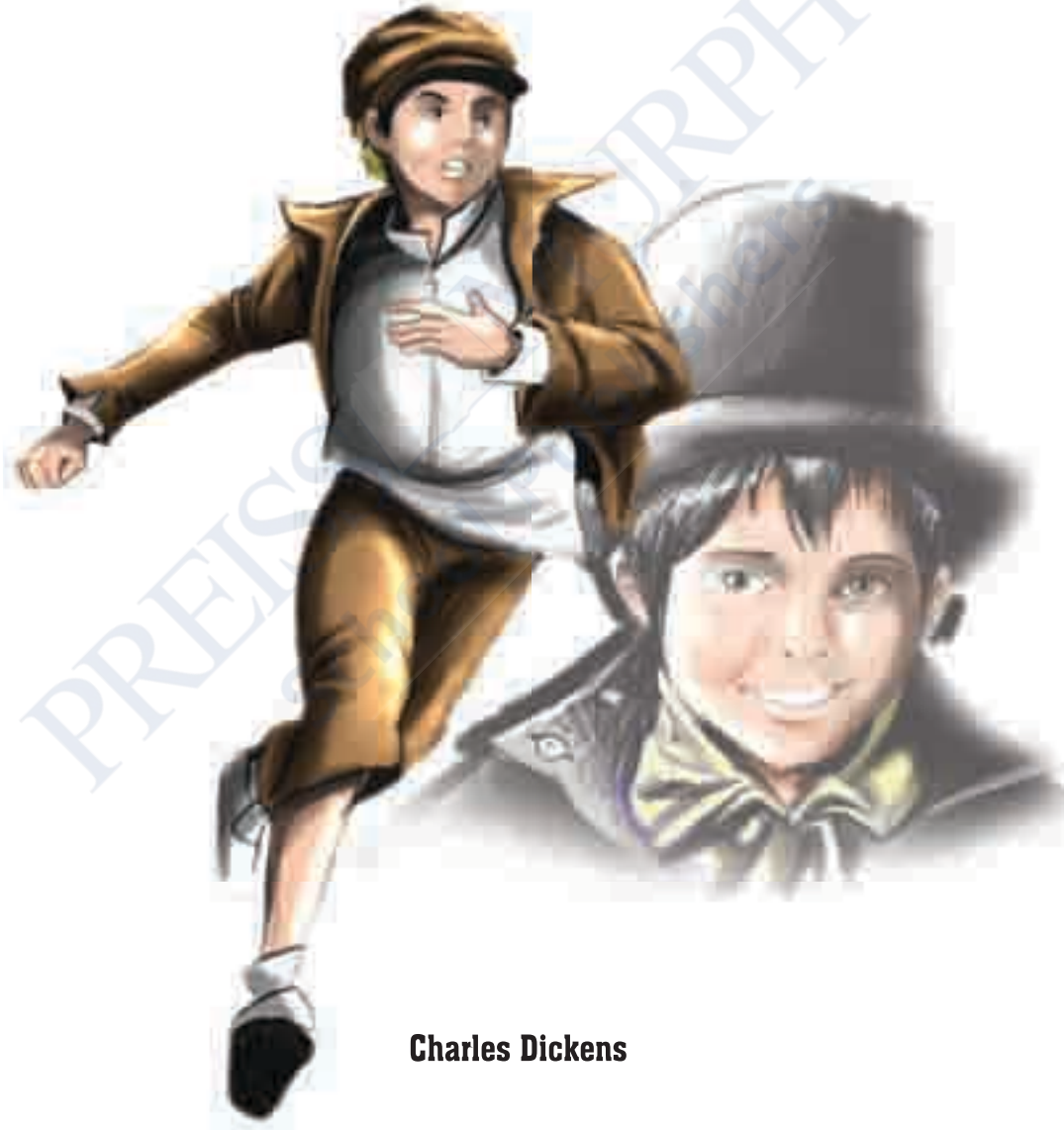


Classic Readers

OLIVER TWIST



Charles Dickens

OLIVER TWIST

Retold by Alfred Lee

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Oliver

The outskirts of London. A big old workhouse In a small, dark and damp room Oliver Twist was born.

A weak and skinny baby, wrapped in an old blanket, breathed heavily trying to give out his first cry. A doctor stood over the baby anticipating its death at any time. Then, and to the doctor's relief, the baby coughed and gave a loud cry. A faint smile appeared on the doctor's face as he knew that the baby was alive and well.

The young mother lay in bed gasping for breath after the agony of delivering her baby. She tried to sit up but was too weak and tired to do so. She quickly collapsed on her pillow again. Her face was as pale as the bed sheets that surrounded her.

"Nownow " the doctor exclaimed. "You need to get as much rest as possible".

"I want to see my baby before I die," said the young woman weakly.

"You must not talk of such nonsense, no more talk about death" said the doctor.

The young mother smiled faintly as she saw the obvious truth in the doctor's eyes. She knew that the doctor's words were only meant to make her feel better.

The young woman turned to the old woman who was nursing her.

"Please oh please let me see my baby" she pleaded.

The old nurse looked at the doctor who nodded his head in approval. The nurse picked up the newborn and brought him closer to his mother. The young woman smiled and ran a cold, pale finger over the baby's tiny cheek.

"Hello there. I'll call him Oliver." she said and kissed him gently

on the forehead.

She thanked the nurse and said no more. Oliver's mother looked around the room with blank, empty eyes and her head fell back. The doctor dashed towards her and to check her pulse.

"No pulse, it's all over, she's dead" he said sadly.

"Oh, poor dear" said the old nurse. "What is to become of baby Oliver, I wonder?" she said as she cuddled Oliver lovingly in her arms.

The baby looked up at her and gave her a tiny smile.

"You're all alone in this world you poor thing" she whispered to herself.

As he was getting ready to leave the room, the doctor turned to the nurse and asked, "Do you happen to know anything about the mother? Where did she come from?"

"A shame really" answered the nurse. "She was found lying in the street in a terrible condition. She almost bled to death" she added. "She had walked quite a long distance before she was found. Her shoes were worn out but, no one knows where she came from that's for sure".

The doctor shook his head and left the room. Oliver cried loudly. His cry was one of agony. Did Oliver cry of fear of an unpredictable future that lay before him? Oliver Twist was born.

After a couple of months, Oliver was sent to another work house. A small and ugly place where the orphans were treated more like animals rather than innocent children. The children were in terrible condition. They were all skinny and weak from lack of food. Hungry little eyes

stared at government inspectors who visited the work house every now and then to make sure that the children were well looked after.

The woman in charge of the workhouse was a wicked and sly person. Her name was Mrs. Mann. Mrs. Mann made sure that everything was nice and clean by the time the inspector came. The children were washed, and scrubbed clean but, most importantly, they were fed. Mrs. Mann paid attention to the slightest detail concerning both the work house and the orphans. The government inspector is normally greeted at Mrs. Mann's workhouse with a nice hot cup of tea and English cake. Satisfied with both Mrs. Mann's generosity, and her care for the children, the British Government provided her with a weekly allowance of seven pence. The money was meant to be used to improve the orphans living conditions. But, Mrs. Mann always said "The more you give those little beasts, the greedier they get". So she ended up keeping most of the money for herself and she bought a couple of loaves of bread for the poor young orphans with the rest.

On his ninth birthday, Oliver Twist was a weak and pale young lad. He was of average height but, was full of spirit. Accompanied by two other boys, Oliver spent his birthday locked up in the cellar. The three of them were beaten by Mrs. Mann and locked up in that awful cellar for the rest of the day because they dared to ask for more food.

At around seven o'clock in the evening and while Mrs. Mann was sitting in front of the kitchen fire, she heard a heavy knock on the front door. "Who could that be" sighed Mrs. Mann lazily, as she slowly got out of the chair and walked to the door. A second impatient knock was heard.

"Ohhhh.....I'm coming, I'm coming" shouted Mrs. Mann.

She opened the door angrily and was about to scold whoever knocked on the door, when she realized that it was Mr. Bumble, a work house official. Mr. Bumble was a fat and proud man who had a sense

of self importance.

“Mr. Bub.....Bumble sir.....what are you.....oh please come in” said Mrs. Mann surprisingly.

Mr. Bumble stepped inside, looked around and quietly sat down.

“I’m here to take young Oliver Twist back to the main workhouse. He is too old to remain with you” said Mr. Bumble coldly.

“Oliver Twist.....well he’s fast asleep sir. I’ll send him over first thing in the morning.” lied Mrs. Mann.

“Now.....woman..... Now.” shouted Mr. Bumble banging his fist on the kitchen table.

“Right away, Sir.....at once.” said Mrs. Mann as she dashed out of the kitchen to fetch Oliver.

Mrs. Mann quickly washed Oliver’s face and hands in a hurry and led him to where Mr. Bumble was waiting.

“This is Mr. Bumble, Oliver” said Mrs. Mann

Oliver bowed politely.

“Come along with me, boy, your days at Mrs. Mann’s workhouse are over.” said Mr. Bumble in his firm tone.

Oliver could have jumped for joy, but then he noticed that cruel threatening look on Mrs. Mann’s face. Oliver had to pretend that he was sad or else he could easily get another beating.

“No, Sir. No.....please don’t take me away from Mrs. Mann, she’s like a mother to me” said Oliver trying his best to sound true and honest.

Mrs. Mann smiled and Oliver knew that she was pleased with his dishonesty.

“The decision has been made Oliver, you’re coming with me.” said Mr. Bumble impatiently.

Mrs. Mann gave Oliver a cold kiss on the cheek and more importantly, a loaf of bread so that he should not seem too hungry when he got to the workhouse. Without another word, Mr. Bumble took Oliver’s hand

and led him out of Mrs. Mann's Workhouse. Oliver was relieved. No more Mrs. Mann. No more beating and most importantly, no more hunger. But little did Oliver know about the days and months to come.

Oliver's luck didn't change a bit. Life in Mr. Bumble's workhouse was very harsh indeed. Now Oliver had to work to earn his living. Oliver had a lot to do in the workhouse. He swept the floor, cleaned the hearth from the chimney ashes, watered the garden and sometimes even cleaned the toilets. And for that, he was given a daily ration of thin soup that tasted like boiled water, an onion twice a week and half a cake on Sundays. The boys were fed in a large damp mess hall with a huge



steaming pot at one end and Mr. Bumble at the other end monitoring the boys as they stood in a line in front of the pot waiting for their daily meal of hot soup. Standing there, Oliver held his bowl anxiously for he was very hungry today and couldn't wait to sit down and gobble down his soup. The bowls were never washed at the end of the day. The boys made sure to polish them clean as they licked the final couple of drops.

Three months had passed since Oliver left Mrs. Mann's workhouse. He and his fellow orphans suffered terrible hunger in silence. None of the orphans dared to ask for more food or else they would be severely beaten by Mr. Bumble who always went around the work house carrying a huge stick. Mr. Bumble never hesitated to use the stick on the boys to set things straight and to prove to everyone that – he – was in charge.

The boys were so hungry and desperate to have more soup, that one tall and strong boy threatened to eat the boy who slept next to him unless he has more food. He had wild hungry eyes and the boys fully believed him. So, one cold rainy night, the orphans gathered together and held a small council meeting. They had to decide on one boy to walk up to Mr. Bumble and ask for more food. Votes were cast, and it fell to Oliver Twist to walk up to the master after supper next evening and ask for more. Oliver went to bed that night trembling from fear of what might happen to him the next day.

Next evening, the boys gathered in the mess room as usual for their supper. After they had finished their soup, the tall, strong lad gestured Oliver to go ahead with what they had all agreed on the previous night. Shaking and almost in tears, Oliver slowly walked to the pot, held up his bowl.

“I want some more, please” Oliver said.

The cook stared at Oliver for a second or two.

“What did you say?” asked the cook in disbelief.

“Please sir, I'm still very hungry, I want more soup” pleaded Oliver.