

Oliver Twist

By Charles Dickens

EPISODE SEVEN

- NARRATOR Nine in the evening. Mr and Mrs Bumble stand before an old, crumbling warehouse, whose upper story overhangs a river...
- MONKS This is the woman?
- BUMBLE Hem! This is the woman.
- NARRATOR The man led the way up a steep staircase - or rather, a ladder - leading to a floor above.
- MONKS So. The woman knows our business, does she?
- MRS CORNEY I do.
- MONKS Is he right in saying that you were with this hag the night she died and that she told you something?
- MRS CORNEY About the mother of the boy you named. Yes.
- MONKS The first question is: of what nature was her communication?
- MRS CORNEY That's the second. The first question is: what may the communication be worth?
- MONKS Ah.
- MRS CORNEY You had better bid.
- MONKS It may be worth nothing...it may be twenty pounds.
- MRS CORNEY Give me five-and-twenty pounds in gold and I'll tell you all I know. Not before.
- MONKS What if I pay it for nothing?
- MRS CORNEY You can easily take back again. I am but a woman alone and unprotected.
- BUMBLE Not alone, my dear, nor unprotected, neither: I am here, my dear.
- MRS CORNEY You are a fool and had better hold your tongue.

- MONKS He had better have it cut out if he can't speak in a lower tone. So! He's your husband, eh?
- MRS CORNEY He my husband!
- MONKS See here! I'm in earnest. Now. Let's hear your story.
- MRS CORNEY When this woman, that we called old Sally, died, she spoke of a young creature, who had brought a child into the world some years before. The child was the one you named to him last night - the mother this nurse had robbed.
- MONKS In life?
- MRS CORNEY In death. She stole from the corpse that which the dead mother had prayed her, with her last breath, to keep for the infant's sake. I'll show you...
- BUMBLE A gold locket. And two locks of hair...
- MONK A ring!
- MRS CORNEY The word 'Agnes' is engraved on the inside. There is a blank left for the surname.
- MONKS Ha!
- MRS CORNEY And the date - which is within a year before the child was born.
- MONKS And this is all? Stand aside. Don't move a step forward, or your life is not worth a bulrush.
- NARRATOR With these words, the man suddenly pulled an iron ring in the floorboards and threw back a large trapdoor, which opened close at Mr Bumble's feet and which caused him to step backwards with great haste. Tying a lead weight to the packet, in which the locket and ring were wrapped, Monks dropped it through the trapdoor into the river...where it fell with a scarcely audible splash...and was gone.

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- NARRATOR The following evening: in the room of the housebreaker. Sikes is lying on the bed displaying a set of features in no degree improved by the deathly hue of illness. Seated by the window is a female, so pale and reduced with watching and privation that there would have been considerable difficulty in recognising her as the same Nancy who has already figured in this story.



NANCY How do you feel tonight, Bill?

NARRATOR Illness has not improved Sikes's temper...

SIKES As weak as water.

NARRATOR As Nancy raises him up and leads him to a chair...

SIKES Lend us a hand and let me get off this bed anyhow.

NARRATOR ...he strikes her for her awkwardness.

SIKES Yer stupid!

NANCY No, Bill!

SIKES Whining are you? Don't stand there snivelling. D'ye hear me?

NANCY I hear you. What fancy have you got in your head now?

SIKES Oh! Thought better of snivelling, have you? All the better for you.

NANCY Why, you don't mean to say, you'd be hard upon me tonight, Bill.

SIKES No? Why not?

NANCY Such a number of nights as I've been patient with you, nursing and caring you, as if you had been a child. You wouldn't have treated me as you did just now, if you'd thought of that, would you? Come, come; say you wouldn't.

SIKES Well, then, I wouldn't. Why the girl's whining again!

NANCY It's nothing. Don't you mind me. It'll soon be over.

SIKES What - what'll be over? What foolery are you up to, now? Don't come over me with your woman's nonsense. Come on - bustle about!

NANCY No, Bill.

SIKES I said -

NANCY Bill!

FAGIN Why - what's the matter here, my dear?



- SIKES Fagin! What evil wind has blowed you here? Hold your din, Bulls Eye! What have you got to say for yourself, eh?
- FAGIN I was away from London, a week or more, my dear, on business. Don't be out of temper, my dear. I have never forgot you, Bill, never once.
- SIKES No! Of course you han't! If it hadn't been for the girl, I might have died.
- FAGIN There now, Bill. Who but poor old Fagin was the means of your having such a handy girl about you?
- NANCY He says true enough there!
- SIKES It's all very well but I must have some blunt from you tonight.
- FAGIN I haven't a piece of coin about me.
- SIKES You've got lots at home. Nancy shall go and fetch it and I'll lie down and have a snooze while she's gone.
- NARRATOR Fagin's den. Fagin was on the point of fetching the money for Nancy from a cupboard upstairs when the murmur of a man's voice reached their ears from outside...
- MONKS Fagin?
- FAGIN Bah! It's the man I expected before. He won't stop long, Nance. Not ten minutes, my dear. Hush!
- NARRATOR It was the same man who had come with Fagin when Oliver was asleep over his books...the madman at the inn...the man called Monks...
- MONKS Who's she?
- FAGIN Only one of my young people. Any news?
- MONKS Yes.
- FAGIN And - good?
- MONKS Not bad, any way. I have been prompt enough this time. Let me have a word with you. Not here.
- FAGIN Then we shall go up there.



- MONKS Not that infernal hole we were in before.
- FAGIN My dear, my dear!
- NARRATOR Before the sound of their footsteps had ceased to echo through the house, Nancy had slipped off her shoes and climbed the stairs with incredible softness and silence behind them. What did she hear?
- MONKS Ha!
- NARRATOR The man called Monks...
- MONKS The only proofs of the boy's identity lie at the bottom of the river!
- FAGIN Hush, my dear!
- MONKS 'Hush!' You old villain. I have the young devil's money safely now. And it was I that did it.
- FAGIN Yes my dear; but without my help you'd never have found Oliver at all.
- MONKS Oh, but how I'd rather have had it the other way! What a game it would have been to have brought down the boast of my father's will, by driving the brat through every jail in town and then hauling him up for some capital crime, after having made a good profit of him besides.
- NARRATOR What was the meaning of these words? What else did Nancy hear? She heard the two men laugh - and the man called Monks becoming increasingly wild...
- MONKS Hah! If I could take the boy's life without bringing my own neck in danger, I would. But, as I can't, I'll be ready to meet him at every turn in life and if he ever takes advantage of his birth, I might harm him yet. In short, Fagin, you never laid such snares as I shall for my young brother, Oliver.
- NARRATOR Brother? There were more words, which Nancy strained to hear...of a young woman called 'Miss Maylie' and of a small hotel in Hyde Park in London where Miss Maylie was staying. What was she to Oliver? Nancy hastened back downstairs with the same silent tread for immediately afterwards the two men were heard descending. Monks went at once into the street and Fagin crawled upstairs again for the money. When he returned, Nancy was adjusting her bonnet, as if preparing to be gone.
- FAGIN Why, Nance! How pale you are!



- NANCY Pale! Come! Give me the money and let me get back.
- NARRATOR When she got into the open street Nancy sat down upon a doorstep and seemed wholly bewildered and unable to find her way. She rose and hurried in a direction quite opposite to that in which Sikes was awaiting her return. After completely exhausting herself, she stopped to take breath, wrung her hands and burst into tears. Then, hurrying again in the other direction, she soon reached the room where she had left the housebreaker.
- If she betrayed any agitation when she presented herself to Sikes he did not observe it, merely inquiring if she had brought the money. But as the next day closed in, her manner awakened his suspicions.
- SIKES Why, burn my body! You look like a corpse come to life again. What's the matter?
- NANCY Matter? Nothing.
- SIKES What foolery is this? What are you thinking of?
- NANCY Of many things, Bill. But, Lord! What odds in that?
- SIKES What do you mean? You're not a-going to? No, you wouldn't do that!
- NANCY Do what?
- SIKES No - there ain't a stauncher-hearted gal going. Give me my medicine!
- NANCY Here.
- SIKES Now, come and sit aside me and put on your own face or I'll alter it so, that you won't know it again when you want it.
- NARRATOR Sikes locked her hand in his and fell back upon the pillow, turning his eyes upon her face. They closed, opened again, closed once more, again opened. Gradually, the grasp of his hand relaxed and he lay like one in a profound trance. The sleeping draught she had given him had taken effect...
- Nancy stooped softly over the bed and kissed the robber's lips. Then she opened and closed the room door with a noiseless touch and hurried from the house.

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- NARRATOR The small hotel near Hyde Park...
- NANCY Miss Maylie. I must see the Miss Maylie!
- NARRATOR Nancy is led past the scornful housemaids into a small room, where a slight, beautiful girl enters.
- ROSE Oh please - sit down.
- NANCY Let me stand, lady. Is - is - that door shut?
- ROSE Yes. Why?
- NANCY Because I am about to put my life and the lives of others in your hands. I am the woman that dragged little Oliver back to Fagin's on the night he went out from the house in Pentonville.
- ROSE You!
- NANCY I, Miss Maylie! I am the infamous creature you have heard of! Do not mind shrinking openly from me, lady. The poorest women fall back as I make my way along the pavement.
- ROSE What dreadful things are these!
- NANCY Thank Heaven upon your knees, dear lady, that you had friends to care for and keep you in your childhood and that you were never in the midst of cold and hunger and riot and drunkenness.
- ROSE I pity you! It wrings my heart to hear you!
- NANCY Bless you for your goodness! But I have stolen away from those who would surely murder me if they knew that I was here and what I have to tell you. Do you know a man named Monks?
- ROSE No.
- NANCY He knows you - and knew you were here, for it was by hearing him tell the place that I found you out.
- ROSE I never heard the name.



- NANCY Some time ago, soon after Oliver was put into your house on the night of the robbery, I - suspecting this man - listened to a conversation held between him and Fagin in the dark. I found out from that Monks had seen Oliver accidentally with two of our boys on the day we first lost him and had known him directly to be the same child that he was looking for, though I couldn't make out why. A bargain was struck with Fagin that if Oliver was got back Fagin should have a certain sum of money and he was to have more for making Oliver a thief, which this Monks wanted for some purpose of his own.
- ROSE For what purpose?
- NANCY He caught sight of my shadow on the wall as I listened in the hope of finding out and I saw him no more till last night. Again they went upstairs, and again I listened at the door. The first words I heard Monks say were these: 'So the only proofs of the boy's identity lie at the bottom of the river.' Oh Miss Maylie, Oliver is the brother of this man called Monks. And I think he has done, or wishes still to do Oliver harm so he can keep an inheritance to himself, for their father is dead.
- ROSE What is all this!
- NANCY The truth, lady. And there is more. As he descended the stairs I heard him speak of you and the other lady and said it seemed contrived by Heaven, or the devil, against him, that Oliver should come into your hands. It's growing late. I must get back.
- ROSE Back! Why do you wish to return to companions you paint in such terrible colours? If you repeat this information to a gentleman who I can summon in an instant from the next room, you can be taken to some place of safety.
- NANCY I wish to go back. I must go back, because - how can I tell such things to an innocent lady like you? - because among the men I have told you of there is one the most desperate among them all that I can't leave - no, not even to be saved from the life I am leading now.
- ROSE Your having interfered in dear Oliver's behalf before your coming here, at so great a risk, to tell me what you have heard...hear me and let me save you yet for better things.
- NANCY Dear, sweet lady - it is too late! I cannot leave him now! I could not be his death.
- ROSE Why should you be?



- NANCY If I told others what I have told you and led to their being taken he would be sure to die. He is the boldest and has been so cruel! But I must go back.
- ROSE What can I do? This mystery must be investigated, or how will its disclosure to me benefit Oliver, whom you are anxious to help?
- NANCY You must know some kind gentleman who will hear it as a secret and advise you what to do.
- ROSE But where can I find you again?
- NANCY Every Sunday night, from eleven until the clock strikes twelve, I will walk on London Bridge - if I am alive.
- NARRATOR Thus speaking - and sobbing aloud - the unhappy creature turned away. While Rose Maylie, overpowered by this extraordinary interview, sank into a chair.