A Tale of Two Cities: Part 29

Charles Dickens

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THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."—SHAKESPEARE.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

A WEEKLY JOURNAL.

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES.

In Three Books.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

BOOK THE THIRD. THE TRACK OF A STORM.

CHAPTER XIII. FIFTY-TWO.

In the black prison of the Conciergerie the doomed of the day awaited their fate. They were in number as the weeks of the year. Fifty-two were to roll that afternoon on the life-tide of the city to the boundless everlasting sea. Before their cells were quit of them, new occupants were appointed; before their blood ran into the blood spilled yesterday, the blood that was to mingle with theirs to-morrow was already set apart.

Two score and twelve were told off. From the farmer-general of seventy, whose riches could not buy his life, to the seamstress of twenty, whose poverty and obscurity could not save her. Physical diseases, engendered in the vices and neglects of men, will seize on victims of all degrees; and the frightful moral disorder, born of unspeakable suffering, intolerable oppression, and heartless indifference, smote equally without distinction.

Charles Darnay, alone in a cell, had sustained himself with no flattering delusion since he came to it from the Tribunal. In every line of the narrative he had heard, he had heard his condemnation. He had fully comprehended that no personal influence could possibly save him, that he was virtually sentenced by the millions, and that units could avail him nothing.

Nevertheless, it was not easy, with the face of his beloved wife fresh before him, to compose his mind to what it must bear. His hold on life was strong, and it was very, very hard to loosen; by gradual efforts and degrees unclosed a little here, it clenched the tighter there; and when he brought his strength to bear on that hand and it yielded, this was closed again. There was a hurry, too, in all his thoughts, a turbulent and heated working of his heart, that contended against resignation. If, for a moment, he did feel resigned, then his wife and child who had to live after him, seemed to protest and to make it a selfish thing.

But, all this was at first. Before long, the consideration that there was no disgrace in the fate he must meet, and that numbers went the same road wrongfully, and trod it firmly, every day, springing up to stimulate him. Next followed the thought that much of the hope of mind enjoyable by the dear ones, depended on his quiet fortitude. So, by degrees he calmed into the better state when he could raise his thoughts much higher, and draw comfort down.

Before it had set in dark on the night of his condemnation, he had travelled thus far on his last way. Being allowed to purchase the means of writing, and a light, he sat down to write until such time as the prison lamps should be extinguished.

He wrote a long letter to Lucie, showing her that he had known nothing of her father's imprisonment until he had heard of it from herself, and that he had been as ignorant as she of his father's and uncle's responsibility for that misery, until the paper had been read. He had already explained to her that his concealment from herself of the name he had relinquished, was the one condition—fully intelligible now—that her father had attached to their betrothal, and was the one promise he had still exacted on the morning of their marriage. He entreated her, for her father's sake, never to seek to know whether her father had become oblivious of the existence of the paper, or had had it recalled to him (for the moment, or for good), by the story of the Tower, on that old Sunday under the dear plane-tree in the garden. If he had preserved any definite remembrance of it, there could be no doubt that he had supposed it destroyed with the Bastille, when he had found no mention of it among the relics of prisoners which the populace had discovered there, and which had been described to all the world. He besought her—though he added that he knew it was needless—to console her father, by impressing him through every tender means she could think of, with the truth that he had done nothing for which he could justly reproach himself, but had uniformly forgotten himself for their joint sakes. Next to her preservation of his own last grateful love and blessing, and her overcoming of her sorrow, to devote herself to their dear child, he adjured her, as they would meet in Heaven, to comfort her father.

To her father himself, he wrote in the same strain; but, he told her father that he expressly confided his wife and child to his care. And he told him this, very strongly, with the hope of rousing him from any despondency or dangerous
jolted heavily and slowly through the streets. Some time earlier, inasmuch as the tumbrils
were tending, he thought he had done with this world.

But, it beckoned him back in his sleep, and showed itself in shining forms. Free and happy,
back in the old house in Soko (though it had nothing in it like the real house), unexpectedly
released and light of heart, he was with Lucie again, and she told him it was all a dream, and
he had never gone away. A pause of forgetfulness, and then he had even suffered, and had
come back to her, dead and at peace, and yet there was no difference in him. Another pause of obli-
vation, and he awoke in the somber morning, unconscious where he was or what had happened,
until it flashed upon his mind, “this is the day of my death!”

Thus, he had come through the hours, to the
day when the fifty-two heads were to fall. And
now, while he was composed, and hoped that he
could meet the end with quiet heroism, a new
motion began in his waking thoughts, which was
very difficult to master.

He had never seen the instrument that was
to terminate his life. How high it was from
the ground, how many steps it had, where he
would be tended. How high it was from
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He had never seen the instrument that was
to terminate his life. How high it was from
the ground, how many steps it had, where he
would be tended, how he would be touched,
whether the touching hands would be dyed red,
which way his face would be turned, whether
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whether the touching hands would be dyed red,
With wonderful quickness, and with a strength, both of will and action, that appeared quite supernatural, he forced all these changes upon him. The prisoner was like a young child in his hands.

“Carton! Dear Carton! It is madness. It cannot be accomplished; it never can be done; it has been attempted, and has always failed. I implore you not to add your death to the bitterness of mine.”

“Do I ask you, my dear Darnay, to pass the door? When I ask that, refuse. There are pen and ink and paper on this table. Is your hand steady enough to write?”

“It was, when you came in.”

“Steady it again, and write what I shall dictate. Quick, friend, quick!”

Pressing his hand to his bewildered head, Darnay sat down at the table. Carton, with his right hand in his breast, stood close beside him.

“Write exactly as I speak.”

“To whom do I address it?”

“To no one.” Carton still had his hand in his breast.

“Do I date it?”

“No.”

The prisoner looked up, at each question. Carton, standing over him with his hand in his breast, looked down.

“If you remember,” said Carton, dictating, “the words that passed between us, long ago, you will readily comprehend this when you see them. You will readily comprehend this when you see it. Do you remember them, I know. It is not in your nature to forget them.”

He was drawing his hand from his breast; the prisoner chancing to look up in his hurried manner as he wrote, the hand stopped, closing upon something.

“Have you written ‘forget them?’” Carton asked.

“I have. Is that a weapon in your hand?”

“No; I am not armed.”

“What is it in your hand?”

“You shall know directly. Write on; there are but a few words more.” Carton dictated again.

“I am thankful that the time has come, when I can prove them. That I do so, is no subject for regret or grief.” As he said these words with his eyes fixed on the writer, his hand slowly and softly moved down to the writer’s face. The pen dropped from Darnay’s fingers on the table, and he looked about him vacantly.

“What vapour is that?” he asked.

“You see?” said Carton, looking up at him, as he knelt on one knee beside the insensible figure, putting the paper in the breast: “is your hazard very great?”

“Mr. Carton,” the Spy answered, with a timid snap of his fingers, “my hazard is not that, in the thick of business here, if you are true to the whole of your bargain.”

“Don’t fear me. I will be true to the death.”

“You must be, Mr. Carton, if the tale of fifty-two is to be right. Being made right by you in that dress, I shall have no fear.”

“You must be, Mr. Carton, if the tale of fifty-two is to be right. Being made right by you in that dress, I shall have no fear.”

“You?” said the spy, nervously.

“Him; man, with whom I have exchanged. You go out, and take me to the coach.”

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“You?” said the spy, nervously.

“How, then?” said one of them, contemplating.

“If it had been otherwise?” Carton’s hand was again watchfully and softly stealing down; “I never should have used the longer opportunity. If it had been otherwise?” the hand was at the prisoner’s face; “I should but have had so much the more to answer for. If it had been otherwise——.” Carton looked at the pen, and saw that it was trailing off into unintelligible signs.

“Carton’s hand moved back to his breast no more. The prisoner spring up, with a reproachful look, but Carton’s hand was close and firm at his nostrils, and Carton’s left arm caught him round the waist. For a few seconds he faintly struggled with the man who had come to lay down his life for him; but, within a minute or so, he was stretched insensible on the ground.

Quickly, but with hands as true to the purpose as his heart was, Carton dressed himself in the clothes the prisoner had laid aside, combed back his hair, and tied it with the ribbon the prisoner had worn. Then, he softly called “Enter there! Come in!” and the Spy presented himself.

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“How, then?” said one of them, contemplating.
The door closed, and Carton was left alone. Straining his powers of listening to the utmost, he listened for any sound that might denote suspicion or alarm. There was none. Keys turned, doors clashed, footsteps passed along distant passages; no cry was raised, or hurry made, that seemed unusual. Breathing more freely in a little while, he sat down at the table, and listened again until the clocks struck Two.

Pondering that he was not afraid of, for he divined their meaning, then began to be audible. Several doors were opened in succession, and finally his own. A guilder, with a list in his hand, looked in, merely saying, "Follow me." He listened for any sound that might denote suspicion or alarm. There was none. Keys turned, doors clashed, footsteps passed along distant passages; no cry was raised, or hurry made, that seemed unusual. Breathing more freely in a little while, he sat down at the table, and listened again until the clocks struck Two.

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"I am he. Necessarily, being the last."

It is Jarvis Lorry who has replied to all the previous questions. It is Jarvis Lorry who has silently and stands with his hand on the coach door, replying to a group of officials. They leisurely walk round the carriage and leisurely mount the box, to look at what little luggage it carries on the roof; the country-people hanging about, press nearer to the coach-doors and greedily stare in; a little child, carried by its mother, has its short arm held out for it, that it may touch the wife of an aristocrat who has gone to the Guillotine.

"Behold your papers, Jarvis Lorry, counter-signed!"

"One can depart, citizen?"

"One can depart. Forward, my possessions! A good journey!"

"I salute you, citizens.—And the first danger passed!"

These are again the words of Jarvis Lorry, as he clasps his hands, and looks upward. There is terror in the carriage, there is weeping, there is the heavy breathing of the insensible traveller. "Are we not going too slowly? Can they not be induced to go faster?" asks Lucie, clinging to the old man.

"It would seem like flight, my darling. I must not urge them too much: it would rouse suspicion."

"Look back, look back, and see if we are pursued!"

"The road is clear, my dearest. So far, we are not pursued!"

Houses in twos and threes pass by us, solitary farms, ruinous buildings, dye-works tanneries and the like, open country, avenues of leafless trees. The hard uneven pavement is under us, the soft deep mud is on either side. Sometimes, we strike into the skirting mud, to avoid the stones that clatter us and shake us, and sometimes we stick in ruts and sloughs there. The agony of our impatience is then so great, that in our wild alarm and hurry we are sure, the new postilions follow, sucking and sure, the new postilions follow, sucking and

Sometimes, we strike into the skirting mud, to avoid the stones that clatter us and shake us, and sometimes we stick in ruts and sloughs there. The agony of our impatience is then so great, that in our wild alarm and hurry we are sure, the new postilions follow, sucking and sure, the new postilions follow, sucking and

Deer passed!”

"What is it?" asks Mr. Lorry, looking out at window.

"How many did they say?"

"Fifty-two."

"I said so! A brave number! My fellow-citizen here, would have it forty-two; ten more heads are worth having. The Guillotine goes handsomely. I love it. Hi forward. Whoop then!"

The night comes on dark. He moves more; he is beginning to revive, and to speak intelligibly; he thinks they are still together; he asks him, by his name, what he has in his hand. O pity us, kind Heaven, and help us! Look out, look out, and see if we are pursued.

The wind is rushing after us, and the clouds are flying after us, and the moon is plunging after us, and the whole wild night is in pursuit of us; but, so far, we are pursued by nothing else.

**DRIFT.**

**SANCTUARY-ARREST FOR DEBT.**

Like all the dispensations of the earlier English Church, the right of "sanctuary" was so distorted from its original conditions that it proved a contention, grievance, point of quarrel, and stumbling-block between the ecclesiastics and the laity, especially the feudal chiefs who held any law rather cheap. The privilege, which had belonged to every church during the earlier ages of Christianity, of sheltering the criminal and the laity, especially the feudal chiefs who held any law rather cheap. The privilege, which had belonged to every church during the earlier ages of Christianity, of sheltering the criminal and the laity, especially the feudal chiefs who held any law rather cheap. The privilege, which had belonged to every church during the earlier ages of Christianity, of sheltering the criminal and

In the days of Richard the Second, John of Gaunt, the fourth son of Edward the Third, by his Queen Philippa, "feudal to the core," and a staunch friend of the reformer John Wiclif, openly violated the privi-