

One

Christine Daaé had never seen a more beautiful place in all her life. The grass on the Giverny countryside tickled her ankles as she ran and sunshine brighter than her hair warmed her face. Her bare feet slid on the grass, which was wet from the rain that had fallen the previous night. She fell right on her bottom with a giggle.

“Are you alright?” someone asked.

Christine looked over her shoulder. Her best friend Raoul de Chagny reached the top of the hill and plopped down next to her. He brushed a lock of his reddish-brown hair aside as he wiped sweat off his face.

“I should ask the same for you.” Christine said with a smile.

Raoul smiled back. “I’m exhausted, but fine.”

“I guess that’s what we get for running around on a hot summer day.”

“Oui, but look at the view!”

The two looked out at the world beyond the hill. Vibrant grass waved in the breeze, little houses watching from a distance.

“It’s *beautiful*.” Christine breathed.

“It sure is,” Raoul agreed. “If I could do anything in the world, it would be to lie here all day long.”

“You can’t do a thing like *that*.”

“Why not?”

“You’ll burn to a crisp! It’s best to enjoy this moment by moment, not forever. *Nothing* lasts forever.”

“Not even our friendship?”

Christine smiled. “Well, besides that, of course.”

She and Raoul had known each other for three years, nearly half of their lives. They had met by the sea in a little town called Étretat.

Christine had been playing with her father’s scarf when it blew away. “Oh no!” she had cried, watching the red cloth float past the white cliffs. “It’s gone!”

Just as tears had begun to shed, she heard someone ask, “Is this yours?”

A little boy had dashed over to her, something red in hand.

The Opera Ghost
(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

“My papa’s scarf!” Christine had exclaimed. “You found it!”

The two had quickly become friends and were saddened when their vacation came to an end. They begged Raoul’s mother to visit Christine and her father in the countryside. After visiting them and growing weary of Versailles upon their return, she moved her family to a mansion near the Daaés in Vernon!

Now here Christine and Raoul were, not at the Étretat beach, but on a hill in Giverny, one more majestic than the sparkling ocean.

“If we don’t last forever...” Christine’s voice trailed off at Raoul’s surprised look. “Not that it’ll happen! But if we don’t... what do you want to do?”

“I want to be rich with my own money and own a house bigger than the ones out there. The biggest mansion in all of France!” Raoul looked out at the countryside. “But if I end up leaving you for some reason, I’ll join the navy. Then I’ll be a hero like my Uncle Rayier! What do *you* want to do?”

Christine thought about it for a moment. “Perhaps I’ll sing for the choir at the church still. But what I *really* want is to sing all around the world. Especially in Sweden. I want to see everything I missed before!”

Before her birth, Christine’s father had been a professional violin player. He had been known as the best fiddler in all of Sweden and France! He had played at fairs, ceremonies and weddings throughout the country. At one of these events in Uppsala, he met Charlotte Leroux. The two fell deeply in love and married a few months after meeting. They had plans of touring through Sweden after their daughter was born in the woodland village of Ryd, but that wasn’t to be.

Christine didn't remember her father’s travels as he neared the end of his career, but she still sensed the peaceful aura his music gave her. It remained after they moved to France when she was two, but it had been strongest in Sweden.

“I think you’ll be famous,” Raoul said. “But I doubt you’ll travel the world or anything.”

“Why not?” Christine gave Raoul a look. “Do you think my voice isn’t good?”

“No, I think it’s great! I just think you’ll want to stay here, that’s all.”

“You’re right. Besides returning to Sweden, I’d rather stay right here. Maybe if I change my mind, we’ll meet up- me on my boat and you on your navy ship.”

Raoul smiled. “I like the sound of that.”

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Just then, the two heard a voice call out, “Christine! Raoul!”

They turned around, seeing a blonde bearded man walk up the hill.

“Papa!” Christine exclaimed.

She ran to her dad, jumping up and giving him a big hug.

“Are you two having fun?” he asked.

Christine let go and nodded. “It’s so nice out!”

“And exhausting.” Raoul added.

“How about we cure that with some lunch?” Christine’s father suggested through a chuckle.

“Oui!” the children replied.

Together, the trio descended the hill and walked down a grassy trail near the little Daaé cottage. A plate was waiting for them on the dining table inside.

“Chouquettes!” Christine exclaimed. “My favorite!”

She popped one of the little pastries in her mouth, smiling at the sweet, sugary taste.

“*Mmm,*” Raoul said after taking a bite of one. “Better than what my mother makes.”

Christine’s father chuckled. “It’s a Leroux family tradition. And it will be passed down as a Daaé family tradition as well.”

As the children enjoyed their chouquettes, Christine asked, “Can you tell us one of your stories?”

“Oh, yes!” Raoul chimed in. “I love those.”

“As do I! But I love them *even more.*”

Christine’s father smiled as the children scrambled from their chairs to the floor and crowded around him.

Daddy Daaé had heard many legends during his time in Sweden. He told of the vittra, gnomes who lived underground and were fearsome when enraged. He warned of the nökk, a shapeshifting creature that played a fiddle in order to lure its victims to the bottom of the sea, and Nattmara, a black sand creature that terrorized people with their worst nightmare.

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(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

While Raoul was thrilled by the scary stories, Christine preferred fantastical ones- fairies dancing in the mist, elves skilled in magical illusions and a rainbow bridge floating through the night sky.

But there was one story she loved hearing most of all.

“Little Lotte thought of everything and nothing. Her hair was as golden as the sun’s rays and her soul was as clear and blue as her eyes. She wheedled her mother, was kind to her doll, took great care of her frock and her little red shoes and her fiddle, but most of all loved hearing the Angel of Music when she went to sleep.”

Raoul looked at Christine, her blue eyes sparkling as her father told of Little Lotte. “She’s lucky. She gets lullabies every night from an angel.”

“An angel *of music*.” Christine corrected him.

“It’s the same thing.”

Christine smiled. “I think she’s the luckiest girl in the world for having an angel of music! I bet the angel travels far and wide, giving music to everyone who hears it,” she said dreamily before asking her father, “Do you think so, Papa?”

“I do,” Daddy Daaé smiled. “And I’m sure *you’ll* be visited someday, too.”

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A few hours later, gas lamps lit up the village as Christine and Raoul walked through the traveling circus.

“I’ve never seen a more beautiful world than this!” Christine exclaimed in awe.

“It’s quite silly if you ask me,” Raoul’s mother said. “I only came because your father wanted me to chaperone. Besides that, I want *nothing* to do with this preposterous event!”

“She’s such a killjoy!” Raoul whispered, making Christine giggle.

She sure is, she thought. But we’re here to make joy feel alive!

As the children walked past numerous stands and tents, they heard someone over the loud calliope.

“Come one, come all, see the most wondrous freak of nature! At just fourteen years of age, it has wowed hundreds- no, *thousands* who have seen it! It’s... The Living Corpse!”

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“It looks ugly,” Raoul commented as his mother hurried him and Christine along. “Truly a freak, but definitely *not* wondrous!”

Christine tried to get a peek at the mysterious ‘corpse’, but the crowd blocked her view. All she could see was a bit of black hair through the bars of a cage.

How could a poor person be exploited like that? Christine wondered. They should be in a nice, warm house, not in a cold, dark cage!

“Let’s go, children,” Raoul’s mother said. “The church benefit will be starting soon. My head is aching terribly from that ear splitting music!”

As they left the circus, Christine looked back at the sideshow.

Life may not be treating you well, but I hope The Angel of Music blesses you with kindness.

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Christine and Raoul soon arrived at Sainte-Radegonde with their parents. It seemed as though all of Giverny was in the small church!

“Bonjour, everyone,” the reverend said. “Welcome to our talent show! Every act is a donation for a new pipe organ. For those who aren’t going to participate, I hope you will be able to spare some change at the end of the show. And if you aren’t able to donate, please do not worry. Your prayers are plenty. Let’s begin!”

The show was a delight to watch. Laughter echoed throughout the little cathedral as people sang, danced and did tricks.

“Better than the circus, isn’t it?” Christine’s father asked her with a nudge.

Christine giggled.

“I think I like the circus better.” Raoul said.

“Just wait until the final act.” Christine’s dad whispered with a twinkle in his eye.

“And now it’s time for our lovely show to end with one more performance,” the reverend announced. “Please welcome Gustave Daaé and his daughter singing *Amazing Grace!*”

Christine froze. She loved singing with her father and Raoul, but in front of so many people...

“You got this!” Raoul whispered.

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(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

Christine gave him a weak smile and felt someone tap her shoulder. Her father was standing up, his bow and violin in his hands. Christine stood with him, staying close as she walked past the wooden chairs. Once she got to the front and looked out at the dozens of people watching her, she felt a rush of nervousness. Her heart raced and she clasped her sweaty hands together.

“Un, deux, trois!” Christine’s father counted to three in a soft whisper before playing the first verse of *Amazing Grace*.

Christine closed her eyes and took a shaky breath before singing,

Amazing grace

How sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me

I once was lost, but now I’m found

Was blind but now I see

Her small, wobbly voice became louder and more confident as she continued on.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear

And grace my fears relieved

How precious did that grace appear

The hour I first believed

My chains are gone

I've been set free

My God, my Savior has ransomed me

And like a flood, His mercy rains

Unending love, Amazing grace

Through many dangers, toils and snares,

I have already come

'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,

And grace will lead me home!

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Christine opened her eyes while singing the last line, looking up at the audience. As soon as her father finished a long final note, everyone burst into applause!

“Thank you for that amazing performance!” the reverend said.

Christine’s father wrapped an arm around her, tears in his eyes as they went back to their pew. He told her softly, “Everyone is proud of you for being so brave, but I’m the proudest of all.”

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The moon was full as Christine gazed at it from the window beside her bed.

“Do you think the korrigans will come tonight?” she heard a voice ask.

Christine giggled as her dad stepped into the room. Korrigans were fairy folk who danced underneath the moonlight. Raoul swore he saw the fairies when visiting his uncle in Brest and Daddy Daaé thought he spotted them in Perros-Guirec, but Christine had yet to see them in Giverny.

“Those are only in Brittany.” Christine reminded her father.

“You never know, they might be sneaking around here,” he said, giving her nose a tweak. “Did you have a good day?”

Christine sat up with a nod. “The circus was fun!”

“I’m sure it was,” Christine’s father smiled. “I remember going to the circus when I was about ten years old. My parents and I traveled to New York.”

“That’s in America!” Christine exclaimed, her eyes sparkling.

“Oui, it is! My favorite part was staying at a hotel by the beach on Coney Island. Its peacefulness made me want to move to the countryside many years later,” Daddy Daaé gave a happy sigh. “Maybe you and I can go there someday. I’d love to show you the beach. It’s just as beautiful as Étretat.”

“We’ll go after we visit Sweden, of course,” Christine sighed. “But I’ll probably be too busy with singing.”

Christine’s father ruffled her hair. “You’ll *never* be too busy to spend time with your dear papa! Speaking of singing, you were spectacular today.”

Christine sunk down into her sheets. “I don’t want to sing in front of a crowd ever again. It was so scary!”

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“You were very brave. I’m proud of you, mon petit,” Daddy Daaé said, making Christine smile. “Are you ready for your next performance?”

Christine nodded and sat up straighter. “I’m ready!”

Christine’s father sat down on the edge of her bed, holding his well worn violin. He played a few swaying notes before Christine sang softly,

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment (Pleasure of love only lasts a moment)

Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie (Pain of love lasts a lifetime)

Tu m'as quittée pour la belle Sylvie (You left me for the beautiful Sylvie)

Elle te quitte pour un autre amant (She leaves you for another lover)

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment (Pleasure of love only lasts a moment)

Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie (Pain of love lasts a lifetime)

Tant que cette eau coulera doucement (As long as water runs smoothly)

Vers ce ruisseau qui borde la prairie (Towards this stream which borders the meadow)

Je t'aimerai, te répétait Sylvie (I will love you, Sylvie kept telling you)

L'eau coule encore, elle a changé pourtant (The water is still flowing, yet it has changed)

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment (Pleasure of love only lasts a moment)

Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie (Pain of love lasts a lifetime)

As Christine lay down with a yawn, Daddy Daaé played Brahms' lullaby.

“Do you think the Angel of Music heard that?” she asked softly as the final note floated through the air.

“Yes, I think so.” he replied.

“I hope *I’ll* hear the angel soon, just like the boy at the circus.”

Christine’s father chuckled. “Someday you will. *Both of you*, I’m sure. One day, when you need it most, the angel will come to you,” He gave Christine a gentle kiss on the forehead. “Sleep well, mon petit.”

Two

Unlike Raoul's hope, life began to change. Five years later, when he and Christine were twelve, he left to go to a prestigious boarding school. She missed her friend dearly, having solace in his eventual return.

As for herself, she went to Conservatoire de Paris when she was sixteen. She studied at the conservatory for three years, learning about music and making her voice the best it could be. Even though Raoul was gone, Christine felt content in her world of song.

Not comfortable with living in a dorm with strangers, Christine stayed with Daddy Daaé during her schooling. Although they resided in their little Giverny house during the summer, the rest of the year was spent in the Valerius mansion. It belonged to Daddy Daaé's best friend and benefactor, Professor Pierre Valerius, and his wife, Mimi. Christine had visited them many times before with Papa. Even though the mansion wasn't truly a mansion, Christine called it that because it was the biggest place she had resided in. It was actually a Haussmann building, a large complex with six floors. The ground and first floors held shops and storage while the others had flats.

The Valerius couple resided in an apartment on the second floor, which was for wealthy people. It had two big bedrooms that were connected to their own bathrooms, a large laundry room, a spacious kitchen, a roomy dining area and a lavish parlor that led to a wide balcony. It was certainly different from the Giverny house, which had two small bedrooms, a wide room that acted as the living room, dining area *and* kitchen and a privy in the backyard.

Christine missed the simplicity of that little cottage, but she liked living in what (to her) felt like luxury. She spent her days reading in the parlor with Pierre, sewing and baking with Madame Valerius and- of course- spending time doing all of those things and more with Papa. Beautiful music floated through the mansion as Christine sang alongside her father's violin. Sometimes Madame Valerius would join in on the piano while Pierre clapped in time to the song's beat. The

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music continued in the bedroom Christine shared with Papa as they softly sang folk songs in the evenings.

The Valerius mansion was near Bois de Boulogne, a large public park with multiple lakes, streams and flower gardens. Daddy Daaé adored the park, saying it reminded him of Ryd. Madame Valerius and Pierre were brought back to their courting days. Christine loved hearing of these past memories as they walked through The Bois, which reminded her of a forest from a fairy tale. And here she was, in a fairy tale come to life.

But a deep sorrow brewed within.

At first, it had been a simple cough and slight chest pain. Then came the night sweats, the fever... the *blood*...

Now Christine was twenty-one years old.

And consumption was about to claim her father's life.

Daddy Daaé had been diagnosed four years earlier. Despite the coughing and chest pain, he felt as fit as a fiddle. The higher altitude of Paris certainly helped in easing his symptoms. But after Pierre passed away three years later, things slowly began to go downhill. Even though he was growing weaker, Papa still managed to spend time with his daughter.

On Christmas Day, Christine received a new pair of ice skates. Daddy Daaé and Madame Valerius accompanied her to The Bois, where she glided on one of the park's many ponds. It was great fun, but the cold weather aggravated Papa's symptoms. He spent the rest of the day indoors, enchanting Christine with many tales of the North. Christmas ended as every day did, with her singing *Plaisir d'amour* and him playing the lullaby on his violin. The story of Little Lotte lulled her to sleep.

Three days had passed since then. Through the door of the Daaé bedroom, Madame Valerius listened to the angelic singing of Christine and the ghostly sound of Daddy Daaé's violin amidst pained coughing.

But as night fell, only silence could be heard.

Christine had rarely emerged from the Daaé bedroom during the past few days, but she hadn't come out at all today. She dutifully remained by her father's bedside.

“Mon petit.” he whispered.

Christine gently clasped his hand. “Yes, Papa?”

“Sing for me... my dearest angel.”

Christine looked into her father’s eyes, hesitant. After the smallest of encouraging nods, she sang in a shaky, soft voice,

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment (Pleasure of love only lasts a moment)

Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie (Pain of love lasts a lifetime)

Tu m'as quittée pour la belle Sylvie (You left me for the beautiful Sylvie)

Elle te quitte pour un autre amant (She leaves you for another lover)

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment (Pleasure of love only lasts a moment)

...Chagrin... d'amour...

Christine lowered her head and sobbed softly, still holding her father’s hand as his soul departed into the heavens.

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Gustave Daaé

13th June 1829

28th December 1887

Christine couldn’t bear to look past her black crepe veil at the new gravestone in front of her. Yet she was impressed by its craftsmanship.

It’s as if an angel created it, she thought. *The Angel of-*

“Are you ready, child?” someone asked.

Christine turned around, seeing Madame Valerius. She nodded in a solemn reply. This visit to Passy Cemetery was the first time she had been outside since Christmas. She had been too distraught to attend Daddy Daaé’s funeral and hadn’t bothered to celebrate her twenty-second birthday a week later on January eighth.

Now it was March eleventh. Three months had passed since his death, meaning Christine could wear clothes with some black instead of a full mourning outfit.

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Yet here she was, still dressed in shadows as Madame Valerius led her out of the cemetery. Outside of the gates, she raised her arm to signal to a forthcoming Hansom cab.

“I want to show you something before we go home.” she told a confused Christine.

Fifteen minutes later, she and Christine exited the carriage. They walked down a wide sidewalk in the middle of the square as Madame Valerius said, “I know how distraught you are over your father’s passing. I felt the same way when my beloved Pierre died. I’m thankful that they are together again. Just as collecting lamps have helped me heal, I think singing will help *you*.”

Singing? Christine thought with a frown. *But I haven’t sung in so long!*

“Church and that music school helped your voice become quite magnificent,” Madame Valerius said as they came to the edge of the sidewalk. “That’s why you’ll be going here from now on.”

Christine gasped as she raised her veil from her face. A massive opera house loomed across the street. Intricate designs were carved into the stone columns. The building was topped with two golden statues and a green dome, which had another statue atop of it.

“It’s *beautiful!*” Christine whispered.

Madame Valerius smiled. “It’s called Palais Garnier. I think you’ll be much happier there than cooped up in my house.”

As Christine gazed upon the towering structure once more, she very much agreed.

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Before she knew it, Christine was watching a crowd of ballerinas, their chatter echoing against the tall walls of Palais Garnier. She and Madame Valerius had received a short tour of the opera house and were in the auditorium.

Christine held a case closely as she stood far away from everyone else. The carpetbag beside her held the few possessions she owned. She had another bag on her other side filled with a few dresses and her nightgown. The case she clutched carried the most treasured thing of all- her father’s fiddle.

Chapter Two

Christine looked down at the case as she heard someone say, “Bonjour!”

She jerked her head up, seeing a girl with short, curly black hair and light brown skin bound towards her. She looked about five years younger than Christine and her brown eyes sparkled with a childlike wonder.

“*Bonjour!*” the girl yelled, startling Christine. “There, you heard me! If you were deaf, you wouldn’t be able to hear the beautiful music of the opera!” The girl held out a hand. “I’m Meg Giry. My mama used to be the box keeper before becoming the ballet mistress seven years ago, but I’ve been going here since it opened *thirteen* years ago! That’s nearly my whole life!”

Christine gave a shy smile. “Bonjour. I’m Christine Daaé.”

She shook Meg’s hand, placing it on top of her own a moment later.

“Are you trying out to be a dancer?” Meg inquired. “That’s what I am.”

She glanced down at her ballerina outfit as she spoke. It was white with slightly ruffled sleeves that went off the shoulder and a short three layered skirt. It perfectly complimented her white slippers.

“No, I’m going to be a singer.” Christine responded shyly.

Meg grinned. “Oh, I bet you’re magnifique! The opera house is a wonderful place to perform. It’s so magical and-”

“Did you hear what happened to Fleur last night?” Sorelli DuPont- the star ballerina- whispered to her friend, Cécile Jammes, as they walked past Christine and Meg. “She was found unconscious in one of the rehearsal rooms! She said she was dancing when strange smoke filled the room and it made her collapse right then and there. No one has any idea how it happened.”

“The Opera Ghost did it.” Cécile alleged firmly.

“Are you sure?”

Cécile nodded. “It *definitely* did! Who else would sneak around in the middle of the night?”

“It’s not wise to mention that, you know.” a voice said.

Christine squeaked and stood close to Meg as the ballerinas stopped. A haggard old man in overalls was standing behind them, a rope around his shoulder.

“That’s Joseph Buquet,” Meg whispered to Christine. “He’s a stagehand, the chief of the flies. I’d even call him the *lord* of the flies!”

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Cécile frowned as she asked Buquet, “Mention what, The Opera G-”

“*Shh!*” Buquet exclaimed, holding up his hands. “*It* can hear you. It can *see* you, too. I should know,” He looked down at the rope and confessed, “*I’ve* seen it.”

Meg and Cécile gasped, their eyes widening. “*You’ve seen it?*” they asked in disbelief.

Sorelli frowned. “Don’t listen to him, girls. The-” She rolled her eyes with a sigh. “...*It* doesn’t exist.”

“But it *does*. I still vividly remember when I laid eyes on it,” Buquet said. “I went to the auditorium late one night. My insomnia wouldn’t let me sleep and the broken elephant tusk wouldn’t fix itself! I heard footsteps as I walked inside and rushed backstage. I thought I’d find an intruder, but I saw something much worse,” The stagehand took a shaky breath. “I saw two dots of light in the dark, staring directly at me. *Staring directly into my soul.*”

Christine shivered.

“Ever since then, I’ve constantly felt its eyes on me. It’s always watching me no matter where I go, no matter what I’m doing. I will *never* be able to escape that ghost’s wretched gaze for as long as I live,” Buquet jerked his head back, looking over his shoulder before slowly turning back to Christine and the ballerinas. “Be careful, girls. You don’t want to get caught in its magical lasso,” His haunted eyes stared straight at Christine’s. “Believe me.”

Buquet scurried away, leaving the girls in stunned silence.

“Well, *I* don’t believe old Buquet for a second,” Sorelli said, putting a hand on her hip. “He’s just fanatical.”

“Over something that *most definitely* exists!” Cécile exclaimed.

The two argued about the existence of the ghost as they left Christine and Meg. She wasn’t rattled like Christine was.

“Don’t tell me you’ve never heard of The Ghost until just now!” she said.

Christine shook her head, causing Meg’s eyes to widen.

“*Everyone* around here knows about The Opera Ghost. They blame it for all the strange happenings in the opera house,” Meg smiled. “But that’s only a legend! Mr. Buquet probably saw it in a dream. You don’t need to be scared.”

“I- I’m not.”

“Good! I’m not, either.”

Just then, a woman with red curls and an elaborate green dress strode by, her big bustle moving about as she walked. She stopped at the sight of Christine.

“Oh, how *ever* could you wear that?” she asked in a haughty tone.

Christine looked down at her dress, which was dark blue with white buttons. They stood out against the black on most of the bodice and a black trim on her skirt and sleeve cuffs. The top of the sleeves were puffed.

“What’s wrong with it?” Christine asked timidly.

“Those little spheres are terribly out of style, not to mention wearing blue is considered bad luck in the theater!” the woman exclaimed. “Don’t think of wearing peacock feathers next. No one ruins *my* performances!”

As the woman strode off, Meg held Christine’s hand.

“It’s okay, you didn’t know it was bad luck. Carlotta hates things that shake up her world!”

“She must not like me, then.” Christine said.

“She doesn’t... but she doesn’t like *anyone*. But *I* like you!”

Christine gave Meg a shy smile. “You don’t mind that my dress isn’t fashionable?”

“I think it’s perfect. It’s way better than Carlotta’s big dress!”

“Thank you. I don’t like bustles very much, so I never wear them. Carlotta makes them look so silly!”

The girls giggled as Madame Valerius went over to them.

“I see you have made a friend.” she said with an approving smile.

Christine glanced at a grinning Meg. “Oui. This is Meg.”

“Bonjour!” Meg said with a wave.

Madame Valerius smiled at her before telling Christine, “I must leave you, Christine. But I promise I will attend the very first show you participate in!” A twinkle was in her eye as she added, “I’m sure you’ll have a starring role.”

Christine blushed as the widow said, “The ballet mistress has made arrangements for you to live with her and her daughter.”

“Ooh, *that’s me!*” Meg whispered excitedly.

“I know you’ll be very happy there. Au revoir, Christine.”

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“Au revoir, Madame Valerius.” Christine replied.

The widow gave her one final smile and a hug before leaving.

Once she was gone, Meg squeezed Christine’s hand and told her, “Oh, I can’t *wait* for you to see more of the opera house!”

Christine nodded in agreement.

...Although after hearing the haunting tale of the Opera Ghost, she wasn’t so sure.

•••

Despite her ghostly worries, Christine loved being at the opera house. Meg made her feel welcome and comfortable with the grand building.

Not long after Madame Valerius left, Meg gave Christine a tour of her own. She showed her Rotonde des Abbonées, which was just past the lobby. In the middle of the round room’s ivory cream ceiling was a circular design.

“There’s a secret message in there,” Meg said, walking around in a circle as she read, “Charles Garnier... 1865... 1871, something’.”

Christine squinted. “I think it says ‘Jean Louis’ right before his name’.”

“So *that’s* what it says! I’ve always wondered about that! Charles Garnier is the opera house’s dad and the years are how long it took for it to be built.”

“*Wow*, that’s so long! It started a year before I was born.”

“And it ended the year *I* was born!” Meg said with a giggle.

She led Christine through the round room and they went up a small flight of stairs. A magnificent staircase loomed before them.

“That’s the Grand Staircase.” Meg said.

“I’ll say!” Christine breathed in wonder.

“There’s a legend that a ballerina fell from the ceiling skylight and cracked her head on the thirteenth step,” Meg said as they went up the stairs. “See? That’s the evidence.”

Christine gasped at a tiny crack on the step. “Did it really happen?”

“I don’t know, but it’s pretty spooky!” Meg led Christine to the top of the stairs. “Our next spot is pretty *pretty!*”

Chapter Two

That destination was the lavish Grand Foyer. It was a golden room full of gold pillars, curtains and chandeliers.

This is breathtaking! Christine thought in awe.

Each end of the foyer had a fireplace with a blue clock.

“See what time it is?” Meg asked. “It’s the eleventh of March o’clock!”

Christine peered closely at the clock. Numbers one through thirty-one were on the outside. Instead of numbers on the inside, it had months! The little hand pointed at March while the big hand was on the eleven.

Meg gazed at the ceiling. “Do you see the pictures up there?”

Christine looked up. Far above her head, the ceiling had various paintings in golden frames.

“They tell of the history of music,” Meg explained before adding, “Someday, *you* might be up there!”

“I doubt it,” Christine said with a blush. “I’m not talented enough for that.”

“I’m sure you are. Sing a little of something!”

Christine gazed at the chandeliers that lined the hallway. Their candles reminded her of an audience of people. Then she looked at Meg.

“No,” she said softly. “No, not right now. I’m not ready.”

“Alright. Whenever you are, I’ll be happy to hear! Ready to see the auditorium?”

Christine nodded. She was surprised when Meg took her hand and ran through the foyer! Even though they were gliding on a sleek wooden floor, Christine felt like she was slipping through freshly rained on grass with Raoul.

I never thought I’d have as much fun as I did then! Christine thought with a laugh.

“The best part of the opera house is a floor below us. But I’ll save that for later!” Meg said with a wink before taking Christine to the dressing rooms. “We’re on the third floor, where the girls’ rooms are. The biggest one is where all the ballerinas hang out. It’s so much fun sharing a whole room with them!”

Christine noticed that one of the dressing room doors at the very end of the hall was cracked open. She opened the door and peeked inside. The room had coral pink walls with white borders. At the opposite end of the room was a golden cheval mirror. A vanity table with a round mirror was on the left side of the wall

The Opera Ghost
(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

and the right wall had a window with pale pink curtains, which complimented the pink ceiling. Sunlight peeked through the curtains and made the wooden floor shine.

“Oh, this is so quaint!” Christine exclaimed.

“No one uses this room or the one next door or the one right across the hall, so it’s very quiet down here,” Meg said. “Maybe this could be yours!”

Christine smiled. “I’d like that very much.”

She looked back at the little dressing room as Meg led her away.

“Come on,” she said. “I need to show you the best part of the opera house.”

They went to the auditorium, a vast room full of seating. On the red carpet were multiple rows of velvet seats with more in the balcony. Above the stall boxes on the floor were four tiers of golden boxes that surrounded the seats in a horseshoe shape. On the ceiling was a detailed painting of angels flying through the sky.

But that was far from the prettiest thing in the amphitheater.

Hanging from the center of the painting was the most glorious chandelier Christine had ever seen. Made of golden bronze, it illuminated the room with a shower of crystals.

“Isn’t it pretty?” Meg asked with a smile. “Mama said it cost thirty thousand francs to build. *Gold* francs!”

“My goodness!” Christine exclaimed. “How in the world did they get the money for it?”

“I don’t know, but things are expensive around here.”

“I can definitely tell!”

Meg pointed to one of the boxes. “See that box over there?”

Christine followed her friend’s finger to a box on the left side of the auditorium. “Oui.” she said with a nod.

“That’s box five.”

Box five was just like all the other first tier boxes. There was nothing to distinguish it from any of the others except for an ornate column on the right. It was the most ordinary box in the world, with its red hangings, chairs, carpet and ledge covered in dark red velvet.

Chapter Two

“Remember how Mama used to be a box keeper?” Meg asked, to which Christine nodded again. “She took especially great care of box five. That’s because no one is allowed to sit there.”

“Why not?”

“It belongs to... *The Opera Ghost*.”

Christine shivered at the name.

“The Ghost wants a monthly salary, so Mama collects one hundred francs and gives it to The Ghost on the first of each month. Usually, salaries are sent to the managers’ office, but The Ghost has a special request for her to put it in the seat of its box. Somehow, The Ghost takes it!”

“That’s a lot of money to give someone.”

“The opera makes *a lot* more than that! Even though she teaches ballet now, Mama still delivers the money to the-”

The girls were startled by a loud creak. They looked up, seeing the chandelier swing slightly.

“Don’t worry, it won’t fall on us,” Meg reassured her. “It’s very sturdy.”

“I hope so,” Christine replied. “I wonder why it moved. There’s no breeze.”

“*Hmm*. I think I have a suspicion,” Meg said before hollering, “*Opera Ghost! If you’re here, move the chandelier!*”

“Or not!” Christine added (albeit with a much quieter yell).

The girls waited for a sign.

“Good, it didn’t-”

“I think I saw it move!” Meg exclaimed. “Thanks, Opera Ghost!”

Just then, the girls heard someone say, “Mon amour! You’re just in time.”

Christine gasped as she wondered, *Is the ghost behind us?*

Meg smiled and bounded over to a tall middle-aged woman in a dark purple dress. Her dark gray hair was tied in a tight bun, but she looked kind instead of strict like most women with that hairstyle.

“Mama! I’m giving Christine a tour of the opera house.”

Meg’s mother, Madame Girya, smiled at Christine. “Bonjour, Christine.”

“Bonjour.” she said shyly.

“Do you like it here so far?”

The Opera Ghost
(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

“Oui, very much! It’s a very beautiful place.”

Madame Girya took in a content breath as she looked around at the vast room. “It truly is.”

“I told Christine about The Opera Ghost in box five,” Meg said to her mother. “And the chandelier moved! But not so much that it could fall and kill some-” She stopped at Christine’s frightened look. “...It moved just the tiniest bit. The Opera Ghost knew we were talking about it.”

“Oh, did it?”

“It was a bit unnerving.” Christine admitted.

“You have nothing to fear. The Ghost means no harm.”

“Until it does.” Meg added.

“But that occurs very rarely. Most of the time, it wants to... liven the place up a bit,” Madame Girya put a hand on Meg’s shoulder. “Are you ready to dance, mon amour?”

Meg nodded and spun on her toes. “I’m *always* ready to dance!”

Madame Girya asked Christine, “Would you like to dance, too?”

Christine shook her head. “No, thank you. I’ll probably wander around the stage while I watch.”

“Stay away from box five,” Meg advised. “You’ll die if you go near it.”

Christine gasped as Madame Girya exclaimed, “Megan Amina Girya!”

“Just kidding! It’s okay if you go near it. ...I think. Although you shouldn’t *ever* sit there. The Opera Ghost expects its box to be empty all the time except when Mama goes up there,” Meg looked at Madame Girya. “Right, Mama?”

Madame Girya nodded. “Yes, avoid sitting there. Make yourself comfortable anywhere else.”

Christine stood off to the side, watching as the chatty ballerinas arrived backstage. Two firm taps from a stick Madame Girya held ended the prattle and the dancers stood in a straight line.

“Come! We rehearse now,” Madame Girya told the girls. “We’ll start with prancing before moving to the barre for rises.”

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She went to Foyer de la Danse, a golden studio behind the gray backstage. She played a viola while the ballerinas danced, her eyes hurriedly going from the instrument to the dancers.

“Keep your arms straight, Sorelli! There’s no need to pick at your fingernail polish. Slower, Cécile! You’re not a calf in a field. Goodness, Meg, you’re a girl, not a horse!”

Meg whinnied, making the dancers giggle. While they continued with exercises, Christine wandered to the stage, composing herself along the way. Madame Giry’s viola reminded her of Daddy Daaé’s beloved violin. The lump in Christine’s throat went away as she reached the edge of the stage. She took in a breath.

It’s magnificent here. Everything is so big and grand, even the stage! she thought.

Christine spotted box five to her right. It looked like the other boxes, not haunted in the slightest.

Just then, its curtain moved!

Christine screamed, clapping a hand on her mouth as the music stopped.

“Are you alright, Christine?” Meg asked.

Christine turned around. She blushed at the staring ballerinas and hurriedly nodded.

“Back to work, girls.” Madame Giry ordered.

As the viola music resumed, Christine backed away from the stage with a shiver. Her heart was still pounding at the sight of the curtain.

That wasn’t The Opera Ghost, Christine told herself. It was just a breeze!

She knew there was no wind in the auditorium, but she desperately wanted to rid herself of the uneasy feeling in the air. She rushed backstage and paid attention to the ballet dancers, giving a lighthearted wave to Meg.

But the haunting aura lingered on.

•••

That evening, Christine joined the dancers in their dressing room. She took a peek inside the bag with some of her possessions. At the very top was a framed photograph of her and Daddy Daaé. She touched the photo with a sad sigh.

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(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

Just then, the candles on the wall went out! A few ballerinas screamed as the dorm was plunged into darkness. The candles suddenly came back to life after a few harrowing seconds.

“What in the world was that?” Christine whispered to Meg.

“It’s here! The Phantom of the Opera!” the ballerinas chorused before breaking out into giggles.

“U- Um, this ghost...” Christine took a slightly shaky breath. “Does anyone know what it looks like? I mean, besides two dots of light.”

The dancers shook their heads.

“We’ve heard rumors floating through the opera house,” Sorelli said. “Some say it’s a person with parchment paper skin that always dresses in a stylish evening suit... to make up for having no head!”

“I think the suit covers *a skeleton*,” Emilie suggested. “A skeleton with glowing eye sockets!”

“I like to think it’s the spirit of a boy who died long ago.” Stephanie said.

“But he’s possessed by a horrific demon!” her little sister, Charlene, cut in.

“*I* think he’s a dashing gentleman with the longest hair you’ve ever seen,” Colette said with a swoon. “*But he thirsts for blood instead of love!*”

“I think *he* is actually a *she*,” Luciana said. “What man would ask for a footstool?”

“I heard it’s a person with *fire* for a head.” Elena said.

“No, no, it has *two* heads!” Melody corrected her. “Or *three!*”

“Maybe it has a regular head, but its entire face is covered in acid burns,” Nellis proposed. “Maybe fire burns, too.”

“Or just half. A *whole* face would be horrible!” Agnes exclaimed with a shudder.

“Since it’s a ghost, it probably lives within the walls,” Maria said. “It’s too hideous to live anywhere else!”

“Maybe it lives on the roof.” April suggested

“Or the cellars,” Julie chimed in. “That’s the spookiest place in the opera house!”

“It looks like death itself,” Fleur guessed. “*Smells* like it, even! That’s probably why I fainted last night.”

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“I think it looks like a canary,” Cécile said with a smile, getting strange looks from the other ballerinas. “What? It has to look like *something*.”

Each rumor led the dancers into more bouts of laughter.

But Christine was getting more *afraid*.

“Hey, stop it! You’re scaring Christine,” Meg told the ballerinas before saying to Christine, “I think The Opera Ghost is just that- a ghost. Maybe it wears a sheet over its head, but it’s not frightening like what *some* people think.”

The door creaked open and the ballerinas shrieked!

Christine froze as she wondered, *Has the ghost found us?*

Madame Giry poking her head in the room made everyone sigh in relief.

“I *thought* I heard voices in here,” she said. “It’s time to go, girls.”

Meg turned around to face the dancers. “You heard the boss!”

The ballerinas obeyed the Girys and left the room.

Meg took Christine’s hand, lifting her from the floor. “You’ll love our apartment, Christine. It’s so cozy!”

Once Madame Giry blew out the candles and left the dorm with Meg, the room was eerily quiet. Christine shivered as she gazed behind her at the darkness.

What is this strange sensation? It’s sending my heart reeling! she thought.

Just then, a candle on the wall came back to life. In the center of its flame were two brightly glowing dots.

Christine covered her mouth to stop a scream and Meg raced back into the room.

“Come on, let’s go!” she said as she grabbed Christine’s hand.

Christine looked behind her, seeing darkness once again.

Was that just my imagination? she wondered. *Or was it...*

She was led out of the room before she could make her ghostly guess.

Three

The Girys lived in a little flat on Rue Notre Dame des Victoires, which was a short Hansom cab drive away from Palais Garnier.

“This is so nice.” Christine remarked, touching part of the cab’s leather seats with a smile.

“It is!” Meg agreed. “I hope you like walking, because that’s how we get to the opera house every morning. Mama says it’s not safe for us to walk around at night, which is why we’re taking a cab. This is safer *and* comfier!”

Christine smiled and looked out the cab window. After driving on a long, straight road, it turned into a new street. The road suddenly became narrow. To the left was a columned building.

“That is Palais Brongniart, a stock exchange.” Madame Giry said.

“When I was little, I thought the Greek gods lived there,” Meg said. “Turns out it’s just a bunch of boring money people!”

Christine giggled and looked to her right, seeing a Haussmann building. The cab stopped midway down the road and Christine got out with the Girys. She set Papa’s violin case beside her and stretched. Three people in one little cab was a tight squeeze!

“Here we are!” Meg exclaimed as the driver unloaded Christine’s bags from the top of the cab. “Home sweet home!”

Much like the Valerius mansion, the entrance to the building was a wooden door (albeit with a rounded top instead of square). There was a blue square on top of the plain stone doorway that had the number forty-two inside.

Christine picked up the violin case and one of her bags before following the Girys into the building. A red Turkish carpet with light floral designs covered the first two floors of the spiral stairwell. The third and fourth floors had a gray and red striped carpet. Christine admired it as Madame Giry unlocked the door to the flat, which was the last one on the fourth floor.

The Girys’ apartment was much more compact than the Valerius mansion. It had a kitchen in the middle of the hallway, a bathroom and a bedroom at the end

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of the hallway's right side. A living room connected to a smaller bedroom on the left. Its size reminded Christine of the Giverny cottage.

"I sleep in this bedroom and so will you," Meg said as they walked into the smaller bedroom. "We're bed buddies!"

The room was mostly filled with a twin bed, a dresser and shelves on the wall full of knick knacks. A small window overlooked a courtyard.

Madame Giry entered the room with Christine's other bag. "I'm afraid there isn't any room in our closets for your clothes."

"I can burn all of my clothes so she can use the dresser," Meg said, getting a look from Madame Giry. "What? I wear my ballet outfit all the time!"

"I'm fine with keeping them in there for now." Christine told Madame Giry, who set her bag by the dresser.

Christine took out her nightgown and peeked inside her other carpetbag to give Papa's photograph a touch.

"What's that?" Meg asked.

Christine hurriedly covered the photograph. "I- It's nothing."

"Is that your dad and you?"

Christine gave a small nod as she showed Meg the photo. "...It is."

"You're so cute! Your dad looks nice, too."

"Oui, he was," Christine whispered, feeling tears prick at her eyes. "The nicest papa in the world."

"Mine is, too. He's Roma, so he's always on the road," Meg smiled. "Some of the trinkets on my shelves come from him. His vardo has so many things in such a small space! It's too bad I can't do that with my dresser," She jumped back onto the bed as Christine took out her nightgown and sat up a moment later. "Hey, I just got an idea! You can put your clothes in the dressing room dresser! That'll be big enough! When we leave at night, you could pick out your dress for the next day," She looked at Madame Giry. "Mama, do you know the room at the very end of the hall? That's Christine's now."

"The stage manager will have to assign a room to her," Madame Giry said. "But there's no guarantee that-

The Opera Ghost
(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

“The managers will assign her, then. And if not... *The Ghost* will! It *really* holds the power in the opera house.”

Christine’s head jerked over her shoulder at the mention of the ghost. She gripped her photograph tightly.

Madame Girya sighed. “There’s no guarantee of that happening, either. Armand and Firmin don’t believe in *The Ghost* like we do.”

Meg crossed her arms with a pout. “Poligny and Debienne would’ve obeyed it with no questions asked,” she muttered before explaining to Christine, “They’re the former managers. If you had been here just a couple months earlier, you would’ve gotten that room with no problem whatsoever, even if the stage manager didn’t approve. They *definitely* believed in *The Ghost*! Now they’re ghosts themselves.”

Christine gasped.

“What? *The Opera Ghost* didn’t kill them or anything, they just left. They’re probably in Frankfurt with Lefévere, the first manager.”

“I will talk to the stage manager in the morning,” Madame Girya said. “In the meantime, let’s get some sleep.”

After changing into their nightgowns, Meg and Christine laid down in the bed.

“This is so exciting,” Meg whispered. “We’re like sisters!”

Christine smiled. “When I was younger, my best friend Raoul and I would have sleepovers. We’d talk for hours.”

“Oh, we’ll talk for hours, too! Hours and hours and hours an... and hours... and... and-” Meg promptly fell asleep.

“Bonne nuit, girls.” Madame Girya whispered after giving her daughter a kiss on the forehead.

Christine whispered a soft good night as Madame Girya turned off the electric lamp and left the room. She gazed up at the ceiling for a few minutes before getting out of bed. Her footsteps were silent as she opened the bedroom door and went to the living room window. She moved the curtain and gazed past Palais Brongniart at the stars. They twinkled like little gems in the inky sky.

I wish you could have seen the opera house, Papa. It's the most beautiful thing in the world! The Girya's flat is nice, almost like our house in Giverny, Christine

thought. *But, oh, how I miss it! Most of all... I miss you. I wish you were somehow here again.*

A tear slid down her cheek and she turned away, her heart aching for the past as she walked towards the future.

...

“Wake up, wake up!” someone exclaimed.

Christine opened her eyes, feeling the bed shaking. She rolled over to see Meg jumping on the bed.

“Good, you’re awake!” she said as she stopped and plopped down. “How did you sleep?”

“Fine.” Christine replied, sitting up with a yawn.

She suddenly smelled something sweet.

“Mama is making blueberry crêpes,” Meg explained. “The Grand Foyer is set up for breakfast at nine and we usually do that, but today’s special since you’re here!”

Today certainly felt special. It was Christine’s first full day at Palais Garnier.

“The route’s easy to remember, just turn right at the end of our street and walk down Rue du Quatre Septembre,” Meg said as she walked to the opera house with Madame Giry and Christine. “Then turn right and go straight down Place de l’Opera!”

“That sounds easy enough,” Christine said. “Right, straight, right, straight!”

They arrived half an hour before the opera house opened at ten. Performers and dancers steadily arrived. Christine was standing by the doorway of the ballerinas’ room when someone tapped on her shoulder. She looked behind her, relieved to see Madame Giry instead of a certain ghost.

“The stage manager isn’t here today, so I talked to the managers about the unused dressing room,” she said before giving a small smile. “*Your* dressing room.”

Christine grinned as Madame Giry slipped a little key into her hand. “*Oh*, thank you so much, Madame Giry!”

The Opera Ghost
(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

Meg overheard the conversation and scrambled to her mother. “Can we please go back to the apartment to bring Christine’s clothes over? Please, please, please, please, *pleeeeee*?”

Madame Girya chuckled. “Yes, you may! If you leave now, you won’t miss much practice.”

Christine and Meg returned to the flat and picked up Christine’s bag of clothes. As they neared the opera house, they saw a man selling something on the corner.

“Cheese and bread!” he called. “Get fresh cheese and bread right here!”

“Ooh, cheese!” Meg exclaimed, her eyes lighting up.

“And bread.” Christine added.

“How much money do you have?”

Christine felt the few coins in her dress pockets. “Not much.”

“Well, maybe the cheese will be not much. Let’s go!”

Meg ran to the stand, where she ordered brie cheese.

“A fine chunk of the finest brie in all of Paris.” the seller declared.

“The finest city in all of France!” Meg added.

The small piece of cheese was just enough for Christine to buy.

“There you go. Let me wrap it up for you...” The seller wrapped the cheese in parchment paper. “Have a nice day!” he said kindly as he handed it to Meg.

“You too!” Meg replied with a friendly wave.

She shared the cheese with Christine as they walked through the opera house.

“This is my favorite kind of cheese,” Christine said. “I always thought the middle tasted like a cloud.”

“Hey, it does!” Meg exclaimed before popping the last of the brie in her mouth.

“*Mmm*, yummy cloud.”

Near the beginning of the dressing room hallway, Meg ran right into someone just as they opened their door.

“Oof!” Meg exclaimed before backing away. “...Oh. Uh, sorry about that, Carlotta.”

The red-headed woman from the day before gave Meg a glare. “Just what do you think you’re doing down here?”

“I’m helping Christine move into her new room! Not to live in, of course, but-”

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“Oh, so now they give away dressing rooms to whoever wants one?”

Meg looked at Christine, who nervously said, “I- I’m going to be a singer.”

“*You*, a singer?” Carlotta asked before crossing her arms. “Let me hear it.”

Christine’s mouth suddenly went dry. She looked at Meg, who looked at her eagerly. Then she glanced at Carlotta with a deep breath.

“I’m sorry,” she said, rushing past her. “I- I can’t right now.”

Carlotta watched the girls go down the hallway and squinted with suspicion. She locked her door and strode down the opposite end of the hall, holding the key with an iron grip.

Christine and Meg soon arrived at the empty dressing room, which Christine unlocked. She took in a happy breath as she opened the door, smiling at the picturesque room.

Meg rushed past her and flung the dresser door wide open. “Come on, let’s get those clothes in!”

Christine hung her dresses in the closet and set a few small possessions in the drawers underneath. Her papa’s violin was in the big drawer at the bottom.

“There,” she said. “It’s perfect.”

“Now that this is yours, we can spruce it up a little. *Ooh*, we could put paper flowers on the vanity mirror!” Meg suggested. “I’m great at making those.”

“That would look lovely.”

Christine sat on the blue chaise lounge near the vanity. She smiled at how comfortable the divan felt. As she looked around, something blue caught her eye. She looked at the cheval mirror, only seeing her reflection.

That was odd... Christine thought warily.

“Mon amour!” a voice exclaimed.

Christine looked to her right, seeing Madame Giry at the doorway.

“Are you a dancer?” she asked in a slightly strict tone.

Meg sighed. “Yes.”

“Then come dance.” Madame Giry said, putting an arm around her daughter and leading her out of the room.

Christine rose from the divan and looked at her new dressing room.

The Opera Ghost
(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

This is my room. A room of my very own! she thought with pride before locking the door and following the Girys.

•••

The next day, she and Meg watched the final rehearsal of a play called *Hannibal*. The managers- a thin man with dark gray hair named Firmin and a plump, mustached brunette man named Armand- had a front row seat of the rehearsal.

Carlotta strode onto the stage. "*Lights, please!*" she hollered as she put her hands on her hips. "As the most important character in this play, I need my aria to be absolutely *perfect!*"

"They're always having to move things around and make it how *she* wants it, all because she's the prima donna!" Meg remarked. "If she wants a carriage instead of stairs for her grand entrance, she gets it. Something's bound to fall and kill someone."

"She's certainly a prima donna. A spoiled one at that!" Christine whispered, causing the girls to giggle.

Once the backdrop was repositioned, Carlotta cleared her throat and sung the aria in a powerful voice,

Les troupes ont perdu la bataille (The troops have lost the battle)

Mais j'ai gagné la guerre (But I have won the war)

D'un seul acte de séduction (With one act of seduction)

Le travail de l'amour a été perdu (Love's labor has been lost)

Les chaînes ont enfin rompu (The chains have finally broken)

Et mon peuple de Dieu est libre (And my people of God are free)

Ainsi, les soldats du Ciel m'ont récompensé (Thus, Heaven's soldiers reward me)

Avec un trophée en or! (With a trophy made of gold!)

Christine gasped in horror as Carlotta held up a severed head!

"Don't worry, it's fake." Meg whispered to Christine.

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Christine relaxed and watched Carlotta. She held the fake head with a grasp as strong as her voice.

Just as the prima donna hit the highest note, a sandbag dropped from the rafters!

“See what I mean?” Meg asked. “Something’s bound to fall and kill someone!”

Luckily, no one was hurt.

“Buquet!” Firmin, one of the managers called.

Joseph Buquet came out from behind the stage. It looked like he hadn’t slept at all the night before.

“You’re the chief of the flies, correct?” Armand asked, to which the stagehand nodded.

“Surely, the chief would know better than to pull such a childish trick.” Firmin said firmly.

“That wasn’t me, monsieur,” Buquet said. “I was taking care of a backdrop for *Roi*-”

“Take care of this, then!”

Buquet nodded again and lifted the heavy sandbag. “This won’t happen again, monsieur. Just know that I am not the one responsible for this accident...” He paused, his eyes filled with fear. “*It is.*”

“It’?”

“Y- Yes, monsieur.” Buquet stuttered, not daring to say-

“What, that Opera Ghost?” Carlotta asked. “The one who has been messing around here for years?”

“Oh, please hold your tongue-”

“No one tells La Carlotta Espinoza to hold her tongue!” Carlotta growled, giving Buquet a clonk on the head with the fake head.

“D- Don’t speak its name aloud! Prudent silence is wise lest you want to get caught in its magical lasso,” Buquet told her, his voice shaking ever so slightly.

“Be quiet...” He looked at everyone. “And *careful. Please.*”

Christine shivered at the ominous silence as Buquet hurriedly went backstage.

“*Hmm.* These things do happen.” Firmin remarked to Carlotta.

“Especially when the high note is so shrill!” Armand added.

The Opera Ghost
(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

Carlotta growled. “These things do happen... but they do not happen to *me!*” She raised a fist to the towering ceiling and declared, “You will pay for this, Phantom!”

She stormed off the stage in a huff, flinging the fake head into the orchestra pit.

“We need someone to finish the aria.” Armand said.

“Why don’t you, Christine?” Meg asked.

Christine shook her head. “No, I couldn’t-”

“You’ve heard the song before. It’s not very long. And I’m sure you’re-”

“*You!*” Firmin pointed at Christine. “You’re new here, yes?”

“U- Um... oui.” Christine responded quietly.

“Let’s see how you do.”

Meg pushed Christine along, guiding her to the stage. Christine looked out, seeing hundreds of empty seats past Armand and Firmin.

“Begin!” they said together.

Christine took a deep breath and sang the first notes of the aria...

But it came out in a weak warble.

She tried again, but she couldn’t make her singing as beautiful as it had been months before. Carlotta smirked as Meg looked at Christine worriedly alongside everyone else. Christine felt the multiple pairs of eyes on her and stopped trying to sing, her quaver making a soft echo throughout the auditorium.

Quicker than a wink, she fled the stage, not wanting anyone to see the tears rolling down her cheeks.

Four

I failed, Christine thought miserably as she sat on the divan in her dressing room. *I failed at doing what I do best. Or, what I thought I do best.*

After taking a minute to compose herself, Christine took a shaky breath and softly sang,

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment (Pleasure of love only lasts a moment)

Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie- (Pain of love lasts a lifetime-)

“No, it’s all wrong!” she told herself angrily. “It sounds-”

“Far too weak.”

Christine gasped, looking around wildly as she asked, “Who’s there?”

She was met with silence.

“Your voice should be stronger.”

Christine took a slower look around the room. The door was locked and the window curtain was drawn. She ran to her dresser, opening the doors.

No one was there.

“I must be hearing things.” Christine said softly.

“You are.” the voice said.

Christine looked up in surprise. “You’re real! Where are you? *Who* are you?”

“I’m here, there and everywhere,” The voice chuckled. “And I... I’d like to hear you sing again.”

Christine was hesitant.

“It’s alright. Relax... take a deep breath... and *focus on the music.*”

Christine closed her eyes and slowly inhaled. Her body relaxed as she exhaled. Hearing Papa’s violin echo in her ears, she sang,

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment (Pleasure of love only lasts a moment)

Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie (Pain of love lasts a lifetime)

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Tu m'as quittée pour la belle Sylvie (You left me for the beautiful Sylvie)

Elle te quitte pour un autre amant (She leaves you for another lover)

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment (Pleasure of love only lasts a moment)

Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie... (Pain of love lasts a lifetime...)

Christine opened her eyes, hardly believing what she had heard. Her voice sounded far less wary than before.

“I haven’t sounded that good in ages!” She looked up at the ceiling. “Thank you... whoever you are.”

“You’re very welcome,” the voice said. “If you let me, I’ll teach you to use your voice at its fullest potential. I can make you into the greatest singer the Paris Opera has ever heard.”

Christine’s face warmed as she thought, *That would be impossible to do. Besides, I don’t even know who I’m talking to! But I’d love to improve my voice...*

“...Oui.” she decided softly.

“What was that?”

“*Oui!*” Christine exclaimed with a nod. “I’ll take lessons with you.”

The voice chuckled. “Good. It’ll be nice to have company. We’ll start tomorrow at nine.”

“In the morning? But that’s when the opera house opens for breakfast!”

“And...? Everyone will be far away from the dressing rooms then. If we had lessons later, someone would certainly hear us. *No one can know of this.* Besides, I’m sure you wouldn’t want to roam the streets at night.”

Christine nodded. “You’re right. Nine is alright, then.”

“Good. I’ll see you bright and early.”

“Au revoir.”

The voice didn’t reply.

I’m taking lessons from a mysterious voice without a name. I must be going crazy! Christine thought. *Wait a minute. The voice came to me when I couldn’t sing. That means...*

Just then, Meg rushed into the dressing room.

Chapter Four

“Christine!” she exclaimed. “Are you alright? You ran off crying and I was so worried-”

“I’m fine,” Christine reassured her friend. “But I won’t be able to sing Carlotta’s part. At least, not right now.”

“That’s alright. Carlotta is willing to do it since it’s the final night of *Hannibal*,” Meg took Christine’s hand. “Let’s see the rest of the rehearsal!”

“Go on ahead. I’ll follow you.”

Meg nodded and skipped out of the room.

Once she was gone, Christine looked up at the ceiling and whispered, “Thank you... *Angel of Music*.”

•••

Christine yawned as she went to her dressing room that morning. Thoughts of being tutored by The Angel of Music had made it hard to fall asleep last night.

“G- Good morning,” the voice said shyly. “Go in front of the mirror, please.”

“Angel, is that you?” Christine asked tiredly.

“No, it’s *Ghost*. Phantom of the Opera Ghost.”

A shiver went down Christine’s spine.

I’ve been talking to The Opera Ghost? The spirit that terrorizes the opera house and frightens me terribly? she realized. But it didn’t frighten me at all yesterday. It was the kindest ghost in the world.

“I’m sorry for calling you that... *Opera Ghost*,” Christine apologized. “I was thinking of The Angel of Music.”

“There’s an angel of music?”

“Oui. The angel comes to those who need it most.”

“So... would *I* be your angel of music?”

“I guess you would,” Christine smiled as she went to the mirror in the back of her dressing room. “What’s your actual name? Surely, it can’t be Phantom Opera Ghost.”

“I can’t say. *But if you insist on calling me something...*” The voice paused for a moment. “You may refer to me as Mr. E.”

“Mr. E,” Christine echoed before giggling. “It’s like ‘mystery!’”

The Opera Ghost
(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

Mr. E chuckled. "Yes, like 'mystery'. Shall we begin our lesson? Or would you like some time to wake up?"

"We shall. I'm very much awake now!"

"Alright, then. Sing the song from yesterday."

Christine opened her mouth.

"*Ah, ah, ah!* Remember to breathe. Deep breath in, deep breath out. *Slowly*. Is there a candle in the room?"

Christine went to her vanity, where an unlit votive candle rested in its holder. "There is."

"Light it and hold it near your mouth. But not *too* close. Then sing while breathing through your diaphragm. It'll ease the tension on your throat. Go on, now. Try it."

After lighting the candle, Christine sang a note. To her surprise, her voice was clearer than before and the candle didn't go out!

"There! See what a little breathing can do?"

Christine smiled. "Oui, it works like a charm."

"You're sounding better. But we still need to make your singing as perfect as I know it can be."

•••

"Christine!" someone exclaimed through the door. "*Christine!*"

Christine was so startled that she cut herself off from singing a final note. Being in front of the mirror made it feel like she was in her own little world, with no one living in it besides her and Mr. E.

"U- Um... I'll be right out, Meg!" she called before telling her maestro, "I have to get going."

"Of course," Mr. E responded cordially. "You've improved since we began our lesson half an hour ago. I know you'll excel quickly, Christine."

Christine felt a blush warm her face as she thought, *The praise he gives me is sweet... but the way he says my name is sweeter somehow.*

"I'll see you tomorrow." Mr. E said.

Chapter Four

“Y- Yes,” Christine managed to stutter out. “See you tomorrow... Or, *listen* to you tomorrow!”

She heard Mr. E give a soft chuckle...

And then silence.

Christine took a deep breath as she looked at herself in the mirror, her face still warm from Mr. E’s words. She suddenly remembered that Meg was waiting for her and rushed to the door.

“*There* you are!” Meg said, her eyes brightening.

“Bonjour, Meg,” Christine responded with a smile. “Sorry to keep you waiting.”

“It’s alright. Why weren’t you at breakfast?”

Christine looked back at her dressing room. “I was here. I wanted to practice my singing when no one was around.”

“*Ooh, secret practice.* Will I be able to hear it?”

“Maybe someday.” Christine quietly replied with a shrug.

“Breakfast is still going on in the Grand Foyer. I hope getting some food in your tummy isn’t something you’ll wait on.”

Christine looked up with a smile. “I think it’s something I’ll be able to do right now!”

She locked her dressing room door and ran down the hallway with Meg, thoughts of breakfast in her mind and a ghostly song in her heart.

•••

Just over a week had passed since Christine’s arrival at the opera house. She walked through the dressing room hallway, which was now quite familiar to her. Her dressing room was at the very end of the hall, right next to an unused room. It was peaceful compared to the big room in front of the hall. Christine opened its door, finding chattering ballerinas in that room.

“What’s going on?” she asked as she stepped inside.

“Mr. Buquet died!” Meg told her.

Christine gasped, her eyes widening in fright. “The chief of the flies?”

“Oui! He was found by Fireman Papin early this morning!”

The Opera Ghost
(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

“Old Buquet was hung up in the flies. And the noose was missing!” Sorelli explained, provoking gasps from the ballerinas. “Papin was just about to make his rounds through the cellars. He always does that to prevent catastrophe.”

“Little did he know that it was already there... because of *The Opera Ghost!*” Cécile exclaimed.

The ballerinas screamed before collapsing into giggles.

“How did we know... *The Opera Ghost* did it?” Christine asked.

“Who else would strangle someone with a magical lasso?”

The voice of poor Joseph Buquet echoed in Christine’s head, “*You don’t want to get caught in its magical lasso. Believe me.*”

Christine looked back at the candle from her first night as Buquet’s haunted eyes flashed in her vision. She *definitely* believed him.

And she hoped to never become trapped as he had.

•••

News of Buquet’s demise haunted the opera house for the rest of the day. Christine couldn’t go anywhere without hearing of it! She was thankful for her lesson with Mr. E, when she could sing without any worries.

But even that was starting to carry some stress.

“No, no, no, you’re not supposed to *step* through the octave range, you gradually *glide* through it,” Mr. E told her. “Do one long ‘ahh’ instead of three separate ones.”

“I’m sorry,” Christine said. “I’m doing the best I can.”

“I know you can do better. Try again.”

Christine tried to make her voice move smoothly. “*Ahhhhhhh... ahh-*”

“*Glide*, Christine! Make your voice fly like the angel I know you are!”

Christine stopped, feeling tears prick at her eyes. “I’m trying! But I’m not an angel. Just an ordinary person.”

“Yes, an ordinary person *who’s worse than the days before!*”

A sudden silence pierced the dressing room.

“I’m terribly sorry, Christine. Please excuse my outburst,” Mr. E said.

“Sometimes when I’m caught up in music, I get too...”

Chapter Four

“Cranky?” Christine asked, managing to crack a smile.

“I was going to say ‘temperamental’, but yes, ‘cranky’ describes it quite well.”

“It’s alright. You’re just frustrated,” Christine wiped her slightly wet eyes with a sigh. “And I am, too. It’s been a week since we started and I seem to be getting worse with every lesson! I’m nothing like I was at the conservatory.”

“No, you’re *not* worse than before. That’s just moody me talking. I think you’re improving. With time, you’ll be back to your conservatory heights,” Mr. E paused.

“Are you feeling alright?”

Christine nodded. “I’m fine.”

“You don’t sound fine. I think we should take a short break.”

“That would be good,” Christine agreed before asking, “How long have you been at the opera house?”

“A few years. Where were you before coming across this majestic theater?”

“I lived in Giverny with my papa,” Christine said as she sat down. “Before I was born, he traveled through Sweden and played the violin at events. His love for music inspired me to start singing.”

“A worldly man, I see!”

“Oui! He was originally from France, though, just as my mother was.”

“Really? But Daaé isn’t a French last name. Or a Swedish one for that matter.”

Christine’s eyes widened slightly. “How do you know my last name?”

“I heard a woman saying it in the manager’s office. And there is only one Christine in this opera house. Your last name is of Norwegian origin.”

“Interesting. That means I’m French, Swedish *and* Norwegian!”

“A great combination if you ask me.”

Christine giggled. “Oui! Someone on my papa’s side must be from Norway, then. My grandmother was fully Swedish. After my grandfather died, she and Papa moved to her homeland. Papa said he found his destiny there- playing the violin and meeting my mother.”

“What made him return here?”

“He was ready to move back to *his* homeland after being away for six years.”

Mr. E chuckled. “I sure know what that’s like.”

“You want to leave the opera house after so many years?”

The Opera Ghost
(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

“No, I was at the circus for *fourteen* years. My whole life.”

“My goodness! That’s a very long time.”

“It is,” Mr. E said. “But I didn’t start working there until I was nine. Before then, I lived with my parents, the most talented performers in the entire circus. It traveled through many parts of France, similar to your father’s Swedish travels. Eventually, I grew tired of it all and set out for a new job. I suppose you could say I started a new life.”

“That’s how I feel with the opera house. It feels so different from the country!”

“And the circus. Speaking of opera, are you ready to continue our lesson?”

Christine nodded. “Oui. I feel much better now.”

“Good. The last thing I would want to do is hurt you and your feelings. Sing your little song, please. If you’d like to, I mean.”

“*Alright...*” Christine closed her eyes and took a deep breath, moving away from the wall as she sang,

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment (Pleasure of love only lasts a moment)

Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie (Pain of love lasts a lifetime)

Tant que cette eau coulera doucement (As long as water runs smoothly)

Vers ce ruisseau qui borde la prairie (Towards this stream which borders the meadow)

“Sing a bit more.” Mr. E encouraged Christine.

Je t'aimerai, te répétait Sylvie (I will love you, Sylvie kept telling you)

L'eau coule encore, elle a changé pourtant (The water is still flowing, yet it has changed)

“There, *that’s* it!” Mr. E exclaimed before singing,

L'eau coule encore, elle a changé pourtant

“‘The water is still flowing, yet it has changed’. I think that describes your voice perfectly.”

Chapter Four

Christine blushed. “Merci. Can you sing my part? I- I mean, if it’s not too uncomfortable for you.”

“It’s alright. If it sounds dreadful, I’m terribly sorry.” Mr. E said before singing what Christine had sung a minute earlier.

Once he finished, Christine was silent for a few long moments.

“I knew it would be terrible-”

“No, no, it’s not terrible at all!” Christine said quickly with a shake of her head. “It’s the most beautiful voice I’ve ever heard. Especially from a man.”

Mr. E gave a soft chuckle. “Thank you. I must ask... what caused you to be so nervous about singing?”

Christine frowned, looking down at the floor as she clasped her hands together. “I’d rather not say.”

“...Oh. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to bring up any-”

“It’s fine! Maybe I’ll tell you later. When I’m ready.”

“Take your time.”

Christine smiled and gazed up at the ceiling. “Mr. E?”

“Yes, Christine?”

“What am I doing right now?”

“Looking up at the heavens. ...Alright, looking up at the *ceiling*. You’re holding onto your hands and your thumb is rubbing against your knuckle,” Mr. E paused as Christine looked at her hands in surprise. “An unconscious habit.”

“How can you see me?”

“I have my ways.”

“Ah, yes. Your *mysterious* ways.” Christine said, spreading her hands as she said ‘mysterious’.

Mr. E’s chuckle became a small laugh. Christine felt her face warm. His laugh sounded so gentle and cozy!

“I believe our time is up.” Mr. E said.

Christine sighed. “Oui, it is. Will we be able to spend *more* time together outside of lessons? Maybe outside of this little room?”

The Opera Ghost
(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

“No, I’d rather you stay where you are. It’s safer this way. As for recreational time together... I think we should concentrate on lessons first.”

“Of course. You’re my maestro after all.”

“But if you keep making good progress... We’ll see what happens. Keep working hard, Christine.”

“Oh, I will!”

A smile spread across Christine’s face as she added in her thoughts, *I’ll do it for you, my angel.*

•••

As the weeks went on, Christine kept practicing with Mr. E. In between her secret lessons, she watched rehearsals of a play called *Il Muto di Figaro* and spent time with Meg.

Now it was the middle of April. The dreary chill of winter had faded, improving Christine’s spirit. She deeply grieved for her father, but the melancholy wasn’t as heavy.

“You seem different.” Meg remarked as she walked through the halls of the opera house with Christine.

“In what way?” Christine asked. “I haven’t changed my hair at all and I’ve worn this dress plenty of times.”

“No, it’s still a prairie waterfall going into a sapphire valley! Your mood seems different. I can tell that you’re happier.”

Christine smiled. “Oui, I am. Ever since spring truly arrived, I’ve felt lighter. It’s as if the snow has melted off my shoulders!”

“That’s how I feel, too! Once all that snow is gone, everything feels sunny again. Mama calls spring ‘a new beginning, a time for change’,” Meg made a face as she gripped her curls. “That’s why I have to help her clean part of the auditorium today. I’d rather have more practice than do *that!*”

“My papa and I cleaned our house at the start of every spring. I see that carries on in the city.”

“At least we don’t have to clean the whole thing! Just some of the boxes.”

“Including...”

Chapter Four

“Oh, I don’t know if it’ll include *that* box. Maybe it will,” Meg gasped. “If it *does*, you can join me! You know plenty about cleaning thanks to your daddy. *And* you’d finally get to see the box.”

Christine bit her lip, unsure about seeing Mr. E’s box.

It seems like an invasion of privacy. That box belongs to him and him only. It’s personal! she thought. *But since Madame Giry goes up there every month...*

“We’re here!” Meg announced.

The girls had reached the end of the hallway, where Christine’s dressing room was.

“What are you doing for the rest of the day?” Meg asked.

“Probably reading one of the books I got at the library yesterday.” Christine replied.

“I’d *much* rather read about a lost princess than clean.”

“You’ll have time tonight. Good luck on cleaning.”

“I’ll sure need it!” Meg said with a wave.

Christine waved back and went into her dressing room. She had spruced up the room in the past month, adding little touches that reminded her of home. A flowered quilt from her childhood bed was draped over the divan. The photograph of her and Daddy Daaé stood by the vanity table’s little round mirror, which had little paper flowers (made by her and Meg) wrapped around it. A blue bowl was carefully hidden in one of the dresser drawers, the same bowl her father had used for washing his face during his travels.

But instead of soap and water, it held a necklace that had belonged to her late mother. The necklace was a pink chain with three pale pink gems in the shape of hearts. The middle gem was slightly bigger than the others, which Christine had always loved. She imagined it was her mother’s spirit.

Her most prized possession- her father’s violin- was hidden in the bottom dresser drawer, which was bigger than the other two. Christine smiled as she opened the case. The sight of the well-loved instrument brought back many happy memories. She gently stroked the flowers painted on the sides.

“Good afternoon, Christine.”

The Opera Ghost
(Phantom of the Opera Rewritten)

Christine gasped. The voice caused her to jump and let go of the case, making the lid fall on her fingers. She winced, rubbing her slightly sore fingers.

“I’m terribly sorry for startling you.” the voice said.

“Mr. E!” Christine exclaimed before swiftly locking the case and closing the drawer. “What are you doing here? It’s not time for lessons!”

“I know. This is the recreational time you’ve been wanting.”

Christine smiled. “I was actually just about to do that,” She opened the top drawer, taking out two books. “Which one sounds better, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* or *Phantastes*?”

“The first one is a French story and the second sounds very much like ‘phantom’... A difficult decision. What are they about?”

“The second one isn’t about you, unfortunately. It’s about a young man who is pulled into a dream world in search of his dream woman. She’s called the Marble Lady.”

“Should be called The Angel of Music,” Mr. E remarked to himself (although Christine heard him with a blush). “What’s the other one about?”

“It’s about a hunchback named Quasimodo. He works as a bell ringer for Notre Dame.”

“Is he a lonely outcast of society?”

“From what I skimmed through, yes.”

Mr. E sighed. “...Sounds like a story I’ve heard before.”

“So should I read that one first?”

“Read whichever one your heart desires.”

“That would probably be both!” Christine looked at the two books as she sat at the divan and said, “I’ll read the first chapter of *Phantastes*, then the first one of *Hunchback*. Then I’ll decide which one to continue first.”

“That’s a fine idea, Christine.”

She opened up *Phantastes* and began reading. She was halfway done with the first page when she looked up at the ceiling.

“Would you like me to read aloud?”

“That would be nice.” Mr. E replied.

Chapter Four

Christine smiled before reading, “I awoke one morning with the usual perplexity of mind which accompanies the return of consciousness.”

“Are you sure this isn’t a story about me?”

Christine laughed. “Let’s find out! ‘As I lay and looked through the eastern window of my room, a faint streak of peach color, dividing a cloud that just rose above the low swell of the horizon, announced the approach of the sun...’”

•••

“I was soon to find the truth of the lady’s promise, that this day I should discover the road into Fairy Land.’ What a nice first chapter!” Christine said, closing the book twenty minutes later.

“Yes, it was,” Mr. E agreed. “The woman reminded me of you. A tall, gracious woman with pale skin and blue eyes.”

Christine blushed. “Oh, I’m not tall at all. And I don’t have brown hair like she does.”

“Besides your blonde hair, the rest matches perfectly.”

“Oui!” Christine suddenly realized something. “Wait... You know what I look like?”

“Yes. You look lovely, Christine.”

Christine’s blush grew and she looked down at the book in her lap. “If you can see me... Can *I* see *you*?”

A long moment of silence passed. A dozen seconds felt like forever.

“...Y- Yes. Yes, you may see me, Christine,” Mr. E finally said. “Wait until I tell you to turn around.”

Christine waited, setting the book next to her on the divan. She was reaching for the book when Mr. E spoke again.

“Look behind you, Christine.”

Christine rose from the divan, apprehension flooding through her as she slowly turned around.

She was face to face with *The Opera Ghost*.