OLIVER TWIST

Treats of Oliver Twist's Birth and Board

Among other buildings in English Victorian towns, there often stood a house for the poor, known as the workhouse. On the night this story begins, a young girl collapsed in the street and was carried into one. Her shoes were worn with walking and she was heavily pregnant. The next day, in the presence of a parish doctor and a drunken nurse, she gave birth to a baby boy. Oliver breathed, sneezed and let out a cry.

His poor mother hardly had the strength to hold him in her arms. She kissed Oliver once with her sweet, white lips, closed her eyes and died.

Her family could not be traced; nor could Oliver's father. Left a workhouse orphan, Oliver was given a surname by Mr Bumble, the parish beadle: "Twist".

The workhouse children were fed on three meals of watery gruel a day, an onion twice a week and half a roll on Sundays. They grew so hungry they used to worry they might eat each other. One evening, some of the boys cast lots to choose who would go up and ask the master for more gruel after supper. It fell to Oliver.

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In Which Oliver Asks for More

Oliver was nine now, but he looked much younger. His spirit was sturdy, though. Bravely, he held out his bowl to the plump, well-fed master, made his request – and got hit over the head with a ladle.

Mr Bumble marched Oliver straight before the workhouse governors. They were so horrified at his crime, they decided to get rid of him at once.

Mr Bumble put a notice on the workhouse gate, offering a reward to anyone who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish.

Then he locked Oliver up in a cell. Every day he came back to beat him. Every night, Oliver shivered without a blanket and sobbed bitterly in the lonely dark. There he stayed for over a week.

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