

Brief summary of Ch. 6, bk. 2 (fading away), to slowly disappear

Stephen decides to leave Coketown. He again encounters the old woman, who introduces herself as Mrs. Pegler, whom he had first met outside Bounderby's. Tom initiates his plan to implicate, show to be involved in a crime, Stephen in the former's robbery of the bank. The meeting at Stephen's room is arguably important because it sets the stage for the bank robbery. While Louisa shows her ability to feel compassion, Tom reveals his self-interested. Generally speaking, Tom's plan is that in terms of offering him help, Tom tells Stephen that if he waits outside the bank for several consecutive nights, help will come to him. Stephen does so, but no help arrives. Eventually he packs up and leaves Coketown, hoping to find agricultural work in the country. At the same time, he notices several people observing his loitering, the offence of waiting in a place, looking as if he is going to do something illegal, including Mrs. Sparsit and Bitzer, but no one comes to offer him help.

Commentary:

'Sugar lump': in the past sugar had been an expensive luxury, but its availability increased greatly in the nineteenth century. Lump was the dearest form of sugar and its consumption, along with new bread and fresh butter, at this little tea-party would have seemed to many an endorsement of Bounderby's view of the poor as craving luxury.

'Lord Chesterfield': Lord Chesterfield (1694-1773) published his collection, *letters to his son 1774*, advising his illegitimate (born of parents not married to each other) son on matters of etiquette (the set of rules or customs which control accepted behaviour in particular social groups or social situations), good breeding and manners.

'The railway's crazy neighbourhood': the upheaval caused by railway development was tremendous (very great in amount) laid waste many areas of

large cities such as London and Birmingham, but the creation of the British railway system was one of the greatest Victorian achievement.

‘Snuff-takers’: Snuff is a powdered tobacco which is sniffed up the nose as a stimulant or sedative, much used in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

Brief summary of Ch. 7, bk. 2 (gunpowder)

Harthouse insinuates (to use clever, secret and often unpleasant methods to gradually become part of something) himself further into the affections of both Tom and Louisa. He sets about trying to corrupt Louisa.

Commentary:

‘Gorgon’: In ancient Greek mythology the Gorgon, Medusa (mɪˈdʒuːzə), one of three sisters, had snakes instead of hair and turned to stone anyone who looked at her.

‘Mr Bounderby had taken possession’: Mr Bounderby has followed the traditional pattern of the successful merchant or manufacturer in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in moving out of town away from his place of business. In earlier times craftsmen and shopkeepers had lived above their premises, sharing them with workmen, apprentices and servants. This communal pattern of living began to break down in the eighteenth century, giving way to the desire for suburban existence or, for the really wealthy, a country estate. Despite its displacement from the economic centre, therefore, the aristocratic mode of life remained a social ideal, a fact which throws some light on the still class-ridden of British society.

‘A man shaving himself in a boot’: The point here is that this engraved advertisement for shoe polish, or blacking, suggests that the product is so successful that it is possible to use a boot as a mirror in which to shave. This is one of many references in Dickens’s work to Warren’s Blacking, the shoe-polish factory at which he worked for several months when he was twelve.