

OLIVER TWIST – CHARLES DICKENS

For a second or two, Oliver glanced up the street, and down the street, and over the way: impressed with the belief that the unknown, who had addressed him through the keyhole, had walked a few paces off, to warm himself, for nobody did see the big charity boy, sitting on a post in front of the house, eating a slice of bread and butter: which he cut into wedges, the size of his mouth, with a clasp, and then consumed with great dexterity.

“I beg your pardon, sir” said Oliver, at length: seeing that no other visitor made his appearance: “did you knock?”

“I kicked,” replied the charity boy.

“Did you want a coffin, sir?” inquired Oliver, innocently.

At this the charity boy looked nostrous fierce: and said that Oliver would want one before long, if he cut jokes with his superiors in that way.

“Yer don’t know who I am, I suppose, Work ‘us?” said the charity boy, in continuation: descending from the top of the post, meanwhile, with edifying gravity.

“No, sir,” rejoined Oliver.

“I’m Mister Noah Claypole,” said the charity boy, “and you’re under me. Take down the shutters, yer idle young ruffian!”

With this, Mr. Claypole administered a kick to Oliver; and entered the shop with a dignified air, which did give him great credit. It’s difficult for a large-headed, small-eyed youth of lumbering make and heavy countenance, to look dignified under any circumstances; but it is more especially so, when superadded to these personal attractions are a red nose and yellow smals.

Oliver, having taken down the shutters, and broken a pane of glass in his efforts to stagger away beneath the weight of the first one to a small court at the side of the house in which they were kept during the day, was graciously assisted by Noah: who having consoled him with the assurance that “he’d catch it,” condescended to help him. Mr. Snowberry came down soon after. Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Snowberry appeared. Oliver, having “caught it,” in fulfillment of Noah’s prediction, followed that young gentleman down the stairs to breakfast.

“Come near the fire, Noah,” said Charlotte. “I saved a nice little bit of bacon for you from your master’s breakfast. Oliver, shut that door at Mister Noah’s back, and take them bits I’ve put on the cover of the bread-pan. There’s your tea; take it away to that box, drink it there, and make haste, for they’ll want you to mind the shop. D’ye hear?”

“D’ye hear, work ‘us?” said Noah Claypole.

“Lor, Noah!” said Charlotte, “what a rum creature you are! Why don’t you let the boy alone?”

“Let him alone!” said Noah. “Why everybody lets him alone enough, for the matter if that. Neither his father nor his mother will ever interfere with him. All his relations let him have his own way pretty well. Eh, Charlotte? He! He! He!”

“Oh, you queer soul!” said Charlotte, bursting into a hearty laugh, in which she was joined by Noah; after which they both looked scornfully at poor Oliver Twist, as he sat shivering on the box in the coldest corner of the room, and ate the stale pieces which had been specially reserved for him.