



# Classic Tales By Charles Dickens

## David Copperfield

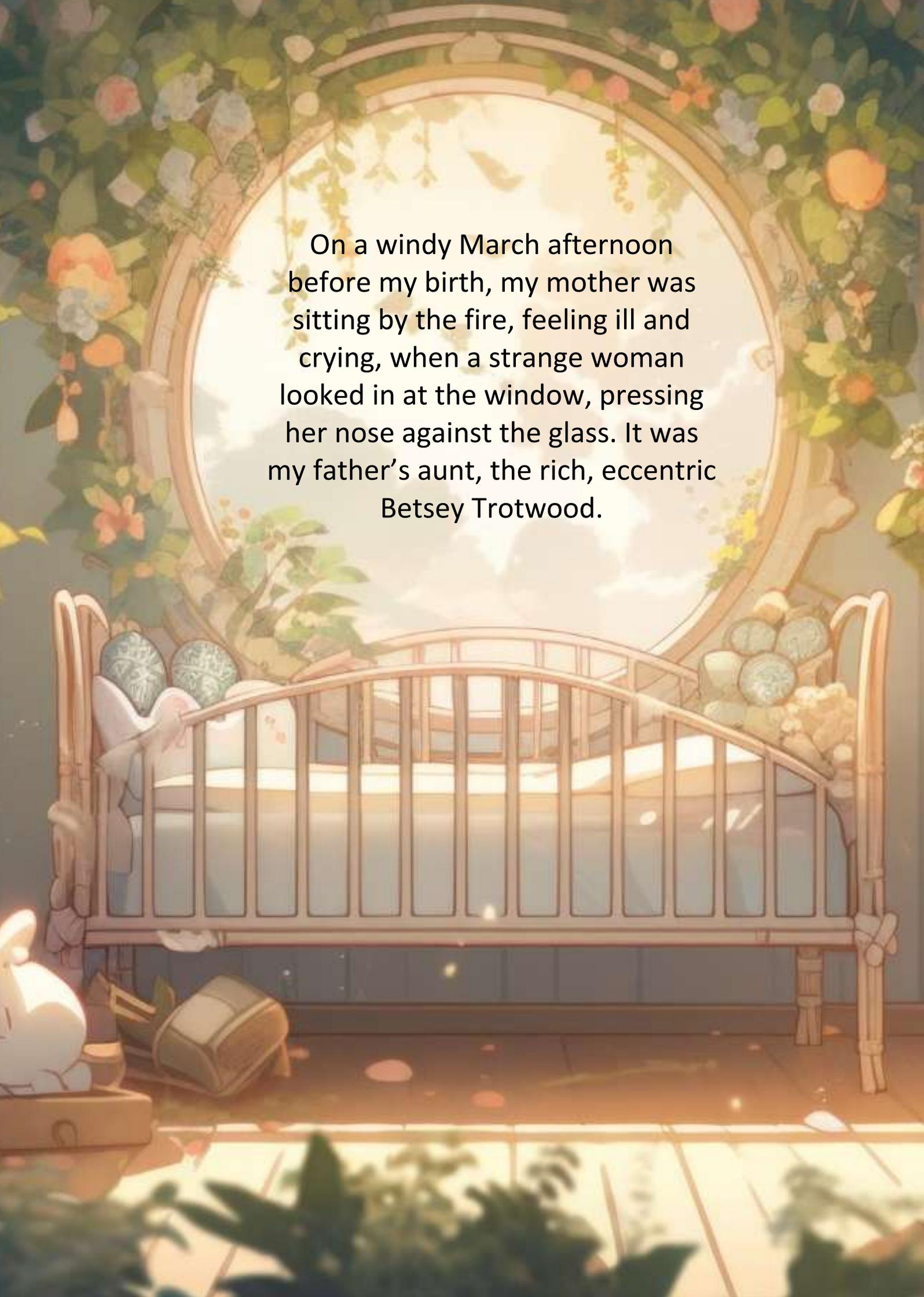


I was born at Blundestone, in Suffolk. My father's eyes had closed upon the light of this world six months before mine opened on it.



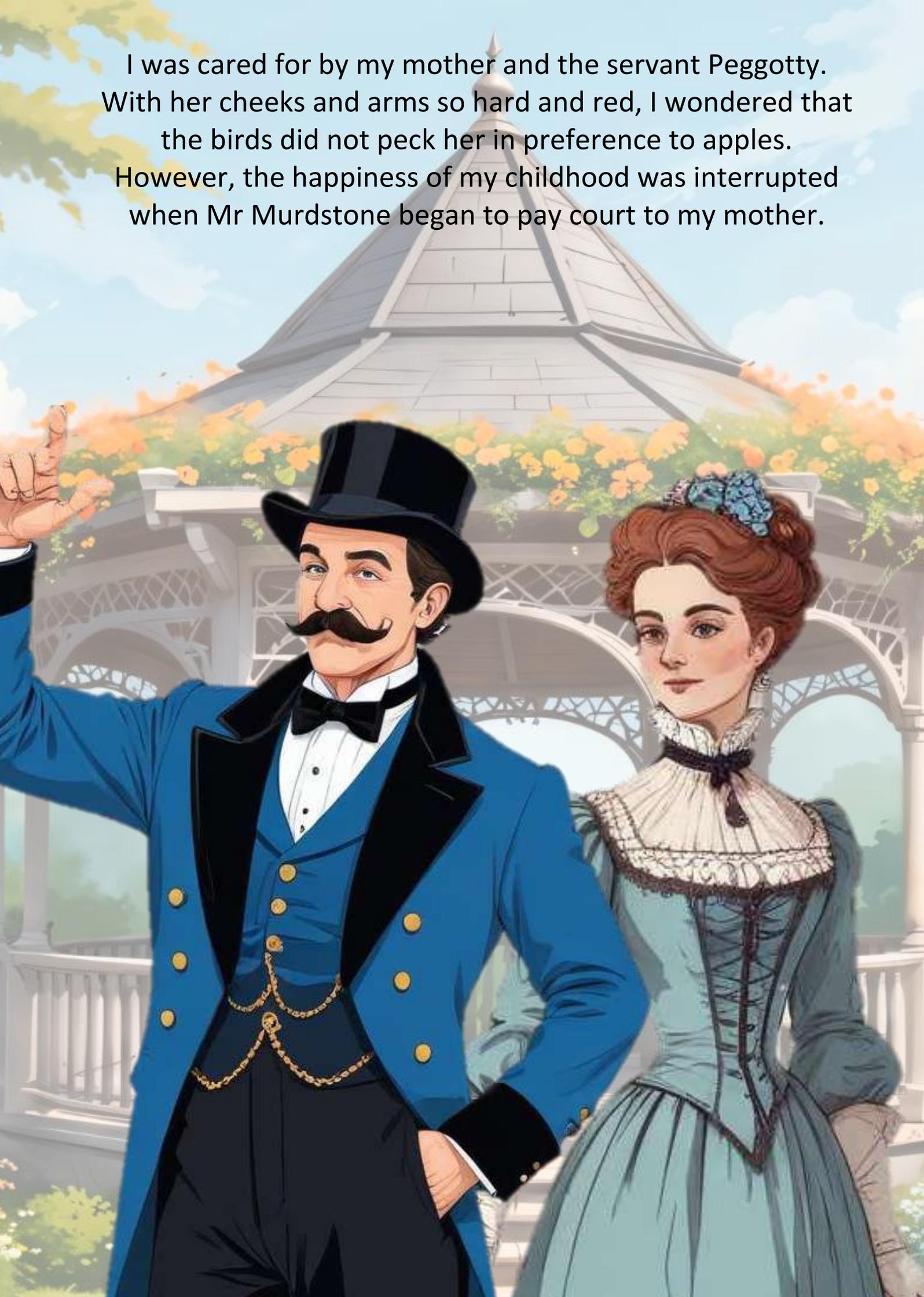
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I was cared for by my mother and the servant Peggotty. With her cheeks and arms so hard and red, I wondered that the birds did not peck her in preference to apples. However, the happiness of my childhood was interrupted when Mr Murdstone began to pay court to my mother.



One day, Peggotty took me to visit her family in Yarmouth. I met her brother, Daniel, and his adopted nephew and niece, cousins named Ham and Little Em'ly, who, along with the widow Mrs Gummage, lived in a large black barge on the beach. It had an iron funnel sticking out for a chimney and a door cut in the side. I quite fell in love with the beautiful Em'ly, who told me as we walked along the beach, "I should like so much to be a lady."



Barges were sturdy vessels designed to carry cargo safely. In Victorian times, many trading companies used boats to move goods up and down the coast.

On a cold, cloudy afternoon, I returned home to find my mother had married Mr Murdstone. Soon, Mr Murdstone's sister Jane came to live with us, too. Murdstone was a cruel, unfeeling man. One day, when he beat me for not learning my lessons well enough, I caught the hand with which he held me in my mouth and closed my teeth firmly around it. Despite my mother's protestations, I was dispatched to Salem House, a boarding school in London.



Mr Barkis took me part of the way in his cart, asking me that when I wrote to Peggotty, I should give her the strange message, "Barkis is willin."

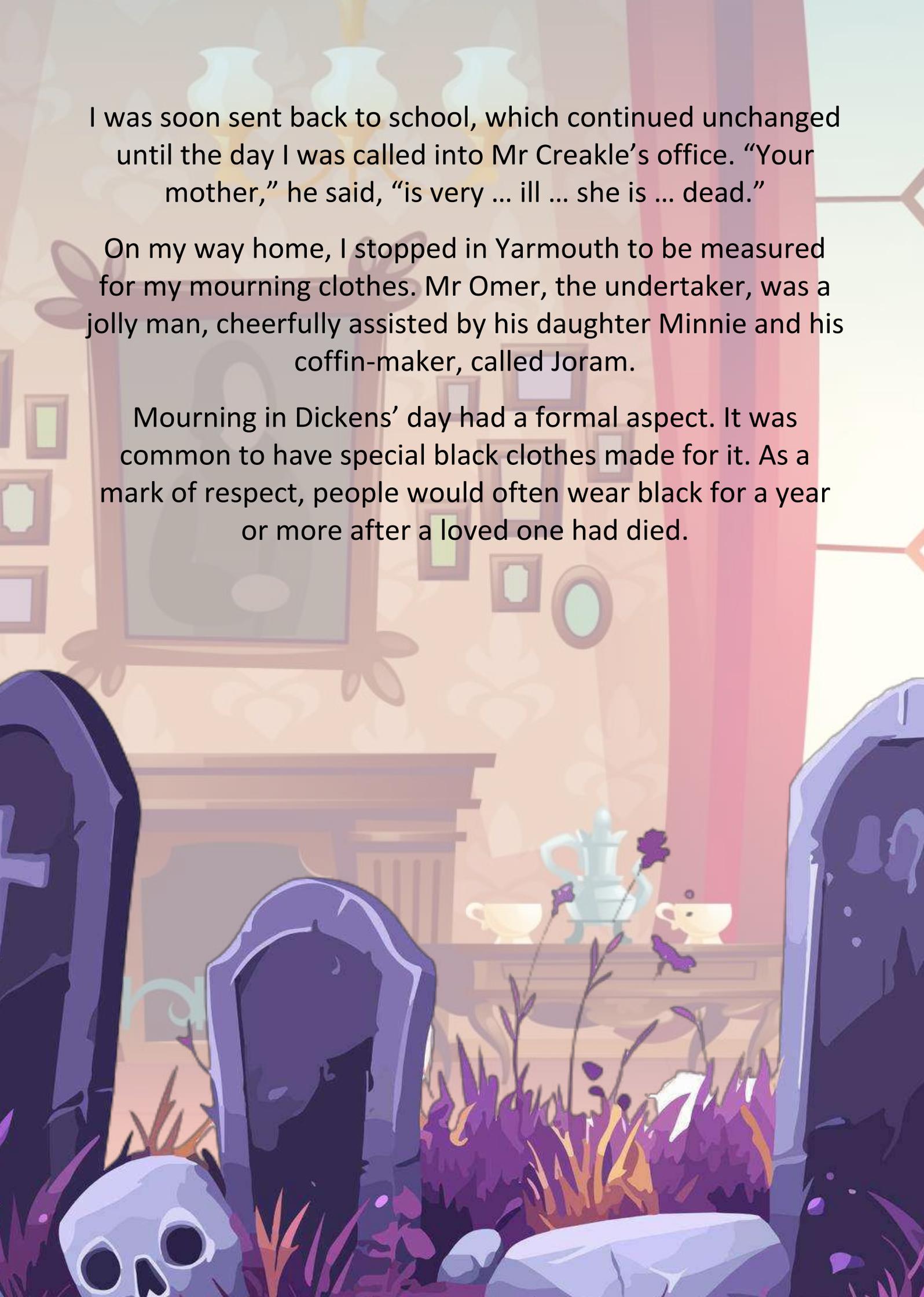
Salem House was run by Mr Creakle, a friend of cold Mr Murdstone. On arrival, I found myself forced to wear a sign proclaiming: Take care of him. He bites. I would have been miserable had it not been for the good-hearted Tommy Traddles and the handsome, confident James Steerforth.



When the holidays arrived, I again journeyed with Barkis, who said that Peggotty had not responded. “You might tell her,” he said to me, “Barkis was ‘a waiting’ for an answer.”

It felt strange to be home and discover my mother sitting by the fire, suckling an infant. She and Peggotty kissed me repeatedly. Mr Murdstone and Jane remained aloof.





I was soon sent back to school, which continued unchanged until the day I was called into Mr Creakle's office. "Your mother," he said, "is very ... ill ... she is ... dead."

On my way home, I stopped in Yarmouth to be measured for my mourning clothes. Mr Omer, the undertaker, was a jolly man, cheerfully assisted by his daughter Minnie and his coffin-maker, called Joram.

Mourning in Dickens' day had a formal aspect. It was common to have special black clothes made for it. As a mark of respect, people would often wear black for a year or more after a loved one had died.

Back home, a distraught Peggotty told me, “She was never well for a long time.” The baby had also died. Discharged from service, Peggotty took me to visit Yarmouth again. In a small church, she quietly married the faithful Barkis.

I did not return to school but was sent to the Murdstone and Grinby counting-house in Blackfriars. Here I met Mr Micawber, who rented me a room. I soon became friends with his wife and children.



Mr Micawber was a stoutish, middle-aged man, with no more hair on his large and shining head than there is upon an egg. He was perpetually in debt and eventually sent to prison.

On his release, Mr Micawber decided to leave London with his family. I used guile to get Peggotty to send me money and Aunt Betsey's address in Dover. Though my belongings and money were stolen on the way, I continued my journey on foot, arriving with my clothes and shoes in woeful condition. Finding my aunt in her neat cottage garden, I announced, "If you please, Aunt, I am your nephew."



“Oh, Lord!” said my aunt, and sat down on the gravel path. But she let me stay, especially after meeting Mr Murdstone and Miss Murdstone, who rode a donkey across Aunt’s beloved green!

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One day, my aunt took me to Canterbury. Inside a very old house with long, low lattice windows, I met her lawyer, Mr Wickfield, his dutiful daughter Agnes, and his curious-looking clerk Uriah Heep, a high-shouldered, bony youth with red hair cropped like stubble, hardly any eyelashes, and no eyebrows.

Waiting for my aunt, I sat opposite the room where Uriah worked. His eyes, like two red suns, observed me stealthily. On Mr Wickfield's advice, I lodged with him while attending a school run by the kind Dr Strong.



When I had completed my education, my aunt gave me leave to visit Peggotty while I considered a suitable career. In London I met Steerforth, who took me to Highgate to meet his proud, possessive mother and her companion, Rosa Dartle. Rosa had a scar across her lips. “I was a young boy, and she exasperated me, and I threw a hammer at her,” explained Steerforth.



I, in turn, took Steerforth to visit the Peggottys. Ham and Little Em'ly had just become engaged. Steerforth liked Yarmouth so much that he bought a boat, so he could sail there regularly.



Back in London once more, I was apprenticed to Spenlow & Jorkins. One evening, I met Agnes, who was visiting London to see her father's agent. She warned me against Steerforth and told me that Uriah was "subtle and watchful. He had mastered Papa's weaknesses," she said, "and taken advantage of them." Talking to me soon after, Uriah confided his passion for Agnes. I was horrified.

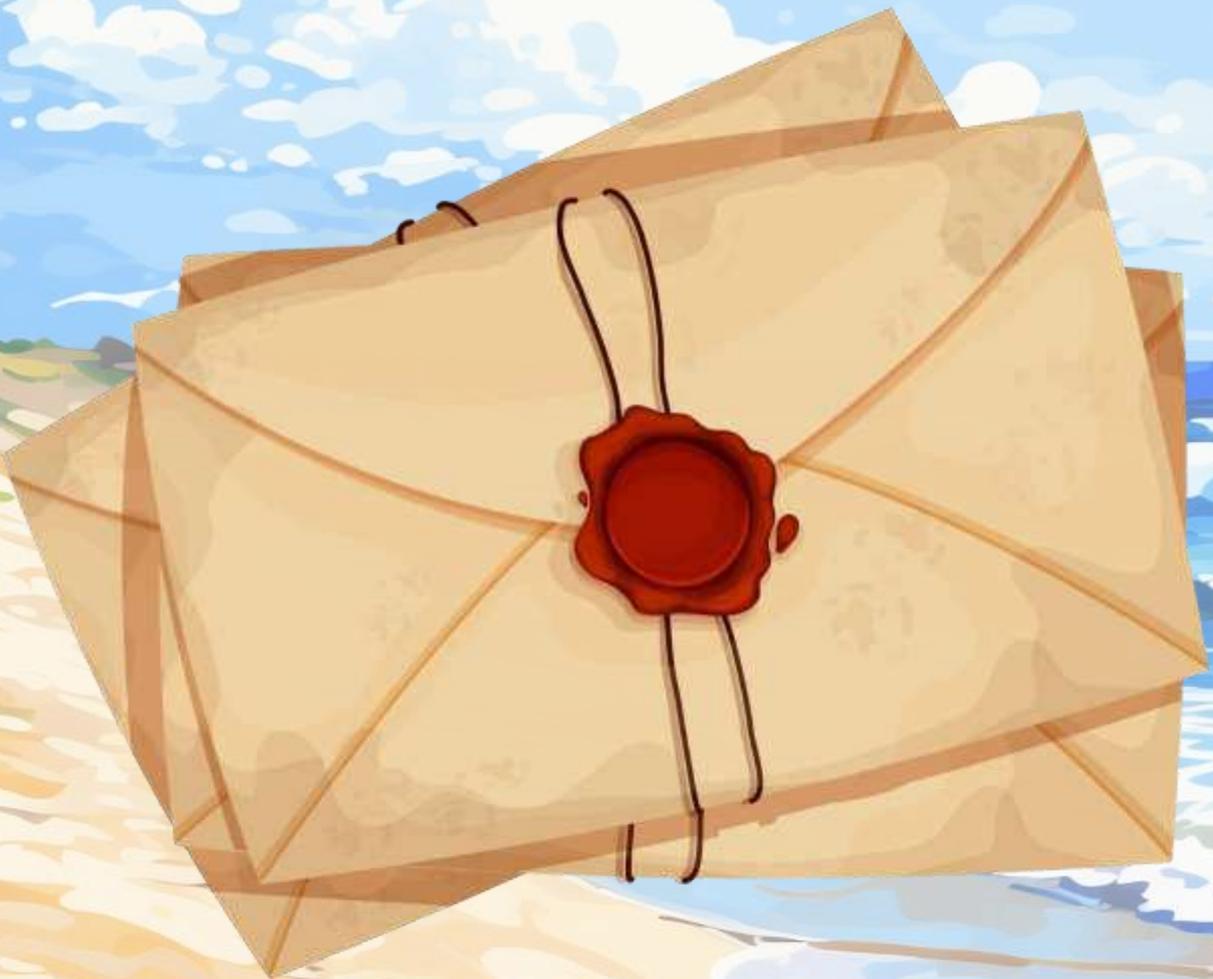


But passion was soon to enter my own life. On meeting Mr Spenlow's silly but beautiful daughter, Dora, I fell hopelessly in love. She had the most delightful voice, the gayest laugh, the most fascinating ways. Unfortunately, her father had engaged Miss Murdstone as a companion for his daughter.

One evening, as I was dining with the Micawbers and my old school-friend Tommy Traddles, Steerforth brought a note from Peggotty. Barkis was dying. Naturally, I hurried to Yarmouth.



I was to find that soon after Barkis' death, Em'ly disappeared, leaving Ham a note in which she vowed "never to come back, unless he brings me back a lady." The man involved was Steerforth. Distracted, Peggotty's brother Daniel set off in search of Em'ly, saying, "My unchanged love is with my darling child, and I forgive her."



Back in London, my aunt arrived, claiming that her investments had failed and she and Mr Dick must live with me. Later, when I visited Canterbury, Agnes revealed that Uriah was now Mr Wickfield's business partner. No longer a humble clerk, he had moved, with his mother, into the Wickfields' house.



Poor as I was, I had been courting Dora in secret. When Miss Murdstone showed my love letters to Dora's father, he vehemently disapproved. However, when he died suddenly, leaving Dora penniless, she was sent to live with her aunts.

Eventually, we were married. Beautiful, silly Dora attempted to keep house for me but was totally inept.

On a visit to Canterbury, I found Mr Micawber working for Uriah, who had virtually taken over the business. I begged Agnes not to marry Uriah just to please her father, who was depressed and drinking heavily.



Back in London once more, I met Daniel Peggotty, newly returned from Europe and still resolutely searching for Em'ly. Later, Steerforth's manservant told me how Steerforth had abandoned Em'ly. Led by Martha to a dingy attic room, Daniel Peggotty at last found his Em'ly. "I thank my Heav'nly Father as my dream's come true," he cried, taking her up in his arms. At once he began to make plans to emigrate to Australia, where Em'ly's past would be unknown.

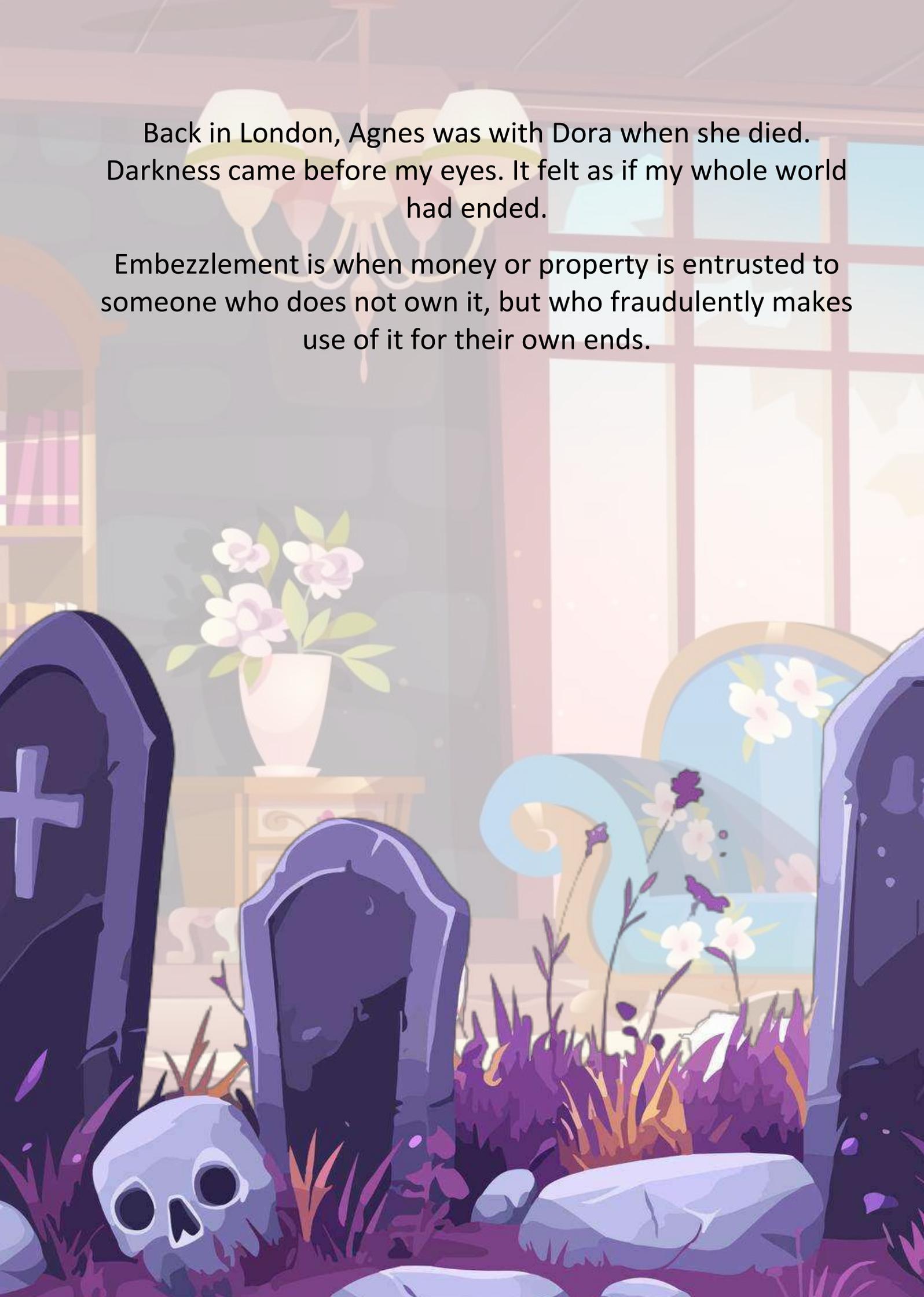


Dora was gravely ill, but she insisted I go to witness Traddles and Mr Micawber confronting Uriah. While working for Uriah, Mr Micawber had discovered how the former clerk had tricked Mr Wickfield into signing over control of the firm.



Uriah had forged Wickfield's signature and framed him for embezzlement. Aunt Betsey waded into the fray, grabbing Uriah. "You know what I want," she shouted. She had feared Mr Wickfield had embezzled her money but had kept quiet for the sake of Agnes. Now Mr Wickfield's name was cleared, and Aunt Betsey recovered her investments. She kindly lent the Micawbers enough money to make a fresh start in Australia.





Back in London, Agnes was with Dora when she died.  
Darkness came before my eyes. It felt as if my whole world  
had ended.

Embezzlement is when money or property is entrusted to  
someone who does not own it, but who fraudulently makes  
use of it for their own ends.

I had agreed to take a letter from Em'ly to Ham, but arrived in Yarmouth to find a storm raging and a schooner about to be wrecked on the beach. Unconcerned for his own life, Ham waded into the waves and died attempting to save a stranger, who also died. The stranger was Steerforth.

The Micawbers and the Peggottys, including Mrs Gummage and Martha, set sail for Australia. I spent some time in Switzerland, writing about my experiences. I often thought about Agnes, too.



At last, I returned to Dover, where my aunt gave me news of all my old friends and told me she suspected Agnes had an attachment. I called on Agnes and, as we spoke of Dora and Em'ly, I noticed how beautiful she was. Eventually, I told her, "I went away, dear Agnes, loving you. I stayed away, loving you. I returned home, loving you." She laid her gentle hands on my shoulders and looked at me calmly.

"I have loved you all my life," she said.





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