

A Little Princess



Adapted from the novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Tracy Wells

Adapted from the 1905 novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Norman Maine Publishing

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Norman Maine Publishing

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*For my mother,
thank you for your
love, support, and editing eye,
and for always seeing
the princess inside of me.*

A Little Princess

CLASSIC. Adapted from the novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Sara Crewe is sent to live at an upscale boarding school run by Miss Minchin, a greedy and domineering head mistress. Sara's wealthy father, Captain Crewe, leaves instructions that his daughter is to be given a private room with a parlor and a maid. Some of Sara's fellow classmates are envious of Sara's fortune and make fun of her by referring to her as "Princess Sara." On her birthday, Sara receives news that her father has died, all of his fortune has been lost, and that she has been left a pauper. With her school bills unpaid, Miss Minchin makes Sara a servant, making her wear rags and live in the attic. Hungry, cold, and overworked, Sara finds that she is left with only her imagination to comfort herself. However, Sara's luck changes one day when she looks out her attic window and sees that a new family has moved into the house across the street.

Performance Time: Approximately 90-120 minutes.



Frances Hodgson Burnett
(1849-1924)

About the Story

English writer Frances Hodgson Burnett is best known for her children's novels, *The Secret Garden*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and *A Little Princess*. She was born in Manchester, England, and had two older brothers and two younger sisters. After her father died, Burnett was cared for by her grandmother, who taught her a love a books. Considered precocious and imaginative, Burnett attended The Select Seminary for Young Ladies and Gentlemen in Manchester. As a child, Burnett enjoyed telling stories to family and friends and wrote stories down in notebooks. In 1863, Burnett's education came to an end when her mother was forced to sell the family business and the family moved to Knoxville, TN, where Burnett's uncle lived. With the publication of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in 1886, Burnett became a popular writer of children's books. *A Little Princess* first appeared as a serialized magazine story in 1888 and was later published as a novel in 1905. Since then, the story has been adapted numerous times for the stage, television, and film.

Characters

(7 M, 17 F, 1 flexible, opt. extras)

(With doubling: 5 M, 15 F)

SARA CREWE: Bright, imaginative, polite student who loves books and storytelling; should appear more finely dressed than the other students at her school.

CAPTAIN RALPH CREWE: Sara's wealthy, doting father; finely dressed with an overcoat and hat.

MISS MINCHIN: Stern, selfish, domineering headmistress at the Select Seminary for Young Ladies; wears dark clothing.

AMELIA MINCHIN: Miss Minchin's younger, kinder sister who works at the Select Seminary for Young Ladies.

BECKY: Scullery maid at the Select Seminary for Young Ladies who Sara befriends; her face is dirty and her dress and apron are tattered and worn.

EMMA: Scullery maid at the Select Seminary for Young Ladies; wears tattered, worn dress and apron.

COOK: Cook at the Select Seminary for Young Ladies; wears a tattered, worn dress and apron; female.

ERMENGARDE: Sara's best friend who is the class outcast and struggles with French; wears a ribbon in her hair.

LAVINIA: Wealthy, mean-spirited student who is envious of Sara's wealth; wears nice dresses.

JESSIE: Lavinia's best friend who does whatever Lavinia tells her to do; female.

LOTTIE: Youngest student who is grieving the death of her mother; female.

MARY: Student who enjoys Sara's stories.

GERTRUDE: Student who enjoys Sara's stories.

NANCY: Student who enjoys Sara's stories, especially ones about princesses and fairies.

MR. CARRISFORD: Captain Crewe's childhood friend and business partner who lives next door to the Seminary and is

searching for Sara; sickly looking and uses a wheelchair or cane.

RAM DAAS: Mr. Carrisford's Indian servant; wears traditional Indian garb and a turban; male.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Mr. Carrisford's attorney.

MRS. CARMICHAEL: Mr. Carmichael's wife.

NORA: Carmichaels' daughter.

JANET: Carmichaels' daughter.

DONALD: Carmichaels' son.

MONSIEUR DUFARGE: French teacher; male.

MR. BARROW: Captain Crewe's attorney.

ANNE: Poor, hungry girl in the street; dressed like a beggar.

BAKER: Generous, kind baker who sells raisin buns on the street; flexible.

Options for Doubling

CAPTAIN CREWE/MONSIEUR DUFARGE (male)

MR. CARMICHAEL/MR. BARROW (male)

ANNE/LOTTIE (female)

EMMA/MRS. CARMICHAEL (female)

CAPTAIN CREWE/BAKER (flexible)

Setting

Late 1800s, the Select Seminary for Young Ladies, a school for young ladies in a row house section of London.

Set

This play is easy to stage with very few set pieces required.

Schoolroom. There are student desks or small tables and chairs. There is a larger desk for the teacher. Additional items may be used to dress the scene as a classroom.

Attic bedroom: There are two small beds or cots, sheets for beds, a small stool, a small table, a washbasin, and a window large enough for someone to enter and exit from.

London street outside of the school: To indicate the school's exterior, a backdrop depicting London row houses and/or trees, lampposts, or benches may be used.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I

Scene 1: Interior of schoolroom.

Scene 2: Interior of schoolroom.

Scene 3: Interior of schoolroom.

Scene 4: Interior of schoolroom.

Scene 5: Attic bedroom.

Scene 6: Interior of schoolroom.

Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1: Attic bedroom.

Scene 2: London street outside of the seminary.

Scene 3: London street outside of the seminary.

Scene 4: Attic bedroom.

Scene 5: Interior of schoolroom.

Scene 6: London street outside of the seminary.

Props

Suitcase	Hand basket
Wrapped package with a doll inside it	Coin
Overcoat and hat, for Sara Crewe	Basket filled with baked goods
Books	Eight raisin buns
Ruler	Small paper bag
Jump rope	Pad of paper
Board or card game	Pen
Dinner bell	Cane
Broom	Blanket
Birthday party decorations	2 Bed sheets
Large table draped with a tablecloth	4 White handkerchiefs
Wrapped birthday presents	Basket filled with food
Large doll wrapped as a birthday present	3 Pieces of cake
Small suitcase	Large bag or sack
Black dress that is too small, for Sara	2 New blankets
Plastic or stuffed rat with fishing line attached	Rug
Glass of water	Pillow
Stuffed monkey	Tablecloth
Wheelchair	Assorted food items
Lap blanket	Wall décor
	Small card
	Package with a new dress for Sara inside

"You're my little princess,
Sara Crewe.
And you always will be."

—Mr. Carrisford

ACT I

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Interior of schoolroom at the Select Seminary for Young Ladies. Sara and Captain Crewe enter. Crewe carries a suitcase and a package. They are well dressed with overcoats and hats and appear wealthy.)

CREWE: Here we are, Sara.

SARA: Is this the place you've been telling me about?

CREWE: Yes, little Sara. We have reached it at last. This is the Select Seminary for Young Ladies. It is where you will be going to school for the next few years.

SARA: It is an awfully long way from our home in India. You and I have never been apart, Papa.

CREWE: I know, but India is no place for a girl your age. The time has come for you to go to learn everything that a young girl should know.

SARA: I'm very smart, Papa. Everyone says so.

CREWE: You are, indeed, but there are things that only grown ladies can teach a little girl. Because your mother died when you were so young, you haven't had anyone to teach you those things.

(Sara rushes to Crewe and hugs him.)

SARA: I don't want to go to school if you can't stay with me. Please stay and we'll do lessons together.

CREWE: (Chuckles.) I promise you that you will have so much fun here you won't even notice I'm gone. There will be a lot of little girls to play with, and I will send you loads of books. You'll grow so fast that it will seem like no time before you are big enough to come back home and take care of me.

SARA: (Sighs.) Well, Papa, if this is what you think best for me, I suppose I shall resign myself to it.

CREWE: You are my Little Missus, aren't you? You speak just like a little grown-up.

SARA: If I only I were a grown-up. Then you wouldn't have to leave me in this place.

(Amelia enters.)

AMELIA: *(Surprised.)* Oh! Hello there. You must be Captain Crewe and his lovely daughter, Sara.

CREWE: We are, indeed. And you are...?

AMELIA: Oh, my, where are my manners? I am Amelia Minchin. My sister, Maria, runs this school.

CREWE: Miss Minchin and I have corresponded over the past couple of months. Is she available now?

AMELIA: Certainly. I'll go get her right away. *(Exits.)*

SARA: I don't like this place, Papa. I daresay soldiers, even brave ones, don't like going into battle.

CREWE: So you're comparing yourself to a soldier going into battle, are you? I will miss that wonderful imagination of yours.

(Miss Minchin and Amelia enter. Amelia stands behind Miss Minchin.)

MINCHIN: Captain Crewe! It's good to meet you at last. I feel as if I already know you and your little Sara.

CREWE: We are glad to be here. It has been a long and tiring trip from India.

MINCHIN: I'm sure it has. *(Sternly.)* Amelia, get our guests a chair! We wouldn't want them to think we are barbarians.

AMELIA: Yes, Maria.

SARA: I'm quite all right. You don't have to go to any trouble.

MINCHIN: *(Large smile.)* It's no trouble at all. We here at the Select Seminary for Young Ladies would do anything to make our girls happy and comfortable.

CREWE: I do like the sound of that.

(Amelia brings chairs on. Miss Minchin, Crewe, and Sara sit. Amelia stands behind Miss Minchin.)

MINCHIN: It will be a privilege to be responsible for the education of such a beautiful and promising child. You mentioned her cleverness...a clever child is a treasure in an establishment like mine.

SARA: I am not beautiful. I have dull hair and green eyes and am not fair in the least. I believe I am one of the ugliest children I have ever seen. Are you calling me beautiful to please my father?

MINCHIN: *(Uncomfortable laugh. To Crewe.)* My, but she does speak her mind, doesn't she? That must be that marvelous wit you mentioned.

CREWE: Miss Minchin is speaking the truth, little Sara, though modesty is a virtue that young ladies should possess. I daresay this school is rubbing off on you already.

MINCHIN: We here at Select Seminary pride ourselves in teaching our young ladies the proper etiquette and manners that one needs as she enters womanhood. Additionally, our focus on education rivals that of many other girls' schools in London.

CREWE: I am not the least anxious about her education. The difficulty will be keeping her from learning too fast and too much. She is always sitting with her little nose in books. She doesn't read them, Miss Minchin, she gobbles them up as if she were a little wolf instead of a little girl.

AMELIA: My goodness! What a description!

CREWE: *(To Minchin.)* Drag her away from her books when she reads too much. I will make sure that she has a pony to ride and new dolls whenever she wants them. She ought to play with more dolls.

SARA: Papa, if we went out and bought a new doll every day, I should have more than I could ever be fond of. Dolls

ought to be dear friends. Emily is going to be my dear friend.

AMELIA: Who is Emily?

SARA: She is a doll I haven't gotten yet that Papa is going to buy for me. I'm going to call her Emily.

CREWE: Your papa has already bought her for you.

(Crewe hands Sara a package. Sara furiously unwraps the package to reveal a doll and hugs it closely.)

SARA: *(Indicating doll.)* It's Emily! I knew her right away because she just looks as if she's really listening to me. *(To doll.)* You will be my friend while Papa is gone. I will tell you all about him.

MINCHIN: *(Awkward smile.)* What an original child! What a darling little creature!

CREWE: Yes, she is a darling little creature. Take good care of her for me, Miss Minchin.

MINCHIN: She will be taken care of before all others, Captain Crewe. I can assure you of that.

CREWE: Money is no object, as you know. I expect that Sara will have the best of everything.

MINCHIN: Of course. As we discussed, she is to have the largest and most beautifully decorated suite in the house as well as a pony and carriage and her own private French maid.

CREWE: I will also send lists of new clothes and toys that she should receive. Please purchase the items for me and send the bill to my accountant. He will reimburse you as well as pay Sara's tuition.

MINCHIN: I am not worried about receiving payment from you, Captain Crewe.

CREWE: I suppose it is time for me to go. I have a long boat trip back to India.

MINCHIN: What business do you have back in India, Captain Crewe?

CREWE: My childhood friend and I are investing in diamond mines. They could be worth quite a fortune.

AMELIA: Did you say *diamond mines*?

MINCHIN: (*To Crewe.*) Did you say *fortune*? What kind of fortune are we talking about?

CREWE: Enough so that Sara, here, could live like a princess for the rest of her life.

AMELIA: Oh, my goodness!

SARA: (*To Crewe.*) We don't need diamond mines for me to live as a princess. You treat me like a princess already.

CREWE: (*Hugging Sara.*) Little Sara, I don't believe you know how much your papa is going to miss you. (*Pulls back and looks her in the face.*) Are you learning me by heart?

SARA: No, I already know you by heart. You see, Papa, you are always inside my heart.

(*Sara and Crewe hug tightly. Crewe stands and starts to exit.*)

CREWE: Thank you, Miss Minchin. I will be in touch soon.

MINCHIN: Have safe travels, Captain Crewe. (*Crewe exits.*)

Well then, Sara, why don't we show you to your room.

SARA: That would be lovely, Miss Minchin.

MINCHIN: You are an awfully clever girl, Sara. You aren't going to give me any trouble, are you?

SARA: What do you mean by trouble?

MINCHIN: Oh, never mind. (*Sternly.*) Amelia! Show Sara to her room at once!

AMELIA: Yes, Maria. (*To Sara.*) Come along.

(*Amelia exits, carrying Sara's suitcase. Sara exits.*)

MINCHIN: (*To herself.*) What an unusual girl, but so wealthy.

I really must keep her father happy. (*Pause.*) But I'd better keep my eye on her. (*Exits as lights fade to black.*)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: Schoolroom. Mary, Gertrude, and Nancy are seated at desks or a table. Lavinia and Jessie are seated in the front row and Ermengarde and Lottie are seated in the back. Ermengarde's head is down. There is a desk near the back.)

MARY: Have you seen the new girl's room? Her bed is draped in silk and she has her own sitting room!

NANCY: I know, Mary. And she has her own maid. She's even French! Can you imagine?

GERTRUDE: I heard she's really smart, too.

MARY: What does it matter if she's smart, Gertrude? Have you seen her clothes?

LAVINIA: I saw her maid unpacking her clothes when she arrived. Her suitcases were filled with petticoats that have lace frills on them...frills and frills!

JESSIE: My petticoats don't have frills on them.

LAVINIA: Miss Minchin said to Miss Amelia that the new girl's clothes were so grand they're ridiculous for a child to own.

NANCY: I wouldn't think they were ridiculous if they were my clothes.

LAVINIA: All you care about is clothes, Nancy. My mama says that children should be dressed simply. I'll just bet the new girl has on one of those petticoats now.

JESSIE: And silk stockings, too!

GERTURDE: And what little feet she has! I've never seen such little feet.

LAVINIA: It is just the way her slippers are made. My mama says that even big feet can be made to look small if you have a clever shoemaker.

LOTTIE: I think she's very pretty.

LAVINIA: Oh, hush, Lottie. I don't think she is pretty at all. Her eyes are such an unusual color.

JESSIE: She isn't as pretty as you are, Lavinia, but she does have tremendously long eyelashes and her eyes are so green they make you want to keep looking at them.

LAVINIA: (*Annoyed.*) Well, Jessie, perhaps you would like to have Sara as your best friend instead of me.

JESSIE: Oh, no, Lavinia! That isn't what I meant at all. You'll always be my best friend.

LAVINIA: And don't you forget it.

(*Miss Minchin enters and Sara follows.*)

MINCHIN: Quiet down, everyone! We have a new student joining us today.

LAVINIA: (*Sarcastically, under her breath.*) How lucky for us.

(*Miss Minchin turns to Lavinia.*)

MINCHIN: (*Sharply.*) What was that, Lavinia?

LAVINIA: Nothing, Miss Minchin.

MINCHIN: Perhaps you were extending a courtesy to our new student by offering your desk to her?

LAVINIA: But, Miss Minchin, I always sit at this desk. You said it's because I'm your prized pupil.

MINCHIN: Well, things change, Lavinia. Young ladies, I wish to introduce you to a new pupil. Her name is Sara Crewe, and I expect you to be nice to her. She has come to us from India.

LOTTIE: Oh, India! How romantic and exciting!

SARA: India is a romantic place with exotic foods and clothes. I loved living there, and I miss it terribly.

LAVINIA: Why don't you just go back there then?

MINCHIN: I've had enough of your tongue today, Lavinia. Move to the empty desk at the back of the room.

LAVINIA: But, Miss Minchin—

MINCHIN: Now, Lavinia!

LAVINIA: Yes, Miss Minchin...

MINCHIN: (*To class.*) All right, I think we've had enough distraction for one day. As soon as lessons are over, you can all make Miss Crewe's acquaintance. Now, Sara, as your papa has engaged a French maid for you, I must conclude that he wishes you to receive a special study of the French language.

SARA: I think he engaged her because he...he thought I would like her, Miss Minchin.

MINCHIN: I am afraid that you have been a very spoiled little girl and always imagine that things are done because you like them. My impression is that your papa wanted you to learn French.

LAVINIA: (*To Ermengarde.*) She's not so high and mighty now, is she?

ERMENGARDE: I think she's wonderful.

LAVINIA: Shut up, Ermengarde. No one wants to hear what you have to say.

ERMENGARDE: (*Head down, starts chewing hair ribbon.*) Sorry.

SARA: (*To Minchin.*) I have never really studied French, but...but...

MINCHIN: That is enough. If you have not learned, you must begin at once. The French teacher, Monsieur Dufarge, will be here in a few minutes. Take this book and look at it until he arrives.

(*Minchin hands Sara a book. Sara takes it and sits.*)

GERTRUDE: (*To Sara.*) You'll like Monsieur Dufarge. He's very nice.

SARA: Thank you. I'm sure I will. (*Frowning, looks at book.*)

MINCHIN: You look rather cross, Sara. I am sorry you do not like the idea of learning French.

SARA: I am very fond of it, but—

MINCHIN: You must not say "but" when you are told to do things. Look at your book again.

SARA: Yes, Miss Minchin. (*Aside.*) When Monsieur Dufarge comes, I will make him understand.

(*Monsieur Dufarge enters, carrying a book.*)

MINCHIN: Monsieur Dufarge, what timing. I was just telling our new pupil, Sara, about our French lessons.

DUFARGE: And what finely taught lessons they are, if I do say so myself.

MINCHIN: Her papa, Captain Crewe, is very anxious that she should begin the language, but I am afraid she has a childish dislike of it. She does not seem to wish to learn.

DUFARGE: I am sorry to hear that, Mademoiselle Sara. Perhaps when we begin to study together, I might be able to show you what a charming language it is.

SARA: *S'il vous plaît, Monsieur Dufarge. Je parle français très bien.* [*Translation: "Please, Monsieur Dufarge. I speak French very well."*]

DUFARGE: Ah, Madam Minchin, there is not much I can teach her. She has not learned French. She practically is French. Her accent is exquisite.

MINCHIN: (*To Sara, mortified.*) You ought to have told me.

SARA: I...I tried.

NANCY: (*To Mary.*) Miss Minchin isn't going to like that.

MARY: Miss Minchin doesn't like anything.

(*All Girls giggle except Lavinia.*)

MINCHIN: (*Raps desk with ruler, yells.*) Silence, young ladies! Silence at once!

LAVINIA: I didn't think it was funny, Miss Minchin. I thought it quite rude of Sara not to have spoken up.

MINCHIN: Thank you, Lavinia, but if I wanted your opinion on the matter, I would have asked for it.

LAVINIA: Yes, Miss Minchin.

MINCHIN: Apparently, we don't need your services today, Monsieur Dufarge.

DUFARGE: As you wish. *(To Sara.)* I should be happy to converse with you in French any time you wish.

SARA: Thank you, Monsieur Dufarge.

(Dufarge bows and exits.)

MINCHIN: *(To Ermengarde, sternly.)* Miss St. John!

ERMENGARDE: Yes, Miss Minchin?

MINCHIN: What do you mean by such conduct? Remove your elbows from the desk at once! Take your ribbon out of your mouth! Sit up at once!

(Ermengarde sits up.)

ERMENGARDE: Yes, Miss Minchin.

LAVINIA: *(To Jessie.)* Ermengarde is such a ghastly child. It's no wonder no one likes her.

JESSIE: *(Chuckles uncomfortably.)* You said it, Lavinia. She's so peculiar.

SARA: It's not nice to laugh at others, you know.

LAVINIA: *(Sarcastically.)* Oh, really, Princess Sara? Is that your *royal* opinion?

MINCHIN: Lavinia, I do not wish to hear you talking out of turn. Now, everyone, please pair up and go over your French texts. Monsieur Dufarge will be back tomorrow for his regularly scheduled French lesson, and I expect all of you will be ready to conjugate some verbs.

(Lavinia pairs up with Jessie. Gertrude pairs up with Nancy. Mary pairs up with Lottie.)

SARA: Who should I pair up with, Miss Minchin?

MINCHIN: Go sit with Ermengarde. She is absolutely terrible at her French lessons. You can help her.

(Sara crosses to Ermengarde and sits.)

SARA: Your name is so pretty, Ermengarde. I've never heard anything like it. It sounds like something out of a storybook.

ERMENGARDE: Do you like it? I...I like yours.

SARA: So, should we take a look at these French lessons?

ERMENGARDE: You speak it so well already.

SARA: I can speak it because I have heard it all my life. You could speak it too, if you always heard it.

ERMENGARDE: Oh, no, I couldn't. I'm too stupid to speak French. My father is simply disgraced by me. He is so clever. He speaks eight languages and has thousands of books that he has read and knows by heart. He is always sending me books in the hopes that one day I will be smart like him.

SARA: I'm sure you are more clever than you think.

ERMENGARDE: Everyone is talking about how clever you are and how grand your room is. Is it true that you have a playroom all to yourself?

SARA: Would you like to come see my room sometime? You could meet Emily.

ERMENGARDE: I would love to, but who is Emily?

SARA: She is my doll and special friend. I believe that dolls can do things that we don't know about.

ERMENGARDE: Like what?

SARA: Perhaps Emily can walk and talk but only when I am out of the room. I believe that is her secret.

ERMENGARDE: Do you mean to tell me that your doll can walk?

SARA: Yes. At least I pretend she can. I love to pretend things and make up stories.

ERMENGARDE: You make up stories?! You know how to do that?

SARA: Why, anyone can make up things. Have you never tried?

ERMENGARDE: I don't think I could.

SARA: Well, I'll make up enough stories for the both of us.

(Ermengarde suddenly clasps Sara's hands.)

ERMENGARDE: Lavinia and Jessie are best friends. I'm the stupidest girl in school and have no friends at all. I know that you're the cleverest girl in school, but do you think we could be best friends?

SARA: I would love to be your friend. I think there is nothing better in the world than knowing you are liked. Besides...I can help you with your French lessons.

MINCHIN: *(Rapping her desk with her ruler, yells.)*
Ermengarde, stop being such a nuisance to Sara and start working on your French lessons!

ERMENGARDE: Yes, Miss Minchin.

LAVINIA: Yeah, Ermengarde, you wouldn't want to be a nuisance to the royal princess, herself.

JESSIE: That's telling her, Lavinia.

SARA: Don't worry, Ermengarde. We're going to be the best friends this school has ever known.

(Sara and Ermengarde smile as lights fade to black.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: Schoolroom. Desks are moved aside and it is recess. Mary and Gertrude are sitting on the floor playing a game. Nancy is jumping rope.)

MARY: So what do you think of the new girl, Gertrude?

GERTRUDE: Oh, you mean Sara? She's very smart and kind, but a bit odd.

NANCY: She must be. She's friends with Ermengarde. Nobody likes Ermengarde.

(Sara and Ermengarde enter. Sara is carrying her doll.)

SARA: (To Ermengarde.) Miss Minchin is constantly praising every little thing I do. I am growing quite tired of it.

ERMENGARDE: You deserve every bit of praise. You are the kindest, most wonderful girl I know.

SARA: Thank you, Ermengarde. I do realize how lucky I am to be smart and have everything a girl could ask for. You see, it is my opinion that things happen to people by accident.

ERMENGARDE: What kind of things?

SARA: A lot of nice accidents have happened to me. It just happened that I was born with a father who was beautiful and nice and clever and could give me everything I liked. It just happened that I always liked lessons when I learned them.

ERMENGARDE: I wish those accidents had happened to me. I hate lessons, and my father isn't beautiful or nice...though he is quite clever. He tells me how clever he is every time I see him. Or, perhaps, I am just bad-tempered like Miss Minchin says I am.

SARA: You do not have a bad temper at all. Perhaps I do not have a good temper, but if a girl has everything she wants

and everyone is kind to her, how could she help but be good-tempered?

ERMENGARDE: I think you would be good-tempered no matter what.

SARA: I don't know if I'll ever find out whether I'm a nice girl or a horrid one. Perhaps I'm a hideous girl and no one will ever know because I've never had any challenges in life to overcome.

ERMENGARDE: Lavinia has no challenges, and she is horrid enough.

SARA: Well, perhaps that is because Lavinia is growing. I just heard Miss Amelia say that Lavinia was growing so fast that she believed it was affecting her health and temper.

(Sara and Ermengarde cross to Mary and Gertrude, sit, and play with Emily. Lavinia and Jessie enter.)

LAVINIA: *(To Jesse.)* You know, before Sara Crewe came to this school, I was the undisputed leader here. I have always been the prettiest and best dressed...that is, of course, until little miss fur coats and silk stockings showed up. Now Sara always gets to lead the processions when we go out.

JESSIE: There's one thing about Sara that is quite surprising. For all of her fancy clothes and nice things, she never acts arrogant. I'm pretty sure I would be quite conceited if I had her clothes and if people made such a fuss over me, as Miss Minchin does with her. It's disgusting, really, the way Miss Minchin shows her off when our parents come.

LAVINIA: *(Mimicking Miss Minchin.)* "Dear Sara must come into the drawing room and talk to Mrs. Musgrave about India."

JESSIE: *(Mimicking.)* "Dear Sara must speak French to Lady Pitkin. Her accent is so perfect."

LAVINIA: There's nothing particularly clever in her knowing French. She says herself she didn't learn it at all. She just picked it up because she heard her papa speak it. And as for

her papa, there's nothing particularly grand about being an officer.

JESSIE: Well, he's killed tigers. He killed the one that Sara uses as a rug in her room. That's why she likes it so much. She lies on it and strokes its head and talks to it as if it were a cat.

LAVINIA: She's always doing something silly. My mama says that pretending things is silly. She says she will grow up eccentric.

(Lottie rushes in and throws herself on the floor. Amelia and Miss Minchin rush in after her.)

LOTTIE: *(Pounds her fists and kicks her legs.)* Oh! Oh! Oh! I haven't got any mama!

(Amelia kneels down by Lottie.)

AMELIA: *(Shouts.)* Oh, Lottie! Do stop, darling! Don't cry. Please don't.

LOTTIE: Oh! Oh! Oh! Haven't...got...any...ma-ma!

MINCHIN: She ought to be whipped! *(To Lottie.)* In fact, you shall be whipped, you naughty child!

LOTTIE: *(Wails and kicks louder.)* Ohhhhh!

AMELIA: Lottie, please stop!

MINCHIN: I've had enough of this!

(Furious, Miss Minchin exits.)

AMELIA: *(To Lottie, kindly.)* I know you haven't any mama, poor — *(Changes tone.)* If you don't stop, Lottie, I will shake you! *(Changes tone.)* Poor, little angel. There, there. *(Changes tone.)* You wicked, bad, detestable, child! I will smack you! I will!

(Sara approaches Amelia.)

SARA: Might I give it a try, Miss Amelia? I might be able to make her be quiet.

AMELIA: If you can, it would be a miracle, but you are clever in everything you do. I daresay, if anyone can quiet her, you can.

SARA: Thank you, Miss Amelia.

(Amelia backs away.)

AMELIA: Oh, Sara! We've never had such a dreadful child before. I don't believe we can keep her here.

LOTTIE: I...haven't...any...ma-ma-ma!

(Sara kneels down by Lottie.)

SARA: *(Matter-of-factly.)* Neither have I.

(Lottie suddenly stops her tantrum and looks up.)

LOTTIE: Where is she?

SARA: She went to heaven. I am sure she comes out sometimes to see me, though I don't see her. So does yours. Perhaps they can both see us now. Perhaps they are both in this room.

(Lottie sits upright quickly and looks around.)

LOTTIE: Is she? *(Realizes.)* She wouldn't want me to throw temper tantrums.

SARA: Our mamas are in a special place filled with fields of flowers and soft winds. And they can float wherever they wish to go and send beautiful messages to us.

LOTTIE: I want to go there. I haven't any mama in this school.

SARA: Then I will be like a mama to you. And Emily will be your sister.

LOTTIE: Will she?

SARA: Oh, yes. (*Indicating doll.*) Would you like to hold your little sister while I tell you a story?

LOTTIE: Oh, yes, please!

(*Lottie hugs Emily. Miss Minchin enters, slapping a ruler in her hand.*)

MINCHIN: Is Lottie ready for her punishment?

AMELIA: It's the most wonderful thing! Sara's calmed her down. There's no need to punish her after all!

MINCHIN: I don't know...perhaps a few whacks will teach Lottie a thing or two about throwing tantrums.

AMELIA: (*Guiding Miss Minchin toward exit.*) Maybe next time, Maria. For now, let's leave the girls to their playtime.

MINCHIN: All right, but if anyone gets out of line, I will be back.

(*Miss Minchin exits with Amelia.*)

SARA: (*To Girls.*) I am about to tell Lottie a story if anyone would like to join us.

(*Mary sits by Sara.*)

MARY: I love stories!

NANCY: Me, too! Especially ones about princesses and fairies.

GERTRUDE: What is the story about, Sara?

SARA: This one is about mermaids and princesses...just for you, Nancy!

NANCY: Oh, goody!

(*All Girls, except Lavinia and Jessie, cross to Sara.*)

LAVINIA: I have no interest in hearing such childish stories.

JESSIE: Neither do I.

LAVINIA: Come along, Jessie. You and I have better things to do than fawn all over Princess Sara like the rest of her little ladies in-waiting.

(Trying not to listen to Sara's story, Lavinia stands off to one side with Jessie.)

LOTTIE: Come on, Sara! Tell the story!

(As Sara begins the story, Becky enters, carrying a broom. Her face and clothes are dirty and worn. She looks at Sara as she sweeps.)

SARA: *(To Girls.)* One bright, sunny day, a beautiful princess went for a stroll along the seaside. The water was cool and clear, and when she looked into its depths, she saw mermaids swimming about.

MARY: Mermaids! I love mermaids!

(Becky sweeps slowly as she listens to the story. Sara notices this and speaks louder. Lavinia watches Becky.)

SARA: *(To Girls.)* The mermaids swam in the green water and dragged a fishing net woven of deep-sea pearls.

GERTRUDE: Were they just like the pearls in your beautiful necklace, Sara?

SARA: Oh, they were much more beautiful than the ones in my necklace, Gertrude.

ERMENGARDE: I don't believe that, Sara. Your pearl necklace is beautiful.

SARA: Well, my papa gave it to me, so I suppose it ought to be.

LOTTIE: Keep telling the story!

SARA: All right, Lottie. The princess sat on a large white rock and watched the mermaids. Suddenly, she saw a prince mer-man, whom she fell in love with instantly.

NANCY: It's a love story! I so enjoy love stories!

(Miss Minchin enters, clanging a dinner bell.)

MINCHIN: Come along, ladies. It's time for supper.

MARY: But Sara was just telling us a story, Miss Minchin.

GERTRUDE: *(To Minchin.)* She was just getting to the good part.

MINCHIN: Enough of this foolishness! I said, it's time for supper now!

GIRLS: Yes, Miss Minchin.

(Miss Minchin exits. Girls start to exit. Lottie drops Emily. Lavinia walks next to Sara. Lottie hangs back.)

LAVINIA: *(To Sara, indicating Becky.)* You know, that scullery maid over there was listening to your story.

SARA: I knew she was listening, and why shouldn't she?

LAVINIA: I don't know if your mama would like you to tell stories to servant girls, but I know my mama wouldn't like me to do it.

SARA: I don't believe my mama would mind in the least. She knows that stories belong to everybody.

LAVINIA: I thought that your mama was dead. How could she know anything?

LOTTIE: Sara's mother knows everything. She lives with my mama in a place full of flowers and wind.

LAVINIA: *(To Sara.)* You wicked thing! You're making up fairy tales about heaven and telling them to this little girl.

SARA: How would you know that they are fairy tales? I'll tell you one thing...you will never find out if my stories are true or not if you are not kinder to others! *(Turns to Lottie and takes her by the hand.)* Come along, Lottie.

(Sara and Lottie exit. Lavinia exits in a huff. Becky continues to sweep slowly. After a moment, Becky sleepily rubs her eyes. She

puts aside her broom and looks to make sure no one sees her. She lays down, curls into a ball, and falls asleep. After a moment, Sara enters, looking for her doll.)

SARA: *(Surprised to see Becky sleeping)* Oh! That poor thing!
(Approaches Becky, starts to wake her, but stops.) I wish she'd wake up herself. I don't want to have to wake her, but Miss Minchin would be cross if she found out. I'll just wait a few minutes.

(Sara sits on nearby chair. After a moment, Becky wakes up, looks around, and sees Sara. Upset, Becky suddenly stands.)

BECKY: Oh, miss! I beg yer pardon! Oh, I do! I do!

SARA: Don't be frightened. I promise you, it's quite all right. You looked so tired.

BECKY: I didn't mean ter do it, miss. I was so tired an' I jus rested me head fer a minute.

SARA: You were tired. You couldn't help it. I doubt you are really even awake yet.

BECKY: *(Surprised.)* Ain't...ain't yer angry, miss? Ain't yer goin' ta tell the missus?

SARA: No, of course I'm not!

BECKY: Oh, tank ya, miss! Tank ya!

SARA: Why, we are just the same, you and I. I am just a young girl like you. It was just an accident that I am not you, and you are not me.

BECKY: *(Fearful.)* An accident, ya say? I promise I didn't cause no accident!

SARA: I know you didn't. I only meant that if we had been born to different parents, you and I might be standing in each other's shoes right now.

BECKY: *(Looking at Sara's shoes.)* I sure do like yer shoes.

SARA: *(Laughs.)* Are you hungry?

BECKY: Oh, miss, I sure am. I'm always a bit hungry.

SARA: Come to my room after you're done with your chores. I have some cake in my cupboards that I'd love to give you.

BECKY: Miss, you're mighty kind. Cake would sure fill my achin' belly.

SARA: Then be sure to come up and see me this evening.

BECKY: Ya know, Miss, once I done saw a princess. I was standin' in the street and a crowd o' people were goin' into the opery hall. Someone said, "That's the princess." When I looks, I tink that you look just like that princess I done saw that day.

SARA: I've often thought that I would like to be a princess. I wonder what it feels like to be one. (*Lost in thought for a moment.*) I believe I will begin pretending I'm one. (*Thinks it over and looks at Becky.*) Becky, were you listening to the story I was telling earlier?

BECKY: Yes, miss. I know I hadn't oughta, but it was so beautiful. I couldn't help it.

SARA: I should like to tell you the rest of it, but I know you haven't the time to hear it now. Each day when you are done with your chores, come to my room. I will tell you a little bit at a time until it's finished. And after that, I'll tell you more stories, for stories are meant to be shared.

BECKY: Oh, tank ya, miss! If I have yer stories to look forward to, I won't mind how hard my work is or how empty my belly is.

SARA: You'd better get going now. Miss Minchin will be wondering where I am and come looking for me. I don't want her to find you here. But don't forget to come to my room later. I have a story to tell and a big slice of cake with your name on it.

(Becky grabs the broom and starts to exit.)

BECKY: Tank ya, miss.

SARA: Please call me Sara.

BECKY: How about Princess Sara, 'cause ya sure are a princess to me. *(Exits.)*

SARA: *(Thinking it over.)* Princess Sara. *(Pause. Smiles.)* I think I like the sound of that.

(Sara picks up her doll and exits as the lights fade to black.)

Scene 4

(AT RISE: *The schoolroom is decorated for Sara's birthday party. There is a large table draped with a tablecloth and piled with presents* CS. *Miss Minchin enters. Amelia, Becky, and Emma enter behind her. Becky and Emma are carrying presents.*)

MINCHIN: We only have a few minutes before all of the girls arrive for Sara's birthday party. Amelia, are the refreshments ready?

AMELIA: Yes, Maria. The cook has baked a beautiful cake, and the punch and snacks are all set up in your office. The girls can enjoy their refreshments there after the presents are opened.

MINCHIN: Good. I'm glad to see you can do something right.

AMELIA: Oh, thank you, Maria.

MINCHIN: Emma, Becky, have you cleaned this room thoroughly?

EMMA: Yes, ma'am. I mopped and swept it all by myself.

MINCHIN: Then what did you do, Becky?

BECKY: I washed the windows and folded the napkins.

MINCHIN: Is that all? You know, Becky, if you don't start working harder around here, you may find yourself out on the streets.

BECKY: Yes, ma'am.

MINCHIN: Emma, please put that gift on the table with the others.

EMMA: Yes, ma'am. (*Places gift on table.*)

MINCHIN: Becky, hold yours for now. It is a very special gift and should be kept apart from the others.

AMELIA: I do believe it is time for the girls to come in.

MINCHIN: I suppose it is. Go and summon the girls. (*Amelia exits.*) Sara—and more importantly, her father—had better appreciate this party. It has cost me quite a bit of my own

money, though Captain Crewe can expect a large bill with this month's tuition. The gift alone cost a fortune.

EMMA: I'm sure all the girls will enjoy the party, ma'am.

This room sure is pretty.

MINCHIN: Did I ask for your opinion?

EMMA: No.

MINCHIN: That's what I thought. A word to the wise...someone in my elevated social standing is not the least bit interested in what a scullery maid has to say. Do I make myself clear?

EMMA: Yes, ma'am.

MINCHIN: Good, now head back to the kitchen and let the cook know that the party is about to begin. *(Emma exits.)*

Let that be a lesson to you as well, Becky. Your opinions are only valuable to others if you are above a certain social tier. I'm afraid you shall never know what social acceptance feels like.

BECKY: Yes, ma'am.

(Amelia enters, holding Sara's hand. All Girls follow, giggling and murmuring with anticipation.)

MINCHIN: Silence, young ladies! *(Girls immediately quiet down. Becky is squirming a bit with excitement and waving a little at Sara.)* Becky!

BECKY: Yes, ma'am?

MINCHIN: It is not your place to look at the young ladies. You have forgotten your station in life. Please put the box down and leave immediately.

BECKY: Yes, ma'am. *(Puts the box on the gift table and backs away toward exit.)*

SARA: If you please, Miss Minchin, may Becky stay?

MINCHIN: *(Shocked.)* You wish for Becky to stay? My dear Sara, are you certain?

SARA: She should stay because she might like to see the presents. She is a girl, just like the rest of us.

MINCHIN: My dear Sara, Becky is the scullery maid. Scullery maids...er...are not young girls.

SARA: But Becky is and I know she would enjoy herself. Please let her stay...because it is my birthday.

MINCHIN: As you ask it as a birthday favor, she may stay.

BECKY: *(To Sara.)* Oh, I'm so grateful, miss. I did want to see the gifts, miss, that I did! Thank ya, miss. *(To Miss Minchin.)* And thank ya, ma'am, for lettin' me take the liberty.

MINCHIN: *(Points to far corner.)* Go and stand over there. I don't want you too near the young ladies. *(Becky stands in the corner.)* Now, young ladies, I have a few words to say to you.

MARY: *(To Nancy and Gertrude, stage whisper.)* She's going to make a speech.

NANCY: *(Stage whisper.)* I wish it were over.

GERTRUDE: *(Stage whisper.)* I bet it's going to go on forever.

MINCHIN: *(To Girls.)* You are aware that dear Sara is [12 years old] today. *[Or insert another age.]*

LAVINIA: *(Under her breath, snidely.)* Dear Sara!

MINCHIN: *(To Girls.)* Several of you here are also [12 years old], but Sara's birthdays are rather different from other young girls' birthdays. When she is older, she will be heiress to a large fortune. It will be her duty to spend in an honorable manner.

JESSIE: *(To other Girls, stage whisper.)* Here we go again about the diamond mines.

MINCHIN: *(To Girls.)* When her dear papa, Captain Crewe, brought her from India and left her in my care, he said to me, "I am afraid she will be very rich, Miss Minchin." I assured him that her education at the Select Seminary for Young Ladies would be a compliment to such a fortune, and I am pleased to say that Sara has risen to become the most accomplished student at this school. Her manners, for which you call her "Princess Sara," are perfect.

LAVINIA: *(Scoffs. To Girls, stage whisper.)* She actually thinks that is why we are calling her "Princess Sara"!

MINCHIN: *(To Girls.)* Sara has shown you kindness by giving this party. I hope you all appreciate her generosity. I now wish you to express your appreciation by saying aloud together, "Thank you, Sara."

LAVINIA: *(Rolls her eyes, stage whisper.)* Oh, Sara's going to love this.

SARA: *(Embarrassed.)* Please, Miss Minchin, they don't have to.

MINCHIN: Nonsense. *(To Girls.)* All together now.

(Other Girls say "Thank you, Sara," but Lavinia and Jessie say it sarcastically. Sara is embarrassed.)

SARA: *(To other Girls.)* Thank you for coming to my party.

MINCHIN: Very good, Sara. That is how a real princess behaves when her citizens applaud her.

LAVINIA: *(Stage whisper, but Miss Minchin overhears.)* That's just great. Miss Minchin is going to make her feel even more like a princess.

MINCHIN: Lavinia, if you are jealous of your fellow pupil, I expect that you will express your feelings in a more ladylike manner. *(To Girls.)* Now, I will leave you all to enjoy the party.

(Miss Minchin and Amelia exit.)

LAVINIA: *(To Jessie.)* I am not jealous. Who could be jealous of Sara? She's not even pretty.

JESSIE: *(Smiling a little.)* I believe you, Lavinia.

LOTTIE: *(Excited.)* Open your presents now, Sara!

(Sara picks up a box and shakes it.)

SARA: I know that these are books. *(Puts box down.)*

ERMENGARDE: Did your papa send you books for your birthday? He's as bad as mine! Don't open them, Sara.

SARA: I like them, but I simply can't wait to open this one.

(Sara picks up the present Becky held and opens it. It is a large doll.)

LAVINIA: *(To other Girls.)* Another doll?! How many does she need?

JESSIE: I know we're getting to be a little too old for dolls, but that one is beautiful.

MARY: She is almost as big as Lottie!

LOTTIE: No, she's not! I'm very big.

NANCY: Look at her beautiful clothes!

GERTRUDE: She has real hair and everything, and her eyes open and close.

SARA: I told my father that this is the last doll I am ever going to get. She is beautiful, isn't she? What if she could understand human talk? Do you think she'd be proud to be admired?

LAVINIA: You are always pretending such odd things. I find it all simply boring.

SARA: I know I pretend a lot, but I like to. If you pretend hard enough, it seems almost real.

LAVINIA: It's very easy to pretend if you already have everything you could want. Do you think you could pretend so much if you were a beggar and lived on the streets?

SARA: I believe I could. If I was a beggar, I would have to pretend all the time just to stay happy, but I think it wouldn't be easy.

LAVINIA: Well, I prefer to think of things that actually exist, unlike your father's diamond mines.

SARA: My father's diamond mines are real.

LAVINIA: Oh, really? Have you seen them with your own eyes?

SARA: No, but have you seen the pyramids in Egypt with your own eyes?

LAVINIA: No.

SARA: Then does that mean they don't exist?

LAVINIA: No, of course not.

SARA: Then I don't have to see the diamond mines to know they're real. I just have to trust my papa.

LAVINIA: Fine. Believe whatever you want. We'll see what's really true. Come on, Jessie. I've had enough of this party. It's too babyish for me anyway.

(Lavinia and Jessie cross to the opposite side of the room. Other Girls continue to look at gifts.)

JESSIE: I wanted to look at that doll a little longer.

LAVINIA: I still don't believe her father owns a diamond mine. My mama has a diamond ring that cost 40 pounds, and it's not a big one, either. If there were mines full of diamonds, people would be so rich it would be ridiculous.

JESSIE: *(Giggles.)* Perhaps Sara will be so rich she will be ridiculous.

LAVINIA: She's ridiculous without being rich.

JESSIE: I believe you hate her.

LAVINIA: No, I don't! But I don't believe in mines full of diamonds.

JESSIE: Do you want to know what Gertrude told me?

(Lavinia pretends not to care. Pause.)

LAVINIA: Oh, spit it out!

JESSIE: One of Sara's favorite things is to pretend that she actually is a princess. She pretends it all the time...even in school. She wants Ermengarde to be one, too, but Ermengarde thinks she is too ugly to be a princess.

LAVINIA: She is too ugly. But then again, so is Sara.

JESSIE: Sara says it has nothing to do with what you look like or what you have. It only has to do with what you think and what good you do for others.

LAVINIA: She'd think she was a princess if she were a beggar. I'll call her, "Your Royal Highness."

(Lottie starts dancing around room.)

JESSIE: What is Lottie doing?

LAVINIA: She is such a horrid child. If Sara is so fond of her, she should keep a better eye on her.

(Lottie nearly bumps into Lavinia. Lavinia pushes Lottie down. Lottie starts to throw a tantrum.)

LOTTIE: Owwww! She pushed me!

LAVINIA: Stop this minute, you crybaby! Stop this minute!

LOTTIE: I'm not a crybaby, I'm not! *(Wails.)* Sara! Sa-ra!

JESSIE: *(To Lavinia.)* If she doesn't stop, Miss Minchin will hear her. *(Bends down.)* Lottie, darling, I'll give you a penny.

LOTTIE: I don't want your penny!

(Sara puts her doll on a chair and quickly crosses to Lottie.)

SARA: Now, Lottie, everything's okay.

LOTTIE: *(Points to Lavinia.)* She pushed me and called me a crybaby.

SARA: If you keep crying, you will be one.

LOTTIE: I haven't any mama. I haven't...a bit...of mama!

SARA: Lottie, we've talked about this. You have me, remember?

LOTTIE: Yes. Will you tell me a story?

SARA: Yes, let's go sit over there.

LOTTIE: Will you tell me about the diamond mines?

LAVINIA: The diamond mines? *(To Lottie, angrily.)* You nasty, little, spoiled thing. I should like to slap you!

(Sara stands and approaches Lavinia.)

SARA: I should like to slap you, but I won't! We don't live in the gutter. We both know better.

LAVINIA: (*Scoffs.*) Ah, yes, Your Royal Highness. We are princesses, I believe. At least *one* of us is. This school ought to be in high demand now that Miss Minchin has a princess for a pupil.

SARA: It's true. I do pretend I am a princess. I pretend I am a princess, so I can try and act like one.

LAVINIA: (*Sarcastic.*) Dear me! I hope when you ascend to the throne, you won't forget us little people.

SARA: (*Smiles.*) I won't.

LAVINIA: Well, I guess that's all that needs to be said. Come on, Jessie. We're leaving.

JESSIE: But the party's not over yet.

LAVINIA: (*Yells.*) Now!

JESSIE: (*Disappointed.*) All right, Lavinia.

(Jessie and Lavinia exit. Amelia enters.)

AMELIA: Sara, your papa's lawyer, Mr. Barrow, has arrived and wishes to speak to Miss Minchin. She must talk to him alone and the refreshments are laid out in her office. Gather your friends, and we'll go there now so Miss Minchin can speak to Mr. Barrow here in the schoolroom.

MARY: Yeah, refreshments!

GERTRUDE: (*To Amelia.*) Will there be a cake?

NANCY: (*To Amelia.*) And punch?

AMELIA: Yes. There are many wonderful things to eat. Come along now.

(Amelia and Girls exit, except for Becky, who looks at the presents. Becky hears Miss Minchin approaching and hides under the table. Unseen by Miss Minchin, Becky pokes her head out from under the tablecloth so that the audience can see her. Miss Minchin and Mr. Barrow enter.)

MINCHIN: Please be seated, Mr. Barrow.

(Barrow takes the seat that the new doll was placed on. He picks up the doll and looks at it.)

BARROW: This doll cost a hundred pounds. That young man spent money lavishly enough.

MINCHIN: I beg your pardon, Mr. Barrow. I do not understand.

BARROW: Such birthday presents for a 12-year-old child! It's mad extravagance!

MINCHIN: Captain Crewe is a man of fortunes. The diamond mines alone –

BARROW: Diamond mines! There are none. Never were!

MINCHIN: *(Shocked.)* What! What do you mean?!

BARROW: What I mean is...it would have been better if there never had been any. Diamond mines spell ruin more often than they spell wealth. When a man goes into business with a friend, he had better steer clear of the friend's diamond mines. The late Captain Crewe –

MINCHIN: The *late* Captain Crewe! Please don't say you've come to tell me that Captain Crewe is –

BARROW: Dead. He died of jungle fever compounded by the business troubles he was having with the diamond mines. There's no way around it. Captain Crewe is dead.

MINCHIN: *(Alarmed.)* What were his business troubles?

BARROW: The diamond mines left him in ruin.

MINCHIN: Ruin!

BARROW: He lost every penny. He put all his money into the mines with his friend. Then the dear friend ran away. The shock, combined with the jungle fever, was too much for him. He died without a penny to his name.

MINCHIN: Do you mean to tell me that he left nothing? That Sara will have no fortune? That the child is a beggar? That she is left on my hands as a little pauper instead of an heiress?

(Mr. Barrow stands.)

BARROW: She is certainly left a beggar, and she is certainly left on your hands, ma'am, as she hasn't a relation in the world that we know of.

(Miss Minchin rushes to Mr. Barrow. He holds up his hands.)

MINCHIN: This is monstrous! She's in my sitting room at this moment, dressed in silk and wearing lace petticoats, enjoying a party given at my expense.

BARROW: It's certainly at your expense, ma'am. I've never seen a cleaner sweep of a man's fortune. He died without even paying our last bill, and it was a big one.

MINCHIN: But what am I to do? I refuse to be made responsible for her!

BARROW: I have nothing to do with that, ma'am. Barrow and Skipworth, Esquire are not responsible. I'm sorry to be the bearer of such bad news, but I really must be on my way.

(Mr. Barrow starts to exit. Miss Minchin rushes after him.)

MINCHIN: If you think you can just dump her on me, you are greatly mistaken. I have been robbed and cheated. I will turn her out into the street.

BARROW: I wouldn't do that, madam. It wouldn't look well for this establishment. It would be better to keep her and get some work out of her for the time being. She's a clever child. Now, good day.

(Mr. Barrow exits. Miss Minchin paces. Pause.)

MINCHIN: *(Calls.)* Amelia!

(Amelia enters.)

AMELIA: Yes, Maria? What is the matter, Sister?

MINCHIN: Bring Sara and the girls here immediately. And see if Sara has a black dress in her wardrobe.

AMELIA: A black dress? Why a black one?

MINCHIN: She has dresses in every color. Does she have a black one?

AMELIA: Yes, but she has outgrown it. It is too small.

MINCHIN: It will have to do.

AMELIA: Oh, Maria, what has happened?

MINCHIN: Captain Crewe is dead. He died without a penny.

That spoiled, pampered, fanciful child is left a pauper on my hands. I have spent hundreds of pounds on nonsense for her, and I shall never see a penny of it. Put a stop to this ridiculous party of hers. Now go get the girls.

AMELIA: Do I have to?

MINCHIN: This moment! Don't sit there staring like a goose.

Go! (*Amelia exits. Miss Minchin paces. To herself.*) Princess Sara, indeed! That child has been pampered as if she were a queen! (*Becky lets out a small cry. Miss Minchin hears this and lifts the tablecloth. To Becky, shouts.*) How dare you! Come out immediately!

(*Becky stands, shaking with fear.*)

BECKY: If you please, ma'am. I know I hadn't oughta, but I was lookin' at the doll and got scared when ya came in, so I just hid under this here table.

MINCHIN: And I suppose you have been listening this whole time?

BECKY: No, ma'am. I wasn't listenin, but I couldn't help but hear. Oh, poor Sara!

MINCHIN: (*Enraged.*) Poor Sara?! Poor me! Leave this room immediately!

BECKY: I will, ma'am. But I was just wonderin' if after I'm done wit me chores for the day, if I can wait on Miss Sara, now that she's poor.

MINCHIN: No, certainly not! She will wait on herself and other people, too. Now leave the room this instant, or I will throw you out on the street!

(Becky exits in a hurry. Amelia enters, followed by Sara and other Girls.)

SARA: You wanted to see me, Miss Minchin?

MINCHIN: *(Coldly.)* Yes. I have some very bad news. Your father is dead.

ERMENGARDE: Oh, Sara!

(Sara stares blankly. Pause.)

SARA: *(To Minchin.)* What do you mean he's dead? How did he die?

MINCHIN: The diamond mines turned out to be nothing more than a hoax concocted by his friend.

LAVINIA: I knew it!

JESSIE: Lavinia, not now!

MINCHIN: *(To Sara.)* The resulting stress, combined with jungle fever, was too much for him and he died.

SARA: I see.

MINCHIN: I hope you do because everything will be very different now. Your father left you penniless. You are a beggar, as it appears you have no relations and no one to take care of you. *(Sara stares blankly. Enraged.)* What are you staring at? Are you so stupid that you cannot understand? I have told you that you are quite alone in the world and have no one to care for you unless I keep you here out of charity.

SARA: I understand.

MINCHIN: *(Indicating new doll.)* That doll is mine, not yours. I paid for it. In fact, everything you own is mine!

SARA: Please take it away from me then. I do not want it.

MINCHIN: Don't put on airs. The time for that sort of thing is past. You are a princess no longer. Your carriage and pony will be sent away, and your maid will be dismissed. You will wear your oldest and plainest clothes. You are like Becky now. You must work for your living.

SARA: Can I please work? If I do, it will be so much better. What can I do?

MINCHIN: You will do anything you are told. If you make yourself useful, I will let you stay here. If you don't please me, you will be sent away. *(Sara stands, thinks, and starts to exit. Shouts.)* Stop! Don't you intend to thank me?

SARA: *(Turns.)* What for?

MINCHIN: For my kindness to you in giving you a home.

(Sara approaches Miss Minchin and stops.)

SARA: You are not kind, and this is not a home. *(Exits.)*

MINCHIN: *(Enraged.)* Why, that ungrateful little wretch! Any more behavior like that and she will find herself out on the streets...or much worse.

LOTTIE: But, Miss Minchin—

MINCHIN: Get out of here! All of you! *(All exit. Rings her hands furiously.)* Sara Crewe will rue the day she enrolled at the Select Seminary for Young Ladies!

[END OF FREEVIEW]