

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Original by Charles Dickens

Retold by Pauline Francis



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Introduction

Charles Dickens was born in 1812, the second of eight children. When Charles was twelve years old, his father went to prison because he owed money. So Charles went out to work to help his family. He never forgot the terrible times when he was poor, and later used his experiences in some of his stories.

In his twenties, Charles Dickens found work writing about London life for newspapers and magazines. Some of these articles were published as a book called *The Pickwick Papers*. This is how he became famous at the age of twenty-four.

Great Expectations was published as a novel in 1861. It tells the story of a boy called Pip, who steals food to help an escaped convict. A few years later, he goes to the house of an old lady called Miss Havisham, who is the guardian of a beautiful girl, Estella. Pip falls in love with Estella. When Pip is left some money, he is able to give up his blacksmith's apprenticeship and become a gentleman in London. He accepts the money with delight so that he can marry Estella. Who is Pip's secret benefactor? And will Estella agree to marry him?

Charles Dickens wrote many famous novels, including *Nicholas Nickleby*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*. He travelled widely, especially in

America, reading to audiences from his work. Charles Dickens died in 1870 at the age of fifty-eight. He is buried in Westminster Abbey, London.

CHAPTER ONE

Terror in the Graveyard

I was brought up in Kent, in marshlands about twenty miles from the sea. My earliest memory is walking alone in the graveyard where my parents and five brothers were buried. It was a bleak, damp afternoon on Christmas Eve, and the wind blew from the sea across the marshes. I was so afraid that I began to cry.

‘Hold your noise’, cried a terrible voice. A man appeared from behind one of the headstones. ‘Keep still, you little devil, or I’ll cut your throat.’

The man was dressed in rough grey clothes and had an iron chain around his leg. He was soaked to the skin and had a rag wound around his head. His teeth chattered with cold.

‘Oh, don’t cut my throat, sir’, I pleaded in terror.

‘What’s your name?’ he asked.

‘Pip, sir’, I said.

‘Show me where you live, Pip.’

I pointed to our village, about a mile from the churchyard. The man caught hold of me and held me upside down, emptying my pockets. I only had a piece of bread on me.

‘Where’s yer mother and father?’ the man asked.