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Opening extract from

Glitterwings Academy: Midnight Feast

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'Look!' cried Teena. She stood up in her stirrups, pointing eagerly as Glitterwings Academy came into view. 'There it is! I see it!'

Flying up above with her parents, Twink Flutterby looked down at her little sister and smiled. *That was me last term,* she thought. *Riding on a mouse because I couldn't fly yet, and so excited to be seeing Glitterwings!*

Twink's mother stopped and hovered, her eyes shining. 'Oh, isn't it lovely! When I was a student here, I always thought Glitterwings was at its very

prettiest in the summer term.'

'You used to say that *every* term, if I recall!' teased Twink's father. His dark purple hair fell over his forehead as he grinned at his wife.

Privately, Twink thought her mother was right. The great oak tree that housed Glitterwings Academy was in full leaf, its strong branches basking in the sun. The tiny windows that wound up its trunk sparkled like dewdrops, and the grand double doors at its base seemed to gleam.

'Come on,' said Twink's father, glancing at the sun. 'We still have quite a way to go after we drop Twink off, if we're to get to Mother's before dinner.'

Twink's spirits plummeted at his words. She had been trying not to think about her family going to Gran's without her, but now she couldn't avoid it. She trailed along after her parents as they skimmed over the bright field of wildflowers that encircled the school.

As they landed, Twink saw crowds of excited fairies flitting about Glitterwings like hummingbirds, shouting welcomes to each other. No one



from Daffodil Branch seemed to be there yet, though, and for a moment Twink felt very alone.

'We'll send you a butterfly when we get to Gran's,' Twink's mother said. She gave Twink a tight hug, her wings folding warmly around her. 'Have a wonderful birthday, darling. I'm sorry we can't be with you on the day, but I'm sure you'll have a good time with your friends.'

Twink forced a smile. 'Oh, it'll be glimmery! I can hardly wait.'

'That's the spirit, Twinkster.' Her father hugged

her, too, and Twink knew that she hadn't fooled him. He handed her her oak-leaf bag and ruffled her bright pink hair. 'Have a good term, love. We'll see you soon.'

Twink waved as hard as she could as her family departed. Teena twisted about in Brownie's stirrups, shouting goodbyes until they had all disappeared from view.

Twink's hand dropped to her side. Her bright lavender wings drooped. That was that, then. Her family was gone.

'Twink!' cried a voice.

Twink spun quickly about, and saw her best friend. 'Bimi!' The two girls embraced, lifting off the grass as their wings fluttered excitedly.

'Isn't it great to be back?' laughed Bimi. 'I never thought I'd miss this place when I first came here, but I really did – everything at home just seemed boring!'

Twink's smile slipped away. She dropped back to the ground with a *thump*. 'Yes, I – I suppose so,' she said.

Bimi landed beside her, staring. 'You *suppose* so? Twink, what's wrong?'

'Oh, nothing.' All at once tears threatened. Twink made a face, trying desperately not to cry. She didn't want to say what was wrong – she knew how stupid and babyish it would sound.

Bimi's eyes were full of concern. She drew Twink quickly away behind a cluster of bluebells. The fragrant blossoms cast soft shadows over the grass, shielding the two girls from prying eyes.

'Twink, you have to tell me!' insisted Bimi. 'What is it?'

Twink wiped her eyes. 'It's – it's my birthday on Friday.'

Bimi looked confused. 'What's so bad about that?'

Twink felt a lump in her throat. She took a deep breath. 'It's just – well, my family always make it a really special day for me. We go to my grandmother's, and – and it's always just wonderful.' She bit her lip, thinking of Gran's cosy kitchen and delicious honey cakes.

'Oh, Twink.' Bimi touched her arm.



'But this year I'll be at school for my birthday,' continued Twink. 'And Gran was away during the hols, so I didn't get to see her. She's only just got back, and now my family's going to go and see her without me. They'll be doing all these glimmery things without me on my birthday – it's like they don't even care!'

Bimi rubbed her silver and gold wing against Twink's lavender one. 'Twink, I'm sure they care! But it's really too bad that you have to miss all the fun.'

Twink swallowed hard, already ashamed of her outburst. She knew that her parents had tried their best to make it up to her, with a special party at home before she left. It wasn't their fault that her gran had been away, or that Twink's birthday fell during Glitterwings term-time.

'I've just – I've just never had a birthday without them before,' she said softly. Her cheeks reddened as she looked down. 'It's going to feel a bit strange, that's all.'

Bimi nodded sympathetically. 'I know. I'm glad

my birthday comes in the holidays. But you know, *that* will be strange, too, not being able to spend it with my friends from school.'

Twink hadn't thought of that. She stroked a bluebell's smooth leaf. 'I suppose things are different when you go away to school, aren't they? We're not babies any more, and things are just harder sometimes.'

'That's true,' said Bimi. 'But they're better, too. Look at us – we can fly now, and we're going to the best school in the world!'

They smiled at each other. Twink thought how glad she was that she could talk to someone this way. She was the luckiest fairy in the school, to have Bimi for a best friend.

'Come on,' she said suddenly. 'Let's go to Daffy Branch, and make sure we've got beds beside each other again!'

The two girls took off, swooping over grass and flowers. Twink laughed as they zoomed through the double doors of the school at full speed, dodging fairies from older years.

'Watch it, you kids!' someone shouted after them.

When they got inside, Twink paused, gazing upwards. The inside of Glitterwings was even more wonderful than the outside: a high, high tower filled with a soft golden light. Fairies flitted in and out of its many branches like brightly coloured birds.

'Hurry!' said Bimi. The swirling gold and silver pattern of Bimi's wings sparkled as she took off, and Twink remembered how she had thought Bimi the most beautiful fairy she had ever seen when she first met her. Now she was simply Bimi – her friend.

She flew to catch up with Bimi and the two fairies spiralled upwards, passing empty classrooms and dorm branches filled with arriving fairies. On impulse, Twink did a quick somersault in the air, the wind tickling her wings.

Bimi laughed. Twink grinned back at her, feeling a bit better. It had taken her ages to learn to fly the term before – much to her embarrassment when the rest of the first year was whizzing about like dragonflies! Now, though, she couldn't get enough of it.

It'll be all right, she told herself firmly. *I learned how to fly, so I can learn anything – even how to be away from my family on my birthday.*

When the girls reached Daffodil Branch, Twink saw with satisfaction that it was just as they had left it – a snug, comfortable branch with cosy moss beds and glow-worm lamps. An upside-down daffodil hung over each bed like a canopy. Their uniforms would be daffodils, too, with the jaunty oak-leaf cap that every student at Glitterwings wore.

'Look, we can have the same beds as last time!' cried Bimi. She and Twink flitted quickly to the two beds nearest the window. 'Oh, good!' said Bimi, bouncing on hers. 'I was worried that we wouldn't be together.'

A few of the other girls had already arrived and were putting away their things. Pix, a clever red-headed fairy, grinned and flapped her yellow wings. 'We saved them for you!' she called.

'Thanks!' Twink called back with a smile.

A fairy with a pointed face and silvery-green hair sniffed loudly. 'Well, *I* don't think it's fair, saving

beds for people! Maybe Lola and I would have liked to sleep there.'

Twink made a face at her, and didn't answer. 'Mariella hasn't got any nicer, I see,' she muttered to Bimi.

'No, she's still her same old wonderful self,' agreed Bimi. 'Lucky us!'

Twink opened up her oak-leaf bag and began to unpack. Carefully, she arranged her things on the soft brown surface of her bedside mushroom: her thistle comb, a bottle of sparkly wing polish, the drawings of her family.

