

Chapter 1 A Day of Surprises

On the morning of January 6, 1482, the streets of Paris are crowded. It is the last day of the Christmas season and the people of the capital are ready for a party. There will be singing and dancing, and later a big fire with plenty of food in the Place de Grève. But now the people are hurrying to the Great Hall for the first and most amusing activity of the day. Everyone wants to find a good place to watch a new play. They also want to be able to see the important politicians, college professors, and churchmen in the seats above them.

At noon, the people begin shouting, "The play! The play! We want the play!" And after a few minutes the play begins. The writer of the play, Pierre Gringoire, is listening very carefully. Today the most important people in Paris are hearing his words. The young man dreams that he will be famous, and possibly even rich, by the end of the afternoon.

Suddenly, the actors stop speaking. Every face in the crowd turns to watch the greatest churchman of Paris, a close friend of King Louis XI, arrive in the theater with a group of ten or twelve other important men. When these people are finally sitting down, the play continues. But after a few minutes one of the churchman's guests, a rich Belgian businessman from Ghent, shouts, "Excuse me, good people of Paris, what are we doing here? Today's a day for parties and fun, but I'm not amused. What's this play about? The problems of old politicians and priests. It's boring, don't you agree?"

"My friends," the businessman continues, "it's time to choose your 'Pope* of Fools.' In my country on the sixth of January, we

* Pope: the head of the Roman Catholic Church

play a game to choose our Pope. It's a lot more fun than this boring play."

Everyone shouts happily and one student calls out, "Tell us how to play the game, good sir!"

"It's really very easy. If you want to be Pope, you come up to the stage. One by one you put your heads through a hole in a sheet. We choose the person who can make the ugliest face."

The crowd loves the game. They laugh as one strange face after another pushes through the hole. But suddenly the crowd is silent. They have seen some very ugly faces, but now they are clearly looking at the winner. The face has a nose like a big potato, a wide mouth in the shape of a horseshoe, a small left eye under heavy red hair, a closed right eye, and a few very large and broken teeth. It also has a look that seems dangerous and sad at the same time.

"The Pope! The Pope!" shouts the crowd. A few students pull down the sheet and the people see their Pope.

"Oh, it's Quasimodo. What an ugly thing he is!" one person says. "He's strong, too. He can kill you with two fingers."

"Don't look!" shouts another. "He's as ugly as a wild animal."

Quasimodo is famous in this part of Paris because he rings the bells at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame. His body, like his big face and head, is terrible to look at. He has very large hands and feet, and strangely shaped legs that come together at the knees. The big hump on his back has given him the name the "Hunchback of Notre-Dame." He cannot hear so nobody talks to him. In fact, nobody goes near him. The good people of Paris are afraid of Quasimodo. They believe the stories they have heard about him: He is evil.

But the businessman from Ghent is very pleased. "This is surely the ugliest man in Paris. You've chosen a good Pope."

The students run to the stage with a gold paper hat and coat for their Pope of Fools. They put him on a chair and lift him on their shoulders. Then they carry him through the streets of the city, with



They have seen some very ugly faces, but now they are clearly looking at the winner.

the crowd from the Great Hall following behind. Nobody asks Quasimodo for his opinion of all this, but his ugly face looks almost happy.

At the Great Hall, Pierre Gringoire sits sadly in the empty theater. He knows that his dream is at an end. "Nobody listened to my play. Nobody paid me any money. They chose to listen to a foreigner from Ghent, and now they've followed a hunchback through the streets. What shall I do now?"

Night comes early in Paris at the beginning of a new year. The sky is already dark when the young writer reaches the Place de Grève. He is hoping to get warm at the big fire and to find some free food. He is also worried about a bed for the night because he cannot return to his apartment. He hasn't paid the owner of the building for the last six months, and the man is waiting for his money.

The writer walks toward the big fire in the middle of the square, but he cannot get near it. A crowd of people is watching a beautiful young gypsy girl. She sings and dances like someone from a different world. Gringoire pushes to the front of the crowd for a closer look. The girl has dark gold skin and very black hair, and eyes that shine brightly in her beautiful face. In her colorful gypsy dress, she moves like a foreign princess from an old storybook.

Every face in the crowd watches the girl, but a quiet, serious man seems to study her very closely. This man is wearing a long black coat and his pale face has deep lines, maybe from worry or from study. He is already losing his hair, but he is probably only about thirty-five years old. His eyes never leave the girl's face, but he does not seem to enjoy watching her.

Finally, the girl stops dancing and the crowd begins to shout, "Don't stop, Esmeralda! We want more!"

Esmeralda, the gypsy girl, calls for Djali, her pretty white goat.

"Djali," says the dancer, "now it's your turn. What day of the month is it?"

The goat lifts one little foot and hits the ground six times.

"And what time is it?" asks Esmeralda.

Djali hits the ground seven times, and then the clock on the church rings seven o'clock.

"This is evil," shouts a voice in the crowd. It is the man in the long black coat. But the crowd wants more.

"Djali," says the girl, "how does Monsieur* Charmolue, the King's lawyer, walk?"

The goat walks on two legs, exactly like Monsieur Charmolue. Everyone laughs and shouts for more.

But the same serious man cries again, "The girl is evil, and that goat is a devil."

Esmeralda turns her head. "Oh, it's that terrible man. Why does he follow me everywhere? Why does he hate me?"

Then the crowd hears another voice. "Go away, gypsy girl. We don't want you here." This time it is not the man in the black coat. It is a woman's voice, full of hate.

"It's Sachette, the witch from the Tower of Roland," shout some children.

The witch has locked herself in the Tower of Roland at one corner of the Place de Grève. She hates all gypsy women. She shouts at them when they come near her prison.

The people forget about Sachette when they hear loud noises at the entrance to the square. The Pope of Fools and a great crowd of thieves and gypsies run into the Place de Grève.

Quasimodo has no friends, and he has never known love, but today he is a king. It is exciting to be part of the people's great day of fun and parties. His heart is filled with happiness. For the first time in his short, painful life.

It is no surprise that Quasimodo's happiness does not last long. The same quiet man in the black coat hurries out of the crowd.

* Monsieur, Madame, Mademoiselle: the French words for Mr., Mrs., and Miss

With an angry face, he pulls the gold hat and coat from the hunchback and throws them to the ground.

Gringoire knows this man. "It's Father Claude Frollo, an important priest from Notre-Dame!" he says to himself. "Is he crazy? Quasimodo will break him into little pieces."

Everyone waits for the hunchback to throw Father Claude to the ground. They know he is very strong. But Quasimodo falls on his knees in front of the priest and the two men speak by using hand signs. Then they leave the square silently and disappear down a dark, narrow street. Nobody follows them because everyone is afraid of Quasimodo.

"This has been a day of surprises: a beautiful gypsy girl, an ugly hunchback, a terrible priest, and a crazy witch," thinks Pierre Gringoire. "But where am I going to find supper and a bed?" He is now very hungry and cold, so he decides to follow the beautiful gypsy girl.

"She probably has a warm little house for herself and her goat," thinks the writer. "And I've heard that gypsies are good, kind people. Who knows...?"

Esmeralda and Djali walk quickly down a number of dark, lonely streets. Gringoire does not know this part of Paris. Soon he is lost, but he continues to follow the pretty pair. Then Esmeralda turns a corner and for a minute Gringoire cannot see her. He hears a loud female scream and runs to the corner.

The street is dark except for one small light in a narrow window. In the shadows, Gringoire can see the gypsy fighting with two men who are trying to carry her away.

"Help! Help! Police!" shouts Gringoire. He hurries toward Esmeralda, but one of the men turns and sees him. It is Quasimodo. The hunchback hits Gringoire. The young writer flies across the road and hits his head on the hard sidewalk. His eyes close and everything goes black.

"Murder! Murder!" screams the poor gypsy.

A group of soldiers suddenly arrives in the road.

"Stop, you criminals! Don't touch that woman!" shouts an officer of the King's Guard.

The handsome young soldier lifts Esmeralda out of Quasimodo's arms and places her in front of him on his horse. The surprised hunchback tries to attack the officer, but is stopped by fifteen of the officer's men. They catch Quasimodo, tie his hands behind his back, and take him away. The soldiers do not notice a second man, in a black coat, disappearing at the end of the street.

Esmeralda sits nicely on the officer's horse. She turns, places her two hands on the young man's shoulders, and looks at him closely for a few seconds. Then in her sweetest voice she says, "Kind officer, what is your name?"

"Phoebus de Châteaupers, at your service, my pretty lady," answers the officer of the King's Guard.

Esmeralda smiles and looks into the handsome man's eyes. "Thank you," she says softly.

Officer Phoebus smiles and smoothes his mustache. The girl silently climbs off the horse and disappears into the night.

"That was a beautiful girl!" says Phoebus de Châteaupers. "I wanted to keep her."

The dark street is silent and empty now except for one body which is lying next to the sidewalk. Gringoire's clothes are wet and cold, and slowly he begins to wake up. "What happened?" he asks himself. Then he remembers Esmeralda and thinks, "I hope she escaped from that terrible hunchback."

The young writer gets up and begins walking again, but he is completely lost. When the streets end, he finds himself on a wet, dirty road. He is not alone. Here and there he can see strange black shapes moving down the road. Then he sees a red light in the sky. "Oh, wonderful!" cries Gringoire. "A fire and maybe some food."

Now, with the light from the fire, Gringoire can see the black shapes more clearly. One is a man who cannot see. Another is a



"Kind officer, what is your name?"

woman with a bad arm. Then there is a man who cannot walk. All the poor, the weak, and the sick of Paris are moving slowly and painfully down this road. They pull at Gringoire's coat and ask for money, but he does not stop.

Finally, he reaches the end of the road and finds himself in a great square with a thousand lights and a crowd of noisy people. Everyone is suddenly strong and healthy when they arrive at the square.

"Where am I?" asks Gringoire.

"You're in the City of Thieves," answers a man in the clothes of a soldier. He is cleaning red paint from his head. Tomorrow, he will put more "blood" on his head. Then he will return to the city streets to ask for money from the good people of Paris.

"What are *you* doing here?" asks an old thief. "You're not one of us."

"I'm very sorry," begins Gringoire nervously. He knows that even the police are afraid to walk into the City of Thieves. "I'm lost. I was looking for a place to sleep and something to eat."

"You looked in the wrong place this time," the old man laughs.

"Let's take him to the king!" one of the women shouts, and everyone agrees.

The crowd pushes and pulls Gringoire to a large hall at one side of the square. Inside, people are drinking beer and eating at long tables. The King of Thieves is sitting at the best table.

"Who's our pretty friend?" asks the king. "Has he come for a cup of tea and a cookie?"

Everyone laughs at the king's joke, but Gringoire is shaking from head to toe.

"Dear sir, great King . . ." he tries to say.

"Stop!" shouts the king. He is serious now. "Tell us your name and nothing more."

"I'm Pierre Gringoire. I'm a writer."

"Enough! You've found the City of Thieves, and you're not one

of us. I'm your judge. You're not a thief, so we'll punish you. We'll hang you. We'll enjoy that."

"But, good sir..." Gringoire tries again, "I wrote a play. Maybe you saw it today in the Great Hall."

"Yes, I did. It was boring, but your death will be amusing. Is everything ready for a hanging?" the king asks his men.

But then the king thinks of something. "I forgot one of our laws," he says. "Is there a woman here who wants this man for her husband? A man for nothing. If you marry him, he won't die."

"No! No! Hang him! We'll enjoy it," shouts the crowd.

But then a pretty voice is heard at the back of the room. "Are you really going to hang that man?"

"Yes, sister," answers the King of Thieves. "Or will you take him for your husband?"

Esmeralda stops and thinks. "I'll take him," she says.

Gringoire cannot believe his luck. Is this beautiful gypsy really going to save him?

Esmeralda takes his hand, and the king says, "Brother, she is your wife. Sister, he is your husband for four years. Now, go!"

In a few minutes, Gringoire is sitting at a table opposite the beautiful gypsy in a warm little room. There is food in front of him and a good bed in the next room.

The writer looks at the girl and thinks, "She saved my life and married me. She clearly loves me a lot, doesn't she?" With this idea in his head, he touches Esmeralda's hand.

"What do you want with my hand?" she asks, and moves away from Gringoire.

"But you love me. You're my wife," explains the writer.

"Don't be silly. You have no reason to touch me," says Esmeralda.

"But why did you marry me?"

"I didn't want you to die. We can be friends. That's all. Like brother and sister and nothing more. Remember that."

"That's fine for me," says Gringoire. "I'm happy to be alive and warm, and this bread and cheese is delicious. Don't you want something to eat?"

"No, I'm thinking about love," answers Esmeralda.

"What's love?" asks the writer. He always enjoys this kind of conversation.

"Love!" the girl says. "That's when two become one. A man and a woman are joined."

"What kind of man will you love, Esmeralda?" asks Gringoire.

"A soldier on a horse. A man who can protect me. You know about words. What does *Phoebus* mean?" she asks.

"It's a Latin word which means 'sun'," explains Gringoire.

"The sun! How wonderful!" says Esmeralda. Then she forgets about Gringoire and begins to dream. In a minute or two, she disappears into her bedroom and locks the door behind her.

"This isn't a very romantic wedding night," Gringoire says to himself, "but it's much better than dying in the City of Thieves."

Chapter 2 Broken Hearts and Broken Lives

Father Claude Frollo was not an ordinary child. He was born in 1446, and from an early age he was interested in books and learning. He started college very young, learned quickly, and graduated at the age of eighteen. His greatest interests in life were science and religion.

The important men in the Church noticed this serious young man. When he was only twenty years old, they made him a priest. People heard stories of Claude's great learning and, as usual in those days, it worried them. They began to ask themselves if Father Claude was a good priest or an evil sorcerer.

This question was asked openly on Quasimodo Sunday (the first Sunday after Easter), 1467. On that fine morning, a box was left at