

A LITTLE PRINCESS

A FULL-LENGTH DRAMA

by
Edith Weiss



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MELCHISEDEC: Hello. I'm a rat, in case you hadn't noticed. And, I'll bet you didn't. You thought I was a mouse, didn't you? Cause if you had known I was a rat, some of you people would be all screaming, "Oh, it's a rat!" and you'd run out of here with your petticoats flying. I notice now that no one's wearing petticoats. You're an odd bunch, but I like you. And, I don't scare people on purpose, you know, I just come looking for food. Do you have any food? I do have a family to feed, you know. *(deals with audience response)*. I live here, in the Select Seminary for Young Ladies in London, England. Mostly in the attic, cause it's so cold and dirty up there only the scullery maid goes up there.

MISS MINCHIN: *(from offstage)* I hope you enjoyed your tour, Mr. Barrow.

MELCHISEDEC: Oh, no. It's Miss Minchin and her sister Amelia. They own the place. They're pretty 'orrible. *(hides somewhere on set)*

(Enter MR. BARROW, MISS MINCHIN, AMELIA, and JAMES from US left)

MISS MINCHIN: Rest assured, Mr. Barrow, we are the best boarding school for girls in London. And it will be a great privilege to have charge of such a beautiful and promising child.

AMELIA: Yes, we do feel privileged.

MR. BARROW: Captain Crewe has said that Sara is to have the very best of everything. Anything she wants.

MISS MINCHIN: She will have that and more, Mr. Barrow.

AMELIA: Anything her little heart desires.

MR. BARROW: Her father, Captain Crewe, is already on his way back home, to India. She is his only child, and he is very wealthy. He insists she be treated as well here as she was treated at home.

MISS MINCHIN: This child will be a great treasure to an establishment like mine. We do have the daughters of the best families in all of England.

AMELIA: The very best families. Of all England.

MR. BARROW: Then I'm off, and I leave little Sara to your charge. Send Sara's expenses to me, and I will pay them. Good day.

AMELIA: Good day, Mr. Barrow, it was very nice making your acquaintance.

MISS MINCHIN: Good bye, Mr. Barrow. And rest assured, little Sara is in very capable and loving hands.

JAMES: I'll see you out, sir.

(Exit JAMES and MR. BARROW DS left. JAMES then reenters, goes into kitchen, brings back tray of tea cups and cookies which HE serves.)

MISS MINCHIN: I don't understand the way Captain Crewe has spoiled and pampered that child. Being rich is no excuse for that. James, I wanted the lemon biscuits.

(JAMES exits into kitchen, returns with tray during following, serves them)

AMELIA: He's very rich. Very, very rich.

MISS MINCHIN: Oh, it's a lucky day for our boarding school. Even though his little daughter is an odd duck. Isn't she the oddest child you've ever seen?

(BECKY enters DS right with coal bucket, puts coal in fireplace, then cleans there. SHE is ignored by AMELIA and MINCHIN)

AMELIA: Yes, that Sara is odd. Not at all like an ordinary ten year old. She just has a way of looking at you like she's looking right through you. And she's shy, but not timid. Not at all timid. She's locked herself in her room, and she isn't making the least particle of noise. Not crying, not yelling for her father -

(BECKY sits for a second in the chair by the fireplace, falls asleep.)

MISS MINCHIN: And why would she make the least particle of noise? She has everything. A French maid! Her own carriage and pony! And did you see her wardrobe! Ridiculously extravagant for a child of ten. She is provided for as though she were a little princess!

AMELIA: Probably, Miss Minchin, Captain Crewe is trying to make up for the fact that Sara's mother died, and after all what does a man know about raising a child, especially in a foreign country -

(JAMES notices BECKY sleeping. HE quietly backs US to her, and tries to wake her up without MINCHIN noticing. HE fails)

MISS MINCHIN: *(interrupting)* Oh, it reflects well on us to have such a wealthy pupil. Mark my words, Miss Amelia, we'll get many more. The word will get out, and we shall become the most exclusive boarding school for girls in all of England! James! Where's James?

JAMES: Yes, mum?

MISS MINCHIN: Take the tea things away. And stay put when you're serving us. Remember your place, James.

JAMES: *(gathering tea things then exiting with them)* Yes, mum.

MISS MINCHIN: Anyway, we must be very, very nice to Sara.

AMELIA: Oh, that won't be hard. She's so well mannered and very polite. She really seems like such a nice child.

MISS MINCHIN: *(noticing BECKY)* Becky! Wake up, you insolent lazy child! How dare you sit there sleeping when you're supposed to be working?

BECKY: I didn't go to do it, Missus! I didn't even know I fell asleep! I beg yer pardon, Missus! I beg yer pardon!

MISS MINCHIN: You impudent creature! Miss Amelia, take her into the kitchen and box her ears!

AMELIA: Oh, Miss Minchin, won't you do it? You're so much better at boxing ears than I am. I haven't the stomach for it.

MISS MINCHIN: *(very severe)* You shall do as I say, Miss Amelia.

AMELIA: Could I ask the cook to do it? She doesn't mind. I think she kind of likes it.

MISS MINCHIN: *(very angry)* You will not question my authority. Now take this guttersnipe into the kitchen and box her ears!

AMELIA: *(faintly)* Well, Becky, come on, then.

MISS MINCHIN: We'll teach you a lesson you won't soon forget!

(As MINCHIN is turned away, MELCHESDIC tries to make his escape)

MELCHESDIC: *(to audience)* I better get out of 'ere.

(As HE tries to exit, MINCHIN sees him)

MISS MINCHIN: *(with a loud scream)* A rat! James! *(grabbing broom by fireplace and trying to beat him with it)* Get out you disgusting creature! James!

JAMES: *(running on)* What is it, mum?

MISS MINCHIN: Take this broom and kill that rat!

(As JAMES chases MELCHISEDIC off DS right, SARA, carrying Emily the doll, enters from US left. SHE doesn't see the rat.)

MISS MINCHIN: Hello Sara. *(with a subtle, resentful undertone)* So, you've decided to come out of your room and grace us with your presence?

SARA: What did you say that for, Miss Minchin? I've come out of my room because I thought our lessons were about to begin. I've never thought about my presence gracing anyone.

MISS MINCHIN: *(condescending)* Well aren't you just the most clever little girl. What an original creature you are. Sit there. Here are your schoolbooks. Having lived in India all your life, you've probably never seen so many books.

SARA: My papa and I had a library full of books. We read all the time.

MISS MINCHIN: Of course you did. Does your doll plan to study as well?

SARA: Dolls don't study, Miss Minchin. Please, may I keep her with me for company?

(MINCHIN purses her lips disapprovingly.)

Just this once?

MISS MINCHIN: Just this once, Sara. I know you miss your father terribly, and he only just left, but you're too old of a girl to go around carrying a doll.

SARA: Thank you Miss Minchin.

MISS MINCHIN: I have things to attend to in the kitchen. The other children will be here presently. *(exits DS right.)*

SARA: Emily, I don't like this place. But, if we are here I suppose we must be resigned to it. We must make Papa proud of us. I really miss him.

MARIETTE: *(Enters, with a large box)* Sara! Another box came from the shop. Come with me, to open it. It will only take a minute, I think it is your petticoats!

SARA: Come on, Emily.

(Exit SARA and MARIETTE. Enter JULIA, EMMA, LAVINIA, JESSIE, ERMENGARDE, LOTTIE, and AURORA. They arrange desks and sit.)

JULIA: Did you hear we have a new girl?

ERMENGARDE: I saw her. She looks nice. I hope she's nice.

AURORA: They gave her the most beautiful bedroom in the house!

EMMA: I know! The one with its own sitting room.

JULIA: *(catty)* She *needs* an extra room, she has her own maid!

LOTTIE: I don't have a maid here.

LAVINIA: Who does she think she is?

JESSIE: We all have maids at home.

LAVINIA: But not at school! That's just showing off.

JESSIE: Yes, you're right. She just needs to show off.

EMMA: And, they've been bringing in boxes and boxes of things –

AURORA: I've peeked in her room! You should see the shoes, the silk stockings, the fur capes, the beautiful dresses! Boxes and boxes of clothes!

LOTTIE: I don't have boxes and boxes of clothes.

LAVINIA: Lottie, stop being such a baby.

ERMENGARDE: She's only four. She's almost still a real baby.

LOTTIE: *(crying)* I am not a baby! I'm four and a half years old.

(Enter MISS MINCHIN, AMELIA, and SARA)

MISS MINCHIN: Young ladies. May I have your attention, please.

LOTTIE: See? I'm a young lady.

MISS MINCHIN: Lottie, I was speaking. Young ladies, I wish to introduce you to your new companion.

(All girls rise and stare at SARA curiously)

AMELIA: We expect you all to be very agreeable to Miss Crewe. When your lessons are over, you can make each other's acquaintance.

(Pupils bow, SARA curtsies, pupils sit.)

MISS MINCHIN: Today we begin with our French lesson. Now, as you have a French maid, Sara, I conclude that your father wishes you to learn French.

SARA: Well, no, I think he engaged her because he – he thought I would like her.

MISS MINCHIN: I am afraid that you have always been a very spoiled little girl and always imagine that things are done because you like them.

SARA: That's not what I meant, I only meant-

MISS MINCHIN: I was still speaking, Sara. And I was saying that my impression is that your papa wished you to learn French.

(Doorbell rings. AMELIA exits DS left to answer it. The pupils, with the exception of ERMENGARDE and LOTTIE, snicker amongst themselves at SARA'S discomfort.)

And you will begin at once.

AMELIA: *(entering with MONSIEUR DUFARGE)* Monsieur Dufarge is here for the French lesson.

DUFARGE: I see we have a new student.

MISS MINCHIN: This is Sara Crewe, Monsieur Dufarge. I'm afraid she has a childish prejudice against learning French.

DUFARGE: *(going to SARA, speaking to all)* Bonjour mesdames. Comment allez-vous ?

STUDENTS: *Bonjour. Nous allons bien, merci.*

(SARA speaks, very well, along with the students. MISS. MINCHIN is shocked. DUFARGE is very pleased. The last thing we hear is ERMENGARDE, one beat behind and with a terrible accent.)

ERMENGARDE: . . .al ons by en, mercy.

DUFARGE: *(to SARA)* Vous avez un bon accent. Avez-vous etudie le Français ?

SARA: *No, c'est ma maman qui me l'appris. Elle etait Francaise et nous parlions Français.*

DUFARGE: *Elle etait Francaise ?*

SARA: *Elle est morte quand j'etais petite.*

DUFARGE: *Je suis desole. (to MISS MINCHIN)* But there is a misunderstanding, Miss Minchin. She speaks beautiful French, which she did not learn in a classroom but spoke with her mother, who, I am unhappy to say, passed away when Sara was a small child.

MISS MINCHIN: You ought to have told me, Sara!

JULIA: *(snickering)* Perhaps that's what she was trying to say, Miss Minchin.

MISS MINCHIN: Do not speak unless spoken to, Julia.

SARA: I'm sorry. I – I tried, but I suppose I did not begin right.

(LAVINIA and JESSIE and others giggle and snicker, ERMANGARDE stares, open-mouthed, at SARA and bites the ribbon on her pigtail.)

MISS MINCHIN: Silence, young ladies!

DUFARGE: *(in French)* Silence! Silence, *s'il vous plait*.

MISS MINCHIN: Silence at once! Ermengarde St. John!

ERMENGARDE: Yes, Miss Minchin ?

MISS MINCHIN: Stop chewing on that ribbon! Remove your elbows! Sit up at once!

ERMENGARDE: Yes, Miss Minchin.

MISS MINCHIN: Come along, Amelia. We'll leave them to their lessons.

(Exit MISS MINCHIN and AMELIA US right.)

DUFARGE: And now, we begin. *Comment dit-on cela en francais ?* How do you say that in French? Open your books to page two. Ermengarde.

ERMENGARDE: We, mon-sewer?

DUFARGE: One, two, three.

ERMENGARDE: Oon, ducks, tro-is.

DUFARGE: Everybody *s'il vous plait*.

ALL: Un, deux, trois.

DUFARGE: C'est bon. Ermengarde, again *s'il vous plait*. One two three.

ERMENGARDE: *(reading from her book)* Oon, ducks, tros.

DUFARGE: Le bon pain. This morning, for breakfast, I had le bon pain. Ermengarde ? Le bon pain.

ERMENGARDE: *(reading from her book)* Lee bong pang.

DUFARGE: Everybody, turn to Page cinq. Repeat after me please. Repetez, *s'il vous plait*. Avez-vous.

(MELCHISEDEC sneaks onstage. Everyone's head is down, in their books, DUFARGE is facing upstage, listening to the students. As he talks, the class goes into a soft freeze, still moving their mouths but no sound comes out.)

ALL: Avez-vous.

DUFARGE: Dites-moi.

ALL: Dites-moi.

MELCHISEDIC: *(to audience)* I've been in the wall, listening. That new girl, Sara, is not your typical student. I can see Miss Minchin doesn't like her very much, and that could cause problems. I often scurry out here looking for crumbs during French class – all the students have their noses in their books, and Monsieur Dufarge has very bad eyesight. I'm actually starting to learn French. Repetez, *s'il vous plait*. Oh! A crumb! I don't know how to say that in French, but I can pretend I do. *(with accent)* Ooh! Une croomb! C'est bon! Hey, I'm learning French! Well, I gotta go. Au revoir. *(exits)*

(Sound comes up, scene returns to normal.)

DUFARGE: Close your books and translate please. This is my friend.

ALL: C'est mon amie.

(COOK enters.)

DUFARGE: Excuse me.

ALL: Excusez-moi.

COOK: Pardon me.

ALL: Pardonnez-moi.

COOK: Mr. Dufarge, it's time for tea, upstairs.

DUFARGE: C'est bon !

(Exit DUFARGE. ALL students except for ERMENGARDE and SARA run out of the room, US right, leaving a mess behind. ERMENGARDE sits by herself, very sad)

COOK: Becky ! James ! Get in here and clean up this mess.

SARA: *(crossing to ERMENGARDE)* What is your name ?

ERMENGARDE: My name's Ermengarde St. John.

SARA: That's very pretty. It sounds like a story book.

ERMENGARDE: You can speak French, can't you ?

(BECKY and James enter from kitchen, DS right.)

BECKY: Yes, mum.

COOK: It took you long enough ! Now clean up in 'ere. And see you be quick about it.

(COOK exits, BECKY and JAMES start putting away books and necessary stage clean up.)

SARA: I speak French because I've heard it all my life. You could speak it if you always heard it.

ERMENGARDE: Oh, no, I couldn't. I *never* could speak it. I can't say the words. That's a nice doll.

SARA: This is Emily.

ERMENGARDE: She's beautiful. Is it true that you have a playroom all to yourself?

SARA: Papa wanted me to have one because when I play I make up stories and tell them to myself, and I don't like people to hear me.

ERMENGARDE: You *make up* stories! Can you do that – as well as speak French? *Can* you?

SARA: It's just pretending. I pretend that Emily can walk. And that makes it seem as if it were true. Have you never pretended things?

ERMENGARDE: No. May I hold Emily?

SARA: Yes. *(suddenly SARA remembers her father, does an intake of breath, holds lips tightly closed to keep from crying)*

ERMENGARDE: Have you a – a pain?

SARA: I miss my father. I love him more than anything, and he's gone away, and that's where my pain is.

ERMENGARDE: Are you going to cry?

SARA: No. I promised him I would bear it. And I will.

ERMENGARDE: Lavinia and Jessie are best friends. I wish we could be best friends. Could we? You're clever, and they say I'm stupid, but I would like to be best friends with you.

SARA: I'm glad of that. We will be friends. And – I can help you with your French lessons.

BECKY: Excuse me fer talking without yer talkin' to me first, but Miss Minchin gets mad if you miss tea.

ERMENGARDE: Come on, Sara. Sit with me, all right? I always have to sit alone and now I have a best friend.

SARA: *(To BECKY)* Thank you. That was -

ERMENGARDE: Come on, Sara!

(SARA, ERMENGARDE and BECKY exit US right. BECKY and JAMES exit DS right. Enter MELCHISEDEC.)

SCENE TWO

MELCHISEDEC: Me again. Thank you for not screaming. You're probably used to me by now. Everybody here got used to Sara as the months went by. Miss Minchin and Miss Amelia kept expecting her to turn bratty, cause they don't treat her like a little girl. They treat her like a distinguished guest. But, she stayed

real nice. Which actually made some people mad! (*OFFSTAGE sounds of giggling*) Oh, speaking of which –that sounds like the young ladies of the seminary. I better hide. They’re screamers, I’m sure of it.

EMMA: You slapped little Lottie? But Lavvie, she’s such a little girl.

LAVINIA: I had to, Emma. She wouldn’t stop crying. And then that Sara Crewe ran to her rescue. I don’t like her.

AURORA: I don’t like her either.

JESSIE: There’s one thing about Sara though - she’s never ‘grand’ about herself the least bit.

JULIA: That’s true. She carries herself as if she were a princess, but without seeming grand somehow.

AURORA: I think if I had so many fine things and everybody made such a fuss over me, I would put on airs. I would think I was very grand. I would make people bow to me.

LAVINIA: It’s disgusting, the way Miss Minchin shows her off when parents come. (*mimicking MINCHIN*)

“Dear Sara must come into the drawing room and talk to Mrs. Musgrave about India.”

AURORA: (*mimicking MINCHIN*) “Dear Sara must speak French to Lady Pitkin.”

EMMA: Sara is odd. Sometimes, I put my ear to her door, and I hear her talking to herself.

AURORA: And she gives tea parties for Lottie and Ermengarde.

JULIA: I don’t understand that. Both of them are so tiresome.

LAVINIA: Sara’s always doing something silly.

AURORA: My mama says she will grow up eccentric.

(*Offstage, sounds of LOTTIE screaming and crying, MINCHIN and AMELIA yelling at her to keep quiet.*)

JESSIE: It sounds like Lottie is coming in here.

LAVINIA: Let’s watch. Maybe Miss Minchin will give her a whipping.

(*Young ladies move upstage as LOTTIE, crying and followed by MINCHIN and AMELIA, enter US right.*)

MISS MINCHIN: What *is* she crying for?

LOTTIE: Oh – oh – oh! I haven’t got any ma- ma – mama!

AMELIA: Oh, Lottie! Do stop, darling! Don’t cry! Please stop!

LOTTIE: Oh! Oh! Oh! Haven’t – got- any- mama!

MISS MINCHIN: She ought to be whipped! You *shall* be whipped, you naughty child!

LOTTIE: (*crying and screaming*) No! No, don’t whip me!

AMELIA: (*crying*) You poor child, if you’d just stop crying!

MISS MINCHIN: Amelia, it doesn’t help the situation for you to cry as well!

AMELIA: I’m sorry! I don’t know what to do!

MISS MINCHIN: I’ve had enough!

(*MINCHIN storms angrily out of the room, exit US right. AMELIA tries ineffectually to soothe LOTTIE.*)

ENTER SARA, US left, with her doll Emily.)

SARA: Miss Amelia, may I try to make her stop?

AMELIA: (*tearfully*) Oh, Sara, we never had such a dreadful child before and if she doesn’t stop we’ll just have to smack her until she does. Please, do try.

(*Exit AMELIA US right. SARA sits close to LOTTIE, who redoubles her tantrum; SARA says nothing and eventually LOTTIE stops wailing.*)

SARA: What’s the matter, Lottie?

LOTTIE: (*again, starting to cry*) I – haven’t – any – ma – mama!

SARA: Neither have I.

LOTTIE: (*surprise, stops her crying*) Where is she?

(BECKY enters DS right, quietly, and puts coals in the fireplace.)

SARA: She went to heaven. Your mama is in heaven, too. But 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.

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

SARA: I will be your mama. We will play that you are my little girl. And Emily shall be your sister.

LOTTIE: Would you tell me about heaven?

SARA: It's beautiful there –

(BECKY stops working and starts listening.)

with fields and fields of lilies, and the scent of them is everywhere, and little children gather armfuls of them, and laugh –

(BECKY drops the hearth brush. The other young ladies move DS.)

LAVINIA: That girl has been listening!

SARA: I know. Why shouldn't she?

AURORA: Well, I know my mamma wouldn't like me to tell stories to servant girls.

SARA: My mama knows stories belong to everyone. *(crossing to BECKY)* Don't be frightened. Here, would you like a piece of cake?

(BECKY nods. SARA takes cake out of her pocket, gives to BECKY.)

BECKY: *(taking it eagerly)* Thank you, miss.

SARA: Come on Lottie, it's time for your nap. You can sleep in my room.

(Exit SARA and LOTTIE US left.)

LAVINIA: *(to BECKY)* If you don't hurry up with your work, I'm going to tell Cook on you.

BECKY: Beggin' yer pardon, I didn't mean nothin' by it.

JULIA: And give me that piece of cake! Servant girls don't eat cake!

(BECKY gives her the cake, picks up coal bucket and EXITS into kitchen DS right.)

EMMA: Julia, may I have some?

JULIA: No.

AURORA: It's wicked of Sara to make up fairy stories about heaven.

JESSIE: But – there are much more splendid stories about it in the Bible.

LAVINIA: Jessie, sometimes I just don't know if I want to be your friend anymore.

(The young ladies exit US left, JESSIE follows)

JESSIE: Wait, Lavinia – we're best friends! What did I do wrong? Aurora, tell her I didn't do anything wrong!

(Re-enter SARA and LOTTIE from US left.)

LOTTIE: There's Emily! Can I hold her?

SARA: Of course.

LOTTIE: Sara, why does everybody call you a little princess?

SARA: I don't know. But, if I was a princess – a real princess, I could scatter largess to the populace.

LOTTIE: What's a largess populace?

SARA: I mean that I could do good things for people. *(talking more to herself)* But even if I am only a pretend princess, I can invent little things to do for people. Things like giving a piece of cake to Becky. She was just as happy as if it was largess. I'll pretend that to do things people like is scattering largess. I've scattered largess.

LOTTIE: Scattered largess. I'm tired, Sara.

SARA: Come on, then.

(Exit SARA and LOTTIE US left.)

SCENE THREE

(MELCHISEDEC enters, puts a letter on table US, puts small brown lumpy package on couch.)

MELCHISEDEC: *(to audience)* In the year since Sara has been here, she has received, every single week, two letters from her father. As you can imagine, she lived for those letters. Every morning her maid Mariette *(MARIETTE enters, crosses to table with letter)* checked the mail to see if there was a letter.

MARIETTE: Sara! Sara, there is a letter from your Papa!

SARA: *(from off stage)* I'm coming! *(entering)* Oh, thank you Mariette. Would you read it to me?

MARIETTE: Of course, Sara. *(they sit on couch, MARIETTE screams.)*

SARA: What happened?

MARIETTE: Something has stuck me in my bottom! *(gets up and sees a dumpy brown package. A tag says "For Sara")* It's a present for you.

SARA: It must be from Becky. *(opens package. It's a small shabby pincushion, handmade)* Look, Mariette- a pincushion! Look at the pains she went to – look how hard she worked on this! This is so nice, isn't it Mariette?

MARIETTE: *(doubtfully)* It's very . . . pretty, madame Sara. Shall I read the letter now?

SARA: Oh yes, please.

MARIETTE: *(opens letter)* Let's see if he will talk about the diamond mines. They will make you very, very rich, little Sara.

SARA: I just wish Papa could come for my birthday.

MARIETTE: But he cannot! He has to run so much business in India! *(reading letter)* "Dear Sara, How are you? I miss you so much. You see, little Sara," -

SARA: I'm not so little now. I'm eleven!

MARIETTE: Yes. Well. "You see, little Sara, your daddy is not a businessman at all, and figures and documents bother him. He does not really understand them, and all this seems so enormous. Perhaps, if I was not feverish" –

SARA: Feverish? Papa has a fever?

MARIETTE: Sara, it takes weeks for a letter to get here from India. I'm sure he is fine now!

SARA: Yes, yes I'm sure he is. Isn't he?

MARIETTE: Of course. Now I finish. . . "perhaps, if I was not feverish, I should not be awake, tossing about, one half of the night and spend the other half in troublesome dreams. But, little Sara, the main thing is I wish you a wonderful birthday. I have sent some surprises to you. Love, Papa."

SARA: That letter is my favorite present already.

MARIETTE: I know it is. Sara, we must get ready for your party. Your papa has sent you a beautiful dress. Come, we must put it on you.

(Enter BECKY DS right, happy and nervous.)

BECKY: Do yer like it, Miss Sara? Do yer like the present I made? Do yer?

SARA: Like it? You darling Becky, you made it all yourself.

BECKY: It ain't nothin' but flannin', an' the flannin' ain't new; but I wanted to give you somethin' and I made it at night. I knew yer could *pretend* it was satin with diamond pins in.

SARA: Oh, Becky, I love it, I really do!

BECKY: Oh, miss! Thank yer, miss, kindly, it ain't good enough for that.

(Offstage voice of COOK.)

COOK: Becky! Get in 'ere afore I get mad!

BECKY: *(quickly)* Happy Birthday, Sara. *(exits DS right)*

MARIETTE: Sara, we must go upstairs now. Come!

(SARA and MARIETTE exit US left. From DS left, enter JAMES, JULIA, ERMENGARDE, AURORA, EMMA, LOTTIE, LAVINIA, JESSIE, carrying gifts.)

EMMA: I've never seen so many gifts!

JULIA: I can't wait to see what they are. This one is very heavy.

LOTTIE: I don't have any gifts, but that's all right because these are for Sara.

ERMENGARDE: Where's the cake? I'll bet Miss Minchin had the Cook make the best cake ever.

AURORA: Well of course she did. It's for her star pupil.

(Enter MINCHIN, and AMELIA from DS left.)

MISS MINCHIN: Silence, young ladies! James, put that box on the table. Julia, put that on the chair.

ERMENGARDE: Should I get the cake, Miss Amelia?

AMELIA: If Miss Minchin says it's all right –

MISS MINCHIN: No you may not. Young ladies don't go into the kitchen. When the time is ready, we shall go into the dining room for cake.

AMELIA: Shall I get Sara now?

MISS MINCHIN: *I'll* get Sara. Emma, get away from that box! Amelia, you stay here and make sure nobody touches anything.

(Exit MINCHIN US left.)

LAVINIA: Such a fuss! All because Sara is so rich because of those diamond mines.

AMELIA: Lavinia, that's unkind.

JULIA: I had a birthday last month and my party wasn't like this.

AMELIA: Julia, all these gifts are from Sara's father, and Sara is the one throwing the party for you. She even has three different cakes.

JESSIE: Three cakes! What a wonderful idea!

AURORA: It's rather vulgar, if you ask me.

EMMA: Sara probably has a cake for the servants!

LOTTIE: Sara can do what she wants!

(Snickers from the girls. enter SARA and MINCHIN US left.)

MINCHIN: And here's the birthday girl! What do we say, ladies?

ALL: Happy Birthday Sara!

BECKY: *(enters DS right, staring, in awe, at all the gifts)* Did yer want me to bring out the cakes, Missus?

MISS MINCHIN: Not yet! Now get back into the kitchen! It is not your place to look at the young ladies.

You forget yourself. Leave us!

SARA: If you please, Miss Minchin, mayn't Becky stay?

MISS MINCHIN: (*with horror*) Becky?! My dearest Sara!

SARA: I want her because I know she will like to see the presents. She is a little girl, too, you know.

MISS MINCHIN: My dear Sara, Becky is the scullery maid.

AMELIA: (*gently*) Scullery maids carry coal scuttles and make fires, Sara.

MISS MINCHIN: Scullery maids –er – are not little girls.

LOTTIE: It's Sara's birthday. She should do what she wants.

MISS MINCHIN: As you ask it as a birthday favor – she may stay. Rebecca, thank Miss Sara for her great kindness.

BECKY: Oh, if you please, miss! I'm that grateful, miss! I did want to see the gifts, that I did. Thank you, miss. And thank you, ma'am – (*to MINCHIN, with an awkward bob*) for letting me take this liberty.

MISS MINCHIN: Go and stand there. (*indicating as far away as possible*) Not too near the young ladies. And now, young ladies, I have a few words to say to you.

JULIA: She's going to make a speech.

EMMA: I wish it was over.

MISS MINCHIN: Dear Sara has become my most accomplished pupil.

LAVINIA: (*whispering*) Dear Sara!

MISS MINCHIN: Her French and her dancing are a credit to the seminary. Her manners – which have caused you all to call her Princess Sara- are perfect. Her generosity is shown by giving you this afternoon's party.

I wish you to express your appreciation of it by saying aloud all together, "Thank you Sara."

ALL: (*rising*) Thank you, Sara.

SARA: Thank you for coming to my party.

AMELIA: Very pretty indeed Sara. That is what a real Princess does when the populace applauds her.

MISS MINCHIN: Lavinia, the sound you just made was extremely like a snort. If you are jealous of your fellow-pupil, I beg you will express your feelings in some more ladylike manner. Now, Miss Amelia and I will leave you to enjoy yourselves.

(*Exit MINCHIN and AMELIA DS left. The girls jump out of their seats and rush to the opened boxes.*)

SARA: (*excited*) These are books!

ALL: (*disappointed and sympathetic*) Awwww.

ERMENGARDE: Does your papa send you books for a birthday present? He's as bad as my father.

SARA: I like books, Ermengarde.

LOTTIE: (*getting doll out of box*) Look! Look! Look at this doll!

JESSIE: She's almost as big as Lottie!

LAVINIA: She's dressed for the theater. Her cloak is lined with fur!

JULIA: This trunk is for the doll. Can we open it?

SARA: Yes.

EMMA: Look at the lace collar and the silk stockings!

LAVINIA: For a doll.

AURORA: And she has a fan, and a diamond tiara, and jewels!

LAVINIA: It's just a doll!

SARA: Suppose a doll understands human talk.

LAVINIA: You are always supposing things.

SARA: I know I am. If you suppose anything hard enough it seems as if it were real.

LAVINIA: It's all very well to suppose things if you have everything. Could you suppose and pretend if you were a beggar and lived in a garret?

SARA: I *believe* I could. But it mightn't be easy.

(Enter AMELIA from DS left.)

AMELIA: Sara, your papa's solicitor is here to see Miss Minchin, so let's move the party to the dining room so she can speak with him in here.

LOTTIE: Could we take the toys in?

AMELIA: Yes. And, I'll tell Cook it's time for the birthday cake.

ERMENGARDE: Cakes! Birthday cakes!

(Exit AMELIA DS right. Exit all, US right, taking gifts, wrapping, etc., except for BECKY. SHE lingers by the box of books and, upon hearing MISS MINCHIN off, hides under a table.)

MISS MINCHIN: (entering, from DSL, with BARROW. AMELIA enters from DSR. They sit) The doll has its own wardrobe, Mr. Barrow.

AMELIA: It's magnificent.

BARROW: Mad extravagance, I call it.

AMELIA: (uncertainly) What?

MISS MINCHIN: (coldly) I beg your pardon. Captain Crewe is a man of fortune. The diamond mines alone –

BARROW: (rising) A fortune? It's gone! Diamond mines? There are none!

AMELIA: There are none?

MISS MINCHIN: (rising) What do you mean?

BARROW: He invested in a dear friend's diamond mines, and he is ruined! And his friend has disappeared.

AMELIA: His friend has disappeared? He is ruined?

MISS MINCHIN: (dropping into her seat) Ruined!

BARROW: Yes! The late Captain Crewe –

MISS MINCHIN: (yelling) The late Captain Crewe?!

AMELIA: (faintly) The late? You don't come to tell us that Captain Crewe is-

BARROW: He's dead, ma'am. He died of jungle fever and business troubles combined.

AMELIA: Business troubles?

BARROW: He lost every penny.

MISS MINCHIN: (livid and loud) Do you mean to tell me, that he left *nothing*? That Sara will have no fortune? That the child is a beggar?

AMELIA: Please, calm yourself-

MISS MINCHIN: (loudest) That she is left on my hands as a little pauper instead of an heiress?

BARROW: She is 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: It's monstrous! Right at this moment, she's eating three cakes and dressed in lace petticoats at my expense! I've paid for all of it since the last cheque came, and are you telling me I won't be reimbursed for it?!

BARROW: (calmly) That is correct. You will not be reimbursed for it, there's not a brass farthing left, and you are responsible for her.

MISS MINCHIN: I refuse to be made responsible! I have been robbed and cheated, I will turn her out into the street!

BARROW: That wouldn't look well for your establishment. The word would get out. I can see it in the newspapers now: "Pupil bundled out penniless and without friends."

AMELIA: That wouldn't be good.

BARROW: Better keep her and make use of her.

MISS MINCHIN: I will get a good deal out of her before she grows older!

BARROW: I'm sure you will, ma'am. I am sure you will. Good day. (exits DS left)

MISS MINCHIN: Does Sara Crewe have a black frock in her sumptuous wardrobe?

AMELIA: A black frock? Yes. Yes, she does. But it is too short for her. She has only one, and she has outgrown it.

MISS MINCHIN: Go and tell her to take off that preposterous silk dress and put the black one on!

AMELIA: Oh, sister! Her father is dead!

MISS MINCHIN: Yes, died without a penny! Put a stop to that ridiculous party of hers. Go and make her change at once. And tell Mariette we can't afford her, send her away.

AMELIA: (*crying*) I? M-must I go and tell her now?

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

(*AMELIA exits US right.*)

The Princess Sara, indeed! That child has been pampered as if she were a queen!

(*Sound of BECKY under the table, sobbing. MINCHIN lifts tablecloth, sees her.*)

How *dare* you! How dare you! Come out immediately!

BECKY: If you please, it's me, mum. I know I hadn't ought to. But I was lookin' at the books, mum, an' I was frightened when you come in, an' – I slipped under the table.

MISS MINCHIN: You've been here listening.

BECKY: No, mum. Not listenin' – I thought I could slip out without yer noticin' - but I couldn't and I had to stay. But I didn't mean to listen, mum- but I couldn't help hearin'.

MISS MINCHIN: Leave the room!

BECKY: If you please, mum, - if, oh please, if you let me wait on Sara after I've done my pots an' kettles? Now she's poor, poor little Miss Sara, please mum!

MISS MINCHIN: No – certainly not. She will wait on herself, and on other people too. Leave this room this instant, or I'll throw you out into the street!

(*As BECKY begins to exit DS right, AMELIA and SARA, dressed in black and holding her doll Emily, swathed in black material enter US right. BECKY gives a furtive squeeze to SARA'S hand.*)

BECKY: (*whispering so MINCHIN doesn't hear*) I'm so sorry, Miss Sara.

MISS MINCHIN: Rebecca!

(*BECKY runs off. enter MARIETTE from US left, with valise.*)

MARIETTE: May I say goodbye to Sara?

AMELIA: Yes, of course.

MISS MINCHIN: Be quick about it.

MARIETTE: They're making me leave, Sara. I'm so sorry about your papa. You are poor now, Sara, but remember, you can always act like a little princess. (*hugs SARA*) Good-bye. (*exits DS left*)

MISS MINCHIN: (*crossing to SARA*) Put down your doll. What do you mean be bringing her here?

SARA: No, I will not put her down. She is all I have. My papa gave her to me.

MISS MINCHIN: But all of your other things, your new doll, new clothes, all your gifts – they are mine. I paid for them. You are nothing but a beggar.

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

MISS MINCHIN: Don't put on grand airs. You are not a princess any longer. You are like Becky – you must work for your living.

SARA: I will work. I will be glad to work.

MISS MINCHIN: If you don't please me, you will be sent away. Remember that. Now go.

(*SARA turns away to go.*)

Stop! Don't you intend to thank me?

SARA: What for?

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

SARA: (*simply*) You are not kind, and this is not a home. (*starts to move US left*)

AMELIA: (*a bit embarrassed*) Sara - You – that is not your room now. You are to sleep in the attic next to Becky.

MISS MINCHIN: Before you go to your room, go into the kitchen and see if Cook needs any help.

(*SARA exits DS right.*)

We'll see how well Princess Sara adjusts to her new life.

AMELIA: She just might surprise you.

MISS MINCHIN: Oh, do keep quiet, you silly goose. Now let's box up all of Sara's things. We should be able to get a pretty penny for them.

AMELIA: (*as they exit US left*) You have to feel a bit sorry for the child, don't you?

MISS MINCHIN: Do keep quiet Amelia. You're as weak as water!

SCENE FOUR

(*At Rise, COOK, BECKY, and JAMES are putting together the attic – on one side of the stage - two hard beds, a table, Emily the doll.*)

COOK: I don't see why she needs a bed. She can sleep on the floor, the little beggar.

JAMES: Everybody needs a bed, Cook. She's just a little girl, why do you have to be so mean for?

COOK: Don't you talk back like that to me, James Tooley! I'll smack you, I will, and not give you any soup for five days!

JAMES: (*immediately cowed*) Sorry.

(*Enter MELCHISEDEC. HE talks to audience while COOK, JAMES and BECKY set up attic.*)

MELCHISEDEC: I was taking a nap, but who can sleep with the cook screeching and yelling? The attic is where I live. Becky cleaned it, knowing Sara's coming. As you see, everything changed for Sara. Boom! Just like that, and everything changed.

(*SARA enters schoolroom, starts dusting. Older students enter from DS left, laughing etc. When they see SARA, some point, some whisper etc.*)

LAVINIA: Hello, Princess Sara.

AURORA: You missed a spot. See? Right there.

EMMA: Miss Minchin said we're not to talk to her. She's just a servant.

JULIA: She said she was beneath us, and that young ladies don't talk to servants.

ERMENGARDE: But that's Sara! She's our friend, and I'm going to talk to her.

JESSIE: That's only because no one else likes you.

LAVINIA: We should go to the dining room for dinner. You can talk to Sara then, Ermengarde, when she's serving us.

(EMMA, JULIA, AURORA, LAVINIA, JESSIE off US right, laughing)

ERMENGARDE: Sara, I'm sorry they're so mean. Why don't you say anything back?

SARA: When people are insulting you, there is nothing so good for them as not to say a word- just look at them and think.

JULIA: *(entering, UPS R)* Ermengarde, if you don't get in here we're going to eat all the food and leave you nothing.

EMMA: *(popping in behind JULIA)* And, we'll tell Miss Minchin you missed dinner because you were talking to Sara. Why are you two just staring at us?

JULIA: Why aren't you saying anything? *(pause)* Stop it. I don't like it.

SARA: *(SARA and ERMENGARDE share a smile)* You better go, Ermengarde.

ERMENGARDE: I'll see you later, Sara.

(Exit JULIA, EMMA and ERMENGARDE. SARA sighs and keeps working. By the end of MELCHISEDEC's speech SHE is in the attic, sitting on the bed.)

MELCHISEDEC: I noticed that people are mean sometimes. I don't understand it. But what do I know; I'm just a rat. Sara was determined not to let any of this get her down. She worked so hard, everyday, for months. Then, late at night, she would study. If she displeased the Cook or Miss Minchin, they'd make her go to bed without supper. She went to bed hungry many times. I may be just a rat, but I understand being hungry. I think it's time for Miss Sara to make my acquaintance. We are roommates, after all.

(MELCHISEDEC exits to attic, watches SARA without her seeing. SARA sits on the bed, talking to her doll Emily, taking off her skirt, top, shoes. Like servants at the time, she goes to bed in her slip. She folds her clothes and puts them in a trunk.)

SARA: I can't bear this, Emily. I'm cold, I'm wet, I'm starving to death. I've walked a thousand miles today, and they have done nothing but scold me from morning until night. Some men laughed at me because my old shoes made me slip down in the mud. And they laughed. Do you hear? I feel like I'm a prisoner in the Bastille! *(pause, as though SARA is waiting for a response)* You are nothing but a doll! You never had a heart, nothing could ever make you feel – you are stuffed with sawdust! You are a doll!*(throws doll to the floor and hides her face in her arms.)* I'm sorry Emily. You can't help being a doll, any more than Lavinia and Aurora can help not having any sense. We are not all made alike. You probably do your sawdust best.

(MELCHISEDEC comes warily into SARA'S view.)

Look, Emily. I think he's hungry. I dare say it is rather hard to be a rat. Nobody likes you, and they scream, "Oh, what a horrid rat!" I shouldn't like it if people screamed, "Oh, what a horrid Sara!" Nobody asked this rat if he wanted to be a rat when he was made. I might have some crumbs in my apron . . .*(throws crumbs)* There. Don't be afraid. Come on.

LOTTIE: *(enters, SHE listens at entrance to attic)* Sara, who are you talking to?

SARA: Lottie, come in, quickly! You're not supposed to be here – oh, I would be punished if they knew you were here.

LOTTIE: I wanted to cheer you up. *(sees MELCHISEDEC, screams)* A rat! A horrid rat!

(MELCHISEDEC runs away.)

SARA: Shhhhh . . .he's not horrid. Don't be afraid.

LOTTIE: I miss you, Sara. I don't like you being up here all alone.

SARA: I'm not all alone. Becky lives here too, and look – this window in the roof – I can see the stars at night, and sparrows in the day – and I can see a very large and nice family in that house there – I call that the Large Family because there's so many of them. They're such a happy family. So you see, Lottie, I'm fine.

LOTTIE: All right, Sara.

SARA: Lottie, before you go . . .do you have any crumbs in your pocket?

LOTTIE: Yes I do. I'm sloppy when I eat.

SARA: Could you shake them onto the floor, please?

LOTTIE: *(doing so)* Yes, Sara. You're very strange. Good night. I'll see you tomorrow. *(exits)*
(SARA looks out of attic window. MELCHISEDEC returns, drawn by the smell of the crumbs.)

SARA: Look, there, some crumbs for you! *(looks out window again)*

MELCHISEDEC: *(to audience)* It's a very unusual person who would feed a rat. Probably a very lonely person.

BECKY: *(enters)* Watching the house next door again, Sara?

SARA: Becky! Someone's moving around on the top floor of that house. It was always empty and dark.

BECKY: It's an Indian gentleman that's in the apartment upstairs, miss! He's very rich, an' he's ill, an' the gentleman of the large family is his lawyer. An' somethin' else, miss, I think the Indian gentleman might be a heathen.

SARA: I lived with my father in India, and we were not heathens.

BECKY: I never lived next door to no heathens, miss.

SARA: I see a man on the top floor there- it must be a servant – and he's holding something in his arms.

BECKY: What's he holdin' miss? I can't make it out. *(suddenly, a monkey flies onstage into their bedroom. MELCHISEDEC is terrified, screams and EXITS. BECKY picks up monkey, is terrified, shrieks, tosses it. It's pandemonium)* Oh! Oh, miss! I think a heathen flew in 'ere!

SARA: It's a monkey, Becky, try to catch him!

BECKY: *(hiding under covers)* No, miss, it could be somethin' evil! It could kill us, miss Sara! *(as SARA crosses to where the monkey is)* Don't trust it, miss, it's just playin' dead!

(A tapping is heard at the attic window.)

AHHHHH! It's more monkeys!

SARA: Becky, it's just the Indian manservant. They're called Lascars. *(to RAM DASS)* Come in!

(RAM DASS, in a turban, enters through the window. HE sees BECKY under the covers, shuddering and whining. HE notices the shabbiness of the room. SARA picks up monkey.)

RAM DASS: *(bowing to SARA)* I am so sorry if he frightened you. He is Master Carrisford's pet. There is something hiding in the bed?

SARA: That's Becky. She's afraid. *(handing him the monkey)*

RAM DASS: Thank you. I am Ram Dass. You can come out now, Becky.

BECKY: *(from under the covers)* I'll just wait till yer gone if you don't mind.

END OF FREE PREVIEW