

“Charles [Dickens] must have been reviewing the final words of Chapter Twenty Three about that mysterious fellow Datchery when the poison took him from us,” she continues, confident the writer’s nephew is thoroughly hooked, as indeed he is, a gullible river trout flapping ecstatically on the end of her line. Nothing could possibly make him happier...except her next words. “I want you, Dunston, to be the very first to read these pages.” The spellbound fish leaps gleefully from hook to frying pan. “I want you to analyze all *six* instalments right up to that final page we both saw, and when you do, I’m sure you’ll be able to shed light on the story’s ending and discover who committed this abominable act.”

She smiles as she hands him the Fourth, the Fifth and the as yet, according to her, unseen, unread Sixth Instalment. He’s speechless, breathless, witless, hands shaking so much he’s barely able to take the manuscript. She’s surprised at the pleasant sensation, an unexpected tingling like the spreading warmth of hot porridge in her childhood tummy on a raw, Scottish morning, as she observes the man’s obvious delight with his assignment. Her pleasure at his pleasure is a distant second though to her satisfaction at the successful conclusion to her campaign. From what she’s read, there’s little hope the poor man will ever be able to figure out how the story is to unfold. No matter how hard he chases, he’ll never catch this particular wild goose. Charles’ circle will be safe from the detective skills of Mr. Plod for a long, long time.