

Oliver Twist

By Charles Dickens

EPISODE FOUR

NARRATOR Mr Bumble was seated on the top of the coach to London, accompanied by two shivering paupers who were to be delivered, by himself, to Clerkenwell.

Having completed his duties, he sat himself down at an Inn to take a dinner of steak and beer, followed by a glass of hot gin-and-water. Composing himself then to read the paper, his eye rested on the very first paragraph, which was the following advertisement:

VOICE *FIVE POUNDS REWARD! A young boy, named Oliver Twist, ran away or was enticed on Thursday evening last, from his home, at Pentonville and has not since been heard of. The reward will be paid to any person who will give such information as will lead to the discovery of the said Oliver Twist...*

MR BUMBLE ...or throw any light upon his previous history, in which the advertiser is, for many reasons, warmly interested.

NARRATOR There then followed the name and address of Mr Brownlow. And so it was that in five minutes Mr Bumble stood before the house in Pentonville. He was shown into the little back study, where sat the advertiser. Did Mr Bumble know where the poor boy was? No. Did he know of him? Yes.

It would be tedious if the story were given here in Mr Bumble's words, taking as it did some twenty minutes in the telling. But the sum of it was that Oliver was an orphan. That he had, from his birth, displayed no better qualities than treachery, ingratitude, and malice. That he had terminated his brief career in the place of his birth by making a cowardly attack on an unoffending lad called Noah Claypole, of Sowerberry's, The Undertaker and that he had run away at night from his master's house.

BROWNLOW Mrs Bedwin! That boy, Oliver, is an imposter! Never let me hear his name again. Never!

NARRATOR There were sad hearts at Mr Brownlow's that night. And, locked in at Fagin's lair, Oliver's heart too was sad, when he thought of his good friends. It was well for him that he could not know what they had heard, or it might have broken outright.

The mud was lying thick upon the stones and a black mist hung over the streets as Fagin glided stealthily along, like some loath-some reptile, to the house of Bill Sikes.



- SIKES Fagin - bring in your body. Bulls Eye - lie down, you stupid brute! Get us both something to drink, Nancy. Make haste! It's enough to turn a man ill, to see his lean old carcass shivering in that way.
- FAGIN About the house at Chertsey, Bill?
- SIKES Yes. The robbery? Wot about it?
- FAGIN Hush, Bill, hush! Somebody will hear us, my dear. When is it to be done, eh?
- SIKES Not at all. Toby Crackit has been hanging about the place for a fortnight and he can't get one of the servants to help. The old lady has had 'em these twenty years and if you were to give 'em five hundred pound they wouldn't be in it. The game's up.
- FAGIN And yet, it's a sad thing, my dear, to lose so much when we had set our hearts upon it.
- SIKES So it is. Worse luck! Fagin, is it worth fifty extra, if it's safely done from the outside?
- FAGIN Yes.
- SIKES Is that a bargain?
- FAGIN Yes, my dear, yes.
- SIKES Then, let it come off as soon as you like. Toby and me were over the garden-wall the night afore last, testing the panels of the door and shutters. It's barred up at night like a jail; but there's one part we can crack. 'Cept we'd need a boy.
- FAGIN A small boy?
- SIKES Yeah...
- FAGIN Perhaps Nancy would fetch us a jug of beer?
- NANCY Ha! You don't want any beer. Go on, Fagin. Tell Bill at once, about Oliver!
- FAGIN Ha! you're a clever one, my dear: the sharpest girl I ever saw! It was about Oliver I was going to speak, sure enough. Ha! ha! Ha!
- SIKES What about him?



- NARRATOR Two or three miles more, and the cart stops. Once again they walk in mud and darkness until they come to a solitary and ruinous house by the side of a bridge, the home of Toby Crackit.
- SIKES Toby!
- TOBY Aha! My pal! Who's he?
- SIKES One of Fagin's lads.
- TOBY Pistols for me? Cudgels?
- SIKES I've got 'em.
- TOBY Keys, lanterns nothing forgotten?
- SIKES Nothing. Take his other hand, Toby.
- NARRATOR It is now intensely dark. The church-bell strikes two. Sikes and Toby Crackit, with Oliver between them, turn up a road and after about a quarter of a mile, they stop before a detached house surrounded by a wall, to the top of which Toby Crackit, climbs in a twinkling.
- TOBY The boy next. Hoist him up. I'll catch hold of him.
- NARRATOR Before Oliver has time to look round, Sikes has caught him under the arms and in three or four seconds he and Toby are lying on the grass on the other side. Sikes follows directly. Then they steal cautiously towards the house. And now, for the first time, Oliver, well-nigh mad with fear, sees that house-breaking and robbery, if not murder, are the objects of the expedition. A mist comes before his eyes his limbs fail him and he sinks upon his knees.
- SIKES Get up! Or I'll strew your brains upon the grass.
- OLIVER For God's sake let me go! I'll never come near London, never! Oh! Have mercy on me and do not make me steal. Have mercy!
- SIKES On my life I'll -
- TOBY Stay, Bill! Pistols won't answer here. Say another word and I'll do your business myself with a crack on the head. Here, wrench the shutter open.
- NARRATOR It is a little window, about five feet and a half above the ground at the back of the house...



- SIKES Now listen, Oliver - I'm a going to put you through there. Take this light. Go softly up the steps straight afore you and along the little hall, to the street door. Unfasten it, and let us in. Take this lantern. You see the stairs afore you?
- OLIVER Yes.
- SIKES It's done in a minute. Directly I leave go of you, do your work.
- SIKES Hark!
- TOBY What's that?
- SIKES Nothing. Now boy go!
- NARRATOR In the short time that Oliver has had to collect his senses he has firmly resolved that, whether he died in the attempt or not, he would make one effort to dart upstairs from the hall and warn the family of the house. Filled with this idea, he advances at once, but stealthily.
- SIKES Come back! Back! back!
- VOICE What ho!?
- SIKES Come back!
- VOICE Who's there?
- NARRATOR A light appears - a vision of two terrified half-dressed men at the top of the stairs swims before Oliver's eyes...
- VOICES Oh!!!
- NARRATOR A flash, a loud noise, a smoke, a crash - somewhere - and Oliver staggers back to the window. Sikes has Oliver by the collar before the smoke has cleared away. He fires his own pistol after the men, who were already retreating and drags the boy up and through the window.
- SIKES Give me a cloth here! They've hit him. Quick! How the boy bleeds!
- NARRATOR Then comes the loud ringing of a bell, mingled with the noise of fire-arms, and the shouts of men and, for Oliver, the sensation of being carried over uneven ground at a rapid pace. And then the noises grow confused in the distance and a cold deadly feeling creeps over the boy's heart and he sees or hears no more.



- NARRATOR The next day, back at the workhouse where Oliver was born. Mrs Corney, widow and matron of the workhouse, is seated before a cheerful fire in her own little room with a cup of tea. The small teapot and the single cup awaken in her mind sad recollections of Mr Corney (who has been dead some five-and-twenty years) and she is overpowered.
- MRS CORNEY I shall never get another like him! Oh, come in with you! Some of the old women dying, I suppose. They always die when I'm at meals.
- BUMBLE Ma'am?
- MRS CORNEY Dear me! Is that Mr Bumble?
- BUMBLE At your service, ma'am. Shall I close the door?
- MRS CORNEY I wonder, would you - would you take a cup of tea? Do you take it sweet, Mr Bumble?
- BUMBLE Very sweet, indeed, ma'am.
- MRS CORNEY Oh! Mr Bumble!
- BUMBLE Just one little kiss.
- MRS CORNEY Oh! Who's there?
- AGED PAUPER If you please, mistress, Old Sally is a-going fast.
- MRS CORNEY Well, what's that to me? I can't keep her alive, can I?
- AGED PAUPER No, no, mistress, nobody can. But she says she has got something to tell, which you must hear. She'll never die quiet till you come, mistress.
- BUMBLE A very obstinate pauper, ma'am.
- MRS CORNEY Some of them can't even die without purposefully annoying their betters.
- NARRATOR The worthy Mrs Corney, bidding Mr Bumble to await her return, climbs the stairs to old Sally's room, scolding all the way.
- MRS CORNEY Well, Sally, my dear?
- SALLY Come here! Nearer! Let me whisper in your ear. In this very room - in this very bed - I once nursed a pretty young creature, that was brought into the house with her feet cut and bruised with walking - and all dirtied with dust and blood. She gave birth to a boy and died. I robbed her, so I did! She wasn't cold - I tell you she wasn't cold, when I stole it!



- MRS CORNEY Stole what, Sally?
- SALLY It! The only thing she had. She wanted clothes to keep her warm and food to eat but she had kept it safe and had it in her bosom. It was gold, I tell you! Gold, that might have saved her life!
- MRS CORNEY Gold! Go on, go on - yes - what of it? Who was the mother? When was it?
- SALLY She charged me to keep it safe. I stole it in my heart when she first showed it me hanging round her neck and the child's death, perhaps, is on me besides! They would have treated him better if they had known it all!
- MRS CORNEY Known what? Speak!
- SALLY The boy grew so like his mother, that I could never forget it when I saw his face. Poor girl! She was so young, too! Such a gentle lamb! Wait, there's more to tell...
- MRS CORNEY Be quick, or it may be too late!
- SALLY The mother whispered in my ear that if her baby was born alive, and thrived, the day might come when it would not feel so much disgraced to hear its poor young mother named. 'And oh, kind Heaven!' she said, 'whether it be boy or girl, take pity upon a lonely, abandoned, desolate child!'
- MRS CORNEY The boy's name?
- SALLY Oliver. The gold I stole was -
- MRS CORNEY Yes, yes - what? What?
- NARRATOR But old Sally has fallen lifeless on the bed.
- Outside the night grows bitter cold. In the ditch where Sikes has left him, Oliver, alive or dead, still lies, unmoving.