

DAVID COPPERFIELD

Adapted from the novel of Charles Dickens by Paul Stebbings & Phil Smith. Original score by Thomas Johnson. . For the American Drama Group Europe and TNT Theatre Britain.

Start:

An improvisation with and with the audience – David Peggotty and Clara are playing hide and seek – with much laughter – Clara on stage pointing and Peggotty dashing around trying to find David who hides behind and with audience members as they enter and are seated. Perhaps they start with looking for Clara who is hopeless and easily caught by David. Then Clara can't see David and asks Peggotty for help with finding her spectacles to see where David is – but Peggotty points out they are on her nose. There is much laughter and cuddling when David catches his mother etc. This is a happy family but its also clear that Peggotty is a servant as she is ordered about in a kindly way by Clara and perhaps fusses over and cleans dirt from David. When it is David's turn to hide the other two look for him in the audience and he goes to the stage – the lights change. Music a graveyard – at first frightening and then he arrives at a peaceful grace – the sense of a country graveyard, green and restful not frightening. He starts to speak.

DAVID *now written as DC*: (Spelling name on grave) Da - vid Cop – per –field. Died 1837 in Blunderstone, in the county of Suffolk on the island of England. My name is David Copperfield too I never knew you, the man who named me David – so because I do not know you and you do not know your own son, I am going to tell you who I am – I hope you are not busy, I hope you have nothing better to do or that you are sleeping under this green green grass. I am sure the dead listen to us, if walls have ears surely graves have ears as well. So, here it is, this is my story. Whether I turn out to be the hero of my own life or whether someone else will hold that position I cannot say. I am too young. Look there's my beautiful mother and there's Peggotty her help and my nurse and everybody's friend. She lives by the sea when she is not with us. Well, father, your eyes closed upon the light of this world six months before mine opened on it. If only you had waited, just short while; for I never held your hand in this life. Life – which without a father was...I miss you even if I never knew you but without you I have to confess that our little family is a very happy family.

PEGG: It's time to come in now Mas'r Davey. You and me have to eat our fish.

DC: Where's mother? (man comes and takes Mother away)

PEGG: Gone to Mr Murdstones for supper. She'll come and kiss you good bye in the morning.

DC: Why? Is she going, leaving?

PEGG: No silly, you are – you are comin' away with me for a week or so – to the sea side. To the Peggotty's - it's a grand place for a lad – on a beach by the roarin' sea.

DC: Really! Oh yes, yes please! Take me to the sea! Peggotty do you have crocodiles in the sea at Yarmouth – I think you do!

PEGG: We ain't got no crocodiles in our sea. If there be, I never saw them.

DC: Well this book from my father's library assures me that Yarmouth is full of crocodiles and alligators. There are rather green and eat women who are so tasty (kisses then bites Peggotty in fun – who squeals). They never touch tough boys like me.

PEGG: You are makin' a fool of me, Mas'r Davety. I never seen no crockodil, how big is one?

DC: (Makes a size with hand) About as big as a sardine.

PEGG: That must be why I missed 'em. Good. Better than good. Mas'r Davey – it is well known that Yarmouth town is finest place in the universe!

DC: Really?

PEGG: (Both) Truly. Yarmouth is the finest place in the whole wide world

(MUSIC)

Blackout -the stage is transformed into the Peggotty's boathouse -a washing line hung with fish is set).

SCENE TWO. Yarmouth sands

DAVID: Don't, Emily! It's dangerous to go near the sea!

EMILY: I love it! I love it!

DAVID: It's ...wrong!

EMILY: How can it be bad, it feels lovely! Sand in my toes, water on my skin, salt spray in the air I breathes!

DAVID: No, no!

Emily: I love the wild wind and water, the giant green waves, yes! Yes! Yes!
(EMILY runs and dives into the audience.)

DAVID: Peggotty! Mister Peggotty! Emily's in the sea! Help! Help!

(The PEGGOTTYS come running.)

MISTER PEGGOTTY: Master David Copperfield, what's a going on here, young sir?

DAVID: Emily's in the sea! She's drowning!

MISTER PEGGOTTY: Hohoho! See, Emily's drowning! (Both laugh.)

EMILY: Look at me! Look at me! I'm a mermaid!
(She swims, dances and dives among the audience.)

PEGGOTTY: O, look at the girl, Mister Peggotty!

MISTER PEGGOTTY: In her element again, Peggotty! Come here, Master Copperfield, help us catch the little sprat!

DAVID: I fear she will drown!
(The PEGGOTTYS are beside themselves with laughter).

MR PEGGOTTY: O hohoho! She won't drown, Master David! You are her very best friend but the sea is her friend too – not always mind, for the sea has moods and is spilit so and so if you ask me – one day your friend and another your worst enemy. But today the sea is a smilin' ,isn't it sister?

PEGGOTTY: Oh today the sea is a regular gentleman. A bouncin' our Emily on his lap and smiling with his crestin' waves like laughin' teeth look! Look!

(The PEGGOTTYS take a large net and throw it to EMILY.)

PEGGOTYY: Haul her in, Master Davy, Haul her in! Ain't she a pretty catch.

EMILY: Jump in, master David, jump in! It's grand in the boiling sea! Way-hay!

DAVID: Oh Peggotty's I am all at sea myself! You are extraordinary folk – if I removed your boots I dare say you would have no feet but fins. The Peggotty's are a race of Mermaids and Mermen! Come Emily, we will haul you in – the prettiest catch in the wide sea.

(Takes the net, throws it onto the sea, while the PEGGOTTYS laugh at him fondly. They sing: Cast your net wide.

(DAVID hauls Emily on to the beach. The PEGGOTTYS detach the washing line of fish and wave this about in a dance.)

(Shouting) Make a wish, Davey, make a wish on a fish!

DAVID: O, O! I er wish I could stay here forever with you! Is that not your wish too, Emily? Say yes, say yes!

EMILY: (Not understanding David's emotion') Oh if I have a wish...I..er.. Well, I wish I could be a real lady with fine clothes and a coach and horses and a grand house with servants and... I wish I were to be a lady!

DAVID: You shall be everything you wish to be, Emily.

PEGGOTTY: Oh she is a puss! Why would anyone want to be a Lady when Lady's must be all prim and proper and never feel the sand between their fine toes!

(She is trying to tease Emily but Emily pulls away – this is not a game).

DAVID: (Carefully taking off a shoe and trying the sand and water) OooH oooh – that is - (wiggling toes at audience) that is....I want to stay here forever, Peggotty, and look after Emily and save her from drowning every day!

EMILY: I wasn't going to drown!

DAVID: You ARE a mermaid! (Suddenly he kisses EMILY.)

EMILY: You are dry!

PEGGOTTY: Master David, what would your poor mother say?

DAVID: O yes, I'd forgotten about her! (Crestfallen at the prospect of losing EMILY.) How selfish I am – poor mother has no one but me – and you of course Peggotty, Mother loves you too.

PEGGOTTY: Of course your mum loves you mas'r Davey – but she has- has a friend to -a special friend– no no I don't want to talk about it, I promised not yet – I said to her – I oh I is confus-ed.

David: what did you promise? Who are you talking about?

PEGGOTTY Oh I am all a fluster – crocodiles – let crocodiles eat my tongue – oh it waves and wags too much, what an old gossip – let the Crocodiles eat my tongue – see me Davey –

David: Now Peggotty, a why do you blush? (She throws apron over her head).

Mr PEGG: No you two, come and cast your cares away! I know the jolliest of fishin songs now we caught a net full of fish and young Emily bein' the best catch of all!

PEGG: Oh Mas'r Davey (hugs him – he is suspicious but adored being hugged by Peggotty).).

EMILY: Make me laugh, your songs is like ticklin' trout to me!

PEGGOTTY: Oh what fish, we've swept up with little Emily! What shiners!

MR PEGGOTTY: Ain't it wonderful! The world is so full of fish! (He plunges a knife into a fish he takes from the washing line and smells its innards.) Smell that, Master David! Fresh as a daisy! Aaaaaaah!

PEGGOTTY: O what a catch A catch!

Emily: You'll love this song, Davey, ever since I were a littl'un they sings it to make me laugh when the dark clouds roll across the sea.

DAVID: In truth you are the most extraordinary family in the whole wide world.

ALL SING: Fish fish Fish fish Fish fish Fish fish
What more could we wish But a grand catch with which To slap each other with fish
Slap slap slap slap Slap slap slap slap

Mr PEGG: Now Mas'r Davey, now sister where are your deep frowns like a ploughed field across your for'heads?

(Repeat the song slapping each other with fish. Sudden sound of thunder.)

DAVID: (Points out to sea.) What's that cloud?

EMILY: Storm's a coming! You know Davey, I **do** fear the sea.

DAVID: But you said it was your friend, a better friend than me, and a luckier one since you are never apart!

EMILY: But it's cruel friend Davey. I have seen it be so cruel. I have seen it tear a boat as big as our house all to pieces. And that's how I lost my father. Although I never saw it and I never saw 'im. I were too young.

DAVID. Then we are the same. For I too lost my father

BOTH: We are the same.

EMILY: But I don't miss 'im that I never knew on account of me havin' such wonderful uncle and aunt in these two...shiners! (Hugs Peggottys – all hug).

MR PEGGOTTY: (A rumble of thunder) The sky's darknin'! Bring in the boat, haul in the nets!

PEGGOTTY: You must go home, David! David has to go home! Your poor mother will worry!

MR PEGGOTTY: It's time to go home!

DAVID: I wish I could have two homes home, Peggotty!

PEGGOTTY: And so you do Mas'r Davey, you will always have a home here.

MR PEGGOTTY: Take him home sister!

DAVID: This is my home, Peggotty just said it was!

PEGGOTTY: (hard) Now listen, Master Davey, you must go back home. Your Mam will miss you and...and.. You'll have a father again!

DAVID : Father ? Father? Will I see Father again!

PEGGOTTY: (Upset) I've spoken too much already! New come on home, Mas'r Davey you have to see your Pa!

DAVID: (Terrified) I do not want to see him! I speak to him, but I cannot see him -

PEGGOTTY: O bless him! Come on, Davey! (DAVID relents and allows himself to be led away.)

EMILY: Don't you go forgettin' us, Davey! (To herself) Don't forget us in your grand house wi' servants and fine things, and soft ...(hugging herself) ..soft...

MR PEGGOTTY: Come on, Emily, haul in the nets! Before the storm breaks! (Crashes of thunder).

SCENE 3. (DAVID returns from the PEGOTTY'S, the boathouse is turned round to become a grave again.).

DAVID: Oh Father, what a time I had at Yarmouth by the sea with the Peggottys. And Father, I want to tell you a secret....I cannot confide in Mother – oh no – she is a hopeless keeper of any confidence – now my secret – I am exceedingly young – too young – but my heart knows nothing of my age or sensible affection – so – it is hard to tell even you who keep all my secrets in your cold heart – I am in love with the most adorable Emily.

Mr MURDSTONE: (To Clara/Mother) Why is your boy talking to a grave?

CLARA: It is his father. It has been his practice since he were able to speak.

MR MURD: It is unhealthy. You must restrain him, Clara. If the boy needs a father he will have one will he not? He may converse with me.

CLARA: I – but –

Mr M: Firmness, Clara, you are but a baby at times.

CLARA: I Know. You are so right Edward.

PEGOTTY: Master Davey, leave the graveyard now, young lads should be out playin' laughin'.

DAVID : You said I would have a father again, Peggotty.

PEGGOTTY: And so you have, and so you have - look over there, Davey. (Subdued).

DAVID: - What's happenng? Peggotty? No! Mamma! mamma! She is being married!

ALL: (Sing except DAVID) Happiness and wedded bliss. Happiness and wedded bliss! Let the bride and bridegroom kiss What could be more sweet than this?

ALL: Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

DAVID: Father (appeals to heaven and kneels before the downstage gravestone) take me up to heaven, away, away!

CLARA: David, David, darling Davey. (Going to DAVID and leaving MURDSTONE at the church door).

DAVID : What are you doing with that man, he hugs you as if he were a bear, a foul and monstrous bear!

CLARA: Shush Davey, That's Mamma's friend. That's Mister Murdstone. He is your father now. Mr Murdstone and I are married.

DAVID: SO that's why you sent me away to Yarmouth! You tricked me!

PEGGOTTY: Now it were no trick, Mas'r Davey, just as they needed a little time – a little -

CLARA: Oh how can you be so cruel Davey, I have had to endure so much being alone in the world – would you deny Mamma any happiness?

DAVID: We have been so happy us three. We are a family – why do we need this other man?

CLARA: A boy has need of a father and a woman has need of a husband. I want you to love and respect that gentleman as your other, dear and dead father.

DAVID :I would rather die!

CLARA: Oh Davey! Peggotty, Peggotty tell Davey to be nice.

PEGOTTY: Nice to Such a man as thatThe dear man in that grave would not have him! That I say and that I swear!

CLARA: Great Heavens! You'll drive me mad! Was ever a poor girl so used by a servant! I am married!

PEGGOTTY: Indeed you are, M'am. But It won't do. No price would make it do! No!!

CLARA: You are a cruel thing! Do you want me to burn my face? Or shave my head? I dare say you would! I dare say you would enjoy it if I were to burn my face or scald my skin with boiling water! (CLARA wails and throws herself on the grave next to DAVID). Oh have I betrayed you both? (to grave and DAVID). Am I a nasty, cruel selfish bad, mamma? (DAVID shakes head vigorously). Say yes then and Peggotty will love you and her love is a great deal better than mine! I don't love you at all, do I, Davey? (DAVID nods vigorously, wiping a tear from his eye. DAVID and CLARA stare into each others other's eyes like lovers).

PEGGOTTY: Nobody went so far as to hint at such a thing.

CLARA: My poor boy. I can't bear it!

DAVID: Mother! (Hugging her).

CLARA : Davey! Little Davey!

PEGGOTTY: (Bursting out of her clothes) Oh my buttons my corsets my stays! Oh Master -Davey, I was only trying to make you happy. We should all be happy but we is all so sad.

CLARA: I love you, Davey! (All three weep).

DAVID : Oh why can't we live together forever, Peggotty, Mamma and me?

MURDSTONE: (Going to the grave preceded by his big black dog, Luther).
What's this bleating?) Sheep! Sheep in the graveyard. A scandal. See them off, Luther! ' (Luther bounds over and licks CLARA so she becomes flustered, leaps into the audience and looks for sheep. The dog .has broken up the hugging as . MURDSTONE wished).

MURDSTONE : GOOD DOG, Luther, Heel.(Luther comes to his master). See, a disciplined creature. Obedience is all. (Pats dog).

PEGGOTTY: Weil, I don't like dogs. They is more like slaves than servants. They has no dignity , not like fish.

MURDSTONE: Well, you can return to your rebellious fish. Miss Peggotty, you are dismissed. We have no need of a household servant now that Clara and I are married. My sister will be arriving to order the house. Pack and be off!

CLARA Oh, Edward, surely Peggotty and your sister can both manage the household-

MURDSTONE: Enough, Clara, I have spoken. You would not wish to contradict me in front of servants and children!

CLARA : I am sorry, Edward, I -

MURDSTONE: Then it is settled. Here is half a crown, you should be grateful for our generosity. Now go.

PEGGOTTY: But Mrs Copperfield!

MURDSTONE: Mrs Murdstone! My wife. Out, servant - out! You are dismissed, we have no further need – in my house – of a fishwife!

PEGGOTTY: I hope, M'am. That you will not live to regret this stupidity!

CLARA: Peggotty, I so sorr -

MURD: Silence!

Peggotty exits in a huff and deliberately treads on the dog who howls and hides behind MURDSTONE).

DAVID: Peggotty. I love you, Peggotty!

PEGGOTTY: (Almost gone). I won't forget you, Master Davey, if you ever need me you know where I am with the ...fish, (DAVID and PEGGOTTY sing sadly a reprise) Fish, fish, fish, fish, fish, fish, fish, fish... What more could we wish than a grand catch with which to slap each other with fish...: (She exits).

DAVID: Father, Lazarus rose from the grave – rise too – come back to me and save us all. Just for a day, just for a day, come back to life and if not take me down with you, away, down, away from this! (Falls on grave).

MURDSTONE: Clara , David, you will not come to this grave again. I forbid it! Your love of death is unhealthy. Now that I am husband and father you will direct your love towards me.

CLARA: Yes, husband.

MURDSTONE: The Lord thy God is a jealous God and so am I. I will not compete with a box of bones. Now, David Copperfield, no more tears. No more weak emotion. Be firm. That is the Murdstone motto. Here, shake hands. Let us be the best friends in the world, SON. (He laughs DAVID holds out his left hand).

CLARA: Davey, be nice! (Dog jumps at DAVID and licks him).

DAVID: '(On ground) 'Help! (MURDSTONE is kissing CLARA as the dog licks DAVID, barks and leaps off David so MURDSTONE has to stop kissing CLARA).

CLARA: Oh Edward, I feel so ...happy

DAVID: I have never known anyone like you in all my life.

MURDSTONE: That is because you have never known a proper man in your family, David. And a family, like a body cannot live without a head.

DAVID The Peggottys don't have a head, shouting orders like a soldier. The Peggottys are all arms hugging and mouths that smile, not lips like yours that snarl and bark – yes bark like that dog.

MURDSTONE: (Dog growls). I see you need a firm education, my lad. : Firmness is all.

CLARA : David, Mr Murdstone is your father! You must obey and adore him as I do.

(Smitten -the dog nestles up to MURDSTONE who strokes the dog while CLARA responds as if she is being stroked).

MURD: Good boy, good boy. (To Dog)

CLARA: DAVID, BE A GOOD BOY

DAVID (Subdued) Yes, Mother. (But then steps on the dog who howls).

MURDSTONE: And speaking of a firm hand, my dear sister is waiting at the house. come. Clara, David, Luther. Heel! Heel! FOLLOW ME! (All three bow their heads and march off behind him to meet Miss Murdstone).

Miss MURDSTONE: Welcome home, brother Edward, Clara. I have taken the liberty of rearranging the furniture and making other improvements in the house whilst you were away. I hope you have no objections. (Tries to smile).

CLARA: (Pushed forward by MURDSTONE) Pleased to meet you, Miss Murdstone. But ..oh..(looking round) How you have changed my little house.

MURDSTONE: Our house, Clara.

MURDSTONE & MISS: Home sweet home

CLARA: BUT..

MR M: COME CLARA, LET US RETIRE TO BED.

(BLACKOUT -MURDSTONE & CLARA exit)

MISS MURDSTONE – Edward's sister – enters and rearranges furniture etc – she SINGS a song – the MURDSTONE line).

MISS MURDSTONE: Edward you have inspired a veritable revolution in this household. (Moans) Oh Edward. Firm, firm we must be firm.

CLARA enters, pregnant and carrying a baby and flowers. DAVID Starts to learn by rote, muttering his maths tables through the scene. But MISS MURDSTONE spies her and hides, creeping up behind her as she tries to place them around the bust).

MISS MURDSTONE: What the Devil are you doing, Clara?

CLARA: I thought perhaps we could change..

MISS MURDSTONE: Change? Change! (A thought strikes her) Did my brother ask you to make a change?

CLARA: No but....I thought Edward might like a little colour.. a little life – flowers are so-

MISS MURDSTONE: You "thought Edward might like a little colour" -Did you ask him?

CLARA: No but...

MISS MURDSTONE: Then how would you know?

CLARA: (Begins to answer then changes what she was going to say). There are some things that only a wife knows about her husband.

MISS MURDSTONE: (Furious & jealous) Things! "Things!" Is this a house where people talk openly of such things! Do not try and drive a wedge between me and my brother, woman. You may have your ..."things.....but I have his blood! And our blood is thicker than your watery emotion, my dear sister-only in law! You may have-married him, but I have his -blood!

CLARA: I feel so wretched..I feel ill.

MISS MURDSTONE: Weil, you would go having babies. (Glowers at CLARA's stomach, who begins to cry. DAVID goes to comfort her).

DAVID: Oh Mother...

MISS MURDSTONE: Get back to your books! Give me those flowers! Luther! Luther! (Dog enters, MISS MURDSTONE gives him the flowers and he bounds off). Excellent beast.

MURDSTONE: (Entering, shocked – thinking it aimed at him) I beg your pardon.(He holds his sister's gaze).

MISS MURDSTONE: I must sit down, I am overcome. Clara is such a baby. (Aside) I don't know what you see in the child.

MURDSTONE: What's going on?

MISS MURDSTONE: Clara has been-

MURDSTONE: I was speaking to my wife. Clara, I have told you before that these emotional displays weaken your already fragile health. Do you wish to kill yourself? Then who would bring up young David?

CLARA: No.no...

MURDSTONE: Consider my child, our child (MISS M: "humph") in your belly.

Clara: I want to be a good and loyal wife, Edward. But I am not even permitted to run my own house (CLARA catches herself and puts hand over mouth).

MURDSTONE: "My" house, "My" house?

CLARA: No, er.. "our" house .

MURDSTONE: My house, when you married me your property became mine. You became mine.

CLARA: Yes, Edward but you must understand me, Edward. It's very hard that in "your" house I may not have a word to say about domestic arrangements – I may not so much as move an item of furniture to where I choose, nor order a dish that I desire, nor nor indeed have any function save that of nodding my head to agree with what is already decided for me. I am sure we managed very well in this house before you and I were married....

MURDSTONE: Clara, I wonder at you!

MISS MU: You may have the appearance of a woman but you are no more than a child, as has so often been observed, how can a child organise a household!

CLARA: Oh Edward, don't you like me a little...inexperienced. It pleased you once that I am like a little girl. You told me so.

MURDSTONE: (Embarrassed. His sister shoots him a withering look). I did have a certain satisfaction in the idea that I might form your character and give to it the firmness it lacks. But when my sister comes to this house and performs the work of something like a servant and when she receives no word of thanks from you, then my feelings for you turn to ice. (He turns away and comforts MISS MURDSTONE who pretends to be upset at the ungratefulness).

CLARA: O! OH! I must have your love! I am loving, am I not. (Feeling her case is lost). I am so sorry. Forgive me, I beg of you!

MURDSTONE: Childish emotion will have no effect upon me. I am ice.

CLARA: I implore you to forgive me !

. MISS MURDSTONE: (Callously placing her brother's hand upon CLARA's) Then you will surrender all responsibility for the domestic arrangements of this house?

CLARA: Yes, yes ..all all – here are my keys.(handing over her keys). But let us be friends. I cannot live under this coldness!

(MISS takes the keys but ignores the offered embrace.).

MURDSTONE: WE SHALL ALL BE THE BEST OF FRIENDS. We must all be firm. Firmness is all. Now, David, Mathematics is a healthy discipline, a model for us all. We are going to put you to the test. And then we will send you UP to bed.

DAVID: (Sullen) I don't want to sleep upstairs. I want to sleep in Mamma's room.

CLARA: Oh Davey! You torture me, it is impossible to return to my room.

DAVID: Just as it is impossible to return to any happiness or joy in this wretched house.

CLARA: Oh Davey, would you make me so unbearably sad?

MURDSTONE: How dare you question my authority, my decisions, decisions taken for the good of all of us under this, my roof! And how dare you upset your poor mother who is about to have another child, who I trust will grow up to be a proper child, a correct child who respects his father and all authority. You are a pest, a snake, I shall beat respect into you. Sister, the cane!

MISS MURDSTONE: With pleasure..

DAVID: I shall run away, I shall run away to Emily. Emily will look after me and Mr Peggotty will sing me fine songs of the sea and I will never have to gaze on your vile face again! (He runs to his mother she rocks him at her breast as MURDSTONE takes cane and prepares to thrash David.).

CLARA (To David as stage whisper)

MURDSTONE: We must beat sense into him, beat him like an errant beast.

(They sing as DAVID is flogged).

(CLARA in an attempt to distract MURDSTONE kisses him to the horror of MISS who exclaims "in public". DAVID pushes CLARA and MURDSTONE jealously apart and bites MURDSTONE who howls with rage and as the dog barks goes to hit DAVID but his elbow connects with CLARA who falls over and screams, as LUTHER runs off with the cane).

MURDSTONE: He bites, he bites!. Hold the wretch down, sister. He is worse than a dog. (MISS grabs DAVID by the ear).

DAVID: Mamma!

MURDSTONE: (To CLARA). Now stand up, Child. Stand up I say. It's nothing but a scratch. What? (bends over her). Get up you stupid child. You Cannot trick me. You will have no false sympathy from me. I am a Murdstone!

MISS: Hussy, viper! Your husband commands, obey! You should never have married the useless creature.

MURDSTONE: Silence(Worried) Clara....(Feels her pulse) What has her heart stopped? Oh my little bird., she was always so weak. Her heart, I warned her, I told her not to exert her feelings so.I Oh-Clara that it should come to this, a child, a child in the guise of a woman- my child has been taken up to heaven..(He wants to hold her corpse but he can't and kneels beside her).

DAVID Mamma! Mamma! (He bites MISS MURDSTONE who pursues him offstage. MURDSTONE carries the body of Clara behind the grave The light shifts to the grave which reveals the name CLARA MURDSTONE carved upon it -DAVID emerges with

a placard "IT BITES" round his neck and his hands tied together led on by MISS MURDSTONE who has CLARA's baby in her arms. DAVID kneels and sobs before the grave as the MURDSTONES and their dog stand behind the grave looking down on DAVID).

DAVID: Now you have her again, how selfish you are, father. I despise all fathers, angels, and God. None of you could save my mother! " SINGS: If I had a penny and I lost my penny . I really wouldn't cry If I had a father and I lost my father To live I'd truly try But once I had a mother And now I lose my mother I feel it in my poor bones That I could truly die. (Throws himself in the grave).

MURDSTONE: You are no son of mine. You are merely a tiresome responsibility of mine. I have failed in my responsibility.

MISS: You have spared the rod and the whip, Edward. You have been too gentle. We must rid ourselves of this boy. There is no more room for you in the Murdstone family home, David Copperfield.

MURDSTONE: You are a marvel among women, Sister, a beacon in a dark world. You - You are a difficult subject David. Rebellious.

MISS: Blasphemous.(Dog barks).

MURDSTONE: Your childhood is over.

MISS: Your family is dead.

DAVID: I will find another family.

MIS: If you ever harbour the fantasy of running away to the foul smelling fisher folk – what is their name, brother?

MURD: Piggitty or something.

DAVID: Peggotty!

MISS: These pigs type folk, then beware for my brother will bring the force of the law down on them and ruin them – utterly!

DAVID: Then I will die.

MURDSTONE: Oh, no. You will grow up. I will no longer be your father but I am your legal guardian. You will go to work. After your mother's funeral you will go to work in my bottling factory. You have heard no doubt of my warehouse. It provides employment for other boys I see no reason why you should be not set to work.

MISS: Since education is clearly wasted upon you!

MURDSTONE: I am therefore sending you to London to earn your living, work instils firmness even in so corrupt a child as you David Copperfield.

DAVID: London – I had dreamed of a city of towers and spires where knights and ladies lived in grand palaces. But if palaces and fine Princesses lived there I never saw them. My London is no such place, rather a foul smelling, smoke choked kind of Hell.

Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse is down at the riverside in Blackfriars. It is the last house at the bottom of a narrow street, curving down hill to the river Thames. It is a crazy old house right on the water when the tide is in, and on the mud when the tide is out, and horribly overrun with rats. Its panelled rooms, discoloured with the dirt and smoke of a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant. They are all before me, just as they were in the evil hour when I went among them for the first time, with my trembling hand. Murdstone and Grinby's trade is the supply of wines and spirits to certain ships : a great many empty bottles are one of the consequences of this trade, and many young boys are employed to examine them against the light, and reject those that are cracked, and to rinse and wash them. Then there are labels to be pasted on full bottles, or corks to be fitted to them, or seals to be put upon the corks, or finished bottles to be packed in casks. All this work is my work - No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sink into this slavery.

SCENE FIVE.

(At first bottles come out from the leftside of the grave/huge bottle to be corked by DAVID who then passes them to other hands that come out from the right of the grave -to suitable mechanical music. Then the action halts. DAVID takes a bottle and creeps to the forestage, writing a note and putting it in the bottle):

DAVID: Sweet Emily, I am dying here even if my body lives. If fate is kind may this message reach you and tell you that I will love you and all the Peggotty's forever and a day -even if the ice should cover the sea and the cruel world turn my heart to stone. David Copperfield. Oh grey river Thames take this bottle and wash it to my Emily. (He gives the bottle to the audience, on it is written "please give this to Emily when she next appears on stage").

BOTTLE SONG – David pursued and taunted by bottles.

DAVID: Emily! Peggotty! Help! Help!

SCENE SIX.

(The grave turns to reveal the Peggotty's boathouse, Emily steps forward beachcombing. Hopefully the audience give her the bottle, she may have to improvise about what is washed up on the shore to get the bottle and in the event of not being given it she can find another pre-set. She reads the message Behind her the PEGGOTTY's present a scene of domestic fishing bliss -mending nets,

EMILY: Oh Davey.poor Davey, will I ever see you again?

(NOTE THE SONG/POEM is moved to second Act page 23).

PEGOTTY: Our poor sprat is a sad one tonight,

MR PEGGOTTY: I could wish myself, you see, that our little Em'ly was in a fair way of being married. I could wish to see her hitched to a honest man as had a right to defend her. I don't know how long I may live, or how soon I may die; but I know that if ,my boat was capsized, any night, in a gale of wind in Yarmouth waters here, and was to see the town-lights shining for the last time over the rolling sea as I couldn't make no head against, I could go down quieter for thinking "There's a man ashore there, iron-true to my little Em'ly, God bless her, and no wrong can touch my Em'ly while so be as that man lives.

(Advancing behind Emily as the song ends). Now don't you go a crying sea-salt tears my littl'un.

EMILY: Will we ever see Davey again?

PEGGOTTY: Oh, he's a regular salmon. He'll swim home to us through thick and thin.

EMILY: When? When!

PEGGOTTY: Soon enough. I feel it in my water.

DAVID: (From audience) Oh -oh -ahoy there!

PEGGOTTY: Oh now ain't that a coincidence) Master Davey! (Waves) Master Davey!

Emily: Davey! Davey! Over here!

DAVID: I am here – here and I shall never go away!

MR PEGGOTTY: If I didn't believe in fate I'd find this a bit fishy....

PEGGOTTY: It's the salmon, the salmon in him, a salmon swims round half the world and always comes home to his river of birth.

All CHANT: A salmon, a salmon, Davey is a salmon. (As the bedraggled DAVID hauls himself on-stage).

MR PEGGOTTY: My Master Davey, you do look bedraggled and battered. What storms have been about you?

DAVID: (kissing everyone then with arms around them). I am not master Davey anymore, I am simple plain Davey. And I care not one jot if the Peggottys are humble fishing folk living in a upturned boat. I am one of you. If you will take me, I will be a Peggotty beside the churning seal

Emily: Oh Master Davey, you don't have to change your ways to be with us. You will always be a gentleman to me.

DAVID: And you will always be a lady to me, Emily. A princess! (He crowns her with a lobster pot –all laugh except Emily who is not to happy). Queen of the Yarmouth sand!

Emily: I don't want to be a pretend anymore Davey. And don't you pretend not to be a Gentleman. You always will be and I will always be a nobody that stinks o' stale fish.

MR PEGGOTTY: (Insensitive) You're a puss! You'll always be a puss, that's what you are!

PEGGOTTY: Now don't lets fall to fightin' jus' when we is all together at last! Why Master Davey , what's that placard on your back? .

All: It Bites.

DAVID: Oh I kept it as a trophy, a medal of honour. I bit Mr Ghastly Murdstone (Starts growling and chasing Peggotty who squeals with delight).

MR PEGGOTTY: David let this be your true family. (As all play around him he raises himself up). This shoal of fish. This pod of whales, this school of dolphins! This happy family. What-say-you,--dear-sister?

DAVID: (With Emily on his shoulders) Are you dear Peggotty's real brother?

MR PEGGOTTY: Of coures, now let's sing. There's fish to be gutted.

PEGGOTTY: Altogether now! (All about to sing).

DAVID: Did you never marry, Mr Peggotty?

MR PEGGOTTY: Oh no, I only married the sea,

DAVID: (All about to sing) Is Emily is your true daughter?

PEGGOTTY: Oh Lordey no, Emily is the daughter of Mr Peggotty's brother in law.

DAVID: Dead, Mr Peggotty?

MR PEGGOTTY: Drowned dead.

PEGGOTTY: Altogether now! (All about to sing).

DAVID: Were you never married, Peggotty?

PEGGOTTY: No, but I once had a sweetheart.

DAVID: Dead, Mr Peggotty?

MR PEGGOTTY: Drowned dead.

PEGGOTTY: Altogether now and...

DAVID: Emily, did you ever have a brother?

EMILY: One brother, Bill.

DAVID: And he..?

ALL: Dead, drowned dead.

MR PEGGOTTY: We are altogether now, so....

ALL SING: Fish and family song.

We is all father mother sister Brother son and maybe daughter Quite removed from the common order living and loving, fishing by the sea Not your normal family Tied by mud and mixed up blood

PEG: (Speaks and kisses) Welcome to the Peggottys my lovely little minnow!

EMILY: David, David Peggotty!

DAVID: Sister! I will be a fisherman too! (MURDSTONE enters on a donkey).

EMILY: (Halting the song) Donkeys, Mister Peggotty, real donkeys!

PEGGOTTY & Emily: Donkeys, Mister Peggotty!

DAVID: It's Mr Murdstone! The Devil on a donkey! (Runs behind boat-house and peeks out).

MURDSTONE: The game is over, Peggotty. I have come for the boy. I am his legal father. Give the child to me.

PEGGOTTY: Is that it?

Mr PEGGOTTY: Get off my beach!

MURDSTONE: This document declares my legal rights over the boy. Defy me and you defy the law!

DAVID: Don't let me go, Mr Peggotty. How can he be my father when he hates me so? He is a cruel man and he broke my Mamma's gentle heart!

MURDSTONE: listen to his lies! He goes against divine nature.

PEGGOTTY: What you call "divine nature" is yourself, Mr Murdstone. And I never found You in the bible!

MURDSTONE: The boy is the very Devil, he ran away from honest work.

PEGGOTTY: We'll take our chance with him.

MURDSTONE: I am sending the boy back to work, I am taking David home.

DAVID: The bottles, oh Emily...no! (She hugs him).

PEGGOTTY: You think I don't know what kind of home that might be? (Grabs fish from barrel). The same home where you killed the poor girlchild you married! (She slaps MURDSTONE with fish). That's for Clara the poor sad creature! (Slap).

MURDSTONE too embarrassed to do anything tries to sit astride the donkey and take the blows with dignity). You with your great eyes, smooth and silky. (Slap). My poor girl Clara had never seen such a man! (Slap!) You were to be another father for her Davey and live together in a garden of roses! (Slap) And when you had the little fool in your power you began to break her! (Slap) like a caged bird. (Slap). To sing your music.(Slap). Tyrant! (slap).

MURDSTONE: This is either madness or gin.

PEGGOTTY: You tormented that simple young woman through her boy here. You broke her heart and gave her the wounds she died of! That is why Master Davey hates you now! Don't flinch at the truth! (Hits him on the top of the head with the fish).

MURDSTONE: I..I... keep that wretched child, he is no responsibility of mine now!, let him fall among foul smelling folk! Let him go to the Devil! You You foul fishwife, you -

DAVID: Queen and Empress (Of Peg) – King Emperor (of Mr Peg) Princess Duchess! (Of Emily) You are not fit to kiss their feet!

MR PEGGOTTY: Don't even dare to speak to us!

PEGGOTTY: (Slaps him). Get off of our sand! And take both your ass and your arse with you!

(MURD retreats pelted by fish – they all hug and reprise Family song)

SONG: reprise

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO Scene One.

TIME – song/ clock made from oars etc

Time passes -Mr Peggotty greyer with a stick, Peggotty without rose red cheeks with a shawl, Emily with tied back hair and a longer dress and finally David with scarf and adult hat and long trousers).

SCENE TWO.

(EMILY stands looking out to sea. DAVID emerges with his suitcase, a scarf and hat).

DAVID: Do you remember, Emily, how when we were little children I carved you a wooden heart from a piece of driftwood.

EMILY: Oh yes, Davey.

DAVID: How childish we were! Playing, pretending! You must have thrown it away long ago. (She turns and takes the wooden heart from around her neck so only the public see it). It is time to put away childish things. London is an adult world, it has no place for children or their play. I shall miss you when I am in London. I shall have no one to talk to...heart to heart.

EMILY: Even when you fall in love?

DAVID: Ha ha! I am always in love with something or other! The wonder is that you have never fallen in love.

EMILY: (Ironical) Yes, isn't it a wonder....

DAVID: Duty calls, I must receive an education and learn to earn my keep. That is what must be but in my secret heart I wish I could stay here by the sea with you.

EMILY: Truly? Without you the sea will not be the same.

DAVID: I shall return soon and we shall pretend we are children again and run along the beach hand in hand. Slap, slap! (He misses with his imaginary fish and falls in her arms) Oh sister! (Then he quickly and innocently breaks away from her).

EMILY: (Unhappily) Oh brother. (Enter the Peggottys)

PEGGOTTY: Time to go, Master Davey. The steamship's at the quay. MR

PEGGOTTY: Aye tonight we'll have sad but slap-up mackerel pie. For we will miss you round the table, Davey. Here, take this to London with you. You'll need to pay your learnin' fees.

DAVID: Oh Mr Peggotty that's a great deal of money!

MR PEGGOTTY: Aye there's the guts of many a fish. And this is for your supper. (Hands him a lobster -rubber?)

DAVID: Thank you. I don't know what to say...

EMILY: The ship, Davey, don't miss the ship. (Hugs and kisses).

DAVID: Good bye precious Emily.

EMILY: Take me with you!

DAVID: I can't play games anymore.

EMILY: Not for games!

DAVID: What else could we do? (Hugs her) Dear sister, still playing? (EMILY is crushed by this and DAVID runs off waving down the aisle).

PEGGOTTY: Weil, time for fish tea, Emily.

EMILY: (Throwing her wooden heart into the sea). Oh you can take your fish tea and shove it down your stinking gullet!

MR PEGGOTTY: Emily!

EMILY: I want to be a lady and you've turned me into a fishwife. (Runs off). ...)

EMILY sings:

Here I stand on the hard dead land
My eyes look out to sea
Where my true love lies in the deep
No never more to see
His dark black hair swept from his eyes
His merry laughter was a prize
For which I'd give all that I own
But now my love I am alone
And the dark sea is my lover's bride
Who lies forever by his side.

ACT TWO SCENE THREE.

DAVID: (In an academic gown, pouring over books being tested by his fellow student Steerforth) The case of Barkis versus Micawber. See also Trotwood v versus Lloyds insurances underwriters, cross referred to the appeal court's decision in the divorce settlement of Heep versus Wickfield.~oh.

DAVID: SteerforthI fear that I am not a model student

STEERFORTH: My dear friend, the law is a bore.

SONG OF THE BOOKS: The Law is a bore oh what is it for? Packing our heads with facts that are dead Facts that have no logic nor no sense Why should they try to make a pretence Of believing that all of this dense Fog of history of other folks misery Does anything but kill the finer feeling Grinding down humanity questioning their sanity Their senses are reeling oh for some healing Light and love,.....but the books suck me back Changing me slowly to a legal hack With a brain like a dictionary A heart like a cemetery Oh the Law is a bore but that's what its for To dry us out and block up the spout So everything we want to give and everything we took Is noted down and dried out in one dull book.

DAVID: Steerforth, you are a dear fellow.

STEERFORTH: Fellow I may be, but tonight I am not your fellow student. I am bored. Let's go out and get drunk.

DAVID: I have to finish this case study for the Proctor's Court.

STEERFORTH: I have to get drunk. (Producing a bottle of champagne and two glasses from his bag). How are we to compromise? I know- we both get drunk and the Proctor goes to Hell -Fair? (Opens Champagne).

DAVID: My guardians, the dear Peggottys are poor fishing folk, Steerforth. They saved hard to pay for my studies. For them, I must work . I must study.

STEERFORTH: My dear mamma, a poor widow who scraped together pennies to place me in a fine university - I owe her everything, David. (Mimicking sadness and then struck by an idea). Now wait - Your fisher folk and my mother are proud to have us studying the Law in London?

DAVID: Yes, very proud.

STEER: And are we truly confident that after we have graduated we will secure highly respected and well rewarded positions in the legal profession.

DAVID: I am not confident that my abilities will be so recognised.

STEER: Is it not likely that we will fail to fulfil our potential and their dreams and languish in some obscure office, as some forgotten clerk?

DAVID: It is more than possible, it is probable that fate will treat us so cruelly.

STEERFORTH: Then we must not pass our exams too quickly. We must remain students for as long as humanely possible so my Mamma and you fisherfolk may dream that we may one day be famous lawyers or sage Judges, called to the King's bench. For the sake of those who love us, as an act of kindness and love, let us fail this exam and drink their health. To Mothers and er...Peggottys, cheers!

DAVID: To mothers and Pegottys, cheers! (The books start to rise back up) I say this Champagne tastes damn good! You take a load off my mind, Steerforth. What a capital fellow you really are!

STEERFORTH: Then here's to me, Cheers!

DAVID: To Steerforth, who has saved my life!

STEERFORTH: Another toast.

DAVID: Toast with cheese and sardines!

STEERFORTH: My your wit sparkles like Champagne (raises eyebrows to

heaven). I say, Davey, could you lend me another pound for a second bottle? And can I call you Davey?

DAVID: Of course!

STEERFORTH: Oh, you are such a generous fellow.

DAVID: Am I? Oh. Well then, (with sudden enthusiasm) take the pound.

STEER: Two pounds, wasn't it my dear fellow. Two pounds, we said? Yes?

DAVID: Oh forgive me, Steerforth, of course, two pounds. Now we should drain this bottle don't you think?

STEERFORTH: I hardly ever think. When I do think I think of the ladies....A toast to the delightful Dora.

DAVID: Who?

STEERFORTH: The prettiest, the finest, noblest most voluptuous actress in all London . We are going to meet her tonight at the theatre.

DAVID: Really? Let's go! Dora, Dora I'm already in love with Dora and I haven't even seen her yet!

STEERFORTH: Hurrah!

BOTH: Hurrah! (Run off through audience).

(EMILY arrives in a coat at DAVID's room).

EMILY: David? Davey! (She picks up empty champagne bottle, sees the white glove and the discarded books). Why aren't you here? What are you .-----doing? He has gone to the theatre God save us from the theatre! (Going then turns back, takes a champagne bottle and scribbles a note): I love you David. I love you as a woman, not as a sister. I will find you in all the great ocean of London. ((Exit)

ACT TWO SCENE FOUR.

(The curtain of the theatre descends so only the forestage remains visible.

STEER and DAVID enter from the back of the stalls).

DAVID: I say is that really or tenth bottle of champagne, dear fellow?

STEERFORTH: I neither counted nor care. Champagne like love is all in the quality!

DAVID: Hear, hear!

STEERFORTH: Ssh, we're in the theatre,

BOTH: (Stunned to realise it) Oh my Gawd, we are in the theatre!

DAVID: (Burps) Oh sorry.

STEERFORTH: (Shouts across to someone in the public) Ooh! Hello Sibyll! You are not Sibyll? What's your name. She as beautiful as Sibyll don't you think, David?

DAVID: Ssh I am sorry he's drunk

STEERFORTH: I am so sorry he's drunk (repeat).

BOTH: I am so sorry we are drunk.

DAVID: I say, where do we sit? Do we have a box?

STEERFORTH: Box? box?

DAVID: (Putting up fists, weeping) I love you, Steerforth, I don't want to fight.

STEERFORTH: Davey, you and I will never fight. (Taking his wrists gently) Nor can we afford a box to see the' divine Dora perform. We stand.

DAVID: I can hardly stand...But they (the audience) are all sitting down. I say are they all drunk too? Are you drunk, Sir? ;

STEERFORTH:-No Davey. We shall stand in the wings and watch the divine Diva Dora.

DAVID: How?

STEER: I have influence, I am known.

DAVID: Capital! Splendid! It's such an honour to know someone who is known. Oh Steerforth what influence you have! What...listen this man is a type of god, he treads the earth with more than mortal feet. (They leave the auditorium via a side door or onto the stage and off) I am nothing a nobody, I am not worthy to polish his shoes but he gives me his hand – and raises me up so I walk with Gods!

STEER: Oh Davey, Ssh, it starting – sorry he's drunk.

DAVID: I am drunk he is really sorry.

Enter Dora – as Medea holding two large dolls

MEDEA

I've made up my mind, my friends.

I'll do it—kill my child now, without delay,

and flee this land. I must not hesitate.

No matter what, my child have to die.
Since that's the case, then I, who gave him life
will kill him. Arm yourself for this, my heart.
Why do I put off doing this dreadful act,
since it must be done? Come, pick up the knife,
wretched hand of mine. Pick up the sword,
move to where your life of misery begins.
Don't play the coward. Don't remember now
how much you love him, how you gave them life.
For this short day forget they are your child—
and mourn him later. Although you kill him,
still you love him! (Kills child)

(Blackout then lights up for applause).

DAVID "Bravo" from the wings. They exit. STEER and DAVID appear at the auditorium door.

STEERFORTH: Come my dear Davey now we shall pay a visit to the divine' Dora in her dressing room.

DAVID: How capital! Steerforth you have the key to every door, and that key is charm, my dear fellow – natural- charm! Here's to you you you you charmer!

STEERFORTH: Cheers! To Dionysios the god of wine and theatre! Come!

.(DORA humming to herself and petting her pet dog, Jip, sits on the stage adjusting her hair -the curtain is still down, creating the narrow forestage. STEERFORTH and DAVID "knock" and enter the dressing room proffering flowers. DORA wears heavy make-up and has a dog hand puppet -JIP. The dog barks, yelps and slurps everyone Jip is stroked and petted until everybody is in a fit of eroticism).

STEER: THIS IS MY DEAR FRIEND, THE EMINENT LAWYER, DAVID COPPERFIELD.

DAVID: You , Dora, are a great artist, a genius, a goddess of the stage. Dora - I adore you.

DORA: (Giggling) Adowable, Dorwa!

DAVID & STEERFORTH: Adorable Dora! ..

STEERFORTH: All this charming conversation makes me thirsty. Shall we go to the bar for a bottle of champagne. (To DAVID) I...say –Davey Old fellow, good friend and top sort of man – could you lend me .five pounds for a few days

DAVID: Of course you..can. – five pounds you say – make it ten – ten pounds I insist! All bought with the Peggotty's fish you know and there are plenty of fish in the sea!

STEERFORTH: You are the soul of generosity! (Holds out hand, DAVID shakes it and then realises his mistake and hands over £5).

DAVID: You are my, my best friend I And so are you. (seeing double – they laugh).

DORA: I don't understand.

STEERFORTH: Don't you worry your...{chant with DAVID) pretty little head.

BOTH: Don't you worry your pretty little head.

ALL: Dora mustn't worry her pretty little head.

JIP: Woof woof. (Repeat as the they roll down the aisle and bump into EMILY).

EMILY: Davey! (She holds the bottle out to him).

DAVID: Eh? (Takes bottle and holds it upside down, handing it back to her puzzled because its empty, EMILY sees something is wrong and takes it back).

EMILY: David, David Copperfield. What are you doing?

STEERFORTH: I say, Davey, is this gorgeous creature some secret woman of yours?

DAVID: No no this is my sort of....(Gives up) Oh Emily, how delightful to see you here. Oh the whole world is wonderful.

EMILY: Is it? (She is clutching her bottle).

STEERFORTH: I am mortified, I am laid low. (Falls to his knees and abases himself before Emily) I have not been introduced.

DORA: Oh how funny, weally delightful!

EMILY: Who are your...friends, Davey?

DAVID: Oh darling Emily, this is the finest friend any man had since the world began..end a great lawyer..Master Steerforth. (He tries to pull STEER to his feet but they both collapse). Master Steerforth. This is my ..er..my childhood er..my dear...sweet...(STEER and DORA are nudging each other and giggling suggestively)...almost a..but not quite..because.. not a sister but a sister ..Oh start again. Mister Steerfroth this is Emer-ly. There done it!

EMILY: Are you well, Davey?

DAVID: Neverberra.

DORA: Adowable, Davey-wavey.

DAVID: Oh forgive me. I must introduce... This...this.. (Dora preens) is the most delightful, beautiful, adorable (gazing at DORA), wonderful-

DORA: Dog Jip. Say hello to Jipey, Emily.

EMILY: Hello...Jipey. And who are you?

DAVID: She..., I am the luckiest man in the world...I am in love...with...er..(losing her name)..her. (To Dora who squeals).

EMILY: I am so happy for you. I am going back to the Peggottys, back to Yarmouth. Davey. This is no place for me. I thought you might save me from a life I do not deserve. I am misunderstood in Yarmouth, but nothing like here. You can keep your fine London! ,And as for you Davey, I suggest you ask your fine-friends to take you home to bed, instantly! Good bye!

STEERFORTH: (Stopping her, suddenly sober, sinister and powerful) Miss Emily, you will find people everywhere very much the same. None of us can run away from our desires. We cannot cut ourselves off from our own hearts. Can you tear yourself away from your own insides? What you know in your heart, what you feel in your gut? Then you will become a thing of pieces. And the life in you is too beautiful to disappear. Please, for the sake of suffering humanity, stay! Our senses exist only to see, taste and touch. I exist to appreciate you, to experience you. Stay here, Emily, always, stay, stay! (Fearful Emily runs away, leaving her bottle with STEERFORTH as she pushes away from him. He shrugs and seeing the note reads and pockets it).

DAVID: Emily, Emily don't move about so.

STEERFORTH: What an angel.

DORA: How can an angel stink of fish?

STEERFORTH: She is indeed an aboriginal sort of angel, but damn pretty.

DAVID: The whole world is moving. Dora why are there two of you. One for Steerforth and one for me?

DORA: I don't understand.

DAVID: I think I have to go to bed...Emily said so. Where is Emily I must find her – I must -

STEERFORTH: But Dora said she wants to go to the bar.

DAVID: Did she? Oh then I must go to the bar. I love Dora. Dora I love you!

DORA: And I love you too, and Jipey loves you, don't you Jip. Woof woof!

DAVID: I want to show you how much I love you, Dora, but just now I need to be sick. (Runs off and vomits in the wings).

STEERFORTH: David, oh!

DORA: Charming weally charming! (She and STEER fall into each others arms, he kisses her). What an idiot. How does such a clever felwow as dear Steerforth endure so great a fool as David Copperfiewd?

STEER: Oh he has his uses. And so, Dora, do you (Kisses her, JIP whines).

DORA: Oh you naughty man, let's go to the bar! (Still in each others arms they stagger down the aisle). But please get rid of that tedious David creature.

STEERFORTH: Steerforth will steer him home and then gallop to your rescue. You do need rescuing from your admirers, don't you Dora?

DORA: Hurry back, dear Steerforth! I am a feather and you are the wind. (Exits)

STEER: Davey, are you there, old fellow? I say, Davey?

ACT TWO SCENE FIVE.

(Darkness, a cock crows red dawn, DAVID sits holding his head in a dressing gown. BOTTLES appear and chase him round the stage).

DAVID: Ssh...oh my head. I will never touch another drink again...

DAVID: (Sings) I will never drink again not another bottle

Bottles: You drained us last night and now we come to throttle Choke and churn you!

DAVID: Away, away I curse and spurn you!

Bottles: Too late, too late you poured down our poison

So we will hammer on and on and on Flattening your brain!

DAVID: I complain, the pain, the pain, I shall go insane!

Bottles: Beating on your head!

DAVID: Wishing I was dead!

Bottles: Sawing up your skull

DAVID: I am not feeling well!

Bott: Squeezing your eye balls

DAVID: How low can a man fall?

Bott: Hell bottled Hell, Hell bottled Hell, Hell bottled Hell.

DAVID: I am not feeling well, the pain the pain the pain.

BOTT: Champagne, champagne, champagne.

DAVID: Oooh! I'll never ever touch a drop of drink again.

ONE Bottle:: Back to the bottle factory David!

DAVID: I heard what you said, rejoin the living dead I am drained and pickled My mouths as dry as sand Is this my own hand? My life blood bleeds away I gave my heart and head away The springs of life are bled dry and I join the living dead...why?

STEERFORTH: (Enters and catches the raving DAVID in his arms) My oh my, can't my good friend hold his drink? Hair-of-the-dog? (Offers a flask).

DAVID: Woof!-Woof! (Rolls back) Ugh!-Jip...No. Steerforth!

STEERFORTH: Here put your coat on. (Taking off his dressing gown).

DAVID: Where are we going?

STEERFORTH: To Yarmouth of course. It was you who promised Emily you would go there today.

DAVID: Did I?

STEERFORTH: That is why I have booked us on the steamship to Yarmouth. The tickets were four pounds, old chap. (Holds out hand, DAVID pays up after only a moment's hesitation).

DAVID: My stomach.

STEERFORTH: Up you get. Big steps, deep breaths, there. (STEER is marching him up and down the room like a puppet master).

DAVID: That's a bit better, thank you Steerforth. Oh my head. Oh Dora. Is it possible to be in such love and such pain at the same time?

STEERFORTH: Is it possible for a woman to be so wonderful and have such a disgusting dog?

DAVID: Oh I love Dora, oh I do feel ...(Rushes off and is sick, returns looking white). I think I should stay here and work, my books, my exams, what will I tell the Peggottys?

STEERFORTH: Tell them you miss them all, your true dear family. Tell them you are yearning for Yarmouth, the finest place in the whole wide world, paradise beside the sea. and above all- tell them that their paradise is incomplete without your great friend, Steerforth. (Bundling DAVID up in hat and coat).

DAVID: Yes, yes you are absolutely right -but then you always are right. (Exit).

ACT TWO SCENE SIX:

.(The Peggottys' boathouse -the Peggottys, Emily, DAVID, STEERFORTH are all reaching a musical climax -an extended ecstatic ending of the fish slapping song- after which they applaud each other). .

MR PEG: My oh my, Master Davey, your fine friend Steerforth is the life and soul of our little party!

PEGGOTTY: Its an honour and privet hedge to have such gentleman here in our humble boat.

STEERFORTH: Oh a boat is never humble, dear hosts. A boat rides the sea and the sea is the darkest, deepest most mysterious thing in the wide world. (Looking at Emily).

DAVID: Emily, have you forgiven me my high spirits in London? I must confess to having been drunk and...in love. (Blushes).

EMILY: There is nothing to forgive. I am sorry. I should never have gone to London. It is not my place.

MR PEGGOTTY: Your place is here with us, Emily. (Putting arm round her, first her shoulder then her waist. She kisses him on the cheek).

STEERFORTH: There is no finer place in all of England. It is so wonderfully flat – and the better for it. There is a sharp bracing air; the sea is crisp and clear; the sun sheds of light, if not much warmth; and everything is fresh and lively. I am so fresh and lively myself, in the pleasure of being here, that I could stop strangers in the street and shake hands with them!

DAVID: I knew you would love it here, Steerforth. And I knew you would all love Steerforth as I do.

PEGGOTIY & MR PEGGOTIY: We do! We do!

DAVID: I would like you to know, Steerforth, that you are surrounded by bloaters. (All giggle).

STEERFORTH: Are they some kind of wild tribe?

MR PEGG: Bloaters is what we calls folks from Yarmouth.

EMILY: (With an irony unnoticed by all except Steerforth) And a bloater is also a type of fish.

DAVID: It is well known to those who have the good fortune to be born Bloaters, that Yarmouth is the finest place in the universe.

PEGG and Mr PEGG: (but not Emily who looks away) True all true!

STEER: (Hint of patronising that Emily catches) I am indeed convinced. Ah Yarmouth.

PEGGOTIY: And now young masters, we're going to feed you up. Why you're thin as herring bones!

MR PEG: Come Emily, let's prepare dinner.

EMILY: And Steerforth, you will sing us the noble song you promised before dinner?

STEERFORTH: Indeed I shall. For you are nature's aristocrats and you deserve no less! (The Peggottys "OOOH" and retire upstage Steerforth takes David to one side) Emily is not your true sister, is she?

DAVID: Why do you ask that question?

STEERFORTH: Ah-ha. You are jealous. You want to keep her all to yourself. A woman in London and a woman by the sea. What a devil you are!

DAVID: Steerforth, why.....(Changing) You are joking of course! Why you are a merry soul!

STEERFORTH: Yes, it was a joke – but a cruel one. (sighs) . David, sometimes I am afraid of myself.

DAVID: You are afraid of none else, for sure. What fun we are having! They are such simple people here, I hope you don't mind them?

STEERFORTH: It is a charming little place. And your Emily is a sweet thing.

DAVID: They are the happiest people on earth.

STEERFORTH: Yes so, there's a pretty wide separation between them and us, They are not to be expected to be as sensitive as we are. They are not delicate as we are not shocked, nor hurt easily. They are wonderfully good , I dare say—but they have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that, like their coarse rough skins, they are not easily wounded.' 'Really!'

DAVID: Ah, Steerforth! It's well for you to joke about the poor! You may try to hide your sympathies in jest from me, but I know you better.

STEERFORTH: Help me, David, how I can hate myself. It would be better to be this poor Peggotty, or any foolish fisherman ,than to be myself, and be the torment to myself that I have been, in this Devil's bark of a boat within the last half-hour!

DAVID: Dear friend, there is no demon in your soul. You have charmed us all, it is only yourself you have confused – do not trouble yourself that you are too charming. There is no Devil in that. It is a gift, it is a goodness.

STEER: . David, I wish to God I had had a wise father these last twenty years!

DAVID: My dear Steerforth, what is the matter?'

STEER: I wish with all my soul I had been better guided! I wish with all my soul I could guide myself better!

DAVID: You, I and poor Emily have all lost so much in losing a father so young. But we are not lost, not at all. Believe me.

STEER: Well, I am heavy company for myself, sometimes. Forgive me. I cast a long shadow on the innocent happiness of you and your tribe of Bloaters!

DAVID: When I see how perfectly you understand them, how wonderfully you can enter into happiness like this plain fisherman's, or humour a love like my old nurse's, I know that every joy or sorrow and emotion of such simple people moves you. And I admire and love you for it, Steerforth, twenty times the more!

STEER: I believe you are truthful, and are good, Davey, I wish we all were! Come! (Shouting). Dear dear Pegotty's, place your cooking pots aside. For I mean to sing you a song!

EMILY: Oh please, Steerforth. Sing us a song. A noble song, a fine song.

PEGGOTTY: (Laughing) No fish.

STEER: An aria.

EMILY: (Serious) Let your song have wings.

(STEERFORTH sings a Neapolitan song which entrances EMILY, which then becomes a Tarantella and he dances with her whirling her around the stage as the others clap and DAVID dances with PEGGOTTY who ends up knocking over STEER and EMILY and they all end up in a heap but STEER takes EMILY's hand and raises her to her feet).

EMILY: My poor rough hand, Steerforth, it has spent too long in salt water.

DAVID: No, no, sister, that is a sweet hand, the hand of an angel that any mortal man would lay down his life to place a ring upon and call his own.

MR PEGGOTTY: Now we've dinner to prepare. Davey, come and help me gut the fish, while my sister fries the sprats . Emily!

EMILY: Yes Mr Peggotty.

MR PEGGOTTY: Why dont you take this young gentlemen down to the lobster pots? You can show him our fine fishing boat by the by. She's a corker of a boat, Sir.

DAVID: Oh that will cheer you up, Steerforth! A walk on the beach and a fine fish supper! (PEGGOTTY cooks fish & sings a song which MR PEGG and DAVID join in. It continues softly -they with their backs to the audience as if preparing a meal).

SONG: Basting and pasting Poaching and grilling Barbecue, steam and stew There's so many ways to do A dish of fine fresh fish. (The song becomes threatening and erotic as necessary but never pulls focus).

Emily: Will you come with me, Sir?

Steerforth: Call me Steerforth, Master Steerforth.

Emily: Master Steerforth (knowing).

STEERFORTH: This is a wild kind of place, is it not? Dismal enough in the dark, and the sea roars as if it were hungry for us.

Emily: The boat is not far off.

STEER: Will we see in the dark, Emily?

EMILY: Oh the moon is quite enough.

STEERFORTH: But I cannot see.

EMILY: Then take my hand. (They walk towards the small boat).

STEERFORTH: So you sail in this?

EMILY: Oh yes.

STEERFORTH: It's so small.

EMILY: It serves.

STEERFORTH: Is it safe in a storm?

EMILY: It serves.

STEERFORTH: You've been in this in a storm?

STEERFORTH: Rocking and bucking. (the boat is bobbing gently at anchor).
How does it feel?

EMILY: I ain't sick.

STEERFORTH: Show me how it feels to be rocked and bucked by the sea. (Without replying she rocks the boat in its mooring). You know that David loves you, don't you? But he needs to be told that he can love you. You do love him, don't you?

EMILY: He's too much of a gentleman now, for me to tell him such things.

STEERFORTH: I am not a gentleman, so you can tell me what you feel.

EMILY: I cannot!

STEERFORTH: So you find me ugly, repulsive?

EMILY: No, no....Master Steerforth....I find you....you are...

STEERFORTH: I know what I am. But imagine if I were David. What would you say? Here on an imaginary sea, in an imaginary boat, in an imaginary storm, what would you say to an imaginary David?

EMILY: (Still the boat rocks) I would say that I love him.

STEERFORTH: Say it.

EMILY: I love him.

STEERFORTH: Now imagine I am him.

EMILY: I love you.

STEERFORTH: And what would you do?

EMILY: Master Steerforth!

STEERFORTH: Oon't you know what you would do in an imaginary boat, on an imaginary sea in an imaginary storm?

EMILY: Yes... (The cooking fish song is rising behind them).

STEERFORTH: Fish? Would you play at fish!

EMILY: No, not I don't want to be a fishwife. I must be better than that.

STEER: And what would you be, if you could be anything that you desired?

EMILY: I would be a lady. A fine lady.

STEERFORTH: (Ironical) And how could I possibly help you to become that?

(They fall among the nets and the song,
reaches a hearty crescendo).

Mr PEGGOTTY: My oh my what a tasty dish!

PEGGOTIY: Dinner! (Out of the door) Ahoy you two beachcombers, super fish supper!

DAVID: Oh listen to the wind in the rigging, the sighing of the sea. Oh I could never be more happy than this! (There begins low sung storm music which underlies the rest of the scene).

MR PEGG: There's more than a sighing out there tonight. I see a storm rising.

EMILY: (Rising entangled with nets) Curse them! Take me away from all this Steerforth, make me a lady!

STEERFORTH: Haven't I just made you a lady?

EMILY: Truly?

STEERFORTH: What else is a lady but a gentleman's pleasure. Get out of the boat.

EMILY: What do you mean?

STEERFORTH: Out! (Throws her tangled in the nets "out" of the boat and pushes off with an oar.

EMILY: What are you doing?

STEERFORTH: Sorry to throw you out like a gutted fish. But you've nothing left inside now, nothing for my taste. It's a dirty trick I know. But pity me too, girl. I am in torment. Pity me, forever locked in this nightmare where the Devil steers my boat, the Devil steers my soul!

EMILY: (Screams) NO! (DAVID and MR PEGGOTTY come running out of the "house" PEGGOTTY follows with a full frying pan of fish. EMILY rolls over weeping in the nets, hidden to view. But throughout these scenes the wind has been rising and now there is a flash of lightening and a roll of thunder).

MR PEGGOTTY: The boat, the boat. She's out to sea!

PEGGOTTY: And the sky, the sky Mr Peggotty!

DAVID: Steerforth! Emily! What can they be doing?

MR PEGGOTTY: Oh she's taken him for a spin round the bay, nothing more, Davey. Why she a young sprat!

DAVID: But the storm, Mr Peggotty.

MR PEGGOTTY: Why Emily has ridden a hundred storms.

PEGGOTTY: But the boat, the boat is making heavy weather, Mr Peggotty. I don't like it, why don't she put her prow into the wind?

MR PEGGOTTY: The girl's gone mad, the prow, the prow. Turn the boat into the swell!

DAVID: Emily!

MR PEGGOTTY: She'll capsize. The boat!

PEGGOTTY: It's bad, I feel it in my water!

DAVID: A wave, no!

All: She's sunk!

DAVID: Gone. (Dazed).

MR PEGGOTTY: The lifeline, Peggotty, throw me the line. I'll save 'ern!

DAVID: No, Mr Peggotty. I am a young man. Tie me!

MR PEGGOTTY: Wise words, Davey. (Ties rope to DAVID's waist)

PEGGOTTY: Oh Davey, Davey Godspeed!

PEGGOTTYS: (Sing as they pull). Heave hol Heave hol Pull on the rope We heave end pull! with love and hope! Heave hol Heave hol Heave hol

(DAVID forges forward to the sound of a storm - he returns pulled to the stage with the dead and dripping corpse of Steerforth -rolling it onto the stage and hauling himself up with the help of the Peggottys).

DAVID: My friend, the best of men. Speak, speak. It is no use.

MR PEGGOTTY: How the sea fishes us.

DAVID: How noble he looks, He can never do more wrong. I love him now more than ever.

PEGGOTTY: And Emily? Oh mercy!

MR PEGGOTTY: Emily, Emily too has been swallowed by the sea. Drowned dead.

EMILY: (Appearing in torn clothes and netting.) I am dead, as good as dead.

DAVID: Sister!

PEG: Child!

MR PEGG: My mermaid! (Overlapping).

EMILY: (As they go towards her). Don't touch me. Don't come near me. Don't touch my skin! (She has a gutting knife. She looks at Steerforth's body) So, as dead as me. He promised to turn me into a lady and I promised to love him. He promised to turn me into his lady but he made me into his whore. (Falls to her knees, DAVID goes to comfort her but is sharply pulled back by MR PEGGOTTY).

PEGOTTY: O Lor!

DAVEY: Sister!

MR PEGGOTTY: Don't touch her, Master David. You heard her, even she knows it! Foul thing! How did you let him near you?

EMILY: He called me his lady, he made me think of ..Davey.

DC: What!

MR PEGGOTTY: Worser still!

EMILY: I've always wanted you David, and he knew it.

DAVID: Emily, sister!

EMILY: Sister, sister I am not your sister! (DC stands back in horror).

MR PEGGOTTY: Have you been scheming for my Emily? Scheming for my little (weeping) Mermaid. All you fine gentlemen, nothing better than wolves! Come here, Emily....(She hesitates, looks to David who looks away, she is poised between DAVID and MR PEGG, having to decide where to go). Leave Davey be, leave all these fine folk be. Take my hand, coarse skin or no. It is our flesh and blood.

PEGGOTTY: Stay your hand, brother. Let her heart speak.

EMILY: David, try to help me! Mr. David, for the sake of old times, do, please, try to help me! I want to be a better girl than I am. I want to feel a hundred times more thankful than I do. I want to feel more, what a blessed thing it is to be the wife of a good man, and to lead a good life not as a lady but as..... Oh me, oh me! Oh my heart, my heart!

DAVID: When I was a child on this beach, what happiness (I thought) if we were married, and were going away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields, never growing older, never growing wiser, children eve, laying down our heads on moss at night, in a sweet sleep of purity and peace, and buried by the birds when we were dead! I know now. I have been as blind as I have been foolish, I loved you then and I love you now.

(They kiss).

THE END

Paul Stebbings
TNT theatre
paul@tnt-theatre.net
www.Adg-europe.com