



Hi! I'm Melody Ann Georgina Weston. I'm tall for my age and I'm very pretty; my best friend, Jackson, is almost as pretty as me, but not quite.

I'm dark and she's fair, so we set each other off brilliantly and people stare at us when we're together, which we usually are—

Hang on a minute! What do you mean – you're prettier?

That was Jackson, and she's not supposed to interrupt. We agreed that we'd do one chapter each, and we tossed to see who'd go first and I won, so I can say what I like ... but if it'll keep her quiet, I'll agree that

she *is* really pretty. We've been friends for ages, and we don't take much notice of other kids, and we do what we want to do ... at least, we used to. We go to Stargirl Academy now, and that makes everything different.

This is what you should know about me, Jackson and Stargirl Academy.

1. The Academy used to train Fairy Godmothers, but the head teacher, Fairy Mary McBee, decided that was old-fashioned. She thought it would be better to train girls like me and Jackson instead. The idea is that we learn how to help people, like Fairy Godmothers used to. We can't grant wishes, though. I think that's a shame.

2. We get a Tingle in our elbow when it's time to go to the Academy ... and however long we're there, it doesn't matter. When we get back, it's exactly the same time as when we left.

3. We learn magic and spells. Every time we go to the Academy, they teach us a new spell, and then we try it out on a mission. We each have a magic necklace with a pendant, and on the pendant are six stars. If we do well and manage to help someone, one of the stars lights up. When we have SIX stars, we'll have finished our training, and we'll be proper Stargirls.

4. Jackson and I (we're Team Twinstar) have five stars each, but the other team – Team Starlight – has six already.

5. When Team Starlight were given their sixth star, Jackson and I felt DREADFUL. Really, REALLY dreadful.

Why?

This is where I tell you a secret about me and Jackson. It might make you not like us very much, but it's just the way we are.

Right from the very first moment we walked into the Academy, we thought we were better than the other kids... I don't suppose they're actually much younger than us, but it felt as if they were. We were totally and utterly shocked when they were given their fifth star, and we weren't. It was horrible. And then they got their final stars ... and we didn't.

Ouch.



And this is me, Jackson Williams. Best friend of Melody Ann Georgina Weston. Sometimes she says really stupid things, but she's right about the stars. It felt awful when Team Starlight started jumping about and being pleased with themselves and we were left out. I suppose it made it worse knowing that it was our fault ... we do like being different, and sometimes it gets us into trouble. The other girls are nice – don't get me wrong – but Melody and I have never quite fitted in. They're just a little bit more fluffy bunny than we are—

You mean they're nicer!

No, I don't! Well ... I suppose maybe I do. But not everyone can be sweet and kind and helpful all the time. Miss Scritch, the deputy head at Stargirl Academy, isn't. Sometimes she can be really chilly, but I have a feeling she quite likes me and Mel because we're more like her than the others are. I don't think I've ever seen any of Team Starlight slam a door or smash something because they're angry. I know I've done that, and so has Melody. And, if I'm being absolutely truthful, sometimes I find myself thinking the other Stargirls are a bunch of goody goodies. Especially when they're all together.

It's not so bad when they're on their own. Ava and Madison can be quite sparky and fun, and Lily's OK too. Emma makes me laugh because she talks so much, but

Olivia and Sophie are weird – Olivia in particular. She's scared of loads of stuff, and at first me and Melody thought she was a total wimp, but actually she thinks about other people all the time, and that freaks me out. What makes it worse is that we should be grateful, because it was Olivia who suggested that Team Starlight came back to the Academy so we could try and win our last star.

I'm sure if Fairy Mary McBee knew how we were feeling she'd chuck us out. I don't think a proper Stargirl ought to wish another Stargirl would stamp their feet and scream and shout just to show they're human—

Hadn't you better get on with the story?

Go away! I only interrupted you once, and you've done it twice now!

Sorry ... You can have the first chapter.

OK. Thanks. It seemed like AGES after our last visit to the Academy before we got another Tingle. I'd almost convinced myself we were never going back, and we'd never get to be proper Stargirls. Melody thought the same, I know, although we didn't talk about it much. Mostly we pretended that we didn't care. We did, though. There's something about Stargirl Academy that gets under your skin, even if you don't want it to. And another thing – I'd discovered I was really good at magic, and I kept wondering, what if I never got to do magic again? It didn't help that it was nearly

*Christmas, and everyone we met was wildly
excited ... but then it finally happened.*

Chapter One



My mum was working, so Melody's mum said she'd take us shopping, but she took us to the local shopping mall instead of anywhere exciting. She spent ages and AGES in every single shop making up her mind which presents to buy and we got really bored.

We moped around waiting for her to come out of the chemist, and because we had nothing else to do we watched a line of snotty-nosed kids queueing to see Father Christmas in the most unlikely grotto ever. It was a kind of cuckoo clock covered in sparkly pink fur; even Father C looked a bit embarrassed. A small scowly grown-up dressed as a silver



cuckoo popped out and shouted, “Cuckoo, cuckoo! Wishes granted! Hurry up!” each time it was a kid’s turn to go and collect his present; some of the tiny ones looked terrified.

“Darling, I want you to hold Baby’s hand!” a mum said. I thought she was talking to me, but when I turned to glare at her – who did she think she was? – I saw she was talking to a little girl in a fussy pink velvet dress. “Hold his hand, Pipsy, and you can see Father Christmas together.”

Pipsy shook her head. “But I don’t want a present from here, Mumsy. I want the purple fluffy dog that runs in circles and sings – the one in the toyshop!” She grabbed at her mother’s coat sleeve. “Please, Mumsy wumsy! I’ll be the goodest girl in the whole wide world! I’ll hold Baby’s hand for ever and ever if I can have the fluffy dog! Pleeeeease!”





Mel leant over to whisper in my ear. "Mumsy wumsy? Whoever calls their mum that?"

"Whiney little girls in prissy pink dresses," I whispered back.

Pipsy was still hanging onto her mother's coat. "Please please PLEEEASE?"

"Hush, Pipsy!" I think the mum had noticed us listening. "You can have the fluffy dog later."

"Really?" Pipsy stared at her. "The purple fluffy dog? The one that sings?"

"Of course, darling." Mumsy began hauling Baby out of his buggy. "We'll buy whatever you want. But take Baby to get his present first. He just LOVES Father Christmas, don't you, Baby? And we're going to see two Father Christmasses today, aren't we, poppet?"

"Yes," said Baby. He had a round pink face, and was already clutching an armful of toys. "Baby's going to get presents. LOTS of presents."



I nudged Melody. "Spoiled brats," I said under my breath.

Melody nodded. "Look how many bags their mum's got!"



“What would you want if you could have a wish?” I asked as Mel and I moved away from Mumsy and her horrible children.

Melody shrugged. “Dunno. What about you?”

I gave her a sideways look. “I was kind of hoping I’d be a Stargirl by now...”

“Oh!” Mel took my arm. “Wouldn’t it be fantastic if we won our final star in time for Christmas?”

“It’d be perfect,” I said, but then we were interrupted.

A skinny woman suddenly appeared from behind the furry cuckoo clock. She barged past me and tried to pull two children away from the back of the queue, but the little girl started yelling at the top of her voice. “Nooooo! Nooooo! I want to see Santa Claus!”

Her older brother clutched at the side of the clock. “But we always come, Mum! Always!”



*“WAAAAAAAAHH!” screeched the girl.
“WAAAAAAAAH!”*

The woman grabbed them, and hauled them to one side. “Joe! Jenny! I’ve been looking for you EVERYWHERE! I said we WEREN’T going to see Father Christmas. I TOLD you!” She was shouting so loudly I should think everyone in the mall must have heard her.

The little girl was almost purple, she was bawling so hard, but her brother was very pale.

“Why not?” he whispered, and he was obviously trying not to cry.

His mother began dragging them towards the door. “Costs too much,” she snapped. She tilted her head towards a sign above the clock. It said: LET FATHER CHRISTMAS GRANT YOUR CHRISTMAS WISH! PAY THE CUCKOO AND ENTER THE MAGICAL CLOCK! ONLY £5 PER CHILD. “Waste of good money. Besides, I’m





late for work, and it's a big day at The Nag's Head. Come ON, kids..."

The boy didn't say anything else, but I saw him silently rubbing at his face with the back of his hand as he and his shrieking sister disappeared in amongst the Christmas shoppers.

"She was really mean," Melody said indignantly. "She nearly pulled their arms off! And all they wanted was one little present."

"I know," I agreed, and I thought of the parcels my mum had already started piling under our tree at home, and the way she gave me a little wink every time she saw me looking. "Do you think they'll get any presents at all?"

Melody shook her head. "Not with a mum like that. I'm sure she doesn't look after them properly. Their clothes were really tatty – and the little boy was as thin as a pin. I bet they're half-starved so their mum can have loads and



loads of wonderful clothes and chocolate and cake."

I wasn't so sure about that. The woman had been thin too, and her coat very ordinary, but when I said as much to Melody she snorted.

"Rubbish, Jackson! You heard the way she talked to them, didn't you?"

"Yes," I said.

Melody looked very serious. "If ever we get to go back to the Academy, I want to help kids like that. Poor little things! I'm sure they need help just as much as any of our friends and relations – probably a whole lot more. Have you noticed that Team Starlight always seems to choose people they know?" She sighed. "Wouldn't it be nice to be able to show them the proper way to be a Stargirl—"

And that was when the Tingle came. It was so strong it made me jump, and Melody clutched



her elbow at exactly the same time.

"Ouch!" she said. And then, "WOW!"

"This'll be our chance!" I knew I was right.

"Our big chance!"

*"Team Twinstar – the best Stargirls ever!"
said Melody. And then she stopped, and we
stared at each other.*



We'd had the Tingle, but where did we go to find the Academy? We were right in the middle of a huge shopping mall!

"I know!" Melody slipped her arm through mine. She was grinning a wicked grin. "Come on!" And before I could say a word, she was marching me up to the pink furry cuckoo clock, pushing past the startled cuckoo, waltzing me inside ... and in through the front door of The Fairy Mary McBee Academy for Stargirls.