

Chapter 11: Dusk

Vocabulary:

Recognizant- perceptive, affording acknowledgement

Summary: The courtroom crowd pours into the streets to celebrate Darnay's condemnation. John Barsad, charged with ushering Darnay back to his cell, lets Lucie embrace her husband one last time. Darnay insists that Doctor Manette not blame himself for the trial's outcome. Darnay is escorted back to his cell to await his execution the following morning, and Carton escorts the grieving Lucie to her apartment. Carton tells Manette to try his influence one last time with the prosecutors and then meet him at Tellson's, though Lorry feels certain that there is no hope for Darnay, and Carton echoes the sentiment.

Chapter 12: Darkness

Vocabulary:

Inveteracy- tenacity

Summary: 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 Evrémonte: 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.

Chapter 13: Fifty-two

Vocabulary-

Apprised- informed

Assignment meeting between lovers

Sloughs- mud hollows

What is the significance of 52? (book 2
chp. 8) _____

Summary: Fifty-two people have been condemned to die the next day. Darnay resolves to meet his death bravely. Carton appears at the door to Darnay's cell, and Darnay observes something new and bright in Carton's face. Carton tricks Darnay into switching clothes with him, dictates a letter of explanation, and then drugs him with the substance that he had purchased at the chemist's shop. He orders Barsad to carry the unconscious Darnay to the carriage waiting outside Tellson's. At two o'clock, guards take Carton from Darnay's cell, believing him to be Darnay. He stands in the long line of the condemned. A poor seamstress, also falsely sentenced to death, realizes that Carton is not Darnay and asks, "Are you dying for him?" He replies, "And his wife and child." Meanwhile, Barsad delivers the real Darnay to Manette, Lorry, and Lucie, and sends the carriage on its way. Lorry presents the family's papers at the city gates as they leave. They flee through the countryside, fearing pursuit.

Chapter 14: The Knitting Done

Vocabulary:

impeach- challenge

Epicure- one with discriminating tastes,
especially in food or wine

Voluble- talkative

Alacrity- cheerful eagerness

Accoutered- outfitted

Summary: Meanwhile, Madame Defarge heads toward Lucie's apartment to try to catch Lucie in the illegal act of mourning a prisoner. Evidence of such a crime, she believes, will strengthen her case against the family. At the apartment, Miss Pross and Jerry Cruncher are in the middle of making final arrangements to depart Paris. To avoid drawing the suspicion that leaving together might engender, Miss Pross tells Cruncher to wait for her with the carriage at the cathedral. When Cruncher leaves, Madame Defarge barges in and demands to know Lucie's whereabouts. The women fight, and Madame Defarge draws a gun. In the struggle, however, Miss Pross shoots her. She meets Cruncher as planned and reports that she has gone deaf from the gunshot.

Chapter 15: The Footsteps Die Out Forever

Vocabulary: sundry- various

Insatiate- incapable of being satisfied

Rapacious- greedy

Expiation- act of making atonement

Summary: Carton and the young seamstress reach the guillotine. The Vengeance and the other revolutionary women worry that Madame Defarge will miss the beheading of Charles Darnay. The seamstress reflects that the new Republic may make life easier for poor people like herself and her surviving cousin. She kisses Carton and goes calmly to her death. Carton then goes to his.

The narrator recounts that those who saw Carton die witnessed a peaceful and even prophetic look on his face and speculates confidently about Carton's final thoughts: Carton notes the fact that the oppressors in the crowd "have risen on the destruction of the old," but also realizes that, someday, Paris will recover from these horrors and become beautiful.

Also, in these imagined last moments, Carton sees Lucie and Darnay with a child named after himself. He sees Manette happy and healthy and sees Lorry living a long and peaceful life. He sees a future in which he holds a special place in their hearts and in the hearts of generations hence. He sees his own name "made illustrious," and the blots that he threw upon his life fade away. According to the narrator, Carton dies in the knowledge that "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known."

I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and, in their struggles to be truly free, . . . I see the evil of this time . . . gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out.

Analysis: Chp. 11-15

“Crush humanity out of shape once more . . . and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. Sow the same seed of . . . oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind.”

In this concise and beautiful passage, which occurs in the final chapter of the novel, Dickens summarizes his ambivalent attitude toward the French Revolution. The author stops decidedly short of justifying the violence that the peasants use to overturn the social order, personifying “La Guillotine” as a sort of drunken lord who consumes human lives—“the day’s wine.” Nevertheless, Dickens shows a thorough understanding of how such violence and bloodlust can come about. The cruel aristocracy’s oppression of the poor “sow[s] the same seed of rapacious license” in the poor and compels them to persecute the aristocracy and other enemies of the revolution with equal brutality. Dickens perceives these revolutionaries as “[c]rush[ed] . . . out of shape” and having been “hammer[ed] . . . into . . . tortured forms.” These depictions evidence his belief that the lower classes’ fundamental goodness has been perverted by the terrible conditions under which the aristocracy has forced them to live.

Dickens uses the figure of Miss Pross to emphasize the power of love. As the devoted servant battles with Madame Defarge, he notes that “the vigorous tenacity of love [is] always so much stronger than hate.” The showdown between the two women serves also as a commentary on social order and revolution. Revolution, as embodied by Madame Defarge, may prove fiercer and wilder, but the social order that Miss Pross represents emerges as stronger and steadier. Although Dickens denounces the cruelty and vengefulness of Madame Defarge, he acknowledges the unavoidable fact of such people’s existence in the world:

And yet there is not in France, with its rich variety of soil and climate, a blade, a leaf, a root, a sprig, a peppercorn, which will grow to maturity under conditions more certain than those that have produced this horror. Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. Sow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind. This means that the corruption of the aristocracy CREATED the hatred and vengeance in the peasants.

Yet in noting the prevalence of evil, Dickens also shows an understanding of the processes by which evil arises. Madame Defarge certainly possesses a criminal bloodlust, but Dickens suggests her own tragic past and suffering, rather than any innate ill-will toward humanity, have transformed her into the despicable creature that she has become. As such, Dickens is not so interested in criticizing Madame Defarge specifically as he is in using her as an example of the vices that society perpetrates.

Although, at the end of the novel, the narrator, using Carton’s voice, prophesies a restored and replenished France—true to Carlyle’s theory of history in which one era emerges “like a phoenix” out of the ashes of another—*A Tale of Two Cities* ultimately extends a cautionary word toward its readers. In certain sublime instances—such as Carton’s self-sacrifice—death may beget life, but oppression can beget nothing other than itself, which is more oppression. The only thing that will cleanse the entire country is death.

The novel ends with something of a Christian paradox: life is achieved through death. Thus, this is Dickens’s **RELIGIOUS COMMENTARY**. Carton’s sacrifice of his life enables him to live in a way that he otherwise could not, for this sacrifice—the only means by which Darnay can be saved—assures Carton a place in the hearts of others

and allows him to have undertaken one truly meaningful and valuable act before dying. The final passage, in which the narrator imagines and records Carton's last thoughts, extends Carton's life beyond the moment of his death. He will live on in Lucie and Darnay, who will feel as deeply connected to him as they do to each other. He will live on in their child, who will bear his name and ambitiously follow a path that might have been Carton's own. Generations to come will honor his memory, endowing him with a glory that he could never have enjoyed had he continued living as Stryver's disaffected and drunken assistant. Carton's death emphasizes one of the novel's simpler philosophies—that love conquers all. Carton's love for Lucie allows him to overcome not only the purposelessness of his life but also his own death. Moreover, the event constitutes a Victorian ending, in that it provides the perfect resolution to various characters' problems. It ensures the continued happiness of Darnay and Lucie and it represents the redemption of the once spiritually aimless Carton.

The closing shift from third-person narration to the first-person supposed thoughts of Sydney Carton creates a powerful effect—it is as if Carton's beautiful act transcends even the narrator's control over the story. Indeed, the stunningly philosophical words that the narrator ascribes to Carton mirror Carton's quasi-religious ascension into the realm of the sublime.

In his repetition of the phrase "*I see*" over the second to last four paragraphs, Dickens uses anaphora, a rhetorical device in which a phrase recurs at the beginning of successive clauses. These paragraphs then culminate in the spiritually edifying and uplifting anaphora of "*It is a far, far better thing*" and "*It is a far, far better rest.*" This device lends the closing passages a soothing, peaceful tone, and, in its repetition, evokes the language of prayer and reverence. The harmony between the style and content of these final paragraphs leaves the reader with a feeling of complete resolution. The novel begins with anaphora and closes with it as well, bringing the novel full circle.