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For U.G SEM-IV
Hard Times

Today I have completed the Book II.

Chapter-X : Mrs. Sparsit's Staircase

Chapter 10, entitled "Mrs. Sparsit's Staircase," is one of symbolism. Not only is the "staircase" a staircase erected in Mrs. Sparsit's mind as symbolic of Louisa's eventual shame for the dark at the bottom, but it is also the staircase of destruction for many of the other characters.

After several weeks at the Bounderby home, Mrs. Sparsit returns to her apartment at the bank. On the eve of her departure, Mr. Bounderby invites her to be a constant weekend guest at his home. Following this invitation, she and Mr. Bounderby discuss the bank robbery. Bounderby says that Rome was not built in a day and neither will the thief be discovered in such a short period of time. He adds that if Romulus and Remus could wait, so can he, for he and they have much in common: they had had a she-wolf for a nurse; he, a she-wolf for a grandmother. He makes reference not only to Tom's diligence at the bank but also to the old woman, who is under suspicion.

Constant companions, Louisa and Harthouse discuss the robbery. Louisa cannot believe that Stephen could rob the bank. Meanwhile, Mrs. Sparsit watches the growing friendship between the two and does nothing to prevent the disaster she knows will come.

Chapter-XI : Lower and Lower

"Lower and Lower" depicts Mrs. Sparsit's watchful waiting for Louisa's complete descent into the black gulf at the bottom of the staircase. It also shows Gradgrind's unemotional acceptance of his wife's death; he hurries home, buries her in a business-like manner, and returns to his "dust-throwing" in Parliament.

Even though Mrs. Sparsit is not at the Bounderby country residence during the week, she manages to keep a close watch on Louisa through talk with Bounderby, Tom, and Harthouse. When Mrs. Sparsit learns that Bounderby is to be away for three or four days on business, she, inviting Tom to dinner, skillfully worms from him information concerning Louisa and Harthouse. When she learns that Harthouse is expected back the next afternoon from a hunting trip to Yorkshire and that he has asked Tom to meet him, Mrs. Sparsit gloats over Louisa's final descent. She first suspects, then learns, that Harthouse is using the ruse of Tom's meeting him to be alone with Louisa.

The next afternoon, she goes out to the Bounderby country residence and looks for the pair. Hiding behind a tree in the woods, she hears Harthouse, who has returned by horseback, declare his love for Louisa and urge her to go away with him. A storm rises and the rain begins to fall in sheets. Afraid of discovery, Mrs. Sparsit is drenched as she watches Louisa leave Harthouse and go into the house. Much to her delight, Mrs. Sparsit sees Louisa, clothed in a cloak and hat, leave the house and go to the railroad station. Following her, Mrs. Sparsit – drenched, cold and sneezing – bursts into tears when, after the train arrives in Coketown, she realizes that she has lost Louisa.

Chapter-XII : Down

When the chapter opens, the reader sees Mr. Gradgrind, home from Parliament, occupied in his usual pursuit – working with statistics, unmindful of the pouring rain and storm. He is startled as the door opens and Louisa enters. Fleeing to the house of her birth for refuge against the emotions which stir her and which she does not understand, she curses the day of her birth, challenges her father's philosophy to save her now, and explains to him why she married Bounderby. Although she tells her father of Harthouse's declaration of love and his desire that they elope, she assures him that she has not disgraced the family name. As he sees the crumbling of his dogma, he reacts as a father who loves his daughter. He holds her in his arms, not knowing how to comfort her. The book ends with her, the symbol of all his teachings, lying in an insensible heap at his feet.