

David Copperfield

by Charles Dickens

CHAPTER 1

EARLY CHILDHOOD

I was born on a Friday night at midnight. They say that any child born at this hour on a Friday night will be **unlucky** in his life. When you have read my story, you will be able to judge whether this is true or not . . .

My mother was a **widow** when I was born – my father had died six months earlier. It is strange to think that he never saw me, and that my only memory of him are the visits I made to his **grave**.

On the Friday I was born, my mother was sitting at home when she suddenly **realised** that there was a face **staring** at her through the window. It was a woman's face, with her nose pressed so hard against the window that it was flat. My mother was shocked, and I'm sure that this is the reason I was born that day. Although my mother had never seen this woman before, she knew that it was Aunt Betsey. Miss Betsey Trotwood was my father's aunt, a widow, who had always liked my father, but had opposed his plans to get married. As soon as my mother opened the door, Aunt Betsey said, "Mrs Clara Copperfield?"

"Yes," answered my mother.

"My name is Miss Trotwood. You have heard of me, haven't you?" the visitor asked.

"Yes, I have had that pleasure," my mother replied.

"Well, now you see me," said Aunt Betsey, coming into the house without waiting for an invitation. She sat down and talked for a while with my mother about my poor, dead father. Then she changed the subject.

"You are expecting a baby, aren't you? I have no doubt it will be a girl, and I shall be her friend. I will be her godmother,

and you will call her Betsey Trotwood Copperfield," declared Aunt Betsey. At that moment, my mother's **maid**, Peggotty, came into the room. She looked at my mother's face and realised that my arrival into the world was near. She sent her **nephew**, Ham, who was spending his holiday with her, to bring the doctor. Aunt Betsey remained seated in another room until, after a long wait, the doctor came to congratulate her.

"And how is she?" inquired Aunt Betsey.

"As well as a young mother can be expected to be," answered the doctor.

"And *she*? How is *she*?"

The doctor was confused.

"The baby," repeated my aunt. "How is *she*?"

"Madam, it's a boy," was the reply.

Aunt Betsey did not say a word, but took her hat in her hand, almost hitting the doctor with it, and left the house.

My memories of my early childhood are of my mother and Peggotty. My mother was young, pretty and slim. Peggotty was quite fat and had dark eyes and bright red **cheeks**. Although Peggotty was our maid, I found it difficult to treat her like a servant – she was part of our family. We used to have long conversations about many different subjects.

I will never forget the day my mother came home accompanied by a man with beautiful black hair and **whiskers**. His name was Mr Murdstone and I had often seen him with my mother. For some reason I felt jealous when I saw him this time, but my mother looked very happy. When he left, Mr Murdstone wanted to shake hands with me, but I had already decided that I didn't want to.

Later that night I heard Mother and Peggotty arguing and crying. I heard Peggotty say, "Mr Copperfield wouldn't have liked this one." They argued and cried some more, and then went to bed.

After that, Peggotty seemed to spend less time in our