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Victor Hugo's
Les Misérables

A play

Adapted for the stage by
Jonathan Holloway

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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LES MISÉRABLES

First performed by Red Shift Theatre Company at The Quay Theatre, Sudbury on 18th April 1997. The play then toured the UK including three weeks at the Edinburgh Festival and a residency at The Pleasance Theatre, London. The cast was as follows:

Inspector Javert	}	Graeme Rose
Gribier		
Jean Valjean	}	Clifford Barry
Thenardier		
Fauchelevant	}	Mario Vernazza
Barber		
Beggar		
Enjolras		
Quink		
Paul	}	Peter Jordan
Marius		
Mme Thenardier	}	Rachael Savage
Eponine		
Abbess		
Fantine		
Cosette	}	Natasha Pollard

Directed by Jonathan Holloway

Designed by Neil Irish

Original music composed by Paul Clark

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CHARACTERS

Inspector Javert

Jean Valjean

M. Thenardier

Fauchelevant

Barber

Beggar

Paul

Marius

Gribier

Enjolras

Quink

Mme Thenardier

Eponine: the Thenardiers' daughter

Fantine

Cosette: Fantine's daughter

Abbess

Mme Thenardier and **Eponine** must be doubled; likewise **Fantine** and **Cosette**. Other doubling is as follows: **M. Thenardier/Fauchelevant/Barber/Beggar/Enjolras; Paul/Marius**

The action of the play takes place in various interior and exterior locations in and around Paris

Period — early nineteenth century

PRODUCTION NOTE

The original production employed the idea of a travelling company who embraced character doubling with great gusto. The show had a look in which the nineteenth century collided with WWII occupied France. We used a lot of music, and Paul Clark created a live contemporary score heavily influenced by jazz and authentic French (Breton/Cajun) folk. Because the actors were also the band, and needed to be seen when off-stage, they each had a home base downstage left and right to which they could return when not acting in a scene.

Jonathan Holloway

*Also by Jonathan Holloway
published by Samuel French Ltd*

Darkness Falls

(A double bill: **The Monkey's Paw**,
adapted by Jonathan Holloway from the short story by W.W.Jacobs,
and **The Dark** by Jonathan Holloway)

ACT I

SCENE 1

An empty stage

The only permanent fixture on the stage is a rough wall US, strong enough for the actors to climb on

When the play begins, the stage is in darkness. The entire cast — except Marius — is on stage, standing and sitting DL and DR until needed in a scene. They remain on stage throughout

The Lights come up

A man, Javert, walks c. He is tall, wears a grey tailcoat and a broad-brimmed hat which conceals his eyes, and carries a heavy stick. He tips his head back to reveal his face, which is without emotion. He stares at the audience, scanning the auditorium

Javert A scaffold has a disturbing effect. That is the point. The guillotine is the ultimate expression of the law. It is not neutral. It draws the line between light and dark. That line must be as sharp as her blade. Social questions are finally fixed in that moment. *(He gestures the downward travel of the blade)* The machine listens, the mechanism understands. She cuts off evil when it rises into the light. I was born in a prison. My mother was a fortune-teller. Her husband ended his days in the galleys. Society keeps two types of men at arms' length — those who prey upon it and those who protect it. I was born an outsider. I grew up in chaos and darkness. I looked black, deafening confusion in the face every day. And I stared it out. Structure is blessed and it is fragile like glass. Twist it just a little, and it shatters. Crime is a revolution against that sacred structure, and that is why Judgement must be absolute and admit no exceptions. Keep awake. Watch. *(He clenches a fist)* Rigour. Austerity. Isolation. Self-denial. Chastity. *(He turns to leave the central area but stops. He turns back and looks at his fist)* It was his strength that gave him away.

He leaves

SCENE 2

The Lights brighten

A young man, Marius, enters through the auditorium. He has the confidence and bearing of a man who is used to speaking in public

Marius Ladies and Gentlemen, good-evening. Please don't be alarmed. The revolutionary years in Paris are behind us now. "All that fuss" — your description; the usual English talent for understatement, eh? And while we're about it, let's deal with another English talent: getting other people's history wrong. (*He mounts the stage*) 1789: the storming of the Bastille. 1793: Louis XVI gets his head chopped off. 1805: Napoleon Bonaparte made Consul for life. 1815: Waterloo. 1825: coronation of Charles X — ah, now we're in murky waters; people you've never heard of. 1830: the July revolution in Paris, shortly followed by the abdication of Charles X. Economic depression. 1831: mass demonstrations against inflated prices. Strikes. 1832: insurrection in Paris, Republicans and Bonapartists together at the barricades. Eight hundred killed and wounded. That's the background to our story — and 1832 is roughly an hour and a half away. And any right I may have to make judgements or pass opinions — well, that's even further off.

Marius moves to the side

A park bench is positioned c

SCENE 3

The stage is bathed in a dappled light, to indicate a park

Fantine is seized by a fit of coughing, and has to sit down. When the coughing subsides, she picks up a bag, stands and moves forward, looking at something in the auditorium which makes her smile, then frown. We hear the voices of little girls at play. A sturdy woman, Mme Thenardier, walks forward and stands beside Fantine. Thenardier moves us, still on the edges of the light

Mme Thenardier Is that your little girl?

Fantine Yes.

Mme Thenardier She's a nice little thing.

Fantine Almost three years old. (*She coughs*)

Mme Thenardier What's her name, then?

Fantine Cosette.

Mme Thenardier It's amazing how easily children make friends.

Fantine (*suddenly seized by an idea*) Look at your children. So light-hearted and strong. You must be a good mother. (*She pauses, then speaks urgently*) Would you consider looking after my daughter for a while? I have to find a job, and it's tough with a child. I can't manage carrying her with me, you see? Besides, provincial people can be so difficult. Will you take care of her for me? Please? And anyway, I'll soon be back to get her. They could all three live together like sisters for the time being.

Mme Thenardier (*her manner changing, becoming non-committal*) We'll have to think about it.

Fantine I'll pay six francs a month.

Thenardier (*calling from us*) No. Seven. And I want six months in hand. In advance, right? Understand?

Mme Thenardier That's my husband. Six times seven is forty-two.

Fantine Oh. All right. I'll still have enough to get to — my home — if I walk there. That's where I'll get a job. I know people, you see? And when I've got enough money put by, I'll come to fetch her.

Thenardier And, while I think of it, we'd better have another fifteen francs for all the expenses we'll get stuck with.

Mme Thenardier That's fifty-seven francs.

Fantine (*shaken*) Fine — er ...

Mme Thenardier What?

Fantine No, really. That's fine.

Thenardier (*moving DS*) Has she got enough clothes to last?

Fantine Certainly. In fact she has some beautiful clothes. Everything she'll need. There's even a silk dress. It's all in here.

Thenardier Don't get the stuff out. You never know who's watching. Just hand over the bag.

Fantine (*worried by his manner*) She's my little darling.

Mme Thenardier Now, don't make a fuss. You know what children are like. They take their cue from us. Don't say goodbye, just slip away and it'll all be much easier.

Fantine goes, sobbing quietly

Thenardier (*looking in Cosette's bag of clothes*) That's my debts taken care of. I was fifty francs light. Might have got me legs broken. It's as if they dropped out of the sky. Hah! That was an excellent trick you pulled.

Mme Thenardier Yeah. And without even knowing it. Fancy being so daft as to leave your kid with a stranger. Sad cow.

The Thenardiers move to the side

The Lights dip

SCENE 4

The Lights come up again; it is afternoon, in a small garden

Valjean, disguised as Père Madeleine and carrying a book, moves forward and sits on the bench, reading

Paul moves forward, bearing a letter and a French newspaper, Le Moniteur

Paul P-P-Père Madeleine.

Valjean Paul, it's late.

Paul The letter, it's come. I knew you'd want to see it right away.

Valjean Thank you, Paul. Put it down. I'll attend to it later.

Paul No, sir, you don't understand. It's the letter.

Valjean Ah, the letter. So, would you read it to me? You're obviously dying to.

Paul (*reading*) "In recognition of Monsieur Madeleine's contribution to the process of manufacturing jet b-b-beads, and the success of his d-d-display at the Industrial Exhibition, the Jury of the Institute has reported to the King and recommends that Monsieur Madeleine be elevated to the position of Chevalier of the Legion d-d-d'Honneur."

Valjean (*reflectively*) How curious.

Paul Well done, Monsieur. What a victory!

Valjean To be rewarded for being rich. Now, there's a thing.

Paul That's not all. Have you seen what they say in *Le Moniteur*? I've b-b-bought six copies, to keep.

Valjean No.

Paul (*exasperatedly*) But, P-P-Père Madeleine, you must have seen it. There is talk of you being nominated as mayor. Imagine, the King must know your name very well by now.

Valjean That's not necessarily a good thing. I will decline both positions. We will write in the morning.

Paul But why? Why on earth? Surely, it's what you've w-w-worked for. Six y-years.

Valjean No. I have worked to make myself rich. Have you checked this month's balance?

Paul Yes, P-Père Madeleine. Rounded down, it stands at six hundred and thirty-seven thousand francs. Have you thought more about Monsieur Orgon's advice?

Valjean Yes, and the answer is no.

Paul B-B-But really, sir. Everyone is investing. It's all the thing. You will be left b-behind. (*Receiving no further response, he gathers himself to leave*) I will leave the newspaper with you, sir, so you can read about

yourself. You should be mayor. You can d-do more good, cut through the red tape. And anyway, damn it, you d-deserve respect.

Paul exits

Valjean continues reading. He stops, picks up the newspaper and glances at the article about himself. He shakes his head, then scans the inside pages. His attention is caught by an item

Valjean (*reading*) “Monseigneur Myriel, Bishop of Digne, known affectionately as Monseigneur Bienvenu, died last Monday at the age of eighty-two. He was blind, but reportedly content in the company of his sister.”

Valjean moves to the side of the stage and pulls an old kitbag out from under a chair. He returns to the bench and empties the contents of the bag on to it: his convict clothes, a dog-eared yellow card and a parcelled-up silver candlestick. He carefully unwraps the candlestick

God Bless you, Père Bienvenu.

Valjean digs deeper into the bag and extracts a wad of money. He counts the money, re-packs the bag and then goes off

Javert (*from the side of the stage*) It was his strength that gave him away.
(*He moves US*)

The Lights dip

The bench is cleared

Fauchelevant, a deaf old man, lies prone c beneath a pile of debris

SCENE 5

The Lights come up; a roadside in the open air

Paul appears, watching

Valjean enters and joins Paul

Valjean Paul! What is it? What's all the noise?

Paul Fauchelevant, the carrier. There's b-b-been an accident.

Valjean God save us! The horse has broken both its back legs.

Paul Fauchelevent, can you hear me?

Fauchelevent (*gasping out his words from beneath the debris*) Yes, I can hear you. The horse can't move. She's on my hip and the axle is broken.

Paul It's resting on his chest. The full weight of the cart is on his chest. Monsieur, if we lift the cart the mare will move. The wood's all rotten. The whole lot will come d-down on him.

Valjean Paul, calm down. Run and fetch the blacksmith. He can fix the wood together.

Paul He's not there. The nearest smithy's by the canal.

Valjean That'll take fifteen minutes, assuming he isn't off as well.

Paul We can't wait. We need to get under the cart and lift it. It's sinking into the mud — he'll be crushed. (*He turns out to the audience*) Come and give us some help.

Valjean Listen out there! I'll give five Louis d'or. Come on! All right, all right! Twenty!

Javert moves in from us

Javert People want to help. But they're scared. It's impossible. There's only room for one man to get under there. Mind you, I did once know a man who could have lifted it; Monsieur Madeleine.

Valjean Ah.

Javert But he was in Toulon prison.

Fauchelevent (*in panic*) I can't breathe. My ribs are being crushed. For God's sake, do something.

Valjean (*turning back out to the audience*) Isn't there anyone prepared to save this man's life for twenty Louis d'or?

Javert I only ever met one man who could hold up a loaded axle like that.

Fauchelevent It's crushing me.

Valjean decides to help and drops down on his hands and knees beneath the "cart"

Paul P-P-Père Madeleine, please get out and save yourself!

Valjean raises the "cart"

Fauchelevent Someone get me out! Get me out before he drops it!

Paul helps Fauchelevent out from under the cart

Fauchelevent Monsieur Madeleine. Thank you. God bless you, I owe you my life.

Valjean No, I'm not claiming the credit, Monsieur. These things are all a matter of timing, and a greater power has His eye on that.

Valjean stands, assisted by Javert. The two look into each other's eyes

Paul!

Paul Yes Monsieur, are you alright?

Valjean *(still staring at Javert)* See to it that Fauchelevent gets to a doctor. He's too old for labouring work. Contact the Monsignor. Ask him to find the old man something quiet. Gardening or some such. He deserves some dignity and peace by now.

Everyone moves to the sides

The Lights dip

Fauchelevent's debris is cleared

Fauchelevent exits

SCENE 6

The Lights come up on a dingy factory setting; Madeleine's bead works

M. Quink, the storeman, comes forward

Fantine approaches him

Fantine Monsieur Quink. I need to ask you a favour.

Quink That's rich.

Fantine Sorry?

Quink Asking favours.

Fantine I don't understand.

Quink It's not like you were brilliant at your job, is it? Come on, then. What's up?

Fantine I have certain expenses, Monsieur. I need a raise in pay.

Quink Sorry.

Fantine Or, if that's not possible, an advance.

Quink This wouldn't have anything to do with a little girl at Montfermeil?

Fantine Yes, my little girl.

Quink Don't look so surprised. Things get about. So, a favour for a favour.

Fantine What sort of favour?

Quink Don't look so shocked. It's not as if you're inexperienced, after all.

Fantine I have a daughter by the man I loved. She is a beautiful child. Five years old now. It's two years since I saw her. She lodges. The Thenardiers have put up the cost of her keep. From seven francs a month to twelve, and now I have a letter saying they want fifteen.

Quink Maybe it depends on how friendly you can be.

Fantine I will ask you again tomorrow. That will give you time to reflect on your behaviour. I'm asking for kindness, that's all.

Quink moves away

Fantine stands quietly

Mme Thenardier enters and stands watching Fantine

Mme Thenardier The winter season is upon us and your daughter suffers because her pretty dresses are no protection against the elements, and besides most are now too small. A child grows up so fast. She needs a set of woollen clothes. We would supply them ourselves, but things are difficult. Please send thirty francs urgently. The winter will be tough.

Mme Thenardier retires into the shadows

Quink moves forward

Fantine Can I have my money now?

Quink I spoke to Père Madeleine, but he'd already heard about you. Says you've got to go. I had to beg on your behalf. Explained that you needed money for your daughter.

Fantine But I don't want to leave.

Quink You'll go without a fuss, or I'll make sure everyone knows about your shame.

Fantine What about yours? Your suggestion?

Quink No-one will believe a tart. Père Madeleine, in his generosity, has allowed you thirty francs severance, and I'm taking ten by way of commission, and for the favour of not exposing you. Yes, did you want to say something?

Quink leaves

The Lights dip

SCENE 7

Valjean steps out from the shadows and stands c

A spot comes up on Valjean c

Valjean *(to the audience)* Your mother was beautiful. Her love for you was deeper than the ocean. It had more mass than the greatest mountain. She thought of you constantly, longed to be with you, cried herself to sleep night after night. Children, you see, they are the centre around which humanity turns. To forget this is to lose ourselves.

Valjean retires

The Lights come up on a daytime setting

The town Barber enters and moves to Fantine. He sports a magnificent set of false teeth too big for his mouth. He carries a chair which he places c

Fantine withdraws a comb from her hair, which falls to her waist

Barber Really, my dear. You shouldn't be thinking of this. It's not just hair. Your childhood is in there. Years.

Fantine Now I have a child of my own, and therefore no choice.

Barber But you have such lovely hair.

Fantine How much would you pay me for it?

Barber *(shrugging)* Eight francs, I reckon.

Fantine That's not enough.

Barber Mmm. So, how much do you need?

Fantine Ten francs.

Barber Oh, all right. I'm a fool to myself.

The Barber cuts off Fantine's hair during the following. (This can be achieved symbolically by tying it in a scarf)

Mme Thenardier steps forward

Mme Thenardier You'll never guess what that little cow has done now. She hasn't trusted us with the money. She's sent clothes for the brat instead.

Thenardier Give the dress to Eponine. *(He mimics Fantine)* "Little Cosette" can freeze for all I care. She's a crap worker anyway. It's her mother's fault. Write and say she's sick.

Mme Thenardier One of the customers called her The Lark the other day,

on account she's got to be up and about so early. I said it was silly to give such a pretty name to such a dirty, ugly creature.

Barber There, it's done. Now I'll give you a nice style. It's a very specific sort of look. Popular in Paris, I believe, but I can't remember the name of it. I've got a picture somewhere.

Fantine Good. My little Cosette won't be cold any more. Her clothes are woven with my hair. (*She coughs*) I don't care what people think, because I know one day we'll be wealthy and happy.

The Lights dip

The Barber moves off

Fantine produces a letter from her pocket

SCENE 8

The Lights come up

Fantine reads the letter

Mme Thenardier enters and stands at the side of the stage

Mme Thenardier (*speaking to the audience*) I am distressed to tell you Cosette has fallen before a terrible epidemic. Around here they call it Army Fever. She has medicine daily, but it's too expensive. It's killing us, and regretfully we just can't afford to carry on the treatment. I can't tell you how hard I find this, particularly as I am a mother and have sisterly feelings toward you. But if you don't help us out with forty francs, by next week, I fear your child will die.

Mme Thenardier exits

The Barber enters

Fantine Oh what fun! Forty francs! Piff! Two Napoleons. Easy. I guess they've taken me for a magician. (*She laughs hysterically*) They're mad!

Barber Hallo, my dear. What's the joke?

Fantine I've had a letter from those thieving peasants. They want forty francs.

Barber What's it for?

Fantine My child. My baby girl. (*She cries*) She's sick.

Barber Look, I'm sorry to mention it, but you know you really do have lovely teeth.

Fantine What?

Barber Fine teeth. Don't think badly of me. I know things are rough for you.

There are always people prepared to pay for practically anything. It's supply and demand. I think I could sell your incisors. I reckon I could pay a gold Napoleon for each of them.

Fantine I don't understand.

Barber Those two nice white teeth in front, at the top. Look at mine. Lovely, eh?

Fantine That's awful.

Barber All right, all right. I know it's pretty unpleasant. Why don't you think it over?

Fantine My hair will grow back. But only little children grow new teeth, and I'm not a child — although I wish so much that I was, and that I'd wake up from this nasty dream. *(Pause)* Do you know anything about Army Fever?

Barber Yes, it's around at the moment.

Fantine Does one need medicine?

Barber I'm not an expert. But I think strong treatment is essential.

Fantine Where does the disease come from?

Barber From the air, I think. It doesn't help with all these veterans on the tramp.

Fantine Is it something children can get?

Barber They are very vulnerable. And it is usually serious — poor little things.

Fantine Can they die?

The Barber nods

Well, then. I am content. My little girl is not going to die, because I am a good mother. We will complete a transaction, Monsieur. Oh, and I can make a little more by selling my mirror. I won't be needing it now. Get your chisels out.

The Barber unrolls a towel with surgical instruments in it. Fantine sits facing the audience

Barber Just remember it wasn't me. It's the times, and I didn't make things the way they are.

Fantine Thank you for my independence, Père Madeleine. Thank you for freeing me from your glass bead factory. Thanks for the attic room with the beams that bump my head. Thank you for the water bucket that freezes in winter. Thanks for the holes in my knickers, the lack of heels in my stockings, the whalebone sticking out of my corset like ribs from a corpse. Huh! It all makes sense now. Time to go into business for myself. There are, after all, some professions where the lack of two front teeth might be considered an asset.

The Barber hands Fantine a kidney dish and she holds it under her chin. The Barber performs the operation with his back to us, bracing himself to tug hard on Fantine's teeth. Each tooth drops noisily into the kidney dish. The Barber holds this pose during the following speeches

Valjean *(from the shadows)* Her love for you was deeper than the ocean. It had more mass than the greatest mountain. She thought of you constantly, longed to be with you, cried herself to sleep night after night.

Madame Thenardier appears us, composing a letter in her mind while putting on her stockings

Mme Thenardier I've had enough! My patience has run out! You have worn out our goodwill! Time and time and time again we write to tell you the cost of the care lavished, yes lavished, upon Cosette. Time and again you fail to match our kindness and send the minimum of funds. You must dispatch one hundred francs now. Cosette is still recovering from her illness and cannot earn her keep. Send the money now or out she goes. We have done our best. Now, for Heaven's sake, take some responsibility for your child.

Valjean Her love for you was deeper than the ocean. It had more mass than the greatest mountain.

The Barber moves away

Fantine is revealed, crying bitterly, sobbing through the bloody gap in her mouth

The Lights dip

Fantine moves from the chair and crouches in the corner like a frightened animal

Javert enters, with his notebook, and sits in the chair

SCENE 9

The Police Station

The Lights come up; a threatening, shadowy cell

Fantine is revealed crouching in the corner. Javert writes in his notebook

Hungry for More?

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