

Nancy

‘Course the dog would come out with me when Bill was in one of his moods. He was used to me and I felt sorry for ‘im. I used to see ‘im when I went round to Bill’s. I used to take ‘im little bits and pieces to eat. I got friendly, if you know what I mean, with a butcher round the corner and he used to give me scraps for Bullseye and let me know when he had cheap cuts I could get to share with the other girls.

Bill – I mean he is a bastard, knocks me about sometimes when he’s had a skinful, but, I dunno, there’s just something about him somehow. I always hoped we’d make a go of it. I met ‘im when I started working for Fagin.

I usually help Fagin with the younger boys, especially when they’re new. Poor little things. They’re nearly always living rough when he recruits ‘em, tempting ‘em with the promise of a sausage and a bed for the night. Some of ‘em don’t know where their Ma is – or their Ma might have thrown ‘em out. Some of ‘em don’t know who their Pa is, especially if their Ma was on the game.

But this new boy – he was different somehow. For one thing he spoke proper – not like the rest of us. He said his name was Oliver, but still, he was sleeping in a shop doorway when Fagin picked him up. He told me he used to work as a mute for an undertaker, all dressed up and walking in the procession in front of the hearse an’ that, but they treated ‘im cruel. They even made ‘im sleep in the same room as the stiffs. So he ran away.

He was like a fish out of water when he first came. The others teased ‘im all the time, but Jack could see that he could be really useful when they was out picking pockets. He ‘ad a sort of innocence about ‘im and Jack thought that some ladies and gentlemen might be distracted by Oliver looking all angelic an’ that.

That’s what happened when Oliver and some of the others tried to rob a target – an old gentleman who was looking at some books on a table outside a bookshop. Somebody must have been watching because before you knew it the Old Bill was on the scene, the gang scattered and Oliver just ran off.

We didn't know what had happened to 'im for a while. I sort of missed 'im. We just got on somehow. I think he was looking for somebody to be his Ma.

But one day some of the boys saw Oliver when they was out on a job. He was all clean and dressed in new clothes. They managed to trick 'im into an alley and then somehow got 'im back to Fagin. He seemed to have filled out a bit – probably because he'd been given some decent grub where he'd been staying.

'Course Fagin's first thought is that Oliver's new clothes will fetch a pretty penny when he sells 'em. Poor Oliver – there was nothing for it but to go back to 'is old ways. Back in 'is rags he was soon sent out with one or two of the others on a job, but he 'urts 'imself doesn't he, while trying to get into some big house down Chelsea way.

Luckily for 'im he was rescued by the lady of the house who took pity on 'im, probably when she heard 'is voice.

I couldn't help wondering what had happened to 'im. I know that Fagin was worried that he would give us away but I knew he would never do that. He had a kind heart that boy, inspite of what life had thrown at 'im. Fagin even sent some of the boys out to try and get 'im back a second time but they couldn't find 'im.

Things carried on for the rest of us, dodging the law and trying to get by one way or another. Then one day while I was out the police come by and Fagin was taken away. Bill thought that I shopped 'im, but I never.

It really put the wind up Bill, afraid that Fagin would set the police on to 'im. He didn't 'alf give me a pasting after that. It really hurt and made it difficult to get any punters interested until the bruises faded. He kept picking arguments with me – usually when he'd had a few but last night he seemed to be a bit kinder somehow. He must have had a bit of luck on a job. He wants me to meet 'im later on tonight at The Three Cripples where he goes when he has money for beer. Perhaps he'll even buy me a tot of gin if he's still in a good mood.

I'd better go and smarten meself up a bit. You never know – it might be a good night.....