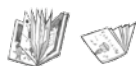


Chapter One



I never thought a Tingle would come when I was away from home. Mum had dropped me off at Auntie June's house; she was taking my baby brother to the clinic, and Auntie June had asked me over to play with my cousin Hannah. I love Hannah; she's younger than I am, but we get on really well. She's got an older brother called Harry, but I don't think he likes me much. Hannah says he doesn't like any girls, and he's really mean to her when Auntie June isn't looking.

I was surprised that Hannah didn't open the door when I knocked. Normally she's hanging around waiting for me to arrive,



but it was Auntie June who let me in. She gave me a hug, and then she said, “I’m SO pleased you’re here, Olivia. Hannah’s upstairs. She’s meant to be doing her weekend homework, and she’s having trouble with it.” She shook her head. “She doesn’t find school easy, you know. Not like you and Harry. I hoped she might do better when she changed schools.



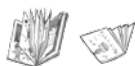
She started brilliantly – she's well above average with her reading, apparently – but now they keep telling me she's not trying. I asked Harry to help her, but she wouldn't let him into her room. I'm sure she'll want to see you, though."

I nodded, and hurried up the stairs. I could hear Hannah crying before I'd even opened the door. "Hannah!" I called. "It's me! Can I come in?"

Harry popped out of his room. "She's just making a fuss," he said. "She's got to write a story and she says she can't. I told her she was stupid, so now she's crying. GIRLS!" And he disappeared again.

I thought, "BOYS!"

Hannah was lying on her bed, but she sat up as I came in, and I saw her eyes were puffy and red. "What is it?" I asked



as I sat down close beside her.

Hannah sniffed. “Nothing,” she said. “I was being silly.”

There were loads of screwed-up bits of paper all over the floor. I picked one up, but as I began to straighten it out, Hannah snatched it from my hand. “Don’t,” she said. “It’s rubbish!”

“Why?” I asked.

“Because it IS.” Hannah tore it into tiny little bits. “It’s rubbish rubbish rubbish.”

I watched as she flung the bits in the waste-paper basket. “Can I help?”

“No.” Hannah rubbed at her eyes. “It’s fine.”

It obviously wasn’t, but I couldn’t say anything. Instead I flicked over a couple of pages of the book on the bedside table. “Is this any good?”



Hannah made a funny gulping noise. "I don't know. Mum bought it for me. She says the books I like are too babyish."

I was surprised. "My mum lets me read what I want."

"You're lucky." Hannah made a face. "But you're clever, and I'm not."

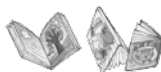


“Yes, you are,” I told her. “Auntie June told me you were brilliant when you started at your new school.”

Hannah’s lip quivered, and I thought she was going to cry again, but she didn’t. Instead she took the book and closed it before creeping very close to me. “If I tell you a secret,” she whispered, “do you PROMISE you won’t tell anyone? Not my mum, or your mum, and especially not Harry?”

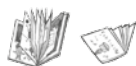
I nodded. “I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die.”

Hannah took a deep breath. “I can’t read. Not properly. They gave me a test when I first got to Merrywood Juniors, and it was a book I knew by heart, so it was fine – and then we went on reading it in class, and I did OK. But then we



finished it, and I don't know the new one. I get the words wrong all the time and people laugh at me and call me names and Miss Fanshaw keeps saying I'm not trying and I DO try ... oh, Livvy, I really really REALLY do..." And then she was crying again, crying her eyes out—

And that was the moment when I got the Tingle. It was so sharp it made me jump, and I had to pretend I was coughing. I didn't know what to do. Poor Hannah was sobbing into her pillow, but I'd had the call to go to the Academy ... and then I thought that maybe that was a GOOD thing. If the Golden Wand pointed at me, I'd get to choose who to help. And if it didn't point at me, but at one of my friends instead, maybe I could tell them how unhappy Hannah was and I could



persuade them that making things better for her would be a Very Good Deed.

PING! The Tingle came again, and it was even sharper than before. I patted Hannah's back. "Don't cry, Hannah. I'll help you..."

"How?" Hannah rolled over and stared up at me. "Nobody can. Not ever."

"I will," I promised. "Wait here. I'm just going to get some tissues." I shot out of her room, down the corridor to the bathroom ... and when I opened the bathroom door I found myself in the hallway of Stargirl Academy.