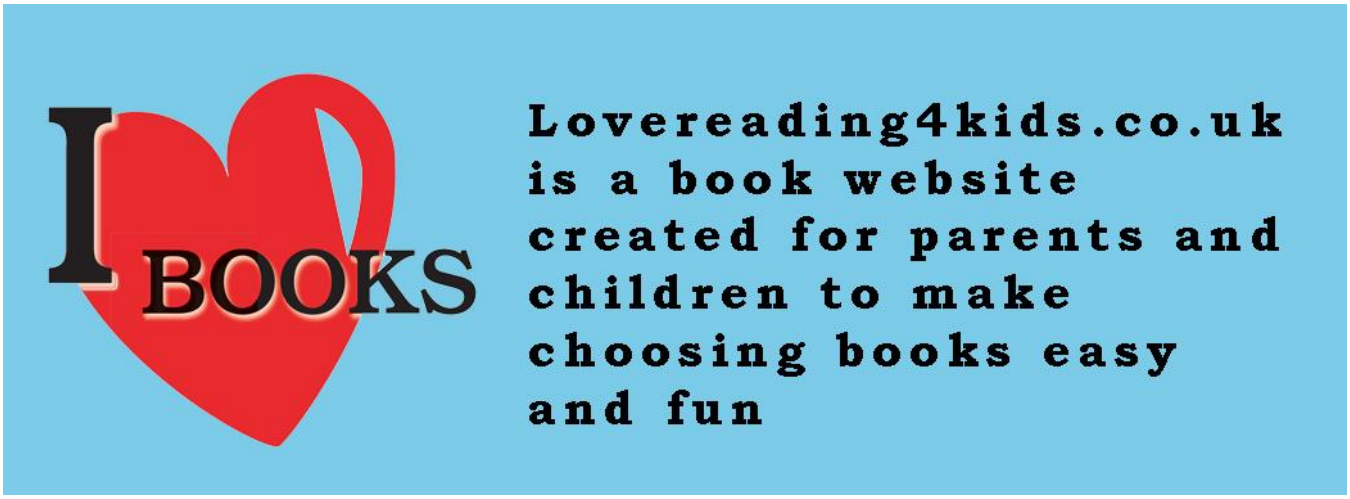


Opening extract from

Mirror Magic

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Illustrated by

Lucy Fleming

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Lovereading4kids.co.uk

To any of my readers who believe in magic as much as I do… – LC

To Kim – LF

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Star Friends
MIRROR MAGIC



LINDA CHAPMAN
ILLUSTRATED BY LUCY FLEMING

Stripes



In the Star World

The sky was a velvet-black and everything glittered with stardust – the animals, the trees, the meadows, the rivers and the mountains. They all shone. It was a special night and a large crowd of animals was gathered around a waterfall made of stars that tumbled into a bottomless pool. The air hummed with chatter as they waited for the event to start.

At the front of the crowd there were eight young animals – a fox, an otter, a badger, a wildcat, a deer, a squirrel, a sparrowhawk and

a dormouse. The squirrel scampered over to the fox and stood up on his back legs, his shimmering tail curling like a comma behind him. "It's almost time for us to travel to the human world, Bracken."

"I can't wait!" the fox said, spinning round with excitement, his indigo eyes shining. "It's going to be such an adventure."

The deer's ears flickered anxiously. "Aren't you two nervous? I am."

The wildcat rolled her eyes. "What a surprise! You're scared of everything, Willow. Why don't you just stay at home?"

Bracken gave her a look of dislike and touched the deer's nose with his. "Don't listen to her. You're brave, Willow, I know you are. And besides, we'll be together – at least to start with. You'll be all right."

Willow, the deer, nuzzled him gratefully.

A large owl with silvery wings swooped silently into the clearing. As he perched on a branch beside the waterfall, the crowd of animals fell silent. This was the moment they had been waiting for.

"Welcome, my friends," Hunter the owl called out. "Once again, the time has come for us to send a group of young Star Animals to the human world. Each of these animals will have the task of finding a Star Friend – a child who believes in magic."



Hunter looked at the animals around him and continued speaking. "These new Star Friends will be taught how to use the magic that flows between our world and the human world to do good deeds, bringing happiness and peace. As you know, usually only two or three Star Animals travel to the human world together but today eight will be making the journey." An excited murmur rose from the crowd. The owl held up his wing.

"We are sending more animals this time because the human world is in trouble. Fewer humans believe in magic, which means fewer people are using Star Magic to do good, and the current of magic that flows between our world and the human world is growing weak. But there's something even more worrying." The owl looked solemn. "We sense someone in the human world is using dark magic to hurt people and cause unhappiness. If this is so, it must not continue."

He turned to the young animals at the front of the crowd. "The eight of you will be sent to the place where we believe dark magic is being used – where the Star Magic is weakest. You must find out what is going on and stop it. But, first, you each need to find a human child to be your Star Friend. A child who is kind-hearted enough to use magic for good and brave enough to defeat someone using dark magic. When you meet a child you think could be a Star Friend, speak to them with your thoughts. If they are open to magic, they will hear you."

"What will happen to us when we're in the human world, Hunter?" said the squirrel, jumping on to Bracken's back. "Will we still sparkle and shine like we do now?" He waved his tail, making every hair glitter.

The owl shook his head. "No, Juniper. You will look like a normal animal, apart from your indigo eyes. However, unlike a normal animal,

you will be able to appear and disappear."

"Will we all find Star Friends in the same place?" asked the otter.

"I do not think so," Hunter replied. "It is rare to find children who truly believe in magic these days and there are unlikely to be eight such children in the same place. If you do not find a Star Friend when you arrive, then travel on. Choose wisely. Once you have found a Star Friend, you will stay with them for their whole lives, guiding and helping them and fighting dark magic."

The wildcat stood up. "When do we leave?"

"As soon as you wish, Sorrel," said the owl. "Simply step under the stream of stars in the waterfall."

"I'm going first!" said Bracken. "Goodbye, everyone!" He darted past Sorrel, who hissed at him in anger. With an excited bark, he leaped into the waterfall and vanished in a cloud of sparkles.



"Rude creature!" the wildcat spat. She gave a haughty flick of her tail, walked to the waterfall and stepped carefully into the stars, vanishing. The animals' voices rose with excitement.

One by one the other young animals followed until, last of all, the dormouse jumped through the waterfall and disappeared.

The owl turned to the crowd. "Let us hope our young friends succeed in finding Star Friends and defeating those who use magic for evil purposes," he said. "I fear that the human world needs Star Animals now more than ever."

He flapped his wings and soared away into the dark sky.



Chapter One

Mountain gorilla, orangutan, Galapagos penguin…

Maia Greene blew her dark blond fringe out of her eyes and turned the pages of the book on endangered animals. It was so hard to choose just one.

"Hurry up now, everyone," called Miss Harris. "There's just five minutes until break time. I want you to have decided on your project by then."

Maia turned the pages more quickly.



Maybe a penguin? They always made her giggle with their funny waddling walk. Or an African wild dog? She loved dogs. Or a wolf? She paused at a photograph of a grey wolf. Her Granny Anne had loved wolves and had kept lots of wolf ornaments and paintings in her cottage. Maia's heart twisted in her chest. Granny Anne had died last month and Maia still missed her a lot. No, wolves would make her feel too sad.

"I can't believe you still haven't decided," said Ionie, who sat next to her. "I've already done a whole page of notes on my animal." She flicked her strawberry blond ponytail over her shoulder and showed Maia a page of neat writing with headings underlined with a ruler.

"I have decided," said Maia defensively. "I'm going to do my project on … on … orangutans." She picked an animal at random just to shut Ionie up. Ever since they had been put on the same table at the start of term, Ionie had been driving her crazy. It was bad enough that Sita and Lottie, her best friends, were in the other Year Six class, but having to sit next to Ionie seemed very unfair. Ionie was clever and she loved pointing out any mistakes Maia made.

"Orangutans? Really?" Ionie sighed. "Can't you be more imaginative than that? There are at least four other people doing orangutans."

"So what amazing, unusual animal have you decided to do your project on?" Maia asked.

"A pronghorn," Ionie answered. "Do you even know what a pronghorn is?"

Maia hadn't heard of a pronghorn. Still, she didn't want to admit that to Ionie so she hazarded a guess. "Is it some kind of deer?"

She saw Ionie's face fall slightly and knew she must have got it right.

"Kind of," Ionie admitted. "It's a bit like a deer and a bit like a goat and a bit like an antelope, although actually it's a totally unique animal. Anyway, why don't I find you something that's more interesting than orangutans." She opened the book on her section of the desk. "Maybe you could do your project on a saola or a pangolin – they were my reserve choices—"

"OK, everyone. It's break time!" Miss Harris called.

Maia jumped up before she had to admit to Ionie that she didn't know what either of those animals were. She tidied her books away and headed outside.

Lottie and Sita were waiting for her by the coat hooks – Lottie, small and skinny, her curly black hair clipped back with a pink butterfly slide, and Sita, tall and graceful, with her shiny

dark brown hair in a thick plait.

"Escape at last!" Maia said, immediately feeling better at the sight of them.

"Your lesson was that bad?" said Sita sympathetically.

"*Any* lesson sitting next to Ionie is bad," said Maia.

Sita's eyes widened in warning. Glancing back, Maia saw that Ionie had followed her to the classroom doorway with an open book about endangered animals in her hands.



"Well, that's the last time I bother trying to help *you* with a project, Maia Greene!" she snapped and she marched back inside.

Maia felt a rush of guilt. She didn't like upsetting people – even people as irritating as Ionie.

"Whoops," Lottie muttered.

"Wait here." Maia hurried back into the classroom. Ionie was standing by their table. "Ionie, I'm sorry…"

"Forget it," Ionie said abruptly, picking up a book. "It's not as if I care what you and your silly little gang think."

Maia bit her bottom lip, not knowing what to say.

Ionie turned her back. "I'm going to read," she said. "Go away."

Maia sighed and went back to the coat hooks. "Well, that was awkward," she told the others.

"It's her own fault," said Lottie loyally.

"She shouldn't be so annoying. It must be horrible having to sit with her." She tucked her arm in Maia's. "Come on, get your coat and let's go outside."

"So, what have you been doing this morning?" Sita asked Maia as they went into the playground. The October sun was shining but a cold breeze was making fallen leaves skitter across the ground.

"Miss Harris was telling us all about endangered animals," said Maia, zipping up her coat and burying her hands in her pockets. "She told us how many species are dying out and about how people need to do more to help…" An idea suddenly popped into her head. "You know it's the Harvest Show in the village hall next weekend? Well, why don't we ask if we can run a cake stall to raise money for endangered animals? We'll have all half-term to prepare for it and do some baking."

"Oh yes, let's!" said Sita.

"Great idea! We could bake loads of different cakes," said Lottie. "My dad's helping to organize the show. I'll ask him if he can sort out a table for us."

Maia beamed. "Perfect. If you come round to mine tomorrow morning we can choose which cakes we're going to bake and practise baking them."

"OK, but it'll have to be before my gymnastics at eleven thirty," said Lottie. "It's a cool idea, Maia."

Maia grinned. It really was.



Maia's mum was waiting for her in the car after school. She could see her eighteen-month-old brother, Alfie, strapped into his car seat. He gave Maia a toy car as she opened the back door.

"Ook! Car!" he said proudly.

Maia grinned. "Yes, car," she said. She was glad

to get out of the cold and into the warm car.

"Half-term starts now!" her mum said, smiling at her and starting the engine. "A whole week off. I bet that feels good."

"It does," Maia said. "No more Ionie!"

Ionie had spent half the afternoon ignoring Maia and the other half of it pointing out spelling mistakes in her write-up of a science experiment on cress that they had been doing. Maia's guilt over upsetting her that morning had quickly faded.

Her mum tutted. "Oh, Maia, that's not very nice. You used to be good friends."

"In Reception and Year One, before she started being so annoying," Maia said.

It was true that she and Ionie had got on when they started school. Ionie was six months older than Maia and she'd always had really good ideas for games – fun things, not just playing tag or hide-and-seek like everyone else, but pretending to be dolphins or imagining

they had unicorns of their own. But then Ionie had started to get really bossy and so Maia had made friends with Lottie and Sita instead.

"Can't you be friends again?" said her mum. "I was talking to Ionie's mum and she says Ionie's lonely."

Maia didn't believe it. "She doesn't act like she's lonely and wants to be friends with people. If we're all talking together, she just goes off and reads a book, and if she has to join in, she tells everyone their ideas are rubbish and hers are the best."

"It might be because she's an only child," Mrs Greene said. "I was one so I know what it's like. It's sometimes difficult to know how to fit in. She might secretly want to make friends with you all."

"Mmm," said Maia disbelievingly. She changed the subject. "Are we going straight home?"

"No. We're going to Granny Anne's house

to collect some stuff for the charity shop. Dad's meeting us there, and then he'll go on and pick up Clio after netball practice."

"Dactor!" shouted Alfie, pointing at a tractor out of the window.

"Yes, tractor! And look, there's a digger, too!" said Maia, pointing things out as her mum drove on through the twisty streets of Westcombe.

Maia had lived in Westcombe all her life – it was a large village on the North Devon coast and Maia loved it. On sunny days she and her mum, dad, Alfie and older sister Clio would go to the shingle beach and have picnics. On stormy, wintry days they would wrap up in raincoats and go for blustery walks, stopping for a hot chocolate at the Copper Kettle tearoom afterwards.

Her mum drove across the main road on to a small bumpy lane that led towards the beach. There were a few houses at the top of the lane and halfway down was Granny Anne's white stone cottage with its thatched roof and small windows.

The car pulled up outside. Maia shivered. The curtains had been pulled across the windows ever since Granny Anne had died. It made her feel as if the cottage had shut its eyes.

Her mum got Alfie out of his car seat and carried him to the front door. Turning the key, she pushed the door open. Maia followed her inside. The cottage was dark and cold, and there were packing boxes in the hall.

