David Copperfield Summary Essay, Research Paper

David Copperfield enjoys his early childhood with his mother and their kindly servant, Peggotty. But when his mother marries the cruel Mr. Murdstone, he is sent away to Salem House, a run-down London boarding school where the boys are beaten by Mr. Creakle. Here David befriends Tommy Traddles and the aristocratic James Steerforth. Shortly after she gives birth to a son by Mr. Murdstone, however, David’s mother dies, and David is pulled out of the school and forced to go to work at Murdstone’s wine warehouse. He lives with the impoverished Micawber family, whom he grows to love, but when Micawber is sent to debtor’s prison, David runs away from his work and goes to live with his indomitable great-aunt, Miss Betsey Trotwood. Miss Trotwood adopts David and sends him to Dr. Strong’s school in Canterbury, where he thrives.

David lives in Canterbury with a lawyer named Mr. Wickfield (whose scheming clerk, Uriah Heep, takes advantage of Wickfield’s alcoholism to secure himself a position as partner in the firm) and Wickfield’s daughter Agnes, with whom David forms a close and lasting friendship. When David finishes at Dr. Strong’s school, he goes to work at the law firm of Mr. Spenlow and Jorkins, where he falls in love with and becomes engaged to Dora Spenlow.

When Em’ly, David’s childhood sweetheart and Peggotty’s niece, runs away with Steerforth, Mr. Peggotty (Peggotty’s brother) sets out to find her. Miss Trotwood is suddenly and unexpectedly plunged into financial ruin, and David begins doing extra work to help support her–he learns shorthand and begins reporting on Parliament for the papers, and he eventually begins writing stories for magazines. He marries Dora, who proves inept at housework. Soon after, he is shocked to learn that Mr. Micawber has gone to work as a clerk for Uriah Heep and that Heep intends to marry Agnes.

Dora becomes ill after the birth of their child and dies, as does the child. With the help of Martha Endell, David and Mr. Peggotty succeed in locating Em’ly; the Peggottys plan to leave for Australia to begin a new life. After exposing Uriah Heep as a criminal and a fraud–and forcing him to make reparations for all the money he embezzled–Mr. Micawber also plans to move his family to Australia. Steerforth is killed in a shipwreck, as is Ham–Em’ly’s cousin, who loved her–and David remains deeply saddened by Dora’s death. He travels abroad for several years but returns at last, realizing that he loves and has always loved Agnes Wickfield. Now a famous writer, David marries Agnes, and the two live happily ever after, as do their friends in Australia.