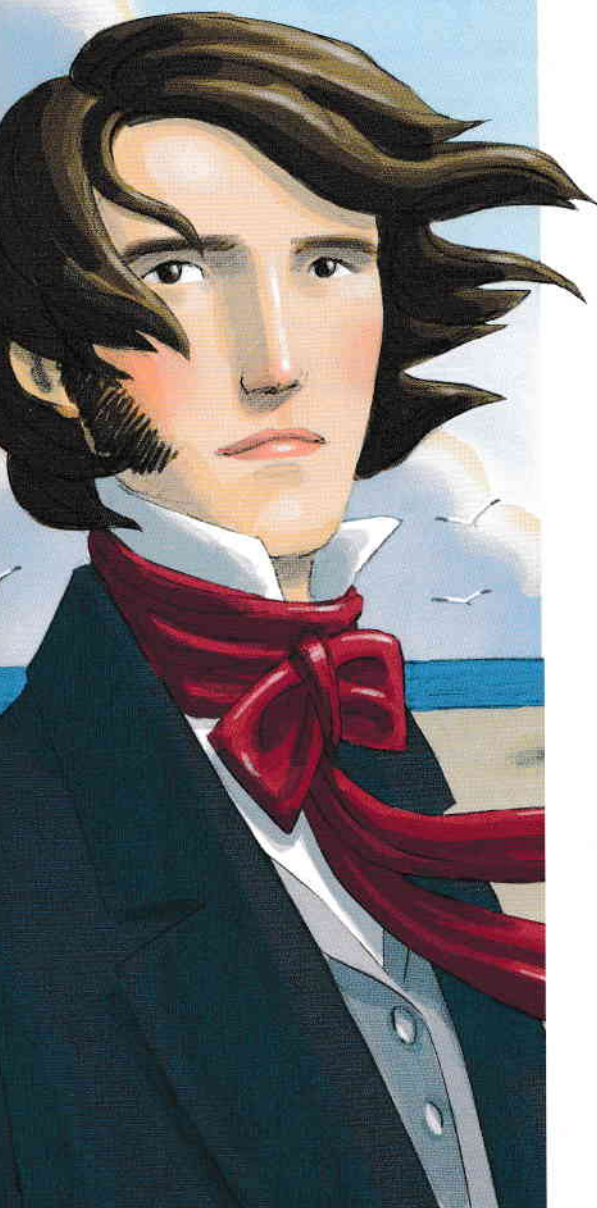


LBRIS

We know
books

Charles Dickens

David Copperfield



Illustrated by **Alfredo Belli**

Text adaptation and activities by
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The beginning of my story

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y story starts in Suffolk, in the east of England, where I was born. Unfortunately, my father died before I was born and this made my young mother very unhappy. She knew that life without a husband and with a new baby was difficult. She called me David—

David Copperfield. A kind servant called Peggotty lived with us.

One of my father's aunts, Miss Betsey Trotwood, came to visit the day before I was born. She was a strange, rich woman who lived alone with a servant in a cottage by the sea. She hated all men because her previous marriage was unhappy. My mother was not happy to see her.

'Well, Mrs Copperfield, when will the baby girl be born?' asked Aunt Betsey.

My mother was quite surprised and said, 'Perhaps it'll be a boy.'



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‘Oh, don’t be stupid!’ said Miss Betsey angrily. ‘Of course, it’ll be a girl, and I’m going to send her to the best school and educate her well. I don’t want her to make the same mistakes I made in my life.’

My mother suddenly felt ill and Peggotty helped her go upstairs to her room. The doctor came and stayed with my mother all evening. At about midnight the doctor came downstairs to the sitting room, where Miss Betsey was waiting nervously.

‘What’s the news, doctor?’ she asked seriously.

‘The young mother is well,’ said the doctor, smiling.

‘But the baby, how is *she*?’ she insisted.

The doctor looked strangely at Miss Betsey and said, ‘It’s a boy.’

Miss Betsey said nothing. She walked out of the house angrily and never came back. And that is the story of the day when I was born.

My early childhood was very happy because my beautiful mother and kind Peggotty looked after me, and we did a lot of things together. But when I was about eight, things changed for the worse. A gentleman called Mr Murdstone started to come to our house. He had black hair and black eyes and wore black clothes. He was unfriendly and never smiled, and Peggotty and I didn’t like him, but my mother did.

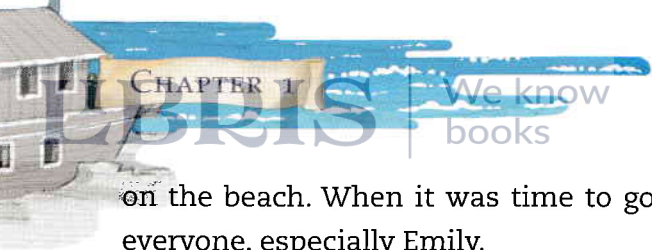
A few months later my mother decided to go on a short holiday with Mr Murdstone and Peggotty took me to stay with her family in the town of Yarmouth, on the sea. Mr Barkis, the local driver, took us with his horse and cart. He was a good man, and he liked Peggotty a lot. I was excited about this holiday because I loved Peggotty and I wanted to see the sea. But at the same time I was sad because my mother was leaving with Mr Murdstone. Peggotty’s family lived in an old boat on the beach. It had doors, windows and a chimney, just like a real house, and everything was tidy. I was very happy to be there. I met Peggotty’s brother, Daniel Peggotty, a friendly fisherman¹. He was not married, but he adopted two orphans who lived with him, Ham and Emily. They called him Uncle Daniel. I fell in love with Emily because she was such a beautiful little girl with red hair and blue eyes, and we played together

1. **fisherman** : a person who fishes as a profession.

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on the beach. When it was time to go back home, I was sad to leave everyone, especially Emily.

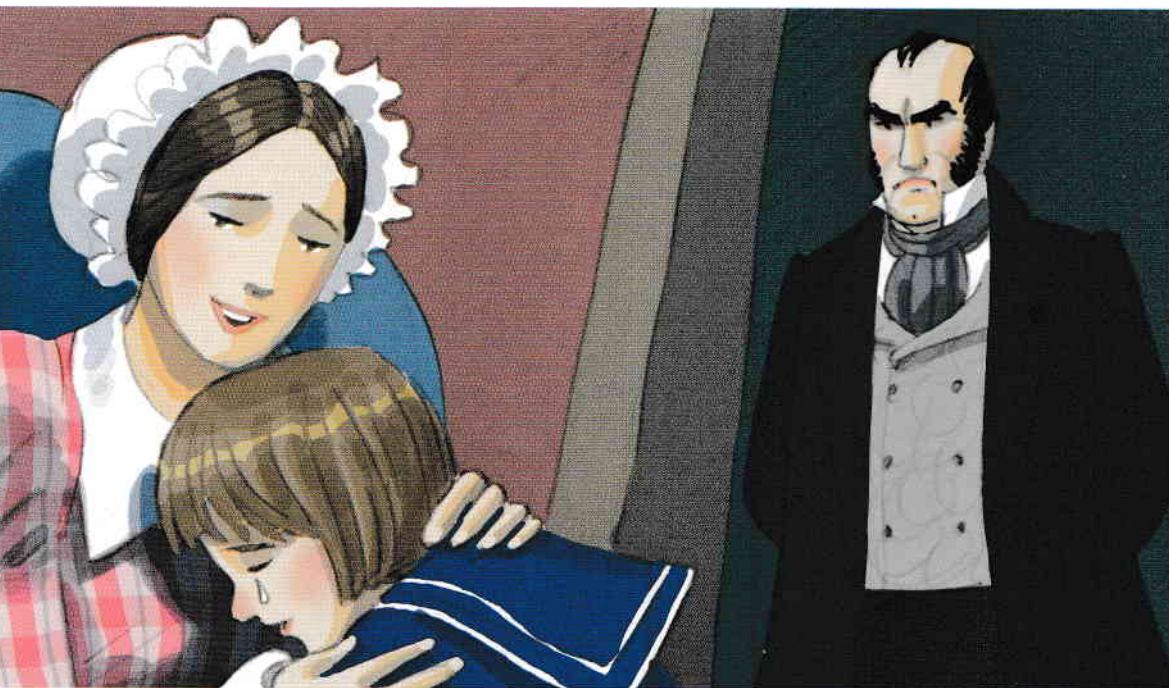
‘Goodbye, David,’ said Daniel Peggotty. ‘Please come back soon.’

Peggotty and I rode back in Mr Barkis’s cart, and when we got near home she looked at me sadly. Then she said, ‘David, I have to tell you something. While we were away your mother married Mr Murdstone. He’s your stepfather now.’

I looked at Peggotty’s kind eyes and didn’t know what to say. I was shocked. My heart beat fast and there were tears in my eyes. How could my beautiful mother marry an unpleasant man like Mr Murdstone? I was confused.

When we got home I was very upset and ran upstairs to my room and started crying. My mother came in and she was unhappy too. She sat next to me and took my hand.

Mr Murdstone came in suddenly and said, ‘What’s this, Clara? Remember you must be strict with the boy! I’ve already told you this. You’re too weak with him.’



'Oh, yes, Edward,' said my mother, 'you're right. I'm sorry. I'll be more strict with him.'

As soon as my mother left the room Mr Murdstone said to me, 'Listen carefully, David! If you don't obey me, I'll hit you like a dog! Remember that!'

I was very frightened of Mr Murdstone because I was still quite young. I hated him because he had a great influence over my mother, who loved me. But she also wanted to please her new husband.

A few days later, Mr Murdstone's sister arrived to help my mother in the house. She was a tall woman with dark hair and a plain face and she never smiled. She was like her brother. She planned to stay with us for a long time.

'Well, Clara,' Miss Murdstone said to my mother, 'I'm here to help you. Just give me the keys to the house and the cupboards and I'll organize everything.'

My mother was embarrassed and gave her the keys. From that moment on Miss Murdstone was in complete control of the house and kept the keys all the time.

This was a terrible time for me. My mother continued to give me lessons. I always enjoyed my lessons with her, but now both Mr Murdstone and his sister were present. Mr Murdstone held a thin stick in his hand during the lessons. I was always nervous and couldn't answer properly. My lessons became more difficult!

'If you don't study your lessons, we'll punish you, David!' Mr Murdstone said, looking at me and at the stick.

'But Edward, he's trying...' my mother protested weakly.

Mr Murdstone interrupted and said, 'You must be very strict!'

'Yes,' agreed Miss Murdstone, 'you must be strong with him.'

Mr Murdstone took my arm and said, 'David, you haven't studied your lessons. Come upstairs with me.' He took the stick and we went to my bedroom. I could hear my poor mother crying downstairs.

'Please, Mr Murdstone, don't hit me,' I cried. 'I studied my lessons yesterday, but today I'm nervous and forgot some things.'

He didn't listen to me and hit me hard with the stick. He was such a bad man. I screamed and my mother and Peggotty were crying outside

the door. I suddenly turned my head and bit² his hand, which made him even angrier. Then he left and closed the door with his key.

Mr Murdstone punished me and I stayed in my room for five long days and nights. Only Miss Murdstone came to bring me some bread and milk. I was terribly frightened and lonely. Then one night Peggotty came to the door and whispered, 'Listen David, Mr Murdstone is going to send you away to boarding school tomorrow!'

'Oh, Peggotty, that means I won't see you and my mother very often!' I whispered.

'No, my dear boy,' replied Peggotty sadly, 'but I'll take care of your mother and I'll always love you! And I'll write to you.'

'Thank you, Peggotty,' I said crying. 'Thank you.'

2. bit :



THINK!

David's early childhood was very happy because he did a lot of things with his mother and Peggotty. But when he was eight, things changed for the worse because Mr Murdstone became David's stepfather. Mr Murdstone was a cruel man and he had power over David's kind mother. He and his sister were very strict with David and punished him. They never showed him any *love* or *understanding*.

How important is *kindness*, *love* and *understanding* in a family?

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