GREAT EXPECTATIONS

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by Charles Dickens

Chapter I

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my

infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit

than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.

I give Pirrip as my father's family name, on the authority of his

tombstone and my sister,--Mrs. Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith.

As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness

of either of them (for their days were long before the days of

photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like were

unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape of the letters on

my father's, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man,

with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription,

"Also Georgiana Wife of the Above," I drew a childish conclusion that

my mother was freckled and sickly. To five little stone lozenges, each

about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside

their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of

mine,--who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in

that universal struggle,--I am indebted for a belief I religiously

entertained that they had all been born on their backs with their hands

in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of

existence.

Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river

wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression

of the identity of things seems to me to have been gained on a memorable

raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain

that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and

that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the

above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham,

Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead

and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard,

intersected with dikes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle

feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond

was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was

rushing was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid

of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip.

"Hold your noise!" cried a terrible voice, as a man started up from

among the graves at the side of the church porch. "Keep still, you

little devil, or I'll cut your throat!"

A fearful man, all in coarse gray, with a great iron on his leg. A man

with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his

head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and

lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by

briars; who limped, and shivered, and glared, and growled; and whose

teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin.

"Oh! Don't cut my throat, sir," I pleaded in terror. "Pray don't do it,

sir."

"Tell us your name!" said the man. "Quick!"

"Pip, sir."

"Once more," said the man, staring at me. "Give it mouth!"

"Pip. Pip, sir."

"Show us where you live," said the man. "Pint out the place!"

I pointed to where our village lay, on the flat in-shore among the

alder-trees and pollards, a mile or more from the church.

The man, after looking at me for a moment, turned me upside down, and

emptied my pockets. There was nothing in them but a piece of bread. When

the church came to itself,--for he was so sudden and strong that he

made it go head over heels before me, and I saw the steeple under my

feet,--when the church came to itself, I say, I was seated on a high

tombstone, trembling while he ate the bread ravenously.

"You young dog," said the man, licking his lips, "what fat cheeks you

ha' got."

I believe they were fat, though I was at that time undersized for my

years, and not strong.

"Darn me if I couldn't eat em," said the man, with a threatening shake

of his head, "and if I han't half a mind to't!"

I earnestly expressed my hope that he wouldn't, and held tighter to

the tombstone on which he had put me; partly, to keep myself upon it;

partly, to keep myself from crying.

"Now lookee here!" said the man. "Where's your mother?"

"There, sir!" said I.

He started, made a short run, and stopped and looked over his shoulder.

"There, sir!" I timidly explained. "Also Georgiana. That's my mother."

"Oh!" said he, coming back. "And is that your father alonger your

mother?"

"Yes, sir," said I; "him too; late of this parish."

"Ha!" he muttered then, considering. "Who d'ye live with,--supposin'

you're kindly let to live, which I han't made up my mind about?"

"My sister, sir,--Mrs. Joe Gargery,--wife of Joe Gargery, the

blacksmith, sir."

"Blacksmith, eh?" said he. And looked down at his leg.

After darkly looking at his leg and me several times, he came closer

to my tombstone, took me by both arms, and tilted me back as far as he

could hold me; so that his eyes looked most powerfully down into mine,

and mine looked most helplessly up into his.

"Now lookee here," he said, "the question being whether you're to be let

to live. You know what a file is?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you know what wittles is?"

"Yes, sir."

After each question he tilted me over a little more, so as to give me a

greater sense of helplessness and danger.

"You get me a file." He tilted me again. "And you get me wittles." He

tilted me again. "You bring 'em both to me." He tilted me again. "Or

I'll have your heart and liver out." He tilted me again.

I was dreadfully frightened, and so giddy that I clung to him with both

hands, and said, "If you would kindly please to let me keep upright,

sir, perhaps I shouldn't be sick, and perhaps I could attend more."

He gave me a most tremendous dip and roll, so that the church jumped

over its own weathercock. Then, he held me by the arms, in an upright

position on the top of the stone, and went on in these fearful terms:--

"You bring me, to-morrow morning early, that file and them wittles. You

bring the lot to me, at that old Battery over yonder. You do it, and you

never dare to say a word or dare to make a sign concerning your having

seen such a person as me, or any person sumever, and you shall be let to

live. You fail, or you go from my words in any partickler, no matter how

small it is, and your heart and your liver shall be tore out, roasted,

and ate. Now, I ain't alone, as you may think I am. There's a young man

hid with me, in comparison with which young man I am a Angel. That young

man hears the words I speak. That young man has a secret way pecooliar

to himself, of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver. It

is in wain for a boy to attempt to hide himself from that young man. A

boy may lock his door, may be warm in bed, may tuck himself up, may draw

the clothes over his head, may think himself comfortable and safe, but

that young man will softly creep and creep his way to him and tear him

open. I am a keeping that young man from harming of you at the present

moment, with great difficulty. I find it wery hard to hold that young

man off of your inside. Now, what do you say?"

I said that I would get him the file, and I would get him what broken

bits of food I could, and I would come to him at the Battery, early in

the morning.

"Say Lord strike you dead if you don't!" said the man.

I said so, and he took me down.

"Now," he pursued, "you remember what you've undertook, and you remember

that young man, and you get home!"

"Goo-good night, sir," I faltered.

"Much of that!" said he, glancing about him over the cold wet flat. "I

wish I was a frog. Or a eel!"

At the same time, he hugged his shuddering body in both his

arms,--clasping himself, as if to hold himself together,--and limped

towards the low church wall. As I saw him go, picking his way among the

nettles, and among the brambles that bound the green mounds, he looked

in my young eyes as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people,

stretching up cautiously out of their graves, to get a twist upon his

ankle and pull him in.

When he came to the low church wall, he got over it, like a man whose

legs were numbed and stiff, and then turned round to look for me. When I

saw him turning, I set my face towards home, and made the best use of

my legs. But presently I looked over my shoulder, and saw him going on

again towards the river, still hugging himself in both arms, and picking

his way with his sore feet among the great stones dropped into the

marshes here and there, for stepping-places when the rains were heavy or

the tide was in.

The marshes were just a long black horizontal line then, as I stopped

to look after him; and the river was just another horizontal line, not

nearly so broad nor yet so black; and the sky was just a row of long

angry red lines and dense black lines intermixed. On the edge of the

river I could faintly make out the only two black things in all the

prospect that seemed to be standing upright; one of these was the beacon

by which the sailors steered,--like an unhooped cask upon a pole,--an

ugly thing when you were near it; the other, a gibbet, with some chains

hanging to it which had once held a pirate. The man was limping on

towards this latter, as if he were the pirate come to life, and come

down, and going back to hook himself up again. It gave me a terrible

turn when I thought so; and as I saw the cattle lifting their heads to

gaze after him, I wondered whether they thought so too. I looked all

round for the horrible young man, and could see no signs of him. But now

I was frightened again, and ran home without stopping.

Chapter II

My sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, was more than twenty years older than I,

and had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbors

because she had brought me up "by hand." Having at that time to find out

for myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and

heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as

well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up

by hand.

She was not a good-looking woman, my sister; and I had a general

impression that she must have made Joe Gargery marry her by hand. Joe

was a fair man, with curls of flaxen hair on each side of his smooth

face, and with eyes of such a very undecided blue that they seemed

to have somehow got mixed with their own whites. He was a mild,

good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going, foolish, dear fellow,--a sort

of Hercules in strength, and also in weakness.

My sister, Mrs. Joe, with black hair and eyes, had such a prevailing

redness of skin that I sometimes used to wonder whether it was possible

she washed herself with a nutmeg-grater instead of soap. She was tall

and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her

figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in

front, that was stuck full of pins and needles. She made it a powerful

merit in herself, and a strong reproach against Joe, that she wore this

apron so much. Though I really see no reason why she should have worn it

at all; or why, if she did wear it at all, she should not have taken it

off, every day of her life.

Joe's forge adjoined our house, which was a wooden house, as many of the

dwellings in our country were,--most of them, at that time. When I ran

home from the churchyard, the forge was shut up, and Joe was sitting

alone in the kitchen. Joe and I being fellow-sufferers, and having

confidences as such, Joe imparted a confidence to me, the moment I

raised the latch of the door and peeped in at him opposite to it,

sitting in the chimney corner.

"Mrs. Joe has been out a dozen times, looking for you, Pip. And she's

out now, making it a baker's dozen."

"Is she?"

"Yes, Pip," said Joe; "and what's worse, she's got Tickler with her."

At this dismal intelligence, I twisted the only button on my waistcoat

round and round, and looked in great depression at the fire. Tickler

was a wax-ended piece of cane, worn smooth by collision with my tickled

frame.

"She sot down," said Joe, "and she got up, and she made a grab at

Tickler, and she Ram-paged out. That's what she did," said Joe, slowly

clearing the fire between the lower bars with the poker, and looking at

it; "she Ram-paged out, Pip."

"Has she been gone long, Joe?" I always treated him as a larger species

of child, and as no more than my equal.

"Well," said Joe, glancing up at the Dutch clock, "she's been on the

Ram-page, this last spell, about five minutes, Pip. She's a coming! Get

behind the door, old chap, and have the jack-towel betwixt you."

I took the advice. My sister, Mrs. Joe, throwing the door wide open,

and finding an obstruction behind it, immediately divined the cause, and

applied Tickler to its further investigation. She concluded by throwing

me--I often served as a connubial missile--at Joe, who, glad to get hold

of me on any terms, passed me on into the chimney and quietly fenced me

up there with his great leg.

"Where have you been, you young monkey?" said Mrs. Joe, stamping her

foot. "Tell me directly what you've been doing to wear me away with fret

and fright and worrit, or I'd have you out of that corner if you was

fifty Pips, and he was five hundred Gargerys."

"I have only been to the churchyard," said I, from my stool, crying and

rubbing myself.

"Churchyard!" repeated my sister. "If it warn't for me you'd have been

to the churchyard long ago, and stayed there. Who brought you up by

hand?"

"You did," said I.

"And why did I do it, I should like to know?" exclaimed my sister.

I whimpered, "I don't know."

"I don't!" said my sister. "I'd never do it again! I know that. I may

truly say I've never had this apron of mine off since born you were.

It's bad enough to be a blacksmith's wife (and him a Gargery) without

being your mother."

My thoughts strayed from that question as I looked disconsolately at

the fire. For the fugitive out on the marshes with the ironed leg, the

mysterious young man, the file, the food, and the dreadful pledge I was

under to commit a larceny on those sheltering premises, rose before me

in the avenging coals.

"Hah!" said Mrs. Joe, restoring Tickler to his station. "Churchyard,

indeed! You may well say churchyard, you two." One of us, by the by, had

not said it at all. "You'll drive me to the churchyard betwixt you, one

of these days, and O, a pr-r-recious pair you'd be without me!"

As she applied herself to set the tea-things, Joe peeped down at me

over his leg, as if he were mentally casting me and himself up, and

calculating what kind of pair we practically should make, under the

grievous circumstances foreshadowed. After that, he sat feeling his

right-side flaxen curls and whisker, and following Mrs. Joe about with

his blue eyes, as his manner always was at squally times.

My sister had a trenchant way of cutting our bread and butter for us,

that never varied. First, with her left hand she jammed the loaf hard

and fast against her bib,--where it sometimes got a pin into it, and

sometimes a needle, which we afterwards got into our mouths. Then she

took some butter (not too much) on a knife and spread it on the loaf, in

an apothecary kind of way, as if she were making a plaster,--using both

sides of the knife with a slapping dexterity, and trimming and moulding

the butter off round the crust. Then, she gave the knife a final smart

wipe on the edge of the plaster, and then sawed a very thick round off

the loaf: which she finally, before separating from the loaf, hewed into

two halves, of which Joe got one, and I the other.

On the present occasion, though I was hungry, I dared not eat my

slice. I felt that I must have something in reserve for my dreadful

acquaintance, and his ally the still more dreadful young man. I knew

Mrs. Joe's housekeeping to be of the strictest kind, and that my

larcenous researches might find nothing available in the safe. Therefore

I resolved to put my hunk of bread and butter down the leg of my

trousers.

The effort of resolution necessary to the achievement of this purpose I

found to be quite awful. It was as if I had to make up my mind to leap

from the top of a high house, or plunge into a great depth of water.

And it was made the more difficult by the unconscious Joe. In

our already-mentioned freemasonry as fellow-sufferers, and in his

good-natured companionship with me, it was our evening habit to compare

the way we bit through our slices, by silently holding them up to each

other's admiration now and then,--which stimulated us to new exertions.

To-night, Joe several times invited me, by the display of his fast

diminishing slice, to enter upon our usual friendly competition; but

he found me, each time, with my yellow mug of tea on one knee, and

my untouched bread and butter on the other. At last, I desperately

considered that the thing I contemplated must be done, and that it

had best be done in the least improbable manner consistent with the

circumstances. I took advantage of a moment when Joe had just looked at

me, and got my bread and butter down my leg.

Joe was evidently made uncomfortable by what he supposed to be my loss

of appetite, and took a thoughtful bite out of his slice, which he

didn't seem to enjoy. He turned it about in his mouth much longer than

usual, pondering over it a good deal, and after all gulped it down like

a pill. He was about to take another bite, and had just got his head on

one side for a good purchase on it, when his eye fell on me, and he saw

that my bread and butter was gone.

The wonder and consternation with which Joe stopped on the threshold

of his bite and stared at me, were too evident to escape my sister's

observation.

"What's the matter now?" said she, smartly, as she put down her cup.