

CHAPTER TWO

*Oliver Becomes an
Apprentice*

As punishment, Oliver stayed inside his small, dark, cramped room for more than a week. He had committed the crime of asking for more food. A basic need that he often had been denied. During the day, Oliver cried bitterly. But during the night, he covered his eyes with his small hands to shut out the darkness. He'd crouch against the wall, which is the only thing he felt comforted by. Once a day, he was brought before the boys and flogged as an example. It was during the second week that

Mr. Gamfield, a chimney sweep, saw the reward notice. He was met at the gate by Mr. Bumble. "I want to take the boy in to teach him to be a chimney sweep," said Gamfield. "I need an apprentice." Mr. Bumble led him into the workhouse and straight to the council. "It's a nasty trade," said one of the men when Gamfield stated his intentions. "Young boys have been smothered inside of chimneys," said another. After much conversation, it was decided that Oliver Twist would not be permitted to go. Mr. Gamfield was angry. A few of the boys he had taken in had died. Were they holding this against him? "How about I take him for less? Say, three or four pounds?" The men shook their heads. "He's yours for three pounds. He's just the boy for you. He doesn't eat much. If he misbehaves, smack him around and he'll be fine."

The bargain was made and Oliver Twist was released from his small room. He was ordered to put on a clean shirt and given gruel and bread. Oliver wept, for he thought they wanted to fatten him up before they killed him. "No tears, Oliver," said Bumble. "You should be thankful. You're going to be an apprentice. You have no parents of your own. Now, you will have a kind and blessed gentleman help turn you into a man." Then he smirked at Oliver. "It did cost the workhouse money. Three pounds to be exact. Three pounds for a naughty orphan that no one has ever loved." Oliver sobbed. On their way to the council, Bumble warned Oliver to appear happy. "You must say you're looking forward to being a chimney sweep apprentice." Mr. Lambkins was on the council. He stared at the boy.



"I suppose he's keen on the idea of chimney sweeping?" "Lives for it," said Bumble giving Oliver a small pinch.

Mr. Lambkins looked at Gamfield. "You'll feed him and treat him well?" Gamfield nodded. "You look like an honest man," said Lambkins as he moved his glasses about. If his eyesight had been proper, he would have seen into the evil soul of Gamfield. "Oh I am," said Gamfield with an ugly leer. "I have no doubt you are," said Lambkins. He fixed his glasses more firmly on his nose and looked about him for the inkstand.

This was a critical moment of Oliver's fate. If the inkstand had been where the old man thought it was, he would have dipped his pen into it and signed the papers. Oliver would have been hurried off. But since his inkstand was not in front of him, he searched about. That's when his eyes landed on a pale and frightened face. "My boy, what's wrong?" Mr. Lambkins asked. Oliver burst into tears. He fell onto his knees. Clasp ing his hands together, he begged them to

beat him. Kill him. Send him back to the darkness. Anything but send him home with this dreadful man. Lambkins tore up the piece of parchment. No deal was struck. Gamfield was sent away and Oliver was brought back to his dark room. The next morning, a sign was once again hung on the gate. It declared that Oliver Twist could be theirs for the sum of five pounds. Mr. Sowerberry, the undertaker, was the next to inquire about Oliver Twist. Mr. Bumble led him in front of the board. It was decided that Oliver would be a help to this man. When called upon, Oliver appeared. He was told that he was to make coffins and wasn't allowed to complain or return to the workhouse. "If you do so, you will be sent out to sea," Mr. Bumble said. If that's the case, you could drown or get knocked about on the head." With a small bag, Oliver was led to his new home and workplace by Bumble.

Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry greeted the boy. Oliver bowed. "Dear me," said the wife. "He's so small." "He is small, but he'll grow," said Mr. Bumble. "We'll have to feed him, which will cost us more than he's worth," said the woman. She opened the cellar door. "Get down there and work, you bag of bones." She pushed Oliver down a steep flight of stairs into a stone coal cellar. It was the kitchen. A young girl sat at a table mending socks.

"Charlotte," said the woman, "give this boy the chips we set out for Trip. I suppose the boy will think his food is just fine." Oliver devoured the dog's food without hesitating. The woman was horrified that he had finished so quickly. She thought of all the future meals he would eat. She turned to her husband and asked, "What have you done?" Mrs. Sowerberry then turned to Oliver and said, "Now that you're finished,

come with me. You don't mind sleeping among the coffins do you?" She laughed as she pointed to a thin mattress under a counter. "I suppose it don't matter a bit because you have no choice in the matter." Oliver had no choice but to obey the evil woman.

