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opening extract from

Stage School: Sara's Big Chance

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Chapter One

AUDITION!

For perhaps the first time in the school's history, the whole of Year Seven at the Marcia Lane School of Drama and Dance had arrived early. They'd been told the day before that there was going to be a mass audition next week – for a special Christmas run of *Mary Poppins* at a West End theatre! It was incredibly lucky to get a chance like this in their third week at stage school, and all the Year Sevens

were desperate to find out more.

Bethany, Chloe and Lily were sitting on the windowsill in their form room when Sara walked in.

'Wow, you're all early!' she commented.

'So are you!' Bethany pointed out, grinning.

'I couldn't wait to get here,' Sara agreed. 'I got the earlier bus! Shove up, then.' She dropped her bag and coat on a table and squeezed in next to Lily. 'So, has anyone heard any more about the audition?'

'They're coming on Monday,' Chloe said, a little shyly. It was only the day before that she'd really made friends with Bethany, Lily and Sara. They hadn't hit it off on the first day of term. She and Sara had been sniping at each other for the last three weeks, and she was still a bit unsure whether Sara liked her or not.

'Monday! That's not long to get ready. How do you know, Chloe?' Sara leaned eagerly round Lily. She was an easy-going person, and she'd only been so upset with Chloe because she had thought Chloe had been mean to Lily. Sara was very protective of



her friends. It had turned out it was all a misunderstanding and now that everything was sorted out, she was happy for them all to hang around together. Besides, even if Chloe was a bit mad sometimes, she had a really cool sense of humour.

'I heard Mr Harvey talking about it as I came past the staff room this morning.' Mr Harvey was their singing teacher. 'He was saying the same thing – that he wished he'd had more warning. He'd like to get us to learn a couple of songs, he said.'

'Probably most people know them anyway – everyone knows *Mary Poppins*, don't they?' Sara asked in surprise.

'Yee-es,' Bethany agreed. 'But do we know them the way Mr Harvey wants us to know them?' She raised one eyebrow at Sara, questioningly.

'OK, fair point.' Sara sighed and nodded. Three weeks at Lane's was quite enough to realise that no one *ever* knew a song well enough for Mr Harvey. You could do absolutely everything he asked, and he would just take it as proof that you were capable of more . . . Sara adored singing, and she couldn't



imagine how wonderful it would be to get a part in a West End musical. But so far, all Mr Harvey seemed to have done was criticise her singing. Sara chewed her lip. She might as well face it – she had no chance at the audition if her singing was no good.

'What's the matter?' Bethany asked, spotting her change of mood. 'You were over the moon yesterday! I thought being in *Mary Poppins* was your dream come true!'

'You were humming "A Spoonful of Sugar" all the way down the road,' Lily agreed.

Sara shrugged, trying not to look as though it mattered too much. 'I know, but what chance have I got? There's all of us *and* the Year Eights. Yesterday it seemed like fate – my favourite musical and everything. But Mr Harvey doesn't think my singing's any good. There's no way they'll pick me.'

Lily made an odd spluttering noise. She had just spat half her bottle of water down her front in shock at Sara's denseness.

'What?' Sara asked, looking confused.



‘Mr Harvey thinks you’re the next Martine McCutcheon! You and Bethany are his star pupils! Uuurgh, has anyone got a tissue?’

‘He does not! He’s always telling me off! Bethany too,’ Sara complained. She turned to Bethany for back-up. ‘He is, isn’t he?’

Bethany nodded gloomily. ‘I can’t do anything right in singing.’

Chloe and Lily exchanged disbelieving looks. ‘Would you believe anyone could be that thick?’ Lily asked, and Chloe shook her head, giggling. ‘He’s always picking on you two because you’re so good! He doesn’t bother so much with Little Miss Averages like me and Chloe. Haven’t you worked that out yet?’

Chloe smiled smugly and tossed her red curls. ‘It’s great. The rest of us just go to singing and have a great time, and you two and a couple of others get all the hassle.’

Sara wasn’t sure whether to be delighted or annoyed. Was Lily right? She glanced at Bethany to see if she agreed, and couldn’t help smiling. Bethany

normally looked so calm and confident – now she looked like someone had just stuffed an ice cube down her back.

'You might have said!' Bethany protested indignantly, and Sara nodded.

'Well, like I told you, I didn't think you could be stupid enough not to realise!' Lily defended herself, waving the water around dangerously again.

'So if it's singing they're looking for, I reckon you two have got a good chance,' Chloe said, seriously now.

Sara glowed. She might have been fighting with Chloe for the past couple of weeks, but she did respect her opinion. Was she really that good a singer? The idea was hard to take in.

'Sara's got more chance than me,' said Bethany slowly. 'I mean, for something like this, how you look really matters. Long blonde hair is more what they're going to want, isn't it?'

The other three frowned. It was probably true, but it didn't seem fair that Bethany should have less of a chance just because she was half Chinese.



She could sing brilliantly and was one of the best dancers in their class.

'It might not matter,' Sara argued. 'Like I said to Chloe yesterday, they use wigs and stuff all the time for that sort of show. I bet on stage nobody looks like they really do in real life.'

Chloe quickly changed the subject. 'My mum was so excited when I told her we had an audition. She even rang my dad at work to tell him!'

Sara chuckled with the others, but she couldn't help wishing that her own mum had reacted more like that. She'd gone home buzzing with excitement, and desperate to tell everyone, but, as always, her mum only wanted to hear about her academic classes. She was a teacher herself, and she was very worried that Sara wasn't going to be properly taught at a stage school. It didn't help that Sara's older brother Jack had just got ten A stars in his GCSEs. Her parents were always comparing the two of them, and Sara couldn't get them to see that she was a totally different sort of person. Sometimes she felt like she must have been swapped at birth, and

somewhere a really brainy eleven-year-old was trying to convince her parents that she hated dancing . . .

Luckily, Sara's gran shared her passion for show business, and had always been really supportive. It had been her gran sitting in the front row at all her dance school shows when her mum and her dad had had parents' evening or work stuff. And it was Gran who'd persuaded them to let Sara try out for Lane's. Sara suspected that they'd never thought she'd get in, so they hadn't worried too much about it.

When the letter arrived saying she'd got a place, there had been a huge row. Sara shuddered just remembering it. The letter had come addressed to her, although there was loads of stuff in it for her parents too. She saw the big dark red Lane's logo on the envelope as Jack handed it to her at breakfast, and she knew at once what it was. She sat paralysed, not wanting to open it. What if she hadn't got a place? She'd been telling herself for weeks that it was very unlikely she would – after all, about two



hundred people had auditioned for thirty places, so she hadn't got much chance. It was better to assume she wouldn't get in, then she wouldn't be so disappointed. That was the plan, anyway. Her parents had kept on talking about Sara going to Meadow Park, the local school that her mum taught at, and where Jack was doing so well, and every time they mentioned it Sara had felt worse and worse. It was like they just assumed she hadn't got a hope either. Somehow it was OK for her to tell herself that, but a bit of encouragement from her parents would have been nice!

'What's that, Sara? Something from the writers' club?' Her mum had bought her membership in a young writers' club for her birthday, despite the hints Sara had dropped about new tap shoes.

'It's from the school,' Sara murmured, staring at the words on the envelope – *Marcia Lane School of Drama and Dance*.

'What? From Meadow Park? Why on earth are they writing to you? I didn't know anything about a mailing going out to new students.' Her mum



reached across the table to take the envelope. ‘Let me see.’

‘No! It’s addressed to me, and it’s not from Meadow Park, it’s from Lane’s.’ Sara snatched the envelope into her lap, glaring at her mother.

‘Oh. That.’ Her mother sighed and exchanged a glance with her father. ‘Well, aren’t you going to open it?’

If only the post arrived later, Sara thought miserably. She really didn’t want to read the letter with Mum, Dad and Jack all staring at her. It would be bad enough knowing that she had to go to Meadow Park and spend years with all the staff telling her what a pleasure Jack had been to teach, and everyone else hating her because her mum was a teacher.

She poked her nail into the corner of the envelope, and slowly tore it open across the top. It was quite fat, and a couple of leaflets fell out as she opened it. She didn’t see her mum’s face changing as she noted all of this. Sara’s mum knew enough about schools to realise that this wasn’t just a ‘no’.

Sara picked up the white sheet with the

