

Oliver Twist

By Charles Dickens

EPISODE NINE

- NARRATOR** Noah Claypole, also known as Bolter, hardly daring to breathe, edged closer to take a peep. The old gentleman was pointing to the young lady by his side. Nancy, the woman Fagin had set him to trail, was looking nervously around.
- BROWNLOW** Now listen to me. This young lady, Miss Maylie, has communicated to me what you told her nearly a fortnight ago. To prove that I trust you, I tell you without reserve, that we propose to extort the secret, whatever it may be, from this man, Monks. But if - if - he cannot be secured, or, if secured, cannot be acted upon as we wish, you must deliver up the man called Fagin.
- NANCY** Fagin! No! I will never do it! Devil that he is I will never do that.
- BROWNLOW** Tell me why?
- NANCY** For one reason that the lady knows and will stand by me in. And for this other reason that bad a 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.
- BROWNLOW** Then put Monks into my hands and leave him to me to deal with.
- NANCY** What if he turns against the others?
- BROWNLOW** I promise you that in that case, that such truth if once gained, they shall go scot free.
- NANCY** And if it is not?
- BROWNLOW** Then, this Fagin shall not be brought to justice without your consent. In such a case I could show you reasons, I think, which would lead you to give it.
- NANCY** Have I the lady's promise for that?
- ROSE** My true and faithful pledge.
- NANCY** Monks would never learn how you knew what you do?



- BROWNLOW Never. The intelligence should be so brought to bear upon him, that he could never even guess.
- NANCY I have been a liar - and among liars since I was a little child - but I will take your word.
- NARRATOR Nancy proceeded in a voice so low that it was often difficult for the listener to discover the meaning of what she said - and recounted the name and situation of the public-house whence she had been followed that night, the best position from which to watch it without arousing suspicion, the night and hour on which Monks was most in the habit of frequenting it and his features and appearance.
- NANCY I must go home. This fear comes over me again. I must go home.
- ROSE Home!
- NANCY Leave me, lady - and let me go my way alone.
- ROSE What can be the end of this poor creature's life!
- NANCY Look at the dark water of the river. How many times do you read of such as I who spring into the tide and leave no living thing to care for, or to bewail them? It may be years hence, or it may be only months, but I shall come to that at last.
- ROSE Do not speak thus, pray.
- NANCY It will never reach your ears, dear lady, and God forbid such horrors should! Goodnight, goodnight!
- ROSE This purse. Take it for my sake, that you may have some resource in an hour of need and trouble.
- NANCY No! I have not done this for money. And yet - give me something that you have worn, I should like to have something - no, no, not a ring - your gloves or handkerchief yes, something that I can keep, as having belonged to you, sweet lady.
- ROSE Here then - take this.
- NANCY Bless you! God bless you. Goodnight, goodnight!



NARRATOR

Peeping more than once to make sure that he was still unobserved, Noah Claypole darted away and made for Fagin's house as fast as his legs would carry him.

Two hours before daybreak. Fagin sits with his face turned towards a wasting candle. Stretched upon a mattress on the floor lies Noah Claypole, fast asleep. The hot grease that falls from the candle in clots upon the table plainly shows that Fagin's thoughts are busy elsewhere. Indeed they are. Mortification at the overthrow of his notable scheme, hatred of the girl who has dared to speak with strangers, and utter distrust of the sincerity of her refusal to yield him up, bitter disappointment at the loss of his revenge on Sikes, the fear of detection, and ruin, and death and a fierce and deadly rage kindled by all.

At last! His quick ear catches the sound of a footstep. It is Sikes the house-breaker, Sikes the robber, Sikes the ruffian, returned with a bundle.

SIKES

Do the most you can with it. It's been trouble enough to get. Wot now? Wot do you look at a man so for?

FAGIN

I've got that to tell you, Bill, which will make you worse than me.

SIKES

Aye? Tell away! Look sharp, or Nance will think I'm lost.

FAGIN

Lost! She has pretty well settled that, in her own mind, already.

SIKES

What? Speak will you! Or if you don't it shall be for want of breath!

FAGIN

Suppose that lad that's laying there was to peach - to betray us all - first seeking out the right folks for the purpose and then having a meeting with 'em in the street to paint our likenesses and the place where we might most easily be taken. Stealing out at nights to find those most interested against us and peaching to them. Do you hear me? Suppose he did all this, what then?

SIKES

What then! I'd grind his skull under the iron heel of my boot.

FAGIN

What if I did it! I, that knows so much and could hang so many be sides myself!

SIKES

I'd smash your head as if a loaded waggon had gone over it.

FAGIN

If it was Charley, or the Dodger, or Toby, or -

SIKES

I'd treat them all the same.

FAGIN

Bolter! He's tired - tired with watching for her so long - watching for her Bill.



SIKES Wot d'ye mean?

FAGIN Bolter!

NOAH Mmm?

FAGIN Tell me again - once again, just for him to hear.

NOAH Oo's ee?

FAGIN Tell him!

NOAH What?

FAGIN That about - Nancy.

SIKES Why you!

FAGIN No Bill! Listen to Bolter. Bolter, tell him how you followed her.

NOAH Yes.

FAGIN To London Bridge?

NOAH Yes.

FAGIN Where she met two people.

NOAH So she did.

FAGIN A gentleman and a lady that she had gone to of her own accord before who asked her to give up all her pals and Monks first, which she did and to describe him, which she did and to tell her what house it was that we meet at and go to, which she did and where it could be best watched from, which she did and what time the people went there, which she did. She did all this. She told it all every word without a threat, without a murmur - she did - did she not?

NOAH That's just what it was!

FAGIN And what did they say, about last Sunday?

NOAH They asked her why she hadn't come last Sunday, as she'd promised. She said she couldn't.

FAGIN Why, why?



NOAH Because she was forcibly kept at home by one called 'Bill', the man she had told them of before.

FAGIN What more of him? Tell him that, tell him that.

NOAH Why, that she couldn't very easily get out of doors unless he knew where she was going to and so the first time she went to see the lady she - ha! ha! ha! it made me laugh when she said it, that it did - she gave him a sleeping draught!

SIKES Hell's fire!

FAGIN Bill, Bill! A word. Only a word.

SIKES Let me out! Don't speak to me! Let me out, I say!

FAGIN You won't be - too - violent, Bill? I mean, not too violent for safety. Be crafty, Bill, and not too bold.

NARRATOR Sikes returns home to find Nancy lying upon the bed.

SIKES Get up!

NANCY It is you, Bill!

SIKES It is. Get up.

NANCY Is it morning?

SIKES Leave the curtains. There's enough light for wot I've got to do.

NANCY Bill, why do you look like that at me! Bill, Bill! I - I won't scream or cry - not once - hear me, speak to me, tell me what I have done!

SIKES You know, you she devil! You were watched tonight - every word you said was heard.

NANCY Then spare my life for the love of Heaven, as I spared yours. Bill, dear Bill, you cannot have the heart to kill me. Oh! Think of all I have given up, except this one night, for you. You shall have time to think and save yourself this crime. I will not loose my hold, you cannot throw me off. Bill, Bill, for God's sake, for your own, for mine, stop before you spill my blood! I have been true to you, upon my guilty soul I have!

SIKES Let go my arms!



NANCY

Bill, the gentleman and that dear lady told of a home in some foreign country where I could end my days in solitude and peace. Let me see them - let me see them again and beg them, on my knees, to show the same mercy and goodness to you. It is never too late to repent. They told me so - I feel it now - but we must have time - a little, little time!

NARRATOR

Nancy staggers and falls, a deep gash in her forehead. Raising herself with difficulty on her knees, she draws from her bosom a white handkerchief - Rose Maylie's own - and holding it up as high towards Heaven as her feeble strength will allow, breathes a prayer for mercy to her Maker.

It was a ghastly figure to look upon. The murderer staggering backward to the wall - shutting out the sight of her with one hand - while, with the other, seizing a heavy club to strike her down.

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NARRATOR

Dawn the following morning. The bright sun lit up the room where the murdered woman lay. If the sight had been a ghastly one the night before, what was it now, in all that brilliant light!

Sikes had not moved - he had been afraid to stir. Once he threw a rug over her, but it was worse to imagine the eyes and see them moving towards him. He moved backward, towards the door, dragging the dog with him. Where could he go? Where that was near and not too public?

Nine o'clock at night. A mail coach on the road from London. Sikes almost knew what was to come, but he crossed over, and listened. The guard was standing at the door, waiting for the letter-bag: 'Anything new up in town?' 'Yeah, some girl got her head caved in.' 'Where was that then?' 'I dunno, some dark lane...'

Sikes walked on, leaving the town behind and plunging into the solitude and darkness of the road. He began to feel a haunting of that morning's ghastly figure following at his heels. He could hear its garments rustling in the leaves and every breath of wind came laden with that last low cry. If he stopped, it did the same. If he ran, it followed.

He leaned his back against a bank; it stood above him. He threw himself on his back upon the road; at his head it stood, silent, erect, and still - a living grave-stone.

There was a shed in a field that offered shelter for the night and here a new torture. For a vision came before him of those widely staring eyes in the midst of the darkness. There were but two, but they were everywhere. He got up, and rushed into the field. The figure was behind him. He re-entered the shed. The eyes were there.

Springing to his feet he took the desperate resolution of going back to London.

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London. A carriage arrives outside the house of Mr Brownlow. Two sturdy men get out and station themselves on either side of the steps. At a sign from Mr Brownlow they help out a third man and taking him between them, hurry him into the house. The man is Monks.

MONKS By what authority am I kidnapped in the street and brought here.

BROWNLOW By mine.

MONKS This is pretty treatment, sir, from my father's oldest friend.

BROWNLOW It is because I was your father's oldest friend, young man, through all his trials and errors till he died; it is because of that, I am moved to treat you gently now. Yes, Edward Leeford, even now and blush for your unworthiness who bear the name.

MONKS What do you want with me?

BROWNLOW I know -

MONKS What do you know?

BROWNLOW I know you were the sole child of a wretched marriage that was forced upon your father when he was a mere boy.

MONK Bah!

BROWNLOW I know the misery of your father until he and your mother separated and your mother took herself and you to Paris. I know that while your mother gave herself up to continental frivolities, he, with prospects blighted, lingered on at home, until he fell among new friends. I know that he fell in love with the daughter of one of these friends. She was nineteen and her sister but a few years old.



MONKS

What's this to me?

BROWNLOW

I know how, at this point, the rich relative who had benefited most from your father's forced marriage - and who had sped at this time to Rome for reasons of his health - there repented and died leaving his money to your father. I know how your father went to Rome to claim his inheritance but there fell ill himself and died. How your mother took herself and you to Rome and, your father dying the day after her arrival, no will was found. Thus the fortune came to herself and you.

MONKS

Your tale is the longest. You know nothing. Now call off your dogs and let me go.

BROWNLOW

I know you have a brother.

MONKS

What!

BROWNLOW

And his name is Oliver. Oliver Twist!