was even lower than usual (if that was possible), but he always tried to help me if he could. Sometimes he comforted me by giving me extra gravy. He did that now.

‘Just imagine, boy,’ said Mr Pumblechook, ‘if your sister hadn’t brought you up —’

‘You listen to this,’ said my sister to me crossly.

‘If, as I say, she hadn’t spent her life looking after you, where would you be now?’

Joe offered me more gravy.

‘He was a lot of trouble to you, madam,’ Mr Wopsle said sympathetically to my sister.

‘Trouble?’ she cried. ‘Trouble?’ And then she started on a list of all my illnesses, accidents and crimes, while everybody

except Joe looked at me with disgust. Joe added more gravy to the meat swimming on my plate, and I wanted to pull Mr Wopsle's nose.

In the end Mrs Joe stopped for breath, and said to Mr Pumblechook, 'Have a little brandy, uncle. There is a bottle already open.'

It had happened at last! Now she would discover I had stolen some brandy, and put water in the bottle. Mr Pumblechook held his glass up to the light, smiled importantly at it and drank it. When, immediately afterwards, he jumped up and began to rush round the room in a strange wild dance, we all stared at him in great surprise. Was he mad? I wondered if I had murdered him, but if so, how? At last he threw himself gasping into a chair, crying 'Medicine!' Then I understood. Instead of filling up the brandy bottle with water, I had put Mrs Joe's strongest and most unpleasant medicine in by mistake. That was what the big brown bottle contained.

'But how could my medicine get into a brandy bottle?' asked my sister. Fortunately she had no time to find the answer, as Mr Pumblechook was calling for a hot rum to remove the taste of the medicine. 'And now,' she said, when the fat man was calmer, 'you must all try Uncle Pumblechook's present to us! A really delicious meat pie!'

'That's right, Mrs Joe!' said Mr Pumblechook, looking more cheerful now. 'Bring in the pie!'

'You shall have some, Pip,' said Joe kindly.

I knew what would happen next. I could not sit there any longer. I jumped down from the table, and ran out of the room.

But at the front door I ran straight into a group of soldiers. Mrs Joe was saying as she came out of the kitchen, 'The pie – has – gone!' but stopped when she saw the soldiers.

'Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen,' said the officer in charge.



*He jumped up and began to rush round the room
in a strange wild dance.*

‘I’m here in the King’s name, and I want the blacksmith.’

‘And why do you want him?’ said my sister crossly.

‘Madam,’ replied the officer politely, ‘speaking for myself, I’d like the pleasure of meeting his fine wife. Speaking for the King, I’d like him to repair these handcuffs.’

‘Ah, very good, very good!’ said Mr Pumblechook, clapping.

The soldiers waited in the kitchen while Joe lit the forge fire and started work. I began to feel better now that everyone had forgotten the missing pie.

‘How far are we from the marshes?’ asked the officer.

‘About a mile,’ replied Mrs Joe.

‘That’s good. We’ll catch them before it’s dark.’

‘Convicts, officer?’ asked Mr Wopsle.

‘Yes, two escaped convicts out on the marshes. Has anyone here seen them?’

The others all shook their heads. Nobody asked me. When the handcuffs were ready, Joe suggested we should go with the soldiers, and as Mrs Joe was curious to know what happened, she agreed. So Joe, Mr Wopsle and I walked behind the men through the village and out on to the marshes.

‘I hope we don’t find those poor men, Joe,’ I whispered.

‘I hope not either, Pip,’ he whispered back. It was cold, with an east wind blowing from the sea, and it was getting dark.

Suddenly we all stopped. We heard shouts in the distance.

‘This way! Run!’ the officer ordered, and we all rushed in that direction. The shouts became clearer. ‘Murder!’ ‘Escaped convict!’ ‘Help!’ At last we discovered two men fighting each other. One was my convict, and the other was the man who had run away when I had seen him near the shelter. Somehow the soldiers held the men apart and put the handcuffs on them.

‘Here he is, I’m holding him for you!’ shouted my convict.

‘Officer, he tried to murder me!’ cried the other man. His

face was bleeding and he was clearly very frightened.

‘Murder him! No,’ said the first, ‘that would be too easy. I want him to suffer more, back on the prison-ship. He’s lying, as he did at our trial! You can’t trust Compeyson!’

Just then he noticed me for the first time. I shook my head at him, to show that I had not wanted the soldiers to find him. He stared at me, but I did not know if he understood or not.

The prisoners were taken to the riverside, where a boat was waiting to take them on to the prison-ship. Just as he was about to leave, my convict said, ‘Officer, after my escape, I stole some food, from the blacksmith’s house. Bread, cheese, brandy and a meat pie. I’m sorry I ate your pie, blacksmith.’

‘I’m glad you did,’ replied Joe kindly. ‘We don’t know why you’re a convict, but we wouldn’t want you to die of hunger.’

The man rubbed his eyes with the back of his dirty hand. We watched the small boat carry him out to the middle of the river, where the great black prison-ship stood high out of the water, held by its rusty chains. He disappeared into the ship, and I thought that was the last I had seen of him.



An opportunity for Pip

I always knew I would be apprenticed to Joe as soon as I was old enough, and so I used to spend most of the day helping him in the forge. However, I also attended the village evening school, which was organized by an ancient relation of Mr Wopsle’s. Her teaching mostly consisted of falling asleep while we children fought each other, but Mr Wopsle’s young

cousin, Biddy, tried to keep us under control and teach us to read, write and count. Mr Wopsle ‘examined’ us every three months. In fact he did not ask us any questions at all, but read aloud from Shakespeare, waving his arms dramatically and enjoying the sound of his own voice.

One night, about a year after the escaped convicts had been caught, I was sitting by the kitchen fire, writing a letter to Joe. I didn’t need to, because he was sitting right next to me, but I wanted to practise my writing. After an hour or two of hard work, I passed this letter to him.

*mY deAr JOe I hopE yOu Are well sDon i Can teAcH yoU wHat
I hAve leArnt wHat fuN JoE LovE PiP'*

‘Pip, old boy!’ cried Joe, opening his kind blue eyes very wide. ‘What a lot you’ve learnt! Here’s a J and an O, that’s for Joe, isn’t it, Pip?’

I wondered whether I would have to teach Joe from the beginning, so I asked, ‘How do you write Gargery, Joe?’

‘I don’t write it at all,’ said Joe. ‘But, you know, I *am* fond of reading. Give me a good book or newspaper, a good fire and I ask no more. Well! When you come to a J and an O, how interesting reading is!’

‘Didn’t you ever go to school, Joe, when you were young?’

‘No, Pip. You see, my father drank a lot, and when he drank, he used to hit my mother, and me too, sometimes. So she and I ran away from him several times. And she used to say, “Now, Joe, you can go to school.” But my father had such a good heart that he didn’t want to be without us. So he always came to find us, and took us home, and hit us. So you see, Pip, I never learnt much.’

‘Poor Joe!’

‘But remember, Pip, my father had a good heart.’

I wondered about that, but said nothing.

‘He let me become a blacksmith, which was his job too, only he never worked at it. I earned the money for the family, until he died. And listen to this, Pip, I wanted to put this on his gravestone:

*Whatever the fault he had from the start,
Remember, reader, he had a good heart.’*

‘Did you invent that yourself, Joe?’ I asked, surprised.

‘I did,’ said Joe proudly. ‘It came to me in a moment. From my own head. But, Pip, sad to say, there wasn’t enough money for the gravestone. My poor mother needed it. In bad health, she was. She died soon after. Found peace at last.’ Joe’s blue eyes were watery. ‘I was lonely then, and I met your sister. Now, Pip,’ Joe looked firmly at me, because he knew I was not going to agree with him, ‘your sister is a fine woman!’

I could think of nothing better to say than ‘I’m glad you think so, Joe.’

‘So am I,’ said Joe. ‘I’m glad *I* think so. Very kind of her, bringing you up by hand. Such a tiny baby you were! So when I offered to marry your sister, I said, “And bring the poor little child to live with us. There’s room for him at the forge!” ’

I put my arms round Joe’s neck and cried into his shirt.

‘Don’t cry, old boy!’ he said. ‘Always the best of friends, you and me!’ As I dried my tears, he continued, ‘So here we are, Pip! Now if you teach me a bit (and I warn you now that I’m very stupid) Mrs Joe must never know. And why? Because she likes to be – in charge – you know – giving the orders.’

‘Joe,’ I asked, ‘why don’t you ever rebel?’

‘Well,’ said Joe, ‘to start with, your sister’s clever. And I’m not. And another thing, and this is serious, old boy, when I think of my poor mother’s hard life, I’m afraid of not behaving