

Summaries: A Tale of Two Cities

Book 2, Chapters 21-24

Chapter 21

- The years pass.
- Lucie has a baby girl. She's also named Lucie.
- She also has a small baby boy who dies when he's just a few years old.
- Surprisingly, Sydney Carton has become a much-loved uncle to the children.
- His footsteps continually sound on the Manettes' doorstep.
- Even more frequently, they're heard pacing in the streets and alleys around the Manettes' house.
- Get it? Footsteps? It's just like the title of the chapter.
- When Lucie's son dies, his last words are about Carton. He asks his mother and sister to give Carton a kiss for him.
- Mr. Stryver, our least favorite lawyer, has gotten richer and fatter as the years have passed.
- He marries a rich, pudgy wife. They have three chubby, annoying children.
- Okay, so Dickens isn't so nice about people's weight. Nonetheless, the Stryvers aren't that great.
- Stryver, in his extreme beneficence, wants Darnay to tutor his kids.
- Unsurprisingly, Darnay declines to do so.
- Stryver's a bit peeved. He contents himself, however, with telling his wife stories about how Lucie once was desperate to marry *him*.
- Ah, memory can play funny tricks on us, eh?
- Throughout this whole time, Lucie's been the angel in the Manette house.
- She manages to be everywhere all the time and helps everybody all the time.
- It's pretty amazing, actually. Maybe even impossible.
- By the time little Lucie gets to be six, things in the Manette house have adjusted into smooth, well-ordered happiness.
- Things in France, however, aren't going so swimmingly.
- The footsteps that sound in Saint Antoine are fast and furious.
- They race through the night, gathering weapons and spreading news.
- The Defarges' wine-shop remains the center of all the revolutionary activity.
- As all the Jacqueses get ready to go to war, Madame Defarge rallies the women.
- Together, they storm the Bastille.
- The Bastille, you remember, is the prison where the French government kept its political prisoners.
- It's also the place where Dr. Manette spent a good bit of his life.
- On July 14, 1789, the revolutionaries take over the fortress. (FYI: this actually happened)
- Our narrator goes a little crazy describing the sights, sounds, and noises of the attack on the Bastille.
- Cannons boom, women shriek, and blood runs everywhere.
- Soon, the revolutionaries are running through the halls of the Bastille, crying out for the prisoners and the records that the Bastille still stores.

- Defarge grabs a man in the prison and demands to be shown to the North Tower.
- Why is he so insistent? Well, for one thing, Dr. Manette was a prisoner in the North Tower.
- Taking Jacques Three along with him, he heads up the stairs to cell One Hundred and Five.
- Once in the cell, he asks Jacques Three to run a torch along the wall.
- Sure enough, he eventually finds the initials "A.M." etched in the wall.
- A.M. stands for Alexandre Manette.
- That's Dr. Manette to us.
- Defarge suddenly orders the men with him to rip apart the room.
- He's looking for something...
- Eventually, he orders the men to set all the fragments of furniture on fire.
- Delighted to have more to destroy, they immediately follow orders.
- Outside, the crowd has captured the governor who defended the Bastille.
- They're supposed to wait for Defarge to emerge so they can march the governor back to the wine-shop.
- As the guy passes through the crowd, however, he gets beaten and knifed.
- Soon he falls over, dead of his wounds.
- Madame Defarge, shouting triumphantly, steps on him and cuts off his head.
- Looks like he's not going back to the wine-shop, after all.
- The mobs from Saint Antoine decide to behead some guards and hoist their heads onto pikes.
- So that's exactly what they do.
- Seven prisoners were released; seven other men's heads stand on pikes.
- Fair's fair, right?

Chapter 22

- A week after the Storming of the Bastille, Madame Defarge sits at the counter of her shop.
- Another woman, the short, plump wife of the grocer, sits with her.
- In the past week, this woman has taken on a new name: she's now called "The Vengeance." We're guessing it's not because she's all that friendly.
- Defarge enters the shop.
- Immediately, everyone quiets down to hear what he has to say.
- Luckily, he actually does have something to say: Foulon, an old aristocrat who once told the peasants that they could eat grass, has been imprisoned.
- He's on his way to Paris now, escorted by a revolutionary guard.
- Defarge pauses, then asks if the "patriots" are ready for action.
- Madame Defarge grabs her knife. The Vengeance begins to shriek.
- They run to different houses in the area with the news.
- Soon an entire crowd has gathered outside the house where Foulon has been taken.
- Madame Defarge rushes into the house to see the old man bound up in ropes.
- She begins to clap as if she's just seen a great play.

- Defarge rushes up to Foulon and "folds him in a deadly embrace."
- We're guessing that means he kills the guy.
- Madame Defarge tries to strangle him with his ropes.
- The Vengeance and Jacques Three drag the body out into the streets.
- Hoards of people scream at the sight. They begin to stuff the dead man's pockets with grass.
- Poetic justice, eh?
- Once his head and heart are set on pikes, however, the crowd begins to disperse.
- After all, they're still poor and miserable.
- They all head to the bread lines to beg for some loaves of bread.
- As Monsieur Defarge returns to his wine-shop, he remarks to his wife that the revolution seems to have come at last.

Chapter 23

- We're back in the French countryside.
- It's just about as dismal as when we left it: there's no food, the crops are withered, and the people are in about the same condition as the crops.
- Despite this, things seem to have changed somehow.
- For years, Monseigneur (as a class) has squeezed and starved the poor of the village.
- Now, however, the faces of the poor have a new look. It's one that Monseigneur can't quite figure out.
- Our old friend, the mender of roads, is out mending roads.
- After all, what else would he be doing?
- A man walks up to him, greets him as Jacques, and the two sit down to eat together.
- The mender of roads asks if it's happening tonight.
- What? What's happening?
- Just wait...we'll find out soon enough.
- The traveler wants to take a nap. He asks the mender of roads to wake him at sunset.
- It's now sunset. The mender of roads wakes the traveler.
- Hey, we told you it was going to happen.
- They shake hands. The traveler asks a cryptic question: is it two leagues away?
- The answer is yes.
- Later that night, the chateau on the hill begins to burn.
- Vast clouds of smoke and flames can be seen from the town.
- Monsieur Gabelle, the guy who's in charge of the town, awakens to find a rider at his door.
- Frantic, the rider asks Monsieur Gabelle to send village folks up to the chateau.
- Everyone in the village looks at each other. Amazingly enough, no one wants to help put out the fire.
- The chateau burns.

- After the blaze dies down a little bit, folks start to remember that the Marquis wasn't the only aristocrat in town.
- Gabelle was the one who collected the Marquis' taxes.
- Okay, so he's not *really* an aristocrat. But he's close enough, isn't he?
- That seems to be the general consensus.
- People start to beat down Gabelle's door.
- He takes the advice of his friends and puts a heavy bolt on the door.
- As night descends, we leave Gabelle praying that he won't get strung up on a pike.

Chapter 24

- It's August, 1792.
- Monseigneur, that amazing man who stands in for all French aristocrats, has decided that France is not the safest place to be hanging out.
- He's now fleeing across the ocean, headed for countries that are a bit more friendly than his own.
- But we're not concerned with Monseigneur right now. We're back in London.
- At Tellson's, to be specific.
- Tellson's, in case you were wondering, is as dark and dingy and cramped as it ever was. That's just the way that Mr. Lorry likes it.
- At the moment, Darnay is trying to talk Mr. Lorry out of going to France on business.
- It's too dangerous in France at the moment—especially for an elderly man.
- Mr. Lorry agrees, but business is business. Tellson's has many French customers, and someone has to look after their property, even during times of strife.
- As it turns out, Mr. Lorry happens to be one of the youngest members of Tellson's.
- If anyone could brave war and revolution, it'd be him. That's what he thinks, at any rate.
- Darnay remains unconvinced.
- Mr. Lorry assures him that he'll bring Jerry Cruncher along as a bodyguard.
- Between the two of them, they should be able to stop any mischief that people might intend toward the bank or the bank's property.
- Darnay and Mr. Lorry stand in a corner of the bank talking together.
- Gradually, another conversation in the bank catches their attention.
- Our good old friend, Mr. Stryver, has brought a letter to the bank. It's addressed to a Marquis St. Evrémont, care of Tellson's Bank.
- Our narrator quickly informs us that Dr. Manette made Darnay promise never to reveal his real identity.
- Perhaps that's why Darnay starts when he sees the letter—but he doesn't say a word.
- Luckily, Stryver has more than enough words for the entire office.
- He explains that the new Marquis is a craven coward. He abandoned his lands before the old Marquis died.

- Darnay steps into the conversation and says that he knows the Marquis. He can deliver the letter.
- Puzzled, Mr. Lorry hands it to him.
- Darnay quickly leaves. As he walks out, he opens the letter.
- It's from Monsieur Gabelle, the steward of his uncle's lands.
- Gabelle has been taken prisoner merely because he did what the Marquis ordered him to do.
- Now he begs the new Marquis (Darnay) to come back and take responsibility for his own lands.
- Darnay puts down the letter and begins some serious thinking.
- Sure, he once believed that it would be better for him to abandon his inheritance entirely.
- Starting life over in England was a bit hard, but at least he wasn't the cause of other people's pain.
- Now, however, he sees that inaction can be as morally corrupt as bad actions.
- Quickly, Darnay comes to a conclusion: he must return to France.
- With this decided, Darnay sets about planning a "business" trip. He tells Lucie that he'll be gone for a few days.
- Then he writes a letter explaining his real situation and leaves it for her to find once he's left.
- He also writes to the doctor, asking him to take care of the family until he returns.
- In the dead of the night, Darnay sets out for Paris.
- We're not sure, but we really don't have a very good feeling about this...