

Chapter 1: The Period

Summary: As its title promises, this brief chapter establishes the era in which the novel takes place: England and France in 1775. The age is marked by competing and contradictory attitudes—"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times"—but resembles the "present period" in which Dickens writes. In England, the public worries over religious prophecies, popular paranormal phenomena in the form of "the Cock-lane ghost," and ignores the messages that a colony of British subjects in America has sent to King George III. France, on the other hand, witnesses excessive spending and extreme violence, a trend that anticipates the erection of the guillotine. Yet in terms of peace and order, English society cannot "justify much national boasting" either—crime and capital punishment abound.

Chapter 2: The Mail

Summary: On a Friday night in late November of 1775, a mail coach wends its way from London to Dover. The journey proves so treacherous that the three passengers must dismount from the carriage and hike alongside it as it climbs a steep hill. From out of the great mists, a messenger on horseback appears and asks to speak to Jarvis Lorry of Tellson's Bank. The travelers react warily, fearing that they have come upon a highwayman or robber. Mr. Lorry, however, recognizes the messenger's voice as that of Jerry Cruncher, the odd-job man at Tellson's, and accepts his message. The note that Jerry passes him reads: "Wait at Dover for Mam'selle." Lorry instructs Jerry to return to Tellson's with this reply: "Recalled to Life." Confused and troubled by the "blazing strange message," Jerry rides on to deliver it.

Chapter 3: The Night Shadows

Summary: The narrator (Dickens) ponders the secrets and mysteries that each human being poses to every other. The synopsis, though, is this: death sucks so badly because it forces us to realize how much we don't know about the people around us. Meanwhile, Jerry (the deliverer of the message from the last chapter) is sitting in an alehouse, puzzling over the meaning of his latest assignment. He can't figure out the message that he's supposed to deliver, at all. Nonetheless, he decides to set off to London to deliver it.

Meanwhile, the mail coach rattles its way down the road to Dover. Inside, Mr. Lorry dozes as he thinks. All of the sounds in the mail coach begin to sound like the sounds he knows so well—the sounds of Tellson's bank. Despite the comforting sounds of the bank, however, Mr. Lorry remains uneasy.

Lorry, as he rides on in the mail coach with two strangers, is another mystery to his coach-mates Dozing, he drifts in and out of dreams, most of which revolve around the workings of Tellson's bank. Still, there exists "another current of impression that never cease[s] to run" through Lorry's mind—the notion that he makes his way to dig someone out of a grave.

He imagines repetitive conversations with a specter, who tells Lorry that his body has lain buried nearly eighteen years. Lorry informs his imaginary companion that he now has been "recalled to life" and asks him if he cares to live. He also asks, cryptically, "Shall I show her to you? Will you come and see her?" The ghost's reaction to this question varies, as he sometimes claims that he would die were he to see this woman too soon; at other times, he weeps and pleads to see her immediately. The man has a different answer for each time Mr. Lorry imagines the conversation.

Sometimes he's very happy, other times he's almost angry. Playing the conversation out in his head over and over again, Mr. Lorry finally asks the dead man how long he's been buried. The answer, "eighteen years," terrifies Mr. Lorry.

Chp. 4: The Preparation

Summary: Mr. Lorry finally arrives in Dover. He makes sure that there's a boat that's bound for Calais and leaving the next morning, and then he heads to the inn. As he comes down from his room for breakfast, the landlady and the surrounding guests observe him: Mr. Lorry is a nice, neatly-dressed little man of around sixty years.

He seems to be completely prim and proper, except for his eyes: they appear to be full of compassion and emotion. As our narrator points out, compassion and emotion aren't exactly valuable characteristics for a banker to possess. It's probably safe to assume that Mr. Lorry's worked hard to hide them well from his colleagues.

When Mr. Lorry's breakfast arrives, he informs the waiter that a young woman will soon be arriving. He thinks that she'll ask for someone from Tellson's bank, but she won't know Mr. Lorry by name.

Sure enough, the waiter has heard of Tellson's. He and Mr. Lorry have a friendly chat about the wonders of that reputable bank. Here's the synopsis: Tellson's is very, very reputable. It's been in London for one hundred and fifty years. It also has a branch in Paris that's been around for nearly as long as the one in London. The waiter is suitably impressed.

Wandering around the city of Dover, Mr. Lorry spends his day hashing and re-hashing the imaginary conversation he had with the dead man while he traveled. Around supper time, however, he returns to the inn. A young girl arrives just as he does; she's upstairs when he returns. A bit uneasy, Mr. Lorry pulls at his wig. That doesn't seem to do much good at all, but apparently it makes him feel better. He goes up to the young girl's room.

By the fire, he sees a slender, young, pretty girl whose eyes are incredibly expressive—and incredibly familiar. In fact, they look just like the eyes of a young child whom he once carried from Calais to Dover eighteen years earlier. Miss Manette (that's the young girl's name, by the way) asks Mr. Lorry to be seated. She's been told that Mr. Lorry has information "a discovery" regarding her late father's property: he's "so long dead". He sits and explains that he's been sent to explain... something. After awkwardly attempting to explain that something for a good while, he finally puts forth a "hypothetical" story.

Before he begins, however, he makes it absolutely clear that he is a "man of business." As such, he asks for Miss Manette to listen to a small business matter. Long ago, a "man of business" was the trustee of a French doctor. This doctor had a small child. Ring any bells? It sure does for Miss Manette. She's turned pale and is listening excitedly. Mr. Lorry hastens to assure her that he feels nothing. He's a mere machine of the bank.

Funny, the longer he talks, the harder it is for us to believe that he actually feels nothing. This is affecting him in a strange way. Miss Manette recognizes the story as being very, very much like that of her father's. Mr. Lorry agrees. There's one difference, however: this doctor is still alive. He urges Miss Manette to think of his story as a mere matter of business, but it doesn't seem to be working very well. Finally, he tells her that the mother of the young girl died when the child was two, after searching for her father for two years. Her father... well, her father has been found. He had been a victim of a **lettre de cachet**-or a blank form of consignment, meaning he had been wrongfully imprisoned and hidden away under a fake name. Someone wanted him "buried alive" in the Bastille.

He's alive. He may not be much more than alive, but at least they've finally found him. Mr. Lorry proposes that he and Miss Manette go together to Paris to find

her father. Turning completely ashen, Miss Manette murmurs that she's going to see a ghost. She seems to have fainted completely away. Mr. Lorry has no idea what to do.

Suddenly, a wild-looking red-haired woman rushes into the room. She flies into a fury at Mr. Lorry. How dare he upset her darling in this way? Ordering Mr. Lorry to fetch some smelling salts, she quickly brings Lucie back to consciousness. Mr. Lorry humbly asks if the woman will accompany Lucie to France. She offers a brusque reply: she's never seen any need to cross the water. For her mistress, however, she'll do anything.

Analysis: Chapters 1-4

The opening sentence of the novel makes clear, as the title itself does, the importance of doubles in the text:

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 epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair. . . .

Doubles prove essential to the novel's structure, plot, and dominant themes. The idea of resurrection, a theme that emerges in these early pages, would not be possible without some form of its opposite—death. In order to pave the way for the first such resurrection—the recalling to life of the long-imprisoned Doctor Manette—Dickens does much to establish a dark, ominous tone suggestive of death. From the mist-obscured route of the Dover mail coach to the darkly paneled room in which Lorry meets Lucie Manette, the opening chapters brim with gloomy corners and suggestive shadows.

These descriptions of darkness and secrets also contribute to the gothic atmosphere of the novel's opening. Gothic literature, a genre that establishes an uneasy, mysterious mood through the use of remote, desolate settings, supernatural or macabre events, and violence, dominated much of fiction from the late eighteenth century through the end of the nineteenth century. Such classics as *Frankenstein* (1818), by Mary Shelley, and *Wuthering Heights* (1847), by Emily Brontë, helped establish a strong tradition of gothic themes in British literature of this period. Jerry Cruncher's mysterious appearance during the treacherous nighttime journey, and Lorry's macabre visions of disinterring a body, hearken back to the eerie and supernatural feel of *A Tale of Two Cities'* gothic predecessors.

The obscurity that permeates these pages points to the “wonderful fact” that Dickens continuously ponders: every person in every room in every house that he passes possesses a secret, unknown to anyone—even closest friends, family, and lover. As the novel progresses, the reader witnesses Dickens digging—much as Lorry anticipates having to “dig” the doctor out of his ruinous prison experience—for the secrets that provide his characters with their essences and motivations.

In typical Dickensian manner, this project of discovery happens bit by bit: secrets emerge only very slowly. Although the horrible effects of Doctor Manette's incarceration become clear in the next few chapters, the reader doesn't learn the causes of these effects until the end of the novel. This narrative tactic owes much to the form in which Dickens wrote much of his work. *A Tale of Two Cities* was published as a serial piece—that is, in weekly installments from April 20 to November 26, 1859. The original serial format provides the reason for the novel's relatively short chapters and specific chapter subheadings, which, read in sequence, offer a skeletal outline of

Name: _____ Hr: _____

Book the First Chp 1-4 Summary
Sparknotes

the plot. For example, the first three chapters of the second book bear the subheadings “Five Years Later,” “A Sight,” and “A Disappointment,” respectively.

In addition to his plentiful literary talents, Dickens also possessed a shrewd businessman’s sense. He remained keenly aware of what his reading public wanted and, unlike most artists of his caliber, unapologetically admitted to aiming for the largest possible readership. As he had done previously, with *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens set his sights on writing a so-called popular novel. One means of hooking readers into the story was to create a climate of suspense. Within the first four chapters, Dickens already leaves the reader with many questions that need to be answered, creating a sense of excitement and anticipation.

#	Item	Pgs.	Explanation
1	Title of Book the First		
2	Return Message from Jarvis Lorry		
3	How long has the man been buried?		
4	Mr. Lorry claims to be	guide	A _____ of _____
5	Mr. Lorry actually has	guide	_____ and _____
6		guide	Important to the novel’s structure, plot and dominant themes
7		guide	A theme that emerges in the early pages could not be possible without death
8.		guide	A genre that uses: mysterious mood; violence remote/ desolate settings, supernatural/ macabre events
9.	What phrase is repeated in “The Night Shadows”?		