

Hanna Hemlock slammed the door and stormed down the steps of the Academy of Witches & Wizards. "Ooooh! Miss Almondine Bogglewort makes me angry!" Hanna grumbled. At the bottom step, she plopped herself down and mockingly repeated her teacher's words, "Remember, Hanna dear, just one little letter keeps your house from being a horse." What did THAT mean, Hanna wondered, throwing her cap in disgust.

"HEY!" The soaring hat had struck Melody Fingle. "What's the idea throwing your hat at me?" Melody shouted, plucking the cap from the puddle of mud where it landed. "ICK!"

"I wasn't throwing it at you, Melody Fingle." Hanna took the hat and put it on, dripping and all. "I was just ...throwing it. Sorry."

Except for the mud, Hanna and Melody looked like twins. Both had curly yellow hair and dimpled cheeks. Both wore the unofficial uniform of the fifth grade: purple cap — Hanna wore hers sideways — and matching sweatshirt with AWW on the front in gold letters. (The school yell was "Awww!" — which sounded like everyone was disappointed.)

Melody sat down. "You're mad at Miss Bogglewort, aren't you?" Melody got terrific grades in EXTRA SENSORY PERCEPTION.

"Yup!" Hanna answered. "Look what she gave me for my project in SPELLS AND MISCHIEF." Hanna dug into her purple backpack and produced a black fragment of chalk.

"What kind of word is OLL?" Melody asked, pointing to the letters carved in the slate's wooden frame.

"It's not a word, Mel," Hanna said. Melody hated to be called Mel, but Hanna was feeling a trifle nasty. "It's initials. They stand for One Little Letter." Then Hanna mocked Miss Bogglewort again. "Just one little letter keeps your house from being a horse."

"What's that mean? And quit callin' me that icky name."

Hanna started to cry. "Miss Bogglewort wouldn't tell me — and if I don't figure out the secret by Tuesday, I'll flunk fifth grade!"

"You could still pass, Hanna. You got a B in ROCKET-BROOMS and a B+ in TOAD SCIENCE and a C+ in POTIONS, CONCOCTIONS, AND BREWS — and gee, I might not pass either. Look at what Miss Bogglewort gave ME." It was a brass wand with a star

Just one little letter

BY E. BEEMER

on top that had a crow on one side and a bullfrog on the other.

"That's easy," Hanna said with a snuffle. "You've got the wand that turns princes into frogs and vice versa. You're lucky."

"Where am I supposed to find a prince?" protested Melody. "There's Prince Charles — but my mother won't let me rocket-broom to England. There's the singer Prince, but I'm not sure he counts —"

Hanna giggled. "Look, Melody, if you can't turn a prince into a frog, turn a frog into a prince."

Melody's face lit up. "Wow! That shouldn't be hard! Sorry I can't stick around. Got to get frog hunting — I've only got 'till Tuesday!"

"Tell me about it," Hanna muttered, wiping a drop of mud from her nose.

As Hanna walked aimlessly about town that day, she stopped feeling angry. Miss Bogglewort was only making her think for herself. That was good. Besides, figuring out the slate would be a greater achievement than turning a frog into a prince using a wand. "Perhaps I got the tougher project because Miss Bogglewort thinks I'm a more capable student," Hanna said to her reflection in the window of Wimmer's Soda Shoppe. "Sweet Miss Bogglewort! How wonderful of her to think so highly of me!"

But Hanna's happy thoughts quickly turned gloomy. What about that slate? Did "one little letter" mean to print one letter of the alphabet real small? Which letter? How small? And what was supposed to happen after printing the right letter small enough?

Disgusted, Hanna yanked off her mud-caked cap and was about to give it another hard fling when a man carrying a paper

sack rushed out of Wimmer's Soda Shoppe. He was followed by Mr. Wimmer himself, who was shouting, "Stop that man! He's got my money!"

"Lizards and snails!" Hanna exclaimed. "Mr. Wimmer's been robbed!" Hanna wanted to help, but the man ran too fast. If only her rocket-broom wasn't out getting new bristles!

Remembering the slate, Hanna snatched it from her backpack, sat down on the sidewalk and scrawled MISTER WIMMER'S MONEY across the slate's dull black surface with a tidbit of chalk. She closed her eyes and whispered those words over and over — until, like lightning, an idea flashed through her brain. "It might work!" Hanna gasped. "If I add one letter to MISTER WIMMER'S MONEY, it just might become," she paused to make a simple addition, "MISTER WIMMER'S MONKEY!"

Imagine the thief's surprise when the sack of coins and dollar bills turned into a

chimpanzee. Imagine his shock when the chimp planted a big, wet kiss on his lips. The thief dropped the monkey and ran off, completely bewildered. When the police arrived, the monkey was gone. But the money was right where the robber had dropped it.

Watching from afar, Hanna smiled with pride as a handsome officer with a bushy mustache returned the stolen cash to Mr. Wimmer. She felt great about saving the day...and about solving the mysterious slate.

Hanna spent the rest of the afternoon experimenting with the slate. She changed one little letter and made an old CAN become an old CAR. She subtracted one little letter and made an iron POST become a cooking POT. She added one little letter and turned a bicycle LOCK into a CLOCK. Then she remembered about the HOUSES and HORSES...

On Tuesday Hanna's project was due. She placed the slate, the chalk and a newspaper clipping on Miss Bogglewort's desk, and took her seat behind Melody Fingle, who was sharing her desk with a small, greenish boy wearing a rhinestone crown. He had huge eyes that stared with interest at a fly on the bookshelf.

Miss Bogglewort picked up Hanna's clipping, read it to herself and began to chuckle. "Congratulations, Hanna," she said with pleasure. "You've earned an A in SPELLS AND MISCHIEF. Listen to this, class."

Miss Bogglewort read the headline aloud. It was proof that Hanna Hemlock had discovered the secret of the One Little Letter slate. The headline said HOUSE WINS HORSE RACE! SPORTS WORLD SHOCKED!

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