

# Under the Lights

## Chapter 1: It's No Big Deal

"Give me a minute, Hassan," I said. "Can't seem to get my costume on." I reached over my shoulders to try to fasten the Velcro on my Robin Hood top.

"You're doing it up all wonky," Hassan replied. Before I could stop him, he ripped the Velcro apart. "Oops," he muttered, nearly too quietly for me to hear.

"What?"

"Nothing," he said, in a high-pitched voice which meant that he was definitely lying. "Just a minor Velcro mishap. I'll sort you out – don't worry." He tugged at my costume for a while and patted my back reassuringly.

"Don't know why you went and got yourself the lead part, anyway," he continued. "Just means you have to learn more lines than anyone else, and actually sing instead of just pretending to." He fished my cap from underneath the art trolley and plonked it back on my head so hard that it was wedged right over my eyes. "Plus, you're wearing tights."

"They're leggings," I protested, yanking the cap up, "not tights." Usually, I would get a tingly feeling just before going on stage but, today, my head felt like it was already spinning.

"You! In tights! In front of all those people! Unbelievable!"

"Hassan, can you stop blathering and actually help?" I was starting to not be able to breathe very well, even though I'm not asthmatic and there were no cats nearby. What if I went on stage and I couldn't breathe and then I passed out in front of everyone? What if I fell over and knocked into the dancers and they went down in a long line, like dominoes?

Now that I'd started, I couldn't stop thinking of all the things that might go wrong.

"Ooh, nice tights, Ash," said Janelle, sticking her head round the door.

"They're leggings!" I repeated, trying to untwist the left leg.

"Hey, no judgement from me. I'm wearing tights, too." Janelle flicked her braids over her shoulder and put her hand on her hip. Her costume was even fancier than mine, with a silk tunic and real-leather boots. Janelle had been ill on the day of the audition and had ended up with the part of Merry Man number six. She wasn't too pleased about it: Janelle loves to be centre stage and singing her heart out, almost as much as I do.

Almost as much as I normally do, that is.

