***David Copperfield***

### *Chapter 23 – I Corroborate Mr. Dick and Choose a Profession*

***Summary:***

* Having seen Emily's raw emotion after meeting with Martha Endell, David feels that he has witnessed something extremely private. He doesn't even want to talk about her with Steerforth.
* David gets a letter from Miss Betsey asking what he wants to do next.
* After parting from all the Yarmouth Peggottys and Mr. Omer and his family, Steerforth and David leave Yarmouth.
* David tells Steerforth about his aunt's question: what *should* he do with his life?
* Miss Betsey has suggested that David become a proctor (in a word, a lawyer).
* Steerforth says that he may as well become a proctor, but it'll be horribly boring and old-fashioned.
* David continues: apparently, his aunt got the idea when she went to visit her own proctor to get her will settled in David's favor.
* When Steerforth hears this, he encourages David to do as Miss Betsey wishes.
* David meets up with his aunt at an inn in London, where she is waiting with her servant, Janet, to dine with David.
* Miss Betsey has left Mr. Dick at home to watch the house, but she is *sure* that he won't be firm enough to keep the donkeys off her lawn.
* Miss Betsey refuses to eat very much at the inn because she feels that all London tradesmen are liars.
* After dinner, Janet helps Miss Betsey prepare for bed.
* Once she is all ready for a pre-sleep snack, Miss Betsey asks David what he thinks of the proctor plan.
* David thinks it's a great idea, but he's worried about how much it will cost to find him an apprenticeship with a proctor.
* Miss Betsey tells him that it will be about a thousand pounds – which is about a hundred thousand dollars in today's money.
* David worries that Miss Betsey has already spent a lot on his education – she shouldn't have to spend so much more on his apprenticeship.
* Miss Betsey brushes off his concerns: after all, David has been a pleasure for Miss Betsey to raise from the moment he arrived on her doorstep. The only thing she asks of him is to be a loving child to her.
* David is impressed by Miss Betsey's generosity, and they agree to go to Doctors' Commons (a society of civil lawyers back in the day) to find David a job.
* The next day, David and Miss Betsey head to the office of Spenlow and Jorkins.
* On the way, they stop to see several famous sights in London.
* Suddenly, Miss Betsey grows extremely startled to see a man in poor clothing staring at her.
* She asks David what she should do.
* David is utterly confused: he thinks the man is just a beggar.
* Miss Betsey tells David to go on alone and then wait for her at St. Paul's Churchyard (which is near their destination).
* Miss Betsey plans to meet with this man who has so frightened her.
* David is taken aback that Miss Betsey has decided to meet with this fellow.
* He wonders if this beggar is the same man Mr. Dick described as terrifying Miss Betsey on their evening walks back in Dover.
* Finally, after waiting for her for half an hour at Saint Paul's, Miss Betsey appears in front of David.
* Miss Betsey tells David never to ask about what just happened.
* David finds that Miss Betsey has spent all of her money during this mysterious outing he can never mention again.
* The two head in to Doctors' Commons to meet with Mr. Spenlow.
* Mr. Spenlow welcomes David to his new profession, asks him delicately for the thousand pounds David owes for learning the business, and confirming David's fears that he can earn no salary at this job. (So, David is entering into the equivalent of an unpaid internship these days – an internship he has to pay for.)
* Mr. Spenlow keeps pretending that he wants to be more generous with his clerks, but he can't be for fear of his partner, Mr. Jorkins.
* David discovers later that the terrifying Mr. Jorkins is, in fact, a mild-mannered man who mostly keeps out of Mr. Spenlow's way.
* Mr. Spenlow takes David around to meet the other lawyers and clerks at Doctors' Commons.
* After signing all the necessary documents, Miss Betsey takes David to a nearby neighborhood where she has found a room that seems appropriate for David.
* David is delighted with the place – which is run by a Mrs. Crupp – and can't wait to move in. He's feeling very grown-up indeed.
* Miss Betsey tells David that she trusts he will become firm and self-reliant as he sets out to a new life in London.
* With that, Miss Betsey heads back to Dover.

***Synopsis:***

David determines not to tell Steerforth about Little Em’ly’s outburst the night before because he loves Little Em’ly and believes that she did not mean to reveal to him so much about herself. David also tells Steerforth, as they are on their way home by coach, about a letter he has received from Miss Betsey suggesting that he become a proctor (a kind of attorney). Steerforth thinks that the profession of proctor would suit David well, and David agrees.

When David arrives in London, he meets up with Miss Betsey, who has traveled to London to see him. She is very concerned that Mr. Dick, whom she has left behind at home, will not be able to keep the donkeys off her yard. Miss Betsey and David eventually resolve that David will become a proctor, despite his protestations that it is expensive to do so. On their way to establish David at the Doctors’ Commons (the place where the proctors hold court and offices), a man who looks like a beggar approaches them, and Miss Betsey jumps into a cab with him. When she returns, David notices that she has given the man most of her money. David is very disturbed, but Miss Betsey makes him swear never to mention the event again. They go to the offices of Spenlow and Jorkins, where Mr. Spenlow agrees to engage David as a clerk. Afterward, they find lodgings for David with Mrs. Crupp, an old landlady who promises to take care of David as though he were her own son.

Although David is thrilled with his new accommodations, he gets lonely at night, and Steerforth is away at Oxford with his friends. David goes to Steerforth’s home and visits Mrs. Steerforth and Miss Dartle, who talk glowingly about Steerforth all day. Finally, Steerforth returns. He and David plan to have a dinner party in David’s rooms with two of Steerforth’s friends. David goes overboard in preparing for the party and then drinks himself into illness. While very drunk, he goes with Steerforth and company to the theater, where he runs into Agnes, who makes him go home. The next day he is hungover and humiliated.

Agnes sends for David, and he goes to visit her where she is staying in London. She warns him that Steerforth is his “bad Angel,” that he should avoid Steerforth and be cautious of Steerforth’s influence. David disagrees, but the idea rankles him and disturbs his image of Steerforth. Agnes also delivers the bad news that Uriah Heep has insinuated himself into a partnership with her father, Mr. Wickfield. Both she and David are very distressed over this occurrence.

At a dinner party at the home where Agnes is staying, David runs into Tommy Traddles, his friend from Salem House, and Uriah Heep. Uriah attaches himself to David and accompanies him home. In an unpleasant conversation, Uriah reveals to David his intention to marry Agnes. Uriah insists on sleeping the night on the floor in front of David’s fire. David gets no sleep with Uriah’s evil presence in his apartment.

***Significance:***David and Steerforth leave Yarmouth. Miss Betsey has written to suggest that David become a proctor, based on the advice of her own lawyer. Steerforth agrees that this would be a noble profession for David. They return to London where Miss Betsey has arrived to help settle David's new career. She proposes to apprentice him as a proctor to Mr. Spenlow. The cost of the apprenticeship is quite high and David worries about the financial burden on his aunt. She reassures him that it is not a problem.

On the way to the proctor's office in Doctor's Commons, a man they see on the street disturbs Miss Betsey. She goes off to privately meet with this stranger. When she returns, most of the money she had in her purse is gone and she is very agitated. David is reminded of the story that Mr. Dick told him about a mysterious stranger. Miss Betsey says nothing about the encounter. She helps David make all the arrangements to live in London, and then returns to her home in Dover.

The incident with the mysterious stranger continues to develop. Miss Betsey, who is usually so honest and straightforward, is clearly keeping her relationship with this strange man a secret. David is intrigued, but is also caught up in the many exciting decisions to be made about his new life in London. It is quite ironic that David, who is now almost twenty years old, should be taken care of by his aunt while his ten-year-old self was thrown into the working world alone. David's current financial means contrast greatly to his financial situation when he first came to London as a child.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

David is still thinking of [little Em'ly](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/little-em-ly-emily) and [Martha](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/martha-endell) the next morning, but he feels that it would be a betrayal to share what happened with [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth). In any case, David and Steerforth are busy saying their goodbyes to the Peggottys, [Mr. Barkis](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-barkis), and even [Mr. Omer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-omer). They also part with [Littimer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/littimer), who is remaining behind—ostensibly to oversee outfitting Steerforth's new boat.

***Analysis Part 1:***

David's silence suggests that on some level he realizes that Steerforth poses a threat to little Em'ly. Nevertheless, he fails to guess that Littimer is not, in fact, remaining in Yarmouth to outfit Steerforth's boat, but rather to act as a go-between for his master and Emily.

***Summary Part 2:***

The ride home is silent at first, with [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) wondering when he will return to Yarmouth and [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) lost in his own thoughts. Eventually, however, Steerforth asks David about a letter he received at breakfast. David had wanted to consult Steerforth about this anyway, so he explains that the letter is from [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood), and that it asks him whether he has reached a decision about his future career. David admits he has hardly thought about this at all, and notes that his aunt asks specifically if he would like to be a proctor. Steerforth considers this (and all other professions) boring, but explains that a proctor is a kind of lawyer dealing in everything from wills to marriages to maritime law. He ultimately advises David to take his aunt's suggestion, if only because Miss Betsey has recently altered her will to favor David.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The fact that David so quickly follows his aunt and friend's career advice is a sign of just how little idea he has on what to do with his life. This doesn't bode well for David's future, since the novel depicts the ability to form and stick to a course of action as central to both maturity and financial success. It is also telling that Steerforth finds all careers equally pointless; although he has no financial need to pursue a career, his disdain for the very idea speaks to his own immaturity and directionlessness.

***Summary Part 3:***

When [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) and [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) reach London they part ways, arranging to meet again soon. David then goes to a hotel where [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood) had told him she would be staying, and they greet one another happily. [Mr. Dick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-dick) has not come with Miss Betsey to London, and she admits that she is worried about his ability to keep the donkeys off her lawn. David and his aunt then have supper together, although Miss Betsey is skeptical of the food in London, where she says nothing is "genuine."

***Analysis Part 3:***

Although the scene is mostly comic relief, Miss Betsey's remarks about Mr. Dick do turn out to have bearing on his later development. Miss Betsey says she worries Mr. Dick lacks "strength of purpose," and his inability to complete the Memorial seems to corroborate this. Eventually, however, Mr. Dick will take a regular job copying legal writing, which encourages him to become more focused and disciplined.

***Summary Part 4:***

After [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood) has eaten and prepared for bed, she brings up the topic of jobs again, and [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) says he likes the proctor idea but is concerned about the cost of entering the profession: it requires an initial outlay of 1,000 pounds, and David—conscious of how much money his aunt has already spent on him—says he could try to find a position where he could immediately begin earning money. Miss Betsey, however, says that she wants to help establish David in a career he will enjoy, not only because she views him as her child, but also (she implies) because she wishes she had been kinder to his father and to [Clara](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield). David is touched by his aunt's words, and they agree to go to Doctors' Commons (where many proctors work) the next day.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Although David still lacks a clear sense of purpose in life, his concern over the cost of becoming a proctor is a promising sign: it suggests that he will be careful and disciplined when it comes to saving money. Meanwhile, Miss Betsey's desire to do right by David underscores a central idea of the novel: that, as Miss Betsey herself says, "It's in vain […] to recall the past, unless it works some influence upon the present." Although Miss Betsey regrets her prior harshness to David’s mother and father, she doesn't wallow in guilt, but instead turns her feelings to good use by dedicating herself to raising their son well and kindly.

***Summary part 5:***

The following day, [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood) and [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) head off to visit a firm called Spenlow and Jorkins. Miss Betsey is on edge because she is worried about pickpockets, but David notices that she becomes even more anxious when they pass by an "ill-dressed man" who stops and stares at them. David assumes the man is a beggar and offers to send him away, but his aunt refuses to let David speak to him. Instead, she tells David to wait for her in St. Paul's Churchyard while she speaks to the man. David is shocked, but does as she asks, thinking back to what [Mr. Dick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-dick) had told him of the man who sometimes hangs around Miss Betsey's cottage.

***Analysis Part 5:***

This is David's first glimpse of Miss Betsey's former husband, as well as of how uncharacteristically distressed Miss Betsey becomes in his presence. Her fear stems not only from his past abuse, but also, perhaps, from her awareness of her own feelings; as Miss Betsey later admits to David, she still has fond memories of her husband, despite what he proved to be.

***Summary Part 6:***

After half an hour, [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood) catches up with [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield). She is still disturbed, however, and asks the coachman who brought her there to drive her and David around a bit while she calms down. She won't say anything about the man or her meeting with him, but David notices that most of the money in her purse is now gone.

***Analysis part 6:***

Interestingly, Miss Betsey is still frightened of her husband despite the fact that she now effectively occupies the position of power in the relationship; her husband is impoverished and relies on her handouts to survive.

***Summary Part 7:***

Eventually, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) and [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood) reach Spenlow and Jorkins, where they find several clerks at work. One of them says that [Mr. Spenlow](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-spenlow) is in Court, so David looks around while they wait for him to return: the room is full of faded furniture and legal papers and books, which David approvingly notes "look tolerably expensive."

***Analysis Part 7:***

David’s interest in becoming a proctor seems to stem from a sense that it's both prestigious and profitable. The novel is generally critical of this kind of naked ambition, instead suggesting that the desire to succeed should have some kind of moral basis (for instance, a genuine love for one's work or a need to support one's family).Home and Family Theme Icon

***Summary Part 8:***

[Mr. Spenlow](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-spenlow) himself turns out to be a small and "buttoned up" man with a huge gold pocket watch. He explains that there is an opening at the firm, and that he had told [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood) this when she visited him on business a few days earlier. [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) says that he is very interested in becoming a proctor, but that he would like to try the work out first. Mr. Spenlow replies that the firm always provides hires with a month's trial period, adding that he would be happy to provide two months if it weren't for [Mr. Jorkins](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/jorkins). He similarly blames Mr. Jorkins for the position's cost, as well as for the fact that clerks do not receive a salary while under articles. Later, David learns that Jorkins is actually a very "mild" man whose main function in the firm is to serve as an excuse for Spenlow's policies.

***Analysis Part 8:***

Although the trial period Spenlow provides works in the firm's own favor, providing them with a chance to assess new hires before committing to them, it also gives David a chance to see if he enjoys the work. In David Copperfield, establishing oneself in a career isn't just a matter of finding a job, but also of finding a vocation—something one is naturally suited for.

***Summary Part 9:***

David, Mr. Spenlow and Miss Betsy agree that David will begin work right away, and Spenlow takes him to the Court to give him a sense of what the position will entail. David is favorably impressed by the "old-fashioned" and sluggish atmosphere of the Court, and discusses his plans further with his aunt once they return to her hotel. To David's surprise, Miss Betsey has already been looking for potential lodgings for David in London, and shows him an advertisement for a particular promising set of rooms. They then go to visit the apartment, where Miss Betsey and the landlady, [Mrs. Crupp](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-crupp), negotiate while David daydreams. Eventually, they decide David will provisionally rent the rooms for a month, and Mrs. Crupp will cook for him.

***Analysis Part 9:***

David's reaction to seeing the Court again suggests that his desire to become a proctor rests on questionable motives and assumptions. More specifically, he enjoys the "soothing" atmosphere of the Court, viewing it less as a place to work and more as a place to daydream. Since Miss Betsey wants to establish David in a profession partly in the hopes of making him a more purposeful and resolute person, this seems counterproductive.

***Summary Part 10:***[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) and [Miss Betsey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-betsey-trotwood) return to her hotel for the night, Miss Betsey telling her nephew that she hopes he will soon be a "firm and self-reliant" young man. They discuss plans to have David's things sent to London, and David gives Miss Betsey a letter to take to [Agnes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/agnes-wickfield). Miss Betsey leaves the next day, having arranged for David to be provided for financially for the next month.

***Analysis Part 10:***

Once again, Miss Betsey reiterates her hope that pursuing a career will teach David independence and discipline. In the meantime, however, she continues to support him financially.