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A Tale of Two Cities: Part 16

Charles Dickens

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BOOK THE SECOND.  THE GOLDEN THREAD.

CHAPTER XVII.  ONE NIGHT.

Never did the sun go down with a brighter glory on the quiet corner in Soho, than one memorable evening when the Doctor and his daughter sat under the plane-tree together. Never did the moon rise with a milder radiance over great London, than on that night when it found them still seated under the tree, and shone upon their faces through its leaves.

Lucie was to be married to-morrow. She had reserved this last evening for her father, and they sat alone under the plane-tree.

"You are happy, my dear father?"

"Quite, my child."

They had said little, though they had been there a long time. When it was yet light enough to work and read, she had neither engaged herself in her usual work, nor had she read to him. She had employed herself in both ways, at his side under the tree, many and many a time; but, this time was not quite like any other, and nothing could make it so.

"And I am very happy to-night, dear father. I am deeply happy in the love that Heaven has so blessed—my love for Charles, and Charles's love for me. But, if my life were not to be, still my love for me. If it had not been Charles, it would have been the cause, and then the dark part of another. Or, if it had been no other, I should have been quite happy with you."

"My child, you did see him, and it is Charles. If it had not been Charles, it would have been another. Or, if it had been no other, I should have been the cause, and then the dark part of my life would have cast its shadow beyond myself, and would have fallen on you."

It was the first time, except at the trial, of her ever hearing him refer to the period of his suffering. It gave her a strange and new sensation while his words were in her ears; and she comprehended how much her mind has gone on since she would have been unhappy without Charles, having seen him, and replied:

"Believe it, love! Indeed, it is so. Consider how natural and how plain it is, my dear, that it should be so. You, devoted and young, cannot freely appreciate the anxiety I have felt that your life should not be wasted."

She moved her hand towards his lips, but he took it in his, and repeated the word.

"Quite sure, my darling! More than that," he added, as he tenderly kissed her: "my future is far brighter, Lucie, seen through your marriage, than it could have been—nay, than it ever was—without it."

"If I could hope that, my father!—"

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"Believe it, love! Indeed, it is so. Consider how natural and how plain it is, my dear, that it should be so. You, devoted and young, cannot freely appreciate the anxiety I have felt that your life should not be wasted."

He smiled at her unconscious admission that she would have been unhappy without Charles, having seen him, and replied:

"My child, you did see him, and it is Charles. If it had not been Charles, it would have been another. Or, if it had been no other, I should have been the cause, and then the dark part of my life would have cast its shadow beyond myself, and would have fallen on you."

It was the first time, except at the trial, of her ever hearing him refer to the period of his suffering. It gave her a strange and new sensation while his words were in her ears; and she remembered it long afterwards.

"See!" said the Doctor of Beauvais, raising his hand towards the moon. "I have looked at her, from my prison-window, when I could not bear her light. I have looked at her, when it has been such torture to me to think of her shining upon what I had lost, that I have beaten my head against my prison walls. I have looked at her, in a state so dulled and lethargic, that I have thought of nothing but the number of horizontal lines I could draw across her at the full, and the number of perpendicular lines with which I could intersect them."

He added in his inward and pondering manner, as he looked at the moon. "I was twenty either way. I remember, and the twentieth was difficult to squeeze in."

The strange thrill with which she heard him

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VOL. I.

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go back to that time, deepened as he dwelt upon it; but there was nothing to shock her in the manner of his reference. He only seemed to contrast his present cheerfulness and felicity with the dire endurance that was over; 

"I have looked at her, speculating thousands of times upon the unborn child from whom I had been rent. Whether it was alive. Whether it had been born alive, or the poor mother’s shock had killed it. Whether it was a son who would some day avenge his father. (There was a time in my imprisonment, when my desire for vengeance was unbearables.) Whether it was a son who would never know his father’s story; who might even live to weigh the possibility of his father’s having disappeared of his own will and act. Whether it was a daughter, who would grow to be a woman."

She drew closer to him, and kissed his cheek and his hand.

"I have pictured my daughter, to myself, as perfectly forgetful of me—rather, altogether ignorant of me, and unconscious of me. I have cast up the ages of her year, year after year. I have seen her married to a man who knew nothing of my fate. I have altogether passed from the remembrance of the living, and in the next generation any place was a blank."

"My father! Even to hear that you had such thoughts of a daughter who never existed, strikes to my heart as if I had been that child."

"You, Lucie? It is out of the consolation and restoration you have brought to me, that these remembrances arise, and pass between us and the moon on this last night. —What did I say, just now?"

"She knew nothing of you. She cared nothing for you."

"So! But on other moonlight nights, when the sadness and the silence have touched me in a different way—have affected me with something as like a sorrowful sense of peace, as any emotion that had pain for its foundations could—

I have imagined her as coming to me in my cell, and leading me out into the freedom beyond the fortress. I have seen her image in the moonlight, often, as I now see you; except that I never held her in my arms; it stood between the little grated window and the door. But, you understand that that was not the child I am speaking of?"

"The figure was not; the—the—the image; the fancy?"

"No. That was another thing. It stood before my disturbed sense of sight, but it never moved. The phantom that my mind pursued, was another and more real child. Of her outward appearance I know no more than that she was like her mother. The other had that likeness too—as you have—but was not the same. Can you follow me, Lucie?"

"Hardly, I think. I doubt you must have been a solitary prisoner to understand these perplexed distinctions."

"His collected and calm manner could not prevent her blood from running cold, as he thus tried to anatomise his old condition;

"In that more peaceful state, I have imagined her, in the moonlight, coming to me and taking me out to show me that the home of her married life was full of her loving remembrance of her lost father. My picture had been rent; and he was in her prayers. Her life was active; it was useful; but any poor history pervaded it all.

"I was that child, my father. I was not half so good, but in my love that was all."

"And she showed me her children," said the Doctor of Beaunoir, "and they had heard of me, and had been taught to pity me. When they passed a prison of the State, they kept far from its frowning walls, and looked up at the bars, and spoke in whispers. She could never deliver me; I imagined that she always brought me back after showing me such things. Then, blessed with the relief of tears, I felt my knees, and blessed her."

"I am that child, I hope, my father. O my dear, my dear, will you bless me as fervently to-morrow?"

"Lucie, I recall these old troubles in the reason that I have to-night for loving you better than words can tell, and thanking God for my great happiness. My thoughts, when they were wildest, never rose near the happiness for I have known with you, and that we have taken up.

He embraced her, solemnly committed her to Heaven, and humbly thanked Her for having bestowed her on him. By-and-by, they went into the house.

There was no one hidden in the marriage at Mr. Lorry; there was even to be no bridesmaid but the gaunt Miss Pross. The marriage was to make no change in their place of residence; they had been able to extend it, by itself, themselves the upper rooms formerly belonging to the apocryphal invisible lodger, and for desired nothing more.

Doctor Manette was very cheerful at the supper. They were only three at table, and Miss Pross made the third. HeRegretted the Charles was not there; was more than half disposed to object to the loving little plot he had kept him away; and drank to him affectionately.

So, the time came for him to bid Lucie good night, and they separated. But, in the silence of the third hour of the morning, Lucie came down stairs again, and stole into his room; he was free from unshaped fears, beforehand.

All things, however, were in their places; it was quiet; and he lay asleep, his white head picturesque on the untroubled pillow, and his hands lying quiet on the coverlet. She put her useless candle in the shadow at a distance, crept up to his bed, and put her lips to his; then leaned over him and looked at him.

Into his handsome face, the bitter waters of captivity had worn; but, he covered up tricks with a determination so strong, that he held the mastery of them, even in his sleep. A more remarkable face in its quiet, resolute, and guarded struggle with an unseen assailant, was not to be beheld in all the wide dominions of sleep, that night.

She timidly laid her hand on his dear breast,
CHAPTER XVIII. NINE DAYS.

The marriage day was shining brightly, and they were ready outside the closed door of the Doctor's room, where he was speaking with Charles Darnay. They were ready to go to church; the beautiful bride, Mr. Lorry, and Miss Pross—to whom the event, through a gradual process of reconcilement to the inevitable, would have been one of absolute bliss, but for Solomon should have been the bridegroom. Miss Pross, to whom the event, through a gradual process of reconcilement to the inevitable, would have been one of absolute bliss, but for Solomon, should have been the bridegroom.

"And now," said Mr. Lorry, who could not sufficiently admire the bride, and who had been moving round her to take in every point of her quiet, pretty dress; "and so it was for this, my sweet Lucie, that I brought you across the ocean, and that I carried you to the arms of my dear Lord bless me! How little I thought what I was doing. How lightly I valued the obligation I was conferring on my friend Mr. Charles!"

"You didn't mean it," remarked the matter of fact Miss Pross; "and therefore how could you know it? Nonsense!"

"Really? Well; but don't cry," said the gentle Mr. Lorry.

"I am not crying," said Miss Pross; "you are.

"I, my Pross?" (By this time, Mr. Lorry dared to be pleasant with her, on occasion.) "You were just now; I saw you do it, and I don't wonder at it. Such a present of plate as you have made 'em, is enough to bring tears into anybody's eyes. There's not a fork or a spoon in the collection," said Miss Pross, "that I didn't cry over, last night after the box came, till I couldn't see it."

"I am highly gratified," said Mr. Lorry, "though, upon my honour, I had no intention of rendering those trifling articles of remembrance, invisible to any one. Dear me! This is an occasion that makes a man speculate on all the golden hair that had mingled with the poor shoemaker's white locks in the Paris garret, were as old as Adam.

"And you were cut out for a bachelor, 'praiseworthy' as old fashioned, were as old as Adam."

"You think there never might have been a Mrs. Lorry, any time between the corner being out of the way of the idle corner being out of the way of the idle and curious, and the preparations having been very simple and few, the Doctor, Mr. Lorry, and Miss Pross, were left quite alone. It was when they turned into the welcome shade of the cool old hall, that Mr. Lorry observed a great change from a chaise window; and she was gone.

It was a hard parting, though it was not for long. But, her father cheered her, and said at last, gently disengaging himself from her enfoldling arms, "Take her, Charles! She is yours!" And her agitated hand waved to them from a chaise window, and she was gone.

Besides the glancing tears that shone among the smiles of the little group when it was done, some diamonds, very bright and sparkling, glanced on the bride's hand, which were put up a prayer that she might ever, be as true to him as her love aspired to be, and as his sorrows deserved. Then, she withdrew her hand, and kissed his lips once more, and went away. So, the sunrise came, and the shadows of the leaves of the plane-tree moved upon his face, as softly as her lips had moved in praying for him.
to have come over the Doctor; as if the golden
arm uplifted there, had struck him a poisoned
blow.

He had naturally repressed much, and some
revulsion might have been expected in him when
the occasion for repression was gone. But, it
was the old scared lost look that troubled Mr.
Lorry; and through his absent manner of clasp-
ing his head and drearily wandering away into his
own room when they got up-stairs, Mr. Lorry was
reminded of Defarge the wine-shop keeper, and
the starlight ride.

"I think," he whispered to Miss Pross, after
anxious consideration, "I think we had best not
speak to him just now, or at all disturb him.

It was easier for Mr. Lorry to look in at
Tellson’s, than to look out of Tellson’s. He
must look in at Tellson’s; so I will go there
at once and come back presently. Then, we will
take him a ride into the country, and dine there,
and all will be well.”

He looked up, for an instant at a time, when he
asked no question of the servant; going
thus into the Doctor’s rooms, he was stopped
by a low sound of knocking.

"Good God!" he said, with a start. "What’s
that?"

Miss Pross, with a terrified face, was at his
car. "O me, O me! All is lost!” cried she,
wringing her hands. "What is to be told to
Ladybird? He doesn’t know me, and is making
shoes!"

Mr. Lorry said what he could to calm her,
and went himself into the Doctor’s room. The
bench was turned towards the light, as it had
been when he had seen the shoemaker at his work
before, and his head was bent down, and he was
very busy.

"Doctor Manette. My dear friend, Doctor
Manette!"

The Doctor looked at him for a moment—half
inquiringly, half as if he were angry at being
spoken to—and bent over his work again.

He had laid aside his coat and waistcoat;
his shirt was open at the throat, as it used to be
fore, in his seat near the window, reading and
writing, and expressing in as many pleasant and
natural ways as he could think of, that it was a
free place.

He obeyed, in the old mechanically submissive
manner, and repeated in the old low voice:

"Out?"

"Yes; for a walk with me. Why not?"

He made no effort to say why not, and said
not a word more. But, Mr. Lorry thought he
saw, as he leaned forward on his bench, in the
dusk, with his elbows on his knees and his hand
in his hands, that he was in some misty way
asking himself, "Why not?" The capacity of
OUR EYE-WITNESS AT WOOLWICH. [August 15, 1859.]

Our Eye-witness has spent the greater part of two days in a careful examination of the Royal Arsenal, at Woolwich.

Before proceeding to enter into any description of what he saw on the occasion of this visit, the writer wishes to record here his sense of the obligation he is under to Colonel Tulloh, and the other officers and gentlemen engaged in the superintendence of the different departments, for their readiness to facilitate his examination of the place, and to afford him every assistance which lay in their power towards forming a correct idea of the resources of this splendid arsenal.

The great war establishment which covers upwards of two hundred and sixty acres of ground, is divided into three departments, which are arranged in the following order:

1. The Royal Gun Factories, under Colonel Eardley Wilmot;
2. The Royal Carriage Department, under Colonel Tulloh;
3. The Royal Laboratory Department, under Captain Bozer.

In the Royal Gun Factories a large portion of the brass and iron guns used in our army and navy are cast, bored, and finished.

In the Royal Carriage Department are made the carriages on which these guns are mounted, and by means of which they, and the ammunition they require, are conveyed from place to place.

While the Royal Laboratory Department is for the construction of the heavy shot for cannon, of shells, bullets, cartridges, percussion-caps, and many other implements of death and mutilation.

The order in which the Eye-witness visited the different wonders of this great workshop of destruction is that in which he now proposes to treat of them, and as the introduction with which he entered the Arsenal gates was to Colonel Tulloh, it was naturally the department under the especial care of that officer which the Eye-witness examined before any other.

It happened that the day on which the Eye-witness first visited Woolwich was Friday, and that on that day, at one o'clock in the afternoon, the men employed on the works were paid their weekly wages. The amount earned by each workman during the week is calculated before-hand, and placed ready for him in a numbered compartment of a tray, before which each one passes in a regular succession. As the workman reaches the paying-place he hands in his ticket, on which his number is inscribed. Instantly the money in the compartment bearing the corresponding number is handed to him, and he passes on, the ticket which he has just given up being considered as a receipt. This is the only way in which the thing could be done. The number of men employed in the Arsenal reaches to something like twelve thousand, and as they work by the piece as well as by time, there are hardly two in the place who receive the same sum. It would be, therefore, impossible to calculate how much is due to each at the time of payment. The affair is settled, according to the arrangement just described, in a few minutes.

Through acres of timber, ranged in stacks, your Eye-witness was conveyed to the great saw-mills of the Carriage Department, where the logs from which the gun-carriages are made are handed over to a mass of machinery, by which they are hewn into shape with an almost inconceivable rapidity and precision. The timber is moved along on iron tramways, which intersect...