



THE LAST HOLIDAY CONCERT

Andrew Clements

Author of the 1.5 million-copy bestseller **FRINDLE**

One

PALMER KIDS

Hart Evans sat in the front row at the second big assembly of the year. The kids from the last few homerooms hadn't found their seats yet, so there was plenty of noise. Hart turned and looked around the auditorium, sweeping his eyes from left to right. There were still a lot of unfamiliar faces in the crowd, even after two and a half months of school.

Then, as the last group of kids sat down, Hart saw something he had never noticed before. What Hart saw was the complete sixth grade, almost four hundred students. The thought that came to him was like a vision, a burst of understanding.

And Hart said to himself, *We're the Palmer kids now!*

In the town of Brentbury, kids went to kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth, and fifth grades at Collins Elementary School or at Newman Elementary School. Like two streams

tumbling down different sides of the same hill, the Collins kids and the Newman kids bubbled along separately for six years. Those two streams of children flowed together for the first time at Palmer Intermediate, where they became a swirling pool of sixth graders. Palmer Intermediate School contained the sixth grade, the whole sixth grade, and nothing but the sixth grade.

Every fall it took a couple months for the new sixth graders to stop thinking of themselves as Newman kids or Collins kids. By October or November it began to sink in: *We're the Palmer kids now.*

So Hart was right on time.

Hart Evans liked being at Palmer Intermediate. It was so different from elementary school. Part of that had to do with the building. Everything was bigger—bigger gym, bigger cafeteria, bigger playing fields, and a big auditorium with a full stage. Until about fifteen years ago Palmer had been the junior high school, and that's what it felt like.

That's also how Palmer School was run, like a junior high. All the kids had lockers. They

had homeroom in the morning, and then moved from class to class, subject to subject, teacher to teacher for the rest of the day. It was a whole new school experience. Making the jump to Palmer Intermediate made Hart feel like he was finally getting somewhere.

One of Hart's favorite things about Palmer School was that his little sister Sarah was somewhere else. She was in fourth grade now, two years behind him back at Collins Elementary. Since her first day of kindergarten, Sarah had been like a piece of gum stuck to the bottom of Hart's shoe. She had never missed a chance to tease or bother or embarrass her big brother. Plus Sarah was nosy, and a huge tattletale. And she had never ever accepted the fact that Hart was the most popular boy at Collins Elementary School, which was true.

Sarah didn't understand why everybody liked her brother so much. But clearly, they did. Who always had fifteen guys crowding around his table at lunch? Hart. Who got picked first at recess for baseball or dodgeball, even though he wasn't the best player? Hart. And who got invited to everybody's birthday



For Hart Evans, being the most popular kid in sixth grade has its advantages. Kids look up to him, and all the teachers let him get away with anything—all the teachers except the chorus director, Mr. Meinert. When Hart's errant rubber band hits Mr. Meinert on the neck during chorus practice, it's the last straw for the chorus director, who's just learned he's about to lose his job due to budget cuts. So he tells the class they can produce the big holiday concert on their own. Or not. It's all up to them. And who gets elected to run the show? The popular Mr. Hart Evans.

Hart soon discovers there's a big difference between popularity and leadership, and to his surprise, discovers something else as well—it's really important to him that this be the best holiday concert ever, and even more important, that it not be the last.

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 ALADDIN PAPERBACKS

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