

My Dear Handel

By Salomey
Doku

*A short story based
on Great Expectations
by Charles Dickens*



MY DEAR HANDEL

By Salomey Doku

Herbert Pocket's diarised Point of View, of the events of Great Expectations (1861) by Charles Dickens. A short story.

* * *

I awoke that morning with fresh anticipation ahead of a day already tinged pink with a mixture of delight and nervous energy.

It was Saturday; I was not working, it being the weekend. It was sunny, I would be going to the theatre half-price that evening, but best of all, today, I was to receive a housemate.

To be frank, it was my first bit of good news since I'd left my father's house to make my own way in life by looking about me.

I was eighteen, fresh-faced, full of gay hopes, and absolutely sure of what and who I wanted in life. My prospects shone before me, and I was certain that sooner or later the right opportunity would come marching up to my door and present itself. I determined therefore, that I would doggedly lie in wait for its appearance.

In the meantime, what *did* come bounding up to my door gave me no little surprise.

My initial astonishment to have been summoned by my father - a Mr. Matthew Pocket, by name - to the family lawyer's offices - one, a Mr. Jagger's by name - barely a week before this delightful day, and finding out at that fateful summons that I was to shelter a young master, Mr. Pip Pirrip by name, who had recently come into a substantial fortune, well, my surprise was little more than an understatement.

My feelings, however, quickly gave way to joy bubbling up sweetly that I was to have a new friend and companion along me at this wonderfully fresh new stage of my life. Unfortunately, my joy was just as quickly extinguished by a wave of nervous shame over the accommodation the wealthy young gentleman would be coming to dwell in with me.

'Looking about' having not been the most prosperous of ventures as yet, my bachelor rooms at Barnard's Inn, though spacious, were somewhat, I confess, lacking in charm, slightly musty, and rather bare, to say the least.

Although Mr. Pip would only be passing through my apartment on his way to my father's house in Hammersmith for tutorship and an education, I felt his first impression of London hinged on whether or not he enjoyed his time with me. I felt *determined*, therefore, to settle him and make him as comfortable and easy about his new position as possible.

Mr. Jaggers, perceiving anxiety arising on my part over the readiness of the state of my accommodation, relieved me with the news that new furniture would be coming in to supplement that which I already had, *at Mr. Pip's expense*, he added. Happily, and much to my private further relief, some of our meals would also be supplied at the young gentleman's expense.

I had been living frugally and was beginning to become peaky whilst I 'looked about me', so this was not unwelcome news.

I was a little surprised to hear that he called from the same part of the country, even the same town as our jilted, enormously wealthy, though extremely reclusive relation, Miss Havisham, but accepted the information with no further question. Indeed, all things considered, it seemed normal to me that he should already be somewhere within our circles, and not a complete stranger from some obscure, far-flung corner of the earth. Vaguely, I wondered with faint curiosity if our paths had ever crossed before, but I soon disregarded the notion.

My thoughts had turned homeward, to Barnard's *detestable* Inn. My desire was to immediately depart and make ready my modest home as quickly *as possible* that it be as agreeable *as possible* to this young man, who was otherwise on all accounts of it, a positive *country rustic* who had little to no exposure, or experience, with the upper-class circles with which he was coming to be a part of. I thought a good first impression would therefore be necessary, lest he should be much put out for his swapping of fresh country air and field and grass, for the grim workings of industrious inner London.

As I thought back over all this on the Saturday morning of his arrival, I checked my pocket watch, then threw off all vestige of remaining sleepiness with my blankets and hastened to wash and dress. I gobbled a light repast, with the understanding that I must make full use of my morning to fully prepare myself and my humble abode to receive the young master Pip Pirrip.

An odd name, I mused, as I pulled on an apron, arming myself with a duster and scrub brush. *Odd, but somehow musical, and charming!* I attacked the general untidiness of my apartment with the vigour that my nervous state warranted, alternatively whistling, then humming, then singing aloud a cheery tune all the while - one of my favourites, Handel's '*The Harmonious Blacksmith*'.

The general look of my rooms when I finally retired my weapons of warfare was one of cheerful plain-ness, and as I glanced over the shining cutlery laid out for our first noonday meal, I was content that this was the best that I could do. The rest would be down to me.

Checking my watch once again, I ascertained that I had just about enough time to nip to Covent Garden Market before the arrival of the midday coach that would bring my new acquaintance into London town - at least, I *assumed* it was by this one he would arrive, and so, set out on the confidence that it *was*. Somehow, I felt that the addition of fruit to our midday meal would help the young gentleman feel more at home, being a country boy, and I wanted to be sure I got the best I could afford.

Pulling on my waistcoat, and grabbing my hat, I yanked the door closed behind me with a jerk, and was hurrying down the stairs turning over what few coins I had in my possession, and wondering which fruits Mr. Pip would most enjoy, when I remembered with a start that I *must* leave a note in case anyone should call while I was out, and so hastily returned, scribbled out a brief note, '*Return shortly*', stuck it to the letterbox, then blew back down the staircase again.

You can imagine my surprise when, on my return, I ascended the rickety stairs to my attic flat in a rush to lay out my prizes before Mr. Pip's arrival, only to find my charge already waiting for me at the top of the landing.

My eyes met his own after travelling from shiny black boots, up lean, black cloth clad legs, gayly patterned waistcoat, smart jacket, and ostentatious cravat, finally resting on the pleasantly blushing face of the one who was to be my companion.

“Mr. Pip?” I hazarded, slightly breathless from my stair aerobics. My heart leapt in my chest at the sight of him, for he had a fresh look and an innocent air that was immediately charming to me. I wasn’t sure exactly what I’d expected, but *he* certainly wasn’t it.

His clear eyes, of the softest blue, were shy and questioning, his manner, awkward and unsure, his voice, hesitating but decidedly gentle.

“Mr. Pocket?”

He removed and clutched his outlandish hat tightly in his hand, revealing both his nervousness and a shock of coal black hair, combed and pressed into neat submission. In his other hand he held a shining new cane. As he stood there on my doorstep, his portmanteau at his feet, he had the bewildered expression of one who was freshly born into a world that wasn't at all what he'd expected, and of which he hadn't yet made up his mind to embrace.

His clothes were new, I noted, and he wore them with the look of an overgrown child who is scrubbed and dressed by his mother for Sunday School. Not that they fitted ill on him, but that he had not yet become comfortable in them. They were flamboyant clothes, of good quality but not exactly of the London fashion, and they contrasted somewhat sharply with the unquestionably rustic, ruddy young man inside them. Simply put, they wore him, and not the other way around. Seemingly, he would have been more comfortable in more casual, labour suited attire.

My first, and thereafter lasting impression of him, therefore, was that of a confused country lamb that had somehow wandered far from its fold, and I felt strangely impressed that I was *duty bound* to take charge of him, lest the more wolfish of the gentry, in finding him alone, made quick work of tearing him quite apart.

So strongly did the instinct arise within me to shepherd and protect this foolishly dressed, but as yet untainted one, that I confess I quite babbled, although very cheerily, as I struggled with the door to my accommodation.

I could sense his state of bewilderment increasing, however, and wanted so to put him at ease, for I had seen him start and a dazed look come into those wonderfully soft blue eyes. He had begun to look at me with an odd expression, which in turn, provoked ever more babbling on my side.

Whatever was going through his mind, he very kindly offered to hold the fruit for me while I opened the door to my apartment, so I handed my packages over with a friendly smile before turning my attention to the door.

It swung open so suddenly that I staggered back into him and he, into the opposite door - though, not down the staircase, thank goodness - and we both laughed.

I continued chattering all the while as I introduced our rooms to him, anxious that they should make a good first impression, when I foolishly realised he was *still* holding the packages of fruit. As I reached over to take back the bundles, I met his gaze. It was then that I was jolted by the sudden realisation that I had *seen* this fellow before - nay, had actually *headbutted* him, and that he had actually split his knuckles on my teeth as children some years before.

He knew the look I wore, for it was the same look I had noticed in his own eyes but mere minutes ago. The same clear blue eyes, I now recognised, that hadn't changed one bit!

Falling back a step as the memory rushed upon me, I exclaimed, "Lord bless me, you're the prowling boy!"

That fellow, of all fellows! Here!

A sweet smile played upon his lips and turned up the corners of his eyes as he replied, "And *you*, are the pale young gentleman."

Pale young gentleman? I thought. *Is that the way he has thought of me?*

We stood regarding one another, then simultaneously burst out laughing.

"The idea of its being *you!*", we both cried, which once again set us off into peals of laughter, after we had stared at one another, blinkingly assessing our growth, a while longer. It was strange to see that the boy I had fought with had become a man. He had grown handsome and strong but still retained something of the child he had been in his manner and youthfulness.

"Well!" I exclaimed, beaming at him and reaching out to shake his hand with undisguised enthusiasm. "It's all over now, I hope, and—," feeling it necessary to clear the air concerning the aforementioned *headbutting*, "—it will be magnanimous in you if you'll forgive me for having knocked you about so."

Mr. Pip smiled *very* sweetly at this, revealing dimples, and shook hands, saying all was forgiven, so we continued to chat, ever the more amiably, while I hunted plates for our choicest fruit.

During the course of our conversation, I casually mentioned Estella, the wealthy Miss Havisham's adopted daughter, on chance that he remembered her, being that we had had our fight at Satis House where she had lived with Miss Havisham, and was not a little dismayed to note a change in his disposition that was most telling.

Ah, thought I, here's one who wears his loves on his sleeve - and what love! That Tartar of a witch has already ensnared him, poor boy. And such an adorable darling of a fellow! It's too bad.

Mr. Pip had an honest and open manner about him, and every change in his attitude was easily marked upon his features and in his disposition. He could not hope to hide how he was feeling, and I felt it would be forever impossible for one so unpretentious as he to deceive, or sneak, or do anything out of meanness or hardness. He was possessed of an indescribably sweet, childish innocence that was charming in the extreme. After conversing with him a little while longer, I discerned that he was a simple, tender soul, yet somehow deeply passionate and romantic. I found his honesty of manner extremely taking, and on my part, I couldn't *help* immediately liking him, although I knew that the, ahem, more *wolfish* of the gentry, would sense his simple, honest tenderness too, and would doubtless wickedly play upon it as a weakness.

Keeping my tone light as we continued our discourse, all the while arranging our after-dinner fruit pleasantly onto plates, I was amazed to ascertain just how little he knew of the girl he was evidently much interested in. *What revenge? What revenge? What indeed!*

He was so innocently puzzled that I was almost scandalised, and so promised to tell him the whole dire story of Estella and Miss Havisham during our dinnertime.

At length, as the conversation deepened, I was touched to see that he actually *felt* his raw innocence of the upper class enough to be able to bashfully ask me for hints, if I was ever to see him going wrong anywhere in a manner of politeness, and so, with a full heart, I kindly assured him that I would.

Hearing also that he had been raised a blacksmith, - a *blacksmith!* - indeed confirmed my initial impressions of his being more comfortable in more casual attire, but also sent such

a lovely thrill through me, as I recalled the gay tune that I had whistled earlier in the morning, and I was scarcely able to contain my joy.

I begged him to immediately begin calling me by my Christian name of Herbert, so as to banish any further vestige of needless restraint between us. Needless, say I, because I felt that we two were absolutely meant to be together, and so we should begin at once to be as knit in heart and soul as David and Jonathan of old.

He, on his part, rather blushing— he was *such* a healthy, ruddy colour, a veritable David indeed in the freshness of his natural strength and youth, it seemed to me! —he informed me that *his* Christian name was Philip.

Looking upon him then, I considered the name. *Philip Pirrip!* What a ridiculous name! No wonder he had felt the need to call himself *Pip*. I felt wholly uninclined to it; indeed, it simply didn't suit him *at all* — and I confess, I told him so directly. He blinked at me, his air of childish innocence causing me to feel quite abashed.

As I explained my reasoning for disliking his name, his colour deepened, and I, now feeling curiously guilty, hastily, so that he would understand that my reasoning was *entirely* friendly and not sprung out of any ill-feeling, placed a hand lightly on his arm and suggested an idea that fell upon me as a most cheerful bolt of inspiration.

“I tell you what I should like,” I beamed at him, as the idea, that if our ‘official’ names, of Mr. Pip and Mr. Pocket, were so musical a match, and so *lovely* together, why shouldn't our *forenames* also be just as sweetly unified? I bubbled with unfettered joy at the prospect, it felt so perfectly orchestrated!

“We are **so** harmonious, and *you* have been a *blacksmith*—”, and here I could have clapped my hands and laughed out loud, so great was my delight! “—would you mind it?” I finished breathlessly.

He gazed back at me as one who was both fully absorbed in our conversation, and fully confused by it, and answered in his frank and gentle tone of voice, “I shouldn't mind *anything* you propose, but I don't understand you.”

I realised then that, of *course* he wouldn't have any idea of what I was talking about! He hadn't yet *culture* enough to understand the inference. I had skipped *much* too far ahead in my eagerness to knit our souls together! I quickly reversed and explained myself to this darling, country-bred boy, gripping his arm almost anxiously while taking one of his hands

in mine as I gazed back into those long-lashed mellow blues. *How simply adorable he was!*

“Would you mind *Handel* for a familiar name?” I asked, looking at him most beseechingly. “There’s a *charming* piece of music by Handel, called *the Harmonious Blacksmith*,” I explained, emphasising the words with a smiling flourish.

I could see that he *did* like it in the way his blue eyes lit up, and he nodded his approving sentiment, much to my delight.

“I should like it very much,” said he.

“Then—,” I began, beaming at him widely, and feeling our affinity beginning to blossom, I set about at once to call him what I’d been *longing* to ever since I’d fastened eyes upon him, “Then, my *dear* Handel—,” and here I turned as our door opened and our bubble was intruded upon, “—*here* is the dinner, and I **must** beg you to take the top of the table, because the dinner is of *your* providing.”

This he would not hear of, the darling boy, and so I took the top, and he faced me, and at last, our first meal together had begun.

* * *

And so, I assumed the role of shepherd, and settled into it by beginning to, amicably, little by little, teach my young charge – this lost, wandering, darling country lamb! – some of the rules by which he must survive in what I knew to be a much less genteel world than that he was idealising it to be.

He needed very little direction, for although he *was* a country boy through and through, he was at *heart* a gentleman, and a little polishing between my father and myself brought to the fore what already lay within him.

As far as my education lay, I taught him correct table manners (his rudimentary manners amused me exceedingly, especially after watching him strenuously trying to pack a tumbler - a tumbler! - full of dinner napkin. I did not, however, let the fact I was amused show, lest he be much over-embarrassed and feel awkward, which I noticed he had a tendency to become otherwise).

I took him on a tour of London town (most especially to all my favourite places), took him shopping for more *London appropriate* outfits, introduced him to a variety of things quite new to him, and most unforgettably of all, had the pleasure of teaching him certain ballroom dances that he would need to know as part of his new position.

At first, he danced with a chair, and then the fiddler, but still struggling, he did not deny my offer of partnering him so as to learn the steps properly from start to finish.

These extra (I hasten to add, *strictly private*) sessions were, at first, an awkward, fumbling set of events –as I laughed about later with my darling sweetheart, Clara– but we soon cast our awkwardness away and got down to business (of this, I was determined). He was, as was already established, a quick learner, and when he could finally step without crushing my toes and spin me with ease and no small charming grace in *absolutely* no less than five dances, I concluded our efforts a great success.

Handel was *not* musically gifted, however, unlike his name's sake, and did not readily take to any instrument. He did, however, enjoy hearing tinkling renditions from myself on our house piano. He was especially delighted to hear me perform “The Harmonious Blacksmith” for the first time – so much so, that it became a mainstay of the more musical of our evenings at home.

“Well, my dear Handel,” I laughed gaily at his asking to hear it for the 20th time, “I shall certainly always think of *you* when I hear this tune. I should think you were tired of it by now.”

“By no means!” he declared, dimpling pleasantly. “I love it because you play it so delightfully well, my dear Herbert! I only wish I could take to an instrument so as to be able to play along.”

My father, on his part, read with Handel and taught him by degrees what he would need to know, as a gentleman, and how to hold his own amongst his new society. This he did well, most of the time, except for when goaded by the aforementioned *wolfish* of the gentry.

Chief of these wolves being a fellow student at Hammersmith, and thereby unavoidable, was an odious, condescending blockhead of a fellow by the name of Bentley Drummle. We passed some decidedly tense but entertaining hours in his society, and were always glad to get away.

We, that is, Handel and I, got along so well and spent so much time together, that it was a small wonder to me that we had not always known each other. Handel had thought it hard to leave me completely for Hammersmith, and so he stayed over often at Barnard's Inn, and we quickly began to share everything - our homes, our boat, even our families (well, *my* family – Pip never seemed to feel very comfortable about his adoptive father or anyone from his old life being a part of his new one). In the end, I felt more familiar and affectionate fast friends never existed.

We also confided confidences in one another that I believe we spoke of to no one else. At length, when Estella had once again reappeared and settled in a part of London called Richmond, she made her everlasting mark the stronger upon poor, ensnared, love-dazed Handel. In trying to reason with him, I found him quite unable (as much as unwilling) to free himself of her.

It quite grieved me that he should harbor, to his own wounding, any amount of unrequited love for that hard, *unfeeling*, calculating *witch* Estella. I was jealous for him, and wished I could guard him from her enchantments, foreseeing that it could *not* end well. The day he confessed to me, a hand upon my knee, that he loved and *adored* her, he was singularly surprised when I told him that I already *knew*. How could I not? He had brought his *adoration* of her to my doorstep with his portmanteau! His love for Estella was an undividable part of him.

She would constantly use his adoration of her, to slight, to injure, to destroy him. He would return to me from interviews with her in a state of agitation and sorrow, to find refuge in my affection and have his wounds healed. This in turn provoked *me* to be all the more generous in my love towards him, in the hope that he'd be able to find the strength to free himself of her and end the vicious cycle. Drummle and Handel were almost constantly at one another's throats over her, and it was all I could do to keep Handel from flying at him in a rage each time Drummle goaded him about her.

More pleasantly, I'd confessed to Handel that I had my own secret love– my darling sweetheart Clara, my affianced of no remarkable history or title– such a fortune for the son of my mother, as one forever obsessed with nothing but titles and status!

My fortunes did not much improve, however, in way of *looking about me*. Indeed, as I accompanied my dear Handel often most everywhere, him having money to spend and me having none, I ended up accruing the most depressing debts. Together we lived gay lives, and together we fell into debt. Together, we tallied and accounted for our debts, and together we failed to actually pay them off.

This, I'm afraid to say, caused my darling Clara to take a rather poor view of my dear friend and companion. In those days, we did very badly indeed, and spent money most wastefully as part of that outrageous club 'the Finches'. She was not at all keen on our friendship, but I was Handel's most intimate friend, and we needed one another. When he received the sad news of the loss of his sister (who had brought him up by hand), he naturally turned to me for solace in his grief – and never for all the world would I have denied him the comfort of my friendship at such a time, regardless of what it might cost me!

Our twenty first birthdays came and went, and we were still safely ensconced in the arms of Barnard's detestable Inn - although it was a vastly more comfortable Barnard's for Handel's arrival.

I thought our doing badly would never end, when at last, my looking about me began to pay off, for I was approached whilst in my counting house by a young merchant of the name Clarriker, who was looking for an industrious young clerk to help him get started in business. He seemed to take a shine to my hopeful face amongst all the hopeless ones.

Frankly, I quite *leapt for joy* to have been considered, entered into talks with him, and hurried home all a flutter that evening to share my good news with Handel! I shall never forget how delighted he was for me, or the way he clasped my hands warmly and smiled with such affectionate joy.

Day by day, I met with Clarriker, and my prospects at being his business partner looked more and more real, and less and less like a hopeful fantasy, until one day, it was done, and I had actually entered the House of Clarriker.

Handel had daily grown in joyfulness at the developments that I spoke earnestly with him of every evening, and the day I returned a fully-fledged clerk in the House of Clarriker, I confess that I heard him weeping in his bedroom late that night – probably when he supposed me asleep – and so I shed a tear or two myself, and counted myself blessed to have gained such a loving, affectionate friend as he!

* * *

Sometimes my new business took me away from Handel, and then I went with compound interest (for my work) and regret (in being separated from him). I enjoyed the variation in my life and the money in my pocket, but also had a strange wish to be done so that I could hurry back to his company again.

Not that he was particularly outgoing himself, or even of a naturally cheerful or sunny disposition. He had once sighed over and affectionately envied my own 'hopeful' nature, being himself very much an anxious worrier and overthinker, possessed of an incredible imagination that lent him both sweet dreams and horrible nightmares. But, for all our contrasts, we were fast friends, and found comfort in one other's presence. And besides, I found that as we were, we complimented each other. Whenever I was despondent, which happened at the times that I had looked into my affairs and found them to be getting on badly, he could cheer me quite readily. Vice versa, finding I could be a tonic to the more depressive of his moods imparted no small joy to me.

I had been rebutted for less affection by old friends, and sometimes treated in a way that I had found quite hurtful and dampening to my naturally joyful and loving nature. I *wanted* to love, and so I had counted myself blessed when I found my sweet Clara – and finally, I had also found a friend who would not deny me to love him wholeheartedly. I had found the best of all friends in dear, passionate Pip!

In short, we had grown attached to one another. Perhaps he needed, and *wanted* to be loved, as much as I needed to *give* love. With the way that Estella treated him, I *know* that he did. Perhaps the bond we felt sprung out of the fist fight we'd had as children on Miss Havisham's estate (I confess to have instigated the aforementioned fight) – but I couldn't be sure. All I could be sure of was that I longed to spend time with my friend, and was anxious that he should equally like to spend his time with me. His joy was my joy, and his sorrows I felt as keenly as though they had been my own. We fitted one another most comfortably, and over a very short period of time, we reached a place of completely understanding, and completely trusting one another – as I had, I noted with some surprise, also done with my darling Clara.

I had even gone so far as to joke with him once before our cosy fire, my dear Handel, at first complaining that he had been born the wrong sex entirely, and laughing at his baffled look, continued to expound that, had there been no Clara, and had he been born a woman, I'd be quite content to join our hands in holy matrimony, for he made me really quite happy. Rather than being *scandalised* at these words, he was highly amused and cheerfully assented his similar feelings heartily, saying, "My dear Herbert! My sentiments exactly, if only there had been no Estella! Only, I think you should make a prettier woman than me," and so we both laughed, clasping hands, and continued to chat late into the night.

To no one other than Handel would I have dreamed of making such jokes. With him I always felt at liberty to be frank about what I really thought, for we often thought alike, and I knew that he loved me, as I loved him.

As such, it pained me to be away from home for extended periods and out of the company of those who so understood and loved me so completely – both my Clara, *and* my Handel.

One such week of this nature proved to be highly memorable, even infamous, in our history. I had spent an exciting few days away from home on business in France. As exciting as it was, I sighed, but smiled quietly to myself when I realised that even there, in the midst of delight, I was sorely missing dear Handel's company, and I idly wondered if he missed me as much as I missed him.

On my return, I felt my excitement mounting as I started up the stairs to our – (no longer mine only, now it was *ours*) – our new, much more comfortable abode in the Temple. We were now twenty-three, and had taken leave of our old quarters at Barnard's for over a year– and forever, I hoped! We took to being high up and were squirreled away in the top most apartments, which quite suited us. I had already been to see my darling Clara, and now I positively raced up the stairs as I had done on the day of dear Handel's arrival into my life as a permanent fixture. How pleased he'd be to see me! Five years had flown by since we first met in London, and I knew, as always, that I'd see the same friendly, honest joy mirrored in Handel's face that I knew to be in mine no matter how frequently we met.

Bursting through the door, I espied him standing by the fire, and my joy to be out of that cold, blustering, rain-sodden night and back into our cosy home once more was kindled with that fire. I was struck that he looked pale and drawn, thinner than I had left him, and almost fearful. Still, I was rushing upon him with greetings, my hands outstretched, when suddenly I noticed a dreadful apparition standing nearby, a knife glinting in its hand, and I froze, words dying on my lips.

“Herbert, my dear friend,” Handel started after a moment's silence – and fixing me with wide, fearful eyes that chilled my blood – he continued, while shutting the double doors upon us, “-something very strange has happened. This is... a-a visitor of mine.”

This dreadful apparition, his *visitor*? I looked dumbfounded between Handel and the alarming stranger, and back at him once more, terribly uneasy in my mind. The stranger, his visitor, was an old man; stocky, grizzled, grey, and on all accounts of the most alarming visage. He approached and wished me in a gruff, common voice to swear - to swear! - upon a Testament and to kiss the Book, “Lord strike me dead if I should split”!

Pip's normally rosy face was ashen as he urged me to do so, and so I did, for him, with shaking hand, and quaking within. It was then that I was taken into confidence of the most

dire secret I could never have ever thought to hear from the lips of my dear friend, for poor Handel sat me down, and tremulously told me his tale.

He told all the wretched story of his young life; of his meeting an escaped convict on the marshes by his parents grave, of stealing food and a file from his own for the aforementioned convict, of the *other* convict in hiding, a chase across the marshes, the fight and the capture of both convicts by the law, and of how his misdeed in helping the first convict many years ago had led to him being where he was now – a gentleman provided for by the *same convict* now sitting opposite us!

He recounted all this in a low, mournful voice, occasionally shaking himself and taking deep breaths, as if in an effort to hold himself together. He saw my astonishment and disquiet at his tale very plainly upon my face, because I was frankly unprepared for what he told me, and could do nothing to hide my emotions. He would also cast frequent glances at Provis– for that was the convicts name– and I saw in those looks the repugnance and dread that I felt, as if he could still not believe that his fortunes and his great expectations had been made by the mottled creature sitting over across from him.

Provis, on his part, would smile the most *ghastly* smile, and croon in a dreadful way, “dear boy”, to both of us! Although, I had the added pleasure of being called “Pip's comrade” throughout this narrative.

“And now you know the... the secret of my life, Herbert,” he quite whispered, “–and how P-Provis comes to be here.”

I was speechless, and so Handel, his face twisted in mental agony, reached out and touched my hand.

“Do you think... *very* badly of me now, Herbert?” he asked, his tone desperate.

I looked at him and, taking a deep breath, I clasped his hand reassuringly.

“*No*, Handel. No... I'm just... I need some time to process this *startling* information...” I replied.

Provis began to boast in the most grotesque manner, and to hold forth his success in having created a gentleman out of poor Pip, ever boasting that there could be nothing disagreeable with it, and how that they must both be very proud of it.

I watched poor Handel squirm during all his narrative, and when Provis was quite done telling me how muzzled he was, as though he were but a dog, I gave poor Handel's hand a squeeze and replied, "Certainly," because I could think of absolutely nothing else to say!

When they eventually left, for Handel accompanied Provis to his own apartments – he was not staying with us, thank Heavens! – I say, as they went out into the inky night - for it was well past midnight before Provis would leave us together - my mind raced and wandered ceaselessly until my poor – Oh, my poor dear! – Handel returned.

He groaned as he entered, his face such a picture of shattered dreams and abject misery, that I stood, and held out my arms to him - and into them he staggered. I embraced him a good few minutes, while he stood, his head buried in my shoulder, bemoaning this turn of his fate.

"Oh, Herbert, Herbert! What *am* I going to do?" he groaned into my shoulder.

With a heart full of sympathy, I gently patted the downy black hair at the back of his head as I continued my embrace. Although I felt at a loss for words, I managed to utter in a low voice, "We'll see this through together, old chap. All is not lost."

Pulling back, I patted his pensive, sorrowful face, and attempting to smile and encourage him, said, "Take *courage*, dear Handel."

His response, of knotting his dark brows with a sob, and laying his head tempestuously down on my shoulder again, only served to break my heart further. He swayed as his arms around me tightened gratefully at the same time, and I was struck by the sensation that he was holding onto me for dear life, as though I was his only anchor in a stormy situation that threatened to sweep him away when the wrathful waves of the law had quite done with his fearful benefactor and had turned their bloodthirstiness and sting upon him.

How I managed to extricate myself from that embrace, I do *not* know, but the next thing I knew I was sitting thoughtfully by the fire in Provis's chair. When I realised it, however, I shot up and out of the thing, pulling a different chair closer for my use instead.

Through this action, an unspoken exchange passed between myself and Handel, that I had conceived as much of an aversion to his terrifying benefactor as he had himself.

"What is to be done?" Handel asked despairingly, sitting down close beside me.

“My poor, dear Handel,” I murmured, holding my head in my hands, “I am too stunned to think.”

Handel was adamant that, his fearful benefactor having revealed himself, he *could* not and *would* not accept any further expenses or benefits from the unfortunate fellow. Even the mere suggestion from myself that he might accept it, left us both shivering involuntarily.

“Was there ever such a fate!” he groaned.

His extreme disappointment led him into one of his aggravatingly self-depreciatory states, and he bemoaned almost his entire existence, despairingly claiming himself to be good for nothing, except soldiering! To think that *he* in his trembling, disquieted state over Provis would have given himself up for a *soldier*?

“And I might have gone, my dear Herbert, but for the prospect of taking counsel with your friendship and affection.”

Here, he broke down again; I pretended not to notice the tears that escaped him, and instead reached over to clasp his hand in mine, until the moment was quite passed from him.

I encouraged him the best I could, and told him that he would be infinitely better off in Clarriker's House with me, especially if he hoped to never take another penny from his patron, and even to possibly repay him one day.

Besides, I had the terrible thought that the magnitude of Handel's rejection would drive the convict Provis to commit some reckless action, and throw away his life as a result. As an illegally returned transport, his life was now in danger of the law. After an urgent, hurried counsel, in which we linked arms and walked up and down studying our carpets several times, we shook hands upon taking a direct course to first get Provis safe out of England before Handel would endeavour to deliver himself from him.

After all, wretched though the man may have been, he had risked himself to come and see his Pip, and his Pip *must* harbour some tenderness for that life, no matter how queer the sensation.

I ascertained that Handel was certain as to his breaking with Provis, and as to extricating himself from the older man, confirmed that it would *have* to be done when safely away from English waters.

“That done, extricate yourself, in *Heaven’s* name, and we’ll see it out **together**, dear old boy,” I concluded, shaking his hand. We went to bed then, minds whirling as to this strange new development in Pip’s fortunes, and determined to find out more about the convict Provis on the morrow.

The next day, it was clear from his expression that Handel did not have any refreshing sleep that night, for he still seemed so full of fears.

We breakfasted with Provis – a sight I shall never forget! – and when he was assured of my oath never to speak a word of what he told us, he expressed to us every word of his own miserable life story in a way that led me to actually begin to feel *compassion* towards him for all that he’d been through. He was what he was, because he’d never had a chance in life to be anything *other* than what he was! He was a pitiable wretch, and his fearsomeness as he spoke seemed to slip away.

Key parts of his story struck me as being connected to my own family history, and the longer he discoursed, the more and more certain I was of it, and the more disquieted I grew. Grabbing a pencil and writing quickly inside the cover of a nearby book, I sketched out the words, “*Young Havisham’s name was Arthur. Compeyson is the man who professed to be Miss Havisham’s lover,*” and softly pushed it over to Handel so he could read it. He acknowledged the same with a slight nod, and we both stared in wonder at Provis.

To think, that *this* man – this *convict*, standing smoking by the fire! – could be connected to this most tragic of my family’s histories was inconceivable. That he was actually a part of the very *history* that had both found and wound itself inexplicably down and around both myself and Handel through the course of time, like the great roots of a weighty, moss-covered tree!

That the *other* convict on the marshes so long ago had been *Compeyson*, and that he had been *Provis’s* employer - and that the man in turn had been employed by *Arthur Havisham*, Miss Havisham’s disgraced half-brother, to break her heart! And that her broken heart would lead her to nurture a heartbreaking *monster* in ***Estella*** - it was almost *incomprehensible*.

That very evening, Handel resolved to take leave of Estella before going abroad –for we were quite certain now that Provis’s only chance at living any longer lay in his going away with Handel immediately – especially if Compeyson were still alive and disposed to be vengeful. And so, the next day, he went to Richmond, but returned disquieted at not

finding Estella there. She had gone to Miss Havisham's, and there he followed haplessly early the following day, but not before we had first discussed the best course to take to persuade Provis to follow him out of the country.

While he was gone, I threw myself into finding Provis a new, safer place of accommodation. He was now quite aware of our concerns as to his safety, and willingly complied with our desire to move and hide him.

Handel had had a feeling that we were under an unsettling level of close, undisclosed surveillance ever since Provis had arrived, and he was always very careful about taking him between our quarters and his own. His carefulness, as a result, rubbed off on me. I was struck that Provis would be a good tenant for my dear Clara's wonderful landlady Mrs. Whimple, who had been so very kind to us, and had mothered my poor motherless Clara so. On account of Clara's father, old '*Gruffandgrim*' as I called him (Mr. Barley being his proper name), being a growling rascal of a bedfast tenant, she had struggled to find anyone to take rooms near him.

Having therefore consulted with Wenmick, Mr. Jaggers' ever helpful subordinate, and taken him into our confidences as to what we had planned to do, I went about these proceedings with a good will, and all was settled by nightfall.

* * *

The next night, Handel came to us at Mill Pond Bank, a riverside dock tenancy where my darling Clara lived with her father, and where I had settled Provis. It had occurred to me, and later I found it had also occurred to Handel, that Provis would be best got away over the water, and Mill Pond Bank suited that purpose marvelously.

Although Handel returned to me rested from his quiet day at Wenmick's (which I heard directly from the horse's letterbox) I could see that he had come from Miss Havisham's with a shattered heart, which he quite wore in his bearing and manner of expression. By this, even though he did not speak of it at first, so preoccupied we were with our current troubles, I knew the thing with Estella to be done forever.

My heart ached for him— poor, passionate, darling Pip! She had never deserved him, never wanted him, had warned him continually, and he to his detriment had known it - and yet *still* continued to pursue her. His own hopefulness and fancies had led him into heartbreak, but *never* for the world would I have designed to say to him '*I told you so*,

Handel, and thereby increase his unbearable pain. Unbearable, because as I soon found out, he had lost her to the *worst* of fellows, that blockhead and bully, Bentley Drummle.

I endeavoured to comfort him as the weeks passed, and to restore the spark that had quite gone out of his eyes, but I'm not sure I was entirely successful in this venture. I was glad, then, that he had taken such a shine to my dear Clara upon their first meeting, for I had so wanted them to get along, being my two very favourite people in the world. I saw the pleasure and admiration on his face at seeing Clara and I together, and felt some little peace and joy over it, knowing that they would be friends - and how he needed our friendship at this most unhappy time!

After the first visit to Mill Pond Bank, Handel completely absorbed himself, to forget about his woes I suppose, in the preparation and planning of the safe escape of Provis, his returnee convict cum benefactor, with whom his dreams of Estella had first come to a shattering halt.

He procured a boat, and was out in all weathers, practising rowing up and down the river in it. Sometimes I joined him, but mostly he went alone. His fears that we were being watched ever heightened, and was confirmed one day when an old actor acquaintance of his that had been there on the marshes so many years ago, informed him, rather shockingly, that he had actually seen Compeyson sitting like a ghost behind him in the theatre one day. We were much alarmed, and held a serious counsel over that, but decided there was nothing to be done but to continue to prepare to fly, and to wait for a hint from Wenmick as to the right time to do so.

One day, a few weeks later, as we were almost quitting the gloom of February for the fresh hopefulness of March, Handel went down to visit Miss Havisham. I assumed it was for the final time, the day of his and Provis's flight feeling to be very near. Estella was no longer there, so I couldn't begin to imagine his reason for going, except to be quit of her. I wished he would not go – his visits to where he had first met Estella had *never* done him *any* good.

It was with horror and heartache, then, that I received Handel back the next day from what proved to be a second *disastrous* visit to Miss Havisham's. He was visibly bandaged and bruised, and had a new, haunted look in his eyes.

"My **dear** Handel!" I exclaimed starting up and out of my chair, taking his appearance in with a gasp, and then rushing to his side. "Whatever have you *done* to yourself?"

“Is all well down the river?” was his distracted response. I cheerfully assured him that it was, and urgently repeated my question.

“Yes, most assuredly, everything is fine, but— what has happened to *you* my dear Handel?”

“There was... There was a fire,” he replied, dazedly. “Miss Havisham, she—” and here tears sprang to his eyes and he laid his head against me and wept.

He seemed to have been in shock, until that moment. “Oh, Herbert... It was horrible—dreadful!”

I eventually coaxed the whole, ghastly story out of him as I settled him upon the sofa. Hearing the tale, I left him, hastening to my father at Hammersmith, and then hastened back to him.

All that day I employed myself with the nursing of his poor burned arm and fire blistered hands. Their rawness, I confess, made me shudder, but also had the effect of making me rather gentler in the handling of the dear boy than I might have been.

His left arm was burned all the way to the shoulder. His hair had been singed and was rather shorter, and he could not make good use of either of his hands. They were very painful to him, and I had to be extremely careful not to cause him more distress. As it was, I had to feed and water him – though he admittedly had not much appetite – and I helped him take care of his every need. This experience reminded me of my father's house, and how I'd looked after my many siblings. At least, pretending it was similar, made it somewhat easier, and I took as good care of him as I could.

I could see that the mental agony of the events that had transpired at Miss Havisham's bore heavy upon him too. He was so sensitive and tender hearted, that I felt that no doubt, the violent, vengeful flames of Miss Havisham's funeral pyre were an unspeakable horror for him to have beheld!

I endeavoured to keep his overactive imagination focused on more pleasant scenes by idle chatter, although I'm not sure that I was at all very successful. Sometimes he attended me, but sometimes his eyes were far away, as if he were seeing those flames roar up to consume Miss Havisham once again.

As the day wore on and the evening arrived, I finally felt enough courage to broach the subject of the convict down the river.

As I told him of my conversations with Provis, he seemed startled. Indeed, his little jumps and change of manner led me to believe that my handling of his poorly arm was rougher than I intended, but he assured me that I could not be gentler.

He grew excited, and his breathing quickened as the story progressed. So much did his manner frighten me, that I stopped working on my task of rebandaging his arm and leaned forward several times to take a good look at him. I felt his forehead, to see that he was quite okay, and to ascertain that his wounds were not beginning to make him feverish.

“Herbert,” said he, after a short silence following the conclusion of my story, wherein I had torn my eyes away from him and begun cleaning up my work area. “Herbert, can you see me best by the light of the window, or the light of the fire?”

His hurried words arrested my movements and brought my eyes to his once again.

“By the firelight,” I replied, moving nearer to him.

“Look at me.”

And so, I looked, startled by the intensity of his words.

“I do look at you, my dear boy.”

“Touch me.”

Again, I was startled, but reached out obediently and pressed the back of my hand to his forehead, feeling for any sign of fever, then touched his cheek lightly.

“I do touch you, my dear boy.”

He reached up and held my hand to his face, looking earnestly into my eyes with an agitation that amazed me, as he continued breathlessly.

“You are not afraid that I am in any fever, or that my head is much disordered by the accident of last night?”

“N-no, my dear boy,” I faltered, doubting if it were not so; he had never been so forward with me before. I took time to examine him closely before I was satisfied. “You are rather excited, but you are quite yourself.”

He seemed to relax but did not release his grip on my hand, neither did his intensity assuage.

“I know I am quite myself,” he replied in a low voice. “And the man we have in hiding down the river is Estella's father.”

I fell back a step then, my eyes widening, so great was my astonishment.

“You're quite sure?”

“Positively,” he affirmed, squeezing my hand (for he had not let it go on my moving away), and I felt my shock reflected in his grim aspect.

“But then that means—”, I started back towards him and knelt, looking into his face as I leaned against the sofa.

“I know,” he replied quietly, and we were silent.

Hereafter this momentous revelation, I had some trouble in restraining Handel from rising and rushing immediately out to Gerrard Street to tell his discovery to Mr. Jiggers.

I warned him straightly that if he acted upon his impatience, given his current physical state, he would most probably end by being laid up and stricken useless, at the time when our fugitive's safety would most depend upon him. I would *not* by **any** means let him go to Mr. Jiggers that night, and so reasoned with him, and assured him that it would have to be first thing on the morrow, and at a decent hour. At length, he grew calmer, and submitted to my reasoning, had his hurts looked after, and eventually, fell asleep.

I watched him whilst he slept, from my chair by the fire, to make sure that it was a sound sleep.

“How do you *get* yourself into these ghastly situations, Pip?” I murmured, watching the rise and fall of his chest, as I thought of how Miss Havisham and Estella had between them broken him so completely in mind and body, and of how scarred the heart beneath that poor chest was.

Seeing no stir in him after half an hour, I sighed, rose and stretched, patted the coal black head (gently, so as not to wake him) and went to my own chambers for some rest. I'd had a long day of it, and was asleep before my head hit the pillow.

* * *

The very next day, Handel, despite his injuries, went to see Mr. Jagers directly over his convictions as to Estella's parentage— and I only wish I could have been there to see Mr. Jagers's reaction! Handel confided in me that it was the only time he had ever seen that all-powerful pocket handkerchief fail.

Over the next few days, his bodily wounds started to heal. It was good, because I had no idea when – if ever – his deeper, inward wounds would heal, and so I had to be content with helping him where I could. As he rested, and as I took ever patient care of him, he grew steadily better and better. It was clear to us both, however, that all his practicing in the boat had been in vain. With his being practically disabled now, we must devise a new way to get our convict safe away when Wenmick's hint came.

March had well and truly arrived when we received the long-awaited hint. It was a Monday morning, and Wednesday, Wenmick said, was the best chance we'd have for the escape.

It was then that I mentioned to Handel that I had thought of one of our old Hammersmith acquaintances, a nice fellow by the name of Startop, taking his place in the rowing seat with me, for we had meant to pull down river together. I was pleased to hear that he had often thought of him too, as a suitable rowing replacement. Handel, instead, would steer us.

Startop was a capital fellow with fine, delicate, feminine features, a warm, cheerful nature, and we both viewed him as I had described him, "A good fellow, a skilled hand, fond of us, and enthusiastic and honorable."

We decided we would tell him very little, for his own safety, until the morning of the departure. After breakfast, we set off to determine which steamer Handel would board with Provis, and then I went to see Startop, and Handel went to get passports, and so we met at one o'clock, these things being accomplished.

We then made a few other arrangements as to our whereabouts, so as to arouse the least suspicion in the next few days, if Compeson was still watching us, and separated, Handel heading home directly.

I met Startop in the street on his way to see Handel, and I accompanied him back to our chambers at the Temple. On opening the front door, I called out for Handel, who I had expected to have arrived a few minutes before us.

My attention was arrested, however, by a dirty letter upon the floor, that on picking up, I found to be addressed to 'Mr. Pip'. Opening it, I read its alarming contents, and the demands within that he travel to the marshes alone that night, and tell no one, for fear of losing vital information concerning Provis. I hurried around our apartment, calling for him, and opening doors, but received no answer. Instead, I found a note to me, hurriedly written by Handel, in pencil, that he had gone down to see how Miss Havisham was faring.

I was much disturbed by this contradiction in content, that as I considered the matter, and looked at the letter over and over again, I felt my alarm at Handel's disappearance growing.

Consulting Startop after a quarter of an hour's hesitation, we set off at once for the coach office— only to find the afternoon coach already departed. My alarm then turned into desperate panic, and so we immediately procured a post-chaise and set off at once to follow the coach.

We arrived in the town and started hunting in all the usual places for Handel. We were largely unsuccessful in our search, until we crossed paths with a young man, *Trabb's boy*, he called himself, who said he had seen our charge pass by. We employed him at once to guide us out to the sluice-house at the limekiln stipulated in the letter, which he did willingly.

Now that we were on the right track, I felt a little calmer, and wondered if I had been too hasty. Supposing, perhaps, that Handel had come on a genuine, serviceable errand tending to Provis's safety, after all? Perhaps my intrusion would only tend to mischief? Perhaps I was worrying over nothing at all, and dear Handel was perfectly safe?

These ideas smote me as being plausible, and so when we arrived, I left Startop and our guide at the edge of the quarry and went on to the sluice-house alone. Alone, I stole around two or three times, endeavouring to ascertain that all was well within. As I could hear nothing but the indistinct sounds of a single rough voice within, I at last began to doubt if Handel was there at all.

I had begun to turn back when my heart leapt suddenly at the sound of Handel's wild, agonised cry from within the little building. The suddenness and desperation of that cry turned my blood to ice. Scarcely thinking of anything but the immediate rescue of my precious friend, this ever-wandering lamb, I answered the cry and rushed with all the vehemence of a shepherd who must fight a ravening wolf for its charge through the door to his aide, followed closely by my two fellow helpers.

I staggered over a rude object as I entered and so fell with blows atop his assailant. After a brief struggle, the hulking figure of a bad-tempered ruffian of Handel's past acquaintance named Orlick, broke free of us and cleared the table at a leap. We saw him rather escape out into the night, but chose not to give chase. Instead, we turned our attention upon poor Handel, who was bound to the wall and groaning in pain.

I rushed to him as his head fell forward, and I knew that he had fainted. Trabb's boy produced a knife - from where, I have not the faintest idea - and with it, cut the chords of rope that held my poor Handel so tightly, and he collapsed forward into my arms. We laid him gently upon his back on the floor, his head on my knee. I brushed his dishevelled hair out of his face— so dreadfully pale and cold he was! – and his eyes fluttered and opened as he came around to my touch.

At first, he could not speak, but his eyes looked about him— in bewilderment that he was still living, I suspect. He looked up as I bent over him in relief, and recognised me, gasping out, "**Herbert! Great heaven!**"

My heart leapt for the second time, this time with affection and joy that he knew me, meaning his memory wasn't impaired, which was further confirmed by his recognition of Startop. I hushed him, not sure of what he had endured, and feeling it was better that he keep still until the extent of his injuries, if any, we had ascertained.

However, he was very much excited in mind, and leapt up at me stupidly reminding him of our journey ahead with Startop, only to drop down again and back into my lap in agony, clutching his burned arm.

He was under the impression that he had been there a long time— and how long it must have seemed, shut up as he was with that murderous Orlick! He couldn't help groaning, and I had severe misgivings that he was indeed more hurt than his excited state gave away.

When we had gotten him sitting up against the wall of the tiny room, I carefully, and with much dread, opened his shirt. Seeing how much worse Orlick's rough treatment of him had made the raw, swollen, fire-scorched arm, I shuddered in sympathy and felt we must immediately rebandage it to prevent worse affliction, upon which we tore up our pocket handkerchiefs for the purpose.

Although he could hardly stand for me to touch it, he listened to my gentle entreaties that he sit as still as possible while I made the sling good again— the brave fellow! –and grit

his teeth, squeezing his eyes shut in an effort of endurance. He was desperate to know how I had got to be there, but this I would *not* answer, so intensely focused was I upon the bandaging of his injured arm.

I supported him to stand, and we were well on our way back to the town when I told him the story of my alarm at finding the letter, and how his absence had worked upon me, and of my pursuit of him to the sluice house. In return, he told me, in a shaky low voice while nursing his wounded arm, of what had transpired within the sluice house, and of what information Orlick had given, and worst of all, of Orlick's intention to **kill** him and permanently dispose of his body in the adjacent limekiln. It had been a *very* near thing indeed!

I barked a disbelieving laugh at hearing how Orlick had called him, "Wolf". **My** Handel— a *wolf*? And I supposed Orlick thought *himself* a **lamb** in comparison! This foolish, nay, *twisted* supposition compounded my *complete* horror and gross indignation, against this most brutish of wretches.

However, it also had the effect of making me suddenly, keenly aware that *wolves* were not at all exclusive to the gentry— they could be found in all walks of life, and were no less cunning or cruel, regardless of the fineness of their fur.

Further thinking of how such a one could do harm to my poor, *dear* Handel, and indeed, how he had *already* by murderous intent caused him and his family much hurt, my wrath arose to the point of insisting we go immediately to the magistrate of the town, late as it was, (the midnight hour drawing near), and demand a warrant for the immediate arrest of the vile creature.

Handel shook his head, taking a deep breath, and grimacing. He had considered this already, but thought such action would detain us in the town, or bind us to return, and thereby prove fatal to Provis by hindering our upcoming journey.

"No, we can't, Herbert. Think of Provis..." he faltered.

This I saw with grim disappointment. It was with almost unbearable dissatisfaction, therefore, that I relinquished the matter for the time being, privately purposing in my heart to bring the brute to justice one way or another someday— he would *not* get away with his black hearted, abominable behavior towards *my* boy.

I sat in between Handel and Startop in the post-chaise on the journey back. Startop leant his head against the window, folded his arms, and slept. I dared not sleep, for the full way,

Handel rested his head on my shoulder and there it stayed. I wound my arm around his back, careful not to touch his sore arm, and held in my other hand the poor bandaged hand he proffered to me. After such a nervous few hours, it was extremely pleasing to hold him close to me.

I lay my head against his, and embraced the shivering body; felt it slowly warm and quit the shiver. I held him with a keen feeling that I had almost lost him. I shuddered in remembrance of the heavy, evil weapon that the brutish Orlick had dropped, and that I had stumbled over on entering the almost funerary room.

From Handel's tale, he was mere *moments* from his end, when we had appeared on the scene to snatch him out of the jaws of death. I could not bear to think of the consequences of having entered a few minutes too late, to find a blood-drenched scene within, and of the grief that I would have had to bear as a result. Overjoyed that I had recovered my dear friend, *alive*, and no more hurt than he was, I was absolutely certain, almost to the point of fierceness, that I was **not** easily going to let him go again - forgetting that in less than forty-eight hours, this was just what I was going to have to do.

This unspoken feeling passed between us as I carefully applied the cooling ointment I had bought from the apothecary in the town to his arm at intervals to relieve his private suffering. He bore the pain quietly and with a grit that I admired, squeezing my hand and sinking back into me with relief each time it was done.

Sometimes, during that journey, he dozed, his body leaning heavier against me— that goodly body, that would have been turned into vapour - in a limekiln! I shuddered—but he was soon jolted awake again, as though chased out of sleep by the spectre of his hammer-wielding attacker. His quickened breathing at such times took a little while to subside back into evenness upon realising that he was safe with me, and safer still, as the miles between us and the scene of his near death, and his many emotional deaths at the hands of Estella and Miss Havisham, extended.

Indeed, when we'd finally reached our apartments in the now daylight hours of the morning, and I'd seen that he was carefully undressed, and snug and comfortable once more in his own bed (where he stayed the rest of the day), he stopped me with a close embrace, and thanked me for saving his life over and over again in a low voice so gratefully and earnestly that I kissed his forehead before I knew what I had done, and so slipped away, a little embarrassed by my own forwardness.

“Don't speak of it, my dear Handel,” I murmured, with a friendly smile as I brushed back his hair before leaving the room. “I know you would have done the same for me.”

“Dear fellow!” he choked, tears springing into his eyes. “I’d do anything for you.” He sighed, watching my retreat, swiping at the tears which further softened those already soft cornflower blue eyes. To think – those eyes would be no more – in a *limekiln!*

We, that is, Startop and I, kept him as quiet as possible during the day, dressing his ravaged arm and giving him cooling drinks, feeding him when he was hungry, and helping him with his every need. Even with all this care, the stress of his latest escapade bore so heavily on him that his condition started tending towards delirium as the night came on. His skin was hot to the touch, he mumbled constantly to himself, and could hardly stay still. He wore both himself and us out by fretting needlessly over the great escape to come.

I snatched a few hours of sleep, and got up in the early hours of the morning to check on him, for it had been some time since he’d last come to me for reassurance that the day we’d long awaited hadn’t passed him by unknowingly. I feared he’d be sitting awake, delirious and fevered, and so was delighted to find him finally sleeping soundly. I felt in that moment that all my efforts as an amateur doctor had not been in vain.

My poor, dear boy, I thought, a sudden surge of affection, though it *might* have been my own exhaustion catching up with me, moving me to drop yet another feather-light kiss upon the forehead of the sleeper– an action I almost resisted, but for the fact I was checked on the remembrance that I had almost lost him, and the opportunity to do so, altogether.

This, I thought, *is something that Estella has, to her own wounding, deprived herself of.* She had willingly given up the opportunity. Never would she kiss the darling boy! She had preferred the wolf to the lamb, and much good would it do her.

As I stooped, I looked at his peaceful face closely and sighed, murmuring, “How do you *get* yourself into these ghastly situations, Pip?”

Gratefully, I whispered a prayer of thanksgiving, and lightly patted the coal black head. I straightened and retired to my chambers to rest the remainder of the night with an easy heart as to his condition, and as to my ever-increasing affection for my bosom friend.

When I awoke in the late morning, feeling rested, I found Handel already awake and brewing coffee for us.

“Why, my *dear* Handel! You're positively radiant this morning,” I exclaimed, approaching him.

He looked so much better after his rest, that I was much cheered, and so I embraced and kissed him in the European style a third, a fourth, a fifth time in my pleasure at finding it so, patting the blushing cheeks I had bestowed my love upon before moving away with a hearty laugh.

“This is becoming a habit, dear Herbert,” he grinned, dimpling, but keenly aware of Startop's questioning gaze turned upon us.

“It was for good measure, *mon cher ami*,” I laughed again with a low bow, as we settled down to breakfast. After so many weeks of feeling so tense, it was *delightful* to shake off the gloom with some little bit of joy.

Startop joked with us, as I cut Handel's breakfast for him, that it was near-death experiences, not absence, that made the heart grow fonder, and we laughed.

“Fonder,” I agreed, “—and much more *aware* of just how lucky I am to have you in my life, Handel. And aware of all the things I like about you... and all the things I'd miss.”

Our smiles faded then, and we ate soberly for a while before Startop very thoughtfully changed the subject.

Later, after attending to Handel's arm and blistered hand, I helped him to dress— he could not do this without my help, on account, as I have mentioned, of not being able yet to make very good use of both his hands. As I buttoned up his shirt, I wondered how he'd manage without me, but quickly pushed the thought away, feeling the keen sting of sadness stealing in with it.

Soon I realised that he knew how I felt, for after I'd fastened his pea coat loosely over his shoulders in readiness to depart upon our errand of mercy, he stopped me with a queer, sad look upon his face, opened his mouth to speak, shut it again, and instead laid his head upon my shoulder, and embraced me quietly. He did not speak, but he did not have to; I knew what he meant by it.

This was his way of saying goodbye. Much like his earlier entreaties, that I ‘*look* at him’, and that I ‘*touch* him’, he was now asking me to *embrace* him one last time. Soon we would be parted— who knew when, or if we'd ever meet again? My heart swelled, and ached, as I wrapped my arms and all my love around him and tightly returned that final

embrace. He was my best, my dearest, my most intimate friend - and he so wanted to be loved! Realising in that moment that he was *finally* submitting himself to my adoration, I did what Estella for so long would not do – I loved him; this poor, physically and emotionally scarred man *wholeheartedly*. I wished fervently also that he would find love where he was going.

I confess, in the overflow of my emotions, I couldn't *help* throwing in a kiss or two, one landing upon an ear, another upon a cheek... Seeing that he quite reddened under them, and buried his head deeper into my shoulder with a few stifled sniffs, I threw another few affectionately, sadly, onto that soft, downy, coal black head. Startop's knock on the room door some minutes later brought us back to our errand, and so, slowly pulling away, I patted him on the back and tried to smile as he grasped my hand.

“There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother. I never had a brother, so I can't compare you, but... I wouldn't want to. I can't thank you enough, Herbert,” he said softly. “Once and again. Your friendship and affection has meant so much to me, especially now.”

“Don't speak of it, my dear Handel. Do try to smile, old boy! It may be *ever* so long until I see those dimples again, and I shall miss them until I do,” I replied, chucking him gently on the chin with a smile.

“Now, the river awaits us, my dear fellow,” I continued, straightening his coat and trying to restrain my emotions by becoming a little more serious. “The future awaits. And by God, may the tides of favour be on our side...”

* * *

Of our attempt at flight with Provis, I won't say much. We set off and collected our passenger, and rowed and rowed and rowed all that sunny day, making stops here and there, until at last we landed at a slime-covered inn late that night. We were all uneasy, and felt, rather unnervingly, that we were being watched and followed. After resting the night through in that house, Handel confirmed our fears to us, by mentioning that he had seen two men looking into our boat in the dead of night.

We laid low until the time for the steamer, and then rowed out to meet her. Handel and I had a hasty, but tearful goodbye— when would I ever see the dear boy again? My heart ached for not knowing! – when all of a sudden, as a confirmation of our forebodings, a four-oared galley shot out in front of us and came alongside us.

We kept quite still and quiet, paying them no attention, and the silence between us became unnerving. At last, when the steamer was quite bearing down upon us, and we had to either hail and board her or get out of the way, the man that held the lines in the other boat called out to us the very words that made all our hearts sink, as he then caused our boat to sink also.

“You have a returned Transport there. That's the man, wrapped in the cloak. His name is Abel Magwich, otherwise Provis. I apprehend that man, and call upon him to surrender, and you to assist.”

How they did it, I still don't know; they pulled a stroke ahead of us, ran into us and held our gunwale before we knew what had happened. The steamer was upon us, and our boat was crushed before it, but myself, Startop, and Handel were all pulled from the water safe and uninjured— thank Heaven! There was no sign of the two convicts, though, for Magwich had reached over into the other boat and, exposing *Compeyson*, they had both fallen into the water. When at last Magwich— Provis no longer —came up alone, and much injured by the steamer, we knew that we would never see *Compeyson* again.

Magwich was shackled, and as a prisoner went to London by boat, with Handel accompanying him. It was a dismal parting, for Startop and I were to take the land route, and catch up with them in London.

It was very hard to accept that our attempt at flight had so miserably failed. In London, a witness against Magwich was found (on *Compeyson*'s no longer being able to be that witness, his bloated, drowned body being located down river) Magwich's health sank lower and lower on account of his injuries...

Poor Handel, who was faithfully determined to stick by his side through it all, and see the thing out, was at that time, the most miserable that I have ever known him to be.

“We tried, dear old boy, we tried!” I said to him, more than one evening afterwards, clasping his hands by the fire. I would embrace him then more than I ever had, and encourage him, though I confess I felt selfishly glad that he was still with me. But do what I could, he was in the ‘valley of the shadow’, and there was no comforting or consoling him now.

He would spend his days endeavouring to turn the tide in favour of Magwich, writing appeals to authorities of all shapes and sizes. Each evening, at the appointed time, he'd

visit Magwich, before finally coming home to me, spent and drained. He could not, and *would* not accept that Abel Magwich's death warrant was as good as signed.

We would sit together on the sofa in front of the fire for hours; him, with his weary head on my shoulder, or laying across my lap, as if he had been a child, and I, with my 'embracing arm' around him, a comforting hand playing continuously through his inky hair as he stared into the flames. Sometimes he'd come in and, throwing his hat onto the floor, would lay beside it, as if exhausted, and stare at the ceiling. I'd lie down beside him in companionable silence until I felt it was time to talk him into having something for dinner. Sometimes I would end the evening by playing the most soothing symphonies I could endeavour to think of on the piano until he would fall asleep on our sofa.

For the most part, I'd try to lighten his mind by reading aloud to him from one of our favourite books, or I'd talk about Clara and Gruffandgrim, or the progression of the business— but eventually, we'd come back to Magwich, and fall silent.

Magwich's dreadful condition and situation was a case of horror to us both. We'd had so much hope in his safe escape! So much hope, so cruelly wrenched away. It grieved poor Handel, who had grown very fond of Magwich, and it grieved me because it grieved *him* so.

If there was anything I could have given him that would have consoled or comforted him, I would have done it. He wanted nothing more than my company, and I was glad to give that at the very least.

For, although he spoke very little about it, there was another matter which was almost as grievous to him as Magwich's declining health. I knew that he was *also* very worried about what he would do for *money*, now that he had lost the chance to inherit the fortune Magwich had amassed for him. The man was a returned convict, and his wealth was forfeit to the Crown.

Estella could have claimed it, if she'd have known – but she did *not* know. Pip was not a blood relation, so there was no way he could stake a claim for it, no matter *what* Magwich's intentions as to it might have been. The lavish habits Pip had acquired had led him into the beginnings of a serious debt, and he had no profession or way of earning ready money.

He had been well and truly relieved of the burden of his benefactor's wealth, but it was not on his terms, and gave no relief of mind to him.

I couldn't help seriously worrying about him, and I felt simply *mad* at Mr. Jagers for making him feel worse about it. He'd come home from interviews with Jagers and Wenmick crestfallen, asking me if I thought him a fool too for not accepting '*portable property*' while it was available to him! I could by no means afford to pay his debts, or I would have readily done so. Instead, I set my mind to thinking of a way to help my friend...

I was reading quietly to him, it must have been about five or six nights after the failed escape, for it was now the following week, when he sighed deeply, and from the sigh came a yawn that distracted me.

"You're tired," I murmured, half laying down my book. I patted his knee with my free hand. "Sleep."

Only the night before, he had fallen asleep curled up like a cat on the sofa, after first making himself very cosy by tucking himself into the crook of my arm and using me like a pillow.

Tonight, we were sitting a little apart on the same sofa. He was lying stretched out, one leg thrown over my lap (this was the knee I had patted), as he leant his head on his least damaged hand. He was still healing from his terrible injuries, but was improving well. He glanced at me through half-lidded eyes and shifted, sitting up (a movement that dislodged his leg), and played with the bandages of his left arm.

"God knows I want to, Herbert, but... my mind can hardly rest at such a time..." was the subdued response.

"Then—," taking up my book again, "—perhaps if I *drone* on a while longer, I can *read you to sleep*, dear fellow," and picking up my narrative once again, I continued.

I scarcely made it to the end of the next paragraph, however, before he once again broke in upon the reading, sighing as he shifted once more on the sofa. He closed the distance between us, and laid his head upon my chest, wrapping both arms around me as was his manner of confiding, trustful, intimate embrace that always thrilled me, for it at once communicated something so loving and yet so needy. I slung my arm over his shoulders, and hugged him up to me in response.

After he had satisfied himself with breathing into my shoulder for a while he spoke again.

"Herbert?" he said in the same subdued tone, turning his face to stare into the fire.

“Yes, my dear Handel?” I replied.

“...All of **this** for a *pie*, and a *file*,” his eyes narrowed briefly at the fire, and his brows contorted. “I don't understand... *Why?* Why would he suffer so much for me?”

I laid my book on the sofa beside me, then, and looking at the ceiling as I considered the question, I crossed one leg over the other and wrapped my other arm around him, completing the comfortable embrace with a sigh.

“Well, my dear Handel, I suppose the only answer I have is for *love's* sake. Here was an orphan, visiting his parents grave; here was an orphan, bringing him food and drink and freedom; here was an orphan's adopted father, wishing him no ill; here was an orphan that reminded him keenly of the daughter he'd lost, who would have been about his age... You took Estella's place in his heart, Pip. I suppose that means he loves you. Parents can suffer anything for a child they love, you know.”

I muttered this last in a low voice. Handel turned his face into my chest again and was silent for a while after this. I was just about to take up my book when he stopped me with another question, tilting his head back to peek shyly up into my face.

“And you, Herbert? Do you love me?”

I was startled at first, then coloured a little, as I was pained by the question. “How can you ask me, Handel? You *know* I do,” I replied.

He smiled then, even laughed a little, but slowly replied, “I know. But *why* do you? That's what I don't understand. I'm not... *worthy* of it. All this fuss. There's nothing special or remarkable about me. I just can't see... What is there even to— to *love?*”

I grew agitated by his discourse and actually pushed him away then, breaking in upon his speech in exasperation. “*Why*, Handel? What is there to *love*, my dear Handel?” He blinked back at me, wide eyed at my expression.

I took his hands and held them as I continued, “You *are* an exasperating fellow! How can you **say** there's nothing special about you? How can you **think** that? Don't you *remember* when I told you that you were a **good fellow?** A good fellow with *impetuosity* and *hesitation*, *boldness* and *diffidence*, *action* and *dreaming* curiously mixed in him?” I raised my eyebrows as I leaned towards him, holding his gaze.

“You *are* special, Handel. Whether you feel it or not. As to why I love you... Well, just what is it that you can't *understand*? From the time we've roomed together here in London, have I *ever* given you the least indication that I have any lesser feeling than love or affection for you?”

His clear blue eyes were fastened on my face. The dark brows above them twisted and clouded his expression as he shook his head slowly. Feeling my frayed emotions dampening under *that* look, I reached up and prodded his face in wry amusement.

“You do like to be told things plainly, don't you? Handel, you are a *hopeless romantic*. How can you **ask** me if I love you? **Why** I love you?” shaking my head as I moved away again.

“You, who are like my very own *soul*, and as dear to me as it is. Why, I have liked you from the first, and as my most intimate friend, Handel, you *must* commit yourself to being **loved** by me. If you want **proof** of my love then— then take the last five years of my companionship as proof! And...” pausing, I leaned over and affectionately embraced him, impulsively kissing him once, hard, on the temple, then I let him go again, conscious of a flushing in my cheeks, “—and there, since you drove me to it, take *that*, also! I assure you, my dear Handel, that it's not in my power to be able to deny you even a- a *spoonful* of the affection I feel towards you.”

He stared at me for a long moment, his blushing face going through all manner of emotions, until, to my surprise, he suddenly caught up both my hands in his and pressed them to his lips, kissing them twice.

He laughed, but his face creased as he said in a choking voice, “Don't wonder, Herbert, that I kiss the hands that saved me. And, I'll kiss them again!” And he did so once more, laughing as he pressed my hands to his downturned face. I presently felt hot tears begin to wash my palms, as his laughter turned into fits of sobbing. Alarmed, I tried to lift his face, and to pull him into an embrace, but he would not allow me to do either.

“These hands! This man...” he groaned and shook his head, “Oh, Jonathan, Jonathan! I'm so **grateful** for you, my dear, my lovely *Jonathan!*”

I tried to speak then, and say something, anything, but for once, words failed me. The unexpected nature of his emotional outburst had caught me off guard, and so I sat still and dumb at a loss for words while he sobbed, clutching my hands to his face.

“H-Handel, please...” I eventually stammered. “Don't cry so. You break my heart. What do you mean by weeping like this and breaking my heart?”

He sensed my perplexity and looked up suddenly, directly at me. His blue eyes were rimmed with red and so dilated they looked black. The dark lashes that fringed them were wet and shining. His face was contorted in such a paroxysm of extraordinary emotion, that it moved me, and set my heart to beating quicker than it already was.

“I'm sorry. I just...” he continued, swallowing down further sobs. “You are **so** wonderful to me, Herbert, and I...” Sniffing deeply, he gently placed my damp hands into my lap. “Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears. After all, I'm only crying because I love **you** so, Herbert.”

Standing abruptly and swiping at his eyes, he broke eye contact and continued in a softer tone, more like himself, “I think I'll take your suggestion of sleep to heart now. Good night,” and promptly went to his bedroom.

I could scarcely stop myself from following him, my self-confessed *David*— so unreasonably abrupt was his manner, and so unreasonably discomfited by his tears was I, that I confess, I sat confused on the sofa, and quite argued with myself for the next hour, before I too went to bed.

* * *

The following day, Clarriker informed me that the affairs of the House had indeed progressed to the point that we could now physically go out and establish a small branch-house in the East, which was much wanted for the expansion of the business.

I, in my new partnership capacity, was to go and take charge of it by the end of the week.

Delighted as I was with my new responsibilities, I worked all that day with a heavy heart, knowing I **must** go to Cairo for Clarriker, indeed, for the sake of our business, I must, but wishing not to leave my dear Handel alone at the time when he *most* needed me.

I confessed the same to him on my return home, and my heart quite leapt to hear him say frankly, “Herbert, I shall always need you, because I shall always love you.”

I certainly knew it, yes, I knew it for sure, but —oh! To hear him **say** it— and at such a time! It quite broke my heart a second time. *He loved and needed me!*

“My need is no greater now than at any other time,” he sighed.

My affection and pity for him quite spilled over, and I moved closer, taking both his hands in mine and squeezing them warmly.

“You will be so *lonely*,” I sighed, thinking with an aching heart of just *how* alone he'd be, in our once so resoundingly happy bachelor apartments. He had no Estella, no Magwich, no Joe or Biddy - and now, I must leave him too! It hurt me to think of it.

“I have not leisure to think of that,” said he, casting his eyes down. The superbly long, dark lashes that framed the blue within, grazed his cheekbones as he spoke of Magwich.

“My dear fellow,” I said, releasing his hands and touching him lightly on the arm, feeling at last I could not bear to let the matter go unspoken of any longer, indeed, I could *not* leave him without knowing what would become of him when this trouble was over, “—let the near prospect of our separation— for, it is very near —be my justification for troubling you about your future. Have you thought of your future?”

I could see from his troubled expression and answer that he was afraid to think of his future— so bleak, so hopeless, so loveless and empty it must have looked from where he was standing!

I held him by both arms, and said earnestly, “But yours *cannot* be dismissed, indeed my dear, *dear* Handel, it must **not** be dismissed.” For how could I leave him if it was!

“I wish you would enter on it now, as far as a few friendly words go, with me.”

“I will,” he assented, lifting his soft, pain saddened eyes to mine.

I let go of his arms then as I walked back and forth, taking a deep breath and putting the subject as delicately as I could.

“In this branch house of ours, Handel, we *must* have a—” I was considering how to put it, when he saved me by interposing the very word.

“A clerk?” he suggested.

“A clerk,” I nodded, feeling breathless. “And I hope it is not at all unlikely that he may expand, as a clerk of *your* acquaintance has expanded,” looking at him meaningfully, “—into a partner. Now Handel—”, then, casting away the careful, business-like tone I had

assumed, I stretched out my hand to him and earnestly implored, “–in short, my **dear** boy, will you come to *me*?”

He looked at me, then, in touched amazement, and I'm afraid I saw his lips quiver. I could see the question of how it was to be done in his eyes, so taking his hands again, I continued with my fervent appeal that he should not be lonely if he was ever to stay with me, pouring forth in a torrent of words.

“Clara and I have talked about it again and again,” –oh! How I loved Clara at that moment, for not denying me the one friend I loved more than any other, and for not being jealous over that love!– “and the *dear* little thing begged me only this evening, with tears in her eyes, to say to you that, if you will live with us when we come together, she will do her *best* to make you happy, and to convince her husband's friend that he is her friend too.”

Handel's face creased most beautifully during this speech, and he warmly gripped my hands.

“We should get on so *well*, Handel!” I finished. My proposal, and my heart, laid bare before my bosom friend, I looked at him as beseechingly as I had when I had first asked him if he'd mind *Handel* for a familiar name.

It must have worked upon him, as it worked upon me, because he broke down then and embraced me. Perhaps it was too much for him, in hindsight, with all that he had endured to that point.

To think– only a week ago, we were in tears because he would be leaving me, and now I was the one leaving him –only, I couldn't bear to do it!

With tears in his eyes, he thanked Clara, and thanked me, so heartily, that I was sure he would immediately fall to packing his bags to be ready to go with me to Cairo. However, he hesitated and said he could not yet make sure of joining us, his mind being so much preoccupied with the present trouble that he couldn't think clearly upon any other subject, and asked, while brushing away the tears that ran freely down his face, if the opening would remain if he should linger.

“For *any* while!” I cried, filled to overflowing with joy, and planning the future before us. “Six months! A year!”

He laughed slightly then and patted my hand, “Not so long as that. Two or three months at most.”

This news so filled my heart I could scarcely restrain myself from falling upon him and kissing him all over his blessed face! –*He said yes!*– Instead, I contented myself with vigorously shaking hands with him, and laughing, I bestowed just the *one* friendly, joy-filled kiss upon him as I pulled him into yet another embrace, as to convey the summer of delight that had come upon me.

He's coming with us! We'll never have to separate again! We can continue to be the very dearest friends! Oh, I'm so happy!

Such was the music of my thoughts, that my *Harmonious Blacksmith* had as good as accepted my *hand* in business, and **would** now be *forever* with me, that I took the courage to tell him then that I believed I would have to go away at the end of the week.

What are two or three months, after all? He said yes! He actually wants to spend his future with me! With us! I have the assurance that I shall see the dear fellow always! We'll be working together! And he's coming to live with us! Oh, my heart, I'm so happy!

Saturday came far too quickly then for my liking, and I was filled with mixed emotions—bright hope for the business venture ahead, but exceedingly sorry and sad to leave dear, dear Handel to whatever darkness lay before him. Indeed, as the coach pulled away and I waved and kissed my hand to his diminishing, lonely face, I felt the sensation I had felt when Magwich had first arrived and Handel had collapsed into my arms, of being the anchor to his ship, now cut free and drifting.

* * *

When I received the news, not a month later, of the death of Magwich and of Handel's having fallen into a dreadful illness (by letter from Joe, his adoptive father), I begged a week or two's leave of Clarriker, who had come to see how the business fared in the East. I was desperate to see my dear –I had lately taken to calling him '*my darling David*' in my affectionate thoughts for him! –my poor, *dear* Handel, now orphaned twice over!

I was very much dismayed to find out just how ill he was on my arrival. When we went to him, both Clara and I, we found him tossing and turning in an all-consuming fever, and so delirious that he did not know us. Clara wept something terrible, and my heart broke. To think, I had left him but a few weeks! We were much comforted by dear Joe, who had come to stay at our old apartments to nurse the poor fellow back to health.

We helped Joe as much as possible, and I was grieved that I could not stay in England longer than the stipulated time I had given Clarriker. Hearing also at this time from Joe, of Orlick's being committed to county jail, I paid a visit to the local magistrate, an Avenging Angel with a damning testament. I was made the more bitter by the condition of my friend, and ensured the vicious fellow's term would not come to its end anytime soon.

I left England lighter for having done for Orlick no less than he deserved, but with a heavy heart as to the condition of my dear friend, and whispered many prayers for him as I travelled. Clara could not stay to help Joe, as *Gruffandgrim* still thrived on pepper and rum, and required her constant attention, but she stayed in contact with him, and with me, as I was very anxious about Handel's state.

Our collective gloom gradually lifted, however, as I heard from Clara by letter of Handel's stabilising and improving condition, and I confess, I wept to hear he had finally recognised Joe once more.

Time passed, and Handel continued to improve, and after a few more months he was strong enough to quit England. I still feel that the day he came to me in the East was one of the happiest days of my life. I received him with open arms and a cup overflowing with joy. He had somehow cheated death a second time, and was with me again.

I did everything I could to settle him in his new home with me— as I had done, I remembered, smiling, the few years before when he had first arrived on my doorstep. I never realised back then just how dear he would become to me. We were like a part of each other, like twin brothers, so real was our love for one another.

We had passed turbulent times together, he and I, and keenly felt our fortune at being together again, with a certain, happy future stretching before us now, very much. Indeed, I felt blissfully content and a most fortunate fellow to have quite 'married' my two very best friends in life— one, soon I would have in matrimony (if only old Bill Barley would stick to his pepper and rum!), the other was already with me in business, and both, I had surely married in affection. Indeed, I now found that old adage to be true — 'the children of unsuitable marriages are the happiest when suitably married'!

When Gruffandgrim finally passed beyond the veil of this life, I rushed homeward once again, both to comfort my sweet, darling Clara, and to finally be married to her so I could take her back with me.

On our return as man and wife to the East, the airy dreams I'd once had that we three should travel the land of the Arabian Nights with a caravan of camels, and glide up and

down the Nile seeing wonders were also realised— much to my joy and Handel's astonishment that it should be so.

And so, after what had felt like a long dark separation, we were finally all reunited in Cairo, and began to live together once more; Handel, I, and now also Clara. Indeed, we three became quite an inseparable family. Ours was a happy home, for we did in fact get along so superbly well!

When Clarriker came to me one day many years later, not long after Handel had risen to third partner in the firm, he betrayed a secret he had held for **years**, of how Handel— oh, my good, *darling*, precious Handel! —had orchestrated our partnership, had worked to keep it alive, and was the veritable **founder** of our present happiness. I knew he was a darling, but *this*? I was rendered quite speechless. I could not so much as *look* at the dear boy without tears springing into my eyes and flying at him to embrace him.

Handel would only smile at me when I did this— that *insufferably* sweet smile of his, that lingered and dimpled and turned up the corners of his eyes! —and say in his warm, honest voice, that it was little recompense for one to which he owed his life many times over.

I had thought I could *not* love him more than I did, but through the betrayal of this most wonderful of secrets, my love for him reached soaring, beautiful new heights. No matter what happened hereafter, the loving boy, my dearest and best friend, my '*darling David*'— as I now *always* affectionately called him (though he had a great many names; Clara would call him '*husband Handel*', and that also stuck!) —no matter what happened, I say, he could do **no** wrong in our eyes.

He was so settled in our home, and was truly a permanent fixture, being like a second father or an affectionate uncle to our children as they arrived. Although we joked with him daily that he should marry and start his own home, I secretly wished he would not.

It was with nervousness, then, that I heard that he had actually found *Estella* again on his first return trip back to England after eleven years! However, I was softened to hear that she was much changed by what she had endured at Drummle's cruel hands, and I, finding it within my power, I frankly forgave her with a full heart when she travelled to see us in the East with Handel, full of remorse and apologies over her conduct years ago.

I remembered that Provis, no, Magwich, was made what he was because he had no chance to become anything other. His daughter Estella, with a mentor like Miss Havisham to influence and shape her from her tender years until she was quite grown, had not much

chance to go right either, her heart being quite stolen away from her and “replaced with ice” –as Handel recounts Miss Havisham as a saying in remorse, before that fateful fire.

It seems, through what Estella suffered with Drummle, she had found her heart again.

And so, we– Clara and I –extended our love towards her, seeing the poor thing so desperately needed it, in that underneath all of that hard facade, she had been found out to be nothing more fearsome than a lamb.

Perhaps this is why Handel brought her to us –and indeed, he confided in me later, that it was.

Bruised and broken as she was by her mean upbringing and disastrous marriage, we would rather *die* than add cruelty to cruelty. Handel knew that we would not deny her the rest she so desperately needed by our well, to drink her fill of what love and friendship we could share with her, and we were thankful to see her begin to heal under our restorative touch.

From that time, and for many years hence, I always felt that I must be the luckiest, and happiest man alive; and indeed, you could not now or ever convince me otherwise.

Fin.

* * *

FOOTNOTES

Scriptures on Love, Friendship and Affection

For my Christian friends; since these everlasting Words are at the core of everything I undertake to do, and form the basis, the backbone, and the foundation of my work, as they surely did for Dickens.

Psalm 133:1 KJV

[1] Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

Proverbs 18:24 KJV

[24] A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: And there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

Ecclesiastes 4:10-11 NKJV

[10] For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.

[11] Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone?

Romans 5:7-8 KJV

[7] For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

[8] But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

John 10:11 KJV

[11] I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

John 10:15 KJV

[15] As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

John 15:12-13 KJV

[12] This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

[13] Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 NKJV

[7] But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

[8] So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

1 Thessalonians 2:17 NKJV

[17] But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.

1 Thessalonians 3:12 KJV

[12] And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

1 Thessalonians 4:9 KJV

[9] But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

1 John 3:11 KJV

[11] For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

1 John 3:16 KJV

[16] Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Hebrews 13:1 KJV

[1] Let brotherly love continue.

John 13:23-25 KJV

[23] Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

[24] Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake.

[25] He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?

1 John 4:7-11 KJV

[7] Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

[8] He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

[9] In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

[10] Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

[11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

1 John 4:18, 21 KJV

[18] There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

[21] And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 13 AMP

[4] Love endures with patience and serenity, love is kind and thoughtful, and is not jealous or envious; love does not brag and is not proud or arrogant.

[5] It is not rude; it is not self-seeking, it is not provoked [nor overly sensitive and easily angered]; it does not take into account a wrong endured.

[6] It does not rejoice at injustice, but rejoices with the truth [when right and truth prevail].

[7] Love bears all things [regardless of what comes], believes all things [looking for the best in each one], hopes all things [remaining steadfast during difficult times], endures all things [without weakening].

[8] Love never fails [it never fades nor ends] ...

[13] And now there remain: faith [abiding trust in God and His promises], hope [confident expectation of eternal salvation], love [unselfish love for others growing out of God's love for me], these three [the choicest graces]; **but the greatest of these is love.**

* * *

A Study on Love, Affection, and Friendship

I wrote 'My Dear Handel' primarily as a study. I wanted to explore what close male friendships used to look like in Dickens's day, and use my findings as a basis of comparison with male friendships in the current day. It serves both as research and as a companion story to a graphic novel I'm currently developing that looks at close male friendships today, and at the impact having a close bond with a friend can have on mental health for men.

I wrote this study in a fever of writing in less than two weeks, after listening to the audiobook of *Great Expectations* for the first time. I bought and scoured the novel from back to front over and over again, highlighting my favourite parts and committing them to memory. I watched the BBC adaption, and then also the brilliant 1946 David Lean black-and-white movie adaption (John Mills and Alec Guinness are SUCH a standout Pip and Herbert! If I could imagine Alec Guinness narrating any part of this story, then in my mind, it becomes canon!) I find the story so wonderfully rich - it's a complete *delight*. I'm thankful to have come across it, and for the zest with which these characters have inspired me, and I'm most deeply grateful for Dickens.

My aim with 'My Dear Handel' wasn't to write an AU or go off on any odd tangents; I tried to keep as faithfully to the original text as I could, and just write Herbert's viewpoints of some of the iconic scenes that take place in the book. Pip is very inward looking as a character, and so 'Great Expectations' focuses on his inmost thoughts, but Herbert is very outward-looking, and considerate of others. The pair of them have some really interesting interactions (like the 'look at me' and 'touch me' scene!) so I wanted to write Herbert's emotions around Dickens' original text.

I wanted to fill in the blanks, the spaces, the silences (of which there are many!) - to dive into the inferences, and to unravel the true emotional impact of the chain of events that bring Pip and Herbert closer and closer together throughout the story. We see snippets of the love they have for one another throughout 'Great Expectations'; 'My Dear Handel' dives into and lingers upon those snippets.

This study is, however, by no means perfect— and I won't pretend that it's very good! I wrote it simply as a means of trying to help myself understand how Herbert views Pip throughout the story, and of course, for my own entertainment and satisfaction.

I just couldn't *help* wondering what Herbert's perspective of all that transpired would be, and was simply possessed with the idea of writing a brief diarised summary from what I'd think would be his point of view as a result.

Love is a key theme of Great Expectations— there are so many types of love expressed in the characters' relationships with each other.

There is the unconditional, enduring, fatherly love that Joe has for Pip; there's Pip's everlasting infatuation with Estella that drives him to extreme unhappiness, but also self-sacrificingly leads to him to forgive of her (and Miss Havisham's) for their ill usage of him; there is Herbert's love for his sweetheart Clara, which remains untainted and pure; there is also Herbert's selfless, brotherly love for Pip (which is what I try to analyse in this study) and Pip's brotherly love for Herbert, which leads him to do whatever he can to help his friend succeed in business; there is the destruction that love wreaks upon Miss Havisham, as her heart is broken on her wedding day, and the course of her life is changed by her ensuing bitterness; there is the fatherly love that Magwich has for Pip, which leads him to work a lifetime to create a legacy for him and also leads him to risk his life to come and see Pip in England; and of course, there is Estella's complete lack of being able love at all, which comes back to haunt her mentor, Miss Havisham, and hurts Pip deeply.

Through this study, I wanted to better understand Herbert's love for Pip, and why Herbert stuck with Pip through all that happened. Instead of *leaving* Pip to his troubles, many of them self-inflicted, he constantly supports him throughout the book with a tender, cheerful resilience; something that strikes me as ever so increasingly rare.

What makes a best friend? Pip and Herbert are an excellent study of “best friend love”, for they love one another so freely and so deeply that it seemingly begins to verge on romantic love, especially towards the end of the book, and especially because they are both such tender-hearted, affectionate people.

If you have a best friend, you already know the rapport, the affection and the freedom you enjoy in your relationship.

Think about how you would feel towards *your* best friend if they saved you from certain death, like Herbert does Pip. What about if they saved you from financial ruin? Or selflessly supported your dreams with their own income? Or even just opened their home to you, to give you a place to stay, if you had nowhere else to go?

Understanding the development of Pip and Herbert's relationship to the point of “best-friendship”, from Herbert's perspective, has made this study of great interest to me. Contrasting Victorian men's “best friend” relationships with that of the modern day has also been very interesting.

Pip is a self-confessed very 'sensitive' lover (he says in *Great Expectations* that he is made sensitive by his sister's rough upbringing). *However*, he is denied the romantic love he pursues throughout the book. Herbert is *also* a sensitive lover, who is conversely *not* denied to love, or be loved, by either his girlfriend Clara or his best friend. Herbert is also quick to discern the matters of Pip's heart concerning Estella, and to note (verbally, directly to Pip!) that Pip is a hopeless romantic by both nature and circumstances.

When Pip and Herbert first meet on Miss Havisham's property as children, Herbert's first reaction to a boy his age is to call him out for a fight – much to Pip's confusion. Herbert, not being a very good fighter, but plucky and determined (a quality he retains throughout life), might have been bullied, and being pale, we may say he was indoors often being homeschooled, as his father is a tutor.

Perhaps, as the somewhat poor son of a tutor to the rich, his encounters with upper class boys his age may not have been a wholly positive or particularly pleasant experience, despite his being vaguely high-born himself. His reaction to Pip may then have been a result of him looking at improving his fighting and self-defense skills, say, that boxing was a part of schooling. It may be then, that boxing between the boys was practised often out of the classroom. These boys may quite easily have been brattish, and bullying, looking at the sour, arrogant nature of Bentley Drummle, Pip's rival throughout the story, as an example of some of the characters Herbert may have had to put up with in his younger years.

Pip, on the other hand, we know by his own account, has at this early stage in his life, already been exposed to a supportive, unconditional male friendship through the close bond he has constantly affirmed to him by his adoptive father, Joe. They are "ever the best of friends," through good and bad, thick and thin.

We can begin from this to derive the impact Joe's friendship, unconditional love, and kindness, would have had on molding Pip's own nature, and to discern the way it would impact how Pip would approach relationships with other men in the future.

Mainly, that he would view a closely bonded friendship with another man as a normal thing, that he could be "ever the best of friends" with a man with whom he felt an affinity for quite easily, and that he would actually expect and freely accept this type of relationship again, with it having been a positive experience for him.

Joe, throughout the book, teaches him through action what friendship looks like, by his confidence and companionship through his sister's abuses, his frank forgiveness of Pip's

undesirable behaviours, and by his never withdrawing his continual support and kindness, no matter how much time passes.

When Pip meets Herbert many years later, Herbert is now a young man with a cheerful, and ever hopeful disposition, no longer given to fighting, and seemingly much more comfortable with himself than he was as a child. At the point of Pip's reappearance in his life, he's also in a secret romantic relationship with a young woman called Clara, who is far from his mother's expectations of an ideal match for him, being as poor as he is, and of an unknown history. However, Herbert clearly no longer bows to his mother's wishes, and is attempting to make his own way in life - a sign that he has harboured a distaste for her title and wealth chasing obsessions.

He seems to be trying to shun the expensive frivolities of upper-class society in favour of going his own way, and is living frugally, but seems much happier for it. He was raised to be a gentleman, although, similar to Pip, he comes from poor and humble beginnings. He has associated with gentlefolk his whole life, unlike Pip, due to his father's tutoring of young men from upper class society, and due to his family's connection to the wealthy Miss Havisham, himself being her first cousin once removed. The first time he meets Pip, as a child, he is visiting her to see if she would take a shine to him and enrich him with her wealth.

In contrast, Pip's efforts to assume the life of a gentleman lead to him becoming dandyish, proud, and overly concerned about appearances. He is ashamed of Joe when he comes to see him in London, and sports a flowery dressing gown at this stage of his 'advancement' in life. One can only assume Dickens' satirical awareness of how this evident foppishness associated him with the nickname "Handel", as Dickens found this story extremely humorous!

Herbert, on the other hand, is a marvellously charming, well-mannered, cordial, delightful young gentleman, who has a wonderful understanding of what upper class society is like, unlike Pip. He is naturally elegant, friendly, likeable, and effortlessly carries off his good manners. He possesses keen powers of observation, and is able to be very tactful as a result. He's also able to put others at ease, and with his penchant for nicknames, he shows that he likes to create familiarity between himself and others. Despite all this, however, he seems otherwise alone on Pip's arrival, and quickly becomes attached to him.

The way in which he immediately warms to Pip shows that he was lacking companionship. He seems to greatly prefer the companionship of this blacksmith's boy to the society of those of the standing he grew up with, saving a few gentler and more affectionate

exceptions, like Startop. Perhaps, though, his frank friendship with Pip is born from feeling a natural affinity for a fellow romantic soul, which would be more in keeping with Herbert's nature! He keeps Pip from becoming too high-and-mighty with his 'great expectations', and Pip thinks of him as his 'anchor'.

Herbert uncomplainingly returns to expensive upper class society habits, just for Pip's sake, even though doing so throws him into crippling debt, which suggests his absolute investment into their friendship. Herbert will not readily accept offers of monetary help, despite his poverty, being determined to make his own way. This prompts Pip to go about helping him achieve his dreams of becoming a merchant, without his knowing - which shows a level of kindness and tact in Pip.

Pip is himself a passionate, romantic, and wildly idealistic young man - a contrast to Herbert, who is also romantic but otherwise practical, and has simple goals, to become a merchant and marry his beloved Clara. Herbert's presence becomes a refuge for Pip as he struggles to adjust to London and the 'high life' he has so long desired.

Herbert is an excellent example of a Phlegmatic, with a patient, easy-going temperament. He possesses a very pleasant nature, likes to avoid conflict (like when he tries to steer Pip clear of conflict with Drummle), and is very service-oriented (shown by the patience he displays when he cares for Pip's burns). However, he can be a bit too passive, and lacks the drive and determination to match his ambition of being an insurer of ships (being somewhat languid and unhurried in his "looking about him".) Otherwise, he is practical, consistent, calm and reliable - with the added bonus of being a bit of a Sanguine, he's also pleasant to be around, very affectionate, warm, loving, tolerant of others shortcomings, and forever faithful.

Pip, on the other hand, is deeply Melancholic. He is introverted, creative, possesses a huge imagination, has high standards, is a perfectionist, and can swing from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows. He tends to over-analyse and overthink situations to the point of driving himself to despair. He can also create unrealistic scenarios in his mind, build castles in the air, and is generally a quiet, highly sensitive individual. However, when he turns his critical mind to business ventures like helping Herbert achieve his goals, (or to accounting, like he does for his and Herbert's debts), he does so with success, and also shows he can put thinking ahead to good use, by ensuring Herbert's future is secured by Miss Havisham's money when he decides to reject Magwich as a benefactor.

The two of them find comfort in one another, forging a strong, lifelong bond, as these temperaments do. Just as Herbert finds happiness in friendship with Pip (a bonus being he's one who has not been born or bred in upper class circles, one who is coming from a

different atmosphere altogether) so also does Pip find comfort in friendship with a down-to-earth, sensitive, tactful gentleman like Herbert.

Pip, understanding friendship through the lens of Joe, readily accepts Herbert's attachment to him without question, although with a few dynamic shifts.

Whereas Pip used to view Joe as a man-child sometimes, Herbert, being his own age, is treated differently, and as more of an equal, even as someone to look up to, aspiring as Pip is to become a gentleman, like Herbert.

Pip had also grown used to Joe's unconditional, parental type of love, and being 8 months younger than Herbert, we can imagine that he receives a similar type of attention from him, in being cared for and looked after often. This is something we can imagine Herbert has grown used to doing, being (what is assumed) the oldest boy in a big family, with many younger brothers and sisters that would have relied on and looked up to him.

Pip, being an 'only child' in a way, has grown up being used to being looked after, and almost expects it - he knows that he will be, regardless of what he does. He has a childish innocence about him that he retains throughout the book. Herbert's patient, considerate handling of him speaks to a world of experience of being a responsible big brother –and when we see a glimpse of the family he comes from, of his stressed-out father and careless mother, we can begin to understand and sympathise with him a little better.

Understanding and analysing the basis for the affinity and dynamic between Pip and Herbert lends much context to understanding the development of their strong bond as a key part of grounding this study, which is why I have included the above background information. The two of them manage to build a strong emotional connection, and end the book as the very closest pair of brothers-in-arms, which is both heartwarming, and interesting.

During the writing of 'My Dear Handel', in 'reading between the lines', as I studied the interactions and dialogue between Pip and Herbert, and thought about the spaces in-between, it struck me that strong close male friendships in the West seem to have been encouraged and promoted much more in previous eras than they are now.

As I delved into other works by Victorian era writers, I especially looked in detail at Arthur Conan Doyle's inseparable Sherlock and Watson duo, studying their relationship through both his original texts and through video adaptations. The dynamic of the two men, their genuine interest in one another's welfare, and their unwavering loyalty to one another speaks of a 'real' friendship of a different era.

I found that the most successful adaptations of Sherlock Holmes and Watson were played by actors **who were truly best friends in real life** and remained best friends their whole lives through; Jeremy Brett and David Burke / Ed Hardwick (Granada Holmes adaptation) were close friends that supported one another on and off screen, which Jeremy really needed, suffering from mental health issues that impacted him physically. Vitaly Solomin and Vasily Livanov (Russian Holmes adaptation) were the very best friends throughout life, as were their wives and families (beautiful article below where Vasily talks of his relationship with his best friend): <https://www.fontanka.ru/2010/07/19/154/>

This quote from the article, which is partially from the memoir of Vasily, especially touched me. Spoken by Vitaly on Vasily's 60th birthday - "I want you to live a very long time. Because I really need you."

Vasily responds in his memoir, "And I really need you, Vitasha. Always. Even when you are no longer around." (Vistasha was the nickname he had for Vitaly - Vitaly passed away in 2002). And this also from Vasily's memoir - "But everything about my beloved closest friend and partner Vitaly Solomin has become a part of my way of life, my conscience, so for me it will become the thing of the past only when I pass away too."

This genuine friendship comes across on screen and creates mystery - this mystery is part of the massive success of these adaptations, as these actors *become* these characters. The genuine friendship of these actors then becomes a necessity for bringing to life characters which are as involved in each other's lives as the Sherlock / Watson duo.

Through my studies, I got the overwhelming impression that men's general relationships with one another in the West, 200, 150, even 100 years ago, seem to have been much healthier, more tender, more open, more frank, and much more affectionate than they seem to be today. Men were more emotionally 'mature' and, without clouds of toxic masculinity hanging over them, they expressed themselves more freely.

Terms of endearment were more regularly and more widely used, affection was more freely shown, men would walk arm in arm down the street, and friendships were generally tighter and more strongly bonded. It wasn't until modern times that this really changed in the West.

This well-penned article discusses the nature and development of men's friendships throughout history succinctly (with historical photographic references!):

<https://www.artofmanliness.com/people/relationships/the-history-and-nature-of-man-friendships/>

Close male friendships have existed for thousands of years - thinking again of the biblical David and Jonathan duo. "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: Very pleasant hast thou been unto me: Thy love to me was wonderful, Passing the love of women." - 2 Samuel 1:26 (KJV)

Psychologically, the love for a best friend, verges on and borders the love for a romantic partner, differing only in sexual aspects. Both parties are often as obsessed with one another as in a romantic relationship, but as that obsession is not forged on any sexual obligation, it can actually tend to be healthier.

In Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, best friend love falls under "Companionate love" - a relationship requiring a level of intimacy and commitment. Best friend love expresses the highest levels of both of these without crossing into overtly sexual territory. It is best described as a 'platonic romantic' relationship - a non-sexual romance where emotional and intimacy needs are met without infringing on sexual boundaries.

There's something wonderfully wholesome and uplifting about this 'healthy obsession' for the welfare and emotional happiness of a best friend. It's a concern that tends towards unconditional support, kindness and true affection, which is really the basis for any strong partnership that lasts a lifetime (including a spouse-type relationship).

In some Eastern and African cultures, close male friendships do remain a norm; to hug, embrace one another, kiss one another's neck, and even to hold hands while talking to each other is a normal occurrence; in the West, though, this seems (from my personal observation / perspective) to have slipped from what it was; it's like it has become almost taboo for men to show homosocial outward affection towards their male friends without it being misconstrued as homosexual attention. Showing friendly affection in terms of language or touch is no longer really the norm in the West.

Boundaries are, of course, extremely important too. How much affection is too much? Understanding what may be acceptable with one person, may not be to another, is a key part of building healthy relationships. How can we show our friends that we care about them, that we love and appreciate them, that they make our lives better, and that they mean something to us?

Society is uncomfortable with platonic shows of affection between men, which has led to greater isolation of men than at any other time in history. I fear that more

affectionate male friendships in the West have largely succumbed to societal pressures and toxic masculinity in a way that means that men's mental health is badly suffering as a result. Epidemic loneliness, depression, and higher suicide rates than ever before amongst men of all ages are some of the results of the societal shift in affection between men. The loss of being able to express your heart, and find companionship in open and frank committed friendships speaks truly sad volumes.

We know what friendship is, but how often do we practice it? Where is the display of that resilient, unconditional love that sticks by another come what may, that sees things through, that overcomes both mountains and valleys? The kind of love that doesn't easily give up on a person, instead lending the support so desperately needed especially at the darkest and most difficult times in our lives? Being able to show your friends affection without worrying about what other people might think can be a wonderfully freeing experience, both mentally and emotionally.

In my heart, I'm glad that even in today's hostile climate, such a thing as "best friends" can still exist. It's a shame to think that affectionate friendship of this everlasting nature has died a mass death though, due to the pressures of our society.

'My Dear Handel' is a study of that stripped back, pure version of unconditional love for a friend with whom you share everything - your losses, your triumphs, your laughter and your tears, your hopes, your ambitions, your life, and even your future. It's about friendship that you would dash into danger for, defend, and fight for, even at the risk of losing your own life.

It's a quiet ode, above all else, to a love without alloy that used to exist in some capacity in all relationships, a love that society today is much poorer without.