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Dramatic Publishing



A Little
Princess

Drama/Comedy by
R.N. Sandberg

A Little Princess

Drama/Comedy. By R.N. Sandberg. Cast: 2 to 4m., 7 to 9w. With extras, may be expanded to 20 to 25. Sara is an unusual child. She speaks Hindustani, French and English, has read almost every book in her father's library, and uses fantasy to imagine herself a princess. When her Army captain father leaves her at a boarding school in London, Sara is distraught but makes friends and wins over the headmistress, Miss Minchin, by her intelligence (and her wealth). However, when news arrives that Sara's father has died and that his fortune has been lost, Miss Minchin turns Sara into a servant, banishing her to a rat-infested attic. Sara suffers cold and hunger, but at the moment she believes she can survive no longer, she finds her bare room transformed to a place of warmth and magnificence. Is some magic at work? Is Sara actually the princess she fantasized? *Unit set. Approximate running time: 40 minutes.*

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A LITTLE PRINCESS

By
R. N. SANDBERG



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for Ginger

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In all programs this notice must appear:

First commissioned and produced by
the Seattle Children’s Theatre
as *Sara Crewe*

A Little Princess was originally written as a full-length play entitled *Sara Crewe*. The Seattle Children's Theatre presented the world debut of *Sara Crewe* in September 1994 at the Charlotte Martin Theatre, Seattle, Washington. Directed by John Dillon, it included the following artists:

THE PLAYERS

Sarah Baskin. Sara Crewe
Alyson Bedford. Salesgirl / Jessie
Kate Brickley. Cook / Baker
Anne Marie Cummings Lavinia / Urchin
Hiromi Dames. Lottie
Terry Edward Moore. . . Captain Crewe / Thomas Carrisford
Chris San Nicolas Salesman / Ram Dass, a Lascar
Amy Salloway Ermengarde
Faye B Summers. Miss Minchin

PRODUCTION STAFF & CREW

Artistic Director Linda Hartzell
Managing Director Thomas Pechar
Set Design Jennifer Lupton
Costume Design. Catherine Meacham Hunt
Light Design Greg Sullivan
Sound Design Dave Pascal
Puppet Design. Scott Ramirez
Wig & Hair Design. Joyce Degenfelder
Millinery Barbara Embree
Dialect Coaches. Deena Burke, Regina Santore,
Nathan Scott

Production Manager Silas Morse
Technical Director Sherman Mark Hoffman
Production Stage Manager Linda-Jo Brooke
Stage Manager Mo Chapman
Assistant to the Stage Manager. Heather McLaughlin

A LITTLE PRINCESS

CHARACTERS

SARA, 11
CAPTAIN CREWE, her father, about 30
MISS MINCHIN
LAVINIA, 14
JESSIE, 13
ERMENGARDE, 12
LOTTIE, 8
COOK
LASCAR
CARRISFORD
URCHIN
BAKER

TIME: The 1880s.

PLACE: London. In and around Miss Minchin's Select Seminary for Young Ladies.

SET: A unit set with pieces for additional scenes.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

- 1) A professional production can work extremely well with 9 actors (2 men, 7 women) as the Seattle Children's Theatre production did. A school production, wishing to use a larger cast, could easily use 20-25 actors. Extras could be added to the birthday party, the classroom scenes and the street scenes. The judicious addition by the director of a line or two for these extras is perfectly acceptable.
- 2) An important character not mentioned in the cast list is the Lascar's monkey. The Seattle Children's Theatre production used a puppet (actually a number of puppets) to good effect. The use of a live monkey is impractical for both financial and logistical reasons.

A LITTLE PRINCESS

SCENE ONE

AT RISE: *In a pool of light, SARA, a girl of 11 with wide, mysterious eyes and a striking waif-like appearance, gazes straight ahead at something in a far imaginary distance. She holds her hands up in the air in front of her in a strange, meditative way.*

SARA (*almost chanting*). Papa, Papa, Papa—

(In a separate light, CREWE appears. He's a dashing, energetic British officer, about 30, talking to, swinging around, almost dancing with a large doll.)

CREWE. Velvet, silk, brocade! You shall dazzle them!
You shall bewitch the populace! They shall see you as
the highest of the high, grandest of the grand! Miss Sara
Crewe, Princess!

SARA. She looks like the picture of Mother.

CREWE. They won't mistake you for someone ordinary!
When I'm off in the jungle, out on the march, exploring
the new diamond mines, you shall have a fine life.
Miss Minchin's is the best school in England.
You'll be happier than you've ever been.

SARA. I'm alone.

(CREWE stares straight ahead.)

CREWE. No. *(He holds up the doll.)* Emily will be your guardian spirit. She will always be with you.

(SARA throws herself forward as if embracing him. He drops the doll and reaches out as if embracing her.)

CREWE. Happy Birthday, Sara. *(He steps back.)* And now—off to India! Take good care of her, Emily. *(He disappears.)*

(SARA picks up Emily and stares at her. The lights come up around SARA to reveal the parlor of Miss Minchin's Select Seminary for Young Ladies.)

ERMENGARDE, a flaccid girl of 12, enters crying. She holds a package which has been ripped open. She plops down, throwing the package to the floor.)

ERMENGARDE. I'm sorry to make a scene on your birthday, Sara, but my papa has sent me some books—and he expects me to read them.

SARA. My papa hasn't sent me a thing since I've been here.

ERMENGARDE. He'll ask me questions when he sees me; he'll want to know how much I remember. He thinks I ought to be as clever as he is. But I'm not very clever.

SARA. Ermengarde—perhaps, perhaps, you could lend me these books. I'll read them and tell you everything that's in them. Tell it so you will always remember it.

ERMENGARDE. Oh goodness! Do you think you could?

SARA. I know I could. What will you say to your father?

ERMENGARDE. Oh, he needn't know; he'll think I've read them.

SARA. Why can't you tell him I read them and told you about them?

ERMENGARDE. He wants me to read them.

SARA. He wants you to know what is in them.

ERMENGARDE. He would like it better if I read them.

SARA. He will like it, I dare say, if you learn anything in any way.

ERMENGARDE. That's true enough.

SARA. It's not your fault that... *(She stops.)*

ERMENGARDE. That what?

SARA. That you can't learn things quickly. If you can't, you can't. Just as I can't help being the ugliest child in the school. Being pretty or able to learn things quickly isn't everything. To be kind is worth a good deal. Lots of clever people have done harm, you know. *(Holding up one of the books.)* Look at Robespierre.

ERMENGARDE. Robes...

SARA. You don't know about Robespierre, do you?

ERMENGARDE. No.

SARA. He loved using the guillotine. To chop off heads. You shall know about Robespierre, Marie Antoinette, Napoleon. And you shall tell your father all about them.

ERMENGARDE. Yes, I believe I shall. I'm glad he's sent these. I'm going to write to him. I'm going to tell him I can't wait to learn about Ro...Ro...

SARA. Robespierre.

ERMENGARDE. Robespierre. He'll be very happy. Mama will, too. She'll be quite proud of me. *(SARA is staring at her.)* What's wrong? Have I dripped on my dress?

SARA. No. I was just thinking how nice it would be to have a proud mama.

(LAVINIA and JESSIE, the two oldest students, enter talking.)

LAVINIA. She's an ugly little thing, isn't she?

JESSIE. Do you think so?

LAVINIA. Like a jungle monkey. *(She laughs.)* Oh, there you are. Is it true your mother's dead and your father's off in the jungle? *(SARA just stares at her.)* Well, is it? *(SARA still stares.)*

(MISS MINCHIN enters.)

MISS MINCHIN. Good morning, ladies.

ALL *(except for SARA)*. Good morning, Miss Minchin.

MISS MINCHIN. This is a special day, isn't it, Sara?—
Where is Lottie?

JESSIE. I believe she's in her room, Miss Minchin.

MISS MINCHIN. Lavinia, fetch her for me.

LAVINIA. Of course, Miss Minchin.

MISS MINCHIN. No, wait. I have an announcement which I want you to hear. *(Calling off.)* Cook? Cook?!

(COOK rushes on.)

COOK. Yes, miss.

MISS MINCHIN. Lottie is late again. Bring her down.

COOK. As soon as I finish the cake, miss.

MISS MINCHIN. At once, Cook.

COOK. Yes, miss. *(She rushes off.)*

MISS MINCHIN. We are very fortunate to have Sara among us, ladies. She is a quite special young lady, as you've all come to know. And, today, when we take our promenade on the square, Sara shall lead us. (*SARA is taken aback.*)

LAVINIA. But I'm the leader, Miss Minchin. I'm the eldest. I always lead.

MISS MINCHIN. Today, Sara shall. It's her birthday and she has read all of Kipling.

LAVINIA. I've read things, too, miss.

MISS MINCHIN. Sara is the cleverest child this school has ever known. With Sara leading us, everyone will be able to see the quality of Miss Minchin's students. In fact, from now on, when we present ourselves to the public we shall have Sara leading us.

SARA. I'd be honored to lead, Miss Minchin, but I'd really prefer to share that honor.

MISS MINCHIN. You shall lead, Sara.

SARA. Lavinia and I could take turns. That would be fairest.

MISS MINCHIN. You shall lead and the rest shall follow.

(Screams are heard from offstage. COOK drags on LOTTIE, a child of about 8.)

LOTTIE. Noo! Nooo!

COOK. Shut up!

LOTTIE. I just wanted to look nice for the party.

COOK. Don't do you no good if you're not at the party, does it?

LOTTIE (*throwing herself on the floor in a tantrum*). I don't care! I don't care!

MISS MINCHIN. Cook. Prepare the cake.

COOK. Yes, miss.

(COOK exits. MISS MINCHIN calmly goes to LOTTIE and puts her arm around her.)

LOTTIE *(in the tantrum)*. No, no, no!!! *(MISS MINCHIN grabs her by the wrist and yanks her up.)* Ow, you're hurting me. That's hurting.

MISS MINCHIN. When I hear screaming, my hand automatically tightens. *(LOTTIE screams louder and louder as MISS MINCHIN tightens. Finally, MISS MINCHIN lets her go. LOTTIE catches her breath for a moment, then continues to pound on the floor, furiously. SARA goes to her and lies down on the floor, staring into LOTTIE's face. LOTTIE is startled and stops momentarily.)*

SARA. I used to feel like that a great deal, but whenever I'd start to scream, the monkeys would scream louder. *(LOTTIE calms slightly.)* Well, since I can't bear monkey noise, I'd start thinking of things. Like suppose I was a princess who ruled from an ivory castle. All the populace would come to me when they were unhappy, and I'd give them food and clothes and jobs that they liked to do. And, of course, in turn, they'd bring me the most beautiful divans and the most delicious treats. And I'd lie on those couches and eat all day long, feeling so at peace with my entire kingdom. *(LOTTIE has forgotten her tantrum. SARA turns to MISS MINCHIN and speaks in perfect, fluent French.)* Excusez moi de vous interrompre, mais raconter une histoire peut être reconfortant— *(With a gesture toward LOTTIE.)* pour

les petites. [I beg your pardon for interrupting but a story can be quite soothing—for the little ones.]

ERMENGARDE. Gosh, where did you learn all that?

SARA. From my papa. He always spoke French with me.

My maman was French.

ERMENGARDE. No, I mean the castles and princesses.

SARA. Oh. It's just supposing. I like to suppose I'm a princess. Don't you?

(As they all stare at SARA, COOK carries in the cake with lit candles. MISS MINCHIN leads the GIRLS in singing "For She's a Jolly Good Fellow" to SARA. The song ends.)

COOK. Beg yer pardon, miss. There's a man come. A carrier. Says it's important.

MISS MINCHIN. I'll see him presently.

COOK. Yes, miss. *(As she exits.)* Happy Birthday, Miss Sara.

SARA. Thank you, Cook. It looks delicious.

MISS MINCHIN. On behalf of the school, Sara, it is my pleasure to give you this.

SARA *(opens the present. It is a book)*. Thank you, miss. You know what I like most.

MISS MINCHIN. You have made this term the most rewarding in our history, Sara. You may continue with the celebration in my absence, ladies. Many happy returns, Sara. I am certain you will find the rest of your gifts quite suitable to your position. *(She exits.)*

SARA. Oh, Papa remembered.

JESSIE. Come on, Vinia. She's going to open her presents.

LAVINIA. Must be fantastic if they're suitable to her position. Little Miss Princess.

ERMENGARDE. Blow out the candles, Sara. She said we could go on.

LAVINIA. You just want to eat the cake.

SARA. Of course, she does. We all do.

LAVINIA. The whole thing won't be enough to satisfy her.

SARA. Perhaps you'd like to give her your piece to see if that's true?

LOTTIE. Hurry, Sara, they're melting!

ERMENGARDE. It's your wish I was thinking of, Sara.

SARA. Of course it was.

LOTTIE. Come on, Sara, if they all melt, you'll get no wish.

SARA (*holding her doll close*). And wishes are such precious things, aren't they?

LOTTIE. You've got to close your eyes! Close your eyes or it's no good! (*SARA stares off, blowing out the candles in one breath.*) It's no good. You didn't close your eyes.

SARA. No, Lottie, as long as you feel it, a wish can be wished any way at all. And I always like to see my wishes.

LAVINIA. So what is it you've wished for, turning into a real instead of a fake princess?

ERMENGARDE. If I were a real princess, I'd get a guillotine and chop some heads.

SARA. No, Ermengarde, you wouldn't. You'd want to, because you see how hurtful people can be. But to be generous, to forgive—that's what a real princess would do. That's what you'd do.

LAVINIA. Oh, thank you, thank you, Your Highness.
(Laughing, LAVINIA does a mock curtsy. SARA stares at her. LAVINIA continues laughing and looks at JESSIE, who is not laughing. She looks back at SARA, who is still staring at her. She stops laughing.) You do like to stare at people, don't you?

SARA. Yes. I like to find them out and think them over afterwards. Staring helps me see what's inside. All that's buried deep down. All that people are afraid to let show. Sometimes, it's quite awful what's been done to them. But still, sometimes there's a great deal of good inside and the person doesn't even know. They've forgotten it's there. *(A surge of emotion wells up in LAVINIA. She turns away and moves off by herself.)*

LOTTIE. Come on, Sara, open the presents, now.

JESSIE *(handing one of the packages tentatively to SARA)*.
This looks like a good one.

SARA. Yes, I'm sure you're right. *(She opens the box and takes out a stunning dress. The others all gasp in awe. SARA holds the dress up to herself. She strokes it gently.)*

ERMENGARDE. It's beautiful, Sara. It's the most beautiful dress I've ever seen.

SARA. I shan't wear this for everyday. I shall save it for one special day.

LOTTIE. Can we open another, Sara?

SARA. Of course, Lottie.

LOTTIE *(opening the box and taking out a large, very fine doll)*. A dolly, a dolly! *(They all gather round. SARA holds the doll close.)*

SARA. Papa. *(The GIRLS comment and try to pat it, except for LAVINIA who has stayed apart. To LAVINIA.)*

Would you like to see her? (*Silence as the GIRLS move back from SARA. SARA stares at LAVINIA.*)

LAVINIA. You want me to see her?

SARA. Why shouldn't you? We're classmates. (*SARA hands the doll to LAVINIA.*)

LAVINIA. She's a beauty. You're very lucky.

SARA. Thank you. (*The others gather round LAVINIA, chattering. SARA moves away, picks up Emily and hugs her.*) It's a very wonderful birthday, dear Emily.

LOTTIE. Oh, Sara, can I have Emily, now? Can I?

ERMENGARDE. Lottie!

LOTTIE. I'll take care of her just like Sara takes care of me. Sara's my mother. I'll be Emily's.

SARA. You and I don't have mothers, do we, Lottie, so we must be mothers ourselves. (*She holds out Emily to LOTTIE.*)

LOTTIE (*grabbing Emily*). That's right. Oh, my baby. Oh, my little—

(*MISS MINCHIN enters, visibly upset. LAVINIA gives SARA back the new doll as the GIRLS quickly move apart and stand stiffly.*)

SARA. Look what my papa gave me, Miss Minchin.

ERMENGARDE. Isn't she a beauty?

JESSIE. And a velvet dress, too.

LOTTIE. A princess dress!

MISS MINCHIN. Stop! Enough!

LOTTIE. But there're more presents—

MISS MINCHIN. Enough, I said! This party is over.

ERMENGARDE. Over?

LOTTIE (*overlapping*). Why?

MISS MINCHIN. It is over. (*Reaching for the new doll.*)

Give me that.

SARA (*holding on*). My papa gave it to me.

MISS MINCHIN. Your father gave you nothing. I paid for it. (*She takes the doll and the dress.*) For six months. All of your ridiculous extravagances. (*The CHILDREN are staring at her.*) You are to go to your rooms. All of you, save Sara.

LOTTIE. Nooo.

MISS MINCHIN. Immediately. Without one whimper or comment. Now, go. (*The GIRLS exit quickly except for LOTTIE who runs to SARA, hugs her and with great effort gives her Emily. LOTTIE exits as MISS MINCHIN paces. SARA stands fixed, holding Emily.*) I have something of grave import to convey to you, Sara.

SARA. My papa always said it's best to be quick with bad news.

MISS MINCHIN. I've just received a letter. Your father entrusted his entire fortune to a friend. The friend lost that fortune in a business venture. You have no money. (*SARA turns away slightly. MISS MINCHIN searches for a way to go on.*) There is more. Just when your father heard of the loss, he had come down with a case of jungle fever. He didn't have the will to fight it. He's dead, Sara. I'm sorry. (*SARA is immobile, staring straight at MISS MINCHIN.*) You do understand what I'm saying? Your father is dead. You have no one to take care of you. No friends, no money, nothing. (*SARA's face twitches slightly but she continues to stare straight ahead at MISS MINCHIN.*) I don't know what we shall do. I have spent so much. And it's all lost, your fee as well. What are you staring at? Don't you understand

what I mean? You are quite alone in the world unless I choose to keep you here. Now, listen to me and remember what I say. If you work hard, I shall let you stay. You speak French well and in a year or so you can begin to help with the younger pupils.

SARA. I can speak French better than you, now.

MISS MINCHIN. Don't be impudent. You will have to improve your manners if you expect to earn your bread. You are not a parlor boarder, now. Remember that if you don't please me, and I send you away, you have no home but the street. You can go. (*SARA turns to go.*) Don't you intend to thank me?

SARA (*trying to control the twitching in her face*). What for?

MISS MINCHIN. For my kindness to you. For my kindness in giving you a home.

SARA. You are not kind.

MISS MINCHIN. I've paid for you for months. I'm keeping you on with no chance of recovering the money. That's more kindness than most would give. Now, put that doll down. You'll have no time for dolls.

SARA. I won't put her down. My papa gave her to me before I ever met you.

MISS MINCHIN. Don't bother going to your room. That room is no longer yours.

SARA. Where am I to sleep?

MISS MINCHIN. In the attic.

SARA. Where the rats are?

MISS MINCHIN. You're a servant, now.