

HURLY- BURLY

MACBETH
MAYHEM

ROSS MONTGOMERY

With illustrations by Mark Beech

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*To all the kids who are so well behaved,
who are SO good at always doing the
right thing ... that no one notices them*

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CHAPTER 1

Toil and Trouble

Three evil witches moved slowly around a smoking cauldron, wearing hooded robes and waving their hands in the air ...

Double double, toil and trouble;

Fire burn and caldron bubble.

Fillet of a fenny snake,

In the caldron boil and bake ...

Then one of the witches fell off the stage screaming. They'd tripped over their own robes – again.



“CUT!” yelled Mr Fortune, our headmaster. “Tomi, can you look where you’re going, please? And, Leo, for the last time, stop picking your nose! We can see what you’re doing under that hood, you know.”

All the other children in the theatre groaned with frustration. I couldn’t blame them. This rehearsal had been going on for hours!

“This is a disaster,” said my best friend Rianna, who was sitting beside me. “The prize-giving assembly is in two days’ time and it’s still a total mess!”

“So?” I replied, shrugging. “Even if it does go wrong, everyone will be too excited about the prizes to care!”

The prize-giving assembly was the highlight of the school year. It took place on the last day of term. The theatre would be packed with every pupil, their parents and all the teachers. Mr Fortune would make a big speech and after

that there would be a special performance to entertain the parents.

This year the drama club were going to perform some scenes from their latest play, William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. That was why Tomi had just fallen off the stage, dressed as a witch.

At the end of the assembly came the best part of all – the prizes. There was a prize for top marks, a prize for best attendance, a prize for music ...

And, of course, the prize for best behaviour. And we *all* knew who was going to win that one – me, Beth!

Everyone knew that I was the best-behaved girl in school. I never once handed in my homework late. I stayed behind after every lesson to help the teachers. I even cleaned the playground at break-time. That was why I had won the best-behaviour prize two years

running – and this year I was on course to win it for the third time in a row!

I rubbed my hands with glee. I could almost taste that trophy! Rianna saw the look on my face and rolled her eyes.

“Honestly, Beth – you’re obsessed with that stupid prize,” she muttered.

“It’s not just a prize,” I said. “If I win three years in a row, that’ll be a record for our school. I’ll be famous!” I gazed at the stage. “I wonder if I’ll be on the news ...”

On the stage, poor Mr Fortune was looking even more stressed than normal. Our school, New Forest Academy, had had a lot of trouble lately. The theatre had caught fire during last year’s school play and this year’s drama trip had been a total disaster when the ferry they were on capsized just off Dover!

I knew Mr Fortune was desperate to prove to the parents that the school had finally turned over a new leaf. I watched him scribble notes in his planner with a special red marker pen.

“Well, it’s obvious that we’ve got a lot of work to do before the big day,” Mr Fortune sighed. “Let me remind you all how important this assembly on Friday is – the school has to look its best for our visiting parents! I expect perfect behaviour, flawless uniforms ...”

Claire, one of the girls in my class, suddenly leapt to her feet.

“Don’t worry, sir,” she said. “I’ll make sure your classroom is spotless, as always!”

I growled with annoyance. Claire was our classroom monitor. She was a complete clean freak – her desk was so polished you could lick soup off it. She even wiped Mr Fortune’s whiteboard for him every day after school. What a goody two shoes!

But Claire wasn’t the *only* one who was desperate to impress our headmaster. Another classmate, Duncan, stood up beside her.



“Don’t worry about the parents, sir,” he said. “My handmade banner is almost finished. The theatre will be looking its very best on Friday!”

I ground my teeth with irritation. Duncan was the best artist in the year. He had offered to make Mr Fortune a huge banner that would be unfurled above the stage at the start of the assembly. What a creep!

Mr Fortune couldn’t have looked happier. “Thank you, Claire and Duncan,” he said. “What a perfect example you two set your classmates!”

I gasped – I knew what Claire and Duncan were up to. They were trying to get their hands on my best-behaviour prize! I couldn’t let them steal it from me right before the assembly. I leapt to my feet just as the bell rang for the end of the day.

“I’ll stay behind and tidy up the theatre, sir!” I said as I shot Claire and Duncan a dirty look.

Mr Fortune smiled gratefully. “Thanks, Beth. I can always rely on you!”

He shoved his planner into his bag and raced out of the theatre. Everyone else followed, clearly wanting to get home after a long and boring rehearsal. Soon the only people left in the theatre were me and Rianna.

“What’s got into you, Beth?” said Rianna, shaking her head. “You’re too competitive! Prizes aren’t everything, you know.”

I gave her a playful push. “You can talk!” I said. “You’re bound to win the drama prize after your performance in *Macbeth!*”

It was true – Rianna had stolen the show in the school play and she wasn’t even the main character. Our classmate Frank had been great in the role of evil Macbeth – but it was Rianna who got the biggest round of applause at the end for playing Macbeth’s best friend, Banquo.

Macbeth was about a brave Scottish warlord who was loved and respected by everyone. But after a battle one day, Macbeth and Banquo stumbled on three witches. The witches told Macbeth that he was destined to become King of Scotland.

At first Macbeth thought nothing of it – but he soon changed his mind when he thought of all the power he could have as ruler. With his wife, Lady Macbeth, he plotted to murder the king and take his place. He got away with it too – after the murder, Macbeth was crowned king and got everything he wanted!

But once the terrible deed was done, Macbeth was sure that he'd be found out – or that the other warlords would try to kill him and take his place. He started committing more and more awful crimes to cover up his first one. He even murdered his best friend, Banquo!

By the end of the play Macbeth had been driven mad with power. An army led by a

warlord named Macduff came to overthrow him and finally brought peace back to Scotland.

It was a great play – gruesome and gory and scary. When Rianna came onstage as Banquo's ghost to haunt Macbeth, I thought the audience were going to wet themselves! She was going to perform the scene again for the parents during the prize-giving assembly. Maybe we needed to put some cling film over the seats ...

Rianna shrugged. "I'm not bothered about winning the drama prize, to be honest. Things like that can go to your head if you're not careful." She glanced around the messy theatre. "Are you sure you're going to be able to tidy up all this on your own?"

"Of course!" I said. "That's what *best-behaved* pupils do, remember?"

Rianna shook her head again with a smile and raced off, leaving me alone in the dark theatre. It was really eerie when it was empty.

The stage was still decorated with spooky scenery from *Macbeth*, with a smoky backdrop and twisted branches.

But at least I finally had the stage to myself. In just two days' time I was going to be standing on this very spot, accepting the prize and creating a new school record. I had always known I was destined for great things – and now the school record was as good as mine. All my hard work would finally be worth it!

I already knew my victory speech word for word. The winner wasn't *supposed* to give a speech, but as it was such a special occasion I was sure Mr Fortune wouldn't mind.

I cleared my throat, stepped to the front of the stage and practised my final lines.

“And tomorrow,” I said, “when the summer holidays begin, I know that I will have inspired all of you to work hard for your dreams!”

I bowed to the empty seats, imagining the cheers and applause ... and nearly leapt out of my skin.

Someone was *actually* clapping behind me.

It turned out I wasn't alone after all.