

Penguin



Readers



DAVID COPPERFIELD

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CHAPTER ONE

I am born

I will begin the story of my life at the very beginning of my life. I was born in the village of Blunderstone in Suffolk, England. It was midnight on a Friday when my cries were first heard in this world.

My father had closed his eyes for the last time six months before I opened mine. It is strange to think that he never saw me, and that my first **memory** of him was his **grave**. I often felt sorry for him, lying outside alone on cold, dark nights, when I was inside beside a warm and bright fire.

My mother was sitting beside a fire on the windy Friday when I was born. She felt nervous when she thought about giving birth and sad for the little stranger inside her. She missed my father very much and could not feel excited about meeting me. At that moment, she looked up and saw a strange lady walking quickly up the garden path. My mother knew the woman immediately: it was Miss Betsey – a **wealthy** aunt of my father's, and soon a **great-aunt** of mine.

Instead of ringing the bell, Miss Betsey came to the window and looked inside. She pressed her nose against the glass and gave my mother a terrible shock. I have always believed that it was because of this shock that I was born on that Friday.

My mother was so frightened of Miss Betsey that she left her chair and ran behind it. Miss Betsey looked slowly around the room. When she finally noticed my mother, she waved to her and asked her to open the door. My mother obeyed.

“Mrs Copperfield?” asked Miss Betsey.

“Yes,” said my mother, quietly.

“I am Miss Trotwood. I imagine that you have heard of me,” the visitor said.

“I have,” my mother answered, and invited her inside.

They went into the sitting room and sat beside the fire. At first, Miss Betsey said nothing and, despite trying very hard not to, my mother began to cry.

“Oh, don’t do that! Stop it!” said Miss Betsey quickly, but my mother could not stop. “Take off your **cap**, child, and let me see you.”

My mother took off her cap with nervous hands, and her beautiful hair fell untidily around her face.

“Goodness me,” Miss Betsey said, “you’re just a baby!”

My mother was very young and looked much younger than her age. “I am a young **widow**, and I will be a young mother if I live through the birth,” said my mother, and then she cried more. She thought that she felt Miss Betsey touch her hair gently. But when she looked up, Miss Betsey was back on her chair and staring into the fire.

“Why did my nephew call this house ‘The Rookery’?” Miss Betsey asked. “A rookery is a place where birds live, but I see no birds in the trees here. My nephew was a silly man!”

“Mr Copperfield is dead,” said my mother, angrily, “and if you speak unkindly about him—” She stood up quickly, then **fainted**.

It was getting dark outside when my mother opened her eyes again. Miss Betsey was still there. “Let’s have some tea,” she said.

“Will it help me?” asked my mother. “I feel very unwell.”

“Of course it will,” said Miss Betsey. “What’s your girl’s name?”

“I don’t know that my baby is a girl yet,” answered my mother.

“I mean your **servant**,” Miss Betsey said.

“Peggotty,” said my mother.

“Peggotty!” repeated Miss Betsey. “What kind of name is that?”

“It’s her family name,” said my mother. “Mr Copperfield called her that because her first name is Clara – the same as mine.”

“Here, Peggotty,” Miss Betsey shouted to the servant in the kitchen. “Bring us tea! Mrs Copperfield fainted. Hurry!”

“I’m sure you will have a girl,” said Miss Betsey to my mother, as she sat back down in her chair.

“Perhaps it will be a boy,” my mother said, quite bravely.

“No, it will be a girl! I will be her favourite aunt, and you will call her Betsey Trotwood Copperfield. She will have a happier life than this Betsey Trotwood.”

Miss Betsey was silent for a few minutes, and my

mother watched her quietly. She did not know what to say. My father had told her that Miss Betsey used to have a husband who **beat** her.

“Was David good to you, child?” Miss Betsey asked.

“Yes, always. We were very happy,” replied my mother.

Peggotty came in with the tea and saw how ill my mother looked. She wondered if the baby was coming. She immediately took my mother upstairs and sent someone to get the doctor.

When the doctor arrived, he was surprised to see a strange lady in the sitting room. Each time he went in there that evening, my aunt was staring into the fire. At 12:30 a.m, the doctor walked nervously into the kitchen and spoke to the lady. “I’m happy to say that everything is over now, **ma’am**. Mrs Copperfield’s baby is here,” he said, smiling.

My aunt stared at him. “How is she?” she asked.

“Well, I hope she will soon be comfortable, ma’am. As comfortable as a new mother can be,” he replied.

“And *she*? How is *she*? The baby,” said my aunt, directly.

“It’s a boy, ma’am,” he replied.

My aunt said nothing more. She put on her hat, walked out and never came back.

CHAPTER TWO

I discover my world

The first things that I remember as a child are my mother's beautiful **curly** hair and Peggotty's cheeks, which were as hard and as red as apples. I was always surprised that the birds did not come and eat them. I can remember my mother and Peggotty on the floor with me as I took my first steps from one to the other.

What other things do I remember? Let me see. In the clouds of my earliest memories, I can see our house. A long **corridor** led from the kitchen to the front door. There was a big, dark cupboard off the corridor – I often ran past it at night because I imagined terrible things lived in there. There were two sitting rooms. One was where we sat in the evening – my mother and I and Peggotty, because she was our friend when her work was done. The other was the best sitting room, which was more formal and not as comfortable.

And now I can see the outside of our house in summer, with the bedroom windows open to let in the sweet air. In the back garden, there were trees filled with fruit that was tastier than any I have eaten since then.

One night, Peggotty and I were sitting together by the fire. My mother was spending the evening at a neighbour's house, and I was reading a book about animals to Peggotty. I was tired of reading and felt very sleepy. But I was allowed

to stay up late and wait for my mother to come home, so I did not want to go to bed.

“Peggotty,” I said, suddenly, “were you ever married?”

“**Master** Davy!” replied Peggotty, “What’s made you think about that?”

“But were you?” I said. “You’re a very beautiful woman.”

“Me? Beautiful? No, my dear!” said Peggotty.

“You shouldn’t marry more than one person, should you, Peggotty?” I said.

“No, you shouldn’t,” she said.

“But if you marry a person and then become a widow, you can marry another person. Is that right?” I asked.

“Yes, if you choose to, my dear,” said Peggotty. “I don’t know much about that because I was never married myself, Master Davy, and I don’t plan to be.”

I was worried that I had hurt Peggotty, but I soon saw that I was wrong. She opened her big, warm arms wide and held me so **tightly** that two buttons on the back of her dress flew off.

“Now, let me hear more about those animals,” said Peggotty.

Soon my mother came home. She looked extremely pretty, I thought. There was a gentleman with beautiful black hair with her.

The gentleman said hello to me, but for some reason I did not like him or his deep voice, and I felt jealous when his hand touched my mother’s. She thanked the gentleman for walking her home, then said goodnight to him.