'Oh, don't send her away,' she sobbed. 'My aunt sent me the hamper. We're—only—having a party.'

'So I see,' said Miss Minchin, witheringly. 'With the Princess Sara at the head of the table.' She turned fiercely on Sara. 'It is your doing, I know,' she cried. 'Ermengarde would never have thought of such a thing. You decorated the table, I suppose—with this rubbish.' She stamped her foot at Becky. 'Go to your attic!' she commanded, and Becky stole away, her face hidden in her apron, her shoulders shaking.

Then it was Sara's turn again.

'I will attend to you tomorrow. You shall have neither breakfast, dinner, nor supper!'

'I have not had either dinner or supper today, Miss Minchin,' said Sara, rather faintly.

'Then all the better. You will have something to remember. Don't stand there. Put those things into the hamper again.'

She began to sweep them off the table into the hamper herself, and caught sight of Ermengarde's new books.

'And you'—to Ermengarde—'have brought your beautiful new books into this dirty attic. Take them up and go back to bed. You will stay there all day tomorrow, and I shall write to your papa. What would HE say if he knew where you are tonight?'

Something she saw in Sara's grave, fixed gaze at this moment made her turn on her fiercely.

'What are you thinking of?' she demanded. 'Why do you look at me like that?'

'I was wondering,' answered Sara, as she had answered that notable day in the schoolroom.

'What were you wondering?'

It was very like the scene in the schoolroom. There was no pertness in Sara's manner. It was only sad and quiet.

'I was wondering,' she said in a low voice, 'what MY papa would say if he knew where I am tonight.'

Miss Minchin was infuriated just as she had been before and her anger expressed itself, as before, in an intemperate fashion. She flew at her and shook her.

'You insolent, unmanageable child!' she cried. 'How dare you! How dare you!'

She picked up the books, swept the rest of the feast back into the hamper in a jumbled heap, thrust it into Ermengarde's arms, and pushed her before her toward the door.

'I will leave you to wonder,' she said. 'Go to bed this instant.' And she shut the door behind herself and poor stumbling Ermengarde, and left Sara standing quite alone.

The dream was quite at an end. The last spark had died out of the paper in the grate and left only black tinder; the table was left bare, the golden plates and richly embroidered napkins, and the garlands were transformed again into old handkerchiefs, scraps of red and white paper, and discarded artificial flowers all scattered on the floor; the minstrels in the minstrel gallery had stolen away, and the viols and bassoons were still. Emily was sitting with her back against the wall, staring very hard. Sara saw her, and went and picked her up with trembling hands.

'There isn't any banquet left, Emily,' she said. 'And there isn't any princess. There is nothing left but the prisoners in the Bastille.' And she sat down and hid her face.

What would have happened if she had not hidden it just then, and if she had chanced to look up at the skylight at the wrong moment, I do not know—perhaps the end of this chapter might have been quite different—because if she had glanced at the skylight she would certainly have been startled by what she would have seen. She would have seen exactly the same face pressed against the glass and peering in at her as it had peered in earlier in the evening when she had been talking to Ermengarde.

But she did not look up. She sat with her little black head in her arms for some time. She always sat like that when she was trying to bear something in silence. Then she got up and went slowly to the bed.

'I can't pretend anything else—while I am awake,' she said. 'There wouldn't be any use in trying. If I go to sleep, perhaps a dream will come and pretend for me.'

She suddenly felt so tired—perhaps through want of food—that she sat down on the edge of the bed quite weakly.

'Suppose there was a bright fire in the grate, with lots of little dancing flames,' she murmured. 'Suppose there was a comfortable chair before it—and suppose there was a small table near, with a little hot—hot supper on it. And suppose'—as she drew the thin coverings over her—'suppose this was a beautiful soft bed, with fleecy blankets and large downy pillows. Suppose—suppose— ' And her very weariness was good to her, for her eyes closed and she fell fast asleep.

She did not know how long she slept. But she had been tired enough to sleep deeply and profoundly—too deeply and soundly to be disturbed by anything, even by the squeaks and scamperings of Melchisedec's entire family, if all his sons and daughters had chosen to come out of their hole to fight and tumble and play.

When she awakened it was rather suddenly, and she did not know that any particular thing had called her out of her sleep. The truth was, however, that it was a sound which had called her back—a real sound—the click of the skylight as it fell in closing after a lithe white figure which slipped through it and crouched down close by upon the slates of the roof—just near enough to see what happened in the attic, but not near enough to be seen.

At first she did not open her eyes. She felt too sleepy and—curiously enough—too warm and comfortable. She was so warm and comfortable, indeed, that she did not believe she was really awake. She never was as warm and cosy as this except in some lovely vision.

'What a nice dream!' she murmured. 'I feel quite warm. I—don't—want—to—wake—up.'

Of course it was a dream. She felt as if warm, delightful bedclothes were heaped upon her. She could actually FEEL blankets, and when she put out her hand it touched something exactly like a satin-covered eider-down quilt. She must not awaken from this delight—she must be quite still and make it last.

But she could not—even though she kept her eyes closed tightly, she could not. Something was forcing her to awaken—something in the room. It was a sense of light, and a sound—the sound of a crackling, roaring little fire.

'Oh, I am awakening,' she said mournfully. 'I can't help it—I can't.'

Her eyes opened in spite of herself. And then she actually smiled—for what she saw she had never seen in the attic before, and knew she never should see.

'By the time it stops blazing,' Sara said, 'we shall forget about its not being real.'

She stood in the dancing glow and smiled.

'Doesn't it LOOK real?' she said. 'Now we will begin the party.'

She led the way to the table. She waved her hand graciously to Ermengarde and Becky. She was in the midst of her dream.

'Advance, fair damsels,' she said in her happy dream-voice, 'and be seated at the banquet table. My noble father, the king, who is absent on a long journey, has commanded me to feast you.' She turned her head slightly toward the corner of the room. 'What, ho, there, minstrels! Strike up with your viols and bassoons. Princesses,' she explained rapidly to Ermengarde and Becky, 'always had minstrels to play at their feasts. Pretend there is a minstrel gallery up there in the corner. Now we will begin.'

They had barely had time to take their pieces of cake into their hands—not one of them had time to do more, when—they all three sprang to their feet and turned pale faces toward the door—listening—listening.

Someone was coming up the stairs. There was no mistake about it. Each of them recognized the angry, mounting tread and knew that the end of all things had come.

'It's—the missus!' choked Becky, and dropped her piece of cake upon the floor.

'Yes,' said Sara, her eyes growing shocked and large in her small white face. 'Miss Minchin has found us out.'

Miss Minchin struck the door open with a blow of her hand. She was pale herself, but it was with rage. She looked from the frightened faces to the banquet table, and from the banquet table to the last flicker of the burnt paper in the grate.

'I have been suspecting something of this sort,' she exclaimed; 'but I did not dream of such audacity. Lavinia was telling the truth.'

So they knew that it was Lavinia who had somehow guessed their secret and had betrayed them. Miss Minchin strode over to Becky and boxed her ears for a second time.

'You impudent creature!' she said. 'You leave the house in the morning!'

Sara stood quite still, her eyes growing larger, her face paler. Ermengarde burst into tears.

'My eye, miss!' ejaculated Becky. 'A blanket 'all!' and she turned to view the splendours about her with awed bewilderment.

'A banquet hall,' said Sara. 'A vast chamber where feasts are given. It has a vaulted roof, and a minstrels' gallery, and a huge chimney filled with blazing oaken logs, and it is brilliant with waxen tapers twinkling on every side.'

'My eye, Miss Sara!' gasped Becky again.

Then the door opened, and Ermengarde came in, rather staggering under the weight of her hamper. She started back with an exclamation of joy. To enter from the chill darkness outside, and find one's self confronted by a totally unanticipated festal board, draped with red, adorned with white napery, and wreathed with flowers, was to feel that the preparations were brilliant indeed.

'Oh, Sara!' she cried out. 'You are the cleverest girl I ever saw!'

'Isn't it nice?' said Sara. 'They are things out of my old trunk. I asked my Magic, and it told me to go and look.'

'But oh, miss,' cried Becky, 'wait till she's told you what they are! They ain't just—oh, miss, please tell her,' appealing to Sara.

So Sara told her, and because her Magic helped her she made her ALMOST see it all: the golden platters—the vaulted spaces—the blazing logs—the twinkling waxen tapers. As the things were taken out of the hamper—the frosted cakes—the fruits—the bonbons and the wine—the feast became a splendid thing.

'It's like a real party!' cried Ermengarde.

'It's like a queen's table,' sighed Becky.

Then Ermengarde had a sudden brilliant thought.

'I'll tell you what, Sara,' she said. 'Pretend you are a princess now and this is a royal feast.'

'But it's your feast,' said Sara; 'you must be the princess, and we will be your maids of honour.'

'Oh, I can't,' said Ermengarde. 'I'm too fat, and I don't know how. YOU be her.'

'Well, if you want me to,' said Sara.

But suddenly she thought of something else and ran to the rusty grate.

'There is a lot of paper and rubbish stuffed in here!' she exclaimed. 'If we light it, there will be a bright blaze for a few minutes, and we shall feel as if it was a real fire.' She struck a match and lighted it up with a great specious glow which illuminated the room.

'Oh, I HAVEN'T awakened,' she whispered, daring to rise on her elbow and look all about her. 'I am dreaming yet.' She knew it MUST be a dream, for if she were awake such things could not—could not be.

Do you wonder that she felt sure she had not come back to earth? This is what she saw. In the grate there was a glowing, blazing fire; on the hob was a little brass kettle hissing and boiling; spread upon the floor was a thick, warm crimson rug; before the fire a folding-chair, unfolded, and with cushions on it; by the chair a small folding-table, unfolded, covered with a white cloth, and upon it spread small covered dishes, a cup, a saucer, a teapot; on the bed were new warm coverings and a satin-covered down quilt; at the foot a curious wadded silk robe, a pair of quilted slippers, and some books. The room of her dream seemed changed into fairyland—and it was flooded with warm light, for a bright lamp stood on the table covered with a rosy shade.

She sat up, resting on her elbow, and her breathing came short and fast.

'It does not—melt away,' she panted. 'Oh, I never had such a dream before.' She scarcely dared to stir; but at last she pushed the bedclothes aside, and put her feet on the floor with a rapturous smile.

'I am dreaming—I am getting out of bed,' she heard her own voice say; and then, as she stood up in the midst of it all, turning slowly from side to side—'I am dreaming it stays—real! I'm dreaming it FEELS real. It's bewitched—or I'm bewitched. I only THINK I see it all.' Her words began to hurry themselves. 'If I can only keep on thinking it,' she cried, 'I don't care! I don't care!'

She stood panting a moment longer, and then cried out again.

'Oh, it isn't true!' she said. 'It CAN'T be true! But oh, how true it seems!'

The blazing fire drew her to it, and she knelt down and held out her hands close to it—so close that the heat made her start back.

'A fire I only dreamed wouldn't be HOT,' she cried.

She sprang up, touched the table, the dishes, the rug; she went to the bed and touched the blankets. She took up the soft wadded dressing-gown, and suddenly clutched it to her breast and held it to her cheek.

'It's warm. It's soft!' she almost sobbed. 'It's real. It must be!'

She threw it over her shoulders, and put her feet into the slippers.

'They are real, too. It's all real!' she cried. 'I am NOT—I am NOT dreaming!'

She almost staggered to the books and opened the one which lay upon the top. Something was written on the flyleaf—just a few words, and they were these:

'To the little girl in the attic. From a friend.'

When she saw that—wasn't it a strange thing for her to do—she put her face down upon the page and burst into tears.

'I don't know who it is,' she said; 'but somebody cares for me a little. I have a friend.'

She took her candle and stole out of her own room and into Becky's, and stood by her bedside.

'Becky, Becky!' she whispered as loudly as she dared. 'Wake up!'

When Becky wakened, and she sat upright staring aghast, her face still smudged with traces of tears, beside her stood a little figure in a luxurious wadded robe of crimson silk. The face she saw was a shining, wonderful thing. The Princess Sara—as she remembered her—stood at her very bedside, holding a candle in her hand.

'Come,' she said. 'Oh, Becky, come!'

Becky was too frightened to speak. She simply got up and followed her, with her mouth and eyes open, and without a word.

And when they crossed the threshold, Sara shut the door gently and drew her into the warm, glowing midst of things which made her brain reel and her hungry senses faint. 'It's true! It's true!' she cried. 'I've touched them all. They are as real as we are. The Magic has come and done it, Becky, while we were asleep—the Magic that won't let those worst things EVER quite happen.'

'I was a-'pretendin',' miss,' she answered a little sheepishly; 'I was tryin' to see it like you do. I almost did,' with a hopeful grin. 'But it takes a lot o' stren'th.'

'Perhaps it does if you are not used to it,' said Sara, with friendly sympathy; 'but you don't know how easy it is when you've done it often. I wouldn't try so hard just at first. It will come to you after a while. I'll just tell you what things are. Look at these.'

She held an old summer hat in her hand which she had fished out of the bottom of the trunk. There was a wreath of flowers on it. She pulled the wreath off.

'These are garlands for the feast,' she said grandly. 'They fill all the air with perfume. There's a mug on the wash-stand, Becky. Oh—and bring the soap dish for a centrepiece.'

Becky handed them to her reverently.

'What are they now, miss?' she inquired. 'You'd think they was made of crockery—but I know they ain't.'

'This is a carven flagon,' said Sara, arranging tendrils of the wreath about the mug. 'And this'—bending tenderly over the soap dish and heaping it with roses—'is purest alabaster encrusted with gems.'

She touched the things gently, a happy smile hovering about her lips which made her look as if she were a creature in a dream.

'My, ain't it lovely!' whispered Becky.

'If we just had something for bonbon dishes,' Sara murmured. 'There!'—darting to the trunk again. 'I remember I saw something this minute.'

It was only a bundle of wool wrapped in red and white tissue paper, but the tissue paper was soon twisted into the form of little dishes, and was combined with the remaining flowers to ornament the candlestick which was to light the feast. Only the Magic could have made it more than an old table covered with a red shawl and set with rubbish from a long-unopened trunk. But Sara drew back and gazed at it, seeing wonders; and Becky, after staring in delight, spoke with bated breath.

'This 'ere,' she suggested, with a glance round the attic—'is it the Bastille now—or has it turned into somethin' different?'

'Oh, yes, yes!' said Sara. 'Quite different. It is a banquet hall!'

'Yes, miss,' answered Becky, watching her with serious rapture. She was always quite serious.

'What next, now?' said Sara, and she stood still and put her hands over her eyes. 'Something will come if I think and wait a little'—in a soft, expectant voice. 'The Magic will tell me.'

One of her favourite fancies was that on 'the outside,' as she called it, thoughts were waiting for people to call them. Becky had seen her stand and wait many a time before, and knew that in a few seconds she would uncover an enlightened, laughing face.

In a moment she did.

'There!' she cried. 'It has come! I know now! I must look among the things in the old trunk I had when I was a princess.'

She flew to its corner and kneeled down. It had not been put in the attic for her benefit, but because there was no room for it elsewhere. Nothing had been left in it but rubbish. But she knew she should find something. The Magic always arranged that kind of thing in one way or another.

In a corner lay a package so insignificant-looking that it had been overlooked, and when she herself had found it she had kept it as a relic. It contained a dozen small white handkerchiefs. She seized them joyfully and ran to the table. She began to arrange them upon the red table-cover, patting and coaxing them into shape with the narrow lace edge curling outward, her Magic working its spells for her as she did it.

'These are the plates,' she said. 'They are golden plates. These are the richly embroidered napkins. Nuns worked them in convents in Spain.'

'Did they, miss?' breathed Becky, her very soul uplifted by the information.

'You must pretend it,' said Sara. 'If you pretend it enough, you will see them.'

'Yes, miss,' said Becky; and as Sara returned to the trunk she devoted herself to the effort of accomplishing an end so much to be desired.

Sara turned suddenly to find her standing by the table, looking very queer indeed. She had shut her eyes, and was twisting her face in strange convulsive contortions, her hands hanging stiffly clenched at her sides. She looked as if she was trying to lift some enormous weight.

'What is the matter, Becky?' Sara cried. 'What are you doing?'

Becky opened her eyes with a start.

Chapter 16

The Visitor

IMAGINE, if you can, what the rest of the evening was like. How they crouched by the fire which blazed and leaped and made so much of itself in the little grate. How they removed the covers of the dishes, and found rich, hot, savoury soup, which was a meal in itself, and sandwiches and toast and muffins enough for both of them. The mug from the washstand was used as Becky's tea cup, and the tea was so delicious that it was not necessary to pretend that it was anything but tea. They were warm and full-fed and happy, and it was just like Sara that, having found her strange good fortune real, she should give herself up to the enjoyment of it to the utmost. She had lived such a life of imaginings that she was quite equal to accepting any wonderful thing that happened, and almost to cease, in a short time, to find it bewildering.

'I don't know anyone in the world who could have done it,' she said; 'but there has been someone. And here we are sitting by their fire—and—and—it's true! And whoever it is—wherever they are—I have a friend, Becky—someone is my friend.'

It cannot be denied that as they sat before the blazing fire, and ate the nourishing, comfortable food, they felt a kind of rapturous awe, and looked into each other's eyes with something like doubt.

'Do you think,' Becky faltered once, in a whisper, 'do you think it could melt away, miss? Hadn't we better be quick?' And she hastily crammed her

sandwich into her mouth. If it was only a dream, kitchen manners would be overlooked.

'No, it won't melt away,' said Sara. 'I am EATING this muffin, and I can taste it. You never really eat things in dreams. You only think you are going to eat them. Besides, I keep giving myself pinches; and I touched a hot piece of coal just now, on purpose.'

The sleepy comfort which at length almost overpowered them was a heavenly thing. It was the drowsiness of happy, well-fed childhood, and they sat in the fire glow and luxuriated in it until Sara found herself turning to look at her transformed bed.

There were even blankets enough to share with Becky. The narrow couch in the next attic was more comfortable that night than its occupant had ever dreamed that it could be.

As she went out of the room, Becky turned upon the threshold and looked about her with devouring eyes.

'If it ain't here in the mornin', miss,' she said, 'it's been here tonight, anyways, an' I shan't never forget it.' She looked at each particular thing, as if to commit it to memory. 'The fire was THERE', pointing with her finger, 'an' the table was before it; an' the lamp was there, an' the light looked rosy red; an' there was a satin cover on your bed, an' a warm rug on the floor, an' everythin' looked beautiful; an'"—she paused a second, and laid her hand on her stomach tenderly—'there WAS soup an' sandwiches an' muffins—there WAS.' And, with this conviction a reality at least, she went away.

Through the mysterious agency which works in schools and among servants, it was quite well known in the morning that Sara Crewe was in horrible disgrace, that Ermengarde was under punishment, and that Becky would have been packed out of the house before breakfast, but that a scullery maid could not be dispensed with at once. The servants knew that she was allowed to stay because Miss Minchin could not easily find another creature helpless and humble enough to work like a bounden slave for so few shillings a week. The elder girls in the schoolroom knew that if Miss Minchin did not send Sara away it was for practical reasons of her own.

'She's growing so fast and learning such a lot, somehow,' said Jessie to Lavinia, 'that she will be given classes soon, and Miss Minchin knows she will

She was in such haste that as she tiptoed out of the attic she dropped her red shawl and did not know it had fallen. No one saw it for a minute or so. Becky was too much overpowered by the good luck which had befallen her.

'Oh, miss! oh, miss!' she gasped; 'I know it was you that asked her to let me come. It—it makes me cry to think of it.' And she went to Sara's side and stood and looked at her worshipingly.

But in Sara's hungry eyes the old light had begun to glow and transform her world for her. Here in the attic—with the cold night outside—with the afternoon in the sloppy streets barely passed—with the memory of the awful unfed look in the beggar child's eyes not yet faded—this simple, cheerful thing had happened like a thing of magic.

She caught her breath.

'Somehow, something always happens,' she cried, 'just before things get to the very worst. It is as if the Magic did it. If I could only just remember that always. The worst thing never QUITE comes.'

She gave Becky a little cheerful shake.

'No, no! You mustn't cry!' she said. 'We must make haste and set the table.'

'Set the table, miss?' said Becky, gazing round the room. 'What'll we set it with?'

Sara looked round the attic, too.

'There doesn't seem to be much,' she answered, half laughing.

That moment she saw something and pounced upon it. It was Ermengarde's red shawl which lay upon the floor.

'Here's the shawl,' she cried. 'I know she won't mind it. It will make such a nice red tablecloth.'

They pulled the old table forward, and threw the shawl over it. Red is a wonderfully kind and comfortable colour. It began to make the room look furnished directly.

'How nice a red rug would look on the floor!' exclaimed Sara. 'We must pretend there is one!'

Her eye swept the bare boards with a swift glance of admiration. The rug was laid down already.

'How soft and thick it is!' she said, with the little laugh which Becky knew the meaning of; and she raised and set her foot down again delicately, as if she felt something under it.

touched it, I had so much pudding at dinner, and I was so bothered about papa's books.' Her words began to tumble over each other. 'It's got cake in it, and little meat pies, and jam tarts and buns, and oranges and red-currant wine, and figs and chocolate. I'll creep back to my room and get it this minute, and we'll eat it now.'

Sara almost reeled. When one is faint with hunger the mention of food has sometimes a curious effect. She clutched Ermengarde's arm.

'Do you think—you COULD?' she ejaculated.

'I know I could,' answered Ermengarde, and she ran to the door—opened it softly—put her head out into the darkness, and listened. Then she went back to Sara. 'The lights are out. Everybody's in bed. I can creep—and creep—and no one will hear.'

It was so delightful that they caught each other's hands and a sudden light sprang into Sara's eyes.

'Ermie!' she said. 'Let us PRETEND! Let us pretend it's a party! And oh, won't you invite the prisoner in the next cell?'

'Yes! Yes! Let us knock on the wall now. The jailer won't hear.'

Sara went to the wall. Through it she could hear poor Becky crying more softly. She knocked four times.

'That means, "Come to me through the secret passage under the wall," she explained. "I have something to communicate."'

Five quick knocks answered her.

'She is coming,' she said.

Almost immediately the door of the attic opened and Becky appeared. Her eyes were red and her cap was sliding off, and when she caught sight of Ermengarde she began to rub her face nervously with her apron.

'Don't mind me a bit, Becky!' cried Ermengarde.

'Miss Ermengarde has asked you to come in,' said Sara, 'because she is going to bring a box of good things up here to us.'

Becky's cap almost fell off entirely, she broke in with such excitement.

'To eat, miss?' she said. 'Things that's good to eat?'

'Yes,' answered Sara, 'and we are going to pretend a party.'

'And you shall have as much as you WANT to eat,' put in Ermengarde. 'I'll go this minute!'

have to work for nothing. It was rather nasty of you, Lavvy, to tell about her having fun in the garret. How did you find it out?'

'I got it out of Lottie. She's such a baby she didn't know she was telling me. There was nothing nasty at all in speaking to Miss Minchin. I felt it my duty'—priggishly. 'She was being deceitful. And it's ridiculous that she should look so grand, and be made so much of, in her rags and tatters!'

'What were they doing when Miss Minchin caught them?'

'Pretending some silly thing. Ermengarde had taken up her hamper to share with Sara and Becky. She never invites us to share things. Not that I care, but it's rather vulgar of her to share with servant girls in attics. I wonder Miss Minchin didn't turn Sara out—even if she does want her for a teacher.'

'If she was turned out where would she go?' inquired Jessie, a trifle anxiously.

'How do I know?' snapped Lavinia. 'She'll look rather queer when she comes into the schoolroom this morning, I should think—after what's happened. She had no dinner yesterday, and she's not to have any today.'

Jessie was not as ill-natured as she was silly. She picked up her book with a little jerk.

'Well, I think it's horrid,' she said. 'They've no right to starve her to death.'

When Sara went into the kitchen that morning the cook looked askance at her, and so did the housemaids; but she passed them hurriedly. She had, in fact, overslept herself a little, and as Becky had done the same, neither had had time to see the other, and each had come downstairs in haste.

Sara went into the scullery. Becky was violently scrubbing a kettle, and was actually gurgling a little song in her throat. She looked up with a wildly elated face.

'It was there when I wakened, miss—the blanket,' she whispered excitedly. 'It was as real as it was last night.'

'So was mine,' said Sara. 'It is all there now—all of it. While I was dressing I ate some of the cold things we left.'

'Oh, laws! Oh, laws!' Becky uttered the exclamation in a sort of rapturous groan, and ducked her head over her kettle just in time, as the cook came in from the kitchen.

Miss Minchin had expected to see in Sara, when she appeared in the schoolroom, very much what Lavinia had expected to see. Sara had always been an annoying puzzle to her, because severity never made her cry or look frightened.

When she was scolded she stood still and listened politely with a grave face; when she was punished she performed her extra tasks or went without her meals, making no complaint or outward sign of rebellion. The very fact that she never made an impudent answer seemed to Miss Minchin a kind of impudence in itself. But after yesterday's deprivation of meals, the violent scene of last night, the prospect of hunger today, she must surely have broken down. It would be strange indeed if she did not come downstairs with pale cheeks and red eyes and an unhappy, humbled face.

Miss Minchin saw her for the first time when she entered the schoolroom to hear the little French class recite its lessons and superintend its exercises. And she came in with a springing step, colour in her cheeks, and a smile hovering about the corners of her mouth. It was the most astonishing thing Miss Minchin had ever known. It gave her quite a shock. What was the child made of? What could such a thing mean? She called her at once to her desk.

'You do not look as if you realize that you are in disgrace,' she said. 'Are you absolutely hardened?'

The truth is that when one is still a child—or even if one is grown up—and has been well fed, and has slept long and softly and warm; when one has gone to sleep in the midst of a fairy story, and has wakened to find it real, one cannot be unhappy or even look as if one were; and one could not, if one tried, keep a glow of joy out of one's eyes. Miss Minchin was almost struck dumb by the look of Sara's eyes when she made her perfectly respectful answer.

'I beg your pardon, Miss Minchin,' she said; 'I know that I am in disgrace.'

'Be good enough not to forget it and look as if you had come into a fortune. It is an impertinence. And remember you are to have no food today.'

'Yes, Miss Minchin,' Sara answered; but as she turned away her heart leaped with the memory of what yesterday had been. 'If the Magic had not saved me just in time,' she thought, 'how horrible it would have been!'

'She can't be very hungry,' whispered Lavinia. 'Just look at her. Perhaps she is pretending she has had a good breakfast'—with a spiteful laugh.

'She's different from other people,' said Jessie, watching Sara with her class. 'Sometimes I'm a bit frightened of her.'

'Ridiculous thing!' ejaculated Lavinia.

All through the day the light was in Sara's face, and the colour in her cheek. The servants cast puzzled glances at her, and whispered to each other, and Miss

the table where the candle stood. She struck a match and lit the candle. When she had lighted it, she bent forward and looked at Sara, with her new thought growing to definite fear in her eyes.

'Sara,' she said in a timid, almost awe-stricken voice, 'are—are—you never told me—I don't want to be rude, but—are YOU ever hungry?'

It was too much just at that moment. The barrier broke down. Sara lifted her face from her hands.

'Yes,' she said in a new passionate way. 'Yes, I am. I'm so hungry now that I could almost eat you. And it makes it worse to hear poor Becky. She's hungrier than I am.'

Ermengarde gasped.

'Oh, oh!' she cried woefully. 'And I never knew!'

'I didn't want you to know,' Sara said. 'It would have made me feel like a street beggar. I know I look like a street beggar.'

'No, you don't—you don't!' Ermengarde broke in. 'Your clothes are a little queer—but you couldn't look like a street beggar. You haven't a street-beggar face.'

'A little boy once gave me a sixpence for charity,' said Sara, with a short little laugh in spite of herself. 'Here it is.' And she pulled out the thin ribbon from her neck. 'He wouldn't have given me his Christmas sixpence if I hadn't looked as if I needed it.'

Somehow the sight of the dear little sixpence was good for both of them. It made them laugh a little, though they both had tears in their eyes.

'Who was he?' asked Ermengarde, looking at it quite as if it had not been a mere ordinary silver sixpence.

'He was a darling little thing going to a party,' said Sara. 'He was one of the Large Family, the little one with the round legs—the one I call Guy Clarence. I suppose his nursery was crammed with Christmas presents and hampers full of cakes and things, and he could see I had nothing.'

Ermengarde gave a little jump backward. The last sentences had recalled something to her troubled mind and given her a sudden inspiration.

'Oh, Sara!' she cried. 'What a silly thing I am not to have thought of it!'

'Of what?'

'Something splendid!' said Ermengarde, in an excited hurry. 'This very afternoon my nicest aunt sent me a box. It is full of good things. I never