

Few people ever saw Quasimodo. When they did, they felt afraid. They believed that he was a devil. They also believed that his helper was Father Claude, the sorcerer. The poor hunchback knew what people thought of him. He hid away and tried to be happy in his world, the Cathedral of Notre-Dame.

Quasimodo was happiest in the bell tower. The bells were his family. He touched them, talked to them, and understood them. Their voices were the only ones that he could still hear. His favorite was Marie, the biggest and best bell, but on special days the bellringers rang all of the fifteen bells. Quasimodo guided his assistants and watched and listened. The sound of the bells lit up his eyes and woke the love in his heart. He ran around and got more and more excited. Finally, he jumped on Marie. He rode her as she sang her wonderful song. As he flew through the air on her back, the hunchback became half man and half bell.

Quasimodo had his cathedral, his bells, and one other love: the priest, Father Claude Frollo. Father Claude took him in, fed him, taught him, and gave him a purpose. The good people of Paris hated Quasimodo, but Father Claude protected him from them. The priest was sometimes silent and his rules were often hard. But Quasimodo loved this man. He would happily give his life to help Father Claude.

And what about the priest? Little by little, between 1467 and 1482, Father Claude became even more serious and even more alone. He continued to study, and he followed the Church's rules for priests very carefully. But people were afraid of him and told dangerous stories about him: "He visits the dead." "He works for the devil." "He is an evil sorcerer."

The priest did have secrets, but nobody understood them. Why was his hair already gray? Why did he always cover his head when he was outside? Why did he keep his eyes on the ground? When did he begin to hate and fear women? And why did he keep gypsy women away from Notre-Dame?

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Let us return to 1482 and a courtroom in Paris. It is January 7, and Quasimodo stands in front of Judge Florian Barbedienne. What is his crime? He tried to carry off the gypsy girl, Esmeralda, and he attacked the King's Guard.

Florian Barbedienne is an unusual judge. He cannot hear, not even the bells of Notre-Dame. He is a successful judge because he can read a criminal's face. He sends the bad to prison, and the good are sent home. The judge moves from question to question. Each time he thinks that Quasimodo has answered. But the hunchback has not heard the questions, and soon the people in the courtroom begin to laugh.

Judge Barbedienne sees them laughing. Quasimodo, he thinks, has answered impolitely. But Quasimodo has not said anything.

"Silence!" shouts the judge. Then he turns to the court secretary and asks, "Have you written down the criminal's answers?"

The judge sees the people laugh again and he grows angrier. Quasimodo is the only silent person in the courtroom.

"Hunchback," Judge Barbedienne begins, "I'm very unhappy with your answers. You haven't been serious in my courtroom. I'll punish you with one hour of flogging."

"Sir," says one of the judge's assistants quietly, "this man can't hear."

But the judge does not hear his assistant's words. He can only imagine what the man has said.

"Ah! I didn't know that," he shouts. "Flog this terrible criminal for *two* hours!"

That afternoon, crowds of people hurry to the Place de Grève for the flogging of the famous bellringer. A Parisian woman, Madame Oudarde Musnier, is taking her friend and the friend's young son there. They have also brought a cake for Sachette, the poor woman in the Tower of Roland.