

Penguin



Readers

Les Misérables



VICTOR HUGO

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LES MISÉRABLES

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LEVEL

4

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People in the story



Jean Valjean



Fantine



Cosette



Monsieur and
Madame Thénardier



Javert



Marius Pontmercy

New words



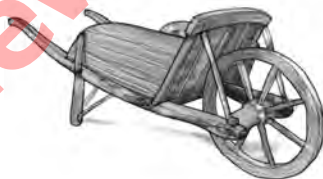
candlesticks



cannon



carriage



cart



coin



rope

Note about the story

Victor Hugo (1802–1885) was a French writer and *Les Misérables* (1862) is his most famous book. In English, *Les Misérables* means “**miserable*** people” but the title of the book has almost always been kept in French.

For hundreds of years, the **rulers** of France were kings, but by the late 1700s many people were poor and hated their rich kings. During the French **Revolution** (1789–1799), King Louis XVI was killed and Napoleon became the ruler of France.

The story of *Les Misérables* begins in 1815, when Napoleon famously lost the Battle of Waterloo, where French soldiers fought against English and other European soldiers. After this, Louis XVIII became King of France, but many French people were still poor and did not want another king. The story ends in 1832, when there was another, smaller revolution. During the night of 5–6 June 1832, **barricades** were built in the narrow streets in the centre of Paris by the **revolutionaries** who were fighting French soldiers.

In French, *Monsieur* means Mr or Sir, and *Madame* means Mrs. Francs were French money that was used until 2002.

Before-reading question

- 1 Choose three of the characters from the “People in the story” on page 4. What are they like, do you think? For example, are they rich or poor, happy or unhappy, good or bad?

*Definitions of words in **bold** can be found in the glossary on pages 78–80.

CHAPTER ONE

The silver candlesticks

It was 1815 and Monsieur Charles Myriel was the **Bishop** of Digne. He was a kind man, aged about 75, who lived **simply** in a small house. When Monsieur Myriel arrived in Digne, he moved into the bishop's **palace**, next to the hospital. But, as soon as he visited the hospital, he noticed how small it was.

"The bishop's palace is much bigger," he said to the **director** of the hospital. "And there are only three of us living there – myself, my sister and our **servant**. We don't need all those large rooms. You should move the hospital to the palace and we'll live here."

The director agreed and the bishop moved house the next day. His furniture was very old and the only expensive things that he owned were his grandmother's **silver** forks and spoons, and two large silver candlesticks. Monsieur Myriel gave most of his money to the poor. He walked many miles every week to visit the villages around Digne. He was always happy and often laughed like a schoolboy. When he could, he worked in his garden, growing vegetables, fruit and flowers. At night, he often sat in his little garden, looking at the moon, and he felt thankful.

One evening in October 1815, a **stranger** arrived in Digne on foot, and everyone who saw him felt afraid. He was a tall,

strong man of about 46, with old, dirty clothes, very short hair and a long beard. No one knew who he was or where he came from.

First, the stranger went into the town hall to show his papers. Fifteen minutes later, he came out and went into the **inn**.

“What would you like, Monsieur?” asked the **landlord**, without looking up.

“Dinner and a bed,” replied the man.

“Of course,” answered the landlord, and then he looked up. He **stared** at the stranger’s dirty clothes and added, “If you can pay.”

“I have money,” said the man, who went to sit down.

The landlord said something quietly to the kitchen boy, who ran off to the town hall. A few minutes later, the boy came back with a message for the landlord.

“I can’t give you a room or dinner,” the landlord said to the stranger.

“Why not?” the man asked.

“I don’t have any rooms or any food,” said the landlord.

“That’s not true,” said the man. “I’m tired and I’m hungry. I’m not leaving.”

“I know who you are. Your name is Jean Valjean!” said the landlord. “You must go!”

So the stranger got up and quietly left the inn. He tried the only other inn in Digne, but they also told him to leave. Then, he walked around the streets, knocking on doors, but no one wanted him. Finally, he sat down on a step near the

church. "Maybe I'll have to sleep here," he said to himself. Then, he noticed a small house next to the bishop's palace and went up to the door.

Monsieur Myriel was at home with his sister. "There are stories of a dangerous man in town tonight," the bishop's sister was saying. "People are afraid that something terrible will happen. Shouldn't we **lock** our doors?"

At that moment, there was a loud knock.

"Come in," said the bishop, **calmly**.

The door flew open and the stranger entered. The bishop's sister was **terrified**.

"My name is Jean Valjean," the man said, loudly. "I was a **convict**. I've been in prison for nineteen years. I was **released** four days ago and I've walked thirty-six miles. No one will give me food or a bed for the night. Can I stay here?"

"Of course," said Monsieur Myriel.

"Really?" said the man, in great surprise. "But I've been a convict. Everyone else has closed their doors to me because they think that I'm dangerous. I was given five years in prison for stealing bread and another fourteen years for trying to escape four times. Can I really stay with you? I'll pay as much as you want."

"No, I don't want your money," said Monsieur Myriel. "I'm the bishop. Come and sit by the fire, Monsieur. It's very cold tonight. And, sister, please bring some more light."

His sister got the two silver candlesticks from the cupboard, and the servant brought in soup, bread, meat and fruit. Then, they sat at the table and Valjean ate hungrily.



When dinner was finished, the bishop's sister put the silver forks and spoons away in the cupboard. The bishop got up, picked up one candlestick and gave the other to his visitor. "I'll show you to your room, Monsieur," he said.

Valjean fell asleep quickly, but he woke in the middle of the night. After nineteen years of sleeping on a prison floor, the bed was too comfortable. He lay awake in Monsieur Myriel's silent house, unable to sleep. He could not stop thinking about the bishop's **silver**. Suddenly, he got out of bed, took off his shoes and left the room. He went quietly to the dining room, opened the cupboard and took out the silver forks and spoons. Putting them into his bag, he left the house without making a sound.

A few hours later, Monsieur Myriel discovered that

Valjean was gone, and the silver, too. But he did not worry. "We have other forks and spoons," he told his sister, calmly.

They were having breakfast when there was a knock at the door. Outside, three policemen stood holding Valjean by the arms.

"Ah, there you are!" the bishop said to Valjean. "I'm happy to see you, my friend. I also gave you two silver candlesticks to sell. Why didn't you take them with the forks and spoons?"

Valjean stared at the bishop.

"Do you mean that his story is true?" one of the policemen asked Monsieur Myriel.

"Yes," answered the bishop. "He hasn't stolen anything. You may go."

Monsieur Myriel went to get the two silver candlesticks and gave them to Valjean.

"Now go, my friend," said the bishop. "And don't forget that you've promised to use the money to become an **honest man**."

Valjean was shaking. He still could not speak. He could not remember promising the bishop anything.

"Jean Valjean, my brother," Monsieur Myriel continued, "now you're not owned by **evil**, but by good."

Valjean left the town as fast as he could, his head full of **confusing** thoughts. At times he felt angry, then he felt sad. He almost preferred being in prison because there he was **calm**, feeling nothing. At the end of the day, he sat down on the ground behind a tree and looked around

himself at the mountains. A little boy of about ten years old was coming along the path, singing and playing with some coins in his hand. As he passed the tree, the boy dropped one of the coins and it fell near Valjean's foot. Valjean put his boot over it.

"My coin please, Monsieur," said the boy.

"What's your name?" said Valjean.

"I'm Petit-Gervais," replied the boy.

"Go away," said Valjean.

"I want my coin!" cried the child. "My silver coin!"

Valjean stared at the child. Then, he got to his feet and shouted, "Get out of here!"

The terrified child quickly ran away.

Valjean did not move. After a while, he suddenly noticed the silver coin on the ground. "What's that?" he said to himself. Then, he remembered the boy, picked up the coin and looked along the path. But he saw no one.

"Petit-Gervais!" he called as loudly as he could.

There was no answer. Valjean began to run along the path, calling the boy's name again and again. But he could not see the boy anywhere. "Oh, what have I done?" Valjean thought, **miserably**. Then, he dropped to his knees and cried for the first time in nineteen years. The bishop's words filled his mind: "You've promised to become an honest man." The words felt like an attack – a terrible fight between good and evil – which Valjean could not understand. He continued to cry for a long time, knowing only that he was now a changed man.

During-reading questions

CHAPTER ONE

- 1 Why is it difficult for Valjean to find somewhere to stay?
- 2 What does Valjean steal from the bishop?
- 3 Why does Valjean try to find Petit-Gervais?

CHAPTER TWO

- 1 Why does Fantine leave her daughter with Madame Thénardier?
- 2 How did Mayor Madeleine become rich?
- 3 Why does Fantine sell her hair and her teeth?

CHAPTER THREE

- 1 Where did Javert first meet Mayor Madeleine?
- 2 What does Mayor Madeleine have to do in Arras?
- 3 Where is Valjean going at the end of the chapter and why?

CHAPTER FOUR

- 1 In what ways are the Thénardiens bad people?
- 2 What is Cosette doing when Valjean finds her?
- 3 Who is Valjean afraid of meeting in Paris?

CHAPTER FIVE

- 1 Why does Marius live with his grandfather?
- 2 What ideas do Courfeyrac and his friends talk about?
- 3 Who is Marius's "angel"?

CHAPTER SIX

- 1 What does Marius find on the ground near his building?
- 2 How can Marius see into his neighbours' room?
- 3 Who are the two visitors that Marius sees in the Jondrettes' room?

After-reading questions

- 1 How does Valjean change after meeting the bishop?
 - 2 Why does Fantine's life become so difficult?
 - 3 Why does Javert kill himself, do you think?
 - 4 Who is your favourite character in the story, and why?
 - 5 There are many unusual families in the story. Which characters do not live with their real mothers or fathers, and why?
 - 6 Why is the book called *Les Misérables*? Is it a good title, do you think?
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Exercises

CHAPTERS ONE AND TWO

- 1 Match the words together. Then write sentences about the story in your notebook.

Example: 1 – f

Valjean was a convict who has just come out of prison......

- | | |
|------------|----------------|
| 1 convict | a palace |
| 2 bishop | b hair |
| 3 servant | c inn |
| 4 silver | d francs |
| 5 landlord | e town |
| 6 coins | f prison |
| 7 mayor | g kitchen boy |
| 8 barber | h candlesticks |