'Oh, no, I couldn't,' said Ermengarde. 'I NEVER could speak it!'

'Why?' inquired Sara, curiously.

Ermengarde shook her head so that the pigtail wobbled.

'You heard me just now,' she said. 'I'm always like that. I can't SAY the words. They're so queer.'

She paused a moment, and then added with a touch of awe in her voice, 'You are CLEVER, aren't you?'

Sara looked out of the window into the dingy square, where the sparrows were hopping and twittering on the wet, iron railings and the sooty branches of the trees. She reflected a few moments. She had heard it said very often that she was 'clever,' and she wondered if she was—and IF she was, how it had happened.

'I don't know,' she said. 'I can't tell.' Then, seeing a mournful look on the round, chubby face, she gave a little laugh and changed the subject.

'Would you like to see Emily?' she inquired.

'Who is Emily?' Ermengarde asked, just as Miss Minchin had done.

'Come up to my room and see,' said Sara, holding out her hand.

They jumped down from the window-seat together, and went upstairs.

'Is it true,' Ermengarde whispered, as they went through the hall—'is it true that you have a playroom all to yourself?'

'Yes,' Sara answered. 'Papa asked Miss Minchin to let me have one, because—well, it was because when I play I make up stories and tell them to myself, and I don't like people to hear me. It spoils it if I think people listen.'

They had reached the passage leading to Sara's room by this time, and Ermengarde stopped short, staring, and quite losing her breath.

'You MAKE up stories!' she gasped. 'Can you do that—as well as speak French? CAN you?'

Sara looked at her in simple surprise.

'Why, anyone can make up things,' she said. 'Have you never tried?'

She put her hand warningly on Ermengarde's.

'Let us go very quietly to the door,' she whispered, 'and then I will open it quite suddenly; perhaps we may catch her.'

She was half laughing, but there was a touch of mysterious hope in her eyes which fascinated Ermengarde, though she had not the remotest idea what it meant, or whom it was she wanted to 'catch,' or why she

wanted to catch her. Whatsoever she meant, Ermengarde was sure it was something delightfully exciting. So, quite thrilled with expectation, she followed her on tiptoe along the passage. They made not the least noise until they reached the door. Then Sara suddenly turned the handle, and threw it wide open. Its opening revealed the room quite neat and quiet, a fire gently burning in the grate, and a wonderful doll sitting in a chair by it, apparently reading a book.

'Oh, she got back to her seat before we could see her!' Sara explained. 'Of course they always do. They are as quick as lightning.'

Ermengarde looked from her to the doll and back again.

'Can she—walk?' she asked breathlessly.

'Yes,' answered Sara. 'At least I believe she can. At least I PRETEND I believe she can. And that makes it seem as if it were true. Have you never pretended things?'

'No,' said Ermengarde. 'Never. I—tell me about it.'

She was so bewitched by this odd, new companion that she actually stared at Sara instead of at Emily—notwithstanding that Emily was the most attractive doll person she had ever seen.

'Let us sit down,' said Sara, 'and I will tell you. It's so easy that when you begin you can't stop. You just go on and on doing it always. And it's beautiful. Emily, you must listen. This is Ermengarde St John, Emily. Ermengarde, this is Emily. Would you like to hold her?'

'Oh, may I?' said Ermengarde. 'May I, really? She is beautiful!' And Emily was put into her arms.

Never in her dull, short life had Miss St John dreamed of such an hour as the one she spent with the queer new pupil before they heard the lunch-bell ring and were obliged to go downstairs.

Sara sat upon the hearth-rug and told her strange things. She sat rather huddled up, and her green eyes shone and her cheeks flushed. She told stories of the voyage, and stories of India; but what fascinated Ermengarde the most was her fancy about the dolls who walked and talked, and who could do anything they chose when the human beings were out of the room, but who must keep their powers a secret and so flew back to their places 'like lightning' when people returned to the room.

'WE couldn't do it,' said Sara, seriously. 'You see, it's a kind of magic.'

Once, when she was relating the story of the search for Emily, Ermengarde saw her face suddenly change. A cloud seemed to pass over it and put out the light in her shining eyes. She drew her breath in so sharply that it made a funny, sad little sound, and then she shut her lips and held them tightly closed, as if she was determined either to do or NOT to do something. Ermengarde had an idea that if she had been like any other little girl, she might have suddenly burst out sobbing and crying. But she did not.

'Have you a—a pain?' Ermengarde ventured.

'Yes,' Sara answered, after a moment's silence. 'But it is not in my body.' Then she added something in a low voice which she tried to keep quite steady, and it was this: 'Do you love your father more than anything else in all the whole world?'

Ermengarde's mouth fell open a little. She knew that it would be far from behaving like a respectable child at a select seminary to say that it had never occurred to you that you COULD love your father, that you would do anything desperate to avoid being left alone in his society for ten minutes. She was, indeed, greatly embarrassed.

'I—I scarcely ever see him,' she stammered. 'He is always in the library—reading things.'

'I love mine more than all the world ten times over,' Sara said. 'That is what my pain is. He has gone away.'

She put her head quietly down on her little, huddled-up knees, and sat very still for a few minutes.

'She's going to cry out loud,' thought Ermengarde, fearfully.

But she did not. Her short, black locks tumbled about her ears, and she sat still. Then she spoke without lifting her head.

'I promised him I would bear it,' she said. 'And I will. You have to bear things. Think what soldiers bear! Papa is a soldier. If there was a war he would have to bear marching and thirstiness and, perhaps, deep wounds. And he would never say a word—not one word.'

Ermengarde could only gaze at her, but she felt that she was beginning to adore her. She was so wonderful and different from anyone else.

Presently, she lifted her face and shook back her black locks, with a queer little smile.

To explain Miss St John's amazement one must recall that a new pupil is, for a short time, a somewhat uncertain thing; and of this new pupil the entire school had talked the night before until it fell asleep quite exhausted by excitement and contradictory stories. A new pupil with a carriage and a pony and a maid, and a voyage from India to discuss, was not an ordinary acquaintance.

'My name's Ermengarde St John,' she answered.

'Mine is Sara Crewe,' said Sara. 'Yours is very pretty. It sounds like a story book.'

'Do you like it?' fluttered Ermengarde. 'I—I like yours.'

Miss St John's chief trouble in life was that she had a clever father. Sometimes this seemed to her a dreadful calamity. If you have a father who knows everything, who speaks seven or eight languages, and has thousands of volumes which he has apparently learned by heart, he frequently expects you to be familiar with the contents of your lesson books at least; and it is not improbable that he will feel you ought to be able to remember a few incidents of history and to write a French exercise. Ermengarde was a severe trial to Mr St John. He could not understand how a child of his could be a notably and unmistakably dull creature who never shone in anything.

'Good heavens!' he had said more than once, as he stared at her, 'there are times when I think she is as stupid as her Aunt Eliza!'

If her Aunt Eliza had been slow to learn and quick to forget a thing entirely when she had learned it, Ermengarde was strikingly like her. She was the monumental dunce of the school, and it could not be denied.

'She must be MADE to learn,' her father said to Miss Minchin.

Consequently Ermengarde spent the greater part of her life in disgrace or in tears. She learned things and forgot them; or, if she remembered them, she did not understand them. So it was natural that, having made Sara's acquaintance, she should sit and stare at her with profound admiration.

'You can speak French, can't you?' she said respectfully.

Sara got on to the window-seat, which was a big, deep one, and, tucking up her feet, sat with her hands clasped round her knees.

'I can speak it because I have heard it all my life,' she answered. 'You could speak it if you had always heard it.'

She stared so hard and bit the ribbon on her pigtail so fast that she attracted the attention of Miss Minchin, who, feeling extremely cross at the moment, immediately pounced upon her.

'Miss St John!' she exclaimed severely. 'What do you mean by such conduct? Remove your elbows! Take your ribbon out of your mouth! Sit up at once!'

Upon which Miss St John gave another jump, and when Lavinia and Jessie tittered she became redder than ever—so red, indeed, that she almost looked as if tears were coming into her poor, dull, childish eyes; and Sara saw her and was so sorry for her that she began rather to like her and want to be her friend. It was a way of hers always to want to spring into any fray in which someone was made uncomfortable or unhappy.

'If Sara had been a boy and lived a few centuries ago,' her father used to say, 'she would have gone about the country with her sword drawn, rescuing and defending everyone in distress. She always wants to fight when she sees people in trouble.'

So she took rather a fancy to fat, slow, little Miss St John, and kept glancing toward her through the morning. She saw that lessons were no easy matter to her, and that there was no danger of her ever being spoiled by being treated as a show pupil. Her French lesson was a pathetic thing. Her pronunciation made even Monsieur Dufarge smile in spite of himself, and Lavinia and Jessie and the more fortunate girls either giggled or looked at her in wondering disdain. But Sara did not laugh. She tried to look as if she did not hear when Miss St John called 'le bon pain,' 'lee bong pang.' She had a fine, hot little temper of her own, and it made her feel rather savage when she heard the titters and saw the poor, stupid, distressed child's face.

'It isn't funny, really,' she said between her teeth, as she bent over her book. 'They ought not to laugh.'

When lessons were over and the pupils gathered together in groups to talk, Sara looked for Miss St John, and finding her bundled rather disconsolately in a window-seat, she walked over to her and spoke. She only said the kind of thing little girls always say to each other by way of beginning an acquaintance, but there was something friendly about Sara, and people always felt it.

'What is your name?' she said.

'If I go on talking and talking,' she said, 'and telling you things about pretending, I shall bear it better. You don't forget, but you bear it better.'

Ermengarde did not know why a lump came into her throat and her eyes felt as if tears were in them.

'Lavinia and Jessie are "best friends,"' she said rather huskily. 'I wish we could be "best friends." Would you have me for yours? You're clever, and I'm the stupidest child in the school, but I—oh, I do so like you!'

'I'm glad of that,' said Sara. 'It makes you thankful when you are liked. Yes. We will be friends. And I'll tell you what'—a sudden gleam lighting her face—'I can help you with your French lessons.'

Chapter 3

Ermengarde

On that first morning, when Sara sat at Miss Minchin's side, aware that the whole schoolroom was devoting itself to observing her, she had noticed very soon one little girl, about her own age, who looked at her very hard with a pair of light, rather dull, blue eyes. She was a fat child who did not look as if she were in the least clever, but she had a good-naturedly pouting mouth. Her flaxen hair was braided in a tight pigtail, tied with a ribbon, and she had pulled this pigtail around her neck, and was biting the end of the ribbon, resting her elbows on the desk, as she stared wonderingly at the new pupil. When Monsieur Dufarge began to speak to Sara, she looked a little frightened; and when Sara stepped forward and, looking at him with the innocent, appealing eyes, answered him, without any warning, in French, the fat little girl gave a startled jump, and grew quite red in her awed amazement. Having wept hopeless tears for weeks in her efforts to remember that 'la mère' meant 'the mother,' and 'le père,' 'the father,'—when one spoke sensible English—it was almost too much for her suddenly to find herself listening to a child her own age who seemed not only quite familiar with these words, but apparently knew any number of others, and could mix them up with verbs as if they were mere trifles.

And she began from that minute to feel rather a grudge against her show pupil.

Chapter 4

Lottie

If Sara had been a different kind of child, the life she led at Miss Minchin's Select Seminary for the next few years would not have been at all good for her. She was treated more as if she were a distinguished guest at the establishment than as if she were a mere little girl. If she had been a self-opinionated, domineering child, she might have become disagreeable enough to be unbearable through being so much indulged and flattered. If she had been an indolent child, she would have learned nothing. Privately Miss Minchin disliked her, but she was far too worldly a woman to do or say anything which might make such a desirable pupil wish to leave her school. She knew quite well that if Sara wrote to her papa to tell him she was uncomfortable or unhappy, Captain Crewe would remove her at once. Miss Minchin's opinion was that if a child were continually praised and never forbidden to do what she liked, she would be sure to be fond of the place where she was so treated. Accordingly, Sara was praised for her quickness at her lessons, for her good manners, for her amiability to her fellow pupils, for her generosity if she gave sixpence to a beggar out of her full little purse; the simplest thing she did was treated as if it were a virtue, and if she had not had a disposition and a clever little brain, she might have been a very self-satisfied young person. But the clever little brain told her a great many sensible and true things about herself and her circumstances, and now and then she talked these things over to Ermengarde as time went on.

'Things happen to people by accident,' she used to say. 'A lot of nice accidents have happened to me. It just HAPPENED that I always liked lessons and books, and could remember things when I learned them. It just happened that I was born with a father who was beautiful and nice and clever, and could give me everything I liked. Perhaps I have not really a good temper at all, but if you have everything you want and everyone is kind to you, how can you help but be good-tempered? I don't know'—looking quite serious—'how I shall ever find out whether I am really a nice child or a horrid one. Perhaps I'm a HIDEOUS child, and no one will ever know, just because I never have any trials.'

'Lavinia has no trials,' said Ermengarde, stolidly, 'and she is horrid enough.'

Sara rubbed the end of her little nose reflectively, as she thought the matter over.

'Well,' she said at last, 'perhaps—perhaps that is because Lavinia is GROWING.' This was the result of a charitable recollection of having heard Miss Amelia say that Lavinia was growing so fast that she believed it affected her health and temper.

Lavinia, in fact, was spiteful. She was inordinately jealous of Sara. Until the new pupil's arrival, she had felt herself the leader in the school. She had led because she was capable of making herself extremely disagreeable if the others did not follow her. She domineered over the little children, and assumed grand airs with those big enough to be her companions. She was rather pretty, and had been the best-dressed pupil in the procession when the Select Seminary walked out two by two, until Sara's velvet coats and sable muffs appeared, combined with drooping ostrich feathers, and were led by Miss Minchin at the head of the line. This, at the beginning, had been bitter enough; but as time went on it became apparent that Sara was a leader, too, and not because she could make herself disagreeable, but because she never did.

'There's one thing about Sara Crewe,' Jessie had enraged her 'best friend' by saying honestly, 'she's never "grand" about herself the least bit, and you know she might be, Lavvie. I believe I couldn't help being—just a little—if I had so many fine things and was made such a fuss over. It's disgusting, the way Miss Minchin shows her off when parents come.'

'I am sorry of that, mademoiselle,' he said kindly to Sara. 'Perhaps, when we begin to study together, I may show you that it is a charming tongue.'

Little Sara rose in her seat. She was beginning to feel rather desperate, as if she were almost in disgrace. She looked up into Monsieur Dufarge's face with her big, green-gray eyes, and they were quite innocently appealing. She knew that he would understand as soon as she spoke. She began to explain quite simply in pretty and fluent French. Madame had not understood. She had not learned French exactly—not out of books—but her papa and other people had always spoken it to her, and she had read it and written it as she had read and written English. Her papa loved it, and she loved it because he did. Her dear mamma, who had died when she was born, had been French. She would be glad to learn anything monsieur would teach her, but what she had tried to explain to madame was that she already knew the words in this book—and she held out the little book of phrases.

When she began to speak Miss Minchin started quite violently and sat staring at her over her eyeglasses, almost indignantly, until she had finished. Monsieur Dufarge began to smile, and his smile was one of great pleasure. To hear this pretty childish voice speaking his own language so simply and charmingly made him feel almost as if he were in his native land—which in dark, foggy days in London sometimes seemed worlds away. When she had finished, he took the phrase book from her, with a look almost affectionate. But he spoke to Miss Minchin.

'Ah, madame,' he said, 'there is not much I can teach her. She has not LEARNED French; she is French. Her accent is exquisite.'

'You ought to have told me,' exclaimed Miss Minchin, much mortified, turning to Sara.

'I—I tried,' said Sara. 'I—I suppose I did not begin right.'

Miss Minchin knew she had tried, and that it had not been her fault that she was not allowed to explain. And when she saw that the pupils had been listening and that Lavinia and Jessie were giggling behind their French grammars, she felt infuriated.

'Silence, young ladies!' she said severely, rapping upon the desk. 'Silence at once!'

and Captain Crewe had loved her language, so it happened that Sara had always heard and been familiar with it.

'I—I have never really learned French, but—but— ' she began, trying shyly to make herself clear.

One of Miss Minchin's chief secret annoyances was that she did not speak French herself, and was desirous of concealing the irritating fact. She, therefore, had no intention of discussing the matter and laying herself open to innocent questioning by a new little pupil.

'That is enough,' she said with polite tartness. 'If you have not learned, you must begin at once. The French master, Monsieur Dufarge, will be here in a few minutes. Take this book and look at it until he arrives.'

Sara's cheeks felt warm. She went back to her seat and opened the book. She looked at the first page with a grave face. She knew it would be rude to smile, and she was very determined not to be rude. But it was very odd to find herself expected to study a page which told her that 'le père' meant 'the father,' and 'la mère' meant 'the mother.'

Miss Minchin glanced toward her scrutinizingly.

'You look rather cross, Sara,' she said. 'I am sorry you do not like the idea of learning French.'

'I am very fond of it,' answered Sara, thinking she would try again; 'but— '

'You must not say "but" when you are told to do things,' said Miss Minchin. 'Look at your book again.'

And Sara did so, and did not smile, even when she found that 'le fils' meant 'the son,' and 'le frère' meant 'the brother.'

'When Monsieur Dufarge comes,' she thought, 'I can make him understand.'

Monsieur Dufarge arrived very shortly afterward. He was a very nice, intelligent, middle-aged Frenchman, and he looked interested when his eyes fell upon Sara trying politely to seem absorbed in her little book of phrases.

'Is this a new pupil for me, madame?' he said to Miss Minchin. 'I hope that is my good fortune.'

'Her papa—Captain Crewe—is very anxious that she should begin the language. But I am afraid she has a childish prejudice against it. She does not seem to wish to learn,' said Miss Minchin.

'"Dear Sara must come into the drawing room and talk to Mrs Musgrave about India,"' mimicked Lavinia, in her most highly flavoured imitation of Miss Minchin. '"Dear Sara must speak French to Lady Pitkin. Her accent is so perfect." She didn't learn her French at the Seminary, at any rate. And there's nothing so clever in her knowing it. She says herself she didn't learn it at all. She just picked it up, because she always heard her papa speak it. And, as to her papa, there is nothing so grand in being an Indian officer.'

'Well,' said Jessie, slowly, 'he's killed tigers. He killed the one in the skin Sara has in her room. That's why she likes it so. She lies on it and strokes its head, and talks to it as if it was a cat.'

'She's always doing something silly,' snapped Lavinia. 'My mamma says that way of hers of pretending things is silly. She says she will grow up eccentric.'

It was quite true that Sara was never 'grand.' She was a friendly little soul, and shared her privileges and belongings with a free hand. The little ones, who were accustomed to being disdained and ordered out of the way by mature ladies aged ten and twelve, were never made to cry by this most envied of them all. She was a motherly young person, and when people fell down and scraped their knees, she ran and helped them up and patted them, or found in her pocket a bonbon or some other article of a soothing nature. She never pushed them out of her way or alluded to their years as a humiliation and a blot upon their small characters.

'If you are four you are four,' she said severely to Lavinia on an occasion of her having—it must be confessed—slapped Lottie and called her 'a brat;' 'but you will be five next year, and six the year after that. And,' opening large, convicting eyes, 'it takes sixteen years to make you twenty.'

'Dear me,' said Lavinia, 'how we can calculate!' In fact, it was not to be denied that sixteen and four made twenty—and twenty was an age the most daring were scarcely bold enough to dream of.

So the younger children adored Sara. More than once she had been known to have a tea party, made up of these despised ones, in her own room. And Emily had been played with, and Emily's own tea service used—the one with cups which held quite a lot of much-sweetened weak tea and had blue flowers on them. No one had seen such a very real doll's

tea set before. From that afternoon Sara was regarded as a goddess and a queen by the entire alphabet class.

Lottie Leigh worshipped her to such an extent that if Sara had not been a motherly person, she would have found her tiresome. Lottie had been sent to school by a rather flighty young papa who could not imagine what else to do with her. Her young mother had died, and as the child had been treated like a favourite doll or a very spoiled pet monkey or lap dog ever since the first hour of her life, she was a very appalling little creature. When she wanted anything or did not want anything she wept and howled; and, as she always wanted the things she could not have, and did not want the things that were best for her, her shrill little voice was usually to be heard uplifted in wails in one part of the house or another.

Her strongest weapon was that in some mysterious way she had found out that a very small girl who had lost her mother was a person who ought to be pitied and made much of. She had probably heard some grown-up people talking her over in the early days, after her mother's death. So it became her habit to make great use of this knowledge.

The first time Sara took her in charge was one morning when, on passing a sitting room, she heard both Miss Minchin and Miss Amelia trying to suppress the angry wails of some child who, evidently, refused to be silenced. She refused so strenuously indeed that Miss Minchin was obliged to almost shout—in a stately and severe manner—to make herself heard.

'What IS she crying for?' she almost yelled.

'Oh—oh—oh!' Sara heard; 'I haven't got any mam—ma-a!'

'Oh, Lottie!' screamed Miss Amelia. 'Do stop, darling! Don't cry! Please don't!'

'Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!' Lottie howled tempestuously. 'Haven't—got—any—mam—ma-a!'

'She ought to be whipped,' Miss Minchin proclaimed. 'You SHALL be whipped, you naughty child!'

Lottie wailed more loudly than ever. Miss Amelia began to cry. Miss Minchin's voice rose until it almost thundered, then suddenly she sprang up from her chair in impotent indignation and flounced out of the room, leaving Miss Amelia to arrange the matter.

very charming. Mariette told the head housemaid that she thanked her as if she was thanking a lady.

'Elle a l'air d'une princesse, cette petite,' she said. Indeed, she was very much pleased with her new little mistress and liked her place greatly.

After Sara had sat in her seat in the schoolroom for a few minutes, being looked at by the pupils, Miss Minchin rapped in a dignified manner upon her desk.

'Young ladies,' she said, 'I wish to introduce you to your new companion.' All the little girls rose in their places, and Sara rose also. 'I shall expect you all to be very agreeable to Miss Crewe; she has just come to us from a great distance—in fact, from India. As soon as lessons are over you must make each other's acquaintance.'

The pupils bowed ceremoniously, and Sara made a little curtsy, and then they sat down and looked at each other again.

'Sara,' said Miss Minchin in her schoolroom manner, 'come here to me.'

She had taken a book from the desk and was turning over its leaves. Sara went to her politely.

'As your papa has engaged a French maid for you,' she began, 'I conclude that he wishes you to make a special study of the French language.'

Sara felt a little awkward.

'I think he engaged her,' she said, 'because he—he thought I would like her, Miss Minchin.'

'I am afraid,' said Miss Minchin, with a slightly sour smile, 'that you have been a very spoiled little girl and always imagine that things are done because you like them. My impression is that your papa wished you to learn French.'

If Sara had been older or less punctilious about being quite polite to people, she could have explained herself in a very few words. But, as it was, she felt a flush rising on her cheeks. Miss Minchin was a very severe and imposing person, and she seemed so absolutely sure that Sara knew nothing whatever of French that she felt as if it would be almost rude to correct her. The truth was that Sara could not remember the time when she had not seemed to know French. Her father had often spoken it to her when she had been a baby. Her mother had been a French woman,