

Peggotty, too, seemed unhappy during the journey. She was very quiet, and I thought something was wrong. Finally we arrived home. When I entered the house, I saw a new maid.

“Where’s Mother? Why didn’t she come to the gate?” I asked.

“Oh, Master Davy, I tried to tell you, but . . .” said Peggotty.

“She isn’t dead, is she?”

“No, of course not. It’s just that . . . you’ve got a new father. Come and see him.”

“I don’t want to see him.”

When we entered the sitting-room, my mother was sitting on one side of the fire, **knitting**. On the other side was Mr Murdstone. My mother jumped up when she saw me, and Mr Murdstone said, “Now, Clara, control yourself.” She kissed me, but not like she usually did. Mr Murdstone was watching us. I went upstairs to my room, but they had moved all my things to another room. In fact, the whole house had changed. Mr Murdstone had also brought a big, black dog with him, which immediately tried to attack me.

That evening I lay on my bed and cried. I couldn’t understand how my mother could love this man. I finally fell asleep, thinking about my holiday in Yarmouth and Emily.

When I woke, Mr Murdstone was in my room. He began to talk to me.

“David, if I have an obstinate horse or dog, do you know what I do? I hit it. I hit it very hard. You’re a clever boy, David. I’m sure you understand me.”

That night after dinner, my mother **hugged me** before I went to bed, as she always did.

“David,” she whispered, “obey your new father.”

I believe she was afraid of Mr Murdstone.

The following day, a dark, serious woman with a big nose arrived. It was Miss Murdstone, my **stepfather**’s sister. She had come to help my mother. She was a very strict, **suspicious**

person, who made it very clear from the start that she did not like me. She was so suspicious of everyone, Peggotty once told me, that she believed Miss Murdstone slept with one eye open!

It was obvious that Mr Murdstone and his sister wanted to control our lives. On one occasion when my mother said that she would like to be consulted, they said she was very ungrateful, and Miss Murdstone declared that she would leave the following day. At this point, my mother said she was very sorry and started to cry. I never heard my mother question the Murdstones' decisions again.

At this time, I didn't go to school – my mother taught me at home. However, when I had lessons, my stepfather and his sister were also in the room, and it always seemed to me that they wanted me to make a mistake. It made me so nervous that I couldn't think clearly, and I forgot things which I had learned and practised only a few moments before. On these occasions, my stepfather asked me questions, which made me panic even



*My stepfather asked me questions, which made me panic even more.*

more. My only enjoyment was when I could find a quiet corner to read a book.

One morning when I came into the room for my lesson, I saw Mr and Miss Murdstone sitting in their usual places. That day, however, my stepfather had a **cane** in his hand.

“You must be much more careful today, David,” he said, waving the cane in the air. I understood at once that he was going to **beat me** if I couldn’t answer my mother’s questions correctly. My mind went blank. One wrong answer followed another, until my mother started to cry and my stepfather took me up to my room. When we got there, he suddenly put my head under his arm.

“Please don’t beat me, Mr Murdstone,” I pleaded. “I can’t learn when you and Miss Murdstone are in the room.”

“Can’t you?” he asked, as he prepared to hit me. I was terrified and desperately wanted to escape. I **bit** Mr Murdstone’s hand. Mr Murdstone beat me so fiercely that I thought he would kill me. He finally stopped and left the room. I stood up slowly and looked in the mirror. My face was red and **swollen**, with lines across it from where the cane had cut me.

For five days my room was my prison. I was allowed to spend 30 minutes in the garden each day, but I saw no one except Miss Murdstone. I went to evening prayers with the others, but no one spoke – my mother looked away and Mr Murdstone held his bandaged hand.

On the fifth night, I heard someone **whispering** my name. It was Peggotty on the other side of the locked door.

“Peggotty! Is Mother still angry with me?” I asked.

“No, not very.”

“What are they going to do with me, Peggotty?”

“They’re going to send you to school. Near London.”

“When?”

“Tomorrow. Davy, dear, you must never forget me. I’ll never forget you, and I’ll take care of your mother. I’ll write to

you . . .” Then Peggotty kissed the door, which was the closest she could get to me.

When the carriage arrived the next day, my mother was pale and red-eyed. I asked her forgiveness, which I received.

“You will come back for the holidays and be a better boy,” she said.

Miss Murdstone then walked with me to the carriage, and I was on my way to my new school.

### CHAPTER 3

### SCHOOLDAYS

As the carriage travelled along the road, I wondered why Peggotty hadn't come to say goodbye. Suddenly, the carriage stopped and Peggotty appeared from behind some bushes. She hugged and kissed me, and put a bag of cakes and a small purse into my hands. Then she disappeared. In the purse were three coins from her and two more from my mother. I offered the **coachman**, Mr Barkis, one of the cakes, which he quickly ate.

“Did she make these cakes?” he asked.

“Peggotty? Yes, of course,” I answered.

“Does she have an admirer?” Mr Barkis asked.

“No, not Peggotty!”

“If you write to her, tell her that Barkis is **willing**.”

I didn't know what he meant, but I gave Peggotty his message in my first letter to her. Mr Barkis drove me to Yarmouth, where I ate lunch before boarding the coach for London. I travelled through the night and arrived in London early in the morning. Someone from the school was supposed to meet me, but nobody was there. I sat in the office at the coach station and thought about what I would do if no one came to collect me. At last, a tall, thin young man dressed in black clothes entered the office and walked towards me.

“Are you the new boy?” he asked.

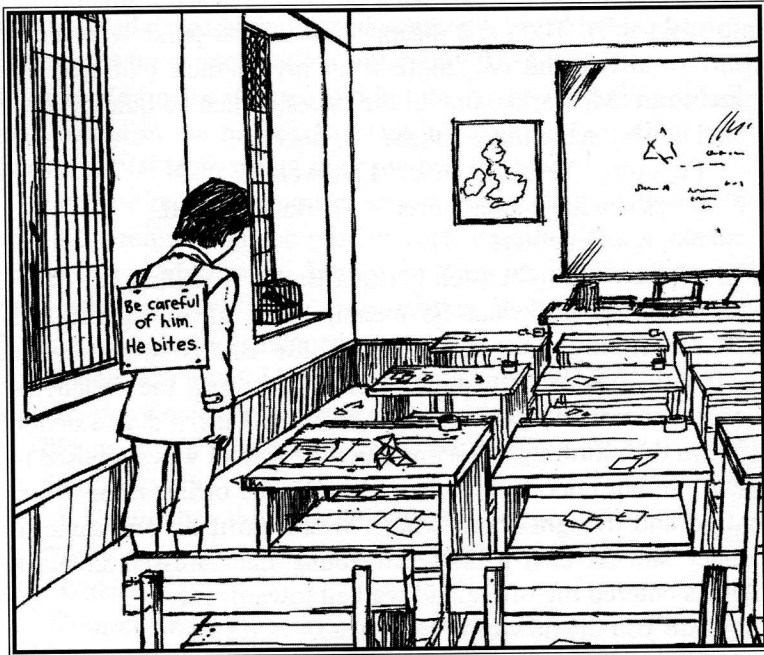
“Yes, sir,” I replied.

He informed me that his name was Mr Mell and that he was one of the teachers at the school. The school, Salem House, was a large, ugly building, with a high wall around it. It was empty, because the other boys had not yet returned from their holidays. Mr Mell told me that the headmaster, Mr Creakle, was also on holiday with his family. We walked into a classroom, where I saw a sign that said: "Be careful of him. He bites." I looked around for a dog.

"What are you looking for?" asked Mr Mell.

"The dog. The dog that bites," I told him, pointing to the sign.

"That sign is for you – because you bit your stepfather. You must wear it on your back. I'm sorry you have to begin your time here like this."



*I felt as if hundreds of eyes were watching me.*

Mr Mell put the sign on my back, and even though no one was there to see it, I felt as if hundreds of eyes were watching me. I walked around the school, looking at the names carved or written on desks, doors and walls. One name was always written strongly and clearly – J. Steerforth. Another name, Tommy Traddles, also appeared often. I wondered who these people were and if they would be my friends. In the meantime, I started my studies with Mr Mell.

One day Mr Creakle returned and said that he wanted to meet me. His assistant took me to his house, which was next to the school. I entered the room and saw a fat man with a **bald** head, small eyes, a small nose and a large **chin**.

“So, what has he done so far?” asked Mr Creakle, looking at me.

“Nothing,” his assistant answered.

Mr Creakle seemed **disappointed** to hear this.

“I have the pleasure of knowing your stepfather,” Mr Creakle informed me. “He knows me, too. But you don’t know me, do you?” he asked, holding me by the ear.

“Not yet, sir,” I answered, thinking only of the terrible pain in my ear.

“Not yet, but you soon will,” he said. “Understand one thing – if I say I will do something, I do it! If I tell you to do something, you will do it! Now you know me, boy! Take him away!”

The following day, Mr Sharp, the senior teacher, returned to school. The first boy to return was Tommy Traddles, whose name I had seen earlier. He, like every other boy who arrived after him, laughed at the sign on my back.

Soon J. Steerforth came back to school. I had already heard a lot about him – he was about six years older than me, very good-looking and a very good student. He asked me why there was a sign on my back, and **remarked** that it was a pity.

“How much money have you got, Copperfield?” he asked.

I told him, and he said he would look after it for me. He persuaded me to spend most of it on food and drink for a party. I didn't mind – I made new friends and heard many stories about school life.

The lessons began, and I started to learn about the strict discipline in the school. Everyone was afraid of Mr Creakle and the **beatings** they got for the smallest offence. These beatings happened every day at Salem House. I was beaten on several occasions. Steerforth always helped me afterwards, and he became a close friend. In fact, Steerforth was my hero – there was nothing I wouldn't do for him. One evening, he discovered that I had read many books, and since he had difficulty falling asleep at night, he asked me to tell him some stories. Of course, I agreed, even though I was very tired and wanted to go to sleep.

One day I was pleasantly surprised when I received an unexpected visit from Mr Peggotty and Ham. I introduced them to Steerforth, and that evening we had a feast in our room with the **shellfish** they had brought. Before they left, they invited Steerforth to visit them at Yarmouth.

At last, the holidays arrived. Mr Barkis came to take me home, and I was pleased to see him.

"I gave your message to Peggotty," I told him.

"I'm sure you did, but I didn't get an answer."

"Was she supposed to answer?" I asked.

"When a man says he's willing, that means he's waiting for an answer," Mr Barkis said. "Tell her that Barkis is waiting for an answer. By the way, what's her name?"

"Peggotty – Clara Peggotty."

Mr Barkis carefully wrote the name on a part of his carriage, as if to remember it.

When we arrived at the house, I couldn't see anyone. I entered quietly, hoping not to find Mr Murdstone or his sister. I heard my mother's voice, singing a song she used to sing to me when I was a baby. When I walked into the sitting-room, I saw

my mother sitting by the fire. There was a baby in her arms.

“Davy! My dear boy!” she called, running across the room to greet me. “Look, Davy, you’ve got a brother!” How happy I was at that moment. Then Peggotty came into the room, delighted to see me.

The Murdstones were not at home and wouldn’t return until late, so the three of us had dinner together. Oh, it was as if we had returned to the good old days.

During the meal, I told Peggotty what Mr Barkis had said. She began to laugh.

“Peggotty!” said Mother. “What’s the matter?”

This made Peggotty laugh even more.

“What is it, Peggotty?”

“Oh, Mr Barkis wants to marry me, ma’am.”

My mother spoke slowly. “That would be good for you, wouldn’t it?” she asked.

“I won’t marry him, ma’am. Neither him nor anyone else,” Peggotty insisted.

My mother became serious and looked at Peggotty. “Please don’t leave me, Peggotty. I couldn’t manage without you,” she confessed.

“Leave you? Never! Your husband and his sister would like me to do that, but I shall never leave you, ma’am.”

We talked for so long that we forgot how late it was. When we heard the Murdstones arrive, my mother gave me a kiss and told me to go to bed.

The next morning I went downstairs with fear in my heart, not knowing how the Murdstones would treat me. Mr Murdstone looked up at me as I entered.

“I’m sorry for what I did, and I hope you will forgive me,” I told him.

“I’m glad you’re sorry,” he replied.

Life was miserable for me when the Murdstones were at home. Miss Murdstone counted the days until I returned to



school, marking each day on a calendar as my departure came nearer. I could do nothing right. **I wasn't even allowed** to hold my baby brother. If Mr Murdstone was in a good mood, I changed it to bad. If Miss Murdstone was in a bad mood, I made it worse. They didn't want me to be near them, but they didn't want me to spend time with Peggotty either.

Finally it was time to return to Salem House. Mother came to the gate to say goodbye. I kissed her and my baby brother. As the carriage drove away, I heard my mother call my name. I looked back and saw her holding up the baby for me to see. It is an image I shall never forget.

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**CHAPTER 4****DREADFUL NEWS**

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I returned to the routine of school life. Somehow the time passed until March, when it was my birthday. I received a message to go to Mr Creakle's office, and I was sure I was going to receive a birthday present from Peggotty. I stood up quickly, but my teacher said kindly, "Don't hurry, David. You have lots of time."

As I entered, I was surprised to see that Mrs Creakle was there, and not her husband.

"David, I've got something to tell you," Mrs Creakle said. "The world changes, and we all must live with these changes – sometimes when we are young, sometimes when we are older."

I looked at her, wondering what she meant.

"Was your mother well when you left home, David?"

I **nodded**, still not understanding what she was talking about.

"Because I'm afraid I've just heard that your mother has been ill – very ill."

Suddenly I understood – even before I heard the words: "*She is dead.*"

I thought of my sad, empty home and of my baby brother.