



Chapter 7

Nurse Sally's Secret

It was a cold, bitter evening. At the same workhouse where Oliver was born, Mr. Bumble was sipping tea with Mrs. Corney, the woman in charge. They chatted about the paupers in disgust while they had their fill of cheese and tea. "We already take care of these paupers and here they are always complaining they need more," said Mrs. Corney. "A selfish bunch," replied Mr. Bumble as he slid his chair closer to Mrs. Corney. Mrs. Corney blushed. She was widowed for twenty-five years and looked forward to these chats with Mr. Bumble. Mr. Bumble finished his tea. Then, he leaned over

and kissed Mrs. Corney.

"How dare you," she said. "I'll scream if you do that again." Before she had the chance, the door opened. "Old Sally is dying. She said she must tell you something at once, Mrs. Corney." Mrs. Corney was annoyed at this interruption. She secretly had hoped to be kissed again. But, she hurried off to see Sally. When Mrs. Corney entered the dark attic, Sally mustered all her strength and sat up. "Lie down," commanded Mrs. Corney. "God will be coming for you soon enough." Sally refused to lie down. "I will never put my head on that pillow again until I'm dead," said Sally. "Come closer. I must whisper in your ear." Mrs. Corney leaned over and tilted her ear to Sally's mouth. "Make the nurses go away," said Sally. At once, Corney dismissed both of them. "Now listen to me," said the dying woman aloud. "In this very room, in this very bed, I once

nursed a pretty woman who was brought here full of dirt and dust. She gave birth to a boy and died." Sally started to sob. "She wasn't even cold before I stole it from her. Took it right from her." "Stole what?" demanded Mrs. Coney. "It," replied Sally sobbing louder. "It was the only thing she had. It was gold I tell you. Rich gold that might have saved her life." "Gold?" asked Corney, moving closer. "Tell me more." "She asked me to keep it for the child. If only I had, he may have been treated better. If only they had known. His life could have been better. So much better." "What was the boy's name?" asked Mrs. Corney. "They called him Oliver. The gold I stole was . . ." But she never finished the sentence. Sally fell back onto her pillow never to take another breath. Mrs. Corney spied a piece of paper in Sally's hand. She slipped it out of Sally's hand and shoved it into her pocket

before the nurses rushed back in. "She's gone," said Mrs. Corney. "Stone dead. And nothing to tell after all." She left the room, leaving the two women to hover over the body. While Corney attended to Sally, Mr. Bumble inspected the room he was in. He counted the silver teaspoons and sugar tongs, inspected the fine furniture, and peeked inside Mrs. Corney's chest of drawers. He saw a small box in the last drawer. When he shook it, he heard the clinking of a coin. He smiled. "I'll do it," he said to himself as if he came to a sudden decision. Mrs. Corney burst through the door and held her hand over her heart. "I've been so dreadfully put out, Mr. Bumble." Mr. Bumble tried to coax information out of her but she was too excited. "Have a drink of spiced peppermint," said Mr. Bumble. Mrs. Corney slowly sipped the drink as he stood staring at her.

"Have you heard," said Mr. Bumble, "that Mr. Stout is expected to die this week? He is the master of the workhouse now. They'll need a replacement and I am such the one." He glanced at the drawer with the coin. "If you would marry me, we could live there rent-free." Mrs. Corney threw her arms around Mr. Bumble and promised her love and willingness to marry him. "Now tell me, dear, what upset you so?" asked Bumble. She hushed him. "After we're married, I shall tell you. Now, let's celebrate." At the same time, Fagin, Charley Bates, and the Dodger waited for news of the robbery. Finally, Toby Crackit arrived. He ran in flustered with bright red cheeks. "The robbery failed. They drew their guns and shot Oliver. He was bleeding. Bill Sikes carried Oliver until he couldn't carry him anymore. They chased us all over the countryside. When they sent dogs after

us, we had to leave him in a ditch to die." Fagin flew into a rage. "Where's Sikes?" But he didn't wait for an answer. He was already out the door.

