

Hard Times



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES DICKENS

Born to a navy clerk, Charles Dickens spent his early childhood in Kent. When Dickens was ten, the family moved to London and his father was thrown in debtors' prison. Dickens left school and worked in a boot-blackening warehouse to help support his household. He later returned to school but left at fifteen to work as a law clerk, a court reporter, and a political journalist before devoting himself to writing full-time. His books were wildly successful both in England and in the United States, and include classics like *Hard Times*, *Great Expectations*, *Bleak House*, and *Oliver Twist*, still popular today. Dickens also founded a theater company and a magazine, *All the Year Round*. He was unhappily married to Catherine Hogarth, with whom he had ten children. Dickens was still writing when he died in 1870 and is buried in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The technological innovations that gave rise to the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century introduced the first capitalist economy, opening social and financial opportunities to people who had never had the chance to gain status or wealth under the rigid hereditary class hierarchy of the past. These opportunities enabled people born into lower classes to raise their standing in society by making money and acquiring education—this is apparently what happens to Mr. Bounderby (although he isn't quite as self-made as he claims). In many cases, however, it furthered the poverty of the working class, as the factory owners took advantage of their own success and the demand for labor and mistreated their factory workers. Unions were formed, but weren't always effective in fighting the abuses of the manufacturers, and sometimes were more of an evil than the evils they were originally created to combat. This is the case at Stephen Blackpool's mill.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

North and South by Elizabeth Gaskell, which also was serialized in *Household Words*, examines the delicate relationship between master and worker in industrial northern England. Mr. Robert Thornton in that book, however, is a far better and more just master than Mr. Bounderby, though the problems of their workers are virtually the same.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Hard Times – For These Times*

- **When Written:** 1854
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** Serialized between April 1, 1854 – August 12, 1854
- **Literary Period:** Victorian Era
- **Genre:** Novel, Social Criticism
- **Setting:** Coketown, England
- **Climax:** Louisa, instead of eloping with James Harthouse, runs away from her husband to her father's home.
- **Point of View:** Third person, omniscient



PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins with Mr. Thomas Gradgrind sternly lecturing a room full of school children on the importance of facts. He believes that facts, and not imagination or emotion, are the key to a good education, and he educates all the children of the school and his own children, Louisa and Tom, according to this philosophy. When one of his worst students, Sissy Jupe, is abandoned by her father (a circus performer), Mr. Gradgrind takes in Sissy to educate her along with his children according to his sacred system of facts.

Since their hearts and imaginations have been utterly neglected, Louisa and Tom grow into deformed human beings—inwardly, not outwardly. They know neither how to love nor how to be happy, and sense that there is something very wrong with the way they are living their lives. At Mr. Gradgrind's request, Louisa dutifully marries his older friend, Mr. Josiah Bounderby, who is a blustering manufacturer in Coketown. She agrees to marry Bounderby not because she loves him, but because she thinks it will help her brother Tom, who is apprenticed to Mr. Bounderby. Tom is the only person she cares for and, knowing this, Tom wheedles her into the marriage. Now both Louisa and Tom live with Mr. Bounderby, and Sissy stays back with Mr. and Mrs. Gradgrind and Jane, the youngest Gradgrind.

Mr. Bounderby's factory workers, also called "Hands," do not live happy lives under his rule. One factory worker by the name of Stephen Blackpool is daily worn out by his work at the factory, but what plagues him more is his unhappy marriage, for his wife has become a hideous drunk. He wishes to free himself from her and marry Rachael, a sweet, gentle woman in the village, but he cannot because of the ties of marriage. After he asks Bounderby for help on the matter, Mr. Bounderby informs him that he might be able to get out of the marriage if he had enough money to pay for a lawyer, but as he doesn't the cause is hopeless. As he resignedly leaves Mr. Bounderby's home, he

runs into an old woman, who for some reason is very interested to hear any news about Mr. Bounderby and his successes.

Tom is now a dissolute, lazy young man, very much in debt and inclined to a sulky attitude in front of everyone. His, Louisa's, and Mr. Bounderby's lives are somewhat enlivened by the arrival of a Mr. James Harthouse from London. Mr. Harthouse is a wealthy, pleasing young gentleman who is bored out of his mind and has come to work for Mr. Bounderby in hope of finding something entertaining. He quickly becomes very interested in Louisa, for he sees that a strong fire burns under the cold, impassive mask of a face she wears. Noticing that she softens and shows emotion only towards Tom, Harthouse sets about seducing her by pretending to be Tom's good friend. Mrs. Sparsit, an old widow who used to live with Mr. Bounderby before he married Louisa and was then unceremoniously kicked out, watches the progression of his seduction of Louisa with glee.

Mr. Bounderby's factory workers, restless with their bad lot and stirred on by the fiery words of a sleazy union orator named Slackbridge, decide to form a union. Stephen, present at the rowdy meeting at which they come to this decision, tells them that he cannot join because of a promise he has made to someone. The entire town then decides to shun him as a result of his decision. Bounderby brings Stephen in for questioning, but fires him when he won't reveal anything about the union. Louisa and Tom visit Stephen to give him some money before he leaves town in search of a new job, and before they leave, Tom secretly tells Stephen to hang around the bank the few nights before he leaves town...there might be something good in it for Stephen. Stephen does so, but nothing happens. Soon after that, the bank is robbed, and as a result of his suspicious activity, Stephen is the main suspect.

By a coincidence of events, Louisa is left alone at home one night while her husband is out of town, and Harthouse finds her, passionately declares his love for her, and begs her to elope with him. Louisa tells him that she will meet him somewhere later that night. Mrs. Sparsit, hiding in the vegetation near to where those two are standing, hears all this with a vengeful delight and follows Louisa when she leaves the house, but then loses her track. She hastily runs to tell Mr. Bounderby that his wife has all but eloped with Mr. Harthouse.

Louisa, in the meantime, has actually gone to her father's house and is at her wits' end. She confronts her father and tells him that the unhappiness of her entire life which has brought her to this point is all due to his education of facts, which quashed all feelings of the heart which are so essential to human existence. Dumbstruck and penitent, her father tries to catch her as she falls in a faint on the floor.

Thanks to Sissy's care and actions (Sissy persuades Mr. Harthouse to leave Coketown forever), Louisa gradually begins to recover at her father's house. Bounderby, who learned of the almost-elopement through Mrs. Sparsit, tells Mr. Gradgrind

that if Louisa stays at her old home, he and she shall cease to live together as man and wife—and so they separate.

Meanwhile, tragedy has befallen Stephen. On his way back to Coketown to clear his name, he falls into Old Hell Shaft, a huge pit in the ground. Sissy and Rachael find him there, and the men of the surrounding village manage to rescue him, but he dies shortly after being retrieved from the pit, holding Rachael's hand and peacefully gazing at the stars. Before he dies, he asks Mr. Gradgrind to clear his good name, because it was Tom, who committed the robbery.

Sissy saves the day again: she tells Tom to hide with her father's old circus company, and from there Mr. Gradgrind and Louisa plan for him to slip out of the country. One of Mr. Gradgrind's old pupils, Bitzer, who has been brainwashed by his education of facts, almost prevents Tom's escape, but thanks to the cunning of the circusmaster, Tom manages to evade Bitzer's clutches and escapes to another country.

Back in Coketown, Mrs. Sparsit has accidentally revealed Mr. Bounderby to be a fraud. Everyone had thought Mr. Bounderby to be a self-made man, deserted by cruel parents at a young age... until Mrs. Sparsit dragged his very respectable and kind mother to the public eye, thinking her to be an aid to Stephen Blackpool in the Bank robbery. Mr. Bounderby, now shunned as a liar, "exiles" Mrs. Sparsit from his presence and she is forced to spend the rest of her days with an old, sick, miserly relation.

Mr. Gradgrind, having learned his lesson the hard way, devotes the rest of his life to faith, hope, and charity instead of facts. Louisa does not remarry, but finds some happiness in helping Sissy care for her own children. Tom dies far from home, and repents of his hardness towards his family on his deathbed.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Thomas Gradgrind – Mr. Gradgrind is a school superintendent who promotes an education based on facts alone (no talk of imagination or emotions, please) and later becomes a Member of Parliament. His two eldest children, Louisa and Tom, suffer greatly from being brought up under this philosophy, and Gradgrind eventually comes to learn the error of his ways and dedicate his life to fostering faith, hope, and charity.

Louisa Gradgrind – Louisa, Mr. Gradgrind's eldest daughter, could be said to be the protagonist of the book. From a young age she resents the education of facts, which she finds thoroughly unenjoyable and which represses her imagination and emotions, deforming her heart. Led by her education, she marries a man she doesn't love, and then nearly runs away with another man, James Harthouse, who finally makes her feel as if she is understood. With the help of her gentle friend, Sissy, her heart and her humanity are gradually resuscitated.

Thomas Gradgrind, Jr. (Tom) – Tom, the second oldest Gradgrind child, fares worse than Louisa in that his character is almost irrevocably deformed by his education of facts. He turns into a grumpy, sulky young man who ends up robbing a bank to help pay off his debts and nearly breaks the heart of his father and sister in the process.

Josiah Bounderby – Mr. Bounderby is a pompous, arrogant, and successful factory owner who constantly boasts about how he is a self-made man (he isn't, it is later revealed). He is good friends with Mr. Gradgrind and lives with an elderly widow named Mrs. Sparsit until he marries Louisa Gradgrind, whom he has had his eye on since she was little. Selfish and blustering, he does not make Louisa happy, driving her to be emotionally vulnerable to James Harthouse's advances.

Cecilia (Sissy) Jupe – The daughter of a circus performer, Sissy's background is of the lowest quality, but her imagination and her heart are of the highest, thanks to her father's care when she was little. This father does desert her when she is still a young girl, leaving her to be adopted by the Gradgrinds, but his education has made its mark on her, and nothing Mr. Gradgrind can try to teach her will undo it. She becomes the guardian and the savior of the Gradgrind family: when Louisa nearly succumbs to Harthouse's proposal and when Tom is nearly arrested, Sissy saves the day, saving their lives and their hearts.

Mrs. Sparsit – An old widow with a Roman nose and a classical countenance, Mrs. Sparsit keeps Mr. Bounderby company before he is married. Jealous at being driven out by Louisa, she watches with glee as the inappropriate friendship between Louisa and James Harthouse progresses. However, just at the moment of her greatest triumph (when she thinks that Louisa has ruined herself by running off with Mr. Harthouse), Mrs. Sparsit is foiled when Louisa turns to her father instead of eloping. She furthermore earns Mr. Bounderby's unceasing enmity when she accidentally reveals Mr. Bounderby's mother to be alive, well, and a very good mother and that he had not, therefore, built himself up from poverty.

Stephen Blackpool – A poor worker at Mr. Bounderby's factory, Stephen is a victim both of the industrial system and of society's restrictions on marriage. His face and body are much aged because of the grueling work he must do every day at the factory, and his heart is aged ever since his wife became a drunken prostitute and left him, occasionally returning for money. He has longed ceased to love her, and loves a gentle, kind woman named Rachael in her stead, but he cannot marry Rachael because of his preexisting marriage. His fellow workers shun him when he refuses to join the union, and Bounderby fires him after Stephen refuses to give him details about the union that his fellow workers are forming. Tom furthermore frames him in the Bank robbery, and he dies tragically, on his way back to defend his good name.

Rachael – Rachael is a good, gentle woman who works at Bounderby's factory with Stephen and who is Stephen's best friend and only consolation in the hard times he goes through. She helps Stephen care for his drunken wife when she occasionally returns to haunt him, and is the sole defender of his innocence when, thanks to Tom, he becomes the main suspect in the Bank robbery. Stephen dies holding her hand.

James Harthouse – A young, wealthy London gentleman, Mr. Harthouse is as bored and as pleasing as most men of his class tend to be, and he bends all his powers of pleasing and persuasion in trying to seduce. Louisa, when he sees what a fascinating, repressed, beautiful woman she is. His plans are thwarted when Louisa goes to her father's house instead of rendezvousing with him to elope, and Sissy, in her calm and pure way, confronts him the next day and succeeds in making him leave Coketown forever.

Mrs. Pegler – Mrs. Pegler is Mr. Bounderby's mother who took as much care of her son as the most loving mothers of the world ever did. Mr. Bounderby, who wishes to perpetuate the story that he is an entirely self-made man, tells her never to contact him in public and goes around telling everyone that his mother deserted him at a young age to his drunken grandmother (he never had a drunken grandmother, either). She spends most of the book as a mysterious old woman who hangs around Mr. Bounderby's factory from time to time, inquiring after his well-being, but her true identity is accidentally revealed by Mrs. Sparsit at the end of the book.

Slackbridge – An oily, manipulative orator who rouses the workers to rebel and unionize against Mr. Bounderby, Slackbridge is also responsible for Stephen's alienation from all the other factory workers when Stephen refuses to join the union because of a promise he made to Rachael. Though on the side of the workers, Slackbridge is not much of a better man than Bounderby.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mr. Sleary – Mr. Sleary is the proprietor of the circus of which Signore Jupe and his daughter, Sissy, were a member. He is a good-hearted man and helps the Gradgrinds smuggle Tom out of England when it's discovered that he is the bank robber.

Bitzer – Bitzer is a model pupil of Mr. Gradgrind's education of facts; later, he becomes the porter of Mr. Bounderby's Bank. Cold-hearted and analytical, he almost prevents Tom from leaving England to escape his crime.

Mr. McChoakumchild – McChoakumchild is a schoolmaster at one of Mr. Gradgrind's schools of fact.

Mrs. Gradgrind – The feeble, infirm wife of Mr. Gradgrind, she spends most of her days in a chair by the fire, pettishly telling her children to follow their father's system of facts...until, as she lies dying, she realizes that there was something missing in her and their lives.

Jane Gradgrind – Jane is the youngest sister of Louisa and Tom, who only appears in the later chapters of the book. Due to the influence of Sissy once Tom and Louisa have left home, Jane grows up to be a much sweeter and gentler girl than Louisa ever was.

Signore Jupe – Sissy's father, who abandons her out of shame for not being able to support her.

Mr. E. W. B. Childers – A circus performer.

Mr. Kidderminster – A circus performer.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



FACT VS. FANCY

Dickens depicts a terrifying system of education where facts, facts, and nothing but facts are pounded into the schoolchildren all day, and where memorization of information is valued over art, imagination, or anything creative. This results in some very warped human beings. Mr. Thomas Gradgrind believes completely in this system, and as a superintendent of schools and a father, he makes sure that all the children at the schools he is responsible for and especially his own children are brought up knowing nothing but data and "-ologies".

As a result, things go very badly for his children, Tom Gradgrind and Louisa Gradgrind. Since they, as children, were always treated as if they had minds and not hearts, their adulthoods are warped, as they have no way to access their feelings or connect with others. Tom is a sulky good-for-nothing and gets involved in a crime in an effort to pay off gambling debts. Louisa is unhappy when she follows her mind, not her heart, and marries Mr. Bounderby, her father's friend. As a result of her unhappy marriage, she is later swept off her feet by a young gentleman, Mr. James "Jem" Harthouse, who comes to stay with them and who seems to understand and love her. Louisa nearly comes to ruin by running off with Harthouse.

Cecilia (Sissy) Jupe was encouraged when she was little to dream and imagine and loved her father dearly, and therefore she is in touch with her heart and feelings, and has empathy and emotional strength the other children lack. Sissy, adopted by the Gradgrinds when her father abandons her, ultimately is the savior of the family in the end.



INDUSTRIALISM AND ITS EVILS

Hand in hand with the glorification of data and numbers and facts in the schoolhouse is the treatment of the workers in the factories of

Coketown as nothing more than machines, which produce so much per day and are not thought of as having feelings or families or dreams. Dickens depicts this situation as a result of the industrialization of England; now that towns like Coketown are focused on producing more and more, more dirty factories are built, more smoke pollutes the air and water, and the factory owners only see their workers as part of the machines that bring them profit. In fact, the workers are only called "Hands", an indication of how objectified they are by the owners. Similarly, Mr. Gradgrind's children were brought up to be "minds". None of them are people or "hearts".

As the book progresses, it portrays how industrialism creates conditions in which owners treat workers as machines and workers respond by unionizing to resist and fight back against the owners. In the meantime, those in Parliament (like Mr. Gradgrind, who winds up elected to office) work for the benefit of the country but not its people. In short, industrialization creates an environment in which people cease to treat either others or themselves as people. Even the unions, the groups of factory workers who fight against the injustices of the factory owners, are not shown in a good light. Stephen Blackpool, a poor worker at Bounderby's factory, is rejected by his fellow workers for his refusal to join the union because of a promise made to the sweet, good woman he loves, Rachael. His factory union then treats him as an outcast.

The remedy to industrialism and its evils in the novel is found in Sissy Jupe, the little girl who was brought up among circus performers and fairy tales. Letting loose the imagination of children lets loose their hearts as well, and, as Sissy does, they can combat and undo what a Gradgrind education produces.



UNHAPPY MARRIAGES

There are many unhappy marriages in *Hard Times* and none of them are resolved happily by the end. Mr. Gradgrind's marriage to his feeble, complaining

wife is not exactly a source of misery for either of them, but neither are they or their children happy. The Gradgrind family is not a loving or affectionate one. The main unhappy marriage showcased by the novel is between Louisa Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby. Louisa marries him not out of love but out of a sense of duty to her brother, Tom, the only person in the world she loves and who wheedles her into saying "yes" because he works for Bounderby and wants to improve his chances at rising in the world. Bounderby's intentions regarding Louisa seem a bit creepy at first, but he turns out to mean no harm to her (except that he deprives her of any marital affection). The only solution to this bad marriage, once Louisa has escaped the

hands of Jem Harthouse, is for Louisa to live at home the rest of her days. She will never be happy with another man or have the joy of children, though Dickens hints she will find joy in playing with Sissy's future children.

Stephen Blackpool, too, is damned to unhappiness in this life as a result of his marriage. The girl who seemed so sweet when he married her many years ago becomes, by a gradual process, a depraved drunk who is the misery of his life. She periodically returns to Coketown to haunt Stephen and is, as he sees it, the sole barrier to the happiness he might have had in marrying Rachael. Mrs. Sparsit (an elderly lady who lives with Mr. Bounderby for some time) was also unhappily married, which is how she came to be Mr. Bounderby's companion before he marries Louisa.



FEMININITY

The best, most good characters of *Hard Times* are women. Stephen Blackpool is a good man, but his love, Rachael, is an "Angel". Sissy Jupe can overcome even the worst intentions of Jem Harthouse with her firm and powerfully pure gaze. Louisa, as disadvantaged as she is by her terrible upbringing, manages to get out of her crisis at the last minute by fleeing home to her father for shelter, in contrast to her brother, Tom, who chooses to commit a life-changing crime in his moment of crisis. Through these examples, the novel suggests that the kindness and compassion of the female heart can improve what an education of "facts" and the industrialization has done to children and to the working middle class.

Still, not all the women in the novel are paragons of goodness. Far from it. Mrs. Sparsit is a comic example of femininity gone wrong. She cannot stand being replaced by Louisa when Bounderby marries, and watches the progression of the affair between Louisa and Jem Harthouse with glee. As she attempts to catch them in the act of eloping (and ultimately fails), she is portrayed as a cruel, ridiculous figure. Stephen Blackpool's wife, meanwhile, is bleakly portrayed as a hideous drunken prostitute.

So while the novel holds women up as potentially able to overcome the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and fact-based education, those women in the novel who do not fill this role, who have slipped from the purity embodied by Sissy and Rachael beyond even the empty-heartedness of Louisa, are presented as both pathetically comic and almost demonic. Women in the novel seem like a potential cure to the perils of industrialization, but also the most at peril from its corruption.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE STAIRCASE

Mrs. Sparsit, who has not quite gotten over having to leave Mr. Bounderby's house to make way for Louisa, maliciously watches the affair between Louisa and Mr. Harthouse progress with glee. As the two slowly draw closer together, she imagines that Louisa is slowly descending a great winding **staircase**. Down, down, down she goes...and when Louisa finally elopes or disgraces herself publicly in some other way with Mr. Harthouse, Mrs. Sparsit imagines her stepping off the bottom of the staircase and falling into a dark abyss. Louisa, of course, never quite falls off this staircase as she refuses to elope with Mr. Harthouse.



PEGASUS

The **Pegasus's Arms** is the name of the tavern at which the circus company is staying when Sissy returns with Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby to find her father gone at the very beginning of the novel. Pegasus, a mythical winged horse, represents the imaginary and fantastical world in which imagination is allowed to soar: a world the Gradgrinds are forbidden to experience. It is the perfect residence, on the other hand, for Sissy's father's circus company, who make the world of magic and fairy stories come to life. This is what gives Sissy such a good heart: free exercise of her imagination and her heart.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *Hard Times* published in 2001.

Book 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

●● "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!"

Related Characters: Thomas Gradgrind (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

In the opening scene of the novel, we're introduced to a thoroughly unpleasant character, Thomas Gradgrind.


Gradgrind is a schoolteacher, but he has none of the affection or whimsy one might associate with someone who teaches kids. Instead, Gradgrind is harsh and stern--he essentially treats his students like adults, or even like machines. Gradgrind emphasizes the importance of facts in education: learning, he argues, is all about mastering an unchanging set of pieces of information.

Gradgrind's view of education is absurd for a number of reasons. It holds no appeal for an imaginative author like Charles Dickens--it was creativity, not command of information, that made Dickens successful. Gradgrind has often been interpreted as the embodiment of 19th century Utilitarianism, the economic and political doctrine that emphasized quantity and mathematical precision in all things. In the 19th century, England became a mechanized, industrialized society--as Dickens sees it, Gradgrind is exemplary of the country's shift toward information, numbers, and figures--a shift that made England powerful but also heartless.

Book 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

“‘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.

Related Characters: Thomas Gradgrind, Bitzer (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we see Gradgrind's methods in action. He calls on a toadying young boy named Bitzer, asking him for a definition of a horse. Bitzer proceeds to give a "definition" of horse that is semantically accurate and yet wildly misleading. Bitzer's glib lists of facts about horses tell us nothing about the animals themselves; he away takes all the charm and beauty of horses.

The passage, then, is Dicken's critique of Gradgrind's Utilitarian teaching methods. The world is made up of more than facts--the world is a place of beauty, poetry, imagination, and emotion; all the things that can't be summed up with a list of pure statistics. In turning his back on the beauty of the world, Gradgrind does a huge disservice to his students.

Book 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

“There was an air of jaded sullenness in them both, and particularly in the girl: yet, struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brightened its expression.

Related Characters: Louisa Gradgrind, Thomas Gradgrind, Jr. (Tom)

Related Themes: 


Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Here Dickens describes two of the key characters of the novel, Gradgrind's children--Tom and Louisa. Both children are testaments to the tragic futility of Gradgrind's emphasis on facts. Try as he might, Gradgrind's attempts to make his children practical and efficient are failing: Tom and especially Louisa are intelligent and imaginative in a way that nobody can stamp out. Louisa in particular is a creative, imagination person--she sees the world in a fundamentally different way than Gradgrind does. Dickens conveys Louisa's creativity and adventurousness by comparing her to a fire with nothing to burn: in a harsh, efficient world, Louisa has no outlets for her energy or adventurousness. And while as children Tom and Louisa still have this "heart" and "fancy," as they grow up with their father's world of hard facts they find themselves emotionally warped and repressed.

Book 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

“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.

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Here we get our first good look at Coketown, the setting for most of the novel. Dickens uses his descriptions of the town to criticize the path his country took in the 19th century. During the 19th century, Britain pursued a series of policies that transformed its towns into industrial powerhouses, devoted to producing goods at factories. Such factories



made Britain immensely wealthy, but also crippled most of its population: men and women were horribly injured in factories, families lived in poverty, and the country's cities themselves were made exceptionally dirty and ugly (although Dickens describes this ugliness in a rather racist way here).

Coketown, we can see, was *supposed* to be a beautiful brick town--i.e., industrialization was supposed to make it a utopia. Instead, factories have made it hideously ugly, a clear example of the limits of mechanization.

Book 1, Chapter 6 Quotes

☝☝ '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!'

Related Characters: Cecilia (Sissy) Jupe (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Dickens's talent for pathos is on full display, as is his critique of Britain's cruel Utilitarianism. Sissy, one of the main characters of the novel, has been abandoned by her father, Signore Jupe, because he couldn't find the means to support his child. Ashamed, he ran away. Now, Sissy is without a home. And yet she continues to worship her father--she can't understand the harsh truth, which is that he ran out on her. The passage is moving because we the readers know the truth about Sissy, but Sissy doesn't.

The passage also helps us see what's so inadequate about Gradgrind's way of looking at the world. Sympathy and emotion are vital parts of the human experience, but Gradgrind, and many of the other characters, ignore emotion altogether. In doing so, Dickens suggests, they're missing out on one of the essential aspects of life and humanity.

Book 1, Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ 'You are quite another father to Louisa, sir.' Mrs Sparsit took a little more tea; and, as she bent her again contracted eyebrows over her steaming cup, rather looked as if her classical countenance were invoking the infernal gods.

Related Characters: Mrs. Sparsit (speaker), Louisa Gradgrind, Josiah Bounderby

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis


Josiah Bounderby is a powerful factory owner who lives with a widow named Mrs. Sparsit. Mrs. Sparsit and Bounderby discuss Gradgrind's decision to take in Sissy. At first, Mrs. Sparsit says that she dislikes the idea of Louisa, Gradgrind's daughter, associating with a "dirty," poor girl like Sissy. As the conversation goes on, though, Bounderby claims that he thinks of Louisa like another daughter--a statement that Sparsit claims to agree with, despite the fact that she clearly is jealous of Bounderby's interest in Louisa.

At this point in the novel, it's not clear that Mr. Bounderby is going to marry Louisa one day--and yet Dickens already gives us hints of their relationship. Sparsit seems jealous of Bounderby's closeness with Louisa, which is why, despite agreeing with him, she glares into her cup with the utmost severity. In all, Sparsit is presented as the rather flat, negative caricature of femininity--the spiteful, jilted lover who is jealous of other women and even demonic ("invoking the infernal gods") in her nature.

Book 1, Chapter 8 Quotes

☝☝ 'I wish I could collect all the Facts we hear so much about,' said Tom, spitefully setting his teeth, 'and all the Figures, and all the people who found them out: and I wish I could put a thousand barrels of gunpowder under them, and blow them all up together! However, when I go to live with old Bounderby, I'll have my revenge!'

Related Characters: Thomas Gradgrind, Jr. (Tom) (speaker), Josiah Bounderby

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Tom, still a young man, claims to be irritated with his father's emphasis on facts and figures--instead of accepting Gradgrind's example, he rebels, claiming that he would like to destroy all the facts that Gradgrind is obsessed with. The passage is a great example of how Utilitarianism can actually have an opposite effect on its pupils; i.e. instead of making its pupils efficient and hard-

working, it just makes them miserable and soulless. (As we'll see later, Tom grows up to be a lazy, bitter man--hardly the image of efficiency and intelligence that Gradgrind had hoped for.)

The passage further complicates Tom's character by suggesting that Tom's only joy in life is manipulating other people--he seems to take pleasure in manipulating Mr. Bounderby (as we'll see, Bounderby has a crush on Louisa). It's as if Tom's upbringing has been so harsh and soulless that manipulating others is his only source of pleasure.

Book 1, Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ 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.

Related Characters: Stephen Blackpool

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Here we're introduced to Stephen Blackpool. Stephen is an important character--critics have pointed out that he's the only important character in all of Dickens who actually works at a factory. Dickens's portrait of Blackpool is tragic to the extreme: Blackpool's life as a laborer has left his body horribly scarred. Dickens clarifies his point with an interesting analogy: if the average human being has his share of pain and happiness, then Stephen has had his happiness stolen away from him, and in its place received an extra share of pain.

Critics often point to the passage as an example of Dickens's socialist ideas. Stephen, one could argue, has been robbed of the fruits of his own labors by wealthy capitalists like Bounderby: instead of being adequately rewarded for all the hard work he does, he's underpaid and overworked.

Book 1, Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ 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.

Related Characters: Rachael, Stephen Blackpool

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we learn more about why Stephen Blackpool is so unhappy. Stephen loves a woman named Rachael, but he can't marry her--he's already involved in a preexisting marriage, and can't get the divorce. Dickens suggests that because of society's narrow-minded rules and laws, Stephen is unable to enjoy the life he wants.

The passage has been criticized by some for suggesting that the real source of Stephen's misery is love, not his harsh existence at the factory. By focusing too much on the "human melodrama," one could argue, Dickens dilutes his own critique of factory conditions in England, so that his novel is moving but not especially politically progressive.

Book 1, Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ 'Well, sister of mine,' said Tom, 'when you say that, you are near my thoughts. We might be so much oftener together -- mightn't we? Always together, almost -- mightn't we? It would do me a great deal of good if you were to make up your mind to I know what, Loo. It would be a splendid thing for me. It would be uncommonly jolly!'

Related Characters: Thomas Gradgrind, Jr. (Tom) (speaker), Louisa Gradgrind

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 70



Explanation and Analysis

Years have now passed, and Tom and Louisa have grown into subdued, soulless people who don't know how to love or express emotion. Tom knows that Louisa loves him, however, if nobody else. In this passage, Tom is clearly trying to manipulate his sister into helping him out. We're not told exactly what Tom is asking his sister to do (marry Bounderby, as we'll later see), but the bigger point is that Tom is using his sister's affection for him as leverage. Tom, we can surmise, doesn't really love his sister that much--his childhood with Gradgrind has left him so emotionally impoverished that his only source of pleasure is controlling other people's feelings. He is, one could say, the Frankenstein's monster that Gradgrind's education program has created.

Book 1, Chapter 15 Quotes

☞ '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.'

Related Characters: Louisa Gradgrind, Thomas Gradgrind (speaker), Josiah Bounderby

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 72


Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, from the final pages of Book One, Louisa makes the crushing decision to marry Bounderby, a man she instinctively dislikes. Louisa goes to her father for help and advice, and finds that he's extremely unhelpful. Gradgrind has always trained Louisa to think of facts, not feelings. So when it comes time to decide whether or not to marry Bounderby, Louisa has no way of making a decision--there's simply no way that facts alone can decide a marriage. Gradgrind's weakness and incompetence is crystal-clear in this passage: he seems to acknowledge (albeit ten years too later) the hole in his education program. By focusing so exclusively on information, Gradgrind has impoverished his own soul, and left his two children lonely and repressed, without even a conception of what real love is (as this darkly humorous passage shows).

Book 2, Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ 'An individual, ma'am,' said Bitzer, 'has never been what he ought to have been, since he first came into the place. He is a dissipated, extravagant idler. He is not worth his salt, ma'am. He wouldn't get it either, if he hadn't a friend and relation at court, ma'am!'

Related Characters: Bitzer (speaker), Mrs. Sparsit, Thomas Gradgrind, Jr. (Tom)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bitzer (whom we met at the beginning of Book One, when he was still a kid) has turned out to be an obsequious, gossiping porter for a factory bank. Bitzer tells Mrs. Sparsit that Tom Gradgrind has turned out to be a lazy, useless employee of the bank. We can surmise that Tom has

continued to work for Bounderby because he's now Bounderby's brother-in-law (Louisa has married Bounderby after all).

The passage suggests that nobody who passed through Gradgrind's fingers turned out right. Bitzer seems to be harder-working than Tom, but he's just as heartless in the way he critiques Tom and gossips to anyone who'll listen. He's hardly a likable character; like many of the factory employees, he's more interested in money than people, a clear reflection of the education he received from Gradgrind and the general industrialization of English society.

Book 2, Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ '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.'

Related Characters: Thomas Gradgrind, Jr. (Tom) (speaker), James Harthouse, Louisa Gradgrind

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Tom has a drink with Jem Harthouse. Tom, intoxicated, opens up to Jem about his sister, Louisa. In the course of the conversation, he reveals that Louisa has only married Bounderby as a favor to him--she actually despises Bounderby. Tom seems utterly indifferent to Louisa's feelings; he's more concerned about his own success as an employee of the factory. Furthermore, he reveals his own sexist and dehumanizing beliefs here--because Louisa is a woman, he presumes, she can "get on anywhere." Her marital happiness is of no consequence to Tom.

The passage also reinforces a key fact about Louisa--in spite of her education at the hands of Gradgrind, and in spite of her sad, lonely life, she still has a spark left. Tom points out, for not the first time in the novel, that Louisa has a curious affinity with fire--perhaps symbolizing her imagination and adventurousness, which have been tragically suppressed by her marriage.

Book 2, Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ 'You can finish off what you're at,' said Mr Bounderby, with a meaning nod, 'and then go elsewhere.'

'Sir, yo know weel,' said Stephen expressively, 'that if I canna get work wi' yo, I canna get it elsewheer.'

The reply was, 'What I know, I know; and what you know, you know. I have no more to say about it.'

Related Characters: Josiah Bounderby, Stephen Blackpool (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mr. Bounderby fires Stephen for refusing to inform about the rising union in the factory. Stephen isn't an outspoken supporter of the union, but he's loyal enough to keep from "ratting" about the union to Bounderby.

Bounderby callously tells Stephen that he can finish his work and leave the factory. Even after Stephen explains that he'll never be able to get another job after he's fired, Bounderby ignores him.



Bounderby, we can be pretty sure by now, is a heartless character. He thinks of his employees as animals, or cogs in a big machine--to be replaced at any time. Bounderby represents the dark side of the emphasis on facts and figures--because he's predisposed to think in terms of numbers, and therefore profits, he has no compunction about ruining Stephen's career, or even about viewing him as a real, suffering human being.

Book 2, Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ 'Your brother. My young friend Tom --'

Her colour brightened, and she turned to him with a look of interest. 'I never in my life,' he thought, 'saw anything so remarkable and so captivating as the lighting of those features!'

Related Characters: James Harthouse (speaker), Louisa Gradgrind, Thomas Gradgrind, Jr. (Tom)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Harthouse begins his seduction of Louisa. Harthouse pretends to run into Louisa by accident; then he

proceeds to flatter her excessively. Because Louisa has never been treated with anything but callous efficiency, she's immediately interested in Harthouse; he represents an alternative to her usual way of life.

The passage also suggests that what really interests Louisa about Harthouse isn't exactly his flattery--rather, it's his association with Tom, Louisa's beloved brother. Louisa shows affection for Tom long after the point when it's obvious that Tom doesn't really love her. She has nobody else to love, and so she pours all of her emotion and affection into her lazy, undeserving brother. Harthouse realizes this, and so emphasizes his relationship to Tom in order to endear himself to Louisa.

Book 2, Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ 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.

Related Characters: Mrs. Sparsit, Josiah Bounderby, Louisa Gradgrind, James Harthouse

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, a comical, tertiary character becomes villainous and critical to the plot of the novel. Mrs. Sparsit is jealous of the relationship between Louisa and Mr. Bounderby, and she resents the fact that she was kicked out of the house as soon as Bounderby married Louisa. To retaliate, Mrs. Sparsit tries to draw Louisa and Bounderby apart--thus, she tries to flatter Mr. Bounderby excessively, making him more conscious of Louisa's coldness. By the same token, Sparsit's flattery draws Louisa closer to James Harthouse.

The passage shows Mrs. Sparsit engaging in manipulation that's pretty obvious, at least from our perspective. Perhaps it's because Louisa is so unfamiliar with emotional matters that she can't see through what Mrs. Sparsit is trying to do, and thus falls for James.

Book 2, Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ Wet through and through: with her feet squelching and squashing in her shoes whenever she moved; with a rash of rain upon her classical visage; with a bonnet like an over-ripe fig; with all her clothes spoiled; with damp impressions of every button, string, and hook-and-eye she wore, printed off upon her highly connected back; with stagnant verdure on her general exterior, such as accumulates on an old park fence in a mouldy lane; Mrs Sparsit had no resource but to burst into tears of bitterness and say, 'I have lost her!'

Related Characters: Mrs. Sparsit

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

In this half-serious, half-comic scene, Mrs. Sparsit tries to track down Louisa. Mrs. Sparsit has been manipulating Louisa into falling hard for James Harthouse--now, Louisa seems to be going to meet Harthouse, though it's not clear where. Sparsit follows Louisa; she's been trying to get revenge on Louisa for having her kicked out of Bounderby's house. Tonight, Sparsit thinks, she'll finally see evidence of a romance between Louisa and Harthouse--enough evidence to disgrace Louisa and get Bounderby to divorce her. Sparsit walks in the rain for a long time to ensure that she sees Louisa's supposed infidelity, but at the last minute she loses sight of Louisa. Sparsit was so desperate for revenge that she bursts into tears. It's hard to have much sympathy for her, though--she's a petty, vindictive person, although extremely limited by the restrictions placed upon her gender.

Book 2, Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ '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!'

Related Characters: Louisa Gradgrind (speaker), Louisa Gradgrind, James Harthouse, Thomas Gradgrind

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we learn the truth: after Mrs. Sparsit loses sight of Louisa, she doesn't go to meet with Harthouse in Coketown--instead, she goes to visit her father. Louisa pours out her heart to her father, accusing him of raising her to be emotionally clueless, so that she was naturally victim to smooth flatterers like James Harthouse. She demands that her father help her out of her current emotional problem--a problem for which facts and figures are absolutely beside the point.

In many ways, the entire novel has been building up to this scene. We've seen ample evidence of the limitations of Gradgrind's methods of education, but it's not until now that Louisa has shown real anger with her father for stunting her emotional development. Louisa, we always knew, still had some "fire" in her--here, she finally lets the fire out.

Book 3, Chapter 1 Quotes

☝☝ 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.

Related Characters: Cecilia (Sissy) Jupe, Louisa Gradgrind

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

Here Louisa reunites with her old friend, Sissy. Sissy knows that Louisa has been going through a great deal of hardship--previously, Louisa had abandoned Sissy for expressing her sadness with Louisa's decision to marry Bounderby. Here, though, all tension is forgotten as Sissy reaches out to Louisa, offering to teach her old friend about the Heart. Louisa has had many years to learn about the Head--but now, it's an emotional education that she desperately needs.

The passage is interesting because it uses light imagery to show the contrast between Louisa and Sissy. Although Louisa has been compared to a burning fire in the past, here it's Sissy, not Louisa, who's associated with light and virtue.

Book 3, Chapter 3 Quotes

☞☞ 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...

Related Characters: Josiah Bounderby

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Mr. Bounderby confronts his old friend Mr. Gradgrind. He demands to know what's happened to Louisa. Calmly, Mr. Gradgrind explains that Louisa needs some time to herself--she's trapped in a loveless marriage to Bounderby, and needs to tend to her emotional side before she can return to Coketown. Bounderby is furious to hear such words from his old friend. His entire face convulses in rage and indignation.

Bounderby is furious with Gradgrind for a number of reasons. Gradgrind's speech to Bounderby about the importance of preserving the marriage echoes the speech that Bounderby gave to Stephen Blackpool about his own loveless marriage--the tables have turned. Furthermore, Bounderby seems furious with Gradgrind for focusing too strongly on emotions and the Heart, at the expense of facts and the Head. Gradgrind has "switched teams," and Bounderby is on his own. It goes almost without saying that watching Bounderby's ridiculous rage is extremely satisfying--he's a cruel, callous person, and now he's getting his comeuppance.

Book 3, Chapter 9 Quotes

☞☞ 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.

Related Characters: Thomas Gradgrind, Jr. (Tom), Louisa Gradgrind

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel, Thomas and Louisa go through a strange kind of reconciliation. Thomas has been separated from his sister for a long time. He tries to travel to see her, but dies of illness during the course of his trip. Thomas's last words are Louisa's name.

How should we take such an ending? Tom has always been a lazy, loutish character, making his sudden transformation into a loving sibling a tad surprising. And yet the ending is characteristic of Dickens: he sees the best in everybody. Tom has had a sad adulthood, but Dickens remembers a time when Tom was still innocent and sincere in his affections for his sister--as he dies, Tom seems to revert to such a childhood state. Dickens suggests that it's never too late to repent one's sins: so many of the characters in the novel undergo sudden, surprising changes of heart that leave them better, more loving human beings.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 1

A scary-looking man with a square forehead and deep-set eyes—the superintendent of the school in whose classroom he is standing—speaks and gestures in an ominous and intimidating way to the teacher and the children in the room. He tells them that the most important thing for them to learn is facts, "nothing but Facts!", for he believes that facts alone will be of use to them.

The novel opens with a detailed and repulsive physical description of Mr. Gradgrind, indicating to the reader that what this man says about facts being important above all else is not to be trusted, is likely to result in producing adults who are scary and hard-looking like him.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 2

That scary-looking man is Mr. Thomas Gradgrind. He proceeds to grill the children on what practical knowledge they possess (not much, with the exception of a pale, fair-haired boy named Bitzer, who gives Gradgrind the robotic, factual answers he wants). The first girl Mr. Gradgrind calls upon, whom he calls "girl number twenty" but who is actually named Cecilia "Sissy" Jupe, is unable to define a horse for him and is humiliated by him in front of the class; Bitzer, who Mr. Gradgrind then calls upon, responds correctly but in an unnaturally emotionless manner.

Mr. Gradgrind's way of calling Sissy "girl number twenty" instead of by her real name shows how he wants a factory-like school that cares only about stuffing facts into children. As Sissy, is unreasonably humiliated in front of her classmates for answering Mr. Gradgrind's questions as any child might be expected to answer them, Bitzer's mechanical answers demonstrate what an education of Facts can do to children.



Sissy goes on to make a number of similar innocent mistakes when called upon, but mistakes that prove she has an imagination. Mr. McChoakumchild, the actual schoolmaster of the class and a very learned one at that, then begins his deathly boring lesson on facts for the day.

Mr. McChoakumchild's name indicates in a less than subtle way what his teaching will do to his pupils. All the practical knowledge he possesses and teaches will only serve to suffocate the fancy, the imagination, of the children.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 3

Mr. Gradgrind walks back to his home, called Stone Lodge, he thinks with satisfaction about the education of facts that his young children are receiving, both at home and at school. But he cannot believe his eyes when he sees his two children, Louisa Gradgrind and Tom Gradgrind, peeping into a circus tent. This circus, by the way, features a horse-rider named Signore Jupe who seems likely to be Sissy's father.

The very name of the Gradgrind household reflects how stony its owner's heart is. Additionally, the sighting of his children at the circus is, significantly, the first time Mr. Gradgrind is presented with evidence that children's imaginations cannot be stamped out entirely by a rigorous education of facts. He's not happy about it.



In accordance with his beliefs that children should focus solely on facts and not on imagination and fun, he angrily pulls them away from the circus. Louisa, who is sixteen and a good deal older than Tom, speaks clearly in defense of herself that her curiosity compelled her to get a glimpse of the circus, and tries to clear her brother of any blame by saying she brought him along. Mr. Gradgrind just scolds them as he takes them home, and adds, "What would Mr. Bounderby say?"

Louisa's unwillingness to embrace her father's beliefs about avoiding circuses and the way in which she stands up right away for her younger brother forecast her attitudes in both of those areas as an adult. The ridiculous way in which Mr. Gradgrind drags his children away from the circus shows how little he understands the natural curiosity of children. Gradgrind's final comment about Bounderby indicates that Bounderby agrees with sentiments, and foreshadows Bounderby's importance to come.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 4

Mr. Bounderby is described as a physically inflated, coarsely made man. He is standing in Stone Lodge, boasting to the feeble Mrs. Gradgrind about his rags-to-riches background—he spent his youth living in a ditch, deserted by his mother, but worked his way up to his current prosperous position of manufacturer. He is a close family friend, and takes an interest in the children, particularly Louisa.

Mr. Bounderby's physical description corresponds to his internal qualities, i.e. his huge, swelling body is representative of his huge, swelling ego. His story of having lifted himself up from nothing helps justify both his ego and the state of the economic system—why have any pity for the workers if Bounderby was able to take himself from even greater poverty to his present wealth?



Mr. Gradgrind returns with Louisa and Thomas, having dragged them from the circus, and indignantly exposes the misbehavior of his children to his wife and to Bounderby. The two men discuss what ought to be done, and Bounderby, discovering that Sissy Jupe (whose father is involved in the circus) goes to the same school as Louisa, decides that they ought to go into town and confront Sissy, who he thinks is likely a bad influence on Louisa.

Mr. Bounderby's personality seems to dominate Mr. Gradgrind's, who seems to trust his friend's wisdom and is willing to do whatever Bounderby suggests. Bounderby sees anyone with any "fancy" to them as potentially dangerous.



Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby set off for Coketown to confront the Jupes. As they leave, Mr. Bounderby plants a kiss on Louisa's cheek, who is disgusted by this show of affection from him.

The unusual interest that Mr. Bounderby shows in Louisa and the kiss that he asks of her when she leaves, as young as she is, is an indication of his interest in Louisa as a potential future wife. The strength of Louisa's repugnance in her reaction shows that she, at least, suspects that the kiss was not the innocent, disinterested kiss of a family friend, and that, as a child, she knows enough to try to avoid that which she does not love (or even like).



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 5

Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby stroll into industrial Coketown, once a red brick town but now discolored, having been blasted with ashes and smoke from the factories. Everything in the town looks identical, and is eminently useful, and in short has been produced so as to produce a maximally useful product.

The language describing Coketown's appearance could not be more condemning or disdainful. It used to be colorful and attractive, but the ashes from the factory has made it into a kind of industrial hell that sees uniqueness of any kind—such as individual human beings—as an obstacle in the way of efficiency and usefulness.



On their way to the Jupes' home, Gradgrind and Bounderby collide with Sissy Jupe and Bitzer; Gradgrind finds, to his chagrin, that his star pupil was mean-spiritedly chasing the young girl. Gradgrind asks a frightened Sissy what she was doing and where she was going, and she tells the two gentlemen that she was going home to her father with a bottle of oils for him, that ought to heal his bruises from the circus.

Mr. Bounderby is coarse and insensitive in the way he responds to this information and jeers at her and her father's way of earning their living. In response to Mr. Gradgrind's somewhat kinder questions, she docilely leads them to where she and her father are staying.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 6

Sissy leads Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby into the pub, called the **Pegasus's Arms**, where she, her father, and the rest of the circus troupe are staying. She is greatly distressed, however, when she can't find her father there, and runs out to look for him in the circus booth. As Gradgrind and Bounderby wait for her return, they meet some of the other members of the circus: Mr. E. W. B. Childers and Mr. Kidderminster, who speak in an almost incomprehensible slang (to Mr. Gradgrind's confusion and Mr. Bounderby's contempt).

The circus people reveal that Sissy's father, Signore Jupe, had not been performing very well lately and that he in fact deserted Sissy, whom he loved dearly, because of his shame in his failure to earn their living. As Gradgrind and Bounderby discuss what they ought to do with this now father-less child (Gradgrind wants to take her in and raise her with his education of facts, while Bounderby doesn't want to do anything for her), the rest of the circus company comes in, including the circus owner, Mr. Sleary. They are dirty, poor, and uncivilized, but they are also kind, gentle, and generous, and are very sad to hear that Sissy might be leaving them.

Sissy returns in tears upon discovering her father's desertion, and accepts Mr. Gradgrind's offer to take her into his home and educate her. The circus players, who all loved Sissy dearly, sadly say goodbye to her, and show her a lot of affection in their simple and sincere way.

Bitzer's treatment of Sissy is a sign that an education of only "Facts" does not necessarily develop moral or good people. As the book progresses, Bitzer is revealed to possess a number of nasty qualities that proceeded from his education of "Facts".



Bounderby, as a manufacturer and therefore a representative of industrialism in Coketown, also proves to have some nasty personal qualities, showing what kind of men make their living in the industrial world. Gradgrind's relative kindness indicates that he has more potential to have a heart than Bounderby does.



Note that the circus people gather at the Pegasus's Arms—named after a mythological flying horse, and contrast that to Gradgrind's insistence that his students define horses only realistically. This contrast establishes the circus folk as being aligned with "fancy" as opposed to "fact". The circus people's names, containing the words "Child" and "Kid" further emphasizes their connection to "fancy". Gradgrind's confusion and Bounderby's contempt, meanwhile, show both their inability to perceive beyond pure "fact" and how that affects their ability to connect or empathize with others.



The circus people have had an education of imagination and fancy rather than facts, but they prove to the better people for it: they know how to love, as their love and care for Sissy demonstrates. Signor Jupe's abandonment of Sissy also comes from love. Again there is a contrast between Gradgrind and Bounderby, with Gradgrind wanting to help Sissy (admittedly in a way that won't actually be that helpful to her), while Bounderby can't be bothered by an abandoned child.



The circus players prove themselves again to be much more capable of sympathy than Gradgrind or Bounderby as they tearfully say goodbye to Sissy, though Gradgrind's offer to take in Sissy is generous.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 7

Mr. Bounderby returns to his own home, where he lives with a previously well-connected and elderly widow named Mrs. Sparsit. As the two breakfast, Bounderby expresses his disapproval of Louisa associating with the likes of Sissy. Mrs. Sparsit, though she out loud agrees with Bounderby's assertions, often makes funny facial expressions (which Bounderby doesn't see), that communicate her real feelings, including her own dislike of Bounderby's interest in Louisa.

The interest that Bounderby again shows in Louisa hints at the marital intentions he will have towards her later on. Mrs. Sparsit's relationship to Bounderby is never fully described (do they just live together or is there something more?) but she clearly dislikes Bounderby's interest in Louisa, as it threatens her own comfortable position in Bounderby's rich house. Her secret facial expressions imply that her agreement with Bounderby is for show only.



Mr. Gradgrind, Louisa, and Sissy enter the room. Upon questioning, Sissy lets slip that she and her father read many fairy tales together, and is overcome with grief upon thinking about their separation. Louisa ignores Sissy entirely, but does comfort the girl when she starts crying. Mr. Gradgrind tells Sissy not to mention her past again, and he, his natural daughter, and his adopted daughter set off for Stone Lodge.

Sissy has clearly had the imagination of fancy that Mr. Gradgrind is so opposed to, and seems to be a nice girl for it. Louisa's initial coldness shows how her own education of facts is affecting her, though her kinder reaction when Sissy begins to weep shows that she may still have a little sympathy in her.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 8

Tom and Louisa are at home, moodily discussing their unhappy existence and resenting their education of facts. Both say that the only consolation in their life comes from the company of the other, though Louisa shows her affection more openly. As for Tom, he expresses his discontent with life, and reveals that he sometimes manipulates Mr. Bounderby when Bounderby says something to him he doesn't like by commenting that Louisa wouldn't like whatever it was Bounderby had suggested. Louisa is curiously expressionless.

Here is a testament of how unhappy an education of facts makes children. Here also, is another hint at the possible marriage of Louisa and Mr. Bounderby, young though she is. This chapter also captures the relationship between Louisa and Tom: she clearly loves Tom, as her open affection shows. But he seems more interesting in using Louisa to get what he wants. Louisa's expressionless reaction to the mention of Bounderby forebodes the nature of her future relationship to him, in which she passively allows herself, despite a lack of love or even like, to be married to him.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 9

After a lot of time spent with Mr. Gradgrind's education of facts, Sissy hasn't made much "progress." One night she falls into conversation with Louisa, and bemoans how she can never answer Mr. McChoakumchild's questions the way he wants her to, though she answers the questions honestly and sensibly.

Sissy's education of fancy apparently cannot be altered. Gradgrind's education is not looking for answers that are honest and sensible—it's looking for facts, pure facts.



Their conversation turns to Sissy's parents, and Sissy reveals her mother was a dancer and her father was a clown, who read her many wonderful fairy tales and made her very happy. She also tells Louisa how desperate her father was in his misery when he couldn't please the crowds, and of his increasing depression, and how she still hopes for some word of her father. Louisa is won over, and waits as eagerly as pitiful Sissy for word of Signore Jupe (which doesn't come).

Sissy's story reveals the depth of her education in and connection to "fancy". Her parents are devoted to art and beauty and humor—to connecting with audiences and making them feel. And Sissy clearly has similar power, as her story makes Louisa feel for Sissy and to hope for the things that Sissy hopes for. Of course, such hopes lead to vulnerability, as Signore Jupe's failure to write proves. Again, though, this incident shows that Louisa does have the capacity to feel.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 10

Stephen Blackpool, a worker or a "hand" at Mr. Bounderby's factory, is waiting for a woman by the name of Rachael on a dark and wet night after work. He is an older, grey-haired man who has evidently suffered a lot. Rachael, a woman with a beautiful and peaceful face, eventually comes, and the two walk a ways together. They are not married (for they go their separate ways after a while) but Stephen evidently has a deep affection for Rachael. Upon returning home, he is aghast to find his bed occupied by a drunk and filthy woman, more creature than human. By their conversation, it comes out that they are acquainted with each other.

With Stephen the novel introduces the workers at Bounderby's factory. That these workers are called "hands" indicates the degree to which they aren't treated as real, full people. From the point of view of Bounderby, their sole purpose is to do the things he wants him to do—to be his hands. Stephen's physical indication signals the difficult life of a worker, but it is clear that the greater cause of his unhappiness lies with these two women in his life: sweet Rachael and the drunk hag, who is actually his wife. Two greater opposites could not be imagined.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 11

After a morning of tiring work with hundreds of other hands in the factory, Stephen pays a visit to the factory owner, Mr. Bounderby. Bounderby is home, eating a rich lunch and accompanied by Mrs. Sparsit.

The contrast between Mr. Bounderby's fine way of dining and the bone-tired state of the poor factory workers is striking. Dickens is absolutely trying to make clear the huge disparity in wealth created by industrialization.



Stephen asks him if there is anything he can do to dissolve his unhappy marriage. Bounderby maintains that the law is the law, and that the sanctity of marriage must be preserved. As Stephen unhappily protests, he scandalizes Mrs. Sparsit. Bounderby refuses to give Stephen any help in what he describes as Stephen's unlawful and unholy quest to leave his marriage. Stephen, sighing, departs from Bounderby's residence.

Bounderby is uninterested in helping his workers, and casts Stephen's desire to escape his marriage as being both illegal and against the tenets of religion. Mrs. Sparsit just seems upset that Stephen would dare protest the words of Bounderby, as if he is a lesser being than Bounderby. It's worth also noting that Dickens was unhappily married and in love with other women, so his seeming vendetta against marriage in the novel is not unsurprising.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 12

As Stephen is walking away from Bounderby's house, he runs into an old, neatly-dressed woman who closely questions him as to Bounderby's well-being. Upon his replying that Bounderby seems well, she is satisfied. She walks with him back to the factory as he heads to his afternoon shift. When they arrive, she marvels at the looms and seems to think Bounderby's factory must be a marvelous place.

As the day ends and Stephen finishes his shift, he thinks longingly of Rachael and how his unhappiness would disappear if only he were free to marry her.

The woman's belief that the factory must be marvelous is a testament to the middle class's (not to mention upper class's) blindness regarding the awful conditions for workers during industrialization. The woman's awe of the factory also hints at a deeper connection that she has to Bounderby himself that will come out later in the novel.



Stephen dwells excessively on this topic; the fact that his marriage cannot be dissolved seems unjust in the face of his misery. It is worth noting that Dickens has been criticized by some critics for depicting Stephen's misery in this way, as it might have been more accurate to actually locate his misery as a function of the awfulness of factory life.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 13

Upon returning home in the rain after his shift, Stephen finds that Rachael is there, caring for his wife. Rachael mentions that this is a duty of friendship she feels she owes his wife, as they grew up together and were best friends when Stephen proposed to his wife. Stephen groans at this reminder. Rachael continues tending to the unconscious woman's wounds with great care, while Stephen is overcome by the memory of the dark thoughts he had had of his wife while walking home, and eventually falls into an uneasy slumber.

He awakes to the sight of his sick wife sitting up in bed, attempting to end her life by poisoning herself. Stephen freezes, but Rachael snatches the poison away from her just in time. The sick woman again falls asleep, and Rachael sorrowfully takes of her leave of unhappy Stephen and his unconscious wife.

Rachael's tenderness in caring for Stephen's wife and her old friend show what great good one loving woman can do. Rachael is depicted as a kind of saint. The clear implication in Rachel's story of growing up with Stephen's wife is that Stephen could have picked Rachael, but didn't, thus dooming himself. Why Stephen picked as he did, or why his wife became a drunk and a prostitute, is never explained



Stephen's hesitation in preventing his wife from committing suicide shows just how much he wishes he could escape from his marriage. That Rachael acts immediately despite her own clear love for Stephen shows what an incredibly good and unselfish person she is.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 14

Louisa and Sissy have grown into young women, and Tom is now a young man, apprenticed to Bounderby. Mr. Gradgrind's education of facts has not affected Sissy, who has acquired none of the knowledge he tried to force her to learn but is good, earnest, and affectionate as ever. She continues to live at Stone Lodge, where she takes care of Mrs. Gradgrind. Gradgrind himself has become a Member of Parliament, which is as mechanized and fact-oriented as the factory town he represents.

The novel makes clear that Sissy's early "education of fancy" is responsible for the good-hearted young woman she has grown into. Tom meanwhile, is either following or being pushed to follow in Bounderby's footsteps. By comparing the work of Parliament to the "fact-based" work done in Coketown, the novel indicates that Parliament's actions and laws do not take into account real people, real lives, or involve any humanity or compassion.



Louisa, as melancholic and reserved as ever, seems to be the subject of both her father and her brother's musings, who are pondering something now that she is a young woman. Tom in particular hints at something that might soon fall in her path which could do him a good deal of good, playing on her affection for him (which, from the way he tries to manipulate her in their conversation, is considerably more genuine than his affection for her).

In contrast to Sissy, Louisa's fact-based education has made her sad and reserved—it seems to have made her distant from herself and from others, distant from feeling. It is also made clear, here, that Tom's character has not improved for the better with time, as he appears to be using Louisa's selfless affection for him to achieve some end of his.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 15

Mr. Gradgrind summons Louisa to his room, and informs her that Mr. Bounderby has asked for her hand in marriage. She doesn't react at first, then responds that she doesn't love Bounderby. Gradgrind recommends that she substitute Fact for sentiment in their marriage. Louisa replies that she accepts this, but for a moment seems to be wavering on the brink of releasing all her pent-up feelings. Because there is no history of confidence or the sharing of emotions between her and her dry father, though, she says nothing, and instead assures him that thanks to his education, she has never received nor looked for romantic attention.

Louisa's dull reaction to the marriage proposal (from a man she has shown dislike for in the past) shows how distorted of a young woman she has become. Instead of revealing the feelings of her heart, which her father has taught her not to do, she goes along as usual with her father's wishes. Her education of facts has not taught her how to deal with a situation so difficult as this. She takes Gradgrind's advice to replace sentiment with fact in her marriage, which to the reader is obviously ludicrous advice and forebodes bad things for the couple-to-be.



She then says she will marry Mr. Bounderby, which she knows is her father's wish. Taking her downstairs, Mr. Gradgrind announces the news of the betrothal to his wife and Sissy. Louisa sees the look of shock, sorrow, and pity on Sissy's face. From then on, she places a cold distance between her and Sissy.

Sissy, unlike Louisa, does not try and hide her reaction at the news of the proposal, and the reader can assume that Louisa strongly resents Sissy's open feelings—perhaps because she herself is unable to express those same feelings. Louisa resents it so deeply that she tries to cut herself off from Sissy completely.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 16

Back at Mr. Bounderby's house, Bounderby is rather nervous as to how Mrs. Sparsit will take the news of his engagement (knowing she has never reacted favorably in the past to hints of it). When he finally breaks it to her, she condescendingly wishes them all her best, and makes it clear that she pities him and sees him as a victim in this marriage. Nothing Mr. Bounderby can pompously say moves her from this position.

The determination of these two egoistic characters to preserve their pride and vanity at the expense of the other makes for a comic and ridiculous scene. Mrs. Sparsit's belief that this will be an unhappy marriage, will prove to be correct—and she will do everything she can to make it unhappy.



The day of the wedding comes, and Louisa and Mr. Bounderby are married. Tom thinks only of all the advantages he will gain by this marriage, such as how Mr. Bounderby will have to treat him better now. After the wedding breakfast and before departing with her new husband on their honeymoon to Lyons (where Bounderby wants to observe some factories), Louisa is trembling and looks upset. Tom doesn't notice a thing and cheerfully passes her off to Bounderby.

Tom's selfishness and total self-absorption is on display here. First he sees the marriage only in terms of what it will do for him, how he can use the marriage as a kind of transaction to make Bounderby give him more respect. And he is so caught up in these thoughts that he does not even notice—or care about—his sister's obvious dismay and deep sadness. Tom's education proves to have turned him into a not very nice young man.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 1

On a sunny day in Coketown, Mrs. Sparsit sits in her new living quarters attached to the Bank of Bounderby's factory, and chats Bitzer, now a young man and the Bank's porter. In their conversation, they discuss what a lazy young man Tom Gradgrind is.

Someone knocks at the door to interrupt their somewhat malicious gossip, and Bitzer opens the door to admit a languid, well-dressed young gentleman who is trying to find Mr. Bounderby. Mrs. Sparsit is impressed by the man's manners and his flattery, and upon questioning, disdainfully reveals that contrary to this young man's beliefs, Louisa Bounderby is not a grim old hag, but a young woman. Upon the young man's departure to find Mr. Bounderby, Mrs. Sparsit sits for many hours, thinking and thinking about something ill-intentioned towards Louisa.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 2

The young gentleman is none other than Mr. James Harthouse, usually called Jem, a young man who is affluent and bored out of his mind and hoping to find some distraction in working for Mr. Bounderby. It was James' brother who recommended that he go work for Bounderby, whom his brother refers to, along with Gradgrind, as the "Hard Fact fellows". Mr. Harthouse and Mr. Bounderby meet, and after Bounderby pompously greets him and Harthouse properly flatters and pleases Bounderby, Bounderby takes Harthouse home to be introduced to Louisa.

Jem Harthouse finally snaps out of his boredom when he meets handsome, proud, cold Louisa. He senses that there is much more to this fascinating woman than meets the eye and tries to discover what, though she deftly evades every attempt of his to provoke a reaction from her.

His efforts are finally rewarded when Tom comes home, and Louisa's impassive face breaks into a warm, beautiful smile. Harthouse inwardly takes note of this; apparently Tom is the only one she loves. Tom, for his part, behaves slovenly and disrespectfully at dinner, proving Mrs. Sparsit's and Bitzer's gossip right.

Though these two gossipers are not much better, Tom Gradgrind has turned out to be a good-for-nothing. So much for the effectiveness of his father's education of facts.



Mrs. Sparsit clearly still harbors a grudge against Louisa. While not explaining the thoughts that she has regarding Louisa, the implication of these thoughts occurring after the unknown gentleman leaves is that Mrs. Sparsit sees some way to use the man to get back at Louisa.



Harthouse is a very different character from the other men introduced so far. His description of Gradgrind and Bounderby as "Hard Fact Fellows" has a bit of mockery in it, suggesting that he himself is not such a "Fellow". Neither does he seem a limp loser like Tom. Instead, he possesses the disingenuous art of pleasing whomever he may like, and as such is bored with the world.



But when his charm doesn't work on Louisa—who has been made so reserved by her education and the repression involved in her loveless marriage—she becomes an object of fascination to him.



The only love Louisa expresses openly is towards her undeserving brother. That is the only love she has been permitted in her life of Facts. Tom, meanwhile, continues to be little more than dissolute.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 3

After dinner, Jem Harthouse takes Tom back to his hotel, and handing him a drink and a cigar, converses with him as a guise to extract information from him about Louisa. He learns that Louisa married Bounderby not out of love but for Tom's sake, to help him advance and to ensure that she could help him out financially given his frequent money troubles. Tom adds that Louisa would probably do anything for him, a point upon which Tom displays some satisfaction.

Tom stumbles home at the end of all this talk, drink, and smoke, and the narrator darkly hints that the night's conversation will have dire consequences on all parties involved.

Tom is utterly insensitive to his sister's feelings and the nature of the private information he is revealing to a total stranger. He seems to care only about what he can get for himself without actually working for it.



Mr. Gradgrind's education of facts has indeed prepared Tom poorly for all the pleasures open to young men of his status. The narrator's comment after Harthouse's interest in Louisa's lack of love with Bounderby forebodes that Harthouse will see this as an opportunity to gain her love. It is worth noting here that this would have been a much bigger deal in Victorian England when the novel was written than it would today. In Victorian England, a woman who had an affair would be ruined, shunned by society.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 4

Meanwhile, the workers at Bounderby's factory in Coketown have had enough of their bad working conditions. They meet in a hall somewhere in the town, where a speaker named Slackbridge incites their rage against the cruelty of the industrial system and insists they must form a union to protect themselves from the manufacturers. The men agree. Stephen however, for a mysterious reason he won't name, says he cannot go along with them in forming the union.

While many are sympathetic to this man who has suffered much, they cast him out nonetheless and say that he must be shunned by all as punishment for not joining the union. And so not a single man speaks to Stephen for four days, until Bitzer comes up to him and asks him to accompany him to Bounderby's house.

The terrible conditions of the factory eventually inspire the men working there to band together to try to strengthen themselves so as to be able to face off with the owners.



Yet, the group that hopes to prove the antidote to the poison of industrialism—the union—hurts Stephen just as much as the factory itself does. In doing so, the union shows that, like the owners, it cares more about power than about people.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 5

Stephen joins Mr. Bounderby, Louisa, Tom, and Mr. Harthouse in the Bounderbys' drawing room. Bounderby demands that Stephen reveal details of the newly formed union. Though Stephen does not believe the union will result in any good, he refuses to act as a spy on the other hands, because he doesn't blame his co-workers for doing what they're doing. Looking around, he senses that the only one sympathetic to him is Louisa.

The contemptuous way in which Mr. Bounderby treats Stephen and his opinions is a condemnation of the manufacturer-work relationship, which is portrayed as abusive and selfish on the part of the manufacturer, Bounderby. The scene also establishes Stephen's inherent decency and dignity and that Louisa has the potential to be compassionate despite what her education did to her.



Stephen goes on to explain reasonably that it's only realistic to expect worker uprisings, because it simply isn't natural for one person to hold power over all the rest. Mr. Bounderby is angered by his words, and fires Stephen, telling him to leave the factory at once.

Stephen sees to the heart of the matter, and is merely pointing this out to Bounderby. But Bounderby reacts angrily to anything that does not go as he wants it—a testament to his sense of entitlement—and he thinks nothing of firing Stephen on the spot.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 6

Stephen steps out of Mr. Bounderby's house into the dark evening, and runs into Rachael and the old woman he met the last time he was at Bounderby's house, whose name is Mrs. Pegler. Stephen and Rachael politely make conversation with the mysterious old woman, who again makes inquiries after Mr. Bounderby's well-being. Stephen invites Rachael and the woman to tea at his place (which his drunk wife once more left a few months ago).

The resilience of working folk like Stephen and Rachael in being cheerful, polite, and attentive to an elderly woman even while Stephen has received terrible news is impressive.



Over tea, the old woman is revealing that she had a son who she lost, when suddenly there is a knock at the door. Louisa and Tom Gradgrind enter. From the look on his face, it is clear that Tom is not here of his own choosing. Louisa is shocked by the poverty of Stephen's rooms. She then does what she had come to do: offer Stephen some money to aid his search for new employment. Though reluctant to accept money, Stephen is grateful for Louisa's genuine kindness, and takes some, which he promises to pay back.

While the education of facts seems to have extinguished all goodness of character in Tom, it has been unable to do the same in Louisa. Louisa is more tender and sensitive to the feelings of the heart, traits that were stereotypically associated with femininity during the Victorian era (when the novel takes place). She therefore takes pity on Stephen and goes out of her way to help him. Louisa's shock at Stephen's poverty is another indication of the middle and upper classes' blindness toward the true condition of the industrial working class.



Tom then does something very unusual: he pulls Stephen aside into a corner, and tells him (in a whisper so no one can hear) that something good may come to him if he hangs around the Bank within the sight of Bitzer every night until the night he leaves to find work elsewhere. Stephen is confused, but says he will. Tom seems nervous and jumpy. Louisa and Tom then take their leave of Stephen, and Rachael does likewise.

Louisa truly has come to try to do something good for Stephen, small as it is. Tom's nervous jumpiness suggests that his advice will in fact not do anything good for Stephen at all—that he is just using Stephen as he uses everyone else. Stephen's good heart is slow to distrust anyone.



In accordance with Tom's request, Stephen hangs around the Bank for about an hour every night before he leaves town. Nothing happens, and so Stephen departs after a few days to seek employment in another town, regretting that he must leave Rachael behind.

As a poor man, Stephen is at the whim of forces larger than him: the powerful factory owners and the growing unions. Neither cares about him, or about the one true thing in the novel—his love for Rachael.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 7

Mr. Harthouse gets along well with Bounderby and the other "Hard Fact" fellows with his easy flattery, and begins to make headway in gaining Louisa's favor without her even realizing it. He "accidentally" comes across her while she is walking alone in the country, and deftly manipulating her feelings for her brother and their mutual knowledge of his ungratefulness for all she's done for him, he pledges to try and help Tom out for Louisa's sake. Louisa discourages him as soon as his compliments start becoming improper, but Harthouse is such a good flatterer that he is able to instantly move away to other topics, only to return in a roundabout manner to professing his admiration for her for the way she cares for her brother. In this way, he begins to establish the beginnings of an intimate relationship with Louisa.

Later, Harthouse meets Tom, and genially tells him that he ought to be more grateful to his sister for all the financial help she's given him (which is considerable). Tom then reveals that the debt he's gotten himself into is yet more considerable, almost weeping with self-pity as he makes this confession. Mr. Harthouse, while restraining the urge to pitch this pathetic whelp into the pond they're walking beside, calmly tells him that he'll help him out a bit, if only he'll act more affectionately toward his sister. Tom agrees. As Tom's behavior improves, Louisa smiles upon Mr. Harthouse, thinking gratefully of him as her brother's benefactor.

Suave James Harthouse is able to take advantage of Louisa so easily because no one in her life and education of facts has ever showed any awareness of or sensitivity to her own feelings, no one has ever been affectionate to her, no one has ever noticed her unhappiness. Her heart is starved for love, and she is happy, in this moment, to receive even a tiny bit of care and admiration from Mr. Harthouse.



It is remarkable how easily this worldly man can manipulate both Tom and Louisa, getting them to think the best of him with his pleasing speeches.. Louisa has led a life so empty of affection that she appreciates the little Tom shows her upon Mr. Harthouse's urging, and so falls prey easily to Mr. Harthouse's manipulation of her unexercised emotions.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 8

The narrator reveals Mr. Harthouse's inner thoughts about this step in his relationship with Louisa; he isn't deliberately planning a wicked seduction, but he's bored by everything in his life except this fascinating, attractive woman, and means to continue to try to gain her confidence.

Riding home after a day of work, Harthouse encounters an upset Bounderby, who reveals that the Bank has been robbed! Only 150 pounds have been stolen, which is very little compared to Bounderby's wealth, but naturally Bounderby is as enraged as if it had been all of his holdings. As they talk, the two men meet Louisa, Mrs. Sparsit, and Bitzer on the path. Harthouse and Louisa both instantly suspect Tom, though neither voices it. Mr. Bounderby, Mrs. Sparsit, and Bitzer suspect Stephen Blackpool, who was observed lurking around the Bank multiple times at night for no apparent reason.

Harthouse isn't so much evil as he is careless and selfish. He's not out to ruin her, but he's not concerned if he does. For her part, because of the industrial, fact-based world Louisa has grown up in, she is vulnerable (especially as a woman) to a show of human, sympathetic feelings from any party...in this case, from Mr. Harthouse.



Mr. Bounderby's ridiculous greed is betrayed by his disproportionate outrage at being robbed of so small a sum of money. Furthermore, it becomes clear to the reader that a poor factory worker, Stephen, has been taken advantage of to shield the real perpetrators of the crime from justice...another abuse of the factory workers by the system.



Mrs. Sparsit claims that her nerves have been shocked by this event, and moves temporarily back in with Louisa and Mr. Bounderby. She also takes to calling Louisa "Miss Gradgrind" instead of "Mrs. Bounderby". That night, while Mrs. Sparsit comforts Bounderby at home, Louisa and Mr. Harthouse go for a walk outside.

Then, long after everyone has gone to bed, Tom finally returns. He finds his sister awake and waiting for him, but upon pleas for him to confide in her, he sulkily and resentfully maintains that he's not hiding anything. He hints that Louisa should mention neither the visit they paid Stephen, Rachael, and the old woman, nor the conversation that Tom had with Stephen that night. Louisa sorrowfully leaves after Tom refuses to say anything more, and upon her departure, Tom cries tears of guilt and self-pity...but he is not penitent.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 9

Mrs. Sparsit stretches the few days she was supposed to spend in Bounderby's house quite a while longer, and continues to lavish so much attention on Mr. Bounderby in his pitiable state of being robbed of 150 pounds that he notices, in contrast, how cold Louisa is to him (which is no change from her previous behavior). Mrs. Sparsit does whatever she can to further this sense of alienation between Mr. Bounderby and Louisa, while Louisa and Mr. Harthouse silently draw closer together in their contempt of Bounderby. Mrs. Sparsit's flattery of Mr. Bounderby ends, however, as soon as he's out of sight, and she makes contemptuous comments about him to his portrait.

Shortly after Mr. Bounderby leaves for work, Bitzer brings Louisa a note telling her that her mother is dying. Louisa immediately departs for her old home. Stone Lodge holds no happy memories for her, and when she arrives she finds that her mother and her younger sister, Jane, rely very much on kind Sissy. She notices with resentment that Jane is a happier, more sympathetic girl than Louisa ever was thanks to Sissy's influence in the Gradgrind household.

As Mrs. Gradgrind lies dying, she feebly attempts to tell Louisa that she has realized that she and Mr. Gradgrind forgot something in the education of their children. She takes a pen to try and write it down, but her movements become weaker and weaker and she dies without communicating to Louisa or her husband what it is.

Mrs. Sparsit seems to be trying to reassert herself in Bounderby's life, and by calling Louisa "Miss Gradgrind" she is stating that Louisa isn't really married to Bounderby. Note that when Louisa feels upset she goes walking with Harthouse, who has shown far more sympathy to her than Bounderby ever has.



Because Tom had no moral upbringing (only a fact-based one), he practically has no conscience. Though he seems to be aware when he does wrong, he is indifferent to it insofar as he is not harmed. He cares only about himself.



Mrs. Sparsit is a comical character in physical features and in personality, but it is no laughing matter how she tries to drive Mr. Bounderby and Louisa apart. She is a duplicitous character, who is showing so much affection to Bounderby to distance him from Louisa. At the same time, her nasty comments about Bounderby once he is gone shows that Sparsit hates him too—she seems to want not Bounderby himself but the comforts of his wealth and home.



Just as Tom resents the goodness his older sister shows him, Louisa resents (though to a lesser extent) the kindness that Sissy has showed her and her family. Louisa resents the goodness that Sissy has brought to her old home, having never possessed or experienced enough of it herself.



It is the wife—the woman—and not the husband who first realizes that the education of facts did not supply her children with everything they needed in life. In Dickens' typically dramatic way, Mrs. Gradgrind dies before being able to articulate what it was missing.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 10

Mrs. Sparsit continues to show excessive pity to Mr. Bounderby when he is present, and excessive contempt to his portrait when he is gone. Watching the progression of Louisa and James Harthouse's relationship, Mrs. Sparsit rather evilly gets it into her mind that Louisa is slowly descending a great spiral **staircase**, and when she gets to the bottom – which, Mrs. Sparsit imagines, will be when she ruins herself and her honor through her affair with Mr. Harthouse – then, how Mrs. Sparsit will rejoice!

In one of their conversations, which Mrs. Sparsit spies on through a window but can't overhear, Mr. Harthouse manages to persuade Louisa that Stephen, whom she thought to be a just man, may very well have succumbed to the temptation of stealing the money, because that's just the way the hands are. Louisa allows herself to be persuaded by him, which makes her feel both bad and relieved.

While the satisfaction Mrs. Sparsit takes in watching Louisa's downfall is malevolent, it's clear that this is not going to end well for Louisa, who is allowing herself to be spun ever more securely into Mr. Harthouse's pleasant web of flattery and careless affection. As Mrs. Sparsit sees, this will end in utter disgrace for Louisa if things continue the way they are going.



Louisa here betrays a very feminine trait: that of closing her eyes to the likely truth of the matter and going along in the deception when someone she loves, Tom, might actually be guilty. Note how casually Harthouse assumes that Stephen must be no good because he is poor. The wealthy create a system that impoverishes the working class, then sees that working class as being worthless and shift because they are poor.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 11

Mr. Bounderby informs Mrs. Sparsit that he will have to be away from home for three to four days on business. Mrs. Sparsit then invites Tom over to her place for lunch that day, and learns that Tom is to meet Mr. Harthouse at the train station that night. She asks him to tell Louisa that she will not pay her usual visit to the Bounderbys that night, as she feels ill. In truth, Mrs. Sparsit has been watching the relationship between Louisa and Mr. Harthouse progress (though nothing definitive has happened yet), and suspects that tonight, with Bounderby away, the two of them will have a rendezvous.

That night, she spies on Tom at the train station, and seeing him waiting impatiently for Harthouse at the train station without Harthouse appearing, she instantly suspects that Tom's appointment is a ploy to keep him away from Bounderby's house, and rushes there.

Almost breathless with delight at the thought that this might be the night of Louisa's ruin, she creeps through the woods around the Bounderby house. Sure enough, she is rewarded by the sight of Mr. Harthouse passionately professing his love for Louisa. Louisa orders him to leave her; but he refuses. Finally, Louisa agrees to meet him elsewhere later that night—but Mrs. Sparsit can't quite hear the location because it has begun to rain heavily. She has also absolutely ruined her dress by lying in the woods while spying on them.

Mrs. Sparsit's craftiness reveals the other side of the spectrum of femininity: a jealous desire to revenge herself upon the woman who took her place at Mr. Bounderby's side. Mrs. Sparsit not only suspects Harthouse's intentions, she tries to push them along by not going to the house herself—she is trying to invisibly push Louisa down that staircase.



As the night progresses, Sparsit seems to descend from the comical and mean-spirited to the ridiculous and almost demonic. Here she resorts to spying, then rushes off when she learns what she wants to know.



Louisa is not so unprincipled as Tom. Though she thinks she and Harthouse are alone, she steadfastly refuses to succumb to Harthouse's adulterous advances...at least for the present. Mrs. Sparsit, in her ruined dress and desperate desire to see Louisa ruined in order to regain her former position, cuts a vicious yet ridiculous figure.



Mr. Harthouse leaves, and Louisa goes back to the house, only to set out again after a short time for the railroad. Mrs. Sparsit follows her and, guessing her destination to be Coketown, discretely boards the train after her. Both get out of the train at Coketown, but in a moment of distraction, Mrs. Sparsit loses sight of Louisa and cannot tell where she has gone. Weeping bitter tears of frustration, Mrs. Sparsit is left in the train station, absolutely soaked to the skin with all her clothes ruined from her adventures: a sorry sight indeed.

In her eagerness to see the downfall of a fellow woman (and one who ought to be pitied), Mrs. Sparsit loses all dignity. She is in this moment more clownish than Signore Jupe ever was. Meanwhile, Louisa appears to be headed toward her rendezvous with Harthouse, appears to be heading toward an encounter that will ruin her reputation and place in society...



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 12

Mrs. Sparsit was wrong: Louisa has not gone to Coketown to meet Mr. Harthouse, but rather to Stone Lodge to see her father. As it continues to storm outside, Louisa enters her father's study. She pours out her heart to her shocked father, who is rendered speechless by his eldest child's misery. Louisa reproaches him for never allowing her or Tom to exercise their fancy and imagination, which set them up for their current unhappiness. Mr. Gradgrind groans in sadness to see her present state.

...but in fact Louisa has more strength—and, the novel suggests, more moral goodness—than it appeared. (Whether it is fair, from a modern point of view, to equate Louisa's moral goodness with a refusal to cheat on her awful husband is another issue). Louisa takes the emotion of nearly consummating an affair with Harthouse and finally unleashes it at the source of her problems: her father. Gradgrind's groan indicates his own potential for goodness, and to learn.



Louisa then reveals to him that Mr. Harthouse has declared his love for her, and she doesn't know if she loves him or not—all she knows is that he was the first person to ever show her any affection. She has not disgraced herself, but has brought herself to her father's feet, pleading for him to save her by some other means than his philosophy and education of facts. She then sinks into a dead faint on the floor.

This is a pitiful scene indeed: Louisa reveals how starved she was for affection, something that she felt more strongly than Tom. This, then, is what an education of facts will bring one to.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 1

Louisa awakes to find herself in her old bed in her old room, feeling very weak. Her father comes in, and sorrowfully admits to her, as a man just waking from a dream, that the education of the Heart, which he neglected, may have been just as important as the education of the Head. Louisa is silent. But he adds that he doesn't know how to help her because he too never had an education of the Heart.

Louisa returning to her old bed in her father's house is symbolically returning to her childhood. But it is different this time, as a shaken Gradgrind has (to his credit) lost his certainty and realized that his philosophy of the "education of the Head" was flawed. Yet he himself was harmed by the same sort of education, and he knows no way forward.



Mr. Gradgrind leaves her to rest, and Sissy comes in. Louisa immediately is filled with anger and resentment at the presence of this good and gentle friend. Sissy, however, shows much tenderness in caring for Louisa and eventually wins Louisa over with her humility and gentleness. Sissy vows to help teach Louisa how to feel and experience happiness.

Louisa's resentment stems from the fact that she knows that Sissy has access to a well of feeling that Louisa does not, and wants to have. That the uneducated daughter of a circus clown is so much a better and stronger person than a fact-educated woman like Louisa, and has more wisdom than a man of Parliament like Gradgrind, is a sign of the triumph of fancy over fact.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 2

James Harthouse doesn't know what to think of Louisa's failure to appear at their rendezvous in Coketown. He waits in Coketown for a while, then goes to see if she is Bounderby's house, then finally goes to the bank, where he encounters Tom who criticizes him for not showing up at the train. Harthouse waits at the bank, hoping for a message from Louisa, but maintaining an air of composure on the outside.

When a messenger arrives to say a woman has arrived to see him, he thinks it must be Louisa. He is surprised and confused when it turns out to be Sissy, who tells him, respectfully but firmly, that she has come on Louisa's behalf but without Louisa's knowledge. She then tells Harthouse that she has come to tell him that he has no further chance with Louisa. To his astonishment, Harthouse finds that he cannot resist Sissy's good and earnest heart; she is so pure and firm that he is filled with guilt and is unable to overcome her. Furthermore, Sissy asks Harthouse to leave Coketown forever and never return. Again, he finds himself unable to resist her wishes. Rather bewildered by the force of Sissy's influence with him, he agrees to leave Coketown forever, and does.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 3

After losing track of Louisa the night before, Mrs. Sparsit, filthy wet clothes and all, rushes to London, finds Mr. Bounderby, and tells him what she saw and what she concluded. Bounderby rather rudely throws her into a carriage in which they rush to Stone Lodge. There, he confronts Mr. Gradgrind, yelling about Louisa's affair with Harthouse. When Gradgrind reveals that Louisa came to him rather than going to meet Harthouse, Bounderby is embarrassed, tells Mrs. Sparsit off for exaggerating, and shouts that she must leave right away, which she does.

Losing none of his bluster, Bounderby then demands of Mr. Gradgrind an explanation for his daughter's behavior. As Mr. Gradgrind hesitatingly tries to explain that her education based solely on facts was responsible and that "there are qualities in Louisa which—which have been harshly neglected", and Louisa needs time to rest and recover, and that Louisa's and his marriage is lacking in love. Mr. Bounderby swells in indignation, responding that what is lacking is Louisa's proper respect for him. He makes several very rude comments about Mr. Gradgrind and Louisa, and finishes by saying that if he doesn't see Louisa back in his own house by noon the next day, Mr. Gradgrind is then responsible for Louisa, not he. Mr. Bounderby departs.

Harthouse is an odd character in the novel, falling neither within the "Hard Facts Fellows" nor into those who had an education or childhood based on "Fancy." He isn't totally evil—he really does seem to be interested in Louisa. But he is completely selfish—he doesn't care that if she responds to his interest it would ruin her forever.



In contrast to Louisa, Mrs. Sparsit, and even Mrs. Gradgrind, Sissy embodies the Victorian ideal of femininity. She is earnest and good and sweet and humble, yet totally firm and unmoving and unafraid when it comes to protecting those she loves from those who would do them harm. Just like that, she gets rid of the terrible threat to Louisa's happiness (or unhappiness) that was James Harthouse. And she can do and be all this, even though she grew up in the circus, because she grew up with imagination and fancy and love.



Mrs. Sparsit's pettiness in essentially tattle-taling on a rival of hers combined with her ridiculous appearance make her seem as awful and near demonic as Stephen's wife. That Sparsit's efforts rebound against her, since her accusations are untrue, seems like a kind of karmic justice. Bounderby, meanwhile, looks more and more like he is all empty idiotic bluster.



The most ironic part of this scene is that Bounderby refuses to listen the very words from Gradgrind that he himself told Stephen when he asked his master how he could escape his unhappy marriage. Bounderby doesn't intend on staying in this marriage if it means he needs to take care of Louisa. In contrast, Mr. Gradgrind has been softened and saddened by his daughter's fate, and even in his newfound hesitance and uncertainty has come to seem a more caring and even wiser man.



When Louisa does not appear at Bounderby's by noon the next day, Mr. Bounderby has his servants send back all her belongings to Stone Lodge and resumes living as if he were unmarried.

After all he said to Stephen about having to stay with his spouse no matter what, Bounderby is a total hypocrite.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 4

Meanwhile, the robber of Bounderby's bank has not been found. Due to Mrs. Sparsit's and Bitzer's testimony, Stephen is the main suspect and his picture is put up on "WANTED" signs all over town. Slackbridge uses these wanted posters to reassure the members of the union that they were right to shun Stephen. The mysterious old woman, Mrs. Pegler, who was seen walking with him and Rachael and who was sighted hanging around Bounderby's house and factory is also suspected.

That Bounderby continues to believe Stephen as the primary suspect in the robbery is unsurprising. But Slackbridge's use of Stephen's "guilt" to shore up his own power shows that the union leaders don't care about the men they are supposed to be protecting either. Both sides of the conflict use the workers, the "hands", to gain and maintain power. But they don't actually care about any of the individual people they employ or who are their members. Such is the injustice that the industrial system can bring about.



Louisa is at Stone Lodge with Sissy when Mr. Bounderby, Tom, and Rachael call on them. This is no courtesy call: Rachael has been trying to prove Stephen's innocence to Mr. Bounderby, but Tom refuses to acknowledge that he was with Louisa, Stephen, and Rachael in Stephen's rooms that night. Louisa puts things to right by confirming that she and Tom were there that night, and that she doesn't think Stephen likely to have committed the robbery. Rachael, very upset by the false charges brought against Stephen, then says that she has written to him, and that since he is the most honest person she knows he will certainly return in two days to clear his name.

The novel now turns its focus back to Stephen. For the first time, Louisa reveals something that might get Tom in trouble. She doesn't do it out of malice, but because she sees it as important to be honest. The reader continues to see how Tom's education of facts has turned him into a bad man.



Mr. Bounderby is skeptical of all of their claims, and angrily storms off, with Tom following after him. Gradgrind expresses sadness that an innocent man would be falsely charged with a crime, which causes Louisa and Sissy to share a glance: each of them believes Tom is actually the robber. Stephen, however, doesn't show up within two days.

Bounderby can't stand anything that does not correspond to how he sees things. The facts he cares about are only his facts, which support his ideas. That neither Sissy nor Louisa speaks up can be seen as a failure to defend Stephen, but can also be seen as compassion for Tom. Stephen's failure to arrive becomes the focus of much of the rest of the novel.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 5

Stephen still doesn't come. Sissy begins to visit Rachael in her home every day, trying to soothe Rachael's sadness about everyone turning against Stephen. They discuss what might have become of him, and Rachael reveals her fear that the real robber may have murdered Stephen, so as not to protect his own identity. Sissy tries to quiet her worries, and says they'll spend a week in the countryside to recover Rachael's strength and perhaps look for Stephen if he doesn't come by Saturday.

Sissy's kindness in visiting Rachael and Rachael's deep concern for Stephen mark these two women as the two most loving characters in the book. They are poor, but deeply feminine, and have the capability of redeeming what is bad in the industrial, fact-based world of Coketown.



The two go for a walk around the town, and as they pass Mr. Bounderby's house, they see an excited Mrs. Sparsit pull up in a coach, accompanied by a distraught Mrs. Pegler. Mrs. Sparsit drags the woman out of the coach and into Bounderby's house, and triumphantly presents her to Bounderby (who happens to be meeting with Mr. Gradgrind and Tom), as one of the suspects connected with the robbery. Her actions draw a huge crowd to the house.

But Mrs. Sparsit and the gathered crowd are all excited when Mr. Bounderby reluctantly reveals that this lady is his own mother. Gradgrind then criticizes Mrs. Pegler for subjecting Bounderby to the terrible abandoned childhood he is always telling everyone about, but Mrs. Pegler further shocks everyone by saying the story isn't true at all: she and her husband cared for him in every possible way, and it was he who abandoned her (and paid her thirty pounds a year to stay away from him), not wishing to be connected with her once he had made his fortune. Revealed as a fraud and a liar to the Gradgrinds and to the entire town, and having been totally humiliated, Bounderby blusteringly orders everyone to get out of his house.

Meanwhile, Louisa and Sissy both suspect in their hearts that Tom was the bank robber. He has become Mr. Bounderby's shadow, and doesn't visit Louisa. Louisa begins to worry that maybe Tom killed Stephen.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 6

Sissy and Rachael have gone to the country to spend some quiet time, and as they are walking around, Rachael, to her horror, spots Stephen's hat lying abandoned on the ground. A few more steps forward, and Sissy nearly falls into a huge yawning chasm in the earth. Fearing that Stephen has fallen into the chasm, Rachael almost becomes hysterical, but Sissy, shaken herself, manages to calm her down and the two go look for help to try and rescue Stephen, if he's down there.

Mrs. Sparsit is consumed by a desire for revenge, to regain what she considers to be hers. She is the jealous woman exaggerated to an almost ridiculous degree. She just doesn't know when to stop, and continues to make a ridiculous spectacle out of herself in her effort to gain revenge.



Mrs. Sparsit has sunk yet lower with this embarrassing mistake, but she is nowhere near as humiliated as Mr. Bounderby now is. Everything Bounderby boasted about himself his entire life has turned about to be a lie—he is not a self-made man, who lifted himself up from poverty to great wealth. The loss of his false origin story eliminates whatever moral authority he may have had, and he is revealed to be a man who used the advantages of his use to gain wealth and then systematically used that wealth to trample on others. This is criticism of the novel's representative successful industrialist, and thus a criticism of industrialism itself, which the novel suggests is hollow, built on both lies and the backs of the poor.



Dickens enjoys the drama of disappearing characters, as the mystery of Stephen's unknown whereabouts extends for yet another chapter.



Rachel is initially overcome by her feelings, a tendency that was considered stereotypically feminine during the Victorian era (when the novel takes place). This could be seen as a weakness, but those same feelings of the heart give Rachel and Sissy strength to persevere for the sake of those they love.



They return to the chasm—which is called Old Hell Shaft—with workmen and a doctor. After four hours, the men manage to rig a kind of elevator and manage to rescue Stephen from the bottom of the pit, though he is barely alive. It is now night. Stephen recovers consciousness, though he is unable to move, and speaks to a tearful Rachael. He tells her that all of the workers have fallen into a pit, just as he fell into this pit, and says that he only survived his fall because from the bottom of it he could see a star on which he prayed for peace and forgiveness between workers and factory owners. He confirms that he had been on his way back to clear his name when he fell into the shaft.

He then calls Louisa to his side, who has also come along with Tom, Gradgrind, and many others, and tells her to bring Mr. Gradgrind to him, which she does with dread. The dying man asks Mr. Gradgrind to clear his good name; he says that he will not name specifics, but he tells Mr. Gradgrind that he once met with Tom, and Tom will tell him how to clear Stephen's name. Stephen then dies peacefully under the stars, holding Rachael's hand.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 7

Tom, however, has mysteriously disappeared. As Stephen gave his last instructions to Mr. Gradgrind, Sissy whispered something in Tom's ear, and he vanished before anyone present at Stephen's rescue could do anything. Mr. Gradgrind, searches for his son but cannot find him anywhere, and Louisa tells her father that Tom will never return to town.

Gradgrind goes into seclusion for a full day, not eating or speaking to anyone, and emerges looking much older and having realized that Tom is the robber. Sissy then reveals that to save Tom from prison she told him to hide with Mr. Sleary's circus company—the circus that Sissy's father used to belong to. Gradgrind, Louisa, and Sissy travel to the circus, which is now near Liverpool. Sissy is greeted with warm hugs by Sleary and all of her former circus-fellows, and Sleary then reveals that Tom is hiding as a clown with his face painted black. They make a plan for Tom to escape the country from a boat headed to either North or South America out of Liverpool's port.

Stephen would not have died had he not been expelled from Coketown by selfish, heartless Mr. Bounderby, had he not been unjustly framed by the real culprit of the Bank robbery, and had he not been shunned by the union. His tragic death is, by extension, a consequence of the industrial system and its corrupt factory owners, the actions of a young man educated only by facts, and the workers who themselves are corrupted by industrialization. Yet Stephen's words to Rachael indicate a way out: forgiveness, which is the central tenet of Christianity. The novel, through Stephen, is suggesting that industrialization has stolen true Christian faith from both owners and workers, and that only by reclaiming the core Christian attributes can the corrupting influence of industrialization be tempered or cured.



At last the truth comes out, and Gradgrind must begin to face that not only did his "education of facts" make his daughter miserable, it also turned his son into a criminal. Stephen's life was difficult, but his death—with a cleared name and in the arms of his beloved—is peaceful. It is also worth noting that Stephen's pose in death is analogous to Jesus, dying in the arms of Mary.



Sissy, who loves and protects the Gradgrind family as much as she can, always knows what is best to do for them in times of trouble. She shows compassion to Tom, protecting him from the harsh reach of the law (not to mention Bounderby).



Gradgrind now truly understands the impact of his educational philosophy on his children. Note how, with suffering, he now somewhat resembles Stephen. How ironic that Tom finds safety now in the very place his father dragged him and Louisa away from when they were young. The circus, so "dangerous" to a boy being educated by facts, is the Gradgrinds' only hope now. Note also how the circus folk hug Sissy. The other "fact-based" characters in the novel almost never touch each other, certainly not in friendship or joy. Sleary helps Gradgrind because of Gradgrind's kindness in taking in Sissy—"fact-based" actions do not inspire such loyalty.



Tom meets with his family after the night performance. He confesses to the crime and sheds a few tears at his father's shock and sadness, but mostly he is grumbling and impenitent as ever. He first says that with so many people placed in positions of trust at least some of them will be dishonest. Then when Louisa tries to hug him, he spitefully blames her for the trouble he's in now—for leaving him alone with Mr. Bounderby, and for making his friend Mr. Harthouse leave town.

Tom does agree to their plan for his escape by ship. However, just as he is about to get into the carriage that will take him to the ship, Bitzer shows up, grabs Tom by the collar, and announces that he's going to turn Tom over to the police.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 8

"Bitzer," says Mr. Gradgrind, "have you a heart?" Naturally, his old star pupil does not, and neither will he be swayed by money, or any pleading from his old teacher. He believes that by turning in Tom he will get Tom's job, and his education taught him only to look out for himself.

Mr. Sleary steps in to say that he must agree with Bitzer, and that he will let Bitzer use his carriage to take Tom back to Coketown. Louisa and Gradgrind are dismayed, but Sissy recognizes that Sleary, in fact, has a plan to free Tom. Sleary reveals quietly to Sissy that she was right: he is going to use the trick circus horses and barking circus dogs to hold up and trick Bitzer, while switching Tom to another carriage and returning him to his ship in Liverpool. Sleary appears at the inn where Gradgrind is staying for the night to reveal that the plan worked to perfection.

Gradgrind tries to pay Sleary, but Sleary refuses any money, saying instead that Gradgrind should just let people visit the circus the next time it's near Coketown. Sleary then reveals that Sissy's father's dog recently made its way back to the circus, which must mean that he has died. Before leaving, Sleary tells Gradgrind that it's important that people have amusement, and that working without pleasure is no way to live.

While Louisa changed for the better, having reached her turning point with Harthouse's proposal and becoming better with Sissy's help, Tom appears to have gone past the point of no return. He blames everything and everyone for his actions but himself.



Bitzer, another product of Mr. Gradgrind's education, reappears to foil the plans of his old schoolmaster.



Bitzer, of course, due to his education, has no heart. He doesn't care what happens to Tom or Gradgrind. He cares only about himself, and what he can get for himself.



The Gradgrinds with their lack of "fancy" can't "read" people the way that Sissy can. They don't understand that Sleary is pulling a fast one to try to help them. The Gradgrinds would be lost if he hadn't decided to help them for the sake of Sissy, and even those fact-educated brains couldn't think of the solution to their problem that this uneducated circus man did.



Gradgrind still sees the world as transactional—someone does something for you, you pay them. Sleary, in contrast, seems to see it was relational; kindness should be met with kindness. Sleary's final words are another attack against the "fact-based" world of industrialization, which treats people like mere cogs and does not attend to the "Fancy" they need in life to truly thrive.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 9

Back at Mr. Bounderby's home, things have come to a head between him and Mrs. Sparsit. Over lunch, they insult each other while managing to remain "dignified," but grow increasingly enraged until Mr. Bounderby orders Mrs. Sparsit to leave his house forever. She does so, with great pleasure, and informs him of the great contempt for him that she has in fact always had.

Mrs. Sparsit spends the rest of her days taking care of a miserly old lady. Mr. Bounderby continues being the arrogant, blustery humbug he always was. Mr. Gradgrind remedies his ways and changes his philosophy of life and education so that facts make way for faith, hope and charity. Rachael spends the rest of her days serenely but sadly working in the factory, taking care of Stephen's drunken wife when she comes back to town. Louisa grows gentler and humbler and finds joy in helping care for Sissy's children. Tom dies far from home, having written of his repentance to his sister, but dying during a final attempted journey to visit her. His sister's name is on his lips as he dies.

Watching these two egos pit themselves against each other in their final scene together is both amusing and appalling. Though Bounderby represents the worst of the industrial world and Mrs. Sparsit represents the worst of femininity, Dickens cannot help making them funny characters to the last. Though it is worth noting that both are rapacious, caring not about each other but about what they can get from each other.



In the end, almost everyone has received what they deserved (even Stephen achieved a kind of peace in death). And yet, this is not your typical happy ending; there is a shadow of sadness over the lives of all the characters that will not go away because of the undoable harm done to Louisa and Tom by the education of facts, and to Stephen by the evils and corrupting force of industrialization.





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