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A Tale of Two Cities: Part 14

Charles Dickens

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guished, players at dominoes musingly built towers with them, drinkers drew figures on the tables with spilt drops of wine, Madame Defarge herself picked out the pattern on her sleeve with her toothpick, and saw and heard something inaudible and invisible a long way off.

Thus, Saint Antoine in this vinous feature of his, until mid-day. It was high noontide, when two dusty men passed through his streets and under his swinging lamps; of whom, one was Monsieur Defarge: the other, a mender of roads in a blue cap. All adust and athirst, the two entered the wine-shop. Their arrival had lighted a kind of fire in the breast of Saint Antoine, fast spreading as they came along, which stirred and flickered in flames of faces at most doors and windows. Yet, no one had followed them, and no man spoke when they entered the wine-shop, though the eyes of every man there were turned upon them.

"Good day, gentlemen!" said Monsieur Defarge.

It may have been a signal for loosening the general tongue. It elicited an answering chorus of "Good day!"

It is bad weather, gentlemen," said Defarge, shaking his head. Upon which, every man looked at his neighbour and then all cast down their eyes and sat silent. Except one man, who got up and went out.

"My wife," said Defarge aloud, addressing Madame Defarge; "I have travelled certain leagues with this good mender of roads, called Jacques. Give him to drink, my wife!"

A second man got up and went out. Madame Defarge set wine before the mender of roads called Jacques, who doffed his blue cap to the company, and drank. In the breast of his blouse, he carried some coarse dark bread; he ate of this between whiles, and sat munching and drinking near Madame Defarge's counter. A third man got up and went out.

Defarge refreshed himself with a draught of wine—but, he took less than was given to the stranger, as being himself a man to whom it was no rarity—and stood waiting until the countryman had made his breakfast. He looked at no one present, and no one now looked at

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."—Shakespeare.
him; not even Madame Defarge, who had taken up her knitting, and was at work.

"Have you finished your repast, friend?" he asked, in due season.

"Yes, thank you;"

"Come then! You shall see the apartment that I told you could occupy. It will suit you to a marvel."

Out of the wine-shop into the street, out of the street into a court-yard, out of the court-yard up a steep staircase, out of the staircase into a garret—formerly the garret where a white-haired man sat on a low bench, stooping forward and very busy, making shoes.

No white-haired man was there now; but, the three men were there who had gone out of the wine-shop singly. Between them and the white-haired man afar off, was the one small link, that they had once looked in at him—through the chinks in the wall.

Defarge closed the door carefully, and spoke in a subdued voice:

"Jacques One, Jacques Two, Jacques Three! This is the witness encountered by appointment, by me, Jacques Four. He will tell you all.

"Speak, Jacques Five!"

The mender of roads, blue cap in hand, wiped his swarthy forehead with it, and said, "Where shall I commence, monsieur?"

"Commence," was Monsieur Defarge's unreasonably reply, "at the commencement."

"I saw him then, messieurs," began, the mender of roads, "a year ago this running summer, underneath the carriage of the Marquis, hanging by the chain. Behold the manner of it. I leaving my work on the road, the sun going to bed, the carriage of the Marquis slowly ascending the hill, he hanging by the chain—like this."

Again, the mender of roads went through the old performance, in which he ought to have been perfect by that time, seeing that it had been the infallible resource and indispensable entertainment of his village during a whole year.

Jacques One struck in, and asked if he had ever seen the man before?

"Never," answered the mender of roads, recovering his perpendicular.

Jacques Three demanded how he afterwards recognised him then?

"By his tall figure," said the mender of roads, softly, and with his finger at his nose.

"When Monsieur the Marquis demands that evening, 'Say, what is he like?' I make response, 'Tall as a spectre.'"

"You should have said, short as a dwarf," returned Jacques Four.

"But what did I know! The deed was not then accomplished, neither did he confide in me. Observe! Under those circumstances even, I do not offer my testimony, Monsieur the Marquis introduces me with his finger, standing near our little fountain, and says, 'To me! Bring that rascal!' My faith, messieurs, I offer nothing."

"He is right there, Jacques," murmured Defarge, to him who had interrupted. "Go on!"

"Good!" said the mender of roads, with an air of mystery. "The tall man is lost, and he is sought—how many months? Nine, ten, eleven?"

"No matter, the number," said Defarge.

"He is well hidden, but at last he is unckicked found. Go on!"

"I am again at work upon the hill-side, and the sun is again about to go to bed. I see my looting my tools to descend to my cottage door, in the village below, where it is already dark, when I raise my eyes, and see coming over the hill, six soldiers. In the midst of them is a tall man with his arms bound—tied to his sides, in this!"

With the aid of his indispensable cap, he presented a man with his elbows bound fast at his hips, with cords that were knotted behind him.

"I stand aside, messieurs, by my box of stones, to see the soldiers and their prisoner pass (for it is a solitary road, that, when my spectacle is well worth looking at), and at last, as they approach, I see no more than that the two-six soldiers with a tall man bound, and that they are almost black, to my sight—except on the side of the sun going to bed, where they have red edge, messieurs. Also, I see that the shadows are on the hollow ridge on the opposite side of the road, and are on the hill above and are like the shadows of giants. Also, I see that they are covered with dust, and that they moves with them as they come, tramp, tramp—spectacle is well worth looking at, first evening when he and I first encountered, due to the same spot!"

He described it as if he were there, and is no evident that he saw it vividly, perhaps he had not seen much in his life.

"I do not show the soldiers that I recognise the tall man; he does not show the soldiers that he recognises me; we do it, and we know it with our eyes. Come on! says the chief of the company, pointing to the village, 'bring him to his tomb!' and they hem him faster. I follow. His arms are swollen because of being bound so tight, his wooden shoes are large and clumsy, and he is lame. Because he is lame, and consequently slow, they drive him with the guns—like this!"

He imitated the actions of a man's being impelled forward by the butt-ends of muskets.

"As they descend the hill like madmen running a race, he falls. They lose him and pick him up again. His face is bleeding and covered with dust, but he cannot touch it; thereupon, they laugh again. They bring him into the village; all the village runs to look. They take him past the mill, and up into prison; all the village sees the prison gate open in the darkness of the night, and swallow itself like this!"

He opened his mouth as wide as he could, and shut it with a sounding snap of his teeth.
Defarge and the three glanced darkly at one another. The looks of all of them were dark, expressed, and revengeful, as they listened to the countryman's story; the manner of all of them, while it was secret was authoritative too.

They had the air of a rough tribunal; Jacques One and Two sitting on the old pallet-bed, with his chin resting on his hand, and his eyes intent on the road mender; Jacques Three, equally intent, on one knee behind them, with his agitated hand always gliding over the network of fine nerves about his mouth and nose; Defarge standing between them and the narrator whom he had stationed, in the light of the window, by turns looking from him to them and from them to him.

"Go on Jacques," said Defarge.

"He remains up there in his iron cage, some days. The village looks at him by stealth, for it is afraid. But it always looks up, from a distance, at the prison on the crag; and in the evening when the work of the day is achieved and it assembles to gossip at the fountain, all faces are turned towards the prison. Formerly, they were turned towards the posting-house; now, they are turned towards the prison. They whisper at the fountain, that although condemned to death he will not be executed; they say that petitions have been presented in Paris, showing that he was unstrung and made mad by the death of his child; they say that a petition has been presented to the King himself. What do I know? It is possible. Perhaps yes, perhaps no."

"Listen then, Jacques," Number One of that name sternly interposed. "Know that a petition was presented to the King and Queen. All here, yourself excepted, saw the King take it, in his hand on Sunday night when all the village is asleep, come soldiers, winding down from the prison, and their guns ring on the stones of the little street. Workmen dig, workmen hammer, soldiers laugh and sing; in the morning, by the fountain, there is raised a gallows forty feet high, poisoning the water."

The mender of roads looked through rather than at the low ceiling, and pointed as if he saw the gallows somewhere in the sky.

"All work is stopped, all assemble there, nobody lends the cows out, the cows are there with the rest. At mid-day, the roll of drums. Soldiers have marched into the prison in the night, and he is in the midst of many soldiers. He is bound as before, and in his mouth there is a gag—tied so, with a tight string, making him look almost as if he laughed. He suggested it, by creasing his face with his two thumbs, from the corners of his mouth to his ears. "On the top of the gallows is fixed the knife, blade upwards, with its point in the air. He is hanged there forty feet high—and is left hanging, poisoning the water."

They looked at one another, as he used his blue cap to wipe his face, on which the per-
spiration had started afresh while he recalled
the spectacle.

"It is frightful, messieurs. How can the women
and the children draw water! Who can gossip
of an evening, under that shadow! Under it,
have I said? When I left the village, Monday,
evening as the sun was going to bed, and looked
back from the hill, the shadow struck across the
church, across the mill, across the prison-
and the children draw water! Who can gossip
of an evening, under that shadow! Under it,
back from the hill, the shadow struck across the
church, across the mill, across the prison—
seemed to strike across the earth, messieurs, to
where the sky rests upon it!"

The hungry man gnawed one of his fingers as
he looked at the other three, and his finger
quivered with the craving that was on him.

"That's all, messieurs. I left at sunset (as
I had been warned to do), and I walked on, that
night and half next day, until I met (as I was
warned I should) this comrade. With him, I
came on, now riding and now walking, through
the rest of yesterday and through last night.
And here you see me!"

After a gloomy silence, the first Jacques said,
"Good! You have acted and recounted, faith-
fully. Will you wait for us a little, outside the
door?"

"Very willingly," said the mender of roads.
Whom Defarge escorted to the top of the stairs,
and, leaving seated there, returned.

"How say you, Jacques?" demanded Number
One. "To be registered?"

"To be registered, as doomed to destruction,"
returned Defarge.

"Magnificent!" croaked the man with the
craving.

"The chateau, and all the race?" inquired the
first.

"The chateau and all the race," returned
Defarge. "Extermination."

The hungry man repeated, in a rapturous
crack, "Magnificent!" and began gnawing
another finger.

"Are you sure?" asked Jacques Two, of
Defarge, "that no embarrassment can arise from
our manner of keeping the register. Without
doubt it is safe, for no one beyond ourselves can
decipher it; but shall we always be able to de-
cipher it—or, I ought to say, will she?"

"Jacques," returned Defarge, drawing him-
self up, "if madame my wife undertook to keep
the register in her memory alone, she would not
lose a word of it—not a syllable of it. Knitted,
in her own stitches and her own symbols, it will
always be as plain to her as the sun. Confide in
Madame Defarge. It would be easier for the
weakest poltroon that lives, to erase himself
from existence, than to erase one letter of his
name or crimes from the knitted register of
Madame Defarge."

There was a murmur of confidence and ap-
proval, and then the man who hungered, asked:
"Is this rustic to be sent back soon? I hope so.
He is very simple; is he not a little dangerous?"

"He knows nothing," said Defarge; "at
least nothing more than would easily elevate him-
self to a gallows of the same height. I charge
myself with him; let him remain with me; I
will take care of him, and set him on his head.
He wishes to see the fine world—the King, the
Queen, and Court; let him see them on Sunday."

"What?" exclaimed the hungry man, stagger-
ing. "Is it a good sign, that he wishes to see Royalty
and Nobility?"

"Jacques," said Defarge; "indulgently show a
cat, milk, if you wish her to thirst for it.
Indulgently show a dog his natural prey, if you
wish him to bring it down one day."

Nothing more was said, and the mender of
roads, being found already dozing on the top-
most stair, was advised to lay himself down on
the pallet-bed and take some rest. He needed
no persuasion, and was soon asleep.

Worse quarters than Defarge's wine-shop, could
easily have been found in Paris for a provincial
slave of that degree. Saving for a mysterious
dread of madame by which he was constant-
haunted, his life was very new and agreeable.
But, madame sat all day at her counter, so
expressly unconscious of him, and so perfectly
determined not to perceive that his being there
had any connexion with anything below in
surface, that he shocked in his wooden skin
whenever his eye lighted on her. For, he re-
tended with himself that it was impossible a
foresee what that lady might pretend next; as
he felt assured that if she should take it into
brightly ornamented head to pretend that
she had seen him do a murder and afterwards
the victim, she would infallibly go through it
so as to have madame in the
to restore him, he was fortunate in hav-
crowd in the afternoon, still with her knitting in
way there, in a public conveyance; it was addi-
tionally disconcerting yet, to nave madame in the
himself with his blue cap: feeling it mightily
disconcerting to have madame knitting all the
time there, in a public conveyance; it was addi-
tionally disconcerting, to have madame in the
crowd in the afternoon, still with her knitting
her hands as the crowd waited to see the or-
riage of the King and Queen.

"You work hard, madame," said a man as
her.

"Yes," answered Madame Defarge; "I have
a good deal to do."

"What do you make, madame?"

"Many things."

"For instance?"

"For instance," returned Madame Defarge,
composedly, "shrouds."

The man moved a little further away, as sur-
ran he could, and the member of roads fancied
himself with his blue cap: feeling it mightily
close and oppressive. If he needed a King and
Queen to restore him, he was fortunate in hav-
ing his remedy at hand; for, soon the large-
faced King and the fair-faced Queen came in
Bull's Eye of their Court, a glittering multi-
and in jewels and silks and powdered and splendid
and elegantly spuming figures and handsomely
faced King and the fair-faced Queen came in
Bull's Eye of their Court, a glittering multi-
and in jewels and silks and powdered and splendid
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Charles Dickens.]

[July 30, 1859.]

DRIFT.

The reader who swears by the "good old days," will, perhaps, be satisfied to accept the following amusing picture of domestic life in the beginning of the fifteenth century, which is drawn from the "inquisitions ad quoddam nam," a series of documents forming an important portion of the Chancery division of our National Records. These inquisitions are most of them taken to show the King whether it will be to "the damage or injury of him or any one else," if he allow lands to be given in mortmain; but, as in the case before us, inquiries upon other matters have been interpolated with this class of records.

King Henry the Fifth having been given to understand that an outrage had been committed on the person of one of his subjects, John Mortimer, of Grendon, in Northamptonshire, issued his writ, on the third day of December in the first year of his reign, to his beloved and faithful John Cokayn, Sir John Bynes, Thomas Wydeville, John Barton, junior, William Palmer, William Wakefield, and John Goffard, appointing them his Commissioners to inquire into the case; which they, having duly summoned a jury, accordingly did at Northampton Castle, on the Thursday before Christmas. Christmas, in that year, 1413, fell on a Monday.

The result of their researches appears below, translated from the Latin; and I pray all who read it, to take breath for an awfully involved sentence. Latin seribes were always a long-winded race.

The jurors say, that whereas John Mortimer, of Grendon, Esquire, was sitting in his mansion house of Grendon aforesaid, at the dawn, busy about the shaving of his beard, his beard being in part shaved, and in part not shaved, clothes not on his body, only his doublet, without a hood or any other covering to his body, a certain William Trussell, Esquire, of Eston Maudyt, Junior, John Malpas, otherwise Kettell, and others, varlets of the aforesaid William Trussell, with many other malefactors of the counties of Chester and Stafford, whose names at present are unknown, in great multitude and armed in force, led on by the conspiracy, confederacy, and malice prepense of the aforesaid William Trussell and others, to the terror and perturbation of the Lord the King's people, riding on horseback, with force of arms, and arrayed in warlike manner, namely, with coats of fence, jakkes, bows, arrows, swords, one-handed and two-handed, hoods of mail, and daggers, on Sunday (these were the days when the clergy possessed great moral influence) next after the feast of St. Hugh the Bishop, in the first year of the reign of King Henry the Fifth from the Conquest, broke into the closes and mansion house of the aforesaid John Mortimer, at Grendon aforesaid, against the peace of the Lord the King, and then and there insulted the said John Mortimer, beat, imprisoned, and ill-treated him, some of the aforesaid malefactors shouting, "Sle, sle, sle, sle," and others of the aforesaid malefactors shouting, "Houghsaynowkyn, Houghsaynowkyn" (Hoeck, sinew, ham) and string him! for which the inconstant state of his costume afforded a tempting facility, and (evidently confident in the justice of their cause and the strength of their jakkes, &c.) "let us hastily depart."

And they the said John Mortimer thus made prisoner, led, with daggers and other weapons pointed to his heart, and violent and malicious threats of death, away with them to Eston aforesaid, and him there as well as at Grendon

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