

The School for Scandal Summary

In a part of English high society where gossip runs rampant, a tangle of love has formed. [Lady Sneerwell](#) is in love with a young, rebellious man named [Charles Surface](#). However, Charles is in love with [Maria](#), as is his brother Joseph. Maria is in love with Charles, but Lady Sneerwell and Joseph plot to ruin this relationship through rumors of unfaithfulness on Charles' part. At the same time, an older man named Sir Peter Teazle has taken a young wife from the country, now called [Lady Teazle](#); after only a few months of marriage they now bicker constantly about money, driving Lady Teazle to contemplate an affair with [Joseph Surface](#).

The plot thickens when [Sir Oliver Surface](#), the rich uncle of Joseph and Charles, returns to town from abroad. He schemes to test the rumors he has heard of Joseph being the well-bred and deserving brother and Charles having fallen into ruin; to do so, he goes to each of them in disguise. He disguises himself as a money lender named Mr. Premium to investigate Charles's spending habits, and is infuriated when he sees Charles living lavishly while driving the family far into debt. Charles proposes to sell him all he has left, the collection of family portraits, angering his uncle even more; however he forgives him when Charles refuses to sell the painting of his uncle.

The tangle of love and rumors becomes clear when, while Lady Teazle is visiting Joseph Surface, her husband comes to call. Lady Teazle hides behind a screen and listens to their conversation. Then, Charles Surface comes to call on his brother as well; Sir Teazle, hoping to see whether Charles is having an affair with his wife as has been rumored, also tries to hide behind the screen. He sees what he thinks is simply a young woman Joseph has been trying to hide. Sir Teazle hides in the closet instead, but when Charles starts to talk about Joseph's relationship with Lady Teazle, Joseph reveals that Sir Teazle is hiding in the closet, and Charles pulls him out. When Joseph goes out of the room momentarily, Sir Teazle tells Charles about the young woman he thinks is hiding behind the screen, and they pull it down to reveal his wife.

Sir Oliver visits Joseph dressed as one of their poor relations looking for money. Sir Oliver is disappointed to find that Joseph is only kind on the surface, but will not do anything material to help his relative.

The play ends with Sir Oliver revealing his plot and his findings to Charles and Joseph. Everyone realizes that Lady Sneerwell and her servant [Snake](#) orchestrated the rumor about [The School for Scandal](#)

Character List

Joseph Surface

Joseph is Charles' brother, cunning and ambitious. He wants to marry Maria because of her money, and he plots with Lady Sneerwell to make this happen. He is promiscuous and propositions Lady Teazle to have an affair. He loves money and he refuses to help his poor relative, Stanley (really Sir Oliver in disguise), telling him that he has no money, even though this is not true.

Charles Surface

Charles is one of Sir Oliver's nephews, madly in love with Maria. He is a young man who likes to spend money; he has a kind heart and is open about his flaws. He is grateful for the help his uncle provides and refuses to sell his portrait out of respect even when Mr. Premium (really Sir Oliver in disguise) offers to pay a fortune for it. Because of this, Charles is considered to be the worthy nephew.

Sir Oliver Surface

Sir Oliver is Charles and Joseph's rich uncle, who has been in the East Indies for a long time. He sent his nephews money while he was away; once he returns, he wants to find out more about their true character in order to determine who is worthy to get his inheritance. To do this, he assumes the identities of Mr. Premium and Stanley to test them. He is kind and vigilant, not believing everything he hears about Charles and Joseph.

Sir Peter (Pete) Teazle

Sir Pete is an old gentleman, very rich, who marries a young girl. He takes Joseph's side and tells Sir Oliver about Charles' behavior. He wants to separate from his wife because he thinks that she spends too much money; in the separation, he is willing to let her a large sum of money as a form of compensation. Ultimately, however, he decides against breaking up with his wife, and tries to reconcile with her.

Lady Teazle

She is Sir Pete's young wife, described as very beautiful but vain, with a passion for having fashionable clothes. She and her husband have their little arguments and Lady Teazle thinks about having an affair with Joseph; however, she decides against it when she hears her husband talking about the money he intends to leave her.

Maria

Maria is a young girl, one of the only characters who doesn't like to gossip. She can be viewed as a symbol for what is pure and good. She loves Charles, but Joseph tries to break them up; he almost succeeds when rumors are spread about an affair between Lady Sneerwell and Charles.

Lady Sneerwell

Lady Sneerwell is a widow, a wealthy woman who likes Charles and who is willing to do anything to break up Charles and Maria. She finds an ally in Joseph, and together they start to scheme. She is known for her tendency to spread rumors; because of this, she is very popular in her social circle.

Mrs. Candour

She is one of Lady Sneerwell's friends who also likes to spread rumors. She is a hypocrite because she affirms that spreading rumors is bad, even though she does this too.

Snake

She is Lady Sneerwell's servant who helps her by spreading her rumors.

Moses

He is one of Charles' money lenders, who helps Sir Oliver get in touch with his nephew.

calumny

the making of false and defamatory statements in order to damage someone's reputation

candour

whiteness; brilliance

cascade

a small waterfall, typically one of several that fall in stages down a steep rocky slope

cherub

a winged angelic being described in biblical tradition as attending to God

chivalry

the medieval knightly system with its religious, moral, and social code

cowardice

lack of bravery

culpable

deserving blame

discernment

the ability to judge well

impertinent

not showing proper respect; rude

innuendo

allusive or oblique remark or hint, typically a suggestive or disparaging one

insinuation

an unpleasant hint or suggestion of something bad

irresolution

doubt; indecision

malicious

intending to do harm

misrepresentation

a false or misleading statement

monody

an ode sung by a single actor in a Greek tragedy

notoriety

bad fame and reputation

odious

extremely unpleasant

pretension

the assertion of a claim to something

rival

a person or thing competing with another for the same objective, or for superiority in the same field of activity

traduce

to speak badly of or tell lies about someone so as to damage their reputation

Lady Teazle.