

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

London is full of fog.

The fog creeps slowly through the streets. It hangs above the river and drifts between the tall buildings. It enters narrow alleys and spreads across the great roads. The lamps shine dimly through it, and the sound of horses and carriages seems far away.

In the middle of this fog stands the *Court of Chancery*.

The court building is large and solemn. Inside it, lawyers move slowly through long halls. Clerks carry piles of papers. People wait quietly on wooden benches, holding documents that have already grown old with years of waiting.

Many cases come to this court.

Some last for a few months.

Others last for years.

And some—like the famous case of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce*—last so long that no one clearly remembers how they began.

The Jarndyce and Jarndyce case concerns a large fortune left in a complicated will. Different relatives claim the money. Lawyers argue about the meaning of the documents. Judges study endless papers.

Year after year the arguments continue.

Meanwhile the money slowly disappears into legal costs.

Many families have waited for the decision of this case. Some of them have grown poor while waiting. Some have died before the judgment came.

Yet still the case continues.

My own life became connected with this terrible lawsuit when I was a young girl.

My name is *Esther Summerson*.

I did not grow up in a happy home. The woman who raised me—my aunt—

treated me with coldness. She often spoke as if my very existence were a mistake.

“Your mother should never have lived,” she once told me.

I never knew my parents. Whenever I asked about them, my aunt refused to answer.

These words filled my childhood with sadness. Yet I tried to be grateful for the small kindnesses that appeared in my life.

One day a lawyer named *Mr. Kenge* came to visit our house.

He brought news that would change my future completely.

“Miss Summerson,” he said politely, “a gentleman named Mr. Jarndyce has taken an interest in your welfare. He wishes to arrange your education.”

I was astonished.

I had never heard of Mr. Jarndyce.

But the opportunity seemed wonderful. Soon afterward I left my aunt’s house and went to school.

The years that followed were much happier than my childhood had been. I studied diligently and tried to develop a calm and cheerful character.

Eventually another letter arrived from Mr. Kenge.

It said that my education was complete.

I was now invited to live at *Bleak House*, the home of my guardian, Mr. Jarndyce.

I traveled there with a mixture of excitement and nervousness.

Bleak House stood in a quiet countryside far from the fog of London. The building was not large or grand, but it felt warm and welcoming.

When I arrived, Mr. Jarndyce himself greeted me kindly.

He was a thoughtful man with a gentle voice and lively eyes.

“Welcome, my dear Esther,” he said warmly. “You are very welcome here.”

His kindness immediately made me feel at ease.

Soon he introduced me to two other young people who were also connected to the Jarndyce lawsuit.

They were *Ada Clare* and *Richard Carstone*.

Ada was beautiful and lively. Her bright smile made everyone feel happy.

Richard was energetic and friendly, full of hopeful plans for the future.

Both of them, like me, were wards of the court. Their inheritance depended on the final decision of Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

Mr. Jarndyce explained the situation gently.

“The case has continued for many years,” he said. “You must not allow it to control your lives.”

Richard laughed lightly.

“Surely it must end someday,” he said.

Mr. Jarndyce smiled, though there was sadness in his eyes.

“Many people have said that before.”

Life at Bleak House soon became peaceful and happy.

Ada and I quickly became close friends. We spent long afternoons walking in the garden or reading together in the quiet rooms of the house.

Richard often joined us, speaking enthusiastically about the future.

“Once the lawsuit is settled,” he said, “Ada and I will have enough money to live comfortably.”

Ada blushed when he said this, but she did not deny it.

Mr. Jarndyce listened with a gentle smile.

“Perhaps,” he said. “But remember that life must be built on more than waiting for a court decision.”

At that time we did not fully understand his warning.

The lawsuit seemed distant and unreal to us.

We were young, and the world still appeared full of promise.

Yet beyond the quiet peace of Bleak House, the great machine of the Court of Chancery continued to turn slowly.

Lawyers argued.

Documents multiplied.

And somewhere in London, among the strange people who spent their lives waiting for judgment, there lived a small old woman whose story would soon help me understand the terrible power of that court.

Part 2

Some weeks after my arrival at Bleak House, Mr. Jarndyce decided that Ada, Richard, and I should visit London.

“You must see something of the world,” he said kindly. “But we will not stay long in that foggy place.”

Richard laughed.

“I should like to see the court where our great case lives,” he said.

Mr. Jarndyce looked at him thoughtfully.

“You may see it,” he replied. “But I hope you will never give your heart to it.”

Soon afterward we traveled to London.

The city felt very different from the quiet countryside around Bleak House. The streets were crowded with carriages, horses, and people hurrying in every direction. Shops and houses stood close together, and the air carried the smell of smoke from many chimneys.

As we approached the district where the *Court of Chancery* stood, the atmosphere seemed heavier.

The buildings grew older and darker. Lawyers and clerks filled the narrow streets, carrying bundles of papers tied with string.

Richard watched everything with curiosity.

“So this is where our case lives,” he said.

Mr. Jarndyce shook his head gently.

“Lives?” he said. “Many people believe that this place destroys life rather than supporting it.”

We entered the court building.

The room inside was large and solemn. At the far end stood the seat of the Lord Chancellor, the judge who decided these cases. Lawyers spoke in slow and careful voices while clerks wrote notes on endless pages.

On the benches sat people who had been waiting for the court’s judgment.

Some looked tired and discouraged. Others stared forward with strange expressions of hope.

Among them I noticed a small elderly woman dressed in worn black clothing.

Her eyes were bright, and she watched the court with intense attention.

When the proceedings paused for a moment, she suddenly approached us.

“Are you connected with the case?” she asked eagerly.

Her voice trembled with excitement.

Mr. Jarndyce answered kindly.

“Yes. These young people are wards in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit.”

The woman clasped her hands.

“Ah!” she cried. “Then you must come to see me. You must hear my story.”

Mr. Jarndyce recognized her at once.

“Miss Flite,” he said gently.

The woman bowed.

“Yes, yes—Miss Flite. I attend the court every day. I have done so for many years.”

Her excitement seemed almost frightening.

Mr. Jarndyce spoke softly to us.

“Miss Flite is also waiting for a decision in a Chancery case.”

Richard looked interested.

“Has she been waiting long?” he asked.

Mr. Jarndyce sighed.

“Many years.”

Miss Flite leaned closer to us.

“You must visit my rooms,” she said eagerly. “I live nearby. I keep certain friends who help me remember the day when judgment will finally come.”

Ada looked at her with sympathy.

“Friends?” she asked.

Miss Flite nodded mysteriously.

“Yes, my dear. My birds.”

Her words puzzled us, but Mr. Jarndyce agreed that we might walk with her for a short distance.

Miss Flite led us through several narrow streets to a small building where she

rented a room.

When we entered, I noticed at once that the room was filled with *birdcages*.

Small birds moved inside them, fluttering their wings softly.

Miss Flite looked at the cages with great affection.

“These are my companions,” she said proudly.

Ada approached one cage with curiosity.

“What are their names?” she asked.

Miss Flite smiled strangely.

“They all have very important names,” she replied.

She began pointing to the cages one by one.

“This bird is *Hope*,” she said.

The bird fluttered gently inside its cage.

“And that one is *Joy*.”

Another bird chirped softly.

“Here we have *Youth*,” she continued.

She moved to the next cage.

“This one is *Peace*.”

Then another.

“And here is *Rest*.”

She continued until we had heard many names.

“That bird is *Life*.”

Another cage held a quiet bird she called *Dust*.

In another cage sat a darker bird named *Ashes*.

Finally she pointed to two cages placed close together.

“These are *Despair* and *Madness*,” she said softly.

Her voice grew quiet as she spoke those last names.

Ada looked troubled.

“Why do they have such sad names?” she asked gently.

Miss Flite looked back toward the direction of the Court of Chancery.

“Because those are the things the court gives to people who wait too long,” she replied.

Richard shifted uneasily.

But Miss Flite soon smiled again.

“Do not worry,” she said cheerfully. “When the judgment finally comes, I will open all the cages.”

She lifted one of the cages slightly.

“Then my birds will fly away into the sky.”

I felt a strange sadness as I looked at the small birds moving restlessly inside their cages.

At that moment I did not fully understand what Miss Flite’s strange collection truly represented.

But in time I would learn that those birds carried a powerful meaning.

They were the hopes and dreams of people who had spent their lives waiting for the decision of the Court of Chancery.

Part 3

We remained for a short time in Miss Flite’s small room.

The cages hung along the walls, and the soft fluttering of wings filled the quiet air. The little birds moved restlessly from perch to perch, as if they wished to escape.

Ada watched them with sympathy.

“They are very beautiful,” she said gently.

Miss Flite nodded eagerly.

“Yes, my dear. They are very precious to me. Each one reminds me of something that the court has taken from people.”

Richard looked thoughtful.

“But you believe the judgment will come someday?” he asked.

Miss Flite clasped her hands.

“Yes,” she said with great seriousness. “It must come someday. That is why I wait.”

Her bright eyes turned toward the direction of the Court of Chancery again.

For a moment her expression changed. The cheerful excitement left her face, and a deeper emotion appeared.

“Waiting is a terrible thing,” she said slowly.

None of us spoke.

She continued in a low voice, as if sharing a secret.

“Waiting for something that never comes can wear a person away.”

Then she began to speak more intensely, her voice trembling with feeling.

“Waiting for something that never comes can grind a person down to the bone. Truly—it can wear a person down to the bone!”

Her words surprised us.

Ada looked at her with concern.

But Miss Flite continued, her voice filled with strange passion.

“And yet,” she said quietly, “there is something in that place that draws people back again and again.”

She lifted one thin hand and pointed toward the court.

“There is something terrible there—something that pulls people toward it.”

Her voice grew softer but more intense.

“It pulls them in without mercy.”

Richard listened closely now.

Miss Flite leaned forward.

“Once you begin waiting there, you cannot stop. You must return. You must wait again.”

She shook her head slowly.

“I went there year after year before I understood what it was.”

Ada asked gently, “What did you discover?”

Miss Flite’s eyes became bright again.

“It is the Lord Chancellor’s table,” she whispered.

We looked at her in confusion.

“What do you mean?” I asked quietly.

She spoke with strange certainty.

“On that table stand the Chancellor’s mace and the great seal of the court.”

Her voice trembled.

“They pull people toward them. They draw them closer and closer.”

She pressed her hands against her chest.

“They draw away a person’s calm mind. They take away reason.”

Her words became more emotional.

“They take away a healthy face. They take away good character.”

She lowered her voice almost to a whisper.

“At night I sometimes felt as if they even stole my peaceful sleep.”

She suddenly raised her head.

“Those cold, shining devils!” she cried.

The room fell silent.

The birds fluttered nervously in their cages.

After a moment Miss Flite’s excitement slowly faded.

She looked at us again with her earlier cheerful smile.

“But one day the judgment will come,” she said calmly.

She gently touched the cages again.

“When that day arrives, I will open every door.”

Her voice grew hopeful.

“Hope will fly away. Joy will fly away. Youth and Peace and Rest will all fly away together.”

Ada smiled kindly at her.

“That will be a beautiful moment,” she said.

Miss Flite nodded happily.

“Yes, my dear. A beautiful moment.”

Mr. Jarndyce soon rose to leave.

“We must not keep Miss Flite too long,” he said kindly.

As we walked back toward the main streets of London, I thought about the strange old woman and her birds.

At that time I did not fully understand her warning.

But her words about the Court of Chancery remained in my mind.

The court seemed almost like a powerful machine that slowly pulled people

toward it—taking their hopes, their peace, and sometimes even their sanity.

And far away from that small room full of birds, another story was beginning to unfold.

In a narrow street of London there lived a lonely law-writer who worked late into the night copying legal documents.

His name was *Nemo*.

Soon his life—and his death—would connect our peaceful world at Bleak House with the hidden secrets of another powerful family.

Part 4

The quiet world of Bleak House soon became connected with darker parts of London.

In one of the narrow and dirty streets of the city stood a rag-and-bottle shop filled with strange objects.

Old papers were piled everywhere. Broken furniture leaned against the walls. Bottles, rusted metal, and scraps of cloth covered the floor.

The owner of the shop was a strange old man named *Krook*.

Krook had wild gray hair and yellow eyes. His clothes were stained and worn. Yet he believed himself to be very important.

“I understand the law,” he often said proudly.

Though he could hardly read properly, he collected large piles of legal papers and spoke as if he were a great expert.

Above Krook’s shop lived a quiet man who worked as a law-writer.

The man spent long nights copying legal documents by candlelight. Few people knew anything about him.

He called himself *Nemo*.

Nemo lived alone in a small and miserable room. The furniture was poor. The air smelled of ink and old paper.

Those who occasionally saw him described him as pale and thin, with tired eyes and rough clothing.

It seemed clear that he had not always lived in such poverty.

One day this lonely man was found dead in his room.

The news soon reached the lawyers connected with the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case.

Among those lawyers was *Mr. Tulkinghorn*.

Tulkinghorn was the legal adviser to the powerful Dedlock family. He was a tall, silent man who spoke very little but observed everything carefully.

When he heard that the dead law-writer had once copied certain documents connected with the Jarndyce case, his interest was immediately awakened.

Tulkinghorn visited Krook's shop to examine the room where Nemo had lived.

The air inside the room was heavy and unpleasant. Papers lay scattered across the table.

Tulkinghorn moved quietly, studying each detail.

He asked Krook several questions.

"Did this man receive visitors?" Tulkinghorn asked.

Krook scratched his head.

"Sometimes," he said. "Mostly lawyers' clerks. Sometimes strangers."

Tulkinghorn noticed that Krook kept many bundles of old papers.

Some of them might once have belonged to Nemo.

The lawyer carefully examined several documents.

Though he showed little emotion, his mind was working quickly.

At the same time another figure connected with this poor neighborhood was a ragged boy named *Jo*.

Jo had no home.

He survived by sweeping mud from the street crossings so that gentlemen and ladies could pass without dirtying their shoes.

For this small service people sometimes gave him a few coins.

Jo knew the narrow streets of the district better than anyone.

When Nemo's body was discovered, Jo had been nearby.

Later Tulkinghorn questioned him.

"Did you know the man who lived above Krook's shop?" the lawyer asked.

Jo scratched his head nervously.

“He was very quiet,” he said. “Didn’t talk much.”

Tulkinghorn asked another question.

“Did any lady ever visit him?”

Jo thought for a moment.

“One lady did once,” he said slowly.

Tulkinghorn’s attention sharpened.

“Describe her.”

Jo explained that she had been a tall lady wearing dark clothing and a veil.

She had asked to see the place where Nemo was buried.

Tulkinghorn listened carefully.

The description suggested someone from high society.

If such a lady had been interested in this poor law-writer, there must be a reason.

Meanwhile the body of Nemo had been buried in a dreadful cemetery not far from the slum.

The place was overcrowded with graves. The earth had been used again and again for burials.

The air smelled foul and unhealthy.

Jo sometimes guided visitors to the graves for a small coin.

One day a mysterious lady appeared and asked Jo to show her Nemo’s grave.

She wore a veil, but her clothes were elegant.

Jo led her through the broken gate into the cemetery.

When they reached the grave, the lady stood silently for a long time.

Jo noticed that her hands trembled.

At last she spoke quietly.

“You may go,” she said.

Jo left her there alone beside the grave.

The lady remained there for some time before slowly leaving the cemetery.

The mysterious visitor was *Lady Dedlock*.

Though no one yet understood the connection, the lonely law-writer named Nemo had once been a man called *Captain Hawdon*.

And long ago Lady Dedlock had loved him.

The discovery of this connection would soon bring terrible consequences to many lives.

Part 5

The discovery of the dead law-writer named Nemo did not end Mr. Tulkinghorn's curiosity.

On the contrary, it increased it.

Tulkinghorn was not a man who forgot details. The smallest clue interested him. He remembered the moment when Lady Dedlock had once examined a legal document with unusual attention.

That moment now returned to his mind.

Why had she cared so much about the handwriting of a poor law-writer?

Tulkinghorn decided to investigate further.

He soon learned that Nemo had once used another name.

His real name had been *Captain Hawdon*.

This discovery made the mystery far more serious.

Captain Hawdon had once been a respectable officer in the army. But something in his life had gone terribly wrong. After leaving the army he had fallen into poverty and had become the lonely law-writer known as Nemo.

Tulkinghorn continued to gather information quietly.

Meanwhile life at *Bleak House* remained peaceful.

Ada and I spent many pleasant days together in the garden or reading in the comfortable rooms of the house. Richard often joined us, bringing energy and cheerful conversation.

One afternoon Richard spoke excitedly about his future.

"I must soon choose a profession," he said.

Mr. Jarndyce nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, Rick. A useful occupation will give your life direction."

Richard smiled confidently.

“I am thinking about becoming a doctor.”

Mr. Jarndyce seemed pleased.

“That is a noble profession,” he said. “Helping others is always honorable work.”

Ada looked at Richard with admiration.

“You would make a wonderful doctor,” she said.

Richard laughed.

“Perhaps. Though I must admit that the Jarndyce case still interests me greatly.”

Mr. Jarndyce raised his eyebrows slightly.

“You must be careful with that interest,” he said gently.

Richard shrugged lightly.

“Surely the case will end someday.”

Mr. Jarndyce did not answer immediately.

At last he spoke quietly.

“Many people have said those same words.”

Meanwhile in London another important development occurred.

Tulkinghorn traveled to the Dedlock family estate, *Chesney Wold*.

Chesney Wold was a grand and ancient house surrounded by wide lawns and old trees. The Dedlock family had lived there for generations.

Sir Leicester Dedlock, the master of the house, was proud of his long family history. Portraits of his ancestors covered the walls.

To Sir Leicester the honor of the Dedlock name was the most important thing in the world.

Lady Dedlock, his wife, was admired throughout society for her beauty and elegance.

Yet those who watched her closely sometimes noticed a quiet sadness in her expression.

Tulkinghorn arrived at Chesney Wold one rainy evening.

He was welcomed politely by Sir Leicester.

The two men spoke about legal matters and family business.

During the conversation Lady Dedlock sat calmly nearby, listening without much interest.

At last Tulkinghorn spoke of the dead law-writer.

“I have discovered the true identity of the man called Nemo,” he said quietly.

Lady Dedlock’s fan paused for a moment.

“Indeed?” she asked.

Tulkinghorn answered calmly.

“His real name was Captain Hawdon.”

For a brief moment Lady Dedlock’s face grew pale.

But she quickly recovered her composure.

“A sad story, no doubt,” she said lightly.

Tulkinghorn observed her carefully.

Though her voice remained calm, he had seen the sudden change in her expression.

It was enough to confirm his suspicion.

Somewhere in Lady Dedlock’s past lay a secret connected with Captain Hawdon.

Tulkinghorn did not reveal all his thoughts that evening.

Instead he spoke of other matters and eventually took his leave.

Yet his investigation had reached an important point.

Meanwhile another thread of the story was unfolding in the poorest parts of London.

The ragged boy *Jo* continued to wander through the dirty streets near the cemetery where Nemo had been buried.

Jo lived a hard life.

The police often drove him away from the places where he tried to sleep. People treated him as if he were invisible.

Yet Jo carried an important memory.

He remembered the veiled lady who had come to visit Nemo’s grave.

That memory would soon lead others closer to the hidden truth.

At the same time the strange figure of *Miss Flite* continued to appear at the Court of Chancery almost every day.

She always sat quietly on the benches, watching the lawyers and judges with

bright, hopeful eyes.

In her small room the birds waited patiently in their cages.

Hope.

Joy.

Youth.

Peace.

Rest.

Life.

And the darker birds named *Dust, Ashes, Despair,* and *Madness.*

They waited for the day when Miss Flite believed the court would finally announce the judgment.

On that day, she often said, every cage would be opened.

Until then, she continued to wait.

Like so many others whose lives had been caught in the slow and merciless machinery of the Court of Chancery.

Part 6

Not long after these events, our peaceful life at Bleak House was interrupted by troubling news from London.

The poor district near the burial ground—called *Tom-all-Alone's*—had become dangerous.

Disease was spreading through the narrow streets. Many families lived crowded together in broken houses where sunlight could hardly enter. Dirty water ran through the alleys, and the air carried the smell of sickness.

Doctors warned that illness could easily spread from such places to the rest of the city.

One of the people most familiar with those streets was the ragged crossing-sweeper *Jo*.

Jo had no home and no family. He slept wherever he could—sometimes under a staircase, sometimes beside a doorway. He survived by sweeping the mud away

from street crossings so that well-dressed people could walk across the road without dirtying their shoes.

Few people noticed him.

Yet Jo carried a memory that had become important.

He remembered the veiled lady who had come to see Nemo's grave.

When *Mr. Tulkinghorn* continued his investigation into the life of Captain Hawdon, he questioned Jo again.

"You showed a lady the grave of the law-writer?" Tulkinghorn asked.

Jo nodded nervously.

"Yes, sir."

"Would you recognize her again?"

Jo scratched his head.

"Maybe I would, sir. She was a wery fine lady."

Tulkinghorn did not reveal his thoughts, but the answer satisfied him.

Meanwhile at *Chesney Wold*, the great Dedlock estate, life continued with its usual quiet formality.

Sir Leicester Dedlock loved the old house deeply. He often walked through its long halls, proudly examining the portraits of his ancestors.

"The Dedlock family has always stood high in England," he would say.

Lady Dedlock moved gracefully through these same halls, admired by every visitor.

Yet her calm expression sometimes hid deeper emotions.

The name *Captain Hawdon* had awakened memories she had tried to forget.

Mr. Tulkinghorn soon returned to *Chesney Wold* again.

The lawyer spoke politely with Sir Leicester about legal affairs, but his true interest remained Lady Dedlock.

During their conversation he once again mentioned the dead law-writer.

"The man called Nemo had a remarkable past," he said calmly.

Lady Dedlock looked at him steadily.

"Many people do," she replied.

Tulkinghorn continued quietly.

“Before his fall into poverty, he served in the army under the name Captain Hawdon.”

Lady Dedlock did not answer.

The silence in the room felt heavy.

Tulkinghorn knew that he had touched a hidden truth.

Yet he still chose not to reveal everything he knew.

Instead he watched patiently.

While these quiet tensions grew at Chesney Wold, our own lives at Bleak House continued to change.

Richard soon began his medical training in London.

At first he wrote cheerful letters describing the hospital and the work he observed there.

“It is difficult work,” he wrote, “but it is interesting. Every day I learn something new.”

Ada read these letters with shining eyes.

“He will become a great doctor,” she said happily.

I hoped she was right.

But some months later Richard’s letters began to change.

They became shorter and less enthusiastic.

At last he returned to Bleak House for a visit.

One evening he spoke openly with Mr. Jarndyce about his doubts.

“I am not certain that medicine is truly suited to me,” he admitted.

Mr. Jarndyce looked thoughtful.

“What troubles you about it?” he asked.

Richard hesitated.

“Perhaps I am not patient enough,” he said.

Mr. Jarndyce answered kindly.

“Patience is necessary in many professions.”

Richard leaned back in his chair.

“I have been thinking about another possibility,” he continued.

“What is that?”

Richard smiled slightly.

“The law.”

Mr. Jarndyce sighed quietly.

“The law?” he repeated.

Richard nodded.

“Since the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case concerns us so closely, perhaps I should study the legal profession.”

Mr. Jarndyce looked at him with concern.

“Rick,” he said gently, “that lawsuit has already caused enough misery.”

But Richard seemed excited by the idea.

“Once the case is settled,” he continued, “Ada and I will have the means to live comfortably.”

Ada blushed but did not disagree.

I watched Richard carefully.

Something in his manner worried me.

The lawsuit that Miss Flite had described with such strange intensity—the lawsuit that had kept people waiting for years—was beginning to attract Richard’s hopes.

Like a powerful force pulling him slowly closer.

And I remembered Miss Flite’s words about the Court of Chancery.

That place, she had said, drew people toward it.

It took away their peace.

It took away their reason.

I feared that Richard might already be feeling its influence.

Part 7

Soon after Richard began his studies in the law, another serious event took place in London.

The poor district of *Tom-all-Alone’s* grew even more dangerous.

Disease spread quickly through the narrow streets. Many houses were broken

and overcrowded. Families lived in dark rooms where fresh air never entered. Children played in dirty alleys beside pools of foul water.

The smell of sickness filled the neighborhood.

Doctors warned that such conditions would bring disaster.

Among the few people who tried to help the poor there was *Dr. Allan Woodcourt*.

Dr. Woodcourt was a young physician who believed strongly that doctors should serve those who needed help most. Though he had little money himself, he spent many hours visiting the sick in the poorest districts.

One of the people he encountered there was the crossing-sweeper *Jo*.

Jo had become weak and ill after many days of wandering through the cold streets. His thin body trembled with fever.

Dr. Woodcourt examined him carefully.

“This boy must be taken somewhere safe,” he said.

But Jo had no home.

Eventually news of his condition reached *Bleak House*.

Mr. Jarndyce was deeply troubled.

“We cannot allow the poor child to suffer alone,” he said.

With his permission Jo was brought to Bleak House so that he could rest and recover.

When Jo arrived, he looked frightened by the comfort of the house. The clean rooms and warm food seemed strange to him.

“I ain’t used to such places,” he said quietly.

My young maid *Charley* helped care for him.

Charley was kind and cheerful. She treated Jo with gentle patience.

For a short time Jo rested peacefully.

But during the night he suddenly disappeared.

No one knew how he had found the strength to leave.

Perhaps he feared that the authorities would punish him for staying there. Perhaps he simply did not believe that such kindness could last.

In the morning we discovered that he had gone.

Mr. Jarndyce was saddened.

“Poor child,” he said. “The world has taught him not to trust anyone.”

Unfortunately Jo had brought more than his misery with him.

Soon after his departure *Charley* became ill.

Her fever rose quickly, and a doctor was called at once.

The diagnosis was serious.

Charley had contracted *smallpox*.

Despite every effort to protect the household, the disease soon spread further.

I too became ill.

At first I felt only weakness and chills. Then the fever came, bringing confusion and pain.

For many days I lay in bed, drifting between sleep and strange dreams.

I remember Ada’s anxious face beside my bed. I remember Mr. Jarndyce speaking gently to encourage me.

And I remember the quiet voice of *Dr. Woodcourt*, who came to assist in my care.

During those long days the doctors were uncertain whether I would recover.

At last the fever slowly began to pass.

My strength returned little by little.

When I was finally able to sit up, I asked for a mirror.

Everyone hesitated.

Their silence told me the truth before I saw it.

The illness had changed my face.

The marks of smallpox remained upon my skin.

For a moment my heart felt heavy.

Yet I quickly reminded myself that I was fortunate to be alive.

“It does not matter,” I said gently.

Ada embraced me with tears in her eyes.

“You are as dear to us as ever,” she said.

Mr. Jarndyce nodded warmly.

“Your kindness and courage have never depended on appearances.”

I accepted their comfort gratefully.

But I could not help wondering how this change might affect the rest of my life.

Meanwhile other events continued to move quietly toward an important revelation.

The mysterious connection between *Lady Dedlock* and the dead law-writer *Captain Hawdon* was growing clearer in the mind of Mr. Tulkinghorn.

The lawyer had begun searching for letters that might prove the truth of their past relationship.

If those letters were discovered, they would reveal a secret that could destroy the reputation of one of the most powerful families in England.

And that secret was now drawing closer to the center of my own life.

Part 8

After my recovery from the illness, life at Bleak House slowly returned to its usual calm.

I was grateful for the kindness everyone had shown me during my sickness. Ada remained as affectionate as ever, and Mr. Jarndyce continued to care for us with his thoughtful attention.

Yet I felt that something within me had changed.

My illness had left marks upon my face, but it had also left a deeper impression upon my thoughts. I now understood more clearly how fragile life could be.

During this time a surprising message arrived for me.

A servant delivered a letter written in careful handwriting.

The message was brief.

A lady wished to meet me privately.

The name at the bottom of the letter was *Lady Dedlock*.

The request astonished me.

I had seen Lady Dedlock only once before at Chesney Wold. She had appeared calm and distant, a woman belonging to a world very different from my own.

Why would she wish to meet me?

Mr. Jarndyce read the letter thoughtfully.

“If you wish to go, Esther,” he said kindly, “you may do so.”

I agreed.

The meeting was arranged in a quiet house in London.

When I arrived, a servant led me into a dimly lit room.

Lady Dedlock stood near the window.

She wore dark clothing and a veil.

When she turned toward me, I saw that her face looked pale and troubled.

For a moment neither of us spoke.

Then she came closer.

Her eyes studied my face carefully.

I realized that she was looking closely at the marks left by my illness.

A strange expression—almost relief—appeared in her eyes.

Suddenly her calm manner broke.

She took my hands in hers.

“My child,” she whispered.

The words filled me with confusion.

“Lady Dedlock?” I said quietly.

Tears rose in her eyes.

“Forgive me,” she said. “I must tell you the truth.”

My heart began to beat faster.

She continued speaking with deep emotion.

Many years earlier, before her marriage to Sir Leicester Dedlock, she had loved a young officer named *Captain Hawdon*.

Their love had been secret.

When a child was born, the scandal would have destroyed her future and her family’s honor.

The baby had been taken away.

She had been told that the child died soon after birth.

Lady Dedlock’s voice trembled.

“That child was you,” she said.

I stood in silence.

My whole life I had wondered about my parents.

Now the truth stood before me.

Lady Dedlock was my mother.

She fell to her knees before me.

“I believed you were dead,” she cried. “If I had known you were alive, I would have searched the world to find you.”

I felt deep compassion for her sorrow.

Yet I also understood the terrible situation we faced.

If this secret became known, it would destroy her reputation and bring shame upon her husband.

I spoke gently.

“You need not fear me,” I said. “I will never reveal what you have told me.”

She looked at me with gratitude.

“You are kinder than I deserve,” she said.

We spoke together for some time.

When the meeting ended, Lady Dedlock embraced me once more before leaving quickly.

I returned to Bleak House with a heart full of mixed emotions.

I had discovered my mother.

Yet the world could never know it.

Meanwhile in London, another person had begun investigating the mystery of Captain Hawdon.

That person was *Mr. Guppy*, the curious law clerk.

During his work among legal papers, he had discovered documents connected with the dead law-writer.

Convinced that the mystery might reveal something important, he began searching for further clues.

His investigation soon led him toward the strange rag-and-bottle shop of *Krook*.

And there, among piles of old legal papers, he hoped to find evidence that would uncover the truth hidden for so many years.

Part 9

While I struggled quietly with the secret of my birth, other events continued to unfold in London.

The curious law clerk *Mr. Guppy* had not forgotten the mystery surrounding the dead law-writer Nemo.

Mr. Guppy was a practical young man who worked in a lawyer's office. His mind was always busy with questions and possibilities. The strange connection between Nemo—whose real name had been *Captain Hawdon*—and certain legal documents fascinated him.

He believed that somewhere in London there might still exist papers that could explain the man's past.

For this reason he visited the rag-and-bottle shop of *Krook*.

The shop looked even more unpleasant than before.

Old papers were piled high along the walls. Broken furniture stood in dusty corners. Bottles and scraps of cloth covered the floor.

Krook himself sat behind a small table, examining one of his strange collections of documents.

When Mr. Guppy entered, Krook looked up with bright curiosity.

"Ah, a gentleman from the law," Krook said proudly. "I understand legal papers myself."

Mr. Guppy smiled politely.

"So I have heard."

He glanced toward the staircase that led to the room where Nemo had once lived.

"I would like to look at some of the papers the man left behind," he said.

Krook nodded eagerly.

"Plenty of papers here," he replied. "Old Chancery documents, many of them."

Mr. Guppy climbed the narrow stairs with a friend.

The room above looked dusty and abandoned. Papers lay scattered across the

table.

Guppy began examining them carefully.

Some of the documents were legal copies made by Nemo during his work as a law-writer. Others were older and less clear.

Guppy believed that somewhere among these papers might be letters or records connected with Captain Hawdon's earlier life.

But before he could make any important discovery, a shocking event occurred.

Krook died suddenly.

His death was unlike anything people had ever seen.

When neighbors entered the room where he had been sitting, they found almost nothing left of his body.

Only a dark, greasy stain remained on the floor, along with a terrible smell.

The strange death was later explained as a rare case of *spontaneous combustion*, a mysterious condition in which the human body seemed to burn from within.

The event frightened everyone who heard about it.

But for Mr. Guppy it also meant something else.

The piles of papers that Krook had collected were now burned or destroyed.

Any documents connected with Captain Hawdon had disappeared.

Guppy's investigation had reached a sudden end.

Meanwhile another danger was slowly growing in the life of *Richard*.

His interest in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce lawsuit had become stronger than ever.

Though he had once planned to become a doctor, he soon abandoned that idea. He began studying the law instead, believing that a legal career would help him understand the famous case.

At first this decision seemed reasonable.

But Richard soon became deeply absorbed in the complicated details of the lawsuit.

He spent many hours reading legal documents and speaking with lawyers.

One of those lawyers was a serious man named *Mr. Vholes*.

Vholes spoke slowly and carefully about the case.

"The matter is extremely complex," he explained. "But with perseverance,

success may eventually come.”

These words encouraged Richard greatly.

He began spending more and more money on legal advice and consultations.

Ada grew worried.

One evening she spoke with me about it.

“Esther,” she said softly, “Richard thinks of nothing except the lawsuit now.”

I tried to reassure her.

“Perhaps he simply wishes to understand it better.”

But Ada shook her head.

“He believes the case will soon end in his favor.”

Her voice trembled.

I remembered Miss Flite’s strange speech about the Court of Chancery.

She had said that the court drew people toward it.

It took away their peace.

It took away their reason.

As I watched Richard’s growing excitement about the lawsuit, I began to fear that those words might be coming true.

The court that had already ruined so many lives might soon claim another victim.

Part 10

Richard’s interest in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce lawsuit soon became stronger than anyone had expected.

At first he spoke about the case with curiosity. Soon he spoke about it with excitement. Before long it seemed that the lawsuit filled his entire mind.

Whenever he visited Bleak House, he discussed nothing else.

“The case cannot continue forever,” he said confidently. “The court must eventually decide.”

Mr. Jarndyce listened patiently.

“The court has already delayed the decision for many years,” he replied gently.

But Richard would not be discouraged.

“Then the end must be near,” he insisted.

Ada loved Richard deeply, yet she could not hide her growing concern.

One evening she came to my room looking troubled.

“Esther,” she said quietly, “Richard believes that once the case is decided we will have everything we need.”

I took her hand kindly.

“And you?”

She hesitated.

“I would rather see him happy in his work than waiting for a court decision.”

Her words showed the wisdom of her heart.

Meanwhile in London the investigation into *Lady Dedlock's past* continued quietly.

Mr. Tulkinghorn had gathered more and more evidence connecting her with Captain Hawdon.

Among the most important discoveries were several *letters* written long ago.

These letters proved that Lady Dedlock had loved Captain Hawdon before her marriage.

Tulkinghorn now possessed the secret that could destroy the reputation of the powerful Dedlock family.

Yet he did not reveal it publicly.

Instead he decided to confront Lady Dedlock privately.

One evening he visited her in London.

The room where they met was quiet and dimly lit.

Lady Dedlock sat calmly, though her face appeared tired.

Tulkinghorn bowed respectfully.

“I regret disturbing you,” he said.

“You seldom disturb me without reason,” she replied coolly.

The lawyer placed several papers upon the table.

“During my investigation into the man called Nemo,” he began, “I discovered that his true name was Captain Hawdon.”

Lady Dedlock remained silent.

Tulkinghorn continued.

“Captain Hawdon once received letters from a lady of high position.”

He slowly opened the bundle of letters.

Lady Dedlock recognized them immediately.

They were the letters she had written many years before.

For a moment her face grew pale.

But she quickly recovered her calm.

“You have discovered my past,” she said quietly.

Tulkinghorn nodded.

“I have discovered certain facts.”

His voice remained calm and respectful.

“You may rely on my discretion. The honor of the Dedlock family is of great importance to me.”

Lady Dedlock understood the meaning behind his words.

The lawyer now held her secret in his hands.

Though he spoke politely, the power he possessed over her life was immense.

When Tulkinghorn left the house that evening, Lady Dedlock remained alone for a long time.

The memories she had tried to bury had returned.

Meanwhile in the busy streets of London another tragic story was approaching its end.

The poor crossing-sweeper *Jo* had continued wandering from place to place.

His health grew worse each day.

At last he was found again by *Dr. Allan Woodcourt*.

The doctor recognized immediately that the boy was dying.

Woodcourt stayed beside him, speaking gently.

Jo struggled to explain the little he knew about the world.

“I never know’d nothink,” he said weakly.

His voice trembled.

With great effort he asked the doctor to repeat a simple prayer.

Dr. Woodcourt knelt beside him and spoke the words slowly.

Jo tried to repeat them.

A short time later the poor boy died.

His life had been short and full of suffering.

Yet in his final moments someone had shown him kindness.

When the news reached Bleak House, we were deeply saddened.

“Poor Jo,” Ada whispered.

Mr. Jarndyce shook his head.

“His life shows us how much suffering exists in this world,” he said.

The death of the forgotten boy seemed small compared with the great events of society.

Yet to me it felt like a powerful reminder.

Behind the grand houses and complicated lawsuits of England, there existed another world filled with hardship and injustice.

And the great lawsuit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce was quietly moving toward the tragic conclusion that would soon affect us all.

Part 11

Not long after these events, an unexpected change occurred in my own life.

One evening Mr. Jarndyce asked me to walk with him in the garden of Bleak House.

The air was calm, and the sky above us was slowly growing dark.

After a few moments of quiet walking, he spoke gently.

“My dear Esther,” he said, “you have become very important to this house.”

I thanked him warmly.

“Your kindness, your patience, and your careful attention to everyone here have brought happiness to Bleak House,” he continued.

His voice was sincere.

Then he stopped walking.

“I wish to ask you something important.”

My heart began to beat faster.

“Esther,” he said quietly, “would you consider becoming my wife?”

The question surprised me completely.

Mr. Jarndyce had always treated me with affection and kindness, almost like a father. I had never imagined him speaking of marriage.

For a moment I could not answer.

He noticed my hesitation and spoke kindly.

“You must not feel any pressure,” he said. “I would never wish to make you unhappy.”

I knew how generous he was.

Everything I had in life had come from his kindness. If marrying him would bring him happiness, how could I refuse?

That night I thought carefully about his proposal.

My heart was filled with gratitude toward him. I believed that I could spend my life trying to repay his generosity.

The next day I told him that I would accept.

Mr. Jarndyce seemed pleased, though his manner remained calm and thoughtful.

Meanwhile events in London continued moving toward a crisis.

Mr. Tulkinghorn, who possessed the secret of Lady Dedlock’s past, continued watching her closely.

He believed that her connection with Captain Hawdon might eventually cause a scandal.

Though he had promised discretion, he did not promise silence forever.

His careful observation placed great pressure upon Lady Dedlock.

At the same time the strange old woman *Miss Flite* still appeared every day at the Court of Chancery.

She continued sitting patiently on the wooden benches, watching the lawyers argue their endless cases.

Whenever we visited London, we sometimes saw her there.

One afternoon I spoke with her again.

“Are you still waiting for the judgment?” I asked gently.

Miss Flite smiled eagerly.

“Yes, yes! The day will come.”

She looked toward the Lord Chancellor’s seat.

“When the judgment comes, I shall open all the cages.”

I remembered her small room filled with birds.

“Hope will fly away,” she said softly.

“Joy will fly away.”

She continued listing their names.

“Youth. Peace. Rest. Life.”

Her voice became quieter as she spoke of the darker birds.

“Dust. Ashes. Despair. Madness.”

For a moment she looked tired.

Then her bright excitement returned.

“But they will all be free when the court finally decides my case!”

As I watched her hopeful face, I felt both compassion and sadness.

Miss Flite had waited for many years.

The court had taken much from her life.

Yet she still believed that the long-delayed judgment would one day arrive.

Meanwhile another tragedy was approaching.

Mr. Tulkinghorn, the silent lawyer who held Lady Dedlock’s secret, was about to meet a sudden and violent end.

One night he was found dead in his chambers.

He had been shot.

The shocking news spread quickly through London.

Suspicion immediately fell upon several people.

One of them was *Lady Dedlock*.

Another was *George Rouncewell*, the former soldier who had once known Captain Hawdon.

The police began a careful investigation.

The responsibility for solving the crime soon fell to a calm and intelligent detective named *Inspector Bucket*.

As the investigation began, the hidden secrets surrounding the Dedlock family moved closer to the surface.

And the tragic consequences of those secrets were about to change many lives forever.

Part 12

The news of *Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder* spread quickly through London.

The powerful lawyer had been found dead late at night in his chambers. He had been shot with a pistol, and no one had immediately seen the murderer.

The crime shocked society.

Tulkinghorn had been a quiet and careful man, but his influence had been great. Many powerful families trusted him with their most secret matters.

Now those secrets seemed to hang dangerously in the air.

The investigation soon came under the direction of *Inspector Bucket*.

Inspector Bucket was a calm and thoughtful detective. He spoke politely and listened carefully, but his mind missed nothing.

When he began questioning people connected with the case, several names quickly appeared.

One of them was *George Rouncewell*.

George was a strong and honest former soldier who owned a small shooting gallery in London. Tulkinghorn had recently questioned him about his connection with Captain Hawdon.

Because of this, suspicion fell upon him.

George was arrested and placed in prison while the investigation continued.

The news reached *Sir Leicester Dedlock*.

Sir Leicester was greatly disturbed.

“George is an honorable man,” he declared. “He is no murderer.”

But the police could not ignore the evidence.

Meanwhile Inspector Bucket quietly examined another possible suspect.

This was *Hortense*, the French maid who had once served Lady Dedlock.

Hortense had been dismissed from Lady Dedlock's service after behaving badly. She had left the Dedlock household with anger and resentment.

Inspector Bucket began observing her movements carefully.

While the investigation continued, the situation at *Chesney Wold* grew more serious.

The rumors surrounding Lady Dedlock had begun to spread.

Though the full truth remained hidden, some people had already heard that Tulkinghorn possessed a dangerous secret about her past.

Sir Leicester soon learned that the lawyer had been investigating his wife's life before their marriage.

The shock of this discovery was terrible for him.

Sir Leicester had always believed completely in the honor of his family.

The idea that a scandal might touch the Dedlock name struck him deeply.

One evening the emotional strain became too great.

Sir Leicester suddenly collapsed.

Doctors were called immediately.

Their diagnosis was grave.

Sir Leicester had suffered a *stroke*.

The illness left him unable to move properly and unable to speak clearly.

Though his mind remained conscious, his body was greatly weakened.

Lady Dedlock was filled with sorrow and guilt.

She believed that the secret of her past had caused her husband's suffering.

The burden of that guilt weighed heavily upon her heart.

At the same time Inspector Bucket continued his investigation.

He gathered witnesses and examined every detail of the crime.

At last he arranged a meeting where the truth could be revealed.

Several important people were present.

Among them were Sir Leicester's servants and other witnesses connected with the case.

Hortense was also brought into the room.

Inspector Bucket spoke calmly.

“The person responsible for Mr. Tulkinghorn’s death is present here tonight.”
Everyone looked around in silence.
Then the inspector turned toward Hortense.
“Madame,” he said quietly, “you killed Mr. Tulkinghorn.”
Hortense’s face became pale.
For a moment she tried to deny the accusation.
But Inspector Bucket explained the evidence step by step.
Hortense had followed Tulkinghorn secretly.
She had obtained a pistol.
And during the night she had entered his chambers and shot him.
Her reason was simple.
She hated Lady Dedlock and wished to bring disgrace upon her.
By killing Tulkinghorn, she hoped to create a scandal that would destroy the Dedlock family.
At last Hortense could no longer deny the truth.
She was arrested immediately.
George Rouncewell was released from prison, his innocence proven.
Yet the danger surrounding Lady Dedlock had not disappeared.
The investigation had revealed that Tulkinghorn possessed a secret about her past.
Though the details were not yet public, the threat of scandal remained.
During this difficult time Lady Dedlock felt the full weight of her situation.
Her husband lay ill.
The secret she had hidden for so many years now threatened to destroy everything.
One night she made a desperate decision.
Without telling anyone, *Lady Dedlock left the house.*
When her disappearance was discovered, great alarm followed.
Sir Leicester, though weak and unable to speak clearly, showed terrible distress.
Through gestures he made it clear that she must be found.
Inspector Bucket acted immediately.

A search began throughout London.

And soon the inspector came to Bleak House to ask for my help.

For he believed that Lady Dedlock might try to see *me* before the end.

Part 13

When *Inspector Bucket* arrived at Bleak House, his expression was serious.

Mr. Jarndyce received him kindly, but we could all see that the situation was urgent.

“Lady Dedlock has disappeared,” the inspector explained.

Ada gasped in surprise.

“Disappeared?”

Inspector Bucket nodded.

“Yes. She left her house during the night and has not been seen since.”

Mr. Jarndyce asked quietly, “Do you believe she is in danger?”

The inspector hesitated before answering.

“I fear she may be overcome by despair,” he said.

Then he turned toward me.

“Miss Summerson, I believe she may attempt to see you.”

My heart began to beat faster.

I understood at once why he thought this.

Lady Dedlock had revealed the truth to me about my birth. I was the only person who knew her secret and had promised to protect it.

“If she seeks anyone,” Inspector Bucket continued, “it may be you.”

I agreed to help immediately.

That same evening the inspector and I began searching the streets of London.

The city looked dark and quiet as we moved through it.

Inspector Bucket walked quickly but calmly. He questioned people along the way, asking whether they had seen a tall lady dressed in black.

Hours passed without success.

At last the inspector spoke again.

“There is one place we must search,” he said quietly.

I knew at once which place he meant.

The *burial ground* where Captain Hawdon—once known as Nemo—had been laid to rest.

We hurried toward the miserable district near *Tom-all-Alone’s*.

The streets there were narrow and dirty. The houses leaned against one another like tired people.

When we reached the broken gate of the burial ground, Inspector Bucket lifted his lantern.

The small light shone across the uneven ground and the crooked gravestones.

We walked slowly among the graves.

Suddenly the inspector stopped.

“Here,” he said softly.

My heart trembled as I stepped forward.

In the dim light I saw a figure lying beside one of the graves.

It was *Lady Dedlock*.

She lay motionless on the cold ground beside the grave of Captain Hawdon.

I knelt beside her and touched her hand.

It was cold.

My mother was dead.

The sorrow of that moment cannot easily be described.

Though we had known each other only briefly, the bond between us had been real.

Inspector Bucket removed his hat respectfully.

“She must have wandered here during the night,” he said quietly. “The cold and exhaustion overcame her.”

Arrangements were made to carry her body away with dignity.

Later the news reached *Sir Leicester Dedlock*.

Though still weak from his illness, he understood what had happened.

His reaction surprised everyone.

Instead of anger, he showed only sorrow.

With great effort he made it clear that he forgave his wife completely.

“She was always my dear wife,” he said weakly.

His loyalty moved everyone who heard his words.

Lady Dedlock was buried quietly, and her secret was not publicly revealed.

Sir Leicester’s dignity protected her memory from scandal.

Meanwhile the long and terrible lawsuit of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* was finally approaching its end.

For many years people had waited for the court’s decision.

Among those waiting faithfully was the strange old woman *Miss Flite*.

Every day she continued to appear at the Court of Chancery.

She sat on the wooden benches watching the lawyers and judges with bright, eager eyes.

In her small room the birds remained in their cages.

Hope.

Joy.

Youth.

Peace.

Rest.

Life.

And the darker birds named *Dust, Ashes, Despair, and Madness*.

Miss Flite believed that when the court finally delivered its judgment, she would open every cage.

The birds would fly away.

But none of us yet understood how strange the final result of that lawsuit would be.

Part 14

At last the day arrived when the Court of Chancery would announce its decision in the long and famous case of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce*.

News of the coming judgment spread quickly through London.

Lawyers hurried through the streets carrying bundles of documents. Clerks whispered excitedly in the court corridors. People who had waited many years for the decision gathered once again inside the courtroom.

Among them sat the small figure of *Miss Flite*.

She had come early, as she always did. Her bright eyes watched the judges' seats with eager expectation.

For years she had waited for this moment.

When I entered the courtroom with Ada, I saw her sitting on one of the wooden benches.

She recognized me immediately.

"Miss Summerson!" she whispered with excitement. "Today may be the day!"

Her thin hands trembled with anticipation.

"If the judgment comes today," she said eagerly, "I shall go home at once and open every cage."

Ada smiled gently.

"Your birds will be very happy."

Miss Flite nodded.

"Hope will fly away first," she said softly.

"Then Joy. Then Youth and Peace and Rest."

She spoke the names with deep feeling.

The courtroom slowly filled with people.

Lawyers arranged their papers. Clerks prepared their notes. At the far end of the room stood the high seat of the *Lord Chancellor*.

At last the judge entered.

The room became silent.

The long case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce was about to end.

The Lord Chancellor began speaking.

His voice echoed through the courtroom as he explained the complicated history of the lawsuit.

The will that had begun the dispute was extremely complex. For many years the court had examined its meaning, studied new claims, and considered countless

legal arguments.

Now the final result had been reached.

Everyone listened carefully.

Richard stood near the front of the courtroom. His face showed intense hope.

Ada held my hand nervously.

Miss Flite leaned forward, her bright eyes fixed on the judge.

Then the Lord Chancellor spoke the final words.

The fortune that had once been the subject of the lawsuit had been completely consumed by *legal costs*.

After years of hearings, documents, and arguments, nothing remained.

The entire estate had been spent paying lawyers and court expenses.

There was nothing left to divide.

The case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce was therefore *dismissed*.

For a moment the courtroom remained silent.

The result seemed almost impossible to understand.

Then murmurs spread among the people.

The great lawsuit had destroyed itself.

All those years of waiting had ended in nothing.

I looked at *Richard*.

The expression on his face had changed completely.

The hope that had guided his life suddenly disappeared.

Ada held his arm gently.

“Richard,” she whispered.

But he seemed unable to speak.

Nearby I saw *Miss Flite* standing very still.

For years she had believed that the court would bring justice and freedom.

Now the decision had come—but not in the way she expected.

Slowly she turned toward me.

Her expression was strangely calm.

“The judgment has come,” she said quietly.

I did not know what to say.

Miss Flite continued speaking softly.

“It has taken everything.”

She paused for a moment.

“But the waiting is over.”

Later that day I visited her small room.

The birdcages still hung along the walls.

Miss Flite stood beside them.

She opened one cage slowly.

A small bird fluttered out into the room.

Then she opened another.

One by one she opened every cage.

The birds flew through the open window into the sky.

“Hope,” she said softly.

Another bird flew away.

“Joy.”

Another.

“Youth.”

She continued until the last cage stood empty.

At last she spoke the final names.

“Dust. Ashes. Despair. Madness.”

The last bird disappeared into the evening sky.

Miss Flite watched the empty cages for a long moment.

Then she turned to me with a gentle smile.

“They are free now,” she said.

I understood then that the long years of waiting had finally ended—not with justice, but with release.

Yet the tragic consequences of the lawsuit were not finished.

For *Richard*, the loss of the case had destroyed the hope that had sustained him for so long.

The end of the lawsuit came too late to save *Richard*.

For many years he had believed that the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case would bring him wealth and security. He had built his plans, his hopes, and even his identity around that expectation.

Now the truth had destroyed that hope completely.

When the court announced that the entire fortune had disappeared into legal costs, Richard seemed unable to accept the result.

At first he spoke very little.

Ada tried to comfort him.

“The case is finished now,” she said gently. “We can begin our life together.”

Richard smiled weakly.

“Yes,” he said. “It is finished.”

But the years of worry and disappointment had already damaged his health.

His strength began to fail quickly.

Soon he became seriously ill.

We arranged for him to rest in a quiet room where he could receive care. Ada remained beside him constantly.

She spoke to him softly and tried to remind him of happier days.

One evening I visited him with *Dr. Allan Woodcourt*, who had taken charge of his treatment.

Dr. Woodcourt examined Richard carefully.

When he finished, he spoke privately with Ada and me.

“His condition is very serious,” he said gently.

We understood his meaning.

Richard’s life was slowly coming to an end.

During the following days Richard seemed calmer.

It was as if he had finally accepted the truth about the lawsuit.

One afternoon he asked to see *Mr. Jarndyce*.

When our guardian entered the room, Richard looked at him with deep regret.

“Sir,” he said weakly, “I have wasted your kindness.”

Mr. Jarndyce shook his head firmly.

“No, my dear Rick,” he replied. “You were misled by a cruel system.”

Richard sighed.

“That system destroys people,” he said quietly.

Mr. Jarndyce took his hand.

“Then perhaps your story will help others understand its danger.”

Richard smiled faintly.

Ada leaned close beside him.

“You must rest,” she whispered.

Richard looked at her with deep affection.

“Ada,” he said softly, “you have always been the best part of my life.”

Tears filled her eyes.

“We will face everything together,” she answered.

But Richard knew the truth.

His voice became weaker.

“Forgive me,” he said.

“There is nothing to forgive,” Ada replied.

A peaceful expression appeared on his face.

Soon afterward he died.

The loss was terrible for Ada.

Yet she showed quiet courage during her grief.

Mr. Jarndyce and I did everything we could to comfort her.

Meanwhile another important change was approaching in my own life.

Some weeks after Richard’s death, Mr. Jarndyce asked me to walk with him once again in the garden of Bleak House.

The evening air was calm, and the leaves moved softly in the wind.

After a few moments he spoke kindly.

“My dear Esther, there is something I must tell you.”

I listened quietly.

“When you accepted my proposal,” he continued, “you did so out of gratitude.”

I could not deny this.

Mr. Jarndyce smiled gently.

“But gratitude is not the same as love.”

My heart began to beat faster.

“I have watched you carefully,” he said. “And I believe I know where your true happiness lies.”

He paused before speaking again.

“Dr. Woodcourt loves you,” he said softly.

I could not answer.

“And I believe you love him.”

His words were spoken with complete kindness.

Mr. Jarndyce had once again placed my happiness above his own.

The engagement between us was quietly ended.

And with that generous decision, a new path opened before me.

Part 16

After Mr. Jarndyce released me from our engagement, I felt both relief and deep gratitude.

His kindness had shaped my life from the beginning, and now it had given me the freedom to follow my own happiness.

Some days later *Dr. Allan Woodcourt* visited Bleak House again.

Mr. Jarndyce welcomed him warmly.

“Woodcourt,” he said with a cheerful smile, “you have been working very hard among the poor.”

Allan answered modestly.

“There is always more work to do.”

Mr. Jarndyce looked pleased.

“That is exactly why I respect you.”

After speaking for a short time, Mr. Jarndyce turned toward me.

“Esther, perhaps you and Dr. Woodcourt would enjoy a walk in the garden.”

Allan and I stepped outside together.

The afternoon was quiet, and the garden looked peaceful in the soft light.

For a moment neither of us spoke.

At last Allan looked at me with gentle seriousness.

“Miss Summerson,” he said, “when I last spoke to you about my feelings, you told me you were not free.”

“Yes,” I replied softly.

“May I ask,” he continued, “whether that situation has changed?”

I felt my heart beating quickly.

“Yes,” I said.

For a moment Allan seemed unable to speak.

Then he took my hand gently.

“Esther,” he said, “I have admired you for a long time. Your kindness, your patience, and your courage have meant more to me than you may know.”

His voice grew warmer.

“If you can care for me even a little, I would devote my life to making you happy.”

Tears filled my eyes.

“I do care for you,” I answered.

His face brightened with joy.

Soon afterward we were engaged.

Mr. Jarndyce seemed truly happy for us.

“You will both bring goodness into the world,” he said kindly.

In time Allan and I were married.

Not long after our marriage, an opportunity appeared that suited Allan perfectly.

A small medical practice became available in a quiet country village. The people there were poor and often lacked proper medical care.

Allan accepted the position eagerly.

“This is exactly the kind of work I hoped to do,” he said.

We moved into a modest little house near the village.

Though the house was small, it quickly became a warm and happy home.

Villagers often came seeking Allan’s help. Some could pay only a few coins.

Others could pay nothing at all.

But Allan treated everyone with the same kindness.

I helped him whenever I could, visiting sick families and caring for children.

The peaceful rhythm of this life brought us great satisfaction.

Meanwhile our friends also began to find new paths forward.

Ada, though still mourning Richard, slowly regained her strength.

She had one final gift from the brief happiness they had shared.

A child was born.

The little boy brought new hope into her life.

Mr. Jarndyce loved the child deeply and often visited to see him.

The boy reminded everyone of Richard's gentler qualities.

Even *Sir Leicester Dedlock*, though still weakened by illness, continued living quietly with dignity.

Despite everything that had happened, he never spoke harshly of his late wife.

Instead he protected her memory with loyalty and respect.

And somewhere in London, in her small room once filled with cages, *Miss Flite* no longer kept her birds.

The cages stood empty now.

The birds named Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Despair, and Madness had all flown away.

Their long waiting had ended at last.

Part 17

As the years passed, the painful events connected with the *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* lawsuit slowly became memories.

Yet the lessons of that long and tragic case were never forgotten by those who had witnessed its effects.

The lawsuit had consumed wealth, destroyed hope, and taken years from many lives.

Mr. Jarndyce often spoke about it when visitors asked about the famous case.

“The court did not merely delay justice,” he would say quietly. “It devoured the people who waited for it.”

Those words were sadly true.

For *Richard*, the lawsuit had become an obsession that led him away from a healthy life. By the time the case finally ended, it had already taken everything from him.

But those who remained continued trying to live with courage and kindness.

My husband *Dr. Allan Woodcourt* worked tirelessly among the people of our village.

Each day he visited the sick and the poor, traveling along quiet country roads to reach small cottages and farms.

Often I went with him.

The work could be difficult, but it brought us great satisfaction.

Sometimes I remembered the crowded streets of London and the misery of places like *Tom-all-Alone's*.

Compared with that suffering, the peaceful life of our village felt like a blessing.

From time to time we received letters from our friends.

Ada wrote often.

Her little son was growing quickly.

The child brought light into her life and helped ease the sorrow of *Richard's* death.

When she visited us with the boy, our house seemed full of laughter again.

Mr. Jarndyce remained the generous heart of our extended family.

He often traveled to see us and always brought cheerful stories and thoughtful gifts.

Though he sometimes joked about the windy weather of Bleak House, his kindness toward everyone around him never changed.

I often reflected on how much my life had been shaped by his generosity.

Without him, I might never have known a loving home or a peaceful future.

Other people connected with our story continued living their lives in quieter ways.

George Rouncewell returned to his honest work and enjoyed the respect of those who knew him.

Inspector Bucket, whose careful investigation had solved the mystery of Tulkinghorn's murder, continued his work as a detective.

His calm intelligence and patient methods earned him great admiration.

Even the memory of *Lady Dedlock* remained treated with dignity.

Sir Leicester protected her reputation carefully, ensuring that the full truth of her past never became public gossip.

In this way her final tragedy remained private.

And what of *Miss Flite*, the strange little woman who had waited so faithfully in the Court of Chancery?

After the final judgment of the lawsuit, she no longer needed to sit in the courtroom.

The endless waiting had ended at last.

She once told me quietly that the cages in her room remained open now.

The birds had flown away into the wide sky.

Their names—Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Despair, and Madness—were no longer trapped behind wires.

Miss Flite herself seemed calmer after that day.

The long burden of expectation had lifted from her life.

As for me, I sometimes thought back to the moment when she had described the terrible power of the *Court of Chancery*.

She had said that something within that place drew people toward it and slowly took away their peace.

Looking at the lives that had been damaged by the Jarndyce and Jarndyce lawsuit, I understood her words more clearly than ever.

The law was meant to protect justice.

But when it becomes too slow, too complicated, and too distant from ordinary people, it can become a force that harms those it should help.

Yet even in the midst of such sorrow, kindness and loyalty still survived.

That truth was the most important lesson I carried with me from those difficult

years.

And whenever I looked at the quiet countryside surrounding our little home, I felt grateful that life had finally brought us to a place of peace.