

## Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

**G**reat Expectations is a *Bildungsroman* that depicts the growth and personal development of an orphan named Pip.

In the excerpt below, Pip meets Miss Havisham, a strange, reclusive upper-class lady who invites him to her place – Satis House – for reasons that are still unclear at this point of the novel.

A snobbish girl called Estella, who is about the same age as Pip, guides him to Miss Havisham's room and then leaves him alone with the eccentric lady.

**S**he was dressed in rich materials – satins, and lace, and silks – all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled<sup>1</sup> on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks<sup>2</sup>, were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing, for she had but one shoe on – the other was on the table near her hand – her veil was but half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on, and some lace for her bosom<sup>3</sup> lay with those trinkets<sup>4</sup>, and with her handkerchief, and gloves, and some flowers, and a prayer-book, all confusedly heaped about the looking-glass.

It was not in the first few moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed. But, I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered<sup>5</sup> like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose<sup>6</sup>, had shrunk to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some

ghastly<sup>7</sup> waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress, that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could.

"Who is it?" said the lady at the table.

"Pip, ma'am".

"Pip?"

"Mr. Pumblechook's boy, ma'am. Come - to play".

"Come nearer; let me look at you. Come close".

It was when I stood before her, avoiding her eyes, that I took note of the surrounding objects in detail, and saw that her watch had stopped at twenty minutes to nine, and that a clock in the room had stopped at twenty minutes to nine.

"Look at me", said Miss Havisham. "You are not afraid of a woman who has never seen the sun since you were born?"

I regret to state that I was not afraid of telling the enormous lie comprehended in the answer "No".

"Do you know what I touch here?" she said, laying her hands, one upon the other, on her left side.

"Yes, ma'am". [...]

"What do I touch?"

"Your heart".

"Broken!"

### Glossary

<sup>1</sup> shone – <sup>2</sup> large boxes – <sup>3</sup> the part of a garment covering her chest – <sup>4</sup> small ornaments – <sup>5</sup> dried up – <sup>6</sup> not fitting close to her body – <sup>7</sup> dreadful

She uttered the word with an eager<sup>8</sup> look, and with strong emphasis, and with a weird<sup>9</sup> smile that had a kind of boast<sup>10</sup> in it. Afterwards, she kept her hands there for a little while, and slowly took them away as if they were heavy.

"I am tired", said Miss Havisham. "I want diversion, and I have done with men and women. Play".

[...]

It was then I began to understand that everything in the room had stopped, like the watch and the clock, a long time ago. I noticed that Miss Havisham put down the jewel exactly on the spot from which she had taken it up. As Estella dealt the cards,

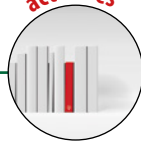
I glanced at the dressing-table again, and saw that the shoe upon it, once white, now yellow, had never been worn. I glanced down at the foot from which the shoe was absent, and saw that the silk stocking on it, once white, now yellow, had been trodden ragged<sup>11</sup>. Without this arrest of everything, this standing still of all the pale decayed objects, not even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like grave-clothes, or the long veil so like a shroud.<sup>12</sup>

So she sat, corpse-like, as we played at cards; the frillings<sup>13</sup> and trimmings<sup>14</sup> on her bridal dress, looking like earthy paper.

### Glossary

8 impatient – 9 strange – 10 excessive pride – 11 in bad condition – 12 a cloth used to wrap a body for burial – 13 gathered, ruched, or pleated strips of cloth – 14 ornaments

### activities



### ↓ TEXT COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS

Answer the following questions.

- 1 What does Miss Havisham look like?
- 2 What is she wearing?
- 3 What does Miss Havisham want Pip to do? Why?
- 4 What does Pip compare Miss Havisham to? Why?

- 5 Which colour is prevalent in Miss Havisham's chamber?
- 6 How would you define Miss Havisham's mood?
- 7 What are the causes of Miss Havisham's eccentricity?
- 8 What do the clocks symbolize in your opinion?

### ↓ CLOZE EXERCISE

Fill in the blanks with the following words: loyal – cake – apprentice – death – friends – wedding – orphan – benefactor – ashamed – gentleman – husband – convict.

### The Plot

As a young child, the ..... 1 Pip lives with his sister and brother-in-law Joe Gargery, the village blacksmith to whom he becomes an ..... 2. One day, while Pip is walking through the marshes he meets an escaped ..... 3 who threatens him into bringing back food and a file to break the leg-irons.

Much later, Pip is sent to entertain Miss Havisham, a rich old lady who was jilted on her ..... 4 day long ago. She still wears her wedding gown, and the now-rotten wedding ..... 5 is on the table in her dining room. Pip falls in love with her adopted daughter Estella, a beautiful but snobbish girl.

Pip feels ..... 6 of his family and of his friend Biddy, he wants to be a gentleman, not a blacksmith. One day he learns that an anonymous ..... 7 has left him a lot of money. He is to move to London, where he will be trained as a ..... 8. A lawyer, Jaggers, will oversee his inheritance. Pip thinks his benefactor is Miss Havisham, and believes he is

being trained as Estella's future ..... 9. In London Pip is educated by Mr. Mathew Pocket. On his twenty-fourth birthday, Pip learns that his benefactor is Magwitch, the convict from long ago. He realizes with shame that he has mistreated his good friend Joe, who has always been generous and ..... 10 to him.

Pip's moral education begins. He decides he can no longer accept the convict's money. He tries to help Magwitch escape, but in the chaos, Magwitch dies. Pip discovers that Estella is Magwitch's daughter.

Estella marries Pip's enemy, Drummle. Miss Havisham dies and leaves a good deal of money to Mr Pocket, at Pip's request. Pip goes to Joe and Biddy, who have married one another since the ..... 11 of Pip's sister. He asks them for forgiveness. The novel ends when he meets Estella after many years. She has left Drummle, who has since died. She is remarried. She and Pip part as ..... 12 and Pip realizes she will always be a part of his life.