



Oliver Twist asks for more

Nine-year-old Oliver is a resident in the parish workhouse where the boys are "issued three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week, and half a roll on Sundays." The workhouse is run by Bumble the Beadle, Limbkins is Chairman of the Board of Guardians for the workhouse.

The room in which the boys were fed was a large stone hall, with a copper at one end; out of which the master, dressed in an apron for the purpose, and assisted by one or two women, ladled the gruel at mealtimes. Of this festive composition the boys had one porringer and no more – except on occasions of public rejoicing when they had two ounces and a quarter of bread besides. The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with their spoons again till they shone again; and when they had performed this operation (which never took very long, the spoons being nearly as large as the bowls), they would sit staring at the copper, with such eager eyes, as if they could have devoured the very bricks of which it was composed; employing themselves meanwhile, in sucking their fingers most assiduously, with the view of catching up any stray splashes of gruel that might have been cast thereon. Boys have generally excellent appetites. Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months. At last they got so voracious and wild with hunger, that one boy who was tall for his age, hinted darkly to his companions that unless he had another basin of gruel, he was afraid he might some night happen to eat the boy sleeping next to him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age. He had a wild, hungry eye and they implicitly believed him. A council was held; lots were cast for who should walk up to the master after supper that evening and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist.

The evening arrived; the boys took their places. The master, in his cook's uniform, stationed himself at the copper; his pauper assistants ranged themselves beside him; the gruel was served out; and a long grace was said over short commons. The gruel disappeared; the boys whispered to each other and winked at Oliver; while his next neighbours nudged him. Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said, somewhat alarmed at his own temerity, -
"Please, sir, I want some more."

The master was a fat, healthy man; but he turned very pale. He gazed with stupefied astonishment on the small rebel for some seconds; and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralyzed with wonder, the boys with fear.

"What!" said the master at length, in a faint voice.

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

The master aimed a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle, pinioned him in his arms, and shrieked aloud for the beadle.