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SCOLAR English Alliance “From Page to Stage®” Programme 2020 - *A Tale of Two Cities* Radio Drama Synopsis

A Tale of Two Cities is a novel by Charles Dickens, set in London and Paris before and during the French Revolution.

Prologue

Dickens' famous opening sentences “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” introduce the historical background and themes of the novel.

Scene 1: Paris

In Paris, the hated and abusive Marquis St. Evrémonde orders his carriage driven recklessly fast through the crowded streets, hitting and killing the child of Gaspard in Saint Antoine. The Marquis throws a coin to Gaspard to compensate him for his loss. Defarge, having observed the incident, comes forth to comfort the distraught father, saying the child would be worse off alive.

Scene 2

Mr Lorry discovers that his old friend Dr Alexander Manette who has been imprisoned in the Bastille is released and is looked after by his old servant Defarge and Madam Defarge in his wine shop in Paris. Mr Lorry takes Lucie Manette to bring her father home to London.

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Scene 3

Lucie finds her father in a small garret – a skill he learned in prison. Dr Manette does not recognise Lucie at first but does eventually see the resemblance to her mother through her blue eyes and long golden hair, a strand of which he found on his sleeve when he was imprisoned.

Scene 4

Charles Darnay meets his uncle the Marquis Evrémonte in his castle. Out of disgust with his aristocratic family, the nephew has changed his real surname (St. Evrémonte) to Darnay. He asks his uncle's servant Gabelle to sell his property and to distribute the proceeds to the peasants living on his land. He prepares to leave for London. He is unable to take Gabelle with him but promises him that he will return to help him should Gabelle ever need his help.

Scene 5

In London Darnay is on trial for treason against the British Crown. The key witnesses against him are two British spies, John Barsard and Mrs Hawkins. Barsard claims that Darnay gave information about British troops in North America to the French. But Sydney Carton, Darnay's lawyer proves that he is an unreliable witness because of his criminal witness. Mrs Hawkins, the owner of a pub claims that she saw Darnay in her pub talking to naval officers. But Sydney Carton shows her and the court his strong resemblance to Darnay that Mrs Hawkins has to admit that Carton and Darnay look so alike that she cannot tell them apart. With the two witnesses discredited, Darnay is acquitted.

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Scene 6

After the trial, Carton and Darnay meet in a pub. Carton reveals his regret for having ruined his life and career by drink.

Scene 7

Carton confesses his love for Lucie knowing she does not love him. He promises her that he will save her life or the life of anybody she loves.

Scene 8

Darnay reveals his love for Lucie to Dr Manette who supports him. He is about to reveal his real name when he is stopped by Dr Manette.

Scene 9

Charles Darnay receives a letter from Gabelle begging him to return to Paris to save him. Although Darnay knows this may cost him his life, he tells Dr Manette he has to go to Paris to keep his word to Gabelle. He reveals his real name of Evrémonde to Dr Manette. This information shocks Dr Manette.

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Scene 10

Charles Darnay is tried by the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris. Dr Manette, held as revolutionary hero in Paris testifies in Darnay's favour and Darnay is acquitted only to be immediately challenged by Madam Defarge who produces a letter discovered hidden in Manette's room. The letter explains the cause of Manette's imprisonment. Years ago, the brothers Evrémonte (Darnay's father and uncle) enlisted Manette's medical assistance. They asked him to tend to a woman, whom one of the brothers had raped, and her brother, whom the same brother had stabbed fatally. Fearing that Manette might report their misdeeds, the Evrémontes had him imprisoned in the Bastille. Dr Manette wrote the letter condemning the Evrémontes. Upon hearing this story, the jury condemns Darnay for the crimes of his ancestors and sentences him to death.

Scene 11-12

Sydney Carton bribes a guard to allow him to enter Darnay's prison cell. Under pretence of saving Lucie, Carton dictates a letter to Lucie telling her that he will keep his vow to her to save the man she loves. He chloroforms Darnay and has him taken out of the cell wearing his clothes and pretending to be him.

Charles Carton dies on the guillotine in place of Charles Darnay, happy that he has found a purpose in his life by sacrificing himself for someone he loves.