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Dramatic Publishing

Nicholas Nickleby, SCHOOLMASTER

A One-Act Play

By

TIM KELLY



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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TIM KELLY

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(NICHOLAS NICKLEBY, SCHOOLMASTER)

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NICHOLAS NICKLEBY
A One-Act Play
for Six Men and Six Women

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

PHOEBE	servant girl, about fourteen
MRS. SNAWLEY	an unpleasant stepmother
WILLIAM	Mrs. Snawley's stepson
MRS. SQUEERS	Wackford Squeers' vulgar wife
FANNY.	the Squeers' vain daughter
MRS. NICKLEBY	Nicholas' mother
NICHOLAS NICKLEBY.	the new schoolmaster
KATE	Nicholas' gentle and loving sister
WACKFORD SQUEERS.	brutal and ignorant schoolmaster
COBBEY	one of Wackford's pupils
BOLDER.	another of Wackford's pupils
SMIKE*	dim-witted boy who works for Wackford
BOYS**	pupils of Dotheboys Hall

Time: Nineteenth Century England
Place: Dotheboys Hall, a boarding school
for young boys in Yorkshire, England

*The role of SMIKE may be played by a girl.

**The extras who play the BOYS are optional.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Stage Properties:

Desk or table, a few stools or benches. On the desk: pointer and hand bell.

Brought On:

Mrs. Snawley: newspaper; Phoebe: kettle; William: coin; Kate: handkerchief; Mrs. Squeers: large wooden spoon; Nicholas: book; Kate: envelope with letter; William: kettle and spoon.

Historical Note:

It was largely through the popular success of NICHOLAS NICKLEBY that the miserable conditions of the boarding schools for unwanted children in the north of England were exposed and eventually corrected to some extent.



**NICHOLAS NICKLEBY,
SCHOOLMASTER**



SCENE: A large, dismal area in a decayed and rambling edifice known as Dotheboys Hall. It functions partly as a classroom and partly as a reception hall. A table or desk is UC. Stools or benches are scattered in front of the table.

PHOEBE (offstage R). Do come along, Mrs. Snawley. The mistress will be happy to talk with you.

MRS. SNAWLEY (offstage R). It was Mr. Squeers I was wanting to talk with.

PHOEBE (offstage R). He's traveling back from London. If you care to wait . . .

(**PHOEBE** and **MRS. SNAWLEY** enter from R and move to C. **MRS. SNAWLEY**, a cold woman who is anxious to get rid of a troublesome stepchild, carries a folded newspaper.)

MRS. SNAWLEY. I've got me own affairs to tend. Can't waste time. I'll see the wife.

PHOEBE. I'll fetch her. (She exits L. **MRS. SNAWLEY** looks about the room.)

MRS. SNAWLEY. Ain't exactly cozy, but fit enough for troublesome boys. (She calls R.) William! (A pause.) Do you hear me? (A pause.) William!

(**WILLIAM** enters from R. He looks forlorn and stifles a sob.)

WILLIAM. Yes, Mother.

MRS. SNAWLEY (snapping). Don't call me Mother. I'm not your mother. Your mother is dead. (WILLIAM fights to control his sobbing.) And stop that sniffing. I never could stand a boy what was partial to sniffles.

WILLIAM. I'm not sniffing.

MRS. SNAWLEY. What are you doing, then? Not crying? Growing boys don't cry.

WILLIAM. I'm not crying.

MRS. SNAWLEY. Well, whatever you're doing – stop it!

(MRS. SQUEERS, the nasty and vulgar wife of the headmaster, enters L and crosses to MRS. SNAWLEY.)

MRS. SQUEERS. You wished to speak with me?

MRS. SNAWLEY. If you're Mrs. Squeers.

MRS. SQUEERS. The same. (With a false smile.) What a nice boy you've got there. A new pupil?

MRS. SNAWLEY. That's what I wanted to talk to you about.

MRS. SQUEERS (gesturing toward a stool). Pray be seated.

MRS. SNAWLEY. I'm not planning on staying long. (To William. You sit. (WILLIAM sits with his head bowed. MRS. SNAWLEY and MRS. SQUEERS converse as if he weren't in the room. MRS. SNAWLEY points to some advertisement in the paper.) This caught my eye yesterday morning and I may thank my stars for it.

MRS. SQUEERS. What is it?

MRS. SNAWLEY. An advertisement for this school.

MRS. SQUEERS. My husband must have put it in. He tends to all the pesty business details.

MRS. SNAWLEY (reading). "Education – At Mr. Wackford Squeer's Academy, Dotheboys Hall in Yorkshire. Youths are

boarded, clothed, booked, provided with all necessities, instructed in all languages, living and dead.”

MRS. SQUEERS. My Squeery is such a cultured penman when he sets his quill to scribbling them advertisements.

MRS. SNAWLEY (continuing to read). “No extras, no vacations, and diet unparalleled.”

MRS. SQUEERS. I’m famous for me soups.

MRS. SNAWLEY. I don’t want any misunderstandings, so I speak plain out. I have only this month married the boy’s father. As he has little money in his own right, I am afraid he might squander it on the boy.

MRS. SQUEERS. I quite understand, I do. Yes, yes.

(PHOEBE enters carrying a heavy iron kettle.)

PHOEBE. Here’s the kettle. (Mrs. Squeers’ face turns into a mask of anger and subdued rage. She screams at Phoebe.)

MRS. SQUEERS. Not now, you stupid cow! Can’t you see we got a client!

PHOEBE. Only doing me work.

MRS. SQUEERS. Get out!

PHOEBE (mumbling as she exits). Fetch the kettle in, fetch the kettle out. (MRS. SQUEERS turns back to Mrs. Snawley with a sickly-sweet smile on her face.)

MRS. SQUEERS. Servants is such a trial, ain’t they?

MRS. SNAWLEY (with a hard look to William). Like step-children.

MRS. SQUEERS. Quite so. Has it got a name?

MRS. SNAWLEY. William. William Snawley.

MRS. SQUEERS. He’ll have plenty of company at Dotheboys Hall.

MRS. SNAWLEY. I have selected your school because it is far

away from my home — as far away as possible. If I enroll William, you're certain there are no holidays — no comings home twice a year?

MRS. SQUEERS. It's a matter of commerce, my dear. As long as you pay the school fee, you'll never have to worry about the lad coming home. At Christmas, he will send you a hand-painted card and that is all.

MRS. SNAWLEY. Then we understand each other?

MRS. SQUEERS. We do, indeed.

MRS. SNAWLEY. His trunk is outside.

MRS. SQUEERS. I'll have it taken care of.

MRS. SNAWLEY. William, stand up. (WILLIAM stands.) You are to give no trouble. Behave. Otherwise, I shall have to complain to your father that you've been wicked and obstinate. It would break his heart.

WILLIAM. I'll give no trouble. I promise.

MRS. SNAWLEY. I bid you good day, Mrs. Squeers.

MRS. SQUEERS. Good day and good-bye, Mrs. Snawley. (MRS. SNAWLEY exits R.)

(FANNY, the Squeers' vain and egotistical teenage daughter, skips out L.)

FANNY. Papa has returned from London. There's a handsome young gentleman with him. I saw them from the upstairs window.

MRS. SQUEERS. Another pupil?

FANNY. He's too old for that. I think it's the new schoolmaster Papa's been hoping to find.

MRS. SQUEERS. Young *gentleman*? The last thing we need here is a gentleman.