

The matron of the workhouse picked two letters from the alphabet, O and T, and named the boy Oliver Twist. If the baby had known what his life would be like at the workhouse, he would probably have cried even louder. He was just one of many babies born there, often without names. The government gave the matron, Mrs Corney, a little money to feed each child. But Mrs Corney liked money much more than she liked the miserable children and she kept most of the money for herself.

By the time Oliver was ten years old, he was very thin and short, with a pale but sweet face. One day Mrs Corney called him to speak to him.

"You know you're an orphan – that you have no father or mother, and that you have been brought up by us here?"

"Yes ma'am," said Oliver, shaking with fear.

"You must be taught a useful trade," said the matron.

"Tomorrow morning, you will begin picking oakum." Picking oakum was taking apart old ropes from ships, so that the fibres could be reused. It was very hard work and Oliver's back hurt and his hands were covered in blisters all the time.



Working all day meant that Oliver was even hungrier by dinner time. However, Mrs Corney had found another way to save money. This was to add a lot of water to the soup. Every day each boy in the orphanage was only allowed one bowl of that watery soup. Oliver was starving. He picked up his empty bowl and went to the cook.

"Please sir, I want some more," he said.

The whole room fell silent. "What!" the cook finally said, angrily. Nobody had ever dared ask for more.

"Please sir," replied Oliver, "I want some more."

The man couldn't say a word. He hit Oliver on the head with the ladle and rushed out to Mrs Corney's office.

"Ungrateful child!" shouted the matron when she was informed about the incident. "That boy will be hanged one day. Lock him up in the basement!"

It was also decided that Oliver would be sent to work as an apprentice. Mrs Corney wanted him away from the workhouse as soon as possible.

The boy, however, had other plans – he was going to run away to London.

