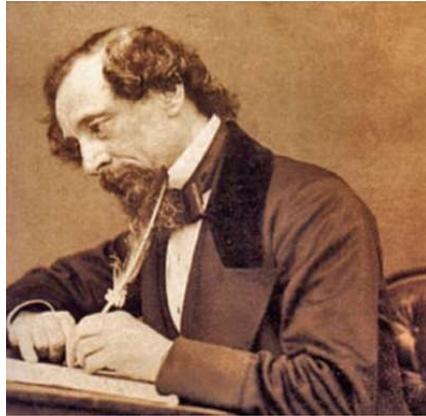


OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

by Charles Dickens



THE AUTHOR

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was the second of eight children in a family plagued by debt. When he was twelve, his father was thrown into debtors' prison, and Charles was forced to quit school and work in a shoe-dye factory. These early experiences gave him a sympathy for the poor and downtrodden, along with an acute sense of social justice. At the age of fifteen, he became a clerk in a law firm, and later worked as a newspaper reporter. He published his first fiction in 1836 - a series of character sketches called *Sketches by Boz*. The work was well-received, but its reception was nothing compared to the international acclaim he received with the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* in the following year.

After this early blush of success, Dickens took on the job as editor of *Bentley's Miscellany*, a literary magazine in which a number of his early works were serialized, including *Oliver Twist* (1837-9) and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9). He left to begin his own literary magazine, *Master Humphrey's Clock*, in 1840, and over the next ten years published many of his most famous novels in serial form, including *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1), *A Christmas Carol* (1844), and *David Copperfield* (1849-50), perhaps the most autobiographical of all his novels. Other works were serialized in *Household Words* between 1850 and 1859, including *Bleak House* (1852-3), which was then succeeded by *All the Year Round*, which he edited until his death in 1870, publishing such novels as *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-1), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5). A workaholic to the end, Dickens died of a stroke in 1870 after having penned a chapter of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, his final (and unfinished) novel, the previous day.

As far as his personal life was concerned, Dickens was a tireless writer and speaker, but his own personal insecurities made him very difficult to live with. He married Catherine Hogarth in 1836 and, though they had ten children together, their relationship grew increasingly strained until they finally divorced in 1859. He traveled extensively, including making several trips to America (he never much liked the country or its people), and was frequently called upon to read from his own writings, drawing large and enthusiastic crowds. Dickens also spoke out on a variety of social issues, including American slavery and the lack of copyright laws that made it far too easy for unscrupulous people to steal his writings, as well as the abuses of industrial society that play such a prominent role in his novels.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, the Thames plays such a major role in the story that it may almost be considered one of the characters. Most of the major events in the story take place on the river, and it serves as the one constant in the changing world inhabited by Dickens' characters. The main theme of the novel is money and its impact in people's lives for good or ill (mostly the latter). In this last complete Dickens novel, the author incorporates his usual social criticism and wide range of colorful characters, including various villains and a parallel pair of young couples whose love stories have much in common, yet run almost independent of one another. Dickens struggled mightily while writing the book, both because of poor health and a variety of other commitments. During the process of composition he took a trip to France to clear his mind, and on the way home was involved in a serious train wreck at Staplehurst in which a number of people were killed. He had to return to the train, which by then was dangling from the edge of a collapsed bridge, to retrieve the parts of the manuscript on which he had been working.

PLOT SUMMARY

The story begins with Gaffer Hexam and his daughter Lizzie in a boat on the Thames at night. They are looking for corpses that might be floating in the river, or any other valuables that might arise. They indeed discover a body that has obviously been dead for a few days. They are then met by one of Gaffer's competitors, Roger Riderhood, who throws accusations at Gaffer out of jealousy.

The tale then moves to a dinner party hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, two social climbers whose marriage is purely one of convenience. Among the guests are Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn, a solicitor and a barrister. The group discusses the strange case of John Harmon, a man who made a huge fortune by collecting dust (today it would be called running a landfill). Harmon recently had died and left a strange will. A small portion of his fortune was to be left to his faithful servants, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, with the rest going to his son, young John Harmon, on condition that he marry a certain Bella Wilfer, a young lady to whom the old man had taken a fancy. Should the son not survive, the Boffins were to inherit the entire estate. The son is due to arrive from abroad, but at the end of the dinner party a message arrives indicating that young Harmon had drowned; this was the body found by Gaffer that very night.

Mortimer is then summoned to the home of Gaffer Hexam to view the body. Eugene accompanies him and takes special notice of Lizzie Hexam. When they go to the police station they find the body badly decomposed, but able to be identified because of papers found with it. A young man who introduces himself as Julius Handford also appears to see the body, and is quite shocked to hear the dead man described as John Harmon. At the inquest, no one is surprised when a verdict of "death by causes unknown" is rendered, though the gossips strongly suspect foul play. The Boffins thus inherit the entire Harmon fortune. Meanwhile, Lizzie tells her brother Charley that he must go away and get an education, despite the fact that their father hates learning.

We next meet the Wilfer family. Rumty Wilfer is a poor clerk with many children, most of whom are now out of the house, and an imperious wife who pretends submission but really runs the family. Daughters Bella and Lavinia are just as unhappy with their poverty as their mother is. Bella is also furious to find that she has been used a romantic pawn in a virtual stranger's will, and is determined to hate John Harmon should she ever meet the man. While the girls sulk and Rumty tries to console them, a young man arrives asking if he can rent the room they have

advertised to let. His name is John Rokesmith, and despite the fact that he can offer no references, the family is sufficiently hard up that Wilfer agrees to take him in as a boarder. The narrator at this point remarks on the remarkable similarity in appearance between John Rokesmith and Julius Handford.

Meanwhile, the Boffins, having come into an unexpected financial windfall with the death of their former master's son, change the name of Harmony Jail, Harmon's estate, to Boffin's Bower and proceed to redecorate, each furnishing half of each room to his or her personal taste. One day Boffin encounters a street peddler named Silas Wegg. Boffin is impressed because the man can actually write poetry (such as it is), and hires him to come for several hours each day and read to him so that he might acquire the rudiments of an education (unfortunately, the only book he owns is Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which he nevertheless enjoys despite Wegg's butchery of the text). Wegg agrees, seeing this as an opportunity to fleece a neophyte.

In *The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters*, a run-down tavern operated by one Abbey Potterson, Riderhood spreads the rumor that Gaffer might be helping his found corpses to their deaths. Abbey doesn't believe him, but for the reputation of her establishment banishes both Gaffer and Riderhood henceforth. Lizzie Hexam then comes to the defense of her father, but Abbey, who is a sort of mother-figure to the motherless girl, urges her to leave her father and make her own way in the world. Lizzie refuses, but is now determined to get her brother Charley out of the house at all costs. That night she sends him off with a little money she had set aside; when she tells her father, he insists that he never wants to see the boy again because learning is a betrayal of the family tradition.

Wegg, who has a wooden leg, then goes to the shop of a certain Mr. Venus, a taxidermist and dealer in human bones for medical purposes, among other things. Venus has apparently acquired his missing appendage, and Wegg wants to buy it back from him so that all of himself can be together.

Boffin, meanwhile, goes to visit Mortimer Lightwood, his solicitor, and informs him that he and his wife, who always had a tender spot for the Harmon children even if their father had been rather a Tartar, had decided to adopt a young male orphan, give him the name of John Harmon, and raise him with all the advantages that might not otherwise be available to him. He also intends to offer a reward of ten thousand pounds for anyone who can identify the killer of young John Harmon. He also wants to leave all his property to his wife upon his death. After leaving the lawyer's office, Boffin is approached by John Rokesmith, who is unknown to him. Rokesmith offers to serve as his secretary; he is even willing to work without pay for a period of time until his work is proved satisfactory. Boffin doesn't think he needs a secretary, but agrees to meet Rokesmith several days hence to discuss the matter. He then pays a visit to the local parson, Mr. Milvey, to see if he knows about any suitable orphans. He lists several possibilities, but none seems promising. Boffin then determines to make the acquaintance of Bella Wilfer. He realizes that she has lost a considerable fortune through no fault of her own because of Harmon's death, and wants to make amends by helping her forward in society. Bella's family is rather rude to the Boffins, but Bella herself is genial, especially when Boffin announces their intentions with regard to her. He also asks them about their new boarder, Rokesmith, and finds that he keeps to himself and rarely speaks to anyone. A close observer also might note at this point that Bella and Rokesmith show some signs of being attracted to one another.

The Veneerings invite a few of their friends to help them plan the upcoming wedding of Alfred Lammler and Sophronia Akershem, which is to take place in their home the next day. The wedding takes place with the guests looking out for their own interests and pleasures and running down the others. Five days later, the bride and groom, during their honeymoon on the Isle of Wight, discover that they have been mutually deceived about one another's wealth - neither has any, and both are adventurers who hoped to marry into money. They agree to keep their dirty little secret to themselves and work together to extract money by means fair or foul wherever and from whomever they can get it.

Meanwhile, the Podsnaps, a very conventional couple - a fact of which they are inordinately proud - are planning a birthday party for their excessively plain eighteen-year-old daughter Georgiana. During the conversation at the party, Veneering tells about the incident of the drowned heir to the Harmon fortune, and the Lammlers arrive and begin to cultivate young Georgiana, who has been left by herself in a corner and ignored by the rest of the company. After the party, the Lammlers discuss how they can manage to make money out of the attachment Sophronia has just established.

Lightwood and Wrayburn are going into business together (though neither has much business to speak of) and are planning to get a bachelor's cottage on the river and enjoy the lazy days of summer. One evening as they are planning their future, Roger Riderhood appears at the door and wants to dictate an affidavit. He claims that he knows who committed the Harmon murder. In his affidavit, he swears he heard Gaffer Hexam admit to the killing the night the body was discovered. Because his obvious motive is a desire to collect the reward, the men immediately mistrust him, but they must follow up on his evidence, so they take him to the police station and together wait for Gaffer to return home from his nightly meanderings on the river. The two friends and the Inspector wait for a few hours at *The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters*. They then decide to conceal themselves near the landing where Gaffer is due to come in. While doing so, Eugene looks in at the window and sees Lizzie crying, and his heart goes out to her. He asks the Inspector if the operation can be carried out without involving Lizzie, and the Inspector agrees. Meanwhile, Eugene and Mortimer are feeling increasingly guilty about being involved in such an obvious setup. More hours pass and Gaffer doesn't appear, so Riderhood offers to go out in his boat and look for him. He returns and reports that he found Gaffer's boat, empty and crammed between two barges. They go out to see and find Gaffer drowned with his own boat's rope around his neck. After the body is brought to shore, Eugene disappears to "take a walk."

Boffin is having plenty of trouble managing the house and business he has just inherited, to say nothing of planning the new house he plans to build. Hopelessly lost in a stack of papers, he is glad to see John Rokesmith appear at the door. After a brief conversation and a quick demonstration of Rokesmith's organizational prowess, Boffin hires him to manage the business and the building of the new house, though the question of salary is postponed for later consideration. Now, worried that his new friend Wegg might be jealous, and totally unaware that he is being fleeced, he offers to make Wegg the manager of the old estate after he and Mrs. Boffin move out (while continuing to pay him for reading to him in the evenings, of course). That evening, Mrs. Boffin tells her husband of a recurring dream she has been having ever since Rokesmith left; she dreams that she sees the faces of old Harmon and his two children, and that the three faces then blend into one. Boffin then takes her out for a walk to help calm her mind.

Rokesmith makes himself master of his chores very quickly, including becoming familiar with the particulars of old Harmon's will. The only area of business he refuses to touch involves

the stipulation that he never be asked to meet with Mortimer Lightwood (Mortimer had earlier seen him in the identity of Julius Handford). The law, still pursuing the murder case after the death of Gaffer, seeks to interview the same Julius Handford, but, despite six weeks of advertising in the newspaper, he is nowhere to be found. Rokesmith now turns to the task of finding a suitable orphan for the Boffins to adopt. He hears through Rev. Milvey of an old woman who has been raising an orphan she can no longer afford. He and Mrs. Boffin go to visit the woman, a poor but dignified septuagenarian named Betty Higden. They find that she has not only taken responsibility for raising her orphaned great-grandson Johnny, but also takes in children whose parents cannot care for them during the day. One of these, now a tall young man named Sloppy, has come to live with her. Betty is reluctant to part with the young boy and insists on taking no charity - she is determined that neither she nor any of those in her care will ever go to the poor house or be taken in by social services. She agrees, however, to give Johnny to the Boffins when he has had time to get accustomed to the idea. Meanwhile Sloppy will serve as go-between.

On the way home, Rokesmith walks along a route he knows to be frequented by Bella. They do indeed meet, though Bella is cold and distant to him. Her mother soon comes out and deprives them of any opportunity of real conversation, though Rokesmith does manage to convey to Bella that the time is approaching for her to move into the Boffins' new home. Bella looks forward to the opportunity with little enthusiasm, though she does seem anxious to escape from her mother and the poverty of her home. Rokesmith goes away from the encounter disappointed at how hardhearted and mercenary Bella is.

Once the Boffins move into their new house, they are accosted by mendicants of all sorts, from social climbers wishing to make their acquaintance to tradesmen wishing to do business to charities seeking contributions to beggars of all stripes looking for handouts. With all these Rokesmith must deal. Bella, meanwhile, is settling in and thoroughly enjoying her beautiful new clothes and the ensuing social whirl. At the same time, Wegg is spending night and day searching the old Harmon house and the dust mounds for some treasure he is certain must be hidden there.

The story now turns to the plight of Charley Hexam, who had been sent away by his sister to get an education. He had arrived at a deplorable little school, but by dint of talent and hard work he had gotten the attention of a local tutor, Bradley Headstone, who took him on as a pupil intending to train him to be a teacher himself. Headstone is a bit of a plodder, but works hard, and Charley soon is enamored of his newfound knowledge. In the process he becomes a bit of a snob, fearing now that his uneducated sister might somehow drag him down and keep him from achieving the career he seeks. One day he announces his intention of visiting Lizzie, and Headstone asks if he might come along (he remembers Charley saying that his sister is rather attractive). Despite the fact that Headstone enjoys the love and adoration of his next-door neighbor and fellow-teacher Miss Peecher (her pupil, Mary Anne, likewise loves Charley with no discernible response), he seeks stimulation elsewhere. When Charley and Headstone arrive at the room Lizzie is renting, they encounter the mistress of the house, a young girl of indeterminate age, the severely-disabled Jenny Wren (her real name is Fanny Cleaver), who cares for her drunken father and makes her living by sewing doll clothes. Jenny is observant and quick-witted despite her twisted body. When Lizzie arrives, Charley speaks condescendingly to her and tries to get her to educate herself and move away from the river. Lizzie says she is content where she is, but after they leave, Headstone inquires further of Charley - he clearly is thinking of tutoring Lizzie himself, and perhaps pursuing a closer relationship. As they leave, they pass Wrayburn on the way to visit Lizzie.

When Wrayburn arrives, one can clearly see that he is developing a comfortable though proper relationship with Lizzie and Jenny. They banter with one another, then settle down to some serious conversation. Wrayburn offers to pay for a tutor for Lizzie, arguing that she is still suffering the burdens of her father's negative attitude toward education. Lizzie doesn't want to take charity, but obviously finds the idea appealing. The two are obviously attracted to one another, but Wrayburn is reluctant to express himself because he considers himself a good-for-nothing layabout - his law office still has no customers except for the work he is doing trying to clear Gaffer Hexam's name. When Jenny's father gets home, in a drunken stupor as usual, she treats him like a child and he submits to her orders like one. She sends him off to bed, then speaks to Lizzie of her future husband; she has no doubt that she will have one, and has long been plotting how she will make him do all the things for her that Lizzie does presently, and how she will make sure that he is not a drunkard.

Mr. Veneering buys himself a seat in Parliament, with which his friends seem inordinately pleased, though none of them cares one whit about it. Meanwhile, the Lammles continue to cultivate Georgiana Podsnap, hoping to set her up with an acquaintance of theirs named Fledgeby. Both are young and naive, but both are also rich. When the Lammles bring them together for the first time, they cannot manage to say a word to one another all evening, but the matchmakers are obviously hatching some plot to enhance their own fortune through the relationship. Fledgeby realizes what the Lammles are trying to do and, though he has no interest in Georgiana, is willing to play along with the game for his own financial advantage. When Fledgeby goes home, he summons his elderly Jewish servant Riah, who is if anything more reserved than he, and gives him instructions concerning his business. Riah tells him about a garden he has planted on the roof, and when Fledgeby asks to see it, Riah answers that he has two guests up there. The two turn out to be Lizzie Hexam and Jenny Wren; Riah is the scholar hired by Eugene Wrayburn to tutor the two girls.

Later, Eugene and Mortimer are sitting in Eugene's newly-furnished office talking about the emptiness of Eugene's life and his inability to plan for or care about anything. They soon receive a visit from Charley Hexam and Bradley Headstone. Charley insists that Eugene stop seeing his sister immediately; he is incensed that Eugene would have the temerity to hire a tutor for Lizzie when Charley intended that Headstone should fulfill the function. Headstone, who clearly is fond of Lizzie, adds whatever moral weight he can to Charley's demand, but the selfishness of both of them is totally transparent - Charley wants Lizzie to be grateful to no one but him for lifting her up, and Bradley is clearly in love with her. Eugene scornfully ignores Charley and directs his dismissive comments to the schoolmaster, who tells Charley to leave, then threatens Eugene if he doesn't comply. After the two depart, Mortimer asks Eugene his intentions toward the girl, and Eugene says he honestly doesn't know, but considers her one of the finest young ladies he has ever met.

Silas Wegg, meanwhile, is advancing his schemes to make money out of the Harmon estate. He enlists the aid of his friend Venus the bone dealer, who has visited to return his severed leg-bone (for which Wegg paid handsomely), to search the house, and especially the dust mounds, for hidden valuables, especially papers. Venus suspects that old Harmon, being the suspicious and cantankerous sort, had made many wills, and that not all of them had yet been found. Wegg resents the privileges given to John Rokesmith and sense some mystery about him, but he doesn't know what it is. As they speak, Rokesmith himself arrives at the door bearing a message to the effect that Boffin does not expect Wegg to be available at his convenience in the evenings, since now their regular readings occur at the new house in the mornings.

Bella is now settling down comfortably at the Boffins and has come to appreciate the generous couple despite their rough edges. She finds Rokesmith a mystery, however, and is quite curious about him, though she somehow feels that he is beneath her because he is a mere employee while she is a guest. Whenever they talk, however, she finds herself agreeing with what he says despite herself. Rokesmith is isolating himself increasingly from outsiders, willing to spend time with Bella and the Boffins but avoiding company whenever possible. Rokesmith encourages Bella to visit her family, which she does reluctantly, and, unsurprisingly, is insulted by her mother and sister, who, filled with envy and jealousy, have nothing good to say about the Boffins. She does spend time alone with her father, however, and turns over to him a fifty-pound note given her by her benefactors, insisting that her mother and sister know nothing of it. While they eat dinner together, she confesses her mercenary bent and tells him that she is determined to marry for money. He is disappointed, and, deep down, she realizes that her attitude is wrong.

Soon Sloppy visits the Boffins to tell them that the orphan they intend to adopt is very ill. Betty had concealed this from them because she wanted no charity, but they hurry to see the child, bringing Rokesmith and Bella along. They find little Johnny with a high fever and take him to Children's Hospital immediately. They are too late, however, and the child soon dies, leaving his newly-purchased toys to the child in the next bed. When Wegg hears the news he cackles with glee, hoping that he might become the next adoptee. At this point the Boffins decide to give up the idea of adopting another little boy since giving the name of John Harmon to another child might bring him bad luck as well. They decide they would rather find someone needy, but not necessarily a typical child, on whom to shower the benefits of their newfound fortune. At first they consider Sloppy, but he declines to move to the mansion because Betty needs him.

Miss Peecher continues her unrequited love of Bradley Headstone. One day Headstone stops by her house and asks her to deliver a message to Charley for him. She agrees, but sadly notes that he is heading in the direction of his earlier visit, and strongly suspects that he is again seeking Lizzie. She is correct in her assumption, and Headstone tires again to convince Lizzie to submit to Charley's desires and allow him to tutor her rather than the tutor hired by Eugene. Lizzie won't hear of it and Headstone can barely conceal his strong emotions. After he leaves, Lizzie and Jenny discuss Eugene, and Lizzie begins to realize that she is truly attracted to him despite his slacker lifestyle, believing that she can make a better man of him.

The narrative now moves to the riverside home of Roger Riderhood and his daughter, Pleasant, who runs a sort of pawnshop in the place. Before Roger gets back from his nightly journey on the river, a man appears in sailor garb, but with hands too soft to be those of a seaman. He tells Pleasant that he had been at sea earlier, but that sickness had forced him to earn his living ashore. When Roger arrives, the stranger engages him in conversation until Roger recognizes his knife and coat as having belonged to George Radfoot, a man with whom he had had shady dealings in the past, but who was now dead. The stranger hints at knowing something of Radfoot's death, and accuses Riderhood of lying about Gaffer Hexam. He also implies that he knows the truth about the Harmon murder, and tells Riderhood that, should he ever choose to reveal what he knows, Roger will share the reward. On the other hand, the stranger threatens to reveal Riderhood's shady dealings unless he signs a statement clearing Gaffer's name.

After the stranger leaves Riderhood's dwelling, Dickens finally reveals that he is the mysterious Julius Handford, who is in reality John Rokesmith, who is really the supposedly-dead John Harmon, Jr. Harmon goes over in his mind the details of his experience prior to the beginning of the story - his knowledge of his father's death and the bizarre provisions of his will,

his hatred of the corrupting influence of the money that was now his inheritance, and his distaste of the way his father had engineered his son's marriage to Bella Wilfer. On his voyage home, he had encountered a sailor named George Radfoot to whom he bore a superficial resemblance. Radfoot and he had established a relationship during the voyage, and Radfoot had agreed to help Harmon disappear after the ship landed so that he could determine how things were with the Boffins and Bella. Radfoot, however, had turned out to be treacherous - he had conspired with Roger Riderhood to drug Harmon and dump him into the river in order to rob him of the money in his money-belt. After Harmon had been drugged, however, the room where they were staying was invaded by unknown men who had killed Radfoot and thrown both bodies into the river. Harmon had miraculously survived, but since Radfoot was already wearing Harmon's clothes, the police had concluded that Harmon was the dead man. Harmon called himself Julius Handford during his recuperation, then took the name John Rokesmith when he boarded at the Wilfer home and sought a job with the Boffins. His dilemma now was whether or not to reveal himself. He now knows that the Boffins are kind and generous and are using the money well, and that Bella will never marry him without a fortune to his name. Furthermore, if he reveals himself, she will be forced to marry him under duress and can never love him for himself. Worst of all, he realizes that he loves Bella despite her mercenary spirit and condescension toward him. He therefore decides to maintain the identity of John Rokesmith, but to propose to Bella under that identity. He has no illusions about her probable response, and when he returns to the mansion that night his suspicions are confirmed - she cruelly rejects him and begs him never to take such liberties with her again. He assures her that she has nothing to worry about on that score and goes for a long walk, during which he figuratively buries John Harmon so deep in his consciousness that he will never rise again. Bella, meanwhile, realizes how cruel and foolish her treatment of him was.

As Rokesmith walks about the next day, he encounters Rumty Wilfer, who speaks to him of Bella. He is pleased by Bella's rise in life through the generosity of the Boffins, and assures Rokesmith that Bella has no male interest in her life, but that she will surely marry for wealth. He leaves the kind old man in a troubled state of mind. He then returns to the mansion to find Betty Higden there. Betty is upset that Sloppy, in his loyalty to her, is refusing to take advantage of the opportunities afforded him by the generosity of the Boffins. In order to open the door for him, she has determined to run away and make her own way on the road. She asks the Boffins for a small loan to equip a basket with which she can make things to sell, and their secrecy concerning her intentions. They try to talk her out of it, but she refuses to budge, and they grudgingly admit that her determination is admirable and decide to honor her requests; they only ask that she accept a letter identifying them as her friends should she even face some emergency. Rokesmith then goes to Bradley Headstone to arrange for a rudimentary education for Sloppy. While he is there, he receives an unsolicited harangue on the subject of one Eugene Wrayburn. That evening, Rokesmith returns in disguise to Riderhood with the document he required, and having secured the signature that clears the name of Gaffer Hexam, seals it in an envelope and mails it to Lizzie.

Headstone is still determined to see Lizzie again. In order to avoid Jenny and her sharp tongue, Headstone and Charley arrange to meet Lizzie in another part of town. When they meet, Charley excuses himself and assures Lizzie that he supports what Headstone is about to say. He nervously and passionately proposes marriage, but Lizzie calmly refuses him in no uncertain terms. He cannot believe that she would reject so elevating a proposal and leaves convinced of her crass ingratitude. Charley then returns and scolds Lizzie for being so inconsiderate to him and

ignoring the possible career advancement such a match could bring him, then casts her aside and says he never wants to speak to her again. After he leaves, Lizzie breaks down in tears. The old Jew Riah is passing by and comforts her, offering to see her home. Just then Eugene arrives and insists on having the honor of caring for Lizzie, but Riah refuses to budge unless Lizzie orders him to do so, and she asks him to stay. Both then escort the distraught girl to her home. Later, at a party thrown by the Lammles to celebrate their first anniversary, Mortimer Lightwood announces that Lizzie has received the letter clearing her father, but has also disappeared; no one seems to know where she has gone. Meanwhile, Mrs. Lammle feels sorry for Georgiana asks her easily-managed friend Twemlow to warn the Podsnaps against her and her husband's machinations.

Fledgeby, meanwhile, orders Riah to research bad debts on record in the commercial centers of London; he intends to purchase some of these debts and use them for his own profit. He is not surprised to find his erstwhile friends the Lammles on the list. Soon after, Lammle visits, bemoaning the fact that he has just received a letter from Podsnap insisting that he and his wife stay away from Georgiana and ending any contact between the families. Fledgeby tells Lammle that Riah is really to blame for his hard-nosed practices, neglecting to tell Lammle that Riah is in his own employ. Fledgeby then questions Riah about Lizzie's disappearance, suspecting that Riah had arranged it. Riah admits as much, but refuses to tell Fledgeby where Lizzie is hiding. Fledgeby does manage to get out of the old man the name of Lizzie's chief suitor, however - one Eugene Wrayburn. Riah then goes to get Jenny to take her to visit Lizzie. They go first to *The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters* to show Abbey Potterson the letter signed by Riderhood that clears Gaffer Hexam. Suddenly confusion arises outside - a steamer has collided with a small boat and split the craft in two. They go outside and see a body being dragged to shore; it is Riderhood himself. He is still breathing, so they bring him into the tavern, where a doctor soon revives him. Rather than being grateful, Riderhood is as nasty as ever, and his daughter arrives to take him home.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilfer are preparing to celebrate their anniversary. At this time, Mrs. Wilfer inevitably chooses to remind everyone how she married below her station and has been suffering ever since from the indignities of living with her poor husband. Bella and her sister Lavinia are present for the festivities, such as they are. Bella takes over the cooking chores and tries to encourage her father, while Lavinia confronts her mother for her ingratitude at every possible opportunity. Rokesmith was invited and declined to come, but Bella's former suitor George Sampson, who has now turned his attentions to Lavinia, joins the party. All have a miserable time, but Bella confides in her father as he walks her back to the Boffins' home. She tells him about Rokesmith's proposal and her immediate rejection of it, mentions that she thinks Lightwood to be in love with her - an interest that she fails to reciprocate - and reiterates her insistence on marrying for money. She also voices her concern that wealth is beginning to turn the head of her formerly-humble benefactor.

The next evening Bella arrives home to find Boffin in conversation with Rokesmith. The subject is the secretary's salary, and Boffin offers him two hundred pounds a year, but in the process treats him very rudely, as one ought to treat an inferior. After Rokesmith leaves, Boffin openly speaks of the changes that he and his wife will be required to make in their attitudes because of their new station in life. In the days that follow, Bella accompanies Boffin on his walks through town and notes that he seems to be making a collection of books about misers. Bella decides that her avowed principles look rather unpleasant when put on display by her benefactor. Soon Mrs. Lammle latches onto Bella, hoping for a new victim after the loss of Georgiana. She

worms her way into the young woman's company, though Bella never fully trusts her, and introduces her to many potential suitors, none of whom Bella likes. She does, however, confide in Sophronia about Rokesmith's proposal to her. Sophronia, on hearing such hardhearted sentiments, determines to show no mercy toward Bella as she had done toward Georgiana. Boffin, meanwhile, continues to act harshly toward Rokesmith, demanding that he cut expenses and insisting that he move into the mansion so his rent money can be saved and he can be available at all hours when needed. Mrs. Boffin seems upset by the change she sees in her husband, but continues to assure Bella that he is a good man at heart.

Meanwhile, Wegg and Venus are continuing to discuss ways of finding hidden treasure in the old Harmon house and the dust mounds. Boffin drops in one night while the two are talking, announces that he intends to sell the dust mounds, and asks Wegg to read to him from some of his books about misers. In seeing the way his eyes light up at the tales of men who hid their treasure in order to hide it from others, they become convinced of his growing greed and growing susceptibility to their machinations. After Boffin leaves, the two follow him out to the dust mounds and watch him dig up a bottle and hide it under his coat. Wegg is all for assaulting him and taking the bottle on the spot, but Venus physically restrains him. After Boffin leaves, Wegg tells Venus that he has discovered something - a will written by old John Harmon that was written after the current will, and which leaves the entire estate to the crown except for the smallest mound, which is to go to Boffin. Wegg and Venus plan to use the newer will to blackmail Boffin, counting on the fact that he will never voluntarily give up his newfound wealth. They intend to demand half his fortune at least; the longer they talk, the larger their demands become until they consider themselves, in their own minds at least, to be the rightful owners of the Harmon fortune. Venus then demands the right to keep the will safe; Wegg objects, but since they by this time have moved to Venus' establishment and he threatens to use his taxidermy skills on Wegg if he refuses, the one-legged man has little choice. The two scoundrels clearly don't trust each other in the least. Venus then complains of his disappointment in love, and reveals that his beloved is none other than Pleasant Riderhood.

Business is not going well for Betty Higden. As she walks from town to town along the Thames, she sells a few of her wares, but is often rejected. Repeatedly people try to talk her into going to the local parish house for charity, but she adamantly refuses. As time passes, she loses consciousness several times and begins to hallucinate. One day she is found by a lock-keeper - none other than the scoundrel Riderhood - who threatens to turn her over to charity unless she gives him the few shillings in her possession. She readily complies, then hurries off on her journey toward London and her protectors. She loses strength, however, and lies down outside a paper mill to sleep. When she wakes up, she finds herself in the arms of Lizzie Hexam, who is working at the mill. There she dies, having extracted from Lizzie a promise to contact the writers of the letter she conceals on her person. When she is interred in the corner of a little churchyard, only Sloppy, Bella, and Rokesmith are there to mourn her passing.

Bella and Rokesmith had been sent separately by Mr. and Mrs. Boffin to find out how Lizzie was doing and if her hiding was in any way related to the false charges against her father, and both are anxious to meet this girl whose fortunes have been so intertwined with their own. The two consult with one another and decide that Bella should broach the subject, as being more likely to win Lizzie's confidence. Bella also shares with Rokesmith her concern that Boffin is being spoiled by his riches, and the two exchange their affirmations of affection for Mrs. Boffin. Though they had never met before, Bella and Lizzie realize that they are kindred spirits and soon

are exchanging confidences. Lizzie assures Bella that her decision to go into hiding had nothing to do with the false accusations. Instead, she fled because of the unwanted attentions of Charley's friend Headstone and was assisted by a faithful friend who had found her employment in the mill owned by some of his people. She later admits that her love for Wrayburn, which she believes can never be requited, also drove her away. As Lizzie describes her unselfish love for Wrayburn (who has remained unnamed throughout the conversation), Bella begins to feel ashamed of herself and her mercenary view of the world. Lizzie assures her that she believes that, deep inside, Bella is capable of unselfish and faithful love. When Bella returns to Rokesmith, she tells him only that Lizzie's situation has nothing to do with what happened to Gaffer, and that she is profoundly grateful to whatever person forced Riderhood to sign the confession clearing him. Bella, of course, does not know that her companion was the one who did this. On the way back to the train, he offers her his arm and puts his cloak around her, and she easily accepts his protection and support. As she looks out the window of the train at the beautiful night sky, he cannot take his eyes off her face.

Eugene Wrayburn continues to try to locate Lizzie. He visits Jenny Wren and offers to buy a doll outfit from her, but she is wise to him and refuses to listen or tell him anything. Her drunken father, however, is in the corner of the room, and soon staggers his way to Eugene's office and offers to find out where Lizzie is in exchange for money and liquor. Meanwhile, Mortimer tells Eugene that he is seriously in debt to a Jewish moneylender. Eugene seems to care nothing for any of this. He then reveals to Mortimer that he has been followed every night for weeks when he leaves the office. The culprits are Bradley Headstone and Charley, who hope to discover Lizzie's whereabouts, and Eugene has been playing games with them. He leads them in a different direction each night, speeding up, slowing down, doubling back, and often passing them without once acknowledging their presence. Mortimer decides to join him for one of these evening constitutionals, and the same pattern develops. When they finally pass Headstone, his face is contorted with rage. Mortimer wonders why his friend, who seems to care for nothing in the world, is so diligent in frustrating the schoolmaster; he also fears what the choleric scholar might do if he loses control of himself.

In that he indeed has much to fear, for Headstone himself realizes he is not far from a murderous rage. He knows that if he ever finds Wrayburn with Lizzie, he will kill him. As the schoolmaster meditates on his wrath during his night watch outside the law offices, he sees another man enter and come out again. That man is Riderhood, delivering a letter from Pleasant. The two strike up a conversation, and Riderhood quickly discerns that the schoolmaster is insanely jealous of Wrayburn. Since he has no love for Wrayburn himself, he is happy to help Headstone in his quest for revenge, especially when the schoolmaster pays him five shillings for any knowledge he may gain of the whereabouts of Lizzie Hexam.

The Lammles, meanwhile, are in desperate financial straits. They are about to lose their furniture and have no prospects of money on the horizon. They decide that they must in some way appeal to the richest and simplest people they know, and therefore turn their minds upon the Boffins. Sophronia suggests that the Boffins could be manipulated only if their secretary were out of the way, so they determine to get rid of Rokesmith by telling Mr. Boffin about his proposal of marriage to Bella, couching the revelation in such a way as to place Rokesmith in the worst possible light. Alfred asks if they might by the same stroke get rid of Bella as well, but his wife assures him that nothing could separate the old fools from their favored ward. The ultimate goal, then, is to get Alfred to take Rokesmith's place as manager of the Boffin property. No sooner do

they make the decision to pursue this end immediately than Fledgeby arrives. They beg him to use his influence to get the Jewish moneylender Riah to hold off a little longer before calling in his debt (not realizing that Fledgeby is Riah's employer), and Fledgeby agrees to see Riah immediately. He does so, but orders Riah to call in the debt that very day. As Fledgeby waits for Riah to return, Jenny arrives at the office. She sits down to wait for Riah, after which Twemlow comes in. He, like the Lammles, is in a troubled financial state, and Fledgeby agrees to plead his case with Riah. When the old Jew appears, Fledgeby speaks on Twemlow's behalf, but does so in language that makes clear to Riah that no mercy is to be shown. The result, of course, is that Fledgeby appears to be the merciful friend while Riah comes off looking like a hardhearted villain. Jenny, observing all this and not realizing that Fledgeby really owns the business, storms out, calling Riah cruel and expressing fear that he might someday betray Lizzie.

Wegg and Venus continue to pursue their plot to extort money from Boffin, but Venus begins to develop a conscience about the matter. One night while Wegg is busy reading he slips a piece of paper to Boffin asking him to meet him in private at his place of business. Boffin comes the next night, and Venus tells him everything - the new will and the extortion plot. Boffin is distraught at the thought of losing his newly-gained fortune and is at a loss for any means of standing against Wegg's plot. Venus swears he will have no more to do with the matter and will return the will to Wegg and withdraw. Boffin begs him to remain part of the plot until the dust mounds are carted off, but Venus refuses. Wegg soon arrives at the taxidermy shop and Boffin hides, listening to the ensuing conversation. Any doubts he may have had about Wegg's character are soon dispelled. After Wegg leaves, he still is unable to convince Venus to delay his action. On the way home, Boffin is stopped by a lady in a carriage. She is Sophronia Lamble, and she tells him she has a very important matter that she must communicate to him in private. Boffin, becoming more suspicious by the minute, suspects that she, too, is looking for a piece of his fortune.

Sophonria having told Boffin of Rokesmith's proposal to Bella, the old man wakes the next morning with fire in his eyes. He calls Rokesmith into his presence and unloads on him in no uncertain terms, accusing him of presumption and insolence in seeking to marry far above his station; after all, Bella cares for nothing but money, and she deserves a rich husband. Bella observes all of this with shame. Boffin then accuses Rokesmith of plotting to gain Bella's fortune, and orders him out of the house at once. Rokesmith denies any designs on Bella's fortune, but again professes his love for her, affirming that he wanted nothing to do with any fortune that would remove her farther from him. He maintains his dignity throughout, thanks Mrs. Boffin for her kindness, and leaves the house for the last time. Bella then bursts out with everything she had been holding inside for months. She accuses Boffin of being spoiled by his fortune and turning into a monster, defends Rokesmith as a perfect gentleman unworthy of the treatment he had received, and states that she, too, must leave the house of anyone who could be so cruel and heartless. Boffin warns her that, if she leaves, she will renounce all claim on his fortune, and she tells him that she would never take a farthing from him anyway under such circumstances. She says goodbye to Mrs. Boffin, goes upstairs, packs the few things she brought with her, leaving all the clothes the Boffins had bought for her, and prepares to return to her father's house.

She goes directly to her father's place of employment and finds him there eating a meager supper. Before she can tell him her news, Rokesmith rushes in and takes her in his arms, praising her for her brave and selfless act on his behalf. Before long, the two have expressed their mutual love and are engaged, much to the amazement of poor Rumty Wilfer. He completely approves,

however, and the three have a delightful meal together. As they walk toward the Wilfer residence, Rokesmith and Bella make their plans. Upon arriving home, they find the usual discord, with Mrs. Wilfer in a foul mood and Lavinia doing everything possible to annoy her. Lavinia tells Bella of her engagement to George Sampson, but Bella only informs the rest of the family that she has left the Boffin residence for good, telling them nothing of her engagement to Rokesmith. After the others go to bed, Bella tells her father that John has assured her that there will always be a little corner of their humble abode that Rumty is welcome to share with them whenever he pleases.

The Lammlers, having lost everything at auction, are now in disgrace with their erstwhile friends, none of whom will now be seen with them. The Veneerings hold a dinner during which the unfortunate couple are the main subject of discussion. Before the dinner, Mrs. Lammler pays a visit to Twemlow the lowly, and as they share their mutual woes, is astonished to discover that Fledgeby is not a petitioner of Mr. Riah, but is in reality his supervisor, and thus the cause of all their troubles. After the dinner is over, Eugene Wrayburn receives a note and goes outside to discover Jenny's father, who has obtained directions to the whereabouts of Lizzie Hexam. Eugene leaves immediately without another word to anyone.

The next day Eugene rows past Riderhood's lock and is recognized by the scoundrel. Soon Bradley Headstone comes by on a barge and asks Riderhood for advice on following Eugene and finding Lizzie. Riderhood tells him to get a few hours' sleep, then simply to head downriver and look for Wrayburn's boat docked at the side. Headstone takes the advice and returns three days later, having located Eugene and seen him with Lizzie. By this time, he is ready to do murder. For some strange reason Riderhood cannot quite fathom, Headstone is dressed in exactly the same clothes worn by the lock-minder.

Soon the Lammlers visit the Boffins in an attempt to get into their good graces and take advantage of the intelligence that Sophronia had given - the information that had cost Rokesmith his job. The Boffins are not about to be taken in, however; they readily give the Lammlers a hundred pounds for their information, but inform them that they should in no way expect to take the places vacated by Rokesmith and Bella in their household. Georgiana Podsnap then arrives, still as naive as ever, and offers money and jewelry to the Lammlers to tide them over in their misfortunes. Boffin takes the proffered gifts and promises that they will be well-used, but as soon as Georgiana leaves he informs the Lammlers that they will be returned to the Podsnaps with the appropriate explanations. Gravely disappointed at what they saw as their last hope of financial salvation, the conniving couple leave, go abroad, and are never seen again by the Boffins.

That night Boffin goes again to see Wegg and Venus, the latter having agreed to maintain the pretense a little longer. Wegg takes off the kid gloves and directly threatens Boffin with the will he found. He demands two-thirds of the value of the estate, insisting also that Boffin do no more searching on the mounds, and that the mansion be counted against Boffin's third. The old man has little choice but to agree to their extortion if he doesn't want to lose his entire fortune. Wegg treats Boffin very rudely and insists further that he be allowed to keep an eye on Boffin and have free run of the mansion. Boffin only asks that the information about the new will be kept from his wife, and Wegg agrees.

Soon after, John Rokesmith and Bella Wilfer secretly marry. Only her father is present, though she does send a letter to her mother and sister after the fact. The two are deliriously happy and go home to the small cottage John has reserved for them. When her mother receives the letter, she is of course angry because her daughter has married a pauper. When John and Bella

visit, Bella is as cheerful as can be and shows nothing but love for her mother and sister. On several occasions early in their relationship, John asks Bella if she would like to be rich. Bella thinks he is testing her because of her past mercenary tendencies and responds that she is quite content as they are, and could easily be content with less. She now fears the corrupting power of wealth. She also grows to love caring for her little house, consulting a manual for housewives and learning to cook and clean and sew. One day she gives John the happy announcement that she is expecting a baby.

Eugene, meanwhile, has located Lizzie. She begs with him to leave immediately, convinced as she is that nothing can ever come of their relationship because so much difference exists between their social standings. They clearly love one another, but Eugene simply has not gotten to the point of being sure he wants to marry her; he has been a careless fool for so long that he can't even convince himself that he might be serious about a woman. That night, Eugene is approached in the dark by a bargeman who is in reality Bradley Headstone. When Eugene turns his back Bradley attacks him with a stout stick, throws him into the river and leaves him for dead. Lizzie hears the skirmish and quickly puts her rowing experience to work, commandeering a boat and rescuing Eugene before he drowns. She brings him back to the doctor's and does all she can to nurse him, though the doctor doubts that he can survive. Headstone then goes back to Riderhood's hovel by the lock and, while eating a meal, arranges to get some blood on Riderhood's clothing. He leaves the next day, but Riderhood follows him, and observes him taking his clothes (identical to the lock-minder's) and throwing them into in a bundle into the river. Headstone returns to his classroom, but his mind is clearly not on his job. He has gotten word that Wrayburn is dead. Soon Charley comes to visit and denounces his former mentor for his inconsiderate behavior in indirectly involving him in the scandal of the attack on Eugene. He says he will no longer have anything to do with Headstone, casting him off as he has cast off Lizzie because both did things that reflected badly on the rising scholar. Riderhood, meanwhile, succeeds in fishing the cast-off bundle out of the river.

Shortly after these events, Fledgeby comes to visit Jenny Wren. He offers her free scraps of cloth from Riah's countinghouse in return for knowing the whereabouts of Lizzie Hexam. Jenny immediately becomes suspicious when Fledgeby is able to commit what she thought was Riah's business enterprise to her financial benefit. She agrees to visit Fledgeby the next day in his home, but is determined to discover the truth about the countinghouse. When she gets to Fledgeby's home, she is prevented from going upstairs by a determined lady - none other than Sophronia Lammle. Alfred soon comes downstairs and the two head off on their trip to the Continent. When Jenny gets to the top of the stairs, she hears a horrible groaning sound. Going in, she finds Fledgeby brutally beaten; Lammle clearly found out that Fledgeby had ordered Riah to call in their loan, and had gotten revenge on the double-dealing moneylender. Jenny, more and more suspecting the truth, helps to clean Fledgeby up, but prepares a vinegar poultice with a small additional touch - a large sprinkling of pepper to rub into the wounds of the unfortunate conniver. She then goes to find Riah, and quickly ascertains that he was guiltless in the earlier incidents. He explains that he cannot continue in Fledgeby's employ because it reflects badly, not only on himself, but also on all Jews. He has resigned and is prepared to seek employment with the paper mill run by his friends, and to which he sent Lizzie. Meanwhile, Jenny's father has gone out on another drunken binge, and this time drinks himself to death. She finds him just as he is being carted off to the doctor's, but he is too far gone for anyone to help him. Once she earns the money for a suit of burial clothes and a simple grave, she puts her "bad child" into the earth. She

also invites Riah, who at the moment has no place to live, to join her in her humble home. Shortly thereafter Mortimer Lightwood arrives with a letter from Lizzie, informing her that Eugene is not dead, but is dying, and asking that she come immediately.

Jenny finds Eugene in bad shape, fading in and out of consciousness. She stays to nurse him while working on her doll clothes at the foot of the bed. Mortimer stays with him at all times and Lizzie comes in whenever she is not working. Over time, Jenny finds she is able to intuit Eugene's wishes better than the others. She discerns that he wants to marry Lizzie before he dies, and Mortimer is sent with the message. Lizzie readily agrees, and arrangements are made. Mortimer goes to fetch Bella, who readily agrees to attend, though she is puzzled by her husband's refusal to do so. On the way to the wedding, Rev. Milvey encounters Bradley Headstone, and the perpetrator thus discovers that Eugene not only is not dead, but that his attempted murder has brought about the very event he was trying to prevent. Eugene and Lizzie then marry in one of the former's few lucid moments.

After Bella returns home, John continues to ask her if she would not like to be rich. She says she has all she needs, but he coaxes her to describe the house she would like to have if they could afford it. Her dreams mostly center about the nursery, for she has now given birth to a little girl, young Bella. John has spoken repeatedly about some great trial awaiting her, and assured her that if she trusts him utterly that she will be safe and he will be victorious. The trial is initiated when the two are out for a walk and accidentally encounter Mortimer Lightwood, whom John has been avoiding. The reason becomes obvious - Mortimer immediately recognizes John as the man he knows as Julius Handford, who is a person of interest in the death of John Harmon. John is taken away by the police, but not before assuring Bella that no harm will come to him and that she must maintain faith. He requires little time to explain to the authorities that he cannot be implicated in the death of John Harmon since he *is* John Harmon, which is quickly proved by calling two men who were with him on the ship on which he arrived in London. Bella, of course, is astonished beyond measure, and a rather lengthy explanation is required.

The explanation is given when the Harmons travel to the Boffin residence. Bella is amazed to see the joy with which they are received, and is even more astonished to find that the house has been redecorated according to her dream specifications, including the preparation of a nursery. Mrs. Boffin then explains everything. On the night of John's proposal to Bella and her angry rejection, the dejected secretary had gone to his room, where Mrs. Boffin had come in and recognized something in his posture - she knew he was the same boy she had cared for as a child. He had poured out his heart to her, and she and her husband had agreed to help him achieve his ends. They insisted that they had no right to the inheritance and wanted him to have it, but understood that Bella could not be approached with fortune in hand. They plotted the whole mistreatment and firing of Rokesmith in order to see if Bella was a good enough woman to support him even if doing so meant loss of fortune. Meanwhile, Boffin played the miser in order to show her the ugly consequences of the love of money. Now that Bella's selfless love for John was apparent and exposure was inevitable, the decision was made to prepare the home and reveal the truth.

The matter of the will discovered by Wegg remains, however. The next day, Wegg and Venus go to Boffin prepared to make their demands. Boffin seems unmoved by Wegg's insolence, which only makes the wooden-legged man more demanding and harsh. Harmon and Sloppy then appear, and inform Wegg that the will he found may be more recent than the one known to the public, but that a more recent will was discovered by Boffin before he left his old home. The last

will leaves the entire estate to the Boffins, but they have already insisted that they should receive only the one mound, and that the rest should go to John Harmon. Wegg is thus powerless, the more so when he discovers that Venus has been working with Boffin all along and helping him in his plot to draw Wegg in. He is then unceremoniously thrown out of the house by Sloppy, who had been hired by Boffin to cart away the dust mounds at all sorts of odd hours and keep Wegg occupied trying to find more treasure. Venus is overjoyed because Boffin and John Harmon have interceded for him and brought his lady love, Pleasant Riderhood, back into his life.

Headstone, meanwhile, is quietly going mad. He worries constantly about being apprehended for his assault on Wrayburn, but finally realizes that he will not be pursued because Eugene wishes to protect his new wife. His agony is only the greater through his realization that he has been the means of bringing Eugene and Lizzie together. His only real worry now is Riderhood, who knows enough about him to incriminate him; he is convinced, however, that the lock-minder will never find him in London. Riderhood does find him, however, and appears in his classroom with the bundle of clothes he fished from the bottom of the river. He bears a grudge because he knows Headstone was prepared to frame him for the attempted murder should he ever be apprehended. He orders the schoolmaster to meet him at the lock, and promptly threatens to turn him in to the authorities if he doesn't pay him every last penny he can beg, borrow, or steal. He intends to follow Headstone everywhere he goes until the bargain is fulfilled. Headstone, subject to increasingly frequent seizures, determines to end it all and take Riderhood with him. He goes out to the end of the lock with Riderhood following. He then seizes him in a death grip and plunges into the water. The next morning both bodies are found, still locked together in death.

The Harmon's then turn to the task of resolving all the little confusions and righting all the injuries caused by John's deception. They make sure that Jenny and Riah are well taken care of, hire Lightwood as their lawyer, see that Twemlow is properly reimbursed for his losses, and hire Rumty Wilfer as John's secretary. Sloppy is set up in a cabinetmaking shop, and soon meets and falls in love with Jenny, and one gets the impression that the long-awaited suitor of whom Jenny spoke so often has finally materialized. Fledgeby, on the other hand, is attacked and exposed for his greed and oppression of the unfortunate. When Mrs. Wilfer first visits the happy couple, she, of course, handles the whole situation very badly, but John and Bella are kind to her anyway. Eugene gradually recovers, and vows to be as good a man as Lizzie deserves. Though British society frowns on both marriages (only Twemlow stands up for them at the Veneerings' next party), the happy couples realize that their negative reaction reflects only on themselves and in no way detracts from the joys of those who have found true love.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- John Harmon, Sr. - An eccentric man who made a fortune in dust, and has left that fortune to his only son if he marries Bella Wilfer. Otherwise, all goes to the Boffins.
- John Harmon, Jr. (a.k.a. Julius Handford, John Rokesmith) - The protagonist, he fakes his own drowning because he wants Bella to love him for himself, not his money. He observes the consequences of his supposed death as Julius Handford, then becomes Boffin's secretary as John Rokesmith. In this context he succeeds in wooing Bella despite her initial disdain for him.

- Nicodemus “Noddy” Boffin - “The Golden Dustman”; former manager of the Harmon estate, he inherits the property when all believe young Harmon to be dead. He is a kindhearted and generous man who looks foolish trying to mix with society, but assists John in his scheme by treating him cruelly and unfairly in order to elicit Bella’s sympathy. The character is based on Henry Dodd, known as “The Golden Dustman,” a self-made man who earned a fortune collecting and selling refuse.
- Henrietta Boffin - His wife, also good and kindly, she longs for the life of High Society but has no idea of how to fit into the station for which her newfound wealth qualifies her.
- Bella Wilfer - The object of old Harmon’s strange will, she detests being poor and wants nothing but money. She changes under the tender influence of the supposed John Rokesmith, and becomes his devoted and loving wife.
- Reginald “Rumty” Wilfer - Bella’s father, a poor clerk in Veneering’s company with a large family. He loves his daughter and is beloved by her in return. His wife and other daughter, Lavinia, are snobs despite their poverty and treat both Bella and Rumty badly.
- Jesse “Gaffer” Hexam - A Thames boatman who scavenges the river for corpses and other flotsam at night.
- Lizzie Hexam - His daughter, a sweet and kindly girl who hates what her father does for a living and tries to make sure her brother will never fall into the same occupation. She is the object of romantic attentions from Bradley Headstone, whom she abhors, and Eugene Wrayburn, whom she loves and eventually marries.
- Charley Hexam - Lizzie’s brother, he is selfish and graceless. Lizzie sacrifices herself to send him away for an education, but then he puts on airs and tries to control her life, finally rejecting her in the end.
- Roger “Rogue” Riderhood - A deputy lock-keeper who, out of jealousy toward Gaffer, tries to spread rumors to get him in trouble about him helping the bodies he finds to their demise. He later helps Headstone in his attempt to kill Wrayburn, and is finally killed by Headstone when he tries to extort money from him.
- Pleasant Riderhood - Roger’s daughter, she finally marries Venus, the anatomist.
- Hamilton and Anastatia Veneering - A nouveau-riche couple who seek to present themselves as in the latest of fashion. Veneering purchases for five thousand pounds the office of M.P. for the borough of Pocket Breaches, but soon loses his office when another buys it for more money.
- Mr. and Mrs. Podsnap - Snobbish members of the upper class, they become for Dickens the epitome of all that is wrong with the British aristocracy.

- Georgiana Podsnap - Their shy daughter, used by the Lammles in a plot to enhance their finances.
- Alfred and Sophronia Lamble - Two young social climbers whose marriage is one of convenience. They ingratiate themselves with Georgiana Podsnap in order to gain some financial advantage. Sophronia repents and indirectly warns Georgiana off; later they try the same trick on Bella and the Boffins, but fail.
- Fascination Fledgeby - A reserved young man of business whom the Lammles try to set up with Georgiana Podsnap. He is a moneylender who callously takes advantage of the unfortunate for his profit, but forces Riah to take the blame for his dealings.
- Riah - Fledgeby's elderly Jewish servant and man of business, he is hired by Eugene to tutor Lizzie and Jenny Wren. He also helps Lizzie to run away after Headstone makes advances to her.
- Mortimer Lightwood - A young lawyer who handles the affairs of the Harmon family.
- Eugene Wrayburn - An aimless lawyer without ambition or clients and a friend of Lightwood, he quickly falls in love with Lizzie Hexam. He is nearly killed by Headstone, but marries Lizzie on what he thinks is his deathbed and eventually recovers.
- Silas Wegg - A street peddler and hustler with a wooden leg who ingratiates himself with the Boffins in order to get money from them. He tries to blackmail them using a will he finds, but fails when Boffin reveals another more recent document.
- Venus - An anatomist and taxidermist, he pretends to work with Wegg in his plot against the Boffins, but in reality works with them to stymie the scheming Wegg.
- Betty Higden - An old woman of nearly eighty, she is willing to allow her great-grandson Johnny to be adopted by the Boffins. She is proud and refuses charity of any kind, but finally dies of exposure in cold weather.
- Sloppy - An orphan taken in by Betty, he does small chores for her and helps her watch the children entrusted to her care. He is later taken in by the Boffins, helps them in their plot against Wegg, and finally sets up his own cabinetmaking shop and falls in love with Jenny Wren.
- Bradley Headstone - Charley's tutor, a dull and unimaginative man who falls in love with and proposed to Lizzie. She rejects him and he tries to get revenge by killing Eugene Wrayburn. He almost succeeds, but finally plunges to his death in a clinch with the vicious scoundrel Riderhood.
- Emma Peecher - Headstone's neighbor and fellow-teacher. She is in love with Headstone, but gets no more response than her pupil Mary Anne, who is in love with Charley.

- Jenny Wren - A seriously-disabled girl whose real name is Fanny Cleaver. Lizzie boards in her father's house for a time, and the two become close friends. Jenny makes doll clothes for a living while supporting her drunken father. She falls in love with Sloppy at the end of the book.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Evil often stops short at itself and dies with the doer of it; but Good, never.” (Book I, ch.9, p.111)

“Johnny, my pretty, your old Granny Betty is nigher fourscore year than threescore and ten. She never begged nor had a penny of the Union money in all her life. She paid scot and she paid lot when she had money to pay; she worked when she could, and she starved when she must. You pray that your Granny may have strength enough left her at the last ... to get up from her bed and run and hide herself, and swoon to death in a hole sooner than fall into the hands of those Cruel Jacks we read of, that doge and drive, and worry and weary, and scorn and shame, the decent poor!” (Betty Higden, Book I, ch.16, p.215)

“So insolent, so trivial, so capricious, so mercenary, so careless, so hard to touch, so hard to turn! ... And yet so pretty, so pretty! ... And if she knew!” (Harmon, Book I, ch.16, p.224)

“This was quite according to rule, for the incompetent servant, by whomsoever employed, is always against his employer.” (Book II, ch.7, p.318)

“Two incidents of the little interview were felt by Miss Bella herself, when alone again, to be very curious. The first was, that he unquestionably left her with a penitent air upon her, and a penitent feeling in her heart. The second was, that she had not had an intention of a thought of going home, until she had announced it to him as a settled design.” (Book II, ch.8, p.334)

“I have made up my mind that I must have money, Pa. I feel that I can't beg it, borrow it, or steal it; and so I have resolved that I must marry it.” (Bella, Book II, ch.8, p.345)

“Her heart - is given him, with all its love and truth. She would joyfully die with him, or, better than that, die for him. She knows he has failings, but she thinks they have grown up through his being like one cast away, for the want of something to trust in, and care for, and think well of. And she says, that lady rich and beautiful that I can never come near, ‘Only put me in that empty place, only try how little I mind myself, only prove what a world of things I will do and bear for you, and I hope that you might even come to be much better than you are, through me who am so much worse, and hardly worth the thinking beside you.’” (Lizzie, Book II, ch.11, p.375-376)

“It is a sensation not experienced by many mortals to be looking into a churchyard on a wild windy night, and to feel that I no more hold a place among the living than these dead do, and even to know that I lie buried somewhere else, as they lie buried here. Nothing uses me to it. A

spirit that was once a man could hardly feel stranger or lonelier, going unrecognized among mankind than I feel.” (Harmon, Book II, ch.13, p.393-394)

“I’ll not unsay them. I’ll say them again. You are an inveterately bad girl, and a false sister, and I have done with you. For ever, I have done with you!” (Charley, Book II, ch.15, p.434)

“And yet, Pa, think how terrible the fascination of money is! I see this, and hate this, and dread this, and don’t know but that money might make a much worse change in me. And yet I have money always in my thoughts and my desires; and the whole life I place before myself is money, money, money, and what money can make of life!” (Bella, Book III, ch.4, p.494)

“Power (unless it be the power of intellect or virtue) has ever the greatest attraction for the lowest natures; and the mere defiance of the unconscious housefront, with his power to strip the roof off the inhabiting family like the roof of a house of cards, was a treat which had a charm for Silas Wegg.” (Book III, ch.7, p.537)

“No one is useless in this world who lightens the burden of it for anyone else.” (Harmon, Book III, ch.9, p.557)

“I have never dreamed of the possibility of his being anything to me on this earth but the kind of picture that I know I could not make you understand, if the understanding was not in your own breast already. I have no more dreamed of the possibility of *my* being his wife, than he ever has - and words could not be stronger than that. And yet I love him. I love him so much and so dearly, that when I sometimes think my life may be but a weary one, I am proud of it and glad of it. I am proud and glad to suffer something for him, even though it is of no service to him, and he will never know of it or care for it.” (Lizzie, Book III, ch.9, p.565)

“If great criminals told the truth - which, being great criminals, they do not - they would very rarely tell of their struggles against the crime. Their struggles are towards it. They buffet with opposing waves, to gain the bloody shore, not to recede from it.” (Book III, ch.11, p.584)

“My dear, dear girl; my gallant, generous, disinterested, courageous, noble girl! (Harmon, Book III, ch.16, p.646)

“He was even better convinced of the truth of what she said than she was, as he felt her loving arms about him. If the Golden Dustman’s riches had been his to stake, he would have staked them to the last farthing on the fidelity through good and evil of her affectionate and trusting heart.” (Book IV, ch.11, p.795)

“Behold Mr. And Mrs. Boffin beaming! Behold Mrs. Boffin clapping her hands in an ecstasy, running to Bella, with tears of joy pouring down her comely face, and folding her to her breast, with the words, ‘My deary, deary, deary girl, that Noddy and me saw married and couldn’t wish joy to, or so much as speak to! My deary, deary, deary wife of John, and mother of his little child! My loving, loving, bright, bright, Pretty Pretty. Welcome to your house and home, my deary!’” (Mrs. Boffin, Book IV, ch.12, p.819)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Consider the role of deception in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. Choose three characters who engage in deception of others, supposedly for their own good, and evaluate their actions. Are the things they did ethical according to Scripture? Use details from the novel and specific passages to support your arguments.
2. In Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*, Bella Wilfer undergoes a major character transformation. Do you find that transformation convincing? Has Dickens given you enough information to allow you to believe that her attitude has changed to such a large degree? Why or why not?
3. In Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*, the descent of Noddy Boffin into greed and cruelty is an essential plot device, as is the revelation that it was all a front intended to help Bella and deceive Simon Wegg. Is Boffin's transformation credible? Why or why not? Use details from the novel to support your conclusion.
4. The transformation of Noddy Boffin from good-hearted servant to tight-fisted miser is an important plot device in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. G.K. Chesterton suggested that Dickens originally intended his decline to be real, and to be followed by a gradual and genuine repentance, but that he ran out of time and decided to have the whole thing be an act instead. Assess this analysis. Is Boffin's fall into miserliness credible? Can you believe that he has been a consummate and convincing actor throughout half the book more than you can believe that he became a miser? Would the novel have been more convincing had Dickens followed what Chesterton thought was his original intention?
5. Some of the incidents in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* present a critique of the English Poor Laws. How does Dickens communicate his critique? Why does he object to the law? How would he have the law be changed? Support your arguments with details from the novel.
6. Some critics have suggested that the Thames plays such a major role in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* that one might consider it a major character in the story. Do you agree? Why or why not? What does the river symbolize in the novel?
7. Discuss the significance of the dust mounds in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. What are they intended to symbolize? How do they contribute to the overall themes of the novel? What role do they play in the author's social criticism?
8. Scripture has much to say about the corrupting influences of wealth. How does Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* provide illustrative support for the Bible's teaching on the subject? Be sure to cite specific incidents and quotations from the novel and connect them with specific passages of Scripture.

9. The destructive power of wealth is a major theme in both *A Christmas Carol* and *Our Mutual Friend* by Charles Dickens. Assess the treatment of this theme in both stories in the light of Scripture. Is Dickens' view of wealth consistent with the teachings of the Bible? Be sure to consider reasons as well as outcomes, issues of the heart as well as matters of behavior.
10. Compare and contrast the two heroines in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. In what ways are Bella Wilfer and Lizzie Hexam similar and in what ways are they different? Pay particular attention to the ways in which the two girls interact with one another in answering the question.
11. The transformation of a ne'er-do-well by love is central to two Charles Dickens novels - *Our Mutual Friend* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Compare and contrast the characters of Eugene Wrayburn and Sydney Carton. Include what they are at the beginning of the story, the nature of their transformations, and what they eventually become. Which transformation is more believable? Why?
12. Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* contains many unsavory characters. Whom would you consider the real villain of the story? Choose one character and show why he or she should be considered the antagonist, being sure to argue why other candidates do not measure up.
13. Compare and contrast the two extortion attempts in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. How are the plans to gain money set up by Wegg and Riderhood similar, and how are they different? What differences in the targets and foundations of the two plots make them dissimilar? Why do you think Dickens included two plot devices of this kind in his story? Does the parallelism contribute to the themes he is seeking to communicate?
14. Choose one of the two marriages or in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* and discuss the future happiness of the couple involved. Who will be the happier - John and Bella Harmon or Eugene and Lizzie Wrayburn? Why do you think so? What will the future of the chosen couple look like? What problems might they encounter as their marriage progresses?
15. Analyze the relationship between Sloppy and Jenny Wren that appears to be budding as Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* ends. Assuming the two marry, what will their marriage be like? Be sure to discuss specific character traits of the two as you consider their future together.
16. In Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*, the author periodically interrupts the narrative to include conversations among the socialites who make up the circle gathered around the Veneerings. These people and their conversations are at best tangential to the plot of the story with the exception of Lightwood and Wrayburn, who are themselves tangential to the group of socialites. Why does Dickens choose to do this? Analyze the role of the Veneering circle in communicating the themes of the novel.

17. Analyze the role played by the character of Jenny Wren in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. Many critics consider her to be a pivotal figure in the narrative. Why might they arrive at this conclusion? Do you agree or disagree? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
18. In Oscar Wilde's comic masterpiece *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Miss Prism says in reference to her lost novel, "The good ended happily and the bad unhappily. That is the meaning of fiction." Wilde could very easily have been referring to Charles Dickens in this witticism. Consider Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* in the light of this comment. Does Dickens' love of happy endings add to or detract from the credibility, effectiveness, and enjoyable quality of the novel? Use details from Dickens' last novel to address the validity of Wilde's implied criticism.
19. Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* contains two examples of role reversals between parents and children. Both Bella Wilfer and Jenny Wren speak to and treat their fathers as if they were their children. What is Dickens trying to say through these relationships? In answering the question, note that the two relationships are in some ways quite different; be sure to incorporate comparisons and contrasts into your analysis.
20. The supposed death of the protagonist near the beginning of the story is a plot device used in both Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* and Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Compare and contrast the ways in which this device is used in the two novels. Do John Harmon and Edmond Dantes have the same reasons for wishing to keep their identities secret? Do the revelations of those identities in the two stories have the same impact on the plots? Do the two authors let their readers in on the secret to the same extent? Why do you think the two writers made these particular choices in composing their stories?
21. When Charles Dickens included the Jewish villain Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, he was criticized by many for anti-Semitism. In response to this criticism, he created the character of Riah in *Our Mutual Friend*. In your opinion, does the way in which he portrays Riah clear Dickens of the charge of anti-Semitism? Why or why not? Use details from the novel in answering the question.
22. The theme of death and resurrection plays a prominent role in two of Charles Dickens' novels, *Our Mutual Friend* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Compare and contrast the way Dickens uses and develops the theme in the two novels. Be sure to include the nature of the characters who experience death and resurrection along with the underlying messages in the novels that Dickens draws out through the death and resurrection theme. Be sure to cite specifics from both novels in developing your answer.

23. Book II, chapter 13 of Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* consists entirely of a long soliloquy on the part of the protagonist. He goes over his past history and argues with himself the merits of revealing the identity that to this point he has concealed from all around him. Discuss the functions of this soliloquy. Clearly it is intended to be more than a plot device that familiarizes the reader with John Harmon's past and reveals what most by this time surely have guessed anyway - that Julius Handford, John Rokesmith, and John Harmon are in reality one and the same person. What other purposes does this chapter serve? Why is it essential, and in many ways the narrative center of the novel?
24. Soliloquies of self-abnegation, in which the speaker yields his own identity for the benefit of others, play central roles in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Compare and contrast the decisions made by John Harmon and Sydney Carton to deny themselves in order that others may prosper. The circumstances and outcomes of the two decisions are clearly different, but do the actions taken by the two men bear any significant similarities, particularly with regard to revealing their true characters? Support your answer with specifics from both novels.
25. The transformation of a ne'er-do-well by love is central to two Charles Dickens novels - *Our Mutual Friend* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Compare and contrast the characters of Eugene Wrayburn and Sydney Carton. Include what they are at the beginning of the story, the nature of their transformations, and what they eventually become. Which transformation is more believable? Why?
26. Discuss the role of friendship in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. The title phrase appears in several contexts in the novel, and those contexts give the reader hints that point toward both positive and negative examples of friendship. Use the contrasts that grow from these diverse sections to explain and illustrate Dickens' view of friendship, both false and true.
27. Henry James, in his review of Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*, argued that the novel was one of Dickens' weakest efforts because it was peopled only with eccentrics, and contained no normal people to make the story credible. As he said, "a community of eccentrics is impossible." Do you agree with his assessment of the novel? If so, how would you support his criticism? If not, what examples would you cite to refute it?
28. Discuss the role played by reading and literacy in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. Be sure to note not only their contribution to the plot, but also the way Dickens uses them to develop the central themes of the novel.
29. Compare and contrast the views of love found in Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* and Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. In your essay consider the authors' views on the motivations of men and women, the characteristics essential for love to blossom, and the requirements for a good marriage.

30. Compare and contrast the way in which the need to suffer the loss of material things in order to grow spiritually is presented in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. To what extent are the respective treatments faithful to Scripture? Support your conclusions with specifics from the two works.
31. Compare and contrast the protagonist in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and Lizzie Hexam in *Our Mutual Friend*. Pay attention to their strength of character, their humility, and their willingness to sacrifice their own desires for the good of others. Which of the two more effectively displays Christian values? Why do you think so?
32. Victorian novels often satirized the English educational system. One such novel is George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, where the schoolmaster Rev. Stelling is held up to ridicule. Compare and contrast Eliot's criticism with the treatment by Charles Dickens of Bradley Headstone in *Our Mutual Friend*.