

Chapter One



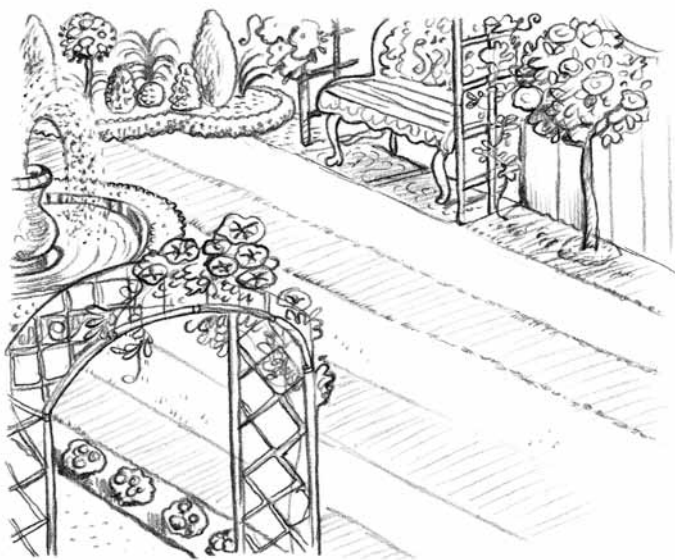
Mr Appleby's our next-door neighbour and he has the most perfect garden – you'd think he polishes it every morning and every evening. The lawn has the neatest stripes, as if he's painted it rather than mown it, but he still has loads of time to lean over the fence and chat. His latest thing is complaining about the new family that's just moved in to the house next to his. Apparently the little boys play football indoors, and the baby keeps on crying.

Mum says Mr A talks a lot because he's lonely, but I think it's the other way round and he's lonely because everyone knows how much he talks, and so (like me) they



run away when they see him coming.

Anyway, last Saturday Mum was being talked at in the garden and I was picking up windfall apples under the tree when I got the most ENORMOUS Tingle in my elbow. Do you know what that means? It means it's time to go to Stargirl Academy, which is the most exciting thing EVER to happen to me. We go to the Academy and learn SPELLS!



By the way, you have to absolutely promise never to tell anyone about the Academy because the head teacher Fairy Mary McBee told us it was the most enormous secret. Is that OK? I'm sure it is.

So I had this huge Tingle – my elbow positively HURT – and I thought, Hurrah!

I told Mum I was taking the apples inside and I ran into the house through the back door, only instead of ending up in the



messy back room where we keep the washing machine, guess what? I found myself in the corridor of Stargirl Academy!

Lily and Madison and some of the others say it gets misty before they find the Academy front door, but I've never had that happen to me. Well, only a few little wisps of fog. In a way it's strange that I DON'T see any mist, because the Academy rests on the top of an enormous cloud and floats around ... in fact, a long time ago it was called Cloudy Towers. That was when it was an academy for training Fairy God-mothers, but now it's been brought up to date and Fairy Mary McBee is training us to be Stargirls instead. I'm so very glad she decided on the change. Sometimes I look at the secret glowing star on the tip of my littlest left hand finger, and I feel as if I'm glowing



myself – glowing with happiness! We were given our secret stars on our very first visit, and we use our star fingers when we're casting a spell – isn't that amazing?

It's a VERY exciting life being a Star-girl. One minute I was in our garden, and the next minute – woweee! – I was on my way to meet up with the three Fairy Godmothers who teach us magic. I still had the bag of apples in my hand as I went into the workroom where we meet and have our lessons.

Fairy Fifibelle Lee and Miss Scritch were both there when I walked in. Miss Scritch is the deputy head, and Fairy Fifibelle is a teacher. I like Fairy Fifibelle loads because she doesn't always get things right, and that makes me feel much better because I don't either, although I always try my best. I'm



a little bit afraid of Miss Scritch. She can be scary and she doesn't like it when I talk too much, which I do sometimes. Our head teacher, Fairy Mary McBee, is LOVELY! But she wasn't there, and neither were any of my friends.

"Oh!" I said. "Am I the first?"



Miss Scritch nodded. "Unless someone is hiding under the table, Emma, you are undoubtedly the first Stargirl to arrive today."

I wasn't sure if I was meant to laugh or not, so I made a sort of agreeing noise. Sometimes it's difficult to tell if Miss Scritch is joking or being sarcastic.

Fairy Fifibelle Lee beamed at me. "It's wonderful to see you, dearest Emma. Are you ready for a special day today?"

I smiled back. "I hope so! Why is it special?"

"Fairy Mary McBee will tell you when she comes in," Fairy Fifibelle promised. "Why don't we go and wait in the sitting-room? I'm sure the others won't be long."

I was pleased, because I adore the sitting-room. The workroom is very interesting with all its bulging cupboards full of



magical bits and pieces, and its shelves of bottles and jars, but it isn't a place to sit in and relax. The sitting-room is completely different. The walls are covered in the funniest pictures, mostly of the Fairy Godmothers who were trained here years ago. Sometimes they wave at us, and there's one who often gives me a little wink in a friendly kind of way. There's always a roaring fire, and the sofas and chairs are incredibly comfortable. It's the kind of room that makes you feel comfy inside yourself as well as outside, if you know what I mean.

I snuggled down on the biggest sofa, and Fairy Fifibelle sat down opposite me. "Tell me, dearest, how are you getting on?" she said. "Are you enjoying yourself?"

"I LOVE it here!" I told her. "I love everything about being a Stargirl – I love having



a star finger and my friends and I love learning magic and spells—Oh, and I totally love my necklace!”



Our necklaces are very special indeed. Fairy Mary McBee gave us one each when we first came to the Academy, and they're truly magical. If we tap them, we turn invisible! Well, we can just about see each other, and our Fairy Godmothers can always see us, but we're invisible to ordinary people. And the necklaces aren't just magical. They're very pretty too. I never get tired of looking at the Academy crest on the pendant with its two crossed wands and six little twinkling stars.

Even though the sitting-room wasn't brightly lit, four out of the six stars twinkled back at me as I gave my pendant a little polish, and I sighed happily.

"I can't believe I'll be a fully qualified Stargirl soon," I said. "Only two more stars." A sudden doubt came into my mind,



and I gave Fairy Fifibelle an anxious smile.
“That is right, isn’t it?”

Fairy Fifibelle Lee nodded. “Of course, my precious petal. ‘For every good deed done, a star will shine.’ That’s the Stargirl Academy rule.”

“Everyone in Team Starlight has four stars now,” I told her, and then I hesitated. Had Melody and Jackson got four stars? I wasn’t sure. They weren’t part of our team; when they first came to the Academy, they’d announced they were going to be a team of two, and they always behave as if they’re MUCH better than we are ... but I don’t think they are. Not really, even though they’re very good at magic.

Fairy Fifibelle gave me another of her beaming smiles. “Fairy Mary and Miss Scritch and I are delighted with the way



you work together to help people, and we're sure you'll graduate very soon. When all six of your stars are shining, there'll be a party to celebrate, and Fairy Mary McBee will give you your certificates!"

I love parties, and I was sure a party at Stargirl Academy would be brilliant fun, but before I could say anything there was the sound of laughter and Fairy Fifibelle looked up. "That sounds like the other Stargirls," she said. "Shall we go and join them?"