stood my ground if I had not been responsible for other people's money as well as my own. Poor Crewe had put into the scheme every penny that he owned. He trusted me—he LOVED me. And he died thinking I had ruined him—I—Tom Carrisford, who played cricket at Eton with him. What a villain he must have thought me!'

'Don't reproach yourself so bitterly.'

'I don't reproach myself because the speculation threatened to fail—I reproach myself for losing my courage. I ran away like a swindler and a thief, because I could not face my best friend and tell him I had ruined him and his child.'

The good-hearted father of the Large Family put his hand on his shoulder comfortingly.

'You ran away because your brain had given way under the strain of mental torture,' he said. 'You were half delirious already. If you had not been you would have stayed and fought it out. You were in a hospital, strapped down in bed, raving with brain fever, two days after you left the place. Remember that.'

Carrisford dropped his forehead in his hands.

'Good God! Yes,' he said. 'I was driven mad with dread and horror. I had not slept for weeks. The night I staggered out of my house all the air seemed full of hideous things mocking and mouthing at me.'

'That is explanation enough in itself,' said Mr Carmichael. 'How could a man on the verge of brain fever judge sanely!'

Carrisford shook his drooping head.

'And when I returned to consciousness poor Crewe was dead—and buried. And I seemed to remember nothing. I did not remember the child for months and months. Even when I began to recall her existence everything seemed in a sort of haze.'

He stopped a moment and rubbed his forehead. 'It sometimes seems so now when I try to remember. Surely I must sometime have heard Crewe speak of the school she was sent to. Don't you think so?'

'He might not have spoken of it definitely. You never seem even to have heard her real name.'

'He used to call her by an odd pet name he had invented. He called her his "Little Missus." But the wretched mines drove everything else out of

our heads. We talked of nothing else. If he spoke of the school, I forgot—I forgot. And now I shall never remember.'

'Come, come,' said Carmichael. 'We shall find her yet. We will continue to search for Madame Pascal's good-natured Russians. She seemed to have a vague idea that they lived in Moscow. We will take that as a clue. I will go to Moscow.'

'If I were able to travel, I would go with you,' said Carrisford; 'but I can only sit here wrapped in furs and stare at the fire. And when I look into it I seem to see Crewe's gay young face gazing back at me. He looks as if he were asking me a question. Sometimes I dream of him at night, and he always stands before me and asks the same question in words. Can you guess what he says, Carmichael?'

Mr Carmichael answered him in a rather low voice.

'Not exactly,' he said.

'He always says, "Tom, old man—Tom—where is the Little Missus?"' He caught at Carmichael's hand and clung to it. "I must be able to answer him—I must!" he said. "Help me to find her. Help me.'

On the other side of the wall Sara was sitting in her garret talking to Melchisedec, who had come out for his evening meal.

'It has been hard to be a princess today, Melchisedec,' she said. 'It has been harder than usual. It gets harder as the weather grows colder and the streets get more sloppy. When Lavinia laughed at my muddy skirt as I passed her in the hall, I thought of something to say all in a flash—and I only just stopped myself in time. You can't sneer back at people like that—if you are a princess. But you have to bite your tongue to hold yourself in. I bit mine. It was a cold afternoon, Melchisedec. And it's a cold night.'

Quite suddenly she put her black head down in her arms, as she often did when she was alone.

'Oh, papa,' she whispered, 'what a long time it seems since I was your "Little Missus"!'

This was what happened that day on both sides of the wall.

'Madame Pascal pronounced it as if it were Carew instead of Crewe—but that might be merely a matter of pronunciation. The circumstances were curiously similar. An English officer in India had placed his motherless little girl at the school. He had died suddenly after losing his fortune.' Mr Carmichael paused a moment, as if a new thought had occurred to him. 'Are you SURE the child was left at a school in Paris? Are you sure it was Paris?'

'My dear fellow,' broke forth Carrisford, with restless bitterness, 'I am SURE of nothing. I never saw either the child or her mother. Ralph Crewe and I loved each other as boys, but we had not met since our school days, until we met in India. I was absorbed in the magnificent promise of the mines. He became absorbed, too. The whole thing was so huge and glittering that we half lost our heads. When we met we scarcely spoke of anything else. I only knew that the child had been sent to school somewhere. I do not even remember, now, HOW I knew it.'

He was beginning to be excited. He always became excited when his still weakened brain was stirred by memories of the catastrophes of the past.

Mr Carmichael watched him anxiously. It was necessary to ask some questions, but they must be put quietly and with caution.

'But you had reason to think the school WAS in Paris?'

'Yes,' was the answer, 'because her mother was a Frenchwoman, and I had heard that she wished her child to be educated in Paris. It seemed only likely that she would be there.'

'Yes,' Mr Carmichael said, 'it seems more than probable.'

The Indian gentleman leaned forward and struck the table with a long, wasted hand.

'Carmichael,' he said, 'I MUST find her. If she is alive, she is somewhere. If she is friendless and penniless, it is through my fault. How is a man to get back his nerve with a thing like that on his mind? This sudden change of luck at the mines has made realities of all our most fantastic dreams, and poor Crewe's child may be begging in the street!'

'No, no,' said Carmichael. 'Try to be calm. Console yourself with the fact that when she is found you have a fortune to hand over to her.'

'Why was I not man enough to stand my ground when things looked black?' Carrisford groaned in petulant misery. 'I believe I should have

'Carmichael,' he said to the father of the Large Family, after he had heard this description, 'I wonder how many of the attics in this square are like that one, and how many wretched little servant girls sleep on such beds, while I toss on my down pillows, loaded and harassed by wealth that is, most of it—not mine.'

'My dear fellow,' Mr Carmichael answered cheerily, 'the sooner you cease tormenting yourself the better it will be for you. If you possessed all the wealth of all the Indies, you could not set right all the discomforts in the world, and if you began to refurnish all the attics in this square, there would still remain all the attics in all the other squares and streets to put in order. And there you are!'

Mr Carrisford sat and bit his nails as he looked into the glowing bed of coals in the grate.

'Do you suppose,' he said slowly, after a pause—'do you think it is possible that the other child—the child I never cease thinking of, I believe—could be—could POSSIBLY be reduced to any such condition as the poor little soul next door?'

Mr Carmichael looked at him uneasily. He knew that the worst thing the man could do for himself, for his reason and his health, was to begin to think in the particular way of this particular subject.

'If the child at Madame Pascal's school in Paris was the one you are in search of,' he answered soothingly, 'she would seem to be in the hands of people who can afford to take care of her. They adopted her because she had been the favourite companion of their little daughter who died. They had no other children, and Madame Pascal said that they were extremely well-to-do Russians.'

'And the wretched woman actually did not know where they had taken her!' exclaimed Mr Carrisford.

Mr Carmichael shrugged his shoulders.

'She was a shrewd, worldly Frenchwoman, and was evidently only too glad to get the child so comfortably off her hands when the father's death left her totally unprovided for. Women of her type do not trouble themselves about the futures of children who might prove burdens. The adopted parents apparently disappeared and left no trace.'

'But you say "IF" the child was the one I am in search of. You say "if." We are not sure. There was a difference in the name.'

Chapter 13

One of the Populace

THE winter was a wretched one. There were days on which Sara tramped through snow when she went on her errands; there were worse days when the snow melted and combined itself with mud to form slush; there were others when the fog was so thick that the lamps in the street were lighted all day and London looked as it had looked the afternoon, several years ago, when the cab had driven through the thoroughfares with Sara tucked up on its seat, leaning against her father's shoulder. On such days the windows of the house of the Large Family always looked delightfully cosy and alluring, and the study in which the Indian gentleman sat glowed with warmth and rich colour. But the attic was dismal beyond words. There were no longer sunsets or sunrises to look at, and scarcely ever any stars, it seemed to Sara. The clouds hung low over the skylight and were either gray or mud-colour, or dropping heavy rain. At four o'clock in the afternoon, even when there was no special fog, the daylight was at an end. If it was necessary to go to her attic for anything, Sara was obliged to light a candle. The women in the kitchen were depressed, and that made them more ill-tempered than ever. Becky was driven like a little slave.

''Twarn't for you, miss,' she said hoarsely to Sara one night when she had crept into the attic—''twarn't for you, an' the Bastille, an' bein' the prisoner in the next cell, I should die. That there does seem real now, doesn't it? The missus is more like the head jailer every day she lives. I

can jest see them big keys you say she carries. The cook she's like one of the under-jailers. Tell me some more, please, miss—tell me about the subt'ranean passage we've dug under the walls.'

'I'll tell you something warmer,' shivered Sara. 'Get your coverlet and wrap it round you, and I'll get mine, and we will huddle close together on the bed, and I'll tell you about the tropical forest where the Indian gentleman's monkey used to live. When I see him sitting on the table near the window and looking out into the street with that mournful expression, I always feel sure he is thinking about the tropical forest where he used to swing by his tail from coconut trees. I wonder who caught him, and if he left a family behind who had depended on him for coconuts.'

'That is warmer, miss,' said Becky, gratefully; 'but, someways, even the Bastille is sort of heatin' when you gets to tellin' about it.'

'That is because it makes you think of something else,' said Sara, wrapping the coverlet round her until only her small dark face was to be seen looking out of it. 'I've noticed this. What you have to do with your mind, when your body is miserable, is to make it think of something else.'

'Can you do it, miss?' faltered Becky, regarding her with admiring eyes.

Sara knitted her brows a moment.

'Sometimes I can and sometimes I can't,' she said stoutly. 'But when I CAN I'm all right. And what I believe is that we always could—if we practised enough. I've been practising a good deal lately, and it's beginning to be easier than it used to be. When things are horrible—just horrible—I think as hard as ever I can of being a princess. I say to myself, "I am a princess, and I am a fairy one, and because I am a fairy nothing can hurt me or make me uncomfortable." You don't know how it makes you forget'—with a laugh.

She had many opportunities of making her mind think of something else, and many opportunities of proving to herself whether or not she was a princess. But one of the strongest tests she was ever put to came on a certain dreadful day which, she often thought afterward, would never quite fade out of her memory even in the years to come.

For several days it had rained continuously; the streets were chilly and sloppy and full of dreary, cold mist; there was mud everywhere—sticky London mud—and over everything the pall of drizzle and fog. Of course there were several long and tiresome errands to be done—there always

somehow as he sat alone in his armchair by the fire, nearly always in a great dressing gown, and nearly always with his forehead resting in his hand as he gazed hopelessly into the fire. He looked to Sara like a man who had a trouble on his mind still, not merely like one whose troubles lay all in the past.

'He always seems as if he were thinking of something that hurts him NOW,' she said to herself, 'but he has got his money back and he will get over his brain fever in time, so he ought not to look like that. I wonder if there is something else.'

If there was something else—something even servants did not hear of—she could not help believing that the father of the Large Family knew it—the gentleman she called Mr Montmorency. Mr Montmorency went to see him often, and Mrs Montmorency and all the little Montmorencys went, too, though less often. He seemed particularly fond of the two elder little girls—the Janet and Nora who had been so alarmed when their small brother Donald had given Sara his sixpence. He had, in fact, a very tender place in his heart for all children, and particularly for little girls. Janet and Nora were as fond of him as he was of them, and looked forward with the greatest pleasure to the afternoons when they were allowed to cross the square and make their well-behaved little visits to him. They were extremely decorous little visits because he was an invalid.

'He is a poor thing,' said Janet, 'and he says we cheer him up. We try to cheer him up very quietly.'

Janet was the head of the family, and kept the rest of it in order. It was she who decided when it was discreet to ask the Indian gentleman to tell stories about India, and it was she who saw when he was tired and it was the time to steal quietly away and tell Ram Dass to go to him. They were very fond of Ram Dass. He could have told any number of stories if he had been able to speak anything but Hindustani. The Indian gentleman's real name was Mr Carrisford, and Janet told Mr Carrisford about the encounter with the little-girl-who-was-not-a-beggar. He was very much interested, and all the more so when he heard from Ram Dass of the adventure of the monkey on the roof. Ram Dass made for him a very clear picture of the attic and its desolateness—of the bare floor and broken plaster, the rusty, empty grate, and the hard, narrow bed.

'People you never speak to can't ask you questions like that,' she said; 'and I'm sure the Indian gentleman wouldn't even if he was quite intimate with you. I am fond of him.'

She had become fond of the Large Family because they looked happy; but she had become fond of the Indian gentleman because he looked unhappy. He had evidently not fully recovered from some very severe illness. In the kitchen—where, of course, the servants, through some mysterious means, knew everything—there was much discussion of his case. He was not an Indian gentleman really, but an Englishman who had lived in India. He had met with great misfortunes which had for a time so imperilled his whole fortune that he had thought himself ruined and disgraced forever. The shock had been so great that he had almost died of brain fever; and ever since he had been shattered in health, though his fortunes had changed and all his possessions had been restored to him. His trouble and peril had been connected with mines.

'And mines with diamonds in 'em!' said the cook. 'No savin's of mine never goes into no mines—particular diamond ones'—with a side glance at Sara. 'We all know somethin' of THEM.'

'He felt as my papa felt,' Sara thought. 'He was ill as my papa was; but he did not die.'

So her heart was more drawn to him than before. When she was sent out at night she used sometimes to feel quite glad, because there was always a chance that the curtains of the house next door might not yet be closed and she could look into the warm room and see her adopted friend. When no one was about she used sometimes to stop, and, holding to the iron railings, wish him good night as if he could hear her.

'Perhaps you can FEEL if you can't hear,' was her fancy. 'Perhaps kind thoughts reach people somehow, even through windows and doors and walls. Perhaps you feel a little warm and comforted, and don't know why, when I am standing here in the cold and hoping you will get well and happy again. I am so sorry for you,' she would whisper in an intense little voice. 'I wish you had a "Little Missus" who could pet you as I used to pet papa when he had a headache. I should like to be your "Little Missus" myself, poor dear! Good night—good night. God bless you!'

She would go away, feeling quite comforted and a little warmer herself. Her sympathy was so strong that it seemed as if it MUST reach him

were on days like this—and Sara was sent out again and again, until her shabby clothes were damp through. The absurd old feathers on her forlorn hat were more draggled and absurd than ever, and her downtrodden shoes were so wet that they could not hold any more water. Added to this, she had been deprived of her dinner, because Miss Minchin had chosen to punish her. She was so cold and hungry and tired that her face began to have a pinched look, and now and then some kind-hearted person passing her in the street glanced at her with sudden sympathy. But she did not know that. She hurried on, trying to make her mind think of something else. It was really very necessary. Her way of doing it was to 'pretend' and 'suppose' with all the strength that was left in her. But really this time it was harder than she had ever found it, and once or twice she thought it almost made her more cold and hungry instead of less so. But she persevered obstinately, and as the muddy water squelched through her broken shoes and the wind seemed trying to drag her thin jacket from her, she talked to herself as she walked, though she did not speak aloud or even move her lips.

'Suppose I had dry clothes on,' she thought. 'Suppose I had good shoes and a long, thick coat and merino stockings and a whole umbrella. And suppose—suppose—just when I was near a baker's where they sold hot buns, I should find sixpence—which belonged to nobody. SUPPOSE if I did, I should go into the shop and buy six of the hottest buns and eat them all without stopping.'

Some very odd things happen in this world sometimes.

It certainly was an odd thing that happened to Sara. She had to cross the street just when she was saying this to herself. The mud was dreadful—she almost had to wade. She picked her way as carefully as she could, but she could not save herself much; only, in picking her way, she had to look down at her feet and the mud, and in looking down—just as she reached the pavement—she saw something shining in the gutter. It was actually a piece of silver—a tiny piece trodden upon by many feet, but still with spirit enough left to shine a little. Not quite a sixpence, but the next thing to it—a fourpenny piece.

In one second it was in her cold little red-and-blue hand.

'Oh,' she gasped, 'it is true! It is true!'

And then, if you will believe me, she looked straight at the shop directly facing her. And it was a baker's shop, and a cheerful, stout, motherly woman with rosy cheeks was putting into the window a tray of delicious newly baked hot buns, fresh from the oven—large, plump, shiny buns, with currants in them.

It almost made Sara feel faint for a few seconds—the shock, and the sight of the buns, and the delightful odours of warm bread floating up through the baker's cellar window.

She knew she need not hesitate to use the little piece of money. It had evidently been lying in the mud for some time, and its owner was completely lost in the stream of passing people who crowded and jostled each other all day long.

'But I'll go and ask the baker woman if she has lost anything,' she said to herself, rather faintly. So she crossed the pavement and put her wet foot on the step. As she did so she saw something that made her stop.

It was a little figure more forlorn even than herself—a little figure which was not much more than a bundle of rags, from which small, bare, red muddy feet peeped out, only because the rags with which their owner was trying to cover them were not long enough. Above the rags appeared a shock head of tangled hair, and a dirty face with big, hollow, hungry eyes.

Sara knew they were hungry eyes the moment she saw them, and she felt a sudden sympathy.

'This,' she said to herself, with a little sigh, 'is one of the populace—and she is hungrier than I am.'

The child—this 'one of the populace'—stared up at Sara, and shuffled herself aside a little, so as to give her room to pass. She was used to being made to give room to everybody. She knew that if a policeman chanced to see her he would tell her to 'move on.'

Sara clutched her little fourpenny piece and hesitated for a few seconds. Then she spoke to her.

'Are you hungry?' she asked.

The child shuffled herself and her rags a little more.

'Ain't I jist?' she said in a hoarse voice. 'Jist ain't I?'

'Haven't you had any dinner?' said Sara.

'No dinner,' more hoarsely still and with more shuffling. 'Nor yet no bre'fast—nor yet no supper. No nothin'.'

Chapter 12

The Other Side of the Wall

When one lives in a row of houses, it is interesting to think of the things which are being done and said on the other side of the wall of the very rooms one is living in. Sara was fond of amusing herself by trying to imagine the things hidden by the wall which divided the Select Seminary from the Indian gentleman's house. She knew that the schoolroom was next to the Indian gentleman's study, and she hoped that the wall was thick so that the noise made sometimes after lesson hours would not disturb him.

'I am growing quite fond of him,' she said to Ermengarde; 'I should not like him to be disturbed. I have adopted him for a friend. You can do that with people you never speak to at all. You can just watch them, and think about them and be sorry for them, until they seem almost like relations. I'm quite anxious sometimes when I see the doctor call twice a day.'

'I have very few relations,' said Ermengarde, reflectively, 'and I'm very glad of it. I don't like those I have. My two aunts are always saying, "Dear me, Ermengarde! You are very fat. You shouldn't eat sweets," and my uncle is always asking me things like, "When did Edward the Third ascend the throne?" and, "Who died of a surfeit of lampreys?"'

Sara laughed.

for the moment to her narrow, unimaginative mind that there must be some real power hidden behind this candid daring.

'What?' she exclaimed. 'Found out what?'

'That I really was a princess,' said Sara, 'and could do anything—anything I liked.'

Every pair of eyes in the room widened to its full limit. Lavinia leaned forward on her seat to look.

'Go to your room,' cried Miss Minchin, breathlessly, 'this instant! Leave the schoolroom! Attend to your lessons, young ladies!'

Sara made a little bow.

'Excuse me for laughing if it was impolite,' she said, and walked out of the room, leaving Miss Minchin struggling with her rage, and the girls whispering over their books.

'Did you see her? Did you see how queer she looked?' Jessie broke out. 'I shouldn't be at all surprised if she did turn out to be something. Suppose she should!'

'Since when?' asked Sara.

'Dunno. Never got nothin' today—nowhere. I've axed an' axed.'

Just to look at her made Sara more hungry and faint. But those queer little thoughts were at work in her brain, and she was talking to herself, though she was sick at heart.

'If I'm a princess,' she was saying, 'if I'm a princess—when they were poor and driven from their thrones—they always shared—with the populace—if they met one poorer and hungrier than themselves. They always shared. Buns are a penny each. If it had been sixpence I could have eaten six. It won't be enough for either of us. But it will be better than nothing.'

'Wait a minute,' she said to the beggar child.

She went into the shop. It was warm and smelled deliciously. The woman was just going to put some more hot buns into the window.

'If you please,' said Sara, 'have you lost fourpence—a silver fourpence?' And she held the forlorn little piece of money out to her.

The woman looked at it and then at her—at her intense little face and draggled, once fine clothes.

'Bless us, no,' she answered. 'Did you find it?'

'Yes,' said Sara. 'In the gutter.'

'Keep it, then,' said the woman. 'It may have been there for a week, and goodness knows who lost it. YOU could never find out.'

'I know that,' said Sara, 'but I thought I would ask you.'

'Not many would,' said the woman, looking puzzled and interested and good-natured all at once.

'Do you want to buy something?' she added, as she saw Sara glance at the buns.

'Four buns, if you please,' said Sara. 'Those at a penny each.'

The woman went to the window and put some in a paper bag.

Sara noticed that she put in six.

'I said four, if you please,' she explained. 'I have only fourpence.'

'I'll throw in two for makeweight,' said the woman with her good-natured look. 'I dare say you can eat them sometime. Aren't you hungry?'

A mist rose before Sara's eyes.

'Yes,' she answered. 'I am very hungry, and I am much obliged to you for your kindness; and'—she was going to add—'there is a child outside who is hungrier than I am.' But just at that moment two or three customers

came in at once, and each one seemed in a hurry, so she could only thank the woman again and go out.

The beggar girl was still huddled up in the corner of the step. She looked frightful in her wet and dirty rags. She was staring straight before her with a stupid look of suffering, and Sara saw her suddenly draw the back of her roughened black hand across her eyes to rub away the tears which seemed to have surprised her by forcing their way from under her lids. She was muttering to herself.

Sara opened the paper bag and took out one of the hot buns, which had already warmed her own cold hands a little.

'See,' she said, putting the bun in the ragged lap, 'this is nice and hot. Eat it, and you will not feel so hungry.'

The child started and stared up at her, as if such sudden, amazing good luck almost frightened her; then she snatched up the bun and began to cram it into her mouth with great wolfish bites.

'Oh, my! Oh, my!' Sara heard her say hoarsely, in wild delight. 'Oh my!'

Sara took out three more buns and put them down.

The sound in the hoarse, ravenous voice was awful.

'She is hungrier than I am,' she said to herself. 'She's starving.' But her hand trembled when she put down the fourth bun. 'I'm not starving,' she said—and she put down the fifth.

The little ravening London savage was still snatching and devouring when she turned away. She was too ravenous to give any thanks, even if she had ever been taught politeness—which she had not. She was only a poor little wild animal.

'Good-bye,' said Sara.

When she reached the other side of the street she looked back. The child had a bun in each hand and had stopped in the middle of a bite to watch her. Sara gave her a little nod, and the child, after another stare—a curious lingering stare—jerked her shaggy head in response, and until Sara was out of sight she did not take another bite or even finish the one she had begun.

At that moment the baker-woman looked out of her shop window.

'Well, I never!' she exclaimed. 'If that young un hasn't given her buns to a beggar child! It wasn't because she didn't want them, either. Well,

out of her boots—was a princess—a real one! The look in her eyes was exactly the look which Miss Minchin most disliked. She would not have it; she was quite near her and was so enraged that she actually flew at her and boxed her ears—exactly as the neat-herd's wife had boxed King Alfred's. It made Sara start. She wakened from her dream at the shock, and, catching her breath, stood still a second. Then, not knowing she was going to do it, she broke into a little laugh.

'What are you laughing at, you bold, impudent child?' Miss Minchin exclaimed.

It took Sara a few seconds to control herself sufficiently to remember that she was a princess. Her cheeks were red and smarting from the blows she had received.

'I was thinking,' she answered.

'Beg my pardon immediately,' said Miss Minchin.

Sara hesitated a second before she replied.

'I will beg your pardon for laughing, if it was rude,' she said then; 'but I won't beg your pardon for thinking.'

'What were you thinking?' demanded Miss Minchin. 'How dare you think? What were you thinking?'

Jessie tittered, and she and Lavinia nudged each other in unison. All the girls looked up from their books to listen. Really, it always interested them a little when Miss Minchin attacked Sara. Sara always said something queer, and never seemed the least bit frightened. She was not in the least frightened now, though her boxed ears were scarlet and her eyes were as bright as stars.

'I was thinking,' she answered grandly and politely, 'that you did not know what you were doing.'

'That I did not know what I was doing?' Miss Minchin fairly gasped.

'Yes,' said Sara, 'and I was thinking what would happen if I were a princess and you boxed my ears—what I should do to you. And I was thinking that if I were one, you would never dare to do it, whatever I said or did. And I was thinking how surprised and frightened you would be if you suddenly found out— '

She had the imagined future so clearly before her eyes that she spoke in a manner which had an effect even upon Miss Minchin. It almost seemed