

Who is Madame Defarge in "A Tale of Two Cities"

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Who is Madame Defarge, and how does she die? Discuss the significance of her knitting. [NU: 2015]

In "A Tale of Two Cities" (1859), Charles Dickens (1812–1870) creates many unforgettable characters. Among them, Madame Defarge is the most feared. She is calm on the surface but filled with anger inside. Through her, Dickens shows how revenge can turn a woman into a symbol of terror.

Madame Defarge: Madame Defarge is the wife of Monsieur Defarge. She is also a leader among the revolutionaries. She demands freedom for the French people. But more than freedom, she wants revenge. Her family once suffered under the Evrémonde brothers. So she hates Charles Darnay and his family. Dickens says of her,

"She was absolutely without pity." (Book Three, Chapter XIV).

This line shows her cold and heartless nature.

Significance of Her Knitting: Madame Defarge is always seen with her knitting. But it is not a hobby. Her knitting is a secret weapon. In it, she records the names of her enemies. Each stitch marks a person for death. Once a name enters, escape is impossible. If asked what she knits, she answers only "Pastime." This silence makes the knitting more deadly. It represents revenge, fate, and hidden cruelty. Her knitting is like a list of death written in thread.

Her Death: At the end, Madame Defarge goes to Lucie's house. She plans to kill Lucie and punish her family. But Lucie is absent. Only Miss Pross is there. Madame Defarge demands entry, but Miss Pross blocks her way. They fight fiercely. Madame Defarge pulls a pistol. In the struggle, the gun fires. It kills Madame Defarge instantly.

In short, Madame Defarge is a powerful symbol of revenge. Her knitting is a sign of silent hatred. Her death shows that violence finally destroys itself. Through her, Dickens warns against the dangers of blind cruelty.