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Dramatic Publishing



Nicholas Nickleby

A Full-Length Adaptation
of the Charles Dickens' novel

By
TIM KELLY



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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TIM KELLY

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(NICHOLAS NICKLEBY)

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NICHOLAS NICKLEBY
A Full-Length Play
*for a flexible cast of forty-one**

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Vincent Crummles | a theatrical producer |
| Mrs. Crummles | his wife, an actress |
| Miss Snevellicci | another actress |
| Miss Petowker | another |
| Ralph Nickleby | Nicholas' uncle, a moneylender |
| Newman Noggs | his clerk |
| Mrs. Nickleby | Nicholas' mother |
| Kate Nickleby | Nicholas' sister |
| Nicholas Nickleby | lad who comes to London to seek his fortune |
| Wackford Squeers | a brutal and ignorant schoolmaster |
| Mrs. Snawley | an unpleasant stepmother |
| William | her son |
| Mrs. Squeers | Wackford's nasty wife |
| Phoebe | servant at Dotheboys Hall |
| Fanny | Wackford's daughter, a vain creature |
| Bolder | Wackford's pupil |
| Cobbey | another pupil |
| Graymarsh | yet another pupil |
| Smike | dimwitted boy, works for Wackford |
| Dress Shop Model | at Madam Mantalini's |
| Madam Mantalini | runs a fashionable dress shop |
| Miss Knag | her employee |
| Lady Hawk | unscrupulous |
| Sir Frederick | something of a fool, Lady Hawk's dupe |
| Tim Linkinwater | Cheeryble's clerk |
| Charles Cheeryble | runs a counting house |

Madelaine Bray Nicholas' heart's desire
 Brooker ex-convict with a strange secret
 Lady Scaley friend of Lady Hawk
 First Waitress at coffee house
 Second Waitress at same coffee house
 Ninetta Crummles an "Infant Phenomenon"
 Miss Bravassa an actress
 Mr. Folair an actor
 Frank Cheeryble nephew of the Cheeryble brothers
 Arthur Gride a decrepit, ancient gentleman
 Peg his housekeeper
 Miss La Creevy a landlady and painter of miniatures
 Mr. Bray Madelaine's ill and unpleasant father
 Magistrate a judge
 Policeman servant of the law
 Citizens, Stagehands. as desired

**Fewer with doubling and tripling of cast. See Production Notes.*

Time: Nineteenth Century England

Place: Various locations in and about London, England.

Running Time: two hours.

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

There is no curtain.

The simple setting shows us four basic playing areas. The first is the forestage, or stage apron, which represents a London street.

The second area, at L, is Ralph Nickleby's office. It is sparsely furnished, consisting of a desk and chair and a bench, DL. Entrance into this room from some outer office is L. It is possible to leave the room and step into an alley which is R. This is Alley A. It is located between the Nickleby office and the third playing area which will represent, as required, Dotheboys Hall, Madam Mantalini's Dress Shop, and a coffee house. A table is situated UC. In front of it are scattered some stools or a few small benches.

Between this multi-purpose C area and stage R is another avenue, Alley B.

Entrance into Alley A is from UL; entrance into Alley B is from UR.

The fourth area, at R, is the outer office of a business firm belonging to the Cheeryble brothers. There's a small bench,

or chair, DR. A desk and stool are positioned upstage. The entrance into the main office is offstage R.

SCENE: A London street, followed by Ralph Nickleby's office. Voices are heard offstage DR.

VINCENT (offstage). Hurry, my dear. We shall be late for the wedding.

MRS. CRUMMLES (offstage). We're hurrying as fast as we dare, husband. I'm quite out of breath as it is.

VINCENT (offstage). Few steps more and we're there.

(VINCENT CRUMMLES, theatrical producer and flamboyant personality, enters on the forestage, quickly followed by a colorful entourage of actors. The director can bring in as many or as few as the stage will comfortably accommodate. These are essential: MRS. CRUMMLES, MISS SNEVELLICCI and MISS PETOWKER.)

MRS. CRUMMLES. I hope Nicholas won't think we're intruding.

VINCENT. Intruding, wife?

MISS SNEVELLICCI. It is his sister's wedding.

VINCENT. A fact I myself ascertained by reading the *London Times*.

MISS PETOWKER. Who is this Nicholas Nickleby?

VINCENT. My dear Miss Petowker, if you were not a new member of my theatrical troupe, you would know without asking.

MISS PETOWKER. Well, I don't know, Mr. Crummles, and I am asking.

MRS. CRUMMLES. My husband found him in the street.

MISS PETOWKER. The street? Was he some kind of beggar?

VINCENT. His true gift was dramatization. Within a month, he was translating and pushing melodrama with his pen.

MISS SNEVELLICCI. Mr. Crummles was like a father to him.

VINCENT. We've kept in touch, Nicholas and I. He really ought to write down his experiences.

MISS PETOWKER. Were they unusual?

VINCENT. Extraordinary!

MRS. CRUMMLES. Unique!

MISS SNEVELLICCI. Nicholas Nickleby was a drama in himself.

MRS. CRUMMLES. From the day he set foot in London, adventure clung to him like jam on toast.

(As they converse, RALPH NICKLEBY, a dour man, enters UL. He walks into Alley A and then into his office as he reads a folded newspaper. He moves behind the desk, sits, puts down the paper and rings a small hand bell to signal his clerk that he has returned from some errand. His interest returns to the paper.)

VINCENT. You see, Miss Petowker, Nicholas was the sole support of his widowed mother and lovely sister, Kate. The little family came to London seeking happiness and good fortune. Alas, fate was not kind . . . (As the scene in Ralph Nickleby's office begins, VINCENT, MRS. CRUMMLES, MISS PETOWKER, MISS SNEVELLICCI and the OTHERS back off-stage like figures in a dream.)

(NEWMAN NOGGS, Ralph Nickleby's old clerk, enters L. He holds a black-bordered envelope.)

NOGGS. This came while you were out, Mr. Nickleby.

RALPH. Give it to me. (NOGGS hands the envelope to him.) This envelope has a black border. Someone has died. Did you

order more shares in United Metropolitan Hot Muffin and Crumpet?

NOGGS. If you'll permit, sir . . . I think you're over-extending your investment.

RALPH. You're a clerk here, not a financial adviser. I shall continue to invest heavily. (He looks at the envelope.) I know this handwriting. I know the postmark, too. (He tears open the envelope and takes out a death announcement.) It is as I suspected. My brother is dead.

NOGGS. She brought the announcement herself. The grieving widow.

RALPH (standing angrily). You mean she's here?

NOGGS. With her children.

RALPH. My niece and nephew! (He frowns.) Obviously, they plan to beg for money. Confound them. I shall give them good advice in two words — "Go home!"

NOGGS. What shall I tell them, sir?

RALPH. You'll tell them nothing. I'll attend to it. Admit them.

NOGGS. Right away, sir. (He exits L. RALPH paces in front of the desk, irritated by the visit.)

RALPH. They can't do better than go back to the country.

MRS. NICKLEBY (offstage L). Ralph! Dear brother-in-law Ralph.

RALPH (under his breath). Sentimental female. Bah!

(MRS. NICKLEBY, a talkative, somewhat confused woman, sweeps in. She is followed by her daughter KATE, a girl of about fifteen. MRS. NICKLEBY throws back her black veil and kisses RALPH dutifully on the cheek.)

MRS. NICKLEBY. He is gone. Your brother, my husband.

RALPH. I have not seen my late brother in many, many years.

We were not on the best of terms, as you know. Nonetheless, I extend my sympathy to you and your daughter. (He looks at KATE.) This is my niece, is it not?

MRS. NICKLEBY. But, naturally, Ralph. This is Kate. (KATE curtsies.)

KATE. Uncle.

RALPH. What of the boy? My nephew, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS (offstage L). I am here, Uncle.

(NICHOLAS enters. He is a good-looking lad, about seventeen, alert and independent.)

KATE. I wonder, Uncle, might we sit? Mother is tired.

RALPH. Forgive me. (He indicates the bench. MRS. NICKLEBY and KATE sit.)

MRS. NICKLEBY. We came directly from the coach.

RALPH. Where are you staying?

MRS. NICKLEBY. We have no lodgings . . . (A meaningful pause.) As yet. (This is what RALPH feared and he grunts.)

RALPH. I shall be direct. You must bear up against sorrow, ma'am. I always do.

MRS. NICKLEBY (plucking out a handkerchief from her sleeve and dabbing her eyes). Mine was no common loss.

RALPH. It was no *uncommon* loss. Husbands die every day. Wives, too.

NICHOLAS (with a hint of criticism). Brothers also, sir. (RALPH gives NICHOLAS an indignant look as he didn't care for the tone of Nicholas' voice.)

RALPH (meaning NICHOLAS). And puppies likewise. (To MRS. NICKLEBY as he walks behind his desk.) You intend to remain in London?

NICHOLAS. It is here we plan to seek our fortune, Uncle.

RALPH. I take it you are well supplied with funds?

MRS. NICKLEBY. We are almost penniless. Some time ago, I advised my husband to "speculate." He did and lost everything.

KATE. We sold what furnishings we possessed to pay for the coach fare.

RALPH. Still, I would advise you to return home.

MRS. NICKLEBY. Home? What home? We have no home. Since you are our only living relative, we have come to you. It was your brother's dying wish that I should appeal to you on behalf of his children.

RALPH. I am not a man of wealth. I work for my daily bread and expect others to do the same. (NICHOLAS bristles.)

NICHOLAS. I do not expect you to support us, Uncle.

RALPH. In that case, you will not be disappointed.

KATE. I am not afraid of honest labor.

NICHOLAS. Perhaps we have made a mistake in coming here.

MRS. NICKLEBY. Nicholas, please!

RALPH. Hold your tongue, sir. Upon my word. This is a fine beginning.

KATE. My brother meant no disrespect.

MRS. NICKLEBY. Nicholas is headstrong.

RALPH. Kate appears to have a delicate nature. Perhaps dress-making. I have some influence with the shop of Madam Mantolini. It's a fashionable establishment.

MRS. NICKLEBY. Nicholas has not long completed such education as his poor father could give him, and he was thinking of . . .

RALPH. Of making something of himself some day. The old story. Are you willing to work, sir?

NICHOLAS. Of course I am. (RALPH takes the folded newspaper from his desk.) This caught my eye this morning and you

may thank your stars for it. (He taps an advertisement.) Read. (NICHOLAS takes the paper from RALPH and reads.)

NICHOLAS. "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. No extras, no vacations, and diet unparalleled. Mr. Squeers is in town and attends daily at the Saracen's Head. Able assistant wanted. Annual salary — Five Pounds. A Master of Arts preferred."

RALPH. Let Nicholas get that situation and his fortune is made.

MRS. NICKLEBY. But he is not a Master of Arts.

RALPH. That, I think, can be gotten over.

KATE. The salary is so small and Yorkshire is such a long way off.

MRS. NICKLEBY. Hush, Kate. Your uncle must know best.

NICHOLAS. If I am fortunate enough to be appointed to this post, Uncle, for which I am so imperfectly qualified, what will become of my mother and sister?

RALPH. Once you have the situation, I will undertake their protection. I have recently foreclosed on a mortgage. The small house is not grand, but I daresay it will do for your mother and sister.

MRS. NICKLEBY. You are the soul of generosity.

RALPH. I trust you will never forget it, ma'am. I will have my clerk, Noggs, show you the dwelling. As for you, Nephew, I will escort you to the Saracen's Head myself. (He gestures L.) If you please. (MRS. NICKLEBY stands, then sweeps out L. KATE follows. NICHOLAS and RALPH exchange a cold look. They dislike one another.)

RALPH. After you, Nephew. (NICHOLAS nods, then exits. To himself.) Penniless relatives. Another cross to bear. (He exits.)

End of Scene One