

Oliver Twist

Charles Dickens



TIMELESS CLASSICS



| Contents |

1	A Hungry Orphan	5
2	Off to London.....	11
3	Oliver Meets Mr. Brownlow	19
4	The Boy Is Kidnapped	27
5	A Terrible Job.....	31
6	Old Sally’s Story	37
7	Oliver’s Recovery.....	43
8	Rose and Harry	49
9	A Plain Gold Ring.....	55
10	Fagin’s Plan.....	63
11	Nancy’s Sad Fate.....	69
12	The End of the Story	77
	Activities	87

A Hungry Orphan

In a certain town, which I have no reason to name, there is a workhouse. There, the poor of the town toil without pay. On a date that does not matter, Oliver Twist was born in this sad place.

At first, there was some doubt that the baby would live. But after a few struggles, he breathed, sneezed, and let out a loud cry.

Hearing this, the young mother's pale face rose weakly from the pillow. "Let me see the child—and die," she whispered hoarsely.

The doctor frowned. "Come now, my girl. You must not talk about dying yet."

Sally, the woman who had been helping, quickly hid the bottle she had been drinking from in her pocket. Then she said, "Bless her heart, no!"

The doctor placed the child in his mother's arms. She put her cold white lips to his forehead, looked around wildly, fell back—and died.

Sally and the doctor rubbed her hands and chest, but the young woman's heart had stopped forever. "It's all over," said the doctor. "It's a shame. She was a good-looking girl. Where did she come from?"

"She was brought here last night. They said she was found lying in the street. Where she came from, nobody knows," Sally answered.

The doctor raised the dead woman's left hand. "Ah! No wedding ring, I see. The same old story. Well, goodnight."

Old Sally dressed the baby boy. What a wonderful example of the power of dress young Oliver was! Wrapped in a fine blanket, he might have been the child of a rich man. But now that he was dressed in old, worn-out baby clothes, he fell into his place at once. He was a *workhouse child*, doomed to be kicked along through the world, looked down on by all, and pitied by none.

The tiny boy was sent to a baby farm, run by a Mrs. Mann. A wise woman, indeed, was Mrs. Mann. She was very clear about what was good for children and what was good for herself. She kept most of the food money for herself, and fed the children barely enough to stay alive.

As you know, dear reader, this kind of farming does not produce much of a crop. Oliver's ninth birthday found him a pale, thin child. Unlike many of the children who had come to the baby farm, however, he was still alive.

It was on this day that the baby farm had a most important visitor. It was Mr. Bumble, the parish beadle. Mr. Bumble was a greedy, fat man and quite convinced of his own importance as a minor official at the village church.

"Oliver is too old to stay here any longer," Mr. Bumble told Mrs. Mann. "He must go to the workhouse now." In all the years Oliver had spent with Mrs. Mann, not one kind word or look had ever come his way. And yet he burst into tears when he was led away by Mr. Bumble. The farm was the only home he had ever known.

The workhouse was a fine home for poor people. It gave them a wonderful choice. They could choose to live there and starve slowly. Or they could choose *not* to live there and starve quickly. People who lived in the workhouse got a meal of gruel—watered-down oatmeal—three times a day. Twice a week they were given an onion, too. On Sundays they got half a roll.

Oliver and the other boys were wild with



hunger. One boy began hinting that he might eat one of the others if he didn't get more gruel in his bowl. The other boys believed him and quickly held a meeting. They played a game of chance to decide who would be the one to ask for more. The miserable job fell to Oliver Twist.

That evening he went up to the master, bowl in hand. "Please, sir," he said timidly, "I want some more." The master was a well-fed, healthy man, but now he turned pale. He stared at Oliver, his mouth hanging open in shock. Then he grabbed the boy and yelled for the beadle.

The members of the workhouse board were

having a meeting when Mr. Bumble burst in. “I beg your pardon, sirs!” he said. “Something outrageous has happened. Oliver Twist has asked for *more!*”

“For *more?*” snorted one. “That boy will be hanged some day,” he cried. “I know it.”

Oliver was shut up in a dark room for a week. Every other day he was brought to the dining hall. There, he was whipped as an example and a warning to the other boys. A notice was put up in front of the workhouse. It offered five pounds to any citizen who would take Oliver Twist.

In the end, Oliver was given to Mr. Sowerberry, the parish undertaker. Mr. Sowerberry was a tall, thin man, dressed all in black. He took Oliver home to Mrs. Sowerberry, a short, scrawny woman. She ordered the maid, Charlotte, to give the boy some meat the dog hadn’t eaten. That night Oliver had a restful sleep among the coffins and coffin-making supplies upstairs.

In the morning Oliver met Noah Claypole, who also worked for Mr. Sowerberry. Noah was a 10-year-old charity-boy, sent by his mother to a charity school and dressed in a charity uniform. He was used to being called *Charity* and looked down upon by other boys. But now Noah had

the luck to find Oliver—an orphan—whom even *he* could look down upon. Oh, what a beautiful thing human nature is! The same fine qualities can be found in both a great lord and a dirty charity-boy.

When Oliver had been at Mr. Sowerberry's a few weeks, the undertaker asked his wife a question. In a timid voice, he said, "I want to ask what you think, my dear. Young Twist is a very good-looking boy. There is a most interesting look of *sadness* about him. I think he could come to children's funerals. It might look nice, don't you think, dear?"

The next day Oliver went out to a funeral with Mr. Sowerberry. He didn't like it at all, but Mr. Sowerberry told him that, in time, he would get used to such sad affairs.

Off to London

Noah Claypole, of course, did not like to see Oliver in this new position of importance. So, in the next few months, Noah made sure to treat Oliver as badly as possible. Charlotte, the maid, treated him badly because Noah did. And Mrs. Sowerberry was Oliver's enemy because Mr. Sowerberry was friendly to him.

One evening, Noah and Oliver were waiting for their dinner. Noah was bored. He decided to pass the time by tormenting Oliver. "How's your mother, *Workhouse?*" he began.

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

"I feel very sorry for you, *Workhouse,*" said Noah in a harsh, nasty voice. "But you must know— they say your mother was a real bad one."

"What did you say?" Oliver sputtered.

"A real bad one," Noah repeated. "And it's

better she died when she did. Or she would surely have ended up in prison—or been hanged.”

Red with fury, Oliver jumped up, knocking over his chair. He grabbed Noah by the throat and shook him until the boy’s teeth chattered in his head. Then, as hard as he could, Oliver struck out and knocked Noah Claypole to the floor.

A minute before, Oliver had been the sad, quiet boy that cruel treatment had made him. But now his eyes were bright and he stood up tall.

“Help! He’ll murder me!” cried Noah. “Come here, Charlotte! Oliver’s gone mad!”

Charlotte rushed in, grabbed Oliver, and beat him with her fists. “Oh, you awful little murderer!” she cried. Mrs. Sowerberry helped by scratching Oliver’s face. Noah got up and hit him from behind.

When Mr. Sowerberry came home, he was told of Oliver’s terrible attack. That night he gave Oliver a good beating indeed.

Oliver took it all without a tear. He refused to cry in front of them. But later that night, when he was alone, he hid his face in his hands and wept for a very long time.

Oliver made up his mind. He tied up his few bits of clothes in a handkerchief and waited for

dawn. At first light, he walked quietly out of the house and started off on the road to London.

Oliver saw a sign that said it was 70 miles to London. It took him a week to get there. One day a kind man gave him some bread and cheese. Another day a kind old lady gave him her table scraps. If not for the help of these two people, Oliver would have died on the highway.

On the seventh morning, Oliver limped slowly into Barnet, a little town near London. He sat, with bleeding feet and dusty clothes, on a cold doorstep. He was too tired to even beg.

Soon he noticed that someone was watching him from the other side of the street. It was the strangest-looking boy Oliver had ever seen. He was short, bowlegged, and had small, sharp, ugly eyes. His hat sat on his head so lightly that it seemed ready to fall off. He wore a man's coat, which came nearly to his heels.

The boy crossed the street and called out cheerily, "Hello! What's the row?" Oliver could see that they were both about the same age.

"I am very hungry and tired," said Oliver, trying to hold back his tears.

"You want grub? Then you shall have it, mate! It happens that I'm at a low-water mark

myself—but I'll fork out this time. Come on!"

The boy treated Oliver to some bits of bread and ham. As they ate, they talked. The sharp-eyed boy soon found out that Oliver was going to London but had no place to stay there.

"Don't fret your eyelids on that score," the boy said. "I'm going to London tonight. I know a jolly gentleman there. He will give you lodgings for nothing—if *I* introduce you, that is."

This offer of a place to sleep was too tempting to pass up. As they walked down the road, Oliver found that the young man's name was Jack Dawkins, but his friends called him the Artful Dodger. Oliver got the idea that his new friend might not be quite respectable. But he still wanted to meet the jolly old gentleman.

The boys got to London at about 11:00 that night. The Dodger led Oliver up one street and down another. Oliver hurried to keep up, thinking that he had never seen a dirtier place. Even the air was dirty! Oliver choked on the filthy odors.

Finally, the Dodger opened a door and whistled a signal. He led Oliver up a dark and broken staircase to a room in the back. The ceiling was black with age and smoke. A candle,

stuck into a beer bottle, burned on the table. Standing over the fire, frying some sausages, was a shriveled old man. His evil-looking face was surrounded by a mass of matted red hair. On the floor, several beds made of old sacks were placed side by side.

Around the table were four or five boys, all about the same age as Oliver and the Dodger. Oliver was shocked. They were smoking pipes and drinking—as if they were middle-aged men!

“This is him, Fagin,” said the Dodger. “My friend, Oliver Twist.”

The old man grinned and bowed. The other boys gathered around Oliver, kindly putting away his cap and the clothes he was carrying, and emptying his pockets.

They all ate supper. After that, Fagin gave Oliver something to drink. Soon after, Oliver felt himself being lifted onto one of the sack beds. Soon the weary boy fell into a deep sleep.

When he awoke, no one was in the room but Fagin. He was admiring a sparkling gold watch, then more watches, rings, bracelets, and all sorts of fine jewels! Oliver noticed that the man had taken them from a box hidden under a board in the floor.

Suddenly Fagin saw that Oliver was awake. He slammed the lid back on the box. “How long have you been watching me, boy? Speak up!”

“I just woke up, sir. I couldn’t sleep anymore. I’m sorry if I bothered you.”

Fagin’s manner changed completely. “Tush, tush, my dear!” he cooed. “Of course not. These things are my little treasures, Oliver. Some people call me a miser. But these things are all I have to live on in my old age.”

Oliver thought that indeed Fagin must be a miser. Otherwise, why would he live in such a wretched place when he had all those fine watches? It must cost him a good deal of money to take care of the Dodger and the other boys.

Soon the Dodger came back in the door with one of the other boys, Charley Bates. The four sat down to eat breakfast. After that, the boys played a strange game with Fagin. The old man would walk about the room. The two boys would follow him around and bump into him accidentally. Then they would quickly take Fagin’s handkerchief, watch, watch chain, and even his glasses case from his pockets. If Fagin felt their hands, he would say so, and the game would start over.

While they were playing this game, a young woman named Nancy came to see Fagin. Her hair and clothes were not very neat. She was not exactly pretty, but she had a lively way about her and cheerful rosy cheeks. Oliver thought she seemed like a very nice girl. After a long visit, everyone had something to drink. Then Nancy, Charley Bates, and the Dodger went out to work.

Oliver had no idea what kind of work they did—but he was eager to learn. And sure enough, after a few days, Fagin sent Oliver out with the Dodger and Charley Bates.

 **TIMELESS CLASSICS**

Oliver Twist

Oliver Twist is a penniless orphan. What chance has he got on the dangerous streets of 19th century London? Before long, he's taken in by a gang of thieves. The boy's future looks grim indeed...until a few kindly souls enter the picture.

 **SADDLEBACK**
EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING
www.sdlback.com

LEXILE HL570L

ISBN: 978-1-61651-088-6

