

‘It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done.’

Sydney Carton is a lawyer who has wasted his abilities and his life. Now he has to make a difficult choice about what is really important to him, which could be a matter of life or death.

The French Revolution is running its violent course; lives are ruined as a new France is created. How did the gentle Doctor Manette and his daughter Lucie become caught up in France’s struggles? What is the real identity of the handsome Charles Darnay, who wins Lucie’s hand in marriage? And why does the shadow of La Bastille Prison hang over them all?

The best of times and the worst of times. London and Paris. Sydney Carton and Charles Darnay. A story of contrasts and chaos. Can peace ever be restored in France? Can it ever be restored in the hearts of the people involved?

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES

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THE CHARACTERS



Doctor Manette

Having been imprisoned for eighteen years, can Doctor Manette recover? What powers could he still possess?

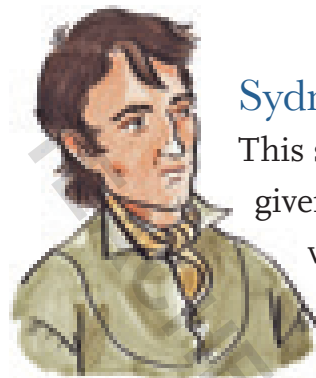
Lucie Manette

Lucie is Doctor Manette's daughter, but she hasn't seen him since she was a baby. Can she help him recover? Why does she listen to people's footsteps with an increasing sense of dread?



Charles Darnay

What is the true identity of this handsome young Frenchman? Why does Doctor Manette turn pale when he sees him?



Sydney Carton

This slovenly, heavily-drinking lawyer has given up on himself. Does he mean it when he says he would give his life to help Lucie Manette?

Mr Jarvis Lorry

Why should a businessman like Mr Lorry, who has worked for Tellson's Bank all his life, dream of digging a body from a grave?



Monsieur Defarge

Monsieur Defarge was once the servant of Doctor Manette. Now he owns a small wine shop. What part will this man play in France's violent revolution?



Madame Defarge

Since her childhood, this formidable woman has waited patiently for vengeance. Now the time has come. How far is she prepared to go? What is the significance of her constant knitting?





A TALE OF TWO CITIES

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 wealth, it was the season of poverty. In short, it was a time very much like the present.

FRANCE, 1767

Doctor Manette had been a promising young doctor with a beautiful wife and baby daughter, Lucie, but that was ten long years ago. Manette had long since accepted that he would never again see his wife, his child, or anything else beyond the walls of Room 105 in the North Tower of La Bastille Prison. He sat upon his low, hard bed holding his head in his hands.

Ten years confined alone in a prison cell had left their mark upon Doctor Manette's appearance, and, he feared, were beginning to leave their mark upon his mind. He must record the facts before they faded from his memory.

Taking hold of a pen he had fashioned from a rusty nail, he dipped it into an inky mixture of chimney soot and his own blood, and began to write his story.

Ten years ago, walking home along the banks of the Seine, I was stopped by the Marquis St Evremonde. 'Are you Doctor Manette?' he demanded. I said that I was. At once, he bundled me into his carriage and drove me to his chateau. There, I was made to tend to a young peasant girl who had been sorely abused by the Marquis and now lay pregnant and dying. There was nothing I could do for her.

In my few days at the chateau, I also watched over the death of the young girl's brother, who had been fatally wounded by the Marquis's sword. As the young man's life drew to its painful end, he talked about the cruelty his family had suffered at the hands of the Evremonde family. The boy's one comfort on his death bed was that he had succeeded in taking his other sister far away.

'For now, she is safe from these devils,' he told me, 'but she has damned the Evremondes and their descendants to destruction. When she is old enough, she will seek vengeance.'

These horrors disturbed me terribly. Upon my return home, I reported them immediately to the Royal Court. But the king's loyalty was to his nobility, not to his people. The next day, I was arrested. Since that night I have been locked up in Room 105, North Tower, La Bastille.

He folded his account and concealed it in a crack in the wall. Someone may find it there, he thought to himself, when I and my sorrows are dust. He lay back on what he assumed would one day be his deathbed, and reflected that somewhere in the world Lucie was growing up fatherless; that somewhere in France a peasant girl was growing up without her family, plotting vengeance; and that everywhere in France families like the Evremondes were continuing their reign of cruelty.

Darnay, he drew upon a play by Wilkie Collins called *The Frozen Deep*, in which Dickens himself had recently acted. For the historical background he drew upon Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution*.

The eighteenth century saw the development of new ways of thinking which became known as The Enlightenment. Influential thinkers of the time questioned the authority of state and church, beginning a philosophy of more equal rights for everybody. This movement was particularly strong in France, laying some foundations for the French Revolution.

In the years leading up to the French Revolution, France suffered a few poor harvests. This added to the poverty of most people, whilst the rich continued to enjoy their privileges. Resentment was inevitable.

St Antoine was a small district of Paris, very close to both La Bastille and La Force prisons. Dickens therefore places the Defarges at the heart of the revolution.

Key events

- July 14th, 1789. The storming of La Bastille. Bastille Day is still celebrated in France.

- 1789. The French National Assembly issues the Declaration of the Rights of Man, declaring that 'men are born and remain free and equal in rights'.
- 1789. Seven thousand women march upon the King's palace at Versailles. Can you imagine Madame Defarge at the head of this march?
- 1792. Formation of the French Republic.
- 1793. Execution of King Louis XVI.
- The revolutionary movement in France continued until 1799. It had an immense influence upon French, European, and American history.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of both England and France at the time of the French Revolution:

Books

- Jim Pipe, *Avoid being an Aristocrat in the French Revolution! (Danger Zone!)*, Bookhouse, 2007.
- Terry Deary, *France* (Horrible Histories), Scholastic, 2011.
- Terry Deary, *Rowdy Revolutions* (Horrible Histories), Scholastic, 2011.