***David Copperfield***

### *Chapter 17 – Somebody Turns Up*

***Summary:***

* David writes to Peggotty several times to let her know that he has been taken in by his aunt and that he has started school with Doctor Strong.
* Peggotty writes back to David, and her letter is splotched with tears on David's behalf.
* Peggotty is still a little unsure about David's aunt. She hints to David that if he needs to run away again, he can come to Yarmouth.
* She also tells David that the Murdstones have put his old house up for sale.
* Everything seems fine in Peggotty land.
* David passes on Peggotty's greetings to his aunt, who he sees about once a month on Saturdays.
* He also sees Mr. Dick every other Wednesday; Mr. Dick comes to his school and stays the night at Mr. Wickfield's house with David.
* David figures out that Miss Betsey totally controls Mr. Dick's money, and that Mr. Dick is happy to hand over his business to Miss Betsey. Mr. Dick thinks Miss Betsey is the wisest woman in the world.
* One visit, Mr. Dick asks David who "the man that hides near our house and frightens" (17.9) Miss Betsey is?
* David has no idea who this could be.
* Mr. Dick explains that an unfamiliar man has come up behind Miss Betsey suddenly on their evening walks twice now, and each time she has wept and given him money.
* At first, David doesn't believe Mr. Dick's story, but now he wonders whether Miss Betsey has paid this man to protect Mr. Dick from something.
* Mr. Dick absolutely adores his Wednesday visits to David's school: he is well-known and well-liked by the boys there.
* He has also befriended Doctor Strong who he greatly respects.
* Eventually, Doctor Strong starts reading Mr. Dick excerpts from his Dictionary, which Mr. Dick thinks is the best book in the world.
* Since Mr. Dick regularly visits Mr. Wickfield's house, he has become close to Agnes Wickfield.
* Mr. Dick's friendship with David deepens. Mr. Dick starts to ask David's advice about things, since he believes that David must have inherited good sense from his aunt.
* One morning, David bumps into Uriah Heep, who reminds David of his promise to come and have tea with his mother.
* David isn't sure whether or not he likes Uriah Heep, but he's a bit offended that Uriah implies that David won't visit his house because David is too much of a snob.
* David agrees at once to come over to Uriah Heep's house at 6 PM, as long as Mr. Wickfield approves.
* Later on, David and Uriah Heep walk over to Uriah's house.
* Uriah Heep continues to study a great deal of law, but he admits that it's hard because he doesn't understand Latin.
* David offers to teach him Latin.
* Uriah Heep claims that he is too humble to accept David's offer.
* David says this is nonsense, but Uriah Heep exclaims that a man in his station of life has to be humble if he is going to succeed.
* Eventually, they arrive at Uriah Heep's home.
* Mrs. Heep, Uriah's mother, looks exactly like him, only shorter.
* She is similarly obsessed with her own humility.
* Mrs. Heep tells Uriah that "this is a day to be remembered" (17.59) because David Copperfield is visiting *her* house.
* David is embarrassed by her compliments, but he is still pleased to be treated as an honored guest.
* The two Heeps are very attentive, but they also manage to make David tell them all about things he doesn't want to talk about, about his family and his past.
* David can see that Uriah and Mrs. Heep are very fond of each other.
* They spend the entire meal getting David to tell them secrets he shouldn't be telling, and David becomes very uncomfortable.
* Then the most extraordinary thing happens: a man walks past the open front door, and it is Mr. Micawber!
* David is not entirely happy to see Mr. Micawber just then (since he's having dinner with new people who don't know about his time in London), but he is happy to see Mr. Micawber in general.
* Mr. Micawber calls out to David through the door, and David goes to greet him.
* David asks after Mrs. Micawber, who is well – both the twins have been weaned, and so she is traveling with Mr. Micawber.
* David introduces Mr. Micawber to the Heeps, and Mr. Micawber tells them that any friend of David's is a friend of his.
* Mrs. Heep assures Mr. Micawber that she and her son are too humble to *dare* to call themselves friends of David.
* Mr. Micawber asks David if he is still in the wine trade – a reference to David's awful days as a worker for Murdstone and Grinby's – and David tells him that he is now a student with Doctor Strong.
* David is in agony, because he doesn't want Mr. Micawber to reveal David's recent past in the city.
* Mr. Micawber is glad to hear David is a student and compliments his intelligence.
* David wants to get Mr. Micawber away from the Heeps, so he offers to go pay his respects to Mrs. Micawber.
* Mr. Micawber explains to the Heeps that he is a man in great financial difficulties, but he has always enjoyed confiding his problems to David.
* They say goodbye to the Heeps, and David and Mr. Micawber walk over to the inn where the Micawbers are staying.
* Mr. Micawber immediately pulls out the newspaper to see if there are any want ads in the classifieds.
* Mrs. Micawber tells David that they had gone to Plymouth in search of a job, but her family's influence was not enough to get him employment.
* In fact, since he just got out of debtors prison, the reception of Mr. Micawber by Mrs. Micawber's family was not warm.
* Her family basically kicked the Micawbers out after a week, which David thinks is shameful.
* Mr. Micawber decides to try his hand at the coal trade, so that's why they're in Dover – but at present, they have no capital at all. In fact, they're waiting for a money order so that they can pay their bill at the inn where they are currently staying.
* David expresses his sympathy for the poor Micawbers at this awful news.
* Mr. Micawber invites David to have dinner with them the next evening.
* Weirdly, that night, David sees Mr. Micawber and Uriah Heep walking by his home at Mr. Wickfield's arm in arm.
* When David goes the next day to have dinner with the Micawbers, Mr. Micawber informs David that he has been drinking brandy at Mrs. Heep's house.
* Mr. Micawber tells David that some day, Uriah Heep might become attorney general.
* David worries that Mr. Micawber might have told Uriah Heep too much about David's history, but he doesn't want to ask Mr. Micawber point blank what he has said about David. Once again, David is very uncomfortable.
* Mr. and Mrs. Micawber are in high spirits, constantly toasting one another and singing.
* Because they are in such high spirits, David is astonished when he gets a letter from Mr. Micawber at 7 AM the following morning:
* No money is coming to Mr. Micawber, and he doesn't have the cash to pay his hotel and room service bills.
* He is (once again) completely ruined.
* David is so worried that he runs over to the inn on his way to school.
* But half way there, he sees Mr. and Mrs. Micawber riding past him in a coach to London, chatting to one another and looking perfectly happy.
* So, David goes on to school, feeling rather glad that they are gone even though he likes them fine.

***Synopsis:***

Peggotty writes to David and tells him that the furniture at his old house has been sold, the Murdstones have moved, and the house is for sale. David tells Miss Betsey of all the news in Peggotty’s letters when she visits him at school, as she does frequently. Mr. Dick visits even more frequently and becomes a favorite of Doctor Strong and the other school boys. Mr. Dick tells David that Miss Betsey recently had a strange nighttime encounter with a man who frightened her so badly that she fainted. Neither Mr. Dick nor David understands the encounter. Mr. Dick reports that the man appeared again the previous night, and that Miss Betsey gave him money.

David goes to tea at Uriah Heep’s house, where Uriah and his mother intimidate David into telling them secrets about Agnes, especially about her father’s health and financial situation. David is very uncomfortable with the Heeps and feels that they are manipulating him. Uriah and his mother both frequently repeat that they are so humble as to be grateful for any attention from David. In the middle of tea, Mr. Micawber walks by the door. On seeing David, he enters. The two of them leave together and visit Mrs. Micawber, who is very glad to see David. The Micawbers are in terrible financial straits again, but they are quite merry over dinner nonetheless.

David Copperfield writes to [Peggotty](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/" \l "Peggotty) about [Miss Betsey](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#Miss_Betsey) and his new school. Peggotty writes back that the Murdstones have left Blunderstone and the house is now for sale or rent. Mr. Dick comes to Canterbury once a week to visit David and he becomes good friends with Doctor Strong and with Annie Strong. Mr. Dick mentions to David that every so often a strange man appears outside the cottage, and Miss Betsey seems frightened of him and gives him money. David suspects this might be a misunderstanding on Mr. Dick's part.

[Uriah Heep](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#Uriah_Heep) invites David home to have tea with him and his mother, who feigns humility as much as her son does. The Heeps skillfully manage the conversation so that David ends up telling them much more about himself, his family, and the Wickfields than he should. As they dine, David notices Mr. Micawber walking past the open street door. Micawber recognizes David, who is forced to introduce Micawber to the Heeps. The Micawbers are about to leave town, and they invite David for a lavish dinner. Micawber says he has had drinks with Uriah Heep and is very impressed with the young man. The next morning, David receives a despairing letter from Mr. Micawber in which he says he's about to be thrown into debtor's prison again. David rushes to their lodging to offer comfort, and he sees the Micawbers leaving on the London coach, smiling, relaxed, and enjoying good food and drink. David decides he's glad to have seen the Micawbers, but he's also glad they're gone.

***Significance:***

On a visit to David in Canterbury, Mr. Dick relates the appearance of a strange man at his aunt's house who had frightened her. David is not sure if he should believe Dick's story, and is worried that it might have something to do with Dick's own family trying to take him back from Miss Betsey.

David has tea with Uriah Heep and Heep's mother. Both Heeps constantly refer to their own humbleness and poverty. While they are very poor, they are also extremely interested in pumping David for information about himself and his life. David ends up sharing many experiences and feelings that he later regrets. During the meeting, by sheer coincidence, Mr. Micawber walks past the house and sees David. David uncomfortably introduces him to the Heeps and tries to get him not to reveal anything to them about his former life. However, some information slips out.

David goes to see Mrs. Micawber and learns what has brought them to Canterbury. She recounts that they had to leave Plymouth because her family had not been able to provide assistance. After looking at various industries, they stop in Canterbury to see the Cathedral and end up having to stay there until they can get money to pay their hotel bill. During their time in Canterbury, Mr. Micawber strikes up a friendship with Uriah Heep, which worries David, who does not want Heep to find out about David's past. The Micawbers, of course, do not receive any money to pay their bill and have to secretly leave, burdened with this new debt. Although David likes them very much, he is glad to see them go.

Mr. Dick's description of the mysterious stranger that bothers Miss Betsey will come up later in the story. Similarly, Uriah Heep's tendency to collect gossip and secrets about people will serve him as he climbs the social ladder to take over Mr. Wickfield's business. Heep's constant talk of his humble existence is a cover for his ambitions.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

Sometime after arriving at [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood)'s, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) had written to [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty), and his family are doing well. David passes this information on to Miss Betsey but does not mention [little Em'ly](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/little-em-ly-emily), whom he senses his aunt would not approve of.

***Analysis Part 1:***

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.

***Summary Part 2:***

Meanwhile, [Mr. Dick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-dick) pays frequent visits to [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) at school, always speaking glowingly of [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood) 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.

***Analysis Part 2:***

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.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Mr. Dick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-dick) quickly becomes a favorite with [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield)'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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/annie-strong), 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/agnes-wickfield).

***Analysis Part 3:***

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.

***Summary Part 4:***

One day, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) is walking [Mr. Dick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-dick) back to the coach office when he stumbles across [Uriah Heep](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 4:***

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.

***Summary part 5:***

When [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) arrives at [Uriah Heep](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/uriah-heep)'s house, he finds that [Mrs. Heep](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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."

***Analysis Part 5:***

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.

***Summary Part 6:***

The conversation is suddenly interrupted by the appearance of [Mr. Micawber](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-micawber), who notices [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/uriah-heep) and [Mrs. Heep](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/doctor-strong)'s and asks whether he could visit [Mrs. Micawber](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-micawber). Micawber agrees that this is a wonderful idea, and extols David's faithful friendship throughout all of the Micawbers' financial difficulties.

***Analysis Part 6:***

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.

***Summary Part 7:***

Mr. Micawber leads [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) to the inn where he and his family are staying, and then leaves him with [Mrs. Micawber](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 7:***

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.

***Summary Part 8:***

David feels sorry for the Micawbers but does not have any money to lend them. [Mr. Micawber](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-micawber) returns, apparently so despairing that he alludes to the possibility of suicide. This throws [Mrs. Micawber](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 8:***

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.

***Summary Part 9:***

The evening before [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) is scheduled to dine with the Micawbers, he happens to see [Uriah](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/uriah-heep) and [Mr. Micawber](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 9:***

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.

***Summary Part 10:***

Despite [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield)'s misgivings about [Uriah](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/uriah-heep), 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 10:***

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.