

expression, the colour went out of her face. 'What's the matter?' she said in alarm.

'You know what.' Sikes took out his gun, but realizing, even in his madness, that a shot might be heard, he beat her twice across the face with it as hard as he could. She fell, with a low cry of pain and terror, almost blinded by the blood that flowed from the cut on her forehead. The murderer staggered to a corner, seized a heavy stick and struck her down.

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### *The end of the gang*

The sun burst upon the crowded city in all its brightness. It lit up every corner of London, the great houses of the rich, and the miserable homes of the poor. It shone everywhere, even into the room where the murdered woman lay. The horror of that scene was even more dreadful in the clear morning light.

Sikes sat there, unable to move, looking at the body. He had thrown the blood-covered stick into the fire, then washed himself and his clothes. He had cut out the bits of his clothes that were stained and burnt them too, but there were still bloodstains all over the floor. Even the dog's feet were bloody.

Finally, he forced himself to leave the room, pulling the dog out with him and locking the door behind him. He walked rapidly north, towards Highgate, then on to Hampstead. On the open land of Hampstead Heath, away from people and houses, he found a place in a field where he could sleep without being disturbed.

But before long he was up again and running. This time he ran

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back towards London for a while. Then he turned and went north again, sometimes walking, sometimes running, with no clear purpose in his mind. Eventually, he felt hungry, and changed direction towards Hendon, a quiet place away from the crowds, where he could buy food. But even the children and chickens there seemed to look at him with suspicion. So he turned back towards Hampstead Heath again, without having eaten, uncertain where to go.

At last he turned north again, his dog still running at his heels, and set off to a village just outside London. He stopped at a small, quiet pub and bought a meal, then went on again. It was now dark and as he continued walking, he felt as if Nancy were following him, her shadow on the road, her last low cry in the wind. If he stopped, the ghostly figure did the same. If he ran, it ran too, moving stiffly, like a corpse. Sometimes he turned, determined to drive the ghost away, but his blood ran cold with terror. Every time he turned, the ghost turned too, and was still behind him.

Finally, he found another field where he could hide. He lay down, unable to sleep, his mind filled with visions of the dead girl. Her wide, dead eyes stared at him, watching him through a curtain of blood.

Suddenly he heard shouting in the distance. He jumped to his feet and saw that the sky seemed on fire. Sheets of flame shot into the air, driving clouds of smoke in his direction. He heard an alarm bell, and more shouts of 'Fire!' Running with his dog across the fields, he joined the crowds of men and women fighting the fire. He could forget his own terror in this new danger, and he worked all night with the crowd, shouting, running and working together to stop the flames destroying more buildings.

In the morning the mad excitement was over, and the dreadful

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memory of his crime returned – more terrifying than ever. In desperation, he decided to go back to London.

‘At least there’ll be somebody I can speak to,’ he thought to himself. ‘And it’s a better hiding-place than out here in the country. I’ll hide there for a week, get some money out of Fagin, then escape to France.’

Suddenly he remembered the dog – people would be looking for his dog as well as himself. He decided to drown the animal. But the dog smelt the man’s fear, and turned and ran away from him faster than it had ever run in its life.

‘You have a choice, Mr Monks,’ said Mr Brownlow. ‘You have been kidnapped and brought here to my house. You can either tell me what I want to know, or I’ll have you arrested, instantly, for fraud and robbery. It’s your choice. And you must decide now. At once.’

Monks hesitated and looked at the old man, but Mr Brownlow’s expression was so serious and determined that the younger man realized it was pointless to protest. ‘I didn’t expect this treatment from my father’s oldest friend,’ said Monks angrily, sitting down with a frown on his face.

‘Yes, I was your father’s oldest friend,’ said Mr Brownlow. ‘And I know all about you – how your father, while still a boy, was forced by his family into an unhappy marriage with an older woman, and how you were the result of that marriage. I also know that your parents separated, hating each other by the end.’

‘Well – what’s so important about that?’

‘When they’d been separated for ten years,’ said Mr Brownlow, ‘your father met another family. There were two daughters, one nineteen years old and the other only two or three. Your father



*Sikes decided to drown his dog.*

became engaged to the older daughter. At this point one of his rich relations died and left him a lot of money in his will. Your father had to travel to Italy to receive his inheritance, and while there, he

became ill and died. Your mother, who was living with you in Paris, immediately rushed to Italy when she heard the news. As your father had made no will of his own, all the relation's money came to you and her.'

Monks listened with close attention, biting his lip and staring at the floor.

'Before your father went to receive that money, he came to see me,' continued Mr Brownlow slowly, his eyes fixed on Monks' face.

'I never heard that before,' said Monks, looking up suddenly, a suspicious expression on his face.

'He left me a picture of the poor girl he wanted to marry. He talked wildly about shame and guilt, and how he would give part of the money he'd inherited to his wife and to you, and use the rest to escape from England with the girl he loved. He refused to tell me any more details.'

Monks breathed more easily, and even smiled.

'But,' said Mr Brownlow, pulling his chair nearer to the other man, 'by chance I was able to rescue your brother Oliver from a life of misery and —'

'What?' cried Monks.

Mr Brownlow continued without a pause. 'And when he was recovering from his sickness here in my house, I noticed how similar he looked to the girl's face in the picture. But he was taken away before I could discover his history – as you know very well.'

'You can't prove anything!' said Monks.

'I can. I heard that you were in the West Indies. I went there to try and find you to see if you knew anything about Oliver, but you'd already left. I returned to London, and was unable to find you until two hours ago.'

'And now what? You can't prove that Oliver's my brother.' Monks smiled unpleasantly.

'I couldn't before,' said Mr Brownlow, standing up. 'But now I can. There was a will, but your mother destroyed it. This will mentioned a child that would be born later; this was Oliver, the child you met later by accident. You noticed his resemblance to your father and you became suspicious. You then went back to his birthplace, found proof of his birth and the fact that he's your half-brother, and destroyed that proof.'

Monks sat in silence, his eyes filled with fear.

'Yes,' continued Mr Brownlow fiercely, 'shadows on the wall have caught your whispers with Fagin, and brought them to my ear. For the sake of that innocent child, whom you wanted to destroy. And now murder has been done, and you are as guilty of that as if you had struck the blow yourself!'

'No, no,' said Monks quickly. 'I knew nothing of that. Nothing at all.' He was silent for a while, realizing how much was known about him. Hatred and fear fought inside him, but he was a coward at heart. At last, seeing no escape, he raised his head. 'I will admit everything – in front of witnesses, if necessary.'

Mr Brownlow nodded coldly. 'I will prepare a document for you to sign. You must give Oliver what is really his, and then you can go where you please.'

At that moment Dr Losberne rushed into the room. 'The murderer will be taken tonight! His dog's been found.'

'And Fagin?' asked Mr Brownlow.

'They're sure of him. They may have him already.'

Mr Brownlow turned back to Monks. 'Have you made up your mind?'

'Yes,' replied Monks. 'And you promise – it'll remain a secret?'

No police, or charges of fraud against me?’

‘Yes,’ said Mr Brownlow. ‘You have my promise. For now, you must remain here, locked in this room. I will come for you tomorrow evening and take you to sign a confession in front of witnesses.’

Mr Brownlow then left the room with the doctor, and they eagerly discussed the news of the hunt for the criminals. ‘My blood boils with anger,’ said Mr Brownlow. ‘This poor murdered girl must be revenged. You stay here and guard Monks. I’ll go out and get the latest news.’

The two men parted, each in a fever of excitement.

Down by the river Thames was a district called Rotherhithe, one of the dirtiest and roughest places in London. The houses next to the river had no owners; they were broken down and ruined, but could be defended against attack. In an upper room of one of these houses, were three members of Fagin’s gang.

‘When was Fagin taken, then?’ asked the man called Toby.

‘Two o’clock this afternoon. Charley and I escaped up the chimney, but Noah was caught. Bet went to see Nancy and when she saw the body, she started screaming and wouldn’t stop. She’s been taken to hospital.’

‘What’s happened to Charley Bates?’

‘He’ll come here when it’s dark. It’s too dangerous now.’

‘We’re in trouble,’ said Toby. ‘Fagin’s going to hang – that’s certain.’

‘You should have seen him when he was caught,’ said another robber. ‘The police carried him through the crowd while all the people jumped at him, screaming and trying to attack him.’

Suddenly Sikes’ dog ran into the room. All the robbers rushed

out immediately to look for Sikes, but there was no sign of him. They returned to the upstairs room.

‘I hope he’s not coming here,’ said Toby.

‘The dog’s come a long way,’ said another man. ‘Covered in mud, and tired out.’

They sat there in silence, wondering where Sikes was. It was already dark when they heard a sudden, hurried knock at the door downstairs.

Toby went to the window to look down, then pulled his head back in, his face pale with fear. There was no need to tell the others who it was.

‘We must let him in,’ said Toby, although none of them wanted to see him. Toby went down to the door and returned, followed by Sikes. White-faced, with a three-day-old beard, hollow cheeks and staring eyes, Sikes looked like a ghost. No one said a word.

‘Nothing to say to me?’ Sikes asked.

The only answer was a low shout of many voices from outside in the distance, coming closer. Lights appeared. Looking out, Sikes saw a stream of people crossing the bridge towards them. Then there was a loud knocking on the door and more shouts from the crowd.

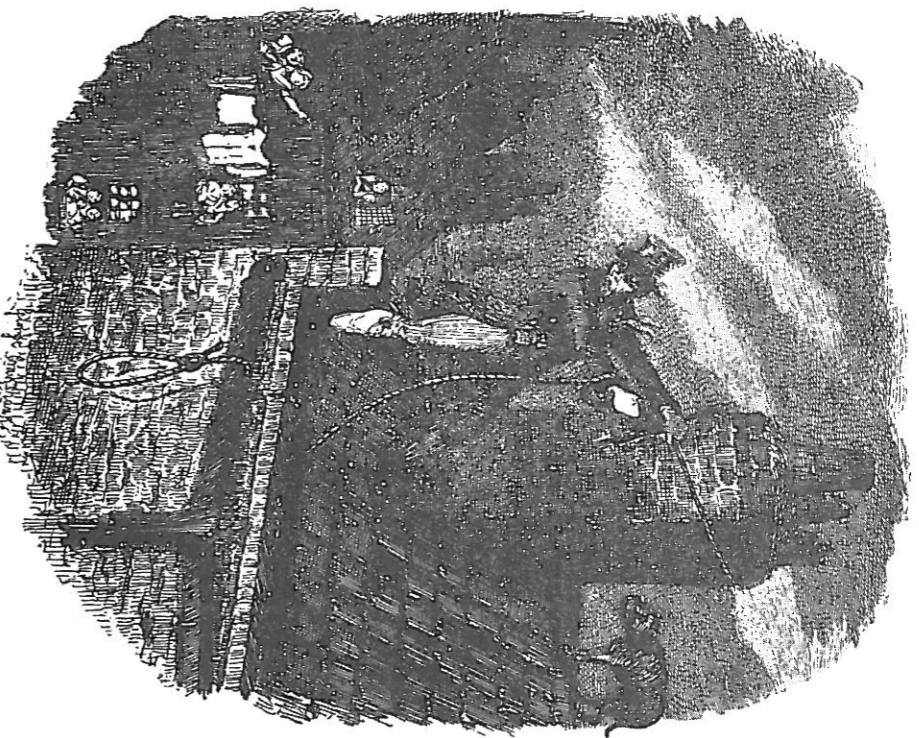
‘The doors are made of metal and they’re locked and chained,’ said Toby. The three robbers watched Sikes nervously, as if he were a wild animal.

‘Bring a ladder!’ shouted some of the crowd below.

‘Give me a rope, quick,’ Sikes said to the others. ‘I’ll go the other way, climb down the back and escape over the river. Get me a rope – now! Or I’ll do three more murders!’

A minute later, Sikes appeared on the roof and the shouts from the crowd below swelled to a great roar. Then the front door was smashed down and people streamed into the house. Sikes quickly

tied the rope around the chimney, then began to tie the other end around himself, ready to lower himself to the ground behind the house. But just as he put the rope over his head, he screamed in



*Sikes quickly tied the rope around the chimney.*

terror and threw his arms above his head. He staggered back, slipped and fell over the edge of the roof. As he fell, the rope tightened around his neck with a horrible jerk. In a second the murderer was dead, and there he hung, his body swinging gently from side to side. The dog, which had followed its master onto the roof, jumped down towards the lifeless body, missed, and fell dead on the stones below.

14

### *The end of the mystery*

The next day Oliver travelled with Mr Brownlow, Dr Losberne, Mrs Maylie and Rose back to his birthplace. He had been told a little of his history, and knew that there would be more explanations at the end of this journey. He was anxious and uncertain, wondering what he would hear.

But towards the end of the journey, he began to recognize familiar places, and in great excitement pointed them out to Rose. There was the path he had taken when he had run away. There, across the fields, was the 'baby farm'. Then, as they drove into the town, he saw the house of Mr Sowerberry the undertaker, and the workhouse that had been his prison.

They stopped at the biggest hotel in the town, and went in to their rooms. During dinner Mr Brownlow stayed in a separate room, and the older members of the group went in and out with serious faces. Mrs Maylie came back with her eyes red from crying. All this made Rose and Oliver, who had not been told any new secrets, very nervous and uncomfortable.

At nine o'clock Dr Losberne and Mr Brownlow brought Monks

into the room. Oliver was very surprised; this was the same man he had bumped into once outside a pub, and seen another time with Fagin, looking in at him through the window of the country cottage. Oliver was told that Monks was his half-brother, and the boy stared at him in shock and amazement. Monks looked back at him with hatred.

'We have the whole story here in these papers,' said Mr Brownlow, putting them on the table. 'All we need now is for you to sign them, Monks. And to tell Oliver what happened.'

Monks started hesitantly. 'My father had arrived in Italy to collect the money he had inherited, when suddenly he fell ill. When he died, we found two papers in his desk. One was a letter to his girl; the other was a will.'

'What was the letter?' asked Mr Brownlow.

'It was written when he was ill, telling the girl how ashamed he was that she was pregnant. He asked her not to remember him as a bad man but as someone who had made a mistake. He reminded her of the day he'd given her the locket and ring.'

Oliver's tears fell fast as he listened to the story of his father.

'And what about the will?' asked Mr Brownlow.

Monks was silent.

'The will', continued Mr Brownlow, speaking for him, 'was in the same spirit as the letter. He talked of the misery of his marriage to his wife, and the evil character of you, Monks, his only son, who had been brought up by your mother to hate him. He left you and your mother an annual income of £800. The rest of his property he left to his girl Agnes and to their child, if it were born alive, and if it showed itself to be of a good, kind character. The money would only go to you, Monks, as the older son, if the younger turned out to be as evil as you.'

'My mother', said Monks, 'burnt this will, and never sent the letter. The girl Agnes left her home in secret, so that her pregnancy would not bring shame on her family. I swore to my mother, when she was dying, that if I ever found my half-brother, I would do him all the harm I could. He would feel my hatred like a whip on his back. I paid Fagin to trap Oliver into a life of crime. But then he escaped, and that stupid, interfering girl Nancy talked to you. If I'd had the chance, I would have finished what I'd begun.' Monks stared at Oliver, and his lips moved in a silent curse.

'And the locket and ring?' asked Mr Brownlow.

'I bought them from Mr and Mrs Bumble, who had stolen them from the nurse, who had stolen them from Agnes, the dead girl. I've already told you how I threw them into the river.'

Mr Brownlow turned to Rose. 'I have one more thing to explain,' he said to the girl.

'I don't know if I have the strength to hear it now,' she murmured, 'having heard so much already.'

Mr Brownlow put his hand under her arm. 'You have a great deal of courage, dear child,' he said kindly. He turned to Monks.

'Do you know this young lady, sir?'

'Yes.'

'I don't know you,' said Rose faintly.

'The father of poor Agnes had *two* daughters,' said Mr Brownlow. 'What happened to the other one, who was only a young child at the time?'

'When Agnes disappeared,' replied Monks, 'her father changed his name and moved to a lonely place in Wales, where no one would know about the family shame. He died very soon afterwards, and this young daughter was taken in by some poor people. My mother hated Agnes and everybody connected with her. She hunted for this

young sister, and made sure that her life would be unhappy. She told the poor people who had taken her in that the girl was illegitimate, and that she came from a bad family with an evil reputation. So the child led a life of miserable poverty – until Mrs Maylie saw her by chance, pitied her, and took her home.’

‘And do you see this young sister now?’ asked Mr Brownlow.

‘Yes. Standing by your side.’

Rose could hardly speak. ‘So . . . Oliver is my nephew?’

‘I can never call you aunt,’ cried Oliver. ‘You’ll always be my own dear sister!’

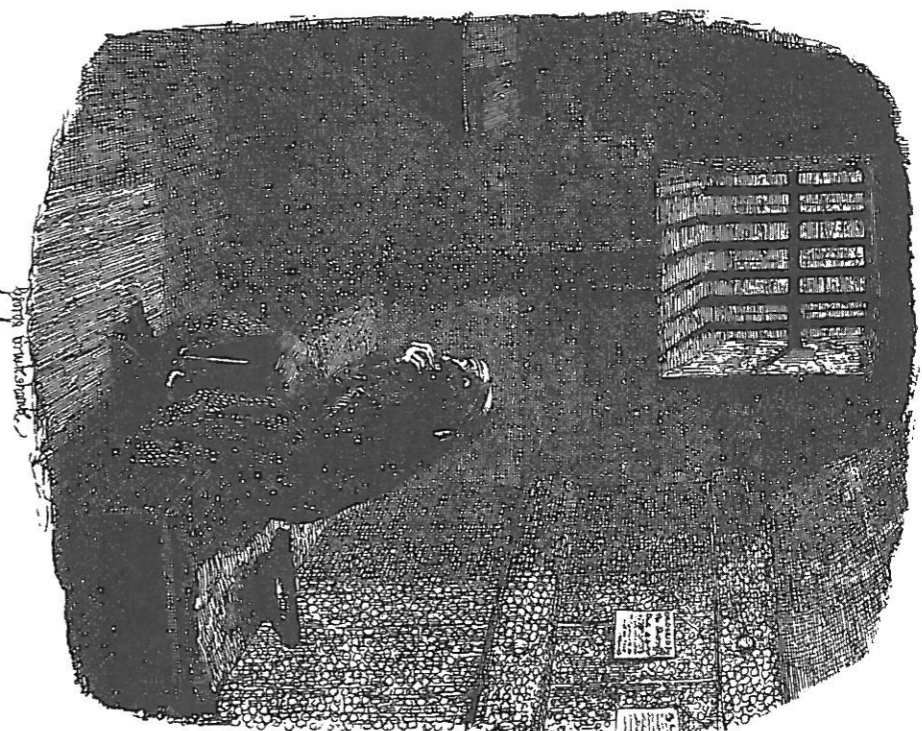
They ran into each other’s arms, both of them crying in their happiness. A father, sister and mother had been lost and gained, and it was too much for one evening. They stood for a long time in silence, and the others left them alone.

The court was full of faces; from every corner, all eyes were on one man – Fagin. In front of him, behind, above, below – he seemed surrounded by staring eyes. Not one of the faces showed any sympathy towards him; all were determined that he should hang. At last, there was a cry of ‘Silence!’ and everyone looked towards the door. The jury returned, and passed close to Fagin. He could tell nothing from their faces; they could have been made of stone. Then there was complete stillness – not a whisper, not a breath . . . Guilty. The whole court rang with a great shout, echoing through all the rooms as the crowd ran out of the building to tell all the people waiting outside. The news was that he would die on Monday.

Fagin thought of nothing but death that night. He began to remember all the people he had ever known who had been hanged. He could hardly count them. They might have sat in the same prison cell as he was now. He thought about death by hanging –

the rope, the cloth bag over the head, the sudden change from strong men to bundles of clothes, hanging at the end of a rope.

As his last night came, despair seized Fagin’s evil soul. He could



*As his last night came, despair seized Fagin’s evil soul.*

not sit still, and hurried up and down his small cell, gasping with terror, his eyes flashing with hate and anger. Then he lay trembling on his stone bed and listened to the clock striking the hours. Where would he be when those hours came round again?

In the middle of that Sunday night, Mr Brownlow and Oliver were allowed to enter the prison. Several strong doors were unlocked, and eventually they entered Fagin's cell. The old robber was sitting on the bed, whispering to himself, his face more like a trapped animal's than a human's.

'You have some papers, Fagin,' said Mr Brownlow quietly, 'which were given to you by Monks to look after.'

'It's a lie!' replied Fagin, not looking at him. 'I haven't got any.' 'For the love of God,' said Mr Brownlow, very seriously, 'don't lie to us now, on the night before your death. You know that Sikes is dead and Monks has confessed. Where are the papers?'

'I'll tell you, Oliver,' said Fagin. 'Come here.' He whispered to him. 'They're in a bag up the chimney in the front room at the top of the house. But I want to talk to you, my dear.'

'Yes,' said Oliver. 'Will you pray with me?'

'Outside, outside,' said Fagin, pushing the boy in front of him towards the door. 'Say I've gone to sleep – they'll believe you. You can take me out with you when you go.' The old man's eyes shone with a mad light.

'It's no good,' said Mr Brownlow, taking Oliver's hand. 'He's gone too far, and we can never reach him now.'

The cell door opened, and as the visitors left, Fagin started struggling and fighting with his guards, screaming so loudly that the prison walls rang with the sound.

They left the prison building in the grey light of dawn. Outside in the street, huge crowds were already gathering, joking and

laughing, and pushing to get the best places near the great black platform, where the rope hung ready for its morning's work.

Less than three months later, Rose married Harry Maylie. For her sake, Harry had abandoned his political ambitions, and had become a simple man of the church. There was no longer any mystery about Rose's birth, but even if there had been, Harry would not have cared. They lived next to the church in a peaceful village. Mrs Maylie went to live with them, and spent the rest of her days in quiet contentment.

Mr Brownlow adopted Oliver as his son. They moved to a house in the same quiet village, and were just as happy. Dr Losberne discovered suddenly that the air in Chertsey did not suit him. In less than three months he, too, had moved – to a cottage just outside the village, where he took up gardening and fishing with great energy and enthusiasm.

Mr Brownlow suggested that half the remaining money from the will should be given to Monks and the other half to Oliver, although by law it should all have gone to Oliver alone. Oliver was glad to accept the suggestion. Monks went off with his money to the other side of the world, where he spent it quickly and was soon in prison for another act of fraud. In prison he became ill and died. The remaining members of Fagin's gang died in similar ways in other distant countries, all except Charley Bates, who turned his back on his past life of crime and lived honestly, as a farmer.

Noah Claypole was given a free pardon for telling the police about Fagin. He soon became employed as an informer for the police, spying on people and telling the police about anyone who had broken the law. Mr and Mrs Bumble lost their jobs and became poorer and poorer, eventually living in poverty in the same



GLOSSARY

workhouse that they had once managed.  
 In that quiet country village, the years passed peacefully. Mr Brownlow filled the mind of his adopted son with knowledge, and as he watched the boy grow up, he was reminded more and more of his old friend, Oliver's father. The two orphans, Rose and Oliver, led lives that were truly happy. The hardships that they had once suffered had left no bitterness in their gentle souls, and all their lives they showed the mercy and kindness to others that God himself shows to all things that breathe.

- beadle** a kind of former police officer who dealt with the poor people of a town or country district
- career** a person's working life and its progress or development
- cart** a simple uncovered carriage, pulled by a horse
- cell** a small room for one or more prisoners in a prison
- charity (school)** a free school for poor children, paid for by rich people
- coach** (in this story) a large four-wheeled carriage pulled by horses
- coffin** a wooden box in which a dead person is buried
- commit (a crime)** to do something illegal or wrong
- corpse** a dead body
- dawn (n)** the time of day when light first appears
- devil** a very wicked person, or Satan, the enemy of God; also used for emphasis in questions, e.g. *What the devil are you doing?*
- dim** (of a light) faint, not bright
- drunk/drunken** confused, helpless, violent, etc. because of drinking too much alcohol
- evil (adj)** very bad, wicked
- fit (n)** a sudden attack of a disease which causes violent movements and loss of consciousness
- fraud** deceiving somebody illegally in order to make money or obtain possessions
- furious** full of violent anger
- gentleman** a man of good family, usually wealthy
- gin** a strong, colourless alcoholic drink
- handkerchief** a small piece of cloth for wiping the nose or eyes

hang to kill somebody by hanging them from a rope around the neck, as a legal punishment for a crime  
**housekeeper** a person employed to manage a house and do the housework  
**identity** who a person is  
**illegitimate** born of parents who are not married to each other  
**inheritance** money, possessions, etc. received as a result of the death of the previous owner  
**jerk** (*n*) a very sudden, sharp movement  
**kidnap** (*v*) to steal somebody away by force and keep him/her a prisoner illegally  
**lean** (*v*) to bend, to be in a sloping position  
**locket** a small ornamental case, worn on a chain around the neck  
**magistrate** a judge who deals with smaller crimes in local courts  
**master** (*n*) a male employer; the man in control  
**mouse** a small animal with a long tail, found in houses or fields  
**orphan** a child whose parents are dead  
**passion** strong deep feeling, of hate, love, or anger  
**pawnbroker** a person who lends money in exchange for valuable things left with him, which he can sell later if the money is not repaid  
**poverty** the state of being poor  
**rat** an animal similar to a mouse, but larger  
**reluctant** unwilling and therefore slow to agree, act, etc.  
**resemblance** similarity, looking like something or somebody else  
**roar** (*n* and *v*) a long loud deep sound, like that made by a lion  
**ruin** (*v*) to damage badly or destroy  
**seize** to take hold of suddenly and violently  
**servant** someone employed to do work in a house  
**spirit** a person's mind and emotions, often their courage or liveliness

**stagger** (*v*) to walk or move unsteadily as if about to fall  
**stick** (*v*) to put or fix something in a position or place  
**strike** (*v*) to hit somebody violently; also, to show the time by sounding a bell in a clock  
**swing** (*v*) to move backwards and forwards while hanging or supported  
**take up** to begin doing something (e.g. a hobby) regularly  
**undertaker** a person whose business is to prepare the dead for burial and arrange funerals  
**will** (*n*) a legal document which states what somebody wants to happen to their money and property after their death  
**workhouse** in former times, a place provided by the government for the very poor, where they were fed and housed in exchange for work done