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☆☆☆☆☆ “Retains the breathless pace throughout with an elegant, timeless story!”

81 Minute Books Presents

“Behind the Green Curtain”

Preview

Written by Ron Knight

Part 1

The Wizard of Oz film is ranked as one of the greatest movies of all time and nominated for five Academy Awards. There was one teenager who was behind the scenes during the making of the film. What he did and what he witnessed has never been told...until now.

You'll never look at *The Wizard of Oz* the same way again.

Based on true events...

In 1938, Victor Fleming walked on stage at the Bradford High School Theatre, located in Kenosha, Wisconsin. He looked into the audience of 109 teenagers.

“Hello theatre students, my name is Victor Fleming. I'll be directing a new film called, *The Wizard of Oz*.” He gazed at the teenagers for a long moment. “Before you get your hopes up, I'm not looking for actors. However, I am looking for one student to be an assistant on the set while we're filming.”

Mr. Fleming paused as the excited teenagers whispered amongst themselves. “The student that I choose will be excused from school and assigned a tutor so that you can continue with your studies. The assistant will have a salary, along with all living and food expenses paid.”

Mr. Fleming leveled his eyes on the students. “I assure you the experience will be unforgettable and help you one day achieve great things. At the same time, this will be the most difficult thing you've ever done in your life.”

~

Jack was a sophomore at Bradford High School. He had joined theatre his freshman year, but spent most of the time trying to figure out what the heck he should be doing. He had trouble memorizing lines as an actor and seemed to be the clumsiest stagehand in the history of Bradford Theatre.

By his second year, Jack had greatly improved. He helped the other actors go over lines, made their costumes and built props for each play. The teacher never really took him seriously, but the other students loved having Jack around because he was so talented.

In addition, Jack was their leading fundraiser. One of Jack's inventions called the *Smell System*, he sold to other theatres.

The Smell System discharged thirty different odors into the audience during a scene. For example, if the scene was in the woods, Jack pressed a button on the Smell System and a scent of pine would float into the air.

If the scene was about a beautiful young girl, Jack would hit a different button on the Smell System and a faint aroma of perfume would be discharged.

This made the play even better and the audience enjoyed the interaction.

~

When it came time for Jack's interview, he realized that all 109 theatre students were in line to speak with the director of *The Wizard of Oz*, Victor Fleming.

Jack was the last one to get the chance to be interviewed.

He walked into the door, seeing Mr. Fleming sitting at a desk in the rear part of the classroom. Jack made the longest walk of his life to the desk.

Mr. Fleming interlocked his fingers and smiled. "So, you must be Jack. I've heard a lot about you.

Jack opened his mouth, then turned and bolted out the door into the hallway, gasping for air.

After a few minutes, Jack had to decide. Should he just leave and save what was left of his dignity, or walk back into the room?

Jack took in a deep breath, wiped his sweaty hands on his pants, then entered the classroom and made the long journey to the desk. "I'm sorry, sir."

Mr. Fleming held up his hand for a moment. "It's okay. I discovered a lot about you in the last few minutes."

Jack wiped a bead of sweat from his forehead. "How so?"

"Well, it's easy to be afraid, discouraged, or wanting to just quit. You decided to walk back into the room which was a true test of your courage. I admire that."

Jack sighed. "I know that we only have a minute to talk, so I guess there are a few things you should know about me. I'm a sophomore here at-"

"Stop. I know everything about you." Mr. Fleming stood and walked around the desk, now facing Jack. "There were over one hundred students that interviewed with me today. I asked each one who the hardest working student was in theatre. Everyone said the same name...Jack."

"Well..." Jack felt a drizzle of sweat run down the back of his neck. "That was nice of them."

Mr. Fleming tapped Jack on the shoulder. "Pack your things...you got the job."

~

A month later in October, Jack said goodbye to his parents and was taken by bus to Culver City, California and dropped off at the Culver Hotel, located across the street from the studio where he would be working for the next year.

When Jack entered the hotel he was greeted by a man dressed sharply in a new suit. “Hello there, I’m Mr. Reynolds, manager of the hotel. Welcome to Culver City, *The Heart of Screenland*.” He guided Jack to the front desk, looked through some papers, then rolled his eyes up. “You’re a little young to be working on a film. Are you an actor?”

Jack gripped his suitcase and swallowed. “No, sir. I’ll be working behind the scenes.”

Mr. Reynolds turned and grabbed a key, then handed it to Jack. “You’ll be on the second floor, room 207.” He looked over the desk. “Do you need help with your suitcase?”

“No, sir. I can get it.” Jack turned and was about to walk to his room, but suddenly the front entrance was flooded with over one hundred little people.

~

The room was simple with a bed, dresser and a nightstand. On the dresser was a copy of the book, *The Wizard of Oz*, along with a piece of straw used as a bookmark.

Next to the book was Jack’s schedule. Right away he noticed a mistake. His start time was 5:00 a.m. and his end time was 9:00 p.m. That couldn’t be right. He’ll speak to Mr. Fleming about the issue in the morning.

There were two pages of rules...no wait...three pages, which included no drinking. Prohibition ended five years ago, but despite that, he hadn’t planned on sneaking booze into his room.

Jack skimmed down the list, noticing most of the rules were based on him being at work or in his room; nowhere else.

On the last sheet of paper was his pay. \$10 a week.

Jack smiled, looked around his room, then unpacked.

Tomorrow was going to be the best day of his life. “*Wizard of Oz*, here I come!”

To be continued...

You have completed 9 minutes of this book.