

Great Expectations



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What this cautionary tale of a young man raised high above his station by a mysterious benefactor lacks in length, it more than makes up for in its remarkable characters and compelling story. The novel begins with young orphaned Philip Pirrip--Pip--running afoul of an escaped convict in a cemetery. This terrifying personage bullies Pip into stealing food and a file for him, threatening that if he tells a soul "your heart and your liver shall be tore out, roasted and ate." The boy does as he's asked, but the convict is captured anyway, and transported to the penal colonies in Australia. Having started his novel in a cemetery, Dickens then ups the stakes and introduces his hero into the decaying household of Miss Havisham, a wealthy, half-mad woman who was jilted on her wedding day many years before and has never recovered. Pip is brought there to play with Miss Havisham's ward, Estella, a little girl who delights in tormenting Pip about his rough hands and future as a blacksmith's apprentice.

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目录:

[Great Expectations_ 下载链接1_](#)

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