

ACT ONE

SCENE FOUR

Inside the Undertaker's next morning.

There is loud kicking on the outside of the shop door. OLIVER steps from behind eth counter and begins to undo door chain. The kicking desists and a voice begins. . .

NOAH
(off)

Charlotte, open the door, will yer? Charlotte open the door. . .

OLIVER *(undoing the chain and turning the key)*

I will directly sir.

NOAH
(through the keyhole)

Are you the new boy?

OLIVER

Yes sir.

NOAH
(still outside)

How old are yer?

OLIVER

Eleven sir.

NOAH

Then I'll whop you one when I get in, you just see if I don't you little work'us brat!

NOAH begins whistling. OLIVER draws back the bolts and opens the door. NOAH CLAYPOLE is framed in the doorway.

OLIVER

Did you knock sir?

NOAH

I kicked. *(between mouthfuls)*

OLIVER

Did you want a coffin sir?

NOAH

No! But you'll be wanting one before very long if you start cheeking your superiors.

(he enters majestically)

Yer don't know who I am, I suppose, Work'us?

OLIVER

No sir, I can't say as I do.

NOAH

(punctuating)

I'm Mis-ter - No-ah - Clay-pole - and - you're - under - me! So open up the blind, you idle young scallywag.

NOAH kicks OLIVER's backside. OLIVER taking down the shutter, and CHARLOTTE enters with a tray of food. All the time she is ogling NOAH lasciviously.

CHARLOTTE

Noah, I saved a nice little bit of bacon for you from master's breakfast. Oliver, pull up a chair for Mr Noah and then take them bits and then take them bits and go over in the corner and eat 'em. And make haste, 'cos they'll want you to mind the shop. D'you hear?

NOAH and CHARLOTTE are groping each other surreptitiously whilst OLIVER is turned away. They all begin eating.

NOAH

D'you hear? Work'us?

CHARLOTTE

Here's your bacon Noah.

NOAH

Nice and greasy, just how I like it.

She feeds him

NOAH

What are you staring at work'us?

CHARLOTTE

Lor Noah let the boy alone.

NOAH

Let him alone? I'm giving the boy a change, you silly thing! ! Ev'ryone's left him alone. His father left him alone - his mother left him alone - they all left him alone - except dear old, kind old Noah.

NOAH gropes CHARLOTTE

CHARLOTTE

I better go downstairs. Something's burning.

NOAH

(addressing OLIVER-conversationally)

Work'us...How's yer mother?

OLIVER

You leave my mother out of it - She's dead.

NOAH

What did she die of, work'us? Shortage of breath?

OLIVER

(tearfully)

| She's just dead! She died of a broken heart.

NOAH

Well tol-de-rol-lol-lol-right-fol-lairy, Work'us. What's set you a snivelling now?

OLIVER

You'd better not say anything more see!

NOAH

Better not say anything more see!The cheek of it - the workhouse cheek of it!

(NOAH curls up his nose in disgust)

Yer know, Work'us, it can't be helped now, and of course, yer couldn't help it then, and I'm very sorry for it, and I'm sure we all are, and pity yer very much. But yer must know work'us, your mother was a regular right down bad 'un.

OLIVER

What did you say?

NOAH

And it's a good thing she died when she did or she'd have been transported to Australaylia, or hung from a gibbet as like as not!

(a fight ensues during which, over the music (12 The Fight) the following lines are shouted)

NOAH

Help, Charlotte, Missis....this here new boy's a murderin' of me! Char - LOTTE !!

(Charlotte enters followed by Mrs Sowerberry)

CHARLOTTE

Oh, you ungrateful, murderous little villain.

MRS SOWERBERRY

Quick, put him in 'ere....Get the lid quick. Noah, run and get help...(Charlotte, water quick)