***David Copperfield***

***Chapter 9 – I Have a Memorable Birthday.***

***Summary:***

* Two months pass between the end of winter holidays and David's birthday in March.
* He remembers this birthday particularly because of what happened on it.
* Mr. Sharp, the teacher at Salem House, comes in to the classroom and tells David to go to the parlor.
* David thinks he's going to get another care package from Peggotty.
* He finds Mr. Creakle eating breakfast with Mrs. Creakle.
* Mrs. Creakle holds an open letter in front of her.
* She tells David that the world changes all around us all the time, and that people pass from it throughout our lives.
* And then Mrs. Creakle informs David that his mother has died, and that his little brother is ill and will probably pass away soon.
* Mrs. Creakle keeps David in the parlor all day while he weeps and dozes off in turn.
* David realizes that he is an orphan now.
* He is really sad that his mother has died, but at the same time, he is aware of a new dignity he feels in relation to his classmates.
* David heads home for the funeral.
* The man who escorts him through London this time is *not* Mr. Barkis: it is another man, Mr. Omer, who brings David to a workshop with three seamstresses who are stitching up a black set of clothes for David.
* It turns out (rather morbidly) that Mr. Omer also stitched the clothes David's father was buried in.
* Mr. Omer breaks the news that the baby has died.
* David starts to cry once more, and Minnie Omer comforts him.
* A man carrying some nails appears – he seems to be Minnie's sweetheart.
* He has built a coffin for David's mother and brother.
* Having made these funeral preparations, the Omers and Joram, the carpenter, all get into a coach with David.
* David feels odd: he is miserable, but he is surrounded by people enjoying their ride.
* When David arrives, he is immediately greeted by Peggotty, who bursts into tears and hugs him when she sees him.
* Mr. Murdstone is sitting in the parlor weeping silently next to the fire.
* Miss Murdstone asks David in a whisper if he has been measured for his mourning clothes. That's all she offers him in terms of comfort.
* Mr. Murdstone moves restlessly through the house, rarely speaking to Miss Murdstone and never to David.
* David also sees very little of Peggotty until the funeral.
* At the funeral, Mr. Chillip (the doctor who delivered David in the first chapter) greets David kindly.
* Mr. Chillip tries to draw Miss Murdstone into a conversation about how much David has grown, but she refuses to acknowledge David.
* David recalls the pallbearers carrying his mother's coffin from the garden down the path to the cemetery.
* Peggotty comes in to David's room when all is finished.
* She explains that Mrs. Copperfield had been ill and unhappy for a long time, that she improved a bit when her baby was born, but she never really recovered her health.
* Mrs. Copperfield felt that she was going to die. She told Peggotty first and then Mr. Murdstone about a week before it happened.
* On her deathbed, Mrs. Copperfield tells Peggotty to bury her baby with her if he should die, too.
* She also praises Mr. Copperfield's loving heart.
* Finally, at dawn, Mrs. Copperfield asks Peggotty to hold her. She dies softly, like a child going to sleep.
* (We are in tears now, in case you may have wondered.)
* After his mother's death, David only remembers her as she used to be when he was a young child.

***Synopsis:***

Two months uneventfully pass at school. On his birthday, David learns that his mother has died. He returns home for the funeral, not knowing that he will not be going back to Salem House ever again. Upon arriving home, David is met by the village tailor. The tailor sews his funeral suit and tells him that his baby brother has died as well. David arrives at his house in the midst of the funeral preparations. He receives consolation for his grief from Peggotty alone. Peggotty recounts his mother's illness and her last days. David resolves to remember his mother as she had been before marrying Mr. Murdstone rather than as the scared and timid woman she had become after the marriage. David meets the tailor and his family. This family will continue to play a part in David's life and will generally be his first welcome whenever he returns to visit in Yarmouth. David's resolution regarding his mother will continue to influence him throughout his life, particularly when the Murdstones are paired with various other people he cares about.

***Analysis:***

In the middle of the next term, David’s mother dies. The school sends David home, and Mr. Omer, a funeral director and general services provider, picks him up at the coach. Mr. Omer takes David to his shop, where he meets Mr. Omer’s daughter, Minnie, and her sweetheart, Mr. Joram. Mr. Joram builds David’s mother’s coffin behind the shop, and David sits through the day listening to the sounds of the hammer. Mr. Omer tells David that David’s little brother died a few days after his mother. The Omer family is quite jovial, but David sits in the shop with his head down.

***Critical Study(Ch7-9):***

On David's birthday in March, he's called to Mr. Creakle's parlor and is told his mother has died. On the way home, in Yarmouth, David is met by Mr. Omer, tailor and funeral director, who tells him his baby brother has died as well. David is measured for a suit of mourning clothes while his mother's casket is being built outside. Mr. Omer takes David to Blunderstone, where Peggotty tells him about his mother's last hours. Clara Copperfield is buried, with the baby in her arms, in the churchyard next to David's father.

In Chapter 7, [David Copperfield](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#David_Copperfield)'s admiration for [James Steerforth](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#James_Steerforth) grows into a kind of hero-worship. He's very impressed by Steerforth's good looks, seeming to equate good looks with good character. However, several hints in this chapter suggest that Steerforth's character is somewhat lacking. He doesn't step up and confess it was he, not Tommy Traddles, who laughed in church, so Traddles suffers the punishment that is rightly his. Steerforth promised to protect David, but he doesn't protect him from being beaten by Creakle. Also, Steerforth's comment that he wouldn't stand for being beaten and David should have more pluck seems like criticism, but David chooses to take it as encouragement. Steerforth's hounding of Mr. Mell reveals a streak of meanness in his character, and only Traddles points this out. Steerforth clearly enjoys using his charm and position to wield power over others.

In Victorian England, social status was extremely important, and for those who were class conscious, it was considered shameful to be poor. It was believed people who were poor had weak characters or were lazy, drunken, or irresponsible. Only very poor people lived in almshouses, supported by charity, like Mr. Mell's mother. It seems unfair for Mr. Mell to lose his job because his mother is poor, but this information, which David revealed to Steerforth, seems to be the excuse Creakle uses for firing Mr. Mell.

In Chapter 8 when David Copperfield arrives at Blunderstone for the holidays, the Murdstones are away from home, so David receives the unexpected gift of "one happy afternoon" with just his mother and [Peggotty](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#Peggotty). Those brief, joyful hours contrast sharply with the cold, repressed atmosphere pervading the house as soon as the Murdstones return. David realizes how much the Murdstones have come between him and his mother, and becomes sadly resigned to the loss of their close relationship. The last scene in the chapter, as Clara stands at the garden gate, foreshadows the final loss to come.

In Chapter 9, [Charles Dickens](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/author/)'s description of David's feelings and behavior after learning of his mother's death perfectly captures a child's feeling of dramatic importance in the midst of the first experience of real grief. At the same time David is trying to grasp the fact he is now an orphan, he is thinking about the dignity these new feelings of melancholy lend to his demeanor.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) skips over most of the next half-year, saying only that he became increasingly infatuated with [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth), who was leaving at the end of the term. The most notable event that term, however, occurred on David's birthday, which is why David can still remember all the sights and sounds of that day.

***Analysis Part 1:***

As time goes on, David only falls deeper and deeper under Steerforth's spell. In some ways, his removal from Salem House (and thus from Steerforth) probably contributes to his growth over the next several years; if he and Steerforth had maintained their relationship, David would likely have grown into a more passive and deferential person.

***Summary Part 2:***

That morning, [Mr. Sharp](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters) tells [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) in a "feeling tone" to go to the parlor. David does so unsuspectingly only to find [Mr. Creakle](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-creakle) and his wife waiting for him. Mrs. Creakle attempts to break the news gently to David, saying first that [Clara](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield) is "very ill," then that she is "dangerously ill," and finally that she has died. Mrs. Creakle then stays with David while he cries and imagines how difficult it will be to return home for the funeral.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Clara's death in many ways marks the end of David's childhood. Despite the Murdstones' abuse, David has until this point largely been able to count on being provided for in some way. Now that he is an orphan, however, he quickly begins having to learn to fend for himself. In this sense, Clara's death is "necessary" in order for David to fully come of age, but that doesn't mean it isn't painful.

***Summary Part 3:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) leaves the following day, and when he arrives in Yarmouth, he is greeted by a "merry-looking, little old man in black." This man takes him to a shop entitled "Omer, Draper, Tailor, Haberdasher, Funeral Furnisher, &c." Inside, three women are stitching black fabric and the man—whom David now realizes must be [Mr. Omer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-omer)—begins to chat and joke with one of the women, who is his daughter [Minnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/minnie). Mr. Omer then takes David's measurements and talks about how fashions come in and go out "like human beings." Afterwards, Mr. Omer and David sit down to tea, and Mr. Omer remarks that he knew David's father—by which he means that he helped bury David's father—and confirms that David's younger brother has also died.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Dickens draws several parallels between David and his half-brother—including Clara's remark that they look similar and the moment when David first sees his brother and imagines himself in his mother's arms. Given this, it's possible to read the death of David's brother as the "death" of David's own childhood self. The scene with Mr. Omer further underscores just how alone David is by alluding to his father's death.

***Summary Part 4:***

Upset, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) retreats to a corner and begins to cry. As he watches, a young man named [Joram](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters) comes in and announces that he has finished making something, which David realizes must be his mother's coffin. [Minnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/minnie) says that her father has ordered a chaise, and flirts with Joram as she packs up the fabrics she has been working on into baskets. These baskets, along with David himself, are then put in the chaise. [Mr. Omer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-omer), Joram, and Minnie come along as well, and David is struck by how strange their cheerfulness is under the circumstances. When they arrive at David's house, he gets out of the chaise quickly and runs to [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty).

***Analysis Part 4:***

For Mr. Omer and his family, death is not just a familiar part of life but a familiar part of their work. David, however, is still a young child and doesn't realize that what is a life-altering occurrence for him is everyday for the Omers.

***Summary part 5:***

When [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) enters the house, [Miss Murdstone](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-murdstone) simply asks whether he has been measured for his mourning clothes. David suspects that she took "a choice pleasure in exhibiting what she called her self-command." Meanwhile, [Mr. Murdstone](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-murdstone) ignores David entirely, instead pacing and trying to read.

***Analysis Part 5:***

As horrible as Mr. Murdstone is, he does seem to have loved Clara in his own twisted way; in the wake of her death, he appears distracted and agitated for the first time in the novel. By contrast, Miss Murdstone simply doubles down on her doctrine of firmness. Despite the novel's overall approval of self-control and discipline, Miss Murdstone's "self-command" in the face of death seems inhuman.

***Summary Part 6:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield)'s memories of the days leading up to the funeral are confused, though he remembers being upset when [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) took him into the room where his mother's body lay, covered by a sheet. He remembers the funeral perfectly, however, and describes how [Miss Murdstone](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/miss-murdstone) discouraged [Mr. Chillip](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-chillip)—the doctor who attended his birth—from speaking kindly to David. He then recalls how the funeral procession passed into the cemetery, and how, when the burial was over, Chillip escorted David back to the house, where he waited for Peggotty to come see him.

***Analysis Part 6:***

Because Mr. Chillip helped bring David into the world, his presence at this moment in the story underscores the fact that David, now parentless, is entering a new phase of his life. The difficulty David has in recalling the details of the events surrounding his mother's funeral is also significant. Although the story as a whole hinges on David's ability to recall events accurately and integrate them into a coherent narrative, there are moments when this ability threatens to disappear. Like Mr. Dick's "Memorial," these moments undercut the idea that it's possible to present a tidy account of how a person's past has shaped his or her character.

***Summary Part 7:***

[Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) comes to [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield)'s room, and explains that [Clara](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield) had been sick and unhappy for a long time, and only grew weaker after the birth of the baby. Although Clara was always the same "sweet girl" in her interactions with Peggotty herself, Peggotty says that the last time Clara truly seemed like herself was the afternoon David came home for the holidays. When David left, Peggotty explains, Clara had a premonition that she would die soon, and did in fact decline soon afterwards. Peggotty was with her in her final illness and death, and explains that Clara asked that the baby be buried with her if he also passed away as well. She also spoke of how "kind and considerate" her first husband (the late David Copperfield) had been to her, and then died "like a child that had gone to sleep."

***Analysis Part 7:***

It's not clear what the literal cause of Clara's death is, but the fact that it's tied to childbirth is symbolically significant. Although Clara obviously was a mother, she in some ways failed to mature beyond childhood herself. The fact that, to Peggotty, Clara never stopped being a "sweet girl" and a "child" underscores this, and helps explain why Clara dies, narratively speaking; setting to one side the role the Murdstones' abuse played in Clara's illness, Clara dies because she can't adapt to adult life as a wife and mother.

***Summary Part 8:***

[David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) explains that after [Clara](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/clara-copperfield)'s death, he forgot what she had looked like most recently and only ever remembered her "as the young mother of [his] earliest impressions." He also imagines himself as the baby buried with Clara, "as I had once been, hushed for ever on her bosom."

***Analysis Part 8:***

David's closing words in this chapter make it clear that Clara's baby does in fact represent David (or, at least, some aspects of him). Interestingly, however, David himself doesn't seem bothered by the comparison; on the contrary, he almost sounds as though he wishes he actually were the dead child buried with Clara. This again reflects his idealization of the past, and his ambivalence about growing older. In some sense, David wants to remain a child forever, even if that means dying as a child.

***Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

Thus ended Peggotty's narration. From the moment of my knowing of the death of my mother, the idea of her as she had been of late had vanished from me. I remembered her, from that instant, only as the young mother of my earliest impressions, who had been used to wind her bright curls round and round her finger, and to dance with me at twilight in the parlour. What Peggotty had told me now, was so far from bringing me back to the later period, that it rooted the earlier image in my mind. It may be curious, but it is true. In her death she winged her way back to her calm untroubled youth, and cancelled all the rest. (9.104)

***Explanation:***

David seems really committed to the idea that youth is "calm" and "untroubled." So, when Mrs. Copperfield passes away, she is at peace again: she becomes like a child winding her "bright curls round and round her finger." And children who are not untroubled grow up too fast – like David himself, or like Emily. What do you think of this line between childhood and adulthood, where childhood is calm and adulthood is troubled? Is childhood really all that calm? Don't David's own experiences provide strong proof that childhood is a time of profound vulnerability and difficulty?