

Chapter One
My Birth and
Early Life at The
Rookery, Suffolk.

The afternoon before I was born my mother was sitting alone by the fire. She was poor in health and very low in spirits. My father had died six months earlier and she missed him sorely. It filled her with sorrow to think that he would never see me or hold me in his arms. Then the March wind suddenly blew open the front door and, without a word of warning, in marched my father's

aunt, Betsey Trotwood. She had come all the way from Dover convinced that I would be a girl.

“I am quite sure you will have a girl and I intend to be her godmother,” said Miss Betsey to my mother. “Furthermore, I beg you’ll call her Betsey Trotwood Copperfield.”

Later that evening the doctor was called to attend to my mother. As the clock struck



midnight he came downstairs to tell
Miss Betsey that I had been born.

“How is she?” enquired my aunt.

“Ma’am,” returned the doctor, “it’s a boy.”

My aunt said never a word. She took her
bonnet by the strings, aimed a blow at the
doctor’s head, walked out and vanished
into the night like a discontented fairy!

Luckily, my pretty mother Clara was
delighted with her new son, and named





me David Copperfield after my father. We lived happily together, along with my good nurse Peggotty, at The Rookery. We were excellent friends and my early years were very happy – until Mr Murdstone arrived to darken our lives. He was stern and handsome, and he began to court my sweet mother – she was too gentle to resist him. I didn't like him or his ill-omened black eyes, and I don't

think Peggotty did either, but we were powerless to prevent his visits.

Over the following weeks my mother saw more and more of Mr Murdstone, so Peggotty and I spent more and more time in each other's company. One evening, as we sat by the fire reading my crocodile book, Peggotty made a welcome suggestion:

“Master Davy, how should you like to go along with me and spend a fortnight at my brother's by the sea in Yarmouth? There's the sea, and boats and ships, and fishermen and the beach. Wouldn't that be a treat?”

I was delighted by the idea and replied that it would be a very great treat. So, early one morning, we were collected by a man called Mr Barkis who drove us down to



Yarmouth in his cart. Mr Barkis took quite a shine to Peggotty, as well as the hamper of refreshments she had brought for the journey!

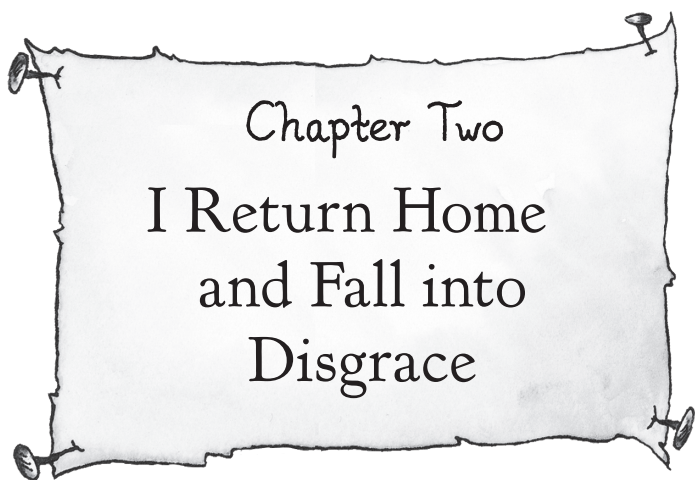
Imagine my excitement when we arrived in Yarmouth and I saw that Mr Peggotty's house was a boat!

"Glad to see you, sir," said Mr Peggotty. "You'll find us rough, sir, but you'll find us ready."





I thanked him and replied that I was sure I would be happy in such a delightful place, as indeed I was. I found that I would have a friend to play with: his niece, little Em'ly. We immediately became the best of friends and the days just flew by.



Chapter Two
I Return Home
and Fall into
Disgrace

When the time came to return home my heart ached at leaving Em'ly. Only thoughts of seeing my mother stopped me from crying. But when I got home I found, to my dismay, that Mr Murdstone had married my mother! My new father would not even permit my dear mama to leave her chair to come and kiss me.



“Now, Clara, my dear,” said Mr Murdstone. “Recollect, control yourself, always control yourself! Davy boy, how do you do?”

I did not do well at all, for everything had changed. My dear old bedroom had been moved, the empty kennel was filled with Mr Murdstone’s snarling dog and – worst of all – Mr Murdstone’s sister came to stay.

Miss Murdstone took the larder and storeroom keys from my mother and

began to run the household. She and Mr Murdstone also took charge of my education. They made me so nervous that even though I was usually quite able, I became unable to learn anything. One morning, when I went into the parlour to recite my lessons, I saw that Mr Murdstone held a cane. The sight of it caused whole pages of my lessons to slip away from me.

“Sir,” I cried, “pray don’t beat me! I have tried to learn, sir, but I can’t while you and Miss Murdstone are nearby. I can’t, indeed!”

It was to no avail. Grimly, Mr Murdstone walked me to my room. He held my head as if it were in a vice and prepared to beat me. I struggled and he cut me. In a panic, I caught his hand and bit right into it.



He beat me then as if he would beat me to death.

Then he was gone and my door was locked. I felt so sore, so sad and so alone. As my anger cooled, I also began to feel that I had been very wicked. For five days I remained a prisoner in my room. In all that time I saw no one but Miss Murdstone. I longed to ask my mother's forgiveness,

but was treated as an outlaw and not permitted to talk to anyone. I think I might have gone mad if I hadn't found my father's old books to read.

On the fifth night, as I lay on the floor reading, I heard a whispering at the door.

"Is that you, Peggotty, dear?" I guessed.

"Yes, my own precious Davy," she replied.

"Be as soft as a mouse, or the cat'll hear us."

Peggotty told me that I was to be sent to boarding school. She slipped me two



half-crowns, wrapped with my mother's love.

The following morning Mr Barkis came to collect me and, under the watchful eye of Miss Murdstone, I bade my mother, and my home, a tearful farewell.