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Adaptation: The Fanfiction of Academia?

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Adaptation: The Fanfiction of Academia?

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Abstract

Adaptive works—pieces of media inspired by pre-existing works—are extremely prevalent in the media landscape and have been for as long as humans have retold stories. A somewhat more recent edition to the conversation is fanfiction, or fan fiction, which is a unique form of audience interactivity that includes the writing of a work by a fan off of any given piece of media. This project explores the definitions, overlaps and delineations of adaptation, transmedial storytelling, transfictionality and fanfiction. It uses particular examples from published works of fanfiction to further unpack these categorizations and adds nuance and organization to studies on the overlaps of fanfiction and more officially-considered adaptive works. The project then exemplifies the variability of adaptive work by presenting an adapted screenplay and a fanfiction, both written off of a subplot of Charles Dickens' 1864 novel *Our Mutual Friend*.

Keywords:

Adaptation, Fanfiction, Transfictionality, Transmedia Storytelling, Charles Dickens

An Introduction to Adaptive Works

So many works in our historical and modern world are inspired by a preexisting piece of media: every Marvel movie, every iteration of *Scooby-Doo*, every Jane Austen book brought to screen, every Rick Riordan novel, every *Walking Dead* spin-off and, of course, every piece of fanfiction ever written. Fanfiction, or fan fiction, as it is sometimes written, is a piece of work written by a fan inspired by a pre-existing piece of media. Fanfiction participates in a unique level of audience interactivity by engaging with and manipulating pre-existing work, a creative practice that is also found in other adaptive works including those listed above: spin-off shows, movie or stage play versions of written work, modern rewrites of classic stories, the list goes on. The study of fanfiction and adaptive works as a whole creates an interesting web of overlaps and delineations. Ultimately, though, I argue that fanfiction is a unique concept in media studies capable of fitting into the definition of adaptation, transmedia storytelling, *and* transfictionality, whilst also remaining a separate entity in terms of audience expectation, legality, and motivation for creation.

In the world of media expansion, there are three primary terms of importance: adaptation, transmedia storytelling, and transfictionality. The term adaptation when used in terms of a product of work is often used in a more broad sense than precise definition permits. Foundationally, adaptation differs from both transmedia storytelling and transfictionality by use of a consistent centralized story that is passed from the hands of one creative to another. In her article “Transmedia Storytelling: Industry Buzzword or New Narrative Experience” which subdivides the three terms, Marie-Laure Ryan defines adaptations as “[trying] (with greater or less success) to tell the same story in a different

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medium” (2). There must be an overt connection with the content being adapted, which is commonly referred to as the source or canon material. Hutcheon speaks on adaptation in terms of transposition vs translation: while adaptations can be seen simply as rote transposition from “one sign system to another,” they can also be considered a sort of translation (16). At one time this transfer was the most lauded when it was the most faithful to the source, but now there is a prioritized attention to “a transaction between texts and between languages” because a qualitatively *good* adaptation is often much more than a simple copy-paste (Hutcheon 16). Adaptations require originality and writerly skill to make the text the author’s own and thus, in some way, autonomous from the source.

As Linda Hutcheon details in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, the term *adaptation* is complicated as it is used to describe both a process and a product (15). Adaptation as a product is what is detailed above. Adaptation as a *process* is much broader. Whenever a piece of media is developed off of a pre-existing work, this developmental process is referred to as adaptation. However, because adaptation as a product has such an important and interesting narrow definition, I will not use it as an umbrella term for all transformative works. Instead, I will use the term “adaptive works.”

Under the umbrella of these adaptive works is transmedia storytelling. For transmedia storytelling, the necessary consistency is not in *story*, but in *world*. Ryan breaks down the transmedial web as including “autonomous entities that can be consumed separately from each other” without impacting the understanding of the primary narrative (4). This could be considered an adaptive form because the first piece of media is still central, but it is not an *adaptation* in terms of precise definition because,

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as Ryan clarifies it, transmedia storytelling “expand[s] and annotate[s] the fictional world” in question instead of merely “re-presenting an existing story” (3). This tactic is well-employed in the Star Wars franchise. Star Wars is an expansive science-fiction universe that has spawned quite a few other pieces of media, such as the *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. *Clone Wars* does not retell Star Wars movies *A New Hope* or *The Phantom Menace*, for instance, but instead creates a new story within the Star Wars universe. Melanie Schiller’s article “Transmedia Storytelling: New Practices and Audiences” states that stories must “contribute to the construction of the overall...story world” in order to fall under the umbrella of transmedia storytelling, and *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* does this by exploring new planets, characters, and histories, all within the confines of the original storyworld (99).

This addition of context, detail, intricacy, and unique points of view is called *expansion*, and this very same expansion is one part of the three operations of transfictionality, the other two Ryan defines as *modification* and *transportation* (3). Expansion builds an existing story up and out and can include prequels, sequels and spin-offs. Modification works by changing a key detail in a given story to fundamentally change the narrative and is exemplified in alternate endings or canon divergents. Lastly, Transportation moves a story into a different world or time period, creating an alternate universe (AU) narrative. The use of all these tools creates almost endless options for transfictional media. In their article “Transfictionality and Transmedia Storytelling: A Conceptual Distinction,” Mittermayer and Capanema confirm that a piece of media can be considered transfictional as long as there are some shared elements of the “same diegetic world”—a character, backstory, foundational event, setting, the list goes on

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(555). Thus, the transfictional umbrella is quite wide, including, in fact, both transmedia storytelling *and* adaptation, even when more precisely defined.

Fanfiction, also known as fanfic or fic, is also quite a broad category, and operates as a fairly unique entity in the world of media studies. Fanfiction is described by Bronwen Thomas as “stories produced by fans based on plot lines and characters from either a single source text or else a “canon” of works” (1). Fanfiction is easily publishable online with minimal restrictions, usually under an internet username. In Thomas’ article “What is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things about It?” she mentions that in the academic world there is a tendency to dismiss fanfiction: this act of using others' work as a foundation or jumping-off point is viewed as merely a crutch for writers who are too lazy to originate their own worlds, characters, and stories. But, when looked at with an open mind, fanfiction reveals itself to be a remarkable and even “transgressive” entity (Thomas 7). Writers of fic have a tendency to avoid the default. A common example of this is fanfiction’s subversiveness regarding sexuality, turning normally heterosexual narratives into Queer ones and allowing fanfiction to become a space for marginalized groups to let their voices be heard. Besides this, the natural interactivity of fanfiction promotes engagement with the text in the “full complexity and dynamism of the process of reading,” instead of just passive consumption (Thomas 14). Ryan looks at fanfiction through this key concept of *participatory culture*, where people act as contributors as well as just consumers. The interactivity of fanfiction makes it the “purest manifestation of participatory culture” possible (Ryan 10).

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This culture is ultimately so participatory because all fanfiction is adaptive work. Fanfiction is written off of source content and pulls from this source in at least one of the following sectors: storyworld, characters, and backstory or storyworld history. Because of the range of form—canon divergences, AUs, missing scenes, fix-its, etc—fanfictions are able to qualify as all of the three subdivisions of media expansion: narrow-definition adaptation, transmedia storytelling, and transfictionality. Some fanfictions, such as writer missingcrowdof1000's series "Too cute for a ship name," use nearly every piece of the source content and choose to merely notate it with the author's own perspective and opinions, qualifying the fic as narrow-definition adaptation. Alternately, some are like independent_variables' story "hope has blood knuckles," which is made up almost entirely of original characters (OCs) and it is the setting which draws a connection to the source material. This is an example of transmedia storytelling. And finally, all fanfictions are transfictional, including a fixit fic like Write-To-You's story "7 O'clock, Thursday, and a Margarita," which is set post-canon and uses source storyworld and characters, but changes details so fundamentally that the story can no longer exist within the canon plotline. Ergo, fanfiction is a uniquely flexible piece of adaptive media.

In her Archive Of Our Own (known to its users as AO3) series entitled "Too cute for a ship name," fanfiction author missingcrowdsof1000s participates in the act of narrow-definition adaptation with a collection of short stories that follow the 2022 TV show *Ms. Marvel*, which is an adaptive work in its own right, transforming from comics to a television miniseries. This show follows Kamala Khan, a Pakistani-American high schooler who ends up with mystical powers unlocked by a family heirloom. Kamala must navigate high school, her family drama, and being a fledgling superhero, as well

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an unspoken love triangle between herself, a fellow powered teen Karman, and her childhood best friend Bruno. Each story in the series uses a different canonical scene from the show, but instead of merely typing up the action and dialogue from each of the show's scenes, missingcrowdsof1000s dives into the moments through the introspective POV of supporting character Bruno Carrelli. Accordingly, the summaries of each installment of the AO3 series begin with the phrase "a peek into Bruno's mind" (missingcrowdsof1000s).

Missingcrowdsof1000s uses this "peek" to subjectivize the scene through Bruno's interiority. The first installment of the series, for example, takes place during the first overtly romantically-coded scene Bruno and Kamala share, where they sit and talk on a rooftop before Kamala even gains her Ms. Marvel powers. Throughout the conversation, pulled directly from the scene in episode 1, missingcrowdsof1000s inserts some of Bruno's inner thoughts in italics: "*You're the best person I know. You're amazing,*" and "*I love seeing you like this. You're beautiful.*" As with the rest of the series, she leans heavily into Bruno's canonical (and canonically unspoken) romantic feelings for Kamala. In doing so, missingcrowdsof1000s participates "a process of appropriation, of taking possession of another's story, and filtering it, in a sense, through one's own sensibility, interests, and talents" (Kaufman qtd. in Hutcheon 18). Missingcrowdsof1000s does not change the trajectory of the canon story; up until the very last installment, Bruno's feelings remain unspoken and the source material is treated as sacrosanct. The only thing that changes is form, going from an audivideo narrative to written introspective text, and the desired subtextual focus of the author, which are both valuable and viable tools for narrow-definition adaptation.

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Fanfiction that falls into the category of transmedia storytelling is quite different than missingcrowdsof1000s work. But another AO3 author, username `independent_variables`, created a series called “in our bedroom after the war,” which follows the canonically very minor character of Davijaan. In the 2008 TV series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, mentioned previously as an example of transmediality itself, Davijaan dies after very little screen time. Dissatisfied with this arc, *Clone Wars* fan `independent_variables` wrote a seventy-eight-thousand word canon divergent fanfiction entitled “hope has blood knuckles,” as well as several supplemental stories existing in the same world. In her final author’s note, `independent_variables` mentions the learning curve she went through in “writing original characters” and “more detailed worldbuilding,” as these fanfictions delete Davijaan’s death from the canon narrative and give the character an entirely new story/backstory of `independent_variables`’ creation on an existing, but underdeveloped world. The act of creating new characters, settings and histories into an existing world is integral to transmedial work, and it requires a balance of authorial originality as well as a firm understanding of who and what could realistically exist within the confines of the storyworld.

It is interesting to note that as a part of her explanation on transmediality, Ryan points out a connection between fic and transmedia storytelling, stating that “narratives that generate transmedia projects also tend to inspire a lot of fan fiction” (11). *Clone Wars* is in its own right a piece of transmedia, made in part to explore the expansive Star Wars universe. As a writer, `independent_variables` has just as much capacity to think critically about that pre-existing universe and draw inspiration from it. It only makes sense that she would participate in the same process of exploration and mutation as the

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creators of *Clone Wars* and find a space to invent what is fundamentally a novella-length spin-off in this same expansive universe of Star Wars.

The practice of erasing a character's canonical death is not a new one in fanfiction, and falls under the canopy of a "fixit," which in turn falls into the much *larger* canopy of transfictionality. Henry Jenkins, quoted in "What Is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things about It?" notes that a motivation for writing fic is that fans are commonly "torn between fascination and frustration" (qtd. in Thomas 7). In the case of fixit fanfictions, the frustration is in wishing that canon events had gone differently, and the fascination is in exploring what would happen if they *did*. Fanfiction.net author Write-To-You knows this feeling well; since the activation of her account in 2016, she has written and published over a dozen so-called "fixit fics."

One such fic is entitled "7 O'clock, Thursday, and a Margarita," and is set after season 3 of CW's *The Flash*. *The Flash*, an example of transfictional adaptation itself by the way it loosely transforms the comic narratives into a television show, follows the story of Barry Allen when he becomes the so-called "fastest man alive," as well as the many members of his team. The canon arc of Season 3 sees character Caitlin Snow turning into her supervillain alter ego, Killer Frost, then finding redemption. Ultimately, however, she leaves Team Flash in the last episode of Season 3. Her boyfriend at the time, Julian Albert, joined the show during the third season but was written off when Caitlin left the team with the excuse of not having a place without her. But in "7 O'clock, Thursday, and a Margarita," Julian decides not to leave Central City and instead works to bring Caitlin back to the team. This alters the trajectory of the season 3 finale so significantly that the canon plotline of Season 4, which does not include Julian at all, can

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no longer exist. Thus, Write-To-You's transfictional work also becomes more specifically what Marie-Laure Ryan coins as "storyworld modification," where one piece of media attached to another piece of media, such as an alternate ending, "involves semantic incompatibilities that prevent [it] from referring to the same world" (qtd. in Gibbons 336).

If all fanfictions are adaptive work, does this mean that all adaptive works are fanfiction? In their exploration of Shakespeare and fandom, Kavita Mudan Finn and Jessica McCall claim that "a good portion of what we consider canonical literature... also fits the broadest definition of fanfiction, in that it is clearly written in response to or [is] adapting a specific source text" (27). A Shakespeare play like *Henry VIII* is one of Finn and McCall's examples of this, but any film that is created off of source material, from *The Godfather* to *Twilight*, also applies. However, I argue that Finn and McCall are relying too heavily on how far one can stretch that indeed "broad" definition of fanfiction: when comparing the concepts of adaptive works and fanfiction, differences begin to emerge in terms of audience attraction and expectation, legality, motivation for creation, and the canon nature of a piece of material. It is important to note that these factors, while seemingly unimportant, *do* create a distinction between "official" adaptive works (a movie version of *Little Women*, a TV spin-off of *Doctor Who*, a play set post-*Harry Potter*) and "unofficial" adaptive works (an AU where Jo, Beth, Amy and Meg are modern high school students, a fix-it where Rose never got trapped in another universe, a canon divergence where Ron and Hermione kiss in the fifth book instead of the last). This distinction is why these sectors of works are regarded so differently by society and academia, with fanfiction viewed much more derisively as unprofessional and even

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childish whilst official adaptive works are taken seriously and given the appropriate amount of legitimate academic appraisal.

One fascinating point of comparison and difference between adaptive works and fanfiction is what Hutcheon outlines as “knowing” vs “unknowing” audience (120). If the audience of an adaptive work is “knowing,” then they have a “straightforward awareness of the adaptation’s enriching, palimpsestic doubleness,” or its function as both a work of its own and a work bound by the comparison between new and source material (Hutcheon 122). An “unknowing” audience is completely unaware of source material and perhaps even unaware that there *is* source material. While they are able to approach the piece of media without preconceptions, they also are at risk of “upending sacrosanct elements like priority and originality;” in other words, they are at risk of thinking the adaptation is the original (122). Using this concept of audience knowledge, the first distinction between “official” adaptive works and “unofficial” fanfiction begins to emerge: Official adaptive works attract both knowing and unknowing audiences. On top of this, the former are notorious for their level of preconceived expectations and their wish for adaptive works—movie adaptations in particular—to be as close to the canon source as possible.

Curiously, fanfiction works in pretty much the opposite way. Fic tends to attract a primarily or entirely knowing audience; it is on very rare occasions that someone seeks out fic for a fandom that they are not familiar with, or even one that they are not actively passionate about and invested in. Hutcheon points out that “the more rabid the fans,” the greater their expectations, and “the more disappointed they can potentially be” (123). In the case of fanfiction, these fans have the possibility to be the *most* rabid (in

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other words, impassioned) of them all, but there is rarely an expectation of the rote transposition of a text between two forms of media that is found in fans consuming, say, official movie adaptations. In fact, fanfiction readers often prioritize an act of originality from the canon source, a fact which is exemplified partially by the commonly subversive nature of fanfiction mentioned before.

Another prominent difference between official and unofficial adaptive works is legality. Laws regarding fair use have always been complicated. The question, time and again, is whether a work is *transformative* enough to be original; does it, as the article “Payment in Credit: Copyright Law and Subcultural Creativity” breaks down, “add new material or commentary that reflects critically on the original” (Tushnet 161). From the fanfiction standpoint, Rebecca Tushnet claims in this article that most fic authors either “assume that these creations are technically illegal, but not harmful to copyright owners and therefore not truly wrong” or “think that fan creations count as fair use, and thus non-infringing, at least as long as no one is making any money from selling them” (141). Whether or not fanfictions *do* legally qualify as fair use is unimportant here: what *is* important is the fact that the fanfic authors generally do not care. Fans most often simply “fly below the radar,” commonly hiding their identities with internet usernames, having the ability to simply delete their story or account if necessary and disappear forever. They are more likely to continue to write and post with the assumption that their works are not important enough to merit the attention of copyright laws than they are to actively learn the copyright law restrictions and work to avoid them (Tushnet 142).

This is not and *cannot* be the case for those making official adaptations. The option for financial gain is not only a possibility but somewhat of a certainty, which

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ultimately makes things more complicated from a legal sense. These adaptive works are not like fanfictions; they are not released by just anyone without even the requirement of an editor or a basic spellchecker, they are much more in the public eye, and they are transparently connected to creators instead of a fanfiction site username. Because of this they have more to gain *and* more to lose. Interestingly, it is the presence of “so many adapting agents,” as *A Theory of Adaptation* notes in its section on legality, that makes “adaptation...rarely ever close enough to warrant prosecution” (Hutcheon 90). In truth, the U.S. Law of literary copyright infringement “really only cover[s] the literal copying of words” (Hutcheon 90), and when a source work travels through so many hands, minds, opinions and perspectives, the “substantial similar[ities]” necessary for a court case are made considerably harder to prove (Hutcheon 89). In short, both official and unofficial adaptive works walk the blurry line between legal and illegal, but the former of the two is really the only party who might need to take the time to be concerned with this.

As, legally, there can be no financial gain for fanfiction in the way there is for official adaptive works, a difference can emerge in the motivation for the creation of these works. When Thomas defines fanfiction, she notes that “writing stories deriving from one or more source texts has long been the most popular way of concretizing and disseminating [a fan’s] passion for a particular fictional universe” (1). According to Thomas, what drives fans to create derivative works is the opportunity for “in-filling,” or “fleshing out the backstory behind characters, situations, and events, or slightly shifting the perspective from which the familiar is to be enjoyed” (13). Very rarely will one find

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someone writing fanfiction for a purpose other than personal enjoyment, interest, and passion.

The same cannot be said for official adaptive works. As these works are stories or storyworlds that already have a following and a pre-established love, they are in some ways safe financial bets. As is proved with the very existence of fanfiction, being a fan of a piece of media leads to the desire to continue to dwell in a fictional world or with a fictional character. Even if a knowing audience member with high expectations for source integrity leaves disappointed, they will still likely attend the film, watch the TV show, or read the novel, simply because of the allure of past love of and familiarity with the piece of source media in question. So, while the unofficial adaptive work of fanfiction comes from love, passion, and excitement over a piece of media, realistically speaking the official adaptive work emerges from a *capitalization* on that very same love, passion, and excitement.

The last distinction in question is more of a cause of the other differences than an effect. One thing that a fanfiction can never be is canon. Even the phenomenon of “fanon,” described by Thomas as “certain plot or character elements... established within the fan community—even when those elements never appeared in the source text, or radically depart from it” only goes so far: fanon is limited to smaller details within the larger universe of the fandom (9). The works these fanon details may inspire will still be considered derivatives of that larger universe. Even though some fans may consider a fanfiction *better* than canon, more satisfying or logical or even better written, ultimately, the canon nature of a source correlates to its officialness. AO3 will never have a fandom tag that reads, for example, “hope has bloody knuckles (2022)” because

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no matter how well-thought-out independent_variables transmedial storytelling was, in terms of officialness it is still a fanfiction, worked on by one person and a beta reader, published without financial cost and without financial gain. To put it simply, there are almost no scenarios where a fanfiction would generate more fanfiction, and this is arguably the biggest rift between official and unofficial adaptive works.

Thomas says that “fanfiction...takes us away from the notion of texts as static, isolated objects” (6). Adaptation overall is much the same. To use a previous creator’s characters, worlds, or stories is not laziness but instead a prime example of the power of creative interactivity. With both official and unofficial adaptive works, there is an opportunity to explore other perspectives, ideas that might be subversive, voices that could otherwise be silenced. There is a chance to engage actively with a piece of work and therefore give it worth as something dynamic enough to give birth to other ideas and stories. This, no matter what category it may fall into, no matter if it is official or unofficial, made for joy or for profit, worked on by one person or a hundred, *this* is the value that is imbued in all good adaptive works.

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Artist Statement

I read *Our Mutual Friend* by Charles Dickens in the span of three weeks for a class on the English novel. Upon finishing the book, I ended up chatting about it with a friend and mentioned that a certain subplot between two characters named Sophronia and Alfred Lamble, who were fundamentally con artists in a 19th-century setting, would make for a heck of a movie.

Cut to a couple months later and I was starting the script for that very movie.

While I've written quite a bit of fanfiction over the past decade, I had never tried my hand at an adaptation that adhered so closely to the original source. I began by creating a spreadsheet that charted every scene Sophronia and Alfred Lamble were present or mentioned in within the pages of *Our Mutual Friend*. As I looked at their scenes in isolation, a clear arc began to emerge, and I started a beat sheet to map out the plot of the film.

In her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon quotes John North in saying that "in the case of a Victorian novel teeming with secondary characters and subplots, severe pruning is required" (1). I got very lucky with the Lamblies' story as it is *very* heavily a subplot; it really does not interact with the primary narrative until its end. That was where I needed to get creative. Dickens was beginning to weave his plot lines together, and the Lamblies' were interacting with characters that had been very present in *the* story but not at all present in *their* story. Not wanting to introduce more characters and plots than I could handle, I tried to keep the world tight and changed the last target for the Lamblies' con from a character closely involved in the main plotline to Mr. Twemlow, who the Lamblies interact with quite a bit.

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After I was satisfied with my beat sheet, I set to work writing the actual script. I pulled much of the dialogue straight from the novel, though I also tried to add my own bit of styling with characters such as Mr. Twemlow and Georgiana. Then I worked to recreate the language and pace of the characters' interactions for some of the original, supplementary scenes necessary in every adaptation.

My thesis essay discusses the way that an adaptation is not designed to be a simple copy and paste, and that the most successful adaptors put a piece of themselves and their perspectives into their work. Hutcheon touches on this balance of creativity and fidelity by saying that "one way to think about unsuccessful adaptations is not in terms of infidelity to a prior text, but in terms of a lack of the creativity and skill to make the text one's own and thus autonomous" (20). As I wanted this adaptation to be successful, I pushed myself to try and make original decisions within the confines of Dickens' existing narrative.

Accordingly, when rereading the Lammles' scenes, I started to notice a thread for Georgiana that felt perfect for a representation of aromanticism, an identity under the queer umbrella that makes it impossible to feel romantic attraction. Accordingly, when I wrote the script I tried to exacerbate and add lines of dialogue to lean into the preexisting queer, aromantic undertones. I also found myself making Sophronia a much more sympathetic character and thinking more about her backstory and how it might motivate her actions over the course of the film, which was necessary as she had moved from the role of side-character to protagonist.

Once I completed the first draft of my film, I solicited a group of readers to give me feedback. I wanted a mix of what Hutcheon calls "knowing" and "unknowing"

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readers (those who know and don't know the source content, respectively). It was important to me that the script succeeded as both an adaptation, staying true to the themes and tone of Dickens' original story, and as a compelling standalone narrative, so I reached out to some creative writing peers as well as a few students who had taken the English novel class with me.

Ultimately, I received feedback from six people. For the sake of this project I focused primarily on line-edits and workshopping the ending (which was pulled from Dickens work and found by most to be unsatisfying), but the feedback also encouraged me to think critically about Sophronia's arc for a modern audience; and the existence of some canon characters that didn't serve much purpose; and the presentation and explanation of the Lammles' deception of Georgiana and her father Mr. Podsnap. The script ended up being about sixty-nine pages long, which is just a few scenes shy of a feature length film. As such, this script is not in its final form. The potential for future expansion and development is very enticing to me.

In the midst of working on this script, I embarked on the more academic portion of my thesis. I began to unpack the different types of adaptive works, what fanfiction means to media studies academia, and all of the nuances in between. As I continued to explore, I came to the conclusion that as a piece of interconnected academic and creative work, I needed to do a little more writing for this thesis.

So I decided to write a fanfiction, exemplifying a piece of transfictionality in an introspective post-canon fic from Sophronia's close 3rd person perspective. It was important to me to use these two works both as an example of adaptation and transfictionality (the nuances of which will be covered in my essay), but also as an

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example the portion of my thesis that deals with how official and unofficial adaptive works differ from one another. Hence, while I'd solicited feedback and edited my script, I simply wrote the fanfiction, proofread it, and called it a day. I also included author's notes on the fanfiction, which are a huge part of the personable interactivity of fic as opposed to something like a movie adaptation, which in a presentation sense is much more clinical.

Working on the creative project and the academic thesis have both been eye-opening experiences for me. Fanfiction-related and adaptive media studies are a fairly small slice of academia, and I really enjoyed being able to dive into my research, finding every piece of scholarly work I could and even beginning to recognize names and concepts as they were cross-referenced throughout the various journal articles I read. Besides this, writing an adaptation proved to me that, creatively speaking, I do my best work when given the chance to manipulate something that already exists. I grew up writing fanfiction, so creating the adapted narrative of the Lammles' subplot gave me a very similar feeling of being capable of diving into the characters' heads and personalities and finding myself more free in the restrictions than I could ever be with nothing but a blank page and my own thoughts to work with.

I discuss in my thesis how the act of writing fanfiction comes from passion. I believe that this work does, too, both academic and creative. And, ultimately, I believe that this work will find an audience in those who share that same passion, whether it be in classic literature and period piece fiction, or in the study of a type of work which is fascinating and important and historically all-too-undervalued by academia.

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To my Unknowing Readers:

Our Mutual Friend by Charles Dickens is an expansive novel that primarily follows the story of a young man presumed dead when a body with his identification is pulled from the Thames River. Loosely interwoven with this plot is that of Alfred and Sophronia Lammle, two upper-class Victorians who get married only to find out that they've both managed to trick each other: Alfred married Sophronia because he thought she was rich, and vice versa. Left with limited options, Alfred and Sophronia decide to turn their skill for deception on their upper-class social circle. They prey on the young, naive Georgiana Podsnap and try to entrap her into marrying a man of Alfred's selection, which will then grant them access to her money post-marriage. However, Sophronia has a change of heart partway through the scheme and exposes their intentions to her friend Mr. Twemlow so that he will tell Mr. Podsnap what is going on, ruining the con. Still trying to live a life well above their means, Alfred and Sophronia then turn their sights to the Boffins, an older couple that has recently come into new money. Ultimately, that deception is also a failure, and Alfred and Sophronia are forced to give up everything and leave London entirely.

INT. THE VENEERING'S DRAWING ROOM - AFTERNOON

The drawing room of Mr. and Mrs. Veneering is an elegant affair. The walls are a soothing olive green, almost completely obscured by paintings in gilt frames. There is an ornate fireplace along one wall, unlit, and a spread of similarly gilt straight-backed chairs and couches.

Amongst these are four men: MR. TWEMLOW (60s), rotund, meek, and soft, wearing a suit a little too tight; MR. PODSNAP (50s), permanently glowering, leaning on his elaborately carved cane even whilst sitting down; EUGENE (20s), charmingly handsome, lounging against the arm of a chair, shirt slightly untucked; and MORTIMER (30s), standing, staring into a swirling glass of gin, hair neatly and precisely styled.

MORTIMER

First question: Does the name
"Sophronia Akershem" mean anything
to you gentlemen?

MR. PODSNAP

(brusk and snappish, always)
Should it?

MORTIMER

Not necessarily.

Twemlow raises his hand. The other men peer at him. He lowers it again.

MORTIMER

Twemlow...?

TWEMLOW

She was that- well, that mature
young lady at Veneerings last
dinner party, was she not?

MORTIMER

She was indeed. Top marks to
Twemlow.

Not realizing he's being teased, Twemlow looks pleased.

EUGENE

What about this Sophronia,
Mortimer? A lover of yours?

MORTIMER

Hardly. Second question: have any
of you met an Alfred...

He snaps his fingers, looking for a last name.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

MORTIMER
Alfred... Linley? Lumley? Lummler?

EUGENE
Lammle?

A snap and a point in Eugene's direction.

MORTIMER
Ah! Yes. Lammle.

TWEMLOW
Now *Eugene* gets top points.

MORTIMER
Uh, yes, quite.

MR. PODSNAP
I know the fellow.

EUGENE
(snidely)
Is *he* a lover of yours?

Twemlow looks shocked. Mortimer ignores him.

MORTIMER
I have recently heard news that
the two are to be wed.

TWEMLOW
Oh! Oh, that's- well, that's just
delightful!

MR. PODSNAP
He's a rich man.

MORTIMER
She's a rich woman.

TWEMLOW
A good match, then, very good,
very good.

MR. PODSNAP
Their property does not exceed
mine, of course.

EUGENE
(smirking)
Of course.

The door flies open. There stands MR. VENEERING, youngish,
dapper, a certain lack of intellect in his gaze and deportment.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

EUGENE

What-ho, Veneering!

Twemlow stands.

TWEMLOW

Hello, hello- well, hello.

MR. PODSNAP

Where's the fire, good sir?

VENEERING

No fire! Except, perhaps, the flames of a young and tender love.

MORTIMER

Do tell, old chap.

VENEERING

The news came just this morning.
Sophronia Akershem is to be married... to Alfred Lammler.

The entire party does a very good job pretending to be surprised.

EXT. CHURCH - AFTERNOON

Church bells peal through the air. The cross at the top of the church casts a holy shadow onto the courtyard, carriage wheels and horse hooves crossing it this way and that. Women in elegant hats and stunning dresses filter through the door of a squat, tan-stoned church building, escorted by gentlemen in white tie.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Inside, sunlight glows through stained glass. The church is formed of high arches and grim-looking statues stare over a congregation of wedding attendees.

At the front of the church stand SOPHRONIA AKERSHEM-soon-to-be-LAMMLE and ALFRED LAMMLE. No faces yet, just a wedding train, suit tails, a top hat resting atop neatly trimmed black hair, a bouquet of white roses and baby's breath, a veil over an elegant updo. A ring on a woman's hand, a sharply pointed diamond. A ring on a man's, carved gold.

They stand before the PASTOR, dressed in clerical garb. He raises his hands towards the congregation.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

PASTOR

I present to you... Mr. and Mrs.
Alfred Lammle!

Sophronia and Alfred turn towards the congregation, fully revealed. Sophronia beams, cheeks flushed. She is a stunning young woman with large sparkling eyes. She clings to her new husband's arm as he stands beside her, back ramrod straight, stoic but proud. A handsome couple, undeniably.

They process down the aisle to cheers and more wedding bells.

EXT. SHANKLIN SANDS RECEPTION - DUSK

Long tables set with tablecloths and delicate china stretch across a pebbly beach. The waves swish against the shore and dress skirts swirl in the sand. The sun sets, settling the wedding reception into blue hour. Twemlow stands alone by the edge of a table, watching the party.

Sophronia, still hanging on Alfred's arm, is speaking indistinctly to MRS. VENEERING (short and diminutive, with hair styled to a great height). She catches sight of Twemlow, curtsies slightly to Alfred and Mrs. Veneering, and picks up her skirts to cross the sand to him. She clasps his arm in greeting.

SOPHRONIA

I must thank you once again, Mr.
Twemlow, for taking upon yourself
the responsibility of escorting me
down the aisle.

Twemlow, pleased, can't meet her gaze.

TWEMLOW

Oh, oh, well, it was my honor,
really. When I heard tell that
your father was no longer among
us, it felt- well, it felt
imperative that I step up.

Sophronia smiles and squeezes his arm.

TWEMLOW

Well... really, to speak honestly,
Veneering vetted all his
companions and decided that- well,
that I was the right candidate for
this terribly important task.

SOPHRONIA

I appreciate it all the same, Mr.
Twemlow.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

She gazes out at the ocean, hand still squeezed around his arm.

SOPHRONIA

Since the passing of my parents I
have found myself... completely
alone in this world.

Twemlow gives her a few nudges in the ribs with his elbow and
nods his chin towards where her new husband stands.

TWEMLOW

Well... not so anymore, my dear
girl.

SOPHRONIA

Oh, yes. I suppose not.

Alfred, as if sensing he's being spoken of, crosses the
reception and takes Sophronia's arm, tenderly stroking his
fingers along the back of her hand.

ALFRED

My dearest love, may I request the
great honor of you accompanying me
for a walk down the beach?

Sophronia blushes, nods.

SOPHRONIA

I must bid you adieu, Mr. Twemlow.
My greatest appreciation, again.

Twemlow wiggles his fingers in an unintentionally creepy little
wave, watching the two set off down the beach. Then the sight
of Mr. Veneering passing by makes him hurriedly lift his pant
legs and jogs across the sand.

TWEMLOW

(voice fading)
Veneering! Veneering, good sir!
Hello, hello!

EXT. SHANKLIN SANDS - MOMENTS LATER

In the sand, there are two sets of footprints. One distinctly
male and one distinctly female, they track down the coastline,
at first close together, and then slowly drifting further and
further apart. The holes made by the pokes of a parasol grow
deeper, harsher, and another line appears, leading up to a
stick in Alfred's hand, which he's dragging viciously through
the sand.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

The blissful expressions on both the Lammles' faces are gone. Sophronia's chest is heaving with restrained anger and Alfred's jaw is so tight it pulses.

ALFRED

Do you mean to tell me, then,
Sophronia-

He breaks off and Sophronia shoots a glare in his direction.

SOPHRONIA

Don't put it upon *me*, sir. I ask
you, do you mean to tell *me*?

Alfred doesn't respond, they walk on.

SOPHRONIA

Putting it on me! The unmanly
disingenuousness!

Alfred stops walking.

ALFRED

The *what*?

Sophronia does *not* stop walking. She huffs and refuses to answer.

ALFRED

You claim a right to ask me "do I
mean to tell you." Do I mean to
tell you *what*?

Now Sophronia pauses, stabbing her parasol good and deep into the sand.

SOPHRONIA

That you are a man of property?

ALFRED

No.

SOPHRONIA

Then you married me on false
pretenses?

Alfred grits his teeth.

ALFRED

So be it. My turn: Do you mean to
say you are a woman of property?

SOPHRONIA

(seething)

No.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED

Then you married *me* on false pretenses.

SOPHRONIA

If you were so greedy and grasping that you were over-willing to be deceived, is it my fault, you adventurer?

ALFRED

I asked Veneering! He told me you were rich!

Sophronia scoffs and continues walking, Alfred following suit. The waves crash violently against a crag of rocks up ahead.

SOPHRONIA

Veneering! What does Veneering know about me?

ALFRED

Was he not your trustee?

Sophronia levels him with a look, giving him his answer.

ALFRED

Right, then, *Mrs. Lammle*--what made you suppose me a man of property?

SOPHRONIA

(cagey)

You made me suppose so.

ALFRED

Ah, but you asked somebody, too. Come now, admission for admission.

A beat.

SOPHRONIA

I... asked Veneering.

ALFRED

And Veneering knew as much of me as he knew of you.

They walk on. The waves burst upon the rocks as Sophronia stomps her foot into the sand.

SOPHRONIA

I will never forgive the Veneerings for this!

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED

Nor will I.

It's the first thing they've managed to agree on, but it does little to alleviate the tension.

SOPHRONIA

Do you pretend to believe, when you talked of my marrying you for worldly advantages, that I would have married you for yourself?

ALFRED

Again, there are two sides to the question: What do you pretend to believe?

SOPHRONIA

(furiously)

So you first deceive me and then insult me!

ALFRED

Not at all. The double-edged question was yours.

SOPHRONIA

Was *mine*!

She stabs her parasol so hard into the sand that it snaps. For a moment, the two just look at the broken pieces of the delicate white accessory.

ALFRED

Throw it away. You have made it useless; you look ridiculous with it.

She hesitates a moment, then tosses to the ground beside her. One of them hits Alfred and for a moment he seems to inflate, face white, terrible rage rippling off of him. Sophronia meets his gaze, then suddenly bursts into tears and throws herself down on the sand.

He watches her for a moment, disgusted. Then he shakes his head and begins to walk again.

ALFRED

Now, get up, Mrs. Lammle, and let us speak reasonably.

She doesn't move. He looks over his shoulder.

ALFRED

Get up, I tell you!

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA

You tell me?!

He strides back to her and thrusts out a hand. She flinches, expecting to be hit, but instead he lets his hand hover, primed to help her up.

ALFRED

Enough of this! Come! Do you hear?
Get up.

She hesitates a moment longer, then grasps his hand and allows herself to be lifted to her feet. They turn and begin to head back towards the reception, which glows far off down the beach. Wind ruffles the lace on the broken parasol still lying in the sand.

ALFRED

Mrs. Lammle, we have both been
deceiving, and we have both been
deceived.

SOPHRONIA

You sought me out-

ALFRED

Enough! Now, three things:
Firstly, it is enough that the
injury has been done, without the
mortification of it being *known* to
have been done. So. We keep the
facts to ourselves. Agreed?

Sullen, Sophronia scuffs the sand with her toe.

SOPHRONIA

If it is possible.

ALFRED

Possible! We have pretended well
enough to one another. Can't we,
united, pretend to the world?

SOPHRONIA

Then, agreed.

ALFRED

Agreed. Secondly: we owe the
Veneerings a grudge, and we owe
all other people the grudge of
wishing them to be taken in as we
ourselves have been taken in.
Agreed?

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA

Yes. Agreed.

ALFRED

We come smoothly to third. We are
adventurers, Sophronia.

SOPHRONIA

(derisively)

Adventurers. What language you
use.

ALFRED

Adventurers, I say! So are many
people. And as such, we shall
agree to work together in
furtherance of our own schemes.

Sophronia lifts her chin to stare at him suspiciously.

SOPHRONIA

What schemes?

ALFRED

Any schemes that will bring us
money: that is, our joint
interest. Agreed?

SOPHRONIA

I suppose so. Agreed.

They walk together, peace slightly restored.

ALFRED

Now that that's taken care of, we
have further matters to discuss.

When Sophronia looks at him again, he meets her gaze.

ALFRED

Who shall be made to answer for
this predicament that we find
ourselves in?

CUT TO:

INT. GEORGIANA PODSNAP'S BEDROOM - MORNING

GEORGIANA PODSNAP, only child of Mr. Podsnap. She's pretty, but
looks a bit off, her hair too thin and sticking out in some
places, her face a little sallow and gloomy. She's sitting at
her vanity, pulling on the collar of her dress, which is
buttoned tightly and appears to be all but strangling her.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

Her room is luxurious but also strangely bare, nothing on the dresser, bureaus or nightstand, no patterns even on the wallpaper and bedspread.

Her mother, MRS. PODSNAP, paces behind her. Mrs. Podsnap is similarly sallow-faced, clothes hanging off her hips and shoulders, but this trait, along with her diamond-edged jewelry, makes her appear more sharp than sad.

MRS. PODSNAP

Now, Georgiana, as this is your party, please recall that these are also your guests.

Georgiana appears to be zoned out, running her fingers over the bristles of her varnished horsehair brush.

GEORGIANA

Yes, ma.

MRS. PODSNAP

And you will socialize with your guests. They are important people familiar with your father, so you should see this as your duty and honor.

GEORGIANA

Yes, ma.

Mrs. Podsnap reaches one end of the room and turns sharply on her toe.

MRS. PODSNAP

And simply because it happens to be your birthday today, that does not mean you are permitted to do as you please.

GEORGIANA

Yes, ma.

MRS. PODSNAP

So I expect you to dance with Mr. Grompus when he asks.

Georgiana spins abruptly around with her mouth open wide.

GEORGIANA

No, ma!

Mrs. Podsnap glances at her sharply.

MRS. PODSNAP

Yes, ma.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

GEORGIANA

(cowed)

Yes, ma.

MRS. PODSNAP

Now, go downstairs to your father so he may find your appearance acceptable before the Veneerings arrive. They are *always* the first to arrive.

Georgiana dutifully stands, her prominent slouch particularly evident as she slinks her way out of the room.

INT. MR. PODSNAP'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Mr. Podsnap is pacing with a paper in front of his face, practically snorting with rage. His study is cluttered with books, papers and miscellaneous beautiful objects like carved statuettes and hand-blown glass sculptures. A fire roars in the fireplace. Georgiana steps up to stand sullenly in the doorway, not even trying to get his attention.

MR. PODSNAP

(muttering to himself)

Half a dozen dead in the streets.
Bah! Starvation. Bah! Their own fault.

He notices Georgiana and starts then shakes the paper in her face. The flames roar behind him.

MR. PODSNAP

Their own fault, I say!

She nods rapidly.

MR. PODSNAP

There is not a country in the world where so noble a provision is made for the poor as this country! Their *own* fault!

He tosses the paper into the fire and creates a mushroom cloud of ash, then bats at the air to urge Georgiana into the room. She slinks along the edges of the study and lands by his desk, framed by bookshelves, a globe, and an elegant painting of a semi-naked woman on the wall. Podsnap squints at her.

MR. PODSNAP

What? What are you doing here?

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

GEORGIANA
(mumbling)

Ma.

MR. PODSNAP
Ma *what?*

GEORGIANA
Ma wanted me to... my appearance.

MR. PODSNAP
Oh.

He looks her up and down, surveying her as one would a piece of furniture for sale.

MR. PODSNAP
It is... perfectly adequate.

They stand in awkward silence until PODSNAP SERVANT steps up to the entryway.

PODSNAP SERVANT
The Veneerings have arrived, sir.

MR. PODSNAP
Thank the Lord.

He gives Georgiana a flustered pat on the head, then hurries out of the room. Georgiana wanders over to the study window, leaning on the windowsill and staring up at the sky as the carriages beginning to arrive in the Podsnap's courtyard.

INT. THE PODSNAP'S PARLOR - LATE MORNING

Georgiana's birthday party is quite the social event. The Podsnap's parlor is lush with reds and golds, filled almost to the brim with people. Guests mingle amongst the circular tables surrounded by cushioned chairs, hover by heavy velvet curtains, and nurse glasses of sherry beside potted plants and an ornate fireplace.

Georgiana herself is by that fireplace with her mother and a few other women Mrs. Podsnap's age and older. Unlike her mother, she's pushed into the corner, a good quarter obscured by a large leafy plant.

She scans the party nervously. Mr. Podsnap is in the midst of greeting Eugene, while Mr. Twemlow hovers by Veneering's elbow, just looking pleased to be there. Mortimer plants himself by a window, staring out at the view.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

The door opens again and in walk Alfred and Sophronia Lammle. Georgiana looks at them curiously as they sparkle their way into the parlor. Sophronia, dressed to perfection, seems so at ease as she allows Mr. Podsnap to sloppily kiss her hand in greeting. Alfred's arm is around her waist, his thumb rubbing up and down her side. Georgiana is captivated.

However, if she were closer, she could see that Alfred is squeezing Sophronia's side too harshly to be comfortable. The moment she's out of Mr. Podsnap's line of sight, she winces and shakes free.

The Lammles cross the room. Georgiana watches as they greet the Veneerings with an even greater joy than Podsnap, joining them at one of the round tables which is already set for cards.

MRS. PODSNAP
(voice fading in)
Georgiana. Georgiana. Georgiana
Podsnap!

Georgiana snaps to attention, posture straightening in an instant, eyes locked on her mother. Mrs. Podsnap raises a disapproving eyebrow and gestures towards one of the women, a LADY TIPPINS, who is elderly and incredibly birdlike from her stature to the feathers sticking out of her hat. One feather has come loose and is hanging down the side of her face.

MRS. PODSNAP
Lady Tippins was inquiring after
your time at Madame Sauteuse's,
dearest.

GEORGIANA
Oh.

MRS. PODSNAP
Answer, Georgiana...

GEORGIANA
(almost too quiet to hear)
It was fine.

LADY TIPPINS
What?

MRS. PODSNAP
She said it was a delightful
experience.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

LADY TIPPINS

(approvingly)

It is a suitable environment for a young woman of your age and position in life.

She leans forward, winking a few too many times.

LADY TIPPINS

And it opens a *great* many doors to a *great* many men.

Georgiana leans away, alarmed into speechlessness, though her mouth opens in shock.

LADY TIPPINS

(thinking she's spoken)

What?

MRS. PODSNAP

She said that she is delighted to hear that.

Georgiana wrinkles her nose and looks back out to the party, noting with that Sophronia is gone from the card table. Alfred is still there with both the Veneerings, but Eugene has taken Sophronia's place.

A hand falls to Georgiana's arm. She spins around and comes face to face with Sophronia Lammle herself. The new bride smiles shyly at her, buzzing with an eager pleasure to speak to her.

SOPHRONIA

Dearest girl, happy birthday. My name is Mrs. Sophronia Lammle, I'm a *dear* friend of your *dear* father.

GEORGIANA

Hello...

SOPHRONIA

May we move to the corner for a quiet chat? I find this room to be a bit too loud for my sensibilities.

Surprised, Georgiana looks between Sophronia and Mrs. Podsnap, who is keeping tabs on the interaction out of the corner of her eye.

GEORGIANA

Oh! Oh. Indeed, it's very kind of you, but I am afraid I *don't* talk.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA

Well, let us make a beginning.

She gently raises Georgiana up and begins to lead her to a quieter space in the parlor. Georgiana hesitates every few steps.

GEORGIANA

Oh, I'm afraid you'll find me very dull. But Ma talks!

SOPHRONIA

I'm sure we'll have much to speak on! Are you fond of reading, perhaps?

GEORGIANA

Yes, I suppose.

SOPHRONIA

And music?

GEORGIANA

I haven't the nerve to play even if I could. But Ma plays!

She tries to lead Sophronia back to the fireplace. Sophronia resists.

SOPHRONIA

And of course you like dancing?

GEORGIANA

Oh no. No, I don't.

In the tug-of-war between Sophronia's steps and Georgiana's will, Georgiana is beginning to win out. Sophronia raises her eyes to Alfred, who's just begun a game of whist with the Veneerings and Eugene. He makes deliberate eye contact, then slowly lowers his gaze down to his cards to peruse them. Sophronia steels herself.

SOPHRONIA

No dancing? With your youth and attractions? Truly, my dear, you surprise me.

Georgiana looks at her, looks at her mother, and stops straining to return to the fireplace for a moment. She leans in.

GEORGIANA

Well...

(MORE)

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

GEORGIANA (CONT'D)

I can't say how I might have liked
it if I had been a--you won't
mention what I say to Ma?

SOPHRONIA

My dear! Never!

GEORGIANA

I can't say then how I should have
liked it if I had been a chimney-
sweep on May-day.

This comes so out of left field that Sophronia is momentarily
thrown, but she quickly turns the sparkle back on.

SOPHRONIA

Upon my word, my love, you make me
ten times more desirous, now I
talk to you, to know you well! How
I wish we could be real friends.

Georgiana perks up at the word "friends."

SOPHRONIA

Don't fancy me a frumpy old
married woman, dear, tell me about
the chimney-sweeps!

GEORGIANA

Hush! Ma'll hear.

SOPHRONIA

Then come to the corner with me.

Her tugging finally wins out, and Georgiana trips over to the
corner to sit with her.

GEORGIANA

The chimney-sweeps, it was a bit
like dancing. But they so seemed
to enjoy it.

SOPHRONIA

And perhaps you would have enjoyed
it, had you been one of them?

Georgiana nods, slow and long.

SOPHRONIA

But my dear, though they dance,
they have no partners!

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

GEORGIANA

Oh, all the better! It is such a dreadful thing: if I was wicked enough--and strong enough--to kill anybody, it should be my partner in a dance.

Sophronia is caught off guard again and stares at Georgiana, who sits quite placidly, twiddling her fingers in her lap.

SOPHRONIA

Well!

GEORGIANA

It sounds horrid, doesn't it? But it is, and has always been, such a trial to me! No one knows what I suffered at Madame Sauteuse's, where I learnt to dance and make presentation-curtseys, and other dreadful things--or at least where they tried to teach me.

SOPHRONIA

At any rate, my love, that's over.

GEORGIANA

Yes, it is over, but there's nothing gained by that. It's worse here than Madame Sautuese's. Ma was there, and Ma is here, but Pa wasn't there, and company wasn't there, and there were not real partners there.

Her gaze drifts across the room and her face pales. Sophronia looks, too, and sees Mrs. Podsnap speaking with a large, balding man a good fifteen years older than Georgiana. This is GROMPUS. His cheeks are flushed and his eyes a bit glassy from the sherry.

Georgiana hunkers down in her seat, trying to make herself as small as possible. Sophronia looks at her in concern and Georgiana suddenly cowers against her, face half-hidden in the older woman's shoulder

GEORGIANA

Oh it's the Ogre. Oh, please don't, please don't, please don't! Oh, keep away!

But the Ogre (AKA Grompus) approaches, Mrs. Podsnap leading him over to her daughter.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

MRS. PODSNAP
Georgiana, Mr. Grompus. Mr.
Grompus, my daughter.

The Ogre bows low and extends a hand to Georgiana. She shuts her eyes miserably and takes it, allowing him to sweep her into the center of the room for a dance.

Sophronia looks back to her husband. As she watches, he casts down a two of spades with an attitude of frustration. Eugene crows as he wins that trick in their game of whist.

Alfred catches Sophronia's eye and juts his chin at Georgiana, looking annoyed. Sophronia sends him a condescending smile and folds her hands neatly in her lap. Georgiana, waltzed around the room by Grompus, stares over at Sophronia pitifully and that smile immediately transforms into one full of sympathy.

At the whist table, a new round begins.

Mr. Twemlow steps up to Sophronia's side, looking all around her as if to try and spy other company.

TWEMLOW
Mrs. Lammle! You are all alone?

SOPHRONIA
Oh! Mr. Twemlow, good day. And no,
not alone, simply waiting for dear
Georgiana to be returned to me.

Twemlow scans the room, locates the miserable Georgiana, and winces.

TWEMLOW
Ah, yes, a sad fate for any young
woman. But she- well, she has
refused so many eligible men that
Podsnap is rather desperate.

He leans in close, theatrically whispering.

TWEMLOW
She's set to inherit quite the
nest egg should she marry. Podsnap
wants her to be... how shall we
say... well, set up.

Sophronia lifts her eyebrows politely.

TWEMLOW
Ah, but here she comes now.

Georgiana has broken away from the Ogre and dashes back to Sophronia.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

TWEMLOW

I shall leave you. It is nice to see Miss Georgiana with another young gentlewoman. Well, good day!

He trundles off and is soon replaced by Georgiana, who skids into her seat.

GEORGIANA

Oh my goodness. *That's* over! I hope you didn't look at me.

SOPHRONIA

My dear, why not?

Georgiana glances down at herself, glum.

GEORGIANA

Oh, I know all about myself.

SOPHRONIA

Let me tell you something I know about you dear, and that is the you are most unnecessarily shy.

GEORGIANA

Ma isn't.

Grompus tries to approach again.

GEORGIANA

I detest you! Go along!

Surprised at her own vehemence, she turns her face into Sophronia's shoulder again. But it does the trick: Grompus backs off.

Sophronia gently raises Georgiana's chin back up.

SOPHRONIA

Pardon me if I scarcely see, my dear Miss Podsnap-

Georgiana impulsively takes her hand.

GEORGIANA

If we are going to be real friends, and I do hope we are, as you are the only person who's ever proposed it, don't let us be awful.

SOPHRONIA

Awful, my dear?

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

GEORGIANA

It's awful enough to *be* Miss Podsnap, without being *called* Miss Podsnap. Call me Georgiana.

SOPHRONIA

Then, dearest Georgiana-

GEORGIANA

Oh, I am so afraid of awfulness. With Ma being so endowed with awfulness, and Pa being so endowed with awfulness, and there being so much awfulness everywhere... I am rather deficient in awfulness, and so terribly afraid of it. But I don't know whether you can understand what I mean?

SOPHRONIA

Perfectly, my dear.

She's given up trying to speak, and merely waits for Georgiana to talk again.

GEORGIANA

Oh, Mrs. Lammle--

SOPHRONIA

Ah! No awfulness, recall? Sophronia.

GEORGIANA

Oh, yes, then, Sophronia, I *do* wonder what you like me for! I'm sure I can't think.

SOPHRONIA

Dearest Georgiana, for yourself! For your difference from all around you.

Georgiana considers this.

GEORGIANA

That may be, for I think I like you for all your difference from all around *me*.

She puts her other hand on top of the one already clasped with Sophronia's.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

GEORGIANA

Oh Sophronia, I do believe we shall be the best and realest of friends.

Sophronia smiles. Across the room, Alfred wins the game of Whist.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE PODSNAP'S ESTATE - AFTERNOON

The party is over, guests are leaving. Sophronia and Alfred are arm in arm, strolling towards their awaiting carriage. Georgiana waves eagerly from the doorway.

GEORGIANA

Goodbye, dearest Sophronia! And goodbye, Mr. L--that is to say, Alfred! Goodbye, goodbye!

SOPHRONIA

Goodbye, my dearest pet!

The Lammles load into their carriage.

INT. THE LAMMLES' CARRIAGE- CONTINUOUS

The minute the door shuts, Sophronia switches from Alfred's side to the other, pushing herself into the corner to get as far away from him as possible.

Things are silent in the carriage for a moment as it begins to rattle down the street.

ALFRED

Sophronia, are you awake?

SOPHRONIA

Am I likely to be asleep, sir?

Alfred scoffs.

ALFRED

Very likely, I should think, after that fellow Podsnap's company. But I sense there is money in this, besides the satisfaction of taking him down a peg.

SOPHRONIA

You're correct. Twemlow confirmed it just this evening: upon Georgiana's marriage, money.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

Alfred nods slowly and rubs at his chin. The carriage bumps, jostling Sophronia's head against the window, and she flinches but doesn't reposition.

ALFRED

Now, attend to what I am going to say.

SOPHRONIA

I have attended already, have I not? What else have I been doing all tonight?

ALFRED

Attend, I say! Keep close to that idiot girl. Keep her under your thumb. Do you hear?

Sophronia levels him with a long look and flicks her eyebrows at him, then sags against the side of the carriage again.

INT. THE LAMMLES' PARLOR - DAY

The Lammles' parlor is notably less luxurious than the Podsnaps'. It's smaller in size, for starters, more wooden than gilt, ceilings lower. There's a grandfather clock in the corner and simply-framed paintings on the wall. The tea things are set on the table, cups golden and gilt but clearly painted so, the color scratched in some places.

But the study is cozier than Podsnap's, too; chairs and a low table pulled around a fireplace for easy comfortable conversation. This is where Sophronia and Georgiana sit, turned towards each other, knees touching.

GEORGIANA

Sophronia, may I ask you something?

SOPHRONIA

We are one: in heart, in mind, in sentiment, in soul.

Georgiana continues to stare at her, awaiting a response. Sophronia sighs a little.

SOPHRONIA

Of course, my dearest.

GEORGIANA

Well... I simply- that is to say- Mr. Lammle, well... I am sure that Mr. Lammle is like a lover.

(MORE)

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

GEORGIANA (CONT'D)

At least, I should think he was.
Would you consider him to be?

SOPHRONIA

Georgiana, darling! Take care!

Georgiana claps her hands over her face, mortified.

GEORGIANA

Oh, goodness me! What have I said
now?

SOPHRONIA

Alfred. You said you were never to
say Mr. Lammle anymore, Georgiana.

Relieved, the hands come down and Sophronia grasps them,
smiling teasingly.

GEORGIANA

Alfred, then. I am glad it's no
worse; I was afraid I had said
something shocking. I am always
saying something wrong to ma.

SOPHRONIA

But to me, Georgiana, dearest?

GEORGIANA

No, no, not to you. You are not
Ma. I wish you were.

Sophronia gives her the sweetest of smiles, squeezing her hands
then letting them go to reach for her tea.

SOPHRONIA

And so, dearest Georgiana, Alfred
is like your notion of a lover?

Georgiana tucks her elbows into her body, hands up by her face
again.

GEORGIANA

I don't say *that*, Sophronia; I
haven't any notion of a lover. I
only mean that Alfred loves you
so. He always treats you with such
delicate gallantry and attention,
doesn't he?

For a moment, there are cracks in Sophronia's facade. She
studies the fire and hides behind her teacup, sipping slowly
and deliberately.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

Then she gives a little pinched smile and nods. Georgiana relaxes back into the couch, contemplating the fire as well, but with a much dreamier look on her face.

After a moment, Sophronia regains her usual sparkle and sets her teacup down, giving Georgiana a little nudge.

SOPHRONIA

But you know, my Georgiana, that there is something suspicious in your enthusiasm towards Alfred's tenderness.

GEORGIANA

Good gracious, no, I hope not!

SOPHRONIA

Doesn't it rather suggest that my Georgiana's little heart is-

Georgiana scrambles away from her on the couch, holding out her hands.

GEORGIANA

Oh, don't! Please don't! I assure you that I only praise Alfred because he is your husband and so fond of you. I really- I could not- I don't ever, really-

Sophronia grabs those flailing hands again, laughing.

SOPHRONIA

You are quite wrong in your guess at my meaning. What I insinuated was that my Georgiana's little heart was growing conscious of a vacancy.

Georgiana absorbs this then pulls her hands away, resting them gently in her lap. She gazes at the fire, somber.

GEORGIANA

No. It's enough for me to see how loving you and your husband are. That's a different thing. I couldn't bear to have anything of that sort going on with myself; I should go out of my mind. I should pray to- to have the person taken away and trampled on!

Sophronia leans forward, mouth opening to speak, but just then Alfred Lammle sweeps into the room. His eyes alight on Sophronia and he beams.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED
Sophronia! My life!

She extends a delicate hand to him and he kisses it. She kisses his watch chain in return. Georgiana watches this with a fond smile on her face.

Alfred takes a seat in a chair adjoining the couch and stretches his arms comfortably over his head.

ALFRED
Now, what did I hear of being taken away and trampled on?

SOPHRONIA
Ask Georgiana, my soul.

GEORGIANA
Oh, no, do not ask Georgiana.

Alfred raises his eyebrows even more quizzically.

SOPHRONIA
If you are determined to know, Mr. Inquisitive Pet, it was any one who should venture to aspire to Georgiana.

Alfred looks at her with shock.

ALFRED
Now this shows the accidental combinations that there are in things! Could you believe, my Owlets, that I came in here with the name of a suitor to our Georgiana on my lips?

Georgiana looks alarmed. Sophronia extends her fingertips to her husband again.

SOPHRONIA
Of course I could believe, Alfred, anything that you told me.

ALFRED
(kissing those fingertips)
You dear one! And I anything that you told me.

They simper at each other.

Alfred catches sight of Georgiana anxiously tapping foot and smiles.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED

Ah, but we have excited our dear Georgiana. Now, listen close: there is a young man of an excellent and rich family. He was known to two other certain persons, dearly attached to one another and called Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle. This young man, being one night at a play, there sees with Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle, a certain heroine called-

GEORGIANA

(wailing)

No, don't say Georgiana Podsnap!

ALFRED

-No other than my little Georgiana Podsnap. And he says-

GEORGIANA

Oh ple-e-e-ease don't! I so hate him for saying it!

Sophronia laughs, startled.

SOPHRONIA

For saying what, my dear?

GEORGIANA

Oh, I don't know what he said, but I hate him all the same for saying it.

ALFRED

The poor young fellow only says that he is stricken all of a heap, and implores to be asked to dinner.

The Lammles look expectantly at Georgiana, who recovers a bit from her frenzy and reaches for her tea, fiddling with the delicate handle of the teacup. She chews on her lip a bit.

GEORGIANA

And... who might this gentleman be?

ALFRED

His name...

A pause for dramatic effect. Sophronia playfully bats his shoulder.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED
His name is Fledgeby.

INT. THE LAMMLES' DINING ROOM - EVENING

FLEDGEBY, known to many as *Fascination* Fledgeby, is a short man in his mid twenties with patchy facial hair, a red nose, and his shirt buttoned up a bit too high, giving his head the appearance of wobbling on his shoulders with no neck to speak of.

He is seated across from Georgiana at a long dark wood dining table laden with food. The Lammles' dining room is very shiny, small circular mirrors along the wall, silver gilt decorating the chairs, a glittering chandelier overhead.

Mr. and Mrs. Lammle are at the two heads of the table. Fledgeby and Georgiana, across from one another and at absolute peak awkwardness. Georgiana tries to conceal her elbows, squeezing them into her body to the point where she can hardly use a knife and fork, and Fledgeby steadfastly refuses to look her in the eyes--and not in a subtle way. Instead he overtly inspects everywhere else in the room: the ceiling, the floor, the table, to the left, to the right, even, occasionally, behind himself.

Silence permeates the room. Alfred and Sophronia make eye contact and Sophronia raises her eyebrows, unimpressed. Alfred turns to Georgiana.

ALFRED
Georgiana, you are not in your usual spirits! Why are you not in your usual spirits, Georgiana?

Georgiana looks at him, slightly betrayed, and lowers the fork she was attempting to bring to her mouth without moving her arms.

GEORGIANA
I- I do believe- I am much the same as I am in general.

ALFRED
Much the same! You, my dear Georgiana, who are always so natural and unconstrained with us! Who are such a relief from the crowd that are all alike!

Georgiana has no idea what to do or say in response to this, so she just sinks in her chair.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED

Oh, but now I will be judged by my friend Fledgeby.

Sophronia lifts a finger.

SOPHRONIA

I beg your pardon, but I can't part with Mr. Fledgeby quite yet-- you see, Mr. Fledgeby and I are engaged in a personal discussion.

Fledgeby looks between Alfred and Sophronia in bewilderment, not having spoken a word.

ALFRED

A personal discussion! What discussion? I am jealous. Fledgeby, what discussion?

FLEDGEBY

Guhhh- well- uh- yes, tell him.

SOPHRONIA

We were discussing, if you *must* know, Alfred, whether Mr. Fledgeby was in his usual flow of spirits.

Alfred smacks the table in delight.

ALFRED

Why, that is the very point, Sophronia, that Georgiana and I were discussing as to herself! And what did Fledgeby say?

SOPHRONIA

Oh, a likely thing, that I will tell you everything and you tell me nothing. What did *Georgiana* say?

ALFRED

Georgiana said she was quite herself, and I said she was not.

SOPHRONIA

Precisely what I said to Mr. Fledgeby!

The two sit back, a bit out of breath from all the enthusiasm and improvisation. They smile at Fledgeby and Georgiana, waiting.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

Fledgeby clears his throat and snuffles a bit too wetly. Georgiana is so low in her chair that her chin just barely crests the top of the table.

Alfred lets out a short breath through his nose and the game begins again.

ALFRED

Sophronia, my dear, I don't like the color of your dress.

Sophronia places a hand on her chest in mock outrage.

SOPHRONIA

I appeal to Mr. Fledgeby!

ALFRED

And I to Georgiana.

SOPHRONIA

Georgie, my love, I rely upon you not to go to the opposition. Now, Mr. Fledgeby.

Fledgeby takes in the dress, frowning.

FLEDGEBY

Is the color not called... rose-color?

ALFRED

Yes, I do believe so.

FLEDGEBY

I believe rose color to be the color of roses.

Silence.

SOPHRONIA

Surely you must be correct in that estimation. But what do you *think* of the color?

FLEDGEBY

We all have our own eyes--or at least a large majority of us--and that--and--and--and--hm.

SOPHRONIA

Oh, Mr. Fledgeby, to desert me in this way!

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED

Victory! Your dress is condemned,
my dear.

SOPHRONIA

But! What does Georgie say?

Georgiana is practically underneath the table.

ALFRED

She says that in her eyes you look
well in any color, Sophronia, and
that if she had expected to be
embarrassed by so pretty a
compliment as she has received,
she would have worn another color
herself. But what does Fledgeby
say?

Sophronia reaches out and pats Georgiana's hand, which makes
her rise slightly from her slump.

SOPHRONIA

He says that it was no compliment,
but a little natural act of homage
that he couldn't resist. And he is
right, he is *right!*

But still, *nothing* from Georgiana or Fledgeby. For an instant,
Alfred stops sparkling and frowns darkly at Fledgeby and
squeezes the arms of his chair until his knuckles go white.

Sophronia's knife clatters against her plate, breaking the
moment. Mr. Lammle beams again.

ALFRED

Have you heard of this opera
tonight, Fledgeby?

FLEDGEBY

Why no, not exactly. In fact...
exactly. I don't know a note of
it.

SOPHRONIA

Neither do you know it, Georgie?

GEORGIANA

(barely above a whisper)
N-no...

Sophronia gasps and puts her hands to her face.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA

Why, then! Neither of you know it!
How charming!

FLEDGEBY

(looking just at Sophronia)
I consider myself very fortunate
in being reserved by...

He falls silent.

ALFRED

Destiny.

FLEDGEBY

No, I wasn't going to say that. I
was going to say fate. I consider
it very fortunate that *fate* has
written in the book of--in the
book which is its own property--
that I should go to that opera for
the first time under the memorable
circumstances of going with Miss
Podsnap.

Georgiana shoots up in her chair.

GEORGIANA

Thank you, but I generally go with
no one but you, Sophronia, and I
like that very much.

FLEDGEBY

....Oh.

Sophronia puts her hands out: one on top of Georgiana's, one on
the back of Fledgeby's wrist.

SOPHRONIA

Now, I have simply the most
wonderful of ideas: We shall all
go together!

INT. THE LAMMLES' CARRIAGE - NIGHT

The Lammles' carriage pulls up in front of the Podsnaps' home.
Georgiana opens the door to disembark, and Sophronia reaches
out and squeezes her wrist.

SOPHRONIA

Oh, little little Georgiana!
Little Georgiana. I believe you
have quite enslaved him.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

GEORGIANA

Did I... ever speak?

Sophronia releases a peal of laughter and pats her cheek, and, slightly bewildered, Georgiana sees herself out of the carriage.

The door shuts. The smile leaves Sophronia's face and she simply stares at Alfred for a moment as the carriage lurches into motion again. She opens her mouth to speak but he holds out his hand.

ALFRED

Allow me, if you will, this moment
of silence.

Irritated, Sophronia slouches back against the carriage cushion and stares out the window.

INT. THE LAMMLES' FRONT ENTRYWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The Lammles walk into their home, silent. Sophronia shakes her coat off her shoulders and tosses her parasol to a nearby chair, then turns on Alfred.

SOPHRONIA

You could do no better than
Fascination Fledgeby?

Alfred prickles.

ALFRED

I know what I am doing. He is not
so much a dolt as you suppose.

SOPHRONIA

A genius, then?

Alfred grabs her wrist, making her flinch and freeze all motion.

ALFRED

Do not question me, *my love*.

Sophronia wrenches her arm away and turns her back, hiding the shaken expression on her face. Alfred surveys her.

ALFRED

You have done well tonight. You
should go to bed.

She hesitates for just a moment, then nods and briskly leaves the entry hall.

EXT. OUTSIDE PUBSEY & CO - AFTERNOON

Alfred, at the edge of the sidewalk, stares up at the multilevel building in front of him, his hands in his pockets and his stance wide. The first story of the building, its entrance directly in front of him, is Pubsey & Co. Even from the outside it looks grim and a little grimy, the sign covered with mud flecks.

Alfred glowers at the gray sky, swinging his cane slightly.

FLEDGEBY (O.S.)
Horrible place, is it not?

Alfred turns. Fascination Fledgeby is behind him, his smug, jovial expression a direct counter to his words. Alfred lifts an eyebrow.

FLEDGEBY
Pubsey & Co. The creditors are just awful--awful! Living above them is a disgrace.

ALFRED
Why live there? *How* live there? I was under the assumption that the residence belonged to the creditors themselves.

FLEDGEBY
Not so, not so!

ALFRED
Ah.

He turns back to stare at the building, then lifts his eyebrows once again in Fledgeby's direction.

FLEDGEBY
No, no, Pubsey & Co are a disgrace. Never tangle with Pubsey & Co, if you can help it. So strict with their debtors, so hard to move. But, you know...

He leans in confidentially. Alfred leans subtly away.

FLEDGEBY
As the upstairs resident, I try to... make them see sense. For certain... *sensitive* cases.

ALFRED
Fledgeby. May we go inside?

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

FLEDGEBY
(surprised)
Ah! Yes, certainly.

He ushers Alfred through the front door.

INT. FLEDGEBY'S RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Fledgeby and Alfred emerge from a back staircase into Fledgeby's residence. They are met with a clutter of slightly mismatched furniture, stripes and paisleys decorating the couch cushions, wallpaper, and rug. There is a mostly empty cup of tea on the side table, a writing desk with a blotch from spilled ink, and the fire is just embers.

Fledgeby spots the teacup.

FLEDGEBY
Ah! Tea?

He offers the already half-drunk tea to Alfred, who merely stares at him until he wilts and puts the teacup back down.

FLEDGEBY
Perhaps not, then. But do sit.

The two do indeed sit, claiming two chairs on opposite sides of the space in front of the hearth. Alfred folds his hands.

ALFRED
I would like to ask you a question, Fledgeby. What do you think of Georgiana?

FLEDGEBY
Why, I'll tell you.

ALFRED
Do, my boy.

Fledgeby squints.

FLEDGEBY
You misunderstand me. I don't mean I'll tell you that. I mean I'll tell you something else.

ALFRED
Tell me anything, old fellow!

FLEDGEBY
Ah, but there you misunderstand me again. I mean I'll tell you nothing.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

Satisfied with this expert trickery, Fledgeby crosses his ankles and swings his legs a bit. Alfred blinks very slowly at him.

ALFRED

You're a long-headed fellow,
Fledgeby.

FLEDGEBY

Maybe, or maybe not. If I am a
short-tongued fellow, it may
amount to the same thing. Now,
Lammle, I am never going to answer
the question.

ALFRED

My dear fellow, it was the
simplest question in the world!

FLEDGEBY

(raising an intellectual
finger)

It seemed so, but things are not
always what they seem.

ALFRED

So you will *not* tell me what you
think of Miss Podsnap?

Fledgeby pauses and begins to rustle with the papers and books spread across the coffee table, trying to shove them into some semblance of order.

FLEDGEBY

Now, look here, Lammle. Look here.
I am very well aware that I didn't
show to advantage last night, and
that you and your wife did. But
don't you on that account come
talking to me as if I was your
doll and puppet, because I am *not*.

ALFRED

Well, I say!

He sits speechless for a moment. Satisfied once again, Fledgeby lets this silence linger. Then he purses his lips and dives in again.

FLEDGEBY

Well, anyway. That Geor--is the
right name Georgina or Georgiana?

ALFRED

Georgiana.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

FLEDGEBY

I was thinking yesterday, I didn't know there was such a name. I thought it must end in -ina.

Alfred rubs at his forehead, at his wits end.

ALFRED

Dare I ask why?

FLEDGEBY

Why, you play -if you can- the concertina, you know. And you have -when you catch it- the scarlatina. And you can come down from a balloon in a parch - no you can't though. Well, say Georgette, I mean Georgiana- I was going to remark that she doesn't seem to be violent. Doesn't seem to be of the pitching-in order.

ALFRED

She has the gentleness of the dove, Mr. Fledgeby.

Fledgeby purses his lips harder, though, discontented with this answer.

FLEDGEBY

Well, of course you say so. But I say--having my late governor and my late mother in my eye--that Georgina- Georgiana- doesn't seem to be of the pitching-in order.

Alfred glances at the smoldering embers for a moment, sighs, then snaps his head back to Fledgeby to hit him with a glare. He lifts to his feet, looming.

ALFRED

You are a highly offensive fellow, sir! You are a highly offensive scoundrel. What do you mean by this behavior?

Fledgeby leans back in his chair, startled.

FLEDGEBY

I say! Don't break out.

ALFRED

A very offensive fellow sir. A highly offensive scoundrel!

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

FLEDGEBY

I say, you know!

ALFRED

Why, you coarse and vulgar
vagabond! If your servant was here
to give me sixpence of your money
to get my boots cleaned
afterwards--for you are not worth
the expenditure--I'd kick you.

FLEDGEBY

(pleadingly)

I- I say...you wouldn't-

Alfred begins to stalk closer to him, one deliberate step at a time.

ALFRED

I'll tell you what, Mr. Fledgeby.
Since you presume to contradict
me, I'll assert myself a little.
Give me your nose!

Fledgeby cowers and claps his hands over his face.

FLEDGEBY

(muffled)

I beg you won't!

ALFRED

Give me your nose, sir!

FLEDGEBY

I beg, I beg, you won't.

Alfred begins to pace, flinging his hands around as he speaks.

ALFRED

This fellow presumes on my having
selected him out of all the young
fellows I know for an advantageous
opportunity! This fellow presumes
upon his dirty note of hand for a
wretched sum payable on the
occurrence of a certain event,
which only me and my wife can
bring about! This fellow,
Fledgeby, presumes to be
impertinent to me, Lammle. Give me
your nose, sir!

FLEDGEBY

No! Stop. I beg your pardon.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED

Repeat your words louder, sir. The blood boils in my head. I don't hear you.

FLEDGEBY

I say, *I beg your pardon.*

Beat.

ALFRED

As a man of honor, I am disarmed.

Like a flipped switch, Alfred flops back down and puts his hands on his knees, abruptly calm. Fledgeby watches him out of the corner of his eye, wary.

Alfred doesn't speak.

Fledgeby doesn't speak. He offers Alfred a simpering smile, and twiddles his thumbs a bit,.

FLEDGEBY

Lammle... I hope we are friends again?

ALFRED

Mr. Fledgeby, say no more.

Fledgeby rocks a bit from side to side.

FLEDGEBY

I must have gone too far in making myself disagreeable. But I never intended it.

ALFRED

Say no more, say no more! Give me your-

Fledgeby flinches, expecting him to say "nose"-

ALFRED

-hand.

They shake.

EXT. STREETS OF LONDON - MORNING

Sophronia and Georgiana meander down a London street lined with shopfronts.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

They pass an ironworker's shop with candlesticks and polished fireplace grates, a cabinetmaker's shop selling glossy wooden furniture, a stand covered in freshly cut flowers and vegetables.

Sophronia stops at the storefront advertising luxurious dresses, contemplating them silently. Georgiana wanders over to stand by her side. She, too, contemplates the dresses, but soon becomes bored and looks at Sophronia instead.

GEORGIANA

I cannot imagine being married for an entire year.

SOPHRONIA

(distractedly)

Neither can I, dearest.

Georgiana laughs, though a little perplexedly.

GEORGIANA

Sophronia, you don't need to imagine it.

Sophronia snaps to attention and opens her mouth to respond, then shuts it again and smiles weakly.

SOPHRONIA

I suppose time just passes so quickly when you are... in love.

Sophronia is sparkling less today. The bags under her eyes seem darker, she's a little slouched, a little strained.

Georgiana doesn't seem to notice, gazing at the street around them.

GEORGIANA

(contemplatively)

I don't think I would like to be married. But if I ever *am*, I should like to have a love like you and Alfred have.

SOPHRONIA

You mean a love like you and Mr. *Fledgeby* could have, don't you, dearest?

Georgiana winces a bit and peeks at her.

GEORGIANA

I- well- we are dear friends, are we not, Sophronia?

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA

The dearest, my pet.

GEORGIANA

Then... I will be honest with you.
I do not believe Mr. Fledgeby
is... shall we say... quite the
man for me.

SOPHRONIA

Oh, nonsense, dearest Georgie! Mr.
Fledgeby is *singularly* perfect for
you. Would your Sophronia and
Alfred, who know you so
intimately, lead you astray in
this?

GEORGIANA

Well, it is only that... I just
can't imagine Fledgeby acting to
me the way Mr. Lammle does to you,
with such tenderness and devotion.

Sophronia turns away and begins to walk down the street again,
dragging her parasol with an unnaturally limp hand.

SOPHRONIA

Oh... you would be surprised just
how similar Alfred and Mr.
Fledgeby could be, my dear.

The sleeve of her dress shifts. Her wrist is marred with a dark
bruise.

Georgiana trails after her.

GEORGIANA

Besides even wondering whether I
am *interested* in such tenderness
and devotion. It is nice enough to
observe but to have it for
oneself... it makes ones skin
crawl, does it not? But perhaps
I'm simply unnatural?

SOPHRONIA

Different is not always *unnatural*.

GEORGIANA

So you say. But, well...

Georgiana's smile wilts and she turns her gaze away, trailing
her fingertips across the flowers of a nearby cart. They skip
over a bundle of red tulips and skate across the petals of a
red poppy instead.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA

Ah, speaking of romantic
companionship, look who is across
the way?

Her head whips up and she jerks away from the flowers,
frantically scanning the courtyard.

GEORGIANA

Oh, not Mr. Fledgeby, please don't
say Mr. Fledgeby-

Following Sophronia's slight inclination of chin, she finally
sees Grompus. He strides along the street with head held high,
looking with disdain at the less pricey carts and shops as he
passes.

GEORGIANA

Oh no, not the Ogre.

SOPHRONIA

Perhaps we should go and say
hello...

She begins to drift toward Grompus. Missing the teasing
expression on her face, Georgiana grabs her elbow in alarm and
drags her bodily in the opposite direction. Sophronia laughs as
they stumble down the side of the street.

INT. THE LAMMLES' DINING ROOM - MORNING

Servants are bustling about the Lammles' dining room, tidying,
neatening, setting out dishes and glasses. Mr. Lammle stands in
the center of it all, surveying the work with a critical eye.
Sophronia, on the other hand, is at the edge of the room, using
a small looking glass to check her appearance with a bored
expression on her face.

SOPHRONIA

Dearest-

Alfred ignores her, waving a servant towards a different part
of the room and inspecting a nearby plate.

SOPHRONIA

(sighing)
Dearest.

Still nothing.

SOPHRONIA

Alfred!

Alfred's head snaps up and he purses his lips.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED
What, *my love*?

SOPHRONIA
I was merely contemplating your agenda of introducing Fledgeby at this particular event.

Alfred flaps the other servants out of the room and steps towards his wife.

ALFRED
Yes? And?

SOPHRONIA
And I was contemplating whether it was quite *proper*, as this is the celebration of our first year of marriage.

LAMMLE SERVANT steps back into the room.

LAMMLE SERVANT
Mr. Lammle, Mr. Fledgeby has arrived, sir.

Alfred turns his back on her and heads for the front door.

ALFRED
Well, as our marriage is hardly something worth celebrating, we might as well make good of the time for something useful.

Sophronia stares at his back until he vanishes, then jerks her mirror up in front of her face again. She swallows, momentarily looking miserable.

Footsteps shake her out of it. Fledgeby pokes his head around the corner and wrinkles his nose in surprise at all of the finery.

FLEDGEBY
Well, what's this party all about, then?

Sophronia throws up a hand in disbelief and turns her back on him.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

INT. THE LAMMLES' PARLOR - LATER

The usual guests have filled the parlor: Twemlow, the Veneerings, Georgiana, Eugene, Mortimer, and of course, Fledgeby. The Lammles stand behind him as if he is a prized cow on display for an array of judges.

Mrs. Veneering tucks Georgiana's hand around her arm.

MRS. VENEERING

Your parents could not attend,
dear?

GEORGIANA

No. Gladly--excuse me, *sadly*--no,
they had a previous obligation.

Eugene shakes hands with the Lammles and claps Mortimer on the shoulder. Georgiana locks to Sophronia's side as soon as she can escape Mrs. Veneering's grasp. Twemlow hovers around Mr. Veneering, but soon Alfred jerks his head at Fledgeby to lead him over to Twemlow. It takes several tries, but Fledgeby finally leaves the corner he's found to sulk in and goes to greet a few guests.

Twemlow extends a hand with a wide and friendly smile and Fledgeby shakes it with a significantly less friendly expression. Across the room, Sophronia has her eyes locked on them.

TWEMLOW

Your mother, sir, was a connection
of mine. Are you staying in town?

FLEDGEBY

I always am.

TWEMLOW

You like town.

Fledgeby blinks.

FLEDGEBY

No, I do not like town.

TWEMLOW

Oh!

ALFRED

Some people do not like town.

TWEMLOW

Oh, yes, well-- yes, this is true.
I merely supposed-

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED

We should head into breakfast.

FLEDGEBY

Let's.

Alfred ushers the men (Fledgeby moody, Twemlow slightly bewildered) into the dining room and the rest of the party follow behind.

INT. THE LAMMLES' DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The guests take their seats. Sophronia breaks abruptly away from Georgiana and darts for the spot next to Twemlow. He looks up at her in greeting and she hesitates, opens her mouth and stops short.

TWEMLOW

I beg your pardon?

Sophronia only smiles and then slips into the chair beside him.

The food is presented: venison pie, ham and eggs, Easterhedge pudding. The guests fill their plates and begin to eat.

Mr. Veneering, at one head of the table, clanks aggressively on his glass with his fork. Alfred winces infinitesimally. Veneering doesn't rise, but instead spreads his hands.

VENEERING

Today is the day in which we celebrate the Lammles, the oldest and dearest friends I have in this world.

Multiple guests, including Twemlow and the Lammles themselves, look slightly perplexed at this pronouncement.

VENEERING

On this very day twelvemonth ago, our dear friend Twemlow bestowed on my dear friend Lammle the fair hand of my dear friend Sophronia. And here we have our dear friend Twemlow, our dear friend Lammle, and our dear friend Sophronia, as well as similarly dear friends Mortimer and Eugene, though I confess that I miss from this board of companions my dear old friend Podsnap.

Sophronia glances at the clock as Veneering drones on.

CROSS-FADE TO:

INT. THE LAMMLES' DINING ROOM - 5 MINUTES LATER

The hands on the clock have shifted a good five minutes ahead, and still, Veneering speaks. Twemlow is the only one with politeness enough to stay alert. Alfred's glass of brandy is drained and he reaches for the decanter to refill it. Fledgeby openly goes in for seconds. Veneering has yet to take a bite of his breakfast.

VENEERING

For all of these reasons, and many more which I right well know will have occurred to persons of your exceptional acuteness, I am here to submit to you that the time has arrived when, with our hearts in our glasses, with tears in our eyes, with blessings on our lips, and in a general way with a profusion of gammon and spinach in our emotional larders, we should one and all drink to our dear friends the Lammles, wishing them many many years as happy as the last.

The guests stare at him, glazed. Mr. Veneering furrows his brow.

VENEERING

So.... Lammle, God bless you!

He collapses into the back of his chair, out of breath and satisfied with himself, and takes a large gulp of water.

Sophronia nods her appreciation towards Veneering and glances at Mr. Twemlow, opening her mouth again as if to speak. A knife scrapes on a plate and her gaze shoots to Alfred. Twemlow catches both glances and furrows his brow.

TWEMLOW

I beg your pardon, Mrs. Lammle?

SOPHRONIA

Oh, I... did not say anything.

Twemlow nods uncertainly and turns to his meal. Then Alfred, at the opposite head of the table from Veneering, stands up. He's smiling almost to the point of creepiness, shoulders straight, back rigid.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED

I thank you, dear friends, for your kindly greeting and your presence here today. I will never forget that, at the Veneerings', I first saw Sophronia.

Sophronia smiles painfully and lifts her chin.

SOPHRONIA

And I will never forget that, at the Veneerings, I first saw you.

ALFRED

I recall, dearest, speaking soon after our marriage and agreeing that we would never forget it. Truly. It is to the Veneerings that we owe our union, and we hope some day to show our sense of this in a full repayment.

He lifts his glass, toasting the Veneerings with something wolflike in his smile. When he sits down and conversation returns to the table, Sophronia keeps her eyes on her food but her face turned very slightly to her left.

SOPHRONIA

Mr. Twemlow.

TWEMLOW

I- I beg your pardon? Yes?

SOPHRONIA

(in a very low voice)

You have the soul of a gentleman, and I know I may trust you. Will you give me the opportunity of saying a few words to you when breakfast is complete?

TWEMLOW

(surprised)

Well, yes, of course.

Sophronia dips her chin in acknowledgment and doesn't look at Alfred, even as his eyes bore into the side of her head.

INT. THE LAMMLES' PARLOR - LATE MORNING

Sophronia has claimed a seat on one of the couches. Eugene tries to approach Georgiana, and she tries to flee to Sophronia, but Sophronia is beckoning Mr. Twemlow over.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

She flees instead to Alfred. But Alfred is approaching Mr. Fledgeby, so she attempts to flee *back* to Sophronia, but Twemlow has reached the couch, so she bumps into Mortimer, spins in a circle, and goes to hide behind a plant in the corner.

Through this, Sophronia has brought out a book of portraits and opened it on the low table in front of her. As Twemlow takes a cautious seat on the settee, she shows him a portrait.

SOPHRONIA

You have reason to be so surprised, but I wish you wouldn't look so.

Twemlow tries to reconfigure his face but only looks more disconcerted.

SOPHRONIA

I think, Mr. Twemlow, that you never saw that distant connection of yours, Fledgeby, before today?

TWEMLOW

Well, no, never.

SOPHRONIA

Now that you *do* see him, you see what he is. You are not proud of him?

TWEMLOW

To say the truth... no, Mrs. Lammle, I am not.

SOPHRONIA

If you knew him more, you would like him less. Now, look at this portrait. What do you think of it?

Twemlow blanches for a moment at the switch but peers close to the book to view a portrait of Alfred posing by a window.

TWEMLOW

Oh, very like! Uncommonly, truly alike!

SOPHRONIA

Mr. Twemlow, sincerely promise me that you will never betray my confidence--that you will respect it, even though you may no longer respect me--and I shall be as satisfied as if you had sworn it.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

TWEMLOW

Madam. On the honor of a gentleman-

Sophronia cuts him off with a nod.

SOPHRONIA

Thank you. I can desire no more.
Mr. Twemlow, I implore you to save that child!

TWEMLOW

Th- that child? What child?

She flips a page. There is a portrait of herself with flower heads floating awkwardly in the space beside and above her head.

SOPHRONIA

Georgiana. Now here is another portrait. And not good, is it?

TWEMLOW

D-Decidedly not, no.

SOPHRONIA

Mr. Twemlow, you have weight with her pompous, self-blinded father. Lose no time. Warn him.

TWEMLOW

But- but- against what? Against whom?

Sophronia raises her eyes to Georgiana, who, still in the corner, has her back turned on Fledgeby even as he tries to make advances. She takes a deep breath, just barely teary.

SOPHRONIA

Against me.

INT. MR. PODSNAP'S STUDY - MORNING

Mr. Podsnap is at his desk, his face taut with fury as he scribbles onto a piece of paper. He's breathing audibly through his nose.

Georgiana bursts into the room, looking even more disheveled than usual. Her hair is down, sticking in spots to her cheeks, which are damp with tears. The bow on her dress is untied and it makes the garment hang limply and unflatteringly on her body.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

GEORGIANA

Please, father, please, I beg you
to reconsider, you *must*
reconsider-

Mr. Podsnap throws his quill at her. It bounces off her chest and ink splatters her chest. Georgiana sobs, winding her fingers into her hair.

MR. PODSNAP

I certainly will not. Bring that
pen to me.

GEORGIANA

You must, you must, you *must!* I
love her! I *need* her! She is the
only one who has ever understood
me!

MR. PODSNAP

I will *not* reconsider! They are
dishonest and *dishonorable* and we
shall not associate with them any
longer. Now go to your room or
I'll drag you there myself!

Georgiana turns tail and runs out of the room, wailing. In her wake, Mrs. Podsnap enters. She picks up the quill and sets it carefully on Mr. Podsnap's desk.

MRS. PODSNAP

I do not understand. I thought
them to be such a good connection.

MR. PODSNAP

Well. You thought *wrong*.

He dunks his quill and signs the letter with a flourish.

CUT TO:

INT. ALFRED'S STUDY - AFTERNOON

Alfred Lammle's study is considerably smaller and dimmer than Mr. Podsnap's, all dark wood. Only four out of six shelves of the bookcase are filled, and the case itself is cramped up against the desk, where Alfred now sits. He stares at a letter with a familiar signature at the bottom, breathing very deliberately. Then he crumples the letter, grabs his cane from where it leans against the desk, and storms out of the room.

INT. FLEDGEBY'S RESIDENCE - LATER

Alfred, still seething, storms his way up the steps of Pubsey & Co to the second level and bangs on Fledgeby's door with his cane. Fledgeby opens, looking slightly groggy and unkempt.

FLEDGEBY

Hallo! There's something wrong!

ALFRED

(immediately suspicious)

How do you know it?

Fledgeby looks him up and down, taking in the mud splatters on his pants and the way his cane is grinding into the hallway floor.

FLEDGEBY

Because you show it.

Alfred squints at the rhyme, then pushes past Fledgeby into the apartment. He shoves a few books onto the floor to make room for himself to sink into one of Fledgeby's chairs. Fledgeby watches him with raised eyebrows.

ALFRED

Well then, there is. The whole thing's wrong.

FLEDGEBY

I say!

ALFRED

The game's up.

Fledgeby wrinkles his nose.

FLEDGEBY

What game's up?

ALFRED

The game. Our game.

He throws the letter, still crumpled, at Fledgeby's chest. Fledgeby picks it up from the floor and carefully smooths it.

FLEDGEBY

(reading)

Allow Mrs. Podsnap and myself to express our united sense of the polite attentions of Mrs. Alfred Lammle and yourself towards our daughter, Georgina.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED
(growling)
Georgiana.

FLEDGEBY
Does it say-? Oh, yes, it does.
(reading again)
Georgiana. Allow us also wholly
to... *reject them* for the future,
and to communicate our final
desire that the two families may
become... entire... strangers.

He lowers the paper, face slowly turning redder and redder as his chest begins to heave and he stares fixedly at a spot on the floor.

Then he catches himself, inhales deeply, and looks to Alfred.

FLEDGEBY
Who's doing is this?

ALFRED
Impossible to imagine.

FLEDGEBY
Someone has given you bad
character.

ALFRED
Or you.

The two stare each other down. Then Fledgeby casts the paper aside.

FLEDGEBY
Well! It won't improve with
talking about it. If we ever find
out who did it, we'll mark that
person. There's nothing more to
say. The most important thing: do
you have my promissory note?

Alfred slowly draws the piece of paper from his breast pocket and hands it to Fledgeby. Fledgeby skims it, nods, and promptly throws it in the smoldering fire.

ALFRED
Now, Mr. Fledgeby, our partnership
has ended.

Fledgeby extends his hand.

FLEDGEBY
Indeed.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

They shake, and Fledgeby wanders to the fire to try and poke it back to life as the promissory note isn't burning very fast. He pauses, staring off into space.

FLEDGEBY

If we ever find out who did this,
we'll mark that person.

He snaps back to Alfred.

FLEDGEBY

Now I know, Lammle, that you were
in this for the financial gain.
Since the jig is up, I implore you
to promise me that, no matter how
dire, you will never fall into the
hands of Pubsey & Co.

Alfred glares at him.

ALFRED

And if I *have*?

Fledgeby shakes his head long and slow, though a slight satisfied smirk plays around his mouth.

FLEDGEBY

Then I shall do my very best to
aid you, but your case truly is a
hopeless one.

INT. THE LAMMLES' DINING ROOM - MORNING

Alfred and Sophronia sit on opposite ends of their dining room table, eating breakfast in silence. The way the candelabra centerpiece and the mirror on the wall is oriented, they are able to see each other in the mirror reflection more easily than down the length of the table.

Alfred fights the urge to speak. He keeps swallowing, lifting his head and glancing at Sophronia in the mirror, only to take another bite. Finally, he grits his teeth and pushes his plate away.

ALFRED

Sophronia. We have no money.

Sophronia slowly lifts her head.

SOPHRONIA

It seems to me that you have had
no money at all, ever since we
have been married.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED

What seems to you to have been the case may possibly have been the case. It does not matter.

SOPHRONIA

I have never seen any money in the house except my own annuity. That I swear.

Alfred scoffs.

ALFRED

You never turned your annuity to so good an account.

Sophronia sets down her knife and fork with a clatter, spine zipping up extra straight.

SOPHRONIA

Good an account! In what way?

ALFRED

In the way of getting credit and living well.

The two glare at each other through the candelabra. Finally, Sophronia shakes her head and moves on.

SOPHRONIA

And what is to happen next, then?

Alfred is about to answer when a servant enters the room with a plate of toast. The two go silent and sullen until the servant exists again. Neither touch the toast.

ALFRED

Sophronia.

She ignores him, plucking at a thread on the sleeve of her dress.

ALFRED

Sophronia! Attend to me, if you please.

SOPHRONIA

(bitter)

I live to attend you, Alfred. This you should know by now.

ALFRED

I want to take counsel with you. You know our league and covenant.

(MORE)

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED (CONT'D)

We are to work together for our joint interest, and you are as knowing a hand as I am, or we shouldn't be together now. What's to be done?

SOPHRONIA

Have you no scheme on foot that will bring in anything?

ALFRED

Nothing in motion, no.

SOPHRONIA

And have you nothing-

ALFRED

We, Sophronia, we, we, we.

Sophronia grits her teeth.

SOPHRONIA

Have we nothing to sell?

Alfred pauses again and turns his head to look at her in the reflection of the mirror.

ALFRED

I... have given a bill of sale on this furniture to Pubsey & Co. He could take it tomorrow. He could take it now. He would have taken it before now, I believe, if not for Fledgeby.

SOPHRONIA

Fledgeby.

She crosses her arms in a most unladylike fashion, glaring at the ceiling.

SOPHRONIA

Of all the people to be aware of our financial difficulties, you pick *Fledgeby.*

ALFRED

He only knows the barest of details, and he says he will try to soften the proprietors of Pubsey & Co towards us.

SOPHRONIA

And you believe him?

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

Alfred meets her gaze in the mirror.

ALFRED

Sophronia, I never believe
anybody. I never have, my dear,
since I believed you.

For a moment, they just look at each other's reflections.
Everything is silent save for the clock ticking in the
background.

Sophronia nods slightly and looks down at her plate.

Alfred stands.

ALFRED

If we could have packed the brute
off with Georgiana... but,
however, that's spilled milk.

He turns to leave the room but catches sight of Sophronia's
face, which has gone deathly pale. Alfred tilts his head
slightly and when Sophronia sees him studying her, she white-
knuckles the arms of her chair.

SOPHRONIA

Is there nothing you-

ALFRED

We, Sophronia. We!

She shoots to her feet.

SOPHRONIA

Is there nothing we could do? If
we could borrow money, Alfred-

Alfred throws his hands in the air and starts for the door
again.

ALFRED

Beg money, borrow money, or steal
money. It would be all one to us,
Sophronia.

SOPHRONIA

And what of retribution? What of
the Veneerings? Have we given up
on that as well?

He leans against the doorframe, rubbing his forehead.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED

The Veneerings themselves are simply too elevated of a mark. We must hurt them by hurting the ones they know, ruining status and association; we've *discussed this*, Sophronia.

SOPHRONIA

Well then, we do that.

Alfred side-eyes her.

ALFRED

Another plot? It's risky.

Sophronia lifts her shoulders.

SOPHRONIA

We know many rich people.

INT. TWEMLOW'S PARLOR - AFTERNOON

Mr. Twemlow sits in his parlor, a book held close to his nose. The room is very bright and light colored, with mint green wallpaper, light brown curtains, and pale bronze accents. Paisley reigns supreme.

TWEMLOW SERVANT enters.

TWEMLOW SERVANT

A lady to see you, Mr. Twemlow.

TWEMLOW

A lady! Which lady?

TWEMLOW SERVANT

A Mrs. Lammle, sir. She would have sent a card, but has none.

Twemlow pales slightly and raises his book back in front of his face.

TWEMLOW

Oh. Yes, well, yes, yes, send her in.

He peeks out from behind the edge of the book, fidgeting nervously for a moment. Before long, Sophronia steps into the parlor. Twemlow stands. As is the trend of late, she is not sparkling as much as she once did and steps very demurely up to Twemlow's chair.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA

Mr. Twemlow, I will not detain you more than a few minutes.

TWEMLOW

Pray, take a seat, Mrs. Lammle.

He gestures at a chair, hesitates, then gestures at the mirroring one.

TWEMLOW

The- well, the sun will be in your eyes.

SOPHRONIA

Oh. Thank you.

She sinks into the second proffered chair. Twemlow regains his seat.

SOPHRONIA

I have no doubt that you have heard of a reverse of fortune having befallen us. No kind of news travels as fast--particularly amongst one's friends.

TWEMLOW

Yes... the topic arose at a recent dinner. Miss Georgiana was- well, she was particularly distraught.

Sophronia gives a little pinched smile and squeezes her gloved hands together.

SOPHRONIA

How does she do? Besides this recent distress.

Twemlow fidgets uncomfortably, knocking his book back and forth between his hands.

TWEMLOW

Podsnap, well... he is being... protective. Not letting a soul near her. She refuses any suitors, even when they are most selective.

Sophronia smiles a little at the carpet and then abruptly changes track.

SOPHRONIA

Mr.

(MORE)

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA (CONT'D)

Twemlow, I come because I have somewhat of a... *postscript* to what I said that day.

TWEMLOW

Really, really, Mrs. Lammle, I should take it as a favor if you could excuse me from any further confidence.

SOPHRONIA

Please--do you recall the conversation we had on my wedding day so many months past?

Twemlow looks uncertain.

SOPHRONIA

I told you that since the death of my father, I had no one. I *have* no one. But... well, Mr. Twemlow... I feel, and perhaps incorrectly, but... I feel I have you.

TWEMLOW

Me? Not your husband?

SOPHRONIA

(with great weight)
I feel I have you.

Twemlow sits back, struck silent at this. He looks Sophronia up and down, searching her appearance for something beyond the eye. After a beat, Sophronia snaps back to business.

SOPHRONIA

My *postscript* is merely to remind you of your confidentiality.

TWEMLOW

Of that you may be assured.

SOPHRONIA

I scarcely know why I turned traitress to my husband in the matter, for the girl is a poor little fool. I was a poor little fool once myself; and perhaps that...

She rises and is suddenly taller than him and quite a bit colder. Mr. Twemlow slowly looks up as she looms a bit.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA

Mr. Twemlow, if you should chance to see my husband, or to see me, or to see both of us, in the favor or confidence of any one else--whether of our common acquaintance or not--you have no right to use against us the knowledge I instructed you with, for one special purpose which has been accomplished. This is what I came to say. It is not a stipulation; to a gentleman it is simply a reminder.

Rather embodying a fish, Twemlow's lips seem to have lost the function of speech.

Sophronia nods.

SOPHRONIA

Good day, Mr. Twemlow. I bid you adieu.

Still unable to make a sound, Twemlow tracks her out of the room with his head.

INT. THE LAMMLES' PARLOR - AFTERNOON

Sophronia stands at the fireplace mantle, arranging flowers in a vase with minimal interest. A figure passes by the window: Fledgeby. Sophronia spots him, watches him from behind a curtain as he mounts the steps to their door and hammers the knocker, then is let inside.

Fledgeby soon enters the room. Sophronia turns to him with a polite but apologetic smile.

SOPHRONIA

Mr. Fledgeby, it has been far too long. My poor dear Alfred, who is greatly worried just now about his affairs, went out rather early. But do, dear Fledgeby, sit down.

Fledgeby plops himself in a chair and crosses his ankles. Sophronia lowers herself across from him and leans forward intently.

SOPHRONIA

Mr.

(MORE)

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA (CONT'D)

Fledgeby, I have heard what a comfort you have been to my dear Alfred about his affairs, and what a service you have rendered him.

FLEDGEBY

Oh! I thought that, perhaps, Alfred might be reserved about his affairs.

SOPHRONIA

Not to me. Not to me, dear Mr. Fledgeby. I am his wife.

FLEDGEBY

Uh- I- well, yes, I always understood so.

SOPHRONIA

And as the wife of Alfred, may I, dear Mr. Fledgeby, wholly without his authority or knowledge, as I am sure your discernment will perceive, entreat you to continue that great service, and once more use your well-earned influence with Pubsey & Co for a little more indulgence?

Fledgeby shifts and rubs his hands together, staring up at the ceiling. Sophronia hesitates.

SOPHRONIA

The name I have heard Alfred mention, tossing in his dreams, is Pubsey & Co, is it not?

FLEDGEBY

I- it- well- it- Pubsey & Co is a nasty one, Mrs. Lammle, it really is.

SOPHRONIA

And yet I must beg that you continue to try. We must only delay a little longer; Alfred has come into some potential prospects.

An eyebrow lift of surprise from Fledgeby.

She pulls a handkerchief from her sleeve and dabs her eyes slightly.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA

You know, dear Mr. Fledgeby--you who study the human heart, and study the world--what an affliction it would be to lose position and to lose credit, when the ability to tide over a very short time might save all appearances.

FLEDGEBY

Of course, of course! I shall make a point of seeing the creditors at once. Perhaps Pubsey & Co will take it a bit easier, as it is only a sale on your furniture.

Startled, Sophronia looks at him sharply with her head slightly cocked. Then she quickly regains herself and beams.

SOPHRONIA

Blessings on you, dearest Fledgeby!

She rises, as does he, and he kisses her hand quite a few times, then backs out of the door, kissing his own hand and bowing until he completely disappears.

Sophronia tosses the handkerchief to a side table and puts a hand thoughtfully over her mouth. She strides to the window to watch Fledgeby leave the same way she watched him come in, swinging his arms, practically skipping as he stares up at the sky.

Just as he turns a corner, her husband comes around another one. Sophronia shrinks back from the window and hurriedly returns to her flowers, fiddling. A stem snaps under her tense fingers, and she throws the broken flower, a bit of lavender, into the fireplace.

Alfred enters. He whistles and takes a jaunt around the outside of the room, smiling to himself all the while. Sophronia watches him in the blurry reflection of a gold picture frame.

SOPHRONIA

(bitterly)

You're in good spirits, considering the circumstances.

ALFRED

I have good news, Sophronia. I have selected our next target.

Sophronia turns and raises her eyebrows at him to continue.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED
Mr. Twemlow.

Sophronia immediately pales, shying back against the mantle.

SOPHRONIA
Oh- Mr- we could not possibly go
after Mr. Twemlow.

ALFRED
On the contrary: he's perfect!

He counts off on his fingers.

ALFRED
A close associate, someone you
seem quite familiar with, rich,
and on top of that, a dottering
old helpless fool.

Sophronia gapes at him, struggling for words.

ALFRED
Besides, I've heard tell that he
was the one to spoil our plan with
a certain Miss Podsnap. Unless, of
course, there's something you
would wish to say to that end?

The two stare at each.

In the fireplace, the rejected sprig of lavender blackens and
curls.

Sophronia looks away.

SOPHRONIA
I- I- n-no, but- but I still don't
believe- Mr. Twemlow- We could go
after Podsnap a different way, or-
or Mortimer? Lady Tippins? Lady
Tippins is an imbecilic old woman,
she-

Someone, a female figure, darts past the window, unnoticed by
both the Lammles.

ALFRED
I have made my decision,
Sophronia! Whatever this loyalty
is to Twemlow, it is unmerited.

SOPHRONIA
But he is- he's-

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

ALFRED

Spit it out, woman!

SOPHRONIA

It's only that he's-

She saved having to finish the sentence by a young woman bursting into the parlor, a servant chasing after her. It's none other than Georgiana Podsnap, hair in a mess, eyes wild and already streaming with tears.

ALFRED

Good God!

GEORGIANA

I've broken away from my mother.
My father has forbidden me to step
foot in this house but I simply
had to, I-

She flies to Sophronia's side and throws her arms around her.

GEORGIANA

Oh, my dear Sophronia! To think
that you and Alfred should be
ruined! After all your kindness to
me! You don't, you can't, you
never can, think how I have lain
awake at night and cried for my
good Sophronia, my first and only
friend!

Sophronia's arms stay stiff at her sides, her jaw has dropped, she seems incapable of speech. Georgiana abruptly yanks away.

GEORGIANA

I haven't a minute to stay. But
oh, how I felt the separation
before I knew you were brought low
in the world, and how much more I
feel it now!

Sophronia, though still mute, has tears in her eyes. Alfred stares at them with a deadened face, even as Georgiana openly begins to sob. She swipes tears from her face and rubs her dripping nose on her sleeve, beginning to root around in her reticule.

GEORGIANA

Oh, where is, where is it? Oh! I
can't find it!

ALFRED

What are you looking for?

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

GEORGIANA

Oh, it's little enough because Ma always treats me as if I were in the nursery, but I hardly ever spend it and it has mounted up to fifteen pounds, Sophronia, and I hope three five-pound notes are better than nothing, though so little, so little! And now I have found that--oh my goodness! There's the other gone next! Oh no, it isn't, here it is!

Triumphant, she yanks out a small fistful of money as well as a beautiful ruby-studded necklace and thrust them at Sophronia.

GEORGIANA

I want you to sell it. Please.

Sophronia, dazed, slowly takes the items and stares at them lying in her palm.

Georgiana stares between the two Lammles, still half-sobbing.

GEORGIANA

Oh, oh, I must tear myself away or Mama and Father will find out. Dear, dear Sophronia, goodbye, goodbye!

She throws herself at Sophronia's chest again, hugging tight, then whips towards Alfred.

GEORGIANA

Good-bye, Dear Mr. Lammle- I mean Alfred. You won't think after today that I have deserted you and Sophronia because you have been brought low in the world, will you?

She frantically rubs her face.

GEORGIANA

Oh me! Oh me! I have been crying my eyes out of my head, I must go!

She turns toward Sophronia one last time and hugs her again. This time, Sophronia hugs her tightly back, eyes squeezed shut.

With nimble fingers, she slips the money and jewels back into Georgiana's reticule. Georgiana is none the wiser.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA

Goodbye, Georgiana. Dearest... my
dearest Georgiana, goodbye.

Georgiana pulls away and, still a mess of tears, races back for
the door. It slams after her.

Silence fills the parlor. Sophronia's face is white, tears
trickle down to her chin. Alfred stalks towards her.

ALFRED

Give the money and the necklace to
me.

Sophronia doesn't look at him and doesn't speak.

ALFRED

Give it to me, Sophronia!

He grabs at her shoulders and shakes her.

ALFRED

You! You, from the first moment on
the beach, you have been set
against me! I did not wish to
believe it at the time, but you
were even the cause of the failure
with Podsnap!

Sophronia glares at him, crying, hair falling out of its updo
as he shakes her.

ALFRED

What do you see in that *imbecile*
of a girl that is so worth risking
everything for?!

SOPHRONIA

I see *myself*!

She shoves him back and steps away from him.

SOPHRONIA

I see someone who is alone, *deeply*
alone, and who, to fix that, would
end up in a *loveless* marriage with
a *monster* of a husband!

ALFRED

(roaring)
Enough!

He grabs his cane from where it leans against the couch and
raises it over his head. Sophronia screams and drops to the
ground, protecting her head with her arms.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA

*Wait! I must know: Did you tell
Fledgeby the specifics of your
transaction with Pubsey & Co?*

Startled, Alfred lowers the cane a few inches. Sophronia begins to straighten from her ball on the floor.

ALFRED

What?

SOPHRONIA

*Did you tell him that it was a
bill of sale for the furniture,
specifically?*

ALFRED

I did not.

Sophronia lets a huge breath and raises to her feet, hardly daring to look Alfred in the eyes.

SOPHRONIA

*Alfred. Fledgeby has tricked us
from the start.*

The realization comes to Alfred, now.

ALFRED

Fledgeby is Pubsey & Co.

After a moment more, Alfred grabs Sophronia's wrist, turns on his heel and strides back out of the room with his wife stumbling along behind him.

INT. PUBSEY & CO WAITING ROOM - SOON AFTER

The lobby of Pubsey & Co is cold and grey, with a heavy dark wood desk and bookcase and tarnished silver light fixtures. Sophronia, face now devoid of any emotion, stands by the receptionist's desk. She grips her parasol and Alfred's hat.

From upstairs, there is the sound of thumping and groaning. Sophronia stares fixedly at the wall. The secretary behind the desk keeps glancing towards the ceiling but continues to shift through the papers in front of her.

A crash, a grunt of pain. Silence.

Alfred comes slowly down the stairs. His cane is in his hands, but it has cracked into three pieces, which he lays on the secretary's desk. The clatter of wood on wood rings in the silent lobby.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

There is a thick envelope tucked under his arm with a pound note poking out of the top. He puts a hand on the cane pieces.

ALFRED

Tell Mr. Fledgeby, if you please,
that they come from Mr. Alfred
Lammle, with his compliments on
leaving England.

He turns towards the door, then pauses and looks back.

ALFRED

Lammle. Do not forget the name.

The secretary nods warily.

Alfred takes his hat and grabs Sophronia's arm. They exit Pubsey & Co.

EXT. OUTSIDE PUBSEY & CO - CONTINUOUS

Alfred starts towards their carriage. It's raining rather heavily and the shoulders of his coat quickly darken. Sophronia stops walking, staying under the protective lip of the building. Alfred, hand on the carriage door, regards her with annoyance.

ALFRED

Sophronia, now is not the time for
dawdling.

SOPHRONIA

I will not be going with you. I
will be staying here.

He begins to squeeze the handle of the carriage door.

ALFRED

You're speaking nonsensically.
What has into you?

SOPHRONIA

You do not need me, Alfred. You
have goals in mind that are better
achieved *without* my presence.

ALFRED

Don't tell me you're growing a
conscience.

The rain begins to let up, though Alfred is already soaked through.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

SOPHRONIA

Consider this: if you break you
ties with me, you will be able to
leave England and start anew.
Perhaps there you will find a wife
who... better suits your purposes.

Alfred still holds the door knob. He stares Sophronia up and
down.

ALFRED

Understand this, Sophronia:
without me, you are nothing.
You'll end up on the streets.

The rain stops. A thin mist covers the London streets, which
are eerily vacant.

Sophronia opens her parasol, rests it on her shoulder, and
steps out from the shelter of the building. She pauses by
Alfred's side, their bodies facing in opposite directions so
their faces must turn to meet.

SOPHRONIA

Come now. Don't pretend as though
you love me.

She continues along the side of the street, leaving him at the
carriage. Alfred holds up the envelope and shakes it at her.

ALFRED

(calling after her)
No one will accept you! You will
be scorned by society! You are
making a mistake, Sophronia
Lammle!

Sophronia walks on and beams up at the sky.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

RIVER

Summary: (Set post-*Our Mutual Friend*) Alfred and Sophronia leave England and find temporary stay in Paris, France. There, in the city of love, Sophronia contemplates marriage, childhood dreams, Georgiana, and a man she meets by the Seine.

Author's Note: So this is... *quite* different than my usual fic writing M.O. I'm not usually an OC girlie, but for the sake of showcasing transfictionality, I wanted to try something post-canon. Alfred and Sophronia's dynamic is definitely interesting, but not a relationship I want to spend too much raw-creative time on, so invent a character we must.

I feel like Dickens would approve. *He's* certainly invented enough characters in his time. I just need to make sure I pick a suitable name.....

Sophronia Akershem Lammle's favorite difference between Paris and London was the river.

In London, the Thames ruled the world. People lived and died by the Thames—literally, emotionally, spiritually. She could not remember a moment of her life where the Thames wasn't lurking somewhere in the background. A muddy scent, the sound of waves, a glimpse through hulking buildings and the spokes of carriage wheels.

In this way, the Seine was the same: inescapable. But the river didn't stink of death; Paris was too elegant for that. Paris' death wasn't showcased as London's always seemed to be. Sophronia actually enjoyed the presence of the Seine. As bad at finding her way as she was, had settled into navigating by the presence of the river. If one could find it (which one usually could), one could also likely find a familiar scene.

If she was this consumed by rivers, thank God they hadn't ended up in Venice.

Today was gray. Sophronia often forgot that water reflected the color of the sky in a literal sense; instead, she always felt it reflected its mood. She was standing by the edge of the Seine now and trying to focus on the grand sight of Notre Dame, but despite the intricacy of the architecture visible even from this distance, her gaze kept returning to the water. It flowed rapidly, only a meter or so below her feet and the tip of her parasol on the ground, but it didn't churn like the Thames. It wasn't ready to chew her up and swallow her, it was ready to *take* her somewhere.

The sound of a throat, male, clearing behind her immediately made Sophronia flinch. Her first thought—the thought that always came when she saw a flash of a gold watch chain or a too-long nose, or perceived anything remotely masculine—was that it was Alfred. Was that he'd discovered something about her or wanted something from her.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

Did she consider herself blameless? Hardly. She knew her intentions for marrying Alfred had been less than pure, and she knew she had not only gone along with the Boffin scheme but had in fact been its originator. Regarding Georgiana... but that she tried not to think on. She had put a stop to everything before irreparable *social* damage had been done, but could not imagine the *emotional* damage Georgiana had sustained in the process.

She did not love the girl, exactly; Georgiana was strange and unnatural and naive. She was too scared of herself to go far in the world and didn't need to try; she had her father and her wealth to hide behind for the rest of her days, if she so chose. And true, she was miserable, but she was miserable in a way that was blind to what the breadth of her misery could have been. Sophronia had been miserable at her age, too. *And* she had been poor.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle?"

Not Alfred; she knew his tone as well as the sound of chewing on ice. Sophronia carefully turned her chin, placing a polite but vacant smile on her face.

The man who had come to stand beside her was tall, with neat gray coattails and a white rose in his lapel. He had a small mustache, tweaked upwards at the ends, and his dark hair was combed across the top of his head. Sophronia forced herself to meet his eyes and found something there she'd become unaccustomed to from the long weeks seeing only Albert in closer proximity: kindness.

"Bonjour," Sophronia replied with a slight curtsy. She did not bother to correct him from Mademoiselle to Madame; Alfred was not present. Let her feel young and unmarried for this brief moment.

The man broke into a grin and his eyes nearly disappeared into his cheekbones. "Ah! You are English, then?"

His smile was such that to resist a responding one would have forced Sophronia to frown. She ducked her chin, bashful. "Is it so obvious?"

"Your accent is... not natural," the man said. *His* accent on the English words was, of course, also not particularly natural, but Sophronia reveled in the raspiness of his r's.

He must have seen and misinterpreted something in her expression, because he lowered his own chin to try and catch her gaze again. "I apologize. I meant no offense."

"No, no, it's true, I come from England," Sophronia said quickly. She extended her fingertips for him to take. "Sophronia—"

And there she paused, *Lammle* hovering on her tongue. She'd grown accustomed to Albert's name following her own, the word in her throat like one more vice he had around her.

But the man didn't seem to notice the lack of last name. He brushed his lips over the backs of her gloved fingertips. "*Sophronia*," he repeated, relishing the name the same way she relished that gravelly r sound. "Très belle. Je m'appelle Gaspard."

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

“Gaspard,” Sophronia echoed in a whisper. Her wedding ring was covered by her glove, but she hid her left hand in the folds of her skirt anyway.

Gaspard’s gaze lifted to the sky, which was bright and overcast. The corners of his mouth lifted with another smile, and he offered her his arm. “Would you give me the pleasure of walking beside me?”

A walk alongside the river with a young man of presumed prospects. Oh, how life was filled with parallels.

Sophronia slipped her hand into the crook of his elbow.

“So, Madame Sophronia the Englishwoman, what brings you to Paris?” Gaspard asked as they meandered down the length of the Seine.

She watched the hem of her skirt swish with each step, fingers creasing the fabric at Gaspard’s elbow. What had brought her to Paris? A man with an endless appetite for personal gain. A personal lapse of self-interest?

“Well. A boat.” Sophronia glanced up at Gaspard with a playful smile.

He seemed pleased by this response. “A woman most mysterious.”

“And you?” She was eager to get the attention off herself, at least when it came to personal details. “You live here in Paris?”

“Yes, yes, on Rue de la Chaussee d’Antin. You know the place?”

Something went icy in Sophronia’s sternum. The Rue de la Chaussee d’Antin had been practically the only phrase on Alfred’s lips over the past week or so. Alfred did not clamber his way up the ladder like most, he found a way to float to the top, and the Rue de la Chaussee d’Antin was nothing if not *the top*.

“I may have heard of it,” Sophronia deflected. She gazed up at the strong jaw and shadow of dark stubble, and something tugged in her gut.

She recalled the first day she saw Alfred, standing with a slight frown across his brow, a glass in his hand. She had had no real inclination to move towards him, to shrink the space and allow his eyes to rest on her. But there was word amongst her inner circle that this mature young man was wealthy and that was enough for her to gather herself and cross the room.

She had been so willing, just a short year and a half ago, to go to any lengths necessary to hold on to the status she had scrounged from lies. She was and always had been dirt masquerading as gold, but it was only since Georgiana that that was not a feeling she could contend with when she stared into the looking glass each morning.

Sophronia had been silent for too long, she knew that. It was possible that Gaspard had spoken, had asked her more about herself. The river rushed in her ears.

She could pursue this. She could keep her hand at his elbow, follow him where he led. She could find a way to see him on the morrow, build a storyworld of broken luxury and elegance around herself. He would never have to know about Alfred. Alfred, perhaps, would never need to know about him.

ADAPTATION: THE FANFICTION OF ACADEMIA?

They reached a crossroads on the path. One road continued along the Seine, the other spiraled into the depths of the city.

Sophronia chose the river.

Author's Note: Funny little fact here, this story is set *before the construction of the Eiffel Tower*. I don't know why that blows my mind so much. But if La Tour Eiffel felt missing from this story, that would be why lol.

In case anyone was curious: I chose the name Gaspard because it means "bringer of riches." Told you I'd do Dickens proud ;)

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