

## THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

Victor Hugo

Quasimodo had stopped under the great door. His feet seemed as solidly rooted to the floor of the church as the heavy Roman pillars. His great hairy head was sunk between his shoulders like that of a lion, which too has a mane, but no neck. He held the young girl, all palpitating, suspended in his calloused hands, like a piece of white drapery; but he carried her so carefully that he seemed afraid of bruising her or breaking her. It was as if he felt that she was something delicate, exquisite, and precious, made for hands other than his. At moments he seemed as if he dared not touch her, even with his breath. Then all at once he would clutch her in his arms, to his angular breast as if she were his only worldly possession, his treasure, as the mother of this child would have done. His gnomelike eye, bent over her, poured out tenderness, grief, and pity, and then was lifted up suddenly all flashing. The women laughed and wept; the crowd stamped their feet enthusiastically, for at that moment Quasimodo was really beautiful. He was handsome - this orphan, this fondling outcast. He felt himself august and strong. He looked directly into the face of that society from which he had been banished and over which he now exercised so much power - that human justice from which he had snatched its prey - all those tigers, now forced to gnash their empty jaws, those judges, those executioners - all that royal strength which he, the most lowly, had broken with God's strength.

And then there was something touching about the protection offered by a creature so deformed to one so unfortunate - one condemned to death saved by Quasimodo. Here were the two extremes of physical and social wretchedness meeting and assisting each other.

After a few minutes of triumph, Quasimodo had suddenly plunged with his burden into the church. The people, fond of daring deeds, followed him with their eyes through the dark nave, regretting that he had so quickly withdrawn himself from their acclamations. Suddenly he was seen again at one of the gallery of the kings of France. He ran along it like a frenzied person, lifting his prize in his arms and shouting, "Sanctuary!" The crowd again burst forth with applause. When he had crossed the gallery, he plunged again into the interior of the church. A minute later, he reappeared on the upper platform, still carrying the gipsy in his arms, still running madly along, still crying, "Sanctuary!" And the crowd applauded again. At last he made a third appearance atop the tower of the great bell. There he seemed to show proudly to the whole city her whom he had saved, and his thundering voice, that voice which was heard so rarely, and which he never heard, repeated three times with frenzy, even to the clouds, "Sanctuary! Sanctuary! Sanctuary!"

"Noël! Noël! Screamed the crowd, and this immense acclamation was thundered to the opposite bank of the Seine to the amazement of the crowd assembled in the Place de Greve, and the recluse, who was still waiting, with her eye fixed on the gibbet.