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Great Expectations

Author(s): Kathy Acker

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# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

by Kathy Acker

*Being the First Chapter of*

## I RECALL MY CHILDHOOD

My father's name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.

I give Pirrip as my father's family name on the authority of his tombstone and my sister—Mrs. Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith.

On Christmas Eve 1978 my mother committed suicide and in September of 1979 my grandmother (on my mother's side) died. Ten days ago, it is now almost Christmas 1979, Terence told my fortune with the Tarot cards. This was not so much a fortune—whatever that means—but a fairly, it seems to me, precise psychic map of the present, therefore: the future.

I asked the cards about future boyfriends. This question involved the following thoughts: Would the guy who fucked me so well in France be in love with me? Will I have a new boyfriend? As Terence told me, I cut the cards into four piles: earth water fire air. We found my signifier, April 18th, in the water or emotion fantasy pile. The cards were pointing to my question. We opened up this pile. The first image was a fat purring humpster cat surrounded by the Empress and the Queen of Pentacles. This cluster, travelling through a series of other clusters that, like mirrors, kept defining or explained the first cluster more clearly, for there is nowhere to go there is no lineality of time time is an almost recurring conical, led to the final reversed (not consciously known by me) image: during Christmas the whole world is rejecting a male and a female kid who are the genetic existing scum. To the right of this card is the Star. To the left is the card of craftsmanship which due to hard work succeeds.

Terence told me that despite my present good chance and my basic stability and contentedness with myself (the fat purring human cat), or alongside these images, I have the image or obsession of being cast out and scum. This powerful image depends on the image of the Empress or the image I have of my mother. When I was very young, even before I was born, my mother hated me because my father left her (because she got pregnant?) and because my mother wanted to remain her mother's child rather than be my mother. My image of my mother is the source of my creativity—I prefer the

word consciousness. My image of my hateful mother is blocking consciousness. To obtain a different picture of my mother, I have to forgive my mother for rejecting me and committing suicide (the picture of love, found in one of the clusters, is forgiveness transforming need (the savage red untamed lion) into desire (the two lovers hold the cup of fantasy with the caduceus of health)).

Due to this hatred, the cards continued, I separate women myself into virgin meditation (The Hierophant) or the scumiest lust, rather than believing I can be fertile.

I have no idea how to begin to forgive someone much less my mother. I have no idea where to begin repression's impossible because it's stupid and I'm a materialist.

I just had the following dream: In a large New England-ish house I am standing in a very big room on the second floor in the front of the mansion. This room is totally fascinating, but as soon as I leave it, I can't go back because it disappears. Every room in this house differs from every other room.

The day after my mother committed suicide I started to experience a frame. Within this frame time was totally circular because I was being returned to my childhood traumas totally terrifying because now these traumas are totally real: there is no buffer of memory.

Pure time is not time but a hole. Inside this hole everything that happens not comes back again because it never went away. There is no time; there is. Beyond the buffers of forgetting (memory is a tool of forgetting) which are our buffer to reality: there is. As the dream: there is and there is not. Call this TERROR call this TOTAL HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY. The PIG I see on the edge of the grave is the PIG me neither death nor social comment kills. This TERROR is divine because it is real and may I sink into IT like I sink into the arms of any man who shows me affection.

How can I start talking to you about my mother? I'm a mass of memories feelings anxieties. Fuck psychology. My mother was a drunk. Oh I'm so embarrassed to admit my mother was drunk. She didn't drink four bottles of Schmirnoff's a day. She'd down one glass of Scotch fall down on her hands and knees and crawl dog-style across the

floor to the nearest available man place her head on his left thigh. Then she'd try to crawl up the man. Didn't give a damn if her husband who drank four bottles of Jack Daniels a day when she wasn't watching him saw her.

I grew up in this typical American family life.

My mother often told me, though not directly cause when she wasn't drunk she pretended sex and booze are non-existent, the only cause in this world is money. You shouldn't care if an action is right or wrong: you should totally care if you're going to profit monetarily from it. Grow up, kid.

The helmeted bow-legged stiff-muscled soldiers trample on just-born babies swaddled in scarlet violet shawls, babies roll out of the arms of women crouched under POP's iron machine guns, a cabby shoves his fist into a goat's face, near the lake a section of the other army cross the tracks, other soldiers in this same army leap in front of the trucks, the POP retreat up the river, a white-walled tire in front of three thorn bushes props up a male's head, the soldiers bare their chests in the shade of the mud barricades, the females lullabye kids in their tits, the sweat from the fires perfumes reinforces this stirring rocking makes their rags their skins their meat pregnant: salad oil clove henna butter indigo sulfur, at the base of this river under a shelf loaded down by burnt-out cedars barley wheat beehives graves refreshment stands garbage bags fig trees matches human-brain-splattered low-walls small-fires'-smoke-dilated orchards explode: flowers pollen grain-ears tree roots paper milk-stained cloths blood bark feathers, rising. The soldiers wake up stand up again tuck in their canvas shirttails suck in cheeks stained by tears dried by the steam from hot train rails rub their sex against the tires, the trucks go down into a dry ford mow down a few rose-bushes, the sap mixes with disemboweled teenagers' blood on their knives' metal, the soldiers' nailed boots cut down uproot nursery plants, a section of RIMA (the other army) climb onto their trucks' runningboards throw themselves on their females pull out violet rags bloody Tampaxes which afterwards the females stick back in their cunts: the soldier's chest as he's raping the female crushes the baby stuck in her tits

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I want: every part changes (the meaning of) every other part so there's no absolute/heroic/dictatorial/S&M meaning/part the soldier's onyx-dusted fingers touch her face orgasm makes him shoot saliva over the baby's buttery skull his formerly-erect now-softening sex rests on the shawl becomes its violet scarlet color, the trucks swallow up the RIMA soldiers, rainy winds shove the tarpulins against their necks, they adjust their clothes, the shadows grow, their eyes gleam more and more their fingers brush their belt buckles, the wethaired-from-sweating-during-capture-at-the-edge-of-the-coals goats crouch like the rags sticking out of the cunts, a tongueless canvas-covered teenager pisses into the quart of blue enamel he's holding in his half-mutilated hand, the truck driver returns kisses the blue cross tattooed on his forehead, the teenager brings down his palm wrist where alcohol-filled veins are sticking out. These caterpillars of trucks grind down the stones the winds hurled over the train tracks, the soldiers sleep their sex rolling over their hips drips they are cattle, their truck-driver spits black a wasp sting swells up the skin under his left eye black grapes load down his pocket, an old man's white hair under-the-white-hair red burned face jumps up above the sheet metal, the driver's black saliva dries on his chin the driver's studded heel crushes as he pulls hair out the back of this head on to the sheet metal, some stones blow up

My mother is the most beautiful woman in the world. She has black hair, green eyes which turn gray or brown according to her mood or the drugs she's on at the moment, the pallor of this pink emphasizes the fullness of her lips, skin so soft the color of her cheeks is absolutely peach no abrasions no redness no white tightness. This in no way describes the delicacy of the face's bone structure. Her body is equally exquisite, but on the plump or sagging sides because she doesn't do any exercise and wears girdles. She's five feet six inches tall. She usually weighs 100 pounds even though she's always taking diet pills. Her breasts look larger and fuller than they are because they sag downwards. The nipples in them are large pale pink. In the skin around the nipples and in the tops of her legs you can easily see the varicose veins breaking through. The breast stomach and upper thigh skin is very pale white. There's lots of curly hair around her cunt.

She has a small waist hands and ankles. The main weight, the thrust, the fullness of those breasts is deceptive, is the thighs: large pockmarked flesh indicates a heavy ass extra flesh at the sides of the thighs. The flesh directly above the cunt seems paler than it has to be. So pale, it's fragile, at the edge of ugliness: the whole: the sagging but not too large breasts, the tiny waist, the huge ass are sexier MORE ABOUT PASSION than a more-tightly-muscled and fashionable body.

My mother is the person I love most. She's my sister. She plays with me. There's no one else in my world except for some kind of wierd father who only partly exists part out of the shadow, and an unimportant torment I call my sister. I'm watching my mother put on her tight tawny-orange sweater. She always wears a partially lacey white bra that seems slightly dirty. As she's struggling to get into a large white panty girdle she says she doesn't like girdles. She's standing in front of her mirror and mirrored dresser. Mirrors cover every inch of all the furniture in the room except for the two double beds, my father's chair, and the T.V., but they don't look sensuous. Now my mother's slipping into a tight brown wool straight skirt. She always wears tight sweaters and tight straight skirts. Her clothes are old and very glamorous. She hitches her skirt up a little and rolls on see-through stockings.

She tells me to put on my coat and white mittens because we're going outside.

Today is Christmas.

Huge clean piles of snow cover the streets make the streets magical. Once we get to the park below the 8th Street Bridge I say to myself, "No foot has ever marked this snow before." My foot steps on each unmarked bit of snow. The piles are so high I can barely walk through them. I fall down laughing. My mother falls down laughing with me. My clothes especially the pants around my boots are sopping wet. I stay in this magic snow with the beautiful yellow sun beating down on me as long as I can until a voice in my head (me) or my mother says, "Now you know what this experience is. You have to leave."

My mother wants to get a strawberry soda. Today my mother's being very nice to me and I love her simply and dearly when she's being very nice to me. We're both sitting on the round red vinyl turn-

able seats around the edge of the white counter. My mother's eating a strawberry soda with strawberry icecream. I see her smiling. A fat middle-aged man thinks we're sisters. My mother is very young and beautiful.

At camp: males string tents up along a trench filled with muck: slush from meat refuse vomit sparkle under arching colorless weeds, the soldiers by beating them drive back the women who're trying to stick their kids in the shelter of the tents, they strike at kick punch the soldiers' kidneys while the soldiers bend over the unfolded tent canvas. Two males tie the animals to the rears of the tents, a shit-filled-assed teenager squatting over the salt-eroded weeds pants dust covers his face his head rolls vacantly around his shoulder his purple eye scrutinizes the montage of tents, a brown curly-haired soldier whose cheeks cause they're crammed full of black meat're actually touching his pock-marked earlobes crouches down next to a little girl he touches her nape his hand crawls under the rags around her throat feels her tits her armpits: the little girl closes her eyes her fingers touch the soldier's grapejuice-smear wrist, from the shit heaps a wind-gust lifts up the bits of film and sex mag pages the soldiers tore up while they were shitting clenched the shit burns the muscles twisted by rape. Some soldiers leaving the fire wander around the tents untie the tent thongs they crawl on the sand, the linen tent flaps brush their scabies-riddled thighs, the males the females all phosphorescent nerves huddle around the candles, no longer wanting to hear anything the teenagers chew wheat they found in the bags, the kids pick threads out of their teeth put their rags on again stick the sackcloth back over their mothers' tits lick the half-chewed flour left on their lips

My mother thinks my father is a nobody. She is despising him and lashing out at him right now she is saying while she is sitting on her white quilt-covered bed "Why don't you ever go out at night, Bud? All you do is sleep."

"Let me watch the football game, Claire." It's Sunday.

"Why don't you ever take Mommy out, Daddy? She never has any fun. Actually I believe my mother's a bitch.

"You can't sleep all the time, Bud. It isn't good for you."

"This is my one day off, Claire. I want to watch the football game. Six days a week I work my ass off to buy you and the kids food, to keep a roof over your head. I give you everything you want."

"Daddy, you're stupid." "Daddy, you don't even know who Dostoyevsky is." "What's the matter with you, Daddy?"

My father makes my flesh slime.

Daddy's drunk and he's still whining, but now he's whining nastily. He's telling my mother that he does all the work he goes to work at six in the morning and comes back after six at night (which we all know is a joke cause his job's only a sinecure: my mother's father gave him his first break, a year ago when the business was sold, part of the deal was my father'd be kept on as 'manager' under the new owners at \$50,000 a year. We all know he goes to work cause there are drinks and he doesn't hear my mother's nagging.) He's telling my mother he gave her her first fur coat. My father is never aggressive. My father never beats my mother up.

The father grabs a candle, the curly brownhaired soldier his red mouth rolling around the black meat takes out his knife: his hand quickly juts the red rags over his sex his pincher his grabber the curly brownhaired soldier jerks the sleepy young girl's thighs to him, she slides over the sand till she stops at the tent opening, one soldier's mutilated forehead cause he was raping over an eagle's eggs the eagle scalped him another soldier's diseased skin-pores these two soldiers gag the father, the father throws a burning candle into their hairs, the curly brownhaired soldier takes the young girl into his arms, she sleeps she purrs her open palm on her forehead to his shudder trot, the clouded moon turns his naked arm green, his panting a gurgling that indicates rape sweat dripping off his bare strong chest wakes the young girl up, I walked into my parents' bedroom opened their bathroom door don't know why I did it, my father was standing naked over the toilet, I've never seen him naked I'm shocked, he slams the door in my face, I'm curious I see my mother naked all the time, she closely watches inside his open cause gasping mouth the black meat still stuck to his teeth the black meat still in a ball, the curly brownhaired lifts her on to her feet lay her down on the dog-kennels'

metal grating hugs her kisses her lips the ear hollows where the bloodstained wax causes whispers his hand unbuttons his sackcloth pulls out his member, the young girl sucks out of the curly brownhaired's cheeks the black meat eyes closed hands spread over the metal grating, excited by this cheek-to-stomach muscle motion bare-headed straw-dust flying around his legs injects the devil over her scorches, the dogs waking up at the metal gratings leap out of the kennels their chains gleam treat me like a dog drag in the shit, the curly brownhaired nibbles the young girl's gums his teeth pull at the meat fibres her tongue pushes into the cracks between her teeth, the dogs howl their chains jingle against the tar of the road their paws crush down the hardened shits, the curly brownhaired's knees imprison the young girl's thighs.

My father's lying in the hospital cause he's on his third heart attack. My mother's mother at the door of my father's room so I know my father is over-hearing her is saying to my mother, "You have to say he's been a good husband to you, Claire. He never left you and he gave you everything you wanted."

"Yes."

"You don't love him."

"Yes."

I know my grandmother hates my father.

I don't side with my mother rather than my father like my sister does. I don't perceive my father. My mother is adoration hatred play. My mother is the world. My mother is my baby. My mother is exactly who she wants to be.

The whole world and consciousness revolves around my mother.

I don't have any idea what my mother's like. So no matter how my mother acts, she's a monster. Everything is a monster. I hate it. I want to run away. I want to escape the Jolly Green Giant. Any other country is beautiful as long as I don't know about it. This is the dream I have: I'm running away from men who are trying to damage me permanently. I love mommy. I know she's on Dex and when she's not on Dex she's on Librium to counteract the Dex jitters so she acts more extreme than usual. A second orgasm cools her shoulders, the young girl keeps her hands joined over the curly brownhaired's ass, the wire grating gives way, the curly brownhaired slides the young girl under him his pants are still around his knees his fingernails claw the soil his breath sucks in the young girl's cheek blows straw dust around, the mute young girl's stomach muscles weld to the curly-headed's abdominal muscles, the passing wind immediately modulates the least organic noise that's why one text must subvert (the meaning of) another text until there's only background music like reggae on that ground: the inextricability of relation-textures the organic (not meaning) recovered, stupid ugly horrible a mess pinhead abominable vomit eyes-pop-out-always-presenting-disgust-always-presenting-what-people-flee-always-wanting-to-be-lonely infect my mother my mother, blind fingernails spit the eyes wandering from the curly-headed, the curly-headed's hidden balls pour open cool down on the young girl's thigh. Under the palmtrees the RIMAS seize and drag a fainted woman under a tent, a flushing-forehead blond soldier burning coals glaze his eyes his piss stops up his sperm grasps this woman in his arms, their hands their lips touch lick the woman's clenched face while the blond soldier's greasy wine-stained arm supports her body, the young girl recovered.

New York City is very peaceful and quiet, and the pale gray mists are slowly rising, to show me the world, I who have been so passive and little here, and all beyond is so unknown and great that now I am crying. My fingers touch the concrete beneath my feet and I say "Goodbye, Oh my dear, dear friend."

We don't ever have to be ashamed of feelings of tears, for feelings are the rain upon the earth's blinding dust: our own hard egotistic hearts. I feel better after I cry: more aware of who I am, more open. I need friends very much.

Thus ends the first segment of my life. I am a person of **great expectations** ■

N. Y. C. Dec. 1979