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| 1 |

A Convict on the Marsh

My family name is Pirrip, and my first name is Philip. As a baby, I put both names together and called myself Pip.

I lived with my sister and her husband, the blacksmith, in the marsh country. My first clear memory is of one cold day in my seventh year. I was in the lonely churchyard visiting my parents' graves. I knew that the dark flat land past the churchyard was the marshes. I knew that the gray line was the river and that the wind came in from the sea. And I knew that the sad bundle of shivers starting to cry was Pip.

“Hold your noise!” cried a terrible voice. A man stood up among the graves. “Keep still, you little devil, or I’ll cut your throat!”

The frightful man was dressed in rough gray clothes. A great iron was on his leg and a rag

was wound around his head. He seized me by the chin.

“Oh! Don’t cut my throat, sir!” I begged. “Pray don’t do it, sir.”

“Tell me your name!” growled the man. “Quick!”

“Pip, sir.”

“Where do you live? Point out the place!”

I pointed to our village, a mile or more away. I tried not to cry.

“Now,” said the man, “where are your mother and father?”

“Why, over there, sir!” I said, pointing to their gravestones.

“Then who do ye live with—that is if I *let* ye live?”

“My sister, sir—wife of Joe Gargery, the blacksmith.”

“Blacksmith, eh?” said he, looking at the iron on his leg. Then he took down my arms and tipped me back. “Get me a file,” he says. “And get me food, or I’ll have your heart and liver out! Bring them to me there tomorrow morning.” He pointed to a bank of earth in the distance. “Don’t say a word about me—or your



heart and your liver shall be roasted and ate!”

I said I would get him the file. And I promised to get what food I could. Then I ran home without stopping.

At home the blacksmith forge was shut up. Joe was alone in the kitchen. He was a goodnatured fellow with blond hair and blue eyes. My sister, Mrs. Joe, had black hair and eyes and was tall and bony. As she so often said, she had “brought me up by hand.” This meant that she often laid her heavy hand upon me—and upon Joe, too.

“Mrs. Joe is out looking for you, Pip,” Joe warned me. “And she’s got Tickler with her!”

I hung my head. Tickler was a piece of cane, worn smooth by raps on my frame.

“Listen! She’s a-coming!” said Joe. “Get behind the door, old chap.”

My sister threw the door open. Grabbing my arm, she put Tickler to work. “Where have you been, you monkey? It’s hard enough for me, being the blacksmith’s wife, without being a bad boy’s mother!”

All evening I pictured the man on the marshes. I thought about the file and food I must soon steal.

Because it was Christmas Eve, I was put to stirring pudding for the next day. “Hark!” said I as I stirred. “Was that *guns*, Joe? What does it mean?”

“There was a convict off last night,” said Joe. “They fired warning of him. Now it seems another one must have escaped.”

“Who’s firing?” said I.

“Guards on the prison ships!” cried my sister. She pointed her needle and thread. “Right across the marshes. People are put in