

NEW GRUB STREET

A novel by George Gissing, first published 1891.

Adapted as a play for
radio by Lawrence Leonard

[Wattleborough parish church clock strikes eight as Mrs. Milvain calls upstairs.]

Mrs. Milvain: Jasper! Breakfast - and bring the morning paper with you, will you?

[Footsteps running downstairs. Jasper Milvain answers before he reaches the breakfast-room.]

Jasper Milvain: Coming, mother. [He enters the room.] There it is. It tells us that a man's being hanged in London at this very moment.

Mrs. M [pouring tea]: Surely it isn't necessary to go into that over breakfast? I can assure you that your poor dear father would have had you leave the room. In front of your sisters as well.

Dora Milvain: And in such a tone.

Mrs. M. Who is the poor unfortunate?

Jasper: I don't know - it just happened to catch my eye. There's a certain satisfaction in reflecting that it isn't oneself.

Maud Milvain: I do believe you're the most selfish brother in England. You refer everything back to yourself.

Jasper: Seeing that the fact confronted me, what else would you have me do? I could curse the brutality of an age that sanctioned such things or grow doleful over the poor fellow's misery, but none of those emotions would be of much profit. After all it might be me going out between Jack Ketch and the Chaplain instead of eating a fresh boiled egg with coffee as good as any you can buy in this part of the world - do try boiling the milk next time, mother; it makes such a difference.

Dora: Suppose we talk of something else?

Jasper: Instead of boiled milk, you mean? Certainly - what

about crime and punishment? At least a man who comes to be hanged has the satisfaction of knowing that he has brought society to its last resource. He is a man of such fatal importance that nothing will serve against him but the supreme effort of the law. In a way, you know, that is success.

Maud: I trust it's a success you never have to experience. By-the-by, there's a letter for you over there.

Jasper: Doubtless a commission for an article on capital punishment - give me your knife, sister mine. [The envelope is slit, the paper unfolded] It's from Rearden. As I thought, things are going badly with him. You know, he's just the sort of fellow that ends up poisoning himself.

Mrs.M: What a cynic you are, to be sure.

Jasper: Not at all; I'm a realist. I realize that Reardon isn't the type to make literary production a paying business. Because his first book had a sort of success he imagined his troubles were over. He got a hundred pounds for it and thought his income would increase in geometric proportion. When I hinted to him that he couldn't keep it up, he just smiled at me with amused tolerance. People like him come to grief.

Maud: The enjoyment with which he anticipates it, Mother.

Mrs.M: Is his wife the kind of person to grumble?

Jasper: I suspect she is. The girl wasn't content to go into modest rooms - they must furnish a flat. I rather wonder he didn't start a carriage for her. Well, his second book only brought in another hundred and even if he finishes this one, it's very doubtful if he'll get as much.

Dora: Perhaps John Yule may leave them something.

Jasper: Perhaps. But he may live another ten years, and he'd see them in Marylebone Workhouse before he advanced them sixpence, or I'm much mistaken. Her mother has only just enough to live upon, and her brother wouldn't lend her twopence halfpenny. No, Reardon's done the fatal thing - married a middle-class girl with no money. He needed either an heiress or a work-girl, and of the two, the latter would have been preferable.

Dora: How can you say that? You, who never cease talking about the advantages of money.

Jasper: Oh, I don't mean the work-girl would be preferable for