


VICTOR HUGO

The Hunchback Of Notre-Dame

In the crowded streets of Paris,
a woman unfairly accused of murder pleads for mercy.
Only one man would answer: the hunchback Quasimodo!

A dramatic illustration of Quasimodo, the hunchback of Notre-Dame. He is depicted in a blue robe, crouching on the edge of a stone ledge or balcony. His body is hunched, and his face is contorted in a pained or desperate expression. The background is a fiery orange and yellow, suggesting a sunset or a fire. The overall tone is somber and intense.

Complete
— and —
unabridged

It is this day three hundred and forty-eight years six months and nineteen days since that the good people of Paris were awakened by a grand peal from all the bells in the three districts of the City, the University, and the Ville. January 6, 1482, was, nevertheless, a day of which history has not preserved any record. There was nothing worthy of note in the event which so early set in motion the bells and the citizens of Paris. It was neither an assault of the Picards nor the Burgundians, nor a procession with the shrine of some saint, nor a mutiny of the students, nor an entry of our "most redoubted lord, Monsieur the king," nor even an execution of rogues of either sex, before the Palace of Justice of Paris. Neither was it an arrival of some bedizened and befeathered embassy, a sight of frequent occurrence in the fifteenth century. It was but two days since the last cavalcade of this kind, that of the Flemish Ambassadors commissioned to conclude a marriage between the Dauphin and Margaret of Flanders, had made its entry into Paris, to the great annoyance of the Cardinal of Bourbon,

who, in order to please the king, had been obliged to receive this vulgar squad of Flemish burgomasters with a good grace, and to entertain them at his hotel de Bourbon with a goodly morality, mummary, and farce, while a deluge of rain drenched the magnificent tapestry at his door.

What set in motion all the population of Paris on January 6, was the double solemnity, united from time immemorial, of the Epiphany and the Festival of Fools. On that day there was to be an exhibition of fireworks in the Place de Greve, a Maytree planted at the chapel of Braque, and a mystery performed at the Palace of Justice. Proclamation had been made to this effect on the preceding day, with sound of trumpet in the public places, by the provost's officers in fair coats of purple camlet, with large white crosses on the breast.

That morning, therefore, all the houses and shops remained shut, and crowds of citizens of both sexes were to be seen wending their way toward one of the three places specified above. Be it, however, observed, to the honor of the taste of the cockneys of Paris, that the majority of this concourse were proceeding toward the fireworks, which were quite seasonable, or to the mystery which was to be represented in the great hall of the palace, well covered in and sheltered, and that the curious agreed to let the poor leafless May shiver all alone beneath a January sky in the cemetery of the Chapel of Braque.

All the avenues to the Palace of Justice were particularly thronged, because it was known that the Flemish Ambassadors, who had arrived two days before, purposed to attend the representation of the mystery, and the election of the Pope of Fools, which was also to take place in the great hall.

It was no easy matter on that day to get into this great hall, though then reputed to be the largest room in the world. To the spectators at the windows, the palace yard crowded with people had the appearance of a sea, into which five or six streets, like the mouths of so many rivers, disgorged their living streams. The waves of this sea,

incessantly swelled by fresh accessions, broke against the angles of the houses, projecting here and there like promontories into the irregular basin of the Place. In the center of the lofty Gothic facade of the palace, the grand staircase, with its double current ascending and descending, poured incessantly into the Place like a cascade into a lake. Great were the noise and the clamor produced by the cries of some, the laughter of others, and the tramping of the thousands of feet. From time to time, this clamor and this noise were redoubled; the current which propelled the crowd toward the grand staircase turned back, agitated and whirling about. It was a dash made by an archer, or the horse of one of the provost's sergeants kicking and plunging to restore order—an admirable maneuver, which the provost bequeathed to the constabulary, the constabulary to the marechaussee, and the marechaussee to the present gendarmerie of Paris.

Doors, windows, loopholes, the roofs of the houses, swarmed with thousands of calm and honest faces gazing at the palace and at the crowd, and desiring nothing more; for most of the good people of Paris are quite content with the sight of the spectators; nay, a blank wall, behind which something or other is going forward, is to us an object of great curiosity.

If it could be given to us mortals living in the year 1830 to mingle in imagination with those Parisians of the fifteenth century and to enter with them, shoved, elbowed, hustled, that immense hall of the palace so straitened for room on January 6, 1482, the sight would not be destitute either of interest or of charm; and all that we should have around us would be so ancient as to appear absolutely new. If it is agreeable to the reader, we will endeavor to retrace in imagination the impressions which he would have felt with us on crossing the threshold of the great hall, amid this motley crowd, coated, gowned, or clothed in the paraphernalia of office.

In the first place, how one's ears are stunned with the noise!—how one's eyes are dazzled! Overhead is a double

*She scolded herself for not being able to
blind herself to his appearance.
But it was no use. He was too ugly....*

He was Quasimodo — the bell ringer of Notre Dame. For most of his life he has been forced to live in lonely isolation in the bell tower of the famous cathedral — hidden away like a beast, banished from sight, shunned and despised by all. For though he was gentle and kind, it was Quasimodo's crime to have been born hideously deformed. But one day his heart would prove to be a thing of rare beauty.

She was the dazzling Esmerelda. A dark-eyed gypsy girl who, the victim of a coward's jealous rage, is unjustly convicted of a crime she did not commit. Her sentence is death by hanging.

Only one man had the courage to save her: Quasimodo.

*A magnificent novel of intrigue and daring
set in the streets of medieval Paris,*

The Hunchback Of Notre-Dame

is one of the greatest adventures of all time.

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