**Gavroche**

from "Les misérables" by *Victor Hugo*

Text adapted for young children by Alain Paraillous

**Chapter 1**

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there was an eight-year-old boy named Gavroche. His parents, Les Thénardier, were mean and dishonest people. They had run an inn in the village of Montfermeil for several years, but the establishment had closed its doors. The Thénardier had settled in Paris, gradually sinking into misery, subsisting on scams. They had two big girls about fifteen years old Eponine and Azelma, whom they forced to beg and even steal. Gavroche was born much later. Neither he nor his sisters had ever been to school. Mother Thénardier loved her daughters, but she hated the little boy who was her painkiller. It was even worse when Father Thénardier found himself in prison. She was yelling at the kid:

-       *Ah, here you are, dirty kid! I've been calling you for three hours, and you weren't answering!*

Then she picked up the whip and hit the child with all her might. Gavroche got into the habit of hanging out in the streets, with a hollow stomach and only going home to sleep.

**Chapter 2**

One evening, Gavroche decided not to return at all. He slept under a bridge near the Seine. Throughout the summer, this shelter protected him from rain and thunderstorms.

Left to his own devices, Gavroche frequented garments older than him: Montparnasse, Courfeyrac, Babet, Brujon... These street children set a bad example for him. Like them, Gavroche sometimes took an apple or a brioche from the stall of a shop. But deep down, he was a good child, cheerful, jovial, laughing. He knew how to make himself useful. Occasionally, he would sweep a shop, a workshop, or help an old woman carry her basket:

-      *Well, Grandma, your package is very heavy: Is that what you want a helping hand?*

In exchange, he received one or two small coins that allowed him to buy some food.

When he had nothing to do, Gavroche liked to walk the streets of Paris. With his hands in his pockets, and his cap pressed on the frond, he muttered whistling or singing funny songs:

*King Coupdesabot*

*Went hunting,*

*Hunting crows,*

*Mounted on stilts.*

*OR this one:*

*Everything all*

*For Charlotte*

*And for Chatou.*

*I only have a penny*

*And only a boot.*

Despite his poverty, Gavroche was not unhappy.

***Chapter 3***

In the autumn, Gavroche found a job in a theatre. The play played told a story that took place by the sea. A large blue sheet, placed on the Seine, represented the ocean. The manager had hired kids who squatted under this canvas and waved their arms to simulate waves. The play was a great success because the spectators really had the impression of seeing the sea stirring in front of them. Gavroche and his comrades earned food without begging.

After the show, Gavroche returned under the bridge that served as his shelter and fell asleep looking at the stars.

However, with the winter, the cold became harsher. One night, after the theater, instead of returning to the bridge, he preferred to walk along the streets. At least it warmed his feet.

In the middle of a square, he saw a strange monument: a huge half-collapsed wooden and plaster elephant. It was a sculpture project that had been abandoned. Nettles rose along the elephant's legs and ivy wrapped around its tusks.

**Chapter 4**

Gavroche approached and saw a hole just below the proboscis:

-      Oh oh! If I could slip into it, goodbye cold! It must be good in the belly of this big beast!

Gavroche clung to one leg and, in three movements, sneaked through the breach.

-      Tutu plump belly! That's what I thought: the inside is hollow. But we hardly see in you, Mr. Elephant!

The child pulled a lighter from his pocket, lit it and distinguished a kind of niche where he could lie down. His fatigue was such that he fell asleep immediately.

Unfortunately, visitors pulled him out of his sleep. In the darkness, he distinguished bright yellow eyes. They were rats that, sniffing the fresh flesh, had approached. Gavroche felt their whiskers brush thruff his ears and heard their teeth grinding.

With the lighter turned on again, he looked at the critters.

-      Hey there, gentlemen little ogres! Not so fast! Is that where you take me for your dinner?

The voice and glow of the flame put them on the run.

-      My hotel is in high demand! If I want to keep my luxury piaule, I will have to find a solution as soon as possible.

The next day, Gavroche found old rusty gates behind a hedge near the square. He brought them inside the elephant, and set up a shelter inaccessible to rats.

The next day he brought back straw and a blanket:

-      This time, the king himself is no better off! I'm not about to go home! For my old woman to hit me? Bernique!

**Chapter 5**

At the end of the winter, the play was stopped, and Gavroche lost his job. He resumed his previous existence, giving a hand here and there, chipping a few apples from the stalls. Sometimes, the merchant would see it:

-      Boy! Rogue seed! I'll teach you how to fly!

But Gavroche was running fast, and no one could catch up with him.

One day he met two crying children in front of a bakery. They were two brothers. The smallest, Claude, was four years old. His eldest was only six, and his name was Jean.

A good smell of warm bread rose from the sigh. Very skinny, hungry, the two little ones pushed the door of the shop:

-      Please, madam, can we have some bread? We haven't eaten anything for three days.

-      Do you have enough to pay? Replied the big baker who seemed as wicked as the Thénardier.

-      Alas no, we have nothing!

-      So, outside, kind of barefoot! No money, no bread!

Gavroche, who had heard everything, pulled a coin out of his pocket and put it on the counter.

-      Here are fifteen cents, my beauty: use bread for three! Will it go for your account?

The baker, grumbling, cut three slices of a huge loaf. The kids bit into it with beautiful teeth. They only paused to tell Gavroche:

-      Oh, thank you! .... Thank you, sir! ....

***Chapter 6***

Evening was falling. The "sir" could not abandon his little ones:

-      Now, where are you going to sleep, young men? Is it far from home?

-      At home, it's nowhere, replied the elder.

-      So, come to my house! I live in a palace!

Gavroche led them to his elephant.

-      Admire, the loaves, isn't it beautiful?

Here, no rain, no more cold, and good straw to go to bed: luxury hotel, right?

It had been several months since the two petiots had slept in such a comfortable place. They fell asleep immediately, their stomachs wedged by the delicious piece of bread.

The three lived together for several weeks. Gavroche showed Claude and Jean how to earn a few pennies by rendering small services.

The three children helped the merchants to arrange fruits, vegetables, fish on the stalls... In exchange, they were given a coin, a bunch of grapes, a salted sardine... Sometimes not much, and the poor kids often came home on a hollow stomach.

***Chapter 7***

In the streets, Gavroche saw very rich, well-fed and warmly dressed people. Splendid carriages led them to luxurious buildings. He also sees poor people, hungry, wearing rags with holes that did not protect them from the cold. These unfortunate people crisscrossed the streets, burdened with misery, the luckiest slept in slums, and many slept outside. Gavroche felt that this was not fair.

One day, the people of Paris revolted and set up a barricade. On either side, insurgents and soldiers exchanged gunfire. Gavroche did not want to miss the game:

-      Stay, loaves! I'm going to battle!

-      Are you going to fight? ... And against whom?

-      I will fight so that there are no more injustices, and so that one day, all the children eat to their hunger!

Gavroche only had to rely on the noise to join the riot. Gunshots slammed. Plumes of smoke were spreading. Behind the torn cobblestones and the furniture piled up on the barricade, Gavroche recognized several of his friends: those of the theater, but also Montparnasse, Babet, Courfeyrac, Brujon...

-      That's my business! he exclaimed. It's time to change the world!

***Chapter 8***

The thick smoke allowed Gavroche to slip to the barricade without being seen by the soldiers. Gavroche overheard the conversation. So he slipped through the debris of tables and chairs, rushed towards one of the dead soldiers and took his ammunition from him.

-      Hold on, he said proudly to his comrades, with that you will be able to duck. I'm going back to the provisions!

Courfeyrac tried to restrain him, but the little one was already gone.

From the barricade, they dared to shout at him to come back for fear of attracting attention. Going from one corpse to another, he did not realize that the fog of the shooting had become less thick. So much so that the soldiers on the lookout saw something stirring.

A shot slammed.

***Chapter 9***

The bullet missed Gavroche, but it whistled in his ears. He stood upright, his hair in the wind, his hands on his hips, and began to sing:

*We are ugly in Nanterre,*

*It's Voltaire's fault*

*And beast in Palaiseau,*

*This is Rousseau.*

Then he came back with pockets full of bullets and without anyone being able to stop him, he left. Another shot slammed and hit the pavement at his feet. Gavroche burst out laughing and sang, his eyes fixed on the soldiers:

*I am not a notary*

*It's Voltaire's fault*

*I'm a little bird*

*It is Rousseau's fault.*

A third shot missed him again. Behind the barricade, his friends were trembling. He was still singing, running from one body to another, filling his pockets with bullets.

A fourth blow eventually hit him. He staggered, collapsed, and then managed to straighten his blood-covered head. He looked at where the blow had started from, and resumed his song:

*I fell to the ground,*

*It's Voltaire's fault,*

*The nose in the stream,*

*It's the fault of....*

A fifth bullet stopped him in his tracks.

This time, he fell down, face down.

He didn't get up again.

Not seeing Gavroche return, little Claude and little Jean left the big elephant and resumed their wandering lives through Paris.

It took many more years and many struggles for all the children of this country to have enough to eat and to go to school, learn to read, to write, to count.

Gavroche, the street child, was one of those who gave their lives so that there would be fewer miserable people, and a better world would be born.