

The
Princess
and the
Suffragette

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 SCHOLASTIC



Chapter One

One afternoon in June, a carriage rolled up to the door of a tall house in a quiet London square. The girl who climbed down the steps was dressed in the height of fashion, her dress heavily trimmed with lace. She was swathed in a rich sable stole and she stroked the fur smugly as she looked up at the house and the discreet brass plate by the front door.

Miss Minchin

Select Seminary for Young Ladies

"I have come to visit Miss Jessie," the girl said to the sour-faced parlour maid who answered the door.

"I'm sure I don't know, miss," the parlour maid began. "I'm not sure what Miss Minchin would say. Shall I take in your card to her?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Mary," the girl snapped. "It's me, Miss Lavinia. Just show me into the schoolroom." And she tilted her head sideways so that the maid could see underneath her enormous hat.

The parlour maid peered at her, and her mouth turned down even further. "I didn't recognize you, miss," she said coldly, standing back to allow her in. "I'll show you to the schoolroom. As if you didn't know exactly where it was," she added under her breath. She glanced behind her and smirked a little as she watched Lavinia primping in the mirror on the wall, adjusting her hat to show off her sharply pretty face and the elaborate piles of her hair.

“Miss Lavinia to see you, Miss Jessie.” The maid threw open the schoolroom door and stepped back to allow Lavinia to swan graciously inside.

“Lavinia!”

“Lavvie! Oh, you’ve come to visit!”

“Look at your dress, and, oh, Lavinia, the furs! Did your papa buy them for you?”

The girls swarmed around her, cooing and stroking the rich brown fur and admiring the puffs of ostrich feathers on Lavinia’s extravagant hat.

“Do you think she put on her very grandest things, just to show off to all of us?” muttered a younger girl, sitting in the deep window seat that looked on to the street. “She looks ridiculous. That hat – she can’t even see out from under it without cricking her neck.”

“Ssshhh, Lottie, she’ll hear you.”

“I don’t care if she does,” Lottie retorted. “It’s not as if she can do anything to us now, Ermengarde. Miss Minchin’s has been almost bearable since Lavinia left. Jessie isn’t nearly so bad without

Lavinia here to egg her on.” Lottie watched the others, who were listening delightedly to Lavinia’s boasting, and turned back to the window in disgust, watching the dusty, sunny street in front of the seminary.

Almost bearable... Lottie had been at Miss Minchin’s since she was a spoiled baby of four. She had grown up in luxury, surrounded by Miss Minchin’s grand furnishings, taught French and literature and dancing by the most expensive teachers. She was a Young Lady, through and through, just like Lavinia and the other girls.

She hated it. No one actually liked Miss Minchin’s – unless Lavinia had? Lottie glanced back at the crowd in the middle of the schoolroom and frowned. Lavinia had always been a bully, but a clever one. She seemed to know the most hurtful thing to say, at the very worst moment. As a favourite pupil of Miss Minchin’s, she was almost unstoppable – certainly Lottie would never dare to complain about Lavinia’s cruelty. She had ruled

the schoolroom with her sharp tongue and sharper nails. Yes, perhaps Lavinia *had* enjoyed her time as queen of the seminary. She had learned from Miss Minchin herself, Lottie thought. Her cutting remarks were just the same sort of things Miss Minchin said about wrong sums or daydreaming or bitten nails.

The pupils at Miss Minchin's knew quite well who the favourites were. Not the cleverest girls, but the richest ones. The ones who had families that would recommend the seminary, and send more girls to be shut up and stifled in the tall dark house.

The heat had yellowed the leaves on the trees early and there wasn't a breath of wind to move them, but Lottie still ached to be outside. Not in a slow, tortuous crocodile of polite little girls, but running around the square, chasing after a hoop or a ball, as the children from the other houses in the square did sometimes. She sighed, and Ermengarde sighed too.

“Perhaps Jessie hasn’t been so awful to you.” Ermengarde stroked her cheek nervously with the fluffy end of her plait. “But she never stops telling me how stupid I am. And Lavinia visiting is only going to make her worse.”

Possibly Lavinia heard her name – she certainly looked over at just the wrong moment, when Ermengarde was doing her very best impression of a frightened white rabbit, and Lottie had wrinkled her nose in disgust.

Lavinia, seated on one of the schoolroom chairs with her ankles graciously crossed, smiled at them, at her grandest. Her expression was sweet and pitying – the smile of an adult faced with two silly girls. “Is there something the matter, Lottie?” she asked gently. “You look quite ill. Perhaps you should go and see Miss Amelia and ask to be put to bed.”

Lottie smiled back. “I do have a little bit of a headache,” she admitted. “I’m afraid your necklace is making it worse. It’s just so glittery. Paste jewels are very bright, aren’t they?”

Lavinia sucked in a breath. "These are real diamonds," she snapped. "My papa gave them to me, for my presentation at court. They are *not* paste!" She managed to plaster her smile on again. "Of course, a *little girl* like you wouldn't be able to tell the difference." She whisked round, and carried on talking to Jessie about her court presentation dress and its eleven-foot train. She was telling the others about all the compliments she'd received, but there were red patches across the tops of her cheeks, and it was easy to see that she was furious.

"I don't think her court presentation can have been that much of a success, if she has to come back to Miss Minchin's and boast to Jessie and all of us," muttered Ermengarde. "Doesn't she have a huge horde of fashionable new friends now that she's a debutante?"

"Ermie!" Lottie nudged her admiringly. "That was almost catty. Well done. Pity you said it to me instead of Lavinia, though."

Ermengarde shuddered. "I can never think of