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Family Plays

THE LITTLE PRINCESS, SARA CREWE

**Book and Lyrics by
NANCY SEALE**

**Music by
MELISSA SWEENEY**

**Score Arranged by
ERIC STONEROOK**

**Based on the Book by
FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT**

THE LITTLE PRINCESS, SARA CREWE

A sparkling version of the Burnett classic, while retaining its Victorian charm, is enhanced by humor, song and suspense.

Musical. Book and lyrics by Nancy Seale. Music by Melissa Sweeney. Score arranged by Eric Stonerook. Based on the book by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Cast: 5m., 18w., including 12 girls ranging from 6 to 14 years old. To Sara Crewe, everyone at Miss Minchin's Select Seminary for Young Ladies is a story: cold Miss Minchin; her timid sister, Miss Amelia; pupils such as spiteful Lavinia or plodding Ermengarde; as well as the next-door invalid gentleman and his lascar. Imagination sustains Sara when, orphaned and no longer "parlour boarder," she is banished to the attic. Becky, the little scullery maid, becomes her fast friend. Suddenly Sara's bleak garret is mysteriously transformed by a secret benefactor. When Sara finally learns who has cared for her, Miss Minchin gets her just reward. Sara's final song tells it all: "This Is Just the Way It Ends in Books!" *Basic set with three interiors. Turn-of-the-20th-century London costumes. Music score available. Code: LG1.*

Family Plays

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The Little Princess,
Sara Crewe

SARA CREWE

or

THE LITTLE PRINCESS, SARA CREWE

An Original Play By

Nancy Seale

Based on the Novel by

Frances Hodgson Burnett

Music by Melissa Sweeney

Lyrics by Nancy Seale

Score arranged by Eric Stonerook

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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PLACE
LONDON, ENGLAND

TIME
ABOUT 1900

ACT ONE

Scene 1

A street outside Miss Minchin's Select Seminary for Young Ladies.

Scene 2

The Seminary Parlor

Scene 3

Same. A few months later.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

The attic. Six months later.

ACT THREE

Scene 1

The Seminary Parlor. A few weeks later.

Scene 2

Outside the Seminary.

Scene 3

Mr. Carrisford's Study.

Scene 4

Outside the Seminary.

Scene 5

Mr. Carrisford's Study.

CHARACTERS

SARA CREWE

She is about twelve years old when the play opens. She is dark-haired, has rather angular features. Not pretty but interesting looking; she will some day be beautiful. She has a direct manner that sometimes makes those around her uncomfortable. (This is especially true of Miss Minchin.) Sara has a keen imagination. . .all that gives her life meaning after her father's death when she is banished to the attic and loses her status as "Parlor Boarder."

CAPTAIN CREWE

He is about thirty-eight, distinguished looking, wearing the uniform of a British officer in India, circa 1900. He loves his daughter though he does not really understand her. . .has probably allowed his career to fill his life since his wife's death several years before.

MISS MINCHIN

About fifty, with pinched, unpleasant features and expression, she is an extremely cold woman having no understanding of any of her pupils (with the exception of Lavinia). She has an altogether formidable appearance with hair drawn back severely and piled high on her head and dresses in high-necked gowns in dark colors. She is almost more unpleasant in her attempts at being nice.

MISS AMELIA MINCHIN

She is plump with a fading prettiness and is about ten years younger than her sister. She is completely dominated by the older Miss Minchin and rarely dares to disagree with her. However, she is a much more sympathetic character and were she stronger would make the Seminary an almost happy institution.

SEMINARY STUDENTS

LAVINIA

She is about sixteen, has used Miss Minchin as her model and is well on her way to being as unsympathetic. She would be attractive if her expression were not so petulant, revealing her selfishness, conceit, and jealousy of Sara.

ERMENGARDE

She is about thirteen, rather dull, unimaginative, plump, earnest, and admiring of Sara's quicker mind.

MABEL AND SOPHRONIA

Are older pupils who are fun-loving and even dare to make fun of Misses Minchin, behind their backs, of course.

LOTTIE, CARRIE, JESSIE, LAURA, TILLY, BERTHA-MARIE, ARABELLA AND CHARLOTTE

These are other Seminary pupils of assorted ages from about six to sixteen, and of varying dispositions. One thing they all share is a fear of the older Miss Minchin. (*Others may be added as wished and ad libs may be written in for them at appropriate places in group scenes.*)

BECKY

She is about thirteen, timid in opening scenes but shows her spunk and loyalty to Sara as the play develops. She has pleasant features, is a bit awkward, and speaks with a trace of Cockney.

COOK

A heavy-set, unattractive woman who enjoys giving orders to the scullery maids.

BARROWS

He is a lawyer who is a no-nonsense man, balding, brisk, business-like; about forty.

BAKER WOMAN

She is a pleasant, hearty woman of about forty.

BEGGAR CHILD

She is a thin little ragamuffin whose only interest is in satisfying her gnawing hunger.

RAM DASS

He is an Indian lascar, about thirty-five, loyal, intelligent, perceptive.

THOMAS CARRISFORD

He is distinguished, aristocratic, about forty-five. He has been ill and shows his physical weakness at the opening of Act Three, Scene Three. He grows stronger toward the end of the play. His concern about finding Captain Crewe's daughter has become his entire mission in life.

PARKER

He is an investigator who is a rather small, bumptious man, impressed with his own importance though good-hearted enough; never uses one word when six will do. He is dressed rather loudly; has risen from clerical work to being head of his investigation firm and feels that his dress must reflect his position. A trace of Cockney accent can't quite be disguised.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The treatment of the play in production will have a great deal to do with its acceptance by an audience. It should be presented seriously, theatrically, in the manner of the period in which it unfolds, the early 1900's. No attempt should be made to achieve absolute realism in sets; they should merely suggest the atmosphere. The opening scene, as well as the second and fourth scenes of Act Three are to be played in front of the curtain against a backdrop stylistically depicting a London Street which, as Mrs. Burnett wrote in her story's opening, was a "large, dull square where all the houses were alike, and all the sparrows were alike, and where all the door-knockers made the same heavy sound, and on still days — and nearly all the days were still — seemed to resound through the entire row in which the knock was knocked." The three interior scenes should be done in wing and drop, which will both facilitate scene changes and further the theatrical style appropriate to this production. Lighting will be of important in the attic scene flashbacks. Ram Dass' entrance and his transformation of the attic must be handled deftly to be effective.

Although a reliable live monkey would be quite an addition to the Act Three scene, there are some life-like stuffed monkeys which are quite satisfactory, and which we used after finding the rental from a pet store prohibitive in cost.

The basic set remains unchanged during the scenes in (1) Seminary Parlor, (2) Attic, and (3) Carrisford Study. We were able to do this easily as there is an act break between the Parlor and the Attic. . .and as noted, during the "Miss Minchin" reprise, the Carrisford Study changes are made by the addition of one arm chair for Carrisford up left, changing the curtains at the window from white parlor curtains to Indian print draperies, throwing Indian material over the two other arm chairs; turning the small piano to the wall and making it into a bookcase with the addition of elephant bookends, changing wall pictures to Indian prints,

and replacing *objets d'art* from Victorian knickknacks to brass vases, candlesticks, etc.

During the attic scene parlor furniture is struck, curtains removed entirely, fireplace screen and irons, decorations struck. Cot, trunk, small table and stools replace parlor furniture. The Miss Minchin Seminary entrance remains at stage right during entire play and is lighted only for Scene 1, Act One, attic story sequences when Sara meets the Iascar, and Act Three, Scene 4. During the attic scene when Sara is acting out the story of finding the sixpence, meeting Ram Dass, the Beggar Child and the Baker Woman, all props are simply mimed.

It is possible to double cast several of the leading roles among the characters of Seminary pupils. This is a good insurance policy when working with young players. It also gives each of the Saras, Ermengardes, and Lavinias a chance to work in another minor part.

The Seminary pupils may be seated in the roped-off section in small seats in front of the Stage Left audience whenever they are not on stage or about to make entrances. This insures their being under close supervision by the older "students" who could direct them back stage when an entrance is imminent. It also keeps the backstage chatter down.

The piano and accompanist are set on the auditorium floor in front of Stage Right (*but not covering the Seminary entrance.*) The stage piano need not be practical; the accompanist may play Lavinia's tunes and chords.

Directors and actors are cautioned that the play should not be done as a burlesque of the period, but rather in a manner which will reveal the stage conventions of the period, with some exaggeration, but never comic melodrama.

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ACT ONE

Scene One

A London Street, Midafternoon, Autumn, about 1900. A backdrop suggests a street of large, old-fashioned houses. The one at stage right, reached by a flight of three steps, is different from its neighbors in that over the door is a brass plate on which is enscribed in black letters; "Miss Minchin's Select Seminary for Young Ladies". Music in the background suggests a 19th century dancing school, single piano, measured rhythm is played for a moment then fades as light focuses on this door for a minute or two.

The light now spotlights the entrance of Captain Crewe and his daughter, Sara, from an entry which permits them to walk along one of the auditorium aisles. Captain Crewe is about 38, distinguished looking, in the uniform of a British officer in India, circa 1900. He is carrying a small valise and leading Sara by the hand. Sara is dressed rather unsuitably for the street in royal blue velvet dress with lace collar and cuffs. She wears a large, picture hat. Sara is about 12, dark haired, rather thin angular features, not pretty but interesting-looking. . .will some day be beautiful. They walk slowly but with a purpose. They mount the steps to the stage apron at right and walk along as if on a sidewalk in front of the houses. The conversation is timed to come out with "Here we are!" as they reach the steps to Miss Minchin's.

SARA: And I am to live here in London, Papa, for a whole year while you are in India?

CAPTAIN CREWE: A whole year, Sara! But it will go quickly. (*Sara starts to protest*) Now. . .the Indian climate was making you delicate, child. And you need other young girls to play with.

SARA: I had other girls in India. I had Beauty and Alice, and Marie Antoinette, and Little Nell, and Princess. . .

CAPTAIN CREWE: (*laughing*) Oh, yes, your imaginary companions, you little bookworm! I mean flesh and blood. . .like you! (*turns to inspect brass plate*) Ah, here we are!

SARA: *(a little fearfully)* “Miss Minchin’s Select Seminary for Young Ladies.”
I don’t feel like a young lady. . .and I’m not at all sure about select.

CAPTAIN CREWE: Sara, my own girl, it’s going to be just the thing for you.
Now, try the knocker. *(Sara reluctantly goes up the steps and knocks dutifully with door-knocker. A pause, then Sara turns and runs down and puts her arms around her father.)*

SARA: Papa, I’m frightened. Suppose an ogre lives here. . .or a witch!

CAPTAIN CREWE: *(jovially)* Then the Princess Sara will use her magic wand and turn it into a toad or a lizard! *The door opens just as he says the word “lizard”. . .Miss Minchin has opened it and stands looking down at them. . .she is in a high-collared black dress, her hair piled up on her head. . .altogether formidable in appearance.)*

MISS MINCHIN: I beg your pardon! *(she is looking her most witch-like)*

CAPTAIN CREWE: *(laughing)* And I beg yours. Miss Minchin, I believe?

MISS MINCHIN: *(proudly)* The same.

CAPTAIN CREWE: I trust that you received my letter a week or so ago. I’m Captain Crewe; and may I present my daughter, Sara?

SARA: *(curtsying)* How do you do, Miss Minchin?

MISS MINCHIN: *(Her manner changes to become ingratiating. . .evidently she liked what was in the letter.)* Captain Crewe! Certainly, certainly! And this is your precious daughter! Sara is to be our parlor boarder! I know she’ll be very happy here at the Seminary. Her room is all ready for her, and, as you instructed me in your letter, Captain, no expense spared. She will be an asset to the school.

CAPTAIN CREWE: Thank you.

MISS MINCHIN: *(coolly)* And I don’t mind saying, Captain, that my sister, Miss Amelia, and I feel that we do a great deal for our young ladies.

CAPTAIN CREWE: I’m sure you do, Miss Minchin. *(turning to Sara)* Well, Sara? *(he sets down valise on steps)*

SARA: Goodbye, Papa. You will send for me when the year is up? It won’t be any longer? Promise?

CAPTAIN CREWE: On my oath as an officer and a gentleman, not a second longer! Goodbye Sara, Dear, I’ll write to you every week. *(He bends*

down to kiss her and Sara clings to him for a moment. . .then Miss Minchin moves in, puts a hand on Sara's shoulder. . .Sara flinches a little; we sense that Miss Minchin's hand is cold. . .Captain Crewe walks slowly off, down steps, and through auditorium exit)

SARA: *(over a sob)* Goodbye, Papa. Goodbye! *(She tries to wipe away a tear unnoticed.)*

MISS MINCHIN: Now, my dear Sara. No time for tears. One of the first things all the young ladies in our Select Seminary learn is that a well-bred child never gives in to her feelings. *(She turns and precedes Sara into doorway.)* Come along, my dear.

SARA: Yes, Miss Minchin. *(She looks after her father a moment, then turns and follows Miss Minchin inside.)*

ACT ONE

Scene Two

The curtain lifts to reveal the school-room parlor of Miss Minchin's. There is a stairway and landing upstage, left center. Right center is a piano and stool. Down right is a couch with small table in front of it. A large armchair left near stairway. Several other chairs, footstools. Up right is a door leading to hall and outside entrance. Door down right leads to other parts of the house. Girls are engaged in various activities about room. Miss Amelia is teaching several little girls to curtsy, down left. Other girls are reading, writing sums on blackboard propped on piano rack. Two or three on couch sewing.

Enter Miss Minchin, leading Sara, from up right.

MISS MINCHIN: This is, as you can see, my dear Sara, a most select Seminary. First introductions. Girls, this is our newest boarder. . . a young lady of a fine, genteel, and **wealthy** background, naturally.

GIRLS: (*chorusing*) How do you do, Sara?

SARA: (*curtsying*) How do you do?

MISS MINCHIN: My sister, Miss Amelia.

SARA: (*going toward her, down center. . . curtsying*) How do you do, Miss Amelia?

MISS AMELIA: (*weakly*) Poorly, child, poorly. My sciatica is troubling me again; I have simply no appetite, and. . .

MISS MINCHIN: (*severely*) Amelia, the young lady is not interested in your medical history. She just said, "howd' yedo."

MISS AMELIA: And I'm trying to tell her, Sister.

SARA: (*sincerely*) I'm sure you'll be feeling well again, soon, Miss Amelia. It's lovely meeting you.

MISS MINCHIN: And these are the girls: Lottie, Laura, Ermengarde, Arabella, Jessie, Tilly, Sophronia, Mabel, Bertha Marie, Carrie, Charlotte, and Lavinia. (*As she names each girl, that girl curtsies and smiles. The only discourteous response is from Lavinia who merely sniffs and turns her back.*)

MISS MINCHIN: (*Sara is a bit puzzled at this but then her attention is caught by looking about the room*) And now, young ladies, let us tell dear Sara about our school. (*She takes a pitch pipe out and sounds a beginning note. . .Miss Amelia leads song with her, but much more weakly than Miss Minchin's vigorous approach. . .One of the girls is at piano.*)

SONG: MISS MINCHIN'S IS A MOST SELECT SEMINARY
(*Miss Minchin, Miss Amelia, Girls*)

MISSES MINCHIN & AMELIA: (*spoken*) This is, of course, a most select seminary. We here impart the essences of ladyhood. (*singing*)

We teach each girl
To dress, to curl
In the most exacting style as she should.

GIRLS: (*join in refrain*)

At Minchin's Miss Minchin,
No silliness, giggling, or pinchin'
Sobriety, not levity is the rule!
At Minchin's Miss Minchin,
Take punishment without flinchin'

ALL:

At this exclusive, not abusive school!
(*Pantomime of one girl hitting other's hand with a ruler*)

MISSES MINCHIN & AMELIA:

In our *distingue'* and most selective seminary
Good breeding is the thing we look for first.

GIRLS:

In the family tree
There'd better not be
A crooked limb, bent twig, or something worse!
(*refrain*)

ALL:

Miss Minchin's is a most selective seminary

For daughters of the upper, upper, upper uppers.
Though they're none too bright
They can all recite. . .
And a blunder means they go without their suppers!

GIRLS: (*refrain*)

SARA: (*clapping her hands as they finish with all holding curtsy*) Why that was ever so splendid. . . though a bit frightening. I feel as if I know you all already. I do hope you'll be my friends.

GIRLS: (*ad lib*) Of course, Sara, I know I will, I'm glad you've come, etc.

LAVINIA: (*on top of ad libs*) Friends? Certainly they'll be friends. Who wouldn't be with the richest girl in the school? (*Girls are crowding about Sara. Lavinia down stage, obviously miffed*)

ERMENGARDE: How do you know she's rich?

LAVINIA: (*scornfully*) You can tell just by looking at her! Can't you see that lace. . . those boots. . . her velvet dress and hat? Besides, I've heard Miss Minchin talking about her to Miss Amelia. Her father is an officer in India. . . with heaps and heaps of money.

ERMENGARDE: Well, I don't care about that. I just think she seems nice.

LAVINIA: (*scornfully*) Nice!

LOTTIE: Tell us about India, Sara.

CARRIE: Are there lions and tigers there?

JESSIE: And strange looking people with funny clothing? (*Other girls ad lib*)

SARA: (*trying to answer all questions at once*) It's a fascinating country. . . and parts of it are beautiful. . . with jungles and rivers. . . and ancient temples. There are tigers, and elephants, and crocodiles. . . but no lions. . . and the people aren't strange. . . they're fine, handsome. . . and as to their clothing. . .

MISS MINCHIN: Girls, girls, not so fast. Dear Sara must be shown her room and given a little chance to rest. After all she's only been here a few moments.

SARA: Yes, I would like to see my room. Is it upstairs?

ERMENGARDE: I hope it's near mine.

JESSIE: We have an extra bed in Tilly's and my room. You could share with us.

LOTTIE: Or with Laura and me.

BERTHA: Or with me and Lavinia.

LAVINIA: (*under her breath*) Not if I have any say in it!

MISS MINCHIN: Girls, girls, silence! Dear Sara is far too important a pupil to share a room with anyone. She will have her own room, downstairs, next to mine and Miss Amelia's. Dear Sara is our "parlor boarder" you know. (*reaction from girls to clarify*)

LAVINIA: Of course! Only the finest for Lady Sara!

ERMENGARDE: (*disappointed*) Oh — well — We'll see you soon then Sara?

SARA: (*a bit apprehensive*) Oh, Miss Minchin, I'd really like to be closer to the other girls. . .

MISS MINCHIN: Not another word, my dear. Amelia, show Sara her room. (*Ermengarde goes to door down left and calls*)

ERMENGARDE: Becky. Miss Minchin wants you.

SARA: Becky?

MISS MINCHIN: The scullery girl.

SARA: Oh. But I can carry my things. . .and I'm sure the girls would help.

MISS MINCHIN: Sara, my dear, that is servant's work. We will leave it for Becky.

BECKY: (*timidly entering. . .curtsies to Miss Minchin*) Yes'm?

MISS MINCHIN: Becky, you are to help the new young lady with her things. Here, take the bags and packages. (*Becky awkwardly tries to pick up several things at once.*) Don't be so clumsy, girl! (*She drops a package and is terribly embarrassed.*)

SARA: (*kindly*) Thank you for helping me, Becky.

BECKY: (*trying again to get hold of things*) It's a pleasure, Miss.

MISS MINCHIN: You do not thank a servant, Sara. Run along, Becky, and hurry back for more. Sara's room is first off the hall there. (*pointing off up right*) Now girls, it's almost time for tea. You'd all best go and clean up to be ready for our first tea with our new pupil.

GIRLS: Yes, Miss Minchin. (*exit up stairway*)

MISS MINCHIN: Come along now, Sara, Miss Amelia will show you to your room. (*exits up right*)

SARA: That's kind of you, Miss Amelia. I'm sure it's a nice room.

MISS AMELIA: (*sadly*) It is. I was always very fond of it.

SARA: (*Unbelieving, but a bit amused*) You don't mean that it was your room, Miss Amelia. You shouldn't have done that.

MISS AMELIA: I had very little choice in the matter, my dear.

SARA: You mean that Miss Minchin made you give me your room? I'll speak to her at once..

MISS AMELIA: (*quavering*) Oh, no, Sara. . .that wouldn't be wise at all. . .Sister has made up her mind. . .

SARA: But, Miss Amelia, I'm sure that. . .

BECKY: (*entering up right*) Will there be anything more, Miss?

SARA: Just my doll, Becky. . .I put her down over there when I came in.

BECKY: (*enraptured, slowly approaching it as if it were a living princess*) Oh, Miss, ain't she beautiful, just?

SARA: Papa gave her to me just before he brought me here. Her name is Emily. Would you bring her for me, Becky?

BECKY: I'd be that honored, Miss. I've never been close to such a doll before, Miss. (*She slowly and reverently picks up elaborate doll.*) Oh, my!

MISS AMELIA: Just follow me, my dear. (*Curtain as Amelia exits up right, followed by Sara, trailed by Becky, carrying doll.*)