

THE GIRL IN THE ATTIC A PLAY IN TWO ACTS**V CHRISTOPHERS**Adapted from the novel *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett**ACT ONE****SCENE ONE India**

The scene opens in India. It is hot & busy. Several people are moving to & fro as if in a terrible hurry. They are market traders calling out their wares; mothers & children; lone children harrying tourists for coins or food, trying to pick-pocket. Although it is daytime (late afternoon) it is semi-dark - full of vibrant colour - oppressive.

There is a chaise longue covered in a sheet and a variety of Indian "throws" strewn across the chaise longue. A figure tosses and turns in the sheets; a nurse and a doctor watch anxiously as this figure cries out over and over again, in English. The nurse is bathing the person's head with a damp cloth; the doctor paces up and down as waiting for someone to enter the room. As the doctor speaks, lights fade on main stage and that scene freezes.

Doctor: It is a long time since Mr Carrisford left us. He is supposed to be helping us with this poor man. Only he can give him hope.

Nurse: I sent Adhira to the office to try and track him down. It seems that everyone has fled. The news of the collapse of the mines has driven everyone away.

Doctor: I don't understand. Carrisford is a good man; a bit foolhardy, but he would never abandon his best friend. The rumoured loss of the diamonds is a terrible blow to both of them. If only we knew the truth. Crewe put all his money into this enterprise..

Crewe: *(he is breathing very hard, delirious & tries to get out of bed)* Sara, Sara! Little Missus! I must find her. I must warn her. She is poor, destitute, without friends. No money....no money... Help her, please *(he grips the Dr's white coat)* Help her aaaah! *(he falls back, then gets up again)* Carrisford, my friend, where are you? Look after her, Carrisford.... *(during his ramblings the nurse and doctor have to restrain him and put him back onto the chaise-longue)*

Doctor: You must calm yourself, Captain. This will never do – you are dangerously ill. .

There is a gasp from Crewe and choking

Doctor: He's fading fast - quickly nurse.
The Nurse desperately tries to comfort the Captain.

Nurse: Please Sir! You are doing no good by fretting in this way. All will be taken care of. Your little Sara will be found and looked after.

Doctor: Captain, tell us where Sara is. Carrisford will take care of her.

Crewe Sara, Sara. My Little Princess. Forgive me, my darling, forgive me! Ah, if only I could feel your little arms around my neck this minute. What wouldn't I give to feel ... see... Sara.....

Captain Crewe gives a heavy deep sigh and dies.

Doctor: It is too late.. he is gone and we know nothing of his beloved daughter's whereabouts Did he ever mention to you where Sara is? We must find Carrisford.

Adhira comes rushing in

Adhira: Memsaab. He's gone! Everything's gone. He's run away!

Nurse: Now now, Adhira. Calm down. Mr Carrisford would not have just left.

Adhira: Excuse for rudeness Memsaab, but he has gone.

Doctor: I was afraid of this. Nurse we will have to face the facts. Captain Crewe was a ruined man and his friend has deserted him. We must alert the authorities in England and send the sad news to the Crewe's solicitors. They will know where Sara is.

Nurse: That poor child. She has no idea what this means.

The lights fade

Entre'acte: Outside the seminary

Lights cross fade to cold/outdoor.

Two Children appear from within the audience – narrators. They are dressed as smart school children of the day. They are, in fact, pupils of Miss Minchin's seminary for Young Ladies.

Beatrice: But now we must take you back to when Sara Crewe arrived at the Seminary for Young Ladies.

Alice: She had arrived having spent the last few days with her beloved father Captain Crewe, in London, shortly before he left her to go to India.

Captain Crewe and Sara enter hand in hand.

Sara: *(almost whispering)* Papa; Papa!

Crewe: What is it darling? What is my Sara thinking of?

Sara: Is this the place? Is it, Papa?

Crewe: Yes, little Sara, it is. We have reached it at last.

Sara: Couldn't you go to that place with me, papa? Couldn't you go to school, too? I would help you with your lessons.

Crewe: But you will not have to stay for a very long time, little Sara. There will be a lot of girls, and you will play together, and I will send you plenty of books, and you will grow so fast that it will seem scarcely a year before you are big enough and clever enough to come back and take care of your papa.

Sara: If we are here I suppose we must be resigned. I dare say soldiers—even brave ones—don't really LIKE going into battle.

Crewe: *(laughing)* O Sara! What shall I do when I have no one to say solemn things to me? No one else is as solemn as you are.

Sara: But why do solemn things make you laugh so?

Crewe: Because you are such fun when you say them,

Sara: I'm a little scared Papa. I would very much like to be brave but it is difficult.

Crewe: But you have your doll Emily. You said how much she will comfort you when I am gone, and how well she listens.

Sara: That is true. Here we are Emily. This is our destination. Papa, I should like her always to look as if she was a child with a good mother. I'm her mother, though I am going to make a companion of her. I never knew my mother, but I know how to pretend to be a mother.

They walk across stage and stay chatting together before they enter Miss Minchin's.

Beatrice and Alice are joined by a number of chatting, laughing schoolgirls who all greet each other after a long time away. As they pass Sara & Crewe, they start to point and mutter – curiosity getting the better of them.

Beatrice: Come on Alice, there's Victoria. *(She runs across the stage and greets a group of girls)*

Alice: *(Dropping some of her parcels/cases)* Oh wait for me. Hello Victoria. Hello Isobel. Have you seen that new girl over there?

Isobel: She looks very rich. Look at all her petticoats...

Victoria: And her fur muff. She looks spoilt to me.

Beatrice: Well I think she looks very pretty. I'd love to have clothes like that to wear.

Victoria: Really, Beatrice. We all know that your Grandmama pays for you to come here. You're far too poor to own clothes like that!

Alice: Don't be so mean Victoria. You're sounding more and more like Lavinia every day.

The girls continue to discuss Sara and her Father when there is a commotion at the steps and in comes Miss Amelia (sister to Miss Minchin)

Miss Amelia: Come along girls, come along. Let us have some sense of decorum please. Line up ... IN TWOS please Isobel, and we will go in an orderly fashion into the school.