

Tales from Dickens.

BY
HALLIE ERMINE RIVES.

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"The Castaway,"
"Hearts Courageous,"
etc.

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Charles Dickens

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Oliver Twist

OLIVER TWIST was the son of a poor lady who was found lying in the street one day in a village near London, almost starved and very ill. She had walked a long way, for her shoes were worn to pieces, but where she was from or where she was going nobody knew. As she had no money, they took her to the parsonage, where she died next day without even telling her name, leaving behind her only a gold locket, which was around her neck, and a baby.

The locket fell into the hands of the matron of the parsonage, who was named Mrs. Bumble. It contained the dead mother's wedding ring, and, as Mrs. Bumble was a dishonest woman, she hid both locket and ring, intending some time to sell them.

The baby was left with no one to care for it to grow up at the parsonage, who wore calico dresses all alike and had little to eat and many whippings.

Mr. Bumble was a pompous, self-important bully who browbeat every one weaker than himself and scooped up every penny to his own content. It was he who named the baby "Oliver Twist." He used to name all the babies as they came along, by the letters of the alphabet. The one before Oliver was named Swallow; then came Oliver with a T; the next would be Unwin, the next Vilkins, and so on down to Z. Then he would begin the alphabet all over again.

Little Oliver, the baby, grew without any idea of who he was. When he was a year old he was sent to the "poor farm," where an old woman took care of orphan children for a very small sum apiece each week. This money was paid by the town, but nevertheless the old woman took good care to save the bigger share for herself.

He lived here till he was a pale, handsome boy of 9 years, and then he was taken to the workhouse, where, with many other boys of his own age or older he had to work hard all day picking oakum.

The boys had nothing but thin gruel for their meals, with an onion twice a week and half a roll on Sundays. They ate in a great stone hall, in one end of which stood the big copper in which Mr. Bumble ladled out. Each boy got only one helping, and the boys were needed washing, because when the meal was through, there was not a drop of gruel left in them. After each meal they all sat staring at the copper and sucking their fingers, but nobody dared ask for more.

One day they felt so terribly hungry that one of the biggest boys said that unless he got another helping of gruel he was afraid he would have to eat the boy who slept next him. The little boys all believed this and they cast lots to see who should ask for more, and it fell to Oliver Twist.

So that night after supper, though he was dreadfully frightened, Oliver rose and went up to the end of the room and said to Mr. Bumble, "Please, sir, I want some more."

Mr. Bumble was so surprised he turned pale. "What?" he gasped.

"Please, sir," said Oliver again, "I want some more."

Mr. Bumble picked up the ladle and struck Oliver on the head with it; then he pounced on him and shook him. When he was tired shaking him, he dragged him away and shut him up in a dark room, where he stayed a whole week, and was only taken out once a day to be whipped. Fagin, the Jew, was very angry, and a notice was posted on the gate of the workhouse offering a reward to anybody who would take poor Oliver away and do what he liked with him.

The first one who came by was a middle-aged chimney sweep, who wanted a boy to climb up the inside of chimneys and clean out the soot. But as a dangerous job, he burst out crying, so that a kind-hearted Magistrate interfered and would not let the chimney sweep have him.

Mr. Bumble finally gave him to the village undertaker, and there he had to mind the shop and do all the chores. He slept under the counter among piles of empty coffins. The undertaker's wife beat him often, and whenever he was not at work he had to attend funerals, which was by no means amusing, so that he found life no better than it had been at the workhouse. The undertaker had an apprentice, too, who kicked him whenever he got near enough.

All this wretchedness Oliver bore as well as he could, without complaining. But one day the cowardly apprentice began to say unkind things of Oliver's dead mother, and this he could not stand. His anger made him stronger even than his tormentor, who was more than a head taller, and much older than Oliver, and he sprang upon him, caught him by the throat and, after shaking him till his teeth rattled, knocked him flat on the floor.

His big bulging eyes were staring at Oliver, and he was being murdered, so that the undertaker and his wife came running in. Oliver told them what the apprentice had said, but that made no difference. The undertaker sent for Mr. Bumble, and between them they flogged him till he could hardly stand and sent him to bed without anything to eat.

Till then Oliver had not shed a tear, but now, alone in the dark, he felt so miserable that he cried for a long time. There was nothing to do, he thought at last, but to run away. So he tied up a few belongings in a handkerchief and, waiting till the first beam of sunrise, he unbarred the door and ran away as fast as he could, through the town into the country.

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There were so many people there that certainly he was something for a boy to do to earn his living, so he trudged stoutly on and before nightfall had walked 20 miles. He begged a crust of bread at a cottage and slept under a haystack. The next day and night he was so very hungry and cold that when morning came again he could scarcely walk at all.

He sat down finally on the edge of a village, wondering whether he was going to die, when he saw coming along the queerest-looking boy he had ever seen. He was about Oliver's age, with a snub-nose, bow-legs and little sharp eyes. His face was very dirty and he wore a man's coat, whose ragged tails came to his heels.

The boy saw Oliver's plight and asked him what the matter was, mixing his words with such a lot of strange slang that Oliver could hardly understand him. When Oliver explained that he had been walking a number of days and was very hungry the other took him to a shop nearby and bought him some bread and ham, and watched him eat it with great attention, asking him many questions—whether he had any money or knew any place in London where he could stay. Oliver answered no.

"Don't fret about that," said the other. "I know a 'spectable old gentleman as lives there we'll give you lodgings for nothing if I introduce you." Oliver did not think his new host looked very respectable himself, but he thought it might be as well for him to know the old gentleman, particularly as he had no more else to go. So they set off together.

It was night when they reached London, and it was so big and crowded that Oliver did not know where he was. He noticed, however, that the streets they passed through were narrow and dirty, and the houses old and hideously filthy. The people, too, seemed low and ragged.

He was just wondering if he had not better run away when the boy pushed open a door, drew Oliver inside, up a broken staircase and into a back room. Here, trying some sausages over a stove, was a shriveled old Jew in a greasy flannel gown. He was very ugly and his matted red hair hung down over his wild-looking eyes. In a corner stood a clothes-horse, on which hung hundreds of silk handkerchiefs, and four or five boys, as dirty and oddly dressed as the one who had brought Oliver, sat about a table smoking pipes like rough, grown men.

Oliver's guide introduced him to the Jew, whose name was Fagin, and the latter showed him to a table where he had some bread and ham, which he thought a queer job. Fagin grinned horribly as he shook hands with him and told him he was very welcome, which did not tend to reassure him, as if he were looking at a glass of something to drink, and as soon as he drank it he became very sleepy and when this happened on the following morning.

The next few days Oliver saw much to wonder at. When he woke up Fagin was sorting over a great box full of watches, and Oliver saw that whenever the Artful Dodger came home empty-handed, Fagin seemed angry and cuffed and kicked him and sent him to bed supperless; but when he brought home a good number of things he was very friendly.

Whenever there was nothing else to do the old Jew played a very curious game with the boys. The way they played it was that Fagin would put a snuffbox in one pocket, a watch in another, a handkerchief in a third; and he would walk about the room just as any old gentleman would walk about the street, stopping now and then, as if he were looking into shop windows. All the time the boys followed him closely, sometimes treading on his toes or stumbling against him, and when this happened on the watch, would slip a hand into his pocket and take out either the watch or the snuffbox or the handkerchief. If the Jew felt a hand in his pocket he cried out which it was, and then the game began all over again. At last Fagin made Oliver try and see if he could take something out of his pocket without his knowing it, and when Oliver succeeded he patted his head and seemed well pleased.

But Oliver grew very tired of the dirty room and the same game. He longer for his pocket and begged to be allowed to go out, so one day the Jew put him in charge of "the Artful Dodger," and they went upon the streets. Oliver wondering where he was going to be taught to make pocketbooks.

He was on the point of asking when "the Artful Dodger" signed to him to be silent, and slunk behind an old gentleman who was reading a book in front of a bookstall. You can imagine Oliver's horror when he saw him thrust his hand into the old gentleman's pocket, draw out a handkerchief and set off at full speed.

In an instant Oliver understood the mystery of the handkerchiefs, the watches, the purses and the curious game he had learned at Fagin's. He knew then that "the Artful Dodger" was a pick-pocket. He was so frightened that for a minute he lost his wits and ran off as fast as he could, but the Jew called him back and made him run all the faster. Everybody joined the chase, and before he had gone far a burly fellow overtook Oliver and knocked him down.

A policeman was at hand, and he was dragged, more dead than alive, to the police court, followed by the angry old gentleman.

The policeman's letter saw the boy's face, however, he could not believe it was the face of a thief, and refused to appear against him, but the Magistrate was in a bad humor, and was about to sentence Oliver to prison, when the owner of the bookstall came hurrying in. He had seen the theft, and knew Oliver was not guilty, so the Magistrate was obliged to let him go.

But the terror and the blow he had received was too much for Oliver. He fell down in a faint, and the old gentleman, whose name was Mr. Brownlow, over-

came with pity, put him into a coach and drove him to his own home, determined, as the boy had no parents, to adopt him as his own son.

Oliver's Adventures.

WHILE Oliver was resting in such good hands, very strange things were occurring in the house of Fagin. When "the Artful Dodger" told the Jew of the arrest, he was full of anger. He had intended to make a clever thief of Oliver, and make him bring him many stolen things; now he had not only failed in this and lost the boy's help, but he was also afraid that Oliver would tell all about the wicked practices he had seen and show the officers where he had lived. This he thought was likely to happen at any time, and unless he could get the boy into his power again.

Something had occurred, too, meantime, that made Fagin almost crazy with rage at losing him. It was this: A wicked man who went by the name of Monks came to him and told him he would pay a large sum of money if he could succeed in making Oliver a thief, and so ruin his reputation and his good name.

It was plain enough that for some reason the man hated Oliver, but cunning as Fagin was, he never had guessed why. For Monks was really Oliver's older half-brother.

A little while before this story began, Oliver's father had been obliged to go on a trip to a foreign country, where he died very suddenly. But before he died he made a will, in which he left all his fortune to be divided between the baby Oliver and his mother. He left only a small sum to the older son, because he knew that he was wicked, and did not deserve any. The will declared Oliver should have the money only on condition that he should never stain his name with any act of meanness, dishonesty, cowardice or wrong. If he did this, then half the money was to go to the older son. The dying man also wrote a letter to Oliver's mother, telling her that he had made the will, and that he was dying; but the older son, who was with him when he died, found the letter and destroyed it.

So Oliver's poor mother, knowing nothing of all this, when his father did not come back thought at last that he had deserted her, and in her shame stole away from her home, poor and lily-clad, to die finally in the poorhouse.

The older brother took the name of Monks and hunted for them, because he hated Oliver on his father's will, and wanted to do him all the harm he could. He discovered that they had been taken into the poorhouse, and went there, but this was after Oliver had run away. He found, however, to his satisfaction, that the boy knew nothing about his parentage or his real name, and so saved his mind to prevent his ever learning.

There was only one person who could have told Oliver, and that one was Mrs. Bumble. She knew because of the locket she had kept, which had belonged to Oliver's mother and which contained the dead woman's wedding ring with her name engraved inside it. When Mrs. Bumble heard that a man named Monks

was searching for news of Oliver, she thought it a capital chance to make some money. She went, therefore, to Monks's house and told him all she knew. These, Monks thought, were the only proofs in the world that could ever show Oliver who he was, and to make it impossible for him ever to see them, he dropped them through a trapdoor in his house down into the river, where they could never be found.

But Monks did not give up searching for bars and looked only on to the house-tops.

He found only one book to read; this was a history of the lives of great criminals and was full of stories of secret thefts and murders. For the old Jew, having tortured his mind by loneliness and gloom, had left the volume in his way, hoping it would instill into his soul the poison that would blacken it forever.

But Oliver's blood ran cold as he read, and he pushed the book away in horror, and, falling on his knees, prayed that he might be spared from such deeds and rescued from that terrible place.

He was still on his knees when Nancy came in and told him he must get ready at once to go on a journey with Bill Sikes. She had been crying and her face was bruised as though she had been beaten. Oliver saw she was very sorry for him, and, indeed, she told him she would help him if she could, but that there was no use trying to escape now, because they were watched all the time, and if he got away Sikes would certainly kill her.

Nancy took him to the house where Sikes lived, and the next morning the latter started out, making Oliver go with him. Sikes had a loaded pistol in his overcoat pocket, and he showed this to Oliver and told him if he spoke to anybody on the road or tried to get away he would shoot him with it.

They walked a long way out of London, once or twice riding in carts which were going in their direction. Whenever this happened Sikes kept his hand in the pocket where the pistol was, so that Oliver was afraid to appeal for help. Late at night they came to an old deserted mansion in the country, and in the basement of this, where they had kindled a fire, they joined two other men whom Oliver had seen more than once in Fagin's house in London.

The journey had been cold and long and Oliver was very hungry, but he could scarcely eat the supper that was given him for fear of what they intended to do with him in that lonely spot. But his was so tired he finally went fast asleep and knew nothing more till 2 o'clock in the morning, when Sikes woke him roughly and bade him come with them.

It was foggy and cold and dark outside. Sikes and one of the others each took one of Oliver's hands, and so they walked a quarter of a mile to where was a fine house with a high wall around it. They made him climb over the wall with them, and, pulling him along, crept toward the house.

It was not till now that Oliver knew what they intended that they were going to rob the house and make him help them, so that he, too, would be a burglar. His limbs began to tremble and he sank to his knees, begging them to have mercy and to let him run away and die in the fields rather than to make him steal. But Sikes drew his pistol with a frightful oath and dragged him on.

In the back of the house was a window, which was not fastened, because it was much too small for a man to get through. But Oliver was so little that he could do it easily. With the pistol in his hand, Sikes put Oliver through the window, gave him a lantern and bade him go and unlock the front door for them.

Oliver had made up his mind that as soon as he got beyond the range of Sikes' pistol he would scream and wake everybody in the house, but just then there was a sound from inside, and Sikes called to him to come back.

Suddenly there was a loud shout from the top of the stairs—a flash—a report—and Oliver staggered back with a terrible pain in his arm and with everything swimming before his eyes.

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He had just strength enough left to push open the gate, totter across the lawn and knock at the door; then he sank in a faint on the steps.

In the house lived a lady and gentleman, who were kind-hearted and saved Mr. Brownlow, who had rescued Oliver at the police station, and with them lived a beautiful girl whom they had adopted, named Rose. The servants, when they came to the door, made sure Oliver was one of the robbers, and sent at once for policemen to take him in charge; but Miss Rose, the moment she saw what a good-looking boy he was, and how she looked like a thief, made them put him to bed and sent at once for the doctor.

When the good doctor arrived and saw Oliver, who was still unconscious, he rubbed Miss Rose's forehead, and when the boy had come to himself and told them how he had suffered he was sure of it. They were both sorry the policeman had been sent for, because the doctor was sure that Oliver would not believe Oliver's story, especially as he had been arrested once before. He would have taken him away, but he was too sick to be moved.

Thus the time passed till the doctor told them that the boy had been accidentally shot and had come to the house for assistance, when the servants had mistaken him for one of the burglars. This was not exactly the truth, but it seemed necessary to deceive the policemen if Oliver was to be saved. Of course, the servant who had fired the pistol was not to be mentioned, and Oliver had to go away without arresting anybody.

After this Oliver was ill for a long time, but he was carefully nursed, especially by Miss Rose, who grew as fond of him as if she had been his sister. As soon as he grew better she wrote a letter for him to Mr. Brownlow, the old gentleman who had rescued him from the police station, but to Oliver's grief, she found that he had gone to the West Indies.

Thus the time passed till Oliver was quite well, and then Miss Rose (first carefully instructing the servant who went with them not to leave him out of her sight for a moment for fear of his being lost) took him with her for a visit to London.

Meantime there had been a dreadful scene in Fagin's house when Bill Sikes got back to London, and he found that that Oliver was lost again. They were more afraid than ever that they would be caught and sent to prison, and so they were all very nervous.

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Brownlow heard her story over again from her own lips.

But some one else was there, too, hidden behind a pillar where he could hear every word she said, and this listener was a spy of Fagin's.

Nancy had cried so much and acted so strangely that the old Jew had grown suspicious and had set some one to watch her. And who do you suppose this spy was? No one else but the cowardly apprentice who had helped Oliver until he ran away from the undertaker's house. The apprentice had finally run away, too, had come to London and begun a wicked life. He was too big a coward to rob any one, but little children who had been sent to the shop to buy something, so Fagin had given him spying work to do, and in this, being by nature a sneak, he proved very successful.

The spy lay hid till he had heard all Nancy said; then he slipped out and ran as fast as his legs would carry him back to Fagin. The latter sent for Bill Sikes, knowing him to be the most brutal and blood-thirsty ruffian of all, and the knowledge, as the Jew expected, turned Sikes into a demon.

He rushed to where Nancy lived. She had returned and was asleep on her couch, but she awoke as he entered, and saw by his face that he meant to murder her. Through all her evil career Nancy had been a honest woman, and would not have betrayed him. But he would not listen now, though she pleaded with him pitifully to come with her to some foreign country (as Miss Rose had begged her to do), where they might both lead better lives. Fagin had made him mad. As she clung to his knees, he seized a heavy chair and hurled it at her.

So poor Nancy died, with only time for a feeble prayer to God for mercy. Of all bad deeds that Sikes had done, that was the worst. The sun shone through the window and it was clear where Nancy lay. He tried to shut it out, but he could not. He grew suddenly afraid. Horror came upon him. He crept out of the room, looked behind him, and plunged into the crowded street.

He walked for miles and miles, here and there, without purpose. Whichever way he went he could not rid himself of that horror which the night came he crawled into a disused shed, but he could not sleep. Whenever he closed his eyes he seemed to see Nancy's eyes looking at him. He got up and wandered on again, despoiled of his money, his watch, and his dim and the haunt of thieves. Some of his old companions were there, but even they shrank from him.

He had been sent to a den, where there was full of people, all yalling for his capture. He barred the doors and windows, but they began to break down the shutters with sledge hammers, and he thought to let himself down on the side next the river and so escape. Here he fastened one end of the rope to the chimney, and making a loop in the other end put it over his head.

Just at that instant he imagined he saw Nancy's eyes again looking at him. He staggered back in terror, missed his footing and fell over the edge of the den. He had no time to draw the noose down under his arms, so that it slipped up around his neck, and there he hung, dead, with a broken neck.

Meanwhile Mr. Brownlow had acted very queerly so that Monks had got no warning. He had had men watching for the latter and now, having found out all he wanted to know, he had him seized in the street, put into a coach and driven to his own home, where he brought him face to face with Oliver.

The old gentleman told Monks he could do one of two things: Either he could confess before witnesses the whole story about the robbery, and Oliver would be restored to him his rights and name, or else he could refuse, in which case he would at once be arrested and sent to prison. Seeing that Mr. Brownlow was so kind about the matter, Monks, to save himself, made a full confession—how he had planned to keep his half-brother from his inheritance. And he also confessed what no one there had guessed; that Miss Rose, who had been adopted in her infancy, was really the sister of Oliver's dead mother—his aunt, indeed. This was the happiest of all Oliver's surprises that day, for he had learned to love Miss Rose very dearly.

Monks thus bought his own freedom, and cheap enough he probably thought it, for before he had finished his story, word came that Fagin the Jew had been captured, so that Monks was to be tried without delay for his life.

Oliver no longer had anything to fear, and came into possession of his true name and his fortune. Mr. Brownlow became his father, and he and Miss Rose were found guilty of murder and died on the gallows shrieking with fear. Monks sailed for America, where he was soon detected in crime and died in prison.

The wicked apprentice, who had really been the cause of poor Nancy's murder, was so frightened at the fate of Fagin that he reformed and became a spy for the police, and by his aid "the Artful Dodger" was captured. Fagin himself was found guilty of murder and died on the gallows shrieking with fear. Monks sailed for America, where he was soon detected in crime and died in prison.

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"SIKES PUT OLIVER THROUGH THE WINDOW."

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