

Great Expectations

By Charles Dickens, adapted by Tanika Gupta

There is some **sensitive content** in the show that might feel distressing or alarming for some people. **These topics include:**

Death/grief, parent loss/orphaning, domestic violence, violence against children, blood, shouting, cannon fire, gunshots and firearms, knives, racism, racial slurs/discrimination, family separation, forced migration, poverty/food scarcity/hunger, moderate threat and peril, military scenes, mention of death penalty and hanging, repeated mention and discussion of adoption, pyrotechnics/real flames, substance abuse, repeated discussion of addiction, depictions of drugs and alcohol

Synopsis

What follows is a detailed overview of the action of the play, for people who would like to be prepared for what will happen in the show. Do not read if you want to avoid **spoilers** for the story.

Great Expectations is a story about a young orphaned boy named **Pipli**. The story follows Pipli's life and the things that happen to him as he finds his way in the world. Pipli's situation changes many times throughout the play, and through this he eventually comes to learn the importance of remembering where you come from. This version of Great Expectations is set in India at the time of the British government's partition of the country, so it also explores **colonialism, identity** and **political resistance**. In our production, some actors play **multiple characters**, so they change costumes, voice and movement to show that they are being someone different. Some actors are also playing characters of much **younger ages** than their real-life ones, as our story begins when Pipli is a 10-year-old child.

ACT I

At the beginning of the story Pipli is playing by a river which runs round the outside of our set. Pipli goes to the river to remember his **parents**, who have **died** before the beginning of the story. We never meet Pipli's mother and father in our play but Pipli **prays** for them at the shrine that you can see on the stage.

Pipli is surprised by **Malik**, who has been hiding in the reeds at the sides of the stage. Malik is an **escaped convict**. He has **chains** around his ankles which cause him a lot of pain; there is fake blood on the feet of the actor playing Malik, and he will pretend to be in pain. Malik briefly captures Pipli and **threatens him**. Pipli is curious about Malik and wants to help him, and he is also very scared, so he promises to bring Malik rice to eat and a file to break his chains.

Pipli lives with his older sister **Krishna** and her husband **Jagu**. Pipli calls Krishna *didi* (which means sister) and he calls Jagu 'Jagu-*da*' (which is a term of endearment). Jagu sometimes refers to Pipli as *beta*, which means son. Jagu loves Pipli as if he were his own child, but

Krishna can be harsh and sometimes beats Pipli. She does this with her broom, which is a traditional Indian brush in our play. In their village there is also a priest called **Panda** who is well-respected but not very kind. He sometimes disciplines Pipli by hitting him. The actor playing Krishna and the actor playing Panda will both pretend to beat the actor playing Pipli, but this is **simulated violence**. It has been choreographed carefully so that nobody gets hurt. The actor playing Pipli will pretend to cry out in pain quite loudly. In this scene there is also pretend loud **cannon fire**.

Having stolen some food, Pipli returns to Malik and learns more about his life. On the way, he disturbs a character called **Compeyson**, who is also a convict in chains and is sleeping by the river. Compeyson shouts at him in fear and runs away. Pipli finds Malik and gives him the food, and learns that Malik's ancestors were from Africa. Malik softens to Pipli as he is so grateful for the food, but when he hears that Pipli has run into Compeyson he is furious. He tries to run but his chains stop him, so Pipli gives him the file to get free.

Later, Pipli's family are talking by the river, discussing the **partition** of their village, when they hear **shouting**. The two convicts, Malik and Compeyson, rush in, **fighting** viciously. There is much shouting and commotion, and **soldiers** rush in **with guns** to try and stop the fight. This scene involved two moments of **fake blood** being used, and the actors who are fighting will be drenched in **water** to show they have been in the river.

When Pipli returns home, Krishna tells him that a lady called **Miss Havisham** wants him to go to her house and play there. Krishna is very excited because Miss Havisham is very wealthy. Pipli is scared because he thinks Miss Havisham's house is haunted, and Jagu doesn't want him to go as he believes English people treat Indian children badly. Jagu and Krishna have an **argument** about it, but Krishna wins and Pipli is prepared to go and meet Miss Havisham.

At Miss Havisham's house, Pipli and Panda are greeted at the gates by the character **Estella**. Estella is Miss Havisham's **adopted daughter**, and she leads him through the dark passages of the house with a candle. Miss Havisham is a strange, frightening woman who hasn't left the house in many years. We see her **drinking from a small bottle**, which induces strange moods and sometimes **hallucinations** of Compeyson, who was her lover. We learn much later that this is **laudanum**. Over the next few years, we see Pipli spending more and more time at Miss Havisham's. During this time he falls in love with Estella even though she is very mean to him. We see her **hitting him** and **taunting him**. But over time she also grows a secret love and affection for him. At Miss Havisham's Pipli meets a variety of other characters. He meets the strange and frightening lawyer **Mr Jaggars**. In Miss Havisham's garden Pipli also meets **Herbert Pocket**, another young boy who **challenges him to a boxing match**. The two fight each other, and Pipli wins when he **bloodies** Herbert's nose. **Stage blood** is therefore used in this scene. This is made from coloured sugar syrup.

Pipli is now older. Miss Havisham dismisses him from her house when she sends Estella away to school. At this point, Mr Jaggars visits the village to reveal that Pipli has **inherited** a huge amount of property from a mysterious, unnamed person. Pipli is totally swept up in preparing to

travel to Calcutta and become a gentleman, so much so that he falls out with his childhood best friend **Bilquis**, who thinks he is being arrogant. At the end of the first half, Pipli **leaves his family**, dressed as an English gentleman, and travels to Calcutta.

ACT II

At the start of the second half, Pipli arrives in Calcutta. Calcutta is a **huge city**, and Pipli has never experienced anything like it; we see him buffeted by **crowds, traffic**, sights and sounds. This is represented in our production by a soundscape, which includes **shouting**, talking and lots of different city sounds. Pipli is greeted by **Wahab**, who works for Mr Jagers. Wahab tells Pipli all about Calcutta, and they set off on a journey through the city together. They find their way to the offices of Mr Jagers, where Pipli is introduced to the terms of his new life as a gentleman. Jagers also introduces Pipli to **Menaka**, who is his maidservant. In this scene we learn about the British **justice system** and the sentence of **death penalty** for revolutionaries and other people who go against the English crown, and we also see Jagers being condescending and **cruel** to Menaka.

Pipli is then introduced to his new home in Calcutta, where he learns that his roommate will be Herbert, who he met many years ago at Miss Havisham's. They go to a **demonstration** in town where they listen to an **Indian Speaker** protesting about the partition and the rule of the British government. Herbert and Pipli then go to **dinner** and Herbert tells Pipli the life story of Miss Havisham and Estella while they **eat a meal**. The food in this scene is **real food**, and the actors will be eating it for real as they talk. During his time in Calcutta Pipli is also visited by Jagu, who brings him a gift and tells him that Krishna has **died**. Pipli is cold to Jagu, as he is embarrassed of him. In Calcutta Pipli also meets Estella again, now grown up and educated. We see Pipli being educated by **Matthew Pocket**, who is a tutor and Herbert's father, and buying and filling his house with new belongings.

One night, Pipli is **surprised** by a mysterious person who has **broken in**. The person is disguised and their **face is somewhat covered**. It is revealed that the person is Malik, who Pipli met many years ago. Malik has been Pipli's benefactor the whole time, without Pipli's knowledge. Pipli is horrified by this knowledge, because Malik is a criminal and a convict. Malik **attacks** Herbert with a **knife** before Pipli convinces him that Herbert is trustworthy. Malik tells the story of his life, how he was **separated from his daughter** when she was five years old and **forced into illegal opium trading** in his desperation to get back to her. We see Compeyson again, but only as a memory.

Herbert and Pipli plan to get Malik safely out of the city. Meanwhile, Pipli goes to confront Miss Havisham about her manipulation of him; Pipli is furious that she used him in her games of revenge and led him on when he thought she was his benefactor. When he finally declares his love for Estella, she reveals she is **engaged to be married** to a cruel man called **Bentley Drummle**. We never meet Drummle in the play, but he is mentioned several times as Estella's fiance and later husband. Devastated, Pipli begs Estella not to marry Drummle but she is cold towards him, **rejecting** his advances. Seeing this, Miss Havisham is reminded of her own **heartbreak** and realises the terrible consequences of her actions; at the same time, Pipli has

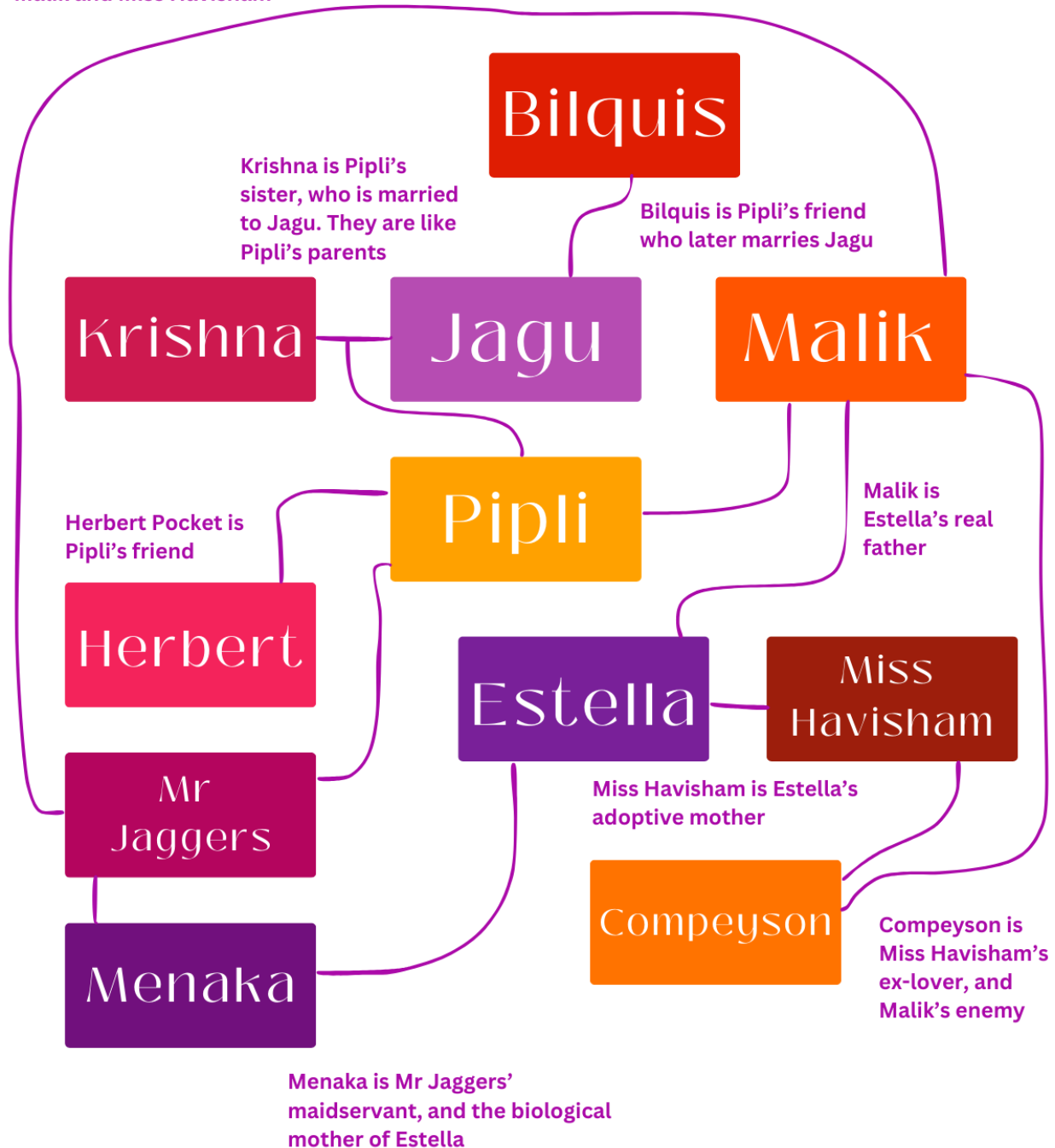
worked out by questioning Miss Havisham that Malik is Estella's **true father**, whom she was separated from aged five. Wracked with guilt, Miss Havisham panics and knocks over a candle, which accidentally **sets fire to her dress**. In this moment, the actor playing Miss Havisham will pretend to be **frightened and in pain**. There will be a **smoke** effect and there will be **real flames** made with flash paper set into the stage. This is carefully choreographed by a professional, and flash paper disintegrates almost instantaneously once it is lit, so it is extremely safe. Pipli rescues Miss Havisham and takes her off.

Pipli and Malik are walking through a **demonstration** in the city with **crowds shouting** and **waving large revolutionary flags** when Compeyson appears leading the **armed authorities** with him. He directs them towards Malik, and Malik and Compeyson **fight viciously** until Malik finally manages to **kill** Compeyson by **strangling** him with a flagpole. A moment later, Malik is **shot in the chest** by soldiers. In this moment, there will be a gunshot sound effect and the actor playing Malik will burst a **blood bag** on his chest to make it appear as though he is bleeding a lot from his wound. This bag contains fake stage blood. Pipli cradles Malik as he **dies**, and tells him that his daughter is alive and well and that he is in love with her.

After Malik's death, Pipli is **depressed, lost** and **in debt**. We see him ignoring his bills and his expensive belongings are taken away. Pipli gets **ill and overwhelmed**, and eventually falls unconscious. Bilquis, Jagu and Jagers come to take him away from Calcutta and we see them put him in bed. When Pipli awakes, he is back in his village where we met him at the start of the play. He apologises to Jagu for leaving him behind and being ungrateful and unappreciative of his home. Jagu forgives him and Bilquis and Jagu tell Pipli the news that they are now happily **married**. In the final scene, Herbert and Pipli visit Calcutta together one last time and reminisce about their old lives there. On their way to meet Herbert's wife and children, they run into Estella. Estella is **widowed** and has remarried to an Indian doctor, and is wearing a traditional sari now. Estella apologises to Pipli for disregarding his feelings for her, and Pipli and Estella part ways as loving friends at the end of the play.

Great Expectations: Who's Who?

Mr Jaggers is the lawyer of
Malik and Miss Havisham



Great Expectations: Actors and their Characters



Malik



Jagu



Pipli



Miss Havisham



Estella



Compeyson/Matthew Pocket



Herbert Pocket/Soldier



Wahab/Soldier/Tailor



Bilquis/Cafe customer



Krishna/Cafe customer



Mr Jagers/Soldier



Panda/Indian Speaker