

OLIVER TWIST;

OR, THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS.

BY BOZ.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

BOOK THE THIRD.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

THE TIME ARRIVES FOR NANCY TO REDEEM HER PLEDGE TO ROSE MAYLIE. SHE FAILS. NOAH CLAYPOLE IS EMPLOYED BY FAGIN ON A SECRET MISSION.

ADEPT as she was in all the arts of cunning and dissimulation, the girl Nancy could not wholly conceal the effect which the knowledge of the step she had taken, worked upon her mind. She remembered that both the crafty Jew and the brutal Sikes had confided to her schemes, which had been hidden from all others, in the full confidence that she was trustworthy, and beyond the reach of their suspicion; and vile as those schemes were, desperate as were their originators, and bitter as were her feelings towards the Jew, who had led her step by step deeper and deeper down into an abyss of crime and misery, whence was no escape, still there were times when even towards him she felt some relenting, lest her disclosure should bring him within the iron grasp he had so long eluded, and he should fall at last—richly as he merited such a fate—by her hand.

But these were the mere wanderings of a mind unable wholly to detach itself from old companions and associations, though enabled to fix itself steadily on one object, and resolved not to be turned aside by any consideration. Her fears for Sikes would have been more powerful inducements to recoil while there was yet time; but she had stipulated that her secret should be rigidly kept—she had dropped no clue which could lead to his discovery—she had refused, even for his sake, a refuge from all the guilt and wretchedness that encompassed her—and what more could she do? She was resolved.

Though every mental struggle terminated in this conclusion, they forced themselves upon her again and again, and left their traces too. She grew pale and thin even within a few days. At times she took no heed of what was passing before her, or no part in conversations where once she would have been the loudest. At others she laughed without merriment, and was noisy without cause or meaning. At others—often within a moment afterwards—she sat silent and dejected, brooding with her head upon her hands, while the very effort by which she roused herself told more forcibly than even these indications that she was ill at ease, and that her thoughts were occupied with matters very different and distant from those in course of discussion by her companions.

It was Sunday night, and the bell of the nearest church

struck the hour. Sikes and the Jew were talking, but they paused to listen. The girl looked up from the low seat on which she crouched, and listened too, intently. Eleven.

"An hour this side of midnight," said Sikes, raising the blind to look out, and returning to his seat. "Dark and heavy it is too. A good night for business this."

"Ah!" replied the Jew. "What a pity, Bill, my dear, that there 's none quite ready to be done."

"You're right for once," replied Sikes gruffly. "It is a pity, for I'm in the humour too."

The Jew sighed and shook his head despondingly.

"We must make up for lost time when we've got things into a good train; that 's all I know," said Sikes.

"That's the way to talk, my dear," replied the Jew, venturing to pat him on the shoulder. "It does me good to hear you."

"Does you good, does it!" cried Sikes. "Well, so be it."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the Jew, as if he were relieved by even this concession. "You're like yourself to-night, Bill—quite like yourself."

"I don't feel like myself when you lay that withered old claw on my shoulder, so take it away," said Sikes, casting off the Jew's hand.

"It makes you nervous, Bill,—reminds you of being nabbed, does it?" said the Jew, determined not to be offended.

"Reminds me of being nabbed by the devil," returned Sikes, "not by a trap. There never was another man with such a face as yours, unless it was your father, and I suppose he is singeing his grizzled red beard by this time, unless you came straight from the old 'un without any father at all betwixt you, which I shouldn't wonder at a bit."

Fagin offered no reply to this compliment; but, pulling Sikes by the sleeve, pointed his finger towards Nancy, who had taken advantage of the foregoing conversation to put on her bonnet, and was now leaving the room.

"Hallo!" cried Sikes. "Nance. Where's the gal going at this time of night?"

"Not far."

"What answer 's that!" returned Sikes. "Where are you going?"

"I say, not far."

"And I say where?" retorted Sikes in a loud voice. "Do you hear me?"

"I don't know where," replied the girl.

"Then I do," said Sikes, more in the spirit of obstinacy than because he had any real objection to the girl going where she listed. "Nowhere. Sit down."

"I'm not well. I told you that before," rejoined the girl. "I want a breath of air."

"Put your head out of the winder, and take it there," replied Sikes.

"There's not enough there," said the girl. "I want it in the street."

"Then you won't have it," replied Sikes; with which assurance he rose, locked the door, took the key out, and, pulling her bonnet from her head, flung it up to the top of an old press. "There," said the robber. "Now stop quietly where you are, will you?"

"It's not such a matter as a bonnet would keep me," said the girl, turning very pale. "What do you mean, Bill? Do you know what you're doing?"

"Know what I'm—Oh!" cried Sikes, turning to Fagin, "she's out of her senses, you know, or she daren't talk to me in that way."

"You'll drive me on to something desperate," muttered the girl, placing both hands upon her breast, as though to keep down by force some violent outbreak. "Let me go, will you,—this minute—this instant—"

"No!" roared Sikes.

"Tell him to let me go, Fagin. He had better. It'll be better for him. Do you hear me?" cried Nancy, stamping her foot upon the ground.

"Hear you!" repeated Sikes, turning round in his chair to confront her. "Ay, and if I hear you for half a minute longer, the dog shall have such a grip on your throat as 'll tear some of that screaming voice out. Wot has come over you, you jade—wot is it?"

"Let me go," said the girl with great earnestness; then, sitting herself down on the floor before the door, she said,—“Bill, let me go; you don't know what you're doing—you don't, indeed. For only one hour—do—do!”

"Cut my limbs off one by one!" cried Sikes, seizing her roughly by the arm—"if I don't think the gal's stark raving mad. Get up!"

"Not till you let me go—not till you let me go.—Never—never!" screamed the girl. Sikes looked on for a minute, watching his opportunity, and, suddenly pinioning her hands, dragged her, struggling and wrestling with him by the way, into a small room adjoining, where he sat himself on a bench, and thrusting her into a chair, held her down by force. She struggled and implored by turns until twelve o'clock had struck, and then, wearied and exhausted, ceased to contest the point any further. With a caution, backed by many oaths, to make no more efforts to go out that night, Sikes left her to recover at leisure, and rejoined the Jew.

"Phew!" said the housebreaker, wiping the perspiration from his face. "Wot a precious strange gal that is!"

"You may say that, Bill," replied the Jew thoughtfully. "You may say that."

"Wot did she take it into her head to go out to-night for, do you think?" asked Sikes. "Come; you should know her better than me—wot does it mean?"

"Obstinacy—woman's obstinacy, I suppose, my dear," replied the Jew, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well, I suppose it is," growled Sikes. "I thought I had tamed her, but she's as bad as ever."

"Worse," said the Jew thoughtfully. "I never knew her like this, for such a little cause."

"Nor I," said Sikes. "I think she's got a touch of that fever in her blood yet, and it won't come out—eh?"

"Like enough," replied the Jew.

"I'll let her a little blood without troubling the doctor, if she's took that way again," said Sikes.

The Jew nodded an expressive approval of this mode of treatment.

"She was hanging about me all day and night too when I was stretched on my back; and you, like a black-hearted wolf as you are, kept yourself aloof," said Sikes. "We was very poor too all the time, and I think one way or other it's worried and fretted her, and that being shut up here so long has made her restless—eh?"

"That's it, my dear," replied the Jew in a whisper.—"Hush!"

As he uttered these words, the girl herself appeared and resumed her former seat. Her eyes were swollen and red; she rocked herself to and fro, tossed her head, and after a little time burst out laughing.

"Why, now she's on the other tack!" exclaimed Sikes, turning a look of excessive surprise upon his companion.

The Jew nodded to him to take no further notice just then, and in a few minutes the girl subsided into her accustomed demeanour. Whispering Sikes that there was no fear of her relapsing, Fagin took up his hat and bade him good-night. He paused when he reached the door, and looking round, asked if somebody would light him down the dark stairs.

"Light him down," said Sikes, who was filling his pipe. "It's a pity he should break his neck himself, and disappoint the sight-seers. There; show him a light."

Nancy followed the old man down stairs with the candle. When they reached the passage he laid his finger on his lip, and drawing close to the girl, said in a whisper,

"What is it, Nancy, dear?"

"What do you mean?" replied the girl in the same tone.

"The reason of all this," replied Fagin. "If *he*—he pointed with his skinny fore-finger up the stairs—"is so hard with you, (he's a brute, Nance, a brute-beast) why dont you—"

"Well!" said the girl, as Fagin paused, with his mouth almost touching her ear, and his eyes looking into hers.

"No matter just now," said the Jew; "we'll talk of this again. 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—like a dog! worse than his dog, for he humours him sometimes—come to me. I say, come to me. He is the mere hound of a day; but you know me of old, Nance—of old."

"I know you well," replied the girl, without manifesting the least emotion. "Good night."

She shrunk back as Fagin offered to lay his hand on hers, but said good night again in a steady voice, and, answering his parting look with a nod of intelligence, closed the door between them.

Fagin walked towards his own home, intent upon the thoughts that were working within his brain. He had conceived the idea—not from what had just passed, though that had tended to confirm him, but slowly and by degrees—that Nancy, wearied of the housebreaker's brutality, had conceived an attachment for some new friend. Her altered manner, her repeated absences from home alone, her comparative indifference to the interests of the gang for which she had once been so zealous, and, added to these, her desperate impatience to leave home that night at a particular hour, all favoured the supposition, and rendered it, to him at least, almost a matter of certainty. The object of this new liking was not among his myrmidons. He would be a valuable acquisition with such an assistant as Nancy, and must (thus Fagin argued) be secured without delay.

There was another and a darker object to be gained. Sikes knew too much, and his ruffian taunts had not galled the Jew the less because the wounds were hidden. The girl must know well that if she shook him off, she could never be safe from his fury, and that it would be surely wreaked—to the maiming of her limbs, or perhaps the loss of life—on the object of her more recent fancy. "With a little persuasion," thought Fagin, "what more likely than that she would consent to poison him? Women have done such things, and worse, to secure the same object before now. There would be the dangerous villain—the man I hate—gone; another secured in his place; and my influence over the girl, with the knowledge of this crime to back it, unlimited."

These things passed through the mind of Fagin during the short time he sat alone in the housebreaker's room; and with them uppermost in his thoughts, he had taken the opportunity afterwards afforded him of sounding the girl in the broken hints he threw out at parting. There was no expression of surprise, no assumption of an inability to understand his meaning. The girl clearly comprehended it. Her glance at parting showed that.

But perhaps she would recoil from a plot to take the life of Sikes, and that was one of the chief ends to be attained. "How," thought the Jew, as he crept homewards, "can I increase my influence with her? what new power can I acquire?"

Such brains are fertile in expedients. If, without extracting a confession from herself, he laid a watch, discovered the object of her altered regard, and threatened to reveal the whole history to Sikes (of whom she stood in no common fear) unless she entered into his designs, could he not secure her compliance?

"I can," said Fagin almost aloud. "She durst not refuse me then—not for her life, not for her life! I have it all. The means are ready, and shall be set to work. I shall have you yet."

He cast back a dark look and a threatening motion of the hand towards the spot where he had left the bolder villain, and went on his way, busying his bony hands in the folds of his tattered garment, which he wrenched tightly in his grasp as though there were a hated enemy crushed with every motion of his fingers.

He rose betimes next morning, and waited impatiently for the appearance of his new associate, who, after a delay which seemed interminable, at length presented himself, and commenced a voracious assault upon the breakfast.

"Bolter," said the Jew, drawing up a chair and seating himself opposite to him.

"Well, here I am," returned Noah. "What's the matter? Don't yer ask me to do anything till I have done eating. That's a great fault in this place. Yer never get time enough over yer meals."

"You can talk as you eat, can't you?" said Fagin, cursing his dear young friend's greediness from the very bottom of his heart.

"Oh yes, I can talk; I get on better when I talk," said Noah, cutting a monstrous slice of bread. "Where's Charlotte?"

"Out," said Fagin. "I sent her out this morning with the other young woman, because I wanted us to be alone."

"Oh!" said Noah, "I wish yer 'd ordered her to make some buttered toast first. Well. Talk away. Yer won't interrupt me."

There seemed indeed no great fear of anything interrupting him, as he had evidently sat down with a determination to do a great deal of business.

"You did well yesterday, my dear," said the Jew, "beautiful! Six shillings and ninepence halfpenny on the very first day! The kinchin lay will be a fortune to you."

"Don't yer forget to add three pint-pots and a milk-can," said Mr. Bolter.

"No, no, my dear," replied the Jew. "The pint-pots were great strokes of genius, but the milk-can was a perfect masterpiece."

"Pretty well, I think, for a beginner," remarked Mr. Bolter complacently. "The pots I took off airy railings, and the milk-can was standing by itself outside a public-house, so I thought it might get rusty with the rain, or catch cold, yer know. Ha! ha! ha!"

The Jew affected to laugh very heartily; and Mr. Bolter, having had his laugh out, took a series of large bites which finished his first hunk of bread and butter, and assisted himself to a second.

"I want you, Bolter," said Fagin, leaning over the table, "to do a piece of work for me, my dear, that needs great care and caution."

"I say," rejoined Bolter, "don't yer go shoving me into danger, or sending me to any more police-offices. That don't suit me, that don't; and so I tell yer."

"There's not the smallest danger in it—not the very smallest," said the Jew; "it's only to dodge a woman."

"An old woman?" demanded Mr. Bolter.

"A young one," replied Fagin.

"I can do that pretty well, I know," said Bolter. "I was a regular cunning sneak when I was at school. What am I to dodge her for? not to—"

"Not to do anything," interrupted the Jew, "but to tell me where she goes to, who she sees, and, if possible, what she says; to remember the street, if it is a street, or the house, if it is a house, and to bring me back all the information you can."

"What'll yer give me?" asked Noah, setting down his cup, and looking his employer eagerly in the face.

"If you do it well, a pound, my dear—one pound," said Fagin, wishing to interest him in the scent as much as possible.

"And that's what I never gave yet for any job of work where there wasn't valuable consideration to be gained."

"Who is she?" inquired Noah.

"One of us."

"Oh Lor!" cried Noah, curling up his nose. "Yer doubtful of her, are yer?"

"She has found out some new friends, my dear, and I must know who they are," replied the Jew.

"I see," said Noah. "Just to have the pleasure of knowing them, if they're respectable people, eh?—Ha! ha! ha! I'm your man."

"I knew you would be," cried Fagin, elated by the success of his proposal.

"Of course, of course," replied Noah. "Where is she? Where am I to wait for her? When am I to go?"

“All that, my dear, you shall hear from me. I’ll point her out at the proper time,” said Fagin. “You keep ready, and leave the rest to me.”

That night, and the next, and the next again, the spy sat booted and equipped in his carter’s dress, ready to turn out at a word from Fagin. Six nights passed,—six long weary nights,—and on each Fagin came home with a disappointed face, and briefly intimated that it was not yet time. On the seventh he returned earlier, and with an exultation he could not conceal. It was Sunday.

“She goes abroad to-night,” said Fagin, “and on the right errand, I’m sure; for she has been alone all day, and the man she is afraid of will not be back much before daybreak. Come with me. Quick.”

Noah started up without saying a word, for the Jew was in a state of such intense excitement that it infected him. They left the house stealthily, and, hurrying through a labyrinth of streets, arrived at length before a public-house, which Noah recognised as the same in which he had slept on the night of his arrival in London.

It was past eleven o’clock, and the door was closed. It opened softly on its hinges as the Jew gave a low whistle. They entered without noise, and the door was closed behind them.

Scarcely venturing to whisper, but substituting dumb show for words, Fagin and the young Jew who had admitted them pointed out the pane of glass to Noah, and signed to him to climb up and observe the person in the adjoining room.

“Is that the woman?” he asked, scarcely above his breath.

The Jew nodded yes.

“I can’t see her face well,” whispered Noah. “She is looking down, and the candle is behind her.”

“Stay there,” whispered Fagin. He signed to Barney, who withdrew. In an instant the lad entered the room adjoining, and, under pretence of snuffing the candle, moved it into the required position, and, speaking to the girl, caused her to raise her face.

“I see her now,” cried the spy.

“Plainly?” asked the Jew.

“I should know her among a thousand.”

He hastily descended as the room-door opened, and the girl came out. Fagin drew him behind a small partition which was curtained off, and they held their breaths as she passed within a few feet of their place of concealment, and emerged by the door at which they had entered.

“Hist!” cried the lad who held the door. “Now.”

Noah exchanged a look with Fagin, and darted out.

“To the left,” whispered the lad; “take the left hand, and keep on the other side.”

He did so, and by the light of the lamps saw the girl's retreating figure already at some distance before him. He advanced as near as he considered prudent, and kept on the opposite side of the street, the better to observe her motions. She looked nervously round twice or thrice, and once stopped to let two men, who were following close behind her, pass on. She seemed to gather courage as she advanced, and to walk with a steadier and firmer step. The spy preserved the same relative distance between them, and followed with his eye upon her.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

THE APPOINTMENT KEPT.

The church clocks chimed three quarters past eleven as two figures emerged on London Bridge. One, which advanced with a swift and rapid step, was that of a woman, who looked eagerly about her as though in quest of some expected object; the other figure was that of a man, who slunk along in the deepest shadow he could find, and at some distance, accommodated his pace to hers, stopping when she stopped, and, as she moved again, creeping stealthily on, but never allowing himself, in the ardour of his pursuit, to gain upon her footsteps. Thus they crossed the bridge from the Middlesex to the Surrey shore, when the woman, apparently disappointed in her anxious scrutiny of the foot-passengers, turned back. The movement was sudden, but he who watched her was not thrown off his guard by it, for shrinking into one of the recesses which surmount the piers of the bridge, and leaning over the parapet the better to conceal his figure, he suffered her to pass by on the opposite pavement, and when she was about the same distance in advance as she had been before, he slipped quietly down and followed her again. At nearly the centre of the bridge she stopped. The man stopped too.

It was a very dark night. The day had been unfavourable, and at that hour and place there were few people stirring. Such as there were hurried quickly past, very possibly without seeing, but certainly without noticing, either the woman or the man who kept her in view. Their appearance was not calculated to attract the importunate regards of such of London's destitute population as chanced to take their way over the bridge that night in search of some cold arch or doorless hovel wherein to lay their heads; they stood there in silence, neither speaking nor spoken to by any one who passed.

A mist hung over the river, deepening the red glare of the fires that burnt upon the small craft moored off the different wharfs, and rendering darker and more indistinct the mirky buildings on the banks. The old smoked-stained store-houses on either side rose heavy and dull from the dense mass of roofs and gables, and frowned sternly upon water too black

to reflect even their lumbering shapes. The tower of old Saint Saviour's church, and the spire of Saint Magnus, so long the giant-warders of the ancient bridge, were visible in the gloom; but the forest of shipping below bridge, and the thickly scattered spires of churches above, were nearly all hidden from the sight.

The girl had taken a few restless turns to and fro—closely watched meanwhile by her hidden observer—when the heavy bell of St. Paul's tolled for the death of another day. Midnight had come upon the crowded city. The palace, the night-cellar, the jail, the madhouse; the chambers of birth and death, of health and sickness; the rigid face of the corpse and the calm sleep of the child—midnight was upon them all.

The hour had not struck two minutes, when a young lady, accompanied by a grey-haired gentleman, alighted from a hackney-carriage within a short distance of the bridge, and, having dismissed the vehicle, walked straight towards it. They had scarcely set foot upon its pavement when the girl started, and immediately made towards them.

They walked onwards, looking about them with the air of persons who entertained some very slight expectation which had little chance of being realised, when they were suddenly joined by this new associate. They halted with an exclamation of surprise, but suppressed it immediately, for a man in the garments of a countryman came close up—brushed against them, indeed—at the precise moment.

"Not here," said Nancy hurriedly. "I am afraid to speak to you here. Come away—out of the public road—down the steps yonder."

As she uttered these words, and indicated with her hand the direction in which she wished them to proceed, the countryman looked round, and roughly asking what they took up the whole pavement for, passed on.

The steps to which the girl had pointed were those which, on the Surrey bank, and on the same side of the bridge as Saint Saviour's church, form a landing-stairs from the river. To this spot the man bearing the appearance of a countryman hastened unobserved; and after a moment's survey of the place, he began to descend.

The stairs are a part of the bridge; they consist of three flights. Just below the end of the second, going down, the stone wall on the left terminates in an ornamental pier or pedestal facing towards the Thames. At this point the lower steps widen, so that a person turning that angle of the wall is necessarily unseen by any others on the stairs who chance to be above him, if only a step. The countryman looked hastily round when he reached this point, and as there seemed no better place of concealment, and the tide being out there was plenty of room, he slipped aside, with his back to the pier, and there waited,

pretty certain that they would come no lower, and that even if he could not hear what was said, he could follow them again with safety.

So tardily stole the time in this lonely place, and so eager was the spy to penetrate the motives of an interview so different from what he had been led to expect, that he more than once gave the matter up for lost, and persuaded himself either that they had stopped far above, or resorted to some entirely different spot to hold their mysterious conversation. He was on the very point of emerging from his hiding-place, and regaining the road above, when he heard the sound of footsteps, and directly afterwards of voices, almost close at his ear.

He drew himself straight upright against the wall, and, scarcely breathing, listened attentively.

"This is far enough," said a voice, which was evidently that of the gentleman. "I will not suffer this young lady to go any further. Many people would have distrusted you too much to have come even so far, but you see I am willing to humour you."

"To humour me!" cried the voice of the girl whom he had followed. "You're considerate, indeed, sir. To humour me! Well, well, it's no matter."

"Why, for what," said the gentleman in a kinder tone, "for what purpose can you have brought us to this strange place? Why not have let me speak to you above there, where it is light, and there is something stirring, instead of bringing us to this dark and dismal hole?"

"I told you before," replied Nancy, "that I was afraid to speak to you there. I don't know why it is," said the girl, shuddering, "but I have such a fear and dread upon me to-night that I can hardly stand."

"A fear of what?" asked the gentleman, who seemed to pity her.

"I scarcely know of what," replied the girl. "I wish I did. Horrible thoughts of death, and shrouds with blood upon them, and a fear that has made me burn as if I were on fire, have been upon me all day. I was reading a book to-night to wile the time away, and the same things came into the print."

"Imagination," said the gentleman, soothing her.

"No imagination," replied the girl in a hoarse voice. "I'll swear I saw 'coffin' written in every page of the book in large black letters,—ay, and they carried one close to me in the streets to-night."

"There is nothing unusual in that," said the gentleman.

"They have passed me often."

"Real ones," rejoined the girl. "This was not."

There was something so uncommon in her manner that the flesh of the concealed listener crept as he heard the girl utter these words, and the blood chilled within him. He had never

experienced a greater relief than hearing the sweet voice of the young lady as she begged her to be calm, and not allow herself to become the prey of such fearful fancies.

"Speak to her kindly," said the young lady to her companion. "Poor creature! She seems to need it."

"Your haughty religious people would have held their heads up to see me as I am to-night, and preached of flames and vengeance," cried the girl. "Oh, dear lady, why ar'n't those, who claim to be God's own folks, as gentle and as kind to us poor wretches as you, who, having youth and beauty and all that they have lost, might be a little proud, instead of so much humbler!"

"Ah!" said the gentleman, "a Turk turns his face, after washing it well, to the East when he says his prayers; these good people, after giving their faces such a rub with the World as takes the smiles off, turn with no less regularity to the darkest side of Heaven. Between the Mussulman and the Pharisee, commend me to the first."

These words appeared to be addressed to the young lady, and were perhaps uttered with the view of affording Nancy time to recover herself. The gentleman shortly afterwards addressed himself to her.

"You were not here last Sunday night," he said.

"I couldn't come," replied Nancy; "I was kept by force."

"By whom?"

"Bill—him that I told the young lady of before."

"You were not suspected of holding any communication with anybody on the subject which has brought us here to-night, I hope?" asked the old gentleman anxiously.

"No," replied the girl, shaking her head. "It's not very easy for me to leave him unless he knows why; I couldn't have seen the lady when I did, but that I gave him a drink of laudanum before I came away."

"Did he awake before you returned?" inquired the gentleman.

"No; and neither he nor any of them suspect me."

"Good," said the gentleman. "Now listen to me."

"I am ready," replied the girl, as he paused for a moment.

"This young lady," the gentleman began, "has communicated to me and some other friends who can be safely trusted, what you told her nearly a fortnight since. I confess to you that I had doubts at first whether you were to be implicitly relied upon, but now I firmly believe you are."

"I am," said the girl earnestly.

"I repeat that I firmly believe it. To prove to you that I am disposed to trust you, I tell you without reserve, that we propose to extort the secret, whatever it may be, from the fears of this man Monks. But if—if—" said the gentleman, "he cannot be secured, or, if secured, cannot be acted upon as we wish, you must deliver up the Jew."

"Fagin!" cried the girl, recoiling.

"That man must be delivered up by you," said the gentleman.

"I will not do it—I will never do it," replied the girl. "Devil that he is, and worse than devil as he has been to me, I will never do that."

"You will not?" said the gentleman, who seemed fully prepared for this answer.

"Never!" returned the girl.

"Tell me why?"

"For one reason," rejoined the girl firmly, "for one reason, that the lady knows and will stand by me in, I know she will, for I have her promise; and for this other reason besides, that, bad life as he has led, I have led a bad life too; there are many of us who have kept the same courses together, and I'll not turn upon them, who might—any of them—have turned upon me, but didn't, bad as they are."

"Then," said the gentleman quickly, as if this had been the point he had been aiming to attain—"put Monks into my hands, and leave him to me to deal with."

"What if he turns against the others?"

"I promise you that in that case, if the truth is forced from him, there the matter will rest; there must be circumstances in Oliver's little history which it would be painful to drag before the public eye, and if the truth is once elicited, they shall go scot free."

"And if it is not?" suggested the girl.

"Then," pursued the gentleman, "this Jew shall not be brought to justice without your consent. In such a case I could show you reasons, I think, which would induce you to yield it."

"Have I the lady's promise for that?" asked the girl eagerly.

"You have," replied Rose. "My true and faithful pledge."

"Monks would never learn how you knew what you do?" said the girl, after a short pause.

"Never," replied the gentleman. "The intelligence should be so brought to bear upon him, that he could never even guess."

"I have been a liar, and among liars, from a little child," said the girl after another interval of silence, "but I will take your words."

After receiving an assurance from both that she might safely do so, she proceeded in a voice so low that it was often difficult for the listener to discover even the purport of what she said, to describe by name and situation the public-house whence she had been followed that night. From the manner in which she occasionally paused, it appeared as if the gentleman were making some hasty notes of the information she communicated. When she had thoroughly explained the localities of the place, the

best position from which to watch it without exciting observation, and the night and hour on which Monks was most in the habit of frequenting it, she seemed to consider a few moments for the purpose of recalling his features and appearance more forcibly to her recollection.

"He is tall," said the girl, "and a strongly made man, but not stout; he has a lurking walk, and as he walks, constantly looks over his shoulder, first on one side and then on the other. Don't forget that, for his eyes are sunk in his head so much deeper than any other man's, that you might almost tell him by that alone. His face is dark, like his hair and eyes, but, although he can't be more than six or eight and twenty, withered and haggard. His lips are often discoloured and disfigured with the marks of teeth, for he has desperate fits, and sometimes even bites his hands and covers them with wounds—why did you start?" said the girl, stopping suddenly.

The gentleman replied in a hurried manner that he was not conscious of having done so, and begged her to proceed.

"Part of this," said the girl, "I've drawn out from other people at the house I tell you of, for I have only seen him twice, and both times he was covered up in a large cloak. I think that's all I can give you to know him by. Stay though," she added. "Upon his throat, so high that you can see a part of it below his neckerchief when he turns his face, there is—"

"A broad red mark, like a burn or scald," cried the gentleman.

"How's this?" said the girl. "You know him!"

The young lady uttered a cry of extreme surprise, and for a few moments they were so still that the listener could distinctly hear them breathe.

"I think I do," said the gentleman, breaking silence. "I should, by your description. We shall see. Many people are singularly like each other though,—it may not be the same."

As he expressed himself to this effect with assumed carelessness, he took a step or two nearer the concealed spy, as the latter could tell from the distinctness with which he heard him mutter, "It must be he!"

"Now," he said, returning, so it seemed by the sound, to the spot where he had stood before, "you have given us most valuable assistance, young woman, and I wish you to be the better for it. What can I do to serve you?"

"Nothing," replied Nancy.

"You will not persist in saying that," rejoined the gentleman with a voice and emphasis of kindness that might have touched a much harder and more obdurate heart. "Think now. Tell me."

"Nothing, sir," rejoined the girl, weeping. "You can do nothing to help me. I am past all hope, indeed."

"You put yourself beyond its pale," said the gentleman:

"the past has been a dreary waste with you, of youthful energies mis-spent, and such priceless treasures lavished as the Creator bestows but once, and never grants again, but for the future you may hope. I do not say that it is in our power to offer you peace of heart and mind, for that must come as you seek it; but a quiet asylum, either in England, or, if you fear to remain here, in some foreign country, it is not only within the compass of our ability but our most anxious wish to secure to you. Before the dawn of morning, before this river wakes to the first glimpse of daylight, you shall be placed as entirely beyond the reach of your former associates, and leave as utter an absence of all traces behind you, as if you were to disappear from the earth this moment. Come. I would not have you go back to exchange one word with any old companion, or take one look at any old haunt, or breathe the very air which is pestilence and death to you. Quit them all, while there is time and opportunity.

"She will be persuaded now," cried the young lady. "She hesitates, I am sure."

"I fear not, my dear," said the gentleman.

"No, sir, I do not," replied the girl after a short struggle. "I am chained to my old life. I loathe and hate it now, but I cannot leave it. I must have gone too far to turn back,—and yet I don't know, for if you had spoken to me so, some time ago, I should have laughed it off. But," she said, looking hastily round, "this fear comes over me again. I must go home."

"Home!" repeated the young lady, with great stress upon the word.

"Home, lady," rejoined the girl. "To such a home as I have raised for myself with the work of my whole life. Let us part. I shall be watched or seen. Go, go. If I have done you any service, all I ask is, that you leave me and let me go my way alone."

"It is useless," said the gentleman with a sigh. "We compromise her safety perhaps by staying here. We may have detained her longer than she expected already."

"Yes, yes," urged the girl. "You have."

"What," cried the young lady, "can be the end of this poor creature's life!"

"What!" repeated the girl. "Look before you, lady. Look at that dark water. How many times do you read of such as me who spring into the tide, and leave no living thing to care for or bewail them. It may be years hence, or it may be only months, but I shall come to that at last."

"Do not speak thus, pray," returned the young lady, sobbing.

"It will never reach your ears, dear lady, and God forbid such horrors should—" replied the girl. "Good night, good night."

The gentleman turned away.

"This purse," cried the young lady. "Take it for my sake, that you may have some resource in an hour of need and trouble."

"No, no," replied the girl. "I have not done this for money. Let me have that to think of. And yet—give me something that you have worn : I should like to have something—no, no, not a ring—your gloves or handkerchief—anything that I can keep as having belonged to you, sweet lady. There. Bless you—God bless you ! Good night, good night !"

The violent agitation of the girl, and the apprehension of some discovery which would subject her to ill-usage and violence, seemed to determine the gentleman to leave her as she requested. The sound of retreating footsteps was audible, and the voices ceased.

The two figures of the young lady and her companion soon afterwards appeared upon the bridge. They stopped at the summit of the stairs.

"Hark !" cried the young lady, listening. "Did she call ! I thought I heard her voice."

"No, my love," replied Mr. Brownlow, looking sadly back. "She has not moved, and will not till we are gone."

Rose Maylie lingered, but the old gentleman drew her arm through his, and led her with gentle force away. As they disappeared, the girl sunk down nearly at her full length upon one of the stone stairs, and vented the anguish of her heart in bitter tears.

After a time she rose, and with feeble and tottering steps ascended to the street. The astonished listener remained motionless on his post for some minutes afterwards, and having ascertained with many cautious glances round him that he was again alone, crept slowly from his hiding-place, and returned, stealthily and in the shade of the wall, in the same manner as he had descended.

Peeping out more than once when he reached the top, to make sure that he was unobserved, Noah Claypole darted away at his utmost speed, and made for the Jew's house as fast as his legs would carry him.

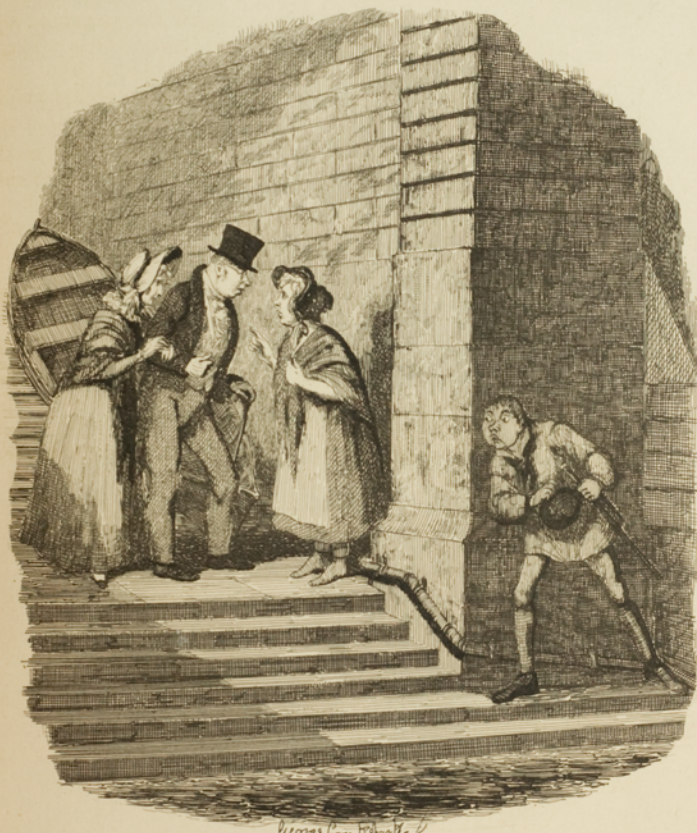
A QUESTION.

To ask me "how I do," you won't!
Then let me ask you "*how* you don't?"

ANSWERED.

Why, sure, that you're an arrant cheat;
And having once been *done* by you,
'Twere really useless when we meet
For me to ask you "*how* you do."

JOYCE JOCUND.



George Cruikshank

The Meeting