



A Tale Of Two Cities

Charles Dickens

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"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," Charles Dickens writes in the opening lines of A Tale of Two Cities as he paints a picture of life in England and France. The year is late 1775, and Jarvis Lorry travels from London to Paris on a secret mission for his employer, Tellson's Bank. Joining him on his journey is Lucie Manette, a 17-year-old woman who is stunned to learn that her father, Doctor Alexandre Manette, is alive and has recently been released after having been secretly imprisoned in Paris for 18 years. When Mr. Lorry and Lucie arrive in Paris, they find the Doctor's former servant, Ernest Defarge, caring for him. Defarge now runs a wine-shop with his wife in the poverty-stricken quarter of Saint Antoine. Defarge takes Mr. Lorry and Lucie to the garret room where he is keeping Doctor Manette, warning them that the Doctor's years in prison have greatly changed him. Thin and pale, Doctor Manette sits at a shoemaker's bench intently making shoes. He barely responds to questions from Defarge and Mr. Lorry, but when Lucie approaches him, he remembers his wife and begins to weep. Lucie comforts him, and that night Mr. Lorry and Lucie take him to England. Five years later, the porter for Tellson's Bank, Jerry Cruncher, takes a message to Mr. Lorry who is at a courthouse. Mr. Lorry has been called as a witness for the trial of Charles Darnay, a Frenchman accused of being a spy for France and the United States. Also at the trial are Doctor Manette and Lucie, who are witnesses for the prosecution. Doctor Manette has fully recovered and has formed a close bond with his daughter. If found guilty of treason, Darnay will suffer a gruesome death, and the testimony of an acquaintance, John Barsad, and a former servant, Roger Cly, seems sure to result in a guilty verdict. Questions from Darnay's attorney, Mr. Stryver, indicate that Cly and Barsad are the real spies, but the turning point in the trial occurs when Sydney Carton, Stryver's assistant, points out that Carton and Darnay look alike enough to be doubles. This revelation throws into doubt a positive identification of Darnay as the person seen passing secrets, and the court acquits Darnay. After the trial, Darnay, Carton, and Stryver begin spending time at the Manette home, obviously attracted to Lucie's beauty and kind nature. Stryver decides to propose to her, but is dissuaded by Mr. Lorry. Carton confesses his love to Lucie, but does not propose, knowing that his drunken and apathetic way of life is not worthy of her. However, he vows that he would gladly give his life to save a life she loved, and Lucie is moved by his sincerity and devotion. Eventually, it is Darnay whose love Lucie returns, and the two marry with Doctor Manette's uneasy blessing. While the couple is on their honeymoon, the Doctor suffers a nine-day relapse of his mental incapacity and believes he is making shoes in prison again.



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