Wanting Some More

A Critical and Creative Look Into the Complexities of Adapting Literature for Children

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Book One

On Oliver Twist

An essay on the complexities of adapting Oliver Twist for a child audience.
Introduction: Children's Literature and Adapting Oliver Twist

As a child, probably around seven or eight, I remember reading Little Women by Louisa May Alcott. I enjoyed it, but there was nothing particularly special about it, so it was put on a forgotten bookshelf and left there for years to gather dust. Nevertheless, there was a definite sense of pride of having read a novel that was not for someone of my age. When I was a little bit older an interest in this novel resurfaced, when my mother rented the 1994 film adaptation of Little Women starring Wynona Ryder as Jo March. I was absolutely taken with it and admittedly, that may have been due to the presence of a young, handsome Christian Bale as Laurie, but it seemed to resonate beyond that. The characters felt richer, and the story more engrossing.

I decided to pull Little Women from my old bookshelf, and when I scanned the cover I was shocked; it seemed that the version I had read as a child was not Alcott's original, but in fact had been abridged and rewritten for a young audience. I was disheartened to learn that this novel I had read with pride as a child was a modified, reduced version of the original. It seemed unfair; as though I had missed out on an experience I felt I had claim to. I remedied this by reading Alcott's original Little Women and it was much better than I remembered the adaptation being.

I am not the only child who was introduced to 19th century novels by way of adaptation. Browse the children's section at any Barnes and Noble bookseller, and you can see the prevalence of these adaptations. Given their popularity, it is surprising that almost no research has been published on these adaptations, and I wondered why that was. For many children, their first interaction with classic texts will be with these adaptations. If they are to serve as an introduction, a gateway between the children's world of literature and adult's, why are people not curious about how loyal these adaptations are to the source material? With few secondary
sources to answer my questions regarding adaptation, I have been left mostly to my own devices in thinking about what makes an adaptation for children successful.

Though I have not found any sources relating directly to adapting for children, I have found sources that focus indirectly on the issues an adapter might face when writing for children. Jacqueline Rose, in her work, *The Case of Peter Pan*, addresses why adults write for children. *Children's Literature: An Issues Approach* by Masha Kabakow Rudman is an in depth manual on how to introduce children to inevitable, yet difficult facets of life. Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* addresses the need for children's literature to challenge the reader, as it leads to emotional maturation. These texts have all been interesting in regards to the difficult, potentially taboo, topics an adapter must include for it to be a faithful adaptation. They have helped me in developing my own questions when looking at adaptations.

I believe that an adaptation for children should be regarded as a supplement to the original text, an introduction to the themes and questions it contained. As well, an adaptation should create a familiarity for the child reader when it comes time for them to pursue the original text. Each author of an original text has an explicit goal in creating a novel that is intrinsic to their own line of thought, and their own methods. In this line of thinking, each adaptation needs to be regarded on a case-by-case basis; there is no strict guideline that can be created to ensure that an adaptation is successful, and what works for one may not work for another. What *is* important is that the adapter takes into consideration the motivations of the original text's author; the questions, methods, and the lessons they hoped to impart on the reader.

What many adaptations seem to struggle with is how to convey the complexities of an original novel. Perhaps adapters become too conscious of their future readers and make assumptions about what a child can comprehend. Yet if an adapter refuses to thoroughly
reproduce the important qualities of the original, and removes the aspects of the original novel that make it important and worth adapting, what is the point of adapting at all?
Adapting Oliver Twist

Having freshly come off a college literature course, during which we read *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, the little orphan boy was on my mind as I began this project. A twenty-two year old reading enthusiast, I had never before read the classic novel. Why read Dickens's original when I have seen the musical, when I already know the story so well? The innocent boy and his association with a group of thieves is embedded in our culture, and a viewing of Carol Reed's *Oliver!* seems to be required viewing as a child. Disassociating ourselves from the source material in favor of familiarity with an adaptation reminded me so much of those early days when I was re-immersing myself in the world of *Little Women*. Because when I finally read Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, I was taken with it in a way that I never felt with the musical. Yet if I had never taken that course in college, I may never have read it.

To address my questions about adaptation, I decided to use one novel and a few of its adaptations as a case study, with the goal of studying how various adapters approached a single text. *Oliver Twist* became my novel of choice. When selecting which of the many *Oliver Twist* adaptations to observe, I used a less than scientific method; after filtering a list of *Oliver Twist* adaptations on Amazon to show the bestsellers, I selected a few from the top of the list. I chose the most popular ones, assuming that these adaptations have continued to be in demand, and are likely are reaching the most readers.

With my adaptations chosen, I began to think of what I wanted to ask of the adapters. An adaptation of *Oliver Twist* has to have a few specific goals, if it is to be read as an introduction to Dickens's world. It needs to introduce young readers to the world of Victorian London, to the characters with whom Oliver will interact, and to the questions of nature versus nurture – all while incorporating a narrator who asks readers to question their own assumptions. The
adaptations I have chosen by Kathleen Olmstead, Les Martin, Peter Oliver, Quadrum Solutions, and Gill Tavner all have strengths and weaknesses. After reading all the adaptations with these questions in mind, I have continuously come back to Chapters VIII and IX of Dickens's text as examples of all these questions. How an adapter addresses these chapters affects the strength of the adaptation as an introduction to the world of Oliver Twist. In this paper, I will look at the interesting choices, for good or for bad, these adapters make regarding the questions of Moral Ambiguity, the presence of Death and Sexuality, and the Narrator in Dickens's work.
Ambiguity: Oliver and Fagin

What instantly comes into mind when thinking of Charles Dickens is his characters. Dickens does not want a reader to come to an easy conclusion on the morality of a person, and by questioning our perceptions, he continually asks his readers to address their assumptions. In Dickens's world, villains are created by their surroundings and are a product of their circumstances. They are not simply good or bad, but both. Dickens's work in creating Oliver as a static, reliably good character gives the readers a consistent person to rely on. Readers can comfortably align themselves with Oliver while observing the other characters as they make good – or bad – decisions.

Characters do not always make the morally right decisions in Oliver Twist, yet if you take into account their history and the way the world has treated them, these decisions can almost be made understandable. Whether or not they actually take the steps to be better people, the fact remains that the option to change and make good decisions is always there, if they so choose to take it. Though one small moment of goodness cannot redeem a character, it adds an additional layer to our understanding of them.

"Modern stories written for young children mainly avoid these existential problems, although they are crucial issues for all of us." says Bettelheim. "The child needs most particularly to be given suggestions in symbolic form about how he may deal with these issues and grow safely into maturity."(Bettelheim 13) By establishing Fagin as a villain from he and Oliver's first encounter, adapters remove the ambiguity with which Dickens addresses him. In Bettelheim's terms, this does a disservice to children and teaches them that bad people are bad, through and through. Dickens's truth is that humans are complex, their motives too ambiguous, and child readers need literary characters that embody the fact that villains are not born; they are created.
Oliver

Oliver is the protagonist because *Oliver Twist* follows the trajectory of his life. Yet, Oliver himself has little to say in the adventures he takes, and is more of an onlooker, an observer of the high and low worlds of British society. Oliver's passive nature was a conscious decision on Dickens's part; if Oliver is flat and inactive his morality is never in question, and the reader never worries that he may go down the same path as some of the more unsavory characters of the novel. Oliver is a trustworthy, reliable character that readers can align themselves with, while focusing their attention on the characters with whom Oliver interacts.

Oliver's purpose in the narrative is to guide the audience on his journey; he is the reader's eyes and ears as they try to make sense of other characters and their motivations. The reader needs him to be a physical embodiment of the wariness they feel for this world. This wariness is firmly established in the scene when Fagin confronts Oliver, in Chapter IX. The chapter begins when Oliver wakes from a deep sleep, perhaps sleeping more comfortably then he ever has before. The narrator describes the state of Oliver's mind as being somewhere between sleeping and waking, in a moment "wrapt in perfect unconsciousness." (Dickens 64) It is a drowsy state, where Oliver could stay sitting for days and not even notice that time has passed, or he could wander around without fully understanding his surroundings. With so many new sensations overtaking Oliver, in a new place with new people, this haziness perfect describes the overwhelming state that he and the readers are in.

In this semi-consciousness, Oliver and the reader notice things only in fragments. Senses are both heightened and clouded; Oliver smells coffee brewing and hears Fagin whistling, yet the warmth of the environment is new and unfamiliar. These soothing noises feel foreign, which emphasize how little comfort Oliver has had in his life. In this moment of semi-cognizance,
Oliver has a roof over his head, and a stuffed belly from last night while, in the previous chapters of the novel, he has been made to sleep in cramped quarters with boys who were dying of emaciation, some never to wake up. Oliver's confusing surroundings are established as the chapter goes on. Oliver like the reader, does not understand why Fagin dresses in rags when he has treasures that could pay for so much, nor why the others boys laugh when Oliver calls people "sir". Oliver does not understand why his enthusiasm to play the "game" is laughed at, or what Charlie Bates means when he says that Oliver is "jolly green" (Dickens 67).

Adaptations fail in this understanding of Oliver and make him too perceptive. By simplifying the haziness Oliver feels and making his impressions of others strong and unwavering, Oliver's role is nullified. Oliver's misunderstanding needs to be conveyed, because it is a stand in for the reader's own confusion. If it is obvious to Oliver that Fagin is a villain from the moment they meet, or clear that the game they are playing is theft, the reader does not need Oliver to be the laymen through which they try to make sense of what is happening. If Oliver is not wary, than the reader is not wary, and there is no room for questioning the motives of other characters. This clarity on Oliver's part removes a layer of ambiguity that the other characters represent.

Gill Tavner's adaptation states so clearly how Oliver feels and takes away any questions he has over his new surroundings. In addition, Fagin is marked as the villain in his first introduction, without any of Dickens's implied ambiguity. Tavner's Fagin is immediately aggressive towards Oliver: "Fagin kept Oliver locked in the room for so many days that he became used to the stench and the darkness." (Tavner 15) In this way, Oliver is a hostage immediately and is aware of it. However, Dickens's Oliver is initially comfortable with Fagin because he feeds him and gives him a warm place to stay.
Kathleen Olmstead does a fine job of addressing the hopefulness Oliver feels in his new home. "Oliver was not sure what to make of Fagin and these boys. It seemed like a very strange family. But Oliver was in no position to judge. He had never known a family. He did not know if this was right or wrong. He did know that his belly was finally full. He had a bed to sleep in and people to watch over him in the morning." (Olmstead 51) I appreciate that Olmstead acknowledges that though this is not a perfect predicament, it is preferable to anything Oliver has known so far. It adds weight to the unsettling contentment the reader should be feeling for Oliver. Because thus far, Fagin has done nothing to earn the reader's scorn; he has fed Oliver and given him a place to stay. Yes, the reasons may be suspicious, but as of now, that is all semantics.

In Dickens's text, Oliver is a continuous presence with whom the readers can align themselves. Oliver, like the reader, is confused and unsure of everybody's moral character, and that is a force that keeps the novel interesting. His uncertainty is made even more complex by the fact that those who the reader should be most suspicious of are the ones showing the most care and interest towards Oliver. Can Oliver trust Fagin? What reasons do Oliver, and the reader, have not to trust him? By removing that uncertainty and making Oliver sure from their first introduction that Fagin is a bad man, Oliver's use in the narrative is dulled, and the reader is left with a protagonist who has lost his purpose.
Fagin

Dickens understands that humans are not simple creatures; his characters may commit cruel acts but they all have moments of kindness. Many adaptations place weight on the idea of good or bad, a limiting method which ignores the natural ambiguity of human nature. Moreover, the introductions of these characters add weight to the reader's overall uncertainty, because in Fagin's case, he has distinct moments of kindness, layered on top of a potential for cruelty. This duality makes Fagin a more imposing character, because the reader is never sure of which side Oliver will face. Some adapters take liberty with the cruelties committed by Fagin later in the novel, and clearly identify him as the cause of Oliver's issues upon their first interaction. An adaptation that establishes Fagin as the villain from their first interaction undermines the goal of Charles Dickens in creating ambiguous characters.

The reader can see how complex Fagin is when regarding his role as a guardian. Fagin is a man who takes care of children who would otherwise find themselves slowly starving to death in a workhouse or on the street. Fagin gives them shelter, he gives them food, and he gives them his companionship. The strange little home that Fagin has created, a half fallen down, ramshackle apartment that holds so many young, grungy boys is perhaps the only true home they have ever had. Whatever the reader may learn about Fagin, he gives the children a comfort that workhouses – overseen by people like Mr. Bumble – refuse to give. The habitat Fagin has created may not be a perfect environment for a child but what, out of the other options, is better? If a boy were to disappear, do they have anyone to worry about them? Who would care if they died? Fagin would – perhaps the level of care would depend on the boy – but he does care in his own way.
Fagin also teaches boys how to survive in a cruel, uncaring country. Before Fagin came into their life, how many "good" people walked past these poor boys on the streets, who were dying of starvation? How many people like Mr. Brownlow, who has the funds and means to take care of them, walked right by? Most would agree that Fagin's home, of all the places Oliver has found himself, is the most comfortable so far. Fagin just asks, in return, for a bit of help.

The reader can look at Fagin and the crimes he asks these young children to commit, and assume that he is the evil villain of this world. Yet in Dickens's story, Fagin is rarely called Fagin; he is called "the Jew", a word that implies much in a historically anti-Semitic culture. Fagin, in this British society, will only ever be the Jew and everything that the name seems to symbolize. So what choice did Fagin really have in all this? Is he not a victim of the world, just as much as Oliver? Never in the adaptations is Fagin referred to as the Jew, because it would be inappropriate in our modern culture. With this revision, the reader has less background on Fagin as a character, and the hardships he might have faced just by being Jewish. The unfamiliar reader immediately has less empathy for Fagin's own, unfair predicament. Yes, Fagin may be a villain, but if he is, the cruelties of the world made him that way.

Dickens seems to argue that the world at large is the ultimate corrupting figure. This sets up the question of the power of surroundings in sculpting a person, and ultimately a question of what-if? What if there are no rich aunts, nobody to swoop in and save little Oliver? What if he was destined to be just another one of Fagin's boys forever? In Oliver's effort to please Fagin, he would likely try to emulate the Artful Dodger, Fagin's shining pupil. Remember who was once Fagin's most prized pupil? Bill Sykes. The horrible killer was once a boy like Oliver, intent on pleasing the man who feeds him and gives him a warm place to stay.
Would readers then argue that Fagin's "nurturing" created Bill? That theory only goes so far, because Fagin also raised Nancy, who grew to be a good intentioned person who risked her life to save Oliver's. So when does blaming one character take away agency from another? To blame Fagin is to ignore that he likely never wished for Bill to turn into a killer, for him to be an abusive tyrant. Fagin looked after Bill, taught him a trade, and how Bill understood and used those skills is a matter of his own choices. And the important thing, that Dickens wants his reader to understand, is that Bill did have a choice to not kill Nancy; he just chose not to take it.

Fagin's position complicates the concept of justified crime, if you determine that Fagin's encouragement of theft is corrupting the children. However, there is a threshold, morally speaking, of when a petty crime becomes consequential crime; even Fagin understands this and is aghast when Bill kills Nancy. Fagin, at his core, is teaching these other boys a trade. It may not be an honorable job – to be a thief – but it is better than the other options; begging on street corners, starvation, and dying.

Fagin and the complex nature of his role in *Oliver Twist* are first addressed at the tail end of Dickens's Chapter VIII, when he is introduced to Oliver. Dickens quickly asserts how different this man is in comparison to the other authority figures so far in Oliver's life, by showing Fagin happily feeding Oliver. Fagin is excited to meet Oliver, as though the boy is a gift on his doorstep. "The Jew grinned; and, making a low obeisance to Oliver, took him by the hand; and hoped he should have the honor of his intimate acquaintance." This is a stark contrast to the guardians Oliver has had so far, who have treated his very presence with contempt. Although the narrator also laces Fagin's introduction with accusatory adjectives (his "villainous-looking" and "repulsive" face) (Dickens 63), in action alone, there is a restfulness to Fagin's demeanor, a warmth to the shelter he has created. Continuing into Chapter IX, Oliver is satisfied and content.
at Fagin's home. Oliver does not think of his hunger or wonder where his next meal is going to come from. He does not worry about somebody like Noah or Mr. Bumble taunting him. Unfortunately, this moment of sleepy tranquility is interrupted, and the reader learns that Fagin is a man with two sides; kind and cruel.

In Chapter IX, while Oliver is waking, Fagin believes he is alone for a moment, and uses this time to muse on his property; a box of stolen goods and extravagant treasures. Oliver, with his confused senses (as discussed in the previous section on Oliver) watches Fagin admiring his treasures, but Oliver is not sure of what he is witnessing. Oliver has found Fagin in what can be considered Fagin's most intimate and compromising moment. Fagin has let down any barriers, and while he marvels at these trinkets, he mutters to himself. When Fagin realizes that Oliver has been watching him, Fagin grasps a knife and threatens Oliver's life. He is exposed as someone who has a dangerous side.

Oliver is able to convince Fagin that he has not seen anything, and if he has, he will not tell anybody. Fagin immediately reverts into that kindly figure of whom the readers and Oliver were first introduced to. Though he now resembles his early, caring manner, a tension undercutsthe rest of the chapter and the rest of the novel. The man who has been welcoming and caring may not be what he has appeared to be so far. Thinking of Fagin admiring his treasures, greedily inspecting every nook and cranny of every jewel, and praising the virtues of the death penalty for allowing him to have acquired these rewards without scorn, readers question whether Oliver can trust this man in any capacity at all. Was his early kindness motivated by greed? How about his nurturing of these other boys?

The narrator seems to know more than the reader and Oliver, so there is an uneasy feeling that saturates this chapter. Most adaptations do not recreate the uncertainty, though mostly
hopefulness, through which Oliver perceives Fagin during their first introduction. This breakdown is usually through a misunderstanding between an adapter being unable to separate the narrator and Oliver, because they are not the same; not everything the narrator says is what Oliver is thinking. When the narrator, in Dickens's original text, states that Fagin is "villainous-looking" and "repulsive" these are judgments being made specifically by the narrator, not Oliver. Oliver's thoughts about this man, and in fact the rest of the chapter, are unknown. Adapters approach Fagin to varying degrees of success. Some use his introduction to convey a sort of immediate cruelty, which goes against the introduction that Dickens has. Others do not know how to show that this single man can be both cruel and kind.

The adaptation company Quadrum Solution does something perplexing in relation to Fagin's introduction, and the following chest scene. In Quadrum, little dialogue is given to Fagin throughout the entire first half of the adaptation. The description of Fagin lists the word "villain" but there is no follow up, and he is kind and generous to Oliver. At first glance, this adaptation seems to follow Dickens's route by making Fagin at first seem kind and welcoming. Where it divides is that Quadrum Solutions omits the scene involving Fagin catching Oliver. Oliver watches him but Fagin does not catch him. Because Oliver is not caught, he incurs no wrath or anger and as a result, the reader does not know what kind of violent mood changes Fagin is capable of. Without this scene, there is no reason for Oliver to distrust Fagin, and Quadrum further insinuates that although Fagin is a strange man, he is a good man. "His behavior made Oliver laugh a lot." (Quadrum Solutions 46)

This becomes an issue because in Quadrum's adaptation, Fagin is as violent as Dickens's incarnation of the character, but the reader is unprepared for it. "Fagin, taking up a club, inflicted a smart blow on Oliver's shoulders and was raising it for a second time when Nancy
screamed…" (Quadrum Solutions 68) To be fair, Dickens has this scene almost word for word; Fagin abuses Oliver with a club. The difference is that the reader is aware that this side of Fagin exists. Dickens wanted to show that Fagin can be kind and cruel in almost the same breath, and that is the job of the treasure chest scene. Without the treasure scene being recreated in full, with Fagin's outburst, the readers are not prepared for Fagin's cruelty.

Gill Tavner's adaptation does almost the opposite of Quadrum's; Oliver is fearful of Fagin from their first introduction, and does not interact with any potential good side that Fagin might have. "A cold, bony hand reached out and touched Oliver's face, making him shiver [...] 'Glad to see you, young Oliver,' sneered Fagin. 'You'll like it 'ere, won't 'e boys. Ha ha ha.' His laugh sent cold shivers down Oliver's spine..." (Tavner 11-12) Oliver also has no haziness regarding his new acquaintances: "Although Oliver suspected that he couldn't trust his new friends, he had no choice. He ate the little food they offered and fell into an exhausted sleep." The boys are aware of his chest, and that he puts their stolen goods into it. "Fagin, who then hid the items in a locked chest, cackling and rubbing his hands in delight. 'Good work, me boys, good work.'" (Tavner 15) Tavner's Fagin has nothing to hide, and only his cruel side is on display.

Les Martin stays true to Dickens in a different way. Martin, unlike Dickens and the other adapters, paints a purely kind picture of Fagin in his introduction. Gone is the adjective "villainous" used by Dickens and the other adapters, and replaced by it are non-subjective physical characteristics; "yellow teeth" and a "matted red beard". In addition, Martin refers to Fagin as the "kind gentlemen" as Dickens does. I appreciate this, because it reasserts the presence of the narrator as a force in the reader's confused perceptions of Fagin and his motives, as well as makes Oliver's first impression of Fagin a hopeful one. "Oliver already could see how kind the gentlemen was. It had cost him a pretty penny to care for these boys." (Martin 20). This
introduction not only sets up Fagin as a kind person, but as a caring and giving one. It also acknowledges the difficulties Fagin must face as a caregiver to so many boys. Fagin also happily feeds Oliver and given that hunger is so important in Martin's adaptation (see the next section on Death); it adds weight to Martin's characterization of Fagin as a mostly good person.

Where it differs yet stays true to the original is through how Martin shows Fagin's cruel side. Martin does not include the chest observation scene, yet he still manages to subtly prepare the reader for Fagin's inevitable cruelty. Oliver watches as the boys who are thieving for Fagin are rewarded with food if they do well, and are sent to bed without supper if they bring him nothing of value. Martin further emphasizes how Fagin uses guilt to influence these boys to work for him. "But sometimes they came back empty-handed. Then Fagin got angry at them. He sent them to bed without supper. 'Hurts me more than you,' he said. 'But you must learn not to be lazy.'" (Martin 26). Martin goes straight to the point, and the main issue with Fagin as a character, that he is manipulative.

Kathleen Olmstead's introduction of Fagin does much the same as Les Martin. Where it varies is Olmstead's treatment of the chest scene. She does a wonderful job displaying Oliver's – semi-consciousness, and misunderstanding of Fagin's actions: "Oliver did not understand why Fagin was so angry. He was not even sure what he had seen." (Olmstead 53) Further Olmstead does something smart, by expounding on the idea of Fagin as a manipulator. After Oliver catches Fagin with his chest; "Fagin saw that Oliver meant no harm. 'I'm sorry, boy. I was only trying to frighten you. You should be careful about who you watch around here. Not everyone is as trusting and forgiving as I am.'" (Olmstead 54) Olmstead frames Fagin's outburst as a life lesson that Oliver needs to learn.
Fagin and Oliver's relationship becomes complicated as the novel progresses, but the fact remains that Fagin is still a guardian for many other boys. They have mostly full bellies, and a father figure who, in his own twisted way, does care for them. Fagin creates a home that is not perfect, but certainly comfortable considering the other options. Adaptations make it too easy to vilify Fagin because they do not acknowledge the small comforts he gives to the boys, and even at first to Oliver. Yes, Fagin may be taking advantage of the boys, and manipulating them, but what the adaptations fail to ask, is what if this is still the best situation for the boys to be in?
Death and Sexuality: The Sowerberrys and Nancy

The topics of death and sexuality are inescapable over a human life, and certainly unavoidable in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. Death surrounds Oliver; his mother dies in childbirth, he works in a funeral home, and three of his "caretakers" – Fagin, Bill and Nancy – end up dead. Sexuality, meanwhile, shows itself subtly and is only inferred to by the language used to describe Nancy; her physical appearance and mannerisms. In adapting *Oliver Twist*, these issues need to be present, because without them an adapter is not properly preparing the reader for the critical issues of the original text. However, adaptations struggle with how to convey these topics in a way that stays true to Dickens's intentions.

Bettelheim argues that children need these difficult topics to be present in their children's literature, as reading should be a learning experience that will encourage emotional growth. The issue with the children's literature that he has encountered, is that it does not challenge child readers: "The idea that learning to read may enable one later to enrich one's life is experienced as an empty promise when the stories the child listens to, or is reading at the moment, are vacuous. The worst feature of these children's books is that they cheat the child of what he ought to gain from the experience of literature: access to deeper meaning, and that which is meaningful to him at his stage of development." (Bettelheim 11) One could argue that since Dickens wrote adult literature, there is no worry that his novels do not broach these deeper meanings. The danger with adaptation is that the difficult themes may be mistaken for "adult" themes, and erased in the adaptation. If this happens, readers are left in the end with a similarly vapid book for children that refuses to challenge them, though they want to be challenged, and are entirely capable of coping and learning from the themes that adapters wish to hide from them.
Death is something that even adult literature is wary of. "Until very recently, books dealing realistically with the topic of death were categorized almost in the same realm as pornography[...] We have shunned dying people as though dying itself were a contagious disease[...] We have preferred not to confront death, which is associated with pain and fear of the unknown." (Rudman 325) If adults are fearful of death even in their own literature, how are adapters going to properly address it for children? With children, are adapters afraid less of how children will handle death and more with how adults will deal with the inevitably complex and unanswerable questions children will ask?

Removing death and sexuality amplifies the strange elements that do remain. Why are adapters so comfortable reproducing the violence against Nancy by Bill Sikes, especially the gruesome murder scene? "So he brought down the pistol heavily on Nancy's head. Blood rushed from her forehead and she fell. Before she took her last breath, she pleaded for mercy, but Sikes took up a heavy club, hit her hard, and she was dead." (Quadrum Solutions 160) Yet these adaptations omit the prevalence of alcohol and tobacco usage among children during the early scenes at Fagin's home. For arguments sake, one could say that this is a cultural shift in acceptability. However, as I spoke about with Fagin, it would be culturally inappropriate to call Fagin the "Jew" in our modern culture and so it was removed. Why is one thing acceptable and another not? Why are adapters unwilling to reproduce all of the issues in Oliver Twist?

If children want to be asked questions by their reading, it is important that an adapter honor that curiosity. An adapter who refuses to properly reproduce Dickens's questions is making a statement on their own unwillingness to allow children the agency come to their own conclusions.
Death

To understand the prevalence of death in *Oliver Twist*, the reader can look to some of the earlier chapters for insight. The most pivotal moments for Oliver regarding his interactions with death happen in Chapters IV through VI, while he is living with the Sowerberrys in their funeral home. While there, he retrieves the emaciated dead bodies of poor people with Mr. Sowerberry, walks alongside funeral processions as a mute, sleeps under a desk that resembles a crypt, and is literally put into a coffin after attacking Noah Claypool.

In an effort to subdue the presence of death, adaptations tend to erase the Sowerberrys or mention them only in passing, as being obstacles to Oliver and his voyage into London. In Gill Tavner's adaptation, the time Oliver spends with the Sowerberrys is relegated to a single paragraph. "So, Oliver was thrown from the only home he remembered and sent to work for a cruel family. The adults worked him hard and beat him, and the children bullied him. Unable to stand it any longer, Oliver ran away." (Tavner 10) Yet the Sowerberrys cannot simply be erased without undoing some of Oliver's important character progression. It is unbelievable that Tavner's Oliver would have the initiative to leave without showing a more specific moment of cruelty that these adults subjected him to.

Dickens's Oliver is similarly timid and inactive to Tavner's Oliver, yet what makes his decision to leave for London believable is that there is a specific moment that changes Oliver. In Dickens's text, it is Noah Claypole (also unnamed in Tavner) whose taunting both figuratively and literally gives Oliver the "kick" and the confidence he needs to pursue London. "A minute ago, the boy had looked the quiet, mild, dejected creature that harsh treatment had made him. But his spirit was roused at last; the cruel insult to his dear mother had set his blood on fire. His breast heaved; his attitude was erect; his eye bright and vivid; *his whole person changed*, as..."
he stood glaring over the cowardly tormentor who now lay crouching at his feet: and defied him with an energy he had never known before." (Dickens 44)

This anger and passion unseen so far in Dickens's text was roused specifically by Noah's taunting of Oliver's dead mother. Without the time that Oliver spends at the Sowerberrys, the reader knows him only as a meek child who shows little gumption to mold his own circumstances. Yet in Tavner's version, this same timid Oliver decides to up and leave before the reader can believe that he is capable of enacting such a plan. Because Dickens gives the reader this fight scene, the reader knows that Oliver has something in him that shows us a glimpse of his potential vigor; it is believable that Oliver would not only initiate the journey to London, but also survive it. Before Oliver leaves for London, Dickens introduces a character who further reminds the readers of the presence of death.

Dick is a little boy who grew up with Oliver in the workhouse, and he serves as a reminder to the reader that although some little boys may have a happy ending, there are many who will not. When Oliver flees from the Sowerberrys, he passes by the workhouse and sees Dick behind the gate. The narrator in Dickens's text remarks, "they had been beaten, and starved, and shut up together, many and many a time." They exchange a few words; Oliver tells Dick that he is leaving for London and promises to come back for Dick. Dick tells Oliver that he overheard the doctor saying that he is dying, but this is not a sad thing for Dick: "I dream so much of Heaven, and Angels; and kind faces that I never see when I am awake."(Dickens 53) It is always startling to hear a character wish for death, and more upsetting that this character is a small child. This moment may seem small in the greater context of the novel – it hardly takes up a page – yet Dick's presence is not forgotten by Dickens, or the impact that this character has on Oliver's life.
Dickens does not allow the reader to forget Dick, and Oliver's promise to save him is remembered in Dickens's Chapter LI. Chapter LI, at first blush, serves mostly as an explanation of every question the reader has regarding Oliver's lineage. It is an overwhelming chapter, a sprawling set of pages, almost completely of monologues and exposition. It is easy to become lost in the conversation, in the reveal of Oliver's history and the knowledge that Oliver is now safe and his future is in good hands. Despite the revelations, Chapter LI ends with Dick, the unforgotten little boy who remains at the workhouse. Oliver has not forgotten his promise to go back for Dick. Dickens taints Oliver's happy ending in the last sentence of this chapter: "Poor Dick was dead!" (Dickens 426) Though Oliver's ending was happy, Dick's was decidedly not.

Some adaptations do remember Dick, and somewhat recreate his and Oliver's parting interaction, yet they often fail to honor Dick's own words and longing for death. All adaptations who include Dick also remember Oliver's parting promise to save him. Yet the adapters do not allow Oliver to attempt to honor this promise; they refuse to tarnish Oliver's happy moments with the thought of Dick's death.

Of all the adapters I looked at, only Kathleen Olmstead unflinchingly reproduces the omnipresence of death in her adaptation. Oliver's mother's death and his time with the Sowerberrys are shown. Despite Olmstead's willingness to portray death she fails to remember Dick during Oliver's happy moments and it is a glaring omission that weakens her otherwise faithful adaptation. Though Olmstead approached the subject of death (mostly) head on, the adaptations by Gill Tavner and Les Martin took interesting, but not altogether successful approaches to death. Both Martin and Tavner attempted to funnel the concept of death into a different form: hunger.
Hunger is a motivating force in the original; the most memorable line from *Oliver Twist* revolves around food with, "Please, sir, I want some more." (Dickens 12). Both Tavner and Martin appropriate hunger to be a stand in for death, but hunger serves its own function in the narrative. Food and hunger are a cause of most of Oliver's tribulations in the early parts of the text. When he stands up and asks for more gruel from Mr. Bumble, he is treated as a criminal. His outburst against Noah is blamed on overfeeding. Perhaps Tavner and Martin felt as though hunger is a more relatable topic for children, and conveys death in an accessible way; most children have felt the absence of food, even if it has been a couple of hours since the last meal. If that is the adapters train of thought, there is an assumption that children do not have any relationship with death, and will not be able to access the feeling of a greater loss. Tavner and Martin presume to know what a child can understand, and do not give them the entrance for questioning, or relating to, death.

Whatever the intention in erasing the time Oliver spends with the Sowerberrys and Noah Claypool, they are a vital time in Oliver's character progression and their absence undermines the message that Dickens wanted to assert; that not everybody will have a happy ending. In an effort to escape the death, which has surrounded him, and the people who remind him of it, Oliver seeks out a new life, which ensures a continuation of his story, and the potential for a happy ending. Hunger, most importantly, does not work as a stand in for death, because hunger can be quenched; death cannot be relieved. Moreover, it is a force that haunts Oliver, even in his happiest times, when those moments are interrupted by the memory of his dead friend.
Sexuality

The question of how to adapt sexuality in *Oliver Twist* is extraordinarily tricky, as the moments of sexuality are all shown through implication in Dickens's text. Not only was Oliver born out of wedlock, which implies sexual immorality, but Nancy – Oliver's martyr – is a sex worker. Nancy's profession is overtly implied, yet Dickens never explicitly calls her a prostitute or sex worker. This could be a reflection of the Victorian time that Dickens was writing in, and he may have felt unable to verbalize this taboo profession. How does an adapter imply the unsaid in an adaptation for children? In addition, how can this lack of verbalization be used to an adapter's advantage in their unwillingness to admit that Nancy is not only a thief, but likely a sex worker?

Everything about Nancy, everything the reader knows about her past and her present can be ascertained by what is not said. The lack of narrator interjection, when the narrator is typically so talkative, allows us to see that although certain things are not remarked upon, they still exist. What Dickens strategically does is add emphasis to certain physical attributes and manners, which allows the reader to read between the lines and speculate as to whom Nancy is, and what she does. Adapters either do not know how to recreate those specific clues, or refuse to. "Sexuality seems to pose problems for any theory of language based on the idea that things can be simply and unequivocally referred to."

(Rose 49) Dickens artfully refers to Nancy's sexuality to assert Nancy's position within society. Adapters are not bound by these Victorian rules, yet they still feel pressure to subdue Nancy's profession. Rather than sticking to Dickens's choices, they go other direction completely and say too much.

Nancy is introduced late in Dickens's Chapter IX. She is only called by name once, and she and her friend Bet are described almost completely by their physical appearance. Oliver
believes Nancy and Bet are nice girls. Oliver and the reader could happily leave these nice girls at that, and assume that Oliver is correct. Strangely, Dickens's narrator feels the need to reconfirm this, saying, "As there is no doubt they were." (Dickens 68) With this interjection, the reader must now rethink Oliver's judgment and impression of the girls. Why are two nice girls visiting Fagin and his house of thieves? What business do they have with him? Our questions are not answered and the reader must now question whether these girls really are as nice as they seem.

With the narrator's affirmation of their agreeable disposition, what does their physical description reveal about Nancy and Bet? They both have a "good deal" of messy hair, and their shoes and stockings are "rather untidy". They are not pretty, and their faces have a lot of color painted on. They are "agreeable" and "free" in their manner (Dickens 68). In this description, it becomes apparent that Nancy and Bet are not like Fagin's boys; who are nondescript. The boys are not dressed in rags and they are not dressed like little noblemen (with the exception of the dandy-esque Artful Dodger). The boys need to blend into the crowd, to neither be seen nor heard.

Nancy and Bet are dressed for attention, but what kind of attention? If they try to pick someone's pocket, they will be noticed immediately. What does it mean that Bet and Nancy's faces are caked in makeup, that their hair is rather big and untidy? Why are their stockings and shoes in disarray? They are dressed in ways that a young lady should not be dressed. Do you think Oliver's first reaction, upon meeting Rose Maylie, was to look at her stockings? No, because Rose is a lady. The fact that Nancy's stockings, therefore her legs, are the one of the first things that Oliver notices is important. A proper lady would be dressed so as not to bring
attention to any imprudent parts of her body. As a result, it is assumed that though these girls
may be good company, they may not be good morally.

What seems like just a nice visit including laughter and alcohol is happily ended with
Fagin giving the girls some money. That Fagin gives them money is cause for suspicion. Yes, he
fed Oliver during their first introduction, but that was an investment in Oliver's future use to him.
Fagin is a man who hides his most valuable treasures in a trap door under the floor, and who
threatened Oliver's life when his secret stash had been found out. Fagin does not easily part with
money, unless there are services that were performed which benefit him in some way.

What remains unsaid does not disguise the fact that Nancy is a sex worker. The readers
are told that she was raised by Fagin, and was once a child thief like the Dodger. Now that she is
grown, she assists Bill. Not much further is said in this chapter about their acquaintance, and the
reader will learn that Nancy has been with Fagin for years, and perhaps was, in her younger
years, merely a thief like the boys. Now that she is older, around the age of seventeen, she can be
useful in ways that a young man cannot. Yet adapters are unwilling to infer that Nancy is a sex
worker, and instead do various things to Nancy's character to explain her presence in Fagin and
Oliver's life.

Nancy's introduction in Les Martin's adaptation is perplexing. "'Nancy grew up with me,'
Fagin said. 'Now she devotes herself to helping Bill. Bill makes a fine living as, er, a salesman.
And Nancy is all set to be his wife someday.'" (Tavner 27) Martin, rather than reproduce the
vague figure of Nancy that Dickens has created, instead gives her little ambiguity. The questions
surrounding Nancy are answered; she is to be married and she "helps" Bill. Sure, "helps" is an
ambiguous word, yet given that her introduction is preceded by the admission that she used to
work with Fagin, the implication is directed to the idea that she was, and is, a thief. Not only this,
the insertion that they are to be married is strange and unnecessary; it adds a dimension to both Nancy and Bill's characterization that reduces the complexity and problematic qualities of their relationship. The possibility of marriage also raises Nancy to a higher level than society views her, and creates a more empowered figure and status then she actually has.

Gill Tavner took a strange route by not introducing Nancy until after Mr. Brownlow has taken in Oliver. Her introduction comes when Fagin and Bill are conspiring to steal Oliver back, and she is told that she will be the one to kidnap him. "Nancy, who would have been pretty if she had not been so dirty, hungry and tired, looked tenderly at Bill. With a cunning laugh she answered, I think I can, Bill dear. I think I can." (Tavner 22) Her physical appearance is remarked upon, and though Dickens states that she is not "exactly pretty" (Dickens 68), Tavner asserts that she "could be pretty". Nancy is being given a sort of potential for pretty, or for good, that Dickens does not allude to. Interesting though this is, it is under cut by the tenderness with which she addresses Bill, and with her "cunning" laugh. By aligning herself with Bill and not questioning or protesting his request, Tavner gives her not the potential for good, but for cruelty.

Tavner, in emphasizing a penchant for cruelty in Nancy's demeanor puts her closer to Fagin and Bill's level, and makes her initially unsympathetic. What does it do to further our understanding of her character as an associate of Fagin's? Clearly she is willing to do a horrible thing for Bill and Fagin, but why? Obviously, there is something to Bill and Nancy's relationship that implies romance, yet their acquaintance is not further explored. The reader is introduced to Nancy in a way that shows her willing to do this favor for them, while Dickens's Nancy immediately balks at their suggestion and tries to refuse. In Tavner, not only is her profession erased, but almost her identity as an easily identifiable "good" force in Oliver's life. It is
important that her true profession is implied, because the reader can understand how dangerous it was for her to help Oliver, and why it results in her death.

The characterization of Nancy in both Dickens's original and in the adaptations is certainly complex, but not always in a good way. Most adapters could easily have followed the same route as Dickens, implying her profession but not stating outright; this method would have allowed the ambiguity that Dickens wanted to assert. Yet some adapters took the opposite direction by clarifying Nancy's presence, offering strange intrusions that hinder the importance of Nancy's character as a fallen woman unable to escape Fagin's grasp.
Tone: The Importance of Narrator

The most difficult aspect of reproducing Oliver Twist might not lie with the characters, or even with the taboo subject matter, but with recapturing the narrator. The narrator of Oliver Twist is as present as Oliver himself and through the narrator's interruptions and musings, further insights into the world of Victorian England are offered. The narrator gives the readers a chance to rethink some of the early conclusions they have come to on certain characters, and reevaluate their assumptions. How does an adapter recreate such a visible narrator in a way that does justice to both the original text and to the questions Dickens aims to leave the reader asking? Examples of how the narrator works as a spectator, commentator and question asker in the original text are Chapters VIII and IX. The language used by the narrator is important in these early sections, as it lends gravity to the importance of the narrator's overall position as a complicated figure who challenges the reader's perceptions.

The first example of the narrator as a character capable of influencing the reader's perceptions is in Chapter VIII when Oliver is introduced to Fagin. The narrator refers to Fagin warmly, even if his descriptions are done to amplify the actual cruelty of Fagin. Oliver, in their first interaction, trusts Fagin and feels comforted by him. Though Fagin's introduction is loaded with symbolism (the "pitchfork", his placement in front of a fire lit stove), the fact that he offers Oliver food allows the reader to somewhat see past the vision of Fagin as a devil figure.

Fagin is described by Dickens's narrator as physically "villainous looking", yet in the same breath he calls Fagin "kind", "merry" and "pleasant". The reader must now wonder how Fagin can be all of those adjectives at once. It is hard to separate "villainous looking" from
purely villainous, and the very description paints Fagin in an imposing light. If Fagin is not just
villainous looking, but also purely villainous, does the narrator address Fagin as a "pleasant",
"merry" and "kind" gentleman with sarcasm?

Perhaps these paradoxical descriptions are merely suggestions by the narrator. Maybe the
narrator is subtly insinuating that for all his faults, Fagin is pleasant and kind in ways that are
clouded by the bad things that he does. Which perspective, then, does the reader take? These
interesting word choices and interjections, and their cryptic tone, leaves the reader more curious
about what was not said than what was.

In the next section, Chapter IX, Oliver wants to help the old gentlemen, and he happily
studies Fagin and the boys. Fagin makes the act of thievery a game, something to be played and
won. Oliver does not question the rules of the game, that the winner is the one who takes all of a
man's valuables without alerting their targets suspicion. Dickens attempts to assert that Oliver
has remained ignorant in all of this, that the game Fagin will teach is a game that has no
consequences and no implications. In the game, Fagin pretends to be a gentleman strolling
around town and taking in the shops. He constantly looks around himself "for fear of thieves"
(Dickens 68). It is the first time that theft and thievery are mentioned in the chapter, yet it is so
central to addressing Oliver as a symbol of ultimate morality. The boys are to take any valuables
off Fagin's gentleman character without also alerting his suspicion. How is it possible that Oliver
could remain ignorant of what he is being told to study? Does Oliver remain in that confused
half-awake and half-asleep state (as spoken about in the earlier section on Oliver) throughout the
chapter? Throughout the book? Is he totally ignorant to what is happening, what he is being
encouraged to do?
It is almost as if the narrator is saying that even though Oliver does not understand what is happening, the reader should know directly what kind of game they are playing. The narrator saying the word "thieves" so implicitly is striking because of how in a particular moment of description, in this chapter, what gives us more insight is what the narrator chooses not to say. In the case of Nancy's introduction (as discussed in the Sexuality section of this paper), the narrator has no problem staying close-mouthed when the subject of her questionable profession and relation to Fagin arise; instead Dickens's narrator uses as few words as possible to infer that Nancy is a sex worker.

The main issue with many adaptations lies with their lackluster narrator. It is often a case of telling us, rather than showing us, and it hurts the overall story. When a narrator spells out everything the reader is supposed to think and feel it leaves the reader feeling like an outsider to the story, rather than an active participant. In an adaptation, the lack of an interesting narrator may simply lie with poor storytelling or poor writing. What needs to be taken into account is that these adaptations are for children. Is this lack of narrator an effort to guide child readers into a particular way of understanding Oliver Twist, without allowing them their own conclusion?

Of all the adapters, only Kathleen Olmstead incorporated such a visibly present narrator, though she produced him in a different way. For example, on the first page she explains what a workhouse was for a reader who perhaps does not understand their purpose. "There was a time – the same time that our story takes place – when too many cities and towns were home to these large, cold buildings. Men who could not pay their bills were sentenced to hard labor here. Women and children with no place else to go lived and worked here. Children left on doorsteps with no family to call their own spent their days in the bottle-washing factories." (Olmstead 1-2) In one respect, her narrator is interesting, because she approached the narrator as being an
accessible device to explain cultural shifts. Dickens writes with the assumption that the members of Victorian society are aware of the poor laws, and writes more to point out the cruelty of it. Olmstead took Dickens's sarcastic musings on the poor laws, and subtly explained it for a new generation without the sarcasm. This version takes an approach that assumes children will be bewildered to learn of those injustices.

Peter Oliver developed a narrator in a similar vein to Olmstead, yet he frames the story of Oliver Twist as being a true story from the past. "The strange story of Oliver Twist began a long time ago in a small town near London." (Oliver 7) Yet, this is a narrator who tells us too much with absolute certainty; never making a comment that would give us cause to wonder about it as a truthful insight. He gives the reader none of the ambiguity that Dickens asserts in Fagin's introduction. Fagin is never described as anything other than in the negative; never once called "kind" or "merry" by the narrator. Everything Fagin does is grotesque. "By a crackling fire, a very old and shriveled man was cooking some sausages in a frying pan. His villainous and ugly face was partly hidden by a beard of red matted hair […] The old man grinned nastily and made a long bow to Oliver." (Oliver 22) As with some of the other adapters I spoke about in the Fagin section, Peter Oliver uses the narrator to explicitly convey Fagin's nastiness, rather than imply that there may be another side to him.

Many of the narrators of the adaptations are either nonexistent, or they do too much to point the reader in the wrong direction. Dickens's narrator wanted to guide the reader into questioning the truth of what is being told, rather than take it as gospel. The adaptation narrators seek to point the reader in one specific direction, a direction that refuses to acknowledge that a right answer to important questions is, as in life, never easy to come to.
Conclusion: The Issue with Adaptation

Thinking of my own personal experience with adaptation, it was only a fluke that I realized that I had not read the original, but an adaptation of Little Woman. Perhaps, if I had never known that it was an abridgement, I would still be thinking today that it was the main text, and a poor text at that. If adaptations are supposed to serve as a precursor to the original, I'm not sure that a child would be encouraged to read the original after reading one of these. Worse, I worry that a particularly poor adaptation may actively deter a child from wanting to read the original novel. Inevitably, the idea that these adaptations should serve as introductions gets lost in the production. What an author does with difficult topics such as death, sexuality and moral ambiguity reveals their own ideas of what a child can comprehend, and what a child should be sheltered from. Furthermore, by not including a complex narrator who questions the reader's perceptions, adapters are not allowing a child to ask questions.

Adapters have a hard time maintaining all of Dickens's questions. However strong they may be in certain areas, the weaknesses overshadow the strengths. Adapters either poorly reproduce Dickens's complexities (Tavner on Fagin, Les Martin on Sexuality), or refuse to address them at all (Tavner on the Sowerberrys, all of the adapters on Dick's death). Martin and Tavner's adaptations focus almost solely on Oliver, and lost the ambiguity with which Oliver perceives the world. Olmstead, successfully recreates, if not a similar narrator to the original, at least a complex one who ask readers questions.

What kind of conclusion can I come to that does not read as an utter lambasting of all the adaptations I have read? No, none of them gets it completely right, and that is an issue. But I do not think that there is a perfect formula for creating a good adaptation. There are strengths in each adaptation and as long as adaptations are trying to challenge children – and I think most of
these adaptations have moments that will spark questions – then I think the adaptation has not completely failed.

The issues with most adaptations lie with an adapter’s resistance to fully recreate the questions being asked by the original author. How an adapter addresses difficult topics certainly affect the success of retelling Dickens, yet most important is recreating his fearlessness in asking readers to question their own assumptions. No adaptation was able to reflect every aspect that makes *Oliver Twist* special, which an adaptation and introduction to this work should do. I think there are better ways to introduce children to classic novels, than what these straightforward adaptations have to offer.
Adaptation in Practice: Crime and Punishment

Now, it may make sense to take what I have learned by studying the Oliver Twist adaptations, and use it to create a similar abridgement of my own. However, I am not going to do that. It was never my intention to directly adapt in such a straightforward way. My original creative goal for Division III has always been to create a story that introduces young readers to imposing literature, in a way that makes them want to read the original. The story I chose to reproduce is Fyodor Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment. It is a novel that I had never read in high school, and only first read in my third year of college. I avoided this novel, because I was intimidated by it. Like Oliver Twist, it was a story I wish I had read much earlier because it brought forth the questions of moral ambiguity that have always fascinated me.

Crime and Punishment is complex because it the questions the idea of heroism and villainy as being mutually exclusive. Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov is the protagonist of Crime and Punishment, yet he is someone who the audience feels hesitant in rooting for. Raskolnikov's "crime" is that he kills two women, deluding himself into thinking that his actions will be for the benefit of the rest of the world. His "punishment" is the betrayal of his own mind for feeling guilt over the deaths. The guilt he feels proves that he is not an extraordinary man; a man who can rise above the laws of mortal men. Yet Raskolnikov is not purely bad; he does thoughtful things like continually helping a family in dire circumstances, when he has no connection to them other than a strange encounter at a bar. How do I introduce child readers to such a character, to the questions that Dostoevsky intended to ask by creating a polarizing protagonist?

I drew most of my inspiration not from the Oliver Twist adaptations I read, but from a PBS television series from the 1990's called Wishbone. Wishbone introduced plot and characters...
from famous novels by interweaving them into an original, modern day story, with a Jack Russell Terrier as the guide. This approach is like a wink to the reader when they later encounter the source material; a familiarity with the world will already be set in place. I loved the concept that, instead of abridging the story in a rushed manner like the straightforward adaptations do, *Wishbone* essentially treated these stories as though it was a nice introduction to a person that you hope to one day become friends with. You did not learn their entire life story, but just a snippet, enough to make you want to get to know them better.

I decided to entrust two characters that I had been developing, Cooper and Amelia, to guide the readers through the stories. I want child readers to be able to imagine themselves partaking in the events, and to do that I knew my protagonists must be of similar age to the reader. Cooper and Amelia are two characters that I have been building on, fleshing them out, and even writing a short story about them where they befriend a gray squirrel. When my two protagonists, Amelia and Cooper, come into contact with Raskolnikov, it will be before the events of *Crime and Punishment* have taken place, as he is debating on whether or not to commit murder.

My goals for this adaptation have not been to reduce or abridge, but to enhance and build upon the ideas that Dostoevsky has already created. I do not want a young person to walk away from my story thinking, been there, done that and now I am done with that novel forever. Instead, I want them to leave with a curiosity for what is next. This prequel serves the purpose of introducing children to *Crime and Punishment*, and it is my hope that it will leave children excited and encouraged to read the original story, and find out how Raskolnikov's journey ends.
Book Two

The Pocket Watch

Adaptation in action: a prequel to Crime and Punishment featuring familiar and original characters.
Prologue: A Small Man and a Bigger One

One man was big. The other was small.

Nickel, the big man, had big feet that extended into big knees and hips. His protruding chest – shaped like that of a tin soldier – rattled with moisture and his broad shoulders shook while he coughed. With one massive hand, he covered his mouth. With the other, he scratched his head, where the hair was cut so close to his scalp that his head seemed even larger. The one thing that wasn’t enormous about this man was his odd little mouth. It was much too small for his head, and much too small for his disconcertingly large teeth, which stretched so wide and so tall that the bands holding his lips in place appeared like they could snap. This is why the man’s mouth is always open, and why he will most likely die of respiratory complications at a very young age.

The small man called Leon was small almost everywhere that the big man was big, from his ears to his toes. His shins were small and his fingernails were small, too. His teeth were tiny, but numerous; he resembled a baby shark when he smiled. His eyes, however, were much too large for his eyelids, which stretched dangerously over them like a shrunken set of fitted bed sheets.

A shuffle came from the dingy basement, where the two peculiar men uncomfortably sat on a damp floor, surrounded by smoke. It was little Leon who spoke first.

“What Just Happened…?” He asked, stunned and possibly furious.

“I hate it when you ask me that,” Nickel replied. He waited for a response, and when one didn’t arrive, he tried to use this brief pause to take an assessment of his surroundings.

Unfortunately, for Nickel and his partner Leon, there was nothing to assess, as the room in which they currently resided was filled with black smoke. A small amount of light peaked through a
window, and Nickel wondered if there was anything that could be done to funnel the smoke out more quickly. He had no energy to do anything though, except wait for it to dissipate and for his vision to come back, so instead he tried to think with his other senses. Mingling with the smoke, Nickel noted the faint smell of motor oil – and maybe just a hint of beef jerky – in the cramped air. He could hear the heavy breathing of someone a few feet away from him, but he knew that it was only his partner, and sometimes friend, Leon.

As adrenaline surged through his body, Nickel controlled the shaking in his hands by using them to wipe off the shoulders of his pea coat, which was soiled with dust and water, and creepy crawlies he couldn't see and didn't want to think about.

“This was a new jacket, too,” Nickel muttered to himself. Though he had recently taken a shower four days ago, today he was completely filthy. The momentum of he and Leon crashing through stairs and tumbling into the murky basement had forced mud onto the spiky bits of hair that poked from his shaved head. It pushed dirt under his fingernails, and muck into the crevices of his forehead and nostrils.

As the air began to clear, Nickel could see what he assumed was the shadowy figure of Leon rise to his feet. The small man emitted a guttural, nearly inhuman noise from the back of his throat as he extended his arms into the air to stretch. The two had worked together for many years, yet Nickel could never cease to be overwhelmed by Leon’s many animal-like peculiarities.

The small man began slowly approaching Nickel, careful not to trip over bits of broken wood that littered the floor, or to step in any puddles. A thump thump thumping echoed in Nickel’s ear as he heard Leon shuffle closer, and the thumping was so loud that Nickel could swear that the rats under the floorboards must be deafened by it.
Suddenly, two shadowy hands burst through the smoke and grabbed Nickel by the scruff of his coat. Leon had deceivingly large muscles hidden underneath his tiny suit, and he easily raised the big man onto his submarine feet. Nickels legs were shaky and he would have preferred to stand up on his own accord, but he begrudgingly said a quick "thanks" to the small man. That wasn't what Leon wanted to hear.

"We let them get away!" Leon croaked at Nickel, in a voice that could scare the venom out of a cobra.

"I…humph," replied the big man, looking down into what he assumed were the small man's big eyes, though it was hard to tell in the fog.

Leon turned towards what he thought were the broken stairs.

"Let's get on with it, then," he said. Nickel, as usual, followed him.
Chapter One: Memories

Cooper St. George, when he thought of his father, felt both happy and sad. His father was more of an acquaintance than a dad, someone you meet occasionally for hot chocolate, with whom you spend a few pleasurable moments. After you part, the acquaintance leaves for months on end and you forget how much you enjoyed their company, until you meet again. And then of course they leave, as they always do, and you go right back to forgetting them.

Cooper's father, Cooper Sr., had always been an explorer. Exploring where, he never would say, but it was always far from Cooper Jr. Never any phone calls, no post cards, no letters, and no check-ins from Cooper Sr. to make sure that Cooper and his mother were okay. When he would return from those journeys there would be no announcement of his impending arrival, although Cooper's mother always seemed prepared. She would heat up some beef stew on the stove while Cooper set the table with spoons and his father washed his hands in the bathroom. She would shut off the fluorescent fixtures in the kitchen and light candles, and they would eat, alternating spoonfuls of stew with bites of buttered white bread.

It was always beef stew, and it was always the kind from the can. Their dinners together were a ritual, a wordless ceremony wherein the participants would revel in the quiet familiarity of each other's company. Only the sound of each other's gentle gnawing of potatoes and beef could be heard.

In their silence, Cooper would wonder where his father had been. He didn't feel angry about his father's absence; in fact, it was exciting to tell people that his dad was an explorer. Cooper pictured his father wearing a fedora and a leather jacket with a machete on his hip. He imagined falling boulders, screaming monkeys and boxes of jewels. Once Cooper sneaked a look into his father's bag, determined to find some priceless artifact, but all he found were clothes,
allergy pills and a book. The book wasn't old or well read; it was clean and the price sticker was still on it.

Between bites Cooper tried to decipher his father's appearance for clues. Did short sleeves and tanned skin mean he'd been somewhere warm? Did long sleeves and dry skin signal somewhere cold? He had never directly inquired of his father to ask where he'd been; it felt somehow invasive to do so. Once he asked his mother. He had found her sitting on the sofa, watching a mystery show and eating ice cream. She put her spoon down when Cooper asked and replied, "Away." Cooper didn't ask again.

After their dinner of soup and bread, Cooper would venture outside to the backyard and construct a sad old tent into something habitable, at least for one night. Careful not to poke himself in the eye with the sticks that kept the vinyl from falling, or to pull on the duct tape that held together ripped seams, and careful not to jam the rusty zipper, he placed two lumpy sleeping bags on two foam pads and finally, with a sigh, sat on the bag to the right, with his eyes fixed on sliding glass doors and waited.

A little later, his father would step through those doors that led from their house, with a chunky mug of hot chocolate and marshmallows in each hand. Cooper and his father would exchange a few words. They never talked about anything serious, no school or exploration-related chatter. With so many topics off limits, reading seemed to be the safest conversation starter. Cooper had never heard of most of the books his father talked about, and Cooper Sr. would seem both excited and hesitant to explain them. Sometimes, it seemed like he had to stop himself from saying too much. Maybe he just didn't want to give away the ending.

Their time together always passed quickly, and before long it would be time for bed. As he grew older, Cooper Jr. found it easier to resist curling into his father for warmth as they slept.
If he lay too close, he would be awakened the next morning when Cooper Sr. woke, pulled on his shoes, buttoned up his coat, and got into a taxi waiting on the street. Cooper would stay in the tent, whispering goodbyes to his father, who was too far away to hear them.

This was before, when Cooper's mother was still alive. She was gone now, and whenever people were left awkwardly alone in a room with Cooper, they assured him that his mother was happy and in a better place. But if that were true, that she was happy, then it meant that she was happy even without him by her side. That thought almost hurt more than her absence.

Cooper's father had been away when his mother died. Cooper assumed that some distant aunt or uncle would look after him, but until plans could be arranged, he stayed down the street at his neighbor's house. Cooper could see his home from the window of Ms. Robertson's guest room. His home was so much brighter than the others on the street; it was a warm honey yellow color, with a little white mailbox that stood proudly next to the sidewalk. The door was brick red, and above it on either side were two windows. From a distance, the door seemed like a smiling mouth forming under two, welcoming eyes.

A few days passed at Ms. Robertson's. Cooper waited for someone to come for him, and feared that nobody would. Ms. Robertson was kind to him, but Cooper was so tired and confused that he didn't know how to act around her.

"Your mother loved you very much," she had said during their first dinner together. A moment passed, and it seemed to Cooper that Ms. Robertson was waiting for a reply.

"Thanks," he said. This seemed to satisfy Ms. Robertson; she went back to eating forkfuls of meatloaf. Cooper continued to push mashed potatoes around his plate.

That night, he lay in an unfamiliar bed in an unfamiliar house, knowing that his own home was just down the street. His mind unwillingly drifted to Ms. Robertson's words. Your
mother loved you very much, she had told him. He didn't know why she would say that. Of course his mother had loved him. Cooper didn't need reminding, not now; right now he wanted to forget. Not forget that she loved him, but forget her, at least until it didn't hurt so much to remember.

Despite his best efforts to push those memories away, every night at Ms. Robertson's Cooper dreamt of his mother. He would wake thinking he had heard her pounding steps on the stairs, unmistakable because she walked so loudly on her heels. When he remembered that it wasn't her, it couldn't be her and that he wasn't even in his own bed, his heart and gut constricted into one tight knot, preventing him from falling back to sleep. Sometimes when he lay in bed and the moon made its way through his window at exactly the perfect time, he allowed himself to conjure up his mother's perfect voice. It was deep and warm, and her breath as it blew on Cooper's forehead could be felt all the way down to his toes. It was a voice that always sounded like it had been snacking on chocolates just a moment before; sheepish, maybe even a little guilty, but happy. It could tell any kind of story, a dancing story, a princess story, a dragon story. It could do all the voices, and even sing all of the songs.

The days continued to pass in a blur. Cooper didn't want burden Ms. Robertson, so he kept to himself. It was summer and without school as a distraction, he had to rely on books to fill his mind and the empty spaces between breakfast, lunch and dinner. He spent most of his time outside on the front porch, which overlooked the street. Occasionally, a neighbor would jog by and wave. Sometimes, he would wave back.

A few weeks into his stay with Ms. Robertson, Cooper was outside sitting on the porch, in a comfortable deck chair. He was enjoying the heat of the morning sun, sipping iced tea and
reading *Oliver Twist*. Cooper was taking in the words and remembering how his mother used to do the Cockney accents, when a very strange thing happened.

He suddenly heard a car turn onto his street; it was making a horrible coughing noise, like a dog choking on a leaf. He peered up and saw an olive green and purple van – like the one from *Scooby Doo* – make its way up the street. It stuttered by Ms. Robertson's porch, past her house and continued on. For a moment, Cooper almost thought he recognized the driver, but no, it couldn’t be. He pushed away that thought. But then the bus stopped in front of his mom's house. The driver got out and looked around. Cooper put *Oliver Twist* aside and stood up.

"Is that…?" Cooper asked himself, while squinting his eyes. He took his glasses off, rubbed the lenses clean with his shirt, and put them back on. "Dad?"
Chapter Two: Home

Cooper ran to his house, not caring that he wasn't wearing any shoes and that the pavement was scalding hot against his bare feet. Cooper Sr. seemed startled as he heard the sound of feet slapping against the road.

"Dad!" Cooper yelled, as he made his way past the mailbox and to his father. When Cooper Sr. realized who it was, he held out his arms. Cooper couldn't remember the last time they had hugged, and he welcomed the embrace, pushing his face into his father's chest.

"I'm so sorry, Coop," Cooper Sr. rubbed his son's back.

Cooper hadn't even considered that his father would be the one to come for him and seeing him made everything feel real in a way that Cooper wasn't comfortable with. He stuttered through a deep breath, and pulled away to look at his father. Cooper Sr. hadn't shaved in a while, and the hair that grew on his face was gray, though the hair on his head remained brown like his son's. His jeans were dirty, shirt untucked and he was wearing baseball cap. Cooper Sr. resembled any other dad, not like the exotic adventurer Cooper had always perceived him to be.

"So, are you ready to go?" Cooper Sr. asked.

"Go?" Cooper asked, pushing his glasses back into place. "Go where?"

"I left a message on the answering machine, but I guess you didn't get it?"

"I've been staying at Ms. Robertson's across the street," answered Cooper.

"Oh," Cooper Sr. shrugged. "Well, I got place for us a couple hours away. You'll like it."

Cooper couldn't believe it. "We're moving? Why can't we stay here?"

Cooper Sr.'s face drooped in confusion. "It just wouldn't be the same without her."

His father was probably right, but Cooper still didn't want to leave. He couldn't imagine being away from his home, from the memory of his mother. But Cooper just didn't have it in him
to put up a fight. And a horrible thought came to him; if he said no, would his father still leave without him?

"Okay," Cooper agreed. "I just need to pack."

"Pack light," his father said. "Only the essentials."

So Cooper packed into his lime-green book bag a change of clothes, a toothbrush and some of his mother's books. He created a mental image of everything inside the house; the kitchen, TV, his bedroom and even the bathrooms. He tucked the images away with other memories, on reserve to think about another day. After Cooper said a quick goodbye to Ms. Robertson, who gave him a pat on the head and a lemon-poppy seed muffin, he joined his father who was waiting for him by the van. There was no backseat in the van. Inside, the vehicle was an empty, cavernous space. He threw his backpack in, and it landed next to his father's bag. The yellow, smiley face patch on his bag seemed to be sneering in the wide, open space. Since there wasn't a backseat, Cooper got to sit in the front, which his mother never let him do.

"Ready?" Cooper Sr. asked as he buckled in. Cooper wasn't sure that he was, but he wasn't sure that he wasn't, either.

"Yeah," Cooper finally answered. He waved goodbye to Ms. Robertson, who was watching their departure from her porch. His father accelerated, and Cooper observed his home as it quickly became a blurry picture in the rearview mirror.

Before leaving town, they stopped at a bizarre, flat building with rows and rows of different sized garage doors, which Cooper Sr. said were storage lockers. His father had to get out of the van and enter a code into a keypad next to a closed gate, guarding the entrance. He got back into the car; the gate slowly opened and they drove through. His father parked next to one of the bigger lockers. They both hopped out of the van, and walked to the door.
"What's inside?" Cooper asked, as his father put a key into the door's padlock.

His father's eyebrows wiggled in a mysterious way, and all he said was, "You'll see."

Cooper Sr. swung the locker door up. Cooper was half-expecting an elephant or something exciting inside, but instead the locker was filled with cardboard boxes. The boxes were all different sizes, and most had the words "for the shop" written in permanent marker on the side. Together Cooper and his father loaded them into the van, filling up the empty space and sweating in the morning heat. Eventually the van was full, and the locker was empty.

"What's inside of these?" Cooper asked, before his father could shut the trunk doors of the van.

"Some things," he answered, as though that were an explanation. Cooper assumed that they must be rare artifacts from all those days of traveling.

"Can I see?" Cooper asked.

"You'll see soon enough," his father answered, and he seemed irritated by the question. He shut the back doors, telling Cooper, "Get in the car; I'll be there in a minute."

Cooper sat in the passenger's seat and waited for his father who was outside, talking to a tall man with a red beard. Cooper's curiosity was getting the better of him, and after checking that his father wasn't looking, he took a small box that was shoved between the driver's seat and the passenger's onto his lap. He edged his fingers into the seams of the four flaps, and pulled them open.

Cooper didn't really know what he was expecting, but he was a little let down to find that hidden in the box was merely a Magic-8 Ball. It was covered in soot, like it had been in a fireplace, and it smelled the way a penny tasted. Cooper blew some of the grit off, and
instinctively shook it before thinking of a question. He rubbed his hand over the window, waiting for an answer. When it cleared, Cooper read the 8-Ball's fortune: *Outlook not so good.*

"Great," he muttered to himself. He took a deep breath, and looked outside. His father was still talking to the other man, but their discussion appeared heated. Cooper Sr. was grimacing and it seemed like the tall guy was yelling; his hands were animated and his mouth was moving fast. The windows were up and Cooper tried to roll his down, but it wouldn't budge. Unable to hear his father's conversation, he turned his attention back to the 8-Ball and shook it again, but something wet landed on his cheek. The 8-Ball was leaking; liquid slowly oozed out and onto Cooper hands. While he frantically wiped his hands on the underside of the passenger's seat, he heard a booming voice through the closed window. Cooper raised his eyes just in time to watch his father stomp back to the van. Cooper quickly put the broken toy back into the box, and rubbed the droplet off his cheek.

"Is everything okay?" Cooper asked as his father entered the van, slamming the door.

"Yeah," his father spat while jamming keys into the ignition. The red-bearded man was shouting in front of van, and Cooper Sr. violently slammed his foot onto the pedal. They lurched forward, and the angry man had to jump out of the way to not be hit.

"Let's get the hell out of here," Cooper Sr. said, as they narrowly passed through the slowly closing gate and out of the driveway.

Cooper couldn't find any words during the majority of the ride, and his father spent most of it fidgeting with the air conditioner, which was blowing out tepid air. Eventually, as the air somewhat cooled, his father seemed to calm down from whatever had irritated him before.

"You hungry?" Cooper Sr. asked, after an hour of near silence. Cooper nodded and they pulled into a fast food drive through. Cooper Sr. parked and they ate their burgers in the car.
"I'm sorry for snapping earlier," Cooper Sr. said between bites. "Sometimes people just make me so angry. But I'll work on it."

Cooper sipped his soda, and pretended to brush it off.

"That's okay. Thanks for lunch."

His father smiled at him, and they continued on their journey. It was early in the evening when his father drove onto a road called "Old Main Street", and parked in front of a dirty white building that was sandwiched between a gas station and a grocery store.

"Here it is," Cooper Sr. said, shutting the engine off, then patting Cooper's shoulder reassuringly. "We're home."

The street perhaps was once bustling, but was now empty of people and cars. They were parked on a lawn that was torn and overgrown and a muddy, plastic pink flamingo stood in the middle of the yard. The newly overcast skies made the flamingo seem ominous. Three brass orbs dangled on a hook outside the entrance door, like a useless wind chime. The house itself was unlike the home Cooper and his mother had shared. This one was not inviting, but a horrible, cold, white color with paint peeling off in chips.

"Why are the windows so big?" asked Cooper. It didn't seem like a proper house, like eyes gaped too big for its face and letters were spray painted across the windows. They said, RD + RJ 4EVA.

"Those are display windows. For the store."

The furrow between Cooper's eyebrows grew deeper as he struggled to understand.

"We're living in a store?"

"Yup! Come on, let's get unpacked before it starts raining."
They each grabbed a box and his father led the way to the entrance. He unlocked the door, and flipped a light switch just inside. The fluorescent bulb took its time coming on, and Cooper hoped that the light would reveal some sort of unexpected magical interior; yet the light only seemed to amplify its dusty emptiness. Other than a desk with a cash register, and some empty display cases, nothing of excitement appeared beyond the cobwebs that hung from the ceiling. But after stuffing all those boxes into the shop, stacking them into neat rows, the emptiness filled and Cooper realized that the shop wasn't very big at all.

His father began taking things out of the boxes; not really unpacking, but admiring, gasping when particular items seemed to excite him, and then putting them back in the box. Cooper was enthusiastic and his curiosity was repeatedly punished with the knowledge that his father's mysterious artifacts were, in fact, quite underwhelming. Cooper had no interest in stringless tennis rackets, or the pairs of stained silk gloves with which his father was enraptured.

Cooper spoke up.

"Dad," he said, "Do you mind if I look around?"

"Sure," Cooper Sr. answered between shallow breaths. He was blowing air into an inflatable punching clown.

Cooper slung his backpack over his shoulder, and waded through the boxes until he approached a door-less doorframe behind the cash register. Behind that was a nook that led to a set of stairs. Cooper felt for a light switch on the wall, and again the light stuttered before turning completely on. He entered and took the stairs, one at a time. They were carpeted and drenched in dust; Cooper was sneezing uncontrollably by the time he reached the door at the top of the stairs. He turned the knob, and it opened into what appeared to be a kitchen although the only thing this
room contained was an olive green refrigerator. He entered the room and shut the door behind
him.

His sneezes subsided immediately, yet it was still hard to breathe. The air felt stale in
here, as though nobody had moved and lived in this space for a very long time. The floors were
tiled an off-white color, but they were dark yellow in the cracks. Cooper stepped further into the
room and noticed that his steps left footprints in the dust.

He walked over to the fridge; on the door were bright colored magnets, each letter of the
alphabet, but they weren't spelling anything in particular. He tried to move the letters to make a
word, but they wouldn't budge; it was like they had been hot glued to the door. Cooper then
opened the fridge door, and was hit with a shock of hot air and the pungent smell of moldy
cheese. He slammed it shut, and ran over to the lone window in the room. After some pushing
and shoving, he forced it opened and let in some fresh air.

The skies had turned a navy blue without Cooper even knowing. The air had cooled
down, and with it came a light breeze that felt comforting against his face. He stuck his hand
through, feeling sporadic drops of water; a light rain had started falling. Sticking his tongue out
to catch the droplets, Cooper felt calm, like he could comfortably stand in this spot forever. This
tranquility was broken by a mosquito landing on his cheek. He slapped it away, but it left a
mound of itchiness. Cooper scratched the spot, and heard muffled footsteps on the carpeted
stairs. The door opened, and his father peaked through with a huge grin on his face.

"What d'ya think?" he asked, gesturing around the room.

Cooper nodded his head, and said, "It's good." Not knowing if he meant it, he added, "But
dad, what is this? What kind of store are we living in?"
"When I was your age," Said Cooper Sr., "This same building was a curiosity and pawn shop. I used to love it. And I've always wanted to have a shop like that myself."

"You used to live here?"

"Well, not here, down the street a ways," Cooper Sr. answered.

It had never crossed Cooper's brain that he his father once had a home too.

"But, what about your traveling?" asked Cooper.

"I'm retiring," he answered, a little sadly.

Cooper didn't know how to feel about that, so he nodded his head.

"This will be an adventure, just a different kind," Cooper Sr. insisted. After a moment of silence, he spoke again. "Well, there's two bedrooms; grab the one you like and get settled. I'll be downstairs, unpacking."

Cooper Sr. started walking back down, and Cooper was about to continue further into the house, but his father came back and shouted, "Don't keep that window open all night; I don't want mosquitoes getting in."
Chapter Three: New Beginnings

Two weeks later, a booming voice rang in Cooper's ear, waking him from a night of restless sleep.

"Are you ready for school?" it asked. Accompanying the voice was a curious sprinkling sound like light rain hitting the roof. Cooper opened his eyes to see his father sitting next to him on the bed, rattling a red maraca in one hand and clutching a plastic butter knife in the other. It was too early for words, so Cooper slowly sat up and yawned, which prompted his father to jump up and open the window curtain. Letting in a burst of sunshine, his father told him: "Get ready, I'll fix breakfast."

He left Cooper's room, shaking the maraca as he went. Cooper was slowly getting used to his father's bursts of enthusiasm. He was equally becoming wary of his father's angry flares, even if they had yet to be directed at him.

With the sun shining in his eyes, making his glasses-less vision even more contorted, Cooper took his time getting dressed, wondering what the other people at school would be wearing. He figured that he would be safe with jeans, but decided against a button up shirt in case it seemed too fancy. Eventually, he put on a brown shirt that said Life is Good in chalky, white lettering. His father had bought it for him on their second day in town, since Cooper hadn't packed much at his father's request. They had to do their clothes shopping at the grocery store next door, because his father said he was too busy setting up shop to lose any time going further away.

"Slim pickings," his father had said as they went through the small rack of shirts. Everything seemed to say either New Hampshire or Live Free or Die. "I suppose that's what we get for moving to a tourist trap."
Cooper didn't know what a tourist was, or how to trap one. He was going to ask when they walked back to the shop, but his dad had gotten into an argument with a grocery store clerk about the price of extra sharp cheddar, and Cooper Sr. was in a horrible mood when they left. Cooper had decided not to ask him.

After dressing, Cooper used the bathroom. He splashed his face and head with freezing cold water, and combed back his hair. Then he joined his father in the kitchen. Cooper Sr. sat at the kitchen table munching on dry cereal with one hand while turning pages of the newspaper in the other. The maraca was gone, and so was the knife.

"We're out of spoons," his father said by way of greeting. A plastic fork accompanied a dry bowl of cereal on the table. They hadn't found time to buy any silverware, so every fast food trip was also a chance to take as much plastic cutlery as possible.

Cooper brought milk over from the fridge, sat down, and drowned his cereal in it. Struggling to eat it, he took to spearing the morsels onto his fork. Breakfast with his father tasted different. Perhaps it was that his mother had always bought skim milk and his father bought whole.

"First day of school," said his father, his previous energy apparently gone. His eyes didn't look up from the paper,

"Yup," Cooper answered through a mouthful of shredded wheat. He gave up on the fork, and instead tipped the bowl into his mouth, trying not to spill it.

"Don't you just love those leaves?" His father raised his eyes from the paper and gestured outside. The trees were just starting to turn colors and a couple had fallen. They had been in their new home for two weeks now, but Cooper hadn't gone outside much and didn't notice the changing weather.
"Yeah, they're nice," Cooper said, because they were nice, even if their arrival meant that school was starting back up. His dad perked up.

"Hey, I got the store all set up and ready for the grand opening. There's a sign and everything. Want to see?"

"Sure," Cooper hadn't been downstairs since their first day, using instead the rickety fire escape stairs that led outside from a door in their living room. He was not exactly hopeful that the contents of those boxes would be any more exciting than the broken magic-8 ball he had encountered before, but he was curious.

His father stood up and said, "Finish your breakfast; I'll do the dishes, and meet you down stairs in a minute."

Cooper finished pouring the cereal into his mouth, then brought the dirty bowl over to the sink. He grabbed his backpack from a brass hook next to the stairway, turned on the light and descended down. As he walked down, his fingers traced the peeling wallpaper of the staircase wall. The carpet wasn't as dusty as before – his dad had vacuumed it – and now that it was clean Cooper could see that it was ruby red color, and in the horrible lighting, it made the yellow walls emanate a sort of bloody hue. It was eerie, so Cooper took the stairs two at a time, but once he got to the empty doorframe, he had to undo a chain that had been placed as a barrier. Once he was inside the store, he saw that hanging above the doorway was a sign that read "Employees Only." It made him feel kind of important, like an official business person.

Entering the shop, he almost knocked down an umbrella stand to the left of the cash register. It was shaped like an owl, but tall, and with angry eyes. Only one umbrella was in the stand, and the handle had a penguin engraved on it. Cooper picked up a yo-yo sitting next to the cash register; he swung it, and the string snapped. *What kind of adventurer brings back broken*
toys? He put the yo-yo down back down next to the cash register, hoping his father wouldn't notice, and walked further on.

Pinned along the left wall were the tennis rackets he had seen his father admire. So, to, were the stained gloves. Closer to the entrance was the inflatable clown his father had been blowing up on that first night here. In the display window closest to the entrance, Cooper could see what appeared to be a taxidermy peacock. However, the tail, which should have been bright turquoise and green, had faded into a horrible brown. A tall, plastic cactus stood next to it, and sitting on its arms were two stuffed doves. They were gray with dust and both seemed fragile; Cooper thought about touching one, but decided against it for fear that it crumble.

The other window display housed an antique dollhouse. At first Cooper thought it was neat and realistic, but as he peered closer, he realized that the dolls inside were in fact cartoonish looking mice, made out of some kind of metal. Surrounding the house, as though they were on guard, were tin soldiers; some were metallic, and the ones that had been colored had flecks of paint coming off.

In the middle of the store were items encased in glass. The display closest to the cash register was marked "Oceania"; it had a book with a title full of words Cooper couldn't pronounce and a glass paperweight, smooth on one side, flat on the other. Cooper tried to open the case and get a better look at it, but it was locked. So instead, he wiped his fingerprints off the glass with the bottom of his shirt, and wiped off his own glasses for good measure.

Cooper's eyes travelled to a bookshelf in the back, right side of the store. He didn't realize that there had been books in all those boxes. He walked to the collection, stepping over a set of canoe paddles lying on the floor. The spines of the books were breaking, and the titles, most of which had been written in gold lettering, were fading. Cooper pulled one from the shelf, but
could only make out the words *Crime and* - when he heard his father's hurried footsteps on the stairs. Cooper stuffed the novel back onto the shelf.

"Ahh," Cooper Sr. said as he entered the room, looking around appreciatively. "It looks much better down here, doesn't it?" Cooper nodded his agreement.

"Dad," said Cooper, "Are these mom's books?" he pointed to the shelves. Cooper Sr.’s eyebrow dimples indented a bit, before he smoothed them out with his fingers.

"No, they're not hers. Come here," Cooper Sr. said, before changing the subject. "Come look at this," he was gesturing to another display case. Cooper walked over to join his father.

Cooper Sr. carefully undid the lock of the display, which was called "St. Petersburg." With the case opened, he pulled from it a dirty, silver pocket watch.

"I'll walk you to school, it being your first day and all, but before I wanted to show this to you Coop-" But his father's glowing smile was interrupted by a clumsy knock on the door. A young woman peered through the entrance door window, which had a sign that read, "gninepO dnnarG", or, "Grand Opening". The lady was clutching a toddler with her right hand and holding an old, broken clock in the other. Cooper Sr. turned to the women, his smile turning into a grimace, and pointed to a sign with hours. "Can't you read? We're don't open until 9 o'clock."

"Please," the lady said through the door window. "I saw that you were opening today, but I have to to work at nine. I hate bother you, but is there any way you could just take a look at this real quick? Please?"

With his eyebrows scrunched and lips pursed, Cooper Sr. repeated, "Nine o'clock," and turned his back on the women. He addressed Cooper with a softer expression.

"I wanted to tell you, I came across this in one of those boxes last night. It's an old-"
"Please, sir!" The women outside pleaded, her voice not raised but strained and desperate, "I know I'm early but it's important!"

His father looked venomously at the women.

"It's fine," Cooper said, "You should help her."

"All right," Cooper Sr. relented. He walked to the door and unlocked it.

"Thank you!" The lady exclaimed as she pushed the door open and pulled the toddler along with her. 'I promise this will be quick! It's just my car broke down and the mechanic gave me the bill and I can't afford it, but I need it to get to work the next town over. Could you take this off my hands just for today? I get paid this afternoon and I'll be back for it at three. It's my grandfather's clock you see and…"

While waiting, Cooper picked up a shining, peach colored conch shell, which was resting on a shelf near the display his father had been trying to show him. He held it to his ear, eager to hear the ocean, but it didn't make a sound. He put it back on the shelf, next to two soup cans and an empty matchbook.

"Bye dad," Cooper said quietly, before he slipped out the entrance door and walked to school alone.
Chapter Four: New Friends

Amelia understood a lot of things; nevertheless, the one riddle she could not even begin to answer was that of the young adult brain. She could not figure out was why the girls in her new class spoke in some sort of secret code. It wasn't a dead language like Latin, or modern variety of “pig”, but a new one called "text". When she tried to speak it herself, in the comfort of her bedroom at night, the words twisted her tongue and made her cheeks feel warm, like after a day out in the sun.

“So I texted him last night,” a girl named Marissa spoke dramatically through her chewing gum. She was sitting in the middle row of desks, while friends and somewhat-friends huddled around her. The not-friends-at-all-not-even-enemies sat at desks as close to the wall as possible. Amelia was one of the latter, and she listened quietly while observing her classmates.

“Oh Em Gee!” squealed Linda from Marissa's side, her ponytail waving side to side in excitement. “What did you write? What did he say?”

At her desk, Amelia sighed heavily. Sitting with her legs pulled up onto the chair, and crossed at the knees, she took a book from her bag and opened to a random page. While reading, she tried to keep her eyes from straying over to the mass in the center of the room. Her classmates giggled loudly, and Amelia slammed her book shut; loud enough so that the book knew she was frustrated, but not so loud as to encourage attention. Amelia then laid her head on the table, resting her cheek on the cool of the wood.

It's a new year, she thought. Maybe I should try to make friends with them.

She was frustrated with herself. Why couldn't she make friends with her classmates? They had never been mean to her, in fact, and they smiled when she got up the courage to speak to them. However, her words never lasted; a string in Amelia's throat tangled when she tried to
make conversation with them, and sometimes even saying "hello" could cause her to choke. That was another thing she couldn't. It was better not to risk it, better not to say anything at all. Understand, why her tongue insisted on warring with the perfectly good words in her brain.

Amelia lifted her head from the desk and looked to the front of the class to where her teacher sat. She liked Mr. Franklin, and had him as a teacher two years ago, in fourth grade. But she didn't like that he always called on her in class, even when her hand wasn't up. And sometimes he told that she was ruining her book when she "dog-eared" the pages. Amelia thought a creased page was distinguished, an acknowledgement that a book had been loved.

Her classmates continued to talk and Amelia continued to listen. Unable to stand her alienation, she walked to the front of the room where Mr. Franklin sat at his desk.

"May I please use the bathroom?" she asked him. Amelia noticed that his hair was parted a different way this year, and she wasn't sure if she liked it.

"Go ahead," Mr. Franklin answered with a smile, while scratching the tip of his nose with a pencil eraser.

Amelia whispered a barely audible, "Thanks" as she slipped out of the room. Walking down the hall, and into the girl's bathroom, she went over to the row of sinks. She looked at herself in the mirror. Her face was nice in a plump and dimpled way, and her hair was brown and shiny; she always kept it in two braids, which rested on her shoulders. Smiling and frowning, she watched how her dimples formed with each tense of a cheek. If she could only just work on her smile a bit more, maybe she could get to the point where it came naturally. Maybe one day she could teach it how to open and speak without her permission.

She sighed, and glanced up at the clock. It was time to go back to class.

***
Cooper walked up the steps of the school entrance. Inside, it was unremarkable; shiny tiled floors and white walls, with the occasional poster of a U.S. president. It seemed like any other school, and though it was smaller than his last one, it was still big enough to be overwhelming on your first day. Luckily, he had toured the building a few days earlier, and the assistant principal had shown him where his classroom would be. Bypassing the front office with the nice receptionist, he went straight towards room 207. Up the stairs, some classes hadn't been let in yet, and he had to walk past younger students sitting outside their classroom doors. They stared at him, an unfamiliar boy in a school where everyone knows everyone. He picked up his pace, walking by the bathrooms and nearly ran into a girl. She seemed to be about his age, yet shorter, and her braids bounced as they averted collision. She whispered a quick "Sorry!"

Cooper continued walking, and the girl kept in pace. He walked faster, and so did she. He slowed his pace, and she hurried past him, into room 207. She entered the doorframe, while he waited 2.5 seconds to complete his own entrance.

"Ah, you must be Cooper Sr. George? I'm Mr. Franklin," said his new teacher. "Come in, take a seat. There's an empty desk next to Amelia," He pointed to a vacant desk. Cooper took his place next to the girl with braids. He tried to busy his mind with the question of how to set up the supplies inside his desk to optimize space. Amelia studied a pencil drawing carved into the wood of her desk; she couldn't figure out if it was an elephant or an anteater. After the pledge of allegiance had been recited, and the school secretary delivered the announcements, Mr. Franklin stood up from his desk and addressed the class. After a couple of jokes that Cooper had heard before, the teacher clutched his chin with his fingers.
"Let's see," Mr. Franklin said while squinting around the room. "I know most of you and most of you know me. However, we'll go around the room and I want each of you to say your name, and your favorite animal."

The students began going around the room and listing off their favorites. Mostly people liked dogs and cats. Cooper's favorite was a rhinoceros, and Amelia liked elephants.

"Good, good!" said Mr. Franklin enthusiastically. "Now, I want you all to find a partner."

Amelia's stomach sunk. Everybody else seemed excited to group up with their friends, but Amelia felt her neck get warm and worried that nobody would pick her. But the new boy next to her turned and asked, "Want to be my partner?" Amelia nodded a little too fast.

"Everybody has a buddy?" asked the teacher. Answers of "yes" echoed around the room. "Good. I want you all to get to know each other better. Ask questions like favorite color, favorite activity. Ask anything!" This was greeted by a couple of giggles. "Anything appropriate," he added, and nodded his head for them to start.

Amelia turned towards Cooper, who smiled without showing his teeth.

"My name is Cooper," he said.

"Amelia," said she.

At first, they sat in silence, taking in each other's appearances through quick, side-eyed glances. The boy's brown hair was still wet from this morning's comb through. His thick, black-framed glasses magnified his blue eyes.

"What's your favorite color?" Cooper eventually inquired.

"Orange. What's yours?" Amelia was relieved to find that her words were not letting her down today.

"Green."
"How about," Amelia bit her lip, "What's your favorite movie?"

"Indiana Jones," Cooper answered. He didn't add that it was because he used to imagine it was based on his father. "How about you?"

"I don't think I have one favorite," she answered.

"Do you have a least favorite?"

"Well," Amelia was absently tracing the elephant carving (she was now almost certain it was an elephant) on her desk, "I hate any movie where an animal gets hurt."

"Me too," Cooper agreed, "I almost don't watch movies with animals in case something bad happens.

"Hmm…anything else we can ask?"

"Do you like to do anything?" Amelia forced her mouth to ask, then added, "Anything in particular, I mean. Sports or music or…” Her cheeks reddened but Cooper didn't notice. He tried to think of an answer but nothing immediately came to mind. With a glance at his bag, he remembered something he still liked.

"I like to read," he finally answered.

"Oh! What kinds of things?" Amelia liked to read too, particularly books that her parents told her she shouldn't read.

"This one I'm reading now, well, I've read it before but I'm reading it again," said Cooper, "is called Oliver Twist." He took the book from his bag to show Amelia, and she leafed through the pages.

"Oh, I've seen the movie," Amelia said, thinking of that weird old man who sang and danced about pick pocketing.
"It's nothing like the movie," Cooper was quick to say, "It's better but in a different way. You can borrow it when I'm done if you like," he offered.

"Yes, thank you," Amelia said.

"It's a bit strange," Cooper said, "The author is kind of sarcastic, I think."

"I like strange things," said Amelia. She blushed, but Cooper smiled reassuringly.

At the front of the class, Mr. Franklin stood up from his desk and asked everyone to quiet down. Cooper sat with his notebook out, drawing nothing particular in the margins. Amelia watched the curving of his pen, and told herself that this year she would make an honest effort to make friends.

***

At lunchtime, while waiting in line, Cooper remembered the meals his mother used to make; peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, with the crust still on because that was Cooper's favorite part. She always gave him an apple, but he never ate it, and his mother always turned it into applesauce later in the week. Every lunch bag came stuffed with a note saying silly things, usually quotes from Groucho Marx, who was his mother's favorite actor. She always drew a heart on the bag.

During dinner the night before, Cooper's father had said he wouldn't have time to make school lunch. With greasy hands, he laid a couple dollars on the table, next to the bucket of fried chicken that had been ordered for supper. The dollars still smelled like the French fries he had been eating when Cooper pulled them out of his pocket to hand to the lunch lady.

Cooper came out of the line, and he saw Amelia sitting at the end of an empty table. He walked over, and she appeared happy to see him. Amelia found that her tongue never tripped when she spoke to Cooper. They talked about the books they were reading, and Cooper told her
about the house they had just moved into, which wasn't really a house but that store on Old Main Street next to the gas station.

"There's been nothing in that building for as long as I can remember. I've always been so curious about it," Amelia said.

"It's not that exciting," said Cooper, though he was happy that Amelia was interested in his sad, makeshift home.

"What kind of stuff are you going to sell?" she asked.

"Um, well, just strange things, old things. Also, we buy stuff that people need to sell quickly."

"Is it open?" asked Amelia. "The store, I mean. I like strange things."

Cooper was excited to have a new friend, but afraid of what she would think of him and his odd new home.
Chapter Five: A Strange Place

After school, Amelia and Cooper walked the short distance to his new house. As they approached the door, Amelia giggled.

"Is that a cactus wearing a hat?" she asked, pointing at the shop window.

Cooper looked and saw that his father had added a top hat to the top of the plastic cactus. He couldn't help but laugh, too. They stepped through the store's front door, and instantly Cooper felt a wave of embarrassment over all the junk inside. Amelia must think it weird, and he dreaded introducing her to his father, who was standing at the cash register.

Cooper Sr. was helping a customer, but he looked up at the sound of the bell ringing. He first regarded the visitors with a look of pure annoyance; a look that Cooper Jr. had realized over the past two weeks was his father's natural facial expression. When he saw Cooper, his gaze softened.

"Cooper! How was your day? I didn't get to say goodbye, with that annoying women in my face," said his father.

Cooper didn't know what to say, but what came first to his lips was, "This is Amelia." His father's eyes came to rest on the girl, and she said a quiet hello.

"Ah, nice to meet you Amelia," Cooper Sr. punched numbers into the ancient cash register, and said to the customer, "That'll be fifty dollars,"

"Fifty?" The person muttered. Cooper walked in a bit further and saw that it was a little old lady whose hair, in the fluorescent lighting, appeared purple. She had five of those dollhouse mice in a row, as well as the conch shell. Cooper thought about telling her that it didn't work, but decided against it.

"Fifty," his father repeated, not very kindly.
The woman took a checkbook out of her flower-patterned pocket book, and began writing. Cooper could tell his father was impatiently tapping his foot from behind the counter by the way his body bounced. Cooper started following Amelia, who was wandering around the store. She walked over to the peacock and let out quiet, "Wow." Next to the bird was a snow globe that Cooper hadn't noticed before; inside was one of those British soldiers with the red jackets and big, furry hats. Amelia shook it, and Cooper was surprised that it actually snowed.

Amelia beamed at him. She was thrilled at the strangeness of it all, the peacock, the little mice, and the cactus. She loved things, things that had no purpose, only sentimental meaning. If something was meaningful to someone at one time, even for a moment, it was special.

"This is all so great," she enthused.

"Really? You like it?" Cooper was surprised and relieved that she thought so.

Amelia nodded and noticed the books in the corner of the room. She started walking towards the shelf in the back corner, but was interrupted by the bell over the door ringing. Without either Cooper or Amelia noticing, the old lady had left the shop. Cooper Sr. hadn't even said goodbye to her.

"So, Amelia, you a local?" Cooper Sr. asked. He came out from behind the counter, and walked towards them.

"I think so; my parents are from here and so are my grandparents," she answered.

"What's your last name?"

"Collins," Amelia answered. Cooper Sr.'s eyebrows shot up.

"You related Jeremy Collins?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, "My father is Jeremy."
"I knew him; he was in my grade..." A peculiar look came upon Cooper Sr.'s face, but he seemed to catch it and replaced it with something kind. "Coop, I wanted to give you something this morning, let me just remember where I put it."

He paced around a moment, eyes prancing around the room, until they fell onto the display he had unlocked this morning called, "St. Petersburg." Behind the display were such curious items; a thick, thread loosened green shawl, a yellow ticket with the face of a sad young woman, and a silver pocket watch. Written on the items were unfamiliar words, in a language that neither Amelia nor Cooper could comprehend.

"This is one of my favorite discoveries," he held the watch by its chain. "I found it buried near one of the docks when we offloaded a shipment in Russia."

Cooper had never heard his father talk about the places he'd been. It was something they had never discussed, even now that his father had given up on that life. Cooper Sr. handed the watch to his son. It was flat and silver, with a steel chain and a globe engraved on the cover. Cooper opened it, and saw that the hands were not moving. Just another piece of junk.

"It's so cool." Amelia said, admiring the intricate engravings. Cooper closed the cover, and flipped it over. On the back were more of those different markings; almost English, but not quite.

The bell over the shop door rang, and broke their focus. It was the women from this morning, the one with the clock. The toddler was no longer with her and she seemed even more frazzled than before. She approached the counter, and Cooper Sr. begrudgingly walked behind it.

"Yes?" he asked, as though he had never before seen her in his life.

"I've come to buy back my clock from this morning," she said.
"Ahh, yes," Cooper Sr. crouched down behind the desk and rummaged around the shelves. Finding what he was looking for, he placed it on the counter and said, "That will be $200."

Cooper watched the transaction, and by the look on the women's face, he realized his father was charging the women more than he gave her for it this morning.

"Do you want me to walk you home?" Cooper asked Amelia loudly, hoping to cover the conversation taking place between his father and the customer.

"I'd like to look around another moment," Amelia had barely noticed the women, and was continuing to peruse the displays.

"$200," said the women, "But you only gave me $150 for it!"

"Yes, well, this is a business."

"I can't pay that," she said, her forehead creased with exasperation.

"Unfortunate," Cooper Sr. took the clock and put it back on the shelf under the counter.

"But you don't understand, I have to have it back; it's my grandfather's," she pleaded.

"It will be $200 to buy it; no more, no less."

"This is ridiculous. You're…you're a crook!" She stuttered out.

Cooper tried not to catch Amelia's eye, so couldn't tell whether she had noticed the conversation. She walked back to him.

"Hey, I didn't get to look at the watch," said Amelia, while holding her hand out.

"Oh, here," Cooper held it out for Amelia's grasp, and in the split second they were both touching it, something very strange happened.
What should have been an ordinary exchange of inanimate object from one hand to another was anything but. The most confounding transformation in the world happened in the next moment, a series of events that is almost indescribable. However, one can try.

Cooper held the watch by its chain, while Amelia was clutching at its wind-up key. Suddenly, an overwhelming pressure sunk onto their heads, pushing their feet, legs, and torsos towards the floor. Both their hands were stuck to the pocket watch like glue. When Cooper looked to his father, he saw that not only had the arguing ceased, but Cooper Sr. and the woman had become motionless. The watch let out a small zap, gently shocking the children, and then – the cover sprung back open. Inside, the hands moved backwards, a million times a second. The lights in the store flickered, until everything went black.

The pressure the children felt was replaced by a tingling sensation, like all their limbs were asleep. Their eyelids became heavy, and shut without their permission, and their ears were ringing. When the tingling went away, the air around them felt different and heavy. It wasn't until their eyes opened that they realized that they were in a cold, dirty, and very busy road.
Chapter Six: A Very Strange Place

"Look out!" cried a deeply alarmed voice, but Amelia and Cooper's eyes and bodies had not yet adjusted to the sensations of movement and chaos, and so they did not react. Amelia felt a breeze rush past her, before an impossibly hard, bony arm shoved her and Cooper to the ground. The impact forced them to acknowledge their surroundings, and they realized they were sitting on a sidewalk, if one could call it a sidewalk; really, it was a bunch of stones at the side of a street. A horse lurched past them, and Cooper realized that they had been only seconds from being crushed by it.

"What were you doing?" asked the same serious voice, and both Amelia and Cooper looked up. The face to which the voice belonged to was covered in a furry hat, that left visible only a pair of intense and pointed eyebrows. Taking in the scene, and unsure of what to say, Amelia asked an impossibly simple question: "Where are we?"

The man, who they now saw was a young one, received the question as though it was a ball to be caught. He missed.

"Where are you?" asked the voice slowly, like it was a question of unimaginable gravity. "Where are you..." he repeated.

Cooper's eyes had begun to adjust, and the surroundings startled him. They were far from his father's shop, he was sure of it; he had never seen a horse drawn carriage in his life. This road was unfamiliar, and there were people everywhere. An intense smell, somewhat damp and musty and potentially putrid intruded into his nostrils without asking. Cooper hoped Amelia could make some sense of their surroundings.

Amelia, unfortunately, was hoping Cooper knew what was going on. However, she gained a bit of her strength back, and was able to rise to her feet without falling back down. The
ground beneath her was loose, just rocks and sand. She helped Cooper back to his feet; he was even less stable than her, and needed to lean back into a doorway for support. From inside the door, vinegary smells emanated, making their eyes water.

"Where are you…?" The young man repeated.

"Please," Amelia asked, "Please, we're so confused."

"You are in Sennaya Ploschad," the young man finally answered. "Haymarket Square."

The words didn't register to Amelia, or to Cooper. All they knew was that wherever they were, it was foreign and very busy; horses and carriages rushed pass and surrounding them were people in tattered clothing who talked loudly in funny accents. They didn't seem to notice the young man with two younger children, whose clothes were peculiar and ill suited for the chill wind that blew off the canal.

"Who are you?" Cooper asked, looking for something to say. This was a question the young man knew the answer to.

"My name is Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov," said the young man. He may as well have been speaking gibberish as far as Amelia and Cooper was concerned; they couldn't comprehend his name any more than they could comprehend algebra. The young man with the long name seemed to understand. "You may call me Rodya. What are your names?"

"Amelia," she said.

"Cooper," said he.

"Please," Raskolnikov asked, "What were you doing in the road?"

Cooper bit his lip, and looked to Amelia for help.

"We don't know," Amelia shook her head.
The young man named Raskolnikov could not understand this bewildering response.

"You do not know how you came to be in the road? Did you not just walk into it?"

"No," said Cooper, "we wouldn't walk into the middle of a road."

"W-we were standing in one place," tried Amelia, "and then the next minute, we were in another," she stuttered out.

Explanations were fruitless, thought Cooper; they couldn't make sense of the scene themselves. He shrugged his shoulders and brushed dirt from his eyes.

"What is it that you are wearing?" asked Raskolnikov. Amelia looked down at herself.

"Jeans?" she answered, like it was a question.

"You are not from here," said Raskolnikov. He nodded his head like it all made sense now. "Are you foreign?" he asked.

Cooper peeked at Amelia, and when she nodded, Cooper answered "yes" for both of them.

"Do you have parents? Anywhere you can go to?" Raskolnikov waited with his eyes squinting and lips pursed, yet neither Cooper nor Amelia had an answer. Raskolnikov took a breath, and then made a motion with his hands.

"Come," said Raskolnikov. "We will go to my apartment and drink some tea."

Feeling they had no other option, Amelia and Cooper followed the young man. Before they walked away, Amelia darted back into the street. She found Cooper Sr.'s fallen pocket watch. Fearing another surprise, she used her shirtsleeve as a buffer to pick it up and place it in her pocket. Amelia then joined Cooper and Raskolnikov, and tried to match their pace. Cooper scratched his nose and tried to ignore the watering of his eyes. Amelia took his hand.
Chapter Seven: Amelia, Cooper and Raskolnikov Drink Tea

They quickly approached a dirty apartment building, entered and followed Raskolnikov up the stairs. Walking fast, Raskolnikov almost ran into an older woman on the second floor landing. This lady seemed unwilling to meet with the visitors; she tucked herself behind a door and slammed it shut. Amelia saw Raskolnikov wince and shake his head at the sound. They passed a young woman in aprons who was sweeping the stairs, and Raskolnikov whispered a request for tea. She shook her head, muttering, and continued her work.

When they reached the fourth floor landing, Raskolnikov unlocked a door and held it open for the children. Inside, they were greeted with shadows. Raskolnikov crossed over the room and pulled open a curtain, letting a beam of light pass through. Amelia thought the apartment was adequate for sleeping, maybe, but to host gatherings? It was too cramped. The walls were slanted, and it felt as though they were slowly pushing in, suffocating the inhabitants. The ceiling was so low that even Amelia, the smallest of the three, was worried she might bump her head. Inside it smelled of sweat and musk; something horrible was emanating from the corner of the room, out of some sort of pot. Cooper was sure that at any second a mouse would come scurrying out from under the bed.

Raskolnikov seemed to sense that Amelia and Cooper were uneasy. He smiled at them and gestured to his bed, which was pushed lengthwise against the back wall. Taking of his coat, the young man repeated, "Sit, sit." Amelia and Cooper walked over to the bed, where they took a seat, staying close together with their feet dangling over the edge.

At first they sat in silence. Cooper and Amelia were so stunned by the situation that they could barely create a coherent sentence. After a couple of fruitless attempts at conversation, courtesy of Raskolnikov, a knock came at the door. Before waiting for an answer the knocker,
the young lady in aprons, entered. She, with grease stained skirts, carried a tray of cookies, tea cups and a kettle in hand. Setting it on a small tea table, just in front of the bed, she turned towards Amelia and Cooper.

"What are your names?" The lady asked.

"Amelia,"

"Cooper,"

She smiled and told them her name was Nastasya.

Amelia considered holding out her hand to shake, instead said, "Nice to meet you."

"Are you tutoring again?" Nastasya asked, turning her face to meet Raskolnikov's. He hesitated, and addressed the children.

"Yes," he nodded, after a moment.

"Good. Your rent has been due for too long. Praskovya is thinking of having the cops summon you. If she knew I was still bringing you tea…" Nastasya trailed off and shook her head.

She swept out of the room, and her steps descending the stairs could be heard even with the door shut.

"Praskovya is my landlady," Raskolnikov explained, rubbing his temples. "She does not like me very much. Please, drink."

Raskolnikov poured the tea; Amelia and Cooper added cream and sugar to their cups. After a sip, Cooper couldn't help but grimace at how bitter it was. Amelia shared this opinion; for this tea, there was no such thing as too much sugar. Yet while Amelia and Cooper added more to theirs, Raskolnikov took his unsweetened. After a few sips of the soothing, hot liquid, and a
couple bites of cookies, Amelia and Cooper felt a bit more settled; the wasps in their stomachs had calmed down, and they were ready to ask questions.

"Rodya," Cooper asked. "Where are we?"

"In my apartment," he answered.

Amelia put her tea down on the table and leaned in. "Yes, we know that, but where are we?"

"Stolyarny Lane?" It wasn't an answer, so much as a question.

"But what city?" Cooper shook his head.

"City?" Raskolnikov looked perplexed. "Petersburg, of course."

"Peterborough?" asked Amelia hopefully. Peterborough was the next town over from where she and Cooper lived. No matter how hopeful her voice sounded, though, she had been to Peterborough before and didn't remember it being so weird.

"No, not Peterborough – Petersburg," he enunciated it clearly.

Cooper thought for a moment, and then remembered the exhibit in his father's shop. The yellow ticket. The green shawl. The stop watch. He stood up from the bed, nearly knocking over the table and the tea with it.

"Russia? We're in Russia?" Cooper yelled, his arms flinging cartoonishly in exclamation.

"Of course," Raskolnikov answered, perplexed by this young man's outburst.

"Are we speaking Russian?"

"What?" Raskolnikov laughed at the question, "Of course we are!"

Cooper sat back on the bed, unsure of what to do. They were in Russia. But how did they get here? And why?

"The watch," Amelia said, "It was something to do with the watch."
"What watch?" asked Raskolnikov.

"This one," Amelia gripped a blanket and used it to pull the watch out of her pocket. She showed Raskolnikov the watch. The moment he saw it, Raskolnikov's eyes grew large, and he gasped out:

"My father's watch!"

That had not been the reaction Amelia was expecting. Looking down at her hand, then back at the young man, she asked, "You mean Cooper's father?"

He regarded Amelia with a bewildered expression and repeated, "My father. It was his, but now, it is mine," Raskolnikov's hand whipped out and he took it from her grasp. Amelia protested, afraid that something weird would happen again if his skin touched it. Cooper braced himself and Amelia reached out for his hand in anticipation but… nothing happened.

Raskolnikov turned the watch over in his hand, and opened it. Amelia peered at the young man, whose eyes were squinting, but Cooper's attention was overtaken by the surprise of seeing the clock hands moving.

"How did you get it to work?" Cooper asked. But Raskolnikov wasn't interested in answering questions.

"How did you get this?" The young man repeated, "She said that she would not sell it." His eyebrows were furrowed and mouth tight in accusation. For a moment, Cooper felt quite nervous. Maybe it wasn't right to have followed this man back to his home. Cooper regarded the door…Finding her voice, Amelia tried to speak up.

"We just – one moment we were in one place, and the next we were in another and – I just don't know..." Her words started out strong, but the gravity of what she was saying weighed
on her tongue and her voice began to break. Raskolnikov's gaze softened and he refilled Amelia and Cooper's cups with more tea.

"Alyona Ivanovna," his voice was calmer now. "Did she sell this to you?"

"No," said Cooper, "I don't even know who that is."

"Please tell me then, how did you get this?"

"My father," answered Cooper, "He said that he found it."

"Pff. Then she must have sold it to him. Where is he?"

"I don't know," Cooper said and involuntarily winced at the weight of it all.

Raskolnikov smiled and tapped Cooper's hand. "No, this is good," Raskolnikov muttered to himself, "I have proof of her ethics, of her cruelty. Proof of why I must…" he trailed off.

"You must what?" asked Amelia.

"Nothing!" he said quickly, then muttered something that sounded like "Vicious little women…"

"What?" Cooper asked.

"Never mind," the young man said. He stood up, and put on his jacket. "Come, we must pay Alyona a visit."
Chapter Eight: Meeting the Louse

They followed Raskolnikov out of his apartment, down the stairs, and onto the street. Raskolnikov took a left and kept walking. Cooper thought this city was remarkable; they were surrounded by canals and rivers that had to be crossed to get anywhere, but no cars or paved streets. Everything was so loud; people hung out of windows, laughing and yelling. A horrific, unavoidable stench followed their every movement. With her short stride, Amelia was struggling to keep up with the pace Raskolnikov had set.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"Alyona 200 Ivanovna 201 is 202 the 203 pawnbroker 204 to 205 whom 206 I 207 sold this 208 watch 209," Raskolnikov answered.

"Rodya, why are you counting? Also, could you slow down a bit?"

Raskolnikov lowered his pace and Amelia felt like she could finally breathe. Raskolnikov continued to count.

"Just," he finally said, "215 the 216 distance 217 between 218 my 219 apartment, 220 and- never mind, 223…"

Amelia caught Cooper's gaze, and he shrugged his shoulders. They were both wondering why Raskolnikov would need to know the number of steps between his apartment and the pawnbroker's. Walking down the street, they came to a canal posted "Kokushkin", and passed over its bridge. Eventually, they came to a building at the corner of an intersection, where the canal met with the dirty roads. They walked by the street entrance, Raskolnikov still counting.

Upon entering a busy courtyard, Cooper thought he heard Raskolnikov whisper what sounded like a triumphant "seven hundred and thirty." Then, he stopped counting. Cooper was on the verge of asking what that number meant, when Amelia accidentally stepped on the back
of his boot, tripping him. The thought left his brain and Raskolnikov led them to what Amelia assumed was the front entrance of the building. They entered and Amelia noticed two painters who had clearly been drinking more than water with their lunch inside an otherwise empty ground floor apartment. The two men laughed loudly and splattered more paint onto their work clothes than on the wall; their movements echoed through the building. Yet, the moment they saw Raskolnikov, Amelia and Cooper, they stopped and observed the visitors.

Cooper thought they looked terribly out of place; one of the men was so tall that his head nearly scraped the ceiling, while the other man was so small that it took a second for Amelia to realize that he was standing on a ladder. The small one smiled at her, revealing many rows of tiny teeth. Cooper couldn't help but shiver. Raskolnikov didn't seem to notice these extraordinary men, and he kept walking while Amelia and Cooper were stuck in place.

"Come on," Raskolnikov said when he realized they were no longer following him. Jolted out of their stupor, Cooper and Amelia raced up the stairs and after him.

When they reached the fourth storey apartment, passing numerous people in different states of disheveled dress, Raskolnikov pulled a string that caused a bell to let out a couple sad jangles. A few moments later the door opened a fraction of the way; only an eye could be made out. It moved up and down, registering those just outside the door. When it seemed to be satisfied, a lock was unbolted; the door opened, revealing a little old woman.

But this little old woman was none of those adjectives in a comforting sense, like Amelia's sweet grandmother. Her littleness was the byproduct of a crouched back. The few teeth she still had in her mouth were yellowed and decayed. Her hair lacked luster, and was beginning to gray and the bun pulled on top of her head resembled dry straw. Cooper noticed that almost everything about the pawnbroker was yellow; her clothes, her hair, her skin. The irises of her
eyes were a deep grey, but yellow were the parts that should have been white. Amelia felt alarmed by this woman, and was even more nervous when the woman glared at her through narrowed eyes.

"Alyona," Raskolnikov addressed the old lady, through gritted teeth, "Do you remember me?"

"I remember very well, my friend," her eyes glittered but there was nothing friendly about them."What is this one wearing?" she asked Raskolnikov while gesturing towards Amelia.

"She is foreign," he replied hastily.

"Where in this world do ladies wear pants? And your shirt," she pointed to Cooper, "Life is Good? What does that mean?" Yet the old woman didn't seem to want an answer, for she turned her back on the guests and walked into the apartment, allowing them entrance.

Raskolnikov motioned for the children to follow him. Amelia went in first, and Cooper reluctantly closed the door behind them; he would have preferred to stay outside then meet with this mean lady. However, he relented and followed them into a small room. Everything inside was clean; the floors, the windows, the picture frames and even the curtains. The floor and yellow furniture were shining with polish. A single doorway went off the main room, and it was covered by a curtain; Cooper assumed that it lead to a bedroom.

"And what have you brought for me today?" the old lady asked, sitting crookedly on a chair, leaving Raskolnikov, Amelia and Cooper standing above her. She groaned and grunted through every sentence; it sounded painful to talk.

"Nothing," said Raskolnikov, "I came to take."

"Aha, your watch will it be?"

"Yes," he answered, the whites of his eyes were bright.
The old woman put a hand to her fabric-covered neck, like she was feeling for something. She then stepped behind the curtain. The three visitors remained in the kitchen while they listened to the old women hobbling in the other room. Cooper could hear the echo of her cane pounding against the floor, and he whispered, "But Rodya, you have the watch in your pocket."

"Yes," he answered with a perverse sort of smile, "and I will catch her in the lie. It is a charade, her looking for the watch. She will claim it is missing, when I know she has sold it to your father."

Cooper didn't respond, but kept his ears open, listening for when the old lady would come back. He thought of his father, and wondered if it was true what Raskolnikov had said, that his father had bought it from Alyona. But if that were true, did his father lie about finding it? Why would he do that?

Quietly, and with a ghostly presence, a woman entered the room from the outside landing. She was tall, and her stomach was protruding from behind a white apron. She looked shocked to see the visitors, but smiled at the children.

"Hello!" Amelia said enthusiastically.

The women nodded her head at the guests, but said nothing. She then tucked behind the curtain, leaving the room as silently as she had entered.

"Who was that?" whispered Amelia, hoping the women could not hear her.

"The old women's sister, Lizaveta. She is not smart, though she has a kind heart," Raskolnikov answered. He added, "Alyona treats her like a slave."

Suddenly, they heard a shriek.

"Lizaveta!" The old women screamed, her shrill voice echoing throughout the apartment.

"Who have you let into this apartment?" The old woman sounded furious.
Cooper and Amelia strained to hear the conversation behind the fabric.

"No one, Alyona, I swear," Lizaveta slowly gasped out.

"You're lying," accused Alyona.

"No, I swear, sister, no one has been in here, but me and you and the people who are here when you let them."

"That tramp, the young one with whom you read verses, the one who paints her cheeks and struts around with her yellow ticket waving about. It was her!" the old lady accused.

"No!" said Lizaveta, though her voice was not assertive. "Sonia is a good girl!"

The old women let out a horrible grunting noise, phlegm coating the back of her throat. She came into the room again, her cane announcing her hurried presence. Alyona's yellow mouth was twisted into a grin. Lizaveta scurried back into the room, knocking her left elbow against doorframe. She clutched it in pain, but said nothing. She bowed her head at Alyona, bracing herself.

"Your watch is gone," Alyona said to Raskolnikov simply.

"Gone?" asked Raskolnikov, his mouth twisting into a smile.

"Gone," Alyona said.

"Are you sure?" he asked too quickly and with humor in his voice.

Alyona's eyebrows shot up. "I am sure," she said with a curt smile, "but perhaps you know where it is?"

Amelia and Cooper watched as Raskolnikov opened his coat, and took the watch from an inside pocket. He dangled it in front of the women's face. More swiftly than one would expect from a woman of her age and decrepitude, her hand shot out to grasp the watch. Cooper and Amelia watched the old lady deposit it into her dress pocket.
Raskolnikov's eyes were wide. Worried that he would wrestle the old lady for it, Amelia ran in front of him, and stared the women directly in her cold, yellow eyes.

"How did you get it?" questioned Alyona, looking behind Amelia who, despite her best efforts, was a very tiny shield.

"You sold it to their father," spat Raskolnikov."You cheat."

"I did not," said Alyona quite simply. Cooper couldn't help but think that the old lady found this all somehow amusing. Raskolnikov was furious and Cooper joined Amelia to stand between Raskolnikov and the old woman.

"You did!" Raskolnikov pointed his finger at her. "I have caught you in your lie! You were to hold it until I could pay for it again, that was the deal."

"It was, and remains, the deal." She said quietly. Her eyes were now dissolved of any expression but the lines around her mouth were twitching, like she was pushing back a grin.

"Lizaveta," she said, addressing her sister, "You may go." Her voice was unapologetic. Lizaveta bowed from the room, shaking.

The old woman stood up, and leaned in close to the children.

"And you as well," she said. "Come back when you have real business to conduct."

Raskolnikov, rather than protesting, nodded his head and turned on his heel. Cooper and Amelia followed him back out to the landing, but Raskolnikov paused for a moment on the stairs. He nodded his head again, but it wasn't directed towards the children. It was almost as though this moment had confirmed something for him.
Chapter Nine: A Brief Interlude with Two Mysterious Figures

Raskolnikov and the children did not realize as they passed through the rickety apartment doors, which led to the street, that one big pair of eyes and one little pair were watching them.

"That's them," Leon said, standing on his tippy toes to get a view of Amelia, Cooper and Raskolnikov through the window. They exited not through the courtyard, but by the street.

"They've met him," the little man's shoulder slumped in defeat.

"It's so cold here, how do they stand it?" Nickel's paint-covered work suit was thin, and he rubbed his arms to encourage circulation.

"Pay attention," said Leon, jerking on Nickel's sleeve.

"All right, they've met him. So what?" asked Nickel.

"So what?" Leon yelled, too loudly and it echoed around the room. "So, he's already formulated the plan! What if he backs out now? What if they change his mind?"

"It'll be fine," Nickel said. "They've barely done anything. Visiting the pawnbroker was unexpected, but he looked darn angry when he came out; maybe he's even more sure of what he has to do."

"Okay," Leon said, pressing down from his toes and into his heels. "But you and I have to follow them back to his apartment. When he's not looking, we'll grab them."

Nickel shook his head. "Now that others have seen them, it will be harder to grab them without noticing. Someone may try to interfere." Nickel pushed his back against the window, hoping the hot sun would warm his bones. His tall frame blocked out all sun light.

"Then we'll be sneaky?" said Leon.

"Yes, sneaky." Nickel agreed.
They heard footsteps coming down the stairs, and watched as the slumped and beaten down figure of Lizaveta exited the apartment. Leon shook his head and tsk- tsked sadly.

"Poor girl," said Nickel, sniffling his nose.

Just then, a foreign ringing noise came from Leon's breast pocket. He clapped his hand over it. Nickel ran from the window and over to the door; he shut it to keep the unusual noise from being noticed in the busy apartment building. He walked back to Leon, who took the noisy object into his hand. It was small with lots of buttons in lots of places. Some of the buttons had letters, some had numbers and some had words. Leon pressed a button marked "ON", and held the object to his ear. But before he could say "hello", cracked words came through.

"Yes, they've met him," answered Leon, using his kindest, most professional voice to respond. "Yes, we'll stop it. Yes, Fyodor- I mean - Mr. Yes. We'll stop them."

Leon took a deep breath, turned to Nickel, and said, "Let's get back to work."
Chapter Ten: A Plan is Hatched

"We have to do something," Amelia said and waited for Cooper to respond.

Raskolnikov had left them in his room alone, after swallowing down a bitter cup of tea. Amelia's stomach was churning, so she merely nibbled on a biscuit, while Cooper added some tea to the sugar cubes resting in his cup. After finishing his tea, Raskolnikov had stood up and proclaimed, "I must run some errands now."

"Can we come?" asked Amelia.

"No," he answered sharply. Without another word, Raskolnikov left.

Something about Raskolnikov alarmed Cooper. The look on his face when Alyona snatched the watch from his hand…his expression was unsettling. A breath caught in Cooper's throat; he would never want Raskolnikov to look that way at him.

"Cooper?" Amelia asked, and Cooper snapped out of his thoughts and back into the room. "Are you listening?"

"No, sorry, I was just thinking," he answered.

"It's not right what that woman did," said Amelia. "She cheated Rodya. She sold it to your father, but just couldn't admit it."

"My father?" Cooper asked while shaking his head, "But how? Anyway, I don't believe she did sell it to him."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he said that he found it."

"Found it?" Amelia asked, "Where?"

"I don't know," Cooper sighed. "He was going to tell me, I think, but that lady came in, the lady with the clock." He thought for a moment, and in the quiet, Amelia asked:
"How did we get here?"

"I don't know," said Cooper. "One minute we were there and the next minute we were here."

"St. Petersburg," said Amelia.

"Speaking Russian," added Cooper.

Amelia had an idea, "Maybe the-" she started to say, before catching herself. Since coming to St. Petersburg Amelia's tongue was more active than usual, but now she found herself reining it back in. Her thought was ridiculous, and she was suddenly too shy to say it aloud.

"What?" asked Cooper, "maybe what?"

"The watch," she eventually answered. "Do you think it could have been the watch that did it?"

"You mean the watch that brought us here?"

"It's a stupid thought, I know," she shook her head.

"No!" Cooper exclaimed. "You're right – what else could it be? We both touched it and everything in the store went crazy. And, however we got here, it came here with us."

"Maybe we can get the watch to take us home," said Amelia hopefully.

"But, how will we get back, though?" Cooper asked, "We'd have to steal it from Alyona,"

"That horrible woman," was all Amelia said in reply.

Cooper scooted closer to Amelia. They sat in the dusty room, not looking at one another but feeling comforted by the closeness.

Just then, a bookshelf caught Amelia's eye. It was the smallest one she had ever seen, and almost overshadowed by a dresser. She walked over, crouching to get a better look, but it housed only a few novels. Her finger passed over the volumes, but caught something taller, not a book,
but papers. She pulled it from the shelf, and saw that it was an early draft of an essay; parts that had been scratched out, and notes were scrawled into the margins. Some of the ink had smeared though, and Amelia could only read bits and pieces.

*On Crime* was the title. Amelia scanned further down the page, but couldn't make anything else out. After flipping a few pages, she found something odd. Circled was a paragraph that Amelia could read quite clearly. It said:

> *Men are divided into ordinary and extraordinary. Ordinary men must live in submission, and have no right to transgress the law because they are ordinary. Extraordinary men, however, have a right to commit any crime and to transgress the law in any way because they are extraordinary.*

Break the law? Commit any crime? Amelia read a bit further down the page.

> All great men must, from their very nature, be criminals. If one such man is forced for the sake of his idea to step over a corpse or wade through blood, he has in his conscience a right to wade through that blood. If a grand discovery can only be made by sacrificing the lives of one, a dozen, a hundred, or more men, an extraordinary man is duty bound to eliminate the dozen or the hundred men for the sake of making his discoveries known to the whole of humanity.

Amelia re-read that section three times, sure she misunderstood. What did he mean by "sacrificing?" Was Raskolnikov condoning murder? What kind of grand discovery could possibly justify murder?

* Adapted from Dostoyevsky, Coulson, and Gibian 219-221
"Cooper, come here," Amelia said. "You need to read this."

Cooper had been sitting on the bed, almost completely lost in thought when Amelia spoke to him. But before he even had a chance to react to her words, they heard quick footsteps coming up the stairs. Amelia scrambled to put the essay back where she had found it, and jumped onto the bed.

"What was it?" Cooper asked, seeing that Amelia was pale.

"Nothing," she answered, her voice strained.

Without a knock or quiet announcement of arrival, Raskolnikov opened the door and hurried into the cramped room, looking determined. When he saw the two children on the bed, it was as though he had forgotten they would be in his room. He quickly settled his expressions down, and smiled.

"Amelia, Cooper," he addressed them. "I have a plan, though I need your help."

"A plan?" Amelia asked. Cooper was surprised to hear the worry in her voice, so he spoke up.

"What do you mean? What kind of plan?"

Raskolnikov took a seat at the table. A smile was turning the corners of his mouth upward, and after eating a cookie, he announced:

"We are going to break into Alyona Ivanovna's apartment, and steal back my father's watch."
Chapter Eleven: Some Time to Think

Even if the watch were their key to getting home, Amelia wasn't so sure she wanted to help Raskolnikov.

"What if it doesn't work?' Cooper asked, "What if she comes back too soon, while we're still in there?"

"She won't," Raskolnikov said. "For many weeks I've studied her movements. She leaves the apartment between seven and eight, leaving only Lizaveta to watch the apartment. I can detain her on the bridge, while you find the watch."

Cooper thought it was quite curious that Raskolnikov had been watching the pawnbroker's movements, but before he could ask any further questions, a knock came at the door, and without a pause, Nastasya entered.

"A little late for tutoring, isn't it?" she asked.

"Get out!" Raskolnikov yelled angrily.

"Rodya!" Amelia exclaimed; both she and Cooper were shocked by his outburst.

Nastasya just laughed and said, "Praskovya would like to speak with you," before leaving the room. Raskolnikov's face drained of color.

Amelia and Cooper learned that Praskovya was his landlady. However, she didn't really want to talk to Raskolnikov, not face to face anyway. She made him stand outside her door and only talked to him through the crack. Amelia and Cooper stood just behind him as they talked.

"They're orphans!" Raskolnikov exclaimed through a whisper. "Foreign orphans! Please, take pity."

Cooper couldn't understand Raskolnikov's fear of the landlady. She seemed quite nice, and upon hearing of their troubles, she allowed them to stay for the night. In exchange for dinner...
and bed, they were to help Nastasya with the chores. Nastasya let them cut vegetables while she boiled a bone in the pot on the stove.

While cutting potatoes – very careful to keep her thumb tucked away from the blade – Amelia thought of what she had read. Amelia wanted to help Raskolnikov; he had been kind to them and she couldn't imagine how hard Alonya's penchant for taking advantage of the poor was weighing on him. Nevertheless, she wasn't sure if it was a good idea to steal, and was worried about what Raskolnikov had written about doing so. Was it okay, sometimes, to do something wrong if it benefitted others? What did he mean by "sacrifice?" Looking over at Cooper, she wanted to get him alone to tell him what she had read, but with Nastasya watching, she was resigned to chopping and keeping quiet.

Cooper was stuck with the onions, and usually his glasses worked like a shield to protect his eyes from crying. But today his eyes begged for a release. He tried to think of the last time he had cried, but it had been so long, since his mom's funeral. The lenses were failing him, and water was brimming into his eyes.

Nastasya looked his way, and considered the peculiar clothes of the children. The glasses Cooper wore were unlike any Nastasya had ever seen, and how could an orphan afford such a pair? And the pants Amelia was wearing, such mystifying material, it was cloth but it was blue, and blue dye was so expensive. Amelia felt a gaze on her back, and she met the cook's eyes.

Nastasya smiled, and nodded her head.

Amelia carried and dropped chopped potatoes into the boiling pot.

"Here, the onions are ready," Cooper said, carrying them in his hands, careful not to let any slip out and onto the floor.

"Thank you," Nastasya said, nodding her head. "You may go now."
They left the kitchen, and began walking up the stairs.

"Cooper," Amelia whispered, "I need to tell you something,"

"Yeah?"

"Earlier, I was reading something that Rodya wrote, an essay I think," said Amelia. Cooper gripped the banister, "An essay?"

"It said something awful. I… I don't know how to explain it, but it was about crime."

"What do you mean crime?" He stopped in his tracks. Amelia paused, and tried to think of what to say.

"It was weird. Like he was saying that crime was okay, if it made someone else's life better," she shook her head. "At least, I think that's what he was saying."

"Like stealing?" Well, Raskolnikov was asking them to help him steal. But, it was Raskolnikov's watch, anyway.

"That's not all," Amelia's voice had gone even quieter.

"What else?" asked Cooper.

"He said," Amelia looked around to make sure no one was listening. Eventually, she finished her thought: "He said it was okay to kill."

Suddenly, Raskolnikov appeared a few steps in front of him. Amelia wondered how his steps had gone unnoticed.

"Is dinner ready?" Raskolnikov asked. "We need to eat." Raskolnikov seemed quite happy, and as the children followed him upstairs, it seemed like he had an extra bounce in his step.
Chapter Twelve: Stealing the Watch

They spent the evening huddled around the table and sipping tea while Raskolnikov mapped the movements they would soon make. Once the plan was in place, and each part rehearsed, they slept. Nastasya had laid scratchy blankets on the floor for Amelia and Cooper. The room was warm and the uncomfortable bed and flickering candle reminded Cooper of those nights when his father would come home. Unlike those nights, tonight he was restless. Why did his father lie to him about the watch? And why was he helping Raskolnikov commit a crime? After tossing and turning, Cooper eventually fell into a fitful sleep.

Amelia watched Cooper, as his eyes wrestled against eyelids. Occasionally, he would twitch. She thought about waking him, and talking to him about what they were going to do. But Raskolnikov was close, and she feared that he might hear anything they said. Amelia turned over on her back and sighed. She did not sleep well that night.

Luckily, or unluckily, the night was short. Raskolnikov woke them early the next morning, gently whispering, "It's time."

They crept down the stairs quietly so as not to wake Nastasya and the landlady; Raskolnikov went first and warned them of every creak in the steps. They made their way through the streets, the same way they had gone the day earlier, and over the bridge. This time, Raskolnikov was not counting steps. He seemed preoccupied with something else; he was clutching his right side rib, like something was pushing into it. Amelia could almost see the outline of whatever he held in his jacket; it was big and L-shaped.

They waited just outside the canal entrance of the pawnbroker's courtyard with their eyes fixed on the entrance door. Waiting, barely able to breathe, eventually the small figure of Alyona
left the front doors. She was looking around before she descended the entrance stairs. Her neck stretched too far, almost like an owl, as she peered over each shoulder.

"She's suspicious," Cooper whispered.

Eventually, she exited the courtyard through the street entrance. When she was out of their sight, Raskolnikov turned to the children. He didn't say anything, but nodded his head, and turned his back on them. He entered the courtyard, and exited the same way that departed figure of Alyona had.

Amelia addressed Cooper, anticipation running through her veins and a metallic taste coating her tongue.

"Here we go," she said.

"Ready?" Cooper asked Amelia, hoping she would say no. She nodded.

They double-checked to make sure the coast was clear. Then, they hurriedly crossed the courtyard and went through the main entrance. Upon entering, they were startled, surprised, and angry that they had forgotten about the painters. This time, they weren't painting; the little one was reading a newspaper and the big one was picking at his nails. They stopped at the sound of the door shutting, and watched Cooper and Amelia as they passed by the apartment door. Amelia had to put her hand on Cooper's back to make him keep walking. He stopped at the second floor landing, and turned breathlessly to Amelia.

"They saw us," he said. "Should we turn back?"

"I don't know…crap!" Amelia said it too loud, and clapped her hand to her mouth. Whispering, she asked, "Why didn't we remember that they would be here?"

Cooper sighed, his jaw tense. After a moment, and feeling like they couldn't turn back, Cooper continued ascending the stairs. Amelia followed.
Luckily, they passed nobody on the stairway. When they reached fourth floor landing, Amelia and Cooper took some long, deep breaths, before pulling on a string that made the bell ring. The door opened partially, and they could see Lizaveta's eyes peering through the crack.

"Yes?" she asked quietly.

"Lizaveta?" Amelia said, adding some hysteria to her breath, "Alyona has fallen. She needs your help."

"Fallen?" Lizaveta asked slowly, allowing the door to open further. The information seemed to transfer slowly into her brain; it took her even longer to process it.

"She's hurt," Cooper said breathlessly, "on Nicholas Bridge, you must go."

"Hurt?" Amelia and Cooper solemnly nodded their heads, feeling guilty already. Their plan revolved around Lizaveta being forgetful, and it worked. She ran out of the apartment, forgetting to bolt the door behind her. Amelia felt horrible about the abuse Lizaveta would likely suffer at the result of their plot.

"Now," Cooper said, "When she went to get Raskolnikov's watch she went into that back room. It must where she keeps everything."

"You stay here and keep watch," Amelia said, "and I'll go find where she keeps it."

Cooper nodded his head, and Amelia walked through the main room and through the curtain, covered doorway. As she went through the door, she felt confident about their job; it was such a small apartment, though not as small as Raskolnikov's, and finding the treasures should be easy. Inside the room were two small beds. She peeked under the first bed and found nothing. Under the second bed, Amelia found something she hadn't thought she would; a locked chest.

Cooper, meanwhile, stood in the kitchen, not knowing what else to do. Should he stand outside the apartment, to keep watch? Or, should he find a cupboard and hide inside it? The
decision was made for him when he heard steps coming up the stairs. Thinking of Amelia, he ran
to the back room and told her to hurry up.

"I can't," she said. "The watch must be in this chest, but it's locked!"

She had it on a bed, considering the possibilities. The lock wasn't strong, and could be
opened easily with only a rock, or an axe. She searched around the room for something hard, but
Cooper grabbed her hand.

"Forget the watch; we have to go,"

But by the time they ran back into the kitchen, they were not alone. Expecting to see
Lizaveta and Alyona, instead they were stunned to find the painters guarding the door.

They were even bigger, and smaller, up close.
Chapter Thirteen: Caught

Neither Amelia or Cooper, nor Leon or Nickel, knew what to say.

Amelia and Cooper were rather surprised to find these abnormal men in Alyona's kitchen. They were the painters from downstairs, and their features were even more extreme and unnatural up close; they hardly seemed like real people.

Nickel was surprised by how small the children were. Their little bodies and little fingers. Their chubby cheeks and nervous little eyes. Leon did eventually find something to say, but it tumbled out all wrong.

"You're ruining the book!" was all little Leon said.

Amelia and Cooper were shocked to hear the little man's squeaky, high voice.

"What?" Cooper's initial fear was partly replaced by curiosity.

"The book?" asked Amelia. "What are you talking about?"

Leon looked up and into Nickel's big face, and sighed. Nickel nodded in agreement to the silent message, and then stepped closer to the children.

"You must come with us," the big man said, placing a massive hand on Amelia's shoulder.

"Why?" asked Cooper, the fear coming back.

The smaller man shook his head, "Just come," he said, his voice somehow menacing through its falsetto.

The small man began walking out the door, and the big one pushed the children to follow him. The pressure the big man applied to their backs was gentle, like a light breeze. Cooper pushed against it, refusing to move, because he was stunned by a sudden epiphany. It was quite simple, really; Cooper didn't want to go with them, and he was not going to. He was so tired of
being pushed around, of being forced to do things he didn't want to do, and most importantly, he was tired of being lied to. So, when a little voice inside his brain asked, *well then, what do you want?* Cooper grabbed Amelia's hand, and told her to run.

They knocked the little man down as they rushed through the doorway. Down the stairs they clattered, past the empty apartment where the decorators no longer stood. Leaving the building, they came to the courtyard. It was empty, until suddenly Alyona came assertively bounding through the street entrance. Behind her, Raskolnikov followed. And finally, behind him, was Lizaveta. She was disheveled and withdrawn. Cooper and Amelia barely had time to register their arrival, and the look of shock on all their faces, before the two terrifying men came running out of the apartment behind them.

"Rodya, help!" Screamed Amelia as Cooper dragged her towards the courtyard's canal exit.

Amelia and Cooper ran along the canal, frantic to find a place to hide. Cooper half considered jumping into the water, but thought against it. Amelia saw a wide doorway; she grabbed Cooper's hand and tucked him into it, hiding. Amelia and Cooper were able to catch their breath. Leon and Nickel ran by, not realizing that they had passed the children.

"Should we turn back?" Cooper asked, gasping.

"I don't-"

They heard the voices of the men, who had doubled back and were calling their names.

"Cooper, Amelia," said the high voice.

"We just want to talk," said the deeper one.

Amelia grabbed the handle of the door, and was relieved when it opened.

"In here," Amelia whispered to Cooper, and they went inside the building.
It was empty and somber inside. Enough light peaked through the boarded up windows to just make out a rat scuttling across the floor.

"Do you think anyone's in here?" Cooper asked.

Amelia shook her head, "I don't think so. It's so dirty, I can't imagine anyone living here."

The building was quite big, and in addition to a staircase, there were three rooms on the ground floor. One doorway didn't have a door, but was covered with fabric. Amelia walked over, and with a little bit of patience, was able to peel the fabric off, which had been nailed into the surrounding doorframe.

She and Cooper went through the door, but stopped just short of a very old set of stairs.

"Looks like some sort of cellar down there," said Amelia.

Cooper nodded his head. He took Amelia's hand, and told her, "Let's check out the upstairs, instead." They had only climbed up one set of stairs to the second floor, before hearing the two voices again. The bizarre men had found them.

"They must have come in here," echoed the big voice, magnified by the acoustics of the empty building.

Amelia and Cooper entered a room just to the right of the stairs, and as they were walking, a floorboard creaked.

"Did you hear that?" asked the squeaky voice.

Amelia and Cooper could hear feet on the steps, and they clasped their hands to their mouths to muffle their breath.

"Up here?" they heard the big voice say, and Cooper and Amelia realized the big and little men were ascending past the floor they were on, going higher and higher and beyond them.
"Let's get out of here," Amelia whispered. When it seemed safe, they carefully went back down the stairs, terrified of giving away their presence. Before they left the building, though, Amelia had an idea.

"Should we hide down there?" asked Amelia, pointing to the basement with the scary looking stairs. "We can trick them into thinking we left the building."

Cooper didn't really want to go down into the foreboding looking basement, but he realized that it might be a good way to confuse the men.

"Okay," he said.

"Alright, I'm going to slam the door so they think we've left," Amelia whispered. "Then, really quick, we'll run down the stairs." Cooper nodded his head and braced himself.

"Get ready," Amelia said. "On the count of three, okay? One…two…three!"

Amelia slammed the front entrance door shut, then as quickly and quietly as she could, followed Cooper. The basement stairs wobbled, and they had to watch their step in the murkiness. Cooper was worried that they would fall apart right under them, but eventually they made it. Down there, it smelled in a different way to the rest of the city. It was moldy and humid down here, and smelled like a wet dog. Like the windows upstairs, the single one in this room was boarded and only a small amount of light could escape through.

Leon and Nickel had checked all the rooms of the top landing when they heard the noise of the door slamming.

"They left!" Nickel yelled.

Nearly running into each other to reach the stairs first, they hurriedly descended to the bottom landing. They opened the door, and were both about to exit back onto the street, when a noise came from behind the vacant doorway.
"Ouch!" Cooper whispered. He had slipped on the soggy floor, and had to brace himself by grabbing onto a splintery piece of wood. Amelia tried to hush him, but it was too late.

"Do you think they're down there?" Leon asked, as quiet as a mouse. Nickel shrugged his shoulder, which Leon took as a "yes". Then he, like Amelia, slammed the front entrance door shut as loud as possible. Leon put his finger on his mouth, signaling for Nickel to keep quiet.

"They bought it," Cooper said too loudly, in relief. Amelia hugged him, and asked, "Are you okay? Did you get cut?"

"No, I'm fine," he answered, rubbing his hand where the splinter had entered.

"Then let's get out of here," said Amelia.

Leon listened to the conversation and regarded Nickel with a knowing smile, pleased that his plan had worked. He walked over to the top of the basement stairs, and said quietly: "Come out, come out!"

Cooper and Amelia's heart's sunk.

"Why don't you come up the stairs, now, kids," suggested Nickel.

"No!" Amelia shouted. Her eyes searched the dingy room for something, anything to help them, but – nothing.

"Go get them," Leon told Nickel.

The big man nodded his head in reply and said, "Give me a match, I can't see my way down,"

The little man took a book of matches from his pocket, but he struggled to light one.

"Let me have it," Nickel said, taking the matches out of Leon's little hand. Unfortunately, Nickel was not as dexterous as Leon, and his big hands fumbled with the match, striking it aggressively. Eventually, it ignited.
"Aha!" Nickel admired. But as he was congratulating himself, his big fingers touched the flame. "Ouch!" He exclaimed, somewhat pathetically, before dropping the match on the floor. He hadn't realized that he'd been standing on top of the fabric that Amelia had earlier torn off the doorway. The flame caught light of the material, which was so old and so dry that it went up in seconds. The blaze illuminated the drab basement, and the room filled with glowing orange light. The flames latched onto the stairs, and they went ablaze.

Amelia and Cooper now feared that more than the two men. They looked around the room, which was damp, and hoped that the things it contained would not be so flammable. Smoke funneled down the stairs, and filled the basement. Amelia and Cooper could feel their throats tighten, and it became hard for them to breathe.

"We have to put this out," Amelia shouted. "Do you see any water?"

"No," Cooper answered, "I can't see anything!" He pulled his shirt over his chin, trying to prevent the smoke from entering his mouth.

"What do we do?" Amelia cried. Desperate, she went to the boarded up window. "Hoist me up!" she said. Cooper struggled to raise her up, and she banged on the window, hoping that somebody would hear her cries.

"Help! Help!" she screamed.

Suddenly, a voice answered.

"Get back from the window," it bellowed. Amelia and Cooper backed up, and the violent sound of an axe on wood entered the basement. A flash of light illuminated the room, unlike the orange glare of flames; clear and bright and golden, like the sun. Shining through, was Raskolnikov's face.

"Come," he yelled, "come!"
Cooper helped push Amelia through the window, and then Raskolnikov hoisted Cooper up. As he was being helped, Cooper felt a splash of water on his leg. He looked back and saw the two erratic men frantically throwing buckets of water on the flames. *Were they trying to save us?* Cooper wondered. This thought was overtaken with the relief he felt when Raskolnikov pulled him out of the burning building, and back onto the street overlooking the canal.

Cooper and Amelia hugged each other, and Raskolnikov watched their embrace.

"Are you alright?" Raskolnikov asked. They came apart, and reassured him that they were fine.

"Let's get out of here," Amelia was terrified the two men were still on their trail. Raskolnikov nodded, and the three of them hurried away. Neither Amelia, Cooper nor Raskolnikov heard the crash that came from the abandoned building, which were the forms of Leon and Nickel crashing through the stairs. The flames had gone out completely, leaving Leon and Nickel gasping in the smoke.
Chapter Fourteen: Unanswered Questions

They were walking quickly along the canal, without any direction in mind. Amelia and Cooper continued looking over their shoulders, eager to put as much distance between themselves and the abandoned building as possible. Brushing the dirt from her clothes, Amelia addressed Raskolnikov.

"We didn't get the watch," was all she said.

"Those men caught us," Cooper added to Amelia's thought.

"Who were they?" asked Raskolnikov.

"I don't know who they are, but they think we stole their books," said Amelia, struggling to keep in step with the taller man.

"A book?" Raskolnikov asked, his voice full of confusion. Raskolnikov blinked his eyes a few times, before saying, "how peculiar." His voice didn't reveal any curiosity; it was angry, irritated. Cooper found himself nervous about Raskolnikov's sudden appearance with an axe moments before, even though it had led to their rescue. Raskolnikov was still holding it and when he noticed Cooper looking at it, he tucked it into his jacket. Amelia watched this, and realized that the axe was the L-Shaped object he had been carrying on their way to the pawnbroker's apartment. Why did he have an axe? She wondered.

Only paying attention to the pace at which they walked, and not the direction, they unintentionally found themselves in front of the pawnbroker's apartment building. Waiting by the canal entrance was Lizaveta. Her eyes settled on Raskolnikov, Amelia and Cooper, and with a hurried hand motion, she gestured for them to come to her.

"Alyona wants to see you," she whispered. She seemed extremely worried, nodding her head abruptly. She turned her back, and led them back into the building.
The pawnbroker sat on a yellow chair.

In her hand, was Raskolnikov's pocket watch. She acknowledged their arrival with a cough.

"Tell me," she raised her eyes to look at Raskolnikov, "what was so important that you decided to detain me on the bridge for so long?"

Raskolnikov's expression took on a confused look, before he asked, "I do not know what you are talking about."

"Well," the pawnbroker said, "if you cannot answer that question, tell me why these children told Lizaveta that I had fallen?"

She addressed that question to Raskolnikov, while looking at the children. Neither of them had an answer.

Alyona Ivanovna held out her hand, and let the pocket watch slip slightly from her grip. She allowed the chain to let the watch swing, like a pendulum. Her expression was like that of a master holding out a dog treat, expecting a trick in exchange. Cooper and Amelia caught each other's eye. They watched the pained expression come over Raskolnikov's face, as the pawnbroker taunted him with the only piece of his father he had left.

"A botched robbery, I assume," Alyona's mouth curled into a grimace. One hand was dangling the watch and the other touched her neck. She pulled loose from her blouse a necklace, which was merely a piece of old string from which a key was hanging. Amelia realized instantly that it was the key to the chest; it had been hanging from Alyona's neck the whole time.

Without conferring with one another, without so much as a look, Amelia and Cooper reached out their hands, grasping for the watch. They each got a hand on it, pulling it from Alyona's grasp. With it suspended between them, it opened, and gave Amelia and Cooper a small
shock, just like before. Their eyes were pushed shut by some unseen force, and they dropped the
watch on the floor. There were no lights in Alyona's apartment that flickered, and since no one
was speaking, they didn't stop. When Cooper and Amelia opened their eyes again, they found
themselves surrounded by old things encased in glass, and with angry voices discussing money.
They were back in Cooper Sr.'s shop.
Chapter Fifteen: Making Things Right

Cooper and Amelia let out relieved gasps of breath, and they found themselves hugging each other, both on the verge of tears.

"Did that really happen?" Amelia whispered, her mouth pressed into Cooper's shoulder.

"I think so," he said as they came apart and acknowledged their surroundings.

The store was exactly the same as it had been before, and under the glass marked "St. Petersburg" was the same green shawl, the same yellow ticket. They saw that the watch was laying on the floor, exactly as it had fallen when they were sent to St. Petersburg. And Amelia and Cooper stood exactly where they had been standing before being transported, hearing the same noises; the arguing between Cooper Sr. and the poor lady who had pawned her clock.

Everything was as they had left it.

"I don't have $200,"

"Well," said Cooper's father, "Come back when you do."

Cooper Sr. seemed to notice the kids for the first time since the women's entrance, and he addressed them, not wanting them to see this exchange.

"Kids, why don't you go upstairs," rang Cooper's father voice from the haze of confusion being felt by Amelia and Cooper.

Cooper looked at his father, and at the women and at the clock and wondered how his father could be so cruel to someone, over something as silly as a clock. But a kind of calm had entered him and a growing confidence. He knew that he didn't want to be pushed around anymore, and he didn't want to see it happen to anyone else either. Cooper also knew without a doubt that he loved his dad, but he just wasn't so sure how much he liked him.
"No," Cooper answered finally, addressing his father's request. He walked over to the cash register to stand next to his father and said, "Just stop it," quietly and assertively. Cooper took the clock back from under the desk, and handed it to the lady. Taken aback, she set the $150 in cash on the table. She quickly walked out of the store, the bell over the door ringing to signal her exit.

His father didn't really know what to do, and neither did Cooper, so they stood in place and avoided making contact with each other's eyes.

Amelia had been silently watching the interaction from over by the "St. Petersburg" exhibit. Looking for something to do to break the tension, she slipped the arm of her shirt over her hand, and gently picked the watch up from the floor, careful not to touch it with her skin. Then, she gingerly carried it over to the desk and placed it on the counter.

Cooper Sr. looked at the pocket watch questioningly, and as Amelia fixed her the sleeve of her shirt, she asked, "Um, sir? Where did you say you found this?"
Epilogue: A Very Small Man and a Very Large One Reading a Book

"I guess they didn't screw it up too much," said the big man.

"It all just seems a bit random, though. This entire epilogue; completely unnecessary," said the little one.

They were in the den of a nondescript building that had walls without windows, and doorframes without doors. The walls were not really walls at all, but bookshelves stocked to the brim with novels that had faded, golden lettering.

Sitting on a chair, with his feet on the table, the big one took a bite of beef jerky. Gnawing the meat, he flipped through the pages of a shiny, new book.

"There is something about them," pointing a finger at his open page, "look."

The little man's little legs couldn't reach the table, so he left them dangling over the chair. He flipped to the right page number with nervous fingers, but once he read a bit further down the page, he didn't look too upset.

"It just says he saved two kids from a burning building," he said, "but it barely got a mention. Easy to forget."

"It also says he was burned in the process," the large man added, with a nervous glance.

"Well, that's just an exaggeration if I've ever seen one; he never got near enough to the flames to be burned,"

"Well," said the big man, relaxing his posture, "it's all a little out of place, but not enough for people to notice,"

They were trying to console themselves, convince themselves that they, Leon and Nickel, hadn't screwed up things too badly. They were reading from a book called Crime and
"Punishment," the front of which had a picture of a sad young man; Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov.

"You can still understand why he did it," said Leon, who was scratching his nose.

"But not enough to excuse him," added Nickel pointedly, whose big fingers enveloped the book.

"Overall, I hardly feel any remorse for her at all, the pawnbroker had it coming," said Leon assertively.

"Poor Lizaveta, though," remembered Nickel.

"Oh yes, she was quite nice," Leon agreed. He slammed his copy on the table and took a deep sigh. He slumped far into his chair. "Well, let's just hope that this is the last we see of those kids."

A moment after he said it, a many-buttoned object sitting on the table let out an unusual noise. Leon stood up, and leaned across the table to reach it. He pressed a button, and held it to his ear.

"You've done well," said the voice.

"Thanks," answered Leon, "It was, um, a close one."

"Too close?" asked the voice.

"Won't happen again, sir."

"I certainly hope not."

"So what can we help you with, sir?" asked Leon.

"I have another assignment for you," said the voice. "But first I need to know, how fluent are you in Newspeak?"
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