A Little Princess

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Contents

The Whole of the Story

I do not know whether many people realize how much more than is ever written there really is in a story – how many parts of it are never told – how much more really happened than there is in the book one holds in one's hand and pores over. Stories are something like letters. When a letter is written, how often one remembers things omitted and says, "Ah, why did I not tell them that?" In writing a book one relates all that one remembers at the time, and if one told all that really happened, perhaps the book would never end. Between the lines of every story there is another story, and that is one that is never heard and can only be guessed at by the people who are good at guessing. The person who writes the story may never know all of it, but sometimes he does and wishes he had the chance to begin again.

When I wrote the story of "Sara Crewe", I guessed that a great deal more had happened at Miss Minchin's than I had had time to find out just then. I knew, of course, that there must have been chapters full of things going on all the time, and when I began to make a play out of the book and called it *A Little Princess*, I discovered three acts full of things. What interested me most was that I found that there had been girls at the school whose names I had not even known before. There was a little girl whose name was Lottie, who was an amusing little person; there was a hungry scullery maid who was Sara's

adoring friend; Ermengarde was much more entertaining than she had seemed at first; things happened in the garret which had never been hinted at in the book; and a certain gentleman whose name was Melchisedec was an intimate friend of Sara's who should never have been left out of the story if he had only walked into it in time. He and Becky and Lottie lived at Miss Minchin's, and I cannot understand why they did not mention themselves to me at first. They were as real as Sara, and it was careless of them not to come out of the story shadowland and say, "Here I am – tell about me." But they did not – which was their fault, and not mine. People who live in the story one is writing ought to come forward at the beginning and tap the writing person on the shoulder and say, "Hallo, what about me?" If they don't, no one can be blamed but themselves and their slouching, idle ways.

After the play of *A Little Princess* was produced in New York, and so many children went to see it and liked Becky and Lottie and Melchisedec, my publishers asked me if I could not write Sara's story over again and put into it all the things and people who had been left out before, and so I have done it – and when I began, I found there were actually pages and pages of things which had happened that had never been put even into the play, so in this new *Little Princess*, I have put all I have been able to discover.

– Frances Hodgson Burnett

A Little Princess

Chapter 1

SARA

ONCE ON A DARK winter's day, when the yellow fog hung so thick and heavy in the streets of London that the lamps were lit and the shop windows blazed with gas as they do at night, an odd-looking little girl sat in a cab with her father and was driven rather slowly through the big thoroughfares.

She sat with her feet tucked under her, and leant against her father, who held her in his arm as she stared out of the window at the passing people with a queer old-fashioned thoughtfulness in her big eyes.

She was such a little girl that one did not expect to see such a look on her small face. It would have been an old

look for a child of twelve, and Sara Crewe was only seven. The fact was, however, that she was always dreaming and thinking odd things and could not herself remember any time when she had not been thinking things about grown-up people and the world they belonged to. She felt as if she had lived a long, long time.

At this moment she was remembering the voyage she had just made from Bombay with her father, Captain Crewe. She was thinking of the big ship, of the Lascars passing silently to and fro on it, of the children playing about on the hot deck and of some young officers' wives who used to try to make her talk to them and laugh at the things she said.

Principally, she was thinking of what a queer thing it was that at one time one was in India in the blazing sun, and then in the middle of the ocean, and then driving in a strange vehicle through strange streets where the day was as dark as the night. She found this so puzzling that she moved closer to her father.

"Papa," she said in low, mysterious little voice which was almost a whisper. "Papa."

"What is it, darling?" Captain Crewe answered, holding her closer and looking down into her face. "What is Sara thinking of?"

"Is this the place?" Sara whispered, cuddling still closer to him. "Is it, Papa?"

"Yes, little Sara, it is. We have reached it at last." And though she was only seven years old, she knew that he felt sad when he said it.

It seemed to her many years since he had begun to prepare her mind for "the place", as she always called it. Her mother had died when she was born, so she had never known or missed her. Her young, handsome, rich, petting father

seemed to be the only relation she had in the world. They had always played together and been fond of each other. She only knew he was rich because she had heard people say so when they thought she was not listening, and she had also heard them say that when she grew up she would be rich, too. She did not know all that being rich meant. She had always lived in a beautiful bungalow, and had been used to seeing many servants who made salaams to her and called her "Missee Sahib" and gave her her own way in everything. She had had toys and pets and an ayah who worshipped her, and she had gradually learnt that people who were rich had these things. That, however, was all she knew about it.

During her short life only one thing had troubled her, and that thing was "the place" she was to be taken to some day. The climate of India was very bad for children, and as soon as possible they were sent away from it – generally to England and to school. She had seen other children go away, and had heard their fathers and mothers talk about the letters they received from them. She had known that she would be obliged to go also, and though sometimes her father's stories of the voyage and the new country had attracted her, she had been troubled by the thought that he could not stay with her.

"Couldn't you go to that place with me, Papa?" she had asked when she was five years old. "Couldn't you go to school, too? I would help you with your lessons."

"But you will not have to stay for a very long time, little Sara," he had always said. "You will go to a nice house where there will be a lot of little girls, and you will play together, and I will send you plenty of books, and you will grow so fast that it will seem scarcely a year before you are big enough and clever enough to come back and take care of Papa."

She had liked to think of that. To keep the house for her father, to ride with him and sit at the head of his table when he had dinner parties, to talk to him and read his books – that would be what she would like most in the world, and if one must go away to "the place" in England to attain it, she must make up her mind to go. She did not care very much for other little girls, but if she had plenty of books she could console herself. She liked books more than anything else, and was, in fact, always inventing stories of beautiful things and telling them to herself. Sometimes she had told them to her father, and he had liked them as much as she did.

"Well, Papa," she said softly, "if we are here, I suppose we must be resigned."

He laughed at her old-fashioned speech and kissed her. He was really not at all resigned himself, though he knew he must keep that a secret. His quaint little Sara had been a great companion to him, and he felt he should be a lonely fellow when, on his return to India, he went into his bungalow knowing he need not expect to see the small figure in its white frock come forward to meet him. So he held her very closely in his arm as the cab rolled into the big, dull square in which stood the house which was their destination.

It was a big, dull, brick house, exactly like all the others in its row, but that on the front door there shone a brass plate on which was engraved in black letters:

MISS MINCHIN
SELECT SEMINARY FOR YOUNG LADIES

"Here we are, Sara," said Captain Crewe, making his voice sound as cheerful as possible. Then he lifted her out of the

cab, and they mounted the steps and rang the bell. Sara often thought afterwards that the house was somehow exactly like Miss Minchin. It was respectable and well furnished, but everything in it was ugly, and the very armchairs seemed to have hard bones in them. In the hall everything was hard and polished – even the red cheeks of the moon face on the tall clock in the corner had a severe varnished look. The drawing room into which they were ushered was covered by a carpet with a square pattern upon it, the chairs were square, and a heavy marble timepiece stood upon the heavy marble mantel.

As she sat down in one of the stiff mahogany chairs, Sara cast one of her quick looks about her.

"I don't like it, Papa," she said. "But then I dare say soldiers – even brave ones – don't really *like* going into battle."

Captain Crewe laughed outright at this. He was young and full of fun, and he never tired of hearing Sara's queer speeches.

"Oh, little Sara," he said. "What shall I do when I have no one to say solemn things to me? No one else is quite as solemn as you are."

"But why do solemn things make you laugh so?" enquired Sara.

"Because you are such fun when you say them," he answered, laughing still more. And then, suddenly, he swept her into his arms and kissed her very hard, stopping laughing all at once and looking almost as if tears had come into his eyes.

It was just then that Miss Minchin entered the room. She was very like her house, Sara felt: tall and dull, and respectable and ugly. She had large, cold, fishy eyes and a large, cold, fishy smile. It spread itself into a very large smile when she saw Sara and Captain Crewe. She had heard a great many

desirable things of the young soldier from the lady who had recommended her school to him. Among other things, she had heard that he was a rich father who was willing to spend a great deal of money on his little daughter.

"It will be a great privilege to have charge of such a beautiful and promising child, Captain Crewe," she said, taking Sara's hand and stroking it. "Lady Meredith has told me of her unusual cleverness. A clever child is a great treasure in an establishment like mine."

Sara stood quietly, with her eyes fixed upon Miss Minchin's face. She was thinking something odd, as usual.

"Why does she say I am a beautiful child?" she was thinking. "I am not beautiful at all. Colonel Grange's little girl, Isobel, is beautiful. She has dimples and rose-coloured cheeks, and long hair the colour of gold. I have short black hair and green eyes; besides which, I am a thin child and not fair in the least. I am one of the ugliest children I ever saw. She is beginning by telling a story."

She was mistaken, however, in thinking she was an ugly child. She was not in the least like Isobel Grange, who had been the beauty of the regiment, but she had an odd charm of her own. She was a slim, supple creature, rather tall for her age, and had an intense, attractive little face. Her hair was heavy and quite black and only curled at the tips; her eyes were greenish-grey, it is true, but they were big, wonderful eyes with long black lashes, and though she herself did not like the colour of them, many other people did. Still, she was very firm in her belief that she was an ugly little girl, and she was not at all elated by Miss Minchin's flattery.

"I should be telling a story if I said she was beautiful," she thought, "and I should know I was telling a story. I believe I am as ugly as she is, in my way. What did she say that for?"

After she had known Miss Minchin longer, she learnt why she had said it. She discovered that she said the same thing to each papa and mamma who brought a child to her school.

Sara stood near her father and listened while he and Miss Minchin talked. She had been brought to the seminary because Lady Meredith's two little girls had been educated there, and Captain Crewe had a great respect for Lady Meredith's experience. Sara was to be what was known as "a parlour boarder", and she was to enjoy even greater privileges than parlour boarders usually did. She was to have a pretty bedroom and sitting room of her own; she was to have a pony and a carriage, and a maid to take the place of the ayah who had been her nurse in India.

"I am not in the least anxious about her education," Captain Crewe said, with his gay laugh, as he held Sara's hand and patted it. "The difficulty will be to keep her from learning too fast and too much. She is always sitting with her little nose burrowing into books. She doesn't read them, Miss Minchin – she gobbles them up as if she were a little wolf instead of a little girl. She is always starving for new books to gobble, and she wants grown-up books – great, big, fat ones – French and German as well as English – history and biography and poets, and all sorts of things. Drag her away from her books when she reads too much. Make her ride her pony in the Row* or go out and buy a new doll. She ought to play more with dolls."

"Papa," said Sara. "You see, if I went out and bought a new doll every few days I should have more than I could be fond of. Dolls ought to be intimate friends. Emily is going to be my intimate friend."

Captain Crewe looked at Miss Minchin and Miss Minchin looked at Captain Crewe.

"Who is Emily?" she enquired.

"Tell her, Sara," Captain Crewe said, smiling.

Sara's green-grey eyes looked very solemn and quite soft as she answered.

"She is a doll I haven't got yet," she said. "She is a doll Papa is going to buy for me. We are going out together to find her. I have called her Emily. She is going to be my friend when Papa is gone. I want her to talk to about him."

Miss Minchin's large, fishy smile became very flattering indeed.

"What an original child!" she said. "What a darling little creature!"

"Yes," said Captain Crewe, drawing Sara close. "She is a darling little creature. Take great care of her for me, Miss Minchin."

Sara stayed with her father at his hotel for several days; in fact, she remained with him until he sailed away again to India. They went out and visited many big shops together, and bought a great many things. They bought, indeed, a great many more things than Sara needed, but Captain Crewe was a rash, innocent young man and wanted his little girl to have everything she admired and everything he admired himself, so between them they collected a wardrobe much too grand for a child of seven. There were velvet dresses trimmed with costly furs, and lace dresses, and embroidered ones, and hats with great, soft ostrich feathers, and ermine coats and muffs, and boxes of tiny gloves and handkerchiefs and silk stockings in such abundant supplies that the polite young women behind the counters whispered to each other that the odd little girl with the big, solemn eyes must be at least

some foreign princess – perhaps the little daughter of an Indian raja.

And at last they found Emily, but they went to a number of toy shops and looked at a great many dolls before they finally discovered her.

"I want her to look as if she wasn't a doll really," Sara said. "I want her to look as if she *listens* when I talk to her. The trouble with dolls, Papa," and she put her head on one side and reflected as she said it, "the trouble with dolls is that they never seem to *hear*." So they looked at big ones and little ones, at dolls with black eyes and dolls with blue, at dolls with brown curls and dolls with golden braids, dolls dressed and dolls undressed.

"You see," Sara said when they were examining one who had no clothes. "If, when I find her, she has no frocks, we can take her to a dressmaker and have her things made to fit. They will fit better if they are tried on."

After a number of disappointments they decided to walk and look in at the shop windows and let the cab follow them. They had passed two or three places without even going in, when, as they were approaching a shop which was really not a very large one, Sara suddenly started and clutched her father's arm.

"Oh, Papa!" she cried. "There is Emily!"

A flush had risen to her face, and there was an expression in her green-grey eyes as if she had just recognized someone she was intimate with and fond of.

"She is actually waiting for us!" she said. "Let us go in to her."

"Dear me!" said Captain Crewe. "I feel as if we ought to have someone to introduce us."

"You must introduce me, and I will introduce you," said Sara. "But I knew her the minute I saw her – so perhaps she knew me too."

Perhaps she had known her. She had certainly a very intelligent expression in her eyes when Sara took her in her arms. She was a large doll, but not too large to carry about easily; she had naturally curling golden-brown hair, which hung like a mantle about her, and her eyes were a deep, clear, grey-blue, with soft, thick eyelashes – which were real eyelashes and not mere painted lines.

"Of course," said Sara, looking into her face as she held her on her knee. "Of course, Papa, this is Emily."

So Emily was bought and actually taken to a children's outfitter's shop and measured for a wardrobe as grand as Sara's own. She had lace frocks, too, and velvet and muslin ones, and hats and coats and beautiful lace-trimmed underclothes, and gloves and handkerchiefs and furs.

"I should like her always to look as if she was a child with a good mother," said Sara. "I'm her mother, though I am going to make a companion of her."

Captain Crewe would really have enjoyed the shopping tremendously, but that a sad thought kept tugging at his heart. This all meant that he was going to be separated from his beloved, quaint little comrade.

He got out of his bed in the middle of that night and went and stood looking down at Sara, who lay asleep with Emily in her arms. Her black hair was spread out on the pillow, and Emily's golden-brown hair mingled with it; both of them had lace-ruffled nightgowns, and both had long eyelashes which lay and curled up on their cheeks. Emily looked so like a real child that Captain

Crewe felt glad she was there. He drew a big sigh and pulled his moustache with a boyish expression.

"Heigh-ho, little Sara!" he said to himself. "I don't believe you know how much your daddy will miss you."

The next day he took her to Miss Minchin's and left her there. He was to sail away the next morning. He explained to Miss Minchin that his solicitors, Messrs Barrow & Skipworth, had charge of his affairs in England and would give her any advice she wanted, and that they would pay the bills she sent in for Sara's expenses. He would write to Sara twice a week, and she was to be given every pleasure she asked for.

"She is a sensible little thing, and she never wants anything it isn't safe to give her," he said.

Then he went with Sara into her little sitting room, and they bade each other goodbye. Sara sat on his knee and held the lapels of his coat in her small hands, and looked long and hard at his face.

"Are you learning me by heart, little Sara?" he said, stroking her hair.

"No," she answered. "I know you by heart. You are inside my heart." And they put their arms round each other and kissed as if they would never let each other go.

When the cab drove away from the door, Sara was sitting on the floor of her sitting room with her hands under her chin and her eyes following it until it had turned the corner of the square. Emily was sitting by her, and she looked after it too. When Miss Minchin sent her sister, Miss Amelia, to see what the child was doing, she found she could not open the door.

"I have locked it," said a queer, polite little voice from inside. "I want to be quite by myself, if you please."

Miss Amelia was fat and dumpy, and stood very much in awe of her sister. She was really the better-natured person of the two, but she never disobeyed Miss Minchin. She went downstairs again, looking almost alarmed.

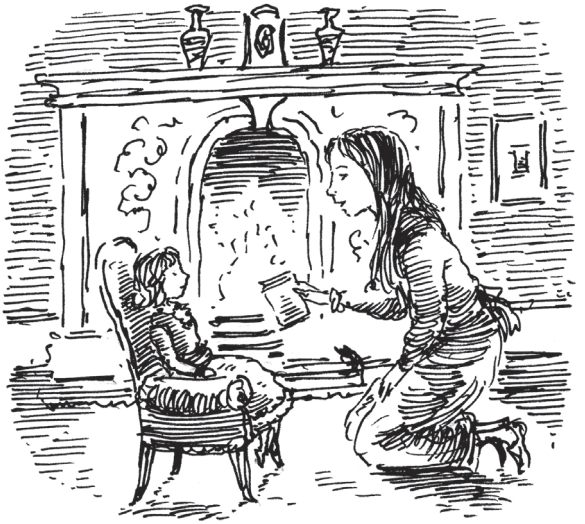
"I never saw such a funny, old-fashioned child, sister," she said. "She has locked herself in, and she is not making the least particle of noise."

"It is much better than if she kicked and screamed, as some of them do," Miss Minchin answered. "I expected that a child as much spoilt as she is would set the whole house in an uproar. If ever a child was given her own way in everything, she is."

"I've been opening her trunks and putting her things away," said Miss Amelia. "I never saw anything like them – sable and ermine on her coats, and real Valenciennes lace on her underclothing. You have seen some of her clothes. What *do* you think of them?"

"I think they are perfectly ridiculous," replied Miss Minchin sharply, "but they will look very well at the head of the line when we take the schoolchildren to church on Sunday. She has been provided for as if she were a little princess."

And upstairs in the locked room Sara and Emily sat on the floor and stared at the corner round which the cab had disappeared, while Captain Crewe looked backwards, waving and kissing his hand as if he could not bear to stop.



Chapter 2

A FRENCH LESSON

WHEN SARA ENTERED the schoolroom the next morning everybody looked at her with wide, interested eyes. By that time every pupil – from Lavinia Herbert, who was nearly thirteen and felt quite grown up, to Lottie Legh, who was only just four and the baby of the school – had heard a great deal about her. They knew very certainly that she was Miss Minchin's show pupil and was considered a credit to the establishment. One or two of them had even caught a glimpse of her French maid, Mariette, who had arrived the evening before. Lavinia had managed to pass Sara's room when the door was open, and

Chapter 5

BECKY

Of course, the greatest power Sara possessed, and the one which gained her even more followers than her luxuries and the fact that she was "the show pupil" – the power that Lavinia and certain other girls were most envious of, and at the same time most fascinated by in spite of themselves – was her power of telling stories and of making everything she talked about seem like a story, whether it was one or not.

Anyone who has been at school with a teller of stories knows what the wonder means – how he or she is followed about and besought in a whisper to relate romances; how groups gather round and hang on the outskirts of the