

1

What's a Thespian?

“Are you ready, thespians?” Mrs. Burke asked.

“Are your desks cleared?”

“Yes,” we all answered.

“But Mrs. Burke,” I asked, “what’s a—”

“Charlie,” Mrs. Burke said. “What’s that on the floor?”

I looked down. Somehow my math sheet had fallen on the floor. There was a sneaker mark on it. I picked up the paper and stuffed it in my desk.

Mrs. Burke frowned and shook her head. “Okay, all of you thespians,” she said, “please listen carefully.”

“What’s a thespian?” I blurted out.

“Charlie, have you forgotten Rule Number Four of Mrs. Burke’s Empire?” she asked.

“Raise your hand,” Samantha Grunsky hissed, poking my back with a pencil.

Having Samantha tell me what to do was annoying. But I still wanted to know the answer to my question, so I raised my hand. But Samantha’s was already up and Mrs. Burke called on her.

“Yes, Samantha,” Mrs. Burke said.

“I know what a thespian is,” she said.

That figures, I thought. She already knows everything.

“It’s an actor,” Samantha said.

I looked back at her and she gave me one of her I-know-everything looks.



“That’s correct,” Mrs. Burke said, “and today I want to talk about our play.”

I squirmed in my seat. Maybe she was going to give us our parts for the play. It was hard to sit still. I already knew the part I really wanted.

Every year, each fourth-grade class does a special project. Mrs. Ladislavski’s class (everyone calls her Mrs. L.) designs an obstacle course for the whole school to run through. Ms. Lewis’s class makes a special lunch with food from all around the world.

Mrs. Burke’s fourth-grade class presents a play. Everyone comes to see it, even the parents. There are lights and costumes and props and everything.

Last year the play was *The Elephant’s Surprise*, and it was pretty good even though the elephant’s cardboard trunk fell off halfway through the play and Mrs. Burke had to come out and hold it up every time the elephant talked.

At first, I thought I wasn’t going to like doing a play. My older brother Matt told me I would have to be a bunny or something, and I didn’t want to be a

bunny. Especially if Matt or someone else was going to make fun of me.

But then last week Mrs. Burke read us the play. It was called *The Sorcerer's Castle*, and it was great. Really great. There was a bunny in it, but it was stuffed, so I was safe there.

The part I wanted to play was the sorcerer. His name was Kragon. The Evil Sorcerer Kragon. Mwa-ha-ha-ha!

It was the best part in the play. And it was really the only part I wanted. But I knew four other boys wanted to be Evil Sorcerer Kragon, too. And two girls.

Only one of us would get it.

Mrs. Burke picked up a big stack of papers. "I'm going to hand out scripts that will be yours to keep," she said. "At the top of the first page I've stapled a piece of paper that says what your part is."

This was it! Now my legs were jiggling and I couldn't sit still. Even my hair was tingling.

I had to be the Evil Sorcerer Kragon. I knew

that I could do the part really well—if I just got the chance.

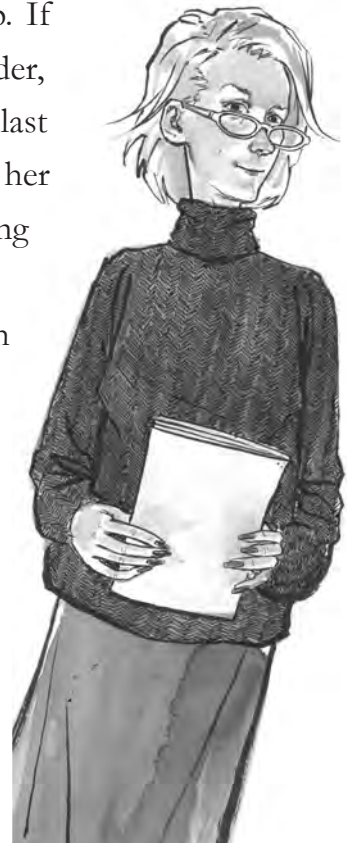
Please, please, please, please, please! I thought.

“Your first assignment,” Mrs. Burke continued, “is to go through all the pages and mark the lines that are yours. Wherever you see the name of your character, underline that part.”

Mrs. Burke started calling people to the front of the class to get their scripts. I sat on the edge of my seat, ready to jump up. If she was going in alphabetical order, I would be called soon, since my last name is Bumpers. But then I heard her call Cory Filkins, so she wasn’t going alphabetically.

Boogers! I couldn’t wait much longer.

The kids who already had their scripts started whispering about their parts. I thought I heard Cory say something about “Sorcerer,”



but then Manny Soares said, “Me, too,” so I figured they were the Sorcerer’s Assistants.

Finally, after a million years, Mrs. Burke called my name.

My heart was really beating as I walked up. She handed me my script. “This is a big part, Charlie,” she said, smiling. “I know you can do it.”

I nodded. This was a good sign. The Evil Sorcerer Kragon was a big part.

When I got back to my desk, I looked down at the piece of paper stapled to the top of my script.

I looked up at Mrs. Burke, then at the paper again.

There must be some mistake!

I checked to make sure this was my script. “Charlie Bumpers” was printed on the upper right-hand side of the paper.

“The Nice Gnome?” I said out loud. “I’m the Nice Gnome?”