Nicholas Nickleby was written by Charles Dickens in 1839. Dickens had a very hard life when he was a child, and his novels often describe the problems of poor people, especially children. He wanted his books to change people’s ideas about their society.

**Scene 1**

**Narrator**

When Nicholas Nickleby is 18, his father dies and his family has no more money. His uncle finds him a job as a teacher at Dotheboys Hall in Yorkshire. He travels there with the head teacher, Mr Squeers, and some of the schoolboys. Along the way, they stop at an inn.

**Squeers**

Bring me roast beef and potatoes, my man. And a mug of beer. And be quick with it!

**Innkeeper**

Yes, sir.

**Squeers**

You can have a little of my food, Nickleby. I don’t want to pay for two meals. The food here is too expensive.

**Nicholas**

Thank you, sir.

**(The innkeeper brings the food.)**

**Squeers**

Is that all we get? This place is terrible! Here you are, Nickleby, have a slice of beef.

**Nicholas**

Thank you.

**Boy 1**

Mr Squeers, we’re hungry.

**Boy 2**

We haven’t eaten since last night.

**Boy 3**

And we only had a slice of bread…

**Squeers**

Be quiet, you idiots! I’m not made of money!

**Nicholas**

But they must have something to eat!

**Squeers**

Oh, very well. Here, have a potato. And don’t say that I’m not generous!

**Scene 2**

**Narrator**

The next evening they arrive at Dotheboys Hall. It’s dark and it’s snowing. It’s very cold. Mrs Squeers meets them at the door.

**Mrs Squeers**

Squeery, my love, you’re here! How was your journey?

**Squeers**

It was terrible. The boys complained all the time. How are the cows and all the other animals?

**Mrs Squeers**

They’re well, my love.

**Squeers**

And how are the boys?
Mrs Squeers    Oh they’re well too, I suppose. We’ve had problems with some of the parents. They haven’t got any money and they can’t pay for their sons’ education.

Squeers    Well, they have to pay! And while we’re waiting for the money, their sons can do extra work! We’ve got plenty of hard jobs for them in the school and in the garden.

Nicholas    But surely you don’t make the boys here work for you?

Mrs Squeers    Who are you?

Squeers    This is Mr Nickleby, my sweet. He’s the new teacher.

Mrs Squeers    Well, we aren’t interested in his opinions! Of course the boys have to work for us! We can’t do all the work, can we?

Squeers    And if they don’t want to work, they get a good beating.

Scene 3

Narrator    One evening Nicholas finds a boy working in the kitchen. His clothes are old and too small for him and he looks ill.

Nicholas    What’s your name?

Smike    It’s Smike, sir. I haven’t done anything wrong! Don’t beat me!

Nicholas    Of course I won’t beat you! Don’t be afraid of me. You look too old to be at school. How old are you? Eighteen? Nineteen?

Smike    I don’t know how old I am. Now I have to finish my work or they’ll beat me again. Oh, life here is so hard. My heart will break!

Nicholas    No, it won’t. There is always hope.

Smike    Not for me. I haven’t got any family or friends. It doesn’t matter if I live or die.

Nicholas    I’ll be your friend, Smike.

Scene 4

Narrator    Every morning Mr and Mrs Squeers shout at the boys to wake them up.

Squeers    Wake up, you lazy dogs! Are you going to sleep all day!

Nicholas    We’re coming.

Mrs Squeers    Smike! Come down here now! Smike!

Nicholas    He isn’t here.

Squeers    That’s what you say! I’m coming to find him.

*Fanny    What’s the matter?

Mrs Squeers    We can’t find Smike.

Nicholas    I think he’s run away.

Squeers    How do you know that?

Mrs Squeers    You helped him to run away, didn’t you!

Nicholas    No, I did not! I don’t know anything about it.

Squeers    I’ll beat the life out of him when I find him. I’m going to get the coach to York.

Mrs Squeers    And I’ll take the coach in the other direction. We’ll find him.

Squeers    And if we don’t… you’ll pay for this, Nickleby.

* Fanny is the Squeers’ daughter.

Glossary

inn locanda
innkeeper locandiere
journey viaggio
complain lamentarsi
beating (n) botte, percosse

beat (someone) picchiare
qualcuno
coach carrozza
pay for pagarla per

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