

## Sarah Valentine, *No Great Expectations: Part 2*

**Philip Valentine Coates**

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*Those interested in nineteenth-century London will undoubtedly come away from No Great Expectations: Part 2 with more understanding.*

An extensively researched biographical account of one woman's struggles in the 1800s, Philip Valentine Coates's *Sarah Valentine, No Great Expectations: Part 2* offers a graphic and often depressing look at the living conditions, mistreatment, and hard-knock experiences that faced the lower class in East London.

Coates is the great-great-grandson of Sarah Valentine. Growing up, he heard countless stories about plucky Sarah, who endured unimaginable conditions yet still found a way to thrive. Using his research expertise, Coates compiled information from county records, newspaper archives, and his own recollections for the three-part biography.

In this second part of the trilogy, focus is put on the years during which Sarah left her family's meager home to try to make a life for herself. She is plagued by troubles. Raped by her fiancé, Sarah is forced to give her child to a family friend to raise. She is unable to find work and so resides in a workhouse where she is abused by roommates.

Sarah's lack of resources and support, compounded by little education and a knack for making enemies, leave her repeatedly knocked down. Her living conditions are difficult to comprehend in this age of technology and widespread comfort, but the extensive research leaves no doubt that the atmosphere is accurately portrayed.

Though the book is disturbing in its near-constant descriptions of misery, lack of hope, and squalor, it is sometimes difficult to muster a lot of sympathy for Sarah. She comes across as a strong character who refuses to be beaten, but she never quite comes to life beyond this.

The book also fails to put Sarah's story into a larger context. Not examining the world beyond Sarah during those momentous years makes it difficult to determine how common or unique her circumstances might have been. Run-on sentences, improper punctuation, and baffling modifiers impede the flow of the writing and make the prose more difficult to read.

*No Great Expectations: Part 2* would ideally be read in sequence, though it stands alone nicely, including just enough description of what transpires in the first installment to provide understanding and context. Starting and ending points are well placed, encapsulating an especially trying time in Sarah's life.

Those interested in nineteenth-century London will undoubtedly come away from *No Great Expectations: Part 2* with more understanding and sympathy for those who lived, endured, and sometimes persevered during that time.

ANGELA MCQUAY (January 6, 2017)

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