

Oliver Asks for More

'We name the new babies here in order from A to Z,' he explained when people asked. I named the last one Swubble. This one is Twist.'

Among other buildings in a town in England, there was a house for poor people who had no money and nowhere to live. This was called the **workhouse**.

Oliver Twist was born in the workhouse. His mother, a young woman, lay ill in bed. A doctor and an old woman stood by her side. She lifted her head from the pillow.

'Let me see the child and die,' she said.

'Oh, you mustn't talk about dying yet,' said the doctor.

'No, dear,' said the old woman. 'You are too young to die.'

The young woman shook her head and held out her hand towards the child.

The doctor put the child in her arms. She pressed her cold white lips to its face, and then fell back.

'She is dead,' said the doctor.

'Yes, poor dear,' said the old woman, as she took the child away from its dead mother. 'Poor dear.'

'She was a good-looking girl,' said the doctor, as he put on his hat and gloves. 'Where did she come from?'

'She was brought here last night,' said the old woman. 'She was lying in the street. She had walked a long way and her shoes had holes in them. Nobody knows where she came from, or where she was going to.'

The doctor **raised** the dead woman's left hand.

'The usual story,' he said. 'I see that she has no ring on her finger. She wasn't married. Good night!'

He went home to his dinner. The old woman sat down on a chair in front of the fire and began to dress the baby. She dressed him in the very old clothes used for babies who were born in the workhouse. The child was an **orphan**, born into a world which had no love or pity for him.

No one was able to discover who the baby's father was, or what his mother's name was. Mr Bumble, an important officer in the town, invented a name for the baby. He chose the name Oliver Twist.

workhouse /'wɜ:khaʊs/ (n) a place where very poor people live

raise /reɪz/ (v) to lift

orphan /'ɔ:fən/ (n) a child whose parents are dead

‘We name the new babies here in order from A to Z,’ he explained when people asked. ‘I named the last one Swubble. This one is Twist. The next one will be Unwin.’



At the age of nine, Oliver was a pale, thin child. He and the other workhouse boys never had enough warm clothes or food. They were given only three meals of thin soup every day. On Sundays they had a small piece of bread.

They were fed in a big hall. A large pot stood at one end of the room, and the soup was served by the **master**. Each boy had one small bowl of soup and no more. The bowls never needed washing, because the boys cleaned them with their spoons until they shone.

One day Oliver and his friends decided that one boy would walk up to the master after supper and ask for more soup. Oliver was chosen.

In the evening, the boys sat down at the tables. The master stood by the pot, and the soup was served. It disappeared quickly. The boys whispered and made signs to Oliver. He stood up from the table and went to the master, with his bowl and spoon in his hands.

‘Please, sir,’ he said, ‘I want some more.’

The master was a fat, healthy man, but he went very pale. He looked with surprise at the small boy.

‘What?’ said the master at last in a quiet voice.

‘Please, sir,’ repeated Oliver, ‘I want some more.’

The master hit Oliver with his spoon, then **seized** him and cried for help. Mr Bumble rushed into the room, and the master told him what Oliver had said.

‘He asked for more?’ Mr Bumble cried. ‘I cannot believe it. One day they will **hang** the boy.’

He took Oliver away and shut him in a dark room. The next morning a notice appeared on the workhouse gate. Five pounds were offered to anybody who would take Oliver Twist.

Oliver was a prisoner in that cold, dark room for a whole week. Every morning he was taken outside to wash, and Mr Bumble beat him with a stick. Then he was taken into the large hall where the boys had their soup. Mr Bumble beat him in front of everybody. He cried all day. When night came he tried to sleep, but he was cold, lonely and frightened.

But one day, outside the high workhouse gate, Mr Bumble met Mr Sowerberry. Mr Sowerberry was a tall, thin man who wore black clothes and

master /ˈmɑːstə/ (n) the man who is in charge of a home, people or an animal; a title that was used with a boy's surname

seize /siːz/ (v) to take something quickly and with force

hang /hæŋ/ (v) to kill someone by hanging them from their neck