

VOLUME I



I was born Philip Pirrip. As a small child, I found it impossible to pronounce my name correctly. My name always came out Pip. And so I became known as Pip.

I never saw my mother or my father or the five little brothers that preceded me. What I know about them I learned from my sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith. I did visit them regularly, however, for they were buried in a nearby churchyard.

We lived in the marsh country, by the river, twenty miles from the sea. One raw afternoon toward evening, I was standing in the churchyard where my parents and brothers were buried. Beyond lay the marshes, a dark flat wilderness crisscrossed by ditches and mounds. Some cattle were feeding there. Far past the marshes was the river, which looked like a low leaden line in the gray light. I was quite frightened, and I began to cry.



“Hold your noise!” cried a terrible voice. “Keep still, you little devil, or I’ll cut your throat!”

A fearful man, in ragged gray clothes, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and torn by briars. A man who limped, and shivered, and glared and growled, and whose teeth chattered as he seized me by the chin.

“O! Don’t cut my throat, sir,” I pleaded in terror. “Pray don’t do it, sir.”

“Tell us your name!” said the man. “Quick!”

“Pip, sir.”

“Once more,” said the man, staring at me. “Say it clear!”

“Pip. Pip, sir.”

“Show us where you live,” said the man. “Point out the place!”

I pointed to where our village lay, a mile or more from the church.

The man, after looking at me for a moment, turned me upside down, and emptied my pockets. There was nothing in them but a piece of bread. Roughly, he placed me on a high tombstone, trembling, while he ate the bread ravenously.

“You young dog,” said the man, licking his lips, “what fat cheeks you ha’ got. Darn me if I couldn’t eat ’em,” said the man, with a threatening shake of his head.

I earnestly expressed my hope that he wouldn’t, and held tighter to the tombstone to keep myself from crying.

“Now lookee here!” said the man. “Where’s your mother?”

“There, sir!” said I, pointing.

He started and began to run. Suddenly he stopped and looked over his shoulder.

“There, sir!” I timidly explained, extending my finger toward her grave.

“Oh!” said he, coming back. “And is that your father beside your mother?”

“Yes, sir,” said I.

“Ha!” he muttered then, considering. “Who d’ye live with—supposin’ I let you live, which I

han't made up my mind about?"

"My sister, sir—Mrs. Joe Gargery—wife of Joe Gargery, the blacksmith, sir."

"Blacksmith, eh?" He looked down at his leg with the iron ring around it.

The fearful man came closer to me, grabbed me by both arms, and tilted me back as far as he could. His eyes looked most powerfully down into mine, and mine looked most helplessly up into his.

"Now lookee here," he said, "the question being whether you're to be let to live. You know what a file is?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you know what food is?"

"Yes, sir."

"You get me a file." He tilted me again. "And you get me food." He tilted me again. "You bring 'em both to me." He tilted me again. "Or I'll have your heart and liver out." He tilted me again. "You bring me, tomorrow morning early, that file and that food. You do it, and you never tell anyone that you met me, and I'll let you live. You fail, and your heart and your liver shall be tore out, roasted and ate. Now, I ain't alone. There's a young man hid with me. Compared to him, I am an Angel. That young man has a secret way of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver. It is impossible for a boy to attempt to hide himself from that young man. A boy may lock his door, may be warm in bed, may tuck himself up, may draw the clothes over his head, may think himself comfortable and safe, but that

young man will softly creep and creep his way to him and tear him open. I am keeping that young man from harming you at the present moment, with great difficulty. Now, what do you say?"

I said that I would get him the file and whatever food I could. And I would come to him early in the morning.

"Say Lord strike you dead if you don't!" said the man.

I said so, and he put me down on the ground.

"Now," he pursued, "you remember what you've promised, and you remember that young man, and you get home!"

"Goo-good night, sir," I faltered.

At the same time, he hugged his shuddering body in both his arms—as if to hold himself together—and limped toward the low church wall. He looked as if he were avoiding the hands of the dead people, stretching up out of their graves, to clasp his ankle and pull him in.

He came to the low church wall and got over it. Then he turned around to look at me. When I saw him turning, I ran toward home. I stopped for a moment to look over my shoulder, and saw him going on again toward the river. He seemed to be making his way toward an ancient scaffold, one of the few structures that rose above the flat misty marsh. Dangling from the scaffold were some chains that had once held a pirate. The man was limping on toward this grisly object, as if he were the pirate come to life and was going back to hook

himself up again. I looked all round for the horrible young man and could see no signs of him. But now I was frightened again. I ran home without stopping.



My sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, was more than twenty years older than I. She had established a great reputation because she had brought me up “by hand.” I did not know what that expression meant. However, I knew she had a hard and heavy hand. I was also aware that she often laid her hand upon her husband as well as me. I supposed, therefore, that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand.

My sister was not a good-looking woman. I had a general impression that she must have made Joe Gargery marry her by hand. Joe was a fair man, with curls of hair on each side of his smooth face. He was a mild, good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going fellow.

My sister had black hair and eyes. She was tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron.

Joe’s blacksmith forge adjoined our house. When I ran home from the churchyard, the forge

was shut up, and Joe was sitting alone in the kitchen. "Mrs. Joe has been out looking for you, Pip. She's furious. She's a-coming! Get behind the door, old chap."

I took the advice. My sister glared at me. "Where have you been, you young monkey?" said Mrs. Joe, stamping her foot. "Tell me directly what you've been doing."

"I have only been to the churchyard," said I.

"Churchyard!" repeated my sister. "If it warn't for me you'd have been buried in the churchyard long ago."

My sister turned her attention to preparing tea and bread-and-butter. Though I was hungry, I dared not eat my slice. I felt that I must have food for my dreadful acquaintance and the still more dreadful young man. Therefore, I slid my hunk of bread-and-butter down the leg of my trousers.

It was Christmas Eve, and I had to stir the pudding for the next day. As I finished, I heard a loud muffled bang from the direction of the marsh.

"Ah!" said Joe. "There's another convict off."

"What does that mean, Joe?" said I.

Mrs. Joe, who always took it upon herself to provide explanations, said, snappishly, "Escaped. Escaped."

"There was a convict off last night," said Joe, "after sunset-gun. And they fired warning of him. And now, it appears they're firing warning of another."

"Who's firing?" said I.

“Lord bless the boy!” exclaimed my sister, as if she didn’t quite mean that, but rather the contrary. “From the Hulks!”

“And please, what’s the Hulks?” said I.

“That’s the way with this boy!” exclaimed my sister. “Answer him one question, and he’ll ask you a dozen. Hulks are prison-ships.”

“Who’s put into prison-ships, and why are they put there?” said I.

It was too much for Mrs. Joe. “People are put in the Hulks because they murder, and rob, and do all sorts of bad things. And they always begin by asking questions. Now, you get along to bed!”

I went to bed in mortal terror—of the young man who wanted my heart and liver and the dreadful man with the ironed leg. I was afraid to sleep. I knew that at the first faint dawn of morning I must rob the pantry.

As soon as light appeared in the sky, I got up and went downstairs. I stole some bread, some cheese, about half a jar of mincemeat, some brandy, a meat bone with very little on it, and a pork pie. Then I seized a file from among Joe’s tools, and I ran for the misty marshes.