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*Dramatic Publishing*

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A Play For Children

# A LITTLE PRINCESS

Adapted by June Walker Rogers.

from the story *Sara Crewe*

by Frances Hodgson Burnett



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(A LITTLE PRINCESS)

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A LITTLE PRINCESS  
*A play in two acts*  
For six men, thirteen women  
(Extras as desired)

CHARACTERS

BECKY . . . . .	<i>A scullery maid</i>
MISS MINCHIN . . . . .	<i>Head mistress of the school</i>
AMELIA . . . . .	<i>Her sister</i>
ERMENGARDE	
LAVINIA	
JESSIE	
_OTTIE . . . . .	<i>Pupils</i>
SARA CREWE . . . . .	<i>A new pupil</i>
MARIE . . . . .	<i>Sara's French maid</i>
MONSIEUR THIBAUT . . . . .	<i>The French Instructor</i>
MR. BARROWS . . . . .	<i>Captain Crewe's solicitor</i>
ANNE . . . . .	<i>A street beggar</i>
MRS. PERRENS . . . . .	<i>A vendor</i>
MR. CARRISFORD . . . . .	<i>A neighbor</i>
LASCAR . . . . .	<i>His Indian servant</i>
MR. MICHAELS . . . . .	<i>Mr. Carrisford's solicitor</i>
NORA	
JANET	
GUY LAWRENCE . . . . .	<i>Michael's children</i>

Extras may be added as pupils in the seminary.

TIME: *Many years ago.*

PLACE: *London.*

## Act One

SETTING: The stage is divided into three playing areas.

In Act One, stage R is the sitting room of SARA's suite. There is a chair R, a trunk UR and a door to the corridor URC. (This need not be a practical door, but can be just the frame with an imaginary door. It is angled slightly, the up-stage side further right). There is a bench RC. At rise a folding screen is open DRC to mask the room slightly.

The center area, which is quite small, represents the hall of MISS MINCHIN's school. There is a hall table UC with a chair beside it.

The left area is a classroom. MISS MINCHIN's desk is LC, angled slightly, the left side upstage. There is a desk chair behind it and three benches that face it angled in the same way.

As this furniture will be moved during the course of the play it should be light and easy to change. It is not necessary to have walls...the entire stage should look light and open.

(In the center playing area, BECKY, the scullery maid, a freckle-faced, good-natured girl, wearing a uniform and cap which is now askew, is sweeping in a furious way. MISS MINCHIN and her sister, AMELIA, enter L, hurriedly. MISS MINCHIN is a large, overbearing, heartless woman who hides her true feelings with a tight-lipped smile. AMELIA is a fluttery, sparrow-type of woman, afraid to offend her sister in any way. She tries to parrot MISS MINCHIN but is usually ineffectual.)

MISS MINCHIN: Hurry! Hurry, Becky! You're dawdling!

AMELIA: Dawdling!

MISS MINCHIN: (Exiting R) We still have a tremendous amount of work to do.

AMELIA: (Following her off) Tremendous amount!

BECKY: Oww! I can't sweep any faster. Me hands is ready to fall off. They been flyin' around like a windmill.  
(ERMENGARDE, a chubby, slow girl enters L)

ERMENGARDE: Becky, did a package arrive for me this morning?

BECKY: No, Miss Ermengarde.

ERMENGARDE: (Disappointed) I asked Mama to send that divinity fudge weeks ago. How can she expect me to study without my daily fudge?

BECKY: (Sweeping around ERMENGARDE) Don't know, Miss.

MISS MINCHIN: (Entering R followed by AMELIA) That cook is impossible!

AMELIA: Impossible!

MISS MINCHIN: Oh, Miss St. John, you decided to join us this morning!

AMELIA: You decided to join us.

ERMENGARDE: Yes, Miss Minchin.

MISS MINCHIN: I have never seen a child who spent so much of her time eating.

AMELIA: Always eating.

ERMENGARDE: That reminds me, I must see Cook before class. How could I ever concentrate on spelling without a little snack? S-N-A-C-K. (She exits R)

MISS MINCHIN: (Looking after her) Glutton!

AMELIA: G-L-U-T-T-O-N.

MISS MINCHIN: I do believe she's beginning to waddle. Soon we'll have to roll her from room to room.

AMELIA: Room to room.  
(BECKY rests her chin on her broom handle and looking after ERMENGARDE nods her head in agreement)

MISS MINCHIN: Becky, how dare you stop sweeping when we have a new pupil?

BECKY: (Sweeping frantically) Sorry, Miss Minchin.

MISS MINCHIN: Come, Amelia, there is much to do! (Exits L)

AMELIA: Coming, sister. Much to do. (Rushes after her.)

LAVINIA, a spoiled pupil who delights in ridiculing others whom she considers inferior enters R followed by JESSIE, her subordinate)

LAVINIA: (Mimicing AMELIA) Coming, Sister, much to do! She's such a dull-witted woman. Almost as dull-witted as Becky. You are dull-witted, aren't you, Becky?

BECKY: If you say so.

LAVINIA: (Correcting her) If you say so, Miss Lavinia, you wretched scullery maid. (BECKY begins to whimper) You always look so unkempt. Your cap is coming unstarched before my eyes. (She pulls BECKY's cap further down over her eyes)

JESSIE: (As she and LAVINIA surround BECKY menacingly) Now you've made her whimper. Don't you hate whimpering scullery maids?

BECKY: (Not knowing which way to turn) Oww! Leave me be! (Backs off toward R with broom in front of her and bumps into ERMENGARDE who is entering R eating a biscuit) Oww! Excuse me, Miss. (Runs off R)

ERMENGARDE: (Finishing biscuit, takes apple from her pocket and starts to eat that) Everybody's so busy this morning. Even Cook was rushing out to get special supplies.

LAVINIA: It's a lot of fuss for the new pupil. We're waiting for her to come down.



ERMENGARDE: Oh?

JESSIE: (In an affected voice) She arrived late last night.  
A Miss Sara Crewe. Direct from In-ja!

LAVINIA: Probably some barbarian. I don't know what this school is coming to.

ERMENGARDE: That's true. If they let you in, they'd let anyone in.

LAVINIA: (Starts toward ERMENGARDE) Ermengarde, you've always looked like an elephant, now you're beginning to think like one.

ERMENGARDE: I won't forget that!

JESSIE: (Stepping between them to avoid trouble) Miss Crewe is accompanied by a French maid, Lavinia.  
Oo-la-la!

LAVINIA: Oh. A pretentious barbarian. I hate her already!

MISS MINCHIN: (Hurrying in) Come, come, girls. Form a line! (The girls form a line. If desired, other, extra school girls may run in here and join the line) Our new pupil will be joining us any moment now and I want her to see this is a school run with decorum. Run into your classroom...with decorum! (The girls march to classroom at L where they sit quietly on the bench. At the same time, MARIE, SARA's French maid, enters from UR) Ah Mademoiselle, I trust that Miss Crewe finds her quarters satisfactory?

MARIE: (With French accent) Oui, Madame. The sitting room is charming and we are particularly pleased with the size of the closets.

MISS MINCHIN: (Critically) I noticed the extreme number of trunks that arrived with her.

MARIE: The Captain Crewe is a very generous father. So many, so beautiful clothes. Sable and ermine on her coats, lace on her petticoats.

MISS MINCHIN: (Sharply) Over-indulgent parents can be a hindrance in life. She has been provided for as if she were a little princess.

MARIE: No one could be more deserving of the title. Now, if you will excuse me...(Starts off)

MISS MINCHIN: (Detaining her, snooping) I imagine you have been with the Crewe family for some time...

MARIE: Oh but no. I was engaged by Captain Crewe's solicitor. Mademoiselle Sara and I are just beginning to get acquainted. A bientot, Madame. (She exits DL)

MISS MINCHIN: (Watching her off, annoyed) A bientot to you, too! (She makes a face)

AMELIA: (Entering L) Aren't you feeling well, sister? You look as though you ate a sour grape.

MISS MINCHIN: (With a nasty look) Even though you are

my sister, Amelia, don't impose on my good nature! (AMELIA cringes) I'll attend to you later. Please find the French master, Monsieur Thibault and ask him to come to the classroom.

AMELIA: (Bowing nervously) Yes, sister. Right away, sister! Get the French master! (Exits DL, calling) Ou etes-vous. Monsieur Thibault? Ou etes-vous?

MISS MINCHIN: (Calling after her) Decorum, Amelia! French or English, noise is noise!

(SARA CREWE enters UR. She is a sweet, intelligent girl in a beautiful, lace trimmed dress)

SARA: Miss Minchin, please forgive me for being late to my first class this morning.

MISS MINCHIN: Hmm. Let's not make tardiness a habit! Punctuality is the virtue of the Gods! Now come, Sara, and meet some of my other young ladies.

(She leads SARA into the classroom L. The girls all sit up at attention on their benches)

Young ladies, I wish to introduce you to your new companion, Sara Crewe.

(The girls rise, curtsy and sit again)

I shall expect you all to be agreeable to Miss Crewe. She has just come to us from a great distance. All the way from India. And even though her father Captain Crewe is one of the wealthiest men in that far country, there is no reason for us to treat her any differently than anyone else. Is there?

GIRLS: No, Miss Minchin.

MISS MINCHIN: After all, there are diamond mines in this world and somebody has to own them.

JESSIE: (To LAVINIA, impressed) Diamond mines!

LAVINIA: (To JESSIE) Oh pooh! Owning a diamond mine is no better than owning a shop. Only underground.

ERMENGARDE: (To LAVINIA) You're just jealous!

MISS MINCHIN: Young ladies, stop whispering. Sara, you may sit over there next to Ermengarde.  
(She points to ERMENGARDE. SARA walks to bench. ERMENGARDE slides over making room for her)

SARA: (To ERMENGARDE) Thank you. (She sits)

MISS MINCHIN: We hope this will be the beginning of a long and happy association with Miss Minchin's Select-Seminary for Young Ladies, Sara. And the first thing we shall do, is start you on your French lessons...

SARA: But, Miss Minchin...

MISS MINCHIN: We never say "but", Sara. As your father has engaged a French maid for you, it is obvious that he wishes you to make a special study of the language.

SARA: I think he engaged her because he thought I would like her, Miss Minchin.

MISS MINCHIN: (With tight smile) Perhaps you've been a wee bit spoiled, my dear, and imagine things are done because you like them.

SARA: But...

MISS MINCHIN: We never say "but"...(Before SARA can speak)...I accept your apology. Nevertheless I am sure, Captain Crewe would take great pleasure in hearing his child converse in French...parle en francais.

SARA: I do not need to learn French, Miss Minchin...

MISS MINCHIN: (Interrupting) And you don't intend to try, is that it? Really, Miss Crewe, I do not like difficult children. We are here to learn...(Turning to the others)... N'est-ce pas, girls?

GIRLS: (Enjoying SARA's discomfort) Oui, Miss Minchin.  
(MONSIEUR THIBAUT, the French instructor, enters L)

M. THIBAUT: (Stopping before SARA) Ah, you have a new pupil for me, Madame. Another charming young lady to teach.

MISS MINCHIN: I am afraid the task may be formidable, Monsieur. Miss Crewe does not seem anxious to learn your language.

M. THIBAUT: (To SARA) I am sorry, Mademoiselle. I know the thought of studying a strange language can be

rather frightening, but with a little application, you will see how delightful French can be. (Turning to class)  
C'est vrai, n'est-ce pa, Mademoiselles?

GIRLS: (With terrible, flat accents) C'est vrai, Monsieur Thibault.

M. THIBAULT: (Correcting their pronunciation) C'est vrai, Monsieur. Monsieur! (Shakes his head) Impossible.

SARA: (Standing. Speaking beautifully) Monsieur Thibault, je parle francais. Ma mere etais Francais et je l'ai parle toute de ma vie. Madame Minchin ne comprends pas. (JESSIE and LAVINIA snicker)

MISS MINCHIN: (Annoyed and embarrassed) You are mistaken. Miss Minchin understands Miss Crewe's humor quite well. (SARA sits down, mortified)

M. THIBAULT: Madame, I am sure Sara did not try to deceive you. She did not need to learn French. She is French and there is not much I can teach her. Mon plaisir, Mademoiselle Crewe. (He bows and exits)

MISS MINCHIN: You ought to have told me!

SARA: I tried. I suppose I did not begin properly.  
(JESSIE and LAVINIA giggle, irritating MISS MINCHIN further)

MISS MINCHIN: Silence, young ladies! Silence at once!

ERMENGARDE: (To SARA) You speak French beautifully.

SARA: Thank you.

MISS MINCHIN: (Glaring at ERMENGARDE) Stop twisting your hair around your finger. That's a very unattractive nervous habit. (JESSIE and LAVINIA laugh) As you are all in such a merry mood, you may look over the first three chapters in your grammar book and prepare for an examination this afternoon.  
(ERMENGARDE, LAVINIA and JESSIE groan as MISS MINCHIN exits L)

LAVINIA: (Rises, goes to SARA) It's all your fault. That test is punishment for your behavior.

JESSIE: I don't think you'll ever be one of us.

SARA: (Calmly) I sincerely hope not. You both have very bad manners. (Turning to ERMENGARDE) But I would like to be your friend. You seem kind and...

LAVINIA: (Interrupting) ...and stupid! That's what she is! Fat and stupid. Come, Jessie. (She exits L)

JESSIE: (Following her) What about the test? We ought to study...or at least write some of the answers on our handkerchiefs...(She exits)

ERMENGARDE: That Lavinia is a tyrant. You're ever so much nicer. (Digs into her pocket and brings out a biscuit) Have a biscuit?

SARA: (Laughing) No, thank you.

ERMENGARDE: (Eating it) I must be nervous. I always get hungry when I'm nervous. (Thinking it over) And often, when I'm calm. (She pulls an apple from the pocket) Have an apple? (SARA shakes her head no. ERMENGARDE bites into the apple. LOTTIE'S VOICE is heard off)

LOTTIE'S VOICE: NO! NO! NO! I don't want to!

AMELIA'S VOICE: (Off) Lottie! Stop that! Go to your class!

ERMENGARDE: (Rising, leads SARA out of classroom DC) Lottie's having another one of her tantrums. Let's go see. (AMELIA enters DL, pulling LOTTIE on. She is a smaller girl than the others, with a shrill voice, who has found she can get anything she wants if she yells loud enough and uses the fact that she is a motherless child)

LOTTIE: Oh! Oh! Oh! I haven't got a Mama, that's why you're mean to me.

AMELIA: Lottie, please don't cry. I'm not mean. But you know you cannot miss another class.

LOTTIE: Why not? I like missing classes!

AMELIA: But you must learn something before you leave this school.

LOTTIE: (Throwing herself to the floor) I don't have to!