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A Tale of Two Cities: Part 22

Charles Dickens

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES.

BOOK THE THIRD. THE TRACK OF A STORM.

CHAPTER II. THE GRINDSTONE.

Tellson’s Bank, established in the Saint Germain Quarter of Paris, was in a wing of a large house, approached by a court-yard and shut off from the street by a high wall and a strong gate. The house belonged to a great nobleman who had lived in it until he made a flight from the troubles, in his own cook’s dress, and got across the borders. A mere beast of the chase flying from hunters, he was still in his metempsychosis no other than the same Monseigneur, the preparation of whose chocolate for whose lips had once occupied three strong men besides the cook in question.

Monseigneur gone, and the three strong men absolving themselves from the sin of having drawn his high wages, by being more than ready and willing to cut his throat on the altar of the dawning Republic one and indivisible of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death, Monseigneur’s house had been first sequestrated, and then confiscated. For, all things moved so fast, and decree followed decree with that fierce precipitation, that now upon the third night of the autumn month of September, patriot emissaries of the law were in possession of Monseigneur’s house, and had marked it with the tricolor, and were drinking brandy in its state apartments.

A place of business in London like Tellson’s place of business in Paris, would soon have driven the House out of its mind and into the Gazette. For, what would staid British responsibility and respectability have said to orange-trees in boxes in a Bank court-yard, and even to a Cupid over the counter? Yet such things were. Tellson’s had whitewashed the Cupid, but he was still to be seen on the ceiling, in the coolest linen, aiming (as he very often does) at money from morning to night. Bankruptcy must inevitably have come of this young Pagan, in Lombard-street, London, and also of a curtained alcove in the rear of the immortal boy, and also of a looking-glass let into the wall, and also of clerks not at all old who danced in public on the slightest provocation. Yet, a French Tellson’s could get on with these things exceedingly well, and, as long as the times held together, no man had taken fright at them, and drawn out his money.

What money would be drawn out of Tellson’s henceforth, and what would lie there, lost and forgotten; what plate and jewels would tarnish in Tellson’s hiding-places, while the depositors rusted in prisons, and when they should have violently perished; how many accounts with Tellson’s, never to be balanced in this world, must be carried over into the next; no man could have said, that night, any more than Mr. Jarvis Lorry could, though he thought heavily of these questions.

He occupied rooms in the Bank, in his fidelity to the House of which he had grown to be a part, like strong root-ivy. It chanced that they derived a kind of security from the patriotic occupation of the main building, but the true-hearted old gentleman never calculated about that. All such circumstances were indifferent to him, so that he did his duty. On the opposite side of the court-yard, under a colonnade, was extensive standing for carriages — where, indeed, some carriages of Monseigneur yet stood. Against two of the pillars were fastened two great flaring flambeaux, and, in the light of these, standing out in the open air, was a large grindstone: a roughly mounted thing which appeared to have hurriedly been brought there from some neighbouring smithy, or other workshop. Rising and looking out of window at these harmless objects, Mr. Lorry shivered, and retired to his seat by the fire.

From the streets beyond the high wall and the strong gate, there came the usual night hum of the city, with now and then an indescribable ring in it, weird and unearthly, as if some unwanted sounds of a terrible nature were giving up to Heaven.

"Thank God," said Mr. Lorry, clasping his
expected, and he heard the gate clash again, and back!" and sat listening. But, there was no hands, "that no one near and dear to me is in this dreadful town to-night. May He Have well guarded, and he got up to go among the trusty people who were watching it, when his door suddenly opened, and two figures rushed in, at sight of which he fell back in amazement.

Lucie and her father! Lucie with her arms stretched out to him, and with that old look of earnestness so concentrated and intensified, that it seemed as though it had been stamped upon her face expressly to give force and power to it in this one passage of her life.

"What is this?" cried Mr. Lorry, breathless and confused. "What is the matter? Lucie! Manette! What has happened? What has brought you here? What is it?"

With the look fixed upon him, in her paleness and wildness, she panted out in his arms, imploringly, "O my dear friend! My husband!"

"Your husband, Lucie?"

"Charles."

"What of Charles?"

"Here."

"Here, in Paris?"

"Has been here, some days—three or four—I don't know how many—I can't collect my thoughts. An errand of generosity brought him here unknown to us; he was stopped at the barrier, and sent to prison."

The old man uttered an irrepressible cry.

"What is that noise?" said the Doctor, turning towards the window.

"Don't look!" cried Mr. Lorry, breathlessly. "Don't look out! Manette, for your life, don't touch the blind!"

The Doctor turned, with his hand upon the fastening of the window, and said, with a cool, bold smile: "My dear friend, I have a charmed life in this city. I have been a Bastille prisoner. There is no patriot in Paris—in France—who, knowing me to have been a prisoner in the Bastille, would touch me, except to overwhelm me with embraces, or carry me in triumph. My old pain has given me a power that has brought us through the barrier, and gained us news of Charles there, and brought us here. I knew it would be so; I knew I could help Charles out of all danger; I told Lucie so,—What is that noise?" His hand was again upon the window.

"Don't look!" cried Mr. Lorry, absolutely desperate. "No, Lucie, my dear, nor you!" He got his arm round her, and held her. "Don't be so terrified, my love. I solemnly swear to you that I know of no harm having happened to Charles; that I had no suspicion even, of his being in this fatal place. What prison is he in?"

"La Force."

"La Force! Lucie, my child, if ever you were brave and serviceable in your life—and you were always both—you will compose yourself now, to do exactly as I bid you; for, more depends upon it than you can think, or I can say. There is no help for you in any action on your part to-night; you cannot possibly stir out. I say this, because what I must bid you to do for Charles's sake, is the hardest thing to do of all. You must instantly be obedient, still, and quiet. You must let me put you in a room at the back here. You must leave your father and me alone for two minutes, and as there are Life and Death in the world you must not delay."

"I will be submissive to you. I see in your face that you know I can do nothing else than this. I know you are true."

The old man kissed her, and hurried her into his room, and turned the key; then, came hurrying back to the Doctor, and opened the wider and partly opened the blind, and put his hand upon the Doctor's arm, and looked out with him into the court-yard.

"Looked out upon a throng of men and women: not enough in number, or near enough to fill the court-yard: not more than forty or fifty in all. The people in possession of the house had let them in at the gate, and they had rushed in to work at the grindstone; it had evidently been set up there for their purpose, as in a convenient and retired spot.

But, such awful workers, and such awful work! The grindstone had a double handle, and, turning at it madly were two men, whose faces, in their long hair flapped back when the whirlings of the grindstone brought their faces up, were more horrible and cruel than the visages of the wildest savages in their wont barbarous disguise. False eyebrows and false moustaches were stuck upon them, and their hideous countenances were bloody and sweaty, and as awry with howling, and all staring and glaring with beastly excitement and want of sleep. As these ruffians turned and turned, their matted locks now flung forward over their eyes, now flung backward over their necks, some woman held wine to their mouths that they might drink; and what with dropping blood, and what with dropping wine, and what with the stream of sparks striking out of the stone, all their wicked atmosphere seemed gore and fire. The eye could not detect one creature in the group, free from the stain of blood. Shouldering one another to get next at the sharpening-stone, were men stripped to the waist, with the stain all over their limbs and bodies; men in all sorts of rags, with the stain upon those rags; men devilishly set off with spoils of women's lace and silk and ribbon, with..."
the stain dyeing those trifles through and through. Hatchets, knives, bayonets, swords, all brought to be sharpened, were all red with it. Some of the halted swords were tied to the wrists of those who carried them, with strips of linen and fragments of dress. Ligatures various in kind, but all deep of the same colour. And as the frantic wielders of these weapons snatched them from the stream of sparks and tore away into the streets, the same red hue was red in their frenzied eyes;—eyes which, any unbru
tailed beholder would have given twenty years of life, to petrify with a well-directed gun.

All this was seen in a moment, as the vision of a drowning man, or of any human creature at any very great pass, could see a world if it were there. They drew back from the window, and the doctor looked for explanation in his friend's sable face.

"They are," Mr. Lorry whispered the words glancing fearfully round at the looked room. "Murdering the prisoners. If you are sure of what you say; if you really have the power you think you have—as I believe you have—make yourself known to these devils, and get taken to La Force. I have too little, I don't know, but let it not be a minute later!"

Doctor Manette pressed his hand, hastened bareheaded out of the room, and was in the court-yard when Mr. Lorry regained the blind.

His streaming white hair, his remarkable face, and the impetuous confidence of his manner, as he put the weapons aside like water, carried him in an instant to the heart of the concourse at the stone. For a few moments there was a pause, and a hurry, and a murmur, and the un
telligible sound of his voice; and then Mr. Lorry saw him, surrounded by all, and in the midst of a line twenty men long, all linked shoulder to shoulder, and hand to shoulder, hurried out with cries of "Live the Bastille! Save the prisoner in front there! Save the prisoner of La Force! Room for the Bastille kindred in La Force!" and a thousand answering shouts.

He closed the lattice again with a fluttering heart, closed the window and the curtain, hastened to Lucie, and told her that her father had spoken of hiring a lodging for a short term, in that Quarter, near Tellson's, Mr. Lorry advised with Lucie. She said that her father had spoken of hiring a lodging for a short term, in that Quarter near the Banking-house. As there was no business objection to this, and as he foresaw that even if it were all well with Charles, and he were to be released, he could not hope to leave the city, Mr. Lorry went out in quest of such a lodging, and found a suitable one, high up in a removed by
street where the closed blinds in all the other windows of a high melancholy square of buildings marked deserted homes.

To this lodging he at once removed Lucie and her child, and Miss Pross; giving them what comfort he could, and much more than he had

Twice more in all; but, the last spell of work was feeble and fitful. Soon afterwards the day began to dawn, and he softly detached himself from the clasping hand, and cautiously looked out again. A man, so besmeared that he might have been a sorely wounded soldier creeping back to consciousness on a field of slain, was rising from the pavement by the side of the grindstone, and looking about him with a vacant air. Shortly, this worn-out murderer descried in the imperfect light one of the carriages of Monseigneur, and, staggering to that gorgeous vehicle, climbed in at the door, and shut himself up to take his rest on its dainty cushions.

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himself. He left Jerry with them, as a figure to fill a doorway that would bear considerable knocking on the head, and returned to his own occupations. A disturbed and doleful mind he brought to bear upon them, and slowly and heavily the day lagged on with him.

It wore itself out, and wore him out with it, until the Bank closed. He was again alone in his room of the previous night, considering what to do next, when he heard a foot upon the stair. In a few moments, a man stood in his presence, who, with a keenly observant look at him, addressed him by his name.

"Your servant," said Mr. Lorry. "Do you know me?"

He was a strongly made man with dark curling hair, from forty-five to fifty years of age. For emphasis, the words:

"Do you know me?"

"I have seen you somewhere."

"Perhaps at my wine shop?"

Much interested and agitated, Mr. Lorry said:

"You come from Doctor Manette?"

"Yes. I come from Doctor Manette."

"And what says he? What does he send me?"

Defarge gave into his anxious hand, an open scrap of paper. It bore the words in the Doctor's writing:

"Dearest,—Take courage. I am well, and your father has influence around me. You cannot answer this. Kiss our child for me."

That was all the writing. It was so much, however, to her who received it, that she turned from Defarge to his wife, and kissed one of the hands that knitted. It was a passionate, loving, thankful, womanly action, but the hand made no response—dropped cold and heavy, and took to its knitting again.

There was something in its touch that gave Lucie a check. She stopped in the act of putting the note in her bosom, and, with her hands yet at her neck, looked terrified at Madame Defarge. Madame Defarge met the lifted eyebrows and forehead with a cold, impassive stare.

"My dear," said Mr. Lorry, striking is to explain; "there are frequent risings in the streets; and, although it is not likely that they will ever trouble you, Madame Defarge wishes to see those whom she has the power to protect at such times, to the end that she may know them—that she may identify them. I believe," said Mr. Lorry, rather halting in his reassuring manner, "have the dear child here, and our good Pross. Our good Pross, Defarge, is an English lady, and knows no French.

"The lady in question, whose rooted conviction that she was more than a match for any is reigned, was not to be shaken by distress and danger, appeared with folded arms, and observed in English to The Vengeance whom her eyes first encountered, "Well, I am sure, Boldface! I hope you are pretty well!" She also bestowed a British cough on Madame Defarge; but, neither of the two took much heed of her.

"Is that his child?" said Madame Defarge, stopping in her work for the first time, and pointing her knitting-needle at little Lucie as if it were the finger of Fate.

"Yes, madame," answered Mr. Lorry; "this is our poor prisoner's darling daughter, and only child."

The shadow attendant on Madame Defarge and her party seemed to fall so threatening and dark on the child, that her mother instinctively knelt on the ground beside her, and held her to her breast. The shadow attendant on Madame Defarge and her party seemed then to fall, threatening and dark, on both the mother and the child.

"It is enough, my husband," said Madame Defarge. "I have seen them. We may go."

But, the suppressed manner had enough of menace in it—not visible and presented, but indistinct and withheld—to alarm Lucie into saying, as she laid her appealing hand on Madame Defarge's dress:
"You will be good to my poor husband. You will do him no harm. You will help me to see him if you can!"

"Your husband is not my business here," returned Madame Defarge, looking down at her with perfect composure. "It is the daughter of your father who is my business here."

"For my sake, then, be merciful to my husband. For my child's sake! She will put her hands together and pray you to be merciful. We are more afraid of you than of these others."

Madame Defarge received it as a compliment, and looked at her husband. Defarge, who had been uneasily biting his thumb-nail and looking at her, collected his face into a sterner expression.

"What is it that your husband says in that little letter?" asked Madame Defarge, with a lowering smile. "Influence; he says something touching influence?"

"That my father," said Lucie, hurriedly taking the paper from her breast, but with her alarmed eyes on her questioner and not on it, "has much influence around him."

"Surely it will release him!" said Madame Defarge. "Let it do so."

"As a wife and mother," cried Lucie, most earnestly, "I implore you to have pity on me and not to exercise any power that you possess, earnestly, "I implore you to have pity on me and not to exercise any power that you possess,"

"It is the daughter of my business here."

"You will do him no harm. You will help me to see him if you can?"

"I am not thankless, I hope, but that dreadful shadow indeed! No substance in it, Lucie."

"But the shadow of the manner of these Defarges was dark upon himself, for all that, and in his secret mind it troubled him greatly.

MELONS.

There can be little doubt that the coach which conveyed Cinderella to the prince's ball was not a pumpkin, but a Cantaloup melon. The hypothesis is supported by a variety of reasons. Imprimis — But first of all, perhaps, we ought to say a few words about the melons themselves.

Although Cinderella is now a tolerably old girl, we may assume that melons are considerably older. The "lodge in a garden of cucumbers" of the Scriptures was most probably a lodge in a garden of melons, with perhaps a mixture of water-melons. Cucumis is the generic name of all melons, pumpkins, and cucumbers. Siccus or sicer, sikus or sikus, is also Greek for the same. The Latin word melo, whence our melon, comes (etymologists say) from the Greek pepo, melon, an apple, to which our fruit bears a distant resemblance in form and perfume. Palladius, who has left twelve books on the ancient Roman agriculture of his time, has a chapter on the culture of melons proper. Our pumpkin, pumpos, pumpkin, and pumpkin, are modern forms of the Latin pepo, which is a modification of the Greek pepo, sweet or ripe. "When cucumbers attain an excessive magnitude," says Pliny, "they are called pepones;" he therefore uses the word melopepo to describe a sort of pumpkin resembling a quince in its powerful odour and its warty outside. By the way, melomelum, a sweeting apple, is the origin of our word marmalade. Our horticultural forefathers employed "musk melons" to distinguish varieties of melons from pumpkins that had no musky smell; which said pumpkins were, of old, called by the early gardeners and are still called by the English peasantry, millons and melclons. It will thus be seen that the names, like the fruits, of the great pumpkin family, alter their form and their radical quality by such slight gradations as to render it difficult to draw the line between them.

Gourds, together with the French "courage," and the Dutch "kunwurde," from quite a different verbal root, are pumpkins of great variety of form, size, and properties. There are the Hercules or club-gourd, the calabash and bottle-gourd, whose outer rinds, when thoroughly ripe, dry, and hard, are made to serve for water-vessels, bottles, and powder-flasks. Some of these are eaten in their immature state, but it is wiser to label untried sorts, raised from imported seed, with a ticket marked BEWARE! although their mawkish taste will generally prove a sufficient safeguard. In hot climates the club-gourd attains the enormous length of five or six feet. In a few weeks, if well watered, it forms shady arbours, under which the people of the East squat and smoke. When the fruit is young it hangs down inside the arbour like candles. In this state it is cut, boiled with...