

"This story teaches you that people aren't always
as good as they pretend to be." Mysha, 11



THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

VICTOR HUGO

A frightful horde of men and women, armed with scythes, pikes, billhooks and rusty swords, advanced towards the massive front doors of Notre Dame Cathedral.

For many years Quasimodo the bellringer has lived peacefully in the Cathedral of Notre Dame with his master, Archdeacon Claude Frollo. But the arrival of Esmeralda, the young and dazzlingly beautiful gypsy dancer, changes everything.

Esmeralda has fallen in love with the brave and handsome Captain Phoebus. Will the Archdeacon be able to control his violent jealousy when Esmeralda rejects him?



Esmeralda's life is in danger, but Quasimodo will do anything to protect her. When the King's soldiers clash with the thieves and beggars of Paris, can the innocent young dancer survive?

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Retold by Tony Evans
Illustrated by Catty Flores



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THE CHARACTERS

Pierre Gringoire

Pierre Gringoire is struggling to make a living writing plays and poetry. What will happen to him when he is captured by a criminal gang?



Esmeralda

Esmeralda is a beautiful young dancer, graceful, innocent and charming. Can she find happiness with the man she loves?



Quasimodo

Born with many disabilities, Quasimodo is sharp-witted and immensely strong and athletic. Will he be able to save Esmeralda from a horrible fate?



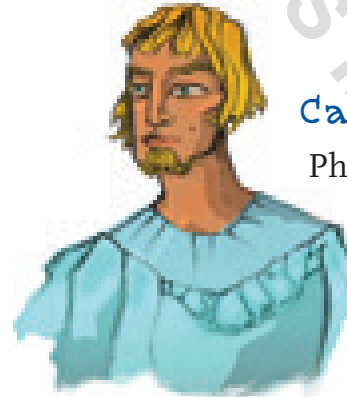
Claude Frollo

Frollo is Archdeacon of Notre Dame Cathedral. What are his feelings for Esmeralda, and how will he act on them?



Captain Phoebus

Phoebus is a young army officer, brave but reckless. Can he survive the violent jealousy of his rival in love?



Clopin Trouillefou

Clopin is the sinister leader of a gang of Paris thieves and beggars.

What part does he play in Esmeralda's story? Does he act for good or for evil?





THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

The sixth of January 1482 was a special day for the citizens of Paris, who were celebrating the annual ceremony of the Feast of Fools. By early afternoon many hundreds of people had filled the Palais de Justice, where the mystery play was being performed.

Pierre Gringoire, the young man who had written the play, was too anxious to notice the glorious building around him. The audience packing the great hall were getting restless. The crowd got noisier and noisier, until a ragged figure with a hideous sore on one arm stood up and shouted to the multitude. Pierre recognised him – it was Clopin Trouillefou, the beggar.

‘Come on! It’s time to elect the Pope of the Fools! We’ve had enough of this rubbish – let’s have the face-pulling contest!’

Clopin’s companions cheered, and soon most of the audience were whistling and shouting.

They all turned round so that they could get a good view of the window set in the stonework of the little chapel on one side of the hall.

It was no good – Pierre was forced to call a halt to the performance.

It was typical of his bad luck, he thought.

He had not even been paid for his work, and now he probably never would be. Of course, he could hardly blame

the audience. The Feast

of Fools was the one day each year when all the servants, students, workers, thieves and beggars – all the common people of Paris – took over the city, and more or less did what they wanted. The nobility, priests and king's officials were made fun of, and the people chose their leader for the day's celebrations – the Fools' Pope.



On this occasion it had been decided that whoever could pull the ugliest and most ridiculous face would be elected pope for the day. One by one the contestants climbed up inside the little chapel, and stuck their heads out through the hole.

The first face at the window, with turned up eyes, a red gaping mouth and wrinkled forehead, caused an explosion of laughter and catcalls. As more and more grotesque characters took their turn at the window opening, the great hall became a huge furnace of impudence and joviality.

Then the next contestant came to the window. The crowd was stunned into silence. The search was surely over – they had found the Pope of the Fools. The face that appeared was familiar to many that saw it, but it was still far more disturbing than could possibly be imagined. The right eye had vanished entirely under an enormous wart. The beady left eye glared out next to a nose like a squashed tomato, and the twisted mouth contained a set of notched and irregular teeth. The head was topped by a thatch of coarse bushy hair.

Back in time

Before Victor Hugo wrote this book– with the original title of *Notre-Dame de Paris* – he made a careful study of the late medieval period in France, so that his description of life in Paris in 1482 could be as accurate as possible. The society he describes was harsh even from the point of view of 1830, when the book was written, and is very hard for us to imagine today.

Although judges and courts existed and criminal trials took place, the justice system of that time was very different from what now exists in western Europe. When Esmeralda is tortured in order to make her confess to a crime she did not commit, she is being treated like most uncooperative suspects were in those days. In the original version she is convicted of witchcraft as well as murder. In the middle ages, indeed until the late seventeenth century, a superstitious belief in witches and magic

was responsible for the execution of thousands of innocent people – usually harmless old women.

Public executions and punishments drew large numbers of spectators – most people at that time had hard lives and did not feel that such exhibitions were unkind. Quasimodo's cruel whipping in the Place de Grève would have been just one of many similar sentences carried out to entertain the crowd.

Attitudes to disabled people were also very different at the time in which this story is set. It is clear that Victor Hugo portrays Quasimodo as a character who is misunderstood, and has a hidden capacity for love, affection and loyalty. Sadly, in 1482 he is seen only as a figure to be feared and made fun of – although Esmeralda comes to understand that his appearance masks a gentler spirit within.