



Chapter 4

Fagin and His Gang

Oliver was on his way to London. He had often heard the workhouse men say that London was where the poor could find ways to live. It was the perfect place for a homeless boy! It took Oliver six days to land in London. He traveled with a few shirts, some crumbs of bread, and two pairs of socks in his bundle. He begged for water at cottage doors and slept in meadows in haystacks. He felt cold, tired, and alone. On his journey, signs started to appear that beggars would be put in jail. This frightened Oliver a great deal and made him walk faster. But luck was with him when a man gave him a meal of bread and cheese. A woman greeted him with pity and sympathy and offered him what little she had. She had a son who was off wondering about in some part of the world. She hoped someone would treat him as well as she

treated Oliver. On the seventh morning, Oliver made his way to the tiny town of Barnet. It was there that he met the strangest-looking boy. He was about his own age but had the manners and air of a man. He wore a man's coat that reached to his heels. His trousers hung off of him. "Hello!" said the boy to Oliver. "How are you?" "Tired," said Oliver. "I've walked a long way. Been walking for seven days straight." "Seven days!" said the boy. "You must be hungry then. If you want grub, you shall have grub." He led Oliver to a nearby shop where they feasted on ham and bread. "Staying in London?" asked the strange boy. "Yes."

"Got any lodgings?" "No." "Money?" "No." The strange boy whistled and put his arms into his pockets as far as the big coat sleeves would let them go. "Do you live in London?" asked Oliver. "I do indeed. When I'm home, that is. I suppose you'd like a place to sleep tonight?" "Please," answered Oliver. "I know a man in London. He will give you free room and board if you're with me." Oliver couldn't resist the offer of a free room.

After that, he learned the boy's name was Jack Dawkins. "My friends refer to me as the Artful Dodger." It wasn't until eleven o'clock that evening that Oliver and Jack made their way to the man's house. As they approached the town, a stench invaded the air. It was a dirty and wretched place.

By far, it was the worst that Oliver ever laid eyes on. For a split second, Oliver thought of running away. But in seconds, he was being pulled inside the house. "Who's there?" said a faraway voice. "Plummy and slam!" replied Jack. This seemed to be a secret password. It must have been the correct password because a man's face peeped out of a passage. "There's two of you. Who's that?" "A new pal," replied Jack, pulling Oliver forward. "Is Fagin upstairs?" He didn't wait for an answer. Jack pulled Oliver up the dark stairway that had several broken steps. The ease of which Jack traveled up the rickety stairs led Oliver to believe that Jack had walked on them often enough. Once upstairs, Jack threw open the door to a back room. The walls and ceiling were black with age

and dirt. There was a meal upon the fire and a table in front of it. Candles were on the table. Sausages cooked in the frying pan as a man stood with fork in hand above them. "This is him, Fagin," said Jack. "My friend, Oliver Twist." The man grinned. He took Oliver by the hands and called for everyone to gather around him. Five boys scurried over. One was anxious to hang Oliver's cap on a peg for him. Another offered to put his hands in Oliver's pockets so he wouldn't have the trouble of emptying them himself. "We're very glad to have you, Oliver," said Fagin. "Dodger, take off the sausages and fix Oliver a plate." Oliver's mouth watered when he saw his plate filled high with sausages. As he ate, he couldn't help but notice all the handkerchiefs hanging about the place. "Don't you be thinking about those right now," said Fagin as he handed Oliver a drink. Oliver took a sip and soon felt tired. It wasn't long before he fell into a deep sleep.



Fagin and the boys tricked Oliver into thinking that they earned money by cleaning handkerchiefs and making pocketbooks. "Maybe you can teach me to make such beautiful things," said Oliver. All of them roared with laughter. This puzzled Oliver. The odd games they played puzzled him, too. Fagin would dress up and pretend to shop around the room. Then the boys would try to reach into his pockets without him seeing or feeling them. They even convinced Oliver to play this silly game. It wasn't until a week later that Oliver understood that it was not a silly game at all. They were practicing their pickpocket skills! All the handkerchiefs and trinkets in Fagin's room were stolen!