

Old Sally lay in bed in a freezing cold room. The fire was so small and mean that it gave no warmth at all.

Mrs Corney bent over the bed, and the dying woman opened her eyes. 'Come closer,' she murmured. 'Let me whisper in your ear.' She held onto Mrs Corney's arm and pulled her down towards her. 'In this same room I once helped a pretty young woman who came in with cut and bleeding feet, who gave birth to a boy and then died.'

'Well?' asked Mrs Corney impatiently.

'I robbed her. She was hardly dead before I stole it!'

'Stole what?'

'It! The only thing she had. It was gold. It could have saved her life!'

'Gold? Who was this mother? Tell me!'

'She told me to look after it when she died.' The old woman's mind was getting confused. 'She trusted me, poor girl, and I stole it.'

'Quick, tell me or it may be too late!' said Mrs Corney greedily.

'What was it, and what was the boy's name?'

The old woman could hardly speak. 'Oliver. The gold I stole was

—

'Yes, yes! What?'

The old woman fell back onto the bed, dead.

Mrs Corney hurried back to her room, where Mr Bumble was still admiring her furniture and counting her silver tea-spoons. They sat down again by the fire, and soon Mr Bumble's arm returned to its previous position round Mrs Corney's waist. It was not long before he asked her to marry him, and the widow happily accepted him. While they drank to celebrate the arrangement, Mrs Corney told Mr Bumble about old Sally's death, and the unknown gold object which she had stolen from the dead body of the young woman.

After many expressions of undying love, Mr Bumble finally left the room and returned home, with bright visions of his future.

While these events were happening in the workhouse, the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates were playing cards in Fagin's house. The Dodger, as usual, was winning easily; somehow, he always seemed to know exactly what cards the other players had in their hands. Suddenly there was a faint ring on the bell downstairs, and Toby came in — the man who had gone with Bill Sikes and Oliver to rob the house in Chertsey. Fagin jumped to his feet.

'Where are they?' he screamed. 'Sikes and the boy! Where are they hiding?'

'We failed,' said the robber.

'What happened?'

'They fired and hit the boy. We ran away with Oliver between us, and they chased us with dogs.'

'And the boy? What about the boy?' gasped Fagin.

'His head was hanging down, and he was cold. We needed to go faster so we left him in a field, alive or dead. That's all I know about him.'

Fagin did not wait to hear any more. He gave an angry scream, ran out of the house and hurried through the streets until he reached Bill Sikes' house. As he climbed the stairs, he thought, 'Well, Nancy, if there's anything going on here, I'll find out about it — however clever you are.'

Nancy was alone upstairs in her room, her head on the table.

'She's been drinking again,' thought Fagin. As he closed the door, she woke up. He told her what had happened during the robbery; she said nothing and her head returned to the table. 'And where do you think the boy is now, my dear?' Fagin asked her,

trying hard to see her face. 'Poor little child! Left alone like that.'

Nancy looked up. 'I hope the child's dead. Then he'd be happier than any of us.'

'What!' said Fagin, in amazement.

'It's better like that. The sight of the boy turns me against myself, and all of you.'

'You're drunk.' Fagin suddenly lost his temper. 'The boy's worth a fortune to me – and now a drunken gang has lost him. And if Sikes doesn't return that boy to me, dead or alive, I'll tell the police about him and I'll get Sikes hanged. Just remember that!'

When Fagin left her, Nancy was already back in a drunken sleep, her head lying on the table once more. Fagin went out into the blackness of the night and walked home. He had reached the corner of his street and was searching in his pocket for his key, when a dark figure came out of the shadows and crossed the road towards him. 'I've been waiting here for two hours, Fagin,' said the stranger. 'Where have you been?'

'On your business, my dear,' said Fagin, glancing at him uneasily.

'We'd better talk inside.'

The door closed behind them and they crept quietly up to the top floor in order not to wake the sleeping boys downstairs. They sat in a dark room, the only light coming from a candle burning in the passage outside.

The stranger's name was Monks, and he was in an evil mood.

He listened to Fagin for a while, frowning heavily. 'It was badly planned,' he said angrily. 'Couldn't you have made the boy into an ordinary thief, and then got him arrested and sent out of the country for the rest of his life?'

'But he isn't like the other boys here,' Fagin said. 'I had nothing

to frighten him with. Anyway, I've already helped you. After he was caught by the police, stealing from the bookshop, I got Nancy to get him back. And then she felt sorry for him.'

'Kill her!' Monks said impatiently.

'We can't afford to do that kind of thing,' said Fagin. 'But I can turn the boy into an ordinary thief now. And then Nancy will harden her heart against him. I know how women are. But if he's already dead —'

'That's not my fault!' said Monks quickly. 'I always said to you – do anything you want to him, but don't kill him. I wouldn't have been able to forget it, if you had.'

Suddenly he jumped to his feet, staring at the wall opposite the door. 'What's that?' he whispered, terrified.

'What? Where?' cried Fagin.

'The shadow! I saw the shadow of a woman pass along that wall!'

White-faced, they both ran from the room into the passage. The candle threw long shadows down the stairs, but there was no one there. They listened. Only silence filled the house.

'It was your imagination,' said Fagin, softly.

'I swear I saw it!' replied Monks. They searched all the upstairs rooms. They were empty, and as quiet as death. Monks grew calmer, and eventually left the house at one o'clock in the morning.

The chase down at Chertsey the previous night had not lasted long. There was a lot of noise of men shouting and dogs barking, as the servants from the house pursued the robbers across the fields. But Sikes and Toby wasted no time. They dropped Oliver's unconscious body in a field, and disappeared into the fog and the darkness in

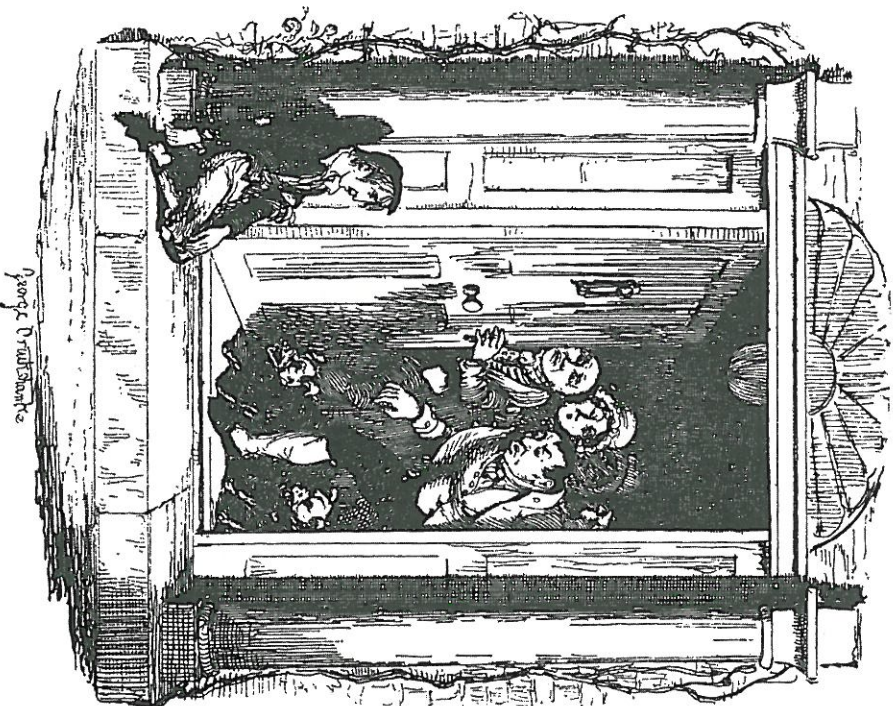
different directions. The three pursuers lost enthusiasm for the chase and agreed among themselves that it was much too dangerous to continue. They returned to the house, keeping close together and trying to look brave.

Morning came, but Oliver still lay in the field as if dead. It began to rain heavily, and after a while Oliver opened his eyes. His left arm was covered in blood and hurting badly. He felt so weak he could hardly stand, but he knew that if he stayed where he was, he would die. Gasping with pain, he forced himself to his feet and with slow, shaky steps, began to walk. He had no idea where he was going, and moved forward mechanically, as though in a dream.

After a while his feet found a road, and he looked round and saw a house in the distance. He decided he would rather die near human beings than in a cold field, so he turned his steps towards the house. As he came nearer, he realized that the house was familiar and he felt faint with terror. But where else could he go? With a last effort, he crawled up the path and knocked on the door, then fell exhausted on the step.

It was now mid-morning. Inside the house the men servants were still describing the night's adventures to the cook and the servant girl, who gasped with appreciative horror at every exciting moment. They were all enjoying themselves very much — when there came a knock at the door. Pale with fright, they all stared at each other. Nobody was keen to answer the knock, so eventually they all went, including the dogs. Very cautiously, they opened the door, and saw nothing more alarming than poor Oliver, curled up in a sad little heap on the step.

Then one of the men gave a shout, seized the boy by a leg and pulled him into the hall. 'Here he is!' he cried excitedly. 'Here's the thief! I shot him last night!'



*They opened the door and saw poor Oliver, curled up in a sad little heap on the step.*

A young lady appeared at the top of the stairs. 'What's going on here? Quiet, please! Is this poor boy very hurt?' 'Very,' said the servant, proudly.

'Then one of you go to town as fast as you can and fetch a policeman and Dr Losberne. The rest of you, help to carry the boy upstairs and put him to bed. Treat him kindly, I beg you.'

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## Oliver starts another life

In a comfortable, pleasant sitting-room, the two ladies of the house waited anxiously for the doctor and the police to arrive. The owner of the house, Mrs Maylie, was an older woman, but her niece, Rose, was a girl of seventeen, whose quiet beauty and gentle charm won all hearts.

As soon as the doctor arrived, he ran breathlessly into the house and burst into the room without knocking. He was clearly a good friend of the ladies.

'I never heard of such a dreadful thing! You should both be dead of fright!' he said to Mrs Maylie. 'In the silence of the night, too! Are you both all right? Why didn't you send for me at once?'

'We are quite all right,' said Rose, smiling. 'But there's an injured boy upstairs whom aunt wants you to see.'

Dr Losberne went up to examine Oliver, and was there for some time. He came down looking rather puzzled, and asked the two ladies to see the boy with him.

'I can promise you there's nothing very frightening about him,' he said.

Instead of the evil-looking robber they expected to see, the two ladies found only a pale, thin child, lying peacefully asleep.

He looked so innocent that Mrs Maylie said, 'This child could

never have been in a gang of robbers!'

'It certainly seems strange,' agreed the doctor, 'but wickedness can hide behind the most gentle face, you know.'

'But he's so young, too!' cried Rose. 'Can you really believe this poor boy is a criminal? Oh, Dr Losberne, and my dear aunt, I beg you both to have pity on him.'

Mrs Maylie did not need persuading, and the doctor could not resist Rose's tears. He had, in fact, an extremely kind heart, which he tried to hide behind a quick, fierce manner – though this usually deceived no one.

'Well, what's to be done, then?' he said quickly. 'We'll have the police here at any moment, ready to take the boy away and throw him into prison!'

Rose begged him to think of a plan, and the doctor thought hard for a few minutes, frowning fiercely. At last he said, 'I've got it!' and rubbed his hands together in satisfaction.

A little later, Oliver woke up and was very anxious to tell his story, although he had lost a lot of blood and was very weak. When the doctor and the ladies had heard all about his sad life, they were quite sure that they wanted to save Oliver from any unfair punishment. So Dr Losberne went down to the kitchen to talk to the three servants who had surprised Sikes and Oliver during the robbery. The doctor folded his arms and gave the men a long, hard stare.

'Tell me, he began, 'can you be *absolutely sure* that the boy upstairs is the same one that was in the house last night? Well?'

The doctor, usually such a friendly man, seemed so angry that the servants stared at him, open-mouthed. The doctor gave them no time to think, and went on fiercely,

'Three men see a boy for about a second in the dark, in the

middle of a lot of smoke and noise. A boy comes to the same house the next day and because one arm is injured, they think he must be the robber. Are you going to swear that this is the same boy? Well? What do you say?' he finished impatiently.

The servants looked at each other in great confusion. Suddenly there was a ring at the gate; the police officers had finally arrived. Dr Losberne gave orders that plenty of beer should be served before the officers went up to see Oliver. He also made sure that the servants had a generous amount of beer, too.

When the officers were finally allowed to see Oliver, Dr Losberne said, 'This is a boy who was shot this morning while walking on a farmer's property where he shouldn't have been. The servants saw him and immediately thought he must be the same boy from last night. But now they say they're sure it's *not* the same boy.'

The servants were by now so confused by beer and excitement that they were not sure of anything at all. The robbers had certainly had a boy with them, they said, but whether this boy was the same boy . . . well, it seemed very doubtful. The police, too, had drunk quite a lot of beer by now, and before long they were very willing to believe that Oliver was not the robber of the night before. They had their own ideas about who committed all the robberies in the area, and Oliver was unknown to them.

At last the police left, and Oliver was allowed to recover in the kind care of Mrs Maylie, Rose, and Dr Losberne. It was several weeks before he was well enough to get out of bed. But then he quickly grew stronger, and every day told his rescuers how grateful he was. One thing, however, caused him unhappiness. He wanted to find Mr Brownlow, the kind old man who had looked after him in London. 'Mr Brownlow would be pleased to know how happy I am now,' he said. So when Dr Losberne offered to take Oliver to

London to see Mr Brownlow, the boy was very pleased.

They set out by coach one fine morning, and when they arrived in London, they went straight to Mr Brownlow's house. Oliver's heart beat with excitement as they stopped outside. But the house was empty. They were told by the people next door that Mr Brownlow had moved to the West Indies six weeks before. Oliver was very disappointed; he had thought about Mr Brownlow so much recently, and had always hoped to find him again. But now the kind old man had moved abroad, still believing Oliver was a lying thief, and he might hold this belief until the day he died.

This was a bitter disappointment to Oliver, but his new friends were still as kind to him as ever. They left the house in Chertsey and moved to a quiet cottage in the country, taking Oliver with them. Spring came, and in the fresh air, away from the noise and smoke and trouble of the city, Oliver began a new life. He went for walks with Rose and Mrs Maylie, or Rose read to him, and he worked hard at his lessons. He felt as if he had left behind forever the world of crime and hardship and poverty.

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### *Life in the country*

The weeks slipped contentedly past, and spring turned into summer. Oliver was now a strong and healthy boy, and very fond of Rose and Mrs Maylie – as they were of him.

One hot summer evening, after a walk in the country, Rose became very weak and pale, and confessed she felt ill. By the next morning she was in a dangerous fever, and Mrs Maylie and Oliver

were afraid she might die. Mrs Maylie sent Oliver to the nearest town, four miles away, to post two express letters. One was to Dr Losberne in Chertsey, the other to Harry Maylie, Mrs Maylie's son.

Oliver, filled with anxiety, ran as fast as he could along the country roads and across the fields until, hot and exhausted, he reached the town. He posted the letters and turned to hurry home again. As he was running past a pub in the main street, he accidentally bumped into a tall man in black coming out. The man stared at Oliver. 'What the devil's this?' he said, stepping back.

'I'm sorry, sir. I was in a hurry, and didn't see you.'

The man murmured angrily to himself, 'Who would have thought it? Curse him! I can't get away from him!'

'I'm sorry, sir,' repeated Oliver, frightened by the man's wild, staring eyes.

'The devil break your bones!' the man said through his teeth. 'What are you doing here?' He raised his hand and started towards Oliver with a mad look in his eyes, but fell violently to the ground, shaking and gasping, in a fit. People hurried up and helped the man into the pub while Oliver, thinking that the man was mad, ran quickly home.

Mrs Maylie and Oliver passed a sleepless night, and Rose grew steadily worse as the fever burned in her. Oliver said every prayer he had ever learnt ten times over.

Late the next day Dr Losberne and Harry Maylie arrived, and the house was full of worried faces and anxious whispers. But the danger passed, and by the next night Dr Losberne was able to announce that, though seriously ill, Rose would not die. Oliver cried for joy.

A day or two later, Mrs Maylie talked privately to her son. Harry was a handsome young man of about twenty-five, with a cheerful,

honest face and friendly manners. He was clearly very fond of Rose.

'I know that you want to marry Rose,' Mrs Maylie told her son, 'and she is the nicest person I know. But I want you to remember one thing — her birth.'

'Mother, that means nothing to me,' said the young man. 'I love her.'

'I know you do, Harry, but she herself is well aware of her doubtful birth, and this might affect her answer if you ask her to marry you. I know you have ambitions to enter politics. If you marry a woman with a stain on her name, even though it's not her fault, it might spoil your chances of success in life. Society is cruel, Harry. People might use the knowledge of your wife's doubtful birth against you, and against your children, too. And one day, you might begin to regret your marriage.'

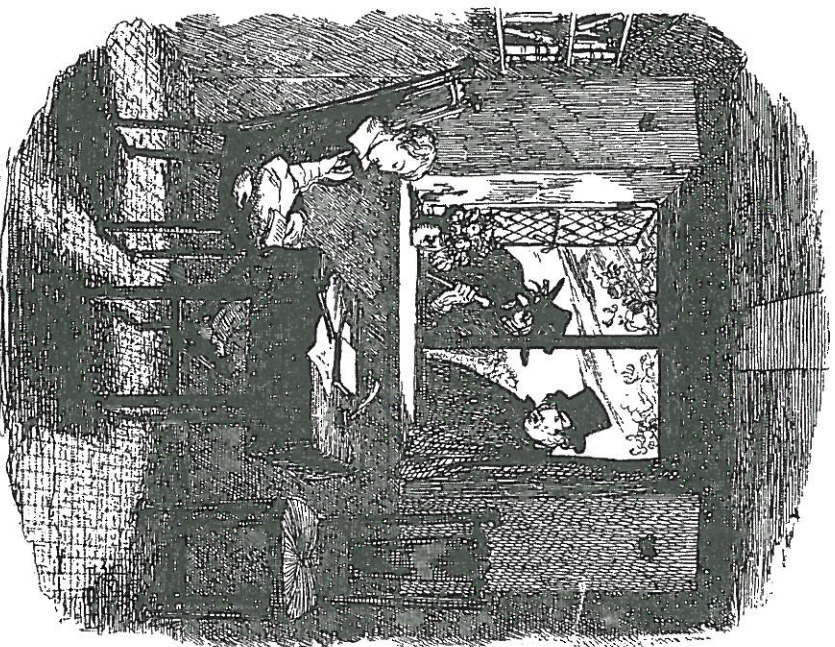
'Only a selfish man would do that, Mother!' Harry answered impatiently. 'No, I am quite determined. I have loved Rose for a long time, and nothing will ever change that.'

Mrs Maylie sighed. 'And she, I know, is very fond of you. But she herself may try to protect you, and refuse an offer of marriage from you, for your sake. Remember that, Harry. But now, I must go back and sit with her.'

'Will you tell her how much I've worried about her?' asked Harry. 'And how anxious I am to see her again?'

'Of course I will,' replied Mrs Maylie.

Some days after this conversation, Oliver was sitting in the room where he studied in the evenings. It was a warm night, and he had been studying hard for some hours. He fell asleep at his desk and started dreaming. He dreamt that he was in Fagin's house again, and could see the old man sitting in his corner, whispering to another man. 'Yes, my dear,' he heard Fagin say, 'you're right.



*In his dream, Oliver heard Fagin say, 'Yes, my dear, you're right. That's him.'*

That's him.'

In Oliver's dream the other man answered, 'Of course it is! I told you I'd seen him. I'd recognize him anywhere. If I walked across his unmarked grave, I'd know it was him buried under the ground.'

He said this with such hatred that Oliver woke up from fear. In front of him, at the open window, so near he could almost touch them, were Fagin and the strange, wild man he had bumped into outside the pub in the town. In a flash, they were gone. Oliver sat still, white with terror, for a second, then shouted loudly for help.

Harry and Dr Losberne came running, and hearing what had happened, they rushed outside into the night and searched the garden and the fields around. There was no sign of anybody.

'It must have been a bad dream, Oliver,' said Harry, breathless after running through the fields. He had heard all about Oliver's past from his mother.

'No,' replied Oliver, still frightened. 'I saw them both as plainly as I see you now.'

Nothing more was seen or heard of the two men, and after a few days, the event was forgotten. Rose recovered rapidly and was soon able to go outside again. Harry Maylie waited a few days, then, as his mother had expected, he asked Rose to marry him. And as his mother had warned him, Rose refused.

'Don't you love me?' he asked her, holding her hand.

'I do,' she whispered, 'but please try to forget me. It would ruin your future as a politician if anybody found out about my birth. I could never, never forgive myself.'

Harry paused for a few minutes. 'Tell me one thing, dear Rose. Could you have accepted if your past had been different? Or if I had been poor and friendless, with no hope of riches or success?'

'I could,' answered Rose, covering her face to hide her tears. 'But as you are, I can never be more than a friend to you.'

'I shall ask you once more,' said Harry softly. 'In a year's time or less, I shall ask you to change your mind.'

The girl shook her head and smiled sadly. 'No, it will be useless.'

Harry left the next day, having asked Oliver to write to him secretly with news of his mother and Rose. From an upstairs window, Rose watched him leave with tears in her eyes.

Mr Bumble was now a married man, and not a happy one. He was no longer a beadle but the manager of the workhouse, and his wife, formerly Mrs Corney, scolded and argued with him day and night. One evening, after a particularly violent fight, when she threw things at him and chased him out of the house, he went for a walk alone through the town. He felt very sorry for himself, and finally went into a pub to find comfort in gin-and-water. A tall dark man, sitting in the corner, watched Mr Bumble while he drank. The stranger's clothes were dusty and muddy, as if he had travelled a long way. Mr Bumble began to feel uncomfortable at the man's hard stare, and tried to avoid meeting his eyes.

'I've seen you before,' the stranger said, eventually. 'You were the beadle here.'

'I was. But I don't recognize you.'

'It doesn't matter. I came here to look for you, and I'm lucky to have found you. I'd like some information.' He pushed a couple of coins across the table.

'What information?' asked Mr Bumble suspiciously, slipping the coins into his pocket.

'About a workhouse birth. A boy called Oliver Twist.'

'Young Twist! I remember him! He was a dreadful —'

'It's not him I want to talk about,' interrupted the stranger. 'I've heard enough of him. It's the old woman who was the nurse for his mother. Where is she?'

'Oh—she died last winter,' said Mr Bumble. Then he remembered that his wife had been there when old Sally had died, and he realized

that this information might be worth something. He told the man that one woman had been with the nurse when she died, and had heard some secret from her.

'Where can I find this woman?' the stranger asked quickly, showing in his pale face how important this was to him.

'I can bring her to meet you tomorrow,' said Mr Bumble.

'All right. Down by the river, at nine in the evening.' The man wrote the address on a piece of paper.

'And your name?' asked Mr Bumble.

'Monks,' replied the stranger, 'but you don't need to remember it.' Then he quickly left the pub.

The next evening was dark and cloudy; a storm threatened and already the first drops of rain were falling. Mr and Mrs Bumble walked up the main street of the town, then turned towards a group of ruined old houses next to the river. Mr Bumble went first, carrying a dim light, and his wife followed closely behind. At the oldest and most ruined building, they stopped and Mr Bumble took out his piece of paper. The first distant crash of thunder shook the air, and the rain began to pour down heavily. Then they heard Monks calling out of an upstairs window.

'Is that the man?' Mrs Bumble asked her husband.

'Yes.'

'Then be careful to say as little as you can. Don't tell him I'm your wife.'

Monks opened a small door, saying impatiently, 'Come in! Don't keep me waiting!'

Mr Bumble was only brave when dealing with poor, helpless people. He felt very uneasy about entering this dark building with an ill-tempered stranger. However, he was equally afraid of his wife. Nervously, he followed her through the door.



Inside, Monks stared at Mrs Bumble for some time. 'So this is the woman, is it?'

'Yes,' replied Mr Bumble cautiously.

As they walked upstairs, there was a bright flash of lightning outside, followed by loud thunder. They sat down at the table and Monks started immediately.

'So you were present when the old woman died, is that right? And she told you something?' He stared at Mrs Bumble again.

'Yes,' said Mrs Bumble. 'Something about the mother of Oliver Twist. But first, how much will you pay me for the information?'

'If it's what I want to hear – twenty-five pounds,' said Monks.

'But it's a lot of money for something which has been lying dead for twelve years.' Reluctantly, he pushed the money across the table towards her, then bent forward to listen. The faces of the three nearly touched, as the two men leant over the table to hear what the woman had to say, and the woman leant over towards them so that they could hear her whisper. In the dim lamplight their faces looked pale and ghostly.

'The old woman who was the nurse died with only me in the room,' said Mrs Bumble.

'No one else was there?' asked Monks fiercely.

'No one.'

'Good,' said Monks. 'Go on.'

She spoke about a young woman who had given birth in the same bed some years before. The child was Oliver Twist. And this nurse had robbed the child's mother.'

'Robbed in life?' asked Monks.

'In death. She stole from the body when it was hardly cold. But the old woman fell back and died before she could tell me more.'

'It's a lie!' shouted Monks furiously. 'You know more! I'll kill

you both if you don't tell me what else she said.'

'She said no more,' repeated Mrs Bumble calmly, showing (unlike Mr Bumble) no fear of the strange man's violence. 'But in her hand I found a piece of dirty paper.'

'Which contained . . .?'

'Nothing. It was only a receipt from a pawnbroker. I went to the pawnbroker and got back a little gold locket. Inside was a gold wedding ring and on the locket itself, the name "Agnes".' She put the locket on the table in front of Monks.

He picked it up immediately and looked at it closely, his hands shaking. 'Is this all?'

'It is. And now I want to ask you a question. What do you intend to do with the locket?'

'This. So it can never be used against me.' Monks suddenly pushed the table to one side and opened a small door in the floor. Down below rushed the river, its muddy waters swollen by the heavy rain.

'If you threw a man's body down there, where would it be tomorrow?' asked Monks.

'Twelve miles down the river, and cut to pieces,' replied Mr Bumble in a shaky voice.

Monks tied the locket to a heavy weight and dropped it into the water. In a second, it was gone. The three of them looked into each other's faces, and seemed to breathe more freely.

'Now we have nothing more to say,' said Monks, with a threatening look at Mr Bumble. 'And nothing to say to anyone else either. Do you understand?'

'Certainly,' said Mr Bumble, very politely. He moved away from the strange man, anxious to leave quickly.

At the door to the street, Monks turned again to Mr Bumble.



*'If you threw a man's body down there, where would it be tomorrow?'*  
asked Monks.

'And if we ever meet again, we don't know each other. Do you understand that as well?'

'Perfectly,' said the relieved Mr Bumble, moving away into the rain and pulling his wife with him.

### Nancy makes a visit

On the evening after the Bumbles' little business meeting, Mr Bill Sikes, waking from a sleep, called out to ask the time.

The room he was lying in was very small and dirty. It was a different room from the one he had occupied before the Chertsey expedition, but it was in the same poor part of London. There were so few possessions or comforts in the room that it was clear Mr Sikes had met hard times. He himself was thin and pale from illness, and was lying on the bed, wrapped in an old coat. The white dog lay on the floor next to him.

Seated by the window was Nancy, repairing Sikes' old jacket. She, too, was thin and pale. At Sikes' voice she raised her head from her work. 'Not long past seven,' she said. 'How do you feel now, Bill?'

'As weak as water. Help me get up, will you?'

As Nancy helped him out of bed, Sikes swore and cursed at her clumsiness. Illness had not improved his temper.

'You wouldn't speak like that if you knew how kindly I've nursed you these last few days,' said Nancy. 'So many nights, I've looked after you.' She sat down in a chair, exhausted.

'Get up!' shouted Sikes. 'What's wrong with you?'

But Nancy was unable to get up. Her head fell back against the chair and she fainted.

Sikes swore and cursed again, but Nancy remained unconscious.

'What's the matter here?' asked a voice from the door, and Fagin, followed by the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates, entered the room. When they saw Nancy, they hurried to help her. Charley