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A Little Princess

Frances Hodgson Burnett · *1905 · original English text*

Sara Crewe is sent to a London seminary as a petted "princess," then is made a drudge when her father's fortune seems to vanish. She keeps a harder vow: if she is a princess in rags, she can still be one inside. Kindness in the attic is answered, at last, from the other side of the wall.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

If a child is stripped of fortune, pretty rooms, and even a father's name in the world's eyes, what does it mean to go on being a princess?

"Whatever comes," she said, "cannot alter one thing. If I am a princess in rags and tatters, I can be a princess inside."
Sara Crewe · After her fall, when she chooses how she will behave

Sara had already practiced the part in comfort: she pretended she was a princess so that she could try to behave like one. In the attic the same rule costs her more. She shares bread, tells stories, and will not become Miss Minchin's image of her. Help comes through Ram Dass and the Indian gentleman next door, who was her father's friend. Restoration does not create her dignity; it finds it.

KEY CHARACTERS

Sara Crewe
A child who uses the word "princess" as a rule of conduct, not as a claim of rank.

Miss Minchin
The head of the seminary; kind to money and cruel when money fails.

Becky
The scullery maid who becomes Sara's friend in the attic.

Captain Crewe
Sara's affectionate father, whose apparent ruin starts the trial.

Mr. Carrisford
The "Indian gentleman" next door, her father's partner and the seeker who finds her.

Ram Dass
Mr. Carrisford's servant; he sees Sara's life and begins the secret help.

Ermengarde and Lottie
School friends: one loyal and slow, one little and clinging.

Melchisedec
The attic rat Sara names and treats with ceremony, a sign she will not stop imagining decently.

A PRINCESS INSIDE

> *"I pretend I am a princess, so that I can try and behave like one."*
> **Sara Crewe** · Early chapters

> *"Whatever comes," she said, "cannot alter one thing. If I am a princess in rags and tatters, I can be a princess inside."*
> **Sara Crewe** · After the fall

Grades 3–5
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
Sara at Miss Minchin's
CHAPTERS 1–5

Captain Crewe leaves his clever, generous daughter at a London seminary. Sara makes friends of the small and the shy, and a maid of the attic notices her.

- Sara is rich, but she is also odd: she tells stories and talks as if furniture had feelings.
- Ermengarde is slow and loyal; Lottie is little and hungry for a mother.
- Becky, the scullery maid, is won by being treated as a person.

> *"I pretend I am a princess, so that I can try and behave like one."*
> **Sara Crewe** · Early at the seminary, explaining her game

02
The Diamond Mines
CHAPTERS 6–7

News of diamond mines makes Miss Minchin still more flattering. Then a lawyer's word comes: the mines have failed, Captain Crewe is dead, and Sara is a beggar in the house.

- Sara's birthday feast is broken off in the middle.
- Miss Minchin's affection had been for the money; it turns to spite.
- Sara is sent to the attic, given Becky's work, and told she may stay for her keep.

03
The Attic, and Melchisedec
CHAPTERS 8–10

Cold, hunger, and insult become Sara's daily fare. She names a rat Melchisedec, keeps her stories, and watches the house next door.

- The attic window looks across to an Indian gentleman who is ill and restless.
- Sara still tells stories to Becky and Ermengarde; the stories are a kind of bread.
- She is kind to a hungry child in the street even when she is hungry herself.

04
The Other Side of the Wall
CHAPTERS 11–16

Ram Dass, the Indian servant next door, sees the attic life. Comforts begin to appear as if by magic; Miss Minchin cannot explain them.

- A fire, food, blankets, and books arrive while Sara sleeps.
- The sick gentleman is hunting a lost child, the daughter of his friend Crewe.
- A monkey's visit across the roof becomes the first open meeting.

05
"It Is the Child"
CHAPTERS 17–19

The Indian gentleman recognizes Sara. The mines were not lost after all. Miss Minchin is left with her own meanness, and Sara does not forget Becky.

- Mrs. Carmichael has to explain the whole rescue to the stunned girl.
- Sara's first instinct is still to be just, even toward those who were not just to her.
- The last chapter looks on to a life in which the attic friends are not dropped.

Virtue in Want · Kindness · False Regard · Friendship · Providence and Help

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 3–5

1. The hosted text is Project Gutenberg #146, A Little Princess (1905), original English.
2. Sara's vow is: "Whatever comes," she said, "cannot alter one thing. If I am a princess in rags and tatters, I can be a princess inside." There are two spaces after some periods in this edition.
3. She also says, earlier, "I pretend I am a princess, so that I can try and behave like one." The two lines belong together.
4. The "magic" of the attic gifts has a human agent: Ram Dass and Mr. Carrisford. The book still treats the turning as a mercy, not as a trick only.
5. Chapters 17 and 18 take their titles from lines in the story: "It Is the Child" and "I Tried Not to Be."

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #146, A Little Princess, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/a-little-princess/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.