

The Little Match Girl Excerpt

Prologue.

(House lights and Stage Preset fade to Blackout. Faces of people appear in the darkness, candles held under their chins to offer the illusion of faces floating in mid-air. Dialogue delivered line upon line, almost "stream of consciousness.")

BOY

Hello. Hello!

(Others echo)

What are you doing? Matches?

(MATCH GIRL, seated in the snow C, lights a match, pool of light rises on her as she gazes into the flame, allowing the match to burn out.)

A penny? No thank you. Don't need any. What's your name?

(Others echo)

Your nose is red, isn't it? Cold?

(Others echo. High laughter from WOMAN)

No sister? Dead mother?

WOMAN

Is your mother dead?

GIRL

I have no mother.

BOY

Mothers are nice.

WOMAN

Is your mother dead?

BOY

No mother? I could help. I wish... Do you ever wish?

(Others echo. Faces disappear. A large, drunken man is illumined.)

MATCH GIRL'S FATHER

What?! None?!

MATCH GIRL

Yes. Yes.

MATCH GIRL'S FATHER

Well, you'll just have to pay. Just like your dead mother paid. Sold none?! I'll have your head, you wretched daughter! I love you, and you don't even know it, do you? Do you?! You don't even know what love is, do you?

BOY

Do you....?

(The sound of a music box is heard.)

GIRL

Do you know what? When my grandmother was alive, she loved me best of all!

GRANDMOTHER

I loved you best of all.

GIRL

Let's go skating!

BOY

Let's go skating! I know the place. A brother fro a while...

MATCH GIRL'S FATHER

Smile! Smile when you say it!

(The sound of a slap. MATCH GIRL holds the side of her face as if she'd been hit. She begins to rise.)

People don't like you anyway, so you have to. I'm getting old...

(LITTLE GIRL runs over and caresses MATCH GIRL'S cheek.)

BOY

Cold? I know. It's cold for me too.

GRANDMOTHER

You'll never be cold, because I love you.

WOMAN

In winter, pull the covers over you...

MAN

See the snow! See the snow!

(MOTHER appears. LITTLE GIRL and MATCH GIRL run to her with outstretched arms; MOTHER lifts LITTLE GIRL and whirls her away. MATCH GIRL turns back, saddened, and sits back down, alone in the snow.)

VOICE OF MATCH GIRL

Grandmother – I'm cold; take me with you!

GRANDMOTHER

I love you. Goodbye.

WOMAN

Wait...

MAN

I hate the cold weather!

(Female voice sings "Good King Wenceslas" under narration, as MATCH GIRL rises, mirror-image approaches. MATCH GIRL and IMAGE touch. IMAGE exits and MATCH GIRL is again alone; she sits.)

NARRATOR

It was dreadfully cold. The snow was falling and it was almost dark on the last evening of the old year. In the cold and gloom, a poor girl was wandering through the streets. She carried a number of matches in an old apron and she held a bundle of them in her hand. No one had bought any matches from her all day long, and no one had given her so much as a single penny.

(Voices of the dark resume.)

MAN

What? What?

WOMAN

Who are you? What is it you want? What is it you want?

MAN

What are you doing here? What are you doing here?

(GIRL runs across stage in front of MATCH GIRL, trips, falls, and exits.)

WOMAN

(Laughing)

She fell in the snow, the little wretch!

(Sound of silver bells.)

MAN

Get out of the way of the horses! Get out of the way of the horses!

YOUNG MAN

Let's go skating!

YOUNG WOMAN

Let's go skating! Hurry.

YOUNG MAN

Hurry!

YOUNG WOMAN

Hurry!

(BOY and GIRL skate by; MATCH GIRL waves.)

MAN

What? What?!!

WOMAN

Who are you? What is it you want? What is it you want?

MAN

What are you doing here? What are you doing here?

WOMAN

She fell in the snow, poor little wretch!

MAN

Get out of the way of the horses. Get out of the way of the horses!

BOY

Let's go skating! Let's go skating!

(Sleigh bells. YOUNG COUPLE skate across, pause at MATCH GIRL, laugh, exit.)

WOMAN

Merry Christmas!

NARRATOR

It was dreadfully cold. When she had left home she had been wearing slippers, but they had been of little use. They were big slippers – much too big, for they had belonged to her mother. The little child had lost them...

(YOUNG MAN runs in, stoops to pick up a slipper, waves it in the air. MATCH GIRL reaches after it as YOUNG MAN runs off, laughing.)

...as she was running across the road to get out of the way of the carriages that went racing by.

MAN

Cold?

MATCH GIRL'S FATHER

Matches. Matches.

WOMAN

Who are you? What is it you want?

MATCH GIRL

Matches. Matches. Will you buy my matches?

MATCH GIRL'S FATHER

Louder! Louder!

(Sound of sleigh bells. MATCH GIRL rises as MAN rushes by, ignoring her.)

MAN

The horses! The horses! Get out of the way of the horses!

(Another MAN rushes by, bumps MATCH GIRL, grabs her and throws her down. Blackout. The lights rise on GRANDMOTHER, surrounded by a circle of children. MATCH GIRL sits DSC in story circle, her back to audience. Music box.)

GRANDMOTHER

One slipper was not to be found again. The other had been picked up by a boy,,,

GIRL

Why?

GRANDMOTHER

Thinking he could use it as a doll's cradle.

BOY

Why would he want a cradle?

GRANDMOTHER

Someday when he had children of his own...

(GRANDMOTHER fades vocally as NARRATOR speaks.)

NARRATOR

She walked along in the cold. She was very cold and the snow was falling on her long, dark hair. But she wasn't thinking of that –

(GRANDMOTHER'S voice returns and speaks with NARRATOR.)

GRANDMOTHER & NARRATOR

-- oh, no – she was thinking of Christmas, and the sweet smell pf roast goods!

GIRL

Was she crying?

GRANDMOTHER

She was the very picture of misery. The snow was falling on her long, dark hair, and she was walking along, hungry and cold. But she wasn't thinking of that, because the lights...

(GRANDMOTHER strikes a match.)

...were shining on the windows and the roast goose was cooking and the air was filled with the smell.

GIRL

What did she look like?

GRANDMOTHER

She was the very picture of misery.

MAN

Get out of my way...!

(MATCH GIRL begins to stand. As she does so, MATCH GIRL'S FATHER appears in midst of story circle and GRANDMOTHER and CHILDREN scatter and disappear. FATHER grabs the stool that GRANDMOTHER was sitting upon and lifts it above his head as he grabs MATCH GIRL'S arm with his other hand. He looms over her, threatening.)

MATCH GIRL'S FATHER

What!! None?!! Well, you'll pay! Like your dead mother paid! Sold none? I'll have your head, you wretched daughter! I love you, and you don't even know it, do you? Do you?!! You don't even know what love is, do you? DO YOU?!!

(MATCH GIRL turns away, prepared to be beaten, as lights Blackout.)

SCENE ONE.

(Music: Prokofiev's "The Stone Flower: Theme of the Mistress of the Copper Mountain. Theme of Dalino, the Stonecutter.)

(Lights rise on the street. Snow is falling. The STREET VENDOR appears. A little BOY and GIRL enter, buy pies from VENDOR and exit, running. MATCH GIRL appears, tries to sell matches to VENDOR; he turns away. Haughty WOMAN enters, bumps into MATCH GIRL, rushes off. Another WOMAN enters, pauses, looks at MATCH GIRL, takes her into her cloak and whirls her around, exits. Middle-aged COUPLE appear, look at MATCH GIRL, laugh, exit. She follows after them, then turns back in despair. She trips; her matches spill in the street.

(A MOTHER with small SON appear. SON wants to help MATCH GIRL, but mother pulls him away. MATCH GIRL runs DSC to shop window, and pantomimes peering in. THREE WOMEN pass by, stand behind MATCH GIRL, looking into window and conversing merrily. They exit. A YOUNG MAN enters; MATCH GIRL rushes up to him with her matches but he brushes her away and exits. A Procession of PRIESTS and ALTER BOYS enter and pass as MATCH GIRL observes. COUPLE enters, laughing, and embrace. MATCH GIRL offers her matches; they refuse and exit.

(Three beautiful YOUNG LADIES enter, dressed in fur with fur muffs; they pause and look at MATCH GIRL. She approaches them and strokes a muff. One YOUNG LADY allows match girl to hold her muff, but then grabs it back as the three exit haughtily. Three CADETS march past, turning their heads to look at MATCH GIRL. Three CLEANING WOMEN enter, with brooms and pails, as PEOPLE continue to pass MATCH GIRL, ignoring her. A MOTHER and SON enter. MOTHER REACHES toward MATCH GIRL, beckoning. LITTLE GIRL rushes on into MOTHER'S embrace, leaving MATCH GIRL standing, arms outstretched to no one. YOUNG LADIES in fur enter again and do a brief dance. They exit as a life-size statue of the VIRGIN MARY appears, a candle cupped in its palms. MATCH GIRL crosses to statue and lights the candle, kneeling to pray. Statue abruptly spins around, revealing

only a WOMAN who waves at a GENTLEMAN passing, joins him with an embrace, and they exit.

(CADETS reappear and dance. Each takes MATCH GIRL in his arms as they exit. The last CADET lowers her to the ground and reaches for her as he exits. MATCH GIRL runs to him but he disappears and is replaced by her drunken FATHER, who grabs her and hurls her to the ground. Music ends. Lights change. Snow ends.)

FATHER

You see, daughter – it's not for me that you do your selling of matches... no, not for me... but for your own good...you see. Just think what you would be like if you did not work...always looking around for something to do...getting into trouble and wrongdoing with wasting of time. Isn't that true, daughter?

(WOMAN'S voice: "Please...please don't...")

(He lurches toward her. MATCH GIRL sprawls, back toward him, looking dreamily off into space.)

Look at you! Always dreaming in your face every chance you can get! Just like your mother used to be. Always wishing for something else than what she was...

(MATCH GIRL'S voice: "I wish...I wish we...")

Well, we are poor people, daughter, and are meant to stay that way – not happy and carefree. There are no pretty bells ringing in this house, daughter! So get the smell of spring flowers out of your little girl head and some good sense in its place! Two pennies yesterday...and not a cent today! We can't eat the dust from your empty fingers, now can we?!!! Well, don't come home tonight with any matches in your apron, or you'll pay – just like your dead mother paid!!

(MATCH GIRL'S voice: "Please don't! Please don't hit me! Please...")

(FATHER stumbles away. Lights change to street. Snow. She sits: alone and cold. Voices.)

MAN

How much are your matches? No. No thank you.

YOUNG MAN

How old are you? You should wear something on your feet.

MAN

Don't you ever go to church?

VOICE OF MATCH GIRL

No.

(A MAN enters slowly, passes the MATCH GIRL, pauses.)

MAN

Don't you ever go to church?

MATCH GIRL

No.

(MAN exits and voices resume.)

YOUNG MAN

The bells ring for hours on New Year's Day, and it's the angels singing, you know...

MATCH GIRL'S FATHER

So get the smell of spring flowers out of your head now! Do you hear? DO YOU HEAR?!!!

(MATCH GIRL holds her head and cries out: "Aaaaah!")

GRANDMOTHER

And then, my dear, we'll have some cake and warm ginger tea, and I'll tell you of an angel, and how she flew to heaven on a star...

(A MOTHER appears, her DAUGHTER runs to her and they twirl off.

Another LITTLE GIRL runs to MATCH GIRL'S GRANDMOTHER: a memory. Four

LITTLE BOYS enter, laughing, carrying wooden stars on little sticks. They surround MATCH GIRL, who touches the stars in wonder. They freeze.)

NARRATOR

Her little hands were almost numb with the cold. Ah! A match might warm them. If she could only take one from the bundle and strike it!

(MATCH GIRL takes a match from the bundle and strikes it against one of the stars. It blazes.)

VOICE OF MATCH GIRL

I wish...I wish...