

# THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF DAVID COPPERFIELD

30 min Schools Script

**BBC**  
Children  
in Need





THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF DAVID COPPERFIELD

Play by

David Schneider, Armando Iannucci and Simon Blackwell

Based on the screenplay by Armando Iannucci and  
Simon Blackwell and the novel by Charles Dickens

All our performers mingle on stage, chatting in character. There's a lectern to one side of the stage. A few wooden chairs and a table are set out to suggest a living room.

NARRATOR DAVID enters, smartly dressed, holding an old-fashioned manuscript book. The performers applaud him and take seats at the sides of the stage where they remain watching except when performing in a scene.

The heavily pregnant CLARA takes a seat on one of the chairs in the "living room".

Narrator David goes to the lectern, opens his book and starts to read.

NARRATOR DAVID  
To begin my life with the beginning  
of my life.

Clara lets out a really loud moan. She's in labour.

CLARA  
AAAAAAAAAAAAARGH! PEGGOTTY!!!

PEGGOTTY gets up from the seats at the side and rushes around looking for something, including in the audience.

PEGGOTTY  
Peggotty's coming! As promised!  
Peggotty promisey. With you in 13  
seconds!.. Aha!

She finds what she's looking for: some towels, hidden under one of the seats in the front row. Clara lets out another moan and Peggotty joins her with the towels.

CLARA  
AAAAAAARGH!

PEGGOTTY  
Try to pretend it doesn't hurt.

CLARA  
But it do-AAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH-es!

BETSEY TROTWOOD gets up from her seat, knocks at an imaginary door and opens it. One of the other performers makes the knocking noise with a percussion instrument.

BETSEY  
(of herself)  
Betsey Trotwood. Sister of your  
late husband, may he rest in peace.  
You've heard of her?

CLARA  
Yes. I've had that pleasurAAAAAGH!

BETSEY  
Well, now you see her.

CLARA  
AAAAAAARGH!

Betsey is unconcerned by Clara's noises.

BETSEY  
Ah! The girl! Here comes the girl!

CLARA  
Or it could be a boOOOOOOOOOOOOOY!

BETSEY  
No. It's certain to be a girl and I  
beg you to call her Betsey Trotwood  
Copperfield and I shall be her  
godmother.

PEGGOTTY  
Let's get you upstairs, Mrs  
Copperfield.

Peggotty helps Clara off-stage. Clara lets out a big moan as she goes. Betsey puts in two long bits of cotton wool in her ears and sits down to wait.

NARRATOR DAVID  
I record that I was born on Friday,  
at twelve o'clock at night.

We hear a cry like a baby. Peggotty returns with DAVID dressed as a young boy (ie not as a baby).

PEGGOTTY  
It's a beautiful baby boy, miss.  
Cute as a potato.

She proudly presents David to Betsey. David looks at her, cries once like a baby then stops.

BETSEY  
A boy? The first of twins surely,  
with his sister being born as we  
speak?

PEGGOTTY  
No. Just the boy.

Betsey stamps her feet and storms off.

David goes and sits in the living room. Peggotty joins with a children's book and they start reading.

NARRATOR DAVID

I was happy. There was just me, my mother, and Peggotty, her maid.

DAVID

(reading)

"The crocodile can be found in Africa, the Americas and Australia"

PEGGOTTY

What a remarkable vegetable!

DAVID

(laughing)

Not vegetable! Reptile!

PEGGOTTY

So I said. One of them. What a world of gammon and spinach it is!

DAVID

"A world of gammon and spinach". I like that! I shall write it down and put it in my box.

He gets a piece of paper out of a small biscuit tin/box and starts writing on it.

NARRATOR DAVID

But soon our merry party was joined by a tall man with black hair, two large hands and a particular manner. I did not like his voice and I did not like him.

Clara and MURDSTONE step forward.

CLARA

Peggotty, David. You must congratulate me.

She shows a wedding ring.

PEGGOTTY

Mrs Copperfield!

CLARA

David, you have a new Pa.

DAVID  
(shocked)  
A new Pa?

MURDSTONE  
Your mother and I are married.

MURDSTONE  
(to Peggotty)  
From now on you address my wife as  
Mrs Murdstone, understand?  
(to David)  
Come! Shake hands!

An unsure David offers his left hand.

MURDSTONE  
Wrong hand, boy!

JANE MURDSTONE joins them. She's even fiercer than Murdstone.

JANE MURDSTONE  
(of David)  
Wants manners, that one.

MURDSTONE  
This is my sister, Jane Murdstone.

The others watch as she inspects the stage then the audience.  
She's not impressed.

JANE MURDSTONE  
The parlour's rather bright.

She picks up something in the audience (eg a bag), looks at  
it with contempt and puts it back.

JANE MURDSTONE  
I'll take care of it.

CLARA  
Am I not to be consulted on  
decoration in my own house?

Jane and Murdstone glare at her.

MURDSTONE  
"My own house"? Clara?

CLARA  
(defeated)  
Our own house.

NARRATOR DAVID

I remember those days as the death-blow of my peace and a grievous daily drudgery of misery.

MURDSTONE

Time for your lesson, Davy boy!

David, holding a book, stands in front of the seated Murdstone, Jane and Clara. Peggotty stands at the back.

MURDSTONE

Read the book!

David looks at the words but he's too nervous to read.

DAVID

Sorry, sir. The words have skates on and skim away.

JANE MURDSTONE

You might as well try and teach the furniture.

DAVID

I'm very stupid.

CLARA

Not stupid perhaps, more...

MURDSTONE

Clara Murdstone, silence!

DAVID

(angry)

Clara *Copperfield*, sir!

The adults are shocked. After a moment, Murdstone goes and grabs a cane.

CLARA

Edward! No! Please...

She goes to stop Murdstone but Jane holds her back.

JANE MURDSTONE

Let your husband improve your son!

Murdstone tries to grab David who tries to avoid him, running over chairs, ducking under the table etc. Clara is in agony. Peggotty doesn't know what to do.

MURDSTONE

If I have an obstinate horse or dog to deal with, I beat him. I conquer him, even if it costs him all the blood he has.

He grabs David, who bites his hand.

MURDSTONE

OWWW!

He lets go of David who tries to escape. Murdstone grabs him again and hauls him off stage.

CLARA

Edward! Please!...

We hear the sound of David being caned. He shouts out as he's hit over the following.

CLARA

Edward! I beg you!

JANE MURDSTONE

Edward is teaching. Let him teach!

We hear a couple more strokes and cries from David.

NARRATOR DAVID

The Murdstones were of the opinion that I was a wicked young fellow of bad passions and should therefore be sent away from home...

Murdstone comes back on-stage, holding David by the collar.

MURDSTONE

What lies before you is a fight against the world.

NARRATOR DAVID

...a fight which was to begin at a bottling factory owned by Mr Murdstone and run by a Mr Creakle and his side-kick Tungay.

CREAKLE and TUNGAY stand. They watch as the other performers arrange the chairs and themselves to form a factory production line, some miming the machines, some playing workers, passing mimed bottles along the line, labeling them, corking them etc. They make appropriate factory noises.

Murdstone pushes David into the production line, next to MICK WALKER>



MICK WALKER

There are some here younger than  
you, mate. You'll get used to it.  
Cork with the hand-corker, yeah?  
Have a go.

One of the performers is stood on a chair with their arm out  
as part of the production line. David tries to jump to reach  
the arm but can't. His fellow workers laugh at him.

MICK WALKER

Then you pass it to Mealy Potatoes,  
he seals.

Another boy, MEALY POTATOES, mimes throwing a bottle at  
David.

MEALY POTATOES

'Ere! Catch!

Everyone on stage goes into mock slow-motion, watching the  
imaginary bottle arc towards David who misses it. They watch  
it drop to the floor and shout "Smash!". No longer in slow-  
motion, everyone turns to Creakle. It's tense. David's  
terrified. Creakle speaks very quietly.

CREAKLE

You know my rules. Half a day's pay  
per bottle.

TUNGAY

(repeating, louder)  
...per bottle.

CREAKLE

(recognises David)  
Oh. The famous biting boy.

TUNGAY

...biting boy.

Creakle gestures him over. David joins them.

CREAKLE

Tie it to him, Tungay.

TUNGAY

...to him, Tungay!  
(realises)  
Oh. That's me.

He gets a sign that says "He bites" on it and puts it around  
David's neck. The other kids point at David and laugh.

NARRATOR DAVID

My step-father had arranged for me to lodge with a Mr Micawber, a shabby but genteel man with an extensive face and cheery disposition even though, as it turned out, he was perpetually sunken in debt.

As Narrator David speaks, the performers dismantle the factory line and arrange some chairs around the table like a dining room. One of them takes the sign off David. MICAWBER joins David at the front of the stage. They look out over the audience.

MICAWBER

London! Fuller of wonders and wickedness than all the cities on earth. And it's ours to go wherever we choose!

David starts to head off towards one side of the audience. Micawber stops him.

MICAWBER

But not down there. Creditors make the road impassable. Two tailors and a surprisingly violent hat-maker.

David turns to go the other way. Micawber stops him.

MICAWBER

Uh-uh. A most unreasonable muffin man. You find us fallen back financially - in short, without money - but something will turn up.

He walks David upstage to join MRS MICAWBER (holding a baby) and 3 or 4 young MICAWBER CHILDREN at the table.

MICAWBER

This woman is the apple of my eye, Master Copperfield, the lodestar on whom the sextant of my heart is set. In short, my wife.

MRS MICAWBER

A pleasure to make your acquaintance.

DAVID

How do you do.

MICAWBER

And these are my children, the...

He's interrupted by a CREDITOR running on stage and grabbing the chair Micawber was about to sit on.

CREDITOR

You owe me for the candles!

The creditor runs away with the chair.

MICAWBER

(melodramatic)

Right! That's it! This is too much!  
I shall end it! They shall have  
their blood! Where's my razor?!

DAVID

If it would help, Mr Murdstone gave  
me some money.

David gives him a banknote. Micawber calms.

MICAWBER

Thank you, Master Copperfield. I  
will write you a Wilkins Micawber  
IOU. As good a promissory note as  
any issued from Threadneedle  
Street.

MRS MICAWBER

Would you have your concertina  
about you, Wilkins? That always  
calms you. He has a gift, Master  
Copperfield.

Micawber gets a concertina as Mrs Micawber gestures for two  
of the kids to share a chair so Micawber has a seat. He  
proceeds to play terribly.

MRS MICAWBER

(of Micawber)

Angels in his fingertips.

NARRATOR DAVID

I lodged for some time with the  
Micawbers...

The Micawbers leave David alone at the table. He writes  
quotes down on pieces of paper and puts them in his box.

DAVID  
(Micawber impression)  
"The apple of my eye"; "Something  
will turn up".

NARRATOR DAVID  
Sometimes something did indeed turn  
up. But more often it would not.  
Eventually their difficulties  
became overwhelming.

A few BAILIFFS arrive and start removing the chairs and the  
table and carrying them away. David has to grab his writing  
box so it doesn't get taken. The Micawbers run back on stage.

MICAWBER  
Bailiffs! Hide the spoons! We are  
undone! The debtors' prison awaits!

A bailiff crosses with a plate with a (mimed) roast chicken.

MICAWBER  
That is not your chicken! You're  
stealing an honest man's chicken!

The bailiffs start rounding the Micawbers up.

BAILIFF  
(to the Micawbers)  
To prison with you!

MRS MICAWBER  
Hands off Micawber! He bruises like  
a peach!

DAVID  
Leave them be! You malicious  
beasts! Have you no heart?!

The Micawbers are taken off stage. Micawber shouts back.

MICAWBER  
Until something turns up!

David is left alone on stage, sad, abandoned.

The performers arrange themselves into the bottling factory  
again and make the movements (without sounds this time).

NARRATOR DAVID  
The bottling factory no longer held  
any fear for me. It was where I  
worked all day and now where I  
slept at night. It became my home.

The performers make the sounds of the factory line. David walks around supervising. He comes to a girl trying to reach the arm he failed to reach earlier.

DAVID

Jump! Imagine you're an acrobat.

He helps her to jump. She reaches the arm and pulls it down. He walks on to another worker.

DAVID

Keep at it, Wilson. Else I have to cork six to make up for your four.

NARRATOR DAVID

And then one day, Creakle called for me...

CREAKLE steps forward, with Tungay.

CREAKLE

(whispers)

Copperfield.

TUNGAY

Copperfield!

Murdstone and Jane Murdstone join Creakle. Murdstone and Creakle look awkward, Jane looks harsh. David goes over to join them., while the other performers keep the movements of the factory line going in silence.

CREAKLE

Your stepfather informs me...

TUNGAY

Me.

CREAKLE

That your mother is ill...

TUNGAY

Ill.

DAVID

How ill?

JANE MURDSTONE

Tell him.

TUNGAY

Tell him.

DAVID  
Tell me please.

CREAKLE  
I won't deceive you: very ill.

TUNGAY  
Very ill.

DAVID  
How ill?

TUNGAY  
She's dead.

Murdstone and Creakle look at Tungay, annoyed. David tries not to cry.

MURDSTONE  
We didn't want to make a fuss.

A pause. Everyone waits to see how David reacts. Slowly, the performers making the factory line grow louder. And louder. Suddenly, David goes over to them and mimes taking a bottle off the line and throwing it to the ground. The factory line performers shout "SMASH!"

CREAKLE  
Copperfield. I will allow you that,  
you are upset but do not...

TUNGAY  
Do not.

DAVID  
I've got no-one! Nothing! Do you  
hear me? Nothing!

David mimes sweeping a whole load of bottles off the line. The performers shout "SMASH!" even louder.

CREAKLE  
Right! That's half a day's pay.

TUNGAY  
Pay.

DAVID  
Half of nothing is nothing!

He mimes pushing over part of the factory line. The performers alter their position as he does so and shout "SMASH" several times as if loads of bottles were breaking.



Their factory line noises become incredibly loud as, watched by Tungay, Creakle and the Murdstones, David makes a break for it and runs round the factory line a couple of times as if escaping.

As one, the performers stop being the factory line and goes silent. They clear the chairs etc as David grabs his writing box and starts walking around the edge of the stage.

NARRATOR DAVID

I wanted more than this. I wanted to be something. Yet I was now alone, without blood relatives except for my aunt in Dover, with nothing to my name but the clothes that I wore and my box of writing.

A performer holds up a sign saying "DOVER 23 MILES" as David continues walking around the stage.

NARRATOR DAVID

And so, I set off to see my aunt without even knowing if she was still alive.

A PASSER-BY grabs David's jacket from him as he walks. David tries to take it back but the passer-by escapes into the audience. David carries on walking round the stage, growing more and more tired. A STREET-SWEEPER joins him on stage.

DAVID

Miss Betsey Trotwood?

STREET-SWEEPER

Carry straight on, another 2 mile. Good luck with her. She's as fierce as a birthing badger.

David carries on, exhausted. Two performers become donkeys ridden by two other performers. Betsey rushes towards them, shooing them away.

BETSEY

Donkeys! Donkeys! Shoo! Off my green or I'll box your ears! Janet!

JANET, her maid, rushes out, banging a pan with a ladle.

JANET

Shoo! Off you go!

The donkeys start to go. Betsey kicks one in the bum to hurry it along. They go. She sees the exhausted David.

BETSEY

And you! No young men needed here.  
Shoo!

Janet bangs her pan at him.

DAVID

(desperate)

No, no! I'm your nephew. I'm David  
Copperfield. The one you wanted to  
be a girl.

BETSEY softens.

BETSEY

Come inside. Janet, help me help  
him to a chair.

She helps David, who's close to collapse, as Janet brings a  
chair.

BETSEY

Not that one, it's Viennese, he's  
very dirty. Quick!

Janet brings up another chair. David starts to faint and ends  
up fainting into the first chair.

BETSEY

Not the Viennese!... Oh well.

As Narrator David speaks, Janet and Betsey bring him round  
with some water then bring him a nice new jacket which he  
puts on. He likes it.

NARRATOR DAVID

My aunt, helped by her maid, Janet,  
took me in. And thus began a new  
life for me, with everything new  
about me, including a new name.

BETSEY

I've been thinking I might call you  
Trotwood. If I'm to financially  
support my nephew I want to like  
his name.

David, now fully recovered, nods approval.

NARRATOR DAVID

A florid, pleasant-looking  
gentleman called Mr Dick also lived  
with her.

(MORE)

NARRATOR DAVID (CONT'D)  
A fine gentleman, despite his  
belief that when Charles I was  
executed 200 years earlier, all the  
king's troubles flew from the  
king's head to his own.

MR DICK joins them.

MR DICK  
Quick question. Is my head  
definitely attached to my body?

DAVID  
(makes a show of checking)  
I can confirm without a doubt that  
it is.

MR DICK  
Thank you.

NARRATOR DAVID  
We picnicked. We flew kites on  
which we stuck all the bad thoughts  
from Charles I that Mr Dick had  
written on hundreds of pieces of  
paper...

We see David with Mr Dick, miming the kite flying high in the  
air. They're laughing, happy, watched by Betsey and Janet.

NARRATOR DAVID  
And then there was Agnes...

AGNES joins Betsey and Janet and watches the kite-flying.

NARRATOR DAVID (CONT'D)  
Her face with a happy tranquility  
about it that I shall never forget.  
She was the daughter of Mr  
Wickfield, a most agreeable and  
thirsty man who owned a school near  
Canterbury.

MR WICKFIELD joins Agnes.

MR WICKFIELD  
Is it too early for sherry?

He looks around for some sherry. David leaves Mr Dick miming  
his kite-flying, comes up to Agnes and bows.

AGNES  
A bow! I am so rarely bowed to.

DAVID

Well, I hope I've started a new fashion.

He bows again, she bows back. They laugh.

NARRATOR DAVID

Agnes was so sweet-tempered, it was as if I missed my right hand when she was away. On her visits, I would often show her my writing.

David hands her some of the papers from his box. She reads from them.

AGNES

"Miss Murdstone's sleepless eyes, like two red suns". Very good. "The bottles are propelled by iron pistons that nod up and down like melancholy mad elephants." What a talent you have, Trot.

David smiles. Mr Dick joins them.

MR DICK

Can you form a queue?

DAVID

(unsure what to do)  
What, now?

MR DICK

The capital letter Q. I'm trying different forms.

He shows them a piece of paper.

MR DICK

What do you think? I like this one:  
a cigar in an ashtray.

DAVID

Or a kite with a string.

MR DICK/AGNES

Yes!

NARRATOR DAVID

It was agreed that I should attend Mr Wickfield's school.

(MORE)

NARRATOR DAVID (CONT'D)

And so after a blissful summer I set off in a coach with Agnes and her father to a grave building with a learned air about it that seemed very suited to the stray rooks that walked with a clerkly bearing on the grass plot in front of it.

During this speech, the performers rearrange the furniture to make a coach (a table with two chairs in front of it). Janet, Betsey and Mr Dick help David put a trunk on the table and then climb onto it with Mr Wickfield for the journey.

AGNES

Here we are.

Agnes and David dismount. Mr Wickfield struggles to do so.

MR WICKFIELD

This is lethal. It's very very high.. .Hmm... Maybe I'll just stay on the coach...

AGNES

Come on. One foot... almost there.

They help him down. MRS STRONG approaches.

MR WICKFIELD

Mrs Strong. Welcome! No, I'm welcome, aren't I? You're already here.

MRS STRONG

Welcome!

MR WICKFIELD

This is Mrs Strong, our headmistress.

DAVID

A pleasure.

AGNES

(to David)

We live just next door. Come visit us.

Agnes and Mr Wickfield head off. URIAH HEEP arrives and grabs the trunk. It's heavy but he tries not to show it.

DAVID

Oh, don't trouble yourself.

URIAH

It's not even a bit of trouble to help. It's pure pleasure. Uriah Heep. Thrilled to make your acquaintance, sir.

He bows deeply. David smiles at him, a bit taken aback.

MRS STRONG

Come meet your classmates.

She leads David around the stage. A performer stands on a chair and drops a lump of plaster in front of them.

MRS STRONG

Just a bit of ceiling, no cause for alarm. The place may need a little decoration, once Mr Wickfield's funds are more fluid.

They get to the other side of the stage where David's new CLASSMATES are chatting.

MRS STRONG

Everyone. This is Copperfield. He's new.

They turn and look at David who smiles nervously. Uriah joins him. He stands very close to David.

URIAH

I shall put your trunk in the dormitory. I am in deep humility.

He bows even deeper than before and goes. David finds it strange.

MRS STRONG

Well, I'll leave you boys to it.

She goes. One of the boys, STEERFORTH, approaches David.

STEERFORTH

And what do you make of our friend Heep?

David hesitates for a moment, then plucks up the courage.

DAVID

He stands so close by that he's nearer to you than your own shirt.

The boys laugh.



DAVID

He's closer to you than your own shadow.

They laugh some more.

STEERFORTH

I like you. The very daisy in the field is not fresher than you are. We shall call you Daisy. Join us!

NARRATOR DAVID

I did not tell my schoolmates the truth about my background - the bottling factory, the Murdstones - or at least I only told it as invented stories. To them I was Trotwood Copperfield, brought up by my aunt, far from hardship. But then one day...

David and the boys are chatting. The seats are arranged like a classroom.

STEERFORTH

Tell us the story of the penniless debtor again. The one with the concertina.

(bad Micawber impression)

"Something will come along".

DAVID

(correcting, as Micawber)

"Something will turn up!"

Micawber, who's tried to smarten up, joins them with Mrs Strong.

MICAWBER

An excellent precept, young man.

He winks at David. David is shocked, tries to hide his panic. The boys stand for Mrs Strong and Micawber.

MRS STRONG

Everyone. We have a new master joining us: Professor Micawber. I'll leave you to it.

She goes. David looks worried.

MICAWBER

(trying to sound posh)

Good morning, boys. Please sit.

They sit.

MICAWBER

Now, which dish from the feast of knowledge will it be our particular pleasure to partake in at this current juncture. In short: what lesson is it?

STEERFORTH

(setting Micawber up)  
It's Latin grammar now, sir.

MICAWBER

(bluffing)  
Latin. Good. Good. Conjugations.  
Amo amas amat. Aquarium. Gymnasium.  
Possum. No, that's an animal.  
(sudden thought)  
Terminus! That is indeed Latin,  
meaning the end and there we shall  
end our lingering in the ancient  
world. For there is a belief among  
a good many medical men that music  
may help in the absorption of  
knowledge.

He gets his concertina and starts to play - terribly. The boys start to snigger, David starts to panic.

STEERFORTH

(to David)  
That's him! From your story!  
"Something will come up"  
(to Micawber)  
Enough! I'm tempted to burst my ear-  
drums with a pair of pencils.

MICAWBER

(stops playing)  
Who are you to insult a gentleman,  
sir?!

STEERFORTH

I see no gentleman.

Mrs Strong re-joins them. Uriah lurks in the background.

MRS STRONG

I heard some manner of wild  
wheezing, Professor. Is there a  
squirrel trapped in the pipes  
again?

STEERFORTH

He's no professor. Ask him about debtor's prison. He has taken money from Daisy for years and has followed him here to continue his efforts.

A beat. Everyone looks to Micawber who decides to confess.

MICAWBER

This gentleman is correct. I did, to my shame, reside within prison walls...

MRS STRONG

Even we draw the line at employing former convicts. And indeed, much higher than that is where we actually draw the line. Uriah! Please see him out.

Uriah leaves with Micawber, who glances back at David. David feels guilty. The others leave David alone on the stage.

NARRATOR DAVID

No further damage was done. Or so I thought.

Uriah returns and goes up to David.

URIAH

(quietly, menacing)

I had an interesting talk with your Mr Micawber as I was showing him out. Lot of *bottles* in London. Do you like *bottles*?

DAVID

You seem very exercised by the idea of bottles.

URIAH

Your friends are so damning of the humbler classes. We wouldn't want them to find out about you. I hope to secure a position with Mr Wickfield. Maybe you could put in a word.

Uriah goes, leaving David lost in thought.

NARRATOR DAVID

Uriah Heep forced me into honesty,  
which turned out to be a place as  
comfortable as any palace.

Steerforth and a couple of others join David, who turns to  
them.

DAVID

My classroom was a bottling factory  
and my bed two of Micawber's dining  
room chairs. I'm here because my  
aunt saved me.

STEERFORTH

Admirable. A self-made man. Picked  
life up by the scruff and shook it.

The other boys agree. David is relieved.

NARRATOR DAVID

The school was a crumbling disgrace  
but I was happy. My time there drew  
to an end and misty ideas of being  
a young man at my own disposal  
lured me away...

During the speech, performers arrange the chairs and table to  
make a large living room. David and some friends including  
Steerforth take seats and silently mime drinking, eating and  
laughing. A maid, MRS CRUPP, mimes topping up their drinks.

NARRATOR DAVID

My aunt had arranged substantial  
rooms for me in London, a generous  
allowance and a position for me to  
train as a lawyer...

DAVID

(loud, to his friends)  
I shall have a dinner party like  
this once a week till I die! Where  
are the lobsters? I want lobsters!

STEERFORTH

I am bored to the eyeballs! To the  
theatre!

DAVID'S FRIENDS

To the theatre! To the theatre!

Laughing and chatting, they head off-stage. David is at the  
back of them but turns back around as Narrator David speaks.

NARRATOR DAVID

One day I received an unexpected visit.

Betsey, carrying a big plant, and Mr Dick join David.

BETSEY

Trotwood, I am ruined.

MR DICK

Like a castle.

BETSEY

I've lost everything, Trot. I'm not sure how. I have now only my clothes and my plant and Mr Dick.

MR DICK

That's me.

DAVID

But surely Mr Wickfield has been monitoring your affairs.

BETSEY

Mr Wickfield has troubles of his own just now.

NARRATOR DAVID

I was determined not to let all the light and goodness my aunt had brought me turn to gloom. I travelled immediately to see Mr Wickfield.

Betsey and Mr Dick wait where they are as David crosses to the other side of the stage where Mr Wickfield is sat at a table. Agnes stands behind him.

MR WICKFIELD

We shall ensure this never happens again. Although that's problematic as I have no idea how it happened in the first place, I'd never have authorised such a document. We'll approve a loan to tide you over.

DAVID

Thank you.

Uriah joins them. He's now very confident.

URIAH

I feel a loan is out of the question.

DAVID

Do you have authority here, Uriah?

URIAH

I do. And it's Mr Heep. As in "Wickfield and Heep". I am now a partner.

David, shocked, looks to Agnes. She nods: it's true.

DAVID

(quietly, to Agnes)

He is like a weed. Unchecked, he will overrun and choke all life and joy from this place. He must be stopped.

AGNES

I fear it is too late for that.

URIAH

We have several smaller rental properties that aren't necessarily first choice...

The performers close the chairs in around Betsey and Mr Dick till they form a tight circle, the walls of their new room.

URIAH

(gesturing at the room)

That is where you and your aunt shall live now. If any problems arise... I suggest you tend to them yourselves.

David joins Betsey and Mr Dick in the new room. They take in its smallness. Betsey runs her finger along one of the chairs as if to see how much dust there is. It's not pleasant.

BETSEY

(bravely)

We'll make do. Together we'll make this the most desirable mouse-hole in London.

NARRATOR DAVID

I was poor again. At a time of misfortune, a loving visitor is all the more welcome. And so it was with Peggotty.



Peggotty and David stand at the front of the stage, facing the audience, like Micawber and David did earlier.

PEGGOTTY

You had nothing, then you had something, now you have nothing again. So stands to reason you'll have something again.

DAVID

I wish I could be so sure it worked like that.

PEGGOTTY

Oh, Davey, my precious potato, it will. Let's walk.

She starts to head off to one side. He holds her back.

DAVID

Not that way. A particularly irritable tailor to whom I owe money for my waistcoat is up there.

They head off the other way and come across Mr Micawber, looking rougher than ever, asleep on the floor with his concertina as a pillow. David touches his shoulder to wake him.

DAVID

Mr Micawber?

He wakes up with a start, the concertina making a noise.

MICAWBER

My dear young friend! And...

PEGGOTTY

...Peggotty.

MICAWBER

Peggotty! Of course!

DAVID

Are you... well?

MICAWBER

(putting on a brave face)  
Never better.

DAVID

And Mrs Micawber?

MICAWBER

In even finer fettle than myself.  
There she is with our happy tribe  
of dependents.

He points out Mrs Micawber, holding a baby, and the other kids, huddled nearby. Mrs Micawber bravely smiles and waves back. They also look worse than before.

DAVID

You live on the streets now?

MICAWBER

We do currently live al fresco,  
with all the advantages that  
entails. Every meal is a picnic.

David looks to Peggotty, his heart full of compassion.

PEGGOTTY

You need to love those folk who  
help you out, and help out the ones  
you love. That's a Peggotty  
proverb.

NARRATOR DAVID

I knew what I had to do.

Peggotty, David and the Micawbers join Betsey and Mr Dick in their tight circle of chairs. It's very cramped. Micawber plays his concertina for Betsey and Mr Dick, who are trying to be polite; one of the kids holds the baby and makes crying noises as if the baby's crying; two of the other kids are arguing. Everyone gets in each other's way. It's mayhem.

MR DICK

You really should write about this,  
Trotwood. An infernal noise but it  
would make a cracking comic scene.

DAVID

Yes. I should try and write.

BETSEY

No "try" about it, Trot. Look, we  
found a book for you to write in  
and a small hidden area... for you  
to write in.

She gives him a book identical to the one Narrator David is reading from and shows David a single chair just outside their "room". Mrs Micawber heads towards the chair.

MRS MICAWBER

Perfect bit of privacy here.

(shouts back to her kids)

Right, who's next for the chamber  
pot? Come on! Chop chop!

(off Betsey's look)

Or we could go somewhere else.

She hauls a couple of kids who have joined her by the chair back to the main room. David goes and sits in the chair. It suddenly becomes quiet. The lighting state changes; everything focuses on David. He gets out a pen and thinks. After a beat, Murdstone appears behind him.

MURDSTONE

If I have an obstinate horse or dog  
to deal with, I beat him.

David hears the words and writes them down. Murdstone disappears, to be replaced by Uriah.

URIAH

I am in deep humility.

He bows deeply. David writes. Uriah is replaced by Mr Wickfield, facing backwards, struggling to get off the coach.

MR WICKFIELD

This is lethal. It's very very  
high...

David smiles and writes it down. He continues thinking and writing. We hear Agnes's voice.

AGNES

David? It's me.

The lights come back up again, the noise returns as we see the busy, cramped room again. David heads back from his chair to join the others. Agnes is holding a Micawber child.

AGNES

The door was open so I...

(of the child)

Is this anyone's?

MRS MICAWBER

(taking the child)

That's one of ours I think.

(She checks)

Yes.

DAVID

Agnes! Do come in! Join the choir!

AGNES

Goodness, so many people. Will the floor hold up? Miss Trotwood, do you have a letter bearing my father's signature?

BETSEY

Yes, I believe I do.

She goes to fetch a piece of paper.

DAVID

Is something wrong?

AGNES

Something's about to be made right.

Betsey holds up the piece of paper.

NARRATOR DAVID

And so it was. We headed to Canterbury that very night by mail coach, to the offices of Wickfield and Heep.

Uriah sits at the table where Mr Wickfield sat earlier. Agnes and David approach him.

AGNES

We are here to speak to you about Miss Trotwood's investments.

Betsey, Peggotty and Micawber join. As does Mr Wickfield.

URIAH

It's a party. Should I make a bowl of punch? We need a lemon. Miss Trotwood, you look like you're sucking one.

BETSEY

If I had a lemon, Heep, I'd squirt the juice in your eyes. You've embezzled money from this firm.

URIAH

Slander! Anyone else wish to defame me?

MICAWBER

I do! I put it to you that you falsified documents to mystify an individual who I shall designate in code as Mr W.

(MORE)

MICAWBER (CONT'D)  
 (pointing at Mr Wickfield)  
 In short: you faked his signature.

URIAH  
 Prove it!

AGNES  
 Oh, we shall.

She holds up some pieces of paper.

URIAH  
 You stole those documents!

AGNES  
 Can Mr Wickfield's daughter not  
 tidy up her father's papers?

URIAH  
 They were in a locked drawer.

AGNES  
 I'm a very enthusiastic tidier.

David takes one of the documents from Agnes and gives it to  
 Mr Dick. Betsey hands Mr Dick the paper she found earlier.

DAVID  
 What do you think, Mr Dick?

MR DICK  
 Swans.

URIAH  
 Swans?

MR DICK  
 Yes. When Mr Wickfield signs his  
 name the W looks like a swan. But  
 when Mr Heep mimics his signature,  
 it's more like a church bell.

Uriah's not sure what to say for a moment. Then:

URIAH  
 You and your kind have always hated  
 me and mine. Kept us down. And who  
 are you? A fine set of people. You,  
 Copperfield, you were pure scum  
 before anyone had charity on you.  
 And you, Miss T, you're a grim old  
 prospect, no wonder your husband  
 abandoned you so quickly.

David, furious, turns Uriah to face him and goes to punch him. Everyone freezes for a moment just as the punch lands and Uriah's face contorts.

NARRATOR DAVID

And so the firm was returned to Mr Wickfield...

They unfreeze. Uriah goes and the stage is cleared as Narrator David speaks. David, Betsey, the Micawbers, Peggotty, Mr Wickfield, Janet and Mr Dick take up positions as if on the lawn in front of Betsey's house.

NARRATOR DAVID

I completed my book allowed me to repay my aunt's kindnesses and buy back her house for her.

Betsey sees something out in the audience.

BETSEY

Donkeys! Janet!

Mr Dick touches her on the arm. She calms.

BETSEY

Maybe it's fine.  
(to David)  
You saved my home, Trot.

MICAWBER

Your generosity has indeed proffered an exit from the vicissitudes of financial hardship. In short, something did come up: You.

DAVID

Your prsesence in my writing has repaid me many times over.

PEGGOTTY

You could have made me taller and younger in the book though.

They laugh. Agnes, holding a baby, joins David and Betsey. David puts his arm round her.

DAVID

(of the baby)  
Betsey Trotwood, meet Betsey Trotwood. You always wanted a girl.

Betsey is moved.



BETSEY

I don't know. If you ask me, the  
boy turned out just perfect.

She touches David's cheek. Narrator David joins David on stage.

NARRATOR DAVID

And now, I have nothing left to  
tell. Unless to confess that this  
narrative is far more than mere  
fiction - it is my written memory,  
the people within it as real as the  
earth, and they shall remain near  
me, strong and wise, until I  
breathe my last.

(to David)

We made it through. And we had  
quite the ride on the way.

They shake hands. All the other characters join them on stage  
and congratulate the two of them, and each other.

BLACKOUT