

Oliver in London

For some reason the Dodger did not want to enter London during daylight, so it was nearly eleven o'clock at night when they got near the centre. Oliver had never seen a dirtier or more miserable place. The streets in this district were narrow and muddy, and there were terrible smells everywhere. Children wandered around even at this time of night, in and out of the many shops, playing and screaming. The pubs were full of people fighting, and big, evil-looking men stood in doorways or at dark corners. Oliver almost wanted to run away, but just then the Dodger pushed open a door and pulled Oliver into a dark hall.

'Who's there?' a voice cried out.

'It's me,' said the Dodger. The faint light of a candle appeared in the hall.

'Who's the other one?'

'A new friend.'

They went up some dark and broken stairs. Oliver could hardly see where he was going, but the Dodger seemed to know the way, and helped Oliver up. They entered a room with walls that were black with age and dirt. In front of the fire was a table with a candle stuck into a bottle of beer, and an old man, with a horribly ugly face and red hair, stood next to the fire cooking. He was wearing a dirty old coat and seemed to divide his attention between his cooking and a number of silk handkerchieves, which were hanging near the fire. There were several rough beds in the room. Four or five boys, about the same age as the Artful Dodger, sat round the table, smoking and drinking like middle-aged men. They all looked up when the



George Cruikshank

'My friend Oliver Twist,' the Dodger said to Fagin.

Dodger and Oliver entered.

'This is him, Fagin,' the Dodger said to the old man. 'My friend Oliver Twist.'

Fagin smiled and shook Oliver's hand. Then all the young gentlemen came up to him and shook both his hands very hard,

especially the hand which held his few possessions. One of the boys was particularly kind. He even put his hands in Oliver's pockets so that Oliver would not have to empty them himself when he went to bed. The boys would probably have been even more helpful, but Fagin hit them on their heads and shoulders until they left Oliver alone.

'We're very glad to see you, Oliver,' said Fagin. 'I see you're staring at the handkerchieves, my dear. Aren't there a lot? We've just taken them all out to wash them, that's all! Ha! Ha! Ha!'

This seemed to be a joke, as the old gentleman and all his young friends gave loud shouts of laughter. Then supper began. Oliver ate his share of the food and was then given a glass of gin-and-water. Fagin told him to drink it fast. Immediately afterwards, Oliver felt himself lifted onto one of the beds and he sank into a deep sleep.

When he woke, it was late morning. Fagin was the only other person in the room, and he was boiling coffee in a pan. When the coffee was done, he turned towards Oliver and looked closely at the boy. Oliver was only just awake and his eyes were half-closed, so he seemed to be still fast asleep. Fagin then locked the door and from a hidden hole in the floor, he took out a small box, which he placed carefully on the table. His eyes shone as he opened it and took out a gold watch covered in jewels.

'Aah!' he said to himself. 'What fine men they were! Loyal to the end. They never told the priest where the jewels were. Nor about old Fagin. Not even at the very end. And why should they? It was already too late. It wouldn't have stopped the rope going round their necks!'

Fagin took out at least six more watches, as well as rings and bracelets and many other valuable pieces of jewellery. He looked at them with pleasure, then replaced them. 'What a good thing

hanging is!' he murmured. 'Dead men can never talk, or betray old friends!'

At that moment he looked up and saw Oliver watching him. He closed the lid of the box with a loud crash, and picked up a bread knife from the table. 'Why are you watching me? What have you seen? Tell me – quick!'

'I couldn't sleep any longer, sir,' said Oliver, terrified. 'I'm very sorry.'

'You weren't awake an hour ago?' Fagin asked fiercely, still holding the knife.

'I promise I wasn't, sir,' replied Oliver.

'Don't worry, my dear,' Fagin said, putting down the knife and becoming once again the kind old gentleman. He laughed. 'I only tried to frighten you, my dear. You're a brave boy, Oliver! And did you see any of the pretty things?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Ah,' said Fagin, turning rather pale. 'They – they're mine, Oliver. All I have, in my old age.'

Oliver wondered why the old man lived in such an old, dirty place, when he had so many watches, but then he thought that it must cost Fagin a lot of money to look after the Dodger and the other boys. So he said nothing, and got up and washed. When he turned towards Fagin, the box had disappeared.

Soon the Dodger entered with a cheerful young man named Charley Bates.

'Have you been at work this morning?' Fagin asked the Dodger.

'Hard at work,' answered the Dodger.

'Good boys, good boys!' said Fagin. 'What have you got?'

'A couple of pocket-books and some handkerchieves.'

'Good workers, aren't they, Oliver?' said the old man.

'Very good,' said Oliver. The others all started laughing, though Oliver saw nothing funny in his answer. Fagin inspected the handkerchieves and told the two boys that they were extremely well made and that he was very pleased with their work.

After breakfast they played a very strange game. The cheerful old man put a watch in his jacket pocket, with a guard-chain round his neck, and a notebook and a handkerchief in his trouser pocket. Then he went up and down the room holding a walking stick, just like the old gentlemen who walked in the streets. Sometimes he stopped at the fireplace, and sometimes at the door, pretending to stare with great interest into shop windows. He would then constantly look round, as if afraid of thieves, touching all his pockets in such a natural and funny way that Oliver laughed until the tears ran down his face. All the time, the two boys followed Fagin everywhere, and every time he turned round, they moved out of his sight so quickly that it was impossible to follow their movements.

Finally, the Dodger bumped into him accidentally from behind, and at that moment both boys took from him, very quickly, his watch, guard-chain, handkerchief, and notebook. If the old man felt a hand in any of his pockets he cried out, and then the game began again.

Later, the boys went out again to do some more work. When they had gone, Fagin turned to Oliver. 'Take my advice, my dear,' he said. 'Make them your models. Especially the Dodger. He'll be a great man himself, and will make you one too, if you copy him. Is my handkerchief hanging out of my pocket, my dear?'

'Yes, sir,' said Oliver.

'See if you can take it out, without my feeling it. Just as you saw them doing it when we were playing.'

Oliver held up the bottom of the pocket with one hand, as he had seen the Dodger hold it, and pulled the handkerchief lightly out of it with the other.

'Has it gone?' asked Fagin.

'Here it is, sir,' said Oliver, showing it in his hand.

'You're a clever boy, my dear,' said the old gentleman, putting his hand on Oliver's head. 'I've never seen a quicker boy. If you go on like this, you'll be the greatest man in London. Now come here and I'll show you how to take the marks out of handkerchieves.'

Oliver wondered what the connection was between playing at stealing from the old gentleman's pocket and becoming a great man. But he followed him quietly to the table and was soon deeply involved in his new study.

Oliver remained in Fagin's room for many days, picking the marks and names out of the handkerchieves and sometimes playing the same game as before. One evening two young ladies came to visit, and a very cheerful party followed. Oliver thought they were very nice, friendly girls.

The Dodger and Charley Bates went out to work every day, but sometimes came home with no handkerchieves, and Fagin would get very angry. Once he even knocked them both down the stairs and sent them to bed with no dinner because they had returned with nothing.

At last, the morning came when Oliver was allowed to go out to work with the two other boys. There had been no handkerchieves for him to work on for several days and there was not very much to eat for dinner. The three boys set out, but they walked so slowly that Oliver thought they were not going to work at all. Then suddenly the Dodger stopped and put his finger to his lips.

'What's the matter?' demanded Oliver.

'Be quiet!' replied the Dodger. 'Do you see that old man outside the bookshop? He's the one.'

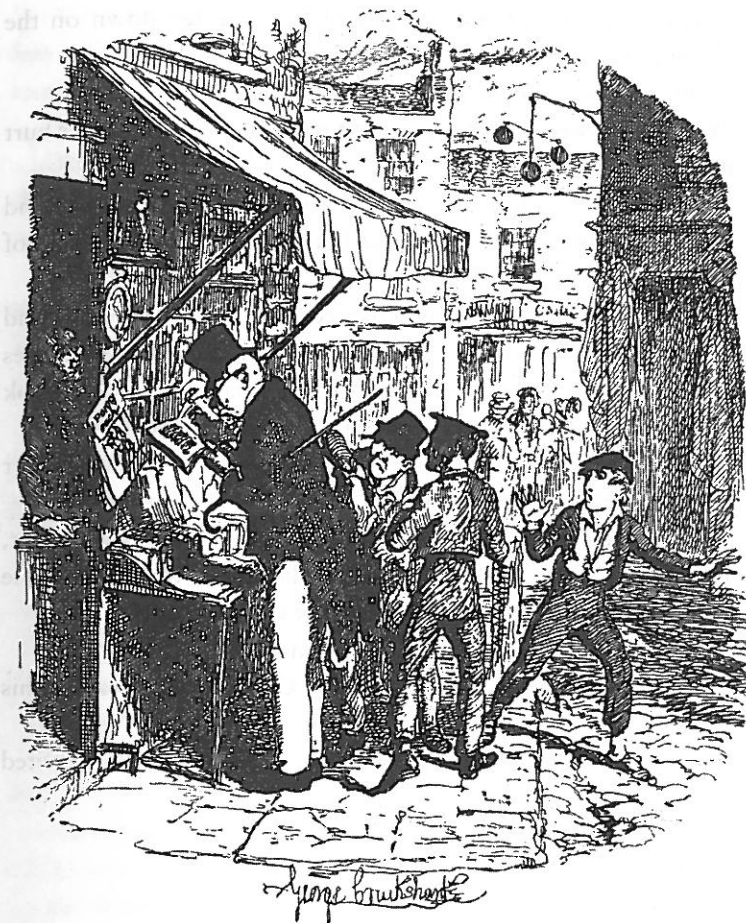
Oliver looked from the Dodger to Charley Bates with great surprise and confusion, but he had been told not to ask questions. The two boys walked quickly and secretly across the road towards the old gentleman. Oliver followed behind them, watching in silent amazement.

The old gentleman looked quite rich; he wore gold glasses, white trousers, and had an expensive walking stick under his arm. He had picked up a book and was standing there, reading it with great concentration – just as if he were in his own armchair at home. Oliver, his eyes wide with horror and alarm, watched as the Dodger put his hand in the old gentleman's pocket, took out a handkerchief, and handed it to Charley Bates. Then the two of them ran round the corner as fast as they could.

Suddenly, the whole mystery of the handkerchieves, and the watches, and the jewels, and Fagin, became clear. Oliver stood for a moment in terror, the blood rushing through him until he felt he was on fire. Then, confused and frightened, he started to run. At the same time, the old gentleman, putting his hand to his pocket and realizing his handkerchief was missing, turned round. He saw Oliver running away, so he naturally thought Oliver was the thief. With loud cries of 'Stop thief!', he ran after Oliver with the book still in his hand.

The old gentleman was not the only one who started shouting. The Dodger and Charley Bates, not wanting to attract attention to themselves by running down the street, had stopped round the first corner. When they realized what was happening, they also shouted 'Stop thief!' and joined in the chase like good citizens.

The cry of 'Stop thief!' always causes great excitement. Everybody



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in the street stopped what they were doing and began to shout themselves. Many joined in the chase with enthusiasm and soon there was a big crowd running after Oliver.

Finally, they caught the exhausted boy. He fell down on the pavement and the crowd gathered round him.

'Is this the boy?' they asked the old gentleman.

'Yes,' he answered, leaning over Oliver. 'But I'm afraid he's hurt himself.'

'I did that,' said a huge young man proudly. 'And I hurt my hand doing it.' The old gentleman looked at him with an expression of dislike.

Oliver lay on the ground, covered with mud and dust and bleeding from the mouth, and looked wildly at all the faces surrounding him. At that moment a policeman arrived and took Oliver by the collar. 'Come on, get up,' he said roughly.

'It wasn't me, sir,' said Oliver, looking round. 'It was two other boys. They're here somewhere.'

'Oh no, they aren't,' replied the policeman. In fact, he was right, as the Dodger and Charley had quietly disappeared as soon as the crowd had caught Oliver. 'Come on, get up!'

'Don't hurt him,' said the old gentleman.

'I won't,' said the policeman, tearing Oliver's jacket half off his back as he lifted him up.

The three of them started walking, followed by the excited crowd.

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Oliver's life changes

Oliver was taken to the nearest police station. The officer at the gate looked at the boy. 'Another young thief, eh?' He turned to the old gentleman, 'Are you the person who was robbed, sir?'

'Yes, I am,' replied the old gentleman, 'but I'm not sure that this boy actually took the handkerchief. I don't really want to take him to court.'

'Too late. He must go before the magistrate now.'

Oliver was locked in a small stone cell, which was disgustingly dirty and smelly. As the key turned in the lock, the old gentleman said to himself thoughtfully, 'There's something in that boy's face . . . He could be innocent. Where have I seen someone like him before?' After thinking about this for a few minutes, he said, 'No; it must be imagination.' He sighed unhappily, and began reading the book again.

Some time later, the officer touched his shoulder and told him that the court was ready. A magistrate was a judge who dealt with small crimes in local courts, and the magistrate for this district was well known. His name was Mr Fang and he was a disagreeable, bad-tempered man. Today he was in a particularly bad mood. He frowned angrily at the old gentleman, and asked sharply,

'Who are you?'

'My name, sir, is Brownlow.'

'Officer! What is this man charged with?'

'He's not charged, sir,' answered the officer. 'He's accusing the boy.'

The magistrate looked at Mr Brownlow from head to foot. 'And what have you got to say?'

Mr Brownlow began to explain. 'I was standing outside a bookshop —'

'Be quiet, sir!' shouted Mr Fang. 'Policeman! Now — you arrested the boy. What happened?'

The policeman told the magistrate what he had heard, and how he had searched Oliver afterwards and found nothing.