*Les Misérables Synopsis*

**Prologue**

In 1815 in France, a chain gang of prisoners do hard labor. After serving nineteen years in prison for stealing a loaf of bread, Jean Valjean, Prisoner 24601, is released on parole by the prison guard Javert. By law, Valjean must display a yellow ticket of leave, which identifies him as an ex-convict. He is shunned wherever he goes and cannot find regular work with decent wages. Only the Bishop of Digne offers him food and shelter. Still angry and broken, Valjean steals the Bishop's silver. He is captured by the police, but the Bishop tells the police that the silver was a gift, also giving Valjean a pair of silver candlesticks. The Bishop tells Valjean that he must use the silver to become an honest man. Humbled by the Bishop's kindness, Valjean resolves to redeem himself and tears up his yellow ticket, breaking his parole.

**Act 1**

Eight years later, in 1823, Valjean is Monsieur Madeleine, a wealthy factory owner and mayor of Montreuil-sur-Mer. Fantine is a single mother working in his factory, trying to support her daughter Cosette, who is being raised by an innkeeper and his wife while Fantine works in the city. One day, a coworker steals a letter about Cosette from Fantine, revealing to the other workers that Fantine has a child. A fight breaks out, and the foreman fires Fantine. Desperate for money, first she sells her hair, and finally becomes a prostitute. When she fights back against an abusive man, Javert, now a police inspector stationed in Montreuil-sur-Mer, arrives to arrest her. Valjean pities Fantine and orders Javert to release her. Valjean rescues a man who is pinned by a runaway cart. Javert witnesses the incident and remembers the incredible strength Valjean displayed in the work camp. But a man who looks like Valjean has been arrested. Valjean realizes that this case of mistaken identity could free him forever, but he is not willing to see an innocent man go to prison in his place. He confesses his identity to the court. At the hospital, Fantine dreams of Cosette. Valjean promises to find Cosette and protect. Relieved, Fantine succumbs to her illness and dies. Javert arrives to take Valjean back into custody, but Valjean asks Javert for time to fetch Cosette. Javert refuses, insisting that a criminal like Valjean can never change for the better. They struggle, but Valjean overpowers Javert and escapes.

The Thénardiers use little Cosette as a servant and treat her cruelly while extorting money from Fantine to indulge their own daughter Eponine. Cosette dreams of a life with a mother where she is not forced to work and is treated lovingly. Valjean meets Cosette and offers the Thénardiers payment to adopt her. He takes her to Paris.

Nine years later, in 1832, Paris is in upheaval because of the impending death of General Lamarque, the only man in the government who shows mercy to the poor. Among those in the streets are the student revolutionaries Marius Pontmercy and Enjolras, who contemplate the effect Lamarque's death will have on the poor and desperate in Paris. The Thénardiers have since lost their inn and now run a street gang. Their daughter Eponine is also now grown and has fallen in love with her oblivious friend Marius, as well as the streetwise young urchin Gavroche who knows everything that happens in the slums. The Thénardiers prepare to con some charitable visitors, who turn out to be Valjean and a fully-grown Cosette. Cosette runs into Marius, and the pair fall in love. Thénardier recognizes Valjean, but Javert intervenes before they can finish the robbery. Valjean and Cosette escape, and only later does Javert suspect who they were. Javert makes a vow that he will find Valjean and recapture him. Meanwhile, Marius persuades Eponine to help him find Cosette. At a small café, Enjolras excites students to revolt. When Gavroche brings the news of General Lamarque's death, the students realize that they can use this moment to incite revolution. At Valjean's house, Cosette thinks about her meeting with Marius. She confronts Valjean about the secrets he keeps about his and her own past. Eponine leads Marius to Cosette's garden. He and Cosette meet again and confess their mutual love, while a heartbroken Eponine watches them through the garden gate. Thénardier and his gang arrive, intending to rob Valjean's house, but Eponine stops them by screaming a warning. The scream alerts Valjean, who believes that the intruder was Javert. He tells Cosette that it's time once again for them to go on the run and starts planning for them to flee France altogether. On the eve of the 1832 Paris Uprising, Valjean prepares to go into exile. Cosette and Marius part in despair, while Enjolras encourages all of Paris to join the revolution. Eponine realizes Marius will never love her, and Marius is conflicted about whether to follow Cosette or join the uprising. Meanwhile, Javert reveals his plans to spy on the students as the Thénardiers scheme to profit off the coming violence. Marius decides to stand with his friends, and all anticipate what the dawn will bring.

**Act 2**

The students build a barricade. Javert, disguised as a rebel, volunteers to "spy" on the government troops. Marius discovers that Eponine has disguised herself as a boy to join the rebels. Wanting to keep his best friend safe from the impending violence, he sends her to deliver a farewell letter to Cosette. Valjean intercepts the letter and learns about Marius and Cosette's romance. Eponine walks the streets of Paris alone, imagining that Marius is there with her, but laments that her love for Marius will never be reciprocated. She then returns to the barricade. The French army arrives at the barricade and demands that the students surrender. However, Javert tells the students that the government will not attack that night Gavroche recognizes him and quickly exposes him as a spy, and the students tie him up. The students hope all the people of Paris will side with them and that will overwhelm the army. Eponine returns to find Marius but is shot by the soldiers while crossing the barricade. As Marius holds her, she assures him that she feels no pain and reveals her love for him before dying in his arms. The students mourn this first loss of life and resolve to fight in her name. Valjean arrives, hoping he can protect Marius in the coming battle for Cosette's sake. Valjean asks Enjolras to allow him to be the executioner of the imprisoned Javert, which Enjolras grants. But as soon as Valjean and Javert are alone, Valjean frees him. Javert warns Valjean that he will not give up his pursuit and rejects what he perceives as a bargain for Valjean's freedom. Valjean says there are no conditions to his release. The students settle down for the night and express anxiety about the battle to come. Valjean prays to God to protect Marius, even if the cost for his safety requires Valjean's own life. As dawn approaches, Enjolras realizes that the people of Paris have not risen up, but resolves to fight on in spite of the impossible odds. The army kills Gavroche, who snuck out to collect ammunition from bodies on the other side of the barricade. The army gives a final warning, but the rebels fight to the last man. Everyone at the barricade is killed except Valjean and a gravely wounded Marius, who both escape into the sewers. Javert returns to the barricade to search for Valjean. Valjean carries Marius through the sewers but collapses from exhaustion. Thénardier, who has been looting bodies, comes upon them and extracts a ring from the unconscious Marius. He flees when Valjean regains consciousness. When Valjean carries Marius to the sewer's exit, he finds Javert waiting for him. Valjean begs Javert for one hour to bring Marius to a doctor, and Javert reluctantly agrees. Javert finds himself unable to reconcile Valjean's merciful acts with his perception of Valjean as a criminal beyond redemption. Finding himself torn between his beliefs about God and his desire to adhere to the law, Javert commits suicide by throwing himself into the Seine.

In the wake of the failed revolution, many women mourn the deaths of the students. Marius, wounded but alive, despairs the deaths of his friends. He wonders who saved his own life. He and Cosette reaffirm their blossoming romance. Valjean realizes that Cosette will not need him as a caretaker once she is married and gives them his blessing. Valjean confesses to Marius that he is an escaped convict and must go away because his presence endangers Cosette. He makes Marius promise never to tell Cosette. A few months later, Marius and Cosette marry. The Thénardiers gatecrash the reception disguised as nobility and attempt to blackmail Marius, telling him that Valjean is a murderer and that Thénardier saw him carrying a corpse in the sewers. When Thénardier shows him the ring he stole as proof, Marius realizes that it was Valjean who saved his life. The newlyweds leave to find Valjean. In the final scene, Valjean awaits his death, having nothing left to live for. The spirit of Fantine appears to him and tells him that he has been forgiven and will soon be with God. Cosette and Marius arrive to find Valjean near death. Valjean thanks God for letting him live long enough to see Cosette again, and Marius thanks him for saving his life. Valjean gives Cosette a letter confessing his troubled past and the truth about her mother. As he dies, the spirits of Fantine and Eponine guide him to Heaven. They are joined by the cast, all of whom sing of the coming of a better world.