

# Bleak House



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES DICKENS

Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, a town in Hampshire, England, in 1812. His family moved to London and lived in various parts of the city throughout his early life. Dickens's education was cut short when his father was sent to debtor's prison. Dickens was 12 at the time, and while the rest of the family accompanied his father to jail, Dickens was sent to work in a blacking-warehouse. This experience of child labor stayed with him and became a prominent theme in many of his novels. When Dickens was 20, he embarked on a career in journalism. He was an extremely ambitious young man and quickly became successful for his political cartoons published in London periodicals. His first novel, *The Pipwick Papers*, was published in serial form soon after this initial success. Dickens's decision to publish his novels in short installments over a long period of time—so that poor readers could purchase cheap periodicals instead of an expensive novel—became extremely popular among Victorian readers. Dickens gained a wide audience in Britain and America and traveled to the United States with his wife, Caroline Hogarth, in 1842. After his return to England, Dickens became the editor of a London newspaper and, after purchasing a house in Kent, wrote several more successful novels. He was a well-known public figure and extremely famous in the London social and literary scene. Dickens and Catherine had 10 children together, but Dickens left Catherine for Ellen Ternan in 1857, who was 18 years old at the time. Dickens and Ellen stayed together for the rest of his life. In his later years, Dickens arranged several very successful reading tours in various parts of the world, including America. He died after a series of strokes in 1870 and was interred in Rochester Cathedral.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Bleak House* is set in the mid-1800s and addresses several issues which would have been relevant and familiar to his Victorian audience. The novel's philanthropist characters, like Mrs. Pardiggle and Mr. Quale, reflect the 19th-century vogue for social engagement in charitable causes and the fashion among middle-class people for social organization. Although Dickens is critical of these character's efforts, the 19th century was a period of rapid social reform in which ideas such as social care for the poor and infirm were seriously considered and acted upon for the first time in modern history at a governmental level. The 19th century was also a period of colonial expansion in Britain; the Victorian establishment, ruled over by Queen Victoria, who came to the throne in 1837, put a

great deal of resources into establishing colonies abroad in places like India and Africa. Although this was considered a national enterprise, colonial expansion was not always popular among the general public, who felt that the tax spent on the Empire could be used more effectively at home. Dickens gives voice to this discontent through the figure of Mrs. Jellyby. Dickens also addresses social issues, such as the terrible living conditions of the industrial poor in the slums of London and the spread of disease through unsanitary burial practices and through the foul water of the Thames, which many poor people used for both bathing and drinking. Dickens also heavily criticizes the issue of child labor, which was yet to be abolished in Britain. Dickens's observations about class in the novel reflect the changing social order, in which the wealthy upper classes were gradually replaced by wealthy industrialists, who had earned their money in manufacturing and trade, as the century progressed.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*Bleak House* includes many of the themes and tropes which were popular in the 19th century. Dickens was heavily influenced by Scottish writer Walter Scott, whose novels included a large and varied host of characters and were written from numerous perspectives. Scott's influence can be seen particularly in *Bleak House*, with its overlapping plots which describe the experience of characters from many different backgrounds. The use of houses to represent internal psychological states in *Bleak House* is a common feature of 18th-century Gothic novels such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Anne Radcliffe. *Bleak House* is also similar to earlier 19th-century novels like [Jane Eyre](#) (1847), as it features a female protagonist who is downtrodden in early life, unaware of her real parentage, and who finds love at the novel's end. Both works also contain realistic descriptions of poverty and its criticism of 19th-century social problems, such as the lack of social provision and education for the poor. Many of Dickens's other novels, such as [Oliver Twist](#) and [Great Expectations](#), deal with themes of social reform and criticize 19th-century institutions, such as the prison system and workhouses. These themes are also discussed in Victorian novels such as [Middlemarch](#) by George Eliot and [Mary Barton](#) by Elizabeth Gaskell. In its portrayal of the private investigator, Mr. Bucket, who uses methods of deduction to solve crime, *Bleak House* foreshadows later detective fiction, such as the Sherlock Holmes novels by Arthur Conan Doyle. Dickens was also heavily influenced by fairy tale collections, such as *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, and often used orphans as main characters. Dickens's whimsical characters and coincidental plot twists also influenced modern children's authors, such as J. K. Rowling in

her Harry Potter series.

## KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Bleak House*
- **When Written:** 1852-1853
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** 1852-1853
- **Literary Period:** Victorian
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** London and Kent
- **Climax:** Mr. Tulkinghorn discovers that Lady Dedlock has had an illegitimate child before her marriage to Sir Leicester, but he is murdered by Lady Dedlock's maid, Mademoiselle Hortense, before he can reveal the secret.
- **Antagonist:** Mr. Tulkinghorn
- **Point of View:** Third Person and First Person

## EXTRA CREDIT

**Jarndyce and Jarndyce.** The fictional lawsuit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce in *Bleak House* is believed to be based on a real Chancery lawsuit known as *Thellusson v Woodford*, which had been disputed in court for over 60 years. At the time of Dickens's writing, it was widely believed that the Chancery system was in need of reform and Dickens's novel helped support this idea and spurred many social campaigners into action.

**Serialization.** *Bleak House* was published over the course of a year in a series of 20 installments. Dickens used this format for most of his novels and often adapted the novel as he went to suit his reader's expectations. It was common for him to ask people for their views on his novels and to alter his plots drastically if he anticipated that the public response to them would be negative.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Lady Dedlock, the wife of aristocratic nobleman Sir Leicester Dedlock, is extremely bored in her fashionable London townhouse. She is considered a cold, haughty woman, but there is a rumor that she is not of noble birth and that Sir Leicester married her despite this. Her husband's lawyer, Mr. Tulkinghorn, arrives and reads to them from some legal documents. Midway through, Lady Dedlock turns pale and asks who wrote the paper. Mr. Tulkinghorn, a reserved, steely man, explains that an anonymous law writer penned the document. Mr. Tulkinghorn continues to read and Lady Dedlock, who says she feels faint, retires to her room.

Esther Summerson is an orphan girl who has been raised by her

godmother, Miss Barbary, a hard, pious woman who seems to dislike Esther and keeps her away from other children. Esther longs to be loved and accepted and, one day, on her birthday, she begs her godmother to tell her something of her past. Miss Barbary bitterly tells Esther that she was "her mother's disgrace." Esther is distraught and does not understand what her Miss Barbary alludes to. Two years later, Miss Barbary has a stroke while Esther is reading to her from the Bible and dies not long after this. At her godmother's funeral, Esther is approached by a man she has seen before at Miss Barbary's **house**. This man is Mr. Kenge and he tells Esther that Miss Barbary was really her aunt, and that Esther is now to be sent to school under the care of her new guardian, a man named Mr. Jarndyce. Esther is amazed and incredibly grateful. She is very happy at school and is trained to be a governess.

After six years at school, Esther is told that she is to travel to London and become the companion of a young woman who is a ward of the court in a lawsuit called Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Esther arrives in London and finds herself directed to the court of Chancery by a clerk named Mr. Guppy. Here, she is introduced to her new companion, Ada Clare, and another ward of the court, and Ada's cousin, Richard Carstone. The court of Chancery is a large, archaic institution which deals explicitly with disputes over property. Many of the cases, like Jarndyce and Jarndyce, have gone on for several generations and have torn families apart in this time. Esther is glad that she has not been born into this, as Richard and Ada have, and the three of them wait to be taken to a woman named Mrs. Jellyby's house, where they will spend the night. Outside the court, they meet a mad old lady named Miss Flite who is very excited to meet the wards in Jarndyce.

Mrs. Jellyby's house is extremely chaotic and filled with dirty and neglected children. Mrs. Jellyby is a philanthropist and is only interested in her charity work in Africa. Esther befriends Mrs. Jellyby's eldest daughter, Caddy, and Esther, Richard, Caddy, and Ada all go out for a walk the next morning. They end up near the court and meet Miss Flite, who invites them home to see her lodgings. Miss Flite lives above a rag and bone shop owned by a man named Krook, whose shop is a jumble of old law papers which Krook himself cannot read, as he is illiterate. Miss Flite's room is sparse, and in her window she keeps several **birds** in cages, which she says she will release when her Chancery suit is resolved. Another man lives in the house, a law writer known as Nemo. The next day, Richard, Esther, and Ada are driven to Bleak House and are warmly greeted by their guardian. Esther is given housekeeping duties and she begins to be very fond of her new companions.

Meanwhile, Mr. Tulkinghorn goes to Krook's shop and asks for the writer named Nemo. Krook directs him to Nemo's room, but when Mr. Tulkinghorn gets there, he discovers that the writer has died of an opium overdose. Mr. Tulkinghorn calls several people to search the room for any important legal

documents. Mr. Tulkinghorn discovers that a poor boy named Jo, who sweeps the streets nearby, knew the writer a little and Jo is sent for at the inquest.

Not long after this, while Jo is out one evening, a mysterious veiled woman, dressed all in black, approaches him and offers him money to show her where Nemo is buried. Jo obeys the woman but is frightened of her. Some time later, Mr. Tulkinghorn summons Jo to his office, in the presence of a policeman called Mr. Bucket, and asks him to identify another veiled woman who wears a black dress. Jo is bewildered but insists that this is not the same woman because she does not wear rings.

Mr. Jarndyce tries to help Richard choose a profession, but Richard struggles to settle on one and sometimes dreams that his fortune will be made when Jarndyce and Jarndyce is resolved. Esther notices that Ada and Richard have fallen in love and, one day, they announce they are engaged. Mr. Jarndyce has many philanthropic friends and, one afternoon, Esther and Ada visit the house of a brickmaker with one of these people and meet two poor women, Jenny and Liz, with whom they strike up a friendship. Mr. Jarndyce takes Esther and Ada on holiday to stay with his friend, Mr. Boythorn, who lives next door to Chesney Wold, Sir Leicester's country house, and Esther sees Lady Dedlock and her French servant, Mademoiselle Hortense, in church one afternoon. She has the strange feeling that Lady Dedlock dislikes her but also thinks that she looks a little like herself. When Esther returns, she hears that Jenny and Liz have taken in Jo, who is very sick, but that they cannot keep him at their house because of their violent husbands. Esther agrees to take Jo in and nurse him, but Jo disappears during the night. Esther falls ill herself and her face is scarred beyond recognition by the disease. Esther does not mind the loss of her beauty so much, but she is disappointed because she has fallen in love with a young doctor, Mr. Woodcourt, who is currently away at sea. She believes that he will not love her now that she has lost her looks and persuades herself to give up on the romance.

While Esther is ill, she hears from her servant that a veiled woman has been several times to Jenny's house to ask after Esther's health. She does not know who this woman can be. Soon after this, Esther goes to Mr. Boythorn's house in the country to recover and, one day, when is walking in the woods outside Chesney Wold, she is approached by Lady Dedlock. Lady Dedlock confesses that she is Esther's real mother and that she had no idea that Esther was alive. She was told that Esther died at birth, but really her sister, Miss Barbary, took Esther and raised her in secret. Esther's father is a man named Captain Hawdon, who is also Nemo. Lady Dedlock says that no one knows her secret, but she is very afraid that Mr. Tulkinghorn will find out and expose her. Therefore, she can never see Esther again. Esther is distraught but forgives her mother. Esther returns to Bleak House and confides in Mr.

Jarndyce. He is very kind and tells her that he has fallen in love with her. He asks her to marry him and, after brief consideration, Esther accepts.

Meanwhile, Richard's career progresses badly. He has switched jobs three times and has been unable to settle on anything. Esther is concerned to learn that he has taken a lawyer, a man named Mr. Vholes, and that he has given up on work and intends to pour all his energy into solving the case. He has also turned against Mr. Jarndyce, who has tried to dissuade him from having anything to do with Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Mr. Jarndyce has seen people go mad over Chancery lawsuits and worries that this is now happening to Richard. Ada is deeply concerned but remains loyal to Richard. One day, she confesses to Ada that she and Richard have been married in secret and that she will no longer live with Mr. Jarndyce, but with Richard, though she bears her guardian no ill will and hopes that Richard will soon come around. Esther is very upset but supports Ada's wishes. She asks Mr. Woodcourt, who is back from sea, to visit Richard sometimes and to make sure he is well.

One night, several weeks after this, Mr. Tulkinghorn suggests to Lady Dedlock that he knows her secret, and Lady Dedlock angrily confronts him and gives herself away. Mr. Tulkinghorn triumphantly explains that he has proof that she was Captain Hawdon's lover when she was young. He knows that it was his handwriting that she recognized, and he has obtained a sample of this himself to compare with some letters of hers which have been found. Lady Dedlock knows that Mr. Tulkinghorn will reveal her secret and does not know what to do. She cannot bear to hurt her husband, who has always been kind to her.

Mr. Tulkinghorn returns home and is shot in his living room. Sir Leicester puts up a reward for the apprehension of Mr. Tulkinghorn's murderer, and Mr. Bucket volunteers for the job. He receives a letter which tells him that Lady Dedlock is the murderer and discovers that Lady Dedlock has fled her home. Mr. Bucket arrests Mademoiselle Hortense, who has killed the lawyer in order to try and frame Lady Dedlock. Mr. Bucket knows that Lady Dedlock's secret is out and tells Sir Leicester what has happened. Sir Leicester has a stroke from the shock but later comes around. He says that he forgives Lady Dedlock and begs Mr. Bucket to find her. It is winter and she is outside in the snow alone. Mr. Bucket takes Esther with him on his search for her mother. They discover that Lady Dedlock has gone to Jenny's house, which is near Bleak House, to see if she can find Esther. She has borrowed Jenny's clothes and returned to London in disguise. They find her body beside Captain Hawdon's grave; she has frozen to death.

Not long after this, Richard dies from tuberculosis. Ada tells Esther that she is pregnant and that this gives her hope for the future. Esther is still engaged to Mr. Jarndyce, but when Mr. Woodcourt confesses his love to her, Mr. Jarndyce gallantly steps aside and allows the pair to marry. He gives them a house in Yorkshire, where Mr. Woodcourt has taken a job at a hospital

for the poor. They live a happy and modest life together, and Esther is eternally grateful for all the love she has received.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Esther Summerson** – Esther, the novel’s protagonist, thinks she is an orphan but is actually the daughter of Lady Dedlock, a wealthy woman who is married to Sir Leicester Dedlock. Lady Dedlock gave birth to Esther in secret, before her marriage. Esther’s father is Captain Hawdon, whom Lady Dedlock had a brief love affair with. Lady Dedlock thinks that Esther died at birth but, really, Esther was raised in secret by Lady Dedlock’s sister, Miss Barbary. Esther is a naturally loving child who seeks acceptance and friendship. Miss Barbary is cruel to her, however, and Esther’s childhood is lonely until her aunt’s death. Miss Barbary blames Esther for her mother’s “sin”—her conception of an illegitimate child—and for the fact that Miss Barbary broke off an engagement to raise Esther. This sense of shame and guilt for her own existence makes Esther insecure, and as an adult, she is always shocked and grateful when people care for her as much as she cares for them. Esther is the ward of Mr. Jarndyce and the companion of Ada and Richard, two wards of the court. Throughout the novel, she is a noble and selfless friend and often puts the needs of others before her own. She is generous and willing to help others and is very compassionate when she sees people in need. Esther is also modest and does not expect praise or rewards for her acts of kindness. Esther is a homemaker, is very good with children, and is associated with an ideal feminine figure throughout the novel, in contrast to poor homemakers such as Mrs. Jellyby. Despite Esther’s virtuous and giving nature, she is not naïve, and although she tries to give people the benefit of the doubt, she sees through the visage of selfish characters, like Mr. Skimpole, who pretend to be charitable but who are, in fact, only out for themselves. Esther is rewarded for her kindness and loyalty when her true love, Mr. Woodcourt, proposes to her. Her name, Summerson, is associated with youth, beauty, and warmth.

**Mr. Jarndyce** – Mr. Jarndyce adopts Esther Summerson at Miss Barbary’s private request and pays for the girl’s education. He then gives Esther a place in his home as his housekeeper and the companion to his relative, Ada Clare, who is a ward of the court and involved in the lawsuit Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which Mr. Jarndyce has inherited from his uncle Tom Jarndyce. Mr. Jarndyce is very sensible when it comes to this lawsuit, which is notoriously meandering and complicated and which, he believes, is unlikely to ever be resolved. Tom Jarndyce went mad and shot himself because he couldn’t stand the suspense of the suit, which promised to bestow a large amount of property on him and yet bankrupted him in legal fees before its resolution. Mr. Jarndyce learns from his uncle’s mistakes and is

clearly a practical and observant man. He understands that lawsuits like Jarndyce and Jarndyce encourage people to develop false hopes and earnestly tries to dissuade his young cousin, Richard Carstone, from becoming involved in the case. Mr. Jarndyce has great sympathy for the poor and supports charitable causes. He cannot bear to be thanked, however, and hurries away rather than meet with any gratitude for his many acts of kindness. Mr. Jarndyce always considers the needs of those he helps and makes sure that, when he offers his help, it is practical and really benefits the person that it is designed to help. He does not seek personal acclaim for these acts of generosity and, therefore, puts his own ego aside and puts the needs of others before his own. Mr. Jarndyce falls in love with Esther Summerson but, nobly, allows her to break off their engagement and actively arranges her marriage to Mr. Woodcourt, whom he knows she loves more and will be happier with.

**Lady Dedlock** – A proud, strong, and determined woman, Lady Dedlock is the wife of Sir Leicester Dedlock and the mother of Esther Summerson. Lady Dedlock is not from a noble family but has used her fashionable image to progress socially and attract the attention of Sir Leicester, an aristocrat who is hopelessly in love with her. Before her marriage, though, Lady Dedlock gave birth to Esther in secret. She is deeply ashamed of the fact that she fell pregnant outside of wedlock, and despite her public image of indifference to scandal and haughty disdain for anyone who gossips about her, she truly feels that she deserves to be punished for the birth of her illegitimate child, whom she thinks has died at birth. Before her marriage to Sir Leicester, Lady Dedlock was in love with Captain Hawdon, with whom she conceived Esther. Despite her marriage, and her husband’s adoration, Lady Dedlock still cares deeply for the Captain; she visits his grave after his death and chooses this place to die after her secret is discovered and she faces public ruin. Lady Dedlock is excellent at controlling her emotions and maintaining a cold mask, which suggests that she is bored with everyone and everything. However, underneath, she is passionate and loving woman who has only learned how to repress her feelings and does not do so naturally. She is devastated when she discovers Esther’s existence and realizes that because of her reputation, she may never be openly affectionate with her daughter. Sir Leicester’s lawyer, Mr. Tulkinghorn, persecutes Lady Dedlock throughout the novel. Mr. Tulkinghorn seeks power over Lady Dedlock and wishes to control her because he knows her secret. Although he does succeed in eventually driving Lady Dedlock is driven to despair and out of her home, she does not let him see that his threats have affected her. She is committed to her husband and cares deeply about his wellbeing. Her concern about her secret being made publicly is more for his sake than for her own.

**Sir Leicester Dedlock** – Sir Leicester Dedlock, Lady Dedlock’s husband, is an aristocrat and the descendant of the noble

Dedlock line, who have been extremely powerful and important in England for many generations. Although Sir Leicester is very conservative, and dislikes social change and the increased social mobility of the 19th century, he married a woman who is not of noble birth. Sir Leicester is heavily involved in politics and does not believe that the British establishment and political system are in need of reform—a perspective which would be considered old-fashioned and outdated by Dickens' middle-class audience. Sir Leicester believes that social reform will lead to social degeneration, and he generally dislikes mixing among the classes and disapproves of social mobility. He is a symbol of the old upper classes, as opposed to the industrialists of the period, who grew wealthy through trade and manufacturing rather than family connections, and is a relic of a time which, Dickens suggests, is nearly over in Britain. Sir Leicester Dedlock is extremely proud of his social position and his family history. His weakness is his love for Lady Dedlock, which he pursues even though she is from a poor background. Despite his social intolerance, Sir Leicester is an honest and well-meaning man. He is extremely gallant and attentive towards his wife and, on a personal level, takes people on an individual basis rather than judging them based on class. Even when Sir Leicester discovers Lady Dedlock's secret, he forgives her immediately and intends to take her back, despite the revelation that she has an illegitimate child (Esther). He is physically and mentally destroyed by the loss of his wife and the trappings of his wealth and lineage become relatively meaningless in comparison with her memory. Like many aristocrats of this period, Sir Leicester prefers to patronize individuals rather than participate in philanthropy or give money to people who he has no personal connection with.

**Ada Clare** – Ada Clare is a ward of the court in the lawsuit Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and the close friend of Esther Summerson, who is hired as a companion for her. Ada is an orphan and is taken in by Mr. Jarndyce, who also takes in Ada's cousin Richard Carstone, as well as Esther. Ada is young and optimistic when she arrives at Mr. Jarndyce's house. She is very beautiful and immediately finds love and attraction with Richard, whom she becomes engaged to and later marries. She is a loyal friend to Esther, and the two women become extremely close. Ada is kind and compassionate and is deeply affected by scenes of suffering and poverty that she witnesses. As her relationship with Richard progresses, Ada helplessly watches his descent into madness as his obsession with Jarndyce and Jarndyce spirals out of control. Although Ada tries to help Richard, she cannot talk him out of his involvement with the court. Ada is loyal to Richard, however, and marries him despite his impoverished condition and his mounting debt, as the fees he pays to his lawyer drain his meager income. She has faith that Richard will find a profession for himself and stays with him even when it becomes clear that this is not the case. Richard eventually dies in Ada's arms and, several months later, she gives birth to his son. Although Ada grieves for her

young husband, she does not allow his death to make her bitter and, instead, pours her love into their child.

**Richard Carstone** – Richard is a ward of the court in the lawsuit Jarndyce and Jarndyce, as well as the cousin and eventual husband of Ada Clare. He is taken under the guardianship of Mr. Jarndyce, who takes Richard into his home and tries to get him set up in a profession. Richard also becomes close friends with Ada's companion and Mr. Jarndyce's housekeeper, Esther Summerson. Richard is an orphan and a relative of Tom Jarndyce, a plaintiff in Jarndyce and Jarndyce who shot himself after the long, drawn out trial drove him mad. Throughout the course of the novel, Richard, too, is driven mad by his role in the Chancery suit. Richard is a friendly, lively, and passionate young man who genuinely wants to please his friends and relatives. However, he is not particularly ambitious and has not developed any strong interests when it comes to his profession. He is easily swayed and goes along with whichever options Mr. Jarndyce suggests for him, and although he is well liked by his employers, they all remark that he lacks discipline. This trait, coupled with his carelessness with money, leads Richard to give up all three professions he takes on, and eventually drives him towards Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Richard is naïve and idealistic and believes that the case will make his fortune once it is solved. As Richard degenerates into madness, stubbornly ignoring the warnings and advice of other characters, his hopes turn into bitter delusions. He begins to believe that Mr. Jarndyce is his enemy and works against him in the lawsuit. Richard falls victim to a predatory lawyer named Mr. Vholes, who continually encourages Richard's false hopes that the lawsuit will one day make him rich. Richard is associated with Miss Flite, an old woman who has been driven mad by a Chancery suit and who names one of her caged **birds** after him.

**Mr. Tulkinghorn** – Mr. Tulkinghorn is Sir Leicester Dedlock's lawyer. He holds a grudge against Sir Leicester's wife, Lady Dedlock, whom he suspects is not truly of noble birth. Mr. Tulkinghorn specializes in working with wealthy clients, and he consequently is privy to the secrets of many rich and powerful people. A cruel, merciless individual, Mr. Tulkinghorn sadistically delights in having power over others; he loves to collect secrets, as this gives him social currency and power over the upper classes, who are his superiors and employers. Mr. Tulkinghorn despises the gentry, but he also despises members of the lower classes, such as Lady Dedlock, whom he views as a social climber because she married into wealth. He is associated with a rat and a crow throughout the novel, suggesting that he is an unpleasant and sinister man. He disguises his cruel motives under a veneer of respectability and discretion. Sir Leicester trusts Mr. Tulkinghorn completely and thus never suspects his cruelty to Lady Dedlock, whom he tries to blackmail when he discovers that she had an illegitimate child (Esther) before her marriage. Mr. Tulkinghorn is a bully and a coward underneath, however, and uses his connections in

the legal system to protect himself. He is very afraid of George—a soldier who comes to him about an outstanding debt—and threatens Mademoiselle Hortense with prison before she has committed a crime. Despite his respectable façade, he is not a noble man and will work with clients who are deeply corrupt, like the debt collector Mr. Smallweed, if this gets Mr. Tulkinghorn his own way. He is extremely good at manipulating people and often persuades people to act for him so that he can evade responsibility for these actions. In spite of himself, Mr. Tulkinghorn admires Lady Dedlock because she meets his cool façade with an equally stoic one when he threatens to reveal her secret. At the end of the novel, Mademoiselle Hortense, who wishes to frame Lady Dedlock, murders Mr. Tulkinghorn.

**Mr. Vholes** – Mr. Vholes is a lawyer who takes on Richard Carstone’s case in the lawsuit Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Mr. Vholes is a predatory and morally bankrupt man, but, like Mr. Tulkinghorn, conceals this under a veneer of professionalism and respectability. Mr. Vholes is middle-class and supports a small family on his legal income. He bribes Mr. Jarndyce’s friend, Mr. Skimpole, for an introduction to Richard because he knows that Richard is a ward in Jarndyce and Jarndyce and that this is a famously unsolvable case. Although Mr. Vholes tells Richard that he is dedicated to helping him solve the case and receive his inheritance, Mr. Vholes really wants Richard as a client because he knows that Richard will pay him a fortune in legal fees. Mr. Vholes subtly encourages Richard’s hopes, while denying that he does this, and claims that he is only doing his job and thinking of Richard’s best interests when he convinces him to pursue the case, even though Mr. Vholes knows the case is unlikely to ever be resolved. Mr. Vholes also implies that Richard’s guardian, Mr. Jarndyce, is secretly working against Richard—a tactic that ensures Richard blames his guardian for his lack of success solving the case and not Mr. Vholes. Mr. Vholes is morally irresponsible and does not care that Richard grows desperate, delusional, and saddled with debt as time goes on. Esther Summerson feels that Mr. Vholes is like a “vampire” and describes him as looking “lifeless.” This implies that he wishes to suck the life out of Richard, which he ultimately achieves when Richard goes mad from the strain of the case and dies. His name, Vholes, also associates him with a rodent, and when Richard is in his office, Dickens uses the image of the office cat, who sits and watches a mousehole, to suggest that Mr. Vholes is a predator and that Richard is his prey.

**Mr. Guppy** – Mr. Guppy is a young clerk in Mr. Kenge’s office. An ambitious, self-interested man and a social climber, Mr. Guppy cares a great deal about his appearance and reputation and is primarily interested in advancing his social status. Throughout the novel, he serves as a figure of ridicule and a comic relief character. Mr. Guppy meets Esther Summerson when she comes to London and suspects her relation to Lady

Dedlock, who is really Esther’s mother, after he sees a portrait of Lady Dedlock at her husband’s country house, Chesney Wold. Mr. Guppy proposes to Esther, because he believes she has noble relations and, when she rejects his offer, makes a dramatic show of being heartbroken and follows her all over the city. He constantly brings up his disappointment with his friends, Mr. Jobling and Bart Smallweed, but only hints at what has happened and never tells them the full story. This is because he likes to draw attention to himself and make himself seem mysterious and important by suggesting that he has confidential links to noble people and influential figures. Mr. Guppy plots against his friends and acquaintances, whom he is often jealous of and suspects of plotting against him. He gets involved with the mystery of Esther’s parentage when he tries to blackmail Lady Dedlock because he thinks that he has found evidence that she is Esther’s mother, in a bundle of letters found in Krook’s shop. Although Mr. Guppy pretends that he wants to help Lady Dedlock conceal her secret, he really wants leverage for himself and thinks that if he helps Esther find her mother, she will be grateful and marry him, which will improve his social connections. Mr. Guppy does not really love Esther, and when he sees her after her illness, her face now scarred by smallpox, he is embarrassed that he proposed and denies his previous attentions to her. However, when, at the end of the novel, it is revealed that Esther is Lady Dedlock’s daughter, Mr. Guppy suddenly wants to marry her again.

**Mr. Jobling / Mr. Weevle** – Mr. Jobling is a friend of Mr. Guppy and Bart Smallweed’s and has recently been fired from his job as a clerk. Mr. Jobling is an unlucky man and an unsuccessful social climber. He plots with Mr. Guppy to move into Krook’s shop so that he can spy on the old man and find out if there are valuable legal papers contained within the jumble of documents which crowd the shop. Before this move, Mr. Jobling changes his name to Mr. Weevle. During his stay with Krook, Mr. Weevle works hard to ingratiate himself with the old man. He buys Krook gin and helps him to read—Krook is illiterate but jealously guards his documents because he knows they are legal papers and suspects their value—and does odd jobs around the house. This leads the neighbors to surmise that Mr. Weevle may inherit Krook’s fortune. Mr. Weevle almost succeeds in getting evidence from Krook, which proves that Esther Summerson is Lady Dedlock’s daughter, and that her father was Krook’s previous lodger, Captain Hawdon, but Krook spontaneously combusts before the exchange takes place and the letters are destroyed in the fire. Mr. Weevle is taken in by Mr. Guppy’s suggestions that he has powerful friends and is involved in an important and confidential mystery and is slightly in awe of his friend. However, because the reader knows that this is not the case, and that Mr. Guppy is exaggerating, it is obvious that Mr. Weevle is very gullible and not as cunning as his compatriot. Mr. Weevle regrets his involvement in the conspiracy after Krook’s death and comes to believe that his room, which was the room occupied by Captain

Hawdon before his death, is haunted because of his guilt over trying to steal the letters.

**Bart Smallweed** – Bart Smallweed is the grandson and Mr. Smallweed and Mrs. Smallweed and the brother of Judy Smallweed. He is a clerk in the same company as Mr. Guppy and a friend of Mr. Jobling's. Bart is only 15 but has the cynical and worldly manner of a much older man. He has a small, wizened frame and has inherited his grandfather's shrewd eye for business and his insatiable greed for wealth. Bart, like the rest of his family, is willing to step on people to get his own way and does not tell his friends anything because he does not want to give them an advantage over him. He was a mirthless child, who had no interest in toys or stories, and he does not have any high minded or noble thoughts but considers everything in terms of money and personal gain. The name "Smallweed" suggests something small, parasitic, and unpleasant, and this description is apt for every member of the family.

**Mr. Smallweed** – Mr. Smallweed is an elderly miser, the husband of Mrs. Smallweed, and the grandfather of Bart Smallweed and Judy Smallweed. He is an invalid and is carried everywhere in a chair from his living room. He comes from a long line of men who worked as moneylenders and accountants and who were obsessed with wealth. Mr. Smallweed is a vile old man—he hates and torments his wife and thinks about nothing but how to trick and manipulate people for his own financial gain. He gloats horribly whenever he exploits people successfully and enjoys nothing except tricking and using others. Mr. Smallweed charges excessive interests on loans he has paid out and has a murky history of corrupt business practices. The ex-soldier, George, owes money to Mr. Smallweed for a loan on which he has paid back more than double in interest to the old man. George implies that Mr. Smallweed once tricked him into trying to track down Captain Hawdon, who was George's commanding officer and who had an affair with Lady Dedlock in her youth and became the father of Esther Summerson. Mr. Smallweed is a coward and is afraid of George, who is very physically strong. He tries to pretend that he is not responsible for charging George interest but that this order comes from a "friend in the city," who is a terrifying and sinister man. George, however, knows that this is a tactic which Mr. Smallweed uses to try and scare his clients and to evade responsibility for his own malpractice. Mr. Smallweed's wife, Mrs. Smallweed, is Krook's sister, and the Smallweeds inherit the shop after Krook's death. Predictably, they try to use legal documents they find, which prove that Lady Dedlock had a child outside of wedlock, to blackmail her husband, Sir Leicester Dedlock. However, Mr. Smallweed's obsessive greed backfires, and the documents are seized by the policeman, Mr. Bucket, who gives him only a tiny sum for the papers.

**Mrs. Smallweed** – Mrs. Smallweed is the wife of Mr. Smallweed and the grandmother of Judy Smallweed and Bart Smallweed. Mrs. Smallweed is an elderly woman who suffers from

dementia. She spends her days sitting in her chair opposite her husband, who throws a pillow at her face every time she speaks. Although Mrs. Smallweed is now a frail, helpless character, in her youth she was just as greedy and obsessed with wealth as her husband. This is made clear in the fact that all she does in her old age is shout out amounts of money and make vague references to stashes of money which are hidden around the house and which Mr. Smallweed wishes to keep secret. Mrs. Smallweed is Krook's sister; this connection is revealed after Krook's death when Mr. Smallweed gleefully inherits the contents of Krook's shop on his wife's behalf.

**Judy Smallweed** – Judy Smallweed is the granddaughter of Mr. Smallweed and Mrs. Smallweed and the sister of Bart Smallweed. She is a mean, pinched woman who has grown up to be just as bitter, joyless, and greedy as the rest of her miserly family. Judy cares for her elderly grandparents but is not a particularly loving or affectionate grandchild. She often roughly shakes her grandfather when he slumps down in his chair and allows him to throw a pillow at his wife every time she speaks. Judy keeps a servant, Charley—a young orphan girl whom Mr. Jarndyce eventually hires to be Esther Summerson's maid. Judy is a cruel employer, as she makes Charley work long hours and only feeds her table scraps for her meals.

**Krook** – Krook, Mrs. Smallweed's brother, is an old drunk who keeps a rag and bone shop in back street behind the court of Chancery. Krook is illiterate and cannot read the heaps of legal documents contained within the shop. He tries to teach himself to read by spelling out individual letters in chalk on the walls of the shop and asking people to read the words back to him. However, he never makes any real progress towards literacy and is constantly drunk on gin. Krook is a sinister and implicitly threatening old man. He keeps a bad-tempered cat who claws things on his command, and he spies upon his tenants and closely questions people who visit the shop. It is unclear how much Krook knows about the lawsuits and secrets which are contained in the documents that populate his shop, but he is clearly a greedy and miserly old man and wishes to keep these secrets to himself, and always to gather new ones, even if he does not understand what they mean. His proximity to the courthouse has earned him the nickname the "Lord Chancellor," and he is a parody of the Chancery court and the confusing jumble of papers which the real Lord Chancellor presides over. The amount of gin that Krook drinks means that his breath is ripe with alcohol fumes, and he sees to steam at the mouth. This description ties in to the idea that Krook is a fairy tale villain, like a dragon or a wolf, which is he also associated with by his lodger Miss Flite, and that he unknowingly guards the treasure which reveals the key to Esther Summerson's identity: the letters from her mother, Lady Dedlock, to her father, Captain Hawdon, who is also Krook's lodger, Nemo. Krook is also associated with a dragon in the manner of his death; he spontaneously combusts, and Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle

discover his ashes. This suggests that Krook's insides catch on fire—that he is consumed from the inside out by a fire caused by the gin he drinks and perhaps his own smoldering greed.

**Miss Flite** – Miss Flite is a poor, mad old lady who rents a room above Krook's shop and who spends her day awaiting a judgement on her Chancery suit in the courthouse. Miss Flite immediately takes an interest in Richard Carstone and Ada Clare because they are wards in Jarndyce and Jarndyce. She also becomes friends with Esther Summerson, their companion, as well as Mr. Jarndyce, their guardian. She is very close to a poor man called Gridley, who also has a case in Chancery and who, like Miss Flite, spends his days in the court. Miss Flite has gone mad while she waits for her verdict and believes that she is a very important person in the court. She is a kindly and affectionate woman, and her friends tolerate her delusions and humor her when she tells them that she expects a judgement very soon—as with all Chancery cases, it is unlikely that hers will ever be satisfactorily resolved. Miss Flite explains to her friends that her father, brother, and sister all went mad and died while they oversaw the lawsuit. She inherited the case from them, and though she resolved to stay out of it, she felt helplessly drawn to the court and eventually started going there almost every day. She believes that Chancery exercises a sinister magic force over its victims. Miss Flite's story also foreshadows Richard's descent into madness as he waits for a verdict in Jarndyce and Jarndyce. However, Miss Flite is often quite lucid in her madness and recognizes that Chancery suits send people mad because they force them to put their lives on hold. She keeps a number of caged **birds** in her room, which represent the hopes, dreams, youth, and beauty of Chancery's victims, which waste away while they wait for their cases to end. She plans to release the birds on "judgement day," which refers both to the end of the case and to the biblical apocalypse.

**Captain Hawdon / Nemo** – Captain Hawdon is Lady Dedlock's ex-lover and the father of Esther Summerson, whom Lady Dedlock gave birth to illegitimately and in secret. Captain Hawdon was once an officer in the army and was attended by George, who now runs a shooting gallery near the court and who becomes involved in the Dedlock mystery when Mr. Tulkinghorn, Lady Dedlock's lawyer, blackmails him into providing a sample of Captain Hawdon's handwriting in an effort to discover her secret. It is not clear what has happened to Captain Hawdon since his days in the army, but George implies that Captain Hawdon went into debt and ruined himself and was often suicidal over the failure he considered himself to have become. Although George believes that Captain Hawdon is dead, he has, in fact, changed his name to Nemo and taken work as a law writer for Mr. Snagsby, who runs a stationer's shop near the Chancery court. Under the guise of Nemo, Captain Hawdon lives in Krook's shop and is very poor and addicted to opium. He is clearly a kind man, who was once

noble and optimistic. He often gives money to Jo, the homeless urchin who sweeps the streets outside of Chancery. Nemo is known in the area as a mysterious man, who works all hours and is rumored to have sold his soul to the devil. He eventually dies of an opium overdose before he can learn that Lady Dedlock had a child or that Esther Summerson, his daughter, is alive. He is buried in a pauper's grave in a slum called Tom-all-Alone's, and Lady Dedlock returns to visit his grave in secret, where she dies of exposure.

**George** – George is an ex-soldier who runs a shooting gallery near the Chancery court and who keeps a manservant named Phil. George is a bachelor and has lived a rootless life. He has never settled anywhere since his time in the army and, although he has a family, he is too ashamed to contact them and tell them where he is. George left home very young to become a soldier and never returned. His mother is Mrs. Rouncewell, Sir Leicester Dedlock's housekeeper at Chesney Wold, and his brother is Mr. Rouncewell, who became a successful ironmonger in the north of England. George is an honorable, gentle, and kindhearted man and does not intend to hurt his mother, who is heartbroken by his departure. He is so good and modest that he underestimates how much people care for him and believe that once he is gone, they will easily forget him. However, this assessment is clearly unfounded: many people care deeply for George, including his good friends Mr. Bagnet and Mrs. Bagnet, and George's mother and brother welcome him warmly when he returns home at the novel's end. George has no mind for business and has gone into debt to start his gallery, which has subsequently failed to make money. He borrowed this money from Mr. Smallweed, who charges him so much in interest that he pays the amount back several times. He has been given security on the debt by Mr. Bagnet and is deeply ashamed when Mr. Smallweed unexpectedly calls the money in. George is wrongfully accused of Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder at the end of the novel, but he is released when the policeman, Mr. Bucket, discovers the real culprit is Mademoiselle Hortense. George is suspected at first because he has been blackmailed by Mr. Tulkinghorn: to save himself from debtor's prison, George gave Mr. Tulkinghorn a letter from Captain Hawdon that revealed the Captain's youthful affair with Lady Dedlock, which resulted in the birth of Esther Summerson.

**Phil** – Phil is George's manservant who helps him run the shooting gallery. Phil is extremely poor and is an orphan and knows little of his origins. When he was a child, he followed a traveling blacksmith to the city and worked in this profession until he was badly burned in an accident. As a result of his injuries, Phil's face is scarred on one side, and he cannot use one side of his body. He gets around by dragging himself along the wall in the gallery. He lost his customers after this accident and was socially ostracized. George found Phil when he tripped over him, when Phil was lying in a drain in the street. George

felt sorry for the poor man and took him on as his assistant. Phil is very loyal to George and is a hard worker. George is a loyal employer to Phil in turn and takes Phil with him at the novel's end when George is given a job as Sir Leicester Dedlock's attendant.

**Jo** – Jo is a poor, homeless boy who sweeps the streets around the Chancery court and receives a few coins from passersby for this work. Jo is an orphan and knows nothing about his parents. He has had no education and has survived on the streets for as long as he can remember. Jo becomes involved in the Dedlock mystery when Lady Dedlock visits Jo and pays him to show her Captain Hawdon's grave. Lady Dedlock knows that Jo knew Captain Hawdon because he is asked to give evidence at the inquest into the Captain's death; however, Jo knows nothing about his death and only knows that Captain Hawdon, otherwise known as Nemo, gave him coins sometimes. Jo relies entirely on meager acts of charity to live. He is a good-natured boy and helps a poor woman, Liz, get medicine when she is ill. Although he is kind, however, Jo is considered repugnant by many of the characters because he is so poor, has no way to wash or take care of himself, and is riddled with disease because of the unsanitary conditions he lives in. Jo eventually dies of smallpox when George takes him in. The law stationer Mr. Snagsby who feels sorry for Jo and often gives him money. Mrs. Snagsby, who witnesses this, becomes convinced that Jo is Mr. Snagsby's illegitimate child, but this is not the case. Dickens uses Jo's poverty and the manner of his death to reflect the real-life squalor and poverty that was rife in city slums during the Victorian period.

**Mr. Snagsby** – Mr. Snagsby, Mrs. Snagsby's husband, runs a law stationer's shop near the court of Chancery and hires many freelance law writers, including the elusive Nemo, or Captain Hawdon. Mr. Snagsby is a mild-mannered, overweight man who is naturally very sympathetic to the suffering of others. He often gives money to Jo, the urchin who sweeps the streets outside his shop. The neighbors believe that Mrs. Snagsby bullies her husband, because she is left in charge of the business and is an aggressive and volatile woman. However, Mr. Snagsby is quite happy with this relationship and prefers to daydream and to have a quiet life than to make his wife unhappy. He is often dismayed by his wife's suspicions; she is very imaginative and accuses him of being caught up in all sorts of conspiracies against her. Mr. Snagsby becomes embroiled in the Dedlock mystery when Mr. Bucket takes him to find Jo, whom Lady Dedlock has been to visit in secret because she wants him to show her the location of Captain Hawdon's grave. Mr. Snagsby never understands his role in the situation—Mr. Bucket knows that Jo is friendly with Mr. Snagsby and thinks the boy is more likely to come with him if he is with a friend—and becomes paranoid and anxious until Mr. Bucket sets him right at the novel's end.

**Mrs. Snagsby** – Mrs. Snagsby is the wife of Mr. Snagsby, who

runs the law stationer's shop outside the court of Chancery. She is a high-strung and emotionally volatile woman with an overactive imagination. Although her husband is loyal and mild mannered, Mrs. Snagsby suspects that he is unfaithful to her and thinks that Jo, the urchin who sweeps the streets outside the shop and whom Mr. Snagsby often gives money to, is Mr. Snagsby's illegitimate son. Mrs. Snagsby lets these delusions carry her away to such an extent that she becomes completely paranoid and follows her husband around looking for evidence of his infidelity. She becomes extremely upset at the thought of this and takes her anger out on her unfortunate servant, Guster. She is a religious and a gullible woman and is in the thrall of the lecherous Mr. Chadband, who presents a pious face to the world but is really a smarmy, petty criminal.

**Guster** – Guster is the servant of Mr. Snagsby and Mrs. Snagsby, who run a law stationer's shop outside the Chancery court. Guster is an orphan and is prone to seizures, which are brought on when she is frightened or stressed. She is often stressed and alarmed working for Mrs. Snagsby, who is temperamental and alarmist, and thus often has fits while at work in the household. Guster is kind to the orphan, Jo, when he is brought to the **house**. She relates to him because she is also poor and friendless and shares her supper with the boy. Despite the stress of her workplace, Guster is grateful to work for the Snagsbys because her life with them is so much better than the conditions in the workhouse from which she was bought. Workhouses were notoriously filthy, overcrowded, and unsanitary and so, even as a mistreated servant, Guster has a better life than she would have in these establishments.

**Mr. Bagnet** – Mr. Bagnet is an ex-soldier and a good friend of George's. Mr. Bagnet is the husband of Mrs. Bagnet and the father of Woolwich, Quebec, and Malta. He is a devoted husband and an honest, straightforward man. He trusts his wife's opinions on everything and allows her to run the family as she sees fit, although he keeps up a façade of paternal "discipline," which Mrs. Bagnet tolerantly ignores. Mr. Bagnet is forgiving and does not hold a grudge against George when George gets into debt and needs the Bagnets to pay for him. He runs a shop which sells musical instruments with his son, Woolwich, and is grateful for his wife's stabilizing influence on his life. It is implied that, if it were not for Mrs. Bagnet, Mr. Bagnet would have ended up a drifter like George.

**Mrs. Bagnet** – Mrs. Bagnet is the wife of Mr. Bagnet and the mother of Woolwich, Quebec, and Malta. She is a very determined, practical woman, as well as a devoted wife and mother. She traveled the world with her husband while he was in the army and is used to managing with very little. Her children are named after the places they were born. Mrs. Bagnet runs a very regimented and orderly household and takes control for her husband in all matters of morality and business. Mrs. Bagnet is a close friend to George but laments that he has not married and has not lived a more settled life. At

the end of the novel, it is Mrs. Bagnet who goes to fetch Mrs. Rouncewell, George's mother, when George is falsely accused of Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder, and brings about the reunion between mother and son.

**Mr. Bucket** – Mr. Bucket is a private investigator who takes on the case of Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder for which Sir Leicester Dedlock offers a substantial reward. Mr. Bucket has worked with Mr. Tulkinghorn previously, when Mr. Tulkinghorn hired him to find Jo, who was wanted to prove that Lady Dedlock went with Jo to visit Captain Hawdon's grave. Mr. Bucket, however, solicits work for himself and will work for anyone who pays him. He is dedicated to the process of solving crime and uses his considerable powers of observation and deduction to work out the truth of matters. Mr. Bucket is very good with people and can easily put them at ease so that they will confide in him and give him information. He is comfortable mingling with people from various classes and does not discriminate between the cases he takes but simply works to provide for himself and his wife, Mrs. Bucket. Mr. Bucket uses many methods such as disguise, trickery, and misdirection to get the result he wants and solve crime. He eventually arrests Lady Dedlock's maid, Mademoiselle Hortense, for Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder after he gathers enough proof and discovers the murder weapon. Mr. Bucket is one of the first literary detectives and his use of observation and private investigative methods is a prototype for many famous detectives such as Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie's Poirot.

**Mrs. Bucket** – Mrs. Bucket is the wife of Mr. Bucket and operates as his partner in his private detective work. Her lodger is Mademoiselle Hortense, who is also a suspect in the case of Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder, and whom Mr. Bucket eventually arrests. Although Mrs. Bucket's efforts do not feature explicitly in the action of the novel, Mr. Bucket's account of his investigation reveals Mrs. Bucket's part in the process. It is evident that Mademoiselle Hortense has been offered a room in their **house** on purpose and that Mr. Bucket has used his wife to spy on the lodger, whom he correctly suspects of killing Mr. Tulkinghorn. Mrs. Bucket is, therefore, a clever and trustworthy woman who is dedicated to her husband's career.

**Mademoiselle Hortense** – Mademoiselle Hortense, a French woman, is Lady Dedlock's maid. She is an extremely jealous and proud woman and cannot stand to be treated as an inferior in her role as a servant. She despises Lady Dedlock because of her haughty manner and leaves her service when Lady Dedlock replaces her with Rosa and seeks to punish her for her arrogant behavior. While they are at Chesney Wold, Esther Summerson, Ada Clare, and Mr. Jarndyce watch Mademoiselle Hortense walk through wet grass in bare feet when Lady Dedlock dismisses her from her service and chooses Rosa over her. Mr. Jarndyce suggests that Mademoiselle Hortense does this so

that she will become ill and will possibly die, which she feels will punish Lady Dedlock. This demonstrates the intensity of Mademoiselle Hortense's pride and her obsessive hatred of her mistress. After she leaving Lady Dedlock's service, Mademoiselle Hortense harasses Mr. Tulkinghorn and Mr. Snagsby, who she thinks may have incriminating evidence about Lady Dedlock's past. Both these men find her unnerving and suggest she may be mad. This is confirmed at the end of the novel, when Mademoiselle Hortense murders Mr. Tulkinghorn and tries to frame Lady Dedlock for his murder. She confesses this when she is arrested by Mr. Bucket and is frenzied in her hatred for Lady Dedlock.

**Jenny** – Jenny is a very poor woman, the wife of a brickmaker, and a friend of Liz's. Esther Summerson and Ada Clare meet Jenny when they visit the brickmaker's **house** with Mrs. Pardiggle and find her grief stricken over the death of her baby. Jenny is touched by Esther's kindness during this time and repays her by helping Lady Dedlock, who she knows is Esther's mother, when Lady Dedlock's secret is revealed and she flees her home and the scandal that pursues her. Jenny's husband mistreats her terribly, as he often drinks too much and beats her. Dickens uses Jenny and the poverty she lives in to illustrate the squalid living conditions among the poor in London.

**Liz** – Liz is a very poor woman, the wife of a brickmaker, and a friend of Jenny's. Liz meets Esther Summerson and Ada Clare when they visit the house with Mrs. Pardiggle soon after Jenny's baby has died. Later in the novel, Liz gives birth to her own child, who lives, but she laments sorrowfully that she almost wishes the child had died when she thinks of the poor life it will lead. Like Jenny, Liz also is in an abusive relationship. He husband beats her, but she has no way to earn money or to improve her situation. She is entirely reliant on her husband for money and can do nothing when he spends it all on gin.

**The Brickmaker** – The brickmaker is a poor, working man whom Esther Summerson and Ada Clare meet on a philanthropic visit to his **house** with Mrs. Pardiggle. He is married to Jenny and lives with her friend Liz and Liz's husband, who is also a brickmaker. Jenny's husband is a drunk and spends all his earnings on gin. He beats his wife and children and has no intention of changing his ways. He virulently hates Mrs. Pardiggle, who comes repeatedly to his house to lecture him on religion and morality. The brickmaker feels patronized by Mrs. Pardiggle and rightly assumes that she is oblivious to the material need that he and his family live in. Although it is true that he squanders his money on alcohol, the brickmaker protests that he earns so little that it would hardly cover food, and that there is not point in washing his children because the water that they use to bathe in is filthy and unhygienic. Dickens uses the brickmaker to give voice to the poor, who in his time often lived in slums and subsisted on meager incomes which hardly left them enough to feed themselves or to care for their children.

**Mrs. Jellyby** – A wealthy woman, Mrs. Jellyby is the wife of Mr. Jellyby, and the mother of Caddy, Peepy, and the other Jellyby children. Mrs. Jellyby is a philanthropist and is obsessed with a project she has developed to build links to the coffee trade with a remote region in Africa. Mrs. Jellyby is so distracted by this project that she neglects her family and bankrupts her husband gathering money for this cause. Mrs. Jellyby's **house** is in chaos and her children are dirty and uneducated. Mrs. Jellyby represents both the frantic efforts of middle-class Victorians to contribute to social causes (even at the expense of their own homes and regardless of whether these causes really help the poor) and Britain's colonial efforts abroad, which Dickens felt were a waste of money and which squandered resources abroad that could be used to support the poor in Britain. Mrs. Jellyby's fanatic philanthropy is almost a type of madness and prevents her from seeing the damage that she does to her family. She is totally disinterested in her daughter's wedding and does not listen to anybody else when they talk. Her philanthropic efforts abroad ultimately fail, and Dickens uses Mrs. Jellyby to suggest the idea that charity should begin at home.

**Mr. Skimpole** – Mr. Skimpole is a friend of Mr. Jarndyce's and a playful, entertaining gentleman of leisure. He is not a poor man, but he is always in debt and constantly borrows money from Mr. Jarndyce and from his other acquaintances, whether they can afford it or not. Mr. Skimpole hates to take things seriously and is totally irresponsible. Although he does not care for anyone but himself, his friends and acquaintances are disarmed by his cheerful, charming manner and do not immediately recognize this. Mr. Skimpole does not feel that it is his job to help or guide anybody, and he claims that he cannot keep track of his debts or finances because he cannot count or understand money. However, he often accepts bribes and avoids his friends as soon as they become poor, usually from furnishing his expenses. He also plays a part in bankrupting Richard Carstone; he accepts a bribe from Mr. Vholes, the predatory lawyer who preys on Richard's frail mental state, to introduce him to Richard, and he encourages Richard to keep spending money even when Richard is nearly ruined. Although Esther Summerson wants to give Mr. Skimpole the benefit of the doubt, believing that he is innocent and not aware of the consequences of his careless actions, she is skeptical of his character and loses patience with him after his poor treatment of Richard. Mr. Skimpole never takes responsibility for his actions and, in fact, angrily attacks Mr. Jarndyce and calls him selfish when Mr. Jarndyce finally withdraws his charity.

**Mrs. Pardiggle** – Mrs. Pardiggle is a philanthropist and a friend of Mrs. Jellyby's. She is acquainted with Mr. Jarndyce, who dislikes her, and frequently visits the house of a brickmaker, Jenny's husband, whom she is trying to convert to her religion. Although Mrs. Pardiggle claims that she visits the brickmaker and reads to him from the Bible simply for his own good, Mrs.

Pardiggle is condescending and bullying in her attitude towards the family. She does not listen to his explanation as to why he is poor and why he behaves the way he does. She also completely disregards the family's material needs and focuses on her belief in their moral corruption and need for religious conversion. Mrs. Pardiggle has five children, whom she forces to participate in her charitable causes. However, they are deeply unhappy as a result because they are not allowed to be children and cannot choose how they spend the money she gives them. In this sense, Mrs. Pardiggle is another version of Mrs. Jellyby, but instead of squandering her charitable efforts abroad, she irritates and condescends the poor that she visits in Britain. She does not really care about the brickmaker or his family and is only interested in having an outlet for her boundless energy and for forcing other people round to her way of thinking.

**Mr. Jellyby** – Mr. Jellyby is the husband of Mrs. Jellyby and the father of Caddy, Peepy, and the other Jellyby children. Mr. Jellyby is totally defeated by his wife's obsessive philanthropy. He cannot earn enough to supply her missions and ends up going bankrupt as a result. He is deeply unhappy because his **house** is a mess and his children are uncared for, but he cannot muster the energy to take these matters into his own hands, and instead sits miserably with his head against the wall. Mr. Jellyby loves his eldest daughter, Caddy, and is delighted when she gets married and strives to be a domesticated wife for her husband, Prince. He thanks Esther Summerson for her influence on Caddy because Esther is emblematic of a good housekeeper and a good maternal figure in the novel. Through Mr. Jellyby, Dickens emphasizes the damage and unhappiness that Mrs. Jellyby's obsessive and ineffective philanthropy creates.

**Mr. Quale** – Mr. Quale is a philanthropist and friend of Mrs. Jellyby's. Mrs. Jellyby wants him to marry Caddy, her eldest daughter, but Caddy despises Mr. Quale and hates all philanthropy in general because she blames it for her mother's neglect of the family. Mr. Quale represents philanthropists who, Dickens suggests, make a great show of being charitable and invested in social causes but who accomplish nothing. Mr. Quale is known in his philanthropic circle for having no specific cause of his own but for talking very enthusiastically about everybody else's causes.

**Caddy Jellyby** – Caddy Jellyby is the eldest daughter of Mrs. Jellyby and Mr. Jellyby and the older sister of Peepy. She becomes close friends with Esther Summerson and Ada Clare and marries Prince Turveydrop, her dance teacher. When Esther and Ada meet Caddy, she is working for her mother as a secretary and writing endless letters for Mrs. Jellyby's philanthropic causes. Caddy hates her life and despises her mother, who neglects Caddy and her siblings and has never taught Caddy to keep **house** or given her an education. Rebellious against her mother's unconventional lifestyle, Caddy decides to marry for love and dedicate all her time to becoming

a wife and mother. She is a good-natured, industrious girl, and she and Prince work extremely hard to keep his father, Mr. Turveydrop, in the lifestyle he is accustomed to, which is a very lavish one. Although married life is hard work, Caddy is deliriously happy in her marriage and is always thankful to Esther, who makes the effort to arrange Caddy's wedding and who teaches her to manage her home.

**Prince Turveydrop** – Prince Turveydrop is a dance teacher, the son of Mr. Turveydrop, and the husband of Caddy Jellyby. Prince is a sweet, earnest, and hard-working young man who goes out of his way to make sure that his father, who has pretensions of being an aristocrat even though he is not of noble birth, is able to live a lavish lifestyle. Prince is dedicated to his father and is completely convinced that his father is extremely important in the London social scene and in fashionable circles. Prince is a loving and naïve son, as he never questions why he and his wife have to work so hard to sustain his father's lavish and leisurely lifestyle.

**Mr. Turveydrop** – Mr. Turveydrop is the father of Prince Turveydrop and the father-in-law of Caddy Jellyby. A well-dressed and poised man, Mr. Turveydrop is the owner of a prestigious dance studio and is well known in fashionable and aristocratic circles, despite the fact that he is not of noble birth himself. He allows his son to work tirelessly in the dance studio but takes much of the money and most of the acclaim that goes along with this school. He takes on a selected group of student apprentices but then uses them as servants to run errands and do chores in the house. It is rumored that Prince's mother, who died young, was completely besotted with her husband and worked herself to death in the dance school to pay for his lifestyle. Mr. Turveydrop is extremely careless about other people's well-being and seems to only think about himself and his own comfort. He is emotionally manipulative and pressures Caddy and Prince into working for him and makes them feel guilty if they take any time off.

**Peepy** – Peepy is the son of Mrs. Jellyby and Mr. Jellyby and the younger brother of Caddy Jellyby. Esther Summerson meets and takes pity on Peepy when she first arrives at Mrs. Jellyby's house and discovers that Peepy is neglected and that nobody notices when he falls down the stairs and hurts himself. Peepy grows attached to Esther throughout her visit because she is the first person, other than Caddy, to be motherly towards him. Peepy eventually becomes the servant of Mr. Turveydrop.

**Mr. Chadband** – Mr. Chadband is a minister and pretends to be a deeply religious man. However, underneath this façade of piety, he is very greedy and interested in money. He eats a great deal and is described as an oily gentleman, which suggests that he is smarmy, gluttonous, and false. He is a friend of Mrs. Snagsby's, who naively worships him, and is married to Mrs. Chadband. His wife used to be the maid of Miss Barbary, who is Esther Summerson's aunt and the sister of Lady Dedlock. Mr. Chadband tries to save money and avoid paying for things at all

costs. He tries to avoid paying for the cab he takes to the Snagsby's house and, later, tries to extort money from Sir Leicester Dedlock when he discovers the link between Lady Dedlock and his wife and the fact that Lady Dedlock had an illegitimate child outside of her marriage.

**Mrs. Chadband / Mrs. Rachael** – Mrs. Chadband (formerly Mrs. Rachael) is the wife of Mr. Chadband and was previously the maid of Miss Barbary, who is the aunt of Esther Summerson. Mrs. Rachael is a cold, greedy woman, who disliked Esther when she was a child because she was illegitimate. She tries to extort money out of Sir Leicester Dedlock when it is revealed that Esther is the illegitimate child of Sir Leicester's wife, Lady Dedlock.

**Miss Barbary / Esther's Godmother** – Miss Barbary is Lady Dedlock's sister and Esther Summerson's aunt. She is a hard, judgmental woman, who despises her sister because she gave birth to an illegitimate child. Esther claims that her aunt (whom she originally believes to be her godmother, not her aunt) is a "good woman" but that she is so good that she cannot stand sin in others. Miss Barbary is a hypocrite, however, and is arrogant because she believes she is without sin. In actuality, she is cruel to Esther as a child and blames her for her mother's sin and is not a kind or forgiving woman. These traits come back to haunt Miss Barbary and she is struck down by a stroke while Esther reads a passage from the Bible which suggests that no one is without sin. She dies soon after this. Miss Barbary also resents Esther because she breaks off an engagement to Mr. Jarndyce's friend, Mr. Boythorn, in order to raise Esther in secret to hide Lady Dedlock's shame.

**Volumnia Dedlock** – Volumnia Dedlock is a distant cousin of Sir Leicester Dedlock's and often comes to stay with him at his **house** in Chesney Wold. Volumnia pretends to be much younger than she is, and is an old-fashioned minor aristocrat who has been raised to do nothing but attend dances and live an idle life of leisure. She cares for Sir Leicester during his illness after the shock of Lady Dedlock's death, and she is keen to ingratiate herself with her cousin so that he will leave her an inheritance after his death.

**Tom Jarndyce** – Tom Jarndyce is the grandfather of Richard Carstone and Ada Clare and the uncle of Mr. Jarndyce. Tom Jarndyce famously tried to solve Jarndyce and Jarndyce but went mad while he waited for a verdict and shot himself in the head outside of the court. He lived in Bleak **House** before Mr. Jarndyce inherited it.

**Rosa** – Rosa is a beautiful servant girl whom Lady Dedlock hires. She becomes engaged to Watt, Mr. Rouncewell's son. Lady Dedlock hires Rosa because Rosa bears some resemblance to herself, and Lady Dedlock likes to imagine that Rosa is her daughter, who Lady Dedlock thinks has died at birth. Lady Dedlock dismisses Rosa from her service when Mr. Tulkinghorn reveals to her that her daughter, Esther

Summerson, is alive. Although Lady Dedlock is attached to her maid and wants her to be happy, she is worried that the scandal surrounding her will negatively affect Rosa's reputation and she wants to protect her from this.

**Mr. Rouncewell** – Mr. Rouncewell is the son of Mrs. Rouncewell, the father of Watt, and the brother of George. Mr. Rouncewell is an industrious and practical man who has made his fortune in the iron trade. He has rejected a career in Sir Leicester Dedlock's service, where his family has worked for generations. He is very proud that he has deviated from this course and that he has made his own way in the world and provides for his family with his money made in manufacturing. Mr. Rouncewell is a caring man and a political activist. The reader is told that he successfully runs for Parliament and is staunchly opposed to Sir Leicester's political conservatism. Mr. Rouncewell represents changes in social mobility during the 19th century, in which working men were no longer reliant on wealthy patrons to make their fortune but could make their own way in new industries and trade.

**Mrs. Rouncewell** – Mrs. Rouncewell is the housekeeper at Sir Leicester Dedlock's country **house**, Chesney Wold. She is the mother of George and Mr. Rouncewell and the grandmother of Watt. Mrs. Rouncewell loves both her sons, but George has always been her favorite. She is devastated when he leaves home and believes he has been killed in the army. Although she loves Mr. Rouncewell, she does not understand his decision to leave Sir Leicester's service and to go into industry instead. She accepts his decision but views it as a rejection of her lifestyle and a proud Rouncewell tradition. Mrs. Rouncewell is a loyal servant to Sir Leicester and lives out the rest of her days in this role. She is delighted by George's return, who is more like her than Mr. Rouncewell, and enjoys the discipline of service to reign in his wandering temperament.

**Mr. Woodcourt** – Mr. Woodcourt is a young surgeon, the son of Mrs. Woodcourt, and the eventual husband of Esther Summerson. Mr. Woodcourt is a generous and loyal young man who dedicates his life to his career and spends his time as a doctor caring for the poor rather than the rich. He has little interest in wealth and takes a low-paying post at a poor hospital in Yorkshire at the novel's end. Mr. Woodcourt is in love with Esther throughout the novel, although she denies this to herself, and his love for her remains strong when he returns from a voyage overseas and finds that her face has been scarred during a bout of smallpox. Mr. Woodcourt proves that he does not love her for her looks alone but for her kind and generous spirit. His name suggests that he is a solid man who "courts" Esther loyally and will remain by her side no matter what. He is also a loyal friend to Richard Carstone, whom he befriends at Esther's request, to try and help Richard during his time of depression. Mr. Woodcourt is an effective surgeon because he makes his patients feel heard and puts them at ease.

**Mrs. Woodcourt** – Mrs. Woodcourt is Mr. Woodcourt's mother and becomes the mother-in-law of Esther Summerson. She is a friend of Mr. Jarndyce's and often visits his **house**. Mrs. Woodcourt is a proud woman and claims that she comes from a noble Welsh family which is not recognized by the British aristocracy. When she realizes that Mr. Woodcourt is in love with Esther, Mrs. Woodcourt is initially convinced that Esther is not good enough for her son. She tries to put Esther off by subtly suggesting this and implying that her son is not really in love with Esther. She changes her mind, however, towards the end of the novel, when she discovers that Esther is Lady Dedlock's daughter. Although Lady Dedlock is not really from a noble family, Mrs. Woodcourt does not realize this and assumes that Esther is a member of the aristocracy because of Lady Dedlock's marriage to the noble Sir Leicester Dedlock.

**Charley** – Charley is the daughter of Neckett, the elder sister of Emma and Tom, and the maid of Esther Summerson. Charley is orphaned when her father dies, and she is left to care for her siblings. She works as a maid for Judy Smallweed in order to support them. Charley and her siblings share a filthy room in Mrs. Blinder's **house** and there is no one to care for them during the day when she is out at work. Although the children are innocent, people are reluctant to help them because their father was a debt collector, which was an unpopular profession. The children's only friend is Gridley, who lives in their same building. Charley and her siblings are rescued from this dire situation when Mr. Jarndyce learns of their situation from Mr. Skimpole, whom their father unsuccessfully tried to arrest for debt. He employs Charley as Esther's maid, who Esther agrees to tutor, and provides an education for Tom and Emma. Charley grows up to be a happy and industrious young woman because of this. She is a dedicated servant to Esther and becomes her close friend as she grows up and leaves her service.

**Gridley** – Gridley is a man from the north of England who has come to London as a young man to pursue his interests in a Chancery suit. Gridley's father left him some property, but the suit has gone on for so long and strayed so far from its original purpose that he has bankrupted himself paying legal fees and almost gone mad with anger and frustration. Gridley spends his days in court with Miss Flite and lives in the room below Neckett, and his three children, Charley, Emma, and Tom, who Gridley cares for after Neckett's death. Although Gridley was once a kind and caring man, the suit has warped him to the point that he cannot control his anger and he is afraid to own a weapon in case he should try to murder one of the lawyers. He is forced to go into hiding because he threatens Mr. Tulkinghorn. Gridley eventually succumbs to the strain of his lifestyle and dies in his hideout at George's gallery. Miss Flite is heartbroken by his death.

**Mr. Boythorn** – Mr. Boythorn is a close friend of Mr. Jarndyce's and was once engaged to Miss Barbary, Esther Summerson's aunt, in his youth. Mr. Boythorn is an extremely boisterous and

aggressive man but is very gentle and kindhearted underneath. He lives next door to Sir Leicester Dedlock's country **house**, Chesney Wold, and is engaged in a furious dispute with the nobleman about a pathway which he thinks belongs to his property, and Sir Leicester thinks belongs to his. Despite this feud, Mr. Boythorn is very noble and keeps the dispute between Sir Leicester and himself. He does not criticize Lady Dedlock for his dislike of her husband and is very generous with his friends. He insists that Esther go to stay at his house after her illness so that she has peace in the countryside to recover. Mr. Boythorn enjoys sparring with Mr. Skimpole, with whom he disagrees on everything, and even continues his fight with Sir Leicester, long after his interest has waned and after Sir Leicester has had a stroke, because he does not want Sir Leicester to feel patronized or that Mr. Boythorn thinks he is incapable of participating in this battle.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Quebec** – Quebec is Mr. Bagnet and Mrs. Bagnet's daughter and goddaughter to George.

**Malta** – Malta is Mr. Bagnet and Mrs. Bagnet's daughter and goddaughter to George.

**Woolwich** – Woolwich is Mr. Bagnet and Mrs. Bagnet's eldest son and godson to George.

**Mr. Kenge** – Mr. Kenge is a lawyer and a partner in the law firm Kenge and Carboy's. He is legally involved in Esther's upbringing with Miss Barbary but does not know that Lady Dedlock is Esther's mother. He is a very talkative man and is known as "conversation Kenge."

**Bob Stables** – Bob Stables is an aged, aristocratic cousin of Sir Leicester Dedlock's.

**Mrs. Piper** – Mrs. Piper is a poor woman who lives near Krook's shop and is a friend of Mrs. Perkins's.

**Mrs. Perkins** – Mrs. Perkins is a poor woman who lives near Krook's shop and is a friend of Mrs. Piper's.

**Lord Chancellor** – The Lord Chancellor is the high judge of the court of Chancery.

**Watt** – Watt is the grandson of Mrs. Rouncewell and the son of Mr. Rouncewell. He becomes engaged to Rosa, Lady Dedlock's maid.

**Neckett** – Neckett is a debt collector who is sent to Mr. Jarndyce's **house** to arrest Mr. Skimpole for debt. Neckett lives in Mrs. Blinder's house with his three children, Charley, Emma, and Tom. Their mother is dead and when Neckett dies, these children are left orphaned.

**Emma** – Emma is the daughter of Neckett and the younger sister of Charley and Tom.

**Tom** – Tom is the son of Neckett, the younger brother of Charley, and the older brother of Emma.

**Mrs. Blinder** – Mrs. Blinder is the landlady who keeps the **house** in which Neckett, Charley, Tom, Emma, Gridley, and, later, Miss Flite have lodgings.

**Mr. Badger** – Mr. Badger is a physician who takes on Richard Carstone for an apprenticeship at Mr. Jarndyce's suggestion. Mr. Badger is married to Mrs. Badger, who has been married twice before to two very eminent men in their different professional spheres.

**Mrs. Badger** – Mrs. Badger is the wife of Mr. Badger and has been married twice before. She is very proud of her previous husbands, who are both dead, because both men were extremely dedicated to their professions and were famous in their fields.

**Sir Morbury Dedlock** An ancestor of the Dedlock family. His wife, who had turned against the Dedlocks during the English Civil War, cursed him and all Dedlocks.

**Mr. Tangle** A lawyer.

**Mr. Grubbe** The landlord of the village pub.

## TERMS

**Ward** – A ward of the court is a person who is left in the care of, and appointed a guardian by, a legal body. In *Bleak House*, this legal body is the court of Chancery, and **Ada Clare** and **Richard Carstone** are both wards of the court. They are both orphans and are under the age of 21. Richard and Ada are descendants of an ancient lawsuit known as Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which takes place in the court of Chancery. Because of this, the court is responsible for their care during this period in which they are underage and have no immediate family member to take care of them. Ada and Richard's guardianship is handed over to **Mr. Jarndyce**, who is a relation on their grandfather **Tom Jarndyce's** side of the family.

**Plaintiff** – A plaintiff is a person who brings a lawsuit or legal case to a court of law. In *Bleak House*, characters such as **Gridley**, **Richard Carstone**, and **Tom Jarndyce** are all plaintiffs because they have paid a lawyer to take up an individual case and defend their role in a lawsuit, which is held in the court of Chancery. Gridley's case is separate from Jarndyce and Jarndyce and is over his father's property, whereas most of the other characters are plaintiffs in Jarndyce and Jarndyce. **Mr. Jarndyce** is a plaintiff because he has inherited the case from his relations, however, he takes no personal action and does not participate in the progress of the case.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have

a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## SOCIAL MOBILITY, CLASS, AND LINEAGE

The 19th century was a period in which the strict class systems of the previous centuries began to break down. Increased social mobility meant that middle- and lower-class men could, for the first time, improve their circumstances and become wealthy by finding work in the new jobs and industries that became available during the Industrial Revolution. This presented a challenge to the upper classes, who had inherited and maintained their wealth across several generations and who now began to see their dynasties collapse. In *Bleak House*, Dickens presents people of different classes and professions and demonstrates the way in which their fates intertwine. By including characters from all walks of life, Dickens suggests that social mobility leads to a fairer and more just society, one in which not only the needs of the rich are met, and opportunities for prosperity exist for people from different classes.

Dickens suggests that the upper classes are archaic and that they are no longer relevant in 19th-century society. In *Bleak House*, the prestigious and ancient Dedlock family represents the upper crust of society. Sir Leicester Dedlock is the current representative of the Dedlock fortune and the husband of Lady Dedlock. Sir Leicester Dedlock is highly conservative, dislikes social change, and believes that ancient British institutions (such as the aristocracy and the Chancery courts) are essential and fundamental to the successful running of the country. Although Sir Leicester is a kindhearted old gentleman, Dickens satirizes Sir Leicester's absolute faith in the British government and dismisses the British political system (which Sir Leicester avidly follows in the newspaper reports on the antics of Lord Doodle, Moodle, and Foodle) as silly and unproductive. By satirizing the British establishment in this way, Dickens suggests that the current politicians do no good other than to protect those who are already wealthy and prosperous (like Sir Leicester), and that it doesn't matter which government is in power because, ultimately, they all have this same end in mind. Dickens further supports these impressions with the descriptions of the Dedlock cousins who come to stay with Sir Leicester. These cousins are elderly, socially irrelevant, and infirm. One cousin, Volumnia Dedlock, paints her face and dresses like a young girl, but her age shows through the makeup, and she is only well-known in social circles that have nothing to do with contemporary London life. Dickens implies that the cousins are relics of a degenerating noble class that must make way for new societal developments.

Even in the great Dedlock household, members of lower social classes have begun to infiltrate and play an important role. Sir Leicester Dedlock has married Lady Dedlock, a woman who is not of noble birth but who, through determination and social

poise, has "floated" into the upper classes. Sir Leicester married her for love, which suggests that even the aristocracy is not immune to the social changes that are afoot. It is Sir Leicester's attachment to Lady Dedlock that finally brings down the Dedlock dynasty, when it is discovered that Lady Dedlock has an illegitimate child, whom she gave birth to before she was married to Sir Leicester. This child, Esther Summerson, has been raised in secret by Lady Dedlock's sister. Although Sir Leicester forgives Lady Dedlock, she runs away when her secret is discovered and dies of exposure in the snow, hidden among the London streets. As the couple have no children together, Lady Dedlock's death means that Sir Leicester's lineage will not be continued. Although this instance of social mobility ends tragically, with Lady Dedlock's death, her presence has a positive influence and acts as a catalyst for the collapse of the Dedlock line. This suggests that greater social mobility and marriage between different classes will ultimately topple the old and idle social elite in Britain, something that Dickens feels is long overdue.

However, although lineage and inherited wealth primarily benefits the upper classes in Dickens' society, it is still important to members of lower classes throughout the novel. Although Lady Dedlock has no children with Sir Leicester, her lineage continues with Esther Summerson, who marries a surgeon, Mr. Woodcourt, at the end of the novel. Although Mr. Woodcourt is from a middle-class background, his mother, Mrs. Woodcourt, is extremely proud of her Welsh lineage and even feels, at first, that Esther is not good enough to marry into this line. This suggests that, despite increased social mobility, people are still preoccupied with names and titles, and that the middle classes seek to emulate the aristocracy.

Social mobility, however, gives people from different classes an opportunity to provide for their families without relying on the *inheritance* of wealth. Mr. Rouncewell, for example, the son of Sir Leicester's housekeeper, goes into the iron industry, rather than taking a job as Sir Leicester servants. Although he is cut off from the powerful Dedlock family, who have provided jobs for the Rouncewells' for generations, Mr. Rouncewell is able to provide for his family's future because of his success and the wealth he acquires for himself. This suggests that it is not only the wealthy who wish to provide for their families after their death. Lineage also provides hope for the future, as in the case of Ada and Richard Carstone, two of Esther's companions. When Richard dies shortly after his marriage to Ada, Ada sustains her hope for the future through their child.

Although Dickens is in favor of social mobility, he doesn't advocate for the total eradication of the class system—this would be unrealistic, because people will always try to improve their social status. Instead, Dickens suggests that the old class system, in which wealth was passed down only through powerful family lines and was not accessible to the lower classes, is rightfully in decline, and that greater social mobility

will allow more people to build wealth and prestige for themselves through industry, regardless of their birth.



## LAW VS. JUSTICE

Many of the characters in *Bleak House* are involved in a notorious lawsuit known as Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which has been in dispute in the court of

Chancery for several generations. The court of Chancery was a British legal institution which dealt primarily with disputes over inheritance, and throughout *Bleak House*, Dickens criticizes the Chancery court process as an archaic and unnecessarily convoluted system that does not help its clients. Instead, it allows predatory lawyers to take advantage of the expectations of plaintiffs, who hope they have been left property. Dickens uses his descriptions of Chancery, and the effects that a large suit like Jarndyce and Jarndyce has on its plaintiffs, to demonstrate that the Chancery court is an outdated and corrupt institution and not an effective way of finding the truth in legal disputes.

Dickens suggests that the 19th-century Chancery system is not an effective mode of achieving justice. The lawsuit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce has gone on for many years without any success and is famous in the courts as a particularly convoluted example of Chancery process. Although the case is finally resolved at the end of the novel, the money owed to its plaintiffs is used up in legal fees. Therefore, even if people really are owed money in the case, they do not receive this money at the case's termination, and, therefore, the court fails to achieve justice.

The Chancery court is associated with infirmity and decay throughout *Bleak House*, which speaks to Dickens' distaste for it. The original will around which Jarndyce and Jarndyce is constructed is described as a "scarecrow suit," which suggests it has little substance. Mr. Jarndyce, one of the descendants of the Jarndyce family and the guardian of Esther, Richard, and Ada, who are "wards" of the case, states that, even if the will at one time made sense, the lawyers have "twisted it into such a state of bedevilment that the original merits of the case have long disappeared." This suggests that the Chancery process does not help to clarify legal disputes but only confuses them further. The court system is parodied by its association with Krook's shop, a rag and bone shop behind the courthouse that is run by an old man named Krook, who has the ironic nickname, "the Lord Chancellor," a reference to the high judge of Chancery. Krook's shop is a jumble of moldy law papers which Krook, who is illiterate, cannot understand. Dickens uses Krook's shop to mirror the proceedings in Chancery and to suggest that the court, like Krook's shop, is a tangle of confused legal affairs, which no one is really trying to solve.

Instead, the Chancery system is intentionally corrupt and encourages lawyers to prolong legal cases. Although lawyers

are *supposed* to seek justice for their clients, they are incentivized to extend cases in order to run up large legal fees. Mr. Vholes, who becomes Richard's lawyer, demonstrates as much when Richard sets out to resolve Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Rather than looking out for Richard's best interests, Mr. Vholes encourages Richard to pour resources into the suit until he is on the brink of bankruptcy. Dickens suggests that lawyers like Mr. Vholes are predatory, noting that Vholes has "something of the Vampire" about him. This implies that Mr. Vholes is not really interested in helping Richard solve the case but that instead he deliberately overcomplicates and lengthens the process in order to profit from Richard. Richard is vulnerable and puts his trust in Mr. Vholes because he believes that when the case is complete, he will receive a large financial settlement. Dickens further suggests that the whole Chancery profession is self-serving because it does nothing to achieve real justice and instead only exists to provide lawyers with work. Although the Chancery system is in need of reform, the 19th-century public is reluctant to make these changes to the law because they feel that it would be unfair to men like Mr. Vholes, who supports a family with his legal work. Dickens, however, feels that these reforms are necessary to prevent predatory legal practice and to prevent self-serving lawyers from holding up the course of real justice.

Dickens contrasts the Chancery system with the character of Mr. Bucket, who represents criminal law. Mr. Bucket is a private investigator who is active in London and who is hired to solve the murder of a lawyer named Mr. Tulkinghorn. Unlike the Chancery system, which relies on legions of lawyers to create work for itself, Mr. Bucket operates alone and relies on wit and observation to solve crimes. He solves the murder of Mr. Tulkinghorn quickly and efficiently, implying that Mr. Bucket is effective as a law enforcement figure. However, although Mr. Bucket is efficient when it comes to solving crime, he lacks social responsibility because he operates for his own personal gain. This is evident when Mr. Bucket apprehends Mademoiselle Hortense because Sir Leicester offers a reward. Although it is implied that Mr. Bucket does solve the case accurately, he is not incentivized to do this—he is only incentivized to produce an individual, who he claims committed the crime, to receive the money. Dickens suggests that in cases of criminal law, legal process is necessary to prevent individuals from being falsely accused. Mr. Jarndyce supports this sentiment; despite his hatred of Chancery, he encourages George to take a lawyer when he is wrongly accused of Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder. Criminal law, Mr. Jarndyce argues, is a different matter from Chancery and requires regulation to make sure that individuals cannot benefit from falsely accusing others. Although Mr. Bucket is invaluable as someone who *investigates* crimes, his claims must be verified legally for true justice to be served. Overall, Dickens suggests that legal reform is necessary to prevent corruption in both the court of Chancery *and* the criminal justice system so that institutions

and individuals who uphold the law are held accountable for the processes they oversee.



### PASSION, OBSESSION, AND MADNESS

Dickens clearly sees the value of following one's passion, as his characters who do not feel a calling in life are somewhat lost and forlorn throughout

the book. However, there is a distinction made between a calling—a cause or profession one feels naturally drawn to, which one follows to a moderate and balanced degree—and an obsession. *Bleak House* is peppered with characters who are driven to distraction by their various obsessions, which consume their lives and drive them mad, and unregulated passion leads to disastrous consequences throughout the novel. The book suggests that a genuine calling, however, when it is honestly chosen and industriously achieved, is a benevolent and useful way to contribute to society.

Lack of professional direction, or the lack of purpose in life, can have a negative effect on people's wellbeing. Many of the characters in *Bleak House* are searching for meaning in their lives and turn to professional and social endeavors to give themselves a sense of place within society. Characters who do not feel a professional or social calling of this kind are often slightly adrift within the novel. One example of this is "the trooper," George, an ex-soldier who makes a series of bad investments and inadvertently saddles his loyal friends, and Mrs. Bagnet, with debt because he cannot find a stable calling in life after the army. Lack of professional direction is also a problem for Richard Carstone, who cannot decide which industry he wishes to train for and tries several before giving up entirely. Richard cannot choose a discipline because he doesn't feel a particular passion for any of them. Mr. Jarndyce, Richard's guardian, warns Richard against relying on passion alone and tries to advise Richard that if he studies hard in the profession of his choosing, even if it is not his preference, he will reap the rewards in the future and feel a sense of fulfillment. Richard disregards Mr. Jarndyce's advice, however, and Richard's lack of purpose gives way to a misguided obsession. Dickens suggests that it is better to *choose* a direction in life than to rely on passion alone, which, if unchecked, may leave one open to being taken in by false or illusory ideas.

In the novel, extreme passion easily transforms into obsession. Without a profession to discipline and distract him, Richard becomes obsessed with the lawsuit, Jarndyce and Jarndyce, from which he expects an inheritance. He is so consumed with his delusional hopes of hypothetical inheritance that he does not see the reality of the situation: that Jarndyce and Jarndyce is unlikely to be resolved and that, in the meantime, he is bankrupting himself for no good reason to pay his legal fees. Richard's situation is echoed in the character of Gridley, a poor man who lives near the court and who spends a large part of his life trying to demand a verdict from the Chancery court.

Gridley's obsession ultimately consumes him, and he dies miserable and penniless, having never heard a verdict on his case. Even beyond the court, characters are troubled by obsessions. Mrs. Snagsby, the wife of Mr. Snagsby, who runs a stationery shop near Chancery, becomes consumed with passionate jealousy and obsessed with the idea that her husband has fathered an illegitimate child: the unfortunate street sweeper, Jo, with whom Mr. Snagsby is friendly. Her misguided belief leads her into a paranoid obsession, and she follows her husband (who is innocent) everywhere looking for signs of his guilt. Driven by their passions, these characters begin to stray into strange behaviors. Dickens suggests that a passion that is not moderated, or does not have a good foundation in reality, can easily turn into an unhealthy fixation.

At its worst, obsession can lead to madness. Dickens demonstrates this through the character of Miss Flite, an elderly lady who religiously attends the Chancery court to await the outcome of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Miss Flite goes mad while she obsessively waits for a verdict in the case, and her example serves as a warning for other characters, and for the reader, about the close relationship between obsession and madness. Following in Miss Flite's footsteps, Richard gradually succumbs to his obsession with Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and he, too, goes mad. Like Miss Flite, he begins to attend court daily with the vague notion that he will hear news regarding his suit. He eventually dies when the case is terminated, and it is announced that all the money owing to the plaintiffs has been eaten up in legal costs.

Richard's tragic demise through lunacy and obsession is directly contrasted by the stable and disciplined life built by Mr. Woodcourt, the surgeon whom Esther marries. Like Richard, Mr. Woodcourt also feels a lack of direction early in his life and career, but unlike Richard, Mr. Woodcourt makes a diligent and concerted effort to make the best of his chosen career as a doctor. While Richard suffers because of his poor life choices, which are based on unrestrained passion rather than on disciplined and practical ideas, Mr. Woodcourt grows to cherish his profession, which provides a solid living for himself and Esther and contributes in a positive way to society. Overall Dickens takes a moderate view, suggesting that discipline and diligence are good protection against the pitfalls of obsession, delusion, and madness, which can easily distort any type of passionate preoccupation.



### PHILANTHROPY, SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND KINDNESS

The 19th century was a period in which philanthropy (charitable contributions to social causes) was considered extremely important and fashionable. Many people in both the middle and upper classes felt that society had a responsibility to take care of the poor and to end the squalor and destitution that was rife among the lower

classes. This attitude also extended beyond British borders as well, and many Victorians felt that it was Britain's responsibility to manage populations abroad where Britain had colonies. Although Dickens was a prominent social campaigner and contributed significantly to social causes such as the abolition of child labor, *Bleak House* demonstrates Dickens's view that charity begins at home, and that individual acts of kindness are more effective than showy philanthropic missions to improve society.

The 19th-century fashion for philanthropy, both in Britain and abroad, distracts from genuine social problems. Dickens is critical of the vogue for philanthropy which encouraged many Victorians to throw themselves passionately into a wealth of social causes. Although their efforts are vigorous, many of the philanthropists in *Bleak House*—symbolized by Mrs. Jellyby and her friends—seem more interested in *appearing* charitable than in really helping the causes with which they are involved. One example of this is Mr. Quale, who is adamant that philanthropy is essential to the proper organization of society, but who does nothing but *talk* about the causes adopted by others, which obviously achieves nothing practical. This suggests that many Victorian philanthropists are caught up with the idea of social organization but do little to really contribute to changes within society.

Dickens also makes the point that many of the charitable missions taken up by 19th-century philanthropists focus on parts of the British Empire located *outside* of Britain. Mrs. Jellyby personifies this, as she is obsessed with “saving” Africa, where Britain had several colonies. While Mrs. Jellyby focuses on Africa, however, her home is left in chaos; her children are neglected, and her husband is nearly bankrupted by her philanthropic efforts. Mrs. Jellyby's children represent the lower class in Britain, who remain in poverty while Britain squanders its efforts abroad. Dickens uses Mrs. Jellyby's house to criticize British colonial expansion, which he viewed as a waste of the country's money, but which many Victorians viewed as a philanthropic mission to “save” countries that did not live under British rule. Dickens criticizes this attitude and suggests that Britain should fix its own society before it interferes with countries abroad.

Philanthropy, when it ignores the needs of those it aims to help, can become a hindrance rather than a source of relief. Dickens parodies zealous but ultimately harmful philanthropists through the character of Mrs. Pardiggle. Mrs. Pardiggle is a fiercely determined do-gooder who goes to poor people's houses and reads the Bible to them for the improvement of their souls. This was common practice in the 19th century, and many middle-class philanthropists engaged in this type of didactic charity to in an effort to help the poor, whom they thought of as sinful and corrupt. Although the brickmaker she visits tells Mrs. Pardiggle that he does not understand what she reads and that he will continue to drink and beat his wife

regardless, Mrs. Pardiggle insists that she is there for the family's own good. At the same time, however, she seems oblivious to the obvious practical wants of the family and is only concerned with their spiritual education. Her presence, in turn, exacerbates the family's problems, as the brickmaker is aggravated by Mrs. Pardiggle and this makes him more likely to drink and hit his wife.

In contrast, Esther, who accompanies Mrs. Pardiggle on this visit, is sensitive to the immediate needs of the family and comforts the brickmaker's wife, Jenny, who is mourning the loss of her baby. Esther's simple act of kindness—she covers the dead child's face with a handkerchief—provides gentle and unobtrusive comfort to the woman. Esther, unlike Mrs. Pardiggle, does not assume that she knows what is best for the family and instead performs an act of kindness because she sees their suffering. Dickens suggests that *this* is the attitude that the Victorian public should emulate, not Mrs. Pardiggle's aggressively didactic philanthropy.

Genuine acts of kindness improve society, whereas mandatory philanthropy can make people uncharitable. Mrs. Pardiggle's children are extremely resentful of the philanthropic efforts that their mother forces on them. It is unlikely that these children will grow up to pity the poor—whom their mother aims to help—but that they will feel cheated because of their own neglected upbringing and, therefore, will not be generous or interested in taking up social causes themselves. Dickens implies that when charitable behavior is mandatory, rather than spontaneously and willingly carried out, people will grow to resent it and it will cause selfishness in society, rather than increase kindness and belief in social responsibility. In contrast to this, practical acts of kindness, when they are performed because of a genuine desire to help, are extremely beneficial to society. For example, when Mr. Jarndyce hires Charley (the orphan of a debt officer who is forced to work to support her younger brother and sister) to be Esther's maid, he removes her and her siblings from a dire situation and allows them to lead a comfortable and dignified life. Mr. Jarndyce is extremely averse to being thanked for his many acts of generosity and runs from any suggestion of praise. Through Mr. Jarndyce, Dickens makes a broader narrative comment that should not perform charitable acts for show but instead try to help those in need when one can. Unlike Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle, Mr. Jarndyce puts the needs of the people he helps first—above his own vanity—and, therefore, his help is more effective because it does not foist itself on others when it is unwanted but waits for opportunities when it can be of selfless and genuine service.



### HAUNTING, GUILT, AND DESTINY

There are many examples of hauntings in *Bleak House*, and the line between the past and the present is blurry and uncertain throughout. Characters are

also influenced by their past and by powerful emotions such as guilt and shame, which are associated with these private histories. In the resolution of *Bleak House*'s many plots, Dickens suggests that a person's past behavior influences their future and demonstrates that greed and selfishness have their punishments while virtue and goodness earn their rewards.

Many of the novel's characters are haunted by their pasts. The most prominent example of haunting in *Bleak House* is the legend of "The Ghost's Walk" at the Dedlock country house, Chesney Wold. "The Ghost's Walk" is both a literal terrace attached to the house and a reference to a ghost story attached to the family. The sound of raindrops on the "Ghost's Walk" represents the footsteps of the ghost—the unhappy wife of a Dedlock ancestor who swore to haunt the mansion until the Dedlock line was destroyed—who is believed to walk up and down on the terrace. The legend also indirectly refers to Lady's Dedlock's guilt over her illegitimate child, whom she gave birth to before her marriage to Sir Leicester, and whom she believes died at birth. The impact of the past on Lady Dedlock is clear through her emotional reaction when she discovers that Esther is her daughter. Esther, in turn, is haunted by her childhood and the unkind assertion made by her aunt, Lady Dedlock's sister who raised Esther in secret without her sister's knowledge: that it would be better if Esther had never been born. In response to this past rejection, Esther feels a sense of guilt about her existence and spends her whole life hoping that those around her will accept her. The constant presence of secrets from the past in *Bleak House* suggests that although time moves on, people's pasts stay with them and impact their behavior in later life.

Past events not only haunt the novel's characters but foreshadow their futures. Captain Hawdon, Esther's father, is so haunted by his past mistakes and the failure he has made of himself that he retires entirely from public life and tries to erase his past. He becomes a shadowy presence who haunts Krook's shop, where he takes up residence. This sense of haunting is intensified because Captain Hawdon's guilt over his past, and his wish to escape from recognition, leads him to change his name to Nemo, which means "no one." This change foreshadows his destiny: Captain Hawdon dies in his room at Krook's from an opium overdose and becomes a ghostly legend associated with the place, and also literally "no one" when he dies. Similarly, the "ghost's walk" legend both haunts the Dedlock family and foreshadows their future destruction, which is brought about when the existence of Lady Dedlock's illegitimate child is discovered by Mr. Tulkinghorn, the sinister lawyer who works for Sir Leicester, and Mr. Guppy, a clerk who suspects Lady Dedlock's past connection to Captain Hawdon. Just as the ghost in the legend curses the Dedlock name and then expires, Lady Dedlock's past shame causes her to run away, and it is her decision to flee that dooms her. In this sense, Lady Dedlock's past guilt informs her future decisions, and this

in turn shapes her tragic destiny. This suggests that guilt is a powerful and destructive emotion and can bring about one's own demise if it is never resolved.

Characters create their own destinies through their past behaviors and reap the rewards or suffer the punishments that they deserve. The inevitable destiny of Mr. Tulkinghorn is one of the most prominent examples of this in *Bleak House*. Mr. Tulkinghorn's office is decorated with a large, personification of "Allegory" painted on the ceiling. This Allegory points to a specific spot on the floor and comes to represent destiny, or fate, within the novel. Dickens deliberately draws the reader's attention to this painting early on, during the first description of Mr. Tulkinghorn's study. When Mr. Tulkinghorn is finally shot by Lady Dedlock's resentful maid, Mademoiselle Hortense, who wishes to frame Lady Dedlock for the murder, he falls down dead in the spot that Allegory points to. This suggests that this destiny has waited for Mr. Tulkinghorn and that he could never escape from meeting this end.

Mr. Tulkinghorn's death is inevitable because of his behavior throughout life. He is an unpleasant and mercenary man, and he deliberately learns other people's secrets in order to have power over them. Therefore, he gets what he deserves when Mademoiselle Hortense uses this power against him and kills him *because* of what he knows about Lady Dedlock; Mademoiselle Hortense is aware that Mr. Tulkinghorn knows Lady Dedlock's secret and thinks that the police will suspect Lady Dedlock of the murder because she has motive to silence Mr. Tulkinghorn. This suggests the book's lesson that negative behavior in life will bring on negative consequences.

In contrast to Mr. Tulkinghorn's unhappy destiny, the characters who behave virtuously, honestly, and industriously throughout the novel have a hand in creating their own happy endings. Esther, who is always grateful for the love she receives and is very generous with other people, is repaid through the love others feel for her and their willingness to provide for her in turn. Similarly, Mr. Woodcourt is rewarded with a happy ending after his generous and genuine commitment to treating the poor through his medical practice. Although many of the characters meet tragic fates throughout *Bleak House*, those who are kind and behave well towards others are ultimately rewarded, or at least fondly remembered, whereas those who behave selfishly, or who seek to have power over others, receive what they give out before the novel's end.



## IDENTITY AND APPEARANCE

Appearances can be deceiving in *Bleak House*, and the identity that a person presents to the world does not necessarily represent their inner life or their real personality. Many of the novel's characters use this to their advantage, while others are at odds with their appearance and long for their true self to show through their physical or

public exteriors. Dickens uses these contrasts between interiors and exteriors to demonstrate that appearances should not always be trusted, and that inner beauty is always preferable to false sentiments and calculated masquerades.

Many of the characters in *Bleak House* are the opposite of what they appear to be and use these deceptions to their advantage. Mr. Skimpole, a friend of Mr. Jarndyce, presents himself to the world as an innocent “child” who understands nothing about the financial or practical realities of life. Mr. Skimpole is delightful company because of this and is always a welcome guest because he is so whimsical and entertaining. However, beneath Mr. Skimpole’s light-hearted facade, he is really a ruthless individualist and cares only for his own pleasure at the expense of everybody else. Mr. Skimpole happily allows his friends to pay his debts for him and furnish him with money and food, and doggedly pursues his own interests even when this causes harm to others. For example, when Esther takes the sick urchin, Jo, into Mr. Jarndyce’s **house**, Mr. Skimpole has no sympathy for the boy and is only concerned about the threat to his own health. Mr. Skimpole therefore suggests that they put Jo back on the street. When the others refuse, Mr. Skimpole secretly gets his own way when he accepts a bribe from Mr. Bucket, who wants Jo on an investigative matter, and lets Mr. Bucket take Jo away in the middle of the night even though he is very ill.

Although Mr. Skimpole’s behavior is mercenary and selfish, Mr. Jarndyce—among others—is completely taken in by Mr. Skimpole because he maintains such a convincing facade of innocence, and because Mr. Jarndyce wishes to see the best in people. Although Mr. Skimpole *does* understand the nature of a bribe, Mr. Jarndyce cannot believe this because Mr. Skimpole has convinced him that he simply does not understand money. In contrast, Esther sees through Mr. Skimpole’s exterior and suspects that he is a calculating individual underneath his show of naivety. Dickens suggests that, while it is noble to give people the benefit of the doubt, it also pays to question people’s outward facades, especially if a person’s claims do not line up with their behavior.

Meanwhile, other characters in the novel feel trapped by their external identities, which influence the way that others treat them. In order to maintain her social position as a representative of the stately Dedlock line, Lady Dedlock must constantly present a poised face to the world. Underneath, however, Lady Dedlock is a woman racked by guilt and pain. She conceals her extreme emotions under a facade of boredom, as though she has been “frozen,” in order to hide her secret (the birth of her illegitimate child) and to protect herself from predatory characters like Mr. Tulkinghorn who wish to use her disgrace to their advantage. Although Lady Dedlock does not necessarily wish to be seen this way, she is constantly pursued by “the fashionable intelligence,” who are obsessed with observing her comings and goings. This suggests that Lady

Dedlock has been so successful in constructing her exterior identity that she is now completely trapped by it. The “fashionable intelligence” (a group of fashionable individuals who know all the happenings among the rich and famous) are, obviously, shallow and are not interested in her inner life, but only in gossip and scandal; they have no sympathy with Lady Dedlock when her image slips. Lady Dedlock is able to temporarily conceal her identity at the end of the novel, when she disguises herself as the brickmaker’s wife, Jenny, to escape from the police, who she knows are hunting her for Mr. Tulkinghorn’s murder. In her disguise as a poor, friendless woman, Lady Dedlock’s true identity is temporarily revealed, as she flees from public scandal and disdain. Through Lady Dedlock’s tragic demise, Dickens demonstrates that people’s external identities are not always a choice but are sometimes constructed to avoid the judgement, ridicule, or cruelty of others.

The best outcome, according to Dickens, is for the world to recognize one’s true face, regardless of one’s external identity or appearance. This ideal outcome is the fate of Esther, whose face is scarred by the illness she catches from Jo on the night she brings him into Mr. Jarndyce’s house. It is implied that Esther’s face is scarred beyond recognition, but Esther’s character is not changed by this event, and she continues to pour love and acceptance onto others. Esther, who has struggled with self-acceptance because of her abusive childhood, finally receives validation when Mr. Woodcourt reveals his love for her. Although Esther had nursed private hopes that Mr. Woodcourt would fall in love with her, she gives up all thought of this and accepts another marriage proposal, from Mr. Jarndyce, when her face is changed by her illness. Mr. Woodcourt is away on a voyage overseas during Esther’s illness and she assumes that, even if he had been attracted to her before, he will now never love her because of her changed appearance. Esther’s inner beauty shines through, however, and, when Mr. Woodcourt returns, he reveals that he loves her regardless. He recognizes both her inner and outer beauty, which she herself cannot see, and through their blissful union, Esther is finally rewarded for her life of selfless and compassionate dedication to others, which reveals her true nature and her inner self to the world.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## FOG

In *Bleak House*, fog symbolizes confusion and illusion—in other words, the inability to see clearly. In the opening of the novel, London is wrapped in fog so thick

that it enters people's houses and even surrounds the court, the lawyers, and the Judge who sit inside the court of Chancery; which specializes in cases based on property and inheritance and around which much of the novel revolves. The court of Chancery is both wrapped in literal fog *and* surrounded by a haze of confusion and misunderstanding. This is epitomized by the court case Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which is in session during the fog. The case has dragged on over several generations and is a joke among the lawyers because of how complicated and incomprehensible it has become.

The fog is also present when Esther, Richard, and Ada are brought to London, foreshadowing their entanglement with Jarndyce and Jarndyce and the complications that this will bring about in their own lives. Richard and Ada are "wards" of the court in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which means that they expect to inherit property and must await the verdict. Throughout the novel, Richard's hopes and ambitions become obscured by the Chancery case, which takes over his life, just as a fog clouds one's field of vision, engulfing everything else in sight. Similarly, Esther's identity and past are murky and are called into question when she is brought to London to act as a companion to Ada.



### MISS FLITE'S BIRDS

Miss Flite's caged birds symbolize the stifling effect that Chancery lawsuits have on the characters throughout the novel, as such lawsuits lead people to suspend other goals and ambitions because they wait to see if they have inherited a fortune. Miss Flite is one such example of this. She is a mad old woman who lives above Krook's shop and visits the court every day as she waits for a verdict on an ancient lawsuit, Jarndyce and Jarndyce. She promises to free her caged birds when the case is resolved, but some of the birds have already died, forcing her to wonder if she, too, will die before the lawsuit wraps up. Of course, her life is practically already over, as everything she thinks and does centers around the court.

Richard also goes mad while he waits for a verdict in Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The novel's characters, like the birds, are trapped in a suspended state and can only be free once the case is resolved, which is unlikely, or when they give up hope on the case, as Mr. Jarndyce has done. Rather than pursue a career and *earn* his fortune, Richard waits in vain to learn how much he has inherited. His hopes are dashed when the lawsuit is finally resolved, and it transpires that all the inheritance has been used up in legal fees. This also points back to Miss Flite's birds because Krook points out that, when they are released, they will be killed by wild birds, just as Richard dies when he is released from suspense in Chancery. The bird's names are also symbolic; Miss Flite names them things like "hope," "joy," and "peace," which suggests that Chancery lawsuits cage these feelings and make them impossible to reach. This again is

apparent through Richard, who has no peace while Jarndyce and Jarndyce is unresolved. Miss Flite eventually names two birds the "wards in Jarndyce" in honor of Richard and Ada, whose married life is destroyed by the court case.



### HOUSES

Throughout *Bleak House*, houses represent the inner lives of the people who live in them. This was a trope which was common in both Victorian fiction and in the popular Gothic novels of the previous century, which influenced many 19th-century writers. For example, Mr. Jarndyce tells Esther that he has inherited Bleak House itself from Tom Jarndyce, and that the house was in a state of chaos and disrepair when it came to him. This reflects Tom Jarndyce's madness, brought on by his involvement with Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The renovations and reparations which Mr. Jarndyce makes to the house reflects the restoration of order through Mr. Jarndyce's calm, benevolent, and sensible personality. Mrs. Jellyby's house too, reflects her inner life and is utterly neglected because her mind, and therefore her domestic activity, is used up elsewhere. Meanwhile, the new Bleak House, into which Esther and Mr. Woodcourt move is a beautiful den of flowers and growth, which represents the fruition and growth of their love and their pleasant future together.

Houses also take on their owners' characteristics, in the form of ghosts or presences, which is demonstrated by Nemo's room, which begins to feel haunted by the writer after his death there. Nemo's room is a gloomy, decrepit room, which reflects the writer's destitution and inner turmoil, and the horror and loneliness of his situation is conveyed to the reader through the description of the two windows which look into the bed and seem to be appalled by what they see. This is similarly demonstrated in the houses that belong to the Dedlocks, which take on the stiff, immovable, and yet outdated feel, of this seemingly immovable dynasty.



### QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Wordsworth edition of *Bleak House* published in 1993.

## Chapter 1 Quotes

☞☞ The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest, near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation: Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery. Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth.

**Related Characters:** Lord Chancellor

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 3-4

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage, in which Dickens describes a section of London coated in a dense fog, comes at the very beginning of the novel. Fog symbolizes confusion in the novel, and it also points to the thick smog that engulfed London in this century, caused by pollution from factories and from the river Thames. The fog causes an “obstruction”—one cannot see through it or walk around easily or pleasantly as a result. This parallels the court of Chancery, which is described as a “leaden headed corporation” and sits behind a literal “obstruction,” Temple Bar, a large stone archway that still exists in modern London. The court is “leaden headed” and associated with “obstructions” because the lawyers who practice Chancery law often hold up, or obstruct, cases for longer than necessary.

The fog is thickest around the court because the court is a source of confusion and frustration to its clients, who wait unendingly for their verdicts. Although the fog blinds people in London, the Chancery court blinds its clients more when it persuades them to bring a suit to Chancery, as Dickens suggests it is a useless, unnecessary institution. He also implies it is deliberately corrupt, as it is described as a “hoary sinner.” The word *hoary* both refers to something that is outdated and trite, as well as something that is grey or white with age, thus suggesting that Chancery needs to be reformed.

☞☞ This is the Court of Chancery; which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor, with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance; [...] there is not an honorable man among its practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, ‘Suffer any wrong that can be done you, rather than come here!’

**Related Characters:** Miss Flite, Richard Carstone

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 4

### Explanation and Analysis

Dickens describes and criticizes the court of Chancery, a legal institution which dealt primarily with disputes over property and inheritance. The court of Chancery was notorious in the 19th century for cases that dragged on for many years, even, occasionally, across multiple generations in the same family. The cases brought to Chancery usually focused on family disputes over the inheritance of property but, because of the lengths of these Chancery suits, the houses “decay[ed]” while the case was being fought and while no one could legally claim them. Dickens suggests this is a wasteful system, particularly when there are so many homeless people in London.

Dickens also suggests throughout the novel that Chancery suits drive their plaintiffs mad because they go on for such a long time and force clients to put their lives on hold and to go into debt in order to pay their legal fees. Dickens demonstrates his political point through the fates of his characters throughout the novel, especially Miss Flite and Richard Carstone, who are both driven mad by the lawsuits they participate in. Dickens suggests that anyone who is “honorable,” and has any experience of the Chancery court, must feel compelled to warn these plaintiffs to stay away from suits like this, because of the personal ruin they so often lead to.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

☞☞ Sir Leicester Dedlock is only a baronet, but there is no mightier baronet than he. His family is as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable. He has a general opinion that the world might get on without hills, but would be done up without Dedlocks. He would on the whole admit Nature to be a good idea (a little low, perhaps, when not enclosed with a park-fence), but an idea dependent for its execution on your great county families.

**Related Characters:** Lady Dedlock, Sir Leicester Dedlock

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 9

### Explanation and Analysis

Here, Dickens introduces Sir Leicester Dedlock, a wealthy, aristocratic man from a prodigious family, and the husband of Lady Dedlock. Sir Leicester is a descendant of the Dedlock family, which has passed down its great wealth through property, land holdings, and inheritance across many centuries. Dickens satirizes the pride of ancient families when he suggests that they are “more respectable” than hills, and that Sir Leicester believes the world would “be done up without Dedlocks.” This suggests that Sir Leicester has such supreme confidence in the importance of his rank and family, because it is so old and socially respected, that he feels society would collapse without their existence. In *Bleak House*, Sir Leicester represents conservatism and the old establishment, which came under threat as new means of building wealth became available in cities during the mid 19th-century Industrial Revolution.

Sir Leicester is a sympathetic but satirical figure throughout the novel. He is ridiculous in his conceit and feels that he can cast his judgement on things like “Nature,” as though he has control over his environment. This, Dickens suggests, is how many aristocrats feel, and the “park fence” around the natural world suggests that they do, in fact, have power to organize society as they see fit. Sir Leicester believes that the “great county families” must organize society because otherwise it would not get done—an idea which, of course, is untrue.

☞☞ A whisper still goes about, that she had not even family; howbeit, Sir Leicester had so much family that perhaps he had enough, and could dispense with any more. But she had beauty, pride, ambition, insolent resolve, and sense enough to portion out a legion of fine ladies. Wealth and station, added to these, soon floated her upward; and for years, now, my Lady Dedlock has been at the center of the fashionable intelligence.

**Related Characters:** Sir Leicester Dedlock, Lady Dedlock

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 10

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Dickens introduces Lady Dedlock, Sir Leicester Dedlock’s wife, and implies that she is not of noble birth. Although Lady Dedlock is clearly feared and respected in the fashionable world, both because of her husband’s status and her own “beauty” and “pride,” there are still some “whispers” that she may be from a poor background and an unknown family. It would be highly unusual for an eminent noble like Sir Leicester to marry a woman who did not already have a title or a respected place within society. The idea that he may have made an exception for Lady Dedlock suggests that he has married her for love and that, because he is so wealthy and respected, he felt that he could take this risk and dispel any criticism which came his way.

Lady Dedlock is, in fact, from a poor background, but her “ambition” and “insolent resolve” gave her the confidence to bluff her way through society. She has fooled people into thinking she is noble when she is not, and this further suggests that nobility is not innate or gifted only to a certain class at birth, but is a carefully cultivated act which one can imitate if one understands how to do it. Lady Dedlock is described as “floating” her way to the top because she maintains a façade of boredom, as though everything is effortless for her, and this contributes to the idea that she is regal and proud.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

☞☞ ‘Submission, self-denial, diligent work, are the preparations for a life begun with such a shadow on it. You are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born, like them, in common sinfulness and wrath. You are set apart.’

**Related Characters:** Miss Barbary / Esther’s Godmother (speaker), Sir Leicester Dedlock, Captain Hawdon / Nemo,

Lady Dedlock, Esther Summerson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 16

### Explanation and Analysis

Here, Miss Barbary, Esther Summerson's aunt and Lady Dedlock's sister cruelly responds to young Esther when she asks about her mother. Miss Barbary is a very religious woman and believes that all children are born "into common sinfulness" and, therefore, are sinful at birth. However, because Esther is an illegitimate child, the daughter of Lady Dedlock and Captain Hawdon, and was born before Lady Dedlock's marriage to Sir Leicester Dedlock, Miss Barbary feels that Esther is especially sinful and that this shame will stay with her throughout her life. Miss Barbary suggests that Esther has inherited this shame from her mother, who would be considered a disgraced and fallen woman if it was widely known that she had an illegitimate child. In Dickens's time, illegitimate children were believed to be inherently more sinful than other children because of the circumstances of their birth.

Miss Barbary suggests that Esther must work harder to be grateful and self-effacing because she has this stain upon her character. This influences Esther's character and she longs to feel loved and struggles to believe that she can be loved in her adult life. Dickens suggests that Miss Barbary is a cruel woman and that children should not be held accountable for their parents' sins or social status.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ She was a pretty, very diminutive, plump woman, of from forty to fifty, with handsome eyes, though they had a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off. As if—I am quoting Richard again—they could see nothing nearer than Africa!

**Related Characters:** Esther Summerson (speaker), Mr. Jarndyce, Ada Clare, Richard Carstone, Mrs. Jellyby

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 33

### Explanation and Analysis

Esther, Ada, and Richard spend their first night in London at the home of Mrs. Jellyby, a philanthropist who is obsessed with conducting charity in Africa. The 19th century in Britain was a period in which many people were interested in philanthropy and participated actively in many charitable

and social causes, both at home and abroad. Much of this philanthropy stemmed from the idea that people could organize, and therefore improve, society and the living conditions of the poor. Britain also had many colonies abroad in this period and laid claim to much of Africa as part of its expansion of the British Empire. Philanthropists, like Mrs. Jellyby, sought to organize these foreign cultures to be more in line with British values and British rule and dedicated themselves to social and religious missions of this type.

Mrs. Jellyby is so obsessed with her ideas for reform in Africa that she can see nothing else. Her eyes have a "faraway" look because, in her mind, she can already see her success in organizing the trade links with this country, which she has planned to establish. Although Mrs. Jellyby thinks she is helping, her passion for this cause is detrimental to her family, and she ultimately doesn't even help the community abroad that she wishes to reach.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ 'We are never to get out of Chancery! We have come by another way to our place of meeting yesterday, and—by the Great Seal, here's the old lady again!'

**Related Characters:** Richard Carstone (speaker), Caddy Jellyby, Ada Clare, Esther Summerson, Miss Flite

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 43

### Explanation and Analysis

The morning after they have spent the night at Mrs. Jellyby's, Richard, Esther, Caddy, and Ada go for a walk in London. They get lost and find themselves in the court again, where they meet Miss Flite, whom they also saw there the night before. Richards talks about the streets around Chancery as though they are a maze that they will never find their way out of. This statement ominously foreshadows Richard's future. Richard becomes obsessed with the lawsuit Jarndyce and Jarndyce, in which he is a plaintiff, and finally dies when it is resolved, but he finds that all his inheritance has been used up in legal fees. It is pertinent that they meet Miss Flite because she represents Richard's future—Miss Flite, too, has gone mad and ruined herself while she waits for a verdict on her case. Richard's statement also suggests that Chancery has a seductive effect on people; it draws them into its center, the court of Chancery, and makes it impossible for them to leave.

●● A little way within the shop-door, lay heaps of old crackled parchment scrolls, and discolored and dog's-eared law-papers [...] One had only to fancy, as Richard whispered to Ada and me while we all stood looking in, that yonder bones in a corner, piled together and picked very clean, were the bones of clients, to make the picture complete.

**Related Characters:** Esther Summerson (speaker), Krook, Miss Flite, Caddy Jellyby, Ada Clare, Richard Carstone

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 45

### Explanation and Analysis

Miss Flite takes Esther, Caddy, Richard, and Ada to see her apartment, which is above a rag and bone shop owned by a man named Krook. Krook's shop is filled with old legal papers because it is very near to the court. Rag and bone shops typically bought and sold anything and Krook has gained possession of many court documents because lawyers, clerks, and plaintiffs sell them to him when they are no longer needed.

There are many gruesome things in the shop, which is very dark and dingy, and Richard jokes that the lawyers not only sell their legal documents when cases are over, but also the "bones" of their clients which have been "picked clean" by the court system. Although Richard only wants to tease the girls, his words are ominous because they accurately represent the exploitation which goes on in Chancery and foreshadow his own future with the courts. Predatory lawyers *do* prey on hopeful plaintiffs, who look to inherit a fortune, and encourage them to ruin themselves on cases which the lawyers know will never be solved. Richard falls prey to this and becomes a victim of this system himself before the novel's close.

●● She partly drew aside the curtain of the long low garret-window, and called our attention to a number of bird-cages hanging there: some containing several birds. There were larks, linnets, and goldfinches—I should think at least twenty. 'I began to keep the little creatures,' she said, 'with an object that the wards will readily comprehend. With the intention of restoring them to liberty. When my judgment should be given. Ye-es! They die in prison, though. Their lives, poor silly things, are so short in comparison with Chancery proceedings, that, one by one, the whole collection has died over and over again.'

**Related Characters:** Miss Flite, Esther Summerson (speaker), Caddy Jellyby, Ada Clare, Richard Carstone

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 49

### Explanation and Analysis

Miss Flite takes Esther, Richard, Caddy, and Ada up to her room and shows them her collection of caged birds, which she plans to release when a verdict on her case is reached. Miss Flite's birds represent the many people who have been unsuccessful, or who have ruined themselves in the pursuit of property and inheritance, during Chancery suits. Although Miss Flite is mad, she is lucid enough to understand the process that Chancery plaintiffs go through, and that she herself has experienced. Miss Flite knows that Chancery suits often drag on for years without a verdict being reached, and that all the inheritance is often used up in legal fees, but at the same time, she still maintains her delusion that her suit will one day be settled.

The birds represent the plaintiffs who put their lives on hold and suspend all their other plans, just as the birds are trapped and suspended in their cages, to pursue legal action. She suggests that Richard and Ada, "the wards," will understand this because they have been born into a family which is split by Jarndyce and Jarndyce, a notoriously lengthy lawsuit, and have seen the effects of the case on their relatives. Her words are also ominous because Richard gets caught up in the case and becomes like one of Miss Flite's birds; his life is put on hold and sacrificed to the court system.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

●● We observed that the wind always changed when Mrs. Pardiggle became the subject of conversation; and that it invariably interrupted Mr. Jarndyce, and prevented his going any farther, when he had remarked that there were two classes of charitable people: one, the people who did a little and made a great deal of noise; the other, the people who did a great deal and made no noise at all.

**Related Characters:** Esther Summerson (speaker), Ada Clare, Richard Carstone, Mrs. Pardiggle, Mr. Jarndyce

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 87

### Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Jarndyce is a very kindly and sensitive man. He performs many acts of kindness throughout the novel but cannot bear to be thanked or rewarded for these. He suggests that the wind has changed because, when Mr. Jarndyce feels uncomfortable or sees others suffering, he says that the wind is in the east—which is, for him, a bad omen—and hurriedly escapes the situation. In this context, the reference to the wind suggests that he is annoyed by and tries to avoid Mrs. Pardiggle.

Mr. Jarndyce suggests that, although she makes a lot of noise about her charitable work, Mrs. Pardiggle does not accomplish anything that is genuinely helpful to other people. Dickens uses the novel's philanthropists, and Mrs. Pardiggle in particular, to suggest that the 19th-century craze for philanthropy encouraged people to perform charitable acts for show rather than because they really want to help others, and that actions like this are pointless and are often more of an annoyance and a hindrance to others than a help.

“I'll save you the trouble. Is my daughter a-washin? Yes, she is a-washin. Look at the water. Smell it! That's wot we drinks. How do you like it, and what do you think of gin, instead! An't my place dirty? Yes, it is dirty—it's nat'rally dirty, and it's nat'rally onwholesome; and we've had five dirty and onwholesome children, as is all dead infants, and so much the better for them, and for us besides. Have I read the little book wot you left? No, I an't read the little book wot you left. There an't nobody here as knows how to read it; and if there wos, it wouldn't be suitable to me. It's a book fit for a babby, and I'm not a babby.’

**Related Characters:** The Brickmaker (speaker), Liz, Jenny, Ada Clare, Esther Summerson, Mrs. Pardiggle

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 94

### Explanation and Analysis

Esther and Ada accompany Mrs. Pardiggle on a charitable visit to a brickmaker's house. The brickmaker, however, is extremely annoyed by Mrs. Pardiggle, who has visited him several times to read the Bible to his family and tells her why her visits do no good. The brickmaker pre-empts Mrs. Pardiggle's questions about hygiene and lifestyle and what measures he takes to keep his family clean. This reflects Mrs. Pardiggle's attitude that the poverty which the family lives in is their own fault and something they could fix if they

mended their ways. The brickmaker irritably explains that this is not true. He shows her the water that they use for washing and drinking and shows that it is putrid. Many poor people used water from the Thames for these purposes, which contained all the city's waste and sewage.

The brickmaker says that there is no point in trying to keep his house clean with this water and that he drinks gin instead of water because the water would poison him. Many middle-class philanthropists encouraged sobriety among the poor but, like Mrs. Pardiggle, ignored the reasons why the poor chose to drink alcohol. Mrs. Pardiggle's book is a Bible, and she has left it because she feels that the brickmaker is spiritually corrupt and that this is why he lives in filth. However, as the brickmaker explains, this is an insulting and childish attitude which ignores the social and practical reasons why the poor live in squalor.

“Mrs. Pardiggle, who had been regarding him through her spectacles with a forcible composure, calculated, I could not help thinking, to increase his antagonism, pulled out a good book, as if it were a constable's staff, and took the whole family into custody. I mean into religious custody, of course; but she really did it, as if she were an inexorable moral Policeman carrying them all off to a station-house.

**Related Characters:** Esther Summerson (speaker), Liz, Jenny, Ada Clare, The Brickmaker, Mrs. Pardiggle

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 94

### Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Pardiggle listens to the brickmaker's speech but is unaffected by it—she is determined to have her way and sits and reads the Bible to the family while ignoring their protests. Esther observes that Mrs. Pardiggle tries to annoy the brickmaker by remaining very calm. This demonstrates that Mrs. Pardiggle feels that the brickmaker is poor through his own choice and that he does it to annoy her. She views her battle with the brickmaker as a challenge for *her* to overcome—she feels she will spiritually cajole them out of poverty—and does not realize that their poverty has nothing to do with their attitude or their personalities; it is the class that they have been born into and they have very little practical way of improving their situation because they do not make enough money and receive no charitable or government funded help to alleviate their circumstances.

Mrs. Pardiggle has an aggressive and condescending

attitude toward the family. They have explained to her that they get no benefit from her presence, or her Bible readings, but she insists that they do not know what is good for them, and that *she* does. She is like a “moral policeman” because, instead of sympathizing with or trying to help the family in some practical way, she rebukes them for their poverty, which does nothing to improve their situation.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

☞ ‘How much of this indecision of character,’ Mr Jarndyce said to me, ‘is chargeable on that incomprehensible heap of uncertainty and procrastination on which he has been thrown from his birth, I don’t pretend to say; but that Chancery, among its other sins, is responsible for some of it, I can plainly see. It has engendered or confirmed in him a habit of putting off—and trusting to this, that, and the other chance, without knowing what chance—and dismissing everything as unsettled, uncertain, and confused.’

**Related Characters:** Mr. Jarndyce (speaker), Esther Summerson, Richard Carstone

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 143

### Explanation and Analysis

Richard must decide on a career to make his living, but he is reluctant to pick one and has an undisciplined attitude. Mr. Jarndyce complains to Esther privately that this is partly due to Richard’s position as a ward of the Chancery court. Mr. Jarndyce can see that Richard is a thoroughly indecisive person who is optimistic about the future. However, Richard’s hopes for the future are not founded on anything tangible—like a career which he plans to work hard at so that he can reap the rewards—but focus on dreams and delusions, such as the idea that Jarndyce and Jarndyce will be settled and that Richard will receive a large inheritance and will never have to work.

Mr. Jarndyce feels that this is not Richard’s fault because Richard has been born into this lawsuit, which was started by his relatives several generations back, and it is all he has ever known. Richard is still underage and is, therefore, a ward of the court, so much of his identity and experience is built around waiting for a verdict in this lawsuit. As Mr. Jarndyce predicts, this does not bode well for Richard’s future, and he ends up entangled in the lawsuit and ruined as he waits for a large pay out which will never come. Mr. Jarndyce here, laments the evils of the Chancery system and the damage that it does across families which is

inherited by each new generation.

## Chapter 15 Quotes

☞ We were looking at one another, and at these two children, when there came into the room a very little girl, childish in figure but shrewd and older-looking in the face—pretty-faced too—wearing a womanly sort of bonnet much too large for her, and drying her bare arms on a womanly sort of apron. Her fingers were white and wrinkled with washing, and the soap-suds were yet smoking which she wiped off her arms. But for this, she might have been a child, playing at washing, and imitating a poor working-woman with a quick observation of the truth.

**Related Characters:** Esther Summerson (speaker), Neckett, Emma, Tom, Charley, Ada Clare, Mr. Skimpole, Mr. Jarndyce

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 180

### Explanation and Analysis

When Mr. Skimpole tells Mr. Jarndyce that the man who tried to arrest him for debt, Neckett, has died and left three orphaned children behind, Mr. Jarndyce, Esther, Ada, and Mr. Skimpole go to visit the children and find the two younger children left alone. Mr. Jarndyce and the others are shocked to find Tom and Emma, who are both very young, left by themselves throughout the day. However, this is explained when the eldest, Charley, returns and it is clear from her dress that she goes out to work to provide for her two younger siblings. Dickens was firmly opposed to child labor and campaigned throughout his life for governmental reforms to ban children from the workforce. In this passage, Dickens emphasizes how unnatural it is for Charley to do an adult woman’s job when he draws attention to the large size of the clothes compared to her small child’s frame.

Dickens also draws attention to the fact that children should not have to work and should be left to play. His image of a young child pretending to do laundry, contrasted with a real child who has spent the whole day really doing laundry for money, suggests that Charley, like so many Victorian children who went out to work, is being let down by society and is missing out on her childhood as a result.

## Chapter 16 Quotes

☞ What connection can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard step? What connection can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together! Jo sweeps his crossing all day long, unconscious of the link, if any link there be. He sums up his mental condition, when asked a question, by replying that he ‘don’t know nothink.’

**Related Characters:** Jo (speaker), Lady Dedlock, Sir Leicester Dedlock

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 189

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Dickens suggests that there is a connection, although it is hard to distinguish on the surface, between Sir Leicester Dedlock, in his mansion in Lincolnshire, and Jo, the homeless urchin, who sweeps the streets in London. The connection between Jo and Sir Leicester Dedlock in *Bleak House* is their relationship with Lady Dedlock, who is Sir Leicester Dedlock’s wife. Lady Dedlock comes to see Jo in disguise and asks him to show her the burial ground where Captain Hawdon, who was her lover when she was young and with whom she had an illegitimate child, is buried. Lady Dedlock knows that Jo knew Captain Hawdon because he was asked for information at the inquest into the Captain’s death. The ironic thing about Jo’s involvement in this mystery is that Jo “knows nothink,” both in the sense that he has no education and that he cannot guess who Lady Dedlock is or what she wants with Captain Hawdon.

Dickens suggests that, although Sir Leicester Dedlock, who is extremely noble and aristocratic, would never suspect there could be a link between himself and Jo, a link, in fact, exists. Throughout the novel, characters are often connected in strange and unfathomable ways. This emphasizes people’s common humanity, regardless of class, and implies that Sir Leicester is no better than Jo simply because he is wealthy, powerful, and educated.

☞ Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As, on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever, and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years—though born expressly to do it.

**Related Characters:** Jo

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 189

**Explanation and Analysis**

Here, Dickens describes a fictional London slum, known as “Tom-all-Alone’s,” where Jo the urchin lives. Slums were considered a pressing social problem in Victorian London. They were areas of housing in the city which were crudely and quickly constructed to house the vast numbers of people who relocated to industrial centers from the countryside for work during the Industrial Revolution. They were notorious for being overcrowded, unsanitary, poorly ventilated, and structurally unsafe. Dickens uses the word “tumbling” to suggest that the buildings are haphazardly piled on top of each other, just as the tenants are haphazardly piled within. It also refers to the frequent structural collapses that took place and killed many people in the slums of London.

People who live in the slums have lice and live among human waste and “maggots.” Victorian social reformers were concerned about infectious diseases which spread from poor areas into areas where the middle-class and the rich lived. This would have been recognized as a topical issue by Dickens’s audience, and appetite for proper sanitation of water and the prevention of disease only grew among the public throughout the 19th century. Dickens uses *Bleak House* to draw attention to these social problems and to suggest that, although politicians may mean well, and talk zealously about social reform, the problems in slums and among the poor are too numerous and severe to be easily solved.

## Chapter 20 Quotes

☝☝ Mr Guppy suspects everybody who enters on the occupation of a stool in Kenge and Carboy's office, of entertaining, as a matter of course, sinister designs upon him. He is clear that every such person wants to depose him. If he be ever asked how, why, when, or wherefore, he shuts up one eye and shakes his head. On the strength of these profound views, he in the most ingenious manner takes infinite pains to counterplot, when there is no plot; and plays the deepest games of chess without any adversary.

**Related Characters:** Richard Carstone, Mr. Guppy

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 235-236

### Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Guppy is a clerk in the legal office Kenge and Carboy's. He is very arrogant and believes that his position—as a minor clerk in a large legal office—is one that everyone around him is jealous of and wishes to steal from him. Mr. Guppy is a comic and satirical character throughout the novel and represents middle-class social climbers who, Dickens suggests, go to great lengths for very modest social advancements. Mr. Guppy likes to appear secretive and important and, therefore, when he is asked why he thinks people are trying to steal his job, he will not explicitly say. This implies that his job is far more important and mysterious than it really is.

Mr. Guppy is very imaginative and believes that he has social and professional enemies everywhere. It is implied that he is always plotting and scheming about how to get one over on other people, but this has more to do with him than the people around him, to whom he is largely insignificant. Mr. Guppy's social paranoia is a type of obsession, and this ties into the theme of obsession and delusion which runs through the novel. Mr. Guppy is deluded because he believes that he is more socially relevant than he really is and obsessive because he dedicates a great deal of time to thwarting his enemies, who do not really exist.

## Chapter 21 Quotes

☝☝ Everything that Mr. Smallweed's grandfather ever put away in his mind was a grub at first, and is a grub at last. In all his life he has never bred a single butterfly. The father of this pleasant grandfather, of the neighborhood of Mount Pleasant, was a horny-skinned, two-legged, money-getting species of spider, who spun webs to catch unwary flies, and retired into holes until they were entrapped. The name of this old pagan's God was Compound Interest.

**Related Characters:** Judy Smallweed, Bart Smallweed, Mrs. Smallweed, Mr. Smallweed

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 248

### Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Smallweed is a greedy, miserly man who comes from a long line of accountants and debt collectors. It is implied that greed is hereditary in the Smallweed family and that Mr. Smallweed is a lot like his own grandfather, just as Bart and Judy are very much like him. The Smallweed family does not care about being high minded or developing their ideas. Their thoughts are described like insects, or “grubs,” because they are earthy and materialistic and focus only on money. They do not care at all about lofty moral ideas, which Dickens describes as “butterflies.” This implies that they are extremely corrupt and are obsessed with wealth and material accumulation; traits which were considered unpleasant or vulgar in the 19th century.

It is ironic that the area they live in is called Mount Pleasant because they are such an unpleasant family. Mr. Smallweed's father was also like *his* father and is also compared to an insect. He is described as a spider because he leant money and then collected the debts with extra compound interest. This image implies that he tricked his clients, and lured them into his metaphorical web, which he sat at the center of and reaped the rewards from.

## Chapter 28 Quotes

☝☝ Service, however (with a few limited reservations; genteel but not profitable), they may not do, being of the Dedlock dignity. So they visit their richer cousins, and get into debt when they can, and live but shabbily when they can't, and find—the women no husbands, and the men no wives—and ride in borrowed carriages, and sit at feasts that are never of their own making, and so go through high life. The rich family sum has been divided by so many figures, and they are the something over that nobody knows what to do with.

**Related Characters:** Bob Stables, Volumnia Dedlock, Sir Leicester Dedlock

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 335

### Explanation and Analysis

Sir Leicester Dedlock has many cousins and relations who have not inherited large portions of wealth and, therefore, rely on central figures of the Dedlock line, like Sir Leicester himself, to keep them afloat. These Dedlock relative cannot do “service,” or, in other words, work for their money, because they are Dedlocks in name if not in fortune. This demonstrates the power of social connections in this period and highlights the idea that class was based on birth and social status rather than earned wealth, which was gradually becoming more accessible to the middle and lower classes through new trade and manufacturing jobs.

The Dedlock relations are described as parasitic. They live off their wealthy relations because of their connection to the family name and borrow money to maintain noble lifestyles when they do not have a noble income. Dickens suggests that this is an inevitable problem in large noble families and in societies in which prestige is based on noble connections and connections of birth. The Dedlock line, although extremely wealthy, is not infinitely wealthy and cannot provide for all these relatives who refuse to work and who are basically idle drains on their families, friends, and on society.

## Chapter 30 Quotes

☝☝ One other singularity was, that nobody with a mission—except Mr Quale, whose mission, as I think I have formerly said, was to be in ecstasies with everybody’s mission—cared at all for anybody’s mission. Mrs Pardiggle being as clear that the only one infallible course was her course of pouncing upon the poor, and applying benevolence to them like a strait-waistcoat; as Miss Wisk was that the only practical thing for the world was the emancipation of Woman from the thraldom of her Tyrant, Man. Mrs Jellyby, all the while, sat smiling at the limited vision that could see anything but Borriboola-Gha.

**Related Characters:** Esther Summerson (speaker), Mr. Quale, Mrs. Pardiggle, Mrs. Jellyby, Ada Clare, Prince Turveydrop, Caddy Jellyby

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 362

### Explanation and Analysis

Caddy Jellyby marries her fiancé, Prince, and Mrs. Jellyby and several of her philanthropic friends attend the wedding. Esther observes that, although the philanthropists all claim to be passionate about social causes, they do not seem to consider anybody’s cause but their own important. This suggests that, although they claim to care about society, the philanthropists are selfish and are only interested in getting their point across and *appearing* philanthropic, rather than learning about society from a different perspective. Mr. Quale exemplifies this type of fashionable philanthropy—which is, really, all for show—because he socializes with philanthropists so that he can be *seen* to be involved but does not actually participate in any philanthropic or charitable work on his own.

In this passage, Dickens satirizes the idea that social problems have easily identifiable or singular causes. While Miss Wisk believes that women’s emancipation is the central cause of social ills, Mrs. Jellyby believes the key lies in colonial efforts abroad. It is ironic that Mrs. Jellyby feels that Miss Wisk’s view is “limited,” as clearly both perspectives are limited and unrealistic. Dickens implies that social problems have complex and multifaceted causes and the answer does not lie in obsessively championing one solution but in understanding society as a whole and in listening to and responding to the experience of others—something which, ironically, the philanthropists in the novel do not do.

## Chapter 35 Quotes

☝☝ What should I have suffered, if I had had to write to him, and tell him that the poor face he had known as mine was quite gone from me, and that I freely released him from his bondage to one whom he had never seen!

**Related Characters:** Esther Summerson (speaker), Mr. Jarndyce, Jo, Mr. Woodcourt

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 429

### Explanation and Analysis

Esther is secretly in love with Mr. Woodcourt, but after catching the smallpox, which left her face severely scarred,

she is relieved that they are not engaged so that he does not have to see her face. Prior to this point, Esther has clearly noticed that Mr. Woodcourt finds her attractive. She is very insecure, however, and does not believe that he is interested in her personality but only in her looks. This suggests that she believes his attachment to her is shallow and struggles to believe that people could love her deeply and regardless of how she looks, as she longs to be loved.

The novel implies that Esther's insecurity stems from her childhood. Her aunt and godmother, Miss Barbary, was cruel and abusive towards Esther and told her that she was an unlovable and disgraced child because she was illegitimate. Esther, therefore, expects rejection from the people she cares about and feels that, if she had been engaged to Mr. Woodcourt, she would have written to him and ended their engagement to pre-empt his rejection of her when he returned home and saw that her good looks had vanished. Esther underestimates Mr. Woodcourt, however, and the strength of his feelings for her. He loves her for who she is and not only for her looks and marries her before the novel's end.

## Chapter 36 Quotes

☹️ Even in the thinking of her endurance, she drew her habitual air of proud indifference about her like a veil, though she soon cast it off again.

'I must keep this secret, if by any means it can be kept, not wholly for myself. I have a husband, wretched and dishonoring creature that I am!'

**Related Characters:** Lady Dedlock, Esther Summerson (speaker), Captain Hawdon / Nemo, Sir Leicester Dedlock

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 436

### Explanation and Analysis

When Esther meets Lady Dedlock at Chesney Wold and learns that the woman is her mother, Lady Dedlock explains that she can never see Esther again and must keep her secret for the sake of her husband, Sir Leicester. It will clearly be a struggle, or an "endurance," for Lady Dedlock to keep away from her daughter, and keep her secret, now that she knows that Esther exists and did not die at birth, as Lady Dedlock had been told. Esther notices that Lady Dedlock is accustomed to keeping her secret and maintaining a cold, indifferent face for the world, and that it is now almost automatic for her. Lady Dedlock has used her haughtiness

and her pride to keep people at a distance and prevent them from prying into her past.

Still, she is clearly a woman who has suffered greatly and who feels ashamed of herself and her past. She feels that she has wronged Sir Leicester, because she has married him in spite of her secret and has always kept her past from him. Having a child out of wedlock was considered disgraceful for women during the 19th century, and most noble men would not consider marriage with a woman who had an incident like this lurking in her past. Lady Dedlock clearly cares about her husband, as she is prepared to suffer in silent agony rather than disgrace him.

☹️ 'I dread one person very much:  
'An enemy?'

'Not a friend. One who is too passionless to be either. He is Sir Leicester Dedlock's lawyer; mechanically faithful without attachment, and very jealous of the profit, privilege, and reputation of being master of the mysteries of great houses.'

**Related Characters:** Esther Summerson, Lady Dedlock (speaker), Captain Hawdon / Nemo, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Mr. Tulkinghorn

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 437

### Explanation and Analysis

When Esther asks Lady Dedlock if her secret is safe or if anyone knows that she is really Esther's mother, Lady Dedlock replies that she is afraid that Mr. Tulkinghorn suspects or will find out. Esther assumes that Mr. Tulkinghorn hates Lady Dedlock because she is afraid of him. However, Lady Dedlock is more afraid of Mr. Tulkinghorn because he does *not* hate her. He is totally indifferent to her and does not even view her as a person who is worth caring about. She describes him as "passionless," and this is frightening because it implies that Mr. Tulkinghorn is very good at controlling his emotions and will never make a mistake or reveal any weakness.

He does not wish to destroy Lady Dedlock for any personal reason but because he delights in having power over others and because he is interested in the "profit" and "privilege" that this power brings. This suggests that, even if Lady Dedlock begged him not to reveal her secret, she would be

unable to awaken any sympathy in him because Mr. Tulkinghorn does not care about other people but only about himself. His knowledge of Lady Dedlock's secret will also give him power over Sir Leicester Dedlock, Lady Dedlock's husband, who is the "master" of a "great house" and, Mr. Tulkinghorn assumes, will want this scandal covered up.

“I am resolved. I have long outbidden folly with folly, pride with pride, scorn with scorn, insolence with insolence, and have outlived many vanities with many more. I will outlive this danger, and outdie it, if I can. It has closed around me, almost as awfully as if these woods of Chesney Wold had closed around the house; but my course through it is the same. I have but one: I can have but one.”

**Related Characters:** Lady Dedlock (speaker), Captain Hawdon / Nemo, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Esther Summerson

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 437-438

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lady Dedlock explains that she will keep her secret, as she has done for so many years under intense public scrutiny, and that, if she has to, she will die rather than allow the public to make her a figure of scorn. Lady Dedlock is a very determined and very proud individual. She will never allow herself to show weakness publicly and is committed to maintaining her reputation as a woman who is indifferent to public opinion. Although she is highly regarded in fashionable circles, Lady Dedlock, truly despises fashionable society. She views it as shallow and proud and has pretended to be this way herself in order to rise to the top of it and, therefore, conquer it.

Lady Dedlock knows that she is capable and can survive intense grief. She has lived through what she believed was the death of her child—she was told by her sister that Esther died at birth—and has lived with the guilt of her secret, the fact that she had an illegitimate child, her whole life. Her suggestion that she will “outdie” the scandal if her secret gets out foreshadows Lady Dedlock's death when Esther's parentage is finally made public. Although Lady Dedlock has a position of social privilege as the wife of an aristocrat, she is caged by her reputation, which must remain intact for her to maintain her position; therefore, the

trees of her husband's stately home feel like the bars of a cage to her.

“The way was paved here, like the terrace overhead, and my footsteps from being noiseless made an echoing sound upon the flags. Stopping to look at nothing, but seeing all I did see as I went, I was passing quickly on, and in a few moments should have passed the lighted window, when my echoing footsteps brought it suddenly into my mind that there was a dreadful truth in the legend of the Ghost's Walk; that it was I, who was to bring calamity upon the stately house; and that my warning feet were haunting it even then.”

**Related Characters:** Esther Summerson (speaker), Sir Leicester Dedlock, Lady Dedlock

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 440

### Explanation and Analysis

After the revelation that Lady Dedlock is her mother, Esther walks in the grounds of Chesney Wold and accidentally ends up on the Ghost's Walk, the terrace which is believed to be haunted by the wife of a Dedlock ancestor, whose footsteps foreshadow the demise of the Dedlock line. Esther's presence on the Ghost's Walk foreshadows the demise of the Dedlock line because she is Lady Dedlock's illegitimate child, who Lady Dedlock gave birth to before her marriage to Sir Leicester Dedlock. The legend of the Ghost's Walk refers to the story of a Dedlock ancestor whose unhappy wife threatened to walk the terrace as a spirit until the Dedlock name was disgraced. Although Lady Dedlock is not a Dedlock by blood, she has married into the line and taken Sir Leicester's name. Her disgrace, if her secret gets out, will also be Sir Leicester's as it will suggest that he had a lapse of judgement when he married her and that he, too, has destroyed his own lineage.

Esther is familiar with both the legend and with her own parentage and recognizes that, although the story of the ghost may not literally be true, there is a “dreadful truth” to the idea that someone who threatens the Dedlock line will walk on the terrace and that their footsteps will echo there. Esther, it seems, is the presence that haunts the Dedlock line and threatens its downfall, because her existence threatens to ruin Lady Dedlock's reputation.

## Chapter 37 Quotes

“ I never shall forget those two seated side by side in the lantern’s light; Richard, all flush and fire and laughter, with the reins in his hand; Mr. Vholes, quite still, black-gloved, and buttoned up, looking at him as if he were looking at his prey and charming it. I have before me the whole picture of the warm dark night, the summer lightning, the dusty track of road closed in by hedgerows and high trees, the gaunt pale horse with his ears pricked up, and the driving away at speed to Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

**Related Characters:** Esther Summerson (speaker), Mr. Skimpole, Ada Clare, Richard Carstone, Mr. Vholes

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 457

**Explanation and Analysis**

While Richard visits Esther and Ada one afternoon, his lawyer, Mr. Vholes, arrives and persuades him to return to London, claiming that there has been a new development in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, the lawsuit which Richard has decided to pursue. Mr. Vholes is described as vampiric, and Dickens uses imagery associated with Gothic novels to suggest that Mr. Vholes lures Richard away from the friends who genuinely care about him and towards the lawsuit which will ultimately kill him. The images of “lantern light” and “lightning” are commonly found in Gothic novels and Mr. Vholes’s dress, which is all black and “buttoned up,” is reminiscent of an undertaker. This suggests that Mr. Vholes leads Richard to his death. However, he takes no responsibility for this and Richard literally drives the coach, which rushes him towards his own destruction.

The “gaunt, pale horse” is also a reference to Richard’s impending death, which comes not long after this incident. In the Book of Revelation in the Bible, the personification of Death rides a “pale horse.” The description of Mr. Vholes “charming his prey” also ties into vampire mythology and the idea that vampires seduce their victims before sucking their blood, as Mr. Vholes persuades Richard to trust his judgement.

## Chapter 39 Quotes

“ The one great principle of the English law is, to make business for itself. There is no other principle distinctly, certainly, and consistently maintained through all its narrow turnings. Viewed by this light it becomes a coherent scheme, and not the monstrous make the laity are apt to think it. Let them but once clearly perceive that its grand principle is to make business for itself at their expense, and surely they will cease to grumble.

**Related Characters:** Mr. Vholes

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 467

**Explanation and Analysis**

Dickens implies that the only reason “English law,” and, in particular, the court of Chancery, exists is to make money for the lawyers and clerks who work in it, at the expense of the clients who pay for legal proceedings. This passage refers to Mr. Vholes and the idea that, in his pursuit of legal fees, Mr. Vholes will lead clients on and suggest that their cases will pay very lucratively even if this is not true. Dickens implies that this type of law is not really interested in pursuing justice for its clients, who may legally be owed the property or inheritance which is at stake in the suit. Instead, the lawyers who operate in Chancery are only interested in generating legal fees. This suggests that, even when a case is complete, the lawyers will deliberately overcomplicate and prolong it so that they will not lose a paying client.

“The laity,” or the general public, consider this a “make,” or con, because the lawyers wield all the power in this situation. The masses are not educated in the law and, therefore, cannot challenge their lawyer’s judgement. If they hope to see a settlement in their case, they must trust their lawyers, and this puts hopeful plaintiffs at risk of exploitation. Dickens is being sarcastic when he suggests that people will “cease to grumble” when they know this because, of course, there legitimate reason to complain about this institution.

“ Mr. Vholes gives it a rap, and it sounds as hollow as a coffin. Not to Richard, though. There is encouragement in the sound to him. Perhaps Mr. Vholes knows there is.

**Related Characters:** Richard Carstone, Mr. Vholes

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 471

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Richard is in Mr. Vholes' office to discuss the progress of his case. Mr. Vholes has been defending Jarndyce and Jarndyce to Richard as a worthwhile cause, and defending his own role as Richard's lawyer, to convince Richard that it is worth his time, energy, and money to continue with the case. The reader knows that this is not true because, when Mr. Vholes hits the table to emphasize this point, the desk "sounds hollow as a coffin." This suggests that Mr. Vholes' promises are empty and that his encouragement will lead to death for Richard.

Richard is delusional, however, and has been driven mad by his participation in the court case. He sees encouragement in everything because he is desperate for his efforts in the lawsuit to succeed and has invested everything in this enterprise. He has gone into debt and destroyed his career in the hope that his fortune will be made when he receives his inheritance from Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Mr. Vholes is aware of Richard's desperation, but instead of discouraging him from going any further, he knows that his hopeful words will drive Richard to pursue the case, which benefits Mr. Vholes as Richard continues to pay him for his work.

☛ They gradually discern the elder Mr Smallweed, seated in his chair upon the brink of a well or grave of waste paper; the virtuous Judy groping therein, like a female sexton; and Mrs Smallweed on the level ground in the vicinity, snowed up in a heap of paper fragments, print and manuscript, which would appear to be the accumulated compliments that have been sent flying at her in the course of the day. The whole party, Small included, are blackened with dust and dirt, and present a fiendish appearance not relieved by the general aspect of the room.

**Related Characters:** Krook, Judy Smallweed, Mr. Smallweed, Mr. Jobling / Mr. Weevle, Mr. Guppy

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 477

### Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling visit Krook's shop after the old man's death and find the Smallweeds, who have inherited the property, rooting through the piles of legal paper which

the shop contains. The hole in which the papers are contained is referred to as a "grave" because it contains documents from Chancery cases which are considered finished, or dead. Judy is sarcastically described as "virtuous" because she is not a pleasant character and is, in fact, a self-serving and miserly woman. Her portrayal as a "female sexton" refers back to the idea that the hole is a "grave" because a sexton is a church official who performs funerals, and, it is implied, that Judy rakes up things from the past which have previously been buried.

The Smallweeds are associated with demons, or hellish creatures, because they are "blackened" with dirt. Hell, in the Christian tradition, is typically believed to be hot and to "blacken" its dwellers with soot. The "fiendish" appearance of the Smallweeds supports this idea that they are creatures who torment people and who rake up old crimes and secrets, which are present in the legal documents, in order to punish those who have committed crimes or hidden them. The Smallweeds are also fiendish because they do this for their own personal gain (they hope to use the documents for blackmail and extortion) and not for any higher purpose.

## Chapter 54 Quotes

☛☛ Heaven knows what he sees. The green, green woods of Chesney Wold, the noble house, the pictures of his forefathers, strangers defacing them, officers of police coarsely handling his most precious heirlooms, thousands of fingers pointing at him, thousands of faces sneering at him. But if such shadows flit before him to his bewilderment, there is one other shadow which he can name with something like distinctness even yet, and to which alone he addresses his tearing of his white hair, and his extended arms.

**Related Characters:** Mr. Bucket, Mademoiselle Hortense, Mr. Tulkinghorn, Lady Dedlock, Sir Leicester Dedlock

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 629-630

### Explanation and Analysis

Sir Leicester has just learned about Lady Dedlock's secret (about her illegitimate child) from Mr. Bucket, the private investigator. Sir Leicester is from a noble family and his wife's secret will likely bring scandal and disgrace to this prodigious line. Dickens uses images from Sir Leicester's

past—the “green woods of Chesney Wold”—with potential images of his future: the destruction of his ancient home and public shame, humiliation, and scandal.

However, Dickens suggests that these fates, which he can only vaguely imagine, are nothing compared to the loss of his wife, who has run away because her secret has been revealed. Sir Leicester’s shock is focused primarily on the fact that Lady Dedlock concealed this secret from him; this is why he metaphorically “extends his arms” to her and tears

his hair when he pictures her. Sir Leicester has truly loved and idolized his wife and the knowledge of her shame genuinely surprises him. However, the extent to which Sir Leicester loves Lady Dedlock is clear in the fact that she is more important to him than the potential destruction of his ancient family line. This is demonstrated when, shortly after this, Sir Leicester forgives Lady Dedlock everything and asks Mr. Bucket to bring her home.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1

It is autumn in London, and the city is wet, cold, and wrapped in **fog**. The Court of Chancery is in session and Jarndyce and Jarndyce, a famous lawsuit which has dragged on for several generations, is brought before the Lord Chancellor. The atmosphere is dreary, the lawyers doze, and the court is almost empty except for a “mad old woman,” who visits the court daily, and a poor man from Shropshire who is determined to attract the Chancellor’s attention but who, every day, is ignored.

The lawsuit, Jarndyce and Jarndyce, has gone on for so long that no one understands what it was originally about. Families have split over it, lawyers have grown rich from it, most of the members of the Jarndyce family (including “old Tom Jarndyce,” who shot himself outside the court) are long dead, and the case is *still* not resolved. It has become a joke among the lawyers and clerks and has ruined or corrupted almost everyone involved with it.

In the dingy, **foggy** courtroom, the Lord Chancellor listens to a lawyer named Mr. Tangle expound upon the case. Bored, the Lord Chancellor dismisses Mr. Tangle and asks him about the “two young people” he met with earlier that day. Their grandfather is dead, Mr. Tangle tells him—something about “brains.” A man at the back of the room announces loudly that “a cousin” will stand in for their grandfather. The Lord Chancellor seems to agree to this, asks that the young people be sent to his private rooms. As the Lord Chancellor sweeps out, the man from Shropshire once again tries, unsuccessfully, to get his attention.

## CHAPTER 2

Lady Dedlock, a woman who is well known in fashionable circles, has returned to London after a brief stay in her husband’s country **house** in Lincolnshire. She has returned to the city to escape the constant rain and the tedium of the country, and her unexpected return is discussed all over town by the “fashionable intelligence.”

*Fog and smog were common in London in the 19th century because of pollution and industrial use of coal. The Court of Chancery was a specific legal department which dealt with suits about property, equity, and inheritance separate from other legal affairs. It was notorious for meandering lawsuits which were never resolved. It often paid out very little to its plaintiffs and rarely gave people the inheritance they were owed. It was widely considered to be desperately in need of reform during Dickens’s lifetime.*



*It was not uncommon for Chancery suits to drag on over long periods of time and for their original aims to be lost among the many claims by different relatives and lawyers. Dickens suggests that this type of suit brings out the worst in people and turns them against each other as they compete over inheritance. Tom Jarndyce’s madness, which the suspense of his Chancery suit causes, foreshadows Richard’s madness later in the novel.*



*Mr. Tangle’s name signifies his purpose, which is to confuse the case in order to prolong it. The grandfather that the passage refers to is Tom Jarndyce, who has shot himself in the head. This passage also shows that individual plaintiffs, like the man from Shropshire, have little power against the large, bureaucratic institutions like Chancery.*



*Lady Dedlock is a celebrity among the London social elite and, therefore, her every move is subject to scrutiny. The “fashionable intelligence” are essentially a well-dressed rumor mill—fashionable people who make it their business to know other people’s business.*



Lady Dedlock is the wife of Sir Leicester Dedlock, a baronet from a stately line of English nobles. He is extremely proud of his lineage, which stretches back for generations, and believes wholeheartedly that society would collapse without the stabilizing presence of the Dedlocks. He is a proud and vigorous man, always ready to defend himself and his family's honor, but he is also rather bigoted and stubborn.

Sir Leicester is 20 years older than Lady Dedlock and married for love rather than status; it is rumored that Lady Dedlock is not from a noble family. Sir Leicester is extremely attentive to his wife, and although Lady Dedlock was not born into the gentry, her beauty, poise, and determination helped her to surpass her aristocratic peers and rise to the top of the fashionable world.

Although her youthful beauty has faded, Lady Dedlock is still an attractive woman, but she seems bored and disinterested in life. She has climbed as far as she can in social circles and seems to have no more outlets for her ambition. She will spend a few days in town, in Sir Leicester's lavish London house, before she departs for Paris.

On this damp, **foggy** afternoon in London, one of the servants—who looks like “Mercury in powder”—shows a reserved-looking gentleman into the room where Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock are seated together. His name is Mr. Tulkinghorn, and he knows all the personal secrets kept by the nobility. He is a lawyer for the rich, and it is his profession to draw up their legal papers. He is inscrutable, however, and it is impossible to tell what he is thinking. Sir Leicester approves of Mr. Tulkinghorn and finds him a thoroughly respectable man.

Like many people of her class, Lady Dedlock believes that she is very mysterious and that the people who serve and cater to her know nothing about her inner life. However, the maids, the servants, and even the shopkeepers who sell jewelry and furniture to fashionable ladies and gentlemen know a great deal about the secret desires and weaknesses of the gentry. They know how to use these weaknesses to their advantage, and it is entirely possible, therefore, that Mr. Tulkinghorn is also privy to Lady Dedlock's weaknesses and desires.

*The Dedlocks are an ancient land-holding family in Britain. Before the 19th century, and the advent of the Industrial Revolution and birth of modern capitalism, inheritance of land and wealth was the main source of social power. This meant that vast amounts of wealth, power, and property tended to be kept within single families rather than distributed among the populace. Sir Leicester is a representative of this and reflects the supreme confidence and entitlement of 19th-century landowners.*



*Lady Dedlock is Sir Leicester's weakness, and he overlooks her lack of noble connections for love—something which was unusual among the aristocracy of this period, but which became more common as class barriers gradually broke down. Lady Dedlock has achieved her social status through sheer determination, which reflects Dickens's belief in individual industry as a means of crossing social boundaries.*



*Lady Dedlock is intelligent and ambitious. She has achieved her status by maintaining a noble façade and this suggests that the fashionable world and the aristocracy are easily taken in and are willing to those who appear to be like them.*



*Sir Leicester's servants are old fashioned and wear the powdered wigs of the previous century, suggesting that Sir Leicester is conservative and dislikes social change. Mr. Tulkinghorn is an extremely powerful man because he is privy to the private, legal affairs of rich and powerful people. His inscrutability contributes to his professional respectability as he maintains a passionless façade that masks the secrets he knows and consequently encourages his clients to confide in him even more.*



*Although Lady Dedlock and other members of her class wish to maintain the idea that they are elite and totally separate from the lower classes, this is clearly not the case. They are subject the same predictable weaknesses, emotions, and desires as anyone else. Salespeople know how to manipulate their wealthy patrons and to exploit their desires in order to sell them products, while servants know their masters well because they attend to them privately in very intimate settings.*



Mr. Tulkinghorn has come to update Lady Dedlock on Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which was in court that day and in which Lady Dedlock is a plaintiff (someone who is potentially owed money in a legal dispute). Lady Dedlock is bored with the suit and doesn't expect it will ever be resolved. Sir Leicester, however, feels that Chancery is an essential and respectable institution and that the length of the trials *must* reflect how important these cases really are. Furthermore, Sir Leicester feels that old institutions like Chancery support social order, and that if people like him did not respect Chancery, the lower classes may get unsettled and start to rebel, "like Wat Tyler."

*Sir Leicester is complacent about the political establishment and does not feel that it needs to justify its own existence. He trusts that if it operates a certain way, it's because it genuinely needs to operate that way. This highlights Sir Leicester's conservatism and social privilege; he does not feel that society needs to change because he reaps many benefits from the way it currently operates. He is afraid of social revolt for this reason. Wat Tyler is thought to be the leader of a famous peasant's revolt in the medieval period.*



Mr. Tulkinghorn begins to read the day's report to Lady Dedlock but pauses when she asks him who wrote the document he's reading from. Mr. Tulkinghorn replies that it is written in the standard legal style and Lady Dedlock requests that he go on. A few moments later, however, she turns faint and asks a servant to take her to her room. Sir Leicester is surprised as Lady Dedlock is rarely ill but asks Mr. Tulkinghorn to continue reading once Lady Dedlock has retired to bed.

*This passage implies that Lady Dedlock recognizes the handwriting on the document—hence her curiosity about who penned the document and her subsequent outburst—but tries to conceal this from Mr. Tulkinghorn and her husband.*



## CHAPTER 3

Esther Summerson is a timid, friendless girl and confides all her secrets in her favorite doll, who is her only companion. She is raised, like a child in a fairy tale, by her godmother, Miss Barbary, who is a "good, good woman." Her godmother is so good, however, that she is repulsed by corruption in others and, therefore, is very stern and severe. Esther does not love her godmother and always feels guilty about this. Esther never knew her parents, and her godmother never mentions them. She feels different and separate from the other girls at her school and is not allowed to go out or to attend parties.

*Dickens was very influenced by fairy tales, which were popular as children's stories during the 19th century. It is typical of Dickens's style to use an orphan as a main character, as orphans are often the central figures in fairy tales. Esther's emphatic belief that her godmother is "good" is ironic because her godmother is clearly judgmental and intolerant. It seems that Esther is taken in by her godmother's external façade of goodness.*



Despite this, Esther is an affectionate child and longs to be accepted. One year, on her birthday, her godmother tells her that it would be better if Esther had never been born, and that she was her mother's "disgrace." Esther is distraught and begs her godmother to tell her about her mother, but Esther's godmother coldly refuses and only replies that one day the punishment for her mother's sins will come back to haunt Esther.

*Esther's past is mysterious, but it is implied that her mother was a "fallen woman." It was considered extremely shameful for women to fall pregnant outside of marriage during this period. It was a common belief in the 19th century that children could be born corrupt and would inherit their parent's sins.*



Not long after this, Esther comes home from school to find her godmother in discussion with a smart-looking gentleman. Her godmother introduces Esther to this man, who is friendly and seems to know something about her. Esther's godmother dismisses her, however, before she can find out more.

*It is insinuated that this man has something to do with Esther's past or knows something of her origins, but Esther's godmother is keen on keeping the girl isolated and in the dark.*



One night, two years later, Esther is reading the Bible to her godmother when she comes to the passage in which Jesus defends an adulterous woman. As she reads the words, “Ye without sin cast the first stone,” her godmother starts up, cries out, and then falls to the floor. She is paralyzed, her face set in a permanent scowl, and she dies soon after.

*This passage in the Bible cautions people against judging others, because no one is perfect or without sin. It is implied that Esther’s godmother has a stroke because she feels guilty about judging Esther’s mother. Her permanent scowl reflects her personality in life and serves as a punishment for her intolerant behavior.*



On the day after Miss Barbary’s funeral, the smart-looking man visits the **house** again and asks to see Esther. The man introduces himself as Mr. Kenge and seems to know Mrs. Rachael, Miss Barbary’s maid. Mr. Kenge reveals that Miss Barbary was really Esther’s aunt, and that he has come to discuss what will happen to Esther now that her aunt is dead. Miss Barbary has left Esther no money, and Mrs. Rachael, who has always disliked Esther, will not continue to care for her. Mr. Kenge asks Mrs. Rachael if Esther has ever heard of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and Mrs. Rachael replies that she has not. Mr. Kenge is shocked and tells Mrs. Rachael that he has come to renew an offer that Miss Barbary previously refused.

*It is confirmed that Mr. Kenge does know something of Esther’s past, and now that her godmother is dead, he can reveal these details to her. This suggests that lawyers have a great deal of power over people because they are privy to their secrets. As she has inherited nothing from her aunt, Esther is socially powerless and has no way to provide for herself.*



Mr. Kenge informs Esther that a gentleman named Mr. Jarndyce will provide for her education, and that she is to be sent away to school. Although Esther is grateful, she is apprehensive to leave the only place she has ever known. A coach arrives that afternoon to take Esther to Reading, and Mrs. Rachael coldly dismisses her. Mrs. Rachael remains behind in Miss Barbary’s **house**, which has been left to her.

*Mr. Jarndyce’s act is an example of private philanthropy. This type of patronage is a common feature of many Victorian novels. As Miss Barbary has left Mrs. Rachael her property, Mrs. Rachael can now transcend her social position as a servant and can retire as a wealthy lady.*



In the coach, Esther finds herself alone with a gentleman who is wrapped up in furs and who ignores her to stare out of the window. She is still crying because of her abrupt departure and is surprised when the man begins to talk to her. He has a loud, booming voice, which makes him sound angry, but Esther thinks he has kind eyes. He offers her a pie and a piece of cake, and when she declines, he tosses them out of the window and then gets out of coach a few stops later.

*Although the man appears aggressive, he is kind to Esther. However, he reacts extremely to her rejection of his kindness, suggesting that he is a volatile man.*



Esther arrives at Greenleaf school. She settles in quickly and is very happy there. She is educated in order to become a governess and grows very fond of the other girls she boards with. After six years at Greenleaf, Esther receives a letter on her birthday from Mr. Kenge. This letter informs her that she will be removed from the school and sent to the **house** of her guardian, Mr. Jarndyce, where she will become the companion of a young ward in the lawsuit Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

*Middle class women in the 19th century could train to be teachers or governesses, a career path that provided them with an education and a meager income. This education was usually supported by philanthropists, who used their incomes to set up charitable schools like Greenleaf.*



Esther is delighted at the prospect of this new position, and although she is sad to leave her companions at Greenleaf, she sets out in good spirits in a coach bound for London. She is startled by the thick **fog** when she arrives and remarks on this to the young legal clerk who greets her and takes her in another carriage to Mr. Kenge's office. The young clerk offers her a mirror, in case she should want to examine herself before meeting the Lord Chancellor.

Esther waits in Mr. Kenge's office for several hours. At last, Mr. Kenge appears and takes her to another room where a young man and a young woman are also waiting. Mr. Kenge introduces Esther to the young woman, Ada Clare, who is to be her companion, and Esther is struck by Ada's beauty. The young man's name is Richard Carstone. The three are left to wait in the room together and Esther learns that they are both orphans and both under the age of 20. Mr. Kenge returns after a short while and shows them into the next office, where the Lord Chancellor is waiting.

The Lord Chancellor greets them all politely and tells them that they will be under the care of a Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak **House** while they wait for the outcome of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Ada and Richard, it appears, are related, but Esther is from another family and is only hired to be a companion to Ada. The Lord Chancellor approves of all this and dismisses the three young people.

They are left outside the court to wait for Mr. Kenge. Richard asks Ada and Esther if either of them know where they are going, and they reply, to each other's surprise and amusement, that neither of them have any idea. While they discuss this, a strange looking old woman approaches them and announces graciously that she is delighted to meet the "wards of Jarndyce." Richard whispers to the others that the woman is mad, but the old woman hears him and says that she has not always been mad.

The woman, whose name is Miss Flite, tells them that when she first came to court, to "hear a judgement" on her case, she was a young and optimistic woman who believed in hope and beauty. Even though she is old now, she still "expects a judgement" any day and feels that it may even fall on Judgement Day. Ada is a little spooked, and the three young people politely disentangle themselves from the old lady when Mr. Kenge returns. He tells them that she is a harmless soul as he leads them away, and the old lady blesses them.

*As she has come from the countryside, Esther is surprised by the smog and pollution of the city, which she has never experienced before.*



*Ada and Richard are too young to receive their inheritance even if the case is resolved. Since they are orphans, they have no family to provide for them and are automatically placed under the care of the court, where their inheritance will hypothetically come from. Ada and Richard's position demonstrates that young people are basically powerless in the face of large-scale institutions, which have large amounts of power over their futures.*



*As the novel will later reveal, Ada and Richard are cousins from different sides of the Jarndyce family, which split over the original will and the distribution of the Jarndyce property.*



*As orphans in the care of the court, the three young people are totally powerless in this situation, and their fate is in the hands of complete strangers.*



*Miss Flite has become so consumed with her court case that her whole world now revolves around it. She, therefore, believes that the resolution of her case is not only a personal matter which affects her, but something of towering importance which affects the whole of humanity, such as Judgement Day. Miss Flite, in her madness and obsession, is an early warning to the characters not to become embroiled in a Chancery suit.*



## CHAPTER 4

Mr. Kenge informs the party that they will spend the night at the home of a woman called Mrs. Jellyby, a friend of Mr. Jarndyce's, who is working on a project in Africa where she encourages the local people to grow coffee beans. They set out in a carriage with Mr. Guppy, the clerk who met Esther earlier that day. He is talkative and jokes a little with Esther as he drives them to Mrs. Jellyby's residence in Thavies Inn.

As they arrive at Mrs. Jellyby's, they notice a crowd of people around a young boy whose head is stuck in some railings. Esther jumps out of the carriage, hurries to the boy's aid, and manages to free him. The boy rushes away unharmed, and Esther, Ada, and Richard enter Mrs. Jellyby's home.

They are astonished to find that the **house** is filled with children, and that it is very dirty inside. The children are unwashed and badly dressed, and one child falls down the stairs, completely unnoticed by the servant who shows them up to Mrs. Jellyby's room. Mrs. Jellyby greets the group placidly, and Esther notices that Mrs. Jellyby has a strange, faraway look in her eye and that her dress is very shabby.

In the corner of Mrs. Jellyby's room, a young girl, who is covered in ink, looks up from her work. Mrs. Jellyby dreamily tells her guests that all her time is dedicated to her work in Africa, and that she is constantly writing letters to the government and to private philanthropists to raise funds for the project. The girl in the corner is Caddy, Mrs. Jellyby's eldest daughter. The small boy who fell down the stairs comes in crying, and Mrs. Jellyby tries to send him away. Esther finally picks up the child, whose name is Peepy, and he falls asleep in her arms.

Mrs. Jellyby asks Caddy to show Esther and Ada to their room, and Esther carries Peepy up with her and puts him to sleep on her bed. Their rooms are in shambles, and Ada first cries and then laughs when she sees them. All the other children follow them upstairs and Esther entertains them with fairy tales. Dinner that evening is an equally chaotic affair, and Esther is surprised to learn that the strange, silent man who sits at the table is Mr. Jellyby. Another philanthropist, Mr. Quale, also joins them and talks enthusiastically about Mrs. Jellyby's work.

*The 19th century was a period of colonial expansion in Britain, and the British government claimed several territories in Africa. There were attempts to set up trade links with these nations, and many Victorian philanthropists and social campaigners took this duty on themselves, as Mrs. Jellyby does with her research into the coffee trade.*



*The boy has clearly not been supervised because no one has stopped him putting his head through the fence. This passage also speaks to Esther's unwavering kindness and willingness to put others before herself.*



*Mrs. Jellyby's house, brimming with neglected children, represents the poor in Britain, who Dickens felt were neglected because of the government's exploits abroad. A large amount of government and taxpayer's money was spent on colonial enterprise, which Dickens considers a waste of money. Mrs. Jellyby represents the careless British government, which was often depicted as a mother in the 19th century, who ignores her own children and squanders her energies abroad.*



*Mrs. Jellyby is so consumed with her mission that she comes across as slightly mad and given no thought to her dress or appearance, let alone to the well-being of her children. She has no time to care for herself or her children and does not think it is strange that her daughter is covered with ink and has clearly been writing for several hours. Peepy is also neglected and appears unaccustomed to love and care, which is what Esther provides him with.*



*Mrs. Jellyby's house is uncared for and chaotic, and this reflects her negligent attitude towards her home and her internal chaos caused by her obsession with Africa. In the Victorian era, fairy tales were considered both educational and entertaining for children; Mrs. Jellyby's children have never heard them because their educations have been neglected.*



When Esther and Ada return to their room that night, they begin to talk about their guardian, Mr. Jarndyce. Neither of them has ever met Mr. Jarndyce, and Richard has only seen him once in his life. They all received the same letter, however, inviting them to London as a means of repairing “some of the damage” that Jarndyce and Jarndyce has caused.

Ada falls asleep quickly, but Esther lies awake. Caddy comes to the door to say goodnight, so Esther invites her in. Caddy bitterly announces that she despises Africa. She hates her mother’s causes and complains that, even though Ada is an orphan, she has been educated and taught to do many useful things, whereas Caddy only knows how to write letters. Esther listens politely and Caddy says that the **house** is a disgrace. Esther can see that Caddy is very upset and allows her to sit and talk. Eventually Caddy falls asleep with her head in Esther’s lap, while Esther sleeps in her chair and dreams of Bleak House.

## CHAPTER 5

The next morning, Caddy suggests that the group go for a walk before Mrs. Jellyby gets up. Esther washes Peepy, who has appeared in her room very early, and puts him back to bed. Caddy, Ada, Esther, and Richard then set out into London. Caddy is extremely bad tempered and walks very quickly so that she and Esther leave the others behind. Caddy complains that her parents are fools and that she hates Mr. Quale. Esther tries to remind her that they are her parents, but Caddy says that Mrs. Jellyby does not do her duty as a mother.

Richard and Ada catch up with Esther and Caddy. Richard announces that they have inadvertently walked back to Chancery, and that the same mad old lady who they saw last night is there again. She welcomes them and invites them to come and see her lodgings. She leads them away from the court into a dingy street and stops outside a shop with the written sign “Krook, Rag and Bottle Warehouse.” Miss Flite leads them into the shop, which is cluttered with junk and heaps of old law papers. There is also an advertisement for a copy writer named “Nemo,” who performs written work.

*Although Mr. Jarndyce is not responsible for the court case, he seems to feel some guilt for the orphans’ involvement in it. As the novel will continue to show, he views the Chancery proceedings as a bad influence which may negatively affect his charges’ lives.*



*Mrs. Jellyby’s philanthropy is misguided because it has caused Caddy to hate social causes rather than encouraged her to participate in them. Caddy resents her mother’s obsession with Africa because it has led her to neglect the family and ignore their immediate needs. Although Caddy, unlike Esther, has had a mother, she feels as though she is not much better off than an orphan. True to character, Esther is very kind to Caddy and unquestioningly offers her sympathy. She also puts her own needs aside and defers going to bed so that Caddy can lean on her.*



*Mrs. Jellyby’s obsession has turned Caddy against all philanthropists and philanthropy. This is unfortunate, Dickens suggests, because now, if Caddy comes across a worthwhile social cause, she will be less likely to engage with it. Dickens valued social responsibility highly and felt that people should be encouraged to engage with charitable causes.*



*This passage suggests that Chancery draws the characters in with a force of its own and that it is a dangerous force. This foreshadows Richard’s madness, when he will be draw to the court again and again because of its seductive influence. Krook’s shop is a parody of the court, which also contains a confusing mass of legal papers. “Nemo” is Latin for “no one.”*



At the back of the shop, they meet the proprietor, Krook, a scrawny old man whose breath seems to come out of his mouth like steam. He asks them if they are selling anything while Miss Flite unlocks a door, which leads to flats above. She cordially begs them to follow her, and Krook urges them to do as she says. Miss Flite tells them that Krook is her landlord and that he is a little mad. Krook tells them that his nickname is the “Lord Chancellor,” and that his shop is “Chancery.” A skinny, grey cat jumps down from a nearby shelf and Krook sets her on a piece of sack, which she tears to pieces with her claws. Krook remarks to Richard that the cat will do this to anything he tells her to.

Miss Flite unlocks the door to the stairs and tells Krook to go away; she is entertaining the wards of Jarndyce. Krook seems impressed by this and recognizes Richard’s surname. He remarks that there was also a Clare, a Barbary, and a Dedlock involved in the suit and tells them that Tom Jarndyce spent a good deal of time in the shop. Krook says that Tom went slowly mad while he waited for a verdict and explains, to their horror, that one day Tom Jarndyce shot himself in the public house opposite the shop. Esther notices that Ada and Richard have gone pale, and is glad that she has nothing to do with the lawsuit.

Miss Flite lives on the top floor in a very bare room that looks out at the courthouse. In her window, she keeps several cages, each of which contains a **bird**, and, she explains, she will release these birds when there is a judgement in her suit. She says that many of the birds have died in the time that the suit has gone on, and she wonders if she, too, will die before the case comes to an end. She cannot allow the birds to sing much, she says, because Krook’s cat wants to kill them and waits outside the door like a “wolf.”

The bells in the square outside begin to ring, and Miss Flite cries out that she must attend the court. They all hurry downstairs, but the old lady stops them on the way and makes them creep past a dark door where, she says, a law writer lives. She tells them that he is rumored to have sold his soul to the devil as she leads them back down into Krook’s shop.

They pass Krook as they move back through the shop and see him poring over some papers. He has written a capital letter in chalk upon the wall. He stops Esther as she goes by and asks her to read what he has written. She tells him the letter is a “J” and watches as he spells out the rest of the word, which is “Jarndyce.” Krook then writes the words “Bleak **House**,” and Esther reads them to him. Krook seems pleased and leers at Esther as she hurries from the shop. He continues to watch them as they bid goodbye to Miss Flite.

*Krook’s mouth seems to steam both because of the gin he consumes, which gives off fumes, and the because Krook is like a dragon who guards his treasure. As the novel will unveil, the law papers that populate his shop contain the secrets to many unresolved cases. At the same time, Krook’s nickname is ironic and suggests that Krook presides over a heap of junk, just as the Lord Chancellor does, and suggests that most Chancery suits are worthless and a waste of time. Krook tries to threaten Richard with the cat, suggesting that he will be a sinister, shadowy figure throughout the novel.*



*Part of Miss Flite’s delusion is that she is a very important figure in the court, which comprises her whole world. Jarndyce and Jarndyce is such a famous case that Miss Flite reveres Richard and Ada because they are like celebrities in the legal world. Krook hints at Lady Dedlock’s connection to Miss Barbary, although none of the characters understand this connection yet. It is also ironic that Esther thinks she has nothing to do with the suit, as this will soon prove not to be the case.*



*Even Miss Flite’s view from her window is of the courthouse; it is literally the only thing she sees and the only place she goes. The birds symbolize people, like Miss Flite herself, who have been trapped by the Chancery system and who wait, suspended, for a verdict on their case so that they can move on with their lives. The description of the cat like a “wolf” is another reference to fairy tales.*



*The idea that the law writer—later revealed as Nemo—has sold his soul suggests that he has suffered some disgrace or “fallen from grace” in some way.*



*Krook cannot read but makes desperate attempts to learn so that he can unlock the secrets of the many legal papers that his shop contains. Krook is hungry for secrets that he can use against the rich and powerful. In this passage, the writing on the wall is both literal and figurative: it is evident that many of the papers Krook has pertain to Jarndyce and Jarndyce and to the property up for dispute, such as Bleak House.*



Richard comments on their strange experience and laments what great trouble Jarndyce and Jarndyce has caused. Ada agrees and thinks that it is sad that she was born into a feud, in which she is the enemy of so many unknown relatives. Richard says cheerily that he will never allow the case to make *them* enemies. Caddy squeezes Esther's arm knowingly as they make their way back to Mrs. Jellyby's. From here, Esther, Richard, and Ada take a carriage to Bleak **House**.

*Richard and Ada have inherited the lawsuit through no fault of their own and are pitted against relatives who they have never met or wronged in any way. Dickens uses this idea to suggest that it is wrong to punish children for their parents' sins, and that children are not responsible for the circumstances they are born into. This is a common theme in Victorian literature and reflects changes in the rigid class systems of the period, in which someone's fate was decided by their birth. On another note, it seems that Caddy believes that Richard and Ada will begin to fall in love.*



## CHAPTER 6

Esther, Richard, and Ada make their way to Mr. Jarndyce's **house**, but a passing coach stops their carriage, and the driver hands each orphan a note. The notes are from Mr. Jarndyce and express his desire that they should meet as "old friends" and refrain from mentioning any favors that he has done them. Richard and Ada have both heard that Mr. Jarndyce cannot bear to be thanked for anything. As night approaches, they draw near to the house and all three of them begin to feel nervous. Their fears are dispelled, however, when they arrive: Mr. Jarndyce greets the young people warmly and ushers them into a room with a large fire.

*Mr. Jarndyce is deeply embarrassed whenever he is thanked. As the novel will continue to show, Mr. Jarndyce views kind acts as something which it is his responsibility to perform—as a man with a great deal of wealth and privilege—and, therefore, does not expect anything in return for his goodness.*



They are all careful not to thank Mr. Jarndyce as they make themselves at home and Esther realizes privately that Mr. Jarndyce is the man she met in the coach when she was removed from her godmother's house. He asks them what they thought of Mrs. Jellyby and seems upset (he complains agitatedly that the "wind is in the east") when they tell him about the state of Mrs. Jellyby's house. He is relieved, however, when he hears how kind Esther was to the children and says that maybe the wind is in the north after all.

*Esther realizes that Mr. Jarndyce oversaw her removal from her aunt's house to make sure that she was alright, rather than to be thanked for his good deed. This suggests that Mr. Jarndyce genuinely cares about those he helps and does not seek personal gratification. Mr. Jarndyce says that the "wind is in the east" when his peace of mind is disturbed in some way, usually when he hears about someone suffering.*



Mr. Jarndyce shows the young people to their rooms, and they find that the **house** is rambling and strangely proportioned, and that the furniture comes from all over the world and is terribly mismatched. Esther and Ada have rooms next to each other, joined by a beautiful sitting room. Mr. Jarndyce explains that dinner will be served shortly, and that they will be joined for dinner by his only other guest, a man named Mr. Skimpole, who is an artist and a man who is as entertaining and charming as a "child." Esther and Ada get ready for dinner and a maid brings Esther the housekeeping keys, of which she will now be the mistress.

*Unlike Mrs. Jellyby's chaotic house, Mr. Jarndyce's house reflects his pleasant, eclectic, and slightly eccentric personality. Although Esther is not a servant, she has a certain level of responsibility in the house and acts as a type of housekeeper. This also reflects her personality, as she always takes care of everyone else.*



Downstairs at dinner, they are introduced to Mr. Skimpole. Esther is struck by his appearance and thinks that he looks like a young man who has aged prematurely. Mr. Skimpole tells them that he has no head for anything practical and has never been able to maintain a stable income. He has been lucky, he explains, to have good friends who help him survive. However, he does not think he wants very much from life but to be left alone to enjoy art and beauty, of which he is very fond. Mr. Skimpole laments that he has no discipline but feels that this benefits his friends and acquaintances as it allows them to practice their generosity when they help him. Mr. Jarndyce wholeheartedly agrees.

After dinner, the group retires to the drawing room. Ada sings and plays the piano, and Esther and Mr. Jarndyce notice that Richard watches Ada closely. After a while, Esther observes that Richard and Mr. Skimpole have left the room, and she is surprised when a maid comes to fetch her and tells her that Mr. Skimpole “has been took.” Esther assumes that Mr. Skimpole has been taken ill and rushes to his room. However, when she gets there, she finds that he has, in fact, been placed under arrest for debt.

Richard, who is with Mr. Skimpole, seems extremely concerned, but Mr. Skimpole is unruffled and cannot understand what the fuss is about. The man who has come to arrest him sits on the sofa in the room. Esther asks Mr. Skimpole how much he owes, and he tells her that it is a trifling amount. Although he says that Mr. Jarndyce would happily pay it, he would rather give someone new the opportunity to help him. Esther asks what will happen to Mr. Skimpole if he cannot pay, and the man replies that he will go to prison or to “Coavinses,” a **house** for those in debt.

Mr. Skimpole suggests that, since Richard is involved in Jarndyce and Jarndyce and may be owed a great deal of money, he can cover the debt, but the debt collector is not impressed with this idea. Esther agrees to pay for Mr. Skimpole with the small amount of money that she has saved for emergencies. The debt collector prepares to leave, but Mr. Skimpole detains him and asks him if he ever thinks about the people he arrests or the fact that he takes away their freedom. The debt collector answers firmly that he does not and takes his leave.

*Although Mr. Skimpole says he does not want much from life, this is not true. In fact, he wants to live luxuriously; he does not want to work, and wants to enjoy art and culture at his leisure. Mr. Skimpole knows that the façade of helplessness will encourage kind-hearted people, like Mr. Jarndyce, to help him, and he takes advantage of this while pretending that he does them a favor.*



*Richard and Ada are clearly attracted to each other and the people around them notice. This passage also continues to build out Mr. Skimpole's character; he truly is broke, as evidenced by the authorities who have come to collect him, but it's likely that he anticipates that someone will swoop in and save him.*



*Mr. Skimpole's flippant attitude surrounding his arrest and possible stint at a debtor's prison suggests he is in debt very often. He considers the debt a “trifling amount” because he knows that someone else will pay it for him and, therefore, it does not affect him. It may, however, be a significant amount to whoever is forced to pay it on Mr. Skimpole's behalf.*



*Mr. Skimpole takes for granted that Richard is wealthy because of his connection to the court case. This is not the case, however, and all of Richard's supposed inheritance is tied up in Chancery. The amount, which Mr. Skimpole considers small, is all Esther has managed to save for herself throughout her life. That she's willing to spend it on a person she has only just met further emphasizes how Esther puts other people before herself. Meanwhile, Mr. Skimpole's question to the debt collector is totally impractical. The debt collector must work for money and does not waste time thinking about those he arrests. Mr. Skimpole acts as though his arrest is not justified but really it is his responsibility to stay out of debt.*



The group returns to the drawing room, and Esther is amazed at the ease with which Mr. Skimpole slips back into his entertaining manner. When Mr. Skimpole has gone to bed, however, Mr. Jarndyce takes Esther and Richard aside and is very concerned that they have given Mr. Skimpole money. He tells them that Mr. Skimpole is always in debt. Mr. Jarndyce is irritated that Mr. Skimpole has taken money from Esther, but she placates him by suggesting that Mr. Skimpole does not understand money and does not know what he is doing. Relieved, Mr. Jarndyce wishes them goodnight and Esther, still dazed by her change in circumstances, retires to bed.

*Mr. Skimpole is irresponsible and does not think about the giant favor Esther has done him. Esther gives Mr. Skimpole the benefit of the doubt to protect Mr. Jarndyce's feelings. She does not wish to make him feel foolish for always helping Mr. Skimpole, or to shatter his illusions about his friend. Esther is amazed by her good fortune and, therefore, hardly thinks about the money. She is an extremely grateful character throughout, and Dickens clearly feels this is a virtue.*



## CHAPTER 7

In Lincolnshire, at Chesney Wold, the rain continues to fall. The **house** is quiet—Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock are in Paris—and the horses in the stables and the dogs in the kennels dream of summer days. Mrs. Rouncewell, the housekeeper, looks out at the rain from her sitting room at Chesney Wold. Mrs. Rouncewell knows the house better than anyone. She is a widow and has worked at Chesney Wold for 50 years, since the time of Sir Leicester's father.

*Mrs. Rouncewell is very familiar with the Dedlock family as she has served two generations of them. Dickens includes the perspective of animals in this sequence, which suggests that the fates of all creatures are intertwined and important, regardless of social standing.*



Sir Leicester is a good master and relies on Mrs. Rouncewell to manage all household affairs. Mrs. Rouncewell has two sons, but one joined the army when he was young and was never heard from again. Mrs. Rouncewell still grieves for him and has a habit of wringing her hands whenever he is mentioned. Her other son could have become Sir Leicester's steward at Chesney Wold, but he became an Ironmonger instead, growing very successful in the Iron business in the north of England. Sir Leicester is rather perturbed by this and thinks that this son of Mrs. Rouncewell's may be of a revolutionary disposition.

*Servants have a very personal relationship with their masters and are often privy to their master's secrets and weaknesses. In Victorian society, reputation was extremely important, and trusted servants like Mrs. Rouncewell were considered valuable assets. Sir Leicester dislikes the young Mr. Rouncewell's success because he is a "self-made" man who has not relied on inherited wealth or patronage to make his fortune but has earned it in trade. Conservative men like Sir Leicester were wary of these changes in society which gradually became more common as the century progressed.*



Mrs. Rouncewell's grandson, Watt, is currently down at Chesney Wold for an apprenticeship and is in the sitting room with his grandmother. Watt asks Mrs. Rouncewell about one of the maids in the **house**, who he thinks is extremely pretty, and Mrs. Rouncewell tells him that her name is Rosa.

*Watt is Mr. Rouncewell's son and is clearly romantically interested in Rosa. That Watt is at Chesney Wold for an apprenticeship suggests that he will be a self-made man like his father, forced to support himself through a trade rather than an inheritance.*



As they sit and talk, a carriage appears outside. Rosa enters the room and tells them that two men have come to view the **house**. Mrs. Rouncewell is indignant because the house is not currently open to visitors, but Rosa insists that the men are very interested to see it and gives Mrs. Rouncewell a card from one of the men, which reads “Mr. Guppy.” Mrs. Rouncewell complains that she does not know who this is but agrees to show them the house. Rosa and Watt accompany them.

Mr. Guppy and his friend find the tour very boring, but Mr. Guppy suddenly livens up when he sees a **portrait** of Lady Dedlock. He seems very struck by the picture and remarks that he knows the lady’s face. When they pass the Ghost’s Walk terrace, Watt asks Rosa to tell them the ghost story attached to the house, but Mrs. Rouncewell says that it is not given out to visitors.

When Mr. Guppy and his friend have gone, however, Mrs. Rouncewell relates the story to Rosa and Watt. During the English Civil War, when Parliament rebels overthrew Charles I, Sir Morbury Dedlock married a woman whose brother joined the revolution against the crown. The lady’s brother was killed during the skirmish and, after this, she swore revenge on the Dedlock family.

On the night before a famous battle, Sir Morbury caught his wife in the stables attempting to lame his horse, which he would ride into battle the next day. He managed to stop her, but the horse kicked her, and she walked with a limp for the rest of her days. She never recovered from this injury, but she took to walking on the terrace, brooding silently over her fate. One day, her husband saw her collapse on the terrace and tried to carry her inside. She refused his aid, however, and, before she died, promised that she would walk the terrace until the Dedlock line was punished. When that day came, she said, they would hear her footsteps approach.

Mrs. Rouncewell concludes that the lady’s steps are still heard today whenever there is a death or an illness in the family. Watt suggests that it comes when “disgrace” occurs, but Mrs. Rouncewell says it is not possible to disgrace the Dedlock name. She says that Lady Dedlock often hears the footsteps on the Ghost’s Walk, and that the sound is impossible to block out. She asks Watt to wind up a clock in the corner of the room and takes Rosa to the window. The rain is still audible over the chimes of the clock.

*It was common for people to visit rich people’s houses as heritage sites and as a form of entertainment in the Victorian era. Although manufacturing and trade were the most effective ways to make money in this period, the noble, land owning classes were aspirational because they were the upper classes and had inherited their wealth rather than earned it. Earned wealth was considered vulgar.*



*Over the course of the novel, it becomes clear that Mr. Guppy is a social climber and wishes to ingratiate himself with the upper classes and to gain social power. This perhaps speaks to why he came to tour Sir Leicester’s house, hoping to be surrounded by the trappings of wealth even temporarily. That he thinks Lady Dedlock’s face is also significant, though it’s unclear if he’s perhaps seen Lady Dedlock before and that’s why she looks familiar, or if he knows someone who looks like her.*



*The English Civil War was fought between the Royalists, who supported the King, and the Parliamentarians, who sought to overthrow the monarchy. As a noble, land-owning family, the Dedlocks are naturally Royalists and dislike revolution and social change.*



*Sir Morbury’s wife tries to sabotage her husband’s ability to find and, therefore, weaken the Royalist forces. The story of the Ghost’s Walk foreshadows Lady Dedlock’s eventual downfall. The sound of footsteps refers both to the ghostly footsteps from the story and the sound of the rain that falls on the porch. It is, therefore, ambiguous whether the ghost story is true or not.*



*Mrs. Rouncewell comes from an older generation than Watt and thus has great faith in the nobility, who she has always served. This generational difference shows how British society changed rapidly in the 19th century, and that while class was still extremely important, the rigid barriers between classes began to break down and to be less accepted.*



## CHAPTER 8

The next morning, at Mr. Jarndyce's **house**, Esther explores the grounds and begins her housekeeping duties. After breakfast—at which, she notes, Mr. Skimpole is extremely cheerful—she is invited into Mr. Jarndyce's study, which he calls “the Growler.” Mr. Jarndyce tells Esther the history of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. He despises the lawsuit and feels that the lawyers have confused the dispute beyond recognition. It was once about a will, but the original suit has long been forgotten.

Mr. Jarndyce explains that Tom Jarndyce was his uncle, and that the **house** once belonged to him. When Tom Jarndyce tried to solve the lawsuit himself, he gradually went mad and the house fell into disrepair. Mr. Jarndyce renovated the house when he inherited it and knows that there is some more property in the suit that has not yet been bequeathed to anybody. Mr. Jarndyce says that this is the mark of Chancery, which can be seen on houses all over the country.

Esther remarks on what a transformation Mr. Jarndyce has produced in Bleak **House**, and Mr. Jarndyce happily tells Esther that he has great faith in her ability as a housekeeper. He then changes the conversation to Richard's career prospects and Esther suggests that they should ask Richard what profession he would prefer. Mr. Jarndyce agrees that this is a wonderful idea. He then asks Esther if there is anything she wishes to know about her past, but she tells him that she has great faith in his honesty and that, if she needed to know anything, he would tell her. This gratifies Mr. Jarndyce very much.

Ada and Esther settle into their new life at Bleak **House**. They spend time with a circle of philanthropists—acquaintances of Mr. Jarndyce—and are amazed at the energy which these people expend on their many charitable causes. One of the most active of these is a Mrs. Pardiggle, who visits the house one day with her five young boys. She proudly introduces her children to Esther and Ada and lists the many charitable causes that they are already involved in. Esther does not think it does them any good, however, because the children seem extremely miserable.

*Mr. Jarndyce distrusts the Chancery system and thinks it is an outdated institution which does more harm than good. He also distrusts lawyers and feel that it is in their own interests to make the case more complicated than it already is in order to run up legal fees and advance their own careers.*



*Tom Jarndyce's madness foreshadows Richard's madness when he, too, tries to solve the lawsuit. Chancery suits, which drag on for a long time, leave many properties unoccupied and disused, as no one can inherit or buy them.*



*Throughout the novel, houses serve as a symbol for the owner's inner life. Thus, Tom Jarndyce's house fell into disrepair when he did, consumed with his single-minded obsession with the case. Mr. Jarndyce restores order and hope in the household because he is a sensible man and is not drawn into madness or obsession by the Chancery suit. Although Richard stands to potentially inherit some wealth, he currently has no wealth of his own and, therefore, must find a career as a way of earning it.*



*Philanthropy was very popular among the middle classes in the Victorian period. Although Mrs. Pardiggle's children surpass their social responsibilities, under her guidance, it does not make them happy. Dickens is critical of charitable efforts which are forced on people, either by government or through social pressure. He feels that this leads to resentment and breeds bad intentions towards those that need help rather than encouraging genuine social concern and productive action. Mrs. Pardiggle's unhappy children hark back to Mrs. Jellyby's neglected children.*



Mrs. Pardiggle explains that her children accompany her on all her visits and philanthropic missions, for which she has inexhaustible energy. She tells Esther and Ada that she expects them to join her on one of these visits and, despite Esther's timid protests, insists that they should accompany her to the house of a brickmaker and his family, whom she visits often. Feeling that they have little choice, Esther and Ada reluctantly prepare to go with her.

On the way to the brickmaker's house, Esther attempts to talk to Mrs. Pardiggle's children. The eldest child bitterly complains that his mother gives him pocket money but forces him to spend it all on charitable causes. Esther decides, after spending some time with them, that they are some of the most unhappy and constrained young people she has ever met. She is relieved when they finally arrive at the cottage.

The **house** is on a very dirty street. Several poor people watch them as they pass and make disparaging comments about "gentlefolks" who should "mind their own business." Mrs. Pardiggle barges into the brickmaker's house, where they find a man stretched out on the floor and several other family members squeezed into a dingy and cramped little room. The family seem disappointed to see her, but Mrs. Pardiggle announces that she will never tire of visiting them and that she will continue to return.

The brickmaker, who is lying on the floor, impatiently tells Mrs. Pardiggle that it doesn't matter how often she comes to lecture him, because he is not going to change his ways. There is no point, he says, in washing his children, because the water they have is so contaminated, and he drinks gin because the water is not safe to drink. He has not read the book she left him because it is like a story for children. Nonetheless, Mrs. Pardiggle determinedly whips out her Bible and begins to read to the family.

*Although Mrs. Pardiggle's efforts are misguided, she is an impressively active and forceful woman. Esther and Ada feel pressured into accompanying Mrs. Pardiggle, just as her children are pressured into giving to charity.*



*Mrs. Pardiggle's gift of pocket money is undermined by the fact that she chooses how the children spend it. This mirrors Victorian philanthropic efforts, which often advocated giving money to the poor while forcing them to spend it on activities which the middle class sanctioned and deemed beneficial. Dickens suggests that allowing people financial freedom is better than false or forced charity, which really seeks to control the people that it claims to help.*



*Although Mrs. Pardiggle claims to help the poor, the poor people she encounters openly dislike her and resent her interference. Mrs. Pardiggle is intrusive and does not respect the family's privacy. She has obviously visited them many times and, it is clear, that she does not actually help the family when she visits. She does not respect their feelings, however, and insists she will return.*



*Mrs. Pardiggle's advice to the brickmaker—to wash his children and to stop drinking gin—ignore the reasons that he does these things in the first place. She patronizes the family and treats them like children who do not know what is best for themselves and who bring their situation upon themselves. The brickmaker insists that he knows that his lifestyle is bad, but he does not live like this on purpose, and changing his behavior will not change his circumstances. With the brickmaker as a mouthpiece, Dickens sends a powerful message about poverty to his middle-class audience.*



Ada and Esther feel terribly uncomfortable and the family takes no notice of Mrs. Pardiggle, who reads in their midst. Eventually she breaks off and prepares to leave, although she says she will be back. Esther and Ada do not follow her, however, and instead approach a woman who sits by the fire and holds a baby in her arms. When they get closer, they see that the baby is dead. Ada bursts into tears at the sight and falls to her knees beside the mother. The woman is shocked by this but soon begins to cry with Ada, who takes hold of her hand.

Esther takes the baby from the woman and covers it gently with a handkerchief. Another woman enters the hut and rushes to the mother, addressing her as “Jenny.” Esther and Ada leave the women to their grief. On the way home they meet Richard. He is so upset by their tale, and the sight of Ada’s tears, that he agrees to return with them the next day and take some essentials to the poor, deprived family.

They set out the next morning. On the way, they pass a public **house**, in which they see the brickmaker, who is very drunk. When they arrive at the house, they find Jenny’s friend at the door. She is there to comfort Jenny but periodically rushes outside to check that her husband has not come home. She is afraid he will beat her if he finds her gone. The dead child is still in the room—Jenny is asleep on the bed—but the baby’s clothes have been changed and cleaned, and Esther thinks that it looks like an angel sleeping there.

## CHAPTER 9

Life continues at Bleak **House** and Esther notices that Richard grows restless. She also notices, however, that he and Ada are especially close, even though the three of them spend most of their time as a group. Richard still has not selected a profession. Although Mr. Jarndyce writes to Richard’s relative, Sir Leicester Dedlock, asking Sir Leicester to provide an income for Richard, Sir Leicester politely declines, and Richard must find a way to make his own living.

Esther observes that Richard is an honest and generous young man, but that he is bad with money. She is very fond of him and enjoys watching him and Ada as the pair fall in love. One morning, Mr. Jarndyce receives a letter from his old friend Mr. Boythorn. The letter announces that Mr. Boythorn will come to visit and will arrive that afternoon.

*Esther and Ada feel that reading the Bible to the family will do nothing but irritate them in their already dire situation. Infant mortality was extremely high during the 19th century, especially among the impoverished. Ada’s sympathy with the woman is genuine and spontaneous. This scene humanizes the brickmaker’s family for Dickens’s audience, many of whom (like Mrs. Pardiggle) may have viewed poor people as corrupt and inferior.*



*Esther’s act here is kind and unobtrusive. It is a gesture of sympathy with the mother, while also respecting the family’s privacy and grief. Richard’s response is similarly compassionate and practical, and this suggests that what the poor really need is material help to improve their living conditions.*



*The brickmaker has kept to his word and has not given up gin. Women, especially poor women, had almost no legal protection against domestic violence in the Victorian era. Scenes of poverty are very common in Victorian novels because many Victorian writers wanted their middle-class readers to witness, and to sympathize with, the plight of the poor in their society.*



*This passage provides evidence of Richard’s unsettled and undisciplined temperament, which has never been reigned in by a stable job and will in fact be encouraged by the uncertainty of the lawsuit. Despite Sir Leicester’s great wealth, he is reluctant to help unknown relatives, making him a stark contrast to a generous soul like Mr. Jarndyce.*



*Richard is spendthrift. This does not bode well for his future, as it suggests he will not be sensible with his income once he does finally land a stable job.*



Mr. Boythorn arrives later, after some difficulty with his carriage, and Esther, Ada, and Richard find him very endearing. He is a boisterous, yet kindhearted gentleman whose aggressive personality is contradicted by the fact that he keeps a very tame bird, which climbs on him and eats food from his hand. During dinner, Mr. Boythorn gives his opinion on Jarndyce and Jarndyce—which is one of violent disapproval—and tells them about his feud with Sir Leicester Dedlock. The two men have had a fallen out because of a patch of land between Chesney Wold and Mr. Boythorn's property, which they both believe belongs to them and which Sir Leicester has tried to fence off to stop Mr. Boythorn from using.

Mr. Boythorn has great respect for Lady Dedlock, however, and will say nothing against her. Mr. Boythorn asks if they have heard anything about Jarndyce and Jarndyce and, when they say no, he says that he will write to Kenge and Carboy the next day. After dinner, Esther discusses Mr. Boythorn with Mr. Jarndyce and learns that Mr. Boythorn was once engaged to be married. However, this relationship ended, and the disappointment changed the whole course of his life.

The next day they receive word that a clerk from Kenge and Carboy will visit them that afternoon. Esther is alone in her study when Mr. Guppy is shown in. He is very smartly dressed, and Esther tells him that Mr. Boythorn is upstairs. Mr. Guppy leaves and returns sometime later, looking shaken by his meeting with Mr. Boythorn. Esther offers him a glass of wine; Mr. Guppy drinks two and then addresses himself to her.

Mr. Guppy tells Esther that he earns a good salary at Kenge and Carboy, that he owns a little **house** in a pleasant spot in London, and that he would like to marry her. Esther immediately declines, but Mr. Guppy presses her and says that he is bound to be a success if she will consent to marry him. He tells her that he has loved her ever since they first met and that he will never stop loving her despite her refusal. Esther tells him not to make a fool of himself and tries to ring for a servant. At this, Mr. Guppy agrees to go, but first makes her promise that she will never mention this incident to anyone connected with Kenge and Carboy. Esther concedes and Mr. Guppy forlornly departs.

*Mr. Boythorn's gruff exterior and generous temperament suggests that people are not always what they appear. Mr. Boythorn, like Mr. Jarndyce, dislikes the Chancery system, however, Mr. Boythorn is engaged in a property dispute of his own with Sir Leicester. That Sir Leicester has fenced off this disputed land furthers his characterization as an ungenerous man.*



*Mr. Boythorn is also involved in the lawsuit and, though he takes little interest, he takes more interest than Mr. Jarndyce and keeps in touch with his lawyers. Throughout the novel, Dickens drops clues about the central mystery surrounding Lady Dedlock to misdirect and increase suspense for the reader.*



*Esther has met Mr. Guppy before, as he was the same clerk who met her when she first arrived in London. Esther assumes that Mr. Guppy is shaken by Mr. Boythorn's ferocious manner, but the content of the meeting remains unclear.*



*Mr. Guppy assumes that Esther is interested in social prestige, like he is, and tries to persuade her to accept his proposal by telling her about his social status (his house and his profession) which he thinks she will find appealing. He is clearly very concerned about his position and reputation as he entreats Esther not to make his rejection public knowledge. Social climbers like Mr. Guppy are often figures of fun in Dickens's novel because they are shallow and want to transcend their class without earning this privilege through virtue or hard work.*



## CHAPTER 10

Mr. Snagsby owns a law stationer's shop, which stocks all sorts of office and legal supplies, in Cook's Court near Chancery. He is married to the niece of the original owner of the shop, a very thin woman with a sharp nose, and is a mild, overweight man whose wife often talks over him. He lingers in the doorway of his shop one evening, admiring the sky, and hears his wife shriek "like a shrill ghost in an unquiet grave," while she rebukes their unhappy servant, Guster.

Guster has come to the Snagsbys' from a workhouse and is a thin, unfortunate woman who is subject to seizures. When she is not ill, Guster is a hard worker and is popular with the apprentices in the shop as well as Mr. Snagsby himself. Mrs. Snagsby also appreciates Guster because she can take her anger out on her. Despite her mistress's cruelty, Guster loves her work and loves the abundance of the little shop.

Mrs. Snagsby manages the money and business side of the shop. When they gossip among themselves, the neighbors say that she is a jealous woman and that Mr. Snagsby is henpecked and should stand up to her. Mr. Snagsby, however, is a gentle and thoughtful man and is happy to let his wife handle practical affairs while he spends his time daydreaming. As he stands in the doorway, he sees a crow fly across Chancery Lane.

The crow flies towards Mr. Tulkinghorn's house in Lincoln Inn's Field. He lives in an apartment block occupied by many other lawyers and has a well-furnished and spacious residence. In his living room, a large Roman figure, who represents "Allegory," is painted on the ceiling. Mr. Tulkinghorn splits his time between this apartment and the country houses of his wealthy clients, whose secrets he knows and conscientiously keeps. It is always impossible to tell what he is thinking. He does not employ clerks to copy his documents and only gives limited information to those who do anonymous work for him.

Mr. Tulkinghorn, who is in this room, seems to come to a decision about something. He tells his manservant that he is going out and makes his way to Mr. Snagsby's. Guster fetches Mr. Snagsby, who appears with a slice of bread and butter in his hand, and he leads Mr. Tulkinghorn into a back room. Mr. Tulkinghorn wants to know who copied a piece of work, which refers to Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and which was given out by Snagsby. Mr. Snagsby checks his book and finds that it was copied by a law writer known as "Nemo," who lives nearby.

*Mr. Snagsby is a placid, content man. His wife, in contrast, is a very frazzled, stressful woman, who seems to get easily worked up about things that bother her.*



*Workhouses were the first attempt at social housing for poor people in Britain. However, workhouses were notoriously corrupt, dismal places, making servitude seem like a luxury in comparison.*



*In the 19th century, it was widely believed that men should be in charge of financial and business concerns, while women should be in charge of domestic ones. Although the neighbors assume that Mr. Snagsby dislikes this arrangement, he is quite happy to let his wife take charge of the business. Mrs. Snagsby is a very imaginative, energetic woman.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn is like the crow because he is sinister and, as the novel later reveals, dresses all in black. The "Allegory" on Mr. Tulkinghorn's ceiling both represents the mythological figure of "Allegory" and acts as an allegory throughout the novel. It points to a spot on the ground where Mr. Tulkinghorn's eventual death will take place and, therefore, is a metaphor for and a representation of Mr. Tulkinghorn's fate.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn always has a purpose when he acts, because he considers every decision so carefully, but his motives are not always obvious to others. Mr. Tulkinghorn wants to know who wrote the document that he read to Sir Leicester and which Lady Dedlock enquired about; he suspects from her reaction that she recognized the handwriting. However, Nemo ("no one" in Latin) is clearly a fake name and does not tell Mr. Tulkinghorn much about the man's identity.*



Mrs. Snagsby lurks on the stairs, eager to discover what Mr. Snagsby is up to. Mr. Snagsby tries to sign to her that Mr. Tulkinghorn is an important client. Mr. Tulkinghorn asks where he can find Nemo, and Mr. Snagsby agrees to lead him to Krook's shop, where Nemo lives. On the way, Mr. Snagsby tells Mr. Tulkinghorn that Nemo is rumored to be a strange fellow who works all night. When they arrive at the shop, Mr. Snagsby asks Mr. Tulkinghorn if he will go inside but Mr. Tulkinghorn says no, thanks Mr. Snagsby, and dismisses him.

Mr. Tulkinghorn pretends to leave the street, but then turns back and enters Krook's shop. Krook directs him to Nemo's room and warns Mr. Tulkinghorn that Nemo is a wicked man who has sold his soul to the devil. Mr. Tulkinghorn proceeds upstairs and enters Nemo's room. The air is sour inside, and Nemo lies on the bed, apparently asleep. Mr. Tulkinghorn calls his name, but Nemo does not wake up. Mr. Tulkinghorn notices the smell of opium in the air and the candle burns down and plunges the room into darkness. The windows over the bed gape in on the scene as Mr. Tulkinghorn tries to rouse the writer.

## CHAPTER 11

Krook appears behind Mr. Tulkinghorn and asks what the matter is. He goes to fetch a candle and Mr. Tulkinghorn waits for him on the stairs. When he returns and they enter the room, they discover that Nemo is dead. Krook sends Miss Flite for a doctor and two medical men return with her. One is an older, Scottish man while the other is young and dark. They confirm that Nemo is dead, and the older man departs.

Krook complains that Nemo owes him several weeks' rent. The young surgeon says that he saw Nemo when he was alive and that, although the man was poor, he had the look of someone who had once been rich and who had suffered a "fall." Krook replies that he knows nothing about the man. Mr. Tulkinghorn stands in the corner and it is impossible to tell what he thinks of these events. He does suggest, however, that they send for Mr. Snagsby, as he sometimes gave the man work.

Mr. Snagsby arrives, and Mr. Tulkinghorn asks him if he knows anything of the deceased writer, but Mr. Snagsby can only tell them that he appeared about a year ago and came to the stationers shop to look for writing work. Mrs. Snagsby, he says, took a liking to the man and insisted upon giving him work. Mr. Tulkinghorn asks Krook to look over the room for any important papers that Nemo may have kept, but Krook tells him that he cannot read.

*Mrs. Snagsby is extremely suspicious and paranoid and, therefore, always wants to know what her husband is doing in case he is plotting against her. Nemo continues to be a mysterious figure and no one in the area seems to know much about him.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn disguises his visit to Krook because he does not want Mr. Snagsby to know what he is up to, even if this information is inconsequential. He is an extremely careful man and gives nothing away unintentionally. Opium was a common recreational drug during this period. The room is given a personality—the windows like eyes—making it seem like the room itself is horrified by the squalor and destitution which Nemo lives in.*



*Nemo, it seems, has died of an opium overdose. The young doctor will later be revealed as Mr. Woodcourt, who will become a significant character as the novel unfolds.*



*Krook only thinks about money and not about the humanity of his tenants. Mr. Tulkinghorn appears unobtrusive and inscrutable, but he is really calculating and subtly manipulates the situation so that he can learn Nemo's identity from Mr. Snagsby, who he knows has dealt with the writer.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn wants Krook to look for the papers in his presence. He naturally wants any important documents for himself, but he will not risk his reputation by trying to steal them; instead, he hides his intentions in plain sight and appears to be honest and transparent.*



Mr. Tulkinghorn then directs Mr. Snagsby to inspect the room and draws his attention to an old chest which Mr. Tulkinghorn stands in front of. They search the room and the chest and find nothing of value, before Krook sends Miss Flite to fetch the beadle. Mr. Tulkinghorn leaves to go home.

*Although Mr. Tulkinghorn stands right beside the chest, he pretends that he has only just noticed it so that Mr. Snagsby will open it for him. Mr. Tulkinghorn leaves others to investigate and only watches so that he can use any information, but no responsibility can be placed upon him.*



Groups of people begin to gather in the street to find out what has happened. The neighbors gossip together and seem to enjoy the excitement. The beadle arrives and begins to conduct his investigation. The police arrive too and disperse the crowds, who begin to lose interest and drift off. The beadle concludes his work in Nemo's apartment, where the body still lies and where a coffin is now placed. No one can identify where Nemo has come from or say anything about his past.

*Just as fashionable people gossip about the Dedlocks, poor people in this street gossip about Nemo's death. This loosely connects Lady Dedlock and Nemo, who, it transpires, once knew each other. A beadle is an old-fashioned church official, reminding readers that they are in Dickens's Victorian world.*



The coroner arrives the next morning and the death is still the talk of the street. An inquest is held, which Mr. Tulkinghorn attends. A neighbor named Mrs. Piper, who has been very suspicious of Nemo because of the rumor that he sold himself to the devil, presents evidence. She tells the jury that he used to talk to a boy who sweeps the streets around Chancery and the Coroner calls for someone to fetch the boy.

*Mrs. Piper cannot really tell the court anything and has only heard superstition and rumor about the deceased.*



The boy, Jo, is summoned but cannot tell the jury anything about himself—he is an orphan with no home and no education—and cannot tell them anything about Nemo except that he was a poor, friendless man who was always kind to Jo and sometimes gave him money. The death is ruled as accidental and dismissed. As Jo leaves the court, Mr. Snagsby gives him a half-crown. That night the singers and actors of the local troupe perform a piece about the mysterious death.

*Jo has no education whatsoever and cannot express himself well. He has no knowledge about his own origins and only knows what he has experienced, a life of poverty and destitution. This was not uncommon in the 19th century, and cities like London teemed with unknown souls who had grown up anonymously in workhouses or just on the street. Mr. Snagsby is a sympathetic man and is kind to Jo because he sees that he is poor.*



At Mr. Snagsby's shop, Guster has seizures all night and keeps the household awake. Meanwhile, Nemo's body is taken to a crowded cemetery. It is a filthy, unhygienic place where people fear to go and where disease and "corruption" linger around the graves like a spirit. Only one figure approaches the grave: Jo, the street sweeper.

*Burial grounds for the poor were notoriously unhygienic and poorly maintained. These cemeteries spread disease because the dead were inadequately covered and heaped together in graves. It seems that Jo remembers Nemo and pays him this respect because Nemo has been kind to him.*



## CHAPTER 12

The weather has improved at Chesney Wold, and Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock are on their way back from Paris, where Lady Dedlock has been very bored. In the coach, Sir Leicester reads his mail and tells Lady Dedlock that Mr. Tulkinghorn has sent her a message; he says that he has something to tell her about the person whose handwriting she inquired after. Lady Dedlock seems unconcerned but says that she would like to stretch her legs and gets out to walk alongside the carriage.

They arrive in Chesney Wold the next day and are the subject of so much gossip that even the birds in the trees seem to discuss their return. Mrs. Rouncewell and Rosa greet them, and Lady Dedlock is struck by Rosa's beauty. She compliments the girl and Rosa is deeply flattered. She discusses her mistress with Mrs. Rouncewell that evening, but Mrs. Rouncewell feels that Lady Dedlock would be better looking if she was not so cold.

Lady Dedlock's maid, a Frenchwoman named Mademoiselle Hortense, is jealous of the attention that Lady Dedlock gives to Rosa. She mocks Lady Dedlock slyly when she isn't looking, while she serves the guests who have come to spend some weeks at Chesney Wold. The cheerful party of guests go out hunting in the grounds and frequent the little village church.

Although they are modern men and women, there is something old-fashioned and shallow about these guests. The men believe in nothing and yet complain that the poor are pessimistic, and the ladies want everything to be pleasant and saccharine and do not want to be troubled with challenging ideas. Lord Boodle, an eminent noble, is among them and has many conversations with Sir Leicester about how the world has changed for the worse. They complain about the political system and minutely observe the differences between politicians, such as "Foodle," "Noodle," and "Koodle."

Although the **house** is very crowded, Mr. Tulkinghorn's room is always left unoccupied because he may arrive unannounced at any moment. Lady Dedlock watches out for him from the window and seems to anticipate his arrival. Mademoiselle Hortense observes this and Lady Dedlock is irritable with her. One evening, when Lady Dedlock and Sir Leicester are on the Ghost's Walk, Mr. Tulkinghorn arrives and walks across the lawn to meet them.

*Lady Dedlock maintains an appearance of boredom and reserve so that people will not be able to guess her secrets. Although Lady Dedlock brushes off Mr. Tulkinghorn's note, it seems like it does bother her greatly, especially given her initial reaction to seeing the handwriting.*



*Rosa is dark haired and pale, like Lady Dedlock herself, so it seems that Lady Dedlock sees her as a daughter figure. Mrs. Rouncewell is more attached to Sir Leicester, who is true nobility, rather than Lady Dedlock.*



*Mademoiselle Hortense's character reflects negative French stereotypes which would have gone over well with Dickens's English audience. She is a disloyal servant and has contempt for her mistress. She compares unfavorably with loyal servants like Rosa and Mrs. Rouncewell.*



*Sir Leicester's cousins are conservative members of the nobility and come from many ancient lines. These groups rely on society remaining static so that their roles and titles are not called into question. They are non-progressive and shallow and view the poor in sentimental terms, as romantic and tragic figures, rather than as real people who may fight for changes in their circumstances. Dickens mocks politicians here; their interchangeable names reflect the idea that they are all the same, while the silly and frivolous nature of their names suggest that they are all totally ineffectual when it comes to achieving social change.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn is clearly a very important man and wields a lot of influence over Sir Leicester. Mademoiselle Hortense is sly and watches Lady Dedlock carefully, adding to the tension between the two women. The Ghost Walk signifies the ruin of the Dedlock name, which Mr. Tulkinghorn eventually helps bring about.*



Mr. Tulkinghorn discusses Sir Leicester's running feud with Mr. Boythorn, who Sir Leicester feels should be hanged for making such a nuisance of himself. Inside, Mr. Tulkinghorn tells Lady Dedlock that he has found the person whose handwriting she enquired about, but that this person is dead. He explains that the man died of a drug overdose—whether purposely or accidentally is unknown—and that he was clearly very poor but had once, perhaps, been a successful man.

*Sir Leicester hates social disturbance and feels that Mr. Boythorn is a nuisance because of his protests. Sir Leicester does not have the power to hang his neighbor, though, and the expression is hyperbolic.*



Lady Dedlock and Mr. Tulkinghorn watch each other very intensely throughout this conversation. Lady Dedlock then retires to bed. Mr. Tulkinghorn stays at Chesney Wold for some weeks. Lady Dedlock maintains her inscrutable appearance of utter boredom. Mr. Tulkinghorn remains as silent and unreadable as ever.

*Mr. Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock watch each other because they are each trying to gauge the other's reaction to this news. Neither will reveal their true motives. Lady Dedlock wishes to know what Mr. Tulkinghorn knows about her secret connection to Nemo, which has yet to be revealed. And Mr. Tulkinghorn, who does not yet know her secret, watches her reactions to see if she will accidentally give any secrets away.*



## CHAPTER 13

Meanwhile, Richard has still not decided what profession he should go into. Mr. Jarndyce feels that this is because Richard has been born into uncertainty, with his familial connection to Jarndyce and Jarndyce. When Mr. Jarndyce suggests that Richard should become a doctor, Richard agrees that he has always thought this, although he has never mentioned it before. Mr. Jarndyce is not sure that Richard has the discipline to become a surgeon, however, and invites Mr. Kenge down to discuss it with him.

*Richard has inherited the court case and, although it is not his fault, this inheritance has had a negative effect on his temperament. Richard has clearly not always wanted to become a doctor, as he has never mentioned it before. He does not really care about his profession and just goes along with whatever Mr. Jarndyce says. Mr. Jarndyce can tell this is the case but does not wish to force Richard into anything.*



Mr. Kenge agrees with Mr. Jarndyce that a doctor is a noble profession, but that it is a great deal of work. Mr. Jarndyce says that all professions require diligence and hard work. Mr. Kenge arranges for Richard to take an apprenticeship with a cousin of his in London. Mr. Jarndyce agrees to take him to the city the next week, and to take Esther and Ada along for a holiday.

*Mr. Jarndyce and Mr. Kenge suspect that if Richard is not serious about medicine, he will not put in the necessary amount of effort to be a success.*



They take an apartment in London and Esther is excited to explore the city. She is dismayed, however, to find that Mr. Guppy has seen her and that he now follows her around; he always attends the theater on the same nights that she does and stares at her all the way through performances. She notices that his dress is shabby and that he makes himself look very pitiable; she is totally at a loss as how to put him off. She does not want to tell Richard or Mr. Jarndyce because she does not want to get Mr. Guppy into trouble, but his pursuit annoys her and makes her feel she is "haunted" by him.

*Mr. Guppy is an attention seeker and throws himself into Esther's way so that she will notice him and repent her decision. He tries to make himself look pathetic so that she may reconsider. This is very off-putting behavior, however, and has the opposite effect. Esther is very decent and does not wish to hurt Mr. Guppy, although he makes life difficult for her and has little regard for her feelings.*



Richard is apprenticed to a surgeon named Mr. Badger, whose wife, Mrs. Badger, has been married twice before to two very eminent men. One night, the party is invited to dinner with the Badgers, and Mrs. Badger entertains them with tales of her previous lovers, who are both dead and whom she never tires of talking about. Her first husband was a famous sea captain, while her second was a prodigious scientist; both were extremely dedicated to their careers.

Esther notices towards the end of their stay in London that Ada and Richard have been unusually quiet. Richard is set to remain behind in London, while Esther, Ada, and Mr. Jarndyce are to return to Bleak House. After their dinner at the Badgers', Ada takes Esther aside and tells her that she and Richard have fallen in love and agreed to be married. Esther tells Ada that she has known all along, and the pair celebrate together.

Richard comes into the room, and he and Ada ask Esther if she will speak to Mr. Jarndyce for them. They realize that they are too young to be married but wish to have their guardian's permission. Esther goes to Mr. Jarndyce's study the next evening and tells him of their relationship. Mr. Jarndyce confesses that he had anticipated this but that he hoped they would wait a little before deciding anything. Nonetheless, he is happy for them and invites the pair into his office.

Mr. Jarndyce congratulates Richard and Ada but cautions them against getting married too young. He tells them both, however, that he will support their decisions no matter what, and that although he is their guardian, he does not want any power over them. He advises Richard to invest in his future career and repeats his friendly warning that he will get nowhere without hard work, then sends the young couple away with his blessing. He and Esther watch them go but, as they pass down the corridor from his room, the sun goes behind a cloud, casting a shadow on the pair.

## CHAPTER 14

Before Richard leaves for his apprenticeship, he and Ada agree that Esther should live with them after the marriage. Richard jokes that they may be rich by then, if Jarndyce and Jarndyce resolves, and Ada looks uncertain. She begs Richard not to put his trust in Chancery and to forget about it, but Richard cannot and makes all sorts of unrealistic plans.

*Mrs. Badger's husbands are all examples of professionally successful men. Their success comes from their dedication and discipline, which contrasts sharply with Richard's undisciplined and scattered approach to his career.*



*It seems that Ada and Richard are worried about Esther's reaction to their secret and are relieved when she is happy for them. Of course, Esther always puts others before herself and is nothing but delighted for her friends.*



*Richard and Ada are young and impulsive, and rush into this romantic decision. Mr. Jarndyce, who is older and more measured, understands that they might change their minds but supports them, nonetheless.*



*Mr. Jarndyce is not judgmental and seeks to guide the young people rather than to dictate to them. Mr. Jarndyce knows that, as her husband, Richard will be responsible for Ada's income as well as his own and encourages him to work her for her sake. However, the shadow which falls on them foreshadows their doomed romance and Richard's early death.*



*Although Richard says he does not rely on his inheritance to make him rich, his actions suggest the opposite and he does not commit to a career because he believes that, one day, his fortune will be made through Chancery.*



A short while before they leave London, Caddy comes to visit Ada and Esther and brings Peepy with her. She tells them that Mrs. Jellyby is as chaotic as ever and that her father will soon be bankrupt. She also declares that although her mother has intended her to marry Mr. Quale, she will *never* marry a philanthropist and, instead, is secretly engaged to another man. She hopes that she and her husband can make a fine home and take care of her father and siblings.

Caddy is engaged to her dancing master, Prince Turveydrop, whose father, Mr. Turveydrop, is a very noble man. They have often met in secret at Miss Flite's room, and Caddy has grown fond of the old woman. Esther agrees to go with her to the dance studio the next day to be introduced to Prince.

They arrive at the dance studio the next day, just as a lesson is about to begin. Caddy hurriedly introduces them to Prince before his father, Mr. Turveydrop, enters the room. His father is lavishly dressed, extremely genteel, and a "model of Deportment."

While Prince begins the dance lesson, a woman who has brought in two pupils tells Esther that Mr. Turveydrop takes all the credit for his son's work and that he worked his young wife, Prince's mother, to death. The woman remarks, however, that his young wife was totally blinded by his "deportment" and thought him a most wonderful husband. She seems to hate the old man and complains bitterly that he believes that he is royalty.

During the lesson, Mr. Turveydrop approaches Esther and begins to charm her with his elegant conversation. He complains to her that society has degenerated because people no longer learn the art of "[deportment](#)." Even his son, he complains, has no real style. Esther tries to defend Prince's hard work in the class, but Mr. Turveydrop condescendingly dismisses her opinion.

The lesson ends and Mr. Turveydrop reminds Prince that he has another lesson elsewhere that he must hurry to attend. Prince gets ready to leave but first checks that his father is taken care of for the rest of the day. He affectionately bids the older man, and then Caddy, farewell and hurries off. Esther likes Prince a lot but feels quite baffled by his father, who appears so regal and yet works his son so hard. She thinks about this as she departs with Caddy to visit Miss Flite.

*Mrs. Jellyby's philanthropic efforts have ruined her husband because she spends so much money on them. Caddy hates philanthropists because of her mother's influence, and she will not marry one because she worries that her husband's missions will ruin her just like her Mrs. Jellyby's missions have ruined her father.*



*Despite her madness, Miss Flite is a very kind old woman and does her best to help the characters throughout the novel, emphasizing that the novel's characters are not always what they seem at first glance.*



*Mr. Turveydrop is a very fashionable man who, despite being a dance teacher, and not a member of the nobility himself, has convinced everyone that he is uniquely genteel because of his way of carrying himself, or his "deportment."*



*Mr. Turveydrop is a conman, however, and has not earned the praise and attention which is showered on him. Instead, he takes credit for other people's hard work and reaps the rewards when good people are taken in by his façade of nobility. Mr. Turveydrop is a social climber, like Mr. Guppy, and is parasitic in the same way as Mr. Skimpole because he makes use of other people's industry and money but provides nothing in return.*



*This is part of Mr. Turveydrop's act and makes him appear elite and unique, although he is really an ordinary man. The fashionable world is easily taken in by appearance and façade, and Mr. Turveydrop has successfully convinced society that he is a very important man simply by acting like one.*



*Prince is a naïve young man and totally charmed by his father's pretense of greatness. This makes him devoted to the old man and he works very hard to see that he is taken care of, which obviously works very well for Mr. Turveydrop but is much to Prince's detriment. Esther sees through this arrangement but does not trust her judgement enough to feel sure that she is right.*



On their way, Caddy tells Esther that Prince worked for his father through his childhood and, consequently, cannot read and write well. Caddy, who has always written for her mother but has been educated in nothing else, plans to help him with this. She has been helping Miss Flite clean her rooms so that she can learn how to keep her future home tidy.

As they arrive at Krook's, Caddy tells Esther that the other lodger has died, and that Miss Flite has been ill because of the shock. As they pass Nemo's door, Esther feels a shiver. Ada and Mr. Jarndyce are with Miss Flite when Esther and Caddy arrive. A doctor, Mr. Woodcourt, is also present. He speaks kindly to Miss Flite and tells her she will be well enough to attend the court the next day, where her absence has been noted.

Miss Flite tells them that she has been very anxious and disturbed ever since Nemo's death, and Mr. Woodcourt agrees this is the case. He has kindly been treating her free of charge ever since the death occurred. Miss Flite then tells them that, recently, at the end of every court day, a clerk gives her a shilling. She believes that this is compensation for the length of her trial. As she says this, Esther looks at Mr. Jarndyce and knows that he has arranged this.

Miss Flite is about to tell them the names of her **birds**, when she hears Krook outside the door. Mr. Jarndyce opens the door and finds Krook eavesdropping. He enters the room shiftily and seems pleased to converse with a Jarndyce. Krook also knows the names of Miss Flite's birds and lists them off for the group. He then says in a low voice to Mr. Jarndyce that, if Miss Flite ever sets the birds free, they will be slaughtered by wild birds. Mr. Jarndyce seems disturbed by Krook, but Krook seems unwilling to leave Mr. Jarndyce's side. Krook offers to show them around the shop and, after this tour, they return home.

## CHAPTER 15

During their time in London, the party spends a great deal of time with Mr. Jarndyce's philanthropic acquaintances. Esther notices that they perform their duties and carry on their causes noisily and are not very pleasant people. Mr. Quale, who is often present, seems to spend most of his time going on and on about other people's missions rather than cultivating a passion of his own. Mr. Skimpole has been ill, and they have seen little of him, but he reappears a short time into their stay and tells them that he is in debt again because of his doctor's fees.

*Mr. Turveydrop made Prince work as a child, which is not a noble thing to do when he himself is quite capable of earning. He has neglected Prince's education, just as Mrs. Jellyby has neglected Caddy's, but for different reasons which are, however, equally self-serving.*



*Esther's shiver foreshadows her connection with Nemo, which is yet to be revealed. Mr. Woodcourt is kind to Miss Flite and makes her feel important when he suggests that she is missed in court where, of course in reality, she is not much noticed as a mad woman. It seems that Mr. Woodcourt's kindness gives Miss Flite an incentive to recover.*



*Mr. Woodcourt is very generous and is willing to work for free to help those in need. Mr. Jarndyce too, is an example of commendable charity. He has arranged to give Miss Flite a mysterious income so that Miss Flite will not starve. He keeps it secret because he hates to be thanked and does not act kindly in order to win praise.*



*Krook is a shifty, untrustworthy man who always seeks ways to win power over people. Miss Flite's birds represent the illusions of those who wait for Chancery settlements. The wild birds beyond the cage represent the harsh reality that most suits will never be resolved and those which are will lose a large chunk of the money in legal fees.*



*The philanthropists claim to be charitable, but their charity is performative, intended to win themselves praise and to make themselves look good. They do not really care about the causes they support and do not achieve much good for these causes. Mr. Quale is the ultimate representation of this as he hides the fact that he is unproductive by flattering the people around him.*



Mr. Skimpole tells them one night that he has been invited to go with them to stay with Mr. Boythorn, and that the man who tried to arrest him at Mr. Jarndyce's has died. He has left three children orphaned with no one to care for them. Mr. Jarndyce is horrified and rebukes Mr. Skimpole for saying this last thing triumphantly. He wants to visit the man's lodgings to find out more.

The group head down to Coavinses and are informed that the man, Neckett, used to live in Bell Yard. There, an elderly and ill-looking woman greets the group. She gives Esther a key and directs her to the top of the **house**, which is split into several lodgings. On the stairs, a man stops them and asks if they want Gridley. Alarmed at the man's threatening appearance, Esther says no and they pass on.

Esther unlocks the room at the top and discovers a small boy who cradles a baby in his arms. Esther asks them who has left them here, and they say that they live with their sister Charley, who goes out to work washing clothes. Charley arrives just at this moment; she is a young girl dressed in an adult woman's clothes which are far too big for her. She takes the baby from her brother in a motherly way and soothes the child immediately. Mr. Jarndyce is horrified and asks Charley how old she is. Charley replies that she is 13 and that she works to support her brother and sister.

Charley explains that their mother died when Emma, the baby, was born. She locks her siblings up while she goes out to work to protect them. Tom, the boy, cuddles his sister and begins to cry. The landlady, Mrs. Blinder, comes upstairs and quietly tells Mr. Jarndyce that she does not charge the children rent, but Mr. Jarndyce says that the situation cannot possibly continue. Mrs. Blinder says that people in the building disliked their father, because he was a debt collector, and says that they would have been kinder to the children if this was not the case.

While they talk, the man from the stairs, Gridley, comes in and begins to play with the children. He makes a gruff comment about rich people who come to gawk at the children, but Mr. Jarndyce respectfully tells him that this is not what they are here to do. Gridley apologizes for his bad temper and tells Mr. Jarndyce that he has been embroiled in a Chancery lawsuit which has ruined his life and almost sent him mad—he is “the man from Shropshire.” Mr. Jarndyce explains who he is, and Gridley is amazed that Mr. Jarndyce can be such a mild, good natured man.

*Mr. Skimpole only thinks about himself and believes that the man has been punished for troubling him. Mr. Jarndyce, in contrast, considers the man's children, who have been left to fend for themselves, and immediately wants to know how he can help them.*



*The group visits the dead man's workplace, the debtor's prison, to get Neckett's address, which shows how committed Mr. Jarndyce is to helping the children Neckett left behind. Cities were very cramped during the Industrial Revolution, as many people relocated there to find work. It was common for families to live in a single room in a house or even to share with other families.*



*Dickens was extremely opposed to child labor and felt that children should be protected from the necessity of having to work or to provide for their families. Although Charley's clothes are grown up, Dickens highlights the contrast between her youth and the role that she has assumed to highlight how unnatural it is for a child to have to behave like an adult.*



*Mrs. Blinder is kind to the children, but debt collectors were extremely unpopular, especially in poor areas where many people were in debt, and this colors people's attitude towards the children. Although it is not their fault, they inherit the stigma that their father faced in life and are forced to suffer the consequences of it after his death.*



*Gridley has obviously met philanthropists in the past. Many wealthy people in this era visited poor people in order to develop their sense of sympathy with the poor. This did not provide any practical help to the poor, however, and was insensitive and voyeuristic. Mr. Jarndyce understands Gridley's suspicion and is not offended by his assumption.*



Gridley explains that his lawsuit is about his father's will and some property that he was left. All the property has been used up to pay legal fees, and the case is still not resolved. Gridley then takes the children down to his room so that they can play, and Mr. Skimpole muses on what these men could have been in a different life. The little group sees Charley off to work and then leaves the house themselves.

*Gridley's case is presented as typical of Chancery suits, which are very expensive but usually yield very little result for the client. Mr. Skimpole's comment is impractical and ignores the pressing needs of Gridley and the children.*



## CHAPTER 16

Lady Dedlock is at Chesney Wold and is very restless. Sir Leicester is laid up with "the family gout," which he has proudly inherited from his Dedlock ancestors. Meanwhile, in London, Jo languishes in a poverty-stricken slum known as "Tom-all-Alone's." There is little connection between this world and the Dedlocks' world, and the politicians and Lords who try, unsuccessfully, to solve poverty in places like this.

*Sir Leicester is proud of his gout because it was a disease associated with lavish lifestyles and with the nobility. With this, Sir Leicester's preoccupation with his noble lineage is portrayed as rather absurd. Slums were tightly packed clusters of unsafe and unsanitary housing, which sprung up in cities during the Industrial Revolution to deal with overcrowding and to house the poor. Politicians of Sir Leicester's class cannot solve these types of social problems because they have no experience of them and cannot understand them.*



The **house** in Tom-all-Alone's are so dilapidated that they frequently collapse. Jo does not know where the street got its name because Jo knows very little about the world. He cannot read and writing is a mystery to him. Everything seems strange and baffling to Jo. At his crossing, Jo sees a herd of oxen and a Collie dog; Jo is like these creatures. It begins to rain in the afternoon, and Jo seeks shelter in a doorway from the drizzly night.

*Slums were very unhygienic and dangerous places to live. Jo is compared with an animal because he has always been treated like one. He has received no help, no social care, and no education.*



Mr. Tulkinghorn is in his office, underneath the painted Allegory, who points perpetually to the floor. A woman has just passed his **house**. She is dressed like a servant, but her face is covered, and she has the bearing of a rich woman. She walks quickly to the crossing, where Jo stays, and beckons him to follow her. Once out of sight, the woman asks Jo about Nemo's inquest and what he knows of the death. She asks him to show her Nemo's lodgings, the law stationer's shop, and the place where the body was buried.

*The woman's manner is incongruous with her dress, suggesting that she doesn't want to be found out. It seems that the woman wants to find out what became of Nemo, though it's curious that she knows to go to Jo for this.*



Jo agrees and the woman tells him to lead her there and to stop in front of each location, without glancing back. She gives him some money, and Jo leads her to Mr. Snagsby's, then to Krook's, and then on to the cemetery. The graveyard is blocked off by a locked iron grate and Jo tells the woman that his coffin was placed on top of a pile of others towards the back of the yard. The woman gives Jo another coin, and he notices the glittering rings she wears.

*The woman does not wish to be seen with Jo. Nemo has been buried in a pauper's grave, which was unmarked and in which several coffins would be piled together.*



Meanwhile, Lady Dedlock has several parties to attend that night, and Sir Leicester is left alone with Mrs. Rouncewell. He complains that the rain is very loud on the Ghost's Walk. Mrs. Rouncewell agrees and tells Rosa that she has never heard it so distinctly before.

*That the chapter shifts focus so suddenly suggests that the woman who paid Jo is, in fact, Lady Dedlock, and that she invented the parties so that she had a reason to go out. The rain on the Ghost's Walk refers to both Lady Dedlock's connection with her past, as she goes to track down Nemo, and foreshadows the ruin of the Dedlock line because of this connection.*



## CHAPTER 17

Richard often visits Esther and Ada, and he seems very cheerful. Esther thinks it is a shame, however, that Richard has so little discipline and thinks that he relies too much on talent and charm rather than hard work. She thinks that the Chancery suit, too, has made him careless and that he is rather like a gambler.

*Despite all of the warnings he's received, Richard places all of his hopes in the Chancery suit. Instead of cultivating a career—in case the suit is unsuccessful, or his inheritance is small—he relies entirely on these hopes for future wealth.*



One night, Mr. and Mrs. Badger join them for dinner, and Mrs. Badger observes that Richard does not enjoy his work and that, unlike Mr. Woodcourt, Richard does not have the patience or dedication required to make a success of himself. Ada anxiously asks if Mr. Badger agrees, and Mr. Badger says that he trusts Mrs. Badger's opinion because she has been married to two great men. Mrs. Badger chimes in to say that her previous husbands believed that, if you are going to do something, it is better to put your all into it than to do things half-heartedly.

*The Badger's insinuate that they no longer want Richard as an apprentice because he is not serious about the profession and, therefore, it is a waste of his time as well as theirs. Mrs. Badger has lived with men who were dedicated to their professions and understands that discipline is required to be a success in any field.*



The next evening, Richard comes to visit Esther and Ada, and they tell him what the Badgers said. Richard seems unconcerned and admits that he does not care much about his profession. Ada appears downhearted but does not wish to trouble Richard. Esther tries to persuade Richard to take his career seriously, but he dislikes the hard work. He thinks perhaps he should try something else, and Esther and Ada encourage him to try and discover his passion.

*Ada knows that, if she is to marry Richard, she will be reliant on him financially. She does not want to destroy his hopes, however, even if she fears that they are based on an illusion. Esther and Ada hope that if he can find something, he enjoys then he will be able to dedicate himself to this.*



Richard tells them that he wants to study law, and that he has been to see Mr. Kenge to find out how Jarndyce and Jarndyce progresses. Esther and Ada are worried that he will pin his hopes on the case, but Richard assures them he will not and that he will take his law career seriously.

*Esther and Ada worry that Richard's interest in law is just an excuse to get closer to Jarndyce and Jarndyce, rather than an attempt to make a career for himself separate from the lawsuit.*



Esther and Ada encourage him to tell Mr. Jarndyce about this change of profession and Richard agrees. Mr. Jarndyce takes this news graciously and assures Ada that he thinks no less of Richard because of this change. Esther thinks that Mr. Jarndyce looks worried, however. Esther tries to go to bed, but she feels miserable and decides to stay up and work. She goes to the Growlery to get some of her work things and finds Mr. Jarndyce still up.

Esther sits down with him and asks him what is wrong. Mr. Jarndyce says that she would not understand but agrees to tell her something of her origins instead. He tells her that nine years ago, he received a letter from her aunt, Miss Barbary, which told him about a little girl whom she had raised in secret to hide a familial shame. He worried for the child and agreed to become her guardian, though he never met Miss Barbary. Esther recalls her aunt's unkind words and, again, tentatively thanks Mr. Jarndyce for his kindness. She says that he is like a father to her, but Mr. Jarndyce seems strangely depressed and sends her off to bed.

The next day, Mr. Woodcourt comes to visit and brings his mother, Mrs. Woodcourt. Mr. Woodcourt has plans to travel to China and has come to say goodbye. His mother is Welsh and tells them that their family hails from a noble line of Welsh ancestors. She further insinuates that her son must marry someone who is of high social standing and Esther wonders why she feels the need to mention this. Mr. Woodcourt also seems a little embarrassed by his mother and bids Esther a courteous farewell.

Esther keeps herself busy for the rest of the day and is surprised when Caddy comes to see her. Caddy gives Esther a bunch of flowers, and Esther thinks that they are Caddy's and that Prince given them to her. Caddy, however, tells Esther that the flowers were left for *her* at Miss Flite's house by someone who was in a rush to board a ship. Ada teases Esther when she hears this.

## CHAPTER 18

Throughout the summer, Richard dithers over the change to his career. He is reluctant to give up medicine but also bored and keen to try law. Finally, midway through the summer, he takes a position in Kenge and Carboy's. Meanwhile, he spends money carelessly and makes little effort to save. Richard rents a flat near his new office and furnishes it extravagantly. He throws himself into his new job and goes to work on Jarndyce and Jarndyce right away. Seeing that there is no more he can do, Mr. Jarndyce reluctantly leaves Richard to it and takes Ada, Esther, and Mr. Skimpole to visit Mr. Boythorn.

*Richard is an honest and naïve character. He does not try to hide his change of career from Mr. Jarndyce, but he also does not take his future seriously. It seems that both Esther and Mr. Jarndyce foresee that Richard's careless behavior will end in tragedy.*



*Miss Barbary has hidden Esther away to protect her mother's reputation. Her mother's disgrace has been passed on to Esther because children in this period were blamed for their parents' sins and illegitimate children, like Esther, were considered inherently corrupt because they were born out of wedlock.*



*Mrs. Woodcourt suspects that Esther is in love with her son and stresses his noble lineage as a hint to Esther that she is not good enough to marry him.*



*Esther is very humble and struggles to believe it when people show her affection, so she is quick to assume that the flowers are meant for somebody else.*



*Richard lives as though he is already rich, and this suggests that, although he makes a show of building his career, he believes that, one day, Jarndyce and Jarndyce will make him rich.*



On the coach on the way up to Mr. Boythorn's **house**, Mr. Skimpole tells them that the landlord has confiscated all of his furniture because he has not paid the rent. He is very unconcerned about it, however, because Mr. Jarndyce let him borrow the furniture in his own name and will, therefore, pay the bill to get it back.

It is a beautiful summer afternoon when the group arrives in Lincolnshire. They meet Mr. Boythorn, who has ridden out to greet them in his own carriage and find him furious that the cart is late. They must bypass Sir Leicester's property, because of the feud between the two men. Sir Leicester is in Lincolnshire, at Chesney Wold, but Lady Dedlock is away. Mr. Boythorn calls Sir Leicester all sorts of names but he speaks very respectfully of Lady Dedlock. Mr. Jarndyce asks if they may visit Chesney Wold and Mr. Boythorn says that, as his guests, they may do as they like.

As they enter the village, they pass Watt sitting outside a pub. Mr. Boythorn tells them that he works at Chesney Wold and that he is engaged to Rosa, Lady Dedlock's maid. The **house** is quaint and the garden is very pretty. The walkway over which Mr. Boythorn and Sir Leicester have been arguing about is at the back of the house and is guarded by a servant and covered with signs, which state that the path belongs to Mr. Boythorn.

The next day is Sunday, and the party attends the local church. The community is small, and Esther observes the congregants as the pews fill up. She notices a very pretty servant girl who is being watched by a sour looking French maid. A respectful hush falls over the congregation which signals that Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock have arrived. Esther looks up and catches Lady Dedlock's eye. She is startled by the look Lady Dedlock gives her and finds herself, strangely, reminded of her childhood.

Esther thinks that Lady Dedlock looks like her godmother, and, also, that she looks a little like herself. She is surprised to find the French maid watching her too and tries to compose herself. After the service, the Dedlocks leave the church, and Mr. Skimpole says that he would be very happy to be patronized by such a wealthy man. Mr. Boythorn indignantly tells says that Mr. Skimpole has no principles, but Mr. Skimpole lightly disagrees and says that he sides with anyone who can benefit him. Despite their frequent disagreements, however, Mr. Boythorn and Mr. Skimpole get on well and seem to be entertained by each other.

*Mr. Skimpole is totally irresponsible and uses other people's money freely and without a thought. Mr. Jarndyce will now have to reimburse Mr. Skimpole's landlord.*



*Mr. Boythorn's anger is part of his personality, and thus the others do not take it too seriously. Mr. Boythorn is honorable because his feud is with Sir Leicester and he does not attack Lady Dedlock on her husband's behalf. He is also not spiteful and does not wish his guests to be restricted because of his dispute with the neighbor.*



*Earlier, the novel mentioned that Sir Leicester fenced off the walkway to prevent Mr. Boythorn from using it; now, Mr. Boythorn has covered it with possessive signs (and even has a servant guarding it). Although the men are desperate to have just a little more property in their names, their childish argument is amounting to nothing.*



*The girl is implied to be Rosa, and the maid is Mademoiselle Hortense, who hates Rosa because she is Lady Dedlock's favorite. Mademoiselle Hortense is a bitter, proud, and spiteful woman who cannot stand to be rejected in this way. The congregation is very respectful of Sir Leicester, emphasizing his prestige and status in high society.*



*Esther notices the resemblance between herself and Lady Dedlock and this foreshadows the revelation that Lady Dedlock is her mother. Mademoiselle Hortense suspects that Lady Dedlock has a secret and also notices the resemblance between her mistress and Esther. Meanwhile, Mr. Skimpole has no scruples about who he takes money from and does not care if it comes from a benevolent or a corrupt source.*



Ada, Esther, and Mr. Jarndyce often go for walks in the grounds. One day, when they are out in their favorite part of the woods, they are caught in a thunderstorm and rush for shelter in the groundskeeper's cottage. The lodge is very dark, and the groundskeeper offers Esther and Ada seats in the doorway so that they can watch the rain. They are startled to discover that Lady Dedlock stands behind them, and that she, too, has taken refuge from the storm.

Lady Dedlock warmly introduces herself to Mr. Jarndyce and asks after Richard, whom Mr. Jarndyce wrote to Sir Leicester about. Mr. Jarndyce thanks her and introduces her to Esther and Ada. She greets Ada politely but seems to dislike Esther. Esther, who is fascinated by Lady Dedlock's beauty and proud manner, is hurt by this.

Lady Dedlock talks with Mr. Jarndyce as the storm continues. She thinks that he may have known her sister at one time, and Mr. Jarndyce concedes that he did. As they wait, a carriage approaches the hut. The Frenchwoman, whom Esther saw in church, gets out, followed by the pretty handmaiden. Lady Dedlock is indignant with the French woman and says that she sent for Rosa. She gets into the carriage with Rosa and directs the coach to drive on, leaving the French woman behind.

The French woman watches the carriage go and then, with her face set in a cold, furious scowl, takes off her shoes and begins to march back towards the **house**. Esther and Ada watch her go, confused. The groundskeeper laughs when he sees this and tells them that Mademoiselle Hortense is extremely proud and cannot bear to be treated as an inferior. His wife suggests that she walks through the wet grass so she can imagine it is blood. The rain lets up soon after this and Esther, Ada, and Mr. Jarndyce return to Mr. Boythorn's **house**.

## CHAPTER 19

It is the summer and Chancery is on its annual vacation, which lasts several months and, during which, the lawyers go abroad. The cases are suspended, and the clients can make no progress with their suits. The clerks are bored and have no work. Miraculously, the country carries on while its legal system grinds temporarily to a halt. Chancery Lane boils in the heat and fills up with stray dogs looking for shade. Krook sits outside of his shop and teaches himself to read on the pavement.

*In this passage, fate throws Esther and Lady Dedlock together and brings Lady Dedlock's secret closer to the surface.*



*Despite her cold exterior, Lady Dedlock is clearly a compassionate woman and thinks of Richard, who is a relation of her husband. Lady Dedlock also appears struck by Esther's resemblance to her and exaggerates her coldness to hide her surprise.*



*As Mr. Jarndyce never met the woman who wrote to him about Esther, he does not know that she is also Lady Dedlock's sister, Miss Barbary, whom he knew at another time. Mademoiselle Hortense tries to ingratiate herself with Lady Dedlock. Lady Dedlock sees through the Frenchwoman, however, and sees that she is spiteful and unpleasant underneath. She leaves the maid behind to punish her pride.*



*This passage suggests that Mademoiselle Hortense removes her shoes so that she might catch a cold from exposure to the elements and possibly die from it. It seems that she intends to die to punish Lady Dedlock, and this demonstrates the strength of Mademoiselle Hortense's fierce pride and her hatred of her mistress. She mirrors the wife of Sir Morbury Dedlock in the tale of the Ghost's Walk.*



*The fact that the Chancery court can take such a long holiday suggests that it is not vital to the running of the country and that it does not treat its cases as urgent.*



In Mr. Snagsby's **house**, they prepare to have guests. Mr. Chadband, a minister, and his wife, Mrs. Chadband, are friends of Mrs. Snagsby, who is a staunchly religious woman. Guster lays out tea in the drawing room—for Mr. Chadband eats a great deal—and Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby await their guests' arrival.

The guests arrive slightly late, much to the dismay of Mr. Snagsby, who is hungry. Mr. Chadband is a large but simpering man with very oily hair and skin. He makes a long speech as he enters, blessing the Snagsbys' house. Once inside, he launches into his sermon but is interrupted by Guster, who tells them that the cabman who drove the Chadbands to the Snagsbys' needs to be paid. Mr. Chadband allows Mrs. Chadband to pay and makes a great show of his generosity.

The party begins to eat—after Mr. Chadband has made a long, pious speech about the food—and Mr. Chadband demolishes the platter set before him. Guster enters the room once more, drops a plate on Mr. Chadband's head by accident, and stammeringly tells Mr. Snagsby that he is needed in the shop. Mr. Snagsby finds Jo in the shop, in tears because he has been asked to “move on” by a policeman, who is with him.

Jo insists desperately that he has nowhere to “move on” to, and the policeman says that this is not his business. He asks Mr. Snagsby if he knows the boy and Mrs. Snagsby, who has been listening on the stairs, screams that he does not. She rushes downstairs and into the room and Mr. and Mrs. Chadband also join them. The policeman says that, when he arrested Jo, the boy said that he knew Mr. Snagsby and a young man who was in the vicinity confirmed this.

The young man, Mr. Guppy, arrives at this moment and joins the conversation. He greets Mr. Snagsby and tells him that he thought he'd better intervene on Jo's behalf. The policeman knows that Jo lives in Tom-all-Alone's—a notoriously criminal area—and wants to know where Jo got the money he has. Jo, who is very upset, tells them that a mysterious lady gave him the money to show her the burial ground where Nemo was interred.

The constable is skeptical about Jo's story but leaves him with Mr. Snagsby. Jo's story has piqued Mr. Guppy's interest, and he wishes to interrogate the boy. Mrs. Snagsby invites Mr. Guppy upstairs, and Mr. Guppy politely agrees and takes Jo up with him. Mr. Guppy is introduced to the Chadbands. When she hears that Mr. Guppy works for Kenge and Carboy's, Mrs. Chadband tells him that, before her marriage, she was the maid of a young child, named Esther Summerson, who was sent by Kenge and Carboy's.

*The Snagsbys and the Chadbands are often used as comic relief characters throughout the novel, and their exploits provide comedic counterparts to the central action of the novel.*



*Mr. Chadband is a minister, but his oily appearance and his large appetite suggest that he is untrustworthy and not as spiritual as he tries to appear. It is implied that Mr. Chadband has tried to cheat the cabman, further suggesting he duplicitous. Mrs. Snagsby, who is taken in by him, is clearly very gullible and naïve.*



*Guster is an unfortunate character but also provides comic relief as the Snagsbys' hapless maid, who is made more careless by her mistress's constant rebukes.*



*The policeman, who is Mr. Bucket, does not feel a social responsibility towards Jo and simply does his job by moving him on. Dickens suggests that this is ridiculous way to treat homeless people as they have nowhere to move on to.*



*Jo earned the money from Lady Dedlock, when she asked him to lead her to the burial ground where Nemo was laid to rest. However, Mr. Bucket—clearly prejudiced towards poor people—assumes Jo has stolen the money because he is impoverished and has little means of earning money.*



*It seems that Mr. Guppy is interested in Esther's history and suspects her connection with Lady Dedlock, which is perhaps why he wants to talk to Jo. He feels that, if he can learn something about Esther's past, he may be able to use this to his own advantage. Mrs. Chadband reveals herself to be Miss Barbary's old maid, Mrs. Rachael.*



Mr. Guppy announces that he, too, knows Esther and begins to ingratiate himself to Mrs. Chadband. Mr. Chadband then begins to soliloquize on the spiritual nature of Jo, who is very confused by the whole thing, and lectures Jo about his amazing potential. Jo understands nothing of this speech and listens miserably. Mr. Chadband concludes this speech by telling Jo that he can leave, but that he must return the next day for instruction. Jo shuffles off and Mr. Snagsby slips him some scraps from the table as he goes.

*Mr. Guppy also wants to press Mrs. Chadband for Esther's history. Mr. Chadband's speech is lost on Jo because Jo has not even had a basic education. Mr. Chadband does not really care about educating Jo but about making himself appear pious and charitable. Mr. Snagsby helps Jo in a far more concrete, immediate way by giving the boy some food.*



## CHAPTER 20

In his office, during the long vacation, Mr. Guppy is extremely bored. He lounges restlessly about Kenge and Carboy's and grows jealous of Richard, who is also there over the holiday but who has been given use of Kenge's private office. Mr. Guppy thinks that Richard believes himself too good for the place and is convinced that Richard is trying to steal his job. He is pleased that Richard occupies himself with Jarndyce and Jarndyce because Mr. Guppy feels this is a legal dead end.

*Mr. Guppy is obsessed with his own social position and resents Richard because Richard is a ward of the court and, therefore, Mr. Guppy thinks that Mr. Kenge grants him special favors. Mr. Guppy is arrogant and jealous of Richard and assumes that Richard wants to be like him. This makes Mr. Guppy bitter and makes him pleased to see Richard fail. He does not try to help Richard with the case because he views him as his competition.*



Mr. Guppy's colleague Bart Smallweed enters the office. He is only 15 but seems never to have been a child. He admires Mr. Guppy and copies him in everything. However, when it comes to personal lives, Bart often offers counsel to Mr. Guppy. Mr. Guppy leans out of the window to cool himself down and sees his friend Mr. Jobling below.

*Proximity to the law and the legal profession has warped Bart and crushed all the youth and hope out of him while he was still a child. Chancery law has this negative, stifling effect on almost all the characters who get close to it.*



Mr. Jobling shouts up to Mr. Guppy that he is hungry and Mr. Guppy shouts back that, if he will wait, they can dine together. The group retire to a local inn where Bart Smallweed fancies the middle-aged waitress. He is a strange, wizened little man, who seems to have been surrounded all his life by legal proceedings.

*It is comical that Bart pursues the waitress because she is so much older than him. At the same time, however, while Bart is externally still a young man, there doesn't seem to be an ounce of youth left in him, and therefore he may be more suited to an older woman.*



They order three meals and Mr. Jobling, who has a downtrodden appearance, eats heartily. He has fallen on hard times, been fired, and borrowed money from a bad source. Mr. Guppy suggests that Mr. Jobling should go to Mr. Snagsby for writing work and to Krook to rent a room, as he knows that Krook is looking for a lodger. Mr. Guppy says that he can put a good word in with Krook, who, he says, is a mysterious character. Mr. Guppy cannot work out if Krook is rich or poor, or what he did for money in his youth.

*Mr. Jobling has gone into debt and has lost money on the interest. Mr. Guppy involves himself in everyone's business because he likes to feel like a man who is in the know and who has a certain level of social influence. In that vein, since he likes to know everything about everyone, it is irritating to Mr. Guppy that he cannot figure Krook out.*



Mr. Jobling gratefully thanks Mr. Guppy and accepts his offer. Mr. Guppy tells Mr. Jobling that Krook's previous lodger died in the room but Mr. Jobling seems unconcerned by this. Bart Smallweed goes ahead to Krook's to see if he is in, while Mr. Guppy pays the bill. Bart returns and says that Krook is asleep, and the men set out to wake him up.

*Mr. Guppy has suggested that Mr. Jobling should rent Nemo's old room, possibly to make sure he has an ally in the building who could perhaps give him access to Krook's supply of legal documents or find out juicy tidbits of information.*



Bart Smallweed leaves them, and Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling go on to Krook's shop. They find Krook asleep in the shop, with a gin bottle beside him, reeking of alcohol. It takes them some time to wake the old man up and, when they do, Mr. Guppy offers to run to a nearby inn and have the gin bottle refilled. Krook willingly agrees and Mr. Guppy hurries out. When he returns, he introduces Krook to Mr. Jobling and explains Jobling's circumstances to the old man.

*Mr. Guppy refills Krook's gin to ingratiate himself with the old man and make him more likely to rent to Mr. Jobling. Mr. Guppy is eager to see Mr. Jobling situated in Krook's. Once again, it seems that this arrangement will give him an insight into Krook and, potentially, the law papers he has in his shop.*



Krook shows Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling the room—Mr. Jobling assumes the false name, Mr. Weevle, to disguise himself and listens to Krook's tales about the shop's connection with famous legal disputes such as Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Mr. Jobling moves in the next day and decorates the dingy room to his liking. He pins a series of portraits on the wall which represent "Great British Beauties." Mr. Jobling becomes very popular with the neighbors in Cook's Court and is an excellent lodger. Mrs. Piper, who lives nearby, even remarks to her neighbor that he may inherit Krook's fortune.

*Mr. Jobling, who is also a social climber, makes an effort to flatter Krook and does favors for the old man in the hopes that he may receive something from him—either an inheritance or access to important or influential documents that are hidden in his shop.*



## CHAPTER 21

Bart Smallweed lives with his elderly grandparents in a spot called Mount Pleasant. Mrs. Smallweed is mad and unable to care for herself, and Mr. Smallweed is paralyzed from the waist down. Mr. Smallweed is the son of an accountant who was totally obsessed with money and who never thought of anything else. He sent his son out to work very young and stamped all interest in childish pleasures out of the boy. This tradition was continued with the following generations until there is nothing whimsical or childlike about anyone in the family.

*The name of the house is ironic because the Smallweeds are a deeply unpleasant family. The family has always lent out money and collected debts and interest, and Mr. Smallweed and his grandchildren have inherited this fervor for money from a long line of people in this trade. Child labor has a negative effect on members of the Smallweed family, as it makes them grow up too soon and crushes all childish hopes and dreams out of them. With this, Dickens seems to be making a larger narrative comment about the dangers of child labor in the Victorian era.*



In the drab little apartment, the elderly Smallweeds sit opposite each other in front of the fire. Mr. Smallweed keeps his equity documents and bills of wealth under his chair, near a cushion which he often throws at his wife to silence her. Bart's sister, Judy, sets the table behind them. She says that Bart will be home in "ten minutes" and Mrs. Smallweed suddenly begins to shout about "ten-pound notes" until Mr. Smallweed throws the pillow at her.

*Mr. Smallweed is completely obsessed with money and, like Krook, jealously guards his wealth, which is represented by his legal documents. He is cruel to his wife and snappish with his grandchildren. Mrs. Smallweed has lost her mind, but the content of her outbursts (seen here with her shouts about "ten-pound notes") suggests that she, too, has been obsessed with money in her lifetime and that now it plays out in her madness.*



The force of this throw knocks Mr. Smallweed back in his chair, and Judy lifts him up by the collar and shakes him until he is righted. Judy is very like her relatives and is shrunken and mirthless. As a child, she never played with dolls or other children, and she almost never laughs. Neither Judy nor Bart know any fairy tales. As Judy serves tea, Mr. Smallweed asks who the serving girl is, and Judy says that her name is Charley. Mr. Smallweed complains that she eats too much, and Judy snaps at Charley to be thorough in her work.

Bart arrives home and tells them where he has been, and Mr. Smallweed praises him for dining at his friend's expense, rather than spending his own money. Bart sits down to tea and Mr. Smallweed begins to talk of his son, who died when Bart and Judy were younger. It takes him some time to finish his story, however, because he often breaks off to swear at Mrs. Smallweed. He concludes by telling them that they will inherit the family fortune and that Judy may use her share of this to run her florist shop.

When they have finished tea, Judy calls in Charley and allows her to eat the table scraps. A man named George arrives and asks to see Mr. Smallweed. He is tall and sturdy and has the look of an ex-military man. George takes a seat by the fire and sits up very straight. He asks Mr. Smallweed to honor their agreement and make him a pipe to smoke before he pays his monthly interest on his debt. Judy reluctantly gets his pipe and she and Bart leave the room.

George wonders aloud what Mr. Smallweed does all day and suggests that, as soon as he is slightly late with a payment, Mr. Smallweed will call in the full amount. Mr. Smallweed simpers that he wouldn't dream of it, but that he has no control over the man from the city who gave him the money to lend to George. George pretends to believe this but really, he is skeptical of the old man's motives. Charley brings George his drink, and he thinks she is far too pretty to belong to the family.

George asks what the man in the city will do to him—and, under his breath, asks if the man's name starts with a D. George shakes Mr. Smallweed himself when he throws the cushion at Mrs. Smallweed, who has begun shouting again. George says that he likes to take a pipe from Mr. Smallweed in return for his money and Mr. Smallweed agrees he is a "prudent" man. Mr. Smallweed asks if George has any relatives who are willing to pay his debt and George says that he would never ask that of them.

*Judy has also been affected by her repressive and unchildlike childhood, in which she has been encouraged to care only about money. Neither Judy nor Bart have had an age-appropriate childhood education based in childish things, like fairy tales. Readers may recall that Charley is the eldest daughter of Neckett, the debt collector who passed away, and the older sister of Tom and Emma.*



*Mr. Smallweed is an extremely greedy, mean-spirited man. He encourages his children to mirror his behavior and to take advantage of others for their own gain.*



*George is a very dignified man and does not like to be treated unfairly. Although Mr. Smallweed is taking advantage of him by charging him excess interest on a debt, George demands a pipe as some small recompense in return for the extra interest, which Mr. Smallweed has legally trapped him into paying. Mr. Smallweed deeply resents even this small act of fairness.*



*George does not trust Mr. Smallweed and feels that the old man waits for an opportunity to catch him out. The novel implies that Mr. Smallweed is a coward and pretends that he is not the one who calls in the debts. He avoids responsibility instead and pretends that he works for a man in the city, who is very sinister and threatening. As Mr. Smallweed cannot physically defend himself, he uses this apparition to bully his clients.*



*George implies that the man in the city is really the devil, because he thinks Mr. Smallweed is a diabolical and greedy old man who has sold his soul. Meanwhile, Mr. Smallweed hopes that George has wealthy relatives so that he can exploit them for extra money by increasing George's debt.*



Mr. Smallweed says that, if George had found “the Captain,” his fortune would have been made. George says that, although he would have liked this at the time, now he is pleased that he was not successful. Mr. Smallweed asks him why, and George says that Mr. Smallweed lied to him; he told him that Captain Hawdon was about to receive a large inheritance, when, really, he was deeply in debt. Mr. Smallweed protests that he did not know this, and that Captain Hawdon’s wealthy relatives might have bailed him out.

Mr. Smallweed feels that Captain Hawdon has tricked him, and he grows angry as he thinks about this. George says that he was often with Captain Hawdon when the Captain was ready to kill himself, and Mr. Smallweed says that George should have let him. George then says that, by the time he was asked to track Captain Hawdon down, the man was already dead, but Mr. Smallweed doubts this.

George gets up to leave, teasing Mr. Smallweed as he goes about the possibility of his missing a payment. Mr. Smallweed plays along but pulls an ugly face at George’s back when he shuts the door. George wanders home past several theaters and arrives at a building called “George’s Shooting Gallery,” which is a large hall set out for several types of combat practice. It is deserted, however, and the only person inside is George’s attendant, Phil, who lies asleep upon the floor.

George wakes Phil and tells him to close the gallery for the night. Phil jumps up obediently and sets about this. He is a little man whose face is burnt on one side and who is partially lame from an accident. He gets around by dragging himself along the wall and this leaves a greasy mark on the gallery wall. George pulls out two mattresses, and he and Phil lie down for the night. As they go to sleep, George asks Phil where he was found, and Phil says that he used to live in a gutter.

## CHAPTER 22

Mr. Tulkinghorn sits beside the open window in his office, underneath the painting of Allegory. The air is very hot and stuffy, and dust blows in from the street. He drinks a glass of fine wine, which he keeps in his cellar, and Mr. Snagsby sits opposite him at his desk. Mr. Snagsby tells Mr. Tulkinghorn that he has not told his wife where he is because she has a wild imagination and tends to become fixated on ideas once they are in her head.

*Mr. Smallweed suggests that he would have paid George handsomely for bringing a man named Captain Hawdon to him. However, George is happy that he did not succeed because Mr. Smallweed tricked him; he told George to bring him Captain Hawdon so that Mr. Smallweed could bestow an inheritance on him, however, in reality Mr. Smallweed wanted to have Captain Hawdon arrested for debt.*



*Although Mr. Smallweed tried to trick Captain Hawdon, he feels that Captain Hawdon has evaded him on purpose, even though the Captain did not know of Mr. Smallweed’s plans. Captain Hawdon was heavily in debt to Mr. Smallweed and considered himself a ruined man.*



*George despises Mr. Smallweed (and it seems that the feeling is mutual), but he is an honorable man and continues to pay his debt, which he is legally bound to pay. The passage suggests that George has gone into debt to start his business, the shooting gallery, but its emptiness suggests that it has not been as successful as he had hoped.*



*Phil and George are both down and outs, but Phil comes from a much harder life. In hiring Phil and giving him a place to sleep, George shows that he’s attuned to the man’s immediate needs—unlike the novel’s philanthropists, who don’t seem to do anything useful for the people they claim to help.*



*Mr. Snagsby does not want to lie to his wife, but he feels that he must. It seems that even if he is honest, she does not believe him and thinks that he is lying anyway.*



Mr. Tulkinghorn offers Mr. Snagsby a glass of wine, and Mr. Snagsby repeats Jo's statement for Mr. Tulkinghorn. When he is finished, Mr. Snagsby is startled to find that there is another man with them in the room. Mr. Tulkinghorn tells him that this man is a policeman named Mr. Bucket. Mr. Bucket asks Mr. Snagsby if he will come with him to Tom-all-Alone's and help him find Jo. Mr. Snagsby hesitates but Mr. Bucket reassures him that he means Jo no harm and only wants to talk to him.

When Mr. Snagsby hears this, he agrees to go with the inspector. Mr. Bucket takes him aside and suggests that Mr. Snagsby is a worldly gentleman and, therefore, he expects Mr. Snagsby will keep little excursion to himself. There is a dispute over some inheritance, he says, that Jo may know something about. Mr. Snagsby agrees to keep quiet and the two men set off together. On the way out, Inspector Bucket asks Mr. Snagsby if he knows anyone with the name of Gridley, but Mr. Snagsby does not. Inspector Bucket says it is not important; it is only that he has a warrant for Gridley's arrest.

The pair walk through the city, and when they reach Tom-all-Alone's, another policeman joins them. Mr. Snagsby notices that Mr. Bucket never walks entirely in a straight line and that he makes himself appear inconspicuous. They move down into an unsanitary slum, and Mr. Snagsby draws back in horror as a cart passes which carries the bodies of people who have died of fever.

Eventually, they hear from one of Mr. Bucket's many informants—who emerge now and then from dark street corners—that Jo (who is also known as "the Tough subject") has gone to a doctor to fetch medicine for a woman who is ill. He will come back, however, so Mr. Bucket decides to wait. They enter a small apartment in which there are two men, both drunk, and two women, who lie on the floor. They call each other Liz and Jenny, and Jenny cradles Liz's baby. The men tell Mr. Bucket that they have come from Hertfordshire to find work.

While they wait for Jo, Liz tells Jenny that, although she loves the child, she sometimes wishes it would die. Mr. Bucket sternly asks her what she means, and Liz sighs and tells him to look round the room. She believes the child has no hope of a good life or future. Mr. Snagsby, who has waited outside, coughs to tell Mr. Bucket that Jo has arrived and, once Jo has given the medicine to Liz, Mr. Bucket leads him and Mr. Snagsby back to Mr. Tulkinghorn's apartment.

*It's implied that Mr. Tulkinghorn has asked Mr. Snagsby for Jo's statement about the mysterious veiled woman, and that Mr. Tulkinghorn wishes to have Jo brought to him so that he can question him further. Mr. Bucket is a very skilled detective as he is excellent at concealing himself. This passage also makes it clear that Mr. Snagsby cares about Jo and feels loyal towards him.*



*Mr. Bucket suggests that Mr. Snagsby keep the meeting a secret in a way that makes it seem like it was Mr. Snagsby's idea. This is very flattering and an effective way to manipulate people, which speaks to Mr. Bucket's skill as a detective.*



*Middle-class Victorians experienced significant improvements in living standards during this period. Therefore, it is not strange that Mr. Snagsby, who has a successful career in trade, is shocked by the squalor and destitution which still existed in parts of the city.*



*Mr. Bucket mingles with people from all classes and all social groups and easily puts people at ease so that they will give him information. He has sources everywhere and is constantly on the lookout for clues and evidence. This is the brickmaker's family whom Esther and Ada met outside London, when they were at Bleak House. The family has traveled to London to find work but are still desperately poor.*



*Liz's speech is very similar to the one that the brickmaker gives Mrs. Pardiggle, in which he explains that it is pointless to change his ways because he is so poor. Although Liz loves her child, she knows that it will have a bad life and will probably never escape poverty, because it will have no education, no money, and no social advantage.*



When they arrive and take Jo upstairs, he suddenly recoils and announces that “the lady” is there. A woman, veiled and dressed in black, stands in Mr. Tulkinghorn’s room. Mr. Bucket asks Jo how he knows it is the same woman, and Jo says that he recognizes the dress. The woman lifts her hand and Jo says that this is not the hand of the woman who paid him to go to the cemetery because she wears no rings.

Mr. Bucket pays Jo and sends him away. When he has gone, the woman lifts her veil—it is Mademoiselle Hortense. Mr. Tulkinghorn thanks her for her service and dismisses her too. Mr. Bucket confirms that Jo has been consistent in his story. He thanks Mr. Snagsby and allows him to go; Mr. Snagsby is worried that his wife will be anxious. When he returns home, still rather confused about the night’s events, he finds that Mrs. Snagsby has sent the police out looking for him and is sure he has been murdered.

## CHAPTER 23

Esther does not see Lady Dedlock again while she is at Mr. Boythorn’s, except in church on Sundays. When she does see her, she has the strange impression that Lady Dedlock is very aware of her presence. Shortly before they return to London, Esther comes home from a walk and finds that Mademoiselle Hortense wants to see her.

Mademoiselle Hortense greets Esther passionately and begs her to employ her as a maid. She complains that Lady Dedlock is too proud and that she would be honored to serve Esther. Esther is taken aback by the woman’s intense manner and rejects her offer. Mademoiselle Hortense seems to accept this graciously and Esther is relieved when she leaves the room.

When they return to London, they find that Richard has been working hard on Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and that he thinks he is close to unravelling the mystery. He spends his days at the court, often accompanied by Miss Flite. When Esther is alone with Richard, she asks him if he feels “settled” in his career now, but Richard begins to cry and tells Esther that he cannot be “settled” until the suit is complete. He also announces that he has gone into debt. He feels that he is unworthy of Ada, but Esther assures him this is not true.

*Mr. Tulkinghorn has hired Mademoiselle Hortense to dress up as Lady Dedlock, in the veiled dress she wore to visit Jo, in order to ascertain her identity. Mademoiselle Hortense knows that Lady Dedlock always wears her rings and holds up her hand to gauge Jo’s reaction.*



*Mr. Bucket is a fair man and rewards Jo for his trouble. Mademoiselle Hortense works with Mr. Tulkinghorn against Lady Dedlock. She wishes to conspire against her mistress, whom she hates, and sees the lawyer as someone who will help her do this. Meanwhile, Mrs. Snagsby is very imaginative and always jumps to the worst conclusion.*



*Esther feels that Lady Dedlock watches her but does not know why. It is also very strange that Mademoiselle Hortense should want to meet with Esther when she is a total stranger to her.*



*Mademoiselle Hortense clearly suspects the connection between Esther and Lady Dedlock and wishes to work for Esther so that she can find out what she knows and, potentially, ruin Lady Dedlock, which seems to ultimately be her goal.*



*Richard is delusional and convinces himself that he can solve Jarndyce and Jarndyce alone. His days in court mirror Miss Flite’s and Tom Jarndyce’s gradual descents into madness and suggests that the cycle repeats itself in Richard. Richard is no longer as carefree as he was and begins to worry that he has ruined himself—and his marriage—permanently.*



Richard then tells Esther that he has decided to quit the law and to go into the army instead. Esther is shocked and disturbed by this and worries for Richard's future. She leaves Richard and goes to meet Caddy, who is delighted to see her. Caddy takes her to the dance studio and tells her how things are between her and Prince. She has convinced Prince that he must tell his father of their engagement and hopes that Esther will be present when they do because Mr. Turveydrop has such a high opinion of her.

They find Mr. Turveydrop in his rooms, and Caddy and Prince kneel before him while Esther watches. When Prince tells his father of his engagement, Mr. Turveydrop bursts into tears and seems to be deeply injured. Prince assures his father, however, that he and Caddy intend to take care of him and will work hard to provide him with the lifestyle he is accustomed to. Mr. Turveydrop recovers when he hears this and, resignedly, gives the marriage his blessing.

Caddy is amazed by her father-in-law's generosity and she and Esther set off to tell Mrs. Jellyby of the engagement. When they arrive, they find that Mr. Jellyby has been declared bankrupt and is upstairs with two accountants. Mrs. Jellyby is upstairs, working composedly on her charity projects in Africa. She dismisses Esther's concern about Mr. Jellyby and complains that Caddy's departure has forced her to employ a secretary. She wishes that her daughter showed more of an interest in her philanthropic efforts for the improvement of humanity.

Mrs. Jellyby regrets that Caddy will not marry Mr. Quale—who is an eminent philanthropist—but Caddy insists she has always hated Mr. Quale. However, Mrs. Jellyby is very calm about the engagement; she feels that Caddy may do as she likes and immediately goes back to sorting her letters. Caddy begins to cry, and Esther is shocked by Mrs. Jellyby's total indifference. Mrs. Jellyby tells Caddy that she is being silly and wishes her to leave so that she can continue her work.

Esther leads Caddy downstairs, where they find the children playing on the floor. Esther comforts Caddy, who is still very upset, and spends a little time entertaining the children. Esther goes home and feels very grateful for the people around her who show her so much care and attention.

*Richard discards yet another career in the vain hope that he will find his calling elsewhere. Esther feels this is unlikely but keeps this worry to herself so that she does not dampen Richard's spirits.*



*Prince assumes that his father cries because he is afraid that Caddy and Prince will abandon him. However, Mr. Turveydrop lives an extremely comfortable life through his son's efforts, and it's implied that he cries because he is afraid of losing these benefits if his son also has a wife to support. He agrees to the marriage as soon as Prince assures him that this is not the case.*



*Caddy, like Prince, is taken in by Mr. Turveydrop and feels that he does them a favor by allowing them to care for him. Meanwhile, Mrs. Jellyby's philanthropic efforts abroad have bankrupted her husband. She is so obsessed with these projects, however, that she barely notices how dire the family's financial situation is. She explains that she has hired an assistant since Caddy left home and this cost has likely contributed to the family's financial situation.*



*Mrs. Jellyby does not care about what Caddy wants—she only cares about philanthropy. To her, there is no value in a husband who is not a philanthropist. Mrs. Jellyby is extremely disinterested in her daughter and hurts Caddy's feelings. She does not even respond to Caddy's tears but views her daughter as an inconvenience which interrupts her work.*



*The children playing on the floor add to the sense that they are dirty and not looked after. Esther is empathetic with the children, as she, herself, knows how it feels to be neglected, and tries to show them what little care she can.*



When Esther goes to her room, she finds Charley there. Charley explains that she has been hired by Mr. Jarndyce to be Esther's maid. Esther is overcome with gratitude and Charley bursts into tears because she is so happy. Esther embraces her and agrees to give her lessons, as Mr. Jarndyce has suggested. Charley thanks her on behalf of Tom and Emma. She begs Esther not to cry, but Esther tells her that she cries from happiness too, because she is so grateful to have Charley for a maid.

*Mr. Jarndyce has drastically improved Charley, Tom, and Emma's situation. Instead of Charley having to work for the Smallweeds, who are cruel to her, Mr. Jarndyce arranges for Charley to have a kind mistress, who will educate her. This in turn will allow her to have career prospects in future. Mr. Jarndyce has broken the cycle of poverty in this case through this kind, practical help.*



## CHAPTER 24

Richard comes to see Mr. Jarndyce and tells him of his plans to join the army. Mr. Jarndyce respects Richard's decision but seems concerned. His concern is intensified when they hear that Richard has put in an application for his suit in Jarndyce and Jarndyce and has hired a legal agent to handle the case. He throws himself into his study for the army and begins to take combat lessons.

*Mr. Jarndyce worries that once Richard is embroiled in the case, and has a personal stake in it (which he will if he is paying a lawyer to defend his interests), there will be no way back for Richard.*



Everything seems to be going well until, one evening, Richard comes to see Mr. Jarndyce in a rage. It transpires that Mr. Jarndyce has contacted Richard to ask him to temporarily break off his engagement with Ada. Richard is furious with him, but Mr. Jarndyce insists that since Richard is in debt, he should focus on his career first and then commit to Ada. Richard fires up that he does not rely on his earnings alone for his fortune. At this, Mr. Jarndyce is horrified and begs Richard not to rely on the court case for his future.

*Richard takes Mr. Jarndyce's advice personally and feels that his guardian is out to get him. Richard confirms Mr. Jarndyce's worst fears—that he is banking on the lawsuit to make his fortune and that he does not intend to commit seriously to any career.*



Richard says that Mr. Jarndyce does not trust him, but Mr. Jarndyce insists that he acts with both Richard and Ada's best interests in mind. Ada is shocked by proceedings but clearly trusts Mr. Jarndyce's intentions. Ada rises and tries to comfort Richard. She promises that she will be faithful to him regardless of how long it takes him to make a success of himself and promises that he can rely on Mr. Jarndyce. Richard agrees, but he is reserved with Mr. Jarndyce after this.

*Ada can see Mr. Jarndyce's good intentions clearly, whereas Richard cannot because he has been blinded by his delusions. Ada tries to convince Richard that Mr. Jarndyce's advice makes sense, suggesting that she is the far more levelheaded of the pair. Richard seems temporarily placated but clearly holds a grudge against his guardian.*



One morning, in London, when Esther and Mr. Jarndyce have gone to visit Richard, they meet his combat instructor, George. Mr. Jarndyce asks George about his customers at the gallery, and George tells them that he once met a man named Gridley, who was worried that, if he was taught how to use a musket, he would use it on his enemies. George tells them that Gridley is in hiding now and that, he fears, he will soon collapse under the pressure of his court case.

*Gridley, like Miss Flite and Richard, has gone mad through his obsession with a Chancery suit. He is close to violence but has the self-awareness to no longer trust himself. Gridley understands that he has allowed the court case to consume him and that it will soon destroy him as a result of his obsession.*



Richard's preparations for the army are complete and he suggests that, before he leaves, they visit the court for news of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Esther goes with him, but Mr. Jarndyce refuses to come. Esther is struck by the contrast between the composed, bored looking lawyers and the tormented suitors, such as Gridley. Jarndyce and Jarndyce is brought before the court and the lawyers begin to laugh and joke about it. Esther glances at Richard and is shocked to see how haggard and drawn he looks as he listens.

Esther notices Mr. Guppy in the court and wishes to escape. As Richard leads her out, however, Mr. Guppy stops them and tells Esther that there is a woman to see her. It is her godmother's servant, Mrs. Rachael, whose married name is now Mrs. Chadband. She greets Esther haughtily and then swoops away, leaving Esther with Richard.

Richard sees George in the crowd and calls him over. George asks them quietly if they know a mad old lady who sits in the court, and Esther directs him to Miss Flite. George says that Gridley is hidden at his gallery and has asked for the old woman. He tells them that Gridley is dying and, when Miss Flite is informed, she agrees to go with them.

Outside George's gallery, they meet an old man who says that he is a doctor and that he has been sent for by George's servant to treat Gridley. Phil opens the door and the doctor takes off his hat and reveals that he is really Mr. Bucket, who has come to arrest Gridley. He knows that Gridley is there because he looked in through the skylight of the gallery and saw him. He does not arrest Gridley right away, however, but allows him some time with Miss Flite.

George leads Miss Flite to Gridley's bedside while the others wait. Mr. Jarndyce, who has heard about Gridley, arrives, and George takes them down to visit the sick man. Gridley lies on a couch and looks thin and wasted. Miss Flite sits near him and holds his hand, and he is pleased to see the others, though he is very weak. Gridley explains that he thought he could fight Chancery but that he was arrogant and has learned the hard way that he cannot win.

*Richard is so obsessed with the case that he cannot spend an afternoon in London without checking in at the court. His behavior is reminiscent of Miss Flite's. Esther can see that the lawyers do not have any stake in the long, drawn-out lawsuits, and, in fact, gain from them, whereas the suitors stand to lose everything, including their sanity.*



*It seems that Mr. Guppy spends time with Mrs. Chadband so that he can find out about Esther's past and uncover her history. He also wishes to ingratiate himself with her as he has not yet let go of the idea that she may accept his proposal.*



*Miss Flite and Gridley are connected by their madness and their presence in court. They have a close kinship because of this shared experience.*



*Mr. Bucket is completely mercenary and will use any means to achieve his investigative ends. Mr. Bucket is one of first literary detectives of this type and inspired Arthur Conan Doyle in his creation of Sherlock Holmes. Mr. Bucket uses many techniques which are similar to Sherlock Holmes's methods of deduction throughout the novel.*



*Gridley has wasted away under the strain that the Chancery suit has put on him. The constant suspense of waiting to see how the case will end has worn him down, and although he thought that he could take on the large, unjust system, he has learned that he has little power against such large institutions.*



Mr. Bucket tries to encourage Gridley, but he is close to death. Mr. Bucket seems genuinely concerned when Gridley is not roused and admits that he sees him as an “old acquaintance.” Miss Flite lets out a scream, and the others realize that Gridley has died. The sun sets, and as Richard leaves for the army, Esther’s heart feels heavy and sad.

*Mr. Bucket has a strange type of affection for the people he arrests often, as though they are participants in a game and in which he is on one side and they are on the other. Gridley’s death hangs over Richard’s departure and foreshadows his own deadly fate in Chancery. It seems that the sun is metaphorically setting on Richard’s life, as his obsession with Jarndyce and Jarndyce is past the point of no return.*



## CHAPTER 25

In Mr. Snagsby’s house, Mrs. Snagsby’s imagination goes to work. She can see that a change has come over her husband and wonders what he is hiding. Meanwhile, Mr. Snagsby is preoccupied by the mystery he was involved with. He is afraid of Mr. Bucket, who seems to be all knowing, and grows nervous when any unknown person comes into the shop. Mrs. Snagsby’s suspicion makes Mr. Snagsby feel guilty, and this increases her suspicion. She begins to spy on him and to read his letters and other documents at night.

*Rather than ask her husband what’s going on, Mrs. Snagsby invents fantastical mysteries in which he may be embroiled. Mr. Snagsby, ironically, is totally oblivious of the real mystery that he has become involved with—the mystery of Lady Dedlock’s secret and Esther’s identity—and imagines that he plays a much greater role in it than he really does.*



The next evening, Jo arrives for his lesson from Mr. Chadband. Mrs. Snagsby is convinced that Jo is Mr. Snagsby’s son and watches for signs throughout the evening. Jo is extremely confused by events and seems unsure what Mr. Chadband wants from him. Guster and the other servants gather to watch as Mr. Chadband launches into his sermon. Mrs. Snagsby, who sees signs of Mr. Snagsby’s infidelity everywhere, believes that Mr. Chadband refers to this in his sermon and grows hysterical. Eventually she needs to be carried out of the room, much to Mr. Snagsby’s confusion.

*Mrs. Snagsby has convinced herself that Mr. Snagsby has an illegitimate child, and that that child is Jo. Once she gets this idea, she does not reason with herself but thinks that she sees “signs” everywhere that prove her hunch is correct. She becomes so overwrought with this idea that she sends herself into hysterics. Mr. Snagsby, of course, has no idea why she is so upset.*



Jo, who has nearly fallen asleep during Mr. Chadband’s lecture, is finally allowed to leave. He meets Guster downstairs, who shares her supper with him and asks Jo about his parents. They are both orphans and know nothing of where they came from. On Jo’s way out of the house, Mr. Snagsby gives him a half-crown, and Mrs. Snagsby watches silently from the stairs.

*Mr. Chadband claims that his lecture is designed to help Jo, but really it is just a confusing inconvenience to the boy. Guster relates to Jo, because she is an orphan herself, and is kind to him. Mrs. Snagsby seems increasingly mad as she interprets Mr. Snagsby’s simple kindness to Jo as evidence of her husband’s guilt.*



## CHAPTER 26

Morning breaks over Leicester Square, where George and Phil sleep in the shooting gallery. When the sun is up, the two men rise and have breakfast together. George asks Phil about where he was born, and Phil says that it was in the country, but that he has never really seen the country since. George tells Phil that he grew up in the country and that his mother still lives there. George asks Phil how old he is, but Phil does not know and can only count roughly from the day when he followed a “tinker” to the city.

Phil tells George that he became a blacksmith and took over the “tinker’s” business, but he was badly burned in an accident and, after this, people did not want him around. Phil reminisces about the day he met George and enthusiastically expresses his gratitude that George took him on. He clears their plates and goes to work cleaning the weapons. They hear footsteps in the passage and Mr. Smallweed is brought into the room, carried on his chair by a young man. This young man, it turns out, is the cab driver who brought them there. Mr. Smallweed is accompanied by Judy, who pays the cabbie and sends him on his way.

Phil lifts Mr. Smallweed’s chair effortlessly and deposits him by the fire. He hisses in the heat from the flames, and Judy drags him back slightly. Mr. Smallweed eyes the surrounding weapons rather nervously and George asks him for his pipe. This sends Mr. Smallweed into an impotent rage and he snarls and shakes his fist at George. George indignantly asks Mr. Smallweed what he has come for.

Mr. Smallweed tells George that he “his friend in the city” has recently done a deal with Richard Carstone, who he knows is a friend of George’s. George is unhappy to hear this, but Mr. Smallweed says this is not why he has come. He has come because he has been approached by a lawyer who is looking for a sample of Captain Hawdon’s handwriting. Mr. Smallweed thinks George may have one and asks if he will bring it to the lawyer’s office.

George says that he will come, but that he will not show the lawyer anything unless he is given a satisfactory reason for it. George goes to a safe and withdraws a sheet of paper. Phil then carries Mr. Smallweed to a carriage, which waits outside, and Judy and George follow him into the cab.

*Phil implies that when he was just a child, a traveling man brought him to the city. Although he seems to long for the country, he doesn’t have the means or the opportunity to return.*



*Phil has been rejected by society because of how he looks. As is true for many of the novel’s characters, though, there is much more to Phil than meets the eye. Upon meeting Phil, George saw through the man’s exterior and recognized that he had the makings of a loyal attendant and friend.*



*Mr. Smallweed is aware of his physical powerlessness and worries that George and Phil may use the weapons against him if he offends them. Mr. Smallweed judges them by his own standards, however, and forgets that George is an honorable man who would never hurt someone so defenseless. Mr. Smallweed, however, would physically threaten people if he could and this is why he shakes his fist and is so frustrated by his own impotence.*



*Mr. Smallweed implies that Richard has borrowed money off him, suggesting that Richard is getting himself into an increasingly tight spot. It’s also implied that George served with Captain Hawdon in the army and so it is likely that he would have a document written by the captain.*



*George is unwilling to do anything that might damage or hurt anyone. He has kept the document in a safe, which suggests it is private, and only intends to hand it over if there is a good reason.*



## CHAPTER 27

They have not gone far in the cab when George realizes that they are on their way to Mr. Tulkinghorn's. They carry Mr. Smallweed upstairs and wait for Mr. Tulkinghorn in his office. Mr. Tulkinghorn enters, and Mr. Smallweed introduces him to George. Mr. Tulkinghorn explains to George that he knows he was in Captain Hawdon's service while the Captain was ill. He says that he will give George a reward if he can produce Captain Hawdon's handwriting, but that he will not press him to do so. He wants Captain Hawdon's writing to compare it with another sample.

George listens to Mr. Tulkinghorn's proposal and resolutely decides he wants nothing to do with the business. Mr. Smallweed begins to swear at George and George becomes confused and asks Mr. Tulkinghorn why he wants the Captain's handwriting. Mr. Tulkinghorn assures George that he will not damage the Captain's reputation. George says he knows this is true because Captain Hawdon is deceased. Mr. Tulkinghorn seems surprised at this and George grows more confused and says that he is "not a man of business."

At last George says that he will answer Mr. Tulkinghorn later, if he may be allowed to consult a friend. Mr. Tulkinghorn placidly agrees to this and George offers to carry Mr. Smallweed downstairs. Mr. Smallweed, however, addresses the lawyer in a low voice and tells him that George has the writing sample in his coat. Mr. Tulkinghorn tells him firmly that he will have nothing to do with violence and dismisses Mr. Smallweed, who George carries down the stairs.

Once outside, George breaks away from Mr. Smallweed and makes his way to Elephant and Castle. He passes a music shop and approaches a woman who is washing cabbage in a tub outside. George thinks fondly that this is always how he finds her. The woman is Mrs. Bagnet. When she finally looks up and sees George, she exclaims that she wishes he were far away because he always gets her husband, Mr. Bagnet, into trouble. George takes this good humoredly and greets the woman.

Mrs. Bagnet laments that George never married as she leads him into the **house**; he is always such a wanderer, she complains. Mrs. Bagnet's daughters, Quebec and Malta, rush happily to meet George as he enters. As she prepares dinner, Mrs. Bagnet tells George that Mr. Bagnet and their eldest son, Woolwich, get on very well with their music business. George grows thoughtful and muses by the fire.

*Mr. Tulkinghorn disguises his motives very well. He does not seem eager, nor does he plead with George to give him the letter. Instead, he acts as though it is a matter of little importance to him. This makes Mr. Tulkinghorn seem powerful because it suggests that he can easily procure the handwriting another way—even though George has the document, Mr. Tulkinghorn still makes himself seem like the more powerful and better-positioned of the two.*



*George is not taken in by Mr. Tulkinghorn's suave proposal; he senses that the lawyer is up to no good. It is unclear whether Mr. Tulkinghorn's surprise is genuine or not. In proclaiming that he is "not a man of business," George implies that he is an honorable man and likes things to be straightforward and out in the open. He is not cunning like Mr. Tulkinghorn and cannot see through underhand tricks.*



*George does not trust his own judgement in matters of business. True to character, Mr. Smallweed tries to encourage Mr. Tulkinghorn to take the letter by force. Mr. Smallweed is a bully who tries to get others to commit violence for him, but Mr. Tulkinghorn is much too clever to do anything that would damage his respectable reputation. George carries Mr. Smallweed, despite the man's rudeness to him, which shows his honorable character.*



*Elephant and Castle is a district in London. Mrs. Bagnet is a practical woman who cares about order and cleanliness. She teases George and suggests that he is a bad influence on her husband, but it also seems that she is very pleased to see him.*



*Mrs. Bagnet's children are named after the places they were born, suggesting that Mrs. Bagnet has traveled the world as an army wife. The Bagnet family have clearly given up traveling, however, and have settled in London to run their business.*



Mr. Bagnet and Woolwich return. Mr. Bagnet is an old soldier, like George, and has a very upright bearing. George says that he has come to ask Mr. Bagnet's advice and Mr. Bagnet says he is happy to give it, but only after George has joined them for dinner. While Mrs. Bagnet finishes the food, George and Mr. Bagnet go outside to smoke. They both agree that Mrs. Bagnet is a fine woman, although Mr. Bagnet never tells her just how fine because "discipline must be maintained."

Dinner is served in a very regimented manner, and after they have eaten, George and the Bagnets talk. George tells them of his dilemma and addresses himself to Mr. Bagnet, although he knows Mrs. Bagnet will answer. When George is finished, Mrs. Bagnet tells him to have nothing to do with affairs that are not out in the open.

George leaves the Bagnets' home and returns to Mr. Tulkinghorn's. Mr. Tulkinghorn answers the door and asks George if he has changed his mind. George says that he has not, and Mr. Tulkinghorn asks if he is the man who hid Gridley. George admits this, and Mr. Tulkinghorn becomes flustered. Mr. Tulkinghorn says that he never would have let George into his **house** if he had known of George's connections with dangerous criminals. George is affronted and leaves when Mr. Tulkinghorn slams the door in his face a moment later.

## CHAPTER 28

Sir Leicester has recovered from his gout and is at Chesney Wold. The weather is bad, however, and Sir Leicester's cousins have come to visit. Among them are Volumnia Dedlock and Bob Stables, elderly yet eminent members of Bath society. These cousins are lesser, poorer members of the Dedlock family, but Dedlocks nonetheless. They inhabit the lower branches of the Dedlock line and receive incomes from Sir Leicester, who tolerates their company.

Lady Dedlock is very popular with these cousins. One evening, Sir Leicester, Lady Dedlock, and Volumnia are in the drawing room, when Volumnia comments on how pretty Rosa, Lady Dedlock's maid, is. Lady Dedlock says that Mrs. Rouncewell discovered Rosa and Volumnia asks about the housekeeper. Lady Dedlock tells her that Mrs. Rouncewell has two sons, and Sir Leicester remarks incredulously that one of these sons—an ironmaster—has run for Parliament.

*It is implied that George and Mr. Bagnet have served together and became friends in the army. Mr. Bagnet's devotion to and pride in his wife is very touching. Although he pretends that he is still a disciplined army man who will not shower his wife with praise, Mr. Bagnet clearly appreciates his wife.*



*Although they are no longer part of the army, the Bagnets still live according to a very orderly and rigid schedule. This is the opposite of George, who is a drifter, and who totally lacks discipline when it is not forced upon him as it is in the army. Mrs. Bagnet confirms what George already feels to be true.*



*The lawyers are afraid of Gridley because he was a violent and aggressive man who hated the court. Earlier in the novel, George told Esther that Gridley did not trust himself with weapons in case he killed someone in court. Mr. Tulkinghorn seems to be aware of this—and the damage that fraternizing with the wrong people could do to his reputation—and uncharacteristically loses his composure.*



*Bath was a social center during the previous century and would be considered outdated and unfashionable by Dickens's Victorian middle-class readership. This suggests that the cousins are relics of a past age and both socially and politically irrelevant. Sir Leicester does his duty by these relatives because they are members of the Dedlock family, of which he is the head.*



*The cousins seem to be drawn to Lady Dedlock because of her social status. Meanwhile, Sir Leicester is horrified by the idea that a man who is not of noble birth might appear in government. Recent reforms had made it possible for men who did not own land or have titles to run for Parliament for the first time, a major upheaval in British politics at the time.*



In fact, says Sir Leicester, Mr. Rouncewell is waiting downstairs to speak to them about Rosa. Volumnia and the other cousins hurry to bed and Mr. Rouncewell is shown in. Sir Leicester is rather haughty, but Mr. Rouncewell holds his own. He explains that his son, Watt, has become engaged to Rosa and that he would like to take them both north with him so that Watt can learn the iron trade and Rosa can be educated. Sir Leicester is indignant, but Mr. Rouncewell seems rather proud. Sir Leicester regally announces that Mr. Rouncewell may do as he pleases and that both he and Rosa are welcome at Chesney Wold. With that, he terminates the interview.

*Sir Leicester looks down on Mr. Rouncewell because he is a self-made man and has rejected Sir Leicester's patronage. Mr. Rouncewell, however, clearly feels proud of his hard-earned achievements and is unashamed of his lower-class status. Mr. Rouncewell understands that the world is changing and that it is more useful to learn a trade and make money that way than to rely on patronage from the upper classes, a system which was gradually becoming irrelevant at the time.*



That night, as Rosa helps her prepare for bed, Lady Dedlock asks her maid if she is in love with Watt. Rosa is startled and says that she *thinks* she is, but that she is not sure. Lady Dedlock chides her for her secrecy and tells Rosa that she wants her to be happy. Rosa begins to cry and Lady Dedlock seems to hear something in the distance, possibly a step upon the Ghost's Walk. The next day, Sir Leicester speaks at length to the cousins about the collapse of society—which he thinks is due to the current government—and, soon after, the cousins, in a flock, depart from Chesney Wold.

*The footsteps on the Ghost's Walk, coupled with Rosa's tears, make this scene seem ominous and foreboding, suggesting that conflict is to come. On another note, Sir Leicester feels that any social change is degenerative rather than progressive, because he is a staunch conservative and always supports the continuation of old systems rather than risk change.*



## CHAPTER 29

Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock retreat to their townhouse, and Chesney Wold is occupied only by the ghosts of Dedlock ancestors. Sir Leicester reclines in great comfort in the townhouse. Mr. Tulkinghorn appears from time to time on legal business and always pays great attention to Lady Dedlock. The narrator interjects, suggesting that although Mr. Tulkinghorn seems very polite, he may secretly despise and wish to destroy Lady Dedlock.

*The frequent association of the Dedlock ancestors with ghosts suggests that the Dedlock line has not been rejuvenated and that it is an old institution that haunts modern society. It also foreshadows its imminent collapse.*



One evening, as Sir Leicester reads from the newspaper to Lady Dedlock, and Lady Dedlock grows bored with the political content of the article, their servant announces Mr. Guppy. Sir Leicester is amazed at this impertinence, but Lady Dedlock agrees to see him and Sir Leicester gallantly leaves them alone. Lady Dedlock coldly asks Mr. Guppy if he is the person who has written to her many times. Mr. Guppy replies that this is the case, and Lady Dedlock sits contemptuously by the fire and fans herself while Mr. Guppy explains.

*Sir Leicester is amazed because Mr. Guppy is unknown to him and has arrived unexpectedly without a formal introduction, an old-fashioned ritual in British society. Lady Dedlock wishes to intimidate Mr. Guppy with her cold exterior.*



Mr. Guppy explains that he works for Kenge and Carboy's and that he has connections with Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Lady Dedlock's attention is piqued by this. He also informs her that he knows Mr. Tulkinghorn, and that if she mentioned his conduct to anyone at Kenge and Carboy's, then Guppy would find himself ruined. Lady Dedlock disdainfully signals for him to continue. Mr. Guppy whips out a sheet of notes and stammeringly asks Lady Dedlock if she knows Esther Summerson.

Lady Dedlock says that she has met the girl once. Mr. Guppy asks if Lady Dedlock noticed the resemblance between herself and Esther and Lady Dedlock replies in a steely tone that she did not. Mr. Guppy nervously continues that Esther is of mysterious parentage and that he was struck by her likeness to Lady Dedlock when he saw a portrait of her Ladyship at Chesney Wold. He stops to read his notes and mutters the name, "Mrs. Chadband."

Mr. Guppy continues that he has fallen in love with Esther and wishes to help her solve the mystery of her birth. Mr. Guppy says that he has met someone who helped raise Esther and that this woman worked for a Miss Barbary. The color drains from Lady Dedlock's face, but she gives no other sign that she is interested. Mr. Guppy asks Lady Dedlock if she has ever met Miss Barbary, and Lady Dedlock says no.

Mr. Guppy then explains that Miss Barbary admitted to his acquaintance that Esther's real name is not Summerson, but Hawdon. Lady Dedlock utters an exclamation but recovers her poise quickly. A man of this name was found dead in Cook's Court, Mr. Guppy tells her, but Lady Dedlock insists she knows nothing about this. Mr. Guppy then relates the strange circumstances which involved a lady in disguise, and Lady Dedlock expresses no interest in these events. Mr. Guppy says that the woman wore very expensive rings and notices the rings on Lady Dedlock's own fingers.

Lady Dedlock observes Mr. Guppy with cold fury as he explains that a bundle of letters has been found in Captain Hawdon's room, and that the letters will be given to him the next night. He offers to bring the letters to Lady Dedlock the next evening and she says that he may do so if he wishes. Mr. Guppy implores her to give him some sign that she will keep his secret, but Lady Dedlock icily dismisses him.

*Mr. Guppy tries to win Lady Dedlock's favor when he suggests that he is throwing himself on her mercy and that, if she tells on him, he will lose his job. This is manipulative, however, and Lady Dedlock's demeanor suggests that she sees through it.*



*Mr. Guppy implies that Esther is Lady Dedlock's daughter, although he is not bold enough to suggest this directly. Lady Dedlock's icy glare makes him nervous and he loses his place in the notes he has brought. He clearly has evidence for his claim, through the testimony of Mrs. Chadband, who was once Mrs. Rachael, Esther's godmother's maid.*



*Mr. Guppy's intentions are not straightforwardly honorable. He does wish to marry Esther, but it seems that he wishes to ensure that she has noble connections first. He also wants Lady Dedlock to influence Esther and convince her to marry him. It is also possible that he wants to blackmail Lady Dedlock into providing for them.*



*The novel has already implied that Lady Dedlock was the mysterious woman who went to visit Captain Hawdon's grave (something Mr. Guppy also seems to know, since he glances at her rings), suggesting that he was once very important to her. Esther's connection to Captain Hawdon is a surprise to her, however, as it seems that Esther is Captain Hawdon's daughter. Given Lady Dedlock's resemblance to Esther, this would suggest that Lady Dedlock and Captain Hawdon were lovers and gave birth to Esther.*



*Mr. Guppy implies that Captain Hawdon's letters may contain evidence of Lady Dedlock's love affair with him, and possibly confirmation of Esther's parentage. Lady Dedlock sees that Mr. Guppy is trying to threaten her, although he pretends that he is helping her out, and refuses to deal with him.*



The **house** remains silent as Mr. Guppy goes downstairs to leave. In Lady Dedlock's room, however, she falls to her knees and tugs at her hair. Her mouth is stretched in torment as she realizes that her only child did not die after all but was raised in secret by her sister.

*This passage confirms that Esther is Lady Dedlock's daughter from her affair with Captain Hawdon. It is important that Lady Dedlock did not know of Esther's existence, and did not conceal this fact knowingly from her husband, because this would make her less sympathetic with Dickens's audience and would put her on a par with the cruel and neglectful mothers who also feature in the story. Lady Dedlock is a victim of circumstances, however, and a tragic figure instead of a villain.*



## CHAPTER 30

When Esther, Ada, and Mr. Jarndyce return to Lincolnshire, Mrs. Woodcourt comes to visit them. She takes an interest in Esther and tells her a lot about the Welsh history of the Woodcourt line. She watches Esther carefully and explains—that, because of his heritage, Mr. Woodcourt cannot marry whomever he pleases. When Esther tries to change the subject, Mrs. Woodcourt asks her what she thinks of her son. Esther says that she thinks him very kind and diligent, and Mrs. Woodcourt confirms that this is true but complains that he is a terrible flirt.

*Mrs. Woodcourt thinks Esther is in love with her son and tries to explain to her, indirectly, that she cannot marry him because he is of noble birth while Esther is not. Mrs. Woodcourt tries to convince Esther that Mr. Woodcourt's attentions are not specifically directed at her but are minor flirtations that he directs at many women. All of this suggests that Mr. Woodcourt is in indeed love with Esther, and his mother wants to sabotage the potential relationship.*



Mrs. Woodcourt then asks Esther if she intends to marry and, when Esther expresses surprise, Mrs. Woodcourt predicts that Esther will marry very well to a man who is much older than her. Esther feels uncomfortable with these conversations but likes Mrs. Woodcourt and wants the old lady to like her, too.

*Mrs. Woodcourt seems to suggest that Mr. Jarndyce is in love with Esther and subtly tries to direct Esther towards him. That Esther so badly wants Mrs. Woodcourt to like her suggests that Esther does, in fact, harbor feelings for the woman's son.*



After Mrs. Woodcourt's departure, Caddy comes to stay and asks Ada and Esther to help her plan her wedding and to be her bridesmaids. Mr. Jellyby has recovered from bankruptcy and become friends with Mr. Turveydrop. Caddy and Prince have now agreed to live with Mr. Turveydrop when they are married. Caddy worries that she has had no example from her mother and is unprepared to be a wife, so Esther suggests that she should stay with them and learn the basics of housekeeping.

*Dickens showcases a traditional 19th-century view of women and seems to feel that women's virtues lie in tending to the home and being good wives to their husbands. He is disparaging about the female social campaigners in the novel partially because they neglect their homes and their domestic duties.*



On the evening before Caddy's wedding, Esther and Ada go with her to Mrs. Jellyby's and try to make the **house**, and Mrs. Jellyby herself, look presentable. Mr. Jellyby cries when he sees them and tearfully tells Caddy, as he watches her tidy up, that she must never "have a mission." Caddy agrees that her mother's missions have ruined their home.

*Mr. Jellyby believes that Mrs. Jellyby's fanatical philanthropy has destroyed their home and family. This reflects a typical 19th-century view that a woman should maintain the home and support her husband, who should be in charge of financial and professional affairs, and that to distort this order leads to disaster.*



Caddy looks very happy and pleasant for her wedding, and they arrange a meal for the wedding party. Mrs. Jellyby's philanthropist friends are all present and Esther arranges food for the children. The philanthropists talk devotedly about their own missions all evening and ignore everything else. Before Caddy leaves with her new husband, she begs her mother to take care of the family, but Mrs. Jellyby seems bemused and distracted and does not understand Caddy's plea. The couple will spend a week away on their honeymoon. Before they leave, they comfort Mr. Turveydrop and tell him he will not have to be without them long. He advises them to come home soon because it will be bad for the business if they stay away too long.

Esther is shocked by the blasé attitude of Mr. Turveydrop and Mrs. Jellyby but is even more surprised when Mr. Jellyby suddenly seizes her and thanks her for her help with the wedding. As she drives away in Mr. Jarndyce's carriage, Esther asks her guardian if he approves of the marriage. Mr. Jarndyce assures her he does. Ada agrees, and Esther is very happy for Caddy and Prince.

## CHAPTER 31

One evening, when Esther has finished Charley's lessons for the night, Charley asks her if she knows a brickmaker's wife named Jenny. Esther says that she does and asks Charley what she knows of her. Charley says that Jenny and Liz have returned to London and that she met Jenny outside a physician's **house**. She was there to buy medicine for an orphan boy who is ill. Esther is worried and decides to go and visit the brickmaker's wife and see if she can help.

It is a wet, blustery night and already dark when Charley and Esther set out to Jenny's. As Esther walks there, she has the surreal feeling that she has undergone a transformation. The little **house** is just as dingy and foul as she remembers, and Jo lies ill in the corner, where Jenny tends to him. Esther approaches and speaks to Jenny and Jo starts up in horror when he sees her. He cries out that Esther has come to take him to the cemetery, and he doesn't want to go.

Jenny tries to calm Jo and tells him that this lady is a friend. Jo admits that Esther is not the lady that he fears, but that she looks like her. Charley, who is used to caring for her brother and sister, immediately begins to tend to Jo in a very experienced manner. Jo complains that he feels hot then cold and that his body aches. Jenny says that she found Jo in town that morning and that she knew him from when she lived in London before. Jo complains deliriously that he is going on a journey and has been "moved on" again.

*The philanthropists are self-obsessed and do not listen to other people's ideas. This suggests that this type of philanthropy is all for show and more about drawing praise and attention to oneself rather than truly helping people. Mr. Turveydrop also only thinks about himself and his comfortable lifestyle, which relies on his son's work to continue, rather than about Caddy and Prince's happiness.*



*Mr. Jellyby thanks Esther because Esther has shown the qualities which were associated with "good" women in the 19th century. She has put other people before herself and been domestically organized and diligent. Dickens's narrow view of women reflects mainstream opinion in the mid-19th century.*



*Esther sincerely wishes to help Jenny and Liz any way that she can, even though she's only met them briefly. She does not think of herself, and the risk that this journey might pose to her health, but only about their needs.*



*Esther's feeling is a presentiment as, later, she catches the illness from Jo (which is smallpox) and her appearance is transformed by the scars it leaves on her face. Jo thinks that Esther is Lady Dedlock, who asked Jo to show her Captain Hawdon's grave, once again emphasizing the resemblance between the two women.*



*Jo has noticed the physical similarity between Esther and Lady Dedlock and this has led him to confuse the two women. Jo clearly has a very high and dangerous fever. In his delirium, he references the police officer who tried to get him to "move on" even though Jo had nowhere else to go.*



Jenny tells Esther that Liz has gone out to see if anyone will take Jo in; he cannot stay with her because of her violent husband. Liz returns and says she has had no luck finding a place for Jo in “the proper refuge.” She has also seen Jenny’s husband on his way home and warns them as soon as she arrives. Rather than turn Jo out on the street, Esther and Charley lead him away with them. He seems afraid of Esther though and is reluctant to follow her.

*Jenny has tried to find a spot for Jo in a workhouse, which were set up to be homeless shelters and hospitals for the poor. However, although workhouses were designed with social aims in mind, they were horribly inefficient and corrupt and did not drastically improve quality of life for those who were sent to them. Jo is delirious and still associates Esther with his mysterious encounter with Lady Dedlock and the cemetery.*



Esther keeps her distance, but beckons Jo towards Mr. Jarndyce’s house so that he will not lie down to die in the street. He follows them as though in a daze and does not seem frightened. When they arrive back at Mr. Jarndyce’s, they find that Mr. Skimpole is there. Esther calls him and Mr. Jarndyce in to see Jo and Mr. Skimpole emphatically states that they should throw Jo out immediately, for fear of contagion.

*Esther is selfless and does not worry too much about the possibility that she will catch the disease; she is primarily concerned about helping Jo. Mr. Skimpole, however, is very selfish and immediately thinks of himself. He is prepared to let Jo die so that he will be safe.*



Mr. Jarndyce complains resentfully that if Jo were a prisoner, he would have a bed for the night and be treated for his sickness, and Mr. Skimpole says that he should be a prisoner then, as this would be more poetic. Mr. Skimpole then launches into a philosophical debate, but Esther reminds them that Jo needs immediate care. Mr. Jarndyce says that Jo can sleep in the loft above the stable, and that they will send for the authorities in the morning.

*Mr. Jarndyce is angry because he perceives that prisoners are treated with more care than poor and sick people in Victorian London. This is likely true because, although workhouses existed to house the poor, they were often crowded and turned people away, as is the case with Jo. Mr. Jarndyce suggests that the Victorian establishment spends more money on keeping prisoners than it does on helping the poor.*



Mr. Skimpole seems bemused by this decision and Mr. Jarndyce asks him what he would suggest. Mr. Skimpole casually reels off a homemade remedy for fever. Jo is sent to the loft and Mr. Skimpole entertains them for the rest of the evening with songs about a “peasant boy.” Esther wakes early the next morning when she hears noise outside her window. She leans out and sees the servants milling around. They tell her that Jo disappeared during the night.

*It is ironic that Mr. Skimpole knows a fever remedy because it suggests that, even though he is perhaps the only one who could help Jo, he would still be unwilling to. This supports the idea that Mr. Skimpole will always let other people come to his aid, but that he’s reticent to do the same for others. His approach to Jo is sentimental and romantic (as seen through his songs) and does not account for the fact that Jo is a real person who is suffering.*



They search for Jo but can find no trace of him. A few nights later, Charley feels cold and tells Esther that she thinks she has a fever. Esther immediately locks herself and Charley in the room and refuses to let Ada in. She nurses Charley for several weeks until, eventually, the girl recovers. Esther falls ill, however, and Charley is horrified when she realizes that she has passed the fever on to her. She then nurses Esther in her turn, and Ada is only allowed to communicate with them through the window in the garden. As Esther’s illness progresses, she loses her sight and hovers close to death. Charley stays by her side and begs Esther not to die.

*Esther, again, does not spare a thought for herself but risks her health to take care of Charley. She is fiercely protective of Ada’s health, however, and will not let her into the room in case she is infected. Esther is always willing to sacrifice herself and risk her life for others and she is a virtuous heroine in this sense.*



## CHAPTER 32

It is nighttime at Lincoln's Inn, and most of the lawyers' offices are dark. In Cook's Court, Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins, Krook's neighbors, gossip on a doorstep in the clammy air. At Krook's shop, Mr. Weevle goes up and down the stairs anxiously and hovers by the door as though waiting for something. Mr. Snagsby, who also has a strange, anxious feeling that night, walks the Court and passes Mr. Weevle as he goes. They exchange a few words and both comment on the unpleasant smell of frying meat that lies heavy in the air and that they suppose comes from the nearby pub.

Mr. Weevle says that the dense air gives him "the horrors," and Mr. Snagsby says that this is not surprising given the room he lives in and what happened there. Mr. Snagsby remarks that Nemo was one of his writers, and now Mr. Weevle is too; he says it has a feeling of "fate." This makes Mr. Weevle extremely uncomfortable, and he unhappily bids Mr. Snagsby goodnight.

Mr. Weevle remains in the street and awaits his companion, who had promised to meet him. At last Mr. Guppy arrives, and Mr. Weevle protests that Mr. Guppy is late. He leads Mr. Guppy up to his room and complains that he cannot stand the place, with its morbid history and Krook lurking in the shop below. Mr. Guppy wants to know why Mr. Weevle was speaking to Mr. Snagsby, but Mr. Weevle complains that Mr. Guppy is too mysterious.

Mr. Guppy looks at the portrait of Lady Dedlock on Mr. Weevle's wall. Mr. Weevle thinks it is strange that Krook chose midnight as the time to give him the letters as, by this time, Krook will be very drunk. Mr. Guppy asks Mr. Weevle what Krook has been doing and if he can read yet. Mr. Weevle says Krook cannot read, but Mr. Guppy wonders how he recognized "the name Hawdon." Mr. Weevle says that Krook copied the word and asked him what it said. Mr. Guppy asks if the handwriting is a woman's or a man's, and Mr. Weevle thinks that it is a woman's.

Mr. Weevle is to go downstairs at midnight. As the men wait, they notice that the air is full of ash, and they wonder if there is a fire somewhere. Mr. Guppy asks Mr. Weevle how he found out about the letters and Mr. Weevle tells him that it was after Krook asked him to spell out "Hawdon" for him. Mr. Weevle's plan is to bring Krook up to his room and read the letters to him. Mr. Guppy whispers that they must make some fake letters for Mr. Weevle to read from.

*Dickens often shows the perspective of many characters simultaneously and demonstrates how their paths cross and overlap. This technique suggests that society is interconnected, and that people frequently collide with others in interesting and unexpected ways.*



*Mr. Weevle seems to regret taking Nemo's room and is haunted by the idea of the man who died there. Victorian society was very keen on ghost stories and Dickens makes frequent references to ghosts and hauntings throughout the novel, although they are often ambiguous and not meant to be taken literally.*



*Mr. Weevle has let his imagination run away with him and cannot forget the recent death which occurred in his room. Krook is a sinister presence who also seems to haunt the building. Mr. Guppy is dramatic and likes attention, so he does not fully divulge his plans. This causes Mr. Weevle's imagination to go to work and he imagines all kinds of horrors.*



*Krook has Captain Hawdon's letters and, because Mr. Weevle has ingratiated himself with the old man, has agreed to sell them to him. It is unclear how much Krook knows throughout the novel, and this contributes to his role as a sinister character.*



*Mr. Weevle has clearly been in Krook's confidence and convinced the old man to let him see the letters. He has then passed this information on to Mr. Guppy. However, Mr. Guppy wishes to keep the letters for himself so wants fake letters in order to trick Krook.*



Mr. Guppy says that, if Krook detects the false letters, they will call his bluff because the letters are neither theirs nor his. Mr. Weevle says that, although this seems honest, they are being very secretive and mysterious about it. Their whispers make the room feel haunted. While they talk, more soot creeps into the room and Mr. Guppy throws open the window. Mr. Guppy tells Mr. Weevle that he has not told Bart about their plan because he does not trust his grandfather; Mr. Weevle agrees this is wise.

Mr. Weevle muses on Krook's strange habit of spelling out words. He will never learn to read, he thinks, but he clearly believes that he has found some valuable documents. Mr. Guppy notices that the grime in the air has got on his coat and tries to wipe it off. The clock strikes 12 a.m. and the men prepare to go downstairs, with Mr. Guppy pushing Mr. Weevle ahead of him.

Mr. Weevle goes down the stairs but, suddenly, charges back up. He cries that Krook is not there but that the air is thick with grease and smells like something charred. Mr. Guppy creeps down into the room and finds the cat hissing in the corner and Krook's coat upon his chair. Mr. Weevle says that he saw Krook sitting in the chair and holding the letters. He saw him remove the ribbon that bound the papers and, now, finds the ribbon on the floor.

They hold up the lantern and see a pile of ashes on the floor. Horrified by this discovery, Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle rush out of the house and call for help. Krook has died from spontaneous combustion, a fiery death fit for the "Lord Chancellor."

## CHAPTER 33

An inquest will be held for Krook, just as an inquest was held for Nemo, and Krook's death is also the talk of the street. Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle are supplied with drinks in the pub and asked to repeat the story many times. Two policeman guard the door of the shop. Mr. Snagsby rushes to the Sol's Arms when he hears the news but is forced to leave before he hears the story because Mrs. Snagsby has followed him. She glares at him accusingly, and Mr. Snagsby almost thinks she holds him responsible for Krook's death.

*Krook does not legally own the letters and has no real claim on them. The clerks are clever and shifty because they are used to working for lawyers, who constantly perform legal tricks. The Smallweeds are also greedy and mercenary, like Mr. Guppy, and he knows that they would only look out for themselves and betray him if it served them to do so.*



*It is likely that Krook, who is illiterate, does not know the value of many of the documents in his shop. However, because he is a greedy old man, he realizes that his possession of them gives him power and thus jealously prevents anyone else from learning the secrets that the documents harbor.*



*The men suspect that something is terribly wrong—Krook seems to have vanished into thin air with the letters and the only trace of them is the ribbon on the floor.*



*Spontaneous combustion refers to the idea that people can spontaneously burst into flames. It is often associated with heavy drinking and, in Bleak House, it is associated with fiery emotions, such as greed and passion. It was a familiar topic in the Victorian period and, although scientifically it was believed to be a myth, it featured in sensational fiction.*



*Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle are the center of gossip because they discovered Krook. Mrs. Snagsby still suspects Mr. Snagsby of infidelity. Ironically, because Mr. Snagsby does not know what Mrs. Snagsby imagines, his own imagination concocts wild accusations with which she might charge him.*



Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy walk from the pub together towards the court and are both very uneasy about the previous night's events. Mr. Weevle accuses Mr. Guppy of conspiracy and Mr. Guppy indignantly, but rather anxiously, denies this. They irritably decide on a story to tell at the inquest, which explains their presence in Krook's shop, and Mr. Weevle says that he plans to leave his lodgings immediately. Mr. Guppy says that to do so is to waste an opportunity, but Mr. Weevle snaps that Mr. Guppy should go and live in his old room.

As they walk along the road, they pass a carriage which contains most of the Smallweed family. Mr. Smallweed leans out of the window and excitedly calls to Mr. Guppy. He asks him to carry him into the Sol's Arms and Mr. Guppy reluctantly does so, with Mr. Weevle's help. Judy and Bart follow, accompanied by Mrs. Smallweed. They deposit Mr. Smallweed in an armchair and he says that he has come to learn about the recent accident. Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle tell him that they discovered Krook.

Mr. Smallweed tells them that Krook was Mrs. Smallweed's brother, and that they have come to take possession of the shop. Mrs. Smallweed begins to dance and chant crazily when she hears this, and Mr. Smallweed swears at her. Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle are rather indignant that Bart never told them of this relation. They help carry Mr. Smallweed up through Krook's shop and into Miss Flite's room, which is currently deserted.

The street is in a frenzy of excitement all day. A coffin is obtained for Krook, despite the manner of his death, and scientists, doctors, and journalists gather in the street, wanting to discuss the cause of death and the likelihood of spontaneous combustion. Mr. Guppy lingers around and is disheartened to see Mr. Smallweed lock up the shop before he departs.

Mr. Guppy pays a visit to Lady Dedlock. She seems, as usual, perfectly indifferent and disdainful of him. He tells her contritely that he does not have the letters and that he knows they have been destroyed. Lady Dedlock dismisses him but, as Mr. Guppy slinks towards the door, Mr. Tulkinghorn enters the room.

*Mr. Guppy still has not told Mr. Weevle all his plans, and the men now suspect each other. They are concerned that they will be implicated somehow in Krook's death because of their presence at the shop. Mr. Guppy is a coward and wants Mr. Weevle to stay in the room, which they now both consider unlucky and haunted, to gather information for him.*



*Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle do not know why Mr. Smallweed is so excited about Krook's death.*



*Mrs. Smallweed has inherited the shop, and all the documents inside it, but, since she is mad, her husband will take possession of it. Mr. Guppy is a hypocrite as he has tried to hide his secrets from Bart but is irritated that Bart has kept a secret from him—it's clear that none of the clerks are trustworthy and all are trying to double cross each other. Miss Flite attends court during the day, which is why her room is empty.*



*It was a matter of scientific dispute whether spontaneous combustion could occur or not well into the 20th century. It is now considered to be a myth and its victims are believed to have burned to death after being exposed to a spark or flame. Mr. Guppy seems to have lost his chance to rifle through Krook's documents.*



*Mr. Guppy has promised to bring Lady Dedlock the letters but now believes they were destroyed in the fire. Mr. Guppy does not wish his employers to know of his private investigations, but this aim is foiled when Mr. Tulkinghorn arrives.*



Mr. Guppy is horrified to see the lawyer here and wishes him good day. Mr. Tulkinghorn, however, has met Lady Dedlock's eye and a predatory look passes over his face. The moment passes quickly, and Mr. Tulkinghorn apologizes for the interruption. Lady Dedlock says that it is fine; she is just going out for dinner. Mr. Tulkinghorn nods and then stops Mr. Guppy and asks him who he works for. Mr. Guppy says that he is employed by Kenge and Carboy, and Mr. Tulkinghorn seems to recognize him. Mr. Guppy hurries away and Mr. Tulkinghorn politely helps Lady Dedlock to her carriage.

*Although Mr. Tulkinghorn does not work for Mr. Guppy's company, he knows everything that goes on in the world of law.*



## CHAPTER 34

In George's shooting gallery, George is shocked to receive a letter from Mr. Smallweed which asks for the full repayment of his debt. George asks Phil what he makes of it and Phil says that this is always the way in matters of money. George replies indignantly that he has paid off his debt and that, now, he is only paying interest. Phil, who is currently painting the wall white, suggests that George "whitewash" the business, but George says that to do this would bankrupt the Bagnets, which he would never do.

*Mr. Smallweed suddenly pulls out of his prior agreement with George and calls in George's debt. Although this is an unpleasant thing to do, legally Mr. Smallweed has the upper hand. This suggests that the laws surrounding debt and interest need reforms. Phil suggests that George should ignore the letter, but the Bagnets have provided George with the security to borrow money, and they will have to pay if George does not.*



Midway through this conversation, they hear footsteps in the hall, and Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet appear at the entrance of the gallery. Mrs. Bagnet greets George warmly; they have come to sign the security on George's debt, which is due to be renewed as usual. Mrs. Bagnet remarks that George looks pale and George uncomfortably explains that his request for renewal has been rejected. Mrs. Bagnet is horrified and wishes that George had thought of her and the children in his careless lifestyle.

*The Bagnets have agreed to take responsibility for George's debt because they trust that he can pay it back and will not need to make use of their offer. They are shocked to find that George is in difficulty with the repayments, and Mrs. Bagnet worries that they will have to repay the full amount.*



George is distraught to have let his friends down and hopes that the issue can be resolved. He only just received the letter, he explains, and is just about to go to see Mr. Smallweed. Mrs. Bagnet quickly forgives George and admits that she knows he would never trouble them on purpose. Mr. Bagnet advises that George should see Mr. Smallweed immediately, and George agrees and sets out with Mr. Bagnet. As the men walk to Mount Pleasant together, they earnestly discuss the many merits of Mrs. Bagnet.

*A truly honorable man, George does not want the Bagnets to think that he has known this for a long time or has used them in any way. He does not expect them to pay his debt and wants to find another way to resolve the situation.*



They arrive at Mr. Smallweed's, and Judy sneers at them as they enter. Mr. Smallweed is perched in his usual seat and greets the two ex-soldiers with a leer. George asks for his pipe and asks Mr. Smallweed why "his friend in the city" has sent him this letter when he knows that Mr. Bagnet cannot pay. Mr. Smallweed snaps that he does not know Mr. Bagnet cannot pay and George remarks that Mr. Smallweed is in a very shrill good mood which seems somehow sinister in intent.

*Mr. Smallweed mocks George and seems to feel that he has triumphed over the trooper in some way. George is naïve and expects Mr. Smallweed to treat him fairly. Mr. Smallweed is a horrible man, however, and delights in getting one over on people.*



George insists that he wants to resolve the dispute amicably and to renew his debt, as he always has before. Mr. Smallweed's joking manner suddenly evaporates and he snarls at George that he will "crush" and "destroy him" if the debt is not paid. Astounded, George and Mr. Bagnet glance at one another and leave the Smallweed's **house** as Mr. Smallweed calls for Judy to throw them out.

Once outside, George and Mr. Bagnet solemnly pace together. They agree to visit Mr. Tulkinghorn, but, when they arrive, his clerk tells them that he is with a client and will not see them. George and Mr. Bagnet wait in the hall and George leans gloomily against the fireplace. Eventually, Mr. Tulkinghorn's client, who is Mrs. Rouncewell, exits his chamber. George does not turn around as she goes past, but she notices Mr. Bagnet's military bearing and timidly explains that she had a son who joined the army. Mr. Bagnet speaks politely with her for a moment before she goes on her way.

Mr. Bagnet tries to cheer George up, and the clerk goes into Mr. Tulkinghorn's office again to tell him that they are still outside. They are admitted and Mr. Tulkinghorn asks George why he has come back when he is not welcome. George explains the situation, but Mr. Tulkinghorn coldly replies that George must pay his debts and, if he or Mr. Bagnet cannot, they must suffer the consequences. George says that he cannot do this, because it implicates his good friends, and so he tells Mr. Tulkinghorn that he will give him the sample of Captain Hawdon's handwriting.

Mr. Tulkinghorn says that, if George chooses to do this, he will write a document which frees Mr. Bagnet from all obligations connected with the debt. George immediately agrees and pulls the letter from his pocket. It is nothing but a list of instructions, sent to him by Captain Hawdon. Mr. Tulkinghorn takes the letter, but his face does not reveal if he is pleased or disappointed, and he quickly sends the men away.

George has dinner with the Bagnets, but he is not his usual cheerful self and even Malta and Quebec's playful attention cannot raise his spirits. Mrs. Bagnet worries that he has taken her rebuke to heart, but George assures her that he deserves it. Before he leaves them, George calls Woolwich over and tells him to take care of his mother as he grows up. He then leaves before he has smoked his usual pipe with his friends.

*Mr. Smallweed shows George his true colors and reveals that he has always despised the trooper and wished to end him. Mr. Smallweed does not have any special reason to hold a grudge against George—he is just a bitter, miserly old man who hates everyone.*



*It seems that George does not turn around because he is ashamed of the tight circumstances he's found himself in and does not wish to be seen by anyone.*



*George trades Captain Hawdon's handwriting—the only semblance of leverage he has—for Mr. Tulkinghorn's cooperation. He is very unhappy about this because he hates to be disloyal to his friends.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn accepts George's offer—despite his earlier show of indifference, it seems that Mr. Tulkinghorn really did need this handwriting sample from George. Mr. Tulkinghorn gives no outward sign to suggest that he is pleased to take the letter.*



*While many of the novel's characters are quick to sabotage others to help themselves, George is far too honorable and loyal to drag the Bagnets down with him. He's also willing to shoulder the blame, as seen in his conversation with Mrs. Bagnet. George's advice to Woolwich suggests that he sees Mrs. Bagnet as a mother figure, and it also hints that George perhaps didn't take care of his mother.*



## CHAPTER 35

Esther lies sick and delirious with fever for several weeks. Charley takes care of her, and Ada is strictly kept out of the room. Esther dreams strange dreams during her illness and is confused about who and where she is. Finally, one day, she is well enough to sit up and have tea with Charley, who cries with relief when she sees that Esther will recover.

During this tea, Esther looks around her room and finds things are a little different. She asks Charley what has changed, and Charley is reluctant to tell her. Finally, Esther realizes that the mirror is gone, and Charley begins to cry. Esther understands that her face has been scarred by the disease, but she has expected this. She tells Charley not to cry and comforts her, for she is not surprised by this change and is only relieved to be alive.

Later that day, Mr. Jarndyce comes in, and Esther is relieved that he treats her the same as always and is overjoyed to see her. He tells her how anxious everyone has been to see her recovered and that even Richard has written to ask after her. Esther asks why Richard should not write to him, and Mr. Jarndyce replies that Richard's letter to him was not friendly; he worries that Richard's proximity to Jarndyce and Jarndyce has warped his perception of things.

Esther is shocked to hear this and asks Mr. Jarndyce if Richard suspects him of thwarting his interests. Mr. Jarndyce replies that this is the case, and Esther is disappointed. Mr. Jarndyce tells her that it is not Richard's fault, and that it is the nature of Chancery court cases to bring people into this state. Esther resolves to go and see Richard as soon as she is well.

Mr. Jarndyce tells Esther that she will soon be strong enough to see Ada again, and tells her of the many well-wishers she has had during her delirium. Mr. Boythorn has written to insist that she must go and rest at his **house** when she is well enough to travel; he will be out of town for some weeks. Miss Flite has also come out to see her, having walked all the way from London. Mr. Jarndyce and Esther agree that before Esther goes to Mr. Boythorn's house, they must pay for a carriage to bring Miss Flite to Bleak House.

*Esther feels as though her identity is changing. Although this is part of her fever, it also represents the change to her face and the change her identity will literally undertake, when she learns of her true history, towards the novel's end.*



*Charley does not want Esther to be upset when she sees the change in her face and, therefore, hides the mirror from her and hopes Esther will not notice. As always, Esther puts her own feelings aside to comfort Charley.*



*Esther is afraid that her changed appearance will change the way people treat her. However, she is so good to the people around her that they love and accept her no matter what.*



*Richard believes that Mr. Jarndyce is his enemy because they have competing interests in the lawsuit. Mr. Jarndyce understands this because he has seen the warped and unpleasant effect that these lawsuits have on people.*



*Esther's goodness makes her beloved by many people and she receives back the love and kindness that she gives out. Mr. Boythorn wishes to let Esther stay in his house in the country, while he is away, so that she can rest in pleasant surroundings.*



Esther is touched to be surrounded by so many people who care for her. She resumes her talks with Ada through the window, but she is too anxious to pull back the curtain and show Ada her face. Miss Flite arrives the next day and enters Esther's room in a flood of tears. Esther calms the old lady down and sees that Miss Flite wants to tell her something. Esther kindly asks her what it is and Miss Flite says that she met a poor woman at the gates who asked after Esther's health.

Esther asks if the woman's name was Jenny, and Miss Flite confirms that it was. Charley tells Esther that Jenny has often come to the house to speak to her. Jenny has told Charley that a veiled woman has visited her and asked after Esther. Charley asks Esther if she remembers leaving a handkerchief with Jenny, which she used to cover the dead child's face. Esther says she does, and Charley says that the veiled woman took this handkerchief from Jenny when she heard who it belonged to.

Esther cannot explain this but thinks that the woman may be Caddy. Miss Flite suggests that the woman is the Lord Chancellor's wife and Esther busies herself with tending to the old lady, who is tired and hungry, and orders dinner for her guest. Esther asks Miss Flite how her case is progressing, and Miss Flite says that she expects a judgement any day.

Miss Flite seems very anxious about her judgement and Esther, seeing her distress, suggests that she should give up the case. Miss Flite says that this would be easier but that it is not possible; Jarndyce and Jarndyce is in her family, and her father and her brother, who are both dead, bequeathed the case to her. Miss Flite says that it is some magic in the court that "draws people on" and leads them, unwittingly, into madness and despair.

Miss Flite says that she can feel this invisible force of Chancery pulling at her, just as it pulled at her father. She explains that her father was once a respectable man, but that he was led on by the court and died in debtor's prison. The same thing then happened to her brother and sister in turn. One day, just after her sister died, Miss Flite decided to go and see the beast that had destroyed her relatives and, when she saw the court, she was struck too and was drawn into it herself. She can spot the beginnings of this madness in people, she says, and confides in Esther that she sees them now in Richard's face.

*Although Esther has, so far, been loved and accepted by her relatives despite her changed face, she is insecure—perhaps because of her childhood—and still fears rejection.*



*The veiled woman is implied to be Lady Dedlock, as she is described in the same disguise she used when she visited Captain Hawdon's grave with Jo. Lady Dedlock has taken the handkerchief because she now knows that Esther is her daughter and wishes to have a keepsake of hers. She fears that Esther will die from her illness and goes to Jenny's house to find out how Esther is, although, of course, she cannot reveal her identity.*



*Esther, of course, does not suspect Lady Dedlock because she does not know that Lady Dedlock is her mother.*



*Miss Flite has followed in the footsteps of her family members who also went mad while pursuing the lawsuit. It is impossible to become involved with Chancery without going mad. The lawsuits put such strain on people that they go through a predictable cycle and cannot prevent their decline.*



*Chancery is given the quality of a corrupt, almost supernatural force which seduces people and purposely leads them on. This relates to the lawyers, who deliberately encourage their clients to invest in cases, even if these suits are useless. However, it is also fate, as there is no escaping the inevitable tragic end, wrought with madness and despair, that Chancery inflicts upon its victims.*



Esther feels uncomfortable about this, and Miss Flite says that, when her judgement is finally delivered, she will free her **birds**. She changes the subject and tells Esther about Mr. Woodcourt. The boat that he had been traveling on was shipwrecked, and Mr. Woodcourt was in the newspaper because he took such excellent care of the survivors. Esther feels immensely proud as Miss Flite reads the article to her and is glad to know such a skilled and generous man.

Miss Flite says that Mr. Woodcourt deserves a title, but Esther skeptically says that he will not receive one for generous deeds which help ordinary people. Miss Flite reprimands Esther for speaking so and says that many fine men are knighted in England. Esther feels that this is Miss Flite's madness talking.

Esther gets used to the idea that her face has changed. Her only regret is that she once tentatively believed that Mr. Woodcourt loved her, but that he did not propose because he was poor and had no career. She is glad now that this is not the case and that she does not have to write to him and explain the change in her appearance. He is now free to marry whomever he wants.

## CHAPTER 36

Esther and Charley travel together to Mr. Boythorn's **house** in Lincolnshire. Mr. Boythorn is away, so they have the house to themselves. Esther is delighted with the property, and she and Charley spend a long time exploring the grounds. That night, before she goes to sleep, Esther steels herself to look in the mirror for the first time. She is shocked by her changed appearance but resolves to overcome her reservations and be grateful for her situation.

The only consideration which bothers Esther is the thought of Mr. Woodcourt and how he will take the change. She has kept his flowers but decides to dispense with all romantic notions and to remember him fondly. Ada plans to join Esther and Charley in a few days, and Esther wants to be fully recovered before her friend arrives. She resolves therefore to spend as much time outside as possible, and she and Charley spend all day riding the pony that Mr. Boythorn has left for them.

*Miss Flite's birds, caged until some elusive day in the future, symbolize all the suspended dreams, ambitions, and hopes, which people put off while they wait endlessly for a verdict in Chancery.*



*Here, Dickens uses Esther's perspective to criticize the British establishment, which, he claims, never rewards people for doing charitable deeds that help poor people.*



*Esther struggles to believe that she is loved, but she has clearly seen from Mr. Woodcourt's behavior that he was once attracted to her. She believes that his attraction is shallow, however, and she does not believe that he loves her enough to marry her without her looks.*



*Esther is a very strong character and is not at all shallow or vain. Although she is naturally disappointed to have lost her good looks, she bravely seeks to overcome this pain by thinking gratefully about the things that she does still have.*



*Esther has nursed hopes that Mr. Woodcourt will fall in love with her on his return. She resignedly puts these hopes aside now, as she assumes that he will never love her without her natural beauty.*



The villagers are friendly with Esther, and she and Charley find that they are never short of company. Esther's favorite place to walk takes her through the grounds of Chesney Wold, and she particularly likes the spot known as the Ghost's Walk. Esther likes to rest here during her walks and likes to sit on a nearby bank which is crowded with violets. Esther has heard the legend of the Ghost's Walk from Mr. Boythorn and though she is fascinated by the **house**, and by the Dedlock family history, she does not visit Chesney Wold because of her strange awkward feeling about Lady Dedlock.

One day, while Esther sits in her favorite spot, she notices a figure coming towards her and is shocked to find that it is Lady Dedlock, who rushes towards her with a face full of concern. Esther is so startled that she calls Charley, and, when she does this, Lady Dedlock immediately stops and regains her haughty composure. She tells Esther that she has heard of her illness and hopes that she is better now. Esther thanks her and says that she is. Lady Dedlock suggests that Charley go back to the **house** and that she should walk a while with Esther.

When Charley has left them, Lady Dedlock sits down beside Esther and Esther is amazed when Lady Dedlock produces the handkerchief, which she left with Jenny. Lady Dedlock bursts into tears and kneels before Esther. She confesses that she is her mother and begs Esther to forgive her. Esther is shocked but forgives her mother instantly. She tries to raise her up but Lady Dedlock says that she cannot be redeemed; she is a married woman, and Esther is her secret shame. She can only reveal herself to Esther for long enough to give her a letter and then she must never speak with her again.

Esther asks if anyone knows the secret and Lady Dedlock replies that she dreads that one man does—a mercenary, unfeeling man who seeks nothing but power and social privilege. This man is Mr. Tulkinghorn. Although Mr. Tulkinghorn suspects nothing yet, Lady Dedlock knows that he is always watching and that he cares nothing for her or for anyone but himself. Esther asks if there is no one who can help Lady Dedlock, but she again insists that she is beyond redemption. She tells Esther that she may tell Mr. Jarndyce—who is very kind—but no one else. Before she bids her daughter farewell, she implores Esther to believe that she loves her despite the mask of coldness she wears.

*It is pertinent that Esther likes the Ghost's Walk as, although she does not know this, she is the "ghost," or the secret at the heart of the Dedlock family which will inevitably tear them apart and bring disgrace to their name. She knows the legend but naturally does not connect it with herself and believes that Lady Dedlock dislikes her.*



*Lady Dedlock lets her guard down for a moment because she thinks that she and Esther are alone. She has amazing strength of will because she is able to hide her feelings immediately, as soon as she sees that Charley is present.*



*When Lady Dedlock procures the handkerchief, Esther realizes that Lady Dedlock is the veiled woman who has been to Jenny's house to enquire about her. Although Dickens makes Lady Dedlock a sympathetic character, she is still positioned as a fallen woman because she had a child out of wedlock. This reflects 19th-century audience's willingness to sympathize with unfortunate women, like Lady Dedlock, but their reluctance to let them off the hook entirely for their transgression.*



*Lady Dedlock, who is also skilled at maintaining a façade and cloaking her true feelings, sees through Mr. Tulkinghorn's veneer of politeness and respectability and knows that he is cruel and ruthless underneath. Lady Dedlock trusts Mr. Jarndyce because he is sympathetic and thinks of others before himself; she is sure he will put Esther's interests first.*



Esther walks home slowly, stunned by her ordeal, and hides her tears from Charley. She tells her maid that she will go to bed early and, once in her room, reads Lady Dedlock's letter. It tells Esther what she already knows: that she was raised by her aunt, Miss Barbary. Esther burns her mother's letter and, as she does so, is haunted by her aunt's cruel words, which she remembers from her childhood.

*Esther is still pained by her aunt's cruelty. Miss Barbary took her from her mother without her mother's knowledge and, therefore, denied Esther the childhood love she now knows that she would have received.*



That evening, after dark, Esther goes out walking alone and walks through the Dedlock cemetery behind Chesney Wold. She wanders from here through the grounds and ends up on the Ghost's Walk. She hears her own footsteps on the flagstones and is suddenly horrified by the realization that she is the omen in the story who will bring ruin to the Dedlock line. She runs from the **house**, back through the grounds, shaken with horror and despair.

*Esther realizes that, if people find out her identity, Lady Dedlock's name will be ruined and she will bring disgrace to the Dedlocks as a result. She feels, for a moment, that her identity is defined by the shame she has inherited from her mother and that people will blame her for.*



When Esther arrives home, however, she has a letter from Ada. This note is full of kind words, and Esther remembers how loved she is and is grateful for the friends in her life. She wakes up the next morning anxious and excited over Ada's arrival. She is half afraid that Ada will reject her when she sees her altered face. Her fears are allayed when Ada arrives and throws herself into Esther's arms, delighted to see her old friend.

*Esther's shame is dispelled when she remembers how many people love and care for her; she is not defined by her mother's actions and receives love because of her own unique identity, which is giving and kind.*



## CHAPTER 37

Esther does not tell Ada about her discovery out of respect for Lady Dedlock's secret. However, Ada is very curious about the mistress of Chesney Wold. Charley informs them that Lady Dedlock has left, however, and that she has gone to her **house** in London. Not long after this, Charley appears again and tells Esther that she is requested by Mr. Grubble, the landlord of the village pub. Esther is extremely confused but follows these instructions and finds Mr. Grubble waiting for her at the door of the pub.

*Lady Dedlock cannot bear to be near her daughter in case her love for Esther causes her façade to slip and reveals her secret.*



Mr. Grubble leads her into a back room where Esther is surprised to find Richard. Richard tells her that he has come down on his break from Chancery and that Mr. Skimpole is with him. Esther is dismayed when Richard talks of Mr. Jarndyce in a disparaging tone, but Richard brushes this off. Richard has paid for Mr. Skimpole to join him because Mr. Skimpole was determined to see Esther. Esther thinks this is rather suspicious, despite Mr. Skimpole's charming manner when he is shown into the room.

*Richard has not come to Mr. Boythorn's house directly because he fears that Mr. Jarndyce is there and avoids his guardian, who he mistakenly believes is plotting against him. Mr. Skimpole takes advantage of Richard and has fun at his expense, despite his façade of friendliness and naivety.*



Esther is distressed to find that Mr. Skimpole encourages Richard in his Chancery suit because he finds it very poetic. Esther leads Richard and Mr. Skimpole back to Mr. Boythorn's **house** and shows Richard into the living room where Ada is seated. Ada is very pleased to see him, and Esther can see that she still loves Richard dearly.

The next morning, Esther and Richard walk in the grounds and Richards tells her that when the lawsuit is resolved, he will move to the country for some peace. Esther suggests that this is possible before the end of the suit, but Richard says that he cannot live "in an unfinished **house**." Esther recalls Miss Flite's words and the story of old Tom Jarndyce. Esther tries to remind him of Mr. Jarndyce's warning, but Richard scoffs when he hears this name and says that Mr. Jarndyce has his own interests in the suit and wishes to thwart him.

Esther reprimands Richard and asks him to remember Mr. Jarndyce's generosity. Richard seems a little ashamed, but he maintains that he must make his own way in the case. He says that once the case is solved, he will be able to see Mr. Jarndyce clearly and understand his real motives. Richard admits that Mr. Jarndyce has written to him, but he wishes to keep this a secret from Ada as he does not want to draw her into any unpleasantness. Esther commends this in him and understands that he really does love Ada, but that he is very confused and unsettled.

Esther asks Richard if he has any debts. Richard says that he has, but that he does not worry about this because he is bound to inherit something when the case is complete. Esther is worried because Richard relies entirely on these hypothetical ideas and does not seem to listen to anything she says. Richard leaves that afternoon, and Esther confides in Ada about her fears about Richard's future.

Ada writes Richard a letter and tells him that he has inadvertently wronged Mr. Jarndyce. She also begs him not to go into debt or trouble himself about the lawsuit for her sake. When he receives this note, Richard again comes to visit, but rather than dissuading him from following the suit, the note seems to have made him pursue it more doggedly.

*Mr. Skimpole does not think about the real-life consequences for Richard but encourages Richard because it entertains him to do so. He is totally selfish and only cares about his own enjoyment.*



*Richard is clearly exhausted by the lawsuit and now wishes that it was all over. He will not give it up, however, because he cannot stand the uncertainty of it hanging over him and feels that he must resolve it before he can have peace. Esther is haunted by the memory of Tom Jarndyce, Richard's grandfather, who shot himself after the Chancery suit sent him mad.*



*The Chancery suit acts like a delusion, or a fog which surrounds Richard, and prevents him from seeing clearly. Although Richard acts unkindly towards Mr. Jarndyce, Esther can see that he is a good person underneath but is warped by madness and paranoia.*



*Richard rests all his hopes on his supposed inheritance and takes great risks in his present which he hopes his future inheritance will resolve. Like Miss Flite, Richard is now beyond help and reason, and Esther can see that any persuasion or sensible advice will be lost on him.*



*Ada tries to exert her influence over Richard. Rather than put Richard off the case, however, Ada's involvement spurs Richard on because it reminds him that he hopes to gain the inheritance not only for his sake but also for Ada.*



Mr. Skimpole often comes with Richard and, one morning, Esther takes him aside and attempts to talk him into being responsible for Richard. She wants him to stop encouraging Richard to go into debt and spend money. Mr. Skimpole seems bemused by this request and says he can take no responsibility when it comes to money because he cannot count. Esther tells him it is everybody's duty to be responsible, but Mr. Skimpole rejects this idea and says that, compared to him, Esther is a paragon of responsibility.

Richard and Ada join them, but Richard hurries off again to meet a man who approaches across the gardens. Mr. Skimpole says that this is Mr. Vholes, Richard's lawyer, and a most respectable and responsible man. Mr. Skimpole has been in debt to Mr. Vholes in the past, and it is he who introduced the lawyer to Richard because Mr. Vholes paid him to. Richard introduces Mr. Vholes to them, and Esther observes that he looks "lifeless."

Mr. Vholes has come to tell Richard of a development with the case, and Richard agrees to go to London with him that evening. Richard is delighted to hear this news and rushes away with Mr. Vholes as soon as he can. Esther and Ada are very uncomfortable to see him go, and Mr. Skimpole remains behind with them for one more night. That night, Ada tells Esther that she will be faithful to Richard no matter what the future holds.

*Mr. Skimpole insists that there is no common ground between himself and Esther. While Esther is extremely responsible and thinks of other people, Mr. Skimpole claims he is incapable of this. Mr. Skimpole does not try, however, and seems to actively encourage people to make bad decisions, which suggests he knows more than he lets on.*



*Mr. Vholes has bribed Mr. Skimpole to introduce him to Richard because he knows that Richard is an important client and is very invested in Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Since Jarndyce and Jarndyce is notoriously complex, however, it seems unlikely that it will ever resolve and, therefore, Mr. Vholes intentions for Richard are suspect.*



*Mr. Vholes implies that a major development has taken place. However, given the nature of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, this seems unlikely and Esther and Ada suspect, that Mr. Vholes leads Richard on in order to profit off of him.*



## CHAPTER 38

Esther returns to Bleak House and immediately travels up to London to visit Caddy and Prince. Caddy tells Esther that she and her new husband have been extremely busy, but that Mr. Turveydrop is very kind to them. While at his house, Esther observes that he has several "apprentices" who are being educated as dancers but who also wait on Mr. Turveydrop. They remind Esther of chimney sweeps.

Caddy is also learning to dance and play the piano, and she and Esther attend a dance class together with the apprentices. After this, Prince goes out to teach at a school, and Caddy and Esther get ready to go into town. Caddy tells Esther how kind Mr. Turveydrop is to Mr. Jellyby and that the two are great friends. Mr. Turveydrop also extends his kindness to Peepy and allows the boy to run errands for him.

*Mr. Turveydrop takes on the children as unpaid apprentices but really uses them as servants to do all his domestic work. Children were often used as sweeps because they were very small and could fit into narrow spaces. Dickens was very opposed to child labor of any kind.*



*Caddy and Prince work incredibly hard to keep Mr. Turveydrop in comfort. Although they are clearly doing him a favor, they feel that it is a privilege to serve him because they are so taken in by his façade of gentility and benevolence. Although he pretends to patronize Peepy, he really uses him as a servant.*



Esther takes Caddy with her to Mr. Guppy's **house** and is invited in by Mrs. Guppy, his mother. Mr. Guppy is also present and is startled when Esther walks in. Esther reminds Mr. Guppy that he has expected her—she sent him a note—and Mrs. Guppy seems to find something extremely funny. When Esther asks to speak with him alone, Mr. Guppy irritably dismisses his mother, and Caddy leaves the room with her. Esther reminds Mr. Guppy that he once implied that he had a means of discovering her past and advancing her interests this way. Mr. Guppy remembers this and seems rather alarmed.

*Mr. Guppy is shocked by the change in Esther's appearance and Mrs. Guppy laughs because she knows that Mr. Guppy once proposed to Esther. This passage suggests that Mrs. Guppy finds Esther ugly because of her scars and mocks her son for his proposal.*



Esther tells Mr. Guppy that she does not want him to investigate her past, and she implores him to give up any efforts he has already made. Mr. Guppy agrees to do this and Esther thanks him and makes to leave with Caddy. As they make their way out, however, Mr. Guppy stops Esther and makes it clear that he no longer wishes to marry her. Esther calmly explains to Caddy that Mr. Guppy once proposed—to Mr. Guppy's deep embarrassment—and agrees to accept that this offer has now been terminated.

*Mr. Guppy is relieved because he has lost the letters and, therefore, has lost any proof of Esther's identity. Mr. Guppy is very shallow and does not want Esther to think that he is still in love with her now that she has lost her looks. He is worried that people will laugh at him if they think he is in love with her.*



## CHAPTER 39

Mr. Vholes occupies a dingy, airless office in Symond's Inn in Chancery Lane. Mr. Vholes is a "highly respectable" man who supports his aged father and three daughters on his reputable income from his position as a lawyer. The process of law reform has slowed in England because people are reluctant to put men like Mr. Vholes out of work. It is the "Vholes" of this world who support the Chancery system and, also, who feed off it.

*Although Mr. Vholes's profession is technically respectable, he is really a parasite who encourages his clients to take up bad cases in order to make money from them. However, people are unwilling to take a stand against people like Mr. Vholes because their work is technically legal and because they always claim that they are just doing their jobs and trying to support their families. This kind of attitude, in Dickens's view, prevents social reform.*



Richard is in Mr. Vholes's office and is distraught because another piece of business with his suit has fallen through. Mr. Vholes quietly assures him that though it may seem slow, work is still being done. Richard throws up his hands impatiently and asks Mr. Vholes how he will get through the vacation with no money. Mr. Vholes turns cool at this and tells Richard that, while Richard spends his time frivolously, he will be working tirelessly for Richard's interests. In the corner of the room, the office cat watches a mouse hole and waits for its prey to appear.

*Mr. Vholes constantly encourages Richard to keep on with the case. However, nothing changes in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and although Mr. Vholes claims to work on Richard's behalf, he really has a vested interest in keeping Richard on as a client for as long as he can, making money off of him all the while. The cat and mouse symbolize the idea that Mr. Vholes preys on Richard's hopes to make money.*



Richard tries to explain that he does not doubt Mr. Vholes' integrity, but that it is hard to hold out hope in a long and complicated case like Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Mr. Vholes says that he never encourages his clients to hope and that he has made it clear to Richard that much of the inheritance in the case will be lost. Richard asks how he figures this, and Mr. Vholes insinuates that there are other forces working against Richard. Richard assumes that he refers to Mr. Jarndyce and becomes violently angry at the thought of his guardian. He cannot believe that, once, he would have defended Mr. Jarndyce from any slight.

*Mr. Vholes denies all responsibility for the false hope he has given Richard. Although he never explicitly encourages Richard, he implicitly encourages him by implying that he works hard on the case and that it is going well. Mr. Vholes also implicitly suggests that Richard has enemies in the case. Although Mr. Vholes does not name Richard's guardian, he does not deny Mr. Jarndyce's involvement, although he has no evidence of this.*



Mr. Vholes tells Richard that he may rely on him and that he always has Richard's best interests in mind. He subtly confirms Richard's view that Mr. Jarndyce has tried to destroy the lawsuit for his own ends. Mr. Vholes is very glad that Mr. Skimpole brought Richard to him as a client so that he can protect Richard in this case. Before Richard leaves, Mr. Vholes reminds him of a fee which is due, and Richard eagerly pays this out.

*Mr. Vholes convinces Richard that he cares about him and that he works on his behalf. This distracts Richard from the fees that he pays.*



Richard leaves Mr. Vholes office and wanders in the sunshine outside the court for a short time. Although he is comforted a little by his meeting with the lawyer, he is eaten up with suspense and worry, and it is very soothing to have a tangible enemy in mind in the figure of Mr. Jarndyce. Richard's clothes are shabby, and his complexion is ruddy and inflamed as he stalks across the courtyard. Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle watch him and remark that there may be another case of "combustion" soon. Mr. Guppy says it is Richard's own fault because he meddled in Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

*Away from the court, Richard is in the sunshine because his vision is not clouded by the lawsuit. The Chancery lawsuit is not something that Richard can take on and defeat; it is a large, faceless institution, which has the powers of law and government behind it. Mr. Jarndyce, however, is just one man, and it is easier for Richard to imagine the lawsuit in these terms as this supports his hopes that he can win. Mr. Guppy suggests that Richard will slowly destroy himself.*



Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle discuss the Smallweed family; they are still in Krook's shop and seem to be sifting through all the documents that the old man had stashed there. Mr. Guppy suggests nervously that perhaps the letters were not destroyed after all but are somewhere in the shop. Mr. Weevle thinks this is unlikely and regrets his involvement with the whole affair.

*Mr. Guppy is now afraid that someone else will find the letters, and that Esther and Lady Dedlock will suspect him of lying to them; he has promised them both that he will no longer pursue the case.*



The street around Krook's shop is a hive of gossip and activity and the pub nearby does a roaring trade. Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle approach and knock on the shop door. They are admitted and go, squinting, into the shadowy gloom from the bright sunlight outside. Mr. Smallweed is seated at the back of the shop beside a hole in the floor that looks like a grave. Judy digs around inside it and brings up old papers.

*The curiosity about Krook's death has not yet died down. The hole is like a grave, which suggests that it contains things from the past and secrets which people think that they have successfully buried.*



Mr. Weevle says that he has come to empty his room. He and Mr. Guppy are shocked to see Mr. Tulkinghorn in the shadows behind Mr. Smallweed, who gives them a wicked grin and introduces the lawyer as his solicitor. Mr. Guppy suggests that there is much “property” in the shop, but Mr. Smallweed says, with a leer, that it is all worthless. Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle slink upstairs to Mr. Weevle’s old room.

They find the room cold and gloomy, just as they left it. Mr. Guppy is in the middle of taking down Mr. Weevle’s Great British Beauties collection when Mr. Tulkinghorn appears in the doorway and asks to speak with Mr. Guppy. Mr. Guppy turns red, but Mr. Tulkinghorn suavely explains that he simply wishes to congratulate Mr. Guppy on his recent acquaintance with the Dedlocks. Mr. Guppy defensively replies that his work with any noble person is confidential and the business of Kenge and Carboy’s.

Mr. Tulkinghorn admits that this is quite right and bids them good day. Before he goes, he takes the picture of Lady Dedlock from the wall and admires it. As soon as he is gone, Mr. Guppy begin to pack hastily. He begs Mr. Weevle not to ask any questions and heavily implies that, through his failed romance, he has become entangled with some very powerful and influential enemies, much to Mr. Weevle’s amazement.

*Mr. Tulkinghorn does not normally deal with lower-class clients like the Smallweeds and thus must have some special reason for doing so. Mr. Smallweed knows that Mr. Guppy tries to get information from him and dismisses him immediately.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn does not want his presence at the shop to get out and implicitly threatens Mr. Guppy by reminding him that he knows of Mr. Guppy’s visits to Lady Dedlock. Mr. Tulkinghorn understands that Mr. Guppy has gone to see Lady Dedlock without his employer’s knowledge and that he does not want this to be widely known.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn uses the portrait to signal to Mr. Guppy that he knows about his visits to Lady Dedlock and that he will use this information against Mr. Guppy if he needs to protect his own interests. Although Mr. Guppy cannot tell Mr. Weevle his secret, he draws attention to the fact that he has a secret to make himself seem impressive.*



## CHAPTER 40

British politics are in a terrible state because of a disagreement between Lord Moodle and Lord Coodle, which has become so volatile and unruly that, currently, no one is ruling the country. At Chesney Wold, Mrs. Rouncewell expects that the Dedlocks will assemble to discuss this calamity and she has prepared the **house**. In the sunset, the light shines in on the Dedlock portraits, which line the hall, and for a brief moment, the elderly figures in them seem to grow young again and to shimmer and move. The illusion is very brief, however, and shadow falls swiftly in the gallery. Lady Dedlock’s portrait sits in darkness.

The Dedlocks arrive the next evening, with all the cousins in tow. Lady Dedlock is unwell and does not often join the cousins, who engage in many pleasurable pursuits to keep their spirits up. Volumnia takes an interest in the nation’s fortunes and often talks privately with Sir Leicester about it, although she does not always understand his opinions and is very naïve about politics. When Sir Leicester explains that the government has spent a great deal of money sorting out the mess, Volumnia asks what it has all been spent on. Sir Leicester is very indignant and tells her firmly that it has gone towards “necessary expenses.”

*It is pertinent that, although the government has collapsed, the country carries on as normal and no one seems to have noticed. This suggests that politicians are useless. The idea that the Dedlocks are politically relevant is nothing but an illusion, when, really, their time in the sun is over. Lady Dedlock’s imminent demise and the revelation of her secret is foreshadowed by the darkness which falls on her picture.*



*The Dedlocks’ feel that a change in government would be a blow to their social position. However, although Sir Leicester and the cousins fear social change, they are not likely to be affected by it because they are such a wealthy family and have such an important reputation. Volumnia takes an interest in Sir Leicester’s opinions because she hopes to be left an inheritance. Sir Leicester always trusts the conservative government, no matter how much money they spend.*



While Sir Leicester, Volumnia, and Lady Dedlock are in the library one evening, discussing the state of the country, Mr. Tulkinghorn is announced. Volumnia cries that she has seen so little of the lawyer that she thought he was dead and a shadow passes over Lady Dedlock's face for a second, as though she wishes this were the case. Another cousin asks how wealthy Mr. Tulkinghorn is and a gun is fired in the garden, which makes everybody jump. Lady Dedlock, who faces the window, says that the gamekeeper must have shot a rat.

Mr. Tulkinghorn enters and informs Sir Leicester that the Dedlocks' favored party has been ousted in one constituency, and that Mr. Rouncewell has taken this seat. Sir Leicester thinks this is most improper, and Volumnia is very put out. Mr. Tulkinghorn remarks that Mr. Rouncewell had help from his son, Watt, and Sir Leicester opens his mouth to address Lady Dedlock. She cuts him off and tells him that she will not dismiss Rosa, but Sir Leicester says that this is not what he meant. Instead he was going to tell her to warn Rosa about the kind of family she is to marry into—one that would bring down the whole British establishment if it could.

Mr. Tulkinghorn says that Mr. Rouncewell's political group is very active and "proud." He launches into a story about an incident much like this one. The story is about the daughter of an ironmaster who was taken on as a maid by a noble woman. This noble woman had a secret: that she was once engaged to a young soldier and that she gave birth to his illegitimate child before her marriage to her noble husband. The noble woman believed her lover was dead, but her secret was nonetheless discovered while the ironmaster's daughter was in her service.

When the secret came out and the ironmaster heard of it, he removed his daughter from the lady's service, ashamed of his connection with her because of the scorn and disgrace she had brought upon herself and her family. Her husband, meanwhile, nearly died from grief. Mr. Tulkinghorn concludes his tale and hopes that Lady Dedlock, who remains frozen by the window, has not been upset by it. She does not reply and sits silently in front of the window all evening.

## CHAPTER 41

Mr. Tulkinghorn returns to his rooms and is very pleased with himself. Not long after, Lady Dedlock arrives and confronts the lawyer. She asks him how long he has known her story and if it is true that her secret is known among common people. Mr. Tulkinghorn is impressed by her poise and the lack of emotion despite her inner turmoil.

*Lady Dedlock wishes that Mr. Tulkinghorn was dead because she worries that he knows her secret—that she has an illegitimate child—and will expose her. The gunshot foreshadows the fatal gunshot that kills Mr. Tulkinghorn. Mr. Tulkinghorn is compared to the rat because he is a parasitic and ruthless man.*



*Mr. Rouncewell's victory signifies social change and increased social mobility as Mr. Rouncewell is not a man who has land or inherited wealth—he is self-made and a servant's son—but has successfully won over the public and has been voted into Parliament. Sir Leicester is essentially a kind man and will not dismiss an innocent girl because of her associations.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn tells the story—a thinly veiled rehashing of her own life story—to threaten Lady Dedlock. As the events of the story echo Lady Dedlock's own circumstances, it makes it clear to her that Mr. Tulkinghorn knows her secret and that he may, at any time, expose her.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn implies that Lady Dedlock's secret will bring such intense shame on the family that even an ironmaster will not want his daughter-in-law associated with them. Men who had earned their wealth, rather than inherited it, were still considered vulgar and not truly noble compared with the landed upper classes.*



*Lady Dedlock wants to know if her secret is common knowledge, or if Mr. Tulkinghorn has spread it among her acquaintances, because then she will be prepared for it to reach Sir Leicester.*



Mr. Tulkinghorn tells Lady Dedlock that his story was hypothetical, but Lady Dedlock thanks him because she is now prepared to be exposed. She says that, if he wants, she will write a confession or do anything else she can to persuade Mr. Tulkinghorn to keep her secret or to spare her husband's feelings. Mr. Tulkinghorn tells her to be calm, but Lady Dedlock says that she fully expects to be punished.

Lady Dedlock tells Mr. Tulkinghorn where her jewelry is kept and that she has a little money, but that she is not wearing her own clothes. Mr. Tulkinghorn does not understand, and Lady Dedlock explains that she will leave Chesney Wold that night and never return. Mr. Tulkinghorn shakes his head at her and Lady Dedlock asks him why she shouldn't leave; her presence, she says, is a "stain" on Chesney Wold. Mr. Tulkinghorn assures her that he has not forgotten this. She tries to leave but he tells her that, if she does, he will ring for the servants. Lady Dedlock remains in the room, cold with fury.

Mr. Tulkinghorn says it is unfortunate that they must talk in this way, but that it is not his fault, since she revealed her secret to him. Lady Dedlock rushes to the window and he seems concerned for a second that she will jump out. She stands and looks out, however, and, again, Mr. Tulkinghorn is impressed by her strength of will. He says that he has not decided how to treat her case and that the real consideration is Sir Leicester and the Dedlock line, with which Sir Leicester is inseparably attached.

A discovery such as this would destroy Sir Leicester, Mr. Tulkinghorn insists, and he wishes to prevent this. Lady Dedlock says that, if she leaves, this will be avoided, but Mr. Tulkinghorn says her flight would be a lethal blow to her husband. Instead, he advises her, to keep her secret and wait for him to make the first move. Lady Dedlock is horrified by this suggestion. She asks him if he expects her to live with her guilt and that suspense of knowing that she will one day be exposed. Mr. Tulkinghorn confirms that this is the only option he offers.

Lady Dedlock considers for a moment and Mr. Tulkinghorn presses her to agree. Lady Dedlock concedes and Mr. Tulkinghorn politely shows her to the door. He is amazed by her rigid, emotionless state and would understand her better if he could see her for what she is in private—a distraught woman, wild with grief. Mr. Tulkinghorn goes to bed happy that night, and Sir Leicester and the cousins, and the Dedlocks in the family vault, sleep soundly beneath the stars.

*Lady Dedlock understands that Mr. Tulkinghorn meant the story as a threat and has come to show him that she is not afraid and that she is prepared to withstand whatever he intends to do to her. She is concerned for her husband's sake, however; she knows that Sir Leicester truly loves her.*



*Lady Dedlock tells Mr. Tulkinghorn where her valuables are because she assumes that he wants to blackmail her for money. She has worn a different dress because she does not want to be found when she flees. Mr. Tulkinghorn has no mercy; he despises Lady Dedlock and wishes to control her rather than allow her to run away and escape her shame.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn takes no responsibility for discovering Lady Dedlock's secret. He implies that he only suspected the truth and told the story to test her response. Her arrival in his study has confirmed his suspicions and so he blames her for revealing herself to him. He loves to have power over people and wants to keep her in suspense while he decides what to do.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn pretends that he works for Sir Leicester's best interest, but, in fact, he works for his own to satisfy his own desire for power. He emotionally manipulates her because he suggests that, if she leaves, she will be responsible for Sir Leicester's death.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn has trapped Lady Dedlock because he knows that she cares for her husband and fears her secret's exposure for his sake. She is an extremely strong woman, however, and is used to keeping her emotions inside and not allowing them to show on her face.*



## CHAPTER 42

Mr. Tulkinghorn returns to London the next day and makes his way through the hot city to Lincoln's Inn and his apartment. When he arrives, he finds Mr. Snagsby in the hall and asks the stationer what he wants. Mr. Snagsby meekly explains that Mademoiselle Hortense has been hanging around the shop because Mr. Tulkinghorn will not see her. She wants Mr. Snagsby to make her an appointment with the lawyer. Mr. Snagsby complains that this has made Mrs. Snagsby very jealous and has made the neighbors talk and caused a great deal of trouble at home.

Mr. Tulkinghorn does not know what Mademoiselle Hortense wants and thinks she might be mad. He tells Mr. Snagsby to send her to him the next time she comes. Mr. Snagsby leaves satisfied, and Mr. Tulkinghorn is about to go to his cellar when there is a knock at his door. Mademoiselle Hortense barges into the room. Mr. Tulkinghorn finds that she puts him on edge; her movements are very sharp and erratic.

Mademoiselle Hortense claims that Mr. Tulkinghorn has used her. She came to him expecting revenge against Lady Dedlock and instead he used her to settle a bet. She begs him to use her to destroy Lady Dedlock or to find her a new service position. She throws the money that he gave her back at him and says that she does not need it because she is "rich in hate."

Mr. Tulkinghorn sneers at her and tells her that if she ever comes to him again, or goes to Mr. Snagsby's, he will have her thrown in jail. Mademoiselle Hortense spits back that she dares him to try and raves at him until he successfully forces her out. When she is gone, he perches in his usual chair beneath the pointing figure of Allegory.

## CHAPTER 43

Although Esther can never speak to her mother again, she thinks about her often, looks for any mention of her in the papers, and listens for any mention of her in fashionable circles. Meanwhile, Mr. Jarndyce's worry over Richard increases and, although Ada implores him to be patient with her beloved, Mr. Jarndyce writes to him often to try to undo some of the damage caused by the suit.

*Mademoiselle Hortense seems to think that Mr. Snagsby has influence with Mr. Tulkinghorn, although he does not really. True to character, Mrs. Snagsby is paranoid and assumes that Mr. Snagsby and Mademoiselle Hortense are having an affair.*



*Mademoiselle Hortense is a very intense woman, and Mr. Snagsby's assertion that she is mad seems to be correct. She is prepared to go to great lengths to get her way.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn has not told Mademoiselle Hortense why she was brought to his room wearing Lady Dedlock's dress. Mr. Tulkinghorn only told her that she was there to settle a bet—he has not revealed his suspicions about Lady Dedlock's secret to her. Mademoiselle Hortense is obsessed with Lady Dedlock and intent on destroying her.*



*Mr. Tulkinghorn is not afraid of Mademoiselle Hortense because he feels he has the law on his side. He underestimates Mademoiselle Hortense's madness, however, and the lengths she will go to have her way. The image of Allegory suspended over the lawyer's head, which has cropped up several times throughout the novel, seems to spell doom.*



*Esther accepts that she can't openly acknowledge that she is Lady Dedlock's daughter, but she is still curious about her mother's fate. Meanwhile, Mr. Jarndyce does not want to intervene in Richard's affairs, but he grows desperate as he watches Richard's troubles increase.*



Ada and Esther beg Mr. Jarndyce to speak with Mr. Skimpole, who is often with Richard, and who spends the young man's money freely. Mr. Jarndyce is momentarily irritated when he hears this but dismisses the idea that there is anything calculated in Mr. Skimpole's behavior. Esther says it is a shame that Mr. Skimpole introduced Richard to Mr. Vholes, but Mr. Jarndyce says that this, too, is an accident and that Mr. Skimpole just happened to borrow five pounds from Mr. Vholes.

They visit Mr. Skimpole the next day and find him having breakfast. His **house** is very dirty and cluttered, but he eats lavishly. Mr. Jarndyce brings up the subject of Richard and explains patiently to Mr. Skimpole that he must not allow Richard to pay for everything. Mr. Skimpole protests that Richard is rich, but Mr. Jarndyce tells him that this isn't true. Mr. Skimpole agrees and seems so utterly helpless and innocent that Esther cannot believe that Mr. Skimpole contrives to use Richard.

Mr. Skimpole then introduces him to his three daughters: Sentiment, Beauty, and Comedy. They, too, are helpless, charming girls and explain that they can do nothing practical but have "sympathy" for and interest in everything and everyone. Mr. Skimpole says that he will return with Mr. Jarndyce to his **house**. Mrs. Skimpole is ill, and an angry baker, whom Mr. Skimpole owes money to, is due at the house. Mr. Skimpole says that he cannot bear these things which will ruin his mood. Esther thinks it a shame that Mrs. Skimpole will be left to deal with the baker.

Mr. Skimpole is in bright spirits, however, and sings for them in the library when they get home. Midway through this performance, Sir Leicester Dedlock is announced, much to everybody's amazement, and he is shown into the room. Esther is stunned and is barely aware of herself as Mr. Jarndyce introduces her. Sir Leicester has come to apologize on behalf of Mr. Boythorn and to assure them that, when they are in Lincolnshire, they are welcome to visit Chesney Wold despite his feud with this gentleman.

Sir Leicester is especially eager to meet Mr. Skimpole, who he has heard is an artist. Mr. Skimpole is pleased to meet him and expresses his gratitude for the noble classes who patronize the arts. Sir Leicester approves of this greatly and invites Mr. Skimpole to visit Chesney Wold in future. Sir Leicester then gives Lady Dedlock's regards to Mr. Jarndyce and mentions that his Lady has told him that she met Esther and Ada in the grounds. With that, Sir Leicester takes his leave.

*Esther and Ada think that Richard's situation might improve if Mr. Skimpole did not keep encouraging him to go into debt and spending his money. This passage implies that Mr. Skimpole accepted a bribe from Mr. Vholes, who gave him money on the condition that Mr. Skimpole introduce him to Richard. Mr. Jarndyce refuses to believe this, however, because it would shatter his illusions about his friend, whom he sees as harmless and who he has often lent money to.*



*Mr. Skimpole always makes sure he is well taken care of, usually at other people's expense. Mr. Skimpole pretends that he has no real grasp on the concept of money, and thus he cannot tell who is rich and who is poor. Esther cannot believe that Mr. Skimpole intentionally uses and manipulates Richard, even though all the evidence seems to suggest this.*



*Mr. Skimpole's daughters are a metaphor for the type of art that does not have a social purpose and that achieves nothing practical. Dickens, like many Victorian novelists, felt that novels—unlike other art forms—could be used for a social purpose: to educate people about the lives of others and to encourage people to support social reform. Mr. Skimpole dislikes this sort of art, however, because it makes him think of something other than his own comfort.*



*Esther is afraid that Sir Leicester has learned of her connection to Lady Dedlock. Sir Leicester is very gallant and wants to show them, even though they are strangers to him, that he is not petty. He cares a great deal about his reputation because he feels it is his public duty to maintain his image.*



*Sir Leicester likes to patronize artists like Mr. Skimpole, whose subjects deal with nothing unpleasant and are simply entertainments for rich people. Patronage was a common form of artistic funding before the 19th century but writers like Dickens were self-made and earned their own money by writing alone.*



Esther is shaken by this encounter and is worried that she may be made a guest at Chesney Wold by her unsuspecting guardian. She decides to confide in him and to ask for his guidance. Esther finds him in his office and asks him if he remembers Lady Dedlock's reference to her estranged sister when they were trapped in the rain together. Mr. Jarndyce is confused and asks her if she knows that this sister was once Mr. Boythorn's fiancée. Esther says that she knows this, and that this woman was also the aunt who raised her, Miss Barbary.

*Esther cannot spend time with her mother for fear the secret will get out and therefore decides to confide in Mr. Jarndyce so that he does not plan for her to go to Chesney Wold. Mr. Jarndyce thinks that he knows Miss Barbary, Lady Dedlock's sister, only through his connection to Mr. Boythorn. He does not realize that she is also the woman who wrote to him about Esther—once again, the novel's characters are far more interconnected than first meets the eye.*



Esther asks why Mr. Boythorn and Miss Barbary separated. Mr. Jarndyce says that he doesn't know, but that, one day, Mr. Boythorn received a letter from her which ended the engagement. Esther confesses that Lady Dedlock is her mother. She is reassured by her guardian's sympathetic reaction. He asks her to tell him the whole story, and Esther is grateful as ever for his kindness.

*Miss Barbary ended her engagement so that she could raise Esther in secret and so that people would not discover her sister's shameful secret. As usual, Mr. Jarndyce reacts with compassion and patience.*



## CHAPTER 44

The next morning, Esther goes to Mr. Jarndyce again. He asks her if anyone knows her secret, and Esther tells him of her mother's fears about Mr. Tulkinghorn. Mr. Jarndyce knows who this is and feels Lady Dedlock is right to be concerned. Esther then tells him about Mr. Guppy—whom Mr. Jarndyce almost laughs at—and Mademoiselle Hortense. Esther admits that she fears Mademoiselle Hortense greatly because her behavior is so odd. Mr. Jarndyce agrees that he found her strange and remembers the day when she risked her health to walk through the wet grass barefoot. Mr. Jarndyce promises to try and protect both Esther's and her mother's interests if he can.

*Mr. Jarndyce is a good judge of character and recognizes that Mr. Tulkinghorn is a valid threat. Mr. Jarndyce does not think Mr. Guppy is a threat—hence his near laughter—as Mr. Guppy's attempts to embroil himself in the mystery have been incompetent. Mademoiselle Hortense, however, gives him pause because he has seen proof that she is a very intense and erratic woman.*



Mr. Jarndyce tells Esther that he has a proposition for her but that he would like to make it in writing. He wants to assure her first that nothing she does or says will ever change his feelings towards her, and Esther gratefully responds that she feels the same. Mr. Jarndyce tells her that he will write her a letter, and that when she is ready, she must send Charley to fetch it.

*Mr. Jarndyce does not want Esther to feel any pressure to accept his propositions—whatever they may be—and thus assures her that he will still hold her in the same high regard even if she says no. He also does not want to force her to listen to his proposition and thus leaves it entirely up to her when she should receive it in writing.*



A few nights later, Esther sends Charley to Mr. Jarndyce's room, and the girl returns with the note. Esther thinks back over her past and feels amazed at how her fortunes have changed when she reads that Mr. Jarndyce wishes to marry her. The letter is loving but not romantic; Mr. Jarndyce understands if Esther does not wish to marry a man so much older than her, and stresses that, despite his past kindnesses, Esther does not owe him her love. Everything will remain the same between them, he says, if she declines his offer.

*Mr. Jarndyce is very considerate of Esther's feelings. He realizes that she may feel pressured to marry him as repayment for his kindness as her guardian, and he wishes her to know that he understands this and expects nothing from her in return for his past care. While many characters in the novel act only out of self-interest, Mr. Jarndyce genuinely puts others first—something he and Esther both have in common, which would perhaps make them a good match. Readers may also recall that Esther's face is terribly scarred from smallpox at this point. While this made the shallow Mr. Guppy rescind his proposal, it doesn't bother Mr. Jarndyce in the slightest—yet another indication that he is a good, honorable man.*



Esther is overcome with gratitude and knows that she will accept Mr. Jarndyce's offer. However, despite her happiness, she feels that she has lost something and weeps for this loss, though she does not know what it is. She sets down her housekeeper's keys and then does her hair in the mirror. The sight of her scarred face makes her remember Mrs. Woodcourt and, for some reason, this and the memory of Mr. Woodcourt's flowers makes her cry again. Before she goes to sleep, she finds the flowers—which are pressed inside a book—and burns them.

*Esther accepts Mr. Jarndyce, even though she is clearly in love with Mr. Woodcourt, because she does not think that Mr. Woodcourt will ever love her now that her face is scarred. She cries because she knows unconsciously that Mr. Woodcourt once loved her too, and she feels that she has lost this opportunity for love.*



The next day, Esther finds that Mr. Jarndyce treats her as he always does. She waits for him to ask for her reply, but he never does. She waits for a week and then visits him in his study. He tells her that he has waited for her letter from Charley, but Esther says she has come to answer him in person and kisses him.

*Unlike Mr. Guppy, who badgered Esther endlessly about saying yes to his proposal (prior to her face being scarred from smallpox), Mr. Jarndyce wants the decision to be entirely Esther's and puts no pressure on her to give him a reply, let alone a positive one.*



## CHAPTER 45

A few days later, as Esther and Ada walk around the garden, Esther notices Mr. Vholes on his way to the **house**. She keeps this from Ada because Ada hopes that Richard will soon grow bored of Chancery affairs. Esther goes to Mr. Jarndyce's office and finds Mr. Vholes there. He has come to tell Mr. Jarndyce that Richard is severely in debt and to ask Mr. Jarndyce to pay his legal fees. Mr. Vholes explains that he has his father and children to support.

*Esther does not wish to disappoint Ada by letting her know that Richard is still involved with his lawyer. Mr. Vholes has exploited Richard's hopes and convinced him to go into debt. He now expects Mr. Jarndyce to pay this debt for Richard all the while convincing Richard to see Mr. Jarndyce as his enemy.*



Mr. Jarndyce explains that he does not think Richard will allow him to pay his fees, and Mr. Vholes accepts this. Mr. Jarndyce asks Esther to write to Richard, however, to see if Richard will accept his help. Mr. Vholes does not want anyone to think that he has tried to exploit Richard and that he has not appealed to Mr. Jarndyce for help—after all, he has his reputation to think of. He wants this meeting to be confidential, and Esther agrees not to tell Richard.

*Mr. Vholes wishes to maintain his respectable reputation by attempting to get Richard out of debt. It is a half-hearted attempt, however, as Mr. Vholes has encouraged Richard to believe that Mr. Jarndyce is an enemy and, therefore, Richard is unlikely to accept his guardian's help or advice.*



Ada, Esther, Charley, and Mr. Jarndyce take rooms in London, and Esther and Charley drive out to the coast at Deal to visit Richard's barracks. Esther finds Richard in his room, which is very messy. He is pleased to see her but seems in very low spirits about his profession; he is heavily in debt and about to leave the army. He will return to London with Esther. She begs him to quit Jarndyce and Jarndyce instead, but Richard says he cannot give up on that too, as it is the only thing he has ever pursued constantly.

Esther gives Richard a letter from Ada which begs him to accept her small inheritance to pay his debts. Richard breaks down when he reads this and tells Esther that he longs to die. Esther tries to comfort him, but Richard immediately begins to talk of Mr. Vholes and the assurance that the lawyer has given him that his suit gets on well. Esther leaves Richard with a heavy heart.

Esther and Charley walk around the port that afternoon and come across a boat which has just moored. Esther sees Mr. Woodcourt among the party and hurries back to her hotel. Mr. Woodcourt is booked to stay there, however, and Esther hears him arrive. She sends a note to his room and invites him to come and see her. He arrives at once and, Esther thinks, is shocked by the scars on her face.

Esther talks to Mr. Woodcourt about his travels and tells him how Miss Flite gets on. She notices that Mr. Woodcourt seems very uncomfortable with her and puts this down to her changed appearance. She feels quite relaxed, however, and feels that she comforts him. Richard arrives for the journey home while they are talking, and Mr. Woodcourt is surprised to see the change in him, too.

Mr. Woodcourt tells them that he will not return to sea and seems to understand that Richard is also in professional difficulty. Richard hurries off to put his luggage in the carriage. Mr. Woodcourt expresses his concerns to Esther and says that Richard has a strange, singular expression on his face. Esther asks Mr. Woodcourt if he is going to London, and he says that he is. She asks him if he will sometimes look in on Richard, and Mr. Woodcourt promises to do so.

*Richard is still a soldier and lives in the army camp on the coast. Richard's room reflects his internal state of chaos and confusion. Richard feels like a failure because he has abandoned three professions. This makes him cling on even more to the idea that he can solve the Chancery case to redeem himself and make his fortune.*



*Richard is ashamed that Ada has had to use her money to support him. As her fiancé, Richard feels that he is financially responsible for them both. Again, rather than put Richard off Chancery, it only increases his determination to resolve the suit and prove himself.*



*Esther does not want Mr. Woodcourt to see her scarred face and initially tries to hide from him. She is embarrassed because she loves him and thinks he used to love her. When she finds that he is in the same hotel as her, though, she feels that it would be unkind not to see him.*



*Mr. Woodcourt is very kind and genuinely remembers and cares about his patients, like Miss Flite. Esther thinks he is uncomfortable because he pities her for losing her beauty.*



*Mr. Woodcourt is genuinely concerned about Esther and commiserates with him, although he can clearly see that Richard is in a far worse state than him.*



## CHAPTER 46

It is dark in Tom-all-Alone's, a filthy slum in the city. Politicians argue over how to fix this area, which is rife with crime and disease. As morning breaks on the slum, Mr. Woodcourt wanders through the streets and looks around. He comes upon a woman with a bruised forehead who crouches in a doorway. He stops and, speaking to her as an equal, offers to bandage and clean her wound.

Mr. Woodcourt asks the woman if her husband gave her the bruise, and the woman begins to cry and looks away. Mr. Woodcourt asks if her husband is a brickmaker, because she has clay on her clothes, and the woman says yes. He finishes dressing the cut and then offers her money for a place to stay. The woman holds out a handful of coins, however, to prove that she has her own, and Mr. Woodcourt kindly bids her good day.

As Mr. Woodcourt leaves Tom-all-Alone's, he passes a scrawny, sick looking boy who stumbles along the narrow streets. A few moments later, he is startled by a scream of "stop him!" and sees the woman he has treated chasing the boy. He thinks the boy has robbed her and gives chase, but he cannot catch him until the boy runs into a dead end and collapses, exhausted, in a corner.

The woman draws up beside Mr. Woodcourt and exclaims that she has found the boy at last. Mr. Woodcourt asks what he has done, and the woman replies that he has been kind to her. The woman explains that the boy, Jo, has been ill and was staying at her **house** until a young lady very kindly took him home. Jo, however, ran away in the night and Jenny, the woman, has been looking for him ever since. Jenny begins to cry and shouts at Jo that the young lady who took him in has been ill and disfigured because of him and that he has been ungrateful.

Mr. Woodcourt has a sudden realization and turns away from the boy in horror. He calms himself and, after a moment, asks the boy where he has come from and why he left the lady's **house** in the night. Jo says that he does not know where he comes from but that he hangs around the area because Mr. Snagsby gives him money. As for leaving the lady's house, Jo says that he was "took" in the night by a gentleman who is everywhere and who sees everything.

*Politicians often speak about fixing slums such as Tom-all-Alone's, but few of them have practical ideas about how to help the inhabitants in tangible, productive ways. Mr. Woodcourt, however, offers practical help because he views the people there as human beings and offers them one-to-one help based on their individual needs.*



*Mr. Woodcourt understands and tries to empathize with the position of the woman, without imposing on her. His help is effective and unobtrusive.*



*Mr. Woodcourt is reluctant to knock the boy down because he is so sick and must wait for him to exhaust himself or hit a dead end in a street, as he does.*



*Jo has been missing since the night he escaped from Esther's home and has likely had no treatment or care since that evening. Jenny feels that he has treated Esther ungratefully because she thinks he ran away, and Esther became ill with the smallpox as a result of her kindness to Jo.*



*Mr. Woodcourt is angry with the boy at first because he realizes that Jo is the child who gave a dangerous illness to Esther. However, he quickly remembers that it is not the boy's fault and helps him despite his feelings. Jo explains that he did not run away but was taken away. It seems that he is referring to Mr. Bucket, the private investigator, who always seems to know where Jo is.*



Jo says he was put in hospital but, when he was released, he was told to “move on” and now, he says, he will “move on” to the cemetery. Mr. Woodcourt says that he will find a better place for Jo and, after letting him say goodbye to Jenny, he leads him out of Tom-all-Alone’s.

*In saying that he’s going to “move on” to the cemetery, Jo implies that the authorities will move him on so often that eventually, he will grow exhausted and will die.*



## CHAPTER 47

Mr. Woodcourt buys Jo breakfast, but the boy is very weak and cannot eat much. Mr. Woodcourt is determined to find him a room and goes to Krook’s shop to find Miss Flite. He is told that she has moved to Mrs. Blinder’s. When Mr. Woodcourt arrives at Miss Flite’s new lodgings, he receives a delighted greeting from the old lady, but is told that all the rooms are full. Miss Flite, however, remembering Gridley—whose room she now occupies—suggests that they take the boy to George and leads Mr. Woodcourt there with Jo.

*Miss Flite thinks that, since George was kind to Gridley, he will perhaps also take pity on Jo and allow him to stay there.*



George is pleased to see Miss Flite and listens gravely to Jo’s story. Mr. Woodcourt tells him that Jo needs a place to stay but that he does not want to take him to a hospital or workhouse because he will soon be turned out. In these establishments, he will also be within reach of the man he is afraid of: Mr. Bucket. George immediately agrees to keep him and says that he may lie down on a mattress in the shooting gallery.

*George is a compassionate man and takes an interest in Jo because Jo is in need. Jo is afraid of Mr. Bucket because Mr. Bucket is so shrewd and observant that he seems, to the poor, delirious boy, to be everywhere and know everything.*



Mr. Woodcourt tells George that Jo will likely die, and George solemnly assures the doctor that the boy will be cared for. While Phil takes Jo for a bath, George and Mr. Woodcourt talk of their mutual acquaintance with Esther and seem to approve of each other. George tells Mr. Woodcourt that the man Mr. Bucket took Jo to see is Mr. Tulkinghorn, a devious man who keeps people “dangling” rather than being honest with them.

*George and Mr. Woodcourt are both honorable, practical men who willingly help those who are weak and in need and do not expect praise or repayment for their services. George sees through Mr. Tulkinghorn’s façade of respectability and can see that the lawyer uses underhanded methods to get his way and achieve power.*



After this brief conversation, Mr. Woodcourt decides to take Jo to see Mr. Snagsby, because Jo has mentioned the name so frequently. Mr. Snagsby is very troubled when Mr. Woodcourt appears, because he assumes that he is connected to the mystery, which Mrs. Snagsby has set out to solve. Mr. Snagsby tells Mr. Woodcourt that living with his wife is like living in a madhouse. He is sorry to hear about Jo’s condition, however, and says he will visit that night.

*Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby have both become extremely paranoid. Mr. Snagsby still does not understand why he was called to Mr. Tulkinghorn’s office, and suspects that there is a conspiracy at the heart of the matter, and Mrs. Snagsby has driven herself to distraction by imagining all the possible reasons that Mr. Snagsby could be acting strangely.*



Jo lies in bed very ill. Phil and George take good care of him, many people come to visit. Esther, Mr. Jarndyce, and Mr. Snagsby all come to see Jo, but he is confused and delirious. One day, Jo sits up and cries that Captain Hawdon has come to take him to the cemetery. He dies that afternoon, another of the many poor and homeless people who die in London every day.

*Jo, in his delirium, seems to see the ghost of Captain Hawdon. It is really Jo's memory of the Captain, who often had a kind word for him, and his memory of his visit to the cemetery with Lady Dedlock, which combine in his mind. Dickens uses Jo's death to suggest that real help needs to be supplied to the poor to prevent so many undignified and needless deaths.*



## CHAPTER 48

The Dedlocks are in London, and Lady Dedlock is in her sitting room with Rosa. She calls Rosa to her side and tells her that she has brought much comfort to her life. She then tells Rosa that she must leave her service. Rosa begins to cry but Lady Dedlock says that she wants her to be happy, and that this is why she plans to send her away.

*Lady Dedlock is afraid that, if her secret gets out while Rosa is her maid, that the girl will be tainted by the scandal and will be unable to secure another position in the future. Lady Dedlock genuinely wants her to be happy and safe and so sends her away.*



Not long after this, Mr. Rouncewell arrives and Lady Dedlock informs him that he must take Rosa away because she is still in love with his son. Mr. Rouncewell is clearly offended by Lady Dedlock's haughty tone but restrains himself as he leads the sobbing girl away. Mr. Tulkinghorn is present during this interview and lurks silently in the corner of the room.

*Lady Dedlock hides her real motive for dismissing Rosa by pretending to look down on Mr. Rouncewell's son and dislike his engagement to Rosa. She knows that Mr. Rouncewell already believes she is haughty and cold and, therefore, plays up to this image to protect Rosa.*



Sir Leicester goes out on government business after dinner and Lady Dedlock is left alone. Mr. Tulkinghorn comes to see her and tells her that she has broken their agreement and is, therefore, not to be trusted. Lady Dedlock asks what he means and Mr. Tulkinghorn replies that she agreed to take no action regarding the secret, but that she has acted by sending Rosa away.

*Mr. Tulkinghorn immediately finds an excuse to blame Lady Dedlock for her own exposure. He implies that she has broken their agreement by trying to protect her maid.*



Lady Dedlock understands that this is a warning to her, and that Mr. Tulkinghorn now intends to reveal her secret. She asks him when he plans to do it, but he refuses to tell her and says that he is going home. Lady Dedlock sits in stony silence as he leaves the room. On his way out, Mr. Tulkinghorn stops and looks at the clock in the hall. He reads the time on it, but the narrator suggests that it should spell out the words, "Don't go home."

*Mr. Tulkinghorn plays with Lady Dedlock and deliberately keeps her in suspense so that he feels she is in his power. The reader is told that something bad is going to happen to Mr. Tulkinghorn when he arrives home.*



Lady Dedlock leaves her home by the back door and takes the key from the servant who lets her out. She says she will walk for some time in the gardens. It is a bright, moonlit night. Elsewhere, in the moonlight, Mr. Tulkinghorn crosses his courtyard and makes for his wine cellar. A gunshot rings out in the silent city night. The clock strikes 10 p.m. In Mr. Tulkinghorn's study, the Roman Allegory points to the same, eternal spot on the floor.

*Dickens connects the image of Lady Dedlock leaving her home to Mr. Tulkinghorn returning to his, leading readers to wonder if Lady Dedlock is a murderer.*



The next morning, the cleaner enters and runs out of the room screaming. People rush in and out of the room and wish that the Allegory on the ceiling could reveal what he has seen. There is a bottle of wine upon the table and two candles which were blown out soon after being lit. There is a stain upon the ground, and the figure of Allegory has a mad look as it points down at it. The Allegory is the only witness; beneath him, Mr. Tulkinghorn lies face down upon the carpet, with a bullet in his heart.

*There are no witnesses to Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder, except the painted figure on the ceiling, Allegory, which has cropped up several times throughout the novel. It seems that the murderer blew out the candles, either after the murder or to commit the murder in the dark.*



## CHAPTER 49

It is Mrs. Bagnet's birthday and Mr. Bagnet and the children go through their yearly ritual of doing all the chores for the day and preparing dinner, while their mother sits with her feet up. This process makes Mrs. Bagnet rather anxious, however, and she winces slightly—while pretending to enjoy herself—as she watches every domestic task done wrong and the dinner almost ruined. They sit down to eat, and Mr. Bagnet says that George will no doubt call in. The Bagnets have been worried about the trooper recently as he has seemed out of sorts.

*Mrs. Bagnet does not enjoy her rest but plays along and pretends that she does because she understands that her family mean well and want her to enjoy herself.*



After dinner, the children wash the dishes and George arrives. He is very pale and tells them that Jo has died. George gives Mrs. Bagnet her present and he and Mr. Bagnet light their pipes and drink a toast to her. A man peers across the threshold and George is surprised when he recognizes Mr. Bucket.

*George has grown attached to Jo in the short time he was with him, and this demonstrates that George is a loving and compassionate man.*



Mr. Bucket is invited in and explains that he is looking for a musical instrument for a friend and happened to see one in the Bagnets' shop. Mr. Bucket sits down to join the party and plays happily with Malta and Quebec. He compliments Mrs. Bagnet on her house and garden and asks her if the garden has another gate onto the street. Mrs. Bagnet says no, and Mr. Bucket says it is the best garden he has ever seen.

*Mr. Bucket is a shrewd private investigator always has an ulterior motive, so readers can reasonably assume that his story about wanting to buy an instrument is just a ruse. However, rather than create a scene and upset the family, Mr. Bucket smoothly blends in and wins their trust. It seems that he asks about the garden to find out if there is another escape route from the house.*



Mrs. Bagnet says that George has been feeling low, and Mr. Bucket commiserates with him. Mrs. Bagnet introduces Woolwich, and the boy plays a ballad for Mr. Bucket on his pipe. They spend a pleasant evening together and, when George makes to leave, Mr. Bucket gets up too. Mr. Bucket tells Mr. Bagnet that he will return tomorrow for the instrument, which the men have discussed.

Mr. Bucket follows George into the street and, as soon as they are some distance from the house, tells George that he is under arrest. There has been a murder, Mr. Bucket says, and he thinks George knows something about it. Mr. Bucket tells George that it is Mr. Tulkinghorn who has been killed and George cannot believe that he is a suspect. Mr. Bucket asks George where he was at 10 p.m. the night before, and George is horrified to realize that he was at Mr. Tulkinghorn's and that he did, indeed, have a dispute with the man.

Mr. Bucket explains that Sir Leicester Dedlock has put up a large reward for the imprisonment of Mr. Tulkinghorn's murderer. Realizing that he is officially accused, George draws himself up with dignity and allows Mr. Bucket to handcuff him. He asks Mr. Bucket to pull his hat down over his face so that he will not be seen in the street in handcuffs and Mr. Bucket obliges.

## CHAPTER 50

Esther hears that Caddy, who has recently given birth to a little girl, is ill and goes to visit her friend in London. When she returns, Mr. Jarndyce proposes that they go to stay in London so Esther can be near Caddy. He asks if Caddy has a doctor and, although Esther says yes, Mr. Jarndyce suggests that they employ Mr. Woodcourt. When Caddy is feeling a little better, Esther tells her that she is engaged to Mr. Jarndyce.

Ada often comes to visit Caddy, as does Mrs. Jellyby—although she only talks about her mission during these visits. Mr. Turveydrop is also very attentive, but Esther notices that the household is strictly arranged according to his pleasure and that the utmost care is taken not to inconvenience the old man at all. Peepy has become his attendant and accompanies him around the city. Esther sees Mr. Woodcourt often now because he is Caddy's doctor. She picks up from his manner that he still feels very sorry for her.

*Mr. Bucket is very good with people and easily convinces them to drop their guard. This is very useful for his investigations because people often give him information freely.*



*George is very shocked by Mr. Bucket's sudden change, as George is a straightforward fellow and does not suspect people of lies. George must have visited Mr. Tulkinghorn (to give him Captain's Hawdon's handwriting sample) just before Mr. Tulkinghorn left to visit Lady Dedlock. Although George did not fight with the lawyer, Mr. Tulkinghorn was reluctant to let him in and was obviously afraid of George.*



*Sir Leicester has obviously not heard Lady Dedlock's secret or about Mr. Tulkinghorn's blackmail attempts. George is too dignified to resist arrest and, therefore, follows orders and allows Mr. Bucket to bring him in. He is very ashamed to be seen in this condition though and wishes to hide his face.*



*Mr. Jarndyce is keen to give Mr. Woodcourt work and trusts him to do a good job with his patients. Both men are similarly compassionate and put others first.*



*Mrs. Jellyby is still very selfish and does not enquire about her daughter's health, even though Caddy is ill. Although Mr. Turveydrop pretends to be very attentive, he still manages to arrange things so that Caddy and Prince are always thinking about and waiting on him, rather than the other way around.*



Around this time, Esther notices that there is a new distance between herself and Ada. Esther wonders if Ada is upset because of the new relationship between herself and Mr. Jarndyce. One night, Mr. Jarndyce and Esther discuss Mr. Woodcourt, and Mr. Jarndyce says that he seems like a man who has suffered some large disappointment. Esther asks if Mr. Woodcourt will return to sea, and Mr. Jarndyce says that he hopes not.

Ada sits in the corner and watches Esther during this conversation and Esther is startled to see that she begins to cry. Esther embraces her and asks what the matter is, but Ada seems unable to explain. Ada goes to bed before her and, when Esther comes upstairs, Esther notices that Ada has fallen asleep with her hand under her pillow, as though she is hiding something.

## CHAPTER 51

After his promise to Esther, Mr. Woodcourt makes a point of often calling on Richard in London. Before his first visit, he must call on Mr. Vholes to get Richard's home address and finds that the lawyer is interested to talk to him. Mr. Woodcourt tells him curtly that he only wants the address, but Mr. Vholes insists that Mr. Woodcourt remind Richard that he cannot keep making use of legal services if he does not have the money to pay.

At last, Mr. Vholes reveals Richard's address, and Mr. Woodcourt calls on the young man. Richard is very pleased to see him, but Mr. Woodcourt observes that his room is a mess and that he looks worn and distracted. He tells Mr. Woodcourt sadly that he cannot seem to do anything right and that he wishes he had his discipline.

Mr. Woodcourt commiserates with Richard and listens to his troubles. Richard tells him that he is not concerned for himself but that he is worried because Ada's fortunes are bound up with his own. Mr. Woodcourt reports this to Esther and takes it as proof that, at heart, Richard is a good fellow.

One morning, Esther suggests that she and Ada visit Richard and is surprised to find Ada a little hesitant to do so. At last, she agrees, however, but she begins to cry as she dresses. On the walk there, Esther notices that Ada seems to know the way—though, Esther thinks, she has never been there before—and, when they arrive, Richard tells them that Mr. Woodcourt has just left.

*Esther thinks that Ada might disapprove of her engagement to Mr. Jarndyce. Mr. Jarndyce picks up on the fact that Mr. Woodcourt has been disappointed somehow—perhaps at Esther's tragic loss of beauty. Mr. Jarndyce sincerely likes Mr. Woodcourt and likes to have him around.*



*Esther has no idea what has upset Ada, or what she can be hiding from her.*



*Mr. Woodcourt is true to his word and tries to help Richard because he has promised Esther, showing that he is still a loyal friend to her. Mr. Vholes is only interested in Richard's money, not in Richard's personal life or deteriorating health.*



*Richard's messy room reflects his crazed internal state. Mr. Woodcourt is the opposite of Richard; he is measured where Richard is passionate and disciplined where Richard is scattered.*



*Mr. Woodcourt is very compassionate with Richard and treats him as a friend and an equal, although he is, also, secretly, there as a doctor to check on Richard's health. He does not patronize Richard or try to lecture him.*



*Ada has clearly been to see Richard in secret as she is familiar with the way to his home.*



Richard has been poring over his papers from Jarndyce and Jarndyce but is pleased to see Ada and Esther. He tells them that, with Mr. Vholes' help, the case comes along well, and Esther thinks that his hopeful expression is transformed into something obsessive and horrible. He grows tired suddenly and sinks onto the couch. Ada kneels by his side and caresses him.

Ada begins to cry again and reveals to Esther that she and Richard have been married in secret. Esther sees that Ada has been hiding her wedding ring from her. Although she is delighted for the pair, who are clearly very much in love, she cannot help the strong feelings of foreboding in her chest. She keeps this to herself, however, and is bright and cheerful with the young lovers.

Ada intends to remain with Richard and not go back to Mr. Jarndyce's **house**, and Esther agrees that this must be the case. She tries to part with them cheerfully, saying that she will return soon, but, on her way down the stairs, she bursts into miserable tears. She tells Charley when she arrives home and the pair walk out and stand for a time beneath Richard and Ada's window. When Mr. Jarndyce arrives home, he sees that Esther is upset, and she tells him of the marriage, which he half expected. He tries to cheer Esther up, but she can see that he is worried, and she thinks that, for the first time, he doubts her ability to be everything he wants in a wife.

## CHAPTER 52

Esther is walking in the garden, when Mr. Woodcourt hurries towards her and tells her that George has been arrested for Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder. Esther is horrified when she remembers Lady Dedlock's hatred of the lawyer and rushes inside with Mr. Woodcourt to consult Mr. Jarndyce. Mr. Jarndyce does not believe that George is guilty, and Esther acknowledges that it is unfortunate that there appears to be so much evidence against him.

Mr. Woodcourt explains that George is the one who sent him to see Mr. Jarndyce and the rest of the group because the trooper is very concerned that his friends will think he's guilty. Mr. Jarndyce says that he will stand by George. Mr. Woodcourt and Mr. Jarndyce decide to visit George immediately. Esther goes too, both for George's sake, but also because of Mr. Tulkinghorn's relationship with her mother, Lady Dedlock.

*Richard's obsession with Jarndyce and Jarndyce distorts everything and makes everything positive seem negative and horrible.*



*Ada is afraid that Esther will be angry with her and that she will lose her friend, however, she has decided that she cannot desert Richard. Esther is not angry, but she is very worried for both their sakes. She does not like to show this to them because she feels they have enough worries.*



*Ada can no longer see Mr. Jarndyce, whom Richard hates, but Mr. Jarndyce does not hold this against her and understands her decision. Esther is upset because Ada will no longer live with her but also because she fears that their marriage will end in tragedy.*



*Esther does not believe George is guilty either but is realistic. She acknowledges that there is evidence to suggest that he may have committed the murder.*



*George is afraid that his friends will turn against him. He does not care what happens to him as much as he cares about losing his friends' respect and trust. Esther is worried that her mother has something to do with the murder and wants to find out more.*



They are allowed into George's cell and immediately let the trooper know that they believe he is innocent. They are surprised to find George very calm; he explains that as he is innocent and there is nothing he can do, he sees no point in protesting about his situation. Mr. Jarndyce asks if George has entered a plea and he replies that he has told the magistrate the truth. Mr. Jarndyce exclaims that the truth alone will not do, and that George needs a lawyer, but the trooper does not want one. He dislikes lawyers and says that Gridley did not have one. Mr. Jarndyce protests that Equity is a different type of law.

George explains that, even if he had a lawyer, the man would probably not believe him and would lie about events in court. George explains that he *did* have motive to kill Mr. Tulkinghorn because he was very much in debt to the man. George says that, if he is to be hanged, he'd rather be hanged on his own terms as an honest man. While he talks, the door opens and, a few moments later, they are alerted to the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet, who have just entered the cell.

Mrs. Bagnet, who has heard the conversation, urges George to take Mr. Jarndyce's advice. Mrs. Bagnet complains that George has always been willful and gives him the small supper which she has brought for him. Esther notices that Mrs. Bagnet is signaling for them to meet her outside and she draws Mr. Jarndyce away with many kind words to the trooper. As Esther leaves the room, George looks at her intently and remarks on a strange coincidence. He thinks that he saw Esther the previous night outside Mr. Tulkinghorn's **house**. Esther feels a chill at these words as she leaves the cell.

Mrs. Bagnet follows them outside and immediately bursts into tears. She composes herself quickly though, and tells Esther that although George will never admit this, his mother is still alive and must be summoned. Mrs. Bagnet decides then and there that she will go to Lincolnshire herself and fetch George's mother. She sets off right away with a small pouch of money in her skirts. Esther and Mr. Jarndyce watch her go, amazed, and Mr. Bagnet remarks that she is an incredible woman.

## CHAPTER 53

Mr. Bucket has eyes and ears everywhere and is guided by his senses in a great many things. He finds his way in and out of forbidden places and untrodden streets and is ever watchful and ever calculating. He has a wife, Mrs. Bucket, and a lodger, whom Mrs. Bucket spends a great deal of time with and which allows him the freedom to go about his job.

*George is not canny in the ways of law and business and thinks that the case will be a straightforward matter of telling the truth. Mr. Jarndyce feels that Chancery law is unnecessary and should be abolished, but criminal law is important. Chancery was separate from the regular courts, and although Dickens dislikes this institution, he acknowledges that criminal law is important to uphold justice.*



*George is a very honest and straightforward man who dislikes the theatricality, intellectual arguments, and legal gymnastics which go into courtroom justice. George feels that he does not need a lawyer's help but can defend himself.*



*Mrs. Bagnet feels that George is stubborn to refuse legal help and that he does not care about himself because, he feels, he is burden on people. Esther believes that George has seen her mother outside Mr. Tulkinghorn's and suspects that she may have committed the murder to keep her secret safe.*



*George will not admit that his mother is alive, suggesting that he is ashamed of his past. Mrs. Bagnet, who is an objective outsider, knows that she must take action and contact his mother even if George can't or won't.*



*Mr. Bucket has informants and contacts everywhere so that he always knows what is going on in different parts of the city.*



Mr. Tulkinghorn has a very large funeral and the street around the court is crowded with carriages. Mr. Bucket occupies one of these carriages and observes, from this spot, his wife on the steps of Mr. Tulkinghorn's house accompanied by the lodger. After the funeral, Mr. Bucket goes to see Sir Leicester and enters the **house** without any trouble because he is on familiar terms with the servants.

One servant gives Mr. Bucket a letter and Mr. Bucket thinks it amusing that, as a man who does not often write or receive letters, he has been sent so many in such a short amount of time. He opens it, reads the words "Lady Dedlock," and is not surprised. Mr. Bucket enters the library and sees that Sir Leicester is not present. There are no letters addressed to Sir Leicester on the table, and Mr. Bucket considers that he will give him the news the next day.

Mr. Bucket is summoned to the drawing room after dinner and finds Sir Leicester with Volumnia and another aged cousin. Mr. Bucket flirts a little with Volumnia and then listens gravely as Sir Leicester repeats his insistence that he will spare no cost to track down Mr. Tulkinghorn's murderer. Volumnia and the cousin express their desperation to know who has made away with the dear lawyer, and Mr. Bucket insinuates that, although he has his suspicions, he cannot divulge anything at present.

Mr. Bucket continues that, sometimes, very odd secrets can be discovered in families, even very wealthy and prodigious ones, and Sir Leicester is quite indignant at this possibility. From here, Mr. Bucket goes to another part of the **house** and discourses with one of the servants. He flatters the man and asks him if Lady Dedlock dines out often. He asks the man what his father did and then tells him that his own father was a servant.

While they talk, Lady Dedlock returns and sweeps past Mr. Bucket towards the stairs. She briefly asks him if there is any news on the murder but seems to pay little attention to his reply. Mr. Bucket asks the servant if Lady Dedlock enjoys walking, and the servant answers that she walks outside at night very often. Mr. Bucket asks if she was out on the night of the murder and the servant confirms that he let her out the garden gate.

*Victorians are known for their extravagant funerals, and there was a large consumer culture based on mourning rituals and commemoration of deceased loved ones during this period in Britain. Mr. Bucket watches everything because he is always searching for evidence and clues.*



*It's likely that Mr. Bucket does not like to write letters because they are written evidence of his thoughts and actions. He has seen written evidence, like letters, used against people in court and avoid contact with the medium for this reason. The letters mention Lady Dedlock, further suggesting that she committed the murder.*



*Always in search of clues, Mr. Bucket tries to be on good terms with everyone he meets in case he ever needs information from them.*



*Mr. Bucket subtly tries to prepare Sir Leicester for the shock of Lady Dedlock's secret—that she gave birth to an illegitimate child—which Mr. Bucket must soon reveal. Mr. Bucket wins the servant's trust by suggesting that they have something in common. He is trying to work out when and why Lady Dedlock left the house on the night of the murder.*



*The servant does not realize that he has given incriminating evidence against Lady Dedlock and thinks that he has just made friendly conversation with Mr. Bucket. The fact that Lady Dedlock left by the garden gate, not the front door, suggests she did not want to be seen.*



## CHAPTER 54

The next morning, Mr. Bucket waits for Sir Leicester in the drawing room. Sir Leicester arrives late and explains that he suffers from gout in times of stress. Lady Dedlock has not come down, and Sir Leicester thinks it best if they talk in private. Mr. Bucket tells Sir Leicester that a woman is responsible for Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder and asks Sir Leicester to prepare himself for a shock. If he feels overwhelmed, Mr. Bucket says, he should think of his ancient lineage and all the shocks that they have borne. Sir Leicester solemnly signals for him to continue.

Mr. Bucket begins to speak of Lady Dedlock, and Sir Leicester furiously announces that he must have a good reason for this. Mr. Bucket replies that he does and explains that Mr. Tulkinghorn bore a grudge against Lady Dedlock. Mr. Bucket further explains Lady Dedlock's trip to see Captain Hawdon's grave, her love affair with the captain before her marriage, and Mr. Tulkinghorn's knowledge of this. He suggests that Mr. Tulkinghorn may have been about to reveal Lady Dedlock's secret. Sir Leicester is distraught and covers his face with his hands.

A servant interrupts them, and Mr. Smallweed is carried into the room, followed by Mrs. Snagsby and Mr. and Mrs. Chadband. Mr. Bucket introduces himself and Sir Leicester seems amazed by this intrusion. Mr. Smallweed announces that his brother-in-law, Krook, had a bundle of letters from a lady named Honoria to a Captain Hawdon. Mr. Smallweed complains that he had paid for them but never received them and demands an investigation. Mr. Bucket tells him to mind his own business and pulls out the bundle of letters himself.

Mr. Bucket says that he will give Mr. Smallweed 50 pounds for them, and Mr. Smallweed demands 500. Mr. Bucket laughs at this and says 50. Mr. Bucket asks Mr. Chadband what he wants, and Mr. Chadband implies that he and his wife know a secret. He brings Mrs. Chadband forward and she scornfully tells Mr. Bucket that she helped raise Lady Dedlock's child, which her Ladyship's sister took from her at birth. Mr. Bucket contemptuously suggests they will get 20 pounds for this secret.

Mrs. Snagsby comes forward next, in floods of tears. She tells Mr. Bucket the tragic and convoluted tale of Mr. Snagsby's infidelity, which she has concocted in her mind, and Mr. Bucket listens patiently. When she has left off, he dismisses the group and tells them that they may have damaged their meager interests in the case by barging in like this. He slams the door behind them as they go and turns back to Sir Leicester.

*Mr. Bucket flatters Sir Leicester and encourages him to bear the shock of Lady Dedlock's secret bravely by suggesting that this is what his ancestors would have done. He hopes that this will have a psychological effect upon Sir Leicester.*



*Mr. Bucket reveals Lady Dedlock's secret: that, before she married Sir Leicester, she had a love affair with Captain Hawdon and gave birth to an illegitimate child.*



*Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle had arranged to sell the letters to Krook, and Krook planned to sell them on to Mr. Smallweed, his brother-in-law. Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy think that the letters were destroyed in the fire that killed Krook but Mr. Smallweed does not know this. This passage reveals that the letters were, in fact, not destroyed, and Mr. Bucket somehow got his hands on them. Given his dodgy character, Mr. Smallweed likely wanted the letters for blackmail.*



*Mr. Bucket has tricked the old man and now teases him to punish him for his greed. Mr. and Mrs. Chadband also feel that they can make money selling Lady Dedlock's secret, or blackmailing her with it, and have come to try this. Mr. Bucket despises the group, who are only interested in money, and who are willing to sink to such depths for paltry amounts.*



*Mrs. Snagsby is the only one who is not trying to use a secret to her advantage. She has just been caught up with it all and let her imagination run away with her. Nothing about her account is close to accurate and Mr. Bucket irritably dismisses her.*



Mr. Bucket tells Sir Leicester that the murderer is in the house, and that he is about to arrest them. He unlocks the door and Mademoiselle Hortense enters. Mr. Bucket slams the door shut once more, and Mademoiselle Hortense looks around at him, first with confusion and then with fury. Mr. Bucket says that the woman is his lodger, and she says that she has been sent here to find Mrs. Bucket.

Mr. Bucket forces Mademoiselle Hortense to sit on the sofa and tells Sir Leicester that she has been stalking Mr. Tulkinghorn. She took the room near the court so that she could follow him more easily. Mademoiselle Hortense spits upon the floor and calls Lady Dedlock an unclean woman. Mr. Bucket silences her and explains that she is under arrest. He then lays out his reasons as to why he has come to this conclusion.

Mr. Bucket says that he arrested George because he knew that the soldier had been with Mr. Tulkinghorn that night and that the two had quarreled. On the night after the murder, Mr. Bucket returned home and found his wife and Mademoiselle Hortense eating dinner. He knew, by the flattering way she talked about Mr. Tulkinghorn, that she was false and had an intuition that she had committed the murder.

That night, Mr. Bucket told his wife, and Mrs. Bucket helped him solve the crime. He told Mrs. Bucket to relay to Mademoiselle Hortense that it was George who had committed the murder. Mrs. Bucket then stuck close by Mademoiselle Hortense and told her husband everything that the lodger did. From these reports, Mr. Bucket concluded that Mademoiselle Hortense murdered Mr. Tulkinghorn in order to frame Lady Dedlock. Sir Leicester rises from his chair and swoons a little. Mr. Bucket passes him the letters he has received and confirms that these are from Mademoiselle Hortense.

Mr. Bucket says that Mademoiselle Hortense silenced the gun using curtain fabric from Chesney Wold, and that she, Lady Dedlock, and George all visited Mr. Tulkinghorn that night in a relatively short space of time. The day after Mr. Tulkinghorn's funeral, Mademoiselle Hortense suggested to Mrs. Bucket that they go out to the country to have tea and, while they were in the tearoom, Mademoiselle Hortense excused herself. She came back breathless and, later that night, Mr. Bucket ordered the nearby lake to be dredged and discovered the discarded pistol.

*Mademoiselle Hortense is confused about why she has been sent to Sir Leicester's. She has obviously been tricked by Mr. Bucket, as Mrs. Bucket is not present.*



*Here, the novel reveals that Mademoiselle Hortense—not Lady Dedlock—is the true murderer, and that she is also Mr. Bucket's lodger. Mademoiselle Hortense shows her true hatred of Lady Dedlock.*



*Mr. Bucket's technique—luring the murderer to the library and laying out the process he has used to solve the crime—is one that is imitated often in later crime and mystery fiction, such as Agatha Christie's Poirot series. Mr. Bucket is good at seeing through false behavior.*



*Mrs. Bucket is Mr. Bucket's assistant and the pair are one of the first crime fighting duos, even though Mrs. Bucket's part in the action is told through her husband.*



*Mr. Bucket uses careful observational methods to detect crime and piece together the evidence. Mr. Bucket deduces from Mrs. Bucket's account that Mademoiselle Hortense contrived their day in the country to get rid of the weapon outside of London. During tea, she threw the gun in the lake.*



Mr. Bucket puts Mademoiselle Hortense in handcuffs and begins to lead her away. She spits and swears and screams that she would love to claw at Lady Dedlock. Once they are out of the room, Sir Leicester falls to his knees and stares helplessly at the trappings of Dedlock heritage and luxury which surround him.

*Mademoiselle Hortense is clearly a hateful woman and shows no contrition or sorrow for what she has done. Although Sir Leicester is so proud of his lineage, this cannot help him now in the face of his wife's shame; he knows Lady Dedlock will be ruined.*



## CHAPTER 55

Mrs. Bagnet and Mrs. Rouncewell sit in a carriage together and travel through a landscape of half constructed railway lines, towards the prison where George is held. Mrs. Rouncewell is overcome with gratitude and begins to cry. She tells Mrs. Bagnet that George never came home because he felt ashamed of himself and his low rank in the army.

*This passage reveals that Mrs. Rouncewell is George's mother—once again, the novel's characters are surprisingly interconnected. Mrs. Rouncewell understands why George never contacted her and forgives him for this.*



Mrs. Bagnet explains that George is a good friend but that he is often in low spirits. He came to them a couple of nights before and was particularly unhappy. When Mrs. Bagnet asked him what was wrong, he said that he had seen a woman who reminded him of his mother and that this woman kept the house at Chesney Wold. Mrs. Bagnet knew right away that this was George's mother.

*Earlier in the novel, George and Mrs. Rouncewell were both in Mr. Tulkinghorn's office. Although he didn't seem to know that this was his mother, he was reminded of her.*



Mrs. Bagnet hopes Mrs. Rouncewell can persuade George to get a lawyer, and Mrs. Rouncewell says that Sir Leicester will help prove George's innocence. Every now and then, Mrs. Rouncewell murmurs a distressed "my Lady" under her breath. They arrive at George's cell and find him writing at his desk. He does not see them at first, but when he does look up, he recognizes his mother, falls on his knees, and weeps before her.

*Mrs. Rouncewell knows that Sir Leicester will be loyal to her and will furnish her son with the best of lawyers. She obviously knows something of Lady Dedlock's dislike of Mr. Tulkinghorn and fears that Lady Dedlock may have something to do with the murder.*



Mrs. Rouncewell embraces her son, and George begs her forgiveness. Mrs. Rouncewell says that there is nothing to forgive and George explains that he has lived a careless, rootless life and has been too ashamed to write to her. He regretted losing touch with his mother, but he was in debt and did not wish to drag her into the situation, and so he kept to himself.

*George has tried to do the honorable thing but has been too proud to reach out to his mother. He is forgiven for this now because Mrs. Rouncewell knows his intentions have always been good.*



George thanks Mrs. Bagnet profusely for bringing his mother to him and agrees to get a lawyer. He says that his mother should speak with Mr. Jarndyce, who has promised to find him one for him, and Mrs. Rouncewell says that they must send for Mr. Rouncewell, George's brother. George begs her not to because, he says, he cannot face him; his brother is such a success and the opposite of George. He says, though, that he has drawn up a testimony for himself and hopes to be acquitted.

*George now has a reason to fight for his innocence and his mother's reappearance has spurred him on to do this. This suggests that people live for and are inspired by their friends and family and that having a social network is important. George is ashamed that he has not built a successful career for himself, like his brother, once again suggesting that he is a proud man.*



Mrs. Bagnet prepares to leave, and Mrs. Rouncewell says that she must go to Sir Leicester's townhouse and speak to Lady Dedlock. Mrs. Bagnet accompanies her and drops her at the front door. Mrs. Rouncewell finds Lady Dedlock in the library and pleads a word with her. Lady Dedlock listens, shocked, as Mrs. Rouncewell tells her that George is in prison for Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder. Mrs. Rouncewell begs Lady Dedlock to reveal anything she knows about the murder; Lady Dedlock seems afraid and asks why she should know.

*Mrs. Rouncewell clearly suspects that Lady Dedlock knows who killed Mr. Tulkinghorn or was even involved herself. Lady Dedlock's fearful reaction suggests that she's beginning to realize that people suspect her of the murder.*



Mrs. Rouncewell says that she has received a letter accusing Lady Dedlock. Although Mrs. Rouncewell does not believe it, she begs Lady Dedlock to reveal any secret she knows which could save George. Mrs. Rouncewell leaves, and Mr. Guppy is announced. He comes timidly into the room and nervously tells Lady Dedlock that the letters he thought were destroyed are, in fact, still in existence and have fallen into public hands. Mr. Guppy leaves the room but Lady Dedlock barely observes him.

*Lady Dedlock discovers that she is being framed for Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder and that the murderer (which readers know to be Mademoiselle Hortense) has sent out these incriminating letters. These are also the letters that Mr. Bucket received. Mr. Guppy tells Lady Dedlock what she already knows: her secret is out.*



Lady Dedlock stands horrified and knows that her secret will soon be exposed. She thinks that she has often wished Mr. Tulkinghorn dead, but now that her wish has come true, her situation is more precarious than ever. She fears she will be hanged and collapses in anguish upon the floor. She quickly pens a letter, which says that she is innocent of the murder and apologizes to Sir Leicester. After this, she dresses in her winter clothes and rushes out into the snowy night.

*While Mr. Tulkinghorn kept her secret, Lady Dedlock knew she was safe from everyone except the lawyer. Lady Dedlock does not know that she is no longer a suspect in the murder investigation and that Mademoiselle Hortense has been arrested.*



## CHAPTER 56

In Sir Leicester's townhouse, Volumnia is wandering about when she stumbles Sir Leicester, face down on the library floor. Lady Dedlock's note still lies upon the table. Sir Leicester is not dead, but he seems to have aged massively in a short period of time and it is difficult for him to speak. Mrs. Rouncewell is at his bedside and he wonders where he is, London or Chesney Wold.

*The novel implies that Sir Leicester has had a stroke brought on by the shock he received when he learned of Lady Dedlock's secret.*



Sir Leicester begs to see Lady Dedlock. Mrs. Rouncewell fetches the letter upon the table without reading it and gives it to Sir Leicester. He reads it through and moans, turning his face away from the housekeeper. Hours later, when he is again capable of movement, Sir Leicester signals for a slate to be brought and he tries to write upon it. He manages, after a struggle, to write the word "Mr." and Mr. Bucket is summoned.

*Sir Leicester is heartbroken for his wife when he reads the note and desperately wants Mr. Bucket to find Lady Dedlock. It seems that Sir Leicester still deeply cares for his wife despite her shameful past.*



Sir Leicester writes “Full Forgiveness. Find...” on the slate and Mr. Bucket immediately understands. He promises Sir Leicester that he will find Lady Dedlock and tells Mrs. Rouncewell that George is no longer a suspect and that she must take care of Sir Leicester. Next, Mr. Bucket searches Lady Dedlock’s room and finds the handkerchief which has Esther’s name embroidered upon it. He takes this with him and heads out into the night, where he rents a horse and cart.

Mr. Bucket rides to George’s gallery and finds the trooper has just returned from Mr. Jarndyce’s **house**. Mr. Bucket asks for the address and rushes off again for this destination. He rings the bell and is admitted by Mr. Jarndyce who is dressed for bed. Mr. Bucket explains the situation and says that he wishes to take Esther with him to track down Lady Dedlock. He shows Mr. Jarndyce the letter Lady Dedlock left, which he thinks is a suicide note, and explains that, if he tries to find her alone, she may think he wants to arrest her and may do something drastic.

Mr. Jarndyce goes to get Esther and then returns to tell Mr. Bucket that she will accompany him. Mr. Bucket waits patiently and, while he does, thinks of all the places in London he knows where homeless and desperate people go and where among these Lady Dedlock is likely to venture.

## CHAPTER 57

Esther comes downstairs, still dazed and half asleep, and listens with horror as Mr. Bucket reads her Lady Dedlock’s letter. She puts on warm clothes and follows Mr. Bucket outside where a carriage is waiting in the snow. Mr. Bucket drives Esther to the police station and questions her on the way about her relationship with her mother. She tells him that she met Lady Dedlock when she was a guest at Mr. Boythorn’s **house**.

At the station, another policeman writes up a description of Lady Dedlock and Esther confirms the likeness with her mother. It is already very late, and Esther waits for some time before Mr. Bucket reappears. He entreats her to be calm and, first checking that she has warm clothes for the journey, leads her outside into another horse and carriage.

The carriage first takes them to the docks where a sign on the wall reads “Found Drowned.” Mr. Bucket disappears down some steps with another man on the quayside and Esther waits, horrified, until the men return. Mr. Bucket explains that it is just a precaution and tells Esther not to fear. They hunt around the city a while longer, checking bridges and other isolated spots, and then begin the journey out of London towards Saint Albans.

*Sir Leicester forgives Lady Dedlock everything. He truly loves his wife and cares little about his reputation in comparison with his love for her. It is tragic that Lady Dedlock runs away without knowing that her husband forgives her. Mr. Bucket looks for evidence and deduces that Esther is someone important to Lady Dedlock because she has kept her handkerchief.*



*Mr. Bucket knows that Esther lives with Mr. Jarndyce and wants to find her. If Esther is with Mr. Bucket, Lady Dedlock will be less likely to run from her daughter or harm herself drastic in Esther’s presence. Mr. Bucket realizes that Lady Dedlock thinks she is a suspect and thinks that she is being hunted for the murder of Mr. Tulkinghorn.*



*Mr. Bucket uses his knowledge of the city and his powers of deduction to hone his search for Lady Dedlock.*



*Esther knows that her mother will believe she is a suspect and will also run from the guilt and shame of her secret.*



*Dickens shows the investigative procedure in depth based on his knowledge of the Victorian police force. The 19th century was the period in which the police force, as people understand it today, was officially established.*



*Mr. Bucket has gone to look at bodies which have been pulled out of the river to see if Lady Dedlock is among them and has drowned herself.*



The carriage stops at every public **house** along the way, and Mr. Bucket goes in and chats to the customers and to the owners of the establishment. Esther remains in the carriage, wrapped up against the cold. Mr. Bucket hears that Lady Dedlock has walked this way a few hours earlier and they drive on until they come to Bleak House. Mr. Bucket helps Esther down from the coach and leads her towards the house.

On the way, he asks her if she remembers seeing a man on the road on the night that she took Jo in. Esther says yes and wonders how Mr. Bucket knows about Jo. Mr. Bucket tells her that he was the man and that he is the person who took Jo away. Esther asks if Jo was a criminal and Mr. Bucket says that he told him to stay out of London because he knew too much about Lady Dedlock through Mr. Tulkinghorn.

As they approach the **house**, Mr. Bucket points at Mr. Skimpole's room and asks if he is often a guest. Esther asks how Mr. Bucket knows Mr. Skimpole and the policeman explains that he bribed Mr. Skimpole to lead him to Jo that night when Jo was taken. Esther is furious with Mr. Skimpole and Mr. Bucket says that, whenever a person pretends to be innocent or says that they do not understand money, that this is just their way of avoiding responsibility.

Once inside, they ask the servants if any of them have been near the brickmaker's cottage. When the servants say no, Mr. Bucket suggests that he and Esther should go there immediately. They find the brickmakers and Liz in another cottage nearby, but Jenny is not with them. Esther asks if they can tell her anything about Lady Dedlock—who Mr. Bucket says has been at their **house** recently—and Liz gives Esther a look as though she wants to speak to her privately. Her husband kicks her, however, and she is forced to stay quiet.

Esther asks where Jenny is and if she will be back soon, but her husband answers unpleasantly that she has gone to "Lunnun." Esther asks if Jenny left after Lady Dedlock's visit and they say yes. Lady Dedlock came to them to ask if the young lady was at Bleak **House** but left, after a short rest of about 20 minutes, when they said no. She did not go towards London. Esther asks how her mother looked and Liz answers timidly that she looked ill and exhausted.

*Mr. Bucket goes into the public houses to try and glean information from the customers. He is friendly and sociable so that he will win their trust and they will give him information willingly. Mr. Bucket thinks that Lady Dedlock may have gone to Bleak House to find Esther.*



*Mr. Bucket has chosen to protect the interests of wealthy people, like Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, rather than Jo, because he can make money when he works for them, and Jo has nothing to offer. Although this seems mercenary, there is little that Mr. Bucket, as an individual, can do for Jo, who has really been failed by a society which disregards the poor.*



*Mr. Skimpole did not want Jo at the house because he was afraid of catching his disease, and thus co-operated with Mr. Bucket to get Jo off his hands. This shows that Mr. Skimpole is extremely selfish and that he blatantly disregarded Mr. Jarndyce's wishes, as Mr. Jarndyce wanted to help Jo. Esther thinks that, perhaps, Mr. Skimpole did not understand the bribe, but Mr. Bucket assures her that he did and that he lies about this to avoid taking responsibility for his actions.*



*The brickmakers do not seem to have a permanent home and are constantly between houses. The brickmakers are clearly hiding something they know about Lady Dedlock's whereabouts. Liz wants to give Esther this information but cannot because her husband will beat her.*



*The brickmaker says that Jenny has gone to London and confirms that Lady Dedlock came to Bleak House to find Esther. He tells them that Lady Dedlock has gone in the opposite direction of Jenny, into the country, and not back towards London.*



Esther tries to find out more, but the brickmaker grows impatient and Mr. Bucket tells Esther that it is time to go. As he leads her outside, he tells her that Lady Dedlock has given one of the brickmakers her watch. He knows this because the brickmaker has told him that he does not own a watch, but also made an exact time of Lady Dedlock's visit. Mr. Bucket thinks perhaps that Lady Dedlock gave them the watch so that Jenny would carry a message to London for her.

*Mr. Bucket seems to have gained all the information he wants from the brickmakers and does not want to cause a scene. He knows that the brickmakers have done some favor for Lady Dedlock as she has given them her watch in return.*



They continue out into the country, and the weather grows worse through the night. They travel all the next day, though their progress is slow, and although Mr. Bucket still stops at every public house, he seems unsure of their route. He still hears from people that a woman dressed like Lady Dedlock has gone by, however. The next night, they stop at an inn run by a woman and her daughters. They take Esther inside to get her warm, but she faints when she sees the mounting snow and thinks of her mother alone and outside.

*It is urgent that find Lady Dedlock so that she does not die from exposure to the cold. Mr. Bucket seems to have lost the trail, even though people claim to have seen Lady Dedlock.*



The women revive Esther with some food and hot soup before Mr. Bucket returns and says that they must be on their way. Although Esther has never seen the women since, she always recalls their kindness towards her. They keep going for several more hours and find no trace of Lady Dedlock. Mr. Bucket seems to have lost the trail when, suddenly, he announces that they must turn around and follow Jenny instead, back to London. Esther pleads with Mr. Bucket not to abandon her mother, but Mr. Bucket asks her to trust him as they race back towards the city.

*Esther always remembers the women because they were kind to her during a difficult time in her life, highlighting how even small acts of kindness can be extremely memorable and important. Mr. Bucket seems to realize that it is not Jenny who has gone to London, but Lady Dedlock. He does not tell Esther his suspicion, though and Esther thinks that he has given up on her mother.*



## CHAPTER 58

It has been publicly put about that Lady Dedlock has gone to Chesney Wold but, already, rumors fly all over London and discuss Lady Dedlock's treachery and the scandal which has attached itself to the Dedlock name. Sir Leicester, who is still in a great deal of pain and struggles to be understood when he talks, lies beside the window and watches the snow fall in the street. Mrs. Rouncewell stays with him and Sir Leicester looks up eagerly whenever there is a noise in the house and asks that the fires be lit for when Lady Dedlock arrives home. Mrs. Rouncewell sadly obeys his requests.

*The Dedlock household has tried to prevent gossip and scandal but the word has gotten out and everyone is talking about Lady Dedlock's secret. Sir Leicester is in denial about the danger his wife is in and, although she is alone in the snow outside and on the run from the police, he expects her home at any minute because he does not want to think the worst.*



George waits in the room below, and his mother, Mrs. Rouncewell, goes to him every now and then and expresses her concern. She fears that Lady Dedlock is dead and that the Dedlock name is on the verge of collapse. She has heard the step on the Ghost's Walk louder than ever and fears the prophecy has come true. George hopes that his mother is wrong but agrees that Lady Dedlock's rooms have a terribly gloomy look as he helps her spruce them up in case of the Lady's return.

Volumnia sits with Sir Leicester when Mrs. Rouncewell is absent but is easily bored with her duty as caregiver. When Mrs. Rouncewell returns, Volumnia begins to talk about George—she adores a soldier—and Mrs. Rouncewell explains to Sir Leicester that her son has been found. Sir Leicester is overjoyed and asks George to be brought to him. Sir Leicester is very pleased to see the trooper, whom he knew as a young man at Chesney Wold. George is very kind to him and stays by his bedside while Sir Leicester rests.

Later that afternoon, Sir Leicester tells Volumnia that, if he grows worse and loses his powers of speech or movement, that she must make it known that his feelings towards Lady Dedlock have not changed and that he still holds her in the highest regard. As it grows dark, he begins to grow restless and upset and snaps at Volumnia for lighting a candle when it is not yet dark, although night has clearly fallen. Mrs. Rouncewell and now George stay by his bedside and, at last, gently persuade him to light some candles.

George keeps watch all through the night and Volumnia stalks the halls, wondering forlornly what will happen to her inheritance if Sir Leicester dies. At last, she allows George to escort her to bed, and George himself sits up and watches the grey dawn approach with a great sense of foreboding.

## CHAPTER 59

Esther and Mr. Bucket re-enter London in the early hours of the morning and travel down a series of poor, narrow streets. Esther still cannot understand Mr. Bucket's reasoning, but she has no choice but to trust him, and he is very kind and considerate of her. Mr. Bucket often gets out to consult with passers by and other police officers and, eventually, the carriage stops, and he asks Esther to get out and walk.

*Having learned his lesson about keeping his family at arm's length, George will not leave his mother again and accompanies her home to Chesney Wold. The Ghost's Walk signals the end of the Dedlock line, which will collapse with Sir Leicester's physical decline and Lady Dedlock's ruin. Both George and his mother suspect that Lady Dedlock will die.*



*Volumnia is very shallow and thoughtless; she cares more about flirting with George than she does caring for the ailing relative who supports her financially. Sir Leicester is pleased that George has come home because it gives him hope that missing people—like his wife—can be found.*



*Sir Leicester does not want people to think that he does not forgive Lady Dedlock. Sir Leicester does not want to face the fact that night approaches and Lady Dedlock is still missing. She will have to survive a night in the snow alone.*



*Volumnia is selfish and only thinks about her own inheritance and status. As a noble, aging woman, she would have no way of earning a living and to lose her patronage from Sir Leicester would be a significant blow to her lifestyle.*



*Esther still does not understand Mr. Bucket's reasoning and he has not told her what he suspects: that her mother has returned to London in Jenny's place.*



Esther recognizes the street and realizes they are in Chancery Lane. Mr. Bucket begins to lead her away when she hears Mr. Woodcourt call her name. He rushes over and, seeing that she is cold and wet, gives her his cloak. He explains that he has just been with Richard, who is very depressed, and asks if he can accompany them wherever they are going. Mr. Bucket enthusiastically agrees and leads them towards Mr. Snagsby's house.

When they arrive, Mr. Bucket goes inside and leaves Esther and Mr. Woodcourt in the street. A few moments later, he returns and invites them in. He asks Mr. Woodcourt if he will attend to a servant who has fallen into a fit and sits Esther down by the fire. Mrs. Snagsby glares at her. Mr. Snagsby imploringly tells his wife that he has no idea why these people are here and, at Mr. Bucket's command, goes to help Mr. Woodcourt with Guster.

Mr. Bucket then tells Mrs. Snagsby—who still peers menacingly at Esther—that she has made a mistake and that she should be ashamed to accuse her husband, who has done nothing wrong. He then sends Mrs. Snagsby out of the room and shows Esther a letter. Esther recognizes the handwriting—it is her mother's. Esther reads the first part of the letter, which states that Lady Dedlock went to Bleak **House** to see if she could have one last glimpse of Esther and to avoid pursuit.

The next part of the letter is still in Lady Dedlock's hand, but the writing is shaky, as though she is tired. It says that Lady Dedlock wanders the streets and waits to die. She wishes to be forgiven for her sins but knows a place where she will lie down and surrender to death. The letter has come from Guster, whom Mr. Woodcourt has revived, and Mr. Bucket takes Esther in to speak with her.

At the sight of the poor, stunned girl, Esther begins to cry and begs Guster to tell her how she got the letter. Guster weakly explains that a woman dressed in poor clothes, but very "well spoken," approached her and asked the way to the cemetery nearby. Guster felt very sorry for the woman, who looked exhausted, and showed her the way. Guster remembers that this is the place where Captain Hawdon was buried and grows upset until Mrs. Snagsby comforts her.

*Mr. Woodcourt is very worried about Esther, once again showing that he still cares for her deeply.*



*The servant is Guster, who is prone to seizures. Mrs. Snagsby still suspects Mr. Snagsby of being unfaithful and seems to think Esther is another one of his supposed mistresses.*



*Once again, Mrs. Snagsby is quick to assume that her husband is having an affair. Mr. Bucket clears up Mrs. Snagsby's mistake and explains that her husband has never been unfaithful to her.*



*Lady Dedlock has written this half of the letter later than the first, and her handwriting is shaky because she is tired from her long walk and grows steadily weaker. Lady Dedlock has given the letter to Guster because she knows that Mr. Snagsby knows Mr. Jarndyce and Mr. Bucket.*



*Esther feels sorry for Guster, who is very afraid, and cries because she is also afraid for her mother. Lady Dedlock's looks are incongruous with her dress because she is a rich woman disguised as a poor woman. However, since Lady Dedlock is not from a wealthy family, she has, until now, essentially been a poor woman disguised as a rich woman in her identity as Lady Dedlock. Lady Dedlock has gone to Captain Hawdon's grave to die, perhaps suggesting that she still loves him and wishes to be reunited with him in death. It also seems that going to die at the Captain's grave is a way for Lady Dedlock to end things where they began: with her scandalous affair with the Captain, the root of all her troubles.*



Mr. Bucket knows the place, and he, Esther, and Mr. Woodcourt rush into the street and head for the burial ground. Esther is nearly delirious with exhaustion and the narrow, filthy streets covered in slush and snow seem alien to her. Outside the gates of the cemetery, a woman lies on the ground, and Esther rushes to her and thinks that it is Jenny. Mr. Bucket tries to hold her back. He says that “they changed clothes at the cottage,” but Esther does not understand.

*The burial ground is the spot that Jo showed Lady Dedlock when she came to him in disguise. Esther does not know that Jenny and her mother swapped clothes and that this is, in fact, Lady Dedlock.*



Esther is horrified by the sight of Jenny, who helped her mother, lying senseless in the snow. Mr. Woodcourt looks pained as he holds her back and Mr. Bucket says that he should let her go. Esther runs to the woman and lifts her head. It is Lady Dedlock, who lies there dead, frozen in the snow.

*Esther feels sorry for the woman, whom she assumes is Jenny, and rushes to help her. Mr. Woodcourt and Mr. Bucket know it is Lady Dedlock but do not hold Esther back because they know she must learn the truth for herself.*



## CHAPTER 60

Esther has a short illness after Lady Dedlock’s death but recovers quickly. They remain in London, and Mr. Jarndyce says that they should stay there for a time. They see Ada every day and hear reports from Mr. Woodcourt every few days on the state of Richard’s health. Mr. Woodcourt says that although Richard is not ill, he is deeply troubled and weak. Mr. Jarndyce is very concerned about Richard, but Richard still distrusts him. Esther says that this is unreasonable, but Mr. Jarndyce laments that no one is reasonable about Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

*Richard’s condition continues to deteriorate, and Mr. Jarndyce suspects that it will end in tragedy because of the negative effect that the lawsuit has on people.*



Mrs. Woodcourt has come to stay with them, and Mr. Jarndyce asks Esther how she gets along with the old lady. Esther says that Mrs. Woodcourt seems more personable this time, and Mr. Jarndyce agrees she does not talk about her lineage as much as she used to. Mr. Jarndyce says that it is also good to have her there because Mr. Woodcourt comes often to visit her. Esther feels uncomfortable about this and tries to hide it from her guardian.

*Mrs. Woodcourt now knows that Esther is a Dedlock but does not realize that Lady Dedlock was not of noble birth. It seems, then, that Mrs. Woodcourt now thinks that Esther is good enough for her son.*



Esther asks Mr. Jarndyce if he thinks that Mr. Woodcourt will go abroad again, and Mr. Jarndyce says that Mr. Woodcourt has been offered a position in Yorkshire at a new hospital for the poor. Esther thinks that the parish there will be very lucky to have him, and Mr. Jarndyce agrees but cautions her that it is a meager living and not a prestigious post.

*Mr. Jarndyce is one of the most honorable characters in the novel. He is both levelheaded and charitable, hence his belief that Mr. Woodcourt is doing a good thing by serving the poor but that he will have a difficult time supporting himself on this salary. It is interesting, though, that he stresses to Esther how little Mr. Woodcourt will make, suggesting that Mr. Jarndyce perhaps has other motives for discussing the doctor with her.*



Esther goes to visit Ada every day during this time. She lives with Richard in his gloomy lodgings, and her husband grows paler and more distracted by the day. One evening, on her way there, Esther meets Miss Flite who tells her that she has just left Richard at the court with Mr. Vholes. Miss Flite wrinkles her nose at the name and says that she distrusts the lawyer. Richard, she says, has become quite a regular in court, and she has made him her “executor,” a title she had once thought to bestow on Gridley.

Esther is unhappy to hear this but hides it from the old woman. Miss Flite leans towards her and tells her confidentially that she has added two new **birds** to her aviary. She has called them “The Wards in Jarndyce” after Richard and Ada, and they live in the cage with all the others that are named things like “Hope,” “Joy,” and “Peace.” Esther thinks Miss Flite looks worried as she tells Esther this, and she watches unhappily as the old lady hurries away.

Mr. Vholes arrives at Richard’s a few minutes after Esther gets there, and while Ada and Richard prepare the food, he asks to speak with Esther in private. Mr. Vholes tells her that he thinks Richard’s marriage to Ada is “ill advised” and that Richard is in a very bad state. Esther, who deeply dislikes Mr. Vholes and thinks he is like a vampire, says that Richard’s ill health is due to the bad influences in his life. Mr. Vholes disregards this, however, and explains patiently that he is quite respectable and that he only performs the work for his client which he has been paid to oversee.

Richard is irritable and sullen over dinner, although he tries to be merry for Esther and Ada’s sake. Mr. Vholes leaves immediately after dinner and Richard goes with him. When he returns, he gives a brief defensive speech in which he dwells upon what a solid, honest fellow Mr. Vholes is and then throws himself mournfully on the couch. Mr. Woodcourt comes in soon after this and persuades Richard, in a friendly, unassuming way, to take a walk with him.

Ada and Esther sit together while the men are out and Esther notices that her friend is very agitated. Ada explains that she can see how far Richard has fallen and how ill and worn he is. She begins to cry and tells Esther that she is pregnant. Esther is very pleased for her, but is distressed when Ada says that, although the thought of her child gives her hope for the future, she is afraid that Richard will die before the child is born.

*Miss Flite is very self-aware in her madness and her dealings with Chancery. She distrusts Mr. Vholes because she can see he is part of the Chancery system, which draws people in and sends the mad. Richard is now mad, like Miss Flite, and Miss Flite treats him as a colleague in the delusional lawsuit over which she presides. Richard, she says, will be her successor in this.*



*Miss Flite is fully aware that Richard and Ada’s situation is tragic. She has named two birds after them because she knows that they are trapped by the madness of Chancery and cannot escape until the case is over. All their hopes, joy, and peace are bound up with the case, too.*



*It seems that Mr. Vholes does not like that Ada distracts Richard from the case and feels that she may talk him out of investing in the lawsuits, which would prevent Mr. Vholes from profiting off of Richard. Esther feels that Mr. Vholes is vampiric and will drain the life out of Richard by exploiting him. Since Mr. Vholes’s work is all legal and considered respectable, it is difficult to challenge his ethics, although they are clearly skewed.*



*Richard defends Mr. Vholes because he is losing face but cannot bring himself to admit this. Mr. Woodcourt is very good with Richard and persuades him to take care of himself by treating him as an equal and making Richard feel that it is valuable to Mr. Woodcourt to spend time with him.*



*Ada can see how bad Richard’s health and mental state are but does not like to show this in front of him.*



## CHAPTER 61

Mr. Skimpole also visits Richard regularly, and Esther can see that he is bad influence and that Ada is troubled by his presence. She goes to visit Mr. Skimpole in secret and tells him that Richard is very poor, and that Mr. Skimpole should not go there anymore. Mr. Skimpole lightly agrees and says that he only visits places that bring him pleasure and where he can be entertained.

Esther also tells him that she was very disappointed to hear that he accepted a bribe from Mr. Bucket on the night that Jo was taken from the house and Mr. Skimpole is amazed at the suggestion and feigns total ignorance. Esther says that he has no regard for morality and Mr. Skimpole says that he has no need for it and is above this sort of thing. He also asks Esther to think of the damage which may have been done to Mr. Bucket's investigation if he had not accepted the bribe.

Esther leaves after this and never sees Mr. Skimpole again. When Mr. Jarndyce discovers that Mr. Skimpole has ignored his request to leave Richard alone, he, too, stops speaking to Mr. Skimpole. Mr. Skimpole dies shortly after, still owing Mr. Jarndyce an enormous amount of money. Before his death, he publishes a book, which describes Mr. Jarndyce as an extremely selfish man.

Richard's health grows worse, and his obsession with Chancery becomes "like the madness of a gamester." Mr. Woodcourt still goes to see him, but Esther can see that Richard deteriorates. One night, Esther and Mr. Woodcourt walk home from Richard's together and Mr. Woodcourt confesses his love for Esther. Esther is amazed and tries to stifle her disappointment because she is already engaged to Mr. Jarndyce.

Still, she expresses her immense gratitude and high regard for Mr. Woodcourt and, although he is disappointed in love, he handles it nobly and assures her that nothing will change between them, and that he will still attend to Richard. He leaves Esther alone and she goes to her room to cry.

## CHAPTER 62

That night, in her room, Esther reads Mr. Jarndyce's letter and, the next morning, is refreshed and hopeful again. When she is alone with Mr. Jarndyce, she timidly asks him if he still wishes to make her the "mistress of Bleak House," and Mr. Jarndyce assures her that this is the case. They agree that in a month's time this should be settled.

*Mr. Skimpole is only interested in friends he can use for his own pleasure and drops Richard immediately. He does not really care about Richard but only about himself.*



*Mr. Skimpole feels that he does not need to take responsibility for things because he can always find people to take advantage of. While this is true, sensible people, like Esther, distance themselves from people like this, who are only out for themselves.*



*It is ironic that Mr. Skimpole writes about Mr. Jarndyce in this way, as Mr. Skimpole is the truly selfish one, while Mr. Jarndyce helped him time and time again even when Mr. Skimpole was far from deserving. Mr. Skimpole only views Mr. Jarndyce as selfish because Mr. Jarndyce has recently refused to keep paying for him, despite the countless times Mr. Jarndyce had helped him in the past.*



*Richard has gambled his future on the Chancery suit and lost. He is now in a desperate madness, like that of an addict. Esther honors her agreement with Mr. Jarndyce, even though this brings her pain, and Mr. Woodcourt respects this.*



*Mr. Woodcourt does not resent Esther for rejecting him and does not seek to punish her by withdrawing the favors he has promised to carry out on her behalf.*



*Esther is worried that Mr. Jarndyce is unhappy with her because he rarely mentions their engagement.*



While they talk, Mr. Bucket is announced. The private investigator enters the room, followed by two men who carry Mr. Smallweed. Mr. Bucket explains that Mr. Smallweed has found a will made out in the name of Jarndyce in Krook's shop, and the old man slouches miserably in his chair and glares at Mr. Bucket. Mr. Bucket explains that Mr. Smallweed very cooperatively agreed to deliver the will to Mr. Jarndyce on the principal that there may be a reward, even if this reward is only escaping the punishment for concealing such a document. Mr. Smallweed leers at him behind his back.

Mr. Jarndyce thanks Mr. Bucket but says he wants nothing to do with the suit. He takes the document immediately to Mr. Kenge without reading it. Mr. Kenge is amazed; the will was written later than the date of the suit and cancels much of the case in dispute! He calls for Mr. Guppy and sends him to inform Mr. Vholes. He says that Richard and Ada's fortunes will be made by this and rebukes Mr. Jarndyce for his lack of faith in the Chancery system.

## CHAPTER 63

George is now an attendant for Sir Leicester and goes on a visit to an industrial town in the north of England to track down his brother, Mr. Rouncewell. When George arrives, in a landscape of sprawling factories and ironworks, and asks after his brother, he is shocked to find that Mr. Rouncewell owns almost everything in the town. He grows embarrassed about his own downtrodden state in life and is almost tempted to turn back. He goes on, however, and finds Watt in the factory.

Watt goes to tell his father and, when George is shown into Mr. Rouncewell's office, he tells his brother that his name is Mr. Steel. George tells Mr. Rouncewell that he once served with his brother, but Mr. Rouncewell recognizes him and is delighted. George is amazed at this warm reception, and Mr. Rouncewell takes George home for dinner and invites him to Watt's wedding to Rosa, which will take place in a year's time.

George is impressed with his brother's success—his home is extremely luxurious—and is delighted to meet the family. However, he tells his brother that he wants Mrs. Rouncewell to erase him from the will; since he has no children, he wants Mr. Rouncewell's family to inherit everything. Mr. Rouncewell says that there is no way Mrs. Rouncewell will be induced to do this because her love for George is so great, but he reminds him that, when George inherits his wealth, he may then bequeath it as he likes.

*It seems that Mr. Smallweed really had no intention of handing over the will, which is likely very important and valuable, to Mr. Jarndyce, but Mr. Bucket has caught him and forced him to do so.*



*Mr. Jarndyce never thinks about what he may gain from the lawsuit and consistently dislikes it because of the harm it has done to people. Although it seems that Mr. Jarndyce has been wrong to doubt the system, subsequent events prove him quite right to be wary of it.*



*Industrial growth was very booming during the 19th century in Britain, and poor men who entered manufacturing as a profession had the opportunity to grow very wealthy. Always a proud man, George is ashamed of his lack of success beside his brother.*



*George wants to gauge his brother's reaction to him before he reveals his identity. This is uncharacteristic for George, who is usually straightforward to a fault and doesn't like lies or deception.*



*Mr. Rouncewell has made himself very wealthy and improved his circumstances through pure hard work, something which was not possible for poor men before the 19th century. George is very honorable and does not want to inherit money when he has nothing to spend it on and when it would deprive someone else.*



The brothers are very alike and get on well. Mr. Rouncewell hopes to incorporate George into the family business, but George explains that he has taken a post as Sir Leicester Dedlock's attendant. Mr. Rouncewell seems unhappy about this, but George tells him that he has grown used to being ordered about as a soldier and that he cannot stick to things without this discipline. Mr. Rouncewell accepts this and is pleased for his brother.

*George is not cut out to make his own fortune because he lacks discipline and drive. He knows and accepts this and is happy to work as an assistant for Sir Leicester. With this, Dickens suggests that, although it is possible to make oneself wealthy in the 19th century, it takes a certain level of grit and determination.*



George asks Mr. Rouncewell to look at a letter he has written. The letter is to Esther and tells her that, a long time ago, he was given a letter for her mother from Captain Hawdon, with whom the trooper served. George then gave this letter to Mr. Tulkinghorn but did not know what the lawyer planned to do with it. He explains that he did not know that Captain Hawdon was alive, he was believed to have been drowned on a voyage, and that, if he had known, he would have done anything to help her father. Mr. Rouncewell approves of the letter and George agrees when his brother suggests that he ride with him some of the way back to Chesney Wold.

*George was never able to give Captain Hawdon's letter to Lady Dedlock because he could not identify her in her new position. Instead, he kept the letter and gave it to Mr. Tulkinghorn because he did not realize the importance of the secret it contained. He wants Esther to know that he did not willingly conspire against her or her mother.*



## CHAPTER 64

One morning, Mr. Jarndyce gives Esther a letter which invites her to begin preparations for her wedding. They agree to marry after the end of the legal term and Esther waits, with a glimmer of excitement, to discover the outcome of Jarndyce and Jarndyce now that the will has been found. Mr. Jarndyce goes away on business to Yorkshire and writes to Esther, inviting her to travel out and meet him.

*Esther allows herself to hope that, perhaps, the outcome of the lawsuit will be favorable after all. She also begins dutifully preparing for the wedding, committed to marrying Mr. Jarndyce despite her love for Mr. Woodcourt.*



Esther arrives and dines with Mr. Jarndyce at a hotel. Mr. Jarndyce tells her that he has come here to arrange a **house**, which belongs to him but which he plans to give to Mr. Woodcourt, who has taken the hospital post in the area. Esther is overcome by her guardian's goodness, and Mr. Jarndyce says that he planned it as a surprise for the "mistress of Bleak House."

*Once again, Mr. Jarndyce proves himself a very generous, good man. While he is certainly fond of Mr. Woodcourt himself, he also seems to suspect that Esther cares for Mr. Woodcourt deeply.*



The next day, Mr. Jarndyce takes Esther to see the **house**, and she thinks that it is beautiful and exactly to her taste. He takes her around to a secluded little porch, overgrown with flowers, and shows her the inscription above the door—this house is Bleak House and Esther is to be mistress of it. Esther cannot understand what this means.

*Mr. Jarndyce has kindly decorated the house in a way that he knows Esther will like, once again revealing his thoughtfulness and generosity. However, it's unclear why he's done this, since this house is going to belong to Mr. Woodcourt.*



Mr. Jarndyce explains that although he has always been certain that Esther would make a wonderful wife, he wishes to make her happy and, when Mr. Woodcourt returned, he had no doubt that the pair loved each other. He tells her that he has spoken with Mrs. Woodcourt and that once he explained that Esther is really a Dedlock, the woman was won over. Esther marries Mr. Woodcourt not long after this, and the pair are very happy together.

*Esther is to marry Mr. Woodcourt and live in Yorkshire with him where he has taken a job. Mr. Jarndyce cares more about Esther's happiness than his own and wants her to marry the man she truly loves, Mr. Woodcourt.*



## CHAPTER 65

Esther and Mr. Jarndyce return to London and are surprised when Mr. Guppy, Mrs. Guppy, and Mr. Weevle come to see them. Mr. Jarndyce is very amused when Esther tells him of Mr. Guppy's previous advances and invites them into the library. Mr. Guppy explains that he is successful man with many noble connections and that, although he thought that he had fallen out of love with Esther, he has realized recently that this is not the case and would "magnanimously" like to renew his proposal.

*Although Mr. Guppy did not want to marry Esther after her face was scarred, and when he thought she was poor and had no connections, now that he has found out she is Lady Dedlock's daughter, he wishes to marry her for the social prestige attached to this name. He suggests that he is doing her a favor when, really, he is trying to help himself.*



Mr. Jarndyce listens to Mr. Guppy's long speech and tells him that Esther most certainly declines. Mr. Guppy is amazed this refusal, and they have some trouble turning Mrs. Guppy out of the house. She indignantly protests in the stairwell that her son is a decent man and that Esther should be grateful for the offer. Finally, Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle, both deeply embarrassed, drag her from the room.

*Mr. Jarndyce sees through Mr. Guppy and teases him. He allows him to explain and embarrass himself. Mrs. Guppy is a social climber who looks down on noble people but also, jealously, wants to be like them.*



Mr. Jarndyce discovers that Jarndyce and Jarndyce will be settled in two days' time. Esther and Mr. Woodcourt decide to go to the court to be with Richard, who is very feeble and sick. On their way, they pass Caddy, who has heard about Esther's wedding and is extremely excited to talk to her about it.

*Richard is almost worn out with suspense as he waits for the verdict. It seems that he's so worn out that he won't even be able to enjoy the case finally coming to a close—Chancery has already sapped him of his vitality.*



They are a little late to the court because of this interruption and, when they arrive, find that the court is stuffed with people and that there is a great commotion going on. They ask a passing clerk what has happened, and he says that Jarndyce and Jarndyce is finished. Esther and Mr. Woodcourt hope that the news is good for Richard and Ada but are confused by the clerks' behavior—everyone they pass is in fits of laughter and scatters their papers all over the place.

*Something monumental has clearly happened at the court. The lawyers seem to be amused by this, and there has clearly been some irony in the way that Jarndyce and Jarndyce has worked out.*



On their way out, they meet Mr. Kenge and he explains that all the money owed in the lawsuit has been used up in legal fees. Mr. Woodcourt is horrified for Richard's sake and rushes to find him. Esther goes home to fetch Mr. Jarndyce, and they meet later that day at Richard's apartment. They find Richard on the couch and Ada with him, and Mr. Woodcourt tells them gravely that he had to be carried from the court with blood in his mouth.

Esther comforts Richard, and Mr. Jarndyce is brought inside where the two are reconciled. They speak gently to Richard of Esther's upcoming wedding and he promises Mr. Jarndyce that he will have a fresh start now that the delirium of Chancery is over and has left him. Richard asks when he will leave his horrible apartment and be happy with his wife and child. They tell him very soon, and Ada holds him as he dies. When Miss Flite arrives, she tells them that she has set her **birds** free.

## CHAPTER 66

It is quiet down at Chesney Wold, and Lady Dedlock is buried in the family crypt. Sir Leicester is an invalid now and goes about the grounds with George by his side. Sir Leicester still maintains his dispute with Mr. Boythorn, but Mr. Boythorn pursues his claims on the land more out of a sense of sympathy for Sir Leicester, whom he does not wish to patronize, rather than out of a genuine desire to win the battle. Phil lives in the groundskeeper's cottage, and Mrs. Rouncewell is very happy to have her son back. The Bagnets also come to visit often.

Volumnia has been written into the will so that, in the event of Sir Leicester's death, she will be taken care of. In general, though, the cousins do not haunt Chesney Wold anymore. It is no longer a lively or a fashionable **house** and nothing much goes on within its walls, where Sir Leicester quietly lives out the rest of his days.

## CHAPTER 67

Esther has been the "mistress of Bleak **House**" for seven years. Ada gives birth to a healthy baby, and the child helps her survive her grief for Richard. Mr. Jarndyce invites her and her son to live with him, and she gratefully accepts. Esther has two little girls, and her daughters are great friends with Ada's son. Charley marries a miller who lives nearby, and her little sister Emma becomes Esther's maid. Tom, Charley's brother, also gets a job in the mill.

*The tragic irony is that all of plaintiffs who have waited so long and invested so much in resolving the case will now be ruined. The lawyers do not care because they have made money from it, and this does not affect their business, as there will surely be more cases. Richard is very ill, and the blood in his mouth suggests that he may have tuberculosis.*



*The madness has left Richard now that the case is complete, and he can see clearly that Mr. Jarndyce is a kind man and not his enemy. It is too late to help Richard, and the only way that he will leave his poor, ruined circumstances, is to die. Miss Flite has set her birds free, just as the many plaintiffs of Jarndyce and Jarndyce have been set free.*



*Sir Leicester has insisted upon Lady Dedlock being buried as a Dedlock despite her shame, highlighting that he truly loved her. Mr. Boythorn does not want Sir Leicester to think that he pities him and, therefore, kindly treats him as an equal and continues the dispute as if it were a playful game. George has remembered all his friends in his new position.*



*Volumnia no longer worries about her old age because she is provided for, and her efforts to ingratiate herself with Sir Leicester have been successful. The Dedlock era is over, and this signifies the social change that was taking place throughout the 19th century, as social mobility and the new middle class replaced the nobility.*



*Ada's child gives her hope for the future and allows her remember Richard fondly rather than be consumed by grief. Mr. Jarndyce's kindness to Charley, Emma, and Tom, as children, has paid off and improved their prospects in adult life.*



Caddy and Prince are very happy and industrious. Caddy's little girl is deaf and cannot speak, but Caddy is a devoted and tireless mother. Mrs. Jellyby's plans for the African province have failed because the king of that nation was not very receptive to her efforts at establishing trade. She has taken on a new mission and hopes that women will soon be allowed in Parliament. Peepy is now the servant of Mr. Turveydrop.

Esther is always grateful to Mr. Jarndyce for his kindness to everyone. She still mourns for Richard and sees his likeness in his son's face. Mr. Woodcourt is much beloved by the people in the village and at the hospital where he serves. They are not rich, but they are very happy, and this is all Esther has ever wanted to be. Sometimes, she looks at herself in the mirror and is startled by the change in her face. She thinks it is curious how she does not miss her old looks at all.

*Mrs. Jellyby's plans did not take into account what the ruler of the African country might want and, therefore, were completely pointless. It would take a long time for women's rights to advance to the point that Mrs. Jellyby hopes. Although Dickens is critical of Mrs. Jellyby, he seems to consider this at least a slightly more worthwhile cause than the colonialization of Africa.*



*Mr. Woodcourt's hard work and Esther's kindness and diligence have paid off, and they are rewarded with the love of everyone they encounter. This more than compensates, Esther feels, for their lack of wealth or the loss of her beauty, which no longer seems to matter at all.*





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Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. Wordsworth. 1993.

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