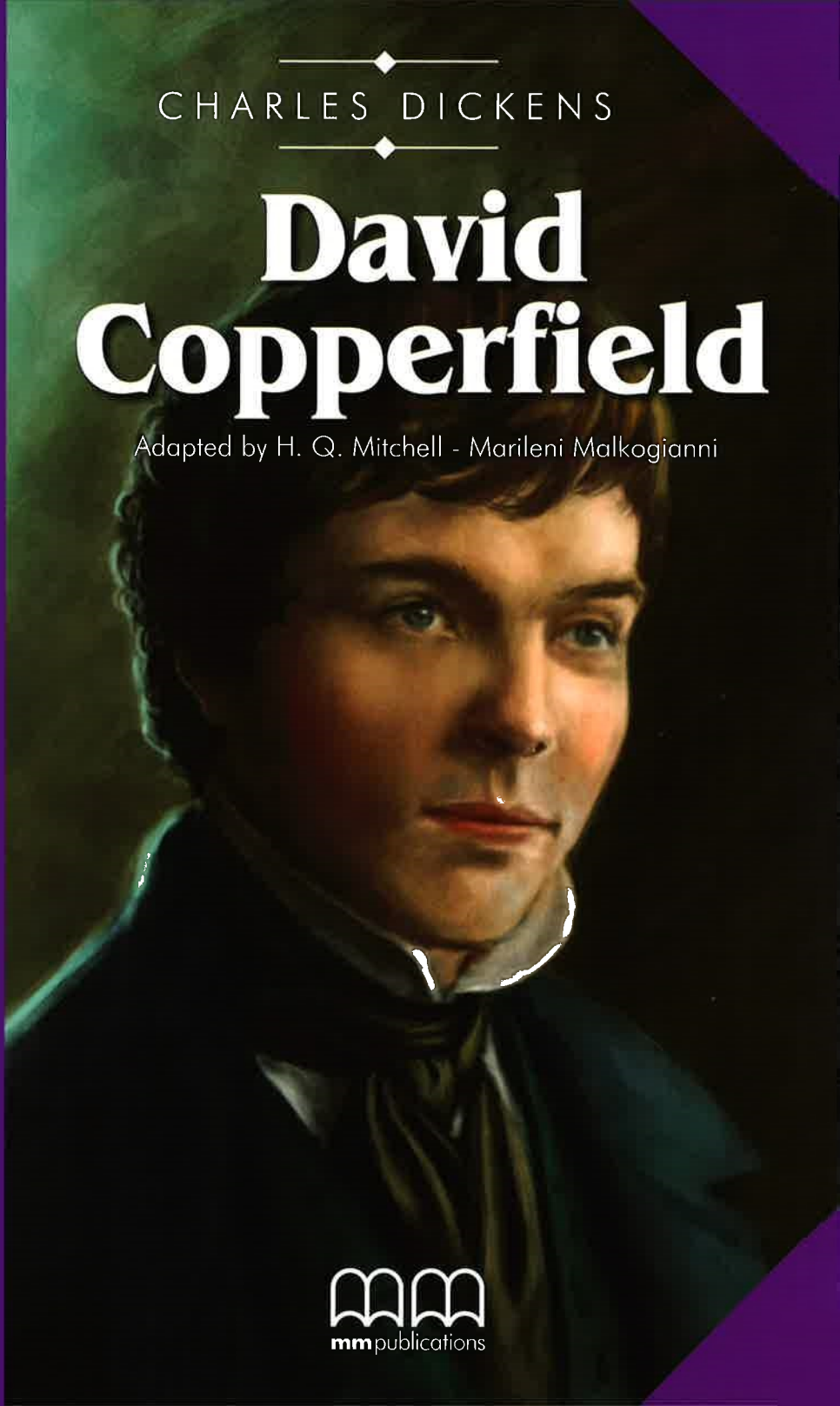


TOP READERS

CHARLES DICKENS

David Copperfield

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level
4


mmpublications

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CHAPTER 1

MY STORY BEGINS AT THE BEGINNING OF MY LIFE: I WAS BORN on a Friday night in a town called Blunderstone in Suffolk, England. My mother's name was Clara and she named me after my father, David, who died six months before I was born. My father had one living relative, a wealthy aunt named Betsey Trotwood who lived in Dover. Aunt Betsey had never approved of my parents' marriage – she felt that my mother was too young to be a good wife.

On the day of my birth, Aunt Betsey paid my mother a surprise visit. "I have a feeling that you're going to give birth to a girl," declared Aunt Betsey, as she entered the house. "I'm here to offer my help and support, but you must name the child after me."

I was born a few hours later, and, when my aunt heard that I was a boy, she walked straight out of the house and never returned.

My early childhood was filled with loving memories of my beautiful mother and of my kind nurse, Peggotty, who treated me as if I was her own child. But, my happiness did not last long. I'll never forget the day my mother arrived home with a mysterious gentleman named Mr Murdstone. He had shiny black hair and whiskers and I didn't like him at all. I was sure he didn't like me either.

Mr Murdstone visited my mother regularly, and I made sure to avoid him as much as possible during his visits. A few months after Mr Murdstone began courting my mother, Peggotty invited me to come to Yarmouth with her to visit her brother, Daniel.

"You'll like Yarmouth, Master Davy," she said. "It's a small fishing village by the sea – you can play on the beach and watch the boats and the fishermen."

I was enchanted by Peggotty's description of Yarmouth and I was thrilled when my mother agreed to let me go. We had to travel to Yarmouth by cart; when we arrived we made our way to Peggotty's brother's house on foot.

"There it is," said my nurse, pointing into the distance.

I was surprised to see that the house was actually a houseboat. We knocked on the door and were welcomed by the housekeeper, Mrs Gummidge, and two orphan children named Ham and Emily whom Mr Peggotty had adopted. The children referred to Mr Peggotty as



‘Uncle’. Mr Peggotty was out fishing and he returned home later that afternoon. Peggotty introduced me to him and he shook my hand enthusiastically. “Glad to see you, young man!” he said with a broad smile. I liked Mr Peggotty immediately.

I spent two glorious weeks in Yarmouth, playing and exploring with Ham and Emily; the three of us quickly became close friends. Soon, it was time to go back to Blunderstone. I was sad to leave my friends, but I couldn’t wait to see my mother again. As soon as we arrived home, Peggotty took me by the hand and led me into the kitchen.

“There’s something I have to tell you, Master Davy,” she said.

I couldn’t help but notice the look of concern in her eyes. “What? What is it?” I asked.

“You have a new father,” said Peggotty.

“A new father?” I repeated. “But I don’t want a new father!”

Peggotty sighed. “You don’t have a choice, my boy.”

We went to the parlour where we found my mother and Mr Murdstone sitting by the fireplace. My mother smiled at me and stood up to give me a hug, but Mr Murdstone stopped her.

“Now, Clara, my dear,” said Mr Murdstone, “control yourself. Davy boy, how do you do?”

I shook hands with Mr Murdstone, then I greeted my mother. She kissed me, patted me on the shoulder and then sat down again. As soon as I could get away, I went up to my room and sobbed.

After dinner the following evening, Mr Murdstone’s sister arrived. She was a stern woman with dark hair and thick eyebrows. I could tell she didn’t like me very much. I was unhappy to learn that Miss Murdstone would be living with us permanently. She quickly took control of the household, and it wasn’t long before my mother and I began to feel like strangers in our own home.

The Murdstones forbade me from playing with other children and I hardly ever spent time with my mother. I didn’t attend school; Mr Murdstone preferred to teach me at home. One day, I went to the parlour for my lessons and I found Mr Murdstone there, holding a cane. My mother was looking on anxiously.

“David,” said Mr Murdstone, “your lessons have been very disappointing lately. If there is no improvement today, I will be forced to use this.”



Mr Murdstone cut the air with the cane and I shivered. I was terrified, and, needless to say, my lessons went very badly. Finally, Mr Murdstone stood up and ordered me to go upstairs with him. My mother tried to stop him, but Miss Murdstone held her back. "Don't be a fool, Clara," she said, "the boy must be punished."

I heard my mother cry out, but Mr Murdstone ignored her. He took me to my room and closed the door. Then, he twisted my head under his arm and raised the cane in the air.

"Please, sir, don't hit me!" I pleaded.

Mr Murdstone hit me as hard as he could; I tried to pull away from him, but it was no use. He hit me again and I bit his hand as hard as I could. Mr Murdstone was furious; he beat me until my entire body was bruised, then he walked out and locked the door. I spent five days locked in my room. On the last night of my captivity, Peggotty informed me that I was going to be sent to a boarding school in London.

In the morning, Miss Murdstone appeared and told me to get dressed and go down to the parlour. I found my mother there; her eyes were red and it was obvious that she'd been crying. "My sweet boy," she said as she took me in her arms.

The cart arrived once I'd finished eating my breakfast. My mother kissed me goodbye and I climbed into the cart reluctantly. Tears ran down my cheeks as I watched my house disappear into the distance.



CHAPTER 2

A FEW MINUTES LATER, I HEARD PEGGOTTY CALLING MY NAME. I turned around and saw her running behind the cart. Barkis, the driver, brought the cart to a halt and Peggotty climbed in beside me. "This is for you, dear boy," she said as she handed me a box of cakes and a purse containing several shiny coins. The money was a gift from my mother. I thanked Peggotty and she kissed the top of my head and hugged me tightly. Then, she climbed out of the cart and hurried off.

We continued on our journey and when it was time for lunch, I offered Barkis one of Peggotty's cakes.

"Did she make these cakes?" he asked, referring to Peggotty.

"Yes," I said. "Peggotty makes all our cakes and she does all our cooking."

Barkis seemed impressed. "Does she?" he said. "Is she married?"

I shook my head.

The driver was quiet for a moment. "Will you be writing to Peggotty at all?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Well, when you write to her again, please tell her that Barkis is willing."

I wasn't quite sure what Barkis meant, but I promised to do as he'd asked. Barkis dropped me off in Yarmouth, where I caught the evening coach to London. I arrived at Salem House School the following morning. The building was old and run-down and was surrounded by a very high brick wall. I knocked on the front door and a large man with a wooden leg answered it.

"You must be the new boy," he grunted.

I nodded.

"The headmaster, Mr Creakle, is waiting for you in his office."

The man showed me to Mr Creakle's office and I walked inside carefully. Mr Creakle was sitting at his desk; he had small black eyes, a hooked nose and a large chin. He reminded me of a pirate.

"So, Mr Copperfield," said Mr Creakle, without taking his small, bright eyes off me, "your stepfather told me that you like to bite people, is that true?"