A TALE OF TWO CITIES

CHARLES DICKENS



TIMELESS CLASSICS

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A Season of Change

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom. It was the age of foolishness. It was the season of light. It was the season of darkness. It was the spring of hope. It was the winter of despair.

It was the year 1775.

The kings of England and France were neither very good nor very wise rulers. In France, the King and Queen, the Lords and Ladies of the court, and most of the rich people lived in great comfort. They behaved as if each day was a grand party. Although the common people did all the work, they were often hungry and wore only rags. In those days, many workers starved to death or died of illness or neglect. But their deaths did not touch the cold hearts of the rich.

* * * *

One cold winter's day, a man stepped off the coach at the seacoast town of Dover in England. He was a middle-aged man, dressed like a man of business. He went straight to the inn.

"My name is Mr. Lorry," the man said to the innkeeper. "I am from Tellson's Bank in London. I will need a room for myself and another room for a young lady. Miss Lucie Manette will arrive later today."

The innkeeper bowed. "Very good, sir."

After he had something to eat, Mr. Lorry left the inn and went for a walk on the beach. Although the day was cold and dreary, he walked for hours. Often, he paused to look out across the sea toward France. He seemed to have a lot on his mind.

Lucie Manette arrived a few hours later. The innkeeper showed her to Mr. Lorry's sitting room. As they greeted each other, Mr. Lorry studied her. "She has grown into a beautiful young woman," he thought. "Indeed, she looks a lot like her mother, with those blond curls and blue eyes."

When they were both seated, Lucie said, "The bank sent me a letter saying there was

surprising news of my long-dead father. Can you tell me what that means, Mr. Lorry?"

"It's hard to know just where to begin," Mr. Lorry said with a troubled sigh. "Twenty years ago, I did some work for a famous French doctor named Dr. Manette."

Lucie gasped. "That was my *father*!"

"Dr. Manette had married an English woman," Mr. Lorry went on.

"My father died when I was very small," Lucie said. "My dear mother lived only two years after that. When she died, I was left an orphan." Lucie paused and looked closely at Mr. Lorry. "Were *you* the man who brought me to England?" she asked.

Mr. Lorry nodded. "Yes, but now I must ask you a question. What if your father had *not* died? What if he had been put in prison by someone who hated him? What if your mother begged the King for news about your father—but no one would help her?"

Lucie's face turned pale. She fell on her knees and grasped Mr. Lorry's hand. "Please tell me the truth!" she exclaimed.

"Your father is alive," Mr. Lorry said.

Lucie stared at him. "*No*, that cannot be! It must be his ghost!" she cried.

Mr. Lorry shook his head. "Your father is greatly changed, but he is not a ghost. He is not in good health, but he is alive. He has been released from prison. Now he is staying in the house of a former servant, a man named Monsieur Defarge. Tomorrow, we will go to Paris to rescue your father. Then we will bring him home to England."

Late the next day, Mr. Lorry and Lucie arrived in Paris. Their carriage drove down a narrow, dirty street. It stopped in front of a wine shop owned by Monsieur and Madame Defarge. Lucie saw many poor, ragged people huddled outside the door. Some were so thin and pale they looked like skeletons. Lucie shivered.

Just as she and Mr. Lorry went into the wine shop, a delivery cart came down the street. Suddenly one of the wooden barrels of wine rolled off the cart. It broke when it hit the rough cobblestones of the street. The red wine splashed like blood across the stones. At once the crowd of poor people ran into the street

and fell on their knees to drink the wine. They scooped up the wine in their hands. They wet handkerchiefs in the puddles of wine and sucked the cloth. They squeezed the dirty wine into the mouths of their thin, ragged children.

The red wine stained the street and the hands and faces of the people. One man rose from his knees. He dipped his fingers into the red mud of the street. On the wall behind him, he wrote the word *Blood*.

Almost at once, another man took a handkerchief and wiped the word from the wall. "Not *now*!" he whispered. "Soon the streets will run with blood—not wine. But the time is not yet right. Be patient."

Inside the wine shop, wooden tables and benches stood about the room. Behind the counter a middle-aged woman sat, knitting.

"Madame Defarge?" Mr. Lorry asked.

The woman looked up. Seeing that the strangers were very well-dressed, a cold, unfriendly look came into her eyes. "I am Madame Defarge," she said.

"Good day, madame. May I speak with your husband?" said Mr. Lorry.

Monsieur Defarge came forward to greet them with a smile. Lucie saw that he was the man who had erased the word *Blood* from the stone wall. "How may I help you?" Defarge asked with a smile.

"We are here to see Dr. Manette," said Mr. Lorry.

Defarge's smile vanished. "Come with me," he said in a gruff voice.

He led them up a dark, narrow staircase. Lucie saw garbage scattered about on the landing. The cold, damp air smelled sour. Trembling, Lucie drew her warm cloak tighter around her.

At the top of the stairs, Defarge took out a key and unlocked the door to an attic room.

"Why is he locked up?" Lucie asked. "Hasn't he been locked up long enough?"

"He was locked up for 18 years," Defarge answered. "If we left the door open, he would not understand. He would be afraid."

"How can that be?" asked Mr. Lorry. "How can a man be so fearful?"

Defarge turned to them. His eyes flashed with anger. "*How?* Oh, let me tell you, sir. It

is *fear* that butters the stale crusts we eat. It is fear that we wear like a rough shirt. Fear is the only friend who walks with us day and night. There is good reason for so much fear. Here in France terrible things are done to the people every day."

Defarge pushed the door open. Inside, the attic room was dark and narrow with a low ceiling. A small window let gray light into the room. Next to the window, an old man was sitting on a low bench. He was thin and pale and dressed in rags. His gray hair and beard were long and tangled.

When the visitors walked into the room, the old man did not look up. They saw that he was busy making a pair of shoes.

"You have a visitor," Defarge said to Dr. Manette.

"Dr. Manette, do you know who I am?" Mr. Lorry asked, stepping into the dim light. "Do you remember me?"

The old man gazed at Mr. Lorry. For a moment, it almost seemed as if he did remember. But then he frowned and shook his head. With a sigh, he returned to work.



"Well?" Defarge asked Mr. Lorry. "Do you know him?"

Mr. Lorry nodded. "Oh, yes, but he has changed so much. And yet, for one moment, I saw the face I remember from so long ago."

"Why is he making a pair of shoes?" Lucie asked. "My father was a doctor."

"He learned to make shoes in prison," Defarge said. "Now that is all he knows. He does not even remember his real name. He calls himself by his cell number." Defarge turned to Dr. Manette. "Can you tell us your name, sir?"

Dr. Manette looked sadly at Defarge and said, "105, North Tower."

Lucie stepped closer to Dr. Manette. He peered at her. "Who are you?" he asked.

Lucie's eyes filled with tears. She sat down next to him on the bench. "My name is not important right now," she said softly. "For now it is enough for you to know that you are safe."

Dr. Manette gazed at her blond hair. "That *voice!*" he exclaimed. With shaking fingers he reached out and touched her hair. "Your golden curls. They're the same as—" He shook his head. "What is your name, my gentle angel?"

Lucie put her arms around the man's thin shoulders. "I will tell you my name later," she said. "For now, believe me that your pain is over. I have come to take you home to England."

TIMELESS CLASSICS

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

The workers are in revolt! Every French nobleman is in danger of losing his head to the infamous guillotine. Yet Charles Darnay renounced his title years ago. Why is he scheduled to die for the crimes of his corrupt family? His only hope lies in the hands of one unlikely man.

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