

Chapter 14

Fagin's Gang Grows



On the same night Nancy met with Rose, Noah Claypole, Mr. Sowerberry's helper, and Charlotte, Mr. Sowerberry's maid, were walking toward London. "I'm so tired of walking," said Charlotte. "I have such a heavy load." "Don't whine," said Noah. "Carrying Sowerberry's money is worth it, ain't it?" He pointed to the London lights in the distance. "Sowerberry will never find us there. Serves him right taking his money. No more making coffins for me." "This money is heavy, Noah. "Can't you carry it?" "You took it, didn't you? You should have the honor of carrying it."

The truth was, Noah didn't want to carry the heavy load. If Sowerberry did find them, Charlotte would be the one to go to jail. "But I took it for you," whined Charlotte. They came upon the Three Cripples. "I've heard this is a fine place," said Noah. "Let's have a feast tonight. We have the money to pay for it!" The two walked into an empty pub. They sat at the bar and recalled how they stole a large sum of money from their master. In the next room, Fagin sat reading a paper. He took immediate notice of the two strangers through a hole in the wall. He pressed his ear to the wall. He listened to their tales of cunning ways. We could use them in our gang, thought Fagin. Fagin went out to meet the two strangers. "I heard you talking of stealing from your master of the house." Noah and Charlotte became frightened.

"Your secrets are safe with me," said Fagin. "That's what we do here. We pickpocket, steal from old ladies, kids, and even banks. It's our way of doing business. You can work here. You'll be safe." "Would we need to hand over our money?" asked Noah. "That's the only way," said Fagin. "But you would be paid. You would live here and get your food and drink here." Noah thought for a moment. "I don't want to do anything that's too high-risk. I like to be sneaky but don't want to get caught." "How about snatching old ladies' purses? You grab them and run around the corner." "They holler too much," said Noah. "Besides, they scratch something awful." "How about the children?" asked Fagin. "Their moms send them on errands. You knock them down and steal their money. It's quite simple."

Charlotte clapped her hands together. "A perfect job for you, Noah!" Noah and Charlotte couldn't believe their luck. They were anxious to meet Fagin the next day and have their new adventures begin. But the next day when Noah and Charlotte met Fagin, he wasn't quite so happy. "Bad news for us. One of our best boys is in jail. Jack Dawkins. Yes, the Artful Dodger got caught stealing a silver snuff box." Charley Banks walked in the door. "It's all over, Fagin. They found the gentleman who owns the box. He identified the Dodger. It hurts to think he's going to jail for stealing something so small. If only it had been a gold watch! Much more honor and glory in that!" "He was the best of us," said Fagin. "He'll manage to get out of jail." But Charley wasn't too sure. "We must find out how he does today. But we can't go.

They'll lock us away with him," said Fagin. He looked over at Noah. "But you! No one knows you! You could help us." Noah hesitated. This made Fagin angry. "You want to eat and drink without earning your keep?" Finally, Charlotte convinced Noah to go. The first thing Noah noticed at the courthouse was the awful, damp, dank smell. The walls were blackened. A thick greasy scum covered every surface. Noah saw the Dodger shuffle into the courtroom. He was yelling and shouting that he was innocent. "Hold your tongue," said the jailer. "I'm an Englishman, ain't I?" said the Dodger. "Where are my privileges? I want to see the Secretary of State for the Home Affairs. I've got places to go and I must go now." "Silence," yelled the jailer.

"Who is this before me?" asked the judge.

"It's a pick-pocketing case, your worship," said the jailer.

"Has he ever been here before?" He ought to have been. I know him well. Everyone knows him." The Artful Dodger bowed. "I'm popular, eh?" Everyone laughed except the jailer and judge. "Take him away," said the Judge. "Off to jail." They led the Dodger away kicking and screaming. Noah backed out of the courthouse and made his way back to Fagin's to report on all he had seen. He prepared himself for Fagin's wrath.



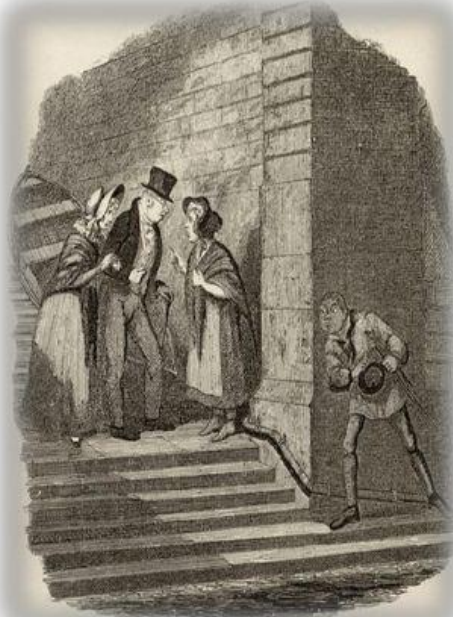
Chapter 15

A Secret Meeting

Nancy was anxious to go to London Bridge on Sunday evening. Right before she left, Fagin and Sikes came in the door. Sikes was surprised to see Nancy wearing a coat and bonnet. "Where are you going?" Sikes demanded. "To get some fresh air," said Nancy. He pushed her down on the floor. "You ain't going nowhere. Cook us a meal." Nancy had no choice. She prepared a meal as she watched the clock. Once midnight passed, she knew that there wasn't any point traveling to the bridge. Fagin kept his eye on Nancy. He thought that she had been acting

strange the last few weeks. He wondered where she was really going that evening. Did she have another boyfriend? He decided to send Noah out to spy on her. "I have another job for you," said Fagin to Noah. "Don't worry, it's nothing dangerous. I'll pay you a pound to follow a girl," said Fagin. "One of my girls. It's Nancy. I don't trust her anymore. I want to know where she goes. Who she sees." Noah did what he was paid to do. He followed Nancy all week long. She never went far and never saw anyone but Fagin's boys. On Sunday, Noah saw the door to her house open. She stepped outside and quickly walked down the street. Noah followed her to London Bridge. Noah saw two people approach Nancy right before she stepped onto the bridge. One was a young girl and the other was an older gentleman. Noah hid

behind some bushes and listened to their conversation. "Why didn't you come last week?" asked Rose. "We looked for you."



"I was held captive in my own house. Sikes wouldn't let me leave," said Nancy. "I tried." Mr. Brownlow took his hat off. "Rose told me your story, Nancy. You have my word that you will be safe. We need to find Monks to find out the rest of his story. If we can't find him, we'll need you to hand Fagin over to us." Nancy gasped. "Never! I will not do it. Ever! He's the devil to me but I still won't do it. You see, I have led a bad life. But I have led it with him. I will not turn any of them in, as bad as they are." "Then you must put Monks into our hands, dear Nancy," said Rose. "But Monks could turn against them!" cried Nancy. "You have our promise," said Mr. Brownlow. "We only want Oliver's story. We won't harm your friends in any way." Nancy trusted them. "Monks is a young man. Younger than thirty. But he looks old and haggard. His lips are

swollen and a deep purple. His hands are covered with sores. His throat has a red mark on it. It looks like a burn of some sort. You can often find him at the Three Cripples." Mr. Brownlow raised his eyes. "I think I know this man!" Rose took Nancy's hands. "Please come with us. We'll keep you safe. We have money. You'll have food and clothes. You'll want for nothing."

"My place is here," sighed Nancy. "I am one of them and I must go now." She turned and made her way down the dark road as she wept. After everyone had gone, Noah crept from his hiding spot and ran as fast as he could to Fagin's house. Fagin wasn't happy with the news. He sent for Bill Sikes and told him what Nancy had done. But he did not tell Bill about the part where Nancy professed her loyalty to them. Sikes flew into

a rage. "How dare she turn on us! She will pay for this." He rushed home and pulled Nancy out of bed by her hair. "Bill! What are you doing? What have I done?" Nancy had never seen such hatred in anyone's eyes. "As if you don't know!" he yelled. "Fagin had you followed. We know about your meeting at the London Bridge. You betrayed us!" He struck her face with the hand.

She gasped for breath. "If you know it all, then you know I didn't betray you or Fagin. They offered me money to turn Fagin in. I refused." Sikes slapped her again and she flew onto the floor. "Bill!" she begged. "They have money. We can escape here. Start a new life together." "I would sooner die than live with you any longer," said Sikes. He took out his pistol and aimed it at her head. Nancy cowered on the floor. Sikes raised his

gun and slammed the barrel down on Nancy's head over and over again. Nancy took her last breath and died. In the end, no one could protect poor Nancy.

WHO SAID IT?

- A. "I'm surprised they don't murder you, I would if I was in their place."
- B. "Oh my brother! What has happened to him?"
- C. "Such silver, my dear, such silver!"
- D. "So if you do make up your mind to speak without permission, say your prayers first."