

The Dystopian Dickens: Expectant of Hard Times

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### Abstract

As part of this thesis, the novel *Expectant* will parody different elements of two of Charles Dickens' novels with their dystopian, futuristic setting. *Expectant* replicates the themes of disappointment and emotional deprivation from *Great Expectations* (1860-61), and dehumanization and the struggle between fancy and reason from *Hard Times* (1854). The parody will draw parallels from the plotlines, characters, and symbols of these novels to further cement the similarities of the themes employed with themes popularized more recently by novels of the dystopian genre.

The mission of the project is to sell the novel, *Expectant*, to publishers on the basis that it is competitive in a dystopian-driven young adult literary market and that, through the parody of Dickens, it offers a different perspective on dystopian literature that will generate interest within the intended target audience.

## Dickens and Dystopian Literature

**Writing Theory**

Although the Victorian era (1832-1901) was called the Age of Progress, Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was concerned with the negative effects that the Industrial Revolution and the new theory of evolution, propagated by Charles Darwin's 1859 *Origin of Species*, might have upon English life on both a societal and familial level (James 11). It was an age of keeping up appearances, but the reality of flaws and weaknesses beneath the polished veneer of Victorian life was not lost on Dickens, who wove the common thread of social awareness throughout many of his tales. These "condition-of-England novels" called attention to social conflicts caused by "industrial distress" and modernization, the drawbacks of "utilitarian education [,] and the need for imagination and feeling in a materialist world" (James 217-218). When plucked out of the context of Victorian England, the problems addressed by Dickens seem relevant to the concerns of modern dystopian literature.

Clearly, dystopian literature as a genre is not a wholly new development, nor is the human curiosity about the ultimate fate of society. It seems certain that for as long as society continues to exist, humankind will analyze its flaws and discuss its possible downfall. The idea of dystopia, however, cannot be without the existence first of a utopia: "A society in which the political institutions, social norms, economic system, and ways of life are superior –i.e., more harmonious, reasonable, virtuous, enlightened, and pleasurable – than those of the author's own society" (Paik 3). When he wrote his *Utopia* in the years 1515-1516, Sir Thomas More was inspired by the enlarging of the world, one full of unknown possibilities and chances for betterment and perfection – at least, a better

perfection than had been achieved in Europe. If *Utopia* was conceived from an imagination stirred by an expanding world of possibilities, then, conversely, the idea of dystopia stems from a shrinking world and the fear of wasted potential. Dystopian literature, then, serves as a warning bell, demanding awareness of real-world societal flaws by exposing and in many cases exaggerating the failure of a supposedly perfect social order (Paik 3).

Thus, here is where Dickens and dystopian authors coincide: both share a deep concern for the state of society and seek to bring about awareness of societal flaws for the purpose of positive reform. The existence of this concern in modern society is evident, given the resurging popularity of dystopian novels and subsequently dystopian films in recent years and in the present. Current events such as natural disasters, political unrest, and threats of war are obvious causes for concern even in the minds of young adults, because it is their wide readership which makes the greatest contribution to popularity of the dystopian genre. The societal issues and previously mentioned current events which preoccupy young adults and inspire their reading material seem strangely relatable to the present and simultaneously futuristic, while also encompassing concerns Dickens had for Victorian society in nineteenth-century England. This association between the problems Dickens identified in the late 1800s and the problems filling the pages of young adult bestsellers today is important because it not only gives readers a sense of continuity within literature, but a sense of continuity within humanity. Modern problems are not unique to modern times, and the existence of societal issues and flaws is not cause for hopelessness and desperation but a call to action and a motivation to engage in attempts at change with realistic expectations not of perfection, but of improvement.

In order to effectively link the social issues and concerns of Dickens' novels with those commonly addressed by modern dystopian literature, several common and recurring themes must be brought to light. Since *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and *Hard Times* (1854) provide inspiration and patterning for *Expectant*, their themes are especially comparable to those of many works of dystopian literature.

Both Dickens and dystopian novels explore the advancement of technology as a possible mode of societal deterioration. While this takes a futuristic form in many modern dystopian novels (robots, artificial intelligence, etc.), Dickens addresses the same topic by giving attention to the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution in England. In *Hard Times*, his disdain for factories is obvious in his dismal depiction of the factory town of Coketown, and his honest portrayal of bleak factory conditions and the adverse familial ramifications of over-worked fathers. The industrialization of England produces an environment that is "severely workful" and people who are "equally like one another," who "do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next" (21; pt. 1, ch. 5). Dickens sees the advancement of technology as contributing to dehumanization, an idea acknowledged also in Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993). Although description of science and technology in the novel are subtle, the Giver acknowledges to Jonas that red hair like his friend Fiona's "must drive [the genetic scientists] crazy" as it hinders their pursuit of what the scientists term as "Sameness" (95). In his young adult dystopian novel *The Maze Runner* (2009) and the sequels that follow it, James Dashner reveals the consequences of a failed method of population control that has decimated the earth's population beyond imagination, causing a state of dystopia in which children are

unknowingly subjected to experiments in order to find a cure. In all these cases, technology is developed in order to benefit mankind in some way but backfires and causes damage to society. The dehumanization that results is acknowledged as an issue in countless dystopian novels such as these as well as in Dickensian literature.

Although the Enlightenment-era schism between reason and emotion was no longer the main concern a hundred years later in Dickens' Victorian era, the similar divide between fact and fancy plays out in the anthology of dystopian literature as well as in Dickens' works. This is a central theme in *Hard Times*, which demonstrates the misery that results when children are completely cut off from imagination and fancy and subjected to a utilitarian and facts-only education. Lack of imagination, fancy, and emotion in Dickens' works leads to standardization and loss of identity. It can also be argued that suppressed desire is a central theme in *Great Expectations*. Pip struggles with the validity of his desire to become a gentleman and to win Estella, while Estella herself represents the novel's message about the harmful effects of "suppression of appetite and voracious desire" (Houston 183, 155). Many recent dystopian works, too, have experimented with the possibility that a society might try to achieve perfection through standardization of emotion and reliance instead on fact. Ted Dekker and Tosca Lee's *Forbidden* (2011) plays out in a society from which a virus has eradicated the possibility of all emotions except for fear. Although this development is brought about by a force outside of societal control, it is considered a blessing in disguise as it has brought peace and has facilitated greater control of the masses. However, it is clear that the price of this peace and control is the loss of true humanity. The same loss is communicated in *The Giver* through the removal of sensory experience such as color and memory from the

masses. In general, the idea that imagination and emotion give individuals a unique capacity for humanity contributes to dystopian and Dickensian literature. Both relay the damage that could be done to humanity should it be deprived of what Dickens refers to in *Hard Times* as “fancy” (6; pt. 1, ch. 2).

Out of all the concerns addressed by the genre of dystopian literature, the issue of injustice and corruption in government structures is perhaps the most pronounced. Barely any dystopian novels can be found which do not feature an untrustworthy and oppressive governmental system or an unethical judicial system. In many cases, the plot of such novels revolves around the suffering people slowly becoming aware of injustice and reacting against it. Such is the case with the popular *Hunger Games* (2008) novels, as well as the *Divergent* (2011) series and the *Maze Runner* (2009) series. These represent more recent dystopian works marketed to young adults, but the theme of corrupt government and the correlation of power and knowledge is common in older works as well. In his *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault holds up Bentham’s Panopticon as a model for an ideal prison in which the prisoners are forced by the architecture of the prison to assume that they are consistently under surveillance. Even when they are not, they must alter their behavior because lack of privacy (even perceived lack of privacy) produces lack of freedom based on an internalized system of discipline. While Foucault and Bentham held that the assumption of constant surveillance manufactured by the Panopticon would be a positive development producing desired behavior within the prison system, the negative effects of such an idea when introduced to society at large are demonstrated in *1984*. In his novel, George Orwell imagines a society in which the citizens are constantly monitored and controlled by their



government, which employs propaganda, manipulation, and brainwashing in order to control individual thought and produce desired behavior. Dickens was concerned with injustice as well, and deals with the corruption of the legal system in *Great Expectations* in particular. The lawyers take bribes and are concerned more with their “portable property” than they are with exposing the truth and seeing justice carried out. Dickens portrays the corrupt lawmen as the true criminals, whereas those branded as criminals by society suffer disproportionately to their crimes, usually committed simply in order to survive. Indeed, in much of the anthology of dystopian literature, those that society trusts as its heroes and defenders are revealed to be the true criminals through their creation and tolerance of governmental and legal corruption.

Another integral concern of Dickens and dystopian authors alike is the inequality of social class shown in the desperately wide gap between the destitution of the poor and the luxury of the rich. As with the other issues addressed, this concern is meant to mirror actual social conditions and call attention to the state of real society. Dickens illustrates the social problems caused by the widening economic gap between rich and poor through the characters of Pip and Joe in *Great Expectations*. Once Pip believes he has realized his dream of becoming a gentleman, his relationship with Joe becomes strained as he subjects Joe to the same social exclusion to which he has been subjected by Estella (Sen 119). This social gap is emotionally difficult for Pip in his situation, but similar scenarios can lead to greater problems in some dystopian novels especially in the area of equality. The dystopian genre, recognizing that to some extent “the liberties protected and sustained by modern political institutions depend on the exploitation of human labor [and] the internal health of democracy depends on eminently undemocratic forms of

domination,” calls attention to the ways in which this exploitation and abuse is intolerable (Paik 144). This is also a major theme of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945). In the novel, the farm’s governing system originally functions upon the basis that “all animals are equal.” This idea is amended later on with “but some animals are more equal than others” (118). This illustrates the concern of dystopian literature that power and wealth can corrupt and create inequality, taking advantage of those with less power. The pigs, the self-proclaimed rulers, slowly mold a society on the farm in which the work is not shared equally and the majority of the animals fall back into the same slavery they had escaped in rebelling against the farmer. While this exaggerated inequality is depicted as detrimental, dystopian literature also acknowledges that attempted total equality is also not ideal and results in dehumanization, illustrated by the “Sameness” which scientists work to achieve in *The Giver* and also by the utilitarian education of *Hard Times*.

Though the commonality of many Dickensian themes and dystopian themes is evident, it must be clarified that Dickens himself was not a dystopian author. While dystopian novels are characterized almost always by negative and pessimistic endings, Dickens consistently wrote optimistic endings for his works. The alternate endings of *Great Expectations*, as vague as they are, most closely approach a typical dystopian closing but are still not pessimistic enough to warrant a dystopian label for the novel. Dickens was not a dystopian author. That being said, the concerns of his novels are indeed echoed in many dystopian works, making the link between the two worthy of noting and investigating in this manner.

Undoubtedly, a successful integration of Dickensian and dystopian social concerns into one streamlined work of fiction will incorporate the use of the above

themes. In order to best demonstrate the continuity of thought between Dickensian novels and dystopian novels, important and recognizable characters, symbols, and quotes from Dickens' *Hard Times* and *Great Expectations* will be used to convey the discussed themes and demonstrate their prevalence within both genres of literature.

Readers will recognize in *Expectant* parodies of Dickens characters such as Pip, Estella, Miss Havisham, Tom Gradgrind, and Sissy Jupe, among others. In *Great Expectations*, the character of Pip is used to demonstrate the negative influence of societal gaps and the desire for sameness with the masses can exert on a somewhat naïve, impressionable mind. This character type will be paralleled in *Expectant* through the character of Flip, who is meant to demonstrate the problems that can be caused by wide economic and class gaps as well as by the desire to be like everyone else. Dickens' Estella and Miss Havisham are the cold, predatory characters which represent the ways in which higher society, in a form of vampirism, bleeds and feeds off those less fortunate in order to sustain a decadent lifestyle. Likewise, the novel *Expectant* will parody the form and function of these characters in the characters of Essie and her grandmother, Miss Shavisham. In *Hard Times*, Dickens uses the characters of Tom Gradgrind and Sissy Jupe to illustrate the negative effects of over-embracing fact and the positive outcomes of reasonable indulgence in fancy, respectively. The function of these characters will be mimicked in *Expectant* in the plotlines of the characters Rob and Julia. Therefore, many of the main characters from *Great Expectations* and *Hard Times* will be parodied in *Expectant*, and Dickens' purposes for them and the themes they help carry will be replicated.

Some of the more recurring and notable symbolism from *Great Expectations* and *Hard Times* will also be employed in *Expectant*. From *Great Expectations*, the symbols of light and darkness, mist and fog, the association of people with statues, Miss Havisham's garden as a symbol of fallen Eden, and the presence of insects to communicate decay will be used to carry association with the novel and its symbolism. For example, the symbol of mist and fog, which represents confusion as it rolls in and clarity as it clears from the scenery in *Great Expectations*, will carry the same meaning in the novel *Expectant*. Similarly, from *Hard Times*, the symbols of fire and ashes as communicative of rebirth, and the association of factories with fairy palaces to bridge the gap between fact and fancy will be employed and their symbolic meanings carried over into *Expectant*.

Additionally, the novel could perhaps close with a quote from Dickens' *Hard Times*: "Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not" (277; pt. 3, ch, 9). This quote is applicable to the project because it draws the readers' attention back to their lives, asking them to examine the events of the story against reality. Awareness and call to action are important aspects of dystopian literature as well as of the social reform novels Dickens wrote, and are therefore crucial to incorporate into the project.

A vital aspect of this project will be its use of the modern, fast-paced style which is popular in current dystopian literature. The faster, more modern style is important to the novel *Expectant* because it will help associate it more closely with modern dystopian literature. Because the symbolism and plot points of the novel provide heavy links to Dickens, the prose style will depart from Dickens' style and instead provide a contrast to

it. In order to take greatest advantage of the benefits and popularity of this more modern style, a first-person narrator will also be employed. While this is the same narration style used by Dickens in *Great Expectations*, it will be integrated into the writing style of *Expectant* because it is also a subtle way to lend greater gravity and immediacy to the story and its implications for the reader. The first-person narrator's effectiveness in Victorian society as well as in modern society lies in its ability to draw the reader in and make the events of the story more personal and real for each reader. Because it draws the reader into the life of the narrator and forces them to imagine themselves as the protagonist, it inspires deeper contemplation of the story and how it would translate to reality.

The choice to employ an active and personal narration and writing style is made with the intended audience in mind. As the novel would be marketed to young adults, it should recognize and make use of the trends in the current market, in which fast-paced dystopian novels have become popular. The young adult market is the targeted audience for this project because it will not only be successful in that market but useful. It will make Dickens' work more accessible and relevant for teenaged and young adult readers by showing the continuity of his ideas with the ideas of a popular modern genre. For this reason, it is of great importance that the reader recognized the illusions and parallels to Dickens that the project will feature. To ensure this, *Great Expectations* and *Hard Times* are the novels focused on most heavily, as they are the classic works of Dickens' that are most often taught in schools. As these are some of Dickens' most identifiable and popular works, the parallels to them within the project will be easily recognized by a majority of

young adult readers, even those who are not overly knowledgeable about or interested in Dickens.

The success and popularity of classical literature is time tested, and the dystopian novel falls under another category of literature that has long fascinated readers. The popularity of classical literature will persist, and the popularity of dystopian literature will continue to fascinate readers for as long as they wonder about the state and future of society. Because both of these major aspects of the project, *Expectant*, are timeless and classic, the book should achieve success within the young adult market while honoring the Dickensian tradition.

### Synopsis of Novel

**Chapter 1.** The novel begins on the outskirts of town where the cemetery is located and Flip's parents are buried and unfolds in a postmodern society which futuristically mirrors Victorian England. Flip is watching the mists rise over the fields and pondering his name and past and remembering small details from his childhood. He doesn't remember much, but he vividly recalls a scene in which his parents took him to some sort of doctor in the dead of night. They are the only people in the strange laboratory room, and the doctor is drawing and storing Flip's blood. As this is not a pleasant memory for him, he tries to forget it and think about good times with his parents instead (when they told him fairy tales, played games, and never took the chemical injections, etc.) as he sits on a hill above the graveyard.

**Chapter 2.** When he realizes it is time to go to work in the Nuketown plant, he leaves and on the way passes a large mansion, Sadist House, just as he does every day. It has always filled him with curiosity, and he notes that from the outside, it looks just like a fairy palace, and especially so at night. He muses briefly on the societal system and its harsh segregation of rich and poor, requiring that the poor work themselves to the bone for the rich to live so lushly ("Some say this is how they've fixed everything, made the world perfect. But this is how I know they really haven't"). While walking by the house today, he glimpses a girl standing in the window on the upper-most floor, looking like a statue. He confesses that he used to sneak into the mansion garden and play with this girl, Essie, and has fallen in love with her but stopped coming around when he started working. He ponders what his life might be like if he had been born into a family like hers, and then he continues on to work.

**Chapter 3.** Several uneventful days go by. Flip comes home to his adoptive family, exhausted after working in a steel and metal-works plant, converses briefly with his adoptive father Beau with whom he is close, avoids Beau's wife who feels he is a burden, and wakes up in the morning to do it all over again. One day, however, after returning home from work tired and covered in grime, Flip receives a message that he has been invited to Sadist House. He is at once excited and nervous, assuming that Essie wants to see him. But he stifles his feelings because he doesn't want to be found out. Beau remarks that if they had been better off, he would have given Flip some excitement to inject so that he could enjoy the event properly. Flip muses on the way that society processes emotion. Inherent emotion control has been genetically removed from the population so that injections are needed to experience emotion at all. Injections are costly and only the upper classes can afford to have them regularly. Flip is different, though, and experiences natural emotions without the aid of injections. He and his family have kept this a secret from everyone else, afraid that Flip's anomaly would jeopardize his safety. Even though it is tiresome, Flip pretends that he does not have inherent emotions so that he can appear to be like everyone else and not draw attention to himself.

**Chapter 4.** Finally the day of Flip's visit arrives, and he cleans up to the best of his ability and finds himself standing at the front gate of the mansion. He remembers crawling under the back gate when he was young in order to play with Essie in the overgrown garden. A camera, with some trouble (which greatly disturbs Flip), verifies his identity and lets him in. He is taken aback by the splendor of the house, but also by the coldness and darkness and corridors lined with locked doors. The maid, Julia, smiles often and makes up short ghost stories as she leads him through the house to meet with its



owner, Essie's grandmother, Miss Shavisham. The grim and proper old lady, who seems to be deteriorating in front of Flip, tells him that she has charitably selected him to be their new groundskeeper since he has some knowledge already of their garden. She has noticed him passing Satis House every day and remembers him from his supposedly secret childhood adventures in her garden. Flip notices a mischief in her eyes, and as he is taken out to survey the gardens, he notices Essie's grandmother nudging her toward him as she takes a chemical injection.

**Chapter 5.** Flip walks around the garden where he and Essie used to play, with Essie following close behind him. She explains that he is to come and work on the gardens every day, and tells him that he is to be well-paid for his work. All the plants are dead and decaying, the weeds are horribly overgrown, and the place is overrun with bugs. Flip is horrified as he remembers the beauty of the garden when he was a child. Flip asks Essie what happened to the garden, and she remarks casually that she doesn't quite remember, only that she stopped coming out to the garden and one day realized it had completely died. Essie returns inside, and Flip begins working tediously to restore the garden, both for his employer and for the sake of his fond memories of the place.

**Chapter 6.** After a couple weeks of working while Essie watches, Flip has seen no improvement in the garden. One day, Julia comes out into the garden to help and distracts Flip from his hopelessness by acting out ridiculous stories and telling him about her father, who was an artist (though a poor one rejected by society) before he died. Flip in turn tells Julia about his parents who also encouraged him to use his imagination. Julia, who notes offhandedly that she's never seen Flip use a chemical injection, continues to

come keep him company while he works on the garden, and Essie stops coming out, to his dismay. However, he notes that the garden is showing signs of improvement.

**Chapter 7.** After several days of working on the garden without seeing Essie at all, Flip arrives at the mansion to begin work for the day and is swiftly fired by Miss Shavisham without giving any reasons other than her being bored of him and his failure to eradicate the bugs. Crushed, he leaves and walks around the streets to clear his head, although it is particularly misty and foggy, and the streets are oddly empty. While thinking, he absentmindedly walks by the official government buildings in the heart of the city. As he strolls by one building, he notes that it is the laboratory in which chemical injections are researched and made. Although it is foggy and dismal out, he can see the large barred windows from outside the gates and, for a reason he doesn't know, he remembers what the bars look like from the inside. A guard sees and threatens him, telling him to move on.

**Chapter 8.** Flip is disheartened about his separation from Essie and confused about his memories, but he does not show these emotions for fear of his secret of not needing chemical injections being discovered. He also thinks about Julia's nonchalant comment and wonders if she knows his secret. Beau is able to help him return to his old job at the Nuketown steel plant. Working there after spending his days at Sadist House makes him more dissatisfied than before. However, notices that the inside of the plant reminds him strangely of the inside of Sadist House in their gigantic size and their shadowed and dark corners, sardonically calling them both fairy palaces in their own right. Flip's adoptive family notices his increasing discontent, and Beau offers to work

overtime so they can afford some injections of happiness. Flip is touched by Beau's selflessness but still yearns for Essie and her higher class of life.

**Chapter 9.** Ever since losing his garden job, Flip takes a different route to work, except for one day, out of habit, he passes Sadist House and sees Essie again in the window, standing still like a statue. When he returns home that night, another message is waiting for him, saying that someone has chosen to sponsor him for progression, meaning that an unnamed sponsor has paid for him to move into the city and take up governmental work as a member of higher society. Flip has a difficult time hiding his elation and shock, and is secretly sure that Essie's grandmother is his sponsor. Although Beau is sad to see him go, he understands that it is a wonderful opportunity. Flip daydreams about being with Essie, as her grandmother apparently believes they are a match. He prepares to move into the city.

**Chapter 10.** The next day, Flip is taken into the city and moved into a lush sort of apartment house for other young men being sponsored like himself. While taking in all the stateliness of the governmental buildings surrounding him, Flip meets his new housemate, Robert, who is loud and flamboyant and plans to spend all his extra sponsorship money on injections for different emotions he has yet to experience. As they all receive their apprenticeship assignments, Flip wonders when he will get to see Essie but also finds himself wondering about Julia. Rob is assigned to intern with the scientists while Flip is to intern at the justice building.

**Chapter 11.** As he begins training in the justice building, Flip learns all about the law and criminal procedures. He is surprised to learn that it is rather corrupt, but he seems to be the only one who notices. He is shown the prisons, which are carefully monitored,

and is told stories of many prisoners who seem to have been forced into a life of crime. Listening to discussions in the building, Flip realizes that the lawyers he must work with approach the law as a game to be played. Whoever pays the highest fee will win regardless of the implications of wrong and right. For perhaps the first time, Flip recognizes specific occurrences of corruption and recognizes the validity of problems and suffering outside of his own but feels powerless to do anything about it so decides to keep his head down and ignore it.

**Chapter 12.** During a break from work, Rob and Flip relax in the house and enjoy food and finery paid for by their sponsors. Rob is so giddy from an injection of excitement that Flip can barely keep up with him as they converse. But he listens as Rob spills every detail he has learned about the science department and how injections are made and the populations' emotions monitored. Flip begins to worry that in his new position, his lack of need for injections will be found out. He begins to wonder how this might affect his relationship with Essie and tries to rationalize the fact that if she does indeed love him, it will only ever be induced by chemical injections. Her induced love will fade after twenty four hours and will need to be replenished by daily chemical injections, just like all other injections of emotion. Flip decides he can live with this. He receives a message from Beau asking how he is doing. Flip wants to distance himself from that old life but feels guilty at the idea of cutting Beau out of his life altogether. Conflicted, he decides with the best of intentions that he will respond some other time.

**Chapter 13.** The next day Flip goes to work and assists one of the law officers at the prisons with checking prisoner data. While making the rounds, a guard slips Flip a note and disappears before he can stop him. The note asks Flip to meet the guard outside

of the science building after everyone else has gone home. Flip continues the rest of the day jittery and nervous, assuming that the note is Essie and that he will finally have a chance to meet up with her. When asked about his nervousness, he covers as he always does, claiming that he accidentally injected too much enthusiasm earlier in the day and it still hasn't worn off yet. The end of the day comes and Flip waits eagerly outside the building as it begins to drizzle.

**Chapter 14.** One of the prison guards meets Flip outside the science laboratory building. Flip holds back his confusion, fully believing that this meeting will in some way reunite him with Essie. Maintaining an air of secrecy, the guard, an older man whom Flip has noticed watching him a few times before, tells Flip that he must speak with him privately. He takes Flip a little ways outside the city to his house, a small but warm cottage-like building with a pond and gardens. The interior is also warm and strangely bright despite the dreary weather. The man, named Louis, sits down with Flip and confesses that he, not Miss Shavisham, is Flip's sponsor.

**Chapter 15.** Flip is dumbfounded by this confession as Louis begins to explain. He says that he would offer Flip an injection to induce tranquility but knows that it wouldn't do him any good. Louis explains that he was once the chief scientist at the laboratory doing research about emotion control and testing chemical injections. Once he saw the ways in which his work was abused and the ways in which it was detrimental to society, he began researching ways to reintroduce emotional autonomy, a genetic capability thought to have been eradicated long ago. He explains that Flip's father allowed him to take samples of Flip's blood in order to secretly study this capability that Flip was born with. The other scientists discovered his research, destroyed it, and had

him dismissed. He scraped together all his remaining money in order to sponsor Flip when he came of age so that perhaps he could help him continue his research and eventually reintroduce autonomous emotion control, ending the need for injections.

**Chapter 16.** Flip is appalled, shocked, and gravely disappointed that he has allowed his imagination to run away with him and over-exaggerate both his relationship with Essie and her grandmother's intentions. Unsure of whether or not to help in the research, he storms out of Louis' house and back to the apartment, where he finds Rob in a bit of a stupor from an injection of euphoria. Flip recounts all the night's events, relaying all of his confusion and indecision at what to do. He wants to pursue Essie and not help his uncle, which could disgrace them both. Rob admits that he has seen a locked vault full of secret research the scientists whisper about and suggests they steal and destroy it to protect Flip.

**Chapter 17.** According to plan, Rob breaks into the lab the following night to destroy the research. However, he uses the opportunity to steal injections, which he plans to sell in order to repay debts he has incurred. He accidentally kills a guard in the process, causing blame to fall on Louis. He returns to the apartment very calm because of injections but Flip panics, realizes Louis must escape the city, and is furious at Rob, who insists that he is just trying to provide for his young brother who is the only person in the world that he loves. Flip realizes he will never see Essie again but finds himself thinking about Julia and what the implications would have been for her if the research were to have been exposed.

**Chapter 18.** Flip makes Rob bring all the stolen injections and any evidence of the murder and goes to Louis' house. The young men tell Louis what has happened and

insist he leaves with them. Louis hurriedly packs, lamenting only that he never got a chance to right the wrongs he committed against society by developing the injections. The three try to escape out of the city by crossing the river by boat but they are discovered and in the frenzied attempt to escape the search party, their boat capsizes. Flip loses consciousness in the water.

**Chapter 19.** When Flip awakens, he is at Beau's house being nursed back to health by Julia. Beau and Julia explain that he has been gravely ill since he nearly drowned in the boat accident. Louis confessed to all of Rob's crimes and was executed in his place and Rob has fled the city because of his debts. Julia, who has been helping Beau since his wife died, has also taken in Rob's younger brother, who was left all alone. As Flip recovers, he and Julia begin to venture outside the house and take Rob's brother on outings. One day, they take a trip to Louis' cottage home and sit in the flowering garden, where Julia begins to tell Rob's brother a fairy tale.

### **Sample Chapter 15**

It's like someone's poured sludge into my head through my ears. Everything is frozen in my brain. And my paralysis seems to apply to my mouth, too, because when I try to speak, to repeat it back to Louis to make sure, I find that his words are stuck in my mouth. My tongue is heavy. My eyes burn. I feel electric.

Louis takes a deep breath, rubbing his hands together as if he'd been expecting all this, expecting me to react by forgetting how to breathe. He looks right into my eyes and smiles slightly, but there is no evidence of emotion or feeling there in the crooked angle of his upturned lips. Everyone around me is so well practiced at wearing fake emotions like masks on their faces that I sometimes forget they can't feel them.

“I’d offer you an injection for calmness, but I doubt it would do you any good,” he says.

And I thought I was ruined before. He knows, my God, he knows. All my thoughts come unstuck and I almost convince myself that I can feel them hitting against the inside of my skull. The top of my head aches with pressure. There are black dots starting to dance in the shadows of his house, in the corner near the door, as the ache in my head intensifies. I could get up and walk out, couldn’t I?

“...what do you mean?” I ask. Maybe I can play it all off. Maybe his words aren’t what I think they are.

“You are right – I should explain.” He stands and rubs his haggard, stubbled face. He crosses his arms and looks down, thinking. Sunken, his eyes are so sunken in. For the first time, I see how truly tired he is. What is it like to experience the pressure of a burden without any emotion attached to it? Is it easier or harder?

He continues, setting his shoulders back. “I was a scientist, once. The chief scientist. A while ago... I was the one who developed the regulatory injections.”

I sit forward slightly, and the old chair creaks. My movement stirs up the faint scent of dust and age, making my nose itch. He’s searching my face for some sign of recognition, I can tell, because his eyes remain locked onto mine even after I look down at my boots and his faded burgundy carpet.

“Although you don’t have any personal experience with the monster I’ve created, I’m sure you’ve noticed that it has not become the salvation of humanity that it was supposed to be...that I intended it to be all those years ago. While I was still young and bright eyed. And stupid.”



He comes nearer to me, slowly, and sits on the small table in front of me, his hands folded. His face is empty and still, like it's made of stone. "You don't have to keep up the charade. I know."

A sideways glance at him is all I can muster. His gaze is too uncomfortable to meet fully.

"You knew and yet you chose to..." I have to spit out the words quickly, they're burning inside my mouth like acid. "Sponsor me."

"It's why I chose to sponsor you. Well, that and other things. I developed these chemical injections, Flip, and you see what they have become. They were intended to provide a sense of control, predictability. Lead to peace."

We both know what the reality has become, and he knows he doesn't even have to say it. He would have explained it in scientific terms of utility, that it's not what's best for the greatest amount of people, it's not a system that runs smoothly. I know all of this, but there's more to it than that. There's Rob back in his room, probably concocting some elaborate scheme to make enough money to purchase his own private arsenal of all the chemical injections that will keep him feeling elated, confident, optimistic. Those are his favorite feelings and when he's off them...well. Then there's Essie. That day at the manor house when she had to inject herself just to be able to look at me. And Beau, living in an emotionless murk because he's too poor to afford happiness no matter how hard he works. I know well enough the dark effects that Louis' chemical injections have produced. It makes me sick, sick enough to wish that there was some injection for people like me, something to take the feelings away for a little bit. How ironic, that all I've

wanted this whole time is to be like them, when all they've been wanting is to be like me. They just don't know it yet.

"What did you think sponsoring me would do about it?" I hesitate after asking this, knowing he must want something from me. But there's still so much I want for myself. He takes a moment, refills his cup with water from the pitcher beside him on the table. His house is small but his proximity to me has to be unnecessary. He leans in toward me even further, and the sterile, biting scent of rubbing alcohol fills the air between us.

"I needed your help," he admits, his eyes only half-open and looking down, focused on the floor in front of him. "When I realized that this project had become something I never intended, I began researching solutions, ways to set things back on track. I remembered you."

"...remembered?" Something stirs in my head, I see it all again, as I had only a few days before: Light glinting off a steel examination table, and a man's crooked nose jutting out above a medical mask. Vials of blood, my parents holding gauze to my arm and smiling at me. Their faces are cloudy and vague like always, shadows of forgetfulness and the distance of too many years dissolving their features into blurs. I haven't been able to picture their faces in a long time. "You were the one they took me to, when I was younger..."

"I knew your father well. We were friends. He confided in me about his... *uniqueness*, and yours. I was mildly interested by it at the time, when my project was still in its initial stages. I took your blood and your fathers and promised to run some tests on in my spare time. For leisure."

I sit back hard and more dust particles mushroom up around me, hanging in the air above and beside me. “My father...him too?”

“Yes. But I never conducted the tests. I was too enraptured with the success of my injections to worry about a few anomalies...until the situation fell out of my hands and it became clear that anomaly was perhaps the only solution to the problem.” He stands now, taking to pacing the small area beside the chairs and table. With his head down and his hands clasped behind his back, I can easily imagine him in a white lab coat. In a medical mask. I’m finally filling in pieces of my disjointed memory. I finally see a face behind the crooked nose, and it belongs to Louis. Maybe my parents’ faces will follow in time.

“Solution?” I prompt him, and he pauses for only a moment to look at me with knit brows, as if he’s been pondering something else before being brought back to the present topic.

“When it became clear the injections were causing more harm than good, I finally tested your blood. I discovered that emotion control, or what’s left of it, is genetic. Despite the notion that inherent emotion control had been eradicated from the human DNA altogether, there is a recessive gene which carries it. Which you, and a projected very few others, have.” Louis stops pacing and faces me fully. “When I discovered this, I realized that extensive experimentation with this gene could potentially reintroduce inherent emotion control to the general population.”

His face is stone still and expressionless but I know my own astonishment is written all over my face. That would have to mean a whole new way of life, a turning of society on its head. Without the need for chemical injections for artificial emotion, everyone would be just like me...would that really be an improvement?

Louis begins again before I could object. “But the other scientists felt that this was a dangerous thing to experiment with. They believed, and believe still, in the efficacy of the injections. To undermine the project would be to give up control and subject all of us to uncontrollable forces that, as things are now, none of us would be prepared to handle. I was told I was playing with fire. My research was destroyed and I was displaced as chief of sciences. Demoted.”

Of course, his job as a prison guard. My stomach is folding in on itself and I can feel my heartbeat pounding in my head, in my temples, with a frenzied but rhythmic beat, each pulse radiating pain. I can’t stop picking at the skin around my fingernails, fidgeting in my chair like it’s stuffed with needles.

“With my research destroyed, I need you here. I took the sum they gave me to keep my research quiet and used it to sponsor you. I reasoned that with you here, in the city, you could assist me in continuing my research and perhaps, eventually, find a way to reintroduce inherent emotionality as a dominant gene into the human DNA.”

Louis pauses, waiting for my response. I can’t tell if he honestly expects me to jump at the chance with enthusiasm, or if he understands my apprehension. I can’t think straight as it is, but there is one thing that keeps my mind running in circles: Essie. Louis, and not her grandmother, was my sponsor. I can see clearly now that Miss Shavisham never truly intended to bring us together. There is a sharp sting in my thumb, and blood oozes from the spot near my nail that I’ve picked raw.

I still love her. If I assist Louis in his research and it is not well received, I will ruin what little chance I may still have to win her. But if it is well received and inherent emotion control can be restored to the population ... pinprick shivers run across my

shoulders, and down through my arms and core. She could yet love me back. Of her own free will, without needing some chemical. The realization of all the greatness I had expected upon learning I had been sponsored, it was all right there to be grasped still.

Without the need for the chemicals, Rob could focus on providing for his brother, like he's meant to from the beginning. And Beau. My throat thickens and I have to swallow back the choking feeling. Beau could finally have a chance at experiencing the light, floating weightlessness of happiness, the fluid and energetic rush of excitement. He deserves to know what those feelings are like.

But the risk. It could still all fall apart, it could hurt everyone I love. I would be punished, Beau would be punished, Essie would recoil from my disgrace. All of my expectations for greatness dashed and destroyed so easily. My heart hasn't stopped racing while Louis watches me and I study my hands to try and calm myself.

"I don't think I can do it." I meet his eyes and in them is no reaction to my words whatsoever.

"Logistically, the possible benefits far outweigh the costs –"

"You don't understand how this *feels!*" I don't decide to stand up but I find myself on my feet anyway. There is a boiling rage burning in my chest as I heave in breath after breath. What heaven it must be, I wonder. I long to know what it's like not to feel longing. To not have to suppress your desires because they've already been suppressed for you on a genetic level.

"Statistically –"

I am out the door, slamming it behind me and running, tearing through Louis' well-kept garden before my brain has caught up with my body. There is fog and it's

drizzling still, making me stumble a little as the dirt path leading away from Louis' house gives way to uneven pavement marking the way into the city. I will be back at the housing complex soon, where I can close myself away in my room and pretend that Essie's grandmother is still my sponsor and that I am normal, just like the rest of them.

I reach the housing complex in the middle of the city, its upper levels obscured from sight by either misty fog or factory smoke, or a mixture of the two, I can't tell. I take the stairs inside two at a time, jarred by the echo of my own heavy footsteps against the steel. I pause outside the door, fumbling with my key. Before the knob, I survey the shadowed hallway. Most everyone is asleep, probably. Dreaming, their brains constructing their own fairy palaces to deceive them of the fact that they are actually no more than thousands of greasy cogs in rusty machines in dismal factories. It is a good, helpful lie to believe. Sometimes lies are good to believe. Like, for example, the lie that Essie's grandmother is still my sponsor and I am normal, like the rest of them.

Essie's grandmother is still my sponsor. I am normal, like the rest of them.

Except sometimes is not all the time, and Louis the disgraced scientist is my sponsor. I am an anomaly, and what I choose to do about that could ruin everything.

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