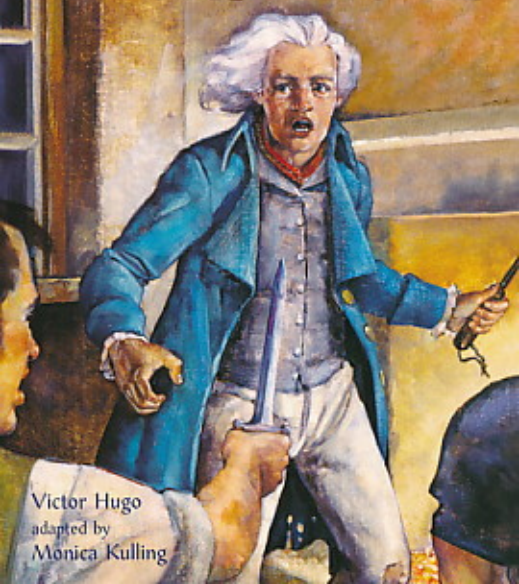


STEPPING STONES™  
a chapter book

CLASSIC

# Les Misérables



Victor Hugo  
adapted by  
Monica Kulling



## CHAPTER ONE



# The Journey's End

Years ago I stole a loaf of bread to feed my hungry family. I was sent to prison and sentenced to hard labor. I traded my name for a number. I was no longer Jean Valjean. For nineteen years, I was known as number 24,601. That was a dark, lonely time for me.

Now I am old and dying. I write this for my daughter, Cosette. When she reads it she will know the truth. I hope she can forgive me. I hope she will understand why I

did not tell her everything sooner.

At the time my story begins, I was the breadwinner in my sister's household. Her husband was dead, and she had seven children.

One year the winter was very hard. I didn't have work, and we had no food. I couldn't let the children starve, so I broke the baker's window and stole a loaf of bread. I was twenty-five years old when I lost my freedom.

In October of 1815 I was released from prison. Nineteen years of my life had been spent behind bars.

My first taste of freedom filled me with joy. I was free to walk anywhere!

That first day, I walked many miles. By nightfall my bones ached from the cold, damp air. And I was exhausted.

I stopped at the best inn in the town of Digne. I entered and the innkeeper called, "What can I do for you, monsieur?"

"I want a meal and a bed," I replied. "I have money."

The few francs I had earned in prison were more than enough to pay for food and lodging.

"In that case, you're welcome," said the innkeeper.

I sat down and waited for my dinner. I waited. And waited.

The innkeeper was watching me. He had sent a boy out half an hour ago. At that very moment, the boy was at the police station finding out about me.

"Will dinner be ready soon?" I finally asked. I was faint with hunger.

Just then the boy returned. He handed the innkeeper a scrap of paper. The innkeeper frowned after reading it. He walked over to me.

"I'm sorry, monsieur," he said. "I can't have you here."

"Why?" I asked. "Would you like me to

One terrible winter, Jean Valjean steals a loaf of bread to feed his young nieces and nephews. He is caught and put in jail—for nineteen years! When he finally gets out, Valjean changes his name and tries to begin a new life. But evil Inspector Javert wants him back in jail. As Valjean struggles to hide from the law, he finds himself living side by side with many of the sick, injured, and poor members of Paris's lowest class—those known only as Les Misérables.

