

SCENE SEVEN: THE SCHOOLROOM

Cook, Miss Amelia, carrying a large box, Miss Minchin and Becky enter.

Miss M: Now Cook... as you have gathered I want this birthday party to reflect the importance of our student Sara Crewe.

Cook: Yes Mmm.

Miss M: This is not an ordinary occasion. I do not desire that it should be treated as one.

Cook: Yes Mmm.

Miss M: And *please* make sure that wretch of a scullery maid keeps out of the way.

Cook immediately turns round to Becky, who has been keeping out of the limelight, and clips her round the ear

Cook: Did you 'ear that, young 'un? No getting' in the way of the Ladies.

Becky: No Cook – I promise.

Cook: No use promising gel, yer got to make sure you're not seen – get it?

Miss Am: I'm sure Becky understands Cook – let's not get too aggressive shall we?

Miss M: Oh do be quiet Amelia! Cook knows what she's doing.

Cook: Yes Mum, I do, and that scullery maid can get as cheeky as I don't know what.
(*Turning again to Becky*) And remember, you – yer don' get anything ter eat unless I says so!

Becky: Yes Cook.

Miss A: Well get along now Becky. Cook will tell you what to do.

Cook & Becky exit with Cook muttering and pushing her out.

Miss A: You don't think we're making too much fuss over this birthday do you sister dear? We have never done anything like this for any of our other students, not even for Miss Lavinia.

Miss M: Good heavens, Amelia! Where have you been all these weeks? Sara Crewe stands to inherit a fortune. She is likely to be one of the richest people in London, possibly in the country. Do you really think I am doing all this for *her* benefit?

Miss A: Oh dear! I really must be very stupid. (*Miss Minchin at this, raises her eyebrows*) I still don't understand.

Miss M: Money, sister dear, money! Surely you can see that Captain Crewe and his doting daughter are the means for us to keep this seminary until we retire – and we will retire in grandeur, mark my words. Why else would I spend ridiculous amounts of money on a mere student?

Miss A: But you are saying, if I understand you correctly, sister, that you care nothing for Sara herself, and that all this peculiar attention you are paying her is merely to secure our future?

Miss M: Correct Amelia. I am glad you see it my way!

Miss A: I – I did not – er I couldn't- Sara Crewe is a wonderful child – I have grown very fond of her – surely...

Miss M: Miss Amelia, you are ridiculously emotional. This is a business. I care nothing for these spoilt brats. They are a means to an end, nothing more.

Cook enters

Cook: 'Scuse me Mum, but the young ladies are waiting to come in.

Miss M: Thank you Cook. Please let them come in.

*There is a general noise of excited girls as they all enter, chattering and laughing, trying to push each other to be at the centre of all attention – the large box!
Sara follows with Ermengarde & Lottie. Becky sneaks in and watches from the side.*

Miss M: Silence, young Ladies!
Becky has sidled up nearer to all the young ladies and is smiling at Lottie & Ermengarde

Miss M: Becky! It is not your place to look at the young ladies. You forget yourself. Remove yourself at once.

Sara: If you please Miss Minchin, may Becky stay? She is a little girl too and would love to see the presents.

Miss M: Becky! My dearest Sara. Becky is the scullery maid. Scullery maids – er – are not - little girls.

Lavinia and Jessie start to giggle.

Lavinia(*whispering*) Well really. What will Princess Sara be asking for next – that the whole of the kitchen staff attend her Royal Highness' birthday!

Jessie: Just look at Miss Minchin's face – she looks as if she's smelling something unpleasant.

They explode into giggles again.

Miss M: (*aware that everyone is now looking at her*) As you ask it as a birthday favour, she may stay. Rebecca, thank Miss Sara for her great kindness.

Becky is quite overcome and begins to bob curtsies. The girls start to laugh again.

Becky: If you please miss! I'm that grateful miss! And thank you ma'am (*turning to Miss Minchin*) for letting me take the liberty.

Miss M: *(with a dismissive wave of her hand)* Go and stand over there – not too near the young ladies.

Becky moves US but Lavinia makes a fuss about moving out of her way...

Miss M: Silence, Lavinia! Now. You are aware, young ladies, that dear Sara is 12 years old today.

Lavinia *(sarcastically)* Dear Sara!

Miss M: When she is older she will be the heiress to a great fortune, which it will be her duty to spend in a meritorious manner. When her dear Papa Captain Crewe, brought her from India, he said to me in a jesting way, 'I'm afraid she will be very rich Miss Minchin.' My reply was 'Her education at my seminary shall be such as will adorn the largest fortune'. Sara has become my most accomplished student. Her French and her dancing are a credit to the seminary. Her manners – which have caused you to call her Princess Sara – are impeccable. I hope you appreciate her generosity. I wish you to express your appreciation of it by saying aloud "Thank you Sara".