2.10: Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

Charles Dickens was born in a working-class family. His father John Dickens, a naval clerk, and his mother Elizabeth Barrow, an aspiring teacher, never managed to achieve economic security, despite their high ambitions for themselves and their eight children. John’s spendthrift habits led to his being imprisoned for debt in 1824. To earn support for his family, Dickens was forced to leave school to work in Warren’s Blacking Factory. This experience left Dickens with a long-term sense of shame and abandonment. Though a legacy allowed him to pay off his debts, John continued to need financial support, which Dickens provided by working as an office boy.

Although he attended a London academy, Dickens never managed a formal education. He did learn short hand and obtained work as a court reporter. Around this time, he fell
in love with Maria Beadnell, whose father was a banker. After four years, they broke off their connection. Energetic and ambitious, Dickens continued with his work. Habitual nocturnal walks and an avid, eager mind fed him ample material for his freelance reporting that he extended to fictionalized sketches by “Boz.”

His *Sketches by Boz* (1836) followed by *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836) soon won Dickens an avid following. That same year, he married Catherine Hogarth, whose father was a journalist. Dickens turned his professional activities to writing serial novels and publishing magazines, including *Bentley’s Miscellany, Household Words,* and *All the Year Round* that often served as publishing platforms for his novels. These character-driven serial novels—that he produced at an astonishing rate—reflected the social ills and inequalities of his age. His characters were rarely rounded; also, they often revealed the biases of his age, particularly the gender biases for and against the virtuous woman. Nevertheless, his characters, with their memorable quirks and tags, have the ring of authenticity. His later popular public readings of his novels demonstrated the recognizability and range of his characters.

Within that range, Dickens often focused on children to reveal his society’s ethics. The orphan Oliver Twist exposed the cruelty and fundamental lack of charity in the Victorian workhouse. Nicholas Nickleby exposed almost institutionalized parental neglect through Dotheboys Hall. The crossing sweeper Jo’s [of Bleak House (1853)] dying from the complications of small pox and passing that disease on to other characters revealed the fundamental connection of people among the classes, despite the so-called superiority of aristocrats and the upper class. The ethical ambiguity of the legal system, the injustice of classical economics, and the misery of the poor are just a few of the ills Dickens attacked. He leavened the incisive observations in his novels with humor and humanity and complicated their sometimes-surface sentimentality with symbolism and narrative nuance. With masterful prose, he indicted the age’s prevailing hypocrisy, brutality, indifference, and selfishness that tried but often failed to overlook the humanity common among all classes.

His writing brought Dickens great fame and wealth that he increased through tours of America and public readings. His private life faced challenges: His marriage to Catherine Hogarth was compromised by an affair with the actress Ellen Ternan that led to marital separation.

At the age of 58, Dickens died of a stroke. He was buried in Poet’s Corner at Westminster Abbey.

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**2.10.1: From *Hard Times***

https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Literature_and_Literacy/Book%3A_British_Literature_II_-_Romantic_Era_to_the_Twentieth_Cen...
Chapter I: The One Thing Needful

“NOW, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!”

The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a school-room, and the speaker’s square forefinger emphasized his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster’s sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s voice, which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker’s obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders,—nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was,—all helped the emphasis.

“In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!”

The speaker, and the schoolmaster, and the third grown person present, all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim.

Chapter II: Murdering the Innocents

THOMAS GRADGRIND, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir—peremptorily Thomas—Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. You might hope to get some other nonsensical belief into the head of George Gradgrind, or Augustus Gradgrind, or John Gradgrind, or Joseph Gradgrind (all supposititious, non-existent persons), but into the head of Thomas Gradgrind—no, sir!

In such terms Mr. Gradgrind always mentally introduced himself, whether to his private circle of acquaintance, or to the public in general. In such terms, no doubt, substituting the words ‘boys and girls,’ for ‘sir,’ Thomas Gradgrind now presented Thomas Gradgrind to the little pitchers before him, who were to be filled so full of facts.

Indeed, as he eagerly sparkled at them from the cellarage before mentioned, he seemed a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge. He seemed a galvanizing apparatus, too, charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be
stormed away.

‘Girl number twenty,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, squareforefinger, ‘I don’t know that girl. Who is that girl?’

‘Sissy Jupe, sir,’ explained number twenty, blushing, standing up, and curtseying.

‘Sissy is not a name,’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘Don’t call yourself Sissy. Call yourself Cecilia.’

‘It’s father as calls me Sissy, sir,’ returned the young girl in a trembling voice, and with another curtsey.

‘Then he has no business to do it,’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘Tell him he mustn’t. Cecilia Jupe. Let me see. What is your father?’

‘He belongs to the horse-riding, if you please, sir.’

Mr. Gradgrind frowned, and waved off the objectionable calling with his hand.

‘We don’t want to know anything about that, here. You mustn’t tell us about that, here. Your father breaks horses, don’t he?’

‘If you please, sir, when they can get any to break, they do break horses in the ring, sir.’

‘You mustn’t tell us about the ring, here. Very well, then. Describe your father as a horsebreaker. He doctors sick horses, I dare say?’

‘Oh yes, sir.’
'Very well, then. He is a veterinary surgeon, a farrier, and horsebreaker. Give me your definition of a horse.'

(Sissy Jupe thrown into the greatest alarm by this demand.)

‘Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!’ said Mr. Gradgrind, for the general behoof of all the little pitchers. ‘Girl number twenty possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals! Some boy’s definition of a horse. Bitzer, yours.’

The square finger, moving here and there, lighted suddenly on Bitzer, perhaps because he chanced to sit in the same ray of sunlight which, darting in at one of the bare windows of the intensely white-washed room, irradiated Sissy. For, the boys and girls sat on the face of the inclined plane in two compact bodies, divided up the centre by a narrow interval; and Sissy, being at the corner of a row on the sunny side, came in for the beginning of a sunbeam, of which Bitzer, being at the corner of a row on the other side, a few rows in advance, caught the end. But, whereas the girl was so dark-eyed and dark-haired, that she seemed to receive a deeper and more lustrous colour from the sun, when it shone upon her, the boy was so light-eyed and light-haired that the self-same rays appeared to draw out of him what little colour he ever possessed. His cold eyes would hardly have been eyes, but for the short ends of lashes which, by bringing them into immediate contrast with something paler than themselves, expressed their form. His shortcropped hair might have been a mere continuation of the sandy freckles on his forehead and face. His skin was so unwholesomely deficient in the natural tinge, that he looked as though, if he were cut, he would bleed white.

‘Bitzer,’ said Thomas Gradgrind. ‘Your definition of a horse.’

‘Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.’ Thus (and much more) Bitzer.

‘Now girl number twenty,’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘You know what a horse is.’

She curtseyed again, and would have blushed deeper, if she could have blushed deeper than she had blushed all this time. Bitzer, after rapidly blinking at Thomas Gradgrind with both eyes at once, and so catching the light upon his quivering ends of lashes that they looked like the antennae of busy insects, put his knuckles to his freckled forehead, and sat down again.
The third gentleman now stepped forth. A mighty man at cutting and drying, he was; a government officer; in his way (and in most other people’s too), a professed pugilist; always in training, always with a system to force down the general throat like a bolus, always to be heard of at the bar of his little Public-office, ready to fight all England. To continue in fistic phraseology, he had a genius for coming up to the scratch, wherever and whatever it was, and proving himself an ugly customer. He would go in and damage any subject whatever with his right, follow up with his left, stop, exchange, counter, bore his opponent (he always fought All England) to the ropes, and fall upon him neatly. He was certain to knock the wind out of common sense, and render that unlucky adversary deaf to the call of time. And he had it in charge from high authority to bring about the great public-office Millennium, when Commissioners should reign upon earth.

‘Very well,’ said this gentleman, briskly smiling, and folding his arms. ‘That’s a horse. Now, let me ask you girls and boys, Would you paper a room with representations of horses?’

After a pause, one half of the children cried in chorus, ‘Yes, sir!’ Upon which the other half, seeing in the gentleman’s face that Yes was wrong, cried out in chorus, ‘No, sir!’—as the custom is, in these examinations.

‘Of course, No. Why wouldn’t you?’

A pause. One corpulent slow boy, with a wheezy manner of breathing, ventured the answer, Because he wouldn't paper a room at all, but would paint it.

‘You must paper it,’ said the gentleman, rather warmly.

‘You must paper it,’ said Thomas Gradgrind, ‘whether you like it or not. Don’t tell us you wouldn’t paper it. What do you mean, boy?’

‘I’ll explain to you, then,’ said the gentleman, after another and a dismal pause, ‘why you wouldn’t paper a room with representations of horses. Do you ever see horses walking up and down the sides of rooms in reality—in fact? Do you?’

‘Yes, sir!’ from one half. ‘No, sir!’ from the other.

‘Of course no,’ said the gentleman, with an indignant look at the wrong half. ‘Why, then, you are not to see anywhere, what you don’t see in fact; you are not to have anywhere, what you don’t have in fact. What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact.’ Thomas Gradgrind nodded his approbation.

‘This is a new principle, a discovery, a great discovery,’ said the gentleman. ‘Now, I’ll try you again. Suppose you were going to carpet a room. Would you use a carpet having a representation of flowers upon it?’

There being a general conviction by this time that ‘No, sir!’ was always the right answer to this gentleman, the chorus of no was very strong. Only a few feeble stragglers said Yes: among them Sissy Jupe.

‘Girl number twenty,’ said the gentleman, smiling in the calm strength of knowledge.

Sissy blushed, and stood up.

‘So you would carpet your room—or your husband’s room, if you were a grown woman, and had a husband—with representations of flowers, would you?’ said the gentleman. ‘Why would you?’
'If you please, sir, I am very fond of flowers,' returned the girl.

'And is that why you would put tables and chairs upon them, and have people walking over them with heavy boots?'

'It wouldn’t hurt them, sir. They wouldn’t crush and wither, if you please, sir. They would be the pictures of what was very pretty and pleasant, and I would fancy—'

'Ay, ay, ay! But you mustn’t fancy,' cried the gentleman, quite elated by coming so happily to his point. 'That’s it! You are never to fancy.'

'You are not, Cecilia Jupe,' Thomas Gradgrind solemnly repeated, 'to do anything of that kind.'

'Fact, fact, fact!' said the gentleman. And ‘Fact, fact, fact!’ repeated Thomas Gradgrind.

'You are to be in all things regulated and governed,' said the gentleman, 'by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it. You are not to have, in any object of use or ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact. You don’t walk upon flowers in fact; you cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets. You don’t find that foreign birds and butterflies come and perch upon your crockery; you cannot be permitted to paint foreign birds and butterflies upon your crockery. You never meet with quadrupeds going up and down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls. You must use,' said the gentleman, ‘for all these purposes, combinations and modifications (in primary colours) of mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration. This is the new discovery. This is fact. This is taste.’

The girl curtseyed, and sat down. She was very young, and she looked as if she were frightened by the matter-of-fact prospect the world afforded.

'Now, if Mr. M'Choakumchild,' said the gentleman, 'will proceed to give his first lesson here, Mr. Gradgrind, I shall be happy, at your request, to observe his mode of procedure.'

Mr. Gradgrind was much obliged. 'Mr. M'Choakumchild, we only wait for you.'

So, Mr. M'Choakumchild began in his best manner. He and some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs. He had been put through an immense variety of paces, and had answered volumes of headbreaking questions. Orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody, biography, astronomy, geography, and general cosmography, the sciences of compound proportion, algebra, land-surveying and levelling, vocal music, and drawing from models, were all at the ends of his ten chilled fingers. He had worked his stony way into Her Majesty’s most Honourable Privy Council’s Schedule B, and had taken the bloom off the higher branches of mathematics and physical science, French, German, Latin, and Greek. He knew all about all the Water Sheds of all the world (whatever they are), and all the histories of all the peoples, and all the names of all the rivers and mountains, and all the productions, manners, and customs of all the countries, and all their boundaries and bearings on the two and thirty points of the compass. Ah, rather overdone, M'Choakumchild. If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more!

He went to work in this preparatory lesson, not unlike Morgiana in the Forty Thieves: looking into all the vessels ranged
before him, one after another, to see what they contained. Say, good M’Choakumchild. When from thy boiling store, thou shalt fill each jar brim full by-and-by, dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within—or sometimes only maim him and distort him!

Grandgrind discovers his children, Tom and Louisa, watching the circus. He chastises them, invoking the disapproval of Mr. Bounderby. Deciding that the children have been negatively influenced by Sissy Jupe, Grandgrind and Bounderby decide to kick her out of the school.

Chapter V: The Keynote

COKETOWN, to which Mr’s. Bounderby and Gradgrind now walked, was a triumph of fact; it had no greater taint of fancy in it than Mrs. Gradgrind herself. Let us strike the key-note, Coketown, before pursuing our tune.

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood, it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steamengine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next.

These attributes of Coketown were in the main inseparable from the work by which it was sustained; against them were to be set off, comforts of life which found their way all over the world, and elegancies of life which made, we will not ask how much of the fine lady, who could scarcely bear to hear the place mentioned. The rest of its features were voluntary, and they were these.

You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful. If the members of a religious persuasion built a chapel there—as the members of eighteen religious persuasions had done—they made it a pious warehouse of red brick, with sometimes (but this is only in highly ornamental examples) a bell in a birdcage on the top of it. The solitary exception was the New Church; a stuccoed edifice with a square steeple over the door, terminating in four short pinnacles like florid wooden legs. All the public inscriptions in the town were painted alike, in severe characters of black and white. The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction. Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M’Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn’t state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen.
A town so sacred to fact, and so triumphant in its assertion, of course got on well? Why no, not quite well. No? Dear me!

No. Coketown did not come out of its own furnaces, in all respects like gold that had stood the fire. First, the perplexing mystery of the place was, Who belonged to the eighteen denominations? Because, whoever did, the labouring people did not. It was very strange to walk through the streets on a Sunday morning, and note how few of them the barbarous jangling of bells that was driving the sick and nervous mad, called away from their own quarter, from their own close rooms, from the corners of their own streets, where they lounged listlessly, gazing at all the church and chapel going, as at a thing with which they had no manner of concern. Nor was it merely the stranger who noticed this, because there was a native organization in Coketown itself, whose members were to be heard of in the House of Commons every session, indignantly petitioning for acts of parliament that should make these people religious by main force. Then came the Teetotal Society, who complained that these same people would get drunk, and showed in tabular statements that they did get drunk, and proved at tea parties that no inducement, human or Divine (except a medal), would induce them to forego their custom of getting drunk. Then came the chemist and druggist, with other tabular statements, showing that when they didn't get drunk, they took opium. Then came the experienced chaplain of the jail, with more tabular statements, outdoing all the previous tabular statements, and showing that the same people would resort to low haunts, hidden from the public eye, where they heard low singing and saw low dancing, and mayhap joined in it; and where A. B., aged twenty-four next birthday, and committed for eighteen months' solitary, had himself said (not that he had ever shown himself particularly worthy of belief) his ruin began, as he was perfectly sure and confident that otherwise he would have been a tip-top moral specimen. Then came Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby, the two gentlemen at this present moment walking through Coketown, and both eminently practical, who could, on occasion, furnish more tabular statements derived from their own personal experience, and illustrated by cases they had known and seen, from which it clearly appeared—in short, it was the only clear thing in the case—that these same people were a bad lot altogether, gentlemen; that do what you would for them they were never thankful for it, gentlemen; that they were restless, gentlemen; that they never knew what they wanted; that they lived upon the best, and bought fresh butter; and insisted on Mocha coffee, and rejected all but prime parts of meat, and yet were eternally dissatisfied and unmanageable. In short, it was the moral of the old nursery fable:

There was an old woman, and what do you think?

She lived upon nothing but victuals and drink;

Victuals and drink were the whole of her diet,

And yet this old woman would never be quiet.

Is it possible, I wonder, that there was any analogy between the case of the Coketown population and the case of the little Gradgrinds? Surely, none of us in our sober senses and acquainted with figures, are to be told at this time of day, that one of the foremost elements in the existence of the Coketown working-people had been for scores of years, deliberately set at nought? That there was any Fancy in them demanding to be brought into healthy existence instead of struggling on in convulsions? That exactly in the ratio as they worked long and monotonously, the craving grew within them for some physical relief—some relaxation, encouraging good humour and good spirits, and giving them a vent—some recognized holiday, though it were but for an honest dance to a stirring band of music—some occasional
light pie in which even M’Choakumchild had no finger—which craving must and would be satisfied aright, or must and
would inevitably go wrong, until the laws of the Creation were repealed?

‘This man lives at Pod’s End, and I don’t quite know Pod’s End,’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘Which is it, Bounderby?’

Mr. Bounderby knew it was somewhere down town, but knew no more respecting it. So they stopped for a moment,
looking about.

Almost as they did so, there came running round the corner of the street at a quick pace and with a frightened look, a girl
whom Mr. Gradgrind recognized. ‘Halloa!’ said he. ‘Stop! Where are you going! Stop!’ Girl number twenty stopped then,
palpitating, and made him a curtsey.

‘Why are you tearing about the streets,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, ‘in this improper manner?’

‘I was—I was run after, sir,’ the girl panted, ‘and I wanted to get away.’

‘Run after?’ repeated Mr. Gradgrind. ‘Who would run after you?’

The question was unexpectedly and suddenly answered for her, by the colourless boy, Bitzer, who came round the
corner with such blind speed and so little anticipating a stoppage on the pavement, that he brought himself up against
Mr. Gradgrind’s waistcoat and rebounded into the road.

‘What do you mean, boy?’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘What are you doing? How dare you dash against—everybody—in this
manner?’ Bitzer picked up his cap, which the concussion had knocked off; and backing, and knuckling his forehead,
pleaded that it was an accident.

‘Was this boy running after you, Jupe?’ asked Mr. Gradgrind.

‘Yes, sir,’ said the girl reluctantly.

‘No, I wasn’t, sir!’ cried Bitzer. ‘Not till she run away from me. But the horseriders never mind what they say, sir; they’re
famous for it. You know the horseriders are famous for never minding what they say,’ addressing Sissy. ‘It’s as well
known in the town as—please, sir, as the multiplication table isn’t known to the horse-riders.’ Bitzer tried Mr. Bounderby
with this.

‘He frightened me so,’ said the girl, ‘with his cruel faces!’

‘Oh!’ cried Bitzer. ‘Oh! An’t you one of the rest! An’t you a horse-rider! I never looked at her, sir. I asked her if she would
know how to define a horse to-morrow, and offered to tell her again, and she ran away, and I ran after her, sir, that she
might know how to answer when she was asked. You wouldn’t have thought of saying such mischief if you hadn’t been
a horse-rider?’

‘Her calling seems to be pretty well known among ’em,’ observed Mr. Bounderby. ‘You’d have had the whole school
peeping in a row, in a week.’

‘Truly, I think so,’ returned his friend. ‘Bitzer, turn you about and take yourself home. Jupe, stay here a moment. Let me
hear of your running in this manner any more, boy, and you will hear of me through the master of the school. You
understand what I mean. Go along.'

The boy stopped in his rapid blinking, knuckled his forehead again, glanced at Sissy, turned about, and retreated.

‘Now, girl,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, ‘take this gentleman and me to your father’s; we are going there. What have you got in that bottle you are carrying?’

‘Gin,’ said Mr. Bounderby.

‘Dear, no, sir! It’s the nine oils.’

‘The what?’ cried Mr. Bounderby.

‘The nine oils, sir, to rub father with.’

‘Then,’ said Mr. Bounderby, with a loud short laugh, ‘what the devil do you rub your father with nine oils for?’

‘It’s what our people aways use, sir, when they get any hurts in the ring,’ replied the girl, looking over her shoulder, to assure herself that her pursuer was gone. ‘They bruise themselves very bad sometimes.’

‘Serve ’em right,’ said Mr. Bounderby, ‘for being idle.’ She glanced up at his face, with mingled astonishment and dread.

‘By George!’ said Mr. Bounderby, ‘when I was four or five years younger than you, I had worse bruises upon me than ten oils, twenty oils, forty oils, would have rubbed off. I didn’t get ’em by posture-making, but by being banged about. There was no rope- dancing for me; I danced on the bare ground and was larruped with the rope.’

Mr. Gradgrind, though hard enough, was by no means so rough a man as Mr. Bounderby. His character was not unkind, all things considered; it might have been a very kind one indeed, if he had only made some round mistake in the arithmetic that balanced it, years ago. He said, in what he meant for a reassuring tone, as they turned down a narrow road, ‘And this is Pod’s End; is it, Jupe?’

‘This is it, sir, and—if you wouldn’t mind, sir—this is the house.’

She stopped, at twilight, at the door of a mean little public- house, with dim red lights in it. As haggard and as shabby, as if, for want of custom, it had itself taken to drinking, and had gone the way all drunkards go, and was very near the end of it.

‘It’s only crossing the bar, sir, and up the stairs, if you wouldn’t mind, and waiting there for a moment till I get a candle. If you shoul d hear a dog, sir, it’s only Merrylegs, and he only barks.’

‘Merrylegs and nine oils, eh!’ said Mr. Bounderby, entering last with his metallic laugh. ‘Pretty well this, for a self-made man!’

Chapter VI: Sleary’s Horsemanship
THE name of the public-house was the Pegasus’s Arms. The Pegasus’s legs might have been more to the purpose; but, underneath the winged horse upon the sign-board, the Pegasus’s Arms was inscribed in Roman letters. Beneath that inscription again, in a flowing scroll, the painter had touched off the lines:

Good malt makes good beer,

Walk in, and they’ll draw it here;

Good wine makes good brandy,

Give us a call, and you’ll find it handy.

Framed and glazed upon the wall behind the dingy little bar, was another Pegasus—a theatrical one—with real gauze let in for his wings, golden stars stuck on all over him, and his ethereal harness made of red silk.

As it had grown too dusky without, to see the sign, and as it had not grown light enough within to see the picture, Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby received no offence from these idealities. They followed the girl up some steep corner-stairs without meeting any one, and stopped in the dark while she went on for a candle. They expected every moment to hear Merrylegs give tongue, but the highly trained performing dog had not barked when the girl and the candle appeared together.

‘Father is not in our room, sir,’ she said, with a face of great surprise. ‘If you wouldn’t mind walking in, I’ll find him directly.’ They walked in; and Sissy, having set two chairs for them, sped away with a quick light step. It was a mean, shabbily furnished room, with a bed in it. The white night-cap, embellished with two peacock’s feathers and a pigtail bolt upright, in which Signor Jupe had that very afternoon enlivened the varied performances with his chaste Shaksperean quips and retorts, hung upon a nail; but no other portion of his wardrobe, or other token of himself or his pursuits, was to be seen anywhere. As to Merrylegs, that respectable ancestor of the highly trained animal who went aboard the ark, might have been accidentally shut out of it, for any sign of a dog that was manifest to eye or ear in the Pegasus’s Arms.

They heard the doors of rooms above, opening and shutting as Sissy went from one to another in quest of her father; and presently they heard voices expressing surprise. She came bounding down again in a great hurry, opened a battered and mangy old hair trunk, found it empty, and looked round with her hands clasped and her face full of terror.

‘Father must have gone down to the Booth, sir. I don’t know why he should go there, but he must be there; I’ll bring him in a minute!’ She was gone directly, without her bonnet; with her long, dark, childish hair streaming behind her.

‘What does she mean!’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘Back in a minute? It’s more than a mile off.’

Before Mr. Bounderby could reply, a young man appeared at the door, and introducing himself with the words, ‘By your leaves, gentlemen!’ walked in with his hands in his pockets. His face, close-shaven, thin, and sallow, was shaded by a great quantity of dark hair, brushed into a roll all round his head, and parted up the centre. His legs were very robust, but shorter than legs of good proportions should have been. His chest and back were as much too broad, as his legs were too short. He was dressed in a Newmarket coat and tight-fitting trousers; wore a shawl round his neck; smelt of lamp-oil, straw, orange-peel, horses’ provender, and sawdust; and looked a most remarkable sort of Centaur, compounded of the
stable and the play-house. Where the one began, and the other ended, nobody could have told with any precision. This gentleman was mentioned in the bills of the day as Mr. E. W. B. Childers, so justly celebrated for his daring vaulting act as the Wild Huntsman of the North American Prairies; in which popular performance, a diminutive boy with an old face, who now accompanied him, assisted as his infant son: being carried upside down over his father’s shoulder, by one foot, and held by the crown of his head, heels upwards, in the palm of his father’s hand, according to the violent paternal manner in which wild huntsmen may be observed to fondle their offspring. Made up with curls, wreaths, wings, white bismuth, and carmine, this hopeful young person soared into so pleasing a Cupid as to constitute the chief delight of the maternal part of the spectators; but in private, where his characteristics were a precocious cutaway coat and an extremely gruff voice, he became of the Turf, turfy.

‘By your leaves, gentlemen,’ said Mr. E. W. B. Childers, glancing round the room.

‘It was you, I believe, that were wishing to see Jupe!’ ‘It was,’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘His daughter has gone to fetch him, but I can’t wait; therefore, if you please, I will leave a message for him with you.’

‘You see, my friend,’ Mr. Bounderby put in, ‘we are the kind of people who know the value of time, and you are the kind of people who don’t know the value of time.’

‘I have not,’ retorted Mr. Childers, after surveying him from head to foot, ‘the honour of knowing you,—but if you mean that you can make more money of your time than I can of mine, I should judge from your appearance, that you are about right.’

‘And when you have made it, you can keep it too, I should think,’ said Cupid.

‘Kidderminster, stow that!’ said Mr. Childers. (Master Kidderminster was Cupid’s mortal name.)

‘What does he come here cheeking us for, then?’ cried Master Kidderminster, showing a very irascible temperament. ‘If you want to cheek us, pay your ochre at the doors and take it out.’

‘Kidderminster,’ said Mr. Childers, raising his voice, ‘stow that!—Sir,’ to Mr. Gradgrind, ‘I was addressing myself to you. You may or you may not be aware (for perhaps you have not been much in the audience), that Jupe has missed his tip very often, lately.’

‘Has—what has he missed?’ asked Mr. Gradgrind, glancing at the potent Bounderby for assistance.

‘Missed his tip.’

‘Offered at the Garters four times last night, and never done ’em once,’ said Master Kidderminster. ‘Missed his tip at the banners, too, and was loose in his ponging.’

‘Didn’t do what he ought to do. Was short in his leaps and bad in his tumbling.’ Mr. Childers interpreted.

‘Oh!’ said Mr. Gradgrind, ‘that is tip, is it?’

‘In a general way that’s missing his tip,’ Mr. E. W. B. Childers answered.

‘Nine oils, Merrylegs, missing tips, garters, banners, and Ponging, eh!’ ejaculated Bounderby, with his laugh of laughs.
'Queer sort of company, too, for a man who has raised himself!

'Lower yourself, then,' retorted Cupid. 'Oh Lord! if you've raised yourself so high as all that comes to, let yourself down a bit.'

'This is a very obtrusive lad!' said Mr. Gradgrind, turning, and knitting his brows on him.

'We'd have had a young gentleman to meet you, if we had known you were coming,' retorted Master Kidderminster, nothing abashed. 'It's a pity you don't have a bespeak, being so particular. You're on the Tight-Jeff, ain't you?'

'What does this unmannerly boy mean,' asked Mr. Gradgrind, eyeing him in a sort of desperation, 'by Tight-Jeff?'

'There! Get out, get out!' said Mr. Childers, thrusting his young friend from the room, rather in the prairie manner. 'Tight-Jeff or Slack-Jeff, it don't much signify: it's only tight-rope and slack-rope. You were going to give me a message for Jupe?'

'Yes, I was.'

'Then,' continued Mr. Childers, quickly, 'my opinion is, he will never receive it. Do you know much of him?'

'I never saw the man in my life.'

'I doubt if you ever will see him now. It's pretty plain to me, he's off.'

'Do you mean that he has deserted his daughter?'

'Ay! I mean,' said Mr. Childers, with a nod, 'that he has cut. He was goosed last night, he was goosed the night before last, he was goosed to-day. He has lately got in the way of being always goosed, and he can't stand it.'

'Why has he been—so very much—Goosed?' asked Mr. Gradgrind, forcing the word out of himself, with great solemnity and reluctance.

'His joints are turning stiff, and he is getting used up,' said Childers. 'He has his points as a Cackler still, but he can't get a living out of them.'

'A Cackler!' Bounderby repeated. 'Here we go again!'

'A speaker, if the gentleman likes it better,' said Mr. E. W. B. Childers, superciliously throwing the interpretation over his shoulder, and accompanying it with a shake of his long hair—which all shook at once. 'Now, it's a remarkable fact, sir, that it cut that man deeper, to know that his daughter knew of his being goosed, than to go through with it.'

'Good!' interrupted Mr. Bounderby. 'This is good, Gradgrind! A man so fond of his daughter, that he runs away from her! This is devilish good! Ha! ha! Now, I'll tell you what, young man. I haven't always occupied my present station of life. I know what these things are. You may be astonished to hear it, but my mother—ran away from me.'

E. W. B. Childers replied pointedly, that he was not at all astonished to hear it.
‘Very well,’ said Bounderby. ‘I was born in a ditch, and my mother ran away from me. Do I excuse her for it? No. Have I ever excused her for it? Not I. What do I call her for it? I call her probably the very worst woman that ever lived in the world, except my drunken grandmother. There’s no family pride about me, there’s no imaginative sentimental humbug about me. I call a spade a spade; and I call the mother of Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, without any fear or any favour, what I should call her if she had been the mother of Dick Jones of Wapping. So, with this man. He is a runaway rogue and a vagabond, that’s what he is, in English.’

‘It’s all the same to me what he is or what he is not, whether in English or whether in French,’ retorted Mr. E. W. B. Childers, facing about. ‘I am telling your friend what’s the fact; if you don’t like to hear it, you can avail yourself of the open air. You give it mouth enough, you do; but give it mouth in your own building at least,’ remonstrated E. W. B. with stern irony. ‘Don’t give it mouth in this building, till you’re called upon. You have got some building of your own I dare say, now?’

‘Perhaps so,’ replied Mr. Bounderby, rattling his money and laughing.

‘Then give it mouth in your own building, will you, if you please?’ said Childers. ‘Because this isn’t a strong building, and too much of you might bring it down!’

Eyeing Mr. Bounderby from head to foot again, he turned from him, as from a man finally disposed of, to Mr. Gradgrind.

‘Jupe sent his daughter out on an errand not an hour ago, and then was seen to slip out himself, with his hat over his eyes, and a bundle tied up in a handkerchief under his arm. She will never believe it of him, but he has cut away and left her.’

‘Pray,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, ‘why will she never believe it of him?’

‘Because those two were one. Because they were never asunder. Because, up to this time, he seemed to dote upon her,’ said Childers, taking a step or two to look into the empty trunk. Both Mr. Childers and Master Kidderminster walked in a curious manner; with their legs wider apart than the general run of men, and with a very knowing assumption of being stiff in the knees. This walk was common to all the male members of Sleary’s company, and was understood to express, that they were always on horseback.

‘Poor Sissy! He had better have apprenticed her,’ said Childers, giving his hair another shake, as he looked up from the empty box. ‘Now, he leaves her without anything to take to.’

‘It is creditable to you, who have never been apprenticed, to express that opinion,’ returned Mr. Gradgrind, approvingly.

‘I never apprenticed? I was apprenticed when I was seven year old.’

‘Oh! Indeed?’ said Mr. Gradgrind, rather resentfully, as having been defrauded of his good opinion. ‘I was not aware of its being the custom to apprentice young persons to—’

‘Idleness,’ Mr. Bounderby put in with a loud laugh. ‘No, by the Lord Harry! Nor I!’

‘Her father always had it in his head,’ resumed Childers, feigning unconsciousness of Mr. Bounderby’s existence, ‘that she was to be taught the deuce-and-all of education. How it got into his head, I can’t say; I can only say that it never got
out. He has been picking up a bit of reading for her, here—and a bit of writing for her, there—and a bit of ciphering for
her, somewhere else—these seven years.'

Mr. E. W. B. Childers took one of his hands out of his pockets, stroked his face and chin, and looked, with a good deal of
doubt and a little hope, at Mr. Gradgrind. From the first he had sought to conciliate that gentleman, for the sake of the
deserted girl.

'When Sissy got into the school here,' he pursued, 'her father was as pleased as Punch. I couldn't altogether make out
why, myself, as we were not stationary here, being but comers and goers anywhere. I suppose, however, he had this
move in his mind—he was always half-cracked—and then considered her provided for. If you should happen to have
looked in to-night, for the purpose of telling him that you were going to do her any little service,' said Mr. Childers,
stroking his face again, and repeating his look, 'it would be very fortunate and well-timed; very fortunate and well-timed.'

'On the contrary,' returned Mr. Gradgrind. 'I came to tell him that her connections made her not an object for the school,
and that she must not attend any more. Still, if her father really has left her, without any connivance on her
part—Bounderby, let me have a word with you.'

Upon this, Mr. Childers politely betook himself, with his equestrian walk, to the landing outside the door, and there stood
stroking his face, and softly whistling. While thus engaged, he overheard such phrases in Mr. Bounderby's voice as 'No.
I say no. I advise you not. I say by no means.' While, from Mr. Gradgrind, he heard in his much lower tone the words,
'But even as an example to Louisa, of what this pursuit which has been the subject of a vulgar curiosity, leads to and
ends in. Think of it, Bounderby, in that point of view.'

Meanwhile, the various members of Sleary's company gradually gathered together from the upper regions, where they
were quartered, and, from standing about, talking in low voices to one another and to Mr. Childers, gradually insinuated
themselves and him into the room. There were two or three handsome young women among them, with their two or
three husbands, and their two or three mothers, and their eight or nine little children, who did the fairy business when
required. The father of one of the families was in the habit of balancing the father of another of the families on the top of
a great pole; the father of a third family often made a pyramid of both those fathers, with Master Kidderminster for the
apex, and himself for the base; all the fathers could dance upon rolling casks, stand upon bottles, catch knives and balls,
twirl hand-basins, ride upon anything, jump over everything, and stick at nothing. All the mothers could (and did) dance,
upon the slack wire and the tight-rope, and perform rapid acts on bare-backed steeds; none of them were at all
particular in respect of showing their legs; and one of them, alone in a Greek chariot, drove six in hand into every town
they came to. They all assumed to be mighty rakish and knowing, they were not very tidy in their private dresses, they
were not at all orderly in their domestic arrangements, and the combined literature of the whole company would have
produced but a poor letter on any subject. Yet there was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people,
a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another, deserving
often of as much respect, and always of as much generous construction, as the every-day virtues of any class of people
in the world.

Last of all appeared Mr. Sleary: a stout man as already mentioned, with one fixed eye, and one loose eye, a voice (if it
can be called so) like the efforts of a broken old pair of bellows, a flabby surface, and a muddled head which was never
sober and never drunk.
‘Thquire!’ said Mr. Sleary, who was troubled with asthma, and whose breath came far too thick and heavy for the letter s,
‘Your thervant! Thith ith a bad piethe of bithnith, thith ith. You've heard of my Clown and hith dog being thuppothed to
have morrithed?’

He addressed Mr. Gradgrind, who answered ‘Yes.’

‘Well, Thquire,’ he returned, taking off his hat, and rubbing the lining with his pocket-handkerchief, which he kept inside
for the purpose. ‘Ith it your intention to do anything for the poor girl, Thquire?’

‘I shall have something to propose to her when she comes back,’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘

Glad to hear it, Thquire. Not that I want to get rid of the child, any more than I want to thtand in her way. I’m willing to
take her prentith, though at her age ith late. My voithe ith a little huthky, Thquire, and not eathy heard by them ath don’t
know me; but if you’d been chilled and heated, heated and chilled, chilled and heated in the ring when you wath young,
ath often ath I have been, your voithe wouldn't have lathted out, Thquire, no more than mine.’

‘I dare say not,’ said Mr. Gradgrind.

‘What thall it be, Thquire, while you wait? Thall it be Therry? Give it a name, Thquire!’ said Mr. Sleary, with hospitable
ease.

‘Nothing for me, I thank you,’ said Mr. Gradgrind.

‘Don’t thay nothing, Thquire. What doth your friend thay? If you haven’t took your feed yet, have a glath of bitterth.’

Here his daughter Josephine—a pretty fair-haired girl of eighteen, who had been tied on a horse at two years old, and
had made a will at twelve, which she always carried about with her, expressive of her dying desire to be drawn to the
grave by the two piebald ponies—cried, ‘Father, hush! she has come back!’ Then came Sissy Jupe, running into the
room as she had run out of it. And when she saw them all assembled, and saw their looks, and saw no father there, she
broke into a most deplorable cry, and took refuge on the bosom of the most accomplished tightrope lady (herself in the
family-way), who knelt down on the floor to nurse her, and to weep over her.

‘Ith an internal thame, upon my thoul it ith,’ said Sleary.

‘O my dear father, my good kind father, where are you gone? You are gone to try to do me some good, I know! You are
gone away for my sake, I am sure! And how miserable and helpless you will be without me, poor, poor father, until you
come back!’ It was so pathetic to hear her saying many things of this kind, with her face turned upward, and her arms
stretched out as if she were trying to stop his departing shadow and embrace it, that no one spoke a word until Mr.
Bounderby (growing impatient) took the case in hand.

‘Now, good people all,’ said he, ‘this is wanton waste of time. Let the girl understand the fact. Let her take it from me, if
you like, who have been run away from, myself. Here, what’s your name! Your father has absconded—deserted you—and
you mustn’t expect to see him again as long as you live.’

They cared so little for plain Fact, these people, and were in that advanced state of degeneracy on the subject, that
instead of being impressed by the speaker’s strong common sense, they took it in extraordinary dudgeon. The men
muttered ‘Shame!’ and the women ‘Brute!’ and Sleary, in some haste, communicated the following hint, apart to Mr. Bounderby.

‘I tell you what, Thquire. To thpeak plain to you, my opinion ith that you had better cut it thort, and drop it. They’re a very good natur’d people, my people, but they’re accuthomed to be quick in their movementh; and if you don’t act upon my advithe, I’m damned if I don’t believe they’ll pith you out o’ winder.’

Mr. Bounderby being restrained by this mild suggestion, Mr. Gradgrind found an opening for his eminently practical exposition of the subject.

‘It is of no moment,’ said he, ‘whether this person is to be expected back at any time, or the contrary. He is gone away, and there is no present expectation of his return. That, I believe, is agreed on all hands.’

‘Thath agreed, Thquire. Thick to that!’ From Sleary.

‘Well then. I, who came here to inform the father of the poor girl, Jupe, that she could not be received at the school any more, in consequence of there being practical objections, into which I need not enter, to the reception there of the children of persons so employed, am prepared in these altered circumstances to make a proposal. I am willing to take charge of you, Jupe, and to educate you, and provide for you. The only condition (over and above your good behaviour) I make is, that you decide now, at once, whether to accompany me or remain here. Also, that if you accompany me now, it is understood that you communicate no more with any of your friends who are here present. These observations comprise the whole of the case.’ ‘At the thame time,’ said Sleary, ‘I mutht put in my word, Thquire, tho that both thides of the banner may be equally theen. If you like, Thethilia, to be prentitht, you know the natur of the work and you know your companionth. Emma Gordon, in whothe lap you’re a lying at prethent, would be a mother to you, and Joth’phine would be a thither to you. I don’t pretend to be of the angel breed myself, and I don’t thay but what, when you mith’d your tip, you’d find me cut up rough, and thwear an oath or two at you. But what I thay, Thquire, ith, that good tempered or bad tempered, I never did a horthe a injury yet, no more than thwearing at him went, and that I don’t expect I thall begin otherwithe at my time of life, with a rider. I never wath much of a Cackler, Thquire, and I have thed my thay.’

The latter part of this speech was addressed to Mr. Gradgrind, who received it with a grave inclination of his head, and then remarked:

‘The only observation I will make to you, Jupe, in the way of influencing your decision, is, that it is highly desirable to have a sound practical education, and that even your father himself (from what I understand) appears, on your behalf, to have known and felt that much.’

The last words had a visible effect upon her. She stopped in her wild crying, a little detached herself from Emma Gordon, and turned her face full upon her patron. The whole company perceived the force of the change, and drew a long breath together, that plainly said, ‘she will go!’

‘Be sure you know your own mind, Jupe,’ Mr. Gradgrind cautioned her; ‘I say no more. Be sure you know your own mind!’

‘When father comes back,’ cried the girl, bursting into tears again after a minute’s silence, ‘how will he ever find me if I go away!’
‘You may be quite at ease,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, calmly; he worked out the whole matter like a sum: ‘you may be quite at ease, Jupe, on that score. In such a case, your father, I apprehend, must find out Mr.—’


‘Must find out Mr. Sleary, who would then let him know where you went. I should have no power of keeping you against his wish, and he would have no difficulty, at any time, in finding Mr. Thomas Gradgrind of Coketown. I am well known.’

‘Well known,’ assented Mr. Sleary, rolling his loose eye. ‘You’re one of the thort, Thquire, that keepth a prethiouth thight of money out of the houthe. But never mind that at prethent.’

There was another silence; and then she exclaimed, sobbing with her hands before her face, ‘Oh, give me my clothes, give me my clothes, and let me go away before I break my heart!’

The women sadly bestirred themselves to get the clothes together—it was soon done, for they were not many—and to pack them in a basket which had often travelled with them. Sissy sat all the time upon the ground, still sobbing, and covering her eyes. Mr. Gradgrind and his friend Bounderby stood near the door, ready to take her away. Mr. Sleary stood in the middle of the room, with the male members of the company about him, exactly as he would have stood in the centre of the ring during his daughter Josephine’s performance. He wanted nothing but his whip.

The basket packed in silence, they brought her bonnet to her, and smoothed her disordered hair, and put it on. Then they pressed about her, and bent over her in very natural attitudes, kissing and embracing her: and brought the children to take leave of her; and were a tender-hearted, simple, foolish set of women altogether.

‘Now, Jupe,’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘If you are quite determined, come!’

But she had to take her farewell of the male part of the company yet, and every one of them had to unfold his arms (for they all assumed the professional attitude when they found themselves near Sleary), and give her a parting kiss—Master Kidderminster excepted, in whose young nature there was an original flavour of the misanthrope, who was also known to have harboured matrimonial views, and who moodily withdrew. Mr. Sleary was reserved until the last. Opening his arms wide he took her by both her hands, and would have sprung her up and down, after the riding-master manner of congratulating young ladies on their dismounting from a rapid act; but there was no rebound in Sissy, and she only stood before him crying.

‘Good-bye, my dear!’ said Sleary. ‘You’ll make your fortun, I hope, and none of our poor folkth will ever trouble you, I’ll pound it. I with your father hadn’t taken hith dog with him; ith a ill-conwenienth to have the dog out of the billth. But on thecond thoughth, he wouldn’t have performed without hith mathter, tho ith ath broad ath ith long!’

With that he regarded her attentively with his fixed eye, surveyed his company with his loose one, kissed her, shook his head, and handed her to Mr. Gradgrind as to a horse.

‘There the ith, Thquire,’ he said, sweeping her with a professional glance as if she were being adjusted in her seat, ‘and the’ll do you juthitthe. Good-bye, Thethilia!’ ‘Good-bye, Cecilia!’

‘Good-bye, Sissy!’ ‘God bless you, dear!’ In a variety of voices from all the room.
But the riding-master eye had observed the bottle of the nine oils in her bosom, and he now interposed with ‘Leave the bottle, my dear; it is large to carry; it will be of no use to you now. Give it to me!’

‘No, no!’ she said, in another burst of tears. ‘Oh, no! Pray let me keep it for father till he comes back! He will want it when he comes back. He had never thought of going away, when he sent me for it. I must keep it for him, if you please!’

‘Tho be it, my dear. (You thee how it ith, Thquire!) Farewell, Thetthilia! My last wordth to you ith thith, Thtick to the termth of your engagement, be obedient to the Thquire, and forget uth. But if, when you’re grown up and married and well off, you come upon any horthe-riding ever, don’t be hard upon it, don’t be croth with it, give it a Bethpeak if you can, and think you might do wurth. People muth be amuthed, Thquire, thomehow,’ continued Sleary, rendered more pursy than ever, by so much talking; ‘they can’t be alwayth a working, nor yet they can’t be alwayth a learning. Make the betht of uth; not the wurtht. I’ve got my living out of the horthe-riding all my life, I know; but I conthider that I lay down the philothophy of the thubject when I thay to you, Thquire, make the betht of uth: not the wurtht!’

The Sleary philosophy was propounded as they went downstairs and the fixed eye of Philosophy—and its rolling eye, too—soon lost the three figures and the basket in the darkness of the street.

*Bounderby’s housekeeper Mrs. Sparsit dwells on her aristocratic family connections. Louisa Grandgrind describes her feelings of meaninglessness and moral vacuity to her brother.*

**Chapter IX: Sissy’s Progress**

Sissy Jupe had not an easy time of it, between Mr. M’Choakumchild and Mrs. Gradgrind, and was not without strong impulses, in the first months of her probation, to run away. It hailed facts all day long so very hard, and life in general was opened to her as such a closely ruled ciphering-book, that assuredly she would have run away, but for only one restraint.

It is lamentable to think of; but this restraint was the result of no arithmetical process, was self-imposed in defiance of all calculation, and went dead against any table of probabilities that any Actuary would have drawn up from the premises. The girl believed that her father had not deserted her; she lived in the hope that he would come back, and in the faith that he would be made the happier by her remaining where she was.

The wretched ignorance with which Jupe clung to this consolation, rejecting the superior comfort of knowing, on a sound arithmetical basis, that her father was an unnatural vagabond, filled Mr. Gradgrind with pity. Yet, what was to be done? M’Choakumchild reported that she had a very dense head for figures; that, once possessed with a general idea of the globe, she took the smallest conceivable interest in its exact measurements; that she was extremely slow in the acquisition of dates, unless some pitiful incident happened to be connected therewith; that she would burst into tears on being required (by the mental process) immediately to name the cost of two hundred and forty-seven muslin caps at fourteen-pence halfpenny; that she was as low down, in the school, as low could be; that after eight weeks of induction...
into the elements of Political Economy, she had only yesterday been set right by a prattler three feet high, for returning to the question, 'What is the first principle of this science?' the absurd answer, 'To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me.'

Mr. Gradgrind observed, shaking his head, that all this was very bad; that it showed the necessity of infinite grinding at the mill of knowledge, as per system, schedule, blue book, report, and tabular statements A to Z; and that Jupe 'must be kept to it.' So Jupe was kept to it, and became low-spirited, but no wiser.

'It would be a fine thing to be you, Miss Louisa!' she said, one night, when Louisa had endeavoured to make her perplexities for next day something clearer to her.

'Do you think so?'

'I should know so much, Miss Louisa. All that is difficult to me now, would be so easy then.'

'You might not be the better for it, Sissy.'

Sissy submitted, after a little hesitation, 'I should not be the worse, Miss Louisa.' To which Miss Louisa answered, 'I don't know that.'

There had been so little communication between these two—both because life at Stone Lodge went monotonously round like a piece of machinery which discouraged human interference, and because of the prohibition relative to Sissy's past career—that they were still almost strangers. Sissy, with her dark eyes wonderingly directed to Louisa's face, was uncertain whether to say more or to remain silent.

'You are more useful to my mother, and more pleasant with her than I can ever be,' Louisa resumed. 'You are pleasanter to yourself, than I am to myself.'

'But, if you please, Miss Louisa,' Sissy pleaded, 'I am—O so stupid!'

Louisa, with a brighter laugh than usual, told her she would be wiser by-and-by.

'You don't know,' said Sissy, half crying, 'what a stupid girl I am. All through school hours I make mistakes. Mr. and Mrs. M'Choakumchild call me up, over and over again, regularly to make mistakes. I can't help them. They seem to come natural to me.'

'Mr. and Mrs. M'Choakumchild never make any mistakes themselves, I suppose, Sissy?'

'O no!' she eagerly returned. 'They know everything.'

'Tell me some of your mistakes.'

'I am almost ashamed,' said Sissy, with reluctance. 'But to-day, for instance, Mr. M'Choakumchild was explaining to us about Natural Prosperity.'

'National, I think it must have been,' observed Louisa.
'Yes, it was.—But isn’t it the same?’ she timidly asked.

‘You had better say, National, as he said so,’ returned Louisa, with her dry reserve.

‘National Prosperity. And he said, Now, this schoolroom is a Nation. And in this nation, there are fifty millions of money. Isn’t this a prosperous nation? Girl number twenty, isn’t this a prosperous nation, and a’n’t you in a thriving state?’

‘What did you say?’ asked Louisa.

‘Miss Louisa, I said I didn’t know. I thought I couldn’t know whether it was a prosperous nation or not, and whether I was in a thriving state or not, unless I knew who had got the money, and whether any of it was mine. But that had nothing to do with it. It was not in the figures at all,’ said Sissy, wiping her eyes.

‘That was a great mistake of yours,’ observed Louisa.

‘Yes, Miss Louisa, I know it was, now. Then Mr. M’Choakumchild said he would try me again. And he said, This schoolroom is an immense town, and in it there are a million of inhabitants, and only five-and-twenty are starved to death in the streets, in the course of a year. What is your remark on that proportion? And my remark was—for I couldn’t think of a better one—that I thought it must be just as hard upon those who were starved, whether the others were a million, or a million million. And that was wrong, too.’

‘Of course it was.’

‘Then Mr. M’Choakumchild said he would try me once more. And he said, Here are the stutterings—’

‘Statistics,’ said Louisa.

‘Yes, Miss Louisa—they always remind me of stutterings, and that’s another of my mistakes—of accidents upon the sea. And I find (Mr. M’Choakumchild said) that in a given time a hundred thousand persons went to sea on long voyages, and only five hundred of them were drowned or burnt to death. What is the percentage? And I said, Miss;’ here Sissy fairly sobbed as confessing with extreme contrition to her greatest error; ‘I said it was nothing.’

‘Nothing, Sissy?’

‘Nothing, Miss—to the relations and friends of the people who were killed. I shall never learn,’ said Sissy. ‘And the worst of all is, that although my poor father wished me so much to learn, and although I am so anxious to learn, because he wished me to, I am afraid I don’t like it.’

Louisa stood looking at the pretty modest head, as it drooped abashed before her, until it was raised again to glance at her face. Then she asked:

‘Did your father know so much himself, that he wished you to be well taught too, Sissy?’

Sissy hesitated before replying, and so plainly showed her sense that they were entering on forbidden ground, that Louisa added, ‘No one hears us; and if any one did, I am sure no harm could be found in such an innocent question.’

‘No, Miss Louisa,’ answered Sissy, upon this encouragement, shaking her head; ‘father knows very little indeed. It’s as
much as he can do to write; and it’s more than people in general can do to read his writing. Though it’s plain to me.’

‘Your mother!’

‘Father says she was quite a scholar. She died when I was born. She was,’ Sissy made the terrible communication nervously; ‘she was a dancer.’

‘Did your father love her?’ Louisa asked these questions with a strong, wild, wandering interest peculiar to her; an interest gone astray like a banished creature, and hiding in solitary places.

‘O yes! As dearly as he loves me. Father loved me, first, for her sake. He carried me about with him when I was quite a baby. We have never been asunder from that time.’

‘Yet he leaves you now, Sissy?’

‘Only for my good. Nobody understands him as I do; nobody knows him as I do. When he left me for my good—he never would have left me for his own—I know he was almost broken-hearted with the trial. He will not be happy for a single minute, till he comes back.’

‘Tell me more about him,’ said Louisa, ‘I will never ask you again. Where did you live?’

‘We travelled about the country, and had no fixed place to live in. Father’s a,’ Sissy whispered the awful word, ‘a clown.’

‘To make the people laugh?’ said Louisa, with a nod of intelligence.

‘Yes. But they wouldn’t laugh sometimes, and then father cried. Lately, they very often wouldn’t laugh, and he used to come home despairing. Father’s not like most. Those who didn’t know him as well as I do, and didn’t love him as dearly as I do, might believe he was not quite right. Sometimes they played tricks upon him; but they never knew how he felt them, and shrunk up, when he was alone with me. He was far, far timider than they thought!’

‘And you were his comfort through everything?’

She nodded, with the tears rolling down her face. ‘I hope so, and father said I was. It was because he grew so scared and trembling, and because he felt himself to be a poor, weak, ignorant, helpless man (those used to be his words), that he wanted me so much to know a great deal, and be different from him. I used to read to him to cheer his courage, and he was very fond of that. They were wrong books—I am never to speak of them here—but we didn’t know there was any harm in them.’

‘And he liked them?’ said Louisa, with a searching gaze on Sissy all this time.

‘O very much! They kept him, many times, from what did him real harm. And often and often of a night, he used to forget all his troubles in wondering whether the Sultan would let the lady go on with the story, or would have her head cut off before it was finished.’

‘And your father was always kind? To the last?’ asked Louisa contravening the great principle, and wondering very much.
‘Always, always!’ returned Sissy, clapping her hands. ‘Kinder and kinder than I can tell. He was angry only one night, and that was not to me, but Merrylegs. Merrylegs;’ she whispered the awful fact; ‘is his performing dog.’

‘Why was he angry with the dog?’ Louisa demanded.

‘Father, soon after they came home from performing, told Merrylegs to jump up on the backs of the two chairs and stand across them—which is one of his tricks. He looked at father, and didn’t do it at once. Everything of father’s had gone wrong that night, and he hadn’t pleased the public at all. He cried out that the very dog knew he was failing, and had no compassion on him. Then he beat the dog, and I was frightened, and said, “Father, father! Pray don’t hurt the creature who is so fond of you! O Heaven forgive you, father, stop!” And he stopped, and the dog was bloody, and father lay down crying on the floor with the dog in his arms, and the dog licked his face.’

Louisa saw that she was sobbing; and going to her, kissed her, took her hand, and sat down beside her.

‘Finish by telling me how your father left you, Sissy. Now that I have asked you so much, tell me the end. The blame, if there is any blame, is mine, not yours.’

‘Dear Miss Louisa,’ said Sissy, covering her eyes, and sobbing yet; ‘I came home from the school that afternoon, and found poor father just come home too, from the booth. And he sat rocking himself over the fire, as if he was in pain. And I said, “Have you hurt yourself, father?” (as he did sometimes, like they all did), and he said, “A little, my darling.” And when I came to stoop down and look up at his face, I saw that he was crying. The more I spoke to him, the more he hid his face; and at first he shook all over, and said nothing but “My darling;” and “My love!”’

Here Tom came lounging in, and stared at the two with a coolness not particularly savouring of interest in anything but himself, and not much of that at present.

‘I am asking Sissy a few questions, Tom,’ observed his sister. ‘You have no occasion to go away; but don’t interrupt us for a moment, Tom dear.’

‘Oh! very well!’ returned Tom. ‘Only father has brought old Bounderby home, and I want you to come into the drawing-room. Because if you come, there’s a good chance of old Bounderby’s asking me to dinner; and if you don’t, there’s none.’

‘I’ll come directly.’

‘I’ll wait for you,’ said Tom, ‘to make sure.’

Sissy resumed in a lower voice. ‘At last poor father said that he had given no satisfaction again, and never did give any satisfaction now, and that he was a shame and disgrace, and I should have done better without him all along. I said all the affectionate things to him that came into my heart, and presently he was quiet and I sat down by him, and told him all about the school and everything that had been said and done there. When I had no more left to tell, he put his arms round my neck, and kissed me a great many times. Then he asked me to fetch some of the stuff he used, for the little hurt he had had, and to get it at the best place, which was at the other end of town from there; and then, after kissing me again, he let me go. When I had gone down-stairs, I turned back that I might be a little bit more company to him yet, and looked in at the door, and said, “Father dear, shall I take Merrylegs?” Father shook his head and said, “No, Sissy, no;
take nothing that’s known to be mine, my darling;” and I left him sitting by the fire. Then the thought must have come upon him, poor, poor father! of going away to try something for my sake; for when I came back, he was gone.’

‘I say! Look sharp for old Bounderby, Loo!’ Tom remonstrated.

‘There’s no more to tell, Miss Louisa. I keep the nine oils ready for him, and I know he will come back. Every letter that I see in Mr. Gradgrind’s hand takes my breath away and blinds my eyes, for I think it comes from father, or from Mr. Sleary about father. Mr. Sleary promised to write as soon as ever father should be heard of, and I trust to him to keep his word.’

‘Do look sharp for old Bounderby, Loo!’ said Tom, with an impatient whistle. ‘He’ll be off if you don’t look sharp!’

After this, whenever Sissy dropped a curtsey to Mr. Gradgrind in the presence of his family, and said in a faltering way, ‘I beg your pardon, sir, for being troublesome—but—have you had any letter yet about me?’ Louisa would suspend the occupation of the moment, whatever it was, and look for the reply as earnestly as Sissy did. And when Mr. Gradgrind regularly answered, ‘No, Jupe, nothing of the sort,’ the trembling of Sissy’s lip would be repeated in Louisa’s face, and her eyes would follow Sissy with compassion to the door. Mr. Gradgrind usually improved these occasions by remarking, when she was gone, that if Jupe had been properly trained from an early age she would have remonstrated to herself on sound principles the baselessness of these fantastic hopes. Yet it did seem (though not to him, for he saw nothing of it) as if fantastic hope could take as strong a hold as Fact.

This observation must be limited exclusively to his daughter. As to Tom, he was becoming that not unprecedented triumph of calculation which is usually at work on number one. As to Mrs. Gradgrind, if she said anything on the subject, she would come a little way out of her wrappers, like a feminine dormouse, and say:

‘Good gracious bless me, how my poor head is vexed and worried by that girl Jupe’s so perseveringly asking, over and over again, about her tiresome letters! Upon my word and honour I seem to be fated, and destined, and ordained, to live in the midst of things that I am never to hear the last of. It really is a most extraordinary circumstance that it appears as if I never was to hear the last of anything!’

At about this point, Mr. Gradgrind’s eye would fall upon her; and under the influence of that wintry piece of fact, she would become torpid again.

Chapter X: Stephen Blackpool

I ENTERTAIN a weak idea that the English people are as hard-worked as any people upon whom the sun shines. I acknowledge to this ridiculous idiosyncrasy, as a reason why I would give them a little more play.

In the hardest working part of Coketown; in the innermost fortifications of that ugly citadel, where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in; at the heart of the labyrinth of narrow courts upon courts, and close streets upon streets, which had come into existence piecemeal, every piece in a violent hurry for some one man’s purpose, and the whole an unnatural family, shouldering, and trampling, and pressing one another to death; in the last close nook of this great exhausted receiver, where the chimneys, for want of air to make a draught, were built in an
immense variety of stunted and crooked shapes, as though every house put out a sign of the kind of people who might be expected to be born in it; among the multitude of Coketown, generically called ‘the Hands,’—a race who would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like the lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs—lived a certain Stephen Blackpool, forty years of age.

Stephen looked older, but he had had a hard life. It is said that every life has its roses and thorns; there seemed, however, to have been a misadventure or mistake in Stephen’s case, whereby somebody else had become possessed of his roses, and he had become possessed of the same somebody else’s thorns in addition to his own. He had known, to use his words, a peck of trouble. He was usually called Old Stephen, in a kind of rough homage to the fact.

A rather stooping man, with a knitted brow, a pondering expression of face, and a hard-looking head sufficiently capacious, on which his iron-grey hair lay long and thin, Old Stephen might have passed for a particularly intelligent man in his condition. Yet he was not. He took no place among those remarkable ‘Hands,’ who, piecing together their broken intervals of leisure through many years, had mastered difficult sciences, and acquired a knowledge of most unlikely things. He held no station among the Hands who could make speeches and carry on debates. Thousands of his comppeers could talk much better than he, at any time. He was a good power-loom weaver, and a man of perfect integrity. What more he was, or what else he had in him, if anything, let him show for himself.

The lights in the great factories, which looked, when they were illuminated, like Fairy palaces—or the travellers by express-train said so—were all extinguished; and the bells had rung for knocking off for the night, and had ceased again; and the Hands, men and women, boy and girl, were clattering home. Old Stephen was standing in the street, with the old sensation upon him which the stoppage of the machinery always produced—the sensation of its having worked and stopped in his own head.

‘Yet I don’t see Rachael, still!’ said he.

It was a wet night, and many groups of young women passed him, with their shawls drawn over their bare heads and held close under their chins to keep the rain out. He knew Rachael well, for a glance at any one of these groups was sufficient to show him that she was not there. At last, there were no more to come; and then he turned away, saying in a tone of disappointment, ‘Why, then, ha’ missed her!’

But, he had not gone the length of three streets, when he saw another of the shawled figures in advance of him, at which he looked so keenly that perhaps its mere shadow indistinctly reflected on the wet pavement—if he could have seen it without the figure itself moving along from lamp to lamp, brightening and fading as it went—would have been enough to tell him who was there. Making his pace at once much quicker and much softer, he darted on until he was very near this figure, then fell into his former walk, and called ‘Rachael!’

She turned, being then in the brightness of a lamp; and raising her hood a little, showed a quiet oval face, dark and rather delicate, irradiated by a pair of very gentle eyes, and further set off by the perfect order of her shining black hair. It was not a face in its first bloom; she was a woman five and thirty years of age.

‘Ah, lad! ’Tis thou?’ When she had said this, with a smile which would have been quite expressed, though nothing of her had been seen but her pleasant eyes, she replaced her hood again, and they went on together.

‘I thought thou wast ahind me, Rachael?’
'No.'

'Early t'night, lass?'

'Times I'm a little early, Stephen! 'times a little late. I'm never to be counted on, going home.'

'Nor going t'other way, neither, 't seems to me, Rachael?'

'No, Stephen.'

He looked at her with some disappointment in his face, but with a respectful and patient conviction that she must be right in whatever she did. The expression was not lost upon her; she laid her hand lightly on his arm a moment as if to thank him for it.

'We are such true friends, lad, and such old friends, and getting to be such old folk, now.'

'No, Rachael, thou'rt as young as ever thou wast.'

'One of us would be puzzled how to get old, Stephen, without 't other getting so too, both being alive,' she answered, laughing; 'but, anyways, we're such old friends, and t' hide a word of honest truth fro' one another would be a sin and a pity. 'Tis better not to walk too much together. 'Times, yes! 'Twould be hard, indeed, if 'twas not to be at all,' she said, with a cheerfulness she sought to communicate to him.

'Tis hard, anyways, Rachael. 'Try to think not; and 'twill seem better.'

'I've tried a long time, and 'ta'nt got better. But thou'rt right; 't might mak fok talk, even of thee. Thou hast been that to me, Rachael, through so many year: thou hast done me so much good, and heartened of me in that cheering way, that thy word is a law to me. Ah, lass, and a bright good law! Better than some real ones.'

'Never fret about them, Stephen,' she answered quickly, and not without an anxious glance at his face. 'Let the laws be.'

'Yes,' he said, with a slow nod or two. 'Let 'em be. Let everything be. Let all sorts alone. 'Tis a muddle, and that's aw.'

'Always a muddle?' said Rachael, with another gentle touch upon his arm, as if to recall him out of the thoughtfulness, in which he was biting the long ends of his loose neckerchief as he walked along. The touch had its instantaneous effect. He let them fall, turned a smiling face upon her, and said, as he broke into a goodhumoured laugh, 'Ay, Rachael, lass, awlus a muddle. That's where I stick. I come to the muddle many times and agen, and I never get beyond it.'

They had walked some distance, and were near their own homes. The woman's was the first reached. It was in one of the many small streets for which the favourite undertaker (who turned a handsome sum out of the one poor ghastly pomp of the neighbourhood) kept a black ladder, in order that those who had done their daily groping up and down the narrow stairs might slide out of this working world by the windows. She stopped at the corner, and putting her hand in his, wished him good night.

'Good night, dear lass; good night!'

She went, with her neat figure and her sober womanly step, down the dark street, and he stood looking after her until
she turned into one of the small houses. There was not a flutter of her coarse shawl, perhaps, but had its interest in this man's eyes; not a tone of her voice but had its echo in his innermost heart.

When she was lost to his view, he pursued his homeward way, glancing up sometimes at the sky, where the clouds were sailing fast and wildly. But, they were broken now, and the rain had ceased, and the moon shone,—looking down the high chimneys of Coketown on the deep furnaces below, and casting Titanic shadows of the steam-engines at rest, upon the walls where they were lodged. The man seemed to have brightened with the night, as he went on.

His home, in such another street as the first, saving that it was narrower, was over a little shop. How it came to pass that any people found it worth their while to sell or buy the wretched little toys, mixed up in its window with cheap newspapers and pork (there was a leg to be raffled for to-morrow-night), matters not here. He took his end of candle from a shelf, lighted it at another end of candle on the counter, without disturbing the mistress of the shop who was asleep in her little room, and went upstairs into his lodging.

It was a room, not unacquainted with the black ladder under various tenants; but as neat, at present, as such a room could be. A few books and writings were on an old bureau in a corner, the furniture was decent and sufficient, and, though the atmosphere was tainted, the room was clean.

Going to the hearth to set the candle down upon a round three-legged table standing there, he stumbled against something. As he recoiled, looking down at it, it raised itself up into the form of a woman in a sitting attitude.

'Heaven's mercy, woman!' he cried, falling farther off from the figure. 'Hast thou come back again!'

Such a woman! A disabled, drunken creature, barely able to preserve her sitting posture by steadying herself with one begrimed hand on the floor, while the other was so purposeless in trying to push away her tangled hair from her face, that it only blinded her the more with the dirt upon it. A creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing even to see her.

After an impatient oath or two, and some stupid clawing of herself with the hand not necessary to her support, she got her hair away from her eyes sufficiently to obtain a sight of him. Then she sat swaying her body to and fro, and making gestures with her unnerved arm, which seemed intended as the accompaniment to a fit of laughter, though her face was stolid and drowsy.

'Eigh, lad? What, yo'r there?' Some hoarse sounds meant for this, came mockingly out of her at last; and her head dropped forward on her breast.

'Back agen?' she screeched, after some minutes, as if he had that moment said it. 'Yes! And back agen. Back agen ever and ever so often. Back? Yes, back. Why not?'

Roused by the unmeaning violence with which she cried it out, she scrambled up, and stood supporting herself with her shoulders against the wall; dangling in one hand by the string, a dunghill-fragment of a bonnet, and trying to look scornfully at him.

'I'll sell thee off again, and I'll sell thee off again, and I'll sell thee off a score of times!' she cried, with something between a furious menace and an effort at a defiant dance. 'Come awa' from th' bed!' He was sitting on the side of it, with his face
hidden in his hands. ‘Come awa! from ’t. ’Tis mine, and I’ve a right to t’!

As she staggered to it, he avoided her with a shudder, and passed—his face still hidden—to the opposite end of the room. She threw herself upon the bed heavily, and soon was snoring hard. He sunk into a chair, and moved but once all that night. It was to throw a covering over her; as if his hands were not enough to hide her, even in the darkness.

*Blackpool, in hopes of divorcing his wife, goes to Bounderby to ask for his aid and advice. Bounderby expresses shock at what he describes as Blackpool’s immorality.*

**Chapter XII: The Old Woman**

OLD STEPHEN descended the two white steps, shutting the black door with the brazen door-plate, by the aid of the brazen full-stop, to which he gave a parting polish with the sleeve of his coat, observing that his hot hand clouded it. He crossed the street with his eyes bent upon the ground, and thus was walking sorrowfully away, when he felt a touch upon his arm.

It was not the touch he needed most at such a moment—the touch that could calm the wild waters of his soul, as the uplifted hand of the sublimest love and patience could abate the raging of the sea—yet it was a woman’s hand too. It was an old woman, tall and shapely still, though withered by time, on whom his eyes fell when he stopped and turned. She was very cleanly and plainly dressed, had country mud upon her shoes, and was newly come from a journey. The flutter of her manner, in the unwonted noise of the streets; the spare shawl, carried unfolded on her arm; the heavy umbrella, and little basket; the loose long-fingered gloves, to which her hands were unused; all bespoke an old woman from the country, in her plain holiday clothes, come into Coketown on an expedition of rare occurrence. Remark ing this at a glance, with the quick observation of his class, Stephen Blackpool bent his attentive face—his face, which, like the faces of many of his order, by dint of long working with eyes and hands in the midst of a prodigious noise, had acquired the concentrated look with which we are familiar in the countenances of the deaf—the better to hear what she asked him.

‘Pray, sir,’ said the old woman, ‘didn’t I see you come out of that gentleman’s house?’ pointing back to Mr. Bounderby’s. ‘I believe it was you, unless I have had the bad luck to mistake the person in following?’

‘Yes, missus,’ returned Stephen, ‘it were me.’

‘Have you—you’ll excuse an old woman’s curiosity—have you seen the gentleman?’

‘Yes, missus.’

‘And how did he look, sir? Was he portly, bold, outspoken, and hearty?’ As she straightened her own figure, and held up her head in adapting her action to her words, the idea crossed Stephen that he had seen this old woman before, and had not quite liked her.

‘O yes,’ he returned, observing her more attentively, ‘he were all that.’
'And healthy,' said the old woman, 'as the fresh wind?'

'Yes,' returned Stephen. 'He were ett'n and drinking—as large and as loud as a Hummobee.'

'Thank you!' said the old woman, with infinite content. 'Thank you!'

He certainly never had seen this old woman before. Yet there was a vague remembrance in his mind, as if he had more than once dreamed of some old woman like her.

She walked along at his side, and, gently accommodating himself to her humour, he said Coketown was a busy place, was it not? To which she answered 'Eigh sure! Dreadful busy!' Then he said, she came from the country, he saw? To which she answered in the affirmative.

'By Parliamentary, this morning. I came forty mile by Parliamentary this morning, and I’m going back the same forty mile this afternoon. I walked nine mile to the station this morning, and if I find nobody on the road to give me a lift, I shall walk the nine mile back to-night. That’s pretty well, sir, at my age!' said the chatty old woman, her eye brightening with exultation.

'Deed 'tis. Don’t do’t too often, missus.'

'No, no. Once a year,' she answered, shaking her head. 'I spend my savings so, once every year. I come regular, to tramp about the streets, and see the gentlemen.'

'Only to see ’em?' returned Stephen.

'That’s enough for me,' she replied, with great earnestness and interest of manner. 'I ask no more! I have been standing about, on this side of the way, to see that gentleman,' turning her head back towards Mr. Bounderby’s again, 'Come out. But, he’s late this year, and I have not seen him. You came out instead. Now, if I am obliged to go back without a glimpse of him—I only want a glimpse—well! I have seen you, and you have seen him, and I must make that do.' Saying this, she looked at Stephen as if to fix his features in her mind, and her eye was not so bright as it had been.

With a large allowance for difference of tastes, and with all submission to the patricians of Coketown, this seemed so extraordinary a source of interest to take so much trouble about, that it perplexed him. But they were passing the church now, and as his eye caught the clock, he quickened his pace.

He was going to his work? the old woman said, quickening hers, too, quite easily. Yes, time was nearly out. On his telling her where he worked, the old woman became a more singular old woman than before.

'An’t you happy?' she asked him.

'Why—there’s awmost nobody but has their troubles, missus.' He answered evasively, because the old woman appeared to take it for granted that he would be very happy indeed, and he had not the heart to disappoint her. He knew that there was trouble enough in the world; and if the old woman had lived so long, and could count upon his having so little, why so much the better for her, and none the worse for him.

'Ay, ay! You have your troubles at home, you mean?’ she said.
‘Times. Just now and then,’ he answered, slightly.

‘But, working under such a gentleman, they don’t follow you to the Factory?’

No, no; they didn’t follow him there, said Stephen. All correct there. Everything accordant there. (He did not go so far as to say, for her pleasure, that there was a sort of Divine Right there; but, I have heard claims almost as magnificent of late years.)

They were now in the black by-road near the place, and the Hands were crowding in. The bell was ringing, and the Serpent was a Serpent of many coils, and the Elephant was getting ready. The strange old woman was delighted with the very bell. It was the beautifullest bell she had ever heard, she said, and sounded grand!

She asked him, when he stopped good-naturedly to shake hands with her before going in, how long he had worked there?

‘A dozen year,’ he told her.

‘I must kiss the hand,’ said she, ‘that has worked in this fine factory for a dozen year!’ And she lifted it, though he would have prevented her, and put it to her lips. What harmony, besides her age and her simplicity, surrounded her, he did not know, but even in this fantastic action there was a something neither out of time nor place: a something which it seemed as if nobody else could have made as serious, or done with such a natural and touching air.

He had been at his loom full half an hour, thinking about this old woman, when, having occasion to move round the loom for its adjustment, he glanced through a window which was in his corner, and saw her still looking up at the pile of building, lost in admiration. Heedless of the smoke and mud and wet, and of her two long journeys, she was gazing at it, as if the heavy thrum that issued from its many stories were proud music to her.

She was gone by and by, and the day went after her, and the lights sprung up again, and the Express whirled in full sight of the Fairy Palace over the arches near: little felt amid the jarring of the machinery, and scarcely heard above its crash and rattle. Long before then his thoughts had gone back to the dreary room above the little shop, and to the shameful figure heavy on the bed, but heavier on his heart.

Machinery slackened; throbbing feebly like a fainting pulse; stopped. The bell again; the glare of light and heat dispelled; the factories, looming heavy in the black wet night—their tall chimneys rising up into the air like competing Towers of Babel.

He had spoken to Rachael only last night, it was true, and had walked with her a little way; but he had his new misfortune on him, in which no one else could give him a moment’s relief, and, for the sake of it, and because he knew himself to want that softening of his anger which no voice but hers could effect, he felt he might so far disregard what she had said as to wait for her again. He waited, but she had eluded him. She was gone. On no other night in the year could he so ill have spared her patient face.

O! Better to have no home in which to lay his head, than to have a home and dread to go to it, through such a cause. He ate and drank, for he was exhausted—but he little knew or cared what; and he wandered about in the chill rain, thinking and thinking, and brooding and brooding.
No word of a new marriage had ever passed between them; but Rachael had taken great pity on him years ago, and to her alone he had opened his closed heart all this time, on the subject of his miseries; and he knew very well that if he were free to ask her, she would take him. He thought of the home he might at that moment have been seeking with pleasure and pride; of the different man he might have been that night; of the lightness then in his now heavy-laden breast; of the then restored honour, self-respect, and tranquillity all torn to pieces. He thought of the waste of the best part of his life, of the change it made in his character for the worse every day, of the dreadful nature of his existence, bound hand and foot, to a dead woman, and tormented by a demon in her shape. He thought of Rachael, how young when they were first brought together in these circumstances, how mature now, how soon to grow old. He thought of the number of girls and women she had seen marry, how many homes with children in them she had seen grow up around her, how she had contentedly pursued her own lone quiet path—for him—and how he had sometimes seen a shade of melancholy on her blessed face, that smote him with remorse and despair. He set the picture of her up, beside the infamous image of last night; and thought, Could it be, that the whole earthly course of one so gentle, good, and self-denying, was subjugate to such a wretch as that!

Filled with these thoughts—so filled that he had an unwholesome sense of growing larger, of being placed in some new and diseased relation towards the objects among which he passed, of seeing the iris round every misty light turn red—he went home for shelter. Blackpool finds Rachel in his rooms caring for his wife. Rachel prevents Blackpool’s wife from accidentally drinking poison.

Blackpool, who had not intervened to save his wife, looks upon Rachel as an angel. Grandgrind allows Sissy to stay at Stone Lodge to care for his wife. Grandgrind rises in politics, becoming a Member of Parliament. Tom grows to be selfish and hedonistic. He deliberately plays upon Louisa’s affection for him to encourage her to marry Bounderby.

Chapter XV: Father and Daughter

ALTHOUGH Mr. Gradgrind did not take after Blue Beard, his room was quite a blue chamber in its abundance of blue books. Whatever they could prove (which is usually anything you like), they proved there, in an army constantly strengthening by the arrival of new recruits. In that charmed apartment, the most complicated social questions were cast up, got into exact totals, and finally settled—if those concerned could only have been brought to know it. As if an astronomical observatory should be made without any windows, and the astronomer within should arrange the starry universe solely by pen, ink, and paper, so Mr. Gradgrind, in his Observatory (and there are many like it), had no need to cast an eye upon the teeming myriads of human beings around him, but could settle all their destinies on a slate, and wipe out all their tears with one dirty little bit of sponge.

To this Observatory, then: a stern room, with a deadly statistical clock in it, which measured every second with a beat like a rap upon a coffin-lid; Louisa repaired on the appointed morning. A window looked towards Coketown; and when she sat down near her father’s table, she saw the high chimneys and the long tracts of smoke looming in the heavy distance gloomily.

‘My dear Louisa,’ said her father, ‘I prepared you last night to give me your serious attention in the conversation we are now going to have together. You have been so well trained, and you do, I am happy to say, so much justice to the
education you have received, that I have perfect confidence in your good sense. You are not impulsive, you are not romantic, you are accustomed to view everything from the strong dispassionate ground of reason and calculation. From that ground alone, I know you will view and consider what I am going to communicate.’

He waited, as if he would have been glad that she said something. But she said never a word.

‘Louisa, my dear, you are the subject of a proposal of marriage that has been made to me.’ Again he waited, and again she answered not one word. This so far surprised him, as to induce him gently to repeat, ‘a proposal of marriage, my dear.’ To which she returned, without any visible emotion whatever:

‘I hear you, father. I am attending, I assure you.’

‘Well!’ said Mr. Gradgrind, breaking into a smile, after being for the moment at a loss, ‘you are even more dispassionate than I expected, Louisa. Or, perhaps, you are not unprepared for the announcement I have it in charge to make?’

‘I cannot say that, father, until I hear it. Prepared or unprepared, I wish to hear it all from you. I wish to hear you state it to me, father.’

Strange to relate, Mr. Gradgrind was not so collected at this moment as his daughter was. He took a paper-knife in his hand, turned it over, laid it down, took it up again, and even then had to look along the blade of it, considering how to go on.

‘What you say, my dear Louisa, is perfectly reasonable. I have undertaken then to let you know that—in short, that Mr. Bounderby has informed me that he has long watched your progress with particular interest and pleasure, and has long hoped that the time might ultimately arrive when he should offer you his hand in marriage. That time, to which he has so long, and certainly with great constancy, looked forward, is now come. Mr. Bounderby has made his proposal of marriage to me, and has entreated me to make it known to you, and to express his hope that you will take it into your favourable consideration.’

Silence between them. The deadly statistical clock very hollow. The distant smoke very black and heavy.

‘Father,’ said Louisa, ‘do you think I love Mr. Bounderby?’

Mr. Gradgrind was extremely discomfited by this unexpected question. ‘Well, my child,’ he returned, ‘I—really—cannot take upon myself to say.’

‘Father,’ pursued Louisa in exactly the same voice as before, ‘do you ask me to love Mr. Bounderby?’

‘My dear Louisa, no. No. I ask nothing.’

‘Father,’ she still pursued, ‘does Mr. Bounderby ask me to love him?’

‘Really, my dear,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, ‘it is difficult to answer your question—’

‘Difficult to answer it, Yes or No, father?

‘Certainly, my dear. Because,’ here was something to demonstrate, and it set him up again; ‘because the reply depends
so materially, Louisa, on the sense in which we use the expression. Now, Mr. Bounderby does not do you the injustice, and does not do himself the injustice, of pretending to anything fanciful, fantastic, or (I am using synonymous terms) sentimental. Mr. Bounderby would have seen you grow up under his eyes, to very little purpose, if he could so far forget what is due to your good sense, not to say to his, as to address you from any such ground. Therefore, perhaps the expression itself—I merely suggest this to you, my dear—may be a little misplaced.'

'What would you advise me to use in its stead, father?'

'Why, my dear Louisa,' said Mr. Gradgrind, completely recovered by this time, 'I would advise you (since you ask me) to consider this question, as you have been accustomed to consider every other question, simply as one of tangible Fact. The ignorant and the giddy may embarrass such subjects with irrelevant fancies, and other absurdities that have no existence, properly viewed—really no existence—but it is no compliment to you to say, that you know better. Now, what are the Facts of this case? You are, we will say in round numbers, twenty years of age; Mr. Bounderby is, we will say in round numbers, fifty. There is some disparity in your respective years, but in your means and positions there is none; on the contrary, there is a great suitability. Then the question arises, Is this one disparity sufficient to operate as a bar to such a marriage? In considering this question, it is not unimportant to take into account the statistics of marriage, so far as they have yet been obtained, in England and Wales. I find, on reference to the figures, that a large proportion of these marriages are contracted between parties of very unequal ages, and that the elder of these contracting parties is, in rather more than three-fourths of these instances, the bridegroom. It is remarkable as showing the wide prevalence of this law, that among the natives of the British possessions in India, also in a considerable part of China, and among the Calmucks of Tartary, the best means of computation yet furnished us by travellers, yield similar results. The disparity I have mentioned, therefore, almost ceases to be disparity, and (virtually) all but disappears.'

'What do you recommend, father,' asked Louisa, her reserved composure not in the least affected by these gratifying results, 'that I should substitute for the term I used just now? For the misplaced expression?'

'Louisa,' returned her father, 'it appears to me that nothing can be plainer. Confining yourself rigidly to Fact, the question of Fact you state to yourself is: Does Mr. Bounderby ask me to marry him? Yes, he does. The sole remaining question then is: Shall I marry him? I think nothing can be plainer than that?'

'Shall I marry him?' repeated Louisa, with great deliberation.

'Precisely. And it is satisfactory to me, as your father, my dear Louisa, to know that you do not come to the consideration of that question with the previous habits of mind, and habits of life, that belong to many young women.'

'No, father,' she returned, 'I do not.'

'I now leave you to judge for yourself,' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'I have stated the case, as such cases are usually stated among practical minds; I have stated it, as the case of your mother and myself was stated in its time. The rest, my dear Louisa, is for you to decide.'

From the beginning, she had sat looking at him fixedly. As he now leaned back in his chair, and bent his deep-set eyes upon her in his turn, perhaps he might have seen one wavering moment in her, when she was impelled to throw herself upon his breast, and give him the pent-up confidences of her heart. But, to see it, he must have overleaped at a bound the artificial barriers he had for many years been erecting, between himself and all those subtle essences of humanity
which will elude the utmost cunning of algebra until the last trumpet ever to be sounded shall blow even algebra to wreck. The barriers were too many and too high for such a leap. With his unbending, utilitarian, matter-of-fact face, he hardened her again; and the moment shot away into the plumbless depths of the past, to mingle with all the lost opportunities that are drowned there.

Removing her eyes from him, she sat so long looking silently towards the town, that he said, at length: ‘Are you consulting the chimneys of the Coketown works, Louisa?’

‘There seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out, father!’ she answered, turning quickly.

‘Of course I know that, Louisa. I do not see the application of the remark.’ To do him justice he did not, at all.

She passed it away with a slight motion of her hand, and concentrating her attention upon him again, said, ‘Father, I have often thought that life is very short.’—This was so distinctly one of his subjects that he interposed.

‘It is short, no doubt, my dear. Still, the average duration of human life is proved to have increased of late years. The calculations of various life assurance and annuity offices, among other figures which cannot go wrong, have established the fact.’

‘I speak of my own life, father.’

‘O indeed? Still,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, ‘I need not point out to you, Louisa, that it is governed by the laws which govern lives in the aggregate.’

‘While it lasts, I would wish to do the little I can, and the little I am fit for. What does it matter?’

Mr. Gradgrind seemed rather at a loss to understand the last four words; replying, ‘How, matter? What matter, my dear?’

‘Mr. Bounderby,’ she went on in a steady, straight way, without regarding this, ‘asks me to marry him. The question I have to ask myself is, shall I marry him? That is so, father, is it not? You have told me so, father. Have you not?’

‘Certainly, my dear.’

‘Let it be so. Since Mr. Bounderby likes to take me thus, I am satisfied to accept his proposal. Tell him, father, as soon as you please, that this was my answer. Repeat it, word for word, if you can, because I should wish him to know what I said.’

‘It is quite right, my dear,’ retorted her father approvingly, ‘to be exact. I will observe your very proper request. Have you any wish in reference to the period of your marriage, my child?’

‘None, father. What does it matter!’

Mr. Gradgrind had drawn his chair a little nearer to her, and taken her hand. But, her repetition of these words seemed to strike with some little discord on his ear. He paused to look at her, and, still holding her hand, said:

‘Louisa, I have not considered it essential to ask you one question, because the possibility implied in it appeared to me
to be too remote. But perhaps I ought to do so. You have never entertained in secret any other proposal?’

‘Father,’ she returned, almost scornfully, ‘what other proposal can have been made to me? Whom have I seen? Where have I been? What are my heart’s experiences?’

‘My dear Louisa,’ returned Mr. Gradgrind, reassured and satisfied. ‘You correct me justly. I merely wished to discharge my duty.’

‘What do I know, father,’ said Louisa in her quiet manner, ‘of tastes and fancies; of aspirations and affections; of all that part of my nature in which such light things might have been nourished? What escape have I had from problems that could be demonstrated, and realities that could be grasped?’ As she said it, she unconsciously closed her hand, as if upon a solid object, and slowly opened it as though she were releasing dust or ash.

‘My dear,’ assented her eminently practical parent, ‘quite true, quite true.’

‘Why, father,’ she pursued, ‘what a strange question to ask me! The babypreference that even I have heard of as common among children, has never had its innocent resting-place in my breast. You have been so careful of me, that I never had a child’s heart. You have trained me so well, that I never dreamed a child’s dream. You have dealt so wisely with me, father, from my cradle to this hour, that I never had a child’s belief or a child’s fear.’

Mr. Gradgrind was quite moved by his success, and by this testimony to it. ‘My dear Louisa,’ said he, ‘you abundantly repay my care. Kiss me, my dear girl.’

So, his daughter kissed him. Detaining her in his embrace, he said, ‘I may assure you now, my favourite child, that I am made happy by the sound decision at which you have arrived. Mr. Bounderby is a very remarkable man; and what little disparity can be said to exist between you—if any—is more than counterbalanced by the tone your mind has acquired. It has always been my object so to educate you, as that you might, while still in your early youth, be (if I may so express myself) almost any age. Kiss me once more, Louisa. Now, let us go and find your mother.’

Accordingly, they went down to the drawing-room, where the esteemed lady with no nonsense about her, was recumbent as usual, while Sissy worked beside her. She gave some feeble signs of returning animation when they entered, and presently the faint transparency was presented in a sitting attitude.

‘Mrs. Gradgrind,’ said her husband, who had waited for the achievement of this feat with some impatience, ‘allow me to present to you Mrs. Bounderby.’

‘Oh!’ said Mrs. Gradgrind, ‘so you have settled it! Well, I’m sure I hope your health may be good, Louisa; for if your head begins to split as soon as you are married, which was the case with mine, I cannot consider that you are to be envied, though I have no doubt you think you are, as all girls do. However, I give you joy, my dear—and I hope you may now turn all your ological studies to good account, I am sure I do! I must give you a kiss of congratulation, Louisa; but don’t touch my right shoulder, for there’s something running down it all day long. And now you see,’ whimpered Mrs. Gradgrind, adjusting her shawls after the affectionate ceremony, ‘I shall be worrying myself, morning, noon, and night, to know what I am to call him!’

‘Mrs. Gradgrind,’ said her husband, solemnly, ‘what do you mean?’
Whatever I am to call him, Mr. Gradgrind, when he is married to Louisa! I must call him something. It’s impossible,’ said Mrs. Gradgrind, with a mingled sense of politeness and injury, ‘to be constantly addressing him and never giving him a name. I cannot call him Josiah, for the name is insupportable to me. You yourself wouldn’t hear of Joe, you very well know. Am I to call my own son-in-law, Mister! Not, I believe, unless the time has arrived when, as an invalid, I am to be trampled upon by my relations. Then, what am I to call him!’

Nobody present having any suggestion to offer in the remarkable emergency, Mrs. Gradgrind departed this life for the time being, after delivering the following codicil to her remarks already executed:

‘As to the wedding, all I ask, Louisa, is,—and I ask it with a fluttering in my chest, which actually extends to the soles of my feet,—that it may take place soon. Otherwise, I know it is one of those subjects I shall never hear the last of.’

When Mr. Gradgrind had presented Mrs. Bounderby, Sissy had suddenly turned her head, and looked, in wonder, in pity, in sorrow, in doubt, in a multitude of emotions, towards Louisa. Louisa had known it, and seen it, without looking at her. From that moment she was impassive, proud and cold—held Sissy at a distance—changed to her altogether.

So as to prevent potential conflict at his home, Bounderby gives Mrs. Sparsit a position at his bank. There, she socializes with Bitzer; the two criticize Tom, who also works at the bank, as a spendthrift.

2.10.1.2: From “Book the Second: Reaping”

Chapter II: Mr. James Harthouse

THE Gradgrind party wanted assistance in cutting the throats of the Graces. They went about recruiting; and where could they enlist recruits more hopefully, than among the fine gentlemen who, having found out everything to be worth nothing, were equally ready for anything?

Moreover, the healthy spirits who had mounted to this sublime height were attractive to many of the Gradgrind school. They liked fine gentlemen; they pretended that they did not, but they did. They became exhausted in imitation of them; and they yaw-yawed in their speech like them; and they served out, with an enervated air, the little mouldy rations of political economy, on which they regaled their disciples. There never before was seen on earth such a wonderful hybrid race as was thus produced.

Among the fine gentlemen not regularly belonging to the Gradgrind school, there was one of a good family and a better appearance, with a happy turn of humour which had told immensely with the House of Commons on the occasion of his entertaining it with his (and the Board of Directors) view of a railway accident, in which the most careful officers ever known, employed by the most liberal managers ever heard of, assisted by the finest mechanical contrivances ever devised, the whole in action on the best line ever constructed, had killed five people and wounded thirty-two, by a casualty without which the excellence of the whole system would have been positively incomplete. Among the slain was a cow, and among the scattered articles unowned, a widow’s cap. And the honourable member had so tickled the House (which has a delicate sense of humour) by putting the cap on the cow, that it became impatient of any serious reference.
to the Coroner’s Inquest, and brought the railway off with Cheers and Laughter.

Now, this gentleman had a younger brother of still better appearance than himself, who had tried life as a Cornet of Dragoons, and found it a bore; and had afterwards tried it in the train of an English minister abroad, and found it a bore; and had then strolled to Jerusalem, and got bored there; and had then gone yachting about the world, and got bored everywhere. To whom this honourable and jocular, member fraternally said one day, ’Jem, there’s a good opening among the hard Fact fellows, and they want men. I wonder you don’t go in for statistics.’ Jem, rather taken by the novelty of the idea, and very hard up for a change, was as ready to ‘go in’ for statistics as for anything else. So, he went in. He coached himself up with a blue-book or two; and his brother put it about among the hard Fact fellows, and said, ‘If you want to bring in, for any place, a handsome dog who can make you a devilish good speech, look after my brother Jem, for he’s your man.’ After a few dashes in the public meeting way, Mr. Gradgrind and a council of political sages approved of Jem, and it was resolved to send him down to Coketown, to become known there and in the neighbourhood. Hence the letter Jem had last night shown to Mrs. Sparsit, which Mr. Bounderby now held in his hand; superscribed, ’Josiah Bounderby, Esquire, Banker, Coketown. Specially to introduce James Harthouse, Esquire. Thomas Gradgrind.’

Within an hour of the receipt of this dispatch and Mr. James Harthouse’s card, Mr. Bounderby put on his hat and went down to the Hotel. There he found Mr. James Harthouse looking out of window, in a state of mind so disconsolate, that he was already half-disposed to ‘go in’ for something else.

‘My name, sir,’ said his visitor, ‘is Josiah Bounderby, of Coketown.’

Mr. James Harthouse was very happy indeed (though he scarcely looked so) to have a pleasure he had long expected.

‘Coketown, sir,’ said Bounderby, obstinately taking a chair, ‘is not the kind of place you have been accustomed to. Therefore, if you will allow me—or whether you will or not, for I am a plain man—I’ll tell you something about it before we go any further.’

Mr. Harthouse would be charmed.

‘Don’t be too sure of that,’ said Bounderby. ‘I don’t promise it. First of all, you see our smoke. That’s meat and drink to us. It’s the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly for the lungs. If you are one of those who want us to consume it, I differ from you. We are not going to wear the bottoms of our boilers out any faster than we wear ‘em out now, for all the humbugging sentiment in Great Britain and Ireland.’

By way of ‘going in’ to the fullest extent, Mr. Harthouse rejoined, ‘Mr. Bounderby, I assure you I am entirely and completely of your way of thinking. On conviction.’

‘I am glad to hear it,’ said Bounderby. ‘Now, you have heard a lot of talk about the work in our mills, no doubt. You have? Very good. I’ll state the fact of it to you. It’s the pleasantest work there is, and it’s the lightest work there is, and it’s the best- paid work there is. More than that, we couldn’t improve the mills themselves, unless we laid down Turkey carpets on the floors. Which we’re not a-going to do.’

‘Mr. Bounderby, perfectly right.’
'Lastly,' said Bounderby, 'as to our Hands. There's not a Hand in this town, sir, man, woman, or child, but has one ultimate object in life. That object is, to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon. Now, they're not a-going—none of 'em—ever to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon. And now you know the place.'

Mr. Harthouse professed himself in the highest degree instructed and refreshed, by this condensed epitome of the whole Coketown question.

'Why, you see,' replied Mr. Bounderby, 'it suits my disposition to have a full understanding with a man, particularly with a public man, when I make his acquaintance. I have only one thing more to say to you, Mr. Harthouse, before assuring you of the pleasure with which I shall respond, to the utmost of my poor ability, to my friend Tom Gradgrind's letter of introduction. You are a man of family. Don't you deceive yourself by supposing for a moment that I am a man of family. I am a bit of dirty riff-raff, and a genuine scrap of tag, rag, and bobtail.'

If anything could have exalted Jem's interest in Mr. Bounderby, it would have been this very circumstance. Or, so he told him.

'So now,' said Bounderby, 'we may shake hands on equal terms. I say, equal terms, because although I know what I am, and the exact depth of the gutter I have lifted myself out of, better than any man does, I am as proud as you are. I am just as proud as you are. Having now asserted my independence in a proper manner, I may come to how do you find yourself, and I hope you're pretty well.'

The better, Mr. Harthouse gave him to understand as they shook hands, for the salubrious air of Coketown. Mr. Bounderby received the answer with favour.

'Perhaps you know,' said he, 'or perhaps you don't know, I married Tom Gradgrind's daughter. If you have nothing better to do than to walk up town with me, I shall be glad to introduce you to Tom Gradgrind's daughter.'

'Mr. Bounderby,' said Jem, 'you anticipate my dearest wishes.'

They went out without further discourse; and Mr. Bounderby piloted the new acquaintance who so strongly contrasted with him, to the private red brick dwelling, with the black outside shutters, the green inside blinds, and the black street door up the two white steps. In the drawing-room of which mansion, there presently entered to them the most remarkable girl Mr. James Harthouse had ever seen. She was so constrained, and yet so careless; so reserved, and yet so watchful; so cold and proud, and yet so sensitively ashamed of her husband's bragart humility—from which she shrank as if every example of it were a cut or a blow; that it was quite a new sensation to observe her. In face she was no less remarkable than in manner. Her features were handsome; but their natural play was so locked up, that it seemed impossible to guess at their genuine expression. Utterly indifferent, perfectly self-reliant, never at a loss, and yet never at her ease, with her figure in company with them there, and her mind apparently quite alone—it was of no use 'going in' yet awhile to comprehend this girl, for she baffled all penetration.

From the mistress of the house, the visitor glanced to the house itself. There was no mute sign of a woman in the room. No graceful little adornment, no fanciful little device, however trivial, anywhere expressed her influence. Cheerless and comfortless, boastfully and doggedly rich, there the room stared at its present occupants, unsofterned and unrelieved by the least trace of any womanly occupation. As Mr. Bounderby stood in the midst of his household gods, so those unrelenting divinities occupied their places around Mr. Bounderby, and they were worthy of one another, and well
'This, sir,' said Bounderby, 'is my wife, Mrs. Bounderby: Tom Gradgrind’s eldest daughter. Loo, Mr. James Harthouse. Mr. Harthouse has joined your father’s muster-roll. If he is not Tom Gradgrind’s colleague before long, I believe we shall at least hear of him in connexion with one of our neighbouring towns. You observe, Mr. Harthouse, that my wife is my junior. I don’t know what she saw in me to marry me, but she saw something in me, I suppose, or she wouldn’t have married me. She has lots of expensive knowledge, sir, political and otherwise. If you want to cram for anything, I should be troubled to recommend you to a better adviser than Loo Bounderby.'

To a more agreeable adviser, or one from whom he would be more likely to learn, Mr. Harthouse could never be recommended.

‘Come!’ said his host. ‘If you’re in the complimentary line, you’ll get on here, for you’ll meet with no competition. I have never been in the way of learning compliments myself, and I don’t profess to understand the art of paying ’em. In fact, despise ’em. But, your bringing-up was different from mine; mine was a real thing, by George! You’re a gentleman, and I don’t pretend to be one. I am Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, and that’s enough for me. However, though I am not influenced by manners and station, Loo Bounderby may be. She hadn’t my advantages—disadvantages you would call ’em, but I call ’em advantages—so you’ll not waste your power, I dare say.’

‘Mr. Bounderby,’ said Jem, turning with a smile to Louisa, ‘is a noble animal in a comparatively natural state, quite free from the harness in which a conventional hack like myself works.’

‘You respect Mr. Bounderby very much,’ she quietly returned. ‘It is natural that you should.’

He was disgracefully thrown out, for a gentleman who had seen so much of the world, and thought, ‘Now, how am I to take this?’

‘You are going to devote yourself, as I gather from what Mr. Bounderby has said, to the service of your country. You have made up your mind,’ said Louisa, still standing before him where she had first stopped—in all the singular contrariety of her self-possession, and her being obviously very ill at ease—to show the nation the way out of all its difficulties.

‘Mrs. Bounderby,’ he returned, laughing, ‘upon my honour, no. I will make no such pretence to you. I have seen a little, here and there, up and down; I have found it all to be very worthless, as everybody has, and as some confess they have, and some do not; and I am going in for your respected father’s opinions—really because I have no choice of opinions, and may as well back them as anything else.’

‘Have you none of your own?’ asked Louisa.

‘I have not so much as the slightest predilection left. I assure you I attach not the least importance to any opinions. The result of the varieties of boredom I have undergone, is a conviction (unless conviction is too industrious a word for the lazy sentiment I entertain on the subject), that any set of ideas will do just as much good as any other set, and just as much harm as any other set. There’s an English family with a charming Italian motto. What will be, will be. It’s the only truth going!'
This vicious assumption of honesty in dishonesty—a vice so dangerous, so deadly, and so common—seemed, he observed, a little to impress her in his favour. He followed up the advantage, by saying in his pleasantest manner: a manner to which she might attach as much or as little meaning as she pleased: ‘The side that can prove anything in a line of units, tens, hundreds, and thousands, Mrs. Bounderby, seems to me to afford the most fun, and to give a man the best chance. I am quite as much attached to it as if I believed it. I am quite ready to go in for it, to the same extent as if I believed it. And what more could I possibly do, if I did believe it!’

‘You are a singular politician,’ said Louisa.

‘Pardon me; I have not even that merit. We are the largest party in the state, I assure you, Mrs. Bounderby, if we all fell out of our adopted ranks and were reviewed together.’

Mr. Bounderby, who had been in danger of bursting in silence, interposed here with a project for postponing the family dinner till half-past six, and taking Mr. James Harthouse in the meantime on a round of visits to the voting and interesting notabilities of Coketown and its vicinity. The round of visits was made; and Mr. James Harthouse, with a discreet use of his blue coaching, came off triumphantly, though with a considerable accession of boredom.

In the evening, he found the dinner-table laid for four, but they sat down only three. It was an appropriate occasion for Mr. Bounderby to discuss the flavour of the hap’orth of stewed eels he had purchased in the streets at eight years old; and also of the inferior water, specially used for laying the dust, with which he had washed down that repast. He likewise entertained his guest over the soup and fish, with the calculation that he (Bounderby) had eaten in his youth at least three horses under the guise of polonies and saveloys. These recitals, Jem, in a languid manner, received with ‘charming!’ every now and then; and they probably would have decided him to ‘go in’ for Jerusalem again to-morrow morning, had he been less curious respecting Louisa.

‘Is there nothing,’ he thought, glancing at her as she sat at the head of the table, where her youthful figure, small and slight, but very graceful, looked as pretty as it looked misplaced; ‘is there nothing that will move that face?’

Yes! By Jupiter, there was something, and here it was, in an unexpected shape. Tom appeared. She changed as the door opened, and broke into a beaming smile.

A beautiful smile. Mr. James Harthouse might not have thought so much of it, but that he had wondered so long at her impassive face. She put out her hand—a pretty little soft hand; and her fingers closed upon her brother’s, as if she would have carried them to her lips.

‘Ay, ay?’ thought the visitor. ‘This whelp is the only creature she cares for. So, so!’

The whelp was presented, and took his chair. The appellation was not flattering, but not unmerited.

‘When I was your age, young Tom,’ said Bounderby, ‘I was punctual, or I got no dinner!’ ‘When you were my age,’ resumed Tom, ‘you hadn’t a wrong balance to get right, and hadn’t to dress afterwards.’

‘Never mind that now,’ said Bounderby.

‘Well, then,’ grumbled Tom. ‘Don’t begin with me.’
'Mrs. Bounderby,' said Harthouse, perfectly hearing this under-strain as it went on; 'your brother's face is quite familiar to me. Can I have seen him abroad? Or at some public school, perhaps?'

'No,' she resumed, quite interested, 'he has never been abroad yet, and was educated here, at home. Tom, love, I am telling Mr. Harthouse that he never saw you abroad.'

'No such luck, sir,' said Tom.

There was little enough in him to brighten her face, for he was a sullen young fellow, and ungracious in his manner even to her. So much the greater must have been the solitude of her heart, and her need of some one on whom to bestow it. 'So much the more is this whelp the only creature she has ever cared for,' thought Mr. James Harthouse, turning it over and over. 'So much the more. So much the more.'

Both in his sister's presence, and after she had left the room, the whelp took no pains to hide his contempt for Mr. Bounderby, whenever he could indulge it without the observation of that independent man, by making wry faces, or shutting one eye. Without responding to these telegraphic communications, Mr. Harthouse encouraged him much in the course of the evening, and showed an unusual liking for him. At last, when he rose to return to his hotel, and was a little doubtful whether he knew the way by night, the whelp immediately proffered his services as guide, and turned out with him to escort him thither.

Chapter III: The Whelp

It was very remarkable that a young gentleman who had been brought up under one continuous system of unnatural restraint, should be a hypocrite; but it was certainly the case with Tom. It was very strange that a young gentleman who had never been left to his own guidance for five consecutive minutes, should be incapable at last of governing himself; but so it was with Tom. It was altogether unaccountable that a young gentleman whose imagination had been strangled in his cradle, should be still inconvenienced by its ghost in the form of grovelling sensualities; but such a monster, beyond all doubt, was Tom.

'Do you smoke?' asked Mr. James Harthouse, when they came to the hotel.

'I believe you!' said Tom.

He could do no less than ask Tom up; and Tom could do no less than go up. What with a cooling drink adapted to the weather, but not so weak as cool; and what with a rarer tobacco than was to be bought in those parts;

Tom was soon in a highly free and easy state at his end of the sofa, and more than ever disposed to admire his new friend at the other end. Tom blew his smoke aside, after he had been smoking a little while, and took an observation of his friend. 'He don't seem to care about his dress,' thought Tom, 'and yet how capitally he does it. What an easy swell he is!'

Mr. James Harthouse, happening to catch Tom's eye, remarked that he drank nothing, and filled his glass with his own negligent hand.
‘Thank’ee,’ said Tom. ‘Thank’ee. Well, Mr. Harthouse, I hope you have had about a dose of old Bounderby to-night.’ Tom said this with one eye shut up again, and looking over his glass knowingly, at his entertainer.

‘A very good fellow indeed!’ returned Mr. James Harthouse.

‘You think so, don’t you?’ said Tom. And shut up his eye again.

Mr. James Harthouse smiled; and rising from his end of the sofa, and lounging with his back against the chimney-piece, so that he stood before the empty firegrate as he smoked, in front of Tom and looking down at him, observed:

‘What a comical brother-in-law you are!’

‘What a comical brother-in-law old Bounderby is, I think you mean,’ said Tom.

‘You are a piece of caustic, Tom,’ retorted Mr. James Harthouse.

There was something so very agreeable in being so intimate with such a waistcoat; in being called Tom, in such an intimate way, by such a voice; in being on such off-hand terms so soon, with such a pair of whiskers; that Tom was uncommonly pleased with himself.

‘Oh! I don’t care for old Bounderby,’ said he, ‘if you mean that. I have always called old Bounderby by the same name when I have talked about him, and I have always thought of him in the same way. I am not going to begin to be polite now, about old Bounderby. It would be rather late in the day.’

‘Don’t mind me,’ returned James; ‘but take care when his wife is by, you know.’

‘His wife?’ said Tom. ‘My sister Loo? O yes!’ And he laughed, and took a little more of the cooling drink.

James Harthouse continued to lounge in the same place and attitude, smoking his cigar in his own easy way, and looking pleasantly at the whelp, as if he knew himself to be a kind of agreeable demon who had only to hover over him, and he must give up his whole soul if required. It certainly did seem that the whelp yielded to this influence. He looked at his companion sneakingly, he looked at him admiringly, he looked at him boldly, and put up one leg on the sofa.

‘My sister Loo?’ said Tom. ‘She never cared for old Bounderby.’

‘That’s the past tense, Tom,’ returned Mr. James Harthouse, striking the ash from his cigar with his little finger. ‘We are in the present tense, now.’

‘Verb neuter, not to care. Indicative mood, present tense. First person singular, I do not care; second person singular, thou dost not care; third person singular, she does not care,’ returned Tom.

‘Good! Very quaint!’ said his friend. ‘Though you don’t mean it.’

‘But I do mean it,’ cried Tom. ‘Upon my honour! Why, you won’t tell me, Mr. Harthouse, that you really suppose my sister Loo does care for old Bounderby.’

‘My dear fellow,’ returned the other, ‘what am I bound to suppose, when I find two married people living in harmony and
happiness?’

Tom had by this time got both his legs on the sofa. If his second leg had not been already there when he was called a
dear fellow, he would have put it up at that great stage of the conversation. Feeling it necessary to do something then,
h stretched himself out at greater length, and, reclining with the back of his head on the end of the sofa, and smoking
with an infinite assumption of negligence, turned his common face, and not too sober eyes, towards the face looking
down upon him so carelessly yet so potently.

‘You know our governor, Mr. Harthouse,’ said Tom, ‘and therefore, you needn’t be surprised that Loo married old
Bounderby. She never had a lover, and the governor proposed old Bounderby, and she took him.’

‘Very dutiful in your interesting sister,’ said Mr. James Harthouse.

‘Yes, but she wouldn’t have been as dutiful, and it would not have come off as easily,’ returned the whelp, ‘if it hadn’t
been for me.’

The tempter merely lifted his eyebrows; but the whelp was obliged to go on.

‘I persuaded her,’ he said, with an edifying air of superiority. ‘I was stuck into old Bounderby’s bank (where I never
wanted to be), and I knew I should get into scrapes there, if she put old Bounderby’s pipe out; so I told her my wishes,
and she came into them. She would do anything for me. It was very game of her, wasn’t it?’

‘It was charming, Tom!’

‘Not that it was altogether so important to her as it was to me,’ continued Tom coolly, ‘because my liberty and comfort,
and perhaps my getting on, depended on it; and she had no other lover, and staying at home was like staying in
jail—especially when I was gone. It wasn’t as if she gave up another lover for old Bounderby; but still it was a good thing
in her.’

‘Perfectly delightful. And she gets on so placidly.’

‘Oh,’ returned Tom, with contemptuous patronage, ‘she’s a regular girl. A girl can get on anywhere. She has settled
down to the life, and she don’t mind. It does just as well as another. Besides, though Loo is a girl, she’s not a common
sort of girl. She can shut herself up within herself, and think—as I have often known her sit and watch the fire—for an
hour at a stretch.’

‘Ay, ay? Has resources of her own,’ said Harthouse, smoking quietly.

‘Not so much of that as you may suppose,’ returned Tom; ‘for our governor had her crammed with all sorts of dry bones
and sawdust. It’s his system.’

‘Formed his daughter on his own model?’ suggested Harthouse.

‘His daughter? Ah! and everybody else. Why, he formed Me that way!’ said Tom.

‘Impossible!’
'He did, though,' said Tom, shaking his head. 'I mean to say, Mr. Harthouse, that when I first left home and went to old Bounderby’s, I was as flat as a warmingpan, and knew no more about life, than any oyster does.'

'Come, Tom! I can hardly believe that. A joke’s a joke.'

'Upon my soul!' said the whelp. 'I am serious; I am indeed!' He smoked with great gravity and dignity for a little while, and then added, in a highly complacent tone, ‘Oh! I have picked up a little since. I don’t deny that. But I have done it myself; no thanks to the governor.’

‘And your intelligent sister?’

‘My intelligent sister is about where she was. She used to complain to me that she had nothing to fall back upon, that girls usually fall back upon; and I don’t see how she is to have got over that since. But she don’t mind,’ he sagaciously added, puffing at his cigar again. ‘Girls can always get on, somehow.’

‘Calling at the Bank yesterday evening, for Mr. Bounderby’s address, I found an ancient lady there, who seems to entertain great admiration for your sister,’ observed Mr. James Harthouse, throwing away the last small remnant of the cigar he had now smoked out.

‘Mother Sparsit!’ said Tom. ‘What! you have seen her already, have you?’

His friend nodded. Tom took his cigar out of his mouth, to shut up his eye (which had grown rather unmanageable) with the greater expression, and to tap his nose several times with his finger.

‘Mother Sparsit’s feeling for Loo is more than admiration, I should think,’ said Tom. ‘Say affection and devotion. Mother Sparsit never set her cap at Bounderby when he was a bachelor. Oh no!’

These were the last words spoken by the whelp, before a giddy drowsiness came upon him, followed by complete oblivion. He was roused from the latter state by an uneasy dream of being stirred up with a boot, and also of a voice saying: ‘Come, it’s late. Be off!’

‘Well!’ he said, scrambling from the sofa. ‘I must take my leave of you though. I say. Yours is very good tobacco. But it’s too mild.’

‘Yes, it’s too mild,’ returned his entertainer.

‘It’s—it’s ridiculously mild,’ said Tom. ‘Where’s the door! Good night!’

‘He had another odd dream of being taken by a waiter through a mist, which, after giving him some trouble and difficulty, resolved itself into the main street, in which he stood alone. He then walked home pretty easily, though not yet free from an impression of the presence and influence of his new friend—as if he were lounging somewhere in the air, in the same negligent attitude, regarding him with the same look.

The whelp went home, and went to bed. If he had had any sense of what he had done that night, and had been less of a whelp and more of a brother, he might have turned short on the road, might have gone down to the ill-smelling river that was dyed black, might have gone to bed in it for good and all, and have curtained his head for ever with its filthy waters.
Mr. Slackbridge gives a speech urging Coketown workers to join his union against Bounderby. All the men except Blackpool decide to join the union. Although his fellow workers urge him to join, Blackpool refuses, for personal reasons. From that point on, his fellow workers shun Blackpool. Bounderby asks Blackpool to spy on the Coketown workers, but Blackpool refuses. Blackpool then denounces dangerous working conditions. Realizing that Blackpool has not refused to join the union out of loyalty to him, Bounderby fires Blackpool.

Chapter VI: Fading Away

'Twas falling dark when Stephen came out of Mr. Bounderby’s house. The shadows of night had gathered so fast, that he did not look about him when he closed the door, but plodded straight along the street. Nothing was further from his thoughts than the curious old woman he had encountered on his previous visit to the same house, when he heard a step behind him that he knew, and turning, saw her in Rachael’s company.

He saw Rachael first, as he had heard her only.

'Ah, Rachael, my dear! Missus, thou wi’ her!'

'Well, and now you are surprised to be sure, and with reason I must say,’ the old woman returned. ‘Here I am again, you see.’

'But how wi’ Rachael?’ said Stephen, falling into their step, walking between them, and looking from the one to the other.

'Why, I come to be with this good lass pretty much as I came to be with you,’ said the old woman, cheerfully, taking the reply upon herself. ‘My visiting time is later this year than usual, for I have been rather troubled with shortness of breath, and so put it off till the weather was fine and warm. For the same reason I don’t make all my journey in one day, but divide it into two days, and get a bed to-night at the Travellers’ Coffee House down by the railroad (a nice clean house), and go back Parliamentary, at six in the morning. Well, but what has this to do with this good lass, says you? I’m going to tell you. I have heard of Mr. Bounderby being married. I read it in the paper, where it looked grand—oh, it looked fine!’ the old woman dwelt on it with strange enthusiasm: ‘and I want to see his wife. I have never seen her yet. Now, if you’ll believe me, she hasn’t come out of that house since noon to-day. So not to give her up too easily, I was waiting about, a little last bit more, when I passed close to this good lass two or three times; and her face being so friendly I spoke to her, and she spoke to me. There!’ said the old woman to Stephen, ‘you can make all the rest out for yourself now, a deal shorter than I can, I dare say!’

Once again, Stephen had to conquer an instinctive propensity to dislike this old woman, though her manner was as honest and simple as a manner possibly could be. With a gentleness that was as natural to him as he knew it to be to Rachael, he pursued the subject that interested her in her old age.

'Well, missus,’ said he, ‘I ha seen the lady, and she were young and hansom. Wi’ fine dark thinkin eyes, and a still way, Rachael, as I ha never seen the like on.’

'Young and handsome. Yes!’ cried the old woman, quite delighted. ‘As bonny as a rose! And what a happy wife!’
‘Aye, missus, I suppose she be,’ said Stephen. But with a doubtful glance at Rachael.

‘Suppose she be? She must be. She’s your master’s wife,’ returned the old woman.

Stephen nodded assent. ‘Though as to master,’ said he, glancing again at Rachael, ‘not master onny more. That’s aw enden ‘twixt him and me.’

‘Have you left his work, Stephen?’ asked Rachael, anxiously and quickly.

‘Why, Rachael,’ he replied, ‘whether I ha lef’n his work, or whether his work ha lef’n me, cooms t’ th’ same. His work and me are parted. ’Tis as weel so—better, I were thinkin when yo coom up wi’ me. It would ha brought’n trouble upon trouble if I had stayed ther. Haply ’tis a kindness to monny that I go; haply ’tis a kindness to myseln; anyways it mun be done. I mun turn my face fro Coketown fur th’ time, and seek a fort’n, dear, by beginnin fresh.’

‘Where will you go, Stephen?’

‘I donno t’night,’ said he, lifting off his hat, and smoothing his thin hair with the flat of his hand. ‘But I’m not goin t’night, Rachael, nor yet t’morrow. ’Tan’t easy overmuch t’ know wheer t’ turn, but a good heart will coom to me.’

Herein, too, the sense of even thinking unselfishly aided him. Before he had so much as closed Mr. Bounderby’s door, he had reflected that at least his being obliged to go away was good for her, as it would save her from the chance of being brought into question for not withdrawing from him. Though it would cost him a hard pang to leave her, and though he could think of no similar place in which his condemnation would not pursue him, perhaps it was almost a relief to be forced away from the endurance of the last four days, even to unknown difficulties and distresses.

So he said, with truth, ‘I’m more leetsome, Rachael, under ‘t, than I could’n ha believed.’ It was not her part to make his burden heavier. She answered with her comforting smile, and the three walked on together.

Age, especially when it strives to be self-reliant and cheerful, finds much consideration among the poor. The old woman was so decent and contented, and made so light of her infirmities, though they had increased upon her since her former interview with Stephen, that they both took an interest in her. She was too sprightly to allow of their walking at a slow pace on her account, but she was very grateful to be talked to, and very willing to talk to any extent: so, when they came to their part of the town, she was more brisk and vivacious than ever.

‘Come to my poor place, missus,’ said Stephen, ‘and tak a coop o’ tea. Rachael will coom then; and arterwards I’ll see thee safe t’ thy Travellers’ lodgin. ’T may be long, Rachael, ere ever I ha th’ chance o’ thy company agen.’

They complied, and the three went on to the house where he lodged. When they turned into a narrow street, Stephen glanced at his window with a dread that always haunted his desolate home; but it was open, as he had left it, and no one was there. The evil spirit of his life had flitted away again, months ago, and he had heard no more of her since. The only evidence of her last return now, were the scantier moveables in his room, and the grayer hair upon his head.

He lighted a candle, set out his little tea-board, got hot water from below, and brought in small portions of tea and sugar, a loaf, and some butter from the nearest shop. The bread was new and crusty, the butter fresh, and the sugar lump, of course—in fulfilment of the standard testimony of the Coketown magnates, that these people lived like princes, sir. Rachael made the tea (so large a party necessitated the borrowing of a cup), and the visitor enjoyed it mightily. It was

https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Literature_and_Literacy/Book%3A_British_Literature_II_-_Romantic_Era_to_the_Tw...
the first glimpse of sociality the host had had for many days. He too, with the world a wide heath before him, enjoyed the meal—again in corroboration of the magnates, as exemplifying the utter want of calculation on the part of these people, sir.

‘I ha never thowt yet, missus,’ said Stephen, ‘o’ askin thy name.’

The old lady announced herself as ‘Mrs. Pegler.’

‘A widder, I think?’ said Stephen.

‘Oh, many long years!’ Mrs. Pegler’s husband (one of the best on record) was already dead, by Mrs. Pegler’s calculation, when Stephen was born.

‘Twere a bad job, too, to lose so good a one,’ said Stephen. ‘Onny children?’

Mrs. Pegler’s cup, rattling against her saucer as she held it, denoted some nervousness on her part. ‘No,’ she said. ‘Not now, not now.’

‘Dead, Stephen,’ Rachael softly hinted.

‘I’m sooary I ha spok’n on ‘t,’ said Stephen, ‘I ought t’ hadn in my mind as I might touch a sore place. I—I blame myseln.’

While he excused himself, the old lady’s cup rattled more and more. ‘I had a son,’ she said, curiously distressed, and not by any of the usual appearances of sorrow; ‘and he did well, wonderfully well. But he is not to be spoken of if you please. He is—’ Putting down her cup, she moved her hands as if she would have added, by her action, ‘dead!’ Then she said aloud, ‘I have lost him.’

Stephen had not yet got the better of his having given the old lady pain, when his landlady came stumbling up the narrow stairs, and calling him to the door, whispered in his ear. Mrs. Pegler was by no means deaf, for she caught a word as it was uttered.

‘Bounderby!’ she cried, in a suppressed voice, starting up from the table. ‘Oh hide me! Don’t let me be seen for the world. Don’t let him come up till I’ve got away. Pray, pray!’ She trembled, and was excessively agitated; getting behind Rachael, when Rachael tried to reassure her; and not seeming to know what she was about.

‘But hearken, missus, hearken,’ said Stephen, astonished. “Tisn’t Mr. Bounderby; ‘tis his wife. Yo’r not fearfo’ o’ her. Yo was hey-go-mad about her, but an hour sin.’

‘But are you sure it’s the lady, and not the gentleman?’ she asked, still trembling.

‘Certain sure!’

‘Well then, pray don’t speak to me, nor yet take any notice of me,’ said the old woman. ‘Let me be quite to myself in this corner.’

Stephen nodded; looking to Rachael for an explanation, which she was quite unable to give him; took the candle, went downstairs, and in a few moments returned, lighting Louisa into the room. She was followed by the whelp.
Rachael had risen, and stood apart with her shawl and bonnet in her hand, when Stephen, himself profoundly astonished by this visit, put the candle on the table. Then he too stood, with his doubled hand upon the table near it, waiting to be addressed.

For the first time in her life Louisa had come into one of the dwellings of the Coketown Hands; for the first time in her life she was face to face with anything like individuality in connection with them. She knew of their existence by hundreds and by thousands. She knew what results in work a given number of them would produce in a given space of time. She knew them in crowds passing to and from their nests, like ants or beetles. But she knew from her reading infinitely more of the ways of toiling insects than of these toiling men and women.

Something to be worked so much and paid so much, and there ended; something to be infallibly settled by laws of supply and demand; something that blundered against those laws, and floundered into difficulty; something that was a little pinched when wheat was dear, and over-ate itself when wheat was cheap; something that increased at such a rate of percentage, and yielded such another percentage of crime, and such another percentage of pauperism; something wholesale, of which vast fortunes were made; something that occasionally rose like a sea, and did some harm and waste (chiefly to itself), and fell again; this she knew the Coketown Hands to be. But, she had scarcely thought more of separating them into units, than of separating the sea itself into its component drops.

She stood for some moments looking round the room. From the few chairs, the few books, the common prints, and the bed, she glanced to the two women, and to Stephen.

‘I have come to speak to you, in consequence of what passed just now. I should like to be serviceable to you, if you will let me. Is this your wife?’

Rachael raised her eyes, and they sufficiently answered no, and dropped again.

‘I remember,’ said Louisa, reddening at her mistake; ‘I recollect, now, to have heard your domestic misfortunes spoken of, though I was not attending to the particulars at the time. It was not my meaning to ask a question that would give pain to any one here. If I should ask any other question that may happen to have that result, give me credit, if you please, for being in ignorance how to speak to you as I ought.’

As Stephen had but a little while ago instinctively addressed himself to her, so she now instinctively addressed herself to Rachael. Her manner was short and abrupt, yet faltering and timid.

‘He has told you what has passed between himself and my husband? You would be his first resource, I think.’

‘I have heard the end of it, young lady,’ said Rachael.

‘Did I understand, that, being rejected by one employer, he would probably be rejected by all? I thought he said as much?’

‘The chances are very small, young lady—next to nothing—for a man who gets a bad name among them.’

‘What shall I understand that you mean by a bad name?’

‘The name of being troublesome.’
‘Then, by the prejudices of his own class, and by the prejudices of the other, he is sacrificed alike? Are the two so deeply separated in this town, that there is no place whatever for an honest workman between them?’

Rachael shook her head in silence.

‘He fell into suspicion,’ said Louisa, ‘with his fellow-weavers, because—he had made a promise not to be one of them. I think it must have been to you that he made that promise. Might I ask you why he made it?’

Rachael burst into tears. ‘I didn’t seek it of him, poor lad. I prayed him to avoid trouble for his own good, little thinking he’d come to it through me. But I know he’d die a hundred deaths, ere ever he’d break his word. I know that of him well.’

Stephen had remained quietly attentive, in his usual thoughtful attitude, with his hand at his chin. He now spoke in a voice rather less steady than usual.

‘No one, excepting myseln, can ever know what honour, an’ what love, an’ respect, I bear to Rachael, or wi’ what cause. When I passed that promess, I towd her true, she were th’ Angel o’ my life. ‘Twere a solemn promess. ‘Tis gone fro’ me, for ever.’

Louisa turned her head to him, and bent it with a deference that was new in her. She looked from him to Rachael, and her features softened. ‘What will you do?’ she asked him. And her voice had softened too.

‘Weel, ma’am,’ said Stephen, making the best of it, with a smile; ‘when I ha finished off, I mun quit this part, and try another. Fortnet or misfortnet, a man can but try; there’s nowt to be done wi’out tryin’—cept laying down and dying.’

‘How will you travel?’

‘Afoot, my kind ledy, afoot.’ Louisa coloured, and a purse appeared in her hand. The rustling of a bank-note was audible, as she unfolded one and laid it on the table.

‘Rachael, will you tell him—for you know how, without offence—that this is freely his, to help him on his way? Will you entreat him to take it?’

‘I canna do that, young lady,’ she answered, turning her head aside. ‘Bless you for thinking o’ the poor lad wi’ such tenderness. But ’tis for him to know his heart, and what is right according to it.’

Louisa looked, in part incredulous, in part frightened, in part overcome with quick sympathy, when this man of so much self- command, who had been so plain and steady through the late interview, lost his composure in a moment, and now stood with his hand before his face. She stretched out hers, as if she would have touched him; then checked herself, and remained still.

‘Not e’en Rachael,’ said Stephen, when he stood again with his face uncovered, ‘could mak sitch a kind offerin, by onny words, kinder. T’ show that I’m not a man wi’out reason and gratitude, I’ll tak two pound. I’ll borrow t’ for t’ pay t’ back. ‘Twill be the sweetest work as ever I ha done, that puts it in my power t’ acknolwedge once more my lastin thankfulness for this present action.’

She was fain to take up the note again, and to substitute the much smaller sum he had named. He was neither courtly,
nor handsome, nor picturesque, in any respect; and yet his manner of accepting it, and of expressing his thanks without more words, had a grace in it that Lord Chesterfield could not have taught his son in a century.

Tom had sat upon the bed, swinging one leg and sucking his walking-stick with sufficient unconcern, until the visit had attained this stage. Seeing his sister ready to depart, he got up, rather hurriedly, and put in a word.

'Just wait a moment, Loo! Before we go, I should like to speak to him a moment. Something comes into my head. If you'll step out on the stairs, Blackpool, I'll mention it. Never mind a light, man!' Tom was remarkably impatient of his moving towards the cupboard, to get one. 'It don't want a light.'

Stephen followed him out, and Tom closed the room door, and held the lock in his hand.

'I say!' he whispered. 'I think I can do you a good turn. Don't ask me what it is, because it may not come to anything. But there's no harm in my trying.'

His breath fell like a flame of fire on Stephen's ear, it was so hot.

'That was our light porter at the Bank,' said Tom, 'who brought you the message to-night. I call him our light porter, because I belong to the Bank too.'

Stephen thought, 'What a hurry he is in!' He spoke so confusedly.

'Well!' said Tom. 'Now look here! When are you off?'

'T day's Monday,' replied Stephen, considering.

'Why, sir, Friday or Saturday, nigh 'bout.'

'Friday or Saturday,' said Tom. 'Now look here! I am not sure that I can do you the good turn I want to do you—that's my sister, you know, in your room—but I may be able to, and if I should not be able to, there's no harm done. So I tell you what. You'll know our light porter again?'

'Yes, sure,' said Stephen.

'Very well,' returned Tom. 'When you leave work of a night, between this and your going away, just hang about the Bank an hour or so, will you? Don't take on, as if you meant anything, if he should see you hanging about there; because I shan't put him up to speak to you, unless I find I can do you the service I want to do you. In that case he'll have a note or a message for you, but not else. Now look here! You are sure you understand.'

He had wormed a finger, in the darkness, through a button-hole of Stephen's coat, and was screwing that corner of the garment tight up round and round, in an extraordinary manner.'I understand, sir,' said Stephen.

'Now look here!' repeated Tom. 'Be sure you don't make any mistake then, and don't forget. I shall tell my sister as we go home, what I have in view, and she'll approve, I know. Now look here! You're all right, are you? You understand all about it? Very well then. Come along, Loo!'
stairs. He was at the bottom when she began to descend, and was in the street before she could take his arm.

Mrs. Pegler remained in her corner until the brother and sister were gone, and until Stephen came back with the candle in his hand. She was in a state of inexpressible admiration of Mrs. Bounderby, and, like an unaccountable old woman, wept, ‘because she was such a pretty dear.’ Yet Mrs. Pegler was so flurried lest the object of her admiration should return by chance, or anybody else should come, that her cheerfulness was ended for that night. It was late too, to people who rose early and worked hard; therefore the party broke up; and Stephen and Rachael escorted their mysterious acquaintance to the door of the Travellers’ Coffee House, where they parted from her.

They walked back together to the corner of the street where Rachael lived, and as they drew nearer and nearer to it, silence crept upon them. When they came to the dark corner where their unfrequent meetings always ended, they stopped, still silent, as if both were afraid to speak.

‘I shall strive t’ see thee agen, Rachael, afore I go, but if not—’

‘Thou wilt not, Stephen, I know. ’Tis better that we make up our minds to be open wi’ one another.’

‘Thou’rt awlus right. ’Tis bolder and better. I ha been thinkin then, Rachael, that as ’tis but a day or two that remains, ’tware better for thee, my dear, not t’ be seen wi’ me. ’T might bring thee into trouble, fur no good.’

‘’Tis not for that, Stephen, that I mind. But thou know’st our old agreement. ’Tis for that.’

‘Well, well,’ said he. ’Tis better, onnyways.’

‘Thou’lt write to me, and tell me all that happens, Stephen?’

‘Yes. What can I say now, but Heaven be wi’ thee, Heaven bless thee, Heaven thank thee and reward thee!’

‘May it bless thee, Stephen, too, in all thy wanderings, and send thee peace and rest at last!’

‘I towd thee, my dear,’ said Stephen Blackpool—’that night—that I would never see or think o’ onnything that angered me, but thou, so much better than me, should’st be beside it. Thou’rt beside it now. Thou mak’st me see it wi’ a better eye. Bless thee. Good night. Good-bye!’

It was but a hurried parting in a common street, yet it was a sacred remembrance to these two common people. Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of Fact, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog’seared creeds, the poor you will have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections, to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament; or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you.

Stephen worked the next day, and the next, uncheered by a word from any one, and shunned in all his comings and goings as before. At the end of the second day, he saw land; at the end of the third, his loom stood empty.

He had overstayed his hour in the street outside the Bank, on each of the two first evenings; and nothing had happened there, good or bad. That he might not be remiss in his part of the engagement, he resolved to wait full two hours, on this
third and last night.

There was the lady who had once kept Mr. Bounderby's house, sitting at the first-floor window as he had seen her before; and there was the light porter, sometimes talking with her there, and sometimes looking over the blind below which had Bank upon it, and sometimes coming to the door and standing on the steps for a breath of air. When he first came out, Stephen thought he might be looking for him, and passed near; but the light porter only cast his winking eyes upon him slightly, and said nothing.

Two hours were a long stretch of lounging about, after a long day's labour. Stephen sat upon the step of a door, leaned against a wall under an archway, strolled up and down, listened for the church clock, stopped and watched children playing in the street. Some purpose or other is so natural to every one, that a mere loiterer always looks and feels remarkable. When the first hour was out, Stephen even began to have an uncomfortable sensation upon him of being for the time a disreputable character.

Then came the lamplighter, and two lengthening lines of light all down the long perspective of the street, until they were blended and lost in the distance. Mrs. Sparsit closed the first-floor window, drew down the blind, and went up-stairs. Presently, a light went up-stairs after her, passing first the fanlight of the door, and afterwards the two staircase windows, on its way up. By and by, one corner of the second-floor blind was disturbed, as if Mrs. Sparsit's eye were there; also the other corner, as if the light porter's eye were on that side. Still, no communication was made to Stephen. Much relieved when the two hours were at last accomplished, he went away at a quick pace, as a recompense for so much loitering.

He had only to take leave of his landlady, and lie down on his temporary bed upon the floor; for his bundle was made up for to-morrow, and all was arranged for his departure. He meant to be clear of the town very early; before the Hands were in the streets.

It was barely daybreak, when, with a parting look round his room, mournfully wondering whether he should ever see it again, he went out. The town was as entirely deserted as if the inhabitants had abandoned it, rather than hold communication with him. Everything looked wan at that hour. Even the coming sun made but a pale waste in the sky, like a sad sea.

By the place where Rachael lived, though it was not in his way; by the red brick streets; by the great silent factories, not trembling yet; by the railway, where the danger-lights were waning in the strengthening day; by the railway's crazy neighbourhood, half pulled down and half built up; by scattered red brick villas, where the besmoked evergreens were sprinkled with a dirty powder, like untidy snuff-takers; by coal-dust paths and many varieties of ugliness; Stephen got to the top of the hill, and looked back.

Day was shining radiantly upon the town then, and the bells were going for the morning work. Domestic fires were not yet lighted, and the high chimneys had the sky to themselves. Puffing out their poisonous volumes, they would not be long in hiding it; but, for half an hour, some of the many windows were golden, which showed the Coketown people a sun eternally in eclipse, through a medium of smoked glass. So strange to turn from the chimneys to the birds.

So strange, to have the roaddust on his feet instead of the coal-grit. So strange to have lived to his time of life, and yet to be beginning like a boy this summer morning! With these musings in his mind, and his bundle under his arm, Stephen took his attentive face along the high road. And the trees arched over him, whispering that he left a true and loving heart
Harthouse plays upon Louisa’s affections by offering to mentor Tom, who is now gambling and losing money. Bounderby’s bank has been robbed; around 150 pounds has been stolen from Tom’s safe. Bounderby accuses Blackpool of the crime. Louisa is concerned about the fact that she and Tom saw Blackpool before he left town. Tom dismisses her concerns.

Chapter IX: Hearing the Last of It

MRS. SPARSIT, lying by to recover the tone of her nerves in Mr. Bounderby’s retreat, kept such a sharp look-out, night and day, under her Coriolanian eyebrows, that her eyes, like a couple of lighthouses on an iron-bound coast, might have warned all prudent mariners from that bold rock her Roman nose and the dark and craggy region in its neighbourhood, but for the placidity of her manner. Although it was hard to believe that her retiring for the night could be anything but a form, so severely wide awake were those classical eyes of hers, and so impossible did it seem that her rigid nose could yield to any relaxing influence, yet her manner of sitting, smoothing her uncomfortable, not to say, gritty mittens (they were constructed of a cool fabric like a meat-safe), or of ambling to unknown places of destination with her foot in her cotton stirrup, was so perfectly serene, that most observers would have been constrained to suppose her a dove, embodied by some freak of nature, in the earthly tabernacle of a bird of the hook-beaked order.

She was a most wonderful woman for prowling about the house. How she got from story to story was a mystery beyond solution. A lady so decorous in herself, and so highly connected, was not to be suspected of dropping over the banisters or sliding down them, yet her extraordinary facility of locomotion suggested the wild idea. Another noticeable circumstance in Mrs. Sparsit was, that she was never hurried. She would shoot with consummate velocity from the roof to the hall, yet would be in full possession of her breath and dignity on the moment of her arrival there. Neither was she ever seen by human vision to go at a great pace.

She took very kindly to Mr. Harthouse, and had some pleasant conversation with him soon after her arrival. She made him her stately curtsey in the garden, one morning before breakfast.

‘It appears but yesterday, sir,’ said Mrs. Sparsit, ‘that I had the honour of receiving you at the Bank, when you were so good as to wish to be made acquainted with Mr. Bounderby’s address.’

‘An occasion, I am sure, not to be forgotten by myself in the course of Ages,’ said Mr. Harthouse, inclining his head to Mrs. Sparsit with the most indolent of all possible airs.

‘We live in a singular world, sir,’ said Mrs. Sparsit.

‘I have had the honour, by a coincidence of which I am proud, to have made a remark, similar in effect, though not so epigrammatically expressed.’

‘A singular world, I would say, sir,’ pursued Mrs. Sparsit; after acknowledging the compliment with a drooping of her dark eyebrows, not altogether so mild in its expression as her voice was in its dulcet tones; ‘as regards the intimacies we
form at one time, with individuals we were quite ignorant of, at another. I recall, sir, that on that occasion you went so far as to say you were actually apprehensive of Miss Gradgrind.’

‘Your memory does me more honour than my insignificance deserves. I availed myself of your obliging hints to correct my timidity, and it is unnecessary to add that they were perfectly accurate. Mrs. Sparsit’s talent for—in fact for anything requiring accuracy—with a combination of strength of mind—and Family—is too habitually developed to admit of any question.’ He was almost falling asleep over this compliment; it took him so long to get through, and his mind wandered so much in the course of its execution.

‘You found Miss Gradgrind—I really cannot call her Mrs. Bounderby; it’s very absurd of me—as youthful as I described her?’ asked Mrs. Sparsit, sweetly.

‘You drew her portrait perfectly,’ said Mr. Harthouse. ‘Presented her dead image.’

‘Very engaging, sir,’ said Mrs. Sparsit, causing her mittens slowly to revolve over one another.

‘Highly so.’

‘It used to be considered,’ said Mrs. Sparsit, ‘that Miss Gradgrind was wanting in animation, but I confess she appears to me considerably and strikingly improved in that respect. Ay, and indeed here is Mr. Bounderby!’ cried Mrs. Sparsit, nodding her head a great many times, as if she had been talking and thinking of no one else. ‘How do you find yourself this morning, sir? Pray let us see you cheerful, sir.’

Now, these persistent assuagements of his misery, and lightenings of his load, had by this time begun to have the effect of making Mr. Bounderby softer than usual towards Mrs. Sparsit, and harder than usual to most other people from his wife downward. So, when Mrs. Sparsit said with forced lightness of heart, ‘You want your breakfast, sir, but I dare say Miss Gradgrind will soon be here to preside at the table,’ Mr. Bounderby replied, ‘If I waited to be taken care of by my wife, ma’am, I believe you know pretty well I should wait till Doomsday, so I’ll trouble you to take charge of the teapot.’ Mrs. Sparsit complied, and assumed her old position at table.

This again made the excellent woman vastly sentimental. She was so humble withal, that when Louisa appeared, she rose, protesting she never could think of sitting in that place under existing circumstances, often as she had had the honour of making Mr. Bounderby’s breakfast, before Mrs. Gradgrind—she begged pardon, she meant to say Miss Bounderby—she hoped to be excused, but she really could not get it right yet, though she trusted to become familiar with it by and by—had assumed her present position. It was only (she observed) because Miss Gradgrind happened to be a little late, and Mr. Bounderby’s time was so very precious, and she knew it of old to be so essential that he should breakfast to the moment, that she had taken the liberty of complying with his request; long as his will had been a law to her.

‘There! Stop where you are, ma’am,’ said Mr. Bounderby, ‘stop where you are! Mrs. Bounderby will be very glad to be relieved of the trouble, I believe.’

‘Don’t say that, sir,’ returned Mrs. Sparsit, almost with severity, ‘because that is very unkind to Mrs. Bounderby. And to be unkind is not to be you, sir.’
‘You may set your mind at rest, ma’am.—You can take it very quietly, can’t you, Loo?’ said Mr. Bounderby, in a blustering way to his wife.

‘Of course. It is of no moment. Why should it be of any importance to me?’

‘Why should it be of any importance to any one, Mrs. Sparsit, ma’am?’ said Mr. Bounderby, swelling with a sense of slight. ‘You attach too much importance to these things, ma’am. By George, you’ll be corrupted in some of your notions here. You are old-fashioned, ma’am. You are behind Tom Gradgrind’s children’s time.’

‘What is the matter with you?’ asked Louisa, coldly surprised. ‘What has given you offence?’

‘Offence!’ repeated Bounderby. ‘Do you suppose if there was any offence given me, I shouldn’t name it, and request to have it corrected? I am a straightforward man, I believe. I don’t go beating about for side-winds.’

‘I suppose no one ever had occasion to think you too diffident, or too delicate,’ Louisa answered him composedly: ‘I have never made that objection to you, either as a child or as a woman. I don’t understand what you would have.’

‘Have?’ returned Mr. Bounderby. ‘Nothing. Otherwise, don’t you, Loo Bounderby, know thoroughly well that I, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, would have it?’

She looked at him, as he struck the table and made the teacups ring, with a proud colour in her face that was a new change, Mr. Harthouse thought. ‘You are incomprehensible this morning,’ said Louisa. ‘Pray take no further trouble to explain yourself. I am not curious to know your meaning. What does it matter?’

Nothing more was said on this theme, and Mr. Harthouse was soon idly gay on indifferent subjects. But from this day, the Sparsit action upon Mr. Bounderby threw Louisa and James Harthouse more together, and strengthened the dangerous alienation from her husband and confidence against him with another, into which she had fallen by degrees so fine that she could not retrace them if she tried. But whether she ever tried or no, lay hidden in her own closed heart.

Mrs. Sparsit was so much affected on this particular occasion, that, assisting Mr. Bounderby to his hat after breakfast, and being then alone with him in the hall, she imprinted a chaste kiss upon his hand, murmured ‘My benefactor!’ and retired, overwhelmed with grief. Yet it is an indubitable fact, within the cognizance of this history, that five minutes after he had left the house in the self-same hat, the same descendant of the Scadgerses and connexion by matrimony of the Powlers, shook her right-hand mitten at his portrait, made a contemptuous grimace at that work of art, and said ‘Serve you right, you Noodle, and I am glad of it.’

Mr. Bounderby had not been long gone, when Bitzer appeared. Bitzer had come down by train, shrieking and rattling over the long line of arches that bestrode the wild country of past and present coal-pits, with an express from Stone Lodge. It was a hasty note to inform Louisa that Mrs. Gradgrind lay very ill. She had never been well within her daughter’s knowledge; but, she had declined within the last few days, had continued sinking all through the night, and was now as nearly dead, as her limited capacity of being in any state that implied the ghost of an intention to get out of it, allowed.

Accompanied by the lightest of porters, fit colourless servitor at Death’s door when Mrs. Gradgrind knocked, Louisa rumbled to Coketown, over the coal-pits past and present, and was whirled into its smoky jaws. She dismissed the
messenger to his own devices, and rode away to her old home.

She had seldom been there since her marriage. Her father was usually sifting and sifting at his parliamentary cinder-heap in London (without being observed to turn up many precious articles among the rubbish), and was still hard at it in the national dust-yard. Her mother had taken it rather as a disturbance than otherwise, to be visited, as she reclined upon her sofa; young people, Louisa felt herself all unfit for; Sissy she had never softened to again, since the night when the stroller’s child had raised her eyes to look at Mr. Bounderby’s intended wife. She had no inducements to go back, and had rarely gone.

Neither, as she approached her old home now, did any of the best influences of old home descend upon her. The dreams of childhood—its airy fables; its graceful, beautiful, humane, impossible adornments of the world beyond: so good to be believed in once, so good to be remembered when outgrown, for then the least among them rises to the stature of a great Charity in the heart, suffering little children to come into the midst of it, and to keep with their pure hands a garden in the stony ways of this world, wherein it were better for all the children of Adam that they should oftener sun themselves, simple and trustful, and not worldlywise—what had she to do with these? Remembrances of how she had journeyed to the little that she knew, by the enchanted roads of what she and millions of innocent creatures had hoped and imagined; of how, first coming upon Reason through the tender light of Fancy, she had seen it a beneficent god, deferring to gods as great as itself; not a grim Idol, cruel and cold, with its victims bound hand to foot, and its big dumb shape set up with a sightless stare, never to be moved by anything but so many calculated tons of leverage—what had she to do with these? Her remembrances of home and childhood were remembrances of the drying up of every spring and fountain in her young heart as it gushed out. The golden waters were not there. They were flowing for the fertilization of the land where grapes are gathered from thorns, and figs from thistles.

She went, with a heavy, hardened kind of sorrow upon her, into the house and into her mother’s room. Since the time of her leaving home, Sissy had lived with the rest of the family on equal terms. Sissy was at her mother’s side; and Jane, her sister, now ten or twelve years old, was in the room.

There was great trouble before it could be made known to Mrs. Gradgrind that her eldest child was there. She reclined, propped up, from mere habit, on a couch: as nearly in her old usual attitude, as anything so helpless could be kept in. She had positively refused to take to her bed; on the ground that if she did, she would never hear the last of it. Her feeble voice sounded so far away in her bundle of shawls, and the sound of another voice addressing her seemed to take such a long time in getting down to her ears, that she might have been lying at the bottom of a well. The poor lady was nearer Truth than she ever had been: which had much to do with it.

On being told that Mrs. Bounderby was there, she replied, at cross- purposes, that she had never called him by that name since he married Louisa; that pending her choice of an objectionable name, she had called him J; and that she could not at present depart from that regulation, not being yet provided with a permanent substitute. Louisa had sat by her for some minutes, and had spoken to her often, before she arrived at a clear understanding who it was. She then seemed to come to it all at once.

‘Well, my dear,’ said Mrs. Gradgrind, ‘and I hope you are going on satisfactorily to yourself. It was all your father’s doing. He set his heart upon it. And he ought to know.’

‘I want to hear of you, mother; not of myself.’
‘You want to hear of me, my dear? That’s something new, I am sure, when anybody wants to hear of me. Not at all well, Louisa. Very faint and giddy.’

‘Are you in pain, dear mother?’

‘I think there’s a pain somewhere in the room,’ said Mrs. Gradgrind, ‘but I couldn’t positively say that I have got it.’

After this strange speech, she lay silent for some time. Louisa, holding her hand, could feel no pulse; but kissing it, could see a slight thin thread of life in fluttering motion.

‘You very seldom see your sister,’ said Mrs. Gradgrind.

‘She grows like you. I wish you would look at her. Sissy, bring her here.’ She was brought, and stood with her hand in her sister’s. Louisa had observed her with her arm round Sissy’s neck, and she felt the difference of this approach.

‘Do you see the likeness, Louisa?’

‘Yes, mother. I should think her like me. But—’

‘Eh! Yes, I always say so,’ Mrs. Gradgrind cried, with unexpected quickness. ‘And that reminds me. I—I want to speak to you, my dear. Sissy, my good girl, leave us alone a minute.’ Louisa had relinquished the hand: had thought that her sister’s was a better and brighter face than hers had ever been: had seen in it, not without a rising feeling of resentment, even in that place and at that time, something of the gentleness of the other face in the room; the sweet face with the trusting eyes, made paler than watching and sympathy made it, by the rich dark hair.

Left alone with her mother, Louisa saw her lying with an awful lull upon her face, like one who was floating away upon some great water, all resistance over, content to be carried down the stream. She put the shadow of a hand to her lips again, and recalled her.

‘You were going to speak to me, mother.’

‘Eh? Yes, to be sure, my dear. You know your father is almost always away now, and therefore I must write to him about it.’

‘About what, mother? Don’t be troubled. About what?’

‘You must remember, my dear, that whenever I have said anything, on any subject, I have never heard the last of it: and consequently, that I have long left off saying anything.’

‘I can hear you, mother.’ But, it was only by dint of bending down to her ear, and at the same time attentively watching the lips as they moved, that she could link such faint and broken sounds into any chain of connexion.

‘You learnt a great deal, Louisa, and so did your brother. Ologies of all kinds from morning to night. If there is any Ology left, of any description, that has not been worn to rags in this house, all I can say is, I hope I shall never hear its name.’

‘I can hear you, mother, when you have strength to go on.’ This, to keep her from floating away.
‘But there is something—not an Ology at all—that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don’t know what it is. I have often sat with Sissy near me, and thought about it. I shall never get its name now. But your father may. It makes me restless. I want to write to him, to find out for God’s sake, what it is. Give me a pen, give me a pen.’

Even the power of restlessness was gone, except from the poor head, which could just turn from side to side.

She fancied, however, that her request had been complied with, and that the pen she could not have held was in her hand. It matters little what figures of wonderful no-meaning she began to trace upon her wrappers. The hand soon stopped in the midst of them; the light that had always been feeble and dim behind the weak transparency, went out; and even Mrs. Gradgrind, emerged from the shadow in which man walketh and disquieteth himself in vain, took upon her the dread solemnity of the sages and patriarchs.

Mrs. Sparsit relishes the possibility of Louisa’s falling in love with Harthouse. Spying on the two, she overhears Harthouse begging Louisa to leave with him.

Chapter XII: Down

THE national dustmen, after entertaining one another with a great many noisy little fights among themselves, had dispersed for the present, and Mr. Gradgrind was at home for the vacation.

He sat writing in the room with the deadly statistical clock, proving something no doubt—probably, in the main, that the Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist. The noise of the rain did not disturb him much; but it attracted his attention sufficiently to make him raise his head sometimes, as if he were rather remonstrating with the elements. When it thundered very loudly, he glanced towards Coketown, having it in his mind that some of the tall chimneys might be struck by lightning.

The thunder was rolling into distance, and the rain was pouring down like a deluge, when the door of his room opened. He looked round the lamp upon his table, and saw, with amazement, his eldest daughter.

‘Louisa!’

‘Father, I want to speak to you.’

‘What is the matter? How strange you look! And good Heaven,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, wondering more and more, ‘have you come here exposed to this storm?’

She put her hands to her dress, as if she hardly knew. ‘Yes.’ Then she uncovered her head, and letting her cloak and hood fall where they might, stood looking at him: so colourless, so dishevelled, so defiant and despairing, that he was afraid of her.

‘What is it? I conjure you, Louisa, tell me what is the matter.’

She dropped into a chair before him, and put her cold hand on his arm.
'Father, you have trained me from my cradle?'

'Yes, Louisa.'

'I curse the hour in which I was born to such a destiny.'

He looked at her in doubt and dread, vacantly repeating: ‘Curse the hour? Curse the hour?’

‘How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here!’

She struck herself with both her hands upon her bosom.

‘If it had ever been here, its ashes alone would save me from the void in which my whole life sinks. I did not mean to say this; but, father, you remember the last time we conversed in this room?’

He had been so wholly unprepared for what he heard now, that it was with difficulty he answered, ‘Yes, Louisa.’

‘What has risen to my lips now, would have risen to my lips then, if you had given me a moment’s help. I don’t reproach you, father. What you have never nurtured in me, you have never nurtured in yourself; but O! if you had only done so long ago, or if you had only neglected me, what a much better and much happier creature I should have been this day!’

On hearing this, after all his care, he bowed his head upon his hand and groaned aloud.

‘Father, if you had known, when we were last together here, what even I feared while I strove against it—as it has been my task from infancy to strive against every natural prompting that has arisen in my heart; if you had known that there lingered in my breast, sensibilities, affections, weaknesses capable of being cherished into strength, defying all the calculations ever made by man, and no more known to his arithmetic than his Creator is,—would you have given me to the husband whom I am now sure that I hate?’

He said, ‘No. No, my poor child.’

‘Would you have doomed me, at any time, to the frost and blight that have hardened and spoiled me? Would you have robbed me—for no one’s enrichment—only for the greater desolation of this world—of the immaterial part of my life, the spring and summer of my belief, my refuge from what is sordid and bad in the real things around me, my school in which I should have learned to be more humble and more trusting with them, and to hope in my little sphere to make them better?’

‘O no, no. No, Louisa.’

‘Yet, father, if I had been stone blind; if I had groped my way by my sense of touch, and had been free, while I knew the shapes and surfaces of things, to exercise my fancy somewhat, in regard to them; I should have been a million times wiser, happier, more loving, more contented, more innocent and human in all good respects, than I am with the eyes I have. Now, hear what I have come to say.’

He moved, to support her with his arm. She rising as he did so, they stood close together: she, with a hand upon his
shoulder, looking fixedly in his face.

‘With a hunger and thirst upon me, father, which have never been for a moment appeased; with an ardent impulse towards some region where rules, and figures, and definitions were not quite absolute; I have grown up, battling every inch of my way.’

‘I never knew you were unhappy, my child.’

‘Father, I always knew it. In this strife I have almost repulsed and crushed my better angel into a demon. What I have learned has left me doubting, misbelieving, despising, regretting, what I have not learned; and my dismal resource has been to think that life would soon go by, and that nothing in it could be worth the pain and trouble of a contest.’

‘And you so young, Louisa!’ he said with pity.

‘And I so young. In this condition, father—for I show you now, without fear or favour, the ordinary deadened state of my mind as I know it—you proposed my husband to me. I took him. I never made a pretence to him or you that I loved him. I knew, and, father, you knew, and he knew, that I never did. I was not wholly indifferent, for I had a hope of being pleasant and useful to Tom. I made that wild escape into something visionary, and have slowly found out how wild it was. But Tom had been the subject of all the little tenderness of my life; perhaps he became so because I knew so well how to pity him. It matters little now, except as it may dispose you to think more leniently of his errors.’

As her father held her in his arms, she put her other hand upon his other shoulder, and still looking fixedly in his face, went on.

‘When I was irrevocably married, there rose up into rebellion against the tie, the old strife, made fiercer by all those causes of disparity which arise out of our two individual natures, and which no general laws shall ever rule or state for me, father, until they shall be able to direct the anatomist where to strike his knife into the secrets of my soul.’

‘Louisa!’ he said, and said imploringly; for he well remembered what had passed between them in their former interview.

‘I do not reproach you, father, I make no complaint. I am here with another object.’

‘What can I do, child? Ask me what you will.’

‘I am coming to it. Father, chance then threw into my way a new acquaintance; a man such as I had had no experience of; used to the world; light, polished, easy; making no pretences; avowing the low estimate of everything, that I was half afraid to form in secret; conveying to me almost immediately, though I don’t know how or by what degrees, that he understood me, and read my thoughts. I could not find that he was worse than I. There seemed to be a near affinity between us. I only wondered it should be worth his while, who cared for nothing else, to care so much for me.’

‘For you, Louisa!’

Her father might instinctively have loosened his hold, but that he felt her strength departing from her, and saw a wild dilating fire in the eyes steadfastly regarding him.

‘I say nothing of his plea for claiming my confidence. It matters very little how he gained it. Father, he did gain it. What
you know of the story of my marriage, he soon knew, just as well.’

Her father’s face was ashy white, and he held her in both his arms.

‘I have done no worse, I have not disgraced you. But if you ask me whether I have loved him, or do love him, I tell you plainly, father, that it may be so. I don’t know.’

She took her hands suddenly from his shoulders, and pressed them both upon her side; while in her face, not like itself—and in her figure, drawn up, resolute to finish by a last effort what she had to say—the feelings long suppressed broke loose.

‘This night, my husband being away, he has been with me, declaring himself my lover. This minute he expects me, for I could release myself of his presence by no other means. I do not know that I am sorry, I do not know that I am ashamed, I do not know that I am degraded in my own esteem. All that I know is, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me. Now, father, you have brought me to this. Save me by some other means!’

He tightened his hold in time to prevent her sinking on the floor, but she cried out in a terrible voice, ‘I shall die if you hold me! Let me fall upon the ground!’ And he laid her down there, and saw the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system, lying, an insensible heap, at his feet.

2.10.1.3: From “Book the Third: Garnering”

Chapter I: Another Thing Needful

LOUISA awoke from a torpor, and her eyes languidly opened on her old bed at home, and her old room. It seemed, at first, as if all that had happened since the days when these objects were familiar to her were the shadows of a dream, but gradually, as the objects became more real to her sight, the events became more real to her mind.

She could scarcely move her head for pain and heaviness, her eyes were strained and sore, and she was very weak. A curious passive inattention had such possession of her, that the presence of her little sister in the room did not attract her notice for some time. Even when their eyes had met, and her sister had approached the bed, Louisa lay for minutes looking at her in silence, and suffering her timidly to hold her passive hand, before she asked:

‘When was I brought to this room?’

‘Last night, Louisa.’

‘Who brought me here?’

‘Sissy, I believe.’

‘Why do you believe so?’

‘Because I found her here this morning. She didn’t come to my bedside to wake me, as she always does; and I went to
look for her. She was not in her own room either; and I went looking for her all over the house, until I found her here
taking care of you and cooling your head. Will you see father? Sissy said I was to tell him when you woke.’

‘What a beaming face you have, Jane!’ said Louisa, as her young sister—timidly still—bent down to kiss her.

‘Have I? I am very glad you think so. I am sure it must be Sissy’s doing.’

The arm Louisa had begun to twine around her neck, unbent itself. ‘You can tell father if you will.’ Then, staying her for a
moment, she said, ‘It was you who made my room so cheerful, and gave it this look of welcome?’

‘Oh no, Louisa, it was done before I came. It was—’

Louisa turned upon her pillow, and heard no more. When her sister had withdrawn, she turned her head back again, and
lay with her face towards the door, until it opened and her father entered.

He had a jaded anxious look upon him, and his hand, usually steady, trembled in hers. He sat down at the side of the
bed, tenderly asking how she was, and dwelling on the necessity of her keeping very quiet after her agitation and
exposure to the weather last night. He spoke in a subdued and troubled voice, very different from his usual dictatorial
manner; and was often at a loss for words.

‘My dear Louisa. My poor daughter.’ He was so much at a loss at that place, that he stopped altogether. He tried again.

‘My unfortunate child.’ The place was so difficult to get over, that he tried again.

‘It would be hopeless for me, Louisa, to endeavour to tell you how overwhelmed I have been, and still am, by what broke
upon me last night. The ground on which I stand has ceased to be solid under my feet. The only support on which I
leaned, and the strength of which it seemed, and still does seem, impossible to question, has given way in an instant. I
am stunned by these discoveries. I have no selfish meaning in what I say; but I find the shock of what broke upon me
last night, to be very heavy indeed.’

She could give him no comfort herein. She had suffered the wreck of her whole life upon the rock.

‘I will not say, Louisa, that if you had by any happy chance undeceived me some time ago, it would have been better for
us both; better for your peace, and better for mine. For I am sensible that it may not have been a part of my system to
invite any confidence of that kind. I had proved my—my system to myself, and I have rigidly administered it; and I must
bear the responsibility of its failures. I only entreat you to believe, my favourite child, that I have meant to do right.’

He said it earnestly, and to do him justice he had. In gauging fathomless deeps with his little mean excise-rod, and in
staggering over the universe with his rusty stiff-legged compasses, he had meant to do great things. Within the limits of
his short tether he had tumbled about, annihilating the flowers of existence with greater singleness of purpose than
many of the blatant personages whose company he kept.

‘I am well assured of what you say, father. I know I have been your favourite child. I know you have intended to make
me happy. I have never blamed you, and I never shall.’

He took her outstretched hand, and retained it in his.
'My dear, I have remained all night at my table, pondering again and again on what has so painfully passed between us. When I consider your character; when I consider that what has been known to me for hours, has been concealed by you for years; when I consider under what immediate pressure it has been forced from you at last; I come to the conclusion that I cannot but mistrust myself.'

He might have added more than all, when he saw the face now looking at him. He did add it in effect, perhaps, as he softly moved her scattered hair from her forehead with his hand. Such little actions, slight in another man, were very noticeable in him; and his daughter received them as if they had been words of contrition.

'But,' said Mr. Gradgrind, slowly, and with hesitation, as well as with a wretched sense of happiness, 'if I see reason to mistrust myself for the past, Louisa, I should also mistrust myself for the present and the future. To speak unreservedly to you, I do. I am far from feeling convinced now, however differently I might have felt only this time yesterday, that I am fit for the trust you repose in me; that I know how to respond to the appeal you have come home to make to me; that I have the right instinct—supposing it for the moment to be some quality of that nature—how to help you, and to set you right, my child.'

She had turned upon her pillow, and lay with her face upon her arm, so that he could not see it. All her wildness and passion had subsided; but, though softened, she was not in tears. Her father was changed in nothing so much as in the respect that he would have been glad to see her in tears.

'Some persons hold,' he pursued, still hesitating, 'that there is a wisdom of the Head, and that there is a wisdom of the Heart. I have not supposed so; but, as I have said, I mistrust myself now. I have supposed the head to be all-sufficient. It may not be all-sufficient; how can I venture this morning to say it is! If that other kind of wisdom should be what I have neglected, and should be the instinct that is wanted, Louisa—'

He suggested it very doubtfully, as if he were half unwilling to admit it even now. She made him no answer, lying before him on her bed, still half-dressed, much as he had seen her lying on the floor of his room last night.

'Louisa,' and his hand rested on her hair again, 'I have been absent from here, my dear, a good deal of late; and though your sister's training has been pursued according to—the system,' he appeared to come to that word with great reluctance always, 'it has necessarily been modified by daily associations begun, in her case, at an early age. I ask you—ignorantly and humbly, my daughter—for the better, do you think?'

'Father,' she replied, without stirring, 'if any harmony has been awakened in her young breast that was mute in mine until it turned to discord, let her thank Heaven for it, and go upon her happier way, taking it as her greatest blessing that she has avoided my way.'

'O my child, my child!' he said, in a forlorn manner, 'I am an unhappy man to see you thus! What avails it to me that you do not reproach me, if I so bitterly reproach myself!' He bent his head, and spoke low to her. 'Louisa, I have a misgiving that some change may have been slowly working about me in this house, by mere love and gratitude: that what the Head had left undone and could not do, the Heart may have been doing silently. Can it be so?'

She made him no reply.

'I am not too proud to believe it, Louisa. How could I be arrogant, and you before me! Can it be so? Is it so, my dear?'}
He looked upon her once more, lying cast away there; and without another word went out of the room. He had not been long gone, when she heard a light tread near the door, and knew that some one stood beside her.

She did not raise her head. A dull anger that she should be seen in her distress, and that the involuntary look she had so resented should come to this fulfilment, smouldered within her like an unwholesome fire. All closely imprisoned forces rend and destroy. The air that would be healthful to the earth, the water that would enrich it, the heat that would ripen it, tear it when caged up. So in her bosom even now; the strongest qualities she possessed, long turned upon themselves, became a heap of obduracy, that rose against a friend.

It was well that soft touch came upon her neck, and that she understood herself to be supposed to have fallen asleep. The sympathetic hand did not claim her resentment. Let it lie there, let it lie.

It lay there, warming into life a crowd of gentler thoughts; and she rested. As she softened with the quiet, and the consciousness of being so watched, some tears made their way into her eyes. The face touched hers, and she knew that there were tears upon it too, and she the cause of them.

As Louisa feigned to rouse herself, and sat up, Sissy retired, so that she stood placidly near the bedside.

‘I hope I have not disturbed you. I have come to ask if you would let me stay with you?’

‘Why should you stay with me? My sister will miss you. You are everything to her.’

‘Am I?’ returned Sissy, shaking her head. ‘I would be something to you, if I might.’

‘What?’ said Louisa, almost sternly.

‘Whatever you want most, if I could be that. At all events, I would like to try to be as near it as I can. And however far off that may be, I will never tire of trying. Will you let me?’

‘My father sent you to ask me.’

‘No indeed,’ replied Sissy. ‘He told me that I might come in now, but he sent me away from the room this morning—or at least—’

She hesitated and stopped.

‘At least, what?’ said Louisa, with her searching eyes upon her.

‘I thought it best myself that I should be sent away, for I felt very uncertain whether you would like to find me here.’

‘Have I always hated you so much?’

‘I hope not, for I have always loved you, and have always wished that you should know it. But you changed to me a little, shortly before you left home. Not that I wondered at it. You knew so much, and I knew so little, and it was so natural in many ways, going as you were among other friends, that I had nothing to complain of, and was not at all hurt.’

Her colour rose as she said it modestly and hurriedly. Louisa understood the loving pretence, and her heart smote her.
‘May I try?’ said Sissy, emboldened to raise her hand to the neck that was insensibly drooping towards her.

Louisa, taking down the hand that would have embraced her in another moment, held it in one of hers, and answered:

‘First, Sissy, do you know what I am? I am so proud and so hardened, so confused and troubled, so resentful and unjust to every one and to myself, that everything is stormy, dark, and wicked to me. Does not that repel you?’

‘No!’

‘I am so unhappy, and all that should have made me otherwise is so laid waste, that if I had been bereft of sense to this hour, and instead of being as learned as you think me, had to begin to acquire the simplest truths, I could not want a guide to peace, contentment, honour, all the good of which I am quite devoid, more abjectly than I do. Does not that repel you?’

‘No!’

In the innocence of her brave affection, and the brimming up of her old devoted spirit, the once deserted girl shone like a beautiful light upon the darkness of the other.

Louisa raised the hand that it might clasp her neck and join its fellow there. She fell upon her knees, and clinging to this stroller’s child looked up at her almost with veneration.

‘Forgive me, pity me, help me! Have compassion on my great need, and let me lay this head of mine upon a loving heart!’

‘O lay it here!’ cried Sissy. ‘Lay it here, my dear.’

_Sissy visits Harthouse and convinces him to leave Coketown._

**Chapter III: Very Decided**

THE indefatigable Mrs. Sparsit, with a violent cold upon her, her voice reduced to a whisper, and her stately frame so racked by continual sneezes that it seemed in danger of dismemberment, gave chase to her patron until she found him in the metropolis; and there, majestically sweeping in upon him at his hotel in St. James’s Street, exploded the combustibles with which she was charged, and blew up. Having executed her mission with infinite relish, this high-minded woman then fainted away on Mr. Bounderby’s coat-collar.

Mr. Bounderby’s first procedure was to shake Mrs. Sparsit off, and leave her to progress as she might through various stages of suffering on the floor. He next had recourse to the administration of potent restoratives, such as screwing the patient’s thumbs, smiting her hands, abundantly watering her face, and inserting salt in her mouth. When these attentions had recovered her (which they speedily did), he hustled her into a fast train without offering any other refreshment, and carried her back to Coketown more dead than alive.
Regarded as a classical ruin, Mrs. Sparsit was an interesting spectacle on her arrival at her journey’s end; but considered in any other light, the amount of damage she had by that time sustained was excessive, and impaired her claims to admiration. Utterly heedless of the wear and tear of her clothes and constitution, and adamant to her pathetic sneezes, Mr. Bounderby immediately crammed her into a coach, and bore her off to Stone Lodge.

‘Now, Tom Gradgrind,’ said Bounderby, bursting into his father-in-law’s room late at night; ‘here’s a lady here—Mrs. Sparsit—you know Mrs. Sparsit—who has something to say to you that will strike you dumb.’

‘You have missed my letter!’ exclaimed Mr. Gradgrind, surprised by the apparition.

‘Missed your letter, sir!’ bawled Bounderby. ‘The present time is no time for letters. No man shall talk to Josiah Bounderby of Coketown about letters, with his mind in the state it’s in now.’

‘Bounderby,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, in a tone of temperate remonstrance, ‘I speak of a very special letter I have written to you, in reference to Louisa.’

‘Tom Gradgrind,’ replied Bounderby, knocking the flat of his hand several times with great vehemence on the table, ‘I speak of a very special messenger that has come to me, in reference to Louisa. Mrs. Sparsit, ma’am, stand forward!’

That unfortunate lady hereupon essaying to offer testimony, without any voice and with painful gestures expressive of an inflamed throat, became so aggravating and underwent so many facial contortions, that Mr. Bounderby, unable to bear it, seized her by the arm and shook her.

‘If you can’t get it out, ma’am,’ said Bounderby, ‘leave me to get it out. This is not a time for a lady, however highly connected, to be totally inaudible, and seemingly swallowing marbles. Tom Gradgrind, Mrs. Sparsit latterly found herself, by accident, in a situation to overhear a conversation out of doors between your daughter and your precious gentleman-friend, Mr. James Harthouse.’

‘Indeed!’ said Mr. Gradgrind.

‘Ah! Indeed!’ cried Bounderby. ‘And in that conversation—’

‘It is not necessary to repeat its tenor, Bounderby. I know what passed.’

‘You do? Perhaps,’ said Bounderby, staring with all his might at his so quiet and assuasive father-in-law, ‘you know where your daughter is at the present time!’

‘Undoubtedly. She is here.’

‘Here?’

‘My dear Bounderby, let me beg you to restrain these loud out-breaks, on all accounts. Louisa is here. The moment she could detach herself from that interview with the person of whom you speak, and whom I deeply regret to have been the means of introducing to you, Louisa hurried here, for protection. I myself had not been at home many hours, when I received her—here, in this room. She hurried by the train to town, she ran from town to this house, through a raging storm, and presented herself before me in a state of distraction. Of course, she has remained here ever since. Let me
entreat you, for your own sake and for hers, to be more quiet.’

Mr. Bounderby silently gazed about him for some moments, in every direction except Mrs. Sparsit’s direction; and then, abruptly turning upon the niece of Lady Scadgers, said to that wretched woman:

‘Now, ma’am! We shall be happy to hear any little apology you may think proper to offer, for going about the country at express pace, with no other luggage than a Cock-and-a-Bull, ma’am!’

‘Sir,’ whispered Mrs. Sparsit, ‘my nerves are at present too much shaken, and my health is at present too much impaired, in your service, to admit of my doing more than taking refuge in tears.’ (Which she did.)

‘Well, ma’am,’ said Bounderby, ‘without making any observation to you that may not be made with propriety to a woman of good family, what I have got to add to that, is that there is something else in which it appears to me you may take refuge, namely, a coach. And the coach in which we came here being at the door, you’ll allow me to hand you down to it, and pack you home to the Bank: where the best course for you to pursue, will be to put your feet into the hottest water you can bear, and take a glass of scalding rum and butter after you get into bed.’ With these words, Mr. Bounderby extended his right hand to the weeping lady, and escorted her to the conveyance in question, shedding many plaintive sneezes by the way. He soon returned alone.

‘Now, as you showed me in your face, Tom Gradgrind, that you wanted to speak to me,’ he resumed, ‘here I am. But, I am not in a very agreeable state, I tell you plainly: not relishing this business, even as it is, and not considering that I am at any time as dutifully and submissively treated by your daughter, as Josiah Bounderby of Coketown ought to be treated by his wife. You have your opinion, I dare say; and I have mine, I know. If you mean to say anything to me tonight, that goes against this candid remark, you had better let it alone.’

Mr. Gradgrind, it will be observed, being much softened, Mr. Bounderby took particular pains to harden himself at all points. It was his amiable nature.

‘My dear Bounderby,’ Mr. Gradgrind began in reply.

‘Now, you’ll excuse me,’ said Bounderby, ‘but I don’t want to be too dear. That, to start with. When I begin to be dear to a man, I generally find that his intention is to come over me. I am not speaking to you politely; but, as you are aware, I am not polite. If you like politeness, you know where to get it. You have your gentleman friends, you know, and they’ll serve you with as much of the article as you want. I don’t keep it myself.’

‘Bounderby,’ urged Mr. Gradgrind, ‘we are all liable to mistakes—’

‘I thought you couldn't make 'em,’ interrupted Bounderby.

‘Perhaps I thought so. But, I say we are all liable to mistakes and I should feel sensible of your delicacy, and grateful for it, if you would spare me these references to Harthouse. I shall not associate him in our conversation with your intimacy and encouragement; pray do not persist in connecting him with mine.’

‘I never mentioned his name!’ said Bounderby.

‘Well, well!’ returned Mr. Gradgrind, with a patient, even a submissive, air. And he sat for a little while pondering.
'Bounderby, I see reason to doubt whether we have ever quite understood Louisa.'

'Who do you mean by We?'

'Let me say I, then,' he returned, in answer to the coarsely blurted question; 'I doubt whether I have understood Louisa. I doubt whether I have been quite right in the manner of her education.' 'There you hit it,' returned Bounderby.

'There I agree with you. You have found it out at last, have you? Education! I'll tell you what education is—To be tumbled out of doors, neck and crop, and put upon the shortest allowance of everything except blows. That's what I call education.'

'I think your good sense will perceive,' Mr. Gradgrind remonstrated in all humility, 'that whatever the merits of such a system may be, it would be difficult of general application to girls.'

'I don't see it at all, sir,' returned the obstinate Bounderby.

'Well,' sighed Mr. Gradgrind, 'we will not enter into the question. I assure you I have no desire to be controversial. I seek to repair what is amiss, if I possibly can; and I hope you will assist me in a good spirit, Bounderby, for I have been very much distressed.'

'I don't understand you, yet,' said Bounderby, with determined obstinacy, 'and therefore I won't make any promises.'

'In the course of a few hours, my dear Bounderby,' Mr. Gradgrind proceeded, in the same depressed and propitiatory manner, 'I appear to myself to have become better informed as to Louisa's character, than in previous years. The enlightenment has been painfully forced upon me, and the discovery is not mine. I think there are—Bounderby, you will be surprised to hear me say this—I think there are qualities in Louisa, which—which have been harshly neglected, and—and a little perverted. And—and I would suggest to you, that—that if you would kindly meet me in a timely endeavour to leave her to her better nature for a while—and to encourage it to develop itself by tenderness and consideration—it—it would be the better for the happiness of all of us. Louisa,' said Mr. Gradgrind, shading his face with his hand, 'has always been my favourite child.'

The blustrous Bounderby crimsoned and swelled to such an extent on hearing these words, that he seemed to be, and probably was, on the brink of a fit. With his very ears a bright purple shot with crimson, he pent up his indignation, however, and said:

'You'd like to keep her here for a time?'

'—I had intended to recommend, my dear Bounderby, that you should allow Louisa to remain here on a visit, and be attended by Sissy (I mean of course Cecilia Jupe), who understands her, and in whom she trusts.'

'I gather from all this, Tom Gradgrind,' said Bounderby, standing up with his hands in his pockets, 'that you are of opinion that there's what people call some incompatibility between Loo Bounderby and myself.'

'I fear there is at present a general incompatibility between Louisa, and—and— and almost all the relations in which I have placed her,' was her father's sorrowful reply.
'Now, look you here, Tom Gradgrind,' said Bounderby the flushed, confronting him with his legs wide apart, his hands deeper in his pockets, and his hair like a hayfield wherein his windy anger was boisterous. 'You have said your say; I am going to say mine. I am a Coketown man. I am Josiah Bounderby of Coketown. I know the bricks of this town, and I know the works of this town, and I know the chimneys of this town, and I know the smoke of this town, and I know the Hands of this town. I know 'em all pretty well. They're real. When a man tells me anything about imaginative qualities, I always tell that man, whoever he is, that I know what he means. He means turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon, and that he wants to be set up with a coach and six. That's what your daughter wants. Since you are of opinion that she ought to have what she wants, I recommend you to provide it for her. Because, Tom Gradgrind, she will never have it from me.'

'Bounderby,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'I hoped, after my entreaty, you would have taken a different tone.'

'Just wait a bit,' retorted Bounderby; 'you have said your say, I believe. I heard you out; hear me out, if you please. Don't make yourself a spectacle of unfairness as well as inconsistency, because, although I am sorry to see Tom Gradgrind reduced to his present position, I should be doubly sorry to see him brought so low as that. Now, there's an incompatibility of some sort or another, I am given to understand by you, between your daughter and me. I'll give you to understand, in reply to that, that there unquestionably is an incompatibility of the first magnitude—to be summed up in this—that your daughter don't properly know her husband's merits, and is not impressed with such a sense as would become her, by George! of the honour of his alliance. That's plain speaking, I hope.'

'Bounderby,' urged Mr. Gradgrind, 'this is unreasonable.'

'Is it?' said Bounderby. 'I am glad to hear you say so. Because when Tom Gradgrind, with his new lights, tells me that what I say is unreasonable, I am convinced at once it must be devilish sensible. With your permission I am going on. You know my origin; and you know that for a good many years of my life I didn't want a shoeing-horn, in consequence of not having a shoe. Yet you may believe or not, as you think proper, that there are ladies—born ladies—belonging to families—Families!—who next to worship the ground I walk on.'

He discharged this like a Rocket, at his father-in-law's head.

'Whereas your daughter,' proceeded Bounderby, 'is far from being a born lady. That you know, yourself. Not that I care a pinch of candle-snuff about such things, for you are very well aware I don't; but that such is the fact, and you, Tom Gradgrind, can't change it. Why do I say this?'

'Not, I fear,' observed Mr. Gradgrind, in a low voice, 'to spare me.'

'Hear me out,' said Bounderby, 'and refrain from cutting in till your turn comes round. I say this, because highly connected females have been astonished to see the way in which your daughter has conducted herself, and to witness her insensibility. They have wondered how I have suffered it. And I wonder myself now, and I won't suffer it.'

'Bounderby,' returned Mr. Gradgrind, rising, 'the less we say to-night the better, I think.'

'On the contrary, Tom Gradgrind, the more we say to-night, the better, I think. That is,' the consideration checked him, 'till I have said all I mean to say, and then I don't care how soon we stop. I come to a question that may shorten the business. What do you mean by the proposal you made just now?'
‘What do I mean, Bounderby?’

‘By your visiting proposition,’ said Bounderby, with an inflexible jerk of the hayfield.

‘I mean that I hope you may be induced to arrange in a friendly manner, for allowing Louisa a period of repose and reflection here, which may tend to a gradual alteration for the better in many respects.’

‘To a softening down of your ideas of the incompatibility?’ said Bounderby.

‘If you put it in those terms.’

‘What made you think of this?’ said Bounderby.

‘I have already said, I fear Louisa has not been understood. Is it asking too much, Bounderby, that you, so far her elder, should aid in trying to set her right? You have accepted a great charge of her; for better for worse, for—’

Mr. Bounderby may have been annoyed by the repetition of his own words to Stephen Blackpool, but he cut the quotation short with an angry start.

‘Come!’ said he, ‘I don’t want to be told about that. I know what I took her for, as well as you do. Never you mind what I took her for; that’s my look out.’

‘I was merely going on to remark, Bounderby, that we may all be more or less in the wrong, not even excepting you; and that some yielding on your part, remembering the trust you have accepted, may not only be an act of true kindness, but perhaps a debt incurred towards Louisa.’

‘I think differently,’ blustered Bounderby. ‘I am going to finish this business according to my own opinions. Now, I don’t want to make a quarrel of it with you, Tom Gradgrind. To tell you the truth, I don’t think it would be worthy of my reputation to quarrel on such a subject. As to your gentleman-friend, he may take himself off, wherever he likes best. If he falls in my way, I shall tell him my mind; if he don’t fall in my way, I shan’t, for it won’t be worth my while to do it. As to your daughter, whom I made Loo Bounderby, and might have done better by leaving Loo Gradgrind, if she don’t come home to-morrow, by twelve o’clock at noon, I shall understand that she prefers to stay away, and I shall send her wearing apparel and so forth over here, and you’ll take charge of her for the future. What I shall say to people in general, of the incompatibility that led to my so laying down the law, will be this. I am Josiah Bounderby, and I had my bringing-up; she’s the daughter of Tom Gradgrind, and she had her bringing-up; and the two horses wouldn’t pull together. I am pretty well known to be rather an uncommon man, I believe; and most people will understand fast enough that it must be a woman rather out of the common, also, who, in the long run, would come up to my mark.’

‘Let me seriously entreat you to reconsider this, Bounderby,’ urged Mr. Gradgrind, ‘before you commit yourself to such a decision.’

‘I always come to a decision,’ said Bounderby, tossing his hat on: ‘and whatever I do, I do at once. I should be surprised at Tom Gradgrind’s addressing such a remark to Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, knowing what he knows of him, if I could be surprised by anything Tom Gradgrind did, after his making himself a party to sentimental humbug. I have given you my decision, and I have got no more to say. Good night!’
So Mr. Bounderby went home to his town house to bed. At five minutes past twelve o'clock next day, he directed Mrs. 
Bounderby's property to be carefully packed up and sent to Tom Gradgrind's; advertised his country retreat for sale by 
private contract; and resumed a bachelor life.

*Bounderby continues to accuse Blackpool of the bank robbery. Upon Rachel's urging, Louisa tells Bounderby that she 
and Tom visited Blackpool the night before he disappeared.*

Chapter V: Found

DAY and night again, day and night again. No Stephen Blackpool. Where was the man, and why did he not come back?

Every night, Sissy went to Rachael's lodging, and sat with her in her small neat room. All day, Rachael toiled as such 
people must toil, whatever their anxieties. The smoke-serpents were indifferent who was lost or found, who turned out 
bad or good; the melancholy mad elephants, like the Hard Fact men, abated nothing of their set routine, whatever 
happened. Day and night again, day and night again. The monotony was unbroken. Even Stephen Blackpool's 
disappearance was falling into the general way, and becoming as monotonous a wonder as any piece of machinery in 
Coketown.

'I misdoubt,' said Rachael, 'if there is as many as twenty left in all this place, who have any trust in the poor dear lad 
now.'

She said it to Sissy, as they sat in her lodging, lighted only by the lamp at the street corner. Sissy had come there when 
it was already dark, to await her return from work; and they had since sat at the window where Rachael had found her, 
wanting no brighter light to shine on their sorrowful talk.

'If it hadn't been mercifully brought about, that I was to have you to speak to,' pursued Rachael, 'times are, when I think 
my mind would not have kept right. But I get hope and strength through you; and you believe that though appearances 
may rise against him, he will be proved clear?'

'I do believe so,' returned Sissy, 'with my whole heart. I feel so certain, Rachael, that the confidence you hold in yours 
against all discouragement, is not like to be wrong, that I have no more doubt of him than if I had known him through as 
many years of trial as you have.'

'And I, my dear,' said Rachel, with a tremble in her voice, 'have known him through them all, to be, according to his quiet 
ways, so faithful to everything honest and good, that if he was never to be heard of more, and I was to live to be a 
hundred years old, I could say with my last breath, God knows my heart. I have never once left trusting Stephen 
Blackpool!'

'We all believe, up at the Lodge, Rachael, that he will be freed from suspicion, sooner or later.'

'The better I know it to be so believed there, my dear,' said Rachael, 'and the kinder I feel it that you come away from 
there, purposely to comfort me, and keep me company, and be seen wi' me when I am not yet free from all suspicion
myself, the more grieved I am that I should ever have spoken those mistrusting words to the young lady. And yet I—'

'You don't mistrust her now, Rachael?'

'Now that you have brought us more together, no. But I can't at all times keep out of my mind—'

Her voice so sunk into a low and slow communing with herself, that Sissy, sitting by her side, was obliged to listen with attention.

'I can't at all times keep out of my mind, mistrustings of some one. I can't think who 'tis, I can't think how or why it may be done, but I mistrust that some one has put Stephen out of the way. I mistrust that by his coming back of his own accord, and showing himself innocent before them all, some one would be confounded, who—to prevent that—has stopped him, and put him out of the way.'

'That is a dreadful thought,' said Sissy, turning pale.

'It is a dreadful thought to think he may be murdered.'

Sissy shuddered, and turned paler yet.

'When it makes its way into my mind, dear,' said Rachael, 'and it will come sometimes, though I do all I can to keep it out, wi' counting on to high numbers as I work, and saying over and over again pieces that I knew when I were a child—I fall into such a wild, hot hurry, that, however tired I am, I want to walk fast, miles and miles. I must get the better of this before bed-time. I'll walk home wi' you.'

'He might fall ill upon the journey back,' said Sissy, faintly offering a worn-out scrap of hope; 'and in such a case, there are many places on the road where he might stop.'

'But he is in none of them. He has been sought for in all, and he's not there.'

'True,' was Sissy's reluctant admission.

'He'd walk the journey in two days. If he was footsore and couldn't walk, I sent him, in the letter he got, the money to ride, lest he should have none of his own to spare.'

'Let us hope that to-morrow will bring something better, Rachael. Come into the air!'

Her gentle hand adjusted Rachael's shawl upon her shining black hair in the usual manner of her wearing it, and they went out. The night being fine, little knots of Hands were here and there lingering at street corners; but it was supper-time with the greater part of them, and there were but few people in the streets.

'You're not so hurried now, Rachael, and your hand is cooler.'

'I get better, dear, if I can only walk, and breathe a little fresh. 'Times when I can't, I turn weak and confused.'

'But you must not begin to fail, Rachael, for you may be wanted at any time to stand by Stephen. To-morrow is Saturday. If no news comes to-morrow, let us walk in the country on Sunday morning, and strengthen you for another
They were by this time in the street where Mr. Bounderby’s house stood. The way to Sissy’s destination led them past the door, and they were going straight towards it. Some train had newly arrived in Coketown, which had put a number of vehicles in motion, and scattered a considerable bustle about the town. Several coaches were rattling before them and behind them as they approached Mr. Bounderby’s, and one of the latter drew up with such briskness as they were in the act of passing the house, that they looked round involuntarily. The bright gaslight over Mr. Bounderby’s steps showed them Mrs. Sparsit in the coach, in an ecstasy of excitement, struggling to open the door; Mrs. Sparsit seeing them at the same moment, called to them to stop.

‘It’s a coincidence,’ exclaimed Mrs. Sparsit, as she was released by the coachman. ‘It’s a Providence! Come out, ma’am!’ then said Mrs. Sparsit, to some one inside, ‘come out, or we’ll have you dragged out!’

Hereupon, no other than the mysterious old woman descended. Whom Mrs. Sparsit incontinently collared.

‘Leave her alone, everybody!’ cried Mrs. Sparsit, with great energy. ‘Let nobody touch her. She belongs to me. Come in, ma’am!’ then said Mrs. Sparsit, reversing her former word of command. ‘Come in, ma’am, or we’ll have you dragged in!’

The spectacle of a matron of classical deportment, seizing an ancient woman by the throat, and hauling her into a dwelling-house, would have been under any circumstances, sufficient temptation to all true English stragglers so blest as to witness it, to force a way into that dwelling-house and see the matter out. But when the phenomenon was enhanced by the notoriety and mystery by this time associated all over the town with the Bank robbery, it would have lured the stragglers in, with an irresistible attraction, though the roof had been expected to fall upon their heads. Accordingly, the chance witnesses on the ground, consisting of the busiest of the neighbours to the number of some five-and-twenty, closed in after Sissy and Rachael, as they closed in after Mrs. Sparsit and her prize; and the whole body made a disorderly irruption into Mr. Bounderby’s dining-room, where the people behind lost not a moment’s time in mounting on the chairs, to get the better of the people in front.

‘Fetch Mr. Bounderby down!’ cried Mrs. Sparsit. ‘Rachael, young woman; you know who this is?’

‘It’s Mrs. Pegler,’ said Rachael.

‘I should think it is!’ cried Mrs. Sparsit, exulting. ‘Fetch Mr. Bounderby. Stand away, everybody!’ Here old Mrs. Pegler, muffling herself up, and shrinking from observation, whispered a word of entreaty. ‘Don’t tell me,’ said Mrs. Sparsit, aloud. ‘I have told you twenty times, coming along, that I will not leave you till I have handed you over to him myself.’

Mr. Bounderby now appeared, accompanied by Mr. Gradgrind and the whelp, with whom he had been holding conference up-stairs. Mr. Bounderby looked more astonished than hospitable, at sight of this uninvited party in his dining-room.

‘Why, what’s the matter now!’ said he. ‘Mrs. Sparsit, ma’am?’

‘Sir,’ explained that worthy woman, ‘I trust it is my good fortune to produce a person you have much desired to find. Stimulated by my wish to relieve your mind, sir, and connecting together such imperfect clues to the part of the country..."
in which that person might be supposed to reside, as have been afforded by the young woman, Rachael, fortunately now present to identify, I have had the happiness to succeed, and to bring that person with me—I need not say most unwillingly on her part. It has not been, sir, without some trouble that I have effected this; but trouble in your service is to me a pleasure, and hunger, thirst, and cold a real gratification.'

Here Mrs. Sparsit ceased; for Mr. Bounderby’s visage exhibited an extraordinary combination of all possible colours and expressions of discomfiture, as old Mrs. Pegler was disclosed to his view.

‘Why, what do you mean by this?’ was his highly unexpected demand, in great warmth. ‘I ask you, what do you mean by this, Mrs. Sparsit, ma’am?’

‘Sirl’ exclaimed Mrs. Sparsit, faintly.

‘Why don’t you mind your own business, ma’am?’ roared Bounderby. ‘How dare you go and poke your officious nose into my family affairs?’

This allusion to her favourite feature overpowered Mrs. Sparsit. She sat down stiffly in a chair, as if she were frozen; and with a fixed stare at Mr. Bounderby, slowly grated her mittens against one another, as if they were frozen too. ‘My dear Josiah!’ cried Mrs. Pegler, trembling.

‘My darling boy! I am not to blame. It’s not my fault, Josiah. I told this lady over and over again, that I knew she was doing what would not be agreeable to you, but she would do it.’

‘What did you let her bring you for? Couldn’t you knock her cap off, or her tooth out, or scratch her, or do something or other to her?’ asked Bounderby.

‘My own boy! She threatened me that if I resisted her, I should be brought by constables, and it was better to come quietly than make that stir in such a’—Mrs. Pegler glanced timidly but proudly round the walls—‘such a fine house as this. Indeed, indeed, it is not my fault! My dear, noble, stately boy! I have always lived quiet, and secret, Josiah, my dear. I have never broken the condition once. I have never said I was your mother. I have admired you at a distance; and if I have come to town sometimes, with long times between, to take a proud peep at you, I have done it unbeknown, my love, and gone away again.’

Mr. Bounderby, with his hands in his pockets, walked in impatient mortification up and down at the side of the long dining-table, while the spectators greedily took in every syllable of Mrs. Pegler’s appeal, and at each succeeding syllable became more and more round-eyed. Mr. Bounderby still walking up and down when Mrs. Pegler had done, Mr. Gradgrind addressed that maltreated old lady:

‘I am surprised, madam,’ he observed with severity, ‘that in your old age you have the face to claim Mr. Bounderby for your son, after your unnatural and inhuman treatment of him.’

‘Me unnatural!’ cried poor old Mrs. Pegler. ‘Me inhuman! To my dear boy?’

‘Dear!’ repeated Mr. Gradgrind. ‘Yes; dear in his self-made prosperity, madam, I dare say. Not very dear, however, when you deserted him in his infancy, and left him to the brutality of a drunken grandmother.’
'I deserted my Josiah!' cried Mrs. Pegler, clasping her hands. 'Now, Lord forgive you, sir, for your wicked imaginations, and for your scandal against the memory of my poor mother, who died in my arms before Josiah was born. May you repent of it, sir, and live to know better!'

She was so very earnest and injured, that Mr. Gradgrind, shocked by the possibility which dawned upon him, said in a gentler tone:

'Do you deny, then, madam, that you left your son to—to be brought up in the gutter?'

'Josiah in the gutter!' exclaimed Mrs. Pegler. 'No such a thing, sir. Never! For shame on you! My dear boy knows, and will give you to know, that though he come of humble parents, he come of parents that loved him as dear as the best could, and never thought it hardship on themselves to pinch a bit that he might write and cipher beautiful, and I've his books at home to show it! Aye, have I!' said Mrs. Pegler, with indignant pride. 'And my dear boy knows, and will give you to know, sir, that after his beloved father died, when he was eight years old, his mother, too, could pinch a bit, as it was her duty and her pleasure and her pride to do it, to help him out in life, and put him 'prentice. And a steady lad he was, and a kind master he had to lend him a hand, and well he worked his own way forward to be rich and thriving. And I'll give you to know, sir—for this my dear boy won't—that though his mother kept but a little village shop, he never forgot her, but pensioned me on thirty pound a year—more than I want, for I put by out of it—only making the condition that I was to keep down in my own part, and make no boasts about him, and not trouble him. And I never have, except with looking at him once a year, when he has never knew it. And it's right,' said poor old Mrs. Pegler, in affectionate championship, 'that I should keep down in my own part, and I have no doubts that if I was here I should do a many unbefitting things, and I am well contented, and I can keep my pride in my Josiah to myself, and I can love for love's own sake! And I am ashamed of you, sir,' said Mrs. Pegler, lastly, 'for your slanders and suspicions. And I never stood here before, nor never wanted to stand here when my dear son said no. And I shouldn't be here now, if it hadn't been for being brought here. And for shame upon you, Oh, for shame, to accuse me of being a bad mother to my son, with my son standing here to tell you so different!'

The bystanders, on and off the dining-room chairs, raised a murmur of sympathy with Mrs. Pegler, and Mr. Gradgrind felt himself innocently placed in a very distressing predicament, when Mr. Bounderby, who had never ceased walking up and down, and had every moment swelled larger and larger, and grown redder and redder, stopped short.

'I don't exactly know,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'how I come to be favoured with the attendance of the present company, but I don't inquire. When they're quite satisfied, perhaps they'll be so good as to disperse; whether they're satisfied or not, perhaps they'll be so good as to disperse. I'm not bound to deliver a lecture on my family affairs, I have not undertaken to do it, and I'm not a going to do it. Therefore those who expect any explanation whatever upon that branch of the subject, will be disappointed—particularly Tom Gradgrind, and he can't know it too soon. In reference to the Bank robbery, there has been a mistake made, concerning my mother. If there hadn't been over-officiousness it wouldn't have been made, and I hate over-officiousness at all times, whether or no. Good evening!'

Although Mr. Bounderby carried it off in these terms, holding the door open for the company to depart, there was a blustering sheepishness upon him, at once extremely crestfallen and superlatively absurd. Detected as the Bully of humility, who had built his windy reputation upon lies, and in his boastfulness had put the honest truth as far away from him as if he had advanced the mean claim (there is no meaner) to tack himself on to a pedigree, he cut a most ridiculous figure. With the people filing off at the door he held, who he knew would carry what had passed to the whole town, to be
given to the four winds, he could not have looked a Bully more shorn and forlorn, if he had had his ears cropped. Even
that unlucky female, Mrs. Sparsit, fallen from her pinnacle of exultation into the Slough of Despond, was not in so bad a
plight as that remarkable man and self-made Humbug, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown.

Rachael and Sissy, leaving Mrs. Pegler to occupy a bed at her son’s for that night, walked together to the gate of Stone
Lodge and there parted. Mr. Gradgrind joined them before they had gone very far, and spoke with much interest of
Stephen Blackpool; for whom he thought this signal failure of the suspicions against Mrs. Pegler was likely to work well.

As to the whelp; throughout this scene as on all other late occasions, he had stuck close to Bounderby. He seemed to
feel that as long as Bounderby could make no discovery without his knowledge, he was so far safe. He never visited his
sister, and had only seen her once since she went home: that is to say on the night when he still stuck close to
Bounderby, as already related.

There was one dim unformed fear lingering about his sister’s mind, to which she never gave utterance, which
surrounded the graceless and ungrateful boy with a dreadful mystery. The same dark possibility had presented itself in
the same shapeless guise, this very day, to Sissy, when Rachael spoke of some one who would be confounded by
Stephen’s return, having put him out of the way. Louisa had never spoken of harbouring any suspicion of her brother in
connexion with the robbery, she and Sissy had held no confidence on the subject, save in that one interchange of looks
when the unconscious father rested his gray head on his hand; but it was understood between them, and they both
knew it. This other fear was so awful, that it hovered about each of them like a ghostly shadow; neither daring to think of
its being near herself, far less of its being near the other.

And still the forced spirit which the whelp had plucked up, throve with him. If Stephen Blackpool was not the thief, let him
show himself. Why didn’t he?

Another night. Another day and night. No Stephen Blackpool. Where was the man, and why did he not come back?

Chapter VI: The Starlight

THE Sunday was a bright Sunday in autumn, clear and cool, when early in the morning Sissy and Rachael met, to walk
in the country.

As Coketown cast ashes not only on its own head but on the neighbourhood’s too—after the manner of those pious
persons who do penance for their own sins by putting other people into sackcloth—it was customary for those who now
and then thirsted for a draught of pure air, which is not absolutely the most wicked among the vanities of life, to get a few
miles away by the railroad, and then begin their walk, or their lounge in the fields. Sissy and Rachael helped themselves
out of the smoke by the usual means, and were put down at a station about midway between the town and Mr.
Bounderby’s retreat.

Though the green landscape was blotted here and there with heaps of coal, it was green elsewhere, and there were
trees to see, and there were larks singing (though it was Sunday), and there were pleasant scents in the air, and all was
overarched by a bright blue sky. In the distance one way, Coketown showed as a black mist; in another distance hills
began to rise; in a third, there was a faint change in the light of the horizon where it shone upon the far-off sea. Under
their feet, the grass was fresh; beautiful shadows of branches flickered upon it, and speckled it; hedgerows were luxuriant; everything was at peace. Engines at pits’ mouths, and lean old horses that had worn the circle of their daily labour into the ground, were alike quiet; wheels had ceased for a short space to turn; and the great wheel of earth seemed to revolve without the shocks and noises of another time.

They walked on across the fields and down the shady lanes, sometimes getting over a fragment of a fence so rotten that it dropped at a touch of the foot, sometimes passing near a wreck of bricks and beams overgrown with grass, marking the site of deserted works. They followed paths and tracks, however slight. Mounds where the grass was rank and high, and where brambles, dock-weed, and suchlike vegetation, were confusedly heaped together, they always avoided; for dismal stories were told in that country of the old pits hidden beneath such indications.

The sun was high when they sat down to rest. They had seen no one, near or distant, for a long time; and the solitude remained unbroken. 'It is so still here, Rachael, and the way is so untrodden, that I think we must be the first who have been here all the summer.'

As Sissy said it, her eyes were attracted by another of those rotten fragments of fence upon the ground. She got up to look at it. 'And yet I don't know. This has not been broken very long. The wood is quite fresh where it gave way. Here are footsteps too.—O Rachael!

She ran back, and caught her round the neck. Rachael had already started up.

'What is the matter?'

'I don't know. There is a hat lying in the grass.' They went forward together. Rachael took it up, shaking from head to foot. She broke into a passion of tears and lamentations: Stephen Blackpool was written in his own hand on the inside.

'O the poor lad, the poor lad! He has been made away with. He is lying murdered here!'

'Is there—has the hat any blood upon it?' Sissy faltered.

They were afraid to look; but they did examine it, and found no mark of violence, inside or out. It had been lying there some days, for rain and dew had stained it, and the mark of its shape was on the grass where it had fallen. They looked fearfully about them, without moving, but could see nothing more. 'Rachael,' Sissy whispered, 'I will go on a little by myself.'

She had unclasped her hand, and was in the act of stepping forward, when Rachael caught her in both arms with a scream that resounded over the wide landscape. Before them, at their very feet, was the brink of a black ragged chasm hidden by the thick grass. They sprang back, and fell upon their knees, each hiding her face upon the other's neck.

'O, my good Lord! He's down there! Down there!' At first this, and her terrific screams, were all that could be got from Rachael, by any tears, by any prayers, by any representations, by any means. It was impossible to hush her; and it was deadly necessary to hold her, or she would have flung herself down the shaft.

'Rachael, dear Rachael, good Rachael, for the love of Heaven, not these dreadful cries! Think of Stephen, think of Stephen!'
By an earnest repetition of this entreaty, poured out in all the agony of such a moment, Sissy at last brought her to be silent, and to look at her with a tearless face of stone.

‘Rachael, Stephen may be living. You wouldn’t leave him lying maimed at the bottom of this dreadful place, a moment, if you could bring help to him?’

‘No, no, no!’

‘Don’t stir from here, for his sake! Let me go and listen.’

She shuddered to approach the pit; but she crept towards it on her hands and knees, and called to him as loud as she could call. She listened, but no sound replied. She called again and listened; still no answering sound. She did this, twenty, thirty times. She took a little clod of earth from the broken ground where he had stumbled, and threw it in. She could not hear it fall.

The wide prospect, so beautiful in its stillness but a few minutes ago, almost carried despair to her brave heart, as she rose and looked all round her, seeing no help. ‘Rachael, we must lose not a moment. We must go in different directions, seeking aid. You shall go by the way we have come, and I will go forward by the path. Tell any one you see, and every one what has happened. Think of Stephen, think of Stephen!’

She knew by Rachael's face that she might trust her now. And after standing for a moment to see her running, wringing her hands as she ran, she turned and went upon her own search; she stopped at the hedge to tie her shawl there as a guide to the place, then threw her bonnet aside, and ran as she had never run before.

Run, Sissy, run, in Heaven’s name! Don’t stop for breath. Run, run! Quickening herself by carrying such entreaties in her thoughts, she ran from field to field, and lane to lane, and place to place, as she had never run before; until she came to a shed by an engine-house, where two men lay in the shade, asleep on straw.

First to wake them, and next to tell them, all so wild and breathless as she was, what had brought her there, were difficulties; but they no sooner understood her than their spirits were on fire like hers. One of the men was in a drunken slumber, but on his comrade’s shouting to him that a man had fallen down the Old Hell Shaft, he started out to a pool of dirty water, put his head in it, and came back sober.

With these two men she ran to another half-a-mile further, and with that one to another, while they ran elsewhere. Then a horse was found; and she got another man to ride for life or death to the railroad, and send a message to Louisa, which she wrote and gave him. By this time a whole village was up: and windlasses, ropes, poles, candles, lanterns, all things necessary, were fast collecting and being brought into one place, to be carried to the Old Hell Shaft.

It seemed now hours and hours since she had left the lost man lying in the grave where he had been buried alive. She could not bear to remain away from it any longer—it was like deserting him—and she hurried swiftly back, accompanied by half-a-dozen labourers, including the drunken man whom the news had sobered, and who was the best man of all. When they came to the Old Hell Shaft, they found it as lonely as she had left it. The men called and listened as she had done, and examined the edge of the chasm, and settled how it had happened, and then sat down to wait until the implements they wanted should come up.
Every sound of insects in the air, every stirring of the leaves, every whisper among these men, made Sissy tremble, for she thought it was a cry at the bottom of the pit. But the wind blew idly over it, and no sound arose to the surface, and they sat upon the grass, waiting and waiting. After they had waited some time, straggling people who had heard of the accident began to come up; then the real help of implements began to arrive. In the midst of this, Rachael returned; and with her party there was a surgeon, who brought some wine and medicines. But, the expectation among the people that the man would be found alive was very slight indeed.

There being now people enough present to impede the work, the sobered man put himself at the head of the rest, or was put there by the general consent, and made a large ring round the Old Hell Shaft, and appointed men to keep it. Besides such volunteers as were accepted to work, only Sissy and Rachael were at first permitted within this ring; but, later in the day, when the message brought an express from Coketown, Mr. Gradgrind and Louisa, and Mr. Bounderby, and the whelp, were also there.

The sun was four hours lower than when Sissy and Rachael had first sat down upon the grass, before a means of enabling two men to descend securely was rigged with poles and ropes. Difficulties had arisen in the construction of this machine, simple as it was; requisites had been found wanting, and messages had had to go and return. It was five o'clock in the afternoon of the bright autumnal Sunday, before a candle was sent down to try the air, while three or four rough faces stood crowded close together, attentively watching it: the man at the windlass lowering as they were told. The candle was brought up again, feebly burning, and then some water was cast in. Then the bucket was hooked on; and the sobered man and another got in with lights, giving the word 'Lower away!'

As the rope went out, tight and strained, and the windlass creaked, there was not a breath among the one or two hundred men and women looking on, that came as it was wont to come. The signal was given and the windlass stopped, with abundant rope to spare. Apparently so long an interval ensued with the men at the windlass standing idle, that some women shrieked that another accident had happened! But the surgeon who held the watch, declared five minutes not to have elapsed yet, and sternly admonished them to keep silence. He had not well done speaking, when the windlass was reversed and worked again. Practised eyes knew that it did not go as heavily as it would if both workmen had been coming up, and that only one was returning.

The rope came in tight and strained; and ring after ring was coiled upon the barrel of the windlass, and all eyes were fastened on the pit. The sobered man was brought up and leaped out briskly on the grass. There was an universal cry of 'Alive or dead?' and then a deep, profound hush.

When he said 'Alive!' a great shout arose and many eyes had tears in them.

'But he's hurt very bad,' he added, as soon as he could make himself heard again. 'Where's doctor? He's hurt so very bad, sir, that we donno how to get him up.'

They all consulted together, and looked anxiously at the surgeon, as he asked some questions, and shook his head on receiving the replies. The sun was setting now; and the red light in the evening sky touched every face there, and caused it to be distinctly seen in all its rapt suspense.

The consultation ended in the men returning to the windlass, and the pitman going down again, carrying the wine and some other small matters with him. Then the other man came up. In the meantime, under the surgeon’s directions, some men brought a hurdle, on which others made a thick bed of spare clothes covered with loose straw, while he himself
contrived some bandages and slings from shawls and handkerchiefs. As these were made, they were hung upon an arm of the pitman who had last come up, with instructions how to use them: and as he stood, shown by the light he carried, leaning his powerful loose hand upon one of the poles, and sometimes glancing down the pit, and sometimes glancing round upon the people, he was not the least conspicuous figure in the scene. It was dark now, and torches were kindled.

It appeared from the little this man said to those about him, which was quickly repeated all over the circle, that the lost man had fallen upon a mass of crumbled rubbish with which the pit was half choked up, and that his fall had been further broken by some jagged earth at the side. He lay upon his back with one arm doubled under him, and according to his own belief had hardly stirred since he fell, except that he had moved his free hand to a side pocket, in which he remembered to have some bread and meat (of which he had swallowed crumbs), and had likewise scooped up a little water in it now and then. He had come straight away from his work, on being written to, and had walked the whole journey; and was on his way to Mr. Bounderby's country house after dark, when he fell. He was crossing that dangerous country at such a dangerous time, because he was innocent of what was laid to his charge, and couldn't rest from coming the nearest way to deliver himself up. The Old Hell Shaft, the pitman said, with a curse upon it, was worthy of its bad name to the last; for though Stephen could speak now, he believed it would soon be found to have mangled the life out of him.

When all was ready, this man, still taking his last hurried charges from his comrades and the surgeon after the windlass had begun to lower him, disappeared into the pit. The rope went out as before, the signal was made as before, and the windlass stopped. No man removed his hand from it now. Every one waited with his grasp set, and his body bent down to the work, ready to reverse and wind in. At length the signal was given, and all the ring leaned forward.

For, now, the rope came in, tightened and strained to its utmost as it appeared, and the men turned heavily, and the windlass complained. It was scarcely endurable to look at the rope, and think of its giving way. But, ring after ring was coiled upon the barrel of the windlass safely, and the connecting chains appeared, and finally the bucket with the two men holding on at the sides—a sight to make the head swim, and oppress the heart—and tenderly supporting between them, slung and tied within, the figure of a poor, crushed, human creature.

A low murmur of pity went round the throng, and the women wept aloud, as this form, almost without form, was moved very slowly from its iron deliverance, and laid upon the bed of straw. At first, none but the surgeon went close to it. He did what he could in its adjustment on the couch, but the best that he could do was to cover it. That gently done, he called to him Rachael and Sissy. And at that time the pale, worn, patient face was seen looking up at the sky, with the broken right hand lying bare on the outside of the covering garments, as if waiting to be taken by another hand.

They gave him drink, moistened his face with water, and administered some drops of cordial and wine. Though he lay quite motionless looking up at the sky, he smiled and said, 'Rachael.' She stooped down on the grass at his side, and bent over him until her eyes were between his and the sky, for he could not so much as turn them to look at her.

'Rachael, my dear.'

She took his hand. He smiled again and said, 'Don't let 't go.'

'Thou'rt in great pain, my own dear Stephen?'

'I ha' been, but not now. I ha' been—dreadful, and dree, and long, my dear—but 'tis ower now. Ah, Rachael, aw a
muddle! Fro’ first to last, a muddle!’

The spectre of his old look seemed to pass as he said the word.

‘I ha’ fell into th’ pit, my dear, as have cost wi’n the knowledge o’ old fok now livin, hundreds and hundreds o’ men’s lives—fathers, sons, brothers, dear to thousands an’ thousands, an’ keeping ’em fro’ want and hunger. I ha’ fell into a pit that ha’ been wi’ th’ Firedamp crueler than battle. I ha’ read on ‘t in the public petition, as onny one may read, fro’ the men that works in pits, in which they ha’ pray’n and pray’n the lawmakers for Christ’s sake not to let their work be murder to ’em, but to spare ’em for th’ wives and children that they loves as well as gentlefok loves theirs. When it were in work, it killed wi’out need; when ’tis let alone, it kills wi’out need. See how we die an’ no need, one way an’ another—in a muddle—every day!’

He faintly said it, without any anger against any one. Merely as the truth.

‘Thy little sister, Rachael, thou hast not forgot her. Thou’rt not like to forget her now, and me so nigh her. Thou know’st—poor, patient, suff’rin, dear—how thou didst work for her, seet’n all day long in her little chair at thy winder, and how she died, young and misshapen, awlung o’ sickly air as had’n no need to be, an’ awlung o’ working people’s miserable homes. A muddle! Aw a muddle!’

Louisa approached him; but he could not see her, lying with his face turned up to the night sky.

‘If aw th’ things that tooches us, my dear, was not so muddled, I should’n ha’ had’n need to coom heer. If we was not in a muddle among ourseln, I should’n ha’ been, by my own fellow weavers and workin’ brothers, so mistook. If Mr. Bounderby had ever know’d me right—if he’d ever know’d me at aw—he would’n ha’ took’n offence wi’ me. He would’n ha’ suspect’n me. But look up yonder, Rachael! Look aboove!’

Following his eyes, she saw that he was gazing at a star.

‘It ha’ shined upon me,’ he said reverently, ‘in my pain and trouble down below. It ha’ shined into my mind. I ha’ look’n at ’t and thowt o’ thee, Rachael, till the muddle in my mind have cleared awa, above a bit, I hope. If soon ha’ been wantin’ in unnerstan’in me better, I, too, ha’ been wantin’ in unnerstan’in them better. When I got thy letter, I easily believe that what the yoong ledy sen and done to me, and what her brother sen and done to me, was one, and that there were a wicked plot betwixt ’em. When I fell, I were in anger wi’ her, an’ hurryin on t’ be as onjust t’ her as oothers was t’ me. But in our judgments, like as in our doins, we mun bear and forbear. In my pain an’ trouble, lookin up yonder,—wi’ it shinin on me—I ha’ seen more clear, and ha’ made it my dyin prayer that aw th’ world may on’y coom togeether more, an’ get a better unnerstan’in o’ one another, than when I were in ‘t my own weak seln.’

Louisa hearing what he said, bent over him on the opposite side to Rachael, so that he could see her.

‘You ha’ heard?’ he said, after a few moments’ silence. ‘I ha’ not forgot you, ledy.’

‘Yes, Stephen, I have heard you. And your prayer is mine.’

‘You ha’ a father. Will yo tak’ a message to him?’

‘He is here,’ said Louisa, with dread. ‘Shall I bring him to you?’
‘If yo please.’

Louisa returned with her father. Standing hand-in-hand, they both looked down upon the solemn countenance.

‘Sir, yo will clear me an’ mak my name good wi’ aw men. This I leave to yo.’

Mr. Gradgrind was troubled and asked how?

‘Sir,’ was the reply: ‘yor son will tell yo how. Ask him. I mak no charges: I leave none ahint me: not a single word. I ha’ seen an’ spok’n wi’ yor son, one night. I ask no more o’ yo than that yo clear me—an’ I trust to yo to do ‘t.’

The bearers being now ready to carry him away, and the surgeon being anxious for his removal, those who had torches or lanterns, prepared to go in front of the litter. Before it was raised, and while they were arranging how to go, he said to Rachael, looking upward at the star:

‘Often as I coom to myseln, and found it shinin’ on me down there in my trouble, I thowt it were the star as guided to Our Saviour’s home. I awmust think it be the very star!’

They lifted him up, and he was overjoyed to find that they were about to take him in the direction whither the star seemed to him to lead.

‘Rachael, beloved lass! Don’t let go my hand. We may walk toogther t’night, my dear!’

‘I will hold thy hand, and keep beside thee, Stephen, all the way.’

‘Bless thee! Will soombody be pleased to coover my face!’

They carried him very gently along the fields, and down the lanes, and over the wide landscape; Rachael always holding the hand in hers. Very few whispers broke the mournful silence. It was soon a funeral procession. The star had shown him where to find the God of the poor; and through humility, and sorrow, and forgiveness, he had gone to his Redeemer’s rest.

**Chapter VII: Whelp-Hunting**

BEFORE the ring formed round the Old Hell Shaft was broken, one figure had disappeared from within it. Mr. Bounderby and his shadow had not stood near Louisa, who held her father’s arm, but in a retired place by themselves. When Mr. Gradgrind was summoned to the couch, Sissy, attentive to all that happened, slipped behind that wicked shadow—a sight in the horror of his face, if there had been eyes there for any sight but one—and whispered in his ear. Without turning his head, he conferred with her a few moments, and vanished. Thus the whelp had gone out of the circle before the people moved.

When the father reached home, he sent a message to Mr. Bounderby’s, desiring his son to come to him directly. The reply was, that Mr. Bounderby having missed him in the crowd, and seeing nothing of him since, had supposed him to be at Stone Lodge.
‘I believe, father,’ said Louisa, ‘he will not come back to town to-night.’ Mr. Gradgrind turned away, and said no more.

In the morning, he went down to the Bank himself as soon as it was opened, and seeing his son’s place empty (he had not the courage to look in at first) went back along the street to meet Mr. Bounderby on his way there. To whom he said that, for reasons he would soon explain, but entreated not then to be asked for, he had found it necessary to employ his son at a distance for a little while. Also, that he was charged with the duty of vindicating Stephen Blackpool’s memory, and declaring the thief. Mr. Bounderby quite confounded, stood stock-still in the street after his father-in-law had left him, swelling like an immense soap-bubble, without its beauty.

Mr. Gradgrind went home, locked himself in his room, and kept it all that day. When Sissy and Louisa tapped at his door, he said, without opening it, ‘Not now, my dears; in the evening.’ On their return in the evening, he said, ‘I am not able yet—to-morrow.’ He ate nothing all day, and had no candle after dark; and they heard him walking to and fro late at night.

But, in the morning he appeared at breakfast at the usual hour, and took his usual place at the table. Aged and bent he looked, and quite bowed down; and yet he looked a wiser man, and a better man, than in the days when in this life he wanted nothing—but Facts. Before he left the room, he appointed a time for them to come to him; and so, with his gray head drooping, went away.

‘Dear father,’ said Louisa, when they kept their appointment, ‘you have three young children left. They will be different, I will be different yet, with Heaven’s help.’

She gave her hand to Sissy, as if she meant with her help too.

‘Your wretched brother,’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘Do you think he had planned this robbery, when he went with you to the lodging?’

‘I fear so, father. I know he had wanted money very much, and had spent a great deal.’

‘The poor man being about to leave the town, it came into his evil brain to cast suspicion on him?’

‘I think it must have flashed upon him while he sat there, father. For I asked him to go there with me. The visit did not originate with him.’

‘He had some conversation with the poor man. Did he take him aside?’

‘He took him out of the room. I asked him afterwards, why he had done so, and he made a plausible excuse; but since last night, father, and when I remember the circumstances by its light, I am afraid I can imagine too truly what passed between them.’

‘Let me know,’ said her father, ‘if your thoughts present your guilty brother in the same dark view as mine.’

‘I fear, father,’ hesitated Louisa, ‘that he must have made some representation to Stephen Blackpool—perhaps in my name, perhaps in his own—which induced him to do in good faith and honesty, what he had never done before, and to wait about the Bank those two or three nights before he left the town.’
‘Too plain!’ returned the father. ‘Too plain!’

He shaded his face, and remained silent for some moments. Recovering himself, he said:

‘And now, how is he to be found? How is he to be saved from justice? In the few hours that I can possibly allow to elapse before I publish the truth, how is he to be found by us, and only by us? Ten thousand pounds could not effect it.’

‘Sissy has effected it, father.’

He raised his eyes to where she stood, like a good fairy in his house, and said in a tone of softened gratitude and grateful kindness, ‘It is always you, my child!’

‘We had our fears,’ Sissy explained, glancing at Louisa, ‘before yesterday; and when I saw you brought to the side of the litter last night, and heard what passed (being close to Rachael all the time), I went to him when no one saw, and said to him, “Don’t look at me. See where your father is. Escape at once, for his sake and your own!” He was in a tremble before I whispered to him, and he started and trembled more then, and said, “Where can I go? I have very little money, and I don’t know who will hide me!” I thought of father’s old circus. I have not forgotten where Mr. Sleary goes at this time of year, and I read of him in a paper only the other day. I told him to hurry there, and tell his name, and ask Mr. Sleary to hide him till I came. “I'll get to him before the morning,” he said. And I saw him shrink away among the people.’

‘Thank Heaven!’ exclaimed his father. ‘He may be got abroad yet.’

It was the more hopeful as the town to which Sissy had directed him was within three hours’ journey of Liverpool, whence he could be swiftly dispatched to any part of the world. But, caution being necessary in communicating with him—for there was a greater danger every moment of his being suspected now, and nobody could be sure at heart but that Mr. Bounderby himself, in a bullying vein of public zeal, might play a Roman part—it was consented that Sissy and Louisa should repair to the place in question, by a circuitous course, alone; and that the unhappy father, setting forth in an opposite direction, should get round to the same bourne by another and wider route. It was further agreed that he should not present himself to Mr. Sleary, lest his intentions should be mistrusted, or the intelligence of his arrival should cause his son to take flight anew; but, that the communication should be left to Sissy and Louisa to open; and that they should inform the cause of so much misery and disgrace, of his father’s being at hand and of the purpose for which they had come. When these arrangements had been well considered and were fully understood by all three, it was time to begin to carry them into execution. Early in the afternoon, Mr. Gradgrind walked direct from his own house into the country, to be taken up on the line by which he was to travel; and at night the remaining two set forth upon their different course, encouraged by not seeing any face they knew.

The two travelled all night, except when they were left, for odd numbers of minutes, at branch-places, up illimitable flights of steps, or down wells—which was the only variety of those branches—and, early in the morning, were turned out on a swamp, a mile or two from the town they sought. From this dismal spot they were rescued by a savage old postilion, who happened to be up early, kicking a horse in a fly; and so were smuggled into the town by all the back lanes where the pigs lived: which, although not a magnificent or even savoury approach, was, as is usual in such cases, the legitimate highway.

The first thing they saw on entering the town was the skeleton of Sleary’s Circus. The company had departed for another town more than twenty miles off, and had opened there last night. The connection between the two places was...
by a hilly turnpike-road, and the travelling on that road was very slow. Though they took but a hasty breakfast, and no rest (which it would have been in vain to seek under such anxious circumstances), it was noon before they began to find the bills of Sleary’s Horse-riding on barns and walls, and one o’clock when they stopped in the market-place.

A Grand Morning Performance by the Riders, commencing at that very hour, was in course of announcement by the bellman as they set their feet upon the stones of the street. Sissy recommended that, to avoid making inquiries and attracting attention in the town, they should present themselves to pay at the door. If Mr. Sleary were taking the money, he would be sure to know her, and would proceed with discretion. If he were not, he would be sure to see them inside; and, knowing what he had done with the fugitive, would proceed with discretion still.

Therefore, they repaired, with fluttering hearts, to the well-remembered booth. The flag with the inscription Sleary’s Horse-riding was there; and the Gothic niche was there; but Mr. Sleary was not there. Master Kidderminster, grown too maturely turfy to be received by the wildest credulity as Cupid any more, had yielded to the invincible force of circumstances (and his beard), and, in the capacity of a man who made himself generally useful, presided on this occasion over the exchequer—having also a drum in reserve, on which to expend his leisure moments and superfluous forces. In the extreme sharpness of his look out for base coin, Mr. Kidderminster, as at present situated, never saw anything but money; so Sissy passed him unrecognised, and they went in.

The Emperor of Japan, on a steady old white horse stencilled with black spots, was twirling five wash-hand basins at once, as it is the favourite recreation of that monarch to do. Sissy, though well acquainted with his Royal line, had no personal knowledge of the present Emperor, and his reign was peaceful. Miss Josephine Sleary, in her celebrated graceful Equestrian Tyrolean Flower Act, was then announced by a new clown (who humorously said Cauliflower Act), and Mr. Sleary appeared, leading her in.

Mr. Sleary had only made one cut at the Clown with his long whip-lash, and the Clown had only said, ‘If you do it again, I’ll throw the horse at you!’ when Sissy was recognised both by father and daughter. But they got through the Act with great self-possession; and Mr. Sleary, saving for the first instant, conveyed no more expression into his locomotive eye than into his fixed one. The performance seemed a little long to Sissy and Louisa, particularly when it stopped to afford the Clown an opportunity of telling Mr. Sleary (who said ‘Indeed, sir!’ to all his observations in the calmest way, and with his eye on the house) about two legs sitting on three legs looking at one leg, when in came four legs, and laid hold of one leg, and up got two legs, caught hold of three legs, and threw ‘em at four legs, who ran away with one leg. For, although an ingenious Allegory relating to a butcher, a three-legged stool, a dog, and a leg of mutton, this narrative consumed time; and they were in great suspense. At last, however, little fair-haired Josephine made her curtsey amid great applause; and the Clown, left alone in the ring, had just warmed himself, and said, ‘Now I’ll have a turn!’ when Sissy was touched on the shoulder, and beckoned out.

She took Louisa with her; and they were received by Mr. Sleary in a very little private apartment, with canvas sides, a grass floor, and a wooden ceiling all aslant, on which the box company stamped their approbation, as if they were coming through. ‘Thethilia,’ said Mr. Sleary, who had brandy and water at hand, ‘it doth me good to thee you. You wath alwayth a favourite with uth, and you’ve done uth credith thinth the old timeth I’m thure. You mutht thee our people, my dear, afore we thpeak of bithnith, or they’ll break their hearth—ethpethially the women. Here’th Jothphine hath been and got married to E. W. B. Childerth, and thee hath got a boy, and though he’th only three yearth old, he thtickth on to any pony you can bring againtht him. He’th named The Little Wonder of Thcolathic Equitation; and if you don’t hear of that boy at Athley’th, you’ll hear of him at Parith. And you recollect Kidderminthter, that wath thought to be rather thweet
upon yourthelf? Well. He’th married too. Married a widder. Old enough to be hith mother. Thee wath Tighrope, thee wath, and now thee’th nothing—on accounth of fat. They’ve got two children, tho we’re throng in the Fairy bithnith and the Nurthery dodge. If you wath to thee our Children in the Wood, with their father and mother both a dyin’ on a horthe—their uncle a retheiving of ’em ath hith wardth, upon a horthe—themthelvth both a goin’ a black-berryin’ on a horthe—and the Robinth a coming in to cover ’em with leavth, upon a horthe—you’d thay it wath the completeht thing ath ever you thet your eyeth on! And you remember Emma Gordon, my dear, ath wath a mothth a mother to you? Of courthe you do; I needn’ athk. Well! Emma, thee lotht her huthband. He wath throw’d a heavy back-fall off a Elephant in a thort of a Pagoda thing ath the Thultan of the Indieth, and he never got the better of it; and thee married a thecond time—married a Cheethemonger ath fell in love with her from the front—and he’th a Overtheer and makin’ a fortun.’

These various changes, Mr. Sleary, very short of breath now, related with great heartiness, and with a wonderful kind of innocence, considering what a bleary and brandy-and-watery old veteran he was. Afterwards he brought in Josephine, and E. W. B. Childers (rather deeply lined in the jaws by daylight), and the Little Wonder of Scholastic Equitation, and in a word, all the company. Amazing creatures they were in Louisa’s eyes, so white and pink of complexion, so scant of dress, and so demonstrative of leg; but it was very agreeable to see them crowding about Sissy, and very natural in Sissy to be unable to refrain from tears.

‘There! Now Thethilia hath kithd all the children, and hugged all the women, and thaken handth all round with all the men, clear, every one of you, and ring in the band for the thecond part!’

As soon as they were gone, he continued in a low tone. ‘Now, Thethilia, I don’t athk to know any thecreth, but I thuppothe I may conthider thith to be Mith Thquire.’

‘This is his sister. Yes.’

‘And t’other on’th daughter. That’h what I mean. Hope I thee you well, mith. And I hope the Thquire’th well?’

‘My father will be here soon,’ said Louisa, anxious to bring him to the point. ‘Is my brother safe?’

‘Thafe and thound!’ he replied. ‘I want you jutht to take a peep at the Ring, mith, through here. Thethilia, you know the dodgeth; find a thpy-hole for yourthelf.’

They each looked through a chink in the boards.

‘That’h Jack the Giant Killer—piethe of comic infant bithnith,’ said Sleary. ‘There’th a property-houthe, you thee, for Jack to hide in; there’th my Clown with a thauhepan-lid and a thpit, for Jack’th thervant; there’th little Jack himself in a thplendid thoot of armour; there’th two comic black thervanth twithe ath big ath the houthe, to thtand by it and to bring it in and clear it; and the Giant (a very echtpenthive bathket one), he an’t on yet. Now, do you thee ’em all?’

‘Yes,’ they both said.

‘Look at ’em again,’ said Sleary, ‘look at ’em well. You thee em all? Very good. Now, mith,’ he put a form for them to sit on; ‘I have my opinionth, and the Thquire your father hath hith. I don’t want to know what your brother’th been up to; ith better for me not to know. All I thay ith, the Thquire hath thtood by Thethilia, and I’ll thtand by the Thquire. Your brother ith one them black thervanth.’
Louisa uttered an exclamation, partly of distress, partly of satisfaction.

‘Ith a fact,’ said Sleary, ‘and even knowin’ it, you couldn’t put your finger on him. Let the Thquire come. I thall keep your brother here after the performanth. I thant undreth him, nor yet wath hith paint off. Let the Thquire come here after the performanth, or come here yourself after the performanth, and you thall find your brother, and have the whole plathe to talk to him in. Never mind the lookth of him, ath long ath he’th well hid.’

Louisa, with many thanks and with a lightened load, detained Mr. Sleary no longer then. She left her love for her brother, with her eyes full of tears; and she and Sissy went away until later in the afternoon.

Mr. Gradgrind arrived within an hour afterwards. He too had encountered no one whom he knew; and was now sanguine with Sleary’s assistance, of getting his disgraced son to Liverpool in the night. As neither of the three could be his companion without almost identifying him under any disguise, he prepared a letter to a correspondent whom he could trust, beseeching him to ship the bearer off at any cost, to North or South America, or any distant part of the world to which he could be the most speedily and privately dispatched.

This done, they walked about, waiting for the Circus to be quite vacated; not only by the audience, but by the company and by the horses. After watching it a long time, they saw Mr. Sleary bring out a chair and sit down by the side-door, smoking; as if that were his signal that they might approach.

‘Your thervant, Thquire,’ was his cautious salutation as they passed in. ‘If you want me you’ll find me here. You muthn’t mind your thon having a comic livery on.’

They all three went in; and Mr. Gradgrind sat down forlorn, on the Clown’s performing chair in the middle of the ring. On one of the back benches, remote in the subdued light and the strangeness of the place, sat the villainous whelp, sulky to the last, whom he had the misery to call his son.

In a preposterous coat, like a beadle’s, with cuffs and flaps exaggerated to an unspeakable extent; in an immense waistcoat, knee-breeches, buckled shoes, and a mad cocked hat; with nothing fitting him, and everything of coarse material, moth-eaten and full of holes; with seams in his black face, where fear and heat had started through the greasy composition daubed all over it; anything so grimly, detestably, ridiculously shameful as the whelp in his comic livery, Mr. Gradgrind never could by any other means have believed in, weighable and measurable fact though it was. And one of his model children had come to this!

At first the whelp would not draw any nearer, but persisted in remaining up there by himself. Yielding at length, if any concession so sullenly made can be called yielding, to the entreaties of Sissy—for Louisa he disowned altogether—he came down, bench by bench, until he stood in the sawdust, on the verge of the circle, as far as possible, within its limits from where his father sat.

‘How was this done?’ asked the father.

‘How was what done?’ moodily answered the son.

‘This robbery,’ said the father, raising his voice upon the word.

‘I forced the safe myself over night, and shut it up ajar before I went away. I had had the key that was found, made long
before. I dropped it that morning, that it might be supposed to have been used. I didn’t take the money all at once. I pretended to put my balance away every night, but I didn’t. Now you know all about it.’

‘If a thunderbolt had fallen on me,’ said the father, ‘it would have shocked me less than this!’

‘I don’t see why,’ grumbled the son. ‘So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk, a hundred times, of its being a law. How can I help laws? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself!’

The father buried his face in his hands, and the son stood in his disgraceful grotesqueness, biting straw: his hands, with the black partly worn away inside, looking like the hands of a monkey. The evening was fast closing in; and from time to time, he turned the whites of his eyes restlessly and impatiently towards his father. They were the only parts of his face that showed any life or expression, the pigment upon it was so thick.

‘You must be got to Liverpool, and sent abroad.’

‘I suppose I must. I can’t be more miserable anywhere,’ whimpered the whelp, ‘than I have been here, ever since I can remember. That’s one thing.’

Mr. Gradgrind went to the door, and returned with Sleary, to whom he submitted the question, How to get this deplorable object away?

‘Why, I’ve been thinking of it, Thquire. There’s not muth time to lothe, tho you muth thay yeth or no. Ith over twenty mileth to the rail. There’s a coath in half an hour, that goeth to the rail, ‘purpothe to cath the mail train. That train will take him right to Liverpool.’

‘But look at him,’ groaned Mr. Gradgrind. ‘Will any coach—’

‘I don’t mean that he thould go in the comic livery,’ said Sleary. ‘Thay the word, and I’ll make a Jothkin of him, out of the wardrobe, in five minutes.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Mr. Gradgrind.

‘A Jothkin—a Carter. Make up your mind quick, Thquire. There’ll be beer to feth. I’ve never met with nothing but beer ath’ll ever clean a comic blackamoor.’

Mr. Gradgrind rapidly assented; Mr. Sleary rapidly turned out from a box, a smock frock, a felt hat, and other essentials; the whelp rapidly changed clothes behind a screen of baize; Mr. Sleary rapidly brought beer, and washed him white again.

‘Now,’ said Sleary, ‘come along to the coath, and jump up behind; I’ll go with you there, and they’ll thuppothe you one of my people. Thay farewell to your family, and tharp’th the word.’ With which he delicately retired.

‘Here is your letter,’ said Mr. Gradgrind. ‘All necessary means will be provided for you. Atone, by repentance and better conduct, for the shocking action you have committed, and the dreadful consequences to which it has led. Give me your hand, my poor boy, and may God forgive you as I do!’
The culprit was moved to a few abject tears by these words and their pathetic tone. But, when Louisa opened her arms, he repulsed her afresh.

‘Not you. I don’t want to have anything to say to you!’

‘O Tom, Tom, do we end so, after all my love!’

‘After all your love!’ he returned, obdurately. ‘Pretty love! Leaving old Bounderby to himself, and packing my best friend Mr. Harthouse off, and going home just when I was in the greatest danger. Pretty love that! Coming out with every word about our having gone to that place, when you saw the net was gathering round me. Pretty love that! You have regularly given me up. You never cared for me.’

‘Tharp’th the word!’ said Sleary, at the door.

They all confusedly went out: Louisa crying to him that she forgave him, and loved him still, and that he would one day be sorry to have left her so, and glad to think of these her last words, far away: when some one ran against them. Mr. Gradgrind and Sissy, who were both before him while his sister yet clung to his shoulder, stopped and recoiled.

For, there was Bitzer, out of breath, his thin lips parted, his thin nostrils distended, his white eyelashes quivering, his colourless face more colourless than ever, as if he ran himself into a white heat, when other people ran themselves into a glow. There he stood, panting and heaving, as if he had never stopped since the night, now long ago, when he had run them down before.

‘I’m sorry to interfere with your plans,’ said Bitzer, shaking his head, ‘but I can’t allow myself to be done by horse-riders. I must have young Mr. Tom; he mustn’t be got away by horse-riders; here he is in a smock frock, and I must have him!’

By the collar, too, it seemed. For, so he took possession of him.

**Chapter VIII: Philosophical**

THEY went back into the booth, Sleary shutting the door to keep intruders out. Bitzer, still holding the paralysed culprit by the collar, stood in the Ring, blinking at his old patron through the darkness of the twilight.

‘Bitzer,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, broken down, and miserably submissive to him, ‘have you a heart?’

‘The circulation, sir,’ returned Bitzer, smiling at the oddity of the question, ‘couldn’t be carried on without one. No man, sir, acquainted with the facts established by Harvey relating to the circulation of the blood, can doubt that I have a heart.’

‘Is it accessible,’ cried Mr. Gradgrind, ‘to any compassionate influence?’

‘It is accessible to Reason, sir,’ returned the excellent young man. ‘And to nothing else.’

They stood looking at each other; Mr. Gradgrind’s face as white as the pursuer’s.

‘What motive—even what motive in reason—can you have for preventing the escape of this wretched youth,’ said Mr.
Gradgrind, 'and crushing his miserable father? See his sister here. Pity us!'

'Sir,' returned Bitzer, in a very business-like and logical manner, 'since you ask me what motive I have in reason, for taking young Mr. Tom back to Coketown, it is only reasonable to let you know. I have suspected young Mr. Tom of this bankrobery from the first. I had had my eye upon him before that time, for I knew his ways. I have kept my observations to myself, but I have made them; and I have got ample proofs against him now, besides his running away, and besides his own confession, which I was just in time to overhear. I had the pleasure of watching your house yesterday morning, and following you here. I am going to take young Mr. Tom back to Coketown, in order to deliver him over to Mr. Bounderby. Sir, I have no doubt whatever that Mr. Bounderby will then promote me to young Mr. Tom's situation. And I wish to have his situation, sir, for it will be a rise to me, and will do me good.'

'If this is solely a question of self-interest with you—' Mr. Gradgrind began.

'I beg your pardon for interrupting you, sir,' returned Bitzer; 'but I am sure you know that the whole social system is a question of self-interest. What you must always appeal to, is a person’s self-interest. It's your only hold. We are so constituted. I was brought up in that catechism when I was very young, sir, as you are aware.'

'What sum of money,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'will you set against your expected promotion?'

'Thank you, sir,' returned Bitzer, 'for hinting at the proposal; but I will not set any sum against it. Knowing that your clear head would propose that alternative, I have gone over the calculations in my mind; and I find that to compound a felony, even on very high terms indeed, would not be as safe and good for me as my improved prospects in the Bank.'

'Bitzer,' said Mr. Gradgrind, stretching out his hands as though he would have said, See how miserable I am! 'Bitzer, I have but one chance left to soften you. You were many years at my school. If, in remembrance of the pains bestowed upon you there, you can persuade yourself in any degree to disregard your present interest and release my son, I entreat and pray you to give him the benefit of that remembrance.'

'I really wonder, sir,' rejoined the old pupil in an argumentative manner, 'to find you taking a position so untenable. My schooling was paid for; it was a bargain; and when I came away, the bargain ended.'

It was a fundamental principle of the Gradgrind philosophy that everything was to be paid for. Nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing from it were not to be. Every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter. And if we didn’t get to Heaven that way, it was not a politico-economical place, and we had no business there.

'I don’t deny,' added Bitzer, 'that my schooling was cheap. But that comes right, sir. I was made in the cheapest market, and have to dispose of myself in the dearest.'

He was a little troubled here, by Louisa and Sissy crying.

'Pray don’t do that,' said he, 'it’s of no use doing that: it only worries. You seem to think that I have some animosity against young Mr. Tom; whereas I have none at all. I am only going, on the reasonable grounds I have mentioned, to take him back to Coketown. If he was to resist, I should set up the cry of Stop thief! But, he won’t resist, you may depend
Mr. Sleary, who with his mouth open and his rolling eye as immovably jammed in his head as his fixed one, had listened to these doctrines with profound attention, here stepped forward.

‘Thquire, you know perfectly well, and your daughter knowth perfectly well (better than you, becauthe I thed it to her), that I didn’t know what your thon had done, and that I didn’t want to know—I thed it wath better not, though I only thought, then, it wath thome thkylarking. However, thith young man having made it known to be a robbery of a bank, why, that’h a theriouth thing; muth too theriouth a thing for me to compound, ath thith young man hath very properly called it. Conthequently, Thquire, you muthn’t quarrel with me if I take thith young man’th thide, and thay he’th right and there’th no help for it. But I tell you what I’ll do, Thquire; I’ll drive your thon and thith young man over to the rail, and prevent expothure here. I can’t conttent to do more, but I’ll do that.’

Fresh lamentations from Louisa, and deeper affliction on Mr. Gradgrind’s part, followed this desertion of them by their last friend. But, Sissy glanced at him with great attention; nor did she in her own breast misunderstand him. As they were all going out again, he favoured her with one slight roll of his movable eye, desiring her to linger behind. As he locked the door, he said excitedly:

‘The Thquire thtood by you, Thethilia, and I’ll thtand by the Thquire. More than that: thith ith a prethiouoth rathcal, and belongth to that bluthtering Cove that my people nearly pitht out o’ winder. It’ll be a dark night; I’ve got a horthe that’ll do anything but thpeak; I’ve got a pony that’ll go fifteen mile an hour with Childerth driving of him; I’ve got a dog that’ll keep a man to one plathe four-and-twenty hourth. Get a word with the young Thquire. Tell him, when he theeoth our horthe begin to danthe, not to be afraid of being thpilt, but to look out for a pony-gig coming up. Tell him, when he theeoth that gig clothe by, to jump down, and it’ll take him off at a rattling pathe. If my dog leth thith young man thtir a peg on foot, I give him leave to go. And if my horthe ever ththirth from that thpot where he beginth a danthing, till the morning—I don’t know him?—Tharp’th the word!’

The word was so sharp, that in ten minutes Mr. Childers, sauntering about the market-place in a pair of slippers, had his cue, and Mr. Sleary’s equipage was ready. It was a fine sight, to behold the learned dog barking round it, and Mr. Sleary instructing him, with his one practicable eye, that Bitzer was the object of his particular attentions. Soon after dark they all three got in and started; the learned dog (a formidable creature) already pinning Bitzer with his eye, and sticking close to the wheel on his side, that he might be ready for him in the event of his showing the slightest disposition to alight.

The other three sat up at the inn all night in great suspense. At eight o’clock in the morning Mr. Sleary and the dog reappeared: both in high spirits.

‘All right, Thquire!’ said Mr. Sleary, ‘your thon may be aboard-a-thip by thith time. Childerth took him off, an hour and a half after we left there latth night. The horthe danthed the polka till he wath dead beat (he would have walthed if he hadn’t been in harneth), and then I gave him the word and he went to thleep comfortable. When that prethiouoth young Rathcal thed he’d go for’ard afoot, the dog hung on to hith neck-hankercher with all four legth in the air and pulled him down and rolled him over. Tho he come back into the drag, and there he that, ‘till I turned the horthe’th head, at half-patth thith thith mornin.’

Mr. Gradgrind overwhelmed him with thanks, of course; and hinted as delicately as he could, at a handsome
remuneration in money.

'I don’t want money myself, Thquire; but Childerth ith a family man, and if you wath to like to offer him a five-pound note, it mightn’t be unacactiveple. Likewithe if you wath to thtand a collar for the dog, or a thet of bellth for the horthe, I thould be very glad to take ’em. Brandy and water I alwayth take.’ He had already called for a glass, and now called for another. ‘If you wouldn’t think it going too far, Thquire, to make a little thpred for the company at about three and thixth ahead, not reckoning Luth, it would make ’em happy.’

All these little tokens of his gratitude, Mr. Gradgrind very willingly undertook to render. Though he thought them far too slight, he said, for such a service.

‘Very well, Thquire; then, if you’ll only give a Horte-riding, a bethpeak, whenever you can, you’ll more than balanthe the account. Now, Thquire, if your daughter will ethcuthe me, I thould like one parting word with you.’

Louisa and Sissy withdrew into an adjoining room; Mr. Sleary, stirring and drinking his brandy and water as he stood, went on:

‘Thquire,—you don’t need to be told that dogth ith wonderful animalth.’

‘Their instinct,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, ‘is surprising.’

‘Whatever you call it—and I’m bletht if I know what to call it’—said Sleary, ‘it ith athtonithing. The way in whith a dog’ll find you—the dithtanthe he’ll come!’

‘His scent,’ said Mr. Gradgrind, ‘being so fine.’

‘I’m bletht if I know what to call it,’ repeated Sleary, shaking his head, ‘but I have had dogth find me, Thquire, in a way that made me think whether that dog hadn’t gone to another dog, and thed, “You don’t happen to know a perthon of the name of Thleary, do you? Perthon of the name of Thleary, in the Horte-Riding way—thtout man—game eye?” And whether that dog mightn’t have thed, “Well, I can’t thay I know him myself, but I know a dog that I think would be likely to be acquainted with him.” And whether that dog mightn’t have thought it over, and thed, “Thleary, Thleary! O yeth, to be thure! A friend of mine mentioned him to me at one time. I can get you hith addreth directly.” In conthequenth of my being afore the public, and going about tho muth, you thee, there mutht be a number of dogth acquainted with me, Thquire, that I don’t know!’

Mr. Gradgrind seemed to be quite confounded by this speculation.

‘Any way,’ said Sleary, after putting his lips to his brandy and water, ‘ith fourteen month ago, Thquire, thinthe we wath at Chethther. We wath getting up our Children in the Wood one morning, when there cometh into our Ring, by the thtage door, a dog. He had travelled a long way, he wath in a very bad condithon, he wath lame, and pretty well blind. He went round to our children, one after another, as if he wath a theeking for a child he know’d; and then he come to me, and throwd hithelf up behind, and thtood on hith two forelegth, weak ath he wath, and then he wagged hith tail and died. Thquire, that dog wath Merrylegth.’

‘Sissy’s father’s dog!’
‘Thelilia’s father’s old dog. Now, Thquire, I can take my oath, from my knowledge of that dog, that that man was dead—and buried—before that dog came back to me. Joethpine and Childerth and me talked it over a long time, whether I should write or not. But we agreed, “No. There’s nothing comfortable to tell; why unsettle her mind, and make her unhappy?” Tho, whether her father bathely deterred her; or whether he broke his own heart alone, rather than pull her down along with him; never will be known, now, Thquire, till—no, not till we know how the dog thfindth uth out!’

‘She keeps the bottle that he sent her for, to this hour; and she will believe in his affection to the last moment of her life,’ said Mr. Gradgrind.

‘It thseemth to prethent two thingth to a perthon, don’t it, Thquire?’ said Mr. Sleary, musing as he looked down into the depths of his brandy and water: ‘one, that there ith a love in the world, not all Thelf-interetht after all, but thomething very different; t’other, that it bath a way of ith own of calculating or not calculating, whith thomehow or another ith at leathth ath hard to give a name to, ath the wayth of the dogth ith!’

Mr. Gradgrind looked out of window, and made no reply. Mr. Sleary emptied his glass and recalled the ladies.

‘Thelilia my dear, kith me and good-bye! Mith Thquire, to thee you treating of her like a thithter, and a thithter that you truith and honour with all your heart and more, ith a very pretty thight to me. I hope your brother may live to be better detherving of you, and a greater comfort to you. Thquire, thake handth, firtht and latht! Don’t be croth with uth poor vagabondth. People mutht be amuthed. They can’t be alwayth a learning, nor yet they can’t be alwayth a working, they an’t made for it. You mutht have uth, Thquire. Do the withe thing and the kind thing too, and make the betht of uth; not the wurtht!’

‘And I never thought before,’ said Mr. Sleary, putting his head in at the door again to say it, ‘that I wath tho muth of a Cackler!’

Chapter IX: Final

IT is a dangerous thing to see anything in the sphere of a vain blusterer, before the vain blusterer sees it himself. Mr. Bounderby felt that Mrs. Sparsit had audaciously anticipated him, and presumed to be wiser than he. Inappeasably indignant with her for her triumphant discovery of Mrs. Pegler, he turned this presumption, on the part of a woman in her dependent position, over and over in his mind, until it accumulated with turning like a great snowball. At last he made the discovery that to discharge this highly connected female—to have it in his power to say, ‘She was a woman of family, and wanted to stick to me, but I wouldn’t have it, and got rid of her’—would be to get the utmost possible amount of crowning glory out of the connection, and at the same time to punish Mrs. Sparsit according to her deserts.

Filled fuller than ever, with this great idea, Mr. Bounderby came in to lunch, and sat himself down in the dining-room of former days, where his portrait was. Mrs. Sparsit sat by the fire, with her foot in her cotton stirrup, little thinking whither she was posting.

Since the Pegler affair, this gentlewoman had covered her pity for Mr. Bounderby with a veil of quiet melancholy and contrition. In virtue thereof, it had become her habit to assume a woful look, which woful look she now bestowed upon her patron.
'What's the matter now, ma'am?' said Mr. Bounderby, in a very short, rough way.

'Pray, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, 'do not bite my nose off.'

'Bite your nose off, ma'am?' repeated Mr. Bounderby. 'Your nose!' meaning, as Mrs. Sparsit conceived, that it was too developed a nose for the purpose. After which offensive implication, he cut himself a crust of bread, and threw the knife down with a noise.

Mrs. Sparsit took her foot out of her stirrup, and said, 'Mr. Bounderby, sir!'

'Well, ma'am?' retorted Mr. Bounderby. 'What are you staring at?'

'May I ask, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'have you been ruffled this morning?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'May I inquire, sir,' pursued the injured woman, 'whether I am the unfortunate cause of your having lost your temper?'

'Now, I'll tell you what, ma'am,' said Bounderby, 'I am not come here to be bullied. A female may be highly connected, but she can't be permitted to bother and badger a man in my position, and I am not going to put up with it.' (Mr. Bounderby felt it necessary to get on: foreseeing that if he allowed of details, he would be beaten.)

Mrs. Sparsit first elevated, then knitted, her Coriolanian eyebrows; gathered up her work into its proper basket; and rose.

'Sir,' said she, majestically. 'It is apparent to me that I am in your way at present. I will retire to my own apartment.'

'Allow me to open the door, ma'am.'

'Thank you, sir; I can do it for myself.'

'You had better allow me, ma'am,' said Bounderby, passing her, and getting his hand upon the lock; 'because I can take the opportunity of saying a word to you, before you go. Mrs. Sparsit, ma'am, I rather think you are cramped here, do you know? It appears to me, that, under my humble roof, there's hardly opening enough for a lady of your genius in other people's affairs.'

Mrs. Sparsit gave him a look of the darkest scorn, and said with great politeness, 'Really, sir?'

'I have been thinking it over, you see, since the late affairs have happened, ma'am,' said Bounderby; 'and it appears to my poor judgment—'

'Oh! Pray, sir;' Mrs. Sparsit interposed, with sprightly cheerfulness, 'don't disparage your judgment. Everybody knows how unerring Mr. Bounderby's judgment is. Everybody has had proofs of it. It must be the theme of general conversation. Disparage anything in yourself but your judgment, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, laughing.

Mr. Bounderby, very red and uncomfortable, resumed:

'It appears to me, ma'am, I say, that a different sort of establishment altogether would bring out a lady of your powers.'
Such an establishment as your relation, Lady Scadgers’s, now. Don’t you think you might find some affairs there, ma’am, to interfere with?’

‘It never occurred to me before, sir,’ returned Mrs. Sparsit; ‘but now you mention it, should think it highly probable.’

‘Then suppose you try, ma’am,’ said Bounderby, laying an envelope with a cheque in it in her little basket. ‘You can take your own time for going, ma’am; but perhaps in the meanwhile, it will be more agreeable to a lady of your powers of mind, to eat her meals by herself, and not to be intruded upon. I really ought to apologise to you—being only Josiah Bounderby of Coketown—for having stood in your light so long.’

‘Pray don’t name it, sir,’ returned Mrs. Sparsit. ‘If that portrait could speak, sir—but it has the advantage over the original of not possessing the power of committing itself and disgusting others,—it would testify, that a long period has elapsed since I first habitually addressed it as the picture of a Noodle. Nothing that a Noodle does, can awaken surprise or indignation; the proceedings of a Noodle can only inspire contempt.’

Thus saying, Mrs. Sparsit, with her Roman features like a medal struck to commemorate her scorn of Mr. Bounderby, surveyed him fixedly from head to foot, swept disdainfully past him, and ascended the staircase. Mr. Bounderby closed the door, and stood before the fire; projecting himself after his old explosive manner into his portrait—and into futurity.

Into how much of futurity? He saw Mrs. Sparsit fighting out a daily fight at the points of all the weapons in the female armoury, with the grudging, smearing, peevish, tormenting Lady Scadgers, still laid up in bed with her mysterious leg, and gobbling her insufficient income down by about the middle of every quarter, in a mean little airless lodging, a mere closet for one, a mere crib for two; but did he see more? Did he catch any glimpse of himself making a show of Bitzer to strangers, as the rising young man, so devoted to his master’s great merits, who had won young Tom’s place, and had almost captured young Tom himself, in the times when by various rascals he was spirited away? Did he see any faint reflection of his own image making a vain-glorious will, whereby five-and-twenty Humbugs, past five-and-fifty years of age, each taking upon himself the name, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, should for ever dine in Bounderby Hall, for ever lodge in Bounderby buildings, for ever attend a Bounderby chapel, and for ever nauseate all healthy stomachs, with a vast amount of Bounderby balderdash and bluster? Had he any prescience of the day, five years to come, when Josiah Bounderby of Coketown was to die of a fit in the Coketown street, and this same precious will was to begin its long career of quibble, plunder, false pretences, vile example, little service and much law? Probably not. Yet the portrait was to see it all out.

Here was Mr. Gradgrind on the same day, and in the same hour, sitting thoughtful in his own room. How much of futurity did he see? Did he see himself, a white-haired decrepit man, bending his hitherto inflexible theories to appointed circumstances; making his facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope, and Charity; and no longer trying to grind that Heavenly trio in his dusty little mills? Did he catch sight of himself, therefore much despised by his late political associates? Did he see them, in the era of its being quite settled that the national dustmen have only to do with one another, and owe no duty to an abstraction called a People, ‘taunting the honourable gentleman’ with this and with that and with what not, five nights a-week, until the small hours of the morning? Probably he had that much foreknowledge, knowing his men.

Here was Louisa on the night of the same day, watching the fire as in days of yore, though with a gentler and a humbler
face. How much of the future might arise before her vision? Broadsides in the streets, signed with her father’s name, exonerating the late Stephen Blackpool, weaver, from misplaced suspicion, and publishing the guilt of his own son, with such extenuation as his years and temptation (he could not bring himself to add, his education) might beseech; were of the Present. So, Stephen Blackpool’s tombstone, with her father’s record of his death, was almost of the Present, for she knew it was to be. These things she could plainly see. But, how much of the Future?

A working woman, christened Rachael, after a long illness once again appearing at the ringing of the Factory bell, and passing to and fro at the set hours, among the Coketown Hands; a woman of pensive beauty, always dressed in black, but sweet-tempered and serene, and even cheerful; who, of all the people in the place, alone appeared to have compassion on a degraded, drunken wretch of her own sex, who was sometimes seen in the town secretly begging of her, and crying to her; a woman working, ever working, but content to do it, and preferring to do it as her natural lot, until she should be too old to labour any more? Did Louisa see this? Such a thing was to be.

A lonely brother, many thousands of miles away, writing, on paper blotted with tears, that her words had too soon come true, and that all the treasures in the world would be cheaply bartered for a sight of her dear face? At length this brother coming nearer home, with hope of seeing her, and being delayed by illness; and then a letter, in a strange hand, saying ‘he died in hospital, of fever, such a day, and died in penitence and love of you: his last word being your name’? Did Louisa see these things? Such things were to be.

Herself again a wife—a mother—lovingly watchful of her children, ever careful that they should have a childhood of the mind no less than a childhood of the body, as knowing it to be even a more beautiful thing, and a possession, any hoarded scrap of which, is a blessing and happiness to the wisest? Did Louisa see this? Such a thing was never to be.

But, happy Sissy’s happy children loving her; all children loving her; she, grown learned in childish lore; thinking no innocent and pretty fancy ever to be despised; trying hard to know her humbler fellow-creatures, and to beautify their lives of machinery and reality with those imaginative graces and delights, without which the heart of infancy will wither up, the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death, and the plainest national prosperity figures can show, will be the Writing on the Wall,—she holding this course as part of no fantastic vow, or bond, or brotherhood, or sisterhood, or pledge, or covenant, or fancy dress, or fancy fair; but simply as a duty to be done,—did Louisa see these things of herself? These things were to be.

Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not. Let them be! We shall sit with lighter bosoms on the hearth, to see the ashes of our fires turn gray and cold.

2.10.2: Reading and Review Questions

1. Does Dickens offer a coherent social program or political vision in this novel?
2. How do the family relations in the novel parallel the social instability it presents? What relationship is there between the family and the social whole?
3. What role, if any, does Nature play in this novel, and why?
4. What distinctions does the novel make between Fact and Fancy, and how do these distinctions relate to any possibility for social renewal?