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Dramatic Publishing


** Acting Edition Printed In B/W.*

ROBERT JOHANSON'S

**THE
SECRET
OF
MADAME
DEFARGE**



**BASED ON CHARLES DICKENS'
A TALE OF TWO CITIES**



*Acting editions printed in b/w

THE SECRET OF MADAME DEFARGE

DRAMA. ADAPTED BY ROBERT JOHANSON.
BASED ON CHARLES DICKENS' *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*.

Cast: 7m., 10w. (3 to 12m. or w., doubling possible.) Madame Defarge is one of Dickens' supreme villainesses. Her secret drives her to seek a revenge so strong that it ties her to the French revolution. In this short play, the main story of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* becomes the peripheral story to that of Madame Defarge and her single-minded revenge. As the full company gathers to speak Dickens' immortal lines "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" Madame Defarge is revealed in her husband's wine shop in the poorest district of Paris. From here her plots and machinations involve the innocent Lucie Manette and her father, Dr. Manette, returned to life after an 18-year imprisonment in the Bastille, and the heroic Charles Darnay and his wicked uncle, the Marquis St. Evremonde. Somehow they are all involved in Madame Defarge's secret, which is revealed in the climactic trial scene before the French tribunal where the convicted are sent to La Guillotine. This hair-raising drama unfolds at a lightning pace and beautifully dramatizes the reasons the poor of France revolted. A myriad of interesting characters and a great ensemble opportunity play out this unusual slant on Dickens' classic novel. *Flexible unit set. Approximate running time: 45 minutes.*

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THE SECRET OF MADAME DEFARGE

• DICKENS/JOHANSON •

• DRAMATIC PUBLISHING



THE SECRET OF MADAME DEFARGE

A Play in One Act

by

ROBERT JOHANSON



Dramatic Publishing

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PRODUCTION NOTE: The show is designed to move swiftly from location to location reusing a minimum of furniture/props. A counter serves as the bar in the wine shop or the dock at the tribunal or a sideboard with a basin of water in Lucie's room. A long bench is all that is required for Manette's cell or the Sick Girl's bed. A handsome table plays in the Marquis' chateau or as the President's table at the tribunal. The ensemble of actors is simply choreographed to change the locales as the action continues around them. Much of this is noted in the script proper, but in order not to weigh it down too much there are elaborate notes following with many suggestions for production.

SOUND AND LIGHTS: More complicated suggestions are mentioned in the script, but these can also be done simply. The sounds can be done live by the actors—such as the whinnying of horses, using a drummer for hoof beats, etc.—or a sound tape/CD can be created. Sound plays a very important part as much of the external action is mimed. If elaborate lighting is not available, the staging can clearly delineate the action. Being able to isolate areas is, of course, helpful, and dramatic black-outs rather a necessity.

COSTUMES: They need not be elaborate. Most characters—unless doubling—will have one complete outfit—some adding a cloak and hat. The poor should be quite drab in color so that when red hats and red, white and blue bandanas and sashes are added when they become revolutionaries—the change is apparent. By contrast, the

wealthier characters wear better fabrics with richer colors and detail. More specific notes appear after the script.

The important thing is to create a sense of environment. All the actors may visibly sit on the sidelines ready at any moment to enter the action. This—in a sense—is story theatre with a group of actors coming together to tell this tale of two cities which focuses on the main story—in this version—of the life of Madame Defarge. She should always be not far from our consciousness. Often seated DR knitting, hardly ever leaving the stage. She's like a time bomb waiting to explode. Like the earthquake she talks of, she is building up her force until it finally erupts—destroying everything in its path.

The Secret of Madame Defarge

A Play in One Act

For 7m., 10w., extras (doubling possible)

CAST

MADAME THERESE DEFARGE

ERNEST DEFARGE, a wine shopkeeper, her husband

GASPARD, a poor man

MADAME GASPARD, his wife, later the **VENGEANCE**

THEIR CHILD (a boy or a girl)

JACQUES 1,2,3 (played by men or women)

DR. ALEXANDRE MANETTE, formerly imprisoned in
the Bastille

LUCIE MANETTE, his daughter

MISS PROSS, her guardian

JARVIS LORRY, a lawyer

JERRY CRUNCHER, his servant

MARQUIS ST. EVREMONDE, a French nobleman

GABELLE, his steward (played by a woman)

CHARLES DARNAY, his nephew

WOMAN BY THE ROAD

GUARD AT THE BASTILLE

GOVERNOR OF THE BASTILLE (can double with Mar-
quis)

JAILER AT LA FORCE

LE PRESIDENT (OR LA PRESIDENTE) of the French
tribunal (played by a man or woman)

In the story of Dr. Manette:

Two cloaked aristocrats (the Marquis and his brother)
Sick Girl
Boy, Sick Girl's brother
Marquis' Wife
Young Charles Darnay (can be played by a young girl
and double with Gaspard's child)
Servants to the Marquis (men or women)
The Rich—French aristocrats
The Poor—French peasants—later the PEOPLE—CITI-
ZENS of the Revolution

POSSIBLE DOUBLING -

Gaspard, Guard at Bastille, Cloaked aristocrat (Marquis'
brother)
Gaspard Child, Young Charles
Marquis, Governor of Bastille
Jacques 1,2,3—Roadmender, Woman by the Road, Sick Girl,
Sick Girl's Brother, Marquis' Wife, Jailer, Marquis'
Servants

ABOUT THE CAST - This is truly an ensemble piece. The whole cast is the voice of Charles Dickens and breaks off to become his characters. Numerous roles can be doubled—as suggested at the back of the script—but involving as many actors as possible can make for a thrilling event. The action created for the rioting mob, the insanity of the French Revolution—can be challenging and fun to create. Important that the downtrodden French peasants be portrayed in a heavy, beaten-down, practically lifeless fashion until ignited by the Revolution. The wealthier characters are oblivious at first until they become victims. Every attempt should be made to use interracial casting as well as gender-free casting.

The Secret of Madame Defarge

(A bare stage except for one small bench DR at the proscenium or edge of playing area.)

MADAME DEFARGE takes her place on that bench. A handsome woman with a steady face, a large hand heavily ringed in which she carries her knitting. Being sensitive to cold she is wrapped in fur with a quantity of bright shawl twined around her head, though not to the concealment of her large earrings. She begins knitting. Whenever she knits she intently studies her stitches, oblivious to the rest of the world. There is something deep and secretive about her. Her yarn is the color of blood.

Drumming. A steady beat. A slow march tempo. From the distance growing stronger. [Preferably a live drummer, but can be recorded.]

The COMPANY assembles—rich and poor, young and old. They may enter, one-by-one passing through each other—or all at once. On the left side, the more well-to-do take their places, on the right are the impoverished. They address the audience. MADAME DEFARGE does not yet speak, just continues to knit.)

THE RICH. It was the best of times—
 THE POOR. It was the worst of times—
 LORRY. It was the age of wisdom—
 PROSS. It was the age of foolishness—
 DARNAY. It was the season of Light—
 DEFARGE. It was the season of Darkness—
 LUCIE. It was the spring of hope—
 VENGEANCE. It was the winter of despair—
 THE RICH. We had everything before us—
 THE POOR. We had nothing before us—
 MANETTE. We were all going direct to Heaven—
 MADAME DEFARGE (*stops knitting and rises*). We were
 all going direct the other way.

(The clanging of a bell—a large hand bell rung by the actor that will later play the PRESIDENT. The COMPANY becomes a crowd on the streets of Paris—the crowded suburb of St. Antoine. In the bustle, a counter and a sign picturing a wine bottle and the name “DEFARGE” are brought on and placed R near MADAME’s bench DR.)

The Wine Shop of Ernest Defarge

(DEFARGE stands under his sign—a bull-necked, martial-looking man—his strong brown arms bare to the elbows.)

MADAME DEFARGE (*assuming her station at the counter*). Husband, look you.

(Two men are carrying a barrel of wine toward the shop—they will set it by the counter.)

DEFARGE. Eh! My good men. Careful with the barrel there. *(He now calls to someone off L—striding in that direction.)* Hey! Careful there I say! Careful with the wine!

(There is a loud crash from off L accompanied by yelling and curses. The poor and hungry PEOPLE of Paris appear from everywhere—rushing to the spilt wine. So eager for a taste they will lap it from the streets.)

DEFARGE. Dolts! I'll not pay for that! A whole barrel lost! You must bring me another!

MADAME DEFARGE *(quietly, intensely)*. Husband. Look there.

(She nods toward a man at the L proscenium or edge of playing area. There is a piece of stone wall here—that will be very important to the action. The man [GASPARD] is smearing the wall with a bit of rag from a shoe full of deep red wine. The word he writes is "BLOOD.")

DEFARGE. Gaspard—Gaspard! What do you do there? Are you ready for the madhouse? Why do you write in the public streets?

GASPARD. For the time to come when another kind of wine will be spilled on these street-stones, and the stain of it will be brighter red than this.

DEFARGE (*hurls water on the bloody word from a bucket—smearing it into unrecognizability*). Till then, it is only wine, my Gaspard, only wine! If you must write the word—there is another place to write it, eh? (*He puts his hand on GASPARD's heart.*) Here. And write it again in the hearts of your wife and child.

(*MADAME GASPARD who has stood helplessly by, now rushes to her husband with their little CHILD.*)

GASPARD. There is only one word written in the hearts of my wife and child. Hunger. (*He embraces his CHILD.*) Hunger is the inscription on the baker's empty shelves. Hunger grinds our children old. Hunger! You cannot wash away that word, Defarge.

(*GASPARD takes his wife and child away as DEFARGE returns to the wine shop. MADAME DEFARGE—still at the counter—is picking her teeth with a toothpick. The three "JACQUES" are present—men and women who simply take the name of "JACQUES" to signify their membership in a secret society.*)

JACQUES 1 (*to DEFARGE*). How goes it, Jacques? Is all the spilt wine swallowed?

DEFARGE. Every drop, Jacques.

(*At this time an odd group of travelers appears onstage heading for the wine shop. They are the lawyer, JARVIS LORRY and his man JERRY CRUNCHER, MISS LUCIE MANETTE and her chaperone MISS PROSS. MADAME*

DEFARGE coughs lightly raising her eyebrows in their direction.)

JACQUES 2. It is not often that these miserable beasts know the taste of wine or anything but black bread and death. Is it not so, Jacques?

DEFARGE. Even so, Jacques.

JACQUES 3 (*conspiratorially*). We would see the one recalled to life... (*Again MADAME DEFARGE coughs.*)

DEFARGE. Ah, Jacques—my wife. (*She nods and begins knitting.*) Yes—about the furnished room you wished to see— I believe one of you has already been there and can show the way. Good day.

(The three JACQUES quickly leave as LORRY approaches DEFARGE. LORRY is a man of business who wears an odd little wig.)

LORRY. Pardon me, sir, are you Ernest Defarge?

DEFARGE. Yes, Monsieur.

LORRY. I am Jarvis Lorry of Tellson's Bank, London. I have come about Dr.—

DEFARGE. No names, please, Monsieur. You were to come alone. Who is this with you?

LORRY. If the gentleman proves to be who you say, sir, this is his daughter.

DEFARGE (*going down to his knee and kissing her hand*).

I kiss the hand of the child of my old master.

LUCIE (*a pretty girl of eighteen*). Thank you, sir, will you take us to him?

MADAME DEFARGE. Who are these others?

LORRY. My man, Cruncher, and Miss Manette's companion, Miss Pross.

MADAME DEFARGE. They wait here. (*Takes her seat DR—knits.*) Go you, husband. Show them the man who fate buried alive for eighteen years and has been recalled to life.

(As DEFARGE takes LORRY and LUCIE out, the PEOPLE move the wine shop as the three JACQUES bring on DR. MANETTE's room L. MISS PROSS and CRUNCHER converse before sitting at the side.)

CRUNCHER (*wearing a cocked hat and a muffler to his knees*). Recalled to life. Blazing strange thing if you ask me.

PROSS (*a formidable woman wearing a hat like a great Stilton cheese*). Nobody did ask you. And if any harm befalls my Ladybird, you and your master will be recalled *from* life if I have anything to say about it.

(The lights dim and DEFARGE re-enters with a lit candle, leading the way to:)

Dr. Manette's Room (*simply a long bench— no walls or door*)

LORRY. Is he alone?

DEFARGE. Alone? God help him, who should be with him?

LORRY. Is he greatly changed?

DEFARGE. Changed? (*He strikes the wall violently— then takes out a large key.*)

LORRY. Good Lord, man, is his door locked then?

DEFARGE. Ay. Yes!

LUCIE. Why?

DEFARGE. Why! Because he lived so long locked up in the Bastille, that he would be frightened—come to I know not what harm—if his door were open.

LUCIE. Is it possible?

DEFARGE. Is it possible? Yes. And a beautiful world we live in, when it is not only possible, but done under that sky there, every day! A good man—buried for eighteen years! Who did this and why—someday I will know. I will know.

LUCIE. I am going to see my father's ghost! It will be his ghost not him!

LORRY. Courage, dear miss! The worst will be over in a moment.

(They approach the door where the three JACQUES stand looking in—blocking the inside from our view.)

DEFARGE. Leave us, good Jacques. *(The three JACQUES retreat silently into the darkness.)*

LORRY. Do you make a show of Dr. Manette?

DEFARGE. I show him to those to whom the sight is likely to do good.

LUCIE. Men and women named Jacques?

DEFARGE. All of us of the same name—Jacques—the chosen few. Hold there. *(He stomps his foot three times while miming knocking on the door—then draws the key across—SOUND effect is good here—then unlocks the door—another SOUND effect.)*

LUCIE. I am afraid of it.

LORRY. Of it? What?

LUCIE. I mean of him. Of my father.

(SOUND—door creaks open—light reveals a white-haired and bearded DR. MANETTE sitting on a low bench, stooping forward and very busy making shoes. He looks at no one—only at the shoe he is working on.)

DEFARGE. Good day.

MANETTE *(in a voice not physically weak, but faint from solitude and disuse—like the last feeble echo of a sound made long ago)*. Good day.

DEFARGE. You are still hard at work, I see.

MANETTE. Yes. I am working.

DEFARGE. You have a visitor. Here is Monsieur who knows a well-made shoe when he sees one. Take it, Monsieur. *(Hands LORRY shoe.)* Tell Monsieur what kind of shoe it is and the maker's name.

MANETTE. It is a lady's walking shoe.

DEFARGE. And what is the maker's name?

MANETTE. Did you ask for my name?

DEFARGE. I did.

MANETTE. One Hundred and Five, North Tower.

DEFARGE. Is that all?

MANETTE. One Hundred and Five, North Tower.

LORRY *(giving back the shoe)*. You are not a shoemaker by trade.

MANETTE *(taking shoe without looking up)*. No—I learned it here. I taught myself.

LORRY. Do you remember nothing of me—Dr. Manette? *(MANETTE drops the shoe at the mention of his name.)*

Dr. Manette—look at me, sir—is there no old banker—

no old servant—rising in your mind—good Dr. Manette?
(MANETTE looks at him for the first time—for a moment his face changes—then he sighs, picks up shoe and resumes working.)

DEFARGE *(quietly)*. Have you recognized him?

LORRY. Eighteen years—I thought it quite hopeless—but for a single moment I have seen the face I once knew so well. It is he. But hush, hush.

(LUCIE is now beside MANETTE. He is holding his leather knife—working intently. Seeing the skirt of her dress, he starts up and raises the knife. The two men move forward, but LUCIE motions them to be still.)

MANETTE. You are not the jailer's daughter?

LUCIE *(brimming with tears)*. No.

MANETTE. Who are you? *(She slowly sits on bench beside him. He moves back at first and then looks intently at her ringlets—fondling them. With a cry he takes his knife and cuts a bit of her hair, then rips open the neck of his tunic, taking a small pouch from around his neck. Opening it he takes some strands of hair and compares them with hers.)* They are the same. How can it be? When was it? She laid her head upon my shoulder, that night when I was taken, and when I was brought to the North Tower I found these upon my sleeve. How was this? WAS IT YOU? *(He starts violently—the two men try to intervene.)*

LUCIE. Good gentlemen, do not come near us, do not speak, do not move!

MANETTE. Her voice! *(He is very confused and disturbed.)* But it can't be. You are too young—your hands

would be withered like mine. But, your face, your voice, who are you?

LUCIE (*falling softly to her knees in front of him and taking his hands*). O sir, if you hear in my voice any resemblance to a voice that once was sweet music to your ears, weep for it, weep for it. If you touch, in touching my hair, anything that recalls a beloved head that lay on your breast when you were young and free, weep for it, weep for it. If, when I tell you of the new home that is before you in England, where I will be as true to you as ever daughter was to father, I bring back the remembrance of a home long gone, where your poor wife, my mother, hid your torture from me and never told me of your hard, hard history, weep for it, weep for it. (*With a tremendous shudder, MANETTE heaves a great sob and collapses beside LUCIE. She cradles him in her lap.*) Good gentleman, thank God! Thank God for us—thank God.

LORRY. Now my dear girl, the best and the worst are known to you.

(The lights fade as the COMPANY re-enters and speaks, all the while resetting the wine shop as MANETTE's room dissolves.)

RICH. It was the best of times—

POOR. It was the worst of times—

RICH. It was the best of times—

POOR. It was the worst of times—

End of Excerpt. Production Notes

PRODUCTION NOTES

A Tale of Two Cities (1859) was Charles Dickens' twelfth novel. Being an historical novel, it is his only book not written about his contemporary England. His major source was Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution*. His objective was to humanize the facts: facts such as the storming of the Bastille, the actual finding of prisoners' letters hidden in that great edifice, the French women who were constantly knitting at the foot of La Guillotine, the blood frenzy that overtook the mob. In that day, of course, all communication was done by letter, pamphlet, newspaper or word of mouth. The written and oral messages play a key role in the unfolding of this story.

It is important for today's actors to realize that there were two primary classes—rich and poor. The great middle class that we know today essentially did not exist. The downtrodden poor, hungry, dulled of most emotions lived in the shadows of the great palaces and shining edifices—stood along the streets as the gilded carriages of the rich raced by—saw people with so much when they had so little. This play attempts to give emotional life to this revolution. The Poor—ignited with revolutionary zeal—for a brief moment become those in charge—for a brief moment have the power to decide life and death. La Guillotine would take almost 3000 victims—aristocrats that included a king and queen.

SCENERY & PROPS:

It is the actors that convey this story. The scenery should be very neutral. The surround can be black curtains or a cyc. No front curtain necessary. Focus should be on a few essential props and furniture pieces to convey locale. They are as follows:

Preset:

Bench DR mostly used by Madame Defarge

DL—a piece of stone wall—used to write the word “Blood” early in the play—written on with fingerpaint the color of red wine from shoe with rag

Later, wall is used to find the letter written by Dr. Manette in the Bastille and hidden there—the initials A.M. carved into the stone.

The Wine Shop of Defarge:

Simply a counter with a few bottles, mugs, glasses, serving rag—a barrel rolled on at the top of story—and a sign saying “Defarge”—paper, pen, ink under counter for Gabelle

Madame’s knitting

Dr. Manette’s Room:

Nothing more than a bench large enough to seat him and Lucie—with his little box of tools and the shoe he is working on. The door is mimed. (All doors are mimed.)

The Chateau St. Evremonde:

Consists of one or two candelabra—possibly electrified if open flames are not allowed—set on a long table, handsomely draped, on which we find a chocolate service (a silver or porcelain pot, sugar bowl, tongs, swizzle stick, two cups and saucers, trays) —two period chairs. The Marquis has a snuffbox.

Mob/Revolution:

Torches are a good addition, and weapons: pistols, knives, axes, even farm implements.

Lucie’s Room in Paris:

Requires an arrangement of counter with water washing basin, some chairs and the bench—so that there is furniture to be thrown about during the final fight with Defarge and Pross.

The Grand Tribunal:

The chateau table draped in the tri-color, the bar counter serving as the dock, chairs and benches for everyone on the sidelines, and a bench and light blanket for the Sick Girl. Again a torch here is effective for the two mysterious men. A large hand bell for the President.

Letters, papers as required.
Ring of keys for Defarge and Jailer
More knitting for ladies
The baby Lucie in a nice blanket
Coins
Handkerchief—Lucie
Knife—Madame Defarge—for Gabelle (retractable) —also
for Vengeance
Bucket of water—to splash on wall to erase the word
“Blood,” rags
Pipe—Defarge
Toothpicks, red rose—Madame
Attaché case—Lorry
Bundles for Poor
Fans, cards, etc.—Aristocratic prisoners at La Force
Carpetbag, satchels—Pross, Cruncher

SOUND and LIGHTS:

Can add a tremendous amount—the more sophisticated the better, but simplicity will work too. The sound tape or CD should have effects:

Drumming to underscore action—this is best if live—but can be recorded
crash of a wine barrel
key rattled against door, opening lock, creaking of door opening
carriage arriving and stopping abruptly
carriage leaving (horses being whipped, etc.)
metallic sound of guillotine descending—used several times
recorded grand music of Lully or Charpentier for Chateau
possibly eerie music under visions in chateau leading to Marquis’ murder (this could also be drummer) breaking down the huge doors of the Bastille—possibly additional mob sounds throughout this section

sound of carriage ride at tribunal
rolling of tumbrels to the guillotine
gunshot—Madame Defarge’s pistol: Important that this be
sound or a pistol fired offstage—too dangerous to have a
loaded pistol used in fight with the two actresses—be safe
and use a sound effect—very loud—the audience should jump
The lights should set mood and designate areas of the action.
This can beautifully enhance the story, but can also be very simple
if that is all that is available. Quick blackouts are helpful to
button dramatic scenes as described.

COSTUMES:

Madame Defarge—exotic, almost gypsy-like skirt, blouse,
jacket or vest, turban, large hoop earrings, boots. Add patriotic
color for Revolution. (knee/elbow pads for fight)

Defarge—leather or rough pants, peasant shirt, high boots,
vest. Add red jacket if possible for Revolution.

Gaspard—peasant breeches, shirt, worn shoes

Madame Gaspard (Vengeance) —peasant dress, shawl, bon-
net, worn boots or shoes—hair out wild as Vengeance and
added belts, patriotic colors, weapons as Vengeance

Gaspard child—simple shirt and pants or dress if girl

3 Jacques—peasant men or women’s clothing—add red caps
for Revolution and patriotic sashes, vests, etc.

Manette—worn shirt and pants when prisoner, better suit
when he returns, white hair and beard—the beard may be re-
moved when he is cleaned up and returns, his white hair
dressed, pouch on string around neck

Lucie—lovely all-purpose dress with traveling cloak, ladies
shoes or boots, hair dressed nicely in ringlets

Miss Pross—mannish dress, jacket, hat like a great Stilton
cheese. Boots, hair up. (knee/elbow pads for fight)

Lorry—ordinary business suit, traveling cloak, funny wig
which he can constantly adjust on his head

Cruncher—workingman’s jacket, breeches, boots or shoes, large muffler and jaunty tri-corn cap

Marquis—fancy wig, large feathered hat, bejeweled frock coat—lace cuffs, satin breeches, fancy high-heeled shoes. Elaborate make-up. Nightshirt and cap (wig removed) for murder scene—a fast change (can be over breeches and shirt)

Gabelle—elegant servant, possibly wigged

Servants—elegant vests or coats over neutral “poor” outfits, possibly wigged

Darnay—breeches, frock coat, handsome, but not ostentatious, hair pulled back in ponytail, good shoes, traveling coat if possible

Woman by the Road—very poor peasant dress, apron, bonnet or head scarf

Guard at Bastille—uniform jacket

Governor of Bastille—uniform

Jailer—rough peasant with patriotic additions

Aristocratic prisoners—mix of gowns, coats, robes, wigs—worn, slept in

President—Napoleon-style hat with feathers, mix of uniform pieces, patriotic sashes

Two cloaked aristocrats—long, identical cloaks, hats and wigs, elegant shoes

Sick Girl—shift or peasant dress

Sick Girl’s Brother—breeches, torn shirt

Marquis’ Wife—handsome gown, subdued, wig or hair neatly dressed

Young Charles—young boy’s outfit matching in color to Darnay

The Poor—varying combinations of jackets, aprons, worn—not colorful

The Rich—Fancy red hats, sashed, vests in red/white/blue added for Revolution and tribunal