***David Copperfield***

### *Chapter 24 – My First Dissipation*

***Summary:***

* Now that David's off living like a real adult on his own, he's feeling very grand.
* At the same time, it's kind of lonely – he doesn't have a particularly tight relationship with Mrs. Crupp, and he misses Agnes.
* David goes over to Highgate, to Mrs. Steerforth's house, to see if Steerforth is around. But he's not – he's hanging out with his Oxford friends.
* Mrs. Steerforth asks David to dinner, and he is so pleased to have company again that he starts to fall for Miss Dartle a little bit.
* The next day, Steerforth surprises David with a visit at Mrs. Crupp's.
* David is overjoyed, and invites Steerforth to dinner.
* Steerforth can't: he's got plans with these two Oxford friends of his.
* David suggests that Steerforth bring the two Oxfordians along.
* Steerforth agrees, and David makes arrangements with Mrs. Crupp for dinner for four.
* Once Steerforth and his two friends, Grainger and Markham, arrive, David's excited to have them but also a bit nervous – he feels very young and unprepared for a dinner party.
* Luckily, Steerforth steps up and plays host (at David's table).
* David gets very, very drunk very, very quickly.
* There's a lot of singing and laughter and smoking and confusion.
* Eventually, someone suggests that they should all go to the theater.
* Steerforth asks if David is all right, to which David replies, "Neverberrer" (24.36). David is very drunk *indeed*.
* At the theater, David is stumbling all around the audience and making noise. The other playgoers shush him, but he keeps making a scene.
* Suddenly, David spots Agnes sitting in a private box. She looks embarrassed and ashamed of David, and tells him to be quiet and watch the play.
* Agnes tells David that she is absolutely serious: David has to go away and tell his friends to take him home.
* Even though David is annoyed that Agnes is being mean to him, he respects her enough that he does, in fact, go away.
* Steerforth follows David and helps him into his house and into bed.
* The next morning, David wakes up completely embarrassed about what he did the night before.
* David is haunted by the awful sense that he has done many shameful things without being able to remember them.
* Also, he feels incredibly sick.
* When he sees Mrs. Crupp, he wants to confess to her that he feels very miserable, but Mrs. Crupp doesn't seem like the cozy sort of woman one confides in.

***Synopsis:***

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.

***Analysis:***Steerforth comes to visit David at his new lodgings. David arranges an elaborate dinner party to welcome Steerforth and his friends from Oxford. During the party, David gets extremely drunk and is persuaded by the others to go to the theater while intoxicated. There, in his drunken state, he happens to see Agnes. She is angry to see him drunk and convinces him to go home. He does and wakes up the next day with a terrible hangover and regrets all the things he did while drunk.

Again Steerforth leads David astray and takes advantage of his hospitality. The trouble that David goes to in order to please Steerforth is immense and Steerforth acts as though he is used to people sparing no expense to please him. Steerforth encourages David to get drunk and then takes him out to the theater because it amuses him. He does not protect David or take responsibility for anything that has happened. This shines more light on Steerforth's personality and his belief that others exist to serve him.

David's encounter with Agnes is another of the chance meetings that take place throughout the novel. Again, his immaturity is contrasted with her maturity when she serves as both friend and protector.

***Significance:***[David Copperfield](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#David_Copperfield) and [James Steerforth](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#James_Steerforth) stay in Yarmouth for about two weeks. Steerforth stays at the inn and spends time with the sailors at sea. David stays at [Peggotty](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/" \l "Peggotty)'s and sometimes walks to Blunderstone, where he recalls his past and ponders his future. The house is now occupied "by a poor lunatic gentleman" and his caretakers, and the ragged old rook nests are gone. Near the end of their stay, Steerforth is in a dejected mood and tells David he wishes he'd had a "judicious father." He says, "I wish with all my soul I could guide myself better!" But Steerforth is soon back to his usual self. He says he bought a boat, and Mr. Peggotty will be its master when Steerforth is away. Steerforth seems embarrassed when David assumes he bought the boat as an act of generosity toward Mr. Peggotty. Littimer will oversee work on the boat, which Steerforth will rename "The Little Emily." At the inn, Miss Mowcher, a dwarf who is a traveling hairdresser, tends to Steerforth and gossips about Emily and her engagement, sprinkling her talk with the frequent exclamation, "Ain't I volatile?" David returns to Peggotty's house to find Emily there, comforting Martha Endell, a former coworker at Omer's who has fallen into disgrace. Emily and Ham Peggotty give Martha money so she can go to London where no one will know of her disgrace. After Martha leaves, Emily is distraught, repeating she isn't as good a girl as she ought to be, and lamenting she's vain and changeable. When she calms down, she leaves with Ham, holding tightly to his arm.

David Copperfield and James Steerforth set out for London, where David is to meet [Miss Betsey](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#Miss_Betsey). He tells her he's decided to follow her suggestion and study to become a proctor. He is concerned about her spending a thousand pounds to purchase the apprenticeship for him, but she reassures him he is her adopted child and she takes pleasure in him. The next day as they're walking to the offices of Spenlow and Jorkins, Miss Betsey is upset when she's approached by a scruffy-looking man. She flags down a passing hackney coach, tells David to wait for her, and drives off with the man. Miss Betsey returns alone and tells David never to mention the incident. He notices she's given the man most of the money she'd had in her purse. They go on to Spenlow and Jorkins in Doctors' Commons where Miss Betsey purchases the apprenticeship for David. Before she returns to Dover, his aunt rents a small apartment for him on Buckingham Street, with a view of the river, and tells him she expects his new life will make him "firm and self-reliant."

David Copperfield enjoys having his own apartment, but he's still bothered by his "youthfulness" and is lonely without [Agnes Wickfield](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#Agnes_Wickfield) as his confidant. When James Steerforth doesn't appear on the day he'd promised, David goes to see Steerforth's mother to make sure his friend isn't sick. She says Steerforth is away with his Oxford friends, and invites him to stay for dinner with her and Miss Dartle, who is full of questions about Yarmouth. The next day, Steerforth turns up at David's apartment, and David invites him and his Oxford friends to come to dinner. David orders in food and wine and hires some helpers, who turn out to be useless. At dinner, David drinks too much wine, and by the time they all go out to the theater after dinner, David is quite drunk. He makes a spectacle of himself at the theater and is mortified to discover Agnes is in the audience. She strongly suggests his friends should take him home, which they do. He spends the following day feeling sick, hung over, and remorseful.

[James Steerforth](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#James_Steerforth)'s erratic behavior in Chapter 21 is a rare instance in which he seems to be questioning his character and judgment. He puts his reservations to rest rather quickly, though, suggesting the shallowness of the moral values that seem to have troubled him. [David Copperfield](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#David_Copperfield)'s hero-worship blinds him to the real reason Steerforth has purchased a boat and named it "The Little Emily." Emily's assertion, after giving money to Martha Endell, that she's not as good a girl as she ought to be suggests she has become involved with Steerforth and knows she's going to hurt Ham [Peggotty](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/" \l "Peggotty).

In Victorian England, when a girl like Martha was known to have had an affair, she would have been ostracized by nearly everyone in town. It would be unlikely that anyone would marry her, and with the scarcity of job opportunities for women at the time, she'd have little chance of employment. Her only choice, therefore, is to go to London, where no one knows her. With luck, Martha might get a respectable job as a seamstress, but more likely she'll end up as a prostitute. Emily probably knows that if Steerforth doesn't marry her, she might end up in Martha's plight.

David Copperfield discovers that the mysterious man Mr. Dick saw with [Miss Betsey](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#Miss_Betsey) actually does exist. She refuses to talk about him, so David will have to wait for future developments to find out what hold the man has over his aunt.

The dinner party David plans for Steerforth and his Oxford friends turns into a comedy of errors. In his eagerness to appear sophisticated and grown-up, David once again reveals his youth and naïveté. [Charles Dickens](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/author/) portrays David's drunken escapade with perfect comic touches, topped off by the humiliation of having Agnes witness David's behavior at the theater.

Dickens, like David Copperfield, worked in Doctors' Commons at the start of his career. However, Dickens was a law reporter, not a proctor. Also like David, Dickens had lodgings in Buckingham Street.

***Critical Study(Ch23-24):***Steerforth and David depart by coach the next morning, leaving Littimer behind to do "what he has to do," as Steerforth cryptically comments. During the journey, David tells Steerforth about the previous night's encounter with Martha Endell, the "fallen woman." David seeks Steerforth's advice about which profession he should pursue. He inquires about being a proctor, a job suggested to him in a recent letter from his aunt, but Steerforth comments that it is a dull job; David would be "a sort of monkish attorney at Doctors' Commons."

David meets Aunt Betsey in London and tells her that he would be happy to be a proctor. However, when he learns that it will cost his aunt a thousand pounds to place him with a firm, David asks if she can afford it. Her reply is that she has "no other claim upon my means — and you are my adopted child."

The next day they set out for the office of Messrs. Spenlow and Jorkins, in Doctors' Commons, where David is to learn his new profession. On the way, an "ill-dressed man" approaches them, and for a moment Aunt Betsey is terrified. However, to David's great astonishment, she tells him to wait for her, and she drives off in a coach with the strange man. When Aunt Betsey returns a half hour later, she tells David, "Never ask me what it was, and don't refer to it." Significantly, David notices that all the guineas are gone from her purse when she gives it to him to pay the driver of the coach.

At the law office, David meets Mr. Spenlow, a well-dressed little man, who explains that his partner, Mr. Jorkins, is a ruthless taskmaster (Later David finds him to be a mild man and learns that his image as a tyrant is a ruse to pressure people). Arrangements are made for David to begin a month's probation, and after everything is arranged, David is lodged at the home of Mrs. Crupp, who immediately takes a motherly interest in him. The next day his aunt leaves for Dover, and David is ready to begin his career in law.

At first David is pleased with his living quarters, but he soon becomes lonely and wonders why Steerforth has not come to visit. When Steerforth turns up, David invites him and two of his Oxford friends to dinner, and he tries to arrange with Mrs. Crupp to cook the meal. However, Mrs. Crupp is unable to prepare the food, and it must be ordered from the pastry cook.

During dinner, everyone consumes a great deal of wine, and David soon becomes "singularly cheerful and light-hearted" and even tries smoking for the first time. It is suggested that they attend the theater, and on the way out, David is conscious of someone falling down the stairs. He is surprised to find that it is he. The theater is very hot, and to David "the whole building looked . . . as if it were learning to swim." They go downstairs to where the ladies were; there, the boisterous David becomes the center of attention. He discovers Agnes at the theater with some friends and tries to talk to her. She is embarrassed and asks him to leave. Steerforth helps David return home. The next morning David is plagued with remorse and shame — and with a headache.

In Chapter 23, David is launched on a career through his aunt's benevolence. But a disturbing element in her life (a life seemingly so mysteriously free of any past) is introduced, suggesting that there is something or someone in her past to account for the belligerent, withdrawn character we first knew her as. For example, we should ask ourselves at this point: Who is the mysterious stranger who so greatly terrifies Aunt Betsey?

Chapter 24 is one of Dickens' most entertaining chapters in this novel. Young David's becoming intoxicated and making a fool of himself is underplayed just enough to make the scene realistic yet comic. His attempts to talk to Agnes and his abrupt "Goori" (goodnight) when he is told to leave, are examples of classic Dickens humor.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

David enjoys the freedom of having his own rooms, although he also finds it lonely at times; he misses [Agnes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/agnes-wickfield) in particular, and [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) has not yet visited him. After three days, he goes to ask [Mrs. Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-steerforth) about her son's whereabouts and learns that he is seeing a friend from Oxford but will be back the following day. David stays for dinner and talks about his trip to Yarmouth with Steerforth. Although [Rosa Dartle](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/rosa-dartle) is again "full of hints and mysterious questions," David is in such a good mood he begins to fall in love with her.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Although still supported financially by his aunt, David is now semi-independent: he has a job, along with his own living space. However, the nineteenth-century idea of home was closely intertwined with the nuclear family, so it's not surprising that David finds himself pining for a female presence—specifically, Agnes.

***Summary Part 2:***

The next day, [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) appears while [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) is having breakfast. David excitedly shows him around his rooms and invites him to stay for breakfast. Steerforth, however, says that he has to remain with his Oxford friends all day, so David suggests that they all come over for dinner. Once Steerforth has left, David speaks with [Mrs. Crupp](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-crupp) about the evening's plans. She recommends a young man and woman to act as waiter and dishwasher, respectively, as well as a list of courses and shops to find them at. David does as she recommends, and also orders several bottles of wine.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Eager once again to seem grown-up, David is thrilled to have the chance to show off his apartment and host his own dinner party. The fact that the evening doesn't go smoothly, however, is a reminder of how young and immature David still is.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) arrives at six in the evening with his friends Grainger and Markham, who are both very "lively." Since [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) is still self-conscious regarding his age, he asks Steerforth to preside over the dinner. The meal generally goes well, although David is continually distracted by the waiter (who keeps sneaking drinks) and the dishwasher (who keeps breaking plates). Once the meal is over, however, David quickly begins to enjoy himself—in part because the waiter and dishwasher leave, but mostly because he is rapidly becoming very drunk. He becomes very talkative, toasting Steerforth, arguing with Markham over the appropriateness of a proposed toast to "Woman!" and making elaborate plans to visit Oxford and host more dinner parties. Meanwhile, they all continue to drink and smoke.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Although David's drunkenness is comical, it's a mark of David's inexperience that he so disastrously misjudges how much he can and should drink. It also speaks badly of how deeply in thrall he is to Steerforth, since the novel implies that it is only through Steerforth's influence that he is acting this way.

***Summary Part 4:***

At some point, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) becomes aware that he is leaning out his window, trying to catch a breeze and scolding himself for trying to smoke. Some time after that, someone suggests going to the theater, which David agrees is a wonderful idea. David can't find the door and then falls down the stairs as they leave. Nevertheless, they manage to reach the theater, eventually settling in one of the boxes. Several of their neighbors tell David to be quiet, but David catches sight of [Agnes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/agnes-wickfield) and calls out to her. She also tries to get him to quiet down, before finally asking him to go home for her sake. Although he is annoyed, David does as she asks, [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) escorting him back to his apartment.

***Analysis Part 4:***

The fact that David is willing to follow Agnes's advice even in the midst of his confusion and irritation is significant: in the following chapter, David will call Agnes his "good angel," and her moral influence is at work even at David's lowest moments. This is another way in which Agnes resembles the ideal Victorian woman, whose role was in part to guide the men in her life both morally and spiritually.

***Summary part 5:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) sleeps badly and wakes the following day with a terrible hangover. He is also deeply ashamed of his behavior and can't stop thinking about having disappointed [Agnes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/agnes-wickfield). Worse still, he does not know where she is staying, so he realizes he can't apologize any time soon. For the rest of the day, David tortures himself with the idea that he will end up dying of drink like his apartment's prior occupant had. He toys with the idea of sharing his woes with [Mrs. Crupp](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-crupp) but does not feel she would make a very good confidant.

***Analysis Part 5:***

David automatically turns to Agnes as the moral standard against which to measure his own behavior. Once again, however, he fails to realize the significance of this—namely, that he relies on her in the same way he would rely on a wife.