

NELL DASH
The Gruesomely Merry Adventures Of An Irrepressibly Sensible Capitalist With A Vengeance

By Doug DeVita

Contact:
917.584.2907
doug.devita@gmail.com
www.dougdevitaplays.com



CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
Nell Dash	A cheerful but sensible pie-maker	32	F
Lady Fanny Dashwood	A selfish, evil, upper-crust woman	36	F
Nance /	Nell's younger sister, a prostitute	28	F
Estella	Adopted child of Miss Havisham	23	F
Celia Peachum /	Polly's ambitious, conniving mother	35	F
Miss Pross /	An elderly customer of Nell's	75	F
Wackford Squeers	A hospital attendant	30	M
Dodger /	A teenage pickpocket	15	M
Edward Ferrars /	Fanny's gentle younger brother	33	M
Mr. Todd /	A socially awkward barber	35	M
Executioner	An executioner	30	M
Fagin /	An elderly leader of thieves	60	M
Mr. Brownlow /	The Dashwood family solicitor	60	M
Dr. Grimwig /	A grumpy doctor	60	M
Abel Magwitch	Another elderly thief	60	M
Toby Muzzle (or just Muzzle) /	A dim-witted but gentle footman	39	M
Miss Aurelia Havisham /	A recluse	65	F
The Beadle /	An unctuous minor official	35	M
King Stanley V8	The King of this alternate England	37	M
Polly Peachum /	A crafty little girl, very pretty	8	F
Bill Sikes /	A notoriously violent thief	35	M
Tiger Brown /	An ambitious but genial policeman	40	M
Mr. Jaggers	The Havisham family solicitor	40	M
Narrator /	A genial narrator	35	GN
The Reverend Mr. Collins /	A little priest	40	M
Bullseye	A dog. Can also be a puppet manipulated by the Narrator	Dog age	M

CAST: 4 Women, 4 Men, 1 Gender Neutral

The actresses playing Nell and Fanny do not cover any other roles; the rest of the cast play multiple roles as indicated above. Diverse and gender neutral casting is encouraged, and while ages are indicated above they are only a guide for the character, not the performer.

SYNOPSIS: In an alternate London of 1820 during the joyous reign of King Stanley V8, Elinor and Marianne Wood, the illegitimate daughters of Sir Henry Dashwood and his cook, have become Nell Dash and Nance. Their vile half-sister-in-law Lady Fanny Ferrars Dashwood stops at nothing to keep them from getting a single penny of the annuity they have inherited, whilst at the same time trying to attain the two strands of pearls given the girls when they fled Devonshire, pearls which have mysteriously disappeared and have a strange history of their own.

A (Gender Neutral) Narrator appears.

NARRATOR

NELL DASH, the Gruesomely Merry Adventures Of An Irrepressibly Sensible Capitalist With A Vengeance, by Doug DeVita. Book One, Chapter One: In which Lady Fanny Dashwood puts things in irrevocable motion.

The Narrator disappears.

A drawing room in Berkeley Square. Lady Fanny Dashwood is sealing an envelope with hot wax. She rings for Muzzle, her footman. He enters.

FANNY

You do know where to deliver this, Muzzle?

MUZZLE

Yes, Lady Dashwood. If you please, mum, / your

FANNY

/ Ma'am, Muzzle. How many times must / I

MUZZLE

/ Ma'am, your solicitor has been waiting nearly a quarter of an hour now.

FANNY

Oh, yes. Please send him in as you leave to deliver this most urgent message. Hurry, now, Muzzle. Wait for a reply.

MUZZLE

Yes, mum Ma'am.

FANNY

And do not partake of her gin this time, Muzzle.

MUZZLE

No, Ma'am. (He exits. Off:) If you please, sir, her Ladyship will see you now.

He shows Mr. Brownlow into the room, then exits.

FANNY

Mr. Brownlow, thank you for coming so quickly. You were the first person I contacted after the death of my husband this very morning.

MR. BROWNLOW

May I offer my sincere condolences on the / loss

FANNY

/ Yes, yes, yes, thank you.

MR. BROWNLOW

He was not yet 40, was he? So young, compared to his father, the late Sir Henry.

FANNY

Yes. So sad. You have brought my newly late husband's last will and testament?

MR. BROWNLOW

Yes, yes, yes of course.

FANNY

I am to be left everything, then? The estates, the lands, the jewelry, the Dashwood meat packing business, everything will now be in my name?

MR. BROWNLOW

As you have no male heirs... Well, nearly everything, yes.

FANNY

Nearly?

MR. BROWNLOW

The terms of the late Sir John Dashwood's will, may he rest in peace, are quite clear: in the event he were to die childless, and as his legitimate younger sister Mrs. Margaret Ferrars has predeceased him, also childless, he wished to leave an annuity of two thousand, five hundred pounds per annum to each of his sisters, Elinor and Marianne Wood, as his sole remaining blood relations.

FANNY

Half-relations, Mr. Brownlow, half-relations. Do remember: their name was Wood, and not *Dashwood*.

MR. BROWNLOW

Nonetheless, they are his blood relations.

FANNY

I am quite assured they are dead. Nothing has been heard of them for years.

MR. BROWNLOW

Quite assured is not completely certain, now is it, Lady Dashwood? Every effort must be made to ascertain whether or not Miss Elinor and Miss Marianne Wood are still living.

FANNY

They nearly broke their father's heart when they ran away. They are hardly deserving of an enormous annuity of two thousand five hundred pounds a year. Each!

MR. BROWNLOW

My dear Lady Dashwood, what are 5,000 pounds a year compared to the 60,000 a year you stand to inherit?

FANNY

5,000 less than 65,000, Mr. Brownlow. And those ungrateful girls were given two quite expensive strands of pearls by their half-sister Margaret, may she also rest in peace. Those pearls should stand them in good stead. IF they have not succumbed to disease or drink. The last I heard they had become whores.

MR. BROWNLOW

Nonetheless, these are your newly-late husband's wishes, and as his solicitor, I shall undertake an extensive effort to locate his half-sisters.

FANNY

An impossible task, as I am sure they are dead or irrevocably missing. And if they are still alive, they will then never die.

MR. BROWNLOW

I beg your pardon?

FANNY

People live forever when there is an annuity involved. And if those exquisite pearls have not disappeared with them, they will, by all rights, be returned to me, will they not, as the sole surviving member of the Dashwood family?

MR. BROWNLOW

Unless one or both of them has had a surviving male child, and that child, or children, as it were, be still alive. The terms of Sir John's will are quite clear, and quite incontestable.

FANNY

A surviving male child? Or more?

MR. BROWNLOW

It's very possible, Lady Dashwood. I myself had nearly given up hope I would ever find my beloved niece Emily, and while my hopes were dashed to find she had, indeed, died, how overjoyed was I to discover she had not died before giving birth to my great-nephew, a delightful young man recently restored to me.

FANNY

How wonderful for you, Mr. Brownlow, but not every story has a happy ending. I would hate to be the cause of you wasting your time, which I know is quite a valuable – and expensive – commodity. I am grief-stricken enough by the death of my beloved Sir John.

MR. BROWNLOW

My expenses are not drawn from the principal sums of your accounts, Lady Dashwood, and as for your grief, well... I leave you to it. Good day, Ma'am.

He exits.

FANNY

A surviving male child? Or more? Good heavens, I had not thought of that. Will there be no end to the hell those two illegitimate harlots are to put me through?

The Narrator appears.

NARRATOR

Chapter Two: In which Nell vows her vengeance, and Muzzle partakes of her gin.

The Narrator disappears.

Nell's Pie Shop in Fleet Street. Later that morning. Nell, stirring dough with a big wooden spoon. Muzzle enters.

MUZZLE

If you please, Ma'am, a note for you. Oops. The wax broke.

NELL

I see. What's she want now, eh, Muzzle?

MUZZLE

I'm quite sure I can't say, Ma'am.

NELL

Oh, I'm quite sure you can, Muzzle.

MUZZLE

Your brother, Sir John Dashwood, has passed away this morning.

NELL

Half-brother, Muzzle. I guess I must go pay my respects to his widow.

MUZZLE

She don't want you comin' round, Ma'am. And she's taking the opportunity, now she figures she's running things, to cut your meat supplies and charge you for 'em.

NELL

And they say you can't read well.

MUZZLE

That's what they say, Ma'am.

NELL

My own father's meat business she's using against me now? I must say I saw this coming.

MUZZLE

I'm to wait for a reply, Ma'am.

NELL

(Quickly scanning the note.) Yes. No. No. And GOD no. Have you got that?

MUZZLE

Yes, Ma'am. Yes. No. No. And GOD no. She won't like that.

NELL

(Pouring him some gin.) Here, she won't like this either.

MUZZLE

Thank you, Ma'am. She's not a very nice woman, is she?

NELL

You shouldn't be talking about your employer that way, Toby Muzzle, you know that. But... Yes, she is a hard one, ain't she?

MUZZLE

I'm so afraid now, what with both the Mr. Dashwoods gone, she's going to sack me. I'm not really a very good footman, you know, but Mr. Dashwood, the elder, kept me on after my mother, the housekeeper, passed. He was a kind man, wasn't he?

NELL

Yes, he was. My father was a very kind, loving man, with a heart big enough for all God's creatures. I wish I could take you on here, Toby, but times is hard.

(Gives him a pie.) You can always count on me for tot of gin and a pie or two, so you'll never go hungry, at least.

MUZZLE

You're a good Christian woman, Nell Dash, that you are. You and your sister were such sweet affable little things, I always had a soft spot for the two of you, and your mum, too. (He takes a bite of a pie and makes a face.) She was a good cook, your mum. You remember her secret? Stir for an hour, with a big wooden spoon. Makes the dough nice and smooth.

NELL

Mum never had to bake 12 dozen pies at a time.

MUZZLE

She used to let me lick that big wooden spoon. Then she'd hit me with it. I liked her.

NELL

We were all almost like family below stairs there in Devonshire, now weren't we?

MUZZLE

Yes, Ma'am.

NELL

Now off with you. And remember, you don't know who I really am. Fanny would sack you quicker'n a greased pig at the Devonshire fair if you ever let it slip.

MUZZLE

I'll remember, Ma'am. (He goes, muttering to himself.) Yes. No. No. And GOD no. Yes. No. No. And GOD no. Yes. No. No. And GOD no.

Nell goes back to stirring her dough, a little less cheerfully.

NELL

I must now go tell my sister there are but three blood-related Dashwoods left in this world. (She pours a gin and re-reads the note. She speaks in a more refined accent now.) Fanny Dashwood, you are a piece, aren't you? You can keep my sister Marianne and me from paying respects to our departed half-brother. You can make my beloved Edward, your brother, marry my half-sister Margaret instead of marrying me like he wanted. You can force me to change my name from Wood to Dash. And with my half-brother John now gone, you can even try to charge me for the rotten bits of beef you will "condescend" to sell me from my own late father's business.

But as God is my witness, Lady Fanny Ferrars Dashwood, you will never, ever, ever get your greedy little hands on my string of pearls, the only worldly reminder of my past life of quiet half-gentility. But first I must get them back myself.

She leaves as the Narrator appears.

NARRATOR

Chapter Three: In which pleasant conversations between Fagin, Celia Peachum, and The Artful Dodger have far reaching consequences.

The Narrator disappears.

Fagin's lair on Saffron Hill. Shortly after. Fagin, Celia Peachum, and her pretty little daughter, Polly.

FAGIN

Equal partners, eh?

CELIA

Equal partners, Fagin. I've been pimpin' your girls and motherin' your brats for fifteen years. It's me due.

FAGIN

Celia Peachum, dear lady! Time's bein' so hard, the law breathin' down our necks, and you want to take the bread out of our mouths?

CELIA

What about the bread for me own little Polly over there, what's soon to grow into a fine young lady, worth somethin' to us?

FAGIN

I don't doubt she'll make us both a small fortune, me dear, yes, a small fortune.

CELIA

That she will. But listen, you old skinflint: 50% now, or you ain't gettin' me Polly later.

DODGER

(Popping in from a hidden entrance.) Fagin! I got your news!

FAGIN

Not now, Dodger me dear. We're conducting a little business.

DODGER

Right you are.

Dodger lurks in the shadows. Polly stares at him lovingly.

CELIA

You heard me, Fagin. You know what I want. Think it over carefully. Very, very carefully.

FAGIN

I'd hate to think it's come to threats after all I've done for you since you were but your little Polly's age. Always been one of my favorites, you have.

CELIA

And after all I've done for you, too. C'mon, Polly, we're goin'. POLLY! Stop your moonin' afore I cuff you one!

Celia grabs Polly and exits, then motions for Polly to sneak back in. She hides in a corner, watching.

DODGER

She's your favorite?

FAGIN

You're all me favorites, Dodge, you're all me favorites. So? The news?

DODGER

Me half-crown?

FAGIN

You'd take the bread out of our mouths?

DODGER

That's a laugh. C'mon, Fagin, me half-crown.

FAGIN

Turn around.

He does. Fagin goes to a dark corner, takes out a chest and removes a coin. He puts the chest back, slaps Dodger's butt, and hands him the coin.

DODGER

The kid is with the old gentleman.

FAGIN

The one you pinched the tenner from?

DODGER

He's his grand-dad, or uncle, or something like that.

FAGIN

This is bad, Dodge, this is bad. If he peaches, it's the drop for all of us then, me dear.

DODGER

For you maybe, Fagin, but not for me. They don't call me the Artful Dodger for nothing.

FAGIN

Now, Dodger, me boy, how can you talk to your old Fagin like that? Ain't I took care of you like you was me own from almost the cradle to now, ever since you were dropped on me doorstep? Always given you the least moldy sausages?

DODGER

Not for less than a sovereign.

FAGIN

A POUND, DODGE!?! I ain't even asked you yet!

DODGER

But I can always tell when you need me for something big. A sovereign. Or nothin'.

Dodger holds out his hand. They repeat the business.

FAGIN

Find out how we can get the kid back from the old gentleman.

DODGER

See you tomorrow.

Making sure he's gone, Fagin takes out the chest, pulling out piece after piece of jewelry, ending with two necklaces – two lovely strings of pearls. He studies the clasps.

FAGIN

Ah. "M." And "E." ME! Me beauties. Me fortune. Me security. Me legacy.

Polly sneaks back out.

CELIA

Well? Did you see where he hides his stash?

POLLY

Yes.

CELIA

And?

POLLY

I want a string of pearls, mummy.

They leave as the Narrator appears.

NARRATOR

Chapter Four: In which the grieving Fanny invites her brother Edward to partake of her special blend of tea.

The Narrator disappears.

Fanny's drawing room. A week later. Fanny and her brother, Edward Ferrars.

EDWARD

Dearest sister Fanny, I came as soon as I heard about my poor unfortunate brother-in-law.

FANNY

We are all we have now, Edward. Tea?

EDWARD

No, thank you. I did not know that John also suffered from acute stomach problems.

FANNY

Yes, apparently the Dashwoods are not a hearty lot. My poor dear father-in-law, Sir Henry Dashwood, your poor, sweet wife, Margaret, and now my beloved husband, Sir John. All... Gone. Leaving us only their fortunes, and yours.

EDWARD

Yes, dear sister. Unless we each remarry and have sons, we are each other's heirs.

FANNY

Where is that useless Muzzle? I've ordered a lovely tea for you.

EDWARD

No, thank you, Fanny.

FANNY

But Edward, it's the special blend you like from Fortnum & Mason. I ordered it especially when I received your letter telling me you were coming. Dear Brother.

EDWARD

Dear Sister. Thank you, but no.

FANNY

But I insist. You've traveled so far; that journey all the way from Plymouth / must

EDWARD

/ Bath.

FANNY

I beg your pardon?

EDWARD

I live in Bath now, Fanny.

FANNY

How extraordinary. Well. Your journey all the way from Bath must have been exhausting. (She pulls the servant's cord, and calls out in a hearty, guttural bleat) MUZZLE!!! (Back to her more "refined" voice.) Honestly, Edward, my late father-in-law was a lovely, generous man, but he was entirely too kind when it came to retaining his family retainers.

EDWARD

He was loyal to the people who served him, Fanny. I don't see what is so wrong with that.

FANNY

At least my late husband's half-sisters had the good sense to leave after their mother, the cook, passed away. Imagine how awful it would have been for the poor girls to continue living in a house where they had no real social standing?

EDWARD

What of the Misses Wood? Our half-sisters-in-law? Marianne, and... and... Elinor?

FANNY

Dearest Edward, your late brother-in-law spent much of his time and our resources trying to find the dear girls, but they disappeared so quickly after their mother died and you married Margaret, leaving not a trace. I very much fear they are dead.

EDWARD

Oh, dear.

FANNY

You need tea.

EDWARD

No, Fanny, I'll be fine. It's just... I had always hoped...

FANNY

(A louder bark) **MUZZLE!!!**

He instantly enters with the tea.

MUZZLE

Is there anything else you require, mum?

FANNY

Ma'am.

MUZZLE

Ma'am?

She dismisses Muzzle, and begins preparing the tea.

EDWARD

I never should have listened to you and mother. I loved Elinor, not Margaret.

FANNY

Mother was right, Edward. Margaret was entirely the better match. Look at the fortune she brought you on your wedding day!

EDWARD

What do I care about a share in the Dashwood Meat-packing fortunes? I have my own comfortable income and inheritance, Fanny. Oh, my poor, dear Elinor.

He turns away. She quickly pulls a locket from her pocket, and drops a pellet into his tea.

FANNY

This is where we are different, dear brother. You have never understood the utter importance of money and social standing. Tea?

EDWARD

If you insist.

FANNY

I do. Now that you are back in London, we shall have tea every afternoon. Dear brother.

Smiling sweetly, she hands him the tea. He takes a sip.

They disappear as The Narrator appears.

NARRATOR

Chapter Five: In which Nance, The Whore, visits her sister Nell, The Pie Maker, with a risky plan.

The Narrator disappears.

The pie shop. Evening, the same day. A scattered customer or two. Nell and Nance are having a whispered conversation.

NELL

And he gave you what for? Again?

NANCE

I asked for it, he says.

NELL

They always do, Nance, they always do.

NANCE

He was drunk, again.

NELL

They always are, Nance, they always are. Look at that eye! And that lip! You need to see a doctor, Nance. Have you got any money?

NANCE

(Shaking her head “no.”) I’ll be fine. He’s given me worse’n this before.

NELL

Course, if you hadn’t given Fagin our pearl necklaces what our rich half-sister Mags gave us before we left Devonshire, we wouldn’t both be so hard up all the time.

NANCE

The kid, Nell! I need a safe place to stash the kid ‘til I can bring the uncle to him.

NELL

You want me to keep the kid here? A kid what your Bill stole? With Constable Brown and the Beadle already snoopin’ round the place?

NANCE

What's they got on you?

NELL

Nothin', Nance, nothin'. But ever since that crooked Mrs. Mooney was caught stuffin' pussy cats into her pies, they been lookin' at all us legitimate bakers. How'm I going to explain a kid to the Beadle?

NANCE

I'm tryin' to do right by the kid, Nell, ain't I, bringin' him back to the uncle?

NELL

Why you stick with that Bill Sikes, I'll never understand.

NANCE

He needs me. And as long as he needs me, I know where I must...

NELL

Save your sad song, Nance, I've heard it too many times now.

NANCE

You ain't got a lick of romantic sensibility in you anymore, Nell.

NELL

And you ain't got a lick of common sense, Nance, you never had. So where am I supposed to stash this kid? This ain't exactly a private, out of the way little nook, you know.

NANCE

You got plenty of hidin' places here. Down in the bakehouse?

NELL

Ain't you been listenin' to me? That's the first place his high and mightiness looks.

NANCE

What about upstairs? You ain't been able to rent that place for years.

NELL

A barber's movin' in. I hope it improves me own business. A shave and a pie, eh, Nance?

NANCE

Then how about down in the tunnels between here and St. Dunstan's?

NELL

I suppose that could work. Let me think on it.

NANCE

That's all I'm askin' Nell, that's all I'm askin'.

NELL

When do you need me to hide the brat?

NANCE

Next week, I told the uncle.

NELL

Beadle was here day before yesterday, usually don't come back but every five days. If you can bring him the day after, it might work. But what's in it for me, eh?

NANCE

Do your little sister a good turn?

NELL

I'm always doin' me whore sister a good turn.

NANCE

We're both whores, in a way, ain't we, Nell?

NELL

Like our mum, God rest her soul. Except she was able to keep her whoring off the streets.

NANCE

And she could really make a pie. Don't you remember her rule? Stir for an hour!

NELL

Who's got time for that, Nance? Get me string of pearls back.

NANCE

How can I do that? Even if I could find where Fagin keeps his stash, the old miser'd miss 'em in an instant.

NELL

You had no right givin' the old Tea Leaf me pearls in the first place.

NANCE

I had to, Nell. I can't tell you why, but I had to.

NELL

Me string of pearls, nothin' less. Then I'll hide the kid for you. Lord, look at the time! I got to be closin' up me shop in a minute.

NANCE

I better get goin' meself, Nell. Me Bill gets suspicious when I ain't with a customer.

NELL

Wait a bit, I'll give you a savory and a sweet pie to take with you.

NANCE

One of your pies? The only thing harder up than us are your pies, Nell.

NELL

At least they ain't made of pussy. Can you imagine stirring a pussy cat for an hour?

They laugh. The one remaining customer leaves.

NELL (CONT'D)

HERE! WHERE YOU GOING? (In a quieter voice) You poor, old, cheap, deaf thing.

MISS PROSS

YOU OUGHT TO BE PAYING ME, EXPECTING ME TO EAT THIS SHIT YOU CALL A PIE. I'LL BE UP ALL THE NIGHT WITH THE STOMACH CRAMPS.

NELL

AND YOU'LL BE PASSED OUT ALL THE DAY FROM ME GIN. HAND IT OVER. ME MONEY!

The customer pays and exits.

MISS PROSS

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK, NELL?

NELL

NEXT WEEK, THEN, MISS PROSS. Heh, heh, heh, Prossy's a sweet old thing. We do that every week. Lost most of her hearing, poor dear, in a cat fight with a French revolutionist in Paris, years ago. She got the better of it, though; I heard she killed the Frenchie. (As they are now alone, she drops the cockney and speaks in her Devonshire accent.) Look what we've come to, dearest Marianne.

NANCE

(Drops the cockney, too.) Oh, Elinor, if only mum had been his wife, instead of his cook...

NELL

We still would not have inherited, dearest.

NANCE

But we'd have had social standing, and been able to marry well.

NELL

And lived a nice, prosperous life in blissfully quiet anonymity. Perhaps by the sea. Just us, our husbands, our children, and our pearls. As our older half-sister Mags might have, had she lived.

NANCE

Dear Margaret. A purer heart never beat so sweetly.

NELL

Poor dead thing.

NANCE

She was good to us when she was alive. Not like our older half-brother John and that dreadfully selfish wife of his.

NELL

Mags was more like our dear father. John was more like his mother. He was weak and vain. Ah, well, there's no profit in crying over our now dead half-relations. This is the hand we've been dealt, (she resumes the cockney accent) so we've got to play it for all it's worth.

NANCE

I suppose. I'll come by next week with the kid.

NELL

And me string of pearls.

NANCE

The kid's name is Oliver. And the uncle's name is Brownlow.

NELL

Brownlow. Why is that name familiar to me?

Nance shrugs, puts her shawl over her head and darts off. Dodger pops out of the shadows and follows her. Bill Sikes appears and follows them at a discreet pace.

BILL (OFF)

Bullseye!

A small pit bull races across the stage. (This can be a puppet manipulated by the Narrator.)

Constable Tiger Brown, genial but ambitious, enters. Nell curtsies.

TIGER BROWN

Good evening, Nell Dash. Locking up for the night, are you?

NELL

Yes, Constable Brown.

TIGER BROWN

Good thing. Unsavory types around here lately.

NELL

Yes, sir.

TIGER BROWN

Just you be careful, Nell Dash, but not to worry. Me and the Beadle, we're looking out for our friends and neighbors.

She darts to the counter and returns with a pie.

NELL

Here you are, sir, a nice sweet pie for you. Black currant, just as you like, and on the house as usual.

TIGER BROWN

Good night, and thank you, Nell Dash.

He strolls off as the Narrator appears.

NARRATOR

Chapter Six: In which Nell is visited by a Thief, a Beadle, and a Barber.

The Narrator disappears.

The pie shop, morning. Three days later. Nell is stirring.

NELL

20 minutes to go. No wonder mum had such strong arms. (She looks up expectantly as Fagin enters.) Oh, it's you, the old Tea Leaf.

FAGIN

Now Nell, is that any way to speak to your old friend Fagin?

NELL

Since when have I ever been friends with the likes of you? You wouldn't even be here if you didn't want somethin' from me.

FAGIN

A simple exchange of favors, perhaps? If a child, say a small boy, were to wander into your shop askin' to be hidden, you might not be predisposed to help him? For anyone?

NELL

Now what business have I got hidin' brats? (Fagin pulls out a string of pearls.) My pearls!

FAGIN

It would be such a shame if word got out that the respectable Nell Dash was really Miss Elinor Wood, the unmarried mother of a boy she had with her late, half-sister's future husband, and who was paid to "disappear," now wouldn't it, me dear?

NELL

Only my sister Nance knew about my boy... She told you, didn't she! That's why she gave you our pearls, ain't it?

FAGIN

Sad, the love of the gin, no? One sip, one slip of the tongue... And hard earned respectability can just pffft, disappear. Now, I might be willin' to keep me silence. Just a simple exchange of favors...

NELL

You're afraid the kid's gonna peach, ain't ya?

The Beadle, oozing puffed up oily charm, enters. Fagin quickly stuffs the pearls back into his vest pocket.

BEADLE

Ah, my lovely Nell Dash, it's time for another poke around your ovens and larder. The highlight of my week.

NELL

Ah, The Beadle! Your worship!

FAGIN

We do understand each other, Nell?

Fagin quietly sneaks out.

NELL

Shall we inspect the bakehouse, or will you be wantin' your sweetie first?

BEADLE

My sweetie first. Do you have cherry, perchance? I'd dearly love to pop a cherry into my mouth, especially a cherry what's been baked into a pie made by your lovely little hands.

NELL

I'm afraid cherry season is well past, your worship.

BEADLE

Ah, but Mrs. Mooney has a cherry pie on her menu.

NELL

That's all very well if you like your cherries dried and sour. (Mr. Todd enters carrying a barber pole.) Oh, Mr. Todd! Almost ready for your business to start?

BEADLE

A business?

NELL

Mr. T is opening a "Tonsorial Parlor" upstairs, your worship. Shaves, haircuts, nail trimmings, all sorts of lovely things for your gentlemanly splendors.

BEADLE

Do you massage the feet, Mr. Todd? I do dearly love a good massage of the feet.

NELL

Of course he does! And all on the house, too.

BEADLE

Oh, how lovely. Just like you, Nell Dash. Isn't she lovely, Mr. Todd?

MR. TODD

(Clearly, intensely smitten) Lovely, yes.