***David Copperfield***

### *Chapter 21 – Little Em’ly*

***Summary:***

* Steerforth keeps a servant named Littimer, who is the most respectable and imposing-looking man imaginable.
* This man brings David the shaving water he continues not to need and helps him dress.
* Littimer informs David that breakfast is at 9:30.
* Every morning, David and Littimer have this exact same conversation, and it somehow always makes David feels like a child again.
* Steerforth instructs David in riding, fencing, and boxing.
* David continues to feel completely inexperienced, which is fine in front of Steerforth but embarrasses him in front of Littimer.
* David spends a week at Steerforth's house and is perfectly happy.
* Steerforth decides to accompany David to Yarmouth to see the Peggottys.
* Littimer arranges everything for their departure, but does not accompany Steerforth.
* They say goodbye to Mrs. Steerforth and Miss Dartle.
* David and Steerforth arrive at Yarmouth and make arrangements for Steerforth to come to the boathouse that evening.
* They decide to take the Peggottys by surprise.
* Steerforth makes a weird remark that he wants to "see the natives in their aboriginal condition" (21.23), as though the Peggottys are the subjects of an anthropological investigation.
* David comments that the Peggottys *are* part of the lower orders Steerforth was talking about earlier in the visit.
* Steerforth tells David not to mind his argument with Miss Dartle about the poor.
* David wants to head off to see Peggotty first, so he gives Steerforth directions to Mr. Barkis's home and they part.
* As David is walking through Yarmouth, he sees the shop of Mr. Omer, the tailor, who outfitted his mother with her funeral clothes.
* He stops to say thank you.
* David sees Minnie Omer, who is now married to Joram the carpenter, and her young son, Joe.
* Mr. Omer comes in, and David shakes his hand.
* Mr. Omer doesn't remember David, so David reminds him of a day long ago when they road to Blunderstone together with Minnie and Joram to bury David's mother.
* Remembering at last, Mr. Omer asks how David has been.
* David's been fine, as has Mr. Omer, though he's getting old.
* Mr. Omer further recalls that Peggotty was a servant for Mrs. Copperfield.
* He tells David that a young relation of Peggotty is currently acting as an apprentice in his shop: it's little Emily! She's learning to be a dressmaker.
* Mr. Omer informs David that half the women of Yarmouth hate little Emily because she is so beautiful.
* Minnie adds that *that's* not the problem; the issue is that little Emily is reaching above her station in life.
* Little Emily has given them scandal to talk about, which is what has made her the subject of so much gossip.
* Mr. Omer sticks to his story: it's jealousy because little Emily is so lovely.
* See, Emily hasn't really become friends with any of the people in the neighborhood, so word has gotten around that she wants to be a lady. She wants to improve her social position above what she was born to.
* But Mr. Omer says this isn't true – he just thinks that people have misinterpreted her saying that if she were a lady, she would improve her uncle's life.
* Her reputation isn't great because she's so vain about her clothing and because she is a bit spoiled.
* Even so, Emily has been a dedicated apprentice – both Mr. Omer and Minnie agree on this – and she's doing well as a dressmaker.
* David asks if little Emily is in and if he might see her?
* He glimpses Emily through a window, and she looks as lovely as ever.
* Mr. Omer invites David to come in and speak to little Emily, but he suddenly feels very shy and backs off.
* David continues on to Peggotty's house.
* He finds Peggotty in the kitchen cooking dinner.
* David knocks, and she answers the door.
* He smiles at Peggotty, but she doesn't recognize him straight away – it has been seven years since she last saw him.
* So, David pretends for a bit: he asks Peggotty if Mr. Barkis is at home, and if he goes over to Blunderstone often?
* Then David asks about a place in Blunderstone called, let's see, the Rookery?
* And Peggotty suddenly puts it all together: it's David! And they embrace, weeping.
* She is so, so happy and proud to see him.
* Peggotty takes David up to Mr. Barkis's room, where Mr. Barkis is laid up with rheumatism (which is a painful swelling of the joints).
* Mr. Barkis is very happy to see David as well, and they joke about that old message David passed to Peggotty, that Barkis is willing.
* The old carrier tells David that he is very pleased with his decision to marry Peggotty, because she does indeed do a lot of baking.
* Mr. Barkis complains of being very poor.
* He indicates a box underneath his bed, but he tells David that it's full of old clothes. He wishes it were money, but he assures David that it's not.
* Mr. Barkis tells Peggotty to make David a good supper and offers her some money.
* But he won't take the money out of his box (which is obviously *not* filled with old clothes) until David and Peggotty are out of the room. When he is alone, he will crawl painfully out of bed to pull out the box himself, because he's gotten really miserly.
* David tells Peggotty that Steerforth is planning to come.
* Peggotty is well-disposed towards him because Steerforth has been so kind to David.
* Steerforth is so agreeable and good-humored with Peggotty and Mr. Barkis that everyone is delighted.
* Later on, they head to Mr. Peggotty's boat house.
* Steerforth and David sneak up to the front door.
* Everyone inside looks unusually excited, even the generally grim Mrs. Gummidge.
* Mr. Peggotty looks like he's about to embrace Emily, Emily is blushing and smiling, and Ham Peggotty is holding her hand.
* Just at this point, David and Steerforth walk in, and Ham Peggotty shouts that it's David.
* They all shake hands with each other and seem overcome with pride and happiness.
* Mr. Peggotty is thrilled to see David and Steerforth under his roof and all grown up.
* The boatman is glad to be able to tell them his great news: that little Emily, whom he has raised as his own daughter, is going to marry Ham Peggotty, who has been her close companion since they were children.
* Ham is so incredibly filled with joy that he almost falls down when Mr. Peggotty announces their plan.
* David finds it moving that someone as sturdy as Ham could be trembling with feeling at his upcoming marriage.
* David is filled with real pleasure at the news of this upcoming marriage.
* Steerforth shakes hands with Mr. Peggotty and Ham, and then they all call little Emily back in to celebrate.
* Emily is extremely bashful to start with, but she slowly relaxes under the effects of Steerforth's charm.
* She laughs at Steerforth's jokes and seems fascinated with his face.
* Even Mrs. Gummidge starts to cheer up at Steerforth's conversation.
* Little Emily talks to David about their old adventures on the beach and his devotion to her.
* David observes that Emily seems to be pressing close to the wall rather than leaning towards Ham, even though he's sitting next to her.
* At around midnight, they leave. Steerforth goes to a hotel, and David returns to Mr. Barkis's house.
* As they walk off, Steerforth comments on how lovely Emily is.
* David adds that he's happy that they happened to arrive just at the news of this marriage.
* Steerforth thinks Ham seems like kind of an idiot – Emily could do better.
* David is shocked at this: Steerforth had been so generous and kind with Ham that David can't believe he was thinking bad things about him the whole time.
* In fact, David decides that Steerforth is trying to pretend he's a worse man than he is.
* How can Steerforth really have such negative opinions of the poor if he understands them well enough to pass such a pleasant evening with them?
* Steerforth tells David that he wishes everyone could be as good as David is.

***Synopsis:***

The next morning David meets Steerforth's butler, Littimer. Littimer is very proper and makes David feel foolish and inexperienced. After a week of relaxing at Highgate, David and Steerforth set out for Yarmouth.

After arriving at Yarmouth, the two part for a few hours so that David can visit privately with Peggotty first. On his way to her house, he stops at the tailor shop to catch up on old times. He learns that Emily has been apprenticed to the tailor shop as a dressmaker. He is too shy to see her and instead goes on to Peggotty's house.

After a cheerful reunion with Peggotty and Barkis, Steerforth joins David. Then Steerforth and David go on to Peggotty's family home. Their visit interrupts an announcement that Emily and Ham are engaged. The whole group passes a pleasant evening discussing the upcoming marriage and telling stories. On the way home, Steerforth hints that he finds Emily very beautiful and that she should not marry an ordinary fisherman like Ham.

Steerforth's butler, Littimer, is introduced here. He is shown as extremely proper and subservient to his master, Steerforth. His role in serving Steerforth will be problematic for David because David holds both Littimer and Steerforth in such high respect. Everyone in Yarmouth is immediately trusting and admiring of Steerforth, which only magnifies Steerforth's own ideas about how important he is. Steerforth's comments about Emily mirror Emily's childhood comments about wanting to be a lady rather than a fisherman's wife. Combined, both statements foreshadow that something will happen between Steerforth and Emily.

***Critical Analysis:***

At Steerforth’s, David meets Littimer, Steerforth’s servant, who frightens David because he is so haughty and respectable. David persuades Steerforth to accompany him to Yarmouth to see Ham and Mr. Peggotty again and to meet Peggotty and Little Em’ly. On his way to Peggotty’s, David stops at Mr. Omer’s shop and sees Mr. Omer and his daughter, who is now married to her sweetheart. Mr.

Omer tells David that Little Em’ly now works in his shop. She is a good and diligent worker, but some of the girls in town say she has earned a reputation for putting on airs and wanting to be a lady. David decides not to see Little Em’ly until later, so he continues on to Barkis’s house to find Peggotty.

Peggotty does not recognize David at first, but when she does, she sobs over him for a long time. Mr. Barkis, ill but glad to see David, opens his cherished money box and gives Peggotty some money to prepare dinner for David. Steerforth arrives and entertains Peggotty and David. In retrospect, the adult David muses that if anyone had told him that night that Steerforth’s joviality and manners were all part of a game to him, born from his sense of superiority, David would have dismissed such an idea as a lie. When Steerforth and David arrive at Mr. Peggotty’s house, they find everyone, including Mrs. Gummidge, in a state of high excitement because Little Em’ly has just announced that she intends to marry Ham. After they leave, David delights in the good news, but Steerforth becomes momentarily and inexplicably sullen.

***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.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

When David wakes up the next day, he meets a servant named [Littimer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/littimer), who is laying out David’s clothes for him. Littimer has an aura of extreme respectability, which unnerves David: he suspects Littimer considers him young and naive. Littimer, however, speaks respectfully to David, telling him the time, informing him when breakfast will be, and asking whether he can do anything else for David. This same exchange repeats itself every morning that David spends at the Steerforths'. Littimer is also on hand throughout the day to fetch things for David and [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth)—horses for riding, foils for fencing, and so on. Since Steerforth is tutoring David in all these activities, David resents Littimer's presence.

***Analysis Part 1:***

David continues to worry about revealing his youth and inexperience, and is consequently embarrassed that Littimer sees Steerforth teaching David to ride and fence. In this case, however, David's anxiety about his age seems to intersect with insecurity about his class: the activities David is worried about are upper-middle or upper-class pastimes, and he's unnerved by the presence of Littimer, a servant. This overlap makes sense, given that part of growing up, for David, is settling into a comfortable middle-class life that's less extravagant (and at least theoretically more "moral") than that of the upper-class Steerforths.

***Summary Part 2:***

Meanwhile, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) becomes more and more attached to [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth); he does not feel he can be Steerforth's equal, but in spite (or, he suggests, because) of this, he enjoys being treated as a "plaything" or protégé. Steerforth eventually decides to come with David to see the Peggottys, and the two leave together. Once in Yarmouth, David takes great pleasure in revisiting familiar places with Steerforth, who is enthusiastic about everything from the town to the boatmen he meets on a morning walk along the beach.

***Analysis Part 2:***

David's relationship with Steerforth is one of the main obstacles to his growth in the novel. As his remark about being a "plaything" implies, David not only tolerates but enjoys the fact that Steerforth is completely in charge of the relationship, and this kind of passivity isn't compatible with life as an adult Victorian man.

***Summary Part 3:***

The day after [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) and [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) arrive in Yarmouth, Steerforth asks when they will go to see [Mr. Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty), and David suggests surprising the family with a visit that evening. Steerforth approves of this plan, saying he wants to see the Peggottys in their "aboriginal condition," and jokes with David about [Rosa's](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/rosa-dartle) previous words on that topic.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Despite his humorous tone, Steerforth's comments about visiting the Peggottys do reveal quite a bit about his attitude toward the working classes—specifically, that he views them more as a bizarre source of entertainment than as real people worthy of respect. David is also somewhat guilty of romanticizing the Peggottys' lives, which is perhaps why he doesn't see Steerforth's words as a red flag.

***Summary Part 4:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) leaves to visit [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty), with plans for [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) to meet him at [Mr. Barkis](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-barkis)'s in a couple of hours. He is in a good mood, although he is surprised to see how small the town seems, now that he has grown. While passing by [Mr. Omer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-omer)'s shop, he sees [Minnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/minnie) and two children, and decides to stop in. Minnie accordingly sends one of the children (her son Joe) for Omer, who doesn't recognize David at first. David, however, reminds him of the time they rode to Blunderstone together for [Clara Copperfield](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield)'s funeral, and Mr. Omer then greets him, reminiscing about the day. He has more difficulty breathing than he used to but is still as cheerful as even, noting that Minnie and [Joram](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters) became engaged in the very same cart David rode in all those years ago.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Once again, the differences in David’s perceptions of a place (in this case, Yarmouth) as a child and as an adult are surprising to him. In part, this serves as a yardstick for how much he has grown and changed over the years. It also perhaps hints at the limitations of memory, even in a memoir; although David's recollections of Yarmouth are basically accurate, they are colored by factors like his age at the time.

***Summary part 5:***

[Mr. Omer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-omer) asks after [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty), whom he remembers had some connection to [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield). He then explains that [little Em'ly](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/little-em-ly-emily) is apprenticed in the dress shop, where she is performing very well. He also says Emily is so pretty, though, that many women are jealous of her—to which [Minnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/minnie) retorts that Emily should have "kept to her own station in life." Omer disagrees, but acknowledges that people find it suspicious that little Em'ly has not made many friends in town, and that there are rumors that she wants to be a lady. The fact that Emily has a slightly spoiled and fickle demeanor doesn't improve matters, or that she left a previous position as a lady's companion. Mr. Omer insists, however, that Emily has been a model employee for the two years she has worked for him.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Little Em'ly's sexual transgressions are difficult to unravel from her desire to escape working-class life. Narratively, this makes sense, because it's in her wish to be a lady that leads her to take up with Steerforth. On a deeper level, however, it also speaks to how suspect "ambition" was in a nineteenth-century woman. Emily's aspirations not only leave her vulnerable to seduction, but also clash with the Victorian idea of women as selfless and detached from the world of money and business. Her working-class status compounds the problem, since "good" working-class characters in the novel are mostly humble and content with their station in life.

***Summary part 6:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) glances next door, where [Emily](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/little-em-ly-emily) is currently working, and is impressed by her beauty, as well as by the tenderness with which she is watching [Minnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/minnie)'s child. He admits that Emily has a "willful" look, but nevertheless feels that she is basically good and innocent at heart. [Mr. Omer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-omer) urges David to go and say hello to her, but he is too shy to do so.

***Analysis Part 6:***

Despite Emily's flaws, she's a sympathetic character at heart. In this passage, Dickens signals her underlying virtuousness by drawing attention to the ways in which Emily does conform to gender norms—specifically, her deep maternal instincts.

***Summary Part 7:***

David continues on to see [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty), and they pretend to be very formal with one another: David asks whether [Mr. Barkis](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-barkis) (who now suffers from rheumatics) ever goes to Blunderstone, and whether Peggotty happens to know anything about a house called the Rookery. They both then start crying and hugging one another, and David even stops worrying about whether he is acting maturely or not.

Home and Family Theme Icon

***Analysis Part 7:***

The fact that David is able to shed his adult persona around Peggotty is an indication of just how close the two are, and suggests that Peggotty still serves as a mother figure for him.

***Summary Part 8:***

Pegotty goes to tell [Barkis](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-barkis) that [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) is there, which she says will do him good. David finds that Barkis is bedridden and unable to move much, but he reminisces happily about the conversations they used to have about Peggotty while riding in Barkis's cart. He continues on to say that everything David told him about Peggotty's cooking was as "true as taxes." This reminds Barkis that he is, in his words, a "very poor man." He repeats this several times and gestures toward a box, which he says is full of clothes. Finally, he praises Peggotty and urges her to provide David with a good dinner. While they're gone, he says, he will try to find some more money—something Peggotty tells David that Barkis says before pulling a coin or two from the box in secret.

***Analysis Part 8:***

Despite being founded mostly on convenience, Peggotty and Barkis's married life has evidently been happy—partially because Peggotty is such a good homemaker. Barkis, in turn, has proved to be a dutiful breadwinner: after his death, Peggotty learns that he has saved up enough money to leave her comfortably well-off. His current miserliness, however, suggests that he sees his newfound wealth as somewhat precarious; his lie about the contents of the money box is comical, but also indicative of how insecure Barkis's new position is.

***Summary Part 9:***

[Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) gets along well with [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) when he arrives—partly because she is grateful for his kindness to [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield), and partly because of Steerforth's own charisma. Steerforth also charms [Mr. Barkis](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-barkis), and makes no objection to the inconvenience of having to stay at an inn while David remains at Peggotty's. David and Steerforth leave for [Mr. Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty)'s that evening, and looking back, David says he still can hardly believe that Steerforth's charm and kindness were a "brilliant game."

***Analysis Part 9:***

David's memories of Steerforth appear considerably darker looking back than they did at the time they happened, undercutting the novel's frequently nostalgic tone. However, David's suggestion that Steerforth was playing a "game" all along may be overly harsh—at the very least, it's at odds with what the novel says elsewhere about Steerforth's inability to consciously control his own emotions and impulses.

***Summary Part 10:***The Sun is loud as [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) and [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) approach [Mr. Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty)'s, and there is also a lot of noise coming from inside the house. When they enter, they find [Mrs. Gummidge](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-gummidge) clapping, [Ham](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/ham-peggotty) and [little Em'ly](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/little-em-ly-emily) shyly holding hands, and Mr. Peggotty warmly greeting his niece. The scene breaks apart when David and Steerforth arrive, but Mr. Peggotty greets them joyfully, while embracing Emily with pride and happiness.

***Analysis Part 10:***

David and Steerforth's arrival at the Peggottys' foreshadows the role that Steerforth ultimately plays in breaking up the family: here, he quite literally intrudes on a happy domestic scene. The background noise of the sea heightens the ominous nature of the scene by seeming to threaten the family with destruction.

***Summary Part 11:***[Little Em'ly](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/little-em-ly-emily) runs away in embarrassment, but [Mr. Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) continues to speak warmly of the joy she has brought into the household; although he is "rough as a Sea Porkypine," he says, he loves Emily as if she were his daughter. He then explains that a "certain person"—[Ham](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/ham-peggotty)—has known little Em'ly since she was a baby and has watched her grow up, ultimately falling in love with her. Mr. Peggotty was pleased when he learned this, because he wants to make sure Emily is provided for. He therefore spoke to Emily himself on Ham's behalf, but she resisted at first on the grounds that Ham is too good. To Mr. Peggotty's surprise, however, Ham and Emily arrived home from work that day engaged: Emily said she was "steadier" now and ready to marry. It was at this moment that [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) and [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) arrived.

***Analysis Part 11:***

Gradually, it emerges that the scene Steerforth interrupted might not have been as blissful as it seemed at first glance. As Mr. Peggotty himself acknowledges, little Em'ly wasn't pleased to learn about Ham's feelings at first. On the one hand, her initial insistence that Ham was too good for her, and her later assurance that she had grown "steadier" seem to tie into the novel's broader depiction of marriage as something to undertake only after attaining a certain degree of maturity. Elsewhere, however, Emily's resistance to the match seems to have at least as much to do with a lack of attraction as it does with her own immaturity; Emily, after all, has known Ham her entire life and seems to view him more as a sibling than a lover.

***Summary part 12:***Awkwardly but earnestly, [Ham](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/ham-peggotty) professes his love for [little Em’ly](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/little-em-ly-emily), saying that no other man could love her more, even if he could express himself more eloquently. [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) is intensely moved by this, and his childhood memories of little Em'ly add poignancy to his happiness. [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) spares David the necessity of speaking by congratulating Mr. Peggotty and Ham on their much-deserved happiness.

***Analysis Part 12:***

Although Dickens treats Ham's devotion to little Em'ly sympathetically, his fumbling declaration in this passage underscores how mismatched the couple is. Ham is earnest but not especially bright, whereas Emily is quick-witted and charming. What's more the novel associates these traits with class status—the novel's "good" working-class characters tend to be kind but not particularly intelligent—giving Emily, who wants to be a lady, even more reason to hesitate. Meanwhile, the possibility that David may still have feelings for little Em'ly becomes important in light of his later actions towards her.

***Summary part 13:***[Mr. Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) and [Ham](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/ham-peggotty) manage to persuade [little Em'ly](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/little-em-ly-emily) to return to the main room, and her awkwardness quickly fades away thanks to [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth)'s charming and tactful conversation. In fact, she seems enthralled by a story Steerforth recounts about a shipwreck. Steerforth also wins the rest of the family over by singing [sea](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/symbols/the-sea) shanties and talking about "boats, and ships, and tides." Even [Mrs. Gummidge](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-gummidge) is less gloomy than usual. Eventually, Emily and David begin to talk of their shared childhood memories, Steerforth listening on intently.

***Analysis Part 13:***

Whether because of Steerforth’s looks, status, or charm, it's clear that Emily is immediately drawn to him. This instantaneous attraction contrasts starkly with her long reluctance to marry Ham, and suggests that her reluctance was at least partially a discomfort with the idea of Ham as a romantic and sexual partner. While the novel generally defends marrying for rational and mature reasons, it also suggests that a complete absence of attraction will likely have unhappy consequences.  Meanwhile, the way in which Steerforth listens in on David and Emily's conversation is another example of David's memories taking on a darker tone in retrospect; in this case, Steerforth's presence is quite literally looming over those memories and stripping them of some of their innocence.

***Summary part 14:***[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) and [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) finally leave around midnight, the latter praising [little Em'ly's](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/little-em-ly-emily) beauty and the "quaintness" of the house and family. However, when David comments happily on [Ham](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/ham-peggotty) and Emily's engagement, Steerforth says it is a shame that she is marrying such a "chuckle-headed fellow." This shocks David, but he quickly decides Steerforth is joking and insists (aloud) that he knows Steerforth is deeply sympathetic even to the poorest members of society. Steerforth replies that he wishes everyone were as "earnest" and "good" as David, and then begins singing shanties again.

***Analysis Part 14:***

Once again, Steerforth exhibits a callous attitude toward the lower classes. Although he finds the Peggottys charming to engage with briefly, he clearly doesn't respect them—except perhaps for Emily, whom he implicitly suggests is too refined for Ham. On some level, however, Steerforth seems to feel guilty, if not over his prejudice, then over the fact that he is not as honest and charitable as David thinks he is. As always, Steerforth either can't or won't put his wish to be a better person into action, instead letting the subject drop and returning to his usual carelessness.