

# How To Tell If You Are In A Charles Dickens Novel

By [Mallory Ortberg](#) on April 22, 2014 in [How To Tell If You're In a Novel](#)



*Previously in [this series](#): How to tell if you are in a [Muriel Spark novel](#).*

You have no legs and your name is alliterative.

Your father and mother have died at least once in the last year.

Your only friend is a prostitute with a terrible wracking cough, and you have never had anything to eat even once.

You are a thinly veiled caricature of

Hans Christian Andersen.

Someone you have always believed to be dead is not dead at all, and has become very rich raising cattle in Australia, and wants to give you all of his money.

Everyone you know is covered in soot, or has died in a tragically ironic railroad accident.

Your ambitions are thwarted.

Your greatest wish is to someday see the ocean or have a pair of shoes you can call your very own. You work as a slave for a woman who is ten feet tall and

breathes fire.

You are amazed to discover your long-lost brother in an unruly mob, but he does not want you to recognize him.

The only thing more evil than a headmaster is a landlord.

You are a duke who regularly ties orphans to the wheels of his carriage; you laugh uproariously while men grind their teeth and imagine your death.

A sweet, poor girl is desperately in love with you, and you neither appreciate nor deserve her.

You are an adept at recognizing handwriting. You have only to see a letter once, but you will remember the hand that wrote it for the rest of your days.

There is a clove-studded ham as big almost as you on the table. You are separated from it by a window, and an entire world.

The grim Spectres of Want and Poverty are at your door!!!!!!

Every week, your serial adventures end in yet another nail-biting cliffhanger.

A sinister man you find hiding in the ash-heap one afternoon claims to be your benefactor. You do not see him again for fifteen years, until your fortunes have quite changed entirely.

You walk home with a man you have only known for six months from church, and catch a cold as a result of your moral laxity. The cold turns into pneumonia, and within a fortnight your beauty is quite ruined; you are lucky to have escaped with your life. The young man in question hangs himself.

You are either ruddy, stout, or flint-eyed.

A foolish woman owns a small, ridiculous dog.

A coachman treats you saucily.

There is a secret in your family, that if you were to find it out, the shock would kill you.

You never meant to tell this story, on any account, but all those who could be offended by your humble words therein have long since gone to their torment or their reward, as the good Lord would have it.

A strange man dies the night before his execution, but he dies at peace with himself and the world around him.

A man whose name is almost exactly Murder is trying to kill you.

Every day you are beaten until you are killed.