A Tale of Two Cities Chapter Summaries

Book the First

Chapter 4: The Preparation

The next morning, Lorry descends from the coach at the Royal George Hotel in Dover. After shedding his travel clothes, he emerges as a well-dressed businessman of sixty. That afternoon, a waiter announces that Lucie Manette has arrived from London. Lorry meets the “short, slight, pretty figure” who has received word from the bank that “some intelligence—or discovery” has been made “respecting the small property of my poor father ... so long dead.” After reiterating his duties as a businessman, Lorry relates the real reason that Tellson’s has summoned Lucie to Paris. Her father, once a reputed doctor, has been found alive. “Your father,” Lorry reports to her, “has been taken to the house of an old servant in Paris, and we are going there: I, to identify him if I can: you, to restore him to life, love, duty, rest, comfort.” Lucie goes into shock, and her lively and protective servant, Miss Pross, rushes in to attend to her.

Chapter 5: The Wine-shop

“The wine was red wine, and had stained the ground of the narrow street. . . .”

The setting shifts from Dover, England to Saint Antoine, a poor suburb of Paris. A wine cask falls to the pavement in the street and everyone rushes to it. Men kneel and scoop up the wine that has pooled in the paving stones, while women sop up the liquid with handkerchiefs and wring them into the mouths of their babies. One man dips his finger into the “muddy wine-lees” and scrawls the word blood on a wall.

The wine shop is owned by Monsieur Defarge, a “bull-necked, martial-looking man of thirty.” His wife, Madame Defarge, sits solemnly behind the counter, watchful of everything that goes on around her. She signals to her husband as he enters the wine shop, alerting him to the presence of an elderly gentleman and a young lady. Defarge eyes the strangers (they are Lorry and Lucie) but pretends not to notice them, speaking instead with three familiar customers, each of whom refers to the other two as “Jacques” (a code name that identifies themselves to one another as revolutionaries). After Defarge directs the men to a chamber on the fifth floor and sends them out, Mr. Lorry approaches from the corner and begs a word with Defarge. The men have a brief conversation, and soon Defarge leads Lorry and Lucie up a steep, dangerous rise of stairs. They come to a filthy landing, where the three men from the wine shop stand staring through chinks in the wall. Stating that he makes a show of Doctor Manette to a chosen few “to whom the sight is likely to do good,” Defarge opens the door to reveal a white-haired man busily making shoes.
**Book the Second**

**Chapter 2: A Sight**

The bank clerk instructs Cruncher to go to the Old Bailey Courthouse and await orders from Jarvis Lorry. Cruncher arrives at the court, where Charles Darnay, a handsome, well-bred young man, stands trial for treason. Cruncher understands little of the legal jargon, but he gleans that Darnay has been charged with divulging secret information to the king of France (Louis XVI): namely, that England plans to send armed forces to fight in the American colonies. As Darnay looks to a young lady and her distinguished father, a whisper rushes through the courtroom, speculating on the identity of the two. Eventually, Cruncher discovers that they will serve as witnesses against the prisoner.

**Chapter 3: A Disappointment**

The Attorney-General prosecutes the case, demanding that the jury find Darnay guilty of passing English secrets into French hands. The Solicitor-General examines John Barsad, whose testimony supports the Attorney-General’s case. The cross-examination, however, tarnishes Barsad’s pure and righteous character. It reveals that he has served time in debtor’s prison and has been involved in brawls over gambling. The prosecution calls its next witness, Roger Cly, whom the defense attorney, Mr. Stryver, also exposes as a dubious, untrustworthy witness. Mr. Lorry then takes the stand, and the prosecution asks him if, five years ago, he shared a Dover mail coach with the accused. Lorry contends that his fellow passengers sat so bundled up that their identities remained hidden. The prosecutors then ask similar questions of Lucie, the young woman Darnay had noticed earlier. She admits to meeting the prisoner on the ship back to England. When she recounts how he helped her to care for her sick father, however, she seems to help his case—yet she then inadvertently turns the court against Darnay by reporting his statement that George Washington’s fame might one day match that of George III. Doctor Manette is also called to the stand, but he claims that he remembers nothing of the trip due to his illness.

Mr. Stryver is in the middle of cross-examining another witness “with no result” when his insolent young colleague, Sydney Carton, passes him a note. Stryver begins arguing the contents of the note, which draws the court’s attention to Carton’s own uncanny resemblance to the prisoner. The undeniable likeness foils the court’s ability to identify Darnay as a spy beyond reasonable doubt. The jury retires to deliberate and eventually returns with an acquittal for Darnay.

**Chapter 6: Hundreds of People**

Four months later, Mr. Lorry, now a trusted friend of the Manette family, arrives at Doctor Manette’s home. Finding Manette and his daughter not at home, he converses with Miss Pross. They discuss why the doctor continues to keep his shoemaker’s bench.
Their conversation also touches on the number of suitors who come to call on Lucie. Miss Pross complains that they come by the dozen, by the hundred—all “people who are not at all worthy of Ladybird.” In Miss Pross’s opinion, the only man worthy of Lucie is her own brother, Solomon Pross, who, she laments, disqualified himself by making a certain mistake. Lorry knows, however, that Solomon is a scoundrel who robbed Miss Pross of her possessions and left her in poverty. He goes on to ask if Manette ever returns to his shoemaking, and Pross assures him that the doctor no longer thinks about his dreadful imprisonment.

Lucie and Manette return, and soon Darnay joins them. Darnay relates that a workman, making alterations to a cell in the Tower of London, came upon a carving in the wall: “D I G.” At first, the man mistook these for some prisoner’s initials, but he soon enough realized that they spelled the word *dig*. Upon digging, the man discovered the ashes of a scrap of paper on which the prisoner must have written a message. The story startles Manette, but he soon recovers.

Carton arrives and sits with the others near a window in the drawing room. The footsteps on the street below make a terrific echo. Lucie imagines that the footsteps belong to people that will eventually enter into their lives. Carton comments that if Lucie’s speculation is true, then a great crowd must be on its way.

**Chapter 8: Monseigneur in the Country**

The Marquis arrives in the small village to which he serves as lord. There, too, the people live wretched lives, exploited, poor, and starving. As he looks over the submissive faces of the peasants, he singles out a road-mender whom he passed on his journey, a man whose fixed stare bothered him. He demands to know what the road-mender was staring at, and the man responds that someone was holding onto the bottom of the carriage. The Marquis continues on his way and soon comes upon a peasant woman, mourning at a rustic graveside. The woman stops him and begs that he provide her husband’s grave with some stone or marker, lest he be forgotten, but the Marquis drives away, unmoved. He arrives at his chateau and, upon entering, asks if Monsieur Charles has arrived from England.

**Chapter 9: The Gorgon’s Head**

Later that night, at the Marquis’ chateau, Charles Darnay, the nephew of the Marquis, arrives by carriage. Darnay tells his uncle that he wants to renounce the title and property that he stands to inherit when the Marquis dies. The family’s name, Darnay contends, is associated with “fear and slavery.” He insists that the family has consistently acted shamefully, “injuring every human creature who came between us and our pleasure.” The Marquis dismisses these protests, urging his nephew to accept his “natural destiny.” The next morning, the Marquis is found dead with a knife through his heart. Attached to the knife is a note that reads: “Drive him fast to his tomb. This, from Jacques.”
Chapter 12: The Fellow of Delicacy

The next day, Stryver plans to take Lucie to the Vauxhall Gardens to make his marriage proposal. On his way, he drops in at Tellson’s Bank, where he informs Mr. Lorry of his intentions. Lorry persuades Stryver to postpone his proposal until he knows for certain that Lucie will accept. This admonition upsets Stryver. He almost insults Lucie as a “mincing Fool,” but Lorry warns him against doing so. Lorry asks that Stryver hold off his proposal for a few hours to give him time to consult the family and see exactly where Stryver stands. Later that night, Lorry visits Stryver and reports that his fears have been confirmed. If Stryver were to propose, the Manettes would reject his offer. Stryver dismisses the entire affair as one of the “vanities” of “empty-headed girls” and begs Lorry to forget it.

Chapter 14: The Honest Tradesman

One morning outside Tellson’s Bank, Jerry Cruncher sees a funeral pass by. Jerry asks a few questions and learns that the crowd is preparing to bury Roger Cly, a convicted spy and one of the men who testified against Darnay in his court case. Cruncher joins the motley procession, which includes a chimney-sweep, a bear-leader and his mangy bear, and a pieman. After much drinking and carousing, the mob buries Cly and, for sport, decides to accuse passers-by of espionage in order to wreak “vengeance on them.” At home that night, Cruncher once again harangues his wife for her prayers. He then announces that he is going “fishing.” In reality, he goes to dig up Cly’s body in order to sell it to scientists. Unbeknownst to Cruncher, his son follows him to the cemetery, but runs away terrified, believing that the coffin is chasing him. The next day, he asks his father the definition of a “Resurrection-Man”—the term describes men like Cruncher, who dig up bodies to sell to science. He announces his intentions to have this job as an adult.

Chapter 16: Still Knitting

The Defarges return to Saint Antoine later that evening. A policeman friend warns Defarge that a spy by the name of John Barsad has been sent to their neighborhood. Madame Defarge resolves to knit his name into the register. That night, Defarge admits his fear that the revolution will not come in his lifetime. Madame Defarge dismisses his impatience and compares the revolution to lightning and an earthquake: it strikes quickly and with great force, but no one knows how long it will take to form. The next day, Barsad visits the wine shop. He masquerades as a sympathizer with the revolutionaries and comments on the horrible treatment of the peasants. Knowing that Defarge once worked as Doctor Manette’s servant, he reports that Lucie Manette plans to marry, and that her husband is to be the Marquis’ nephew, Darnay. After Barsad leaves, Madame Defarge adds Darnay’s name to her registry, unsettling Defarge, the once loyal servant of Manette.
**Chapter 17: One Night**

It is the eve of Lucie’s marriage to Darnay. Lucie and her father have enjoyed long days of happiness together. Doctor Manette finally has begun to put his imprisonment behind him. For the first time since his release, Manette speaks of his days in the Bastille. In prison, he passed much time imagining what sort of person Lucie would grow up to be. He is very happy now, thanks to Lucie, who has brought him “consolation and restoration.” Later that night, Lucie sneaks down to her father’s room and finds him sleeping soundly.

**Chapter 18: Nine Days**

Darnay and Doctor Manette converse before going to church for Darnay’s wedding to Lucie. Manette emerges “deadly pale” from this meeting. Darnay and Lucie are married and depart for their honeymoon. Almost immediately, a change comes over Manette; he now looks scared and lost. Later that day, Miss Pross and Mr. Lorry discover Manette at his shoemaker’s bench, lapsed into an incoherent state. They fear that he will not recover in time to join the newlyweds, as planned, on the honeymoon, and for nine days they keep careful watch over him.

**Chapter 21: Echoing Footsteps**

Years go by, and Lucie and her family enjoy a tranquil life. She gives birth to a daughter, little Lucie, and a son, who dies young. Lucie still maintains her habit of sitting in a corner of the parlor, listening to the echoing footsteps on the street below. By 1789, the echoes reverberate “from a distance” and make a sound “as of a great storm in France with a dreadful sea rising.” One day in July, Lorry visits the Darnays and reports that an alarming number of French citizens are sending their money and property to England.

The scene then shifts to the storming of the Bastille in Paris. Defarge and Madame Defarge serve as leaders among the mob. Once inside the Bastille, Defarge grabs a guard and demands to be taken to 105 North Tower. Defarge searches the cell. When he is finished, he rejoins the mob as it murders and mutilates the governor who had defended the fortress. Madame Defarge cuts off the man’s head.

**Chapter 22: The Sea Still Rises**

One week later in Saint Antoine, Defarge arrives bearing news of the capture of Foulon, a wealthy man who once declared that if people were starving they should eat grass. Foulon had faked his own death to avoid the peasants’ fury but was later discovered hiding in the country. The revolutionaries set out to meet Foulon, led by Madame Defarge and a woman known only as The Vengeance. The mob strings Foulon up, but the rope breaks and he does not die until his third hanging. The peasants put his head on a pike and fill his mouth with grass. When they have finished, the peasants eat their “scanty and insufficient suppers,” parents play with their children, and lovers love.
Chapter 23: Fire Rises

The French countryside lies ruined and desolate. An unidentified man, weary from travel, meets the mender of roads. They address each other as “Jacques” to indicate their status as revolutionaries. The mender of roads directs the man to the chateau of the murdered Marquis. Later that night, the man sets the castle on fire. A rider from the chateau urges the village soldiers to help put out the fire and salvage the valuables there, but they refuse, and the villagers go inside their homes and put “candles in every dull little pane of glass.” The peasants nearly kill Gabelle, the local tax collector, but he escapes to the roof of his house, where he watches the chateau burn. The narrator reports that scenes such as this are occurring all over France.

Chapter 24: Drawn to the Loadstone Rock

Three years pass. Political turmoil continues in France, causing England to become a refuge for persecuted aristocrats. Tellson’s Bank in London becomes a “great gathering-place of Monseigneur.” Tellson’s has decided to dispatch Mr. Lorry to its Paris branch, in hopes that he can protect their valuable ledgers, papers, and records from destruction. Darnay arrives to persuade Lorry not to go, but Lorry insists, saying that he will bring Jerry Cruncher as his bodyguard.

Lorry receives an urgent letter, addressed to the Marquis St. Evrémonde, along with instructions for its delivery. Lorry laments the extreme difficulty of locating the Marquis, who has abandoned the estate willed to him by his murdered uncle. Darnay, careful to let no one suspect that he is in fact the missing Marquis, says that the Marquis is an acquaintance of his. He takes the letter, assuring Lorry that he will see it safely delivered. Darnay reads the letter, which contains a plea from Gabelle, whom the revolutionaries have imprisoned for his upkeep of the Marquis’ property. Gabelle begs the new Marquis to return to France and save him. Darnay resolves to go to Paris, with a “glorious vision of doing good.” After writing a farewell letter to Lucie and Doctor Manette, he departs.

Book the Third

Chapter 4: Calm in Storm

Four days later, Manette returns from La Force. Lorry notes a change in the once-fragile Manette, who now seems full of strength and power. Manette tells him that he has persuaded the Tribunal, a self-appointed body that tries and sentences the revolution’s prisoners, to keep Darnay alive. Moreover, he has secured a job as the inspecting physician of three prisons, one of which is La Force. These duties will enable him to ensure Darnay’s safety. Time passes, and France rages as though in a fever. The revolutionaries behead the king and queen, and the guillotine becomes a fixture in the Paris streets. Darnay remains in prison for a year and three months.
Chapter 5: The Wood-sawyer

While the family waits for Darnay’s trial, Manette tells Lucie of a window in the prison from which Darnay might see her in the street. For two hours every day, Lucie stands in the area visible from this window. A wood-sawyer who works nearby talks with Lucie while she waits, pretending that his saw is a guillotine (it bears the inscription “Little Sainte Guillotine”) and that each piece of wood that he cuts is the head of a prisoner. One day, a throng of people comes down the street, dancing a horrible and violent dance known as the Carmagnole. The dancers depart, and the distressed Lucie now sees her father standing before her. As he comforts Lucie, Madame Defarge happens by. She and Manette exchange salutes. Manette then tells Lucie that Darnay will stand trial on the following day and assures her that her husband will fare well in it.

Chapter 6: Triumph

A motley and bloodthirsty crowd assembles at the trial of Charles Darnay. When Doctor Manette is announced as Darnay’s father-in-law, a happy cry goes up among the audience. The court hears testimony from Darnay, Manette, and Gabelle, establishing that Darnay long ago had renounced his title out of disapproval of the aristocracy’s treatment of peasants. These factors, in addition to Darnay’s status as the son-in-law of the much-loved martyr Manette, persuade the jury to acquit him. The crowd carries Darnay home in a chair on their shoulders.

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Chapter 12: Darkness

Carton goes to Defarge’s wine shop. The Defarges marvel at how much he physically resembles the condemned Darnay. Carton overhears Madame Defarge’s plan to accuse Lucie and Manette of spying, and to accuse Lucie’s daughter as well. Defarge himself finds this course unnecessary, but his wife reminds him of her grievance against the family Evrémonde: she is the surviving sister of the woman and man killed by the Marquis and his brother. She demands the extermination of their heirs. Carton pays for his wine and returns to Tellson’s.

At midnight, Manette arrives home completely out of his mind. He looks about madly for his shoemaking bench. After calming Manette, Carton takes from the doctor’s coat the papers that will allow Lucie, the doctor, and the child to leave the city. He gives the documents to Lorry. Then, Carton gives Lorry his own papers, refusing to explain why. Afraid that the papers may soon be recalled because Madame Defarge intends to denounce the entire family, Carton insists to Lorry that time is of the essence: the family must leave tomorrow. Alone in the street that night, Carton utters a final good-bye and blessing to Lucie.