

# Behind the S

By Jessica Larsen

(Based on a true story)

*“And our talents improve, by the patience of hope and the labor of love” (Hymns, no. 217).*

Tessa’s heart pounded as Mr. Trager stepped to the front of the room and cleared his throat. “And the lead for our class production of *Cinderella* is—Cassidy!” Tessa cheered as Cassidy walked up front. Cassidy was Tessa’s best friend, and she was the best singer in the fourth grade.

Tessa waited on the edge of her seat as Mr. Trager read the rest of the parts. Her shoulders slumped when she didn’t get her first choice, or even her second. She was the narrator, which didn’t feel like a real part at all.

“It was the worst day ever, Mom,” she complained as she helped make dinner that night. “I wish I could sing like Cassidy. I wanted to help make this play amazing, but I’m not good at anything that could help the play.”

“There are lots of ways to make it amazing,” Mom said. “And being narrator is one of them. I’m sure you’ll find other ways to help with the play as well.” Tessa didn’t say anything, but she wasn’t so sure.

The worst day ever became the worst month ever as the class spent most afternoons practicing for the play. Tessa liked learning the group dance numbers and songs, but she still didn’t feel as talented as her best friend. Cassidy was busy learning her solos and always standing front and center in the practices.

Then Cassidy started staying after school for extra practices. Because the girls carpoled home together, Tessa stayed after school too. With nothing else to do, she read the script over and over, memorizing the lines until she could recite the entire play word for word. Tessa sat watching the practices in the dark auditorium, mouthing the words along with the actors.

One day, Danielle, who played the Fairy Godmother, was out sick. But they were supposed to practice her parts that afternoon! Mr. Trager waved Tessa toward the stage. “Tessa, do you think you could stand in for Danielle just for today?” He held out a script to her. “Sure,” said Tessa. “But I don’t need the script.”

Practice began, and Tessa knew all of the Fairy Godmother’s lines by heart. When Prince Charming couldn’t remember his part, she was even able to help him with his lines. The practice went great.

“Tessa,” Mr. Trager said when they were done, “how would you like to be the understudy?”

“The understudy?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said. “You would fill in for the actors if anyone is gone during a practice or performance. You know everyone’s lines, so I think you’d be perfect.”



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"I'd love to!" Tessa said. Who knew her talent for memorizing could help the play?

The days until opening night flew by. Tessa was able to stand in for a few other people during practices, and she even helped some other students learn their lines. "Thank you for helping me, Tessa!" Danielle said a week before opening night. "You're the best!"

On opening night Tessa stood with Cassidy backstage and smoothed her hands over her dress. "There you are!" Mom said, "Let's get a picture of the talented girls!" Tessa smiled. And although she felt nervous, the smile stayed on her face as she stepped onto the stage to say her lines. Tessa wasn't the lead like Cassidy, but she had used her talents to help the play. And she knew that was what mattered most. ♦

The author lives in Arizona, USA.

