



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.

'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 Garisford 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.

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.'

'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.

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

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 Carmichael 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 listening 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 patted 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.

'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

'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.'

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.

'Well, perhaps,' he said. 'I don't know what it may be worth. The fact is, an idea occurred to me as I was thinking the thing over in the train on the journey from Dover.'

'What was it? If she is alive, she is somewhere.'

'Yes; she is SOMEWHERE. We have searched the schools in Paris. Let us give up Paris and begin in London. That was my idea—to search London.'

'There are schools enough in London,' said Mr Carrisford. Then he slightly started, roused by a recollection. 'By the way, there is one next door.'

'Then we will begin there. We cannot begin nearer than next door.'

'No,' said Carrisford. 'There is a child there who interests me; but she is not a pupil. And she is a little dark, forlorn creature, as unlike poor Crewe as a child could be.'

Perhaps the Magic was at work again at that very moment—the beautiful Magic. It really seemed as if it might be so. What was it that brought Ram Dass into the room—even as his master spoke—salaaming respectfully, but with a scarcely concealed touch of excitement in his dark, flashing eyes?

'Sahib,' he said, 'the child herself has come—the child the sahib felt pity for. She brings back the monkey who had again run away to her attic under the roof. I have asked that she remain. It was my thought that it would please the sahib to see and speak with her.'

'Who is she?' inquired Mr Carmichael.

'God knows,' Mr Carrisford answered. 'She is the child I spoke of. A little drudge at the school.' He waved his hand to Ram Dass, and addressed him. 'Yes, I should like to see her. Go and bring her in.' Then he turned to Mr Carmichael. 'While you have been away,' he explained, 'I have been desperate. The days were so dark and long. Ram Dass told me of this child's miseries, and together we invented a romantic plan to help her. I suppose it was a childish thing to do; but it gave me something to plan and think of. Without the help of an agile, soft-footed Oriental like Ram Dass, however, it could not have been done.'

Then Sara came into the room. She carried the monkey in her arms, and he evidently did not intend to part from her, if it could be helped. He was clinging to her and chattering, and the interesting excitement of finding herself in the Indian gentleman's room had brought a flush to Sara's cheeks.

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 Ernengarde and Lotie 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. The child is

All three of them incontinently fled from the room and tumbled into the hall. It was in this way they always welcomed their father. They were to be heard jumping up and down, clapping their hands, and being caught up and kissed.

Mr Carrisford made an effort to rise and sank back again.

'It is no use,' he said. 'What a wreck I am!'

Mr Carmichael's voice approached the door.

'No, children,' he was saying; 'you may come in after I have talked to Mr Carrisford. Go and play with Ram Dass.'

Then the door opened and he came in. He looked rosier than ever, and brought an atmosphere of freshness and health with him; but his eyes were disappointed and anxious as they met the invalid's look of eager question even as they grasped each other's hands.

'What news?' Mr Carrisford asked. 'The child the Russian people adopted?'

'She is not the child we are looking for,' was Mr Carmichael's answer. 'She is much younger than Captain Crewe's little girl. Her name is Emily Carew. I have seen and talked to her. The Russians were able to give me every detail.'

How wearied and miserable the Indian gentleman looked! His hand dropped from Mr Carmichael's.

'Then the search has to be begun over again,' he said. 'That is all. Please sit down.'

Mr Carmichael took a seat. Somehow, he had gradually grown fond of this unhappy man. He was himself so well and happy, and so surrounded by cheerfulness and love, that desolation and broken health seemed pitifully unbearable things. If there had been the sound of just one gay little high-pitched voice in the house, it would have been so much less forlorn. And that a man should be compelled to carry about in his breast the thought that he had seemed to wrong and desert a child was not a thing one could face.

'Come, come,' he said in his cheery voice; 'we'll find her yet.'

'We must begin at once. No time must be lost,' Mr Carrisford fretted. 'Have you any new suggestion to make—any whatsoever?'

Mr Carmichael felt rather restless, and he rose and began to pace the room with a thoughtful, though uncertain face.