

the main doors of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame. As they were leaving the early church service, two old women looked inside the box.

“What’s *that*?” asked the first old lady. “Is it a strange animal? It can’t be a child. It’s too ugly!”

“Throw it in the river,” suggested the second old lady.

By this time, a crowd was looking at the poor little boy. He was crying and was probably hungry and afraid. But nobody wanted to touch the ugly little red-haired, one-eyed hunchback, and clearly nobody wanted to take him home.

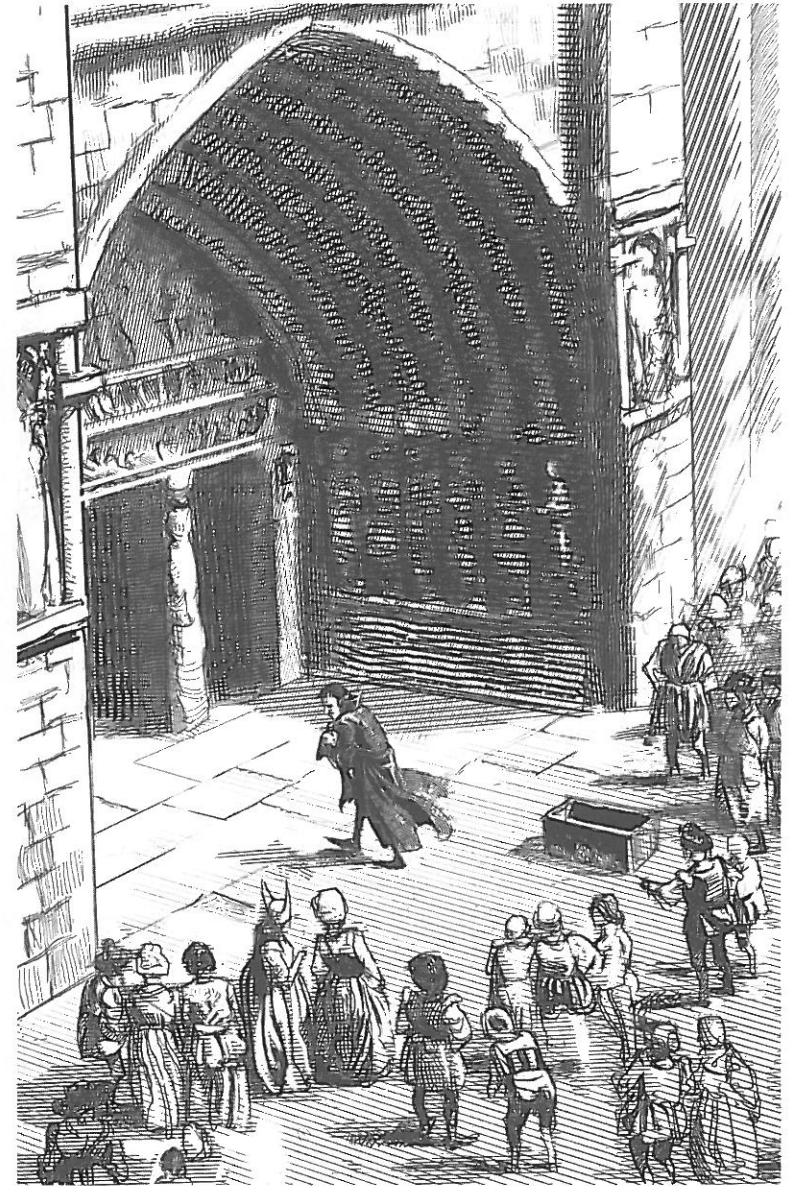
Then the young priest, Father Claude Frolo, pushed silently through the crowd. His face was serious and his eyes looked very bright. He put his hand on the forest of red hair and the child stopped crying.

“I’ll have this child,” said the priest. He picked the boy up and carried him into the cathedral.

After the door closed, one of the old ladies said, “I told you that young priest was a sorcerer. Now do you believe me?”

Father Claude named the poor child Quasimodo and gave him a home in the cathedral. The boy could not exist in the outside world, but with the priest’s help he made a life inside the walls of Notre-Dame. Father Claude was very patient and taught the boy to speak, to read, and to write. Quasimodo became part of that great church. He climbed into every corner and knew every piece of wood, glass, and stone.

Ten years after their first Sunday together, when Quasimodo was fourteen, Father Claude found a job for the boy. He became one of the bellringers up in the highest part of the cathedral. Quasimodo loved his job and soon became the chief bellringer, but as usual life was not kind to the hunchback. The sound of the great bells destroyed his hearing. Another door closed for him, and he fell deeper into his own dark world. He stopped speaking and only talked to Father Claude in hand signs.



“I’ll have this child,” said the priest.

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.

"Let's hurry, Mahiette," says Ouarde Musnier to her guest. "We don't want to miss the flogging."

"There's a crowd near the bridge. Is that the place?" asks Mahiette. This is her first trip to Paris.

"No, listen," Ouarde says. "That's little Esmeralda, the gypsy. Come and see her. She sings beautifully and she's the best dancer in Paris."

"No, we can't go near her," says Mahiette. "She'll steal my son. Don't you know the story of Pâquette la Chantefleurie?"

"No, please tell me about her."

"Pâquette la Chantefleurie was a pretty girl from Rheims, my hometown. As children, we went to the same school and often played together. When we were only fourteen years old, Pâquette came to school with something new. She was wearing a beautiful gold cross around her neck. The next day, she was wearing a pretty new dress. Her father was dead and her mother had very little money. We knew that the new things were from a man. Pâquette sold her body for these nice gifts.

"Then her mother died. Pâquette was alone and had to make her living on the streets. By the age of twenty, she looked old and sad. But then the best thing happened to her. She had a beautiful baby girl, and she became beautiful again, too. At last, she had someone to love. She was a wonderful mother."

"How did they live?" Ouarde asks.

"Pâquette had to sell herself again, but she was happy. She used all of her money to buy things for Agnès, her baby. Agnès had the most beautiful clothes and even a little pair of pink shoes. I saw the baby once. She had golden skin and big black eyes and black hair. She was a happy baby, too, and her mother loved her more every day."

"It's a good story," says Ouarde as the women walk along. "But you haven't explained about the gypsies."

"One day, a group of gypsies came to Rheims. People were

afraid of them because they seemed different, maybe even dangerous. They could look at a person's hand and read the future. Pâquette took Agnès to the gypsies and asked about the baby's future."

"What did they tell her?"

"One old gypsy said, 'She'll be a queen.' So Pâquette felt happy and wanted to tell someone about Agnès's good luck. When the baby was asleep, she hurried to a neighbor's house."

"What happened?"

"While Pâquette was out, the gypsies broke into her little house. They stole Agnès. Some people saw them with the baby, but the gypsies quickly disappeared into the night. They left a little boy in Agnès's bed. He was about four years old, and the poor thing was an ugly hunchback with bright red hair and only one eye. Pâquette screamed and cried, and a neighbor took the boy away. Nobody knows what happened to him."

"But what happened to Pâquette and her baby?" asks Ouarde.

"Pâquette found one of Agnès's pink shoes on the floor. She searched for the gypsies, but they were gone. Her hair turned gray during the night, and she disappeared from Rheims. Now do you understand why I don't want my child near any gypsies?" asks Mahiette.

"Yes, of course," says Ouarde. "But, look, here we are at the Tower of Roland. The cake is for Sachette, another poor, unhappy woman."

The two women look through the window of Sachette's prison. Sachette is silent. She is very pale and thin and has long gray hair. She is looking at something in the corner of the small, dark room and does not notice the women.

"This is strange," says Mahiette. Tears are running down her face. "What's the witch's name?" she asks her friend.

"We call her Sachette."

"And I," says Mahiette, "call her Pâquette la Chantefleurie. Look

in the corner." Oudarde looks and sees a pink baby's shoe. Then she begins to cry, too.

The two women leave the cake for Sachette and hurry to the Place de Grève. They wait patiently with a large crowd of people until the prisoner, Quasimodo, arrives. Is the Hunchback of Notre-Dame the boy that the gypsies left in Agnès's bed sixteen years ago? Yesterday, he was the people's Pope of Fools and enjoyed his special day. Today, his hands and feet are tied and he waits for the King's torturer, Pierrat Torterue. When Torterue is ready, Quasimodo is tied to the great wooden wheel. The flogging begins when the church bell rings the hour.

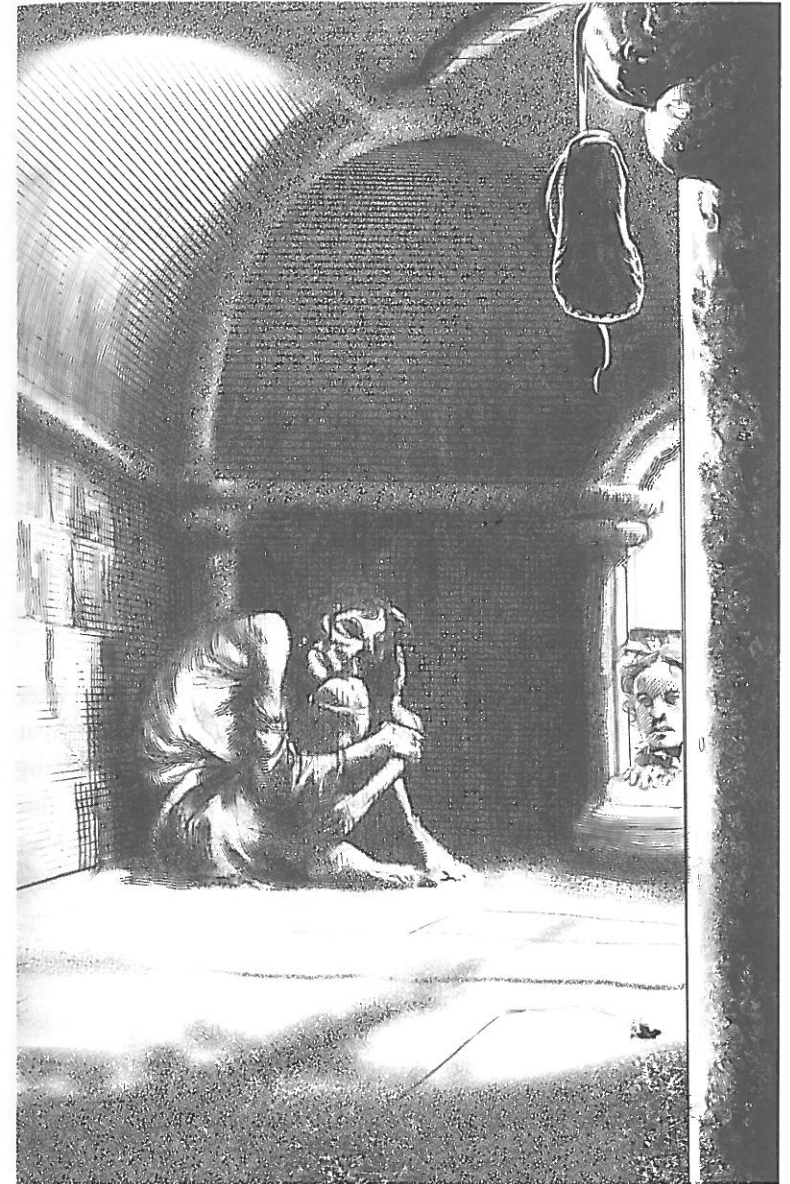
The wheel turns and the torturer hits Quasimodo's back and shoulders with his short rope. Quasimodo jumps like a person surprised in his sleep. He tries to free himself, but he is tied too tightly to the wheel. The wheel continues to turn, and Torterue hits the hunchback again and again. Soon blood is running down Quasimodo's back, and drops of it are flying into the air.

Quasimodo is quiet now and does not move. He does not understand why this is happening to him. Finally, the hour has ended and the torturer stops. His two assistants wash the blood from Quasimodo's back.

But Quasimodo's suffering has not ended. While he waits for his second hour of flogging, the people in the crowd shout at him. He cannot hear their words, but he can see their ugly faces. Then they begin to throw stones at him. Quasimodo stays quiet, but his face is red and angry.

Suddenly, he sees the one person who can help him. Quasimodo smiles sweetly because Father Claude Frollo is walking through the crowd. The priest comes near and his eyes meet Quasimodo's happy face. But Father Claude neither stops nor speaks. He looks at the ground and hurries away, and Quasimodo's smile disappears.

The second hour of flogging begins. Again, Quasimodo tries to free himself from the wheel, and the crowd shouts and laughs.



Oudarde looks and sees a pink baby's shoe.

After a few terrible minutes, the hunchback looks at the crowd and cries painfully, "Some water!" But the people do not help the hunchback.

Again, Quasimodo cries, "Some water!" Everybody laughs.

Then a young girl with a little white goat pushes through the crowd. Quasimodo sees the gypsy girl from the night before. He thinks that she, too, wants to punish him.

Without a word, Esmeralda climbs up to Quasimodo. She kindly lifts a cup of water to his mouth and he drinks. A big tear slowly falls from his only eye. Enjoying this beautiful picture, the people are silent now. But one voice calls out loudly and clearly. Through her window, Sachette, the witch in the Tower of Roland, has seen Esmeralda.

"Go away, gypsy!" Sachette screams. "Thief! Thief!"

Chapter 3 Evil Thoughts and Evil Actions

It is a fine day at the beginning of March, two months after Quasimodo's flogging in the Place de Grève. Opposite the great Cathedral of Notre-Dame, there is a large house. It is owned by the Gondelauriers, one of the richest families in Paris. On this beautiful afternoon, Mademoiselle Fleur-de-Lys de Gondelaurier is sitting in the front yard with a group of her friends. They are busy, cutting cloth and telling stories. These girls are all young, pretty, and very rich. They live comfortable lives in expensive houses, with beautiful furniture and delicious food.

Fleur-de-Lys has a special visitor: Phoebus de Châteaupers, officer of the King's Guard and her future husband. The officer is happy that Fleur-de-Lys is pretty and rich. He is bored, though, in her company. He wants to be in a cheap bar with his soldier friends, talking to the girls there. But for now, he tries to talk to his future wife.

"My dear," he says to Fleur-de-Lys, "what are you making?"

"It's a birthday gift for my mother, as I told you ten minutes ago," answers Fleur-de-Lys coldly. She knows that the handsome officer is bored with her.

Suddenly, Bérangère, Fleur-de-Lys's little sister, calls everyone to the gate. "Look at that pretty girl. She dances very well and she has a little goat with her."

The officer does not look bored now. In fact, he is very interested in what he sees.

"Phoebus," says Fleur-de-Lys, "didn't you save a gypsy girl from the hands of thieves about two months ago?"

"You're right. I believe I did," the officer answers.

"Is that your gypsy girl in front of the cathedral?" Fleur-de-Lys asks.

"I think you're correct. She had a little goat with her."

"Look in the tower, near the top of the cathedral, sister," says Bérangère. "Who is that man in black up there?"

All the young ladies look up and see a priest at one of the high windows in the tower. His eyes are on the dancing girl.

"It's Father Claude Frollo," says Fleur-de-Lys. "He hates gypsy girls. Why is he watching her so carefully?"

"She dances beautifully," says one of Fleur-de-Lys's friends.

"Phoebus, since you know the girl, ask her to dance for us," orders Fleur-de-Lys.

Phoebus invites Esmeralda to the house and soon she is dancing for the party of young ladies. As Fleur-de-Lys and her friends watch, they each have one thought: She is surely the most beautiful girl in Paris. The girls do not want to be polite to Esmeralda. But Phoebus is clearly interested in her.

"My pretty child," Phoebus says after Esmeralda's dance, "we met in January. Do you remember me?"

Esmeralda says, "Oh, yes." She forgets about the other people in the yard. She looks into the officer's eyes and smiles sweetly.