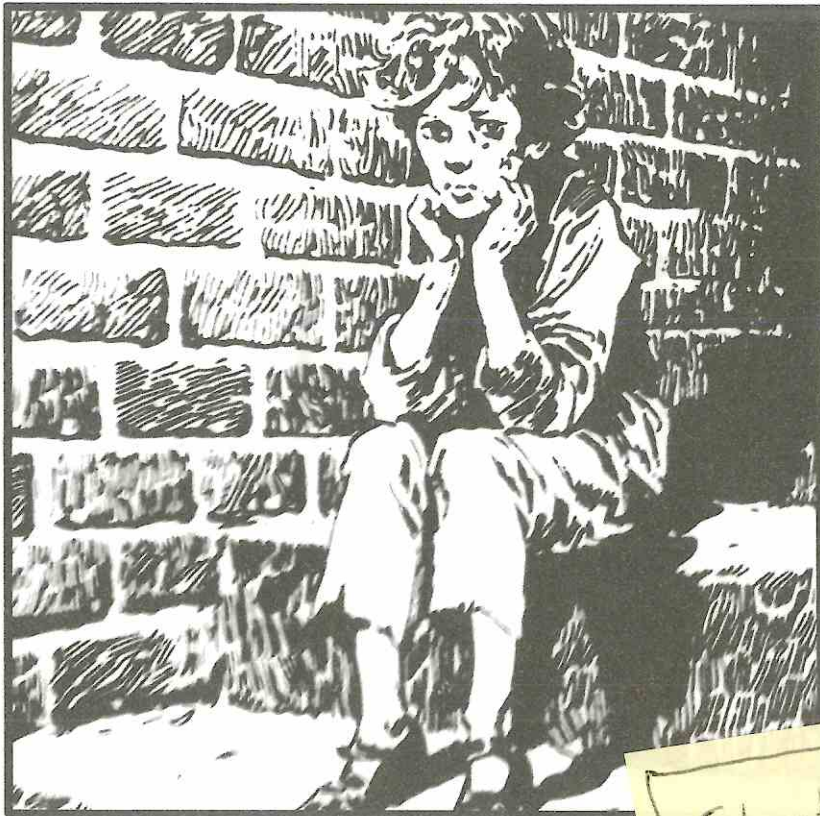


# Oliver Twist



*By Charles Dickens*

*Adapted by Kathleen Costick*

Chapter  
1-2

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# The Workhouse



chapter 1.

Every city in England, large or small, has a workhouse. It is there that poor people are taken from the streets to be fed, clothed, and given tiresome work to do. They are not fed very well—only enough to keep them from dying of hunger. One stormy night, in a city it is best not to name here, a boy was born in one of these very workhouses. He was to be called Oliver Twist.

Oliver was so frail when he was born that the workhouse doctor and the shriveled old woman who attended him were surprised that he lived. His first cries were thin and faint. When his pale, young



mother heard them, she raised herself feebly from her bed and said in a voice that could barely be heard, "Let me hold my child before I die."

The doctor quickly put the baby in her arms. She kissed his little forehead lovingly. Then she gazed around, shuddered, fell back—and died.

"It's all over now, Sally," the doctor said as he prepared to leave.

"Ah, poor dear, so it is!" said the old woman sadly.

"Such a pretty girl too, so delicate-looking," said the doctor. "She is not at all like the other women I see here. Where did she come from?"

"She was found lying in the street last night," replied the old woman. "She must have walked a long way because her shoes were worn to pieces. But who she is or where she came from, nobody knows."

The doctor shook his head sadly and said, "I wonder where the father of her child is. Perhaps he is dead, too. Ah well," he sighed as he put on his hat. "I must go. Goodnight, Sally."

"Goodnight, sir," the old woman muttered as she bent over the body of the young mother. The new baby now screamed so loudly that his little voice filled the room.

Oliver Twist grew into a pale, thin boy. He had a sad, wistful look about him. After he was born, he was sent to a



farmhouse which was really a workhouse for homeless, young children. It was run by a mean, stingy woman named Mrs. Mann. The children in her charge were always dirty and hungry. Every once in a

while, one of the babies would fall from their cribs and tumble to the floor.

One day Oliver complained that he was hungry. As a punishment for this, Mrs. Mann locked him in the coal cellar. While Oliver sat in the dark on the cold stone steps, Mrs. Mann was startled to see someone she knew trying to open her garden gate.

"Oh no," she said to herself. "It's Bumble from the workhouse." She pulled Oliver out of the cellar and sent him upstairs. Then she ran out shouting, "Is that you, Mr. Bumble, sir? How glad I am to see you! The gate is locked so that none of my dear little children can wander away from me. I will open it for you in just one second."

"Do you think it proper, Mrs. Mann, to keep an officer from the workhouse waiting at your garden gate?" puffed Mr. Bumble. He was a fat man, and his face was pink and shiny after his long walk.

"Oh dear, Mr. Bumble, sir. I'm sure I

came just as soon as I could," Mrs. Mann replied meekly.

"All right then. Let's go in," said Mr. Bumble.

Mrs. Mann led him into a small parlor. Then she picked up a bottle and said with a glint in her eye, "You've had a long walk, Mr. Bumble. Would you care for a little drop of something to drink?"

Mr. Bumble looked at the bottle and said, "Well, really I shouldn't . . ."

"Just a drop, Mr. Bumble," said Mrs. Mann as she began to pour.

After Mr. Bumble had drained his glass, he took out a small notebook and said with great importance, "Oliver Twist is now nine years old. Although we offered a reward for information about him, we have never discovered whom his parents were."

"Why, who gave him his name then?" asked Mrs. Mann.

Mr. Bumble drew himself up proudly and said, "I did! We name our foundlings

in alphabetical order. The one before this was S, and I named him Stubble. This was T, and I named him Twist."

Mrs. Mann declared that he was very clever.

"Oliver is too old to stay here now," continued Mr. Bumble. "I have come to bring him back to the workhouse. Please fetch him at once."

A few minutes later, Oliver was being led away by Mr. Bumble, from the only home he had ever known.

Oliver felt terribly sad to leave the farmhouse. He had been unhappy there, but the other children were his friends. He felt very, very alone as he struggled to keep up with Mr. Bumble's huge steps.

Once inside the workhouse, Mr. Bumble handed Oliver to an old woman and left. He returned fifteen minutes later to say that it was "board" night, and that the "board" wanted to see Oliver.

Now Oliver had no idea that the workhouse was run by a group of men



called the "board of directors." So he was very surprised to hear that a board wanted to see him. When Mr. Bumble brought him into a room where nine fat men were sitting around a table, and told him to "bow to the board," he looked hastily around. Seeing no board except the table, Oliver decided to bow to that.

"What's your name, boy?" asked one gentleman. All the men looked sternly at Oliver, which frightened him so much he could hardly speak. Then Mr. Bumble rapped him on the head with his stick. Oliver had to fight to hold back his tears.

"Oliver Twist, sir," he answered in a low voice. A man in a white vest said Oliver was a fool.

Another man at the table asked, "You know you're an orphan, don't you? I mean, you know you've no father or mother to take care of you?"

"Yes sir," replied Oliver. Tears sprang to his eyes, but he could do nothing to stop them.



The first gentleman said, "You must live and work here. You will begin working tomorrow morning at six o'clock."

Oliver bowed again and was led to a room full of hard, narrow beds. He sobbed himself to sleep.

The people in the workhouse were not happy. They were hungry and miserable. They wanted to leave, but they had no money and no place to go. Because



they couldn't find work, they had to stay.

However, the "board of directors," who ran the workhouse, thought the poor people there were happy. The board wanted to make it more unpleasant in order to encourage some of them to leave. Soon after Oliver left the board room, they decided that the people should have only half as much food to eat.

For the next six months, Oliver worked at taking apart old ropes. The stringy fibers were separated and later

used to stuff the cracks in ships to make them water-tight. He and the other boys were fed three bowls of thin gruel a day. They became almost wild with hunger. One boy was afraid that, unless he had more food to eat, he would wake up one night and find that he had eaten the boy in the bed next to him. He was big, and all the boys believed him. Something had to be done!

The boys met and decided that one of them should walk up to the master after supper and ask for more food. But who? They were all afraid. So, a small bundle of straws was made, one of which was much shorter than the rest. Each boy would take a straw out of the bundle. Whoever drew the short straw would have to ask the master for more.

One by one, the boys took their turns. Then it was Oliver's turn. His hand wavered for a moment over the straws—should he choose this one or that? Finally, he took one. It was the short straw!

Supper time came, and the boys were led into the big stone hall where they ate. The master stood at the front beside an enormous, iron pot of bubbling gruel. The boys waited in line for him to fill their bowls.

At the end of the meal, the boys whispered to each other and winked at Oliver. They nudged him with their feet. Oliver got up from the table and, with his bowl and spoon in his hands, walked towards the master. He was so hungry that he almost didn't care what happened to him. He felt reckless and very daring. Even so, he was a little surprised to hear himself say, in a voice that did not tremble, "Please, sir, I want some more."

The master turned very pale. He gazed at Oliver in astonishment. The boys were frozen with fear.

"What?" the master asked, blinking in disbelief.

"Please, sir," repeated Oliver, "I want some more."





meeting when Mr. Bumble burst into their room and exclaimed, "I beg your pardon, sirs, but Oliver Twist has just asked for more!"

The directors of the workhouse were horrified.

"For more?" asked a gentleman at the head of the table. "Excuse me, Mr. Bumble, but do you mean to say that, after he had eaten his bowl of gruel, he asked for more?"

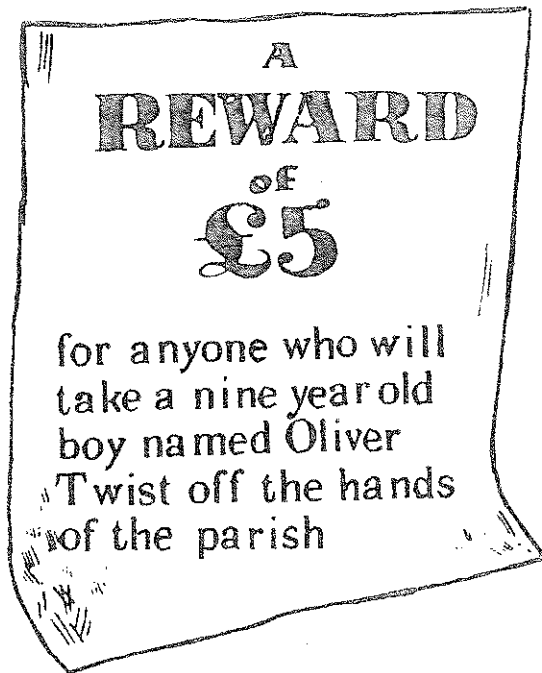
Suddenly, the master hit him on the head with his ladle, and grabbed him so that he couldn't escape—all the time screaming loudly for help. Mr. Bumble came running in, waving his cane in front of him.

The directors were having another

"He did, sir," replied Mr. Bumble.

"I said that boy was a fool," a man in a white vest remarked proudly. "Now I say that he will most certainly hang some-day!" Several of the other men nodded in agreement. They ordered Oliver to be locked in a room by himself.

The next morning, a sign was posted on the gate outside the workhouse. It offered a reward of five pounds to anyone

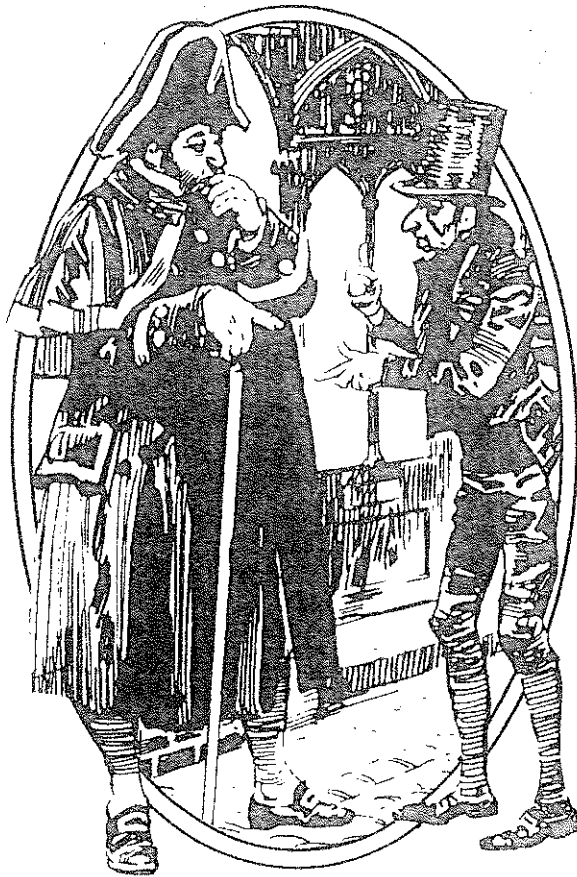


who would take a nine-year-old boy named Oliver Twist. In other words, any person who needed a boy to work for him could have Oliver—and five pounds.

Oliver found himself a prisoner in a dark room. At night, when it was so dark that he could not even see his own hand in front of his face, he would press against the stone wall. In a strange way, the hard stone comforted him. It seemed to protect him from the black nothingness all around him and made him feel less lonely.

Every morning, he was shoved under a pump, and icy cold water was run over him. At supper time, he was placed on a platform in the dining hall and beaten with a cane by Mr. Bumble. All the boys were warned that if they didn't behave, they would be punished like Oliver Twist.

# In the Shop



chapter 2.

While the sign about Oliver was on the gate, a man covered with black soot wandered past the workhouse. He pulled a donkey along beside him. The man was a chimney sweep, and he seemed troubled about something. In fact, he owed a good deal of money to his landlord and could not think of a way to pay it.

The donkey stumbled in front of the workhouse, and the man turned and kicked it again and again, muttering curses at it. Suddenly, his eye caught sight of the sign on the gate. He stopped to read it. He grinned and scratched his stubby face.

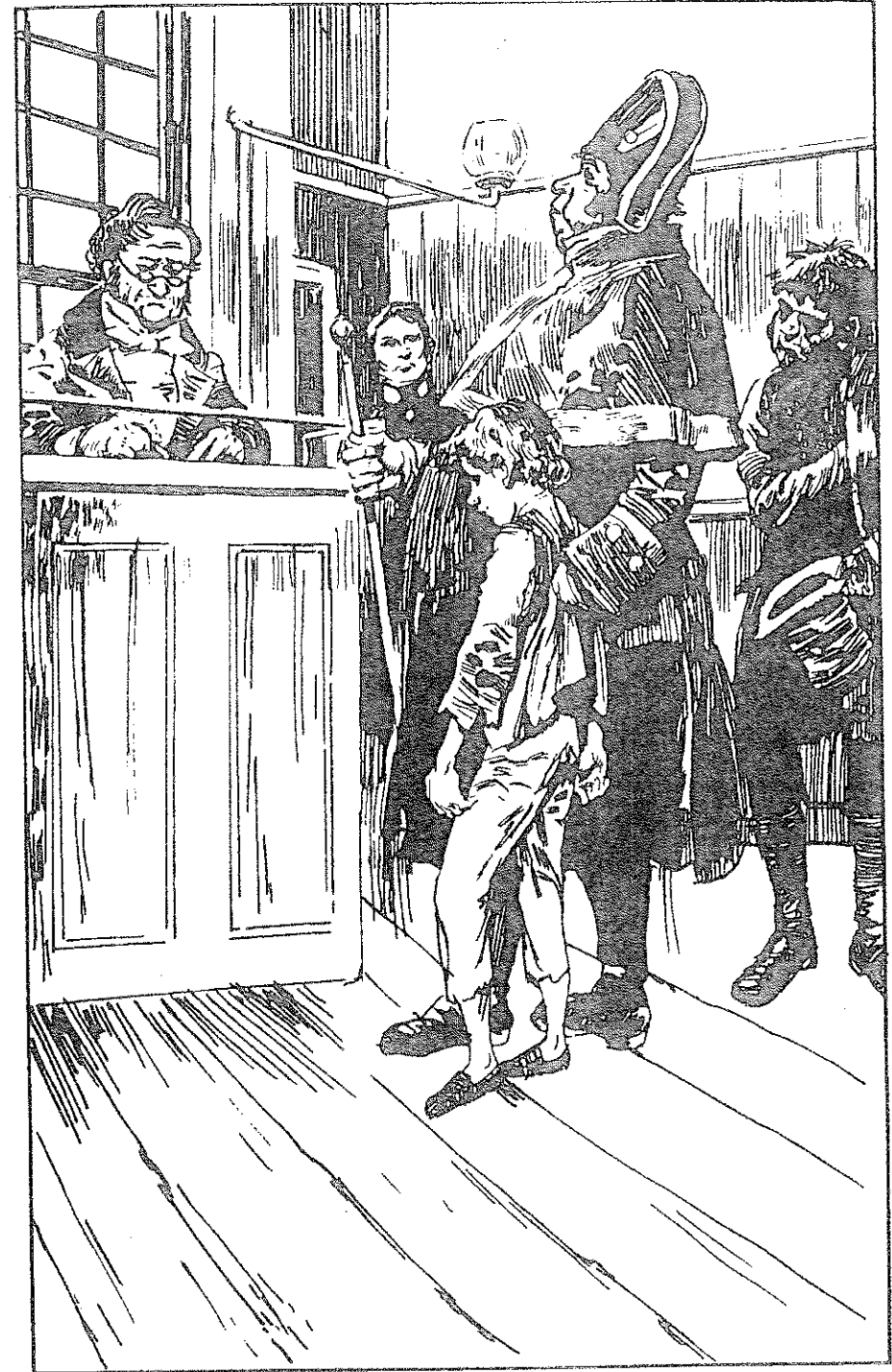


"Five pounds!" he whispered to himself. Just then, Mr. Bumble came and asked if he needed a boy to work for him. The man nodded.

"Then follow me," said Mr. Bumble.

Mr. Bumble took him to see the directors of the workhouse.

"It is very dangerous to clean chimneys," said one of the directors, when he heard that the man wanted to take Oliver Twist. "Many boys have become caught in



them and have smothered to death by smoke."

"Never mind," said the man in the white vest, "it's a good trade for a boy like Oliver Twist." The other men at the table laughed. They told Mr. Bumble to bring Oliver before a judge so that he could be signed over to the chimney sweep.

Later, in court, Oliver stood before a kindly judge who wore little round glasses on the end of his nose.

The judge asked the chimney sweep, "Will you take good care of this boy, sir, and teach him a trade?"

The chimney sweep grinned and nodded.

Oliver stared in horror at the man's cruel, ugly face. He was terrified to think he would have to work for him!

The judge had a pen ready to sign Oliver's papers, but he couldn't seem to find the ink. As he was looking for it, he chanced to raise his head and saw Oliver in front of him, wide-eyed with fear.



"My boy!" exclaimed the judge, leaning over his desk. "You look alarmed. What is the matter?"

Oliver clasped his hands together and begged the judge to do anything rather than send him away with that dreadful man. He said he would rather go back to the dark room and be beaten than go with him!

The judge turned to Mr. Bumble and said, "I refuse to sign this boy over to that

man. Take him back to the workhouse . . . and treat him more kindly!"

Mr. Bumble tried to find someone else to take young Oliver—with no luck. One day, he happened to meet Mr. Sowerberry, the undertaker, who said,



"Hello, Mr. Bumble. I have just measured the woman who died last night at the workhouse. I will finish making her coffin as soon as I can."

Much to his surprise, Mr. Bumble soon learned that Mr. Sowerberry wanted Oliver Twist to work in his house and shop. It was all settled in a few hours. Oliver was brought to the coffin-maker's door that very evening.

Mr. Sowerberry's nasty wife took Oliver into the kitchen and gave him some scraps to eat. She showed him a place under the counter in the shop where he was to sleep, then she left him.

Oliver looked around fearfully. A half-finished coffin lay on a table in the middle of the shop. It was so gloomy in the room that Oliver almost expected to see some frightful creature get out of it and walk towards him. Against the wall was a long row of boards, all cut into the same coffin shape. They looked like a row of square-shouldered ghosts to Oliver.



Oliver was awakened in the morning by the sound of someone kicking at the front door of the shop.

"Open the door, will 'ya?" cried a voice outside.

Oliver opened the door and found himself face-to-face with a big boy who seemed to have very small eyes for such a large head.

"You don't know who I am, do you?"



the big boy growled at him.

"No sir, I don't," replied Oliver.

"I'm Noah Claypole, you little work-house brat, and I work here! You have to follow my orders. Now get that broom over there, and be quick about it!"

Noah Claypole shouted at Oliver and kicked him when they were alone, but not when the owner of the shop was there. Mr. Sowerberry liked Oliver. He thought the boy had a nice face. He especially liked the look of sadness about him.

After Oliver had been there a month, Mr. Sowerberry decided to have him take part in the funerals. He gave Oliver a hat and coat to wear, and Oliver walked with Mr. Sowerberry on many occasions. This made Noah Claypole very jealous. He tried to hurt Oliver more often than before. Noah made Oliver miserable whenever he could.

One day, they were both in the kitchen being fed by Mrs. Sowerberry. When she left the room, Noah grabbed Oliver by the hair and pulled on his ear. He was very disappointed that Oliver didn't

cry. So Noah decided to make him cry another way.

"Hey brat," Noah said, "how's your mother?"

"She's dead," replied Oliver quickly. "Don't you say anything about her to me!"

Oliver's face turned red when he said this, and he started to blink rapidly. Noah thought he must be about to cry. He laughed and said, "You know, brat, it's not your fault your mother was such a bad one."

Oliver was enraged. He leaped up, seized Noah by the throat, and shook him until his teeth chattered in his head. Then, putting all his force into one blow, he knocked Noah to the ground. A moment before, he had been a quiet, mild boy. But the insult to his mother had made him fierce.

"Help!" cried Noah. "He's trying to kill me!"

Mrs. Sowerberry ran back into the kitchen. She was a nasty woman who



always preferred to think badly of other people. When she saw Oliver glaring down at Noah and heard Noah's cries, she screamed, "The boy is dangerous! It's a wonder we haven't all been murdered by him already!"

She tried to take hold of Oliver, but he struggled and fought against her. "Quick, Noah!" she cried. "Run and get Mr. Bumble from the workhouse!"

Noah got up and ran quickly to the gate of the workhouse. "Mr. Bumble, Mr. Bumble!" he yelled. "Oliver Twist has tried to kill me! Come at once!"

When they entered the shop, Mr. Sowerberry was there. He listened in astonishment to what his wife had to say about Oliver Twist.

"Perhaps he is mad!" Mr. Sowerberry said at last.

"It's not madness," said Mr. Bumble sternly. "It's meat!"

"What?" exclaimed Mrs. Sowerberry.

"You've over-fed him, madam!" said Mr. Bumble. "If you had kept him on gruel such as we fed him in the workhouse, this would not have happened. You've made him headstrong and willful.

He has spirit! A poor boy like him does not need spirit. He should always be humble and meek."

Now, although Mrs. Sowerberry had given Oliver a few scraps of meat, she had never over-fed him. But she smiled and said, "So! This is what comes of my being generous!"

Oliver was not given a chance to defend himself. Mrs. Sowerberry hit him

whenever he tried to speak. Mr. Bumble told the coffin-maker to whip the boy soundly, then starve him for a few days. Then he marched off.

Mr. Sowerberry sighed. He would have preferred not to follow Mr. Bumble's orders, but his wife insisted. After Oliver was whipped, he was left in the shop for the night.

When he was alone, Oliver sat for a

