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A Tale of Two Cities: Part 04

Charles Dickens

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"I must bear it, if you let it in." (Laying the palest shadow of a stress upon the second word.)

The opened half-door was opened a little further, and secured at that angle for the time.

A broad ray of light fell into the garret, and showed the workman, with an unfinished shoe upon his lap, pausing in his labour. His few common tools and various scraps of leather were at his feet and on his bench. He had a white beard, raggedly cut, but not very long, a hollow face, and exceedingly bright eyes. The hollowness and thinness of his face would have caused them to look large, under his yet dark eyebrows and his confused white hair, though they had been really otherwise; but, they were naturally large, and looked unnaturally so. His yellow rags of shirt lay open at the throat, and showed his body to be withered and worn. He, and his old canvas frock, and his loose stockings, and all his poor tatters of clothes, had, in a long seclusion from direct light and air, faded down to such a dull uniformity of parchment-yellow, that it would have been hard to say which was which.

He had put up a hand between his eyes and the light, and the very bones of it seemed transparent. So he sat, with a steadfastly vacant gaze, pausing in his work. He never looked at the figure before him, without first looking down on this side of himself, then on that, as if he had lost the habit of associating place with sound; he never spoke, without first wandering in this manner, and forgetting to speak.

"Are you going to finish that pair of shoes to-day?" asked Defarge, motioning to Mr. Lorry to come forward.

"What did you say?"

"Do you mean to finish that pair of shoes to-day?"

"I can't say that I mean to. I suppose so. I don't know."

But, the question reminded him of his work, and he bent over it again.

Mr. Lorry came silently forward, leaving the daughter by the door. When he had stood, for a minute or two, by the side of Defarge, the shoemaker looked up. He showed no surprise at seeing another figure, but the unsteady fingers of one of his hands strayed to his lips as he looked at it (his lips and his nails were of the same pale lead-colour), and then the hand dropped to his work, and he once more bent over the shoe. The look and the action had occupied but an instant.

"Good day!" said Monsieur Defarge, looking down at the white head that bent low over the shoemaking.

It was raised for a moment, and a very faint voice responded to the salutation, as if it were at a distance:

"Good day!"

"You are still hard at work, I see?"

After a long silence, the head was lifted for another moment, and the voice replied, "Yes—I am working." This time, a pair of haggard eyes had looked at the questioner, before the face had dropped again.

The faintness of the voice was pitiable and dreadful. It was not the faintness of physical weakness, though confinement and hard fare no doubt had their part in it. Its deplorable peculiarity was, that it was the faintness of solitude and disuse. It was like the last feeble echo of a sound made long and long ago. So entirely had it lost the life and resonance of the human voice, that it affected the senses like a once beautiful colour, faded away into a poor weak stain. So sunken and suppressed it was, that it was like a voice underground. So expressive it was, of a hopeless and lost creature, that a tarnished traveller, wearied out by lonely wandering in a wilderness, would have remembered home and friends in such a tone before lying down to die.

Some minutes of silent work had passed, and the haggard eyes had looked up again: not with any interest or curiosity, but with a dull mechanical perception, beforehand, that the spot where the only visitor they were aware of had stood, was not yet empty.

"I want," said Defarge, who had not removed his gaze from the shoemaker, "to let in a little more light here. You can bear a little more?"

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"You have a visitor, you see," said Monsieur Defarge.
"What did you say?"
"Here is a visitor."
The shoemaker looked up as before, but without moving a hand from his work.
"Come!" said Defarge. "Here is monsieur, who knows a well-made shoe when he sees one. Show him that shoe you are working at. Take it, monsieur."

Mr. Lorry took it in his hand.
Tell monsieur what kind of shoe it is, and the maker's name."

There was a longer pause than usual, before the shoemaker replied:
"I forget what it was you asked me. What did you say?"
"I said, couldn't you describe the kind of shoe, for monsieur's information?"
"It is a lady's shoe. It is a young lady's walking-shoe. It is in the present mode. I have never saw the mode. I have had a pattern in my hand." He glanced at the shoe, with some little passing touch of pride.
"And the maker's name?" said Defarge.

Now that he had no work to hold, he laid the knuckles of the right hand in the hollow of the left, and then the knuckles of the left hand in the hollow of the right, and then passed a hand across his bearded chin, and so on in its regular changes, without a moment's intermission. The task of recalling him from the vacancy into which he always sank when he had spoken, was like recalling some very weak person from a swoon, or endeavouring, in the hope of some discovery, to stay the spirit of a fast-dying man.
"Did you ask me for my name?"

"Assuredly I did."
"One Hundred and Five, North Tower."
"Is that all?"
"One Hundred and Five, North Tower."

With a weary sound that was not a sigh, nor a groan, he bent to work again, until the silence was again broken.
"You are not a shoemaker by trade?" said Mr. Lorry, looking steadfastly at him. His haggard eyes turned to Defarge as if he would have transferred the question to him; but as no help came from that quarter, they turned back on the questioner when they had sought the ground.
"I am not a shoemaker by trade? No, I was not a shoemaker by trade. I— I learnt it here. I taught myself. I asked leave to—"

He lapsed away, even for minutes, ringing those measured changes on his hands the whole time. His eyes came slowly back, at last, to the face from which they had wandered; when they rested on it, he started, and resumed, in the manner of a sleeper that moment awake, reverting to a subject of last night.
"I asked leave to teach myself, and I get it with much difficulty after a long while, and I have made shoes ever since."

As he held out his hand for the shoe that had been taken from him, Mr. Lorry said, still looking steadfastly in his face:

"Monsieur Manette, do you remember nothing of me?"
The shoe dropped to the ground, and he sat looking fixedly at the questioner.
"Monsieur Manette?" Mr. Lorry laid his hand upon Defarge's arm; "do you remember nothing of this man? Look at him. Look at me. Is there no old banker, no old business, no old servant, no old time, rising in your mind, Monsieur Manette?"

As the captive of many years sat looking fixedly, by turns at Mr. Lorry and at Defarge, some long-obliterated marks of an actively intense intelligence in the middle of the forehead, gradually forced themselves through the black mist that had fallen on him. They were overclouded again, they were fainter, they were gone; but, they had been there. And so exactly was the expression repeated on the fair young face of her who had crept along the wall to point where she could see him, and where she now stood looking at him, with hands which at first had been only raised in frightened compassion, if not even to keep him off and shut out the sight of him, but which were now extending towards him, trembling with eagerness to lay the spectral face upon her warm young breast, and love it back to life and hope—so exactly was the expression repeated (though in stronger characters) on her fair young face, that it looked as though it had passed, like a moving light, from him to her.

Darkness had fallen on him in its place. He looked at the two, less and less attentively, ast his eyes in gloomy abstraction sought the ground and looked about him in the old way. Finally, with a deep long sigh, he took the shoe up, and resumed his work.

"Have you recognised him, monsieur?" asked Defarge, in a whisper.

"Yes; for a moment. At first I thought it quite hopeless, but I have unquestionably seen, for a single moment, the face that I once knew well. Hush! Let us draw further back! Hush!"

She had moved from the wall of the garret, very near to the bench on which he sat. There was something awful in his unconsciousness of the figure that could have put out its hand and touched him as he stooped over his labour.

Not a word was spoken, not a sound was made. She stood, like a spirit, beside him, and he bent over his work.

It happened, at length, that he had occasion to change the instrument in his hand, for his shoemaker's knife. It lay on that side of him which was not the side on which she stood. He had taken it up, and was stooping to work again, when his eyes caught the skirt or her dress. He raised them, and saw her face. The two spectators started forward, but she stayed them with a motion of her hand, as he stooped over his labour.

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degrees, in the pause of his quick and laboured breathing, he was heard to say:

"What is this?"

With the tears streaming down her face, she put her two hands to her lips, and kissed them to him; then clapped them on her breast, as if she laid his ruined head there.

"You are not the gaoler's daughter?"

She signed "No."

"Who are you?"

Not yet trusting the tones of her voice, she sat down on the bench beside him. He recollected, but she laid her hand upon his arm. A strange thrill struck him when she did so, and visibly passed over his frame; he laid the knife down softly, as he sat staring at her.

Her golden hair, which she wore in long curls, had been hurriedly pushed aside, and fell down over her neck. Advancing his hand by little and little, he took it up, and looked at it. In the midst of the action he went astray, and, with another deep sigh, fell to work at his shoemaking.

But, not for long. Releasing his arm, she laid her hand upon his shoulder. After looking doubtfully at it, or two, three times, as if to be sure that it was really there, he laid down his work, put his hand to his neck, and took off a thickened string with a scrap of folded rag attached to it. He opened this, carefully, on his knee, and it contained a very little quantity of hair: not more than one or two long golden hairs, which he had, in some old day, wound off his knee, and attached to it. He opened this, carefully, on his knee, and it contained a very little quantity of hair; not more than one or two long golden hairs, which he had, in some old day, wound off his knee, and attached to it. He opened this, carefully, on his knee, and it contained a very little quantity of hair; not more than one or two long golden hairs, which he had, in some old day, wound off his knee, and attached to it.

But it was found spoken words for it, they came to him coherently, though slowly.

"How was this? — Was it you?"

"If you hear in my voice — I don't know that it is so, but I hope it is — if you hear in my voice any resemblance to a voice that once was sweet music in your ears, weep for it, weep for it! If you touch, in touching my hair, anything that recalls a beloved head that lay in your breast when you were young and free, weep for it, weep for it! If, when I hint to you of a Home long desolate, while your poor heart pined away, weep for it, weep for it!"

"If, when I tell you, dearest dear, that your agony is over, and that I have come here to take you from it, and that we go to England to be at peace and at rest, I cause you to think of your useful life laid waste, and of our native France so wicked to you, weep for it, weep for it! And if, when I shall tell you of my name, and my father who is living, and of my mother who is dead, you learn that I have to kneel to you, and implore his pardon for having never for his sake striven all day and lain awake and wept all night, because the love of my poor mother hid his torture from me, weep for it, weep for it! Weep for her, then, and for me! Good gentlemen, thank God! I feel his sacred tears upon my face, and his sobs strike against my heart. O, see! Thank God for us, thank God!"

He had sunk in her arms, with his face dropped on her breast; a sight so touching, yet so terrible in the tremendous wrong and suffering which had gone before it, that the two beholders covered their faces.

When the quiet of the garret had been long undisturbed, and his heaving breast and shaken form had long yielded to the calm which must follow all storms—emblem to humanity, of the rest and silence into which the storm called...
Life must hush at last—they came forward to raise the father and daughter from the ground. He had gradually drooped to the floor, and lay there in a lethargy, worn out. She had nestled down with him, that his head might lie upon her arm; and her hair drooping over him curtained him from the light.

"If, without disturbing him," she said, raising her hand to Mr. Lorry as he stooped over them, "could be arranged for our leaving Paris at once, so that, from the very door, he could be taken away—"

"But, consider. Is he fit for the journey?" asked Mr. Lorry.

"More fit for that, I think; than to remain in this city, so dreadful to him." "It is true," said Defarge, who was kneeling to look on and hear. "More than that: Monsieur Mme. Manette is, for all reasons, best out of France. Say, shall I hire a carriage and post-horses?"

"That's business," said Mr. Lorry, resuming on the shortest notice his methodical manners; "and if business is to be done, I had better do it."

"Then be so kind," urged Miss Manette, "as to leave us here. You see how composed he has become, and you cannot be afraid to leave him with me now. Why should you be? If you will lock the door to secure us from interruption, I do not doubt that you will find him, when you come back, as quiet as you leave him. In any case, I will take care of him until you return, and then we will remove him straight."

Both Mr. Lorry and Defarge were rather disinclined to this course, and in favour of one of them remaining. But, as there were not only carriages and horses to be seen to, but travelling papers; and as time pressed, for the day was drawing to an end, it came at last to their hastily dividing the business that was necessary to be done, and hurrying away to do it.

Then, as the darkness closed in, the daughter laid her head down on the hard ground close at the father's side, and watched him. The darkness deepened and deepened, and they both lay quiet, until a light gleamed through the chinks in the wall.

Mr. Lorry and Monsieur Defarge had made all ready for the journey, and had brought with them, besides travelling cloaks and wrappers, bread and meat, wine, and hot coffee. Monsieur Defarge put this provender, and the lamp he carried, on the shoemaker's bench (there was nothing else in the garret but a pallet bed), and he and Mr. Lorry roused the captive, and assisted him to his feet.

No human intelligence could have read the wild, lost manner of occasionally assisted him to his feet. He had a wild, lost manner of occasionally clasping his head in his hands, that had not been seen in him before; yet, he had some pleasure in the mere sound of his daughter's voice, and invariably turned to it when she spoke.

In the submissive way of one long accus- tomed to obey under coercion, he ate and drank what they gave him to eat and drink, and put on the cloak and other wrappings that they gave him to wear. He readily responded to his daughter's drawing her arm through his, and took—kept—her hand in both of his own.

They began to descend; Monsieur Defarge going first with the lamp, Mr. Lorry closing the little procession. They had not traversed many steps of the long main staircase when he stopped, and stared at the roof and round at the walls.

"You remember the place, my father? You remember coming up here?"

"What did you say?"

But, before she could repeat the question, he murmured an answer as if she had repeated it. "Remember? No, I don't remember. It was so very long ago."

That he had no recollection whatever of having been brought from his prison to that house, was apparent to them. They heard him mutter, "One hundred and five, North Tower," and when he looked about him, it evidently was for the strong fortress-walls which had long compassed him. On their reaching the courtyard, he instinctively altered his tread, as being in expectation of a drawbridge; and when there was no drawbridge, and he saw the carriage waiting in the open street, he dropped his daughter's hand and clasped his head again.

No crowd was about the door; no people were discernible at any of the many windows; not even a chance passer-by was in the street. An unnatural silence and desertion reigned there. Only one soul was to be seen, and that was Madame Defarge—who leaned against the door-post, knitting, and saw nothing.

The prisoner had got into the coach, and his daughter had followed him, when Mr. Lorry's feet were arrested on the step by his asking, 'Remember? No, I don't remember.'—and immediately after wards leaned against the door-post, knitting, and saw nothing.

Defarge got upon the box, and gave the word "To the Barrier!" The postilion cracked to his whip, and they clattered away under the feeble over-swinging lamps. Under the over-swinging lamps—swinging ever brighter in the better streets, and ever dimmer in the worse—and by lighted shops, gay crowds illuminated coffee-houses, and theatre doors, one of the city gates. Soldiers with lamps at the guard-house then said, "Your papers, travellers!"—"See here then, Monsieur the
Officer," said Defarge, getting down, and taking him gravely apart, "these are the papers of monsieur inside, with the white head. They were consigned to me, with him, at the "He.") His Majesty changed his manners every five years; or rather, they were changed with every administration. Bungaree, like many others (of whom the name of Bungaree is not familiar; but I conceive it right that the whole world should know something of this departed monarch, and of his habits and peculiarities. Honoured, as I was, by his favour, politely expected, as I always was whenever I met his Majesty in the streets of Sydney, I had never spoken a word to him, as I was, when he invited me occasionally to accompany him in his boat to "go kedge fiss," I consider myself as well qualified to become his biographer as was Mr. Boswell to write the life of Doctor Johnson, or Lord John Russell that of Thomas Moore.

Bungaree and myself were contemporaries; but there was a vast difference between our ages. When I first knew him, he was an old man, over sixty, and I a boy of twelve. It would be false to say that I cannot account for the great liking the king always had for me; for, the truth is, I was in the habit of lending him small sums of money, bread and meat, and not unfrequently a glass of rum. Many a time have I, slyly, visited the larder, and the decanters on the sideboard, to minister to the wants of the monarch. I used the word "lend," because the king never said "give." It was invariably "len' it half a dump" (7½d.), "len' it glass o' grog," "len' it loaf o' bread," "len' it ole shirt."}

Although in some respects the memory of King Bungaree was as extraordinary as that of the late King George the Third, he was utterly oblivious to the extent of his obligations, so far as repayment was concerned. In person, King Bungaree was about five feet eight inches high, not very stout and not very thin, except as to his legs, which were more spindles. His countenance was benignant to the last degree, and there was a kind and humorous sparkle in his eye (especially when it was lighted up by liquor), which was, to say the least of it, very cheerful to behold.

King Bungaree's dress consisted of the cocked hat and full dress-coat of a general officer or colonel, an old shirt, and—that was all. I never saw him in pantaloons, or shoes, or stockings. Once, I remember he wore a worried sock on his left foot; but that was in consequence of having wounded himself by treading on a broken bottle.

As the king was a person of irregular habits, he generally slept as well as fished in his clothes, and his tailor's bill would have been enormous, even if he had had a tailor; but, as he "borrowed" his uniform, as well as his money, bread, and rum, his finances were in no way embarrased. Every new governor, from Governor Macquarie down to Governor Gipps (during whose administration Bungaree died), supplied him with an old cocked-hat and full dress-coat, and almost every colonel commanding a regiment instantly complied when his Majesty pronounced these words: "Len' it cock-at—len' it cost—len' it ole shirt." Around his neck was suspended, by a chain, a brass plate. On this plate, which was shaped like a half moon, were engraved, in large letters, the words:

"BUNGAREE, KING OF THE BLACKS.

On the plate there was also engraved the arms of the colony of New South Wales—an eagle and a kangaroo.

In point of intelligence and natural ability, King Bungaree was far from deficient. He was, in truth, a clever man; and not only did he understand all that was said to him in English, but he spoke the language so as to be completely understood, except when his articulation was impaired by the too copious use of ardent spirits, or other fermented liquors. His Majesty changed his manners every five years; or rather, they were changed with every administration. Bungaree, like many of the aborigines of New South Wales, was an amazing mimic. The action, the voice, the bearing, the attitudes, the walk, of any man, he could personate with astonishing minuteness. It mattered not whether it was the attorney-general stating a case to a jury, the chief justice sentencing a culprit to be hanged, a colonel drilling a regiment in the barrack-square, a Jew bargaining for old clothes, a drunken sailor resisting the efforts of the police to quiet him—King Bungaree could, in mere dumb show, act the scene in such a way as to give you a perfect idea of it.