

CHARACTERS

PIP, an orphan
JOE GARGER, Pip's brother-in-law
MRS. JOE GARGER, Pip's sister
MISS HAVISHAM, an eccentric recluse
ESTELLA, Miss Havisham's ward
HERBERT POCKET, Pip's roommate
MR. JAGGERS, a solicitor
ABEL MAGWITCH, a convict
COMPEYSON, a villain

PLOT

Little Pip has been left an orphan since he was a small boy, and his sister, much older than he, has grudgingly reared him in her cottage. Pip's brother-in-law, Joe Gargery, on the other hand, is kind and loving to the boy. In the marsh country where he lives with his sister and Joe, Pip wanders alone. One day he is accosted by a wild-looking stranger who demands that Pip secretly bring him some food, a request which Pip fears to deny. The stranger, an escaped prisoner, asks Pip to bring him a file to cut the iron chain that binds his leg. When Pip returns to the man with a pork pie and file, he sees another mysterious figure in the marsh. After a desperate struggle with the escaped prisoner, the stranger escapes into the fog. The man Pip has aided is later apprehended. He promises Pip he will somehow repay the boy for helping him,

Mrs. Joe sends Pip to the large mansion of the strange Miss Havisham upon that lady's request. Miss Havisham lives in a gloomy, locked house where all clocks have been stopped on the day her bridegroom failed to appear for the wedding ceremony. She often dresses in her bridal robes; a wedding breakfast molds on the table in an unused room. There Pip goes every day to entertain the old lady and a beautiful young girl named Estella, who delights in tormenting the shy boy. Miss Havisham enjoys watching the two children together, and she encourages Estella in her haughty teasing of Pip.

Living in the grim atmosphere of Joe's blacksmith shop and the uneducated poverty of his sister's home, Pip is eager to learn. One day a London solicitor named Jaggers presents him with the opportunity to go to London and become a gentleman. Both Pip and Joe accept the proposal. Pip imagines that his kind backer is Miss Havisham herself. Perhaps she wants to make a gentleman out of him so he will be fit someday to marry Estella.

In London Pip finds a small apartment set up for him, and for a living companion he has a young relative of Miss Havisham, Herbert Pocket. When Pip needs money, he is instructed to go to Mr. Jaggers. Although Pip pleads with the lawyer to disclose the name of his benefactor, Jaggers advises the eager young man not to make inquiries, for when the proper time arrives, Pip's benefactor will make himself known.

Soon Pip becomes one of a small group of London dandies, among them a disagreeable young man named Bentley Drummle. Joe Gargery comes to visit Pip, much to Pip's disturbance, for by now he has outgrown his rural background and he is ashamed of Joe's manners. But Herbert Pocket cheerfully helps Pip to entertain the uncomfortable Joe in their apartment. Plainly Joe loves Pip very much, and after he has gone Pip feels ashamed of himself. Joe has brought word that Miss Havisham wants to see the young man, and Pip returns with his brother-in-law. Miss Havisham and Estella mark the changes in Pip, and when Estella has left Pip alone with the old lady, she tells him he must fall in love with the beautiful girl. She also says it is time for Estella to come to London, and she wishes Pip to meet her adopted daughter when she arrives. This request makes Pip feel more certain he has been sent to London by Miss Havisham to be groomed to marry Estella.

Estella has not been in London long before she has many suitors. Of all the men who court her, she seems to favor Bentley Drummle. Pip sees Estella frequently. Although she treats him kindly and with friendship, he knows she does not return his love.

On his twenty-first birthday Pip receives a caller, the man whom Pip had helped in the marsh many years before. Ugly and coarse, he tells Pip it was he who has been financing Pip ever since he has come to London. At first the boy is horrified to discover he owes so much to this crude ex-criminal, Abel Magwitch. He tells Pip that he has

been sent to the colonies where he has grown rich. Now he wants Pip to enjoy all the privileges he had been denied in life, and he has returned to England to see the boy to whom he has tried to be a second father. He warns Pip that he is in danger should his presence be discovered, for it is death for a prisoner to return to England once he has been sent to a convict colony. Pip detests his plight. Now he realizes Miss Havisham has had nothing to do with his great expectations in life, but he is too conscious of his debt to consider abandoning the man whose person he dislikes. He determines to do all in his power to please his benefactor. Magwitch is using the name Provis to hide his identity. Provis tells Pip furthermore that the man with whom Pip had seen him struggling long ago in the marsh is his enemy, Compeyson, who has vowed to destroy him. Herbert Pocket, who is a distant cousin of Miss Havisham, tells Pip that the lover who had betrayed her on the day of her wedding was named Arthur Compeyson.

Pip goes to see Miss Havisham to denounce her for having allowed him to believe she was helping him. On his arrival he is informed that Estella is to marry Bentley Drummle. Since Miss Havisham has suffered at the hands of one faithless man, she has reared Estella to inflict as much hurt as possible upon the many men who love her. Estella reminds Pip that she has warned him not to fall in love with her, for she has no compassion for any human being. Pip returns once more to visit Miss Havisham after Estella has married. An accident started a fire in the old, dust-filled mansion, and although Pip tries to save the old woman she dies in the blaze that also badly damages her gloomy house.

From Provis' story of his association with Compeyson and from other evidence, Pip learns that Provis is Estella's father; but he does not reveal his discovery to anyone but Jaggers, whose housekeeper, evidently, is Estella's mother. Pip also learns that Compeyson is in London and plotting to kill Provis. In order to protect the man who has become a foster father to him, Pip (with the help of Herbert Pocket) arranges to smuggle Provis across the channel to France. There Pip intends to join the old man. Elaborate and secretive as their plans are, Compeyson manages to overtake them as they are loading Provis onto the boat. The two enemies fight one last battle in the water, and Provis kills his enemy. He is then taken to jail, where he dies before he can be brought to trial.

When Pip falls ill shortly afterward, it is Joe Gargery who comes to nurse him. Older and wiser from his many experiences, Pip realizes that he need no longer be ashamed of the kind man who had given so much love to him when he was a boy. His sister, Mrs. Joe, has died and Joe has married again, this time very happily. Pip returns to the blacksmith's home to stay awhile, still desolate and unhappy because of his lost Estella. Later Herbert Pocket and Pip set up business together in London.

Eleven years pass before Pip goes to see Joe Gargery again. Curiosity leads Pip to the site of Miss Havisham's former mansion. There he finds Estella, now a widow, wandering over the grounds. During the years she has lost her cool aloofness and has softened a great deal. She tells Pip that she has thought of him often. Pip is able to foresee that perhaps he and Estella will never have to part again. The childhood friends walk hand in hand from the place which has once played such an enormous part in both their lives.

MAJOR THEMATIC CONCERNS

Ambition

- characters strive for self-improvement, but this is less important than affection, loyalty, conscience
- moral improvement is superior to social improvement
- social and educational improvement are hollow without moral improvement

Economic and Social Class

- strict social hierarchies are oppressive
- excessive wealth can lead to selfishness
- social class divides and harms individuals

Appearances and Reality

- the novel concerns the appearances of things: happiness, love, beauty, wealth, criminality
- often these are social constructs that do not reflect reality
- false ideals force people to deceive in order to "improve" themselves

Love

- closely tied to destruction when unhealthy (self-love, obsessive love)
- true love is liberating (loyalty, unconditional love)