

'Was he,' she said, with a glance toward the closed door of the library—
'was HE the wicked friend? Oh, do tell me!'

Mrs Carmichael was crying as she kissed her again. She felt as if she
ought to be kissed very often because she had not been kissed for so long.

'He was not wicked, my dear,' she answered. 'He did not really lose
your papa's money. He only thought he had lost it; and because he loved
him so much his grief made him so ill that for a time he was not in his
right mind. He almost died of brain fever, and long before he began to
recover your poor papa was dead.'

'And he did not know where to find me,' murmured Sara. 'And I was
so near.' Somehow, she could not forget that she had been so near.

'He believed you were in school in France,' Mrs Carmichael explained.
'And he was continually misled by false clues. He has looked for you
everywhere. When he saw you pass by, looking so sad and neglected, he
did not dream that you were his friend's poor child; but because you were
a little girl, too, he was sorry for you, and wanted to make you happier.
And he told Ram Dass to climb into your attic window and try to make
you comfortable.'

Sara gave a start of joy; her whole look changed.

'Did Ram Dass bring the things?' she cried out. 'Did he tell Ram Dass
to do it? Did he make the dream that came true?'

'Yes, my dear—yes! He is kind and good, and he was sorry for you, for
little lost Sara Crewe's sake.'

The library door opened and Mr Carmichael appeared, calling Sara to
him with a gesture.

'Mr Carrisford is better already,' he said. 'He wants you to come to
him.'

Sara did not wait. When the Indian gentleman looked at her as she
entered, he saw that her face was all alight.

She went and stood before his chair, with her hands clasped together
against her breast.

'You sent the things to me,' she said, in a joyful emotional little voice,
'the beautiful, beautiful things? YOU sent them!'

'Yes, poor, dear child, I did,' he answered her. He was weak and broken
with long illness and trouble, but he looked at her with the look she
remembered in her father's eyes—that look of loving her and wanting to

take her in his arms. It made her kneel down by him, just as she used to
kneel by her father when they were the dearest friends and lovers in the
world.

'Then it is you who are my friend,' she said; 'it is you who are my friend!'
And she dropped her face on his thin hand and kissed it again and again.

'The man will be himself again in three weeks,' Mr Carmichael said
aside to his wife. 'Look at his face already.'

In fact, he did look changed. Here was the 'Little Missus,' and he had
new things to think of and plan for already. In the first place, there was
Miss Minchin. She must be interviewed and told of the change which
had taken place in the fortunes of her pupil.

Sara was not to return to the seminary at all. The Indian gentleman
was very determined upon that point. She must remain where she was,
and Mr Carmichael should go and see Miss Minchin himself.

'I am glad I need not go back,' said Sara. 'She will be very angry. She
does not like me; though perhaps it is my fault, because I do not like her.'

But, oddly enough, Miss Minchin made it unnecessary for Mr Carmi-
chael to go to her, by actually coming in search of her pupil herself. She
had wanted Sara for something, and on inquiry had heard an astonishing
thing. One of the housemaids had seen her steal out of the area with
something hidden under her cloak, and had also seen her go up the steps
of the next door and enter the house.

'What does she mean?' cried Miss Minchin to Miss Amelia.

'I don't know, I'm sure, sister,' answered Miss Amelia. 'Unless she has
made friends with him because he has lived in India.'

'It would be just like her to thrust herself upon him and try to gain
his sympathies in some such impertinent fashion,' said Miss Minchin.
'She must have been in the house for two hours. I will not allow such
presumption. I shall go and inquire into the matter, and apologize for
her intrusion.'

Sara was sitting on a footstool close to Mr Carrisford's knee, and listen-
ing to some of the many things he felt it necessary to try to explain to her,
when Ram Dass announced the visitor's arrival.

Sara rose involuntarily, and became rather pale; but Mr Carrisford saw
that she stood quietly, and showed none of the ordinary signs of child
terror.

Miss Minchin entered the room with a sternly dignified manner. She was correctly and well dressed, and rigidly polite.

'I am sorry to disturb Mr Carrisford,' she said; 'but I have explanations to make. I am Miss Minchin, the proprietress of the Young Ladies' Seminary next door.'

The Indian gentleman looked at her for a moment in silent scrutiny. He was a man who had naturally a rather hot temper, and he did not wish it to get too much the better of him.

'So you are Miss Minchin?' he said.

'I am, sir.'

'In that case,' the Indian gentleman replied, 'you have arrived at the right time. My solicitor, Mr Carmichael, was just on the point of going to see you.'

Mr Carmichael bowed slightly, and Miss Minchin looked from him to Mr Carrisford in amazement.

'Your solicitor?' she said. 'I do not understand. I have come here as a matter of duty. I have just discovered that you have been intruded upon through the forwardness of one of my pupils—a charity pupil. I came to explain that she intruded without my knowledge.' She turned upon Sara. 'Go home at once,' she commanded indignantly. 'You shall be severely punished. Go home at once.'

The Indian gentleman drew Sara to his side and parted her hand.

'She is not going.'

Miss Minchin felt rather as if she must be losing her senses.

'Not going!' she repeated.

'No,' said Mr Carrisford. 'She is not going home—if you give your house that name. Her home for the future will be with me.'

Miss Minchin fell back in amazed indignation.

'With you! With you, sir! What does this mean?'

'Kindly explain the matter, Carmichael,' said the Indian gentleman; 'and get it over as quickly as possible.' And he made Sara sit down again, and held her hands in his—which was another trick of her papa's.

Then Mr Carmichael explained—in the quiet, level-toned, steady manner of a man who knew his subject, and all its legal significance, which was a thing Miss Minchin understood as a business woman, and did not enjoy.



Chapter 18

'I Tried Not To Be'



It was pretty, comfortable Mrs Carmichael who explained everything. She was sent for at once, and came across the square to take Sara into her warm arms and make clear to her all that had happened. The excitement of the totally unexpected discovery had been temporarily almost overpowering to Mr Carrisford in his weak condition.

'Upon my word,' he said faintly to Mr Carmichael, when it was suggested that the little girl should go into another room. 'I feel as if I do not want to lose sight of her.'

'I will take care of her,' Janet said, 'and mamma will come in a few minutes.' And it was Janet who led her away.

'We're so glad you are found,' she said. 'You don't know how glad we are that you are found.'

Donald stood with his hands in his pockets, and gazed at Sara with reflecting and self-reproachful eyes.

'If I'd just asked what your name was when I gave you my sixpence,' he said, 'you would have told me it was Sara Crewe, and then you would have been found in a minute.' Then Mrs Carmichael came in. She looked very much moved, and suddenly took Sara in her arms and kissed her.

'You look bewildered, poor child,' she said. 'And it is not to be wondered at.'

Sara could only think of one thing.

'Mr Carrisford, madam,' he said, 'was an intimate friend of the late Captain Crewe. He was his partner in certain large investments. The fortune which Captain Crewe supposed he had lost has been recovered, and is now in Mr Carrisford's hands.'

'The fortune?' cried Miss Minchin; and she really lost colour as she uttered the exclamation. 'Sara's fortune!'

'It will be Sara's fortune,' replied Mr Carmichael, rather coldly. 'It is Sara's fortune now, in fact. Certain events have increased it enormously. The diamond mines have retrieved themselves.'

'The diamond mines!' Miss Minchin gasped out. 'If this was true, nothing so horrible, she felt, had ever happened to her since she was born.'

'The diamond mines,' Mr Carmichael repeated, and he could not help adding, with a rather sly, unlawyer-like smile, 'There are not many princesses, Miss Minchin, who are richer than your little charity pupil, Sara Crewe, will be. Mr Carrisford has been searching for her for nearly two years; he has found her at last, and he will keep her.'

After which he asked Miss Minchin to sit down while he explained matters to her fully; and went into such detail as was necessary to make it quite clear to her that Sara's future was an assured one, and that what had seemed to be lost was to be restored to her tenfold; also, that she had in Mr Carrisford a guardian as well as a friend.

Miss Minchin was not a clever woman, and in her excitement she was silly enough to make one desperate effort to regain what she could not help seeing she had lost through her worldly folly.

'He found her under my care,' she protested. 'I have done everything for her. But for me she should have starved in the streets.'

Here the Indian gentleman lost his temper.

'As to starving in the streets,' he said, 'she might have starved more comfortably there than in your attic.'

'Captain Crewe left her in my charge,' Miss Minchin argued. 'She must return to it until she is of age. She can be a parlour boarder again. She must finish her education. The law will interfere in my behalf.'

'Come, come, Miss Minchin,' Mr Carmichael interposed, 'the law will do nothing of the sort. If Sara herself wishes to return to you, I dare say Mr Carrisford might not refuse to allow it. But that rests with Sara.'

'Then,' said Miss Minchin, 'I appeal to Sara. I have not spoiled you, perhaps,' she said awkwardly to the little girl; 'but you know that your papa was pleased with your progress. And—ahem—I have always been fond of you.'

Sara's green-gray eyes fixed themselves on her with the quiet, clear look Miss Minchin particularly disliked.

'Have you, Miss Minchin?' she said. 'I did not know that.'

Miss Minchin reddened and drew herself up.

'You ought to have known it,' said she; 'but children, unfortunately, never know what is best for them. Amelia and I always said you were the cleverest child in the school. Will you not do your duty to your poor papa and come home with me?'

Sara took a step toward her and stood still. She was thinking of the day when she had been told that she belonged to nobody, and was in danger of being turned into the street; she was thinking of the cold, hungry hours she had spent alone with Emily and Melchisedec in the attic. She looked Miss Minchin steadily in the face.

'You know why I will not go home with you, Miss Minchin,' she said; 'you know quite well.'

A hot flush showed itself on Miss Minchin's hard, angry face.

'You will never see your companions again,' she began. 'I will see that Ermengarde and Lottie are kept away—'

Mr Carmichael stopped her with polite firmness.

'Excuse me,' he said; 'she will see anyone she wishes to see. The parents of Miss Crewe's fellow-pupils are not likely to refuse her invitations to visit her at her guardian's house. Mr Carrisford will attend to that.'

It must be confessed that even Miss Minchin flinched. This was worse than the eccentric bachelor uncle who might have a peppery temper and be easily offended at the treatment of his niece. A woman of sordid mind could easily believe that most people would not refuse to allow their children to remain friends with a little heiress of diamond mines. And if Mr Carrisford chose to tell certain of her patrons how unhappy Sara Crewe had been made, many unpleasant things might happen.

'You have not undertaken an easy charge,' she said to the Indian gentleman, as she turned to leave the room; 'you will discover that very soon.'

'He was your father's friend,' Mr Carmichael answered her. 'Don't be frightened. We have been looking for you for two years.'

Sara put her hand up to her forehead, and her mouth trembled. She spoke as if she were in a dream.

'And I was at Miss Minchin's all the while,' she half whispered. 'Just on the other side of the wall.'

The big, kind father of the Large Family knew how to question little girls. Sara realized how much practice he had had when he spoke to her in his nice, encouraging voice.

'What do you mean by "At first," my child?' he inquired.

'When I was first taken there by my papa.'

'Where is your papa?'

'He died,' said Sara, very quietly. 'He lost all his money and there was none left for me. There was no one to take care of me or to pay Miss Minchin.'

'Carmichael! the Indian gentleman cried out loudly. 'Carmichael!'

'We must not frighten her,' Mr Carmichael said aside to him in a quick, low voice. And he added aloud to Sara, 'So you were sent up into the attic, and made into a little drudge. That was about it, wasn't it?'

'There was no one to take care of me,' said Sara. 'There was no money; I belong to nobody.'

'How did your father lose his money?' the Indian gentleman broke in breathlessly.

'He did not lose it himself,' Sara answered, wondering still more each moment. 'He had a friend he was very fond of—he was very fond of him. It was his friend who took his money. He trusted his friend too much.'

The Indian gentleman's breath came more quickly.

'The friend might have MEANT to do no harm,' he said. 'It might have happened through a mistake.'

Sara did not know how unrelenting her quiet young voice sounded as she answered. If she had known, she would surely have tried to soften it for the Indian gentleman's sake.

'The suffering was just as bad for my papa,' she said. 'It killed him.'

'What was your father's name?' the Indian gentleman said. 'Tell me.'

'His name was Ralph Crewe,' Sara answered, feeling startled. 'Captain Crewe. He died in India.'

The haggard face contracted, and Ram Dass sprang to his master's side. 'Carmichael,' the invalid gasped, 'it is the child—the child!'

For a moment Sara thought he was going to die. Ram Dass poured out drops from a bottle, and held them to his lips. Sara stood near, trembling a little. She looked in a bewildered way at Mr Carmichael.

'What child am I?' she faltered.

The child is neither truthful nor grateful. I suppose—to Sara—'that you feel now that you are a princess again.'

Sara looked down and flushed a little, because she thought her pet fancy might not be easy for strangers—even nice ones—to understand at first.

'I—TRIED not to be anything else,' she answered in a low voice—'even when I was coldest and hungriest—I tried not to be.'

'Now it will not be necessary to try,' said Miss Minchin, acidly, as Ram Dass salamed her out of the room.

She returned home and, going to her sitting room, sent at once for Miss Amelia. She sat closeted with her all the rest of the afternoon, and it must be admitted that poor Miss Amelia passed through more than one bad quarter of an hour. She shed a good many tears, and mopped her eyes a good deal. One of her unfortunate remarks almost caused her sister to snap her head entirely off, but it resulted in an unusual manner.

'I'm not as clever as you, sister,' she said, 'and I am always afraid to say things to you for fear of making you angry. Perhaps if I were not so timid it would be better for the school and for both of us. I must say I've often thought it would have been better if you had been less severe on Sara Crewe, and had seen that she was decently dressed and more comfortable. I KNOW she was worked too hard for a child of her age, and I know she was only half fed—'

'How dare you say such a thing!' exclaimed Miss Minchin.

'I don't know how I dare,' Miss Amelia answered, with a kind of reckless courage; 'but now I've begun I may as well finish, whatever happens to me. The child was a clever child and a good child—and she would have paid you for any kindness you had shown her. But you didn't show her any. The fact was, she was too clever for you, and you always disliked her for that reason. She used to see through us both—'

'Amelia!' gasped her infuriated elder, looking as if she would box her ears and knock her cap off, as she had often done to Becky.

But Miss Amelia's disappointment had made her hysterical enough not to care what occurred next.

'She did! She did!' she cried. 'She saw through us both. She saw that you were a hard-hearted, worldly woman, and that I was a weak fool, and that we were both of us vulgar and mean enough to grovel on our knees for her money, and behave ill to her because it was taken from her—though

she behaved herself like a little princess even when she was a beggar. She did—she did—like a little princess! And her hysterics got the better of the poor woman, and she began to laugh and cry both at once, and rock herself backward and forward.

'And now you've lost her,' she cried wildly; 'and some other school will get her and her money; and if she were like any other child she'd tell how she's been treated, and all our pupils would be taken away and we should be ruined. And it serves us right; but it serves you right more than it does me, for you are a hard woman, Maria Minchin, you're a hard, selfish, worldly woman!'

And she was in danger of making so much noise with her hysterical chokes and gurgles that her sister was obliged to go to her and apply salts and sal volatile to quiet her, instead of pouring forth her indignation at her audacity.

And from that time forward, it may be mentioned, the elder Miss Minchin actually began to stand a little in awe of a sister who, while she looked so foolish, was evidently not quite so foolish as she looked, and might, consequently, break out and speak truths people did not want to hear.

That evening, when the pupils were gathered together before the fire in the schoolroom, as was their custom before going to bed, Ermengarde came in with a letter in her hand and a queer expression on her round face. It was queer because, while it was an expression of delighted excitement, it was combined with such amazement as seemed to belong to a kind of shock just received.

'What is the matter?' cried two or three voices at once.

'Is it anything to do with the row that has been going on?' said Lavinia, eagerly. 'There has been such a row in Miss Minchin's room, Miss Amelia has had something like hysterics and has had to go to bed.'

Ermengarde answered them slowly as if she were half stunned.

'I have just had this letter from Sara,' she said, holding it out to let them see what a long letter it was.

'From Sara!' Every voice joined in that exclamation.

'Where is she?' almost shrieked Jessie.

'Next door,' said Ermengarde, 'with the Indian gentleman.'

finding herself in the Indian gentleman's room had brought a flush to Sara's cheeks.

'Your monkey ran away again,' she said, in her pretty voice. 'He came to my garret window last night, and I took him in because it was so cold. I would have brought him back if it had not been so late. I knew you were ill and might not like to be disturbed.'

The Indian gentleman's hollow eyes dwelt on her with curious interest.

'That was very thoughtful of you,' he said.

Sara looked toward Ram Dass, who stood near the door.

'Shall I give him to the Lascar?' she asked.

'How do you know he is a Lascar?' said the Indian gentleman, smiling a little.

'Oh, I know Lascars,' Sara said, handing over the reluctant monkey. 'I was born in India.'

The Indian gentleman sat upright so suddenly, and with such a change of expression, that she was for a moment quite startled.

'You were born in India,' he exclaimed, 'were you? Come here.' And he held out his hand.

Sara went to him and laid her hand in his, as he seemed to want to take it. She stood still, and her green-gray eyes met his wonderingly. Something seemed to be the matter with him.

'You live next door?' he demanded.

'Yes, I live at Miss Minchin's seminary.'

'But you are not one of her pupils?'

A strange little smile hovered about Sara's mouth. She hesitated a moment.

'I don't think I know exactly *WHAT* I am,' she replied.

'Why not?'

'At first I was a pupil, and a parlour boarder; but now—'

'You were a pupil! What are you now?'

The queer little sad smile was on Sara's lips again.

'I sleep in the attic, next to the scullery maid,' she said. 'I run errands for the cook—I do anything she tells me; and I teach the little ones their lessons.'

'Question her, Carmichael,' said Mr Carrisford, sinking back as if he had lost his strength. 'Question her; I cannot.'