

The Phantom of the Opera

Gaston Leroux



About the author

Gaston Leroux, born in Paris in 1868, was trained in law, but chose a career in writing. He wrote stories, plays, poems, novels and screenplays. His own extensive travels around the world and his knowledge of the layout of the Paris Opera are cleverly interwoven into *The Phantom of the Opera*. He was intrigued by the design of the opera house and thought it would be the perfect setting for a detective story. The story remains as popular today as it was when he wrote it.

Summary

This famous classic about a man with a terribly deformed face who falls in love with the beautiful French opera singer, Christine Daaé, is told after the events happen. A historian researches the events surrounding the mysterious disappearance of Viscount Chagny and Christine Daaé and this is his story. He learns from research that the man's face was so monstrous that even his mother could not look at him when he was a child, and his hope of ever finding love was an impossible dream. Much of what we learn about this man, Erik, who almost everyone at the time believes is a ghost, comes at the end of the story when all is revealed by the Persian who knew him better than anyone.

The story begins when the ghost is seen in the Opera on the evening of the retirement party for the managers. There is also a death in the Opera that night. The retiring managers inform the new managers that there is a ghost who can bring disaster to the Opera if he does not get what he wants. The new managers laugh and do not believe this story until they make the mistake of going against the wishes of the ghost. The ghost is in love with Christine Daaé and manages to carry her

away to his underground house on the lake below the Opera. She believes he is the Angel of Music, who her father promised to send after he died. To her horror she discovers, when she sees him for the first time that she is in the grip of a terrible monster. Count Chagny's brother Raoul, the viscount, is also in love with Christine but she cannot return his love for fear of what the monster will do if he finds them together. The monster and the viscount are jealous of each other, but the monster is far cleverer and Raoul ends up in Erik's torture room with the Persian who is helping him find Christine. When it seems that there is no hope and that they will die in the torture room, the Persian reminds Erik that he once saved Erik's life. This saves the two men. When Christine touches the monster's hand, mixes her tears with his, and allows the monster to kiss her, he has his first and last taste of human affection and love. How can he now allow Christine to go away with Raoul? We learn towards the end of the story that Erik was born with no nose and yellow eyes. In fairs all across Europe, he learned magic. He sang beautifully, was the world's first ventriloquist, and could perform unbelievable tricks. When a Persian Princess heard about him, she instructed her chief of police, known as the Persian in the story, to bring him to her palace in Mazenderan. The king used Erik's skills for political murders. Erik built a palace full of trap doors and secret passages for the king. It was a work of genius and the king ordered Erik's death so that no one else could have such a palace. The chief of police saved Erik from death and he escaped. Finally, he went to Paris, where he worked for Philippe Garnier, the architect of the Paris Opera. During the war, work on the Opera stopped, but Erik continued working alone, building trap doors and secret passages. It is his genius, his talents, and his personal tragedy that led him to a life as the Phantom of the Opera.

Chapters 1 and 2: The managers of the Paris Opera House are retiring and have a party. That day, some of the workers see the "Opera ghost" and are very scared. That night, Joseph Buquet is found hanging in the cellars of the opera house. Viscount Raoul Chagny has met Christine Daaé, one of the singers, before and is in love with her. He hears her talking to someone in her dressing room. When he tries to find out who she is talking to, there is no-one there. During the retirement ceremony, the ghost re-appears and then writes letters to the managers giving his orders. However, the new managers do not believe there is a ghost and think the old managers are playing a joke on them.

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Chapters 3 and 4: Viscount Chagny follows Christine back to her home town in Brittany. They knew each other as children and still have a somewhat childish relationship. She tells him that the "Angel of Music", sent to her by her father after his death, helps her sing more beautifully. However, Raoul doesn't believe her. Raoul has a strange experience in the graveyard when Christine goes to visit her father's grave. He sees a shadow which seems to have a face of death. After this, the Opera ghost starts threatening to curse the opera if his conditions are not met. The managers don't obey him, so a chandelier falls on one of the manager's servants and kills her during a performance. The performance of *Faust* seems indeed to be cursed.

Chapters 5 and 6: Christine asks Raoul Chagny to meet her at the masked party at the opera house. He has to wear white and is sworn to secrecy. After talking together at the party, Raoul hides in her room and hears Erik, the Angel of Music, singing. He also sees the face of death again. Christine reveals to him that she is under the power of Erik. He loves her and wants to marry her. She has torn the mask from his face and has seen his monstrous ugliness. Although he has taught her to sing and she has compassion for him because of his misfortune, he terrifies her. While Christine is telling Raoul this and they are walking around the hidden parts of the opera house, they are followed by a shadow.

Chapters 7 and 8: Christine and Raoul have decided to run away together. They decide to go after Christine's next performance although Raoul wants her to leave straight away. Strangely, their engagement is announced in the paper the next day. During Christine's performance, the stage turns dark and she disappears. The police are called and the managers and Raoul interviewed. No-one knows what has happened to her. The Opera ghost demands his next payment. However, the managers cannot decide who took the last payment, whether the ghost received the payment or whether someone else, perhaps one of them, took it. They decide to try to trick the ghost or the thief.

Chapters 9 and 10: The Persian, who works at the Opera, helps Raoul try to find Christine and tells him what he knows about Erik, who is, in fact, the Opera ghost. The Persian knows him from the past and says he is a monster. They realize the ghost must be holding Christine prisoner. They explore the opera house and hear Christine, who is trapped in the room next to Erik's torture room at the bottom level of the opera house.

Chapters 11 and 12: Erik, it seems, has put explosives under the Opera and will blow everyone up if Christine does not marry him. Erik traps Raoul and the Persian in the torture room where he plays tricks on them to torture their minds, and causes intensely hot conditions then threatens to flood the room. They are saved by Christine. She agrees to marry Erik and the Persian also reminds Erik that he saved his life years before, so Erik stops the torture. Afterwards, the Persian finds out that Raoul's brother is dead, probably killed by Erik. As Christine has let Erik kiss her, Erik frees her. Erik is dying and Raoul and Christine run away together. The Persian tells his story and what he knows about the terrible monster Erik. It turns out that Erik was born with a monstrous face and was displayed in a circus as "the living dead". He was a magician and was taken to Persia where, he was employed by the royal family to build a palace full of secret passages and trap doors where the king could use his trickery to perform political murders. The king ordered his death so that the secrets of the palace could never be copied. The Persian, however, saved him. After his death, Erik's skeleton is taken to the National School of Music.

Background and themes

Judging by appearances: This story is about the great misfortune which can come to someone when they are different from everyone else, and when that person is not accepted for who they are. When people do not look into the heart of the man but look at appearances only, they quickly misjudge that person. This is what happens to Erik, in spite of his enormous musical talent, his skillfulness as a magician, ventriloquist, architect, and inventor; he cannot join the human race because of his terrible face. He wants nothing more than acceptance, especially acceptance from a woman. He wants a wife and a normal life in a normal house like other people. He will never have these things and he knows it. So he becomes revengeful and he tortures those who do not allow him to do as he wishes. He uses his genius to create a mysterious world where he can torture people he dislikes. While this is a work of fiction, the character of Erik is, sadly, too recognizable. We see in society today terrible crimes committed by people who have lived as outsiders, who have not had friends, who live in a world of their own. Vulnerable young people, like Christine Daaé and Raoul Chagny, can easily become victims of such people.

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The class system: *The Phantom of the Opera* is also the story of the class system, whereby uneducated and poor people are used and discarded by their superiors, as in the case of the servant of Monsieur Moncharmin.

The triumph of good over evil: *The Phantom of the Opera* is ultimately a story of good and evil, love and hate, jealousy and greed. And, in the end, good conquers evil.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- 1 **Discuss:** In small groups, have students discuss the title of the book and look at the front cover. *Do you know what the word "phantom" means? What other words could you use instead of this? What does this word suggest the book is about? Predict what the story is about and write down your ideas.*
- 2 **Research:** Have students look up *The Phantom of the Opera* on the Internet or in books/magazines and see what pictures they can find. *What do these pictures or photographs suggest about the story? What do the characters look like? Do you think you will enjoy this story? Write down as many adjectives as you can think of to describe the pictures you find.*

Chapter 1

Before reading

- 3 **Predict:** Have students predict what this chapter is about. *What do you think happens in this chapter? The title is a question. What does this tell you about the ghost?*

After reading

- 4 **Discuss:** Have the students discuss the following questions. *What happened in this chapter? What strange events occurred? Do you think the ghost killed Joseph, or do you think he killed himself? Who was Christine talking to? How do you think you would react if you saw a ghost? Give reasons for your answers.*
- 5 **Artwork:** Have the students look over the descriptions of the ghost in Chapter 1 and draw a picture of the ghost.
- 6 **Pair work:** Have the students work together and write answers to the following questions. *What does the ghost request? What would you do if you were the manager? Would you obey the ghost, or do what you wanted to do?*
- 7 **Role play:** Have the students work in groups of four. *Old Managers:* Two of the students are the old managers and tell the new managers all about the ghost and what has happened in the past. The old managers have to warn the new managers about what might happen if they do not obey the ghost. *New Managers:* Two of the students are the new managers and laugh at the suggestions of the old managers. They do not believe them and think the old managers either want to keep control or are playing a joke on them.

Chapter 2

After reading

- 8 **Write:** Have students answer the following questions. *Who are Monsieur Armand Moncharmin and Monsieur Firmin Richard? Where is the Opera? Who writes his memories? What does Monsieur Richard do?*
- 9 **Discuss:** Have the students discuss in small groups everything that has happened in Chapter 2. *What happens in Chapter 2? What do the old managers advise the new managers to do? Who do you think wrote the letters, the ghost or the old managers?*

Chapter 3

Before reading

- 10 **Predict:** Have students predict who the Angel of Music is. *Is the Angel of Music human or a ghost? Do you think the Opera ghost has anything to do with this?*

After reading

- 11 **Discuss:** Have the students discuss their predictions about the Angel of Music. *What was the Angel of Music? Were your predictions correct? If not, what did you think the Angel of Music would be?*
- 12 **Role play:** *Student A:* You are Raoul. You have followed Christine to the graveyard, and then you were found on the church steps. Explain to the police what happened to you, what you saw and what you felt. *Student B:* You are a policeman and you need to know what happened at the graveyard and why Raoul was found on the steps of the church. Interview him about what happened. You do not really believe Raoul and you do not believe in ghosts. You think there must be another explanation.
- 13 **Artwork:** Have students do a painting, collage, or computer-generated image of the Angel of Music. Have the students think about how they could show that this angel is associated with music. Students could choose to use a genre of music that they like to illustrate their image.

Chapter 4

Before reading

- 14 **Discuss:** Have the students discuss the title of this chapter. *What is a curse? Do you believe curses really exist and can work, or is this sort of thing nonsense? Do you know any stories of famous curses? What do you think this curse might mean in the book? Who or what is cursed?*
- 15 **Write:** Have the students answer the following questions.
 - a *What conditions does the ghost expect the managers to meet?*
 - b *What does the ghost threaten to do if his conditions are not met?*
 - c *Who does Carlotta think is threatening her?*
 - d *If you were one of the managers, what would you do?*

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- 16 Write:** Have students do the following piece of writing. *You work for a local newspaper and you have heard about the death of a woman killed by a falling chandelier. Write an article about it. You can include what you have heard about the Opera ghost if you want to.*
- 17 Role play:** *Student A:* You are one of the new managers of the opera house. You are discussing what to do after the chandelier death with the other manager. You think it was a freak accident and that you need to check all the safety features of the Opera. You do not think it was anything to do with the ghost and you are worried about what the press might write about the tragedy. You think the death is very bad for business.
Student B: You are also one of the managers. You are very upset about the chandelier death and you think this has happened because you did not obey the requests of the Opera ghost. You must try and persuade the other manager to do what the ghost wants. You think the Opera may be cursed.

After reading

- 18 Discuss:** Have students discuss the letter at the end of Chapter 4. *What do you think will happen at the masked party? Why must Raoul keep this meeting secret? Why does he need to wear a white mask and coat?*
- 19 Research:** Have the students research the story of *Faust* on the Internet or in books. *Who wrote the story of Faust? What is it about?* Then, have the students discuss in pairs whether they think there is any connection between the story of *Faust* and what has happened so far in *The Phantom of the Opera*.
- 20 Write:** Have the students work in pairs and imagine they have visited the graveyard with Raoul and have seen the face of death. Ask them to write down as many adjectives as they can think of to describe the face, for example, frightening. Then, ask them to think of as many adjectives as they can to describe how they and Raoul felt when they saw the face: for example, frightened.

Chapter 5

After reading

- 21 Discuss:** Have students discuss their predictions about the masked party. *Were your predictions correct? What happened at the masked party? Who is Erik?*
- 22 Artwork:** Have students imagine that they are going to a masked party. Ask them to design a mask. They must include a clue or clues in their design that says something about their character. Afterwards put the masks on display or have the students wear them. Ask students to guess whose mask belongs to whom.

Chapter 6

Before reading

- 23 Write:** Have students write down what tragedy they think occurs in this chapter. Is the tragedy caused by the Opera ghost?

After reading

- 24 Discuss:** Have the students discuss everything they know about the Opera ghost. *Who is the Opera ghost? Who is the Angel of Music and the voice? Are these things separate or part of the same thing? Do you think the Opera ghost was once a man?*
- 25 Write:** Have the students write a letter from Raoul to Christine. Ask them to remember that Raoul is in love with Christine. *Imagine you are Raoul, tell Christine in your letter how you feel about her. Write about her beauty, her beautiful singing voice, her performances and her character. Tell her what you want to happen in the future.*
- 26 Role play:** Put students into pairs and ask them to role play the conversation between Raoul and Christine from the point where they come to the eighth floor and see the Persian to when they look for the ring but cannot find it. After they have performed their role plays, ask the students what they think Raoul and Christine should do at this point in the story and why.

Chapter 7

Before reading

- 27 Predict:** Have the students discuss who they think disappears in this chapter? *Who disappears? How do they disappear? Who is responsible for the disappearance?*

After reading

- 28 Discuss:** Ask the students if they were right about their predictions. *Who, in fact, disappeared? How did Christine disappear? Did the ghost take her or did she run away? Was it a trick? What do you think?*
- 29 Role play:** *Student A:* You are the police detective investigating the disappearance of Christine. Interview the suspects and ask them lots of questions.
Student B: You are Raoul. You are very distressed at the disappearance of Christine as you were going to run away together. Tell the detective about the ghost and what you think happened to her.
Student C: You are one of the managers. You do not really know what happened to Christine. You think the ghost might be involved, but you don't want the detective to think you are mad.
- 30 Write:** Ask students to imagine they are Christine. Ask them to write a letter from Christine to Raoul, telling him what has happened to her. Ask students to think about how Christine must be feeling. *What do you think has happened to Christine? Has she run away or has she been captured by the ghost? How is she feeling? Is she feeling brave or frightened? Is she angry or has she given up? Remember, she may never see Raoul again, so she needs to say how she really feels.*

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Chapter 8

After reading

- 31 Discuss:** Have the students discuss in pairs who they think took the money. *Did the Opera ghost get his payment or did one of the managers steal it? What about Madame Giry? Did she have anything to do with the disappearance of the money?*
- 32 Role play:** Put the students into groups of three. One student is Madame Giry and the other two students are the managers. The managers think Madame Giry has stolen the 20,000 francs and they question her closely. Madame Giry says she is innocent and is upset and annoyed that the managers suspect her. Have the conversation.

Chapter 9

After reading

- 33 Discuss:** Have students discuss this chapter. *Who are the "dead bodies"? Are they really dead? What do you think the torture room is? Who does it belong to and who has been tortured? By who?*

Chapter 10

After reading

- 34 Pair work:** Have students work in pairs and try and remember as many things as they can about Erik from this chapter. Ask them to write down what they can remember in note form.
- 35 Discuss:** Put students into groups and have them discuss the following questions. *Should you judge people by their appearance? What dangers are there in doing this? Why did Erik become the monster he was? Was he like this because of how he had been treated as a child and later in life? If Erik had had other opportunities, do you think he would still have become a murderer? How are people treated in your society if they are different from others? How are disabled people treated in your society? Are there any ways you could improve how these people are treated?*

Chapter 11

After reading

- 36 Write:** Ask students to imagine they had been in the torture room too. Ask them to write an article for the local newspaper about their frightening experience and how they managed to escape.
- 37 Discuss:** Put students in pairs and ask them to discuss the character of Christine Daaé. *Why did Christine behave the way she did? Why didn't she try to escape from Erik? Why did she agree to marry him? Was she scared or did she have any feelings for him? Was she weak in your opinion? What would you have done in her position?*

- 38 Write:** Ask the students to imagine that the Opera ghost has caused another tragedy at the Opera. Ask them to write an article about it for the local paper. Remind them to include references to what has happened before. *Another tragedy has occurred at the Opera. What is it? Is it another murder? Is it an accident? Who was involved? Did anyone see what happened? Who caused it? Was it the work of the Opera ghost or just a coincidence? Is the Opera cursed? Has the ghost made any threats recently? Has the Opera ghost been looked after or is he angry about something?*
- 39 Write:** Ask the students to imagine they are Erik and they are dying. Erik is looking back over his life and trying to decide whether what he did was good or bad. Erik wants to write his life story starting with his childhood. *Imagine you are Erik and you are writing your life story. Do you feel happy or sad about the life you have lived? Do you regret the murders you have committed? Would you have treated people differently if you hadn't been ugly? What would you have done differently? Start with your childhood and write about your life. Remember to include how you felt and how people treated you.*
- 40 Role play:** Student A: You are Raoul. You don't understand why Erik has been so horrible to you and why he has nearly killed you. You are trying to understand this. Ask the Persian what he thinks and what he knows about Erik's life.
Student B: You are the Persian. You need to answer Raoul's questions as fully as you can. You know Erik is an evil man, but you also know his background. Explain to Raoul how Erik has become the evil monster he is.

Chapter 12

Before reading

- 41 Discuss:** Put students in small groups and ask them to discuss who, or what, they think Erik really is. *Is he a ghost or a man? Do you like him, hate him, or feel sorry for him? Do you think he should force Christine to marry him?*

After reading

- 42 Discuss:** Ask students if they have changed their opinion of Erik having read this chapter. *Who do you think Erik is now? Is he a man or a ghost? Were you correct or have you changed your mind about Erik?*