***David Copperfield***

***Chapter 1 – I am Born***

***Brief Summary:***

David is born six months after his father dies. His mother and their servant, Peggotty, are alone in "The Rookery," awaiting the birth. Miss Betsey Trotwood, David's great aunt, arrives unexpectedly on the day David is born. Miss Trotwood predicts that David will be born a girl and proposes to be this female infant's godmother. When David is born a boy, Miss Trotwood takes his gender as a personal insult and leaves. Several superstitious elements are introduced regarding David's birth. One is the hour of his birth, late on Friday night, which implies that he will be able to see ghosts or have some other connection to the spirit world. The other is that he is born with a caul, a good luck charm against drowning.

***Brief Analysis:***

In this chapter, all the factors of David's birth are explained which provides foreshadowing about his future life. The first significance is the relationship between himself, his mother, and his aunt, as is shown by the significant personality traits of both women. The superstitious element of the caul, with its particular reference to sailors and drowning, also foreshadows David's later contact with fisherman and the risks associated with their profession.

***Critical Study:***

An older David Copperfield narrates the story of his life. He begins by saying that only the writing that follows can tell who the hero of his story is. He tells of his simple birth, which occurred at the stroke of midnight on a Friday night. An old woman in the neighborhood has told him that the time of his birth indicates he will be unlucky and will be able to see ghosts and spirits. David’s father is already dead when David is born. David’s aunt, Miss Betsey Trotwood, appears on the day of David’s birth and speaks with David’s mother, Clara. Miss Betsey informs Clara that she intends to take custody of the girl Clara is about to bear. Miss Betsey wishes to raise the girl so that men never take advantage of her the way Miss Betsey has been taken advantage of in her own life.

When David is born and Mr. Chillip, the doctor, informs Miss Betsey that Clara has had a boy, Miss Betsey storms out of the house and never returns.

[David Copperfield](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#David_Copperfield) tells the reader he was born at [Blunderstone Rookery](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/symbols/" \l "Blunderstone_Rookery), in Suffolk, England, six months after the death of his father. Just before David's birth, his great-aunt, [Miss Betsey](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#Miss_Betsey) Trotwood, arrives at Blunderstone. She had become estranged from David's father because she disapproved of his marriage to Clara, a woman half his age. Convinced Clara's baby will be a girl, Miss Betsey intends to be the baby's godmother and asks Clara to name the baby Betsey Trotwood Copperfield. She has no children of her own, having separated from her husband. She comments on her nephew's gullibility, pointing out he had foolishly called the house at Blunderstone "the Rookery" when the nests had been long abandoned. After quizzing Clara about how she manages the household, Miss Betsey decides Clara is inexperienced and impractical. Miss Betsey departs abruptly, never to return, when the doctor, Mr. Chillip, informs her Clara's baby is a boy. After David's birth, he and his beautiful, young, inexperienced mother are tended to by [Peggotty](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/" \l "Peggotty), Clara's loyal family servant.

***Summary and analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield), and his father's aunt, [Betsey Trotwood](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood).

***Analysis Part 1:***

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.

***Summary Part 2:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) briefly describes his great-aunt. [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood), 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield), whom she describes as a  "wax doll."

***Analysis Part 2:***

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).

***Summary Part 3:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) sets the scene for his birth. One Friday afternoon, his mother, [Clara](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield), 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty), to fetch tea for her when she faints after trying to defend her late husband's actions.

***Analysis Part 3:***

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.

***Summary Part 4:***

As [Clara](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield) recovers, [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood) 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.

***Analysis Part 4:***

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.

***Summary part 5:***

[Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) sends her nephew, [Ham](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/ham-peggotty), to fetch a doctor, who arrives to find [Clara](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield) settled upstairs and [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood) waiting in the parlor. The doctor, [Chillip](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield)) 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."

***Analysis Part 5:***

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.