



# Classic Tales By Charles Dickens

## Great Expectations



My father's family name was Pirrip and my Christian name Philip. However, all my infant tongue could manage was Pip — and so I came to be called. I never saw my father or my mother. The shape of the letters on my father's tombstone gave me the idea that he was a square, stout man. I imagined my mother freckled and sickly. Ours was marsh country, a dark flat wilderness, near a river and close to the sea.



On a bleak Christmas Eve, I was visiting the graveyard and beginning to cry when a terrible voice cried, “Hold your noise!” and a man started up from between the gravestones. He was a terrible sight, in drab clothing, with a great iron on his leg.

“You get me a file,” he snarled, “and you get me wittles.” He ordered me to bring them to the old Battery early the next morning. “Or I’ll have your heart and liver out,” he growled.



I ran without stopping to the forge where I lived with my sister and her husband, the blacksmith Joe Gargery. My sister was tall and bony, and always wore a coarse apron. Joe was a sweet-tempered, foolish fellow. Wracked with fear, I could only pretend to eat my supper before going up to bed.



Early the next morning, I crept downstairs and took from the pantry bread, cheese, brandy, and a handsome pork pie. I stole a file from the forge and ran across the marshes towards the old Battery. On my way, I observed another man dressed in drab clothes, also with a leg iron, but he quickly vanished.



After delivering my stolen goods, I returned home to find visitors arriving for Christmas lunch. There were Mr Hubble, the wheelwright, and his wife; Mr Wopsle, the church clerk; and Joe's uncle, called Mr Pumblechook, a wealthy corn-chandler. I ate in terror of my thefts being noticed.

Then my sister went to get the pork pie.

I left the table and ran to the door — straight into a soldier.



Leg irons were often used to restrain prisoners in Victorian times. Convicts were treated harshly, and it was not uncommon for them to have their legs and arms shackled with rings of iron. Wittles, meaning food, is derived from the words victuals and vittles.

Eventually, Miss Havisham gave me twenty-five guineas and I went to work with Joe and his journeyman, Dolge Orlick. I no longer visited Satis House.



Then, one fateful day, my sister was attacked when alone in the house. A tremendous blow to the back of her head knocked out her wits. Thankfully, a friend, Biddy, came to tend her.

I was in the fourth year of my apprenticeship when I was approached in the tavern by a lawyer, Mr Jagers, the burly gentleman I had met at Miss Havisham's house. It seemed that I had come into "great expectations". However, he said, "the name of the person who is your liberal benefactor is to remain a profound secret until the person chooses to reveal it."



I was sure the person must be Miss Havisham. I went to London, to Mr Jaggers's clerk, at Barnard's Inn. Here, I lodged with Herbert Pocket, the son of Miss Havisham's cousin, Matthew Pocket. And here, I met again the pale young gentleman with whom I had fought.

An apprentice was a young person being trained by a skilled craftsman, while a journeyman was a craftsman or artisan qualified to work competently at his trade but only under the supervision of an experienced employer.



Herbert told me how Miss Havisham inherited a fortune while her half-brother received much less. I also heard how she fell in love with a man who said he would marry her and then did not. It was believed that he was already married.

Herbert took me to his family home, where I met two fellow students. Startop was kind, with a woman's delicacy of feature, but Bentley Drummle was a sulky fellow, rich, idle, proud, and suspicious.



I struck up a friendship with Mr Wemmick, who invited me to his strange, castle-like house to meet his Aged Parent, as he called him.

Soon after, I had dinner with Mr Jaggers where, as advised by Wemmick, I closely observed Molly, the servant. Later, Joe brought a message from Miss Havisham and, when I went to visit, I found Orlick employed as the gatekeeper. Inside, I met Estella, now a woman and even more beautiful.



An envelope edged in black brought serious news: my sister had died the previous Monday.

My twenty-first birthday arrived and yet my benefactor remained anonymous. I visited Estella at Mrs Brandley's house in Richmond and found Drummle paying court to her.



Years passed and I was still living the same wasteful, idle life when one stormy night I heard a noise. I went to the stairhead and held my reading light over the banister. A man approached, dressed roughly like a seaman. He had long, white hair and was aged about sixty. It was the convict from the graveyard! I was horror-struck to discover that he — not Miss Havisham — was my benefactor.

Sentenced to transportation, he had worked and worked to repay me for getting him food and a file.



“You acted nobly, my boy,” he said. “I never forgot it.” He told me that the other convict I had met on the marshes was called Compeyson. Before long, Herbert and I realised that Compeyson was the evil trickster who had broken Miss Havisham’s heart.

Abel Magwitch, my benefactor, was risking his life by returning from transportation. While he hid, I visited Miss Havisham and her ward. I tried to control my trembling voice as I told Estella, “I have loved you long and dearly.”



Estella looked at me unmoved. Miss Havisham had taught her to use her beauty to torture men. When I mentioned Drummle's name, she said haughtily, "I am going to be married to him." I covered my face with my hands.

I arrived at the gate of Barnard's Inn to find a note from Wemmick: "Do not go home." He knew I was being watched.



On Wemmick's advice, Herbert took Magwitch to the house of his fiancée at Mill Pond Bank. Meanwhile, I made plans to get Magwitch on a steamer to Europe. Wemmick also explained how Mr Jaggers had defended Molly, his servant, who was charged with murdering another woman. There was a child and a man involved. I remembered how much Mr Jaggers's servant looked like Estella and was convinced that Molly was Estella's mother.

I visited Miss Havisham. She pleaded with me to forgive her for raising Estella to have an icy heart, far from her true nature. "Though it be ever so long after my broken heart is dust — pray do it," she begged. I replied, "I can do it now."

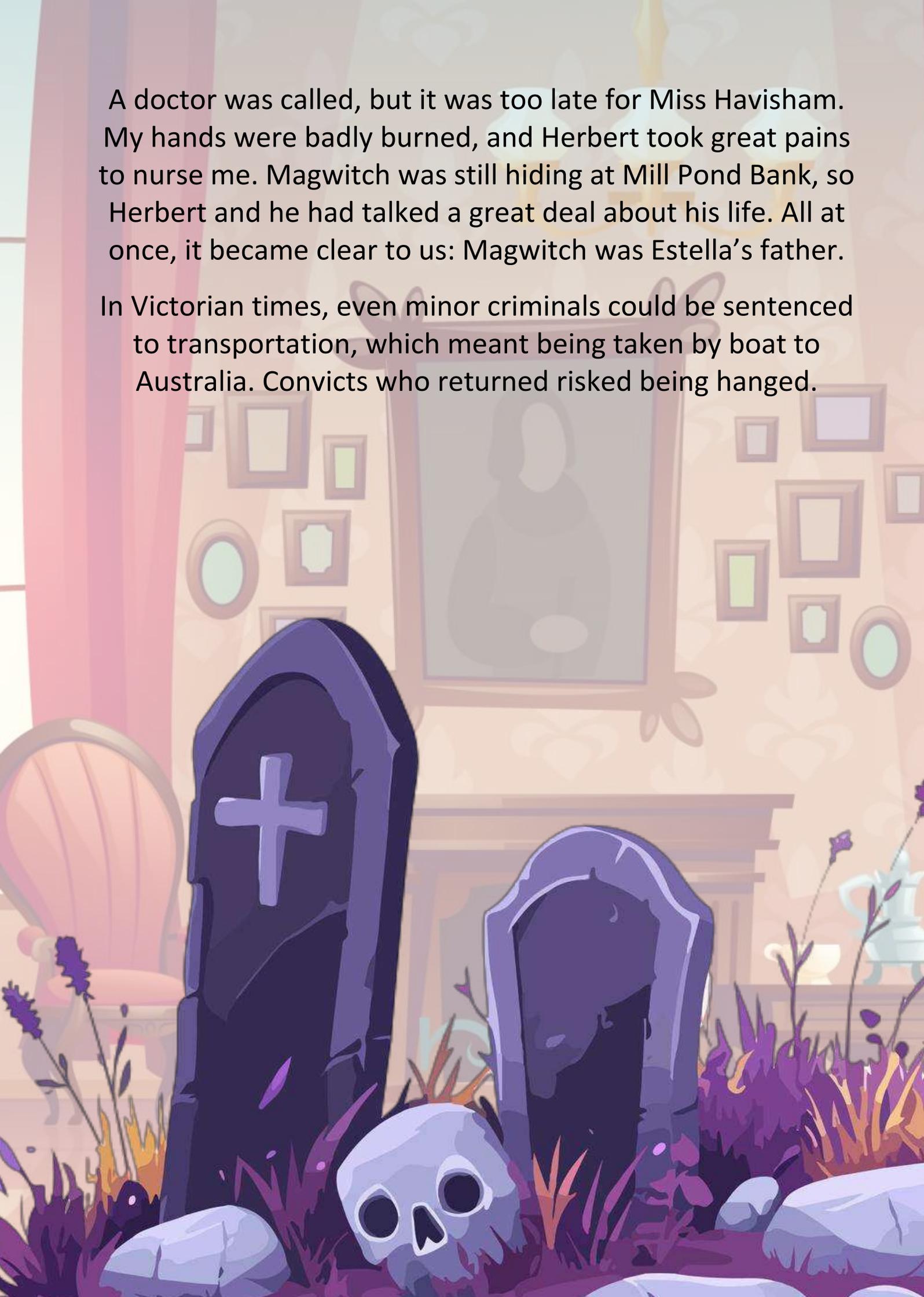


Returning from a walk in the garden, I watched the old lady sitting by the fire. Suddenly, a flaming light sprang up, and I saw her running at me, a whirl of fire blazing all around her and soaring above her head. I fought to smother the flames with my coat, then dragged the cloth from the table, scattering the fossilised remains of the wedding feast.

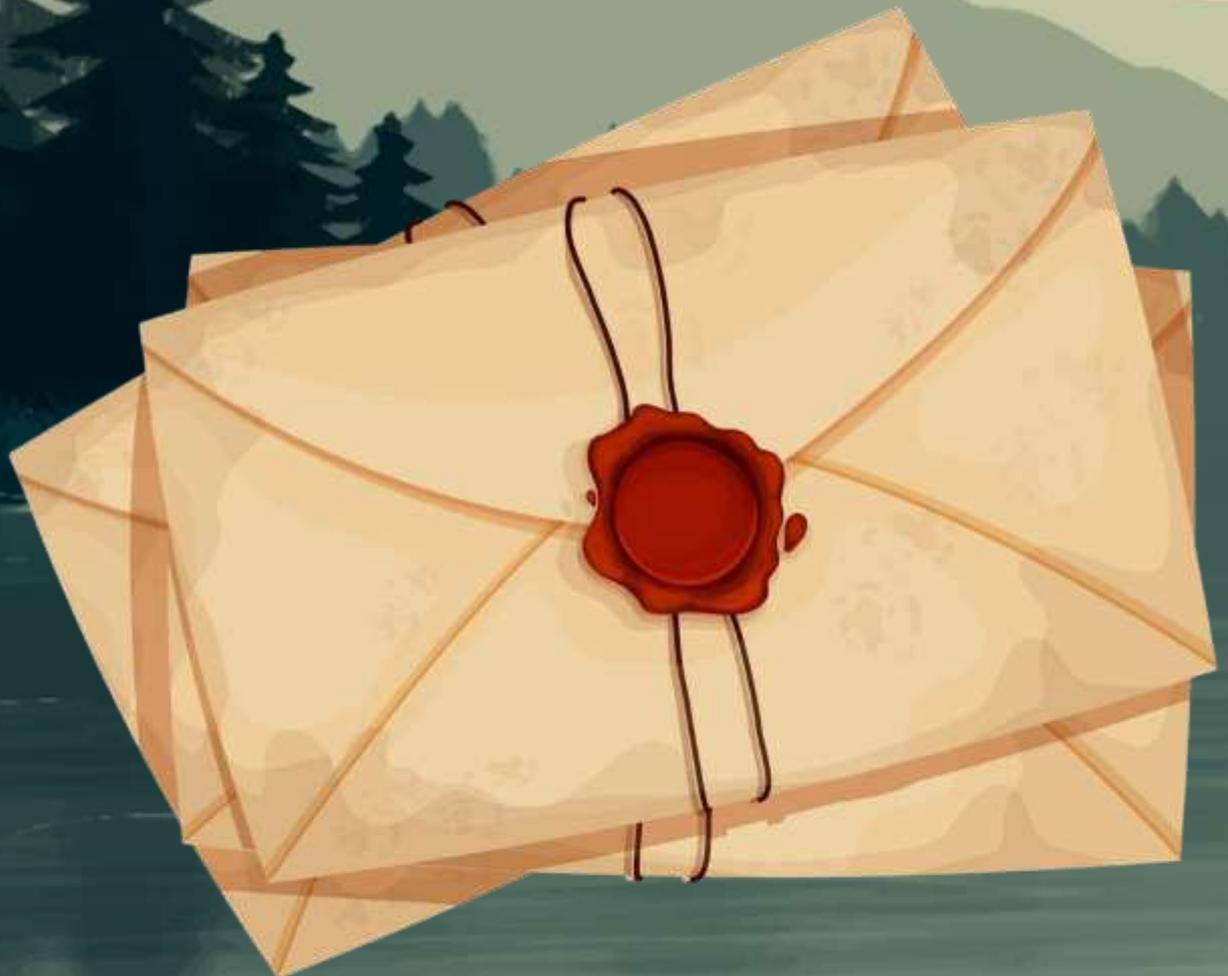


A doctor was called, but it was too late for Miss Havisham. My hands were badly burned, and Herbert took great pains to nurse me. Magwitch was still hiding at Mill Pond Bank, so Herbert and he had talked a great deal about his life. All at once, it became clear to us: Magwitch was Estella's father.

In Victorian times, even minor criminals could be sentenced to transportation, which meant being taken by boat to Australia. Convicts who returned risked being hanged.



Soon after, I received an anonymous letter luring me to a little sluice house in the marshes at nine o'clock. It was a trap. I was only saved from being killed by Orlick when Herbert rushed in. Luckily, I had dropped the note and, finding it, he had followed me. Enraged with jealousy, Orlick confessed to attacking my sister.



On a March day when the sun shone hot and the wind blew cold, Herbert, Startop, and I went with Magwitch down the Thames. Herbert and Startop rowed, making good progress with the tide, and we were in position as the steamers approached. Suddenly, a four-oared galley appeared. An official shouted, "You have a returned transport there ... I call upon him to surrender." Among others in the galley sat Compeyson. A scuffle ensued, during which Compeyson was drowned and Magwitch was severely injured.

Being ill, Magwitch was allowed a chair in court. The sun came in through the great windows as he was sentenced to be hanged.



The Thames is a tidal river. In Dickens's day, when many boats were still powered by oars or sails, it was important to know the state of the tide before setting out on a journey.

I made many petitions for clemency but, as the days passed, Magwitch's health deteriorated. One day I held his hand and told him, "You had a child once ... She is living now. She is a lady and very beautiful. And I love her." He died soon after.



I became ill and regained my senses to find myself being tended by Joe. Slowly I grew stronger, but one morning I rose to find Joe had gone. I followed him back to the forge to discover he and Bidy celebrating their wedding day.

There was nothing left for me at home. My fortune was gone and my friends happily settled. I went abroad for eleven years, working as a clerk. When I returned, Bidy and Joe had a son.



On a cold afternoon, I visited Satis House, only to find it utterly demolished. In the desolate garden, I beheld a figure.

“Estella!” I cried.

“I am greatly changed,” she warned me. But as I took her hand in mine to leave the ruined place, I saw no shadow of another parting from her.





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