

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Written by

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Based on Great Expectations by Charles Dickens

Address
Phone Number

NEW ORLEANS, 2005

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREET - NIGHT

Feet hit the concrete in a sprint through the eerily quiet streets. LUCAS MILLER (10), kind and naive, runs down the empty alleyway to a deserted cemetery, tears streaming down his face. He climbs the fence and tumbles over, scraping his knee in the process.

EXT. CEMETARY - NIGHT

Lucas kneels at the foot of two gravestones, crying. So consumed he doesn't notice distant shouting in the background.

Suddenly, two hands grab Lucas by the shoulders and drag him behind a thorny bush. They belong to JAMES TELLER (30s), a muscular man carrying a heavy duffle bag. Lucas screams, but Teller slaps a hand over his mouth.

TELLER

Be quiet, kid! You'll get us both
killed.

Lucas continues to scream into his hand, thrashing to break free.

TELLER (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Hey, hey! Will you shut the fuck
up!

Lucas goes limp, and Teller spins him around and pins him against a tree.

TELLER (CONT'D)

Where are your parents?

LUCAS

Over there! Over there!

Lucas points in the general direction of his parents' graves: "Jack and Rhonda Miller". Teller, confused, spins him around and holds a knife to his throat. Realization washes over his face and he drops his hold, looking on at the graves.

TELLER

There?

Lucas can only nod, still petrified with fear. Teller clenches his jaw and throws the knife to the ground.

TELLER (CONT'D)
It's alright, I'm not gonna hurt
you. I'm sorry for frightening you.

Teller looks over Lucas, and notices his scraped knee. He points to it, while Lucas looks like he's contemplating whether to run.

TELLER (CONT'D)
You got banged up there, didn't
you?

LUCAS
I scraped it climbing over the
fence.

TELLER
Yeah, that'll do it.

He pulls a white cloth from his bag and bends down on one knee to face Lucas.

TELLER (CONT'D)
My parents died when I was a kid
too. I wasn't much older than you,
in fact.

Teller wipes up the blood running down his leg, tying it around to stop the bleeding.

TELLER (CONT'D)
Who do you live with?

LUCAS
My sister and her boyfriend. That
way.

Lucas points down the street, but is interrupted by nearby GUNSHOTS. Teller grabs Lucas and shoves him to the ground.

TELLER
Shit!

LUCAS
What was that?

TELLER
You picked a bad night to run away.
Come on, I'll help get you home
safe.

Teller leads Lucas out of the cemetery, staying close to the ground.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREET - NIGHT

Lucas and Teller walk quietly and quickly down the street, Teller watching over his shoulder with suspicion.

LUCAS
What's your name?

TELLER
James Teller.

LUCAS
Is that actually your name, or are you lyin'?

Teller laughs.

TELLER
I'm lying. But don't take it personally.

LUCAS
Who were you hiding from?

TELLER
Not important.

LUCAS
It's whoever was shooting earlier, right? What's in the duffle bag?

Teller stays silent, and Lucas gets frustrated.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
Why should I listen to you if you won't tell me nothing?!

Teller slaps a hand over Lucas's mouth again and looks him in the eyes.

TELLER
That's a double negative, kid. You contradicted yourself.

LUCAS
What does that even mean?

TELLER
It means you ask too many damn questions. I'm not telling you *anything* for your own safety. And mine.

Before Lucas can respond, he hears a man yelling in the distance.

LUCAS

Crap! That's my sister's boyfriend.
He's out lookin' for me.

Lucas turns back to Teller, making a split-second decision.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

Follow us to the house. You can
jump the fence and hide out in the
shed for tonight.

Lucas runs down the street and makes himself seen to JOE (26), a caring, but unintelligent, man. Joe brings Lucas in for a hug.

JOE

Lucas! Thank God you're okay! Where
the hell were you?

Lucas blinks up at him, unsure of how to respond. Joe shakes his head and sighs.

JOE (CONT'D)

Know what? Let's just get you home
to your sister.

As they walk down the street, Teller trails them from a distance.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lucas and Joe enter a cluttered kitchen where HANNA (23), Lucas's ill-tempered sister, sits at the table wearing a disheveled waitress uniform. She gets up from her seat and crushes Lucas with a hug, which quickly turns to a hard slap on the head.

HANNA

What the hell were you thinking,
running off in the middle of the
night! You could have gotten
yourself killed, you know that? You
idiot!

LUCAS

I didn't mean to-

Hanna shoves Lucas a little too hard and Joe tries to restrain her.

HANNA

I had Joe going up and down the neighborhood all night looking for you. There were gunshots only a few blocks away, you know that?!

JOE

The important thing is he's safe.

HANNA

No, Joe. He owes you an apology.

LUCAS

I'm sorry, Joe. I didn't mean to scare you both so much.

JOE

It's alright, little man. I know it was a rough day.

HANNA

Would you give us a moment alone, please?

Joe sighs at looks at Lucas with sympathy, before retreating to his bedroom. Hanna grabs Lucas's wrists and pulls, causing him to yelp.

HANNA (CONT'D)

Listen here. I don't care if you get sad or bored or pissed at me. I'm not always happy to be saddled with your ass either. But we're family and we're stuck with each other. You are my responsibility and you can't be running off like that *ever again*. Do I make myself clear?

LUCAS

Yes, ma'am.

Hanna nods, satisfied at the look of fear of Lucas's face.

HANNA

I'm fucking exhausted. You go straight to bed, now. We'll talk punishment in the morning.

Lucas makes his way to his bedroom, and Hanna stumbles to her's. Once she's gone, Lucas quietly sneaks back to the kitchen to raid the food pantry.

INT. SHED - NIGHT

Lucas opens the shed door to find Teller sitting on the ground. His eyes widen, momentarily surprised to actually find the man where he instructed him to go.

LUCAS

I thought you might be hungry. I brought you a blanket too.

Tossing Teller the supplies, Lucas sits across from him.

TELLER

Thanks. You're a good kid. A dumb one, maybe, but a good heart.

LUCAS

You sayin' I shouldn't trust you?

TELLER

If you had any sense. But I'm not complaining.

Teller unwraps a CANDY BAR and takes a bite, leaning his head against the wall. Lucas just stares, examining his tattoos.

LUCAS

Are you a good man?

Teller freezes and looks up at Lucas.

TELLER

It's long past your bedtime. And that sister of yours sounds like a real spitfire. You should probably get going.

Lucas hesitantly leaves the shed, conflicted with his decision to help such a man.

EXT. SHED - MORNING

It's dawn the next morning, and the sun illuminates the unkept house and small yard. Lucas sneaks out the back door quietly and heads to the shed.

INT. SHED - MORNING

Lucas quietly opens the shed door and peaks inside.

LUCAS

Mr. Teller?

Lucas quietly sneaks past the door, only to find the blanket he provided folded neatly on the floor by the rakes. Sitting on top of it is a note: "Thanks again, kid. I won't forget this."

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Lucas sits at the kitchen counter, shoveling cereal into his mouth. The small tube TV on the counter shows the local news.

NEWSCASTER

In other news, crime boss James Teller is still at large after a gang shootout last night on South Claiborne Avenue.

A mugshot of Teller flashes on screen. Lucas's eyes go wide.

NEWSCASTER (CONT'D)

Four innocent bystanders were wounded in the crossfire. Teller is suspected as the instigator of this horrific event-

The TV clicks off.

LUCAS

Hey! I was watching that!

Dropping the remote on the counter, Hanna stumbles to the fridge and yawns, hair tied up out of her face. Joe follows behind, watching closely for residual tension.

HANNA

No TV before noon. You know the rules.

Lucas grunts and gets up to leave, but Hanna grabs his arm roughly.

HANNA (CONT'D)

And where do you think you're going?

LUCAS

I was going to play ball with Ethan today.

HANNA

Not after what you pulled last night. I told you there would be consequences.

(MORE)

HANNA (CONT'D)

I think it's time you start helping Joe with the landscaping business. God knows we need the money.

LUCAS

Seriously?

Lucas looks at Joe, begging for assistance. Joe shrugs his shoulders and sips his coffee.

JOE

Sorry dude, she's the boss. Come on, it won't be so bad. Today's a fun one.

LUCAS

There's nothing fun about mowing grass.

Joe turns to Hanna, suddenly excited.

JOE

I can't believe I forgot to tell you. I got a call from Florence Addington yesterday.

HANNA

No way! That crazy old bat at the Satis House?

Joe laughs.

JOE

You ain't never even talked to her.

HANNA

She's unhinged, everyone knows it.

LUCAS

Who are you talking about?

HANNA

Florence Addington. She's this washed up Hollywood actress driven mad with heartbreak. As legend has it, she hasn't left that house since the day her fiance abandoned her.

Hanna ruffles Lucas's hair, and he tries to shove her off.

JOE

I've always wanted a closer look at that old mansion. Damn shame what's become of it.

HANNA

The state of that garden, you'll have work for the next year just pulling weeds. I am going to need details when you get home. And suck up, that woman is an untapped gold mine.

Joe kisses Hanna on the cheek and grabs Lucas, who begrudgingly follows him out the front door.

EXT. GARDEN DISTRICT - DAY

Joe and Lucas drive through oak tree lined streets, the canopy of branches shielding them from the sun. The Garden District is lined with historic mansions and lavish gardens, each maintained with care and attention to detail. Lucas observes it all through wide eyes, gawking with wonder.

LUCAS

Why don't we ever come around here?

JOE

We've driven through it before, we just never had a good enough reason to stick around.

LUCAS

Which one is ours?

Lucas excitedly leans out the window, and Joe laughs.

JOE

You'll see.

EXT. SATIS HOUSE - DAY

They arrive at the Satis House, a once gorgeous mansion in rapid decay. Grass and foliage grow out of control, overwhelming the gardens.

Lucas and Joe walk hesitantly through the gate. STELLA (30s), a bubbly real estate developer, pounds on the front door with frustration.

STELLA

Please, ma'am. If you would only consider our offer, I really think you-

MISS ADDINGTON (O.S.)

Go away! You wretched woman!

STELLA

But if you would just listen to reason, Miss Addington!

MISS ADDINGTON (O.S.)

I wish to be left alone!

A tattered MUFFIN BASKET is thrown from the second floor window, hitting Joe across the head. A light hit, but enough to throw him to the ground in surprise. Stella rushes to his side.

STELLA

Oh shit! Are you okay? I'm so sorry!

JOE

I'm fine, really. Are these blueberry?

Stella laughs and offers a hand to help him up.

STELLA

Occupational hazard.

JOE

Flying muffin baskets?

Joe bends down to pick up the scattered muffins, and Stella helps. Lucas watches on the side.

STELLA

Yes, yes. I was hoping to persuade Miss Addington to consider selling the Satis House. For a generous offer, of course.

JOE

She doesn't seem too keen on the idea.

STELLA

Apparently not. I'm very sorry, again. I don't know what went wrong with that woman.

Stella walks out the gate and Joe turns to Lucas.

JOE

Perhaps it's better if you stayed
out here, kid. Don't wander too
far.

Lucas rolls his eyes as Joe makes his way toward the house. He sees something flash of red out of the corner of his eye, and walks toward the ill-maintained gardens to investigate.

INT. WINDOW, SATIS HOUSE

SOMEONE'S POV:

Through sheer curtains, someone watches as Lucas walks behind the mansion gardens.

EXT. GARDENS - DAY

Lucas wanders past a stone fountain, worn with age. He quietly observes his surroundings, stomping through the tall grass.

ESTELLA (O.S.)

Who are you?

Wearing a bright red dress, ESTELLA (11), aloof but beautiful, appears behind Lucas swaying slowly on a rusted swing set. Lucas spins to see her, stunned.

LUCAS

(stuttering)

Lucas. My name is Lucas. Who are
you?

ESTELLA

That's not your business.

LUCAS

You asked first. What are you even
doing here?

ESTELLA

I live here, moron.

Estella gets up from her seat and passes Lucas with a haughty glance. He looks at her with curiosity, and follows behind without permission.

LUCAS
Oh, so you're her daughter?
Florence Addington's, I mean?

ESTELLA
Don't be stupid, Miss Addington is
practically ancient. We're cousins,
of some variety.

LUCAS
Where are your parents?

Estella pauses.

ESTELLA
They died.

LUCAS
Oh. I'm sorry.

Estella rolls her eyes and walks toward the front entrance.

EXT. PORCH, SATIS HOUSE

Estella walks up the steps toward the front door, Lucas a
step behind.

LUCAS
My parents died too. Three years
ago, as of yesterday.

She pauses, momentarily taken aback. She appraises Lucas's
appearance with apathy.

ESTELLA
Most likely the only thing we have
in common.

LUCAS
Do you miss them?

ESTELLA
Who?

LUCAS
Your parents.

ESTELLA
I don't really remember them. Miss
Addington says I look just like my
mother.

LUCAS
Your mom must have been really
pretty, then.

ESTELLA
You think I'm pretty?

Estella smirks and takes a step down toward Lucas, so they are face to face. Lucas gulps, trying to hide his fear.

JOE (O.S.)
Lucas! Come on, it's time to get
started!

Joe appears at the gate, carrying equipment from his truck. Lucas spins around, still in shock as Estella grabs his arm tightly.

ESTELLA
Might *Lucas* join me inside for a
while? I would love the company.

JOE
Well aren't you two just adorable!

LUCAS
You know, I really don't mind
helping with-

Joe waves Lucas off with his free arm, giving permission as Estella drags Lucas inside with a tight grip.

INT. FOYER, SATIS HOUSE

Lucas blinks as his eyes readjust to the darkness. They enter a large foyer with a grand staircase layered with dust. Estella leads him up the stairs.

LUCAS
You haven't even told me your name?

ESTELLA
Estella.

LUCAS
Where are you taking me?

Lucas manages to shake Estella's grasp, and she shrugs.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY, SATIS HOUSE

Continuing down the hall, the muffled sounds of a record player grow louder, and Lucas nervously twists his hands. They pass an old grandfather clock. The time is stopped at 10:14, and Lucas takes notice.

LUCAS

This clock is wrong.

Lucas briefly fiddles with the clock, attempting to move the hands.

ESTELLA

I wouldn't do that.

LUCAS

But it's nearly noon.

At the end of the hall, a pair of double doors are thrown open. MISS ADDINGTON (60s), cynical and half-mad, storms over to Lucas with a drink in her hand. With her free hand, she grabs Lucas roughly and stopping him from touching the clock.

MISS ADDINGTON

What the hell do you think you're doing, boy? You just invite yourself in to touch my things and mess with the time-

ESTELLA

I did warn you.

LUCAS

I was just trying to-

MISS ADDINGTON

Did you ever think to consider I prefer my clocks frozen? It is 10:14 in the morning! It will always remain 10:14AM in this house.

LUCAS

You're hurting me!

Miss Addington lets go of Lucas's arm, as if it burned her.

MISS ADDINGTON

They say time heals all wounds. Well, I prefer my wounds to fester.

Miss Addington stumbles back into the room, and Estella shoots Lucas a dirty look. He looks conflicted about whether to follow, but curiosity gets the best of him.

INT. LOUNGE - DAY

The large lounge is mostly bare of furniture, with only a couple chairs, a vanity, and a grand piano. Light floods in through impressive windows.

Miss Addington sways to the music on her record player, spilling a bit of her drink in the process. She sings along to Frank Sinatra's "Fly Me To The Moon," ignoring both Lucas and Estella.

MISS ADDINGTON
*Fill my heart with song,
 Let me sing forever more
 You are all I long for,
 All I worship and adore*

Lucas tries to speak up:

LUCAS
 I'm sorry for touching your things-

Miss Addington puts her finger up, stopping his words as she finishes drunkenly dancing to the last verse of the song.

MISS ADDINGTON
 Damn right, you're sorry. You should be.

She stumbles to her vanity, refilling her drink from a glass decanter.

MISS ADDINGTON (CONT'D)
 Estella, darling. Will you walk to the store and fetch me some plums? Get yourself an ice cream too, if you'd like.

Miss Addington hands Estella a wad of cash. She gladly takes it and leaves quickly, instantly forgetting about Lucas and shutting the double doors behind her.

LUCAS
 Right... I should go back to work then-

MISS ADDINGTON
 No need for that. Sit for a moment. Enjoy the ambience.

Miss Addington herds an uncomfortable Lucas to the chair by the largest window, urging him to sit. Past the curtains, they watch Estella skip through the front gate. Miss Addington leans over his shoulder.

MISS ADDINGTON (CONT'D)
Pray tell, what do you think of Estella?

LUCAS
I think she is rude.

MISS ADDINGTON
Incredibly supercilious, no need to sugarcoat. What else?

LUCAS
I think she is very beautiful.

MISS ADDINGTON
Anything else?

LUCAS
I think... I want to go home now.

MISS ADDINGTON
Not so fast.

Miss Addington grabs Lucas and leans in close, as if telling a secret.

MISS ADDINGTON (CONT'D)
(whispers)
Do you love her?

LUCAS
(whispers)
I don't know her.

MISS ADDINGTON
Oh, but you will. A word of advice: pleasure of love lasts but a moment, pain of love lasts a lifetime.

Miss Addington walks away and pulls out a lighter and cigar from her vanity. Lucas breathes a sigh of relief and gets up from the chair, slowly backing towards the door.

MISS ADDINGTON (CONT'D)
Do you know who said that?

LUCAS
No, ma'am.

MISS ADDINGTON

Bette Davis. An American icon. I had the pleasure of meeting her once, you know.

She takes a drag of her cigar, blowing smoke in Lucas's direction.

MISS ADDINGTON (CONT'D)

She was a bitch. I say that with the utmost respect, of course.

Lucas stares blankly at Miss Addington, who rolls her eyes.

MISS ADDINGTON (CONT'D)

She was an actress, boy. A very famous one. Good lord, your parents have done a great disservice to your education.

LUCAS

With all due respect, my parents are dead.

MISS ADDINGTON

So are mine. And yet, we must march on!

Miss Addington laughs with inappropriate gusto. She suddenly goes serious and holds Lucas's head, intimately staring into his eyes. Lucas blinks with discomfort.

MISS ADDINGTON (CONT'D)

I like you. There's a fire in your eyes. You are surprisingly pleasant, and I am pleasantly surprised.

Cackling at her own drunken wit, Miss Addington stumbles to her fainting couch. Lucas accidentally steps on a dusty film poster, framed and broken on the floor.

LUCAS

My sister said you were an actress too, ma'am.

MISS ADDINGTON

Once upon a time. It feels like a lifetime ago.

LUCAS

What were you like, back then?

MISS ADDINGTON
You mean, before I lost my marbles?

LUCAS
I didn't mean-

MISS ADDINGTON
Yes, you did. Don't pretend
otherwise, you look ridiculous.

Miss Addington puts out her cigar in the ash tray. Her eyes glaze over and she looks thoughtfully out the window.

MISS ADDINGTON (CONT'D)
There's nothing else that can
compare. Embodying another human
being. Absorbing their soul and
their worries as if they were your
own. We all spend far too much time
at the center of our own universe.

LUCAS
Then what happened to you?

MISS ADDINGTON
Most would disagree. But I believe
we all eventually reach the age
where we lose the ability to play
pretend. To fool ourselves. An
actor's job is to prolongue that
insight for as long as possible.

LUCAS
I don't think I understand.

Miss Addington takes a long drink, choosing her words.

MISS ADDINGTON
You wouldn't. I think it is time
that you go now, anyway.

Lucas blinks and nods his head, backing out of the lounge and quickly leaping down the stairs.