



## CHAPTER ONE

### DAVID COPPERFIELD'S CHILDHOOD

To begin the story of my life with the beginning of my life, I must record that I was born on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. I have been informed that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, at exactly the same moment of time.

I was born at Blunderstone, in Suffolk, in the east of England, and was given my poor father's name, David Copperfield. Sadly, my father had been dead six months when I opened my eyes on the world. There is something strange to me in the reflection that he never saw me; and something stranger yet in my first memories of his white gravestone in the churchyard, and the pity I used to feel for him lying out there in the cold and the dark, when our little house was warm and bright, and the doors were locked against him.

My father's death made my beautiful young mother very unhappy, and she knew she would find life extremely difficult with a new baby and no husband.

Our only relative was Miss Betsey Trotwood; a quick-tempered, eccentric and difficult person, who was an aunt of my father's. She had in fact been married once, to a handsome young husband. But because he demanded money from her, and sometimes beat her, she decided they should separate. He went abroad, and soon news came of his death. Miss Trotwood bought a small house by the sea, and lived there alone, with only one servant.

My father had once been a favourite of hers, but she was annoyed by his marriage, on the grounds that my mother, whom she had never seen, was a 'wax doll'. However, she came to visit my mother just before I was born.

It was a cold, windy Friday afternoon in March. My mother was sitting by the fire, feeling very lonely and unhappy, and crying a little. Suddenly a stern, strange-looking face appeared at the window.

"Open the door!" ordered the stern-faced lady.

My mother was shocked, but obeyed at once.

"You must be David Copperfield's wife," said the lady as she entered. "I'm Betsey Trotwood. You've heard of me?"

"Yes," whispered my mother, trembling.

"How young you are!" cried Miss Betsey. "Just a baby!"

My mother started sobbing again. "I know I look like a child! I know I was young to be a wife, and I'm young to be a mother! But perhaps I'll die before I become a mother!"

"Come, come!" answered Miss Betsey. "Have some tea. Then you'll feel better. What do you call your girl?"



"My girl?—I don't know yet that it will be a girl," replied my mother miserably.

"No, I don't mean the baby, I mean your servant!"

"Her name's Peggotty. Her first name's Clara, the same as mine, so I call her by her family name, you see."

"What a terrible name! However, never mind. Peggotty!" she called, going to the door. "Bring Mrs Copperfield some tea at once!" She sat down again and continued speaking. "You were talking about the baby. I'm sure it'll be a girl. Now, as soon as she's born . . ."

"He, perhaps," said my mother bravely.

"Don't be stupid, of course it'll be a she. I'm going to send her to school, and educate her well. I want to prevent her from making the mistakes I've made in life." Miss Betsey looked quite angry as she said this. My mother said nothing, as she was not feeling at all well. "But tell me, were you and your husband happy?" asked Miss Betsey.

This made my poor mother feel worse than ever. "I know I wasn't very sensible — about money — or cooking — or things like that!" she sobbed. "But we loved each other — and he was helping me to learn — and then he died! Oh! Oh!" And she fell back in her chair, completely unconscious.

Peggotty, who came in just then with the tea, realized how serious the situation was, and took my mother upstairs to bed. The doctor arrived soon afterwards, and stayed all evening to take care of his patient.

At about midnight he came downstairs to the sitting-room where Miss Betsey was waiting impatiently.

"Well, doctor, what's the news? How is she?"

"The young mother is quite comfortable, madam," replied the doctor politely.

"But she, the baby, how is she?" cried Miss Betsey.

The doctor looked strangely at Miss Betsey. "It's a boy, madam," he replied.

When Miss Betsey heard that I had arrived, she put on her hat, walked out, and never came back any more.

What else do I remember? Let me see.

There comes out of the cloud, our house, with all the windows standing open to let in the sweet-smelling summer air, and the garden at the back where the fruit hangs thick on the trees, riper and richer to me than fruit has ever been since in any other garden. A great wind rises, and the summer is gone in a moment. We are playing on a winter's evening, dancing about the parlour. When my mother is out of breath and sits down by the fire to rest, I watch her winding her bright curls round her fingers, and straightening her dress, and nobody knows better than I do that she likes to look so well, and is proud of being so pretty.

But when I was about eight, a shadow passed over my happiness. My mother often went out walking, in her best clothes.

I have good reason to remember one evening when Peggotty and I were sitting by the fire alone. It was well after my bedtime, but I had permission to sit up until my mother came home from spending the evening at a neighbour's. I had grown tired and dead sleepy, but I would rather have died (of course) than have gone to bed.

We both jumped when the garden-bell rang. We went out to the door, and there was my mother, looking unusually pretty, I thought. Standing at her side was a gentleman with beautiful black hair and whiskers, who had walked home with us from church last Sunday.

My mother took me in her arms and kissed me. The gentleman patted me on the head, but I didn't like