

KAREN McCOMBIE

FAGIN'S GIRL



Illustrated by
Anneli Bray



FAGIN'S GIRL



KAREN McCOMBIE

Illustrated by
Anneli Bray



First published in 2022 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

Text © 2022 Karen McCombie
Illustrations © 2022 Anneli Bray

The moral right of Karen McCombie and Anneli Bray to be
identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been
asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and
Patents Act, 1988

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced in whole or in any part in any form without the
written permission of the publisher

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-80090-055-4

Printed by Hussar Books, Poland

For Eddy, just because ...

CONTENTS

PART 1: London, 1836

| | | |
|---|------------------------|----|
| 1 | A lucky day indeed ... | 3 |
| 2 | Joe's secret | 8 |
| 3 | Ettie all alone | 17 |
| 4 | Becoming a nobody | 20 |
| 5 | Together again | 26 |
| 6 | Lost and found | 31 |
| 7 | A close call | 42 |
| 8 | A snip and a chop! | 47 |
| 9 | Joe's trick | 54 |

PART 2: Australia, 1988

| | | |
|----|--------------------------------|----|
| 10 | Then and now | 65 |
| | The facts behind the story ... | 75 |

PART 1

London

1836

CHAPTER 1

A lucky day indeed ...

I stretched out in the bed, yawning as I woke up. My two long braids of hair spread out over the white pillow. Then I remembered what day it was and sat up fast.

There was Mother at the table, already at work with piles of fabric and scissors and thin strands of wire. The morning light streamed in the window behind her. It made her red hair glow like the embers of our tiny fire on a cold evening.

“Good morning, Ettie!” Mother called over to me. “And birthday greetings to you, my dear! Ten years old today ... what a grown girl you are!”

Mother's smile was as bright as the sun.
No matter how bad things got, her smile made
everything better.

"You should have woken me up!" I said as
I swung my legs out of the creaky metal bed I



shared with Mother. I looked down to check if my brother Joe's mattress was on the floor still, but it had already been pushed away under the bed. Joe was older than me by two years. He never called me Ettie – always Bean, because I was as small as a bean to him no matter how old I got.

The floor was cold to my bare feet, so I jumped onto the rag rug. Then I hurried behind the curtain in the corner where our clothes hung neatly from wooden pegs on the wall.

“Well, today you deserve to have an extra hour in bed, Ettie,” said Mother.

I could hear the snip-snip of her scissors as she cut out the flowers and leaves from the fabric we had been given. Every week a box of cloth and wire arrived, and every week Mother and I worked twelve hours or more every day. We made sprays of purple violets, blue forget-me-nots and white honeysuckle for the bonnets of rich ladies.

I always put the flowers together, fitting them on the strips of wire. Mother made the leaves, dusting them with a powder that gave them a vivid green shine and slipping them on last.

“Has Joe left for work already?” I asked Mother as I changed out of my night things and pulled on my dress and petticoat. I wasn’t sure what time it was. Maybe seven o’clock? We all got up before six normally.

We’d have our breakfast of bread and butter and milk too, if we had any. Then Joe would hurry off to the brewery. It was his job to clean out the stables there once the horses were harnessed to the carts and they’d set off to deliver barrels of beer to the pubs of London.

“Joe is just fetching the water for us, then he’ll be away,” said Mother.

The door banged, and Joe was back.

I pulled the curtain to one side and grinned at my brother. But Joe looked sad. Or angry maybe. Or as if he had a secret that was bothering him.

Joe talked to me less and less these days. If he did have a secret, I didn't think he was going to tell me ...