

## THE SCHOOL PLAY

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Cory is super excited at Motorsorri today because it's Try-Out Day for the school play: A musical version of *The Sword and the Stone*! Cory is so convinced he'll be cast in the role of King Arthur, he's already outfitted himself in a homemade King costume complete with crown, cloak and scepter. Ms. Motors, and this year's student director, Frannie Fenderson, reminds the class that in order to be considered for a role, they need to sing a song from the musical in front of the class. Frannie is ecstatic to be in charge and calls out "Places please!"

The try outs are an adorable mash-up of the different students forgetting lines, singing off key and Freddie completely freezing under the spotlight. When it's Cory's turn, he rushes the stage enthusiastically, and actually delivers a pretty good song and dance for a kid. Clearly a cut above the charmingly mediocre competition, the other students praise Cory for nailing the try out. Ping is especially congratulatory and tells Cory he's a shoo in for the leading role. Cory soaks in the compliments and confidently reminds the others that Theater is a team sport and "every role is important." When Cory asks Ping what part he's going for, Ping says, "audience member" telling Cory how nervous he would be performing in front of a crowd. Ping promises to cheer extra loud for Cory during the show though. Cory isn't having it. Ping has just GOT TO try out. There's a role for everyone. It takes a bit of convincing, but eventually, Ping agrees to audition. On stage, he sings the same song Cory had but when the spotlight comes on, Ping transforms from a shy semi-truck to a Broadway star. Ping's voice is like an angel's. Cory is stunned – but not more than Frannie is. As soon as the audition ends, the crowd rushes from Cory to Ping and shower him with praises.

The next day, Ms. Motors hands out colorful index cards with images of the roles each student will be playing. There's an equal amount of elation and disappointment as the kids see how they've been cast. When Cory gets his card, he's taken completely off guard. He's been cast in the role of "Second Lieutenant Page Boy #2?? With ONE LINE?!?" Freddie is cast as Page Boy #1 and has three lines! To make matters worse, Ms. Motors awards Ping with his card: The coveted role of King Arthur himself!

Cory is simply flabbergasted and implores Ms. Motors there must be some mistake, but Ms. Motors tells Cory the casting is correct, and echoes his own words from earlier, "Every role is important." Before Cory can protest any further, the moment is interrupted by Frannie already taking her role as Director a bit too seriously. She's the curt Broadway director barking orders at her cast, reminding them the show is TONIGHT! Frannie directs the actors to their places. When it's time for Cory's one line, he embellishes quite a bit as he

adlibs the virtues of being a Page Boy in medieval times. Frannie quickly checks her book and asks, "Is that in the script?" When Cory confesses he added it, she strongly suggests he stick to the play as written.

When Ping comes on stage, he's a veritable virtuoso. His voice is like an angel from heaven as he sings a short song about his desire to draw the sword from the stone. On verse two, Cory decides to chime in and sings over Ping (quite loudly) Frannie shouts, "Is that in the script?" Cory confesses he may have taken some poetic license. Realizing a choice casting opportunity, Frannie eagerly replaces Cory's script with another. She tells him she's recasting him in a much more prominent role. Cory is thrilled. It's his just desserts. But when he sees the image on the outside of the new script, he exclaims, "I'm a rock?!?" Frannie corrects Cory, that he's actually a stone. When Cory flips through the script, he discovers the stone is a silent role. Frannie assures him the role is great – after all, it's in the title of the play. "Places please!"

When it comes time for Ping to rehearse the signature scene of King Arthur drawing the sword from the stone, Cory does his best to still assume the spotlight, adlibbing the lines he believes the stone should have. Frannie reminds Cory his character is the strong SILENT type, and we follow a silly string of take after take with Cory trying new techniques and Frannie calling him on it each time. "No singing!" "No humming!" "No dancing!" "No wiggling!" "Is that in the script?"

Later that evening, the play is about to begin. Chrissy, Mama and Papa are in the front row with Mylar balloons in the shape of rocks, signs with Cory's face, and #1 Stone foam fingers. Freddie peeks out from behind the curtain and waves to Carolyn who waves back. Freddie waves again and Carolyn waves back. When Freddie waves again, Carolyn motions for him to "Get back there!" Frannie is more intense than ever. The show is on in T-minus 10 seconds and as she calls for places, she discovers her star is missing! "Where's Ping?!" She frantically scours backstage.

Cory glances over and discovers Ping hiding behind a side curtain. When he rolls up and asks what's wrong, Ping confesses he has a terrible case of stage fright and can't go on. He asks Cory if he'll play the King instead. Cory is initially excited, but begins to register how upset Ping really feels. Cory knows what he needs to do. Cory brings Ping over to the curtain and encourages him to peek out. He points out how the audience is made up of the same cars he sees every day in Bumperton Hills. There's nothing to be afraid of. Cory goes on to tell Ping that if he needs someone to lean on while on stage, rocks are great to lean on and that he'll be right by his side. "After all, every role is important...and I'm your rock."

That's all the encouragement Ping needs and he confidently takes his place on stage just in time for the curtain to open. Frannie is extremely relieved, to say the least. The play plays out in montage fashion with Ping shining, Freddie as the solo Page Boy, and Cory sitting silently (and resolute) as the stone. At the exciting climax, Ping pulls the sword from the stone, the crowd applauds and Ping and Cory share a look and a smile. Then Ping turns to the crowd and delivers a loud, "Thanks Stone! I couldn't have done it without you!" The Carsons go wild in the audience as the curtain closes. When it opens again, Cory and Ping take a joint bow while Frannie desperately scours her pages wondering aloud, "Is that in the script??"

END

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