***David Copperfield***

***Chapter 2 – I Observe***

***Brief Summary:***

David recalls the sights of his early childhood, including the church, his childhood home, and more. David's mother, long a widow, has begun dating, which causes conflict between her and Peggotty. Mr. Murdstone is introduced as a potential suitor. His relationship with Mrs. Copperfield progresses over Peggotty's objections. At one point, David accompanies Mr. Murdstone alone on an outing. David is too young to understand the conversation of the men as they discuss Murdstone's plans to marry David's mother.

David still suspects nothing when Peggotty suggests a trip away from home. She proposes that the two of them go to Yarmouth to visit her family. David's mother agrees to this plan because she is going to go for a long visit to a friend's home at the same time. David is eager to go and does not connect the unexpected trip with his mother's relationship with Murdstone.

***Brief Analysis:***

The relationship between Peggotty and Mrs. Copperfield is strained by their disagreement about Mrs. Copperfield's new social life. The comments that Mrs. Copperfield makes to Peggotty illustrate that Mrs. Copperfield has a very napve worldview. The deception involved in both David's outing with Mr. Murdstone and the visit to Peggotty's relatives foreshadows the dishonest beginnings of Mrs. Copperfield's future marriage to Mr. Murdstone. This dishonesty foreshadows problems for their future marriage, especially in how the marriage affects David.

***Critical Study:***

David’s earliest memories are of his mother’s hair and his nurse, Clara Peggotty, who has very dark eyes. He remembers the kitchen and the backyard, with the roosters that frightened him and the churchyard behind the house, where his father is buried. Both David and his mother submit themselves to Peggotty’s kind direction. In particular, David recalls one occasion when he sits up late reading a book about crocodiles to Peggotty while waiting for his mother to return home from an evening out. David’s beautiful mother returns with Mr. Murdstone, a large man with black whiskers and a deep voice. David and Peggotty both dislike Mr. Murdstone, and Peggotty warns David’s mother not to marry someone her dead husband would not have liked.

Mr. Murdstone returns later and takes David on a short trip to meet two business acquaintances, one of whom is named Mr. Quinion. Mr. Murdstone and Mr. Quinion joke about David’s dislike of Mr. Murdstone and Mr. Murdstone’s intention to marry David’s mother. When they get home, Peggotty proposes that she and David go to visit her brother and his family in Yarmouth. In Chapter 2, David recalls his home and its vast and mysterious passageways, the churchyard where his father is buried, Sundays in church, and his early life with his youthful, pretty mother and the kindly, capable Peggotty.

One night, after David learned to read, he is reading a story to Peggotty, and he asks, "if you marry a person, and the person dies, why then you may marry another person, mayn t you?" Almost immediately afterward, his mother enters the house with a bearded man whom David resents at once. After the stranger's departure, David hears an argument between his mother and Peggotty about the man. Peggotty insists that the man, Mr. Murdstone, is not an acceptable suitor.

About two months later, Peggotty invites David to spend a fortnight with her at her brother's place at Yarmouth. David is eager to go, but he asks what his mother will say. "She can't live by herself, you know," he insists. Young as he is, he does not realize that he is being sent away deliberately. His mother has a tearful farewell with him. As David and Peggotty drive off in a cart, David looks back. He sees Mr. Murdstone come up to his mother and apparently scold her for being so emotional.

David Copperfield calls up his earliest childhood memories, which revolve around happy times at Blunderstone spent with his mother and Peggotty. He describes his impressions of the house, its grounds, the churchyard and the church. Things change when handsome Mr. Murdstone begins to visit Clara Copperfield. Peggotty disapproves of him and David takes an instant dislike to him. One day, Peggotty invites David to come to Yarmouth with her to visit her relatives for two weeks. As Peggotty and David ride away from Blunderstone in a horse cart, David turns to wave goodbye to his mother and sees Mr. Murdstone standing near her, reprimanding her for being so emotional.

***Critical Analysis(Ch1-2):***

The first chapter is typical of the Victorian novelistic style, especially its long sentences and frequent digressions. The second paragraph is a long single sentence containing eighty-nine words (many sentences are longer). This chapter, and indeed the entire novel, frequently wanders from the main story line. The fourth paragraph of the book is a long digression on David's being born with a caul (a membrane that covers the head of a new-born child and was thought to bring good luck) and on his family's attempt to dispose of it profitably. After a lengthy detour, David pulls himself back to his narrative with an admonition to himself not to "meander." These stylistic features were the result of the publishing practices prevalent at Dickens' time. Books were first published serially in magazines and writers were paid by the word; hence, they included as many words as possible, even if the story became rambling and excessively wordy.

The first chapter also illustrates Dickens' handling of characterization. Dickens is often criticized for creating caricatures rather than characters in his works, of producing people who are one-dimensional and unreal. Both Miss Trotwood and the doctor are described extravagantly, but it must be remembered that this burlesque produces a humorous effect, and most readers of the time accepted the "overdone" quality, preferring entertainment to realism. David's mother and the servant girl, Peggotty, are described with greater restraint.

The character of Mr. Murdstone is strongly caught in Chapter 2. His name itself, compounded of "murder" and "stone," is typical of Dickens' device of creating an artificial name to reflect a person's character. As this chapter ends, the lines are drawn — David and Peggotty are hostile to Mr. Murdstone; Mrs. Copperfield, on the other hand, flattered and naive, is grateful for his attentions.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield), [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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."

***Analysis Part 1:***

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.

***Summary Part 2:***

One particular memory stands out to [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield). While reading aloud to [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 2:***

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.

***Summary Part 3:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) continues reading and is eventually interrupted by the arrival of [Clara](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield), who has been visiting a neighbor. She is accompanied by a handsome man whom David will eventually learn is [Mr. Murdstone](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty), and David go inside the house. As Clara and Peggotty discuss the "pleasant" evening Clara has had, David falls asleep.

***Analysis Part 3:***

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.

***Summary Part 4:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) wakes up later to the sound of [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) and [Clara](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield) arguing over whether it is appropriate (and kind to David) for Clara to spend time with [Mr. Murdstone](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 4:***

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.

***Summary part 5:***

[Mr. Murdstone](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-murdstone) and [Clara](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield) continue to visit with one another, and the atmosphere at the Rookery becomes subtly tense, with [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) spending less and less time with her employers. For his part, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) continues to view Murdstone with suspicion.

***Analysis Part 5:***

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.

***Summary Part 6:***

One morning, [Mr. Murdstone](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-murdstone) takes [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-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.

***Analysis Part 6:***

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.

***Summary Part 7:***

When [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) and [Mr. Murdstone](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-murdstone) return, [Clara](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 7:***

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.

***Summary Part 8:***

Sometime after [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield)'s outing with [Mr. Murdstone](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-murdstone), [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) asks whether David would like to come with her to visit her brother, [Mr. Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty), in Yarmouth. David is intrigued by her descriptions of the [sea](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/symbols/the-sea) and her promise that he can play with her nephew, [Ham](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/ham-peggotty), but worries about his mother. He asks whether [Clara](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield) 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.

***Analysis Part 8:***

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.

***Summary Part 9:***

In the present, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield) cried and hugged him when he left, though he also noticed, as the cart was pulling away from his house, that [Mr. Murdstone](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-murdstone) had arrived and seemed to be scolding Clara for "being so moved."

***Analysis Part 9:***

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.