

DAVID COPPERFIELD

Adapted from Charles Dickens' novel

By Craig Sodaro

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David Copperfield

- 2 -

STORY OF THE PLAY

This adaptation of Dickens' coming-of-age story of a boy in 19th century England is ideal for the junior and senior high school stage. A young hero battling a difficult youth, we see David's struggles from his childhood days at the family's estate in Blunderstone, to his early life of poverty and misery, to his final, joyful success with his writing and retrieving his and his aunt's fortunes.

Many of our favorite Dickens' characters are present as David's gentle mother, Clara; the loving housekeeper, Peggoty; his cruel stepfather, Murdstone; his schoolmates Steerforth and Traddles; the amusing, ever-on-the-run Micawbers; the lovely Agnes Wickfield, and the despicable Uriah Heep.

The large role of David can be played by two actors, one the young David, the other the older. Other parts require actors to be a narrators one moment and then be characters the next, a process which keeps the story moving seamlessly.

David Copperfield

- 3 -

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(15 M, 13 W, 7 Flexible, Extras, Doubling Possible)

DAVID: As a man.
PEGGOTY: The Copperfield servant.
CLARA COPPERFIELD: David's mother.
AUNT BETSEY TROTWOOD: David's aunt.
DAVID: As a boy (Act I).
MISS MURDSTONE: Murdstone's sister.
MURDSTONE: David's stepfather.
MR. PEGGOTY: Peggoty's brother.
EMILY: Peggoty's niece.
HAM: Emily's neighbor.
DIMWITTY: "Teacher's pet" at the school.
CHILD 1 and 2: (Flexible) Children at the school.
J. J. STEERFORTH: Another student, spirited.
TOMMY TRADDLES: Another student, friend of Steerforth.
MISS CREAKLE: Evil schoolmistress.
MISS MELL: School teacher.
VENDOR 1, 2, 3 and 4: (Flexible) On the streets of London.
MR. QUINION: Manager of Grinby and Murdstone.
MR. MICAWBER: Investor who owes everyone money.
MRS. MICAWBER: His wife.
MRS. PENNYWORTH: Micawber creditor.
CONSTABLE: Local law man.
SNYDE: Thief.
URIAH HEEP: Humble Wickfield clerk.
MR. WICKFIELD: Friend of Aunt Betsey.
AGNES WICKFIELD: His daughter.
FLOWER SELLER: (Flexible role)
MRS. HEEP: Uriah's mother.
BILL SYKES: Drunk.
AUDREY: Girl at the bar.
MAGGIE: Girl at the bar.
EXTRAS: As children at the school, citizens on the streets of London and patrons at the Dying Swan.

David Copperfield

- 4 -

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

- Scene 1: Blunderstone Rookery, the Copperfield home, February, 1830.
- Scene 2: Blunderstone Rookery, summer, 1842.
- Scene 3: The Peggoty house, Yarmouth, three months later.
- Scene 4: Blunderstone Rookery, a month later.
- Scene 5: Dormitory at Salem House, London, at midnight.
- Scene 6: Classroom at Salem House, several months later.
- Scene 7: Blunderstone Rookery, a few days later.
- Scene 8: Mr. Quinion's shop, London, several months later and on the road leaving London.
- Scene 9: Aunt Betsey's cottage in Dover.

ACT II

- Scene 1: Mr. Wickfield's office, Dover, five years later.
- Scene 2: Heeps' apartment, several weeks later.
- Scene 3: David's flat, that night.
- Scene 4: The Peggoty house, Yarmouth, a week later.
- Scene 5: David's flat, several days later.
- Scene 6: The Dying Swan Pub, London, hours later.
- Scene 7: Mr. Wickfield's office, the next day.

David Copperfield

- 5 -

ACT I

(AT RISE: Grown DAVID COPPERFIELD stands, back to audience, at CS. COMPANY enters from both wings.)

PEGGOTY: And now, ladies and gentlemen, for your enlightenment and entertainment ...

MICAWBER: We are proud to present the personal history, adventures, experience, and observation of ...

ALL: David Copperfield.

CLARA: The younger, of Blunderstone Rookery.

TOMMY: Which he never meant for anyone to see or hear on any account!

DAVID: *(Facing the audience.)* Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these scenes must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I was born on a Friday at 12:00 at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike and I began to cry simultaneously. I was born at Blunderstone, in Suffolk. I was a posthumous child seeing as how my father's eyes had closed upon the light of this world six months before I opened mine.

(LIGHTS down as company exits.)

David Copperfield

- 6 -

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Blunderstone Rookery, February, 1830. Two chairs flank a small table CS at which CLARA sits, shawl about her shoulders. BETSEY stands SL and PEGGOTY, SR.)

CLARA: (Narrating.) David Copperfield's father, also called David Copperfield, had a favorite aunt, a Miss Trotwood, better known as Aunt Betsey.

AUNT: (Narrating.) Aunt Betsey was thus our hero's great aunt. David's father had been her favorite until he decided to marry Clara. Aunt Betsey was horrified and called David's wife a "wax doll" because she was not yet 20. (Exits SL.)

CLARA: (Narrating.) So, Mr. Copperfield and his aunt never met again.

PEGGOTY: (Narrating.) But one afternoon, just after the birth of our hero, a visitor appeared at Blunderstone Rookery.

(A loud KNOCK is heard. PEGGOTY crosses SL.)

PEGGOTY: I'm comin' I am! Hold your horses! I'm comin'!

CLARA: Who is it, Peggoty? I'm not expecting any visitors. (PEGGOTY returns followed by AUNT.)

PEGGOTY: Why, ma'am, she wouldn't tell me who she is!

AUNT: Leave us, you nosy servant!

PEGGOTY: Well! I can tell when I'm not wanted! (SHE exits SL.)

AUNT: Mrs. David Copperfield?

CLARA: Yes?

AUNT: My, my, my, you are a baby!

CLARA: Have we met?

AUNT: Not at all. But you've heard of me, I'm sure. Miss Trotwood.

CLARA: This is a surprise.

AUNT: More like a shock. Sit down ... you look faint. And I don't mind saying I'll join you on a nice, soft chair.

David Copperfield

- 7 -

AUNT: (*Cont'd.*) I might as well have sat on rocks as on the seat of that carriage! Why anyone would want to live all the way up here, I don't know!

CLARA: David loved this place.

AUNT: Figures. And was David good to you, my child?

CLARA: We were very happy.

AUNT: He spoiled you, I suppose.

CLARA: Now that he's gone, I realize how much.

AUNT: But he has left you something aside from this drafty old house now that he's gone?

CLARA: Yes, 150 pounds a year.

AUNT: He could have done worse. (*PEGGOTY enters SL with tea set on a tray.*) So, what do you call your girl?

CLARA: Peggoty.

(*PEGGOTY proceeds to pour tea.*)

AUNT: Peggoty? You mean to say a human being has been given such a silly name?

PEGGOTY: I beg your pardon!

AUNT: And what business is it of yours?

CLARA: This is Peggoty, our girl.

PEGGOTY: And Peggoty's my surname, if you must know. Mr. Copperfield always called me that on account of my havin' the same first name as Mrs. Copperfield, here. Cream or sugar? (*SHE hands AUNT teacup.*)

AUNT: Sugar, please.

PEGGOTY: Some folks need it.

AUNT: I beg your pardon! (*PEGGOTY hands CLARA teacup and exits SR.*) I wasn't referring to that girl. I mean your new baby girl, born just a fortnight ago, so I'm told.

CLARA: But I'm afraid there's some -

AUNT: How is the child? I should think you'd want her to meet her great aunt! After all, I should like to do everything in my power to help you in raising the little thing.

CLARA: But Miss Trotwood, I didn't have a girl.

AUNT: You ... then what did you have?

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