Chapter 7

The Diamond Mines Again

WHEN Sara entered the holly-hung schoolroom in the afternoon, she did so as the head of a sort of procession. Miss Minchin, in her grandest silk dress, led her by the hand. A manservant followed, carrying the box containing the Last Doll, a housemaid carried a second box, and Becky brought up the rear, carrying a third and wearing a clean apron and a new cap. Sara would have much preferred to enter in the usual way, but Miss Minchin had sent for her, and, after an interview in her private sitting room, had expressed her wishes.

'This is not an ordinary occasion,' she said. 'I do not desire that it should be treated as one.'

So Sara was led grandly in and felt shy when, on her entry, the big girls stared at her and touched each other's elbows, and the little ones began to squirm joyously in their seats.

'Silence, young ladies!' said Miss Minchin, at the murmur which arose. 'James, place the box on the table and remove the lid. Emma, put yours upon a chair. Becky!' suddenly and severely.

Becky had quite forgotten herself in her excitement, and was grinning at Lottie, who was wriggling with rapturous expectation. She almost dropped her box, the disapproving voice so startled her, and her frightened, bobbing curtsy of apology was so funny that Lavinia and Jessie tittered.

'It is not your place to look at the young ladies,' said Miss Minchin. 'You forget yourself. Put your box down.'

Becky obeyed with alarmed haste and hastily backed toward the door.

'You may leave us,' Miss Minchin announced to the servants with a wave of her hand.

Becky stepped aside respectfully to allow the superior servants to pass out first. She could not help casting a longing glance at the box on the table. Something made of blue satin was peeping from between the folds of tissue paper.

'If you please, Miss Minchin,' said Sara, suddenly, 'mayn't Becky stay?'

It was a bold thing to do. Miss Minchin was betrayed into something like a slight jump. Then she put her eyeglass up, and gazed at her show pupil disturbedly.

'Becky!' she exclaimed. 'My dearest Sara!'

Sara advanced a step toward her.

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

Miss Minchin was scandalized. She glanced from one figure to the other.

'My dear Sara,' she said, 'Becky is the scullery maid. Scullery maids—er—are not little girls.'

It really had not occurred to her to think of them in that light. Scullery maids were machines who carried coal scuttles and made fires.

'But Becky is,' said Sara. 'And I know she would enjoy herself. Please let her stay—because it is my birthday.'

Miss Minchin replied with much dignity:

'As you ask it as a birthday favour—she may stay. Rebecca, thank Miss Sara for her great kindness.'

Becky had been backing into the corner, twisting the hem of her apron in delighted suspense. She came forward, bobbing curtsies, but between Sara's eyes and her own there passed a gleam of friendly understanding, while her words tumbled over each other.

'Oh, if you please, miss! I'm that grateful, miss! I did want to see the doll, miss, that I did. Thank you, miss. And thank you, ma'am,'—turning and making an alarmed bob to Miss Minchin—'for letting me take the liberty.'

Becky gave a hysteric but joyful sniff, and her eyes looked quite moist with delight.

'It ain't nothin' but flannin, an' the flannin ain't new; but I wanted to give yer somethin' an' I made it of nights. I knew yer could PRETEND it was satin with diamond pins in. *I* tried to when I was makin' it. The card, miss,' rather doubtfully; ''t warn't wrong of me to pick it up out o' the dust-bin, was it? Miss 'Meliar had throwed it away. I hadn't no card o' my own, an' I knowed it wouldn't be a proper presink if I didn't pin a card on—so I pinned Miss 'Meliar's.'

Sara flew at her and hugged her. She could not have told herself or anyone else why there was a lump in her throat.

'Oh, Becky!' she cried out, with a queer little laugh, 'I love you, Becky—I do, I do!'

'Oh, miss!' breathed Becky. 'Thank yer, miss, kindly; it ain't good enough for that. The—the flannin wasn't new.'

which were alarming him and filling him with anxious dread, but he laughed as he had not laughed for weeks.

'Oh,' he said, 'she's better fun every year she lives. God grant this business may right itself and leave me free to run home and see her. What wouldn't I give to have her little arms round my neck this minute! What WOULDN'T I give!'

The birthday was to be celebrated by great festivities. The schoolroom was to be decorated, and there was to be a party. The boxes containing the presents were to be opened with great ceremony, and there was to be a glittering feast spread in Miss Minchin's sacred room. When the day arrived the whole house was in a whirl of excitement. How the morning passed nobody quite knew, because there seemed such preparations to be made. The schoolroom was being decked with garlands of holly; the desks had been moved away, and red covers had been put on the forms which were arrayed round the room against the wall.

When Sara went into her sitting room in the morning, she found on the table a small, dumpy package, tied up in a piece of brown paper. She knew it was a present, and she thought she could guess whom it came from. She opened it quite tenderly. It was a square pincushion, made of not quite clean red flannel, and black pins had been stuck carefully into it to form the words, 'Menny hapy returns.'

'Oh!' cried Sara, with a warm feeling in her heart. 'What pains she has taken! I like it so, it—it makes me feel sorrowful.'

But the next moment she was mystified. On the under side of the pincushion was secured a card, bearing in neat letters the name 'Miss Amelia Minchin.'

Sara turned it over and over.

'Miss Amelia!' she said to herself 'How CAN it be!'

And just at that very moment she heard the door being cautiously pushed open and saw Becky peeping round it.

There was an affectionate, happy grin on her face, and she shuffled forward and stood nervously pulling at her fingers.

'Do yer like it, Miss Sara?' she said. 'Do yer?'

'Like it?' cried Sara. 'You darling Becky, you made it all yourself.'

Miss Minchin waved her hand again—this time it was in the direction of the corner near the door.

'Go and stand there,' she commanded. 'Not too near the young ladies.'

Becky went to her place, grinning. She did not care where she was sent, so that she might have the luck of being inside the room, instead of being downstairs in the scullery, while these delights were going on. She did not even mind when Miss Minchin cleared her throat ominously and spoke again.

'Now, young ladies, I have a few words to say to you,' she announced.

'She's going to make a speech,' whispered one of the girls. 'I wish it was over.'

Sara felt rather uncomfortable. As this was her party, it was probable that the speech was about her. It is not agreeable to stand in a schoolroom and have a speech made about you.

'You are aware, young ladies,' the speech began—for it was a speech—'that dear Sara is eleven years old today.'

'DEAR Sara!' murmured Lavinia.

'Several of you here have also been eleven years old, but Sara's birthdays are rather different from other little girls' birthdays. When she is older she will be heiress to a large fortune, which it will be her duty to spend in a meritorious manner.'

'The diamond mines,' giggled Jessie, in a whisper.

Sara did not hear her; but as she stood with her green-gray eyes fixed steadily on Miss Minchin, she felt herself growing rather hot. When Miss Minchin talked about money, she felt somehow that she always hated her—and, of course, it was disrespectful to hate grown-up people.

'When her dear papa, Captain Crewe, brought her from India and gave her into my care,' the speech proceeded, 'he said to me, in a jesting way, "I am afraid she will be very rich, Miss Minchin." My reply was, "Her education at my seminary, Captain Crewe, shall be such as will adorn the largest fortune." Sara has become my most accomplished pupil. Her French and her dancing are a credit to the seminary. Her manners—which have caused you to call her Princess Sara—are perfect. Her amiability she exhibits by giving you this afternoon's party. I hope you appreciate her generosity. I wish you to express your appreciation of it by saying aloud all together, "'Thank you, Sara!"'

The entire schoolroom rose to its feet as it had done the morning Sara remembered so well.

'Thank you, Sara!' it said, and it must be confessed that Lottie jumped up and down. Sara looked rather shy for a moment. She made a curtsy—and it was a very nice one.

'Thank you,' she said, 'for coming to my party.'

'Very pretty, indeed, Sara,' approved Miss Minchin. 'That is what a real princess does when the populace applauds her. Lavinia'—scathingly—'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 lady-like manner. Now I will leave you to enjoy yourselves.'

The instant she had swept out of the room the spell her presence always had upon them was broken. The door had scarcely closed before every seat was empty. The little girls jumped or tumbled out of theirs; the older ones wasted no time in deserting theirs. There was a rush toward the boxes. Sara had bent over one of them with a delighted face.

'These are books, I know,' she said.

The little children broke into a rueful murmur, and Ermengarde looked aghast.

'Does your papa send you books for a birthday present?' she exclaimed. 'Why, he's as bad as mine. Don't open them, Sara.'

'I like them,' Sara laughed, but she turned to the biggest box. When she took out the Last Doll it was so magnificent that the children uttered delighted groans of joy, and actually drew back to gaze at it in breathless rapture.

'She is almost as big as Lottie,' someone gasped.

Lottie clapped her hands and danced about, giggling.

'She's dressed for the theatre,' said Lavinia. 'Her cloak is lined with ermine.'

'Oh,' cried Ermengarde, darting forward, 'she has an opera-glass in her hand—a blue-and-gold one!'

'Here is her trunk,' said Sara. 'Let us open it and look at her things.'

She sat down upon the floor and turned the key. The children crowded clamouring around her, as she lifted tray after tray and revealed their contents. Never had the schoolroom been in such an uproar. There were lace collars and silk stockings and handkerchiefs; there was a jewel case containing a necklace and a tiara which looked quite as if they were made of real diamonds; there

least idea what she meant to poor Becky, and how wonderful a benefactor she seemed. If Nature has made you for a giver, your hands are born open, and so is your heart; and though there may be times when your hands are empty, your heart is always full, and you can give things out of that—warm things, kind things, sweet things—help and comfort and laughter—and sometimes gay, kind laughter is the best help of all.

Becky had scarcely known what laughter was through all her poor, little hard-driven life. Sara made her laugh, and laughed with her; and, though neither of them quite knew it, the laughter was as 'fillin'' as the meat pies.

A few weeks before Sara's eleventh birthday a letter came to her from her father, which did not seem to be written in such boyish high spirits as usual. He was not very well, and was evidently overweighted by the business connected with the diamond mines.

'You see, little Sara,' he wrote, '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 I should not be awake, tossing about, one half of the night and spend the other half in troublesome dreams. If my little missus were here, I dare say she would give me some solemn, good advice. You would, wouldn't you, Little Missus?'

One of his many jokes had been to call her his 'little missus' because she had such an old-fashioned air.

He had made wonderful preparations for her birthday. Among other things, a new doll had been ordered in Paris, and her wardrobe was to be, indeed, a marvel of splendid perfection. When she had replied to the letter asking her if the doll would be an acceptable present, Sara had been very quaint.

'I am getting very old,' she wrote; 'you see, I shall never live to have another doll given me. This will be my last doll. There is something solemn about it. If I could write poetry, I am sure a poem about "A Last Doll" would be very nice. But I cannot write poetry. I have tried, and it made me laugh. It did not sound like Watts or Coleridge or Shakespeare at all. No one could ever take Emily's place, but I should respect the Last Doll very much; and I am sure the school would love it. They all like dolls, though some of the big ones—the almost fifteen ones—pretend they are too grown up.'

Captain Crewe had a splitting headache when he read this letter in his bungalow in India. The table before him was heaped with papers and letters

'Lots of 'em, miss,' Becky answered in quite a matter-of-fact manner. 'There mostly is rats an' mice in attics. You gets used to the noise they makes scuttling about. I've got so I don't mind 'em s' long as they don't run over my piller.'

'Ugh!' said Sara.

'You gets used to anythin' after a bit,' said Becky. 'You have to, miss, if you're born a scullery maid. I'd rather have rats than cockroaches.'

'So would I,' said Sara; 'I suppose you might make friends with a rat in time, but I don't believe I should like to make friends with a cockroach.'

Sometimes Becky did not dare to spend more than a few minutes in the bright, warm room, and when this was the case perhaps only a few words could be exchanged, and a small purchase slipped into the old-fashioned pocket Becky carried under her dress skirt, tied round her waist with a band of tape. The search for and discovery of satisfying things to eat which could be packed into small compass, added a new interest to Sara's existence. When she drove or walked out, she used to look into shop windows eagerly. The first time it occurred to her to bring home two or three little meat pies, she felt that she had hit upon a discovery. When she exhibited them, Becky's eyes quite sparkled.

'Oh, miss!' she murmured. 'Them will be nice an' fillin.' It's fillin'ness that's best. Sponge cake's a 'evenly thing, but it melts away like—if you understand, miss. These'll just STAY in yer stummick.'

'Well,' hesitated Sara, 'I don't think it would be good if they stayed always, but I do believe they will be satisfying.'

They were satisfying—and so were beef sandwiches, bought at a cook-shop—and so were rolls and Bologna sausage. In time, Becky began to lose her hungry, tired feeling, and the coal box did not seem so unbearably heavy.

However heavy it was, and whatsoever the temper of the cook, and the hardness of the work heaped upon her shoulders, she had always the chance of the afternoon to look forward to—the chance that Miss Sara would be able to be in her sitting room. In fact, the mere seeing of Miss Sara would have been enough without meat pies. If there was time only for a few words, they were always friendly, merry words that put heart into one; and if there was time for more, then there was an instalment of a story to be told, or some other thing one remembered afterward and sometimes lay awake in one's bed in the attic to think over. Sara—who was only doing what she unconsciously liked better than anything else, Nature having made her for a giver—had not the

was a long sealskin and muff, there were ball dresses and walking dresses and visiting dresses; there were hats and tea gowns and fans. Even Lavinia and Jessie forgot that they were too elderly to care for dolls, and uttered exclamations of delight and caught up things to look at them.

'Suppose,' Sara said, as she stood by the table, putting a large, black-velvet hat on the impassively smiling owner of all these splendours—'suppose she understands human talk and feels proud of being admired.'

'You are always supposing things,' said Lavinia, and her air was very superior.

'I know I am,' answered Sara, undisturbedly. 'I like it. There is nothing so nice as supposing. It's almost like being a fairy. If you suppose anything hard enough it seems as if it were real.'

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

Sara stopped arranging the Last Doll's ostrich plumes, and looked thoughtful.

'I BELIEVE I could,' she said. 'If one was a beggar, one would have to suppose and pretend all the time. But it mightn't be easy.'

She often thought afterward how strange it was that just as she had finished saying this—just at that very moment—Miss Amelia came into the room.

'Sara,' she said, 'your papa's solicitor, Mr Barrow, has called to see Miss Minchin, and, as she must talk to him alone and the refreshments are laid in her parlour, you had all better come and have your feast now, so that my sister can have her interview here in the schoolroom.'

Refreshments were not likely to be disdained at any hour, and many pairs of eyes gleamed. Miss Amelia arranged the procession into decorum, and then, with Sara at her side heading it, she led it away, leaving the Last Doll sitting upon a chair with the glories of her wardrobe scattered about her; dresses and coats hung upon chair backs, piles of lace-frilled petticoats lying upon their seats.

Becky, who was not expected to partake of refreshments, had the indiscretion to linger a moment to look at these beauties—it really was an indiscretion.

'Go back to your work, Becky,' Miss Amelia had said; but she had stopped to pick up reverently first a muff and then a coat, and while she stood looking at them adoringly, she heard Miss Minchin upon the threshold, and, being

smitten with terror at the thought of being accused of taking liberties, she rashly darted under the table, which hid her by its tablecloth.

Miss Minchin came into the room, accompanied by a sharp-featured, dry little gentleman, who looked rather disturbed. Miss Minchin herself also looked rather disturbed, it must be admitted, and she gazed at the dry little gentleman with an irritated and puzzled expression.

She sat down with stiff dignity, and waved him to a chair.

'Pray, be seated, Mr Barrow,' she said.

Mr Barrow did not sit down at once. His attention seemed attracted by the Last Doll and the things which surrounded her. He settled his eyeglasses and looked at them in nervous disapproval. The Last Doll herself did not seem to mind this in the least. She merely sat upright and returned his gaze indifferently.

'A hundred pounds,' Mr Barrow remarked succinctly. 'All expensive material, and made at a Parisian modiste's. He spent money lavishly enough, that young man.'

Miss Minchin felt offended. This seemed to be a disparagement of her best patron and was a liberty.

Even solicitors had no right to take liberties.

'I beg your pardon, Mr Barrow,' she said stiffly. 'I do not understand.'

'Birthday presents,' said Mr Barrow in the same critical manner, 'to a child eleven years old! Mad extravagance, I call it.'

Miss Minchin drew herself up still more rigidly.

'Captain Crewe is a man of fortune,' she said. 'The diamond mines alone— '

Mr Barrow wheeled round upon her. 'Diamond mines!' he broke out. 'There are none! Never were!'

Miss Minchin actually got up from her chair.

'What!' she cried. 'What do you mean?'

'At any rate,' answered Mr Barrow, quite snappishly, 'it would have been much better if there never had been any.'

'Any diamond mines?' ejaculated Miss Minchin, catching at the back of a chair and feeling as if a splendid dream was fading away from her.

'Diamond mines spell ruin oftener than they spell wealth,' said Mr Barrow. 'When a man is in the hands of a very dear friend and is not a businessman himself, he had better steer clear of the dear friend's diamond mines, or gold

'It's true,' she said. 'Sometimes I do pretend I am a princess. I pretend I am a princess, so that I can try and behave like one.'

Lavinia could not think of exactly the right thing to say. Several times she had found that she could not think of a satisfactory reply when she was dealing with Sara. The reason for this was that, somehow, the rest always seemed to be vaguely in sympathy with her opponent. She saw now that they were pricking up their ears interestedly. The truth was, they liked princesses, and they all hoped they might hear something more definite about this one, and drew nearer Sara accordingly.

Lavinia could only invent one remark, and it fell rather flat.

'Dear me,' she said, 'I hope, when you ascend the throne, you won't forget us!'

'I won't,' said Sara, and she did not utter another word, but stood quite still, and stared at her steadily as she saw her take Jessie's arm and turn away.

After this, the girls who were jealous of her used to speak of her as 'Princess Sara' whenever they wished to be particularly disdainful, and those who were fond of her gave her the name among themselves as a term of affection. No one called her 'princess' instead of 'Sara,' but her adorers were much pleased with the picturesqueness and grandeur of the title, and Miss Minchin, hearing of it, mentioned it more than once to visiting parents, feeling that it rather suggested a sort of royal boarding school.

To Becky it seemed the most appropriate thing in the world. The acquaintance begun on the foggy afternoon when she had jumped up terrified from her sleep in the comfortable chair, had ripened and grown, though it must be confessed that Miss Minchin and Miss Amelia knew very little about it. They were aware that Sara was 'kind' to the scullery maid, but they knew nothing of certain delightful moments snatched perilously when, the upstairs rooms being set in order with lightning rapidity, Sara's sitting room was reached, and the heavy coal box set down with a sigh of joy. At such times stories were told by instalments, things of a satisfying nature were either produced and eaten or hastily tucked into pockets to be disposed of at night, when Becky went upstairs to her attic to bed.

'But I has to eat 'em careful, miss,' she said once; ''cos if I leaves crumbs the rats come out to get 'em.'

'Rats!' exclaimed Sara, in horror. 'Are there RATS there?'

'But if you cry, you will be one, Lottie pet. You PROMISED.' Lottie remembered that she had promised, but she preferred to lift up her voice.

'I haven't any mamma,' she proclaimed. 'I haven't—a bit—of mamma.'

'Yes, you have,' said Sara, cheerfully. 'Have you forgotten? Don't you know that Sara is your mamma? Don't you want Sara for your mamma?'

Lottie cuddled up to her with a consoled sniff.

'Come and sit in the window-seat with me,' Sara went on, 'and I'll whisper a story to you.'

'Will you?' whimpered Lottie. 'Will you—tell me—about the diamond mines?'

'The diamond mines?' broke out Lavinia. 'Nasty, little spoiled thing, I should like to SLAP her!'

Sara got up quickly on her feet. It must be remembered that she had been very deeply absorbed in the book about the Bastille, and she had had to recall several things rapidly when she realized that she must go and take care of her adopted child. She was not an angel, and she was not fond of Lavinia.

'Well,' she said, with some fire, 'I should like to slap YOU—but I don't want to slap you!' restraining herself. 'At least I both want to slap you—and I should LIKE to slap you—but I WON'T slap you. We are not little gutter children. We are both old enough to know better.'

Here was Lavinia's opportunity.

'Ah, yes, your royal highness,' she said. 'We are princesses, I believe. At least one of us is. The school ought to be very fashionable now Miss Minchin has a princess for a pupil.'

Sara started toward her. She looked as if she were going to box her ears. Perhaps she was. Her trick of pretending things was the joy of her life. She never spoke of it to girls she was not fond of. Her new 'pretend' about being a princess was very near to her heart, and she was shy and sensitive about it. She had meant it to be rather a secret, and here was Lavinia deriding it before nearly all the school. She felt the blood rush up into her face and tingle in her ears. She only just saved herself. If you were a princess, you did not fly into rages. Her hand dropped, and she stood quite still a moment. When she spoke it was in a quiet, steady voice; she held her head up, and everybody listened to her.

mines, or any other kind of mines dear friends want his money to put into. The late Captain Crewe— '

Here Miss Minchin stopped him with a gasp.

'The LATE Captain Crewe!' she cried out. 'The LATE! You don't come to tell me that Captain Crewe is— '

'He's dead, ma'am,' Mr Barrow answered with jerky brusqueness. 'Died of jungle fever and business troubles combined. The jungle fever might not have killed him if he had not been driven mad by the business troubles, and the business troubles might not have put an end to him if the jungle fever had not assisted. Captain Crewe is dead!'

Miss Minchin dropped into her chair again. The words he had spoken filled her with alarm.

'What WERE his business troubles?' she said. 'What WERE they?'

'Diamond mines,' answered Mr Barrow, 'and dear friends—and ruin.'

Miss Minchin lost her breath.

'Ruin!' she gasped out.

'Lost every penny. That young man had too much money. The dear friend was mad on the subject of the diamond mine. He put all his own money into it, and all Captain Crewe's. Then the dear friend ran away—Captain Crewe was already stricken with fever when the news came. The shock was too much for him. He died delirious, raving about his little girl—and didn't leave a penny.'

Now Miss Minchin understood, and never had she received such a blow in her life. Her show pupil, her show patron, swept away from the Select Seminary at one blow. She felt as if she had been outraged and robbed, and that Captain Crewe and Sara and Mr Barrow were equally to blame.

'Do you mean to tell me,' she cried out, 'that he left NOTHING! That Sara will have no fortune! That the child is a beggar! That she is left on my hands a little pauper instead of an heiress?'

Mr Barrow was a shrewd businessman, and felt it as well to make his own freedom from responsibility quite clear without any delay.

'She is certainly left a beggar,' he replied. '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 started forward. She looked as if she was going to open the door and rush out of the room to stop the festivities going on joyfully and rather noisily that moment over the refreshments.

'It is monstrous!' she said. 'She's in my sitting room at this moment, dressed in silk gauze and lace petticoats, giving a party at my expense.'

'She's giving it at your expense, madam, if she's giving it,' said Mr Barrow, calmly. 'Barrow & Skipworth are not responsible for anything. There never was a cleaner sweep made of a man's fortune. Captain Crewe died without paying OUR last bill—and it was a big one.'

Miss Minchin turned back from the door in increased indignation. This was worse than anyone could have dreamed of its being.

'That is what has happened to me!' she cried. 'I was always so sure of his payments that I went to all sorts of ridiculous expenses for the child. I paid the bills for that ridiculous doll and her ridiculous fantastic wardrobe. The child was to have anything she wanted. She has a carriage and a pony and a maid, and I've paid for all of them since the last cheque came.'

Mr Barrow evidently did not intend to remain to listen to the story of Miss Minchin's grievances after he had made the position of his firm clear and related the mere dry facts. He did not feel any particular sympathy for irate keepers of boarding schools.

'You had better not pay for anything more, ma'am,' he remarked, 'unless you want to make presents to the young lady. No one will remember you. She hasn't a brass farthing to call her own.'

'But what am I to do?' demanded Miss Minchin, as if she felt it entirely his duty to make the matter right. 'What am I to do?'

'There isn't anything to do,' said Mr Barrow, folding up his eyeglasses and slipping them into his pocket. 'Captain Crewe is dead. The child is left a pauper. Nobody is responsible for her but you.'

'I am not responsible for her, and I refuse to be made responsible!'

Miss Minchin became quite white with rage.

Mr Barrow turned to go.

'I have nothing to do with that, madam,' he said uninterestedly. 'Barrow & Skipworth are not responsible. Very sorry the thing has happened, of course.'

It happened that Lottie had been seized with a sudden desire to play in the schoolroom, and had begged her adopted parent to come with her. She joined a group of little ones who were playing in a corner. Sara curled herself up in the window-seat, opened a book, and began to read. It was a book about the French Revolution, and she was soon lost in a harrowing picture of the prisoners in the Bastille—men who had spent so many years in dungeons that when they were dragged out by those who rescued them, their long, gray hair and beards almost hid their faces, and they had forgotten that an outside world existed at all, and were like beings in a dream.

She was so far away from the schoolroom that it was not agreeable to be dragged back suddenly by a howl from Lottie. Never did she find anything so difficult as to keep herself from losing her temper when she was suddenly disturbed while absorbed in a book. People who are fond of books know the feeling of irritation which sweeps over them at such a moment. The temptation to be unreasonable and snappish is one not easy to manage.

'It makes me feel as if someone had hit me,' Sara had told Ermengarde once in confidence. 'And as if I want to hit back. I have to remember things quickly to keep from saying something ill-tempered.'

She had to remember things quickly when she laid her book on the window-seat and jumped down from her comfortable corner.

Lottie had been sliding across the schoolroom floor, and, having first irritated Lavinia and Jessie by making a noise, had ended by falling down and hurting her fat knee. She was screaming and dancing up and down in the midst of a group of friends and enemies, who were alternately coaxing and scolding her.

'Stop this minute, you cry-baby! Stop this minute!' Lavinia commanded.

'I'm not a cry-baby ... I'm not!' wailed Lottie. 'Sara, Sa—ra!'

'If she doesn't stop, Miss Minchin will hear her,' cried Jessie. 'Lottie darling, I'll give you a penny!'

'I don't want your penny,' sobbed Lottie; and she looked down at the fat knee, and, seeing a drop of blood on it, burst forth again.

Sara flew across the room and, kneeling down, put her arms round her.

'Now, Lottie,' she said. 'Now, Lottie, you PROMISED Sara.'

'She said I was a cry-baby,' wept Lottie.

Sara patted her, but spoke in the steady voice Lottie knew.