

Fingersmith Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Sue Trinder, an orphan child of a murderess, raised in the Borough of London by kindly baby farmer Grace Sucksby, has grown up in the company of thieves and fences. Sue is a fingersmith: a pickpocket and petty thief. Wise in the ways of the streets, she has been protected from much of the harshness of that life by the loving Mrs. Sucksby. The first part of the novel is narrated by Sue, from her point of view.

One winter night, a con man called Gentleman comes to Lant Street in search of young Sue. He persuades her to become his accomplice in a scam designed to defraud a young heiress of her fortune and dispose of her by committing her to a madhouse. Despite Sue's feelings that this is a cruel trick to play on someone, particularly an innocent and unsuspecting girl, Sue agrees to her role in the scam for a promised share of the heiress' fortune. She believes this share will change her life and the life of Mrs. Sucksby.

Sue discovers very quickly that Maud Lilly, the heiress, is not as stupid as she has been led to believe. Rather, she is ignorant of many things about life because she has been restricted to the estate where she serves as secretary to her uncle. Sue's role in the scam is to help Gentleman persuade Maud to marry him. Once married and in control of her fortune, Sue is to help Gentleman convince doctors that Maud is mad and have her committed to a women's asylum. As time passes and Sue and Gentleman prepare to woo Maud away from her uncle, Sue discovers that she cares deeply for the kind Maud Lilly.

After all elements of the intricate scam are in place, Sue assists Maud in her escape from Briar and her uncle's control. In the dark of night, a secret marriage is performed, and Gentleman takes his wife and her maid to a small cottage near the church. There, the marriage is consummated and time is spent convincing the woman who has rented them rooms that Maud is mad. After a period of weeks, doctors are brought in to speak with Sue, Maud, Richard, and the woman. The doctors are convinced that Maud is mad. Arrangements are made to deliver Maud to the asylum the next day. The plot twists when they reach the asylum and it is Sue, rather than Maud, who is admitted. The doctors believe that Sue is Maud and that she is suffering from the delusion that she is her maid. This is the first surprising plot twist.

As Part Two begins, the narrative is taken up by Maud and told from her point of view. Raised by the nurses of a madhouse from the time of her mother's death in childbirth, Maud is claimed by her uncle, at the age of ten, and taken to live with him. At Briar, his estate, she is trained to move and speak softly, and to remain on the estate, always under the control of her uncle. Her mornings are spent as her uncle's secretary, reading pornography to the old man to assist him in indexing a bibliography of all pornography. Her afternoons are spent alone or with her maid. After dining with her uncle, she reads to him, and sometimes to other men, as well, from his vast collection of pornographic books.



The handsome and charming Richard Rivers arrives at Briar and brings new life to the dismal estate. He is retained by Maud's uncle, Christopher Lilly, to mount his artwork and organize it into albums. He quickly endears himself to Maud, and persuades her that he can help her to escape her life, claim inheritance, and live a normal life in London. Richard has planned to elope, to get around the legal requirement that Maud have her uncle's permission to marry.

After disgracing and running off her previous maid, Richard sends Sue to be Maud's new maid. Because of Sue's resemblance to Maud, Richard and Maud determine that they will trick Sue into assisting in their plans to win Maud's freedom and to win Richard half of Maud's fortune. Maud pretends innocence and kindness to Sue, as well as love for Richard. Maud, however, grows to love Sue in a way she had not anticipated, and to fear Richard. Her need for freedom overcomes both her love and her fear. The escape and marriage occur. Maud reveals that the marriage is not consummated.

When the doctors arrive, Maud tells them that she is Susan Smith, and that her mistress has become delusional, believing herself to be Sue. With the support of the landlady and Richard, the doctors are convinced that Sue is a deeply deluded Maud. When the carriage arrives at the asylum, Sue protests that she is not Maud Lilly Rivers but Susan Smith. Maud weeps, prays for her deluded mistress, and seals Sue's fate. Richard and Maud begin their journey to London, where Richard has told her they will live in his house.

Upon arrival in London, however, Richard takes Maud to Lant Street, where she becomes the prisoner of the residents of the house. Here, Maud learns that there is yet another plot surrounding both the scheme she developed with Richard and the scheme Richard conceived to lure Sue. Maud learns that Marianne Lilly is not her mother, but Sue's mother. She learns that Mrs. Sucksby has been planning for seventeen years to get Maud, cast off Sue, and claim the Lilly fortune. After trying to escape and returning to Lant Street because she has nowhere else to go, Maud becomes more pliable and agrees to learn to impersonate Sue. Mrs. Sucksby, meanwhile, has decided to stop being a baby farmer, and has sold or given away all of the babies in her care.

In Part Three, the narrative is again told by Sue, from her point of view. She relates the horrors of life and treatment in a Victorian Era madhouse, and her struggles to make the doctors and the brutal nurses believe that she is Susan Smith/Trinder, who cannot read or write. As she begins to succumb to the mind-numbing routine of the asylum, she receives a visit. Young Charles, the knife boy from Briar has been directed to the asylum in search of Richard Rivers, who has promised him a better life as his servant. When, upon arrival, he is told that Mr. Rivers is not there, but Mrs. Rivers is, he asks to see her. Thinking himself visiting a grand hotel, Charles is astonished to see Sue appear as Maud, and more amazed to learn that he is in a women's asylum.

Sue tells Charles the story of what has brought her to the asylum, and persuades him to help her escape, promising him that she will take him to Richard Rivers in London. With Charles' help, Sue escapes the asylum, and the two make their way to London.



Believing that Mrs. Sucksby will be desperately worried about her, Sue longs to return to her home, her substitute mother, and the life she has known. As they watch the house, learning the pattern of Gentleman's comings and goings, Sue discovers that Maud is also in the house, sleeping in her room. Determined to kill Maud for betraying her, she watches for Richard to leave the house. Sue and Charles then go to confront Maud and return to Mrs. Sucksby.

Sue's arrival is met with shock all around. Sue learns immediately that Richard has put the word out in the Borough that she betrayed him and fled with the money. Sue is not able to harm Maud, despite her deeply conflicted emotions. Maud and Mrs. Sucksby try to persuade Sue to leave before Richard returns. Before Sue and Charles can leave, Richard returns.

Before Richard can reveal the true plot, Maud and Mrs. Sucksby rush toward him to silence him. One of them has picked up a knife, and Richard is fatally stabbed. Charles flees the house screaming that there has been a murder, and soon the police arrive. The police find Richard dead and Mrs. Sucksby covered with his blood. They soon discover the bloody knife. Mrs. Sucksby confesses to the murder.

Everyone in the house is arrested. One by one, most are released. Mrs. Sucksby is convicted of murder and hanged. When Sue claims the woman's belongings, she finds the sealed document from Marianne Lilly hidden in the bodice of Mrs. Sucksby's dress. She sees that the document is addressed to her, and pays someone to read it to her. The document reveals the agreement between Marianne Lilly and Grace Sucksby, the exchange of the baby girls, and the disposition of her fortune. It also states that Maud is Mrs. Sucksby's daughter.

Understanding the truth at last, Sue perceives the outlines of the real plot, and her betrayal by Mrs. Sucksby. She also comes to understand that Maud was as much a pawn in the drama of the schemes as she. She concludes that Maud did nothing worse in betraying her than she herself had done in betraying Maud. Admitting the depth of her love for Maud, she sets out to find her. She makes her way back to Briar, despite being told that Maud had gone to France. What she discovers in the house is Maud, herself, working in her uncle's study, writing. Once Maud understands that Sue has not come to kill her, she reveals the contents of her uncle's books and of her own writing. Sue learns that Maud's training has made her adept at writing pornography. Maud confesses that she is writing of her dreams of a life with Sue. Now reconciled, their love for one another confessed, Maud begins to teach Sue to read the stories she writes.



Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

Part One of *Fingersmith* is comprised of Sue's memory of the events related in the book. It is written in Sue's voice and from her point of view. In the opening paragraph, the reader learns that Susan Trinder grew up in the home of Mrs. Sucksby, proprietress of a "baby farm," because she had been orphaned when her mother was hanged for murder. The other residents of the household are young thieves and a locksmith named Mr. Ibbs. Mr. Ibbs, in fact, deals in stolen goods.

Sue relates her memory of a series of events that occurred when she was 5 or 6 years old. She had been taken by a thief to beg at a local theatre. The girl took Sue into the theater for a performance of "Oliver Twist." Sue was terrified by the play, not knowing the difference, at that age, between reality and theatre. After chastising and slapping the girl, Mrs. Sucksby gently calms Sue and tells her that the action of the play could not bring her harm. She treats the play as reality, but provides a happy ending. This example of the woman's care for Sue demonstrates that Mrs. Sucksby was particularly fond of Sue and protected her from much of the harshness and risk of a petty thief's life in the Borough. In describing how Mrs. Sucksby, who was the only "mother" Sue had known, treated her, she said, "You treat jewels like that."

Sue also relates what she knows about her own mother. Pregnant, her mother came to the house of Mrs. Sucksby and Mr. Ibbs seeking a safe haven in which she could give birth to her child. After Sue's birth, the mother paid Mrs. Sucksby to keep Sue while she went off to do one last job that "would make her fortune." The job went badly, and a man was killed with the mother's knife when he tried to protect his property. A friend betrayed her and she was caught by the police. After a month in prison, she was hanged.

Life in the slums of the Borough in London is related through the eyes of a child who assists in the task of quickly refashioning stolen items to remove any identifying marks. The stolen items are then taken through dark and winding alleys and streets to others who will sell them in other parts of the city. Sue indicates that she learned the alphabet removing identifying monograms, and learned numbers and math working with stolen coins. Sue is aware that she is the only thing that has come into that house and remained.

On a winter night a few weeks after the Christmas Sue counted as her seventeenth birthday, the members of the household are gathered and engaged in their usual activity and banter. The tone of the evening is dramatically changed by the arrival of Gentleman. Although his name is Richard, or Dick, Rivers, he sometimes goes by the name Richard Wells. Gentleman indicates that he has come to see Sue. He lays out a plan to become rich with Sue's help. The plan is to have Sue go to the home of a young woman to become her new lady's maid. Gentleman will woo the young woman, marry her, take her money, believed to be about 15,000 pounds, and commit her to a



madhouse. In order to do this, he must find a way to marry her without permission of her eccentric uncle. The uncle's permission is necessary because she has not reached the age of majority. Sue's role in the plan is to go to the house, act as the young woman's maid, learn the routine of the household, gain the young woman's confidence, and help to persuade her to marry Gentleman and escape from her uncle's dark and dreary house. Sue is also to be instrumental in laying the groundwork and convincing others, after the marriage, that the girl is insane and must be committed for her own safety. Sue agrees to be an accomplice in this plan in return for the sum of 3,000 pounds and the young lady's clothes and jewels.

Sue is told that the young woman is quite innocent and ignorant of the ways of the world. She learns that this young woman's life is spent in a dark, damp house where her time is spent reading to her uncle and assisting him with a bibliography of his great library. Although Mrs. Sucksby does not protest Sue's decision to assist Gentleman in his plot, upon later reflection Sue thinks the woman might have been afraid for her to participate in this plan to become rich by ruining the life of this young girl. Thus, the decision is made in ignorance of the "dark and fearful things that were to follow."

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

In the first chapter, the reader is introduced to three of the main characters, Sue Trinder/Susan Smith, Mrs. Grace Sucksby, and Gentleman/Richard Rivers/Dick Rivers/Richard Wells. The tone of the book and the plot is established. The reader also learns a great deal about the point of view from which the first part of the book is narrated.

Sue believes that despite being treated like a jewel by Mrs. Sucksby, she is, indeed, not a jewel; "not even a pearl." She recalls being told by Mrs. Sucksby that her mother can be seen in her; that her fortune is yet to be made; and that her fortune will be the fortune of Mrs. Sucksby and Mr. Ibbs. Sue believes that she knows all about love. When Gentleman lays out his plan and asks her to be part of it, she sees the possibility of earning 3000 pounds as being worth the risk involved, for it will make her fortune as well as the fortune of Mrs. Sucksby.

When Sue completes her narration of her trip to the theatre, she notes that it was during her experience at the theatre that she first became aware of how the world is made. She understood, from that moment, that there are bad people and good people and those that could go either way. She places herself among the good people. It is important to note, as well, that when Mrs. Sucksby tries to calm Sue and explain away the fears introduced by the play, she causes Sue's confusion of acting and reality.

The night of Gentleman's arrival is described as a hard, dark night, with a fog that was like rain, and a rain that was more like snow. Dark nights are said to be good for thieves, and cold nights good for fences because thieves bargain quickly. Gentleman's knock at the door is preceded by a sudden gust of wind and harder rain that made the coals in the fireplace hiss. A baby was awakened, and the dog began to bark. Gentleman is



described, upon his first appearance, as a wet and dripping man, dressed in dark clothes. His eyes are hidden by the shadow of his hat.

Rivers is called 'Gentleman' because he had been raised to be a gentleman and had attended a school for gentlemen. After losing a large sum of money gambling, his father cut him off from the family fortune. Gentleman then supported himself as a thief and con-man. A good painter, he was also a good forger. His ability to mix with society provided opportunities to try to marry heiresses and to sell counterfeit stock. He is considered quite handsome and charming. When he lays out his plan to get the young heiress to marry him, it is done with great dramatic effect. He has considered every obstacle and detail and planned for every contingency. He justifies the wickedness of his plan by arguing that the girl's family made the money from the backs of the poor. He claims that, like Robin Hood, he will take the money from the rich and pass it back to the poor.

It should be noted that the cold, dark, damp weather and the fog arrive with Gentleman. Prior to his arrival, the only mention of darkness occurs with the description of the route taken by Mr. Ibbs with refashioned stolen goods. It is also notable that Sue is very explicit that in childhood, her hair was light and shining, but now it has turned dark. The kitchen of the house in the Borough is filled with light, but darkness surrounds the transactions that provide the goods passing through the kitchen. Finally, just as Gentleman arrived in dark clothing, on a dark and damp winter night, as he lays out his plan, the light in the kitchen is confined to the table where the group sits, surrounded by darkness.



Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

After Sue's decision has been made, Gentleman provides additional information and begins to prepare her for her role in his cruel plan. The reader learns that the old man's name is Christopher Lilly, his niece's name is Maud Lilly, and that they live somewhat west of London in a house called Briar. Gentleman creates a background story for Sue and writes to the young woman recommending Sue as her new lady's maid. The young woman, who is said to be infatuated with Gentleman, responds as expected. Sue is carefully trained in the work of a lady's maid, outfitted appropriately with a single dress, given a new hairstyle, and sent off alone to Briar and the unsuspecting Miss Maud Lilly. Sue is to use the name Susan Smith so she cannot be traced back to her life in the London Borough. With great sadness and many tears, Sue leaves the Borough and the protection and love of Mrs. Sucksby.

Sue compares leaving the warm kitchen of the house in the Borough to leaving heaven. On the night before her departure, she goes up to the room in which she was born and, from the darkness, looks out the window at the jail where her mother was hanged. Mrs. Sucksby joins her, asking if Sue is there, all alone in the dark. She tells Sue that she would not permit her to go, except that Gentleman, who is considered better than the average villain, will be there with her. It is notable that another reference to Sue's mother, whom she has claimed is nothing to her, is made by Mrs. Sucksby. As she calms Sue's fears and responds to her concern that this is a very dirty trick to play on someone, Mrs. Sucksby comments that Sue's mother would also have done this. Mrs. Sucksby also points out that Sue's mother would be proud of what Sue is about to do. When the time comes for Sue to depart, Mrs. Sucksby asks a blessing that Sue's work will make them rich; as her tears come, she turns away so as not to see Sue leave.

Gentleman delivers Sue to the train for her 40-mile trip to Briar. As Sue and Gentleman walk to the train, the fog grows thicker. Sue observes that it is possible to see all of the dark things of the city, like the barges on the river and the black dome of St. Paul's, but none of the fair things. These she says are lost or have become like shadows. The walls of the train terminal have been hung with black cloth because of the recent death of Prince Albert. She notes how gloomy it is. As they await the delayed departure of the train, Sue observes that Gentleman is just another stranger to her and that she is shy of him. She thinks, "You're nothing to me."

Sue arrives at Marlow in darkness and fog; the cart and driver are not there to meet her. She has arrived several hours late, because of train schedule delays due to the deep fog. As she waits, she observes perfect quiet and dark, and is cold and alone. Sue is finally met by William Inker, Mr. Lilly's groom, and taken through the countryside's quiet darkness to a house "with all its windows black or shuttered." Long before reaching the house, Sue hears the tolling of the clock bell at Briar. Her arrival is met by Mrs. Stiles, the housekeeper, and the other members of the house staff.



With the exception of the large kitchen, the house is dark, both inside and out. Her instructions about the rules of the house include instructions as to the disposition of various items. She notes that even the servants of a grand house have their own regimen of benefiting from items used by members of the household. This, she considers their unique form of thievery.

After being fed and instructed on the rules of the house, Sue is taken to her room and told that a second door opens into the bedroom of Miss Maud Lilly. She is informed that the young lady has trouble sleeping and calls her maid to her room when she cannot sleep. A maid, she is told, will sit outside the girl's bedroom for this night and serve breakfast the next morning because Sue, at this point, is still a stranger. After listening and hearing nothing from the girl's room, Sue retires for the night. In sharp contrast to a bed warmed for her by the hands of Mrs. Sucksby, Sue finds a cold, hard bed.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 introduces several important themes, images and symbols. The first and most obvious theme is darkness. Sue notes the darkness of the twisting streets and alleys they traverse to deliver refashioned stolen goods. She remarks that all she can see on the way to the train station is the dark things of London. Her journey from the train to Briar is made in quiet darkness. Sue also observes that everywhere she goes in Briar is dark. A second symbol is the deepening fog that shrouds Sue's journey to Briar. This image will recur throughout the novel. A third theme is thievery. Sue has characterized herself and the residents of the house on Lant Street as honest thieves. She notes the unique form of thievery practiced by the servants at Briar. Finally, there is the thievery that she and Gentleman will perpetrate upon the unsuspecting Maud.

Sue speaks of Mrs. Sucksby's kindness and the gentle way that she has treated Sue throughout her life. Most of what the reader learns about the woman is Sue's perception. Mrs. Sucksby is presented as Sue knows her. It is to be noted that Mrs. Sucksby has told Sue that her mother was a murderess, hanged within sight of the house. It is also to be noted that Mrs. Sucksby's reaction to the idea of Sue's role in this scheme has primarily been silence. Yet Mrs. Sucksby has pointed out to Sue that both Sue's fortune and her own will be made when the job is done. Sue compares the darkness and coldness of Briar to the warmth and light in Mrs. Sucksby's kitchen. She also notes the contrast between the cold sheets that await her at Briar and the sheets she has slept on, made warm by Mrs. Sucksby's hands. When Maud leaves the house on Lant Street, Mrs. Sucksby turns her back and says that she cannot watch Sue leave. The reader must either wonder why she feels this way and defer an interpretation, or conclude that she cannot bear to see Sue leave her. Perhaps it is an expression of her concern or fear for Sue in the scheme she is about to undertake.



Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Awakened at six the next morning, Sue finds herself in a room at Briar still darkened by heavy draperies. When the morning light is admitted to the room, Sue discovers a ceiling streaked brown by dampness, and the wood of the walls stained white. After breakfast with the servants, Sue has her first meeting with Miss Maud Lilly. She notes that in physical appearance they are quite similar. Sue concludes that Maud is very young and ignorant. She finds Maud's appearance startling. Maud is wearing a skirt so short that it shows her ankles, red slippers and clean white gloves.

set into the floor and warns her that she must never cross that point. She also learns that Maud wears gloves at all times and that they must be perfectly clean and white. Sue concludes that although Maud is different, she is not certain that she is stupid, as Gentleman had led her to believe. She concludes that Maud is simply bored and lonely and that she has had no one to teach her many things about life.

After Maud finishes lunch, they go for a walk on the grounds of Briar. Maud spends time cutting the grass around her mother's grave with a pair of scissors and cleaning the stone on the grave. Sue wonders what Maud would think to know that she carries bad blood, the blood of a thief and murderer. She describes her sense of Maud leaving and entering the house as a pearl being taken from an oyster shell and the shell closing back around it. The remainder of the afternoon is spent in Maud's sitting room. They pass the time sewing, chatting, and napping.

When the clock chimes seven, Maud goes to have dinner with her uncle and to read to him for an hour or two. Sue goes to the kitchen to eat her dinner with the other servants. The servants reveal that Mr. Lilly will only permit Maud to read to him and that it is he who requires her to wear gloves. Sue concludes that this is a very unusual kind of love and protection.

Once Sue has helped Maud get ready for bed and seen her tucked in, Maud asks her to leave the door to her room partly open. Sue watches Maud look at the picture of her mother, kiss it, and speak softly to it. At some time in the night, Sue is awakened by Maud calling for her previous maid. Maud is convinced that there is an intruder. After checking the hall and nearby rooms Sue realizes that the crinoline cage has popped open and made the noise that awakened them. She then tries to convince Maud that she was only dreaming. Maud is still frightened, however, and persuades Sue to sleep beside her in her bed. Sue compares this with her experience of sharing a bed with Mrs. Sucksby. She finds Maud to childlike.



The next morning, when Maud sees Sue in her bed, she asks if she had awakened her with bad dreams. After a day just like the one before, Maud asks Sue to sleep in her bed again to keep her warm and prevent bad dreams. This continues night after night. Sue believes this to be like sharing a bed with a sister, and reflects that she has always wanted a sister.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

In chapter three, the relationship between Maud and Sue begins to develop. The similarities of appearance are noted. Sue accepts Maud as a kind but innocent child whom she will help to destroy. She both likes her kindness and gentleness and recognizes the strangeness of her life in her uncle's home and the eccentricities of their lives lived out in its damp darkness. Maud tells Sue she is a good girl, and Sue reminds herself that she carries the bad blood of her mother. Maud, following her uncle's instructions, begins to make Sue "soft" and quiet. Sue is content that she is trusted and needed by Maud. She feels sorry for Maud, and the future that awaits her in the madhouse. Yet Sue remains resolute in her plan to assist Gentleman in his plot to destroy her.

The matter of reading arises again in this chapter. Maud's reaction when she learns that Sue cannot read is a telling counterpoint to Sue's earlier observation that there is no need to learn to read. When Sue suggests that she is willing to learn, Maud's response is surprising. Rather than agreeing to teach Sue to read, Maud refuses the idea and says that she will not allow it. Then she points out that if Sue were to live in Briar as the niece of her uncle, she would certainly know what it means to be unable to read.



Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 opens about two weeks later on the day of Gentleman's return to Briar. During this time, Sue has learned the routine of the house. She has become accustomed to the servants, and they to her. Sue becomes acutely aware of the many normal activities Maud has never experienced. She tries to introduce new experience and fun into Maud's afternoons by teaching her a few dance steps and by teaching her to play cards. She does this out of pity for Maud and because she wants to allay Maud's fears that Richard will be put off by her lack of training and experience.

Sue has learned that Maud always wears gloves, and that she cannot tolerate dirt or stains on her gloves. To keep Maud occupied on the afternoon of Richard's return, Sue stacks the deck of cards and offers to tell Maud's fortune. The fortune is intended to point to Maud's marriage to Richard Rivers, but the final card intended for the fortune, the two of hearts, is somehow dropped to the floor. Maud steps on the card intentionally when she discovers it, leaving a deep crease in the card.

On this afternoon, as Sue is dressing Maud for dinner with the gentlemen, Maud says she is tired of always seeing Sue in the same dress. She gives her one of her own dresses, which Sue alters and wears. When one of the servants comes to pick up the tea tray, she initially mistakes Sue for Maud.

Richard has introduced Maud to drawing and painting as a ruse to have time to speak with her alone. Upon his return, the lessons continue in Maud's sitting room each afternoon until Richard decides it is time to paint the nature elsewhere on the estate. This outing provides a better opportunity for Richard to win Maud's heart and move closer to completion of the plan to marry and defraud her. As the afternoon wanes, they return to the house, reaching the door just as a storm begins.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

Maud has come to trust and rely on Sue as maid, teacher, and friend. They begin to speak to each other of their feelings and desires. Sue continues to sleep beside Maud to prevent bad dreams. Gentleman becomes weary of the continued wait to take Maud from Briar, but pretends patience and understanding.

Sue, believing that she will only need to remain at Briar for about two weeks, also becomes agitated by the extended wait. During this time, Sue and Maud are becoming closer, even while Sue does everything expected of her to advance Gentleman's plan. Sue notes Maud's eagerness to be in Richard's presence and her innocent longing for him. She is, from time to time, unhappy about her role in Maud's destruction, but she recalls that Mrs. Sucksby said that the plan would make Sue's fortune and hers as well.



During their art lesson on the grounds of the estate, Maud has allowed Richard to kiss her wrist, in a tender area beneath her glove. Sue attaches great significance to this act. She comments that this act is more intimate than if Richard had kissed her mouth. Now Maud's gloves are more than an oddity. With this comment, the reader begins to see the gloved hands as symbolic of the cocoon of isolation and control in which Maud has been wrapped by her uncle. They become symbolic of her innocence.



Part 1, Chapter 5

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

It is the evening of the same day. The rain comes so hard that water begins to leak under the basement doors and the servants are forced to cut short their supper to place sand bags to keep out water. Maud dines with her uncle and Richard. When she returns to her darkened rooms, Sue is there awaiting her return. Contrary to Sue's expectation, Maud does not speak of her love for Richard or of the kiss.

The next morning, Maud asks Sue how her mother died. Sue tells her that her mother choked on a pin she swallowed. Maud then reveals that her mother died giving birth to her. She confesses her guilt that she is the reason for her mother's death. As they seek shelter from another storm in the doorway of a little chapel on the grounds, Maud reveals that Mr. Rivers has asked her to marry him. Maud tells Sue that her uncle will never give permission for her to marry Richard, because he will not give up her assistance with his indexing of the books. Sue sympathizes with Maud's tears of disappointment at being deprived of the chance to marry Richard. Trying to comfort Maud and to move toward the culmination of their plan, Sue assures Maud that Richard will find a way for them to marry without her uncle's approval. Maud then confesses that Richard has thought of a way, and swears Sue to secrecy. When Maud admits uncertainty, Sue tells her she must follow her heart. Sue suddenly realizes, however, that Maud does not love Richard. Instead, she is afraid of him. Believing she has no other choice, Maud tells Sue that she will marry Richard. She tells Sue that she must go with her and continue as her lady's maid. Then she tells Sue that she will be very rich once she is married. Sue compares Maud's cheek to a pearl.

That afternoon, the details of the plan to elope are detailed. All of the legal and other details have been planned. When Richard's work for Mr. Lilly is complete in three weeks, they will escape. Sue observes that Maud has three weeks to learn to want Richard. Sue threatens to tell Maud of the plan, but Richard persuades her that Maud will not believe her, that Maud is not afraid of him, but of her feelings for him, and that Sue cannot go back to the Borough empty-handed when she is there to make Mrs. Sucksby's fortune. Sue admits that though she is sorry for Maud, she is not sorry enough to try to save her. It is during this three-week wait that Sue realizes that she is in love with Maud. She becomes very nervous and afraid. On a night close to the time of their departure, Maud, in her innocence, asks Sue what Richard will expect of her on their wedding night. Sue begins to explain, as gently as possible to the gentle, innocent young girl. Spurred on by the desire to ensure that Maud would go through with the marriage, Sue shows Maud what to expect. Again, she speaks of Maud as a pearl.

After this night, a genuine tension and distance exists between the two girls. Sue believes that Maud thought it all a dream of Richard. She now knows the depth of her feelings for Maud. They become awkward in one another's presence. That night, Maud suggests that because the nights are growing warmer, it might be better if Sue slept in



her own bed. From this time forward, until the night of their departure, Sue sleeps in her own room.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

In this critical chapter, the weeks of preparation to carry out their plan have come to fulfillment. Sue recognizes that she not only cares for Maud, but that she is in love with her. She considers speaking to Mr. Lilly or to Maud to try to save Maud from the fate that awaits her. Her loyalty to Mrs. Sucksby, her desire to make her fortune, and her respect for Maud's innate goodness hold her back.

Sue does not want Maud to know her for the villain she perceives herself to be. She remains silent about Maud's fate, the plan to cheat her out of her fortune, and her love for Maud. She believes Maud might love her as well. She considers how different things might have been if she had told Maud the next morning of her feelings. She also considers, however, that Maud would not fit in on the streets of the Borough; she wonders how she would survive there with Maud at her side. She reminds herself several times that she is there to make Mrs. Sucksby's fortune. Richard reminds her of this, as well. By the end of the chapter, Sue has realized that she has waited too long and that it is too late to change the plan that is in place.



Part 1, Chapter 6

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

It is the day of departure from Briar. Gentleman leaves in the morning, and the remainder of the day proceeds like all other days. During the servants' supper, young Charles, the knife boy, is beaten for weeping over the departure of Gentleman. Sue returns to Maud's rooms and packs for their departure while Maud dines and reads to her uncle. Sue finds an odd glove belonging to Maud and decides to keep it as a reminder of her. When Maud returns, she is very agitated. Sue gives her some wine to calm her. Maud is dressed for travel and prepared to wait for the appointed time. As they wait in the dark, watching out the window, Maud leaves the room. Afraid to go after her, Sue frets and waits. Sue hears the clock chime twelve, and finally hears sounds indicating Maud's return. Maud says she wanted to visit her uncle's library one last time.

At last, they leave the house to meet Gentleman by the banks of the river. Sue greases the latches so they will slide open silently. Finally, they are outside, Sue leading Maud by the hand as they make their way across the estate to the river. As the clock chimes 12:30, they see the shape of a boat on the water. Gentleman has arrived to take them away in a boat. No one speaks while on the water. Two miles from Briar, Gentleman moors the boat and helps Maud onto a horse. About a mile away, they come to an old dark church. The vicar appears, dirty and unshaven, and performs the marriage. Sue and a local woman act as witnesses. The woman, Mrs. Cream, fetches something called honesty to serve as flowers for Maud to carry into the church. When the register is signed, Mrs. Cream takes them to her cottage, where Gentleman has taken rooms. Gentleman steps outside for a smoke while Sue gets Maud ready for bed.

Before Sue leaves the room Maud is to share with Gentleman, Maud kisses her, admitting that she did, indeed, know what had happened on a previous night. Pleading with Sue to remain with her as she had done before, Maud expresses the wish that she were still at Briar. Sue pulls away and fears that Maud will call out that Sue had kissed her and that Richard and Mrs. Cream would hear. Sue returns to her room, goes to bed in her coat, and buries her head between the pillow and the mattress.

The next morning, Gentleman comes to Sue's room and informs her that Maud wants her to dress her for the day. Sue finds Maud withdrawn; her eyes dark, her hands bare, and seemingly out of place in her own skin. Mrs. Cream appears with clean sheets, saying Gentleman has asked her to change them. Sue helps the woman change the sheets and sees the blood that proves the marriage has been consummated. Sue plays her part with Mrs. Cream, telling her that Gentleman has brought Maud to the country in the hope it will calm her. When Sue returns to Maud, Maud states that Mrs. Cream does not like her. She seems afraid of the woman. In light of what Sue has told her, Mrs. Cream now fears Maud, as well.



After a week, Gentleman finally sends for the doctor. The doctor, Sue concludes, is someone Gentleman already knows. He arrives, bringing another doctor with him, to evaluate Maud. Gentleman tells Maud the two gentlemen are actually painters, who are friends of his. They are brought first to Sue. They ask her questions, which she answers as she had rehearsed, but begs them not to hurt Maud and to treat her kindly. She reports that the doctors did not stay long with Maud. Before the "doctors" depart, they sign papers committing Maud to the asylum. When they have gone, Sue goes to Maud. Richard tells Sue that he thinks he has been wrong, that the quiet might have been the wrong thing for Maud, and that he has decided that she needs the noise and bustle of the city. He tells her that they will leave for London the next morning.

When morning comes, Richard, Maud and Sue board a coach for the journey to the train station. The coach takes them to a large house where the doctors are waiting. When the door of the coach is opened, Gentleman helps Sue out of the carriage. The doctor greets her as Mrs. Rivers. When Sue protests that she is not the person they want, she is chided about persisting in her delusion. Sue realizes that Gentleman has tricked her and intends to leave her at the asylum. When she appeals to Maud, she learns that Maud will betray her, play the role of Sue, and leave her to rot in the asylum. Sue realizes, now, that Maud was in on the plan from the start.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter marks a critical turning point in the novel. Maud and Sue, both afraid to confess their love for the other, caught in the tumble of events, and committed to their own needs, fail both in love and in friendship. Richard, Gentleman, has been successful in his plan. Sue has been duped. Maud has won her freedom. In an amazing plot twist, Sue is committed to the madhouse. As the chapter concludes, Sue observes that upon realizing what is happening, she cannot speak. Maud does speak, Sue notes, from behind hard eyes, proclaiming, in Sue's voice, her concern for her poor mistress.

It is at this critical juncture that Sue realizes that she, not Maud, has been the pigeon in Richard's plans. She, who proclaimed her knowledge of love and everything upon arrival at Briar, now understands that she, not Maud, is the innocent, subject to the cruel manipulations of the evil and greedy Richard. Her love for Maud is shoved aside by her anger and her feelings of betrayal.

Again, in this chapter, the reader sees the outcome of confusion between acting and reality. Although Sue does not see the significance at the time, she notices that after the wedding night Maud no longer wears her gloves. The reader now learns that there is a scheme within a scheme. The juxtaposition of appearance and truth and of knowledge and ignorance become fuller and more important.



Part 2, Chapter 7

Part 2, Chapter 7 Summary

Part two of the novel is narrated by Maud, in her voice, and from her point of view. Chapter 7 opens with Maud's mental image of her birth and her mother's death due to hemorrhage in childbirth. She relates that she spent the first ten years of her life in a madhouse, raised by the nurses who, she believes, loved her. It is here that she says she learned discipline and order, as well as the attitude and actions of insanity. Her expectation, at this young age, is that she will become a nurse when she is grown, and that she will spend her life tending to lunatics.

At the age of eleven, Maud is called to meet a gentleman. She indicates that the gentleman is dressed in black, including black silk gloves; the tip of his tongue, she notes, is black, as well. He observes her carefully, asking for a demonstration of her ability to read and write. When he asks her if she would like to come and live in his house, Maud says that would not like to do so. A weeping matron tells her that she must go to live with him.

The gentleman, Maud's uncle sends his housekeeper to the asylum to dress Maud for life in his house and to bring her to him. Maud is given bread and hard-boiled eggs for her lunch during the journey to Briar, but she refuses to eat them. Upon arrival, she observes that she is accustomed to the darkness, grimness, and solitude she finds at Briar, but is bewildered by the stillness of the house. She takes the servants to be other nurses, presuming this to be another house filled with lunatics. She is taken to a set of rooms and told that these had been her mother's rooms, and will now be hers. Maud understands, upon first hearing the chiming of the clock in the house, that it regulates the day, just as bells had regulated the day at the asylum.

She is taken then, to her uncle's library, a room in which the glass has been painted yellow to keep out light, and the walls covered with the spines of books. Maud is told that she must wear gloves to keep her hands soft. Her uncle requires soft hands handling his books so they will not be damaged. When Maud says she will not wear gloves, her uncle produces a line of metal beads covered in silk, used to hold down the pages of a book, and strikes both of her hands with it. When she cries out, he tells her she must keep silent. Then he asks her if she will remember to wear gloves in the future. The housekeeper is told to make her tame, to make her soft, to make her quiet. Her uncle tells her that she has been brought to him, not to make a lady of her, but to be a secretary to him.

Maud's uncle points out to her the figure of a hand that has been set into the floor. She is told that if she steps beyond that hand she, like any servant in the house, will be beaten in the eyes until they bleed. He says, "That hand marks the bounds of innocence here." When she is put to bed that night, she is left alone in darkness in her confusion and fear. Brenda, a kind servant, comes to her and tells her that she need not be afraid



and that there are not lunatics in the house. At Maud's request, the maid agrees to sleep in Maud's bed to calm her.

In an aside, Maud tells the reader "I am telling you this so that you might appreciate the forces that work upon me, making me what I am." The housekeeper, Mrs. Stiles, is quite cruel in her punishments of Maud and in the way in which she speaks to her. On her next day in the house, Maud is told that she is to remain in her rooms and sew. The gloves make it difficult to control the needle, and when she pricks her finger, Maud says she will not sew. Mrs. Stiles beats her. Accustomed to a lively and loving environment, Maud has difficulty adapting to the strict regimen of her uncle's house. The more she is restrained, the more she fights the restraint. The punishments accelerate until she is left in an icehouse for three hours. Near frozen, she is finally retrieved, amid great concern that her hands have been damaged. The servants fear Mr. Lilly's punishment if that should be the case.

Maud observes that during a period of about a month her uncle waits for her to be brought under control in much the same way that he might wait for a horse to be broken. After he threatens her with a knife, Maud concludes that perhaps children are like horses and can be broken. Her experience in the madhouse has given her an understanding of the patience of mania. She begins to understand that to continue to struggle against it will only cause her to be drawn deeper into the dark silence.

The next day her education begins. Maud is to be tutored by her uncle. She learns about bindings, type fonts, paper, ink, and the like. She is given items that bear her mother's monogram and is forced to use them. She is also taken to her mother's grave, which is in the loneliest part of the estate grounds, and is forced to keep the tomb neat. When one of the servants gives her a kitten, it is taken away and another servant is told to drown it.

Maud reveals that she hates her mother. She believes her mother had forsaken her. She reveals that she keeps her mother's portrait in a wooden box beside her bed. She removes it every night, and whispers to it that she hates her. In time, her uncle is satisfied with her progress in reading and writing. He begins to have her read his books to him and to the gentlemen who visit him. She notes that Mrs. Stiles and the men look at her strangely.

Finally, Maud is allowed to enter the library beyond the finger in the floor. She is now to assist her uncle in the preparation of his index. He tells her that she must protect the contents of the books from others, and keep them from the eyes of the untutored. He describes the books as poison, and tells her that he has trained her with small doses of poison, but now she is ready for the larger dose. Maud now understands what she has been reading that has provoked the interest and appreciation of the gentlemen who visit her uncle. Mr. Lilly has collected a vast library of pornography, the subject of the index or bibliography he is preparing. He trains Maud to read these books aloud, completely dispassionately.



Maud is fully aware that she has become an oddity. She knows that despite never having left her uncle's house, she is quite worldly. She says that she knows everything and knows nothing. One day, she uses her fingernail to scratch off a small crescent-shaped spot of the paint covering the inside of a window in her uncle's library. She observes that when she peeks out she is like someone looking through the keyhole of a cabinet of secrets, except that she is inside and wants to get out.

She notes for the reader that when Richard Rivers first arrives at Briar she is seventeen. She has been in her uncle's house now for six years. Richard, she says, offers a plot, and a promise. He tells a story about a gullible girl who can be tricked into helping her get out.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Analysis

In this important chapter, the reader learns who Maud is, what she is like, and what forces and factors have made her who she is. Her spirit and independence apparently completely broken, this young girl has learned from lunatics and a manic uncle. She understands patience, particularly the patience of lunacy. She has been held captive in a dismal house and forced to read pornography to her uncle and his friends. She has been trained to read without reacting to the content of the books that surround her. For this, she is considered quite rare and special by her uncle and his friends. Observing the reactions and whispers of the servants, she understands that she has become quite odd. She dreams of a different life, perhaps in London.

Maud longs to escape her confinement and experience the kind of life enjoyed by other girls her age. She has learned to observe the silence of the great dark house, to protect her hands with gloves at all times, except when handling the precious books. She has learned to be thoroughly obedient. Having known love in her early years, she hates her mother for abandoning her in death. Maud is constantly reminded, though, of her mother by living in the rooms she once occupied, as she uses her things, and tends her grave. Maud likes to walk beside the river because she knows it is the same river flowing through London. She believes the rotten punt that lies overturned on the bank of the river is a constant mockery of her in her confinement.

Again, the theme of knowledge and innocence or ignorance is paramount. The reader now understands why Maud wears gloves except when she is handling her uncle's books. Maud's feelings of abandonment by her mother reflect her loveless life of obeying rules in fear and darkness. Maud knows that she is now locked away from life and love in a world of secret knowledge that is everything and nothing. Maud blames her birth for her mother's death and holds herself responsible. Yet she blames her mother for abandoning her. Has she taken the next logical step and blamed herself for her odd and lonely isolation?



Part 2, Chapter 8

Part 2, Chapter 8 Summary

In chapter 8, Maud reveals that she has habitually tormented Agnes, her lady's maid. The reader is introduced to Mr. Hawtrey, a London publisher and bookseller who deals in pornography, and Mr. Huss, a friend of her uncle since their youth, who is also a collector of pornography. Finally, the reader meets Gentleman, known to Maud as Richard Rivers. The reader learns that Mr. Lilly has a second study in which he keeps pornographic engravings that he has collected along with his books. Richard immediately shows interest in Maud and initiates sympathetic conversation with her. He expresses concern over her gloved hands. Maud points out that it is the books, and not her hands, that her uncle wishes to protect. Richard expresses concern over the hours she spends working for her uncle and the loneliness of her existence. Mr. Hawtrey presents new book he has brought to Mr. Lilly. After dinner, Maud reads to the gentlemen from the book.

Maud reads as she has been taught, without blushing. The men respond with appreciation for her skills. Gentleman engages her in conversation, suggesting that she move closer to the warmth of the fire. She replies that she prefers to remain in the shadows. He comments that it is curious to see a lady who is unaffected by the content of the material she reads. Her response is that her level of familiarity with the subject makes her dispassionate. Their conversation confirms her unhappiness. Maud compares herself to her uncle's books. She notes that neither she nor the books are meant for common usage, but are kept separate from the world. Richard asks if she thinks often of her home in the madhouse. He also asks if she thinks of her mother and feels her mother's madness in herself.

Startled by this conversation, Maud becomes distressed. Agnes is called to escort her to her rooms. Feeling dislocated, Maud wonders what Richard Rivers knows about her and how he knows it. Most important, she wonders why he has sought her out. In time, Maud calms, reorients herself, and retires to her bed. This night, as she performs the ritual of looking at her mother's picture, she hears Richard's question in her mind about whether she thinks of her mother and feels her madness.

Later in the night, Maud is awakened by someone opening the door of the house. When she goes to her window to see who is outside, she sees Richard Rivers smoking a cigarette and counting the windows of the house, calculating the way to her room. When he arrives at the door to her sitting room, Maud admits him. Expecting him to have romance on his mind, Maud discovers that he makes no move to touch her, but encourages her to sit and listen as he tells her what he knows about her. He knows that she will inherit her mother's fortune when she marries. He tells her the actual value of her inheritance. He suggests that if they marry, it can be theirs. Richard admits to Maud that his initial intention was to come to Briar and seduce her and marry her, and then dispose of her. He admits, however, that having seen her life, he knows that an attempt



to seduce her would be an insult, for it would simply make her another kind of captive. Then he tells her that he wants to free her. Confessing himself a villain, he suggests that they must use deceit to get her away from her uncle and marry in secret.

Richard lays out his plan to Maud. They will find a way to get rid of her maid, Agnes. This will allow them to bring in a girl Richard knows from London to act as her maid. This girl, he says, resembles Maud. He describes her as a sort of thief who is not too clever. He indicates that they will offer her a small portion of Maud's inheritance for her participation in the plan. She is to be told that Maud is quite innocent and that she is needed to assist in her seduction. Richard will tell her that the plan is to marry Maud and commit her to an asylum. Then he explains, in truth they will use her to help them escape and marry. They will then convince the doctors that the girl is Maud and is suffering from a deep delusion. Offering Maud her freedom, he asks for her trust, her silence, and half of her inheritance.

Maud has reservations about the feasibility of the plan and about relegating this young girl to a madhouse for the rest of her life. In the end, her desire for freedom from her uncle overcomes any scruples, and she agrees to the plan. She then tells Richard what to say to her uncle to secure the position of organizing and mounting his artwork. Richard leaves her sitting room. She remains there and sleeps, dreaming of moving across the water in a boat.

Part 2, Chapter 8 Analysis

In chapter 8, the reader learns that the plot of the novel is taking a new turn. A second plan of deception has been introduced. Sue will be unaware of this plan, and will be the person destroyed as it plays out. Richard and Maud will lead their lives, sharing equal portions of Maud's inheritance, married in name only. Sue will be sacrificed for Maud's freedom and Gentleman's greed. The reader now has a more complete picture of Maud and the forces that have shaped her and drive her to want to escape Briar. Richard Rivers has come into the house and offered the answer to her dreams of escape from this prison and a normal life in London. Noting that the girl who will be brought into the plan means nothing to her, Maud is prepared to play her role and make Richard's fortune.

There is now a plot within a plot. Maud and Richard know the details of both plans. Sue knows the details of the internal plot, but remains ignorant of the external plot. Sue will accept and play out her role in expectation of making her fortune and Mrs. Sucksby's. Maud and Richard will play their roles, using Sue as the disposable pawn in the game that will result in Maud's freedom and Richard's fortune.

With the introduction of another plot surrounding the plot Sue believes herself involved in, the importance of the distinction between acting and reality becomes more acute. Richard raises the question of inherited madness, which seems to parallel Sue's concern with bad blood. Maud prefers the shadows, the darkness, where she is partly protected from the leering gazes of the men who visit her uncle.



Part 2, Chapter 9

Part 2, Chapter 9 Summary

The next morning, when she goes to her uncle's library at the appointed time, Maud is sent away by her uncle because he and Richard are working with the engravings. She learns that Mr. Hawtrey and Mr. Huss are leaving, but that Richard is staying on. Hawtrey compares her to Galatea, a nymph sculpted in marble. Richard reveals that he has been hired by Mr. Lilly to do the work of organizing and mounting the engravings.

Maud admits her fear of escaping Briar, and notes that it is impossible for her to speak with Richard about his plan. Richard introduces the idea of teaching Maud to paint in order to break the boredom of her days, now that he is spending so much time with her uncle and his pictures. Her uncle agrees, and the lessons begin, with Agnes near at hand as chaperone.

As the day approaches when Richard must return to London to purchase materials for his work with the pictures, he decides it is time to get rid of Agnes. He tells Maud that he will go to Agnes' room that night, and that she should not come if called. The next morning, Agnes awakens feeling ill. Her mouth is swollen and red. She tells Maud that it is scarlet fever. Lest infection spread, Agnes is moved to the attic. The decision is made after several days to send her home. As she departs, Maud kisses her wrist in farewell. Agnes tells her she will not have such an easy time abusing Richard.

Three days after Richard's departure, as Maud dreams of a life in London, she receives a letter from Richard, informing her that Sue has agreed to his plan. She burns his letter and immediately sends a reply, telling Richard to send Sue to her. Sue, she believes, will arrive in two days time. Of course, she is distressed by Sue's late arrival, but very relieved when she hears her enter the house.

The next morning, the two girls meet. Each takes the measure of the other. As Mrs. Stiles leaves the room, Maud torments Sue by telling her that Mrs. Stiles, whose own child died in infancy, showed her a mother's love. Maud explains Sue's duties to her. She remarks that she believes Sue to be a good girl. Maud then learns that Sue cannot read or write. She refuses to teach Sue to read, and insists that she will not permit it. Maud is distracted while reading to her uncle, wondering what Sue is doing in her rooms in her absence. When Sue arrives at Mr. Lilly's library to take Maud back to her rooms for lunch, Sue is told about the finger in the floor, and Maud reflects on Sue's innocence. Maud reveals that Sue thinks her uncle is writing a dictionary.

Maud gives Sue her lunch and watches her eat, thinking how Sue has come to Briar to swallow her up. That night, when Maud takes out her mother's picture before sleeping, she whispers to it, "That's her. She's your daughter now." During the night, Maud is frightened and begs Sue to stay with her and sleep in her bed. Sue does as she is asked. When Maud finally calms and begins to settle into sleep, Sue says, "Good girl."



Maud reflects upon how long it has been since anyone considered her good. Over the succeeding days, their routine becomes smooth. Maud notes the kindness and gentleness with which Sue treats her. Maud has made up her mind that she must despise Sue or she will not be able to trick her. Sue has the cook change Maud's lunch to soup because she dislikes eggs, and has the maid bring additional coals for the fire in her rooms to keep her warm. She even smoothes out a pointed tooth for Maud with a silver thimble.

The chapter ends with the arrival of a letter from Richard in which he informs Maud that his work in London is complete. He expresses his impatience, and informs her to expect his return to Briar.

Part 2, Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter grants great insight into Maud's character, her desperate need to escape Briar, and her approach to playing the role of the kind and innocent heiress with Sue. The chapter touches upon several key themes of the novel: what is goodness, what is innocence, what is truth. At this point in the development of the story, all of the main characters are playing a role. Sue is playing her role as the caring, kind lady's maid who must endear herself to Maud to carry out her part of the plan to trick Maud, consign her to an asylum, and win her fortune. Maud is acting her role as a kind and compassionate, but very innocent young girl, experiencing the first blush of romantic interest in Richard. Maud builds Sue's impression of her dependence upon her for not only her service, but for security from her dreams and her fears. Richard is playing his role both with Mr. Lilly and with Sue, carefully pulling everyone into his plot.

Amidst all the role-playing, Maud cannot deny being drawn to Sue as a caring friend. Sue makes her feel safe as she sleeps. Sue listens to her. Sue is gentle with her. Sue has cared for her and her needs in ways Maud has not experienced. She even admits that she has not thought much about Richard and the plan, as her life has been filled with Sue's presence and attention. As much as she is learning to care for Sue, Maud reminds herself that she must maintain a distance and a disdain for Sue or she will not be able to carry out her role in the plan and commit Sue to a madhouse in her name.



Part 2, Chapter 10

Part 2, Chapter 10 Summary

After the letter from Richard arrives, Sue offers to tell Maud's fortune. Maud has seen her sorting cards, but has said nothing. As Sue tells Maud's fortune, Maud observes that one of the cards, the two of hearts, has fallen to the floor. Maud thinks of one of the hearts as her own and grinds it into the carpet, making a crease in the card. In Sue's narrative, the reader learned that Sue intended this to be the last card in the fortune. It was to be the card denoting a love relationship.

The next morning Maud observes that Sue's hands have grown whiter and smoother and that they have healed her nail biting. She becomes resolved to complete the tasks she was to accomplish before Richard's return. Maud tells Sue she is tired of seeing her in the same dress and gives her one of her gowns and pins a brooch over her heart. When one of the other servants enters the room, she mistakes Sue for Maud. When Richard arrives later in the day, he comments that had he not known better he would take Sue for a lady. Seeing Richard and Sue playing out their assigned roles, sends Maud to her room, shaking with laughter.

At dinner, Richard offers to resume Maud's painting lessons. They agree that she will show her uncle her work at the end of three weeks. Maud commits herself to what she must do in the weeks to come. She must give the appearance of falling in love with him, she must give the appearance that he has won her heart, and confess that fact to Sue. Maud admits that she finds it difficult to look at Sue, knowing what Sue believes she will soon do to Maud, and knowing what, in truth, she will do to Sue.

On a day when Richard suggests that it is time for Maud to begin to paint from nature, they walk some distance in the gardens of the estate. Richard reinforces Maud's commitment to the plan. Maud is growing increasingly agitated by the stress of the plan. She delays action, day after day. During this time, Maud and Sue grow closer. Maud notes that several nights, as Sue lies sleeping beside her, she wants to reach out and touch her.

On another outing on the grounds, when Richard is becoming more impatient and Maud continues to delay, Richard observes Maud as she watches Sue sleeping. When Maud looks at Richard, she says she sees in his eyes how much she wants Sue. Richard sees what is happening and quickly draws her aside to remind her that she has committed herself to his plan. Maud tells Richard that she might not want to go through with the plan. Richard tells Maud that he can tell Sue of her feelings, and that when he does, she will laugh. With this threat, Maud agrees to carry out the plan. After making a noise to bring Sue to them, Richard makes a show of kissing Maud on the wrist within Sue's sight. Maud says that this kiss makes her shudder with fear and revulsion because Richard has made her see herself. She is dismayed that Sue believes she has fallen in love with Richard. Yet she also fears that Sue will detect her feelings for her.



Later, Maud plays her role, admitting to Sue that Richard has asked her to marry him. Sue plays her part in encouraging Maud, observing that Richard loves her. Maud is in deep conflict. Sue observes that Maud does not love Richard and that she does not know what to do. Maud asks her what she should do, and playing her role perfectly, Sue tells her that she must marry Richard and do as he says. Maud still fears that Richard will tell Sue of her feelings but Maud has begun to have dreams of making love with Sue. One night, Maud initiates a conversation that will lead Sue to make love to her.

Thinking that she and her world have changed when she realized she is in love with Sue, Maud is now overcome with the knowledge that she has been brought to life and is thoroughly changed. The next morning, Maud and Sue are awkward with each other. When Sue asks how she slept, Maud replies that she slept well, but that she had a sweet dream and that Sue was in it. Sue suggests that the dream must have been of Mr. Rivers. Maud now feels that she cannot cheat Sue and wants to tell her everything and build another plan to be together. She remains silent, realizing that she cannot reject Richard's plan lest she lose everything, including Sue, and spend the rest of her life at Briar. She convinces herself that it is love that makes her move ahead with the plan that will harm Sue.

Part 2, Chapter 10 Analysis

In this chapter, the tension builds. Maud realizes her love for Sue, but remains silent. She wants to save Sue, but realizes that if she does not go along with Richard's plan, she will lose her chance for freedom and will also lose Sue. Once again, Richard has had the good luck and the sharp observational skills to recognize Maud's love for Sue and use it to control her. Maud has confessed to Sue that she does not love Richard, but she indicates that she has nothing if she does not marry him. She knows there will not be another chance for her to escape. At the same time that Maud recognizes her own love for Sue, she becomes more acutely aware of what he plans to do to Sue and, in turn, becomes more nervous in Sue's presence. The forces surrounding Maud have now hardened her resolve to carry through the plan.

Seeing these same events through Maud's eyes deepens the question, what is truth? One must also wonder which of the girls actually initiates the lovemaking, and whether either of them is changed by her love for the other.



Part 2, Chapter 11

Part 2, Chapter 11 Summary

It is now the day of Maud's departure. Richard leaves early in the day. Maud wonders if she will become a ghost, haunting the dark halls and stairways of Briar. She wonders if everything will continue as it has been, even in her absence. Maud realizes that, although she will escape this prison, it will haunt her forever.

Maud and Sue select the clothing and jewelry they will pack for the future. They are still awkward in each other's presence and do not look one another in the eye. After lunch, they walk the grounds of the estate and visit the grave of Maud's mother. Maud reflects that she has surrendered to Richard's plan, in much the same way that she once surrendered to her uncle's control. She feels that the plan and her escape are set more by Richard's desires than her own. When she returns from dinner with her uncle, she feels almost as if she is in a daze. She lets Sue dress her without caring what she will wear. They wait for the appointed hour, knowing that Richard is on his way.

Late at night, when she is certain her uncle has retired to his bed for the night, Maud finds an opportunity to leave while Sue checks the bags she has packed. Maud goes to her uncle's bedroom and takes his razor and his watch chain, to which is attached the key to his library. After watching her uncle sleep for a moment, she makes her way to the library. She retrieves the first book he had her read and slices the pages with the razor. Although she is not explicit about the number of books she ruins, the impression is that she damages several books.

By the time Maud returns to her rooms, and to Sue, the clock has struck midnight. Sue hurries Maud into her cloak and out the door. She takes her through the servants' halls and out across the grounds. Maud notes that the sky is clear and that the moon makes part of the river look like silver. Richard keeps the boat in the darkness as he comes to them. Maud reflects that it matches the boat of escape she has seen in her dreams. Maud notes that no one speaks in the boat, and only Richard moves to row the boat. "We glide, softly," she says, "in silence, into our dark and separate hells."

Maud relates her dim and foggy memory of the ride to the church and the wedding. She says her first clear memory is of being in a room in which Sue is undressing her and putting her to bed. Taunting her, Richard stands beside the bed and shakes it for a few moments. Richard ridicules Maud for being afraid of him and for thinking he could want her. Richard then cuts his wrist and smears blood on the sheets. When he has taunted Maud enough, Richard settles into an armchair and sleeps. When Maud finally sleeps, she dreams of Briar.

Sue comes to Maud's room each morning to bathe and dress her, to bring food and to take away untouched plates of food. Still the two women cannot look each other in the eye. Richard grows impatient and irritable. He notes one day how pale and thin Maud



has become, while Sue looks healthier each day. He instructs Maud to have Sue wear Maud's best gown the next day. Maud complies. She weeps, and pretends fear and nervousness. While she does, she watches for some reaction from Sue, but sees none.

After what Maud perceives to be two or three weeks, the doctors finally come. Richard takes them first to speak with Sue. Richard has told the doctors that Sue is Maud, and that, in her madness, she thinks that she is Sue, the maid. Richard then brings the doctors to speak with Maud. He introduces her as Susan, his wife's maid. Maud plays her role, convincing the doctors that she is indeed Susan, deeply distressed by her mistress' condition. Papers are produced and signed. When the doctors leave, Maud calls Richard a devil and tells him she hates him. He responds that they are more alike than she knows, and that if she hates him, she must also hate herself.

Sue comes the next morning to dress Maud. Maud treats Sue with great kindness and appreciation. Sue is wearing the gown Maud has given her. Sue packs the two bags as instructed, one for London, the other for the asylum. When Sue leaves the room, Maud moves a few items from one bag to the other in order to have things with her. Without Sue's knowledge, Maud also takes out the silver thimble that Sue had used to smooth out her pointed tooth.

The coach arrives and as they journey, Maud thinks of this trip as an undoing of her last coach ride from a madhouse to Briar with Mrs. Stiles. They reach the asylum and Sue is handed over to the doctors. As the coach drives away, there is silence. Maud finds a pair of gloves and puts them on. Maud has never ridden in a train, but must now do so to reach London. When they arrive, Richard hires a cab. Maud believes he is taking her to his house. She is appalled by the squalor surrounding them as they make their way through the streets of London. When the cab finally stops, Maud sees where she is and asks if this is the right place. Richard informs her that they cannot live grandly yet and must still be careful in case her uncle has sent someone to find them. Not knowing where she is, or how to get back to the train, Maud is at Richard's mercy and follows him through a twisting labyrinth of streets to a house where he knocks on the door. They are admitted into a warm kitchen filled with people who seem very strange to Maud. In silence, she is observed by everyone in the room. Then a white-haired woman in a black taffeta dress approaches Maud and studies her carefully. She then tells Richard he has been a good boy.

Part 2, Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter provides much information that was missing from Sue's account of the escape and execution of Richard's plan. Maud is able to provide a number of details, in addition to providing some indication of her state of mind and emotional state as Richard's plan is carried out. In particular, the reader see the depth of Maud's fear and hatred of Richard, her sense of being helpless to alter the course of events once they are set in motion, and her inability to tell Sue of her love and save her from the fate that awaits her at the madhouse. The reader can almost feel the growing awkwardness and guilt that keeps pushing Sue and Maud apart.



Upon arrival in London and the journey into the slums, Maud realizes that Richard has deceived her, as well as deceiving Sue. Though she does not yet know the extent and shape of that deception, her journey through dark, winding alleys to a strange house in the slums foreshadows both the deception and the twisting developments in the final stages of implementing Richard's plan. Maud wonders what has happened to Sue and how she is being treated. Taken into the depths of a strange city, at this moment, Maud has traded captivity by her uncle for captivity by Richard.

Because of Sue's previous narrative, the reader is able to recognize immediately the house to which Richard has taken Maud. The reader recognizes that Maud has entered the home of Mrs. Sucksby, the woman in black taffeta. The conversation between Maud and Richard in the coach continues the ongoing and underlying conversation about good and evil. Maud has labeled Richard a devil. Upon their arrival in Lant Street, and Mrs. Sucksby's inspection of Maud, Mrs. Sucksby says to Richard, "Good boy."

In addition to providing Maud's point of view, this chapter makes several of the themes and symbols of the novel more poignant: darkness, acting and truth, good and evil, Maud's gloved hands, captivity and imprisonment. Maud does not perceive Mrs. Sucksby's kitchen as warm. Rather she finds it hot.



Part 2, Chapter 12

Part 2, Chapter 12 Summary

While Mrs. Sucksby continues to touch Maud's face and examine her features, Maud becomes aware of her surroundings - the conversations around her, the crying babies, and the barking dog. Someone has asked about Sue and been told that she stayed behind to tend to a few final details. Maud gathers her senses, pushes Mrs. Sucksby away and demands that Richard tell her where she is and why she is here. First, she learns that this is Mrs. Sucksby's house and not Richard's. Second, she learns that this is where Sue was raised among thieves. Third, they tell her they consider themselves honest thieves.

Maud leaps to the conclusion that Richard plans to steal all of her inheritance, and that he has brought her there to be killed. She also concludes that Sue has been part of the plan all along. She becomes frantic in an effort to escape, threatening to find the police. Maud picks up a baby, thinking it Mrs. Sucksby's child, and threatens to kill it. Mrs. Sucksby responds with indifference. Realizing that she is threatening to harm a child, Maud puts the baby down. Maud becomes indignant at the suggestion that she will share a meal with the people gathered in the room, and proclaims that she would not even have them as servants. The young man, John Vroom, cuts open her bag and begins to examine the contents.

Richard and Mrs. Sucksby take Maud upstairs to a room that has been prepared for her. When all three are inside the room, the door is locked. Clearly, Maud is both surprised and frightened. She accuses Richard of planning to take her inheritance, retrieve Sue, and kill her. Richard tries to calm her and tells her that although he would not hesitate to kill her, Mrs. Sucksby would not like it. Maud then asks Richard if he does everything Mrs. Sucksby tells him. He replies that in this case, he does. He then tells her that the entire scheme was devised by Mrs. Sucksby. As Maud tries to understand how Mrs. Sucksby would know of her and of her fortune, Richard tells her that Mrs. Sucksby knew her almost before anyone else.

Locked into a bedroom that will now be hers, Maud is told an incredible story by Richard and Mrs. Sucksby. It is revealed to Maud that: Her mother was not mad, and did not die in childbirth in a madhouse. Her real mother was not Marianne Lilly. Sue is the daughter of Marianne Lilly. Mrs. Sucksby served as midwife for Sue's birth because Marianne was unmarried. Shortly after the birth, Marianne's father and brother came to get her. Before they arrived, Mrs. Sucksby switched Sue for one of the babies in the baby farm and kept Sue to raise her. Mrs. Sucksby is in possession of a document written by Marianne Lilly which explains the course of events, and leaves her fortune equally divided between the two girls. This document is to be opened on Sue's eighteenth birthday, which is a few months away. Marianne's father and brother forced Marianne to write a will leaving her entire fortune to her daughter. A scheme was devised by Mrs. Sucksby to have Gentleman marry Maud, have Sue committed to the madhouse, and



bring Maud to Mrs. Sucksby. Maud is to learn enough about life in the Borough to be able to impersonate Sue before lawyers. Sue's fortune will be claimed and divided between Richard and Mrs. Sucksby. Maud is to remain with Mrs. Sucksby and teach her the ways of a lady.

As Maud begins to absorb this information, she fears for Sue, whom she now realizes was duped by Richard and Mrs. Sucksby, just as she has been. Maud also realizes that once the money is claimed, she will no longer be necessary and might be killed.

Part 2, Chapter 12 Analysis

This chapter marks a crucial turning point in the development of the plot of this novel. Maud has now been given the information that will change her life, change her identity, change her self-perception, and will change her expectations. Now she knows that both she and Sue have been tricked to serve the greed of others. Now she knows that there has been a scheme within a scheme within a scheme. She glimpses the coldness of Mrs. Sucksby; the woman Sue believes loves her as if she were her own child. When Maud confronts Mrs. Sucksby, the woman says Sue would have died long ago on the streets of the Borough without her care and protection. She asks Maud what use she could possibly have for a common girl when she becomes wealthy. Dumbfounded by Mrs. Sucksby's statement that she has done all of these things for her, Maud asks how this is possible. Mrs. Sucksby responds by asking how she could not.

Maud is astounded that Mrs. Sucksby could cheat Sue, whom she raised from infancy, and leave her in an asylum. Mrs. Sucksby reminds Maud that she was the one who left Sue at the asylum. Then she asks Maud if she thinks she is her mother's daughter in doing so. This theme is at least alluded to throughout the novel. It was a common belief during the Victorian period that children inherited the goodness or evil of their parents through "bad blood". Sue has previously raised the question herself, wondering if she inherited the bad blood of her mother, the murderess. Richard has taunted Maud with the same belief by asking if she feels her mother's madness rising up in her. The Lant Street denizens think of Richard as being a cut above the other thieves because he was born a gentleman.

The key developments in this pivotal chapter are these: (1) Maud understands that both she and Sue have been drawn into a plot and cheated. (2) Maud's identity and her social status have been dramatically changed. (3) Maud has escaped imprisonment on her uncle's estate only to become a prisoner of Richard and Mrs. Sucksby in the house on Lant Street. (4) The notion of bad blood finding expression in the next generation truly emerges into prominence. (5) The question of who is good and who is evil continues to be asked with new implications.



Part 2, Chapter 13

Part 2, Chapter 13 Summary

Maud's memory of the night that follows is somewhat disjointed. She is aware of Mrs. Sucksby lying down to sleep beside her; as the reader knows she previously slept with Sue. She awakens before Mrs. Sucksby and tries to find the key to the door so she can escape. When Mrs. Sucksby rises, Maud is encouraged to go downstairs to breakfast, but refuses. Mrs. Sucksby brings her a breakfast tray. Reminding herself that she must remain strong if she is to escape, Maud eats. She notes that her gloves have become stained, but she has no others. Maud is drugged with medicine and brandy; she passes the following days in a stupor.

Maud is offered clothing. She hopes that once dressed, she will be able to escape. She is brought three dresses that she finds too bright and utterly hideous. She is brought colored petticoats and dressed in a violet silk dress. Her stained gloves are taken and replaced with new ones. When she asks for shoes, she is told that one needs shoes only if one is going walking. Since she has nowhere to walk, she is given white silk slippers. Mrs. Sucksby begins to rifle through Maud's things, and she comes across a small bag of jewelry. Mrs. Sucksby tells her the jewels are inappropriate and will be sold. In their place, she is told she will have glass beads. Mrs. Sucksby takes the diamond brooch and pins it to her own dress.

As they make their way downstairs, Maud tries to remember which door opens to the street. She soon discovers that all of the doors are kept locked to prevent her escape. Maud's temper flares with both Richard and Mrs. Sucksby. When Mrs. Sucksby asks her to be less vulgar in her speech, Maud replies that Mrs. Sucksby's wishes mean nothing to her. Each night when Maud goes to bed, her clothes are locked up. She considers that she needs money to make her escape. Then she remembers the men who visit her uncle. She recalls that Mr. Hawtrey has a shop in London on Holywell Street and believes that if she can find her way to him, he will help her find Sue.

When she tries to escape, she is easily caught and brought back to the house. Richard takes her to her room and hits her. He reminds her that she once told him she was good at waiting, and tells her that they have been waiting and working for this for seventeen years. During the days of waiting, Maud comes to understand the business that is conducted in the house, and realizes that she is the greatest moneymaking thing ever to come through the house. She is asked if there is anything they can bring her that will cheer her. They interpret her reaction as an indication that she would like to have a bird in a cage, and John Vroom is sent out to get it.

In the month that Maud has been in the house, no one has spoken of Sue. One day, Dainty comments that it is strange that Sue has not yet returned. Mrs. Sucksby tells the girl that Sue will never return because she has betrayed Richard and run away with the money. This information is also passed on to everyone in Lant Street. Maud finds



herself taking out the picture of Marianne Lilly and trying to see Sue's features in her face. Mrs. Sucksby takes the picture, telling Maud to stop thinking about the things that have already been done and to focus on the future.

Richard begins to leave the house each day. One day he returns with a letter from Mr. Lilly. A postscript on the outside of the letter, written by Mr. Lilly's servant reveals that the old man has fallen ill. He says the servants thought it was because of Maud's departure until they read the letter. The letter was written within days of Maud's escape from Briar. In it, the old man wishes Richard well with Maud. He says her mother was a strumpet and that she has her mother's instincts, even if she does not have her mother's face. The old man admits that her loss will affect the progress of his work, but he says he is comforted by the thought that Richard knows how to treat a whore.

Maud is deeply upset by the letter. She admits that she is not sure whether she is upset by her uncle's words or by the support that they give to Mrs. Sucksby's story. After a fit of weeping, Maud resigns herself to the situation, understanding that she will say whatever they ask of her to see an end to her imprisonment.

Maud has an opportunity to escape. She runs through the city in one of the gaudy dresses provided by Mrs. Sucksby with no hat and only slippers on her feet. Amid the stares of the people around her, she tries to find her way to St. Paul's Church, recalling from a map that Holywell Street is in that vicinity. Asking directions of people she passes, she finally finds her way to the bridge that crosses the Thames to St. Paul's. While she sits on the bench catching her breath and attending to her slippers, she is approached by a man who mistakes her for a whore. He offers her a ride in a hired coach. When he presumes to touch her as she climbs into the coach, she realizes her mistake and tells him she has decided to walk. She escapes and crosses the bridge and continues to make her way to Holywell Street with directions from other people on the street.

She finds Holywell Street and Mr. Hawtreys shop. As she steps inside, the men looking at books turn and stare at her. She asks a clerk to tell Mr. Hawtreys she wishes to see him. She sends a note to him by the clerk, identifying herself as Galatea. Eventually an astounded Mr. Hawtreys recognizes her and takes her to his office. Hawtreys is extremely anxious that Maud has come to his shop. He is concerned what his customers will think, and what his wife and daughters will think. While in the office, however, Maud learns that Hawtreys has a staff that writes and publishes pornography. Though he cannot provide real assistance, Hawtreys hires a coach and a woman to take her to a place where she can get a meal and a place to sleep.

When they reach their destination, Maud learns that it is not a hotel, but a home for destitute gentlewomen. The woman insists that this is where she has been told to bring Maud and leave her. Maud now realizes that she has nowhere to go. In exchange for her petticoats, the woman pays the driver to take Maud back to Lant Street. Mrs. Sucksby welcomes her home, tells her how they had worried about her, and removes her filthy clothes and puts her to bed. Maud reflects to Mrs. Sucksby that she has nowhere else to go and no one to turn to. As Mrs. Sucksby comforts Maud, the light falls



on her face in a way that causes Maud to notice the color of her eyes and her facial features. Mrs. Sucksby calms her with the words, "my own dear girl." Maud's narrative ends with the note that Mrs. Sucksby hesitates, and then speaks.

Part 2, Chapter 13 Analysis

This chapter, which concludes Maud's narrative, has revealed another surprising element of the plot. Maud is Mrs. Sucksby's natural daughter. The reader can understand why Mrs. Sucksby has been planning and scheming for seventeen years on Maud's behalf. She has ensured that her own daughter would be raised in privilege with the manners and demeanor of a lady. She has cast Sue aside, sacrificing her for the love of her own daughter and the desire of every mother, to see her child wealthy and happy. Maud now knows the answer to her questions of why she was brought to Lant Street and why Mrs. Sucksby loves her. She has been spared the cruel and hard life of the streets, as her mother has planned for the moment when the inheritance would be claimed and the years of separation could be brought to an end.

Maud is still imprisoned and remains the puppet of the plans and ambitions of others. She is like the yellow bird in a cage that is obtained for her. She has lost the life she knew, she has lost her cherished freedom, she has lost Sue, and she has lost her identity. Her uncle has visited the sins of her mother on Maud and cast her aside. The reader must wonder what Mrs. Sucksby's next words will be.



Part 3, Chapter 14

Part 3, Chapter 14 Summary

In Part 3, Sue's narrative resumes. She relates her astonishment upon being left at the asylum and her efforts to explain to the doctors who she is. The more she protests, the more she confirms the belief of the doctors that she is mad. When she is restrained by a nurse and fights to free herself from the woman's grasp, the nurse tells the doctors that she is becoming demented. Her struggles are interpreted as fits and convulsions. Two male asylum employees are summoned, and Sue is taken to the soft room. Sue's efforts to fight to break free anger the nurses and orderlies and she is hit several times. She is then stripped of her dress, her shoes and stockings, and her hairpins - anything that she could use to do herself harm. She is left alone in the room with the advice that she can do whatever she wants in the room and no one will care. The nurse observes that injury will make her quieter, and the staff likes quiet lunatics because it makes their job easier.

Sue discovers that the door has no handle and no keyhole. The walls and the door are covered with a dirty canvas that is padded with straw. The floor is covered with oilcloth. After screaming and beating on the walls in vain, she finally sits on the floor and cries. Then she sees something on the floor. She discovers it is Maud's glove, which she had intended to retain as a keepsake. She thinks then of the trick Gentleman and Maud played on her; she thinks of the time at Briar when she believed herself to be so clever yet had been so ignorant. Her anger against Maud rises as she thinks back upon her assessment of Maud, her love for Maud, her belief that Maud loved her. She notes, as well, that she is forgetting for the moment that in tricking her, Maud had only turned Sue's scheme against her.

Sue notes that throughout the remainder of the day and night, no one comes to check on her or bring her food. She spends the night thinking, wondering what Mrs. Sucksby is thinking and how worried she must be. She considers that Richard might be telling her that Sue is dead or that she took her share of the money and went away on her own. She becomes calm when she thinks that Mrs. Sucksby will not believe Richard and will search until she finds Sue. She decides that when Mrs. Sucksby finds her, she will be released from the asylum. Then, reflecting that she is the daughter of a murderess, she decides that she will find Maud and kill her.

The next morning, two nurses come to the soft room. After taunting her when she tries to tell them who she is, they take her to another room. While taking her clothes and dressing her in institutional clothing, the glove falls to the floor. They agree to allow Sue to keep the glove. She is dressed in a tartan dress, short stockings and rubber shoes. They then braid her hair and sew the plaits to her head. She is then taken to a room occupied by a nurse and three other patients of the asylum. She learns that she will share this room with Nurse Bacon, Betty, Mrs. Price, and Miss Wilson. When the doctors arrive, Sue again tries to convince them of the truth. Again, they believe her



delusional. When she becomes frantic, she is returned to the soft room. She spends the next day or two there, drugged.

One day, the doctor comments that she has become inflamed by over-indulgence to literature. Sue realizes this could be a way to prove her identity. The doctor interprets her inability to write as part of her delusion and comments that he has never seen a case so pure. As Sue observes the routine of the ward and the asylum, she notes that Nurse Bacon has swollen and painful hands. She sees one of the other women in the room rub salve into the woman's hands to provide relief from the pain. Sue also learns that even if the doctor decides she is cured, her husband must sign her out of the asylum. She observes, as well, that the nurses look at her with scorn, though she does not know why.

Part 3, Chapter 14 Analysis

In this chapter, the reader begins to understand the full meaning of being consigned to a Victorian asylum, and the cruel treatment of the residents at the hands of the nurses. Just as the reader knows Maud is struggling to escape from her imprisonment at Lant Street, so Sue is trying to plan an escape from the Madhouse. At the same time that Sue is depending upon Mrs. Sucksby's love to find her and free her from the asylum, Maud is learning that Mrs. Sucksby really feels no deep concern for Sue and, indeed, has been the one who developed this plan to let her die in a madhouse.

When Sue observes the way the nurses look at her, she does not know that Richard has implied to the doctors that Maud has sexually harassed her maid. Again, the pale softness of Sue's hands is contrasted with the swollen redness and painfulness of Nurse Bacon's hands. Also noteworthy is the observation that there are few windows in the madhouse, particularly the rooms in which the lunatics reside. Sue is now a prisoner of a dark and dismal place. As Maud's spirit was broken at Briar by her uncle and Mrs. Stiles, the housekeeper, so the doctor plans to break Sue's spirit, and her delusion, in the madhouse.



Part 3, Chapter 15

Part 3, Chapter 15 Summary

Sue realizes that the doctor will not be the person to release her from the asylum, and that every attempt to protest her confinement and convince him of her identity only works against her. She now understands, as well, that Dr. Christie believes that once she begins to write again, she will give up the delusion and know who she really is. Forced to sit with a slate and a piece of chalk until she writes an account of her life, which she cannot do, Sue begins to be punished with hunger by denying her meals until she makes progress. One of the other lunatics, Miss Wilson, in an effort to be kind, writes Maud's name on the slate for her. When Sue is unable to duplicate the writing, she is beaten and made to drink creosote. Dr. Christie's attention to Sue is eventually diverted when another patient arrives and draws his interest.

Sue now focuses on planning her escape. She watches the nurse and learns which of her keys match the various locks on doors and cupboards. She observes that the only time Nurse Bacon allows anyone else to touch the keys is when the girl, Betty, takes them to retrieve the salve from a cupboard to massage her hands. Sue reflects upon the irony that with her knowledge of keys and copying keys, it is only a simple key that keeps her imprisoned in the asylum. She begins to sink into a creeping misery, a dullness of hopelessness.

One day she sees her reflection in a dark glass and realizes that she looks mad. She thinks of the gentle care she had received from Mrs. Sucksby, and how safe she felt living with her. She thinks of how she went to Briar to make her fortune and share it with Mrs. Sucksby. She thinks about Maud, who she believes took that fortune from her and caused her to be imprisoned in the asylum where Maud should be. Sue grows more confused and begins to dream of Briar and of Maud. She does not dream of her trickery, but of the life they shared at Briar and the love she feels for her.

As the heat of summer descends, Sue tells of others who reside in the asylum that are subject to fits. One day Mrs. Price is found biting her fingers. The orderlies and nurses tie her up and carry her away. An hour later, they bring her back, soaking wet. Sue learns that a treatment, called plunging, had been administered. She believes this to be a type of bathing that cannot be so bad. She then observes that she still knows nothing at all.

On the night of Nurse Bacon's birthday, the nurses gather for a party. Sue remains awake for fear that she will call out for Maud, and in the hope that they might become drunk and provide an opportunity for Sue to steal the keys and escape. Sue lies in her bed and watches them. The nurses have a competition to see which of them has the largest hand, then the largest arm. Then they decide to see which weighs the most. They decide that the way to do this is to sit or lie on top of one of the patients and see which will evoke the loudest reaction. They decide to do this by having the largest



nurses lie on top of Sue. When one of them lies on top of Sue, she wiggles her hips and leers at Sue. When the other nurses ask if she likes it and laugh, Sue realizes what they have been told. When Sue cries out for them to stop and to get off her, they persist until she butts one of them in the face with her head. She breaks the nurse's nose. When Sue continues to struggle and scream, the nurses decide that she is having a fit. They call the doctor and tell him that she was moving in her sleep and calling a woman's name. Upon hearing this, Sue begins to scream again. The prescribed treatment is the cold water plunge for thirty minutes.

Sue now learns the meaning of the water plunge. She is taken to another room with a large bath, strapped to a wooden frame and swung out over the water. Then they drop the frame into the cold water. As Sue thinks she has died, they raise her out of the water and then drop her into it again. She says this occurred fifteen times, after which she remembers nothing.

Sue is taken back to her room while unconscious. She says she cannot say she is herself. She believes, at this moment, she is no one. That night when the others are sleeping, Nurse Bacon asks Sue if she is all right. She says they were just having fun, and that without a little fun they would all go mad. Sue, however, is now having difficulty remembering anything. She begins to think that perhaps she is Maud since everyone thinks she is. She begins to answer to Maud's name and even begins to think she is dreaming Maud's dreams.

Finally, things change. Five or six weeks after arriving at the asylum, slipping into oblivion, lulled by the sameness of the days and the confinement in a windowless room, a nurse comes for Sue to take her to see her visitor. Hearing that her visitor is a man, Sue assumes it must be Gentleman. She observes that it is a Wednesday, a day when the doctors are away from the asylum. To her astonishment, her visitor is not Gentleman, but a boy. As her mind clears, she realizes that it is Charles, the knife boy from Briar. He looks her over carefully, then he looks behind her as if waiting for Maud to appear, and then, at last, he recognizes Sue. Sue learns that his aunt is Mrs. Cream, the woman in whose cottage they had stayed after the wedding. She explains to him all that has happened and persuades him to help her escape. For his help, she promises to take him to London and to Richard, for whom he wants to work. Charles has grown tired of the beatings administered at Briar and run away. He is trying to make his way to Richard in the hopes of becoming his steward. He tells Sue that Mr. Lilly has become quite ill and that many of the servants have already gone to work in other houses. Charles is astonished to realize that he is in a madhouse and not a grand hotel.

Sue persuades Charles to go into the next town and purchase a key blank and a file. He is to return in exactly one week and bring these items to Sue. The encounter with Charles has snapped Sue out of the dazed lethargy that had overtaken her. Sue does everything she can to remain alert. She worries that Charles will not return. Charles does return, however, on the next Wednesday. Using her skill as a fingersmith, Sue takes the key blank and the file from him and lays out the plan for her escape. Charles departs and Sue returns to her room.



That night when Nurse Bacon begins to show signs of pain in her fingers, Sue offers to massage her hands. She tells the nurse that the girl who usually rubs her hands does not like to do it. She allows Sue to take her keys, tells Sue which key opens the cupboard, and waits while Sue opens the cupboard to get the salve. When she returns the jar of salve to the cupboard, she makes an impression of the door key in the salve, and leaves the cupboard unlocked. Then she returns the keys to Nurse Bacon.

During the night, she watches until Nurse Bacon is asleep. Then Sue retrieves the jar of slave and returns to her bed. Here she files the key blank until it is an exact fit for the impression in the jar of salve. Sue then rises and gets dressed in the asylum clothing, takes the key, and quietly sneaks to the door. Finding it stiff, Sue places some of the ointment into the lock, opens the door, and makes her escape. She makes her way through three more doors. She gets out the front door and makes her way to a tree that overhangs the wall around the asylum. She climbs the tree, eases out onto one of the branches, and drops to the ground on the other side of the wall. Finding Charles where he promised he would be, the two run away from the asylum.

In their flight from the asylum, Sue and Charles run, walk, catch rides with farmers, and make their way to London. Along the way, Sue steals a dress, a hat, a pie and a knife from a house they pass. They pretend to be brother and sister traveling to visit an aunt in London. After traveling all night and all day, they finally see the lights and spires of London.

Part 3, Chapter 15 Analysis

In this chapter, the reader sees the nature of existence in a Victorian asylum. The reader is allowed to glimpse the effect of being shut away and forced into an endless and unchanging routine. The reader sees, most importantly, Sue's determination to escape from the madhouse and return to the people who love her.

During her escape, Sue has promised God that she will be good from now on. Only a few hours later, however, she steals to facilitate their escape and their travel to London.

Sue's description of being lulled into a daze in the asylum must be compared to Maud's life at Briar. Once the comparison is made, the reader must see that the boredom, the sameness of routine, the darkness of their surroundings lull both Sue and Maud into a sort of dazed and complacent compliance. The details of Maud's discipline at the hands of her uncle and the housekeeper must be compared to the treatments and discipline to which Sue is subjected at the madhouse. The desperate need to escape must be compared. Then Maud's fear of leaving Briar becomes understandable.



Part 3, Chapter 16

Part 3, Chapter 16 Summary

Upon arrival in London, Sue is concerned that she will be recognized or that she might encounter Gentleman. She buys a veil for herself and a scarf for Charles at a used clothing stall. She tells Charles that she is afraid the asylum will have people out looking for them. Sue decides that she must watch the house on Lant Street to see who comes and goes, and to wait for a time when she can safely make her way to Mrs. Sucksby. She pawns Charles' pea coat for enough money to get them food and lodging. Charles reacts to this by saying that Richard will not want to hire a boy who comes to him without a coat. As they approach the house on Lant Street, Sue sees Richard enter the house.

Determined to bide her time and not make mistakes, Sue takes a room on the front side of the house across the street. She pays what money they have left, and promises to pay the rest the next day. As she watches through an opening in the shutters, she eventually sees a light in the room she once shared with Mrs. Sucksby. Then she sees Mrs. Sucksby through the window, and sees Maud. Sue is overcome with anger that Maud is living in her house, sharing her room with the beloved Mrs. Sucksby. She vows to kill Maud. Charles, now very frightened, cries that he wants to go to Mr. Rivers. Sue tells him that Richard is a villain.

The next morning, Sue's focus is on getting money. She takes Charles out into the streets of London and tells him to stand and cry. Then she begs money. After begging enough money, Sue retrieves Charles' coat and uses it to cover her hands while she steals a watch from a woman on a bus. She takes Charles back to the rented room and has him write a letter to Mrs. Sucksby for her. When Richard leaves the house, she sends Charles to sell the watch to Mr. Ibbs and deliver the letter to Mrs. Sucksby. Charles does as instructed. He returns distraught, with the news that Maud recognized him and took the letter intended for Mrs. Sucksby. After reading the letter, Maud gave Charles something to give to Sue. It is the folded two of hearts that had been creased when she stepped on it the day Sue told her fortune. Sue interprets this as a taunt.

Sue has had enough of waiting, and she is angry. She has Charles show her how to sharpen the stolen knife on a stone. Sue takes Charles and crosses the street, hiding beside the door until it is open to admit Charles again. The plan works, and soon Sue and Charles are in the kitchen of Mrs. Sucksby's house. Sue rushes to tell Mrs. Sucksby about the trick that has been played on her. Mrs. Sucksby hugs Sue, but Sue notices the diamond brooch the woman is wearing and knows that it once belonged to Maud. She screams that Maud has taken the woman from her with lies and jewels.

When Sue looks at Maud, she notices that her hand is trembling. Maud tells Sue that it would have been better if she had gone away. Mrs. Sucksby tries to take the knife away



from her, but Sue keeps it. She insists that everyone in the room stay where they are. She fears that one of them will go for Richard.

Accused of learning Borough ways very quickly, Maud tells Sue that she is no longer what she was. Mrs. Sucksby has now recovered her composure and plays innocent as Sue tells them what she has been subjected to in the asylum. Mrs. Sucksby suggests that Sue get some sleep upstairs. Maud then reaches out to Sue and tells her not to go to sleep here because there is danger to her. Sue tells Maud that she has come to kill her. Maud replies by reminding Sue that she came to Briar to do that. Finally, Sue drops the knife on the table.

As Sue continues to hurl accusations at Maud, she learns that Maud and Richard do not have the money yet. Maud advises her that she should not be in the house when Richard returns. Mrs. Sucksby agrees. Suddenly, Sue realizes that there are no babies in the house. Maud realizes that Sue has watched them from the house across the street. Then they hear sounds and realize that Gentleman has returned.

An argument ensues during which Gentleman is on the verge of telling Sue of Mrs. Sucksby's scheme. Trying to stop him from saying more, Maud begins to move toward Richard. When Richard mentions Mrs. Sucksby's daughter, Mrs. Sucksby runs toward him. Sue sees a gleam of metal as the two women reach Richard, and Richard is stabbed. Mrs. Sucksby eases him into a chair and tries to control the bleeding. As Richard pleads for help, Charles runs into the street shouting that there has been a murder and calling for the police. Mrs. Sucksby tries to stop the bleeding while telling everyone else to run before the police arrive. Dainty is the only one who escapes.

When the police arrive and determine that Richard is dead, John Vroom, who has been Mrs. Sucksby's favorite whipping boy, accuses her of the murder. Mrs. Sucksby, covered in Richard's blood, confesses to the murder. She tells the police that neither of the girls had any part in it.

Part 3, Chapter 16 Analysis

Sue reminds herself that she must take her time and not make mistakes. She reflects that her mother had not been cautious and had ended with her neck in a noose. Again, the theme of bad blood coming out in the children is alluded to by Sue. Now, more than ever, the question of identity becomes central. Neither Sue nor Maud has a firm sense of her own identity. Further, neither now knows the other. Is Sue now Susan Trinder or Susan Smith? Is Maud now Maud Lilly or Maud Sucksby?

Acting and truth are still an issue. Maud knows the truth but she does not reveal it to Sue. Maud acts. Mrs. Sucksby acts. Sue acts on flawed perceptions. When Richard threatens to reveal the truth, both Maud and Mrs. Sucksby move to silence him. It seems clear that Mrs. Sucksby perceives the need to keep Sue in the dark about her grand scheme. She has everything to gain by keeping the truth from Sue. Maud also tries to silence Richard. Is her motive to protect Mrs. Sucksby? Is it to save Sue from



the pain of knowing the true scheme and Mrs. Sucksby's indifference to her? Is it to ensure a share of Marianne Lilly's fortune that she could lose to Sue?

Sue does not know which of the women actually stabbed Richard. The reader may draw his or her own conclusion at this point. Either Mrs. Sucksby killed Richard or she took the blame to save Maud.



Part 3, Chapter 17

Part 3, Chapter 17 Summary

Sue states that her name in those days was Susan Trinder, but those days have come to an end. She relates that everyone in the house was arrested. Sue is released after four days. Mr. Ibbs is tried and sent to prison. The thieves who had once brought him stolen goods turn against him. His sister is found and placed in a hospital, but soon dies from the shock. John Vroom is sent to jail and flogged. Dainty is the only one of the group who continues to see Sue.

The people of the Borough turn against Sue and speak of her mother's bad blood coming out in her. She says that at any other time she would have been heartbroken. She has become obsessed with seeing Mrs. Sucksby as often as possible. She visits the woman in jail, another dark and bleak place. Sue believes for a time, as she watches Mrs. Sucksby's large hands grow thin, that everything would be right if only the woman's hands could be made beautiful again. Sue and Dainty scrub the house and try to remove all of Gentleman's blood.

Sue has not seen Maud since the night of the murder. She learns from the keepers at the jail that when Maud's name was printed in the newspapers and Dr. Christie saw it. He came because the police did not know what to do with her. After examining her, the doctor pronounced her sane. Sue reveals that the doctor has gained many patients as a result. Sue expects Maud to visit her, but she does not. Sue does not know where she has gone.

During the trial, Mrs. Sucksby seeks out Sue's eye, and seems to relax upon seeing her. Sue observes, however, that she continued to search the courtroom as if looking for someone else. Mrs. Sucksby claims in court to have made her living renting rooms. Others are brought in who testify that they have seen her with stolen goods and selling babies. The fact that the knife had been recently sharpened is interpreted in court as evidence of premeditation. Upon hearing this, Sue is about to arise from her seat and protest, but Mrs. Sucksby shakes her head in indication that Sue should remain silent. Nothing is said in the trial about Sue, about Maud, or about Briar. Nothing is said about Richard being a villain. Mrs. Sucksby presents Richard simply as someone who owed her money for rent. During the course of the trial, however, it comes to light that Richard is not the son of a gentleman. His parents are shopkeepers, and his name is Frederick Bunt. Mrs. Sucksby is sentenced to hang. In the next moment, she makes eye contact with Sue, and looks around the crowd until she sees a young woman dressed in black, sitting in the back of the crowd, just lowering her veil. Sue then recognizes Maud. Sue says that her heart flew open to Maud, but when she remembered everything, her heart closed toward her. When the trial is over, Maud is gone.

For the next week, Sue thinks only of her beloved Mrs. Sucksby and spends every possible moment with her. When Sue asks her what she will do without her, Mrs.



Sucksby replies that she will do better. On the day before Mrs. Sucksby's execution, as Sue is about to leave her for the last time, Mrs. Sucksby begs Sue to watch her hanging. She says that if Sue should ever hear bad things about her, she should think back to her execution. As she is being escorted from the jail, she hears two of the jailers talking. She hears the jailer respond "one of 'em, the other came this morning." She notes that she did not wonder what that meant until later.

Sue says that she sleeps that night without dreaming. She is awakened by the sounds of crowds in the streets. It is the morning of the execution. As the time approaches, Sue climbs the stairs to the room in which she had been born, and looks out the window at the gathered crowd. Then Sue turns away and is not able to watch the execution. She looks only to see a dangling figure.

Sue begins to make plans to return to a life of crime in order to survive. As she prepares to move to another part of London, she has only one thing left to do. She and Dainty go to the jail to retrieve Mrs. Sucksby's belongings. When they return to Lant Street and open the parcel, they find Mrs. Sucksby's black taffeta gown with Maud's brooch pinned to it. The stones were gone. As she tries to clean the blood from the dress, she hears a sound that the dress should not make. She discovers the document hidden in the bodice of the dress. The girls note that the letter is still sealed, and Dainty tells Sue that it is addressed to her. Since neither of the girls can read, they surmise that it is a letter from Sue's real mother. The two girls rush into the street to find someone who can read it to them. Sue pays a man all the money the two of them have, and he reads the letter.

The letter reveals the entire truth. Sue finds it very difficult to reconcile this information with everything she already knows. She remembers Mrs. Sucksby's final words to her and grows sick. In time, Sue realizes that Maud let Sue hate her and made Sue think she would hurt her to keep her from knowing that the person she loved most in the world had tricked and abandoned her and hurt her the most.

Sue tells Dainty everything. She falls ill, and Dainty cares for her. Sue fights back to health so she can find Maud. She journeys to Briar again, walking part of the way, and is later given a ride in a cart by a man with a little girl. The man tells her that Mr. Lilly has died, that Maud has gone to France, and that only a caretaker remains at Briar. Sue leads him to believe that she is going there to visit one of the servants.

Sue tries all of the doors to Briar and finds them locked. She sees a tiny wisp of smoke rising from one of the chimneys and knows someone is there. When a storm begins, Sue breaks in through a window. Expecting to find Mr. Way, who had been Mr. Lilly's steward, Sue makes her way through the house in search of him. As she passes through the dining room, she finds a broken crystal glass. She is afraid of ghosts, but observes that she moves through the house as if she is a ghost. Planning to go to Maud's rooms, and remembering that she had kissed Maud there, Sue passes the door to the library. She remembers the time she waited there for Maud and heard the murmur of her voice as she read to her uncle. She realizes that she is hearing that voice now. When she enters the room, she sees that the paint has been scraped from the windows



and the finger has been removed from the floor. She sees a fire burning in the grate, a lamp lit on the desk, and she notes that most of the books are gone.

Sue sees Maud at the desk, writing. Soon Maud looks up and sees Sue. As both girls recover from the shock of seeing one another, Sue moves toward Maud. Maud asks Sue if she has come to kill her. Sue calls her Maud for the first time and tells her about the document she found. Maud apologizes to Sue and tells her that she only learned the whole story when she reached Lant Street. Sue understands that they have both been tricked.

Sue tells Maud that she does not want the house or the money. She only wants Maud. Maud then confesses to Sue about the content of her uncle's books and that she is now making her living writing pornographic stories. She tells Sue that she writes all the things she dreams of doing with her. They kiss. Sue asks what the writing says. Maud takes her close to the light of the fire and begins to teach her to read.

Part 3, Chapter 17 Analysis

Sue's journey back to Briar is made in the light. Maud has scraped the paint from the windows of the library to let in the light. In the light of the fire, truth has at last conquered the darkness and fog of ignorance. Now it is Sue who is innocent and Maud knowing. Maud wears no gloves. Maud no longer denies Sue reading, but eagerly begins to teach her. Maud reveals that she did not want Sue to know that she had been betrayed by the only person she believes ever loved her. She also reveals that Mrs. Sucksby hoped she would never know the truth.



Characters

Sue Trinder

Sue is the protagonist or main character of the novel. She is a fingersmith, raised in the slums of London. Drawn into a scheme to make her fortune, she is duped by the woman who raised her with great love and protected her from all that could harm her. She is essentially a kind and gentle person who is tricked by those she loves most, and compelled to forsake the woman she loves to make the fortune of the woman who raised her. As the embedded schemes of the novel are played out, she must learn to discern truth from acted fiction. She must learn what she values. She must learn the difference between good and evil. Even believing that she has been betrayed by the woman she loves, she cannot walk away from her completely. Believing herself inappropriately treated like a jewel by Mrs. Sucksby, she turns out to be the true jewel of the novel. Perhaps Maud is a pearl to her, but Sue is a jewel of greater value.

Maud Lilly

Maud is the second major character of the novel. Raised in a madhouse until her manic uncle claims her to become his secretary, she is denied the innocence of childhood and made into an oddity admired only by purveyors of pornography. Imprisoned in a dark and dismal world controlled by her uncle, she longs for freedom and normalcy. Her desperation is so great, that she is an easy mark for Richard and his scheme to achieve her freedom and his own wealth. Confronted with a choice between freedom and her love for Sue, she must choose freedom, for without it she cannot love. Although the initial appearance is that Sue is the victim, in the final analysis the victim must be seen to be Maud. She has been a pawn in the chess game of others from the moment of her birth. She is denied the love of her own mother, abandoned in death by the woman she believes to be her mother, ripped from the asylum nurses who love her, imprisoned for years by a mad and obsessed uncle, betrayed by the woman she loves and the man who promises to help her, robbed of her identity and her future.

Gentleman

Also known as Richard Rivers, Gentleman is a true villain to everyone except Mrs. Sucksby. He is a scoundrel and a con man. He manipulates two young girls into a plot that will destroy both of them for his financial gain. The reader must decide whether he is truly loyal to Mrs. Sucksby or motivated only by greed. Whatever he is, everything Maud and Sue know of him is merely a role he plays. He is a consummate actor who will do anything to achieve his aims. The only real irony in his death is that it is, presumably, at the hands of Mrs. Sucksby. In the end, Gentleman, the great manipulator, is undone by the only person to whom he appears to hold any loyalty.



Mrs. Sucksby

Grace Sucksby is a fence and a baby farmer. Her existence is determined by the stolen goods and unwanted children that enter and leave her house. She gives up her own child to be raised among the elite in the belief that in time they will both be rich. As she uses Sue to go and make their fortune by helping Richard with their scheme, so she has used her own child as part of a scheme to make her own fortune. The reader, at some point, must ask if Mrs. Sucksby knows anything of love. People are expendable to her. Sue, Maud, even Richard are tools of her extravagant plan. As she sent her own daughter away, she sends Sue to die in an asylum, and eventually murders Richard for the plan. Yet she may be the character who changes the most in this novel. For by the end she seems to have learned the meaning of love from Sue's devotion to her. By the time of their final farewell, she seems to understand what might have happened if she had been successful. She might feel shame.

Christopher Lilly

Mr. Lilly is Maud's uncle. He is an old man with an extensive library of pornographic books and engravings. He has imprisoned Maud in his home and trained her to function as his secretary. He believes his sister a strumpet because she delivered a child outside of matrimony. Mr. Lilly believes that his books impart a kind of poison and that only the select may share the privilege of their knowledge. That he would expose a ten-year-old child to this poison is the reader's first glimpse of his unique madness.

Charles Cream

Charles is the knife boy at Briar. He is beaten without mercy for minor infractions, and for his sadness when Gentleman leaves Briar. He is later the instrument of Sue's escape from the madhouse.

Mr. Ibbs

Mr. Ibbs is the man who operates a locksmith shop adjoining Mrs. Sucksby's house. From the shop and her kitchen, he fences stolen goods, removing identifying crests and other markings before reselling them. From assisting him, Sue learns the alphabet and numbers.

John Vroom

John is one of the Lant Street denizens. He is a petty thief who frequently kills and skins dogs. He is Mrs. Sucksby's favorite whipping boy, whom she often hits to release her anger. He accuses her of the murder of Gentleman.



Dainty

Dainty is another of the regulars in the kitchen on Lant Street. She and John Vroom are something of a couple. Dainty is not the smartest of petty thieves, but she is devoted to Sue and to John. She is the only person who stands by Sue in the end.

Mr. Hawtrey

Hawtrey is a gentleman who frequently visits Mr. Lilly. He is a dealer in, and publisher of pornography. Maud tries to enlist his help to escape her imprisonment in London but learns that he will not help her. However, Maud learns that he hires people to write the pornography he publishes. Writing for him will eventually be Maud's livelihood.

Marianne Lilly

Marianne is the sister of Christopher Lilly and the presumed mother of Maud. Although Marianne is dead before the events of the novel occur, she is a critical character in the development of the plot and in Maud's identity. Marianne ran from her father's home and became pregnant out of wedlock. Mrs. Sucksby delivered her child then switched her own daughter for Marianne's daughter. This switching of the babies is the basis of the plot. Maud has been told that her mother was mad and died in an asylum.



Objects/Places

House on Lant Street in the Borough of London

This is the house in which Sue born and raised. This is also the place where Maud is imprisoned after learning of her true identity, and of Mrs. Sucksby's scheme. Gentleman is killed here. Sue returns here after escaping the asylum with the expectation of returning to Mrs. Sucksby's love and protection.

Briar

Briar is the dark, damp, dismal estate owned by Christopher Lilly. It harbors his vast collection of pornography. Maud is brought here as a child and trained to become his secretary. Sue is sent here by Richard as part of the plan within a plan within a plan. It is here that Sue comes to know and love Maud. It is also to this place that both of the girls return after the truth of the schemes is revealed.

Mrs. Cream's Cottage

This cottage is the place where Richard takes the two girls after he marries Maud. Here, both of the smaller plans come to a climax.

The Asylum of Maud's Childhood

This asylum is the madhouse in which Maud spent the early years of her life. It was here that she felt loved. The asylum is where she came to understand the many expressions of madness and the patience of insanity.

The Women's Asylum

The second asylum is the place where Sue is left as part of Mrs. Sucksby's scheme. Sue's experience here allows the reader to glimpse the detrimental effect such a place can have on someone sane.

The Borough Jail and Scaffold

The Jail and the scaffold outside it are visible from the room on the top floor of Mrs. Sucksby's house. It is here that Sue has been told her mother was imprisoned and hanged for murder. It is here that Mrs. Sucksby is imprisoned and hanged.



Mr. Hawtrey's Bookshop

The bookshop is across London from the Borough. In this store, pornography is published and sold. When Maud tries to escape Lant Street, she makes her way here, expecting Mr. Hawtrey to help her. It is here that she discovers that he employs people to write pornography.

The Orange House on Lant Street

This is a small house across the street from Mrs. Sucksby's house. Maud watches the activities there, observing the squalor of the slums. Sue and Charles hide here to watch the activities at Mr. Ibbs' shop and Mrs. Sucksby's house.

The Home for Gentlewomen in London

This house has become a safe haven for destitute gentlewomen. Mr. Hawtrey tries to send Maud there when she escapes Lant Street. After Richard's death, Maud stays here during Mrs. Sucksby's trial and execution and until she earns enough money writing pornography to travel back to Briar.

Maud's Gloves

While in the home of her uncle, Maud is forced to wear gloves to keep her hands soft so they will not damage her uncle's books. One glove becomes a keepsake for Sue.

Jewels

Jewels are of both literal and symbolic importance in the novel. Sue says Mrs. Sucksby treats her as one would treat jewels. Sue told that she is to have Maud's jewels once Maud is committed to the madhouse. Sue compares Maud to a pearl. Maud's diamond brooch is eventually taken and worn by Mrs. Sucksby. Maud's jewels are taken by Mrs. Sucksby to be sold.

Playing Cards

A deck of cards becomes important in the development of the plot, particularly the queen of diamonds and the two of hearts. Sue tells Maud's fortune one day, interpreting the queen of diamonds as an indication of wealth. Later when she sees Mrs. Sucksby wearing Maud's diamond brooch, she calls her the queen of diamonds. The two of hearts, which Sue intends to interpret as signifying love, is dropped on the floor and ground into the carpet by Maud. Later, Maud sends the card to Sue as a symbol.

The Clock at Briar

This large chiming clock regulates the pattern of life on the grounds and within the house. All activity within the house is regulated by its chimes.



Themes

Appearance and Truth

Throughout this novel the characters are acting. Somewhere behind the appearances lies the truth. Throughout the novel, appearances are mistaken for the truth. In each of the three interwoven schemes someone, or perhaps everyone, is acting a role. In the smallest scheme, Gentleman is acting, pretending to be making both his fortune and Sue's by tricking Maud. Sue is acting to carry out her part of the plan to steal Maud's fortune. In the surrounding scheme, Sue is playing her part by implementing the smaller scheme, Gentleman is acting a dual role, and Maud is acting to play the role that will win her freedom. In the largest scheme, Mrs. Sucksby is able to stop acting, as is Richard. Maud must now learn to enact another role. When Sue escapes the asylum and returns to the Borough, Mrs. Sucksby must begin to play her role again. It is only in the light of the revelation of the truth that anyone can understand what has been acting and what has been truth. Since Biblical times, people have repeated the axiom, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." In much literature of the early- and mid-twentieth century, truth was a central theme. The axiom came to be revised to "You shall know the truth, and the truth will hurt like hell, but the truth shall set you free." This is true in *Fingersmith*. There is an additional element here since only when they know the truth are Sue and Maud saved. The axiom can now be stated, "You shall know the truth, it will hurt like hell, but it will set you free and redeem you from a life of falsehood."

Inherited Evil

Inherited evil is another key theme that propels this novel. This belief finds expression throughout the novel. First, Sue speaks of her concern that her mother's bad blood will be perceived by Maud and result in her rejection. When her anger over Maud's betrayal reaches its climax and Sue considers her desire to kill Maud, she comments that she is, after all, her mother's daughter. At this time, of course, she believes her mother to be a murderess. Mr. Lilly speaks of Maud having her mother's temperament, if not her face, when she rebels against his control. Later when he learns that Richard eloped, he writes to Richard and wishes him luck. He says that he knew Maud's mother, whom he calls a strumpet, would eventually come out in Maud. He goes on to say he believes Richard knows how to treat a whore. Richard uses this belief to persuade and control Maud. He asks her if she thinks about her mother and feels her madness rising in her. At this time, Maud believes that her mother died in a madhouse. The final irony in the novel is expressed when Sue and Maud reconcile. Sue and Maud now know that Sue is Marianne's daughter and that Marianne was mad. They also know that Maud is Mrs. Sucksby's daughter and that Mrs. Sucksby was executed for murdering Richard. Their situations are now reversed and Maud is the daughter of a murderess and Sue the daughter of a madwoman.



The Good, The Bad, and the In-Between

Sue's earliest recollection of understanding the world and her place in it is derived from the experience of seeing a performance of *Oliver Twist* as a very young child. This is her estimation of human nature and morality. This is an appropriate foundational observation for this novel. Throughout it, there are questions of good and evil, and of right and wrong. Sue perceives herself to be a good kind of thief. She is pleased that Maud considers her a good girl. She is distressed at the thought of ruining Maud's life, but it does not prevent her efforts to betray her. Maud considers herself something other than good, though she does not quite consider herself evil. She knows that her uncle's tutelage has made her different from other people. She is pleased when Sue calms her to sleep with the words "good girl." Gentleman has no misunderstanding of himself. He characterizes himself as a villain. At various times in the novel, almost everyone with whom he is in contact recognizes him for a scoundrel and a villain. When Mrs. Sucksby calls him a good boy for carrying out the scheme and delivering Maud to her, the reader is delivered an unmistakable jolt. Mrs. Sucksby calls both Maud and Sue good. As she confesses to Richard's murder, she testifies to the goodness of both girls and tells the police they have done nothing wrong. Despite her acts of deception and petty theft, the reader must determine Sue's goodness or evil. The reader must also determine whether Maud's loss of innocence while her uncle's secretary makes her less than good.



Style

Point of View

The point of view throughout the novel is first person narration. In part One, Sue is the narrator. Everything is seen and understood from her limited point of view. Everything the reader knows in this part of the novel is what Sue thinks, feels, sees, knows, and does. The reader's knowledge and understanding, perhaps even the reader's innocence, is limited to what Sue knows. The use of the first person point of view is the method by which the author is able to advance the surprise and the suspense of the novel. Because the reader reaches the conclusion of Part 1 seeing only from Sue's point of view, the surprise of the plot twist that places Sue, rather than Maud, in the asylum becomes possible. This tactic also introduces the suspense that carries the reader into Part 2 eager to learn what will happen next. This point of view also allows the reader to form an impression of Sue based upon her perception of herself.

Part Two takes the reader back to the beginning with Maud's narration. Again using the first person point of view, the reader comes to understand the world as Maud sees it. The use of this point of view allows us to see Maud as she sees herself, as she understands her interactions with others, and as she understands the forces that have made her who she is. The use of an alternative first person point of view allows the author to provide missing information to the reader. This information introduces the second level of scheming, even while allowing the surprise and suspense to build. The telling of this complex story through two distinct but intersecting first person points of view allow the author to provide the desired information to the reader without becoming omniscient or making the reader omniscient. Thus, the suspense, the surprise, and the openness of the key themes of the novel are carried into the third part of the novel.

Part Three, then, carries the plot forward as understood from Sue's point of view. For this reason, the reader is able to participate in Sue's fear, her anger, and her naivety. Again, this point of view is the tactic that maintains the suspense and surprise of the revelations that uncover the truth and bring the interwoven themes and conflicts to acceptable resolution.

Setting

The novel moves primarily between Mrs. Sucksby's house on Lant Street in the Borough of London and Briar, the Lilly estate forty miles away. Other settings are also critical to the development of the novel. These settings establish the locus of the action of the novel as well as the mood. The Borough is dark, damp and dangerous, but Mrs. Sucksby's kitchen is warm and light. The streets through the slums are dark and London is often enshrouded in fog. Briar is dark, dismal, damp, and enshrouded by fog. Storms are frequent. Even this estate of the privileged is hollow and typical of miserliness. At some point in the course of the novel, both of these locations are places of



imprisonment for Maud. She is trapped in darkness as surely as Sue is trapped in the asylum. The asylum is also a prison from which Sue must escape. It, also, is dark and damp. As Sue travels from place to place in the deep fog, the reader must understand the fog as a symbol of her innocence and ignorance.

Language and Meaning

Ms. Waters so thoroughly adopted the language and feeling of the period that the reader feels as comfortable within it as do the characters. The language is deeply evocative of the struggles for knowledge, for understanding and for truth. The alteration of language between gentleness and innuendo and harsh precision carry the characters and the reader deeper within the world the author creates. The use of symbols and multiple levels of meaning are so appropriate that their sense becomes a part of the reader rather than something the reader must consider and apprehend. The opacity and chill of moving about in fog is a symbol of confusion and ignorance that is felt as much as it is mentally understood.

Ms. Waters' style transports the reader into the world of the London slums of the Victorian era as well as the houses of privilege. The level and intricacy of her descriptions bring the asylum and the city to pulsating life. Her facility with language and meaning makes the reader, not only see, but feel, the events of her story.

Structure

The structure of the book is three semi-overlapping parts. The three parts are similar to the structure of Victorian era novels, which were generally written in three volumes. The three-part structure also coincides with the three levels of the schemes that unfold. In Part One, the plot devised by Richard and Sue is played to its conclusion. In Part Two, the plot laid out by Richard and Maud is played to its conclusion. In Part Three, the plot laid out by Mrs. Sucksby and Gentleman is played to its conclusion, although the conclusion is not true to the original plan. In Part One, Sue is not able to do what is necessary to save Maud. In Part Two, Maud is not able to do what is necessary to save Sue. In Part Three, however, Mrs. Sucksby does what is necessary to save both Sue and Maud.



Quotes

"And I remember seeing - what I had never seen before - how the world was made up: that it had bad Bill Sykeses in it, and god Mr. Ibbses; and Nancys, that might go either way. I thought how glad I was that I was already on the side that Nancy got to at last. - I mean, the good side, with sugar mice in."

"In short, there was not much that was brought to our house that was not moved out of it again, rather sharpish. There was only one thing, in fact, that had come and got stuck - one thing that had somehow withstood the tremendous pull of that passage of poke - one thing that Mr. Ibbs and Mrs. Sucksby seemed never to think to put a price to.

I mean of course, me. "

"Ain't it terribly wicked, Gentleman, what you mean to do?"

"Your fortune's still to be made; and ours, Sue, along with it."

"The road was perfectly quiet and perfectly dark, and I imagined the sound of the horse, and the wheels, and our voices, carrying far across the fields. Then I heard, from rather near, the slow tolling of a bell - a very mournful sound, it seemed to me at that moment, not like the cheerful bells of London."

"It was odd to see her stepping out of that gloomy place, like a pearl coming out of an oyster."

"Look down, Miss, at the floor. Down! Further! Do you see that hand, beside your shoe? That hand was set there at my word, after consultation with an oculist - an eye-doctor. These are uncommon books, Miss Maud, and not for ordinary gazes. Let me see you step once past that pointing finger, and I shall use you as I would a servant of the house, caught doing the same - I shall whip your eyes until they bleed. That hand marks the bounds of innocence here."

"Perhaps children are like horses after all, and may be broken."

"It is not the prospect of a whipping that makes me meek. It is what I know of the cruelty of patience. There is no patience so terrible as that of the deranged."

"Don't misunderstand me. Don't think me more scrupulous than I am. It's true I shudder in fear - fear of his plot - fear of its success, as well as of its failure. But I tremble, too, at the boldness of him - or rather, his boldness sets me quivering, as they say a vibrating string will find out unsuspected sympathies in the fibres of idle bodies. *I saw in ten minutes what your life has made of you*, he said to me, that first night. And then: *I think you are half a villain already*. He was right. If I never knew that villainy before - or if, knowing it, I never named it - I know it, name it, now."



"You must understand, I have determined to despise her. For how otherwise, will I be able to do what I must do? - how else deceive and harm her? It is only that we are put so long together, in such seclusion. We are obliged to be intimate."

"They might have killed me, after all. I lay in darkness. I did not dream. I did not think. You could not say I was myself, for I was no one."



Topics for Discussion

What are the conflicts that propel the plot of the novel?

Early in the novel, Sue indicates that she thinks Mrs. Sucksby was actually seeing in Sue her own child who had been born dead many years before. She says, "The idea made me shiver, rather; for it was queer to think of being loved, not just for my own sake, but for someone's I never knew." How does this reflection foreshadow the confusion of identities as the plot of the novel develops? How does it foreshadow the final reconciliation between Sue and Maud?

Innocence and knowledge are a key theme in this novel. Old Christopher Lilly, Maud's uncle, ends Maud's innocence. Who ends Sue's innocence? Who is actually innocent at the end of the novel?

The author has created an unusual structure for this novel. The entire novel is narrated in the first person. What does the author achieve by including Maud's first person account between the two parts of Sue's narration? How would the novel be different if the story had been narrated by an omniscient observer?

Is there a relationship between the fact that the windows of Mr. Lilly's study have been painted yellow and Maud's dislike of eggs? If this is not symbolically important, what other fact accounts for the attention devoted to the fact that Maud does not like and will not eat eggs?

Gloves have an important symbolic meaning in this novel. Consider who wears gloves in the novel, when they wear them, and what they mean in each context. What is the symbolic meaning of wearing, or not wearing, gloves?

In chapter 3, Maud learns that Sue cannot read. Sue has indicated previously that she sees no need or use for reading in her life. Why does Maud refuse to teach Sue to read or to be taught to read?

Why does Sue choose a pearl to describe Maud?

Some of the symbolism and context-defining use of fog, light, and darkness are obvious. Consider the descriptions of the contexts of the critical developments of the plot of this novel. What are the deeper implications of the fog, light, and darkness in the novel?

In Victorian England, it was popular belief that evil or bad blood was passed from one generation to the next. It was also believed at this time that madness was inherited. This theme is critical in the ironic twists of the novel. How does this belief compare to the popular beliefs of ordinary people today? Do you see examples in today's society of people treating others as if they still believe this is true?



Fictional characters can be complex or transparent. Which characters in *Fingersmith* are complex? Which are transparent? Which characters are sympathetic? Which are unsympathetic? Why?

Confusion of acting and reality or of fiction and truth is a predominant theme in the novel. What is the author's answer to the confusion?

Which character in the novel provides the best example of the patience of insanity?

Finger? I'm not sure what this means.