David Copperfield

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES DICKENS

Dickens drew heavily on his own life story while writing *David Copperfield*, and the parallels extend all the way back to Dickens's birth. Like David, Dickens was born to middle-class but relatively poor parents. His father John worked as a clerk in a naval office but habitually owed money (and in fact served as the inspiration for *David Copperfield*'s Mr. Micawber). When John Dickens was eventually imprisoned for his debts, his twelve-year-old son was pulled out of school and sent to work in a blacking (boot polish) factory to financially support his family. Although Dickens was ultimately able to return to school, he found the experience of working at the factory incredibly traumatic and frequently drew on it when he began to make a living as a writer—first as a journalist and then, after the 1836 publication of *The Pickwick Papers*, as a novelist. David Copperfield's romantic frustrations also owe something to Dickens's life: Dickens' marriage to Catherine Hogarth, though happy at first, had become so strained by 1858 that the couple separated (Dickens himself was likely having an affair with the actress Ellen Ternan at the time). Dickens died of a stroke in 1870, having written a total of fifteen novels along with numerous short stories, essays, and articles.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although a rigid class system had long been a feature of British society, Dickens wrote *David Copperfield* at a time when social stratification was worsening and becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. Although the Industrial Revolution had made a handful of entrepreneurs wealthier than ever, England's new factories relied on labor from a vast number of poor workers with minimal legal protections. Child labor, for instance, was commonplace, and attempts at reform often did little to address the problem. For example, an 1833 act limited children ages eleven to eighteen to twelve-hour work days, and the act only applied to textile workers. Meanwhile, the ongoing trend of urbanization contributed to a decline in living standards for the poor. In *David Copperfield*, the overcrowding, pollution, and disease associated with nineteenth-century city life figure prominently in the chapters surrounding Martha Endell. However, the wealth generated by industrialization also contributed to the rise of a professional middle class distinct from both the aristocracy and the working poor. David himself is also a product of the economic changes that took place over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

David Copperfield was Dickens' first experiment with the bildungsroman genre, but it was not his last: *Great Expectations*, published in 1861, also charts a young man's rise from an impoverished and abusive childhood, but ultimately takes a much darker tone, challenging some of *David Copperfield*'s optimistic assumptions about merit and success. Famous examples of the bildungsroman include Goethe's 1796 novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (which popularized the genre), and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (which, like *David Copperfield*, is written as a first-person memoir but features a female narrator and protagonist).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Personal History, Experience, and Observations of David Copperfield the Young, Of Blunderstone Rookery, Which He Never Meant to be Published on Any Account
- **When Written:** 1848–1850
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** Published in serial form between 1849 and 1850, then published as a novel in 1850
- **Literary Period:** Victorian
- **Genre:** Bildungsroman, autobiographical novel
- **Setting:** Victorian England (primarily London, but also Dover, Yarmouth, Suffolk, and Canterbury), Switzerland.
- **Climax:** James Steerforth and Ham Peggotty die in a storm off the coast of Yarmouth, and the Micawbers, Mr. Peggotty, Little Em'ly, and Martha depart for Australia.
- **Antagonist:** Uriah Heep, Mr. Murdstone
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

The Man Who Came to Dinner. Uriah Heep's physical appearance might have been inspired in part by the writer Hans Christian Andersen, whom Dickens met shortly before he began writing *David Copperfield*. Ironically, however, Dickens and Andersen were on very good terms at the time, and it was not until a decade later that Dickens took a disliking to Andersen's personality. In 1857, a planned short stay with the Dickens family stretched to five whole weeks, and Andersen's eccentric behavior—which included lying down crying on the front lawn over a bad review—further irritated Dickens.

Quoth the Raven. Charles Dickens had a succession of pet ravens, all named "Grip," one of whom probably served as the inspiration for Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven": Dickens brought the bird with him to his 1842 tour of America, during which he

met Poe.

PLOT SUMMARY

David Copperfield states his intention to tell the story of his life, beginning from the very moment of his birth. This takes place six months after the death of his father (also named David Copperfield). David's earliest memories are of a happy, makeshift family consisting of himself, his mother Clara, and the motherly housekeeper, Peggotty. When David is seven or eight years old, however, Clara begins to spend a great deal of time with a man named Mr. Murdstone, whom David instinctively dislikes and fears. Eventually, Peggotty takes David on a trip to see her brother, Mr. Peggotty, who is a fisherman in Yarmouth. David enjoys the visit—particularly Mr. Peggotty's niece, little Em'ly, whom David becomes infatuated with. When he and Peggotty return home, however, David learns that his mother and Mr. Murdstone have married, and that Mr. Murdstone's sister, Miss Murdstone, has come to live with them. Both Mr. and Miss Murdstone are bullies determined to have their way, and they use David as a pawn in their efforts to train Clara to behave "firmly."

The Murdstones spitefully send David away to a boarding school run by an abusive headmaster named Mr. Creakle. David's time at the school is not entirely unhappy, as he befriends Tommy Traddles, a kindhearted boy, and James Steerforth, an older, wealthy, and charismatic student who takes David under his wing. David's schooling ends abruptly, however, when he hears that both his mother and her new baby have died.

After Clara's funeral, Mr. Murdstone puts David to work in a London counting-house that he owns. David is miserable and longs to continue with his education. The one bright spot in his life is the Micawbers: an impoverished but good-natured family David lodges with. However, Mr. Micawber eventually moves his family to the country in the hopes of securing a job and digging himself out of debt. Now entirely alone, David decides to run away and throw himself on his great-aunt's mercy. After a difficult journey entirely on foot, David makes it to Dover and finds Miss Betsey's cottage. She is initially unsure of what to do with him, but when the Murdstones pay Miss Betsey a visit, she lectures them for abusing David and driving Clara to her death. Showing the Murdstones to the door, she then announces that she and Mr. Dick—a mentally disabled man who lives with her—will be David's guardians going forward.

Miss Betsey places David in a school run by a kindly, absent-minded man named Doctor Strong. Because the school is in Canterbury, David lodges with Miss Betsey's lawyer, Mr. Wickfield. David becomes good friends with Wickfield's daughter Agnes—a kind and patient girl who is devoted to her widower father. However, David is somewhat unnerved by the presence of Mr. Wickfield's clerk and apprentice, Uriah Heep, who has a cloying and self-deprecating demeanor.

One day, while passing through London, David runs into Steerforth. David visits Steerforth's home, where he meets both Steerforth's mother, Mrs. Steerforth, and a young, sarcastic woman named Rosa Dartle—Steerforth's cousin, who has a **scar** on her face from a time when Steerforth threw a hammer at her. Steerforth then accompanies David to visit the Peggottys. While at Mr. Peggotty's, David learns that Emily is now engaged to her cousin Ham. Unfortunately, David does not notice that Emily doesn't seem especially happy about the engagement, or that both she and Steerforth seem taken with one another—even when Steerforth buys a boat and names it the *Little Em'ly*.

David takes up Miss Betsey's suggestion that he become apprenticed to a proctor. She takes him to meet a proctor named Francis Spenlow and then helps him find a room to rent in London. He eventually visits Agnes and learns that her home life is in disarray: Mr. Wickfield is now drinking more than ever thanks to the encouragement of Uriah, who has positioned himself to become Wickfield's partner.

David encounters Uriah himself shortly after this conversation and learns that he intends on marrying Agnes—something that makes David almost murderously angry. He is soon distracted, however, by falling deliriously in love with Mr. Spenlow's daughter, Dora—a sweet but pampered girl. He also reconnects with Traddles (now studying to be a lawyer and saving to marry his fiancée, Sophy Crewler) and Mr. Micawber, who is as plagued by financial difficulties as ever and has somehow roped Traddles into them.

David receives word that Peggotty's husband, Barkis, is dying, so David travels to Yarmouth. After Barkis dies, his family discovers that he had managed to save up quite a bit of money, so Peggotty travels to London to sort out the will, with plans to meet David and her family at Mr. Peggotty's that night. Ham shows up late and distraught, with a letter from Emily explaining that she has run away with Steerforth in order to become a "lady." Mr. Peggoty and David travel to London to speak with Steerforth's mother, who is unsympathetic. She offers Mr. Peggotty money for the loss of his niece and complains bitterly of the rift Steerforth's actions have caused within her own family.

David returns to London to see Dora, and the two eventually become secretly engaged. Not long afterwards, David returns to his lodgings one evening to find Mr. Dick and Miss Betsey, who confesses that she is "ruined." Miss Betsey explains that she lost her money in a string of bad investments. Mr. Wickfield and Uriah Heep stop by later, and David is dismayed to see that Wickfield looks sicker and more beaten down than ever.

Although David is working harder than ever, his relationship with Dora suffers two setbacks. First, he tries to impress upon her that his financial circumstances have changed, and that it

would therefore be helpful if she learned a bit about doing housework and keeping accounts—a suggestion that only upsets Dora. Worse yet, Mr. Spenlow angrily rejects his daughter's engagement. Shortly after this, Mr. Spenlow dies of a sudden "fit," and is revealed to have been deeply in debt at the time of his death.

On his aunt's request, David goes to Dover to see what is going on at her cottage, which is being let out. This gives David an opportunity to visit the Micawbers (Mr. Micawber now works for Uriah) and observe Uriah's influence on the Wickfield household firsthand: Mr. Wickfield is visibly enraged when Uriah brings up the possibility of marrying Agnes but also says he is powerless to do anything about his "torturer" Uriah and speaks bitterly of his own failings and weaknesses. Agnes, meanwhile, is increasingly sad and anxious but helpfully offers David advice on how to court Dora.

David and Traddles visit Dora's aunts, who agree to allow David to pay visits to Dora but not become engaged to her (at least not yet). Meanwhile, David learns of more "mischief" on Uriah's part: he has insinuated to Doctor Strong that his young wife, Annie, is having an affair with her cousin Jack Maldon—a misunderstanding only resolved years later, when Mr. Dick takes it upon himself to clear the air between Doctor and Mrs. Strong. What's more, David receives a letter from Mrs. Micawber saying that her husband has become cold and distant since he began working for Uriah.

Time passes, and David and Dora are finally able to marry. While the couple is generally happy together, it gradually becomes clear that David expects more of Dora than she can give him. David attempts to instruct her several times on how to run a household, but this distresses her, and he always gives up. Dora eventually becomes pregnant, but either miscarries or gives birth to a child that dies almost immediately. The experience weakens her physically, and David slowly comes to terms with the realization that his marriage will never meet his expectations.

Meanwhile, through Rosa Dartle and Steerforth's servant, Littimer, David learns that Steerforth eventually grew tired of Emily and attempted to marry her off to Littimer, but Emily escaped. David and Mr. Peggotty track down Martha Endell—a "fallen" woman Emily was once kind to—and ask her to be on the lookout for Emily. Martha eventually succeeds and leads Mr. Peggotty and David to Emily. Mr. Peggotty later informs David that he intends to take her with him to Australia to start a new life.

Shortly after this, David, Miss Betsey, and Traddles travel to Dover for a meeting that Mr. Micawber has requested. Agnes, Uriah, and Mrs. Heep are also present at this meeting. Mr. Micawber reveals everything he knows about Uriah Heep's underhanded dealings: that Uriah forced Micawber to work for him by loaning him money, and that Uriah encouraged Mr. Wickfield's alcoholism in order to blackmail him over a series of illegal business dealings Wickfield had ostensibly entered into (but which Uriah himself was in fact guilty of, having forged Mr. Wickfield's signature). Mr. Micawber explains that he has documents proving his claims, and Uriah is ultimately forced to relinquish total control of the partnership to Mr. Wickfield.

Soon, Dora dies, but David is too preoccupied dealing with the fallout from Mr. Micawber's revelations to properly mourn her death. The Micawbers are as impoverished as ever and have decided to seek their fortunes in Australia along with Mr. Peggotty, little Em'ly, Martha, and Mrs. Gummidge. Before David sees them off, he travels to Yarmouth to deliver a message from Emily to Ham. As David arrives in Yarmouth, a storm is blowing in from the sea, and he eventually learns of a shipwreck along the coast. When David travels down to the beach, he sees Ham hard at work trying to rescue those on board only to drown in the attempt. Not long afterwards, the body of one of the ship's passengers washes ashore, and David realizes it is Steerforth.

David spends roughly a year traveling around Europe in an attempt to recover and gradually comes to the realization that he is in love with Agnes. When David returns to England, Agnes and David resume their friendship and eventually declare their love for one another. They marry, and the narrative skips ahead ten years to a visit from Mr. Peggotty, who has achieved modest financial success as a farmer. He says that Emily did eventually learn about Ham's death, but that she is generally doing well.

David closes his account by reflecting fondly on those closest to him—including Miss Betsey, Mr. Dick, Peggotty, and Traddles—and the role they continue to play in his life. He contrasts this with images of the superficial high society people like Jack Maldon inhabit, and with the mutual animosity and loss that binds Mrs. Steerforth and Rosa Dartle together. Above all, though, David is thankful for Agnes, and he prays that he will see her even as he dies, guiding him "upward."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

David Copperfield – David Copperfield is both the protagonist and narrator of the novel, which takes the form of his autobiography and follows his life from birth to marriage and family. He is the son of Clara and David Copperfield but is orphaned at a young age and raised largely by his great-aunt, Miss Betsey Trotwood. Although David comes from a middle-class family background, his father's impracticality and his mother's remarriage to Mr. Murdstone mean that David spends much of his youth forced to make his own way in the world, haunted by the threat of poverty. David works hard to achieve financial security, working multiple jobs at the same time and eventually finding lasting success as a writer. The necessity of earning his own living has a beneficial effect on

David's character; as a child, David is fairly meek and passive, but the experiences he goes through force him to develop a more active and independent streak, in line with Victorian gender expectations. Nevertheless, many aspects of David's personality remain constant over time—particularly his dreamy and sensitive nature, coupled with a vivid memory and a tendency toward nostalgia. His personal life is tumultuous, largely because he unwisely marries Dora Spenlow at a young age. Although the two feel real affection for one another, Dora's childishness prevents their relationship from maturing and deepening. It is only when Dora dies and David marries Agnes Wickfield that he finds an emotional and intellectual companion.

Agnes Wickfield – Agnes Wickfield is the daughter of Mr. Wickfield, a lawyer with whom David boards while attending Doctor Strong's school. Agnes and David become good friends growing up together, although in Agnes's case, this friendship masks deeper, romantic feelings. Following Dora's death, David eventually realizes that he loves Agnes as well, and the two marry and have several children together. Agnes is forced to grow up quickly due to her mother's death and her father's enduring alcoholism. When David meets her for the first time, Agnes acts as Mr. Wickfield's "housekeeper," more or less running the family's domestic affairs and providing her father with emotional support. In this role, Agnes is competent, loyal, and compassionate, but the strain of taking care of her father does begin to wear on her—particularly when Mr. Wickfield's apprentice, Uriah Heep, uses his position to assume control of the legal practice and to attempt to pressure Agnes into marriage. She is also deeply saddened by David's marriage to Dora Spenlow, not only because Agnes herself is in love with him, but also because she foresees that the marriage will not make David happy. Ultimately, however, Agnes's patience and devotion are rewarded, and the book's final pages depict her as the ideal Victorian woman and wife: selfless, supportive, wise, and virtuous.

Miss Betsey Trotwood – Betsey Trotwood is David's great-aunt on his father's side. Although she disapproved of David Copperfield's marriage to Clara, she is present for David's birth because she hopes the child will be a girl. As a young woman, Miss Betsey married a man who abused her, and the relationship permanently soured her on the male sex. Nevertheless, she is moved by David's plight when he comes to her after running away from the counting-house, and she refuses to send him back to Mr. Murdstone. From that point onward, she becomes a parental figure for David, putting him through school and offering advice and support even after he has grown to adulthood. Outwardly, Miss Betsey is a no-nonsense and even gruff woman who intimidates Clara Copperfield, Peggotty, and (initially) even David himself. Her tough exterior, however, conceals deep compassion and respect for her family and friends. This is particularly evident in her relationship with Mr. Dick, a mentally disabled man whom Miss Betsey not only rescues from an asylum but then lives with and treats as an equal. In fact, Miss Betsey displays tenderness and concern even towards people she professes to disapprove of. Although quite critical of Clara's (and later Dora Spenlow's) childishness and naiveté, Miss Betsey nevertheless speaks out for both women's rights to be treated kindly and respectfully by their husbands. The novel implies that some of Miss Betsey's outer hardness is a matter of necessity; since she separated from her husband, she has been living as an entirely independent woman, which was not an easy feat in Victorian England.

James Steerforth – James Steerforth one of David's classmates at Salem School. The two become close friends, but the relationship dynamic is uneven; Steerforth is charismatic, wealthy, and several years older than David, so many of their interactions involve an element of coercion. Nevertheless, Steerforth seems to truly harbor some affection for David, and David, for his part, idolizes Steerforth. The two reconnect as young adults but suffer a permanent falling out when Steerforth seduces and runs away with little Em'ly, whom David had introduced him to and harbored romantic feelings for. Steerforth eventually abandons Emily, attempting to marry her off to his servant, Littimer. He later dies in storm at sea that also results in the death of Ham Peggotty, who was attempting to save him. Throughout *David Copperfield*, Steerforth is difficult to classify as either a hero or a villain. He is unusually intelligent and charming, and David retains some positive feelings toward him even after the harm he causes to little Em'ly and her family. Ultimately, David comes to believe that Steerforth's upbringing ruined his character. The death of Steerforth's father, indulgent treatment by Steerforth's mother, and (above all) Steerforth's very privileged class position formed him into a reckless and self-absorbed man. Steerforth has essentially never learned to think through the consequences of his actions, particularly when they impact people he has been raised to think of as less than fully human (such as the working-class Peggottys). Steerforth's cousin and ex-sweetheart, Rosa Dartle, also suggests that Mrs. Steerforth is to blame for her son's callousness and irresponsibility.

Dora Spenlow – Dora Spenlow is David's first wife and Mr. Spenlow's daughter. Mr. Spenlow is a proctor for whom David is working when he and Dora first meet. She and David develop a youthful infatuation with one another and eventually marry, though not until after Mr. Spenlow, who objects to the match, has died. Although Mr. Spenlow ultimately proves to have exaggerated his fortune, it is true that Dora lived an extremely easy and luxurious life growing up as her father's only child. As a result, she is somewhat spoiled and frivolous. Much to David's dismay, she has never learned to budget money or keep accounts. These tendencies are exacerbated by Victorian gender norms, which, for women of Dora's social standing,

tended to stress the acquisition of ornamental skills over practical or intellectual ones. Dora thus loves music, dancing, and teaching her dog, **Jip**, tricks, but she lacks the ability to run her husband's household or even fully empathize with his interests and pursuits. David initially finds this frustrating and attempts to reshape Dora's character to be more serious and mature. These efforts only distress Dora, however, and David eventually reconciles himself to accepting his wife for who she is. Nevertheless, Dora remains conscious of the fact that she has been a disappointment to her husband, and this knowledge perhaps contributes to her decline and death. Dora suggests on her deathbed that it would have been better if she and David had "loved each other as a boy and girl, and forgotten it."

Uriah Heep – Uriah Heep is one of the novel's primary antagonists, becoming the main villain shortly after David escapes from Mr. Murdstone's control. He is initially introduced as an apprentice at Mr. Wickfield's legal practice, but he eventually becomes Mr. Wickfield's partner. It turns out, however, that Uriah has secured his position through a variety of underhanded and illegal means: in addition to encouraging Mr. Wickfield's drinking habit, he exploited his employer's resulting confusion by forging his signature on multiple questionable business dealings, and then threatening to expose Mr. Wickfield's supposed crimes. Throughout this period, Uriah has also been attempting to force Mr. Wickfield's daughter, Agnes, to marry him as a way of cementing his power in the household. Uriah comes from a working-class background that he has not been able to fully cast off even in his position at Mr. Wickfield's legal practice. For instance, he retains the speech patterns of a lower-class person (dropping the initial H in words). To complicate matters further, the constraints of the Victorian class system mean that Uriah can only express his hopes for advancement in a backhanded way by insisting that he is too "umble" to have any ambitions at all. As a result, Uriah intensely resents anyone who occupies a more respected or privileged position in society—particularly David, perhaps because the two men are otherwise so similar. In fact, Dickens implies that Uriah wishes to marry Agnes at least in part because he senses that David is in love with her, and hopes to cause his rival pain. As the novel ends, Uriah is in prison, claiming to have been reformed. His protestations ring hollow, however, because they refer to the same "humbleness" that Uriah has used throughout the novel as a way of advancing socially.

Little Em'ly (Emily) – Little Em'ly is the niece of Mr. Peggotty, who raises her and her cousin Ham (both are orphans whose fathers have died at sea). David meets her on a childhood trip to Yarmouth, where her relatives work in the fishing industry. The two quickly become friends and childhood sweethearts, but any possibility of a romance between the two ends when David introduces Emily—now a grown woman and Ham's fiancée—to James Steerforth. The two run off together but do not marry, permanently ruining Emily's reputation. After several years living together, Steerforth abandons Emily and attempts to marry her off to his servant, Littimer. Emily refuses, however, and has nearly had to resort to prostitution to support herself by the time her uncle finds her. Mr. Peggotty eventually decides to take little Em'ly to Australia, where she will be able to begin a new life and escape her stained reputation. The fact that Emily ultimately leaves the country (and the narrative) for Australia is perhaps an indication that the novel cannot reconcile the problems she poses for Victorian gender norms. Like Dora Spenlow, little Em'ly exemplifies some of the tensions surrounding female gender roles in Victorian England. David, for instance, repeatedly describes Em'ly as flirtatious but also suggests that the behavior he sees as coquettish (and therefore inappropriately sexual) could simply be shyness, which is a feminine virtue. It also seems likely that Em'ly's affair with Steerforth is motivated at least in part by ambition rather than sexual desire; as a child, Emily repeatedly expresses the wish to escape her working-class surroundings, and marrying (or sleeping) above one's station was one of the only avenues for social advancement available to Victorian women.

Tommy Traddles – Tommy Traddles is David's classmate and friend from Salem House. He is an unusually cheerful boy, particularly given that he receives more abuse from Mr. Creakle than any of the other students. What's more, he is extremely kind and loyal, as evidenced by his outspoken criticism when Steerforth bullies Mr. Mell and ultimately gets him fired. These qualities persists into adulthood, when Traddles diligently pursues his legal studies in the hopes of one day saving up enough money to marry his longtime sweetheart, Sophy Crewler. This makes him something of a foil to David, who applies himself steadfastly to his career but whose romantic attentions wander from little Em'ly to Dora Spenlow before finally settling on Agnes Wickfield.

Peggotty – Clara Peggotty, who goes by Peggotty, is the Copperfield family servant, acting as Clara Copperfield's housekeeper and David's nurse. She is exceptionally loyal to the family and refuses to desert Clara Copperfield even after her marriage to Mr. Murdstone—a match Peggotty clearly disapproves of. This is partly a reflection of her affection for Clara herself, but it also speaks to the role she plays in David's life as a second mother figure. Since Clara herself is largely unable to stand up for or even comfort her son after her remarriage, Peggotty fills the gap. She is eventually fired by Miss Murdstone, and after living briefly with her brother, Mr. Peggotty, Clara decides to marry a cart driver named Mr. Barkis. The marriage is mostly a practical one, since it makes it easier for her to remain in touch with David. She remains a steady, moral influence in David's life for the remainder of the narrative.

Mr. Dick – Mr. Dick is a "distant connexion" of Miss Betsey who

now lives with her. Technically, he is one of David's guardians, but in practice he functions more as a friend than as a parent. Mr. Dick is friendly and good-natured, but he has an unspecified mental illness or disability, which among other things causes him to believe that he has assumed some of the "troubles" of King Charles I after the latter's execution in 1649. This preoccupation with Charles I is a source of distress to Mr. Dick, in part because it continuously intrudes into the "**Memorial**"—or memoir—that he is trying to write. As a result of his eccentricities, Mr. Dick has suffered at the hands of his family—particularly his brother, who attempted to place him in an asylum for life. Miss Betsey strongly implies that the trauma of this experience is at least partially responsible for Mr. Dick's current condition, though she also staunchly defends his underlying wisdom. Her trust in Mr. Dick is not misplaced, since he eventually repays the favor, working to help support Miss Betsey when her finances suffer and mending the rift between Doctor Strong and his wife, Annie.

Mr. Murdstone – Edward Murdstone is Clara Copperfield's second husband, whom she marries when David is roughly eight. Murdstone is handsome and capable of being quite charming, although David instinctively distrusts him from the start (probably in part because of his own jealousy). After the marriage, however, it quickly becomes clear that Murdstone is dictatorial and cruel. Together with his sister, Miss Murdstone, he attempts to teach Clara "firmness"—supposedly for her own good, but more likely because he enjoys bending people to his will. He is even nastier to David, whom he uses as a means of manipulating Clara and eventually beats for botching his lessons. After Clara's death, he pulls David out of school and sends him to work at a counting-house he partially owns. David loses touch with Mr. Murdstone after running away to Miss Betsey's, but he learns years later that he has married another naïve and impressionable young woman he can control. With all that said, there is a hint of humanity to Mr. Murdstone: his love for Clara is possessive and twisted, but he does seem genuinely grieved by her death.

Mr. Micawber – Wilkins Micawber is married to Mrs. Micawber, with whom he has several children. He is a "shabby" but "genteel" man who is perpetually in debt. He speaks in flowery language—a sign that he aspires to something beyond his lower-middle class life—and is prone to wild swings of emotion; visits from creditors tend to send him into fits of despair, but he typically recovers within a few hours in the certainty that "something will turn up." David first encounters the Micawbers when he rents a room from them while working at the counting-house. He grows deeply attached to them but soon realizes that Mr. Micawber cannot be trusted to manage money. David suggests, however, that Micawber's financial difficulties are not the result of laziness, since he is capable of working quite industriously when he knows that doing so will benefit other people. This becomes particularly clear when Mr. Micawber uses his position as Uriah Heep's clerk to expose his employer's wrongdoings. Ultimately, Micawber and his family relocate to Australia—a less rigid and stratified society, where Micawber is finally able to achieve success and stability as a magistrate.

Clara Copperfield – Clara Copperfield is David's mother. She married his father (also named David) at a very young age, and never fully matures herself; she has no skill when it comes to managing the household, for instance, and she is prone to childish outbursts of temper when someone (typically her servant, Peggotty) draws attention to her more foolish decisions. She is basically good-natured, however, and leads a happy life until she meets Mr. Murdstone, who skillfully plays on her vanity and thoughtlessness in order to seduce her into marriage. Murdstone's attempts to teach his wife "firmness" quickly break her spirit, and although Clara outwardly complies with her husband's wishes, she becomes increasingly anxious and unhappy as time goes on. Her physical health declines after giving birth to a second child, and she dies while David is in his second term at Salem House. The loss of his mother, whom he had idolized, is deeply traumatizing for David, and Dickens implies that it plays a large role in his decision to marry Dora Spenlow—a woman whose personality closely resembles that of Clara Copperfield.

Mrs. Micawber – Emma Micawber is Mr. Micawber's wife. She is perpetually stressed and overworked, both because of her husband's financial difficulties and because the couple has a large (and growing) number of children. Nevertheless, she is a devoted wife who goes out of her way to make her husband's life easier—for instance, by pawning various possessions in an effort to pay off his debts. She also insists repeatedly that she will "never desert Mr. Micawber," although in this case, there is probably an element of self-reassurance at work: she often brings up the possibility of leaving when no one else has done so. Generally, however, the Micawbers seem to be well-matched, with Mrs. Micawber sharing her husband's tendency for dramatic, exaggerated words and gestures.

Miss Murdstone – Jane Murdstone is Mr. Murdstone's sister; she comes to live at the Rookery following her brother's marriage to Clara Copperfield, ostensibly to relieve Clara of some of the housework. Miss Murdstone resembles her brother closely in both looks and personality and takes just as much (if not more) pleasure as he does in controlling Clara and terrorizing David. It is not clear whether this obsessive devotion to Mr. Murdstone's plans reflects genuine love for her brother or simply a desire to exercise her own authority. Regardless, in Miss Murdstone's unofficial position as housekeeper, she quickly overhauls the household according to strict ideas about efficiency and organization (this is also a power play, since it makes Clara and David feel like guests in their own home). Later in the novel, Miss Murdstone resurfaces as an impediment to David and Dora Spenlow's love affair,

which she attempts to thwart by informing Dora's father, Mr. Spenlow, of the couple's intention to marry. Miss Murdstone's involvement in this episode underscores the similarities between Dora and Clara.

Mr. Peggotty – Daniel Peggotty is Peggotty's brother and little Em'ly and Ham Peggotty's uncle. He works as a fisherman in Yarmouth, where he lives in a beached boat that he has converted into a house. Mr. Peggotty's defining trait is his generosity; he provides a home not only for his orphaned niece and nephew, but also for Mrs. Gummidge—his former business partner's grumpy widow. Mr. Peggotty's patient and forgiving nature become important in the aftermath of little Em'ly's elopement with James Steerforth. In the Victorian era, women who engaged in premarital sex were subject to extreme social censure, but Mr. Peggotty's sole concern when he learns of Emily's "sin" is to find her and bring her home. He is ultimately successful, and then moves to Australia for the sake of his niece, who will be able to start a new life there.

Ham Peggotty – Ham Peggotty is Mr. Peggotty's nephew and little Em'ly's cousin. He shares both his uncle's generous nature and his reliance on the sea for a living: he is a boat-builder by trade. Despite being several years older than Emily, Ham is deeply in love with his cousin, and the two are at one point engaged to be married. Little Em'ly, however, clearly has misgivings about the relationship, since she aspires to something beyond a working-class life. Ham therefore blames himself when Emily elopes with James Steerforth, saying he should have noticed Emily's discomfort with the prospect of marrying him. Still, Emily's desertion wounds Ham, who afterwards dedicates himself exclusively to his work. He retains his kindness and nobility to the last, however, ultimately drowning in an attempt to rescue the passengers of a sinking boat—one of whom is Steerforth himself.

Mr. Wickfield – Mr. Wickfield is Miss Betsey's lawyer and friend, who graciously allows David to board with him while attending Doctor Strong's school. He is a widower and consequently dotes on his daughter Agnes, whom he regards as his only reason for living. Mr. Wickfield's grief is heavily implied to have played a role in his alcoholism, which his apprentice (and later partner) Uriah Heep treacherously encourages. Over the course of the novel, Mr. Wickfield mentally deteriorates to such an extent that Uriah is able to convince him that he himself is responsible for the illegal business dealings that Uriah has undertaken. Fortunately, Mr. Micawber is eventually able to clear Mr. Wickfield's name by revealing Uriah's crimes, and Wickfield's life measurably improves as a result: he quits drinking and relinquishes the more obsessive side of his love for Agnes, freeing her to marry David.

Rosa Dartle – Rosa Dartle is an orphaned relation of James Steerforth; after the death of Rosa's parents, Mrs. Steerforth engaged her as a companion. Rosa and Steerforth therefore grew up together and at one point were sweethearts—according to Rosa, she was the object of Steerforth's "truest" love. Unfortunately, Steerforth's spoiled upbringing and consequent selfishness ruined any possibility of a lasting relationship between the two. Although Rosa continued to love Steerforth exclusively and obsessively, Steerforth flirted with Rosa as a way of passing the time between what is implied to be a string of lovers. These experiences permanently twist Rosa's character, turning her into a bitter, sarcastic, and angry woman who vents her frustrations on those she sees as responsible for her own misery—most notably, little Em'ly and Mrs. Steerforth. Rosa's warped personality is echoed in her physical appearance; she bears a **scar** on her face from a time when Steerforth lost his temper and threw a hammer at her.

Doctor Strong – Doctor Strong is the headmaster of the school David attends in Canterbury. He is an aging, scholarly man whose primary goal in life is to develop a new dictionary. Nevertheless, he is extremely considerate of those around him and is generous to a fault: for instance, he either does not notice or does not care that his mother-in-law, Mrs. Markleham, is using him to advance her relatives' prospects. Doctor Strong's kindness makes him a favorite with his students but actually places some strain on his marriage. In his selflessness, Doctor Strong assumes that if his wife, Annie, truly is having an affair with her cousin, Jack Maldon, it is the Doctor's own fault for marrying a woman so much younger than himself. This leads him to push Annie away, much to her distress, and the misunderstanding is ultimately resolved only through Mr. Dick's intervention.

Annie Strong – Annie Strong is Doctor Strong's wife. She is much younger than her husband, who had previously been a friend of her father's. Combined with the fact that Annie once had a childhood romance with her cousin, Jack Maldon, this causes several people, including Mr. Wickfield, to suspect her of having an affair. In reality, Annie loves and admires her husband deeply and regards her previous infatuation Maldon as misguided. She does not feel capable of sharing these feelings with Doctor Strong, however, in part because she views herself as unworthy of him, and in part because she is ashamed of the way her mother, Mrs. Markleham, exploits Annie's marriage for her own advantage. Uriah Heep encourages these misunderstandings, and Annie and her husband remain somewhat estranged until Mr. Dick clears the air between them.

Mr. Mell – Mr. Mell is the junior teacher at Salem House. Despite being a kind and intelligent man, he is unable to accomplish much as a teacher thanks to the overall atmosphere of brutality at the school. He has a soft spot for David, however, which unfortunately gets him into trouble. After picking David up at the coach station, Mr. Mell had taken him along when he paid a visit to his mother in an almshouse. David later told Steerforth about this episode, who in turn uses it to bully Mr.

Mell and eventually get him fired: when Mr. Creakle learns of Mr. Mell's impoverished background, he dismisses him on the ground that he does not want a "beggar" as a teacher at his school. David feels intense guilt over the role he played in Mr. Mell's dismissal and is therefore delighted when he learns—in a letter from Mr. Micawber—that Mell has achieved success as a headmaster at a school in Australia.

Mr. Creakle – Mr. Creakle is the headmaster at Salem House and is a soft-spoken but extremely violent man. His background is in business rather than education, and he has no real interest in his students except as a source of income. He is also a sadistic bully, and enjoys beating the boys for supposed infractions (although he is careful to remain on Steerforth's good side on account of his family's wealth). Creakle's cruelty also extends into his family life; his wife and daughter seem frightened of him, and he is rumored to have disowned a son. Creakle reemerges at the end of the novel as a magistrate who treats the prisoners under his jurisdiction (including Uriah Heep and Mr. Littimer) better than he ever treated his students.

Mrs. Heep – Mrs. Heep Uriah Heep's widowed mother. She loves her son obsessively and shares many traits with him—above all, a self-serving insistence on her own "humbleness." David first meets Mrs. Heep when he goes to have tea at Uriah's house, and she very skillfully supports her son's attempts to wheedle information out of David. Although David eventually comes to dislike Mrs. Heep intensely, he reluctantly admits that her feeling for her son is real: for instance, when the truth about Uriah's actions begins to come to light, Mrs. Heep begs her son to confess in the hopes of receiving a lesser punishment.

Mr. Barkis – Mr. Barkis is a cart driver who frequently takes David back and forth from the Rookery to Yarmouth. He rarely speaks (and then only in very short sentences), but he develops a lasting admiration for Peggotty, in part because he likes her cooking. He therefore has David act as a go-between, asking him to inform Peggotty that "Barkis is willing [to be married]." The two eventually do marry, with David's blessing, and have what seems to be a comfortable marriage overall. Although Peggotty remarks more than once that Barkis can be "near" (stingy), even this turns out to be a mark of his affection for his wife; after Barkis's death, it emerges that he has saved up a small fortune, which he divides between his wife, Mr. Peggotty, little Em'ly, and David himself.

Martha Endell – Martha is a Yarmouth woman who used to go to school with little Em'ly. By the time both women are grown, however, Martha has become an outcast; the strong implication is that she has had a premarital affair. Emily is one of the few people in Yarmouth who continues to treat Martha kindly, much to the frustration of Ham, who views Martha as a potential source of corruption. Emily even goes so far as to loan Martha some money, although it doesn't seem to do her much good in the short term; when David next encounters Martha in London, she hints that she is working as a prostitute. She has not forgotten Emily's kindness, however, and eventually helps reunite Emily with Mr. Peggotty. In fact, Martha even accompanies the Peggottys to Australia, where she starts a new life by marrying a farmworker.

Jack Maldon – Jack Maldon is the ne'er-do-well cousin of Annie Strong. The two were childhood sweethearts but later grew apart—probably because of Maldon's self-absorption and laziness. Maldon continues to hang around Annie after her marriage to Doctor Strong, in part because he hopes she will use her influence with her husband to find Maldon a job. Maldon is so persistent that people close to the Strongs begin to suspect that Annie is having an affair with him. Eventually, Mr. Wickfield attempts to remove Maldon from Annie's side by securing a job for him in India. Maldon is characteristically ungrateful for the position and eventually returns to England, where he continues to take advantage of the Doctor's generosity.

Mrs. Markleham – Mrs. Markleham is Annie Strong's mother. She lives with her daughter and son-in-law, and becomes known as the "Old Soldier" amongst Doctor Strong's students because she is constantly strategizing about how to manipulate the Doctor into advancing her family's standing. In doing this, she has no qualms about using her daughter. For instance, she encourages Doctor Strong to send Annie out to concerts and parties simply so that she can go along as well. Annie is ashamed of her mother's behavior but is powerless to stop it (at least before Mr. Dick brings the issue out into the open).

Mrs. Gummidge – Mrs. Gummidge is an elderly woman who lives with Mr. Peggotty; she is the widow of his former business partner, and he therefore feels responsible for her. For much of the novel, Mrs. Gummidge repays Mr. Peggotty's kindness with nothing but complaints (although Mr. Peggotty generously attributes her constant state of self-pity to grief). After little Em'ly runs away with James Steerforth, however, Mrs. Gummidge's manner changes entirely, and she selflessly supports Mr. Peggotty in his attempts to find his niece. After Emily and Mr. Peggotty are reunited, Mrs. Gummidge goes with them to Australia.

Mrs. Steerforth – Mrs. Steerforth is James Steerforth's widowed mother. She is unhealthily attached to her son and consequently allows him to do whatever he wants, causing him to grow up to be a spoiled and reckless man. When Steerforth elopes with little Em'ly, however, it becomes clear that Mrs. Steerforth's love for her son is selfish at heart; she views the relationship as a betrayal and refuses to have anything to do with Steerforth unless he leaves Emily. Nevertheless, she is devastated by the news of Steerforth's death—particularly because Rosa Dartle savagely reminds Mrs. Steerforth that she herself had a hand in it.

Littimer – Littimer is James Steerforth's servant. David initially

finds him intimidating because he has a very proper and slightly condescending manner. As time goes on, it becomes clear that part of Littimer's duties include cleaning up Steerforth's messes: he acts as a go-between for Steerforth and little Em'ly in the early stages of their affair, and Steerforth leaves Emily in Littimer's protection once the affair has ended (the idea being that she will marry him). Emily resists, however, and Steerforth dismisses Littimer when he learns that his servant attempted to compel her to marry him (or possibly sleep with him). David later encounters Littimer in prison, where he has been jailed for robbing his latest employer.

Mr. Omer – Mr. Omer is an undertaker in Yarmouth. David meets him and his family for the first time when he is being fitted with clothes for Clara Copperfield's funeral. Despite (or perhaps because of) his line of work, Mr. Omer is remarkably cheerful and calm even when discussing funeral arrangements. He also does some general work as a tailor, and employs little Em'ly for a while as a seamstress.

Tungay – Tungay is a grumpy, one-legged man who worked with Mr. Creakle in the hops business before following his employer to Salem House. He acts partly as a caretaker, but his primary job is to support Creakle in terrorizing his students; Creakle, for instance, has an unusually quiet voice, so Tungay often repeats what he says at a shout.

Mr. Spenlow – Francis Spenlow is a proctor for whom David works after finishing his studies at Doctor Strong's school. He is generally a good-natured man, but he is very protective of his daughter, Dora, and absolutely forbids David from marrying her when he learns of their engagement. Mr. Spenlow also spoils Dora, which becomes a problem when it is discovered (after Spenlow's sudden death from a heart attack) that he is deeply in debt. David and Dora eventually marry, but Dora is never entirely able to adjust to the less luxurious life she leads after her father's death.

Miss Mowcher – Miss Mowcher is a hairdresser and a friend of James Steerforth. When David first meets her, he is put off by her loud and flighty manner. After Steerforth runs away with little Em'ly, however, Miss Mowcher visits David and explains that her earlier demeanor was just an act she puts on to secure work; because of her appearance (she is a dwarf), she would find it hard to earn a living otherwise. She also admits that Littimer tricked her into delivering a message from Steerforth to Emily, and says that she wants to make amends for the role she played in their relationship. She ultimately does so by helping to catch Littimer stealing from his most recent master.

Mr. Chillip – Mr. Chillip is the doctor who delivered David. He is a kind but timid man, as evidenced by his fear of Miss Betsey and his tendency to attribute all of his opinions to his wife. However, when David reencounters him late in the novel, he is eventually able to coax Chillip into condemning the actions of Miss Murdstone and Mr. Murdstone, who has once again married a young and well-off widow.

Mrs. Crupp – Mrs. Crupp is David's landlady (and to some extent housekeeper) during his early years in London. She is an alcoholic who frequently helps herself to David's liquor, and she resents the attempts of others (particularly Miss Betsey) to keep house. She does, however, seem to harbor some genuine affection for David, who at one point confides in her about his love for Dora.

Minnie – Mr. Omer's daughter, Minnie, is a seamstress in her father's shop. When David first meets Minnie (just before Clara's funeral), she is being courted by Joram—a carpenter who also works in Omer's shop. The two later marry and have at least two children together, including a daughter (also named Minnie) who is close with little Em'ly. Minnie, meanwhile, disapproves of what she sees as Emily's forwardness and ambition, but is nevertheless upset when she learns that Emily has run away with Steerforth.

Miss Lavinia Spenlow – Miss Lavinia is one of Mr. Spenlow's sisters. Along with her sister, Clarissa, Lavinia takes Dora in after Mr. Spenlow's sudden death. She frequently alludes to a past romance with a man named Pidger, although David privately doubts that there was much to the supposed relationship. Nevertheless, Lavinia's taste for romance makes her inclined to sympathize with David, and both she and her sister agree to allow him to visit and court Dora.

Miss Clarissa Spenlow – Miss Clarissa is one of Mr. Spenlow's sisters. She and her sister, Lavinia, act as a guardian for Dora after Mr. Spenlow's death. She is more severe in temperament than Lavinia, and frequently hints that she disapproved of her brother's wife (largely because she never invited the Spenlow sisters to dinner). Clarissa does, however, agree to allow David to visit Dora.

Jorkins – Mr. Jorkins is Mr. Spenlow's business partner, whose main function seems to be to provide Spenlow with a plausible excuse for turning people's requests down: for instance, when David asks to be released from his articles, Spenlow insists that Jorkins would never hear of it. In reality, however, Jorkins is a mild and easy-going man who seems to defer to Spenlow's wishes.

Miss Julia Mills A friend of Dora's, with whom Dora is living when David and Dora first secretly get engaged. When David first meets Miss Mills, she is kind but has "retired" from life after having suffered a heartbreak, and she speaks often of the miseries of love. Later, her father takes her with him to India. When she returns to England near the end of the book, she has married a rich man and speaks mostly about money and no longer about love.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sophy Crewler – Sophy Crewler is Traddles's wife. She is practical and helpful, which delights Traddles. The pair have a happy, stable marriage, which serves as positive example of

marriage for David. Sophy has several sisters, many of which live with her.

Mr. Sharp – Mr. Sharp is the head teacher at David's boarding school, Salem House. Like Mr. Mell, Mr. Sharp is badly paid and very poor. The students think his thick, wavy hair is actually a wig.

Joram – Joram is a carpenter who works for Mr. Omer. When David first meets Joram (before Clara Copperfield's funeral), he is courting Omer's daughter, Minnie. The couple later marry and have at least two children together.

Mr. Quinion The owner of a counting-house. Mr. Murdstone sends David to work for Quinion as a way to get rid of him.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

COMING OF AGE AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

David Copperfield is a classic example of the Bildungsroman, or "novel of education." It not only traces the events of its protagonist's childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, but also (and more importantly) aims to demonstrate the role that those events played in David's growth and development. The ideal Victorian man was active and independent—that is, able to control the course of his own life through force of character rather than allowing his character to be shaped *by* his life. David learns, over the course of the novel, to rise above life's challenges to become the master of his own destiny rather than a victim of his circumstances.

Dickens suggests that every child (or at least every boy) must go through this process in order to become an adult. Perhaps drawing on the Enlightenment idea of the childhood mind as a "tabula rasa" ("blank slate"), David traces his development all the way to the "blank of [his] infancy," noting his first "observations" of the world around him. Given his young age, however, these observations are not so much active insights into his surroundings as they are passive impressions that leave a mark on his developing personality. He remarks, for instance, that a single "kind word" from Mr. Murdstone might have "improved [him] for [his] whole life" and made him "another creature" than the person he ultimately became. Of course, David never received that kind word, and it's hard to say how the abuse he suffered at the Murdstones' hands impacted his character.

What is clear, however, is that David remains a relatively passive and pliant figure well past the point that it is socially acceptable. It is not simply that he continues to be sensitive to events around him (this, he implies, is ultimately useful to him in his career as a writer). What is problematic, from a Victorian point of view, is the fact that David prefers to hand over control of his life to others. This is particularly clear in his interactions with James Steerforth: when he reconnects with Steerforth as an adult, he takes great pleasure in Steerforth's "dashing way[…] of treating [him] as a plaything" and doesn't object to Steerforth's calling him "Daisy," despite the nickname's feminine (and therefore passive, by the standards of the time) connotations. Steeforth's later affair with Little Em'ly (and thus the end of his friendship with David) removes one obstacle to David's growth.

Even more important, however, is the loss of Miss Betsey's fortune and David's subsequent attempts to establish himself in a line of work—something that not only leads to his financial independence, but channels his energy into bringing about a particular goal. Prior to his aunt's misfortune, David had no clear idea of what to do with himself, and characteristically went along with Miss Betsey's suggestion that he become a proctor. It is only when a crisis forces his hand that David begins to search for a career that will allow him to develop as an individual. He says of his time as a parliamentary reporter, for instance, "I will only add, to what I have already written of my perseverance at this time of my life, and of a patient and continuous energy which then began to be matured within me, and which I know to be the strong part of my character, if it have any strength at all, that there, on looking back, I find the source of my success." This growing sense of independence and self-discipline sets David apart from a character like Steerforth, who, because he has no need to work due to his family's wealth, never really grows up. For all his intelligence and charisma, Steerforth remains at the mercy of external events and (just as importantly) his own impulses and emotions.

The final piece in David's development is marriage, which (like vocation) Dickens depicts not only as a marker of maturity but also as a way of fostering maturity. Once again, however, David's first choice is a "bad" one, in part because it is not much of a choice at all: David eventually comes to see his love for Dora Spenlow as the "first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart"—that is, an emotional urge rather than a measured decision. Dora's own childishness further inhibits David's growth, because she cannot act as a confidante or adviser, supporting David in his work or encouraging him in his better habits. It is only when David marries Agnes Wickfield (after Dora's death) that he finds someone who can actually mold him into a more independent and purposeful person. Tellingly, he resolves to "use" his love for Agnes in this way even before he finally confess his feelings for her: "I endeavoured to convert what might have been between myself and Agnes, into a means

of making me more self-denying, more resolved, more conscious of myself."

Given how much stock the Victorian middle class placed in marriage and work, it is not surprising that David's experiences of these play such a prominent role in his growth as an individual. In a broader sense, however, the novel suggests that David ultimately learns to turn all of his "observations" and "impressions" to good use as an active participant in the world. It is significant, in this respect, that David eventually becomes a writer, since that profession quite literally allows him to take charge of and rework his experiences as a child and young man. By the end of the novel, in other words, David has provided an answer to the question he posed in the opening pages—namely, whether he would "turn out to be the hero of [his] own life." In learning to act purposefully and independently, David has moved from being the subject of the novel to its active hero.

AMBITION, SOCIAL MOBILITY, AND MORALITY

Nineteenth-century England was a highly socially stratified society, but one in which it was theoretically possible to move upwards. Although the Industrial Revolution had in many ways worsened the wealth gap by creating a new class of poor, urban laborers, it also held out the promise of social mobility: capitalist ideology maintained that hard work and perseverance would ultimately pay off, and some individuals did in fact manage to rise from poverty to wealth and status. This is what happens in *David Copperfield*, as David—the son of poor parents—works his way upward from being a secretary and parliamentary reporter to being a celebrated and successful writer. David's friend Traddles is similarly able to advance through the legal ranks from law clerk to lawyer—and perhaps even to judge—through hard, honest work. However, the novel is careful to point out that only a combination of hard work and pure intentions can lead to true social mobility. In contrast, attempting to move up the social ladder by nefarious means will not work in the end.

Uriah Heep is the clearest example of a character who attempts to climb the social ladder through dishonest means, which ultimately destroys his life. Like David, Uriah is a fatherless young man who works his way up the social ladder and aspires to marry his employer's daughter (Dora in David's case, Agnes in Uriah's). Where David is sympathetic, however, the novel depicts Uriah's ambitions as odious and predatory. David is doe-eyed and in love with pure and innocent Dora, while Uriah aspires to marry Agnes just to secure his own social position and protect his business partnership with Agnes' father. In addition, Uriah's position at the Wickfield and Heep law firm is completely undeserved in itself: Uriah becomes Mr. Wickfield's partner not through honest hard work, but through a combination of manipulation, blackmail, and forgery. In spite of this, Uriah makes constant and hypocritical assertions that he is "umble," or humble (dropping the letter H, in British English, was associated with working-class dialects). He describes humbleness itself as a fixture of working-class life, saying that his teachers at the charity school constantly instructed their students to show respect to their "betters." Part of what makes Uriah villainous is that he twists the very humility that marks other working-class characters (like Ham Peggotty) as virtuous into a means of advancing his own agenda. Uriah ultimately ends up in prison, however, emphasizing the novel's assertion that using immoral and deceptive means for achieving social mobility is a flimsy, short-term solution that will eventually catch up with the person.

Little Em'ly's storyline raises similar issues about using immoral means for social advancement. As with Uriah, the novel suggests that what is problematic about Emily is not necessarily her wish to be a lady (that is, to advance socially) but rather the way she goes about making that wish a reality. To do so, she breaks her engagement with Ham Peggotty, a hardworking, honest, loving man who is also of lower-class status. If breaking her engagement weren't unethical enough (by Victorian standards), Emily pursues her goal of advancing socially to become a lady by prostituting herself as Steerforth's mistress. Like Uriah, Emily's immoral methods of climbing the social ladder eventually catch up with her—Steerforth grows tired of her, attempts to marry her off to his servant, and Emily is forced to run away. By the end of the novel, she's recovered from her trauma, given up her goal of being a lady, and resigns herself to living a quiet, simple life in Australia with her father.

Just as the novel attributes Uriah or Emily's social downfalls to moral failings, it attributes David's success to hard work and self-discipline; although David acknowledges that he has been lucky, he says that he "never could have done what [he has] done, without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate [himself] on one object at a time." The implication is that David rises through society because he has character traits that lead to success—namely, honesty and perseverance. In addition, David doesn't necessarily crave success for himself or want to climb the social ladder for its own sake. Instead, he commits to working so hard in order to financially support his beloved Aunt Betsey, who tragically loses her fortune due to Uriah's dishonesty. David also works hard in order to prove himself a worthy husband to Dora. Thus, David's pure intentions bolster his chances success and social advancement, encapsulating the novel's claim that one's moral compass as just as important to achieving success as their work ethic.

MEMORY AND NOSTALGIA

In addition to being a Bildungsroman (a novel of education), *David Copperfield* is a fictional memoir, ostensibly written by David himself. However, while David is a writer by profession, he says more than once that he

does not want to publish his memoir, and in fact intends it "for no eyes but [his]." This raises the question of what exactly David hopes to achieve or accomplish in penning his life story, and the answer seems to lie simply in the pleasure David takes in reliving his past. Although his life has certainly not been uniformly happy, the tone of his memoir tends toward nostalgia—particularly when it involves feelings and experiences David has had to set aside in the name of maturity. In other words, the novel's depiction of memory is in many ways at odds with its status as a coming-of-age story: the pleasures of memory compensate for some of the sacrifices associated with growing older, but clinging to the past also threatens to derail David's growth as a character.

David's recollections of his childhood home, the Rookery, are a particularly good example of the emotional pull of nostalgia. He depicts the Rookery as a kind of idyllic, lost paradise: "Now I am in the garden at the back [of the house], beyond the yard where the empty pigeon-house and dog-kennel are—a very preserve of butterflies, as I remember it, with a high fence, and a gate and padlock; where the fruit clusters on the trees, riper and richer than fruit has ever been since, in any other garden, and where my mother gathers some in a basket, while I stand by, bolting furtive gooseberries, and trying to look unmoved." David's growth into a mature and independent man requires that he leave the Rookery behind (literally and figuratively) in order to establish his own career and family. However, when David remarks that the fruit at the Rookery is "riper and richer" than anything else, there is a real sense in this passage that no adult happiness will ever match the happiness of early childhood.

Likewise, David reflects fondly on his marriage with Dora, even though the marriage stunted his maturity and personal growth due to Dora's childlike nature. He says the following of the days immediately following his engagement to Dora: "Of all the times of mine that Time has in his grip, there is none that in one retrospection I can smile at half so much, and think of half so tenderly." Of course, David elsewhere all but calls his relationship with Dora a mistake, in the sense that it was essentially a kind of extended childhood (with Dora herself noticeably resembling David's mother, Clara). By revisiting the relationship through writing, however, David is able to experience everything that was pleasurable about it without sacrificing the maturity he has since attained. However, David also tends to give himself over entirely to his memories and the feelings they evoke, relinquishing the conscious control over himself and his life that he has worked to achieve as an adult. Even the language he uses in these moments underscores the fact that he has become a bystander to his own life: he prefaces his memories of marrying Dora, for instance, by describing himself, "stand[ing] aside, to see the phantoms of those days go by [him], accompanying the shadow of [himself], in dim procession." In this way, the novel highlights how lingering too long in one's memories can make a person stuck in the past and unable to move forward into the future.

David hints that he may never reread the memoir he has written once it is complete, presumably because the urge to lose himself within it would be too strong to resist. In this way, what makes David's nostalgia "acceptable" is the fact that he weaves his memories into a narrative that ultimately looks forward. In fact, the novel's final image is of his angelic second wife, Agnes, guiding David "upward" to better things. As pleasurable as memory and nostalgia are, they are also a distraction from the future, which is where David's focus belongs as a man establishing a career and family.

WOMANHOOD AND GENDER ROLES

Despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that its protagonist is a man, *David Copperfield* is deeply interested in questions surrounding womanhood and the place of women in Victorian society. Although Dickens is often criticized for writing one-note female characters, femininity actually takes multiple forms in the novel—a fact David himself underscores early on, when he says of the matronly servant Peggotty, "I thought her in a different style from my mother, certainly; but of another school of beauty, I considered her a perfect example." Nevertheless, it *is* true that the character who most closely resembles the ideal Victorian woman—Agnes Wickfield—comes across as flat and unrealistic in comparison to many of the secondary female characters. Ultimately, this speaks to the many, often irreconcilable demands placed on Victorian women: the only woman who can actually embody her gender role fully is not so much a human being as (in David's words) an "angel."

The novel highlights how it is seemingly impossible for Victorian women to perfectly fulfill all of the expectations placed upon them. This becomes especially clear in David's many unsuccessful attempts at love. David is a romantic and dreamy character who falls in and out of infatuations throughout the novel, but the three most serious candidates for his affections are Little Em'ly, Dora Spenlow, and Agnes. Strikingly, the first two prove unsuitable because they fail in some way to live up to Victorian gender norms: Emily's premarital affair with Steerforth marks her as impure, while Dora's poor housekeeping abilities are an indication of her broader inability to provide her husband with emotional and moral support. Arguably, however, these failings stem from the fact that Emily and Dora so wholly *fulfill* gender expectations in other respects. Emily, for instance, is repeatedly described as "shy," which jibes well with the meekness expected of a Victorian woman. To the men around her, however, her shyness is indistinguishable from flirtatiousness, which is sexually suspect. David says, at one point, for instance, "[Emily] sat, at this time, and all the evening, on the old locker in her old little corner by the fire—Ham beside her, where I used to sit. I could

not satisfy myself whether it was in her own little tormenting way, or in a maidenly reserve before us, that she kept quite close to the wall, and away from him." Meanwhile, Dora's childlike nature is very much in keeping with the Victorian emphasis on innocence and girlishness, but quite clearly prevents her from fulfilling her "duties" as a wife and confidante: she is timid with servants, incompetent at account-keeping, and totally unable to relate to her husband's intellectual pursuits.

The impossibility of reconciling the many demands placed on Victorian women is clearest, however, in the character of Betsey Trotwood. Miss Betsey is a competent housekeeper by virtue of necessity, having separated from her abusive husband years before the novel begins. In order to achieve this efficiency and practicality, however, Miss Betsey seems to have renounced other conventionally "feminine" qualities. This is especially evident in her tendency to attribute all of her softer emotions to David's mother Clara. For instance, when David tells her he hopes to prove himself "worthy" of his aunt, Miss Betsey responds, "It's a mercy that poor dear baby of a mother of yours didn't live [...] or she'd have been so vain of her boy by this time, that her soft little head would have been completely turned, if there was anything of it left to turn." Although the moment is humorous—and in keeping with Miss Betsey's broader eccentricities as a character—it also hints at the difficulty of attempting to live up to gender norms that often contradicted one another. As an entirely independent woman, Miss Betsey has to work doubly hard to prove her rationality and strength.

Agnes is the novel's answer to this problem, but possibly not a convincing one to modern readers. It is not simply that she is an "inhuman" character (in the sense of being unrealistically perfect), but also that her primary function in the novel is to serve as a moral compass for David. As a result, it's hard to describe her beyond the basic fact that she is good and morally upright. In fact, it is striking that Dickens shows his readers so little of David and Agnes's married life, because it suggests that the perfect womanhood Agnes embodies is difficult to represent even in a work of fiction. In other words, while *David Copperfield* attempts to reinforce Victorian gender roles through the positive image of Agnes, it also reveals the shortcomings, contradictions, and impossibility of those expectations.

HOME AND FAMILY

Although it overlaps to some extent with *David Copperfield*'s treatment of gender roles, the question of what constitutes a home or family is also an important theme in its own right. The ideal Victorian home was one that served as a refuge from the outside world, with the wife/mother providing an atmosphere of calm for the husband/father, whose work took him out into a realm of stress and competition. It is only at the very end of *David Copperfield*, however, that Dickens depicts a family—David and Agnes's—that fits this mold. Up to that point, the families that *do* exist are constantly under threat from both internal and external forces, illustrating the impossibility of having a perfect Victorian family.

Although the Victorian home is supposed to be a sanctuary, David loses his at a very young age. Clara Copperfield's remarriage to Mr. Murdstone transforms the Rookery into a place of abuse and imprisonment—or, as David puts it, a "home [that] was not home." Arguably, however, David's home-life had already been disrupted before he was even born, by the death of his father, which leaves David in the care of two women (his mother and Peggotty, the maid) rather than the Victorian ideal of the nuclear family. From this point onward, David moves through and encounters several different domestic configurations, but nothing that quite corresponds to the Victorian ideal. His life with his Aunt Betsey and Mr. Dick, for instance, resembles but also parodies the conventional Victorian family: Miss Betsey consistently seeks out and "defers" to Mr. Dick's opinions as an obedient wife would be expected to, but it is quite obvious that she doesn't need his advice (in fact, Miss Betsey has taken Mr. Dick in precisely because, as a mentally disabled man, he requires *her* protection). Other families, meanwhile are simply fractured or incomplete: Agnes's mother is dead, for instance, as is Steerforth's father.

The Steerforth household in particular illustrates some of the potential ill effects of an inadequate family life (at least to the Victorian mind), consequently bolstering Dickens' claim that the stable, nuclear family is something to strive for. Steerforth attributes his inability to "guide" himself to his upbringing, telling David he "wish[es] to God [he] had had a judicious father these last twenty years." The fact that he did *not* in turn makes him a destabilizing influence on other families; he expresses the above wish, for instance, moments after he has a premonition of the Peggotty family "dispersed, or dead, or come to [he doesn't] know what harm." This foreboding comes true when Steerforth seduces and elopes with little Em'ly, separating her from her relatives and setting off a chain of events that contributes to Ham's death and the emigration of the rest of the family. Steerforth's actions also permanently estrange him from his own mother, who can't tolerate the thought of sharing her son with another woman. This, of course, is another way in which Steerforth's family life was troubled from the start, since Mrs. Steerforth's devotion to her son is obsessive, even verging on incestuous.

In theory, David and Agnes's marriage reestablishes order in the domestic sphere by adhering closely to the Victorian ideal: David is the breadwinner, Agnes is his loyal, moral, supportive wife, and they have at least three children together. As with the novel's depiction of Agnes herself, however, *David Copperfield*

says very little about the family's life, other than that their "domestic joy" is "perfect." This generic, vague description of marital bliss seems unlikely to override either the earlier images of families in crisis or, for that matter, the images of unconventional family arrangements that can sometimes seem functional and happy (for example, Miss Betsey's life with Mr. Dick). In this way, while Dickens attempts to uphold the traditional Victorian household as an ideal, he also questions it throughout the novel. In other words, like the perfect Victorian woman, the perfect Victorian home is something to strive for, but may not actually be possible.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE SEA

Victorian England believed strongly in the possibility of forging one's own path in life. Men in particular were expected to be active and independent; rather than waiting for events to happen to them, they were supposed to create opportunities for themselves. The presence of the sea, however, is a constant reminder that there truly are forces beyond the control of even the most resolute humans. Besides pointing to the broader limits of human agency, the sea functions as a symbolic threat to the ideal Victorian home that men like David work so hard to establish, and that women like little Em'ly are supposed to work to maintain. As a child visiting Yarmouth, for instance, David associates the sound of the wind and waves with the disasters that have recently overtaken his home life (his mother Clara's marriage to Mr. Murdstone, followed by her death). Relatedly, little Em'ly is both drawn to and afraid of the ocean, and the significance of this becomes clear when she runs away to become Steerforth's mistress, throwing her family into chaos and destroying any possibility of marriage with Ham.

ROSA DARTLE'S SCAR

When David first meets Rosa Dartle, he considers her a generally attractive woman but notices that she has a scar running across both her lips and down her chin. Steerforth later confesses that he is responsible for this, having thrown a hammer at Rosa once when they were children. The scar is therefore significant in terms of both Steerforth's and Rosa's characters. First and foremost, the scar is a tangible reminder of Steerforth's carelessness and the harm that it causes to those around him; Steerforth never learns to control his emotions (anger included), and Rosa, little Em'ly, and others suffer because of it. Meanwhile, where Rosa is concerned, the physical disfigurement represents the emotional disfigurement she has endured as a result of her relationship with Steerforth. Rosa is deeply in love with Steerforth, but she is also painfully aware that he has grown up too spoiled and flighty to return her feelings. The fact that Steerforth nevertheless continues to thoughtlessly flirt with Rosa simply exacerbates her emotional pain, and the cumulative result of her disappointment is that she becomes a cold, sarcastic, and often vindictive woman.

JIP

Jip, Dora Spenlow's dog, is a symbol for Dora herself. Jip learns to do impressive tricks that include standing on his hindlegs, but he can never be taught to stop walking across tables or chewing up books. This is likely because Dora spoils him, insisting that he have mutton chops every day and buying him a pagoda to live in. Like Jip, Dora is pretty and charming but completely lacking in practical domestic skills and resists David's attempts to teach her to do basic things like budget finances or cook. Jip's descent into old age similarly parallels Dora's declining health; significantly, he dies on the same night that she does.

STAINED GLASS WINDOW

The stained glass window is an odd symbol in the sense that it doesn't actually appear in the novel itself: David vaguely remembers seeing such a window sometime in his early childhood, but can't exactly place the image. The memory resurfaces, however, when he first meets Agnes Wickfield, and from that moment on, it repeatedly appears in connection with her. The image of beautiful, soft light filtered through a window symbolizes Agnes's gentle kindness and calming demeanor, while the religious overtones of the window (David associates it with a church) hint at her "angelic" nature, as David frequently refers to Agnes as his "good Angel."

FLOWER POT AND TABLE

When David reconnects with Tommy Traddles as an adult, he learns that Traddles is not only engaged, but also storing up household items for his future life as a married man. So far, he has managed to collect a flower pot and a small marble-top table, which he then nearly loses after acting as a guarantor for Mr. Micawber (the items are taken to a pawnshop, though Peggotty fortunately helps to recover them). Sophy and Traddles are finally able to marry toward the end of the novel, and the flower pot and table do in fact end up furnishing their rooms. The objects therefore symbolize the patience, hope, and dedication the novel depicts as necessary for securing a comfortable life in the future. They also speak to the kind of domesticity the novel values. Neither the flower pot

nor the table are particularly practical items, but they lend a decorative and personal touch that helps make the Traddles' apartment a home. They can also be seen as status symbols that express the Traddles' aspirations toward middle-class life: precisely because they *don't* serve a useful purpose, they indicate that the couple has at least some money to spare on "luxury" items.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Puffin edition of *David Copperfield* published in 2013.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

This is the first sentence in *David Copperfield* and possibly the most famous line in the entire novel. It alerts the reader to the fact that the novel is written as a memoir, and begins to provide some insight into David's own character. For instance, in announcing that the "pages" can speak for themselves, David draws the reader's attention to his objectivity and reliability as a narrator (in reality, David will *not* turn out to be entirely objective, but his desire to be neutral and honest is significant in and of itself).

Most importantly, however, this line introduces the question of David's agency in the novel. The idea of David being "the hero of his own life" implies both that his own story will prove to be the most central narrative in the novel, and that he will play a leading role in that story. Particularly in the context of Victorian England, that also means playing an active role rather than a passive one: the Victorians had a strong belief in the power of individual choice, and the goal—particularly for a man—was to be the guiding force behind the events of one's life, rather than someone simply experiencing them. The fact that David refuses to tell the reader at this point whether he has in fact succeeded in living up to that ideal suggests that the struggle to become independent and in control will be a major theme going forward.

Chapter 2 Quotes

This may be fancy, though I think the memory of most of us can go farther back into such times than many of us suppose; just as I believe the power of observation in numbers of very young children to be quite wonderful for its closeness and accuracy. Indeed, I think that most grown men who are remarkable in this respect, may with greater propriety be said not to have lost the faculty, than to have acquired it; the rather, as I generally observe such men to retain a certain freshness, and gentleness, and capacity of being pleased, which are also an inheritance they have preserved from their childhood.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

While describing his very earliest memories, David pauses to explain why he is able to recall his life in such incredible detail. He claims that this "faculty" isn't a skill unique to him, but rather something that all people have as young children. Although he doesn't spell out why so many people lose this ability as they grow older, it seems likely that it's at least in part a result of gender norms, since the sensitivity and impressionability David discusses here are somewhat at odds with the ideal Victorian man's control and rationality. Regardless, the passage is one of several places in *David Copperfield* where David grows wistful about what is set aside in the name of maturity (although in David's case, he has been able to turn his eye for detail to professional use as a writer).

Chapter 8 Quotes

Ah, what a strange feeling it was to be going home when it was not home, and to find that every object I looked at, reminded me of the happy old home, which was like a dream I could never dream again! The days when my mother and I and Peggotty were all in all to one another, and there was no one to come between us, rose up before me so sorrowfully on the road, that I am not sure I was glad to be there.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Mr. Murdstone , Peggotty, Clara Copperfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

Despite the abuse he and other students suffer at Salem House, David finds himself reluctant to return home for the holidays. As this passage makes clear, David's hesitation is not simply fear of Mr. Murdstone, but rather grief for the loss of his childhood home: although he is physically returning to the Rookery, the safety, love, and contentment he associated with it have disappeared. There is a strong sense here that the particular happiness David enjoyed as a child is gone forever; he even nostalgically describes that period as a "dream," suggesting that it has become unreal in some sense.

This passage is a prime example of David's frequent wistfulness for the past. It is also noteworthy for romanticizing a family structure that was unconventional by the standards of the time. Far from regretting the loss of his father, David takes pleasure in being "all in all" to his mother Clara and Peggotty (a mother figure). This speaks not only to David's extreme closeness to his mother (he goes on to marry a woman named Dora, who strongly resembles her), but also to some of the issues surrounding his own masculinity: David is often described in feminine terms by those around him (for example, Steerforth calls him "Daisy), and he clearly has an affinity for the female-dominated home he grew up in.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ 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 ever, rambling hand in hand through sunshine and among flowery meadows, 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!

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Little Em'ly (Emily)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

After Peggotty and Barkis get married, David and little Em'ly return to Mr. Peggotty's house, huddling together in the chaise for warmth. The episode is the culmination of the pair's childhood romance, as David's longing in this passage makes clear. Interestingly, however, David doesn't simply wish that the moment itself could last forever, but rather that he and Emily could remain *children* forever. Besides pointing to the novel's general ambivalence toward growing up, the passage also hints at complex issues surrounding womanhood in *David Copperfield*. David had previously felt "uneasy" when Mr. Peggotty told him that little Em'ly was "getting on to be a woman." Combined with David's emphasis on the "purity" of his and Emily's love in this passage, this suggests a discomfort with adult female sexuality (chastity, verging on the absence of any sexual desire, was considered the norm for women in the Victorian Era).

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ I set down this remembrance here, because it is an instance to myself of the manner in which I fitted my old books to my altered life, and made stories for myself, out of the streets, and out of men and women; and how some main points in the character I shall unconsciously develop, I suppose, in writing my life, were gradually forming all this while.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Mr. Micawber

Related Themes:

Page Number: 150–151

Explanation and Analysis

While working at Murdstone and Grinby's, David frequently visits the Micawbers in debtor's prison. He is there when Mr. Micawber presents a petition (on imprisoning debtors) to his fellow inmates, and watches as they all sign it. Although the episode is in part a moment of comic relief, David's statement about why he includes it reveals the episode's deeper significance: as the prisoners line up to sign the petition, David entertains himself by coming up with backstories for all of them, based in part on the books he has read. The moment therefore foreshadows David's later career as an author, demonstrating that even at a fairly young age, David has already begun to see the world through a writer's eyes and reshape the world around him for the sake of his stories.

Chapter 14 Quotes

The two things clearest in my mind were, that a remoteness had come upon the old Blunderstone life—which seemed to lie in the haze of an immeasurable distance; and that a curtain had for ever fallen on my life at Murdstone and Grinby's. No one has ever raised that curtain since. I have lifted it for a moment, even in this narrative, with a reluctant hand, and dropped it gladly.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Mr. Murdstone

Related Themes:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

As soon as Miss Betsey takes him in, David begins to distance himself from his experiences working at Murdstone and Grinby's. This period was among the most traumatic in David's life, not only because of the drudgery of the work itself, but also because he feared he would be relegated to that life forever. It was so upsetting, in fact, that David has apparently tried not to think about it until he absolutely needed to in order to complete his memoir. The passage, then, highlights the painful emotional impact of remembering things that it would be better to forget. For David, even revisiting the period in writing, where he has some measure of control over it, cannot neutralize the pain associated with it.

Chapter 15 Quotes

I cannot call to mind where or when, in my childhood, I had seen a stained glass window in a church. Nor do I recollect its subject. But I know that when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old staircase, and wait for us, above, I thought of that window; and that I associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Agnes Wickfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

When David first arrives at Mr. Wickfield's house, Agnes—whom her father calls his "little housekeeper"—shows David to his room. The room itself features diamond pane windows, which partially explains David's memory of seeing stained glass at church. More significantly, however, the passage illustrates Agnes's character and foreshadows the role she will play throughout David's life; the description of the window's "tranquil brightness" reflects Agnes's own calm and kind nature, while the religious imagery paves the way for David's later sense that Agnes is his "good angel." The symbol of the stained glass window recurs throughout the rest of the novel, emphasizing Agnes's status as the ideal Victorian woman while also underscoring how central memories are to David's experience.

Chapter 16 Quotes

"Perhaps you'll be a partner in Mr. Wickfield's business, one of these days," I said, to make myself agreeable; "and it will be Wickfield and Heep, or Heep late Wickfield."

"Oh, no, Master Copperfield," returned Uriah, shaking his head, "I am much too umble for that!"

Related Characters: Uriah Heep, David Copperfield (speaker), Mr. Wickfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange takes place during David's first major interaction with Uriah Heep, who is acting as Mr. Wickfield's clerk at this point in the novel. Although it is not the first time that Uriah claims to be "[h]umble," this passage captures the way in which Uriah will use this claim going forward: at a basic level, Uriah claims to be undeserving specifically so that those around him will be impressed by his modesty, and see him as all the more deserving as a result.

In the particular class context of nineteenth-century England, however, the phrase takes on even more meaning. To a large extent, what makes a lower-class person "deserving" in *David Copperfield* is his acceptance of his station in life. This attitude was not unique to Dickens, and likely reflected middle and upper-class anxiety about social unrest: if the lower classes largely accept their "inferiority," they might press for some reforms, but probably not in a particularly violent or disruptive way. What makes Uriah especially threatening, then, is the fact that he uses this

"good" form of subservience precisely to upend the social order by advancing his own position: Uriah not only goes on to become Mr. Wickfield's partner, but the de facto owner of the firm.

Chapter 21 Quotes

"You see," he said, wiping his head, and breathing with difficulty, "she hasn't taken much to any companions here; she hasn't taken kindly to any particular acquaintances and friends, no to mention sweethearts. In consequence, an ill-natured story got about, that Em'ly wanted to be a lady. Now my opinion is, that it came into circulation principally on account of her saying, at the school, that if she was a lady she would like to do so and so for her uncle—don't you see?—and buy him such and such fine things."

Related Characters: Mr. Omer (speaker), Peggotty, Little Em'ly (Emily), David Copperfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

When David first takes Steerforth with him to Yarmouth, the pair split up so that David can first visit Peggotty alone. On his way to see his old nurse, however, David stops to chat with Mr. Omer, who explains that little Em'ly has been working as a seamstress in his shop, and that many of the women in town resent her. At first, he suggests that this is simply the result of jealousy, but finally admits that people have viewed Emily with suspicion ever since the rumor spread that Emily aspires to be a lady. In part, this suspicion stems from the view—shared even by some working-class people themselves—that the lower classes should be content with their lot in life. Just as important, however, is the fact that Victorian women were expected to be selfless and modest. Ambition would therefore be particularly unseemly for Emily, especially if she desired wealth and social standing for her own benefit. Tellingly, Omer downplays the "wrongness" of Emily's desire by claiming (with some truth) that she wants to be a lady for the sake of others.

Chapter 22 Quotes

"I have been sitting here," said Steerforth, glancing round the room, "thinking that all the people we found so glad on the night of our coming down, might—to judge from the present wasted air of the place—to be dispersed, or dead, or come to I don't know what harm. David, I wish to God I had had a judicious father these last twenty years."

"My dear Steerforth, what is the matter?"

"I wish with all my soul I had been better guided!" he exclaimed. "I wish with all my soul I could guide myself better!"

Related Characters: David Copperfield, James Steerforth (speaker), Mrs. Gummidge, Ham Peggotty, Little Em'ly (Emily), Peggotty

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 275

Explanation and Analysis

One day, during David and Steerforth's visit to Yarmouth, David arrives at Mr. Peggotty's house to find everyone gone except Steerforth, who is listening to the ocean and staring gloomily at the fire. In this passage, Steerforth explains his bad mood, describing the Peggottys "dispersed or dead" before jumping to his own inability to control his feelings and actions. Although David can't follow this shift in topics at the time, it becomes clear in retrospect that Steerforth is brooding guiltily on the consequences of seducing little Em'ly.

What is particularly striking about this, however, is the fact that Steerforth hasn't actually done anything wrong at this point, but seems to feel that it's only a matter of time until he does. This may be an attempt to dodge responsibility for his actions, but it is in keeping with the novel's interest in control (particularly self-control) and will power as measures of maturity; although Steerforth enjoys considerable power over others simply by virtue of his class position, he has little power over himself and is therefore in some sense lacking in agency. The setting, meanwhile, underscores Steerforth's basic powerlessness, since the sea appears throughout *David Copperfield* as a symbol of events, emotions, and experiences that are beyond human control.

Chapter 25 Quotes

"There are some low minds (not many, I am happy to believe, but there are some) that would prefer to do what I should call bow down before idols. Postively Idols! Before services, intellect, and so on. But these are intangible points. Blood is not so. We see Blood in a nose, and we know it, We meet with it in a chin, and we say, 'There it is! That's Blood!'"

Related Characters: David Copperfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 317

Explanation and Analysis

David attends a dinner party at the Waterbrooks' house while Agnes is staying with them in London, and the conversation revolves almost entirely around "Blood"—that is, nobility of birth. Hamlet's aunt, a guest at Mr. Waterbook's dinner party, captures the tension between an entrenched social hierarchy based on bloodlines and the slightly more flexible system ushered in by the Industrial Revolution and the growth of a professional middle class. Although England was a modern capitalist economy by the Victorian era, there was still some resistance to the idea that "commoners" could aspire to wealth and social standing through skill and hard work. Given that *David Copperfield* is about just such a man, it's not surprising that Dickens here satirizes class snobbery.

Chapter 27 Quotes

"However," he said, "it's not that we haven't made a beginning towards housekeeping. No, no; we have begun. We must get on by degrees, but we have begun. Here," drawing the cloth off with great pride and care, "are two pieces of furniture to commence with. This flower-pot and stand, she bought herself. You put that in a parlor-window," said Traddles, falling a little back from it to survey it with the greater admiration, "with a plant in it, and—and there you are! This little round table with the marble top (it's two feet ten in circumference), *I* bought."

Related Characters: Tommy Traddles (speaker), David Copperfield, Sophy Crewler

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 343

Explanation and Analysis

When David visits Traddles at his apartment for the first time, Traddles explains that he is engaged to a woman named Sophy Crewler, but that his current poverty prevents the couple from marrying in the near future. Nevertheless, Traddles says, he and Sophy are already planning for their future together, as evidenced by the flower pot and side table he has carefully collected and stored. On the one hand, the exchange is humorous, because the items the couple have bought are more decorative than practical (and therefore not the things a young couple might be expected to save up for). This lack of practicality is significant, as Traddles and Sophy are hoping to create a middle-class life and home, complete with an aesthetically pleasing atmosphere. Meanwhile, the fact that they *are* planning so far in advance contrasts strongly with David and Dora, who marry without having any real sense of what their future together will be like.

Chapter 31 Quotes

I cannot bear to think of what did come, upon that memorable night; of what must come again, if I go on.

It is no worse, because I write of it. It would be no better, if I stopped my most unwilling hand. It is done. Nothing can undo it; nothing can make it otherwise than as it was.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), James Steerforth, Little Em'ly (Emily)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 377

Explanation and Analysis

As David prepares to recount Steerforth's elopement with Emily, he pauses in "dread." His hesitation seems to be his reluctance to relive a painful memory (this is itself significant in a novel so interested in reliving *happy* experiences). David also feels, however, as though he can stop the event from happening simply by refusing to go forward with his narrative. Although this is obviously not true, it hints at the way in which David uses writing as a way of controlling past events and experiences, imposing order on them by suggesting that they contributed to his growth as a person. However, there are limits on what this restructuring can do: here, for instance, David can't find any way to soften the past (that is, to make it "better") either by writing *or* pausing.

Chapter 33 Quotes

What an idle time! What an unsubstantial, happy, foolish time! Of all the times of mine that Time has in his grip, there is none that in one retrospection I can smile at half so much, and think of half so tenderly.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Dora Spenlow

Related Themes:

Page Number: 410

Explanation and Analysis

The "idle time" David refers to in this passage is the immediate aftermath of his proposal to Dora, which David remembers as a period of near-constant happiness and excitement. Dickens plays much of this for comedy, poking fun at the intensity of his own feelings and the frivolousness of the couple's quarrels. Tellingly, however, David himself both recognizes the "foolishness" of his youthful infatuation and thinks back on it "tenderly." This wistfulness is in keeping with one of the major undercurrents of the novel: as necessary as it is to cultivate "mature" virtues like rationality and self-control, a certain amount of youthful innocence and earnestness are inevitably (and sadly) lost in the transition. The emotional pull of that "childishness" is undoubtedly a factor in David's decision to revisit his past in writing; doing so allows him to experience a taste of what he here describes as perhaps the happiest period of his life.

Chapter 35 Quotes

Wherever Agnes was, some agreeable token of her noiseless presence seemed inseparable from the place. When I came back, I found my aunt's birds hanging, just as they had hung so long in the parlor window of the cottage; and my easy chair imitating my aunt's much easier chair in its position at the open window; and even the round green fan, which my aunt had brought away with her, screwed on to the window-sill. I knew who had done all this, by its seeming to have quietly done itself; and I should have known in a moment who had arranged my neglected books in the open order of my school days, even if I had supposed Agnes to be miles away.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Miss Betsey Trotwood, Agnes Wickfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 430

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after Miss Betsey comes to stay with David in London, Agnes visits and helps set David's apartment in order. This passage illustrates not only Agnes's skills as a housekeeper, but also the cultural significance of her skill: the ideal Victorian woman was a competent housekeeper who also personally projected an aura of comfort and domesticity. Here, for instance, David feels as though Agnes's personality has impressed itself on everything she has touched or arranged in the apartment. It's also significant, however, that this intangible "presence" is the only sign of all the work Agnes has done: since the domestic sphere was theoretically separate from the realm of economics, the labor necessary to maintain a household was, ideally, invisible—or, as David puts it, "seemed to have quietly done itself."

Chapter 39 Quotes

"Father and me was both brought up at a foundation for boys; and mother, she was likewise brought up at a public, sort of charitable, establishment. They taught us all a deal of umbleness—not much else that I know of, from morning to night. We was to be umble to this person, and umble to that; and to pull off our caps here, and to make bows there; and always to know our place, and abase ourselves before our betters [...] Father got made a sexton by being umble. He had the character, among the gentlefolks, of being such a well-behaved man, that they were determined to bring him in."

Related Characters: Uriah Heep (speaker), David Copperfield, Mrs. Heep

Related Themes:

Page Number: 479–480

Explanation and Analysis

When David goes to check on his aunt's cottage in Dover, he visits the Wickfields, where he sees firsthand the extent to which Uriah now has Mr. Wickfield and Agnes in his power. As a result, David finally loses his temper with Uriah, telling him that he could never be worthy of marrying Agnes. Uriah responds with a wordy explanation of his childhood and family background, which is probably the most explicit statement in the novel about the way in which Uriah is able to climb the social ladder. Essentially, Uriah conforms to the expectation that working-class people should respect their superiors, who then promote him as a

reward and because he seems unthreatening and loyal.

Even as it underscores Uriah's cunning, however, the passage also humanizes him by revealing just how entrenched society's ideas about the working classes are (and how ingrained the habit of "[h]umbleness" likely is for Uriah). The only way in which someone in Uriah's position can express ambition is by making a show of how *unambitious* they are.

"Weak indulgence has ruined me. Indulgence in remembrance, and indulgence in forgetfulness. My natural grief for my child's mother turned to disease; my natural love for my child turned to disease. I have infected everything I touched."

Related Characters: Mr. Wickfield (speaker), Agnes Wickfield, David Copperfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 482

Explanation and Analysis

After Mr. Wickfield's outburst (prompted by Uriah's declaration that he hopes to marry Agnes), he confesses to David that he feels largely responsible for the power Uriah has been able to assume over his and Agnes's lives. Interestingly, however, his reference to "weak indulgence" is apparently not primarily a reference to his alcoholism (which was conceived of mostly as a moral weakness at the time). Instead, Wickfield says that he has "indulged" too much in both memory and forgetfulness. The latter presumably refers to Wickfield's motives for turning to alcohol—a desire to forget—but the idea that it's possible to overindulge in "remembrance" is a major idea in the novel. In connecting the act of remembering explicitly to strength of character, this passage points to the tension between wallowing in one's memories and usefully reflecting on the past to create a better future.

Mr. Wickfield's words also reflect the novel's interest in troubled families. Although Wickfield doesn't explain what he means when he says his love for Agnes is "diseased," his total dependence on his daughter and obsession with protecting her fits into a broader pattern of unhealthily close parent-child relationships: James and Mrs. Steerforth, Uriah and Mrs. Heep, and perhaps even David and Clara Copperfield. The closeness of these relationships to some extent prevents the children involved in them from growing up, either emotionally (as in Steerforth's case), or practically (as in Agnes's).

Chapter 42 Quotes

Some happy talent, and some fortunate opportunity, may form the two sides of the ladder on which some men mount, but the rounds of that ladder must be made of stuff to stand wear and tear; and there is no substitute for thorough-going, ardent, and sincere earnestness. Never to put one hand to anything, on which I could throw my whole self; and never to affect depreciation of my work, whatever it was, I find, now, to have been my golden rules.

How much of the practice I have just reduced to precept, I owe to Agnes, I will not repeat here. My narrative proceeds to Agnes, with a thankful love.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Dora Spenlow, Agnes Wickfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 507

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes from David's own account of how he eventually saved enough money to marry Dora. The passage clearly states the belief—central to both *David Copperfield* and the Victorian middle class at large—that discipline and patience are the keys to social advancement. Although David qualifies the claim slightly, acknowledging that luck has also played a role in his success, the passage is nevertheless in keeping with the idea that where someone ends up in life is a reflection of his moral character.

The passage also encapsulates many Victorian ideas about gender and illustrates the way in which those ideas intersected with Victorian economic philosophy. Setting housework to one side, Agnes herself works only for a brief period in the novel. Instead, her role is to help her (future) husband cultivate habits of hard work and resilience, both by exhibiting similar qualities herself and by providing him with a soothing and sympathetic listener and counselor. This speaks to the Victorian idea that women were in many ways morally superior to men, and that they were meant to use their influence to improve and strengthen the men in their lives (particularly their husbands).

Chapter 45 Quotes

❝ "There is nothing," said Annie, "that we have in common. I have long found that there is nothing. If I were thankful to my husband for no more, instead of for so much, I should be thankful to him for having saved me from the first mistaken impulse of my undisciplined heart."

Related Characters: Annie Strong (speaker), Mr. Dick, Dora Spenlow, David Copperfield, Doctor Strong, Jack Maldon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 552

Explanation and Analysis

When Doctor Strong changes the terms of his will to express his faith in his wife's fidelity, the whole question of Annie's relationship with Jack Maldon finally comes to light. As Annie herself explains, there had been a romantic attachment between Annie and Jack at one point, but this was before Annie's marriage to the Doctor. Further, she quickly realized that it would have been a mistake to marry Maldon, despite her youthful infatuation with him.

Annie's speech makes a great impression on David, largely because it gives voice to something he can't quite articulate himself at this point: that his love for Dora was itself a "mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart" rather than the thoughtful and mature affection that could sustain a lasting relationship—like the relationship David eventually cultivates with Agnes. The passage therefore ties into the novel's depiction of self-control as central to coming of age.

Chapter 47 Quotes

❝ "What shall I ever do!" she said, fighting thus with her despair. "How can I go on as I am, a solitary curse to myself, a living disgrace to every one I come near!" Suddenly she turned to my companion. "Stamp upon me, kill me! When she was you pride, you would have thought I had done her harm if I brushed against her in the street. You can't believe—why should you?—a syllable that comes out of my lips. It would be a burning shame upon you, even now, if she and I exchanged a word."

Related Characters: Martha Endell (speaker), Mr. Peggotty , Little Em'ly (Emily), David Copperfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 570

Explanation and Analysis

When David and Mr. Peggotty approach Martha Endell in the hopes that she will help them find little Em'ly, they first have to overcome her deeply rooted sense of shame and despair. Her self-recriminations in this passage (and throughout the scene) make sense in the context of nineteenth-century beliefs about "fallen" women—that is, women who have had sex outside of marriage. Because purity was so central to the Victorian idea of womanhood, the prevailing belief was that a fallen woman was morally ruined forever. At best, then, she was caught in a downward spiral that would result in her own death, and at worst, she actually posed a danger to society: as Martha's comment about brushing against Emily suggests, there was a sense that sexual immorality was contagious. Martha is even more suspect than little Em'ly, because she is implied to have been engaging in outright prostitution. The fact that the novel allows Martha to "redeem" herself is therefore a sign of its relatively progressive views on fallen women.

Chapter 48 Quotes

❝ Finding at last, however, that, although I had been all this time a very porcupine or hedgehog, bristling all over with determination, I had effected nothing, it began to occur to me that perhaps Dora's mind was already formed.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Dora Spenlow

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 580

Explanation and Analysis

Over the two years they are married, David tries multiple times to make Dora into a better housekeeper and (to his mind) a better companion. During his last and most intensive effort, he not only tries to teach her practical skills, but also to make her more serious and thoughtful by talking to her about his work, reading Shakespeare, and so on. He finally gives up, suspecting that "Dora's mind is already formed," but his attempts to mold her into someone else bear a strong resemblance to Mr. Murdstone's efforts to "form" Clara Copperfield's "character." Although David is certainly much kinder to Dora than Murdstone was to Clara, the implication is that, in marrying a woman like his mother, David is in danger of endlessly reliving his own past.

The passage also underscores the fine line between

influencing someone's character for the better (as Agnes does with David) and trying to completely change someone. Ultimately, the novel suggests that there is a limit to the role a person can play in another's growth and development, perhaps because that growth must be both a natural extension of the individual's character and something that the individual must largely cultivate for her or himself.

Chapter 50 Quotes

"The miserable vanity of these earth-worms!" she said, when she had so far controlled the angry heavings of her breast, that she could trust herself to speak. "*Your* home! Do you imagine that I bestow a thought on it, or suppose you could do any harm to that low place, which money would not pay for, and handsomely? *Your* home! You were a part of the trade of your home, and were bought and sold like any other vendible thing your people dealt in."

Related Characters: Rosa Dartle (speaker), David Copperfield, James Steerforth, Ham Peggotty, Peggotty, Little Em'ly (Emily)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 599

Explanation and Analysis

After Martha finds Emily and brings her to her room, she goes to fetch David and Mr. Peggotty. When David arrives, however, he finds that Rosa Dartle is already there, berating Emily for (supposedly) seducing Steerforth. Emily, however, at first assumes that Rosa's reference to a broken home is a reference to the Peggottys, leading to the outburst in this passage. On the one hand, Rosa's words reveal her contempt for the lower classes, since she apparently doesn't think that a family like the Peggottys might feel any love or loyalty to one another. With that said, there is an element of truth to what Rosa says about "trade" as the foundation of Emily's home, since each family member *does* have an economic role to play. The passage therefore hints at the fact that nineteenth-century home-life wasn't truly as separate from the outside world as the prevailing ideology maintained.

Relatedly, Rosa's claim that Emily was "bought and sold" points to some of the tensions surrounding the status of women in Victorian England. On the face of it, Rosa's words condemn both Emily's "promiscuity" and her "greed": in effect, Rosa says that Emily's relationship with Steerforth was a form of prostitution. Practically speaking, however, there isn't much that separates Emily's actions from those of women who married for money, which was relatively common at the time, and another way in which the domestic sphere wasn't entirely "pure."

Chapter 52 Quotes

"Copperfield, I have always hated you. You've always been an upstart, and you've always been against me."

"As I think I told you once before," said I, "it is you who have been, in your greed and cunning, against all the world. It may be profitable to you to reflect, n future, that there never were greed and cunning in the world yet, that did not do too much, and over-reach themselves. It is as certain as death."

Related Characters: David Copperfield, Uriah Heep (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 631

Explanation and Analysis

Once Micawber has revealed the full extent of Uriah's crimes, Uriah turns to David and says that he has always viewed him as an enemy. To David, the personal nature of the rivalry makes no sense, particularly because he hasn't yet realized—as Uriah apparently has—that he is in love with Agnes and is thus Uriah's competition. David therefore scolds Uriah with a message similar to one the novel itself endorses: that "greed and cunning" inevitably result in failure in much the same way that "honest" hard work results in success. The problem, in other words, is not that David himself or society in general has tried to thwart Uriah's ambitions, but rather that Uriah is morally unworthy of success. However, this claim rings somewhat hollow. By calling David an "upstart," Uriah highlights the similarities between them—particularly the fact that David has also sought to improve his station in life. The fact that David has succeeded where Uriah hasn't arguably has as much to do with the fact that David enjoyed greater social standing to begin with as it does with the ways in which each man has tried to get ahead in the world.

Chapter 53 Quotes

"I am afraid it would have been better, if we had only loved each other as a boy and girl, and forgotten it. I have begun to think I was not fit to be a wife.

[...] If I had been more fit to be married, I might have made you more so, too. Besides you are very clever, and I never was."

"We have been very happy, my sweet Dora."

"I was very happy, very. But, as years went on, my dear boy would have wearied of his child-wife. She would have been less and less a companion for him. He would have been more and more sensible of what was wanting in his home. She wouldn't have improved. It is better as it is."

Related Characters: David Copperfield, Dora Spenlow (speaker), Agnes Wickfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 638

Explanation and Analysis

Just before she dies, Dora admits that she and David never should have married. This naturally upsets David, but guilt likely plays a large role in his distress: by this point, he also feels that Dora wasn't an ideal companion for him, although he hasn't necessarily questioned his decision to marry her. Regardless, what Dora says in this scene is also the conclusion the novel itself ultimately reaches—namely, that she was too childish and thoughtless either to support her husband in his career or to strengthen his overall moral character. Ironically, Victorian women were in many ways expected to be childlike—innocent, emotional, in need of protection, and so on. Dora, in other words, is "unfit" as a wife precisely because she in many respects conforms to the gender norms of the time. This passage (as well as David and Dora's entire relationship) therefore raises the question of whether it was even possible for a Victorian woman to entirely live up to cultural expectations.

Chapter 54 Quotes

"When I lost the rest, I thought it wise to say nothing about that sum, but to keep it secretly for a rainy day. I wanted to see how you would come out of the trial, Trot; and you came out nobly—persevering, self-reliant, self-denying! So did Dick."

Related Characters: Miss Betsey Trotwood (speaker), Tommy Traddles, Uriah Heep, Mr. Wickfield, Mr. Dick, David Copperfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 647

Explanation and Analysis

As Traddles attempts to account for all of the money Uriah has embezzled, it emerges that Miss Betsey didn't actually lose her *entire* fortune. Her admission that she concealed this from David, however, places all of his efforts to find work and establish himself in a profession in a new light. Financially speaking, David didn't necessarily need to do all the hard work he ended up doing, but his aunt apparently felt that that work *was* necessary for his growth as an individual: if he hadn't believed that he was completely destitute, he might never have become the "persevering, self-reliant, self-denying" person he is now. In a sense, Miss Betsey's actions mimic the novel itself, since both engineer circumstances that will force David to become more independent.

Meanwhile, Miss Betsey's reference to Mr. Dick underscores the fact that the changes David undergoes have more to do with moral development rather than ambition or a desire to be wealthy. Mr. Dick is not only independently well-off, but also exempt (as a result of his disability) from any expectation that he ought to help support Miss Betsey. Nevertheless, he chooses to do so, and the work he does copying legal papers unexpectedly helps to ease some of the symptoms associated with his condition (largely by distracting him from his Memorial). In other words, Mr. Dick's storyline implies that there is an inherent value to hard work, even if it isn't financially necessary.

Chapter 55 Quotes

And on that part of [the shore] where she and I had looked for shells, two children—on that part of it where some lighter fragments of the old boat, blown down last night, had been scattered by the wind—among the ruins of the home he had wronged—I saw him lying with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Ham Peggotty, Little Em'ly (Emily), James Steerforth

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 661

Explanation and Analysis

Still in a state of shock from Ham's death, David goes down to the shore to find out that Steerforth has died in the storm as well. Why these deaths spark the emotional crisis David managed to avoid after Dora's is a complicated question, but part of the answer seems to involve David's sense that everything in his life has come to nothing: in the very next chapter, David talks about feeling haunted by the "ashes of [his] youthful friendship."

It's significant, then, that so much of this particular passage refers to the past—like the day David spent collecting shells with little Em'ly and his time with Steerforth at Salem House. There's a sense that, in spite of all David's attempts to craft a happier life for himself, the best moments of his life are not only gone forever, but gone as a result of factors completely beyond David's control. Dickens's use of the sea as a symbol of uncertainty and precariousness reaches its climax in this chapter, as the storm throws everything (and especially David's own life) into chaos. This contrasts starkly with the novel's optimistic and forward-looking message that it's possible to secure a better life for oneself through hard work and patience, so it's unsurprising that the events impact David deeply.

Chapter 57 Quotes

❝ "I wish Mr. Micawber, if I make myself understood," said Mrs. Micawber, in her argumentative tone, "to be the Caesar of his own fortunes. That, my dear Mr. Copperfield, appears to me to be his true position. From the first moment of this voyage, I wish Mr. Micawber to stand upon that vessel's prow and say, 'Enough of delay: enough of disappointment: enough of limited means. That was in the old country. This is the new. Produce you reparation. Bring it forward!'"

Related Characters: Mrs. Micawber (speaker), David Copperfield, Mr. Micawber

Related Themes:

Page Number: 673

Explanation and Analysis

On the final night before the Micawbers board the ship for Australia, they have David and several other friends over for a final dinner together. Mrs. Micawaber, as usual, takes the opportunity to speak glowingly of her husbands' talents, which she says she hopes will be made better use of in another country. However, while Mrs. Micawber clearly frames the issue in terms of her husband's industriousness and independence (urging him to be the "Caesar of his own fortunes"), the Micawbers' situation actually hints at some of the shortcomings of the Victorian idea of personal agency.

Despite being in debt for the entirety of the novel, Mr. Micawber is not a particularly lazy or undisciplined person; in fact, more than one character remarks that he pursues his goals with single-minded determination. The question then becomes why he has not been able to advance more. David suggests that Micawber's problem is that he doesn't apply himself to things likely to pan out in his favor, but this is in some ways the same as saying that hard work alone isn't enough for success: Micawber doesn't seem to have the shrewd self-interest necessary to succeed in Victorian society. As a result, his only hope of rising socially is to go somewhere where the social structure itself is different and less rigid.

Chapter 58 Quotes

❝ I had thought, much and often, of my Dora's shadowing out to me what might have happened, in those years that were destined not to try us; I had considered how the things that never happen, are often as much realities to us, in their effects, as those that are accomplished. The very years she spoke of, were realities now, for my correction [...] I endeavoured to convert what might have been between myself and Agnes, into a means of making me more self-denying, more resolved, more conscious of myself, and my defects and errors.

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Dora Spenlow, Agnes Wickfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 681

Explanation and Analysis

During the time he spends overseas in the wake of Steerforth and Dora's deaths, David comes to realize that he is in love with Agnes. However, he also concludes that Agnes is unlikely to share his feelings, and that it would be unfair of him even to share them with her: because he insisted on treating her like a sister, David forced Agnes to quash any romantic feelings she might have had for him. This thought naturally causes David some unhappiness, but it is a mark of his growing maturity (and the influence Agnes has over him) that he resolves to use even this to further his development into a "self-denying" and "resolved" individual. In fact, David has now learned not only to transform his past experiences, but also events that "might have happened,"

into fodder for moral growth. This perhaps hints at another way in which David's career choice is significant, since reading and writing are, among other things, ways to experience and absorb things that haven't personally affected him.

Chapter 62 Quotes

❝ And O, Agnes, even out of thy true eyes, in that same time, the spirit of my child-wife looked upon me, saying it was well; and winning me, through thee, to tenderest recollections of the Blossom that had withered in its bloom!

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Dora Spenlow, Agnes Wickfield

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 716

Explanation and Analysis

As David finally confesses his love for Agnes and proposes, he has the sense that Dora is looking at him through Agnes and blessing the union. Psychologically speaking, it would be easy to explain this away as David rationalizing remarrying after the death of his first wife. Thematically, however, the moment is significant in several respects. For one, Dora did in fact give Agnes her blessing to marry David (though David doesn't know this at the time of his proposal). The passage therefore speaks to Dora's selflessness, and one way in which she *did* fulfill her "duties" as a wife: even on her deathbed, her primary concern was for her husband's well-being.

This in turn helps explain David's remark that his proposal to Agnes has brought back "tenderest recollections" of Dora. Now that he is poised to complete his journey to adulthood by marrying Agnes, David can recast his marriage to Dora as a necessary step along that path. In other words, what looked at the time like a mistake turns out to have been part of his growth as a person.

Chapter 64 Quotes

❝ O Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when realities are melting from me like the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward!

Related Characters: David Copperfield (speaker), Agnes Wickfield

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 729

Explanation and Analysis

Having explained the final fates of most of the novel's major characters, David concludes his narrative with the passage above. The image of Agnes is inspired, in part, by the fact that Agnes is literally sitting near David as he writes late into night. This demonstrates her loyalty to her husband and her dedication to helping him in his career. Furthermore, the image also refers back to the moment when Agnes delivered the news of Dora's death to David by pointing upward (presumably in reference to heaven). For David, this gesture encapsulates everything that Agnes is to him, since he credits her with always encouraging him to be better—morally, professionally, and (in this case) spiritually.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: I AM BORN

David announces his intention to relate his life story, saying that the narrative itself will ultimately show whether he is the "hero of [his] own life." He begins with his birth, which took place in his family home ("the Rookery") in Blunderstone, Suffolk. David explains that his father (also named David) had died six months before he was born, and that some of his earliest childhood memories are consequently of his father's grave. David's only surviving family members, then, were his mother, Clara, and his father's aunt, Betsey Trotwood.

David's first words as a narrator introduce and encapsulate the novel's interest in agency and independence. At this point, it isn't clear whether David will be the "hero" of his own story—a major player in shaping his own narrative and life. From a nineteenth-century perspective, David's family background throws this even more into doubt. David's father dies before he is even born, so David grows up without a male role model to learn self-reliance and strength of will from.

David briefly describes his great-aunt. Miss Betsey, he says, had at one point been married to an abusive husband, but had separated from him by the time David was born. There was a rift, however, between her and David's father, since Miss Betsey disapproved of his marriage to Clara, whom she describes as a "wax doll."

The revelation that Miss Betsey had a failed marriage confirms that family and household dynamics will be an important theme in the novel. Meanwhile, Miss Betsey's disapproval of Clara Copperfield hints at the novel's interest in gender—particularly womanhood. Miss Betsey is an unconventional woman by Victorian standards, and she is suspicious of Clara's fragility and passivity (two qualities that were very much expected of women at the time).

David sets the scene for his birth. One Friday afternoon, his mother, Clara, is sitting at home in mourning when she is startled by the appearance of a face pressed up against the window. Clara goes to the door, and the stranger brusquely introduces herself as Miss Betsey Trotwood: Clara recognizes the name as belonging to her husband's aunt. Once the two women are inside, an awkward conversation ensues: Clara, overwhelmed, begins to cry, while Miss Betsey remarks that Mrs. Copperfield is a "very Baby" and questions why her nephew (David's father) named the house the "Rookery," when there are no rooks. Nevertheless, Miss Betsey is not unkind to Clara, and instructs the Copperfield servant, Peggotty, to fetch tea for her when she faints after trying to defend her late husband's actions.

Clara's defense of her husband proves she is a devoted wife, but she is so delicate and sensitive that the mere act of standing up to Miss Betsey causes her to faint, overwhelmed by nerves and emotion. Miss Betsey, meanwhile, is a practical woman who openly scoffs at her late brother. She also finds Clara's youth and naiveté shocking; it will become clear later in the novel that Miss Betsey thinks marriage should be entered into for sober and mature reasons. Nevertheless, her description of Clara as a "very Baby" does hint that Miss Betsey feels some tenderness towards her, and towards the youthful foolishness and romanticism of the Copperfields' marriage.

As Clara recovers, Miss Betsey explains that she has come because she wants to help raise Clara's child, which she assumes will be a girl. The two women then talk about Clara's marriage to the late David Copperfield: Miss Betsey says that the couple were "not equally matched," and Clara admits that she was not a good housekeeper, but that her husband was trying to teach her to keep accounts when he died. Clara further explains that her husband left her with a small annuity to live on, but is then forced to break off the conversation as it becomes clear that she is going into labor.

The conversation about the Copperfields' married life reveals a tension that will appear throughout the novel: the impossibility of being both childlike and innocent and *being a competent and helpful wife—all things Victorian women were expected to be. Clara Copperfield is certainly childlike, as well as very conventionally feminine. These very qualities, however, make it difficult for her to fulfill the practical "duties" associated with being a wife and homemaker.*

Peggotty sends her nephew, Ham, to fetch a doctor, who arrives to find Clara settled upstairs and Miss Betsey waiting in the parlor. The doctor, Chillip, is slightly unnerved by Miss Betsey's formidable appearance, but keeps her regularly updated on Clara's condition. When Miss Betsey learns that the newborn child (David) is a boy, however, she "[takes] her bonnet by the strings, in the manner of a sling, aim[s] a blow at Mr. Chillip's head with it, put[s] it on bent, walks[s] out, and never [comes] back."

Miss Betsey's disappointment over David's gender is a running joke in the novel; when he reconnects with his aunt later in the novel, she refers repeatedly to his imaginary sister. On the one hand, this is simply an indicator of Miss Betsey's eccentricity and stubbornness. Given her past, however, it's not surprising that Miss Betsey would be suspicious of men, or that she would want a girl to raise to be as self-reliant as possible.

CHAPTER 2: I OBSERVE

David reflects on his earliest childhood memories, noting his belief that children are very skilled observers of the world around them and attributing his vivid memory to having retained this skill. David accordingly describes his earliest impressions of Clara, Peggotty, and the home where he grew up. The house is modest but comfortable, and David describes the garden as particularly lovely: "a very preserve of butterflies [...] with a high fence, and a gate and padlock; where the fruit clusters on the trees, riper and richer than fruit has ever been since." Ultimately, the three of them functioned as a kind of family: despite being a servant, Peggotty would sit with them in the evenings, and he and his mother "submitted [them]selves in most things to her direction."

David's remarks about children's ability to absorb and remember their surroundings are a way of justifying the otherwise unbelievable amount of information David retains and includes in his memoir. However, David's theory that children often lose the capacity to take in the world around them as they age is interesting, especially in the context of a coming-of-age novel; to some extent, the ability to be a passive observer of the world may conflict with the pressure for adults (and men in particular) to be active participants in the world. The suggestion that memory itself is a skill that people often lose as they grow older is in keeping with the novel's frequent nostalgia. In this passage, for instance, nostalgia also colors David's description of his childhood home. Although the absence of a father makes his home is incomplete by the standards of the time, David nevertheless depicts it as a kind of lost paradise.

One particular memory stands out to David. While reading aloud to Peggotty one day, David pauses and asks whether Peggotty ever married, describing her as "very handsome woman." He also wonders whether it's acceptable to marry more than one person—either at once or in succession. Peggotty, somewhat flustered, says it's a "matter of opinion" whether a widower or widower can remarry, and also denies having any intention of ever marrying herself.

Although David will go on to lead a conventional married life with a conventionally beautiful woman, his remarks to Peggotty here open up the possibility of other domestic arrangements with other kinds of women. Peggotty is stout and ruddy, and certainly does not conform to Victorian standards of beauty, so it is striking that David simply takes it for granted that she's attractive. Meanwhile, his innocent question about bigamy foreshadows the difficulties he will have with committing to one woman for life.

David continues reading and is eventually interrupted by the arrival of Clara, who has been visiting a neighbor. She is accompanied by a handsome man whom David will eventually learn is Mr. Murdstone. Murdstone is friendly with David and attempts to pat him on the head, but David takes an instant dislike to the man, in part because he is "jealous that his hand should touch [David's] mother's in touching [David]." Clara and Murdstone say their goodbyes, and she, Peggotty, and David go inside the house. As Clara and Peggotty discuss the "pleasant" evening Clara has had, David falls asleep.

Although Freud hadn't even been born when Dickens wrote David Copperfield, *David's relationship with his mother definitely has Oedipal undercurrents. While it quickly becomes clear that David's suspicion of Mr. Murdstone is justified, his initial reaction is explicitly tied to jealousy—and even physical jealousy, as his remark about Clara and Murdstone's hands demonstrates. The closeness of David and Clara's relationship becomes a problem as David grows older and attempts to establish his own family, because he chooses a woman who he isn't especially compatible with, but who does greatly resemble his mother.*

David wakes up later to the sound of Peggotty and Clara arguing over whether it is appropriate (and kind to David) for Clara to spend time with Mr. Murdstone. Clara appeals to David about whether she is a "nasty, cruel, selfish, bad mama," and all three of them go to bed crying and upset.

Although there's truth to Peggotty's words, her views on how Clara should behave as a young widow are also somewhat restrictive: it's unclear whether she would approve of Clara remarrying at all, but she certainly doesn't want her to marry a man her late husband wouldn't have approved of. In effect, then, Peggotty believes Clara should devote the rest of her life to her husband's memory and her role as a mother. This is a period-appropriate view, but it also denies Clara any opportunity to act on her own desires. Of course, the fact that Clara's attempt to do so ends disastrously could be read as a statement on the dangers of "selfish" female desire.


Mr. Murdstone and Clara continue to visit with one another, and the atmosphere at the Rookery becomes subtly tense, with Peggotty spending less and less time with her employers. For his part, David continues to view Murdstone with suspicion.

Mr. Murdstone's arrival shatters the domestic bliss of David's early childhood. The fact that Clara allows her home to unravel in order to pursue her own ends is another mark against her suitability as a wife and mother from a Victorian perspective.


One morning, Mr. Murdstone takes David with him while he visits Lowestoft, where he introduces David to two of his friends, Quinion and Passnidge—one of whom asks whether David is "bewitching Mrs. Copperfield's incumbrance." Under the guise of talking about "Brooks of Sheffield," Murdstone's friends question how David feels about "the projected business"—that is, Murdstone's marriage to Clara. Murdstone says he is "not generally favourable." The three men then drink and dine together before leaving David to talk privately in another room. David thinks about the men's interactions and concludes that Murdstone is "more clever and cold" than the other two men, who joke with one another but appear somewhat in awe of Murdstone.

Ominously, Murdstone seems to take pleasure in making a joke of David's ignorance in front of his friends. He also evidently wishes he could marry Clara without taking on responsibility for David, based on the fact that his friends refer to David as an "incumbrance," or a burden. None of this bodes well for his future role as Clara's husband and David's stepfather.

When David and Mr. Murdstone return, Clara questions her son about the day he spent, and is visibly pleased to hear what the men had said about her. She cautions David not to say anything about it to Peggotty, however. Back in the present, David remarks that his mother's image—her "innocent and girlish beauty"—is still just as vivid to him as it was that night.

Even setting aside her own feelings for Mr. Murdstone, it's not hard to guess why Clara takes so much pleasure in being called pretty: beauty was expected of women at the time. Clara's "mistake" lies in being too aware of her own beauty; it's all too easy for Murdstone to play on her vanity to manipulate her into marriage. Still, she's largely a sympathetic character, and David's memories of her remain untarnished.

Sometime after David's outing with Mr. Murdstone, Peggotty asks whether David would like to come with her to visit her brother, Mr. Peggotty, in Yarmouth. David is intrigued by her descriptions of the **sea** and her promise that he can play with her nephew, Ham, but worries about his mother. He asks whether Clara will let him go, and then whether she won't be lonely without his and Peggotty's company. Peggotty conceals her discomfort with difficulty before saying that Clara will be staying with a neighbor named Mrs. Grayper. David accordingly agrees, and looks forward to the trip.

David hasn't quite grasped the nature of his mother's relationship with Mr. Murdstone—specifically, the fact that David himself is being replaced as the "man of the house." Peggotty, on the other hand, clearly knows that Clara is going to be remarried, and senses that it would be better if David were out of the house when the wedding takes place. In this protectiveness, she increasingly acts as a mother figure for David.

In the present, David remarks that it "touches [him] nearly now, although [he] tell[s] it lightly, to recollect how eager [he] was to leave [his] happy home." Nevertheless, he says it is a comfort to remember how Clara cried and hugged him when he left, though he also noticed, as the cart was pulling away from his house, that Mr. Murdstone had arrived and seemed to be scolding Clara for "being so moved."

Although he doesn't know it at the time, David is effectively leaving his childhood home for good when he goes with Peggotty to Yarmouth. By the time he returns, his mother will have remarried, and his home will no longer feel like home. Nevertheless, David is able to indulge in one final recollection of the old relationship he had with his mother; in some ways, writing his memoir allows David to re-experience a past that is otherwise closed off to him.

CHAPTER 3: I HAVE A CHANGE

Peggotty and David have a long trip to Yarmouth in a cart driven by a silent man David will later learn is named Barkis. Ham is waiting for them when they arrive and greets David as an old friend before leading him and Peggotty to his uncle Mr. Peggotty's "house." In fact, the house is an abandoned and beached boat, which David finds charming and "romantic."

The men of the Peggotty family all earn their living as fishermen or boat builders, so their house is another point of connection between the family and the sea. In its makeshift quality, however, the house also mirrors the family itself, which is comprised of an uncle, an orphaned niece and nephew, and the widow of a former partner in trade. Finally, its somewhat precarious location on the beach foreshadows the events that will later overtake and break up the family.

David describes his impressions of the Peggotty home, which is clean and tidy but smells strongly of fish: Mr. Peggotty fishes for and sells lobsters, crabs, and crawfish. He also notices several pictures of biblical subjects, which he says he has "never seen since in the hands of pedlars, without seeing the whole interior of Peggotty's brother's house again, at one view." David also meets a woman and a "most beautiful" girl, who he will soon learn are Mrs. Gummidge and little Em'ly.

One aspect of David's good memory is his tendency to quickly form associations between people, places, and things. Here, he only needs to see a print like the ones at Mr. Peggotty's to visualize the whole house again. Because these associations are so vivid and immediate, they can sometimes be overpowering in their intensity and threaten David's grasp on the present. The house itself, meanwhile, is an idealized take on working-class life that associates the Peggotty's basic decency with their housekeeping: although they're poor, the Peggottys do their best to maintain a comfortable and homey atmosphere.

After the family has tea, David sits with little Em'ly on a locker (for storing sails), and pleasurably takes in the sights and sounds, including the wind howling outside and the fire burning inside. Eventually, he asks Mr. Peggotty why he named his "son" Ham, which prompts Mr. Peggotty to explain how he is related to the house's other residents. Ham and little Em'ly are his nephew and niece (by his brother and sister, respectively); both Ham and Emily are orphans, their fathers having died at **sea**. Mr. Peggotty also introduces his "wife" as Mrs. Gummidge but does not explain who she is. Later, however, David learns from Peggotty that Mrs. Gummidge is the widow of a former partner of Mr. Peggotty's, who now supports her.

Because the Peggottys superficially resemble a traditional nuclear family, David assumes that they are one. In reality, they are one of the many makeshift or fractured families in the novel, although it's worth noting that they seem to function well despite this. The one possible source of friction is the fact that Ham and Emily are cousins rather than siblings. In the Victorian era, this meant that a romantic relationship was possible, and the fact that Ham later desires such a relationship while Emily does not contributes to her later elopement with Steerforth.

The next morning, David and little Em'ly walk along the beach, comparing their family lives and noting the differences between them. Emily remarks that while they have both lost their fathers, there is a significant difference in class between them: David's father was a "gentleman," whereas hers was only a fisherman.

The fact that it is little Em'ly rather than David who first brings up the class difference between them is significant. Up until this point, David has led a fairly comfortable, respectable, middle-class life. Consequently, he has never needed to think about class in the way that a working-class girl like Emily has, and sees only the similarities between their situations.

Emily then fantasizes about being a lady: she would like to buy her uncle, Mr. Peggotty, an expensive outfit to repay him for his kindness. She would also like to move away from the **sea**, which she says frightens her. This puzzles David, because Emily seems, if anything, careless about the ocean. Emily, however, says she is only afraid of the sea when it "blows," and demonstrates her point by running out along an old jetty. The image of Emily "springing forward to her destruction" sticks in David's mind forever, and he remarks that he has sometimes thought it would have been better for her if she actually had drowned that day.

Little Em'ly's desire to be a lady leaves her vulnerable to seduction by the upper-class Steerforth: for a woman (and especially a working-class woman) there were few avenues for social advancement outside of relationships with wealthy or powerful men. Emily's ambition also marks her as suspect in a society where women were meant to be selfless, although her desire to help her family tempers this slightly. Regardless, seems to drive Emily is a need to escape the precariousness of working-class existence, as symbolized by the sea. Ultimately, however, she only succeeds in trading the uncertainties of working-class life for the uncertainties of life as a mistress, and this passage foreshadows the self-destructiveness of her actions with the image of her running out along the unstable jetty.

As the days go by, David and little Em'ly develop a youthful (though "pure" and "disinterested") infatuation with one another. Their class differences do not matter to them, because they "[make] no more provision for growing older, than [they] do for growing younger."

David's childhood romance with Emily illustrates the novel's complex relationship with the past. On the one hand, David explicitly indicates that the relationship isn't one that could last, because neither David nor Emily are thinking of the future. In a way, however, this total absorption in the moment is what gives the relationship its "purity," and there's a hint of regret that this kind of purity can't carry over into adulthood.

The adults find David and little Em'ly's romance charming—even Mrs. Gummidge, who otherwise has a habit of complaining about everything and constantly declaring her own unhappiness. On one occasion, she attempts to pick a fight with Mr. Peggotty by complaining that she knows he was out at a public-house (tavern) to escape from her "contrairy" nature. Mr. Peggotty, however, remains calm and generous even when Mrs. Gummidge goes off announcing her intention to "die and be a riddance." He attributes her bad mood, as he always does, to grief over her husband's passing.

The adults' reaction to David and little Em'ly once again highlights the nostalgia at work in the novel's depictions of childhood; the innocence of the children's relationship is so sweet that it even moves Mrs. Gummidge. Mrs. Gummidge's supposed grief for her husband also gently satirizes the tendency of characters like David and (later on) Mr. Wickfield, to become stuck in their recollections of the past. Although Mr. Peggotty charitably chalks up Mrs. Gummidge's behavior to memories of "the old'un," the truth is that she is simply grumpy by nature.

David spends two weeks with the Peggottys and develops a particular set of mental associations with Yarmouth—like "the bells ringing for church, [and] little Em'ly leaning on my shoulder." However, while he is distressed to leave Emily, he finds himself eager to return home to Clara as soon as he and Peggotty are on their way back to Suffolk.

Like the Rookery, Yarmouth becomes the site of some of David's most childhood memories. Also like the Rookery, it's a place that David will eventually "lose" when Steerforth runs away with little Em'ly, stripping the place of its former innocence.

When David and Peggotty arrive at the Rookery, however, it is a strange servant who opens the door. David is distressed, so Peggotty leads him into the kitchen, where she awkwardly explains that Clara is not away or dead, but that David has a new "Pa": Clara has remarried. Peggotty then leads a reluctant David inside, where he sees his mother with Mr. Murdstone. As David watches, Murdstone scolds Clara for her excited response to seeing her son. Despondently, David wanders around the rest of the house, trying "to find anything that was like itself."

Peggotty's reference to David's new "Pa" is ironic in light of the changes Murdstone brings to the Copperfield home: far from making the family more complete, his marriage to Clara makes everything about home feel alien and unfamiliar to David. Meanwhile, Mr. Murdstone's warning to Clara foreshadows the ways in which he will attempt to significantly reshape her character.

CHAPTER 4: I FALL INTO DISGRACE

As David sits in his room, thinking sadly about the cold welcome he has received, Clara and Peggotty enter. David is unable to explain what's wrong to his mother, and Clara accuses Peggotty of turning David against her. She grows more and more upset until Mr. Murdstone enters and reminds her to be "firm." He then sends Clara and Peggotty downstairs—though not before scolding the latter for mistakenly referring to Clara as "Mrs. Copperfield." Now alone with David, Mr. Murdstone threatens his stepson, saying that he deals with "obstinate horses and dogs" by beating them. He then orders David to wash his face and follow him downstairs.

Mr. Murdstone's emphasis on "firmness"—extreme self-discipline and decisiveness—is in many ways the dark side of the self-control and purposefulness David learns to practice as an adult. For Murdstone, "firmness" is simply a tool to bully and control those around him, often by denouncing any display of emotion as weakness. It's also clearly a tool used to shore up Murdstone's authority as a male head of household, since he uses it specifically to keep women and children in line.

David comes downstairs to hear Mr. Murdstone consoling Clara. Reflecting on this in the present, David says he might have grown into an entirely different person, and even been grateful to Mr. Murdstone, if his stepfather had simply reassured him that he was still loved and appreciated in his own home.

As a coming-of-age story, David Copperfield *explores how its protagonist's experiences shape the person he becomes. In particular, the novel repeatedly suggests that family life is critical in determining one's character, so it it's unsurprising that David feels this one missed opportunity could have set his life on an entirely different course.*

After dinner, Mr. Murdstone's sister, Miss Murdstone, arrives. She is a stern-looking, unattractive, and "metallic" woman, who, upon meeting David, remarks that he lacks manners. By the following morning, it is clear that she intends to stay in the house permanently; at breakfast, she announces that Clara is "much too pretty and thoughtless" to occupy herself with housework, and takes charge of the household keys.

Miss Murdstone's relatively "masculine" appearance and behavior are one way of hinting at her villainy; because nineteenth-century gender roles were so strict, any deviation from the norm might seem suspicious to a contemporary reader. Since Miss Murdstone also greatly resembles her brother, her own masculinity also reinforces the idea that Clara and David are now at the mercy of an especially cruel form of male authority. It's also significant that the Murdstones use Clara's "femininity" (her "prettiness" and "thoughtlessness") to further disempower her in her own home.

Miss Murdstone has been acting as housekeeper for some time when Clara finally objects. She says that she knows she lacks the Murdstones' "firmness"—a quality David describes as "another name for tyranny"—but says that it is nevertheless "hard" not to have a voice in household affairs. Her protests are derailed, however, first by Mr. Murdstone objecting to her description of the house as "hers," and then by Miss Murdstone threatening to leave. Mr. Murdstone scolds his wife for not appreciating his attempts to "form her character," and Clara apologizes and drops the issue. From that point on, however, Miss Murdstone threatens to leave whenever she needs to bend Clara to her will.

Even by the standards of the time, Mr. Murdstone's treatment of Clara is heavy-handed and cruel. It does, however, reveal how vulnerable the position of a married woman was in nineteenth-century England. Clara theoretically ought to have a say in the running of the household; in fact, the domestic realm was supposed to be a woman's area of expertise. Since husbands gained control of their wives' property on marriage, however, Mr. Murdstone is technically correct when he scolds Clara for laying claim to the house: legally, the house now belongs to him.

Time passes, and David continues to be unhappy. Church now frightens him, because of the Murdstones' dour and unforgiving approach to religion. Clara also seems to be growing sickly looking and sad, and David wonders if anyone other than him remembers how she used to look and act.

David has difficulty believing the evidence of his own eyes when it comes to the changes in his mother. Consequently, his hope that someone else might remember what she was like before seems to be a way of shoring up his own perceptions. Given that David generally considers himself an accurate observer of the world around him, his self-doubt here hints at the ways in which the Murdstones have chipped away at his self-esteem.

During this time, David is being tutored by Clara. The lessons terrify David, because Mr. Murdstone and Miss Murdstone are also present and use the sessions as a way of keeping Clara in line. On one particular day, David is especially thrown off by the Murdstones' presence and repeatedly botches his reading. Finally, Miss Murdstone scolds Clara for hinting at the correct answers, and Mr. Murdstone "takes the book, throws it at [David] or boxes [his] ears with it, and turns [him] out of the room." Other days, David manages to make it through his lessons without mishaps, but he is never allowed to enjoy his free time, as Miss Murdstone feels he should always be given work to do.

David's lessons, as well as Miss Murdstone's broader insistence that he be kept busy at all times, are a dark twist on the Victorian emphasis on personal responsibility and self-improvement. In both cases, the Murdstones' emphasis is less on the particular task being completed than it is on the work itself as a way of building character. This is consistent with an idea David repeatedly raises later in the novel—namely, that work is an inherently useful activity because it teaches qualities like patience and discipline. The Murdstones' actions, however, reveal the ways in which this ideology can be abused, or used to justify cruelty.

David's one consolation during this period is the library left behind by his father. He reads these novels voraciously, loses himself in their characters, and even begins to associate the stories with places and objects in his own neighborhood.

Although David certainly isn't thinking of writing as a possible vocation at the time, the time he spends reading as a child paves the way for his eventual career. This is a prime example of how David learns to turn even unhappy and painful experiences to good effect.

One morning, David comes downstairs to find Clara, Miss Murdstone, and Mr. Murdstone already assembled. Mr. Murdstone, holding a cane, defends the wisdom of beating children to Clara, and then warns David that he must be especially "careful" during his coming lesson. David, however, makes several mistakes, causing his mother to become distressed and Mr. Murdstone to escort David from the room. David begs Mr. Murdstone not to flog him and explains why he can't concentrate on his studies. The two struggle, and David manages to bite his stepfather's hand, but this only angers Mr. Murdstone, who beats David "as if he would have beaten [him] to death."

Corporal punishment was fairly routine in nineteenth-century England, and often used as a way of "correcting" children's behavior. In this scene, however, Dickens implies that the effects of such punishment on a child's development are overwhelmingly negative: when Murdstone says that he himself was flogged as a child, Clara questions whether it "did him good." Miss Murdstone quickly silences Clara, but the strong suggestion is that Mr. Murdstone's cruelty and violence stem in part from the cruelty and violence he experienced as a child.

Mr. Murdstone leaves David locked in his bedroom. He remains there, frightened and angry, for the next several days; Miss Murdstone brings him meals and allows him out for evening prayers, but he is otherwise left alone. When five days have passed, David hears Peggotty whispering to him from outside the door. Peggotty reassures David that Clara is not angry with him, but says that he is going to be sent to a boarding school outside London the following day. She further explains that she has been avoiding David in an effort to protect him, but promises to take care of his mother while he is gone. The exchange leaves a lasting impression on David, and Peggotty fills "a vacancy in [his] heart."

Although David never stops idealizing his mother, he recognizes on some level that she can't protect him from the Murdstones. What's more, her own fear of her husband and sister-in-law prevents her from even comforting her son. As a result, David comes to see Peggotty as a kind of surrogate mother. The fact that he's able to find makeshift relatives in this way is presumably one reason why his troubled home life doesn't have a more negative impact on his development.


Miss Murdstone fetches David from his room the next morning and brings him downstairs, where Clara urges him to "try to be better" in the future. However, she embraces her son before he leaves, over the objections of Miss Murdstone. David is then taken away in a cart driven by Barkis.

As a coming-of-age story, David Copperfield *is in many ways about teaching its protagonist to "be better." The Murdstones' cruelty, however, clearly isn't teaching David anything useful.*


CHAPTER 5: I AM SENT AWAY FROM HOME

Barkis and David are soon intercepted by Peggotty, who embraces David and gives him a bag of cakes and a purse with a few coins in it. Barkis and David then continue on, David moved by Peggotty's generosity. Barkis explains that he is taking David to Yarmouth, and—despite his generally "phlegmatic" demeanor—questions David closely about Peggotty: whether she made the cakes, whether she has a sweetheart, and so on. Finally, he asks David to tell her that "Barkis is willin'" the next time David writes to her.

Although Barkis's courtship of Peggotty is mostly played for laughs, it's telling that Barkis becomes interested in her after eating one of the cakes she's made. David Copperfield *ultimately suggests that romantic relationships need to be based in part on practical considerations, and Peggotty's skill as a cook (and housekeeper in general) is one example of that.*

David and Barkis arrive at an inn in Yarmouth. David is nervous and overwhelmed as he sits down to dinner, and the waiter manages to trick him out of most of his food and drink, as well as one of the three shillings Peggotty gave him. Nevertheless, the waiter is friendly and warns David about the school he is going to be attending: a boy close to David's age had two of his ribs broken there.

David's first solo excursion into the world highlights just how naïve and inexperienced he is: he believes the waiter, for instance, when he says that only someone used to the inn's ale (that is, the waiter) can safely drink it. Although it happens under unhappy circumstances, David in some sense "needs" to leave home in order to become more worldly and knowledgeable.

After dinner, David is transferred to a coach, where the other passengers make fun of him for supposedly eating so much. As a result, David is afraid to eat anything when the coach stops for supper, and goes hungry. They then travel through the night, and David wonders what is going on inside the houses they pass. As they approach London the next morning, David fantasizes about the city and imagines that the plots of his favorite stories are unfolding there.

David's curiosity about the houses he passes stems from his own recent experiences, which have dramatically undercut the Victorian ideal of home as a calm and happy refuge from the outside world. David now wonders whether these other houses might contain children in circumstances similar to his own. Meanwhile, his memories of the books he has read and his efforts to transplant those stories to London continue to foreshadow his future career.


The coach finally stops at an inn in Whitechapel, but no one is there to meet David. He waits anxiously in the booking-office, wondering whether Mr. Murdstone intends for him to simply be abandoned there. Eventually, however, a young man (later identified as Mr. Mell) with a somewhat rundown appearance comes to collect him, introducing himself as one of the teachers at Salem House. David explains that he has not had anything to eat recently, and the teacher says that he can buy breakfast on the way, since he wants to stop to pay a visit to someone anyway.

David's fears at the booking-office reveal just how starkly his life has changed since his mother's remarriage: he is now in danger of effectively being orphaned while one of his parents is still alive.

After David has made his purchases, he and Mr. Mell arrive at an almshouse for poor women. Here, they visit with two old women, one of whom is implied to be the teacher's mother. After cooking David's food for him, she asks the teacher to play on his flute. He does so (badly), and David dozes for a while.

The fact that Mr. Mell has to hide his mother's poverty speaks to how limited the prospects were for members of society's lowest classes. Although Mell himself has managed to attain lower-middle class status as a teacher, his lower-class background threatens to undo even that moderate success.

David and Mr. Mell leave the almshouse and board a coach, where David again falls asleep. When he wakes up, the two walk the rest of the way to Salem House, which David describes as looking "very dull." A man with a wooden leg lets them in, and returns a pair of boots to the teacher, which he says were too worn for the cobbler to repair. David and the teacher—now identified as Mr. Mell—enter the school, which is largely empty: it is the holidays, and both the students and Mr. Creakle, the headmaster, are away. David then describes the schoolroom Mr. Mell shows him at length, noting its dirtiness and generally "forlorn and desolate" appearance.

Although Mr., Mell's job as a teacher gives him a measure of respectability he would not enjoy doing "unskilled" labor, it clearly doesn't pay well: he can't afford a new pair of boots, and has been wearing the old ones for so long that they can't even be repaired. Given the state of the classroom, however, it's equally clear that the school isn't spending its money on educating its students well. In fact, Mr. Creakle basically views his school as a business venture, which Dickens (a proponent of education reform) suggests undermines the role that education ought to have in shaping young people's minds and characters.

David finds a placard in the room that reads, "Take care of him. He bites." David assumes that there must be a dog somewhere nearby, but Mr. Mell apologetically explains that David must wear the placard on his back—presumably, Mr. Murdstone has asked the school to punish David by making his "attack" on Murdstone public knowledge. From that point on, David is hyperaware of what the placard must look like to the school's employees and servants, and worries that the other boys will mock him when they arrive; he comes across a door several students have carved their names into, and tries to imagine how each boy will respond to the placard.

Like the beating Mr. Murdstone gave David, the placard David is forced to wear speaks to the novel's ideas about how children learn and develop. Although the placard certainly makes an impression on David, it does so by undermining his confidence. By contrast, the people, events, and experiences that end up contributing to David's growth do so by drawing out positive character traits and providing him with a more solid sense of himself as independent and purposeful.

The month David spends waiting for his classmates to arrive is unhappy. He does well at his studies with Mr. Mell, and strikes up a kind of friendship with him, despite the teacher's eccentricities. He is lonely and frightened, however, and constantly ashamed of the placard.

David's ability to make good use of his studies with Mr. Mell, despite the less than favorable circumstances, is a sign of his ability to turn even his worst experiences into opportunities for self-improvement and growth.

CHAPTER 6: I ENLARGE MY CIRCLE OF ACQUAINTANCE

After a month has passed, David notices the man with the wooden leg cleaning the school in preparation for the arrival of students. That evening, David is summoned to see Mr. Creakle. David is intimidated by the headmaster, who has a habitually angry expression and always talks in a whisper (the man with the wooden leg repeats most of what he says in a louder voice). A cross-examination ensues, with Mr. Creakle asking how David has behaved so far, warning him that he knows Mr. Murdstone, and describing himself as a "Tartar." As proof of this, Mr. Creakle warns David that he would disown his own wife and daughter (who are in the room) if they disobeyed him. As he leaves, David dares to ask to take the placard off, and Mr. Creakle lunges at him in answer.

Even more than Mr. Murdstone, Mr. Creakle reveals just how tyrannically a husband and father could be if he chose to abuse his authority; he appears to take great pleasure in terrorizing his wife and daughter, who have few (if any) places to turn for help. Given this, it's not surprising that Creakle proves to be such a sadistic headmaster: anyone who would behave so viciously to his own family certainly won't hold back in the more cutthroat world outside the home.

The next day, the head teacher, Mr. Sharp, returns. A student named Tommy Traddles arrives and tells David that Mr. Sharp's luxuriantly wavy hair is actually a wig. Traddles and David quickly strike up a friendship, with Traddles helping smooth the issue of the placard over with the other students when they arrive.

In addition to being David's first real friend, Traddles will eventually become a foil to David. Although the two characters end up in a similar place—happily married, with thriving careers—Traddles follows a much more straightforward path there, without the missteps and false starts that plague David.

A student named James Steerforth returns. The boys have been anticipating his arrival so they can present David to him: Steerforth is older, good-looking, and rich, and therefore the unofficial leader of the group. When Steerforth meets David, he tells David that he ought to give him his money for safekeeping, and then asks him whether he'd like to use some of it to buy a bottle of wine Steerforth has. In this way, he tricks David into buying not only the wine but also cakes, biscuits, and fruit.

David's first interaction with Steerforth establishes a pattern that will hold for the rest of their relationship. Although Steerforth isn't exactly cruel to David, the combination of his charm and David's impressionability is a bad mixture. David is so in awe of Steerforth that he allows himself to be taken advantage of and led into various questionable activities. Even setting Steerforth's frequently amoral behavior to one side, this is problematic, because it prevents David from learning to exercise his own will and judgment.

That evening, Steerforth lays all the food out on David's bed and the boys stay up feasting and gossiping—an episode David remembers as magical to the present day. Through their talk, David learns more about the school—for instance, that Mr. Creakle and Tungay (the man with the wooden leg) used to work together trading hops (an ingredient in beer) and view the school mostly as a moneymaking venture. Both are consequently cruel with the students, although Mr. Creakle never dares to beat Steerforth. Mr. Mell and Mr. Sharp, meanwhile, are badly paid, and the former is particularly poor, having grown up in poverty.

David's fond memories of his nights at Salem House are another example of the nostalgia that colors his descriptions of experiences he has had to outgrow. This section also continues to develop the novel's treatment of class-related issues: Creakle, for instance, is eager to stay in the good graces of the wealthy and upper-class Steerforths.

After the talk dies down and most of the boys have gone to bed, Steerforth reiterates that he will "take care of" David. He also asks whether David has a sister, since he imagines she would be a "pretty, timid, little, bright-eyed sort of girl." David says that he does not, and continues to think about Steerforth as he falls asleep—though not, he says, because he had any premonition of Steerforth's future.

Part of what makes David and Steerforth's relationship "problematic," from a Victorian perspective, is its homoerotic subtext. In this exchange, Steerforth is apparently romantically interested in a (hypothetical) female version of David. The passage also underscores the idea that the friendship stands between David and adult masculinity by reinforcing his more "feminine" (that is, passive) traits: Steerforth's description of David's "sister" as "timid" and innocent is transparently a description of David himself.

CHAPTER 7: MY 'FIRST HALF' AT SALEM HOUSE

Classes begin the next day with Mr. Creakle barging into the classroom and threatening to beat any students who don't apply themselves in the new term. He then walks over to David and hits him a few times with his cane, which Creakle calls a "tooth." Creakle does the same to other boys in the room, and David remarks that the headmaster "had a delight in cutting at the boys." Even now, David says, he still cannot forget or forgive how frightened the boys were of Creakle, and he describes several instances in which he waited watchfully for Creakle to explode at him or someone else. Traddles in particular, as the "merriest and most miserable of all the boys," experiences frequent beatings, and once even takes the blame for an offense committed by Steerforth (laughing in church).

David's deep animosity toward Creakle isn't simply the result of the beatings he personally received. Instead, it seems to stem from his beliefs about childhood education, and his sense that Creakle was uniquely unsuited to the task. In fact, David suggests that Creakle would have been able to do less "mischief" as head of the army or navy than he did as a schoolmaster. The implication, in other words, is that Creakle's actions have particularly harmful long-term effects on children, because they are uniquely impressionable.

Meanwhile, Steerforth continues to act as a protector for David, though he does not intervene on his behalf with Creakle. David, however, remains in awe of him, and Steerforth seems to feel some fondness in return. Steerforth is especially excited when David happens to mention the novels he has read, and asks him to recount what he remembers of the stories to Steerforth every night. Despite the downsides of the arrangement—David is often tired the next day—he appreciates the admiration it inspires in the other boys, and relishes the opportunity to indulge his "romantic and dreamy" side amidst the drudgery of life at school.

Although David's friendship with Steerforth is generally presented as a hindrance to David's growth, Steerforth does provide David with his first opportunity to exercise his skills as a "writer." Though he's technically recounting other people's narratives, David's storytelling sessions require him to draw on his memories in much the same way he does writing the memoir itself. Still, he's clearly not thinking of storytelling as a vocation yet, since he approaches it in a "dreamy" rather than disciplined manner.

The students at Salem generally learn little because of their fear of Mr. Creakle. David, however, does manage to pick up "some crumbs of knowledge" from Mr. Mell, and is therefore disturbed by the fact that Steerforth consistently treats Mell with disdain. He also regrets telling Steerforth about the visit he and Mell paid to Mell's mother. This unfortunately comes back to haunt David one day when Mell scolds the classroom—and then Steerforth in particular—for being unusually rowdy. Steerforth refuses to listen to Mell, instead throwing the teacher's demand that he sit down and be quiet back at Mell. The argument escalates, and Steerforth eventually says he knows—from David—that Mell is a "beggar."

Although Dickens elsewhere suggests that some forms of hardship can build character, it's clear that some experiences simply can't be turned to good use: the students at Salem House, for instance, are in such a constant state of terror that learning is impossible. Furthermore, the one teacher who does seem able to accomplish something is vulnerable on account of his lower-class background. This becomes painfully obvious when he attempts to scold the upper-class Steerforth, who feels nothing but contempt for Mell. In fact, Mell remains a "beggar" to Steerforth, despite the position he's reached in life.

Suddenly, Mr. Creakle enters, and scolds Mr. Mell for "forgetting himself" so far as to chastise Steerforth and to accuse Creakle himself of favoritism. He also mildly scolds Steerforth for insulting Mell, but Steerforth defends his words, and reveals that Mell's mother lives in an almshouse. Mell confirms that this is true, and Creakle fires him on the spot. As he leaves, however, Mell says he hopes Steerforth will one day be "ashamed" of his actions, and that he "would prefer to see [Steerforth as] anything rather than a friend [...] to anyone in whom [Mell] feel[s] an interest." Creakle then thanks Steerforth, and most of the students cheer for him.

Like Steerforth, Creakle can't or won't separate Mell from his impoverished background; he claims that continuing to employ Mell would be the same as providing charity, despite the fact that nothing material about Mell's situation has changed. This hints that the mere act of "allowing" a lower-class man like Mell to rise in the world is viewed as a form of charity, over and apart from any actual assistance. Tellingly, Mell is ultimately able to achieve success only by immigrating to Australia, where social class was more fluid.

Mr. Mell's dismissal causes a rift between Steerforth and Traddles, who had cried when he left (and been beaten for it). Traddles accuses Steerforth not only of getting Mell fired but also of hurting the man's feelings, but Steerforth rejects the idea that Mell has feelings in the same way that they do. He also says he will ensure that his family provides Mell with some money. David is pleased with the "nobility" of this speech but also feels uncomfortable with Mell's departure. This feeling fades, however, the more time David spends with Steerforth.

The events surrounding Mr. Mell's firing in many ways foreshadow Steerforth's eventual affair with little Em'ly: Steerforth doesn't really believe lower-class people have feelings, so he also doesn't worry about hurting them. He is, however, willing to recompense them, which suggests one way of thinking about the "logic" behind Steerforth's bias: perhaps the lives of the lower classes are so governed by financial necessity that there's no room left over for "higher" feelings. This is an idea that the novel as a whole consistently refutes, but that nevertheless recurs throughout it.

Sometime later that term, Tungay announces that David has visitors. These turn out to be Mr. Peggotty and Ham, and the three share a joyful reunion, with David crying at the sight of his "old friends," and Ham remarking on how much David has grown. Mr. Peggotty confirms that Peggotty, little Em'ly, and Mrs. Gummidge are all well, and David asks whether Emily has changed much. Mr. Peggotty says that Emily is "getting to be a woman," and comments proudly on the progress she has made with her education.

Although David himself can't explain why he's crying, it's likely a reaction to the contrast between his circumstances the last time he saw the Peggottys and his circumstances now. Although David has, as Ham notes, begun to grow up since that first meeting, the experiences that have forced him to do so have mostly been painful.

At this point, Steerforth accidentally stumbles into the room, and David takes the opportunity to introduce him to Mr. Peggotty and Ham. Steerforth is effortlessly charming with them, and David pauses in his narrative to comment on the charisma that made people want to "yield" to him. Back in the main storyline, David speaks glowingly of Steerforth's kindness to Mr. Peggotty, and says that the next time he visits Yarmouth, he will bring Steerforth with him. The group discusses Mr. Peggotty's house, Steerforth saying a boat is "the right sort of house for such a thorough-built boatman."

Steerforth is in many ways a commentary on the dangers posed by someone who learns to influence events and people but never to control himself. With very little conscious effort, Steerforth is able to bend those around him to his will. However, because he has no guiding light beyond his own impulses and emotions, his influence over others only results in dragging them into trouble alongside him. The fact that the Peggottys are working-class exacerbates this, because Steerforth sees them more as quaint abstractions than real people, as his remark about the appropriateness of their house suggests.

After Ham and Mr. Peggotty leave, David considers telling Steerforth about little Em'ly, but is afraid Steerforth will mock him for his infatuation. He is also "uneasy" about the idea of Emily becoming a woman. That evening, the boys feast on the lobsters, crabs, and shrimp Mr. Peggotty brought David.

David and Emily are approximately the same age, but where David seemed flattered by the suggestion that he is growing up, he reacts with discomfort to the idea that Emily is as well. On some level, this might simply be a reflection of his old wish to remain a child with her forever. In light of the novel's later events, however, it also perhaps points to David's (and the era's) discomfort with adult female sexuality. Emily is the most flirtatious of the novel's female characters, and she ultimately has an affair out of wedlock. David's anxiety about her becoming a woman possibly hints at her sexual "looseness."

The rest of the term passes without incident, leaving David only with a "jumble" of impressions of daily life. As the end of the term approaches, David begins to look forward to going home (though he fears he may not be allowed back). In the end, however, David winds up on a coach returning home by way of Yarmouth.

Murdstone's presence clearly hasn't entirely wiped out David's memories of home as a happy place. It's no longer a place he can count on for refuge, however, and therefore in some sense it is no longer home at all.

CHAPTER 8: MY HOLIDAYS, ESPECIALLY ONE HAPPY AFTERNOON

The coach deposits David at an inn in Yarmouth, and the next morning, Mr. Barkis arrives to bring him the rest of the way home. David tells Barkis that he relayed his message to Peggotty and is surprised at Barkis's "gruff" response. David presses Barkis further, and Barkis says Peggotty has not given him an answer and that he does not intend to press her for one. However, he asks David to tell Peggotty that he is waiting for a response.

David's confusion during this exchange with Barkis is not simply the result of his romantic inexperience; Barkis's method of courting Peggotty is idiosyncratic, and mostly played for comic relief.

David is overcome by a "strange feeling" as he approaches his home; he realizes that it is no longer the happy place he remembers, and thinks it might have been better to stay at Salem House. Pushing aside his fear of Mr. Murdstone and Miss Murdstone, David enters the house only to hear Clara singing. The sound makes David think of his early childhood, and he approaches to find her singing to a baby. When she sees David, Clara embraces him and introduces him to his baby brother. David is so happy that he later wishes he "had died" during the reunion.

Despite David's misgivings, he actually is able in this scene to briefly return to the home he has otherwise lost: the image of David with his mother and younger brother is one of perfect domestic bliss. It's significant, however, that David feels as though the moment is also a return to the past, and even more significant that he wishes to die then and there. Even if the Murdstones weren't a factor, this kind of "infantine" happiness is not something that can last indefinitely; the only way to remain a baby in his mother's arms forever, as David puts it, is to die.

Mr. Murdstone and Miss Murdstone are out, so David, Clara, and Peggotty spend a happy afternoon together. Over dinner, he relays Barkis's message to Peggotty, who laughs and grows flustered as she denies having any intention of marrying him. Clara teases her, but David notices that she also looks "anxious" and "careworn." Eventually, she asks Peggotty not to leave her, and Peggotty swears not to, though there are "some Cats that would be well enough pleased if she did."

Peggotty's position as Clara's housekeeper limits her ability to marry and establish a household of her own. Although the novel justifies this by attributing it to loyalty (and therefore Peggotty's own wishes), a real-life servant might be equally constrained by considerations like financial necessity.

David, Clara, and Peggotty continue to chat after dinner, David describing his experiences at school and reveling in the apparent return to older, happier times. Suddenly, Peggotty asks what has happened to Miss Betsey, and then wonders whether she might leave anything to David in her will. Clara is skeptical, but Peggotty continues to press the issue, saying Miss Betsey might "forgive" David (for being born a boy) now that he has a brother.

Even as David is enjoying the return of his old life, Peggotty breaks the mood by reminding him and Clara of how David's position in the household has now changed: her question about Miss Betsey's will is a veiled reference to the fact that David is now unlikely to inherit anything, since Mr. Murdstone will presumably leave everything to his new son.

This upsets Clara, who accuses Peggotty of being jealous of the baby, and suggests that she should marry Barkis after all. Peggotty retorts that that would make Miss Murdstone happy, and the two women get into an argument, with Clara defending Miss Murdstone's place in the household on the basis of her (Clara's) incompetence. She also accuses Peggotty of "insinuating" that Mr. Murdstone is cruel to David, and defends her own "submissiveness" to her husband. David writes that he later suspected Peggotty provoked this argument in order to allow his mother to vent her feelings.

Clara's defensiveness suggests that she's aware on some level that the Murdstones are treating her and David poorly. With that said, there's an element of truth to her excuse-making: by the standards of the day, Clara is correct when she says she ought to be "submissive," though for a modern reader, the way in which Murdstone exploits Clara's submissiveness is likely to be an argument against it. Furthermore, Peggotty seems to share Clara's assessment of herself as childish and incompetent, since she provokes the whole argument to humor her mistress.

That evening proves to be the "last of its race," and it is cut short by Mr. Murdstone and Miss Murdstone arriving home. Clara sends David to bed, however, and he does not see the Murdstones until the following morning. At breakfast, David apologizes for biting Mr. Murdstone and asks for his forgiveness. Miss Murdstone then asks how long David will be visiting, and begins to cross off the days on a calendar. Later that same day, David upsets Miss Murdstone by holding the baby, and Clara eventually concedes that Miss Murdstone is right to disapprove.

Just as Peggotty hinted, the birth of Clara and Murdstone's child has pushed David further outside the family than ever. By crossing off the days until David's departure, Miss Murdstone clearly indicates that David is just a visitor (and an unwelcome one at that). He isn't even allowed to hold his own brother, presumably because doing so would imply that he had some recognized relationship to the baby.

A few days later, Clara makes the mistake of comparing David to the baby and remarking that they look similar. Miss Murdstone retorts that the two children do not resemble each other at all and storms out of the room. This incident, and others like it, chip away at David's self-esteem. He notices, for instance, that everyone becomes anxious when he enters a room, and he realizes that his mother is afraid that the Murdstones will lash out at one or both of them.

Miss Murdstone's reaction to Clara's offhand remark emphasizes how unwilling she is to acknowledge David as a member of the family; even a reminder that David and his brother are related is unacceptable in Miss Murdstone's eyes. In a more subtle way, the family's reactions when David enters the room also underscore his status as an outsider. Although it seems unlikely that David is ever interrupting a truly happy scene, his appearance constantly disrupts whatever domestic harmony does exist in the household.

Partly in an attempt to protect Clara, David avoids his mother, spending many evenings with Peggotty. This also attracts Mr. Murdstone's disapproval, however—ostensibly because David is "sullen," but really because Mr. Murdstone needs David around to use as leverage with Clara. Clara attempts to question the Murdstones' characterization of David, but backs down when her husband and Miss Murdstone imply that she is challenging their judgment. After scolding Clara for being "weak and inconsiderate," Mr. Murdstone orders David to spend his free time with the rest of the family. He also chastises David for his relationship with Peggotty, whom he describes as "low and common company."

The fact that Mr. Murdstone uses Clara's love for David as a way of manipulating her becomes even more villainous in the context of the time: Victorian England idealized mothers and motherhood, so Murdstone's willingness to use it against Clara is especially underhanded. Meanwhile, he noticeably does not consider Peggotty a part of the family in the way that David and Clara do, solely on account of her class status.

David complies with Mr. Murdstone's wishes, and consequently spends most of his time feeling unwanted—or, as he puts it, "a blank space [...] which everybody overlooked, and yet was in everybody's way." He is therefore relieved to return to school, though it pains him to say goodbye to his mother and new brother. As Barkis and David drive away, Clara calls out to her son one more time and holds the baby up so that David can see him. David implies that this was the last time he ever saw his mother, and says the image remained in his mind long afterwards.

At its worst, the Murdstones' treatment of David not only makes him feel like an intruder, but threatens to erase his own sense of self: he is treated as though he were invisible, and consequently begins to feel as though he truly is just a "blank space" with no identifiable features. His mother's actions as he leaves seem intended to remind him of who he is in relation to her and the baby, which is perhaps one reason why the moment makes such an impression on him: it marks the end of his childhood family.

CHAPTER 9: I HAVE A MEMORABLE BIRTHDAY

David skips over most of the next half-year, saying only that he became increasingly infatuated with Steerforth, who was leaving at the end of the term. The most notable event that term, however, occurred on David's birthday, which is why David can still remember all the sights and sounds of that day.

As time goes on, David only falls deeper and deeper under Steerforth's spell. In some ways, his removal from Salem House (and thus from Steerforth) probably contributes to his growth over the next several years; if he and Steerforth had maintained their relationship, David would likely have grown into a more passive and deferential person.

That morning, Mr. Sharp tells David in a "feeling tone" to go to the parlor. David does so unsuspectingly only to find Mr. Creakle and his wife waiting for him. Mrs. Creakle attempts to break the news gently to David, saying first that Clara is "very ill," then that she is "dangerously ill," and finally that she has died. Mrs. Creakle then stays with David while he cries and imagines how difficult it will be to return home for the funeral.

Clara's death in many ways marks the end of David's childhood. Despite the Murdstones' abuse, David has until this point largely been able to count on being provided for in some way. Now that he is an orphan, however, he quickly begins having to learn to fend for himself. In this sense, Clara's death is "necessary" in order for David to fully come of age, but that doesn't mean it isn't painful.

David leaves the following day, and when he arrives in Yarmouth, he is greeted by a "merry-looking, little old man in black." This man takes him to a shop entitled "Omer, Draper, Tailor, Haberdasher, Funeral Furnisher, &c." Inside, three women are stitching black fabric and the man—whom David now realizes must be Mr. Omer—begins to chat and joke with one of the women, who is his daughter Minnie. Mr. Omer then takes David's measurements and talks about how fashions come in and go out "like human beings." Afterwards, Mr. Omer and David sit down to tea, and Mr. Omer remarks that he knew David's father—by which he means that he helped bury David's father—and confirms that David's younger brother has also died.

Dickens draws several parallels between David and his half-brother—including Clara's remark that they look similar and the moment when David first sees his brother and imagines himself in his mother's arms. Given this, it's possible to read the death of David's brother as the "death" of David's own childhood self. The scene with Mr. Omer further underscores just how alone David is by alluding to his father's death.

Upset, David retreats to a corner and begins to cry. As he watches, a young man named Joram comes in and announces that he has finished making something, which David realizes must be his mother's coffin. Minnie says that her father has ordered a chaise, and flirts with Joram as she packs up the fabrics she has been working on into baskets. These baskets, along with David himself, are then put in the chaise. Mr. Omer, Joram, and Minnie come along as well, and David is struck by how strange their cheerfulness is under the circumstances. When they arrive at David's house, he gets out of the chaise quickly and runs to Peggotty.

For Mr. Omer and his family, death is not just a familiar part of life but a familiar part of their work. David, however, is still a young child and doesn't realize that what is a life-altering occurrence for him is everyday for the Omers.

When David enters the house, Miss Murdstone simply asks whether he has been measured for his mourning clothes. David suspects that she took "a choice pleasure in exhibiting what she called her self-command." Meanwhile, Mr. Murdstone ignores David entirely, instead pacing and trying to read.

As horrible as Mr. Murdstone is, he does seem to have loved Clara in his own twisted way; in the wake of her death, he appears distracted and agitated for the first time in the novel. By contrast, Miss Murdstone simply doubles down on her doctrine of firmness. Despite the novel's overall approval of self-control and discipline, Miss Murdstone's "self-command" in the face of death seems inhuman.

David's memories of the days leading up to the funeral are confused, though he remembers being upset when Peggotty took him into the room where his mother's body lay, covered by a sheet. He remembers the funeral perfectly, however, and describes how Miss Murdstone discouraged Mr. Chillip—the doctor who attended his birth—from speaking kindly to David. He then recalls how the funeral procession passed into the cemetery, and how, when the burial was over, Chillip escorted David back to the house, where he waited for Peggotty to come see him.

Because Mr. Chillip helped bring David into the world, his presence at this moment in the story underscores the fact that David, now parentless, is entering a new phase of his life. The difficulty David has in recalling the details of the events surrounding his mother's funeral is also significant. Although the story as a whole hinges on David's ability to recall events accurately and integrate them into a coherent narrative, there are moments when this ability threatens to disappear. Like Mr. Dick's "Memorial," these moments undercut the idea that it's possible to present a tidy account of how a person's past has shaped his or her character.

Peggotty comes to David's room, and explains that Clara had been sick and unhappy for a long time, and only grew weaker after the birth of the baby. Although Clara was always the same "sweet girl" in her interactions with Peggotty herself, Peggotty says that the last time Clara truly seemed like herself was the afternoon David came home for the holidays. When David left, Peggotty explains, Clara had a premonition that she would die soon, and did in fact decline soon afterwards. Peggotty was with her in her final illness and death, and explains that Clara asked that the baby be buried with her if he also passed away as well. She also spoke of how "kind and considerate" her first husband (the late David Copperfield) had been to her, and then died "like a child that had gone to sleep."

It's not clear what the literal cause of Clara's death is, but the fact that it's tied to childbirth is symbolically significant. Although Clara obviously was a mother, she in some ways failed to mature beyond childhood herself. The fact that, to Peggotty, Clara never stopped being a "sweet girl" and a "child" underscores this, and helps explain why Clara dies, narratively speaking; setting to one side the role the Murdstones' abuse played in Clara's illness, Clara dies because she can't adapt to adult life as a wife and mother.

David explains that after Clara's death, he forgot what she had looked like most recently and only ever remembered her "as the young mother of [his] earliest impressions." He also imagines himself as the baby buried with Clara, "as I had once been, hushed for ever on her bosom."

David's closing words in this chapter make it clear that Clara's baby does in fact represent David (or, at least, some aspects of him). Interestingly, however, David himself doesn't seem bothered by the comparison; on the contrary, he almost sounds as though he wishes he actually were the dead child buried with Clara. This again reflects his idealization of the past, and his ambivalence about growing older. In some sense, David wants to remain a child forever, even if that means dying as a child.

CHAPTER 10: I BECOME NEGLECTED, AND AM PROVIDED FOR

Shortly after the funeral, Miss Murdstone gives Peggotty a month's notice. David, however, is left in the dark about his own future, though Miss Murdstone hints that he will not be returning to school. Much to David's relief, however, he is now largely ignored by Mr. Murdstone, and thus allowed to spend time with Peggotty.

Now that the one link between them is gone, Mr. Murdstone abandons any pretense of caring about David's future. The fact that he now allows David to spend time with the servant is ominous (albeit a relief to David), as is the hint that David's formal education is over: Mr. Murdstone apparently doesn't care if David falls out of the middle class or even into poverty.

One evening, David tells Peggotty that Mr. Murdstone seems to dislike him more than ever, despite David's own wish to bond over their shared grief. Peggotty then confesses that she has been unable to find a new job nearby, and that she will consequently be moving to Yarmouth soon. She reassures David, however, that she will visit him often, and invites him to come with her when she makes a preliminary trip to see her brother, Mr. Peggotty. The idea delights David, and Peggotty quickly secures Miss Murdstone's approval.

Dickens implies that Mr. Murdstone's increased animosity towards David stems from grief: David is a tangible reminder both of Clara and of Murdstone's own lost son. Throughout the novel, however, characters demonstrate their worth in part based on how they choose to respond to painful memories, so the fact that Mr. Murdstone reacts with anger rather than compassion is ultimately one more mark against him. Peggotty's predicament, meanwhile, reveals how her status as a servant impacts her unofficial status as a surrogate mother. As much as she would like to remain close to David, she's ultimately subject to economic pressure and her employers' whims.

When the time comes to leave, Peggotty is sad to say goodbye to her home. She is soon distracted, however, by the attention Barkis pays to her as she and David ride in his cart: he asks repeatedly whether she is comfortable, nudging her each time he speaks. Mr. Peggotty and Ham are waiting for them when they arrive in Yarmouth, and while they and Peggotty carry the baggage away, Barkis tells David that "It's all right." David later relays this to Peggotty, who asks David how he would feel if she married. David approves of the idea, provided that it does not diminish Peggotty's affection for him; in fact, he suggests that marrying Barkis would make it easier for Peggotty to visit him. Peggotty has also considered this, and it is one of the reasons she is considering accepting Barkis.

Peggotty's reasons for marrying Barkis are basically practical: she is out of work, and she wants to be able to remain close to David. Unlike Clara, Peggotty is also careful not to rush into marriage without first considering the impact it would have on David.

David finds that Mr. Peggotty's house looks nearly the same as he remembers, and Mrs. Gummidge is as grumpy as ever. Little Em'ly, however, is away at school when David arrives, and in her absence the house seems less "delightful." He therefore waits eagerly for her to return, but when he catches sight of her, both of them pretend not to see the other. Finally, David chases after her and tries to kiss her, but she stops him and runs away laughing. She continues to be coy with David once they are inside, though she tears up when Mr. Peggotty alludes to Clara's death.

David's mixed reaction when he returns to the Peggottys' house likely reflects the changes he has experienced since he was last there. He arrives with memories of his prior trip in mind, and while the place physically resembles these recollections, this only underscores the fact that David himself is now different, and that he therefore can't expect to relive his past experiences. What's more, Emily has changed as well, and her relationship with David takes on a flirtatious edge that wasn't present when they were younger.

After tea, Mr. Peggotty asks David about Steerforth, and David takes great pleasure in describing his friend's bravery, intelligence, and generosity. As he speaks, he notices little Em'ly watching him with fascination. However, when Mr. Peggotty suggests that Emily might wish to meet Steerforth, she becomes flustered and runs away.

Here, Dickens begins to foreshadow Emily's affair with Steerforth, right down to the unwitting role David himself plays in it: just as he eventually makes the affair possible by bringing Steerforth to Yarmouth, David here begins to "seduce" Emily on Steerforth's behalf simply by describing his friend to her.

That night, David listens to the wind and is troubled by the idea that it "moaned of those who were gone." The rest of his visit is happier, but he cannot quite recapture his old friendship with little Em'ly, who "seem[s] to have got a great distance away from [him]," and takes pleasure in teasing him.

Much as his initial response suggested, David can't quite recapture the pure joy and innocence of his first visit to the Peggottys. The sound of the wind reminds him of the loss of his own family, which perhaps makes him aware of just how fragile other families are (later in the novel, David associates the sound of the wind and water with the breakup of the Peggotty home). Meanwhile, there is a new hint of sexuality to David and Emily's relationship that strains their former closeness.

Meanwhile, Mr. Barkis pays daily visits to Mr. Peggotty's house, always wordlessly leaving behind some kind of gift for Peggotty. Finally, toward the end of David's stay, he and little Em'ly are asked to make a day trip with Barkis and Peggotty. As the group leaves, Mrs. Gummidge throws a shoe after them for good luck. The chaise stops at a church, and David and Emily flirt with one another outside while Peggotty and Barkis go into the building. When Peggotty and Barkis return, they are married. The group then has dinner at a nearby inn before heading home, David huddling close to Emily and imagining marrying her and remaining "children ever."

As he has before, David wishes in this passage that he could simply remain a child forever. In this case, however, his wish is tied not to his mother but to little Em'ly; although David fantasizes about marrying her, he wants to do so without growing any older. This again could imply a discomfort with adult sexuality.

David is sad when Peggotty and Barkis drive off after depositing him and little Em'ly at Mr. Peggotty's, but he perks up thanks to Ham and Emily's company. Peggotty visits the next morning and brings David to her new home, where David takes particular notice of an edition of Fox's Book of Martyrs. Peggotty reassures David that he will always have a place with her, but David is still distressed when he returns home the next day.

Although Peggotty's marriage allows her to remain a presence in David's life, David is nevertheless hit hard by the realization that she now has her own home that he isn't a part of. Although Peggotty attempts to reassure David that she still considers him family, the moment represents another break with David's former life.

Mr. Murdstone and Miss Murdstone largely ignore David following his return, but he feels the neglect keenly and wishes he were allowed to go to school. The Murdstones also discourage him from visiting anyone in the neighborhood or even Peggotty, though she does manage to visit him weekly. By and large, however, David's only consolation is once again his books.

David's desire to return to school is partly a reflection of how miserable his life with the Murdstones is, but it also underscores his wish to learn and improve both himself and his position in the world. Ultimately, he will credit this kind of curiosity and determination with much of his professional success.

One day, David sees Mr. Murdstone talking with one of the men—Mr. Quinion—he had met during his visit to Lowestoft. Quinion questions David about what he has been doing lately, and then privately confers with Mr. Murdstone. The next morning, the Murdstones inform David that he will not be returning to school, but will instead be working for Quinion in his counting-house. The Murdstones suggest that the employment will improve David's character by encouraging industry and self-reliance, but David realizes that the Murdstones mostly hope to get rid of him. The following day, David leaves with Quinion and enters a period of his life, which he says has "often, without [his] invocation, come before [him] like a ghost, and haunted happier times."

Mr. Murdstone's insistence that David begin to make his own way in the world for himself reveals the more self-serving side of the Victorian emphasis on independence and agency. Although these qualities were often touted both as a way of building character and as the means of social advancement, Murdstone clearly doesn't care about any of that: he simply wants to wash his hands of David once and for all. The ending of the chapter is also another moment in which David's self-control threatens to slip under the weight of traumatic memories.

CHAPTER 11: I BEGIN LIFE ON MY OWN ACCOUNT, AND DON'T LIKE IT

David remarks that although he is less naïve than he used to be, he still finds it hard to believe that he was cast off at such a young age to become a "little labouring hind in the service of Murdstone and Grinby."

David's words here highlight a point made in the preceding chapter about the darker side of the Victorian emphasis on self-reliance and industriousness. Although David is ostensibly at Murdstone and Grinby for his own good, it's clear to him even at the time that his removal from school and his new position in the counting-house will stunt his growth and limit his prospects.


Murdstone and Grinby turns out to be a warehouse in Blackfriars—a region of central London. The counting-house is on the Thames, and is constantly wet and dirty as a result. Most of its business comes from supplying alcohol to packet ships, and David's job is to clean, label, cork, and pack bottles. Although he shares this work with a few other boys his age, he feels "agony" and "shame" over his new position in life and misses his friends at Salem House.

David Copperfield *is mostly concerned with upward mobility, but David's time at the counting-house is a grim reminder that it's possible to slide down the social ladder as well. David is now a member of the working classes, and without any hope of further education, his prospects for climbing back into the middle class are limited.*

On David's first day at work, Mr. Quinion introduces him to Mr. Micawber—David's new sublettor. Micawber is a "stoutish, middle-aged person" who speaks in an ornate and over-the-top manner that nevertheless impresses David. Micawber returns later that day to escort David to his home, which is "shabby like [Micawber], but [...] made all the show it could." He then introduces David to his family—four children and his wife, Mrs. Micawber, who looks tired and overwhelmed.

The Micawbers do not fit easily into the Victorian class system, and Mr. Micawber's appearance and mannerisms underscore that point: he dresses in a respectable style, but his clothes are shabby, and his ostentatious way of speaking seems intended to make himself seem more well-to-do than he actually is. The latter in particular is significant, because it implies that not everyone can or should aspire to rise in society: Micawber's attempts to craft a more genteel persona for himself come across as somewhat ridiculous.

Mrs. Micawber shows David his room and laments the necessity of taking in lodgers, implying that she grew up in more genteel circumstances. She also reveals that Mr. Micawber is in debt, and that her efforts to earn money to pay off their creditors have so far been in vain. David further explains that throughout his stay with the Micawbers, the couple received a stream of visits from creditors that would throw both of them into temporary fits of despair.

Like her husband, Mrs. Micawber constantly draws attention to her respectable and middle-class status in a way the novel implies a securely middle-class person wouldn't do. The fact that Mr. Micawber is in debt, meanwhile, suggests a reason why the Micawbers' poverty might be justified to the Victorian mind: the implication is that he lacks the self-discipline to work hard and/or the restraint to avoid overspending.

Throughout this period, Mr. Murdstone pays for David's lodgings, but expects David to pay for his own food and other necessities. Being "young and childish," however, David sometimes spends all his money on a treat, forcing him to go without a meal later on. Even when he spends his money wisely, David is prone to being taken advantage of by older and more experienced shopkeepers.

Considering his very young age, David shows amazing self-control when it comes to spending his wages. Still, he isn't truly ready to take on the task of providing for himself and planning his own life. This doesn't necessarily reflect badly on him, however; Dickens was generally a critic of child labor, having worked in a blacking factory himself as a boy.

Meanwhile, David continues to suffer silently at the counting-house. He quickly becomes proficient at the work, but his "conduct and manner" ensure that he remains somewhat estranged from the other boys. He is also preoccupied by the problems of the Micawbers, with whom he has grown very close. He is careful not to accept their offers to dine with them, however, for fear of making their financial difficulties worse.

Despite being functionally working-class at this point, David's middle-class upbringing remains a barrier between him and his fellow workers. This is another indication of the limits the novel places on social mobility: whether due of innate differences or learned ones, the middle and working classes remain distinct.

One day, Mrs. Micawber approaches David and confesses that the family has run out of food, and David offers to give her the money he has in his pocket. Mrs. Micawber refuses, but begins to describe all the items she has pawned or sold, and how painful it has been. David, taking the hint, offers to carry out the transactions for her, and soon disposes of the Micawbers' "more portable articles of property," including Mr. Micawber's books. This is not enough to put an end to the family's troubles, however, and Mr. Micawber is eventually arrested for debt.

The items the Micawbers begin to sell off are in many ways markers of middle-class status. Micawber's books, for instance, aren't basic necessities, but rather items that make the Micawbers' lives and household more comfortable. The fact that they can no longer maintain the appearance of middle-class life is a sign of just how desperate their situation is becoming.

David goes to visit Mr. Micawber in prison, and Micawber warns him not to mismanage his money as he himself has. Immediately after this, however, he borrows a shilling from David, and the two have dinner together.

Although Mr. Micawber theoretically realizes the importance of discipline and restraint, he doesn't seem capable of applying that knowledge to his own life. Given Micawber's melodramatic tendencies, it seems likely that his words to David are less about sharing advice than they are about cultivating an image of himself as a long-suffering victim.

The Micawbers sell off the rest of their furniture, but this is still not enough to secure Mr. Micawber's release. Mrs. Micawber therefore moves into prison with him, and David moves to a room nearby to keep them company. The Micawbers are in some sense better off in prison, where they receive assistance from their relations, and this in turn relieves some of David's anxiety. He is still unhappy and lonely at work, but he will eventually consider himself fortunate not to have associated too much with the other workers.

The fact that the Micawbers are more suited to life in debtor's prison than life outside of it reveals just how unforgiving Victorian society is of anyone who fails to live up to its ideals of hard work and determination; prison is ultimately preferable to freedom under the constant threat of poverty and homelessness. Meanwhile, David's anxiety about spending too much time with lower-class boys reveals a degree of disdain for the working classes, as well as a fear that working-class traits or behaviors are contagious.

Eventually, Mr. Micawber decides to apply for release under the "Insolvent Debtors Act." In the meantime, he drums up the other inmates' interest in a petition to change the laws surrounding debt and imprisonment. David is there when the prisoners sign this document, and mentally invents backstories for all of them. Many years later, David recalls these events and pictures himself as a young boy, "making his imaginative world out of such strange experiences and sordid things."

Even during one of the bleakest periods of his life, David is (unwittingly) developing habits that will later lead to his success as an author. By contrast, Mr. Micawber is also hard at work, but not on anything that's likely to advance his own prospects. David remarks that this kind of misdirected determination is typical of Mr. Micawber, revealing one more way in which Micawber is at odds with Victorian ideology.

CHAPTER 12: LIKING LIFE ON MY OWN ACCOUNT NO BETTER, I FORM A GREAT RESOLUTION

Mr. Micawber successfully secures his release from prison, and while he celebrates with his fellow inmates, David visits Mrs. Micawber. Mrs. Micawber proposes a toast to her parents, and explains that both are now deceased, her father having died after bailing Mr. Micawber out of prison several times. David asks what the Micawbers plan to do now, and Mrs. Micawber says that her surviving family feels they should move to Plymouth and be on hand in case anything "turns up." She then begins to cry, protesting that she will never leave her husband, despite his faults. Alarmed, David goes to fetch Mr. Micawber, who begins crying himself when his wife reiterates her intention to stay with him. Later, Mr. Micawber tells David that Mrs. Micawber is "very low," and David speculates that the Micawbers are so used to being in financial straits that they find anything else disturbing.

Mrs. Micawber's constant insistence that she won't leave her husband carries a strong implication that she wishes she could; it's particularly suspect in light of her lengthy explanation of how her marriage has impacted her relationship to her family. The gender norms of the time, however, mean that she can only express this in a backwards way, by overly emphasizing her wifely devotion. Meanwhile, the Micawbers' discomfort with their newfound hope for the future further emphasizes how unsuited they are to life in Victorian society; in a strange way, the Micawbers are at ease with their lack of financial success, and thrive not despite but because of it.

The realization that the Micawbers will soon leave London reminds David of just how lonely and unhappy his current life is. This sense of desperation only mounts as David watches the Micawbers begin to plan for their departure, but he knows he cannot count on Mr. Murdstone to help him into a better situation.

Despite their chaotic circumstances, the Micawbers functioned as a surrogate family for David during his time at the counting-house. Now that they are leaving, however, David is once again orphaned. With no one else to rely on, David is forced to come up with his own plan to better his life.

On the Sunday before they leave, Mr. Micawber and Mrs. Micawber have David over for dinner, and both thank him for being a friend to them in difficult times. Mr. Micawber urges David to spare himself similar difficulties by avoiding procrastination, though he also notes that "applying that maxim" to his engagement to Mrs. Micawber led him to go into debt to get married. He then reiterates that David should never spend more than he earns, and David promises to heed this advice.

Once again, Mr. Micawber shares conventional Victorian wisdom about self-discipline that he himself can't seem to follow. His remark about marriage in particular becomes a major concern later in the novel, with Dickens suggesting that it isn't enough simply for a couple to love one another: they need to be financially secure before marrying and establishing a household of their own.

David says goodbye to the Micawbers as they board a coach the next morning, and Mr. Micawber reiterates that he hopes his "blighted destiny" will serve as a warning to David. He also promises to help David if anything "turns up," which he says he is sure it will.

Mr. Micawber's undying belief that things will work out is in many ways a parody of the optimistic Victorian ideology surrounding self-improvement and social advancement. Despite all evidence to the contrary, Mr. Micawber is always confident that he is on the verge of great success.

The coach drives away, and David goes to work. He plans to run away soon, however, in the hopes of finding Miss Betsey. He has been thinking about this for some time, and mulling over the story of Miss Betsey's presence at his birth: he suspects that his aunt had a soft spot for Clara, and might help David on her account. He therefore writes to Peggotty and learns that Miss Betsey lives somewhere near Dover.

David's plan to find Miss Betsey is both an early example of him exercising initiative and an attempt to locate a new family for himself. Given how young David still is, this is understandable: although he is beginning to learn to take charge of his own life, he does so in order to find an adult he can rely on.

Not wanting to cheat his employer out of any money, David waits until the end of the week, and then attempts to arrange for a box with his things in it to be taken to a coach office until he can send for it. The man he entrusts with taking the box tricks him, however, and drives away with David's money and belongings. David therefore sets off for Dover empty-handed.

Despite the time he has now spent living on his own, David is still very naïve at this point in the novel, as evidenced by his misplaced trust in this scene. However, the fact that David carries on with his plan despite the loss of all his belongings speaks to his courage and determination.

CHAPTER 13: THE SEQUEL OF MY RESOLUTION

After stopping briefly to catch his breath, David continues on down the Kent Road toward Greenwich. He is worried about having so little money (three halfpence) on hand, so he stops outside clothing shop and, approaching the owner, offers to sell his waistcoat. The owner examines the garment and asks David to name his price, but quickly turns down David's initial proposal and offers ninepence instead. David reluctantly accepts, since he is in a hurry.

Despite knowing he ought to get more for his waistcoat, David quickly yields to the shopkeeper. This is in keeping with his overall passivity as a character, which is a trait he must work to overcome as he grows older.

Leaving the shop, David decides to spend the night outside the walls of his old school. Once there, he falls asleep and dreams about lying in his bed at Salem House, waking up "with Steerforth's name upon [his] lips." He is momentarily frightened, but eventually falls back to sleep. The next morning, he rejects the idea of trying to visit Traddles as too risky and continues along the road to Dover.

David's decision to spend the night near Salem House reflects his tendency toward nostalgia: he thinks that by being close to the students, he can recapture the feeling of being at the school himself. His nightmare, however, is a sign of how circumstances have changed, as well as a moment that foreshadows Steerforth's later betrayal of David's trust.

The sound of church bells ringing causes David to remember the sound of similar bells long ago in Yarmouth. In his present state, the memory distresses him, and he is only able to keep going by once again calling to mind Miss Betsey comforting Clara. All told, he covers 23 miles that day, eventually lying down to sleep near a river in Chatham, as he is afraid to spend any money on lodgings.

Traumatic experiences are not the only ones that can lead to painful memories: as David's memory of the bells demonstrates, it can also be difficult to dwell on past happiness. Nevertheless, the hope of finding a new family encourages David to keep going.


David is tired and sore the next day, and decides to sell his jacket before heading on. He scans the shops in the area and—intimidated by the larger and wealthier ones—eventually enters one that is small, out-of-the-way, and dirty. The shopkeeper is a drunken old man who grabs hold of David and asks him what he wants. David and the man discuss the price for the jacket, and David—frightened—quickly takes up an offer of eighteenpence. The owner begs him to trade with him instead, however, so David refuses, and says he will sit outside the shop until he is paid. This turns out to take all day, and David still does not manage to get the full amount of the owner, who pays him one halfpence at a time.

David's difficulty with the shopkeeper stems from his inexperience and his eagerness to please. Although he realizes he's being taken advantage of and attempts to stand up for himself, he is too frightened and hesitant to insist on the full price from the shopkeeper.

After his ordeal selling his jacket, David buys something to eat and then settles down to sleep under a haystack. He continues on the next day, admiring the orchards and fields he passes through but disturbed by the other "trampers" he encounters. One man threatens to "rip [David's] young body open" if he won't stop to talk to him, and David complies. The man is traveling with a woman he has clearly beaten, and questions David angrily about his destination and intentions. Finally, he demands that David hand over enough money for a pint of beer, but David refuses when he sees the woman shake her head. The man therefore steals David's handkerchief and—seeing the woman urging David to run away—strikes her to the ground.

Although they appear only briefly, the "tramper" and his wife are a reminder of the dangers nineteenth-century women faced. David Copperfield *contains many women who suffer at their husbands' or lovers' hands—Clara Copperfield, Miss Betsey, Emily, and arguably even Dora—this is the only depiction of physical abuse, and it underscores how limited women's options were when it came to leaving an abusive partner.*

After this experience, David goes out of his way to avoid fellow travelers, and focuses on a mental image of Clara in order to push on; as a result, he later comes to associate the image with his journey down a "sunny street of Canterbury." Finally, on the sixth day, David arrives in Dover, and the image "deserts" him, leaving him "helpless and dispirited."

The fact that David takes comfort in an image of his mother is significant in light of the fact that he's seeking out a woman who will become a mother figure to him—specifically, Miss Betsey. Although David's mother and aunt are very different kinds of women, the fact that Clara in some sense "leads" David to Miss Betsey establishes continuity between David's early childhood and the life he is about to begin; there is even a hint that in going to Miss Betsey, David is fulfilling Clara's wishes.

David asks several people for information about where Miss Betsey lives with little success: some joke about her, while others refuse to speak to David because of his dirty appearance. Just as he is growing desperate, David comes across a carriage driver with a "good-natured" look, and repeats his inquiry. The driver tells him to travel up the cliff toward the houses facing out on the **sea** and also gives David a penny, since he warns him that Miss Betsey is "gruffish" and unlikely to help him. David follows the man's directions, eventually stopping in a shop to ask for more information. A young woman shopping there overhears David's question and identifies herself as Miss Betsey's servant. She is suspicious of David, but tells him he can follow her back to her mistress's house.

The difficulty David has in locating Miss Betsey is partly the result of his apparent poverty. Simply because he's dirty and underdressed, David finds that people are unwilling to help or trust him.

David and the maid eventually come to a "very neat little cottage" with a beautiful garden, and the woman goes inside. David is left standing outside, anxious and disheveled. His nervousness grows when he notices a man in an upstairs window laughing, nodding at David, and "shutting up one eye in a grotesque manner." Just as David considers leaving, Miss Betsey emerges from the house and, catching sight of him, tells him to leave because she wants "no boys" around. David, however, tentatively approaches her and introduces himself as her nephew, causing her to fall over backwards in shock.

Miss Betsey's home is a reflection of Miss Betsey herself: it's practical and economical, but with a softer side (like the beautiful garden). This resemblance is in keeping with the Victorian idea that the mistress of a household imbued her surroundings with her own personality. In that sense, the cottage's pleasant appearance is perhaps a hint to readers that for all her unconventional behavior, Miss Betsey is "feminine" at heart and thus a fitting surrogate mother for David.

David recounts the circumstances that have brought him to Miss Betsey, and then bursts into tears. Miss Betsey then pulls David inside the cottage, gives him several disgusting "restoratives," and seats him on a couch, before telling the maid to summon Mr. Dick. This turns out to be the man David saw in the upstairs window, and Miss Betsey—after warning him not to be a "fool, because nobody can be more discreet than [he] can"—explains who David is and that he has run away. She then asks Mr. Dick what she should do with him, and Mr. Dick ponders this before saying that she should wash him.

Despite her business-like manner, Miss Betsey isn't as unfeeling as she pretends. The drinks that she gives David demonstrate her compassion for him and how much his story has upset her: flustered, she grabs bottles at random and ends up giving David salad dressing, among other things. Her gruffness with Mr. Dick also masks how tenderly she feels towards him; in fact, her refusal to treat him differently than anyone else is itself a sign of her respect for him. Her interactions with Mr. Dick are also interesting in the sense that they function as a parody of the traditional relationship between a husband and wife: Miss Betsey allows Mr. Dick to make most of her major decisions for her, but these decisions always seem to correspond to what Miss Betsey was planning to do regardless.

While Miss Betsey and Mr. Dick are talking, David observes his surroundings. His aunt is "austere" but good-looking and wears plain, practical clothes that include a man's pocket watch. Mr. Dick, meanwhile, is "grey-headed and florid" with a "vacant manner." David suspect he may be slightly crazy. The maid (Janet) is pretty and tidy, and David later learns that she is a "protégé" Miss Betsey hopes to dissuade from ever marrying. The room itself is neat and airy, and smells of both flowers and the **sea**.

Miss Betsey's appearance (particularly her style of dress) is somewhat masculine, but not to the same extent as a character like Miss Murdstone; significantly, she is still an attractive woman. At the time Dickens was writing, this half-compliance with gender norms would have signaled that Miss Betsey is, at worst, a comical figure.

Janet leaves to prepare a bath, but is immediately called back by Miss Betsey crying "Donkeys!" Janet and Miss Betsey then hurry outside to shoo away a group of donkeys (and riders) who had wandered across the grass in front of the cottage. This happens two more times before David actually has his bath, and he ultimately learns that keeping the lawn free of donkeys is a constant preoccupation for his aunt.

For the most part, Miss Betsey's obsession with keeping her yard free of donkeys is simple comic relief (as well as a mark of her broader eccentricity). Within the context of Miss Betsey's past, however, the quirk does perhaps make some sense: given the time period, Miss Betsey would have had to work hard to establish herself as an independent woman after separating from her husband, and it stands to reason that she would be protective of her property.

After David's bath, Miss Betsey wraps David up in Mr. Dick's old clothes and sets him down on the couch to rest. He dozes off, but thinks he notices his aunt brushing his hair away from his face and speaking softly to him.

Once again, Miss Betsey's actions hint at a gentler side to her personality—albeit one she hides when she thinks anyone is watching her.

When David wakes up, he has dinner with Miss Betsey, who then calls Mr. Dick down to join them. She asks David more about himself and his history, before getting into a dispute with Mr. Dick over Clara, whom she feels should not have remarried, even for love: "A mighty pleasure for the poor baby to fix her simple faith upon any dog of a fellow, certain to ill-use her." This segues into complaint about Clara's failure to have a daughter, as well as the ill-effects her remarriage likely had on David's character. She also speaks disparagingly of Peggotty's marriage, at which point David jumps in to defend Peggotty, only to start crying. This seems to impress Miss Betsey, but she is distracted by the arrival of more donkeys before any "softer ideas" can be expressed.

Miss Betsey's experiences have clearly soured her on marriage (and men) in general, but her assessment of Clara, though harsh, is basically the same as the novel's—namely, that Clara wasn't mature enough to marry for the right reasons. Furthermore, her disapproval of marrying for love alone becomes increasingly relevant as the novel goes on, and David begins considering marriage himself. Likewise, her belief that Mr. Murdstone likely influenced David's development negatively echoes comments David himself has made (although Murdstone did not, as Miss Betsey suggests here, cause David to become immoral or untrustworthy).

Later that day, David, Miss Betsey, and Mr. Dick have tea, and Miss Betsey again asks what she should do with David. Mr. Dick suggests putting him to bed, and Miss Betsey and Janet take David up to his room. He is still somewhat anxious about his future and spends some time looking out over the **sea**, imagining he can see either his fate or Clara there. He is grateful to be indoors and in a bed, however, and soon falls asleep.

Although David's future is still undecided at this point, David feels more at home at Miss Betsey's than he has since leaving Blunderstone. Clara's reappearance—even as an object of David's imagination—is a further hint that David is at last safely settled with a new family.

CHAPTER 14: MY AUNT MAKES UP HER MIND ABOUT ME

Miss Betsey still seems to be mulling over David's fate the next morning at breakfast, and David finds her attention alarming. Eventually, she tells David that she has written to Mr. Murdstone, but that she has not yet decided whether she will send him back to his stepfather. This depresses David, and when Miss Betsey suggests that he go and give her "compliments" to Mr. Dick, he jumps at the chance to please her. Before he can leave, however, his aunt explains that Mr. Dick's real name is Richard Babley, but that David must not use it, because Mr. Dick associates the name with "ill-use" he has endured.

Since David isn't yet familiar with his aunt's gruffness, he's understandably concerned by her demeanor and words in this scene. Even beyond that, his desperation to please her—and his hope that doing so will improve his chances of staying with her—stem from his cruel treatment at the Murdstones' hands. David has grown accustomed to the idea that he has to earn not only his keep but also his family's love.

David goes upstairs to Mr. Dick, whom he finds at work on what Miss Betsey has called "his Memorial." When he sees David, Mr. Dick remarks that "it's a mad world,' and then asks him whether he knows when Charles I was executed. David responds that it was in 1649, which leads Mr. Dick to wonder confusedly how "if it was so long ago," Charles I's "troubles" have been transferred from his head to Mr. Dick's. David is unsure how to respond, but Mr. Dick soon changes the subject and directs David's attention toward a kite in the room, which he promises they will fly together some time. He then explains that flying the kite is his way of "diffusing" facts that distract him (like those surrounding Charles I's death).

Although it's mostly played for laughs, Mr. Dick's "Memorial" functions as a shadow or parody of David's own memoir. David's memoir is at heart an attempt to uncover a coherent path from his childhood self to the man he is today. Mr. Dick's memoir, however, hints that David is attempting to impose order on something that is basically random and illogical. In particular, the fact that Mr. Dick can't keep Charles I out of his own memoir suggests that personal identity is not as rational and unified as a narrative like David's would tend to imply.

Returning downstairs, David relays Mr. Dick's compliments to Miss Betsey, who asks David what he thinks of him and—when David hesitates—says that David's "sister Betsey Trotwood" would speak directly. David tentatively asks whether Mr. Dick is insane, but Miss Betsey vehemently denies this, and explains that Mr. Dick's brother tried to shut him up permanently in an asylum for being "a little eccentric." This, she says, is how Mr. Dick came to live with her: she offered to care for him, and regards him as both a friendly and wise man. She acknowledges, however, that Mr. Dick's ill-treatment at his brother's hands, along with the ill-fated marriage of his favorite sister, caused him to develop a "fever" that he has not fully recovered from emotionally. According to Miss Betsey, Mr. Dick's obsession with Charles I is his "allegorical way" of talking about this.

Mr. Dick's background is another challenge to the idea that the Victorian home was always a place of refuge: Mr. Dick's family not only mistreated him but ultimately abandoned him. Fortunately, he and Miss Betsey have formed a makeshift family of their own, but Mr. Dick's memories of his past abuse clearly continue to haunt him (regardless of whether Miss Betsey's theory about his "allegorical" use of Charles I are correct). In this way too, Mr. Dick serves as a kind of warning of what David could become if he allows his memories of the past to overtake him.

Miss Betsey then begins to discuss Mr. Dick's Memorial, which she says Charles I must be kept out of in case people misunderstood Mr. Dick's state of mind. As it turns out, Mr. Dick has been working on this memoir for ten years, because he cannot manage to write it without referring to Charles I. David suspects that his aunt is recounting all of this more for her own benefit than for David's. Nevertheless, the knowledge of Miss Betsey's fondness for Mr. Dick relieves some of his anxieties about his own future and makes him to feel kindly toward his aunt.

Mr. Dick's inability to finish the Memorial further emphasizes the "dangers" David needs to avoid in writing his own memoir: Mr. Dick is so bogged down in memories, and so unable to separate his own experiences from others' (specifically, Charles I's), that he never makes any progress on his narrative. Meanwhile, Miss Betsey's protectiveness of Mr. Dick reveals more of her softer and warmer side.

Over the next few days, David waits nervously for a response from Mr. Murdstone and tries to make himself "agreeable." Finally, Miss Betsey tells David that she has received a letter from Mr. Murdstone, and that he will be visiting them the next day, which throws David into a state of terror.

David's desperation to prove himself deserving of his aunt's help is understandable, given his experiences with the Murdstones: for the past few years, David hasn't had a guaranteed home or family to fall back on.

Late the next afternoon, Miss Murdstone arrives in front of the cottage on a donkey, and Miss Betsey tries to shoo her away even after David tells her who she is. Mr. Murdstone then arrives, and he, his sister, Miss Betsey, Janet, and the donkey's owner begin to struggle with one another. The owner eventually runs off, and Miss Betsey reenters the cottage without speaking to the Murdstones.

The altercation over the donkeys mostly serves as comic relief, but it also clearly hints that Miss Betsey and the Murdstones aren't going to get along. Miss Betsey's actions are also perhaps a reminder of how hard she has had to work, as a single woman, to be respected; her obsession with donkeys is comical, but her desire to protect her home and property, at a time when it was unusual for a woman to own either, is understandable.

When the Murdstones enter the room, David attempts to leave, but Miss Betsey insists that he stay. She and Miss Murdstone trade jabs over her policy on trespassing donkeys until Mr. Murdstone intervenes. Having confirmed his identity, Miss Betsey criticizes his decision to marry Clara, whom she describes as a "poor child." Miss Murdstone is visibly annoyed, but agrees with Miss Betsey's characterization of Clara, and agrees that the marriage should not have taken place.

Despite her outward disdain for women who marry (and women who are childish or weak), Miss Betsey clearly feels sympathy for Clara. Besides hinting at Miss Betsey's basic decency (Miss Murdstone, significantly, agrees that Clara was childish but feels no sympathy for her), this compassion presumably also reflects Miss Betsey's similarly disastrous marriage. In that sense, it's worth noting that despite being a considerably tougher woman than Clara, Miss Betsey was also a victim of her husband's abuse. The lack of legal protections for nineteenth-century women made virtually all wives vulnerable to mistreatment.

Miss Betsey sends for Mr. Dick, whom she introduces to the Murdstones. Mr. Murdstone then begins to describe the many problems David has caused him, as well as all the flaws in his character. He further explains that he feels obliged to warn Miss Betsey of this, and of what will happen if she "abets" David's attempts to evade Mr. Murdstone's plans for his improvement. In response, Miss Betsey wonders first whether Mr. Murdstone would have treated his own child similarly, and then whether he would treat David this way if Clara were alive. This prompts a discussion of Clara: although Miss Betsey irritably agrees with Mr. Murdstone that Clara would have supported him in anything, she expresses outrage over the fact that no provisions were made for David's inheritance before his mother's remarriage.

Although Mr. Murdstone clearly doesn't care about David's well-being or future prospects, the speech he gives about hoping that hard work will improve David is plausible from a Victorian point of view. Fortunately for David, Miss Betsey recognizes Murdstone's hypocrisy. This doesn't mean, however, that Miss Betsey disagrees with the basic principles Mr. Murdstone is espousing. When asking about David's inheritance, for instance, she criticizes David's father for passing through life without ever giving any thought to his or his son's future. On the other hand, her displeasure with Clara's meekness is an implicit critique of Victorian norms (specifically, surrounding wifely submissiveness).

Mr. Murdstone says that he intends to take David back, and warns Miss Betsey that if she helps David now, he will not offer David any assistance going forward. Miss Betsey then asks Miss Murdstone and David whether they have anything to say: Miss Murdstone agrees with her brother, while David begs her not send him back to people who had treated both him and Clara so badly. Finally, Miss Betsey asks Mr. Dick what she ought to do with David, and Mr. Dick suggests having him measured for clothes (since David is, at this point, still wearing Mr. Dick's oversized things). Miss Betsey congratulates Mr. Dick for his "common sense" and then tells the Murdstones that they can leave, and that she doesn't believe anything they have said.

Although she seems to have already made up her mind about the Murdstones, Miss Betsey nevertheless consults and then appears to defer to Mr. Dick's opinion. This is one of the instances in which Miss Betsey and Mr. Dick's relationship functions like a kind of mock marriage.

The Murdstones, insulted, begin to object to what Miss Betsey has said, but she cuts them off, explaining that she can easily imagine how Mr. Murdstone must have seduced Clara only to "begin to break her, like a poor caged bird" after they married. This, she suggests, is what killed Clara, and it is partly Mr. Murdstone's guilt that causes him to dislike David so intensely. She then repeats that the Murdstones should leave, and threatens to "knock [Miss Murdstone's] bonnet off" if she ever rides by on a donkey again.

In suggesting that Mr. Murdstone's hatred of David stems in part from his "disagreeable remembrance" of how he used David to torment Clara, Miss Betsey draws attention to the ways in which memories can distort current relationships. This idea is central to the subplot surrounding Mr. Wickfield and his daughter, Agnes, which Dickens introduces in the very next chapter.

The Murdstones leave, and David embraces Miss Betsey, thanking her profusely. Miss Betsey announces to Mr. Dick that they will both act as guardians to David, whom she intends to call "Trotwood" from now on. They buy David a new set of clothes, so that by the end of the day he has a "new life, in a new name, and with everything new about [him]." His past at the counting-house already seems to lie behind a "curtain," and David writes that it is only with a "reluctant hand" that he has "raised that curtain" in this account of his life.

David's new nickname is the same as Miss Betsey's surname, and consequently marks him as her adoptive child (it's also another sign of Miss Betsey's unconventionality, since a child traditionally takes the father's last name). In fact, David is so immediately at home with his new family that his memories of the counting-house are already becoming indistinct. This is likely a good thing, given how traumatic David implies the memories are: even briefly reliving them through writing has been an upsetting experience.

CHAPTER 15: I MAKE ANOTHER BEGINNING

David and Mr. Dick begin flying a kite together every evening, after the latter finishes working on the Memorial for the day. Mr. Dick never makes much progress in his work on account of his ongoing preoccupation with Charles I, but he seems to find flying the kite soothing, and David is touched by his demeanor.

Flying his kite functions as a release valve for Mr. Dick after the frustration of working on his memoir; in sending the day's work into the air, he's able to place it behind him (at least temporarily). This in some ways parallels David's own writing process, because while David does take pleasure in crafting his memoir, he also resolves to set it aside once and for all when it's finished.

Meanwhile, David is also becoming closer to Miss Betsey, who now calls him "Trot." One evening, she asks whether David would like to go to school in Canterbury and, if so, whether he would like to start the next day. David eagerly accepts, although he feels guilty that going to school will require leaving Mr. Dick, who is distressed to see him go. Miss Betsey promises, however, that David will be able to visit the cottage weekly.

David's eagerness to return to school speaks to his overall desire for self-improvement and advancement. Losing the opportunities education provides was one of the things he found most painful about working in the counting-house, so he is understandably happy to regain the chance now.

Miss Betsey and David leave the next day, and David learns on the way that they will be going to see someone named Mr. Wickfield first. They eventually stop in front of a pretty white house, and David notices a red-haired person with a "cadaverous face" at one of the windows. This man, Uriah Heep, opens the door and directs them inside to Mr. Wickfield. As David enters the house, he thinks he sees Uriah Heep "breathing into [Miss Betsey's] pony's nostrils, and immediately covering them with his hand, as if he were putting some spell upon him."

Dickens establishes Uriah's villainy from the moment he's introduced. In a novel where goodness often (though not always) corresponds to appearance, Uriah's deathlike looks mark him as suspicious even before the strange episode with the pony. As the novel progresses, however, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the revulsion David feels toward Uriah's behavior from revulsion toward his lower-class origins.

Once inside, David notices two portraits on the wall: one of a middle-aged man going over paperwork, and the other of a woman with a "very placid and sweet expression." Just then, a man resembling the first portrait enters the room and beckons Miss Betsey and David into his office, saying that they will need to forgive him for being busy on account of his "motive." This man is Mr. Wickfield, who also happens to be Miss Betsey's lawyer. As the adults talk about why Miss Betsey has come, David observes Mr. Wickfield, noticing that he is handsome and well-dressed, but has a "richness in his complexion" that suggests he drinks heavily.

The "motive" Mr. Wickfield refers to here is his daughter Agnes, who has been the center of his life since his wife died. It quickly becomes clear, however, that Mr. Wickfield's total preoccupation with his daughter is unhealthy, in part because it is an extension of his grief for his wife (whom Agnes strongly resembles). In fact, Mr. Wickfield drinks partly to escape these painful memories.

Miss Betsey introduces Mr. Wickfield to David and asks for advice on which school to send him to. Mr. Wickfield responds that the best school in the area currently has no space to board additional students, so he proposes taking Miss Betsey to see both the school as well as a few houses where David might be able to stay. David, however, remains behind, and finds that from his location in Mr. Wickfield's office, he can see into the room where Uriah is working. This disturbs him, because Uriah periodically stares at David with eyes "like two red suns."

Just as David was immediately struck by Uriah (though in a negative way), Uriah seems to take a keen interest in David. To some extent, this instantaneous dislike (at least on David's part) foreshadows the two men's eventual rivalry. In another sense, however, the immediate connection between the two characters signals how much they have in common, including a close relationship to their mothers and a desire to marry Agnes. In many ways, Uriah is simply a working-class version of David, and his villainy is a sign of the novel's discomfort with working-class ambition.

Mr. Wickfield and Miss Betsey return without having found a suitable place for David to stay. Mr. Wickfield therefore offers to board David himself and, when Miss Betsey accepts, says he will introduce both her and David to his "little housekeeper." The three go upstairs, passing many charming nooks and crannies along the way, and meet Mr. Wickfield's daughter, Agnes. Agnes greatly resembles the portrait of the woman David had noticed earlier, and is equipped with a basket full of keys. David is immediately impressed by her appearance and demeanor, and forever associates Agnes with a childhood memory of a **stained glass window**'s "tranquil brightness."

Agnes is more or less the ideal Victorian woman, even when she's still a young girl. The fact that Wickfield introduces her as his housekeeper is significant, because housekeeping in the nineteenth century was not just a matter of tidiness: Agnes's skill as a homemaker is just as much about imbuing her surroundings with her own gentleness, hopefulness, and tranquility as it is about managing servants or keeping accounts. Of course, the fact that she's so competent at such a young age is partly the result of her father's alcoholism and depression; in some ways, she has had to take on the role of a parent while still a child herself.

As Miss Betsey prepares to leave, Mr. Wickfield and Agnes exit the room to give her and David some privacy. David thanks his aunt again for her kindness, and she tells him to repay her simply by avoiding being "mean," "false," or "cruel." She then leaves quickly, which David worries is a sign of displeasure until he sees her climbing "dejectedly" into the chaise.

Unlike Mr. Murdstone, who wanted David to become self-sufficient simply so that the Murdstones wouldn't have to support him, Miss Betsey's main concern in setting David up at school is the formation of his moral character.

Later that day, David dines with Mr. Wickfield and Agnes. Afterwards, Agnes sets out glasses and port for her father and goes to play the piano while David and Mr. Wickfield talk. David notices that while Mr. Wickfield is generally cheerful, he sometimes grows sad while looking at Agnes. Agnes, meanwhile, is quick to notice these changes in her father's mood and always does something to distract him from his gloom. Eventually Agnes retires to bed, and David does the same.

Although Mr. Wickfield loves Agnes deeply, she's also a source of great distress to him: her resemblance to her mother brings back unhappy memories, and also causes Wickfield to worry that he will lose Agnes as well. As for Agnes herself, she has had to take on a maternal demeanor with her own father on account of his frequent incapacitation. Although this motherliness is part of what makes Agnes a model Victorian woman, the book also implies that she shouldn't have been forced to take on that kind of responsibility at such a young age

At some point earlier in the evening, David had walked out in front of the house so he could see all the houses and buildings he passed when first traveling to Miss Betsey's. When he returned to the house, he ran into Uriah Heep and shook his hand, only to find that it was revoltingly cold and damp. The sensation, as well as Uriah's face, continue to haunt David's thoughts as he goes to bed.

In revisiting the places he passed on the way to Miss Betsey's, David seems to take pleasure in the juxtaposition of past and present—specifically, the fact that he couldn't have known that he would end up living in one of the very houses he passed. The implication is that his past pain has actually made his present happiness more enjoyable. The only thing marring that happiness at the moment is Uriah, whom Dickens once again associates with death and decay in this passage.

CHAPTER 16: I AM A NEW BOY IN MORE SENSES THAN ONE

Mr. Wickfield takes David to school the next morning and introduces him to his new schoolmaster, who is named Doctor Strong. Doctor Strong is a "stiff" elderly man dressed in old-fashioned clothing, so David is surprised to learn that the pretty young woman accompanying him, Annie, is his wife. Before Mr. Wickfield leaves, Doctor Strong asks him whether he has been able to find a position for his wife's cousin, Jack Maldon, whom he says will get into trouble if he is left "idle." Mr. Wickfield remarks that many busy people also "achieve their full share of mischief," but seems to agree that it would be better for Jack to be employed. In fact, he even suggests that Doctor Strong might wish to see Jack sent abroad, although Strong himself denies this.

At first glance, the Strongs' marriage appears to be another example of an ill-advised relationship. As it turns out, this isn't the case, but the age difference alone leaves Annie Strong vulnerable to rumors that she married for money and (even more seriously) that she's having an affair with her cousin. Jack's overall character lends further credence to this rumor, because his laziness and carelessness, by the standards of time, are signs of more general moral laxness.

Doctor Strong leads Mr. Wickfield and David to the schoolroom, which looks out on a garden. The other students are welcoming, but David feels awkward and resists their attempts at friendship: he is self-conscious both of what he has missed out on recently (formal education and the company of boys his age) and of what he has been doing instead (living with the Micawbers and traveling around the country on foot). In particular, he worries that the things he learned while working at the counting-house are somehow obvious to his peers. However, when he returns to the Wickfield's that evening, he finds that these memories begin to dissipate in the house's comforting atmosphere.

David's sense of alienation stems partly from knowing that his time at the counting-house has taught him things a middle-class boy shouldn't know, and has perhaps even left a permanent mark on his character. On the one hand, this suggests that behaviors seen as lower-class are learned rather than innate. It also suggests, however, that the stain of lower-class status is almost impossible to get rid of. David understandably finds the thought of this upsetting, so it's a testament to the comfort and tranquility of the Wickfields' home (and Agnes's skill as a housekeeper) that David is able to set his worries aside.

Agnes greets David that evening, and the two discuss school; Agnes receives lessons at home so that she can act as Mr. Wickfield's "housekeeper." David remarks that Agnes's father seems to care deeply for her, and she responds that her mother, whom she strongly resembles, died shortly after giving birth to her.

The similarities between Agnes and her mother, combined with the work Agnes now does in the Wickfield household, strongly suggest that Agnes is functioning as a replacement for the late Mrs. Wickfield. This again underscores the unhealthy relationship that has developed between Mr. Wickfield and Agnes.

At that moment, Mr. Wickfield returns home. He praises Doctor Strong to David, saying he is an extremely kind man and warning David not to be "one of those" who take advantage of his generosity. Mr. Wickfield, David, and Agnes then prepare to sit down for dinner, but they are interrupted by Uriah Heep, who says that Jack Maldon wants to speak with Mr. Wickfield. Meanwhile, David notices Uriah looking around the room and at Agnes.

Uriah's behavior in this scene is an early hint that he hopes to supplant Wickfield at the firm; the look he casts around the room seems to be covetous. It's also significant that Uriah includes Agnes in this appraisal, since it suggests he sees her largely as another possession he hopes to own one day.

Jack Maldon pokes his head into the room and announces that while Annie and "the old Doctor" would prefer him to stay close by, he wants to leave as soon as possible if he must in fact leave. Dryly, Mr. Wickfield says that there will be "as little lingering as possible," while also objecting to the way Maldon continues to refer to Doctor Strong. Maldon goes on to say that Annie could easily find a position for him by using her influence with Doctor Strong, since she is a "charming young girl" who is owed "some compensation" for marrying an aging man. He then leaves quickly to dine with Annie, leaving David with the impression that he is a handsome but "rather shallow" man.

Although Maldon does not explicitly say Annie married Doctor Strong for money, he does frame their marriage in transactional terms, arguing that her husband owes her something for agreeing to marry him. This threatens Annie's reputation on two levels, implying that she's self-interested (a bad quality for a Victorian woman) and doing little to quell the rumors that she's having an affair. His remark that Annie ought to use her youth and looks to extract favors from her husband is also questionable, since it frames the marriage as something closer to prostitution. Again, however, this is in keeping with Maldon's generally lax morals.

Mr. Wickfield, David, and Agnes repeat their previous after-dinner routine, although this time Agnes also looks through David's schoolbooks with him and offers advice. He remains infatuated with Emily, but also has a powerful sense of Agnes's "goodness, peace, and truth."

The help Agnes offers David in this scene encapsulates the role she will play throughout his life—namely, supporting and encouraging his intellectual and moral growth. David, however, hasn't realized yet that these are the qualities he "ought" to be looking for in a wife.

Before David goes to bed, Mr. Wickfield—his eyes "bloodshot" from drinking—asks David whether he wants to continue living in the house despite its "dullness." David replies that he would, and that it isn't any duller for him than it is for Agnes. Mr. Wickfield broods on this for a while, wondering whether Agnes would like to leave but insisting that he cannot spare her. Finally, however, he perks up and says that he is happy David is staying with them, and hopeful that he will provide a "wholesome" presence.

Although David considers the Wickfields' house an ideal home, Mr. Wickfield realizes guiltily that it is not, at least for Agnes. Wickfield's reliance on his daughter in many ways limits her life (for instance, by preventing her from going to school), and this will only become more obvious as Agnes grows older and begins to think about establishing her own family.

Later that evening, David goes to read in Mr. Wickfield's study, but decides at the last minute to visit Uriah Heep, whom he finds hard at work. Uriah explains that he is studying law, but insists—when David says he must be a "great lawyer"—that he is a "very umble person." As David chats with him, he learns more about Uriah's family: he lives with his mother, and his father (now dead) was a sexton. Uriah then explains that he is apprenticed to Mr. Wickfield, expressing profuse gratitude for this. He also lavishes praise on Miss Betsey and Agnes, which David finds unnerving: Uriah "writhes" every time he pays someone a compliment—particularly Agnes, whom he says David must "admire."

On the surface, Uriah's storyline corresponds perfectly with the nineteenth-century ideal of upward mobility: although born into poverty, he has since managed to enter a prestigious field (the law) and is working diligently to advance in his career. Ultimately, this turns out to be an elaborate charade, with Uriah rising more through trickery than hard work. The novel condemns him for this, but it also associates his villainy with his class status. One of Uriah's most frequent lies is that he is "[h]umble," when in fact he desperately wants to advance in the world. Given the respect expected of the lower class, this backhanded boast is the only means Uriah has of asserting himself; he is in some sense forced into a position of dishonesty in order to have a chance of succeeding in the world.

Finally, Uriah says he needs to return home so as not to worry his mother, and asks whether David will be staying with the Wickfields long. David explains his situation, and Uriah repeatedly says that it will be David—rather than Uriah himself—who will eventually become a partner of Mr. Wickfield's. Uriah then leaves, but David dreams that night that Uriah is a pirate who has used Mr. Peggotty's house to kidnap and drown both David and little Em'ly.

Uriah's closeness to his widowed mother is one of the ways in which he serves as a double to David. Ultimately, however, these resemblances underscore the class difference that separates the two characters; although David does not in fact become Mr. Wickfield's partner, Uriah is correct in saying that, in the normal course of things, David would be much more likely to gain that kind of position.

David gradually grows more comfortable around the boys at school, which he finds is nothing like Salem House; in fact, the students are so attached to the school that they are eager to do well just to do the school—and Doctor Strong himself—credit. The Doctor's kindness makes him a favorite with the students, despite his eccentricities (he hopes to write a dictionary, for instance, and is therefore always "looking out for Greek roots"). In fact, the Doctor's generosity borders on naiveté, since he cannot bear to turn down requests for help. David also notices that Doctor Strong has a "fatherly" manner toward Annie, whom David learns came from an impoverished family. He sees Annie often, in part because she is friends with Agnes—though not, David notices, with Mr. Wickfield.

Like Salem House, Doctor Strong's school illustrates the effect that environment has on children's development. In this case, however, the effect is a positive one: the school is so well-run and respected that the students consider it a duty to maintain its atmosphere and reputation. As a result, they not only learn more but also learn to exercise personal responsibility. Doctor Strong's kindness does have its downsides, however, as it allows others to take advantage of him. Although Annie was not actually motivated by greed when she married her husband, the Doctor's naiveté means that she easily could have been. This shadow on Annie's reputation leads Mr. Wickfield to disapprove of Annie and Agnes's friendship—the implication being that Annie might infect Agnes with either her supposed self-interestedness or her supposed sexual looseness.

David also comes to know Annie's mother, Mrs. Markleham, who is known as the "Old Soldier" because of the way she "marshals great forces of relations against the Doctor"—that is, she uses Annie's position to advance her own family. Mrs. Markleham is present at the Strongs' farewell party for Jack Maldon, which David, Mr. Wickfield, and Agnes also attend. Although she thanks Doctor Strong profusely for finding Maldon a post in India, she then alludes to several subjects that make Annie visibly uneasy: most notably, a childhood romance between Maldon and Annie, and how surprised both she and her daughter were when Doctor Strong—a friend of Annie's father—proposed to Annie. She also scolds Annie for refusing to speak up more on her family's behalf, which Doctor Strong agrees is wrong, because it "robbed [him] of the pleasure" of doing someone a favor.

Mrs. Markleham's words and behavior deepen the suspicions surrounding Annie and Doctor Strong's relationship. Unlike her daughter, Mrs. Markleham is perfectly happy to use Doctor strong to rise in the world. Worse still, she urged Annie to consider the family's "means" when considering Doctor Strong's proposal of marriage, effectively asking her to prostitute herself for her family's benefit. Her other main argument (that Doctor Strong would fill a vacancy left by the death of Annie's father) is similarly troubling: although there is a parent-child dynamic at play in Annie and Doctor Strong's relationship, tying it specifically to Annie's father borders on incestuous.

The evening continues with talk of Maldon's impending voyage, followed by games and entertainment. Annie, however, seems anxious and unhappy, and does not end up taking part in either the singing or the card game. The supper that follows is awkward for everyone but Doctor Strong, who doesn't seem to notice Annie and Maldon's moodiness, or the inappropriateness of Mrs. Markleham's stories. Finally, the Doctor makes a formal toast to Maldon, wishing him a successful career and advising him to "imitate [Annie's] virtues." The party then breaks up, and as the students accompany Maldon to the door and watch him drive away in a chaise, David thinks he sees something "cherry-colored" in Maldon's hand.

Despite his generally forgiving nature, even Doctor Strong appears to have noticed Maldon's laziness. Although the Doctor doesn't specify which of Annie's "virtues," Maldon should copy, he presumably means qualities like patience and self-discipline, since these are the kinds of traits that might help him succeed in his new position. However, the fact that Maldon leaves having stolen a ribbon from Annie's dress suggests that he has little intention of reforming in any way.

Returning inside, David learns that Annie is missing. Doctor Strong and the guests eventually find her lying in the hall in a swoon. She quickly recovers, and Doctor Strong attributes her faintness to her affection for her "old playfellow." As Doctor Strong leads her away to sit down, however, Mrs. Markleham notices that Annie has lost one of the red ribbons decorating the bodice of her dress.

At the time, Annie's missing ribbon seems to confirm that she's having an affair with Maldon—the fact that the missing bow was one she "had worn at her bosom" is especially suggestive. Much later in the novel, however, Annie explains that Maldon grabbed the ribbon without her permission. The fact that she describes this incident as attempted seduction rather than as sexual assault illustrates just how strict the norms surrounding female sexual behavior were in the nineteenth century.

Mr. Wickfield, Agnes, and David leave soon afterwards, but David then turns back to fetch a purse Agnes accidentally left behind. As he enters the study, he sees Doctor Strong sitting in a chair reading aloud to Annie, who is seated at his feet and looking up at him with a "wild, sleep-walking, dreamy horror." David's arrival breaks the mood, and Doctor Strong suggests that Annie go to bed. Annie, however, begs to stay, and as David leaves, he sees the couple settling back into their earlier position.

Annie is visibly ashamed of the evening's events—not just Maldon's behavior, but also her mother's transparent use of Doctor Strong's wealth and influence. Again, the strict rules Victorian women were expected to live by mean that Annie feels responsible for dishonoring her husband, even though she is as much a victim as he is. Meanwhile, the fact that Doctor Strong is reading to Annie hints at the nature of their relationship and Annie's real reasons for accepting his proposal: as Annie will eventually explain, she views Doctor Strong as a guide and mentor who has taught her to be the person she now is.

CHAPTER 17: SOMEBODY TURNS UP

Sometime after arriving at Miss Betsey's, David had written to Peggotty explaining his new circumstances. Peggotty's response makes it clear that she is still somewhat wary of Miss Betsey, and also notes that the Murdstones have left the Rookery and put the house up for sale. In happier news, Peggotty tells him that her brother, Mr. Peggotty, and his family are doing well. David passes this information on to Miss Betsey but does not mention little Em'ly, whom he senses his aunt would not approve of.

Although David had never wanted the Murdstones living in the Rookery, their abandonment of it in some ways marks the final loss of David's childhood home; the fact that it's now entirely uninhabited and neglected pains David, who feels that his one physical connection to his parents is now "dead" as well. Peggotty's other news is also significant, largely because of David's response to it: his sense that his aunt wouldn't approve of Emily is another nod to Emily's flirtatiousness.

Meanwhile, Mr. Dick pays frequent visits to David at school, always speaking glowingly of Miss Betsey when he comes. On one occasion, he wonders aloud to David who "the man" is that frightens her by hanging around the house. David has some difficulty learning more, because Mr. Dick is once again struggling to make sense of the date of Charles I's execution. Eventually, however, Mr. Dick explains that the man has repeatedly come up to the house and spoken to Miss Betsey, causing her to faint on one occasion and pay him off on another. Mr. Dick insists that the man was not a beggar, but David privately suspects the story is simply a delusion on Mr. Dick's part. Later, however, David wonders whether the man might have been charged with kidnapping Mr. Dick.

The man lurking around Miss Betsey's cottage is eventually revealed to be her former husband. Given that Miss Betsey wasn't even intimidated by the Murdstones, the fact that she's afraid of her husband speaks to how badly he must have treated her.

Mr. Dick quickly becomes a favorite with David's classmates. The visits benefit Mr. Dick as well, since playing games with the students takes his mind off his fixation on Charles I. Mr. Dick also turns out to have a knack for making toys out of odds and ends, and even Doctor Strong eventually hears about Mr. Dick's skills. David introduces the two men, and Mr. Dick becomes a friend of both the Doctor and Annie, who has looked sad and pale recently. Mr. Dick is particularly impressed by the Doctor's learning, and listens delightedly as he reads from the dictionary he is working on. Mr. Dick also meets and befriends Agnes.

If Mr. Dick's obsession with Charles I and the Memorial is in part a cautionary tale about living in the past, this passage suggests that it's possible to overcome the past and move forward. Although Mr. Dick isn't entirely cured of his fixation, the friendships he forms at the school help refocus some of his attention on something more pleasant.

One day, David is walking Mr. Dick back to the coach office when he stumbles across Uriah Heep. Uriah reminds David that he had promised to come and have tea at his house, and David (somewhat reluctantly) agrees to visit that same evening. Accordingly, Uriah and David meet up at the end of the day and walk to the Heeps' house together, chatting about Uriah's legal studies on the way. David offers to help by teaching Uriah Latin, but Uriah insists that he is too humble for that kind of education.

Once again, Uriah makes a point of demonstrating humility as a backwards way of signaling how deserving he actually is. The fact that he declines an offer to learn Latin specifically is significant, since a classical education would have been available only to relatively well-off students at the time; early in the nineteenth century, gaining access to any kind of education at all could be a challenge for the working classes.

When David arrives at Uriah Heep's house, he finds that Mrs. Heep closely resembles her son. She also shares his personality, saying she is honored to receive David and apologizing for the "natural affections" that lead her to welcome Uriah home with a kiss. The three then sit down for tea, where Mrs. Heep and Uriah make a show of giving David the best food on the table. They also manage to turn the conversation first to David's family and then to the Wickfields, and David inadvertently reveals a great deal of information about both. Despite his discomfort, however, David is forced to admit that the Heeps are "very fond of one another."

Like her son, Mrs. Heep makes a show of embracing her class status as a way of communicating her resentment. Her "apology" is in reality a thinly veiled criticism of the idea that the lower classes don't feel things as intensely as the middle and upper classes. More specifically, it challenges the idea that loving family relationships can't exist alongside poverty—an idea that Dickens later condemns in the context of Steerforth's elopement with little Em'ly. In this case, however, the extreme closeness of Uriah and Mrs. Heep actually does seem unnatural, and serves as another indication of their villainy.

The conversation is suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Micawber, who notices David while walking by the house and greets him enthusiastically. David is less thrilled to see Mr. Micawber, because he fears Micawber will let something slip about his time at the counting-house. However, David introduces Micawber to Uriah and Mrs. Heep, who protest that they are too lowly to be considered David's friends. David explains that he is now a student at Doctor Strong's and asks whether he could visit Mrs. Micawber. Micawber agrees that this is a wonderful idea, and extols David's faithful friendship throughout all of the Micawbers' financial difficulties.

Perhaps sensing that the Heeps don't actually respect him as much as they theatrically claim to, David is very anxious about losing his claim to middle-class status in front of them.

Mr. Micawber leads David to the inn where he and his family are staying, and then leaves him with Mrs. Micawber while he himself goes to look over advertisements for jobs. Mrs. Micawber explains that her husband was unable to find a job in Plymouth, and that her own relatives there were not happy to see the Micawbers—though she suggests that all of this is a sign that Mr. Micawber is not adequately appreciated for his talents. She says that the family then went to Medway in the hopes of something "turning up" in the coal trade, but these plans also fell through. They traveled on to Canterbury, however, both to see the cathedral and in the hopes that there might be a job there.

Like her insistence that she'll never leave her husband, Mrs. Micawber's defense of her husband's talents reads as defensive; presumably, she's aware of her husband's failings and suffers because of them. With that said, Mr. Micawber is certainly diligent in his attempts to find work, so his ongoing financial struggles likely say as much about the society he's living in as they do about his own character.

David feels sorry for the Micawbers but does not have any money to lend them. Mr. Micawber returns, apparently so despairing that he alludes to the possibility of suicide. This throws Mrs. Micawber into a state as well, but both recover quickly and place an order for a large breakfast for the following morning. Before leaving, David agrees to have dinner with the Micawbers sometime in the next few days.

Although the Micawbers' despair is clearly exaggerated for dramatic effect, the fact that they rebound so quickly from disappointment suggests that they themselves believe in the promise of upward mobility; when one prospect falls through, they almost immediately pin their hopes on a new one.

The evening before David is scheduled to dine with the Micawbers, he happens to see Uriah and Mr. Micawber walking along the street together talking. This unnerves David, particularly when Micawber praises Uriah's resourcefulness the next day: David is concerned that Mr. Micawber might have revealed something about David's past over the course of the conversation.

Once again, David worries that his stint as a worker in the counting-house will come to light and threaten the middle-class life he is building for himself. Meanwhile, David's discomfort with Uriah's resourcefulness underscores the fact that hard work and talent are judged differently (and more negatively) in working-class people.

Despite David's misgivings about Uriah, the dinner itself passes happily: David and the Micawbers drink, exchange compliments, and sing "Auld Lang Syne" together. David is therefore surprised when he receives a letter from Mr. Micawber the following morning declaring that "all is over" for him and that he simply didn't have the heart to speak of his troubles the preceding night. Alarmed, David runs off to find the Micawbers, only to see them sitting quite happily on a coach to London. David is glad that they are leaving, despite his enjoyment of their company.

In this scene, the Micawbers again demonstrate great optimism in the face of misfortune. Although Mr. Micawber's account of their misery is characteristically overblown, the family's perseverance speaks to their basic faith in the promise of upward mobility.

CHAPTER 18: A RETROSPECT

David's time at Doctor Strong's passes by almost without him noticing it, although certain incidents and impressions stand out. He is in awe of the head boy, for instance, and cannot imagine ever becoming the head boy himself (though Agnes says he might). He is also infatuated with Miss Shepherd—a girl at a nearby boarding school who attends the same church services as David. He eventually meets her at a dancing school, and the two carry on a youthful romance, exchanging presents and, at one point, a kiss. Eventually, however, David learns that Miss Shepherd prefers another boy over him, and the two drift apart.

Although he can't quite picture himself as head boy, David's admiration of the current head boy reflects his desire for self-improvement and his ability to set goals for himself. The fact that Agnes encourages these hopes is an indication of the role she plays in David's life, gently pushing him to better himself and grow.

Now slightly older, David enters a phase where he finds the boarding school girls irritating. He is doing quite well at school, but is troubled by the appearance of a bully: a "young butcher" who dislikes the students at Doctor Strong's and beats several of them up. David decides to fight the butcher and is badly defeated, but takes comfort in Agnes's support.

Although David doesn't say so explicitly, the rivalry between the butcher and Doctor Strong's students likely grows out of class tension; the butcher seems to feel personally insulted by the middle-class students, presumably because he senses that they look down on him. Agnes, meanwhile, continues to act as a model Victorian woman, offering comfort and support to David when the outside world overwhelms him.

Time passes, and the former head boy returns to visit Doctor Strong's. He is studying to be a lawyer, but David no longer finds him as impressive as he once did. In fact, David himself becomes head boy soon after this, and begins to take a "condescending interest" in the younger boys, who remind him of his former self.

As David grows older, his perceptions of the world and his place in it shift. Because David now realizes that he is capable of similar success, he doesn't find the former head boy so intimidating. That said, his fondness for the younger students, however patronizing it is, also speaks to some nostalgia for his younger self.

Agnes has also grown up, though she remains David's "counscllor and friend." David, however, is preoccupied with a new love interest: the eldest Miss Larkins, who is roughly 30 and implied to be a bit of a flirt (David is particularly distressed by the fact that Miss Larkins knows several officers). David's entire life revolves around Miss Larkins: he dresses with her in mind, finds himself fascinated by anything remotely connected to her, and fantasizes about saving her from a house fire.

David's infatuation with Miss Larkins is a sign of how much more growing up he still has to do. David pokes fun at himself as he describes his past feelings, implying that they were both excessively passionate and lacking in depth. What's more, he's so carried away with romantic fantasies that he fails to recognize the fact that Agnes is essentially already functioning as his wife by providing him with unwavering support and companionship.

Eventually, David is invited to a party Miss Larkins will be attending; he prepares for this event obsessively in the hopes of declaring his love for her. David does in fact manage to dance with Miss Larkins, and as they sit together afterwards, he asks for one of the flowers she's wearing in her hair. He spends the rest of the night in a state of "unspeakable bliss." Afterwards, however, he does not see Miss Larkins for several days. Finally, Agnes informs David one evening that Miss Larkins is marrying a hop-grower the following day, which sends David into a fit of depression. Within a few weeks, however, the prospect of once again fighting the butcher brings him to his senses.

David's quick recovery when he learns Miss Larkins has married is another indication that his feelings for her weren't really mature love. One of the main lessons David learns over the course of the novel is that romantic love alone isn't enough to sustain a marriage, and that factors like compatibility also need to enter into the decision.

CHAPTER 19: I LOOK ABOUT ME, AND MAKE A DISCOVERY

David is excited to finish school and become independent. However, he does not have a clear idea of what he wants to do with his life, despite many talks on the subject with his aunt and Mr. Dick. Eventually, Miss Betsey suggests that he take some time to mull over the matter by going to see Peggotty and her family. David agrees, and his aunt indicates that she is very proud of him—though she attributes this feeling to Clara Copperfield rather than owning up to it directly. She also cautions David, however, that she wants him to be a "firm fellow," unlike the parents he closely resembles.

Although David is eager to grow up, his lack of any clear goal in life is a sign of his relative immaturity. Miss Betsey's pointed words to him reflect not only the necessity of choosing a career, but also her hope that settling into said career will shore up David's character, making him more purposeful and better able to withstand external pressure. Meanwhile, by attributing her pride in David to Clara, Miss Betsey reveals some of the difficulties associated with nineteenth-century female gender norms; because femininity was seen as incompatible with independence and strength, Miss Betsey seems to feel that she needs to suppress any conventionally feminine emotions in order to survive as a single woman.

Miss Betsey sends David off with enough money to do what he likes for three or four weeks. His first stop is Canterbury, where he says goodbye to Agnes and tells her that being apart from her is like missing his "right hand." He also promises to always tell her of any major changes in his life, including any romances. He then wonders aloud why Agnes herself hasn't fallen in love yet, though he says he would probably deem any man she liked to be undeserving of her.

David's description of Agnes as his "right hand" suggests that he knows how crucial her advice and support is to him. Nevertheless, he fails to recognize that he's essentially already relying on her as if she were his wife—not to mention the significance of the fact that he doesn't want her to marry anyone else.

The conversation turns more serious as Agnes asks whether David has noticed any change in Mr. Wickfield. David admits that he has, and delicately attributes it to increased drinking. He also remarks that Uriah Heep often calls Mr. Wickfield away to do business when he is at his drunkest, which Wickfield himself always seems ashamed of afterwards. Mr. Wickfield himself appears at this moment, however, and as Agnes goes to meet him, David notices how tenderly and lovingly she interacts with her father.

Although Uriah takes advantage of Mr. Wickfield's alcoholism to further his own ambitions, Wickfield's behavior is itself a moral flaw. Wickfield himself will eventually admit that he sees his alcoholism as a weakness tied to his tendency to allow his memories to overtake him. In fact, Mr. Wickfield's lack of self-control causes him to revert to a childlike state at times. Agnes, meanwhile, continues to take on a maternal role when interacting with her father, highlighting just how upside-down their family situation has become.

Later, Mr. Wickfield, Agnes, and David all go to have tea at Doctor Strong's. The Doctor says he plans to retire from his position as headmaster soon so that he can focus exclusively on his dictionary and Annie. This reminds Mr. Wickfield of Jack Maldon, who has recently written to the Strongs. Mrs. Markleham laments that Maldon is too frail to endure the Indian climate. Annie refuses to corroborate this, however, and it emerges that Maldon's letters have not said much about his supposed sickness—something Mrs. Markleham attributes to stoicism and a wish to avoid disappointing Doctor Strong. Mr. Wickfield reminds everyone that he found Maldon his position and takes full responsibility for the consequences, but Doctor Strong remarks that he is open to finding Maldon a position closer to home if, as Mrs. Markleham says, his life is in danger.

Maldon's ongoing attempts to avoid work serve as a cautionary tale for David, particularly in the context of Miss Betsey's words at the beginning of the chapter. What's more, Mrs. Markleham's concern for her nephew (whether real or exaggerated) borders on infantilizing, further underscoring Maldon's refusal to accept the responsibilities of an adult man. Meanwhile, Mr. Wickfield's attempt to take the blame for Maldon's posting reflects his ongoing concern about the nature of Maldon and Annie's relationship; anticipating that Doctor Strong will offer to help Maldon return, Wickfield jumps in an attempt to keep Annie and her cousin far apart from one another.

Mrs. Markleham thanks Doctor Strong profusely and urges Annie—unsuccessfully—to do the same. She then reads aloud from Maldon's letter to her in order to prove to Mr. Wickfield that he is ill. When that doesn't work, she badgers Annie to show her own letter from Maldon, in which he states that he will need to return on sick leave, because his life in India is "insupportable."

In addition to taking advantage of Doctor Strong's kindness, Mrs. Markleham also repeatedly oversteps her authority as a mother: despite the fact that Annie is both an adult woman and married, Mrs. Markleham harasses her and ignores her boundaries, forcing her to share private correspondence.

The rest of the evening goes more smoothly, although Mr. Wickfield seems troubled and continues to shoot glances at Doctor Strong and Annie. When Annie and Agnes sing and play duets together, David realizes that Mr. Wickfield disapproves of his daughter's friendship with Mrs. Strong; in fact, he even prevents them from embracing when the night is over. Thinking back to the party the night Jack Maldon went away, David suddenly realizes that Annie may be having an affair. This disturbs David, and seems to cast both Annie and all his happy memories of Doctor Strong and school in a new light.

David's reconsideration of his childhood memories is in some ways the opposite of the nostalgia that colors much of the novel. Rather than idealizing the past, David now realizes that his impression of the Strong household was romanticized. This is an indication of how David's perspective has shifted and become more realistic as he has matured. Mr. Wickfield's behavior in this passage is also significant: his wish to keep Agnes and Annie apart implies that sexual promiscuity is somehow contagious.

David is sad to leave Agnes's house, which he realizes he will never live in again. However, he tries very hard to conceal his feelings out of a wish to appear "manly." He continues to act as much like an adult as possible during the coach ride to London, answering the driver's questions about his planned trip in a condescending and indifferent manner. Eventually, however, the driver hints that David should give up his seat in the front of the coach to another rider—a "shabby man with a squint." David agrees, but feels both insulted and deeply insecure. Nevertheless, he enjoys the ride—particularly passing by places that stir up old memories, like Salem House.

David's preoccupation with looking and acting like an adult clearly stems from insecurity: he realizes on some level that he isn't fully grown up and wishes to conceal it. This deep anxiety about what others will think of him is itself a sign of immaturity, since a truly mature man (as Miss Betsey earlier suggested) wouldn't be so influenced by the opinions of those around him. His fond recollections of Salem House and his home with the Wickfield also signal a reluctance to leave childhood fully behind.

David arrives in London and takes a room at an inn, where he continues to try to act as maturely and impressively as possible. He resists the waiter's suggestions on what to order, for instance, and asks him to check for any letters he may have received. Nevertheless, the waiter takes advantage of David's inexperience by giving him the dregs of several bottles of wine.

Once again, David's excessive concern with the appearance of adulthood suggests that he hasn't quite attained it yet; the "firm fellow" Miss Betsey described earlier in the chapter would be more confident of his own actions and less worried about what others think of him.

Later that evening, David goes to Covent Garden Theatre and sees a production of *Julius Caesar* that deeply impresses him. After returning to the inn, David sits meditating on both the performance and his past, when he notices that another young man has entered the coffee-room. As David rises to go to bed, he passes by the man and, realizing it is James Steerforth, calls out to him. David is overwhelmed by the encounter, while Steerforth seems both pleased to see his friend and pleased that David thinks so highly of him.

The fact that David recounters Steerforth immediately after seeing Julius Caesar—a play famously about treachery among friends—is ominous, and foreshadows Steerforth's ultimate betrayal of David's trust. At the time, however, David is simply excited to see his old friend from school, perhaps in part because he was already reminiscing about the past.

David and Steerforth sit down to chat, and David explains why he is in London. Steerforth then reveals that he is (half-heartedly) studying at Oxford, and is currently returning home to visit his mother, Mrs. Steerforth. It turns out that Steerforth also saw the play in Covent Garden, which David praises enthusiastically. Steerforth is amused by this, however, and calls David a "very Daisy," saying that the production was terrible. He then calls over the waiter and questions him about which room David has been assigned to, until the waiter agrees to move him to a better one. Before they part for the night, Steerforth asks David to have breakfast with him the next morning, and David delightedly agrees.

Steerforth and David's conversation underscores just how naïve David still is in many ways—not only because of his overly enthusiastic reaction to the play, but also because the nickname Steerforth gives him, in its femininity, suggests innocence and vulnerability. On the other hand, the novel suggests that Steerforth's relative cynicism is immature in its own way: his boredom with everything is part of what prevents him from sticking to any course of action, since nothing holds his attention and interest.

CHAPTER 20: STEERFORTH'S HOME

David continues to worry about his age the next day, particularly when he is unable to use the shaving-water the maid leaves outside his door. He is also intimidated by Steerforth, whom he finds dining in a luxurious private room. Steerforth's friendliness soon puts David at ease, however, and he is thrilled when Steerforth asks to hear all about his life on the grounds that Steerforth, "feels as if [David] were [his] property."

David's preoccupation with looking mature takes on added urgency when he meets Steerforth, whom David considers highly sophisticated and worldly. What Steerforth seems to appreciate about David, however, is precisely the fact that he's so innocent and malleable; as his remark about David being his "property" demonstrates, he enjoys being in control of the relationship.

After David explains more about his circumstances, Steerforth invites him to spend some time at his home in Highgate, assuring David that Mrs. Steerforth is sure to like anyone who likes her son. They spend the rest of the morning sightseeing in London, Steerforth enjoying David's naiveté and David enjoying Steerforth's knowledge. In fact, David is so impressed that he says Steerforth is certain to receive a "high degree" at Oxford, but Steerforth laughs this (and academia in general) off as a waste of time, embarrassing David in the process. Steerforth also decides to call David "Daisy" on account of his innocence.

The exchange about Steerforth's studies highlights both boys' immaturity. Since Steerforth comes from a wealthy, upper-class family, he doesn't truly need to pursue a career or even complete his education. From a moral point of view, however, the novel suggests that this lack of purpose has simply exacerbated Steerforth's worst tendencies—particularly his carelessness and impulsiveness. Steerforth's remark about his mother, meanwhile, provides a clue as to why Steerforth has turned out the way he has: apparently, he is used to getting his way at home.

David and Steerforth have lunch and travel to Steerforth's home, where they are greeted by Mrs. Steerforth—a woman with a "proud carriage and a handsome face." The house itself, meanwhile, has a stately air.

Ultimately, the novel implies that Steerforth's flaws stem from the home he was raised in: he was not only born into wealth, but also raised by a mother who coddled him, and herself had little capacity for self-criticism.

David, Steerforth, and Mrs. Steerforth enter the dining room, where they meet another woman: Rosa Dartle, who is Mrs. Steerforth's companion. She is roughly thirty and has "some appearance of good looks," but David finds her alarming to look at—not only because she has a **scar** running across her lips and chin, but also because she has an unusually intense manner. Furthermore, David notices that Rosa has a habit of insinuating unpleasant things by feigning ignorance, breaking off mid-sentence, and speaking sarcastically. For instance, when Mrs. Steerforth suggests that her son's tutor is conscientious and will prevent him from leading a "wild life" at Oxford, Rosa responds, "What a comfort! Really conscientious? Then he's not—but of course he can't be, if he's really conscientious."

Like Uriah Heep, Rosa Dartle tends to express herself in an indirect way. In Rosa's case, however, this is largely due to her thwarted romantic relationship with Steerforth, which has quite literally scarred her and left her bitter and twisted. Furthermore, as an unmarried woman, she has few options beyond remaining in her dependent position among the same people who have hurt her. Her backhanded way of speaking is both a way of needling the Steerforths and a reflection of how much anger and jealousy she is forced to suppress.

As dinner continues, David explains that he is going to visit Peggotty and Mr. Peggotty, and says that he would like Steerforth to come along. Steerforth likes the idea and remarks that he would enjoy "seeing that sort of people together, and [...] making one of 'em." Rosa latches onto this remark, however, and presses Steerforth about whether the Peggottys are "really animals and clods, and beings of another order." Steerforth suggests that working-class people are virtuous but not as sensitive as the upper classes, and Rosa says that she is happy to hear that "when they suffer, they don't feel."

Steerforth's interest in visiting the Peggottys stems less from an appreciation of them as human beings and more from curiosity about people he views almost as another species. Steerforth doesn't believe that the people in the working class have feelings in the same sense that wealthier people do. This idea is highly convenient for the middle and upper classes: if working-class people don't truly suffer, the terrible conditions they often live in seem more justifiable. For Rosa, Steerforth's remarks are another reminder of the self-absorption that has also wounded her, so she seizes on the opportunity to mock his words.

Later, Steerforth asks David what he thinks of Rosa and, when David hesitantly says that she is clever, retorts that Rosa is habitually sharp. David then mentions Rosa's **scar**, and Steerforth is forced to admit that he is responsible for it—not, as David assumes, because of an accident, but because he once threw a hammer at her when she annoyed him. He further explains that Rosa is an orphaned cousin of his who has lived with the Steerforth's for years, but scoffs when David suggests she must love Steerforth "like a brother," quickly changing the subject.

Although Steerforth does seem to regret his actions, the childhood tantrum that injured Rosa encapsulates their relationship to the present day: Steerforth remains prey to his impulses and emotions, often hurting those around him as a result. Meanwhile, Steerforth's scorn when David mentions Rosa's sisterly love is both a hint toward the true, romantic nature of her feelings and a reminder of the tensions that can exist within the supposedly happy realm of family life.

Later that day, the Steerforths and David have tea together, and David notices that Rosa's **scar** tends to flush or turn pale when she is upset. He also notices that Mrs. Steerforth speaks of little except Steerforth himself; in fact, she even shows David letters, pictures, and baby hair that she keeps as souvenirs of him.

The fact that Mrs. Steerforth's life revolves entirely around her son is one reason why he has grown up to be so spoiled and reckless. It's not simply that his mother has consistently indulged all his whims and wishes (though that certainly seems to be the case), but also that she seems unwilling to allow him to grow up: the relics of Steerforth's childhood suggest that she still thinks of him as a young boy.

Mrs. Steerforth asks David about how he came to know Steerforth, and David speaks glowingly of Steerforth's kindness to him at school. Mrs. Steerforth approves of this, and goes on to say that she placed Steerforth in what was otherwise an unsuitable school because she wanted her son to study with a headmaster who would defer to his "superiority." Far from alarming David, this makes him think more highly of Mr. Creakle. Mrs. Steerforth then goes on to say that while she is not surprised David is so devoted to her son, she appreciates it nonetheless. What's more, she says, Steerforth himself has a genuine liking for David for will always help and protect David. Throughout this entire conversation, David is conscious of Rosa listening on while seeming to play backgammon.

In this passage, Mrs. Steerforth essentially admits that her goal in placing Steerforth in Salem House was to prevent him from having to acknowledge any kind of weakness or deficit in himself: out of respect for the family's wealth, Creakle would never dare punish or even stand up to Steerforth. In Mrs. Steerforth's mind, her actions are justified because she sees her son as perfect and superior to everyone else to begin with. The novel as a whole, however, is deeply concerned with personal growth, which education plays a crucial role in. Mrs. Steerforth ultimately deprived her son of many of the experiences that would help him grow and learn.

Later that evening, Steerforth says he might take David up on his offer to visit the Peggottys in a week or so. As they talk over these plans, Rosa asks why Steerforth calls David "Daisy," and David is forced to admit that it is, as Rosa suggests, because he is "young and innocent." Rosa and Mrs. Steerforth then go to bed, and David and Steerforth continue to reminisce in Steerforth's room, which David notices contains a portrait of his mother. When David returns to his room, meanwhile, he finds a portrait of Rosa there. This disturbs him, and he dreams that night that he is constantly asking people, "Is it really, though?" in Rosa's manner.

The fact that Steerforth's bedroom has a portrait of Mrs. Steerforth in it once again underscores how close the two are to one another—inappropriately close, the novel suggests, given that Steerforth is now an adult. Rosa, meanwhile, attempts to draw attention to the fact that Steerforth is in some ways taking advantage of David's own youth and inexperience, but David doesn't really grasp her point, at least beyond feeling vaguely uncomfortable.

CHAPTER 21: LITTLE EM'LY

When David wakes up the next day, he meets a servant named Littimer, who is laying out David's clothes for him. Littimer has an aura of extreme respectability, which unnerves David: he suspects Littimer considers him young and naive. Littimer, however, speaks respectfully to David, telling him the time, informing him when breakfast will be, and asking whether he can do anything else for David. This same exchange repeats itself every morning that David spends at the Steerforths'. Littimer is also on hand throughout the day to fetch things for David and Steerforth—horses for riding, foils for fencing, and so on. Since Steerforth is tutoring David in all these activities, David resents Littimer's presence.

David continues to worry about revealing his youth and inexperience, and is consequently embarrassed that Littimer sees Steerforth teaching David to ride and fence. In this case, however, David's anxiety about his age seems to intersect with insecurity about his class: the activities David is worried about are upper-middle or upper-class pastimes, and he's unnerved by the presence of Littimer, a servant. This overlap makes sense, given that part of growing up, for David, is settling into a comfortable middle-class life that's less extravagant (and at least theoretically more "moral") than that of the upper-class Steerforths.

Meanwhile, David becomes more and more attached to Steerforth; he does not feel he can be Steerforth's equal, but in spite (or, he suggests, because) of this, he enjoys being treated as a "plaything" or protégé. Steerforth eventually decides to come with David to see the Peggottys, and the two leave together. Once in Yarmouth, David takes great pleasure in revisiting familiar places with Steerforth, who is enthusiastic about everything from the town to the boatmen he meets on a morning walk along the beach.

David's relationship with Steerforth is one of the main obstacles to his growth in the novel. As his remark about being a "plaything" implies, David not only tolerates but enjoys the fact that Steerforth is completely in charge of the relationship, and this kind of passivity isn't compatible with life as an adult Victorian man.

The day after David and Steerforth arrive in Yarmouth, Steerforth asks when they will go to see Mr. Peggotty, and David suggests surprising the family with a visit that evening. Steerforth approves of this plan, saying he wants to see the Peggottys in their "aboriginal condition," and jokes with David about Rosa's previous words on that topic.

Despite his humorous tone, Steerforth's comments about visiting the Peggottys do reveal quite a bit about his attitude toward the working classes—specifically, that he views them more as a bizarre source of entertainment than as real people worthy of respect. David is also somewhat guilty of romanticizing the Peggottys' lives, which is perhaps why he doesn't see Steerforth's words as a red flag.

David leaves to visit Peggotty, with plans for Steerforth to meet him at Mr. Barkis's in a couple of hours. He is in a good mood, although he is surprised to see how small the town seems, now that he has grown. While passing by Mr. Omer's shop, he sees Minnie and two children, and decides to stop in. Minnie accordingly sends one of the children (her son Joe) for Omer, who doesn't recognize David at first. David, however, reminds him of the time they rode to Blunderstone together for Clara Copperfield's funeral, and Mr. Omer then greets him, reminiscing about the day. He has more difficulty breathing than he used to but is still as cheerful as even, noting that Minnie and Joram became engaged in the very same cart David rode in all those years ago.

Once again, the differences in David's perceptions of a place (in this case, Yarmouth) as a child and as an adult are surprising to him. In part, this serves as a yardstick for how much he has grown and changed over the years. It also perhaps hints at the limitations of memory, even in a memoir; although David's recollections of Yarmouth are basically accurate, they are colored by factors like his age at the time.

Mr. Omer asks after Peggotty, whom he remembers had some connection to David. He then explains that little Em'ly is apprenticed in the dress shop, where she is performing very well. He also says Emily is so pretty, though, that many women are jealous of her—to which Minnie retorts that Emily should have "kept to her own station in life." Omer disagrees, but acknowledges that people find it suspicious that little Em'ly has not made many friends in town, and that there are rumors that she wants to be a lady. The fact that Emily has a slightly spoiled and fickle demeanor doesn't improve matters, or that she left a previous position as a lady's companion. Mr. Omer insists, however, that Emily has been a model employee for the two years she has worked for him.

Little Em'ly's sexual transgressions are difficult to unravel from her desire to escape working-class life. Narratively, this makes sense, because it's in her wish to be a lady that leads her to take up with Steerforth. On a deeper level, however, it also speaks to how suspect "ambition" was in a nineteenth-century woman. Emily's aspirations not only leave her vulnerable to seduction, but also clash with the Victorian idea of women as selfless and detached from the world of money and business. Her working-class status compounds the problem, since "good" working-class characters in the novel are mostly humble and content with their station in life.

David glances next door, where Emily is currently working, and is impressed by her beauty, as well as by the tenderness with which she is watching Minnie's child. He admits that Emily has a "willful" look, but nevertheless feels that she is basically good and innocent at heart. Mr. Omer urges David to go and say hello to her, but he is too shy to do so.

Despite Emily's flaws, she's a sympathetic character at heart. In this passage, Dickens signals her underlying virtuousness by drawing attention to the ways in which Emily does conform to gender norms—specifically, her deep maternal instincts.

David continues on to see Peggotty, and they pretend to be very formal with one another: David asks whether Mr. Barkis (who now suffers from rheumatics) ever goes to Blunderstone, and whether Peggotty happens to know anything about a house called the Rookery. They both then start crying and hugging one another, and David even stops worrying about whether he is acting maturely or not.

The fact that David is able to shed his adult persona around Peggotty is an indication of just how close the two are, and suggests that Peggotty still serves as a mother figure for him.

Peggotty goes to tell Barkis that David is there, which she says will do him good. David finds that Barkis is bedridden and unable to move much, but he reminisces happily about the conversations they used to have about Peggotty while riding in Barkis's cart. He continues on to say that everything David told him about Peggotty's cooking was as "true as taxes." This reminds Barkis that he is, in his words, a "very poor man." He repeats this several times and gestures toward a box, which he says is full of clothes. Finally, he praises Peggotty and urges her to provide David with a good dinner. While they're gone, he says, he will try to find some more money—something Peggotty tells David that Barkis says before pulling a coin or two from the box in secret.

Despite being founded mostly on convenience, Peggotty and Barkis's married life has evidently been happy—partially because Peggotty is such a good homemaker. Barkis, in turn, has proved to be a dutiful breadwinner: after his death, Peggotty learns that he has saved up enough money to leave her comfortably well-off. His current miserliness, however, suggests that he sees his newfound wealth as somewhat precarious; his lie about the contents of the money box is comical, but also indicative of how insecure Barkis's new position is.

Peggotty gets along well with Steerforth when he arrives—partly because she is grateful for his kindness to David, and partly because of Steerforth's own charisma. Steerforth also charms Mr. Barkis, and makes no objection to the inconvenience of having to stay at an inn while David remains at Peggotty's. David and Steerforth leave for Mr. Peggotty's that evening, and looking back, David says he still can hardly believe that Steerforth's charm and kindness were a "brilliant game."

David's memories of Steerforth appear considerably darker looking back than they did at the time they happened, undercutting the novel's frequently nostalgic tone. However, David's suggestion that Steerforth was playing a "game" all along may be overly harsh—at the very least, it's at odds with what the novel says elsewhere about Steerforth's inability to consciously control his own emotions and impulses.

The **sea** is loud as David and Steerforth approach Mr. Peggotty's, and there is also a lot of noise coming from inside the house. When they enter, they find Mrs. Gummidge clapping, Ham and little Em'ly shyly holding hands, and Mr. Peggotty warmly greeting his niece. The scene breaks apart when David and Steerforth arrive, but Mr. Peggotty greets them joyfully, while embracing Emily with pride and happiness.

David and Steerforth's arrival at the Peggottys' foreshadows the role that Steerforth ultimately plays in breaking up the family: here, he quite literally intrudes on a happy domestic scene. The background noise of the sea heightens the ominous nature of the scene by seeming to threaten the family with destruction.

Little Em'ly runs away in embarrassment, but Mr. Peggotty continues to speak warmly of the joy she has brought into the household; although he is "rough as a Sea Porkypine," he says, he loves Emily as if she were his daughter. He then explains that a "certain person"—Ham—has known little Em'ly since she was a baby and has watched her grow up, ultimately falling in love with her. Mr. Peggotty was pleased when he learned this, because he wants to make sure Emily is provided for. He therefore spoke to Emily himself on Ham's behalf, but she resisted at first on the grounds that Ham is too good. To Mr. Peggotty's surprise, however, Ham and Emily arrived home from work that day engaged: Emily said she was "steadier" now and ready to marry. It was at this moment that David and Steerforth arrived.

Gradually, it emerges that the scene Steerforth interrupted might not have been as blissful as it seemed at first glance. As Mr. Peggotty himself acknowledges, little Em'ly wasn't pleased to learn about Ham's feelings at first. On the one hand, her initial insistence that Ham was too good for her, and her later assurance that she had grown "steadier" seem to tie into the novel's broader depiction of marriage as something to undertake only after attaining a certain degree of maturity. Elsewhere, however, Emily's resistance to the match seems to have at least as much to do with a lack of attraction as it does with her own immaturity; Emily, after all, has known Ham her entire life and seems to view him more as a sibling than a lover.

Awkwardly but earnestly, Ham professes his love for little Em'ly, saying that no other man could love her more, even if he could express himself more eloquently. David is intensely moved by this, and his childhood memories of little Em'ly add poignancy to his happiness. Steerforth spares David the necessity of speaking by congratulating Mr. Peggotty and Ham on their much-deserved happiness.

Although Dickens treats Ham's devotion to little Em'ly sympathetically, his fumbling declaration in this passage underscores how mismatched the couple is. Ham is earnest but not especially bright, whereas Emily is quick-witted and charming. What's more the novel associates these traits with class status—the novel's "good" working-class characters tend to be kind but not particularly intelligent—giving Emily, who wants to be a lady, even more reason to hesitate. Meanwhile, the possibility that David may still have feelings for little Em'ly becomes important in light of his later actions towards her.

Mr. Peggotty and Ham manage to persuade little Em'ly to return to the main room, and her awkwardness quickly fades away thanks to Steerforth's charming and tactful conversation. In fact, she seems enthralled by a story Steerforth recounts about a shipwreck. Steerforth also wins the rest of the family over by singing **sea** shanties and talking about "boats, and ships, and tides." Even Mrs. Gummidge is less gloomy than usual. Eventually, Emily and David begin to talk of their shared childhood memories, Steerforth listening on intently.

Whether because of Steerforth's looks, status, or charm, it's clear that Emily is immediately drawn to him. This instantaneous attraction contrasts starkly with her long reluctance to marry Ham, and suggests that her reluctance was at least partially a discomfort with the idea of Ham as a romantic and sexual partner. While the novel generally defends marrying for rational and mature reasons, it also suggests that a complete absence of attraction will likely have unhappy consequences. Meanwhile, the way in which Steerforth listens in on David and Emily's conversation is another example of David's memories taking on a darker tone in retrospect; in this case, Steerforth's presence is quite literally looming over those memories and stripping them of some of their innocence.

David and Steerforth finally leave around midnight, the latter praising little Em'ly's beauty and the "quaintness" of the house and family. However, when David comments happily on Ham and Emily's engagement, Steerforth says it is a shame that she is marrying such a "chuckle-headed fellow." This shocks David, but he quickly decides Steerforth is joking and insists (aloud) that he knows Steerforth is deeply sympathetic even to the poorest members of society. Steerforth replies that he wishes everyone were as "earnest" and "good" as David, and then begins singing shanties again.

Once again, Steerforth exhibits a callous attitude toward the lower classes. Although he finds the Peggottys charming to engage with briefly, he clearly doesn't respect them—except perhaps for Emily, whom he implicitly suggests is too refined for Ham. On some level, however, Steerforth seems to feel guilty, if not over his prejudice, then over the fact that he is not as honest and charitable as David thinks he is. As always, Steerforth either can't or won't put his wish to be a better person into action, instead letting the subject drop and returning to his usual carelessness.

CHAPTER 22: SOME OLD SCENES, AND SOME NEW PEOPLE

David and Steerforth spend a couple of weeks in Yarmouth. Since Steerforth enjoys sailing, he often goes out on the **ocean** with Mr. Peggotty while David spends time with Peggotty or visits Blunderstone. David uses these excursions to return to memorable places from his childhood—most importantly, his parents' graves, where he spends time reflecting on what he will end up doing in life. The Rookery now houses only a "poor lunatic gentleman" and looks largely abandoned. In addition, some of David's old neighbors have moved away, while Mr. Chillip has remarried and has a child. Overall, revisiting his childhood home is a bittersweet experience for David, but he generally enjoys the memories once he is back in Steerforth's company.

The Rookery's new function underscores just how complete the loss of David's childhood home has been; not only is it no longer a home to David's family, but it's hardly a home at all anymore, serving instead as a makeshift asylum. Its new purpose also hints at the dangers of lingering too long on the past, since a place so central to David's memories now literally houses madness. Still, it makes sense that David returns to the Rookery as he tries to decide on a career, since the experiences he had there have helped shape him into the man he now is.

Whenever David returns from Blunderstone, he passes by Mr. Peggotty's house and checks in. On one occasion, he finds Steerforth alone there, so deep in thought that David's approach startles him unpleasantly. Steerforth says he has been looking at the fire and, given the house's current "wasted air," morbidly imagining the Peggottys are all dead or gone. He then startles David by changing the topic and wishing he had had a father, or that he at least could "guide himself better." Continuing on, he says he would rather be poor like Mr. Peggotty or Ham than be himself. Confused, David presses Steerforth to tell him what's wrong, but Steerforth laughs his bad mood off as an eccentricity in his character, though he once more wishes he had known his father.

Steerforth's premonition of the Peggotty family's fate does eventually come true, so this passage functions as foreshadowing. What's strange, however, is the fact that while Steerforth himself is ultimately responsible for the breakup of the Peggottys, he speaks in this passage as if he can't possibly prevent it. In a sense, Steerforth truly is powerless; because he hasn't learned to master his own desires and impulses, he's not truly in control of his own life. Steerforth attributes this failure to fully grow up to the death of his father, but David also lost his father at a young age and completes the transition to adulthood more successfully. Steerforth's immaturity probably has more to do with the fact that he grew up wealthy and spoiled than anything else.

Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Gummidge arrives, and Steerforth's mood further improves. He and David plan to depart the following day, however, and Steerforth is sad to leave the **sea**; although he acknowledges that his wishes are "capricious," he is enjoying his time out on the ocean. David, meanwhile, wonders aloud why Steerforth does not put one of his many talents (such as sailing) to good use. Steerforth once again admits that his interests and goals are fickle, and says that he has bought a boat to sail whenever he is in Yarmouth. David, however, assumes that Steerforth has really bought the boat for Mr. Peggotty's benefit and is simply too modest to say so. Steerforth passes over this, saying that Littimer has arrived in Yarmouth and will oversee repairs on the boat, which he intends to name the *Little Em'ly*.

Steerforth's lack of self-control is partly the result of his class status. David can't understand why Steerforth doesn't turn one of his interests or talents into a career, but the simple fact is that Steerforth doesn't need to: he has enough money to drift from hobby to hobby without ever actually working. As a result, Dickens implies, he never learns the virtues that pursuing a career entails (most notably, discipline and steadiness). This is one way in which the novel's middle-class perspective colors its depiction of the upper classes: because they don't have to work, the upper classes are in some sense necessarily immoral (or at least amoral).

At that moment, little Em'ly herself approaches with Ham, who is very attentive to and protective of his fiancée. They stop and chat with David and Steerforth, and David notices that Emily does not replace her hand on Ham's arm when they continue walking. He also sees a poor and miserable-looking woman following Emily and Ham (this will later turn out to be Martha Endell). David assumes the woman must be a beggar, but Steerforth is disturbed by the idea of her following little Em'ly, and says he had a premonition of something like this.

Despite Ham's obvious love for Emily, it's equally clear that Emily doesn't share his feelings. The fact that she's reluctant to touch him frames her unwillingness to marry specifically in terms of an absence of physical attraction. The appearance of Martha—a "fallen" woman—also hints at the role that sexuality plays in the breakup of Emily and Ham's relationship, and foreshadows what may happen to Emily herself.

David and Steerforth go to dinner, where they meet Littimer, much to David's dismay. Toward the end of the meal, Littimer announces that someone called Miss Mowcher is downstairs and would like to see Steerforth. Steerforth appears to know her and is excited about the prospect of introducing her to David. Littimer duly fetches Miss Mowcher, who turns out to be a dwarf. She is a talkative woman with a "rogueish" look, and immediately begins to tease Steerforth about what he is doing in Yarmouth, and whether he would think she was a "fine woman" if he saw her looking out a window (that is, if he only saw her face).

Although David himself only learns the truth later, Miss Mowcher's entire manner is a carefully crafted act. As someone with dwarfism, she has few options when it comes to supporting herself; society at large sees her as comical, so she plays to this stereotype. Her joking flirtatiousness with Steerforth also reveals how sexless and unfeminine she is in the eyes of society; the joke hinges on the supposed absurdity of anyone finding her attractive. At the same time, the fact that Miss Mowcher is perceived as unfeminine allows her to speak much more freely and boldly than a "real" woman of the time could.

Miss Mowcher, who is a hairdresser, begins to gossip about a client she visited a week ago, but refuses to tell Steerforth whether Lady Mithers dyes her hair and wears makeup. Meanwhile, David stares at Miss Mowcher, impressed by how cunning and knowledgeable she seems to be. Miss Mowcher, who has been setting out a variety of hairdressing supplies, suddenly pauses her work and asks who David is. Steerforth introduces him, and Miss Mowcher pinches David's cheek and teases him over his politeness. She then takes something from her bag that she says is fingernail clippings from a Russian prince and talks about how she dyes his moustache for him. She also explains that she carries the nail clippings around to advertise her business, and laughs that "the whole social system" is "a system of Prince's nails."

Miss Mowcher's gossip centers mostly on the hypocrisy of her clients, who pride themselves on physical characteristics that are actually artificial. By extension, Miss Mowcher's words are also a commentary on the artificiality of society as a whole, including the class structure and gender roles that everyone perceives as natural, but are actually social constructs. In particular, her remark that the whole social system hinges on "Prince's nails" reveals how flimsy these social constructs truly are. Steerforth, however, is not self-aware enough to realize that he is also implicated in Miss Mowcher's critique, and laughs along with her.

Miss Mowcher gets up on a table so she can reach Steerforth's hair, exclaiming that she will kill herself if David or Steerforth glimpsed her ankles as she was climbing up. She then inspects Steerforth's hair, tells him he would soon go bald without her help, and begins treating him with different oils and potions. As she works, she talks about another client, Charley Pyegrave, who tried to buy a solution to dye his own hair and was asked if he wanted "rouge" (blush or lipstick). She then laughs about all her female clients who wear makeup but refuse to admit it.

On the one hand, Miss Mowcher's anecdotes about makeup tie into a lengthy tradition of associating cosmetics with female deceit and vanity. Within the context of Miss Mowcher's own experiences as a little person, however, her remarks also hint at the impossibility of perfectly conforming to the feminine ideal: women are supposed to be beautiful, but also shamed for attempting to make themselves beautiful.

Miss Mowcher says she hasn't seen a single pretty woman since coming to Yarmouth, and Steerforth jokes with David that they could show her one—meaning little Em'ly. Miss Mowcher asks whether the woman is David's sister, and Steerforth replies that she actually used to be his sweetheart. Miss Mowcher teases David about this, and David—somewhat annoyed—says that Emily is engaged, and as "virtuous as she is pretty." Steerforth agrees with David, adding that Emily is currently apprenticed at Mr. Omer's, and that she is engaged to Ham Peggotty—though he (Steerforth) thinks she was "born to be a lady." Miss Mowcher says that the story should end in "happily ever after" and looks at David with "extravagant slyness."

Dickens continues to foreshadow Emily and Steerforth's affair in this exchange, not only in Steerforth's clear admiration of Emily, but also in David's defensive remark that she is "virtuous." Meanwhile, Steerforth's remark about Emily's genteel demeanor points to the contradictions involved in Victorian ideas about class. On the one hand, it suggests that certain "deserving" people ought to be able to rise socially, but it also implies that the traits that make them deserving are innate: Emily, in Steerforth's view, already is a lady who simply happened to be born to a working-class family.

Miss Mowcher declares Steerforth's hair finished and asks if David would like his done as well. David declines, becoming embarrassed when Miss Mowcher mentions helping him to grow whiskers. Miss Mowcher climbs down, assembles her things, and leaves, but not without first joking that she will "break [David and Steerforth's] hearts" by doing so and offering to leave a lock of her hair. Steerforth then explains to David that Miss Mowcher's job gives her access to (and insight into) a large number of people, and that she is a very shrewd woman. David wants to know whether Miss Mowcher is a good person, but does not learn much from Steerforth on this point.

David's continued embarrassment over his inability to grow a beard is a product of insecurity: he realizes on some level that he is not fully mature, but is anxious to hide this from the world at large. Miss Mowcher's flirtatiousness, meanwhile, again uses her undesirability (by the narrow standards of the time) as a source of humor.

Later that night, David returns to Mr. Barkis's house only to find Ham waiting outside. Ham explains that Emily is inside, talking to an old friend who is now a disreputable woman. David quickly realizes that this must be the woman he saw following little Emily and Ham earlier, and learns from Ham that her name is Martha. Martha begged Emily to speak with her as a fellow woman, but Mr. Peggotty wouldn't allow the conversation to take place in his house. Emily therefore instructed Martha to meet her at her aunt Peggotty's. Meanwhile, she entrusted Ham with a purse full of money, despite his disapproval of Martha.

Mr. Peggotty's (and, to a lesser extent, Ham's) discomfort with the idea of Emily speaking to Martha reveals just how strict the norms governing female sexuality in the nineteenth-century truly were. Although little Em'ly's compassion and generosity reflect "feminine" selflessness, the danger of Martha somehow infecting Emily with her own sexual looseness is so great that Emily's own actions become suspicious.

Eventually, Peggotty opens the door and motions for Ham and David to enter the house. Once inside, David sees Martha kneeling on the floor and little Em'ly standing nearby. Little Em'ly says that Martha wants to go to London, and Martha explains that doing so would allow her to avoid people who know her and her story. Ham is suspicious and asks what Martha will do in London, but Emily assures him that she will "try to do well." Ham therefore hands over the purse, and Emily gives some of the money inside to Martha, who quickly slips away afterwards.

Ham's suspicion of Martha's motives reflects the widespread belief that a woman who had transgressed sexually could never redeem herself. Dickens, however, suggests that to the extent that this was true, it had more to do with society at large than the woman's own morality: Martha, for instance, is unable to find meaningful work in Yarmouth because people know her reputation.

As soon as Martha leaves, little Em'ly begins crying and tells Ham that she is not as "good" as she should be. More specifically, she thinks she has often been unkind to Ham, who has only ever been generous and loving to her. Ham attempts to reassure Emily that she makes him happy, but she says that that is only proof of his own goodness, and that he would be better off with another woman. Eventually, Emily turns to embrace Peggotty, begging her, Ham, and David to help her be a better person. After a while, they are able to calm little Em'ly down, and David notices that she sticks closer to Ham the rest of the night than she typically does.

Emily's distress stems from the fact that she sees her own dark future in Martha's widespread disgrace and desperation.

CHAPTER 23: I CORROBORATE MR. DICK, AND CHOOSE A PROFESSION

David is still thinking of little Em'ly and Martha the next morning, but he feels that it would be a betrayal to share what happened with Steerforth. In any case, David and Steerforth are busy saying their goodbyes to the Peggottys, Mr. Barkis, and even Mr. Omer. They also part with Littimer, who is remaining behind—ostensibly to oversee outfitting Steerforth's new boat.

David's silence suggests that on some level he realizes that Steerforth poses a threat to little Em'ly. Nevertheless, he fails to guess that Littimer is not, in fact, remaining in Yarmouth to outfit Steerforth's boat, but rather to act as a go-between for his master and Emily.

The ride home is silent at first, with David wondering when he will return to Yarmouth and Steerforth lost in his own thoughts. Eventually, however, Steerforth asks David about a letter he received at breakfast. David had wanted to consult Steerforth about this anyway, so he explains that the letter is from Miss Betsey, and that it asks him whether he has reached a decision about his future career. David admits he has hardly thought about this at all, and notes that his aunt asks specifically if he would like to be a proctor. Steerforth considers this (and all other professions) boring, but explains that a proctor is a kind of lawyer dealing in everything from wills to marriages to maritime law. He ultimately advises David to take his aunt's suggestion, if only because Miss Betsey has recently altered her will to favor David.

The fact that David so quickly follows his aunt and friend's career advice is a sign of just how little idea he has on what to do with his life. This doesn't bode well for David's future, since the novel depicts the ability to form and stick to a course of action as central to both maturity and financial success. It is also telling that Steerforth finds all careers equally pointless; although he has no financial need to pursue a career, his disdain for the very idea speaks to his own immaturity and directionlessness.


When David and Steerforth reach London they part ways, arranging to meet again soon. David then goes to a hotel where Miss Betsey had told him she would be staying, and they greet one another happily. Mr. Dick has not come with Miss Betsey to London, and she admits that she is worried about his ability to keep the donkeys off her lawn. David and his aunt then have supper together, although Miss Betsey is skeptical of the food in London, where she says nothing is "genuine."

Although the scene is mostly comic relief, Miss Betsey's remarks about Mr. Dick do turn out to have bearing on his later development. Miss Betsey says she worries Mr. Dick lacks "strength of purpose," and his inability to complete the Memorial seems to corroborate this. Eventually, however, Mr. Dick will take a regular job copying legal writing, which encourages him to become more focused and disciplined.

After Miss Betsey has eaten and prepared for bed, she brings up the topic of jobs again, and David says he likes the proctor idea but is concerned about the cost of entering the profession: it requires an initial outlay of 1,000 pounds, and David—conscious of how much money his aunt has already spent on him—says he could try to find a position where he could immediately begin earning money. Miss Betsey, however, says that she wants to help establish David in a career he will enjoy, not only because she views him as her child, but also (she implies) because she wishes she had been kinder to his father and to Clara. David is touched by his aunt's words, and they agree to go to Doctors' Commons (where many proctors work) the next day.

Although David still lacks a clear sense of purpose in life, his concern over the cost of becoming a proctor is a promising sign: it suggests that he will be careful and disciplined when it comes to saving money. Meanwhile, Miss Betsey's desire to do right by David underscores a central idea of the novel: that, as Miss Betsey herself says, "It's in vain [...] to recall the past, unless it works some influence upon the present." Although Miss Betsey regrets her prior harshness to David's mother and father, she doesn't wallow in guilt, but instead turns her feelings to good use by dedicating herself to raising their son well and kindly.

The following day, Miss Betsey and David head off to visit a firm called Spenlow and Jorkins. Miss Betsey is on edge because she is worried about pickpockets, but David notices that she becomes even more anxious when they pass by an "ill-dressed man" who stops and stares at them. David assumes the man is a beggar and offers to send him away, but his aunt refuses to let David speak to him. Instead, she tells David to wait for her in St. Paul's Churchyard while she speaks to the man. David is shocked, but does as she asks, thinking back to what Mr. Dick had told him of the man who sometimes hangs around Miss Betsey's cottage.

This is David's first glimpse of Miss Betsey's former husband, as well as of how uncharacteristically distressed Miss Betsey becomes in his presence. Her fear stems not only from his past abuse, but also, perhaps, from her awareness of her own feelings; as Miss Betsey later admits to David, she still has fond memories of her husband, despite what he proved to be.

After half an hour, Miss Betsey catches up with David. She is still disturbed, however, and asks the coachman who brought her there to drive her and David around a bit while she calms down. She won't say anything about the man or her meeting with him, but David notices that most of the money in her purse is now gone.

Interestingly, Miss Betsey is still frightened of her husband despite the fact that she now effectively occupies the position of power in the relationship; her husband is impoverished and relies on her handouts to survive.

Eventually, David and Miss Betsey reach Spenlow and Jorkins, where they find several clerks at work. One of them says that Mr. Spenlow is in Court, so David looks around while they wait for him to return: the room is full of faded furniture and legal papers and books, which David approvingly notes "look tolerably expensive."

David's interest in becoming a proctor seems to stem from a sense that it's both prestigious and profitable. The novel is generally critical of this kind of naked ambition, instead suggesting that the desire to succeed should have some kind of moral basis (for instance, a genuine love for one's work or a need to support one's family).

Mr. Spenlow himself turns out to be a small and "buttoned up" man with a huge gold pocket watch. He explains that there is an opening at the firm, and that he had told Miss Betsey this when she visited him on business a few days earlier. David says that he is very interested in becoming a proctor, but that he would like to try the work out first. Mr. Spenlow replies that the firm always provides hires with a month's trial period, adding that he would be happy to provide two months if it weren't for Mr. Jorkins. He similarly blames Mr. Jorkins for the position's cost, as well as for the fact that clerks do not receive a salary while under articles. Later, David learns that Jorkins is actually a very "mild" man whose main function in the firm is to serve as an excuse for Spenlow's policies.

Although the trial period Spenlow provides works in the firm's own favor, providing them with a chance to assess new hires before committing to them, it also gives David a chance to see if he enjoys the work. In David Copperfield, *establishing oneself in a career isn't just a matter of finding a job, but also of finding a vocation—something one is naturally suited for.*

David, Mr. Spenlow, and Miss Betsey agree that David will begin work right away, and Spenlow takes him to the Court to give him a sense of what the position will entail. David is favorably impressed by the "old-fashioned" and sluggish atmosphere of the Court, and discusses his plans further with his aunt once they return to her hotel. To David's surprise, Miss Betsey has already been looking for potential lodgings for David in London, and shows him an advertisement for a particular promising set of rooms. They then go to visit the apartment, where Miss Betsey and the landlady, Mrs. Crupp, negotiate while David daydreams. Eventually, they decide David will provisionally rent the rooms for a month, and Mrs. Crupp will cook for him.

David's reaction to seeing the Court again suggests that his desire to become a proctor rests on questionable motives and assumptions. More specifically, he enjoys the "soothing" atmosphere of the Court, viewing it less as a place to work and more as a place to daydream. Since Miss Betsey wants to establish David in a profession partly in the hopes of making him a more purposeful and resolute person, this seems counterproductive.


David and Miss Betsey return to her hotel for the night, Miss Betsey telling her nephew that she hopes he will soon be a "firm and self-reliant" young man. They discuss plans to have David's things sent to London, and David gives Miss Betsey a letter to take to Agnes. Miss Betsey leaves the next day, having arranged for David to be provided for financially for the next month.

Once again, Miss Betsey reiterates her hope that pursuing a career will teach David independence and discipline. In the meantime, however, she continues to support him financially.

CHAPTER 24: MY FIRST DISSIPATION

David enjoys the freedom of having his own rooms, although he also finds it lonely at times; he misses Agnes in particular, and Steerforth has not yet visited him. After three days, he goes to ask Mrs. Steerforth about her son's whereabouts and learns that he is seeing a friend from Oxford but will be back the following day. David stays for dinner and talks about his trip to Yarmouth with Steerforth. Although Rosa Dartle is again "full of hints and mysterious questions," David is in such a good mood he begins to fall in love with her.

Although still supported financially by his aunt, David is now semi-independent: he has a job, along with his own living space. However, the nineteenth-century idea of home was closely intertwined with the nuclear family, so it's not surprising that David finds himself pining for a female presence—specifically, Agnes.


The next day, Steerforth appears while David is having breakfast. David excitedly shows him around his rooms and invites him to stay for breakfast. Steerforth, however, says that he has to remain with his Oxford friends all day, so David suggests that they all come over for dinner. Once Steerforth has left, David speaks with Mrs. Crupp about the evening's plans. She recommends a young man and woman to act as waiter and dishwasher, respectively, as well as a list of courses and shops to find them at. David does as she recommends, and also orders several bottles of wine.

Eager once again to seem grown-up, David is thrilled to have the chance to show off his apartment and host his own dinner party. The fact that the evening doesn't go smoothly, however, is a reminder of how young and immature David still is.

Steerforth arrives at six in the evening with his friends Grainger and Markham, who are both very "lively." Since David is still self-conscious regarding his age, he asks Steerforth to preside over the dinner. The meal generally goes well, although David is continually distracted by the waiter (who keeps sneaking drinks) and the dishwasher (who keeps breaking plates). Once the meal is over, however, David quickly begins to enjoy himself—in part because the waiter and dishwasher leave, but mostly because he is rapidly becoming very drunk. He becomes very talkative, toasting Steerforth, arguing with Markham over the appropriateness of a proposed toast to "Woman!" and making elaborate plans to visit Oxford and host more dinner parties. Meanwhile, they all continue to drink and smoke.

Although David's drunkenness is comical, it's a mark of David's inexperience that he so disastrously misjudges how much he can and should drink. It also speaks badly of how deeply in thrall he is to Steerforth, since the novel implies that it is only through Steerforth's influence that he is acting this way.

At some point, David becomes aware that he is leaning out his window, trying to catch a breeze and scolding himself for trying to smoke. Some time after that, someone suggests going to the theater, which David agrees is a wonderful idea. David can't find the door and then falls down the stairs as they leave. Nevertheless, they manage to reach the theater, eventually settling in one of the boxes. Several of their neighbors tell David to be quiet, but David catches sight of Agnes and calls out to her. She also tries to get him to quiet down, before finally asking him to go home for her sake. Although he is annoyed, David does as she asks, Steerforth escorting him back to his apartment.

The fact that David is willing to follow Agnes's advice even in the midst of his confusion and irritation is significant: in the following chapter, David will call Agnes his "good angel," and her moral influence is at work even at David's lowest moments. This is another way in which Agnes resembles the ideal Victorian woman, whose role was in part to guide the men in her life both morally and spiritually.

David sleeps badly and wakes the following day with a terrible hangover. He is also deeply ashamed of his behavior and can't stop thinking about having disappointed Agnes. Worse still, he does not know where she is staying, so he realizes he can't apologize any time soon. For the rest of the day, David tortures himself with the idea that he will end up dying of drink like his apartment's prior occupant had. He toys with the idea of sharing his woes with Mrs. Crupp but does not feel she would make a very good confidant.

David automatically turns to Agnes as the moral standard against which to measure his own behavior. Once again, however, he fails to realize the significance of this—namely, that he relies on her in the same way he would rely on a wife.

CHAPTER 25: GOOD AND BAD ANGELS

Two days after David's dinner party, he emerges from his room to find a letter from Agnes. To David's relief, the note does not mention the meeting at the theater, but instead simply asks him to come see her where she is staying with her father's agent, Mr. Waterbrook. David has a difficult time composing a response, but eventually writes simply that the note is "like her," and that he will visit at four.

Agnes's tactfulness is in keeping with the behavior expected of a Victorian woman. Her positive influence on David is mostly unspoken—more a kind of aura she exudes than any particular action or suggestion. As a result, she is able to function as David's moral compass without seeming overly assertive and opinionated (and therefore unfeminine).

David is so nervous by the time he arrives at the Waterbrooks' that he takes several minutes just to to ring the bell. Once inside the drawing room, David is immediately overwhelmed by the sight of Agnes and memories of his time in Canterbury. He begins to cry, and says that he would rather anyone but Agnes had seen him drunk. Agnes, however, simply calms him down and tells him to sit down, at which point David says she is his "good Angel." Agnes uses this as an opportunity to warn David about his "bad Angel," Steerforth.

If it wasn't already clear, David's response to seeing Agnes reveals just how much he values her opinion of him. His reference to her as his "good Angel," meanwhile, encapsulates the Victorian gender norms; in fact, "angel" was a relatively common way of describing the purity, gentleness, and morality of the ideal woman.


David protests against this characterization of his friend. Nevertheless, Agnes presses on, saying she is not judging Steerforth by his actions the other night, but rather by the many things she has heard about him. In fact, she says, David's own account of Steerforth disturbs her, in part because of the "influence" Steerforth has over him. Although Agnes acknowledges that she is not a worldly person, she thinks her longstanding friendship with David justifies her concerns. She concedes, however, that David is unlikely to turn against someone he has developed an attachment to, and simply asks that David remember her warning whenever he thinks of her. David, however, insists that he will not "forgive" Agnes for her words until she reassesses Steerforth's character. He wants her forgiveness, though, so he explains the whole story of the dinner party.

What worries Agnes about Steerforth isn't simply his own questionable morals, but rather the extent to which David is willing to blindly follow where Steerforth leads. Even beyond the fact that this could land David himself in trouble, David's deference to Steerforth prevents him from learning to rely on his own judgment, and therefore from growing up. At this point, David is largely unwilling to listen to these warnings, but Agnes banks on her own influence with David—and, in particular, his fond memories of their time together—to slowly bring him around.


Agnes changes the topic and reminds David that he promised to tell her when he fell in love. David admits that he is somewhat infatuated with Rosa Dartle, and Agnes teases him about his many "violent attachments." She then asks if he has seen Uriah, who was in London a week earlier on business; Agnes believes he is going to become a partner of Mr. Wickfield's. Outraged, David asks why Agnes hasn't tried to stop it, and she explains that she suspects, based on her father's demeanor, that Uriah has forced him to agree to the arrangement. Uriah, she says, has encouraged and taken advantage of Mr. Wickfield's alcoholism to such an extent that he now has a hold over his former employer. As Agnes speaks, David realizes she is likely concealing some of her suspicions to protect her father.

David's reaction to the news of Uriah's deceit seems to have as much to do with class as it does with his suspicions of Uriah personally; he describes him, for instance, as "mean" ("poor" or "lowly"), and initially objects to the partnership on the grounds that Wickfield's reputation will suffer through his association with Heep. Agnes's words, however, quickly reframe the issue as one of morality rather than class prejudice, since she reveals that Uriah is manipulating her father and encouraging his addiction.

Agnes explains that while her father seemed distressed by Uriah's trip to London (that is, the prospect of becoming partners with him), he also looked relieved. In fact, Agnes reveals that she herself encouraged Mr. Wickfield to make Uriah a partner to lessen his own workload. She is not sure whether this was the right decision, however, and feels intense guilt over both her actions and the role that worry for her has played in Mr. Wickfield's decline. David attempts to console Agnes, but she quickly recovers her composure and asks him to be friendly and respectful toward Uriah. At that point, Mrs. Waterbrook enters, and David agrees to return the following day for dinner.

As her father's alcoholism worsens, Agnes is forced to assume more and more responsibility herself. Although this speaks well of Agnes's character, it places further strain on a family situation that was already precarious. Increasingly, Agnes feels personally responsible for her father's happiness, and correspondingly guilty over her failure to secure it. However, it's the very fact that Wickfield does center his life exclusively and obsessively around his daughter that's partly to blame for his alcoholism and depression. In other words, Agnes's well-intentioned actions reinforce the unhealthy guilt and codependency that characterize her relationship with her father.

Several additional people are present at dinner the next day, including Mr. Waterbrook, an imposing couple named Mr. and Mrs. Henry Spiker, and Uriah Heep, who fawns over David for much of the evening. One guest, however, is named "Mr. Traddles," and David attempts to learn if it is Tommy Traddles from Salem House (it is). During a conversation with Mr. Waterbrook, David learns that Traddles is studying to become a lawyer, and that while he is talented, he also tends to get in his own way.

It isn't clear exactly what Mr. Waterbrook is basing his criticism of Traddles on, since he praises the work Trraddles does. His repeated insistence that Traddles is a "good fellow," however, does offer one possible clue: Traddles is perhaps too generous and good-natured to become truly prosperous. Later in the novel, for instance, Traddles acts as a guarantor for Mr. Micawber even though doing so goes against Traddles' own interests. Although Traddles does ultimately succeed through hard work and patience, the setbacks he encounters by virtue of his own kindness undercut the idea that success is simply a question of merit.

Dinner is announced, and David is mildly annoyed that he does not get to escort Agnes to the table. Once seated, the guests begin to talk about social class—or, as Mrs. Waterbrook puts it, "Blood." Everyone seems to agree that blood is the most important quality a person can have, and that it excuses all kinds of character flaws. After dinner, the women leave, and two of the men—Mr. Spiker and Mr. Gulpidge—begin to talk cryptically about a business transaction. This pleases Mr. Waterbrook, who seems to take pride in having important matters discussed in his home.

The discussion of "blood" pokes fun at the rigid class system that social mobility was beginning to chip away at by the 1800s. The Waterbrooks, along with most of their guests, care more about whether someone was born into an upper-class family than whether that person is intelligent, hardworking, or fair.

David is relieved to rejoin Agnes, whom he introduces to Traddles. He is sad to learn, however, that Agnes is leaving London soon, since he feels more impressed by her goodness than ever. Much to David's annoyance, Uriah Heep hovers nearby throughout his conversation with Agnes. Remembering his promise to Agnes, however, he invites Uriah for coffee as they are leaving the party. Uriah at first protests that he is too undeserving to accept, but eventually does.

Even after being promoted to a partner at Wickfield's firm, Uriah continues to rely on sweeping declarations of humility to get ahead. It's increasingly clear, however, that his humbleness is an act, in part because he now feels secure enough to let it slip at times: he addresses David, for example, as "Master Copperfield"—a term that would be polite when addressing a young boy, but that's disrespectful now that David is an adult.

David leads Uriah to his apartment, which Uriah praises at great length. He then asks whether David has heard about the "change in his expectations," but David doesn't immediately answer because he is preoccupied with thoughts of how much he dislikes Uriah. He becomes increasingly annoyed as Uriah talks about his promotion, but Uriah does not seem disturbed by David's obvious displeasure; in fact, he agrees with David that his promotion to a partner *was* unlikely, and that it is a shame that Mr. Wickfield has been so "imprudent" as to require his help. He says, however, that he is delighted to be able to help Mr. Wickfield, and again thanks David for first "kindling the sparks of ambition in [his] umble breast."

Uriah's "humbleness" benefits him in multiple ways. In this passage, his show of humility effectively disarms all of David's criticisms concerning his promotion; when David pointedly says he didn't truly believe Uriah would ever become Wickfield's partner, Uriah refuses to take the remark for the insult it clearly is by agreeing that it was in fact an unlikely turn of events. Uriah is also able to temper any accusations of ambition by suggesting that he never would have dreamed of aspiring to his current position if David hadn't suggested it—a remark that also implicates David in Uriah's rise.

David begins to fear that Uriah is somehow tricking or taking advantage of him, but finally manages to ask about Mr. Wickfield's "imprudence." Uriah says that any other clerk would have had Mr. Wickfield "under his thumb" by now, and that he is glad he has been able to spare Wickfield this fate. Uriah punctuates these remarks by pressing his own thumb down on the table, making David even more furious.

As the conversation progresses, David begins to sense that Uriah's declarations of humility have placed him (David) in an unwinnable position: Uriah will "humbly" accept any criticism short of outright rudeness. No doubt realizing David's powerlessness, Uriah gloats about the power he now enjoys in a typically backhanded way, noting that someone in his position could easily take advantage of Mr. Wickfield.

Uriah asks whether he can confide in David, and—when David reluctantly agrees—says that David must have noticed Agnes's beauty that evening. David agrees that she looked "superior," and Uriah exclaims delightedly that as humble as he is, he is in love with Agnes. This enrages David to such an extent that he fantasizes about stabbing Uriah with the fireplace poker. He manages, however, to simply ask whether Uriah has told Agnes how he feels, and Uriah says that he has not, because he hopes to win her over through his treatment of Mr. Wickfield. He therefore asks David to keep his secret and "not to go against him."

Unlike David himself, Uriah seems aware of David's feelings for Agnes; Uriah's desire to marry her is not solely a reflection of his ambition, but also of his wish to assert his power over David by depriving him of the woman he's in love with. The fact that David is unaware of his own feelings places him at a further disadvantage, because he has no real grounds for objecting to Uriah's hopes beyond class prejudice. His violent fantasies of murdering Uriah, however, clearly stem from jealousy—particularly because his thoughts of Agnes being "outraged" by Uriah sound very much like thoughts of her being seduced or raped.

Uriah remarks that it is very late, and that the hotel he is staying at will have closed up for the night. Irritably, David says that he can take his bed for the night, but Uriah protests strongly against this and instead sleeps on a makeshift bed in the sitting room. David, meanwhile, hardly sleeps at all, because he is so anxious about Agnes. He also dreams about stabbing Uriah with the poker and goes to check to make sure that he has not; unfortunately, he finds the sight of Uriah sleeping so disturbing that he is drawn back to it again and again "in very repulsion." When the morning finally comes and Uriah leaves, David asks Mrs. Crupp to air out his rooms.

Characteristically, Uriah imposes on David's hospitality by professing that he doesn't wish to impose; by persuading David to allow him to sleep in the inferior bed, Uriah actually asserts his authority over him. Meanwhile, it's telling that David's disgust with Uriah deepens so markedly after learning about the latter's designs on Agnes. On the one hand, it strongly hints that David himself is in love with Agnes. It also, however, gives him a plausible reason for feeling "repulsion" beyond simple class bias.

CHAPTER 26: I FALL INTO CAPTIVITY

David sees Uriah again a few days later as he says goodbye to Agnes at the coach office. For Agnes's sake, David again tries to be civil with Uriah. Nevertheless, he is extremely worried about Agnes, in part because he suspects she would make "any sacrifice" on behalf of Mr. Wickfield. He cannot bring himself to voice his concerns to Agnes herself, however, and he broods over the Wickfields' situation for weeks afterward. He also finds himself thinking of Steerforth (who is away from London) with a "lurking distrust" he attributes to Agnes's influence.

David's fear is that Agnes will marry Uriah in an attempt to help her father. Given Agnes's selflessness—a virtue in a Victorian woman—David's concerns aren't unreasonable.


David's trial period at Spenlow and Jorkins is now over, and he is apprenticed outright. There is a small party at the office when he is "articled," and Mr. Spenlow says that he would have been happy to have him over to his home if his daughter hadn't so recently returned from school in Paris. He promises to invite David over another time, however, and asks him to spend a weekend shortly afterwards. On the day David is scheduled to go, the clerks in the office gossip about how luxurious Mr. Spenlow's house is.

Although he's not drawing a salary, David now effectively has a job, placing him one step closer to adulthood and finding a vocation that suits him.

David and Mr. Spenlow take a phaeton (carriage) together from Doctors' Commons to the latter's house. During the ride, Mr. Spenlow talks at length about how illustrious David's choice of profession is, and advises David that the best (that is, most profitable) cases involve disputed wills. He also praises the Doctors' Commons in general, going so far as to say that it is responsible for the well-being of the entire country. David privately finds this hard to believe but defers to Mr. Spenlow's opinion.

Mr. Spenlow's admiration for the Commons stems largely from what others (by Spenlow's own admission) view as "corruption": it's an elitist and cliquish institution where everyone involved knows everyone else. From Spenlow's perspective, however, this is why the Commons is so vital to the stability of the entire country: it's an institution largely interested in preserving the status quo.

David and Mr. Spenlow arrive at the latter's house, which has a beautiful garden. As they go inside, Mr. Spenlow asks for his daughter Dora, and David is immediately struck by the name. A moment later, David sees Dora and falls instantly in love with her. He is so distracted, in fact, that he doesn't immediately notice Miss Murdstone's presence until she says that she and David have already met. Mr. Spenlow explains that Miss Murdstone is Dora's companion, though David notices that Dora doesn't seem especially fond of her.

In recounting his relationship with Dora, David often adopts a gently self-deprecating tone. It's clear, for example, that in retrospect he views his instantaneous "love" for Dora with some amusement and skepticism; at least at this early stage of the relationship, his feelimgs have more to do with infatuation than with genuine love. However, there's also a strong element of nostalgia clouding these memories, and therefore a suggestion that David may partly regret the loss of this more innocent and enthusiastic self.


David has difficulty dressing for dinner because he is so consumed with thoughts of Dora. At dinner, he is wildly jealous of anyone who seems to know Mr. Spenlow better than he does, and spends most of his time talking to Dora, who has "the most delightful little voice, the gayest little laugh, [and] the pleasantest and most fascinating little ways." When Dora and Miss Murdstone retire to the drawing-room after dinner, David worries that Miss Murdstone will prejudice Dora against him.

To a large extent, what David finds charming about Dora is her childishness—or, as he puts it, everything that is "little" about her. This is in part a reflection of the times, since women in the nineteenth century were often described as childlike in their innocence and simplicity. It's also a function of David's love for his mother, who was similarly childish. Either way, the novel ultimately suggests that Dora's childishness is a hindrance to David's own maturity.

David, Mr. Spenlow, and the rest of the men rejoin Dora and Miss Murdstone, who pulls David aside. Although she can't help but complain a bit about Miss Betsey's treatment of her (and about David's childhood character), Miss Murdstone proposes that they now treat each other as "distant acquaintances" and keep their private opinions to themselves. David agrees, but also says that he thinks she and Mr. Murdstone treated both him and Clara horribly.

Although Miss Murdstone proposes letting bygones be bygones, it's clear that she still holds a grudge against David. Her refusal to forgive and forget will become important later, when she spitefully attempts to sabotage David and Dora's relationship.

Miss Murdstone walks away, and David spends the rest of the evening listening adoringly as Dora sings songs "to the effect that, whatever was the matter, we ought always to dance, Ta ra la, Ta a la!" Before he goes to bed, he sees himself in the mirror looking "idiotic," which sends him into a state of depression.

Although genteel Victorian women were generally expected to practice hobbies like playing an instrument, Dora's singing offers additional insight into her character. The lyrics in particular suggest that she views life largely as one long string of amusements (rather than as, for example, a time to grow and learn). In fact, the song is much like Dora herself, in the sense that it is pretty and entertaining but not especially practical or deep.

David wakes up the next morning as infatuated as ever and decides to take a walk in the garden. On the way there, he comes across Dora's dog, **Jip**, who snarls at him. Nevertheless, he continues to fantasize about Dora as he takes his walk, although his thoughts do not even extend as far as marriage: he simply wants to be able to "worship" her.

Despite his dislike of David, Jip is in many ways a symbol for Dora: like his mistress, he is spoiled and excitable, but good-natured at heart. Meanwhile, David's shortsightedness—that is, the fact that he's not thinking of Dora as a potential wife—is another hint that the relationship isn't truly mature, or suited to marriage.

While he is strolling, David runs into Dora herself, who complains that Miss Murdstone hadn't wanted to let her outside, even though it is the "brightest time of the whole day." David awkwardly attempts to compliment Dora by saying that it is brighter now than it had been a moment earlier, but doesn't quite manage to carry it off. He then asks her about Paris, and—when she says he ought to visit it—declares that he won't leave England for any reason "under existing circumstances." At that moment, **Jip** appears and begins yapping at David, who in turn grows jealous when Dora picks the dog up and caresses him.

David's stilted attempts to flirt with Dora are partly the result of his own youth and inexperience, and partly the result of Dora's naiveté: when David attempts to compliment her, Dora takes him quite literally and asks whether the weather has changed.

Dora asks whether David knows Miss Murdstone well and complains about her some more, saying that **Jip** could just as easily be her "protector." She continues to talk to the dog, saying that she and Jip can find their own friends, and that they will spite Miss Murdstone by being happy regardless of her own gloominess. David finds all of this enchanting and is hard-pressed to avoid declaring his love for Dora on the spot. Instead, he walks with Dora inside the greenhouse, which seems like "Fairyland" to him. In fact, he says that to this day, the scent of geraniums moves him.

Once again, David finds Dora's childlike mannerisms charming—in this case, carrying on a conversation with Jip. Although he seems to find the intensity of his own infatuation slightly ridiculous in retrospect, it's also clear that he recalls the exchange with a great deal of tenderness. In particular, David's description of the walk through "fairyland" evokes images of a magical, lost paradise.

Miss Murdstone eventually comes and fetches Dora and David for breakfast and church. David continues to fantasize about Dora throughout the service and the rest of the day; by the time he goes to bed, he is imagining that Mr. Spenlow has given his permission for David and Dora to marry.

David's daydreaming about the future continues to be naïve and impractical—especially his assumption that Mr. Spenlow will be pleased about the budding romance.

David and Mr. Spenlow have to leave early the next day to attend a case in Court. David is naturally distressed to leave Dora and can't focus on his work. In fact, this proves true for the next several weeks; David pays no attention to what is going on in Court except insofar as it relates to Dora (any mention of a will, for instance, causes him to fantasize about how he would spend an inheritance on Dora). Meanwhile, he buys several new waistcoats and continuously wears a pair of too-small boots, all in an attempt to impress Dora. He also takes to walking around any area of London where he thinks she might be out shopping. He manages to run into her a few times, but always tortures himself afterwards with thoughts of everything he did wrong during their conversation.

Although it will eventually inspire him to work harder, David's infatuation with Dora initially proves to be a distraction from his chosen career. Much as David predicted it would, the slow pace of courtroom business allows him to wander off into daydreams rather than focus his attention on a single task or goal. Far from shaping him into a more purposeful and active person, life as a proctor seems to encourage David's more fanciful tendencies.

Despite his promise to Agnes, David can't bring himself to tell her about his latest infatuation. Mrs. Crupp, however, manages to figure out that David is in love with someone, and urges him to cheer up. David asks how she has discovered his secret, and Mrs. Crupp says that she is a "mother herself," and knows that when a young man is taking too much (or not enough) care of himself, it means he is in love. In fact, she says, the previous tenant was in love with a barmaid. David protests strenuously against associating Dora with a barmaid, but Mrs. Crupp simply urges him again to cheer up and "know his own [v]alue." David thinks this is kind of her, even though he knows she mostly came to his room to drink his brandy.

David attributes his hesitation with Agnes to a lack of courage, but it isn't clear exactly what he's afraid of. It's possible he's worried she won't approve of Dora, but it's also possible that he feels awkward discussing the topic with Agnes on account of his own unconscious feelings for her. Regardless, David's reluctance is another indication that Agnes, rather than Dora, is the woman he's "supposed" to marry.

CHAPTER 27: TOMMY TRADDLES

The day after his conversation with Mrs. Crupp, David decides to go see Traddles, who lives in a neighborhood with an air of "faded gentility" that reminds David of Mr. Micawber. When he reaches Traddles' building, he finds a milkman harassing a servant girl for money she owes him. David asks for Traddles, and she directs him upstairs, where he finds Traddles waiting for him on the landing. Together, they enter Traddles's room, which is extremely cramped and crowded. David notices, however, that Traddles has made several "ingenious" accommodations to fit everything into a single room.

Like David, Traddles is just beginning to make his way in the world. However, where David has a wealthy relative to rely on, Traddles does not, and is consequently living in a lower-middle class neighborhood. The fact that he has made the most of his rooms, however, hints at an ability to better his situation in life and eventually work his way upwards.

Traddles explains that he usually invites guests to his "chambers"—an office he shares with other law students—in case they don't want to visit his apartment. He says that he is not ashamed of it, however, because he is making his way in the world, and the initial cost of becoming "articled" (apprenticed) was high.

Unlike David, who is self-conscious about both his age and his social standing, Traddles freely admits that he is just starting out on his career. This self-awareness serves him well, because it allows him to forgo unnecessary expenses (like better rooms).

David reminds Traddles of the sky-blue suit he used to wear at Salem House, and Traddles laughs about the "happy times" they had there. David attempts to remind Traddles of how cruelly Mr. Creakle treated the students (and Traddles in particular), but Traddles seems happy to let bygones be bygones.

Traddles is also a foil to David in his experience of the past. Whereas David often finds himself bogged down in memories (whether pleasant or distressing), Traddles is able to laugh over even the worst memories and then quickly set them aside to focus on the present.

David asks Traddles about the uncle who raised him, and Traddles explains that he was a cloth-merchant who died shortly after he finished school. This uncle had intended to make Traddles his heir, but took a disliking to him once he had grown up. Traddles does not seem disturbed by this, however, and matter-of-factly recounts that he was left with only 50 pounds when his uncle died, and no sort of job training. Fortunately, he was able to use a contact from Salem House to get a job copying law writings. From there, he progressed to writing up cases and then eventually decided to study law himself. He has also been making a little money helping to compile an encyclopedia; he views this work as a good fit, because he says he has "no invention at all; not a particle."

Traddles may be early on in his legal studies, but he's already come a long way from his starting point: through patience and hard work, he has managed to work his way upward from his job as a law writer to his current apprenticeship. The fact that he has also sought out additional work working on the encyclopedia likewise points to his determination. Finally, Traddles's blunt admission that he has "no invention" suggests that he has a good grasp of his strengths and weaknesses, and therefore of his vocation.

Traddles also reveals that he is engaged to a curate's daughter, whom he takes walking trips to see. They cannot currently afford to marry, but Traddles is confident that his fiancée would wait for him for years. In the meantime, he says, they have begun to plan for their eventual home together, and he shows David a **flower pot and a side table** he has collected for this purpose. Traddles acknowledges that furnishing a house requires much more than he currently has, but he remains content to "wait and hope!"

In David Copperfield, *marriage isn't something to take lightly, even setting aside the question of finding an appropriate partner. The expense of maintaining a middle-class household—complete with pleasant but unnecessary items like the flower pot—means that a man must be relatively well established in his career before he can start a family.*

Traddles continues to talk about his circumstances, and eventually mentions that his downstairs neighbors (and landlords) are none other than the Micawbers. David begs Traddles to invite Mr. Micawber in, and Mr. Micawber appears, looking and acting much the same as ever. Mr. Micawber answers David's questions about his family's health (all are well) before recognizing him, at which point he greets him delightedly and calls for Mrs. Micawber to join them.

The Micawbers' reappearance at this point in the narrative is not a good omen. Both David and Traddles are just beginning to establish themselves in their careers and work towards financial security, and the Mr. Micawber's ongoing struggles are a reminder of everything that can go wrong.

While they wait for Mrs. Micawber, Mr. Micawber asks David about Doctor Strong and reminisces about their last meeting in Canterbury. He then reminds David (at great length), that he has been prone throughout his life to "periods [...] when it has been requisite that [he] should pause, until certain expected events should turn up." This, he says, is one of those times.

Mr. Micawber, as always, is experiencing financial difficulties but confident that he will soon be on the path to success. However, coming on the heels of Traddles's account of his circumstances, Micawber's situation is a reminder of the limits of upward mobility.

Throughout Mr. Micawber's speech, David can hear Mrs. Micawber hastily washing up next door. When she finally comes to Traddles's room and sees David, she faints, and Mr. Micawber has to fetch water to revive her. She reports that the children are well, but seems alarmed when Mr. Micawber invites David to dinner. Guessing that there is not enough food to go around, David instead invites Traddles and the Micawbers to dine with him sometime and then leaves. Mr. Micawber accompanies him to the end of the street, explaining that he is currently involved in the corn business (though he is not being paid) and confirming that Mrs. Micawber is pregnant. He then leaves David, saying that while Mrs. Micawber's relatives may disapprove of her pregnancy, he scorns their opinion.

Presumably, Mrs. Micawber's family disapproves of her pregnancy on the grounds that the couple cannot support more children than they already have (and, perhaps, have brought about their own financial difficulties by having too many children). This was commonly cited as a cause of poverty in the nineteenth century, and it underscores the differences between the Micawbers and Traddles and his fiancée, who are planning ahead for their family's future.

CHAPTER 28: MR. MICAWBER'S GAUNTLET

David passes the time until his dinner party by thinking about Dora and eating very little, which he feels is appropriate to his "love-lorn condition." Having learned from his dinner party with Steerforth, David plans a much more modest meal this time. He manages to persuade Mrs. Crupp to cook for the party, but she manipulates him into agreeing to dine out for the following two weeks. He does, however, procure the ingredients for Mr. Micawber to make punch, which is a specialty of his.

David's reaction to falling in love with Dora is another indication of his youth and immaturity. Although his feelings are genuine, he makes a performance of them (for example, by not eating) in a way that's reminiscent of his efforts to look like an adult. In other respects, however, David is learning from past mistakes—in particular, the dinner he previously hosted.

Mr. Micawber, Mrs. Micawber, and Traddles all arrive together and praise David's rooms. Mrs. Micawber is especially delighted with a dressing-table David prepared for her, and Mr. Micawber remarks that the apartment reminds him of his days as a bachelor. This sparks a minor argument between Mr. and Mrs. Micawber that concludes with Mrs. Micawber saying, in tears, that she will never desert her husband. Mr. Micawber hints that Mrs. Micawber's moodiness is the result of their water having been shut off earlier in the day, and David attempts to cheer everyone up by asking Micawber to make punch.

Mr. Micawber's remark is obviously an offhand comment, so the fact that Mrs. Micawber responds to it the way she does is significant. Whether she truly believes the comment was a backhanded insult, or whether she's simply taking the opportunity to vent her own frustration, it's clear that Mrs. Micawber isn't entirely happy with her marriage. As a woman, however, she doesn't have many avenues for expressing her annoyance, so she instead accuses Mr. Micawber of feeling the regret that she herself presumably feels.

Mrs. Crupp's cooking is mostly a failure, but everyone is in such a good mood that David can't be too unhappy himself. Mr. Micawber reassures him that these kinds of domestic "accidents" happen, especially in households without a wife. He also proposes cooking the (undercooked) mutton on a gridiron David has for frying bacon.

Mr. Micawber's words sum up the domestic role of a Victorian woman: regardless of whether the wife herself was doing the chores herself or simply overseeing servants, she was expected to arrange things so smoothly that the actual running of the household would seem effortless.

Suddenly, David realizes that Littimer has entered the room and asks him what he wants. Littimer explains that Steerforth has sent him, and will likely be visiting David tomorrow. Littimer then takes over cooking and serving the mutton, making everyone there uncomfortable with his air of extreme respectability. As Littimer prepares to leave, David asks several times whether Steerforth is coming from Oxford without receiving a direct answer. Littimer is similarly vague when David asks whether he stayed long in Yarmouth overseeing the *Little Em'ly's* refurbishment, and then whether Steerforth has seen the boat yet. Littimer than leaves, much to everyone's relief—and particularly David's, because he feels guilty for harboring suspicions of Steerforth after his conversation with Agnes.

Littimer makes everyone nervous in part because they're unused to having servants to wait on them. In other words, although Littimer isn't upper-class himself, his presence is a reminder that David, Traddles, and the Micawbers aren't particularly well-to-do themselves. The scene is most important, however, for Littimer's evasiveness; in retrospect, it's clear that he doesn't answer David's questions directly because he's hiding Steerforth's affair with little Em'ly.

Mr. Micawber announces that the punch is ready and gives a speech. As everyone drinks, Mrs. Micawber asks for David's and Traddles's opinions on her husband's prospects, explaining that his hopes for work in both the corn and coal trades have fallen through. She further says that while *she* feels her husband would be suited to either banking or the brewing business, the fact that no one will hire Micawber for these jobs poses problems. Traddles and David agree with this, and with Mrs. Micawber's conclusion that "it is clear that [the Micawbers] must live." Finally, she says that the Micawbers cannot simply wait for an opportunity to arise, and that society clearly owes something to a man of Mr. Micawber's talents. She therefore suggests that Micawber should "throw down the gauntlet" by advertising his skills and qualifications in the papers.

Once again, the Micawbers' situation raises questions about how inclusive the promise of social mobility in the nineteenth century was. Mrs. Micawber's ideas about her husband's abilities may be exaggerated, but at the very least he has demonstrated a willingness to work. So far, however, his attempts to create opportunities for himself have all fallen through. This suggests that success isn't simply a matter of personal initiative, but rather something that hinges on broader societal circumstances. It's not unreasonable, then, for Mrs. Micawber to feel that society owes her husband and her family a livelihood.

David reminds the Micawbers that advertising is expensive, and Mrs. Micawber replies that she has considered this and thinks that Mr. Micawber should first borrow some money on credit. She then delivers a long speech reiterating her position and acknowledging that while financial matters typically require "masculine judgment," her father always regarded her judgment as sound. She then goes to lie down in David's bedroom, and David and Traddles congratulate Mr. Micawber on having such a "heroic" wife.

Borrowing money isn't necessarily the wisest thing for the Micawbers to do, given that they're in debt to begin with. It's unclear, however, what other options they have at this point, which again underscores the limitations of viewing success solely in terms of personal responsibility. Meanwhile, Mrs. Micawber's remark about "masculine judgment" is somewhat ironic, given her husband's inability to manage his money.

Mr. Micawber praises Mrs. Micawber's virtues before speaking at length about the joys of having children, despite the financial costs involved. He then moves on to praising Traddles and Traddles's fiancée before hinting that he suspects David is also in love. David is embarrassed, but eventually proposes a toast to "D," which everyone happily drinks to. The conversation then moves on to more "worldly" matters, and Mr. Micawber says he plans to move to a better neighborhood once something "turns up." However, he says that Traddles and David will always be welcome at his home. Mrs. Micawber finally resurfaces and makes tea, all the while pressing David more information about Dora. After tea is over, Mrs. Micawber performs a few ballads, and Mr. Micawber confides that it was partly his wife's singing that led him to fall in love with her.

As always, Mr. Micawber is hopeful that he is on the verge of financial success. His desire to move to a more prosperous area is a particular sign of his aspirations to respectable middle-class life, as is the praise he lavishes on marriage and childrearing; the idealization of the nuclear family coincided with the growth of the middle class and the spread of their influence. Unlike Traddles, however, Micawber didn't wait until he was capable of supporting a family to marry and have children, which throws his self-discipline and responsibility into question.

Sometime after ten at night, David's guests prepare to leave, Mr. Micawber slipping a letter to David as he does so. David, meanwhile, holds Traddles back and warns him not to lend Micawber anything. Traddles says that he doesn't have any money to lend, but tells David that he has already "lent" his name by acting as a guarantor for Mr. Micawber. He also says that Micawber assured him he had nothing to worry about, but David remains anxious.

Although Traddles ultimately does become a successful lawyer, his future seems very much in doubt in this passage. Interestingly, however, what seems to hold Traddles back isn't a lack of drive or ability, but rather a lack of shrewdness. Traddles is eager to believe the best of people and, as a result, doesn't look out for his own interests enough.

David is still sitting lost in thought when Steerforth arrives at his apartment. As soon as David sees his friend, he regrets ever having doubted him, although he still considers Agnes a "benignant, gentle angel." Meanwhile, Steerforth teases David about having another dinner party and asks about Micawber, whom he crossed paths with in the street. David explains the Micawbers and their situation and then excitedly tells Steerforth that his other guest was Traddles. Steerforth, however, doesn't remember Traddles at first, and then simply asks whether he is "as soft as ever." Slightly annoyed, David praises Traddles, but Steerforth seems uninterested, prodding at the fire with a poker.

Steerforth's lukewarm reaction to hearing news of Traddles is another mark against him, although David doesn't fully see it at the time. Steerforth seems bored by David's account of Traddles's hard work and patience—probably because these are qualities Steerforth himself never developed or cared about. Meanwhile, Dickens continues to position Steerforth and Agnes as opposing influences on David, with Agnes functioning as David's moral compass.

Steerforth mentions that he is hungry, having just arrived from Yarmouth, where he says he was "**seafaring**." This reminds David that Littimer had come looking for Steerforth, but Steerforth simply says Littimer is a "fool." David then asks how long Steerforth was in Yarmouth, and whether little Em'ly is married yet. Steerforth replies that he was there for a week and didn't see much of the Peggottys, but that Emily isn't married yet. He also gives David a letter from Peggotty, saying that Barkis is close to death. Steerforth is philosophical about Barkis's impending death, remarking that everyone dies and the important thing is to keep "riding on over all obstacles, and win the race" David notices, however, that there is something agitated and strained about Steerforth's expression.

Steerforth's cavalier attitude towards Barkis's illness likely stems partly from class prejudice; although he takes pleasure in talking to working-class people, he sees them less as fully human beings and more as objects for his own entertainment. Of course, Steerforth is also preoccupied with issues other than Barkis's illness—namely, his affair with little Em'ly. This is presumably what he's thinking of when he talks about "riding on over all obstacles"; he feels guilty about his intended actions, but also feels compelled to go through with them. Steerforth's words are therefore another indication of his difficulties with self-control and purposefulness; although he talks about acting independently and determinedly, his goals are warped and his emotions are controlling him.

David tells Steerforth he intends to go visit Peggotty to try to comfort her. Steerforth agrees that David might as well go but declines to accompany him, saying he needs to visit his mother. He then invites David to come stay at Mrs. Steerforth's before going to Yarmouth, joking that he wants David to "stand between" him and Rosa Dartle. David agrees to come the following day and then walks with Steerforth to the main road, thinking that Steerforth deserves a "worthy race to run."

David still idolizes Steerforth at this point in the novel, and consequently considers Steerforth's aimlessness to be a function of the world rather than a personal flaw. In effect, David thinks Steerforth refuses to commit to anything because he's above everything, when the reality is that Steerforth simply never learned to exercise self-control.

David returns to his room and prepares for bed, at which point he finds and reads Mr. Micawber's letter. It was written shortly before dinner, and explains that Mr. Micawber is "Crushed," his apartment and things having been repossessed. Unfortunately, Traddles' things have also been repossessed, which worries David, who fears his friend won't be able to bounce back from the setback as easily as Micawber always does. He continues to think of Traddles and his fiancée for the rest of the night.

By this point, it's clear that the Micawbers' constant ups and downs financially are, if not exactly the Victorian ideal, somewhat functional for them. Traddles, however, aspires to a more conventional and stable life, so the loss of what he has long been saving for his future marriage is a major blow.

CHAPTER 29: I VISIT STEERFORTH AT HIS HOME, AGAIN

The next morning, David asks for a temporary leave of absence from work and then attends one final case with Mr. Spenlow. The case is "amusing," and David is feeling optimistic about his chosen profession as he heads to Steerforth's home. Littimer is not there (to David's relief), but Mrs. Steerforth and Rosa Dartle are, and are glad to see David. He is a little disconcerted, however, when he notices that Rosa keeps glancing back and forth between him and Steerforth. What's more, she seems to follow them around over the course of the day. Finally, when all four go out for a walk, she grabs David's arm to hold him back for a moment.

Rosa evidently suspects Steerforth of having an affair—or, at least, of having fallen in love—and consequently spends the day jealously watching for hints that she's right.

Rosa asks if David's work is really so interesting that it prevents him from visiting the Steerforths' more often. David agrees with her suggestion that it can be "a little dry," and Rosa says it is natural for him to want a break from it. She then begins to drop hints about Steerforth, however, implying that he is unlikely to find David's work interesting, but that he *must* be "engrossed" in it, since he has been visiting his family home so rarely. David finally catches on to her meaning and says that Steerforth has not been spending his time with him. At this, Rosa looks pale and "sharp" and begins pressing David to tell her what Steerforth and Littimer are up to. David says that he doesn't think Steerforth is up to anything, but Rosa's expression only grows more pained, and she swears David to secrecy.

Although Rosa is often an unlikeable character, her frustration is understandable. Despite knowing perfectly well what Steerforth is like—she hints here, for instance, that he's flighty and easily bored—she's desperately in love with him, as evidenced by her pained expression when David confirms her suspicions. There's very little she can do about her feelings, however, both because they're unrequited and because she's a woman and (to some extent) a dependent in the household. In fact, she's not even free to talk openly about her feelings, so in some ways she's forced to adopt the indirect way of speaking she uses here, and which Mrs. Steerforth later objects to.

David notices that Steerforth and Mrs. Steerforth seem especially close to one another during this visit. He is also struck by how much they resemble one another in temperament, and thinks that any argument between them would probably be difficult to bridge.

In retrospect, it seems clear that Steerforth feels guilty about his plan to seduce and run away with little Em'ly, and is paying particular attention to his mother in an attempt to make up for it. It's true, however, that Steerforth and his mother are very close and very similar, and the unhealthy intensity of the relationship does lead to an equally intense falling-out, as David predicts here.

David reaches this conclusion after a conversation Rosa starts at dinner one night. She begins by hinting that there is something she wants to know more about, and Mrs. Steerforth tells her to be more direct. The two women then get into a discussion of whether Rosa's "mysteriousness" is her "natural manner," with Rosa feigning surprise at everything Mrs. Steerforth says and finally saying she will "learn frankness" from Steerforth. Returning to the original topic, Rosa then asks whether people with similar personalities are more likely to argue seriously. Steerforth believes this is true, so Rosa brings up him and his mother as an example of what she means. Mrs. Steerforth says that she and Steerforth "know their duty to each other" too well to quarrel, and Rosa says she is very relieved.

Rosa's remark about "learning frankness" from Steerforth is, first and foremost, a jab at Steerforth for concealing his affair with Emily. In a broader sense, however, it's also a jab at the hypocrisy of Steerforth (and perhaps the upper classes in general). "Frankness"—that is, naturalness—is almost by definition something innate rather than learned, so the idea that Rosa can become frank by modeling herself on Steerforth would be nonsensical except for the fact that Steerforth's apparent honesty is itself a performance. Although Rosa is not above snobbishness herself, her comments here do undermine the idea that there's anything inherently noble about the upper classes.

Meanwhile, David has also noticed that Steerforth seems unusually determined to make himself agreeable to Rosa. Rosa initially resists his efforts to win her over, but softens by the time dinner is over and everyone is sitting around the fire. Eventually, Rosa begins to play the harp, which Steerforth tells David she has not done in several years. Steerforth then sits next to Rosa and persuades her to sing an Irish song, which sounds almost "unearthly" to David. The mood is broken, however, when Steerforth puts an arm around Rosa and jokes that they will "love each other very much" going forward; Rosa jumps up and strikes him before running from the room.

Just as he did with his mother, Steerforth attempts to ease his guilt over his coming affair with Emily by being unusually kind to Rosa. This suggests that he's aware on some level that Rosa is in love with him, but the brotherly joke he makes toward the end of the scene also implies that he's in denial about just how deep her feelings run. The scene also underscores Rosa's previous jab about Steerforth's earnestness, since it's actually Rosa who bares her feelings in the song she sings, and Steerforth who laughs them off to avoid dealing with them.

Mrs. Steerforth enters as Rosa leaves and asks what the matter is. Steerforth replies that she is compensating for her previous good mood, and his mother warns him not to provoke her. Later, as David and Steerforth prepare for bed, Steerforth once again asks David what he thinks of Rosa, and David wonders what it was that upset her earlier. Carelessly, Steerforth says it could have been anything.

Although Steerforth is clearly joking about Rosa's need to "compensate," it's a joke that again allows him to ignore her feelings for him, and the role he has played in encouraging them: he attributes her bad mood to her natural temperament rather than his own words. Steerforth is not only unable to control to his actions, but also unable (or unwilling) to take responsibility for them after the fact.

David tries to go to his own room, but Steerforth stops him and asks him to always "think of him at his best, if circumstances should ever part them." David reassures him that he always thinks the best of Steerforth, and they say goodnight. Before leaving the next morning, however, David peeks into Steerforth's room and sees him sleeping as "easily" as he had at Salem House. Back in the present, David hints both that Steerforth's peacefulness is surprising in retrospect, and that this was the last time he ever saw his friend. For a moment, however, he says that he wants to remember Steerforth in this way.

Steerforth's request once again implies that he knows in advance what he is going to do (namely, run away with Emily), but doesn't feel he can stop it. It's fitting, then, that David is reminded of him as a boy, since Steerforth hasn't truly grown out of his youthful irresponsibility; the fact that he's sleeping "easily" suggests that however much Steerforth may regret the effects of his upcoming actions, he doesn't truly view himself as to blame for them.


CHAPTER 30: A LOSS

David arrives in Yarmouth that evening and arranges to stay at an inn. He then stops by Omer and Joram's: the shop has closed for the evening, but Mr. Omer is inside and lets David in. David says he was sorry to learn of Mr. Barkis's condition and asks Mr. Omer what he knows about it. Omer, however, says he doesn't know anything, because it isn't appropriate for an undertaker to ask about the health of someone sick. Mr. Omer feels that this is rather unfair, and wishes that people were "stronger-minded" about death. Throughout the conversation, David notices that Omer's asthma has grown significantly worse—something Omer himself readily admits.

In many ways, minor characters like Mr. Omer function as markers for the passage of time in the novel (and therefore for David's own growth). In the years that have passed since David's childhood, Mr. Omer has grown sickly and closer to death himself. His easy acceptance of this reflects his own familiarity with death while also allowing Dickens to keep the book's tone relatively light; although multiple characters die over the course of the novel, the story is hopeful about people's ability to grow through and beyond grief.

Omer explains that little Em'ly has been keeping them up to date on Barkis's condition, and David asks how she is. Mr. Omer replies that he is anxious to see her married, because while her work is as good as ever, she seems depressed. According to Omer, this is because she is "unsettled" and needs a home and husband to care for; in fact, he offered to release her early from her apprenticeship so she could marry. Ham accordingly bought a house and the couple were on the verge of marriage when Barkis's condition deteriorated, delaying the wedding. As a result of this uncertainty, Mr. Omer says, Emily continues to be anxious and unhappy. David then asks Omer if he knows anything about Martha, but Omer doesn't know much, although he says he pities her and doesn't consider her a bad person.

Mr. Omer's concerns about little Em'ly reveal just how central marriage and family were to the Victorian conception of womanhood: Omer effectively suggests that all of Emily's problems can be solved by simply becoming a wife. Still, despite his conventional ideas about women's nature as homemakers, Omer does break with the prevailing attitude toward fallen women by suggesting that Martha ought to be pitied rather than scorned.


Minnie enters and reports that Barkis's condition has worsened, and that Mr. Peggotty is currently at Barkis's house. David hurries there as well, where he also finds Ham and Emily. Everyone is very subdued, but Mr. Peggotty and Ham thank David for coming. Emily, however, says nothing and seems unusually shaken; when David attempts to take her hand, she flinches and runs to her uncle, who attributes her behavior to her "loving" disposition. Mr. Peggotty attempts to send Emily home with Ham, but she begs to be allowed to remain. Ham therefore leaves alone, and David notices that Emily clings even closer to Mr. Peggotty when her fiancé kisses her. She also insists on going with her uncle when he goes upstairs to see Barkis, though David later thinks he sees her lying on the floor of his own bedroom.

At the time, David attributes Emily's odd behavior to a longstanding "dread of death." However, while it's true that little Em'ly seemed especially afraid of death (at least by drowning) as a girl, it's clear in retrospect that her agitation has at least as much to do with her plans to elope with Steerforth as it does with Mr. Barkis. Once again, Emily reveals herself to be ill at ease with her fiancé's displays of affection, while simultaneously clinging desperately to her uncle as if she's afraid to lose him.

Left alone, David thinks about little Em'ly's apparent fear of death, as well as what Mr. Omer told him about her. He is interrupted by Peggotty, who comes downstairs and embraces him, thanking him for coming. She then asks David to come upstairs, saying his presence will cheer Barkis if he happens to wake.

Emily's anxious response to Barkis's decline is tied to her coming actions, since a woman who had engaged in premarital sex was often considered to be as good as dead—the idea being that the stigma attached to the behavior led inexorably to poverty, disease, and death.

Once upstairs, David finds Barkis unconscious, but clinging to the box he keeps beside his bed. Peggotty attempts to wake him by telling him David has come to see him, but Barkis remains the same. Mr. Peggotty says that Barkis will die when the tide goes out, since that is what happens on the **coast**. For the next several hours, everyone waits in Barkis's room, until Barkis finally begins to stir, talking first about driving David to school and then saying that Peggotty is the best woman in the world. Finally, he says that "Barkis is willin'" and dies as the tide goes out.

The repetition of the phrase Barkis initially used to propose with is interesting—particularly because it's the last thing Barkis ever says. What had been a running joke now signals Barkis's willingness to embrace death and presumably, given the cultural context of the novel, God. In other words, as comical as Barkis's and Peggotty's relationship often is, Dickens does suggest that it plays a role into shaping Barkis into the kind of man who can look forward to entry into heaven.

CHAPTER 31: A GREATER LOSS

David agrees to stay until Mr. Barkis is buried (in the same cemetery as Clara Copperfield). He also helps Peggotty and exercises his professional skills by reading and interpreting Barkis's will, which he finds in the box Barkis always kept by his bed. As it turns out, this box also contains several hundred pounds and a few valuable items, including a gold watch. In total, Barkis has saved nearly 3,000 pounds, which he divides in his will between Peggotty, little Em'ly, and David; he also bequeaths the interest on 1,000 pounds to Mr. Peggotty. Dealing with this business keeps David preoccupied for the week leading up to the funeral, during which time he does not see Emily. The funeral itself is small and quiet, and gives David a chance to place some leaves on his mother's grave.

3,000 pounds was a substantial amount of money in the early 1800s; to put it in perspective, Dickens later indicates that the comfortably well-off Miss Betsey has roughly 8,000 pounds (not counting the cottage she owns). The fact that Barkis managed to save this money is a testament to his hard work, discipline, and—most of all—his love for Peggotty and desire to provide her with a good life. It's also interesting that he chose to leave some of his money to David and Emily; it's possible Barkis sees them as family, particularly since he had no children of his own.

David pauses his narrative, saying that he is afraid to recount the events that followed the funeral. Although he realizes that his writing cannot change what has happened, he feels as though proceeding will make it "come again."

David's remarks here speak to the ways memory and narrative intersect in the novel. On the one hand, telling his own story gives David a measure of control over events that might have been out of his control at the time; he can, for instance, choose to depict them in a particular light. There are obviously limits to this control, however, since David can't change the bare facts of what has happened.

Everyone arranges to meet at Mr. Peggotty's the night of the funeral. The weather is "wild" when David arrives that evening, but Mr. Peggotty and Peggotty are already there preparing the house for visitors and usher him in. David asks how Peggotty is, and Mr. Peggotty says she can take comfort in the fact that she and her husband "did their duty" by one another. Mrs. Gummidge is as grumpy as usual and complains that the Peggottys would be better off without her. Mr. Peggotty attempts to cheer her up while setting a candle in the window—a signal he uses to let little Em'ly he's at home. Peggotty teases her brother for being so attached to Emily, and Mr. Peggotty agrees that he is, talking about how much pleasure he takes in visiting Ham and Emily's future home; all the objects in it remind him of his niece.

In the moments leading up to Emily's disappearance, David lingers on images of the family life that's about to be thrown into chaos. Peggotty's marriage to Barkis is likely the kind of marriage Mr. Peggotty envisions Emily and Ham sharing—a relationship that's not especially passionate, but that's comfortable and responsible. However, there have already been many hints that the marriage isn't meant to be, and in this passage, Dickens provides another: although Mr. Peggotty imagines he sees Emily's touch at work in the cottage she and Ham are to share, it sounds as though Ham is actually responsible for the majority of the furnishing. Emily's apparent disinterest in the house that will be her home is another sign of her resistance to the marriage.


Mr. Peggotty sees someone coming: it's Ham, but he is not accompanied by little Em'ly. Ham asks David to step outside so that he can show him something, and David notices that Ham looks very pale. Once outside, David asks Ham what's wrong, and Ham eventually says that Emily has run away, and that it would be better for her to die than to face the "ruin and disgrace" she now will. Ham then asks David's help in breaking the news to the rest of the family, but Mr. Peggotty appears before David can respond and—realizing that Emily is not there—lets out a wail.

Ham's remark that Emily would be better off dead is likely to strike modern readers as cold. In the cultural context of the time, however, it's a selfless wish, as well as a reminder of just how serious the consequences could be for a woman who flouted sexual norms. Despite his own personal feelings for Emily, Ham would rather see her dead than reduced to poverty and even prostitution.

Back inside, David reads aloud a letter Ham gave him. It's from Emily, and explains that she is already "far away" from her home and Ham, whose love she says she never deserved. She doesn't intend to come back unless "he" makes her "a lady," and she asks Ham to convey her love to Mr. Peggotty and to think of her as dead—or "so bad" that her departure is no loss.

Emily's motives for running away with Steerforth are somewhat obscure. It's not clear whether attraction to Steerforth, the desire to be an upper-class lady, or simply the need to escape her impending marriage to Ham was the most important factor. It is clear, however, that Emily considered herself an improper woman even before her affair began, since she claims not to deserve Ham. Regardless, she expresses deep shame over what she sees as her failures as a woman.



Mr. Peggotty seems dazed, although he does try to comfort Ham. Eventually, he asks who the man is that Emily has run away with, and Ham asks David to step outside. David remains, however, slowly realizing the truth as Ham explains that a servant (Littimer) and a gentleman have frequently been seen in the area, most recently with a horse and carriage. Ham assures David that he isn't responsible, but that Steerforth is the man he's talking about.

It's clear from David's reactions throughout the scene that he half-suspects Steerforth of having seduced little Em'ly: he feels "shock" long before Ham explicitly reveals the man's name, but is apparently unwilling to consciously entertain the idea. This reluctance probably stems in part from his feelings for Steerforth, but it also speaks to David's own guilt: by introducing Steerforth to the Peggottys, David unwittingly made the affair possible.

Mr. Peggotty finally rouses himself and prepares to leave: he plans to go knock a hole in Steerforth's boat since he can't "drown" the man himself, and then set off in search of little Em'ly. Mrs. Gummidge, however, begs him not to leave now, but to sit down for a while so that they can reminisce about Emily and Ham as children. This, she says, will help him "bear his sorrow better." Mr. Peggotty does as she suggests, and David—who had previously wanted to beg for the family's forgiveness—begins instead to cry with everyone else.

Mrs. Gummidge's suggestion is striking, because it almost makes it sound as though both Ham and Emily have died. In Emily's case, this makes some sense, given the prevailing wisdom about the fate of fallen women. In Ham's case, it perhaps foreshadows the fact that Emily's jilting of him does indirectly lead to his death, though not for several more years. Regardless, Mrs. Gummidge's suggestion also highlights the importance of memory in the novel by suggesting that recalling happier times can be a way of coping with the present, and even gathering strength for the future.

CHAPTER 32: THE BEGINNING OF A LONG JOURNEY

Despite feeling intense guilt over the part he has played in the "pollution of an honest home," David cannot bring himself to condemn Steerforth. In fact, he loves him more than ever and cannot stop thinking of all his good qualities. He realizes, however, that their friendship is over once and for all. From this point on, David writes, his memories of Steerforth "were as the remembrances of a cherished friend, who was dead."

David's description of the Peggotty's home as "polluted" again links sexual misconduct to disease, perhaps in part as a way of foreshadowing the fate that likely awaits Emily (poverty and prostitution). In any case, given the strength of the language, it's striking that David blames himself more than he does Steerforth. This possibly reflects David's belief that Steerforth, by virtue of his personality, isn't truly responsible for his own actions, but it seems likely that David is also simply unwilling to think badly of someone he has so much affection for. As a result, he takes refuge in his memories of Steerforth to avoid having to face the truth.

By the next morning, most of Yarmouth has heard what has happened, and while many are critical of the couple—and particularly of little Em'ly—everyone is sympathetic to Mr. Peggotty and Ham.

There's clearly a sexual double standard in the townspeople's' attitudes towards Steerforth and Emily: it's acceptable and even expected for a man to engage in premarital sex, but harshly condemned when a woman does the same.

David meets Mr. Peggotty and Ham on the beach. Both look very determined, and David worries that if Ham ever came across Steerforth, he would kill him. Mr. Peggotty, however, simply says that he and his nephew have been talking, and he has decided he has an obligation to look for Emily. David offers to go with Mr. Peggotty to London the next day, and Mr. Peggotty agrees. Ham, meanwhile, will continue to work as a boat-builder, and Mrs. Gummidge will stay in the house and keep a candle lit in case Emily returns. As the conversation winds down, Ham goes and looks out over the **sea**, reflecting that "the beginning of it all did take place here—and then the end come."

Mr. Peggotty's plan to keep a candle burning is a way of communicating to Emily that she still has a home to return to. This is a significant gesture, because Emily's actions have in theory barred her forever from respectable domestic life. Ham's remarks about the sea, meanwhile, resonate on several levels. Literally speaking, Ham seems to be talking about the fact that he and Emily met as a result of their fathers' deaths at sea; the fact that he says the "end" will also take place there foreshadows his own eventual death. Metaphorically, it's also a reminder of the limitations on personal agency; Ham's words imply that some sort of fate is controlling his life regardless of his own actions.


Mr. Peggotty, Ham, and David return to the house, where Mrs. Gummidge has made breakfast and urges Mr. Peggotty to eat. She then begins mending some clothes for Mr. Peggotty, saying she will remain in the house while he is away and write to him to let him know what is going on. David, meanwhile, is amazed at how patient and helpful Mrs. Gummidge is being. She seems to have completely forgotten her own troubles and takes pains to be cheerful around Mr. Peggotty.

Mrs. Gummidge proves to be aware of what the Peggottys have done for her and is eager to return the favor. Significantly, she does this by taking on conventionally female tasks like cooking and sewing; by keeping the household running, Mrs. Gummidge frees Mr. Peggotty up to look for his niece.


That evening, David visits Mr. Omer, who is very distressed by Emily's flight. Minnie, by contrast, at first seems to strongly condemn Emily's actions, but then breaks down in tears wondering what will become of Emily. She explains that she doesn't know what to tell her child, who was friendly with Emily and wears a ribbon that Emily gave her. Minnie worries that she ought to take the ribbon away, but can't bring herself to do it.

Given that Minnie eventually expresses concern for little Em'ly, it's interesting that she's initially so much more critical of Emily's actions than Mr. Omer is. In fact, the strongest condemnations of Emily in the novel come from other women, which perhaps speaks to their need to protect their own reputations. As Minnie's anxiety about the ribbon demonstrates, simply being associated with a disreputable woman was enough to cast doubt on another woman's character.

David returns to Peggotty's house and thinks about everything that has happened since Barkis's death. Suddenly, he hears a knock at the door and opens it to find Miss Mowcher. Her demeanor is entirely changed from the last time David saw her, and he welcomes her in, asking her why she is so upset. She begins to berate herself, saying she could have "prevented it," but is then distracted by David remarking that he is "surprised" to see her "distressed and serious." Miss Mowcher replies bitterly that everyone treats her as a "plaything" without thoughts and feelings. She goes on to explain that she comes from a family of dwarfs, and that the only way she has found to support herself and them is to go along with people making a "jest" of her.

Miss Mowcher's predicament is another reminder of the limits of social mobility in the novel. In this case, Miss Mowcher is so constrained by the expectations of other people that her physical appearance becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: people see her as comical, so she is forced to behave comically in order to make her way in the world.

Miss Mowcher changes the subject, explaining that she got Peggotty's address from Omer and Joram, and has been trying to find David all day. She asks whether David remembers Steerforth mentioning little Em'ly during their earlier meeting, and when David says he does, explains that she thought David was in love with Emily—something Littimer confirmed when she left the room. Although she was worried about what would happen to David under Steerforth's influence, she nevertheless agreed to deliver a letter to little Em'ly—ostensibly from David, but actually from Steerforth. She eventually began to suspect that Littimer and Steerforth had tricked her when she heard that they had been hanging around Yarmouth, but she was not able to reach Yarmouth in time to stop the elopement.

Miss Mowcher's initial belief that David was in love with Emily hint that his childhood feelings for her are not entirely resolved. This makes the guilt David feels over his role in the affair even more plausible, since David may be aware on some level that Steerforth has simply done what he himself would like to—namely, sleep with Emily.

Miss Mowcher says she has to go and asks David whether he trusts her. David hesitates until Miss Mowcher pointedly asks whether he would doubt her if she weren't a dwarf. This convinces David to trust her, and she promises to use her position to try to find out news of little Em'ly and (if possible) to bring Littimer to justice. Finally, she asks David to think kindly of her if he again sees her acting comically, and to remember why she does so.

In a strange way, the crisis surrounding Emily's elopement actually gives Miss Mowcher a sense of purpose. Up to this point, she has simply worked to get by, and has resented the need to conform to her customers' expectations. Now, however, she can usefully leverage her position to help the search; since people don't take Miss Mowcher seriously to begin with, they're more likely to speak freely in front of her.

The next morning, David, Peggotty, Mr. Peggotty, Ham, and Mrs. Gummidge all meet at the coach office. Ham pulls David aside and asks him to look after Mr. Peggotty. He also offers to send the money he earns to Mr. Peggotty, saying he has no need of it himself now. David hints that Ham might one day want to marry, but since Ham refuses to entertain this idea, David simply reminds him that Mr. Peggotty now has an inheritance from Mr. Barkis. David, Mr. Peggotty, and Peggotty then leave for London.

Part of what makes Ham a "good" member of the working class is his total selflessness. To the extent that Ham hoped to move up in life, he wanted to do so for Emily's sake. Now, he has no interest in the money he earns, and seems to view hard work as a distraction from his unhappiness. All of this contrasts starkly with a character like Uriah, whose actions are motivated by selfish ambition.

Since Peggotty will be staying in London for some time to deal with Barkis's affairs, David and Mr. Peggotty help her find a room to rent. They then have tea at David's apartment, and David writes a note to Mrs. Steerforth explaining what has happened and asking to see her the next day. The following afternoon, David and Mr. Peggotty go to Highgate, where David is momentarily overcome by his happy memories of visiting the Steerforths.

Although David Copperfield *is generally an optimistic story, it's also a coming-of-age story and therefore, to some extent, a story about David losing his childhood innocence. This is especially clear as David arrives at the Steerforths' home and finds himself overwhelmed by sadness as he thinks back to how trusting and naïve he was in his friendship with Steerforth.*

Mrs. Steerforth looks pale and unhappy but also very proud. She asks Mr. Peggotty why he has come, and he shows her little Em'ly's letter, asking whether Steerforth will follow through on his promise to "make Emily a lady" (that is, to marry her). Mrs. Steerforth says that this is impossible because of the class difference between them—even if Emily were not "uneducated and ignorant," her relationship to Mr. Peggotty would be a source of embarrassment.

At this point, marriage would be the only way of salvaging Emily's reputation. For Steerforth, however, marriage to a working-class woman would be far more scandalous than an affair, even if his mother wasn't so intractably opposed to the relationship.

Appealing to Mrs. Steerforth's love for her son, Mr. Peggotty passionately defends the selflessness of his love for little Em'ly. If Steerforth marries her, Mr. Peggotty says, the rest of her family will agree to stay out of the way until "the time when all of us shall be alike in quality afore our God." Mrs. Steerforth, however, repeats that no marriage will take place and offers "compensation" instead, which Mr. Peggotty angrily rejects. This in turn causes Mrs. Steerforth to lose her temper: she also cannot be compensated, she says, because her feelings for her son are much deeper than Mr. Peggotty's for Emily.

The confrontation between Mr. Peggotty and Mrs. Steerforth encapsulates the novel's complex attitudes towards class. On the one hand, Mr. Peggotty denies that there is any fundamental difference between the classes by saying that everyone will be equal in heaven. The fact that he accepts his station in this life, however, is part of what makes him a "good" working-class character. Meanwhile, Mrs. Steerforth implies that the classes are inherently different from one another by arguing that her own misery far outweighs the Peggottys'. Although this is clearly a prejudiced view, there is an element of truth to what she says about Emily's loss also representing a financial loss to the Peggottys, since they've also lost her labor. The offer to pay the Peggottys, however, is obviously insulting, not only because it denies the Peggottys' feelings but also because it effectively treats Emily as a prostitute.

Despite Rosa Dartle's repeated attempts to quiet her, Mrs. Steerforth launches into a long rant about how cruel it was of Steerforth to desert her after all the years she spent indulging him and making him the center of her life. Unless Steerforth casts little Em'ly aside, she says, she will never allow him to return. This speech strongly reminds David of Steerforth's own pride, and he foresees that reconciliation between Steerforth and his mother will be impossible

Although Mrs. Steerforth clearly disapproves of Emily on class-based grounds, the bulk of her anger seems to stem simply from the fact that Steerforth has taken up with another woman at all. This is another indication of how codependent her relationship to her son was: in fact, she claims in this exchange that she has "had no separate existence" from her son since his birth. It seems likely that Mrs. Steerforth would object to any romantic relationship her son became involved in on the grounds that it would take him away from her. This in turn helps explain Steerforth's immaturity, because his mother consistently refuses to treat him as an adult.

Mrs. Steerforth says she has nothing more to say, and Mr. Peggotty agrees to leave, explaining that he never really had any hope in talking to her to begin with. As he and David leave, however, Rosa intercepts them and bitterly "congratulates" David for bringing Mr. Peggotty to the house and causing a division between Steerforth and his mother. David objects, but Rosa angrily continues, saying that while she knows Steerforth is "false" and "corrupt," she has no sympathy for either Mr. Peggotty or his niece: in fact, she says, she would like to see Emily whipped. Mr. Peggotty leaves at this point, but Rosa continues over David's protests, saying she would like to ruin the entire family and drive Emily to her death.

Rosa's outburst is surprising, particularly given that she has earlier mocked Steerforth for his own classism. Rosa is in love with Steerforth, however, and despite her awareness of his faults, it's probably psychologically easier for her to see Emily as responsible for the affair. In any case, she echoes Mrs. Steerforth's suggestion that the working-class Peggottys do not constitute a family in the way the upper-class Steerforths do.

David rejoins Mr. Peggotty, who says he will leave to look for little Em'ly that very night but will not say where he is going. They have dinner with Peggotty, who also does not know her brother's plans. She does, however, persuade him to take some of her money, and Mr. Peggotty promises to write to David regularly. He then leaves, and David continues to think about his love and devotion to little Em'ly for the rest of the night.

David is deeply moved by Mr. Peggotty's devotion to Emily. Since Emily's actions have disgraced the entire family, Mr. Peggotty's immediate forgiveness of his niece and determination to find her are a testament both to his own selflessness and to the depth of the bond between them.

CHAPTER 33: BLISSFUL

Far from distracting David from Dora, Barkis's death and Emily's disappearance just make her seem even "purer" and more loveable in comparison. Once they are back in London, David tells Peggotty that he has fallen in love and is somewhat disappointed that she doesn't consider his love as hopeless as he does. Whenever he is in Court, David finds it strange that the judges and lawyers around don't worship Dora as he does, and ends up "despising" them and the place as a result.

Dora's "purity" stems in part from her childishness. Although David clearly finds her attractive, his relationship with her lacks the implied sexual edge of his relationship with Emily; in fact, Dora eventually dies as an indirect result of marrying and sleeping with David, underscoring the fact that she's basically a girl rather than a woman. This in turn reflects the broader immaturity of the relationship—for instance, David's childish disappointment that Dora might share his feelings and therefore undermine his self-indulgently lovelorn state.

Meanwhile, David takes Peggotty sightseeing and helps her to sort out her legal and financial affairs. When the latter are settled, she goes with David to Doctors' Commons to pay her bill. When Mr. Spenlow comes to greet them, however, they are surprised to see that Mr. Murdstone is with him. A tense exchange follows in which Murdstone expresses his condolences over Barkis's death and Peggotty pointedly says that she can take comfort in the fact that no one—including herself—was responsible for it. Murdstone seems somewhat shaken by this, but then tells David that they are unlikely to see each other again soon, taking the opportunity to once again criticize David's character. Murdstone then leaves, having paid for a marriage license. Mr. Spenlow and David chat, and it emerges that Murdstone is marrying a woman who is wealthy, young, and beautiful.

Mr. Murdstone's reappearance in a chapter otherwise about David and Dora foreshadows the tensions that will eventually arise in the latter's relationship. Although David is never cruel to Dora in the way that Murdstone is to his wives, he unwittingly begins to mimic Murdstone's actions in his efforts to make Dora a more serious and mature person.

Peggotty settles her business with Mr. Spenlow and leaves, while Spenlow and David go to hear a divorce case in court. The case hinges on a legal technicality the husband is exploiting to get rid of his wife, which David finds morally questionable. He and Mr. Spenlow debate the issue, with David finally suggesting that he thinks improvements could be made to the legal system. Mr. Spenlow asks David to explain what he means, so David outlines a lengthy critique of the "Prerogative Office," noting that it is irresponsible to keep wills in such a disorganized and dilapidated building, that the clerks who do the most important work are paid the least, and so on. Mr. Spenlow, however, insists that the system is the best one possible and that it is not "gentlemanly" to question the existing order.

Since the legal system helps to maintain different kinds of social hierarchies, Mr. Spenlow's defense of the legal system is at heart a defense of the existing order, including the class system, gender norms, and so on. This is of course relatively easy for Spenlow to do, since he benefits from the status quo, and in fact, Spenlow himself associates his status as a "gentleman" with the ability to "take things as he found them."

David finally drops the issue of the Commons, but he and Mr. Spenlow continue to chat. Eventually, Mr. Spenlow invites David to a picnic on Dora's birthday the following week. David is so excited by the prospect that he commits several "absurdities" over the next few days, including buying a new cravat and hiring and riding a horse to Dora's house.

Once again, David's feelings for Dora cause him to act foolishly—in this case, by wasting money on luxuries intended to impress her. As is often the case, however, David recalls his youthful foolishness fondly and with a hint of regret that it's now in the past.

When David arrives at Mr. Spenlow's, he finds Dora sitting in the garden with **Jip** and a friend named Miss Julia Mills. David presents Dora with a bouquet of flowers but is too flustered to compliment her as he had planned. Dora is pleased with them, however, and cheerfully tells him that Miss Murdstone is away attending Mr. Murdstone's wedding. Meanwhile, Miss Mills watches Dora and David with "an air of superior wisdom and benevolence"; David later learns she has had her heart broken and has "retired from the world" as a result.

David guesses that Miss Mills is about 20—only slightly older than Dora. Therefore, the fact that Miss Mills positions herself as the voice of experience (and that David takes her basically at face value) is a gently humorous reminder of how young and inexperienced everyone involved in the relationship is.

Mr. Spenlow appears, and he, Dora, and Miss Mills take a carriage to their destination, with David riding alongside. David is in such a dreamy state throughout the ride that he doesn't know where exactly they end up. He notices, however, that it is a "green spot, on a hill," and that there are people there waiting for him, which immediately makes him jealous. He feels particular hatred toward a man with red whiskers making a salad, because Dora helps wash and slice the lettuce for him. Later, David sees "Red Whisker" sitting near Dora while eating and "flirts desperately" with another woman in response. Eventually, David wanders off alone and gloomily considers leaving. At that moment, however, Dora and Miss Mills find him.

Like David's early childhood at the Rookery, the picnic with Dora seems to take place in a kind of dreamy fantasy world. It's likely that David's memories of the day are idealized, but this is significant in and of itself, because it suggests that David sees his courtship of Dora as a more innocent period of his life; even his disappointments and missteps (for instance, flirting with another woman in revenge) are treated comically.

Miss Mills says that both Dora and David seem depressed, and advises them not to "allow a trivial misunderstanding to wither the blossoms of spring." David ecstatically kisses Dora and Miss Mills' hands in response, and the three of them then walk among the trees in a transported state that David wishes could have lasted forever.

Miss Mills habitually speaks in a flowery and world-weary manner designed to enhance her reputation as an expert in romance. In retrospect, David finds her mannerisms faintly ridiculous, but they're in keeping with the more general youthful foolishness of his relationship with Dora.

Someone back at the picnic eventually calls out for Dora, so she, David, and Miss Mills return. Dora plays on her guitar and sings, and David continues to be deliriously happy. After tea, they return home with Mr. Spenlow, who falls asleep in the carriage. Miss Mills asks David to ride alongside her for a moment, and then tells him that Dora will be coming to stay at her house, where David can visit if he likes. He spends the rest of the ride home talking to Dora.

Dora's singing and guitar-playing are, like Dora herself, pretty and ornamental but impractical. They're also conventional "accomplishments" for a well-to-do nineteenth-century woman, so it's worth noting that Dora's adherence to one set of gender expectations is what prevents her from living up to another.

David decides he needs to tell Dora how he feels, and spends the next three days torturing himself with thoughts that she does not return his feelings. Finally, he goes to Miss Mills' house where he finds Dora painting the bouquet of flowers he had given her. Miss Mills leaves them alone together, and David waffles on whether to tell Dora or not while they talk about David's horse: David says the ride was long for the horse because he "had nothing to uphold him," but Dora doesn't catch the compliment and asks whether the horse hadn't been fed. Once David clarifies what he means, Dora retorts that he didn't seem so happy to be near her when he was flirting with Miss Kitt, but that he can do whatever he likes.

David's awkwardness, combined with Dora's guilelessness, once again thwart his attempts to flirt with and pay compliments to her.

David bursts out that he is in love with Dora while **Jip** stands nearby barking. He grows more and more passionate as he continues, saying he will die if she wants him to, and that no one has ever loved anyone as truly as he loves her. At some point, however, both David and Dora (who has been crying) calm down and end up sitting next to one another on the sofa, engaged. Dora says she won't marry without Mr. Spenlow's permission, but David admits that they really had very little idea of marriage, or of the future. In the meantime, they decide to keep their engagement a secret.

David's declaration is fumbling and comical; he describes himself as "raving," and Jip's incessant barking gives the scene a sense of slapstick humor. Interestingly, David's account also skips over the actual proposal, perhaps implying that he wasn't in his senses at the time and consequently doesn't remember it. What's more, he remarks that neither he nor Dora was really thinking of marriage in a serious way at the time. All of this highlights the fact that David's decision to marry Dora is not a measured and thoughtful one; in fact, it's hardly a conscious decision at all.

Dora goes and fetches Miss Mills, who wishes her and David well. David then measures Dora's finger and goes to a jeweler: the ring he orders resembles a chain of forget-me-nots, and he associates it with Dora forever afterwards.

Fittingly, the ring David buys features forget-me-nots, underscoring the nostalgia that colors so much of his relationship with Dora.

David spends the next few weeks in a state of bliss, feeling as though he is separate from and above all the people he passes in the streets. A week after their engagement, he and Dora quarrel and she returns his ring, plunging David into despair. Miss Mills urges them to make up, however, and they end up as "blest" as ever. Looking back, David says that this was both a "foolish" time and one that he thinks of with exceptional "tenderness."

Much as he has throughout the chapter, David looks back fondly on the innocence of his relationship with Dora. Their quarrels are silly and melodramatic, but the very fact that they aren't serious is somewhat charming in retrospect, as David has since contend with deeper and more troubling problems.

CHAPTER 34: MY AUNT ASTONISHES ME

David writes to Agnes to tell her of his engagement to Dora, and finds himself thinking of Agnes as one of the "elements of [his] natural home." He also tells her about little Em'ly's disappearance, though he avoids any mention of Steerforth, hoping she will simply guess the truth.

The fact that David can't imagine a home without Agnes, even now that he's engaged to another woman, is a clear sign that Agnes is meant to be his wife.

While David has been spending time with Dora, Traddles has stopped by his apartment a few times and stuck up a friendship with Peggotty, who is often there (much to the annoyance of Mrs. Crupp, who refuses to act as housekeeper while Peggotty remains). One day Traddles manages to catch David at home, assuring him that he entirely understands David's reasons for being gone so often. David questions how Traddles can stand to be away from his fiancée (who lives in Devonshire), and Traddles says he manages it "because there's no help for it." He also attributes his patience to his fiancée, Sophy, who is always preoccupied tutoring, tending to, and humoring her nine siblings and invalid mother.

Traddles and Sophy's patience and realism contrasts vividly with David and Dora's hasty and fanciful engagement. Significantly, however, Traddles suggests that he is patient because he has had to be. This lays the groundwork for the transformation David himself will undergo later in this chapter when his aunt loses all her money. The loss prevents David and Dora from marrying in the near future, and forces David to become more patient, disciplined, and industrious like Traddles.

David is still anxious about Traddles's financial situation, so he asks after Mr. Micawber. Traddles explains that the he is no longer living with the Micawbers, because the entire household was forced to vacate the premises after another debt was called in. Nevertheless, Traddles is not angry with the Micawbers, although he was sorry to see the furniture he'd been saving repossessed (including the **flower pot and table**). Fortunately, he has found the pieces at a local pawnshop, and asks whether Peggotty might be willing to buy them on his behalf, since the broker will run up the price if he knows Traddles wants them. David assures Traddles that Peggotty will help, but makes him promise not to lend anything to Micawber in the future. Traddles is happy to do this for Sophy's sake, but he still feels hopeful Micawber's plans will succeed in the end.

For Traddles, the lost flower pot and table are symbols of the middle-class home he hopes to establish with Sophy one day; they are decorative objects intended to create a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere rather than to serve any particular and necessary purpose. Recovering the items is therefore a legitimate concern, although the scene itself is humorous. Meanwhile, the Micawbers' existence is as precarious as ever, and it is a mark of Traddles' optimism and generosity that he continues to believe, against all evidence, that Micawber is on the verge of success.

David and Traddles go find Peggotty and carry through with their plan to buy back the **flower pot and table**. Afterwards, Traddles returns home while Peggotty goes with David back to his apartment. When they arrive, however, they find the door open and hear voices inside. Entering, they find Miss Betsey and Mr. Dick surrounded by luggage. David greets them, reintroducing his aunt to Peggotty, whom she insists on calling "Barkis" (she has always considered Peggotty's name "pagan" sounding). Meanwhile, Mrs. Crupp—who is eager to please Miss Betsey—has made tea. Mrs. Crupp then leaves, and Miss Betsey tells Mr. Dick that the landlady is an example of the "time-servers" and "wealth-worshippers" she is always warning him about.

Particularly given that she has just lost most of her own fortune, Miss Betsey's disdain for "wealth-worshippers" is significant. She clearly disapproves of people cozying up to wealth in the hopes of enriching themselves, but her remark also suggests a broader impatience with anyone who would view accumulating money as an end in and of itself. The remark therefore underscores the novel's broader depiction of ambition as suspicious, at least among the lower classes.

Miss Betsey asks David to pour the tea, but David senses that she is stalling, and begins to worry that she has found out about his engagement and is here to scold him. He waits for his aunt to speak, however, and she asks whether David has become "firm, and self-reliant." When he replies that he hopes he has, Miss Betsey confesses that she is "ruined," and that her luggage is now all that she owns other than the cottage (which she is renting out). She hopes Peggotty will help find Mr. Dick a place to stay, but she asks to stay with David for the night, and discuss the issue further in the morning.

The question about self-reliance that Miss Betsey poses to David is significant for several reasons. For one, it ties into the novel's depiction of hard work and independence as a hallmark of maturity in a man. In fact, Miss Betsey seems less concerned with David finding an additional source of income and more with him becoming a more active and purposeful person.

David is stunned, but he manages to "rouse" himself when Miss Betsey embraces him and begins crying that she is sorry on his account. She recovers quickly, however, and assures him that they will deal with this setback "boldly."

At this point in the novel, Miss Betsey is actually much firmer and self-reliant than David himself. Once again, however, the novel hints that she is only able to maintain this resolution and composure by tamping down her womanhood (in this case, the stereotypically feminine outburst of emotion). Regardless, her words while crying underscore the fact that she views David as her child, whom she has an obligation to provide for.

CHAPTER 35: DEPRESSION

David proposes that Mr. Dick stay in the same room Mr. Peggotty had rented, and takes him to see it. While there, David learns that although Miss Betsey had already told Mr. Dick her news before they left, he had not seemed upset to hear it. David accordingly begins to explain what being "ruined" could involve, but regrets it when Mr. Dick starts to cry. As they continue talking, David realizes that Mr. Dick actually *had* understood Miss Betsey, but had so much faith in her that he assumed she would be able to recover from the setback easily. Mr. Dick then begins to ask whether working on the Memorial might help, but David says the most important thing he can do at the moment is remain outwardly cheerful. Mr. Dick, however, is not always able to do this.

Mr. Dick's relationship with Miss Betsey in many ways resembles a marriage, but with the traditional gender roles flipped. In this case, it is the man who has boundless faith in the woman's determination and ingenuity, and who provides moral support for her in times of crisis. Although the dynamic is comical at times, it is functional, and David at least greatly admires Mr. Dick's devotion to Miss Betsey.

Returning to David's apartment, David and Mr. Dick find Miss Betsey looking calm. David gives her his bed to sleep in, but she refuses to allow him to prepare her usual nightly glass of wine for her, saying she'll have ale instead. Peggotty then takes Mr. Dick to his own room for the night, and Miss Betsey attempts to convince David that she is happy with her ale. She then turns the conversation to Peggotty, complaining about her name and the ease with which she handed away her money to her brother. She admits, however, that she likes Peggotty, and is so moved by her generosity and devotion that she begins to cry.

By and large, Miss Betsey reacts to the loss of her money with calm practicality: for instance, she asks David to give her ale rather than wine as a way of saving money. She isn't able to maintain an entirely unsentimental demeanor, however, as evidenced by the discussion of Peggotty. Although Miss Betsey attempts to take a hard-headed view on saving money, she is clearly touched by Peggotty's actions.

Miss Betsey explains that while David was away with Mr. Dick, she and Peggotty talked about little Em'ly; Miss Betsey feels little sympathy for her, on account of the trouble she has caused. She then asks whether David "fancies himself in love," which offends David. When Miss Betsey goes on to question whether Dora is "silly," however, he is struck by the idea. His aunt then explains that she doesn't mean to insult Dora, but she seems to pity both Dora and David for their naiveté. David attempts to convince her that he and Dora truly love one another despite their "inexperience." Miss Betsey says he reminds her of Clara Copperfield, and needs an "earnest" partner to steady him. David protests again, and Miss Betsey attempts to placate him by saying that although "girl and boy attachments" often fall through, she'll treat the affair seriously.

Miss Betsey suspects that Dora may not be the right partner for David long before David himself does. Her remark about "girl and boy attachments" implies that part of her hesitation stems simply from the couple's young age, and a sense that they aren't yet ready to take such a life-altering step as marriage. Perhaps because she knows David's tendency towards fancifulness, however, Miss Betsey also suspects that Dora may be similarly impractical and "light-headed." Since Miss Betsey hopes to encourage the "earnestness" she senses in David, she therefore hopes to see him married to a more serious-minded woman.

David goes to bed and broods about how Miss Betsey's loss is likely to affect his engagement to Dora. When he finally falls asleep, he has several dreams about poverty, and continuously wakes to hear his aunt pacing around the apartment. At one point, she enters David's room and exclaims "Poor boy!" to herself, causing David to feel guilty about his own self-absorption. The night seems endless, and when David finally falls asleep for good, he dreams about Dora at a party, "incessantly dancing one dance" and ignoring David.

David's love for Dora exacerbates his fears of falling into poverty. It's not simply that he would, if married to Dora, have an obligation to provide for her, but rather that he senses that Dora is ill-equipped to the kind of life he now envisions for himself. Dora has so far lived a plush life, where she has never had to consider anything beyond her own amusement (here symbolized by her dancing). David's dreams suggest that Dora will have trouble adapting to a more modest, disciplined existence.

The next morning, David rises before Miss Betsey and goes to Doctors' Commons to see if he can cancel his apprenticeship and recover the premium Miss Betsey had paid. He arrives there early and waylays Mr. Spenlow, asking to speak with him. Once in Mr. Spenlow's office, David explains what has happened and makes his proposal. Mr. Spenlow, however, says he can't cancel David's articles, although he assigns the blame for this to Mr. Jorkins. Reluctantly, he allows David to go and ask Mr. Jorkins, but Jorkins insists that he himself objects to the proposal when he learns that Spenlow has vetoed it. David then returns to Mr. Spenlow and describes the conversation, saying (truthfully) that Jorkins seemed sympathetic. Spenlow, however, says that Jorkins's demeanor is misleading, and that he will never change his mind.

To David's credit, he responds to his aunt's financial crisis quickly and decisively, trying to cut her losses by canceling his articles at Spenlow and Jorkins. The resistance he encounters here, however, is a good example of the kind of institutional red tape Dickens often criticizes in his novels: not only is David unable to recover the premium, but he encounters a system that seems designed to be as confusing and discouraging as possible.

David is "bewildered" by his interactions with Mr. Spenlow and Mr. Jorkins, but realizes he will not be able to get the premium back. As he walks home, considering what to do next, a coach stops next to him and David looks up to see Agnes inside. David excitedly says that she is the person he most wants to see, and Agnes teases him that he ought to say that about Dora. She then explains that she has come to visit Miss Betsey, who sent a note to Agnes explaining her misfortune. David and Agnes then decide to walk the rest of the way home together, David feeling immensely more hopeful than he had earlier.

The fact that David immediately takes heart when he sees Agnes suggests that it is she, rather than Dora, who ought to be his fiancée: after all, she is already functioning as his emotional support and moral compass. Part of what makes Agnes an ideal woman, however, is her selflessness, so it is significant that she gently tries to direct David to rely more on Dora, despite appearing to be in love with him herself. Agnes's ultimate wish is to see David happy and successful, even married to another woman.

As they walk, Agnes tells David that Mr. Wickfield and Uriah are in London as well; they are now partners, and Agnes has made the journey with them in part to protect her father. She further explains that Uriah and Mrs. Heep now live with the Wickfields (Uriah in David's old room), and that the entire atmosphere of the house has changed. David and Agnes briefly reminisce about their first meeting and how happy they were as children, before the conversation returns to the Heeps: Agnes has little time to herself now, because Mrs. Heep always wants to speak to her about Uriah. Meanwhile, she is unable to spend much time with her father. She hints that she suspects Uriah of "fraud or treachery," but David does not think she is aware of Uriah's hopes of marrying her.

Thanks to Agnes's presence (and her skills as a housekeeper), the Wickfield household has up until this point been an idyllic place, even taking Mr. Wickfield's alcoholism into account. Uriah's presence in the house, however, entirely changes its character: instead of acting as a shelter from the pressures of the outside world, the Wickfield's home has now been invaded by one of those pressures. Uriah's presence in the household threatens to override even David's memories of the Wickfield home, which likewise serve as a source of comfort and strength; Uriah, for instance, now sleeps in David's bedroom, as if he has taken David's place in the household.

Agnes asks whether David knows how Miss Betsey lost her fortune, and seems anxious when he says that he does not. At that moment, however, they arrive home and find Miss Betsey agitated after arguing with Mrs. Crupp about whether it is appropriate for Miss Betsey to stay there. She is pleased to see Agnes, however, and David admires how naturally Agnes draws people into her confidence.

Mrs. Crupp objects to Miss Betsey's presence on the grounds that it's inappropriate for a woman to live in a set of rented rooms. Although Miss Betsey eventually gets her way, even she isn't immune to the strict social conventions surrounding women's behavior in nineteenth-century England.

David tells Agnes and Miss Betsey about his attempts to cancel his apprenticeship, and his aunt says that his actions were "generous" but unwise. As Miss Betsey begins to explain how she lost her money, Agnes looks very pale. Miss Betsey then says that she ignored the advice of Mr. Wickfield and made several imprudent investments. When she finishes her story, Agnes asks her whether she has said everything, and—when Miss Betsey says that she has—looks relieved. David assumes that Agnes had feared her father was responsible for Miss Betsey's losses.

Miss Betsey's account of how she lost her money is not entirely truthful; Mr. Wickfield was in fact involved, and Miss Betsey is attempting to protect his reputation. Similarly, Agnes's anxiety stems from fears that her father might have been involved in business dealings that were not only unwise, but actually illegal. Although it turns out that Mr. Wickfield did not play the role in Miss Betsey's losses that both she and Agnes suspect, his descent into alcoholism has clearly affected his ability to do his job.

Miss Betsey summarizes her financial situation for David and Agnes: she expects to earn about 70 pounds a year from renting the cottage, and Mr. Dick has his own income that she will not touch. Before Agnes can offer any advice, David interrupts and says he "must do something" immediately to help his aunt. Miss Betsey guesses that he is thinking of joining the army or navy and rejects the idea, at which point Agnes asks whether David has signed a lease on his apartment. This turns out to be the case, so Miss Betsey says that the most practical solution is for her to stay with David until the contract has expired. David protests that this will be uncomfortable for Miss Betsey, but she hushes him.

David's offer to join the army or navy, though well meaning, is not especially well thought out. Aside from the risk involved (which Miss Betsey objects to), his apartment is already paid for, so his leaving it would be a waste of money. In other words, David's inexperience and rashness once again surfaces in this scene, contrasting with Agnes's greater maturity and level-headedness.

Agnes suggests that, if David can find the time, he might be able to earn some money as a secretary: Doctor Strong is retiring to London and is looking for an assistant. David is free in both the early morning and late afternoon and, delighted with Agnes's proposal, immediately writes to Doctor Strong about it.

Once again, Agnes demonstrates her ability to nudge David in the right direction; in fact, David again repeats that she is his "good angel" in this scene, alluding to the gentle guidance she provides for him. His remark also links Agnes's sound career advice to morality, which is appropriate given the connection the novel establishes between work ethic and personal character.

When David returns from posting his letter to Doctor Strong, he discovers that Agnes has quietly rearranged the apartment to give it a more homey atmosphere. Miss Betsey seems to be in a slightly better mood about the prospect of staying in London, although she is still worried about the smog.

Part of what makes Agnes an ideal homemaker (and Victorian woman) is the fact that she never seems to be working; as David notes in this scene, his apartment seems to have rearranged itself. This is significant, because the Victorian home was supposed to be entirely separate from the outer world of labor and toil.

There is a knock on the door, and Mr. Wickfield and Uriah Heep arrive. David notices that Mr. Wickfield looks much worse than the last time he saw him, and not only physically: he seems ashamed of himself and his situation, and only greets Miss Betsey after Agnes urges him to do so. Wickfield is also deferential to Uriah, much to David's dismay: "[T]he thing that struck me most, was that with the evidences of his native superiority still upon him, he should submit himself to that crawling impersonation of meanness, Uriah Heep."

David's characterization of Uriah often blurs the lines between class and morality. The words David associates with Wickfield and Uriah—"superiority" and "meanness," respectively—most explicitly refer to each man's moral character, but they also have class-based connotations. As a result, it's difficult to determine what David finds most offensive about Uriah: his villainy, or his lower-class background.

Miss Betsey explains that she has been telling Agnes about her finances, and that Agnes is "worth the whole firm." When Uriah Heep agrees, Miss Betsey retorts that being a partner himself should satisfy him. Uriah then turns to David and makes a show of sympathizing with his situation. He also asks David how he thinks Mr. Wickfield looks and praises Agnes's beauty. He "jerks about" while saying all this, causing Miss Betsey to finally snap at him to "control his limbs." This subdues Uriah a bit, although he also remarks to David that he expects Miss Betsey's usual "quick temper" is even quicker than usual due to stress. He then says he simply wants to offer his own, or the firm's, services to Miss Betsey and David.

Part of what marks Uriah's ambition as evil is the fact that it does not stop at becoming Wickfield's partner. Uriah makes no secret of the fact that he hopes to marry Agnes, and is in many ways depicted as a sexual predator; his "writhing" for instance, escalates as he talks about Agnes's beauty. This is to some extent understandable, since Uriah's status in the firm and in the household does place him in a position where he could easily exploit Agnes. However, it's also worthwhile comparing Agnes's and Uriah's relationship to the similarly cross-class relationship of Emily and Steerforth. Although Dickens condemns the latter in a different way, he doesn't depict it as so viscerally disgusting as the dynamic between Uriah and Agnes. Arguably, this reflects the belief that middle-class women like Agnes were purer than their working-class counterparts, and therefore polluted by the interest of lower-class men.

Mr. Wickfield says he agrees with Uriah, and that Uriah has helped him by relieving him of much of his workload. Uriah exclaims that he is grateful to be of help, ignoring Mr. Wickfield's obvious lack of enthusiasm. Agnes asks whether her father will stay with her and David for a while, and Uriah answers for him, saying that Mr. Wickfield can "represent the firm" while he himself goes to attend to business.

Since Uriah is the junior partner in the firm, his behavior in this scene—answering on Wickfield's behalf and essentially giving his partner orders—is completely inappropriate. Clearly, however, he intends to make it clear to everyone present that he's effectively in charge of the business at this point.

After Uriah leaves, the rest of the group reminisces about their time in Canterbury, and Mr. Wickfield slowly begins to seem more like himself. David attributes this to Agnes's influence, although Mr. Wickfield never entirely shakes off his melancholy. David then returns with Agnes and Mr. Wickfield to their rooms and has dinner with them. Afterwards, Agnes pours her father's wine for him as usual and then settles him in to sleep on the sofa. David says he hopes that he never forgets how gently and lovingly Agnes acted that night, both toward her father and toward David himself.

Mr. Wickfield's relationship to the past is often unhealthy; his inability to move beyond his wife's death, for instance, contributes to his alcoholism. In this case, however, memory is a source of solace to him (although a bittersweet one, given how his life has changed). Meanwhile, Agnes continues to function more as a mother or wife to her father than as a daughter. The fact that she assists her father in his drinking despite wishing that he would stop is an especially clear example of how tangled and codependent their relationship is.

After Mr. Wickfield falls asleep, Agnes and David talk about Dora for a while, and David finds he loves Dora more and more as Agnes talks about her. When David leaves for the night, he hears a beggar muttering "blind" over and over. This startles David, because it is also what Miss Betsey said when he was describing his love for Dora to her.

Like the repetition of the word "blind," Agnes's ability to make Dora seem even more loveable to David is an indication that David's engagement to Dora is misguided, and that it's actually Agnes herself David loves: everything associated with her takes on added charm. Agnes's approval also foreshadows Dora's eventual blessing of the match between Agnes and David.

CHAPTER 36: ENTHUSIASM

By the next day, David's whole mood has changed: he is now excited about the prospect of working hard to prove himself to Miss Betsey and to win Dora. In fact, he is sorry his situation is not more desperate and is tempted to join a man breaking stones by the road, just to prove his strength. Instead, he tries to be "practical" by stopping by a cottage for rent to see if it would be a good home for him and Dora. Eventually, he arrives at Highgate, where Doctor Strong now lives.

David's enthusiasm is clearly naïve in some ways, and his "practicality" is actually very fanciful: since he's in no position to establish a home any time soon, his viewing the cottage is more of a dreamy detour than a genuine plan. Still, this chapter marks a turning point in David's development, since the loss of his aunt's fortune does in fact spur him to become more industrious and resourceful.

David can't resist walking by Mrs. Steerforth's house, where he sees Steerforth's own room has been shut up. Rosa Dartle, meanwhile, is pacing fretfully in the garden. Regretting his decision to stop by, David leaves.

Steerforth's elopement with Emily has transformed his family home, which is now partially shut up as though in mourning. Rosa, meanwhile, seems frustrated by her own limited options in the situation, as a woman: she is pacing back and forth as though she is imprisoned.

When David reaches Doctor Strong's cottage, he finds the Doctor in the garden. It takes a moment for the Doctor to recognize David, but when he does, he greets him happily and comments on how much he has grown up. David asks after the Doctor and Annie's health, and he says that they are well, and that Annie will be happy to see David. He then reports that Jack Maldon is well too, and home from India, because Mrs. Markleham was anxious about his health.

The mention of Jack Maldon throws David's own growth as a person into sharper relief. Although David is still learning and finding his way in the world, Maldon has not changed at all in the years since David last saw him, and is still taking advantage of the Doctor's generosity rather than working to support himself.

Doctor Strong then says that he has no objection to hiring David as his secretary, but he worries that David could do better for himself. David assures him that he is still studying to become a proctor, but that the 70-pound salary the Doctor is offering would double his and Miss Betsey's income. The Doctor is disturbed by this and attempts to offer David more money. When this is unsuccessful, he makes David promise to quit as soon as he can find a better position, and then finally agrees to hire him. David says he would especially like to work on the Doctor's dictionary, which pleases Strong enormously: his papers became disorganized while Jack Maldon was acting as his secretary. David and Doctor Strong decide that he will work for two hours each morning and three each evening.

Doctor Strong initially objects to employing David on the grounds that someone with his academic record should aspire to a genuine career; the position of secretary is also less prestigious than what David could have looked forward to when his aunt was better off. David's willingness to take the job is therefore a sign of humility and determination—qualities that eventually help him to advance in the world. This is again especially clear thanks to the counterexample Jack Maldon provides.

Doctor Strong invites David in, and he has breakfast with the Doctor and Annie. While they are eating, Jack Maldon arrives and irritates David by greeting him with "an air of languid patronage." Maldon refuses to join them for breakfast, saying it "bores" him, and then indifferently reports several pieces of news, including unrest in Northern England and a murder. He then asks Annie to go with him to the opera, and Doctor Strong urges her to accept, saying she ought to enjoy herself. She resists, and—looking very upset—tries to change the subject by asking David about Agnes. Eventually, however, Doctor Strong agrees on his wife's behalf, and Maldon goes to work. The next morning, David discovers that Annie did not go to the opera after all, but instead spent the evening with Agnes and Doctor Strong.

Part of what makes Maldon unsympathetic as a character are his aspirations to upper-class status, which Dickens links to his laziness. Although Maldon isn't actually upper-class, he adopts a "languid" manner that David remarks is often mistaken for good breeding—presumably because it implies that the person in question has no need to work and consequently a lot of time to be bored. In David Copperfield, *however, it is typically a character's willingness to work—a more middle-class value—that makes them virtuous. Of course, Maldon's behavior towards Annie is another indication of his character, particularly because the same qualities that make her a virtuous woman (reserve, politeness, and so on) make it difficult for her to voice any objections.*

Between his work for Doctor Strong and his time at Doctors' Commons, David is now very busy. The thought that he is doing all this for Dora, however, thrills him—so much so that he sells several waistcoats to feel that he is making more of a sacrifice. He still wants to do more, though, so he decides to consult Traddles.

Again, David's enthusiasm for work and self-denial is a bit naïve and ridiculous; he goes to excessive lengths to feel that he is inconveniencing himself, effectively treating it as a role he's playing. Ultimately, however, he actually becomes the mature and disciplined man he's imitating here.

David takes Mr. Dick with him when he visits Traddles, because Mr. Dick has been fretting about doing nothing to help David and Miss Betsey. David hopes it might be possible to find an easy job for Mr. Dick to do. Before he asks Traddles about this, however, David asks whether he himself could earn some extra money by working as a parliamentary reporter. Traddles explains that David would need to learn shorthand, which would likely take several years, but David is so excited that he simply announces he'll begin immediately. Traddles is taken aback and says he hadn't realized David was "such a determined character."

As Traddles' remark about David's "determination" highlights, David's excitement about work is both new and a little over the top. However, despite the fact that his plan to become a parliamentary reporter is not especially well thought out, it does ultimately pay off, since David uses it as a springboard for his eventual career as a writer.

Mr. Dick wishes aloud that he could "exert himself," and Traddles asks whether he could copy legal documents. Mr. Dick and David are not sure that this is a good idea, however, since Mr. Dick finds it so difficult to keep Charles I out of his writing. Traddles reminds them that this would simply involve copying documents that are already written, and the three men eventually come up with a plan: Mr. Dick will keep a blank sheet of paper beside him to write on whenever he starts to think about Charles I. This proves very successful, and Mr. Dick even finds himself writing less and less about Charles I as time goes on. What's more, Mr. Dick is delighted to be able to present his earnings to Miss Betsey, whom he says he can now "provide for."

Mr. Dick's job copying documents is another example of the way in which the novel distinguishes between work as a character-building exercise and work as a means of advancing oneself. No one has asked Mr. Dick to work, and David and Miss Betsey would be able to manage without the income he provides. Nevertheless, the book suggests that it is worthwhile for Mr. Dick to work simply because it focuses his attention and gives him purpose. What's more, it allows him to feel as though he's fulfilling his role as the man of the house by earning money for Miss Betsey.

After Mr. Dick's problem is sorted out, Traddles tells David that he has a letter for him from Mr. Micawber. In his typically wordy style, Micawber announces that he has managed to secure a job in a "provincial town," and that he would like to invite both David and Traddles to dinner the night before he and his family leave. This turns out to be the same night, so David and Traddles leave for the Micawbers'.

Although Mr. Micawber himself says he isn't surprised something has "turned up," readers may find it more unexpected. In fact, Micawber's new position ends up being less than ideal.

The Micawbers are living in a very cramped and impoverished looking apartment. They are already packed to leave and have very little luggage. Nevertheless, David congratulates Mrs. Micawber, who says that while her family considers Mr. Micawber's new position "banishment," she will never leave her husband. She continues on this topic for some time, recalling her marriage vows and saying that any "sacrifice" she is making in relocating pales in comparison to the sacrifice her husband is making in taking a position that is beneath him.

Mrs. Micawber again expresses her frustration with her husband and his situation in a roundabout way, this time by saying that her family believes what she presumably feels herself—that moving to a small town is like being banished. Meanwhile, her remark that the position is beneath her husband contrasts with David's earlier willingness to take on the lower-middle class job of secretary.

Mr. Micawber says that his new position is in Canterbury. What's more, he will be working as Uriah Heep's clerk. David is stunned, so Micawber explains the Uriah answered his advertisement, helping him to pay off his debts in exchange for his future service.

The fact that Uriah, who was formerly a clerk himself, is now employing a clerk serves as a reminder of how much his circumstances have changed. In his typically underhanded way, Uriah has actually served himself by seeming to do something generous for Mr. Micawber, because he now has Micawber literally in his debt.

Mr. Micawber is then briefly distracted by his children's rowdy behavior, but the conversations soon resumes with Mrs. Micawber saying she hopes that this position will eventually lead to her husband becoming a judge. Mr. Micawber pretends to discourage this idea, but also appeals to Traddles, who explains that only a barrister can become a judge, and that becoming a barrister itself requires five years. However, this does not particularly upset Mrs. Micawber, who simply remarks that it is enough that Micawber's current position won't rule out the possibility. Mr. Micawber, meanwhile, announces that regardless of whether he is fortunate enough to become Lord Chancellor, he would like his son to enter the Church, because he has a wonderful singing voice.

As usual, the Micawbers' hopes for the future wildly surpass what their current circumstances justify. It's noteworthy, however, that their grandiose plans resemble David's overly enthusiastic response earlier in the chapter, when Traddles cautioned him that becoming a court reporter would likely take several years.

As the evening goes on, David explains his and Miss Betsey's problems to Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, who seem happy about the news. When they are close to finishing the punch, David and Traddles both toast to the Micawbers' success, and Mr. Micawber thanks them profusely. He then brings up the two loans that Traddles acted as guarantor for, and gives Traddles an I.O.U. for the first. David notices that both Micawber and Traddles seem just as pleased by this transaction as if it had actually involved money. Everyone parts in good spirits, and David reflects that Mr. Micawber might have avoided asking for money from David himself based on "some compassionate recollection" of David as a boy.

David's remark about Mr. Micawber's "compassionate recollections" of David suggest that Micawber is on some level aware that he's taking advantage of Traddles, and sparing David the same. However, David also says that he thinks Micawber genuinely sees the I.O.U. as identical to actual payment, implying that Micawber is basically honest at heart. It also suggests, however, that Micawber lacks the skills necessary to succeed in society; although planning for the future is useful and necessary, treating the future (or, in this case, future money) as if it were already a certain thing can be disastrous.

CHAPTER 37: A LITTLE COLD WATER

A week passes, and David continues to feel wildly optimistic about the sacrifices he is making on Dora's behalf. He has not explained the situation to Dora herself, however, although he is scheduled to have tea with her and Miss Mills the coming Saturday. Meanwhile, Mr. Dick has settled in well to his new job, and Miss Betsey has frightened Mrs. Crupp into staying in the kitchen. Miss Betsey has also taken it upon herself to redecorate and reorganize David's apartment, making it much cozier. Peggotty helps her with this until she returns to Yarmouth. David accompanies her to the coach office, where she tells him to ask her for help if he ever needs money, and promises to help set David and Dora up in their future home.

In his enthusiasm, David has gotten ahead of himself: he is making elaborate plans for his and Dora's life together before he has even explained his changed circumstances to her. In the meantime, however, David is profiting by Miss Betsey's presence. Despite being a fairly unconventional woman, Miss Betsey has the traditionally feminine knack for housekeeping, and has successfully made David's apartment into something more homelike.

That evening, David goes to Miss Mills' and immediately asks Dora whether she "could love a beggar." When she realizes David is talking about himself, she scolds him for lying and threatens to make **Jip** bite him. David finds her "childish" demeanor adorable, but nevertheless assures her that he is being serious, at which point Dora begins to cry. David begs her to stop and eventually calms her down enough to explain that he will release her from the engagement if she wants. He says, however, that he is as much in love with her as ever, and begins to talk at length about how hard he is working and how "practical" he is becoming.

David's immaturity once again comes through in the melodramatic way he announces his situation to Dora; he almost seems to take pleasure in the thought of being a "beggar," and in describing all the obstacles he imagines himself overcoming. Dora, meanwhile, is immature in a different way, and not equipped to deal with David's revelation. After first attempting to distract him with flirtation, she dissolves into tears at the thought of having to give up her pampered and carefree existence.

Dora says that she still loves David, but refuses to listen to anything more about how hard he is working, and insists that **Jip** must be able to eat mutton-chops every day. David agrees to this and tries to describe their future home together. Dora, however, is alarmed by the idea of Miss Betsey living with them, and David begins to feel that she is being "impracticable." He therefore tries again to explain that he simply wants to "inspire" Dora with his own zeal for hard work and "strength of character." Dora, however, finds all this frightening and says that she doesn't have any strength before insisting that David "kiss Jip, and be agreeable."

Whether she means it seriously or as a deflection, Dora's comment about Jip's mutton-chops again points to her spoiled upbringing: she's unwilling to entertain the idea of scrimping and saving, not just because of what it would mean giving up, but because of the effort it would require. It's also telling that Dora insists she has no "strength," since it reflects the novel's depiction of her as fragile and frivolous.

Dora charms and distracts David for a while, but he eventually returns to his former subject and urges Dora to think about being engaged to a "poor man" so that she will get more used to the idea. Once again, Dora protests that he is being "dreadful," but David presses on, suggesting that she try to learn a bit about account-keeping and cooking. This is too much for Dora, who cries out for Miss Mills and begs David to go away. Overcome with remorse, he begs for Dora's forgiveness, denounces his actions, tries to revive her with water, and eventually spills a box of needles on her while looking for smelling salts.

Dora's inability to manage a household is a recurring source of strain in her relationship with David, and Dickens begins to foreshadow it here. The traits that make Dora an ideal Victorian woman in some respects—her naiveté, her pretty singing and playing, and so on—aren't compatible with the kinds of practical skills David lists here.

At this point, Miss Mills enters and asks what has happened. Dora says that David is a "poor laborer" and tries to promise him all her money, but David eventually succeeds in explaining his situation to Miss Mills. Gradually calming down, Dora leaves the room to compose herself. David seizes the opportunity to tell Miss Mills that he had been trying to impress upon Dora the need for practicality and discipline. Miss Mills, however, says that it is not "appropriate" to trouble Dora with these issues, though she concedes that it might be helpful. David manages to convince her to take the cookbook he has brought with him in the hopes that she can use her influence with Dora and persuade her to read it.

Dora's exaggerated claim that David is now a "poor laborer" is another indication of her naiveté. In Dora's mind, there is little difference between the kind of work David is doing and that of a working-class laborer, probably because the idea of needing to work at all is foreign to her. In any case, Miss Mills' attempt to explain the situation to David hinges on the idea that Dora is not cut out for anything that requires effort or practicality, because she is too childish and delicate—or, as Miss Mills puts it, "a thing of light, and airiness, and joy."

Dora reappears, and is so pretty and charming that David begins to feel that Miss Mills is right. They all have tea together, and Dora plays her guitar and sings. Unfortunately, he happens to mention at one point that he now gets up at five in the morning, which distresses Dora. As he leaves, she warns him not to get up so early the next morning, and David explains that he has to go to work so that they can live. Dora says that this is ridiculous, and—when David questions how they will live otherwise—simply responds, "Any how!" David continues to love Dora as passionately as ever after this incident, but he also begins to worry about how well suited she is to the life he is now leading.

The exchange about David's schedule reveals that Dora either can't or won't understand that working, for him, is a matter of financial necessity. Even when David attempts to reason with her, she laughs his concerns off by saying that they can live "any how." This is in keeping with Dora's general inability to treat life as anything other than a source of amusement; in fact, in this passage she again sings about "the impossibility of ever on any account leaving off dancing."

CHAPTER 38: A DISSOLUTION OF PARTNERSHIP

David immediately begins studying shorthand, although he finds it much more confusing than he had expected. The thought of Dora keeps him going, however, and after a few months he tries his hand at reporting on the House of Commons. This proves to be a disaster, so David begins to practice transcribing speeches that Traddles gives for his benefit. Together with Miss Betsey and Mr. Dick, they hold mock parliamentary sessions in David's apartment. David slowly begins to find it easier to keep pace with Traddles, but then finds that he has forgotten how to read what he has written and has to start learning shorthand again from scratch.

David decided to become a parliamentary reporter hastily, and it shows: even mastering the basic skills he needs is more difficult than he anticipated. There are therefore several false starts on his journey to establish himself in a career, but to David's credit, he perseveres.

Meanwhile, David is still working at Doctors' Commons, where he arrives one day to find Mr. Spenlow looking serious. Sternly, Mr. Spenlow asks David to come with him to a nearby coffeehouse, and David nervously complies. When they reach their destination, Miss Murdstone is waiting for them in a private room, and Mr. Spenlow asks her to show something she has in her handbag. Miss Murdstone produces several letters to Dora, which David embarrassedly admits are his. Miss Murdstone then begins to explain that, knowing the "depravity of the human heart," she has suspected David and Dora for some time, but didn't want to approach Mr. Spenlow without proof. She noticed, however, that Dora seemed to receive too many letters from Miss Mills, and eventually managed to get her hands on one that **Jip** had found and started chewing.

The fact that it's Miss Murdstone who brings Dora and David's relationship to light is significant, because it links the episode back to the role she played in David's childhood, when she helped sabotage David's relationship with his mother. This in turn underscores the similarities between Dora and Clara Copperfield, implying that some of David's affection for Dora may stem from unresolved issues in his past. Of course, from Mr. Spenlow's position, what makes the relationship suspect is David's relative poverty: at best, David is endangering Dora's welfare, and at worst, he is using her in an attempt to advance his career.

Mr. Spenlow asks David what he has to say for himself, and David accepts total responsibility for concealing the relationship. This does not appease Mr. Spenlow, who says that David has acted dishonorably. David objects that he loves Dora, but this only angers Mr. Spenlow further: Spenlow rants that David is too young and poor to think of marrying Dora, and that he has "undermine[d] the confidence that should subsist" between father and daughter. David admits that he has considered most of this, but explains that he and Dora were already engaged when he learned of Miss Betsey's losses, and that since then he has been working hard to improve his situation. Mr. Spenlow dismisses all this as youthful "nonsense" and urges David to be "sensible" and renounce Dora. David, however, refuses to take back his letters and burn them.

By explaining when he learned about his changed circumstances relative to the engagement, David attempts to deflect any charges of ambition. What truly seems to bother Mr. Spenlow, however, is the idea that Dora has withheld something from him, and perhaps the fact that she wishes to marry at all; he's outraged, for instance, when David bluntly declares his love for Dora. This links Mr. Spenlow to other overprotective parents (like Mrs. Steerforth and Mr. Wickfield) who refuse to allow their children to grow up—that is, to transition from being someone's child to being someone's spouse.

During the awkward silence that follows, David tries to think of a way to leave. Before he can, however, Mr. Spenlow reminds David that he is a wealthy man, and David assures Mr. Spenlow that that is not why he wants to marry Dora. Spenlow, however, says that it would be better if David *were* "mercenary," and explains his real point: if David continues to pursue Dora, he will change the conditions of his will (presumably to disinherit Dora if she marries against his wishes). He then gives David a week to mull this over, advising him to "confer with Miss Trotwood, or with any person with any knowledge of life." David leaves, uncomfortably aware of Miss Murdstone watching him and strongly reminded of the lessons she used to preside over back at Blunderstone.

In this exchange, David explicitly brings up the idea that he might have "mercenary" reasons for courting Dora, thereby reinforcing the parallels between David and Uriah (who definitely does wish to marry his employer's daughter for mercenary reasons). Interestingly, Mr. Spenlow feels that it would be better if David simply were ambitious rather than what he is—namely, fanciful and naïve. Meanwhile, David's memories of Miss Murdstone at Blunderstone further highlight the similarities between Dora and Clara Copperfield.

David returns to work in despair and tormented by thoughts of Mr. Spenlow and Miss Murdstone terrorizing Dora. He therefore writes a letter to Mr. Spenlow begging him not to take his anger out on his daughter, and Spenlow reassures him the next day that he doesn't need to worry about that: Spenlow has simply tried to convince Dora that the relationship is foolish, although he may send her abroad if David persists. This does not comfort David much, and he writes a letter to Miss Mills asking to see her.

David's fears for Dora stem partly from his knowledge of her "gentle nature." Knowing how easily frightened Dora is, David feels a responsibility to shelter and protect her as though she were a child.

Miss Mills agrees to see David and makes a show of sneaking him into the back kitchen of her father's house, where she tells him that she has heard from Dora but has not been able to see her. David, meanwhile, "raves" in a way that he feels is appropriate, all the while suspecting that Miss Mills feels a "dreadful luxury in [his] afflictions." She advises him that only love can help him and Dora now, which doesn't bring him much solace. Despite the fact that everything Miss Mills sys only makes him more miserable, however, David feels that she is a good friend. Eventually, they decide Miss Mills will visit Dora the next morning to convince her of David's continued devotion. When David gets home, he explains everything to Miss Betsey, but remains depressed.

David's comical meeting with Miss Mills is a reminder just how naïve and foolish his love affair with Dora is in many respects. Both David and Miss Mills act more from a sense of what, in David's words, "becomes" a case of star-crossed love than from what's actually appropriate or necessary to their particular situation. As is often the case, however, there is a wistful fondness to David's recollections; he will eventually remark, for instance, that he preferred this over-the-top romanticism to the more worldly and greedy persona Miss Mills adopts later in life.


The next day, David arrives at Doctors' Commons only to find it locked up and the other clerks standing around outside. One of these clerks informs David that Mr. Spenlow has died, and David is so shocked he nearly faints. When he recovers, the clerk explains that Mr. Spenlow had dined out the previous night, and his carriage arrived home without him inside. His servants searched along the road and eventually found him lying dead along the roadside: he apparently suffered some kind of fit and either fell out of the carriage or got out because he felt ill, only to die. David finds the news surreal, but can't help but also worry that Mr. Spenlow's death will distract Dora from David himself.

Mr. Spenlow's death comes at a very fortuitous moment for David, since he had no time to alter the terms of his will (though it turns out he had little to leave Dora anyway). In any case, his death removes the main obstacle to David's marriage with Dora and, in doing so, reveals the extent to which David and Mr. Spenlow have been in competition for Dora's affections; David, for instance, is concerned that Dora will forget him in her grief for her father. That of course doesn't happen, and David soon steps in as Dora's protector in Mr. Spenlow's place.

That evening, David learns from a servant that Miss Mills is currently with Dora and writes to her, asking her to communicate his condolences to Dora. The next day, Miss Mills writes back that Dora was too overwhelmed by grief to send her love back to David—all she could say was "Oh, dear papa! oh, poor papa!"

The fact that Dora calls out for her father when David's name is mentioned is significant. Although Dora is probably not aware of any link between the two, the association underscores Dora's childishness, and the extent to which David acts as a parental figure to her.

A few days later at work, Mr. Jorkins tells David that he would like his help going through Mr. Spenlow's desk. David is anxious to know what will become of Dora, so he agrees, and they work through Spenlow's papers methodically until Jorkins finally concludes that Spenlow did not leave a will. David says that Mr. Spenlow himself told him that his affairs were entirely settled, but this only confirms Jorkins' opinion that no will exists, since (he claims) people always lie about this topic. Mr. Jorkins turns out to be correct, much to David's amazement. Furthermore, it emerges that Spenlow's accounts were disorganized, and that he was greatly in debt. In the weeks that follow, much of the household furniture is sold off, but most of the money from the sale goes to settling Spenlow's debts.

From a narrative point of view, Mr. Spenlow's relative poverty, like his death itself, is very convenient. If Dora did in fact stand to inherit a large amount of money, David's decision to marry her might seem suspect to readers, no matter how selfless he is elsewhere in the novel. As it is, however, David remains clear of any charges of ambition, and free to further establish himself on his own merits.

Meanwhile, David relies on Miss Mills for news of Dora, but Dora can only bring herself to call out for Mr. Spenlow whenever David is mentioned. He does learn, however, that Dora will be going to live with two aunts in Putney after the funeral. Once the move has taken place, David hangs around Putney whenever possible, waiting for updates from Miss Mills. These updates mostly take the form of a journal full of melodramatic reports on Dora's emotional state. Nevertheless, David finds some comfort in reading and rereading these entries, despite the fact that doing so also makes him "more and more miserable."

Although Dora herself obviously doesn't mean it this way, the fact that she mentions her father whenever Miss Mills brings David up further emphasizes the connection between David and Mr. Spenlow. In other words, in much the same way Agnes functions as a kind of mother-figure for her father, David may function as a kind of father-figure for Dora.

CHAPTER 39: WICKFIELD AND HEEP

To distract him from his misery, Miss Betsey arranges for David to see how things are going with her cottage in Dover. David wants to see Agnes anyway, so he arranges to take a few days off from Doctor Strong and from his office in Doctors' Commons, where business has suffered in the wake of Mr. Spenlow's death. In fact, David is less certain than ever about his future as a proctor, both because of Mr. Jorkins's poor management and because of the questionable business tactics they and other firms have been engaging in—for instance, effectively kidnapping people to make them their clients.

David's doubts about becoming a proctor are actually a measure of his growth. Whereas before he had no clear sense of what to do with his life, he now knows at least that this isn't his vocation, if only for moral reasons.

When David arrives in Dover, he is pleased for his aunt's sake to find that the tenant now occupying Miss Betsey's cottage is diligent about keeping donkeys off the yard. David then goes on to Canterbury, where he walks around marveling at how little the town seems to have changed. He also finds that the town itself reminds him of Agnes's calming presence.

David often returns to places he has visited before only to remark how different they seem, underscoring how much he himself has changed in the interim. Canterbury, however, continues to exist almost exactly as it is in David's memories, serving as an idyllic place he can retreat to in times of trouble. This in turn is related to its association with Agnes, who imparts a soothing and homelike atmosphere to everything around her.

When David reaches Mr. Wickfield's house, he finds Mr. Micawber at work downstairs. Micawber is pleased to see him, although he hints that he is not entirely happy with his job, explaining to David that legal writing does not allow "the mind [...] to soar to any exalted form of expression." When David asks Mr. Micawber's opinion of Uriah himself, however, he is surprised to hear Micawber praise Uriah for having advanced him money. David then asks whether Mr. Micawber sees Mr. Wickfield often, to which Micawber replies that Wickfield is "obsolete." David retorts that Uriah is trying to *make* Wickfield obsolete, and Micawber uneasily says that he can't discuss business with David.

Up until this point, Mr. Micawber's basic decency has never really been in question. Although he occasionally drags others (notably, Traddles) into his reckless financial schemes, he seems largely honest and kind. In this scene, however, it begins to look as though Micawber's relative success as Uriah's clerk is corrupting him; at the very least, his remark that Mr. Wickfield is "obsolete" seems callous. Although it eventually becomes clear that the job hasn't corrupted Mr. Micawber per se, the fact that even modest financial success places him in a morally questionable position speaks to the novel's ambivalence toward upward mobility.

Mr. Micawber changes the subject, praising Agnes's "attractions, graces, and virtues" and saying that he would think David was in love with her if he didn't already know about Dora. David has a strong sense of déjà vu when Micawber says this. However, he simply wishes Micawber's family well and then leaves the room, feeling that there is a new barrier between him and Mr. Micawber.

David's sense of déjà vu is significant, given how interested the novel is in memory. Presumably, the feeling stems from the fact that David has unconsciously realized that he is in love with Agnes. Regardless, it suggests that memory—even "false" memory—can function as a guiding light, revealing what is truly important.

David finds Agnes writing at her desk and they greet one another, with David saying he never knows what to do without her advice and support. This leads him to suspect that he is missing some quality he needs, although he says he thinks he is "earnest," "persevering," and "patient." Agnes agrees with all of this, but David explains that he feels he is "unsteady and irresolute in [his] power of assuring [him]self." He then goes further, saying that he always seems to be a different person, with different goals, when Agnes is not around. In fact, he says that when he is not with his "adopted sister" he seems to go astray, only finding real contentment when he returns "home." Moved by all of this, David starts to cry, and Agnes comforts him.

Given David's eventual realization that he's in love with Agnes, it's strange how many times he refers to her as a "sister" throughout the novel. It does, however, fit into a broader trend of blurred boundaries between romantic and familial relationships (for instance, Steerforth's relationship with his mother). It also inverts David's dynamic with Dora; whereas David perhaps mistakes longing for his mother for genuine love for Dora, David mistakes his romantic love for Agnes as fraternal affection. This passage also deals heavily with David's incomplete transition to adulthood, and the role Agnes has to play in that; only Agnes, Dickens suggests, can draw out David's latent qualities of perseverance and self-assurance.

David tells Agnes everything that has happened since they last saw one another, saying he "relies" on her. Agnes, however, gently scolds him for this and reminds him that he ought to be relying on Dora now. This forces David to explain that Dora is "easily disturbed and frightened," and he recounts the story of trying to persuade her to learn housekeeping. Agnes suggests that David broached the matter too suddenly, and David feels grateful to Agnes for sympathizing with Dora; in fact, he takes great pleasure in imagining the two as friends.

Once again, Agnes selflessly sets her own feelings for David aside in order to encourage him to depend on Dora, his future wife, for guidance and support. Meanwhile, David's overwhelming desire for Agnes and Dora to be friends mirrors the narrative itself, which assures readers that Dora actually wants David to marry Agnes after her own death. Both this plot point and David's wishes in this scene seem like ways of mitigating or assuaging David's guilt in loving Agnes even while married to Dora.

Finally, David asks Agnes what he should do, and she says that the most "honorable" thing would be to write to Dora's aunts and ask for permission to visit without pressing his suit too strongly. David worries that the aunts might frighten Dora by discussing the issue with her, and then worries that the aunts will not be receptive to his request. Agnes, however, gently tells him that his only consideration ought to be whether this is the morally correct course of action, and David immediately realizes that she is right.

As she often does, Agnes provides David with moral guidance in this scene. She does this gently, however, and in a way that doesn't compromise David's independence; David's instant realization that Agnes is right suggests that she is simply drawing out qualities that he already possesses.

Before writing to Dora's aunts, David decides to go visit Mr. Wickfield and Uriah Heep downstairs. Uriah greets David in a "fawning" manner before taking him to Mr. Wickfield's office, which has been stripped of much of what used to be in it to furnish Uriah's new office. Mr. Wickfield asks whether David will stay with them, and Uriah says he will be glad to give David his room (which was formerly David's). David, however, takes Mr. Wickfield up on his offer of a second spare room and goes back upstairs to see Agnes.

Despite his new position of authority, Uriah continues to speak and act deferentially around his supposed social betters. It is clearer than ever, however, that this is actually a power play; Uriah's attempt to give up his room to David, though theoretically a show of respect, is actually a way for him to assert his authority over David and Mr. Wickfield.

Much to David's frustration, Mrs. Heep is now in Agnes's room knitting. In an effort to be polite, he asks how she is, and she says she is "only pretty well" before hinting that she sees a change in Uriah. David denies this, but Mrs. Heep insists that she has noticed a new "thinness" in her son, and then asks Agnes for her opinion. Agnes responds that Mrs. Heep worries too much, and that Uriah is as well as ever. This quiets Mrs. Heep, but she remains in the room until dinner, her presence feeling like an "evil eye" to David. Agnes's "angelic expression" encourages him, however, and he composes his letter.

Just as Agnes imparts a gentle and uplifting atmosphere to her surroundings, Mrs. Heep creates an oppressive and, in David's words, "evil" feeling in the Wickfield home. Mrs. Heep's presence, in other words, is the flipside of the Victorian idea of the "angel in the house"; although Mrs. Heep's behavior conforms to gender norms—she is a devoted mother, for example, and is seen knitting in this exchange—she makes the house feel less like a home.

After dinner, David finds himself alone with Mr. Wickfield and Uriah, who "leers" and "writhes" constantly. They then rejoin Agnes and Mrs. Heep in the drawing room, and Mrs. Heep insists that Agnes play a favorite song of Uriah's. The Heeps' presence is so unnerving to David that he barely sleeps that night, only for the entire process to repeat itself the next day. In fact, David is unable to speak to Agnes alone at all, and finally decides to take a walk to clear his head.

As the day goes on, Uriah and his mother continue to make David (not to mention Agnes and Mr. Wickfield) feel uncomfortable in the Wickfield home. Mrs. Heep's insistence that Agnes play a particular song for Uriah is especially striking given that Uriah himself pays no attention once she's actually playing it; clearly, the intention is simply to remind Agnes that she's no longer the mistress of the house.

As David walks, he debates telling Agnes what he knows about Uriah's designs on her. Before he has gone far, however, he is approached by Uriah himself, who says he will join him if David allows it. David hints that he wants to be alone after "so much company," and Uriah—guessing that he means Mrs. Heep—says that his and his mother's "umbleness" obliges them to make sure they're "not pushed to the wall by them as isn't umble." Uriah then says that David is a "dangerous rival," and David asks whether that's why he and his mother are constantly dogging Agnes's steps and making her uncomfortable in her own home. Uriah asks him to make his meaning clearer, so—angrily and reluctantly—David explains that he considers Agnes a "very dear sister" and that he is engaged to someone else.

Although Uriah continues to profess humility, he feels secure enough in his position by this point in the novel to admit that he refuses to be "pushed to the wall"—something he would presumably accept if he were truly "[h]umble." He also seems to have sensed that David is in love with Agnes before David himself realizes it. This gives Uriah an advantage over David, since David repeatedly loses his temper when Uriah talks about Agnes without quite being able to explain why it upsets him so much.

Uriah (who has already interrupted David many times to praise Agnes) grabs David's hand and kisses it, says that David ought to have "returned his confidence" on the night he himself confessed his love for Agnes. Uriah then forces David to link arms and walk with him. David says that Agnes is "far above" Uriah, and Uriah agrees that this is the case. However, he also presses David to admit that he considers Uriah beneath *him*. David retorts that what he objects to are Uriah's "professions" of humbleness, but Uriah says that David simply doesn't understand his position: both he and his parents were brought up in charitable institutions where they were constantly told to be humble. Furthermore, his father secured his job as a sexton by being respectful and subservient, and advised his son to do the same.

Uriah continues to have David at a disadvantage as their conversation continues. For one, the gender dynamics of the time allow Uriah to sidestep David's real meaning when he says that Agnes is "far above" Uriah: since women were commonly held to be spiritually and morally superior to men, Uriah can easily admit that this is true without acknowledging the class-based meaning David has in mind. He also forces David to admit that he himself considers Uriah "too umble" before essentially explaining to David the entire way in which he uses humbleness as a means of securing power. Since even Uriah's account of his family history is couched in professions of humility (he talks, for instance, about the "rightful umbleness of a person in [his] station"), there's little that David can outwardly object to in it.

As Uriah talks, David begins to understand that he wants revenge for his "long suppression'' of himself in deference to people of higher social standing. Neither David nor Uriah speaks much as they return to the Wickfields', but Uriah appears to be in a good mood and is very talkative through and after dinner. He drops hints about wanting to marry Agnes and presses Mr. Wickfield to make several toasts (and, consequently, to drink heavily). David, meanwhile, is revolted by Uriah's actions, as well as by Mr. Wickfield's consciousness of his own degradation.

Despite his obvious villainy, Uriah isn't a completely unsympathetic character; even David realizes that Uriah's personality is largely a byproduct of the classism he experienced growing up. In a sense, Uriah is just as enmeshed in his own past as a character like Mr. Wickfield, and unable to turn his early unhappy experiences to good as David does.

Uriah proposes a toast to Agnes, describing her as the "divinest of her sex," and finally saying he has more of a right to marry her than anyone. Mr. Wickfield grows more and more upset as Uriah speaks, and David finally has to physically restrain him from harming Uriah or himself. David pleads with Wickfield to think of Agnes, and Wickfield calms down enough to speak, accusing Uriah of robbing him of his "name and reputation, peace and quiet, house and home." Uriah is taken aback and admits he might have spoken too soon, but also insists that he has *saved* Mr. Wickfield. When this does not quiet Wickfield, Uriah warns him that he'll say something he regrets and that the two of them "know what [they] know."

For Uriah, Agnes partly a status symbol; his claim that he has just as much right to marry her as anyone else is an assertion of his newfound status, which allows him to aspire to marriage with a middle-class woman. Marriage to Agnes would also be the final step in his plan to usurp Mr. Wickfield's position, since he would not only replace Wickfield as Agnes's male guardian, but also (on Wickfield's death) inherit everything he owns.

Mr. Wickfield breaks down and laments how far he has fallen since first meeting David. He does not mention his drinking specifically, but says that "indulgence in remembrance, and indulgence in forgetfulness" have caused his decline. He then suggests that he allowed his grief for his deceased wife and his concern for Agnes grow out of hand until they became a "disease" that has ruined Agnes's life as well.

Mr. Wickfield's words in this passage are one of the novel's most explicit warnings about the dangers of memory. Most obviously, brooding over his wife's death has contributed to his alcoholism—or what Wickfield describes as his, "indulgence in forgetfulness." He also implies, however, that memories of his wife have tainted his relationship with his daughter. Since Agnes greatly resembles the late Mrs. Wickfield, it seems likely that Mr. Wickfield views her as a substitute for his wife, forcing Agnes to remain close to him long into adulthood.

Mr. Wickfield begins crying and says that he can't even remember everything he has done under the influence of alcohol. He says that Uriah knows, however, and Uriah again scolds Wickfield for speaking so freely. At that moment, Agnes enters the room and escorts her father out, saying he is unwell. Now alone with David, Uriah says he didn't expect Mr. Wickfield to react so badly, but that they will be "friends" again by the next day. David ignores this and goes upstairs to read.

Although lingering on the past can be dangerous in David Copperfield, *forgetting it entirely is problematic as well. Mr. Wickfield's alcohol-induced amnesia obviously poses practical problems in his work, but it also undercuts his ability to live up to the broader social norms surrounding an adult man's behavior: because he has no clear sense of what he's doing or why, Mr. Wickfield isn't truly acting in an independent and purposeful way.*

At midnight, Agnes stops by and says that she and David should say goodbye now, since he will be leaving the next day. David notices that Agnes has been crying, and asks whether there is anything he can do, since she so often helps him. Agnes declines, but David presses her to at least promise she will not "sacrifice" herself. Agnes draws back from David, but finally says that he does not need to worry on her account. The image of her saying this stays with David for years afterward.

David evidently fears that Agnes will marry Uriah simply in the hopes of securing a better life for her father. Given Agnes's selflessness, and her ambiguous response in this passage, this isn't an unreasonable concern.

The next morning, David gets up early and prepares to leave. As he is getting in the coach, however, Uriah appears and informs him that he and Mr. Wickfield have already made up. David retorts that he is at least glad that Uriah apologized, and Uriah says that it is easy to apologize when one is humble. He then says that he "plucked a pear before it was ripe" the preceding evening, but that he is confident that it will "ripen yet." As Uriah leaves, he is smacking his lips as if he were actually eating something.

Although Uriah doesn't mention Agnes by name, it's clear that he's referring to her when he talks about plucking a pear. Combined with his lip-smacking, his remarks are uncomfortably sexual in tone, and further underscore Uriah's villainy by casting him as a predator intent on defiling a respectable, angelic young woman.

CHAPTER 40: THE WANDERER

Back in London, David tells Miss Betsey what is going on at the Wickfields' while she paces back and forth in distress. David then composes a letter to Dora's aunts while Miss Betsey looks at him anxiously and "thoughtfully." The next morning, Miss Betsey reads and approves his letter, and David sends it.

Miss Betsey's anxiety in this scene stems both from her concern for the Wickfields and her longstanding belief that David would be better off marrying Agnes than Dora. Nevertheless, she helps him in his courtship of Dora, allowing him to make his own decisions and learn from them.

One day as David is walking home from Doctor Strong's, he notices a woman who seems familiar crossing the road in front of him near St. Martin's Church. He can't place her, but is soon distracted by the appearance of a man on the church steps, who turns out to be Mr. Peggotty. This in turn causes David to recognize the woman he had seen as Martha Endell.

Given that it's written as a memoir, it's not surprising that David Copperfield *grapples with how memory actually works. Here, for instance, David recognizes Martha through an association of ideas—presumably, the fact that he saw both her and Peggotty in Yarmouth.*

David and Mr. Peggotty shake hands, too overwhelmed at first to speak. Eventually, Mr. Peggotty says that he was thinking of visiting David before he sets off traveling again. David asks where Mr. Peggotty is staying and then takes him to a public-house (pub) near an inn called the Golden Cross—the same inn where David had first reconnected with Steerforth.

For David, places often become synonymous with the experiences he has there. In this case, he associates the tavern with Mr. Peggotty's "misfortune," which makes it a symbolically fitting place for him to meet with David now.

Once they arrive at the public-house, David studies Mr. Peggotty and finds that he looks older but determined and "very strong." Mr. Peggotty explains that he has looked for little Em'ly in many places but heard very little. Remembering how fascinated Emily used to be by the **sea** and the "coasts where the sea got to be dark blue, and to lay a shining," he first went to France. He also suspected Steerforth talked to Emily about the pleasures of life abroad and how she could be a lady there. Once in France, Mr. Peggotty traveled from town to town, mostly on foot, asking for news of Emily. Eventually, word spread ahead of him and many poor townspeople would welcome him and give him a place to stay.

The idea that Emily would become a lady abroad raises the question of what exactly determines class status. Although it's possible Steerforth promised to marry little Em'ly once they left England, it's also possible that Emily could pass as an upper-class woman overseas simply because no one there would know the circumstances of her birth—the idea being that class status isn't so much an inherent quality as it is a matter of perception. This has implications for other working-class characters in the book as well—for instance, Uriah Heep, who rises to middle-class status but in some sense isn't "allowed" to be middle-class because of the way others perceive him.

At that moment, David notices Martha is at the door of the public-house and worries that Mr. Peggotty will see her too. Mr. Peggotty, however, continues talking, crying as he says that many of the families that took him in had young children he liked to imagine were little Em'ly's. Eventually, he went on to Italy, where he heard that Emily had been traveling in the Alps. He therefore turned toward Switzerland, imagining what he would say to Emily when he found her. He was sure that if he could only see her, she would agree to come home, and he even bought a plain dress for her to wear instead of the finery Steerforth gave her. Ultimately, however, Mr. Peggotty couldn't find Emily, so he returned home, where he found several letters and 50 pounds sent by Emily.

Although Mr. Peggotty doesn't think badly of Emily for her actions, his reaction to the children he encounters on his journey suggests that he does buy into certain ideas about fallen women. The only thing that actually bars Emily from marriage and family life going forward is social prejudice, but the weight of that convention is so overwhelming that it causes Mr. Peggotty to mourn for the children Emily won't have as though she has actually died. It's also interesting that he carries a "country dress" with him so that he can immediately reclothe Emily as a working-class woman when he sees her. To some extent, Mr. Peggotty seems to see his niece's social rise as shameful in and of itself, whether because working-class ambition was seen as suspect, or because ambition in a woman was often viewed in terms of prostitution.

Mr. Peggotty shows David a letter little Em'ly sent to Mrs. Gummidge. In it, she pleads with Mrs. Gummidge to show her some mercy and send news of Mr. Peggotty to her. If Mrs. Gummidge is too angry to do so, Emily begs her to talk to Ham and see whether he is willing to forgive her and, if so, to honor his wishes and write to her. Mr. Peggotty tells David that Mrs. Gummidge and Ham did in fact write to little Em'ly, telling her that her uncle had gone looking for her. He later received more money from her, and is now planning to travel to a village on the Upper Rhine based on the letter's postmark.

The fact that Emily encloses money in her letters isn't especially surprising, given that her childhood wish to become a lady was motivated in part by a desire to help her family. Under the circumstances, though, the money inevitably reads more as compensation for Emily's loss (and lost virtue) than as simple financial assistance. Presumably, this is why Mr. Peggotty refuses to accept it.

David asks Mr. Peggotty about Ham, and Mr. Peggotty says that he is as hard-working as ever and is always willing to help others out, even when the job is dangerous. Peggotty, however, believes that Ham is heartbroken.

Whereas Ham previously worked hard in the hopes of one day establishing a home for himself and Emily, he no longer seems to be looking toward the future when he works. At best, he seems to be using work as a source of distraction, and at worst, a form of self-destruction; as Mr. Peggotty puts it, he has "no care no-how for his life."

Mr. Peggotty gathers up his things and prepares to leave, explaining that (next to finding little Em'ly), his greatest desire is to return to Steerforth all the money that Emily has sent. If he dies before he is successful, he at least hopes that Emily will find out about his search for her.

Just as Mr. Peggotty refused to accept payment for Emily from Mrs. Steerforth, he hopes to return the money Emily herself has sent so as to avoid profiting off of her sexual misconduct.

As Mr. Peggotty and David leave, David sees Martha—who has listened to their entire conversation—sneak away before them. David walks with Mr. Peggotty to the inn where he is staying, and when he returns to the pub, Martha is nowhere to be seen.

Martha's evasiveness is a reflection of the shame she feels over her fall; it would be deeply embarrassing for her to even talk with "respectable" members of society at this point.

CHAPTER 41: DORA'S AUNTS

David receives a letter from Dora's aunts inviting him to visit and discuss his request to call on Dora. David accepts this invitation and writes that he will be bringing his friend Traddles with him. He finds himself wishing he could consult with Miss Mills, but her father, who is a merchant trader, has taken her with him to India, much to David's annoyance.

David's youthful infatuation with Dora often causes him to act and think in self-centered ways: here, for instance, he feels as though Mr. Mills has gone to India specifically to inconvenience him. Although David's selfishness is relatively mild, it's another indication that his love for Dora isn't the kind of mature love that will morally improve him.

When he dresses for the visit to Dora's aunts, David finds himself torn between wanting to look handsome and wanting to look "practical." Furthermore, as he walks to Putney with Traddles, David worries about Traddles's hair, which tends to stick upright. He asks Traddles if he can fix it, but Traddles laughingly says that nothing he tries works. He then explains that people have always objected to his hair, including Sophy's sisters. This reminds David to ask whether Traddles made a formal proposal to Sophy's family. Traddles says that he did, but that most of them took the proposal very badly, because they relied so much on Sophy. However, when David suggests that the family's behavior was wrong, Traddles objects and says that both he and Sophy felt guilty for causing so much upheaval, and avoid mentioning the topic to this day.

David's anxiety over both his and Traddles' appearance once again reveals how much growing up he has to do. In particular, the effort he makes to appear practical suggests that he still is playing the role of an adult rather than genuinely becoming one. Meanwhile, Traddles' description of Sophy's family centers on a different kind of coming-of-age problem: Sophy's family is reluctant to allow her to leave home and marry because they essentially use her as a servant.

Traddles's selflessness does not fully strike David at the time, since he is so anxious about the upcoming visit. When they arrive and are shown into a drawing-room, David feels as though he is "on view" and nervously trips over Traddles and then sits on a cat as he tries to greet Dora's aunts. The fact that one of the women first assumes Traddles is David further unnerves David, who has to "lay claim to [him]self." Finally, one of the aunts says her sister Lavinia will explain their thoughts on David and Dora's relationship, since she is more familiar with "matter of this nature." David later learns that both Lavinia and Clarissa consider the former an expert on romance because they believe a man named Mr. Pidger was once infatuated with her.

David's extreme awkwardness in this scene reveals his youth and inexperience. It's especially interesting that Traddles is at first mistaken for David; although this kind of misunderstanding could happen to anyone in the real world, it's significant in the context of a story that essentially traces how David became David. Since David is not a "complete" individual at this stage, it's not surprising that there is confusion surrounding his identity.

Miss Lavinia explains that she and Miss Clarissa were somewhat estranged from Mr. Spenlow, and that his death has in any case changed Dora's circumstances. Furthermore, she think David is a respectable young man who loves (or is "persuaded" he loves) Dora. At this point, David breaks in to describe just how much he loves Dora, and the conversation gets off track: Clarissa interrupts with a lengthy speech on Mr. Spenlow's wife, whom Clarissa says should have clarified that there would be "no room" for Spenlow's sisters at the dinner table following her marriage. Lavinia temporarily succeeds in quieting Clarissa to confirm that David wishes to visit Dora as a "suitor," but Clarissa then interrupts again to say that it was nothing to her or Lavinia if Mr. Spenlow wanted to only associate with people from Doctors' Commons.

Despite having little romantic experience themselves, even the Spenlow sisters appear to suspect that David's feelings for Dora may have more to do with infatuation than mature love. Meanwhile, Clarissa's complaints about her brother—though mostly played for humor—again point to the tension that exists in the novel between the family one is born into and the family one creates through marriage.

Miss Clarissa gives Lavinia permission to continue, and Lavinia says that they have spoken with Dora and believe that David "thinks" he is in love. David attempts to interrupt again, but Lavinia continues, saying that "mature affection [...] does not easily express itself," and that it is hard to know whether youthful love will ultimately amount to anything. This, she explains, has influenced her and Clarissa's decision. Despite Lavinia's hesitancy, David senses that she enjoys the idea of overseeing his and Dora's courtship, and again interrupts with a declaration of how much he loves Dora. Traddles backs David up and happens to mention that he himself has been engaged for a long time, which seems to favorably impress Lavinia by reminding her of Mr. Pidger.

Once again, the sisters express doubt over the depth and maturity of David's feelings for Dora. The passage also speaks to the influence of memory on the present, since Lavinia's indulgent feelings toward Dora and David's relationship stem from recollections of her own "romance" with Mr. Pidger—despite the fact that this romance took place largely if not entirely in her own head.

Miss Lavinia continues to explain that it is difficult to know whether David and Dora's feelings will last, at which point Miss Clarissa interrupts to say that they would understand Dora better if Mr. Spenlow had sometimes invited them to dinner. Finally, Lavinia announces that she and her sister are willing to allow David to visit Dora, but not to become engaged to her. Lavinia also stipulates that the visits will formally be paid to *them* rather than to Dora, and that David will not communicate with Dora outside of their supervision. David eagerly accepts these conditions, although Lavinia and Clarissa insist on giving him and Traddles time alone to consider. When the sisters return, they tell David he can come to dinner on Sundays, and tea twice a week. They also invite Miss Betsey.

Although Dora's aunts impose restrictions on her relationship with David, David's standing is actually more legitimate now than it was previously; because it took place without her family's consent or even knowledge, his earlier courtship of Dora wasn't really proper. With that said, Clarissa and Lavinia still clearly have reservations about the relationship, mostly because they suspect it is a passing infatuation rather than mature, lasting love.

Miss Lavinia asks David to follow her and leads him to the next room, where he finds Dora trying to eavesdrop. Dora is upset, however, and says she is frightened of David's friend (Traddles). David protests that Traddles is the "best creature," but Dora says that they "don't want any best creatures." She becomes even more distressed when David announces that she will soon meet Miss Betsey, so David gives up trying to persuade her that she's wrong. Instead, he watches as she shows him a new trick **Jip** has learned (standing on his hind legs in the corner of the room). Eventually, Lavinia returns to fetch David, and Dora runs away to her room when David suggests introducing her to Traddles.

Dora's shyness at the mention of Traddles and Miss Betsey seems to stem from a fear that they will ask more from her than she can give, or perhaps alert David to her deficiencies. Her remark that she doesn't want "any best creatures," which David takes for meaningless, flirtatious "pouting," suggests that she's aware of her own flaws and consequently doesn't want to be around anyone "better" than she is. In any case, David at this point is still charmed by Dora's frivolity, which here takes the form of the amusing but impractical tricks she teaches her dog.

Traddles and David leave, and Traddles remarks that David will likely marry before he does. David then questions Traddles about Sophy, asking whether she plays an instrument, sings, and paints. Traddles replies that she plays and sings a little, and David tells Traddles that he will have to hear Dora sing and see her paintings. They continue to talk about Sophy as they walk home, David continuously comparing her to Dora with "considerable inner satisfaction."

Although "accomplishments" like singing and painting were expected of well-bred Victorian women, the weight David places on them is implied to be excessive; ultimately, these skills aren't especially useful in the context of a marriage, as David will learn firsthand when he officially marries Dora.

Back at home, David tells Miss Betsey about his success, and she says she's happy for him. He notices, however, that she spends a lot of time pacing that evening while he writes to Agnes, telling her the good news. David eventually receives a response from Agnes that is "hopeful, earnest, and cheerful."

Miss Betsey's anxious demeanor continues to hint at her reservations surrounding David's relationship with Dora, which she considers immature and poorly thought out. Meanwhile, Agnes continues to act graciously and selflessly by supporting David's relationship despite appearing to be in love with him herself.

David soon discovers that work leaves him no time to go to tea, so (with Miss Lavinia's permission) he begins to visit on Saturdays as well as Sundays. Meanwhile, Miss Betsey and Dora's aunts pay visits to one another and generally get along well, although the aunts are scandalized by the odd times at which she visits, like just before tea. **Jip**, however, does not like Miss Betsey and has to be shut away whenever she visits. As for David, he finds himself increasingly worried by the fact that everyone seems to treat Dora as a "toy": Miss Betsey nicknames her "Little Blossom," and Miss Lavinia constantly dotes on her.

Even at this relatively early stage of the relationship, David is beginning to have doubts about Dora's suitability as a partner. He's not truly able to articulate what disturbs him about the way in which others treat her—he simply remarks that it's "odd"—but in retrospect it's clear that he senses that Dora isn't enough of an adult herself to provide him with support and guidance, or even to carry out basic tasks in the household. The words he and others use to describe her ("toy," "blossom") reinforce the idea that she is more decorative than practical.

One day during a walk, David tries to convince Dora that she should ask to be treated as an adult. Dora objects, saying that she's happy with everyone's kindness to her, and David argues that she could be happy while being treated "rationally." This causes Dora to begin crying, and she asks why David wants to marry her if he doesn't like her as she is: she says that she is "very affectionate," and that David shouldn't be "cruel" to her. David attempts to comfort her and they make up, with Dora even asking him to give her the cookbook and show her how to keep accounts.

It was partly Dora's childishness that David found so alluring in the first place, so his asking her to change places her in a double-bind: if she stays as she is, she lacks traits and skills that David wants her to have, but if she changes, she'll lose the quality that initially made David want to marry her. Her question about why David wants to marry her is therefore more pointed than she probably realizes, because it's not clear that she (or any woman) could embody everything that David wants.

The next time David visits, he brings Dora not only the cookbook but also an account book and a "pretty little pencil case." It quickly becomes clear, however, that Dora finds both confusing, and she ends up doodling pictures in the account book. David's attempts to verbally instruct Dora go no better: for instance, when David asks how she would prepare a specific meal, she says she would tell the servant to make it before "laugh[ing] in such a charming manner that she was more delightful than ever." Eventually, the cookbook ends up serving mostly as a surface for **Jip** to stand on while holding the pencil case in his mouth. David can't help but find all this charming, however, and he only rarely wishes that people would treat Dora less like a "plaything."

Dora's immaturity is probably a combination of natural tendencies, gender norms, and her wealthy upbringing: her remark that she would tell a servant to make dinner would be perfectly acceptable if she were marrying an upper-class man, but she hasn't learned the skills to run a more modest household. In any case, even David's attempts to dress up practical skills like account-keeping in more ornamental terms (for instance, by giving Dora a "pretty" box for her pencils) go nowhere. Tellingly, she puts all these practical household objects to purely frivolous use by teaching Jip to do pointless tricks with them.

CHAPTER 42: MISCHIEF

David writes that while he continued, throughout this period, to work hard at learning shorthand, he doesn't feel that it's his place to talk about that. Instead, he says that all the success he has achieved in life can be traced back to "habits of punctuality, order, and diligence," as well as "the determination to concentrate [him]self on one object at a time." He also says, however, that he does not say this in a self-congratulatory way, both because he is aware that many people work hard without achieving success, and because he owes so much of his own patience and dedication to Agnes.

This is one of the most explicit statements in David Copperfield *about the importance of hard work. Interestingly, David acknowledges that determination and honesty don't inevitably lead to success, although he implies that they have in his case. However, the fact that he paints hard work as desirable regardless (mostly as a character-building exercise) allows him to mostly sidestep the issue of who is and isn't able to rise in society. It's also noteworthy that he indirectly credits his own success to Agnes by explaining that she inspired him to be better. This is exactly the role a good Victorian wife ought to fill, so the fact that David's statement directly follows a chapter about his relationship with Dora doesn't bode well for that marriage.*

Around this time, Agnes visits Doctor Strong. Mr. Wickfield comes with her, and both Agnes and the Doctor hope the visit will do Wickfield good. Mrs. Heep also comes for a "change of air," and Uriah accompanies her to help settle her into her rooms.

Mrs. Heep's concern for both her son's health and her own is implied to be an affectation, since only relatively well-off people could afford to travel and take time away from work to rest and recover.

In a private conversation, Uriah tells David that he is "jealous" and wants to "keep an eye on" someone he holds dear. David presses Uriah, who eventually implies that he is not fond of Annie Strong. Uriah goes on to complain that Mrs. Strong has always treated him with condescension, and that he was always "beneath him" too. David assumes Uriah is referring to Doctor Strong and defends him, but Uriah says he meant Jack Maldon. Miserably, David realizes that Uriah also suspects Annie. Meanwhile, Uriah talks about how rudely Maldon used to treat him, and how Mrs. Strong will likely urge Agnes to marry someone of higher social standing than Uriah. For that reason, he says, he will do whatever he can to separate Agnes and Annie: being humble, he has to assume that everyone is against him and fight for his own interests.

Despite is remark about Mrs. Strong's influence with Annie, Uriah doesn't stand to gain much by exposing Annie's supposed affair: Agnes, after all, is clearly opposed to marrying Uriah already. That being the case, Uriah's interest in the matter mostly seems to consist of asserting his power over people who were formerly his social superiors. Regardless, he's increasingly willing to reveal that his humility is insincere, since someone who was actually humble wouldn't be "go[ing] at it tooth and nail" to assert his own interests.

At that moment, Jack Maldon himself arrives at Doctor Strong's, and Uriah begins laughing. David walks away in disgust.

Although David loathes Uriah's behavior, there's little he can do to oppose him; Maldon's arrival simply seems to confirm that there's something inappropriate going on between him and Annie Strong, and anything David said would simply expose her to more suspicion.

A few days later, David takes Agnes for tea with Dora, anxious for Agnes's approval. Dora is hiding when they arrive, but David eventually persuades her to join him and Agnes in the drawing-room. Dora is frightened at first—she had previously told David that Agnes sounded "too clever"—but Agnes's kindness and good humor soon win her over. Before long the two women are sitting next to one another and hugging, which pleases David enormously. Dora eventually admits that she is happy Agnes likes her, because she knows how much David trusts Agnes's opinions.

David's eagerness for Dora and Agnes to be friends is not only a reflection of his own confused romantic feelings, but also of the novel's need to portray David in a fairly positive light: by stressing that Agnes and Dora like one another, Dickens makes David's remarriage after Dora's death less jarring.

Before David and Agnes leave, Dora tells David privately that she thinks she would be "more clever" if she had known Agnes growing up. David laughs this off, and Dora asks David to remind her how he is related to Agnes. David replies that they aren't related by blood, and Dora, fidgeting with the buttons on his coat, says she wonders why David fell in love with her, and what would have happened if he had never met her. Dora's seriousness mystifies David, but she soon recovers her good mood and says goodbye to her guests with plans to write to Agnes.

Dora cl>early suspects that David is in love with Agnes, or at least that Agnes would be a better wife for him than she herself would be. Dora's growing realization that she isn't what David truly wants is one of the more uncomfortable aspects of the novel, because it is a reminder that David sometimes hurts other people (though unintentionally) as a he finds his way in the world; in a sense, Dora's suffering helps David grow up.

As Agnes and David walk to Doctor Strong's, David listens eagerly as Agnes praises Dora, feeling that he has never loved Dora so much. David tells Agnes that she is Dora's guardian angel as well as his own, and then asks whether her cheerfulness that evening means that her home life has improved. Agnes admits that it has not, but assures David that Uriah has not brought up the topic of marriage again, and that David should worry about her less. She also tells David that it will likely be a while before she is able to visit London again, but that she will keep in touch with Dora.

Once again, David's eagerness for Agnes and Dora to like one another reveals the depth of his feelings for Agnes. This passage in particular foreshadows Dora's eventual blessing of David and Agnes's marriage, with Agnes now acting as the "angel" blessing Dora and David's.

Agnes says goodnight to David and goes inside Doctor Strong's house. David, however, lingers outside and sees a light on in the Doctor's study. Assuming Doctor Strong is working on the dictionary, David peeks in and sees the Doctor, Mr. Wickfield, and Uriah in the midst of an apparently serious conversation: Doctor Strong has his face buried in his hands. David enters the room and Uriah closes the door behind him to preserve the meeting's secrecy. Uriah then informs David that he has reluctantly felt obliged to share his suspicions of Annie Strong with the Doctor. David is enraged and tries to comfort Doctor Strong as Uriah continues, saying that it has been clear since before Jack Maldon left for India that he and Annie were "sweet on one another," and appealing to Mr. Wickfield for confirmation.

Interestingly, Uriah broaches the topic of Annie's possible affair just after the meeting between David, Dora, and Agnes. Although David is never actually unfaithful to Dora (and Annie is eventually cleared of any suspicion of misconduct), the timing links David to another love triangle, and underscores how complicated finding an appropriate partner is in the novel.

Mr. Wickfield attempts to retract his own suspicions of Annie Strong, but Uriah claims to have witnessed them firsthand. Eventually, Mr. Wickfield admits that he has "doubts," and that he thought Doctor Strong did as well. Doctor Strong denies this, saying he only wished to help Jack Maldon out of love for his wife. Nevertheless, Wickfield says, he believed that given the age gap between the Doctor and his wife, "worldly considerations" might have persuaded Annie to marry. Wickfield also says, however, that while he might have privately doubted Annie, he never meant for anyone to learn about those doubts. Meanwhile, throughout all of Wickfield's speech, Uriah interrupts with remarks that suggest Wickfield is downplaying the situation.

Wickfield's suspicions of Annie are twofold: he believes not only that she may be having an affair, but also that she might have married Doctor Strong for his money. As in little Em'ly's storyline, the accusations of sexual misconduct and of social climbing are intertwined, with one charge lending credence to the other. The exchange also touches on the question of what makes a marriage a good match. Although it turns out that Annie and the Doctor's marriage is a happy one, Wickfield here questions whether a relationship with such a large age gap can truly be healthy.

Uriah reiterates that as painful as the subject is, he had no choice to bring it up—particularly since David has noticed Annie Strong's behavior as well. David angrily disputes this, but realizes that his expression has already given him away to Doctor Strong.

Apart from anything else, the meeting with Doctor Strong gives Uriah another chance to assert his authority over David, who unwillingly becomes a tool in Uriah's plans.

There is a long silence, during which Doctor Strong paces back and forth, discreetly crying. Finally, he says that he is to blame for any "trials and aspersions" Annie has been exposed to. More specifically, he feels that he might have unfairly "ensnared" her in a marriage that cannot be satisfying for a young woman: he married her before her character was fully "formed" and previously took comfort in the thought that doing so would shield her from some of life's uncertainties while allowing her "judgment" to mature. Now, however, he realizes that she may regret marrying him rather than Jack Maldon and that this leaves her vulnerable to gossip. Since Doctor Strong views himself as responsible for Annie's predicament, he resolves to do whatever he can to protect her reputation until he dies, and Annie is free to remarry.

True to his generous nature, Doctor Strong both refuses to believe that Annie is having an affair, and takes responsibility for any unhappiness she feels in the marriage. According to Doctor Strong, he initially viewed marrying Annie as a step that would contribute to Annie's growth as a person, and prevent her from making any foolish mistakes in her youth and inexperience. The potential problem with this, however, is now that Annie has grown and matured, she may no longer view Doctor Strong in the same light. Doctor Strong's efforts to shield and protect Annie—though well-intentioned—also reveal the extent to which women in the nineteenth century were infantilized.

Doctor Strong leaves the room, accompanied by Mr. Wickfield. Uriah remarks that he didn't expect Doctor Strong's reaction, and attributes it to "blindness." David—who was deeply moved by the Doctor's loyalty and kindness—rounds on Uriah and yells at him for deliberately "ensnaring" him in his plan. David is so angry, in fact, that he slaps Uriah and says he won't have anything to do with him from now on. Uriah warns him that he might not be able to avoid him, and David retorts that he already expects Uriah to do his "worst" (that is, marry Agnes).

David's outburst is understandable, but it also reveals just how much of the upper hand Uriah now has. Unlike David, Uriah remains calm and calculated throughout the exchange, and David begins to suspect that Uriah involved him in his plans specifically to "make [him] miserable"—that is, to lord it over David.

After a long silence, Uriah finally says that David has never liked him. Despite this, however, Uriah says that he likes David and won't be part of a "quarrel" with him. David scoffs at all of this, but Uriah simply keeps repeating that he won't be enemies with David—though he also adds that in losing his temper, David has made himself "inferior" to Uriah himself. David in turn repeats that he expects the “worst” of Uriah, and leaves the house. Uriah follows him, however, and reiterates that David has put himself in a "wrong position" by striking someone "so umble," but that he (Uriah) will forgive him. This irritates David, in part because he feels he *has* embarrassed himself.

Uriah here explicitly states what David had already begun to sense himself—namely, that by hitting a supposed inferior, David has compromised his claim to be a respectable gentleman. Uriah then rubs his new "superiority" in David's face by assuming a gentlemanly and forgiving demeanor. The passage, in other words, again raises questions about what social class is and when social climbing is acceptable: outwardly, Uriah is behaving in a much more genteel way in this exchange.

The next day, David sees Uriah walking with his mother, Mrs. Heep; Uriah's face is wrapped up in a handkerchief, and he later learns that he hit Uriah hard enough that he had to have a tooth removed. Meanwhile, Doctor Strong spends most of the rest of the Wickfields' visit shut inside his house.

Uriah's insinuations about Annie have clearly upset Doctor Strong, if only because he feels he has wronged her.

When David returns to his work as secretary, Doctor Strong gives him a letter asking him not to speak about the conversation with anyone. David notices that Annie Strong does not seem aware that anything has happened. Gradually, however, she appears to notice that her husband is even more kind and attentive to her than usual and grows visibly troubled. Annie's sadness in turn makes Doctor Strong seem older and more tired. Despite the obvious affection between the two, the marriage slowly grows more strained as Annie and the Doctor struggle to talk freely with one another. What's more, the Doctor increasingly encourages his wife to go on outings with her mother, Mrs. Markleham, which Annie does not seem to enjoy.

Mrs. Markleham's presence in the Strong household exacerbates the tension between Annie and the Doctor. Although non-nuclear family arrangements of this kind aren't always problematic in the novel—Miss Betsey, for instance, lives quite happily with Dora and David—Mrs. Markleham is yet another example of an overbearing parent who refuses to allow her child to grow up.

The one thing that appears to cheer up both Doctor Strong and Annie Strong is Mr. Dick's presence. Although David is not sure how much of the situation Mr. Dick himself understands, he admits that Mr. Dick seems to have an instinctive or emotional grasp of what is going on. Regardless, he continues to take walks with Doctor Strong, listening to him talk about the dictionary. He also begins to help Mrs. Strong out in the garden, which she seems to find comforting. Miss Betsey does not find any of this surprising, and frequently tells David that "nobody but [her]self [...] knows what that man is."

The emotional support Mr. Dick provides to the Doctor and Annie individually foreshadows the role he will ultimately play in resolving the couple's marital problems. The implication is that Mr. Dick's disability is actually an advantage in this situation; because Mr. Dick sees people in straightforward terms, the rumors surrounding Annie don't sway him. His disability also places him in an unusual position in terms of gender; because he isn't seen as a sexual threat, he can spend extensive time alone with a married woman in a way that most grown men would not be able to. This in turn allows him to act as a kind of mediator between the Strongs.

David describes a letter he received from Mrs. Micawber while the Wickfields were still visiting. In it, Mrs. Micawber reports that Mr. Micawber has become an entirely different man: she and her husband used to share everything with one another, she says, but now he has become very secretive. Worse yet, he is always in a bad mood, and is cold and distant with his family. David finds this letter mystifying, and doesn't know how to respond to Mrs. Micawber's request for advice except by urging her to bring her husband to his senses through "patience and kindness."

The chapter closes with another marriage in crisis—in this case, the Micawbers. Although David doesn't know what to make of the letter at the time, the fact that it appears in a chapter dealing so heavily with Uriah's "mischief" suggests that Mr. Micawber's strange behavior somehow stems from his new position as Uriah's clerk.

CHAPTER 43: ANOTHER RETROSPECT

David once again skims over several years, jumping ahead to his twenty-first birthday (the legal age of adulthood at the time). By this point, David has not only learned shorthand but also become modestly successful as a parliamentary reporter. He has also begun to publish a few works of fiction in magazines, further supplementing his income. Traddles, meanwhile, has qualified as a lawyer and is now earning money himself.

Given that David Copperfield *is a coming-of-age story, the fact that David is now legally an adult is clearly significant. What's even more important, however, is his increasing success as a writer, and not just because of the money it brings in; David has finally found his vocation—a career that is not only profitable but also personally fulfilling.*

David and Miss Betsey have moved out of his apartment and into a cottage, but Miss Betsey herself will soon be moving again to make room for Dora, whom David is finally marrying. In the meantime, Miss Lavinia works to assemble a wardrobe for Dora, while Miss Clarissa and Miss Betsey find furniture for the couple to look at and approve. Dora, however, sometimes buys less practical furnishings instead, including a "Chinese dog house" for **Jip**. Peggotty is also hard at work on David and Dora's behalf, cleaning the cottage and everything in it.

The fact that David has moved from his apartment to a cottage is a major step towards establishing a home and family of his own. Unfortunately, the episode involving the dog house once again hints that Dora will not be an ideal homemaker. The dog house is ornamental and completely impractical—it doesn't evn serve its intended purpose at first because the sound of the bells that decorate it frightens Jip.

David no longer spends much time at Doctors' Commons, but Traddles does visit him there on the day he goes to obtain a marriage license. David can hardly believe he is about to be married, and tells Traddles he hopes that next time they will be coming for Traddles' license. Traddles hopes the same, but says it is comforting to know Sophy will wait for him indefinitely. In any case, he says, he is almost as happy as if he were marrying himself, particularly since Sophy is taking part in the ceremony as a bridesmaid. That evening, Sophy and Agnes (who is also a bridesmaid) arrive at Miss Lavinia's and Miss Clarissa's home. Traddles proudly introduces Sophy to David, who describes her as "not absolutely beautiful" but extremely friendly and kind-looking.

Traddles is characteristically selfless on the topic of David's marriage; although Traddles has been engaged longer and is still unable to marry, he doesn't resent David's good fortune. Ultimately, it may be just as well that Traddles and Sophy wait so long to get married, because it ensures that the relationship—unlike David and Dora's—is based on something beyond infatuation. Sophy's physical appearance underscores this point: she isn't beautiful like Dora, but has other qualities that make her a good companion.

David's state of dazed happiness continues into the next day, when he and his friends visit the cottage he and Dora will live in. He finds himself "unable to regard [him]self as its master," although it has already been furnished with everything from Dora's guitar to **Jip**'s dog house.

David's difficulty in imagining himself as "master" of his cottage is understandable, given his inexperience; as the presence of the guitar and dog house suggest, neither he nor Dora really know much about what they need to establish a household.

That evening before dinner, Miss Lavinia privately brings Dora to see David in the dress she'll be wearing for the wedding. Dora asks David whether the dress is pretty, and whether he is "sure" about Dora herself, and Miss Lavinia has to stop the couple from embracing to prevent her bonnet from being crushed.

Dora's question once again hints at her suspicions that David would be better off marrying someone else.

The next morning, David wakes up (still in a state of disbelief) and goes to collect Miss Betsey. Peggotty and Mr. Dick are also attending the wedding; in fact, Mr. Dick is giving Dora away. David also meets Traddles along the way, and everyone takes a carriage to church for the "fairy marriage." Just before they arrive, Miss Betsey squeezes David's hand and kisses him, saying she loves him like her own son, and that she can't help but think of Clara Copperfield on this occasion. David says that he is also thinking about his mother, along with everything Miss Betsey herself has done for him. Miss Betsey brushes this off, and they all enter the church.

On the one hand, David's description of the wedding as a "fairy marriage" is a reference to his own deliriously happy state at the time. However, it's also a commentary on how flimsy and fanciful his and Dora's understanding of marriage was. The reference to David's mother also becomes more bittersweet in retrospect as Dora's story begins to parallel Clara's more closely, culminating in her death.

David explains that he has only< scattered and dreamlike impressions of the ceremony. He notices Dora entering, as well as various other people in the church, including "disagreeable" looking pew-openers and an "ancient mariner [...] strongly flavoring the church with rum." At some point, Miss Lavinia begins crying and has to be revived by Miss Clarissa. David also sees Miss Betsey crying, despite her attempts to look "stern." Dora, meanwhile, is trembling throughout the ceremony and clinging to Agnes's hand for support; when the wedding is over, she finally bursts into tears on her father's account, though she quickly cheers up as everyone signs the register.

Given how detailed David's memory usually is, it's striking that his impressions of the ceremony are so vague. However, this is in keeping with the idea of the wedding being a "fairy marriage"; David's happiness on the day of his wedding to Dora is almost otherworldly, and consequently difficult to fully capture in narrative. This in turn reflects David's complex attitude towards his memories of Dora. Although he ultimately claims that she was not the ideal partner for him, he often sounds wistful when talking about their time together, depicting it as a kind of lost paradise.

The aftermath of the wedding is similarly hazy to David. As he and Dora walk out of the church together, he is vaguely reminded of his childhood in Blunderstone. Everyone is very cheerful on the ride back, and Sophy jokes that she is surprised Traddles didn't lose the marriage license David entrusted him with. A breakfast follows, but David can't remember what he ate, or what he said in the speech he gave.

Once again, David's memories of Blunderstone hint at parallels between Dora and Clara Copperfield, suggesting that David has married Dora in part as an attempt to recapture his childhood happiness with his beautiful but childlike mother.

Eventually, Dora goes to change out of her wedding dress and the couple prepares to leave—delayed by the fact that Dora keeps forgetting things. Finally, Dora says her goodbyes to her aunts and leaves with David, carrying **Jip** to reassure him that she still loves him. Just before she and David get in the carriage, Dora runs back to say one more goodbye to Agnes. She and David then leave for their new home, and David finally believes he is really married as Dora asks one more time whether he is sure he doesn't "repent."

The fact that Dora is unsure of David's love for her on the very day of their wedding is a red flag to readers that Dora isn't in fact the "right" wife for David. Once again, however, the novel takes pains to emphasize that there's no animosity between Dora and Agnes, thereby paving the way for David to guiltlessly remarry.

David closes the chapter by saying that he will now resume his story, having "stood aside to see the phantom of those days go by [him]."

It's interesting that David distinguishes between his memories of his wedding and the "journey of his story"—particularly because the entire narrative he's writing consists of memories. In this case, David implies that he has taken a less active role in shaping his memories; he has passively "stood aside" and let himself re-experience them. This perhaps speaks to one of David's motives in writing a memoir, which is that it allows him to guiltlessly re-experience moments that were pleasurable but, in hindsight, immature or irresponsible.

CHAPTER 44: OUR HOUSEKEEPING

David finds the transition from courtship to marriage strange—particularly the idea that Dora is now always nearby, and he does not need to scheme in order to see and talk to her. It is also a "wonderful" change, however, and David finds himself charmed by new details he learns about Dora, like the fact that she uses papers to curl her hair.

Although David is happy with his new wife, he is beginning to understand that courtship and marriage are very different things. Over the course of the chapter, it becomes increasingly clear that the qualities David found charming while courting Dora are not necessarily the qualities that make for a good wife.

Despite his happiness, David quickly discovers that neither he nor Dora is really equipped to maintain a household. They hire a servant named Mary Anne who proves to be more of a hindrance than a help: she has a stern look that frightens Dora, and she steals silverware and drinks.

Dora's shyness and timidity are very much in keeping with Victorian gender norms. They are an obvious hindrance, however, when it comes to managing servants, and therefore in conflict with Dora's new duties as a wife.

One day, David mentions to Dora that it is past the time they planned to have dinner, and suggests that she talk to Mary Anne about it. Dora objects that she can't and tries to distract her husband by drawing on his face with her pencil and scolding him for being "serious." Eventually, however, David returns to the subject of dinner and Dora grows frightened. David says he only wants to "reason" with her, but Dora insists that that is even worse than scolding, and eventually accuses him of regretting marrying her. David retorts that Dora is being "childish," and that it isn't "comfortable" to go without meals. This further upsets Dora, and she cries that criticizing the housekeeping is the same as criticizing her. David tries to reassure Dora, but she is inconsolable, and David feels horribly guilty.

Dora's insistence that David's attempts to reason with her are even worse than scolding might seem strange, but makes sense in light of Dora's character; Dora can be charming and entertaining when she's playing her guitar or teasing David, but she has no experience with or talent for more practical activities. By asking Dora to be "reasonable," then, David is in some sense rejecting her as she is. The fact that the dispute centers on housekeeping further underscores this, since (as Dora points out) a woman's housekeeping was seen as a reflection of her character.

Later that night, when David returns home from work, he finds Miss Betsey waiting for him. She explains that she has been keeping Dora company, because she is very upset. David explains that he himself is upset, but that he didn't mean to hurt Dora. Miss Betsey is understanding, but says that David has to be patient, and firmly rejects the idea that she might speak to Dora. When David expresses surprise, Miss Betsey hints that she wishes she been more tolerant of her brother's marriage to Clara Copperfield, and urges David to remember how unhappy Clara was after her second marriage. Finally, Miss Betsey says that since David chose to marry Dora, he ought to appreciate her for her prettiness and affection: any qualities Dora lacks David must either try to teach her or learn to do without.

The conversation in this scene is the most explicit acknowledgment in the novel that Dora resembles Clara Copperfield. More disturbingly, it also implies a parallel between David and Mr. Murdstone, since Miss Betsey is concerned that David will make Dora unhappy by trying to force her to be someone she isn't. Ultimately, the passage suggests not only that David married Dora due to unresolved feelings toward his mother and childhood, but also that, in doing so, he is in danger of replicating his childhood, this time as the abuser.

Miss Betsey leaves with a final warning not to use her as a "scarecrow" to frighten Dora. David watches her go, thinking that she looks worried, and realizing for the first time that he and Dora have to "work out [their] future for [them]selves." Dora then comes downstairs and the couple makes up and agrees never to argue again.

If David is in danger of becoming Mr. Murdstone, then Miss Betsey is in danger of becoming (or being forced to act like) Miss Murdstone—a "scarecrow" used to keep Dora in line. Fortunately, David takes his aunt's warning to heart and tries to be more gentle with Dora going forward. It's troubling, however, that he's only just now become aware of the responsibilities he's undertaken in marrying; it suggests he made a major life decision without fully considering what it entailed, and whether he and Dora were ready for it.

Nevertheless, David and Dora continue to have difficulties managing the household. David eventually dismisses Mary Anne, but the next several servants they hire are all either incompetent or dishonest. What's more, the couple has equal difficulty dealing with shopkeepers, who continuously cheat them. Consequently, they are always short on cash despite the fact that they hardly ever have food in the house. Other pieces of bad luck include a washerwoman who sells some of their clothes, a fire that breaks out in their chimney, and a servant who charges her drinks at public-houses to David and Dora's account.

Clearly, David and Dora's bad luck doesn't all stem directly from mismanagement. Taken together, however, they suggest that David and (especially) Dora are too young and innocent to manage their own household, particularly when it comes to matters of money; they lack the necessary shrewdness, David implies, to avoid being swindled. This is in keeping with the novel's emphasis on the importance of personal responsibility, and the role it plays in financial success. It's not that David and Dora have too little money coming in, but rather that they fail to spend it wisely.

Eventually, David decides to bring Traddles home for dinner, and sends a message to Dora to tell her. Traddles is excited by the prospect, imagining a future day when he will similarly come home to Sophy. When they arrive, however, David begins to wish there were more room around the table: the cottage is crowded with things like **Jip**'s dog house, Dora's guitar, and David's writing table. What's more, Jip continuously gets up on the table to bark at Traddles. David doesn't say anything about this, however, out of fear of hurting Dora's feelings. Over dinner, it further emerges that the oysters Dora bought specifically for Traddles can't be eaten: she forgot to have them opened, and she and David don't own any oyster-knives. The mutton, meanwhile, is undercooked, but Dora is so happy David isn't upset with her, and feels that the evening generally goes well.

To Traddles, who is still unmarried, David seems to have attained the Victorian domestic ideal: he has a home of his own and a wife waiting there, making sure that everything is comfortable for him after his long day at work. As the dinner party demonstrates, however, David's home life is actually not as perfect as it might seem. The various inconveniences that occur are minor and humorous, but they all speak in one way or another to Dora's struggles as a homemaker, and the chaotic atmosphere that results.

After Traddles leaves, Dora apologizes to David and asks him to teach her better housekeeping skills. David says that he is learning as well, and Dora wishes aloud that she had had a chance to learn from Agnes. Shyly, she then asks David if he will humor her by calling her a "stupid name" she likes: "child-wife." David asks why, and Dora explains that she thinks he will be less angry with her failings if he can think of her in that way. Much to Dora's delight, David agrees, and she spends the rest of the evening playing with **Jip**. According to David, this conversation lingered in his mind for a long time afterwards.

In asking David to think of her as his "child-wife," Dora is essentially asking him to be patient with her immaturity and not to expect too much of her. To some extent, she even seems to be asking David to act as a parent to her, instructing and guiding her in the art of being his wife. Like Dora's repeated accusations that David regrets marrying her, the request implies that Dora senses David's disappointment in her. More importantly, the fact that David takes the request seriously (and remembers it vividly) suggests that he too is becoming aware of the fact that he has made a mistake; rather than laughing the remark off or trying to "reason" with Dora as he has before, David begins to feel a kind of dim pity for her.

Not long after the dinner party, Dora tries once again to learn cooking and accounting. She is no more successful than before, in part because **Jip** keeps walking across the account book and smearing the ink. This then distracts Dora, who spends more time playfully punishing Jip than focusing on the accounts. David sometimes takes pity on her, like when he sees her struggling with "bills and other documents, which looked more like curl-papers than anything else," and attempts to instruct her. Since this also depresses and frustrates Dora, however, he typically gives up after a while, feeling guilty.

The comparison of Dora's accounts to curl-papers again suggests that it's Dora's femininity that's preventing her from being a competent housekeeper; everything she touches seems to become pretty and artful at the expense of practical use. The fact that Jip often compounds Dora's struggles is also significant, because Jip—a pampered and charming little lap dog—is in many ways a symbol of Dora herself.

David takes on more and more of the household work himself to spare Dora worry, but he begins to feel a vague sadness himself. Occasionally, it occurs to him that he wishes Dora were more of a "counselor," who could "sustain [him] and improve [him]," but he dismisses this as a desire for unrealistic, "unearthly" happiness. In retrospect, however, he admits that he was also very young and inexperienced, and that he might have caused a great deal of harm, however unintentionally. On the whole, though, Dora seemed much happier after David stopped pressing her to change.

To David's credit, he isn't cruel or even especially demanding with Dora in the way that Mr. Murdstone was with Clara; in fact, David goes out of his way to spare Dora anxiety, taking on traditionally feminine work himself so that Dora can resume her carefree life of singing and playing with Jip. It's clear, however, that Dora knows David isn't completely happy with her, which gives David's memories a bittersweet feel; although he tries to make Dora happy, his own unhappiness inevitably casts a pall over the relationship.

Dora takes to sitting up with David whenever he is working late at home. One evening, David attempts to send her to bed, but Dora becomes distressed and says she wants to see what he's writing. David teases her about tiring her "bright eyes," and while the compliment pleases her, Dora insists that she wants to stay. Finally, she says she has a "silly" question, and asks if she can hold David's pens as he writes, in order to feel that she is doing something useful. David agrees and—since she finds the task so delightful—concocts other tasks for her to do, including copying pages of writing.

The fact that Dora passes off her wish to help David as a "silly fancy" implies that she's afraid of being turned down, presumably on the grounds that she's not capable of supporting her husband in his career. To help Dora feel more at ease in her role as a wife, David cooks up tasks that she can't at, but that don't really affect his work one way or the other. In other words, while the Copperfields' marriage ultimately comes to resemble the Victorian ideal, with Dora dutifully dedicating herself to her husband, the resemblance is superficial; Dora is playing the role of a model wife without actually managing to help her husband, who in fact spends much of his time attending to her well-being.

Around the same time, Dora begins carrying the household keys around with her, although she mostly uses them as a toy for **Jip**. David lets the matter be, however, because Dora enjoys "this make-belief of housekeeping." Dora also becomes very attached to Miss Betsey, who in turn develops such a soft spot for Dora that she constantly tries (unsuccessfully) to win Jip over.

Like the tasks she does for David, Dora's possession of the keys is more about acting the part of a homemaker than actually being one. Dora, however, apparently sees no difference between the two, which is in keeping with her preference for ornamentality over practicality.

CHAPTER 45: MR. DICK FULFILLS MY AUNT'S PREDICTION

Although David no longer works for Doctor Strong, he now lives in the same neighborhood and sees him often. Mrs. Markleham still lives with the Doctor, and uses his insistence that Annie enjoy herself as an excuse to go out herself. In fact, she continually fuels the Doctor's fear that Annie is bored and unhappy to suit her own purposes. One day when David is there, Mrs. Markleham tells Doctor Strong that Annie can't be content being "shut up" inside the way she herself would be. She goes on to say that while the Doctor is an excellent man, his interests (like the dictionary) are naturally different from his young wife's. She is therefore willing to accompany Annie on outings out of a sense of "duty."

Although Mrs. Markleham doesn't seem aware of the rumors surrounding Annie and Jack Maldon, she's apparently willing to damage her daughter's reputation in other ways in pursuit of her own happiness; by suggesting that Annie is bored and in need of entertaining, Mrs. Markleham implicitly calls her devotion to Doctor Strong into question. What makes this especially troubling, from the perspective of the time, is the fact that Mrs. Markleham actually uses her daughter's loyalty to Doctor Strong as a way of manipulating her, suggesting that she would be ungrateful if she didn't comply with the Doctor's "wishes."

Doctor Strong sorrowfully agrees with all Mrs. Markleham says, and the end result is that Annie is often forced out over her own protests. Jack Maldon only rarely accompanies them, however, although Dora sometimes goes. Since David is now convinced that Mrs. Strong is not having an affair, he doesn't object to his wife's friendship with Annie.

Although Annie's devotion and selflessness make her a model Victorian wife, they also leave her vulnerable to suspicion in a strange way. Mrs. Markleham plays on Annie's love for her husband to persuade her to go out and do things against her will—the idea being that Annie would displease the Doctor if she didn't take advantage of his generosity. This in turn seems to confirm to the outside world that Annie is bored and eager to get away from her husband, when in fact she's simply trying to honor her husband's wishes.

Meanwhile, Miss Betsey finds the state of Doctor and Mrs. Strong's marriage troubling and confusing. She suspects Mrs. Markleham is making the situation worse, but Miss Betsey doesn't know how to fix it. She is confident, however, that Mr. Dick has a plan that will work out. Mr. Dick himself has not given any indication of this, but he continues to be close to both Doctor Strong and Annie.

As Miss Betsey suspects, Mrs. Markleham's overbearing presence is causing problems in her daughter's marriage; significantly, the restoration of harmony in the Strong household requires her to occupy a much less visible role than she had previously.

One night when Dora is out with Miss Betsey, Mr. Dick stops by David's house and asks to speak to him. Mr. Dick announces that Miss Betsey is "the most wonderful woman in the world" and then sits down, looking very serious. He asks David what he "considers" Mr. Dick, and—when David replies, "a dear old friend"—clarifies his meaning by tapping his head. Seeing David at a loss, Mr. Dick asks whether he isn't a little "weak," and David hesitantly agrees. This pleases Mr. Dick, and he explains that the business with Charles I has made him "simple," despite what Miss Betsey says. He is grateful to her, however, for saving him from life in an asylum, and is determined to provide for her.

Mr. Dick's relationship with Miss Betsey often resembles a marriage, though one that does not clearly conform to nineteenth-century norms. Here, for instance, Mr. Dick says he wants to provide for Miss Betsey in much the same way a husband ordinarily would. Although he isn't truly able to do this, he comes closer to fulfilling the masculine ideal over the course of the novel by doing things like taking work outside the home.

Mr. Dick moves on to the main subject of his visit and describes how grateful he is for Doctor Strong's patience, kindness, and wisdom. Mrs. Strong, meanwhile, is a "star" in Mr. Dick's eyes. He has noticed "clouds" in the marriage, however, which he doesn't understand. As delicately as he can, David says there is an "unfortunate division" between the Doctor and his wife. Having confirmed that Doctor Strong is not actually angry with Annie, Mr. Dick excitedly says that he knows the solution. He asks why Miss Betsey and David have not intervened, and David says that the subject is awkward. Triumphantly, Mr. Dick then says that a "poor fellow with a craze" doesn't need to obey those kinds of social conventions. Finally, he swears David to secrecy as Dora and Miss Betsey return.

The Strongs' situation reveals just how confining and counterproductive Victorian gender roles could be. Despite having only good intentions towards one another, Doctor and Annie Strong can't clear the air between them on their own; in fact, Annie's devotion to her husband is unintentionally exacerbating the situation, and her modesty and reserve prevent her from speaking freely to either her husband or her mother. What's more, family and marital affairs are seen as so private that no one outside the Strongs' relationship feels they can intervene. In the end, it takes action on the part of someone who exists entirely outside social norms—Mr. Dick—to restore happiness to the Strongs' marriage.

David thinks there is something to be said for Mr. Dick's plan, but he doesn't hear anything about it for a few weeks and begins to think Mr. Dick has forgotten. One day, however, David and Miss Betsey are going for an evening stroll and pass by Doctor Strong's house, where they find Annie Strong and Mr. Dick in the garden. Mrs. Strong says her husband is seeing someone in his study but will be free soon, and asks David and his aunt to come inside.

Within the context of the Strongs' marital problems, Mr. Dick's disability turns out to be an advantage. In part, this is because (as he himself says) it allows him to say things others couldn't. It also, however, allows him to befriend both Annie and the Doctor in a way that wouldn't be possible for most men; Mr. Dick can safely spend time alone with Annie because he is not seen as a sexual threat, and he can help her in "feminine" pasttimes like gardening because he is not obligated to conform entirely to masculine gender norms.

Mrs. Markleham soon enters the drawing room where David and Miss Betsey are seated, and scolds Annie for not informing her that Doctor Strong was meeting with someone about his will. She then explains how she overheard Doctor Strong confirming that the will demonstrates his "confidence" in Annie and leaves everything to her "unconditionally." According to Mrs. Markleham, she was overwhelmed by the Doctor's generosity to her daughter, and speaks glowingly of his "strength of mind." She also congratulates herself for having encouraged Annie to marry Doctor Strong on the assumption that he would leave her a large inheritance. Finally, she announces that she is going to the study and asks Miss Betsey and David to join her. Mrs. Strong comes along as well, leaning on Mr. Dick's arm.

Mrs. Markleham has no real right to know the contents of Doctor Strong's will, but her casual assumption that she does speaks to her complete disregard for her daughter's privacy. It's also a reflection of her own greed and social ambition, which (by association) casts doubt on Annie's motives in marrying the Doctor. Meanwhile, it's significant that the Doctor chooses to demonstrate his faith in Annie's loyalty by altering his will in her favor: the implication is that Annie deserves his money precisely because she didn't marry him for his wealth. The fact that he leaves her his money unconditionally is also a statement of faith in her judgment, since he could, if he wished, stipulate that she would lose access to the inheritance if she remarried (for example, to Jack Maldon).

Once inside the study, Annie Strong immediately kneels before Doctor Strong. Mr. Dick asks what's wrong as the Doctor tries to raise his wife to her feet, but Annie insists on staying where she is and implores her "husband and father" to "break this long silence." Mrs. Markleham scolds Annie for disgracing herself, but Annie says she is only concerned with her husband at the moment, offending Mrs. Markleham. Meanwhile, Doctor Strong that says any strain in their marriage is his fault and again urges her to stand up. Instead, Annie moves closer and rests her head on her husband's knee and begs "any friend" she has to speak.

Annie's pose makes her look like a fallen woman, begging for forgiveness on her knees in front of her husband. Since Annie hasn't actually done anything wrong, the fact that she assumes this penitent position is odd and troubling: the standards for female sexual behavior are so strict that Annie has to atone for something she hasn't done, simply because of the rumor mill. The fact that she calls Doctor Strong her "husband and father" reflects Victorian ideas about women's supposedly childlike natures, but it also intersects with the novel's interest in the ways parent-child relationships impact later romantic relationships. Annie and Doctor Strong are a rare example of a successful marriage that blurs the lines between these two kinds of relationships, although the age difference clearly does create some strain in the form of misunderstandings.

David hesitantly offers to reveal what he knows and—at Annie's urging—explains the conversation that took place between him, Uriah Heep, Mr. Wickfield, and Doctor Strong. When he finishes, Annie finally allows Mr. Dick to help her stand, saying she wants to "lay bare" all her thoughts and feelings over the course of her marriage. Both Doctor Strong and Mrs. Markleham insist that this is unnecessary, but Annie persists. She begins by explaining how some of her earliest memories involve her father's friend, Doctor Strong, who "stored [her] mind with its first treasures, and stamped his character upon them all." She therefore grew up respecting the Doctor and feeling indebted to him "as a father, as a guide," and was at a loss when her mother began to urge her to marry him.

Like her earlier penitent posture, Annie's insistence on revealing all her private thoughts and feelings is disturbing: proving her innocence is so important, both to her and to the novel, that she's forced to completely "bare" herself for approval. With that said, what Annie reveals here is significant, because it offers a window into another person's coming-of-age process. Although Annie credits Doctor Strong with shaping her into the person she now is, she also explains that she didn't immediately realize the significance of this, and therefore hesitated to marry him. This parallels David's own experiences with Agnes, who is the guiding influence in David's life, but whom David nevertheless regards as a sister for most of the novel.

Annie continues her story, explaining that she eventually grew used to the idea of marrying Doctor Strong, and was "proud" that he thought she deserved him. Because she herself had not thought about the Doctor's wealth when she married, it never occurred to her that anyone else would suspect her of marrying him for his money, and when Mrs. Markleham first alerted her to the possibility, she was distressed. She further explains that her mother's exploitation of the marriage—however unintentionally—for her own family's benefit concerned her: Annie noticed that Mr. Wickfield seemed to view her with increased suspicion, and it pained her to think about how her and her husband's love for one another was being misconstrued.

Once again, Annie's narrative reveals how strict the parameters governing appropriate female behavior were in the nineteenth century. To qualify as a good wife, it's not enough for Annie to simply be unmotivated by greed; she has to be so innocent that the thought of anyone marrying for money would never even have occured to her if Mrs. Markleham hadn't made her own motives clear.

The topic of Mrs. Markleham's family brings Annie to Jack Maldon, whom she admits she was once infatuated with. Now, however, she is very grateful she didn't marry him, because "There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose." These words strike David, although he isn't quite sure why. Meanwhile, Annie says she is grateful to Doctor Strong for saving her from "the first mistaken impulse of [her] undisciplined heart."

Annie's youthful infatuation with Jack Maldon continues to parallel David's own storyline, though David himself is only dimly aware of this at the time. The implication, however, is that while Annie's marriage to Doctor Strong saved her from recklessly marrying someone who wouldn't suit her, David gave into his similarly ill-advised impulses by marrying Dora.

However, while Annie wished Maldon would make more of an effort to find work, she tolerated him until his going-away party, when he tried to seduce her. At that point, she says, she realized not only that Maldon was "false," but also that Mr. Wickfield suspected her of having an affair. She was so ashamed, however, that she couldn't bring herself to speak to Doctor Strong. The fact that Doctor Strong insisted on being kind to Maldon for Annie's sake made the situation even more painful for her, and confirmed her feeling that the Doctor ought to have married someone else. Nevertheless, she says, she never meant to reveal any of this, but now that she has learned all the reasons for Doctor Strong's changed behavior towards her (and learned that he trusts her regardless), she feels compelled to declare her fidelity.

Like her early unawareness of her mother's ambition, Annie's initial ignorance of both Wickfield's suspicions and Maldon's intentions proves her sexual purity. Coupled with Annie's embarrassment about the night of the party, this reveals how rigid the standards of purity were at the time; whatever Maldon did to try to "seduce" Annie, he clearly did without her consent, and yet it's Annie who falls under suspicion and is obliged to clear her name. It's also interesting that Annie brings up the episode in the context of discussing Maldon's laziness and ingratitude to Doctor Strong, describing him as "false and thankless." The implication is that since Maldon has no qualms about taking advantage of the Doctor when it comes to advancing his career, he would similarly have no qualms about taking advantage of the Doctor's wife.

Throughout Annie's speech, Doctor Strong has attempted to reassure her. Now that she has finished, the couple embrace, and Annie begs her husband not to let anything else come between them but her own "imperfections."

Annie's explanation restores domestic harmony to the marriage and the household. It's worth noting, however that even as she reconciles with her husband, she insists on humbling herself one final time by alluding to her "many imperfections."

Miss Betsey goes to Mr. Dick and hugs him, saying he is a "remarkable man." Miss Betsey, Mr. Dick, and David then leave, with Miss Betsey remarking happily that Mrs. Markleham has been put in her place. Mr. Dick says that he feels a bit sorry for her, but Miss Betsey insists that the entire situation was Mrs. Markleham's fault, and that it's not appropriate for a mother to cling so much to a married child. David, meanwhile, is deep in thought, mulling over what Annie Strong had said about the importance of like-mindedness in marriage.

What seems to have disturbed Miss Betsey most about the Strongs' situation was Mrs. Markleham's interference in her adult daughter's life; this inappropriate meddling, according to Miss Betsey, was responsible for the entire misunderstanding. In contrast, throughout the novel, Miss Betsey has insisted that her role is to help David learn to become independent of her. David's closing thoughts, meanwhile, hint at his growing realization that Dora is not the proper wife for him.

CHAPTER 46: INTELLIGENCE

About one year into his marriage, David happens to walk by Mrs. Steerforth's house. As usual, it looks dark and uninhabited, and David continues on. He finds he can't stop thinking about the house, though, in part because he had already been mulling over "childish recollections and later fancies" in preparation for a novel he is working on.

The fact that David makes professional use of his memories is very significant. Memory is often a threat to characters' agency in David Copperfield, *both because it can overwhelm and incapacitate, and because it often dates back to a time when characters were less in control of their own lives. By consciously drawing on his memories, and especially by using them as a way to further his career, David demonstrates that he is the master of his experiences and recollections.*

Suddenly, David hears a woman's voice, which turns out to be Mrs. Steerforth's maid asking him to come in and talk to Rosa Dartle. David agrees, and learns from the maid as they walk back that Mrs. Steerforth is unwell and unhappy. The maid then leaves David in the garden with Rosa, whom he notices looks thinner and paler.

Steerforth's elopement with little Em'ly has effectively torn apart his own family as well as the Peggottys. In every other respect, however, the experience of the two families is very different, not only because the consequences of the affair are much more serious for Emily than for Steerforth, but also because Mrs. Steerforth's separation from her son is self-imposed— the result of both her class snobbery and her insistence that her son love her exclusively.

Rosa asks whether anyone has found little Em'ly (although she does not refer to her by name). David says that no one has, and Rosa explains, with obvious pleasure, that Emily has run away from Steerforth and may even be dead. David says that since Emily would probably be better off dead, he will take Rosa's "wish" as a sign that she has "softened" since they last spoke. Rosa, however, simply laughs and asks whether David wants to know what she can tell him. When David says that he does, she leads him to a different section of the garden, making him promise not to grow violent. She then brings out Mr. Littimer and gloatingly orders him to tell his story to David.

Being in love with Steerforth herself, Rosa clearly has her own reasons for hoping that Emily is dead, and for taunting any friend of Emily's as she does here. David's deliberate minsconstrual of Rosa's wish is striking, however; despite not knowing anything about where Emily is or what she's doing, David assumes that she would be better off dead. This is in keeping with the idea that a fallen woman could never again lead a happy or respectable life.

Littimer explains that he traveled with Steerforth and Emily to a number of places, including France, Switzerland, and Italy. Steerforth was unusually attached to little Em'ly, who quickly learned the native languages and passed for a lady. Despite this, Emily was prone to bouts of depression that annoyed Steerforth and made him "restless." The relationship eventually deteriorated so much that Steerforth simply left Emily at a villa in Naples one day. Littimer insists, however, that Steerforth behaved "honorably," because he arranged for Emily to marry a "respectable person"—Littimer himself, as David realizes. When Littimer broke the news of Steerforth's departure to Emily, she threatened to kill herself and then, when she learned of the proposed marriage, to kill Littimer. Littimer says that he was therefore forced to lock her inside the villa, but that she nevertheless managed to escape.

Although Emily outwardly took to her new station in life, she never quite becomes the lady she had aspired to be. Her fits of depression presumably stem partly from guilt, but also, the novel suggests, from her awareness of the precariousness of her position. Littimer says that Steerforth's restlessness only deepened Emily's gloom, probably because she feared what would happen to her if Steerforth left her; as his mistress, Emily has no official standing in society. Steerforth's proposal that Emily marry Littimer is therefore "honorable," because it assures her a respectable life going forward. Clearly, however, the arrangement completely ignored Emily's feelings, treating her more like a piece of property than a person and unintentionally mocking her dreams of being upper-class.

Rosa and Littimer speculate on Emily's fate: Rosa suggests that she is dead, but Littimer says she might have gotten help from some of the boatmen she used to talk to, much to Steerforth's annoyance. David finds the thought of Emily talking to families so similar to her own extremely painful, but Rosa simply orders Littimer to finish his story. Accordingly, Littimer explains that Steerforth was angry when he found out that Emily had escaped, and that Littimer therefore left Steerforth's service (or, more likely, was fired). Littimer says he came to England in the hopes of mending the rift between Steerforth and Mrs. Steerforth, but Rosa reminds him that she paid him to come.

Littimer's story suggests that Emily struck up friendships with the local fisherman out of longing for her own family. These friendships are completely unacceptable to Steerforth, because they threaten to expose Emily's real class background; although Steerforth himself is willing to dabble in friendships with working-class families, he ultimately views them as inferior. It's less clear why Emily's escape upset Steerforth as much as it did; although he might have felt lingering concern for her safety, it seems equally likely that he simply wanted to avoid a scandal.

David attempts to ask, through Rosa, whether Littimer or Steerforth intercepted any letters sent to little Em'ly. Littimer refuses to speak unless David addresses him directly, however, and David manages to suppress his anger long enough to do so. Even then, Littimer is cagey, ostensibly out of loyalty to Steerforth. He hints, however, that Steerforth wouldn't have allowed Emily to receive anything that might "increase low spirits and unpleasantness." David then announces he has nothing more to say to Littimer, except that he intends to tell Mr. Peggotty the role Littimer played in Emily's flight, and that Littimer should be on his guard. Littimer retorts that people are not allowed to take the law into their own hands, and that he will go where he likes. He then leaves Rosa and David alone.

As in the scenes involving Uriah, the conversation between David and Littimer blurs together questions of morality and class. David clearly dislikes Littimer for the way he has treated Emily, and the role he played in her departure. Littimer, however, implies that David is too proud to talk to him and defends his respectability before reminding him that "there are neither slaves nor slave-drivers in this country." This is largely a way for Littimer to deflect from the questionable things he's done, but it also perhaps suggests that some of those actions are driven by class resentment.

Rosa says that Littimer also told her that Steerforth is currently sailing off the coast of Spain. She explains that the rift between him and Mrs. Steerforth has not been mended, and that any chance of reconciliation hinges on Steerforth not seeing little Em'ly again. She therefore says that she has sent for David in spite of her own hatred for Emily, in the hopes that Littimer's information will help him find her.

Once again, the novel depicts Mrs. Steerforth and little Em'ly as rivals for Steerforth's affection, underscoring the unhealthy, jealous family dynamic at play.

At that moment, Mrs. Steerforth approaches, and David sees that she looks much older. She asks whether David has heard Littimer's story, and says that she hopes Mr. Peggotty will be able to find little Em'ly in order to prevent Steerforth from "again falling into the snares of a designing enemy." David assures her that he understands her motives but protests against her characterization of Emily. Mrs. Steerforth agrees to let the matter drop, and congratulates David on his marriage and professional success, saying that if he had a mother, she would be proud of him. David then says goodbye to Mrs. Steerforth and Rosa and, as he looks back at them, imagines that the rising mist is a "**sea**" preparing to engulf them. Later, he says, he had reason to remember this impression.

By suggesting that it was Emily who seduced Steerforth rather than vice versa, Mrs. Steerforth can maintain the fiction that her son didn't willingly choose Emily over his mother. The fact that Rosa, who is in love with Steerforth, also depicts Emily as a seductress highlights how borderline incestuous Mrs. Steerforth's feelings for her son are. Despite this, Mrs. Steerforth comes across as a pitiful and tragic figure in this scene. In complimenting David on his success, it sounds as though Mrs. Steerforth would like to be able to take similar pride in her own son, but is unable to see how her own actions have contributed to making him the spoiled and shallow man that he is. It's fitting, then, that it's David rather than Mrs. Steerforth or Rosa who senses the danger the family is in: his vision of the sea rising over them foreshadows Steerforth's impending death and the final destruction of the family.

The next evening, David goes to the rooms Mr. Peggotty keeps in London. Mr. Peggotty welcomes him in, and David notices that he keeps the apartment ready for little Em'ly's arrival. David tells Mr. Peggotty what he knows of Emily's whereabouts, and Mr. Peggotty is silent and thoughtful. Finally, he asks David what he thinks, and David says he believes little Em'ly is alive. Mr. Peggotty, however, is anxious, and wonders whether his niece's childhood fascination with the **sea** was a warning that she would drown herself. Nevertheless, he says he has a firm sense that she is still alive: in fact, he has been "*told* as she's alive." To David, Mr. Peggotty looks like "a man inspired" when he says this.

In contrast to the Steerforths' house, which no longer looks inhabited, Mr. Peggotty has maintained a home while waiting for Emily's return. This underscores the two family's opposite reactions to Steerforth and Emily's elopement; whereas Mrs. Steerforth selfishly sees her son's actions as a rejection of her and retaliates by disowning him, Mr. Peggotty's only concern is for his niece's well-being. Meanwhile, Mr. Peggotty's memories Emily's childhood serve as a form of foreshadowing; although Emily does die at sea as Mr. Peggotty fears, she does eventually travel across the sea to begin a new life elsewhere.

David raises a practical issue that has been troubling him, explaining that little Em'ly is likely to come to London, but not to seek out Mr. Peggotty. Instead, he says, she will try to lose herself in the city, which Mr. Peggotty sorrowfully agrees is true. David therefore suggests that Martha might be able to find little Em'ly, explaining how Emily had helped Martha in the past, and how Martha had listened in on their conversation at the public house. Since Mr. Peggotty has already mentioned seeing Martha in London, David asks whether he might be able to find her. Mr. Peggotty says that he thinks he knows where she is, and the two men prepare to leave. As they walk downstairs, Mr. Peggotty admits that he once thought Martha "like the dirt underneath [...] Emily's feet."

The shame attached to little Em'ly's actions is so great that David suspects she will be unwilling to seek out her family even in repentance. For that reason, David says, the only person Emily might be willing to speak to is Martha—a woman similarly tainted by sexual misconduct. Interestingly, Mr. Peggotty admits that he once shared society's prejudices toward fallen women; it is only now that he has been personally affected by the issue that he realizes he was unfair to Martha.

As they walk, David asks Mr. Peggotty about Ham, who is much the same: kind and uncomplaining, but uninterested in life. When David asks whether Ham might prove "dangerous" if he ever happened to meet Steerforth again, Mr. Peggotty admits that he doesn't know. David then reminds Mr. Peggotty of the conversation in which Ham talked about the "end of it" while looking out at the **sea**. Mr. Peggotty, however, says that while he has thought about the remark many times, he can't work out what Ham meant. He also doesn't want to ask Ham, because he senses that he would be disturbing "deep" thoughts best left alone. Mr. Peggotty agrees with David that Ham's demeanor is troubling, and that it would be better for him not to see Steerforth again.

Ham's mysterious remark about the "end of it" taking place at sea foreshadows the storm that will eventually kill both him and Steerforth. It's ironic, however, that David brings this episode up in the context of wondering whether Ham would try to hurt Steerforth if he saw him; ultimately, Ham dies trying to save Steerforth, not knowing who he is.

David and Mr. Peggotty are approaching Blackfriars Bridge, and Mr. Peggotty is on the lookout for any sign of Martha. Eventually, they see a woman on the opposite side of the road and begin to approach her, only for David to realize she might want to speak somewhere more private. David and Mr. Peggotty follow where she leads. Finally, they reach a "dull, dark street" and approach her.

Presumably, David thinks Martha might be reluctant to talk about her fallen state somewhere where she might be overheard, and her reputation further damaged.

CHAPTER 47: MARTHA

David and Mr. Peggotty continue to follow Martha into Westminster, where she approaches the riverside. The neighborhood is wet, impoverished, and littered with detritus from boats. To David, it looks as though Martha were "a part of the refuse [the Thames] had cast out, and left to corruption and decay." As Martha gazes out over the river, David approaches her in a state of "dread." She is talking to herself and looks so "wild," he is afraid she will jump into the water.

The place where Mr. Peggotty and David meet Martha is the first glimpse Dickens offers in David Copperfield *of the abject poverty of parts of nineteenth-century London. The rot and pollution of the area, and Martha's association with this moral "corruption and decay," picks up on earlier imagery depicting sexual promiscuity as an infectious disease. In this case, however, the implication is that poverty taints whatever it touches, breeding prostitution and crime.*

David calls out to Martha, who at first struggles to get away. When she sees Mr. Peggotty, however, she lets the men take her away from the water, although she continues to cry out "Oh, the river!" David tries to calm her down, but she says that she is drawn to the river, which is "like her" in the sense that it grows polluted and "defiled" on its way to the **sea**. Mr. Peggotty is horrified, and David—despite his own discomfort—tries to assure him that Martha doesn't mean what she says.

Martha's speech further develops the idea that her fallenness is a kind of pollution linked to social problems like poverty. She says, for instance, that she feels an affinity with the river that becomes "defiled and miserable" as it flows through London—possibly a reference to the role that urbanization was thought to play in encouraging prostitution.

Once Martha has stopped crying, David asks her if she knows who he and Mr. Peggotty are, and if she's willing to talk to them about little Em'ly. She says that she is, but wants to be sure that Mr. Peggotty doesn't consider her responsible for what happened. David assures her that he doesn't, and Martha says that she would have already killed herself if she had helped ruin someone who was so kind to her. In fact, she says, the worst thing about her own fall was that it cut her off from Emily's friendship, and when she learned Emily had run away, she would have done anything to undo it. Breaking down again, she begs Mr. Peggotty to kill her rather than to think the worst of her: she knows she is still far beneath Emily, but she nevertheless feels deep gratitude to her.

Martha's fear that Mr. Peggotty will hold her responsible for Emily's actions again implies that her mere presence could have somehow infected Emily. The fact that Martha is so horrified by this idea is a sign of the novel's relatively enlightened view on the plight of fallen women; contrary to popular wisdom, Martha's actions have not affected her basic sense of right and wrong. It's also noteworthy that Martha considers Emily to be her moral superior even now. The strong implication is that Martha has actually been supporting herself through prostitution, which would have been even more morally objectionable than simply having an affair out of wedlock.

Mr. Peggotty reassures Martha that he is in no position to judge her. He says he knows that she, like little Em'ly, was orphaned, and asks her to imagine Emily's feelings toward her adoptive father now—that is, that she both longs to see Mr. Peggotty again and is ashamed to go to him. Finally, he explains that he and David believe that little Em'ly will come to London, and asks Martha to help them find her when she does. Martha is at first surprised that Mr. Peggotty would trust her, but then solemnly pledges to do everything she can to find and help Emily, and asks "help, human and Divine, [to] renounce her evermore" if she abandons the task.

Like many other characters in the book, Martha is the product of a broken home. In fact, Mr. Peggotty implies that Martha was left entirely on her own after her parents' deaths, with no adoptive family to take care of her. This lack of guidance, Dickens suggests, likely played a role in Martha's later missteps. For that reason, the connection Mr. Peggotty establishes with Martha in this scene is especially significant; it is the first step toward drawing Martha into a surrogate family and therefore toward redemption.

David and Mr. Peggotty tell Martha everything they know of little Em'ly's whereabouts, and provide her with their addresses so that she can contact them. Martha refuses, however, to tell them where she lives, and also declines David's offer of money. Instead, she says that she will try to find work, because in accepting money, she feels she would be losing David and Mr. Peggotty's "trust." This, she says, is the only thing stopping her from killing herself. David begs her to put aside the idea of suicide, but all Martha can say is that she feels, for the first time, as though she has some kind of purpose in life—but she doesn't dare yet hope that she can be "saved." She then leaves, although David and Mr. Peggotty follow her until she reaches a more populous area.

Martha's relief in finally having a meaningful goal to pursue underscores the relationship between vocation and moral character in the novel: characters like Steerforth, who lack a clear sense of purpose and an ability to follow through on it are immature at best and immoral at worst. Part of what "saves" Martha is therefore having a form of work to pursue, but it's also important, by Martha's own admission, that this work be unpaid. Since Martha has likely traded sex for money in the past, either formally or (like Emily) as a kept mistress, payment itself has become suspect; the novel implies that she can only redeem herself by pursuing an entirely selfless goal.

David says goodbye to Mr. Peggotty and heads home. When he passes Miss Betsey's cottage, however, he notices that the door is open and goes to investigate, only to find a man standing in the garden eating and drinking. David realizes that it is the same man his aunt had stopped to talk to in the street years earlier. Eventually, Miss Betsey emerges from the cottage and tries to hand the man some money. She insists that it is all she can give him, but he refuses to leave without more. Upset, Miss Betsey asks why he treats her this way, and how she can "free [her]self" from him short of leaving him "to [his] deserts." The man asks why she doesn't abandon him, then, and Miss Betsey wonders aloud how hard-hearted he must be to ask her that.

Miss Betsey's relationship with her former husband reveals a more vulnerable (and therefore conventionally feminine) side to her. This vulnerability is evident not only in the fact that she clearly fears the man, but also in the fact that she still feels some level of affection for him. Although Miss Betsey recognizes that this tenderness is foolish and mostly the effect of nostalgia, she can't bring herself to cut her husband off entirely.

Miss Betsey and the man continue to argue, Miss Betsey insisting that she can't spare any more money and can't bear "seeing what [he has] become" any longer." She then begins crying, accusing him of treating her cruelly and turning her into a guarded and mistrustful woman. Taken aback by this, the man finally leaves, and David approaches his aunt, asking for permission to speak to the man. Miss Betsey, however, simply tells David to come in and give her a few moments to compose herself.

One reason why Miss Betsey was presumably so wary of David's infatuation with Dora is that she has experienced the effects of an ill-advised marriage firsthand. However, for Miss Betsey (and the novel's other female characters) the consequences of this kind of mistake are much more serious: since a middle-class woman's entire existence revolved around her husband and family, marrying the wrong person could ruin her entire life. Compared to Clara Copperfield, Miss Betsey is lucky in that she has managed to extricate herself from an abusive relationship, but the experience permanently altered her character.

David does as Miss Betsey asks, and she then tells him that the man is her husband, who is only "dead to [her]." She was deeply in love with him at one point, but he "repaid her by breaking her fortune, and nearly breaking her heart." This, she explains, is why she is so tough and unsentimental now. Nevertheless, she says, she tried to provide for him when the marriage ended, although his treatment of her meant that she could have won a "separation on easy terms." He squandered the money she gave him, however, and eventually married another woman. She does not want to see him arrested, however, so she continues to pay him money what she can. Once she has explained all this, Miss Betsey asks David not to speak any more about her "grumpy, frumpy story."

Divorce was difficult to obtain in nineteenth-century England, although it gradually became easier as the century went on. At the time Dickens wrote David Copperfield, *however, a woman couldn't actually separate from her husband on grounds of abuse alone, so it's likely that Miss Betsey's husband also had an affair. Regardless, his treatment of Miss Betsey reveals the vulnerable position of married women in the nineteenth century; he was able to squander her money, for instance, because a husband gained possession of all his wife's property on marrying her.*

CHAPTER 48: DOMESTIC

David publishes his first novel, which does well. This reassures him that he has chosen the correct vocation, and as he is now earning a sufficient income from writing, he quits his work as a parliamentary reporter.

David's professional journey is now more or less complete; although he goes on to become even more successful, what's most important in this coming-of-age story is the fact that he's found a calling and stuck with it. The fact that the career he settles into is writing is one of the more explicit ways in which David Copperfield *parallels Dickens' own life.*

By about a year and a half into their marriage, David and Dora have largely given up their attempts at housekeeping. They do employ a page, who argues constantly with the cook. Despite this, David can't quite bring himself to fire the page, who is a young boy with a "lively perception of his own unfortunate state." Every time David raises the topic of dismissing him, the page cries pitifully and makes David reconsider. Eventually, however, the page is caught stealing Dora's watch, and he confesses to stealing several other items as well. David still has no intention of dismissing him, because he is embarrassed to have been such an unwitting "victim." The police ultimately apprehend the page, however, and deport him.

Despite his professional success, David is still young and naïve when it comes to domestic matters. A more savvy employer, David implies, would have caught the page stealing much earlier, or perhaps avoided the entire situation in the first place. Furthermore, far from being in charge of his servants, David allows himself to be manipulated by them.

The debacle with the page convinces David to try talking to Dora again, and he tells her that he regrets that their "want of system and management" has now gotten people besides themselves in trouble. Dora is worried that David will be cross and tries to distract him by holding **Jip** up to his face. Eventually, however, she does as David says and sends Jip off to his dog house. David then explains that their bad housekeeping not only inconveniences them, but also "spoils" everyone around them. Dora protests that David has never caught her stealing watches, and then begins to cry, saying David shouldn't have married her if he thought she was "worse than a transported page."

Although it's treated humorously, the episode involving the page reveals just how serious a matter housekeeping was in the nineteenth century. In fact, David suggests that housekeeping is a moral issue, since lax standards encourage misbehavior on the part of servants (and probably children as well, if David and Dora had any). Theoretically, setting a good standard ought to be one of Dora's responsibilities as mistress of the house, so Dora's reaction to David, though melodramatic, isn't completely unjustified: any criticism of the running of the household is an implied criticism of Dora herself.

David gently tells Dora that this is "ridiculous" and begs her to be "reasonable": if they fail in their "duties" to servants, then their servants will fail them, and take advantage of "opportunities [...] to do wrong." Dora, however, is inconsolable, and asks why he doesn't send her back to her aunts or to Miss Mills.

David's discussion of "duties" expands on the moral aspects of housekeeping. David suggests that poor housekeeping threatens to disrupt the social order by allowing the lower classes to neglect their responsibilities to their supposed betters.

After this conversation, David decides that a different approach is necessary, and resolves to "form [Dora's] mind." He stops playing along with her "childish" mannerisms, talks to her about serious topics, and reads Shakespeare to her. All of this unnerves Dora, but David presses on in the hopes of a "time when there should be a perfect sympathy between Dora and [himself]." After several months of little progress, however, he is forced to admit to himself that Dora won't change. By way of apologizing for his behavior, he buys Dora some earrings (along with a collar for **Jip**), and then sits her down for a conversation.

David's attempts to mold Dora's character are an attempt to guide her through the same coming-of-age process he has undergone himself. As David eventually realizes, however, Dora is as mature as she's ever going to be, and his attempts to fashion her into his ideal wife are pointless. These attempts are also reminiscent of Mr. Murdstone's treatment of Clara, and while David is not intentionally cruel to Dora, it's clear that his actions hurt her.

David admits that he has been "trying to be wise," and Dora guesses that he has been trying to make her wise as well. She says that this is a hopeless task, and confesses that she fears David doesn't like her as she is. She then begins to say something else, but David—finishing her sentence—says that it would have been better for him not to try to change her. On Dora's urging, he promises not to bring up issues like corrupting the servants again, and tells her that he simply wants them to "go back to [their] old way, and be happy" even if it sometimes means being inconvenienced.

Although David apologizes for his behavior, his last-ditch effort to change Dora seems to have confirmed the latter's suspicions that she isn't truly what David wants: she says at one point that "it would have been better" and then breaks off. She presumably means that "it would have been better" if she and David hadn't married, and perhaps that "it would have been better" if David married Agnes instead.

David explains that this was his last attempt to change Dora, and that doing so had made him feel miserable and guilty. He admits, however, that he felt a vague and ongoing sadness throughout this period of his life. Although he had resigned himself to the fact that perfect happiness in marriage is impossible, he also realized that his discontent stemmed in part from Dora's inability to be an equal partner for him. He also began to connect these thoughts with his "contented days with Agnes, in the dear old house [...] that might have some renewal in another world, but never never more could be reanimated here." He never stopped loving Dora, and was only half-aware of these thoughts himself. Remembering what Annie Strong had said about "undisciplined hearts" and "disparity in marriage," he also worked to adapt to Dora in order to avoid serious unhappiness.

Unlike Dora, David never suggests that the marriage was a mistake; in fact, he says here that his attempts to change Dora made him unhappy in part because they threatened to eliminate the qualities he'd found so charming in Dora to begin with. With that said, one reason David is able to view his marriage to Dora in this light is the fact that he survives it and remarries; in fact, his first marriage actually facilitates his second by teaching him the importance of compatibility between spouses. In this passage, he has already begun to recognize this, and even to sense that Agnes, not Dora, is his ideal partner.

David and Dora's second year of marriage is happier than the first. Dora, however, grows extremely ill after losing a baby and never entirely recovers her strength.

In light of her childishness, it's significant that the illness that eventually kills Dora stems from pregnancy and/or childbirth: the implication is that Dora is unable to successfully make the transition to adult womanhood—and, more specifically, motherhood.

One day, Dora tells Miss Betsey that when she is well, she will make **Jip** run around again, because he is growing lazy. Miss Betsey gently tells her that Jip is not lazy but old, which distresses Dora. Miss Betsey tries to reassure her, saying Jip will revive in the spring, and that he will probably live for many more years. If Dora wants a dog to race, though, Miss Betsey will buy her another. Dora, who has pulled Jip onto the sofa and is petting him sadly, says she couldn't have any dog but Jip, who "barked at Doady [David] when he first came to [her] house." Miss Betsey says that Dora is right, and that she is not offended, and Dora says she doesn't want to "slight" Jip, who will keep her company "a little longer."

Given the similarities between Jip and Dora, the dog's growing weakness doesn't bode well for Dora; in fact, it foreshadows her own approaching death. Dora seems to sense this, since she reacts with such distress to the idea that Jip is growing old. Interestingly, however, she rejects the idea of adopting a new dog, choosing instead to focus on happy memories of Jip, which also happen to correspond to memories of David's courtship. Although Dora's illness may technically be the result of childbirth, it's hard to escape the sense that a part of her has simply lost the will to live; she seems less interested in the future than the past, and especially in what was likely the happiest period of her life—the time just after meeting David but before actually marrying him.

David has Traddles over for dinner shortly after this, and Dora gets out of bed for the occasion, looking a little better. She is still too weak to walk, however, and doesn't seem to be recovering as the days pass. Consequently, David begins to carry her downstairs each day, which amuses Dora—particularly because **Jip**, Miss Betsey, and Mr. Dick often form part of the "procession." However, David can't help but notice, with increasing dread, that Dora is growing lighter and lighter. Then one evening Miss Betsey calls Dora "Little Blossom" as she says goodnight to her, and David starts to cry, thinking about how "fatal" the nickname is.

Despite Dora's own attempts to make light of her condition, it's increasingly obvious that she's dying. Miss Betsey's nickname for Dora brings this inadvertently to David's attention by calling to mind the frailty and short lifespan of actual "blossoms."

CHAPTER 49: I AM INVOLVED IN MYSTERY

One morning, David receives a letter from Mr. Micawber. In it, he explains that although he has not been able to keep in touch with David, he still treasures their friendship. Although Mr. Micawber assures David that he is not asking for money, he alludes vaguely to circumstances that are conspiring to ruin his life, and that have caused him distress that even Mrs. Micawber cannot alleviate. For that reason, he says, he intends to "fly from [him]self" for a few days by traveling to London, and suggests that Traddles and David meet him the day after tomorrow outside King's Bench Prison.

Mr. Micawber's modest professional success has thrown his domestic life into disarray to such an extent that Mrs. Micawber can't even fulfill her wifely role of comforting her husband. In other words, the public and private spheres, which are supposed to be strictly separate, are bleeding into one another in this passage.

David finds the letter confusing but senses that it is important. He is therefore happy when Traddles stops by, and surprised when Traddles reveals that he has also received a letter—in his case, from Mrs. Micawber. They exchange letters, and David finds that Mrs. Micawber's involves Mr. Micawber's strange behavior: in addition to being withdrawn, he is now prone to alarming outbursts of temper. Mrs. Micawber then explains that her husband is going to London, and that she hopes Traddles will meet with him and "reason with him."

Incredibly, the Micawber family seemed to function better when Mr. Micawber had no regular source of income than it does now that he is employed full-time. Although the public and domestic spheres were supposed to be separate in Victorian England, Mr. Micawber is venting his frustration with his employer at home.

Traddles and David agree that the letters are not simply the Micawbers' usual exaggerations, but they can't figure out what is going on. They agree, however, that they ought to write to Mrs. Micawber and assure her that they will meet with Mr. Micawber; David, in particular, feels guilty that he had been too absorbed in his own affairs to respond properly to Mrs. Micawber's earlier letter to him. David and Traddles send a letter the same day, and then explain what is going on to Miss Betsey, who is similarly mystified as to what is happening.

The Micawbers' predicament is puzzling, because the couple is at odds despite the apparent "good faith" on both Mr. and Mrs. Micawber's parts. This situation is reminiscent of the earlier misunderstanding between Doctor and Annie Strong, and it's striking that Uriah Heep played a role in stirring up disharmony in that marriage as well. Combined with Uriah's oppressive influence on the Wickfield household, these incidents paint Uriah as a disturber of domestic peace.

David and Traddles arrive early to the meeting, and find Mr. Micawber already there, looking fondly at the prison. He greets them courteously, but David notices that he looks less "genteel" than he used to. When David asks how Mrs. Micawber is, Micawber says she is only "so-so," and then begins to describe how much he misses being in debtor's prison, where he was free from financial pressures. David reminds him that they have all moved on, but Micawber says that at least in those days he could "look [his] fellow-man in the face, and punch his head if he offended [him]."

Mr. Micawber's fond memories of prison are probably colored by nostalgia, but his point about the pressures of life outside is interesting. To support his family, Mr. Micawber has had to compromise his sense of right and wrong by working for Uriah. In other words, while characters like David achieve financial success through hard work and patience, some characters (like Micawber) seem incapable of achieving similarly "honest" success through no fault of their own.


David, Traddles, and Mr. Micawber go for a walk, the latter saying that he wishes he had never taken up the legal profession. Traddles says he hopes that Mr. Micawber doesn't have a prejudice against the law per se, since he himself is a lawyer. Micawber, however, doesn't respond until David asks how Uriah is. At this, he explodes, saying that Uriah is not his friend, that Uriah's " appearance is foxy," and that he doesn't want to talk about a topic that has caused him so much distress. David accordingly asks about Mr. Wickfield and Agnes, and Mr. Micawber praises Agnes as the "only starry spot in a miserable existence." He is so overwhelmed, in fact, that he ducks into a deserted street and cries, saying that even his respect for Agnes has become a "reproach" to him.

Like virtually everyone else who meets Agnes, Mr. Micawber is immediately impressed by her grace and kindness. The fact that Dickens depicts Agnes in this way isn't surprising, because it captures the Victorian idea that a truly virtuous woman casts an aura of goodness around her. Agnes's mere presence therefore inspires Mr. Micawber to be better, or at least to feel guilty about his service to Uriah.

After Mr. Micawber composes himself, David offers to take him back to Miss Betsey's to meet his aunt and to make punch. Mr. Micawber accepts and, together with Traddles, they take a coach to Highgate. When they arrive at Miss Betsey's, Mr. Dick is also there, and shakes Mr. Micawber's hand several times in an attempt to cheer him up. Micawber congratulates Miss Betsey on Mr. Dick's kindness, and she agrees that Mr. Dick is "not a common man."

Dickens' characters often have tic-like mannerisms: Micawber, for instance, is always eager to make punch. In part, these mannerisms are simply a way to distinguish between the large cast of characters. With that said, the fact that David suggests making punch at this point in this story is significant; Micawber makes punch in a ceremonial way that underscores his status as head of his household, so David's suggestion is perhaps a way of allowing Micawber to feel empowered at a time when his professional and personal lives are in turmoil.

Mr. Micawber continues to praise Mr. Dick, but David senses that there is something he wants to disclose. Appearing to sense the same, Miss Betsey engages Mr. Micawber in conversation, saying that she knows he is an old friend of David's. Micawber agrees that he is, and says that he wishes he had met Miss Betsey before he was "the wreck" he now is. When Miss Betsey asks about Micawber's family, he describes them as "Aliens and Outcasts," and begins to explain that his position at work is precarious. At Mr. Dick's urging, Micawber continues, saying that if he weren't working for Uriah, his whole family would likely be part of a traveling circus. He is in the middle of making punch while he says this, and after mixing up several steps, he abruptly stops and bursts into tears.

Mr. Micawber's explanation of his family's situation is characteristically fanciful, and mostly serves as comic relief—particularly given that Micawber's words are set against the confused responses of the more practical Miss Betsey. Still, it is true that Mr. Micawber is in a position where behaving honorably (that is, exposing Uriah) will jeopardize his family's financial stability.

David asks Mr. Micawber what's wrong, and Micawber replies that, "Villainy is the matter; baseness is the matter; deception, fraud, conspiracy, are the matter; and the name of the whole atrocious mass is—HEEP." He then announces that he won't remain cut off from all his friends and family any longer. Growing angrier, Micawber says that he will not feel at ease around others until he has destroyed Uriah in one way or another, like by "mov[ing] Mount Vesuvius—to eruption—on—a—the abandoned rascal—HEEP". In a confused and halting way, Micawber indicates that he won't explain any more at the present; he invites everyone, however, to a breakfast in one week, where he says he will expose Uriah.

Although Mr. Micawber doesn't go into details, it seems clear that Uriah has been using his position at Wickfield and Heep for personal gain. On the face of it, this criminality is what differentiates Uriah's social climbing from David's.

Mr. Micawber then races out of the cottage, but sends a letter while David, Miss Betsey, Mr. Dick, and Traddles are still trying to make sense of his visit. In the note, Micawber apologizes to Miss Betsey for his agitation, which he says had been brewing for a long time. He also clarifies when and where the meeting will take place, in case he hadn't been intelligible before. After this meeting, he says, he will once again be able to "contemplate [his] fellow mortal," and will be free at last to die.

For all Mr. Micawber's irresponsibility, he's an honest person who doesn't want to be mixed up in Uriah's criminal business dealings—even if doing so would benefit Micawber financially. The idea that he has compromised himself ethically is deeply shameful, though he expresses this in a typically theatrical, exaggerated way.

CHAPTER 50: MR. PEGGOTTY'S DREAM COMES TRUE

As time goes on, David becomes less hopeful that little Em'ly will ever be found (at least alive). Mr. Peggotty, however, is as certain of finding her as ever, despite the fact that Martha's messages to him have never led to anything. He even travels to Naples to try to learn more about his niece's whereabouts, and David finds his devotion touching. Mr. Peggotty also becomes a favorite of Dora, and he pays frequent visits to David's house.

Mr. Peggotty's single-minded determination to find little Em'ly makes him a model parent in the novel. Although his love for his niece is clearly as deep as Mrs. Steerforth's for Steerforth, it isn't possessive in the same way. In fact, as Mr. Peggotty's long and difficult journey demonstrates, his love for Emily is entirely selfless.

On one of these visits, Mr. Peggotty tells David that he has seen Martha recently, and that she told him not to leave London in the near future. David says nothing, not wanting to give Mr. Peggotty false hopes Two weeks later, though, David is again walking in his garden when he sees Martha on the road next to his cottage. She asks him to come with her, explaining that she left a message for Mr. Peggotty with instructions on where to meet them. David agrees and hails a coach, which they take to central London. Martha refuses to say anything on the way, but leads David to a street full of rundown and overcrowded houses when they arrive. They enter one of these buildings, which still bears traces of its former lavish decorations, and climb to the top floor.

According to David, the neighborhood where Martha takes him was at one point full of "fair dwellings in the occupation of single families" that have since "degenerated into poor lodgings let off in rooms." This description echoes one common criticism of poverty in the nineteenth century, which was that it had a destructive effect on the nuclear family; here, for instance, houses have been divided up in such a way that people unrelated to one another are sharing close quarters, while families might be sharing single rooms. Critics of this sort of housing often claimed that the cramped conditions encouraged sexual misconduct, so it's significant that Martha is one of the building's tenants.

As David and Martha reach Martha's room, they see a woman enter before them. David recognizes her as Rosa Dartle and, hearing voices inside the room, he and Martha go around to a back door, where they pause and listen in on the conversation. Rosa says that she has come to see the other speaker, whom David realizes, by her voice, is little Em'ly. Rosa continues, saying she wants to know what kind of woman Steerforth ran off with, and there is a scuffle as Emily tries to leave the room and Rosa stops her. Emily is obviously terrified by this point, but David doesn't feel he has a "right" to intervene, and simply wishes Mr. Peggotty would arrive.

David's decision not to intervene reflects the delicacy of the situation; because of the shame Emily presumably feels, David considers it inappropriate for anyone but her family to intervene. With that said, David may also be holding back out of lingering feelings of resentment towards a woman who in some sense rejected him.

As Rosa continues to taunt little Em'ly for her "mock-modesty," Emily begs her to show her some mercy on account of their shared womanhood. Rosa scoffs at this, and goes on to describe Emily as a seductress and a "purchased slave." She has no sympathy for Emily's pleas and expressions of remorse, and asks whether she "ever thinks of the home [she has] laid waste." Assuming that Rosa means Mr. Peggotty's home, Emily says she thinks about it constantly and with shame. This angers Rosa, who mocks the idea that the Peggotty's home could fall any lower, describing Emily as "a part of the trade of [her] home, [who was] bout and sold like any other vendible thing."

Rosa's repeated descriptions of Emily as a "bold" seductress are clearly at odds with Emily's actual behavior in this scene, which is frightened and meek. This discrepancy is partly a result of Rosa's jealousy, but it also serves to make Emily more sympathetic by way of contrast, which is important given the prejudices a nineteenth-century reader would likely have had towards her. However, while Dickens' sympathies clearly lie with Emily, Rosa does make an interesting point about home and family life. In effect, Rosa questions the idea that the home is entirely separate from the public sphere; instead, she suggests that each member of a family like Emily's is valuable as a source of income.

Emily begs Rosa not to speak of her family so disrespectfully, but Rosa simply ignores her, saying that she was talking about Steerforth's home, and the rift little Em'ly ("this piece of pollution") has caused between Mrs. Steerforth and her son. Emily protests that she never meant to cause them any harm, saying she was well brought-up and that Steerforth played on her innocence and love for him. The mention of love, however, enrages Rosa further: she nearly strikes Emily, and then says that she ought to be whipped for daring to mention love. She continues on sarcastically, saying that she did not expect to find Emily "true gold, a very lady," and that she therefore urges her to seek out an "obscure death," if her "loving heart will not break" otherwise.

Although it's obviously untrue, Rosa's claim that Emily is solely responsible for the breakup of the Steerforth family reflects widely held nineteenth-century beliefs about fallen women—namely, that they posed a threat to the nuclear family. There were widespread fears, for instance, about men who had visited prostitutes passing on sexually transmitted diseases to their families. Meanwhile, Emily argues that her family is equal to Rosa's in terms of feeling and virtue—in other words, that love, rather than financial considerations, is what binds them together. Interestingly, she makes this point by claiming she was "brought up as virtuous as [...] any lady." Given her earlier desire to become a lady, this perhaps signals a new contentment with her position in life, since it suggests that it's possible to be a "lady" in moral terms rather than in class ones.

Rosa warns little Em'ly that if she doesn't leave this house immediately, she will tell everyone about Emily's past. Furthermore, she will do the same elsewhere if Emily ever tries to pass herself off as a respectable woman. Sobbing, Emily asks what she is supposed to do, while David wonders desperately where Mr. Peggotty is. Rosa, however, is unmoved, and tells Emily to "live happy" in her memories of Steerforth's "tenderness," to marry Littimer, or to simply die. She then reiterates her intention to have little Em'ly "cast out" of decent society.

Ironically, Rosa's suggestion that little Em'ly "consecrate" the remainder of her life to Steerforth's memory foreshadows what will become of Rosa herself; after Steerforth's death, she continues to live with Mrs. Steerforth, apparently bound to the household by her own bitterness over the past.

As Rosa is speaking, David hears footsteps on the staircase, and Mr. Peggotty rushes into Martha's room as Rosa leaves it. David sees him catch little Em'ly as she faints, and cover her face with a handkerchief. He then thanks God for bringing him to Emily and carries her out of the room.

Mr. Peggotty seems to cover Emily's face to shield her from David's gaze, recalling David's earlier reluctance to enter the room and see Emily face to face. In fact, David only sees Emily once more before she leaves the country, and then only from a distance.

CHAPTER 51: THE BEGINNING OF A LONGER JOURNEY

The next morning, David is walking in his garden with Miss Betsey when he hears that Mr. Peggotty has come to talk to him. Miss Betsey offers to leave the two men alone, but Mr. Peggotty asks her to stay and explains that he brought little Em'ly back to his room last night, where she knelt before him and explained everything that had happened "as if it was her prayers." At first, Mr. Peggotty says, he found it painful to hear her speak in such a "humbled" way. He was so grateful to have Emily home, however, that this sadness quickly passed.

Although she's not apologizing per se, Emily recounts her experiences in a way that is explicitly penitent: she is kneeling in front of her uncle, and her manner of speaking is similar to a religious plea. This underscores the seriousness of Emily's transgressions.

Mr. Peggotty explains that when Emily escaped from Littimer, she ran along the beach until she passed out from exhaustion. The next morning, she woke up to see a sailor's wife she'd made friends with standing over her. The woman took little Em'ly back to her house, hiding her and nursing her through a fever. While Emily was sick and delirious, she imagined she was back near Mr. Peggotty's old house, but also that Steerforth and Littimer were lurking nearby. When Emily finally came back to herself and remembered where she was, she started crying, and the woman who had taken her in consoled her. Meanwhile, as Mr. Peggotty speaks, David is impressed by the vividness of his story, and feels as if he were actually present for it.

The friendships that Emily made with local fishing families, which Steerforth disapproved of, ultimately save her life. Symbolically, her convalescence in the sailor's household also marks a return to and acceptance of the working-class status she had tried to cast off by running away with Steerforth; Emily, in other words, once again becomes one of the "good" working-class characters who accepts her station in life. Initially, however, the resemblance to her childhood and the memories that resemblance provokes upset Emily, because she can't truly return to a childhood state of innocence.

The fever temporarily wiped out Emily's knowledge of Italian, so she struggled to communicate even as she grew physically stronger. Eventually, however, a little girl she had made friends with called out to her as "Fisherman's daughter," and she remembered how to speak. Once Emily had fully recovered, the woman she was staying with arranged passage for her to France; Emily attempted to pay her and her husband for their kindness, but they refused, and Mr. Peggotty blesses their selfless generosity.

Emily's amnesia temporarily erases one of the major signs of the changes she has undergone since leaving her home—namely, her fluency in foreign languages. The forgetfulness isn't permanent, because Emily can't really return to the person she was before. Her sickness and recovery, however, serve as a symbolic form of rebirth, so it's fitting that Emily has to relearn language the way a young child would. Meanwhile, her hosts' refusal to accept any payment once again associates working-class virtuousness with the absence of ambition or greed.

Once in France, little Em'ly took work at an inn. However, when she happened to see Littimer one day, she fled to England. Although she initially planned to return home, she soon found she was too frightened of her family's anger and the community's scorn. Instead, she went to London, where she was nearly tricked into service as a prostitute by a madam who promised to find her work as a seamstress. At this point, however, Martha found Emily and took her back to her room. Although she told Emily that she had spoken to Mr. Peggotty, and that he had forgiven her, she did not tell Emily when she went out in search of Mr. Peggotty and David. Mr. Peggotty says he isn't sure how Rosa found Emily, but he suspects Littimer told her.

Little Em'ly's storyline nearly falls into the conventional pattern associated with fallen women—that is, a downward spiral leading to poverty and death. Interestingly, however, she is rescued by Martha, another fallen woman. This turns earlier fears that Martha would corrupt Emily on their head, and is therefore a sign of the novel's relatively tolerant view of fallen women: not only is Martha not a harmful influence on other women, but she is actually a positive one, actively working to save both Emily and herself.

Mr. Peggotty says that he and Emily stayed up all night together, crying and talking. Miss Betsey, moved by the story, says she wishes she could be godmother to the child of the woman who took Emily in (since she can't be godmother to David's imaginary sister).

Miss Betsey's wish is a sign of the sentimentality that underlies her gruff exterior, and her remark about David's sister serves as a moment of comic relief. It's striking, however, that Miss Betsey seems to take it for granted that little Em'ly will not have children of her own. This suggests that the novel to some extent buys into the idea that Emily is ruined forever as a result of her transgressions.

Finally, David asks whether Mr. Peggotty has made up his mind about what to do next. Mr. Peggotty says that he has, and David explains that he intends to emigrate with Emily. Mr. Peggotty then says he has already arranged to board a ship for Australia leaving in about two months. Peggotty, however, will not be going, both because she wants to remain close to David, and out of concern for Ham, whom she keeps house for. Meanwhile, Mr. Peggotty says he intends to provide an allowance for Mrs. Gummidge so that she can have her own house (his thinking being that Peggotty might find her gloominess annoying). David is impressed by Mr. Peggotty's thoughtfulness toward everyone around him.

By taking Emily to a foreign country, Mr. Peggotty hopes to spare her societal condemnation: in Australia, no one will know about her affair with Steerforth. The fact that he settles on Australia specifically is interesting, however, because it had been a penal colony and was consequently associated, in the popular imagination, with criminality—including prostitution. In some sense, Emily seems unable to escape her past even by traveling to another continent (though in reality, the scarcity of female colonists in Australia would have made it relatively easy for her to start over and marry if she wanted to).

Mr. Peggotty explains that there is one more thing that troubles him: the money that Emily sent to him over the years. He has brought it with him and asks David to count it, and then explains that he is planning on sending it back to Steerforth and Mrs. Steerforth before leaving the country. He also admits that he is anxious about Ham: he plans to go to Yarmouth to visit him, and asks David to come with him. David agrees, and they set off the next morning.

Once again, Mr. Peggotty refuses to profit off of Emily's relationship with Steerforth. This demonstrates both his own acceptance of his working-class status and shields Emily from any hint of prostitution.

David and Mr. Peggotty pass Mr. Omer's shop on the way to visit Ham, and David stays behind to talk to Omer while Mr. Peggotty goes on ahead. Mr. Omer's health has declined since David last saw him—he is now confined to a wheelchair—but he is in good spirits, and says he "sees more of the world" now than he ever did before. Furthermore, he is proud of Minnie and Joram, who are running the business quite successfully. Mr. Omer also congratulates David on his success as a novelist, and reminisces about how far he has come since he was a small child at Blunderstone.

As it has before, David's visit to Mr. Omer serves partly as a way of marking the passage of time, and how much has changed since David's childhood. Since he was present at Clara Copperfield's funeral, Omer is one of David's last remaining links to that earliest part of his life, and the fact that Omer himself is now growing older and closer to death is bittersweet.

David fills Mr. Omer in on how little Em'ly was found, and Omer—though pleased to hear about Emily—asks what will now happen to Martha. David is sure that Mr. Peggotty has not forgotten about her, but admits that he doesn't know. Mr. Omer says he would like to help her out if possible, because he always thought she had good in her. In any case, he says, since everyone will ultimately die, it is important to be kind to one another. This reminds him to ask about Ham, who often comes to keep Mr. Omer company in the evening. David says he is going to see Ham now, and Omer sends his respects before explaining that he has promised to be in bed by six, and insisting that David see his grandchild Minnie (his "little elephant") before leaving.

Martha is arguably even more "tainted" than little Em'ly, so the fact that Mr. Omer feels she deserves a second chance is noteworthy, and points to the novel's relatively tolerant views on fallen women.

David goes to Ham's house, where Peggotty now lives as well. Mr. Peggotty has brought Mrs. Gummidge over as well, and both she and Peggotty are crying over the news of little Em'ly's return. Ham is out taking a walk but soon returns and greets David happily. The group discusses Mr. Peggotty's impeding voyage, but not Emily herself. David thinks Ham looks peaceful, but Peggotty tells him, as she walks David to his room, that he is "broken-hearted," and only ever refers to little Em'ly as a young girl. David senses that Ham wants to speak to him privately and decides to seek him out.

Ham's reluctance to speak about Emily as a grown woman is understandable given his personal history with her, and indicates the extent to which he has stopped caring about the future; he seems to be living entirely in memories of his and Emily's youth. In the context of the entire novel, Ham's behavior also fits into a broader pattern of discomfort with female sexuality. There's little room for women who aren't either permanent children (like Dora) or pure angels (like Agnes).

The next day, Mr. Peggotty is busy packing up or giving away his possessions. David arranges to meet him and Mrs. Gummidge at the old boat-house that evening, because he wants to see it one last time. In the meantime, he seeks out Ham on his way back from work. Ham asks David whether he has seen little Em'ly, and David responds that he only saw her briefly, and that he suspects she might find it difficult to see David now. He also says he is willing to take charge of any written message that Ham might want to send Emily.

With the sale of the Peggotty's house, David loses yet another reminder of his childhood, if not a place that served as a second home to him. Although the loss is necessary and unavoidable, David is still wishes to store up a few final memories of the boat-house. Strikingly, however, he doesn't plan to see Emily herself before her departure. David says that this is because Emily might find the meeting painful—perhaps out of embarrassment that a respectable gentleman like David knows her story. With that said, David expressed discomfort with the idea of Emily as a grown woman even before her affair with Steerforth, so it seems likely that he is avoiding her in part because he prefers to think of her as an innocent child forever.

Ham thanks David, and says that he does want to say something to Emily—specifically, that he hopes she can forgive him for "pressing" marriage on her when what she needed was a friend to confide in. He also adds, with some difficulty, that he doesn't want Emily to worry that she has made his life unbearable. Although Ham wants Emily to know that he loved her, and could never marry anyone but her, he does not want her to believe that he is "greatly hurt." David assures Ham that he will try to convey all this to Emily. Ham thanks him and also asks him to convey his "lovingest duty" to Mr. Peggotty, whom he does not expect to see again. David promises to do so, and Ham leaves before they reach Mr. Peggotty's house.

The relationship between Ham and Emily is another instance of the difficult transition from the childhood home to the marital home. In this case, however, the problem isn't a child attempting to replicate their childhood home through their choice of spouse (as David does with Dora), but rather a child being pressured to marry someone who was actually part of that childhood home: Ham and Emily are cousins who grew up together, and it was wrong, Ham now suggests, to try to force that familial relationship into a romantic one.

Mr. Peggotty and Mrs. Gummidge have emptied the house of most of its furniture by the time David arrives. The locker David used to sit on with little Em'ly is still there, however, and Mr. Peggotty points it out, as well as David's old bedroom. As the wind blows with a "mournful" sound, David thinks back to lying in bed there as a child while "that first great change was being wrought at home." He also thinks of his childhood love for little Emily, and of Steerforth, whom he senses is nearby. Meanwhile, Mr. Peggotty says it will probably be some time before the house has new tenants, since Emily's fate has led people to view it as unlucky; he himself will be handing over the key to the landlord tonight.

Once inside the Peggotty's house, David is surrounded by objects that remind him of Emily, Steerforth, and himself as a child. Although David elsewhere seems to be fairly happy with the life he has created as an adult, the grief he feels in this passage for his lost childhood (and his childhood innocence) is overwhelming.

David and Mr. Peggotty tour the rest of the house, and then return to Mrs. Gummidge, who suddenly cries out that she doesn't want to be left behind. Instead, she offers to come to Australia as Mr. Peggotty's and Emily's servant, or even "slave." Mr. Peggotty protests that it will be a hard voyage and a "hard life," but Mrs. Gummidge insists that she won't accept any allowance. She can work, and—after all the time she has spent waiting for Emily to come home—she can "be loving and patient." She then kisses Mr. Peggotty's hand, and when David and Mr. Peggotty return to London the following day, Mrs. Gummidge accompanies them.

Although she often appeared to resent the necessity of lodging with the Peggottys, Mrs. Gummidge has clearly come to regard them as family. The fact that she even offers to work for them if they will let her come reveals her to be selfless and loving underneath her grumpy exterior.

CHAPTER 52: I ASSIST AT AN EXPLOSION

The meeting with Mr. Micawber approaches, and David and Miss Betsey discuss what they ought to do: Dora is very weak, and Miss Betsey feels she ought to stay with her and send Mr. Dick in her place. Dora, however, says that she won't forgive them if Miss Betsey stays home on her account: she threatens to make **Jip** bite her, teasingly claims that Miss Betsey never does anything to help her, and claims to be perfectly healthy. David and Miss Betsey therefore agree to go, and humor Dora by saying she is a "little Imposter, who feigned to be rather unwell, because she liked to be petted."

As Dora grows sicker, her childish mannerisms seem less and less like a result of her pampered upbringing and more like a conscious choice. When David and Miss Betsey pretend to agree that Dora isn't actually very sick, Dickens describes Dora as looking "slowly" at both of them, implying that she knows the truth. The fact that she maintains her cheerful and naïve demeanor despite this suggests that she is trying to keep David's spirits up. In other words, Dora is at her most mature and selfless when she's dying.

The next day, David, Miss Betsey, Mr. Dick, and Traddles set off together for Canterbury, and arrive that evening at the hotel Mr. Micawber has indicated. They are scheduled to meet Micawber for breakfast, but David goes out for an early morning walk along the familiar streets. The chiming bells, however, remind him of how much everything has changed: "their own age [...] pretty Dora's youth; and of the many, never old, who had lived and loved and died, while the reverberations of the bells had hummed." He even happens to cross paths with the butcher who used to bully him, who now has a baby and is a "benignant member of society."

In the past, David has often been struck by how little has changed when he has returned to Canterbury: the town's association with his time in the Wickfield household, and with Agnes in particular, has typically allowed it to serve as a refuge for him. Dora's impending death, however, marks the biggest upheaval in David's home life since the death of his mother, so he can no longer visit his second childhood home without reflecting bittersweetly on how much has changed.

David returns to the inn and waits anxiously with Miss Betsey, Traddles, and Mr. Dick. When Mr. Micawber arrives, he refuses to eat anything and warns everyone that they will soon see "an eruption." He explains that Traddles has advised him on what he is planning to do, and asks his listeners to follow his lead, even though he is a "Waif and Stray upon the shore of human nature." David assures Micawber that they trust him, and he asks them to follow him to Wickfield and Heep's. Micawber leaves, and the rest of the group wait for five minutes, as he requested, before setting off.

Mr. Micawber's description of himself as a "waif and stray" is melodramatic, but suggests that he sees himself as a powerless victim of life. In fact, however, his work to expose Uriah demonstrates that he is able to take charge of his own life, and perhaps lays the groundwork for his eventual success in Australia.

When they arrive at Wickfield and Heep's, David approaches Mr. Micawber at his desk and asks for Agnes, as Micawber had told him to do. Mr. Micawber then shows David, Traddles, Miss Betsey, and Mr. Dick inside, and announces their presence to Uriah. Uriah is momentarily surprised, but then greets them fawningly, saying that he hopes Dora is doing better. He also remarks that despite all the changes in the office, he himself has not changed, which prompts Miss Betsey to say that Uriah is "pretty constant to the promise of [his] youth." Uriah pretends this is a compliment and sends Mr. Micawber to fetch Agnes and Mrs. Heep, explaining that Mr. Wickfield's condition keeps him busy with work—though he says this is a "pleasure as well as a duty."

Given that David Copperfield *is a coming-of-age story, it's noteworthy that Uriah has hardly changed at all since his "youth." Where other characters (most notably David) work to correct their faults and weaknesses as they grow older, Uriah continues to be the same resentful and underhanded person he was when he was younger.*

Mr. Micawber shows Agnes in, and David notices that she looks tired and nervous. He also notices that Mr. Micawber and Traddles seem to be communicating silently with one another. Eventually, Traddles leaves the room. Meanwhile, Uriah repeatedly tells Mr. Micawber to leave, but Micawber ignores him, finally saying that he "chooses" to wait. Uriah grows pale and threatens to fire Micawber, saying he'll talk to him later. Mr. Micawber, however, suddenly bursts out that "if there is a scoundrel on this earth [...] with whom [he has] already talked too much, that scoundrel's name is—HEEP!" At this, Uriah accuses David of being jealous of his own "rise," and using Micawber to get back at him. When David urges Micawber to "deal with [Uriah] as he deserves," Uriah warns Agnes and Miss Betsey not to take part in this "gang."

Despite the fact that it is Mr. Micawber who is accusing him, Uriah still blames David for his misfortunes. This underscores the parallels between the two characters' storylines, as well as a major way in which they are different; Uriah resents David because David's class background affords him a degree of respect that Uriah doesn't enjoy, despite also being a fatherless, impoverished young man trying to make his way in the world.

Traddles returns with Mrs. Heep and—when Uriah asks him who he is—explains that he has a power of attorney to act on Mr. Wickfield's behalf. Uriah sneers that Traddles probably tricked Mr. Wickfield into providing this, but Traddles says that they should refer the issue of "fraud" to Mr. Micawber. Worried, Mrs. Heep tries to reason with Uriah, but he snaps at her to be quiet. David, meanwhile, is shocked to see Uriah reveal the full extent of his "malice, insolence, and hatred." Uriah seems especially enraged over the prospect of losing Agnes, and again accuses David of conspiring with Mr. Micawber. Uriah says that while he has never pretended to be a gentleman, David is a hypocrite for plotting against Uriah while priding himself on his "honor."

Despite his villainy, Uriah is arguably one of the more honest and perceptive characters when it comes to social class. Unlike David, who felt deep shame during his brief stint as a factory worker, Uriah isn't embarrassed by his lower-class background. Although Uriah clearly resents the way others treat him on account of that background, he makes no effort, as he says, to pass himself off as a "gentleman" by adopting more middle-class mannerisms and ways of speaking. Meanwhile, he accuses David of priding himself on honor while behaving dishonorably, implying that much of what supposedly distinguishes the classes from one another is simply hypocrisy.

Uriah invites Mr. Micawber to say what he has to say, and Micawber—who has barely been able to restrain himself—takes a letter from his pocket and begins to read. The letter was written by Micawber himself, and begins with a lengthy description of his own misfortunes. It was these, he says, that led him to Uriah, whom he describes as a "Forger and a Cheat." At this point, Uriah tries to snatch the letter away, but Micawber strikes his hand with a ruler and threatens to break his head if he comes near him again.

It's significant that Mr. Micawber strikes Uriah on the hand with a ruler, since (as the earlier scenes in Salem House demonstrated) that was a form of punishment often used to discipline young boys. Symbolically, the effect of this is to cut Uriah—who has spent so long trying to rise above his childhood origins—down to size.

David and Traddles restrain Mr. Micawber, and he resumes reading his letter, explaining that his financial difficulties quickly forced him to ask Uriah for advances, just as Uriah had anticipated: by placing Micawber in his debt, Uriah secured his cooperation in falsifying business documents and deceiving Mr. Wickfield. This plunged Mr. Micawber into a state of depression, but with Agnes's encouragement, he began to collect information on what Uriah was doing.

The revelation that Uriah came by his position at Wickfield and Heaps dishonestly distances him from David, who succeeds through hard work and talent. In doing so, it also suggests that the major difference between the two characters' ambitions is not their different class backgrounds, but their sense of morality.

Mr. Micawber begins to lay out his case against Uriah. His first "charge" is that Uriah took advantage of Mr. Wickfield's episodes of drunkenness to convince him to sign documents withdrawing money for fabricated business dealings. In this way, Uriah made it look as if Wickfield were the one behaving unethically. At this point, Uriah interrupts to again threaten David, but Mr. Micawber reminds Uriah that he himself has been living in Uriah's old house lately, and hints that he found an incriminating pocketbook Uriah left there. Hearing this, Mrs. Heep begs her son to be "umble" and "make terms," but Uriah tells her to be quiet.

Mr. Micawber takes great pleasure in reading the "charges" against Uriah, hinting that he has finally found his calling in life; in fact, Micawber will become a judge after immigrating to Australia. As far as the charges themselves go, the fact that Uriah was able to use Wickfield's alcoholism to his advantage reflects themes of agency and memory. Because Wickfield typically can't remember what has happened when he's been drinking, he isn't fully in control of himself or his actions.

Mr. Micawber's second charge is that Uriah also forged Mr. Wickfield's signature on various documents, including one in which Uriah supposedly advances money to Mr. Wickfield to protect his reputation (that is, by providing him with the money Wickfield was supposed to have withdrawn). Mr. Micawber says that the pocketbook backs up his claims, because it contains Uriah's attempts at replicating Mr. Wickfield's signature. As Micawber speaks, Uriah unlocks a drawer in his desk and then, suddenly remembering that others are watching, stops short. Meanwhile, Traddles confirms that Micawber gave him the incriminating pocketbook earlier that day, and Mrs. Heep again pleads with her son to be "umble." Uriah retorts that she might as well shoot him, and his mother protests that she loves him and has promised Traddles she would convince her son to set things right.

Given that Uriah was able to obtain Wickfield's signature on documents, it's not completely clear why he ever needed to forge it. In terms of the novel's themes, however, one possible explanation is that Uriah ultimately hoped to entirely usurp Mr. Wickfield's position—not just in the firm, but also as the master of the house and of Agnes. Symbolically, forging Wickfield's signature is a way of taking his place, or even his identity. It also, of course, provides Micawber and Traddles with concrete proof of Uriah's crimes, which leads Mrs. Heep to plead with her son to compromise; ultimately, Mrs. Heep is slightly more sympathetic than her son, if only because she does seem to care for and value her family.

Uriah once again ignores Mrs. Heep and fixates on David as the cause of all his problems. Meanwhile, Mr. Micawber proceeds to his final charge, which is that Uriah has used both Mr. Wickfield's supposed business misdealings and his "weaknesses," "faults," "virtues," "honor," and "parental affections" to manipulate and cheat him. Most recently, Uriah convinced Mr. Wickfield to sign over the partnership and his furniture to Heep. He was able to accomplish this, in part, by making Wickfield believe that he had lost all his money in unwise investments and was in fact in danger of defaulting on various contracts. Wickfield felt so much shame over what he had supposedly done that he felt he had no choice except to give in to Uriah's demands. By this point, Agnes is crying in both sadness and relief.

It's fairly obvious that Uriah has exploited Mr. Wickfield's "weaknesses" (most notably, his drinking), but it's interesting that Micawber claims he also exploited, among other things, Wickfield's love for Agnes. This is in line with what Wickfield himself earlier said about allowing his love for his daughter to become twisted. Micawber doesn't explain exactly how Uriah preyed on Micawber's "parental affections," so it's possible Uriah simply pressured Wickfield into doing things by arguing that they would help Agnes. It seems just as likely, however, that Uriah knew about Wickfield's guilt and regrets surrounding his daughter, and used these as additional leverage.

Micawber announces that he is now nearly finished, and simply needs to provide his evidence. He becomes distracted, however, by imagining in detail all the sufferings he and his family will undergo as a result of the sacrifice he has made in leaving Uriah's employment. Meanwhile, Uriah opens a safe he keeps in the office, only to find that all the books in it are gone. Micawber explains that he took them, and Traddles says that he now has them.

Although Micawber exaggerates the hardship his family is likely to undergo, it is true that he has acted selflessly in exposing Uriah—particularly given that his post at Wickfield and Heep seems to be the first stable job he has had in years. In other words, Mr. Micawber ultimately proves himself to be a good person by giving up his livelihood.

Suddenly, Miss Betsey grabs Uriah by the collar and says she wants her property back: she explains that she thought Mr. Wickfield was responsible for its loss, so she had until this point concealed the fact that she had invested it through his firm. David pulls his aunt away from Uriah, assuring her that they will recover the money. Meanwhile, Mrs. Heep continues to plead with her son and everyone else in the room.

Based on what she says in this scene, Miss Betsey apparently suspected Mr. Wickfield not only of mismanagement but actually of embezzlement—or, as she puts it, "making away with" her money. In other words, she was willing to cover for Wickfield when she believed he was guilty of the same crime Uriah is now charged with. Although her very different reaction to Uriah's actions probably stems partly from her preexisting friendship with Mr. Wickfield, it seems likely that class bias also plays a role.

Uriah asks what David wants to do, and Traddles explains what "must be done." First, he says, Uriah needs to give back the contract in which Mr. Wickfield signed away his part in the firm. More than that, Uriah needs to return all the money he has stolen, and provide all of his accounts to ensure that he is telling the truth. Traddles tells Uriah to stay in his room until he and the others have had a chance to go over those accounts, and—when Uriah says he won't—threatens to get the law involved and have Uriah arrested. Mrs. Heep begs Uriah to do as Traddles says, and he reluctantly tells her to go fetch the contract. Mr. Dick goes with her, and she returns with the contract and all the accounts.

The decision not to involve the police probably reflects a desire to protect Mr. Wickfield's reputation (and by extension Agnes's). Nevertheless, Uriah does ultimately go to jail for a different crime; in this way, the novel manages to punish Uriah fully without inadvertently punishing any good characters.

Traddles tells Uriah he can go think things over in his room. Before leaving, however, Uriah turns to David and says he has "always been an upstart" determined to bring Uriah down. David retorts that it is Uriah who has always been "against all the world," and that greed is inevitably punished. Uriah says David sounds like the teachers at the charity school he attended, threatens to get revenge on Mr. Micawber, and leaves.

In describing David as an "upstart," Uriah once more underscores the similarities between them, and also challenges the idea that David's own social climbing is any more respectable than Uriah's. David, however, immediately reframes the issue in terms of Uriah's personal morality, arguing that he's "against all the world" rather than, for example, against the particular people or classes who have oppressed him. Still, while the novel largely tries erase the classist implications of Uriah's storyline, it's Uriah who gets the last word in this scene, calling David out for his resemblance to the people who originally demanded that Uriah be "[h]umble."

Mr. Micawber announces that he can now reconcile with Mrs. Micawber and the rest of his family, and invites everyone to follow him to his house. Agnes remains behind to comfort Mr. Wickfield, and Traddles stays to guard Uriah, but Mr. Dick, Miss Betsey, and David go with Mr. Micawber, grateful for all he has done. When they arrive at his home, Mr. Micawber immediately runs to his wife and embraces her, explaining that "the cloud is past from [his] mind" and welcoming the return of poverty if it means the return of "mutual confidence." Mrs. Micawber is so overwhelmed that she faints and has to be revived by Miss Betsey.

Once Mr. Micawber no longer needs to keep quiet about Uriah's villainy, he immediately reverts to his former, cheerful self and joyfully rejoins his family. Ultimately, this "mutual confidence" proves more important to Mr. Micawber than money.

Miss Betsey is surprised at how large the Micawber family is, and asks what the eldest son is being trained to do. Mr. Micawber says that he had hoped his son would become part of a church choir, but admits that he is currently singing in public-houses. Mrs. Micawber insists that her son "means well," and Micawber agrees, but says that he has not "carrie[d] out his meaning, in any given direction whatsoever." This irritates the son, who asks how he is supposed to find another line of work, and Miss Betsey—who has been thinking this entire time—asks whether the family has thought about emigrating.

The discussion about the Micawbers' eldest son gets to the heart of the debate surrounding initiative and success. Mr. Micawber suggests that his son's failure to establish himself in a respectable line of work stems from a lack of focus and discipline. As the son himself points out, however, he's never had the opportunity to learn a trade or become apprenticed to a professional. As a result, no amount of determination and hard work will help him get ahead in life.

Mr. Micawber says that he always wanted to emigrate (though David doubts he ever thought of it before). He explains, however, that he doesn't have enough money to make the voyage. Miss Betsey says that Mr. Micawber's helpfulness entitles him to a reward, and Micawber says that while he couldn't accept a gift, he would agree to a loan. Miss Betsey assures him that he can set any terms he likes, and urges him to consider going with Mr. Peggotty and little Em'ly to Australia. Meanwhile, Mrs. Micawber wonders aloud whether Australia is the kind of place where her husband "would have a fair chance of rising in the social scale," and Miss Betsey says that it is, as long as he is "industrious." Mr. and Mrs. Micawber agree that Australia sounds like their "legitimate sphere of action."

Despite the new proof of Mr. Micawber's hard work and good intentions (that is, his efforts to bring Uriah to justice), the novel ultimately suggests that there is no place for him within England's rigid class structure. Still, Dickens doesn't entirely abandon the idea that "industriousness" will ultimately translate into success; once in the more fluid colonial society of Australia, Micawber is able to work his way up to the position of a magistrate.

CHAPTER 53: ANOTHER RETROSPECT

David pauses his narration, overcome by memories of his "child-wife" Dora, whom he imagines begging him to "stop to think of [her]." He imagines himself back with her, explaining that he has lost track of how long she has been ill, but that it is slowly becoming clear she will never recover. **Jip**, meanwhile, is old and frail, and spends his days lying next to Dora. However, Dora is uncomplaining and grateful for the time David and Miss Betsey spend tending to and talking with her. Sometimes Miss Clarissa and Miss Lavinia visit, and everyone reminisces about Dora's wedding. David explains that he felt as though everything in his life was on pause during this period, but that a few incidents do stick out in his mind.

Even as a narrative device, the image of Dora asking David not to skim past her is striking. On the face of it, there doesn't seem to be much danger of this; David clearly remembers Dora fondly and takes pleasure in recounting her story. However, in the context of the novel as a whole, David's marriage to Dora functions mostly as a learning experience—specifically, one that teaches him what he ought to look for in a wife. It's interesting, then, that David "stops to think" of Dora—that is, pauses the forward momentum of the narrative to describe her death. Perhaps in doing so, David is trying to recall Dora on her own terms rather than as a precursor to Agnes.

One morning, Dora shows off her curled hair to David, saying that she often thinks about how much he liked it when they were courting, and how she eventually gave him a lock of it. David reminds her that it was the same day she painted the flowers he brought her for her birthday, and the day he confessed his love for her. Dora replies that she used to cry over the flowers David gave her, because she was so happy to think he liked her. She then suggests going to visit some of the places they used to go. David says they will when she is better, and Dora insists that she is "so much better" already.

Tellingly, Dora's happiest memories seem to be of courtship rather than of marriage. As she draws closer to death, she seems to spend more and more time reliving these early days with David, when her childishness and innocence weren't liabilities.

On another day, David is sitting next to Dora's bedside, since she no longer leaves her room at all. She asks him whether it would be alright for her to ask Agnes to visit, given Mr. Wickfield's condition. David assures her that he will write, and Dora thanks him, saying that it isn't simply a "foolish fancy" on her part. She then asks whether David is lonely downstairs without her and—when he says that he is—starts to cry, saying she is both sorry and glad. Finally, she reiterates that she wants to see Agnes more than anything. David reminds her that her first wish should be to get well. To David's distress, Dora confesses that she doesn't think she will ever be healthy again.

Towards the end of the novel, Agnes admits that Dora gave her permission to marry David after her own death. Narratively, this seems intended to ease any concerns readers have over David's behavior towards Dora both before and after her death, and the smooth transition from one marriage to the next begins here, with Agnes arriving in the household as Dora is dying.

One night, David is sitting alone with Dora. Agnes and Miss Betsey are present, but downstairs. Although David is aware on some level that Dora is dying, he still does not quite believe it. Dora interrupts his thoughts, saying she needs to tell him something she has been thinking about for some time, although she isn't sure how he will react. David lays his head on the pillow beside her as Dora confesses that she thinks she "was too young" and naïve when they married, and that it might have been better if they had had their youthful romance and then moved on. David protests that he was not ready to marry either, but Dora says that she might have made him readier if she had been more mature. Furthermore, she says, David was too "clever" for her.

The fact that it is ultimately Dora who explicitly suggests that she and David shouldn't have married is another way in which the novel tries to cast David's actions in the best possible light; David senses vaguely that Dora isn't the best match for him, but he never goes so far as to say that he regrets marrying her, which might make him less sympathetic to readers. What Dora says, however, is clearly the position of the novel as a whole—that is, that David and Dora's relationship was based on an immature understanding of love and marriage, and that Dora in particular couldn't have fulfilled her duties as a wife. In other words, Dora's deathbed confession allows Dickens to underscore an idea central to the novel without calling David's character into question.

David insists that he and Dora have been very happy, and Dora says that this is true, but that David would likely have tired of her as time went on. David, in agony, says that everything she is saying is a "reproach," and Dora insists that it is not, because she loves him too much to scold him. She then asks again if it is lonely downstairs, and then says she wants to speak to Agnes in private. David promises to fetch her, and Dora once more repeats that it is better for her to die now.

Dora's calm acceptance of her death, like her earlier admission, is a way of downplaying anything that seems questionable about David's treatment of Dora. With that said, Dora's remark that David would eventually have regretted marrying her clearly disturbs him, probably because he realizes it's true and feels guilty.

David waits downstairs as Agnes goes to speak with Dora, watching as **Jip** sleeps uneasily in his dog house. Weeping, he begins to think back over his dissatisfaction with Dora, as well as over their courtship, and he wonders whether Dora was right to say they should never have married. Eventually, Jip crawls out of the dog house and indicates that he wants to go upstairs. David tells him that he can't tonight, and Jip crosses over to David, licks his hand, and lies down and dies. David cries out for Agnes, and, realizing from her expression that Dora has also died, falls into a stupor.

Dora's words stir up the "secret feelings" David has "nourished" throughout his marriage. Although the "remorse" he feels while thinking back on these feelings (and the relationship as a whole) suggests that he recognizes that Dora is right, but he doesn't explicitly say so in this passage. Again, this serves to minimize David's culpability in the eyes of readers. Meanwhile, both Agnes and Jip play pivotal roles in this scene, with Jip's death underscoring his similarities to Dora, and Agnes immediately assuming the position of caretaker to David, which Dora has now vacated.

CHAPTER 54: MR. MICAWBER'S TRANSACTIONS

David's grief does not hit him all at once after Dora dies, in part because so much else is going on around him at the time. He mourns, but then feels that the worst of his grief is behind him. This turns out not be the case: David writes that he later experienced a second wave of depression in which he "came to think that the Future was walled up before [him]."

In different ways, David's relationships with Dora and Steerforth represent some of the last vestiges of childhood: David's love for Dora was a form of immature infatuation, as was his devotion to Steerforth. Regardless, David hints here that these two deaths were perhaps the most difficult trial he had to endure while growing up; since so much of maturity in David Copperfield *involves envisioning a future and putting it into action, David's sense that the future has "walled up" is an indication of just how deep David's despair runs.*

David forms a plan to go overseas, although he is not sure how this idea first came to him. He associates it with Agnes, and suspects she might have suggested it. Regardless, he is deeply aware of and grateful for her presence after Dora's death, and begins to think that his old association of Agnes with the **stained glass window** was a "foreshadowing" of the role she would play during this period of his life.

The fact that David can't explicitly trace his plans to Agnes is an indication of just how perfectly she embodies the feminine ideal: the moral influence she has over David is so gentle and unassuming that he can't even pinpoint exactly where or when it is at work. What David is becoming aware of, however, is the broader trajectory of his life, and Agnes's place in it. In retrospect, for instance, he sees his childhood association of Agnes and stained glass not as a stray idea but as a sign that Agnes would become a guiding influence in his life.

David does not intend to leave England until after the entire affair with Uriah has been resolved, and after Mr. Peggotty and Emily have left for Australia. He therefore returns to Canterbury with Miss Betsey and Agnes and goes directly to Mr. Micawber's, where Traddles is staying.

In retrospect, it becomes clear that tying up these loose ends provides David with a sense of purpose in the wake of Dora's death, helping to distract him from his grief.

Miss Betsey asks whether Mr. Micawber has thought more about Australia, and he says that his family is as good as "on the sea" already. He admits, however, that he may need more time to pay off the loan than he had originally indicated, but Miss Betsey says this is no trouble. Mr. Micawber thanks her, and says that as he wants to be sure he is "business-like" in this new period of his life, and proposes drafting receipts for all he owes. He also notes that his family is busily preparing for their new life by learning about farming, and Miss Betsey expresses her approval.

As usual, Mr. Micawber is wildly optimistic about his future, perhaps to the point of foolishness; he's getting far ahead of himself in remarking that his family is as good as departed, and his enthusiastic embrace of farming seems no different than any of the other industries he's thrown himself into over the years. Similarly, the receipts Micawber proposes drafting resemble the I.O.U. he previously gave to Traddles, implying that he's learned very little about managing his finances. Despite these warning signs, however, the Micawbers do in fact go in to succeed in Australia.

Mrs. Micawber explains that she has been busy communicating with her family: she suspects that their coldness stemmed from unwillingness to support Mr. Micawber, so she feels that they ought to make up, now that the Micawbers are leaving the country. Mr. Micawber, however, says that his wife's family would likely find him "offensive" if they met, because he views *them* as "Ruffians." Mrs. Micawber objects that neither he nor her family understand one another, and Mr. Micawber apologetically agrees to meet with his wife's relatives (although he also says he would be happy leaving without seeing them).

The Micawbers' bickering again seems to grow out of Mrs. Micawber's largely suppressed resentment of her husband. By bringing up her family's disapproval of Mr. Micawber, Mrs. Micawber is able to vent her frustration with her husband in a socially acceptable way—that is, one that doesn't involve taking ownership of that frustration herself.

Mr. Micawber and Mrs. Micawber leave David, Agnes, and Miss Betsey alone with Traddles, who is sitting at a table covered in papers. Traddles expresses concern for David, but David shifts the subject to Miss Betsey, explaining that she has recently been traveling back and forth from London, apparently troubled by something. Miss Betsey is visibly upset when David says this, but assures David that he will soon know what is going on. Traddles then explains that Mr. Micawber has worked impressively hard the past few weeks to uncover and set right all of Uriah's treachery. Furthermore, Traddles says, Mr. Dick has been very helpful, both by cheering Mr. Wickfield up and by copying important documents. Meanwhile, Mr. Wickfield has been improving steadily, and is even able to help settle some of Traddles and Micawber's questions.

Like Mr. Micawber, Mr. Dick proves his goodness in part by his willingness to work; in fact, Mr. Dick's determination to work is all the more striking given that no one expects him to do so. Traddles' praise of Mr. Dick and Mr. Wickfield also lays the groundwork for the revelation, later in the chapter, that Miss Betsey deliberately concealed her financial situation from David in order to encourage him to develop these same habits of hard work and discipline. Miss Betsey's anxiety, meanwhile, turns out to involve her relationship to her ex-husband.

Traddles announces that, after going over all the accounts, it is clear that Mr. Wickfield could close the firm now without falling into debt. Doing so, however, would leave him with little money to spare, so Traddles suggests that he stay in business but take advice from his friends. Agnes is deeply relieved and eager to help her father by supporting and advising him now, in the hopes of eventually securing his "release from all trust and responsibility." To do this, she plans to rent the house and keep a school. David is touched by her devotion, and thinks back fondly on his childhood in the Wickfields' home.

Since Agnes is a woman, she isn't "required" to work as a way of proving and developing her independence and resolve in the way that the novel's male characters are. Instead, she works as a way of easing the pressure her father is under. Her work outside the home, in other words, is in keeping with her feminine role at home—that is, providing emotional and moral support first to her father and later to her husband. In fact, her actions immediately cause David to remember the happy domestic scenes of his childhood, further underscoring that Agnes's proposal to keep school is not a threat to the reestablishment of the Wickfield's happy household, but rather an extension of it.

Traddles moves on to Miss Betsey, who says she would be happy to have her money back but can "bear it" if it's lost. Confirming she had 8,000 pounds, Traddles says he can only account for 5,000 pounds. Miss Betsey explains that she held back the missing 3,000 pounds: 1,000 pounds went to David's apprenticeship, and the rest she had saved all along. She told David she had lost everything, however, because she wanted to see whether David could learn to be self-reliant and industrious. Proudly, she says that both he and Mr. Dick have proven themselves.

The revelation that Miss Betsey had 3,000 pounds in reserve, and that she concealed this from David, puts David's efforts to establish himself in a career in a new light. He was never in any real danger of falling into poverty, so his hard work ultimately had much less to do with earning a living and much more to do with developing his character. This was of course Miss Betsey's intention, and it once again serves to distinguish David from a character like Uriah; whereas the latter works because he has to, and in the hopes of advancing his position, David works because it is the morally right thing to do.

Traddles explains that, with Miss Betsey's admission, he can account for all the money that was lost. Miss Betsey confirms that she believed Mr. Wickfield was responsible for her losses and therefore kept quiet, and Traddles says that it was actually Uriah who signed the documents, in part to make Wickfield believe he himself had stolen the money. Miss Betsey explains that Mr. Wickfield actually wrote a letter to her accusing himself of this, but that she burned it in his presence and urged him to say nothing for Agnes's sake. Hearing this, Agnes covers her face with her hands.

Once again, Miss Betsey indicates that she was willing to cover for Mr. Wickfield when she believed he was guilty of the same crime Uriah committed. Here, she says she did this in order to protect Agnes's reputation, but it's likely that class prejudice also contributed to her less lenient view of Uriah's embezzlement.

Miss Betsey asks whether Traddles really managed to get all the money back from Uriah, and Traddles says that Mr. Micawber's thoroughness left Uriah no possible way of avoiding repayment. He also says that, according to Uriah himself, he was motivated less by greed than by his hatred of David. Both Uriah and Mrs. Heep have now left Canterbury, however, and Traddles says he doesn't know much more than that. He does suspect that Uriah still has a considerable amount of money, but Traddles does not think this will keep him out of "mischief," simply because of Uriah's hypocritical and suspicious nature. When Miss Betsey describes Uriah as a "monster of meanness," however, Traddles insists that "many people" are capable of meanness.

On the one hand, the fact that Uriah sees David as his personal enemy highlights the parallels between the two characters; Uriah resents David because he has in many respects lived the life Uriah might have lived if he had been born into a middle-class family. At the same time, however, Uriah's hatred of David allows Traddles and the other characters to more easily cast Uriah's actions as a product of a warped character rather than of frustration with widespread inequality and bias. Similarly, Traddles' belief that Uriah would likely continue to do "mischief" even if he were wealthy implies that Uriah is simply immoral by nature (although his later remark that anyone is capable of meanness possibly suggests that Uriah's character is the result of his circumstances and background).

Miss Betsey changes the subject to Mr. Micawber, and Traddles reiterates how important his help was in catching Uriah. Miss Betsey asks how much money, given this, they ought to provide Micawber with, and Traddles explains that the issue is not so simple: Micawber has given out many I.O.U.'s to Uriah in exchange for his advances, and if he does not pay, he is likely to be arrested before he can leave the country. According to Mr. Micawber, these debts amount to just over 100 pounds. Miss Betsey proposes that she and Agnes jointly provide Micawber with 500 pounds, but David and Traddles strongly urge her not to give him the whole sum at once. Instead, David recommends giving the Micawbers slightly more than they need to secure passage, and then entrusting Mr. Peggotty with providing the rest.

Although Mr. Micawber has proven his basic merit by helping bring Uriah to justice, David still views him as untrustworthy in financial matters—or, at least, as unable to manage his affairs competently. He therefore proposes doling out money to Micawber in smaller amounts, ensuring that he doesn't spend it on anything but paying off his debts and beginning his new life in Australia. This effort to teach Mr. Micawber financial responsibility parallels Miss Betsey's secret test of David's character, and in that sense constitutes a delayed coming-of-age process.

Once they have settled how to pay Mr. Micawber, Traddles says there is one more "painful" topic he needs to address. He reminds Miss Betsey that Uriah had threatened her husband during the meeting where his crimes were brought to light. Miss Betsey confirms that she was in fact married, and Traddles warns her that Uriah may now try to follow through on his threats. Miss Betsey uncomfortably thanks Traddles but dismisses the topic, instead inviting Mr. and Mrs. Micawber back in.

The mention of Miss Betsey's husband lays the groundwork for the chapter's closing scenes, when Miss Betsey reveals that her husband has recently died. It also illustrates the complexity of Miss Betsey's relationship with her former husband; although some of her discomfort may stem from memories of his mistreatment of her, she is also genuinely saddened by his death, and begins to cry silently during this scene.

Miss Betsey explains the financial arrangements they intend to make to help the Micawbers. Mr. Micawber is delighted, only to find himself once again threatened with arrest by a sheriff five minutes later. Miss Betsey and the others quickly pay off the I.O.U., however, and Mr. Micawber happily settles down to write his latest I.O.U.'s. Miss Betsey urges him to avoid writing more of these in the future, and Mr. Micawber says that he has always warned his son against amassing debt, and intends to follow his own advice going forward.

Mr. Micawber theoretically understands what's wrong with his approach to financial management, as evidenced by the fact that he warns his son against getting into debt. He seems just as incapable as ever of putting this knowledge to good use in his own life, but his emigration will change that.

The next day, David, Miss Betsey, and Agnes plan to return to London. The Micawbers will follow them as soon as Mr. Micawber sells off his possessions. David, Miss Betsy, and Agnes go to the Wickfields' for the night, however, which David feels has now been "purged of a disease."

David consistently described Uriah's presence in the Wickfield household as intrusive and contaminating, hinting at both Uriah's sexually predatory behavior towards Agnes and the broader threat posed by the working classes to middle-class domesticity. Now that Uriah is gone, domestic order is restored, and the household is once again happy and healthy.

Once David and Miss Betsey are back in London, Miss Betsey explains that she did not want to worry David with her problems, but that if David still wants to know what has been troubling her, she will tell him. David says that he does, and Miss Betsey says she will tell him during a carriage ride the next morning. The ride takes them to a hospital with a hearse parked outside it, which Miss Betsey indicates should drive away. David realizes that the hearse is carrying Miss Betsey's husband, and Miss Betsey explains that her husband sent for her during his final illness, and told her that he was sorry. He died just before Miss Betsey left for Canterbury, so Uriah's threats ended up being "vain."

Miss Betsey's willingness to forgive a man who abused her is one of the ways in which she conforms to Victorian gender norms; in fact, she not only forgave his treatment of her, but made multiple visits to his deathbed to comfort him. Characteristically, however, she hid this tenderness at the time, in much the same way that she elsewhere distances herself from "feminine" feelings by attributing them to Clara Copperfield.

David and Miss Betsey follow the hearse to a churchyard in the neighborhood where her husband was born. They attend the funeral service, and Miss Betsey admits that this is her thirty-sixth wedding anniversary. When they get back into the carriage, Miss Betsey bursts into tears, saying her husband was a "fine-looking man" when they married, though he was "sadly changed" later on. She quickly composes herself, however, and they return to her cottage.

Once again, Miss Betsey quickly tamps down her grief for her husband, and even seems embarrassed by it; she tells David, for instance, that she wouldn't have started crying if she hadn't already been "shaken" by the events of the last few days. This need to disavow "feminine" displays of emotion speaks to the vulnerability of Miss Betsey's position as a single woman. To maintain her independence, Miss Betsey works doubly hard to prove her rationality and practicality.

Inside the cottage, Miss Betsey and David find a letter from Mr. Micawber explaining that Uriah has called in another debt and that Micawber consequently expects to soon die of anguish. At the end of the letter, however, a postscript announces that Traddles paid the debt in Miss Betsey's absence, and that the Micawbers are now "at the height of earthly bliss."

Before Micawber leaves for Australia, he is arrested for debt several more times. This petty act of revenge is a further sign of Uriah's villainy.

CHAPTER 55: TEMPEST

David says that he has now reached a section of his story that he has been dreading from the beginning. He still dreams about the event in question, and thinks about it whenever there is a "stormy wind, or the lightest mention of a sea-shore." In fact, he says, he does not even need to remember the event, because he can "see" it.

Although recounting his story gives David some measure of control over it, certain events are so traumatic that they can't be neutralized or downplayed. The memories that are about to unfold threaten to disrupt the balance of David's life—in this case, by being as vivid as if they were taking place now. This disruption of the normal order of events is especially threatening to a story like David's, which attempts to present straightforward and optimistic account of his growth over time.

Not long before the ship for Australia is set to sail, Peggotty comes to London to see not only David, but also Mr. Peggotty and little Em'ly. David himself does not see Emily, but he spends a lot of time with the Peggottys, and one evening, Peggotty begins to talk about Ham's kindness and strength. As David walks home that night, he begins to reconsider leaving Ham's message for Emily on the day she will depart, since he thinks she might want a chance to respond. He therefore writes her a letter that same night relaying Ham's message.

David doesn't speak to little Em'ly at all immediately after her return. Although he suggests that this is out of consideration for Emily's feelings, David may also feel some lingering resentment towards her, having been infatuated with her in the past.

Miss Betsey wakes David up the next morning, saying that Mr. Peggotty has come to see him. Mr. Peggotty gives him a letter that little Em'ly has written and asks him to look it over and give it to Ham, if he feels it is appropriate. In the letter, Emily thanks Ham for his message, saying she will keep it with her until she dies. She has also prayed over it, because when she thinks of Ham's goodness, she thinks of "what God must be." Finally, she bids Ham farewell, saying that she "may wake a child and come to [him]" in "another world," though she isn't sure that God will forgive her. David says that Mr. Peggotty can tell Emily he is delivering the message: in fact, he intends to go for a quick trip to Yarmouth before the ship sets sail for Australia.

Although David Copperfield is (for the time it was written) relatively tolerant of fallen women, it doesn't envision much of a future for Emily beyond endless repentance. Her letter to Ham, for instance, is basically backward-looking and tellingly imagines heaven as a place where she will be restored to childhood—that is, a state of innocence and purity. The assumption, shared by everyone, that it would be inappropriate for Emily to speak to Ham in person also indicates the seriousness of her transgressions.


That night, David takes a coach to Yarmouth. On the way, he remarks to the driver that the sky looks strange, and the driver predicts that a storm is coming. The wind continues to pick up throughout the night, and the sky grows darker and darker, until it begins to rain in "sweeping gusts [...] like showers of steel." The weather—particularly the wind—grows even worse the following day, and when David reaches Ipswich, people in the marketplace tell him about trees being uprooted and roofing being torn off. By the time David reaches the coast, the wind is creating massive waves at **sea**.

The storm that arises as David travels to Yarmouth is a way of foreshadowing impending disaster—specifically, the deaths of Steerforth and Ham. Since Steerforth himself has often been associated with the sea, the storm is also a particularly symbolic way for Dickens to kill the character off: Steerforth dies as a result of his own recklessness and inability to control either his actions or their consequences. The suddenness and violence of the storm also challenges David's confidence in his own ability to plot a course for his life, plunging him into a state of paralyzed depression.

David checks into an inn and then heads toward the beach, where a crowd has gathered, concerned for the safety of boats currently at **sea**. The size and strength of the waves unnerves David, and he feels as if the whole town will be swept away in a "rending and upheaving of all nature."

To David, the storm isn't just a threat to the physical safety of Yarmouth's residents, but also, symbolically, to his entire life's philosophy, which hinges on rationality and optimism. Even the act of writing a memoir, for instance, assumes that it's possible to trace a logical path from David's childhood self to who he is as an adult. As he describes it, however, the storm disrupts everything that's orderly, turning "all nature" upside down.

Ham is not in the crowd on the beach, so David goes to his house, which he finds shut up. He then goes to the yard where Ham works, where he hears that Ham has gone to Lowestoft to repair a ship but will return the next day. David therefore returns to the inn, where he hears from a waiter that two ships have already sunk, and several others have been spotted in distress. The news deepens David's gloominess: the storm has put him on edge, and he feels uneasy about Ham's absence. David also finds that the storm has disturbed his sense of time and space, and he thinks that he would not be "surprised" to go outside and see someone from his life in London.

One way in which the storm upsets the normal order of things is by confusing David's perception of time so that past and present become difficult to disentangle. This kind of confusion challenges the basic concept of a memoir—especially one like David's, which is already wary of the ways in which the past, in the form of memory, might intrude on the present or influence the future, and therefore takes pains to present a straightforward record of events.

David cannot shake the fear that Ham will drown trying to attempt to return from Lowestoft by **sea**, so he goes back to see the boat-builder and asks his opinion. The boat-builder assures him that no experienced sailor would go out in such a storm, and David returns to the inn. Meanwhile, the wind continues to pick up and seems to shake the entire building. David finds he can't concentrate on anything, because "something within [him], faintly answering to the storm without, tossed up the depths of [his] memory." He finds it difficult to sleep, first starting awake in a state of "objectless" terror, and then tormented by the noise of the storm. He eventually gets up and goes downstairs to talk to the kitchen staff. A few hours later, he returns to bed and finally falls asleep.

David's premonition of Ham's death, though wrong in its particulars, further adds to the confused sense of time in this passage. This confusion only deepens as the storm stirs up old memories, blurring the lines between past and present. Interestingly, David describes this as the storm speaking to something chaotic already "within him." Over the course of the novel, David has strived to become a collected and purposeful individual who is sure of his goals and can put them into action. The storm, however, threatens to undercut this progress by revealing all the inner tensions and conflicts David has suppressed.

The next morning, David wakes up to the sound of someone knocking on his door, saying there has been a shipwreck involving a "schooner, from Spain or Portugal." David hurries down to the beach to see what is happening, and finds the **sea** stormier than ever. A man on the shore points him to the boat, which has lost one of its masts and, according to one of the spectators, is in danger of splitting in two. Nevertheless, the people on board are still trying to prevent the boat from sinking, including an "active figure with long curling hair" that David particularly notices. Two men are swept overboard, and David begs some of the other spectators to do something. They explain that a lifeboat was already sent out but couldn't accomplish anything.

The curly-haired figure turns out to be Steerforth, so the fact that that particular figure attracts David's attention suggests that David has already realized on some level who the man is. His reluctance to consciously admit this parallels his earlier reluctance to acknowledge that it was in fact Steerforth who had run away with little Em'ly, underscoring the connection between the two events. Ultimately, the fact that the same recklessness that led Steerforth to seduce Emily eventually claims his own life serves as a form of poetic justice.

At that moment, the crowd parts, and David sees Ham walking out toward the **sea**, apparently intending to do what the other spectators have just said is too dangerous—namely, wade out to the wreck with a rope tied around himself. Ham's determined expression reminds David of the look he had when little Em'ly ran away, so David attempts to hold him back. As David is speaking, however, two more men are swept overboard, leaving only the curly-haired figure, and Ham tells David that either his time has come or it hasn't. The crowd then separates David from Ham, and David watches from a distance as bystanders help prepare Ham to enter the water. Meanwhile, the boat is breaking apart, and the man on board waves to those ashore, reminding David of a "once dear friend."

Besides drawing a clear line between Ham's despair at being jilted and his carelessness of his own safety, David's memory of the morning after Emily's disappearance also functions as a subtle hint; in much the same way that Steerforth ruined Emily, he has now wrecked the boat he named after her. David's recollection of a "once dear friend" provides a much more obvious clue to Steerforth's identity, though David himself doesn't consciously guess the truth at the time.

Ham runs out into the water and is immediately hit by a wave. The men holding the other end of the rope pull him back to shore, and David sees that he is bleeding. Nevertheless, Ham goes back out into the water, nearly reaching the wreck when a particularly large wave pulls the boat under. The men on shore pull Ham back in, and David sees that he is dead. David follows as Ham's body is brought to a nearby house. Soon, a fisherman asks David to come with him. David guesses that a body has washed ashore, but the fisherman won't tell him whose it is. When they reach the beach, however, David sees Steerforth's body "lying with his head upon his arm, as [David] had often seen him lie at school."

David's response to seeing Steerforth's body is striking, in that he apparently feels only sadness, rather than anger over what Steerforth did to the Peggottys, or even satisfaction that Steerforth has effectively been brought to justice. Instead, David immediately thinks of Steerforth as a young and innocent child—an image that's especially significant given Emily's wish, earlier in the chapter, to be reborn as just such a child. David's response to Steerforth's death reflects the double standard for male and female behavior at the time; whereas Steerforth's death instantly absolves him of any guilt in David's eyes, Emily has to live out the rest of her life doing penance and—in her own estimation—may not be forgiven even then.

CHAPTER 56: THE NEW WOUND, AND THE OLD

David remembers how, at their last meeting, Steerforth had asked him to remember him at his best. David says that he had always done so, and couldn't "change now, looking on this sight."

Despite the harm Steerforth did to the Peggottys, David doesn't seem to have ever really blamed him for his actions. Given that Dickens depicts Steerforth as being unable to control his impulses and actions, David's leniency seems somewhat justified, but it also contrasts starkly with the lifelong consequences the affair has for Emily.

Some local men who had known Steerforth carry his body up toward the house where Ham is, but hesitate to place him inside. Instead, they go to the inn, and David arranges to take the body to London that night; he feels that he should be the person to inform Mrs. Steerforth of her son's death. As David makes the journey, he feels as though he is surrounded by the "ashes of his youthful friendship," but when he arrives in Highgate, the Steerforths' house looks exactly as it always has.

Steerforth was one of David's last remaining links to his early childhood, and David has now effectively lost both Steerforth himself and the innocent memories of their friendship (Steerforth's elopement with Emily having tainted the latter). This is a necessary part of David's journey to adulthood, largely because David was all too willing to follow Steerforth's lead rather than think and act for himself; significantly, it is only now that Steerforth—David's "bad angel"—is dead that David is free to marry his "good angel" Agnes, whose influence over him is appropriately subtle and feminine. At this point, however, the loss of his "youthful friendship" is still painful to David.

When David finally nerves himself to ring the bell, he tells the maid that something has happened, and that he needs to speak to Mrs. Steerforth directly. He then waits in the drawing-room, surrounded by mementos of Steerforth, as the maid takes his card up to Mrs. Steerforth and Rosa. Eventually, the maid returns and tells David that Mrs. Steerforth is ill, but that he can see her in her chamber. This turns out to be Steerforth's old room, which Mrs. Steerforth says is better suited for an invalid. David guesses, however, that she has moved to it in order to immerse herself in memories of her son. Rosa, meanwhile, seems to guess instantly that David is there with bad news and watches him closely.

Mrs. Steerforth's obsessive love for her son has led her, in his absence, to completely immerse herself in surroundings that remind her of him. Like Mr. Wickfield's "indulgence" in memories of his late wife, Mrs. Steerforth's actions exemplify the dangers of living in the past; in Mrs. Steerforth's case, she's effectively buried herself alive in a shrine to her son.

Mrs. Steerforth expresses her condolences for Dora's death, and David replies that they all "must trust to [Time]" in grief. This unnerves Mrs. Steerforth, and she guesses that Steerforth is sick. David says that Steerforth is "very ill," but when Mrs. Steerforth asks whether he has reconciled with her son, he can't reply. Instead, he mouths the word "Dead" to Rosa. Mrs. Steerforth, however, does not see this, and David tries to break the news to her gently, hinting that "if" Steerforth had been sailing during the storm, something might have happened to him.

David breaks the news of Steerforth's death in much the same way the news of Clara Copperfield's death was broken to David as a child, first saying Steerforth is sick and then that he had died. In part, this underscores the parallels and differences between David and Steerforth; both were single children who grew up very close to their mothers, but who ultimately became very different sorts of men. It also perhaps speaks to how traumatic Steerforth's death is for David, in that it brings back (consciously or unconsciously) memories of his mother's death.

Upset, Mrs. Steerforth asks Rosa to come to her. Rosa does, but also asks whether Mrs. Steerforth's "pride" is satisfied, now that Steerforth has paid with his life. Rosa continues on over Mrs. Steerforth's moans, asking her to look at the **scar** Steerforth gave her. Steerforth's temper, Rosa says, was the direct result of Mrs. Steerforth's temperament, as well as her indulgence of her son. David tries to stop Rosa, but she ignores him, insisting that Mrs. Steerforth "moan for [her] corruption of [Steerforth]," and mocking her for seeing herself as a victim now.

As far as Rosa is concerned, Mrs. Steerforth bears ultimate responsibility for her son's death—not only because she refused to reconcile with him, but also because it was her indulgent upbringing that made Steerforth into the man who ran off with little Em'ly and then refused to return home on his mother's terms. She gestures to her scar as proof of Steerforth's spoiled and careless nature, which caused him to repeatedly hurt the women around him, including, eventually, his own mother: the grief Mrs. Steerforth feels now, Rosa implies, is what Rosa herself has felt most of her life.

Rosa continues, saying she loved Steerforth more truly than Mrs. Steerforth, and that she would have endured any mistreatment if she could have been his wife. She also suggests that Steerforth could have loved her and been a better person because of it: when he grew up, she says, he felt guilt over the **scar** he gave her, and he was "freshest and truest" when he was in her company. Rosa meanwhile, allowed Steerforth to court her and treat her as "a doll, a trifle for the occupation of an idle hour, to be dropped, and taken up, and trifled with, as the inconstant humour took him." Eventually, she says, she and Steerforth drifted apart under the strain of his own personality, and since then, Rosa herself has been treated like a "disfigured piece of furniture" in the household.

According to Rosa, her relationship with Steerforth could have followed a very conventional path if it hadn't been for Mrs. Steerforth's influence: Rosa claims she would have been a traditional Victorian wife, influencing her husband for the better through her very meekness and submissiveness. Instead, Rosa became one of Steerforth's many conquests, and has been "disfigured" physically and emotionally: although not marked in the same way as little Em'ly (Rosa, presumably, didn't sleep with Steerforth), Rosa has similarly lost the possibility of ever marrying or establishing a family.

David begins to say that Rosa ought to feel compassion for Mrs. Steerforth as a grieving mother, but Rosa interrupts, asking who will feel sorrow for her. David again tries to speak, referencing Steerforth's "faults," but this only angers Rosa, who says he "had a soul worth millions of the friends to whom he stooped." David assures Rosa that he himself loved Steerforth, and finally finishes what he has been trying to say, urging Rosa to help Mrs. Steerforth, even if she cannot forget what she or her son did. Rosa accordingly goes to Mrs. Steerforth, cursing David and telling him to leave. As he does, he looks back to see Rosa weeping over Mrs. Steerforth and trying to revive her.

Rosa initially reacts with exasperation to David's demand that she pity Mrs. Steerforth; Rosa's own feelings for Steerforth are, in her mind, at least as strong as his mother's, but she has no official relationship to him and will consequently be as overlooked now as she was during Steerforth's life. Interestingly, however, she does ultimately go to try to comfort Mrs. Steerforth. Since it later becomes clear that Rosa hasn't in fact forgiven Mrs. Steerforth for the role she arguably played in Steerforth's death, Rosa's ongoing care for her seems less like genuine sympathy and more like an inability to move beyond her own feelings for Steerforth and her bitterness over her own past.

David returns later that day with Steerforth's body, and learns that Rosa is still with Mrs. Steerforth, who is insensible despite doctors' efforts to revive her. He then walks around the house pulling down the shades on all the windows, finally reaching the room where Steerforth's body is and lingering there, where "all the world seemed death and silence."

Steerforth's death effectively kills Mrs. Steerforth as well, since she never entirely recovers her senses afterwards. This makes sense, given how completely her life up until this point has revolved around her son; with Steerforth gone, most of Mrs. Steerforth's identity is gone as well.

CHAPTER 57: THE EMIGRANTS

David chooses not to give into his grief immediately, in part because he wants to conceal the deaths of Ham and Steerforth from little Em'ly and Mr. Peggotty. He does, however, tell Mr. Micawber what has happened so that he can help David by intercepting newspapers or other reports of the accident.

If there were any remaining doubt about how much David has grown over the novel, his self-possession in the wake of Ham's and Steerforth's deaths lays it to rest. In fact, David at this point is choosing not only how he will respond to the deaths, but also—in withholding information from them—how Emily and Mr. Peggotty will. This choice might seem questionable, but it's in keeping with David's growing agency, as well as his career as a writer; David is no making decisions about how and whether to "depict" events in real time.

David entrusts Mr. Micawber with this task while he and his family are staying in a public-house, just before setting sail. Traddles (who also knows about the accident) comes with him, and Agnes, Miss Betsey, and Peggotty are already there helping the Micawbers pack. Mr. Micawber is in a very good mood, and has dressed himself in a "nautical" fashion. Miss Betsey asks him when the ship is leaving, and is surprised to learn that they need to be on board the next morning, and that the ship will set sail the day after that. Mr. Micawber then asks permission to make punch one final time. He prepares it with a pocket-knife and serves it in "a series of villainous little tin pots." As he drinks his punch, he talks delightedly about renouncing "the luxuries of the old country."

Far from being disheartened by the challenges of life in Australia, Mr. Micawber takes great pleasure in imagining the coming hardships. This speaks to Micawber's theatrical personality, but it's also a reminder of why Micawber will ultimately succeed in Australia: there isn't a rigid class hierarchy in place, so all that counts, according to Dickens, is the ability to work hard.

A boy arrives saying that someone wishes to see Mr. Micawber, and Mrs. Micawber says she expects it is a member of her family. Mr. Micawber threatens to leave them waiting as payback for their treatment of him, but Mrs. Micawber urges him not to snub a genuine attempt at reconciliation, if only for her sake. Mr. Micawber accordingly agrees and goes downstairs, only for the boy to return with a note explaining that Mr. Micawber has been arrested, and is in a "final paroxysm of despair." David goes downstairs and pays off the debt, and Mr. Micawber embraces him and notes the amount in his pocketbook. This reminds him to give a sheet detailing all his debts, with interest, to Traddles. Meanwhile, Mrs. Micawber still thinks her family will show up before the ship sails.

Mr. Micawber's willingness to forgive and forget his wife's family contrasts sharply with Uriah's vengeful and repeated attempts to have Micawber arrested for betraying him.

Mrs. Micawber promises Miss Betsey and David she will write from aboard ship, if she is able to. Mr. Micawber doesn't doubt his wife will have opportunities to write, because "the **ocean**, in these times, is a perfect fleet of ships," and "the distance is quite imaginary." David is struck by the fact that while Mr. Micawber talked about moving to Canterbury as if he were making an enormous journey, he seems to view going to Australia as a "little trip across the channel." Meanwhile, Mr. Micawber talks excitedly about what they will see and do on the upcoming voyage.

Mr. Micawber is as optimistic about going to Australia as he has been about all his previous ventures. In this case, however, the radically different kind of society he is joining will finally allow him to succeed; in fact, only someone with Micawber's optimism would make the journey in the first place.

Mrs. Micawber says she hopes that her descendants might one day return to England, but Mr. Micawber says he does not feel especially indebted to England, which "has never done much for [him]." The couple argues over this, with Mrs. Micawber urging her husband to see emigration as a way of strengthening "the connexion between [himself] and Albion." She then appeals to David, saying she wants her husband to appreciate his "position": Mr. Micawber should demand that Australia appreciate his talents and offer him "honours," "riches," and jobs. She therefore wants him to assert himself and "be the Caesar of his own fortunes." This, she says, will naturally cause him to become famous and respected in England as well. Mr. Micawber, moved by his wife's faith, says he wouldn't "grudge [his] native country" a share in his future wealth.

Although it's played for comedy, the argument between Mr. and Mrs. Micawber crystallizes the question of how well English society lives up to its claims of being a meritocracy. In urging her husband to be the "Caesar of his own fortunes," Mrs. Micawber is adopting an exaggerated version of the language surrounding self-sufficiency and personal agency. Furthermore, she believes that exhibiting this kind of independence automatically entitles a person to wealth and success. This isn't an unreasonable expectation, given that Victorian society did maintain that hard work and self-discipline would be rewarded.

Miss Betsey drinks to Mr. Micawber's words, and Mr. Peggotty and the Micawbers then toast the whole group. David is struck by Mr. Peggotty's good humor, and expects that he will do well in Australia. Agnes and Miss Betsey then say their goodbyes, causing both Mrs. Micawber and her children to burst into tears.

David's intuition about Micawber's future success proves to be correct. Although Mr. Micawber's optimism has gotten him into trouble in the past, it's the kind of trait required to relocate somewhere far away and—in the English imagination—unsettled.

David returns to the public-house the next morning and finds that the Micawbers have already left. The following afternoon, however, he and Peggotty go to visit the emigrants on board the ship. Mr. Peggotty is on deck, and explains that Mr. Micawber had yet again been arrested, and that he paid off the debt for him. David repays Mr. Peggotty and then accompanies him below deck, where they meet Micawber himself. David, who had been slightly worried that Mr. Peggotty might have heard something about Ham, is reassured by the fact that he has been spending almost all his time with Mr. Micawber.

David continues to take charge of circumstances in this passage, overseeing the responsibilities he's tasked both Mr. Micawber and Mr. Peggotty with—keeping Mr. Peggotty in the dark about Ham's death and preventing Micawber from being arrested.

David takes in his surroundings, watching as people say goodbye to loved ones and strike up new relationships with fellow passengers. The ship is very crowded, and it seems to David that "every age ad occupation [is] crammed into the narrow compass of the 'tween decks."

Dickens depicts the ship going to Australia as a cross-section of English society, implying that a colony like Australia reproduces in miniature the country that established it; David even remarks that some of the passengers, like the ploughmen with dirt all over their shoes, are physically carrying part of England with them. This depiction of colonization characterizes it as a natural extension of Victorian values of determination and personal agency, rather than as a measure of British society's inability to accommodate its entire population (or, of course, as an intrusion into already inhabited areas).

While he is looking around, David sees someone who looks like little Em'ly sitting with one of the Micawbers' children. He also sees a figure who resembles Agnes embracing and walking away from this woman. He then loses track of both figures, however, as all visitors are ordered to leave the ship.

The figure David sees here likely is little Em'ly, since Mr. Peggotty will later tell him that Emily spends much of her time helping others with their children. Although this represents a kind of reintegration into family life following her affair with Steerforth, it also draws attention to the fact that the novel doesn't allow Emily to have a family of her own; she's tainted for the rest of her life.

Mr. Peggotty asks David whether he has any final words for him, and David mentions Martha. At this, Mr. Peggotty gestures to a young woman who is helping Mrs. Gummidge with the luggage, and David sees that it is Martha. Martha, overwhelmed, begins crying, and David shakes Mr. Peggotty's hand and blesses him for taking Martha with him.

Besides serving as another reminder of Mr. Peggotty's generosity, Martha's presence provides an interesting contrast to little Em'ly. Unlike Emily, Martha actually does go on to marry in Australia; in fact her husband even knows about her past and disregards it. This suggests that Emily's decision not to marry is perhaps a form of personal penance. On a narrative level, the difference in the two women's fates may also reflect the fact that Emily was at one point a love interest of the novel's hero, and must therefore be "punished" for her transgressions in a way that Martha is not.

David relays Ham's parting message to Mr. Peggotty, and Mr. Peggotty—still ignorant of Ham's death—gives David a message to relay to Ham. David then says his final goodbye to Mr. Peggotty, and leads Peggotty, who is crying, back up to the deck. There, they say goodbye to Mrs. Micawber, who insists one final time that she will never leave Mr. Micawber. Peggotty and David then disembark, and watch from a distance as the ship gets underway and everyone on board cheers. At that moment, David catches a glimpse of little Em'ly, "surrounded by the rosy light," leaning on her uncle and waving goodbye. By the time the ship is out of sight, however, night has fallen, and everything seems dark to David.

David's description of Emily in this passage is heavily romanticized and, like his avoidance of her since her return, seems in part like a way for David to avoid confronting any lingering feelings he has for her. David's interest in helping see the emigrants off is also a form of avoidance—in this case, a distraction from his grief over Dora and Steerforth. The moment the ship leaves, David loses this purpose, and falls into a state of deep depression.

CHAPTER 58: ABSENCE

David descends into a state of depression, "haunted by the ghosts of many hopes, of many dear remembrances, many errors, many unavailing sorrows and regrets." Before he has fully realized how depressed he is, he goes abroad, so he has no friends around him when, "little by little," he comes to appreciate the depth of his despair. His grief encompasses Dora, Steerforth, and Ham, but also the loss of the Peggotty's home, and the ruin of "the whole airy castle" of his own life. David travels from place to place but can't imagine his grief ever lifting; in fact, at his lowest points, he expects to die.

David's despair in the months after the emigrants' departure is perhaps the most serious threat to his growth as a person that he has faced. This is because David's depression is completely incompatible with the values he has been learning to embody as a nineteenth-century man; he's living entirely in the past, and can't even imagine a future for himself, let alone take steps to make it a reality. With that said, it's not surprising that David has lost confidence in his ability to build a better life for himself, because he's lost so much of what he worked to achieve—most notably, marriage to Dora. The fact that this relationship had already failed to meet his expectations likely compounds David's despair, because marrying and raising a family were seen as so central to a fulfilling life; implicitly, David's talk about "the whole airy castle of [his] life" involves questioning the meaningfulness of the goals he's been taught to pursue (a career, a family, and so on).

David says he is unable to remember or describe all the forms his grief took during this period; instead, he sees himself wandering through foreign cities "as a dreamer might," without truly taking in what he was seeing. This went on for several months, until he found himself crossing from Italy into Switzerland.

David's aimless travels parallel his mental state at the time: he has no clear idea of where he is going, or any hope of getting there. Most of all, he loses sense of himself as an active participant in his own life. This state of mind is so wildly different from the one David normally inhabits that he has difficulty even remembering or explaining it later. Interestingly, David describes his mindset as "undisciplined"—a word he has previously associated with immaturity. In other words, David depicts his depression as a kind of reversion to a childlike way of thinking and acting.

One evening, David is traveling in the Alps, when he is struck by the "beauty and tranquility" of the valley he is descending into. He feels a sense of "sorrow that was not all oppressive," and begins to think that he might be able to change for the better. When he reaches the town he is staying in, the beauty of his surroundings impresses him even more—particularly the sound of shepherd's singing, which seems to come from the sky and mountains. David lies down in the grass and cries as he hasn't since Dora's death.

The beauty of the Alps doesn't put a stop to David's grief, but it does allow him to experience a kind of cathartic grief that allows for the possibility of "better change." This is why the moment is a turning point in David's journey: although he is still unhappy afterwards, he is at least able to once again look towards the future.

While he is sitting in the grass, David takes out a letter that was waiting in town for him. Opening it, he finds it is from Agnes, and mostly expresses concern for his well-being: Agnes says that she is "happy and useful," but then goes on to express her faith that David will find a way to "turn affliction to good" and emerge with a "firmer and higher tendency." She doesn't give him any advice, but she assures him that she is with him in spirit. David puts the letter away, feeling the "shadows" leaving him and conscious of a deep love for Agnes that he can't put a name to. He reads the letter several times that evening and then writes to her, saying that she inspires him to be what she thinks he already is.

Agnes's letter encapsulates the role she plays in David's life. Although she consistently encourages him to be a better and more mature person, she does so without infringing on his own agency. Here, she simply assures David of her confidence in him, which in turn motivates him to be the wise, self-assured, and resilient person she knows that he can be. Her remark about "turning affliction to good" is especially significant, because it speaks to one of the primary ways in which Dickens suggests people can become masters of their fate rather than victims of it; by reframing his losses as opportunities for growth, David demonstrates his purposefulness and resolve.

It has now been nearly a year since Dora's death. David decides to spend the remaining three months in the same valley and then reassess his situation. Once the three months have passed, he decides not to return home immediately, but to begin writing again. He also begins seeking out human contact again, and makes several friends in the valley before leaving for the winter.

Although David doesn't feel ready to return to England yet, he's beginning to take steps toward creating a future for himself—specifically, by resuming his career as a writer.

David begins working on a story based on his own life. When he finishes, he sends it to Traddles, who arranges for it to be published. The work enhances David's fame, and he soon begins working on another novel. Before he finishes this, however, he begins to think about returning home, now that he has recovered his health and seen many countries.

In using his memories as material for a novel, David follows Agnes's advice about "turning affliction to good" in a very concrete way. He also demonstrates his mastery over his past experiences both by repurposing them as fiction and by using them to further his career.

David explains that he has largely said all he wishes to about this period of his life, but that there is one thing he has held back. He then admits that at some point he began to feel that he had "thrown away" Agnes's love. It's possible, he says, that this feeling was at the heart of his longstanding dissatisfaction with his life, but it intensified during his depression. In fact, this was one thing that persuaded him to stay abroad for so long: he feared that he would rashly confess his love and lose Agnes's "sisterly affection." Furthermore, although he initially hoped that he might be able to win Agnes back at some point in the future, he slowly came to see this as impossible, since he was the one who set the terms of their current, platonic relationship by marrying Dora.

One way in which David turns this painful period of his life to good purpose is by using it as an opportunity for self-reflection. Now that he has time to look back on his life, it becomes clear to him that he mistook his youthful infatuation with Dora for lasting love, and that Agnes is the woman he ought to have married. The fact that she gracefully adopted the sisterly role that David pushed her into simply confirms this, because she selflessly set aside her own feelings to suit his needs.

Before returning to England, David therefore decides to keep his love for Agnes a secret. Doing so causes him pain, but he decides to use the loss of "what might have been" into another means of self-improvement: since it is a reminder of his youthful thoughtlessness, it will cause him to be "more resolved" and "more conscious of [him]self" in the future.

David's decision to remain silent about his feelings stems not only from his belief that Agnes views him as a brother, but also from his sense of being unworthy of her; to David, the fact that did not see his relationship with Agnes for what it was when he married Dora is proof of his foolishness and immaturity. However, while he renounces the possibility of being Agnes's husband, he still looks to her as a guiding light. This is evidence of David's growing maturity, as well as of David and Agnes's suitability for one another; David now has enough self-awareness and self-discipline to recognize Agnes's moral superiority, and to put her well-being first.


CHAPTER 59: RETURN

David arrives back in London and finds that it has changed in his three-year absence: some of the buildings he remembers are gone, although those that remain cheer him with their familiarity. His friends' situations have also changed: Miss Betsey is back in Dover, and Traddles is now practicing law.

The life David returns to in England is not the same one he left behind; even the physical landscape of London has changed significantly.

David goes immediately to the neighborhood where Traddles works, and asks for his friend's address at an inn. He also asks whether Traddles is making a name for himself, and is disappointed when the waiters say they haven't heard of him. As he looks around at his surroundings, he is struck by how old and formal they look, and he begins to think that the law might be a difficult profession "to be taken by storm." He continues to feel discouraged on Traddles' behalf as he goes up to his room to change. When he comes downstairs, he sees an elderly man, who the waiter tells David is very rich.

Although Traddles has followed a more conventional career path, it's in some ways more challenging to succeed in. The legal system is old and set in its ways, and this sluggishness makes it difficult even for a hard-working and determined individual like Traddles to break into.

After eating, David goes to see Traddles. As he approaches his room, he thinks he hears girls laughing. A young clerk answers the door and takes David to Traddles, who runs to David and embraces him. Traddles is delighted to see David: he has "nothing but good news," and asks how David has been. Before David can respond, however, Traddles continues on, saying he has just missed "the ceremony." David is confused, and Traddles—guessing that he missed his last letter—explains that he has married, and asks Sophy to come out from where she is hiding behind a curtain. David greets her warmly as Traddles says they are "all" very happy. This reminds him of Sophy's sisters, who are currently staying with them, and he admits that he was playing with them while David was coming up the stairs.

Despite David's fears, Traddles is actually doing quite well, both personally and professionally: he's not only fully qualified as a lawyer, but also married, and has consequently passed two major milestones on the way to adulthood.


Traddles asks Sophy to go fetch her sisters, who went to the neighboring room when they heard David. While Sophy is gone, Traddles says that he finds it very pleasant to have Sophy's sisters around after so many years living alone, even though "the society of girls is [...] not professional." Traddles then admits that they are "quite unprofessional altogether," since he and Sophy are living in the same rooms he works in. Nevertheless, he says, Sophy is a good housekeeper and manages to have found space for five of her sisters while creating a makeshift bedroom for her and Traddles up in a "little room in the roof." Traddles also points out the old **flower pot and table**, although he admits they still have many household items they need to save up for.

Traddles's apartment functions as both a workplace and a home, blending together elements of both the professional and domestic spheres, which were conventionally separate from one another. In part, this is a sign that Traddles still has a ways to go in establishing himself in his career, and in life more generally; at the moment, he simply can't afford to maintain a household separate from his office. However, David also finds himself charmed by the feminine influence that Sophy and her sisters have brought to a neighborhood of law offices. The presence of homelike touches like the flower pot therefore illustrates, in a very literal way, the softening influence women and domestic life were supposed to have on the public sphere.

Traddles says that after successfully arguing a particularly noteworthy case, he went to Sophy's father and explained that since Sophy was willing to marry him with his present income and future prospects, she should not be forced to remain single simply for her family's convenience. He also said that he wanted to be "useful" to the family, and that he would be willing to look after Sophy's sisters if they were orphaned. Reverend Crewler agreed and (with great difficulty) persuaded Sophy's mother to agree to the marriage as well. Consequently, Traddles and Sophy were at last able to marry six weeks ago, although he felt like a "Monster" when he saw how upset her family was during the ceremony. Now, however, he is very happy, both with the sisters' company and with his work.

The fact that Traddles finally stands up for his right to marry Sophy is another sign of his growth as a character. Arguably, Traddles was initially too selfless for a nineteenth-century man; his willingness to overlook the way the rest of the Crewler family took advantage of Sophy was a sign that he might, among other things, fail to look out for his own professional interests. Although Traddles is clearly still inclined to think the best of others—he wouldn't feel guilty over depriving the Crewlers of Sophy otherwise—he is also more willing to assert his own rights and interests.

Sophy's sisters enter, and David sees that they are all very pretty, and that the eldest (Caroline) is in fact as beautiful as Traddles has always said. David finds, however, that he appreciates Sophy's "loving, cheerful, fireside quality" even more than her sisters' prettiness, and he thinks that Traddles has married well. Everyone then sits around the fire while Sophy makes tea.

David's respect for Sophy is a sign of how his priorities have shifted since his marriage to Dora. Although Sophy is not as beautiful as some of her sisters, she is a real companion to her husband, and a skilled homemaker. Agnes, of course, is all of these things as well as beautiful, which makes her the ideal match for David.

Sophy tells David that, while on their honeymoon, she and Traddles saw Agnes and Miss Betsey, and that both women were thinking of David. She also says that Traddles thought about David constantly while he was away, and David is charmed by how often Sophy references her husband's thoughts and opinions. Similarly, he finds it sweet that both Sophy and Traddles go out of their way to please Caroline ("the Beauty"). Although all of the sisters are slightly spoiled, David is touched by Sophy and Traddles's own "self-forgetfulness." As the evening goes on, Sophy's services are constantly in request: she pins her sisters' hair, sings whatever songs they ask for, and writes home on their behalf.

Sophy's suitability as a wife continues to impress David in this passage. In particular, he admires her selflessness, which she demonstrates not only in her constant attention to her sister's needs, but also in her total devotion to her husband; her repeated references to him make it clear that her life revolves around him. From a modern perspective, of course, it seems unrealistic (and possibly unfair) that anyone could be so consistently attuned to the thoughts and wishes of everyone around them.

David returns to the inn later that evening, pleased by the thought of Sophy and her sisters living "among the dry law-stationers and the attorneys' offices." He also feels much more optimistic about Traddles's career prospects, and begins to think back over his own life as he sits in the coffee-room. He is no longer "bitter" about the past, but he feels that he has lost any opportunity of having a real "home" by losing Agnes's love.

The pleasure David takes in the thought of "tea and toast, and children's songs in that grim atmosphere of pounce and parchment" reflects Victorian ideas about the relationship between public and private life. Although these two spheres of life were separate, the domestic realm, and women themselves, were seen as tempering the rough world of business and providing it with a moral compass. David, however, has given up on the hope of having a home of his own at this point in the novel, so witnessing Traddles' happiness is a bittersweet experience for him.

As David is wondering whether he can resign himself to being just a brother to Agnes, he notices that Mr. Chillip is also in the room. David walks over and asks whether Mr. Chillip recognizes him. Startled, Chillip admits that David looks familiar, but can't quite place him, so David finally tells him who he is. The knowledge "move[s]" Mr. Chillip, who tells David that he strongly resembles his father, and that he has heard about David's success as a writer. He also explains that he has moved to a new town where his wife inherited some property. David orders another round of drinks, and Mr. Chillip remarks that "it seems but yesterday" that he was nursing David through the measles.

Mr. Chillip's reappearance toward the end of the novel helps provide a sense of closure, while also reminding readers of how far David has come since his birth.

Mr. Chillip expresses his condolences over Dora's death, which he says he learned about from Miss Murdstone. It turns out that Mr. Chillip is once again living in the same neighborhood as Mr. Murdstone, who married a young woman with some property there. David asks whether Mr. Chillip serves as their doctor, and Mr. Chillip says he is not often called for, but that he has noticed signs of "firmness" in the Murdstones. David continues to press Chillip, who protests that what happens in his patients' private lives isn't his business. Eventually, however, he admits that the new Mrs. Murdstone used to be a "charming woman," but now seems "broken"—though Chillip says that these are Mrs. Chillip's opinions rather than his own.

Like Mr. Chillip himself, the Murdstones' reappearance is in part a marker of David's own progress: the Murdstones may still be abusing children and preying on young women, but David is now completely free of them. There is also a darker side to Chillip's account of the Murdstones, however. David Copperfield *is largely a novel that punishes its villains and rewards it heroes, implying that hard work pays off and dishonesty and cruelty do not. The fact that the Murdstones continue to thrive calls these assumptions about justice into question.*

David, unsurprised, asks whether Mr. Murdstone still claims to be deeply religious, and Mr. Chillip says that he does, according to Mrs. Chillip. He also says that Mrs. Chillip believes Mr. Murdstone uses religion as an excuse to be cruel, which David agrees is true. Mr. Chillip concludes by saying that the Murdstones are not popular in the neighborhood, and that perhaps their own bad natures constitute a kind of "punishment."

Mr. Chillip suggests that the Murdstones haven't truly escaped punishment; while they seem to be doing well, they are trapped inide their own hard-heartedness, and are therefore cut off from much of what makes life meaningful. The idea that this is itself a form of punishment is somewhat fitting in a novel so heavily invested in its characters' abilities to grow and change for the better. On the other hand, this purely moral form of punishment overlooks the fact that Mr. Murdstone continues to wield a large amount of power as a well-off man, and that he uses that power to terrorize those who are weaker.

David and Mr. Chillip continue to chat, and the conversation eventually moves to Miss Betsey, who was present the night Mr. Chillip delivered David. David says that he is leaving tomorrow to visit Miss Betsey, and that Mr. Chillip would realize how kind-hearted she is if he got to know her. The possibility of meeting her again frightens Chillip so much, however, that he leaves to go to bed. David also goes to bed, and spends the next day traveling to Dover, where he is greeted not only by his aunt and Mr. Dick but also by Peggotty, who is now their housekeeper. David recounts his conversation with Mr. Chillip, and while they are amused by Chillip's fear of Miss Betsey, they are disturbed by the news involving Mr. Murdstone.

Mr. Chillip is a fairly timid man to begin with, so Miss Betsey's unconventional assertiveness (for a woman) continues to frighten him decades after his last encounter with her. This serves as a comic counterpoint to the more seriously traumatic events that continue to haunt characters like David years after the fact.

CHAPTER 60: AGNES

David and Miss Betsey spend the night catching up. Mr. Peggotty and his family are apparently doing well in Australia, and Mr. Micawber has actually managed to send back some payments towards his debts. Mr. Dick, meanwhile, continues to copy whatever he can to keep "King Charles the First at a respectful distance."

As David, Miss Betsey, and the Micawbers themselves had hoped, Australian society is open and flexible enough that Mr. Micwber is able to succeed in a way that he never was in England; for the first time in the novel, he has paid off some of his debts. Meanwhile, as the novel draws towards a close, the mention of Mr. Dick's memorial serves as a warning about the dangers of becoming lost in memories of the past. This is a danger Mr. Dick himself has now largely overcome thanks to the discipline and purpose he has developed through work.

Eventually, Miss Betsey asks when David is going to visit Canterbury, and he replies that he'll go the following day. He then appears lost in thought, thinking about the time Miss Betsey lamented that he was "blind" for loving Dora. Miss Betsey seems to guess what David is thinking, and says that Mr. Wickfield is a "reclaimed man," and that Agnes is "as beautiful, as earnest, [and] as disinterested" as ever. David hesitatingly asks whether Agnes has any suitors, and Miss Betsey says that she has many. When he asks whether she has found any "worthy" suitor to love, however, Miss Betsey says she believes Agnes has, but that it isn't her place to say. David replies that he wants to see Agnes happy and is sure she will confide in him eventually, and Miss Betsey puts her hand on his shoulder.

The fact that David finds himself reflecting on his former "blindness" in this scene is striking, given that he still fails to grasp some of what is going on around him; to the reader, it's obvious that Miss Betsey is talking about David when she mentions a "worthy" suitor, but David himself is oblivious to this fact. Crucially, however, his current blindness stems from a greater knowledge of his own weaknesses, rather than a failure to appreciate Agnes's virtues. It's this mature self-awareness that makes David deserving of Agnes now.

David goes to Canterbury the next day and lingers outside Mr. Wickfield's house, looking at the office where Uriah and Mr. Micawber used to work. That room is now a parlor, but the house is otherwise unchanged, and when David enters, he sees that everything has been restored to the way it was during his childhood, before the Heeps lived there. As David is looking wistfully out the window, Agnes enters the room.

With Uriah gone, the Wickfield house once again becomes the site of domestic bliss David remembers from his childhood. In fact, the household is happier and more functional now than it was before, now that Mr. Wickfield has quit drinking and relaxed his obsessively protective attitude towards Agnes.

David runs to Agnes and embraces her, trying to thank her for everything she has done for him. Eventually, Agnes's soothing presence calms David down, and she begins to talk about the meetings she had with little Em'ly before her departure, and about the visits Agnes has paid to Dora's grave. As Agnes speaks, David finds that he is better able to bear these painful memories.

Agnes's calm and gentleness have always been a source of strength for David. What is especially significant about this passage, however, is the ability Agnes has to recast David's painful memories into something tolerable. Agnes's support, in other words, is part of what allows David to draw on even difficult experiences in order to learn and grow.

David asks Agnes how she has been, and she says that both she and her father are doing well in their "restored" home. David presses her, and Agnes—guessing he is asking her about suitors—blushes and shakes her head with "quiet sadness." David accordingly drops the subject and asks her about her school, and she says that she enjoys the work. David responds by praising her goodness, causing her to blush again, and change the topic, asking David if he will spend the night. David explains that he has promised to return to Miss Betsey's, but that he will spend the remainder of the day with Agnes and Mr. Wickfield.

According to David, his awkward attempts to learn whether Agnes is in love are an attempt to do his "duty" as a friend by her, as well as to accustom himself to thinking of her with someone else. He doesn't recognize, however, that her "sadness" stems from the fact that she's in love with him—something that becomes especially clear when she blushes at his praise.

Agnes says that she has to leave David for a while, but explains that he is welcome to the house's books and music. David remarks that even the flowers are the same as those that used to be in the house, and Agnes says that she has tried to return everything to the way it was when they were children. She still carries the basket of keys, for instance, and says that it reminds her of those happy times, and her "brother," David. After she leaves, David resolves never to lose her "sisterly" love, which he believes is the only thing he has left. He then goes for a walk, passing by the butcher and thinking about his childhood infatuation with Miss Larkins. In all this time, Agnes is the only thing that seems to have remained constant.

Like David himself, Agnes looks back fondly on the time they spent growing up together—so much so, in fact, that she has tried to recreate those times with the household décor. At the moment, this attempt to recreate the past is bittersweet for both Agnes and David; since neither realizes that the other returns their feelings, both assume that the fraternal relationship they had as children is all that they can have going forward. Meanwhile, Agnes's careful restoration of the household encapsulates the role she plays in David's life, providing him with an unwavering source of support and comfort even as everything around him (and he himself) changes.

David returns to find Mr. Wickfield, who had been out working in a garden he has outside of town. They have dinner and tea with Agnes and several of her students, who leave afterwards. The three reminisce, and Mr. Wickfield says that as much as he regrets things he has done, he doesn't want to change the past, because that would mean losing the memory of Agnes's kindness and devotion. David says he understands, but Mr. Wickfield insists that no one appreciates what Agnes has endured.

Like David, Mr. Wickfield ultimately comes to embrace even his worst memories—in Wickfield's case, because these experiences are so intertwined with memories of Agnes's "patience and devotion," which both move Mr. Wickfield and provide him with an incentive to change and grow as a means of repaying her.

Agnes hushes Mr. Wickfield, and he changes the subject to Agnes's mother, explaining that she married Wickfield against her father's wishes. Her father never forgave her, and she never recovered from his "repulse," dying just two weeks after Agnes was born. Wickfield explains that he was in an "unhealthy" state of mind at the time, and that his love for Agnes was consequently "diseased." Since then, he has often felt that Agnes's personality reflects "something of her poor mother's story," and David—looking at the pair—is touched once again by Agnes's compassion and loyalty.

Mr. Wickfield's account of his marriage makes it clear that it was not just grief over his wife's death that tainted his relationship with Agnes, but also guilt: by marrying his wife, Wickfield estranged her from her father and indirectly played a role in her death. This perhaps explains his obsessive concern for Agnes, who resembles her mother in looks and personality. Ironically, however, the degree of his anxiety contributed to his alcoholism, and therefore to all of the worry and sadness that this caused Agnes.

Agnes plays some "old airs" on the piano, and then asks David whether he plans to go abroad again. He asks for her opinion, and she says that she hopes he won't, since his fame "enlarges [his] power of doing good" at home. David credits Agnes with making him what he is, and says that he has thought so since Dora's death, when Agnes appeared on the stairs "pointing upward." This image has stayed with him, he says, because he feels that Agnes is always guiding him toward something higher and better. Agnes attempts to deny this, but David insists that he will see Agnes in this way for the rest of both their lives. Agnes, touched, says she is proud of David and then resumes playing the piano.

The memory of Agnes pointing upward becomes a symbol, to both David and his readers, of the powerful moral that Agnes has on him. By inspiring David to ceaselessly better himself, Agnes is not only responsible for his worldly successes, but also, ultimately, for his hopes of going to heaven. The image, in other words, reflects the belief that the ideal Victorian woman was not simply a companion to her husband in practical matters, but also a guide in spiritual and moral ones.

David continues to speak, saying that Mr. Wickfield's story seems "part of the feeling with which [David] regarded [Agnes]" at their first meeting. Agnes suggests that he simply felt sorry for her, but David insists that he always felt that there was something "softened" about Agnes that verged on sorrow. He then asks whether she thinks it is foolish of him to think that he could have sensed this, or that he could have sensed her capacity for loyalty, at such an early meeting. Agnes assures him that she does not, but looks upset for a moment. He thinks about her expression as he goes home that night, worrying that she is unhappy. Meanwhile, David *is* unhappy, but still determined not to confess his love for Agnes.

Mr. Wickfield's story about Agnes's mother confirms something that David had previously sensed about Agnes, but that he hadn't been able to put words to. This is part of a broader trend in the novel whereby actions, events, and feelings only become fully understandable in retrospect. In fact, the very action of writing a memoir, as David is, is in some sense a way of clarifying experiences by incorporating them into a single, logical narrative.

CHAPTER 61: I AM SHOWN TWO INTERESTING PENITENTS

David decides to remain with Miss Betsey until he finishes his novel. In the meantime, he makes trips to London both for pleasure and to confer with Traddles, who managed David's business affairs while he was abroad. Traddles also receives all of David's fan mail, including requests to use David's name to practice law, in exchange for a cut of the profits. David, however, declines these offers to avoid encouraging corruption.

David's refusal to take advantage of the years he spent training as a proctor is a sign of his integrity (though he also has no need to profit off it, since he's now earning a comfortable income as a writer).

While visiting Traddles, David notices that Sophy is often writing in a book that she quickly hides upon seeing David. Eventually, Traddles shows David a piece of paper full of "extraordinarily legal and formal" handwriting, explaining that Sophy is learning to work as his clerk. Sophy is embarrassed, but Traddles is proud to have such a skilled and helpful wife. In fact, he says, he can hardly believe how happy and lucky he is when he sees Sophy going about her daily routine. Although there are still many things they can't afford, Traddles and Sophy often take pleasure in walking past shops and discussing what they would buy: they even plan which house they would move into if Traddles became a judge, and "parcel it out" as if they owned it already.

Traddles' and Sophy's window-shopping illustrates the growing connection between class and consumerism in nineteenth-century England. A comfortably well-off middle-class family could showcase their status with their purchases, so Traddles' and Sophy's fantasies about what they will buy one day indicate their aspirations to move up the social ladder. As their interest in houses demonstrates, this consumerism is also tied to nineteenth-century domesticity: in practice, creating a proper household required a certain level of income.

David remarks that Traddles can always find ways to enjoy life, regardless of his circumstances, and asks whether he still draws skeletons the way he used to. Traddles admits that he does, and laughs, in a "forgiving way," about "Old Creakle." David then takes out a letter Creakle has sent him, explaining that his fame has caused Creakle to "discover" that he always liked David. Mr. Creakle is now a magistrate, and has invited David for a tour of the prison he oversees, so that David can see for himself "the only true system of prison discipline." Traddles agrees to accompany David on a tour, as David comments disapprovingly on the fact that Creakle feels so much "tenderness" for prisoners after having abused and abandoned members of his own family.

Creakle's reappearance underscores how far David has come since his days as a student, and how much he has moved up in the world; he's now famous enough that his old enemy Creakle is trying to improve his own situation by currying favor with David. As David's remark about Creakle's "tenderness" demonstrates, the episode is also an opportunity for Dickens to vent his frustration with the prison reform efforts that took place over the course of the nineteenth-century; although Dickens himself was a social reformer, he thought that the money invested in prison reform would be better spent on the "deserving" poor (that is, lower-class people who had not committed crimes and were attempting to find work).

When the day of the tour arrives, David and Traddles go to the prison, which is an imposing and expensive building. Once inside, they meet several magistrates, and Mr. Creakle greets David and Traddles warmly. There is a conversation about prison conditions that David finds irritating, because he thinks the money would be better spent on schools or housing. The group then begins its tour, and David observes to Traddles that the prisoners are better fed than many workers. This David, says, is explained as a necessary part of "the 'system.'" When David asks what makes this system so effective, the magistrates say that the "perfect isolation of prisoners" encourages them to repent. David suspects, however, that the prisoners are able to communicate with one another, and explains that this later proved to be the case.

Given that David Copperfield *is a novel about personal growth and transformation, it may seem strange that David himself is so cynical about the possibility of prisoners reforming. Again, this is partly a reflection of Dickens' frustration with the priorities of nineteenth-century reformers; as David notes, the need amongst the lower classes for schooling, housing, and even food was urgent, so spending money on improved prison conditions seemed irresponsible to some.*

As the tour goes on, David feels that most of the prisoners are simply parroting what they have learned, which passes for penitence. In fact, he suspects that some particularly self-centered men take pleasure in the attention they receive for expressing remorse. Having heard that "Twenty Eight" and (especially) "Twenty Seven" are model prisoners, David tries not to form a final opinion until after seeing them.

David's remark about the backhanded pride involved in public declarations of guilt strongly recalls Uriah Heep's use of "humbleness" as a way of asserting authority. This isn't an accident, since one of the prisoners does in fact turn out to be Uriah. It's significant, however, that this latest form of humility involves only Uriah's criminal action and not his social class. This shift corresponds to the broader idea that what is objectionable about Uriah isn't his ambition (a quality David shares), but his moral charcter.

Finally, the group arrives at Twenty-Seven's cell, and David is surprised to see that the prisoner is Uriah Heep, who greets both him and Traddles. Mr. Creakle asks Uriah how he is, and he replies that he is "very umble." One of the other magistrates then asks whether Uriah is "comfortable," and Uriah says he is, because he is better able to see his faults than he was outside prison. This moves the magistrates, as does Uriah's declaration that it is his "duty" to put up with things like overcooked meals.

Again, Uriah's claims of humility initially revolved around his class background rather than his misdeeds, as they do now. This change in the word's connotation underscores the novel's insistence that Uriah is problematic not because of his social climbing, but simply because of his villainy.

The magistrates call for Twenty-Eight to be brought out, and David sees that it is Littimer. One of the magistrates asks whether the quality of the cocoa has improved since Littimer complained about it, and Littimer says that it has, although he suspects the milk isn't entirely pure. After further questioning, Littimer says that he understands his "follies" now and is happy. He adds, however, that he knows David from his "former life," and wants to take the opportunity to warn him that he views all his crimes as the result of "having lived a thoughtless life in the service of young men." He also says that he tried to save a woman who "fell into dissolute courses"—that is, little Em'ly—and wants David to tell her that Littimer forgives her and hopes she will repent.

Under the guise of expressing repentance, Littimer is able to vent his resentment towards his former employers and others (like David) from a class higher than his own. His claim that these sorts of men led him astray is especially hypocritical given that he's in prison for robbing his last employer. The passage also reveals Littimer's resentment toward Emily, who refused to marry him, similarly framed as innocent concern.

Both the magistrate and Mr. Littimer express hopes that David will be affected by what the latter has said and repent. Littimer then exchanges a glance with Uriah and returns to his cell. Mr. Creakle asks whether there is anything more he can do for Uriah, and Uriah asks permission to write to Mrs. Heep again: he is worried about the state of his mother's soul and wishes she could be brought to the prison, which he views as the only place without "sin." He assures Mr. Creakle, however, that he himself is a changed man and could safely be let out.

Uriah's "wish" that his mother had also been imprisoned is first and foremost a way of currying favor with the magistrates by praising their system. However, it's also a reminder that Uriah lacks the one redeeming quality his mother has—namely, genuine love for her family. As David puts it, Uriah looks "as if he would have blighted the outer world [...] if he could." In other words, there is an undercurrent of real resentment to Uriah's wish, and it seems likely that he would be happy to see is mother in prison purely out of spite.

Mr. Creakle asks whether Uriah has anything to say to David. Uriah says he does, reminding David that he once hit Uriah and saying he forgives him. Furthermore, he says he hopes that David, Mr. Wickfield, Agnes, and "all of that sinful lot" will see the error of their ways: in fact, he hopes that they could all "be took up and brought here [to the prison]." He then returns to his cell as the magistrates all congratulate him.

Uriah's desire to see David and his friends imprisoned is genuine, though it's not the expression of concern the magistrates take it for but rather a wish for revenge. Prison, in other words, hasn't changed Uriah at all; he is just as resentful as ever, and just as good at manipulating those around him.

David asks a magistrate what crime led to Uriah's imprisonment, and learns that he was the ringleader in a case of "fraud, forgery, and conspiracy." Littimer, meanwhile, robbed an employer: the magistrate says he particularly remembers this case because a "little woman" turned Littimer in. David guesses that he is talking about Miss Mowcher, and the magistrate confirms that she recognized Littimer while he was trying to escape in disguise, grabbed hold of him despite him "cut[ting] her face right open," and testified at his trial.

Littimer's crime, like Uriah's actions as Wickfield's clerk and partner, was a crime against his employer and supposed social better. Uriah, meanwhile, moved on from defrauding a private law firm to attempting to defraud the Bank of England—something that perhaps hints at the dangerous consequences of social unrest and class resentment for the nation as a whole.

As the tour ends, David feels it would be useless to try to convince Mr. Creakle that Uriah and Littimer are not repentant at all. Instead, he and Traddles simply leave the prisoners and the magistrates to their "system," which they hope will prove hollow sooner rather than later.

Part of what ultimately distinguishes the novel's villains from its heroes is the villains' inability to grow and change. Where David learns from his mistakes, Uriah and Littimer remain exactly the same even after going to prison.

CHAPTER 62: A LIGHT SHINES ON MY WAY

Over the next two months, David continues to live with Miss Betsey and pay visits to Agnes, whose encouragement he relies on heavily in his work. At the same time, however, he finds these visits painful, since it reminds him of the kind of marriage he could have had. He is still determined not to risk their relationship or her happiness by confessing his love, although he does fantasize about telling her the truth as an old man. Meanwhile, Miss Betsey seems to understand David's dilemma, but never speaks to him about it. As Christmas approaches, however, David begins to worry that Agnes has not told him to who she is in love with because she has guessed his own feelings. Since this would make his restraint pointless, he decides he needs to broach the topic with her.

In many ways, Agnes is already serving as a wife to David; her support of his writing career, for instance, resembles Sophy's clerking for her husband Traddles. David, however, is so humbled by his past romantic mistakes that he doesn't see this, and even assumes that Agnes is in love with someone else.

One day, Miss Betsey asks David if he is going to Canterbury to read his manuscript aloud to Agnes. He says that he is, and then asks whether his aunt knows anything more about Agnes's "attachment." Miss Betsey, looking at David with "a kind of doubt, or pity, or suspense," says that she does, and that she believes Agnes is going to marry soon. David, attempting to look happy, blesses Agnes, and Miss Betsey echoes this, blessing her future husband as well.

Once again, David fails to realize that his aunt is talking about him when she says Agnes is likely to marry soon.

After a long, cold ride, David arrives at the Wickfields' to find Agnes done teaching for the day. They discuss David's work and Agnes, who is busy stitching, jokes that she needs to enjoy David's company while she can, because he will soon be too famous to talk to her. David, however, grows serious and asks Agnes whether she doubts his loyalty to her. She says that she does not, and David, reminding her of his deep gratitude to her, asks her to share her "secret" with him. Agnes says nothing, and David presses her to "let [him] be [her] friend, [her] brother." At this, Agnes gets up and walks across the room, starting to cry. David begs her to tell him what's wrong and let him help her, but she says she can't speak at the moment.

David unwittingly hurts Agnes by describing her as his sister and therefore insisting on the platonic nature of their relationship. David does this, of course, because he is trying to hide his own romantic feelings for fear of hurting Agnes. With that said, it's striking that David so often describes Agnes as his sister. On the one hand, this seems to give the relationship an incestuous subtext that's problematic elsewhere in the novel—for instance, in Dora's resemblance to Clara Copperfield. These other matches, however, tend to resemble parent-child relationsips, and are questionable in part because they signal an unwillingness to leave childhood behind.

David begins to suspect that Agnes might be in love with him, but is afraid he is letting his hopes run away with him. He assures her that he has learned enough over the years not to "envy" her love for someone else, but Agnes simply tells him that he is mistaken: she has a secret, but it is not a "new one," or one that she can tell David.

David's restraint and his willingness to support Agnes in spite of his own feelings contrast with his jealousy while courting Dora, and therefore demonstrate his growth as a character.

Agnes tries to leave, but David catches her and says that he never planned to tell her this, but that he now hopes that he might one day be something other than a brother to her. Agnes continues crying, but David presses on, explaining that she was always so selfless, that he learned to take her for granted. Nevertheless, he says, his life even with Dora would have been "incomplete" without Agnes. After Dora's death, this became even clearer to him, and he has loved Agnes ever since. David then explains why he has stayed silent, and how grateful he would be to be Agnes's husband. Agnes accepts, and David senses that Dora is speaking through her and blessing the union. Agnes, meanwhile, says that she is very happy but has one thing to confess: she has loved him "all [her] life."

Ironically, the selflessness that makes Agnes such an ideal wife for David is also what caused David to overlook her for so long. Although this double bind is eventually resolved, it points to one of the many tensions present in nineteenth-century gender norms. Another issue the novel works to resolve here is David's prior marriage to Dora—in this case, by suggesting that Dora herself has blessed the marriage from beyond the grave. Although it later emerges that Dora did in fact give Agnes permission to marry David, readers may find this particular passage strange or even troubling; David's suggestion that the moment inspires him "tenderest recollections" of Dora implies that Dora was just a stepping stone on the way to marriage with Agnes.

David and Agnes go for a walk that evening, and the quietness of their surroundings seems to mirror their own "blessed calm." David thinks back over his whole life, imagining a "ragged way-worn boy" who has finally arrived at this destination.

In retrospect, David suggests, everything that has happened to him has led up to and prepared him for his engagement to Agnes. Regardless of whether this is true, it's certainly the case that David's memoir structures his experiences in a way that frames even apparent mistakes or dead-ends, like his marriage to Dora, as necessary parts of his development.

The next day, David brings Agnes with him to see Miss Betsey, but does not immediately reveal that they are engaged. After dinner, however, David says that he has talked to Agnes about the conversation he had with her. Miss Betsey scolds him for breaking his promise to keep quiet, but David insists his aunt shouldn't be angry, taking Agnes's arm to demonstrate what he means. This sends Miss Betsey into "hysterics," and Peggotty needs to revive her. Miss Betsey then hugs Peggotty and Mr. Dick, telling them the good news. She refuses to tell David, however, whether she deliberately told him Agnes was going to marry in order to provoke a confession.

Miss Betsey's emotional response to the news of Agnes's and David's engagement is yet another sign that she isn't actually as unsentimental as she pretends to be. She's clearly very savvy, however, since Dickens strongly implies she was working behind the scenes to nudge David towards proposing.

David and Agnes marry about two weeks later, with only Traddles, Sophy, Doctor Strong, and Annie Strong as wedding guests. As the couple drives away together, Agnes says she has something she needs to tell David: the night Dora died, she "left something" to Agnes, and Agnes asks David to guess what it was. Agnes confirms that Dora insisted that only Agnes could succeed her as David's wife. The couple embraces, weeping but very happy.

Agnes's confession confirms David's earlier sense that Dora approved of their marriage. In this way, it mitigates any uneasiness readers might have about David remarrying, and also recasts David and Dora's marriage as useful rather than mistake, in the sense that it helps bring Agnes and David together.

CHAPTER 63: A VISITOR

Ten years after David and Agnes marry, David has grown more successful as an author, and his "domestic joy [is] perfect." One evening, he and his wife are sitting at home surrounded by their children when a visitor arrives asking to see David. The servant says that the man looks like a farmer, and told him he had come a long distance. David asks for the man to be shown in, and Agnes—who catches a glimpse of his face before David—announces that it is Mr. Peggotty.

The fact that Dickens shows so little of David and Agnes' married life is significant for a couple of reasons. Nineteenth-century novels—particularly coming-of-age stories—often end in marriage, which indicates just how important establishing a family was; even more than establishing himself in a profession, it's the capstone of David's growth into adulthood. At the same tme, the fact that David and Agnes's marriage is left largely unexplored is perhaps an indication of just how elusive the "perfect" domestic joy David mentions was in reality; it's difficult to depict or even imagine what a perfect family would look like.

Mr. Peggotty is now an old man, but he still looks strong and healthy, and takes the children on his knees when he goes to sit by the fire. He tells David how happy he is to see him and Agnes, as well as their children, who remind him of David and little Em'ly as children. David invites Mr. Peggotty to stay in his house, assuring him that they will catch up after the children have gone to bed.

Mr. Peggotty's remark about David's children resembling David and Emily helps bring the novel full circle: a story that began with David as a small child ends when he has small children of his own. Mr. Peggotty's remarks also provide a sense of continuity—no matter how much has changed over the course of the novel, some things, like Mr. Peggotty, are constant.

Mr. Peggotty explains that he has promised little Em'ly he will only stay in England for a few weeks. He says he doesn't mind the long journey, however, and felt he had to see Agnes and David's family before he grew too old. David wants to know all about Mr. Peggotty's life in Australia, so Mr. Peggotty explains that while their lives were initially hard, they were patient, and have now secured a comfortable living by farming sheep and other livestock.

Dickens suggests that hard work and determination pay off in Australia even more than they do in England. This makes some sense, given that Australia, as a new colony, lacked the rigid social hierarchy of England, and offered many potential opportunities for advancement.

Agnes asks after Emily, and Mr. Peggotty explains that she was initially very depressed, so it is fortunate she didn't know about Ham's death when they set sail. Over the course of the voyage, however, she busied herself taking care of sick or young passengers, which lifted her spirits. When Mr. Peggotty learned about Ham's accident, he kept the knowledge from Emily, but she eventually found out from an account in a newspaper brought by an immigrant. Mr. Peggotty admits that the discovery deeply affected Emily, and that she is still "sorrowful," but says that the solitude and work on the farm have kept her going. He also explains that while no one knows her true story, she has always refused any offers of marriage. Nevertheless, she takes pleasure in teaching children and caring for the sick.

Little Em'ly's status at the end of the novel is ambiguous. On the one hand, Dickens "allows" her to begin a second life somewhere where she will not be subject to prejudice. She is even able to act as a kind of surrogate mother through her work as a teacher, and the fact that she occupies this position of trust is significant, given the fears about fallen women's supposed ability to corrupt others. The cost of Emily's redemption, however, seems to be a lifelong state of penance; although Emily isn't exactly unhappy, her life is shaped by memories of her past sexual transgressions—so much so that she apparently feels it wouldn't be appropriate for her to marry.


David asks about Martha, and Mr. Peggotty says she married a farm-laborer, who is aware of her "true story." As for Mrs. Gummidge, Mr. Peggotty laughingly explains that a ship's cook proposed to her, but that Mrs. Gummidge rejected him by overturning a bucket on his head. Nevertheless, Mr. Peggotty says, Mrs. Gummidge has been a helpful and uncomplaining assistant to him and Emily.

Interestingly, Martha isn't subject to the same "punishment" as little Em'ly, perhaps because her own sexual misdeeds weren't a "betrayal" of the novel's main character. Regardless, Martha's story is true to life; because relatively few immigrants to Australia were women, those women who did immigrate stood a good chance of marrying even with a suspect personal history.


Finally, David asks about Mr. Micawber, and Mr. Peggotty says has paid off all his debts. Mr. Peggotty explains that both he and Mr. Micawber eventually grew successful enough to leave the countryside and settle in a town. Since then, he says, Mr. Micawber has become a magistrate, and he shows David a newspaper article recounting a public dinner given in Micawber's honor. The article also mentions that a Doctor Mell presided over the dinner and gave a speech praising Micawber, and David delightedly realizes that this is his old schoolteacher. Mr. Peggotty then points out another section of the paper, which contains a typically ornate letter from Mr. Micawber to David, publically congratulating him for his success and thanking him for the "intellectual feasts" (that is, novels) he has provided to the residents of Port Middlebray.

The opportunities for social advancement are so plentiful that even Mr. Micawber has managed to succeed, not only paying off his debts but working his way up to the position of magistrate (just as Mrs. Micawber once hoped that he would). Even more unexpectedly, Mr. Mell—a relatively minor character from the novel's early chapters—resurfaces in greatly improved circumstances. Since Mell was the kind but impoverished teacher unjustly fired because of Steerforth's and Creakle's classism, his happy ending underscores the novel's contention that virtue is ultimately rewarded regardless of class.


Mr. Peggotty stays with David and Agnes for roughly a month: both Peggotty and Miss Betsey come to London to see him, and they all have many more chats about Mr. Micawber and the other settlers. Shortly before Mr. Peggotty leaves, he and David visit Ham's grave in Yarmouth: David copies the inscription for Mr. Peggotty, who takes some grass from the grave to give to little Em'ly.

Although Mr. Peggotty and the other immigrants have made new and largely happy lives for themselves in Australia, they can't (and don't intend to) entirely leave the past behind. The grass Mr. Peggotty gathers from Ham's grave is a reminder of the past painful experiences that have shaped them, and that they continue to grapple with.

CHAPTER 64: A LAST RETROSPECT

David explains that his narrative is now finished, and announces that he will "look back, once more—for the last time—before I close these leaves."

The suggestion that David isn't ever going to reread his memoir once it's finished speaks to how powerful and potentially dangerous a force memory is in the novel. David has often taken pleasure in re-experiencing his past through writing, but for that very reason, he needs to avoid the temptation to lose himself in memories and neglect the present and future.

David pictures himself with Agnes and his children, "journeying along the road of life," surrounded by many other people. He then describes these "faces." Miss Betsey, for instance, is now in her eighties but is still "a steady walker of six miles at a stretch." Peggotty, meanwhile, is now "shrivelled" rather than ruddy, but retains her old habit of needlework, and still carries around the book about crocodiles that David read as a child. She shows this to David's children (two of whom she is godmother to), reminding David of his own childhood. Mr. Dick also spends time with David's children, flying his kite with the boys and saying that he intends to finish the Memorial when he has time.

David's closing depiction of his life strikes a balance between change and continuity. Major figures from David's own childhood, like Peggotty and Miss Betsey, are still present and recognizable, though older. Interestingly, these figures also fill exactly the same role in the lives of David's children that they once did in David's own, with Mr. Dick flying his kite and Peggotty entertaining them with the "crocodile book." In other words, part of David's reward for successfully completing the transition to adulthood is to re-experience happy memories of his childhood through his own children.

David describes a visit to Mrs. Steerforth and Rosa. Although Mrs. Steerforth still possesses "traces of old pride and beauty," her overall state of mind is confused and "fretful." She asks Rosa who David is and, when Rosa tells her, says she is sorry he is in mourning and asks whether he has reconciled with Steerforth. She then suddenly remembers that Steerforth is dead and cries out for Rosa, who alternately soothes her and insists that she loved Steerforth "better."

Having refused to allow her son to grow up, Mrs. Steerforth's "punishment" is, appropriately, to remain permanently stuck in the past—specifically, the moments just before and after she learned of Steerforth's death. Rosa is similarly trapped—in her case, by her inability to let go of her obsession with Steerforth and her anger at his mother.

Miss Mills eventually returns from India married to a very wealthy man. She has several servants and now talks about money rather than the miseries of love. David disapproves of this and "what Julia calls 'society,'" which includes people like Jack Maldon. Maldon himself is safe in a post Doctor Strong secured for him, but nevertheless speaks condescendingly of the Doctor, calling him "charmingly antique."

Although David is well off at this point, his disdain for overt money-grubbing is a sign of both his moral character and his respectability: someone secure in their class position can afford to condemn people who take a clear interest in amassing wealth. David's distaste for "society" also speaks to his own middle-class values—particularly the importance of hard work, which causes him to disapprove of people who embrace idleness in an attempt to appear upper-class.

Meanwhile, Doctor Strong continues to work on his dictionary. He and Annie Strong now have a happy life together, in part because Mrs. Markleham no longer has the influence she once had.

David suggests that the Strongs' marital problems stemmed mostly from Mrs. Markleham's undue power in the household, which disrupted the balance of the traditional nuclear family. Now that Mrs. Markleham has been put in her place, the Strongs lead a happy life together.

Traddles is now a very successful lawyer on the cusp of becoming a judge. He reminisces with David about the period when Sophy acted as his clerk. As the two men walk to Sophy's birthday dinner, Traddles also remarks that he has been able to accomplish many other things he wished to, including providing Sophy's father with a larger income, educating his sons well, and seeing several of Sophy's sisters happily married. Three other sisters have come to live with Sophy and Traddles, while an additional three keep house for Sophy's father. The only one who is not happy is "the Beauty," who married a "vagabond." She has since separated from her husband and is living with Traddles and Sophy, who are trying to cheer her up.

Like David, Traddles has reached the pinnacle of Victorian success through hard work and patience: he has both a thriving career and an idyllic family life. Still, the "Beauty's" unfortunate marriage is a reminder that life doesn't always work out so tidily for essentially good people.

Traddles and David reach Traddles's house, which is one of the properties he and Sophy used to look at. Since so many of Sophy's relatives are either living with or visiting them at any given time, Traddles and his wife have "squeezed themselves" into some small upstairs rooms. Everyone sits down to dinner, and David notes that Traddles and Sophy now have real silverware.

As their willingness to inconvenience themselves demonstrates, Traddles and Sophy are as selfless as ever. Despite this, Traddles has managed to advance quickly in his career, and the couple now has the material possessions (for instance, good silverware) associated with upper-middle class status.

David explains that he is approaching the end of his story and "subduing [his] desire to linger yet," but that one face—Agnes's—remains with him even as he does so. He sees her next to him, keeping him company while he writes late into the night. He then closes with a prayer that when he "closes [his] life indeed," Agnes will still be beside him, "pointing upward."

Once again, David hints that he must resist the temptation to surrender himself to his memories. It's in large part Agnes who allows him to remain focused on the future. In fact, the gentle guidance she has provided for David throughout the novel here becomes spiritual in nature: Agnes is no longer simply providing David with guidance on work and relationships, but actually pointing him toward heaven.

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