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ENGLISH CLASSICS FOR INDIAN SCHOOLS

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Retold from
CHARLES DICKENS' NOVEL

BY

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NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

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CHAPTER I

The hero of this story, Nicholas Nickleby, and his only sister Kate were born at a small town in Devonshire, called Dawlish. Their father was a yeoman farmer, whose life had been one long struggle to bring up his children decently on the money he made from selling the produce of his tiny farm, and on the yearly interest from his wife's little fortune; but when his children went to school he found his expenses much greater, and tried to increase his income by speculation, mainly on the advice of his wife. She was, however, a foolish and worrying woman; luck went against the Nicklebys, and they soon lost every penny they had. Then, utterly discouraged, and too worn out to struggle any more, the poor man took to his bed and died, leaving his wife and the two children quite destitute.

During his last hours, poor Mr. Nickleby talked a great deal about his only brother Ralph, who had gone up to London as a young man, set up in business there, and was supposed now to be very rich. Mrs. Nickleby remembered this after her husband's death; and when she found that the

house, land and furniture were all claimed by her husband's creditors, she came to London to find her brother-in-law, and to ask his help on behalf of her two children.

Nicholas was now nineteen; and his sister Kate, a very lovely girl, was two years younger. They took lodgings near the Strand, in the house of a painter of miniatures; this was Miss La Creevy a very kindhearted little woman, who did everything she could to make them feel comfortable, and to prove that she was a real artist did all her work in a bright yellow silk gown and long black mittens.

Mrs. Nickleby now wrote to Ralph Nickleby at once, telling him of his brother's death, and asking him if he would call and see her and advise her what to do. He came round soon after receiving her letter; but his visit was chiefly to inform her that she need expect no help from him. For Ralph Nickleby was a hard, mean man, who cared for nothing but his money, and who had never been known to give away anything in his life.

"Well, Ma'am?" he opened, eyeing her sternly and making her cry at once. "So you tell me there's nothing left?"

"Nothing" sobbed Mrs. Nickleby.

"And yet you have spent what little you had, in coming to London to see what I could do for you?"

“I hoped” faltered poor Mrs. Nickleby “that you might be glad to have a chance to do something for your poor brother’s children. He was your only brother; and it was his dying wish that I should appeal to you.”

But Ralph only sneered at that. “Whenever a man dies without any property of his own, he always seems to think he can do as he likes with other people’s” he muttered. “Well, what is your daughter fit for, Ma’am?”

“Kate has been very well educated” sobbed Mrs. Nickleby.

“Then we must get her some work at once in a boarding-school” said Ralph. “And if the life there is too hard for her, perhaps dress making will come easier. And you, Sir! Have you ever done anything?” he went on, turning to Nicholas.

“No” answered Nicholas bluntly.

“No, I thought not!” growled Ralph. “But are you willing to work, Sir?”

“Of course” Nicholas said.

“Then look at this—and thank your stars for the chance.”

So saying, he handed a newspaper cutting to his nephew. This informed him that an assistant schoolmaster was required at the Academy of Mr. Wackford Squeers, Dotheboys *Hall, Greta Bridge, Yorkshire. The yearly salary was to be five pounds. Nicholas was not greatly

* Note—a pun, meaning “Cheat-the-boys.”

impressed by the advertisement, nor was he at all anxious to go so far away from his mother and sister; but since his uncle made no other offer, he went round with him to see Mr. Squeers, who was just now staying at the Saracen's Head, Snow Hill, for the purpose of collecting pupils to take back to his school.

Squeers' appearance struck Nicholas as being very unpleasant. He had only one eye, and a puckered, withered face, with a harsh voice and very coarse manners. His age was about fifty-three, and he seemed ill at ease in his badly-fitting suit of scholastic black. It was only under great pressure from his uncle that Nicholas, next day, agreed to accept the post; and then only on condition that Ralph should find suitable work for Kate, and a home for Mrs. Nickleby.

After his final interview with Mr. Squeers a few days later, Nicholas packed his few belongings and prepared for the journey. Many things, which his mother and Kate wished him to take, he left behind; for he thought that, if they should be hard pressed, these things might be converted into ready money for them.

The night before he left, Kate and Miss La Creevy made him a cosy supper with a few extra luxuries which they could ill afford, and they talked far into the night. As the coach for the north started early, Nicholas rose next day at six, wrote a note of farewell to Kate, and left it with

half his small stock of money with Miss La Creevy, who promised to look after his mother and sister as well as she could. Then Nicholas took his box and went to the Saracen's Head, where he found Squeers and five small boys at breakfast. At least, Squeers was at breakfast: the boys sharing a mug of milk and three small pieces of bread and butter. Just before the coach started, Mrs. Nickleby, Kate and Ralph came to say good-bye. Ralph was as surly as ever, and Mrs. Nickleby and Kate very much upset by the strange appearance of Squeers.

During the bustle of the last few minutes before starting, Nicholas felt someone tugging at his sleeve; he looked down from the top of the coach, and saw it was Newman Noggs, a poor half-starved clerk of his Uncle.

"Take it. Read it. Nobody knows. That's all" whispered Noggs; and after pushing a dirty letter into Nicholas' hand, he slipped away into the crowd.

"Stop, stop!" cried Nicholas. But Noggs had disappeared, and the coach was now starting. Soon Nicholas was busy keeping the little boys from being flung off their seats on the bad parts of the road.

The weather was bitterly cold. Snow fell at intervals, and the wind nearly cut the passengers in two. At Eton Slocombe, there was a good coach-dinner served at the inn, of which the grown-up passengers partook, while the five

small boys sat by the fire and ate sandwiches. With night came more snow: the travellers wrapped themselves in their coats, sheltered behind their luggage, and prepared for a miserable night. Halfway between Grantham and Newark, Nicholas was awakened by the coach giving a violent jerk, which flung him out of his seat into the road. He gathered himself up, and found that the coach had been overturned in the ditch. He himself was not much hurt, and was soon helping the guard to cut the horses free, and to get the other people out of the snowdrift into which they had been flung. Owing to the depth of the snow, they had all escaped serious injury and were able to walk on to an inn close by. It was a poor place, certainly; but there was a great blazing fire for them to sit round for some hours, till the coach was repaired and ready for them to continue their journey. It snowed all the way to Yorkshire now; and when at six o'clock next evening the coach arrived at Greta Bridge, Nicholas and the little boys were so cold and hungry that they could scarcely move. Squeers went across to the inn on the bridge; and a few minutes later, a small pony-chaise and a cart came out of the yard.

“Put the boys and the boxes into the cart” Squeers ordered. “The young man and me will go in the chaise.”

With great difficulty, the thin pony was made to start up the road; while the cartload of infant misery followed behind.

“Is it far now to the Hall, sir?” asked Nicholas, when they had gone a very long way.

“About three miles” answered Squeers. “But you needn’t call it a Hall, here. The fact is, it ain’t a Hall.”

“Indeed?”, said Nicholas, much surprised.

“No” replied Squeers. “We call it a Hall in London—it sounds better. But they don’t know it by that name hereabouts.”

In due course they reached the school, a long stone house. Squeers shouted outside; and after a minute or two, a tall, thin, miserable-looking boy unlocked the door to admit them.

“That you, Smike?” shouted Squeers.

“Yes, sir” answered the boy timidly.

“Then why didn’t you come before?”

“Please sir, I fell asleep over the fire, sir.”

“Fire?” bawled Squeers. “Where’s a fire?”

“Only in the kitchen, please sir. Missis said I might sit there while I waited, sir.”

Squeers grunted, and the boy went off to see to the pony and cart.

Nicholas looked about him, and could see that the inside of the house seemed as cold and dreary as the snow that covered the wild country around it. Suddenly a very tall, ugly woman bounced into the room which they had now entered, and kissed Squeers: saying as she did so—“And how is my Squeery?”

“Quite well” answered her husband shortly. “How’s the boys?”

“They are all right—and the pigs and cows” snapped Mrs. Squeers: for such Nicholas now discovered her to be. Squeers presented him to her.

“The new young man, my dear! He will take a meal with us to-night, and go among the boys to-morrow.”

Supper was now brought in: a hot steak for Squeers, and cold beef and ale for Nicholas. The five little boys, who seemed more dead than alive, were given a little porridge and then packed into one small bed to warm each other. A straw mattress and two blankets were given to Nicholas, and the Squeers left him.

Just before going to sleep, he remembered the letter given to him by Newman Noggs at the coach. He had great trouble to read the queer cramped writing, but at length managed to make out that his father had once done Noggs a kindness, and that Noggs wanted Nicholas to know his address in London, in case he were ever in need of a night’s lodging there. Nicholas was very touched by the strange, friendly letter, and put it carefully away.

At seven next morning he was awakened by Squeers, who told him he would have to go without washing, as the pump was frozen. Nicholas dressed, and went with the schoolmaster into a large room, where he met Mrs. Squeers

with a big basin and wooden spoon. She informed him that it was "brimstone morning." The room was very dirty and bitterly cold. It was furnished with a few old desks for the boys, and two small ones for himself and Mr. Squeers: and was filled now with boys of all ages—a motley, ill-fed, diseased-looking crew. Each one was given a large spoonful of brimstone and treacle by Mrs. Squeers, and after that a small basin of porridge. Nicholas had porridge too, with the addition of a small slice of bread-and butter; after which he sat and watched the boys, who showed no desire to play, but crouched in a silent, shivering group.

Squeers returned half an hour afterwards, and the school started. The bigger boys however, were not kept for any lessons, but were sent out to break the ice on the well, and to carry water for Mrs. Squeers who was having a washing-day. Nicholas took charge of fourteen of the smaller boys, and tried to teach them to read; but they were so cold and seemed so unhappy, that he had little success. At one o'clock the boys went out to the kitchen for a meal of salt beef and potatoes, a small portion of which was served to Nicholas at his own desk in the school-room. There followed another hour of shivering in the cold room, and work began again. Squeers now gave a few slovenly lessons, thrashed two or three boys, and then left them with Nicholas till it was dark, when a scanty meal of bread and cheese was served to them.

By this time, Nicholas realised well enough what a horrible place he had come to; and when he recalled that he was there as Squeers' assistant, to be the aider and abettor of a system that filled him with anger and disgust, he felt ready to despair. Yet he had no money, and no chance at present of escaping; so he sat down and wrote a cheerful letter to his mother and sister, and hoped his uncle would be kind to them. After this he went wearily to his mattress, placed in a bedroom which he had to share with as many small boys as could be crowded on to the floor of it.

During the next week Nicholas met Miss Fanny Squeers, the daughter of the house. Miss Squeers was a very plain girl of twenty-three with red hair and a remarkable squint. She fell in love with Nicholas at first sight—mainly on account of the straightness of his legs: crooked ones being more common at Dotheboys Hall. At the same time, Mrs. Squeers took a most violent dislike to him; and between the two women, Nicholas' life became almost unbearable.

For Nicholas disliked Fanny Squeers as much as he disliked everything at the Hall. He was polite to her, however, when they met; and Fanny who was not used to politeness, took this as a sure sign that her love was returned. So she rushed off to her great friend Tilda, a miller's daughter, who had just become engaged to the

local corn-factor; to her she imparted the great news, and gave glowing descriptions of the ways and looks of Nicholas.

“How I should like to see him!” cried the friend.

“And so you shall, dear” Fanny replied. “Mother is going away for two or three days; and when she is gone, I’ll have him up to tea and ask you and John to meet him.”

Some days after this, Mrs. Squeers went off in the coach from Greta Bridge, to fetch three new boys, and to try and collect some money which was owing for some of the old ones. Whenever she went away like this, Squeers used to drive over every evening to a tavern in the nearest market-town, several miles away; so Fanny lost no time in arranging a tea party, at which she could show Nicholas to her friend and the corn-factor.

As the time for the party drew near, Fanny was in a great flutter of preparation. Her hair was curled in five rows, well over the squinting eye; a long blue sash floated down her back; round her throat she wore a bright green scarf, and long gloves completed her toilet. All these things were meant to be as arrows in the heart of Nicholas.

Tilda arrived soon after all these preparations were complete, also in long gloves; and the two girls sat in great state, while a hungry-looking servant prepared the tea.

When Nicholas walked in, he was introduced to Tilda with great ceremony. And this being over, the two girls burst into a variety of giggles, peeping at Nicholas over their handkerchiefs; till he, overcome by their strange appearance and behaviour, burst into hearty laughter and began to make himself at home.

In the midst of all this merriment John the corn-factor arrived, very damp with much washing, and dressed in his best waistcoat and an enormous white collar.

The girls went through a long and solemn introduction, while the men shook hands; then the servant was told to bring in the tea, and they all sat round the table. It was a sight to see the two men fall to on the thin bread and butter, and empty the plate so quickly.

“Old woman away?” asked John with his mouth full. Miss Squeers nodded shyly.

“Thought so!” said John staring hard at Nicholas. “You don’t get bread and butter every night when she’s at home, I’ll bet! They don’t put much into ’em here; you’ll be nought but skin and bone if you stop. The other teacher—he *was* a lean un!”

The thinness of the late teacher was evidently a great joke to John, for he laughed at the thought of it until the tears ran down his cheeks and he had to wipe his eyes on his sleeve.

Nicholas thought his behaviour very rude: and was beginning to get angry and inclined to

quarrel, when Miss Squeers interrupted the conversation with a loud scream and fell sobbing on to Tilda's shoulder.

Tilda comforted her, and glared at the two men.

"Say another word, John," she screamed "and I'll never speak to you again."

Poor John had not meant to be rude, and was much surprised at the trouble he had caused; but he told Nicholas he was sorry, and peace was restored. They all sat down to tea again, but it was not long before Fanny burst into more tears.

"What's the matter, dear?" asked Tilda.

"Nothing" sobbed Fanny.

"Here," whispered Tilda to Nicholas, "say something nice to her and she will soon come round; me and John will go into the kitchen and come back after a bit."

Nicholas looked alarmed, "What on earth should you do that for" he asked. "I can't make all this out; you don't mean to say you think...?"

"Oh no! I don't think anything at all," giggled Tilda, "but you are a funny one to keep company! We had better play a game of cards."

They sat down at once to play Speculation, and Nicholas had no time to think things out. He carefully chose Tilda as his partner which pleased her very much, for she was always ready to flirt. But it infuriated Fanny and she was so rude to

Tilda, that a furious quarrel was soon raging between the two girls. It ended in Tilda sweeping out, taking her corn-factor with her.

As soon as they had gone, Miss Squeers gave several loud screams, and then she settled down to cry harder than ever.

Nicholas looked at her for a few seconds, but feeling uncertain whether any attempts at comfort would result in his being scratched or embraced, he slipped quietly out to the wretched room where he slept.

He felt tired and worried, and more anxious about the future, for he guessed rightly that Fanny would now aid her mother in any way to annoy him.

CHAPTER II

While Nicholas was going through these unpleasant experiences in the North of England, his mother and sister were still at Miss La Creevy's waiting to hear from Ralph Nickleby.

They were comfortable, for the quaint old lady was very kind to them both; she was especially fond of Kate, who was goodnatured enough to sit still for hours, while the old lady painted her portrait. This was a great help to Miss La Creevy, who often needed models, but could never afford to pay them.

During one of these sittings she asked Kate if she had heard from her Uncle, and when she expected to hear from him again.

"I scarcely know" answered Kate. "But I hope we shall see him soon."

"I suppose he has a great deal of money" said Miss La Creevy.

"We have always believed him to be very wealthy."

"You may be sure he is" cried the old lady, "or he wouldn't be so surly; when a man's a bear, he is generally very rich."

"His manner is rough" sighed Kate.

"Rough," cried Miss La Creevy, "He's a porcupine, a cross-grained old savage, a great bear!"

"Perhaps it's only his manner" said Kate gently. "I believe he was unhappy early in his life and that soured his temper. I should be sorry to think ill of him."

Miss La Creevy sniffed at this, and soon began again. "Well, my dear, it's very right and proper for you to think like this, but I must say, that without hurting himself, he could very well help you and your mother to be comfortable."

But Kate would not agree to this, and said she would much prefer to work for her living; and that all she wished to ask of her Uncle was a recommendation to some one who would employ her.

She had scarcely finished saying this, when a loud knock was heard at the door, and in answer to Miss La Creevy's "Come in" Ralph Nickleby appeared. He stood and scowled at the

two women for a second or two, and then said sharply to Miss La Creevy :

“Have you let your lodgings yet, ma’am?”

Miss La Creevy looked at Kate in surprise, and said: “Why no, Sir! I have not put up a bill yet, Sir.”

“Then do at once, ma’am, for my people will not want the rooms after this week; or if they do, can’t pay for them.—Now Kate, if you are ready we will lose no time.”

Without troubling to say good-bye to Miss La Creevy, he hustled Kate out of the room, and went up to Mrs. Nickleby, who received him with many expressions of regard.

He very rudely interrupted her welcome, and told them that he had found a situation for Kate with a dressmaker and milliner in the town.

“At a milliner’s?” said Mrs. Nickleby in surprise.

Kate said nothing, but hung her head to hide her dismay.

“Yes, ma’am, at a milliner’s! Her name is Mantalini, and if Kate is disposed to try for the post, I will take her round there at once.”

It was quite evident that he did not intend to offer them anything else, so Mrs. Nickleby timidly asked Kate what she had to say about it. Poor Kate was feeling very unhappy, but she did not wish to upset her mother, and just answered that she would go with her uncle and talk to him on the way to Madame Mantalini’s.

As Ralph was showing signs of impatience at being kept, she at once went and changed into a walking dress ; and Ralph, who had been fretting and fuming at the delay, hurried her down into the street.

As they were going along, Kate asked her uncle if she would be able to live at home, if she took this situation.

“ At home ? ” said Ralph. “ Where’s that ? ”

“ I mean, with my mother.”

“ You’ll live here, to all intents and purposes ” answered Ralph. “ For here you’ll be from morning till night, and here you will have your meals : but I have provided a home, where you can join your mother every night.”

They had now arrived at Madame Mantalini’s door, where a footman met them and showed them into a small room to wait. Madame Mantalini talked to Kate, engaged her as a beginner at a salary of five shillings a week, and told her to be there at eight the following Monday.

“ Now ” said Ralph as they walked home-wards, “ you are provided for, and you must leave your lodgings next Saturday. You and your mother can live in a house of mine till it is let.”

“ Is it far from here, uncle ? ” asked Kate.

“ In the East End ” answered Ralph ; “ but I’ll send my clerk to show you the way. Good-bye ! ”

Kate went sadly back to her mother and Miss La Creevy, and told them that she had got

the work and they were to move on Saturday. Miss La Creevy was so upset at the thought of their leaving, that she had to pull all sorts of queer faces during the evening, to prevent herself from having what she called "a real good cry." She promised to come over and see them very often.

On Saturday Newman came with a coach to take them to their new home. It was a very old house on one of the river wharves, dark, damp and gloomy. A few old bits of furniture were arranged in two rooms, and Newman lighted a fire and put on the kettle.

He did all he could to help Kate make the place as comfortable as possible; and when there was nothing else to do, stood and cracked all his fingers in rapid succession. This startled Mrs. Nickleby at first, but she put it down to gout.

"Perhaps, my dear, Mr. Noggs would like to drink our healths," she said as he was going.

"I think, Mother, you would hurt his feelings very much if you offered it," said Kate.

Newman stared at her gratefully for a minute, bowed suddenly like a gentleman and rushed out.

CHAPTER III

Miss Squeers made one more attempt to ensnare the affections of Nicholas; and being as unsuccessful the second time as she had been at

first, promptly went over to her mother's side and did all she could to make his life more miserable than ever.

But there was another and deeper reason for his greater unhappiness. The wretched boy Smike, ever since Nicholas has spoken kindly to him one day, had followed him about like a dog, trying in his humble way to serve him, and content to be near him. Squeers and his family soon observed this; and, jealous of the love he gave to Nicholas, treated the poor boy more cruelly than ever. Blows and stripes seemed to be his only portion. Nicholas had tried to arrange a few regular lessons for the boys, and did all he could to interest them in the few tattered books they had. But they were too illfed and beaten to learn anything.

One cold morning in January, Nicholas was awakened by Squeers shouting at him from the bottom of the stairs, asking for Smike.

Nicholas looked round at the sleepers on the floor, but could not see Smike.

"He is not here, sir," he said.

"Don't tell me lies," roared the schoolmaster, "He is!"

"He is not" retorted Nicholas angrily.

"We'll soon see that! I'll find him. I warrant you!" Saying this he bounced into the bedroom and swung his cane over the corner where Smike generally slept at night. But the cane only hit the ground. There was nobody there.

“Come” said Squeers. “This won’t do; where is he?”

“I have seen nothing of him since last night” replied Nicholas. Squeers now asked the boys if any of them knew what had become of Smike, and amid the general hum of anxious denial, a small voice was heard to say, “Please Sir, I think Smike’s run away, Sir.”

“Ha!” said Squeers, “who said that?”

“Tompkins, please Sir,” said all the boys at once.

Squeers made a plunge into the crowd, and caught hold of a very small boy still in his night dress.

“So you think he has run away, do you?”

“Yes, please Sir,” replied the small boy.

“And for what reason do you think any boy would want to run away from this school?” asked Squeers, beating him until he could hold him no longer.

Mrs. Squeers had been listening to all this at the bottom of the stairs, but now she came into the room, knocking boys right and left as she did so.

“What’s all this about?” she asked.

“Well, my dear” said Squeers, “the fact is that Smike is nowhere to be found.”

Mrs. Squeers insisted that it was all Nicholas’ fault, and abused him soundly for some minutes. Then she went out to search the stables and outhouses, but there was no trace of Smike.

When she came back, she told Squeers that he had better take the pony and trap and go searching one way and she would take the cart and go the other.

“He must be on a public road” she said, “for he has no money, and he didn’t take any food with him, that I’ll answer for. So he must beg his way, and he could do that nowhere but on a public road.”

The Squeers started out, each taking a stout stick with them, and several pieces of cord for use on the poor boy when he was found.

Nicholas stayed behind and tried to look after the boys, but he was too worried about Smike to do much for them.

Squeers came back two days later, with the pony worn out and in a very bad temper, for he had not seen or heard anything of the boy. But the day after that, Mrs. Squeers was heard shouting outside, and running to the window, Nicholas saw poor Smike tied to the back of the cart. He was covered with mud and looked more dead than alive. The Squeers carried him in and ordered every boy to go at once to the school room, where Squeers soon appeared with an extra thick, new cane.

“Is every boy here?” asked Squeers in a roaring voice. “Each boy to his own place then, and Nickleby, go to your desk.” Squeers counted the boys to see that they were all there and then left the room, returning soon after with Smike.

“Well,” said Squeers “and what have you to say?”

Smike did not answer, he only stared at Nicholas.

“Have you anything to say?” shouted Squeers, beating his cane on his desk.

“Spare me, Sir,” Smike managed to whisper at last.

“Spare you? I’ll thrash you within an inch of your life!” answered Squeers. “You nasty, ungrateful, brutish, sneaking, obstinate dog” chimed in Mrs. Squeers, taking his head under her arm and giving it a sharp cuff with each word.

“Stand aside,” said Squeers.

He lifted his cane and gave a savage cut at Smike as he lay on the floor, when Nicholas called out “Stop!”, and told him that he would not stand by and see a poor boy tortured: but that if the thrashing went on, he would stop it by force. Squeers was so furious at the interruption, that he lifted his cane and struck Nicholas full in the face with it.

Smarting with the blow, Nicholas wrested the cane from his hand and beat the ruffian till he roared for mercy.

When he had finished he went straight up to his room, packed his things and left the house for ever; he looked round for Smike before he left, but could find no trace of him.

He decided to walk to London, as he had scarcely any money, and was trudging along,

when he suddenly met the corn-factor. He told him what had happened, which made the huge Yorkshireman shake with laughter. But when he heard that Nicholas had to go all the way to London, he insisted on lending him a pound and a stout stick.

Nicholas walked as far as he could, but the snow was still thick and the evening soon grew dark; so he turned into a barn to rest.

On waking next morning, he saw a form lying a few yards away from him; it was Smike.

When Smike saw that Nicholas was awake, he crawled over to him and knelt at his side.

“How came you here?” asked Nicholas.

Smike explained how he had followed Nicholas all the way, but had not dared to appear before, in case he should be sent back.

“May I come with you?” he begged. “I will be your servant. I will not want anything. I only want to be near you.”

“And so you shall” cried Nicholas. “And the world shall deal with you as it does with me. Come.”

With these words, he helped Smike up and took his bag on his back; so they passed out of the barn together, on to the London road.

It took them many weeks to reach London, for Smike was too worn out to go far at a time. Also the roads were in a very bad state, owing to the wet weather. They were almost shoeless and penniless when they at last reached the city,

and Nicholas decided to seek out Newman Noggs and ask him to give them shelter, while he looked for work.

Newman lived in a tumbledown street in Soho, where all the houses were let out in single rooms. He had a little attic on the top back floor.

As soon as he had recovered from his astonishment at seeing Nicholas and Smike, he dashed downstairs to the first floor, where a Mr. and Mrs. Kenwigs were having a wedding party. Without a word of explanation to the astonished company, he seized a large jug of steaming hot Punch off the table, and bore it upstairs. He made Nicholas and Smike share it between them, threw his entire stock of coals on the fire and helped them off with their wet clothes.

Nicholas had a few coppers left and sent Newman out for some bread and cheese and ale. After the discomforts of the last few weeks, their supper seemed a most comfortable meal; to Smike it seemed a feast.

When they had finished, they sat round the fire, and Nicholas asked anxiously after his mother and sister.

“They are well,” said Newman.

“And living in the city still?” inquired Nicholas.

“They are ” answered Newman.

Nicholas went on to tell Newman that he did not wish to see them until he had found work, as he did not wish to be a burden on them,

and he knew they would insist on him going to live with them at once, if they heard he was in London. He then asked if his Uncle had heard from the Squeers; and if he had, what they had said. Newman did not answer for some time, but stared at Nicholas grimly, at last he muttered.

“Hear it tomorrow.”

“But why wait until tomorrow?” asked Nicholas.

“You will sleep the better” replied Newman.

But Nicholas insisted on hearing straight away; so Noggs told him that a letter had arrived for his Uncle two days before, written by Fanny Squeers. She said that Nicholas had nearly killed her father, who was still ill in bed. After this he had run away, taking with him some of Mrs. Squeers’ jewellery, and one of the boys, described by Fanny as a lad of desperate character.

Nicholas felt very angry when he heard this, and told Newman the true story of his leaving. He then said he must go to his Uncle at once and put the matter straight there. He also wished to tell his Uncle what Dotheboys Hall was really like; though he had a shrewd idea that Ralph Nickleby knew a good deal more about the place than he pretended to, and that he had sent him there just to be rid of him.

“But you cannot go out at this time of night” said Newman.

“Yes, I must” answered Nicholas. “It is due to myself and to him, that I should state the truth as soon as possible.”

As he said this he tried to dash down the stairs, but Newman held him back, telling him that his Uncle was away for three days. But he approved of Nicholas’s decision to go straight to his Uncle as soon as he returned, and told him not to see his mother or sister until he had done this.

He also assured Nicholas that his Mother and Kate had heard nothing of the matter, as Ralph Nickleby had received the letter just as he was starting out and had no time to attend to it.

So Nicholas sat down again and began talking over plans for the future with Newman, and the possibilities of obtaining work for himself and perhaps a light job for Smike, who, overcome by the unusual warmth of the room, had fallen asleep on the floor.

They were interrupted by several loud screams from one of the rooms below; and Nicholas, dashing down to see what was the matter, found that the little girl who had been engaged to mind the Kenwigs’ baby, while the party was in progress, had set the curtains on fire with a candle.

He seized the baby and running downstairs with it, met the father with such force that he knocked him down six steps.

But everyone was so relieved to find the baby safe, that this did not seem to matter in the least, and Nicholas was taken into the front room and treated as a hero.

He made a great impression on the company; the little matter of the jug of Punch was quite forgiven, and an extra jugful brewed with which to drink his health.

As soon as he could get away, he went back to Newman's attic, where Newman insisted on him taking his bed, while he made up one on the floor for himself and Smike.

The first thing Nicholas did the next morning was to look for some room in which, until better times dawned for him, he and Smike could live. Newman offered them a share of his, but Nicholas felt that it would not be right to take his offer, for it was evident that the poor man had barely enough food for himself.

He found on inquiry that another small back attic was to be had in the same house, and he agreed to take this, selling a coat to pay the first week's rent and a trifle for the hire of a few pieces of furniture.

He then went out to seek for work, leaving Smike to arrange and rearrange the poor room with as much delight as if it had been the finest palace.

Newman had told him to go to a place called "The General Agency" where situations of all kinds were supposed to be had. Nicholas

found the place, and read over a list of work; but he was not at all encouraged by it, for it seemed to be only domestic servants that were wanted. But he told himself that he could not afford to be critical and that he must have work at once, so he went in and asked the clerk behind the counter, if there were any teachers or secretaries wanted.

The clerk said there was one situation of this kind vacant; Mr. Gregsbury of Manchester Buildings, a Member of Parliament, needed a secretary, and the clerk thought Nicholas might do.

Nicholas asked what the salary was to be.

“I don’t know what the terms are; he said he’d settle that himself; but they should be pretty good ones, as he’s a Member of Parliament,” said the man.

As there was nothing else available that seemed suitable, Nicholas resolved to go at once to interview Mr. Gregsbury, and asked for the number of his flat.

“I don’t know what the number is; but Manchester Buildings isn’t a large place, and if the worst comes to the worst, it won’t take you long to knock at all the doors to find out what you want.”

And with these directions Nicholas had to be content. He found Manchester Buildings in a small dirty street in the region of Westminster. It was Vacation-time, so most of the houses had a

“To Let” bill in the window; but when Parliament was sitting these would disappear and the street swarm with members.

As he turned into the street, he saw a number of people going to one of the houses and thought it would be a good thing to inquire there for Mr. Gregsbury. To his delight, the small page told him that this was the place and asked him to join the other people going in. Nicholas did so, and found the passage crowded with men of all descriptions; after they had been waiting some time, a voice from upstairs called out, “Come up, gentlemen, please.”

The crowd pushed upstairs into a room on the first landing, where they were met by a tough, burly, thickheaded man, with a very loud voice.

Nicholas had at first thought that all the men were after the situation, but soon discovered that they were a deputation from Mr. Gregsbury’s constituency, very displeased with something he had done.

A furious argument raged, but Mr. Gregsbury was not a Member of Parliament for nothing, and soon talked them over and sent them all away, feeling very pleased with themselves, and quite sure that they had got what they wanted, though it was quite plain to Nicholas, as an onlooker, that they had got nothing of the kind.

Nicholas stayed until they had all gone and then came out of the corner where he had waited

and showed the great man the card from the employment office, explaining at the same time that he had heard that Mr. Gregsbury was in need of a secretary, and wished to offer his services.

Mr. Gregsbury stared at him for some time and then said.

“You want to be my secretary, do you?”

“I wish to be employed in that capacity, sir” replied Nicholas.

“Well, what can you do?”

“I suppose,” answered Nicholas smiling, “I could do what usually falls to the lot of secretaries.”

“And what’s that?” Mr. Gregsbury retorted.

“Well, seeing to your letters, sir, arranging your papers and documents, writing from your dictation, and copying your public speeches. And, of course, making myself useful in any way you may require.”

Mr. Gregsbury thought for a moment, and then said;

“That’s all very well as far as it goes, Mr. er……what’s your name?” Nicholas told him. “But it don’t go far enough. I should require to be crammed, sir.”

“I beg your pardon, sir, but will you explain?”

Mr. Gregsbury then explained at great length, that as he was not much of a reader himself, he expected his secretary to read all the papers and memorize the news on foreign policy, etc., as well

as all the bits that might be useful in the home news. "You see, young man, you'll have to write my speeches," he pointed out, "and I hope you can put in a good joke or two; jokes always go well in the House." He also expected his secretary to go to the strangers' gallery whenever he was in the House, and point him out to people there as the great and celebrated member, Mr. Gregsbury.

When he paused to take breath, Nicholas asked him what salary he would give for these services. Mr. Gregsbury thought hard for several minutes, and then said, with the satisfied air of a man who feels that he is being very liberal, that he would give fifteen shillings a week.

"Fifteen shillings a week is not very much" said Nicholas.

"Not much! Fifteen shillings a week not much, sir?" shouted Mr. Gregsbury. "Then you decline my offer, sir?"

"I have no alternative but to do so" replied Nicholas.

"Matthews," called Mr. Gregsbury; and not even troubling to wish Nicholas good morning, he told the page boy to show him out.

For the rest of the day, Nicholas searched for some suitable work, but was unsuccessful; for the only jobs that offered were so poorly paid, and such hard work and long hours, that he was afraid to try any of them.

At last he gave it up and went sadly back to Smike, who had scraped a meal together from the scraps of their last night's supper; the poor fellow picked out the choicest bits and gave them to Nicholas, but he was so discouraged by the day's failure that he had not eaten anything, when Newman Noggs looked in during the evening.

"Any luck?"; he inquired.

"No," replied Nicholas, "I'm tired to death, and for all the good I have done I might as well have stayed at home all day."

"Would you mind doing little things? They would pay the rent and more; but you wouldn't like them, I'm afraid."

Nicholas assured him that he would do anything in his power to earn an honest living; so Newman told him, that Mrs. Kenwigs had asked him if he thought Nicholas would teach her family French in his spare time.

Nicholas could give the lessons during the evening, so as not to interfere with any other employment he might obtain. And he would be paid five shillings every week.

"There" said Newman, "That's all. It's beneath you, I know; but I thought that perhaps you might, just for the present,....."

"Might!" cried Nicholas, "of course I will. Tell Mrs. Kenwigs so at once. And that I am ready to begin whenever she pleases."

Newman ran downstairs at once to tell Mrs. Kenwigs that his friend was willing to take her

offer; and soon returning, brought word that she would be happy to see him in the first floor as soon as he could go down.

One of the little girls was sent out to buy a second-hand French Grammar from the book-stall round the corner, and as soon as she came back, the four children were arranged in a row to await their teacher's coming.

When Nicholas came down, he was received very kindly by Mrs. Kenwigs, and introduced to several friends who had been invited in to hear the first lesson. It went very well; for Nicholas, realizing the kindly spirit of the people he had come amongst, did his best, and when it was over went up to Newman and Smike feeling much happier and more hopeful for the future.

CHAPTER IV

It was with a heavy heart, that Kate left her home on the morning appointed for the commencement of her work with Madame Mantalini. She had to make a very early start, for it was a long walk from her home to the milliner's. As she went along she saw many other girls hurrying towards their workshops, and noted with dismay how pale and sickly most of them looked. She arrived in good time and knocked timidly on the door; it was opened by a footman, who just stared at her.

“Is Madame Mantalini in?” faltered Kate.

“Not often out at this time, miss,” answered the man rudely.

“Can I see her?” asked Kate.

“Eh? Lord, no!” he said, grinning broadly.

“But I came by her own appointment,” said Kate; “I am—I am—to be employed here.”

“Then why didn’t you ring the workers’ bell?” he asked, showing her a handle in one of the door posts. “Let me see though, I forgot. Miss Nickleby, is it?”

“Yes,” replied Kate.

“You’re to walk upstairs then,” said the man. “Madame Mantalini wants to see you. This way—take care of these things on the floor.”

He led Kate into a small back room, through a passage filled with trays, glasses, and piles of chairs, plainly bespeaking a party on the previous night.

“Wait here and I’ll tell her presently,” said the man; he then went off and left her alone. She waited for some time, for from the sounds that came from an adjoining room, she guessed that the Mantalini’s were having breakfast, also a violent quarrel over Mr. Mantalini’s extravagance.

But at last the door between the two rooms was opened and Madame appeared, much surprised to find Kate there.

“Dear me, child,” she exclaimed. “How came you here?”

"I have been waiting for some time, ma'am" said Kate, "The servant must have forgotten to let you know that I was here."

"You really must speak to that man," said Madame, turning to her husband, who had just entered the room. "He forgets everything."

She then led Kate down a flight of stairs, to a large back room where a number of young women were busy with cutting out, sewing, and altering various hats and dresses. It was a close room, lighted by one window in the roof. Madame called for Miss Knag, and a short bustling woman came forward.

"Oh, Miss Knag," said Madame, "this is the young person I spoke to you about."

Miss Knag gave a reverent smile to her employer, and a fairly gracious one to Kate; saying at the same time, that although it was a great deal of trouble to her to have young, untrained girls in the room, she would do her best for Kate, and she hoped that Kate would do her best in her work.

"I think that, at first, Miss Nickleby had better be in the showroom, and try things on for customers, as she will be no use in any other way for the present" said Madame.

"Very well, Madame," said Miss Knag, humbly.

"You'll take care that Miss Nickleby understands her hours, and so forth—? Then I'll leave her with you."

Miss Knag replied that to forget anything that Madame Mantalini had said, was an impossibility; and Madame, giving a general good-morning to the workers, sailed away.

One of the girls showed Kate where to put her bonnet and shawl; and then for sometime the rest of them, including Miss Knag, asked her questions about her life, where she lived and why she was in mourning. Kate was not used to being talked to like this, and answered as little as she could, without being rude. At last Miss Knag, seeing that work was being neglected with all this chatter, ordered silence, and the work went on quietly until half past one.

Then a bell rang, and the girls went into the kitchen for a meal of baked mutton and potatoes. After they had finished this, they all washed their hands, and went back to work. A little later, carriages began to rattle through the street, and customers arrived to be fitted.

Kate was sent up to the show-room with Miss Knag, for she had only to stand by and hold the costumes and hats until Miss Knag was ready for them. Now and then she was allowed to fasten a hook or tie a string. Late in the afternoon, a lady and her daughter came to have some court-dresses tried on. They were very much out of temper, and vented it on poor Kate, even complaining to Madame Mantalini about her. Kate shed many bitter tears when these people had gone, for she

realised that such treatment would often be her portion in the work her uncle had chosen for her.

When the last customer had gone, she was sent back to the work room, and given simple sewing tasks until nine o'clock, when they were dismissed by Miss Knag.

Kate hurried out and found her Mother waiting for her at the corner of the street. Kate was too kind to tell her the truth about her work, and merely said, in answer to Mrs. Nickleby's anxious inquiries, that she thought she would get on quite well when she was more used to it.

This pleased Mrs. Nickleby, who at once began to picture both her children becoming prosperous, Kate in a business of her own perhaps, and Nicholas at least a headmaster.

She and Kate spent the rest of their long walk, discussing the last letter they had from Nicholas, little guessing how near he was to them, or how badly off he was.

Miss Knag, who always liked people very much for the first three days she knew them, and generally hated them afterwards, praised Kate to Madame Mantalini; but Madame was cross, and remarked that as far as she could judge, Kate had only succeeded in vexing a valuable client.

So Kate began her second day's work with a scolding, which made her feel very unhappy;

but she did her best and tried to please her employers, and to take an interest in her work.

As she was putting on her things to go home, Miss Knag asked her which way she was walking and, hearing that it was towards the city, offered to go along with her.

“Good gracious me!” said Miss Knag, “and do you really live in the city?”

“Is it so very unusual for anybody to live there” asked Kate.

“I shouldn’t have believed it possible that any young woman could live there” replied Miss Knag.

“Poor people” said Kate sadly “must live where they can.”

“Ah! very true, so they must; and heaven suits the back to the burden; what a nice thing it is to think that it should be so, isn’t it?”

“Very,” answered Kate.

Miss Knag now devoted her entire attention to the settling of her bonnet. Kate would much have preferred to go home alone, but she did not wish to offend Miss Knag, so she waited patiently for her.

They found Mrs. Nickleby cooling, not her heels alone, but all her limbs generally, at the street corner. Kate made her known to Miss Knag, who acknowledged the introduction with condescending politeness. Mrs. Nickleby was always very pleased at a chance to talk about her children, and Miss Knag was always pleased

to find someone fresh with whom to talk about herself ; so the two ladies got on very well, and both talked without stopping, not even caring whether anyone was listening or not.

Miss Knag lived with her brother, who kept a small book-shop in the Tottenham Court Road; when they arrived near here, Miss Knag was so deep in a long story about a proposal which she had once received from a very wealthy gentleman, that she insisted upon them going home with her to supper.

“Don't go away, Mortimer” said Miss Knag to her brother, as they entered the shop. “It's only one of our young ladies and her mother,—a Mrs. and Miss Nickleby.”

“Oh! indeed,” said Mr. Knag. “Oh!”

Having said this, Mr. Knag slowly snuffed the two candles on the counter and then snuffed himself from his waistcoat pocket. He was a tall lank man with solemn features, and looked so grave and sighed so often, that Mrs. Nickleby decided he must be of a literary turn of mind.

As it was long past ten, he decided to shut the shop ; and having done this, joined the ladies in the back parlour, where a cold supper was laid. He sighed so often and so loudly, that at last Mrs. Nickleby asked Miss Knag if he was ill.

“Hush!” said Miss Knag, “No, it is not illness, but a most sad history ; he is most devoted to Madame Mantalini. He hoped to marry her, and the disappointment of not doing so was a terrible blow. He has such a romantic heart.”

Mrs. Nickleby was much impressed with all this and thoroughly enjoyed her supper party.

For one more day, the friendship between Miss Knag and Kate continued; but on the fourth it received a severe check. Kate had been trying very hard to please the customers who came to be fitted, and succeeded so well that some of them took to asking for her when they arrived. One young lady, the wife of a very great man indeed, told Madame that she would have no one else to serve her, and when Miss Knag wished to do so, sent her away, murmuring something about "an old thing."

"Madame Mantalini" she called, "Pray have up that pretty young thing we saw yesterday."

"Yes, Ma'am" said Madame Mantalini. "Miss Knag, send up Miss Nickleby; and you need not return."

"I beg your pardon, Madame, what did you say?"

"You need not return." Answered her superior, sharply.

Miss Knag vanished without another word, and was replaced by Kate, who took off and put on bonnets and dresses, and pleased the ladies so much that Madame herself praised her when they had gone.

Kate was amazed when she entered the work room to find Miss Knag laid on a large box, bathed in tears, while two or three of the girls

stood round in close attendance on her, with hartshorn, vinegar and other restoratives.

“Bless me!” cried Kate, “what is the matter?”

This enquiry produced in Miss Knag a most violent relapse: and the young ladies, looking angrily at Kate, applied more vinegar and said it was a shame.

“What is a shame?” demanded Kate. “What has happened? Tell me?”

“Matter!” said Miss Knag, coming to all at once and sitting up so suddenly, that she upset two of the attendants, “Matter! Fie upon you, you nasty creature.”

“Gracious!” cried Kate. “Have I offended you?”

“*You*” screamed Miss Knag “You offend *me*! You, a chit, a nobody, a bold-faced thing! Ha, Ha, Ha!”

As Miss Knag was evidently trying to laugh, all the other young ladies, who always took their tone from her as a matter of business, laughed too.

“For fifteen years” exclaimed Miss Knag, now crying again, “for fifteen years have I been the credit and ornament of this room, and the one upstairs. And thank God, I have never, in all that time, till now, been exposed to the vile arts of a creature who disgraces us all with her ways, who makes me blush. Oh! how I feel it.” Here she stamped both feet with great

energy, and then relapsed into tears again. The girls renewed their attentions ; and Miss Knag, having been revived, gurgled, screamed, and hiccupped, and declared herself well again.

Poor Kate had a bad time during the next few days, for Miss Knag did not make friends, and did all she could to make things difficult for her. She also took good care that none of the girls were friendly either.

One night, when Kate joined her Mother as usual, she was surprised to find her uncle Ralph waiting there as well. He told her that he wished her to dine with him the following day, and help him to entertain a party of gentlemen. So the next evening she went to her uncle's and was surprised to find preparations for a very grand party, but very upset to hear that there would be no other ladies present. However, her uncle told her that it was a business party, and took her into a room where eight men were talking round the fire. He introduced them to her and Kate tried, for his sake, to be agreeable to them. But when the wine had gone round several times during the dinner and the men started to make bets about her, poor Kate could bear it no longer and fled. She found her way to a small room, where she sat and rested. After a while she rang the bell, and asked a servant to tell her uncle that she was going home. The maid returned with a message that Ralph wished to see her before she went. Kate picked up a book and tried to read while she waited for him.

Suddenly the door opened, and she saw that one of her uncle's guests had come in; he was very drunk, and when he saw Kate began to behave very badly, trying to kiss her and upsetting her very much indeed.

Fortunately it was not long before Ralph Nickleby appeared, and he very soon sent Sir Mulberry Hawk about his business. Poor Kate was weeping bitterly, and begged her uncle to send her home. So as soon as she felt better, he called a coach and, bidding her not to tell anyone what had happened, said good-night and dismissed her.

Her Mother was in bed and asleep when she got home, so Kate went straight to bed; but the following morning she felt too unwell to go to work; and as Mrs. Nickleby did not wish to leave her, Miss La Creevy was asked to go to Madame Mantalini's to explain, and to say that Kate would return as soon as possible.

She was interviewed by Miss Knag, who informed her that as far as she was concerned, she could spare Miss Nickleby for evermore.

"Oh, indeed, ma'am," cried Miss La Creevy, highly offended at this insult to her favourite. "But, you see, ma'am, you are not the mistress of this business, and therefore of no consequence!"

With this, the little woman bounced into the street, telling herself all the way home just what she thought of Miss Knag; and was so pleased with some of the things she thought of, that she

sat down to her breakfast in a very good temper. She had just taken her first sip of tea, when there was a knock at the door, and the little servant said a gentleman wished to see her. The next minute Nicholas walked in. Miss La Creevy was much surprised to recognise him, and very upset to hear his news about Yorkshire, and to see how pale and ill he looked. She insisted on him joining her at her breakfast; and while they had it, he told her that he had just been to his uncle's to tell him the truth about the Squeers, but had found him out. Newman said that Ralph Nickleby intended visiting Mrs. Nickleby and Kate during the day, to tell them what he had heard about Nicholas. So Nicholas had decided to meet him there and have the matter out, face to face. But he did not wish to arrive suddenly before his mother and sister, as he feared it would give them a shock, for they believed him so far away. So he asked Miss La Creevy if she would go and tell them that he was in London, and prepare them for his coming. This the good soul readily agreed to do; she finished her breakfast in a great hurry, hid the key of her tea caddy under the fender, put on her bonnet, and taking Nicholas's arm, set off at once to the city.

It so chanced that Ralph Nickleby, instead of seeing to any of his business first, went straight to his sister-in-law's. Hence, when Miss La Creevy found her way into their sitting room, she saw Mrs. Nickleby and Kate in tears,

and Ralph just finishing an account of his nephew's wrong-doing. Ralph was very angry and making the case against Nicholas look as black as possible, but Kate was insisting that there was some mistake and that Nicholas was innocent.

"Innocent!" said Ralph. "Do innocent men prowl about the country as idle robbers do? Assault, riot, theft,—what do you call these?"

"A lie!" cried a voice, and Nicholas came into the room. He looked so angrily at Ralph, that Miss La Creevy and Kate put themselves between the two men, for fear of a fight starting.

A scene of great confusion then took place, for Ralph insulted Nicholas and said he believed all that Fanny Squeers had written in the letter. And he told Mrs. Nickleby and Kate that he would help them no longer, if they had anything more to do with this young man.

Mrs. Nickleby was very upset at the thought of losing even the poor home they had; but both she and Kate were firm, and said nothing on earth would ever sever them from Nicholas, or prevent them from believing in him. But Nicholas replied that he could not stay to be a burden on them: and having told them the truth about the whole affair, he said good-bye, promising to send for them as soon as he could get work enough to provide them with some sort of a home. To his uncle, as he left, he said :

“I leave them to you at your own desire. There will be a day of reckoning sooner or later, and it will be a heavy one for you if they are wronged.”

Ralph did not allow a muscle of his face to indicate that he heard one word of this parting address; and the minute it was concluded. Nicholas was gone.

As he hurried through the streets to his poor lodging, many sad thoughts passed through his mind; he felt he was separated from all who loved him, and was tempted to return. Then he wondered if he had been right to leave his mother and Kate at the mercy of his uncle; but felt that as he had no work and would have been a burden on them if he had stayed, he had acted for the best.

When he reached his room, he flung himself on the bed, and turning his face to the wall, gave vent to the emotions he had so long stifled.

He did not hear Smike enter, but, happening to raise his head, he saw him, standing at the upper end of the room, looking sadly towards him. When he saw Nicholas's eyes on him, Smike pretended to be busy with some scanty preparations for dinner.

“Well, Smike” said Nicholas, as cheerfully as he could, “let me hear what new friends you have made this morning, or what new wonder you have found in the streets.”

“No” said Smike, “I must talk of something else today.”

“Of what you like” answered Nicholas.

“Of this” said Smike. “I know you are unhappy and have got into trouble through bringing me away. You are not rich, you have not enough for yourself, you grow thinner every day. I should not be here. I cannot bear the thought of how I am burdening you. I tried to go away today, but I could not leave you without a word.” The poor fellow could say no more, for his eyes were full of tears and his voice was gone.

“The word that separates us” said Nicholas “shall never be said by me. You are my only comfort and stay. I would not lose you, Smike, for all the world. Give me your hand. What if I am in poverty? You lighten it, and we will journey from this place together before the week is out.”

CHAPTER V

Kate was too much upset by the various trials she had undergone, to return to work the next day. Indeed, several days elapsed before she felt well enough to return to Madame Mantalini's.

Miss Knag had not grown more friendly towards her during her absence, and remarked loudly to the girls, when Kate came in, that it

was a pity some people didn't know when to stop away for good, seeing how little they were wanted. She would have gone on longer in this strain, but Madame called down the speaking tube for Miss Nickleby to come upstairs at once, to help in the arranging of the show-room. This order caused Miss Knag to bite her lips so hard, and to toss her head so much, that her powers of speech were quite killed for some time.

"Well, Miss Nickleby, child" said Madame, when Kate presented herself, "are you quite well again?"

"A great deal better, thank you" replied Kate.

"I wish I could say the same" remarked Madame, who looked very tired.

"Are you ill?" asked Kate. "I am sorry to hear it."

"Not exactly ill, child; but worried—worried. There, get to your work, and put the things in order, do!"

While Kate was putting the show-room tidy, and wondering what was the matter with Madame, Mr. Mantalini came in and had a long whispered conversation with his wife, during which Madame made many references to certain debts which she had had to pay for him; and many more to certain weaknesses of his, such as gaming, wasting, idling and betting.

"See what a situation you have placed me in" cried Madame in tears.

“No harm shall come” rejoined Mr. Mantalini. “Money shall be got in; and if it don’t come in fast enough, old Nickleby shall stump up again, or have his jugular separated if he dares to vex....

“Hush” said Madame, pointing to Kate, and took him upstairs to breakfast. Kate busied herself in what she had to do, and was arranging the room in the best taste she could display, when she was startled to hear a strange voice in the room. Looking round, she saw that a large, rough-looking man had come in.

“Don’t alarm yourself, Miss,” said the man. “I say, this here’s the mantle-making concern, aint it?”

“Yes” rejoined Kate, greatly astonished. “What do you want?” The stranger did not answer her, but went out into the passage, and brought back with him another man, also very rough and dirty-looking. Kate felt rather frightened, and was just going to move towards the door, when the man who had entered first, told her to wait a minute.

“Where’s your governor? Mister Mantalini,—is he at home?”

“He is upstairs” said Kate. “Do you want him?”

“No” answered the visitor. “I don’t exactly want him; but you tell him if he wants to speak to me, and save trouble,—well, here I am.”

He showed Kate a large card with the name of Scaley written on it.

Kate rang the bell which would summon Madame Mantalini, and went on with her work. Mr. Scaley meanwhile walked round the room, fingering the dresses, and looking at the furniture. He was so busy doing this that he did not notice Madame Mantalini enter the room, but her cry of surprise roused him.

“Is this the missis?” inquired Scaley.

“It is Madame Mantalini” replied Kate.

“Then” said Mr. Scaley, pulling a small paper from his pocket and opening it very slowly, “this is a writ of execution, and if it’s not settled at once we’ll go over the house and take possession.”

Poor Madame wrung her hands, and rang the bell for her husband; which done, she fell into a chair and a fainting-fit at the same time. Mr. Scaley was not at all put out by this; he just leaned on a stand, on which a handsome blue silk dress was hanging, pushed his hat on one side and stared at the lady. After a while Mr. Mantalini came in; but as he had met Mr. Scaley several times before, in similar situations, he only shrugged his shoulders, and asked what the total amount of his debt was.

“Fifteen hundred and twenty-seven pound, four and nine pence ha’penny” said Mr. Scaley calmly, not moving off the dress.

"The halfpenny be demned," answered Mr. Mantalini.

"By all means if you wish it" retorted Scaley, "and the ninepence."

"And it don't matter to us if the fifteen hundred and twenty-seven pound went along with it" said the man who had come to help Mr. Scaley.

Madame Mantalini here recovered enough to sob bitterly, and Mr. Mantalini went to her, and begged her to stop and listen to him for two minutes.

"Oh! don't speak to me" sobbed his wife. "You have ruined me, that's enough!"

Mr. Mantalini no sooner heard these words, than he fell back several paces, assumed a look of great mental agony, rushed headlong from the room and was heard to bang a door upstairs with great violence.

"Miss Nickleby!" screamed Madame when this sound reached her ears. "Make haste for heaven's sake! He will destroy himself! I spoke unkindly to him, and he cannot bear it from me. Alfred, my darling Alfred!"

She hurried upstairs, followed by Kate, who was feeling very upset by all these disturbances. When the door was flung open they saw Mr. Mantalini, sharpening a large breakfast knife on his razor strop.

"Ha!" he cried. "Interrupted!" Into his dressing-gown pocket went the knife, while he

rolled his eyes, and pulled his hair and whiskers into wild disorder.

“Alfred!” cried his wife, flinging her arms around him, “I didn’t mean to say it! Compose yourself. It was nobody’s fault; it was mine as well as yours, and we shall do very well yet. Come, Alfred!”

Mr. Mantalini did not think it proper to come to at once, but called several times for poison, and asked someone to blow his brains out; then he allowed gentler feelings to prevail upon him, and wept bitterly. In this softened state, he let the knife be taken away from him; to tell the truth, he was rather glad to be rid of it, as it was a dangerous article to carry round in his pocket. Finally he suffered himself to be led away by his wife to be comforted.

Kate went down to the work-room and helped with the sewing. But after two or three hours had passed, Madame appeared and told the girls that their services would be dispensed with until further notice; and at the end of two days, the Mantalini’s name appeared in the list of bankrupts. Kate received a note the same morning, telling her that the business was to be carried on under the name of Miss Knag, and that her services would be no longer required. This was a severe blow for Kate, but she went out for a newspaper at once, to see if there were any suitable work advertised in it for which she could apply.

There was one advertisement announcing that a companion was required; so Kate and her mother went off at once to see the lady, who agreed to take Kate. Two days later, Kate removed herself and her few valuables to Cadogan Square, and began her new duties.

CHAPTER VI

It was a dry, foggy morning in early spring, when Nicholas and Smike left London. Newman Noggs spent a whole day's income on rum and milk for them to have before they left, and insisted on going with them as far as he could.

"Which way?" he asked wistfully.

"Kingston first," replied Nicholas.

"You won't forget me?" said poor Newman, who was very unhappy at his friend's departure.

Nicholas assured him that he would not, and soon Newman had to turn back to London, but he stood and waved his hat until they were out of sight.

It was Nicholas's intention to walk to Portsmouth, a seaport town, where he hoped there might be work on the ships or docks for himself and Smike.

They walked to Godalming the first day, and found some lodgings at a farmhouse. The second day's journey was harder than the first, for they had many hills to climb, and at night they were still twelve miles from Portsmouth. Smike was tired,

for he always insisted on carrying the luggage and would never let Nicholas take a share. So Nicholas decided to spend the night at a small inn, and go the rest of the way in the morning. The landlord took them into the kitchen, where there was a good fire, and told them a man in the parlour had ordered a steak pudding and potatoes at nine, and they should share it with him. Nicholas pointed out that he and Sniike were dusty and travel-stained, and that the gentleman might not care to share; but the landlord said, "Oh! its only Mr. Crummies; he's not particular!"

He settled the matter by throwing open the parlour door and pushing Nicholas and Sniike in. An odd sight met their eyes; at the far end of the room, there were two boys dressed as sailors, fighting a duel with wooden swords. Watching them was a large, heavy man, who kept begging them to go at it a little harder, and they would bring down the house on the first night. When it was over, he turned to Nicholas and said.

"What did you think of that, sir?"

"Capital" said Nicholas."

This pleased Mr. Crummies so much that he explained, over a jug of Punch, that he was an actor and the two boys his sons. They were opening at the Portsmouth Theatre the next evening.

"You are going that way?" he asked.

“Yes” said Nicholas, “I am.” And he asked Mr. Crummles if he knew if work was to be had there. Mr. Crummles did not think that there would be much chance for Nicholas or Smike at the docks, but suddenly offered to take them both in his company. When Nicholas pointed out that he knew nothing about acting or the Stage, Crummles replied that there were a hundred ways in which he could be useful, such as writing the bills for the shop-windows.

“Why” he said, “with your education, you might even write us a piece to bring out the whole strength of the company.”

“What should I get for this” asked Nicholas, “could I live by it?”

“Live by it?” said the manager. “Like a prince! With your salary and your friends to help, if we’d a run of good houses, you’d make a pound a week.”

Nicholas thought for a minute or two, then giving his hand to Mr. Crummles, declared it a bargain. The next day they finished their journey with greater ease than they had expected, for Mr. Crummles had a pony in the stables, and a chaise into which they all packed, with several baskets of costumes, swords and other stage-property.

The journey took a long time, for the pony was fat and would not hurry, but they reached Portsmouth at last, and went straight to the theatre. On the stage, they found Mrs. Crummles,

and about fifteen ladies and gentlemen, waiting for the manager to start rehearsing. Nicholas was introduced, and the company made him and Smike very welcome. But the rehearsal left him quite in the dark, as to what was required of him during the play the next night. He told Mr. Crummles this, but the manager only laughed, and said it would be all right when the time came ; and so it was, for the people were kindly and helped him as much as they could. After the rehearsal, the Crummles took Nicholas and Smike home to dinner, as they had no lodgings ; and when they had finished eating, sent their eldest son out with Nicholas to show him the way to some cheap lodgings. Tired with the excitements of the day, he and Smike went to bed at once, feeling very grateful to the kind people who had befriended them.

Nicholas was up betimes the next morning, for Mr. Crummles had given him a copy of the play, and he hoped to learn some of it by heart, so as to be of real use during the performance that evening. Smike had only to walk on as a soldier, so Nicholas let him sleep as long as he liked, for the long tramp had been a sore trial to the poor boy's feeble body.

Also Mr. Crummles had given him a copy of a French play, which he was to translate and make fit for the company to perform the next week. This task worried Nicholas ; for the manager's parting words had been,

“Give everybody a good part, especially Mrs. Crummles and the Infant Phenomenon,” —a small stunted child, really about seventeen, but always billed as ten, and given a leading part in every play.

During the day, most of the company looked in, to see how their own parts were shaping, and to give advice as to how their own particular bits were to be written. The night's piece went well, for the company were old stagers and very much at home in their parts; so Nicholas got through much better than he had expected. Smike was blissfully happy and went home feeling very proud of himself.

The next morning, just as Nicholas was about to start work, Mrs. Crummles appeared, and asked him to go out with one of the ladies, and do a little canvassing among the regular patrons of the theatre, in order to make sure of a large audience on a special night that was coming during the next week. Nicholas did not like this work at all, but he did not wish to vex Mrs. Crummles, who had been so kind to him and Smike, so he went and spent a trying morning selling tickets to people, who never seemed to know if they wanted them or not. However, it was over at last, and Nicholas got home to his work. He studied his part a little more, and acted that night, as the whole company said, to perfection.

When the great day arrived, everybody was very excited, for the sale of tickets had been

enormous, and by six o'clock the theatre was full. Nicholas played the young lover, and was so good that the audience cheered every line he spoke, and called him before the curtain at the end of the play. Mr. Crummles was so pleased with the success of his new actor and the new play he had arranged for them, that he raised his salary to thirty shillings a week.

The new play was a decided hit; it was played every evening for two weeks, a long run for a play in a small theatre, where the plays were generally changed every two nights.

After the excitement of this novelty had died down, Mr. Crummles told Nicholas that he was bringing an actress down from London.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"I should think it would look very well in the bills" said Nicholas.

"You're about right there" answered Mr. Crummles. "Look here, what do you think of this?"

With this enquiry he unfolded a red, yellow, and blue poster, at the top of which was inscribed in enormous letters, "First appearance of the unrivalled Miss Petowker, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane."

"Dear me" said Nicholas, "I know that lady."

He remembered meeting her at the Kenwigs', when he was teaching the children. He felt pleased at the idea of meeting someone from

London, and hoped she would be able to give him some news of Newman Noggs.

“When does she come down?” he asked.

“We expect her to-day” replied Mr. Crummles. “She is an old friend of Mrs. Crummles. We taught her, indeed, all that she can do.”

He praised the new leading lady so much, that Nicholas fell to wondering if Miss Petowker would approve of having to act with such a new recruit to the profession as he was, and hoped that she would not refuse to play, when she saw and remembered him. But Miss Petowker met him like an old friend, and whispered to him during the rehearsal, that she had quite dropped the Kenwigs, and had told the Crummles that she had met Nicholas in one of the first London Circles. On Nicholas receiving this information with great surprise, she added a sweet glance; as though she felt she had a claim to his good nature now, and might tax it before long.

On the first night that Nicholas acted with Miss Petowker, he noticed that the warmth of her reception was mainly due to the efforts of a very energetic umbrella in one of the upper boxes. He had just got home, and was sitting down to supper with Smike, when his landlord came up to tell him there was a gentleman downstairs, who wished to speak to him.

“Tell him to come up” said Nicholas. “One of our hungry brethren, Smike?”

They slipped some of the slices of cold meat back on the dish, in case their visitor should need supper.

“It is not anybody who has been here before” said Nicholas. “For he is falling on every stair. Come in, come in……. Why, Mr. Lillyvick……!”

The visitor was an uncle of Mrs. Kenwigs, whom Nicholas had often seen in London; but he was very surprised to find him in Portsmouth, and still more surprised to receive a visit from him. But he made him welcome and set him down near the fire.

“When did you come here?” asked Nicholas.

“This morning, sir” replied Mr. Lillyvick.

“Oh! I see; then you were at the theatre tonight, and it was your umb……”

“This umbrella” said Mr. Lillyvick, producing a fat, green one, with a very battered end. “What did you think of that performance?”

As far as I could judge, being on the stage” replied Nicholas. “I thought it very agreeable.”

“Agreeable!” cried the visitor. “It was delicious.”

“Yes,” said Nicholas, “she is a clever girl.”

“She is a divinity” returned Mr. Lillyvick, beating the ground with his umbrella. “I have seen divine actresses before now, sir, but never a diviner one than Henrietta Petowker.”

Nicholas had much ado to prevent himself from laughing ; so not trusting himself to speak, he just nodded, and remained silent.

“ Now let me speak a word with you in private,” said Mr. Lillyvick.

Nicholas looked at Smike who, taking the hint, disappeared. After a few minutes' silence, Mr. Lillyvick burst out with :

“ A bachelor is a miserable wretch, sir.”

“ Is he ? ” asked Nicholas.

“ He is ” rejoined the other. “ I have lived in the world for nigh sixty years, and I ought to know what it is.”

“ You ought to know certainly,” thought Nicholas ; “ but whether you do or not is another question.”

“ The great reason for not being married,” resumed Mr. Lillyvick, “ is the expense ; that's what's kept me off, or else,.....Lord ! I might have married fifty women ! But suppose a man finds he can get a fortune *in* a wife, instead of with her, eh ! ”

“ Why, then, he's a lucky fellow ” replied Nicholas.

“ That's what I say ” retorted Mr. Lillyvick. “ And Henrietta Petowker has a fortune in herself ; and I am going to.....”

“ To make her Mrs. Lillyvick ? I congratulate you ” said Nicholas.

“ Thank you, sir,” said Mr. Lillyvick. “ I am going to marry her, the day after tomorrow.

I shall draw her salary, of course ; and I do hope it's true that it is as cheap to keep two as one. That would be a consolation."

"Surely you can't want any consolation at such a time as this. But if you are going to be married, why are you both here ?"

"Why, that's just what I've come to explain to you" replied the bridegroom. "The fact is we have thought to keep it a secret from the family, the Kenwigs; if my niece and the children had known a word about it, they'd have gone into fits at my feet, and never come out of 'em, until I'd promised never to marry at all. Or they might have made out I'd gone mad. They all want my little bit of money."

"To be sure" said Nicholas "they would have been jealous, no doubt."

"To prevent anything happening" went on Mr. Lillyvick, "we settled to come down here and be married. But we thought it best to let you into the secret, in case you were writing to Mr. Noggs, and might say something about us. We shall be delighted to see you at the wedding, and at breakfast after. It won't be expensive, you know ; just muffins and coffee, with perhaps a shrimp for a relish."

"Yes, I understand," replied Nicholas. "I shall be most happy to come, it will give me the greatest pleasure."

"Well" said the bridegroom, rising. "You'll be very careful not to say anything about it, won't you ?"

“You may safely depend upon me,” said Nicholas. “But won’t you have something to eat or drink?”

“No” answered Mr. Lillyvick, sadly. “I haven’t any appetite. I should think it was quite a pleasant life, the married one, eh?”

“I haven’t the least doubt of it” rejoined Nicholas.

“Yes” said the other. “Oh! Yes. No doubt, no doubt. Goodnight, Goodnight.”

With these words Mr. Lillyvick turned his back on the room and stumbled down the stairs, leaving Nicholas to enjoy a good laugh by himself.

On the morning of the wedding, the whole company were in a great state of excitement; and two of the ladies, who were acting as bridesmaids, went round very early to Miss Petowker’s, to dress her for the ceremony. When she saw them, she declared she could never face the ordeal; and it required all their eloquence, and a great many sips of strong tea and brandy to persuade her otherwise. But in spite of all the excitement, she was quite ready by the time the cab came to fetch her to Mr. Crummies, who was to take the place of her father on this great occasion. The two friends helped her carefully into the cab, and kept up her ‘spirits with sips of brandy, until they reached the manager’s door. There they were met by the two young Crummies who wore large white favours, and the most

resplendent waistcoats in the theatre-wardrobe. Miss Petowker was taken to the first floor, where she at once fainted when she caught sight of the bridegroom.

“Henrietta” he said. “Henrietta, cheer up, my lovely one.”

Miss Petowker only choked and gurgled.

“Is the sight of me so dreadful, Henrietta?” the poor man asked in despair.

“Oh! No, no, no,” replied the bride, “but to see all the friends of my youthful days around me, it overcame me, it was such a shock.”

With such expressions of sorrow and excitement, Miss Petowker called upon all her friends to come and embrace her. The hugs took a very long time, and in the end they had to drive to church very fast, for fear they should be late. The party went to the church in two cabs.

The costumes of the party were very striking; the bridesmaids being so covered with artificial flowers and imitation jewellery, that it was quite impossible to distinguish one from the other. Mrs. Crummles wore the frock she used in the theatre when playing in tragedy, and walked up the church with stern and gloomy majesty.

But the appearance of Mr. Crummles attracted the greatest attention, for he had made up for the part in exactly the same way as he did when acting fathers on the stage. He wore a brown wig and snuff-coloured suit of the previous

century, with grey silk stockings, and buckled shoes.

In order to live up to his clothes, he insisted on being greatly overcome; and, when they entered the church, his sobs were so loud that the pew-opener said he had better retire to the vestry, and have a glass of water, before the ceremony began.

The procession up the aisle was carefully formed: first the bride, and her four lady friends; then the bridegroom and the best-man; then Mr. and Mrs. Crummles, the former still sobbing and walking with a feeble gait. The ceremony was quickly over, and when everyone had signed the register, they all went home to breakfast in high spirits. And here they found Nicholas awaiting their arrival.

“Now then, breakfast, everybody” shouted Mr. Crummles.

No second invitation was required. The company crowded and squeezed themselves at the table as well as they could, the bride blushing very much when anybody was looking, and eating very much when she thought they were not. Mr. Lillyvick went hard at the eating all the time, feeling that since he had paid for all the good things, he would leave as little as possible for the Crummles to finish up afterwards.

When everybody had eaten as much as they could, there was a great number of speeches made,—some by Nicholas, some by the Crummles,

some by the bridegroom and one by the "phenomenon" on behalf of the bridesmaids, at which Mrs. Crummles shed tears of joy, in which the bride shared. Then there was some singing, followed by more speeches, which were stopped by a message from the cab-driver, who had stayed to drive the happy pair to the spot where they took the steam-boat to Ryde. He said that if they didn't come at once the fare would be eighteen-pence over his agreement. This threat broke up the party. After a long and tearful leave-taking, Mr. and Mrs. Lillyvick departed for Ryde, where they were to spend the next two days. They took the "Phenomenon," who had been chosen as travelling bridesmaid by Mr. Lillyvick, as the steam-boat people, deceived by her size, would allow her to travel at half-price.

There was no show at the theatre that night, as Mr. Crummles had given everyone a holiday in honour of the event. He now declared his intention, to go on drinking as long as there was anything left to drink. Most of the company decided to stay and keep him company; but Nicholas, having to play Romeo for the first time on the next evening, decided to go home with Smike and study.

Smike had improved and developed greatly with better food and all the kindness he received in the company, and was now able to remember and say a few lines on the stage. Nicholas coached him, and the boy worked his hardest to

please his master. Down at the theatre, as soon as they were dressed, and in every interval, Nicholas would renew his instruction, and they prospered well. The new Romeo was received with great favour by the audience; and Smike, to his unbounded joy, was told by Mr. Crummles himself, that he was in a fair way to becoming "a prince of actors."

CHAPTER VII

The home of Sir Mulberry Hawk and his friend Lord Verisopht was in Regent Street. The apartments were handsome and well furnished; but today, newspapers, bottles mingled with the ashes of cigars, and many other tokens of riot and disorder, hinted very plainly at the nature of the two friends, and their last night's frolics. Sir Mulberry Hawk was the man who had insulted Kate at her uncle's dinner party, and whom Ralph Nickleby had sent off in a temper. Hawk had never forgiven the sending-off; and meant to be revenged on Ralph by finding out where Kate lived, for his own reasons, and because Lord Verisopht wished to see her again. As he was dependent on the Lord for his living, he was anxious to find her for that reason as well.

This morning, when they were both trying to ease their fevered heads, and to recover from the effects of the night before, Lord Verisopht complained that his friend was not doing his

best to seek her out, and said he would ask Ralph for her address himself.

“ Well, if you seriously want to follow up the girl,” said Sir Mulberry, “ it might be better to go and tell the Uncle that you must know where and how she lives, or you are no longer a customer of his. He will probably tell you, quickly enough.”

They found Ralph at home and alone ; and as Hawk had said, he gave up Kate’s address at once, when he found that he might lose custom if he did not. Just as Ralph was showing his visitors out, Newman Noggs showed in Mrs. Nickleby, crying her name loudly as he did so.

“ Mrs. Nickleby ? ” cried Sir Mulberry Hawk.

“ It’s nobody that you know ” said Ralph hastily.

“ Nobody I know ? ” cried Sir Mulberry.

“ But is this not Mrs. Nickleby, the mother of the delightful creature I met in this house ? ”

“ I think you can tell the gentleman, brother, if he wishes to know ” said Mrs. Nickleby, “ that Kate Nickleby is my daughter.”

“ Then, Nickleby,” said Sir Mulberry, “ introduce us.”

Ralph did so, in desperation, for he was anxious to be rid of the lot of them, and he knew that once Mrs. Nickleby started talking there was very little chance of stopping her. But the two men stayed, and in a very short time had com-

pletely won over Mrs. Nickleby, who thought they were most charming men of the world, and started weaving all sorts of romances around them and Kate.

She was not quite decided which of them to pick for her daughter, but was sure she could fix up a match with one or the other, and have a comfortable life at last.

On hearing that she lived a long way off, and intended returning home on a bus, Sir Mulberry insisted upon hiring a coach, thereby making up her mind for her.

“I will never force her inclinations” she said to herself as the coach rolled on. “But upon my word, I think it must be Sir Mulberry; he is such a fine gentleman, such a manner, and so much to say for himself. I hope it is Sir Mulberry.”

Her thoughts flew back to the times when she had said, that Kate with no fortune at all would marry better than other people’s daughters with thousands; and as she pictured, with all the brightness of a mother’s fancy, the beauty and grace of the girl who struggled so bravely with her new life of hardship and trial, her heart grew too full and the tears trickled down her face.

With many dreams of forthcoming splendour, Mrs. Nickleby spent a very happy evening, and was still occupied with the same ideas when the little girl, who came to help with

the housework, rushed in and said that two gentlemen were waiting in the passage to see her.

“Bless my heart” cried Mrs. Nickleby hastily putting her cap straight, “why don’t you go and ask them to walk up, you stupid thing?”

While the girl was gone on this errand, Mrs. Nickleby swept into a cupboard all vestiges of her humble meal; and then two gentlemen, whom she had never seen, came in. They introduced themselves as friends of Sir Mulberry’s and said they had come on a mission from him.

“On a mission?” said the good lady, hoping it was an offer of marriage for Kate, at least.

“From Sir Mulberry himself” replied one of the men. “He feels that you must find it rather dull here.”

“Rather dull, I confess” answered Mrs. Nickleby.

“We bring the compliments of Sir Mulberry, and he hopes you will join him in a private box at the play to-night.”

“Oh, dear!” said Mrs. Nickleby. “I never go out at all.”

“And that” said the two men “is the very reason, dear Mrs. Nickleby, why you should go out to-night.”

“You are so very kind,” murmured the poor woman, “but.....”

“There’s not a but in the whole case” they told her. “Not such a word! A refusal is out of the question. Sir Mulberry will send a carriage

for you at twenty minutes to seven to the momentyou'll not be so cruel as to disappoint the whole party, Mrs. Nickleby ?”

While Mrs. Nickleby was still hesitating, wanting to go, but afraid that her brother-in-law would be angry if he got to know about it, they went on :

“ Your daughter has made a conquest ; we may congratulate you, for Sir Mulberry is her devoted slave.”

Mrs. Nickleby could resist no longer and promised to come, so the two men kissed her hand with great show, and departed. Punctual to the time, the coach arrived, and she drove to the theatre in great state, feeling very proud and excited. Mr. Pyke and Mr. Pluck, the two friends of Sir Mulberry, who had called on her in the morning, met her at the door, and conducted her to the private box.

Shortly afterwards Lord Verisopht and Sir Mulberry came in, both so hoarse and sleepy and so unsteady on their legs, that Mrs. Nickleby justly concluded they had not long finished dinner.

“ We have been toasting your lovely daughter Mrs. Nickleby,” whispered Sir Mulberry, sitting beside her.

“ Oh, ho !” thought that knowing lady, “ when the wine is in, the truth will out.” But she did not say anything about Kate and merely asked where her brother-in-law was.

Before he could answer, a party entering the next box attracted his attention. Then suddenly he listened intently, and implored his friends not to make a noise.

“Hush” he said, “do you not recognize that voice?”

“Lor, my lord” cried Mrs. Nickleby, poking her head round the curtain, and looking into the other box. “Why, it’s actually my dear Kate.”

“Why, mamma,” said Kate, shrinking back at the sight of the men, “who on earth is it that you have with you?”

“Who do you suppose, dear?” replied Mrs. Nickleby, speaking loudly to impress Mrs. Witterly, Kate’s employer, who had brought Kate to the play with her.

“Look my dear,” continued Mrs. Nickleby, still louder. “Here are Mr. Pyke, Mr. Pluck, Sir Mulberry Hawk, and Lord Frederick Verisopht.”

Kate was very upset at finding her mother in such society, and wondered how she could have met the disreputable crew that had behaved so badly at her uncle’s dinner party, but Mrs. Witterly, keenly alive to the glory of having a lord and a baronet among her friends lost no time in telling Mr. Witterly to invite Mrs. Nickleby and her party into their box, which it filled to the door; there being, in fact, only room for Messrs. Pyke and Pluck to get in their heads.

“My dear Kate” said Mrs. Nickleby, kissing her daughter. “Don’t you see Sir Mulberry Hawk, my dear?”

Kate bowed slightly to him, and then turned to the stage ; but Sir Mulberry was not easily snubbed, and insisted on shaking hands with her paying her a number of compliments as he did so. Then she was compelled, at Mrs. Witterly's request, to introduce him and his friends to her.

The evening came to an end at last, but Sir Mulberry Hawk stayed to hand Kate downstairs.

“Don't hurry, don't hurry” he said, trying to keep her behind Mrs. Witterly. When she asked him not to detain her, he smiled and stopped her outright. This made her very angry, and she told him that she would appeal to her brother and uncle, if he continued to annoy her.

“Upon my soul,” exclaimed Sir Mulberry, as he said this. “She looks more beautiful, and I like her better in a temper, than when she is shy.”

How Kate reached the door, she never knew, but she rushed straight to Mrs. Witterly's coach and, throwing herself into the darkest corner, began to cry. This upset Mrs. Nickleby, but Mr. Pyke hastily called her coach, pushed her into it, and sent it off ; and before long the old lady was consoling herself with the thought, that it was only Kate's shyness at the attentions of a real live baronet, that made her cry ; and she spent the rest of the drive dreaming

happily of the day when she would be Sir Mulberry Hawk's mother-in-law.

The next morning, still under the influence of these pleasant thoughts, she wrote a long letter to Kate, telling her how she approved of her choice.

Poor Kate was wellnigh distracted at getting a letter on the very subject that had kept her awake all night, especially on a day when Mrs. Witterly felt in low spirits after all the excitements of the previous night, and of course expected her companion to be in the best spirits possible.

"How did you come to know Lord Frederick, and those other delightful creatures, child?" asked Mrs. Witterly, as they were waiting for tea.

"I met them at my uncle's," said Kate.

"Have you known them long?"

"No," rejoined Kate; "not long."

"They asked permission to call," said Mrs. Witterly. "I gave it them of course."

As Mrs. Witterly spoke a carriage drove up to the front door, out of which leaped Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Verisopht. Kate rose and was hurrying out of the room, but her employer stopped her. As soon as the visitors entered and had paid their respects to Mrs. Witterly, Sir Mulberry sat by Kate and tried to talk to her. This did not please Mrs. Witterly, who was anxious to talk to him herself; for proud

as she was of having a Lord to tea, she could not pretend that he was interesting. For he much preferred to sit and suck the gold knob at the top of his stick, rather than talk.

Mr. Wititterly came home during tea, and was as pleased as his wife to see the visitors, especially the lord.

“I am delighted, my lord,” he said. “I am delighted — honoured — proud. Be seated my lord, I humbly pray. I am proud, indeed — most proud.”

He then started on a long account of his wife’s various and curious illnesses, pointing out with pride that she was Sir Tumley Snuffim’s favourite patient. It is doubtful whether his lordship understood any of the conversation, but it kept him out of Sir Mulberry’s way, who continued to annoy Kate.

After a very long call, they left, assured by Mr. Wititterly that there would be a welcome for them at all times and seasons.

They came at all times and seasons, and upon all these occasions Kate was exposed to the constant attentions of Sir Mulberry Hawk. This annoyed Mrs. Wititterly more and more, and at last she felt it was her duty to speak to “the young person” about it.

“Miss Nickleby,” she said one morning, “I wish to speak to you very gravely. I am sorry to do it, but I must. Your behaviour, Miss Nickleby, is far from pleasing me—very far. I am

anxious for you to stay and do well, but you may depend upon it, Miss Nickleby, you will not, if you go on as you do now."

Kate looked at her, but said nothing.

"And don't suppose, Miss Nickleby, that looking at me will prevent me saying what I feel to be a religious duty. And I will not be answered, Miss Nickleby, nor will I permit it for an instant. Do you hear?"

"I do hear, ma'am" replied Kate, "with surprise — with greater surprise than I can express."

At this remark, Mrs. Witterly lost her temper completely; and having abused Kate for ten minutes, fell back on her sofa, and uttered dismal screams. This brought Mr. Witterly bouncing into the room.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "Heavens! What do I see? Julia! Julia! Look up, my life, look up."

But Julia continued to look down and screamed still louder; so Mr. Witterly rang the bell for the page.

"Run for Sir Tumley" he said. "Run! I knew it, Miss Nickleby; society has been too much for her; she is all soul, you know, every bit of her."

With this he picked up his wife and carried her off to bed. Kate waited until Sir Tumley had paid his visit, and looked in with a report that Mrs. Witterly had gone to sleep. She then

dressed for walking, and leaving word that she would be back in a couple of hours, went to her uncle's. Ralph had had a good day, and was sitting thinking about his money, when Newman poked his head through the door, and said "Your niece."

Ralph told him to send her in, and when she was seated, asked her roughly what was the matter. She told him about his friend's behaviour and the trouble his attentions had brought her, and begged him to help her by speaking to Sir Mulberry. But Ralph only laughed, and told her not to be silly, pointing out that Sir Mulberry was too good a customer for him to offend, and that he was busy and had no time to spare for her that day.

As she left, Newman met her, and took her across the hall.

"Don't cry" he said. "Don't cry. I shall see you soon, and so shall someone else, too. Yes. Yes!"

"God bless you!" answered Kate, hurrying out, "God bless you."

"Same to you" shouted Newman, opening the door wide to shout it.

When she had passed out of sight, he went in slowly, and stood for some time staring at the door of Ralph's room; finally he turned away, sighing, because he had not the strength to treat the usurer as he deserved.

CHAPTER VIII

Mr. Crummles' season at Portsmouth was so successful, that he stayed two weeks longer than he had intended, during which time Nicholas played a vast variety of parts so well, and attracted so many people to the theatre who had never been there before, that a benefit was given him by the manager. The result of this was twenty pounds for Nicholas.

On receiving this unexpected wealth, his first act was to send honest John Brodie the pound he had lent him. To Newman Noggs he sent ten pounds asking him to give it to Kate, with his love. He did not tell Newman how he was employed, but told him a letter would find him if addressed to the Portsmouth Post Office. He also asked his friend to write and tell him how his mother and sister were and what Ralph had done for them.

"You are out of spirits," said Smike, on the evening after the letter had been sent.

"No, Smike" rejoined Nicholas, "but I was thinking of my sister."

"Shall I ever see your sister?" asked Smike.

"To be sure," cried Nicholas; "we shall all be together one of these days—when we are rich, Smike."

A few days after this, Nicholas found a letter from Newman waiting at the Post Office. It told

him that his mother and sister were in good health, and not in need at the moment, but that circumstances might occur, which would render it necessary for Kate to have her brother's protection. If this should happen, Newman said, he would write at once.

Nicholas read this part of the letter very often, and the more he thought of it the more he began to fear some bad treatment on the part of Ralph. Once or twice he felt tempted to go to London without delay ; but he did not wish to leave his employment, unless it was absolutely necessary, and after some thought, he decided that Newman would have spoken more clearly if there had been anything really wrong. But he felt that he should warn Mr. Crummles, in case he was suddenly called away, so he went down to the theatre to find him.

"Well," said Mrs. Crummles, who was sitting on the stage, in full regal costume, ready for the evening performance. "Next week we go to Ryde, then on to Winchester, and then for....."

"I have some reason to fear," interrupted Nicholas, "that perhaps before we leave here, my engagement with you will have closed."

"Closed" cried Mrs. Crummles, in astonishment.

"Closed" cried several of the other ladies of the company.

Here, the Phenomenon burst into tears, accompanied by two of her friends, and even the male performers who were present stopped drinking beer, and said "Going!"

Nicholas said that he feared it would be so, although he could not yet speak with any degree of certainty; and getting away from the theatre as soon as he had finished his part, went home to read Newman's letter again, and ponder upon it afresh.

During the next few days, he felt worried and anxious, for he could not get rid of the thought that Kate was in trouble and needed him.

Mr. Crummles was so upset at the thought of losing Nicholas, that he even held out vague promises of a speedy improvement, not only in the amount of his salary, but in the payment for his work as an author. Finding Nicholas bent upon going soon, (for he had now determined that, even if no further tidings came from Newman, he would ease his mind by going to London and finding out the exact position of his sister) Mr. Crummles was fain to content himself by calculating the chances of his coming back again, and taking prompt measures to make the most of him before he went away.

"Let me see," he said, "let me see. This is Wednesday night. We'll have posters out the first thing in the morning, announcing your last appearance for to-morrow night."

"But perhaps it will not be my last appearance, you know," said Nicholas. "Unless I am called away, I should be sorry to leave you before the end of the week."

"So much the better," returned Mr. Crummles. "We can have your last appearance Thursday then, re-engagement for one night more on Friday—and yielding to the wishes of the numerous patrons, who couldn't get seats then, another one on Saturday."

"Then I am to make three last appearances, am I?" inquired Nicholas smiling.

"Yes," rejoined the manager. "There is not enough, but if we can't help it we *can't*, so there's no use in talking. A novelty would be very desirable. You couldn't sing a comic song on the pony's back, could you?"

"No" said Nicholas, "I couldn't indeed."

"It has drawn money before" said Mr. Crummles. "What do you think of a firework display?"

Nicholas thought this would prove too expensive, so they decided just to have special posters, and do their ordinary bill.

The first farewell performance went off very well; and Miss Snevellicci, the leading lady, gave a supper party after it in honour of Nicholas and her father and mother who were visiting her. Mr. and Mrs. Lillyvick, who had finished their honeymoon, were there too. The party was very successful, and everyone enjoyed it very much,

except Mr. Lillyvick, who felt that his wife was giving too much of her attention to the other men there.

The next morning, Nicholas had a letter from Newman, very inky, very short, and very mysterious, begging Nicholas to return to London at once and to be there that night if possible.

"I will," said Nicholas. "Heaven knows I have stayed here for the best, and sorely against my will: but even now I may have remained too long. Smike, here, take my purse. Put our things together, and pay what little debts we owe,be quick and we shall be in time for the morning coach. I will tell them we are going, and will soon return."

He hurried away to the lodgings of Mr. Crummles, and the door being opened, ran straight up to the manager's room. To him Nicholas briefly explained what had occurred, and that he must leave for London at once.

"So good-bye" said Nicholas. "Good-bye, good-bye."

He was halfway downstairs before Mr. Crummles had recovered enough to gasp out something about the posters.

"I can't help it" replied Nicholas. "Set whatever I have earned this week against them, or if that will not repay you, tell me what will."

"We'll cry quits about that" returned Crummles. "But can't we have just one night more?"

“Not an hour.....not a minute,” replied Nicholas.

“Won’t you stop to say something to Mrs. Crummles?” asked the manager, following him down to the door.

“I couldn’t stop if it were to prolong my life a score of years” said Nicholas. “Here take my hand, and with it my hearty thanks.”

With these words, he tore himself from the manager’s grasp, and darting rapidly down the street was out of sight in an instant.

“Dear me, dear me,” said Mr. Crummles, “if he could only have acted that, what a deal of money he’d have drawn. He should have stayed with me; but he don’t know what’s good for him.”

With these remarks, Mr. Crummles shut the door and went upstairs to finish his sleep.

Smike had made good speed while Nicholas was away, and everything was soon ready for their departure. They scarcely stopped to have any breakfast, and arrived at the coach-office quite out of breath with the haste they had made. There were yet a few minutes to spare, so, having taken their places, Nicholas hurried into a shop near by, and bought a greatcoat for Smike. As they went back to the coach, Nicholas was surprised to find himself suddenly clutched in a violent and close embrace, nor was he less surprised to hear the voice of Mr. Crummles exclaim, “It is he.—my friend, my friend!”

“Bless my heart,” cried Nicholas, struggling in the manager’s arms, “what are you about?”

The manager strained him to his breast again, exclaiming as he did so, “Farewell, my noble, lion-hearted boy!”

Mr. Crummles, unable to resist an opportunity for professional display, had turned out for the express purpose of taking a public farewell of Nicholas. To render it the more imposing, he now inflicted a series of stage embraces upon Nicholas, pouring forth at the same time all the most dismal farewell speeches he could remember from the stock plays.

His son went through a similar performance with Smike, while the younger boy stood by, in the black cloak he usually wore for tragedy.

The passers-by laughed very heartily, and as it was as well to put a good face on the matter, Nicholas laughed too; then, rescuing the astonished Smike, climbed up to the roof of the coach, and kissed his hand in honour of the absent Mrs. Crummles as they rolled away.

CHAPTER IX

Quite unconscious that his nephew was hastening towards him at the utmost speed of four good horses, Ralph Nickleby sat that morning in his office as usual. He was thinking of Kate and wishing he could have her to house-keep for him.

“If only the boy were drowned or hanged and the old woman dead, this house should be her home” he muttered.

As he was saying this, he suddenly became aware of Newman Noggs, who had his nose pressed on the glass window between the private room and the general office, and was staring hard at him. He rang the bell at once.

“How dare you pry, and peep, and stare at me?” he asked when Newman answered it. “Do you see this parcel? Well, carry it to Cross in Broad Street and leave it there——quick. Do you hear?”

Newman just nodded to show he understood, got his hat, and went off. He did the errand very quickly, and then went on to Miss La Creevy’s. The door was opened by a strange servant girl, who looked rather frightened when she saw Noggs. When she inquired what he wanted, he did not reply, but shot past her straight up to the artist’s room, and knocked loudly on the door.

“Walk in, if you please” said Miss La Creevy; so in he bolted.

“Bless us!” cried the little woman, starting when she saw him; “what do you want, Sir?”

“You have forgotten me” said Newman, sadly; “I wonder at that; there are very few people who, seeing me once, forget me.”

“I had forgotten you, I declare,” said Miss La Creevy, “and I am ashamed of myself for

doing so. Sit down and tell me all about the Nicklebys. I haven't seen them for this many a week."

"How's that?" asked Newman.

"Why, the truth is, Mr. Noggs, I have been on a visit, the first for fifteen years. I have a brother, who lives in the country, with a wife and four dear children, and he came up to London especially to take me back. They made me stay a whole month. I never was so happy in all my life." The good little soul was so overcome by the thought of someone being kind to her that she had to stop and have a cry about it.

When she was better, Newman told her all about Kate and her troubles, and how he had thought it best to send for Nicholas.

"I came to ask you if you would have Kate if he brought her here; for he will not let her remain where she is one night longer, I am sure of that" he said. Of course Miss La Creevy said yes, and after a short chat with her, Newman trudged back to Golden Square, to be well rated by Ralph for being so long away.

The coach that brought Nicholas and Smike to London made good time, yet the journey seemed endless to Nicholas, and he was thankful when they reached the noisy, bustling, crowded streets.

"London at last" he cried, waking up Smike who had slept all the last part of the journey. He engaged beds for himself and Smike at the inn

where the coach stopped, and went without a moment's delay to the lodging of Newman Noggs. There was a good fire in the room and meat and drink set out on the table, but Newman himself was not there.

He inquired for him at a neighbour's, who told him that Newman had a tiresome piece of business, and would not be back until midnight. So Nicholas went straight off to Miss La Creevy's. She was out too; and nearly mad with anxiety, Nicholas set off to his mother's, only to find the same thing; Mrs. Nickleby would not be back until late. When he asked for Kate, the servant said Miss Nickleby didn't live at home now, indeed she came home very seldom. She couldn't say where she lived, but she was sure it was not at Madame Mantalini's.

Nicholas was too worried to sit still and wait for any of them, so he strolled westwards, through Hyde Park, into one of the quiet streets by Bond Street. He had had very little food that day, and stopped at an hotel there to get a glass of wine and a biscuit. While he was having this, his attention was attracted to a noisy party at the next table. To his great astonishment, he suddenly caught the sentence, "Little Kate Nickleby."

It was Sir Mulberry who had said it; and he went on talking about her in such a coarse fashion, that Nicholas could stand it no longer. From the description of the girl's appearance given

by the men, he was quite sure it was Kate they were talking about, so he rose suddenly, and confronted Sir Mulberry. "I am the brother of the young lady, who is being talked about here" he said, "and I say this person is a liar and a coward."

Sir Mulberry only laughed at him, and refused to give his name; neither would his friends; even the waiter only grinned and said nothing when Nicholas asked him. So Nicholas determined to wait and follow him home. It was a long wait, for Sir Mulberry stayed drinking for three more hours, and got straight into his private carriage, when he did go.

Nicholas leapt on to the footboard, and asked him once again for his name.

Sir Mulberry's only reply was to shorten his riding whip, and apply it furiously to the head and shoulders of Nicholas. It got broken in the struggle; and Nicholas, obtaining hold of it, laid open one side of the baronet's face. At that moment, the mare, terrified by the noise, darted off in a wild, mad gallop, and Nicholas was flung heavily to the ground.

He was giddy and sick, but got up at once, roused by the shouts of the men who were tearing up the street. He saw the carriage dash on to the sidewalk, heard a loud cry and the crash of breaking glass; then reeling like a drunken man, he turned down a side street, aware for the first time of a stream of blood that was trickling down his face and neck.

Smike and Newman waited anxiously for his return, but it was some time before they heard a coach stop, and Nicholas staggered in; when they saw him they were aghast at his appearance, but before he would allow them to do anything for him, Nicholas insisted upon hearing everything from Newman.

Newman soon finished his story, and then dressed his friend's wounds, while he heard how they had come about. The next morning, Nicholas was at Cadogan Place by a quarter to eight, and was informed by the page, that Miss Nickleby was then taking her walk in the gardens in front of the house. He asked Nicholas in and went to fetch her, and in a few moments Kate ran into the room, and having kissed her brother, burst into tears.

He told her that he had come to take her away, which was a great relief to her; and they both sought out Mr. Witterly, and told him she was going at once. He made no objection, but pointed out, that as Kate was leaving before the quarter was half expired, he could not pay her any salary.

"As you please" said Nicholas, and putting his sister into a coach, told the man to drive to the city with all speed. When they reached home, they found Newman piling their few belongings on to a cart, and Mrs. Nickleby very upset, quite at a loss to understand the situation, though Miss La Creevy had just spent an hour explaining it to

her. Nicholas had told Newman to remove their things at once, as he would not be beholden to his Uncle for another night's shelter for his mother and sister.

“Come, mother” said Nicholas, “everything is ready for us at Miss La Creevy's.”

But Mrs. Nickleby was not easily moved, and would keep going back to see if anything had been left; until at last she dropped a shilling among the straw on the coach floor, which worried her so that she forgot everything else.

Nicholas gave the key and a letter to Newman, telling him to give them at once to Ralph, and to bring him all news in the evening.

Newman put the letter on to Ralph's desk, and lingered to see him read it; the old man read it twice, frowned heavily, and cursed his clerk harder than usual. Once or twice during the morning, when Noggs showed in clients, he noticed that Ralph was re-reading his nephew's letter.

Late that afternoon he had an unexpected visit from Squeers, who had hurried to London on account of a law case, about one of the boys who had died suddenly at the school. He and Ralph had a long talk together, Squeers giving his account of the trouble between Nicholas and himself. Ralph asked him many questions about Smike, how long he had been at the school, and what he was like, etc.

“ You told me his friends had deserted him,” said Ralph, “ is that true ? ”

“ Yes ” replied Squeers. “ His money was paid for some six years, then it stopped. So I kept him out of charity ! ”

“ Charity ? ” asked Ralph, dryly.

“ Yes, charity ” returned Squeers. “ And just when he was becoming useful to me, if that villain of a Nickleby didn't collar him.”

Ralph smiled unpleasantly, and tearing up Nicholas's letter, said to the other :

“ We will both cry quits with him before long ” and showed his visitor out.

Nicholas, having seen his mother and sister safely to Miss La Creevy's, turned his thoughts to poor Smike, who was waiting for him at Newman's.

“ I was afraid ” said the poor boy, when he saw his friend again, “ that you were lost.”

“ Lost ! ” cried Nicholas gaily. “ You will not get rid of me so easily. But come, I am here to take you home.”

At first Smike would not go, for he feared that he might be in the way ; but Nicholas soon won him over, and taking his arm, led the way to the artist's house.

“ This, Kate ” said Nicholas, when they arrived, “ is the faithful friend I told you to expect.”

Smike was awkward and bashful, but Kate was so kind, and Miss La Creevy so merry, that he was feeling quite at home by the time

Mrs. Nickleby came in. She was very kind too, and the little circle spent a happy afternoon and evening together.

The next morning Nicholas went off to try the Employment Office again. As he stopped to look at the cards in the window, an old gentleman stopped too. A sturdy, stout, old man, with such a jolly twinkle in his eyes, that Nicholas plucked up courage and asked him if he were looking at the cards to find if any clerks were available. The old gentleman looked hard at him for a minute or two, asked him a lot of questions, and finally said suddenly, "Not another word, not another word, come along with me."

He then took Nicholas by the arm, and hurried him along until they came to a quiet little square near the Bank of England. On one of the doors there was a large notice, "CHEERYBLE BROTHERS;" and here the old man dashed in, dragging Nicholas after him.

"Is my brother Ned in, Tim?" he asked a large fat clerk, who was working near the door.

"Yes, he is, Sir" replied the clerk.

Mr. Cheeryble led Nicholas to a half-opened door at the other end of the room; tapping with his knuckles and stooping down to listen, he called out,

"Brother Ned! Are you busy, brother, or can you spare me a minute?"

"Brother Charles," replied a voice, "don't ask me such a question, but come in directly."

They went in without further parley, and to his amazement Nicholas saw another old gentleman, so exactly like the one who had befriended him, that he could hardly tell one from the other. The twin brothers were also dressed exactly alike, which increased the resemblance.

“Brother Ned” said Nicholas’s friend, “here is a young man we must assist.”

“He *shall* be assisted” said the other. “Where is Tim Linkinwater?”

The fat clerk was sent for, and told that Nicholas was to have the spare stool in the office for a week’s trial; and if he proved satisfactory, to be kept on, at a salary of one hundred and twenty pounds a year.

This business being concluded, Nicholas tried to thank them, but as soon as he started, Mr. Charles seized his hand, shook it violently, and pushed him through the door, saying as he did so,

“No—No—No! not another word now, but do be careful of the crossings.”

Nicholas raced home with his good news, and the little circle at Miss La Creevy’s had a happy evening, thankful that their fortunes had turned at last. At the end of the first week, Tim Linkinwater reported so warmly in favour of Nicholas, that the brothers added a little cottage at Bow to his salary; and soon Mrs. Nickleby and Kate were settled there. It was not long before Kate’s clever fingers turned the tiny place into

a pretty and comfortable home, and Smike made the garden a wonder to look upon. Miss La Creevy came out every two or three days in the bus, always armed with a large hammer and a parcel of tintacks, ready to help with anything.

CHAPTER X

One evening, soon after he had gone to the Cheeryble brothers, Nicholas went to see his old friends the Kenwigs, to tell them about the marriage of Mr. Lillyvick, a task he had undertaken to do when he said goodbye to the company at Portsmouth. He found everyone there in a state of great excitement, for Mrs. Kenwigs had presented her husband with a fine son, only that morning. However, Mr. Kenwigs and the little girls were very glad to see Nicholas and begged him to stop.

“I ought to make a hundred apologies for calling on you now” said Nicholas; “but I undertook to deliver a message to you, from Mr. Lillyvick.”

“Your great-uncle Lillyvick, my dears,” said Mr. Kenwigs to the children.

“He sends his kindest love” resumed Nicholas, “and says he has no time to write, but that he is married to Miss Petowker.”

Mr. Kenwigs rose from his seat with a petrified stare, and then shouted at the top of his voice :

“My children, my swindled infants! The villain, ass, traitor!”

“Drat the man” said the nurse rushing in, “what does he mean by making all the noise here? Have you no regard for your baby?”

“No!” returned Mr. Kenwigs, “let him die, he has no expectations, no property to come to now! Take him to the Foundling Hospital.”

With these awful remarks, Mr. Kenwigs sat down and burst into tears, and it was some time before Nicholas could persuade him to go to bed. He waited to see him sound asleep, and then went home.

The office-work at Cheeryble Brothers was all under the charge of Tim Linkinwater, the most punctual and tidy man in London, and there were very few clerks who could satisfy him with their work. He boasted that there had never been any scratching out or untidiness in the office books, and he kept a very sharp eye on Nicholas at first, in case he should make a mistake.

But Nicholas worked hard, and so pleased the old man that he told the brothers that there was not such another young man in all London for tidiness, and he now felt that he would not worry when he was gone, for he knew that the books would be kept as they always had been.

The brothers were delighted; of course, and invited Nicholas to the dinner party they always gave Tim on his birth-day; it was a jolly party,

for all the staff were remembered; even the porters and maids were called in to drink Tim's health. It went on until past eleven o'clock, and as Nicholas had to walk home, it was very late when he arrived there.

He was surprised to find his mother and Smike waiting up to receive him; but as Mrs. Nickleby said she wished to talk to him about something, he sent Smike to bed and asked her what it was.

"Well, my dear" she said, "it's about the gentlemen next door."

"What has the gentleman in the next house to do with us?" asked Nicholas.

"My dear" said Mrs. Nickleby, "he has done and said all sorts of things."

"Well?" asked Nicholas, amazed, for his mother was simpering at the fire.

"Every time I go to the window" went on Mrs. Nickleby, "he kisses one hand, and then the other. Of course it's very foolish of him, but he does it very tenderly. And then there are the marrows and cucumbers he throws over the wall every day. And last evening, as I was walking in the garden, he asked me to marry him, in a voice as musical as a glass bell. The question is, Nicholas, what am I to do?"

"Does Kate know of this?" asked Nicholas.

"I have not said a word about it yet," answered the mother.

“Then for heaven’s sake, do not tell her,” rejoined Nicholas. “And with regard to what you should do, my dear mother, do what your good sense and feeling, and respect for my father’s memory, would prompt. Show this man your dislike of his attentions, and do not seem to take them earnestly for an instant! He is an absurd old idiot!”

So saying, Nicholas kissed his mother and went off to bed. But Mrs. Nickleby had a weak and vain head; and there was something so flattering in the idea of an offer of marriage at her time of life, that she could not dismiss it quite so lightly as Nicholas had done.

“As to its being ridiculous,” thought the good lady as she went to bed, “I don’t see that at all. It’s hopeless on his part, certainly, but why he should be an absurd old idiot, I confess I don’t see. He is to be pitied, I think.”

Having made these reflections, the lady went to sleep.

The quiet life at the cottage, and freedom from worry, soon had a good effect upon Kate and Nicholas; but poor Smike seemed to grow weaker, and would sit for hours, brooding by himself. He was the same willing, loving creature, but they could not make him stronger. Miss La Creevy did her best to cheer him up, and always made him go back with her on the bus, when she had been to see the Nicklebys, just to give him the treat of the ride.

One evening when he had been home with her, and had stayed rather later than usual, owing to her insisting upon him having a good meal before he started home, he was waiting for the bus to come along the Strand. Suddenly he felt a hand grip his shoulder, and a voice he knew well shouted :

“Here he is, father!”

Smike, shuddering from head to foot, looked round, and saw that Mr. Squeers was hanging on to him with all his might and main.

“Here’s a go,” cried Mr. Squeers. Here’s a go ; Wackford, call up one of them coaches.”

There was no one to help Smike ; and when the coach drove up, Mr. Squeers drove off with him, without any trouble.

“To think,” said Squeers to Wackford, “that you and me should have been turning out of that street, and come upon him at the very nick. Your mother will be fit to jump out of her skin when she hears this.”

Squeers followed up these remarks by giving Smike a shower of blows with his umbrella ; the poor boy warded off the blows as well as he could, then fell into a corner of the coach, stunned and stupefied,—the same hopeless, blighted creature, that Nicholas had found at the Yorkshire school.

When they reached Squeers’ lodgings, he beat Smike again, demanding to know if he had been with Nicholas all the time, and where the Nicklebys were living now ; but nothing could

make Smike answer that question, and finding every effort useless, Squeers took him to a little back room upstairs, where he removed most of his clothes and then locked him in.

The night that had brought such trouble to one poor soul, had given place to a bright summer morning, as the north-country mail coach clattered cheerfully to its stopping place in Islington.

The only outside passenger was a burly, honest-looking countryman, who sat on the box, and was so rapt in admiring wonder at the city, that he seemed quite insensible to all the bustle of getting out the bags and parcels. Until, one of the coach windows being let sharply down, he looked round, and saw a pretty face looking at him.

“See here, lass” said the man pointing, “there be St. Paul’s Church! He be a sizable one, he be!”

“Goodness, John! I shouldn’t have thought it could have been half the size. What a monster!”

“Monster! You’re about right there And look at that for a Post Office! If that’s a Post Office, I’d like to see where the Lord Mayor lives.”

So saying, John Browdie, for he it was, slowly climbed down and opened the door, and tapping Mrs. Browdie, late Miss Price, he looked in and burst out laughing.

“Dang my buttons,” he said, “if she isn’t asleep again!”

“A good thing too” replied Mrs. Browdie, “when she is awake she is so cross.”

The subject of these remarks was a slumbering figure, so muffled in shawls and cloaks, that it was not even possible to tell its sex. But upon being awakened by John, and unwrapped by Tilda, it turned out to be Fanny Squeers, who as bridesmaid had been brought by them for a holiday to London. Mrs. Browdie’s remarks proved correct; Fanny was certainly very cross when she was awake. John called a coach, and they all went off to the Saracen’s Head, where they were to stay and meet Mr. Squeers.

He turned up as they were having breakfast, and Squeers told them all about the capture of Smike.

“What” exclaimed John, “got that poor lad! Where?”

In a top back room, at my lodgings, replied Squeers. “Him on one side, and me and the key on the other.”

John sat down by him and asked him to tell all about it again; this flattered Squeers, and he was so pleased with the attention that John gave to the story, that he invited them all to tea with him that day.

“It’s lucky you came to-day” he went on. “For I am taking him back tomorrow in case he should give me the slip again.”

“Don’t say another word” said John, “I’d come, if it were twenty mile.”

“Would you, though?” answered Mr. Squeers, highly flattered.

For the rest of the day, John was in such an odd, restless state, that Fanny decided he was going mad, and his wife was sure he was going to be ill. Tilda proved to be correct; for soon after they arrived at Squeers’ lodgings, Browdie was seized with such dizziness in the head that he had to be taken upstairs, to lie down until he felt better. His wife stayed with him for some time, then came down to the others, saying he had fallen asleep.

But John Browdie was not asleep; and as soon as he was left alone, he took off his shoes, turned the key in the door of the room where Smike was confined, and slipped in. He soon made himself known to the boy, and told him he had come to help him. Smike was too stunned to help himself, so Browdie found his clothes, dressed him, and carried him down the stairs to the back door. Opening it gently, he pushed the boy through, bidding him make for home as quickly as he could; then he stood on guard for a moment or two, in case someone should come out of the sitting room; but finding that there was no pause in the conversation there, crept upstairs and into bed again; and pulling the clothes over his head, laughed until he was nearly smothered.

Once outside the door, Smike ran without stopping, until he reached Newman Noggs. Newman had been out all evening looking for him, and had only just returned, tired and discouraged, to his supper. When he opened the door in answer to Smike's knock, and saw who the visitor was, he was so overjoyed that he dragged the boy into the passage and up the stairs before Smike could even speak, and would not let him tell any of his adventures until he had given him a good supper.

When this was over, they sat by the fire, and Smike told him all that had happened. By the time the poor boy had finished his story, he was so tired he could hardly speak; so Newman suggested that he should spend the night where he was, and he would go and tell the good news to the Nicklebys.

But Smike would not hear of being left alone, and insisted on going too, so they went off together. It was sunrise when they reached the cottage, for Smike could only crawl along.

Nicholas had spent a sleepless night, trying to think out some plan for tracing his friend. At the first sound of their voices outside the house, he leapt out of bed, and joyfully let them in. The rest of the family were soon awake and downstairs, giving Smike a hearty welcome home.

As soon as Nicholas reached the office that morning, Tim Linkinwater asked him to take a

letter to Mr. Charles. Nicholas went to the door of the private office and knocked; receiving no answer, he concluded the old gentleman must be out, and opened the door and walked straight in.

To his astonishment he saw a young lady on her knees at Mr. Cheeryble's feet, apparently in great distress. Stammering out an apology, he was just about to rush out when the young lady turned her head and looked at him. Recognizing her as a very beautiful girl he had seen at the Employment Agency, he stood stock still and stared at her.

"My dear young lady" cried Mr. Charles, "pray don't! Not another word, I implore you. We are not alone."

As he spoke, he lifted up the young lady, who staggered to a chair, and fainted.

"She is ill, sir" said Nicholas, darting eagerly forward.

"Poor dear!" cried Mr. Charles. "Where is my brother? Ring for the house-keeper, and Tim Linkinwater; and Mr. Nickleby, leave the room, I beg and beseech you!"

"I think she is better now," said Nicholas, who had been watching the girl so eagerly that he had not heard the request.

But the brothers sent him away, and when he had gone shut the door and bolted it on the inside. He had plenty of time to think about what had just happened, for Tim was absent nearly the whole of the morning; during which

time Nicholas thought of nothing but the young lady, and her beauty and the mystery of it all.

When Tim returned, he went on calmly with his work as though nothing had happened.

“Is she quite recovered?” asked Nicholas, as soon as he saw him.

“To be sure” said Tim. “Oh yes, to be sure, she is very well.”

“Will she be able to go home to-day?” asked Nicholas.

“She’s gone,” replied Tim.

“Gone! I hope she has not far to go;” said Nicholas earnestly.

But Tim would say no more about her, either at that time or at any of the others when Nicholas tried to make him talk. Failing in this, Nicholas was fain to content himself with watching for the young lady’s next visit; but here again he was disappointed; she did not return.

The truth was, Nicholas had fallen very much in love at first sight. And he was not the only member of the family whose thoughts were turning in the direction of courtship; for ever since her conversation with her son about the gentleman next door, Mrs. Nickleby had begun to display unusual care in the adornment of her person. Even her black widow’s dress began to assume a lively air and many little ornaments were brought to light and worn.

One afternoon as she and Kate were sitting in their little garden, they were surprised by a

large cucumber being thrown over the wall; it was soon followed by a vegetable-marrow, then the air was darkened by a shower of small vegetables, which fell rolling and tumbling in all directions.

Kate rose from her seat in alarm, and was about to run with her mother to the house, when a loud voice said "A-hem," and turning in the direction of the sound, they saw a man on the wall. He had a very large head, and a very old face, with wild, rolling grey eyes, most ugly to behold.

"Queen of my soul!" he called to Mrs. Nickleby. "Are you a princess?"

"You know I am not sir," replied the lady.

"Pray, mamma, come away," whispered Kate.

But Mrs. Nickleby was much too interested to go, and stood watching the old man, who was busy putting on his cap inside out. Having fixed it to his satisfaction, he held out his arms to her, and said:

"Be mine! Be mine! If you will bless me with your hand and heart, all will be love, rapture, and bliss. Be mine! Be mine!"

Mrs. Nickleby, with her eyes modestly fixed on the ground, was just telling him how flattered she was by his proposal, when a large hand was seen creeping along the wall towards the old man. It quickly clasped one of his ankles, and then the other hand appeared and clasped the other.

“Oh, it’s you, is it?” asked the old man looking down, “Perhaps I’d better come?”

“Yes,” replied the man on the other side, “I think you better had.”

The old man disappeared in a hurry, and a few minutes after a coarse squat man looked over at them.

“Beg pardon ladies,” he said, touching his hat, “but has he been worrying you and trying to make love to you?”

“Yes,” replied Kate, “I need not ask you if he is out of his mind, poor creature.”

“That’s pretty plain, that is,” answered the man.

“Is there no hope for him?” asked Kate.

“Not a bit, and don’t deserve to be; for he’s a deal pleasanter out of his senses than with ’em. He was the wickedest, cruellest, old flint that ever drewed breath.”

After these remarks the man touched his hat, and disappeared; Kate and Mrs. Nickleby went indoors, Mrs. Nickleby insisting that her admirer was not mad, only a little flighty and poetical.

CHAPTER XI

One evening soon after Smike had returned, Nicholas went to the Saracen’s Head to see Mr. and Mrs. Browdie, and thank them for helping his friend. He found them both at home, and

delighted to see him. Over the large meal John ordered to be sent up, they explained to Nicholas exactly what had happened about Smike. They also told him that Fanny was stopping in London, Tilda teasing him a little about her.

After the supper had been cleared away, the three friends sat and enjoyed a long talk together. Just as Nicholas was about to go, they heard a great turmoil going on outside in the passage.

Nicholas and John at once went to see what was the matter, found a young gentleman in the act of knocking down a rough-looking man.

“What’s the matter?” said Nicholas.

“A mere nothing,” answered the young man; “this person was drinking in the coffee-room, and spoke insolently of a young lady, whom I happen to know. I asked him to be quiet, but he chose to renew the conversation in a most offensive manner, so I could not refrain from kicking him out.”

This behaviour pleased Nicholas very much, and he espoused the young man’s quarrel with great warmth, saying loudly that he had done quite right. John Browdie also stood for him, and the result was, the waiters took the hint and hustled the offender out.

The young man drew a card from his pocket and handed it to Nicholas, saying with a laugh,

“I am much obliged to you for your kindness; perhaps you will do me the favour to let me know where I can thank you.”

Nicholas took the card, and glancing at it as he returned the compliment read, "Mr. Frank Cheeryble."

"Surely not the nephew of the Cheeryble brothers, who is expected to-morrow?" he said.

"I don't generally introduce myself as the nephew of the firm, but I am proud to be so. And you, I see, are the Mr. Nickleby of whom I have heard so much," answered Mr. Cheeryble.

Nicholas now introduced Mr. and Mrs. Browdie, and they all went upstairs, and spent the next half-hour very pleasantly together.

The Cheeryble brothers were both very interested when they heard that their nephew and Nicholas had met; so was Tim Linkinwater, who declared that London was the only place in the world where such a thing could happen. Mr. Frank had come to work in the office and learn to be a merchant, and he and Nicholas were soon great friends. This pleased the brothers, and they often said how fortunate they considered themselves in having two such fine young men about them."

One afternoon, Brother Charles sent for Nicholas and said:

"Mr. Nickleby, we are anxious, my dear sir, to know that you are properly and comfortably settled in the cottage. We wish too, to meet your mother and sister, to know them. To-morrow is Sunday, we shall make bold to come out at tea-time, and take the chance of finding you at home.

The news that they were to have visitors, and such visitors, put Mrs. Nickleby in a flutter, and there was a great bustle that night; the rooms were all dusted and put straight, and flowers arranged everywhere.

About six o'clock the next day, there came the long-expected knock at the door; and not only the brothers, but Frank Cheeryble as well, came in. Frank offered many apologies for his intrusion to Mrs. Nickleby, who, having plenty of tea, made him very welcome indeed.

The party went off well, and, after tea, they all went for a walk in the lanes until it was dark; then back for supper, before the visitors returned to town.

CHAPTER XII

While these pleasant things were happening to Nicholas and his family, Ralph Nickleby had been nursing his anger, and thinking out ways to injure his nephew. He had relied on getting some help from Sir Mulberry in this, but the letter had been too badly hurt when his carriage turned over, to be of any use for some time to come. So Ralph sent for Squeers; for he knew that he could always hurt Nicholas, if he could hurt Smike.

One evening, Squeers called at the office with a man Newman had not seen before; and a few minutes later, when Ralph had spoken to them, he called out to the clerk:

“Get me a coach!”

Newman called one, and lingered on the doorstep to hear what address Ralph gave the driver; to his surprise it was Nicholas's.

“There's mischief in it, there must be,” he said, as the coach rolled away.

Not knowing what unpleasant visitors were coming upon them, the Nicklebys were having a merry little party at the cottage, to celebrate Mr. and Mrs. Browdie's last night in London. They were enjoying themselves so much, that it was after eleven o'clock before Mrs. Browdie said they would have to go. Just as they were setting out, they were surprised by a long and violent knocking at the door.

“It must be some mistake,” said Nicholas, carelessly; “we know nobody who would come here at this hour.”

When the door was opened, Ralph Nickleby walked into the room.

“Listen to me, and not to him,” he said, as Nicholas rose and stood in a threatening attitude. Then, turning to Mrs. Nickleby, he went on;

“Now, ma'am, listen to me. I have a motive in coming here, a motive of humanity. I come to restore a parent to his child.”

As he said this, Squeers came into the room, accompanied by a sleek, stout man with an oily face, who made straight up to Smike and, tucking that poor fellow's head under his arm in an uncouth embrace, shouted hoarsely.

“How little did I think of this here joyful meeting when I saw him last !”

Smike managed to escape, and flinging himself down by Nicholas, implored him not to give him up. Nicholas promised that he would not ; so Ralph produced some dirty certificates of the boy's birth and christening.

“Nicholas ” whispered Kate. “Is this really true ? Are these statements correct ?”

“I fear so,” answered Nicholas. “What say you, John ?”

John scratched his head, and shook it, but said nothing at all.

“Well,” asked Squeers, “what's to be done? Is Smike to come along with us ?”

“No, no, no,” cried Smike, drawing back and clinging to Nicholas, “I will not go from you to him.”

“That is a cruel thing!” said the supposed parent, to his friends. “Do parents bring children into the world for this ?”

“Do parents bring children into the world for *that* ?” asked John Browdie, pointing to Squeers as he spoke.

“Never you mind!” retorted that gentleman, pulling his nose rudely.

“Never I mind ? No, dang it, no ;” shouted John angrily, pushing his elbow into the chest of Mr. Squeers who was advancing upon Smike. He pushed it so hard, that the schoolmaster reeled and staggered back into Ralph, knocking him over.

This accident was the signal for a great row. Ralph and his party were for carrying off Smike by force; and Squeers had actually got him by the collar, and was hauling him out, when Nicholas seized him, thrashed him well, and throwing him through the door, shut it upon him.

“Now,” said Nicholas, to the other two, “have the kindness to follow your friend.”

“I want my son,” said Snawley, for such, they had learned, was his name.

“Your son,” replied Nicholas, “chooses to remain here, and he shall.”

“You won’t give him up?” asked Ralph.

“I would not give him up against his will, to be the victim of such brutality as that to which you would consign him,” answered Nicholas, “if he were a rat or a dog.”

Ralph looked at him for a moment; and then telling him that he would be sorry for what he had done, and that he would be even with him yet, took Snawley’s arm and left the house.

The family were all terribly upset by these disturbances, and talked far into the night, trying to decide what was the best thing to do.

At last Nicholas made up his mind to tell the brothers, Cheeryble all about it the next morning, and ask their advice. When his work was finished the following day, he asked for an interview; this was granted, and the brothers listened intently to his story, but he was surprised that they were not more astonished at it.

This was soon explained, however, when Mr. Charles told him that his Uncle had been to the office that morning, and had told his version of the affair.

“He came to——” said Nicholas.

“To complain of you,” returned brother Charles, “to poison our ears with falsehoods; but he came on a fruitless errand, and went away with some wholesome truths in his ears. Brother Ned, sir, is a perfect lion. So is Tim; we had Tim in to face him, and Tim was at him before you could say Jack Robinson.”

“How can I ever thank you for all that you have done?” said Nicholas.

“By keeping silence upon the subject, my dear sir,” answered Mr. Charles. “You shall not be wronged. They shall not hurt a hair of your head, or the boy’s head. We have all said it, and we’ll all do it. And now, my dear sir, I am about to employ you on a private and delicate mission.”

“I shall try to prove an able messenger, sir” replied Nicholas.

“One morning,” said Mr. Charles, “you saw a young lady in this room, in a fainting fit. Do you remember?”

“I—I—I remember very well indeed” stammered Nicholas. “A very lovely young lady.”

Then Mr. Charles told him that the young lady was the daughter of an old friend, whom he had loved very dearly when he was a young man.

But she had married someone else, and soon after the little girl was born she had disappeared. He had not heard anything of them, until that morning when Nicholas had seen the daughter at the office. She had come to tell the brothers that her mother was dead, and beg them to give her some work, as the father was an invalid and they were almost starving. She would not accept money unless she earned it; so the brothers had thought out a little plan to help her without hurting her feeling, and wanted Nicholas to help them carry it out.

It seemed that the girl had been painting little pictures, and trying to sell them at some of the shops near where she lived; so Nicholas was told to go and buy up all he could, and then call on the young lady, and order several more.

Of course, Nicholas was delighted to do this, and full of joy at the thought of seeing the young lady again. The brothers gave him full directions for finding the house; and warning him that the whole thing must be kept secret, told him to go off on this errand early the next morning.

Nicholas soon found the place where the Brays lived, a row of mean and not over-cleanly houses situated within the "Rules" of The King's Bench Prison. Here debtors who could afford to pay the lodging fees, or who had friends who would do it for them, were allowed to live.

The Brays lived on the first floor, in the shabbiest house of the row; but the room where

Madeline and her father were sitting was clean and tidy. Mr. Bray, a man of about fifty, was propped up in an easy chair. His looks were haggard, his limbs and body worn to the bone, and he seemed very ill-tempered and impatient with his daughter.

Nicholas explained why he had come, and asked Madeline if she could take orders for more work; he also paid for the two drawings he selected from those she had ready for sale, placing the money on the table in an envelope.

When the invalid saw this, he banged the floor with his stick several times, and then said,

“Ring the bell, ring the bell, tell her to get me a newspaper, and some grapes, and a bottle of the wine I wanted, and—and—and—I forget half what I want just now, but she can go out again.”

“He thinks of nothing that *she* wants,” thought Nicholas; and perhaps the thought was expressed in his face, for the sick man turned to him, and asked him sharply what he was waiting for.

“To know,” said Nicholas, “when shall I call again?”

“You may call in a week,” said her father, before the young lady could answer; so Nicholas bowed to her and went out. As he was going down the stairs he heard a light footstep above him, and turning round saw Madeline there.

“I came to thank you” she said.

As Nicholas looked up he saw that she was crying, and running up to her said earnestly,

“Dear Madam, I know your sad history, and I entreat you to believe that I would die to serve you. I am your humble servant, devoted to you from this hour. Forgive me if I say too much !”

The young lady did not answer, but waved her hand to him as she ran back to her father. Mr. Bray was living in the King’s Rules, because he could not pay his debts; and as things were at present, it did not seem likely that he would ever live anywhere else; for he owed Ralph Nickleby some nine hundred pounds, and another money-lender, called Arthur Gride, about seventeen hundred.

One morning soon after Nicholas had called on the Brays, the two usurers were discussing the matter. Gride, a little, sly, ugly man, quite seventy years of age, had taken a great desire to marry Madeline; and in order to force her consent, was going to offer to forgo her father’s debt, and set him free, as soon as she would agree.

But Ralph was proving a stumbling block, for he was insisting that his money must be paid in full, or the old gentleman might stop in the Rules all his life. At last they came to an agreement that Gride should pay the money, and the two men went off at once to lay their proposal before Mr. Bray.

Madeline was out when they arrived, so the three men were able to discuss the affair openly. At first Mr. Bray would not give his consent; but when he heard that giving it would mean the cancelling of all his debts, and restoring him his liberty, he could not resist the offer, and said he would do all he could to force the girl to do as they wished.

The two men then left, well satisfied with their morning's work, Gride because he felt sure of a beautiful bride, and Ralph because he was going to get his money.

Nicholas felt very depressed after he had been to see Madeline, for he felt that she was suffering, and could not think of any way in which to help her. And the time he had to wait until he could see her again, seemed endless. In truth, Nicholas was very much in love; and like all young men in that condition, proved a dull companion to Mr. Frank and Tim.

But when they asked if anything was the matter, Nicholas assured them that he had never been merrier in his life.

One evening as he was wandering about the town, trying to pass away the time, he happened to stop and look at the bills hanging outside a small theatre, and there to his surprise, he saw the name of "Mr. Vincent Crummles."

"Surely it must be the same man;" thought Nicholas; "there can't be two Vincent Crummleses."

So he went round to the stage door, and writing his name on a scrap of paper, sent it in; and soon after was conducted by a robber in a very large belt, with very large pistols, into the presence of his former manager. Mr. Crummles was very glad to see him, observing at the same time, that it would do Mrs. Crummles' heart good to bid him good-bye before they went.

"You were always a favourite of hers," he said, "from the very first. I was quite easy in my mind about you, from the first day you dined with us; one that Mrs. Crummles took a fancy to, was sure to turn out right. What a woman that is!"

"I am sincerely obliged to her for her kindness," replied Nicholas; "but where are you going, that you talk of bidding good-bye?"

"Haven't you seen it in the papers?" asked the manager. "I wonder at that! It was in the varieties. I had it here somewhere,—ah! yes, here it is."

He handed the paper to Nicholas, who saw that the whole family had been engaged to go to America.

"I am astonished to hear this news" said Nicholas. "Going to America!"

Mr. Crummles then told Nicholas news of all his old friends, and heard with interest of the adventures of Smike. He ended with asking Nicholas to a farewell supper they were to have after the show, at a tavern close by.

Nicholas gladly agreed, and then went for a walk; for the room became very hot and overcrowded, owing to the influx of four gentlemen, who had just killed each other in the play, and now wished to change their clothes.

On his walk Nicholas bought a small present for each of the Crummleses and meeting Mr. Crummles at the theatre, went off to see the rest of the company.

“This is indeed a joy I had not looked for,” said Mrs. Crummles, when she saw Nicholas. “And here are some that you know,” she added, thrusting forward the Phenomenon and the two boys.

Supper was ready, so the company, some thirty strong, sat down at once. It was a very jolly party, and quite a distinguished one; for the company included Mr. Snittle Timberry, who had dramatized two hundred and forty-seven novels, as fast as they had come out.

When everybody had finished eating, the board was cleared, and punch, wine and spirits were placed upon it. Then the business of drinking the healths began; everybody had a turn, so it was very late when the company, with many good-byes and embraces, dispersed.

Nicholas waited until the last to give his little presents. When he had given them, and said goodbye all round, and came to Mr. Crummles, he felt very sad at the thought that this might be the last time he saw the kindly man, who had

proved such a good friend to him when he sorely needed one.

Mr. Crummles appeared completely melted, and shook hands warmly, saying as he did so,

“We were a happy little company. You and I never had a word! I shall be very glad to-morrow morning to think that I saw you again, but now I almost wish you hadn't come.”

Nicholas was about to make some cheerful reply, when he was greatly surprised by the sudden appearance of Mrs. Grudden, a very old woman who looked after the theatre wardrobe. She had declined to attend the supper, in order that she might rise earlier in the morning; and now burst out of a bedroom clad in a long white nightgown, and throwing her arms round his neck, hugged him with great affection.

“What! are you going too?” asked Nicholas.

“Going!” returned Mrs. Grudden. “Of course! Lord have mercy, what do you think they would do without me?”

Nicholas submitted to another hug, and then saying goodbye as cheerfully as possible, took his leave of the Vincent Crummleses.

While Nicholas was absorbed in his thoughts of Madeline Bray, he could not help noticing that Smike's health, long on the wane, was getting worse. The poor boy never complained, and was always eager to help his friends with anything he could manage in the way of light jobs

in the house or garden ; but it was clear to them all that he was rapidly growing weaker, and the doctor did not seem to think that much could be done for him.

Apart from this trouble, life at the cottage went on very happily; for the Brothers Cheeryble, as they found Nicholas worthy of trust, were always showing the family some new kindness.

The brothers always looked in on Sunday afternoons; so did Tim Linkinwater; and as for Mr. Frank, he seemed to pass that way at least three nights in the week. Miss La Creevy was often there too, and she and Tim had become firm friends.

Sir Mulberry and his friends never troubled any of them again; for soon after he had recovered from his accident in the cab, and the beating Nicholas gave him, he and Lord Verisopht had a drunken quarrel. Sir Mulberry lost his temper and challenged his friend to a duel. The challenge was accepted, and one summer morning the two met near Ham House, with their seconds.

Only one shot was fired, and the young lord, without a stagger or a groan, fell dead. Sir Mulberry fled to France, where he had to stay for the rest of his life.

CHAPTER XIII

In an old house, dismal, dark and dusty, like himself, lived Arthur Gride. He kept one servant, a thin blear-eyed old woman, almost stone deaf. Gride did not mind her defects, for he said,

“She’s half a witch, I think, but she’s very frugal, and she’s better deaf. Her living costs me next to nothing; and as to her listening at keyholes, well, that’s no use to her. She’s worth her weight in copper.”

He and Ralph had quite won over Mr. Bray, and he had given them his consent to the marriage of Gride and Madeline. At first the girl protested, and said nothing would make her do it; but Ralph told her what a good thing it would be for her father if she did, and gradually wore down her opposition. He also hinted that he and Gride could clap her father into the common jail if she did not do as they wished.

So the poor girl, worn out with care and poverty, at last consented. Fortunately Newman Noggs, who always kept a very keen eye on Ralph’s doings, got to know of the plot, and guessing at Nicholas’s feelings with regard to the young lady in question, told him all about it.

Nicholas was in despair, and also very angry. His first impulse was to go straight to his Uncle’s and have it out with him, and then to the Brays, to see what he could do there; but Newman begged him not to be violent, and to

take time to consider the matter carefully before doing anything.

“Where are the Brothers” asked Newman.

“Both absent on urgent business, for three days,” replied Nicholas.

The next morning, Nicholas called on the Brays, and begged the father not to sacrifice his daughter; but the old man only laughed, and told him to mind his own business, and get out.

As he was leaving, he met Madeline, and asked for an interview, which she willingly gave him. He was very shocked at the change in the beautiful girl, for the mental suffering that she had undergone during the last few weeks had made her pale and ill. But suffering as she evidently was, nothing he could say could persuade her to change her mind about the wedding, for Ralph had convinced her that it was a duty she owed to her father. She was kind and tender to Nicholas, and her tears fell fast as they said goodbye; but she remained firm.

Nicholas staggered out, wondering wildly what he could do; and at night, having in some measure collected his thoughts went out to Arthur Gride's. He found that gentleman in, busily brushing a bottle-green coat, and bullying Peg Sliderskew, the servant.

Nicholas had thought of the plan of asking the Brothers to offer to pay up some of Bray's debts to the money-lenders. He was sure they

would do this to save Madeline, and intended asking them as soon as they returned.

With this idea, he now came to Gride, and put the offer before him, but the old man only gave an ugly smile, and would not answer.

“You think,” said Nicholas, “that the price would not be paid. But Miss Bray has wealthy friends who would coin their very hearts to save her. Name your price, and defer your nuptial, and you shall have your payment.”

But Arthur Gride would not hear of it ; and having told him that the wedding was to take place the following morning, turned him out, carefully locking all the doors and windows after he had gone, in case Nicholas should be tempted to make a return visit.

He was up early the next morning, and carefully dressed himself in the bottle-green suit. After a scanty breakfast, he set out for Ralph Nickleby's; and to Ralph he related, how his nephew had called the night before.

“Well,” said Ralph, “it doesn't matter. Come, it's nearly time for you to be made happy. You'll pay my bond now, to save trouble afterwards.”

But Gride had not brought the money with him, so Ralph had to be content with his note of promise. Gride grinned assent, and producing two large white favours, pinned one on his own breast, and one on his friend's.

When they reached the Bray's lodgings, they were rather dismayed by the mournful silence that pervaded it. The servant-girl was crying, and there was nobody to receive them; so they stole upstairs into the sitting room, more like two burglars than a bridegroom and his friend.

"One would think," said Ralph, "that there was going to be a funeral here, rather than a wedding."

At that moment Bray came into the room, and said in a low voice.

"She was very ill all last night. I thought she would have broken her heart. She is dressed, and crying bitterly in her own room, but she is better, that's everything."

"She is ready, is she?" asked Ralph.

"Quite ready" returned the father. "She may be safely trusted now. I have been talking to her this morning."

He left the room to fetch his daughter, and the two men flung themselves into chairs to wait. Soon after, they heard the rustle of a frock, and some footsteps outside the door. Gride shambled forward, and opened the door in haste; and there entered, not Bray and his daughter, but Nicholas and his sister.

Ralph leapt to his feet, and shouted to Nicholas, "What brings you here?"

"I come here" answered Nicholas, to save your victim if I can. Hard words will not move

me, nor hard blows. Here I stand and here I shall remain, until I have done my errand."

"And what may your purpose be?" asked Ralph.

"To offer the unhappy subject of your treachery, at the last moment, a refuge, and a home," answered Nicholas. "For this I came and brought my sister, even into *your* presence. Our purpose is not to see or speak with you; therefore to you, we stoop to say no more."

"Gride, call down Bray—and not his daughter," ordered Ralph.

"If you value your head," said Nicholas, taking up a position before the door, "stay where you are."

"Mind me, and not him, and call down Bray," cried Ralph.

"Mind yourself rather than either of us, and stay where you are!" ordered Nicholas.

"Will you call down Bray?" shouted Ralph.

"Remember that you come near me at your peril," said Nicholas.

Gride hesitated. Ralph, being by this time as furious as a tiger, made for the door, and attempting to pass Kate, clasped her arm roughly with his hand, Nicholas seized him by the collar, and would have flung him down, but at that moment a heavy body fell with great violence on the floor above, and in an instant afterwards was heard a most terrible scream.

They all stood still for a second, and gazed at each other. Scream after scream sounded above, and many shrill voices clamouring together were heard to cry, "He is dead."

Nicholas burst from the room, and darting upstairs to a small bedroom found Bray lying on the floor, quite dead, his daughter clinging to the body.

"Who is the owner of this house?" asked Nicholas.

An elderly woman was pointed out to him, and to her he said, as he gently unwound Madeline's arms from her father's neck,

"I represent this lady's nearest friends, and must remove her from this dreadful scene. This is my sister. My name and address are on that card, and you shall receive from me all directions for the arrangements that must be made. Stand aside, every one of you, and give me room."

The people fell back; and Nicholas, taking Madeline in his arms, carried her downstairs to the sitting room. He sent the servant to find a coach, and while they waited for it, he and Kate tried to restore their charge to animation.

In a few minutes the girl had found a coach; and Nicholas was just carrying Madeline out of the room, to place her in it, when Ralph came and stood in front of him, and declared she should not be taken away.

“Who says so?” cried Nicholas.

“I” said Ralph; “this man claims his wife, and he shall have her.”

“That man claims what is not his, and he should not have her, if he were fifty men,” answered Nicholas, “I will prevent him.”

“By what right, I should like to know?” asked Ralph.

“By this right, that I love her,” replied Nicholas, “and by the right that those whom I serve, are her nearest and dearest friends. In their name I bear her hence. Give way!”

Ralph ground his teeth with rage, but made no further attempt to hinder their going; Arthur Gride happened to be standing in the doorway, but Nicholas bumped him out of the way, and went out to the coach with his burden. Kate was already in the coach, and confiding his charge to her care, Nicholas jumped up beside the driver, and bade him drive away.

They took Madeline straight home, where Mrs. Nickleby awaited them in great excitement. They had told her their errand when they went out, and prepared her more or less for the visitor. And if she bustled round more fussily than usual, and got in everybody's way, it was only because her really kind heart made her anxious to be as good to the poor stranger as she could.

The sudden shock she had received, combined with the anxiety of mind which she had for a long time endured, proved too much for

Madeline's strength. She was plunged into a very serious illness, which lasted for many weeks.

Kate nursed her carefully and lovingly; and there is no doubt, that it was owing to her care and kindness at this time, that Madeline recovered as quickly as she did.

Mrs. Nickleby insisted on coming to the bedroom for half an hour each day, and used to sit by the bed, and tell the patient all the news. Mrs. Nickleby wandered so much in her conversations, that it is doubtful whether Madeline understood very much of what she was told, but the old lady was always very pleased with herself, and was sure she did a great deal of good with her daily visits.

Just as Madeline was beginning to recover a little, poor Smike became alarmingly ill; he could hardly move from one room to another, and looked so worn, it was painful to see him.

The doctor told Nicholas, that the last chance of the boy's life depended on his removal from London to pure country air, and recommended Devonshire as a suitable place. It was the only hope, he said, but warned them that the lad would probably not return alive.

The kind brothers, who knew Smike's sad history, called Nicholas to a consultation; they said they would find the money, if a suitable place could be found, and gave Nicholas leave to go away with his friend, and to stay with him as long as was necessary.

The next day, Nicholas went to Devonshire, and soon found a comfortable lodging near his old home. He returned to London at once, and the day after took Smike away with him. The poor boy was very sad at leaving all his kind friends, who gave him a great send-off, with many prayers for his speedy recovery.

The journey took them two days, for Nicholas was afraid of overtaxing Smike's health, and they went as slowly as possible. They lodged in a small farmhouse, very near to the house where Nicholas had spent his childhood. At first Smike was strong enough to walk about, for short distances at a time, with no other aid than Nicholas's arm.

He seemed to find great interest in seeing all the places that Nicholas and Kate had played in as a child; so Nicholas made such spots the scenes of their daily rambles, hiring a pony-chair for the longer distances.

There was not a lane, or brook, or copse near, that they had not played in, and Nicholas would point out the trees they had climbed, and the hedgerows where they had gathered wild flowers together, and tried to keep the sick boy happy and interested. He never left him for a moment, but in spite of all his care, it was plain that Smike grew weaker every day.

Soon he became too ill to move about, and he lay on a couch in the orchard all day; and there in the sun Smike quietly slipped away from

life. The end came one evening, fine and warm, when the soft sweet air crept in at the open window, and not a sound was to be heard but the gentle rustling of the leaves. Nicholas sat by the bed, in his usual place, and talked to him for a while, until Smike fell into a quiet sleep, from which he never awakened.

He was buried in the little Churchyard, beside the Nicklebys' grave, and Nicholas returned home. He had told them the sad news in a letter, and it was a very sorrowful group that met him on his return. Kate and her mother could not repress their grief, and Madeline was scarcely less moved. Honest, kind Miss La Creevy no sooner saw him, than she sat herself down on the stairs, and bursting into floods of tears, refused for a long time to be comforted. Waiting until they were quiet and composed, Nicholas told them all his news; and then, tired with his long journey, went to rest.

That evening he and Kate had a long talk to each other, and confided that they were both in love, she with Frank, and he with Madeline. The only thing that worried them both in these matters was, what would the Cheeryble Brothers say about it all; so Nicholas decided to tell them the next day, feeling that he ought to be very open and frank with such kind friends, and thinking that they might not approve of their nephew and ward, (for so they considered Madeline, since her father's death) making such poor matches.

He saw Mr. Charles the next day, and told him everything ; the old man merely thanked him for his confidence, and promised to think over the matter ; but told Nicholas he wished to see him in half an hour on a very important piece of business, in which his Uncle Ralph was concerned ; and so dismissed him.

CHAPTER XIV

After Nicholas had carried Madeline out, Ralph and his friend had a long argument as to whose fault their failure was. Gride held that Ralph should have stopped his nephew ; and Ralph held that Gride should have claimed his bride, and held on to her.

After a while they went down to the coach, which was still waiting to take them to the wedding. They went back to Gride's gloomy house, and when they arrived there, Ralph asked if he could have a glass of water.

"You shall have a glass of anything you like," answered Gride. "Ring the bell, coachman, it's no use knocking."

The man rang, and rang, and rang again, but nobody came ; the house was as silent as the grave.

"Peg is so deaf," said Gride. "Ring again, coachman, she sees the bell."

Again the man knocked and rang, but there was no answer, so at last the two money-lenders

got a ladder, and climbed over the wall into the back yard.

"I am almost afraid to go in," murmured Gride. "Suppose she should be dead?"

"Suppose she is," sneered Ralph, walking into the house.

It all looked the same as usual; but though the men searched the place from garret to cellar, no Peg was there, and at last they sat them down in the sitting room generally used by Gride.

"The hag is out, I suppose," said Ralph, preparing to depart.

Gride, who had been peering round the room, fell at that moment upon his knees before a large chest, and uttered a terrible yell.

"How now?" asked Ralph, angrily.

"Robbed! Robbed!" screamed Gride. "Worse than money! She had better have taken money! She had better have made me a beggar than have done this!"

"Done what?" said Ralph, "what is missing?"

"Papers, deeds! I am a ruined man!" cried Gride. "She don't know what they are; she can't read, but someone will read them for her, and tell her what to do; and the person this will fall on is me."

"Hear reason," said Ralph. "She can't have been gone long. I'll call the police. They'll soon lay hands on her, never fear."

"No, no, no," shrieked the other, "I daren't, not a word must be said! I should be undone, I should die in Newgate!"

Hearing this Ralph departed quickly, and was driven to his own home ; for he knew well what the lost papers were. Soon after he arrived there, he sent Newman with a letter to Squeers, at the Saracen's Head, to wait for an answer. Newman brought word that Mr. Squeers was still in town, and would wait upon Mr. Nickleby directly. He very soon turned up ; and Ralph, first turning Newman out of the room, settled down to a long talk. He explained to Squeers that Nicholas had upset his plans with regard to Madeline's marriage, and looked like securing the lady for himself. But he was not sure if the Cheerybles or Nicholas knew of the existence of some deeds, the possession of which would make the lady owner of a vast property, and her husband a rich man.

“Now,” said Ralph, “ I hear that the deeds have been stolen, and I know by whom. I want to stop the girl obtaining the papers ; and to anyone who brings those deeds here I will give fifty pounds, in gold.”

“Yes, but who's to bring them?” asked Squeers. “How are you to get at the woman, that's what puzzles me?”

Ralph went on to describe Peg, and said he was sure she would be hiding for the present in some slum. He asked Squeers to seek her out and get on good terms with her, and said he would be responsible for all expenses while Squeers was doing so. He also hinted that the money might be

increased to seventy pounds, if the deeds were returned quickly to him.

A short time after this had taken place, Squeers ran Peg to earth in a little court near Lambeth. She was living in one room, and Squeers now took another on the same landing; and as he became very generous with his gifts of raw spirits, paid for by Ralph, they were soon friendly.

One evening, after he had plied her freely with drink, she told him about the papers she had stolen, and asked him to read them for her.

“Any that are no good, we’ll burn,” she said. “And them that we can sell, we’ll keep.”

“All right,” said Squeers. “First we’ll burn the box; you should never keep things that may lead to discovery, Peg. You burn it, and I’ll read the papers.”

If the old woman had not been very deaf indeed, she must have heard the breathing of two persons just outside the door, who now crept warily into the room.

The old hag and Squeers, little dreaming of any such invasion, were busy at their tasks. Squeers, not being a good reader, was rather bothered to make out what some of the papers were about; but at last he shouted,

“I’ve got it. The name of Madeline Bray—come of age—or marry. The day is ours at last!”

He thrust the papers into his breast pocket, and was rushing out, when Newman Noggs,

bringing a heavy pair of bellows with a crash on to the very centre of Squeers' head, felled him to the ground. Then, taking the papers from Squeers' pocket, he gave them to Frank Cheeryble who had come with him.

Newman had listened to the conversation between Ralph and Squeers, fearing some mischief was afoot; and as soon as he had finished his work he went to the brothers, who set their nephew to search for Peg and the missing papers.

The next day, Ralph waited in vain for his clerk; at noon he sent his housekeeper to see if he was ill, but the woman said that they told her Newman had not been back all night, and nobody knew where he was.

During the afternoon, she came to say that a gentleman wanted to see him and was waiting in the outer office. When he went down and looked in the room, he saw that it was Mr. Charles Cheeryble.

The old gentleman asked for an interview; but Ralph declined to hear anything he might have to say, and walked out, expressing the wish that he hoped he would find his visitor gone when he returned.

On his walk he went to the Saracen's Head and inquired if Squeers was there, but was told he had not been in for some days; so disappointed again, Ralph went on to Arthur Gride's.

The house wore its usual deserted and dingy look, and he received no reply to his knocks and rings; but as he was going away, he heard a window being quietly raised, and looking up, could just see the face of Gride, peering from the garret.

"Come down," said Ralph, beckoning to him.

"Go away," squeaked Gride. "Don't speak, don't call attention to the house, but go away."

"I'll knock, till I have your neighbours up," said Ralph, "if you don't tell me what you mean by lurking there; will you come down?"

"No" answered Gride, shutting the window.

Turning from the door in a rage, Ralph walked back to the city, and went straight to the office of the Cheeryble Brothers.

"My name's Nickleby," he told Tim.

"I know it," said Tim.

"Which of your firm was it that called upon me this afternoon?" demanded Ralph. "Tell him I want to see him."

"You shall see," said Tim, getting off his stool, "you shall see, not only Mr. Charles, but Mr. Ned as well."

He disappeared, and coming back after a short interval, showed Ralph in to the two brothers. They received him politely, and asked what he wanted. He told them he had come to find out why they had taken to interfering in his affairs, and to warn them against doing so. Their

answer to that was to call in Newman Noggs, who confronted his master like a man, and told him how he had discovered his plots against Nicholas and Madeline, and had appealed to the brothers for help for his friends.

The Cheerybles had taken steps to have Squeers and Snawley watched, with the result that those two men and Peg Sliderskew were already in jail, awaiting their trial—Snawley for having pretended that SMIKE was his son, Squeers and Peg, for the theft of the deeds.

Ralph still kept silence obstinately; but the next action of the Cheerybles staggered even him; for they brought in to the room a man whom Ralph, to his dismay, recognised as an old accomplice. This was one Brooker, who many years ago had conspired with Ralph to conceal the latter's marriage; the bride being a girl whose little fortune would have been forfeited had it been known that she had married anyone before coming of age. Soon after, this girl had died; and Ralph, unwilling to have her little son on his hands, had given him to Brooker with a sum of money, on condition that he should never see him again. Brooker had kept the child till he was three; after which, seeing one of Squeers' advertisements, he had handed him over to the schoolmaster. For six years he had paid the school-fees out of the money Ralph had given him; but at the end of this time Ralph, wanting to be rid of Brooker in turn, had informed the magistrates of some crime which

Brooker had once committed, and had had him deported abroad.

“And that child, entrusted to Squeers’ care” said Brooker “was none other than Smike.”

“That child — Smike!” repeated Ralph, faint and pale.

“That child” went on Brooker quietly “whom I have since seen stretched cold upon his bed, and who is now in his grave—”

“In his grave—” echoed Ralph, like one in an evil dream.

“He was your only son” said Mr. Charles Cheeryble softly.

But now Ralph sat in silence, pressing his hands to his face. Presently he stared at Brooker, but said not a word; and when the Brothers Cheeryble, true to their nature, offered some words of pity, he made no reply but got up and left the office as though still in a dream.

So, creeping through the door and slinking along the streets like a thief, Ralph Nickleby took the road to his home. The night was dark and windy, and a huge black cloud seemed to follow him; sometimes he turned his head and looked back at it fearfully, thinking how like a funeral pall it was, and wishing it would pass over him; he tried to run from it, but could not escape it; his way lay past a paupers’ burial ground, where there had been a suicide’s funeral a few days before; Ralph paused, and wondered in which grave the poor wretch lay; but it was too bitterly

cold to linger, and he hurried on; the cloud still followed him, till as he reached his own door it seemed right above his head.

Shivering from head to foot, he went into the room he used as an office. A letter lay on the table. He opened it, and read that by the failure of a venture of his, he had lost ten thousand pounds. At this his tortured mind seemed to give way. Gnashing his teeth, he screamed loudly: "I am trampled down and ruined! The night has come. Is there no devil to help me?"

He spoke no more, but groped his way presently upstairs to a garret. Up there, when he had closed the door, he remained..... Till next morning when those who came to search for him, finding him nowhere in his usual rooms, mounted the dusty stairs at last and discovered him———dead.

Ralph Nickleby had hanged himself.

CHAPTER XV

Some weeks later, Tim Linkinwater brought the Nicklebys a summons to dine with the Cheerybles on the next day but one. Little Miss La Creevy was invited too, which puzzled Mrs. Nickleby. The great day arriving, that good lady began her toilet soon after breakfast, and a very wonderful toilet it was. As for Miss La Creevy, she arrived with two band-boxes and

something in a newspaper, on which a man had sat in the bus on the way, and which had to be ironed again before it was fit to be put on. But at last everyone was dressed, and Nicholas came for them in a coach. At the brothers' house they were received so kindly, that Mrs. Nickleby was quite in a flutter, and forgot to patronise Miss La Creevy. The brothers called Nicholas to them, and showed him the deeds relating to Madeline Bray's fortune, adding their own consent to her marriage with him: "If" said Brother Charles slyly "she will have you, young man!"

"Well, she is in the next room" Brother Ned observed. "Let him go and ask her. Let us get all the lovers out of the way, to talk among themselves. Turn them out, brother, every one!"

Charles began the clearance by leading Kate to a door, kissing her heartily, and pushing her through it; but Nicholas had already disappeared. Only his mother and Miss La Creevy remained, both crying profusely. The two brothers led Mrs. Nickleby from the room, under pretence of having to consult her on the arrangements for the dinner. Tim sat down beside Miss La Creevy, and said soothingly: "Don't cry!"

"I must" the little woman replied. "I'm so happy! It was so kind of them to remember me, and such a pleasant thing to see the young folks brought together!"

"Almost enough to make *us* get married, isn't it?" laughed Tim.

“We mustn’t think of such a thing!” gasped Miss Creevy. “What would the brothers say?”

“Why, bless your soul!” cried Tim. “They left us here on purpose to fix it up. Let’s be a comfortable couple and take care of each other—now do, my dear!”

“I shall never look any of them in the face again” exclaimed Miss La Creevy faintly: but she consented, all the same.

By this time the butler was nearly in a fit, because the dinner was so long postponed; so the brothers collected the various couples, and took them to the dining-room. There they found Newman Noggs, dressed tidily in a new black suit, and looking like the gentleman which he really was. Never had such a dinner been held; for everyone was so happy, that the mildest jokes were received as though they were brilliant, and even the butler forgot his dignity and joined in. Only one hitch occurred; that was when Mrs. Nickleby was told of Miss La Creevy’s engagement; and all the evening henceforth, even when the merriment was at its height, she conducted herself to the little woman in a cold and distant manner, saying loudly at intervals to Kate: “At her age, too! I am disgusted with her!”

When her term of mourning was ended, Madeline married Nicholas: and on the same day Kate became Mrs. Frank Cheeryble. Two or three weeks later, Tim and Miss La Creevy were married too.

Ralph having died without a will, the Nicklebys inherited his money, which in spite of his recent losses was enough to make Mrs. Nickleby independent for life. Nicholas and Frank became partners in the Cheeryble firm, and the brothers soon afterwards retired to a house in the country.

Meanwhile Peg Sliderskew, with Squeers and Snawley, were deported abroad to a convict settlement, from which they never returned. Dotheboys Hall was closed, the magistrates having received complaints of the way its scholars were treated; and if it had not been for the Browdies' kindness, Mrs. Squeers and Fanny would have starved.

The first act of Nicholas, when he became rich, was to buy his father's old home; and in later years, when two families of lovely children were theirs, he and Kate used to take them there for their summer holidays. Mrs. Nickleby herself might have lived there all the year round, but thought it more genteel to reside in London, where she paid lengthy visits to each of her children in turn; but it was long before she would consent to receive Mrs. Linkinwater, nor did she ever quite forgive her.

Near Nicholas' home in Devonshire was a little cottage, where there lived, winter and summer alike, a quiet gray-haired gentleman; he looked after the old house while Nicholas was not there, but his chief delight was when the

children came; for at such times he was master of their revels, and played like a child himself; the little ones adored him, and no game was ever quite perfect without Uncle Newman Noggs. But sometimes he took them to the churchyard, to lay fresh flowers on a green grave there, and talked to them softly of their poor cousin Smike:



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