Oliver Twist

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES DICKENS

Born to an English Navy clerk and a mother of seven other children, Charles Dickens lived a life of some middle-class comfort until, abruptly, changes in the family's financial situation forced his family into a poorhouse and him, at age ten, to work for some time at a boot-blacking factory. Although Charles eventually went to school and began a career as a law clerk, journalist, and writer, he never forgot this period of economic privation and social despair, and he included depictions of poverty in many of the fifteen novels and other stories and pieces of prose he wrote over the course of his life.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Victorian Period coincides with a series of political, economic, and social changes in England that are inseparable from the nature of the fiction produced. The high-point of the Industrial Revolution took place, more or less, at the time of *Oliver Twist*'s writing; the production of goods had transitioned from "cottage industries" in the countryside to centralized factories in London and in the newer cities of Manchester and Birmingham. A whole host of other industries sprang up to support these new modes of production (including coal energy and railroad infrastructure development), and cities grew to include vast tenements of workers recently relocated from the country. England was also the crown jewel of an Empire "on which the sun never set," meaning it extended across much of the known world, including Australia and New Zealand, the Indian subcontinent, and interests in Africa. London was not just a hub for English workers, writers, artists, and thinkers—it was a multinational cosmopolis, the like of which the world had never seen (or had not since the far different Roman Empire, 1800 years previous). Dickens fiction reflects London both as a center of international power, as a city consisting of small neighborhoods, and of a city made up of the rich and those clinging to new and tenuous economic circumstances.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Dickens was, in essence, a genre unto himself: his novels have come to seem synonymous with the "Victorian" period in English literature (extending roughly from the 1830s until 1900, and coinciding with the cultural effects of the reign of Queen Victoria in England and the English Empire). But the Victorian period was a high time for the novel in general. Many magazines serialized works of prose fiction for public consumption, and increased education levels (derived from many factors, including the movement of workers to cities as part of the Industrial Revolution) caused many more in the middle classes to read as a pastime.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Oliver Twist, or, The Parish Boy's Progress*
- **When Written:** Written serially, February 1837 to April 1839
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** February 1837 to April 1839; revised 1847
- **Literary Period:** Victorian
- **Genre:** Victorian social novel; *Bildungsroman* (novel of education); novel of morality
- **Setting:** London, England, and the countryside surrounding, 1830s
- **Climax:** Oliver is shot by a servant of the Maylies; he recovers under their care, and begins the process of learning his true parentage
- **Antagonist:** Monks and Fagin
- **Point of View:** third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Musical adaptation. Many have come to know the general story of *Oliver Twist* via the musical *Oliver!*, which premiered in 1960 in London, and which was made into a successful motion picture in 1968. The musical retains many of the characters made most famous in the novel, including Fagin and the Artful Dodger.

PLOT SUMMARY

Oliver Twist begins in a workhouse in 1830s England, in an unnamed village, where a young woman, revealed to be Oliver's mother, gives birth to her son and promptly dies. The boy, lucky to survive, is raised until the age of nine in a "farm" for young orphaned children, and then is sent to the local workhouse again, where he labors for a time, until his innocent request for more food so angers the house's board and beadle, Mr. Bumble, that the workhouse attempts to foist Oliver off as an apprentice to some worker in the villager. Oliver is eventually given over to a **coffin**-maker named Sowerberry. Oliver works as a "mute" mourner for Sowerberry, and must sleep at night among the coffins. After a fight with Noah, another of Sowerberry's apprentices, over Oliver's unwed mother (whom Noah insults), Oliver runs away to London, to make his fortune.

Near London, Oliver meets a well-dressed young boy who

introduces himself as the Artful Dodger, a thief under the employ of a local crime boss named Fagin. The Dodger takes Oliver to Fagin, who promises to help Oliver but really holds him hostage, and forces him to go on a thieving mission with the Dodger and Bates, another young criminal. Bates and Dodger try to steal the handkerchief of an old man, who notices Oliver (an innocent onlooker), and believes him to be the thief. Oliver is caught and hauled to jail, only to be released into the old man Brownlow's company after Brownlow sees that Oliver had nothing to do with the crime. Brownlow nurses Oliver for a time and vows to educate him properly. But after sending Oliver out to return some books and money to a bookseller, Brownlow is shocked to find that Oliver does not return—Oliver has been picked up by Nancy, an associate of Fagin's, and taken back to the criminal gang.

The remainder of the novel comprises Brownlow's attempts to find Oliver, and Oliver's attempts to escape Fagin, his criminal associate Sikes, and the other boys. Fagin orders Oliver to accompany Sikes and another thief named Toby Crackit on a house-breaking, in a country village, that goes awry; Oliver is shot in the arm in the attempt, by a servant named Giles of the Maylie house (the house being broken into); Oliver nearly dies, but walks back to the house the next morning and is nursed back to health by Rose, Mrs. Maylie, and a local doctor named Lorsborne. Lorsborne later takes Oliver into London to find Brownlow, but they discover Brownlow has gone to visit the West Indies. Oliver is crestfallen, but is happy nonetheless with the Maylies, and is educated by an old man in the Maylies' village. Later, on a trip into London, Rose is visited by Nancy, who wishes to come clean about her involvement in Oliver's oppression, and Oliver finds that Brownlow is back in the city, having returned from the West Indies.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Corney, mistress of the workhouse, receives a package from a dying woman named Old Sally, which Sally in turn received from Oliver's mother upon her death. The package contains material indicating Oliver's family history, which is of interest to a friend and shadowy associate of Fagin's named Monks. Nancy meets with Rose and Brownlow in secret in London, to discuss what she has overheard, from Fagin and Monks, regarding Oliver's parentage; Noah, sent to spy on Nancy, overhears this conversation, and reports it to Fagin. Fagin tells Sikes, misleadingly, that Nancy has "peached" on the whole gang (even though Nancy refused to incriminate Fagin or Sikes to Brownlow), and Sikes, in a fit of rage, kills Nancy, then goes on the lam with his dog.

Brownlow realizes that he recognized Oliver as resembling the picture of a woman in his parlor, and also recognized a man he comes to realize is Monks. Brownlow pieces together the mystery of Oliver's parentage: Oliver's father is also Monks' father, and Monks' mother defrauded Oliver's mother, an unwed woman named Agnes, of the inheritance Oliver's father, Edwin, intended to leave to Oliver and Agnes. Monks wishes to destroy these facts of Oliver's parentage in order to keep all the inheritance for himself. But Brownlow confronts Monks with these facts, and Monks agrees, finally, to sign an affidavit admitting his part in the conspiracy to defraud Oliver.

Meanwhile, the members of Fagin's gang are all caught: Noah; Charlotte, his partner; the Dodger; and Fagin himself. Sikes dies, by accident, attempting to escape a mob that has come to kill him following Nancy's death. Brownlow manages to secure half of Oliver's inheritance for Oliver, and gives the other half to Monks, who spends it in the New World on criminal activity. Rose Maylie, long in love with her cousin Harry, eventually marries him, after Harry purposefully lowers his social station to correspond with Rose's; Rose was said to be of a blighted family, and in the novel's final surprise, this "blight" is revealed: Rose's sister was Agnes, meaning that Rose is Oliver's aunt.

At the novel's end, Oliver is restored to his rightful lineage and is adopted by Brownlow. The pair live in the country with Harry, who has become a parson, and Rose, along with Losborne and Mrs. Maylie. Oliver can, at last, be educated in the tranquility and manner he deserves, as the son of a gentleman.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Oliver Twist – The novel's hero, Oliver Twist is aged nine at the beginning of the novel, and several years older by the end (it is not clear exactly how much time elapses; he is probably about twelve). Born of an unwed mother, in a poorhouse, Oliver is raised in the same poorhouse, then apprenticed to a **coffin**-maker named Sowerberry. After getting in a fight with another apprentice regarding his mother's reputation, Oliver strikes out for London on foot, where he accidentally falls in with a group of thieves led by Fagin. Oliver is briefly saved by Brownlow, only to be retaken by Nancy, and involved, later, in a burglary of the Maylies' house that almost kills him. The Maylies, Rose and her aunt, take Oliver in, and the novel traces the discovery of Oliver's parentage, a secret kept close by Monks, Oliver's half-brother, who wishes to disinherit his brother and eliminate all traces of Oliver's high-born ancestry. Oliver ends the novel happily, having been adopted by Brownlow. Throughout the novel, Oliver remains a boy of good morals, despite his dire financial situation.

Agnes Fleming – Oliver's unwed mother, Agnes was engaged to Oliver's father, Edwin, but Edwin died before they could be married; Agnes was pregnant when Edwin died. Agnes gives birth to Oliver in a poorhouse, since her family has abandoned her in the wake of her pregnancy—at the novel's end, the narrator says that, though she was a fine woman, and beautiful, Agnes was "weak and erring," because of her dalliance with Edwin before their marriage.

Edwin Leeford – Married first to Monks' mother, and then

engaged to Agnes Fleming, Oliver's father dies in Rome after having claimed his inheritance, which he intended to pass on to Oliver and Agnes. This money, instead, went to Monks' mother and to Monks, thus precipitating much of the drama in the novel—Agnes' giving birth to Oliver in a poorhouse, and Oliver's travails in finding out his true identity.

Mr. Brownlow – A man who becomes Oliver's adopted father at the end of the novel, Brownlow is robbed earlier in the novel by Bates and the Dodger, only to think that Oliver, who was with those two boys, was responsible. Brownlow recants his accusation and takes Oliver home, to nurture him, but when he sends Oliver out on a mission to return books (prompted by his friend Grimwig, to test Oliver's virtue), Oliver is re-taken by Fagin. Brownlow is distraught at what he believes to be Oliver's betrayal of him, but never entirely believes that Oliver is a bad at heart and spends the remainder of the novel solving the mystery of Oliver's birth and inheritance.

Losborne – A doctor and close associate of the Maylie family, Losborne cares for Oliver when Oliver is recovering from a gunshot wound in the Maylie home. Later, he cares for Rose when she falls ill with fever. Losborne, at the novel's end, moves close to Harry and Rose, as he has become almost a part of the family.

Fagin – One of the novel's trio of antagonists, Fagin is in charge of the "boys," his thieves, and their exploits pay for his life in London. Fagin attempts to make Oliver a thief, but fails; Fagin is later sentenced to death. Fagin is Jewish, and described in extremely anti-Semitic terms by the narrator.

Monks – The second of the novel's antagonists, Monks (whose real name is Edward Leeford) is Oliver's half-brother, and is hellbent on keeping his own fraudulent inheritance by eliminating all traces of Oliver's inheritance, and on making Oliver into a thief so that his name might be ruined. Monks fails in this attempt, after being caught by Brownlow, and admits to his misdeeds and acknowledges Oliver's true parentage.

Charley Bates – A young thief of Fagin's who is always joking and laughing, Bates undergoes a moral transformation in the novel: from ironic young criminal to defender of goodness after Bates realizes Sikes has killed Nancy. Bates ends the novel having given up crime and taken on a series of difficult jobs, working in the fields.

Nancy – Sikes' romantic partner, Nancy at first takes Oliver back to Fagin but later expresses regret for this, and attempts to protect Oliver as much as she can. After talking one night to Rose and Brownlow, and being overheard by Noah, Nancy is killed by Sikes in a rage, for Sikes believes Nancy has "peached," or ratted out the gang (despite the fact that she has staunchly refused to do so).

Rose Maylie – Mrs. Maylie's niece, Rose helps nurse Oliver back to health, only to catch sick later herself. Rose is in love with Harry, but social barriers (her low social standing) keep their marriage from occurring until the end of the novel. It is revealed, at the novel's end, that Rose is Oliver's biological aunt. Rose embodies pure goodness and generosity.

Harry Maylie – Rose's cousin, Harry is poised for a "brilliant" career in politics, but he renounces this, and takes on the life of a village parson, in order to marry Rose, who believes she is far too socially inferior to Harry to be an acceptable wife for him. The two live "happily ever after" at the novel's end.

Mr. Bumble – The village beadle of Oliver's home village, Mr. Bumble is another, more minor antagonist in the novel—he hates Oliver, and eventually marries Mrs. Bumble in order to take over the poorhouse's control, such that he can order paupers around. But Bumble is exposed as being complicit in a part of Monks' plot, and loses his social station—he and his wife later end up paupers in the very same poorhouse that they used to run.

Blathers and Duff – Two doltish investigators who attempt to see whether Oliver was one of the robbers of the Maylies' home, they are misled by Losborne and sent back to London with misleading information; Losborne makes it seem that Oliver was wounded in a coincident gunshot accident, and that Oliver therefore had nothing to do with the robbery.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Bedwin – Oliver's nurse when he lives, briefly, with Brownlow early in the novel. Mrs. Bedwin is Brownlow's maid. She never believes that Oliver is not virtuous, even when Oliver disappears.

Mr. Grimwig – Brownlow's cantankerous friend, Grimwig does not believe, initially, in Oliver's virtue, and commonly uses the expression, "I'll eat my hat." At the end of the novel, he enjoys joking about how he used to not believe in Oliver's goodness, once Oliver proves it.

Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry – A **coffin**-maker and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry take Oliver in as an apprentice after the workhouse. Sowerberry takes something of a liking to Oliver, and makes him a "mute" mourner at funerals, but Mrs. Sowerberry never likes or trusts Oliver.

Noah Claypole – An older apprentice to Sowerberry, Noah picks a fight with Oliver and ends up blaming Oliver for it; he later makes his way to London and winds up serving as a spy for Fagin, overhearing Nancy's conversation with Brownlow and Rose.

Charlotte – Noah's partner and lover, Charlotte goes with Noah to London, and at the end of the novel, the two have become a con-men pair in the city.

Sikes – The third of the novel's antagonists, Sikes is a brutal "housebreaker," or robber, who takes Oliver with him on the failed robbery of the Maylies' house. Sikes later kills Nancy in a fit of rage, and accidentally kills himself while fleeing an angry

mob.

The Artful Dodger – The most skilled of Fagin's young boy-thieves, the Artful Dodger is a talented pickpocket and card-shark. The Artful Dodger is caught by the police for stealing a snuff box late in the novel, and is observed, by Noah, being sent to jail in a triumphant and defiant manner.

Bet – One of Nancy's fellow female thieves, Bet has a small part in the novel, and is mostly notable for being the object of Tom Chitling's romantic interest.

Mrs. Maylie – Rose's aunt, Mrs. Maylie takes care of Rose after the "blight" on Rose's family name, deriving from Agnes Fleming's pregnancy and death. Agnes, it is revealed later, is Rose's sister.

Toby Crackit – Another housebreaker, Toby accompanies Sikes and Oliver on the robbery of the Maylies' house. It is revealed that Crackit is something of a coward, as he runs away at the first sound of gunshots, after the robbery is botched.

Tom Chitling – Another of the young robbers in Fagin's gang, Tom is mostly notable for his love of Bet and his dim wit—he is beaten by the Dodger repeatedly in cards.

Mrs. Bumble (Mrs. Corney) – Married to Bumble, Mrs. Bumble takes a package from Old Sally once belonging to Agnes, and sells this information to Monks. This small crime causes the Bumbles to lose their social station and, eventually, to wind up in the poorhouse they once managed.

Mrs. Mann – A maid at the poorhouse annex near which Oliver was born, Mrs. Mann is in charge of Oliver very early in his life, before he is sent to work in the poorhouse for adults.

The man in the white waistcoat – A member of the poorhouse's board, the man in the white waistcoat is notable for shouting, constantly, that he believes Oliver will one day be hanged for his "vices."

Dick – A small friend of Oliver's at the workhouse, Dick gives Oliver a blessing when Oliver is running away to London near the beginning of the novel. Oliver hopes, at the novel's end, to return this blessing, but does not have the chance, as Dick, sadly, has died.

Giles and Brittles – Two servants of the Maylie household, Giles accidentally shoots the "robber" who winds up being Oliver, and Brittles, with Giles, seeks out the "robber" that night, only to have Oliver stumble back to the house the next day.

Barney – Another of Fagin's associates, Barney works at the Cripples, a pub with which Fagin is involved, and where criminals often meet. Barney is notable for speaking with a constant headcold.

Monks' mother – Oliver's father's first wife, Monks' mother takes a good deal of Oliver's inheritance for herself and for Monks.

Old Sally – The woman who nursed Agnes just as she was giving birth to Oliver, Old Sally dies later in the novel, and Mrs. Bumble takes from her a small package that she (Mrs. Bumble) later sells to Monks.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THIEVERY AND CRIME

Oliver Twist is, among other things, a meditation on the nature of criminality in 1830s England: an examination of who commits crimes; of the spectrum of crimes (from petty thievery to murder); and of the idea of criminality as a learned behavior or an innate quality. Oliver is born a poor orphan; he is raised in a workhouse and makes his way to London, where is "rescued" by a group of young thieves controlled by Fagin. Thus Oliver, according to Victorian ideas about the link between poverty and criminality, is seen as being "naturally" predisposed to crime, because he was brought up poor, and was not school educated. Oliver is also at risk of learning criminal behavior from Fagin, Charley Bates, the Artful Dodger, and Sikes.

One of the novel's great questions, therefore, is: will Oliver succumb to this "natural" predisposition and learned criminal behavior, or will he retain his innate virtue? Dickens presents a full range of criminality as a means of describing English criminal society at the time of his writing. Sikes and Fagin are both shown to be "natural" criminals—meaning they are men for whom crime is an organic outgrowth of their innate badness or evil. But although Dickens is clear in his disapproval of Sikes and Fagin, he nevertheless reserves a certain amount of room for moral complication as regards the "criminality" of other characters in the novel. Dickens acknowledges that Nancy has been forced to commit crimes, but Dickens has a certain amount of sympathy for Nancy's condition, as she was forced to work for Fagin from a young age. The Artful Dodger and Bates are entertaining and funny characters, and there is a despair Dickens ascribes to their condition, as Fagin's servants and partners in crime (not out of choice, but out of necessity). The Dodger ends up going to a penal colony, and Charley decides he ought to find honest work, and begins a series of menial jobs after renouncing his life of crime. Monks is given part of his inheritance by Brownlow, in the hopes that he will change, but he, too, returns to crime.

Oliver's purity and strength of spirit are never compromised throughout the novel; it is implied that his "gentlemanly"

parentage makes it more likely that he will end up part of a stable family structure, and that he will become educated and find legal employment. Thus Dickens seems to indicate that criminality is, after all, a mixture of moral disposition and of circumstances. Bates transcends his circumstances to live a "legal" life, but his rewards are few, and his job training poor. Oliver is virtuous and strong, but also aided by the help of members of the middle class, and by the fact that he is of noble birth.

POVERTY, INSTITUTIONS, AND CLASS

Oliver Twist is a sustained attack on the British Poor Laws, a complex body of law that forced poor families to labor in prison-like "workhouses." One of the novel's effects is, simply, to describe what poverty was like at this time in England. Although many parts of English society had come in contact with the poor, few had read accounts of what it meant to be poor. Simply by telling of conditions in the workhouse, Dickens does a service to the English poor—he shows they are human beings, and that they are not treated as such.

Dickens' description of the workhouses, and of Bumble and Mrs. Bumble especially, also serves to show that the Poor Laws are not simply dehumanizing—they are a part of the cycle of poverty rather than a remedy for it. The workhouse provides Oliver and others with no meaningful skills, and it feeds them so little that many simply become sick and die. Bumble is a "beadle," or an Anglican Church official in charge of managing the poor within each county. Dickens shows that Bumble behaves "un-Christianly" in hoping simply to shelve the poor in the workhouse, and to prevent them from leading meaningful lives. The novel's goal, then, is not just to describe English poverty—it is actively to change perceptions of both poverty and the general sense of Victorian society that poverty is being dealt with humanely and appropriately, in the hopes of changing society.

Dickens' argument about poverty, social institutions, and class immobility is a complex imagining of the interrelation of the three. Dickens believes that workhouses play to the worst desires of people in power—people like Sowerberry and the Bumbles—to keep the poor poor. The workhouses then enable the middle and upper classes to argue for a self-fulfilling prophecy: that people who have no options in life, no ability to make a positive contribution to society, either die or become society's outcasts. Dickens does not excuse crime committed by those who are inherently evil (Fagin and Sikes), but he does tend to be more sympathetic to the lives of those that have been determined by terrible circumstances (Oliver, Nancy, Bates and the Dodger). Dickens champions Oliver above all, since Oliver struggles so mightily to maintain his goodness, and manages to do so.

INDIVIDUALISM AND SOCIAL BONDS

Oliver Twist presents, also, an inquiry into the nature of "individualism" in 1830s England, and in the social bonds that must be formed and sustained by individuals if they are to prosper. One of the novel's most notable scenes is Fagin's speech, to Noah, arguing that one must look out both for "Number One" (oneself) and "the other Number One," or Fagin. The thieves Fagin controls all look out for themselves, since they would probably not work for Fagin if they were able to earn their living elsewhere. But Fagin argues that, since he is in command of this band of thieves, he is truly their Number One, or the figure they must obey if they are to continue living.

Fagin's organization of the group is based primarily on fear; if the thieves do not rat one another out, they will be saved from the courts and hanging. Dickens shows that this is not a strong enough social bond to keep the boys safe. Bates eventually leaves his life of crime; the Dodger is taken into court, and the boys are encouraged to believe that the Dodger will long be remembered for his defiance in the courtroom. Sikes hangs himself by mistake, and Fagin is tried and sentenced to death on the scaffold.

Oliver, however, is an example both of the importance of a strong individual work ethic *and* of social bonds. Oliver leaves Sowerberry; braves the criminals of Fagin's gang in London; escapes to Brownlow; is recaptured by Fagin; survives a gunshot to his arm and dodges Sikes; and finally educates himself under Brownlow's tutelage. If it weren't for Oliver's goodness and his drive to better himself, he would have remained at Sowerberry's for the rest of his life. But Oliver also benefits greatly from the love he receives from Brownlow, Rose Maylie, Mrs. Bedwin, Mrs. and Harry Maylie, and Mr. Losberne. Dickens praises these social bonds above all—the bonds of love and of a family-like atmosphere. The Maylies and Mrs. Maylie move to a parsonage with Oliver, who is officially adopted by Brownlow, so that he can continue in his education with all the legal protections afforded to the child of a gentleman.

SOCIAL FORCES, FATE, AND FREE WILL

In the novel, "fate" is revealed to be an interaction of social forces or pressures on one's life, and one's decisions as an agent possessing free will. Oliver is an orphan *and* a pauper, meaning his "fate" is more or less sealed from birth: social forces appear poised to keep him in a "low" position forever. But Oliver, as it turns out, is the illegitimate son of a gentleman, and his father has inherited enough money to be able to pass some on to Oliver. Thus Oliver has a competing fate: that of a son who realizes his fortune later in life. The grand question of the novel, then, is which fate will determine the course of Oliver's life: the fate of the pauper, or the fate of the gentleman?

Other characters have their fates set up and determined in interesting ways. Monks, also the son of a gentleman (he and Oliver are half-brothers), seems not to be able to "realize" his fate as a gentleman himself—he become a criminal, and even after inheriting half of his father's money, he dissipates it away and returns to crime. Fagin and his crew—including the Dodger—are mostly fated to remain criminals. Although Fagin does everything he can to avoid detection, it is not a surprise when he is captured at the novel's end, and sentenced to death. Similarly, the Dodger, despite his skill in thievery, accepts that it is his fate to be sent to a penal colony. Sikes understands that, after he kills Nancy, he is a hunted man, and that he can never recover the "normalcy" of his life-in-crime before the murder.

Rose and Harry, too, seem fated to be together. When Harry first proposes to Rose, Rose rejects his offer of marriage—not because she does not love him, but because Harry is poised for a brilliant career, and she comes from a disgraced family. But Harry implies that he is willing to alter the trajectory of his career, to take over the modest life of a country parson, in order to "level" his social relationship to Rose, and therefore to facilitate their marriage. Thus the novel shows that, although there are many strong social forces appearing immutably to "fate" characters to certain destinies, characters can, through exceptional strength of character, determine their own paths in life.

CITY AND COUNTRY

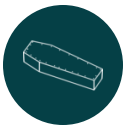
The novel takes place in two separate, morally distinct locations: the Country and the City. The Country is everything outside London and its outlying villages; London is the primary City. To Dickens, the country is a place of peace, quiet, hard work, and strong family structures that ensure people continue to work hard and avoid criminality. The city, however, is a place of difficult working conditions, where the poor are crowded together, ground down by all the difficulties of "modern" industrial life.

Oliver, tellingly, comes from the "country," from a town environment relatively far from London. He makes his way to London to avoid Sowerberry, the **coffin**-maker, and a live of terrible poverty in the workhouses, but what he finds in the city is not a means of escape, but rather, a more difficult life: one of forced criminality. Only when Oliver stumbles, half-dead, upon the Maylies' house far outside the city, does he begin to recuperate, to think longingly for Brownlow, and to begin to find a stable family life. Oliver ends up near a country parsonage at the novel's end, with the Maylies and those who care about him; he is adopted as Brownlow's legal son, allowing him to be educated in peace and quiet.

Dickens wrote during the English Industrial Revolution's most robust stage—when cities were becoming "the" location for all those hoping to make their fortunes, and to rise up out of poverty. But cities were also repositories for vice and poverty, and seemed to provide ammunition for those who sought to equate the "social diseases" of poverty and criminality. Thus Dickens has a complicated relationship to the city and the country as he describes them. He believes that Oliver's virtue is best suited to the country, but that country is rapidly disappearing as England becomes more connected by rail and roads, and more economically dependent on the factories of the city. Dickens does not advocate that the country should remain wholly separate from the city, or that the city should cease to exist. Rather, he seems to argue that the country provides a kind of serenity and family structure that should be brought back to the city.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



COFFINS

Coffins crop up repeatedly in the novel, and symbolize not only the proximity of death throughout *Oliver Twist*, but the very real possibility that Oliver himself will not live long enough to realize his high birth and receive his due inheritance. Oliver is apprenticed, first, to Sowerberry, a coffin-maker, and is forced to sleep among the coffins while in the house. Oliver is made to witness numerous burials while working as a "mute" mourner for Sowerberry—someone brought along to enlarge the size of a funeral party. Other characters in the novel, too, use coffins in their figures of speech: Monks, on seeing Oliver in the town of Chertsey, while Oliver is delivering a letter, utters an oath involving the word, and Nancy tells Rose and Brownlow, later, that the only home she will ever know is the final home provided by a coffin. Indeed, the novel ends with a bittersweet image of a tomb for Agnes, Oliver's unwed mother, in the local church near where Oliver settles; this tomb has no coffin, symbolizing the fact that, though Agnes was a good women, she committed a crime against God by having a child out of wedlock, and her body was not buried with the rest of the family but rather interred in a shallow grave near the workhouse. Thus Oliver manages, at the end of the novel, to avoid the grisly fate, the waiting coffin, reserved for others—Nancy and his mother among them.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *Oliver Twist* published in 2002.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he [Oliver] might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar . . . . But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed . . . a parish child . . . the orphan of a workhouse.

Related Characters: Oliver Twist

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

As the narrator notes here, there is no difference, in a newborn child, between being wealthy and being poor - or, for that matter, being lucky or unlucky, being intelligent or unintelligent. For a newborn, life is utterly a blank slate - and it awaits the impress of the events that happen to a person as he or she ages.

Oliver Twist is, among other things, a novel about how people court fate, and how people change their fates - how both people's decisions and the situations of their environment impact the kinds of lives they lead. Oliver is a child who takes life by the horns, who is willing to attempt scary or dangerous things in order to improve his station. He is also a child who, by any account, has experienced bad luck at an early age - he is here "ticketed" as seemingly headed for a life of poverty and labor. The only way he can change this fate is through more luck, and through the sheer force of his will.

Chapter 2 Quotes

Mr. Limbkins, I beg your pardon, sir! Oliver Twist has asked for more!
For more! . . . Compose yourself, Bumble, and answer me distinctly. Do I understand that he asked for more, after he had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary?
- - -
That boy will be hung . . . I know that boy will be hung.

Related Characters: Mr. Bumble, Oliver Twist

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the most famous scenes in the book - one that has seeped into the popular culture, even for those who haven't read *Oliver Twist*. This is Oliver's first act of rebellion. It is also a polite act, one that is designed not just to better his own circumstances but the circumstances of those around him. Oliver believes that because he is hungry, and because he is fed so very little, it would not be unreasonable to ask those in positions of authority for more food.

But, of course, this is simply not done - not because getting more food would be a bad thing, or a waste of resources, but because those in charge have not thought about the condition of the boys' lives at all. This kind of indifference to the suffering of others is a hallmark of corrupt people in power in *Oliver Twist*, and indeed throughout Dickens' novels more generally. And it is this indifference that Oliver seeks to push back against.

Chapter 3 Quotes

Oliver fell on his knees, and clasping his hands together, prayed that they would order him back to the dark room—that they would starve him—beat him—kill him if they pleased—rather than send him away with that dreadful man [Gamfield, the chimney-sweep].

Related Characters: Oliver Twist

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is an indication of just how cruel and unfair Gamfield will be. Oliver hates the workhouse, and cannot imagine living there another second--that is, until he realizes he might also have to live with a violent man, whose work is dirty, laborious, and incredibly dangerous for those boys employed to do it.

As throughout the novel, this passage is an instance of the immensely difficult choices Oliver is forced to make at every term. Is it sensible to want to return to the workhouse, where the administrators hate him, and where he has already made a name for himself as a "rabble rouser"? Or is it better to go off with a man Oliver doesn't know, who promises to employ him in a field that has caused many other children to perish? Oliver is forced to make this decision - and to do so at an age when boys of privilege are largely playing with their friends and enjoying their time with their families.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Then come with me . . . your bed's under the counter You don't mind sleeping among the coffins, I suppose? But it doesn't much matter whether you do or don't, for you can't sleep anywhere else. Come . . . !

Related Characters: Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry (speaker), Oliver Twist

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

This is another famous scene, and one of the more immediately comic depictions of just how deplorable the conditions are in which Oliver is expected to live. Sowerberry, despite the inherent black humor in what he is proposing, is not kidding. He really does expect his young apprentice, who has no family, to sleep among the coffins he is assembling, in which he will inter dead bodies. Sowerberry does not care at all that this might frighten Oliver. Indeed, he seems to delight in the idea that Oliver would be scared and made to suffer.

In the early pages of *Oliver Twist*, then, Dickens tests the limits of narrative plausibility - the coffin-maker's name is, after all, Sowerberry ("sower" as in planting things in the ground, and "berry" as in "bury") - and the limits of Oliver's own physical and psychological endurance. Indeed, everyone in Oliver's life will test him in this way, and he will continually rise to the challenge that people in positions of authority put to him.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ He wore a man's coat, which reached nearly to his heels. He had turned the cuffs back . . . to get his hands out of the sleeves . . . . He was, altogether, as roistering and swaggering a young gentleman as ever stood four feet six, or something less, in his bluchers.

Related Characters: The Artful Dodger

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

The Artful Dodger is one of the most colorful of Dickens' creations throughout the entirety of his works. Here, the Dodger is defined as a man before his time - although he is a very young child, he is adept at the world of pickpocketing and petty crime and has, from a young age, largely fended for himself. Oliver is in awe of the Dodger's city ways, of his knowledge of London, and of his ability to mix in with different groups of people. In this sense, Oliver will look up to the Dodger, and in the Dodger's cavalier attitude toward life, he is a foil of Oliver.

But the Dodger also has no scruples. He is perfectly willing to lie, cheat, and steal to get his way - things that Oliver is decidedly not willing to do. And while the Dodger is mostly interested in working to better his own circumstances, Oliver has a pronounced soft spot for the lives of other people, and for their own particular anguish.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Oliver wondered what picking the old gentleman's pocket in play, had to do with his chances of being a great man. But thinking that the Jew [Fagin], being so much his senior, must know best, he followed him quietly to the table; and was soon deeply involved in his new study.

Related Characters: Oliver Twist, Fagin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the text, Oliver is still very naive - he does not entirely understand that Fagin is interested in grooming him to become a pickpocket, a child he can let out onto the street in order to fetch goods. And Fagin is not interested in doing this so that Oliver can make a living. Instead, he works primarily so that he, Fagin, can enrich himself. Oliver is merely a means to an end for Fagin - a new, guileless worker whom he can train to do his bidding.

Fagin's depiction, here as in elsewhere in the novel, is deeply unsympathetic, and Dickens makes no bones about his own racism in describing Fagin using anti-Semitic stereotypes. This is an aspect of the novel that it is important to critique: Dickens, like a great many other famous authors in the history of the English language, have ascribed to Jewish characters traits that, according to contemporary consideration, would be considered defamatory and offensive.

Chapter 12 Quotes

What's this? Bedwin, look there!
As he [Brownlow] spoke, he pointed hastily to the picture above Oliver's head; and then to the boy's face. There was its living coy. The eyes, the head, the mouth; every feature was the same. The expression was, for the instant, so precisely alike, that the minutest line seemed copied with a startling accuracy.

Related Characters: Mr. Brownlow (speaker), Oliver Twist

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

This instance of fate, or luck or chance, is of great interest in the novel, and is a fine of example of how coincidence works in Dickens' fictions. Oliver lies below a portrait of a woman he greatly resembles - and he notes that, while asleep and dreaming, he thought about his mother a good deal, wondering if she is safe in another life. What Oliver does not know, and what the reader will not find out till much later, is that the woman in the portrait is indeed Oliver's mother, and that she was quite literally "looking down on him" at this juncture in the novel. In a second reading, this instance of dramatic irony - wherein the reader knows more than the character in the fiction - will be more pronounced. But in the first read, the reader might simply wonder why it is that Oliver's appearance would be likened to that of a woman in a picture, in a house he stumbles into by accident.

Chapter 14 Quotes

Send Oliver with them . . he will be sure to deliver them safely, you know.
Yes; do let me take them, if you please, sir. . . . I'll run all the way, sir.

Related Characters: Oliver Twist, Mr. Grimwig (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

Here is another instance in which Oliver's goodwill is tested by those around him, especially by those in positions of authority. Brownlow is inclined to trust Oliver, to believe that he is a young boy in the city without a family, and that he is in need of help. But Grimwig wants proof of Oliver's good will. He wants to know that he is not a con artist, that he is not a boy who will engage in treacherous behavior, or rob his benefactor. Thus Grimwig tells Oliver to go to the bookseller with money to fetch a book - and if Oliver is honest, he will return.

It is exactly this kind of circumstance, however, where Dickens decides to test Oliver's fate. Oliver is caught at the bookseller's by Nancy, and then delivered back to Sikes - he does not have a chance to announce to Brownlow and Grimwig what has happened to him, and so they naturally assume that he's run off with their money, and that they cannot trust him. In this instance, then, Oliver's bad luck has caught up to his good intentions - he is trapped.

Chapter 17 Quotes

I should like . . . to leave my love to poor Oliver Twist, and to let him know how often I have sat by myself and cried to think of his wandering about in the dark night with nobody to help him.

Related Characters: Dick (speaker), Oliver Twist

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

DIck is an especially saintly character in the workhouse, and another foil for Oliver - indeed, if the Dodger is the "bad" version of the hero, then Dick is the perfect one, a boy who is so sick he cannot participate in life's events, but who nevertheless has the finest of feelings and the best of intentions (similar to Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol*). Dick tells Bumble that he wishes to leave Oliver his "love," because he wants the best for Oliver. And, of course, this infuriates Bumble, who hates that Oliver has whipped up a great deal of support among the other boys in the house.

At this point in the novel Bumble seems aware of Oliver's ability to stand out among the other boys, and indeed among other people in general, and to lead them. Bumble hates that this is the case, and vows to make life even more difficult for Oliver if ever he is to find him - and, of course, Bumble then stumbles upon the notice Brownlow places in the paper, wondering where Oliver is. Bumble decides that he will "set the record straight" with Brownlow, and tell him that Oliver is really a very bad boy.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ The cry was repeated—a light appeared—a vision of two terrified half-dressed men at the top of the stairs swam before his eyes—a flash—a loud noise—a smoke—a crash somewhere . . . .

Related Characters: Oliver Twist, Giles and Brittles

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Oliver faces his own death - although of course he survives the attempted burglary. But he blacks out entirely, and all that he sees before him is, as the narrator describes, a flash of light. As in many other scenes, especially in the beginning of the novel, Oliver is entirely at the mercy of the older men around him - he must do what they say or suffer the consequences. And thus, although robbing someone is essentially the last thing Oliver would ever do, he is forced along on this mission, and very nearly killed during it.

If Oliver is currently at the prey of the men, often criminals, who control him, he will not always be this way, and as the novel progresses Oliver's fate will not be quite so drawn out by those around him. Instead, Oliver will increasingly find that his fate is in his own hands - or, that the coincidences and strange twists and turns that occur in his life might have something to do with the choices he, as a maturing young man, makes.

Chapter 25 Quotes

❝ Bill had him [Oliver] on his back and scudded like the wind. We stopped to take him between us; his head hung down; and he was cold. . . . We parted company, and left the youngster lying in a ditch. Alive or dead, that's all I know about him.

Related Characters: Toby Crackit (speaker), Sikes, Oliver Twist

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

It is interesting that, at this moment in the text, Crackit admits to having "buried" Oliver hastily, in a ditch, not knowing if Oliver will survive - and not particularly caring. Crackit is mostly happy that he has escaped the attempted robbery with his own life, and though Fagin is more concerned with Oliver's fate, it's because Oliver's injury or death would be detrimental to Fagin himself - it would lay him open to the charge that Fagin had endangered the boy and allowed these crimes to happen.

Crackit and some of the other malicious characters in the novel, including Sikes, are mostly concerned with their own safety, and demonstrate time and again their willingness to sacrifice those around them to further their own aims. This, then, is exactly the opposite of Oliver's temperament - Oliver, unlike a great many other characters in the novel, is concerned with the welfare of those around him, and does what he can to improve their circumstances even as he tries desperately, and often fails, to improve his own.

Chapter 26 Quotes

❝ I tell you again, it was badly planned. Why not have kept him here among the rest, and made a sneaking, sniveling pickpocket of him at once?

Related Characters: Monks (speaker), Oliver Twist

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

Monks, an associate of Sikes whose relationship to Oliver is, at this point, unclear, is upset that Oliver has been initiated so quickly into serious robbery. He's upset not because he fears that robbery is bad, or thinks that Oliver shouldn't rob things at all. Instead he absolutely supports the idea of Oliver becoming a thief - but he believes that Oliver should be led slowly into the craft, initially via pickpocketing, and then, over time, into larger and larger hauls. Therefore Monks critiques Fagin, in the conversation with Sikes, arguing that Fagin has rushed along Oliver in his "development."

What is interesting to note in this section, too, is how Monks and Fagin are each concerned with Oliver's "development" as a thief, his "education" such as it is. This follows in the tradition of the "Bildungsroman," or coming-of-age novel, in which a character is educated in schools or school-like places, and in which he or she learns the difficulties of life from a young age. For Oliver, this learning often comes outside educational establishments, within the seedy underworld of London.

Chapter 27 Quotes

❝ Say it again, you vile, owdacious fellow! . . . How dare you mention such a thing, sir? And how dare you encourage him, you insolent minx! Kiss her! . . . Faugh!

Related Characters: Mr. Bumble (speaker), Noah Claypole, Charlotte

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

This is an important, and comedic, indication of the profundity of Bumble's hypocrisy. Bumble has just been wooing Mrs. Corney, and wondering what he might do to curry her favor - and also how to make use of her for his own ends, since Mrs. Corney could give him a job as the manager of a poor home for which Corney also works. But Bumble, walking in on two young people carousing without any other motive - simply because they enjoy spending time with one another - finds this completely intolerable. He launches into the tirade here, accusing Charlotte of possessing lax morals, and implying that Noah is a beast for having any romantic interest in anyone.

Hypocrisy in Dickens is often shot through with class distinctions. Bumble pretends that he is not of the "lower" classes, although he is not wealthy - but he makes a living ordering around the poor in workhouses. Bumble therefore considers himself above Noah and Charlotte, and Bumble participates in a common critique of the poor in Dickens' time - the idea that poor people are "naturally" immoral, have no control over their emotions, and tend to engage readily in illicit sexual behavior.

Chapter 33 Quotes

❝ Death! Who would have thought it! Grind him to ashes! He's start up from a marble coffin, to come in my way!

Related Characters: Monks (speaker), Oliver Twist

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

This is an instance of foreshadowing, and of the nature of coincidence and apparent coincidence in the novel. Oliver, running back to the Maylie's house after having delivered a letter for Dr. Losborne, who is to help Rose in her illness, runs straight into the man who will turn out to be Monks. And Monks, though he seems only to "accidentally" be in the same place as Oliver, is indeed following him, and has had his eye on him. Oliver, of course, cannot know this, nor can he know what will be revealed later - that Monks is Oliver's half-brother, and has been trying to frame Oliver as a thief in order to "ruin" Oliver.

Monks brings up the "coffin" again, a symbol that recurs in the novel. The coffin is emblematic, of course, of the omnipresence of death - and it is also a piece of workmanship, and a trade, into which Oliver almost himself enters. Oliver, wherever he turns, cannot seem to avoid the coffin - they surround him, as does violence and death on the difficult streets of London.

Chapter 34 Quotes

❝ It was but an instant, a glance, a flash, before his eyes; and they were gone. But they had recognized him, and he them; and their look was as firmly impressed upon his memory, as if it had been deeply carved in stone . . . .

Related Characters: Oliver Twist, Fagin, Monks

Related Themes:

Page Number: 214-5

Explanation and Analysis

Oliver has been attempting to improve himself - to become educated following a lifetime's lack of formal schooling. He does this in the Maylie's home, under their supervision, and in his room there is a space for quiet contemplation and a good deal of work. It is, in short, the life he has always wanted - a life of personal and intellectual freedom.

But when Monks and Fagin show up, they do so in part,to remind him that they have not forgotten him - that they will hound him for as long as they can. They want to take Oliver back to them as a point of pride - because they believe they are responsible for Oliver's "education," such as they see it. They are also worried that, if Oliver is free, he might be able to point the authorities to them - and that would be the end of their criminal enterprise.

Chapter 35 Quotes

The prospect before you . . . is a brilliant one; all the honors to which great talents and powerful connections can help men in public life are in store for you. . . . I will neither mingle with such as hold in scorn the mother who gave me life; nor bring disgrace or failure on the son of her who has so well supplied that mother's place.

Related Characters: Rose Maylie (speaker), Harry Maylie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 219

Explanation and Analysis

Rose is the novel's most selfless character - the one to whom all other characters' generosity, including Oliver's, might be compared favorably. Rose thinks so much of Harry, and indeed loves him so much, that she could not imagine a world in which the unexplained "blight" on her family causes her to alter Harry's promising life's work as a lawyer and politician. She loves so deeply that she cannot be with the person she loves - and she is okay with this.

Harry's devotion to Rose, and Rose's devotion to Harry, is one of the book's underlying romances. In Dickens, romantic entanglements tend either to be like this one - where love is profound but thwarted - or like Nancy and Sikes' relationship, where love exists but is deeply imperfect and haunted by violence. There is a moral element, here, too - Harry and Rose are "chaste" in their life, whereas it is hinted that Nancy and Sikes are not - only adding to the illicit, "criminal" quality of the latter relationship.

Chapter 37 Quotes

Are you going to sit there snoring all day?
I am going to sit here, as long as I think proper, ma'am. . . . And although I was *not* snoring, I shall snore, gape, sneeze, laugh, or cry, as the humor strikes me . . . .

Related Characters: Mr. Bumble, Mrs. Bumble (Mrs. Corney) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

Dickens here gives us another domestic scene, and a further contrast to Rose and Harry's relationship on the one hand, and to Nancy's and Sikes' on the other. Bumble believed that marrying Mrs. Corney would make him a rich man without too much work - and if there is anything Bumble does not like to do, it's work hard. Instead, however, he finds that Mrs. Corney is not particularly nice to him - or, from her perspective, she is willing to critique his laziness - something he is more or less comfortable with.

The Bumbles' marriage thus represents a third option in the spectrum of marriages in a Dickens novel. There is thwarted, beautiful love - illicit, dangerous love - and loveless, married life. Dickens implies that Bumble longs for his bachelor days, and that those days are long in the past - that his life now must be made with someone to whom he is not particularly well suited, and who is willing to point out his shortcomings.

Chapter 40 Quotes

Do not close your heart against all my efforts to help you . . . I wish to serve you indeed.
You would serve me best, lady . . . if you could take my life at once; for I have felt more grief to think of what I am, tonight, that I ever did before . . . .

Related Characters: Rose Maylie, Nancy (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

Rose and Nancy are not so much foils as characters in utter opposition. Rose Maylie, as above, has devoted her life to others, and her sickness, which nearly kills her, is an occasion for much grieving among those in her family. Nancy, on the other hand, has made a life of petty theft - although Fagin and Sikes did help to raise her and care for her, and she is loyal to them because of it. Nancy, Dickens implies, chose her life because she had nothing else to choose - there were no other options available to her that would keep her safe and fed.

Rose seems to understand this and wants to protect Nancy. She believes that Nancy is, at heart, a good person, and, further, that Nancy can change her circumstances, can improve them by leaving Fagin and Sikes behind. But Nancy seems already to know at this point that she can never abandon her life, nor can she leave Sikes - that Sikes would as soon kill her as let her do that.

Chapter 43 Quotes

❝ You'll pay for this, my fine fellers. I wouldn't be you for something. I wouldn't go free, now, if you was to fall down on your knees and ask me. Here, carry me off to prison! Take me away!

Related Characters: The Artful Dodger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 280

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is an indication of the Dodger's carefree attitude and odd charm, right till the end. The Dodger does his best to show the court that he does not care much for their ruling - indeed, that someday, somehow, they will "regret" what they've done to him. Of course it is not clear how exactly this will come to pass, but the Dodger is accustomed, even at his young age, to a life lived as a mature adult - wherein, if the Dodger wants something, he will do everything he can do to get it, and will not let anyone, adults or the law, tell him otherwise.

The Dodger runs up against a limit on his free will when he finds himself in court, however. The Dodger could do as much as he pleased on the streets of London, but there are rules he cannot break - and when caught stealing the snuff box, he knew that his time had been called, that he was going to be hauled off to jail and made to serve at least one penalty for a young lifetime of small crimes already committed.

Chapter 44 Quotes

❝ You have a friend in me, Nance; a staunch friend. I have the means at hand, quiet and close. If you want revenge on those that treat you like a dog . . .come to me. I say, come to me.

Related Characters: Fagin (speaker), Nancy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 285

Explanation and Analysis

Fagin does not realize exactly what Nancy is doing - he believes that Nancy is meeting with another lover (not Sikes, that is), on the bridge, rather than meeting with Rose and attempting to work for Oliver's ultimate protection. But for Fagin, the real reason for Nancy's distance with Sikes is not important. What does matter is that Nancy wants this distance, that she hopes to build a life for herself away from Sikes' control. In this, Fagin sees an opening.

Dickens thus describes in this section two different kinds of treachery. On the one hand, Nancy is, of course, giving up her friends and associates to help Oliver and Rose, whom she considers to be worthy people. She is doing this, however, because she knows that her "friends" are criminals and should be stopped - she is serving, in effect, as a whistleblower. Fagin also wants to go against his friend (Sikes), but his treachery is motivated only by the possibility of greater personal gain - of cutting Sikes out of their illicit business.

Chapter 45 Quotes

❝ She goes abroad tonight . . . and on the right errand, I'm sure; for she has been alone all da, and the man she is afraid of, will not be back much before daybreak . . . .

Related Characters: Fagin (speaker), Nancy, Sikes, Noah Claypole

Related Themes:

Page Number: 288

Explanation and Analysis

This is a further instance of Fagin's treachery. He has recruited Noah to do his spying for him, to track Nancy. Thus, he is not really trying to help Nancy at all, to help her get away from Sikes, for example, or to make a life for herself on her own. No - he wishes, instead, to use Nancy as a pawn, as a means of enraging Sikes, perhaps, and further asserting control among the other criminal associates.

Fagin is a difficult character to summarize for several reasons. First, of course, he is a profoundly offensive caricature, especially in the contemporary context (although the offensiveness would also have been apparent in Dickens' time) - and, related to this, his motivations are hard to understand. For Fagin seems to have almost no shred of dignity at all - he will do anything, at any cost, to get his own way - and he seems not to care who stands in his path.

Chapter 47 Quotes

❝ It was a ghastly figure to look upon. The murderer staggering backward to the wall, and shutting out the sight with his hand, seized a heavy club and struck her down.

Related Characters: Sikes, Nancy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 302

Explanation and Analysis

The most gruesome passage in the book, and the moment when the foreshadowings of death, which have run throughout the pages of *Oliver Twist*, become actualized in Nancy's murder. From the beginning, Nancy has attempted to assert herself against, and protect herself from, Sikes, a man who has no moral scruples, no willingness to contain his anger - and who has abused Nancy brutally for years. Sikes is a character with no good in him, and Dickens does not hide the cruelty Sikes is capable of inflicting on those around him. Sikes directs the vast majority of that cruelty against Nancy.

Nancy's death is the book's most upsetting, most graphic, and most jarring moment. It is noteworthy that Rose, in her attempts to encourage Nancy to leave Sikes and stay with them, was not able to convince Nancy of this plan. This is not because Nancy didn't think it would work, but because Nancy felt her rightful place was with Sikes, even if he vowed, ultimately, do to great violence to her.

Chapter 49 Quotes

❝ You must do more than that . . . make restitution to an innocent and unoffending child, for such he is, although the offspring of a guilty and most miserable love . . . .

Related Characters: Mr. Brownlow (speaker), Oliver Twist, Monks

Related Themes:

Page Number: 319

Explanation and Analysis

Brownlow has remained a staunch and dedicated defender of Oliver's throughout the novel, even as other characters have attempted to convince him that Oliver is only using Brownlow for his money and goodwill. Brownlow seems to sense that Oliver has "good" or "noble" (really, wealthy) blood in him - and that, though Oliver might have been the child of an unwed mother, he is nevertheless "deserving," based on his "high birth," of a far greater lot in life than he has already achieved.

That Monks and Brownlow know and have known each other is a surprise to the reader at this stage in the novel - but really should not be, as Dickens has primed the reader to expect coincidences at every turn. The characters in *Oliver Twist*, as in many Dickens novels, are drawn together in a "net" of overlapping relationships that is often knotted up, or unwound, at the close of the novel - when those relationships are revealed and explained, or else destroyed.

Chapter 50 Quotes

❝ The noose was at his neck. It ran up with his weight, tight as bow-string . . . there was sudden jerk, a terrific convulsion of the limbs; and there he hung, with the open knife clenched in his stiffening hand.

Related Characters: Sikes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 326

Explanation and Analysis

In the Dickensian universe, bad behavior cannot go unpunished for very long. Sikes has quite literally gotten away with murder - at least, he has gotten away with murder for a time. But Nancy will be avenged - and in this instance, Sikes dies a painful and very public death, at exactly the moment when he is trying to elude being captured for the heinous crime he has committed. This is another gruesome moment in a novel that has seen increasing violence done to its characters.

Indeed, the relationship of the violent to the comedic, of the serious to the lighthearted, is one of Dickens' hallmarks. *Oliver Twist*, one of Dickens' earlier novels, is perhaps more lighthearted than others, as evidenced by some of the characters' rather whimsical or unrealistic-sounding names. But *Oliver Twist* is also a novel about the consequences of decision-making, and of criminal and selfish behavior. And to this end, Sikes' death is representative of a public and severe form of moral justice.

Chapter 53 Quotes

❝ I believe that the shade of Agnes sometimes hovers round that solemn nook [in the country church]. I believe it none the les, because that nook is in a Church, and she was weak and erring.

Related Characters: Agnes Fleming

Related Themes:

Page Number: 346

Explanation and Analysis

This is a somewhat strange ending to the novel. Dickens has reserved a good deal of shame for Oliver's unwed mother - going so far as to blame her, implicitly, for Oliver's difficulties in life as an orphaned boy. Dickens and his narrator are unable to consider Agnes as being anything but guilty for her "crime" of giving birth to Oliver outside of wedlock. This, for the time in England, was an unpardonable sin, and Dickens does not excuse Agnes' behavior for any reason.

It is also striking that, in a novel so concerned with Oliver's development from young boyhood into young adulthood, the final paragraph should be reserved for a continued statement on the moral status of his mother. It is as though Dickens wishes to remind his audience that, despite everything, some choices - even made innocently, or having mitigating circumstances - can produce ill effects for other people involved. In this case, Dickens argues that Oliver's fate - the things in his life beyond his control, the social disadvantages he has had to endure - have a cause, and that is his mother's decision so many years before. Although it seems preposterous to a contemporary reader, this, for Dickens, was an important point to make at the close of the book.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The narrator introduces Oliver Twist, the novel's young protagonist, who is born in an unnamed town in 1830s England, in a workhouse for the poor. The narrator claims that, although it is typically not considered good luck to be born in a workhouse, Oliver was, in this case, lucky: he had trouble breathing at birth, and if he were surrounded by family members trying to help him breathe, he surely would have died because of their misguided efforts. Since it was only the surgeon, an attending old woman, Oliver's mother, and Oliver at the birth, however, Oliver was allowed simply to "fight with Nature," and he eventually breathes.

The narrator here introduces his (or her) ironic tone, which will be maintained throughout the course of the novel. Although it appears, at first, that the narrator is going to highlight the importance of family, and the ways in which a family might help a mother giving birth, instead the narrator states that all those meddling relatives would only get in the way of the young child's breathing. Much of the humor in the novel derives from this ironic detachment from or subversion of one's expectations of a typical "family drama" of the time.

Oliver's mother asks to see Oliver once before she dies. The surgeon places Oliver in her arms, and she falls back and dies immediately. The surgeon and the attending woman, Mrs. Thingummy, discuss Oliver's mother's origins. The night before the birth, Oliver's mother came to the workhouse in torn, dirty clothes, without a wedding ring. Oliver's father is unknown.

It is a cardinal sin, in the Victorian era in England, to be pregnant and to give birth out of wedlock. This is the first strike against Oliver, in his unlucky early years—that he is a "bastard," or, officially, the child of parents who were not married.

The narrator states that, when Oliver is simply wrapped in swaddling clothes, he cannot be distinguished from the child of a very rich man—all newborns exist outside the hierarchies of social class. But then Oliver is placed in a garment of the workhouse, indicating that he is to be a pauper. The narrator comments that, if Oliver were aware of his poverty, he would be crying even louder.

Another ironic note. Poverty, the narrator states, is not inherent to the poor—it is something taken off or worn, like clothing; it is indeed inseparable from the clothing one wears. Oliver's reversal in fortune later on will show that his "poverty" was not an essential quality of his character (many in Victorian England, though, did seem to believe that poverty was just that: innate, a product of a person's inner laziness or badness.

CHAPTER 2

Because the parish determines that the workhouse does not have a woman in place to care for Oliver, he is "farmed" to a branch-workhouse three miles away, where he plays with twenty or so other young children. He is nursed "by hand," or with a bottle. The woman in charge of this branch-house, Mrs. Mann, spends most of the parish stipend on her own purchases, and leaves only a very small amount to feed the children, many of whom die of malnourishment. But the surgeon and the local beadle make sure not to investigate the branch-house's activities, which continues operating to the detriment of the children in it.

Although this "farming house" is supposed to exist to raise the children of deceased parents, it mainly serves to keep these children "out of the way." Many of the children die before they even reach adulthood, meaning that the state no longer has to look out for them or take care of them. Those children that do, almost by accident, survive to "grow up" will simply be placed in the workhouse, to labor alongside other paupers—and to be shelved, similarly, out of sight of the general populace.

It is Oliver's ninth birthday, and Mr. Bumble, the beadle, or church official in charge of administering the Poor Laws in that region, has arrived to speak with Mrs. Mann about him. The beadle declares also, as an aside, that he gave Oliver his full name (he invented the first, and the last was the next alphabetically, after a previous boy named "Swubble"). After this, the beadle announces that Oliver, being aged nine, will have to leave the "farm" and return to the workhouse.

Oliver's iconic last name was invented by Bumble and assigned to him—much of the novel, indeed, will be a search for Oliver's origins, for his "true name." It should be noted, too, that conceptions of "adolescence," or teenage years, did not exist at this time, nor did child labor laws. From the age of nine, Oliver is expected to work like an adult.

Although Oliver finds Mrs. Mann to be a cruel woman, he pretends that he has loved her and his time at the "farm." He goes with the beadle to the workhouse, and is brought before "the board," or the group of men that manage and administer the house. Oliver cries before them, out of nervousness, and they wonder why he would be crying. They tell Oliver he is to be assigned a trade: he will learn to pick "oakum," or hemp used for making ships, the next morning.

Some trades were reserved specifically for children, as they involved small, repetitive actions that would better be practiced by those with lots of time and small hands. The picking of oakum is one of these trades; and it is irrelevant whether or not Oliver agrees to this assignment—he has no choice in the matter.

The narrator describes how the board regulates the amount of food those in the workhouse are allowed to eat; it is mostly "gruel," or water mixed with thin oatmeal, and many of the workers starve and die. An episode is then related: Oliver, after three months of near starvation, approaches the master in the dining hall and asks if he might have more gruel. The master is flabbergasted, and calls for the beadle, who brings Oliver before the board again.

An iconic scene in the novel. Oliver dares do what no one else does—this is an indication that Oliver possesses "heroic" qualities—that he is a beacon of virtue toward which other characters in the novel seem to gravitate. Oliver's decision to ask for more—to think that he might deserve more or that the world might be willing to give him more—precipitates his leaving the workhouse, and his journey through the world and into London.

One member of the board, a "man in a white waistcoat," remarks aloud, over and over, that he believes Oliver, a troublemaker, will eventually be hung. The beadle and the board decide to post a notice outside the workhouse: five pounds to anyone who will take on Oliver Twist as their apprentice.

This man in the white waistcoat will repeat his refrain, of "hanging for Oliver," numerous times. Of course, it is not Oliver but several of the criminals around him, namely Sikes and Fagin, who will be hanged later on.

CHAPTER 3

Oliver is placed in a small room, in solitary confinement, as punishment for asking for more oatmeal; he remains there one week. Oliver is flogged in public and in private, including before the other boys in the dining hall. Meanwhile, a chimney-sweeper named Mr. Gamfield happens to notice the posted bill, advertising Oliver's services as apprentice.

Here Oliver's punishment in the workhouse is indistinguishable from the punishment he would receive in prison. This lays bare the truth of the workhouse: that it is, essentially, a jail for the poor, who are treated, by the state, like criminals, simply for being poor.

Mr. Gamfield, who has been mercilessly beating his donkey outside the workhouse, is believed, by the man in the waistcoat and others on the board, to be a "suitable" and strong-willed master for Oliver. But the board pretends that they have reservations, sending Oliver to such a dangerous trade as chimney-sweeping, and they argue their reward down to three pounds, fifteen shillings. Gamfield accepts.

The board merely pretends they are concerned for Oliver's health as a chimney-sweep's apprentice—in reality, the board wants to pay less to foist him off on someone else. Another irony: while the board fakes concern for Oliver's condition, they have him locked up in a solitary room not far away.

Bumble takes Oliver before the magistrate, in order to have papers signed granting Oliver to Gamfield as a chimney-sweep's apprentice. All proceeds according to Gamfield's wishes, until the magistrate notices that Oliver is pale and upset about his coming apprenticeship. The magistrate asks Oliver what's the matter, and Oliver replies by begging the magistrate to do anything he can—even to send Oliver back to the workhouse—to avoid going off with the cruel Gamfield.

One of Oliver's qualities, throughout the novel, is an inability to dissemble—to lie about his feelings. Rather, as here, Oliver must show what he feels—he "cannot tell a lie." He is scared about serving as Gamfield's apprentice, and he shows this to the magistrate. Bumble believes Oliver is trying to trick his way into sympathy, but this is simply Oliver's way of expressing emotion.

Bumble is immensely angry with Oliver, and he leads him back to the workhouse; Gamfield walks away, wishing he might have had Oliver as an apprentice; and a sign is once again posted outside the house, offering Oliver's services.

It should be noted that the board is mostly upset, here, because they now have to expend extra effort in "placing" Oliver again, and because they had a "good deal" in placing him with Gamfield—paying Gamfield less than the promised five pounds.

CHAPTER 4

The board and the beadle decide that they will try to send Oliver to sea, to apprentice him to a captain on a ship. On his way back to the workhouse, the beadle encounters Mr. Sowerberry, a **coffin**-maker, who looks to collect money for recent coffins he has made for the workhouse, and who complains, to the beadle, that the workhouse pays him very little for his coffins. The beadle replies that the pay is small because the coffins, and the people that go inside them from the house, are small.

Sowerberry, as evidenced here, also participates in the economy of poverty that surrounds the workhouse, but which benefits no one who actually lives in the workhouses. Sowerberry makes a profit manufacturing cheap coffins for the poor who die while in the workhouse—the coffins can be cheap because the bodies of the poor placed inside are so frail.

Bumble asks Sowerberry if the latter knows of anyone needing an apprentice, and Sowerberry responds that he himself needs one. Sowerberry also compliments the beadle on his "button," a medal he received from the church of the Good Samaritan for healing a sick man. The beadle recalls that he first wore the medal to the official meeting wherein the death of a tradesman was investigated, and Sowerberry reminds the beadle, not without irony, that the tradesman died because he was locked out of the workhouse late at night, and froze to death just outside the door.

Another irony. Bumble has been given an award for his "Samaritanship," meaning his willingness to help others when they are in need, but of course Bumble cares not a jot for the needs of anyone but himself. Sowerberry points this out, subtly, to Bumble, who has difficulty taking the hint. Sowerberry, though a participant in the exploitative economy surrounding the workhouses, does seem more aware of the injustices this system creates.

The beadle brushes of Sowerberry's criticism aside and informs Oliver, while Sowerberry is meeting with the board, that Oliver will either go as apprentice to Sowerberry, or he'll be sent to sea, where surely he will drown. The board approves this apprenticeship. Later that evening, Oliver becomes quiet and frightened. As Bumble drags Oliver to meet Sowerberry and his wife at their home, Oliver begins to cry again, and the beadle starts to yell at Oliver. But Oliver pleads that he is merely lonely at the workhouse and afraid of what will become of him. The beadle, confused by Oliver's emotion, allows Oliver to collect himself, then continues dragging him to Sowerberry.

Here, again, Bumble's lack of concern for others shows. Bumble has no idea why Oliver might be crying—why Oliver might be afraid to be taken out of the only home he has ever known (and a terrible home at that), to be placed in the house of a strange family, and to be forced to work a terrifying trade from a young age. Bumble appears, for a moment, to sympathize with Oliver here, but just as quickly drags Oliver along to Sowerberry—Bumble is incapable actually of changing his attitude toward the poor.

Mrs. Sowerberry remarks that Oliver is very small and thin, when he is dropped off at their house by the beadle. She offers Oliver small bits of meat that their dog wouldn't eat, and Oliver eats them down in the basement. Mrs. Sowerberry then shows Oliver upstairs, to the attic containing the **coffins**, where Oliver is to sleep.

Mrs. Sowerberry believes she is doing Oliver a good deed by giving him any meat at all, even if this meat is of such low quality that a dog won't eat it. No one seems to think that Oliver might be terrified by the thought of sleeping among so many coffins, about to be placed in the ground.

CHAPTER 5

Oliver spends the night, alone, among the **coffins**, and can barely sleep, he is so disturbed by the strange and macabre sight of the coffins laid out. Oliver is awoken the next morning by Noah Claypole, a boy only slightly older than him, who nevertheless begins ordering Oliver about. Charlotte, the Sowerberry's daughter, finds Noah's mistreatment of Oliver funny. Noah believes himself superior to Oliver because, though he is also poor, he knows his parents, who live close by—unlike Oliver, the orphan, who has never known his parents.

This section indicates the "naturalness" of certain hierarchies, which will always develop in societies, no matter how impoverished the circumstances. Noah is a boy of no means, but his family is alive, and his parents work trades—menial ones, but trades nonetheless. This makes Noah, in his own mind, superior to Oliver. Of course, there is a dramatic irony here, for it will be revealed, later, that Oliver is in fact the son of a gentleman, and of higher social station than anyone in the Sowerberry home.

One night, after about a month of Oliver's apprenticeship, Sowerberry tells his wife that, because Oliver is an attractive young man with a "melancholic" disposition, he would make a good "mute," or a mourner brought along to accompany and "enhance" funeral parties.

These "mutes" help mourners to feel that their loved one was an important personage, one for whom many will come and pay respects. At the same time, the more people at a funeral, the more who know about Sowerberry's coffin-making services; it is an advertisement for the man's business.

The beadle arrives soon thereafter, and tells Sowerberry that a woman in the parish has died, and is in need of a **coffin** and a funeral preparation. The beadle does not ask after Oliver, nor does he seem to remember that Oliver is even present at Sowerberry's. Sowerberry decides to take Oliver along with him to the house of the deceased woman.

How quickly Oliver is forgotten. Bumble seems only to care about Oliver when Oliver is making problems for him in the workhouse—otherwise, the poor, to the beadle, are nothing more than objects to be collected, managed, moved about, and profited from.

Oliver and Sowerberry find the house in squalid, impoverished condition. The husband of the deceased woman is afraid to have her in the ground, "where the worms can get her," and mourns her quick passing, of fever. The woman's mother asks when the funeral is to take place, and Sowerberry responds that it will be the next day. The beadle has sent to the house a small amount of food, to placate the family.

A harrowing scene, intended surely, by Dickens, to show the crushing horrors of poverty outside the workhouse. The woman has died simply for want of basic amenities, yet even in her death the family is being charged (to them) high rates just to bury the body and perform the last rites.

Oliver walks with Sowerberry, the beadle, and four pallbearers the next day, at the woman's funeral; the casket is so light, with the woman's frail body, that the pallbearers more or less run to the grave, where they are kept waiting by a pastor busy with other funerals. The casket is buried atop numerous others in a shallow grave, and the ceremony is very brief.

A continuation of the harrowing scene above. To bury bodies more cheaply, the poor are placed in makeshift mass graves, some of which are then exposed by heavy rains. All this contributes to an atmosphere of horror and degradation for the poor.

Sowerberry asks, after the funeral is over, whether Oliver minded being a "mute" mourner; Oliver says he does not like the job very much, but Sowerberry ensures he will get used to it. Oliver wonders how long it took Sowerberry to get used to this line of work.

At least Sowerberry shows some concern for Oliver—even if this concern ultimately derives from a business interest (Sowerberry believes Oliver's handsomeness will bring in more customers). Although Sowerberry is cruel to Oliver, he is the least cruel of the novel's early characters.

CHAPTER 6

Oliver continues working for Sowerberry as a "mute," and because it's a time of year when sickness is more prevalent, the **coffin** trade increases, and Oliver attends more funerals. Oliver notes that many mourners—including people who have lost their wives and husbands—seem all too happy to bury their dead, and to look for new partners. Oliver interprets this as a sign of their happiness, but the narrator implies that these people are actually selfish and heartless.

Another of Dickens' ironies. Dickens makes it seem as though he does not judge those "mourners" who use funerals as excuses to meet new romantic partners—when, of course, Dickens is strongly criticizing the apparent superficiality he sees in the Victorian middle class.

Noah keeps ordering Oliver around, and Charlotte, following Noah's lead, does so as well. Mr. Sowerberry tends to look out for Oliver (because Oliver is so useful for business, serving as a mute), and Mrs. Sowerberry, to oppose her husband, typically criticizes Oliver.

Marriages in the novel tend either to be Happy or Unhappy, with very few falling in between. The Sowerberrys' marriage, like the Bumbles' later on, falls into the latter category.

An important episode is recounted: Noah and Oliver descend to the basement to eat dinner (as usual), and Noah asks about Oliver's mother. Oliver replies that she is dead, and Noah, knowing this, goes on to say that Oliver's mother was a "bad 'un"; he implies that she was a prostitute and a criminal. At this, Oliver becomes enraged, and flies at Noah in a fury.

The implication here is that Oliver's mother, apart from having Oliver out of wedlock, was also what Victorians would call a "woman of loose morals." This is not borne out by the facts of Agnes' life—as Edward, Oliver's father, was her true love, and she was committed to him.

Noah immediately cries out (coward-like) for help, and Charlotte and Mrs. Sowerberry rush to his aid, pulling Oliver away, and remarking that they always knew Oliver was a bad seed. They pledge to inform Mr. Sowerberry of Oliver's actions when he returns home. Noah feels he is lucky to be alive. No mention is made of the fact that Noah incited the fight. Charlotte and Mrs. Sowerberry send Noah to tell Bumble of the fight.

Noah appears to talk a good deal, but when it comes to fighting, Oliver—never one to instigate—will battle to defend his principles, and, in this case, to protect his mother's reputation (although at this point he knows nothing about his mother). Oliver's bravery here is implicitly praised by Dickens, and Noah's cowardice is criticized.

CHAPTER 7

Noah runs all the way to the workhouse, and finds Mr. Bumble. Noah informs Bumble that Oliver has "gone vicious" and attempted to kill him; Noah exaggerates the episode, and says also (falsely) that Oliver pledged to kill Sowerberry as well. Noah asks whether Bumble would return to the Sowerberry home and beat Oliver, since Sowerberry is out at the moment. The man in the white waistcoat, who overhears this exchange, remarks that he always knew Oliver was a bad seed—a boy who one day would be hung.

It was not enough that Noah pushed Oliver into a fight for which he (Noah) was not ready—Noah also lies to Bumble, making it seem that Oliver started the fight, and that Oliver has been plotting to kill the Sowerberrys all along. Bumble is all too willing to believe this—to ascribe unsavoriness to Oliver's character. Of course, later in the novel, it is Bumble who is revealed, by the narrator, to be an unsavory and immoral man.

Bumble heads with Noah back to the Sowerberrys'. He finds Oliver locked in a room, and Oliver tells Bumble he is not afraid of him. Bumble informs Mrs. Sowerberry that Oliver's anger is attributable to his being fed meat at their home. Bumble recommends leaving Oliver down in the cellar for a day or too, to "starve" him a little; he says that Oliver's mother was also physically very strong, and she fought long and hard before she died in childbirth.

A means by which Bumble justifies his, and the workhouse's, thin ration of gruel—any larger amount of food, and the prisoners and workers, well-fed, would revolt against Bumble and the board. It is hard to believe that Oliver would be strong enough to fight Noah, who is much larger than Oliver, even if Oliver is being fed "meat."

Sowerberry returns at this point. Mrs. Sowerberry insists that whatever Noah said about Oliver's mother was true, but Oliver becomes enraged at this, and shouts to Mrs. Sowerberry that these are lies. Mrs. Sowerberry bursts into tears, and at this point Sowerberry, initially reluctant to punish Oliver, feels he must do so.

An important point, noted by the narrator: Sowerberry is still inclined to like Oliver and to side with him. Only after Oliver contradicts his wife does Sowerberry decide that, to save face, he must punish the boy. Sowerberry's major flaw, demonstrated here, is a willingness to please his wife at all costs.

Sowerberry beats Oliver to Bumble's and Mrs. Sowerberry's satisfaction, then has him sleep in the **coffin** workshop alone. That night, Oliver realizes how alone he is in the world, and resolves to do something about his position. In the early morning light, he sneaks out of the Sowerberrys' house and makes his way, quickly and quietly, to the workhouse.

A turning point in the book. Oliver decides to take his "fate" into his own hands. If he were to stay at the coffin-shop, he would be an unhappy, poor apprentice for much of his young life. Instead, he attempts to make his fortune in London.

Oliver encounters an old friend named Dick in the workhouse garden. Oliver tells Dick never to tell anyone that he has seen Oliver there; Oliver announces that he is going off in the world to seek his fortune. Oliver tells Dick he will one day be happy, and Dick, overcome with love for Oliver, kisses him and blesses him. The narrator says that Oliver never once forgot this blessing from Dick—which were really the first kind words anyone had ever spoken to him.

Dick barely appears in the novel—he is in three scenes—but he is something of a foil to Oliver, another "good boy" who is not so lucky, and who apparently does not come from high-born parents. Whatever benefits Oliver later receives, Dick does not; thus their two fates, so similar in the beginning of the text, diverge a great deal by the end, when Oliver returns to his village with Brownlow and the Maylies and Dick dies. In this way, Dickens is able to maintain his criticism of England's Poor Laws even as Oliver escapes poverty.

CHAPTER 8

Oliver decides to walk to London, which is about seventy miles away. He is five miles outside the town, but he hides during the morning hours in case someone might be sent to find him and bring him back. He has only a "crust of bread," a penny, and a change of clothes, and he walks another four miles, wondering whether he will make it to the big city at all.

This is one of the most arduous tasks Oliver must accomplish in the novel. It is not an easy walk for anyone, and Oliver is a small, undernourished boy. Dickens here shows the extent of Oliver's resolve and courage: his willingness to risk his life in order to escape his circumstances.

On the first day Oliver walks twenty miles and sleeps under a pile of hay; the next morning, he exchanges the penny for another loaf of bread. In the towns he passes through, Oliver attempts to get a ride in others' coaches, but they do not admit him, and he often sees billboards stating that beggars will be arrested and prosecuted (as it was illegal to beg, and to travel as a pauper; the poor were supposed to report only to their local workhouses for relief).

One of the additional savageries of the Poor Laws in England was the fact that paupers, as the poor were known, were not permitted to leave the place in which they were born. That is, paupers had only one option: the poorhouse, which was no option at all. Oliver has forgone this "option," and therefore is, technically, a criminal, in the eyes of Victorian law.

Oliver continues walking for days. He encounters a roadworker and his wife, who give him bread and cheese—enough to keep him alive. Oliver is thankful for their kindness and continues on. On the seventh day, in the town of Barnet, Oliver comes upon a young boy who asks him what's the matter. The boy is dressed in the manner of a young gentleman, though he is very small, and he speaks to Oliver in a slang Oliver does not understand. But he says he will help Oliver to get food. Oliver agrees readily, as he is nearly starved.

This couple, the roadworker and his wife, play a very small part in the novel, but they help Oliver a great deal—without their aid, Oliver might have perished on the way to the great city of London. Dickens, and the narrator, appear to have a large amount of sympathy for this couple—it should be noted that it was also illegal to help the poor to flee the region of their birth, as this couple does.

The strange boy purchases ham and bread from a shopkeeper, and takes Oliver to a pub, where Oliver eats ravenously. The boy asks Oliver whether he is heading to London, and if he needs shelter; Oliver says yes to both. The boy introduces himself as Jack Dawkins, and says that he lives with a "kind old gentleman" who will be able to provide Oliver shelter. Dawkins says his nickname is the Artful Dodger.

The narrator introduces one of Dickens' most famous characters, across all his novels. The Artful Dodger is not much older than Oliver, and not much larger, but is impossibly wise in the "ways of the world." The Dodger has been educated in the streets of London, and he speaks a language so full of slang it is sometimes difficult for Oliver to understand.

Oliver distrusts some aspects of the Dodger's bearing—he senses that the Dodger might be using him for some kind of trick—but resolves to go with him into London, to see about the "old gentleman," and from there to decide on the best course of action. The pair make their way, in the evening, into London, a distance of several more miles, and go through a series of increasingly impoverished neighborhoods, until they reach an apartment building, where the Dodger provides a password to another young boy and asks if Fagin is home. The other young boy says yes, and Oliver and the Dodger enter the building.

It is hard to piece through the Dodger's motives. Of course he brings Oliver to Fagin because Fagin is always on the look-out for other boys to bring into the fold—small boys who won't be considered "marks" or thieves. But the Dodger also seems to take a liking to Oliver, and he wants, in however small a way, to help him, in the way that the Dodger was helped when he arrived in the city. The Dodger is still a largely immoral character, but he is not without his humanity.

Oliver walks into the dirty, grimy apartment, and is introduced by the Dodger to Fagin, a Jewish man described (with great prejudice) by the narrator as being small, shriveled, and evil-looking. There are "four or five" other boys in the room, and they appear to work for Fagin. The boys cook sausages for Oliver, who eats them hungrily, and Fagin mixes Oliver a hot gin and water to help him sleep, which Oliver does almost immediately, as he is exhausted from his journey.

Dickens' anti-Semitism in this section deserves a mention. In Victorian England, it was common in popular culture to attribute shockingly "evil" characteristics to Jewish people. These representations go back to the Middle Ages, and though they should not by any means be excused or ignored in Dickens, they are a product of the time and the dominant culture in which, and to which, Dickens was writing.

CHAPTER 9

Oliver sleeps until the late morning, and wakes up slowly to find Fagin boiling coffee for his breakfast. Fagin checks to see if Oliver is awake—Oliver pretends still to be asleep, though he is semi-conscious. Fagin then latches the door of the apartment and pulls a small box out of a hutch in the floor—the box contains jewels and other valuable items, which Fagin examines with great relish, remarking to himself how fine these objects are. Fagin mumbles to himself about the men who stole some of these objects, and implied that they have been hung by the authorities, while Fagin has been left with the booty.

Another anti-Semitic stereotype: the idea that Jewish members of society were somehow "obsessed" with gold and jewelry. There are numerous historical reasons for this association—the fact that many European societies did not allow Christians to lend money at interest, thus causing many Jewish people to enter early banking industries—but Dickens does not concern himself with these subtleties. Rather, his Fagin is an amalgam of various common Jewish stereotypes of the time.

Oliver's eyes open for a moment and catch Fagin's—Fagin immediately closes the lid and hides the box, asking Oliver how much of the preceding he has seen. Oliver says he has seen only a little, but admits to noticing the jewels, which Fagin explains are the "little bit" he has to live on, now, in his old age. Oliver remarks to himself that Fagin must be a "miser," to live with such wealth in such squalid surroundings.

Fagin is also worried that Oliver will realize how much money he manages. What Fagin does not know, however, is that Oliver's concern for money is only very basic: Oliver wants enough money to live comfortably and stably, but he has no desire to be rich. This goodness, ironically, is later rewarded by the relatively large inheritance Oliver receives.

The Dodger returns to the apartment with a "sprightly" boy he introduces to Oliver as Charley Bates. Fagin asks what the Dodger and Bates have "made" that morning, and the Dodger replies he has "made" some pocket-books, and Bates that he has made some handkerchiefs, or "wipes." Fagin asks Oliver if one day he will "make" wipes, and Oliver readily agrees, not understanding that to "make" means to steal these objects. The boys laugh aloud at how "green," or naïve, Oliver is.

Oliver believes that Bates and the Dodger work in some kind of factory and manufacture these items. He will learn, slowly, that they simply steal them. Dickens here attributes Oliver's naiveté to a desire to believe the best in people—but it is sometimes difficult to believe, in the novel, that Oliver is so willing to ascribe goodness to characters who are so clearly immoral and "bad."

Fagin then plays a "game" with the Dodger and Bates, wherein he puts on a large coat, filled with trinkets and baubles, and challenges the two to steal from it without Fagin's noticing. They play this game for a while, and Oliver watches, not understanding how the game relates to their "jobs" in the streets. Two women, Bet and Nancy, arrive dressed in finery, and after a little drink they head out with the Dodger and Bates for the afternoon.

This "game" is a form of pickpocketing practice for the Dodger and Bates. Fagin, in this way, creates a life that almost resembles a kind of foster home, where he cares for his "children" and helps them to play. But, in reality, this is only the appearance of a family: Fagin's relationship to the boys is only motivated by Fagin's greed.

Fagin shows Oliver how easy the life of these young men and women is—they "work" only in the mornings, and are free to spend time to themselves in the afternoon, unless a "job" presents itself to them by chance. Fagin has Oliver practice picking his pocket, and also has him take stitches out of people's personalized handkerchiefs, but Oliver does not understand how these "games" relate to the jobs the Dodger and others do in the streets. Fagin says, simply, that Oliver ought to make those boys his model, and do as they do.

Fagin begins, here, to tell Oliver that he wishes for him to pattern his behavior on Bates' and the Dodger's. Fagin wishes to "raise" Oliver in the tradition of these other pickpockets. But Fagin will encounter resistance on Oliver's part—the boy is too virtuous to be corrupted by his surroundings, even when forced to by those who have power over him, like Fagin and, later, Sikes.

CHAPTER 10

For the next several days, Oliver plays the "wipes" game with Fagin, but is not allowed to accompany the Dodger and Bates on their work. Finally, Fagin allows Oliver to go out with them, since there has been very little money coming into the house for some time. Turning into a bookstall near a part of town called Clerkenwell, the Dodger and Bates spot an elderly gentleman examining his books, and believe he is "green," a "good plant," someone from whom they might be able to take a handkerchief. Oliver still does not understand, but walks up to the man with the two boys.

Like Oliver, this gentleman, later revealed to be Brownlow, is considered "green," or too naïve and wrapped up in his own life to think about the criminal activity going on around him. One of the novel's great coincidences here occurs: that Oliver should find himself near a man who, it is later shown, was a good friend of Oliver's long-lost father. These coincidences build up in the novel, especially as it nears its conclusion.

Oliver observes the Dodger steal the old man's handkerchief out of his pocket, and immediately the Dodger and Bates run away. Oliver is horrified and doesn't know what to do. He quickly realizes where all the jewels have come from in Fagin's apartment, and the reason for the "game" he plays with Fagin. Oliver decides to run away, and the old man at the book-stall, realizing his handkerchief is gone, sees Oliver running last and assumes him to be the thief.

Oliver's response is a normal one—to run from the scene of a crime—but it is also the response that a naïve person would have, thus implicating Oliver in a crime with which he had no part. Once Oliver is seen running away, he can only increase his perceived guilt, not dispel it.

Bates and the Dodger, to avoid suspicion, also raise the cry of "Stop, thief!" shouted by the old man as he runs after Oliver. Others in the street answer the call as well, and soon Oliver is hunted by many people, shopkeepers and bystanders alike, down a narrow road. He is hit on the back of the head by one of them, and brought down; the old man identifies Oliver as the boy he believes to have stolen his handkerchief.

This will be a common scene: that of shopkeepers and other people on the street rallying to capture Oliver, or to allow him to be captured. Later, when Oliver is taken by Nancy and Sikes, people on the street chastise Oliver for his apparent unwillingness to go along with his "sister" Nancy.

A police officer arrives, and though Oliver pleads that he stole nothing, that it was "the other two boys," the officer says this is a likely story, and drags Oliver to the police station nearby. The old man follows along. The Dodger and Bates slink merrily away, undetected, knowing they have framed Oliver for their crime.

Bates and the Dodger have a reaction opposite to Oliver's; they make no fuss and move slowly and surely away from the scene of the crime, thus avoiding being "pinched," or captured by the authorities. Oliver is not yet versed in these sorts of criminal methods.

CHAPTER 11

The policeman walks Oliver to the magistrate's office, along with the old gentleman. Questioned by a guard at the magistrate's gate, however, the old gentleman says he is not sure that Oliver actually stole the handkerchief—it could have been someone else—and he says he does not want to press charges. But the guard says it is too late at this point; they must see the magistrate about the case.

Brownlow realizes, just by looking at Oliver, that Oliver has the appearance of an honest boy. This is in marked contrast to others in Oliver's life (Bumble, those on the board of the workhouse) who look at Oliver and see only a vicious, lying scoundrel.

Oliver is thrown into a cell, and the old gentleman looks at him as this is being done; he swears he has seen something like Oliver's face before, but he does not know how or why, nor can he place the face that resembles Oliver's. He is tapped on the shoulder and led by the guard into the office of Mr. Fang, the district magistrate.

The first of a series of "recognitions" that happen in the novel. Most involve Brownlow. Brownlow later figures out that the woman in the portrait—Edward Leeford's intended—is Agnes, Oliver's mother—but he only does so after Oliver is recaptured by Nancy and sent back to Fagin.

An angry and cruel man, Mr. Fang rules over his courtroom with an iron fist. The old gentleman explains that his name is Brownlow, but before he is allowed to narrate the events of the case—and to plead on Oliver's behalf, since he now thinks Oliver is innocent of the crime—Fang demands that the policeman describe the theft. The policeman must admit, after repeating the sequence of events, that the handkerchief was not found on Oliver, and no one actually witnessed Oliver taking it from Brownlow.

Fang is an exemplar of the "faceless" system of justice holding sway at this time in Victorian England. Fang is capable of dispensing verdicts from his bench without even hearing the substance of a trial—this makes Fang, literally, "judge, jury, and executioner." Dickens lampoons Fang's judicial powers and his inability to hear anyone's side of the case.

Brownlow tells Fang he is worried that Oliver has been injured by the crowd's beating after the "theft." Fang doesn't listen, and asks Oliver to describe the theft himself. A clerk standing nearby attempts to hear Oliver's words, which are mumbled softly (as Oliver does appear quite ill); the clerk ventures that the boy's name is Tom White (because he cannot hear Oliver speak), and guesses, correctly, that Oliver is an orphan with no permanent home. Fang, believing he has heard enough, sentences Oliver "summarily" to three months' hard labor.

It should be noted that Oliver's real name was given him by Bumble—in other words, Oliver's name is an assumed one (his father's last name, it will later be revealed, is Leeford). Thus "Tom White" is simply another identity layered over Oliver's already "artificial" identity. It is interesting to note that Oliver's last name, Twist, is far more interesting than the name given him by the guard—the generic "White."

Just as Fang is delivering the sentence, however, a man rushes into the courtroom: the book-stall's owner, who claims to have seen the theft and to know that Oliver is not the culprit. The bookseller states that he saw two other boys with Oliver, the Dodger and Bates, and that they conspired to steal the handkerchief—Oliver had nothing to do with it. Fang points out that Brownlow is still carrying a book he took from the bookseller's, during the commotion, and for which he did not pay. Fang tells Brownlow he is lucky not to be prosecuted for his own "theft." Fang tells everyone to clear out; he will drop charges against Oliver.

The bookseller emerges just in time. This is a common tactic in Dickens' fiction: a character appears to be in an impossible scrape, only to find out, at the very last second, that he has been rescued. Indeed, this will happen to Oliver throughout the novel—most importantly, when he is taken in by the Maylies after the failed robbery. Oliver's "good luck" in this regard seems to indicate not only that he is the novel's "hero," but that he is protected by some sort of fated good luck.

Brownlow is ushered outside by the guard, along with Oliver and the bookseller. Brownlow orders a carriage immediately, as he fears Oliver truly is ill; the three get into the first cab that arrives.

Another rescue. Brownlow has done a 180 degree turn on his appraisal of Oliver—he now wants only to help the young boy.

CHAPTER 12

Brownlow takes Oliver with him back to his house near Pentonville, a nice neighborhood of London (the bookseller, no longer mentioned, is presumably dropped off). Oliver lies in bed and is tended to by the servants at Brownlow's house; Oliver is in bad condition, and lies "insensate" for many days with fever.

The first of Oliver's spells in bed. Oliver will have another when he is taken in by the Maylies, after the bungled robbery. In those who are good, Oliver seems to inspire even more goodness.

Oliver finally awakes, after several days, to find himself still in Brownlow's house, being looked after by an old woman named Mrs. Bedwin. When Mrs. Bedwin exclaims to herself that Oliver is a sweet young boy, and that his mother should see him lying as he is now, Oliver remarks that he feels his mother has been watching over him as he has been ill in bed. This causes Mrs. Bedwin to shed a few sympathetic tears.

An important instance of foreshadowing. Oliver feels his mother's presence in Brownlow's house—and it turns out that his mother's presence is *there. Brownlow was given a picture of Agnes by Edward Leeford, on that man's last trip from England to continental Europe. Thus, ironically, Oliver is correct in believing his mother is near.*

A doctor visits and corroborates the fact that Oliver is on the mend. Oliver spends several ensuing nights lying quietly in bed, and prays to God for his speedy recovery when he is alone, as he feels that death is "nearby." Oliver eventually feels strong enough to sit in an easy chair in a parlor of the house, and when he does so he spots a portrait on the wall of a young woman, one he finds beautiful and mysterious. But Mrs. Bedwin fears the picture is causing Oliver to grow agitated in his still-present illness, so she turns his chair to face another direction.

The second important recognition. Oliver is very much attracted to the picture of the woman he sees—a woman he does not know to be his mother. He simply finds her radiant, beatific. It is perhaps hard to imagine that Oliver wouldn't suspect a family resemblance between himself and this woman, but that disbelief must be suspended in order for the scene to have its intended emotional effect.

Brownlow enters the parlor soon after to see Oliver; when he does so, he cannot help holding back a few tears, which he attributes, in front of Mrs. Bedwin, to some kind of cold. Brownlow refers to Oliver as Tom White, and when Oliver corrects Brownlow, telling him his real name, Brownlow wonders why Oliver told the magistrate differently—Oliver explains that he never told the magistrate anything (because he was too weak to speak), and Brownlow, though puzzled, takes Oliver at his word.

Oliver has been forced into a difficult position—the guard who claimed Oliver's name was Tom was doing so because Oliver was incapable of speech at that moment; but this seems, to Brownlow, at first, like another possible lie from Oliver. Although Brownlow is inclined to believe the boy, Oliver is nevertheless, through bad luck, put into situations in which it appears he is lying.

Then Brownlow immediately notices the likeness between Oliver and the woman in the picture, the one with which Oliver was fascinated. As Brownlow points out this coincidence, Oliver faints in his easy chair. The narrator takes advantage of Oliver's faint to describe the whereabouts of the Dodger, Bates, and Fagin.

One would imagine that Brownlow, here, would put together that Agnes is Oliver's mother, but this full realization does not come until after Oliver has been recaptured by Fagin's gang. This is perhaps hard to believe, but necessary for Dickens complex plot.

The Dodger and Bates have slipped away from the scene of the crime, and once they are clear of the crowd, Bates begins laughing at Oliver's face when he was taken—Bates finds the incident only funny—while the Dodger worries what Fagin will say, now that Oliver has been nabbed by the police. Bates and the Dodger realize they cannot avoid Fagin much longer, so they head back to the house, where Fagin recognizes at once that only two of them have returned from the day's escapade.

The Dodger and Bates have differing attitudes regarding their escape. Although both are happy to be free, Bates seems only to enjoy the raucous fun of leaving Oliver to take the blame; the Dodger, on the other hand, appears to have small pangs of remorse for their deed, and the Dodger worries that Fagin will be upset with them, when they return to the flophouse.

CHAPTER 13

Fagin yells at the Dodger and Bates, asking what has become of Oliver; the Dodger finally replies that Oliver has been taken by the police, and Fagin, enraged, attempts to throw a pot at the two boys. But at this moment a burly man and his dog walk into the apartment, and Fagin nearly hits the man with the pot. The man, aged thirty-five years, demands an explanation from Fagin, and says, contemptuously, that Fagin ought not to mistreat the boys in this way.

The relationship between Fagin and Sikes is never fully explained. It appears that Sikes is simply a partner-in-crime, but it is also possible that Sikes was a young man "raised," in part, by Fagin. Nancy, of course, was directly under Fagin's control when she was younger—just as the Dodger and Bates are now.

The burly man, who Fagin refers to as Bill Sikes, continues berating Fagin, saying that, if he were Fagin's apprentice, he would have tried to kill Fagin a long time ago. Fagin appears deferential to and fearful of Sikes, and gets him a drink while Sikes sits down in the apartment.

Fagin is terrified of Sikes' physical strength, but Fagin also appears willing, in later scenes, to use his cunning to defeat the burly housebreaker. Sikes and Fagin are yin and yang—two possibilities for crime: brute force and sly calculation.

Fagin worries, aloud, to Sikes, that if Oliver has been caught, and has given up information about Fagin to the police, then Fagin and the boys could be in trouble. Fagin also insinuates to Sikes that if he (Fagin) is in trouble, then that same information would cause Sikes to be in even more trouble, for crimes Fagin does not mention or describe.

One of the gang's, and Fagin's, constant fears is "peaching," or the potential for members of the gang to rat out the group's activities to the police. Fagin does all he can to instill in the group the idea that one must never, ever talk to the authorities because then the law would come for the "peacher" too.

Just at this moment, Bet and Nancy return to the apartment. Sikes and Fagin have resolved that someone needs to go to the court to determine where Oliver is, and what he has said to the authorities. Fagin asks Bet to do this, but she declines; he asks Nancy, and Sikes does also, but Nancy also declines. But Sikes eventually threatens Nancy sufficiently that she is forced to go, and Fagin and Sikes makes sure she is dressed "respectably," so as not to arouse attention at the court.

Bet and Nancy's occupation is never explicitly stated—it is possible they are prostitutes, though Victorian mores would probably have precluded Dickens from saying so outright in the novel. Both clearly have ties to the other criminal activities in which the group engages: thieving and pickpocketing chief among them.

Nancy goes to the court to try to find Oliver, claiming that she is Oliver's sister, and she is looking for her beloved "Nolly." But a guard tells her, finally, that Oliver has been taken by "the gentleman" (Brownlow) into his home near Pentonville. Nancy takes this information back to Fagin, who dispatches Sikes, Nancy, the Dodger, and Bates to find Oliver and Brownlow, before Oliver tells the gentleman any information about Fagin and his crew.

Nancy is a very talented actress and liar; she manages to convince everyone she sees that Oliver really is her brother. Of course, the irony here is that Nancy does become attached to Oliver, later on, and does what she can to save him from Monks. She becomes a kind of sister to him.

CHAPTER 14

The narrator returns to Oliver, who has just awoken from his fainting fit at Brownlow's home, to discover that the picture of the unknown mysterious woman has been removed from the parlor, as Brownlow felt that the picture was too much a source of agitation to Oliver.

Just as Oliver's actual mother was "removed" from his life, so, here, is the painterly representation of her also taken away from Oliver. Only at the end of the novel will Oliver finally learn the truth of his mother, and be able to "live" with the knowledge of her—as a tomb is reserved for Agnes in the country parsonage.

Oliver and Mrs. Bedwin then bond over the course of several days: she teaches him cards, talks about her life with him, and generally contributes to an atmosphere of quiet and tranquility that enables Oliver to recover fully from his fever and illness. Brownlow orders a new suit of clothes for Oliver, who has never had new clothes before.

Mrs. Bedwin, in the meantime, serves as a surrogate mother for Oliver. She is one of several in the novel: Rose and Mrs. Maylie are also important examples, and Nancy, for her part, protects Oliver in several instances, after initially recapturing him for Fagin.

Brownlow calls upon Oliver, after a few more days, to talk to him in his office. Oliver comes in to Brownlow, after being scrubbed by Mrs. Bedwin, and comments on all the books in Brownlow's study, which Oliver says he would like to read. Brownlow says this will be done one day. Oliver worries that Brownlow is preparing to send him away, but Brownlow promises, to Oliver's reassurance, that he would only send Oliver away if Oliver gave him reason to do so.

Oliver worries that, at Brownlow's, like at the workhouse, he will eventually be "sent away." In fact, the defining feature of Oliver's life so far is the fact that he will be sent off when he gets too old, or behaves badly—or simply when the managers of a given place grow tired of him. Brownlow promises this won't happen to Oliver in his house.

Brownlow asks Oliver to narrate his life's story up till this point, which Oliver begins to do, until their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Brownlow's friend, a gentleman named Mr. Grimwig. Brownlow asks Oliver to stay while Grimwig enters. Grimwig is a wizened, older gentleman, with a strange way of talking—he tends to end his sentences with the same oath of "I'll eat my head."

Grimwig is a voice of skepticism in these early pages. It is not that he has anything in particular against Oliver, but Grimwig does appear to believe that all paupers, regardless of their origin, are, inherently, liars and cheats. In this way, Grimwig can be seen as representing conventional Victorian upper class views of the poor. Oliver must prove to Grimwig that this is not the case.

Grimwig begins complaining about an orange-peel he found on the steps, which he believes to be dangerous (for slipping), and which he decries repeatedly, as Brownlow laughs inwardly at his friend's strangeness. Brownlow eventually dismisses Oliver, asking him to return at ten the next morning, to the study, so that Oliver can inform Brownlow further of the circumstances of his life.

One realizes later that, if Oliver had told more of his life to Brownlow at this moment, Brownlow might have learned of Oliver's provenance and linked it to the picture of Agnes in the parlor. This could have avoided all sorts of difficulties in Oliver's life—but it also would have made the novel a good deal shorter and less exciting.

Oliver leaves the study, and Grimwig tells his friend that he believes Oliver is a faker, a young con-man, who is taking in Brownlow, and who means to deceive him in some way. Grimwig convinces Brownlow to test Oliver, by asking Oliver to take back some books to the bookseller, and to pay the bookseller four pounds, ten shillings, owed him. Brownlow goes through with the test, and Oliver promises to do as asked. Grimwig believes that Oliver will run away with the book and money.

An important "test," for Oliver, one he is fated to fail—and not of his own volition, but because of circumstances outside his control. This is another example of Oliver's early bad luck—his inability to find situations that allow him to explain, or to show, his fundamental goodness. Later, at the Maylies', however, Oliver's true and virtuous disposition will become clear.

Mrs. Bedwin states that it is hard to let Oliver out of her sight, but she does so; Oliver goes out to return the book and money to the bookseller. Grimwig tells Brownlow that Oliver will not return, since he has on new clothes, some books, and five pounds, given him by Brownlow for the four pound, ten shilling, debt. Brownlow hopes and believes that Oliver will return. As the chapter ends, Grimwig and Brownlow are sitting in Brownlow's study, still waiting for Oliver's return.

Oliver is, in this final scene of the chapter, quite literally a "new boy": he has new clothes, from Brownlow, and is holding more money than he has ever held before in his life. Again, the stage is set for a great disappointment, one that will motivate the action of the remainder of the novel.

CHAPTER 15

The chapter opens with Sikes sitting with his dog in his filthy, dilapidated apartment building. Sikes mistreats his dog, beating him and yelling at him, and though the dog fights back he remains loyal, for now, to his master. Fagin enters the apartment and interrupts the battle between Sikes and his dog. He hands over an amount of gold he has owed Sikes (Sikes appears to get a cut of some of the robberies orchestrated by Fagin and his boys).

This scene elaborates on the nature of the business relationship between Sikes and Fagin. It seems that Fagin "contracts" Sikes to do particularly dangerous or "dirty" work for him. Fagin, as is again insinuated here, is far too cowardly actually to put himself in danger; he merely coordinates crimes.

Another Jewish man appears, this one named Barney: he speaks throughout the novel as though he has a serious head-cold. Barney tells Fagin that Nancy is nearby, and Fagin and Sikes ask to speak with Nancy; they tell Nancy, once again, to be "on the scent" for Oliver, and Sikes and Nancy walk out together—it appears that he and Nancy have some kind of romantic relationship.

Barney is the comedic foil to Fagin—also Jewish, but incapable of organizing much of anything, and not especially bright. Barney's cold, which causes him to pronounce words with extra Ds, is used heavily by Dickens for humorous effect.

Oliver, meanwhile, has been walking to the book-stall with Brownlow's books. As he nears the stall, he is intercepted by Nancy (Sikes has gone his own way) who throws an arm around him, trapping him, and proclaiming aloud that she has found her long lost brother. Sikes emerges, with his dog, from a nearby beer-shop, and proclaims, too, that Nancy has found her brother; shopkeepers in the area chastise Oliver for running away from his family.

Another instance of Oliver's terrible luck early in the novel. Of all the places Nancy and Sikes could have been, they chose to look at the book-stall the exact moment Oliver is there (Oliver has only been to this stall twice in his life, and both times some terrible fate befalls him). Nancy demonstrates, once again, her skill in play-acting, by pretending to be Oliver's sister.

Oliver cannot counteract the combined force of Nancy and Sikes, who begin dragging him back to Fagin's apartment. Meanwhile, Grimwig and Brownlow continue sitting in the parlor, wondering if Oliver will return.

A scene of great sadness. All Oliver wishes is to return to his new "family," in Mr. Brownlow, but he is prevented by another stroke of terrible luck.

CHAPTER 16

Oliver is dragged by Nancy and Sikes through the back-streets of London—Sikes tells Oliver that, if he lets go of either of their hands, or yells out for help, Sikes will have his dog bite Oliver. Nancy hears the bells chime eight o'clock, and marvels that, at this moment, some young criminals are being hanged in London (as this is the customary time for hanging); Sikes appears jealous that Nancy cares about other men, and Nancy, sensing this, teases Sikes as they head, with Oliver, back to Fagin's.

The nature of Sikes' and Nancy's relationship becomes more clear. They are romantically involved, and Sikes wonders whether Nancy has a special place in her heart for criminals about to be hanged. Sikes is a complex character—gruff and impossibly violent, on the outside, but filled with dread and doubt on the inside.

Nancy and Sikes eventually lead Oliver to a new safehouse, where Fagin is now hiding with Bates, the Dodger, and the other boys. The Dodger and Bates see Oliver from out the window of the apartment, and let the three of them in. Bates, in particular, finds Oliver's new "togs" (clothes), bought for him by Brownlow, to be incredibly funny.

A scene of interesting ironies. Oliver is "welcomed" back to his "home" by his new "family," Fagin and the gang. Of course, Oliver has another option for a new family which he prefers, that offered by Brownlow, but he is not able to return to the old gentleman and Mrs. Bedwin.

Sikes demands that he and Nancy deserve the five-pound note, taken from Oliver; Fagin reluctantly allows the far more powerful Sikes to keep the note, and Sikes allows Fagin to keep Oliver's books. Oliver claims, desperately, to Fagin that the books belong to Brownlow, and that he will think Oliver has stolen them if he, and the books, aren't returned. Fagin says this is right, and that things could not have worked out better for Fagin and the gang. Oliver is very upset.

A demonstration of Oliver's naiveté. Oliver acts as though Fagin and the boys might be concerned that Brownlow believes Oliver is a liar and a thief. In fact, Fagin wants *Oliver to become a liar and a thief—thus the plan has worked out perfectly for him, and horribly for Oliver.*

Oliver leaps up and tries to escape the apartment. Fagin, the Dodger, and Bates run after him. Sikes tries to send his dog after them, but Nancy blocks the door, saying that Sikes shall not hurt Oliver in that way. Fagin and the two boys return with Oliver; he had not gotten very far before being overtaken.

This is a new development for Oliver: a kind of power and courage even more pronounced than his earlier efforts in the workhouse, when he asked for more gruel. Oliver is attempting to take his fate into his own hands.

Fagin begins to berate and slap Oliver for trying to escape. Nancy stomps her foot and demands that, Oliver having been returned to his "care," Fagin should at least treat Oliver well. But Fagin believes Nancy is acting "hysterically" in Oliver's defense. Sikes tells Nancy not to interrupt Fagin's punishment of Oliver, otherwise he (Sikes) will have to "shut Nancy up" himself.

A common Victorian trope is here demonstrated: the idea that women who experience emotional states of any kind are "crazy," "hysterical," or "about to faint." The fact that Nancy does faint here does little to support her cause. But, of course, Nancy is completely rational in her desire to protect Oliver; she cares for him.

Nancy starts screaming at Fagin, expressing remorse for aiding in the return of Oliver to the apartment, and realizing, aloud, that she has participated in a capture of the young boy that mirrors her own capture, by Fagin, when she was a child. Nancy bewails her own fate, and argues to Fagin that, although she was corrupted by him at a young age, she does not wish for the same thing to happen to Oliver. Sikes attempts to control Nancy, who is worked into a frenzy, and when he grabs her, she faints.

Nancy gives the reader more information about the nature of Fagin's "mentorship." Although Fagin appears to take care of the boys and of Nancy, he actually keeps these young people from their families and forces them into terrible, immoral, dissipated lives. Nancy is reminded of these as she sees Fagin attempting to corrupt Oliver.

Bates and the Dodger take Oliver's nice clothes and switch him into shabbier ones. Bet arrives and ministers to Nancy, who is not ill, only shaken up. Oliver quickly falls asleep, exhausted by the terrors of the day.

Bet is an interesting foil to Nancy—someone who occupies the same social position, but who never questions Fagin's authority, nor attempts to change her life or consider the immoralities and crimes she is forced to commit.

CHAPTER 17

The narrator justifies, in the beginning of this chapter, the novel's tendency to move from "serious" or tragic to "unserious" or comic stories, back and forth. The narrator argues that these shifts in the story are indicative of the quick shifts between tragedy and comedy that occur in real life. The narrator then moves on to describe Bumble, who is paying a visit to Mrs. Mann at the workhouse.

Occasionally, the narrator will break into the action to justify the way in which he tells the story. Here, the narrator plays with the reader's expectations for the tone of a Victorian novel; Dickens, unlike some other writers of the time, believed that comedic and tragic elements could be blended in a novel, without making the novel wholly comic or tragic.

Bumble has been charged with overseeing the transport of some paupers to London, where there will be a "settlement," or a return of these paupers to their originally registered location (since it was illegal in England, at this time, to travel if one was a pauper). Bumble then provides Mrs. Mann with her monthly stipend from the Anglican parish, and Mrs. Mann brings in Dick, Oliver's old friend from the workhouse, to speak with Bumble.

Another instance of Bumble's callousness. Bumble does not care at all if the paupers he is to take to London die en route. He cares only that he dispatches his job and gets paid for it. The paupers are nothing more than "objects" for him—something more akin to trash than to human beings.

Dick, who fears that he is dying, tells Bumble that, when he does die, he would like to leave his "love" for Oliver, since he has no other earthly possessions to bequeath anyone. Bumble sends Dick away, and becomes angry, in front of Mrs. Mann, that Oliver has encouraged this kind of "worship" among his friends at the workhouse.

Bumble begins to realize the effect that Oliver has had on others in the workhouse, largely from Oliver's efforts to stand up to the kitchen staff and demand more gruel. Dick is an emblem of the love for Oliver which still exists, quite strongly, in Oliver's home village.

Bumble, still agitated, travels to London on a cart with the paupers, and having deposited them in their rightful jurisdiction, he enters a pub, only to read in the paper a notice regarding Oliver, placed by Brownlow, and offering a five-guinea reward for any information regarding his location or life history. Bumble, excited at this development, immediately leaves the pub and seeks out Brownlow at his home.

Another of the novel's coincidences. It is hard to imagine it would be likely that Bumble would open the newspaper exactly to a notice regarding Oliver, the boy who has occupied his thoughts for some time—but Dickens needs these small coincidences to drive the plot of the novel.

Bumble is admitted to Brownlow's parlor, where Brownlow and Grimwig are sitting. Brownlow asks Bumble to tell what he knows of Oliver's past life, and Bumble unspools a slander about Oliver, claiming that the boy has always been a "bad seed" and a rabble-rouser. Grimwig feels he has been corroborated in his fears of Oliver's badness, and Brownlow, sadly, tells Mrs. Bedwin that Oliver was an "imposter."

Bumble seems poised only to do wrong—here, he arrives at exactly the worst moment, for Oliver's sake, and tells a series of lies which, when heard by Grimwig and Brownlow, seem to play into the pair's worst fears: that Oliver was a liar and a cheat, and that he pretended to be good only to steal from Brownlow, when the opportunity arose.

Mrs. Bedwin refuses to believe that Oliver is bad, but Grimwig is convinced, and Brownlow, with heavy heart, says he never wishes to hear any more about Oliver for as long as he lives. Bumble leaves, and there are "sad hearts" at the Brownlow home that night.

An important scene. Mrs. Bedwin, alone in Brownlow's house, cannot accept that Oliver is bad, because she feels she has seen into his soul, and has appreciated the goodness of his heart. Mrs. Bedwin will, of course, be vindicated in her belief.

CHAPTER 18

Back at Fagin's safehouse, Fagin yells at Oliver, calling him ungrateful, and to keep Oliver from running away again, Fagin goes on at length about the horrors of being hanged, hinting that, should Oliver betray Fagin and the boys, he will be executed. Oliver is terrified. Fagin has Oliver locked in a small room for days, to punish him for his intransigence.

Fagin has not threatened Oliver explicitly until this point in the novel. Fagin, essentially, implies that he has methods of framing Oliver, to send him to the gallows as a criminal—unless Oliver agrees to commit crimes. This paradox appears to trap and frighten Oliver.

Slowly, the Dodger and Bates begin visiting Oliver in the locked room, and Oliver shines the Dodger boots and does other small tasks for the boy; he is simply happy to have human company once again. The Dodger admits to Oliver that he, the other boys, Fagin, Nancy, Bet, and Sikes are all criminals and thieves—Oliver seems to have known this is the case, but is still horrified to hear the Dodger say it so blithely.

Oliver is, after all, a young boy, and though the Dodger and Bates are criminals, still Oliver longs for some company with boys his own age. Oliver can never be friends with the Dodger and Bates, but as the novel goes on, both boys—especially Bates—appear more human, more morally complex and vulnerable.

The Dodger and Bates ask Oliver why he doesn't simply apprentice in the trade of thievery with Fagin, but Oliver says he doesn't want to do it, and wishes he were free to go. Charley says that, of course, Fagin is inclined not to let Oliver go. Oliver subtly gibes the two boys, who speak so highly of their criminal life, for leaving him to take punishment for the theft of Brownlow's kerchief, but Bates and the Dodger say it was necessary to avoid getting the whole crew in trouble.

Oliver questions, in this section, Bates' and the Dodger's ease with which they blamed their own theft of Brownlow's property on Oliver. Oliver wonders if these boys can really be his friends, since they are willing, at the drop of a hat, to incriminate Oliver and send him to prison. This is the attitude among the boys Fagin cultivates—a kind of competition preventing true comradeship.

Bates and the Dodger sing the praises of the criminal lifestyle, and the Dodger tells Oliver that, if Oliver doesn't go around picking people's pockets, someone else will, and will gain the benefit thereof. At this point Fagin walks in with Bet and a new person, a man of eighteen named Tom Chitling, whom Oliver has not yet met. Fagin and Chitling both hint that Chitling has been in prison for over a month, but Oliver does not understand their implications. After eating together, they all go to sleep.

Although Chitling is a good deal older than the other boys, he is not particularly bright, as evidenced later. It is implied that perhaps Chitling went to prison in the first place because he was unable to wrangle himself out of a dicey legal situation. Fagin likes Chitling because he is dependable, as a thief; but Fagin depends more on the street-smarts of the Dodger and Bates.

For the next several weeks, Fagin surrounds Oliver with Bates and the Dodger, hoping they can convince Oliver to give in to a life of thieving. Fagin has kept Oliver away from others, locked in his room, in order to insure that Oliver "prefers any company" to his solitude, hoping this will make Oliver more amenable to living a life of crime with the other boys.

One of the great questions of the novel, then, is whether Oliver will be corrupted by the other boys. Although Fagin seems to think it's possible, readers of Dickens know that Oliver's virtue cannot be destroyed; Oliver would sooner die than lose his virtue.

CHAPTER 19

One night, Fagin leaves his apartment and the boys and travels to Sikes' small, squalid place, where Sikes lives with Nancy. Fagin has come to talk about an upcoming robbery in the village of Chertsey, outside London. Sikes' advance scout, who has been checking into the feasibility of the job, is named Toby Crackit, and Crackit has reported to Sikes that they cannot "turn" a servant in the house, in order to have an easy "in" to the house and to its valuables. Sikes says they need another plan to break into the home.

In addition to the street-crimes perpetrated by the boys, Fagin is also involved in more serious crimes, for which he needs the services of Crackit and Sikes. Crackit seems the slyer of the two—he is willing to attempt to infiltrate the house (later revealed to be the Maylies' house) with spies. Sikes, however, advocates a brute-force method for the break-in.

Sikes asks Fagin if he will pay extra for Sikes' services in breaking into the home if the break-in occurs without a man on the inside—in other words, if it's a "clean" break-in. Fagin agrees. Sikes tells Fagin that he and Crackit can break into the Chertsey house with a drill and a small boy capable of fitting through a tiny window. If Fagin can provide the boy, Sikes says, Sikes can do the burglary.

Another of the novel's coincidences. It just so happens that the house-break requires a little boy, and Fagin just so happens to have a boy he wishes to convert to a life of crime. As the novel goes on, these coincidences become more and more important, particularly as they drive the connection between Monks, the shadowy criminal, and Oliver.

Fagin volunteers that Oliver should be the boy for the job. Fagin wonders for a moment if Nancy will defend Oliver again, in front of Sikes, as she did previously, but Nancy appears amenable to the plan that Oliver should break into the house—or, at least, she doesn't betray her sympathy for Oliver's cause (it is ambiguous what her true feelings are). Fagin believes that, if Oliver successfully completes this burglary with Sikes, Oliver will see what can be gained from a life of crime, and will be "brought over" to Fagin's side. Sikes believes he can keep Oliver in line, and that Oliver is the proper size for the job.

Nancy, again showing her powerful abilities for dissembling, does not betray her desire to help Oliver. Nancy's motivations, here and elsewhere, are not always easy to understand, as she both desires to help Oliver and refuses, on the other hand, to implicate Fagin and Sikes in any way to the authorities. To do the latter, in her mind, would be to "sell out" those who have helped her attain the life she currently leads—even though it is a life that makes her miserable.

Fagin says that Oliver's innate goodness—and his appearance of goodness—would make him an unstoppable thief, since no one would ever suspect him—if Oliver could be convinced that thieving was what he ought to do. Fagin agrees to have Nancy bring Oliver to Sikes the next night. As Fagin is leaving, he remarks to himself that, although Nancy's feelings for Oliver appeared strong a few weeks ago, she has passed out of this feeling, "as all women do." Fagin resolves, when back at his apartment, to tell Oliver of his mission the next morning.

This is the fundamental paradox of Fagin's desire to corrupt Oliver: because Oliver is so serene and gentle looking, Fagin believes he will make the perfect criminal, as no one would suspect him of the ability to commit a crime. But Oliver's goodness is not, as Fagin supposes, merely superficial—it runs all the way to the core of his being, and will not be easy to eliminate.

CHAPTER 20

Fagin gives Oliver new shoes, the next day, and says he is sending Oliver over to Sikes for a short while, although Oliver will not be living with Sikes forever. Fagin says, also, that Oliver ought to watch himself around Sikes, since Sikes is a dangerous man. Fagin gives Oliver a book of crime stories to read while he waits for Sikes, and Oliver, terrified by the book, resolves simply to wait by the fire without reading further.

Oliver is worried that Sikes will now be "in charge" of him, but Fagin assures him that this position is only temporary. Of course, Oliver knows better than to trust Fagin, and the book of scary crime stories seems to give evidence to the idea that Fagin has terrible things in store for Oliver—a dangerous criminal plot.

Nancy comes and tells Oliver it is time to go to Sikes. Oliver considers begging Nancy for her compassion, but decides to wait until later, since it is only eleven, and the streets are filled with witnesses who might see Oliver fleeing Fagin. Nancy, sensing this in Oliver, tells him she is doing all she can for his sake, but that, for right now, Oliver must follow her to Sikes—Nancy will try to make sure that Oliver is not ill-used by Sikes and Fagin, if she can.

Nancy's cleverness is underscored by the narrator. Nancy would like to help Oliver, but Nancy also knows that she must help him in the right way—subtly, without drawing the attention of Sikes or Fagin. Thus Nancy tells Oliver that he must be patient if she is to help him.

Nancy brings Oliver to Sikes' apartment. Sikes, taking Oliver in, shows him a loaded gun, and threatens Oliver with it, in case Oliver should try to escape. Nancy prepares dinner and they all eat; Sikes tells Oliver that they will sleep for a time, then wake early in the morning to travel on their mission. Oliver lies awake all night, worried what will befall him the next day. As he is leaving in the morning, after a small breakfast, he tries to lock eyes with Nancy, as a sign that she is continuing to look out for him, but she turns away at the fire, while Oliver and Sikes head out the door.

Much of the suspense in the novel appears to take place in these "in-between" moments: in the preparation for major events that occur in the wee hours of the night or morning. Oliver's anxiety keeps him awake, but it should be noted that, despite his fears, Oliver is game for the attempt—he will go along with Sikes, and is courageous enough to test his mettle in whatever "adventure" Fagin has planned. Oliver is, in fact, both courageous and virtuous, whereas Sikes is only the former.

CHAPTER 21

Sikes and Oliver walk through London in the early morning, reaching the outskirts of the city by the time vendors are setting out wares for the market-day. They get in a cab, with Sikes pretending to the driver that Oliver is his son, and continue traveling from village to village on the city's outskirts; they then stop at a public-house for dinner, and Oliver nods off there, tired from the day's long journey.

This journey through London mimics Oliver's journey by foot en route from his home village to the big city. Oliver exists on the margins of Victorian society, and, similarly Sikes and Oliver do not keep "normal" business hours—instead, their schedule is that of the thief—largely nocturnal, or night-bound.

Sikes wakes Oliver, and tells him they will be getting in another coach; this one, to Sunbury, another village. After leaving the coach early in the morning, after a full 24-hours of traveling, they walk over a bridge to a dilapidated house; Oliver fears Sikes will throw Oliver in the water and kill him, but Sikes, instead, walks with Oliver into the house, a safehouse being used by Crackit and Sikes to plan the robbery.

There are a series of flophouses present in the novel: Sikes', Fagin's, and this one, inhabited by the three before the robbery outside Chertsey. These houses, just like the band's nighttime activities, reinforce the thieves', and Oliver's, status as a cultural outsider. The house is so beaten down it is barely standing, and no one seems to notice it from the road.

CHAPTER 22

Sikes and Oliver enter the house, and find Crackit and Barney, the younger Jewish man with the permanent head-cold. Crackit is relatively kind to Oliver, and asks him to drink a little liquor after his long journey. Oliver obliges, though he doesn't wish to do so. After eating a small amount, the men sleep, and tell Oliver to as well, until one in the morning, when they prepare to go out and commit the burglary.

Barney tends to appear in circumstances like this, where his presence is not strictly necessary, but when there are small tasks needing to be done. Although Barney in some ways serves as Fagin's foil, here he is his opposite: whereas Fagin is at the center of the gang's criminal plans, Barney seems only to do what he is told.

Crackit, Sikes, and Oliver make their way through the town of Sunbury in the middle of the night—it is so dark and foggy, they do not fear that they will be seen. They arrive at a farmhouse in the neighboring village of Chertsey. Sikes and Crackit help Oliver over the house's garden wall; Oliver realizes, at this point, just what the robbery will entail, and becomes extremely nervous, as he sees that Crackit and Sikes are prepared to use the firearms they have brought along.

Only now does Oliver realize the nature of the robbery. Again, Oliver's naiveté is obvious. Of course Oliver had a premonition that they trio was up to some sort of dangerous criminal behavior, but he does not know the exact form the robbery would take until the three reach Chertsey.

Sikes tells Oliver the plan: Oliver is going to be helped up to a very small window about five and a half-feet above the back-door frame; then Oliver will take a lantern with him, through the house, quietly so as not to startle those sleeping inside nor the dog there, and then to the front-door, which he will unlatch for the robbers. Sikes warns Oliver that he is within Sike's gun's range the entire way, in case Oliver wants to do something not in keeping with the plan.

Sikes is aware that Oliver is virtuous enough that he would be willing to risk his life rather than carry out the robbery. Nevertheless, the robbery is dependent on Oliver—he is the only one who can fit through the small window into the house. Thus Sikes must rely on Oliver.

Sikes helps Oliver into the house. Once inside, with a lantern, Oliver decides to run up the stairs to alert the family of the robbers, but just as he is doing this, two men appear at the top of the stairs above Oliver. Sikes tells Oliver to return to the window, but then a series of shot are fired by the men, and in the confusion, Sikes pulls Oliver back through the window and begins to run, with Crackit, away from the house. Sikes fires into the house but hits no one; as they are retreating, Sikes notices that Oliver has been hit by a bullet, and Oliver, frightened, faints in a dead swoon.

The low point in Oliver's young life. Oliver does not even get an opportunity to inform the family—he is shot by the overzealous Giles as he attempts to mount the stairs. Although Oliver almost dies in the ensuing night, this robbery marks a low point after which Oliver's luck only increases: he is taken in by the Maylie family, he finds out the nature of his birth-family, and he is adopted, ultimately, by Brownlow.

CHAPTER 23

The narrator shifts the scene back to the workhouse where Oliver was born. A woman named Mrs. Corney, who is the matron of the house (the director), is making herself a cup of tea, when she accidentally scalds herself with a small teapot, and mourns her circumstances as the poor mistress of a miserable workhouse. Mrs. Corney, it is revealed by the narrator, is a widow, Mr. Corney having died some years before. She hears a noise and realizes that Bumble has arrived.

Mrs. Corney seems to fill a position similar to that of Mrs. Mann, but Mrs. Mann works in the "farm-house" annex to the workhouse that is for children, where Mrs. Corney manages the fully-grown workers at the main house. Both Corney and Mann are, at best, moderately immoral—Mrs. Corney cares only of her own material gain, and Mrs. Mann was noted, earlier, taking some of the funds for the children for her own use.

Bumble comes simply on a friendly visit. He begins a conversation with Mrs. Corney, complaining about the behavior of the poor people of whom he is in charge—how they continue demanding food enough to feed their families, and how they complain about the terrible conditions of the workhouses. Mrs. Corney asks Bumble to sit down for tea, and he readily agrees.

Mrs. Corney does not sense the irony in this scene: that she is complaining about people she believes complain too much. In reality, of course, the workers in the poorhouse do very little complaining, as they are not permitted to voice their opinions with Corney or with the managing board.

Bumble, while drinking his tea, flirts with Mrs. Corney, who is unsure how to respond to his advances, in the small room of her kitchen, with no other people present (Mrs. Corney seems to worry that the scene would appear improper to someone stopping by). Suddenly, interrupting this scene, is an old woman from the workhouse, who informs Mrs. Corney that Old Sally, a pauper living there, is very sick and about to die. The woman informs Mrs. Corney that Old Sally has asked for Mrs. Corney's audience before she dies. Mrs. Corney goes to speak to Old Sally, cursing her along the way, and leaving Bumble to his tea in the kitchen, alone.

It is not immediately clear what Mr. Bumble wants from Mrs. Corney; he appears simply to have a crush on her. The scene ensuing will be an important deathbed conversation, the second in the novel. The first, tellingly, involved the short conversation Oliver's mother had with the doctor and attending nurse, right after Oliver was born; Oliver's mother died the next instant. Mrs. Corney seems to sense that Sally possesses important information.

CHAPTER 24

The old woman leads Mrs. Corney up the stairs to a small garret room, where Old Sally lies, dying, in bed. Old Sally is attended by a young gentleman, an apothecary's apprentice, who makes himself a toothpick in the fire, complains about the cold to Mrs. Corney, and leaves after a short while; another old woman, already in the garret, talks to Mrs. Corney and the first old woman about Old Sally's condition. The woman who went to get Mrs. Corney learns from the other that Old Sally has been raving in her bed, and is unable to take any liquids. She is very near death.

The conditions of this part of the poorhouse are as squalid and awful as the rest, including the parts in which Oliver lived. Dickens spares no description of the horror of Sally's death—and he all but says outright that the workhouse is responsible for her slow sickness and dissolution. Nevertheless, Sally is also a less-than-moral character, as is to be described in the ensuing parts of the chapter—she seems almost to deserve these horrid surroundings.

Mrs. Corney, after learning that Sally is about to die, begins to leave, but just at this moment Sally awakes from a stupor, and begs Mrs. Corney to come near the bed; Sally has something to say to her. Sally tells a brief story: she, Sally, nursed a woman about ten years ago, who was on her own death-bed; that woman, who was to give birth to a child, had a small bit of gold around her neck, in a pouch, and entrusted that gold to Sally, who stole it; the woman asked Sally that, if her son was born alive, he would be taken care of. Sally tells Mrs. Corney that this boy is named Oliver.

Sally has therefore stolen a bit of material proving the link between Oliver and his mother. This material will be an important part of the set of clues that, simultaneously, Brownlow hopes (later) to piece together, and Monks hopes to destroy. Monks has a vested interest in eradicating Olver's past; Brownlow hopes he can find out the true nature of it.

Sally whispers that the gold is . . . and does not finish her thought aloud—Mrs. Corney bends down and hears Sally finish it, quietly, but the other woman in the room do not hear. Mrs. Corney betrays no emotion as to what Sally has told her, and leaves the room. Sally dies just after speaking with Mrs. Corney.

Mrs. Corney—who is supposed to be helping the poor—is an immensely gifted liar. She would not be out of place among Fagin's gang. She does not let on, to the other women, that Sally has said anything of value, in case these other women want to get their hands on the valuable items Sally received from Oliver's mother.

CHAPTER 25

Back at Fagin's apartment, Bates, the Dodger, and Chitling are playing hands of whist, a card game, with one another. The Dodger is a wonderful player (it's implies that he's also cheating); Chitling remarks, aloud, that he cannot fathom how the Dodger wins so much, and Bates finds Chitling's gullibility to be quite funny.

It stands to reason that the Dodger, so good at tricking people on the street, would be a gifted cheater at cards. Chitling, characteristically, is not intelligent enough to realize that the Dodger's trickery does not disappear at the gambling table.

The Dodger and Bates continue teasing Chitling about Bet, as they believe Chitling has taken a liking to her. Chitling denies this heatedly. After a while, the boys and Fagin hear a bell indicating that someone wishes to come up to the apartment. The Dodger returns leading up a very quiet, and haggard-looking, Toby Crackit, alone. Fagin is shocked at his solo appearance, but offers Crackit food and drink before asking him about the events of the robbery, which Fagin fears has gone awry.

This scene is another example of Dickens' manipulation of the expectations of the audience. For several chapters, we have awaited word of what has become of Oliver, but Dickens does not give this information outright. For readers of the serialized version of the novel, the wait for Oliver's fate cold be many weeks at a time.

After eating, Crackit tells Fagin and the boys that the robbery failed, that he and Sikes escaped the property with Oliver, who was shot in the arm and wounded; and after worrying that they would all be caught, the two men abandoned Oliver in a ditch. Crackit lost Sikes, too, and came back to London alone. Fagin, horrified at this news, runs yelling out of the apartment, horrified by the bungled robbery and the possibility of Oliver's endangerment.

Fagin's reaction here is an interesting one. Typically so cool and collected a customer, Fagin here belies an especial interest in Oliver's fate. Fagin believes that Oliver can make him a great deal of money, as a thief; thus Fagin is upset not for Oliver's fate, per se, but for the potential loss of income that Oliver's injury seems to promise.

CHAPTER 26

Fagin begins slackening his pace, however, and regaining his cool as he enters a small market neighborhood not too far from his apartment; he stops and talks to a trader of stolen merchandise, who knows Fagin in a business capacity, named Lively. Fagin asks Lively if anyone is at the Three Cripples, a nearby pub and hangout for local criminals; Lively says he doesn't know, nor does he know (as Fagin follows up by asking) if Sikes is present at that pub, in particular. Lively says he'll join Fagin for a drink there, but Fagin waves him away, and proceeds to the pub on his own.

The size of London becomes apparent when one considers that there are entire streets and small neighborhoods given over to illegal activities—the police seem not to bother these neighborhoods, so long as the criminality does not extend beyond certain prearranged borders. The Cripples pub, too, is a seat for criminals, and it remains mostly untouched in the novel until Brownlow prompts the authorities to search it, for evidence of Fagin and his cronies.

Fagin walks into the smoky pub, filled as it is with criminals whom Fagin recognizes. Fagin speaks to a man the narrator refers to as the chairmen, and asks him whether he (the chairman) has seen Barney or Sikes that night. He also asks the chairman, who is the landlord of the establishment, whether a man named Monks will be at the pub that evening. The chairmen replies that none of the men are present. Fagin asks the chairmen to tell Monks to visit Fagin the next day.

The first significant description of Monks in the novel. Of the book's three villains, Monks is at once the most human—he is, after all, Oliver's half-brother—and the most difficult to understand. Fagin is motivated by his greed, and Sikes by his lust for violence. Monks, however, seems only to want to blot Oliver out of the virtuous life to protect his own legacy.

Satisfied with this intelligence received at the Three Cripples, Fagin finds a hack-cab on the street and takes it to near Nancy's and Sikes' apartment. He gets out of the cab and vows to get more information out of Nancy, whom he believes to be there. He knocks on the door and is let in by Nancy. Fagin sees no evidence of Sikes in the apartment.

Nancy is beginning to fall into a spiral from which she will not escape. The mistreatment under which Oliver has been placed has upset her a great deal, and her already pronounced desire for alcohol has been exacerbated. Fagin, notably, does nothing to help her in this scene.

Fagin asks Nancy where Sikes and Oliver are; Nancy replies that she doesn't know, and she exclaims (coincidentally), that if Oliver is lying dead in a ditch somewhere, he is better dead than under Fagin's and Sikes' control. Fagin tells Nancy to be quiet, since she is obviously inebriated and distraught. Fagin tells Nancy, further, that if Sikes comes back to the apartment without the boy, Nancy should kill Sikes, and Fagin will protect her—the boy is worth a good deal to Fagin, and Fagin cannot allow Sikes to live after having taken so little care of Oliver during the botched robbery. Nancy is shocked that Fagin would turn on Sikes so quickly, and she defends Sikes. She does not promise Fagin anything.

Fagin makes an important attempted bargain here. Of course it has been known that Fagin is an unscrupulous character, but here he markedly goes behind the back of his associate, Sikes, in order to get him out of the picture—Fagin appears to believe that, because Sikes is no longer a dependable housebreaker, he might just be a violent nuisance, a man who must be eliminated. Nancy stands up for Sikes here, and she will do so again later, which makes Sikes eventual murder of her all the more tragic.

Fagin leaves Nancy, drunk, in the apartment, and is satisfied, since he has informed Nancy that Sikes has left Oliver (believing he can gain more control of Nancy if she knows that Sikes cares nothing for the boy), and has confirmed that Sikes is not in the apartment. On his way back to his own abode, Fagin runs into a man who has been waiting for him on the street.

Monks has a tendency to appear where he is least expected. Although Fagin had asked to meet with him the following night, Monks was nevertheless able to hurry from wherever he was staying to find Fagin. Monks' abode is never described in the novel, nor is his ability to travel so far so fast ever explained.

The man is Monks, whom Fagin had been seeking out. Fagin takes him into a spare room on a lower floor of the tenement building. There the men converse in low voices (the narrator does not describe their exact conversation), but then the narrator reveals that Monks is chastising Fagin for placing Oliver so quickly into harm's way, and for not raising Oliver in the craft of pickpocketing, which, after a while, would have paid Fagin a good deal of money, and after which Fagin could have simply sent Oliver far away.

Monks reiterates his intentions here: he wishes that Oliver become a criminal, but not for his own direct personal gain (as Fagin does). Monks, instead, wishes only to blot Oliver's name—to keep him from living a virtuous life. The reader finds out, later, that Monks' desire dovetails with his hope to keep Oliver from learning of his true parentage, and of his inheritance.

It appears that Monks has a mysterious vested interest in Oliver, and, especially, in Oliver being sent away, but he does not elaborate on what this interest might be. Monks claims, further, that he does not want Oliver killed, as Oliver's death would somehow get back to Monks, and Monks wishes to avoid all penalty regarding Oliver's disappearance. Fagin explains to Monks that Nancy has taken a liking to Oliver, but Fagin appears to believe that, if Oliver survives the robbery and becomes a hardened criminal, Nancy will no longer pity him.

Nevertheless, Monks stops short of asking that Oliver be killed—which would be the simplest and "cleanest" way to handle his problem. It is never explained why Monks is unwilling to kill his brother, unless it is simply a residue of family-feeling, a belief that it is an especial moral wrong to kill a member of one's own family.

Monks, paranoid that someone has heard them speak, tells Fagin they must search the dark abandoned rooms of the tenement for intruders, but after this is done, and no one is found, Monks take his leave of Fagin at around one in the morning, and Fagin returns to his own apartment.

Both Monks and Fagin are notable for their abundance of caution, and the speed with which they can slink away in the dark. Nevertheless, Nancy is able to spy on both of them later on in the novel.

CHAPTER 27

The narrator begins this chapter by jokingly "apologizing" to the reader for having abandoned so estimable a personage as the beadle Mr. Bumble for several chapters, while continuing with other parts of his "history." Bumble has been waiting in the kitchen and living quarters of Mrs. Corney, while the latter has been upstairs speaking with Old Sally. Mrs. Corney returns, and tells Bumble that Old Sally has upset her a great deal. Bumble offers Mrs. Corney his sympathies and gives her a bit of wine.

Bumble's trajectory in the novel is a notable one—it trends downward, just as Oliver's position in society, and his own good fortune, rises. Bumble believes that, by serenading Mrs. Corney, he will increase his social stature and his wealth, but it soon becomes clear that the opposite is true, that his union with Corney is to be a disastrous one.

The two begin kissing, and Bumble continues his wooing of Mrs. Corney. Bumble also reveals, after their wooing has gone on for a little while, that Mr. Slout, current master of the workhouse, is dying, and that a man will be needed to manage the house of which Mrs. Corney is the head female official. This, Bumble declares, is a "coincidence"—that he has "fallen in love" with Mrs. Corney at the same time this position is opened. The narrator implies, however, that Bumble has arranged all this so he might advance his professional position.

Another instance of Bumble's craven self-interest. It is not clear why Bumble would care to woo Mrs. Corney if she were not in a position to offer Bumble the lead job at the workhouse, once they are married. Bumble apparently believes that this position, as master of the workhouse, would lead to even greater social recognition than his current one as beadle, a relatively minor church official.

Bumble promises that he will marry Mrs. Corney, and he leaves her, after kissing her goodbye, to go to Sowerberry's to make arrangements for Old Sally's funeral. When he arrives at the **coffin**-maker's house, Bumble walks in on Noah Claypole and Charlotte flirting, kissing one another, and having a dinner of oysters. Bumble yells at the two of them for carousing in an unchaste manner, as they are not married, and the narrator subtly points out the hypocrisy of Bumble here, who only moments before was doing the same with Mrs. Corney. Bumble then leaves the young lovers and goes downstairs to arrange Sally's funeral with Sowerberry.

Bumble's hypocrisy is on high display here. Bumble's sole purpose, in the beginning of the novel up till its midpoint, is to correct the behavior of others while continuing to behave immorally himself. In the second half of the novel, however, Bumble's behavior no longer goes unnoticed or unpunished. Dickens clearly intends for the reader to loathe Bumble, and to appreciate the extent to which Bumble is willing to lie and manipulate others for his personal gain.

CHAPTER 28

The narrator returns to the scene just after Oliver, Sikes, and Crackit escaped from the Chertsey farmhouse. Crackit is already running away from the three men pursuing them. Sikes, carrying Oliver, calls back to Crackit, telling him to return and help with the boy. Crackit turns back for a moment, but seeing the three men and their two dogs, turns on his heels and runs. Sikes leaves Oliver in the ditch and escapes himself.

The narrative cuts back, finally, to the scene outside Chertsey. Oliver appears in dire straits, and Crackit and Sikes, who seemed so courageous when committing a crime, are revealed as too cowardly or uncaring to do anything for Oliver but run away. One wonders what Fagin would do in this situation—whether he would be willing to risk his physical safety to protect his "investment" in Oliver.

A comic scene ensues, as the three pursuing men, seeing that the criminals are fleeing, decide to pursue no farther—the three admit to one another that they are tired, out of breath, and afraid of the criminals. The fattest of the gang is the head butler of the farmhouse, and is named Giles; the smaller is Brittles, a jack-of-all-trades also employed by the house; and the third is a tinker living in a nearby house. The men do not see Oliver lying in the ditch, and decide to return to their homes, content that the criminals have at least run away.

The difference in this chapter between serious drama and high comedy is one of the notable features of the novel and Dickens' work more generally. Oliver's struggle is a dire one, but the three men pursuing the robbers know nothing of it—and their behavior is therefore free to be interpreted, by the reader, as buffoonery. Dickens believes, rightly, that these sorts of combination of the serious and the comic make literature seem more real, as real life itself functions in this way.

The next morning, Oliver awakes, discovering a terrible pain where he has been shot in the arm, but nonetheless alive (though very weak). Oliver begins walking straight in front of him, not knowing where he is going, and hallucinates that Crackit and Sikes are beside him, firing weapons, though by that morning they have long since fled. Oliver approaches a garden wall and sees that he has been heading toward exactly the house he had been forced to rob the night before. But he is too weak to go to any other home.

The novel's only dream sequence, and it's not a very long leap from this "dream" to the reality in which Oliver has recently been living. At first, it seems that Oliver's approach to the very same house they attempted to rob is another instance of bad luck, but as Dickens will go on to show, the Maylies wish only to help Oliver, and his retreat to this house is a blessing in disguise.

Inside the house, Giles, Brittles, and the tinker are recounting (and embellishing) the previous night, and telling it to the cook of the house and a housemaid, who are rapt with attention. Giles brags that he, bravely, was the one to shoot one of the intruders. As he continues to brag, he and Brittles hear a knock on the door, and though they are afraid to see who it is, they cannot make the maids of the house do it. Giles resolves that Brittles, the younger man and his subordinate, will open the door, and he, Giles, will stand back to defend the house and greet the visitor.

Giles' buffoonery is of a sort Dickens likes, often, to highlight—that of an overconfident oaf, whose actions are not nearly so grand or helpful as he envisions. Bumble behaves in this same manner, and both Giles and Bumble are chastened for their impetuous behavior—Bumble, later, by winding up in the poorhouse, and Giles by becoming the object of Lorsborne's scorn.

Brittles opens the door and Giles recognizes Oliver as the boy he has shot—the thief, as he claims. He yells into the house that a thief has returned, and when it is revealed that the "robber" is hurt, the young woman at the top of the stairs (one of the women of the house), asks that the robber be taken in and cared for. This young woman and her aunt ask that the robber (whom they do not know to be a boy) be brought upstairs and tended to by the other, female servants. Oliver is carried up the stairs by Giles; Giles continues bragging that this boy, whom he has shot, has been captured (though of course Oliver merely walked back, in a daze, to the house).

It's important to note here that the Maylie women (Rose and her aunt, Mrs. Maylie) do not see that Oliver is a young boy. Rose is willing to take in a robber who, for all she knows, could be a dangerous man more resembling Sikes, or Crackit. Rose, as a character, is so virtuous as to be nearly unrealistic—she is the only character who approaches Oliver's mixture of courage, confidence, and innate goodness.

CHAPTER 29

The narrator introduces the people living in the Chertsey house: along with Giles, the butler and head servant, and Brittles, the younger servant, there are Mrs. Maylie, an older and distinguished woman, and her seventeen-year-old niece Miss Rose Maylie. A doctor arrives, breathless, having been shocked by the news of the robbery—the narrator points out, jokingly, that the doctor (Dr. Losborne) seems particularly upset that the robbery occurred by surprise and at night, as though those weren't usual characteristics of a robbery.

The broad outline of Oliver's new "family" is sketched. If Brownlow, back when he was in charge of Oliver, was something like Oliver's stepfather, then Losborne is a kind, well-meaning, if quick-to-anger uncle; Mrs. Maylie is a grandmother (like Mrs. Bedwin), and Rose is an aunt. As it turns out, of course, Rose really is Oliver's biological aunt—a coincidence that seems almost too perfect to be believed.

The doctor talks to Giles, asking if Giles shot the intruder—Giles says, proudly, that he did. Losborne then checks on Oliver, saying that he is all right and stable, considering his wound. Losborne asks if Rose would like to see Oliver—Rose had asked previously to do so, but her aunt would not allow it (the two women have not seen Oliver since he came into the house; only the servants and the doctor have seen him). The doctor believes that Rose would very much be happy to see Oliver, and so insists upon their meeting. Mrs. Maylie also decides to see the "robber."

Losborne is an intelligent man, and he quickly realizes that Oliver, a young boy with goodness writ in his face, would not be capable of planning and executing a robbery, without being forced into it. Losborne, in later scenes, will also be the engine that drives away the investigators, and that ensures Oliver a safe haven at the Maylies' home near Chertsey.

CHAPTER 30

The doctor leads both Rose and Mrs. Maylie upstairs to see Oliver. On revealing that Oliver is only a young boy, Losborne sees Rose and her aunt's looks of total shock—they had expected a more "hardened" criminal. When Rose asks Losborne whether he believes that Oliver, though so young, is actually a thief, Losborne says no—his inclination is, at this point, that Oliver had been somehow forced to participate in the robbery. Losborne appears to have gleaned this from the sweetness of Oliver's temperament while injured.

Again, Losborne realizes, and encourages the Maylies also to believe, that Oliver is simply a young boy who has lost his way. Losborne and the Maylies are the first characters to see Oliver and assume he is good, other than Brownlow—Bumble, the members of the board, and Mr. Fang the judge all presumed Oliver to be a criminal, just because he was poor, and poorly-clothed.

Lorsborne swears that he will get the truth out of Giles and Brittles, but before doing so, he waits, with Rose and her aunt, for Oliver to wake and tell of his life, and how he came to associate with criminals. Oliver does so, pausing in between to take breaks (because he is still in a great deal of pain), and after the conversation is concluded, Rose, Mrs. Maylie, and Losborne are convinced that Oliver is a good boy who has been taken in by scoundrels. Losborne goes downstairs to hear how Giles came to shoot Oliver.

Unlike the previous scene in Brownlow's study, where Oliver is not permitted to tell the full story of his life (as he knows it; of course, Oliver is missing a good deal of detail), Oliver here is able to finish his story, thus convincing the Maylies and Losborne, further, that he really is a good boy, far away from his home, and on the run from evil forces who hope to control him.

When Losborne goes downstairs, he sees that the village constable has joined Giles and Brittles. Losborne, attempting to protect Oliver, cunningly persuades Giles and Brittles into thinking that, perhaps, Oliver is not the same "robber" they shot just that morning, although Giles at first seemed convinced that Oliver was the very same. Just before Losborne is able fully to convince them that Oliver is a different boy from the robber, two investigators arrive at the house from London.

Giles and Brittles are not too bright, and Losborne seems acquainted with a small bit of police psychology—that eye-witness testimony can easily be manipulated, so long as a different idea is planted in the "eyewitness's" head. Giles, here, is convinced quickly that he is not certain the boy he shot was Oliver—this is all the doubt Losborne needs.

CHAPTER 31

The two investigators, named Blathers and Duff, enter gruffly and ask to speak with those in charge in the house. They ask whether "a boy" it was who robbed the home; Losborne says that this isn't true, that Giles and Brittles only believes the person they shot was a boy; Blathers and Duff say that they'll check it out for themselves.

Blathers and Duff are named perfectly, as a means of expressing not only their bumbling qualities (a la Bumble), but their total inefficiency and idiocy as regards police investigation. Losborne is able to dispatch them quickly in this chapter.

Losborne is worried that, if Oliver tells the true story of his life to Blathers and Duff, they won't take pity on him the way he and the Maylies have. Rose does not understand how anyone couldn't pity Oliver, and Losborne tells her that, for this, she is a lovely woman; but he insists that Blathers and Duff must be misled into thinking that Oliver was not the person who entered the house the previous night. Otherwise, Oliver could be arrested for vagrancy, as it is illegal for paupers to travel outside of their home district.

Dickens seems to think this "white lie" of Losborne's is OK, considering the circumstances. Losborne is lying to protect a greater good—the health and safety of the young boy placed in his charge. And Blathers and Duff do not appear to have Oliver's best interests at heart—they would be all too happy to arrest a child.

After telling a long, strange, complex story about a robber he once caught named Conkey Chickweed—a story that neither Losborne nor the Maylies can follow—Blathers, with Duff, goes upstairs to talk to Oliver. Losborne and Giles go along as well. Introducing Oliver to the two investigators, Losborne lies and says that Oliver was injured by accident with a spring-gun earlier that day; Giles, at first confused as how to pull off this ruse, eventually agrees with Losborne, and though Blathers and Duff still suspect that a boy, with two larger men, arranged the robbery, they believe Losborne, and do not believe anymore that Oliver is that boy.

Giles seems almost to give up the lie, as he attempts, poorly, to make up a story that gibes with Losborne's. But, luckily, Blathers and Duff are too perplexed by this seeming coincidence to notice, and they eventually allow that it is possible Oliver was shot in an unrelated incident. This is another bit of good fortune in Oliver's favor—his luck is truly turning around.

Before this interview with Oliver, the doctor also pulled apart a section of Giles' gun, rendering it useless; thus Blathers and Duff, on examining the broken gun, saw that, whomever Giles believed to have injured could "not" have been injured at all. This additional lie increases the appearance that Oliver is not the boy Blathers and Duff are looking for; they leave the next morning, and a rumor goes up in London that another two men and boy have been caught, meaning that Oliver is officially free of suspicion (these three others' being caught is simply a coincidence).

An exaggeration of the white lie. Another coincidence also buoys Losborne's lie, and of course Losborne had nothing to do with it. This series of good breaks in the Maylie home seem to indicate that Oliver will be safe there, that his life has changed for the better. Dickens' characters fates seem always to be either on slow upward or slow downward trajectories, with very few interruptions once one is on a given path. Oliver's clearly trends upward from this point on.

Oliver is now safe at the Maylies' home, where he begins to grow stronger, despite his injury. He is looked after by Rose, Rose's aunt, and Dr. Losborne.

This scene recalls the previous scene at Brownlow's, wherein Oliver was cared for by the servants of the house and by Mrs. Bedwin.

CHAPTER 32

Oliver, not only injured by the gunshot wound, also suffers from another fever, which causes him to lie in bed for many days. However the Maylies care for him with great interest, and soon he begins to regain his strength. Oliver asks Rose whether there is anything he can do to help the family, and Rose replies that, once Oliver's strength has returned, the family could use him around the house in "a hundred ways."

It is typical of Oliver that, even as he is on the brink of serious illness again, he is only worried about what he might contribute to the Maylie household. It later becomes clear that Oliver's presence is a gift enough—the Maylies are overjoyed to have a young boy in their midst.

Once Oliver is hardy enough to make the journey, he takes a wagon with Losborne back to London, in order to meet with Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin, and to explain why he never returned from his trip to the bookseller's, so many weeks ago. As Losborne and Oliver are leaving Chertsey, however, Oliver spots the flop-house in Sudbury where he stayed, with Sikes and Crackit, the night before the robbery.

It does seem hard to imagine that this flop-house, which was more or less hidden when Oliver and Sikes approached it earlier, should be visible in broad daylight from the street—but the scene ensuing is powerful, and strange, enough to make this recognition worthwhile.

Losborne, by nature an impetuous man, goes into the house to berate whomever is there, and finds a humpbacked old man, who claims to live there alone. Losborne says that the old man has been harboring criminals among him, but the old man replies that he has lived alone in the house for twenty-five years, and that Losborne is mistaken. Losborne, cowed by this embarrassing episode, returns to the carriage and to Oliver, convinced that Oliver simply got the house mixed up with another.

Dickens appears to be scrambling the readers' expectations in this scene. One would imagine that the house would have some kind of link to Crackit, or perhaps to Barney, but instead one finds an old hermit who has been living there several decades. This weird blip—either Oliver's mistake or a strange confusion of another kind—is never ironed out or explained in the novel.

Losborne and Oliver head to Brownlow's house, where they ring and find a servant. This servant, however, tells the pair that Brownlow and all his house have decamped to the West Indies six weeks prior, and that they shall remain there for some time. Oliver is crestfallen at this, and though Oliver suggests they talk to the bookseller, Losborne says that is "enough disappointment for one day," and the two head back to Chertsey.

This seems like a hitch in Oliver's plans, an instance of bad luck no longer in keeping with his positive state of affairs. But Brownlow will return to the narrative quickly. The West Indies, like Australia in "Great Expectations," is a place so far away as to seem almost mythical—as though Brownlow had travelled all the way to the moon.

In Chertsey, over the next several weeks, the weather grows warm, and Oliver has a wonderful time recuperating and living with the Maylies. Oliver begins studying with an old man, a tutor, since he has never had any formal education, and on Sundays he begins going to church with the Maylies, and sees his inherent virtue joined to traditional religious observance. Oliver often walks through the beautiful fields of Chertsey, a place prettier than any he has known, and spends three months of bliss with the Maylies and Losborne, who visits often from his home nearby.

This scene is one of the first of Oliver's encounters with the beautiful natural surroundings near the Maylies' home. Oliver was raised in a village in the countryside, but his life was mostly spent in institutions, thus he was not able, nor did he have the time, to run about and see grass, trees, sunlight. Then Oliver was taken in by Fagin and the boys in London, and those squalid city conditions, too, did not allow for much recreation. The depiction of the country is paradisiacal compared to Dickens squalid depictions of much of the city.

CHAPTER 33

One evening that summer, Rose sits down to play the piano for her aunt, when suddenly her aunt, noticing that something is wrong with Rose, asks her what is the matter. Rose replies that, although for some time she has been trying to hide it, she does not feel well—she believes that she is growing ill.

Dickens does not elaborate on what might be the cause of Rose's illness, nor does he explain why Rose suddenly feels better. What's more important, in this scene, is the destabilizing effect Rose's illness has on the Maylie family.

Oliver asks Mrs. Maylie, when Rose has been safely placed in bed, whether Rose will get better, but Mrs. Maylie fears instead that Rose will only grow sicker, and eventually pass away. Oliver is surprised by Mrs. Maylie's negative outlook. The next morning, however, Mrs. Maylie seems poised to help her niece, and to fight off melancholy. She dispatches Oliver to Losborne's, with a note informing him of Rose's fever. Oliver notices another letter for a man named Harry Maylie, but when he inquires of Mrs. Maylie whether he ought to deliver that one, too, she says no, that it should wait for the next day.

The novel has so far moved along without a romantic interest, but now Dickens supplies one (perhaps to satisfy those reading the novel in serialized form). Harry and Rose's romance does not occupy too much of the novel's remaining pages, but it contains enough interest to create a genuine romantic spark in a book that otherwise charts the ups and downs of the life of a ten-year-old—a boy too young for this kind of romantic attachment.

Oliver runs all the way to the market, four miles off, with the letter for Losborne (it will be taken from the market to Losborne by coach). While running back home from dropping off the letter, however, Oliver nearly crashes into a strange gentleman, who curses at Oliver in a manner far outstripping the small, accidental offense Oliver caused; the strange man says, among other things, "He'd start up from a marble **coffin**, to come in my way!" Oliver is perturbed by this man's behavior, but continues running along.

Another coincidence, although this one is later "explained" by the fact that Monks knew Oliver was being rehabilitated in the small farmhouse outside Chertsey. Nevertheless, Monks does not introduce himself to Oliver, and of course Oliver has never seen Monks before. It should be noted that Oliver resembles his mother, meaning he does not look at all—it can be inferred—like his half-brother, Monks, who shares only a father with Oliver.

When Oliver returns home, Rose's fever has grown worse—Losborne, who arrives later, fears that Rose might not survive it. After a few days, in which neither Oliver nor Mrs. Maylie sleep hardly at all, Losborne emerges from the sick room, after another visit, to declare that, finally and against all hope, Rose appears to be on the mend. Mrs. Maylie can barely believe the news—she feared that her niece was lost. And Oliver is overjoyed to hear Losborne's new prognosis.

The dramatic compression in this chapter is notable. At first, Rose is well; then she is sick; then she is violently sick, almost on the verge of death; and when it appears there is no longer hope, she recovers quickly. Again, it is not clear why Dickens inserted this small character arc in the novel, over than to emphasize the importance of Rose's goodwill on the structure of the Maylie family.

CHAPTER 34

Oliver, relieved to hear that Rose will recover from her fever, takes a walk outside to clear his head. On his return to the Maylies' house, he runs into Giles, in a post-chaise (a kind of carriage), with an unnamed gentleman. Giles is still in his nightcap, as they have come to the Maylies' home very quickly. The gentleman asks Oliver whether Rose has gotten better—Oliver says she has, and the man, also quite relieved, introduces himself as Harry Maylie, Mrs. Maylie's son, and Rose's cousin.

Harry comes flying at full speed into the narrative. A dashing young man, whose "brilliant future" is sketched only in the broadest of terms by Dickens, Harry is more or less the archetype of the romantic hero: he is handsome, intelligent, and so devoted to his female love interest that he is willing to forgo all his life's advantages in order to win her.

Harry runs inside and finds his mother, whom he upbraids, gently, for not telling him sooner of Rose's illness. Mrs. Maylie counters that it would not have mattered—if Rose got worse, she would have died before Harry had had a chance to arrive. Mrs. Maylie and Harry have a conversation, in general and abstract terms, which seems to indicate that Harry has a genuine romantic love for Rose, and that some secret of Rose's, which causes her to have a "tainted" family history, keeps Harry and Rose from being happily married.

Rose's "tainted" family history is not elaborated in this scene, but it is described later in the novel, when Dickens (via the narrator) explains that, because Rose is the far younger daughter of Agnes, who gave birth while unwed, Rose has been "afflicted" with the scourge of Agnes' sin. Victorian audiences would not have found that sort of "scourge" to be altogether surprising, although modern readers often have difficulty understanding the gravity of Agnes' "crime" or how it could be seen as affecting her sister.

Harry and his mother leave off the subject for the time being; Mrs. Maylie goes back to tend to Rose, and Harry entertains Oliver, Losborne, and Giles with stories into the night. Over the next several days, Harry stays at the home, and collects flowers with Oliver to arrange for Rose.

Again, Harry is a figure everyone in the family adores, not just Rose; Giles and Losborne, in particular, seem taken with him. Harry's relationship with Oliver is not developed very much in the novel, but one infers that Oliver looks up to Harry a great deal.

One late afternoon, as the sun is setting and Oliver is seated in his room, reading and studying, he wakes up, slowly, to spot Fagin and the man he saw on the street (the "strange man," after Oliver had dropped off a letter for Losborne in the nearby market-town) outside the window. In a daze, Oliver cannot do anything, and he watches them disappear; once he wakes up fully, however, he runs out of the room and calls the rest of the family, asking for their help.

Another "appearance" of Monks. Again, at first this seems improbable, but then one learns, later on, that Monks and Fagin have been in cahoots; it would have been easy for Monks to tell Fagin that Oliver is living at the very house he robbed; and therefore the two could easily have found an opportunity to visit Oliver there.

CHAPTER 35

Oliver alerts the house that "the Jew" (Fagin) and another man were there. Harry, Giles, and Losborne attempt to find them outside, but cannot—the two seem to have vanished without a trace. Harry wonders aloud if Oliver didn't possibly dream their arrival, but Oliver insists that they were there, outside his window. Losborne and Harry continue to listen, in the coming days, for rumors of the two men in town, but hear nothing.

Again, it is hard to imagine that Fagin and Monks could disappear so quickly, until one considers the fact that the two are accomplished criminals, people who are exceedingly good at making quick and thorough getaways. Also, were Harry to find the two near the Maylies' property, the novel would have come to its conclusion a great deal sooner.

A few days later, when Rose is feeling better, Harry comes up to her in the house, and asks to speak with her. Rose, though she likes Harry very much, seems upset, and remarks that she wishes Harry had left sooner—since his professional life is "so high and noble," and Rose feels that she is only keeping Harry from these pursuits, and from the fame they will win him (Harry works as a lawyer, and has an eye toward political office).

Rose's goodness continues even to the realm of self-abnegation—she feels that, because of the accident of her family's "blight," she should not stain the perfect reputation of Harry and his branch of the family by marrying him. One should also note, here, that it was legal and socially acceptable in Victorian England for cousins to marry.

Rose then listens as Harry reiterates his love for her. After hearing him, she asks if she might say something to Harry: she asks that Harry forget her, and when Harry asks why, Rose explains. She is a woman with no name, no prospects, and with a "blight" on her family (still undescribed); she could not bear the idea, she tells Harry, of feeling that she had caused Harry to lose the brilliant future he is planning for himself.

Harry, for his part, is dead set on Rose; he believes he can love no other woman, and he will stop at nothing to win Rose. But the "winning" here occurs in a curious fashion; Harry must purposefully "lower" his social station in order to "deserve" Rose. This is the inverse of the typical sense of romantic striving, wherein the male hero "wins" the woman.

Harry does not agree with what Rose is saying, but seeing that her resolution is firm on the matter—that this "blight" on her family would prevent them from the otherwise happy union they both desire—he asks her only one thing: that he might bring the question of their marriage to her once again, in a year's time, and if she says "no" again, at that moment, then Harry will give up all hope of their union. To this, Rose agrees, and Harry parts with some small hope that they might live together happily.

An important part of the novel. Although Harry will largely disappear for the next ten or so chapters, Rose will keep her promise, and Harry his; he will ask her, again, if she will accept him, and this allows for the establishment of a nuclear family, in which Oliver might live comfortably, at the novel's end. Dickens seems to desire this kind of closure for Harry, Rose, and Oliver.

CHAPTER 36

After breakfast, as Harry is preparing to leave with Losborne, Harry pulls Oliver aside and asks him a favor: that Oliver might write to Harry every day, reporting on how things go in the house, and on how Mrs. Maylie and Rose are doing. Oliver agrees to do so. As Harry and Losborne depart, Rose sees that Harry is happy (because Oliver has agreed to write to him with news of Rose); Rose interprets this happiness as relief that Harry does not have to marry Rose after all, and Rose, quietly, is sad at the prospect of perhaps not marrying Harry after all, although, of course, in the chapter before she said no to this proposal of marriage.

This is an interesting case in the novel—a plot point that appears to have been placed by Dickens, but which seems not to be followed up on in the remainder of the text. Harry does need to receive information about the Maylie family, as he is far away during most of the events that occur in the last quarter of the novel, but it seems that Dickens probably intended to make more of this correspondence with Oliver than he in fact ended up doing. These sorts of blips in continuity are common in novels written serially, in which the writer was writing just slightly ahead of the publication of each chapter.

CHAPTER 37

The narrator turns to the story of Bumble and Mrs. Corney (now Mrs. Bumble); they have been married two months, and Bumble is in a melancholic state. Although he is master of the workhouse, he has resigned as beadle, and so has given up a certain amount of his social stature—he felt that the promotion to workhouse master would be greater than it ended up being in fact.

Here, Dickens turns to a bit of domestic comedy, showing that, once they are married, Bumble and his wife turn into a textbook unhappy couple. Mrs. Bumble now bosses her husband around, and the great irony is, that Bumble, in his attempt to become master of the workhouse, is not even master of the marriage he so desperately desired.

Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Bumble fight about Bumble's laziness, and Mrs. Bumble ends up pushing him out of his chair to take a turn of the workhouse; Bumble begins having sympathy for those men who escape their families in order to be "rid of their wives." Bumble finds his way into a room where a group of women are doing laundry, and as he observes them at his work, Mrs. Bumble comes in and insults him in front of them.

There could be no greater shame, for Bumble, than being insulted in front of the paupers, who he does not consider to be fully human, and yet whose opinion does seem to matter to him. Mrs. Bumble, sensing this, makes sure to highlight Bumble's flaw and failures for the joy of those paupers observing.

Bumble becomes upset, and walks out of the room in a huff. He winds up in a pub and begins drinking, to calm himself down. While at the pub he comes upon a strange man, seated near him, and begins talking to him—the man buys Bumble another pint, and even appears to have been waiting to talk to him. The strange man indicates that he knows about Oliver Twist, and more particularly, about the woman Old Sally who nursed Twist's mother before she died, and who had information and a package from Oliver's mother.

Another coincidence, this one necessary to bring Bumble, Monks, and Mrs. Bumble together. As Monks will find out, Mrs. Bumble has a package that was given by Oliver's dying mother to Old Sally, her nurse in the workhouse. Mrs. Bumble, believing this package might have some value, has kept it, but it turns out that the package is more valuable as a piece of information that can be leveraged, from Monks, for financial gain.

The strange man goes on to imply that he knows, further, that Mrs. Bumble now has that package, taken from Old Sally (and originally possessed by Oliver's mother). The strange man wishes to arrange a meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Bumble for the following night—to all this Bumble, confused, agrees. The man, as he is leaving, gives his name to Bumble—Monks, the same man who was seen with Fagin outside Oliver's window, by the Maylies' house.

Bumble is not particularly adept at this kind of discreet plan-making, but his wife appears more comfortable dealing with Monks and his special brand of underworld wheeling and dealing. Bumble, for the remainder of the novel, is out of his depth, and this scene marks the total dominance of Mrs. Bumble, in their strange, unhappy marriage.

CHAPTER 38

Bumble and his wife go to meet Monks, in a shabby old building down by the river Thames. They find him outside and, ducking out of the thunder and rain outside, head with him up a ladder to small room. Monks indicates, to Mrs. Bumble, that he knows she possesses something of value taken from Old Sally; Mrs. Bumble demands that Monks pay her twenty-five pounds for this package. Bumble remains silent and nervous during this exchange.

Here, Mrs. Bumble puts into practice her street-smarts, demanding payment for the package before Monks even sees it. Monks, therefore, must know that the package is valuable for him, otherwise he would not be so willing to offer cash for it up-front, without even examining it first.

Monks produces twenty-five gold coins and gives them to Mrs. Bumble, who begins her story of how she received the package from Sally. Mrs. Bumble describes Old Sally's death, and states that, though Sally died without saying anything of interest regarding the package she had mentioned to Mrs. Bumble, she did possess, in her hand, a pawnbroker's slip for this package—and Mrs. Bumble took this slip and redeemed it, finding the objects in a small bag, once belonging to Oliver's mother, which she gives, at this point, to Monks.

Dickens qualifies the exact manner by which Mrs. Bumble received the package. This is probably done simply for practical reasons: it would be much more difficult for Old Sally to have clutched the package to her person during the final throes of her illness. A slip for a pawnbroker is much easier to conceal in one's fist, and much easier, too, to hang onto during one's final moments.

In the bag are: a locket engraved with the name Agnes (and a blank for the last name), a wedding-ring, and two locks of hair. At this, Mrs. Bumble completes her story, and asks Monks whether this is what he wanted, and whether he can use this package or this information to ruin Mrs. Bumble. Monks replies that this information will ruin no one, and at that, he opens a trap door, which leads all the way down to the river rushing beneath (as the building juts over part of the Thames River). Monks then drops the package into the river, and claims it is gone forever.

The first announcement of the name of Oliver's mother. This is important for the plot, and also for symbolic reasons. For up till this point, Oliver's mother was a character only inasmuch as she was the woman who gave birth to the novel's hero. But Agnes is a character of her own—one with a family, and a history. It is this history that is to be revealed as the text progresses.

Monks then tells Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Bumble that this is all, and tells them, too, that they must keep the meeting secret. The Bumbles leave the house, and Monks stays behind, with an unnamed servant-boy.

The entire conversation is quite short, and Bumble, notably, has played almost no part in the proceedings.

CHAPTER 39

The chapter opens in Sikes' flophouse, where he is still staying with Nancy. They are both in terrible condition, having very little money, and appear weak and starved. They get into a fight, for which neither is strong enough, and Nancy faints just as Fagin, Bates, and the Dodger enter—they help Nancy and get her water, while Sikes inquires as to what has brought Fagin to him, all of a sudden.

Sikes and Nancy appear to have been abandoned, or at the very least held at arm's length, following the botched robbery. There are many possible explanations for this, but it is most likely that Fagin is avoiding police scrutiny by not associating with Sikes for a period of time.

As Fagin begins his explanation, Bates and the Dodger empty food for Sikes and Nancy out of their sacks. Sikes is angry that Fagin has not visited him, nor brought him any food and nourishment for several weeks, and demands to know why. Fagin and the boys reply that they were "out of London," and that they have brought food for them now. Sikes tells Fagin he is sending Nancy back to Fagin's apartment, with the boys, for some money, which she will then deliver to Sikes—Sikes complains he is dying for want of money.

The nature of the dependence between Fagin and Sikes is here more or less reversed. In earlier chapter, Sikes could simply take money (for example, the money Oliver was holding on his way to the book-stall) and tell Fagin that the money is Sikes', not Fagin's. But here, Sikes is reduced to begging for whatever small amount Fagin can provide him.

Nancy goes, with Fagin and the boys, back to Fagin's apartment. There, after clearing out Toby and Chitling and the boys from the common area, Fagin gets Nancy the money and seems about to speak to her about something important, when Monks enters the apartment, brusquely. Monks and Fagin go off to the second floor to have a private conversation, but Nancy secretly follows them up there, and hears all that they say (although the narrator does not report this dialogue to the reader). Before the two descend, Nancy returns and pretends as though she has not been eavesdropping.

Fagin and Monks do not seem to worry that Nancy will eavesdrop on them. Either Fagin believes Nancy is too weak, and too much of a drunk at this point, to care very much what Fagin has to say, or Fagin and Monks are beginning to get sloppy in their planning. It is this kind of sloppiness that will, eventually, get both Monks and Fagin arrested—the former by Brownlow, the latter by the authorities.

Nancy looks pale, and, after quickly taking the money from Fagin that he has promised for Sikes, she returns to Sikes, and gives him the money. The next morning, Nancy still appears pale and agitated, and Sikes notices this throughout he day. That evening, Nancy slips laudanum, a sleeping drug, into Sikes' beer, and he falls into a deep slumber. At this, Nancy leaves the apartment on some kind of mission.

Nancy has, quite clearly, heard something that truly upsets her. In fact, she is so agitated she is willing to dose Sikes with a drug. Nancy, we are led to believe, has not taken such desperate measures previously; but now, things are different, and she feels compelled to act.

Nancy walks with great speed through the streets, and ends up at a nice hotel in a genteel neighborhood. Acting on information she has gleaned from the conversation between Fagin and Monks the previous night, she asks after Miss Maylie, to a footman in the hotel, hoping to have a conversation with Rose. Rose, hearing that someone is there to see her, allows Nancy to come upstairs for a discussion.

Another one of the novel's necessary coincidences. Dickens never elaborates why the Maylies are in London, but they happen to be there, with Oliver, exactly when Nancy overhears Monks' involvement in the life of Oliver Twist.

CHAPTER 40

Nancy enters Rose's room at the hotel, where Rose apologizes for Nancy's difficulty in coming to see her. Nancy, for her part, apologizes for her low social status, remarking that, "if there were more like you [Rose], there would be fewer like me." Nancy admits that it was she who dragged Oliver back to Fagin's, when he was carrying books to the bookseller. Although Rose is shocked by this information, Nancy says she only did it because of her circumstances—she feels loyal to Fagin and Sikes because they helped to raise her, even if they initiated her into a life of crime. Rose seems to understand this, and says she pities Nancy.

The relationship between Rose and Nancy is an intriguing and complex one. One can imagine that Nancy might have turned out a bit more like Rose, had she simply been raised in more pleasant circumstances. This is one of Dickens' subtle jabs at the impermeability of classes in England at the time—it was very difficult for someone like Nancy to receive a good education, or a good job, without the social connections possessed by someone like Rose.

Nancy reveals to Rose information she has heard from conversations between Fagin and Monks (whom Rose does not know). Nancy says that Monks has his own reasons for wanting to find Oliver, which he has not revealed to Fagin; Monks saw Oliver on the street on the day when the Dodger and Bates robbed Brownlow (by coincidence), and from this time on Monks promised Fagin money if Fagin could get Oliver back, alive, and if Fagin could then make Oliver a criminal. Monks, again, had his reasons for wanting these things, but did not share them with Fagin.

Nancy hears a large amount of Monks' motivation, but not all of it. She knows that Monks and Oliver are half-brothers, and she perceives that Monks has a vested interest in keeping Oliver from discovering that very fact. But Nancy does not seem to know, or to have heard, the extent to which Oliver stands to benefit from this connection with Monks, via the inheritance Oliver is to receive from his deceased father Edwin.

Nancy reveals the content of tonight's conversation between Monks and Fagin to Rose: Monks said that the only proof of Oliver's family ties lies at the bottom of the river Thames, and that the woman who once had this proof (Sally) is "in her **coffin**." Further, Monks reveals that Oliver is of high birth, and that if he finds out about this high birth, he might be able to use it against Monks. Monks, lastly, told Fagin that Monks and Oliver are brothers.

Bumble and his wife might have thought that their actions took place under the cover of darkness, but once Nancy overhears Monks discussing the purchase of the package, Bumble and Mrs. Bumble are irrevocably part of the narrative. And when Monks is captured, the Bumbles will also suffer.

This last piece of information is most shocking to Rose. Monks also told Fagin that the Maylies would die to know their relationship to Oliver, but that they would never learn the nature of this relationship. Rose begs, on hearing this, that Nancy remain with them, in the hotel, and be spirited away to safety. But Nancy insists that she will go back to Fagin, Sikes, and the boys. Rose says that she believes the truth of what Nancy says, because Nancy has risked her life to tell it to her.

Another instance of Nancy's loyalty. Dickens seems to be of two minds regarding this loyalty. On the one hand, Nancy's courage is notable, and she is far stronger, as it turns out, than the male criminals Fagin and Sikes, in her determination and moral fortitude. But Dickens also clearly believes that Nancy has cast her lot with the wrong side—that of the criminals.

Rose begs, again, that Nancy stay with them, but Nancy repeats that she is loyal to the scoundrels she lives with, that it is too late for her, that she cannot be redeemed. Nancy tells Rose, further, that she can be met on London bridge every Sunday night between eleven and twelve to talk with Rose and whomever Rose brings along. Nancy refuses money from Rose but takes her blessings, and saying that she (Nancy) has "no roof but a **coffin**-lid," heads out again into the night, leaving Rose shocked by the evening's revelations.

An important use of coffin symbolism. The coffin, later in the novel, will come to symbolize also Agnes Fleming, Oliver's mother, who was similarly good-natured, like Nancy, but who succumbed, like Nancy, to moral temptation in agreeing to have a liaison with Edwin before marriage. Nancy has also made decisions that push her into a life of crime from which she cannot escape.

CHAPTER 41

Rose is not sure what to do with Nancy's information. Rose has promised to keep Nancy's information secret, but Rose knows, also, that she must ask someone's advice in order to untangle the secret of Oliver's birth, and to protect Oliver. As Rose is sitting down to write to her cousin Harry regarding his assistance in the matter, Oliver comes into Rose's room, greatly agitated.

This is the second time that a letter, intended to be sent to Harry, is not even written—the first was to be written by Mrs. Maylie, when she had found out that Rose had taken ill with fever. It seems that, as regards important family decisions, Harry is often the last to know.

Oliver tells Rose that he has spotted Mr. Brownlow in the street. Oliver wishes desperately to be reunited with the man who had given him so much, and who still believes him to be a thief and a rotten boy. Rose hires a cab and she and Oliver drive to the Brownlow residence. Rose enters and is let in to Brownlow's parlor, where he is seated, once again, with Mr. Grimwig.

Another coincidence. It is not noted whether the hotel in which the Maylies, and Oliver, stay is close to the neighborhood in which Brownlow used to live, but in any event, Oliver sees him, and the plot of the novel begins approaching its grand finale.

Rose claims that she has knowledge of Oliver Twist, can prove that he is in fact a good boy. Grimwig does not believe that this is possible, but Brownlow is clearly excited by the prospect that Oliver was, after all, telling the truth, and that his leaving Brownlow was not of Oliver's choosing. At this point, Rose asks Oliver to enter the parlor (he has been waiting outside the door).

Oliver finally makes his way back to the parlor, where Grimwig and Brownlow were waiting so many months previous. It will take little, this time, to convince Brownlow that Oliver was virtuous all along, and was merely the victim of terrible circumstances.

Brownlow is overjoyed to see Oliver again, as is Mrs. Bedwin, who states, once more, that she never believed that Oliver was a bad boy in the first place. Rose goes out of the parlor with Brownlow to tell him all the information Rose has relayed to her. Brownlow, hearing all, pledges to tell Losborne all that had taken place, while Rose returns to the hotel to inform Mrs. Maylie. Rose and Brownlow part, and Oliver leaves with Nancy.

Mrs. Bedwin has stayed steadfastly in Oliver's corner since his stay at Brownlow's the first time. Bedwin knew, all along, that Oliver possessed a fundamental goodness that could not be taken away. This goodness was also seen, in Oliver, by Rose and Mrs. Maylie, when first they laid eyes on him.

Losborne is furious with Nancy when he hears that she is responsible for dragging Oliver back to Fagin, when Oliver was en route to the bookseller. Brownlow asks him, politely, to be calm, since only by proceeding calmly will they be able to solve the true mystery: that of Oliver's parentage, and of his inheritance, of which Brownlow feels Oliver has been defrauded.

Losborne's characteristic impetuosity is on display in this scene; though Losborne is a kind man, and one with a generous spirit, he has a hard time understanding how someone in Nancy's position could endanger, willfully, the life of a poor child, by leading him back to Fagin.

Brownlow and Losborne go to the hotel to meet with Rose and Mrs. Maylie. Brownlow has a plan for how to proceed, although the plan galls Losborne, who is impetuous and wants to act that night: they will wait until the next Sunday (it is Tuesday), and send Rose to speak again with Nancy on London Bridge, with the aim of getting more information about Monks. Brownlow says that all these developments should be kept from Oliver (who has overheard nothing, yet, of their plans), and he agrees that Grimwig and Harry should be brought in to help. With this plan made, the meeting breaks up till morning.

Brownlow's interactions with, and plans about, Oliver might best be characterized as paternal. He withholds certain information from Oliver that he feels would hurt or frighten the small boy, and he hopes that by hiding this information from Oliver he might bring about a plan which ultimately protects the boy. This is a far cry from the kind of information-withholding practices practiced by those in the workhouse, such as Bumble, who wished merely to make money off the "sale" of Oliver as an apprentice.

CHAPTER 42

On the same night that Nancy dosed Sikes with laudanum and visited Rose, Noah Claypole and his now-partner Charlotte (it is unclear if they are legally married) are walking to London, with only a small bit of clothing tied to sticks they are carrying. Both have escaped Sowerberry, and are coming to London to seek their fortune. They stumble upon a pub called the Three Cripples, where they stop for refreshment, as they have traveled a long distance and eaten and drunk very little.

Noah Claypole might have been believed to have been out of the narrative for good, but here he is introduced again, as a young aspiring criminal on his way to London. In this way, Noah's journey, with Charlotte, to London on foot mirrors Oliver's journey so many months before. And, like Oliver, Noah will soon come into contact with Fagin.

Noah requests of Barney, who is working at the Cripples that night, some beef and ale, and he and Noah sit in a small room, eating and drinking. Barney then goes in the back of the pub and meets with Fagin; both of them are able to observe Noah and Charlotte through a small and out-of-sight window into the room in which the pair is eating. Fagin, not knowing of Noah's connection to Oliver, simply likes the man's "looks," and the fact that Noah seems capable of "controlling" his wife. Fagin vows that he can "use" Noah.

Dickens here makes reference to a common theory among Victorians, the idea that one's "looks," or "physiognomy," could tell an observer important information about that person's personality, or even moral outlook. Fagin believes he sees, in Noah, the shadow of a criminal temperament, and so he pursues Noah to that end.

Fagin comes in just as Noah was discussing how he intended to make money in London through petty thievery—pickpocketing and the like. Fagin notices that the two are from the country based on the dust on their shoes—Noah is impressed by this detection. Fagin indicates that he overheard Noah and Charlotte talking about illegal activities, but he says the two are lucky, as he, Fagin, is also "in that line of work" himself. Noah and Charlotte are stunned and listen attentively to Fagin.

Fagin is nothing if not observant. Although he does not know exactly from where Noah and Charlotte come, he does know that they have come from the country; Fagin is too sly to say, however, what he really means, which is not that the dust tipped him off to their country origins, but rather their behavior did—Noah and Charlotte are terrified of the city, and it is obvious.

Fagin says he has "a friend" who does some criminal work; Noah realizes that he more or less has to help Fagin, now, in his this criminal enterprise, since Fagin has overheard him discussing his desire for illegal employment, and Fagin could take this information immediately to the police. Noah asks for some "light" work to begin with, as he does not have much experience with crime in the big city of London. Fagin says he has just the thing for Noah—Noah will steal small amounts of money from children, given them by their mothers, in certain parts of the city. He will be a robber of little boys and girls. Noah agrees to this, and introduces himself to Fagin as Mr. Bolter, here with his wife Mrs. Bolter.

Once again, Fagin leverages his information and places himself in a position of power by claiming that he could turn Noah in to the police for Noah's desire to become a criminal, should Noah find it necessary to go his own way and disregard Fagin's orders. Fagin is a master at manipulating people without having to resort to the threat of physical violence—in other words, unlike people like Sikes.

CHAPTER 43

The next day at Fagin's apartment, when Noah comes to meet Fagin's "friend," with whom he is to work, he finds Fagin instead. Noah is surprised that Fagin is the "friend" he mentioned, but Fagin answers that every man is his own best friend—every man is his own "number one." Fagin explains to Noah that he must look out for two number ones, in order to be successful as a criminal: Noah himself (number one), and Fagin (the absolute number one of all).

An incredibly important scene in the novel, and one that has become, understandably, quite famous. Fagin inverts the commonplace idea that one should look out for "Number One" (oneself), by arguing that he, Fagin, is also always Number One, and so everyone should also look out for Fagin's interests.

Fagin says that the more Noah values the first, the more he will have to value the second, and vice versa; Fagin also threatens Noah with hanging, at the hands of justice, if he disobeys. Fagin explains to Noah how one of his best hands, the Artful Dodger, was taken by police just the previous day, for stealing a snuff box.

As with Oliver, Fagin threatens Noah, again, with the prospect of hanging, should Noah find it necessary to "peach," or rat out the remainder of the group. This is how fear keeps the band of criminals together. But that fear is all that keeps the gang forever, in contrast to the bonds of love that Oliver seems able to forge between people.

Charley Bates comes to Fagin to inform him that the police have additional evidence against the Dodger linking him to other thefts—this means he will be sent away for a long time, possibly to a penal colony. Bates is upset—not his usual laughing self—and cries to Fagin that no one will know of all the Dodger's wonderful thefts and deeds. Fagin replies, however, that the trial is a matter of public record, and perhaps the Dodger will announce some of his greater criminal achievements aloud to the assembled crowds when he is judged. This, Fagin says, will increase the Dodger's fame, and deservedly so.

The Dodger's crime has come off-stage, and only his punishment will be narrated to the reader. Again, one gets the sense that, perhaps, Dickens had more he wanted to show of the Dodger, but he ran out of space or time to do it. It should be noted, also, that the Dodger, despite his fame in the novel, has relatively few appearances—but the character is so vividly drawn, he remains a touchstone of the novel and of Dickens' work in general.

Fagin's description of the Dodger's fame seems to assuage Charley a bit, and they realize they need someone to witness the Dodger's trial. No one can go except for Noah, since all others have faces that could be recognized by the authorities. At first, Noah hesitates to go near a hall of justice, since he, too, is illegal (having left his assigned village, as a pauper), but Fagin convinces Noah to do it.

Noah is not in a very strong bargaining position—he has just agreed, more or less, to do whatever Fagin demands of him. And it is true that no one in London recognizes Noah, although, understandably, Noah still hesitates to go near the authorities who have the power to put him in prison.

Noah is dressed in different clothes and given directions to the court. Once there he picks out the Artful Dodger right away, by his flamboyant style of dress and characteristically swaggering manner. The Dodger has his charges read against him by the judge, and a policeman corroborates the story and argues that the Dodger has committed many more thefts as well.

It seems that the police have had a "file" on the Dodger for some time, but have been unable to nab him. The Dodger, far from trying to avoid detection, wishes rather to be famous among London criminals.

The judge sentences the Dodger to time in a penal colony, and the Dodger, rather than fighting this sentence, merely tells the whole court they'll regret sentencing him. He is taken away by guards in cuffs, and Noah returns, meeting up with Bates halfway, to Fagin's, to tell of the Dodger's glorious rebuke to the courts.

Fagin believes that the Dodger's court performance will "go down in history," but it is not clear that anyone in the court will remember the Dodger's words beyond the day of his court proceeding. But Fagin needs to create this air of myth and legend in order to keep the group from disbanding, for fear of getting caught.

CHAPTER 44

Nancy, back at Sikes' apartment, worries that she must attempt to protect Oliver while hiding her exertions from both Sikes and Fagin. She does not know how much longer she can do this, and despite her belief that both men are "vile," she still feels a certain loyalty to them, and does not want simply to give them up to the authorities.

Nancy is being torn apart by her loyalties, as are many "informants" placed in Nancy's, or similar, positions. But Nancy is steadfast in her unwillingness to send Fagin and Sikes to jail—she alone among all the criminals seems to feel loyalty and love for them, even though she knows of their essentially evil or corrupt natures.

Fagin comes over that night, a Sunday, to join Nancy and Sikes. Nancy is eager to meet Rose on the London Bridge, and asks Sikes if she can go out (although of course not saying she is to meet Rose); Sikes says no, and when Nancy protests, Sikes yells at her, angrily, and says she will go nowhere. Nancy gets even more upset and begins to weep, but Sikes insists she will not leave the apartment. As Fagin is leaving, however, he pulls Nancy aside, out of Sikes' hearing, and tells Nancy that if she ever needs help against Sikes, he is happy to provide it. Nancy does not understand what Fagin's motive is in helping her, but says "thank you" to Fagin regardless. Fagin leaves.

Fagin, on the other hand, is all-too-happy to turn on his "friend" Sikes, if it means that Fagin stands to gain from the arrangement. Nancy does not seem interested in Fagin's proposal, perhaps because she understands that Fagin is not to be trusted. Indeed, although Sikes is physically dangerous and imposing, Nancy appears, at least in these scenes, able to control him; far more terrifying is the untrammeled cunning of Fagin.

Fagin believes, as he is walking home, that Nancy was eager to see a new lover, and that Nancy knows that, if she were to leave Sikes for another man, Sikes would become murderous with rage. Fagin wonders whether he can convince Nancy to poison Sikes—Fagin himself has grown tired of Sikes' raging, and feels he can gain a larger share from the crimes they commit if Sikes is no longer living.

Fagin's assumption, funnily enough, dovetails with the standard assumption of any kind of romantic tragedy—that one party is seeing another person, and that the relationship is falling apart. Little does Fagin know, however, that Nancy has no lover, only a friend, in Rose.

To this end, Fagin vows to send someone along to follow Nancy the next time she goes out to meet the person Fagin believes to be a lover; Fagin can then use this information to blackmail Nancy into killing Sikes. Happy with this plan, Fagin walks briskly back to his apartment building, happy at his own cunning.

Fagin has figured out a gambit which will not result in very much gain for him, but will wind up killing Nancy, and forcing Sikes to flee for his life, to the countryside, and to another flophouse in London.

CHAPTER 45

Noah comes to Fagin's the next morning for breakfast. Fagin congratulates Noah on the trinkets he stole from children the previous day, after checking on the Dodger at the court. Fagin says he has a new proposition for Noah: that he act as a spy on a "young woman." Noah readily agrees to this. Fagin himself spies on Nancy for six days, and realizes that, on Sunday, she intends again to go out to see her "lover."

Noah is happy to perform any task that does not seem to offer him the possibility of physical harm. Spying, then, is a perfect activity for Noah—one that allows him to be of use for Fagin, and which keeps him, or so he thinks, significantly out of harm's way.

Fagin takes Noah to the Cripples pub that Sunday evening, and, through the trick pane of glass in the secret room (from which Fagin once observed Noah), Noah observes Nancy. He says he would recognize her anywhere, and will follow her the whole night. Fagin wishes him good speed, and after Nancy has left the Cripples for her meeting, Noah heads out after her, directed initially by Barney (holding open the tavern door), and into the night.

A motif is then developed in the novel: of conversations being overheard, or partially overheard, by other characters. Noah is spied on by Fagin, earlier, and Fagin blackmails Noah with that information; then Noah is tasked with doing the same thing to Nancy.

CHAPTER 46

Nancy keeps arrives at the bridge, and Rose and Brownlow arrive just after her. Noah sneaks along the bridge and hides himself in an alcove just below the three; he is in a position to hear all, and escapes detection. Although Brownlow at first questions Nancy's truthfulness, after Nancy begins to speak, and tells of how Sikes would not allow her to leave the apartment last week, and how she again had to drug him with laudanum this week to escape, Brownlow seems convinced of her earnestness. Brownlow tells Nancy that they need to formulate a plan to get information about Oliver from the mysterious man Monks.

Brownlow tends to make moral decision quickly. When he first met Oliver, after he believed Oliver had taken his "wipe," Brownlow looked closely at the boy and realized, all of a sudden, that Oliver was incapable of theft. Here, after hearing very little from Nancy, Brownlow is convinced that she is telling the truth, and that he can trust her. Of course, Brownlow was deeply shaken when he believed in Oliver and then Oliver ran away—which was, perhaps, why Brownlow then tried so hard to find out more information about Oliver's life.

Brownlow says that, if they cannot secure Monks, then Nancy will have to hand over Fagin to them. Nancy becomes upset at this, however, saying that, though Fagin and Sikes are vile men, she cannot betray them; she has no relationship with Monks, and therefore does not feel the same loyalty to him. Brownlow and Rose promise that, if they get the information about Oliver they need, no harm will come to Fagin or Sikes without Nancy's consent. Nancy is relieved to hear this.

Nancy repeats, for the third time, her wish that neither Fagin nor Sikes get in trouble because of the information she (Nancy) will provide to Brownlow. Just as Rose knits together her family, Nancy offers the possibility of a social bond among the criminals—but her awful fate will highlight how impossible such bonds of love are to maintain among criminals.

Nancy describes Monks to Rose and Brownlow, and tells how he might be found at the pub the Three Cripples. Brownlow gives a start at the description of a scar on Monks' face—he believes he might have seen Monks before. Brownlow thanks Nancy for her information, and Brownlow and Rose attempt to convince Nancy to come with them, and not to go home to the dangerous Sikes. But Nancy says she cannot leave him, nor the rest of her criminal "friends."

Once again, Brownlow appears to recognize someone, in the same way that he recognized Oliver and Oliver's similarity to the picture of his mother Brownlow hangs in his parlor. It is perhaps hard to believe that Brownlow's interactions with Oliver's father were so distant in the past that he does not immediately figure out the novel's central mystery, but of course, without that there would be no novel.

Rose is deeply upset that Nancy will not go with them, and that Nancy will take no money from them. Nancy tells Rose and Brownlow that, one day soon, she (Nancy) will die and become another forgotten soul in London. Rose is shocked to hear this, but Brownlow tells her they must depart, and they do so; Nancy departs in a different direction just after. After all three leaves, Noah sneaks back to tell Fagin what he has heard.

Rose tries, for the second time to convince Nancy that she can be helped by Rose and the Maylie family if she leaves Sikes. But Nancy denies Rose's help for the last time, and when she heads back to Sikes' apartment, she will not leave there alive. Nancy seems to foresee her fate.

CHAPTER 47

The chapter opens with Noah asleep on the floor of Fagin's apartment. Fagin is plotting based on the information Noah has overheard. Fagin is partially upset that Nancy is not seeing a lover, and that therefore Fagin cannot blackmail her; but Fagin recognizes, in this turn of events, that he might be able to spin circumstances to his advantage. While Fagin is thus stewing, Sikes enters the apartment.

Fagin thought he would have a different situation for blackmail—he thought he could use Nancy's lover for this purpose—but he realizes, quickly, that he can cause Sikes to kill Nancy, and thus cause Sikes to be chased by police for a crime unrelated to Fagin.

Fagin reveals to Sikes, slowly, that Nancy has spoken to "a gentleman and a lady" on London Bridge; he insinuates to Sikes that Nancy has "peached," or told of Sikes' and Fagin's illegal activities. Fagin wakes up Noah, who also tells Sikes that Nancy has been drugging him at night in order to get him asleep and allow herself out of their shared apartment. Sikes is infuriated by this information and vows to retaliate against Nancy.

The die has been cast—after this point, Nancy will no longer walk free. It is ironic and horrifying to consider that this is how Nancy is repaid for her loyalty—she is killed, in an instant, by the man who is supposed to love her, and to protect her. But such is the nature of the social "bonds" connecting those in Fagin's gang.

Fagin has therefore spun the turn of events, lying to Sikes that Nancy has sold out Fagin and Sikes, when in reality Nancy has avoided doing just that. Sikes returns to his apartment in a fury, and screams at Nancy that she is an ingrate and a liar. Nancy attempts to defend herself by telling the truth—that she did not betray Sikes and Fagin—but Sikes strikes her twice, on the head, with his pistol, knocking a deep gash in her skull. He then beats her with a club until she dies.

There is little Nancy can say to stop Sikes at this point. It is out of the question that Sikes would stop to consider whether Fagin had a vested interest in lying to him about Nancy's involvement—Sikes does not go in for those types of psychological games. He merely resorts to violence.

CHAPTER 48

The next morning, Sikes is sitting in his apartment, staring at Nancy's body, which he has tried to cover with a rug, but to no avail—there is too much blood in the apartment, and it is driving Sikes mad. Sikes attempts to clean his shoes and leaves the apartment, Nancy's body still inside, with his dog; he does not know where he is going, but he no longer can stay alone with the body.

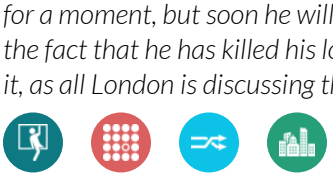
Nancy's death is accomplished in an instant, but Sikes regrets it almost as quickly. Silks regret seems to be in part selfish—that he knows there is nothing he can do to protect himself. Yet at the same time, Sikes also seems truly distraught that he has killed Nancy, as if he senses that she felt a real kind of love for him—a love now forever beyond him—and he repaid her with death. Sikes' desperation in this and the following chapters is truly something to behold; Dickens is a powerful writer of this kind of abjection.

Sikes wanders all day, and ends up in a town where he meets a hawker selling a product that can "get stains out of anything—any kind of stains." The hawker sees a spot of blood on Sikes' clothes, and attempts to get it out with this product. Sikes is aghast and moves on. He walks by two guards, who are talking of a murder in London, and it seems, from this information, that they are speaking specifically of Nancy's murder. Sikes is alarmed and continues his aimless journey.

Another coincidence, and instance of dramatic irony: the audience, or reader, knows that Sikes has just killed someone and that the stain the man attempts to rinse can never be rinsed. But the man selling his wares does not know this, nor does he understand why Sikes seems so upset.

Sikes attempts to sleep in a barn but is tormented by thoughts of his deed, and as he walks, later that night, he comes upon a farm-building that has gone up in flames. To distract himself from his own mind, Sikes takes up water-pails and helps the villagers to put out the fire. That next morning, the fire having been put out, Sikes hears some of the firemen talking of the murder, and saying that they heard the murderer has fled to Birmingham. Sikes walks away, now even more conscious of his need to escape detection, and more paranoid that he will be caught.

This conflagration is an apt metaphor for Sikes state of mind. Try as he might to put out the flames of guilt even as he helps to put out the fire, he can only contain them—he cannot stop the fire completely. This bit of physical activity helps Sikes to "lose himself" for a moment, but soon he will have to come to terms, once more, of the fact that he has killed his lover, and will be brought to justice for it, as all London is discussing the murder.



Sikes realizes that his dog could be used to identify him. He resolves to kill the dog, but as he calls it over—the two are hiding in a culvert near the road, to pass part of the day—the dog runs off, as if knowing that Sikes wishes to kill it. Sikes is now left alone, with his thoughts, and with no plan for where to live, or how to return to London, if at all.

Sikes wants to kill the dog out of his instinct for self-preservation—the same instinct that made him kill Nancy. The dog seems to sense this, though, leaving Sikes truly and totally alone, with nothing left to live for—no love, no home, not even his dog.

CHAPTER 49

Between chapters, Brownlow has found Monks at the Cripples and has brought him, with help from servants, in a carriage back to his (Brownlow's) house. Brownlow says that, if Monks yells or tries to get away, Brownlow will call immediately for the police. Monks appears calm but defeated.

Brownlow has captured Monk "off-stage," that is, this action is not narrated by the narrator. Perhaps, at this point, Dickens felt it was necessary simply to move the plot along, and to resolve certain aspects of Monks' and Oliver's fates.

It is revealed by Monks, when the servants have gone, that Monks is Brownlow's "father's oldest friend." This is, naturally, a shock to the reader but not to the two men in the scene. Brownlow also explains (aloud, and for the reader's benefit), that Monks' real name is Edward Leeford, and that a woman whose maiden name was Leeford, and was related to Monks' father, was Brownlow's wife, who now is dead. Brownlow says he is glad that Monks no longer goes by Leeford, since Monks has sullied that name.

Another, and perhaps the crowning, coincidence of the novel. Brownlow is not just a disinterested party—he has a relationship with Oliver's father, and in becoming Oliver's stepfather, at the novel's end, Brownlow is fulfilling a duty to a long-lost friend of his, one that that friend, Leeford, could never have anticipated being necessary.

Brownlow tells Monks that he has a brother—Monks does not at first admit that this is true. But Brownlow continues: Brownlow knows, he says, that Monks' father and mother were brought together in marriage by Monks' grandfather, that Monks' father never wanted the marriage, and that Monks is the only child of that union. When Monks was a boy of about ten, however, his parents separated, and his mother went to live in Europe, while Monks' father stayed in England. Monks denies that he knows this, too, but it seems clear that he does know.

Though Monks might be a fairly accomplished criminal, he is not nearly so good at lying as is Fagin. Brownlow then goes in for a great deal of explanation that is, of course, not necessary for Monks to hear, but is absolutely necessary for the reader to hear. Monks' denials allow Brownlow to outline the facts of the case in extreme detail.

Meanwhile, in England, Monks' father became friends with a naval officer with two daughters—one nineteen, and the other only two or three. Monks' father becomes engaged to the elder of these daughters. But Monks' father learned that he had inherited, from a relation in Europe, a good deal of money, and so Monks' father went to Europe to get it—but in Rome Monks' father became ill, and Monks' mother, along with Monks, went to join him there. In Europe Monks' father died of this illness and left no will, nor did he have a chance to marry the elder daughter of the naval officer. All Monks' father's money went to his wife and to Monks.

It is, of course convenient and necessary that the younger daughter of the naval officer be significantly younger than the other daughter, Agnes, as that younger daughter ends up being Rose, who is closer to Oliver's age than she is to Oliver's mother's age. Later it is revealed that in fact there was a will, which Monk's mother destroyed, and so Monks received his inheritance through a crime. There is then a suggestion that through this original crime Monk's became ensnared in a life of crime—that committing a crime morally tainted him in such a way that he could never stop committing crime. This puts Oliver's goodness in a new light, that he always refused to commit any crime even as a 10-year-old boy is what saves him. Dickens portrays criminality as a kind of trap—where a single act of criminality forces most people into an inescapable life of crime.

Brownlow knows this because Monks' father stopped to see Brownlow on his way to Europe to collect his inheritance. At this time Monks' father gave Brownlow the portrait of his love that hangs in the parlor—the picture of which Oliver was so enamored—and on Monks' father's death, Brownlow traveled to see this woman, only to find out that, before their marriage, the woman of nineteen and Monks' father had had a liaison, and the woman was pregnant. The woman's family abandoned her, because they were ashamed of her pregnancy before marriage.

Finally, the mystery of the portrait can be explained—the woman resembles Oliver so much because Oliver is her own flesh-and-blood. What is less clear is: why would Brownlow hang this portrait on his wall? Because it was important to a friend of his? Because Brownlow simply thought the image was a beautiful one? It's not explained, but the picture had to be on the wall so that Oliver could see it, and react to it.

Brownlow tells Monks that it was he, Brownlow, who took Oliver in off the street, and Fagin purposely withheld from Monks the name Brownlow, lest Monks should make the connection between the two. After Oliver was taken away by Nancy, back to Fagin's, Brownlow realized who Oliver was, and vowed to find him. Brownlow went to the West Indies because he believed Monks could be found there, but he did not find Monks, and so returned to London.

This, too, explains Brownlow's trip to the West Indies—which, again, may as well be a symbolic stand-in for a place so far away as to be almost like another planet. Thus Brownlow didn't go to the West Indies to escape Oliver, but rather to find out more information about Oliver's predicament.

Monks hears all this but still refuses to admit to his plans for Oliver. Monks tells Brownlow he cannot prove that Oliver is the child of Monks' father and this woman. But Brownlow says he can—he has found out that Monks' mother destroyed a will that *did* make mention to a possible child of his union with his fiancée. Brownlow has also heard that Monks destroyed bits of evidence he gained from Mrs. Bumble, "the only proof of Oliver's parentage." This knowledge is enough to link Oliver to Monks' father.

Brownlow never produces this will, but it's enough when Monks admit to it, to know that the will exists—presumably this is also enough to satisfy the authorities, who choose to allow Brownlow to administer this will, Brownlow then chooses to disburse half the will to Monks and half to Oliver, meaning that Brownlow is in a position of executorship—which is of course possible, since Brownlow becomes Oliver's adoptive father.

Brownlow also declares, to Monks, that murder has been done on account of this secret—as Sikes, after all, killed Nancy because he feared that Nancy had given away the group (Fagin, Sikes, Monks, and the boys) to the authorities. The accumulation of all this information stuns Monks, who agrees, finally, that Brownlow's story of the events is true, and Monks says he will swear to it in a signed affidavit.

The final straw. One notes that, far earlier, Monks was reluctant to kill Oliver, as he felt this would inevitably drag the authorities into the affair. When Monks realizes that a woman has been killed, he knows there is nothing more he can do—the authorities will soon discover his plot, and he might as well surrender to a man more inclined to help him, namely Brownlow.

Brownlow tells Monks he will protect him if he swears to this version of events. Losborne then enters and says that they have found Sikes' dog and have used it to locate the murderer; Losborne, Brownlow, and Harry Maylie make haste to find Sikes and capture him. Losborne also says that the authorities are on the lookout for Fagin.

The novel approaches, briskly, its conclusion, after having wrapped up this lengthy expository conversation between Brownlow and Monks. The other characters will be filled in on these details later.

CHAPTER 50

The chapter opens in a dilapidated safehouse on the Thames river, in a poor section of London. Toby Crackit is hiding out there with Chitling and another, old thief named Kags, trying to avoid detection by the police, who are after all of Fagin's group, after having been alerted to them by Brownlow. Chitling tells Crackit what he knows: that Fagin was taken just that day, that the management of the Cripples have also been arrested (along with Noah and Charlotte), and that Bates, still free for now, is on his way to the safehouse.

The last of the novel's criminal safehouses, and, of course, this one is none too safe for anyone inside. We begin learning, very quickly, what has happened to the other characters—Fagin, like other people of some importance in the novel, is captured "off-stage" by authorities, although the reader does get to see him one more time before he is taken off to be hanged.

Sikes' dog comes bounding into the safehouse, followed some hours later by Sikes, who now resembles a "ghost." Bates, who has arrived at the safehouse in the interim (between the dog and Sikes), will not speak to Sikes, and finds him abhorrent. Sikes thought his friends would support him, but in general the robbers are now simply afraid of him, nor do they wish to associate with him.

This marks a turning-point in Bates' character. Bates believed that all the activities of the gang were funny, but once Nancy has died, he realizes that the group's "fun and games" have real consequences; at this point, he turns against Sikes. Bates is the only criminal in the novel who escapes criminality.

Bates attempts to grapple with Sikes and turn him over to the authorities himself. He cannot subdue Sikes, but Bates yells so much that a crowd begins assembling outside the house, hearing that perhaps the murderer is inside. Sikes refuses to give in, however, and wresting himself free from Bates and the others, he takes a rope and goes up onto the roof of the house—he believes that the tide of the Thames is high enough that he can swing out from the house over the river and escape that way. The crowd outside is now over a hundred people.

Crowds tends to assemble quickly in Dickens—as when Oliver is captured "stealing" from Brownlow, and a crowd quickly forms in the street outside. Here, Dickens seems to be playing on the incredibly packed urban density of London, which would have allowed information to travel quite fast from tenement to tenement building.

In an effort to escape, Sikes ties one end of the rope around a chimney, and is beginning to loop another around the middle of his body, so that he can attempt his escape by lowering himself to the river. But just as he is looping the rope over his neck, he turns and believes he sees "the eyes" of Nancy, which have been following him these many days and preventing him from sleeping. He stumbles and falls; the rope, lodged around his neck, hangs him; and Sikes accidentally kills himself above the crowd. His dog runs and jumps after him, and falls to its death.

Both Sikes and his dog die gruesome deaths—the most gruesome in the novel. Although Sikes is not hanged by the authorities, he is hanged by the only person he has ever cared about—himself. Though in seeing the eyes of Nancy before he dies gives her a sort of revenge and implies that it is guilt that kills him, or even that his death is a kind of half-suicide, as if his subconscious kills him. Sikes's dog dies out of loyalty to Sikes, just as Nancy did.

CHAPTER 51

Two days later, Oliver travels by carriage with Rose, Mrs. Maylie, Mrs. Bedwin, and Brownlow. Oliver has been told the nature of his connection to Monks, but Oliver still does not understand the full nature of his backstory, and he is anxious to discover this truth. Brownlow and Losborne have also kept the details of Nancy's murder and Sikes' death from the ladies, until such a time when he can tell them properly.

Oliver is finally informed of everything having to do with his own history, and with the plot Monks has been organizing against him. This, like other important activities at the end of the novel, also takes place outside the frame of the narrated story, as the reader is already acquainted with what Oliver has yet to learn.

Oliver tells Rose he looks forward to seeing Dick, and promises that, this time, Oliver will say "God bless you" to Dick. The town of his birth looks very small to Oliver now, and the party meets Grimwig, who came out before them, at the main hotel of the town, where they are to stay for the night. They have dinner together.

Dick, perhaps forgotten by the readers after his two short appearances in the novel to this point, has nevertheless remained an important touchstone for Oliver: the first person who was ever kind to him. Oliver's memory of Dick here sets the stage for the novel to reveal Dick's fate just a little later on.

After dinner, Brownlow brings Monks before Oliver, and declares that Monks and Oliver are half brothers, that their father is Edwin Leeford, and that Oliver's mother is a woman named Agnes Fleming. Monks says aloud that Oliver is his "bastard" brother, but Brownlow immediately corrects this, saying it is no fault of Oliver's. Brownlow declares, aloud, so that Oliver might hear, what Monks knew from Leeford's will: that Oliver and his mother were given equal parts of Leeford's fortune, with Monks and Monks' mother receiving a moderate annuity. Monks also declares that this will, though valid, he destroyed, in order to prevent Oliver from gaining his inheritance.

Brownlow is oppositional to the last, even though he knows that Oliver will, at this point, receive his inheritance. But the nature of Monks' anger against Oliver is much deeper-seated than was originally shown. It is not just that Monks wanted Oliver's share of the money Edwin left behind; Monks hates the very idea that so virtuous a child can spring from a union that society has determined "improper," the one between Agnes and Edwin. There is also a sense that Monks despairs at his own inability to escape his criminality—a criminality that he sank into because of a crime he and his mother would not have had to commit if Oliver never existed—and so he wants to drag Oliver down to the same moral hell where he must reside.

Monks also says that the father of Agnes Fleming, and the rest of the family (including a much younger daughter), fled to Wales and took on another name. Monks learned all these secrets from his own mother, who died of illness when Monks was a young man. Before this, Monks had stolen a good deal of money from his own mother, thus beginning his criminal career in London. Brownlow believes this to be the start of Monks' shameful behavior.

It seems that Monks has always had a penchant for misbehaving, as though his criminal nature is inborn in him, and not just a product of the society around him. Though, again, its also possible to trace Monk's criminality back to his and his mother's first crime—destroying the will that would have given Leeford's wealth to Oliver..

Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Bumble are then brought into the hotel room, where they admit that Mrs. Bumble took the pouch from Sally, given by Agnes, which contains another link between Oliver and his mother—this they gave to Monks in the aforementioned chapter, and Monks threw these items in the Thames, in hopes of destroying Oliver's link to his past. But this was, of course, not successful. Bumble and Mrs. Bumble are humbled in front of Brownlow and Oliver.

The Bumbles, finally, are called to account for what they have done. Bumble is exposed as a mediocrity and a terrible judge of character, and his wife is shown to be the mastermind of a very small plot to enrich herself by 25 pounds. But soon the Bumbles will be suffering, stripped of their positions, in the workhouse.

One final revelation is in order: Rose is brought forward, and it is declared that Rose is the younger daughter of the naval captain—the sister of Agnes Fleming, Oliver's mother. This means that Rose is Oliver's aunt. Rose is thrilled to know this, as is Oliver—the bond of kinship had already been strong between them. At this point, Harry Maylie comes in, to reiterate his proposal to Rose. He says that his circumstances have now changed—he is a country parson, having forgone the "brilliant promotions" he was to have in London—and he would like to marry Rose now, since his future will not be impeded by the union.

This coincidence is almost too much for the structure of the book to bear; it does seem to strain credulity. But Dickens was not interested in writing "realistic" fiction so much as he cared to write fiction that generated a series of emotional states with which the reader could sympathize. Here, the reader is happy to know that Rose could be reunited with part of her family, and that Oliver, also a good boy, should have so noble and virtuous an aunt.

Rose agrees to the marriage, and the party appears happy, until, at the end of the chapter, Oliver receives word that, in the workhouse, poor Dick has died. This bit of sadness mars the proceedings, as Oliver had hoped to bless Dick in return for the blessings Dick had given him.

The novel began with an extended attack on the Poor Laws and the state of the poor in England. As Oliver's adventure begins and his background is revealed, that attack recedes. But the story of Dick's fate brings that attack back. Dick was as kind as Oliver, as good as Oliver, but unlike Oliver his poverty killed him. In this way Dickens is able to once more show the brutal unfairness and immorality of the Poor Laws.

CHAPTER 52

The chapter opens with Fagin in court, ready to hear the sentence promulgated against him. Though he hopes against hope that he might be saved, he looks at the faces in the gallery, and at others in the courtroom, and sees he will be convicted. The verdict is read out, and he is indeed guilty. He is to be sentenced to death within several days. He is led to a stone cell, where he is to wait out the remainder of his life.

Fagin's sentence has been decided upon quickly, and will be carried out without delay. The British justice system at this time did not have provisions for appeal, nor the legal protections of "due process," meaning that Fagin will die within days of his trial.

Unrepentant and scared, Fagin can barely sleep. He begins hallucinating that he is still commanding the group of boys, Bates and Oliver included. Then Brownlow arrives with Oliver, and Fagin wonders why they have come to see him.

These final scenes with Fagin seem designed to show how Fagin's power is broken, how his guile and cunning are gone.

Brownlow says they have come about some papers Fagin has, the location of which Fagin tells them—hidden in a chimney in his apartment. Fagin has gone mad in his cell, and Oliver, not afraid of him, prays aloud for Fagin's forgiveness. They leave Fagin, and as Brownlow and Oliver walk out of the prison, they see the gallows looming—about to dispatch the man who once controlled Oliver's life.

In addition, Fagin's cruelty and manipulation is here shown to be no match for Oliver's goodness. Oliver has created an enduring community of love while all of Fagin's manipulation to scare his "boys" into protecting "Number One" has led him only to the gallows, to death.

CHAPTER 53

The narrator closes out the novel by detailing the fortunes of the characters. Rose and Harry marry, and they move to the country parsonage where Harry works; Mrs. Maylie comes as well. Oliver's inheritance is meted out, by Brownlow, half to Oliver and half to Monks, since Brownlow believes this money might allow Monks to start a new life as a virtuous man. But Monks spends this money in the New World and remains a knave until his death.

It is now the job of the narrator to tie in a bow the story of Oliver and his friends and former enemies. Monks, in keeping with his "biological" predilection to crime, does not become good but rather wastes the rest of his inheritance on criminal behavior; he is no better than when he started, before Oliver came into his life.

Brownlow officially adopts Oliver as his son. He and Oliver move to within a mile of the parsonage where Harry and Rose live. And Losborne, inventing an excuse to be close to the group he loves so much, also moves near the parsonage "because the air agrees with him"; he is very content to be near the family. Grimwig and Losborne have become good friends, and Grimwig often jokes about the time when he did not believe Oliver to be a good boy.

Oliver has found, finally, the family that cares for him, that can support him through times of strife. It is a bonus element that there are those in the family, like Rose, who are related to Oliver by blood—but this is not necessary, Dickens shows, for a strong family to develop. The bond between father and adopted son here is a secure one, and a bond of love. And such bonds, such family, are held up as the most powerful and important forces in the novel.

Noah and Charlotte receive pardons for their small role in the crimes of Fagin, but they become a con-man team, faking illness and taking money from people on the streets of London. The Bumbles, removed of their positions by the law, eventually become paupers and must live in the workhouse they once managed. Giles and Brittles stay on to help in the Maylies' new home, and Bates, having repented for a life of crime, takes on a series of difficult jobs, mostly involving physical labor.

One of the novel's more satisfying ironies—the Bumbles are forced to become the paupers they have always despised, showing them firsthand that poverty is not necessarily a "natural" condition, but rather something into which people can fall. Dickens has given them their comeuppance. Bates meanwhile, has escaped the criminal life, but he too seems to be partially punished for the life he used to lead—it is as if he has escaped hell but can only get so far as purgatory.

The narrator ends the novel by describing Oliver's happiness with his aunt Rose, his adopted father Brownlow, who educates him in the books he once promised Oliver would read, all in the beautiful country village. The final paragraph of the novel reveals that an empty tomb, one without a **coffin**, has been kept for Agnes in the local church—though she was a loving woman, she was, according to the narrator, "weak and erring," for having succumbed to her liaison before marriage. The novel ends.

This is perhaps a strange note on which to end the novel, but Dickens wants to make clear to Victorian audiences that Agnes does not "get a pass" for behavior that no one in England, at the time, felt comfortable excusing. Agnes gave birth to a virtuous boy, but she herself was not virtuous, an "imperfect vessel" from which a great deal of good did come.

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