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A Tale of Two Cities: Part 03

Charles Dickens
"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."—Shakespeare.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES.

In Three Books.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

BOOK THE FIRST. RECALLED TO LIFE.

CHAPTER V. THE WINE-SHOP.

A large cask of wine had been dropped and broken, in the street. The accident had happened in getting it out of a cart; the cask had tumbled out with a run, the hoops had burst, and it lay on the stones just outside the door of the wine-shop, shattered like a walnut-shell.

All the people within reach had suspended their business, or their idleness, to run to the spot and drink the wine. The rough, irregular stones of the street, pointing every way, and designed, one might have thought, expressly to lame all living creatures that approached them, had damaged it into little pools; these were surrounded, each by its own jostling group or crowd, according to its size. Some men knelt down, made scoops of their two hands joined, and sipped, or tried to help women, who bent over their shoulders, to sip, before the wine had all run out between their fingers. Others, men and women, dipped in the puddles with little mugs of mutilated earthenware, or even with handkerchiefs from women's heads, which were squeeze dry into infants' mouths; others made small mud-embankments, to stem the wine as it started away in new directions; others, devoted, themselves to the sodden and lee-dyed pieces of the cask, licking, and even champing the moister wine-rotted fragments with eager relish. There was no drainage to carry off the wine, and not only did it all get taken up, but so much mud got taken up along with it, that there might have been a scavenger in the street, if anybody acquainted with it could have believed in such a miraculous presence.

A shrill sound of laughter and of amused voices—voices of men, women, and children—resounded in the street while this wine-game lasted. There was little roughness in the sport, and much playfulness. There was a special companionship in it, an observable inclination on the part of every one to join some other one, which led, especially among the luckier or lighter-hearted, to frolicsome embraces, drinking of healths, shaking of hands, and even joining of hands and dancing, a dozen together. When the wine was gone, and the places where it had been most abundant were raked into a gridiron-pattern by fingers, these demonstrations ceased, as suddenly as they had broken out. The man who had left his saw sticking in the firewood he was cutting, set it in motion again; the woman who had left on a door-step the little pot of hot ashes, at which she had been trying to soften the pain in her own starved fingers and toes, or in those of her child, returned to it; men with bare arms, matted locks, and cadaverous faces, who had emerged into the winter light from cellars, moved away to descend again; and a gloom gathered on the scene that appeared more natural to it than sunshine.

The wine was red wine, and had stained the ground of the narrow street in the suburb of Saint Antoine, in Paris, where it was spilled. It had stained many hands, too, and many faces, and many naked feet, and many wooden shoes. The hands of the man who saw the wood, left red marks on the billiet; and the forehead of the woman who nursed her baby, was stained with the stain of the old rag she wound about her head again. Those who had been greedy with the staves of the cask, had acquired a tigerish smear about the mouth; and one tall joker so besmirched, his head more out of a long squalid bag of a nightcap than in it, scrawled tigerish smear about the mouth; and one tall joker so besmirched, his head more out of a long squalid bag of a nightcap than in it, scrawled...
grown faces, and ploughed into every furrow of age and coming up afresh, was the sign, Hunger. It was prevalent everywhere. Hunger was pushed out of the tall houses, in the wretched clothing that hung upon poles and lines; Hunger was patched into them with straw and rag and wood and paper; Hunger was repeated in every fragment of the small modicum of fire-wood that the man saved off; Hunger stared down from the smokeless chimneys, and started up from the filthy street that had no offal, among its refuse, of anything to eat. Hunger was the inscription on the baker's shelves, written in every small loaf of his scanty stock of bad bread; at the sausage-shop, in every dead-dog preparation that was offered for sale. Hunger rattled its dry bones among the roasting chesnuts in the turned cylinder; Hunger was shred into atomies in every farthing stock of bad bread; at the sausage-shop, in every visible thing with a brooding look upon them that looked ill. In the hunted air of the people there was yet some wild-jeast thought of the possibility of turning at bay. Depressed and shinking though they were, eyes of fire were not wanting among them; nor compressed lips, white with what they suppressed; nor foreheads knitted into the likeness of the gallows-rope they nerved about enduring, or inflicting. The trade signs (and they were almost as many as the shops) were, all grim illustrations of Want. The butcher and the porkman painted up, only the leastest scrags of meat: the baker, the coarsest of meagre loaves. The people rudely pictured as drinking in the wine-shops, euroaked over their scanty measures of thin wine and beer, and were glowingly confidential together. Nothing was represented in a flourishing condition, save tools and weapons; but, the cutler's knives and axes were sharp and bright, the smith's hammers were heavy, and the gun-maker's stock was murderous. The crumbling stones of the pavement, with their many little reservoirs of sand and water, had no footways, but broke off abruptly at the doors. The kennel, to make amends, ran down the middle of the street—when it ran at all: which was only after heavy rains, and then it ran, by many eccentric fits, into the houses. Across the streets, at wide intervals, one clumsy lamp was slung by a rope and pulley; at night, when the lamp-lighter had let these down, and lighted, and hoisted them again, a feeble grove of dim wicks swung in a sickly manner overhead, as if they were at sea. Indeed they were at sea, and the ship and crew were in peril of tempest.

For, the time was to come, when the gaunt scarecrows of that region should have watched the lamp-lighter, in their idleness and hunger, so long, as to conceive the idea of improving on his method, and hauling up men by those ropes and pulleys, to flate upon the darkness of their condition. But, the time was not come yet; every wind that blow over France shook the rags of the scarecrows in vain, for the birds, fine of song and feather, took no warning.

The wine-shop was a corner shop, better than most others in its appearance and degree, and the master of the wine-shop had stood outside it, in a yellow waistcoat and green breeches, looking on at the struggle for the lost wine. "It's not my affair," said he, with a final shrug of his shoulders. "The people from the market did it. Let them bring another."

There, his eyes happening to catch the tall joker writing up his joke, he called to him across the way:

"Say then, my Gaspard, what do you do there?"

The fellow pointed to his joke with immense significance, as is often the way with his tribe. It missed its mark, and completely failed, as is often the way with his tribe too.

"What now? Are you a subject for the mad-hospital?" said the wine-shop keeper, crossing the road, and obligating the jest with a handful of wood, picked up for the purpose, and smeared over it. "Why do you write in the public streets? Is there—tell me thou—is there no other place to write such words in?"

In his exostipation he dropped his cleaner hand (perhaps accidentally, perhaps not), upon the joker's heart. The joker rapped it with his hand (perhaps accidentally, perhaps not), upon his stained shoes jerked off his foot into his hand, and held out. A joker of an extremely, not to say wolfishly, practical character, he looked, under those circumstances.

"Put it on, put it on," said the other. "Call wine, wine; and finish there." With that advice, he wiped his soiled hand upon the joker's dress, such as it was—quite deliberately, as having dircted the hand on his account; and then re-examined, and entered the wine-shop.

This wine-shop keeper was a bull-necked, martial-looking man of thirty, and he should have been of a hot temperament, for, although it was a bitter day, he wore no coat, but carried one slung over his shoulder. His shirt-sleeves were rolled up, too, and his brawny arms were bare to the elbows. Neither did he wear anything more on his head than his own crisply-curling short dark hair. He was a dark man altogether, with good eyes and a good bold breadth between them. Good-humoured-looking on the whole, but implacable-looking, too; evidently a man of a strong resolution and a set purpose; a man not desirable to be met, rushing down a narrow pass with a gulf on either side, for nothing would turn the man.

Madame Defarge, his wife, sat in the shop behind the counter as he came in. Madame Defarge was a stout woman of about his own age, with a watchful eye that seldom seemed to look at anything, a large hand heavily ringed, a steady face, strong features, and great composure of manner. There was a character about Ma-
Madame Defarge, from which one might have predicated that she did not often make mistakes against herself in any of the reckonings over which she presided. Madame Defarge being sensitive to cold, was wrapped in fur, and had a quantity of bright shawl twined about her head, though not to the concealment of her large earrings. Her knitting was before her, but she had laid it down to pick her teeth with a toothpick. Thus engaged, with her right elbow supported by her left hand, Madame Defarge said nothing when her lord came in, but coughed just one grain of cough. This, in combination with the lifting of her darkly defined eyebrows over her toothpick by the breadth of a line, suggested to her husband that he would do well to look round the shop among the customers, for any new customer who had dropped in while he stepped over the way.

The wine-shop keeper accordingly rolled his eyes about, until they rested upon an elderly gentleman and a young lady, who were seated in a corner. Other company were there: two playing cards, two playing dominoes, three standing by the counter clearing out a short supply of wine. As he passed behind the counter, he took notice that the elderly gentleman said in a look to the young lady, "This is our man."

"What the devil do you do in that galley there!" said Monsieur Defarge to himself; "I don't know you."

But, he feigned not to notice the two strangers, and fell into discourse with the triumvirate of customers who were drinking at the counter.

"How goes it, Jacques?" said one of those three to Monsieur Defarge. "Is all the spit wine swallowed?"

"Every drop, Jacques," answered Monsieur Defarge. When this interchange of christian name was effected, Madame Defarge, picking her teeth with her toothpick, coughed another grain of cough, and raised her eyebrows by the breadth of another line.

"It is not often," said the second of the three, addressing Monsieur Defarge, "that many of these miserable beasts know the taste of wine, or of anything but black bread and death. Is it not so, Jacques?"

"It is so, Jacques," Monsieur Defarge returned.

At this second interchange of the christian name, Madame Defarge, still using her toothpick with profound composure, coughed another grain of cough, and raised her eyebrows by the breadth of another line.

The last of the three now said his say, as he put down his empty drinking vessel and smacked his lips.

"Ah! So much the worse! A bitter taste it is that such poor cattle always have in their mouths, and hard lives they live, Jacques. Are I right, Jacques?"

"You are right, Jacques," was the response of Monsieur Defarge.

This third interchange of the christian name was completed at the moment when Madame Defarge put her toothpick by, kept her eyebrows up, and slightly rustled in her seat.

"Hold then! True!" muttered her husband.

"Gentlemen—my wife!"

The three customers pulled off their hats to Madame Defarge, with three flourishes. She acknowledged their homage by bending her head, and giving them a quick look. Then she glanced in a casual manner round the wine-shop, took up her knitting with great apparent calmness and repose of spirit, and became absorbed in it.

"Gentlemen," said her husband, who had kept his bright eye observantly upon her, "good day. The chamber, furnished bachelor-fashion, that you wished to see, and were inquiring for when I stepped out, is on the fifth floor. The way of the staircase gives on the little courtyard close to the left here," pointing with his hand, "near to the window of my establishment. But now that I remember, one of you has already been there, and can show the way. Gentlemen, adieu!"

They paid for their wine, and left the place. The eyes of Monsieur Defarge were studying his wife at her knitting, when the elderly gentleman advanced from his corner, and begged the favour of a word.

"Willingly, sir," said Monsieur Defarge, and quietly stepped with him to the door.

Their conference was very short, but very decided. Almost at the first word, Monsieur Defarge started and became deeply attentive. It had not lasted a minute, when he nodded and went out. The gentleman then beckoned to the young lady, and they, too, went out. Madame Defarge knitted with nimble fingers and steady eyebrows, and saw nothing.

Mr. Jarvis Lorry and Miss Manette, emerging from the wine-shop thus, joined Monsieur Defarge in the doorway to which he had directed his other company just before. It opened from a stinking little black court-yard, and was the general public entrance to a great pile of houses, inhabited by a great number of people. In the gloomy tile-paved entry to the gloomy tile-paved staircase, Monsieur Defarge beat down on one knee to the child of his old master, and put her hand to his lips. It was a gentle action, but not at all gently done; a very remarkable transformation had come over him in a few seconds. He had no good-humour in his face, nor any openness of expression left, but had become a secret, angry, dangerous man.

"It is very high; it is a little difficult. Better to begin slowly." Thus, Monsieur Defarge, in a stern voice, to Mr. Lorry, as they began ascending the stairs.

"Is he alone?" the latter whispered.

"Alone! God help him who should be with him!" said the other, in the same low voice.

"Is he always alone, then?"

"Yes."

"Of his own desire?"

"Of his own necessity. As he was, when I first saw him after they found me and demanded to know if I would take him, and, at
my peril, be discreet—as he was then, so he is now.”

“He is greatly changed?”

“Changed!”

The keeper of the wine-shop stopped to strike the wall with his hand, and mutter a tremendous curse. No direct answer could have been half so forcible. Mr. Lorry’s spirits grew heavier and heavier, and he and his two companions ascended higher and higher.

Such a staircase, with its accessories, in the older and more crowded part of Paris, would be bad enough now; but, at that time, it was vile indeed to uncustomed and unhardened senses. Every little habitation within the great foul nest of one high building—that is to say, the room or rooms within every door that opened on the general staircase—left its own heap of refuse on its own landing, besides flinging other refuse from its own windows. The uncontrollable and obscure impurities; the two bad sources combined made it almost insupportable. Through such an atmosphere, by a steep dark shaft of dirt and poison, the way lay. Yielding to his own disturbance of mind, and to his young companion’s agitation, which became greater every instant, Mr. Jarvis Lorry twice stopped to rest. Each of these stoppages was made at a doleful grating, and they stopped for the third time. There was no question by the young lady, turned himself about, that he would be frightened—rave—tear and rend—come to I know not what harm—if his door was left open.”

“This dialogue had been held in so very low a whisper, that not a word of it had reached the young lady’s ears. But, by this time she trembled under such strong emotion, and, her face expressed such deep anxiety, and, above all, such dread and terror, that Mr. Lorry felt it incumbent on him to speak a word or two of reassurance.

“Courage, dear miss! Courage! Business! The worst will be over in a moment; it is but passing the room door, and the worst is over. Then, all the good you bring to him, all the relief, all the happiness you bring to him, begin. Let our good friend here, assist you on that side. That’s well, friend Defarge. Come, now. Business, business!”

They went up slowly and softly. The staircase was short, and they were soon at the top. There, as it had an abrupt turn in it, they came all at once in sight of three men, whose heads were bent down close together at the side of a door, and who were intently looking into the room to which the door belonged, through some chinks or holes in the wall. On hearing footsteps close at hand, these three turned, and rose, and showed themselves to be the three of one name who had been drinking in the wine-shop.

“I forgot them, in the surprise of your visit,” explained Monsieur Defarge. “Leave us, good boys; we have business here.”

The three glided by, and went silently down. There appeared to be no other door on that floor, and the keeper of the wine-shop going straight to this one when they were left alone, Mr. Lorry asked him in a whisper, with a little anger:

“Do you make a show of Monsieur Manette?”

“I show him, in the way you have seen, to a chosen few.”

“Is that well?”

“I think it is well.”

“Who are the few? How do you choose them?”

“I choose them as real men, of my name—Jacques is my name—to whom the sight is likely to do good. Enough; you are English; that is another thing. Stay there, if you please, a little moment.”

With an admonitory gesture to keep them back, he stooped, and looked in through the crevice in the wall. Soon raising his head again, he struck twice or thrice upon the door—evidently with no other object than to make a noise there. With the same intention, he drew the key across it, three or four times, before he put it clumsily into the lock, and turned it as heavily as he could.

The door slowly opened inward under his hand, and he looked into the room and said something. A faint voice answered something.
Little more than a single syllable could have been spoken on either side.

He looked back over his shoulder, and beckoned them to enter. Mr. Lorry got his arm securely round the daughter's waist, and held her; for he felt that she was sinking.

"A—a—a—business, business!" he urged, with a moan of such was not of business shining on his cheek.

"Come in, come in!"

"I am afraid of it," she answered, shuddering.

"Of it? What?"

"I mean of him. Of my father."

Rendered in a manner desperate, by her state and by the becomer of their conductor, he drew over his neck the arm that shook up his shoulder, lifted her a little, and hurried her into the room. He set her down just within the door, and held her, clenching to her. Defarge drew out the key, closed the door, locked it on the inside, took out the key again, and held it in his hand. All this he did, methodically, and with as loud and harsh an accompaniment of noise as he could make. Finally, he walked across the room with a measured tread to where the window was. He stopped there, and faced round.

The garret, built to be a dry depository for firewood and the like, was dim and dark: for, the contrast must have been visible enough through some opening in the side of a window, and the contrast in the three of the wine-shop stood looking at him, a white-haired man sat on a low bench, stooping forward, and the other was opened but a very little way. The other door of French construction. To exclude the cold, one half of this door was fast closed, and the other was opened but a very little way. Such a scanty portion of light was admitted through the semicircle, that it was difficult, on first coming in, to see anything; and long habit alone could have paved it slowly in any one the ability to do any work requiring neatness in such obscurity. Yet, work of that kind was being done in the garret; for, with his back towards the door, and his face towards the window where the keeper of the wine-shop stood looking at him, a white-haired man sat on a low bench, stooping forward and very busy, making shoes.

ROSE AND TURNIPS.

A THOUSAND years ago, and again almost another thousand years ago, strong Rome, possessing Britain as a province, ground our corn and ate our oysters with a hearty appetite. The class of the long-haired, mustachioed and chin-shaven, tattoo-skinned, breeches-wearing original Britons wore the yoke restlessly; but it was firm upon their shoulders. They yielded up their warriers as Roman legionaries. A body of "Invincible younger Britons" was sent off to serve Rome in Spain. A like body of "Elder Britons" was sent to Illyria. There was a "twenty-sixth cohort of Britons" in Armenia. There was a troop of Britons forwarded even to Egypt. That was the shrewd policy of Rome. The warriors of every country were drained from it to maintain Roman dominion over any other than the fatherland. Into this land there came then, to replace the natural defenders of the soil, legions of Dacians, Thracians, Sarmatians, and even Romanised Indians and Moors. There has been picked up, in a field, trace also of an Egyptian among the men of Rome in Britain. For more than four centuries England was Roman. Rome herself may, during the first half of that time, have supplied many chief magistrates and military captains; furthermore, by the complex network of society, stray men, women, and children may have been drawn out of their home in Italy even as far as Britain. Let us believe also that enthusiastic epiures from Rome sometimes came over to Richborough (Rutupiae) for the oyster season. But they were the nations at large who were sent to possess us. Countries absorbed into the Roman empire supplied their own able-bodied natives bearing Roman arms, adopting Roman habits, and discarding even the dear mother tongue for that of Rome. They spoke Latin, indeed, and spelt it without absolute devotion to its grammar; they built also Roman villas without absolute adherence to the regulations laid down by Vitruvius. What they learnt best was to enrich themselves in the true oppressive Roman way upon the province within which they resided, while they remained true to discipline, and executed well the roads and military works on which they were employed. Soldiers begot not only more soldiers but also priests, traders, and tillers of the soil. There was no neglect of the commissariat; no lack of smiths and workers in metal or glass, coopers, potters, masons, carpenters, physicians. Races, no doubt, were mixed by intermarriage, but the Roman towns and the Roman towns in England, which grew ample and rich, as their inhabitants fattened upon the available wealth of the land, were first colonised or occupied by legionsaries differing in race, and certainly they had more points of contrast among themselves than one meets with to-day anywhere but on what are now called, as the coasts of Britain were then called, the confines of civilisation. The contrast must have been visible enough through the Roman varnish with which everything was coated. At Ellenhorough there were Spaniards and Dalmatians, at Brougham Ger-

man. Manchester was occupied by Frisians, Cirencester by Thracians and Indians, Wroxeter by Thracians. Now we are at Wroxeter, and have arrived there by a train of thought instead of the express train which conveyed us thither on a pleasant day some weeks ago.

Excavations at Wroxeter, the buried city of Uriconium. There was attraction in the news of these fresh diggings. Off we set, therefore. Let it be said, rather, off I set; for there was a time when I, too, was included in the toast of "All Friends Round the Wrekin." I have stood upon that large dropping from the spade of the arch enemy. He would block up the Severn with it, would he? I have stood on it in rainy and fair weather, at midnight and midsun. I have threaded its needle's eye, dipped in its mystic eagle's bowl, seen from its top the spread-