



OLIVER TWIST~

A Family Musical

Adapted from the Novel by
Charles Dickens

Music & Lyrics by
MICHAEL LANCY

Book by
MICHAEL LANCY & CHUCK LAKIN

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OLIVER TWIST

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~ CHARACTERS ~

MR. BUMBLE: A portly man of middle age, Bumble fancies himself a man of some great importance and distinction.

MR. LIMBKINS: An overseer in the Queen's workhouse, a walking skeleton who is more character than reality.

LITTLE BOB: A smart orphan, almost the leader in the workhouse.

MRS. BUMBLE: A harsh woman and a hopeless flirt.

OLIVER: A young lad, more spirited than the others in the workhouse, also more trusting and innocent.

SALLY THINGUMMY: She could be young, or old, but much work and drink have taken their toll.

SOWERBERRY: Tall and gaunt, he is the Undertaker and therefore well-to-do for his class. He is also henpecked.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: The Undertaker's wife, portly and in charge at all times.

CHARLOTTE: The Sowerberry's daughter, constantly eating from a box of chocolates, terribly spoiled. About twelve years of age.

NOAH CLAYPOOL: A nasty, lower class boy of sixteen or so who would sell his mother for half a quid. He's also very stupid.

THE ARTFUL DODGER: A slick and smooth pickpocket, dirty but fed, he is the "artiste," Fagin's best boy.

CHARLIE BATES: Next in line after Dodger as a pickpocket and Fagin's second-in-command.

FAGIN: A crusty old man whose even temper can change in an instant to flashes of near madness. He seems to care for his boys, but one can never be too sure about him.

NANCY: A "professional" lady who is helplessly in love with a man who could easily kill her. She is always on guard, careful and in most ways, smart.

BET: Nancy's best friend, in her teens. Much smarter about life than Nancy, but unwilling to force her opinions on her.

BILL SIKES: Nancy's man, and mean as there is. Only slightly does he ever lower his guard and show even the slightest bit of kindness. Bill is a frightened man and trusts no one.

MR. BROWNLOW: Oliver's last living relative, a man of substance and high personal ideals.

MRS. BEDWIN: Brownlow's housekeeper and confidante.

INSPECTOR FANG: A bumbling police officer who is definitely not in charge.

~ THE PUB GIRLS ~

MARY: The sarcastic one
GERTIE: The overly friendly one
CLAUDIA: The stupid one
BERTHA: The smart one
SUSAN: The caring one

~ ALSO ~

WORKHOUSE ORPHANS: (*at least ten*)
FAGIN'S BOYS: (*at least six*)
LONDONERS, CONSTABLES, WORKHOUSE OVERSEERS

NOTE:

This production of OLIVER TWIST was originally presented on suggestive sets of platforms but with full costumes. Only those props and set dressings necessary to the story are mentioned in the script. Doubling of parts is completely acceptable, particularly with the orphans also playing Fagin's Boys, the Pub Girls included in the musical number "In London," etc.

OLIVER TWIST~

SCENE I

THE HOUSELIGHTS FADE TO THE SOUND OF “BIG BEN” STRIKING.

THE CURTAINS PART, REVEALING THE DREARY AND DARK INTERIOR OF THE QUEEN’S WORKHOUSE IN THE CITY OF LONDON. CENTERSTAGE IS THE OMINOUS FIGURE OF MR. BUMBLE, UPSTAGE ARE HIS OVERSEERS, INCLUDING MR. LIMBKINS. THERE ARE SEVERAL LARGE TABLES AND SMALL DYEING VATS. THERE IS ONE LARGE, STEAMING VAT, CENTER.

SONG: “WORK”

LIMBKINS/
OVERSEERS:

“Oooooo”

BUMBLE:

This is Victoria’s Workhouse,
for the paupers and orphans of London;
This is Victoria’s Workhouse,
we have a job we can’t leave undone.
Hear what I have to say.
Your duties you can’t shirk
Twelve hours every day,

ALL: You must work... work ... WORK!

BUMBLE POUNDS HIS STAFF IMPERIOUSLY AGAINST THE FLOOR AND THE WORK MARCH BEGINS. THE ORPHANS ENTER IN A SOLEMN MARCH, DRESSED IN RAGS, AND SOMBERLY GOING TO THEIR CHORES DYEING CLOTH, SORTING THE MATERIAL, MIXING DYES... ALL UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYE OF BUMBLE AND HIS OVERSEERS.

ORPHANS: Work, work, work, work—
From dawn ‘til day is done;

BUMBLE/

OVERSEERS: Always working.
ORPHANS: Work, work, always work—
Praying for some sun.
BUMBLE/
OVERSEERS: For some sun.
LIMBKINS/
OVERSEERS: Orphans, orphans, do your task!
Never stop, never rest;
Orphans, orphans, don't dare ask,
don't dare question, do your best.

AS THE SONG REPEATS, MR. BUMBLE TAKES HIS PLACE AS IF HE WERE A KING WATCHING OVER HIS SUBJECTS. AS THE REPEAT ENDS, HE SPIES A FEW OF THE ORPHANS TALKING AND HE POUNCES INSTANTLY:

BUMBLE: (SPOKEN) All right, what seems to be the matter? This cloth is in want of dyeing; now cease this endless chatter. Or, for dinner, you'll be crying!

HE EXITS, REGALLY, AS MRS. BUMBLE ENTERS AND SURVEYS THE WORK. SHE SEES ONE OF THE SMALLER CHILDREN RESTING.

MRS. BUMBLE: A little more sweat, you nameless brat! What do you think this is, a tea party?!?

ORPHAN 1: (CRINGING IN OBVIOUS FEAR) No, Missus Bumble, Mum... it's just... I'm so hungry ...!

MRS. BUMBLE: Don't dare speak to me in that tone, you little gutter rat!

MRS. BUMBLE RAISES A SWITCH TO TAKE TO THE CHILD, BUT LITTLE BOB, UPSTAGE, TOSSES A BUNDLE OF CLOTH INTO THE DYE VAT NEAR HER, SPLASHING MRS. BUMBLE. SHE SPINS AROUND TO FACE IN HIS DIRECTION.

MRS BUMBLE: All right, which one of you did that? (SILENCE AND VERY INNOCENT FACES) Oh, so "mum's the word," is it? Well, then, you shall all suffer for it! Get back to work! (SHE TURNS AND EXITS OFF WITH—)
We shall see about this!

MUSIC CONTINUES, AND...

ORPHANS: ... work, work
From dawn 'til day is done.
OVERSEERS: Always working!
ORPHANS: Work, work, always work—
Praying for some sun

OVERSEERS: For some sun.

LITTLE BOB: Bumble, bumble, Mrs. Bumble:
That witch, that evil cur ...

ORPHANS &
OVERSEERS: Quiet! Mumble! Mrs. Bumble,
She'll strap us all for sure.

THEY ALL LOOK AROUND TO SEE IF ANYONE IS SPYING ON THEM, THEN, VERY QUIETLY:

ORPHANS: Work, work, work, work—
From dawn 'til day is done;

OVERSEERS: Always working!

ORPHANS: Work, work, always work.
Praying for some sun.

OVERSEERS: for some sun.

ORPHANS: Praying for some sun

OVERSEERS: for some sun.

ORPHANS: Praying for some...

ALL: Sun.

MRS. BUMBLE SUDDENLY BURSTS IN, ATTENDED BY MR. LIMBKINS, WHO FOLLOWS HER AROUND LIKE A STOOPED-OVER AND SOMEWHAT CADAVEROUS PUPPY.

MRS. BUMBLE: (CHEERFULLY) Sun! That's what we need here, some nice, warm sunlight to warm their appetites for a hearty lunch. (TO LIMBKINS). Open the shutters and let in some light, Mister Limbkins!

LIMBKINS: Yes, mum.

HE TAKES A LONG POLE AND "OPENS THE OVERHEAD SHADES." BRIGHT SHAFTS OF YELLOW LIGHT POUR ONTO THE STAGE AND FLOOD DOWN ON THE ORPHANS. THEY MOVE INTO THE LIGHT, LOOK UP AS IF THEY'VE NEVER SEEN SUNLIGHT BEFORE.

MRS. BUMBLE: Thank you, Mister Limbkins. (TURNS TO THE ORPHANS) That's better, now, isn't it? How pretty... (WITH A CRUEL EDGE)... how pretty. (SUDDENLY) Mister Limbkins!?!

LIMBKINS NODS AND EXITS, KNOWING EXACTLY WHAT TO DO. MRS. BUMBLE THEN BEGINS TO CRUELLY TEASE THE ORPHANS. SHE'S DONE IT BEFORE, BUT THE CHILDREN'S HOPE ALWAYS MAKES THEM FALL FOR IT.

MRS. BUMBLE: Well now, what shall we have for lunch, eh? (THE KIDS RESPOND EAGERLY TO HER) How 'bout some nice buttered bread 'n' jam with kippers? (THE KIDS "YUM" IT UP) Oh... or how 'bout fresh hot chips with ham, sweet ham. Mmmm, ya can smell it cookin'! (THE ORPHANS SLOWLY GATHER AROUND HER, IN A NEAR ECSTASY OF ANTICIPATION) And for dessert... chocolate cake with ice cream... Mmmm, doesn't that sound good? But ya know what's better than that?

(LIMBKINS ENTERS UPSTAGE, PUSHING A CART WITH A LARGE KETTLE, BOWLS AND SPOONS ON IT)

MRS. BUMBLE: (CONT'D) Do ya, eh? (CRUEL AND SHRILL) Gruel! Now, get yer bowls 'n' line up! (THE ORPHANS START MOANING AND MUMBLING AND NOT MOVING VERY FAST AT ALL) Aw, not very enthusiastic, are we? (QUICKLY) Well, perhaps we'd better take it back to the kitchen. Mister Limbkins?

LIMBKINS: Yes, mum.

HE STARTS TO WHEEL THE CART AWAY AND, SUDDENLY, THE ORPHANS ARE VERY ENTHUSIASTIC: THEY LINE UP AFTER SCRAMBLING FOR THEIR BOWLS. LIMBKINS STARTS TO DISH THE SOUPY GRUEL INTO THEIR BOWLS.

MRS. BUMBLE: (VERY SATISFIED WITH THE SITUATION) Ahh, that's better. Nothing like a bowl of nice, hot gruel, eh?

SOME OF THE CHILDREN, UPON RECEIVING THEIR PORTION OF THE MEAL, SIMPLY STARE INTO THE BOWL WITH DISBELIEF ON THEIR FACES: NOTHING EDIBLE COULD LOOK THAT BAD! THERE IS GENERAL MUMBLING AND DISSATISFACTION WHICH ENDS VERY ABRUPTLY AS MR. BUMBLE MAKES HIS ENTRANCE. THE ORPHANS IMMEDIATELY STAND TO ATTENTION, SILENT.

MRS. BUMBLE: Are we ready?

ORPHANS: Yes, Missus Bumble.

MR. BUMBLE: (SINGING) For what you are about to receive, may the Lord make you truly thankful

ORPHANS: (NOT TOO SURE ABOUT THAT, SINGING) Ah-men.

BUMBLE RAISES HIS STAFF, HOLDING IT IN MID-AIR. ONE OF THE CHILDREN, DESPERATELY HUNGRY, BEGINS TO EAT, BUT IS STOPPED BY THE OTHER CHILDREN. THEN THEY ALL WAIT, LIKE RACE HORSES AT THE GATE. BUMBLE FINALLY BRINGS HIS STAFF DOWN WITH A THUMP. THE CHILDREN

IMMEDIATELY DIVE INTO THEIR BOWLS, EATING AS IF IT WERE TO BE THEIR LAST MEAL ON EARTH, MAKING MR. BUMBLE'S PERMISSION A BIT TARDY:

MR. BUMBLE: You may begin.

LIMBKINS: Will that be all, Mister Bumble?

MR. BUMBLE: No. Shut the windows, pull the sash. We don't want to let any more of... this—(INDICATES SUNLIGHT)—in!

MR. BUMBLE EXITS AND LIMBKINS SHUTS THE WINDOWS WITH HIS POLE. SEVERAL OF THE ORPHANS, BY THIS TIME, HAVE ALREADY FINISHED THEIR MEAL AND ARE JUST SITTING THERE. OTHERS HAVE REPLACED THEIR BOWLS ON THE FOOD CART.

MRS. BUMBLE: (FLICKS ONE OF THE ORPHANS WITH HER SWITCH) Don't dawdle! Put your bowls away now or you know what'll happen to you!

THE REST OF THE ORPHANS BEGIN TO REPLACE THEIR BOWLS. EXCEPT ONE: OLIVER. HE EMERGES FROM THE OTHERS HOLDING HIS BOWL AND APPROACHING MRS. BUMBLE, WEARING A VERY WORRIED EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE. LIMBKINS STOPS IN HIS TRACKS AND WATCHES, AS DO ALL THE ORPHANS. MRS. BUMBLE LOOKS DOWN WITH DISDAIN AT OLIVER.

MRS. BUMBLE: Well?

OLIVER: (SHAKING) Please, mum... I'd like some more.

MRS. BUMBLE: (SHOCKED) Whaaatttt!?!

OLIVER: (GULPING) Please, mum, may I have some... more?

MRS. BUMBLE: More?! (TO LIMBKINS, IN DISBELIEF) More? (BACK TO OLIVER) More!

OLIVER SLOWLY NODS HIS HEAD. MRS. BUMBLE KNOCKS THE BOWL FROM HIS HANDS, GRABBING HIM BY THE EAR AND NEARLY LIFTING HIM OFF THE GROUND.

MRS. BUMBLE: Why, you greedy-guts little beggar!

OLIVER: Owwww!!!

MRS. BUMBLE: After all the parish has done for you! (OLIVER CONTINUES HIS PROTEST) Put clothes on your back and food in your stomach and you've got the gall to

ask for more?!? (OLIVER YANKS AWAY FROM HER, TURNS TO RUN OFF, BUT IMMEDIATELY RUNS INTO LIMBKINS, WHO GRABS HIM AND TURNS HIM AROUND TO FACE THE MUSIC) What's your name?

OLIVER: Oliver.

MRS. BUMBLE: (NOT RECOGNIZING IT) Oliver?

LIMBKINS: Oliver Twist, mum. Yer husband named him hisself.

MRS. BUMBLE: (CROSSING TO THEM) Well, Master Twist, you'll get more, all right. A good, sound thrashing'll improve your temperament!

SHE IS ABOUT TO DELIVER A WHACK AT HIM, HER ARM ALREADY RAISED FOR A REAL EAR-RINGER, WHEN SALLY THINGUMMY SAUNTERS INTO THE WORKHOUSE. AT THIS PARTICULAR MOMENT, SHE IS LIVING UP TO HER REPUTATION AS A DRUNK, WEAVING ACROSS THE STAGE IN AN UNSTEADY LINE AND HAPPY AS A LARK.

SALLY: Why, Missus Bumble, it's so nice to see you again!

MRS. BUMBLE: (TURNING HER ATTENTION AWAY FROM OLIVER) Sally. Sally Thingummy, you drunken sot. What 're you doin' here? Get out!

SALLY: (CROSSING TO HER) Now, now, is that any way to treat good ole Sally, the most faithful employee of the Queen's Workhouse?

MRS. BUMBLE: You mean, ex-employee. When Mister Bumble fired you, I thought we'd be rid of you and— (PATS SALLY'S APRON POCKET) your bottle once-and-for-all.

SALLY: (UNTOUCHED BY IT) Tsk, tsk... no appreciation for me—(LOUD BELCH) talents. (HAS WORKED PAST MRS. BUMBLE AND NOW PATS OLIVER ON THE HEAD) Hello, dear...

MRS. BUMBLE: (SNEERS) What talents?

SALLY: (TURNING TO HER) Oooo... sarcasm, is it? That's a sign of a nasty personality. "Tis the mirror of one's own image."

MRS. BUMBLE: (ABOUT TO ANSWER, THEN REALIZES THERE'S NOTHING TO ANSWER) You never did make a bit of sense. (RECOVERS) Better leave now.

MRS. BUMBLE TURNS TO WALK AWAY, BUT SALLY TAKES HER BY THE ARM.

SALLY: Not before we discuss a certain matter.

MRS. BUMBLE: (IRRITATED) What matter?

SALLY: (COOLY) Why, a certain gentleman friend of yours... the one Mister Bumble doesn't know about?

MRS. BUMBLE: (WITH A SUDDEN, PANICKY SMILE AND TOTALLY TRANSPARENT FRIENDLINESS) On second thought, perhaps a cup of tea with an old friend would be nice.

THE ORPHANS REACT TO THIS, AS THEY'VE BEEN WATCHING THE WHOLE SCENE WITH MORE THAN PASSING INTEREST. THEY LIKE SALLY AND SEEM TO REALIZE THAT SALLY HAS COME TO THE WORKHOUSE TO CREATE PROBLEMS FOR MRS. BUMBLE.

SALLY: (OVERLY KIND) I thought you'd reconsider.

MRS. BUMBLE: (ANXIOUS TO GET HER OUT OF EARSHOT) It's the least I can do. (STARTS TO ESCORT HER OUT; TURNS TO LIMBKINS) Mister Limbkins, we can continue our discussion with Master Twist—(GIVES OLIVER A VENOMOUS LOOK) later... (TO SALLY) Come along, you dear, old thing.

THEY EXIT, FOLLOWED BY LIMBKINS WHEELING OUT THE GRUEL CART. WHEN THEY'RE GONE, ALL THE ORPHANS HEAVE A SIGH OF RELIEF AND GATHER AROUND OLIVER, WHO'S MORE RELIEVED THAN ANY OF THEM.

BOY 1: Shoo, Oliver... ya almost bought it on that one.

OLIVER: (NODS) Thought I was a goner, for sure.

BOY 2: She certainly is a mean one.

LITTLE BOB: The devil hisself could take lessons from ole Missus Bumble!

BOY 3: (SPITS) The ole rat bag!

LITTLE BOB: Thank goodness for Sally. She's what saved you, Oliver.

OLIVER: Well, whoever she is, I was glad she showed up when she did.

LITTLE BOB: Ya don't know Sally? Why, she's the only good person in this whole place!

OTHERS AGREE. SUDDENLY THERE IS A LOUD RAP ON THE WORKHOUSE DOOR,

FOLLOWED BY THREE VERY LOUD AND QUICK SNEEZES. THE BOYS ALL EXCHANGE PERPLEXED LOOKS AS BOY 5 RUNS TO THE DOOR TO SEE WHAT THE CAUSE IS.

BOY 4: (CONCERNED) What was that?

BOY 1: (THE SMALLEST OF THE ORPHANS) Sounded like an elie-phant!

BOY 2: (SARCASTICALLY) Knockin' at the bleedin' door?

BOY 5: (RUNNING BACK) Hey, it's old man Sowerberry, the undertaker!

ALL THE ORPHANS LOOK AT EACH OTHER AS IF SOWERBERRY MIGHT HAVE COME FOR ONE OF THEM.

OLIVER: (ANXIOUSLY) Undertaker? Missus Bumble wouldn't have me buried, would she?

LITTLE BOB: (SHAKING HIS HEAD) Nah, not alive, anyway.

OLIVER: Oh, dear.

THERE IS ANOTHER LOUD KNOCK AT THE DOOR, FOLLOWED BY SNEEZES.

LITTLE BOB: We'd better hide Oliver, just in case!

THE ORPHANS SHOUT THEIR AGREEMENT AND ARE ABOUT TO RUN OFFSTAGE WITH OLIVER IN TOW, BUT DO A QUICK ABOUT-FACE AND HIDE THE BOY BY PUSHING HIM DOWN AND SITTING ON HIM JUST AS MR. LIMBKINS ENTERS TO ANSWER THE DOOR. AS LIMBKINS CROSSES, HE CASTS A SUSPICIOUS EYE AT THE BOYS, THEN ANSWERS THE DOOR.

LIMBKINS: Ah, Mister Sowerberry, sir... (HE ESCORTS MR. AND MRS. SOWERBERRY TO CENTERSTAGE) If you'll wait right here, I'll tell the Bumbles that you have arrived.

SOWERBERRY: Thank you, Limbkins.

LIMBKINS EXITS. THERE IS AN AWKWARD SILENCE. SOWERBERRY, WHO IS AFFLICTED WITH, AMONG OTHER THINGS, A NERVOUS TWITCH, TAKES A PINCH OF SNUFF AND SNEEZES LOUDLY, MAKING THE BOYS JUMP. SOWERBERRY LOOKS AT THEM WITH A COLD STARE; THE MAN HAS ALL THE WARMTH OF A HEALING SCAB...

SOWERBERRY: (FAINTLY OMINOUS) Hello... boys.

THEY QUIVER. MRS. SOWERBERRY SIGHS, MARCHES PAST HER HUSBAND, AND BEGINS TO EXAMINE THE ORPHANS. SHE IS OBVIOUSLY SEARCHING FOR A PARTICULAR QUALITY IN ONE OF THEM.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: Now, which one shall it be? (TO THE FIRST) Nah, too small. (THE CHILDREN LEAN DOWN, TRYING TO LOOK SMALL. SHE APPROACHES THE NEXT ONE) N-n-noo... the face, the face is not sad enough. (THE ORPHANS ALL PUT ON BIG, WIDE, FAKE SMILES. SHE TURNS) Disgusting!

SOWERBERRY: What is, my dear?

MRS SOWERBERRY: These boys. (CROSSES TO MR. S) Whatever made you think we could find the right child in this place?

MRS BUMBLE: (ENTERING) Ahh... Mr. Sowerberry, so nice to see you.

SHE OPENLY FLIRTS WITH HIM, TO THE DEGREE THAT THE AUDIENCE MAY REALIZE THAT THIS MUST BE THE "GENTLEMAN" TO WHOM SALLY THINGUMMY WAS REFERRING.

SOWERBERRY: Charmed, Madam.

MRS. BUMBLE: Nice, indeed... and I hope you've been well these last few days?

SOWERBERRY: (SOMEWHAT NERVOUSLY) Yes, I've been quite well, considering the nip in the air. (NODS BEHIND MRS. BUMBLE)

MRS. BUMBLE: Winter's come early this year, without a doubt. (TURNS, AND NOTICES MRS. SOWERBERRY) Oh. Hello, Missus Sowerberry. (CATTY) I didn't recognize you... 'Ave you been ill?

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (FLATLY) Not 'til just now.

MRS BUMBLE: (IGNORING HER AND INCHING CLOSER TO SOWERBERRY) Well, sir, what can we do for you? (POURING IT ON) It's not every day we have a man of substance visit us.

SOWERBERRY: Well, you see, we—

SALLY STUMBLES BACK ON STAGE, STOPS TO DO A TAKE AT MRS. BUMBLE AND MR. SOWERBERRY, THEN STAGGERS HER WAY TOWARD THEM.

SALLY: Ah, there they are now, the two love birds. They're so cute, just the picture of ...

MRS BUMBLE: (HORRIFIED) Sally!

MRS. SOWERBERRY: Who's this drunken sot?

MRS. BUMBLE: This is—

SALLY: (HAPPILY AND DRUNKENLY VEERING OFF TOWARD MRS. S) Me name's Sally Ginthummy... uh... Thingummy. (BEGINS SHAKING MRS. S'S RELUCTANTLY OFFERED HAND LIKE IT WAS A PUMP HANDLE). Glad to meet ya, I'm sure!: (NODS BACK TOWARD MR. S). Are you his mother, then?: (SOME OF THE ORPHANS STIFLE LAUGHS).

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (OFFENDED) Well!!

MRS. BUMBLE: That will be enough, Sally!

THROUGH ALL THIS, SALLY'S HAND-SHAKING HAS CONTINUED WITH NO NOTICEABLE REDUCTION IN FORCE.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: Why I am being subjected to this sort of rabble, I cannot tell. (SUDDENLY) And let go of my hand!

MRS. SOWERBERRY PULLS FORCEFULLY LOOSE FROM SALLY'S GRIP AS IF SHE'D JUST BEEN TOUCHED BY A LEPER. MR. SOWERBERRY HAS CROSSED TO THEM DURING THE STRUGGLE AND, AS HIS WIFE'S HAND COMES FREE, HE TOUCHES HER ARM AS IF TO CALM HER.

SOWERBERRY: Now, dear—

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (JERKING AWAY) And don't you touch me, either!

SALLY: (STILL CHEERFUL) Well, it's plain to see you two would like to be alone. I'll just remove me-self to the kitchen. (GIVES A KNOWING WINK—A TERRIBLY OBVIOUS ONE—TO MRS. BUMBLE AND SOWERBERRY) Cheerio!

SALLY EXITS AS MRS. SOWERBERRY CONFRONTS HER HUSBAND.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (THREATENINGLY) What did she mean by that?!?

SOWERBERRY: (UNCOMFORTABLE) Nothing, dear, nothing at all.

SUDDENLY, NOAH CLAYPOOL BURSTS INTO THE WORKHOUSE, CHASED BY CHARLOTTE, THE SOWERBERRY'S UNLOVELY DAUGHTER (A SPOILED BRAT IF

THERE EVER WAS ONE).

NOAH: Help! Help! Mister. Sowerberry, sir! Mister Sowerberry! Please tell yer daughter ta keep her paws of'n me!

CHARLOTTE: (WHINING) I never did nothin', Noah Claypool, and don't you lie!

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (CODDLING HER) I'm sure you didn't, darling.

NOAH: Nevuh did nothin'? Why, that's a lie, sir. I near hadda run for me life!

CHARLOTTE: Why, Noah Claypool, you big liar, you!

SHE STARTS TO SOB, MELODRAMATICALLY. MRS. SOWERBERRY, WHO OBVIOUSLY ALWAYS SIDES WITH HER DAUGHTER, PUTS HER ARM COMFORTINGLY AROUND HER.

SOWERBERRY: Noah ...

MRS. SOWERBERRY: You dirty, rotten boy, see what you've done? Have you no sense of shame?

NOAH: (RUBBING SNOT OFF HIS NOSE, EXAMINING IT, THEN WIPING IT OFF ON HIS PANTS) Nah ...

SOWERBERRY: (CROSSING TO NOAH) What is the matter with you, you... you ..

MRS. SOWERBERRY: Nasty boy!

NOAH: (OFFENDED) Wuh? Me nasty? (POINTS AT CHARLOTTE) She's the one what could use some sense of shame, awright. She tried to rip me clothes off, she did.

SOWERBERRY: We'll have no talk like that or I'll... I'll...

MRS. SOWERBERRY: Fire you!

NOAH: (INDOLENTLY SCRATCHING HIMSELF) Go ahead, you don't pay me nuthin' anyway!

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (SHOCKED) Such insolence!

MRS. BUMBLE: Will someone tell me what's going on here?

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (RETURNING TO THE POINT AS SHE CROSSES TO MRS.

BUMBLE) We have come to see about finding a new boy to be a mourner in our funeral processions.

CHARLOTTE: (DROOLING) A new boy!

NOAH: (HEARTFELT) I'd hate ta be in his shoes, awright ...

MRS. BUMBLE: (WITH ALL THE SINCERITY OF A USED CAR SALESMAN) Well, we certainly do have a lot of boys!

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (WAVING OFF MRS. BUMBLE) But not the right type we have in mind. He must be a sad little fellow...

SOWERBERRY: Mourners should be sad-looking and...

ORPHANS ALL GET THEIR SPURIOUS SMILES AGAIN.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: He must work hard and eat very little.

ORPHANS LOUNGE BACK LAZILY, DOING THEIR BEST TO PUFF OUT THEIR CHEEKS AND STOMACHS.

MRS. BUMBLE: (THINKING) Hmm... there is one particular boy I would like to be rid of—uh, to find a good home for. (CROSSES TO WHERE OLIVER IS BEING HIDDEN) You'll find that he is a very hard worker and doesn't eat more than a bird. And he'll stay well-behaved as long as you don't feed him any meat.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (SOMEWHAT OFFENDED) We would never do anything like that!

SOWERBERRY: Of course.

MRS. BUMBLE: A real jewel, he is.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: Well, where is he?

MRS. BUMBLE SUDDENLY REACHES INTO THE CROWD OF CHILDREN AND EMERGES HOLDING OLIVER BY THE COLLAR.

MRS. BUMBLE: Here's the little dear!

OLIVER: No!!

THE BOYS JOIN IN YELLING, TOO, BUT TO NO AVAIL: OLIVER IS CAUGHT.

MRS. BUMBLE: (YELLING) Quiet!! (SHE GETS IT). His name is Oliver, Oliver Twist. (PUSHES HIM FORWARD) Say "Hello," Oliver.

OLIVER IS FAR TOO FRIGHTENED TO DO MUCH MORE THAN MUMBLE A GREETING AS HE STARES INTO THE FROZEN FACE OF MR. SOWERBERRY. CHARLOTTE, HOWEVER, WALKS RIGHT UP TO HIM AND CHECKS HIM OUT.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, Mother! ... he's a cute one, he is ...

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (CROSSING TO OLIVER, POKING AT HIM AND TURNING HIM AROUND) Well... a bit scrawny... sickly, I'd say.

SOWERBERRY: But, dear... look at that face, those eyes. He'd be perfect, especially for children's funerals. He's so delightfully... pitiful.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (UNIMPRESSED) Strikes me as the type who'd eat us out of house and home.

CHARLOTTE: That doesn't matter... he's cute! (SHE SNEERS AT NOAH).

NOAH: (SARCASTICALLY) "He's cute."

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (RESIGNED, SIGHS) Well, then, how much for him?

MRS. BUMBLE: I dare say ya couldn't find a boy the likes of Oliver anywhere for under... five pounds?

MRS. SOWERBERRY: Three.

MRS. BUMBLE: (QUICKLY) Done! You can take him with you today. (CROSSING TO EXIT). I'll get his things ready... (STOPS AND TURNS TO OLIVER). Maybe now you'll get "more," Oliver!

MRS. BUMBLE EXITS, CACKLING RATHER CRUELLY. THE MOMENT SHE LEAVES, OLIVER APPROACHES SOWERBERRY.

OLIVER: (PLEADING) Oh, please, sir! You don't really want the likes of me! Why, I'm... mean, real mean. And I eat like a pig... and steal, too! Everything and anything! And I got such horrible habits as would turn yer stomach.

SOWERBERRY: (TAKING IT IN STRIDE) Quiet, boy... we know you're lying.

OLIVER: And I lie a lot, too!

CHARLOTTE: (COOING) Oh, you'll be just perfect!

SOWERBERRY: I hope so.

OLIVER: (DESPERATELY) Oh, please, Mr. Sowerberry, sir, don't take me! I'm... afraid!

SOWERBERRY: (PUZZLED) Afraid? Whatever of?

OLIVER: I'm afraid of... of... stiffs.

EVERYONE REACTS DIFFERENTLY TO THE WORD "STIFFS." THE ORPHANS ALL NOD THEIR AGREEMENT, NOAH STIFLES A CHUCKLE, AND THE SOWERBERRY ADULTS ARE NOTICEABLY OFFENDED.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: (SHOCKED) Stiffs?!?

SOWERBERRY: (REPROVINGLY) Oliver, we never refer to the dead as... "stiffs."

MRS. SOWERBERRY: Perhaps "cadavers," maybe "deceased" or even "departed," but never, ever "stiffs"!

OLIVER: Well, no matter what you call 'em, I'm still afraid. I don't like the idea of it.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: Of what?

OLIVER: (EYES WIDE) Of dead bodies, undertakin'-n-such.

SOWERBERRY: Why, Oliver, taking care of the dead is one of the most respected occupations there is.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: Definitely!

CHARLOTTE: He's cute!

SOWERBERRY: (NOT UNKINDLY) You suffer from a prejudice which can only be cured through education.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: Correct!

CHARLOTTE: Listen to Father. He'll teach ya all about it!

SONG: "TAKIN' CARE OF THE DEAD"

SOWERBERRY: Gather, children, and I'll tell ya

'bout the business that I do;
Listen careful and maybe someday
you can do it, too.

Now what I do is undertakin'
And it's really not so bad:
And you can learn it just like I did
from my dear old dad.

ORPHANS: And we can learn it just like he did,
from his dear old dad!

SOWERBERRY: First you start with the basic tools:
A shovel and a pick;
Then of course you'll need a body,
a dead one, that's the trick!
Now dig a home for your new-found friend,
Six feet is apropos;
'Cause once ya get 'em down there,
they'll have no place else ta go.

ORPHANS: 'Cause once ya get 'em down there,
they'll have no place else ta go.

SOWERBERRY: 'Cause I could put a smile on my dear old Granny,
Make her look like new!
And though she's six feet under,
that smile comes shining through.
So, if you want to make a killing,
Like my Daddy said,
You'll have the time of your life
takin' care of the dead!

ORPHANS: You'll have the time of your life,
takin' care of the dead!

*DANCE BREAK DURING WHICH THEY ALL PLAY OUT DYING, DIGGING GRAVES,
ETC.*

ALL: 'Cause I (he) could put a smile on my (his) dear old Granny,
Make her look like new!
And though she's six feet under,
that smile comes shining through.

So, if you want to make a killing,
Like my (his) Daddy said,
You'll have the time of your life
takin' care of the dead!

MRS. SOWERBERRY: Well now you know the business
 Folks are dying to be in;
 You'll look like all your patrons
 With that everlasting grin.
 So now you're almost ready
 To undertake this chore;
 But let's make sure you've got it,
 We'll sing it one time more!

ALL: 'Cause I (he) could put a smile
 On my (his) dear old Granny,
 Make her look like new;
 And though she's six feet under,
 That smile comes shinin' through!
 So if you want to make a killing,
 Like my (his) Daddy said,
 You'll have the time of your life,
 Takin' care of the dead.
 You'll have the time of your life,
 Takin care of the dead! Oh-yeah!!

<End of excerpt>