***David Copperfield***

***Chapter 12 – Liking Life on My Own Account No Better, I Form a Great Resolution***

***Summary:***

* Mr. Micawber manages to make deals with his creditors, and he is released from debtors prison.
* Mr. Micawber has to spend a little more time at the prison because there are fees to be settled, but he's going to go free soon.
* Back at the prison, Mr. Micawber celebrates with his club while David and Mrs. Micawber toast Mr. Micawber's freedom together.
* David asks Mrs. Micawber what Mr. Micawber plans to do now.
* Mrs. Micawber tells David that her family has suggested Mr. Micawber leave London for Plymouth (which is where she's from).
* David asks Mrs. Micawber if she will accompany Mr. Micawber back to Plymouth.
* Mrs. Micawber weeps as she informs David that she will never leave Mr. Micawber: yes, perhaps they have had to hock all of their precious possessions, including the things she inherited from her parents, but she will stand by her man!
* Mrs. Micawber gets more and more upset as she assures David she'll never leave Mr. Micawber.
* Finally, she gets so loud in her protests that she frightens David, and he runs off to find Mr. Micawber with his club.
* There, David tells Mr. Micawber that Mrs. Micawber seems to be in hysterics, and Mr. Micawber bursts into tears.
* Mr. Micawber runs to Mrs. Micawber and asks what is wrong.
* Mrs. Micawber promises Mr. Micawber that she will never desert him.
* Mr. Micawber is so moved by her devotion that he keeps begging her to be calm.
* David, meanwhile, starts to cry.
* And Mrs. Micawber is so emotional that she makes Mr. Micawber weep again.
* So Mr. Micawber, Mrs. Micawber, and David all cry together for a time.
* Then, Mr. Micawber goes to put Mrs. Micawber to bed, and David waits for him.
* Eventually, Mr. Micawber emerges and tells David that Mrs. Micawber is very sad.
* The problem is that the Micawbers have gotten so used to their troubles that they don't know how to face their new freedom.
* David is so confused and miserable to think that the Micawbers will soon leave London that he doesn't know what to do.
* Late that night, he has a sudden idea: he realizes that he can't survive London without the Micawbers. So he has to escape, too.
* He knows that the Murdstones don't care. He's received a couple of parcels from Mr. Murdstone containing clothes, but there is no sign that the Murdstones expect him to become anything other than a drudge toiling away in that warehouse.
* Mr. Micawber comes in to the counting house the next day to explain to Quinion that he is going to Plymouth and can no longer be responsible for David's rooms.
* Quinion puts David up in the house of one of the other warehouse workers.
* On the Micawbers' last day in London, they have dinner together, and David brings over presents for the kids.
* The Orfling is also there to say goodbye, since she now has to find another place of employment.
* Mrs. Micawber promises that she will always think fondly of David: he has been a true friend to the Micawbers.
* Mr. Micawber also tells David that he is amazingly sympathetic and compassionate.
* David's only landlord also has a bit of advice for him: never procrastinate! And also – never get into debt! Debt makes you totally miserable. (We here at Shmoop can also add that this is absolutely, totally true: debt does suck.)
* Mrs. Micawber gives David a motherly hug and the family drives away in a coach to Plymouth.
* The Orfling and David shake hands and go their separate ways.
* David returns to Murdstone and Grinby's wine warehouse.
* But he doesn't plan to stay at the warehouse for much longer: David is going to run away.
* He wants to go and find his aunt, Miss Betsey Trotwood.
* David has heard of her in the story of his birth (remember the first chapter, so long ago?).
* He imagines his aunt touching his mother's hair and feeling sympathy for her girlish beauty.
* He starts to wonder if his aunt might have some pity for him.
* Slowly, David becomes determined to run away to Miss Betsey.
* David writes to Peggotty and drops hints to try and work out where Miss Betsey lives. He also asks if he can borrow a little money.
* Peggotty writes back that Miss Betsey lives near Dover (on the southeast coast of England), but she's not sure exactly where. She also includes some cash for David.
* David feels that he has to stay at the warehouse until Saturday night because he has been paid in advance for his labor.
* Saturday night, when they're all lined up to get paid for their work, David shakes hands with Mick Walker, says good night to Mealy Potatoes, and runs away.
* David finds a boy next to a donkey cart near the house where he's staying. David tries to hire the boy to help him carry his trunk to the coach office.
* The boy does take the trunk according to David's instructions.
* Unfortunately, the boy also sees the money David borrowed from Peggotty, which David drops.
* The boy grabs David's cash.
* The boy accuses David of running away on "a pollis case" (12.63)— a case for the police.
* He says that David has to prove it's his money at the police station.
* David bursts into tears and demands his cash back.
* The boy starts to drag David off (presumably to the police) when he suddenly changes his mind, jumps on his cart, and drives away with David's trunk and money in hand.
* David runs after the boy's cart, but he can't keep up.
* Finally, with very little left in his possession, David sets out on the road he thinks leads to Dover.

***Synopsis:***

Mr. Micawber is released from jail and his debts are resolved. The family decides to move to look for work. David decides he will not stay in London without the Micawbers and resolves to run away to his aunt Betsey. He borrows some money from Peggotty and hires a young man to help him move his box to the coach station. Along the way, the young man steals David’s money and possessions. Mr. Micawber appears in court and is released from prison. The family moves to Plymouth where Mrs. Micawber's family may be able to help them. David resolves to run away and find his aunt, Miss Betsey Trotwood, to see if she might help him. He arranges secretly to go to Dover to find her, but as he tries to leave London he is robbed of all his money and possessions. He is forced to travel without food or shelter the entire way to Dover.

Again, as a child, David is left to take care of himself and is at the mercy of those around him. Even though he tried very hard to save money for his journey and to be honorable to his dishonorable boss, he is rewarded by being robbed and left to starve on his own.

***Critical Analysis(Ch11-12):***

Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse is on a wharf; the entire building is overrun with rats and "discoloured with the dirt and smoke of a hundred years." David's job, along with three or four other boys his age, is to wash bottles and paste on new labels. David is introduced to Mr. Micawber, with whom he is to live, and then he is put to work. At eight o'clock, Mr. Micawber returns to take David to his lodgings, where the young lad is introduced to Mrs. Micawber and her small children.

David learns that the family has been forced to take in a lodger because of Mr. Micawber's debts, and later David notices that creditors appear at the house at all hours of the day. However, Mr. Micawber, with his implicit faith that "something will turn up," seems unperturbed by their demands for money.

David offers to help the family with the loan of his wages, but instead, Mrs. Micawber asks him to pawn household goods for them so that the family can buy food. This suffices for awhile, but at last Mr. Micawber is arrested and taken to debtors' prison, where his family soon joins him; here David observes that "they live more comfortably . . . than they had lived for a long while . . ." (English jails at that time allowed family members to live with the imprisoned debtor.)

David rents a small room near the prison and continues his solitary existence. The work at Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse is degrading, and the other boys employed there are a lowly group of urchins.

Mr. Micawber holds a dinner party at the prison in celebration of his impending release, and Mrs. Micawber vows to David that she "will never desert Mr. Micawber" no matter how difficult things become. Upon his release, the Micawbers decide to move to Plymouth, where Mr. Micawber can "exert his talents in the country." This influences David to end his "weary days at Murdstone and Grinby's" and run away to Miss Betsey Trotwood, his only relation and a person who he thinks might be sympathetic to his plight.

David writes Peggotty for Miss Betsey's address and the loan of a half-guinea for travelling expenses. When this arrives, he hires a young man with a cart to transport his trunk to the coach office, but the stranger steals his half-guinea and rides off with the trunk. David is alone in London without luggage or funds.

Dickens' own childhood forms a good deal of the background of Chapter 11, and Mr. Micawber is a brilliant caricature of Dickens' father. The degradation that David feels at Murdstone and Grinby's is an exact account of the author's feelings about his early life. At the age of nine, Dickens' father, along with the rest of his family, was sent to debtors' prison and Charles became an apprentice in a blacking factory, pasting labels on bottles. His parents appeared to show little concern for Charles' situation, especially the boy's education. Although the Micawbers are treated humorously in the novel, Dickens never forgave his own parents and always thought that his upbringing was no better than an orphan's.

Chapter 12 develops the characters of the Micawbers, who were introduced in the previous chapter as David's landlords. The mutual good feeling between David and the family suggests that their relationship will ripen into deep friendship.

In addition, David's escape from drudgery leads him into deeper troubles as he sets out for Miss Betsey's. This is an example of Dickens' protest against the exposure of children to hardships, a protest that is found in so much of his writing.

***Critical Study(Ch 11-12):***

David Copperfield, at age 10, begins to work in Murdstone and Grinby's dilapidated rat-infested warehouse, washing, labeling, and packing bottles. He's devastated by his new situation in life, feeling that the little education he has received and his hopes for the future are all draining away, but he does his work without complaint. Nicknamed "the little gent" at the warehouse, David has little in common with the other boys. He has a room in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Micawber and their four young children. Mr. Micawber is ever hopeful something will turn up in the way of employment. In the meantime, the Micawbers are constantly hounded by creditors. They're prone to rapid mood shifts, ranging from deep despair over their debts, to joy and celebration the moment they can afford to pay for a dinner. At one point, David helps Mrs. Micawber pawn their household goods so they can feed the family. Finally, Mr. Micawber is arrested and sent to the King's Bench Prison—a debtor's prison—and Mrs. Micawber and the children move into the prison with him. Having become attached to the family, David rents a room near the prison with a view of a timber yard, and visits them often. David spends his free time walking and lounging in the streets of London, making up stories about the people he observes there.

Mr. Micawber is released from prison and the family decides to move to Plymouth, where there's a chance of Mr. Micawber finding employment. David can't bear the thought of staying in London after the Micawbers leave. He decides to run away and try to find his great-aunt, [Miss Betsey](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#Miss_Betsey), who lives near Dover. He borrows some money from Peggotty for the trip, and he hires a young man with a donkey cart to help him move his box of belongings to the stage coach office. But the young man with the donkey cart runs away with David's box and his money, and after a futile chase, David sets out on foot towards Dover.

In Chapter 10, [Peggotty](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#Peggotty) assures [David Copperfield](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#David_Copperfield) she'll always be there for him. Barkis's quirky courtship of Peggotty provides some light diversion from the uncertain future that lies ahead for David. Their marriage creates a sense of stability in at least one corner of David's life, particularly when Peggotty shows him the bedroom she's set aside for him. Emily's interest in David's description of [James Steerforth](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#James_Steerforth) will turn out to have dire consequences for her.

Chapter 11 contains a number of elements related to [Charles Dickens](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/author/)'s life. The description of David's time at Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse is very similar to Dickens's own experiences. The Dickens family wasn't quite as genteel as David's family, but they fell on hard times, and when he was 10 years old, Dickens was taken out of school and sent to work at Jonathan Warren's blacking warehouse in London. At the time, the families of people in debtor's prison were allowed to move into the prison with the prisoner. They had considerable freedom inside the prison, where there was something of a community atmosphere. Like David, Dickens rented a small room near the prison overlooking a timber yard. Dickens returned to the subject of the debtors' prison in a later novel, *Little Dorrit*.

David Copperfield's encounter with the young man with the donkey cart who steals his money and his box is another example of David's naïveté. It's a tribute to David's resilience and perseverance that he decides to make the journey to Dover on foot, with no money.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Mr. Micawber](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-micawber) successfully secures his release from prison, and while he celebrates with his fellow inmates, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) visits [Mrs. Micawber](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 1:***

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.

***Summary Part 2:***

The realization that the Micawbers will soon leave London reminds [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-murdstone) to help him into a better situation.

***Analysis Part 2:***

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.

***Summary Part 3:***

On the Sunday before they leave, [Mr. Micawber](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-micawber) and [Mrs. Micawber](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-micawber) have [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) 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.

***Analysis Part 3:***

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.

***Summary Part 4:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) says goodbye to the Micawbers as they board a coach the next morning, and [Mr. Micawber](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 4:***

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.

***Summary part 5:***

The coach drives away, and [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) goes to work. He plans to run away soon, however, in the hopes of finding [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood). 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield), and might help David on her account. He therefore writes to [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) and learns that Miss Betsey lives somewhere near Dover.

***Analysis Part 5:***

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.

***Summary Part 6:***

Not wanting to cheat his employer out of any money, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) 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.

***Analysis Part 6:***

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.