

Elphaba—the so-called Wicked Witch of the West—is seared into our collective memories as a feisty and uncompromising character. So it should come as little surprise that from her earliest days, young Elphie is an original.

A firstborn child, Elphie stumbles into awareness of herself in the humid swamplands of Quadling Country, where her father is a renegade missionary. Shaped and molded by his fanaticism and by the whims of her high-strung society mother, Melena, Elphie watches with unflinching eye while largely keeping her own counsel. She suffers ordinary childhood jealousies over the births of her sister, saintly Nessarose, and her brother, junior felon Shell. Furthermore, she twitches with curiosity over her first apprehension of magic—but how is any young child to distinguish the unexplained from the uncanny?

Haunted by a Monkey and taunted by Dwarf Bears, Elphie witnesses dubious attitudes toward the Animal populations of Oz, who live in the shadows of human settlements. She thrashes through her first bruising attempts at friendship, sensing a possible respite from her tricky circumstances. A shop clerk, a mission soloist, at once laced into family life and yearning to escape it, she begins to glean the possible benefits of education, however haphazardly she can cobble it together.

Elphie is destined to be a witch; she bears the markings from childhood—most evidently in her green skin but more profoundly in her cunning and perhaps amoral behaviors. Or is she just misunderstood?

This poignant sketch of young Elphaba adds depth and nuance to one of the most enduring characters in modern fiction.

GREGORY MAGUIRE is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the *Wicked Years*, a series that includes *Wicked*—the beloved classic that is the basis for the blockbuster Tony Award-winning Broadway musical and the major motion picture—*Son of a Witch*, *A Lion Among Men*, and *Out of Oz*. His series *Another Day* continues the story of Oz with *The Brides of Maracoor*, *The Oracle of Maracoor*, and *The Witch of Maracoor*, and his other novels include *A Wild Winter Swan*, *Hiddensee*, *After Alice*, *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*, *Lost*, and *Mirror Mirror*. He lives in New England and France.

Read by **Edoardo Ballerini**

 **Harper Audio**

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