

Oliver Twist

By Charles Dickens

EPISODE SIX

NARRATOR: Oliver's ailments were neither slight nor few; but, at length, he began to get better and to be able to say sometimes - in a few tearful words - how deeply he felt the goodness of the two sweet ladies and how ardently he hoped that, when he grew strong and well again, he could do something to show his gratitude.

He was anxious too to find Mr Brownlow and to give his account of what had happen on the day he had been entrusted with the errand to the book-seller. Dr Losberne took Oliver to London, but the house was empty - a neighbour's servant informing them that Mr Brownlow had gone to the sold West Indies some six weeks before.

This bitter disappointment caused Oliver much sorrow, even in the midst of his happiness. Then after another fortnight, when the spring weather had fairly begun, preparations were made for leaving Chertsey for a few months in a cottage in the country.

It was a happy time and every morning Oliver went to a white-headed old gentleman, who lived nearby, who taught him to read better and to write...

TUTOR Well, Oliver, this has always been one of my favourite books and I'm inclined to think you'll like it too...

NARRATOR In the evenings, Rose would sit down to the piano and play some pleasant tune, or sing some old song which it pleased her aunt to hear.

So spring flew swiftly by. But then, came a heavy blow. Rose fell ill. A high and dangerous fever. Mrs Maylie sent Oliver to the inn at the near-by town with two letters: one should be sent straight to Dr Losberne at Chertsey, and the other letter...

OLIVER Is it for Chertsey, too, ma'am?

MRS MAYLIE No. It is for my son, Harry.

OLIVER Shall I take it, ma'am?

MRS MAYLIE I think not. I will wait until tomorrow.



- NARRATOR Oliver ran swiftly across the fields until he came to the inn. At length, the man carrying the letter set spurs to his horse and was out of the town and galloping along the road to Chertsey.
- Oliver, with a somewhat lighter heart, was turning out of the gateway when he accidentally stumbled against a tall man wrapped in a cloak, who was at that moment coming out of the inn door.
- OLIVER I beg your pardon, sir; I was in a great hurry to get home...and didn't see you were coming.
- MONKS Who would have thought it! Grind him to ashes! He'd start up from a stone coffin to come in my way!
- OLIVER I am sorry. I hope I haven't hurt you!
- MONKS Rot you! If I had only had the courage I might have been free of you. Curses on your head, you imp! What are you doing here? What are you? Ah, ah!
- NARRATOR The man fell violently on the ground, writhing and in a fit. Oliver gazed, for a moment, at the struggles of the madman (for such he supposed him to be) and then darted into the inn for help. Having seen the man safely carried inside, Oliver turned his face homewards, running as fast as he could.
- Late that night, Dr Losberne arrived and went to his young patient, Rose.
- LOSBERNE It is hard; so young; so much beloved; but so little hope.
- NARRATION Another morning. And then as evening drew near:
- LOSBERNE You must compose yourself, ma'am. Be calm.
- MRS MAYLIE Let me go, in God's name! My dear child. She is dead! She is dying!
- LOSBERNE No! As He is good and merciful, she will live to bless us all, for years to come.
- NARRATOR It was almost too much happiness to bear and Oliver, feeling stunned, took a long ramble in the quiet evening air.
- As he walked along the road he heard behind him the noise of some vehicle, approaching at a furious pace. It was a carriage and leaning out of the window was a face he recognised: Mr Giles, the servant of Mrs Maylie.
- GILES Master Oliver? What's the news?
- NARRATOR And leaning out of the other window was a face he did not know...

- HARRY In a word! Better or worse?
- OLIVER Better - much better, sir!
- HARRY Thank Heaven! You are sure?
- OLIVER Quite, sir. The change took place only a few hours ago. Dr Losberne says that all danger is at an end.
- HARRY You had better go on to my mother's in the carriage, Giles. I would rather walk slowly on, so as to gain a little time before I see her. You can say I am coming.
- GILES I will, Mr. Harry.
- NARRATOR Mr Harry: so, Mrs Maylie *had* sent for her son. Oliver glanced from time to time with much interest and curiosity at Mr. Harry. He seemed about five-and-twenty years of age and his countenance was frank and handsome.
- HARRY Mother! Why did you not write before?
- MRS MAYLIE I did; but, on reflection, I decided to keep back the letter until I had heard Dr Losberne's opinion.
- HARRY But Rose; my dear sweet, gentle girl! You will tell her I am here?
- MRS MAYLIE Of course.
- HARRY And say how anxious I have been and how much I have suffered and how I long to see her. You will not refuse to do this, mother?
- MRS MAYLIE No. I will tell her all. But Harry, I would have you consider -
- HARRY I have considered. My feelings remain unchanged, as they ever will.
- NARRATOR What, wondered Oliver, did this hurried conversation mean?
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- NARRATOR Oliver rose next morning - in better heart - and applied himself to the instructions of the white-headed old gentleman. When he returned to the cottage he laboured hard at his books in a little room at the back which looked into the garden and, beyond it, a fine meadowland and wood.
- FAGIN Hush, my dear!



- NARRATOR As the day had been uncommonly warm and he had exerted himself a great deal, gradually, Oliver fell asleep. There is a kind of sleep that steals upon us sometimes, which, while it holds the body prisoner, does not free the mind from a sense of things about it.
- Oliver knew perfectly well that he was in his own little room that his books were lying on the table before him and yet suddenly the scene changed: the air became close and confined and he thought, with a glow of terror, that he was in Fagin's house again. There sat the hideous old man, in his accustomed corner, pointing at him, and whispering to another man, with his face averted, who sat beside him.
- FAGIN Hush, my dear! It is he, sure enough. Come away.
- NARRATOR Was this the madman Oliver had seen at the inn?
- MONKS He! Could I mistake him, think you? If you buried him fifty feet deep and took me across his grave, I fancy I should know, if there wasn't a mark above it, that he lay buried there. I should!
- OLIVER Help! Help! Fag..!
- NARRATOR When the inmates of the house hurried to the spot from which Oliver's cries proceeded they found him outside, pale and agitated, pointing in the direction of the meadows behind the house and scarcely able to articulate the words, 'Fagin!'
- GILES Fay who?
- HARRY Mr Fagin. Oliver: my mother and Rose have told me your story. Come on, what direction did he take?
- OLIVER That. I missed them in an instant.
- HARRY Then, they are in the ditch! Follow! And keep as near me, as you can. You too Giles.
- NARRATOR So saying, Harry sprang over the hedge and darted off with a speed which rendered it a matter of exceeding difficulty for the others to keep near him. But the search was in vain. There were not even the traces of footsteps to be seen.
- HARRY It must have been a dream, Oliver.
- OLIVER Oh no, indeed, sir. I saw them both, as plainly as I can see you now.
- HARRY Who was the other?



- OLIVER The very same man I told you of, who came so suddenly upon me at the inn.
- NARRATOR The next day, a fresh search was made, and inquiries renewed at the village, but with no better success.
- Rose, meanwhile, was recovering rapidly, yet although cheerful voices and merry laughter were once more heard in the cottage there was, at times, an unhappy silence upon some there - even upon Rose herself - which Oliver could not fail to notice.
- At length, one morning, when Rose was alone in the breakfast room, Harry Maylie begged permission to speak with her. There were tears already in her eyes...
- ROSE Harry, you must endeavour to forget me.
- HARRY What!
- ROSE Not as your old and dearly-attached companion, for that would wound me deeply. But, as the object of your love.
- HARRY Rose.
- ROSE No, you can say nothing to alter my resolution. It is a duty that I must perform. I owe it, to others.
- HARRY You mean my Uncle and his wish for me to enter parliament.
- ROSE And to myself.
- HARRY Yourself?
- ROSE Yes, Harry. I owe it to myself and to your dear kind mother that I, a friendless, penniless girl, with a stain upon my name, should not give your friends reason to suspect that I had fastened myself on you like a clog, on all your hopes.
- HARRY Dearest Rose! If I had been less - less fortunate - if some obscure and peaceful life had been my destiny - if I had been poor, sick, helpless - would you have turned from me then?
- ROSE Oh, if your lot had been differently cast, then, Harry, I own I should have been happier. I must leave you now.
- HARRY I ask one promise. Once, and only once more - say within a year, but perhaps sooner - I may speak to you again for the last time.



ROSE It will be useless. But let it be so.

NARRATOR Rose extended her hand. But the young man caught her to his chest and imprinting one kiss on her beautiful forehead, hurried from the room.

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In another room, the parlour of the workhouse in the town where Oliver was born, Mr Bumble sat with his eyes moodily fixed on the cheerless grate. A paper fly-cage dangled from the ceiling, to which he occasionally raised his eyes in gloomy thought. A great change had taken place in the position of his affairs. Mr Bumble had married Mrs Corney and was now master of the workhouse.

BUMBLE I sold myself, for six teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a teapot. I went very reasonable. Cheap, dirt cheap!

MRS CORNEY Cheap!

BUMBLE Ah!

MRS CORNEY Are you going to sit there snoring all day?

BUMBLE I shall snore, gape, sneeze, laugh, or cry, as I wish such being my prerogative.

MRS CORNEY Your prerogative!

BUMBLE The prerogative of a man is to command.

MRS CORNEY And what's the prerogative of a woman, in the name of Goodness?

BUMBLE To obey, ma'am! Your late, unfortunate, husband should have taught it to you - and then, perhaps, he might have been alive now. I wish to God he was, poor man!

BUMBLE Oh! Ah! Ow! Ow!

MRS CORNEY No more with your prerogative if you dare!

MRS CORNEY Now take yourself away from here.

BUMBLE Certainly, my dear.

MRS CORNEY Out! Out!

- NARRATOR Mr Bumble darted from the room. He had fallen to the lowest depth of the most snubbed hen-peckery. All in two months. He walked up one street and down another until, exercise making him thirsty, he entered a public house where he ordered a gin and water. He joined a customer, tall and dark and wearing a large cloak.
- MONKS Were you looking for me when you peered in at the window?
- BUMBLE No, not that I am aware of.
- MONKS I have seen you before, I think? You were differently dressed at that time - and I only passed you in the street - but I should know you again. You were beadle here, once; were you not?
- BUMBLE I was: parochial beadle.
- MONKS Just so. What are you now?
- BUMBLE Master of the workhouse, young man!
- MONKS You have the same eye to your own interest that you always had, I doubt not?
- BUMBLE Eh?
- MONKS Now listen to me. I came down to this place, today, to find you. I want some information from you. I don't ask you to give it for nothing, slight as it is. Put up that, to begin with. Carry your memory back - let me see - twelve years, last winter.
- BUMBLE It's a long time. Very good. I've done it.
- MONKS The scene, the workhouse.
- BUMBLE Good!
- MONKS And the time, night.
- BUMBLE Yes.
- MONKS And the place - wherever it was that miserable women gave birth to puling children for the parish to rear and hid their shame, rot 'em.
- BUMBLE The lying-in room, I suppose?
- MONKS Yes. A boy was born there.



- BUMBLE A good many boys.
- MONKS I speak of one - a meek-looking, pale-faced boy, who was apprenticed to a coffin-maker and who afterwards ran away to London, as it was supposed.
- BUMBLE Why, you mean Oliver! Young Twist! I remember him, of course. There wasn't an obstinater young rascal -
- MONKS I don't want to hear of him - I've heard enough of him! It's of an old woman that nursed his mother. Where is she?
- BUMBLE Ah. Old Sally. She died last winter. There was one lady with her shortly before she died...
- MONKS What?
- BUMBLE She could, I have reason to believe, throw some light on your inquiry.
- MONKS How can I find her?
- BUMBLE Only through me.
- MONKS When?
- BUMBLE Tomorrow.
- MONKS At nine in the evening. I needn't tell you to be secret. It's your interest. Bring her to me there.
- BUMBLE What name am I to ask for?
- MONKS Monks!
- NARRATOR The man stood up, paid for the drinks, and strode hastily away.