

Conner's Performance

by HallowsEveWrite

In this story we follow Conner Reid, an aspiring actor who is trying out for the school play, The Wizard of Oz.

The Costume Box

2022

Chapter 1

Conner's Performance - The Audition

Conner stood outside the audition room for the school play, he looked around at the other people trying out for a role and noticed that he is the youngest among them. Technically he would be the youngest allowed to audition since he had some previous theatre experience that allowed him to bend the grade requirement for the play. Conner's older sister was also auditioning, she had been in many productions in the past, they had performed together a few times. Today was his first time auditioning for a school performance, he would typically perform at the community theatre where his Mom volunteered.

An older boy stepped out of the room and looked at him. "Are you Conner Reid? If so, you're up next." The boy walked past him.

Conner slowly opened the door, he was a little nervous since usually his Mom would get him a role in a performance without needing to audition. He stepped into the school's drama classroom which had a small stage and was mostly used to store previous performance props, costumes and equipment. Sitting in front of the stage were two female teacher's, Ms Gray who was shorter with a stocky build with short hair, she was wearing a black turtleneck and practical black shoes. The other was Mrs Bell who was taller with long grey hair, she was wearing a red cardigan with a black skirt. Mrs Bell motioned for Conner to stand on the small stage.

“Conner Reid is it, you are Jessica Reid’s brother I take it?” Mrs Bell asked Conner.

“Yes Ma’am” Conner replied nervously.

“I see, you are aware the play is ‘The Wizard of Oz’” Ms Gray asked further. “Your sister mentioned she had been in a different production of this play at the community theatre.”

“Yes, I know it’s ‘The Wizard of Oz’. I was also in that performance.” Conner replied quietly.

Ms Gray’s eyes widened slightly. “Oh really, what part did you play before?” She questioned Conner.

Conner’s face flushed a little, he regretted mentioning it. “Well I played one of the Munchkins. But it wasn’t a speaking role, I was hoping to be a more important character this time.” Conner explained.

Ms Gray looked him up and down. “Well we are letting you audition for a role due to your experience, I have been told you have been in multiple performances. In our performance the munchkins will be played by the first graders who want to participate, what grade are you in?” Ms Gray asked.

“I’m in the fourth grade this year.” Conner told her.

“Hmm, well you are too old to play a Munchkin anyway, it’s easier to have one class do that scene. Have you ever had a speaking role in any performance before?” Ms Gray continued.

“I played Chip in the beauty and the beast, it was only a few

lines though.” Conner said. He didn’t tell her that he had hesitated during the performance and got interrupted.

“Let’s give him a chance at least.” Mrs Bell said.

“Okay, let’s see what you got.” Ms Gray asked.

Mrs Bell walked up to him and handed him a sheet of paper. “This is a simple scene from the play, in this scene you are playing the Scarecrow and I will read Dorothy’s lines.” Mrs Bell explained.

This was Conner’s chance to actually get a speaking part, he just needed to get the lines out. Conner read through the lines. “Okay I’m ready to start,” he said.

Mrs Bell cleared her throat and began. “You don’t know how to stroll?” she asked.

“Uh. I don’t know how to do nothing, I mean anything. I don’t have a brain, or any brains.” Conner stammered over the first line. “Sorry, can I try again?” he asked.

“Just continue from where you left off.” Ms Gray said unimpressed.

Mrs Bell started again. “No Brains? How is that possible?” She continued.

Conner looked at the lines this time wanting to get them right, he would try to memorise them later. “How should I know, I don’t have any brains.” he said quietly while reading off the paper. He knew he wasn’t making a good performance just quietly reading lines.

“A little louder please, I know you’re nervous but please remember this is a show.” Ms Gray said, sounding annoyed.

Mrs Bell looked concerned and kept going. “Then what’s inside your head?” she said.

This time Conner knew he had to impress, he tried to push aside his nervousness and change his voice a little. In a rough sounding voice and moving his arms to point to his head and body he said. “I’m a scarecrow. I’m stuffed with straw and corncobs, That’s why I’ve got such a husky voice, Get it? Corn?” Conner really tried with this one which left Ms Gray thinking.

“Hmm, I was hoping for something a little stronger given your experience. That’s why we let you audition in the first place.” Mrs Gray sounded disappointed.

“I’m just nervous right now, I really want to be in the play and show my family I can do this outside the theatre.” Conner pleaded.

“Hmm, the thing is you’re a little on the short side even for the costumes, we would need to make a new one depending on the part.” Ms Gray explained.

“Please, I’ll do any part. Even a flying monkey.” Conner said, realising he wasn’t going to get a main role he kept going.

“Well we will post the results at the end of the day, come back to the drama room and it will be posted on the board outside. If you get a part just wait after school inside for a

copy of the play. You were our last audition, so no need to let anyone else in.” Mrs Bell explained.

“Thank you for giving me a chance.” Conner then gave Mrs Bell the script back and left the room. After closing the door behind him he just let out a big sigh. He figured he wasn’t actually going to get a part after that performance. His sister teased him that the only reason he was in plays at all was because of his mother, which may be true. He looked around and saw his sister.

“How did it go, Munchkin?” Jessica asked him, she had called him ‘munchkin’ ever since he played in The Wizard of Oz the first time.

“Not great to be honest, I blew most of the lines.” Conner said disappointedly.

“Sorry to hear that, you might still get a part. Most people haven’t spent as much time at the theatre as you or I, it may not be that bad.” She tried to comfort him.

“I guess we will find out later. How did your audition go?” He asked Jessica.

“I don’t want to rub it in, but I’m pretty sure I’ll get Dorothy.” She said smiling.

“That’s good, I suppose we will meet here after school to find out the results.” Conner said depressed.

“Yeah, I’ll see you later then.” Jessica told him. They both heard the lunch bell ring and the two separated.

Conner spent the rest of the afternoon attending his classes, he liked school in general and did decently in his classes. Conner was mostly a fan of the art, music and drama classes. The rest of the day was math and social studies so he was starting to look forward to the results.

His best friend Brian was the only other classmate that knew he had an audition, the class didn't really know about it since most fourth graders weren't even allowed to audition. Brian leaned over while they did a worksheet. "Hey Conner, how did it go?" He asked.

Conner looked at him, he had been boasting that he has been doing plays for a while to Brian. "It went fine, I'll see which part I'm getting after school." He told his friend.

"Awesome, you will need to tell me tomorrow what it is." Brian said.

Conner was now feeling anxious about the results, he wanted at least something.

After a couple hours the final bell rang and Conner packed up all his belongings and headed back to the drama room. The room was much further from the fourth grade classes than the upper years and by the time he got there a small crowd had formed. Some older kids looked annoyed, a lot of girls had auditioned and didn't get parts. Conner started to squeeze through to get to the posting. Conner read through the parts, it was split up by 'Main Cast' and 'Supporting Cast' and 'Understudies'. Conner immediately looked at the Supporting Cast list figuring that's where he would be. He

saw all Munchkins were labeled 'Mr. Farley's First Grade Class'. He went through the list, he wasn't even in the Flying Monkey list or even the talking trees. Disappointed, he looked through the understudy list and read past the names, he didn't even do well enough to be anyone's understudy. Conner felt disappointment and a little regret, he was embarrassed for even auditioning for the play.

"Hey Munchkin, I see you got a part in the play." Jessica said to him, Conner hadn't even realised she was standing behind him.

Conner had a tear in his eye. "No I didn't, I didn't even get to understudy" Conner said quietly.

"But you are in the main cast, Munchkin. Main cast members don't understudy" Jessica told him.

"How am I a main cast member after my audition?" Conner questioned her. He inspected the main cast list, at the top he found Jessica Reid beside Dorothy's name which didn't surprise him. He continued down past a bunch of names he didn't recognize and then saw it at the bottom. "I'm playing Toto. The Dog?"

"That's right, I think Toto has the most stage time after Dorothy as well." Jessica smiled at him.

"I suppose that's true!" Conner thought about it, a wave of relief spilling over him. "It's not a speaking role though." He said.

"That makes it perfect for you, you were never good with

lines anyway.” She smirked at him.

“I was hoping to get a speaking role.” He complained.

She laughed at that comment. “Well let’s get the scripts and see if it’s different from the other play.” Jessica opened the door to the drama room and Conner followed. He looked around and saw a bunch of people he didn’t recognize. He also noticed that Mr Farley’s class was absent, he assumed they would get told later.

Ms Gray and Mrs Bell stepped into the classroom and looked around and started counting. She then addressed the room. “Great, I think everyone is here. First I want to say congratulations to everyone, I know some of you may not have expected to get the roles you got but we think they will be perfect fits for you. I expect over this term we will all get to know each other. Please take a copy of the play, I want everyone to read over the entire play this week. Don’t worry too much about memorising lines, that will come with practice and we will perfect it over the next few months. I also want to thank everyone for stepping up and auditioning.”

Mrs Bell walked around the room and handed out copies of the play.

“Rehearsals will begin next week every Tuesday and Thursday evening. I will post the schedule outside the drama room of which scenes are being rehearsed, only characters in those scenes need to attend. Every couple weeks we will have an all cast meeting however.” Ms Gray told everyone.

Once Conner got his copy of the play he met up with Jessica and the two started walking home. “I guess we just need to read through the play this week.” Conner said.

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure she just wants everyone to get a feel for the characters.” She giggled a little. “Although I will say when we performed it at the theatre we used a stuffed dog for Toto, so I’m not sure why she casted him separately.” Jessica teased him.

“Yeah, I’m not really sure what I am doing, I’ll need to read it over.” Conner sounded nervous.

When they got home their mother, Linda Reid, was waiting for them in the kitchen. She was reading a book and quickly put it down. “So how did the auditions go?” she asked immediately.

“Well it looks like the Reid name is meant for show business because we will both be in the main cast!” Jessica excitedly told her mother.

Linda stood up, the chair sliding away from her. “Congratulations! Both of you! This is so exciting. What parts are you playing?” She asked.

“Well I am playing the lead of course, Dorothy” Jessica said proudly.

“Amazing, congratulations. I knew you wanted to play it since last time.” Linda congratulated her daughter. She then turned to Conner.

“So Conner, which role are you playing?” She asked Conner.

Conner’s face flushed red, his mom worked in the theatre and Jessica had hyped up his role. “I’m playing Toto...” Conner said shyly.

“Oh, they casted Toto? I suppose when there are many students they casted as many characters as they could.” Linda smiled at her son. “Remember what I say though, there are no small parts!” Linda said to Conner, waiting for him to finish the statement.

“... Only small actors.” Conner finished softly. Conner had heard this every time his mom had casted him in a performance before.

“Exactly! Well congratulations to my two stars. I’m looking forward to seeing you perform from the audience instead of backstage.” Linda smiled at them.

“Well, I need to call my theatre friends and let them know the good news!” Jessica said as she headed upstairs.

“I’m going to start reading the play, Ms Gray wants all the cast members to read it over this week” Conner said as he headed upstairs.

Conner went into his room, he laid on his bed and pulled the script out of his backpack. Looking at the cover of the script he saw the four characters Dorothy, The Scarecrow, The Tinman and The Lion. Standing in front of them was Toto the small dog. “Well I suppose Toto is a main character, this is my biggest role yet.” Somehow he started to feel excited

about the role.

Chapter 2

Conner's Performance - First Rehearsal

Conner was walking to school with his sister Jessica. “So are you ready for the first rehearsal?” Conner asked his sister.

“I’m looking forward to it, I want to meet the other members of the cast. Did you read the play?” Jessica questioned him.

Conner had read over the play many times, except for a few, Toto was in every scene that Dorothy was in, this meant that he would have almost as much stage time as his sister. In this version of the play Toto did have some actions to take, however they were pretty simple. “Yeah, I read it over a couple of times. We will probably be at rehearsal together for most of the term.” Conner said.

The two of them got to school and went to their individual classes, Conner went inside and sat next to Brian.

“Hey Toto, today is your first rehearsal, hopefully you don’t mess up any lines.” Brian teased Conner. Conner faced flushed red, he hadn’t planned on telling Brian that he was Toto but his teacher had announced it to the class. His classmates had taken to calling him Toto instead of Conner.

“Yeah, that’s today after school, and don’t call me Toto.” Conner said quietly.

“Let me know how it goes, I am interested in what lines you

have to remember.” Brian giggled to himself. Conner just rolled his eyes and started pulling out supplies he would need for the first class.

The rest of the day flew by as the rehearsal got closer Conner got more nervous, he knew it was just the first of many and there weren’t really any expectations but he would still be the youngest one there. The bell rang and Conner packed up his homework, he now realized he would need to do rehearsal, then homework all in the same day.

Conner walked to the drama room, there were already many people there including his sister. Some of them were reading through the play, he just grabbed a chair and sat down. Mrs Bell, Ms Gray and Mr Farley walked into the room together, Ms Gray was carrying a clipboard.

“Attention everyone, I think some introductions are in order.” Ms Gray announced. “I’m going to go through the cast list, please stand up and wave when your name is called.

Everyone sat in a chair and waited for their name.

“Starting with the main cast Jessica Reid will be Dorothy.” Jessica stood up. “Jamie Booth will be the Scarecrow” Jamie stood up. “The Tin Man will be played by Tom Foley” Tom stood up and waved, “The Lion will be played by Madison Grant” Madison stood up and waved, “The Wicked Witch will be Rayna Barnes” Rayna stood up, “Last in the main cast will be Conner Reid who will be playing Toto” Conner stood up and waved to everyone, his cheeks blushing red. “For supporting cast we have Sara Fox as Glinda” Sara stood up,

“Harvey Barret as Oz” Harvey waved to everyone, “The Flying Monkey will be Billy Lee” Billy stood up, “Liam Walsh will be playing the talking tree” Liam stood up. Mrs Gray then went through many more names around secondary cast members. “That just leaves the Munchkins of Muchnkinland which will be played by Mr. Farley’s first grade class.” Everyone sat down again.

“Thank you Ms Gray. The first graders will be practicing separately during class, every so often we will pull some students out of class to join us in rehearsing.” Mr. Farley told the students.

Conner was having trouble remembering the flurry of names he had just been told, many of these students take classes together and were already familiar with each other.

“Now then let’s start with some scenes since we have everyone here.” Mrs Bell announced. “We will be going through a few scenes today, Please bring your scripts up and we will practice. Remember this is an opportunity to not only memorize your lines, which you need to practice at home, but also get a feel for being on stage and acting the scenes out.”

Eventually the scenes that were chosen were all the introductory scenes of the characters, Conner was in all of them.

“Okay, can Jessica, Jamie and Conner come up, we will do the first scarecrow scene” Mrs Bell said.

Conner stepped onto the stage with the other two. “This scene opens with Toto scaring away the crows on the scarecrow’s head. Please start there.” Mrs Bell instructed.

Nervously Conner stepped in the center stage with the script in his hand, the room had all the cast members and teachers all watching him, he hadn’t expected to be the first person to act today.” He read over the section of script, it read “Toto notices birds on the scarecrow’s head and barks to chase them away”.

Conner acted like he noticed something on top of Jamie, stepped closer and tried his best, however nerves got the best of him and let out a little “arf”. The audience giggled a little and the scene continued as normal, there wasn’t much else for him to do in the scene. Conner's face was red from his performance. Most instructions in the play for Toto were to follow Dorothy, so he just walked behind Jessica on stage.

“Jessica and Jaime, that was pretty good, but remember this is supposed to be a funny scene so it’s okay to over act a little” Ms Gray said, then looked at Conner. “You will need to convince the audience you are Toto, it may be better to be on your hands and knees when on stage, a dog doesn’t walk on two feet.” Ms Gray instructed him.

“Yes ma'am,” Conner replied, his face getting redder.

The next scene was the Tinman meeting, Tom joined the stage with the other three. Conner flipped to the page and the scene opened with another gag of Toto finding the Tinman, smelling him and getting scared when he speaks. He looked

at Ms Gray who was motioning her hand down as to tell him to get lower. Conner went down to his hands and knees, he crawled towards Tom, and was embarrassed to be crawling around the stage while everyone else was standing.

“I think it would be best if, when scared, run towards Dorothy and behind her.” Ms Gray offered as advice.

“Okay.” Conner replied. He then crawled towards Tom, took an exaggerated sniff, which got a few giggles from the crowd. Tom then moved slightly and he tried to crawl quickly away. Conner wasn’t used to crawling on his hands and feet and it felt like he was shuffling around on the floor. After getting behind his sister he was again done for the scene except to follow her around. He chose to stand up and brush the dust off himself.

Ms Gray once again offered advice to everyone, complimenting Jessica on the performance. “Conner, remember anytime on stage you are acting. Even as a background character” Ms Gray told him.

Conner thought about her comment, he wasn’t sure what she wanted him to do. The scenes changed again and Madison joined them on stage to do the first Lion scene. Conner was nervous about this scene, Toto had a major part in it. He was also getting told off about not acting properly.

The scene started off normally with the Tin Man and Scarecrow having some back and forth. Madison then let out a roar. “Take that! Roar!” She shouted, then pushed Jamie and he fell to the ground. Madison moves quickly to Tom

and pretends to scratch his chest. Conner knew this was his cue, he wanted to impress everyone so he tried hard to do the scene right. Conner quickly crawled in between Jessica and Madison and tried to bark at her.

“Arf, arf, arf...” Conner said meekly, to be honest he wasn’t sure how to make a dog noise himself.

The scene pressed on Madison threatening him and Jessica then slaps and scolds the Lion. Jessica decided to do a little improvising by kneeling down and patting his head while delivering the line. “How dare you! A great big beast picking on a poor little puppy like Toto”.

Conner’s face flushed, but at least he felt like he gave an acceptable performance in this scene. All Conner had to do was follow Dorothy around for the rest of it, eventually he stood up again to dust himself off, the stage they were working on was rather dusty.

“Excellent performance from Dorothy, I really felt the character in this scene. I like the additions you made as well, everyone should take note of that and don’t be afraid to experiment a little as we rehearse. Our Lion did well, don’t worry too much about the initial roar, the stage crew should be able to help you with that. Toto in this scene you should be a little more aggressive, I don’t mind the barking style you’ve chosen but please increase the volume, again please remember you are acting for the whole scene. Everyone should remember you are ‘In Character’ whenever on stage” Ms Gray said.

The practice continued for a few more scenes, Conner didn't have much to do in these scenes except follow his sister around. There were more major scenes for Toto in the play but they didn't practice them today.

“Great job everyone, thank you for trying so hard. Rehearsals will continue throughout the term, please keep an eye on the board outside the drama room.” Mrs Bell said, dismissing them for the day.

Conner took a deep breath, he was relieved the first practice was over. Jessica walked over to him. “Hey Toto, you did well today!” She complimented him.

Conner's cheeks flushed a little. “Not you too. My whole class has started calling me Toto” he whined.

“Well I can't keep calling you Munchkin, can I?” Jessica teased.

“I guess not.” Conner agreed. “You could just call me Conner though.”

“I could, but you are doing so well at being Toto!” Jessica said, she then ruffled his hair. “We should head home, you're a mess after today's practice.”

Conner looked at his clothes, all the dirt and dust from the stage floor was on him even after brushing it off. “Yeah let's do that.” Conner agreed. He grabbed his backpack and followed his sister home.

When they got home their Mother asked all kinds of

questions about the performance. Conner thought about what Ms Gray said and asked his mother about it.

“Ms Gray keeps reminding me to stay in character on stage, what am I not doing?” Conner asked his Mom.

“You are probably doing something consistently and she wants you to stop. Think about your character and what they would do when in the background.” Linda offered.

“My character is a Dog, how am I supposed to do that?” Conner asked.

“Well you want to be an actor, this is what you need to figure out. You should go change, your clothes are all dirty.” Linda told her son.

“Okay.” Conner agreed and headed upstairs. When in his room he pulled out the script and his homework and set it on his desk. Conner spent the next hour doing homework.

Chapter 3

Conner's Performance - Getting into Character

A few weeks had passed and Conner had gone through all the scenes at rehearsal, since he didn't have any lines to really practice. Ms Gray asked him to work on his stage presence, he still wasn't sure what that meant. His mother told him he should think about Toto as his own character and start from there.

Conner was meeting at the park with Brian taking his dog out for a walk, he had asked to join Brian on one of their walks to play with the dog, his dog was a Jack Russell Terrier named Joey. Conner saw Brian throw a stick for Joey to catch and return.

"Hey, Brian thanks for letting me join." Conner said.

"No problem, Toto." Brian said grinning, he knew Conner didn't like the name.

Conner got slightly annoyed with Brian. "You don't need to call me that." He complained.

"Everyone else does, besides it's fitting" Brian continued to tease him.

"Whatever, I just wanted to watch Joey for a bit." Conner said changing the subject.

"You said it had something to do with the play?" Brian asked.

“I don’t know, Ms Gray and my mom said I need to stay ‘in character’ while on stage. I don’t really get what they are talking about.” Conner explained.

Joey came back and Brian took the stick from him. “Well I don’t know how Joey will help you with that.” Brian questioned him, handing Conner the stick.

Conner took the stick and looked at Joey, he was a brown and white small dog. Conner held the stick out to him and he took it playfully, eventually throwing it for him to fetch. “I don’t know, I just don’t have a dog so I thought I should take a look. Can he do any tricks?” Conner asked.

“Only a few, mostly just things like stay, sit, speak, stuff like that.” Brian said.

Conner perked up when he said he could speak, his cheeks turned pink. “Actually, I would like to hear him bark if possible.” Conner said softly.

“I think I can make that happen, but why? I thought you said you didn’t have any lines, you said it was a ‘non-speaking role’” Brian questioned him.

Conner’s face flushed red, he hadn’t really gone into the details of Toto’s role in the play. “Well, you see, there are a couple scenes where Toto needs to bark at some things.” Conner tried to explain fiddling with his hands.

Brian burst out laughing. “Oh man, I can’t wait to see that. So you will be on stage barking at stuff!” Brian shouted.

Conner was getting embarrassed, he hadn't really thought about his whole class seeing his performance yet. "Well it's part of the show, so yeah I will be acting." Conner said, trying to play it off as a normal part of the play.

Joey had returned with the stick. Brian had Joey run through his training, he made him sit, give him his paw, and roll over. Conner sat beside and watched Joey as he did it, he wanted to get a closer look. Conner observed how Joey sat and watched as the dog's tail wagged whenever Brian called him a good boy. Brian then walked around having Joey follow him, he knew this is what he did in the majority of the play and watched carefully, it was most Joey happily following Brian around, stopping and sitting whenever he did. "Okay Joey, speak!" Brian commanded.

"ARF! ARF! WOOF!" Joey barked back.

"There, is that what you wanted." Brian asked.

Conner leaned back in the grass. "I don't know, I suppose. He was louder than I expected." Conner said.

"Well why don't you try to copy him?" Brian suggested.

"Right now?" Conner asked, his cheeks flushed red again, he looked around and they were the only ones in this part of the park.

"Why not? Won't it be less embarrassing to be a convincing Toto?" Brian asked.

"I suppose that's true. Okay I'll give it a try" Conner said, he

looked around for a second time to ensure they were alone. He sat down in front of Joey who looked at him with his black eyes.

“Okay Joey, speak!” Brian commanded.

“ARF!” Joey replied.

Conner worked up a little courage and tried to copy him.

“Arf...” He said meekly.

“ARF!” Joey barked back at him.

“Arf.” Conner said with more confidence.

“ARF! ARF!” Joey replied back.

“Arf. Arf!” Conner said again, getting a little louder.

“ARF! ARF! WOOF!” Joey continued.

“ARF! ARF! WOOF!” Conner said loudly mimicking the dog. The two of them went back and forth a few more times until Conner looked over at Brian who was lying on the ground giggling to himself. Conner’s face flushed bright red and he stood up, trying to regain some type of dignity through height.

“Are you finished, Toto?” Brian teased him, still giggling a little.

“Yeah, I think I got it.” Conner said quietly, he didn’t bother correcting Brian about the name choice after his little performance.

Conner spent the next few days thinking about Joey and the barking practice, when he was alone in his room he would practice the different types of barks that Joey had done.

It had only been a few weeks since the first rehearsal and they still had a couple months before the play, the group was acting out the last scene for today's rehearsal. This was the scene where they defeat the witch, Conner didn't have much to do but follow his sister around on set.

"Great job today everyone, I want to thank Toto for really improving your barking skills, it's a very drastic improvement, we just need to work on your stage presence." Ms Gray told the room. Complimenting him in front of everyone on his improved barking oddly left him with a sense of pride rather than embarrassment, it was also the first time he had received praise from her.

"Thank you Ms Gray, I'll do my best." Conner said, still not understanding what she meant by stage presence.

"Toto, please stay back afterwards, We just need to go through a couple things." Ms Gray asked.

Everyone except for Ms Gray, Mrs Bell, Jessica, Conner and another girl who was watching the rehearsal left the room.

"Toto, I want you to meet Trish. She recently graduated from our school but I asked if we could borrow her skills again for this production. Trish actually made most of the costumes we will be using during our performance." Mrs Bell introduced them.

The girl who was sitting in the audience stood up and greeted Jessica and Conner. “It’s great to meet you, Jessica. I think you are going to make a great Dorothy. You did such a good job. Your little brother will also make for a cute Toto.” Trish told them. She went over to a small tote bag and opened it and pulled out a measuring tape. “Mrs. Bell asked me to make a new Toto costume for your production.”

“Thank you Trish, it is really nice of you to lend us a hand here. We have performed The Wizard of Oz before, but we never had anyone who would be willing to play Toto. Jessica’s brother here agreed to play any role as long as he was in the play, so we made a few adjustments to the script.” Mrs Bell explained. “I will say though it took convincing Ms Gray here.”

Ms Gray just tsked at Mrs Bell. “It’s just easier to direct the older kids, our Toto is doing well so he can stay in the play, however so we need to make it official and get a costume for him.” Ms Gray sounded annoyed being called out.

Conner now understood how he got the part of Toto a little more, he wasn’t sure how he felt about it.

“Well, let’s start with some measurements. Here Toto stand up on this stool.” Trish pointed to a step stool. Conner stood up, Trish then took out a worksheet and started measuring every part of his body. She measured the length and width of his legs, feet, arms, chest, stomach, hands and waist. She filled in the information on a worksheet for future reference. “Okay now on your hands and knees, I just want to see how

you are going to move on stage.” Trish instructed. Conner got off the stool and crawled around back and forth on the ground. Trish pulled out her phone and took some videos. “Okay that should do for today. I’ll get the main part done in time for the dress rehearsal.” Trish said.

Conner stood back up and brushed himself off. “What will the costume look like?” Conner asked.

“Well Toto is famously a Cairn Terrier, so that’s the look we will go for.” Trish said.

“Yes, it’s just he is such a little dog, wouldn’t it make sense to do a bigger dog?” Conner asked.

“Oh don’t worry, I think we can make it work. One thing I have learned is it is easier to trick the audience if they have an idea in their minds already.” Mrs Bell offered.

“Okay.” Conner said, regretting asking.

“Here you can have these for practice, I have some extra ones.” Trish pulled out some black dog ears on a headband and placed them on Conner’s head, this made him blush. She then pulled out a short black tail and clipped it to his pants.

“Thanks,” Conner said shyly.

After some more planning and arranging Jessica and Conner said goodbye and headed home for the evening, Conner put the headband and tail in his backpack.

Chapter 4

Conner's Performance - Practice Makes Perfect

It had been a few weeks since he had met with Trish, by now the cast had practiced every scene multiple times and were trying to refine the roles. Mrs Bell had been busy getting a stage crew together out of some of the other students and building any missing set pieces that needed to be made. Conner was sitting in the drama room for the latest rehearsal, he was wearing the headband and tail Trish had given him along with black pants and a black T-Shirt. Mrs Bell had asked for an all cast meeting which hadn't really changed his schedule since he and Jessica were supposed to attend every rehearsal.

“Thanks for coming everyone, the play is fast approaching and we wanted to ensure we do a test fit on the costumes and make any necessary adjustments.” Mrs Bell explained to the group

One by one each cast member worked with Mrs. Bell, who pinned and altered the costumes. Conner figured it was a slow rehearsal day and just waited. He looked around and saw his sister enthusiastically talking with Sara Fox, the girl who played Glinda, he decided to see what they were talking about and went over to them.

“Hey Jessica and Sara, what's so exciting?” Conner asked.

“Oh Hey Toto! I suppose you are on the guest list!” Sara said and knelt down so she was at eye level. Suddenly being face to face and being called Toto left him blushing, he couldn’t really correct any of the cast members on calling him Toto, he had trouble remembering everyone’s name all the time and only remembered the ones that were Jessica’s friends.

“Guest list for what?” Conner asked.

“Well Sara is going to be hosting an after party for the performance, I suppose that includes you too.” Jessica said, the excitement trailing off as she realized she would be bringing her little brother to the party.

“Oh don’t be like that Jessica, the party is for everyone, it will be fun! We have a great place and can stay up late watching classic plays in my parent’s home theatre.” Sara explained.

“Sounds fun, but I will need to ask my mom if I can go.” Conner explained to Sara.

“Great, I need to tell everyone else as well.” Sara said as she walked off.

Mrs Farley and Mrs Bell then walked up to Jessica and Conner.

“Jessica, I need you for your fitting. Also Mr Farley needs to arrange something with you two.” Mrs Bell said.

“So the first graders have practiced the songs and the few lines we gave them, they will be dressed as Muchkins and are

excited about the play. One thing we haven't done is actually practiced with the other cast members. This week we are going to pull out both of you as well as Sara and Rayna from class to practice the scene. I don't want to be too disruptive so we will only do that a few times in the coming weeks." Mr Farley explained to them.

"No problem Mr. Farley, we will be patient with the youngsters. Isn't that right Toto?" Jessica said.

"Yeah, plus we get an excuse to miss class." Conner said smiling.

"Great, I will collect you from your classroom on the day of, we are also going to borrow some props before heading to the classroom." Mr Farley said. Jessica then left with Mrs Bell. Conner decided to work on some homework while he waited for his turn.

After about thirty minutes Mrs Bell came up to Conner. "It looks like Trish hasn't completed your costume yet, she assures us it will be ready in time for the dress rehearsal though. It looks like we won't be doing any scenes today so you are free to go, I have some adjustments to make to your sister's outfit and she wanted me to let you know you can head home without her." Mrs Bell explained.

"Okay thank you, I'll see you in the next rehearsal." Conner said he then put away his homework and left the drama room.

Conner left the school quickly and passed by the park on his way home, he looked and saw Brian and Joey playing catch

and waved at them. He noticed Brian giggling as he ran up to him with Joey.

“Hey Toto! I see you're still trying to get into character.” Brian said giggling again.

“I just got out of rehearsal if that’s what you mean, I didn’t even act today.” Conner said, confused. Brian pointed to his own head and it made Conner realize he never took off the headband or unclipped the tail from his pants. Conner’s face made a bright crimson shade of red. “I-I-I forgot to take that off!” Conner spat out embarrassed, he reached up and took the ears off holding them in his hands.

Brian just laughed at his embarrassed friend. “Didn’t you say you didn’t act today, why were you even wearing them?”.

“Well, I put them on before rehearsal, there is this girl who gave them to me, I thought with the stage presence thing. Ms Gray doesn’t scold my acting as much and...” Conner quickly stammered through many excuses trying to convince his friend it was perfectly normal.

“Calm down Toto, I’m only teasing.” Brian reassured his friend.

Conner took a few deep breaths, he was about to correct Brian on his name but let it go after he saw him in dog ears in the middle of the park. They then spent some time playing with Joey in the park.

Conner knelt down to Joey and gave him a few pets. “ARF!” Joey happily barked at Conner.

Conner had seen Joey a few more times since practicing. “ARF!” He replied back mimicking him.

“Toto, you are losing it.” Brian said.

“Mrs Gray said I’m doing well at this though.” Conner defended himself.

“Well, since you didn’t get a chance to rehearse today, you are welcome to practice with Joey.” Brian told him.

Conner thought about it for a moment, “Ms Gray has been complaining about my ‘stage presence’” He said mockingly.

“What does that mean, you aren’t in character or something?” Brian asked with curiosity.

“That’s what I thought, she likes the barking improvement though.” Conner told him.

“She likes the ‘speaking’ part of your ‘non-speaking’ role” Brian teased Conner. “Maybe it’s the way you move around on stage?”

“It does feel awkward, crawling around pretending to be Toto.” Conner admitted to his friend.

“Well that’s your problem right there! Dogs don’t crawl!” Brian informed him, he picked up a stick and threw it for Joey. “Look at Joey, he isn’t ‘crawling’ he is running! He could also be walking, or trotting or pacing.”

“Okay, how does that help me?” Conner asked.

“You should try it!” Brian decided

Conner blushed, “Now? People will see me.” He whispered.

“It’ll be fine.” Brian dismissed his concern, he snatched the dog ears out of Conner’s hand and placed them back on his head.

Conner looked down and thought about it. “Okay I’ll try.” Conner finally agreed.

Brian called Joey over and pointed out all the differences and similarities between how dogs walk and people walk. “So the main thing to keep in mind is to move both your right leg and right arm at the same time, then the left. Got it!” Brian finished up.

Conner sat there a little dumbfounded, he hadn’t expected Brian to have so much information. “Why do you know so much about the way dogs walk?” He asked him.

This time Brian started blushing and looked away. “Nevermind that, you don’t have a dog, it’s just something you notice.” Brian said, clearly trying to keep a secret.

Conner decided not to pry. “Thanks, I think I’m ready to give it a go.” He then went down to his hands and knees and tried to follow Brian’s instructions, going back and forth a few times trying to follow a path Joey had taken. “How was that?”

“It looks decent enough, I’m not sure what Ms Gray will think.” Brian said thoughtfully. “Let’s try something harder, just follow Joey.” Brian then commanded Joey to follow him, which Joey did diligently, followed by Conner moving up to a pace behind him. Suddenly Brian threw a stick for

Joey to catch. “You better hurry.” He grinned at him.

Conner was just getting the hang of it and decided he could give running a try and chased after Joey. Joey was so much faster than Conner, he thought that maybe if he barked at him he would stop and he could catch up. “ARF!” He cried to Joey.

It worked. Joey stopped in his tracks and turned around and barked back. “ARF!” Joey barked back.

Conner finally caught up to Joey and noticed Brian chasing after both of them. “Toto, that looked great!” Brian told him.

Conner stood up and brushed himself off, then he noticed people watching him, he should have realized this part of the park is visible from the shortcut to the school. “Oh crap, that’s my sister! You don’t think she saw?” He asked Brian.

“I think she saw.” Brian told him.

Jessica came jogging up to them with another cast member, the person who plays Oz. “Hey Toto, I see you still wanted to get some rehearsal in today!” The other cast member teased him.

“Well, I am just working on the performance.” Conner said shyly, he looked at both of them. “Why is Oz walking my sister home?”

“My name is Harvey, Toto.” Harvey said mockingly.

“Are you two dating?” Brian asked directly.

Both Jessica and Harvey blushed a little, there was clearly something going on between them. “Harvey and I were walking home together, it isn’t your business.” Jessica informed him.

“I thought Harvey was dating the flying monkey.” Conner sounded confused, over the course of the term he had learned a few things about the other students.

“Billy’s an ass, so no we aren’t dating anymore.” Harvey told him.

“Does he know that?” Conner asked, realizing that he had some leverage on Harvey and Jessica and may be able to get out of this without being teased.

“You know what, if you don’t talk to Billy about Jessica and I then we won’t tell everyone else about play time in the dog park.” Harvey offered to Conner.

“Yeah that works for me.” Conner agreed. The two left in a hurry

“I have to go home, you can play with Joey another time. I’ll see you at school tomorrow.” Brian told him as he grabbed his things and left with Joey.

A couple days later during class one afternoon the class was interrupted and Mr Farley stepped in. “Can I borrow a student of yours?” He asked.

“Sure, who do you need?” His teacher asked.

“Um, er, Toto?” Mr Farley asked, he had clearly forgotten

Conner's name.

"Oh yes, he can go with you!" His teacher said, Conner collected his things and went with Mr Farley. He was the closest to the first grade class so was picked up first.

"My name is Conner Reid, Mr Farley." Conner told the teacher as they walked through the halls.

"Oh yeah, sorry about that. Everyone calls you Toto in the drama room." Mr Farley said, trying to excuse the slip up.

"I know, it's okay, I'm used to it." Conner said.

The two arrived at another classroom and Conner waited outside, he didn't realize that Jessica took the same class as Sara and Rayna. They then headed toward the drama room, Mr Farley had a key and let them in. "We just need a few props to help the students, Mrs Bell said it was fine. We need Dorothy's picnic basket, ruby slippers, Glinda's wand, the witch hat and broom." Mr Farley started to look for the items with Sara's help.

"Hey Toto, do you have your ears and tail?" Jessica asked him.

"Yeah in my backpack." Conner said.

"Well put them on and leave your bag here." Jessica suggested, Conner took them out and put them on. He noticed that Jessica had started tying her hair in braids. Rayna had also grabbed a costume cloak from a rack, it looks like they were going to dress up a little for the first graders.

Sara took a cue and also grabbed Glinda's hat from the costume rack.

"Good idea kids, that will help them remember who is who." Mr Farley praised them.

The five of them headed to the first graders, Mr Farley led them into the room. The kids were all eagerly awaiting their arrival.

"I want to introduce everyone to your fellow stage performers, Dorothy, Toto, Glinda the Good Witch and the Wicked Witch of the West. Please thank them for joining us in today's practice." Mr Farley told the class.

"Thank You!" The first graders said in unison, clearly practiced. Sara waved to one of the little girls who waved back at her.

Mr Farley's classroom had a small carpeted area that was used as a "stage" for practice. He introduced the students who had a few speaking lines and they were eager to start. Mr Farley read the whole scene for everyone and made special notes on when they were supposed to sing, sound shocked and what types of actions to take. The scene opens with Toto and Dorothy entering from what would have been the house falling in Muchkinland. They had practiced this scene many times but used other cast members for the Munchkins, Conner hadn't really thought about how many people would actually be on stage.

Conner paced out ahead of his sister and played his part, all

he had to do was look surprised and scared. He had the scene memorized at this point and without a cue looked back and barked for his sister, he had somehow gained a lot of confidence since the beginning of the term. The bark had the first graders giving a wave of giggles throughout the group, Mr Farley had to calm them down and remind them they are supposed to be nervous about Toto and Dorothy. Conner's face turned red as the first graders laughed at him, he hadn't expected so many people to laugh at him.

The scene was mostly Dorothy and Glinda speaking with the Wicked Witch showing up. In this scene Glinda uses magic and the ruby slippers appear on Dorothy's feet, in reality they were prop shoes that could change color. The first graders added a lot to the scene, explaining who the witch of the east was, thanking Dorothy and it ends in a musical number performed by them. What Conner hadn't expected was the first graders to stand up and dance around him, Jessica and Sara chanting. "Follow the yellow brick road!".

The scene ends with Dorothy and Toto thanking the Munchkins, which has Conner barking again and the scene ends.

"That was excellent everyone, thank you for being in our play." Jessica told the first graders.

"Does anyone have any questions for your fellow actors?" Mr Farley asked the class. Some hands shot up from the kids.

"Are there any other songs in the play? Like in the movie?" One of them asked.

“Oh yeah, there are a few songs the other’s sing,” Rayna confirmed.

“Does Toto crawl for the whole play?” A girl asked Conner.

“Well yeah, he is a dog.” Conner answered.

“How do you bark so well?” A boy asked.

Conner blushed, he noticed Rayna, Sara and Jessica looked at him for an answer. “Well I practiced a lot to get it right.” Conner answered shyly.

“Why are you so short?” It seemed they were only interested in asking Conner questions.

“I’m only in the fourth grade, I’m the shortest outside of you guys in the play.” Conner tried to explain.

“I’m taller than you!” One boy shouted.

“So am I!” Another boy said.

“I am too!” A girl said. The three of them got up and rushed to stand beside Conner, he didn’t know what to do and looked at Mr Farley who just shrugged it off. Sure enough they were taller than him, in fact most of the first graders were.

“Okay, I am one of the shortest in the play” Conner said defending himself, he didn’t think he was that short.

They spent the next ten minutes fielding questions about acting, what to do if they get nervous and so on. They then went through the scene a few more times to get it right. At the end of the day they promised the student’s they would

come back for another practice run.

Sara, Jessica, Conner and Rayna returned the props back to the drama room and Conner put his away.

“Hey Toto, I didn’t realize you were shorter than my little sister.” Sara said.

Conner’s cheeks flushed. “Yeah I didn’t think I was that short.” Conner said. The three girls giggled.

“Come on Toto, let’s go home.” Jessica said. They then left the drama room to head home.

Chapter 5

Conner's Performance - Dress Rehearsal

It was after school only a week before the day of the production and everyone was racing to get things finalized. The stage crew was setting up the main auditorium for the performance and had moved most sets there over the last week. Mrs Bell had set up a small dressing area for the actors which included one section for makeup and small booths for changing. The auditorium was usually the gym but for tonight's rehearsal and next week's performances it was their theatre. Today was the last opportunity to fix anything with the sets or costumes which is why they were doing a full dress rehearsal. Mr Farley's class were wearing brightly colored clothes in primary colors only, they were sitting on some benches chatting between themselves waiting for the rehearsal to start.

Conner was sitting in a makeup chair with Trish working on him, he felt a little special to have his own makeup person while everyone else either had Mrs Bell or another volunteer help with theirs. "We aren't going to do everything for tonight since some of the prosthetics I want to use next week are one time use. Tonight I think we just need to get the point across, we will get you fully ready for next week's performances." Trish explained to Conner.

"Okay, that should be fine. You also have my costume ready,

I haven't tried it on yet?" Conner asked Trish.

"Yes, it's in a costume bag on the rack over there, I'll help you with it after we do your makeup." Trish told Conner.

Trish was applying different types of makeup to his face, this gave the illusion of black and grey fur, she applied it to his face and neck using a small brush. She pulled a small case from her supply bag. "How do you feel about wearing contacts?" She asked Conner.

"I don't need glasses, so I've never used contacts before." Conner said, feeling a little nervous about it.

"I can help you put them on, I think it will really sell the look. Just lean your head back." Trish commanded, Conner complied as she took the contacts out and placed one in each of Conner's eyes, he blinked a few times but barely felt them after a few moments. He wanted to see himself in a mirror but they were all taken up by the students who could do their own makeup.

"Just a couple more things and then we can get the costume on." Trish said. She pulled out a small can of hairspray and told Conner to shut his eyes. "I'm just giving your black hair some white highlights to match the look." She explained to Conner, his hair went down to his neck and was naturally shaggy. After that she pulled out two professional looking black and grey pointed dog ears. "These are nicer than the ones I gave you, so no headband this time." Trish said, she then carefully clipped them into place on Conner's head. "Give your head a shake." Trish said, Conner dutifully

obeyed and the ear's seemed to stay in place. "Perfect, looks like we are done with makeup, like I said the actual performance will be a little more involved, especially around the face." Trish warned him.

"Thank you Trish, it's nice of you to help me out." Conner told Trish.

Conner got off the chair and headed over to the mirror his sister was sitting in front of. He popped his head in front of the mirror so he could see. Looking back at him was the head of Toto, his face made up to look like a dog with considerable skill. Trish had done a decent job of blending his hair color to his face and she was right about his now enlarged pupils selling the look. "Oh, I see Toto has arrived on set." Jessica told him.

"Trish just finished up the makeup, just the costume left now and I'll be ready." Conner told his sister.

"Well you better hurry up, we are going to start soon." Jessica warned him.

Conner led Trish to one of the booths to change in, at the end of the booth were some cubbies to store their belongings. Trish grabbed the costume bag off the rack and followed Conner.

"You will need a hand putting it on." Trish told him.

"Okay, that should be fine." Conner agreed, not wanting to offend Trish. Conner and Trish disappeared into one of the booths.

“You should take off your shoes and clothes first.” Trish said.

Blood rushed to Conner’s face, luckily his embarrassment was hidden by the costume makeup. He took off his socks and shoes and placed them in the cubby, then pulled off his sweater, folded it and put it on top of his shoes. “Um, could you turn around?” Conner asked.

“How am I going to help you with the costume if I can’t see you?” Trish asked.

Conner took a deep breath to calm down and started to pull down his pants, he tossed them on top of his sweater with less care than before, he immediately noticed how drafty the auditorium was. “Okay, let’s get the costume on.” Conner said shyly

Trish pulled out the outfit, it was a large mess of fur with a zippered opening at the back. Trish started to unzip it revealing a soft inside material, it looked warm and inviting in the cold backstage. “For it to go on properly you should sit on your feet, we wanted to create a small dog illusion.” Trish informed Conner.

“What do you mean sit on my feet?” Conner said in a confused voice.

“Well go to a kneeling position.” Trish instructed. Conner dutifully went down to his knees. “Now put your weight on your butt like you are going to sit down. Conner followed the instructions and understood, his legs were now folded underneath him.

“Like this?” Conner asked, it was a surprisingly comfortable position for him. He was confused about why this would help him put on the costume properly.

“That’s perfect, now let me help you out here.” Trish praised him.

She then knelt down herself and started sliding the material up his legs. The material felt soft as it slid up his, Trish tugged a few times to ensure it covered the top and bottom of his legs, as it pulled up to the end Conner felt soft padding on his knees, he was happy to know that his knees would have some protection from crawling around. Conner felt the soft inside material at his feet, Trish grabbed his feet and placed them in some type of pocket, he giggled as she did that.

“Oh a little ticklish are we?” Trish teased him. Conner couldn’t answer and just nodded in embarrassment.

“Here, we are almost done. Just put your arms into the sleeves.” Trish instructed as she held them up. Conner put both arms in the sleeves at the same time and Trish pulled them up, she then started to zip it up from behind him. The sleeves had the same soft material and ended in attached paws that had the same foam padding as the knees. The costume included a high collar and zipped to the top. The furry material was crafted with great care to look like a Cairn Terrier. Conner felt the material tighten around him as she zipped up the back, it was a perfect fit.

“One last thing.” Trish said as she pulled something out of the costume bag, it was a red dog collar with a dog tag on it.

Trish knelt down in front of him and put it over his head.

“Okay Toto, you’re all set!” Trish said happily.

“Thanks Trish, I can’t wait to take a look!” Conner said gleefully, his costume was clearly of high quality. Conner tried to go back to a kneeling position and found he couldn’t, eventually he fell forwards and caught himself with his paw clad hands. He felt his legs were still folded over and his feet were in a pocket. “Hey, what’s going on?” Conner asked.

Trish had opened the dressing room curtain. “You can control the wag of your tail with your feet now, it should look great on set.” Trish told him.

“I can’t stand up!” Conner informed Trish, trying to tell her what was wrong.

Ms Gray came rushing over to him, seeing the dressing room was open. “Oh Toto, you look wonderful, much better than I had imagined. You did such a great job, Trish!” Ms Gray praised her.

“Ms Gray, I can’t stand up in this outfit.” Conner said, looking up at the teacher, moving back to sitting on his feet.

“That’s okay, you were having trouble staying down during practice anyway, it was ruining your stage presence.” Ms Gray told him. Conner now realized after he was done in each scene he would typically just stand up to follow Jessica around set.

“It’s almost time to start, so get into position with Dorothy!”

Ms Gray directed as she walked away chasing after someone else.

“I’m going to watch from the audience with the other’s. Break a leg, Toto!” Trish said, then collected her things and left as well.

Conner was left sitting on the floor unable to stand up due to the costume, he tried to adjust but only ended up on his hands again. He started to crawl around in the costume and was able to accomplish that with relative ease, he started toward his sister and noticed a mirror on the floor to his left. The illusion was better than he expected, he really did look like the dog from the cover of the play. Other than his head, which looked like a boy in makeup. His lower half had been transformed into a puppy, it was even complete with the red dog collar hanging from his neck, the tag on the collar visibly displaying the name Toto in large letters. He moved his feet from left to right in the pocket they were in and saw his tail wag with enthusiasm.

“Having fun, Toto?” Jessica asked him.

Conner felt his face flush again. “It’s a pretty good costume, isn’t it?” Conner said.

“His sister knelt down to him, it’s a really good illusion isn’t it. Your face sort of gives it away though, like a boy’s head on a dog’s body.” Jessica ran her hand down Conner’s back effectively petting him. “The material is nice too.” she commented.

“Trish said she is going to do some extra makeup for the actual production.” Conner told her. “The issue with this is that I can’t stand up in this thing.” Conner complained, transitioning back to a sitting position placing his hands in between his legs.

“Well, that’s not a real issue since you won’t need to stand up for the performance.” Jessica told him, dismissing his concern.

“Places people!” Ms Gray shouted from the back stage.

“Let’s go Toto!” Jessica said with glee. Conner walked on his hands and knees to keep up with her, the opening scene was just them with Dorothy setting up the story by talking to Toto.

Conner crawled onto the stage, this was the first time all the lights, sets, costumes and work had come together to start the production, even if it was still a dress rehearsal he was intimidated. His sister kicks the play off by explaining there is a storm outside and they need to stay hidden in the house, in order to keep the flow of conversation throughout the play Toto barks as if agreeing with Dorothy in the scene.

“Oh, it's too stormy out there. Should we stay here Toto?” Jessica asks with fear in her voice.

“Arf!” Conner replies, this gained many giggles from the first graders who were backstage waiting for the next scene. Wind and rain is heard through the speakers that had been setup and the lights start to change to reflect power surging.

“Oh I don’t know what to do, I hope Aunt Em is okay.” Again Jessica was pulling off the scared sound in her voice.

“Arf. Arf!” Conner replied again, using different tones he was able to make it sound like a conversation, a trick they had perfected over the months of rehearsals. Jessica pulled Conner closer into a hug while the stage crew started to make crashing sounds and the sound of wind filled the air. Eventually the lights started to dim, which was Conner and Jessica’s cue to move onto the next scene.

The dress rehearsal continued without much of a hitch, Conner realized he didn’t really have much down time except for a few scenes which kept him walking back and forth through the stage and his hands and knees. After about forty five minutes they hit the halfway point where Ms Gray calls for a ten minute intermission, this allows for some major set resets behind stage and for actors to take a small breather.

Conner paced backstage a little tired from being in most of the scenes, or prepping for the next scene. “You’re doing great Toto!” Conner heard someone say as he crawled out of someone’s way.

“Thanks.” Conner said, He moved to a sitting position. He looked up and saw Billy Lee, he was dressed as the flying monkey, they only shared one scene.

“You know when I got cast I thought my costume would be the most embarrassing in the play.” Billy told him. His costume consisted of a monkey suit, with makeup. He had large dark wings on and was wearing a vest.

Conner felt blood rush to his face, he was so focused on a good performance he almost forgot he was dressed as a little puppy. “Well, it’s all part of the show I suppose.” Conner said shyly.

“Oh sure, but I heard they gave you a bit part to try and get you to quit. I’m glad you stayed on though.” Billy said, clearly trying to antagonize him.

“That’s not exactly true. I said I would do any part, I want to be an actor.” Conner said. He knew it was a little true, Ms Gray hinted at it earlier.

“You really stepped up though, got the barking down so good that Ms Gray talks about it in drama class.” Billy informed him.

“She does?” Conner asked with a little excitement.

Billy gave him a confused expression, he thought a teacher talking about him pretending to be a dog would embarrass him more. He grinned a little and changed tactics to get under his skin. “You like it, don’t you?” Billy accused him.

“What! No, it’s just a part in a play. I told you I want to be an actor, I’m just acting!” Conner defended himself, he was getting embarrassed now and getting worried if that’s how people saw him.

“Then how do you bark so well, you must like it! I’ve also heard you carry around your little dog ears in your backpack.” Billy went on teasing him.

Conner couldn't deny the dog ears, he did keep them in his backpack. "Those were a gift." He said quietly, looking away from him.

"You're still not answering my questions, just admit it, you like playing Toto." Billy really tried to bother him now.

Conner was getting a little upset, he didn't understand why Billy was bothering him like this. He could feel tears forming in his eyes and he looked up at Billy. "You're just jealous that I am in more scenes than you! In fact, you're not even in the main cast!" Conner's voice had some trembling in it as he tried to tell Billy off.

Billy was taken aback at the comment, he hadn't expected the little boy dressed as a puppy to try and act superior to him.

"Hey, Billy, why don't you leave Toto alone! He has been on stage performing while you have just been sitting around back here!" Conner looked around and saw Sara in her full Glinda the Good Witch dress telling off Billy.

"Whatever Sara, I'll see you later." Billy scoffed at Sara and left the two of them alone. Sara knelt down, rubbing Conner's back to calm him down.

"Thanks Sara." Conner said, taking a deep breath now that Billy was gone.

"No problem Toto, I think you are doing a great job tonight. You are better at this than you give yourself credit for. Personally I am nervous, this is my first time under the lights" Sara revealed to Conner. "I know you and Jessica are

seasoned pros.”

Conner felt a little pride getting praised by Sara. “Thanks, I appreciate that.” He told Sara.

“Places everyone!” Ms Gray shouted to the back room.

Conner scurried to the stage opening meeting up with his co-stars, they still had the rest of the show to get through. After some time they got to one of the final scenes of the Wizard of Oz, the stage crew had rigged up some cool special effects and it was a major scene for Toto, he got to reveal the man behind the curtain.

In practice they had a prop curtain and it was a little larger for the stage, while the scene played out he got into position. He just needed to wait for his cue and he would slowly open the curtain to reveal Oz. Conner tried to grab the curtain but he now realized with his hands surrounded by the costume paws, he would never be able to pull the curtain open.

“Do not look behind the curtain!” Oz’s voice boomed over the speaker, this was Conner’s cue, he had to open it now. Panicking Conner reached forward with his head and grabbed a corner of the curtain in his teeth, he then started shuffling backwards on his hands and knees while it slowly opened. Relieved the scene worked and continued as normal all he needed to do now was follow Dorothy around normally.

After the dress rehearsal was complete Ms Gray came out in front of the stage. “Excellent performance from everyone, thank you for all your hard work this term, I couldn’t be more

proud. Next week we have two performances to give, the first will be during the day for the student body, the second will be that evening for ticket holders.” Ms Gray praised the cast and crew, and dismissed them to change.

Conner crawled back to the backstage to change and headed for the booth where he left his clothes, Trish was already waiting there. “Hey Toto, great job out there!” Trish praised him.

“Thanks, although the costume made me improvise a bit.” Conner told her.

“Oh really, it all looked well practiced to me.” Trish said innocently.

“Can you unzip the outfit?” Conner asked. The two slipped into the dressing room and Trish unzipped the costume and helped Conner stand up, he was a little uneasy being back on two legs. Trish then took the outfit and put it back inside the costume bag, along with the dog collar. Trish left Conner to get dressed. Afterwards Trish helped him remove the makeup, contacts and she took the ears back as well, except for the colored hair he was back to normal.

“Thank you again Trish.” Conner told her.

“No problem Toto, I’m glad you liked my costume!” Trish told him, which left Conner blushing. “I’ll see you next week.” Trish packed up her things and left.

Conner met up with Jessica and the two headed home, now prepared for the real deal next week.

Chapter 6

Conner's Performance - The Student Body

It was the morning of the play and Conner was sitting in class, he hadn't expected to be so nervous and couldn't focus on the lecture at all. He looked over to Brian who leaned closer and whispered. "Are you ready for the big show today?"

Conner nodded, not wanting his nerves to show. It was almost lunch time when a knock on their door was heard and his teacher answered. An older student appeared in the doorway, he recognized her as one of the stage hand volunteers. "Sorry for interrupting your class, but we need Toto to come and get ready for the performance this afternoon." She loudly asked his teacher.

"Yes, thank you for reminding me." His teacher said turning around. "Everyone, I want you to say goodbye to Toto, you will see him again in this afternoon's play!" she announced.

Some giggles were heard from the crowd and Brian shouted "Break a Leg!". Conner's face flushed red as he got up and followed the stage hand to the auditorium.

He walked up the steps to the backstage, he saw that lunch had been set out and provided for everyone involved, he grabbed something to eat first. He looked around and saw many people preparing and getting ready. The students who

required the most makeup were asked to arrive first, this included him, Billy, Tom, Rayna and Madison. He waved to everyone and sat down where Trish waved him over.

“Ready for round two? Toto” Trish asked.

“Yeah, you mentioned you were changing up the makeup?” Conner reminded her.

“That’s right, we have plenty of time to finish up before the play starts so we can take our time.” She told him as she pulled out a few bags. “Let’s start with the contacts and hair this time, then we will get into the makeup, lean your head back.” She instructed.

Conner let Trish put in his contacts since he still didn’t know how to and she pulled out the can of colored hairspray and applied grey streaks to his black hair. This time Conner was sitting in front of a mirror and would be able to watch as she applied the makeup.

“Okay, for the rest just hold still while I apply these prosthetics, this will give a base to then apply the fur on top of it.” Trish tried to explain her process.

“Umm, okay.” Conner agreed.

First thing Trish did was pull out a face cloth and cleanser and cleaned his face. She pulled out a few kits, the first was for his nose. She read over the instructions and pulled out some glue and applied it to the prosthetic and Conner’s nose, she smoothed out any creases and asked him to hold it there, which he did. Meanwhile she started reading the next set of

instructions.

“Have you done this before?” Conner asked.

“No, I typically do costume work, not makeup. I agreed to help out Mrs Bell though and I want to get better.” she paused for a moment. “I did do some makeup at Halloween, but not for an audience of this size.” Trish explained to him.

“Oh, you seem so good at it.” Conner told her.

Trish inspected the nose and decided it was good. She then started to pull out strips of different colored fur. Starting at his neck she pulled off adhesive strips from the fur material and applied it to his neck and face, it took some time for it all to be applied, the only parts of his face not covered were his eyes and the costume nose. Conner looked in the mirror and his head was hidden by a ball of fur.

“Okay, now we need to give it some shape.” Trish said. She then pulled out some scissors and spent the next thirty minutes cutting and giving the fur shape, occasionally she would brush and move around his head. Conner couldn’t tell where his own hair began and the costume fur started, he was pretty sure Trish had cut a bunch of his own hair during the process.

She took a step back and allowed Conner to view in the mirror, his head had been transformed into a black and grey Cairn Terrier head, he had the muzzle with an iconic mustache and his eyebrows had been made to be much more expressive. The color continued up his head and wrapped

around.

“Wow Trish, this is really good, you should give yourself more credit.” Conner told her.

“Well final touches, then I am helping a couple others.” Trish explained. She pulled out the costume ears and clipped them to his head, she fed his hair through to hide and clips and a little hairspray to hold it in place. She then applied black costume makeup to his nose to complete the look.

“We are done! I forgot to mention that I won’t be able to reapply the makeup twice, you will need to wear it until after the performance tonight.” Trish revealed to Conner.

Conner got nervous at that news, his head was essentially a dog’s head for the rest of the day. “Okay, at least tonight's preparation will be quick then.” He told her, sounding nervous.

“Thanks Toto, I’ll see you later for costuming then.” Trish said, ruffling his hair.

Conner got out of the makeup chair to allow another person to use it. He looked around the backstage trying to stay out of everyone’s way.

“Well it looks like Toto got his makeup finished.” He heard Billy say to him. Conner looked at him, he also had his makeup complete, although it wasn’t as professional looking as his own.

“Leave me alone.” Conner told him.

“Oh the dog boy speaks! I thought you would have barked at me like usual.” Billy continued to tease him. The only scene they had together Toto just barks at the flying monkey.

“Knock it off, I already told you, I’m just acting.” Conner said he felt more confident talking back now that he was standing, even if he was significantly shorter than Billy.

“Sure, I’m sure the whole student body will understand that ‘Conner Reid’ who looks and acts like a little puppy is just acting.” Billy mocked him. For some reason Conner felt his face get hot when he said his name, that had only happened when people had called him Toto, he chuckled it up to nerves.

“Well it is a play.” Conner said meekly.

“I think it’s a little more than that for you Toto.” Billy said, realizing he had got what he wanted. He reached over and gave Conner a head pat. “Now why don’t you be a good boy and get ready.”

Conner was flustered by Billy, he was worried now that the students would read more into the performance. He still had a little time before needing to put on the costume and decided to go to the washroom first.

After a little time Conner was sitting on a bench by the dressing rooms waiting for Trish to help him with the costume, eventually she walked up to him with the costume bag.

“Hey are you ready?” Trish asked.

“Yeah, let’s do it.” Conner said depressed, he walked into the dressing room and slowly took off his shoes and shirt.

“Everything alright?” Trish asked.

“Just something Billy said, and I’m nervous” Conner admitted, he didn’t want to get Billy in trouble on the day of the performance.

“Well you make a great Toto, I think.” Trish had started pulling out the outfit from the bag. “You get to make the most people laugh, Toto gets all the best gags in this version of the play and you practiced so hard to make them work.” Trish reassured him.

Conner hadn’t really thought about that, he had always assumed people were laughing at him, Conner Reid, but it was true that he was playing a comedic character and they were probably laughing at Toto in the Wizard of Oz. Conner finished taking off his pants and sat on his feet like before. “Why did you make the costume like this?” Conner asked.

Trish started sliding the costume up Conner’s legs. “It’s a design that creates a good dog illusion, it was a collaboration with the drama teacher’s, Ms. Gray and Mrs. Bell” Trish told him.

“I can’t stand up in it though.” Conner complained.

“Well some sacrifices had to be made to get the tail to work.” Trish told him, as she grabbed his feet and positioned them into the tail, Conner giggled a little. “Now arms in the sleeves.”

Conner put his arms out while Trish pulled up the outfit, she then started to zip it up. She then went and put the dog collar over Conner's head, proudly displaying the name Toto.

“Hey Toto, do you mind if I take some photos? It will be great for my portfolio.” Trish asked.

“Sure, that should be fine.” Conner told her.

Trish spent the next few minutes having Conner make poses, stretching, laying down and walking around. “Thanks Toto, oh I think this will be the last time we will see each other today, you will need to find someone else to help you in and out of your outfit tonight.” Trish informed Conner.

“Oh, okay. Thanks again for all the help, Trish.” Conner said.

“Break a leg!” Trish told him as she headed out.

Conner trotted over to the floor mirror and took a look at the completed look. Head to toe he had been transformed into a puppy, his head no longer looked like a boy but was a spitting image of Toto. From the neck down the costume matched the fur on his head perfectly and it all seemed to blend in together, the only piece not covered in fur was his bright red collar and large dog tag that read ‘Toto’.

“Oh wow, Conner is that really you!” He heard Jessica say.

Conner felt his face flush again when he was called by his real name. “Yeah, Trish went all out for Toto.” Conner said.

“I think it looks amazing, let's go get in position, it's almost time.” Jessica said. Conner could hear the murmuring of the

student body from backstage.

With the curtain closed Conner and Jessica got into position on set, ready to open the show. Ms Gray was doing an announcement to the student body, asking everyone to be quiet and to enjoy the show.

Slowly the curtain opened, Conner got his first look at the student body staring back at him. The youngest students were sitting on some floor mats and behind them benches and chairs had been set up. It went from youngest to oldest from the front of the room to the back, teachers lined the auditorium walls keeping an eye on the students, however in this moment he felt like all eyes were on him. Quickly he scanned the audience and found his fourth grade class and finally saw Brian, the only classmate who had seen him practice at this point. Brian had his mouth hanging open, clearly surprised.

“Oh, it's too stormy out there. Should we stay here Toto?” Jessica asks with fear and a little hesitation.

Conner steeled his nerves and barked with confidence “Arf!” he replied to Dorothy. Conner was struck by a wave of giggles, laughter and a few gasps. He heard some teachers try to shush their students.

“Oh I don't know what to do, I hope Aunt Em is okay.” Jessica continued with the play, even through the noises.

“Arf. Arf!” Conner replied, trying to push the laughing out of his mind, Trish's words about the audience laughing at Toto,

not Conner ringing in his mind. The scene continued with Toto and Dorothy disappearing in darkness.

He heard shuffling all around him as the first graders setup, this was one of the longer scene transitions. “You’re doing great Toto.” He heard Jessica whisper to him, there was pride in her voice.

“Thanks, you too.” He whispered back.

The next scene opens with Toto pacing out and looking surprised, this was the munchikland scene with the first graders. Rather than just wearing primary colored clothing they now also sported hats and had been given a little makeup. The scene played out normally with only a couple hiccups that the audience most likely wouldn’t notice. Eventually the scene ends with the first graders dancing around the cast singing ‘Follow the Yellow Brick Road’.

Conner’s scenes gained a lot of laughs throughout the play, he was feeling good about his performance and glad he was able to do it in front of the entire student body. At the end of the play Ms Gray called out all the actors to take a bow, Conner walked out and did his best to bow to the audience. The actors got an impressive applause from the audience, the curtain then closed.

The cast looked around each other congratulating each other on the performance, Jessica knelt down in front of Conner and he moved to a sitting position. “You did great Toto!”

“Thanks Jessica.” Conner felt a strong sense of pride after his

performance.

“Thank you everyone!” Ms Gray told the cast. “This is the best performance of the Wizard of Oz these halls have seen! Please be back here for six o’clock for the second performance for our ticket holders, for now you can head back to class for the rest of the day. If you aren’t leaving the school feel free to use the drama room until six.” Ms Gray then dismissed everyone.

Conner followed everyone else backstage, he was beaming at not making a mistake and putting on a great show. He made it back to the dressing room. He was looking forward to taking off the outfit and stretching until he noticed it was occupied. He sat in front of the room and waited, eventually Harvey Barret stepped out.

Conner looked up at him. “Harvey, could you give me a hand with my zipper?” He asked.

Harvey smiled, “Yeah sure Toto, anything for Jessica’s little brother.”

“Thanks.” Conner said and blushed as he remembered their encounter a few weeks ago in the park, he paced into the dressing room with Harvey following him.

“No problem,” Harvey said, unzipping Conner’s suit. “Hey, I saw you and Billy talking earlier. Did he say anything about me?”

“No, like you said, he’s just a jerk.” Conner complained, finally standing up and quickly grabbing his pants.

“Alright then, I’ll see you tonight then.” Harvey left the dressing room for Conner to change.

Conner slipped on his pants and hung up the suit, the dressing room had a mirror and Conner noticed he was still wearing the dog collar. He reached up and tried to take it off but couldn’t get it to adjust, he now realized Trish had put it on and taken it off for him everytime. He pulled at it and heard someone from outside knock on his dressing room. “Almost done there, I need to change.” He heard Jaimie Booth ask.

“Yeah, just a sec!” Conner shouted back. Giving up on the collar he just put his shirt on over it and tried to hide it underneath, he would deal with it later. He put on his shoes and stepped out. “Sorry, it’s all yours.”

Conner returned his costume bag to the rack and stood around backstage until he ran into Mrs Bell. “Toto, you should clean up your makeup and head back to class, there is still an hour of school and lot’s of time before the next performance.” Mrs Bell informed him.

Conner felt a wave of terror cross over him. “Mrs Bell, Trish told me she won’t be able to apply this makeup twice and asked me to not take it off between the performances.” Conner told her shyly hoping he could hide out backstage.

Mrs Bell looked him up and down. “Well then just go back to class as you are, your teacher will understand I’m sure.”

Conner was getting scared now, his head still looked like Toto. “Okay.” He said defeated.

Slowly Conner went down the stage of the auditorium and headed to his class, he took careful effort not to cross paths with other students while he headed through the halls. He arrived at his classroom and opened the door, greeted by his classmates' stares, giggles and laughter, he looked down at his feet. He felt really embarrassed and felt he should just leave and hide out in the drama room, until he heard clapping. Conner looked up and saw his best friend had stood up and started clapping for him, slowly a few other kids joined until everyone had stopped laughing and most were clapping for him. Eventually he got the courage to walk into the room and close the door.

“Welcome back Toto! Great performance out there, please take a seat.” His teacher praised him, he was surprised she didn't even mention his makeup. Conner took his usual seat beside Brian who was still smiling at him.

His teacher continued on about some geometry problems and then handed out some worksheets, once given the opportunity Brian started asking him questions rapidly. “What is with the makeup that looks almost real? The costume on stage was so cool, was it hard to move in? How did you make the tail wag? Why didn't you take off the makeup? Can I touch it?”

“Slow down Brian, why are you so excited?” Conner asked him.

“I just think it's so cool, everything came together.” Brian said, blushing a little.

“Well the makeup and costume were made by a theater

student who had already graduated, it is surprisingly easy to move in. The tail is controlled by my feet. The makeup is hard to put on so she could only do it once and we perform again tonight.” Conner told him, trying to answer all his questions.

“Can I touch it?” Brian asked again.

Feeling a little embarrassed but thankful for Brian’s save earlier he nodded. Brian reached over and ran his hand through the hair and fur and felt the ears. “This is so cool.” He said with glee, “Are you still wearing the collar?”

Conner switched to a soft whisper. “I couldn’t get it off, Trish put it on but there is no clip to this thing.” Conner pulled the collar out of his shirt to show him, the large name tag displayed for everyone to see. He hadn’t thought about it but a bunch of students were listening in on their conversation, he was the center of attention. Giggles started to fill the classroom as everyone looked at Conner wearing the dog collar.

Brian looked at it and smiled. “It’s a Martingale collar, they say it’s safer for dogs to use this one than a normal one, although I would personally use a harness I think those are even better.” Brian went on about dog collar trivia.

“Jeez, Brian is a bigger dog nerd than Toto” One of his classmates shouted, clearly people were listening in. This had the students around them laughing, Brian’s cheeks flushed red. He reached over and quickly loosened the collar, pulling it over his head, and handed it to Conner. He then

slumped down in his chair, embarrassed about being called out.

Throughout the class some students came up to Conner congratulating him and asking questions, some people still teased him but he was slowly getting used to the teasing and it was mostly just the same comments, his classmates weren't very creative.

When the last bell rang he looked at Brian who was still depressed from before. "Hey, did you want to help me with the costume tonight?" Conner asked his friend.

"What do you mean?" Brian suddenly perked up.

"Well you knew about the collar and you are clearly interested in the outfit. I need help putting it on and it would be less embarrassing than asking one of the older kids." Conner told him.

"Sure! But I can't help you after the show, I need to walk Joey and head home later." Brian informed him.

"That's okay, we can go to the drama room until the show." Conner told him. The two packed up their things from class and headed to the drama room.

Chapter 7

Conner's Performance - The Production

The drama room had started to fill with the actors, some were practicing lines or trying to improve on small things, the stage hands were trying to fine tune certain elements. There were a lot of people running back and forth from the drama room to the auditorium.

Conner sat with Brian listening to him talk about dog accessories, he was still wearing the Toto makeup from the previous performance to the student body. “So you see the Martingale collar is better for bigger dogs, it wouldn’t even make sense for a small dog like Toto to have one.” Brian explained to him.

“You should definitely tell Trish that, I’m sure she would want to hear all about it.” Conner told him “I am an actor and I wear what I am told.”

“Yeah I can see that.” Brian teased Conner while patting his head, Conner just rolled his puppy dog eyes at him.

Jessica had walked up to them, she was already wearing her Dorothy dress. “Toto, it’s almost time to get ready, we don’t want to be late.”

“Come on Brian, you can check out the rest of the outfit.” Conner told him, the three of them headed to the stage. He led Brian up the stairs and grabbed the costume bag off the

rack and motioned for Brian to join him in the dressing room. He handed Brian the bag while he started to take off his clothes, he had seen him change on a few occasions and he wasn't embarrassed about Brian seeing him. Brian pulled the costume out and inspected it, he ran his hand over the fake fur.

Conner now in just his briefs sat on his feet. "So you need to help pull it up to my knees and legs." He instructed.

Brian unzipped the outfit and pulled it up Conner's legs until it was at his feet. "There should be a pocket my feet go in, just help me get them in." Conner instructed. Brian grabbed his foot and guided it into the pocket, then the second, Conner giggled as he did it. Playfully Brian purposely tickled his feet a little causing waves of giggles from Conner.

"You're really ticklish!" Brian said with glee.

"Stop! This is serious." Conner laughed.

Brian stopped and helped Conner pull up the arms and zipped up the back. Conner adjusted and then moved to a walking position. "Thanks Brian, I think it's just the collar left."

Brian took the collar and put it over Conner's head, he pulled it so it was against his neck and then the two stepped out to allow the next person to use the room. Brian ran his hand down Conner's back. "It's such a nice outfit. You really do look like Toto." Brian praised him. "But something isn't right, wait here I want to grab something."

Conner moved to the side to not be in anyone's way and

waited for his friend, he wasn't sure what he was doing, after a minute he came rushing back. He knelt down in front of him and pulled out a hair brush. "I borrowed this from the makeup area, the fur in this costume looks too messy, it should be brushed." Brian told him.

"If you think it will look better." Conner said, confused.

Brian spent a few minutes running the brush down his back, sides and legs. Then a few moments blending the hair from his neck to the costume. "I think that looks cleaner!" He smiled at Conner.

Billy had walked up to them watching this happen. "Well if it isn't the boy and his dog!" He teased them. "You just like to be a pampered puppy, don't you Toto?"

Conner just looked away from him embarrassed that he caught Brian doting over him. "It's not like that Billy, it's for the show." Conner said humbly.

Billy grinned at them. "I know you like it, I'm sure your friend here loves playing with his new puppy," Billy continued.

Brian stood up and looked at Billy "You are an ass, why don't you leave us alone." Brian demanded.

Billy's eyes narrowed at Brian. "What did you call me?" he questioned him.

"I called you an ass, no wonder Harvey dumped you!" Brian antagonized him.

Billy's face reddened and got clearly flustered. "Harvey and I are still together, what the hell do you know, you twerp." Billy stammered. He then gave him a shove and walked off.

Conner looked up at Brian. "Thanks Brian."

"No problem Toto, I hate bullies." Brian smiled at him, he spent a few more moments cleaning up and fussing over Conner's outfit. "Do you get to keep it?"

"The costume? No, it belongs to the school." Conner told him.

"That's too bad." Brian said disappointed, blushing a little. "I have to go now and you're starting in a few minutes, so break a leg!" Brian then walked away leaving Conner to meet up with Jessica on the stage.

Conner and Jessica were in the middle of the stage for the second time today, they waited in the dark while Ms Gray addressed the audience, thanked them for purchasing tickets and helping support the drama club. The curtains slowly opened revealing the audience. The floor mats and benches had been replaced with more chairs for the audience, unlike earlier there wasn't any order to the audience, most sat together in families. Conner quickly scanned the audience until his eyes landed on his mother and father. His mother looked really excited and waved at them while his father had his mouth covered by his hand trying to hide a laugh.

Conner and Jessica performed the scene without any issue. As the play progresses Conner plays the role of Toto perfectly, he isn't nervous or embarrassed at all. The

audience laughs when he expects them to and he is able to pull off a convincing performance. The play got to the scene with Billy, the flying monkey, attacking the group and kidnapping them. Billy came out on set, he looked more fierce than any of the previous performances. Dorothy and the Lion play their parts and start running away, Toto tries to slow the monkey down by barking at him.

“ARF! ARF! ARF!” Conner cried out.

“Out of the way doggy!” Billy said with his practiced lines, a lot more malice in his voice.

As the flying monkey chased the actors off the stage, Toto followed behind them. The group had to rush around to the other side of the stage while Rayna took their place. Billy stormed out ahead of them, not wanting to chat.

As the curtains close over the final scene, there is a level of ease and relief that fills Conner. He did it, he was able to play a main role in a production, albeit not a traditionally speaking role. The curtain opened once more and the cast had gathered to take a bow, thunderous applause from the audience was heard.

After the play, before they headed backstage Conner and Jessica’s parents came up. Other students were also meeting their parents as well, taking pictures and exchanging gifts.

“Congratulations! You two, I’m so proud!” Linda congratulated her children. “You two look great in your costumes, I got a lot of pictures!”

“Thanks Mom.” Conner said, sitting on the stage.

“Well done, both of you. Conner you played an interesting role.” Conner’s father, David, congratulated him.

“Thanks Dad.” Conner said smiling.

Jessica saw Sara waving at her. “Oh, Mom, Dad. I got invited to an after party with the other students at Sara’s.” She told them.

“Oh, that’s nice, will Sara’s parent’s be there?” Linda asked.

“Well, maybe, I didn’t ask. But Toto was also invited, so it’s for the whole cast!” Jessica said, changing the subject.

Linda and David exchanged looks. “Well if you promise to look out for Conner, I suppose you two can go to the party.” David told them.

“Thank you, I will look out for Conner, don’t worry!” Jessica said.

“Before you head off with your friends let’s get a picture!” Linda told them and took a selfie with the four of them in view, Conner was in the center with Jessica kneeling down above him.

“Let’s meet up with Sara and head over.” Jessica clearly excited and motioned Conner to follow her.

“I’ll see you later then, I’m going to the party!” Conner told his parents and followed after Jessica.

Sara was gathering people around explaining the plan. “Okay,

the party is at my place, it's right beside the school so we can go straight there." People were nodding, others already knew where Sara's house was. "I also thought it would be fun if we made it a costume party! I already asked Mrs Bell and she said we could borrow them."

Conner was going to ask to change since he couldn't stand up in his outfit. "Um, Sara." Conner tried to get her attention.

Instead of Sara, Jessica knelt down. "What is it, Toto?" She asked.

"I wanted to change before the party, this outfit will be annoying." Conner explained to his sister.

Jessica smiled. "You want to be the only one at the party not wearing a costume? Don't you want to fit in with the rest of the cast?" She asked.

Conner was conflicted, he had never been to an older kids party and didn't know what to expect. "Yeah, I suppose so." He told her quietly.

"Then it's settled." Jessica whispered to Conner then stood back up.

One of the munchkins ran up to Sara after the performance. She was wearing a red dress with yellow dots. "Sara, we did it! The play is over!" She cried.

"Congratulations Emily! We did it!" Sara said to her as they hugged.

"Everyone, this is our co-star, Emily, my little sister." Sara

told everyone.

Conner followed the group as they made their way through the school. There were plenty of people who stopped and praised them on their performance as they walked. Everyone stood around taking pictures with the cast, Conner was a crowd favorite and kids kept wanting to take pictures with him. He felt a little embarrassed and proud at the same time, it was a mix of emotions for Conner. He looked at the cast and saw Billy and Harvey chatting, they seemed to be getting into a heated argument, occasionally Harvey or Billy would glance at him. Jessica noticed and knelt down beside Conner. “You didn’t tell Billy anything, did you?” She whispered.

“Brian brought it up before the play.” He whispered back to his sister.

Jessica inhaled deeply and sighed. “Well it was going to come out tonight one way or another, so don’t worry too much about it.” Jessica told him. Conner thought he was getting off easy with his friend revealing her secret.

Conner followed the cast as they made their way through the school. He felt awkward about having to run on his hands and knees after his classmates, but they stopped and waited for him to catch up.

Chapter 8

Conner's Performance - The After Party

Conner felt nervous as the group left the school and entered the courtyard. Sara pointed to a house which backs onto the school, it was surprisingly close to the school. The group quickly walked toward her place, leaving Conner to hurry behind them. He rushed as fast as he could however was having a great deal of trouble keeping up, he looked up and saw Emily standing and waiting for him.

“I figured I would walk with you Toto!” She told him as he caught up.

Conner took a moment to catch his breath after running after his fellow cast members. “Thanks.” He mumbled. She just reached down and patted his head.

The two slowly walked toward the house, Conner didn’t feel the need to hurry anymore as most of them had already disappeared inside. “I should have just taken this thing off after the play.” He complained.

“You make such a cute Toto! We can play together!” She suggested.

Conner wasn’t really sure what to do at a party like this, he was closer in age to Emily than the other cast members. “I don’t know about that.” He said.

Conner and Emily finally make it to the house, it's a one storey house and luckily doesn't have any steps up to the door. Emily holds the door open for Conner and they hear the loud teenagers chatting about the play, relationships and other school work. Conner follows Emily into the living room which had a large television at one end of the room and multiple couches and sofas for sitting. Pillows had also been laid out on the floor for people to sit on. On one end of the room Conner spotted a dejected and seemingly depressed Billy sitting at the end of a couch. Jessica was sitting next to Harvey, both of them looking flustered. Sara and Rayna were herding snacks and people into the room where Jamie was fiddling with the remote trying to get a recording of the play to appear on the television.

Conner followed Emily to the pillows on the floor and sat beside her, not wanting to clumsily try and get onto the couch. Tom who was awkwardly sitting in his Tinman getup looks at Conner. "It looks like our lost puppy finally made his way here." He called out, and some of the others snickered "We should introduce him to Diamond and Sugar!"

Conner had no idea who Diamond and Sugar were and looked at Emily who was smiling. "Great idea, I'll go get them!" Emily happily got up and ran out of the room.

Conner heard yapping from down the hall and Emily returned with two dogs, both of them excited about all the new people in the house. Conner got nervous when he saw the two large dogs one was a full grown saint bernard that rivaled even Emily's standing height, the other was a regular golden

retriever, who still stood taller than Conner while he was kneeling. The dogs bound into the room jumping from person to person until they spotted Conner, sitting there as the smallest dog in the room. “The big one is Diamond and the golden retriever is Sugar.” Emily told the crowd.

The dogs eyed Conner and started moving closer to him, they were clearly curious about the dog boy. Their posture changed quickly and they took an aggressive stance. Conner, not knowing what to do, started to slowly shuffle backwards away from them and further into the room, he really regretted not changing now. Diamond, who towered over Conner, then let out a loud ‘WOOF!’. Conner got legitimately scared, the bark was loud and rang in Conner’s ears, tears started to blur his vision, that’s when they lunged at him.

“Eeek!” Conner squeaked, holding his paw clad hands in front of him. Lucky for Conner, the dogs never made it to him. He lowered his hands and saw that Diamond’s collar had been grabbed by Billy of all people and Sugar’s had been snagged by Harvey. The three boys looked at each other all breathing deeply with relief.

Jessica stood up and rushed over to Conner. “Hey Toto, it’s alright.” She knelt down and gave him a hug while Billy and Harvey quicked ushered the dog away. She wiped away the tears from his black eyes and stood up and looked at the rest of the cast members. “So Jaimie are we watching this play or what?” She asked, trying to move the focus away from her brother.

Jaimie fumbled with the remote for a few more seconds and a recording of the play started on the large television. Sara handed out some bowls of snacks and placed a lidded tumbler in front of Conner with a straw sticking out. He was thirsty after all the running and shuffling and happily drank from the straw, he had half expected them to give him a dog bowl to tease him further however Sara was nicer than that. Billy and Harvey stepped back into the room, both with flushed faces looking more miserable than before, Conner suspected that they had an argument while they stepped away. Emily sat down next to Conner and whispered in his ear. “Sorry about the dogs, I didn’t think they would get so mean.”

“Yeah, okay Emily” Conner whispered back, still upset from earlier. “Let’s just watch the play.”

The recording they were watching was from the afternoon in front of the student body, it had been filmed by one of the AV Club members for them. This was the first time Conner had seen himself perform on stage and he didn’t know how to feel. Objectively it was a decent performance, he didn’t mess up cues and he moved when needing to. The real issue is how embarrassed he was seeing himself on the screen, he wanted to cringe every time he heard himself bark at the other cast members. Emily on the other hand sang along to the songs, much to the other kids delight, she was clearly not as embarrassed as he was.

Different scenes brought comments from others, some laughed, others had their own moments of embarrassment and sometimes there were compliments, mostly aimed at his

sister. Conner was kind of relieved when the play ended with the curtains closing, he could finally put the play behind him. The older kids started to chat amongst themselves and Conner needed to use the washroom. He turned to Emily “Um, where is the washroom in your house?”

“Couple doors down on the right .” Emily told him.

Conner walked through the halls and saw Jessica and Harvey waiting for something. “Hey Jessica, I just need to go to the washroom. Can you unzip this costume?” He asked.

Jessica looked down. “Okay Toto, we are just waiting for Billy to meet us in one of the bedrooms.” She stepped into the washroom with Conner and unzipped the outfit. Conner stood up and stretched out a bit, finally being able to stand. Jessica left to give him some privacy. After going to the washroom and washing his hands Conner attempted to put the costume back on, he was having difficulty with it. The bathroom door shot open, he had forgotten to lock it, and yelped in surprise. Billy was standing before him, he was still wearing the monkey suit, but the makeup had been streaked with tears. Conner was still sitting in his briefs on the ground.

“What are you doing here?” Billy said angrily.

“I was going to the washroom, I’m almost done.” Conner said meekly, embarrassed about the situation.

“You’re Jessica’s kid brother aren’t you Toto?” He questioned him, his eyes still red.

“Yeah, why do you care?” Conner asked.

Billy's eyes twitched in anger and then softened a little and he grinned. "Do you need a hand with that thing?" He asked.

Conner looked around, he didn't understand why Billy would offer to help him. "Yeah, that would be nice." He mumbled, thinking back to how Billy saved him from Diamond.

Billy stepped behind him and roughly zipped up the costume for him, he felt him pull extra hard at the zipper and then he let go. "There now the doggy is back, I know you prefer it this way." he said angrily.

Conner stumbled back into a sitting position. "Thanks Billy." He said meekly.

"You don't even deny it anymore." He scoffed. "I'm heading home, good luck with the rest of the party." Billy ushered Conner out of the bathroom and closed the door.

Conner paced back to the living room where all the kids were speaking, he spotted his sister and Harvey holding hands on the couch and the other cast member just chatting. Rayna held up a bottle and announced. "Okay let's play 'spin the bottle'". This was met with a few laughs and a few groans but it seemed to be the next thing people were going to do.

Conner had no interest in playing kissing games with a bunch of teenagers and just looked around, is this really what they did at parties, just watch movies and play stupid games? Sara knelt down in front of Conner and Emily. "Hey, why don't you two play in Emily's room?" she suggested, clearly trying to get rid of them.

“Yes! Toto let’s play in my room!” Emily cried.

Conner looked around, Jessica just shrugged. “Okay, that works I guess.” He said, not knowing what else to do.

Emily led Conner through the house, it was mostly on the same floor with no stairs, just a few steps for specific rooms. When she opened a door that had colorful letters that spelt out Emily he was greeted with a fairly normal looking room. He had expected Emily’s wall to be a bright pink with a lot of dolls but that wasn’t the case, she had a desk and bed, large play area and plenty of toys, dolls included. One thing he did notice was the amount of stuffed animals, she had all kinds. Across from her bed, hanging on the wall was a TV, he was a little envious since he didn’t even have a TV in his room.

“Welcome to my room Toto!” Emily said, as Conner stumbled into the room, still looking around. “We can play all sorts of games, who needs all the big kids anyway.”

Conner felt a little guilty for leaving all his cast members behind and could hear laughter coming from somewhere else in the house, another part of him knew that this had been Sara’s plan to get both of them out of her and Jessica’s way.

Emily closed her door and sat in front of Conner so they were eye level. “You look so much like Toto, can you bark again?” she asked.

Conner felt embarrassed, did she just want him to pretend to be a dog? “The play is over Emily.”

She pouted and stared at him. “Come on, you were so good at

it, you look just like a dog too.”

Conner figured he would just give her what she wanted, rather than argue. “Arf.” he let out softly.

Emily giggled happily. “You’re such a good boy!”, she then patted his head. “Do you know any tricks?” She continued.

“I’m not a dog, I’m a boy.” Conner complained.

“During the play you were wagging your tail! How did you do that?” Emily questioned him, ignoring his previous statement.

Conner was getting annoyed. “It’s just how the costume works.” He then used his feet to make the tail wag back and forth in order to prove it to her.

Emily giggled and was smiling ear to ear. “Okay fine you’re a boy, what do you want to do then?” Emily conceded. “We could watch another movie or play, I have a bunch of them.”

“Sure, let’s watch a play then.” Conner agreed. “What do you have?”

Emily got up and opened a drawer, she pulled out a disc that had ‘Peter Pan’ written on it. “This is a good one, it’s old and from a few years ago.” She put the disc into the player and went over to her bed. “Do you need some help getting up?” She asked.

Conner walked over to her bed and realized how high up it was. “Yeah, a little.” He said bashfully. Emily stood behind him and gave him a boost while he clambered onto the top of

it. "Thanks," he said and moved to a comfortable viewing position.

The play started, to his surprise it looked like it had been recorded at the community theater. Emily turned off the lights and sat beside him on the bed and would occasionally run her fingers through the fur of Conner's costume, to his annoyance it felt kind of nice. While watching the screen Conner laid down on his stomach and put his head on his padded paws. His body was tired from the two performances and running around on his knees, his eyes felt heavy and he yawned, eventually he dozed off on Emily's bed.

Chapter 9

Conner's Performance - Heading Home

“Toto.” Conner heard his sister whisper and felt a light jostle to wake him up. “Hey Toto, wake up.” His sister whispered again. Conner slowly opened his eyes, waking up from his dreams, he noticed light pouring in from the window. He tried to rub the sleep out of his eyes only to remember he was still wearing the Toto costume.

“What time is it?” Conner groaned and looked around. He was still on top of Emily’s bed, she was sleeping on her pillows under the covers while he was at the end, she was still asleep herself.

“Shh, don’t wake up Emily.” Jessica whispered to him. “It’s just after seven, we need to head home.” Jessica wasn’t wearing the Dorothy costume anymore and had changed into blue sweatpants and a white sweater. She lifted Conner carefully off the bed and placed him on the floor, he took a moment to balance himself and followed her out of the room.

“You didn’t tell me we would spend the night, I would have changed at the school.” Conner scolded his sister. He wanted to stand up and walk around again instead of being forced to crawl.

“I hadn’t planned on staying the night but by the time I went to check on you, both you and Emily were asleep.” Jessica

explained to Conner as they made their way through the house. “Sara and I figured you and Emily had a long day and let you rest. Don’t worry I called Mom and Dad and let them know, we won’t get in trouble.”

Conner wasn’t worried about getting in trouble, he wanted to change his clothes as well. The two stepped into the kitchen where Sara and Harvey were sitting at the table. Sara was wearing a pair of jeans and a T-Shirt and Harvey was wearing part of the Wizard costume from the play, he had clearly spent the night as well. “Sara, do you have anything for my brother to wear home?” Jessica asked Sara.

Sara looked at Conner who still looked like a puppy. “Yeah, I think something of Emily's will fit him.” She told them, getting up to find something.

“Come on Toto, let’s get you out of that costume.” Jessica told him. Conner hurried and followed her to the bathroom to finally change. He sat on his feet waiting for Jessica to unzip the outfit, he felt her tug and pull at the material. “Where is the zipper?” Jessica asked him.

“What do you mean, it should be at the top.” Conner said. “You unzipped it yesterday for me.”

“The pull tab is missing, I can’t unzip it.” Jessica explained. “Who zipped this up for you yesterday?”

Conner thought about the encounter yesterday. “It was Billy, he seemed upset at the time and wanted to use the washroom.” He told her.

Jessica stood up and groaned. “Yeah I bet he was upset.” Her voice sounded concerned and angry, she leaned out the door and called Harvey over.

Harvey entered the washroom to Conner’s confusion. “Apparently Billy is the last one to zip up my brother’s suit and now the zipper tab is missing, this was after our conversation with him.” Jessica explained to Harvey.

“Jeeze, he is such a jerk, that’s exactly the type of thing he would do.” Harvey hissed. “Let me call him. I bet that’s what he wants anyway.”

Harvey stepped away. “Let’s see what Billy says, otherwise we will need to cut the outfit off and I don’t think the school will appreciate that.” Jessica told him.

Conner started feeling humiliated, he had slept through the night in the costume and now he wasn’t even allowed to take it off. If they did cut it off of him there was no way Ms. Gray would let him be part of any other play in the future. Jessica noticed the fear building up in his younger brother. “Hey, don’t worry too much, everything will be okay.” She tried to reassure him. “Billy may seem like a big bully but he thinks this type of stuff is funny.” Conner felt a little better knowing his sister was being casual about everything.

Harvey stepped back into the room, he looked annoyed. “Okay, so apparently Billy does have the zipper tab and had expected us to call him yesterday. Now he says he will meet us at the school to give it to us.” Harvey explained.

The three of them headed to the door and Sara caught up with them before they left. “Here is a change of clothes for Toto” Sara said and handed Jessica a shopping bag. “Harvey told me what’s going on.”

“Thanks Sara.” Jessica said.

The three of them left Sara’s house and made their way back to the school, since it was Saturday they wouldn’t be able to go inside. Harvey and Jessica walked slowly to allow for Conner to keep a regular pace. “Hey you okay down there.” Harvey asked.

“I really want out of this thing.” Conner said and then gave it some thought. “I’ve been wearing it for over twelve hours!”

“Billy said he’s coming with the tab, so once we have it you can change right away.” Jessica told him she felt concerned for her brother. “Also I want to give him a piece of my mind.”

After a few minutes the group finally made their way to the school, Conner felt a little tired from walking all the way here on his knees and took a break. Billy was walking toward them from across the courtyard.

“I see you two are just taking Toto out for his morning walk?” Billy shouted as he got closer.

“Billy! What you did was too far! What did Conner ever do to you?” Jessica shouted defending Conner.

“Conner?” Billy questioned as he finally got closer. “Never met him.” and he shrugged.

Conner was having mixed emotions, he felt pride in his sister defending him, but humiliation from Billy treating him like a dog. "I'm not a dog, my name is Conner." Conner said to Billy.

"Oh so the dog speaks!" Billy laughed at his own joke.

"Billy, just give us the zipper tab so you can go." Harvey finally said.

"You really want the zipper tab back, lover boy" Billy mockingly said while pulling the tab out and holding it out of reach.

"Billy, you aren't being funny, you are just being a jerk." Harvey protested.

"Oh, I'm the jerk now!" Billy was getting angry. "I'm not the one going on secret dates, even though you already had a boyfriend!"

"We talked about this yesterday, it's over" Harvey was getting flustered. "Just leave us alone."

Billy looked Harvey up and down. "You stayed over at Sara's didn't you?" He looked at Jessica and Conner. "All three of you did! That's why you didn't call me yesterday!"

"Just give me the tab!" Harvey demanded, getting closer to Billy. The two were furious with each other and eventually Harvey just gave Billy a shove that sent him to the ground.

Billy was shocked and surprised, Conner had never seen Billy like this; he looked like he was about to cry. "Whatever, just

take it.” Billy sniveled and threw the zipper tab towards Jessica who caught it. “Harvey, you may think I’m the ass but you’re a piece of work yourself.” He then picked himself up and there was a look of acceptance and betrayal on his face. Without waiting for a response Billy took off running.

Jessica and Harvey gave a nervous look to each other, both of them feeling guilty. “Alright let’s get you changed so we can walk home.” Jessica took the zipper tab and spent a couple minutes trying to get it back on the outfit, eventually Conner felt the cold autumn air as the outfit unzipped.

“It’s colder than I thought it was.” Conner said. He pulled off the outfit and tried to stand up falling on his butt. “My legs are all wobbly.” Conner blushed realizing he was sitting in the school courtyard in nothing but his underwear, at least only Jessica and Harvey were the only ones around to see.

Jessica handed Conner the shopping bag with extra clothes he pulled out what Sara had picked out for him. Conner revealed bubble gum pink colored footie pajamas, he sat there looking at them until another cold breeze rushed over them causing him to shiver. “You have got to be kidding me.” He stammered.

“It’s only for the walk home, Sara said you can keep them since Emily doesn’t even wear them.” Jessica said, trying to hold back a laugh. “Besides, it’s not like you have shoes with you anyway.”

Conner sighed deeply, his humiliation would continue. He quickly pulled on the legs and tried to stand up, Harvey held

his hand so he could regain balance. He pulled on the sleeves and started to button up the fleece pajamas, at least it was a refuge from the cold air. He looked himself up and down thinking he had stepped out of an Oz book with a puppy head and silly outfit.

“Let’s get going, hopefully no one sees me.” Conner said as he put the Toto outfit in the empty shopping bag, he also took off the collar and dropped it in the bag as well.

“Here Harvey, you carry this.” Jessica demanded and handed the shopping bag to Harvey, which he took.

Conner’s feet had anti-slip soles which protected his feet during the walk home. He spent that time untangling the ears from his hair and depositing those in the bag as well, he would deal with the makeup once he got home. During the walk he felt like he was on display for the neighborhood to see.

Once Conner saw his house he took the bag from Harvey and rushed to the front door, he put in the passcode and slipped inside. He was glad he was able to get home without even more embarrassing encounters. He left his sister to say goodbye to Harvey and headed for his room, he left the costume there while he started to tackle the makeup in his washroom.

Conner looked in the mirror and started to peel off the layers of fur, he winced as the adhesive left his skin. Then he pried off the nose prosthetic. Conner looked at himself, in the pink pajamas with some adhesive still stuck to his face. The only

thing that concerned him were the black contacts, he had no idea how he would take those out. He sighed and finally took off the pajamas and stepped in the shower.

He thought about everything that had happened, the practicing, the performances and the party. He was proud of what he had accomplished, while embarrassing he was able to put that aside and perform with the main cast! He resolved to keep participating in future shows and plays.