

'Are there any witnesses?' asked the magistrate.

'None,' answered the policeman.

Mr Fang then turned to Mr Brownlow and angrily told him to describe what had happened. Mr Brownlow explained that he had run after the boy only because he saw him running away. He did not think that the boy was the actual thief and he hoped that the boy would not be punished. 'He's been hurt already,' he added, 'and now I'm afraid he's very ill.'

'I don't believe that for a moment,' said Mr Fang unpleasantly. He turned to Oliver. 'Come now, don't try any clever tricks with me! What's your name?' he demanded.

Oliver tried to reply, but he was too weak to speak. He was deadly pale, and he felt the room spinning round him. At last he managed to whisper a request for water, but the magistrate refused angrily. Suddenly, Oliver fainted and fell to the floor.

Mr Fang stared at him angrily. 'Guilty. Three months' prison,' he said immediately. 'Let him lie there. He'll soon be tired of that.' Mr Fang stood up. 'This court is now closed.'

At that moment a man in an old black coat rushed in. 'Stop!' he shouted. 'Don't take the boy away. I saw it all. I'm the bookshop owner.'

Mr Fang's face was black with anger at this unexpected interruption, but the bookshop owner demanded to be heard. He described exactly what had really happened. He had seen two boys steal the handkerchief and then run away, leaving Oliver to be arrested.

In a final burst of bad temper, Mr Fang said that his time had been wasted. He announced that Oliver was innocent, and ordered everybody out of the court.

The order was obeyed, and as Mr Brownlow turned to go down

the street, he saw Oliver lying on the pavement, shaking, his face as white as death.

'Poor boy! Poor boy!' said Mr Brownlow, bending over him. He called a coach quickly, laid Oliver on the seat, and drove away.

The coach stopped at a neat house in a quiet, shady street in north London. Oliver was gently carried in to a bed, and received more care and kindness than he had ever had in his life. But he had a fever, and for many days he lay there unconscious. When he eventually awoke, weak, thin and pale, he looked anxiously around the room.

'What room is this? Where am I?' he said. 'This is not the place I fell asleep in.'

Mrs Bedwin, the motherly old housekeeper, heard his words, and instantly came to him. 'Hush – be quiet, my dear, or you'll be ill again. Lie down.'

He lay down, and woke up again much later. After a while, he was able to sit up in a chair, although he was still too weak to walk. In this new position he could see a picture of a woman hanging on the wall opposite. 'Who is that, madam?' he asked the old housekeeper.

'I don't know, my dear. Do you like it?'

'The eyes look so sad, and they seem to be staring at me. As if the person was alive, and wanted to speak to me but couldn't.'

'You're weak and nervous after your illness,' Mrs Bedwin said kindly. 'Don't worry about things like that.'

Later that day Mr Brownlow came in, having heard that the boy was a little better at last. He was delighted to see that Oliver could sit up. But when he saw Oliver's face clearly, Mr Brownlow stared hard at him.

'I hope you're not angry with me, sir,' said Oliver anxiously.



'No, no. Not in the least,' he replied. Then he turned to the housekeeper. 'But look, Mrs Bedwin, look there!' He pointed to the picture of the woman above Oliver's head and then to the boy's face. It was a living copy of the picture; even the expression was the same. Oliver did not understand what was happening. He was so alarmed by Mr Brownlow's excitement that he fainted once more.

The Dodger and Charley Bates had left the crowd which was chasing Oliver as soon as they could. They went back to their house through the narrow streets, using a complicated route in case anyone was following them. Once they were safely away from other people, Charley Bates rolled on the ground and laughed and laughed.

'Ha! Ha! Ha! When I saw Oliver running away so fast, round all the corners, bumping into walls . . . and all the time I had the handkerchief in my pocket . . . Ha! Ha! Ha!'

'But what'll Fagin say?'

'What do you mean?'

The Dodger said nothing more but led Charley Bates into the house and up the stairs. When Fagin saw them enter, he rose to his feet.

'Where's Oliver?' he asked them furiously.

The two boys looked uneasily at each other, but said nothing. Fagin took hold of the Dodger's collar and shook him violently.

'Tell me or I'll kill you!'

The Dodger slid out of his coat in one smooth movement, leaving Fagin holding only the empty coat. 'The police have got him,' he said reluctantly. He looked round for a weapon to fight with, but Fagin already had a heavy metal pot in his hand. He threw it hard at the Dodger, but missed and hit Charley Bates, who started to shout with fear.

Suddenly, all this noise and confusion was silenced by a deep voice at the door.

'What the devil's going on here?' the voice demanded.

The owner of the voice was a big man of about thirty-five in a black coat and very dirty trousers, with a brown hat on his head and a dirty handkerchief around his neck. He also had a three-day-old beard. A white dog with torn ears followed him into the room. The man kicked the dog into a corner and looked round at the signs of battle.

'Are they trying to murder you, Fagin? I would if I was them. I'd have done it long ago. Now, give me some beer, and don't poison it.'

It was said as a joke, but if the man had seen the evil look on Fagin's face, he might have thought the warning was a necessary one.

Fagin produced some beer, and as the fight appeared to be over, everybody sat down. In the conversation that followed, Fagin told the newcomer that Oliver had been caught by the police. 'I'm afraid, Mr Sikes,' he said, 'the boy may say something which will get us into trouble.'

'Very likely,' said Bill Sikes, smiling unkindly. 'You've got problems, Fagin.'

'And I'm afraid,' added Fagin, ignoring Sikes' remark, 'that if we're in trouble, then a lot of other people will be in trouble too, if you understand me, my dear.'

Sikes turned angrily towards the old man. There was a silence. Then Sikes said, 'Somebody must find out what's happened. If he hasn't said anything yet, we must catch him when he leaves the police station.'

Fagin nodded. But there was a difficulty. None of them wanted to go anywhere near a police station. The problem was solved with



the arrival of the two young ladies whom Oliver had met one evening in Fagin's house.

'Nancy, my dear,' Fagin said. He smiled sweetly at one of the young ladies. 'Can you go to find out what's happened to Oliver?'

The young lady answered calmly, 'No, I won't.'

'You're the only one here that the police in this district don't know,' said Sikes. 'She'll go, Fagin.'

'No,' repeated Nancy.

'Yes, she will, Fagin,' Sikes was right. With a mixture of threats and promises, he soon persuaded Nancy to go.

She set off at once, and at the police station pretended to be a shy, frightened girl. 'Is my poor little brother Oliver here?' she asked the officer with the keys.

'He's not here,' the officer replied. 'The gentleman's got him.'

'The gentleman? Oh no! What gentleman?' cried Nancy, very upset.

The policeman explained that Oliver had become ill, and the old gentleman had taken him to his house in the Pentonville district of north London. Nancy, still looking terribly upset, left the station, and hurried back to Fagin's house with this news. As soon as he heard it, Sikes called his white dog, put on his hat and left without saying goodbye to anyone.

'We must find him,' Fagin said urgently to the rest of them. 'No one can stay here – it's too dangerous now. All of you – walk around Pentonville and keep your ears open. Don't come back until you have some news of Oliver! If you can, kidnap him! We've got to keep him quiet before he starts talking about us to his new friends.'

With these words, he pushed them all from his room and double-locked the door behind them. Then he took out his hidden box and very carefully hid all the watches and the jewellery beneath his clothes.

### Oliver is found again

Oliver began to recover and slowly regain his strength. The picture that had caused Mr Brownlow's excitement was taken down from the wall, and was not mentioned again. Oliver was disappointed at the disappearance of the picture, since he liked the woman's face, but he had many other things to think about now.

They were happy days, while Oliver was getting better. He played cards with Mrs Bedwin and listened to stories about her family. The days were all so quiet and relaxing, after the hardships and poverty of his previous life. Mr Brownlow bought him a new suit and new shoes, and Oliver's dirty old clothes were given away.

One day Mr Brownlow asked him to come to his study for a little talk.

Oliver went in and sat down. He looked at Mr Brownlow's serious face in alarm. 'Don't tell me you're going to send me away, sir, please!' he exclaimed. 'Let me stay here! I could help with the housework . . . please, sir!'

'My dear child, don't be afraid,' said Mr Brownlow kindly. 'I won't desert you. I believe that you're a good boy, not a common thief. You told me you're an orphan – that seems to be the truth. But I want to hear now the whole story of your life, and how you came to be with the boys I saw you with that day.'

Oliver began his story but was soon interrupted by the arrival of Mr Grimwig, an old friend of Mr Brownlow's. Mr Grimwig was a fierce old gentleman and very fond of arguments. He clearly knew all about Oliver and inspected him closely.



'So this is the boy, is it?' he said at last.

Oliver bowed politely and was introduced by Mr Brownlow. Tea was then brought in, and during the meal Mr Grimwig stared so hard at Oliver that the boy felt rather confused. Eventually, Mr Grimwig whispered to Mr Brownlow, 'He may be a good-looking boy, but I think he's deceiving you, my good friend.'

'Nonsense!' said Mr Brownlow, becoming angry.

'Well, we'll see,' answered his friend. 'We'll see.'

Later that afternoon Mr Brownlow wanted to return some books to a bookseller, and to send some money for new books that he had already collected. Mr Grimwig suggested that Oliver should go. 'He'll be sure to deliver everything safely,' he said with a smile.

'Yes, please let me take them,' said Oliver, delighted to be of use.

Mr Brownlow hesitated, but Mr Grimwig's smile had annoyed him. 'Very well,' he said. 'Here are the books, Oliver, and a five-pound note. The bookseller will give you ten shillings change.'

'I won't be ten minutes,' replied Oliver eagerly, and he ran out into the street.

'So you expect him to come back, do you?' enquired Mr Grimwig.

'Yes, I do,' said Mr Brownlow, smiling confidently. 'Don't you?'

'No. He has a new suit of clothes, some valuable books, and a five-pound note in his pocket. He'll join his old friends the thieves, and laugh at you. If he comes back, I'll eat my hat.'

The two men sat by the window with a pocket-watch between them, and waited for Oliver's return.

Oliver hurried through the streets to the bookshop, thinking how lucky he was. Suddenly there was a loud scream behind him.

'Oh, my dear brother!' Before he could look round, a pair of arms was thrown tightly around his neck.

'Don't! he cried, struggling. 'Let go! Why are you stopping me? Who is it?'

The young woman holding him started to cry loudly. 'I've found him! Oh! Oliver! You naughty boy, to make me suffer so much! Come home immediately, you cruel boy!' She burst into tears and several people stopped to stare at what was happening.

'What's the matter?' asked one of the watching women.

'He ran away from his parents a month ago,' the young woman said. 'They're hard-working, respectable people, and he left them to join a gang of thieves and bad characters, and almost broke his mother's heart.'

'Go home, you horrible child,' said another woman.

'Yes - go back to your parents,' said a third.

'But I haven't got any!' replied Oliver, greatly alarmed. 'I haven't got a sister, either. I'm an orphan. I live in Pentonville.'

'Listen to him! Make him come home,' the young woman said to the crowd, 'or he'll kill his dear mother and father, and break my heart.'

Suddenly Oliver recognized the woman he had seen in Fagin's house. 'It's Nancy!' he said, without thinking.

'You see?' cried Nancy to the crowd. 'He knows me!'

Just then a big man ran out of a beer shop, followed by a white dog. 'What's this? Young Oliver! Come home to your poor mother, you young devil! And what books are these? You've stolen them, haven't you? Give them to me.' The man, who was Bill Sikes, seized Oliver with one strong hand and hit him on the head with the other.

'That'll do him good!' shouted some of the crowd. 'It's the only way to treat boys like him.'

Bill Sikes held onto Oliver's arm. 'Come on, you young thief!'

Still weak from illness, and terrified by the growling dog, Oliver





Bill Sikes held onto Oliver's arm. 'Come on, you young thief!'

could not resist. He was taken through the dark narrow streets at great speed. Sikes and Nancy gave him no chance to escape and Oliver had no breath to call out for help. All too quickly, he was back in Fagin's house, where his old friends were waiting for him.

'Delighted to see you looking so well, my dear,' Fagin said, bowing politely. 'Why didn't you write, and say you were coming? We'd have got something warm for supper.'

The Dodger and Charley Bates roared with laughter, and the

Dodger began looking through the books Oliver had with him.

'Give them back!' Oliver cried. 'Those books belong to the kind old gentleman who took me into his home. Send him back the books and the money — he'll think I stole them!'

'You're right,' laughed Fagin. 'He will think that!'

Oliver jumped to his feet and ran wildly from the room, shouting for help. The Dodger and Fagin caught him easily, and brought him back. Then the old man picked up a long piece of wood.

'So you wanted to get away, my dear, did you? Wanted to call the police and get help? We'll cure you of that.'

He hit Oliver hard on the shoulders with the stick. He was raising it for a second hit when Nancy rushed forward and, seizing the piece of wood, threw it into the fire.

'I won't let you do it, Fagin!' she shouted. 'You've got him again. Isn't that enough? Now leave him alone.'

Fagin and Sikes looked at each other, shocked by her reaction.

'You'd better keep quiet, my girl,' growled Sikes.

'No, I won't!' cried the girl wildly. 'Now you've got the boy, you'll turn him into a thief and a liar. Isn't that enough, without killing him too?'

She rushed at Fagin and would have hit him if Sikes had not held her arms so tightly that she couldn't move. She struggled wildly for a while, then, exhausted, she fainted. Sikes laid her down in the corner, as surprised as Fagin at her anger.

'She can be really wild when she's angry,' Sikes said.

Fagin wiped his forehead. 'That's the trouble with women,' he said, 'but she's a clever girl in her work.'

Then Charley Bates and the Dodger took away Oliver's expensive new suit, gave him some old clothes, and locked him up in a dark room. Oliver felt tired and ill, and was soon fast asleep.



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 The robbery
 

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A few days later, a visitor arrived in London from Oliver's home town. He was a large, fat man, and very proud of his hat, which showed the world that he was a most important official. It was, in fact, Mr Bumble the beadle, Oliver's old enemy.

Mr Bumble had completed his business in the city, and had just finished a most satisfactory meal in a pub. He pulled up his chair to the fire, to enjoy his hot gin-and-water in comfort, and opened the newspaper. The first thing he saw was this notice:

A reward of five pounds is offered for any information leading to the discovery of a young boy, Oliver Twist, who was kidnapped from his home in Pentonville last Thursday evening. I am also very interested in any information about his past.

There was then a full description of Oliver's clothes and appearance, and Mr Brownlow's full address. Mr Bumble rubbed his eyes, read the notice again, and was at the address in less than ten minutes. He was shown into Mr Brownlow's study, where the old gentleman and his friend Mr Grimwig were sitting.

'Do you know where the poor boy is now?' Mr Brownlow asked, when the beadle had explained the reason for his visit.

Mr Bumble shook his head.

'Do you know anything good about him?' asked Mr Grimwig, looking closely at Mr Bumble's face.

Mr Bumble shook his head again, very seriously, and turned down the corners of his mouth.

'Then tell us everything you know about him,' said Mr Brownlow impatiently.

Mr Bumble put down his hat, unbuttoned his coat, folded his arms, and sat back in his chair. He spoke in his most important and official voice, and talked for twenty minutes. His listeners heard all the details of Oliver's illegitimate birth, and how generously he had been treated as a workhouse orphan. They heard how he had always been an ungrateful and dangerous child, violently attacking another boy, and finally running away from the house where he had been working.

The old gentleman shook his head sadly and gave Mr Bumble the five pounds. 'I would have been happy to give you three times the amount – if your story had proved that the boy was good.'

If Mr Bumble had known this earlier, he might have told a different story, but now it was too late. So he took the money and left.

Mr Brownlow walked up and down his room for several minutes, deep in thought. He rang the bell for Mrs Bedwin, his housekeeper, and told her what he had heard.

'I don't believe it,' she said, with great certainty.

'I was right,' said Mr Grimwig with satisfaction. 'You should have listened to what I said.'

Mr Brownlow said angrily, 'Never let me hear the boy's name again. Never. Remember that, Mrs Bedwin.'

There were sad hearts at Mr Brownlow's house that night.



Meanwhile, in another part of London, Oliver remained a prisoner. Fagin had told Oliver how ungrateful he had been to run away. He had told him that he would have died of hunger without Fagin's kindness. He went on to tell Oliver the story of another young boy, who had gone to the police to tell them about the gang, but who had finally been hanged one morning for being a thief. Fagin described the hanging in terrifying detail, and said that he hoped he would never have to tell the police about Oliver – and see Oliver with a rope around his neck. Oliver felt his blood turn cold.

He remained locked in a room for many days, seeing nobody between early morning and midnight. He spent his time thinking sadly about his friends in Pentonville. After a week he was free to wander round the house during the day. It was a dirty place, full of rats and insects but no other living thing. All the windows were closed, and covered with wood and metal bars that kept out the light.

One afternoon the Dodger and Charley Bates were at home and they started telling Oliver about their lives as thieves.

'Why don't you become one?' Charley asked him. 'We all are here – both of us, and Fagin, Sikes, Nancy . . . all of us.'

'I don't want to be,' replied Oliver. 'I wish they'd let me go.'

'But it's a good life,' the Dodger said, taking some coins from his pocket and throwing them up in the air. 'What does it matter where the money comes from?' he said, laughing. 'If you don't steal it, someone else will. You can be sure of that!'

Fagin entered at this point, with two young men, and joined in the conversation. One of the young men had just come out of prison, and there were many cheerful jokes about his very short hair-cut. Everybody sat around the fire, talking and laughing for hours. Fagin told Oliver how good the Dodger was at his job, and what a friendly boy Charley was. It was, without doubt, an

interesting evening for Oliver, after so many days locked up alone.

After that evening he was rarely on his own again. He spent a lot of time with the Dodger and Charley, and often played the handkerchief game with them. At other times Fagin would tell them all about robberies he had committed in his younger days, telling the stories so well and putting in so many funny details that Oliver could not stop laughing, even though he knew it was wrong.

Fagin knew what he was doing. He had made sure that Oliver was so lonely and miserable that he would be desperate for any friends, however criminal. Slowly and deliberately, Fagin was trying to poison the young boy's mind.

One damp, cold, windy night a few weeks later, Fagin put on his heavy coat and, with the collar pulled up high to hide his face, left his home. He walked fast through the streets, never losing his way even in the darkest places. Finally, he reached an evil, narrow street lit only by a single lamp. He knocked on a door, said something quietly to the person who opened it, then walked upstairs.

Bill Sikes was sitting by his fire with his dog when Fagin entered. The room was a small, dark place with almost no furniture. Nancy was there, too, and Fagin glanced at her uneasily. He had not seen her since she had attacked him to stop him hitting Oliver. However, she seemed to have forgotten all about it, because she told him to pull up a chair and warm himself by the fire.

'I'm ready for business,' Bill Sikes said, looking at Fagin suspiciously. 'Say what you have to say, Fagin.'

'It's about the robbery at Chertsey, Bill,' answered Fagin. 'Some lovely silver in that house down there!'

'I know, I know,' Sikes said. 'I was down there two nights ago to



have a look at the house. But it's locked like a prison at night, all except one part.'

'Where's that?' asked Fagin, bending his head forwards, his eyes staring excitedly at Sikes.

'Do you think I'm stupid? I'm not telling you! Anyway, what we need is a boy.'

'So there's a small place where only a boy can enter the house?' asked Fagin.

'Maybe. But we need a boy.'

There was silence for a time, while Fagin thought. Then he made a sign to Sikes to tell Nancy to leave the room.

'Don't worry,' Sikes said. 'You can trust her – *she* won't talk. Isn't that right?'

'Of course it's right,' answered the young woman, taking a large drink from the bottle on the table, and laughing. 'Anyway, Fagin, I know your idea is for Oliver to do the job.'

'You're a clever girl,' said Fagin, smiling evilly. 'That's exactly what I had in mind. Listen, Bill – the boy's been training for a few weeks, and it's time he did some work. He's the smallest one, anyway.'

'Is he safe?' asked Sikes. 'Because if he tries any tricks on me, I'll kill him!'

'He'll be ours for life, if he feels he's one of us. And this job will make him feel like that,' said Fagin eagerly. 'The boy looks so innocent he's perfect. And we've got to include him in some crime as soon as we can. Otherwise, if he escapes now, he can tell the police about us and stay free himself.'

So it was decided that Oliver would help Sikes with the robbery in two days' time. The plan was discussed in great detail and all the arrangements made. By then, Sikes was very drunk, and Fagin got

up to leave. As he put on his coat, he stared hard at Nancy, frowning a little. No, he was sure he could trust her; she was loyal.

The next night, Oliver was alone in Fagin's house when Nancy entered. She was so nervous and white-faced that Oliver asked her if she was ill.

'God forgive me!' she said, beating her hands together. 'I never thought I would do this!'

'Has anything happened?' asked the boy. 'What is it?'

She sat with her back to him, and hid her face with her hands.

After a while she said, 'I don't know why I feel so strange sometimes. Come on, Oliver – are you ready? You have to come with me to Bill's house.'

'Why?'

'Oh – nothing important.'

Oliver did not believe her, but he thought that at last this might be an opportunity to escape. So he said, rather too quickly, 'I'm ready.' Nancy guessed what he was thinking.

'Oliver,' she said, 'this is not the time to escape. I've saved you once, and I will again, but if anything happens tonight, it might mean my death.' She said this so seriously that Oliver decided it must be true. He was quiet while they walked quickly through the streets to Sikes' house.

Inside his room, Sikes sat Oliver down on a chair. 'Did he come quietly?' he asked Nancy.

'Quiet as a mouse.'

'Glad to hear it,' said Sikes. 'Now listen to me, boy.' He put a gun against Oliver's head. 'If you say one word when you're outside with me, I'll shoot you. Understand?'

Oliver nodded, trying hard not to tremble.

Sikes and Oliver started out at five o'clock in the morning, while



it was still dark. They crossed from one side of London to the other. At first the streets were empty, then shops began to open and people started going to work. Gradually, the noise and traffic increased, and as they passed through the meat market at Smithfield, Oliver was amazed by the sight and smells of so many animals, and by the huge crowds of people, all pushing and swearing and shouting. But Bill Sikes marched on without stopping.

Later in the day they were given a lift in a horse and cart from west London out into the country. Night fell, and after walking a few more miles down country roads, they finally arrived at an old house standing alone by a river. It was dark and seemed to be empty. They went inside without knocking.

Inside were two other men, who, at Sikes' command, produced food and drink for him and the boy. Then Sikes told Oliver to get some sleep as they would be going out again later that night. Oliver still had no idea of the purpose of this expedition, but his head ached with tiredness and he soon fell asleep.

At half past one the men got up and checked their equipment, gathering several sticks as well. Sikes and the man called Toby left the house together, with Oliver walking between them. There was now a thick fog and the night was very still as they hurried through the deserted streets of the nearby town. Out in the country again, they walked down several small roads until finally they stopped at a house surrounded by a high wall. As quick as lightning, Toby climbed up and pulled Oliver after him. Inside the garden, they crept towards the house, and now, for the first time, Oliver realized in horror that the purpose of the expedition was robbery, and maybe even murder.

Bill Sikes broke open a small window at the back of the house, then shone his light into Oliver's face.

'Now listen. I'm going to put you through here. Go straight through into the hall and on to the front door, and let us in. And if you don't, you can be sure I'll shoot you.'

Oliver, stupid with terror, was lifted through the window into the house. Desperately, he decided to try to run upstairs and warn the family. He began to creep forwards.

Suddenly, there was a loud noise from the hall.

'Come back!' shouted Sikes. 'Back! Back!'

Oliver stood still, frozen with fear. A light appeared, then two men on the stairs, then a sudden bright flash, and a loud bang. Oliver staggered back. Sikes seized the boy's collar through the window and pulled him back out into the garden.

'They've hit him!' shouted Sikes. 'He's bleeding.'

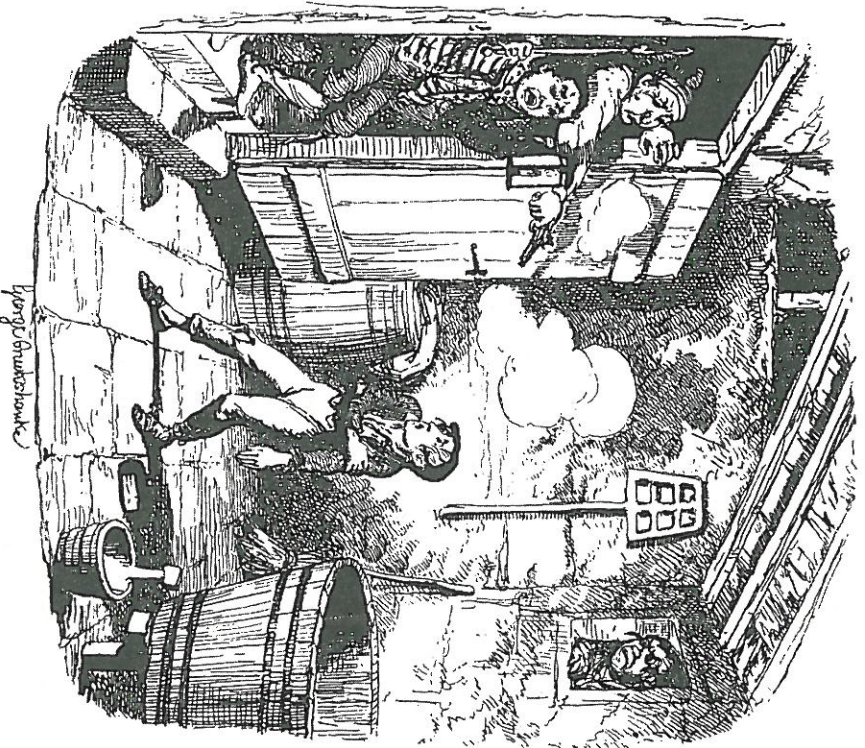
A bell rang loudly, above the noise of more gunshots and the shouts of men. Oliver felt himself being carried across rough ground, and then he saw and heard no more.

### *After the robbery*

The night was bitterly cold. A sharp wind whipped the fallen snow up into the air and blew it into every hole and corner. It was a night for the homeless to lie down and die; and for luckier people to sit close to their fires and thank God they were at home.

In the workhouse where Oliver was born, Mrs Corney – the widow in charge – was making tea by her fire. When she heard a knock at her door, she frowned and called out sharply, 'Come in.' The frown, however, was quickly changed to a sweet smile when





*There was a sudden bright flash and a loud bang.  
Oliver staggered back.*

she saw Mr Bumble enter.

'Hard weather, Mr Bumble,' said the widow.

'Yes, indeed, ma'am,' replied the beadle. 'We've had to give out

to the poor people in this town great quantities of bread and cheese today, and they're still complaining. Why, one man even came back and demanded some free fire-wood! What does he want that for? People are never satisfied. Give them one thing today, and tomorrow they'll ask for something else!

Mrs Corney agreed that it was very shocking. They discussed some workhouse business together, and then Mr Bumble looked hopefully at the teapot. Mrs Corney offered him some tea. Instantly, Mr Bumble sat down by the fire and gave the widow such a warm smile that her face turned a delicate pink. She passed Mr Bumble the tea-cup, and as he took it, he managed to give her hand a little stroke. 'You're a kind-hearted woman, Mrs Corney,' said the beadle.

'Oh, Mr Bumble!' said the widow, smiling shyly. For a while there was a friendly silence between them, then Mr Bumble moved his chair closer to the widow's. Mrs Corney, of course, did not notice this, but when the beadle's arm began to slide around her waist, she felt she must make a small protest.

Encouraged by this response, Mr Bumble immediately gave her a kiss, but at this interesting moment there was a sudden knock at the door. Mr Bumble jumped to his feet and went to the other end of the room.

'Please, Mrs Corney,' said a voice outside. 'Old Sally is going fast.'

'Well, what can I do to help her?' asked Mrs Corney angrily.

'Nothing, ma'am,' replied the old woman outside. 'But she says she has something to tell you, which you must hear. She won't die quietly till you come.'

Complaining loudly, Mrs Corney asked Mr Bumble to wait until she came back. Then she followed the old woman up the stairs.