Classic Readers

The Phantom of the Opera

Gaston Leroux

retold by Jenny Dooley

Express Publishing

Chapter 2

The Mystery Begins

Some months later, as the curtain fell on the evening's performance, six frightened ballerinas rushed breathlessly into the dressing room of Annie Sorelli, the principal dancer. The youngest, Meg Giry, was squealing, "The Phantom! We saw him!"

Everyone had heard stories about the Phantom, but the level-headed Sorelli had always dismissed them as mere superstition.

"Madame, we really saw him! He was ... he was with the Persian!"

Now Sorelli had to struggle to stay calm. The Persian was a dark, mysterious man, with deep green eyes that seemed to pierce the very soul of anyone who met his gaze. No one knew his name. No one knew what he did. The only thing anyone knew for certain was that he was always somewhere in the Opera, startling people by appearing and disappearing at odd times, usually when someone thought they had seen the Phantom.

As the young dancers fluttered about, chattering on and on about the incident, a tall dark figure slipped past the crowd and vanished out of sight, his black cloak hiding him in the shadows backstage.

Sorelli pulled herself together.

"You're acting like a silly goose, Meg. There is no Phantom."

Meg, with hands on her hips, answered back crossly.

"Well, if he's not a Phantom, he certainly looks like one—just like Monsieur Buquet said! He was as thin as a rake, with eyes so deep in his face they looked like black holes, and a face that didn't even seem human. His skin was pale and grey and his nose was so small it almost wasn't there ... and there was not one hair on his head!"

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Joseph Buquet was the chief scene changer and, like Sorelli, a calm and sensible person who would not make up stories about seeing the Phantom. So, those who believed in the Phantom took him seriously; those who did not thought someone had just played a joke on him. One thing was certain: there were now six more witnesses who had seen this terrifying creature.

Sorelli, however, insisted.

"My dears, pull yourselves together!"

Excitedly, Little Meg told the dancers,

"My mother says the Phantom doesn't like people talking about him—and when they do, terrible things happen!"

"And how does your mother know what he does and doesn't like?"

"Well," the other dancers leaned closer to hear, "he talks to her!"

"Oh, Meg! Stop it!" Sorelli was annoyed.

"In Box 5, to the left of the stage. Mama looks after that box and she knows!"

The others looked at her in horror.

"It's true! Others have seen him there, too. He wears a long black evening cloak and a white mask that covers most of his face and ... "

At that moment they heard a woman's voice, screaming frantically. It was Meg's mother, Mme Giry, a short plump woman, whose clothes looked as though they had once belonged to someone else. She was usually chatty and friendly, but now she appeared deathly white with shock.

"Monsieur Buquet's dead! They found him lying in the third cellar with rope marks on his neck! He's hanged himself!"

Sorelli, too, went white with shock. Monsieur Buquet was a reasonable man and she could not imagine what might have made

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Coming to, she felt a tall thin man pick her up and carry her off. She couldn't see his face as they hurried through the darkness and she wondered how he moved so easily without light, stepping effortlessly over and around what must have been pieces of stage sets stored behind her dressing room. It seemed as if only skin and bones were holding her as they continued down, deep into the cellars. Christine was too frightened to speak, sure that her captor would do something awful to her if she made any noise.

Suddenly, she was aware of the sound of water lapping gently against a boat. They had reached a lake beneath the Opera House itself. There, the bony hands placed her in the boat and they rowed off into the mist. A gas lamp on the front of the vessel gave off a soft glow as he rowed her towards a house on the other side of the lake.

In the dim light, she could see that he was wearing a long black cloak and a high silk evening hat. A white mask covered most of his face. When they reached the opposite shore, he carried her from the boat and set her down onto the ground. He knelt before the frightened trembling girl and said,

"You are in no danger, Christine. I could never harm you. Do not let my mask frighten you. I only beg you not to touch it. If you see my face and learn my secret, I can never let you go. You have sung only for me and your devotion has touched my heart—"

Christine cut off his words with a desperate cry, and with a feeling of horror so deep she could hardly breathe, she now realised who he was. It was the one who had transformed her from a nameless voice in the chorus to the star she had become. It was the voice! She was weak with shock, but somehow gathered the strength not to faint. Now that she knew who he was, she could think only of what was hidden behind that mask.

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Journey of Terror

Comprehension

Read or listen to Chapter 7 and match the actions to the people.

Christine	☐	1 looked like a face of fire.
Raoul	☐	2 agreed to help Raoul find Christine.
Erik	☐	3 thought Raoul was completely mad.
The Persian	☐	4 was nervous at the Opera.
Inspector Mifroid	☐	5 died in the Opera cellar.
The Rat Catcher	☐	6 fled Raoul's balcony.
M Fournier	☐	7 thought Erik had harmed Christine.

What do you think?

A Discuss the following questions.

1 Why do you think Raoul believed the blazing eyes in his window were Erik's?
2 Would you risk your own safety to help someone you love? Why/Why not? Discuss.
3 Do you think it is good to help people, even if you do not know them? Why/Why not? Discuss.

B Find the following extracts in Chapter 7 and discuss their meanings.

1 p. 56: "… *a phantom that bleeds…less dangerous than one that doesn't!*"
2 p. 58: "*Suddenly Raoul was aware of someone else's presence in the room.*"
3 p. 60: "*But when he* [the Persian] *saw the desperation in Raoul's eyes, he decided to help the pitiful young man.*"

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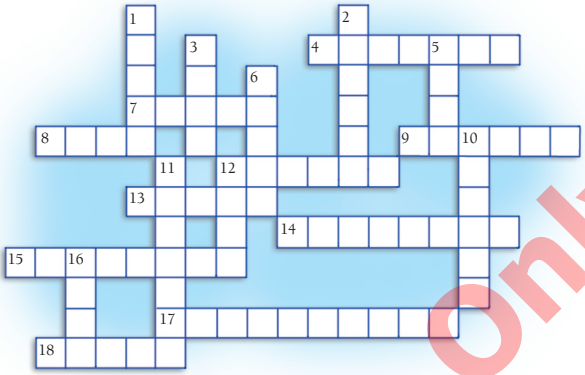
Language Practice

Fill in the crossword.



Across

4 A wonderful and unusual event which may be difficult to explain.
7 To throw sth against sth else very hard and fast.
8 A secret plan to do sth wrong to a person or thing.
9 Very great fear or sth which frightens you.
12 To get away from sb or a place where you do not want to be.
13 To find a solution to a problem.
14 The parts of your face, i.e. nose, eyes, mouth etc.
15 Very unpleasant.
17 What other people know you or remember you by.
18 What we call sb who behaves very badly.

Down

1 To rely on the honesty of sb.
2 To take sb away by force and keep them against their will.
3 To walk in front of sb to take them somewhere.
5 A piece of information which helps you solve a problem/mystery.
6 To follow sb quickly to try and catch them.
10 Happened just a little while ago.
11 What you have when you are relaxed and happy.
12 Extremely wicked.
16 To make sth less unpleasant.

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Paris Collage and Tour

Collage = A design made by combining and sticking together many different things, such as pictures, photographs, cutouts from magazines, coloured paper, cloth, paints and other different materials. It is a French word that means gluing and comes from the Greek word for glue, *kolla*.

I <u>*Create a visual collage of Paris.*</u>

i) Choose something that represents Paris for you and make a picture of it from various materials, e.g. you can cut out a picture of the Eiffel Tower or the Paris Opera House from a magazine or old postcard, or you can draw a famous geographical feature, like the River Seine.

ii) You may also choose a famous French person, or something for which the city is famous, like ballet or fine food. Do some research and learn all you can about your choice.

For Review

The Phantom of the Opera

Who is the Phantom of the Opera? And who is training the young singer, Christine Daaé? Gaston Leroux's chilling tale uncovers the secrets behind the horror which haunts the Paris Opera House.

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 Level 4 Level 5 Level 6

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