

## DOMINOES

Series Editors: Bill Bowler and Sue Parminter

# Nicholas Nickleby

*Charles Dickens*

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Illustrated by Simon Gurr

Charles Dickens (1812–1870) was born in Portsmouth, England, and for most of his life lived in or near London. His family was poor, and he had to go out to work in a factory at the age of twelve. Dickens never forgot this difficult time, and many of his books describe the problems of poor people, especially poor children, and the wide differences between the rich and the poor. When he was older, Dickens started working for a newspaper and then wrote some of the most famous novels in English, including *Hard Times* which is also available as a Domino.

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## Chapter one

### *A new start*

When old Mr Nick Nickleby died at home in Devon in the south-west of England, he left many **debts** behind him. Once these were paid, his wife, his son – Nicholas – and his daughter – Kate – found themselves with little money and no house to live in. There was only one person that they could turn to for help: Ralph Nickleby, the children's **uncle**. Mrs Nickleby didn't really know him, but – because he was in the London **finance** business – he was rich and knew many people. Before her husband died, he said that Ralph would help them. So she wrote a letter to say that they were coming, and the very next day they all travelled to London.

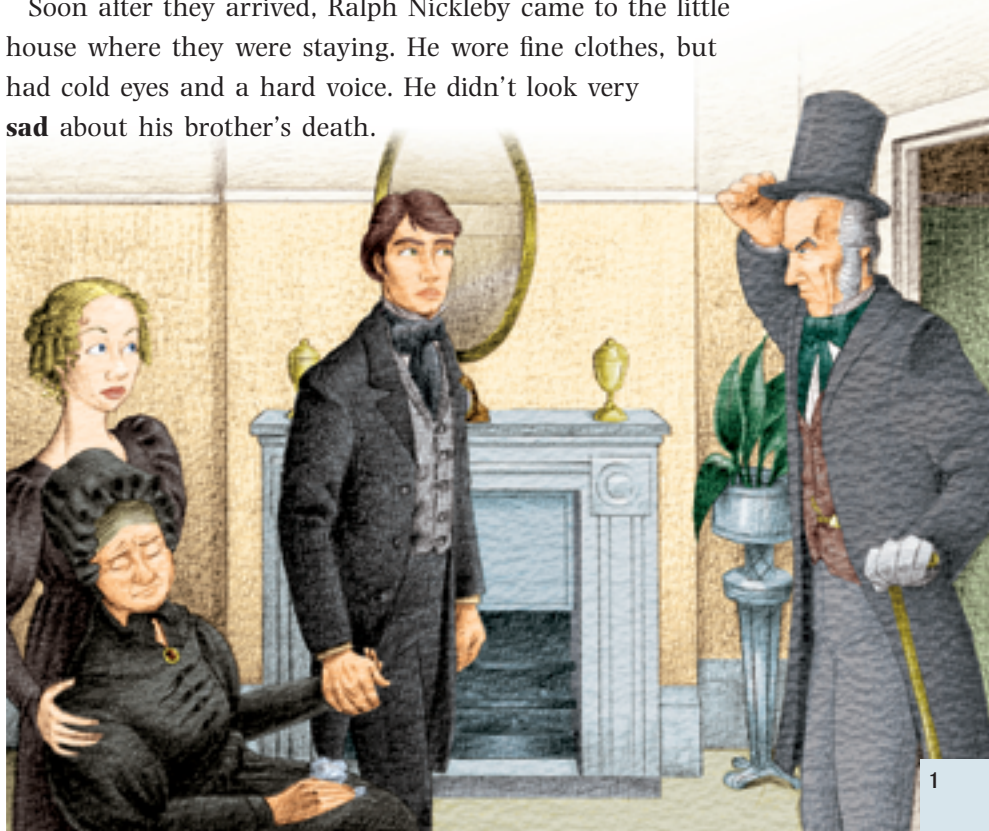
Soon after they arrived, Ralph Nickleby came to the little house where they were staying. He wore fine clothes, but had cold eyes and a hard voice. He didn't look very **sad** about his brother's death.

**debt** money that you must pay back to someone

**uncle** your father's (or mother's) brother

**finance** to do with money

**sad** not happy



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‘How did he die?’ he asked Mrs Nickleby.

‘The doctors don’t really know what the problem was. We think that perhaps he died of a broken **heart**,’ replied Mrs Nickleby.

‘I’ve heard of people dying of a broken neck, but a broken heart? Never. A man can’t pay his debts and so he dies of a broken heart! Ha!’ laughed Ralph Nickleby coldly.

‘Some people have no heart to break,’ said Nicholas to himself quietly.

‘How old is this boy?’ asked Ralph Nickleby, looking angrily at Nicholas.

‘Nearly nineteen,’ replied Mrs Nickleby.

‘And how will you pay for your food now, boy?’ Ralph Nickleby asked Nicholas.

‘I shall not cost you or my mother anything at all,’ replied Nicholas.

For a while Nicholas and his uncle looked at each other without speaking. The older man saw in front of him a young man who was kind and **honest**, and from that moment he **hated** him.

Then Ralph Nickleby talked with Mrs Nickleby about finding work for poor but beautiful Kate. Turning back to Nicholas, he showed him an **advertisement** in the newspaper that he had with him.

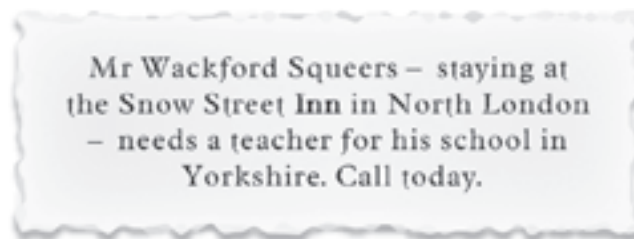
**heart** the centre of feeling in someone; this is in your chest and it sends the blood round your body

**honest** saying things that are true

**hate** not to love

**advertisement** you pay to put this information in a newspaper

**inn** an old name for a hotel near a road



Yorkshire was far away, in the north-east of England, but Nicholas was excited.

‘Perhaps our luck is changing!’ he thought.

‘We must go and see Mr Squeers immediately, before he gives the job to another young man,’ said Ralph Nickleby.

When Nicholas and his uncle arrived at the inn, Squeers was busy with some new students. He was a short man, about fifty years old. He had only one greeny-grey eye in his face, where people usually prefer two, and he looked very **strange** in his black suit, which was too long for him in the arms, and too short for him in the legs.

‘Mr Squeers, this is my **nephew**, Mr Nicholas Nickleby. We’re here because of your newspaper advertisement,’ said Ralph Nickleby.

‘He’s too young to be a teacher,’ Squeers said at once, looking at Nicholas.

But after talking quietly with Ralph Nickleby for a while, he turned back to Nicholas with a smile, saying, ‘The job is yours. Our **coach** leaves at eight o’clock tomorrow morning. Be here early to help with the new students.’

‘Certainly,’ replied Nicholas. And to his uncle he said, ‘I shall never forget how kind you’ve been.’

The next day, Nicholas said goodbye sadly to his sister and his mother at the inn.

‘How will they **survive** without me?’ he thought with a heavy heart.

Just before Nicholas got onto the coach, someone pushed a letter into his hand. It was Newman Noggs, Ralph Nickleby’s **clerk**. Nicholas quickly put it into his pocket.

The journey to Yorkshire was long and hard, and they stopped at different inns on the way. Squeers ate a lot at every meal, but gave very little food to the students who were with him.

‘He worries more about the cost of the meals than he does about those poor, hungry boys,’ thought Nicholas.

**strange** not usual

**nephew** your sister’s (or brother’s) son

**coach** a kind of car with horses

**survive** to live through a difficult or dangerous time

**clerk** someone who does the writing work in an office

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In the evening of the second day, they arrived in Yorkshire. There was snow everywhere, and in front of them was a long, low building with dark windows. It looked cold and unpleasant. This was the school – Dotheboys Hall.

Inside Mrs Squeers was waiting for them. She looked at Nicholas coldly, then turned to her husband.

‘How is my Squeery?’ she said.

‘Very well my love,’ replied Squeers. ‘How are the cows and the other animals?’

‘Very well.’

‘And the boys?’ asked Squeers.

‘Oh, they’re well, too,’ replied Mrs Squeers quickly in a hard voice.

After that, they talked about parents who paid their debts to the school and parents who couldn’t pay. Then Mrs Squeers put a cold supper on the table for her husband – and for Nicholas. Squeers ate and drank a lot; Nicholas had only a little. Then they all went to bed. Before he went to sleep on his bed on the floor upstairs, Nicholas took Noggs’s letter from his pocket and read it:

My dear young man,  
I know the world better than you. The place that you’re going to isn’t like any place that you know. If you ever need somewhere to stay in London, ask for me at the Crown Inn, in Golden Square. They know me there. Don’t think that I’m strange writing to you like this. I was once a gentleman, but I’ve come down in the world.

Your friend,  
Newman Noggs

**crown** a king or a queen wears this on their head

**gentleman** a man from a rich family who does not need to work

If Nicholas's first night at Dotheboys Hall was bad, the next day was worse. He soon saw that Mr and Mrs Squeers loved making the boys there **suffer**. Squeers **beat** them hard and often. He read their letters from home himself, telling them that their parents didn't love them and didn't want them back. The boys had no real lessons, but did jobs for Squeers in the school and its garden all day.

They were especially **cruel** to one boy – Smike. He was taller and older than the other boys at the school – perhaps eighteen or nineteen. His clothes were old and too small for him and he looked ill.

At the end of his first day, Nicholas found Smike working in the kitchen. He saw in the boy's eyes that he was afraid.

'Don't be afraid of me,' said Nicholas kindly.

'Oh, my poor heart will break, living here,' Smike cried.

'No it won't. There's always hope.'

'Not for me,' replied Smike. 'I've got no family or friends. It doesn't matter if I live or die. There's only **suffering** for me in this life.'

**suffer** to feel hurt or unhappy

**beat** (*past beat, beaten*) to hit strongly

**cruel** unkind and liking to hurt people

**suffering** when you feel hurt or unhappy



**YOU HAVE REACHED THE END OF THE SAMPLE.**

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