



Great Expectations

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 TIMELESS CLASSICS



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A Convict on the Marsh

My family name is Pirrip, and my first name is Philip. As a baby, I put both names together and called myself Pip.

I lived with my sister and her husband, the blacksmith, in the marsh country. My first clear memory is of one cold day in my seventh year. I was in the lonely churchyard visiting my parents' graves. I knew that the dark flat land past the churchyard was the marshes. I knew that the gray line was the river and that the wind came in from the sea. And I knew that the sad bundle of shivers starting to cry was Pip.

“Hold your noise!” cried a terrible voice. A man stood up among the graves. “Keep still, you little devil, or I’ll cut your throat!”

The frightful man was dressed in rough gray clothes. A great iron was on his leg and a rag

was wound around his head. He seized me by the chin.

“Oh! Don’t cut my throat, sir!” I begged.
“Pray don’t do it, sir.”

“Tell me your name!” growled the man.
“Quick!”

“Pip, sir.”

“Where do you live? Point out the place!”

I pointed to our village, a mile or more away. I tried not to cry.

“Now,” said the man, “where are your mother and father?”

“Why, over there, sir!” I said, pointing to their gravestones.

“Then who do ye live with—that is if I *let* ye live?”

“My sister, sir—wife of Joe Gargery, the blacksmith.”

“Blacksmith, eh?” said he, looking at the iron on his leg. Then he took down my arms and tipped me back. “Get me a file,” he says. “And get me food, or I’ll have your heart and liver out! Bring them to me there tomorrow morning.” He pointed to a bank of earth in the distance. “Don’t say a word about me—or your



heart and your liver shall be roasted and ate!”

I said I would get him the file. And I promised to get what food I could. Then I ran home without stopping.

At home the blacksmith forge was shut up. Joe was alone in the kitchen. He was a goodnatured fellow with blond hair and blue eyes. My sister, Mrs. Joe, had black hair and eyes and was tall and bony. As she so often said, she had “brought me up by hand.” This meant that she often laid her heavy hand upon me—and upon Joe, too.

“Mrs. Joe is out looking for you, Pip,” Joe warned me. “And she’s got Tickler with her!”

I hung my head. Tickler was a piece of cane, worn smooth by raps on my frame.

“Listen! She’s a-coming!” said Joe. “Get behind the door, old chap.”

My sister threw the door open. Grabbing my arm, she put Tickler to work. “Where have you been, you monkey? It’s hard enough for me, being the blacksmith’s wife, without being a bad boy’s mother!”

All evening I pictured the man on the marshes. I thought about the file and food I must soon steal.

Because it was Christmas Eve, I was put to stirring pudding for the next day. “Hark!” said I as I stirred. “Was that *guns*, Joe? What does it mean?”

“There was a convict off last night,” said Joe. “They fired warning of him. Now it seems another one must have escaped.”

“Who’s firing?” said I.

“Guards on the prison ships!” cried my sister. She pointed her needle and thread. “Right across the marshes. People are put in

those ships because they murder and rob. Now get off to bed!”

I went up to my dark room. I was in terror of my promise to the man with the iron!

At dawn, I went downstairs. Every board seemed to cry, “Stop, thief! Get up, Mrs. Joe!” I stole bread and cheese and took brandy from the stone bottle. I took a beautiful round pork pie. I got a file from Joe’s toolbox. Then I ran for the marshes.

It was a damp morning. The marsh mist was thick. Before long, I saw a man sitting with his back toward me. When I touched him on the shoulder, he jumped up. It was *not* the man I had met!

This man was also dressed in rough gray clothes. He too had an iron on his leg. He swore at me and then ran into the mist. I felt my heart turn over. I dare say I should have felt a pain in my liver, too, if I had known where it was!

Then I saw the right man, limping to and fro. He grabbed the bottle of brandy and poured it down his throat. After gobbling the food, he smeared his ragged sleeve over his eyes.

I felt sorry for him then, and I made bold to say, "I am glad you enjoy the food."

"Thanks to you, my boy, I do."

"Will you leave any for him?"

"Him? Who's him?"

"The other man I saw just now, over yonder. He was dressed like you, only with a hat," I explained. "And with the same reason for needing a file."

He grabbed me by the collar and stared. "*Where is he?* Show me the way he went. I'll pull him down! Give me the file, boy!"

Then he was down on the wet grass, filing at his leg iron like a madman. I was very much afraid of him again. I told him I had to go, but he took no notice. The last I saw of him, his head was bent and he was working at the iron on his leg. The last I heard of him, the file was still rasping away.

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The Capture

I expected someone would be waiting at home to arrest me for stealing the food. But Mrs. Joe was busy getting ready for Christmas.

“And where have *you* been?” she asked. Joe secretly crossed two fingers and showed them to me. It was our warning sign that my sister was in a cross temper.

I said I had been down at the village to hear the Christmas carols.

Mrs. Joe was fixing a fine dinner of a pickled pork leg and roast stuffed fowls. The pudding was on to boil. Clearly no discovery had been made of the missing food and file.

At half past one, I opened the door. Mr. Pumblechook, a well-to-do grain merchant in the village, had come to dine.

As we sat down to Christmas dinner, old

Pumblechook laid an eye on me. "Be grateful, boy," he said, "to them which brought you up by hand."

With that, my sister began to list the problems I had caused. Just when I felt I might get through the day, my sister stood. "You must taste," she said, "a nice pork pie."

As she went out to get it, I ran for my life. But I got no farther than the door. There I ran into a party of soldiers. They all carried muskets. One held a pair of handcuffs.

At the strange sight of soldiers on our doorstep, the dinner party rose. Mrs. Joe came back from the pantry and stared. She quickly forgot the missing pork pie.

"Excuse me," said a soldier, "but I want the blacksmith. These handcuffs are broken. Can you fix them?"

"Are you after convicts, sir?" asked Mr. Pumblechook.

"Two of them!" answered a soldier. "They're out on the marshes. Anybody here seen anything of them?"

Everybody, except me, said no. No one noticed me.