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A Tale of Two Cities: Part 28

Charles Dickens

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES.
In Three Books.
BY CHARLES DICKENS.

BOOK THE THIRD. THE TRACK OF A STORM.
CHAPTER XI. DUSK.

The wretched wife of the innocent man thus doomed to die, fell under the sentence, as if she had been mortally stricken. But, she uttered no sound; and so strong was the voice within her, representing that it was she of all the world who must uphold him in his misery and not augment it, that it quickly raised her, even from that shock.

The judges having to take part in a public demonstration out of doors, the tribunal adjourned. The quick noise and movement of the court's emptying itself by many passages had not ceased, when Lucie stood stretching out her arms towards her husband, with nothing in her face but love and consolation.

"If I might touch him! If I might embrace him once! O, good citizens, if you would have so much compassion for us!"

There was but a gaoler left, along with two of the four men who had taken him last night, and Barsad. The people had all poured out to the show in the streets. Barsad proposed to the rest, "Let her embrace him, then; it is but a moment." It was silently acquiesced in, and they passed her over the seats in the hall to a raised place, where he, by leaning over the dock, could fold her in his arms.

"Farewell, dear darling of my soul. My parting blessing on my love. We shall meet again, where the weary are at rest!" Yes, her husband's words, as he held her to his bosom.

"I can bear it, dear Charles. I am supported from above; don't suffer for me. A parting blessing for our child."

"If I might touch him! If I might embrace him once! O, good citizens, if you would have so much compassion for us!"

"My husband. No! A moment!" He was tearing himself apart from her. "We shall not be separated long. I feel that this will break my heart by-and-by; but I will do my duty while I can, and when I leave her, God will raise up friends for her, as He did for me."

Her father had followed her, and would have fallen on his knees to both of them, but that Darnay put out a hand and seized him, crying:

"No, no! What have you done, what have you done, that you should kneel to us! We know now, what a struggle you made of old. We know now, what you underwent when you suspected my descent, and when you knew it. We know now, the natural antipathy you strove against, and conquered, for her dear sake. We thank you with all our hearts, and all our love and duty. Heaven be with you!"

Her father's only answer was to draw his hands through his white hair, and wring them with a shriek of anguish.

"It could not be otherwise," said the prisoner. "All things have worked together as they have fallen out. It was the always-vain endeavour to discharge my poor mother's trust, that first brought my fatal presence near you. Good could never come of such evil, a happier end was not in nature to so unhappy a beginning. Be comforted, and forgive me. Heaven bless you!"

As he was drawn away, his wife released him, and stood looking after him with her hands touching one another in the attitude of prayer, and with a radiant look upon her face, in which there was even a comforting smile. As she went out at the prisoners' door, she turned, laid her head lovingly on her father's breast, tried to speak to him, and fell at his feet.

Then, issuing from the obscure corner from which he had never moved, Sydney Carton came and took her up. Only her father and Mr. Lorry were with her. His arm trembled as it raised her, and supported her head. Yet, there was an air about him that was not all of pity—that had a flush of pride in it.

"Shall I take her to the coach? I shall never feel her weight."

He carried her lightly to the door, and laid her tenderly down in a coach. Her father and their old friend got into it, and he took his seat beside the driver.

When they arrived at the gateway where he had paused in the dark not many hours before, to picture to himself on which of the rough stones of the street her feet had trodden, he lifted her again, and carried her up the staircase to their rooms. There, he laid her down on a couch, where her child and Miss Pross wept over her.

"Don't recall her to herself," he said, softly, to the latter, "she is better so; don't revive her to consciousness, while she only faints."
“Oh, Carton, Carton, dear Carton!” cried little Lucie, springing up and throwing her arms passionately round him, in a burst of grief. “Now that you have come, I think you will do something to help mamma, something to save papa! Oh, look at her, dear Carton! Can you, of all the people who love her, bear to see her so?”

He bent over the child, and laid her blooming cheek against his face. He put her gently from him, and looked at her unconscious mother.

“Before I go,” he said, and paused.—“I may kiss her?”

It was remembered afterwards that when he bent down and touched her face with his lips, he murmured some words. The child, who was nearest to him, told them afterwards, and told her grandchildren when she was a handsome old lady, that she heard him say, “A life you love—"

When he had gone out into the next room, he turned suddenly on Mr. Lorry and her father, who were following, and said to the latter: “You had great influence but yesterday, Doctor Manette; let it, at least, be tried. These judges, and all the men in power, are very friendly to you, and very recognisant of your services; are they not?”

“Nothing connected with Charles was concealed from me. I had the strongest assurances that I should save him; and I did.” He returned the answer in great trouble, and very slowly.

“Try them again. The hours between this and to-morrow afternoon are few and short, but try. I will go,” said Doctor Manette, “to the President straight, and I will go, to whom it is better not to name, and the croaking voice. This man whom he had described himself, that day, as “At Tils’s banking-house at nine,” he said, with a sneering face. “Shall I do well, in the mean time, to show myself? I think so. It is best that these people should know there is such a man as I here; it is a sound precaution, and may be a necessary preparation. But, care, care! Let me think it out.”

Checking his steps which had begun to tend towards an object, he took a turn or two in the already darkening street, and traced the thought in his mind to its possible consequences. His first impression was confirmed. “It is best,” he said, finally resolved, “that these people should know there is such a man as I here.” And he turned his face towards Saint Antoine.

Defarge had described himself, that day, as the keeper of a wine-shop in the Saint Antoine suburb. It was not difficult for one who knew the city well, to find his house without asking any question. Having ascertained its situation, Carton came out of those closer streets again, and dined at a place of refreshment and fell sound asleep after dinner. For the first time in many years, he had no strong drink. Since last night he had taken nothing but a little light thin wine, and last night he had dropped the brandy slowly down on Mr. Lorry’s hearth like a man who had done with it.

It was as late as seven o’clock when he awoke refreshed, and went out into the streets again. As he passed along towards Saint Antoine, he stopped at a shop-window where there was a mirror, and slightly altered the disordered arrangement of his loose cravat, and his collar, and his wild hair. This done, he went on direct to Defarge’s, and went in.

There happened to be no customer in the shop but Jacques Three, of the restless fingers on direct to Defarge’s, and went in. As he passed along towards Saint Antoine, he stopped at a shop-window where there was a mirror, and slightly altered the disordered arrangement of his loose cravat, and his collar, and his wild hair. This done, he went on direct to Defarge’s, and went in. As he passed along towards Saint Antoine, he stopped at a shop-window where there was a mirror, and slightly altered the disordered arrangement of his loose cravat, and his collar, and his wild hair. This done, he went on direct to Defarge’s, and went in.
and wife. The Vengeance assisted in the conversation, like a regular member of the establishment.

As Carton walked in, took his seat, and asked (in very indifferent French) for a small measure of wine, Madame Defarge cast a careless glance at him, and then a keener, and then another keener, and then advanced to him, and asked him what it was he had ordered.

He repeated what he had already said.

"English?" asked Madame Defarge, inquisitively raising her dark eyebrows.

After looking at him, as if the sound of even a single French word were slow to express itself to him, he answered, in his former strong foreign accent.

"Yes, Madame, yes. I am English!"

Madame Defarge returned to her counter to get the wine, and, as he took up a Jacobin journal and feigned to pore over it puzzling out its meaning, he heard her say, "I swear to you, like Evrémonde!"

Defarge brought him the wine, and gave him Good Evening.

"How?"

"Good evening!"

"Oh! Good evening, citizen," filling his glass. "All! and good wine. I drink to the Republic."

"To this glass would do it! But I would leave the matter there. I say, stop there."

"See you then, Jacques," said Madame Defarge, wrathfully; "and see you too, my little Vengeance; see you both! Listen! For others I cries as tyrants and oppressors, I have this once a long time on my register, doomed to destruction and extermination. Ask my husband is that so?"

"It is so," assented Defarge, without being asked.

"In the beginning of the great days, when the Bastille falls, he finds this paper of to-day, and he brings it home, and in the middle of the night when this place is clear and shut, we read it, here on this spot, by the light of this lamp. Ask him, is that so?"

"It is so," assented Defarge again.

"I communicate to him that secret. I smile this bonhomie with those two hands as I smite it now, and I tell him, 'Defarge, I was brought up among the fishermen of the sea-shore, and that peasant-family so injured by the two Evrémonde brothers, as that Bastille paper describes, is my family. Defarge, that sister of the mortally wounded boy upon the ground was my sister, that husband was my sister's husband, that unborn child was their child, that brother was any brother, that father was my father, those dead are my dead, and that ammunitions to answer for those things descends to me?' Ask him, is that so?"

"It is so," assented Defarge once more.

"Then tell Wind and Fire where to stop, returned Madame; "but don't tell me."

Both her hearers derived a horrible enjoyment from the deadly nature of her wrath—the listener could feel how white she was, without seeing her—and both highly commended it. Defarge, a weak minority, interspersed a few words for the memory of the compassionate wife of the Marquis; but, only elicited from his own wife a repetition of her last reply. "Tell
the Wind and the Fire where to stop; not me!"

Customers entered, and the group was broken up. The English customer paid for what he had had, perplexedly counted his change, and asked, as a stranger, to be directed towards the National Palace. Madame Defarge took him to the door, and put her arm on his, in pointing out the road. The English customer was not without his reflections then, that it might be a good deed to seize that arm, lift it, and strike under it sharp and deep.

But, he went his way, and was soon swallowed up in the shadow of the prison wall. At the appointed hour, he emerged from it to present himself in Mr. Lorry's room again, where he found the old gentleman walking to and fro in restless anxiety. He said he had been with Lucie until just now, and had only left her for a few minutes, to come and keep his appointment. Her father had not been seen, since he quitted the banking-house towards four o'clock. She had some faint hopes that his mediation might save Charles, but they were very slight. He had been more than five hours gone: where could he be?

Mr. Lorry waited until ten; but, Doctor Manette not returning, and he being unwilling to leave Lucie any longer, it was arranged that he should go back to her, and come to the banking-house again at midnight. In the mean while, Carton would wait alone by the fire for the Doctor.

He waited and waited, and the clock struck twelve; but, Doctor Manette did not come back. Mr. Lorry returned, and found no tidings of him, and brought none. Where could he be?

They were discussing this question, and were almost building up some weak structure of hope on his prolonged absence, when they heard him on the stairs. The instant he entered the room, it was plain that all was lost.

Whether he had really been to any one, or whether he had been all that time traversing the streets, was never known. As he stood staring at them, they asked him no question, for his face spoke with a helpless look straying all around, he everywhere for my bench, and I can't find it. "Where is it?"

His head and throat were bare, and, as he spoke with a helpless look straying all around, he took his coat off, and let it drop on the floor. Carton took it up, and there was a small case in which the Doctor was accustomed to carry the list of his day's duties, fell lightly on the floor. Carton took it up, and there was a folded paper in it. "We should look at this?" he said. Mr. Lorry nodded his consent. He opened it, and exclaimed, "Thank God!"

"What is it?" asked Mr. Lorry, eagerly.

"A moment! Let me speak of it in its place. First," he put his hand in his coat, and took another paper from it, "that is the certificate which enables me to pass out of this city. Look at it. You see—Sydney Carton, an Englishman?"

Mr. Lorry held it open in his hand, gazing in his earnest face.

"Keep it for me until to-morrow. I shall see him to-morrow, you remember, and I had better not take it into the prison."

"Why not?"

"I don't know: I prefer not to do so. Now, take this paper that Doctor Manette has carried about him. It is a similar certificate, enabling him and his daughter and her child, at any time, to pass the Barrier and the frontier? You see?"

"Yes!"

"Perhaps he obtained it as his last and utmost precaution against evil, yesterday. When is it dated? But no matter; don't stay to look: put it up carefully with mine and your own. Now, observe! I never doubted until

Lost, utterly lost! It was so clearly beyond hope, to reason with him, or try to restore him, that—as by agreement—they each put a hand upon his shoulder, and soothed him to sit down before the fire, with a promise that he should have his work presently. He sank into the chair, and brooded over the umbrellas, and shed tears. As if that all that happened since the garret time were a momentary fancy, or a dream, Mr. Lorry saw him shrink before you go, will you, for a moment, stay to attend to me? Don't ask me why I make the stipulations I am going to make, and exact the promise I am going to exact; I have a reason—a good one."

"I do not doubt it," answered Mr. Lorry. "Say on."

The figure in the chair between them, was all the time monotonously rocking itself to and fro, and moaning. They spoke in such a tone as if they had been watching by a sick-bed in the night.

Carton stooped to pick up the coat, which lay almost entangling his feet. As he did so, a small case in which the Doctor was accustomed to carry the list of his day's duties, fell lightly on the floor. Carton took it up, and there was a folded paper in it. "We should look at this?" he said. Mr. Lorry nodded his consent. He opened it, and exclaimed, "Thank God!"

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"Perhaps he obtained it as his last and utmost precaution against evil, yesterday. When is it dated? But no matter; don't stay to look: put it up carefully with mine and your own. Now, observe! I never doubted until
within this hour or two, that he bad, or could have, such a paper. It is good, until recalled. But it may be soon recalled, and, I have reason to think, will be."

"They are not in danger?"

"They are in great danger. They are in danger of denunciation by Madame Defarge. I know it from her own lips. I have overheard words of that woman's, to-night, which have presented their danger to me in strong colours. I have lost no time, and since then, I have seen the spy. He confirms me. He knows that a wood-sawyer, living by the prison-wall, is under the control of the Defarges, and has been rehearsed by Madame Defarge as to his having seen Her"—he never mentioned Lucie's name—"making signs and signals to prisoners. It is easy to foresee that the presence will be the common one, a prison plot, and that it will involve her life—and perhaps her child's—and perhaps her father's—for both have been seen with her at that place. Don't look so horrified. You will save them all."

"Heaven grant I may, Carton! But how?"

"I am going to tell you how. It will depend on you, and it could depend on no better man. This new denunciation will certainly not take place until after to-morrow; probably not until two or three days afterwards; more probably a week afterwards. You know it is a capital crime, to mourn for, or sympathise with, a victim of the Guillotine. She and her father would unquestionably be guilty of this crime, and this woman (the inhabitant of the house in strong colours) has been rehearsed by Madame Defarge as to how to present their danger to me in strong words of that woman's, to-night, which I have overheard. I have overheard them, and I have overheard the rest, you know, and will reserve my place. Wait for nothing but to have my place occupied, and then for England!"

"Why, then," said Mr. Lorry, grasping his eager but so firm and steady hand, "it does not all depend on one old man, but I shall have a young and ardent man at my side."

"By the help of Heaven you shall! Promise me solemnly, that nothing will influence you to alter the course on which we now stand pledged to one another?"

"Nothing, Carton."

"Remember these words to-morrow: change the course, or delay in it—for any reason—and no life can possibly be saved, and many lives must inevitably be sacrificed."

"I will remember them. I hope to do my part faithfully."

"And I hope to do mine. Now, good-by!"

Though he said it with a grave smile of seriousness, and though he even put the old man's hand to his lips, he did not part from him then. He helped him so far to arouse the rocking figure before the dying embers, as to get a cloak and hat upon it, and to tempt it forth to the kitchen—without being seen by any one; and then for England!"

SUBTERRANEAN SWITZERLAND.

Formerly, books, records, human authorities (as they were called), transmitted occasional truths, but more frequently error after error, to successive generations. Strange assertions appeared to be truths, because the venerable but credulous Pliny, or such as Pliny, had delivered them, ex cathedra, to mankind. Now, we choose to see and judge for ourselves. Even history, which emphatically might be termed a science of record, is obeying the universal rule. If we do not supercede, we, at least, strive to authenticate history by the evidence of our eyes. And how do we effect this? Precisely by the same method that the geologist makes use of, when he is so wise—or, as poor Cowper thought, so sinful—as to drill and bore.

Dwell and drive
The solid earth, and from the strata there
Extract a register.