

Mary Barton Study Guide

Mary Barton by Elizabeth Gaskell

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Plot Summary

Elizabeth Gaskell is the author of the fiction novel *Mary Barton*, a tale of Manchester life. It concerns the working class life in Manchester, England, in the late 1830s and early 1840s, when there was a clear contrast between the poor factory workers and the rich factory owners. John Barton walks with his pregnant wife, Mary, who is crying, while his thirteen-year-old daughter, also named Mary, plays in the fields. They meet George Wilson and his wife, Jane. The women sit together so Mrs. Wilson can comfort the elder Mary, and the men discuss Mrs. Barton's sister, Esther, who has left her apartments and disappeared without leaving word of where she was going. Barton laments the differences between the poor and the rich. The group goes to have tea with Alice Wilson, George's sister. The elder Mary Barton dies in childbirth and loses the baby.

Mary Barton gets older and gets a job as a seamstress. She meets a new friend, Margaret Jennings, and her grandfather, Job Legh. There is a fire at Henry Carson's mill, and Jem Wilson rescues his father, George. This puts many men out of work. Mary believes she loves Harry Carson, but Jem Wilson proposes to her. She rejects Jem, but after he leaves, she realizes she does love him. She tells Harry she won't see him anymore. Harry and Jem get in a fight over Mary. John Barton goes to convince the government to help the working class, but it doesn't work. George Wilson dies, and Esther Wilson returns to warn Mary against becoming obsessed with riches and a prostitute like herself. Alice's nephew, Will Wilson, returns from sea. Harry Carson is murdered, and Jem Wilson is blamed for it. Esther finds a piece of paper with Jem's writing near the murder scene, and brings it to Mary. A policeman tricks Mrs. Jane Wilson into testifying the murder weapon is her son's gun.

Mary Barton loves Jem Wilson, and knows she must prove his innocence. She tracks down Will Wilson, who has left to sail on another boat. She succeeds in bringing Will back, who testifies he was walking with Jem Wilson the night of the murder. Jem is freed, but he and Mary have learned that John Barton is the true murderer. Mary returns home and finds her father there. She still loves him, so she takes care of him. John Barton asks Jem and Henry Carson to come to his house one night. He admits to the murder, and Carson eventually forgives him. John Barton dies, and Carson remembers the workers' plight and tries to help out more in the future. Jem and Mary move to Canada with Jem's mother, where they happily raise a family.



Preface; Chapter 1 and Chapter 2

Preface; Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 Summary

Elizabeth Gaskell is the author of the fiction novel *Mary Barton*, a tale of Manchester life. She writes the novel after the death of her son, William, who died from scarlet fever. The book concerns the working class life in Manchester, England, in the late 1830s and early 1840s, when there was a clear contrast between the poor factory workers and the rich factory owners.

In chapter one, outside Manchester are fields called the Green Hey Fields, which are very popular with the working class for vacation. Among the fields, John Barton walks with his pregnant wife, Mary, who is crying, while his thirteen-year-old daughter, also named Mary, plays in the fields. They meet Wilson and his wife, Jane, and their young twin sons. The women sit together so Mrs. Wilson can comfort the elder Mary, and the men go off to talk amongst themselves. They discuss Mrs. Barton's sister, Esther, who has left her apartments and disappeared without leaving word of where she was going. Barton laments the differences between the poor, who must work for a living, and the rich, who enjoy the fruits of the poor worker's labor. They discuss Esther's disappearance, and Wilson suggests his sister Alice may be able to comfort Mrs. Barton. Mary runs to her father, and they turn back to the women. Mary stops to pick flowers when Wilson's seventeen-year-old son, Jem, snatches a kiss. She slaps him in the face, angry at his forwardness. They each take one of the twins from their fathers, Jem showing his affection for his younger brother.

In chapter two, Mr. Barton and Mr. Wilson return to their wives. Mrs. Barton is feeling better after talking to Mrs. Wilson, and the group agrees to have tea at the Barton's home. They greet many friends on the way. Two rude boys comment that the younger Mary Barton has found a sweetheart. Jem looks at her to see how she takes this, but her only response is fury. They arrive at the Barton's home and Mrs. Barton gives Mary some money to run to the store for bread. Mr. Barton tells her to invite Alice Wilson, who lives nearby, to come to tea. Mrs. Barton tells Mary to have Alice bring her own teacup and saucer because they don't have enough for Alice. Mr. Barton says Mary can share a cup with Jem, but Mary resolves to make sure Alice brings her own cup. Alice has just returned from gathering herbs in the fields when Mary comes to her door. Alice comes to tea, and as they prepare to eat proposes a toast to absent friends. This makes Mrs. Barton think of Esther and she bursts into tears. Alice feels horrible about what she has said. The party breaks up early. Alice apologizes to Mrs. Barton, but Mrs. Barton hugs and kisses her. She tells Alice to forget about it, she knows Alice didn't mean any harm. Her words are a comfort to Alice in coming days.



Preface; Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 Analysis

The Barton family's tale is a common one for those living in England during and after the Industrial Revolution. As factories and mills became the primary employer for members of the working class, the problems and working conditions there became an important issue. The scene set at the beginning of the novel presents the Barton and Wilson families at a happy time in their lives. Although they are not rich, they live humble lives and are mostly happy with what they have. However, Mary's sister, Esther, clearly wanted more from life and left the family to chase her dream. Mary grieves the loss of her sister and cannot understand why she would leave a loving family. It is clear John Barton loves his wife and wants the best for her. He makes every effort to cheer her up, even inviting Alice Wilson over because he feels she will be a good influence on his wife and someone she can talk to. Alice accidentally makes a comment about lost friends which upsets Mary at first. However, Mary is a strong, kind person and willingly forgives Alice. One also meets the children in the family, the younger Mary Barton and Jem Wilson. Jem is clearly enamored with Mary, although she does not return the sentiment. She pulls away from his kiss and slaps him; and takes pains to ensure they don't have to share the same tea cup during the meal. This dynamic in their relationship foreshadows how they will act towards each other as adults.



Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5

Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 Summary

In chapter three, in the middle of the night, Mrs. Mary Barton goes into labor. John Barton goes for the doctor, who takes a long time getting ready. He tells the doctor this is the worst he's ever seen his wife. When he returns to the house, he finds his wife has died. He thinks about their life together, and he and his daughter, Mary resolve to help one another through this and to always be there for each other. Mary knows she must get a job to help support them, but her father, a life factory worker, doesn't want his daughter subject to the same problems he faces. He sees the rich factory and mill owners, and how distant they are from the poor working class who have trouble feeding their families. Mary has a deep desire to be a lady, despite her father's disdain for the rich. She takes a job as a seamstress at Miss Simmonds' shop. There, she earns a wage for her sewing, as well as meals.

In chapter four, a year has passed, and Mary wishes her mother was still alive because it may have made her life easier. John Barton is more involved with workers' union activities, and Jem Wilson has become an engineer. One day on her way home, Mary meets Alice Wilson, who invites her over for tea to meet another girl, Margaret Jennings. Mary agrees, but first goes home to change.

After putting on a better dress, aiming to impress Margaret Jennings, Mary Barton arrives at Alice Wilson's home for tea. Alice tells the girls how she came to Manchester to be a servant, and never saw her mother again after leaving home. Circumstances always stopped her when she had plans to go home. She takes in her brother's child, Will, who went on to become a sailor. After her story, Alice tells Margaret to sing for Mary. Mary is astonished at the girl's talent. Margaret hears her grandfather, Job Legh, chiming in on the song from outside, and invites Mary to meet him.

Chapter five shows Job Legh to be an intellectual man who has a passion for collecting insects. Margaret tells Mary how her grandfather once brought home a scorpion that he thought was dead, but was only in a stupor from being cold. The heat from the fire revived it, giving Margaret a fright, before her grandfather can catch it and boil it to death. Mary and Margaret become great friends, although Mary doesn't tell Margaret of her attraction to a man she knows. While sewing mourning clothes one night, Margaret tells Mary she is going blind, and worries how this will upset her grandfather. They hear a commotion and learn from a passerby that Carson's mill is on fire, where George Wilson works. The girls go to watch the fire, and see Jem Wilson use a ladder as a bridge from a nearby building to enter the mill and rescue his father and another man.



Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 Analysis

The younger Mary Barton and her father, John Barton, experience the biggest tragedy in their lives when the elder Mary Barton dies in childbirth. They both manage to face the tragedy, as so many people did at that time. Like many girls, Mary desires to rise above her station in life. She sees the hard life that factory workers have, and she aspires to be above that and be a pampered rich lady. She continues to eschew Jem Wilson, as she resents that the families seem to want them to get together. When Mary meets Alice, she shows her snobbish attitudes, because she tries to impress the girl. However, she is embarrassed when she realizes how impressed Margaret is with her. This shows that although Mary's actions may be misguided, her intentions are pure, and as she gets older, she will learn what's really important in life. The girls witness the power of love when Jem Wilson goes into the burning mill to rescue his father. This shows that Jem is a worthy, heroic man, and although Mary cannot yet admit it to herself, one can see her attraction to Jem. It seems Mary wants to live her own life, and therefore would dislike any man her elders wanted her to fall in love with. However, how long she can fight the true feelings of her heart is another matter.



Chapter 6, Chapter 7, and Chapter 8

Chapter 6, Chapter 7, and Chapter 8 Summary

For Henry Carson and the partners that own the mill, the fire is a blessing in disguise. They receive insurance money, and can take their time rebuilding the mill with new machinery. This gives them plenty of leisure time with their families. However, the workers find themselves without income and a way to feed their families. George Wilson is one of the people out of work. He comes to John Barton to ask for some money, not for himself, but for the Davenport family. Ben Davenport worked at Carson's Mill with Wilson, and is also out of work. Ben is also very sick with a fever. Barton and Wilson go to the family's home, a cellar in a poor neighborhood where they live in squalor. Barton goes home and gets his good clothes, which he pawns to buy food and fuel for the fire. He returns to the home and the two men make the family comfortable and try to tend to Ben. Barton complains again about the differences between the rich and the poor. Wilson goes to see Henry Carson and asks him for an order to take Ben to the infirmary. Carson obliges, but by the time he returns Ben is dead. Mary Barton arrives, looking for her father, and Barton tells her to comfort the poor widow.

In chapter seven, the Wilson twins, Joe and Will, also die from the fever. Mary and Alice help their mother, Jane, take care of them in their last hours. Jem Wilson returns, and Alice tells him of his brothers' deaths. Mary is moved by his sadness, and hopes she can give him some money somehow when she is the rich wife of Harry Carson.

In chapter eight, Jem Wilson goes to visit John Barton, and is pleased to see that Mary Barton is there. He hopes to talk to her, but Mary doesn't turn away from reading her bible, and soon retires to her room. Jem is disappointed, for he hoped to make some headway with her. John Barton tells him how hard it is getting for workers, since trading with other countries is also not going well. Barton is chosen to go to London and the Parliament to tell the government about the bad conditions they have to work in. Mrs. Davenport gives him a suit to wear, and Barton prepares for his trip. All the neighbors tell him what they want him to say to the government officials. He tells Mary that he is afraid Jane Wilson will die of heartsickness, now that her twin sons are dead. Mary makes a resolution not to see Harry Carson while her father is gone. Another seamstress, Sally Leadbitter, has been a go-between with Mary and Harry. She goes to take Mary a message from him, and finds Mary distraught over the sudden, inexplicable death of George Wilson. Mary turns Sally away, telling her she does not wish to see Harry. Sally leaves and Margaret Jennings comes to visit Mary. She tells her that she has found a job singing.

Chapter 6, Chapter 7, and Chapter 8 Analysis

What is good for the masters of the mill is bad for the workers of the mill. While the masters take their time rebuilding and refurbishing the mill, the mill workers have no



way to earn any money. Even though he is also suffering, George Wilson still cares for other men. He takes care of Ben Davenport, a fellow worker, out of the goodness of his heart. Although he gets no repayment from this, Wilson is satisfied with how he helps his fellow man. John Barton, while he is also willing to help Davenport, is more angered by his conditions. Barton gets more and more angry as he sees how the workers are treated, and there is no telling what his feelings will push him to do. In addition, the death of George Wilson is a sad blow for all involved. Jem Wilson is still pursuing Mary, but she refuses to give him a chance. However, Mary is turning away from Harry Carson, even though she wants to be a rich man's wife. She does not like Sally Leadbitter, and is only using her because she needs someone to connect her to Harry. She tries to be polite to Sally, but it is hard in the face of adversity. Mary is starting to realize that riches aren't enough to bring happiness.



Chapter 9, Chapter 10, and Chapter 11

Chapter 9, Chapter 10, and Chapter 11 Summary

John Barton returns home, upset because the government officials wouldn't listen to the working class men or their tales of woe. Mary Barton tells her father that George Wilson has died. Barton tells her, Job Legh, and Margaret Jennings how the workers carried their petition to Parliament to no avail. Job Legh tells them that he was in London once, to fetch Margaret after her parents died. He and Margaret's other grandfather went to the city to bury their children and claim their grandchild. Job, who had no other children, was pleased that he got custody of Margaret. Mary falls asleep during his tale but awakens at the end of it. Job reads Barton a poem that says God will help the poor at the end of their days.

In chapter ten, Barton is unable to find more work, especially since the mill owners know he is one of the men who went to the government. He and Mary begin pawning some of their belongings so they can afford food. Their relationship is more strained now, and Mary is upset that her father uses opium to quell his hunger. Mary goes to see Jane Wilson, who chastises her for not coming sooner after George Wilson's death. Mary is shocked to see Alice is now going deaf. Jane tells her that Jem Wilson is doing well, and will be settling down soon. She says that she thinks he will ask a nearby shop girl to marry him, although she doesn't let Alice hear her say this.

John Barton is walking home from a union meeting when he is accosted by a woman. It turns out to be Esther Barton, his wife's long-lost sister, who is now a homeless prostitute. John Barton pushes her away and tells her she is responsible for the elder Mary's death.

In chapter eleven, Barton returns home after leaving Esther. He eventually feels bad for what he said to her, and tries to find her again but cannot. He wishes Mary were married, and tries to convince her to marry Jem. She dismisses this, but later that day, Jem comes to see her. He proposes to Mary, but she says she can never love him and he leaves, heartbroken. After thinking the matter over, she realizes that she does love Jem, and must try to win him back. She begins to ignore Sally Leadbitter at work, since she does not want to see Harry Carson anymore. However, Sally comes to her house to corner her, and says that Harry is nearby and wants to see her. Mary reluctantly agrees to go meet him. He tries to find out what's wrong with her, and says although he never thought about marrying her, he will if it makes her happy. Mary says she can't ever love him, and he must leave her alone. Mary leaves and Sally comments on his mention of not wanting to get married at first. Harry says he will not give up on Mary.



Chapter 9, Chapter 10, and Chapter 11 Analysis

The death of George Wilson is especially hard on John Barton, who has just been turned down on his trip to speak to government officials. As a result of his trip, he has a hard time finding work because the masters of the mills don't want to hire a known agitator. This only serves to anger Barton further against the mill owners. In order to combat his hunger, he turns to opium, an addictive drug. However, he begins to use the drug because it also helps him forget his depression. When he meets Esther Barton, he does not take the time to listen to her, because he partly blames her for his wife's death, and consequently, everything bad that has happened to him since then. He realizes that he was too harsh, but is unable to find her again. Mary Barton finally realizes that she loves Jem, but just a bit too late, as she has told him she can never love him. Jane Wilson is miffed that Mary does not seem to return her son's love, and she feels that Mary is not worthy of his love. Although she still needs to make her feelings known to Jem, she breaks it off with Harry Carson. Harry Carson thinks that since he now proposed marriage, it would show Mary he was making a sacrifice. However, it is clear that Mary has dodged a bullet, for she was likely to go down the same path as her Aunt Esther.



Chapter 12, Chapter 13, and Chapter 14

Chapter 12, Chapter 13, and Chapter 14 Summary

Harry Carson continues to try to get Mary Barton's attention, accosting her on the way to and from work and leaving notes with Sally Leadbitter. Mary continues to ignore him and leave his notes unopened. She had hoped that Jem Wilson would come to see her and check if she had changed her mind, but he does not. Her father, John Barton, is ailing, since he does not have enough food and is now addicted to opium. Margaret Jennings comes over to visit Mary one evening. Margaret tells Mary that she ran into Jem, who was able to sell one of his inventions and got a good amount of money for it. Mary tells Margaret what happened between she and Jem. Margaret tells her not to go chasing after Jem, since men like to do the courting themselves. Margaret also gives Mary some money, since Margaret has had much success at singing. The next day, Mary goes to visit Jane Wilson, who tells her Alice is waiting for a letter from her nephew, Will Wilson, who is a sailor. They sit down to tea, but a man comes to the door. Alice, although her eyesight is also failing, recognizes him and comes over to greet her nephew Will.

Chapter thirteen shows how several days later, Will comes to see Mary, his old playmate. They go to Job Legh's, where Alice is waiting for them. Will tells them stories of his time at sea, including of a few sailors who saw a mermaid.

In chapter fourteen, Esther Barton is released from prison. On the street, she runs into Jem Wilson and tells him who she is. She tells him she met an officer and fell in love, and followed him off when he was stationed in Chester. He is eventually ordered to Ireland, and tells Esther she must stay behind with their daughter. Esther opens a shop in Chester, but her daughter gets sick, and all her money goes to trying to keep her comfortable and cure her. After losing the shop, Esther becomes a prostitute to try and raise money. However, her daughter dies, and now Esther lives on the streets in Manchester, watching over Mary Barton. She tells Jem he must warn Mary, for she is falling in love with a rich man, Harry Carson, and she may end up like Esther. Esther is very concerned for Mary, and although she herself is damned, she wants to save her niece. Jem promises to help her, and offers her a place to stay. However, Esther says she is also an alcoholic, and he won't want her around his family. Jem goes home and thinks over what he has learned. He resolves to learn exactly what Harry Carson's motives are regarding Mary.

Chapter 12, Chapter 13, and Chapter 14 Analysis

Although Mary Barton has clearly told Harry Carson that she is no longer interested in him, he still continues to harass her and try to make her change her mind. However, Mary Barton has seen the light and is set in her resolve to make Jem see how much she loves him. She runs into Margaret and learns that Jem has made a lot of money for



one of his inventions. She sees now how foolish she had been, for if she had been true to herself about her feelings for Jem, she would have been a rich man's wife by now. Mary desperately wants to let Jem know how she feels, but Magaret tells her that men want to be the pursuers. Although this may seem strange in light of modern views, this is in line with the courting, or dating, rituals of that time. Alice Wilson has the biggest surprise of her life when Will Wilson returns. Alice has been a happy, self-sufficient woman for man years, and this seems to be her reward for her patience and good living. Esther tells Jem her story, and one learns exactly what she wants to save her niece from becoming. Jem is surprised to learn of her affection for Harry Carson, but before he approaches Mary to bad-mouth her lover, he decides to learn what Harry's motives are regarding Mary.



Chapter 15, Chapter 16, and Chapter 17

Chapter 15, Chapter 16, and Chapter 17 Summary

John Barton has been very depressed ever since his trip to London. He becomes a Chartist, the most extremely radical group fighting for workers rights. While the weavers are on strike, the managers hire strikebreakers to do the work. That leads to the workers beating up the strikebreakers. Mary Barton is still pining after Jem, who seems to have given up on her. Jem, however, has been waiting for Harry Carson, and finally stops him in the street. He says he is a friend of Mary's, and demands to know Harry's intentions. Harry tries to brush him off and tells him that his intentions are none of Jem's business. Harry pushes Jem until Jem reveals that he is also a lover of Mary's, but still refuses to answer him. Harry strikes Jem, and a policeman comes and holds Jem back. He asks Harry if he wants to have Jem locked up, but Harry says no. Harry warns Jem to stay away from him, but Jem threatens him if he hurts Mary. The men split up, and the policeman yells to Jem that no woman is worth the fight.

In chapter sixteen, the masters of the mills meet to discuss what they will do about the workers' demands. The majority is not inclined to give into the workers. During the negotiation sessions, Harry Carson draws a caricature of the labor leaders, which he shows to the other men, then rips up and throws near the fireplace.

One of the men gets a servant to give him the picture, which he shows to the other men. The Chartists realize that it is time for serious measures. The men use pieces of paper to have a secret drawing. The man who draws the paper with the mark on it will be the one to kill one of the masters. They do this in secrecy so none of the other men will know who the murderer is.

In chapter seventeen, Will Wilson comes to tell Mary he is going to be sailing again soon, and hopes to make enough to ask Margaret Jennings to be his wife. John Barton is going as a delegate from the worker's union to Glasgow, Scotland. He comes in to get ready, but practically ignores Will Wilson, who leaves. Job Legh comes over to talk, but John does not want to bother with him, either. John says goodbye to Mary and leaves. Margaret arrives from the Wilson's, and tells them Alice Wilson has had a stroke. Mary thinks that things seem to keep getting worse and worse.

Chapter 15, Chapter 16, and Chapter 17 Analysis

When Esther Barton tells Jem Wilson how she has come to warn Mary about Harry, Jem is very concerned. He goes to confront Harry about his motives towards Mary, but Harry is only interested in finding out Jem's feelings for her. He figures out that Jem also loves Mary and has been jilted, and so does not reveal his feelings to his rival. The men end up in a fight, which could look bad in the future if something happens to one of the men. John Barton has now joined the radical group, the Chartist, a group of men who



are willing to do anything it takes to secure better rights for workers. The members of the group are very bitter against the masters. When negotiations do not go well and they see the Harry Carson's drawing, they feel that they now have to take drastic measures. John Barton prepares to go to Glasgow. It is unclear at this point whether he has drawn the slip to be the murderer or not. Since he is going on a trip, he may be looking for an alibi so when the murder happens, the reader knows it is not him. However, he could be going on the trip as a way to get away after the murder is done. The fact that he ignores Job Legh and Will Wilson indicates that there is something heavy on his mind. This indicates that there is a high probability that he will be the murderer.



Chapter 18, Chapter 19, and Chapter 20

Chapter 18, Chapter 19, and Chapter 20 Summary

Harry Carson's sisters, Amy Carson, Helen Carson, and Sophy Carson, are lounging around when a servant arrives and tells them their brother, Harry Carson, was shot in the street. They grieve, and Sophy goes to tell her father, Henry Carson. Mrs. Carson hears the commotion, sees the body, and becomes hysterical. Henry Carson offers a reward for information about the murderer. The police superintendent says he has the gun the shooter dropped in a field. He also tells him that Harry got in an altercation with some man a few days ago.

In chapter nineteen, Mary Barton is very depressed. She goes to see Alice Wilson. Margaret Jennings is there as well, and the two girls observe that Alice seems to think she is in her childhood. Mary and Margaret decide to take shifts watching over Alice to give Jane Wilson a break. Mary goes to work at Miss Simmonds, and learns about Harry Carson's murder. She cannot help but cry. A policeman comes to see Mrs. Wilson, but does not identify himself. He presents a gun and asks her if it is her son's, and Jane tells him that it is indeed her son's gun. Jem Wilson is arrested. He sends a man to tell his mother he is in trouble. The man reveals that Jem is wanted for the murder of Harry Carson.

In chapter twenty, Mary Barton goes to take care of Alice Wilson. When she arrives at the home, Jane Wilson angrily tells her that Jem has been arrested for the murder of Harry Carson. Jane says it is all Mary's fault, for she is the reason the men quarreled, and she will be the reason that Jem is hanged. Mary is very upset at this news. She tries to ask Mrs. Wilson to let her stay, but Jane is inflexible. She tells the girl she blames her for all the trouble and tells her to leave the house. On the way home, a boy tells Mary he is very hungry and tries to beg for something, but she brushes him off and tells him hunger is nothing. She gets home and locks the door, falling to the floor and crying. She eventually is able to fall asleep, but is awoken when someone comes to the door. She opens the door and thinks it is her mother standing there, and cries out in joy. However, it is Esther Barton.

Chapter 18, Chapter 19, and Chapter 20 Analysis

Henry Carson and his family learn that their riches cannot protect them from tragedy. Henry Carson is particularly devastated by his son Harry's death, since at that time, much importance was placed on the first born male. Henry had plans for his son, plans to leave the mill to him, and to let him take over the family business. All of Henry's dreams for his son are now gone, and this motivates him to offer a reward for the finding of the killer. When Mary Barton learns about the murder, she is moved to tears. Although she has told Harry that she doesn't love him, she still has feelings for him as a friend. She is genuinely sad to learn about his death. She goes to the Wilsons to find



some comfort as she takes care of Alice. However, Jane Wilson is angry to see Mary and tells her Jem has been arrested. Jane is also angry at herself for telling the police she recognized the gun, and seems to be taking that out on Mary as well. Mary begs to be allowed to stay, because with her father gone, she doesn't have many places to turn. However, Jane only see the possible loss of her son, and will not agree to let Mary stay. Mary returns home, and when she sees Esther Barton, she believes it is her mother coming to make everything right and comfort her.



Chapter 21, Chapter 22, and Chapter 23

Chapter 21, Chapter 22, and Chapter 23 Summary

Esther Wilson has decided to seek out her niece Mary Barton after visiting the scene of the murder. She found a bit of paper there with Mary's name written on it in Jem Wilson's hand. She takes this to be evidence against Jem, and returns it to Mary with promises not to tell. Embarrassed at her situation, Esther pretends that she is living somewhere else with her husband, even borrowing some new clothes to look presentable when she sees Mary. She struggles not to cry because she wants Mary to know how much she cares.

In chapter twenty-two, after Esther leaves, Mary Wilson goes into her father's room. She realizes that the true murder is her father, and that the paper came from a poem Jem had written out for him. She finds the poem and matches up the scrap of paper from the murder scene with it. Mary is distraught at realizing this. However, she knows now that Jem is truly innocent, and she must try to prove it. Since Jem couldn't have been at the murder scene, she resolves to find out where he was and obtain an alibi for him.

Mary Barton goes to see Job Legh and Margaret Jennings, and manages to convince them of Jem Wilson's innocence. She asks them to help her find the alibi. Margaret remembers that Jem was supposed to keep Will Wilson company on his walk to Liverpool. Jane Wilson is still angry and Mary blames her, but she tells Mary that Jem did indeed walk with Will Wilson. Mary goes to see Alice Wilson, and sees that the old woman is slowly dying.

In chapter twenty-three, Mary hurries home, thinking of how she can possibly prove Jem's alibi. She remembers the name of Will's ship, The John Cropper, and knows he went to Liverpool. A policeman drops off a summons for Mary to testify in court. Mary goes to Job and Margaret and asks them to help her again. Job goes to hire a lawyer for Jem, while Margaret gives Mary some money to help out Jem. Job comes back and says he has found a lawyer named Mr. Bridgenorth. Mary knows that she must reach Will, who was going to Liverpool and then to visit his uncle before his ship sailed.

Chapter 21, Chapter 22, and Chapter 23 Analysis

Esther Wilson has gone to the scene of the murder and found a paper with Jem's handwriting. She believes that this proves Jem Wilson's guilt, and gives it to Mary so she can hide it. However, Mary knows that the paper the scrap came from was actually from a paper Jem gave her father. She puts the pieces together and realizes that her father, John Barton, is the actual murderer. She knows now that she must find a way to prove Jem's innocence, but she cannot bring herself to turn in her father. She focuses on finding an alibi for Jem, the one way for her to prove his innocence without implicating her father. She manages to find out that Jem was supposed to walk with Will

Wilson on his way to Liverpool. With this one hope, she convinces Job Legh to help her find a lawyer, so they can help Jem. Mary gets a summons and realizes she will have to go to Liverpool for the trial, and testify to her relationship to both Harry Carson and Jem Wilson. She resolves to reach Will Wilson so he can testify in Will's defense.



Chapter 24, Chapter 25, and Chapter 26

Chapter 24, Chapter 25, and Chapter 26 Summary

Mary Barton goes to see Jane Wilson again. She realizes Jane has also been given a summons by the police to testify against Jem Wilson. She seems to be in shock. Mary stays overnight to watch over her, hoping she and Alice both make it through. In the morning, Jane Wilson seems to be recovered, and Mary tells her about her plans for seeking out Will Wilson. Mary asks the doctor to come out and look at Alice and Jane. The doctor examines Jane, and Mary asks if he thinks she is able enough to go to Liverpool. The doctor says yes, it is a short journey and shouldn't hurt her. This upsets Mary, who tells the doctor she wishes he said Jane isn't well enough to go. The doctor reverses course and agrees with her, saying it is much too arduous a journey for Jane and he will write a certificate saying so.

In chapter twenty-five, Mary Barton arrives home and finds Sally Leadbitter waiting for her. Sally wants to hear the gossip about Jem and the trial, since Mary hasn't been to work and won't be until the trial is over. Mary gets angry when Sally says she knows Jem shot Harry Carson.

Job Legh comes in, and Sally, who doesn't like Job, leaves. He and Mary go to see Jane Wilson, and Job agrees that she is not well enough to go to Liverpool. However, Jane overhears them and insists on going so she can clear her son's name. When they return to Job's, Mary and Job argue about who will be the one to go see the lawyer and who will go hunt down Will. They ask Margaret for her opinion, and she recommends that Mary finds Will while Job goes to Mr. Bridgenorth.

Chapter twenty-six shows that Mary leaves on the train for Liverpool. She goes to the home where Will Wilson is supposed to be lodging, but he is not there. The homeowner, Mrs. Jones, says that Will Wilson has already sailed.

Chapter 24, Chapter 25, and Chapter 26 Analysis

When Mary Barton finds out that Jane Wilson has gotten a summons to testify, she sees how hard it is on her. She tries to save her the agony, as well as keeping her testimony out of the trial, by having the doctor declare her too sick to go. However, Jane believes in her son's innocence, and wants to testify so she can tell the jury how her son is a good person who wouldn't do something like this. The doctor does not seem to have many scruples, since he eagerly agrees to say whatever Mary wants him to say. Sally Leadbitter comes in to dig for information about Jem and the trial. Mary clearly does not like her, but is unable to be rude and tell Sally so. Job Legh, however, doesn't hide his distaste for the girl. He and Mary argue over who should go to find Will Wilson. While Job thinks he will have a easier time getting there and finding Will, Mary insists on doing it because she wants to be the one who saves Jem Wilson. She cannot stand on the

sidelines and just hope that everything is going well; she must do everything she can to save him.



Chapter 27, Chapter 28, and Chapter 29

Chapter 27, Chapter 28, and Chapter 29 Summary

In chapter twenty-seven, Mary Barton despairs at the news that Will Wilson's ship has already sailed. Charley Jones, however, tells Mary that his mother is confused. He said the ship was tugged down the river by a steamboat, and will need to go over a sandbar before it can sail in the ocean. Mary knows she must catch the ship, and Charley says if they hire a boat they might be able to do it. Charley takes her down to the docks, where Mary negotiates with two sailors, offering them money and her shawl to pawn.

In chapter twenty-eight, the sailors take her out in the boat, but the wind is against them for most of the way and Mary is afraid they will not make it. However, the wind begins to cooperate, and the going is much easier as they approach the John Cropper. They are almost to the boat when they see the sails unfurled and the ship beginning to leave for the sea.

One of the sailors in Mary Barton's boat yells to the John Cropper that they are looking for Will Wilson, who must testify in a trial to save an innocent man, Jem Wilson. No one on the boat seems to listen, and the sailor calls out again, using Mary's name. The captain curses them and yells back that he will not stop the ship. However, Will has heard them and comes to the front of the ship to yell that he will come back in the pilot's boat. The sailors turn back and tell Mary that the pilot comes back in a boat as soon as he gets the ship out to sea. Each of the boatmen have a differing opinion on how long it will take, however. When they get back to shore, one of the sailors asks Mary where she is staying, but she looks lost. He takes her home with him.

In chapter twenty-nine, Job Legh goes to the lawyer, Mr. Bridgenorth, and obtains his services. They wait for Mary and Will to come, but they do not show up. He goes to the Jones's home, and learns that Mary was there. He asks Charley to come get him if Mary comes back.

Chapter 27, Chapter 28, and Chapter 29 Analysis

Mary Barton is upset that the ship has apparently sailed, since it means Jem Wilson would have no one to defend him. However, Charley Jones uses his knowledge of ships to tell her that there is still a chance to catch the ship. Mary knows she must pull out all the stops to reach the ship in time. Throughout the voyage to the ship, the John Cropper, Mary is very nervous and afraid they will miss it, since the wind will not cooperate with their small craft. However, the wind soon changes, giving her hope until she sees the sails on the ship unfurl before they are close enough. The sailors yell to the boat, but the hard-hearted captain will not listen to their demands to stop, as he doesn't want to lose time. Will Wilson hears their pleas, however, and says he will return to free his cousin. Mary is glad to hear this, but the sailors cannot agree on how long it

will take him to get back. Exhausted by her efforts to reach Will, Mary cannot think of where she is staying. The sailor gives her a place to stay, but Job Legh is left working for her.



Chapter 30, Chapter 31, and Chapter 32

Chapter 30, Chapter 31, and Chapter 32 Summary

Chapter thirty shows that Job Legh goes to check on Jane Wilson, and tells her they have not found Will Wilson yet. He goes back to the lawyer to check if they are there, and then to the Joneses. Jem returns home, but cannot bring himself to tell Jane that there is not much hope. He says that Will Wilson has been found and is ready to testify to ease her heart. He says Will and Mary are going to stay at the Joneses, and that Jem will definitely be found innocent. Jane goes to bed.

Chapter thirty-one shows that Job Legh is still worried about Mary. The boatman, Ben Sturgis, takes Mary to his house, where he and his wife, Mrs. Sturgis, take care of her. Mary tells Mrs. Sturgis how she ended up there. That night, Mary cannot sleep, so stays awake staring out the window. The next morning is the morning of the trial. In chapter thirty-two, Henry Carson sleeps very poorly before the trial, wanting his son's murderer to come to justice.

Job Legh avoids Jane Wilson so he doesn't have to explain that Will Wilson is not there. He receives a letter from Jem Wilson asking Job to take care of Jane and Mary, and to let Mary believe that he is the murderer because the truth will be too much for her. He goes to the courthouse and sees Mary Barton and Jane Wilson in the witness room. Jane is sobbing, and Job realizes she now knows that it is unlikely Will will make it there before the trial. During the trial, Jem Wilson pleads not guilty. Jane testifies that the gun is her son's, but gives an impassioned defense of his innocence. Mary testifies that both men loved her, but that she turned Harry Carson away and Jem did not know of her love. Mary Barton mutters to herself about not going mad. She sees Will Wilson and realizes Jem is saved, and collapses in a fever. Will Wilson testifies that he was with Jem the night of the murder. The pilot testifies to the circumstances leading to Will's return. Jem is found not guilty. After the trial, Jem finds his mother, but still searches for Mary.

Chapter 30, Chapter 31, and Chapter 32 Analysis

Job Legh is very worried about Mary, who seems not to have succeeded in her mission. He checks with the lawyer and with the Jones family, but cannot find her anywhere. In order to lift Jane Wilson's spirits, he lies that Will Wilson is found, and Mary is with him. However, her hopes are dashed the next day, when Jane meets Mary in the witness room and learns the truth. Mary and Jane testify, although both make clear their feelings about Jem's innocence. Will Wilson also makes it in time, but Mary is not there to see it as she collapses as soon as she lays eyes on him. Mary has been exhausted by her struggle to find Will, and had been wrestling with the knowledge that her father, John Barton, is the real murderer. Her efforts do not go unrewarded, as Will Wilson testifies and, although the prosecution tries to poke holes in his argument, the word of the pilot is

unquestionable. Jem Wilson is found not guilty, although many people do not seem convinced of his innocence, including Henry Carson. After the trial, Jem searches for Mary, who admitted during her testimony that she loves him.



Chapter 33, Chapter 34, and Chapter 35

Chapter 33, Chapter 34, and Chapter 35 Summary

Mary Barton stays with Ben Sturgis, with Jem Wilson watching over her in chapter thirty-three. Jem hears that Alice Wilson is dying, and although he hates to leave Mary, he knows he must go home with Jane Wilson to watch over Alice as she passes away. They return to Manchester, and Alice soon dies peacefully. Jem tells Margaret Jennings that he is going back for Mary and to relieve Job Legh, who has been watching over her. Margaret is reluctant for him to go, but Jem cannot live without Mary. He tells his mother that he is going to Mary and wants to marry her. Jane is put out and jealous, but Jem placates her. As he leaves Manchester, he sees John Barton, looking wasted and pale like a ghost. Jem does not acknowledge John. In chapter thirty-four, Mary is still between life and death when Jem makes it back to Liverpool. However, she eventually recovers. For a time she does not speak, and does not seem to comprehend what has happened.

Mary Barton eventually recovers her wits and asks Jem Wilson to take her home to Manchester. They say goodbye to Ben and Mrs. Sturgis and return home. Jem wants to speak of their love, but Mary tells him it must wait and returns home alone to face her father. When she sees John Barton, she remembers him as her father, not a murderer, and his wasted state tugs at her heart. She takes her money and goes out to buy things to bring him some comfort. On the way, she stops at Job Legh's to see him and Margaret Jennings. After telling them her father is home, she goes to buy food and returns to her father. It takes some time to nurse him back to health. She meets Jem at Job Legh's, where he tells her his mother wants to see her. She says she will come soon. Sally Leadbitter comes to visit Mary, and Mary tells her she isn't coming back to work. Sally says she should rethink that, since Jem has lost his job because people still think he got away with murder. Mary prepares to go see Jem, and John Barton tells her to make sure Jem is at their house at 8 p.m. that night.

Chapter 33, Chapter 34, and Chapter 35 Analysis

Through love and care of the Sturgises, Jem Wilson, and Job Legh, Mary Barton is nursed back to health. However, her ordeal isn't over yet, as she needs to confront her father about the murder of Harry Carson. When she sees her father, however, she is struck by his weakened appearance. She does not see John Barton, the murderer, she sees John Barton, her father, and forgives him instantly. She nurses her father back to health, not asking him about why he killed Harry Carson. John Barton seems to be waiting for the right moment to speak about the ordeal. When Mary tells him she is going to the Wilsons, he asks that Jem Wilson come to see him. It is clear he wants to talk to Jem in some way about the murder. Sally Leadbitter annoys Mary one last time, coming to tell her that Jem has lost his job because people still think he is guilty. This

makes Mary wonder if their ordeal will ever truly be over, or if the murder of Harry Carson will hang over her forever.



Chapter 36, Chapter 37, and Chapter 38

Chapter 36, Chapter 37, and Chapter 38 Summary

Mary Barton goes to see Jem Wilson, who tells her it is true, he has lost his job. She tells him that John Barton wants to see him that night. They come to see Jane Wilson, who greets Mary and asks her to make her son happy. Mary and Jem return to her home where they find Henry Carson, Job Legh, and John Barton deep in conversation. John Barton has just admitted to Carson that he was the one who killed his son, Harry Carson. Carson says Barton will hang for his crime. Barton says he has wished to die ever since he had committed the deed, for living with the knowledge of his sin is worse. Barton apologizes to Jem for what he made him go through. Carson turns to leave and go to the police. John Barton stops him before he leaves, and tells him he has suffered, but Carson interrupts him, saying he has suffered as well. John finally understands how the rich and the poor are equals. Barton asks for forgiveness, but Carson refuses and leaves. He encounters a little girl on the way, who forgives an older boy for pushing her. He returns home and looks at his bible, where his son's name was inscribed at birth.

John Barton lays dying in his bed, with Mary, Job and Jem watching over him. As he is about to expire, Henry Carson returns to the home and takes Barton in his arms, forgiving him for the murder of his son. After the funeral, Jem goes to see his mother, Jane Wilson, who doesn't know about the circumstances surrounding John Barton's death. When he returns to Mary, Margaret tells him that Henry Carson wants to see him. Jane comes to comfort Mary, and their rocky relationship is mended. Mary tells Jane about her father murdering John Barton, although Jem does not find this out for some time.

In chapter thirty-seven, Jem goes to see Mr. Carson, who asks how John Barton obtained his gun. Jem says Barton came to borrow it, as it was George Wilson's gun and Barton and George used to go shooting with it. They discuss how the hard times of the factory workers contributed to Barton's decision to commit murder. They do not come to any agreement about what masters can do to ease the troubles of the working man. However, over the rest of his life, Carson does work to make working conditions better.

In chapter thirty-eight, Mary Barton and Jem Wilson are preparing to move to Canada. Jem tells Mary that her aunt Esther is actually poor, and Mary wants to go see her. Jem goes to look for Esther, and learns she is near death. He returns home, and as they are preparing for the move, they see a face at the window. It is Esther, who has come to see the home once more before she dies. They bring her in, and she soon dies and is buried with John Barton. Mary and Jem get married and move to Canada with Jane. They have a son, Johnnie. They receive word that Margaret Jennings has gotten her eyesight back, and she is to be married to Will Wilson.



Chapter 36, Chapter 37, and Chapter 38 Analysis

Although Henry Carson is deeply stricken by the loss of his son, he finds it in his heart to forgive John Barton. He realizes the conditions that led Barton to murder Harry Carson, and the two men feel a sort of kinship, for they have experienced similar losses. Henry Carson meditates over how the loss of his only son has affected him and his family, but also on how John Barton's life brought him to commit murder. In later years, Henry Carson seems to take what he has learned from this ordeal to heart, trying to make conditions better for working men so no one else has to go through what he did. Barton is able to die in peace with Henry Carson's forgiveness. Barton has led a very troubled life, and at the end he welcomes peace, much like his sister-in-law, Esther. Esther returns to the Barton home and is also able to die in a place where she was once loved. Mary and Jane Wilson's relationship is mended after her father's death. Jane puts aside her dislike for Mary and comforts her on the loss of her father. Mary is able to confess to Jane the truth behind Harry Carson's murder, and to her credit, Jane does not tell anyone she knows, even Jem Wilson. This gives Jem more respect for his mother, and he loves her more for the way she is kind to his wife. The three of them move to Canada to escape the stigma attached to Jem's name. There, they have a son and lead a happy life. The final good news they receive is that Margaret has regained her eyesight and married Will, suggesting a relatively happy time for all.



Characters

Mary Barton

Mary Barton is the daughter of John and Mary Barton, the niece of Esther Barton, and the central character of the novel. Her parents are poor, working class people, but they have a relatively happy life until the elder Mary dies in childbirth, losing the baby as well. Mary and her father, John, grow closer over the years since they are the only two left in their family. John wants a better life for his daughter than that of a factory worker. As she grows, Mary becomes friends with Alice Wilson, an older woman who lives nearby, and Margaret Jennings, a cheerful girl who becomes a singing sensation. Mary takes a job as a seamstress, but she aspires to be rich and live well. To this aim, she lets herself be pursued by Harry Carson, the son of a wealthy mill owner. Jem Wilson, the son of her father's friend George Wilson, has also been in love with Mary all his life, but when he proposes she rebuffs him. Mary soon realizes her mistake and, turning down Carson's advances, she tries to make Jem see that she does love him. When Jem is arrested for the murder of Henry Carson, Mary does all that she can to free him. She is successful, but learns that her father is the true murderer. She still loves him and takes care of him, however, until he dies. Mary and Jem move with Jem's mother, Jane Wilson, to Canada to live in peace.

John Barton

John Barton is the father of Mary Barton and husband of Mary Barton, the elder. He loses his wife in childbirth and is left to raise Mary on his own. He is a lower class textile mill worker, who despairs at the disparity between the rich and the poor. He is a member of organizations, one called the Chartists, that fight for better working conditions, although they aren't very successful. He and Mary have a relatively happy life together, but his best friend, George Wilson, dies, one of many unfortunate occurrences. John loses his job, and cannot find another because mill owners know about his fighting for better worker's rights. He and Mary have to pawn most of their belongings just to eat. He begins to get addicted to opium, which is legal at that time. Mary despairs over her father's condition, but doesn't know how to remedy their situation. John Barton gets very depressed and joins a radical workers' group called the Chartists. He is chosen to kill Harry Carson as a strike back against the masters. John Barton goes away while Jem Wilson is tried and acquitted of the murder. When he returns, he apologizes to Henry Carson for killing his son before he dies.

Jem Wilson

Jem Wilson is the son of Jane and George Wilson, and the older brother of twin boys who die young. He is in love with Mary Barton, although she continually rebuffs his advances. When he learns he is to earn a lot of money for one of his inventions, he



proposes to Mary, but she tells him she can never love him. He takes her word as final, and begins to avoid her, without knowing she has changed her mind. Jem is accused of murdering Harry Carson, although John Barton actually did the deed. With the help of Mary Barton, he gets off and he and Mary move to Canada with his mother Jane.

Esther Barton

Esther Barton is the sister of Mary Barton, the elder, the sister-in-law of John Barton, and the aunt of Mary Barton, the younger. Esther lives with the Barton family, but flees because she is fond of the rich life. She follows her lover, who is in the military, but he must eventually leave her and their child. She tries to make a living, but her daughter falls sick and she loses her shop. She becomes a prostitute and comes back to Manchester to warn Mary Barton that looking to become a rich woman can be her downfall.

Margaret Jennings

Margaret Jennings is the granddaughter of Job Legh. She is a good friend of Mary Barton. She works as a seamstress until she starts to go blind. However, her talent for singing makes her a sensation, and she soon begins to make more money as a singer than she did as a seamstress. She gives money to the Barton family to help them out when they fall on hard times. She eventually marries Will Wilson and gets her eyesight back.

George Wilson

George Wilson is the husband of Jane Wilson, brother of Alice Wilson, and father of Jem Wilson and two twin boys. He is employed by Henry Carson in his textile mill. He and his family are friends with the Bartons, John Barton in particular. Although he often finds himself with short hours or out of work from the mill, he is always ready to help those less fortunate than himself. His young twin sons die within hours of each other, and he dies soon after.

Job Legh

Job Legh is the grandfather of Margaret Jennings. He is a kindly old man who has many interests, including collecting insects. He gained custody of Margaret after her parents died. He helps Mary Barton prove Jem Wilson's innocence.

Alice Wilson

Alice Wilson is the sister of George Wilson, the sister-in-law of Jane Wilson, and the aunt of Jem Wilson. She first lives near the Bartons, and Mary Barton becomes good



friends with Alice. Alice introduces Mary to Margaret Jennings, and the girls become fast friends. Alice is the aunt of Will Wilson, and has cared for him most of his life. She begins to go deaf as she gets older, and moves in with Jane Wilson after George's death. After a stroke, she dies peacefully, thinking she is in her childhood.

Will Wilson

Will Wilson is the nephew of Alice Wilson. He returns from his stint as a sailor and comes to live with the Wilson family. He falls in love with Margaret Jennings and eventually marries her. He testifies that Jem Wilson couldn't have been the murderer of Harry Carson.

Henry Carson

Henry Carson is the owner of a mill which employs George Wilson. He is the father of Harry Carson, who is in love with Mary Barton. His is distraught when his son is killed, but eventually forgives the murderer, John Barton, and works to make conditions better for factory employees.

Harry Carson

Harry Carson is the son of mill owner Henry Carson. He falls in love with Mary and tries to court her, but she denies him. He is murdered by John Barton.

Jane Wilson

Jane Wilson is the wife of George Wilson and the mother of Jem Wilson and two twin boys. She is heartsick after losing her twin sons and her husband in a short period of time. She is antagonistic towards Mary at first, but comes to accept her as a daughter after Jem is acquitted of Harry Carson's murder.

Mary Barton, the elder

Mary Barton, the elder, is the wife of John Barton, mother of Mary Barton, and sister of Esther Barton. She is upset because her sister Esther has recently fled their home looking for a better life. She dies in childbirth when Mary is still a child, likely heartsick over her sister's disappearance.

Sally Leadbitter

Sally Leadbitter is a girl who works with Mary Barton at Mrs. Simmond's dressmaker's shop. She carries notes back and forth between Mary and Harry Carson. She enjoys



the money that Mr. Carson gives her for this service and tries to convince Mary to keep seeing him.

Ben Davenport

Ben Davenport is a man who worked at Carson's mill with George Wilson. After the mill burns down, Wilson and John Barton help the family, giving them money and trying to take care of them because Ben is ill. However, Ben soon dies.

The Wilson Twins

The Wilson twins, Joe and Will, are the twin sons of George and Jane Wilson, and the younger brother of Jem Wilson. The twins are weak and both die within hours of each other at a young age.

Miss Simmonds

Miss Simmonds owns a dressmaker's shop where Mary Barton is employed.

Charley Jones

Charley Jones is Mrs. Jones's son. He helps Mary Barton find a boat so she can track down Will Wilson.

Mrs. Jones

Mrs. Jones lives in Liverpool. Will Wilson is supposed to be lodging in her home.

Ben Sturgis

Ben Sturgis is a sailor and husband of Mrs. Sturgis who takes in Mary Barton while she is in Liverpool.

Mrs. Sturgis

Mrs. Sturgis is the wife of Ben Sturgis. She and her husband take care of Mary Barton in Liverpool.

Tom Barton

Tom Barton was the son of John Barton and Mary Barton that died at a young age.



Mr. Bridgenorth

Mr. Bridgenorth is Jem Wilson's lawyer.

Sophy Carson

Sophy Carson is the daughter of Henry Carson and the sister of Harry Carson, Helen Carson, and Amy Carson.

Helen Carson

Helen Carson is the daughter of Henry Carson and the sister of Harry Carson, Sophy Carson, and Amy Carson.

Amy Carson

Amy Carson is the daughter of Henry Carson and the sister of Harry Carson, Sophy Carson, and Helen Carson.

Johnnie

Johnnie is the son of Jem Wilson and Mary Barton.



Objects/Places

Manchester

Manchester is a city in England and the home of Mary Barton and her family. Just before the Industrial Revolution, it is teeming with factories.

Green Hey Fields

Green Hey Fields are fields outside the city of Manchester where many members of the working class go to relax when they have time off from work.

Factories and Mills

The factories and mills are the biggest employers in the city of Manchester, England. Many of the characters or their family members work there at some time or another.

Mrs. Simmond's Dress Shop

Mrs. Simmond's Dress Shop is where Mary Barton works as a seamstress.

Chartists

Chartists are a group of workers who are fighting for better working conditions in the mills and factories. They try to make the government take notice of the poor conditions they workers and their families are forced to live in.

Liverpool

Liverpool is a city in England.

Halifax

Halifax is a place in England. Jem Wilson sells one of his inventions there.

Chester

Chester is a place in England. Esther Barton has a shop here before her daughter gets sick and dies.



Glasgow

Glasgow is a city in Scotland. John Barton goes there to try to get help for the workers' union.

The John Cropper

The John Cropper is Will Wilson's ship.

Azzizes

Azzizes are the trials held regularly in Liverpool.

Canada

Canada is a country in North America. Jem Wilson and Mary Barton move there with Jane Wilson after they are married for a fresh start.



Themes

Working Class versus Ruling Class

The primary social theme of the novel, *Mary Barton*, is the dueling dynamic between the working class and the ruling class. During the 1830s and 1840s, the working classes faced poor working conditions, while the mill and factory owners lived good, decadent lifestyles. The struggles of the workers to achieve some relief from the masters so they can support their families is one of the main themes of the novel. The author primarily focuses on the laborer's point of view and how they are treated by the mill owners, mainly as if they don't really matter. This class difference is the main trigger for John Barton, who has had enough of being downtrodden and rises up to murder Harry Carson, the mill owner's son. This is devastating to Henry Carson, the mill owner, whose family has risen from the lower classes. One can see his family, mainly his daughters and wife, lounging around with nothing to do, while across the city many more people suffer. When Jem Wilson is wrongly accused of the murder of Harry Carson, he is primarily suspected because of a fight between him and Carson. When a policeman stops the fight, he immediately asks Harry Carson, the richer man, if he wants to press charges, without consulting Jem. This shows how society itself contributed to the oppression of the poor. However, the author believes, at the end of the novel, that conditions will get better, if men like Henry Carson work to make working conditions a concern of the factory owners.

Frailty

In a time before modern medicine and medical advances, the death toll in the novel *Mary Barton* is very high. Many of the characters experience tragedy early on in their lives. For John Barton, he first lost his son, Tom, then his wife, the elder Mary Barton, and her unborn child, and his best friend, George Wilson. The Wilson family experiences the losses of their twin sons, as well as that of George. Job Legh loses his daughter, Margaret's mother, leaving him to raise the baby Margaret. For many of the characters, this frailty of life is an immutable fact of life. Many times, the poor can not afford medical treatment, and the death of a loved one is a way of life and too common a tale. Many times a family loses a child, often to a disease that is rampant among the poor, such as the scarlet fever. In contrast, the rich, mainly seen in the family of Henry Carson, can afford treatment and have a much lower mortality rate. Henry Carson has three daughters and a son, and no mention is made of the loss of any children. He only experiences the same loss when John Barton murders his son, Harry Carson. Through this murder, the men, one rich and one poor, are brought on the same level. This is a reminder that death is the great equalizer to all men.



Women

Esther Barton, a character in the novel *Mary Barton*, is thought to be a potential prostitute by her brother-in-law, John Barton. He and Esther argue over her fancy dresses, and staying out late at night. Esther eventually leaves the home to follow her sweetheart, setting off a chain of unfortunate events that lead her to, in fact, become a prostitute. Esther is a stark contrast to the other women in the novel, as she is the only one who is not married and followed such a path. She serves as a warning as to what a woman can become if she does not find a man and get him to marry her. Esther followed her sweetheart and had a child, but without a wedding ring was unable to keep him around when he was transferred with the military. John Barton wants his daughter, Mary, to be secure, and despairs of their poverty because it may force her into the same lifestyle. However, because of her supposed love for Harry Carson, it looks like she will be following the same path as Esther until she realizes that Harry never planned to marry her. At that point, Mary knows how close she came to ruin, but eventually ends up a suitable married woman. For women in Victorian society, it seems that they only had a few choices: become a prostitute, get married, or become a spinster, like Alice Wilson. A woman is only seen to have real value as a wife and mother, an attitude that would certainly change in later years.

Style

Point of View

The novel *Mary Barton* is told from a third person, omniscient point of view. The narrator describes events from several characters' point of view. While primarily following Mary Barton, the narrator can look into the psyche of John Barton, Jem Wilson, or many other characters. This gives the reader a fuller understanding of what motivates each of the characters and what drives them to commit the deeds they do. In the beginning, the narrator frequently follows John Barton, but as the murder happens and the investigation begins, he drops out of the picture for some time. The narrator also addresses the reader directly at times, revealing things that none of the characters know, or offering advice or an opinion on the events of the novel. For example, just before Mrs. Carson discovers her son has been killed, the narrator describes how she is a weak woman because she has nothing to do all day. The narrator suggests that a little housework would give her something to do and correct her health problems. This technique makes the narrator seem more forthcoming and relatable to the reader.

Setting

The novel, *Mary Barton*, is set in England during the 1830s and 1840s, just before the Industrial Revolution. It primarily concerns the cities of Manchester and Lancaster, and the struggles of the working class Victorian people at that time. While elsewhere in the county people are prospering and a middle class begins to form, the workers of the cities are locked into a struggle with the masters of the mills and factories. The factories were the most common way to make a living, and when they were closed or had no business, it had deadly repercussions for many of the workers. The urban setting allows for many characters to interact continually, and give a clear and accurate picture of what life was like at that time. The author also does not describe the town in great detail, mainly concentrating on individual houses. This indicates she is letting the city stand as a symbol for all industrial cities. The population of the poor also grew as many women had many children, although there was a high rate of infant mortality. The main characters of the novel mostly belong to the lower class, and struggle to make a living. During this time period, women and even children were put to work in factories. Prostitution also became more prevalent at this time, and it is a path chose by one of the characters. While some women were homemakers, many also went to work in factories or, like Mary, became seamstresses. The conditions in England at that time created many hardships for residents, and the novel *Mary Barton* strives to portray their plight accurately.



Language and Meaning

Language and its meaning is very important in the novel *Mary Barton*, because it can signify a character's mood or state of mind. Many times throughout the novel, characters change the way they speak and pronounce words to show their agitation, elation, or hopelessness. The characters use their language as a tool to convey meaning. For the most part, the characters use a common dialect. However, if discussing a serious matter, their words turn more formal, such as using "thy" and "thou" instead of you. This technique is used in situations where a character is asking for divine help, or is trying to make a serious point. Similarly, the wealthy residents of Manchester tend to speak with more refinement than members of the common folk. Unlike most of the factory workers and the lower class, the upper class children have been educated in the ways of etiquette and proper speech, and it shows through their words. This is another way to hammer home the idea that there are many disparities between the upper class and the lower class. There is also a unique language of labor that is spoken among the factory workers, those who are fighting for workers rights. References such as "master" for a boss would not be used today. The author stays true to the time period by using words and phrases typically used in urban living during the 1830s and 1840s.

Structure

The novel, *Mary Barton*, is broken up into thirty-eight relatively short chapters. For people in the nineteenth century, books and novels were a primary form of entertainment, so authors needed to write seamless, straightforward stories, like *Mary Barton*. The plot of the novel is straightforward, told in a linear fashion. The novel follows the titular character, Mary Barton, from a young age until she is married and has a child herself. This technique allows the reader to easily follow the events of the novel, primarily through Mary's eyes. The theme of the workers versus the rich is the prevalent arch in the novel and holds the story together. While much time is used to dwell on this theme, the underlying events move the story along relatively quickly, giving the reader a true glimpse of life at that time period. The main story arcs under the theme include the murder of Harry Carson, John Barton's attempts to better the worker's rights, Mary Barton's attempts to discover her true love, and the fallen Esther Barton. All of these are touched and influenced by the main theme of workers versus the masters, creating an enlightening story that truly captures the plight of the working man.



Quotes

"No, its the poor I tell you, and the poor only, as does such things for the poor. Don't think to come over me with th' old tale, that the rich knows nothing of the trials of the poor; I say, if they don't know, they ought to know. We're their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows, and yet we are to live as separate as if we were in two worlds..." Chap. 1, p. 12

"Here's to absent friends. Friends may meet, but mountains never." Chap. 2, p. 19

"Many and many a time, as Alice reviewed that evening in her after life, did she bless Mary Barton for these kind and thoughtful words. But just then all she could say was, 'Good night, Mary, and may God bless you.'" Chap. 2, p. 19

"He tried to realize it — to think it possible. And then his mind wandered off to other days, to far different times. He thought of their courtship, of his first seeing her, an awkward beautiful rustic, far too shiftless for the delicate factory work to which she was apprenticed; of his first gift to her, a bead necklace, which had long ago been put by, in one of the deep drawers of the dresser, to be kept for Mary." Chap. 3, p. 21

"Carriages still roll along the streets, concerts are still crowded by subscribers, the shops for expensive luxuries still find daily customers, while the workman loiters away his unemployed time in watching these things, and thinking of the pale, uncomplaining wife at home, and the wailing children asking in vain for enough food, — of the sinking health, of the dying life of those near and dear to him. The contrast is too great." Chap. 3, p. 24

"The evil and the good of our nature came out strongly then. There were desperate fathers; there were bitter-tongued mothers (Oh God! what wonder!); there were reckless children; the very closest bonds of nature were snapt in that time of trial and distress. There was faith such as the rich can never manage on earth; there was 'Love strong as death;' and self denial, among rude, coarse men, akin to that of Sir Philip Sidney's most glorious deed. The vices of the poor sometimes astound us here; but when the secrets of all hearts shall be made known, their virtues will astound us in far greater degree. Of this I am certain." Chap. 6, p. 54

"Han they ever seen a child o' their'n die for want of food?" Chap. 6, p. 61

"I sometimes think the Lord is against planning. Whene'er I plan over-much, He is sure to send and mar all my plans, as if He would ha' me put the future into his hands." Chap. 7, p. 70

"Though not guarded from unnecessary sight or sound of death, as the children of the rich are, yet it had so often been brought home to her this last three or four months. It was so terrible thus to see friend after friend depart." Chap. 8, p. 83



"As long as I live, our rejection of that day will abide in my heart; and as long as I live I shall curse them as so cruelly refused to hear us; but I'll not speak of it no more." Chap. 9, p. 92

"He pushed the bottom back, and roughly held the face she would fain have averted, to the light, and in her large, unnaturally bright grey eyes, her lovely mouth, half open, as if imploring the forbearance she could not ask for in words, he saw at once the long-lost Esther; she who had caused his wife's death." Chap. 10, p. 111

"My darling! my darling! even after death I may not see thee, my own sweet one!" Chap. 14, p. 143

"So class distrusted class, and their want of mutual confidence wrought sorrow to both." Chap. 15, p. 152

"What was she to think? Had he given her up? Were a few hasty words, spoken in a moment of irritation, to stamp her lot through life." Chap. 15, p. 154

"He who had drawn the marked paper had drawn the lot of the assassin! and he had sworn to act according to his drawing! But no one, save God and his own conscience, knew who was the appointed murderer." Chap. 16, p. 168

"Trouble! God help me, trouble will never end, I think." Chap. 19, p. 196

"Mary! you'll maybe hear of me as a drunkard, and maybe as a thief, and maybe as a murderer. Remember! when all are speaking ill of me, yo will have no right to blame me, for it's your cruelty that will have made me what I feel I shall become." Chap 20, p. 200

"'Oh! mother! mother! You are come at last?' she threw herself, or rather fell, into the trembling arms of her long-lost, unrecognised aunt, Esther." Chap. 21, p. 204

"So help me God, Mary Barton, I'll come back in the pilot-boat, time enough to save the life of the innocent." Chap. 28, p. 258

"There is one other whom I fear I have loved too dearly; and yet, the loving her has made the happiness of my life. She will think I have murdered her lover: she will think I have caused the grief she must be feeling. And she must go on thinking so. It is so hard upon me to say this, but she must." Chap. 32, p. 276

"The verdict they had come to was unsatisfactory to themselves at last; neither being convinced of his innocence, not yet quite willing to believe him guilty in the teeth of the alibi. But the punishment that awaited him, if guilty, was so terrible, and so unnatural a sentence for man to pronounce on man, that the knowledge of it had weighted down the scale on the side of innocence, and 'Not Guilty' was the verdict that thrilled through the breathless court." Chap. 31, p. 288

"'Mother, good night! Dear mother! bless me once more! I'm very tired and would fain go to sleep.' She never spoke again on this side of heaven." Chap. 33, p. 294



"'Oh sir!' said he, wildly, almost throwing himself at Mr. Carson's feet, 'say you forgive me the anguish I now see I have caused you. I care not for pain, or death, you know I don't; but oh, man! forgive me the trespass I have done!'" Chap. 35, p. 316

"And when the words were said, John Barton lay a corpse in Mr. Carson's arms. So ended the tragedy of a poor man's life." Chap. 35, p. 321



Topics for Discussion

Mary Barton is a headstrong young woman who desires to better herself. Why does Mary strive to do this? What does she find unsatisfying about her allotted station in life? How does she attempt to improve her situation?

Workers in the 1830s and 1840s were completely dependent on the owners of the factories and mills, only working if the owners deemed there was work. How does this tax the families of England? How do the workers survive when they can't find work but still need to feed their families? Do the owners care about the plight of their workers, or do anything to help them? Why or why not?

The novel *Mary Barton* contains several strong female characters. How does society treat women at this time? While women are able to work, are there any other freedoms that are denied to them? How do they overcome the tragedies that mark their lives?

The people of the early to mid-1800s did not have the benefit of medical advances we have today, evidenced by the high mortality rate in the novel. How are the deaths of characters treated in the novel? Do you think the loss of loved ones strengthens or weakens the characters? Explain why, giving examples.

What is John Barton's motivation for murder? Why does his daughter, Mary, and Jem Wilson feel they have to protect him, even if Jem is found guilty?

Henry Carson is able to forgive John Barton for the murder of his son, Harry. What leads him to do this? How does the murder change his attitude towards the working class?

Jane Wilson struggles with accepting Mary Barton as a suitable companion for her son. Why does she feel this way, and how does she act towards Mary? Does she ever come to accept Mary as a part of her son's life? Why or why not?