

Frances Hodgson Burnett  
**A LITTLE PRINCESS**

Read by **Lucy Whybrow**

JUNIOR  
CLASSICS



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1	Sara	6:35
2	Emily	3:40
3	A French Lesson	5:13
4	Ermengarde	7:01
5	Lottie	6:14
6	Becky	7:58
7	The Diamond Mines	5:31
8	'Princess Sara'	5:12
9	Sara's Birthday Party	5:25
10	The Diamond Mines Again	5:07
11	Bad News	6:14
12	In the Attic	8:22
13	Melchisedec	6:33

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14	Sara had some crumbs in her hand	2:31
15	The Indian Gentleman	5:36
16	Ram Dass	5:39
17	The Other Side of the Wall	5:33
18	One of the Populace	6:30
19	Sara and Ermengarde	4:21
20	Becky Punished	7:49
21	The Magic	6:13
22	The Visitor	7:54
23	'It Is the Child!'	6:25
24	'I Tried Not to Be'	7:41
25	Miss Minchin Returns Alone	4:52
26	Anne	6:43

**Total time: 2:37:29**

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## Frances Hodgson Burnett

# A LITTLE PRINCESS

The swings of fortune experienced by the heroine of *A Little Princess*, Sara Crewe, are hardly more fabulous than those of the author's own life. Frances Hodgson Burnett was born plain Frances Hodgson in Manchester, England into comfortable circumstances in 1849, but her father died when she was just four and the family was forced to live in a slum district of the city. There, young Fanny developed a passion for reading, like Sara Crewe, together with an unsentimental sympathy for the very poor and a sharp ear for their authentic speech.

In 1865 her mother and her family emigrated to Knoxville, Tennessee, where they lived in a log cabin, and where the growing teenager tried one enterprise after another in order to help support the family. These included attempting to run a small private school which, of course, in the form of Miss Minchin's infamous seminary, provides the setting for *A Little Princess*.

Like Sara Crewe, Frances Hodgson triumphed over adversity through the exercise of her imagination, through her ability to turn the plain and messy experience

of ordinary life into adventures and romances. She started to send her stories to magazine editors whilst still a teenager, and was immediately successful. She got married in 1873 to a doctor called Burnett, with whom she lived in Washington and Paris, and had two sons whom she adored.

In 1883 her novels of social realism were being compared with the literary giants of the day, like George Eliot and Henry James. But in a letter she wrote with the first story she sent out, she made her intentions quite plain: 'My object is remuneration'; and her extravagant tastes ensured that this would continue to be her main motivation for writing. So when she discovered an ability to turn out more popular and undemanding works, she did not resist it. However, if the billowing romance of these wish-fulfilling narratives caught her readers' imaginations, they did so through her ability to ballast them with gritty realism, and through her attention to the telling detail. As she herself once said of the art of writing, 'It is not enough to mention they have tea; you must specify the muffins.'

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It was in this way that Hodgson Burnett came to share the best-seller lists in 1886 with arguably the greatest novel ever written, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. She achieved this with her most famous title, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. The eponymous hero (modelled upon her own son, Vivian) is a brave-spirited little American boy who inherits an English earldom, and succeeds in impressing upon his illustrious but crusty relatives the great democratic principle of Hodgson Burnett's adoptive country, expressed by the poet Tennyson as 'kind hearts are more than coronets'.

*Little Lord Fauntleroy*, published in 1886, brought Hodgson Burnett fame and fortune. The book was turned into a play on both sides of the Atlantic – the equivalent of a major Hollywood film today – and the splendid little fellow's outfit of black velvet knee breeches and tunic with Vandyke collar and golden curls was subsequently inflicted on a whole generation of little boys.

Her next novel was 'Sara Crewe'; or what happened at Miss Minchin's, which was serialised in 1887, and appeared in book form the following year. This was also turned into a stage play, renamed *A Little Unfair Princess* for the production in London, and *A Little Princess* in New York. And it, too, was a

wild success, so much so that the author was persuaded to expand the original novel to include characters and incidents developed in the stage version, particularly in the first half of the book. The result, *A Little Princess*, has gone on to become an enduring and much-loved children's classic. It is a satisfying fantasy of virtue rewarded and vice punished as well as delivering a deeper message, which is that morality is based in the human imagination, in the ability to imagine what others feel.

Unfortunately, Hodgson Burnett discovered that real life is never quite as romantic as fiction. One of her sons, called Lionel, died tragically young, and she divorced her husband in 1898, marrying a much younger man, whom she divorced in turn in 1901, after only a few months. She lived in Kent during the 1890s, but continued to travel constantly between London and New York. If she had not finally settled in Long Island to tend her garden when the *Titanic* made her maiden voyage in 1912, she would more than likely have been on-board the doomed liner. In fact, her last great novel came out the previous year, in 1911, and was inspired by her love of gardens. This was *The Secret Garden*, another story about an orphan brought to

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England from India. But the dramatic reversals of fortune of her previous popular fictions are here eschewed in favour of a gradual moral and spiritual transformation of the young heroine.

Hodgson Burnett lived until 1924, in considerable style, defying mundane reality – like little Sara Crewe – by creating her own image of herself. She sustained her romantic dream in the face of old age with swathes of chiffon and lace and a large orange wig. However, she was certainly right when she

wrote towards the end of her career: ‘What we all want is more... life, love, hope – and an assurance that they are true. With the best that was in me I have tried to write more happiness into the world.’

Her novels stand among the best from the great age of children’s writing, which the Naxos Junior Classics collection is helping to bring to a new generation of children, with recordings of *Little Women*, *The Railway Children* and other favourites of the genre.

**Notes by Duncan Steen**

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Frances Hodgson Burnett  
**A LITTLE PRINCESS**

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Sara Crewe is one of the most vivid figures in children's fiction. Born in India, sent to school in England, she is, at first, treated like a princess by the teacher, Miss Minchin. But when it is evident that Sara does not have the fortune of a princess, she is despatched to live in the attic and become a servant. It is the remarkable way which which Sara copes, imagining that things are not as bad as they seem, which has made her a role model for many young girls, who also hope to experience the happy ending.



**Lucy Whybrow's** credits include Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* and Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* for the RSC. She won the Ian Charleson Award in 1996 for her role in Katie Mitchell's *Easter*. For Carnival Films she played Lucy Deane in *The Mill On The Floss*. For radio she has recorded *Dombey and Son* and *Alice In Wonderland*. Lucy read the part of Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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