***David Copperfield***

### *Chapter 20 – Steerforth’s Home*

***Summary:***

* The next morning, a chamber-maid knocks on David's door to tell him there's water for shaving outside his door.
* David blushes: he doesn't need to shave yet, and he's sure the chamber-maid knows it and is laughing at him.
* Steerforth is waiting for David in a private dining room.
* David feels rather shy in front of Steerforth, who is so much grander than David is.
* Steerforth asks David all about him.
* David is pleased that Steerforth is so interested. He tells Steerforth his plans to visit Yarmouth.
* Steerforth hears that David is not in a hurry and invites David to his mother's house in Highgate to stay for a few days.
* David is delighted to accept.
* He's so excited: he writes to his aunt to tell her of his change of plans, and then David and Steerforth see some of the sights of London.
* They go to a museum, and David is impressed with Steerforth's knowledge of everything.
* David comments that Steerforth will certainly get a graduate degree out of his higher education.
* Steerforth laughs yet again and says that he has no intention of pursuing further education.
* (By the way, Steerforth has now decided to call David "Daisy" as a nickname.)
* Steerforth wonders why he should bother with fame or acclaim when he's satisfied with what he has?
* David is embarrassed at his misstep and changes the subject.
* Finally, they travel out to Mrs. Steerforth's house, where Steerforth's mother greets them.
* The house is old-fashioned, quiet, and neat.
* There is a second lady in the dining room: she is thin and sharp looking, about 30, with a scar on her mouth that slightly changes the shape of her upper lip. This is Miss Rosa Dartle.
* Miss Dartle has an odd way of speaking: she never comes out and says anything straight, but she hints quite broadly.
* For example, she hints that Steerforth is living a wild life at college and not learning anything.
* This happens a second time when David mentions that he plans to visit the Peggottys, whom Steerforth has met.
* David explains the Mr. Peggotty has adopted Ham and little Emily, so his house is full of people who Mr. Peggotty has been kind to.
* Steerforth comments that they seem worth his attention.
* Miss Dartle chimes in to ask if they *really* seem worth his notice, as though they were animals or beings of another order?
* Steerforth clarifies that he thinks there is a difference between them (i.e., the lower orders) and us (i.e., rich people) – they may be very good people, but they can't be expected to be as sensitive or fine as people with better breeding.
* Miss Dartle thanks him for making her feel better: she had been worried that poor people suffer, but now she knows that they don't really feel things the way better people do.
* David thinks that Steerforth can't mean what he says, and that he must have made his comments about poor people to draw Miss Dartle out.
* Once they are alone, Steerforth asks David what he thinks of Miss Dartle.
* David comments that she seems very clever, and Steerforth agrees: she is so sharp that she seems all edge to Steerforth.
* David remarks on Miss Dartle's scar.
* Steerforth admits that he gave it to her: when he was a little boy, she irritated him and he threw a hammer at her.
* David is sorry to have brought it up, since it must be painful for Steerforth.
* Steerforth continues: Miss Dartle is an orphan of a cousin of Steerforth's father's who Mrs. Steerforth brought to live with her as a companion once Mr. Steerforth died.
* David comments (*incredibly* naively, if we may say!) that Miss Dartle must love Steerforth like a brother.
* Steerforth hems and haws a bit, and then changes the subject.
* The next day, David keeps glancing at Miss Dartle's scar. He notices that, when she gets angry, it flushes dark and stands out clearly on her face.
* Mrs. Steerforth shows David all of Steerforth's old letters to her, his baby pictures, and a lock of his hair.
* David tells Mrs. Steerforth that Steerforth practically saved his life at Mr. Creakle's school, and that he has always been generous and noble to David.
* Mrs. Steerforth agrees that Salem House was not good enough for her son, but Steerforth needed to go there because they had trouble finding a teacher who would "be content to bow himself" (20.59) before Steerforth's superior character.
* Steerforth's mother adds that her son had to go to a school where he could be the acknowledged king of the place.
* Mrs. Steerforth is delighted that David is so devoted to her son, but she also finds it only natural that her son should inspire such feelings in his fellow men.
* During this conversation, Miss Dartle is busy playing backgammon with Steerforth, but David is certain that she doesn't miss a word of any of this.
* Later on, Steerforth calls David Daisy again, and Miss Dartle jumps on it.
* She asks if it means that David is young and innocent.
* She comments that Steerforth thinks David is innocent, and so he is willing to be friends with him.
* Miss Dartle goes to bed soon after, and Steerforth and David stay up late and talk about old school times.
* When David goes to bed, he notices that there is a portrait of Miss Dartle on his wall.
* He finds it disturbing, and starts having uneasy dreams filled with doubts about the people around him.

***Synopsis:***

Steerforth persuades David to stay a few days with him at his mother’s house before going to Yarmouth. Steerforth nicknames David “Daisy,” and the two of them spend the day sightseeing before going to Steerforth’s home. There, David meets Mrs. Steerforth, Steerforth’s widowed mother, and Rosa Dartle, Steerforth’s orphaned distant cousin whom Mrs. Steerforth took in when Miss Dartle’s mother died. Mrs. Steerforth is an imposing, older, more feminine version of Steerforth, and she dotes on her son ceaselessly. Miss Dartle has a scar above her lip from a time when Steerforth, as a child, threw a hammer at her in anger. Miss Dartle views Steerforth’s and David’s words and actions with sarcasm, but both young men are drawn to her.

***Critical Analysis:***

Unsure of what he wishes to do in the world, David is encouraged by Aunt Betsey to visit Peggotty so that he may have "a little change" and "thereby form a cooler judgment." His aunt gives him a "handsome purse of money, and a portmanteau" (a suitcase), and he sets out.

David first stops at Canterbury to say goodbye to Agnes and Mr. Wickfield. While he is there, Agnes tells David that she is worried about her father's condition. David says that he has become concerned over Mr. Wickfield's increased drinking, that whenever Mr. Wickfield "is least like himself," he is most certain to be wanted on "some business" by Uriah Heep.

Later at Dr. Strong's, David observes another domestic problem. A letter has arrived from Jack Maldon in which he states that he is ill and wants to return. Mrs. Markleham succeeds in getting Dr. Strong to let Maldon come over while Annie "never once spoke or lifted up her eyes." David senses trouble ahead.

Arriving in London, David registers at a hotel and is given a small room over a stable. After a dinner during which he tries to give an impression of worldly maturity, he attends a performance of Julius Caesar at Covent Garden. When he returns to the hotel, he is overjoyed to run into James Steerforth, now an Oxford student; he is on his way home to visit his mother. Steerforth admonishes one of the hotel's employees for giving David such a poor room, and David is immediately given a much better room.

The next morning at breakfast, Steerforth invites David to come home with him and meet his mother. David accepts the invitation, and at dusk they arrive by stagecoach at an old brick house in Highgate, a suburb of London. Steerforth's mother is elderly and rather formal. Her companion is Rosa Dartle, a thin, black-haired lady of about thirty. Miss Dartle has a scar on her lip, which Steerforth tells David he caused. "I was a young boy, and she exasperated me, and I threw a hammer at her."

David invites Steerforth to go with him to visit the Peggotty family, and Steerforth is interested but condescending. He expresses pleasure at the chance "to see that sort of people"; he tells Miss Dartle that "there's a pretty wide separation between them and us . . . They are wonderfully virtuous, I dare say . . . But they have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that, like their coarse rough skins, they are not easily wounded."

Throughout Chapter 19, we see David trying to find his place in a mature world — adopting manners which he associates with maturity but which seem rather amusing to the reader. David is finding it hard to assert himself, and it is easier for him to stand by quietly rather than risk taking a stand that might expose his immaturity. In contrast, Steerforth is a man of the world. He demands what he wants when he wants it. And he is imperious enough to get it.

Jack Maldon's imminent return from India suggests that an interesting subplot is building up in the Strong household. As yet it is not clear just what feelings may remain from childhood days, when Annie was Maldon's sweetheart.

In Chapter 20, during the time that David spends with the Steerforth family, Dickens' main emphasis is on the intense love that Mrs. Steerforth feels for her son. He is the very center of her existence, and she no doubt values anything if it has a relationship to her son. For example, it is obvious to us that her only interest in David is the fact that he, too, is devoted to Steerforth.

Of interest in this chapter, also, is Rosa Dartle; she has a peculiar, indirect way of seeking information from others, hinting rather than speaking outright. Steerforth sums her up nicely: "She brings everything to a grindstone and sharpens it, as she has sharpened her own face and figure these years past . . . She is all edge."

***Critical Study :***

David Copperfield is acutely embarrassed by his youth, especially in contrast to Steerforth's confident, commanding manner with the hotel staff. Steerforth plays up the contrast by continuing to call David "Daisy." Steerforth is studying at Oxford but isn't very serious about his studies, and David is surprised to learn he doesn't plan to earn a degree. David goes to Steerforth's home to meet his mother, a genteel, elderly woman. He also meets a younger woman, Miss Rosa Dartle, Mrs. Steerforth's companion, who has a habit of making cutting remarks, and bears a scar on her lip as a result of Steerforth throwing a hammer at her when he was young. At dinner, David invites Steerforth to come with him to Dover, describing the Peggottys to Mrs. Steerforth and Miss Dartle. Miss Dartle wonders if the Peggottys are "that sort of people" who are "animals and clods, and beings of another order." Steerforth says they're different in that they don't have sensitive natures, and "like their coarse rough skins, they are not easily wounded." David assumes Steerforth is joking when he says this.

David agrees to visit Steerforth's home in Highgate and meet his widowed mother. As they make their way there, Steerforth explains that he is attending Oxford but does not plan to take a degree because it is not fashionable. When they arrive at the house, they meet Mrs. Steerforth, who thinks everything that her son does is wonderful, and Miss Rosa Dartle, her companion. Miss Rosa Dartle has a strange way of speaking and a scar on her face from a childhood accident, which involved Steerforth. Mrs. Steerforth explains that she sent her son to Salem House so that he would be the highest-ranking student and get special treatment.

Steerforth proposes that he accompany David to Yarmouth to meet the people there. He says it will be funny to see poor people in their natural environment.

The reader begins to understand Steerforth's character. Because no one, especially his mother, ever disciplined him or set limits for him, Steerforth behaves as though he owns the world and that naturally everyone should do whatever he wants. Steerforth shows little to no understanding of the restraints that other people live with and treats life like a game that he knows he has already won. So often David's positive impressions of Steerforth are in conflict to the negative impression of Steerforth the reader comes to have.

Significance(ch16-20):

David and Mr. Wickfield go the next day to meet Dr. Strong, who is the master of David's new school. They also meet his wife, Annie, who is much younger than her husband. During the visit, Mr. Wickfield and Dr. Strong discuss a cousin of Annie's, Jack Maldon, and his new job. Dr. Strong wants him to get a job that sends him out of the country, but he offers no particular reason why. Maldon goes to have dinner with Mr. Wickfield later that evening and mentions that he does not find the marriage between [Dr. Strong and Annie](https://www.gradesaver.com/david-copperfield/study-guide/character-list#dr-strong-and-annie) fair due to the age difference. After that, Mr. Wickfield appears disturbed and treats him civilly but very distantly. Soon after, Maldon leaves for his new job, and as they are seeing him off, David notices that he has Annie's red ribbon in his hand.

David is at first quite behind in his studies and very awkward with his fellow classmates, for it has been a long time since he has interacted with other boys in a school environment. But he soon becomes comfortable and rises to the top of his class. He also finds more and more of a liking for Agnes and her devotion to her father. He finds out that she is being educated at home so that she can stay with him all of the time. Soon, he receives an invitation from Mr. Wickfield to stay with the family permanently, which he gladly accepts. David loves everything about that home except for Uriah, who disturbs him, especially with the way he writhes about when something pleases him.

David soon finds out from [Peggotty](https://www.gradesaver.com/david-copperfield/study-guide/character-list" \l "peggotty) that Mr. and Miss Murdstone have sold all of the furniture from Blunderstone Rookery and have put the house up for sale. He tells this to his aunt, who visits him very often. [Mr. Dick](https://www.gradesaver.com/david-copperfield/study-guide/character-list#mr-dick) also visits very often and becomes closer not only to David, but also to the boys in the school, Mr. Wickfield, Agnes, and even Uriah. Mr. Dick tells David about a man who has been visiting [Miss Betsey](https://www.gradesaver.com/david-copperfield/study-guide/character-list#miss-betsey) and scaring her to the point where she is giving him money. David does not know what to make of this, and Mr. Dick makes him promise not to tell anyone that he knows about the strange man.

One day, Uriah invites David to tea with his mother, and, after hearing about how humble Uriah and his mother are and how pleased they would be to receive attention from David, he agrees. Yet, they make him very uncomfortable, asking about secrets regarding Agnes and Mr. Wickfield and their financial situation. Luckily, David sees Mr. Micawber and is able to escape. Mr. Micawber takes him to see Mrs. Micawber. They are both still in a serious financial situation, but although they cry about it, they recover quickly over a meal. The next day, David receives a letter from Mr. Micawber saying that, since they can no longer pay for their home, the couple will be leaving. David sees them riding away and hopes that they will find a release from their struggles.

David then reminisces about his school years. Despite his doubts, he is able to rise to the top of his class. Along the way, he falls in love with two girls. The first, Miss Shepherd, has blonde hair and a round face. She is a student at Nettingall's establishment. The two like each other for a while and even kiss, but eventually their attractions for one another die away. David also falls in love with the elder Miss Larkins, a thirty-year-old woman with whom he dances. That crush also ends after he finds out that she has married another man. David also recounts a fist fight that he lost against a butcher who used to bully the other kids around.

After David graduates, he and his aunt have many talks to decide what career path he should follow. They cannot come up with anything, and Miss Betsey suggests that he go and visit Peggotty (whose name she dislikes immensely due to its pagan nature) so that he can go out into the world and see what professions catch his eye. David visits Agnes and Mr. Wickfield one more time before he leaves, and they see Dr. Strong and Annie for tea. During this visit, David finds out that Jack Maldon sent a letter to Dr. Strong saying that he is ill and needs to come home. Then, Annie's mother reveals that Maldon sent a letter to Annie saying that he wants to come home because he misses her. David mentions that he trusts Annie much less—especially compared with Agnes.

David then leaves to visit Peggotty in Yarmouth. Despite all of his attempts to look honorable and respectable, he is often mocked and treated badly due to his youth. He is forced to give up the seat of honor in his coach, the waiters make fun of his youth, and the people at the inn at which he stays put him in the worst room available. Fortunately, at the inn David runs into [Steerforth](https://www.gradesaver.com/david-copperfield/study-guide/character-list" \l "steerforth), whom he has not seen since Salem House, and he is immediately overwhelmed with joy. Steerforth is studying at Oxford and is very well respected. He tells the people to give David the nicer room, and, upon realizing that they are friends, the staff begins to treat David with much more respect.

Steerforth insists that David come with him to visit his home and his mother. Along the way, he gives David the nickname "Daisy," to which David does not object; he accepts the name eagerly. Steerforth's house is huge and beautiful, occupied by his mother and her companion, Miss Rosa Dartle, who is Steerforth's orphaned cousin. Mrs. Steerforth constantly praises and indulges her son and is like him in many ways. Miss Dartle is also dearly loved by her cousin and Mrs. Steerforth. She has a scar on her lip that David learns was caused by Steerforth when he was young—he threw a hammer that hit her. David has a portrait of her without the scar hanging in the room where he sleeps, and for some reason this greatly disturbs him, even entering his dreams.

In Chapter 16 the readers are introduced to Dr. Strong and Annie, his much younger wife. Dr. Strong is an extremely kind, trusting person and deeply in love with his young, beautiful wife. But we begin to wonder if Dr. Strong is much too trusting for his own good when we see the character of Jack Maldon. Maldon's character does not have much depth, but we do see that he is clearly in love with Annie and is attempting to seduce her into having an affair with him. Luckily for Dr. Strong, Maldon leaves for a job. However, this is not the last that we will see of him, and Dr. Strong's trustworthiness will be called into question once more.

David's love of education and learning also becomes apparent in these chapters. This is likely a reflection of Dickens' own belief in the importance of a good liberal education. Education helps a person understand the world and rise in society. David quickly rises to the top of his class despite the fact that he was behind to begin with. He even falls in love twice along the way, and this is part of his education into maturity as well. Thus, this education is portrayed as a very positive part of David's life.

On the negative side, [Uriah Heep](https://www.gradesaver.com/david-copperfield/study-guide/character-list#uriah-heep) is still in the picture, continuing to irritate David with his sliminess and writhing. Foreshadowing continues to hint that Heep has some evil deeds to come. We learn even more from the tea party to which David is invited, during which Uriah and his mother ask uncomfortable questions about the Wickfields' financial situation. This hints at Heep's enormous greed and desire for wealth, which will certainly come back into play later in the novel.

In addition, we see Dickens' attention to social class once more with the reintroduction of Steerforth. His characteristic arrogance is still in place, and he gives David the nickname "Daisy" to mock his naiveté. David does not quite pick up on this slight. Something else about Steerforth is noteworthy here: David is extremely bothered by the scar on Rosa Dartle's lip, which was caused by Steerforth's rage. The tale of the scar presents a whole new side of Steerforth which David had never considered. It shows that Steerforth is capable of being uncontrolled when angry, a trait that does not mesh with the classiness that David had associated with high social standing. This revelation is enough to give David pause, but it is not enough to separate Steerforth from David.

Finally, the selling of David's childhood home, Blunderstone Rookery, by the Murdstones symbolizes the end of that part of David's life. He has been getting a good education, he now lives in a healthy atmosphere, he has loving mentors, and he has even started having more or less serious relationships. By this time he has fully separated himself from the Murdstones. Thus it is appropriate that the house be sold to symbolize the end of the troubles associated with the Murdstones.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

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

***Analysis Part 1:***

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.

***Summary Part 2:***

After [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) explains more about his circumstances, [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) invites him to spend some time at his home in Highgate, assuring David that [Mrs. Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 2:***

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.

***Summary Part 3:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) and [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) have lunch and travel to Steerforth's home, where they are greeted by [Mrs. Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-steerforth)—a woman with a "proud carriage and a handsome face." The house itself, meanwhile, has a stately air.

Home and Family Theme Icon

***Analysis Part 3:***

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.

***Summary Part 4:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield), [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth), and [Mrs. Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-steerforth) enter the dining room, where they meet another woman: [Rosa Dartle](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/symbols/rosa-dartle-s-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."

***Analysis Part 4:***

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.

***Summary part 5:***

As dinner continues, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) explains that he is going to visit [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) and [Mr. Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty), and says that he would like [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/rosa-dartle) 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."

***Analysis Part 5:***

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.

***Summary part 6:***

Later, [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) asks [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) what he thinks of [Rosa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/rosa-dartle) and, when David hesitantly says that she is clever, retorts that Rosa is habitually sharp. David then mentions Rosa's [scar](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/symbols/rosa-dartle-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.

***Analysis Part 6:***

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.

***Summary Part 7:***

Later that day, the Steerforths and [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) have tea together, and David notices that [Rosa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/rosa-dartle)'s [scar](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/symbols/rosa-dartle-s-scar) tends to flush or turn pale when she is upset. He also notices that [Mrs. Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-steerforth) speaks of little except [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) himself; in fact, she even shows David letters, pictures, and baby hair that she keeps as souvenirs of him.

***Analysis Part 7:***

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.

***Summary Part 8:***

[Mrs. Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-steerforth) asks [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) about how he came to know [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/rosa-dartle) listening on while seeming to play backgammon.

Coming of Age and Personal Development Theme Icon

***Analysis Part 8:***

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.

***Summary Part 9:***

Later that evening, [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) says he might take [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) up on his offer to visit the Peggottys in a week or so. As they talk over these plans, [Rosa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/rosa-dartle) 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/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.

***Analysis Part 9:***

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.