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Opening extract from

Glitterwings Academy: Fairy Dust

Written by

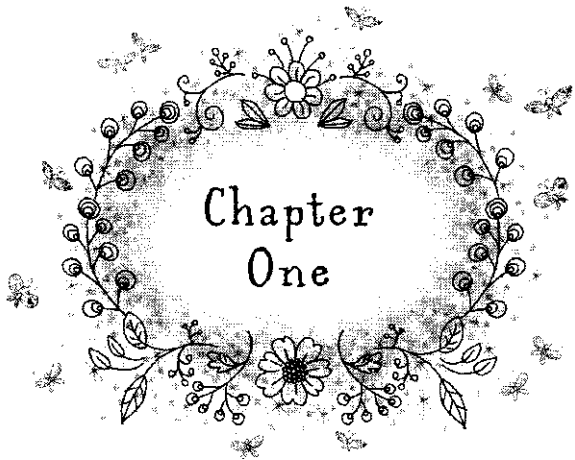
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'Isn't it great to be going back to Glitterwings?' said Twink Flutterby to her best friend, Bimi Bluebell. 'I can hardly wait to see everyone again!' Twink's lavender wings blurred as she did a quick somersault in the air.

Bimi smiled in agreement as the two fairies flew through the misty winter morning. 'We had a fabulous holiday, though, didn't we? I can't believe it's over already.'

Twink nodded, eyes shining. 'It was completely glimmery! You'll have to come to stay with us again

this summer.'

Bimi had stayed with the Flutterby family for the last week of the winter holidays, and the two friends had had a wonderful time. Twink's family lived beside a stream in a grassy meadow, and she and Bimi had gone skating on the frozen water with Teena, Twink's younger sister – first flying overhead to get their speed up, and then touching down and shooting across the ice like rockets, screaming with laughter. Brownie, the Flutterbys' mouse, had cavorted with them, skidding and sliding across the frozen surface.

Then for the last few days, they had stayed with Twink's grandmother in her cosy woodland stump. The kind old fairy had thoroughly spoiled the girls with freshly baked honey cakes, and let them stay up late to hear stories about when she was a young fairy.

Twink banked to avoid an icy cobweb, and sighed happily. It had been such a brilliant holiday, but she'd be glad to get back to Glitterwings Academy. The giant oak tree felt like home now.

'And just think!' added Bimi. 'Next term we'll be Second Years!'

Excitement shivered across Twink's wings. 'Won't that be fantastic? We'll be able to use fairy dust then, and all sorts!'

Twink's father, flying a little way ahead of them, laughed. 'I shudder to think what you girls will get up to with fairy dust,' he teased over his shoulder. 'Better just stay First Years; it's a lot safer for everyone.'

Twink made a face at her father, and then she and Bimi burst into laughter. 'Oh, dear – imagine Sooze using fairy dust!' giggled Bimi.

'Yes, maybe Dad's right,' said Twink with a grin. She and Sooze had once been best friends, and she knew all too well how impulsive the lavender-haired fairy could be. At least she had the best friend in the world in Bimi now!

Twink glanced across at her, struck anew by how pretty Bimi was. She had gleaming dark-blue hair, and silver wings with an unusual swirling pattern of gold. When Twink had first met Bimi, she had

thought she was stuck-up. But Bimi was actually very shy, and hated attention being drawn to her looks.

'Girls, we're almost there,' called Twink's mother. 'Look, Glitterwings is coming into view.'

Twink and Bimi exchanged an eager glance. Putting on a burst of speed, they jetted over the frozen grass, up a small hill – and then stopped with a cry of delight.

'It's beautiful!' breathed Twink.

Twink's mother smiled as she flew up beside them. 'It's always beautiful in winter term,' she said. 'I used to think it was my –'

'Favourite term of all!' finished Twink's father with a mischievous grin.

Twink and Bimi laughed as her mother pretended to swat her dad's arm. Maybe Twink's mother said the same thing every term, but their school did look extremely pretty! The great oak tree that housed Glitterwings Academy sparkled in the grey mist, its bare branches white with frost. Hundreds of tiny golden windows wound their way up its trunk, and

the grand double doors at its base seemed to smile in welcome.

'But – where is everyone?' said Bimi. 'It looks abandoned!'

Twink frowned. Bimi was right. On the first day of a new term there were usually crowds of young fairies hovering outside the tree, chattering and laughing as they shared their holiday adventures. But now there was no one in sight.

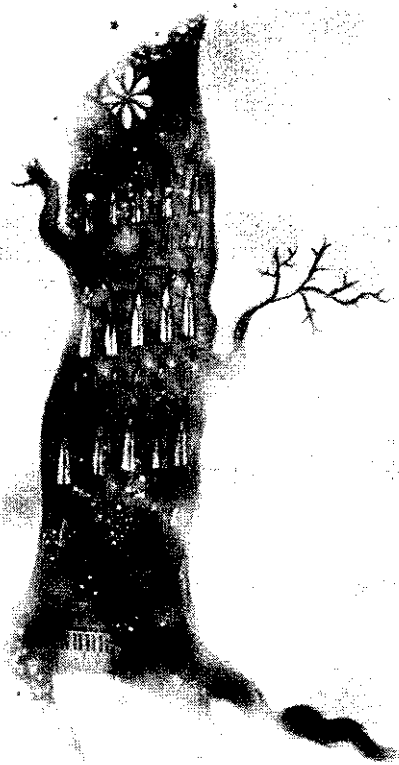
'Maybe it's too cold for everyone,' said Twink's mother. 'They're all inside, warming their wings!'

'Maybe,' said Twink doubtfully.

Suddenly Bimi gave a gasp. 'Look at the pond!'

Twink spun about in the air. Her eyes widened. The school's pond lay a little way away, its surface hard and frozen. And rising up from its centre was a tall, shining pole made of ice. Hundreds of frosty strands flowed down from its top, like icy hair.

Suddenly the mystery of the abandoned school was solved. Everyone was down at the pond. The school's fairies hovered above the bank in brightly coloured clusters, buzzing excitedly.



'What *is* it?' wondered Bimi.

'An ice pole!' murmured Twink's father.

Twink and Bimi looked at each other, puzzled. 'What's an ice pole?' asked Twink.

But her parents had fallen unusually quiet. Twink's father put his arm around her mother. They hovered side by side, gazing down at the ice pole with faraway smiles on their faces.

Twink stared at them, and then glanced at Bimi. Her best friend looked as confused as she felt.

'Oh, it's a lovely one,' sighed Twink's mother. 'I wish we could be here to see it!'

'See what?' asked Twink.

But her father just shook himself and grinned. 'Well, Twinkster, I think you're going to have a very interesting term!'

'But what –' started Twink.

'Write often, darling.' Twink's mother gave her and Bimi quick hugs, rubbing her wings against theirs. 'And we're so proud of both of you already! It's a great honour, you know.'

'*What's* a great honour?' cried Twink, half-

laughing in exasperation.

Her father chuckled and handed them their oak-leaf bags. 'Better let Miss Shimmery tell you. Have a good term, girls. You'll always remember it, that's for sure!'

As Twink's parents flew away, Twink and Bimi looked at each other. 'What was *that* all about?' said Bimi. 'It's not like your parents to be so mysterious!'

Twink shrugged in bewilderment. 'Come on – let's get a closer look!'

The cold wind whistled through their wings as the two girls zoomed down to the pond. They flitted in and out of the crowd of chattering fairies, trying to get a closer look at the ice pole.

'Look, there's Pix!' said Twink, spying another fairy from Daffodil Branch. The clever red-headed fairy was hovering with a few others from their branch. As Twink and Bimi joined them there were squeals of welcome, and quick hugs and flutters.

'But what *is* that thing?' asked Twink finally, gazing at the pole. 'My parents called it an ice pole, but they wouldn't tell us what it's for!'

Pix shook her head. 'Nobody knows. It just appeared over the holidays.'

Up close, the ice pole was even more impressive. Detailed ice-carvings of every creature imaginable glistened from its surface. The long, frozen strands that flowed from its top made a noise like little bells as they clinked against each other in the breeze. The whole world seemed to go still as Twink stared at it. It was so mysterious, and so beautiful!

'Is it magic?' she heard someone whisper.

'Definitely,' replied one of the older girls. 'And not fairy magic, either.'

Magic! Twink caught her breath. But if it wasn't fairy magic, then what *was* it? Not many beings could perform magic.

'All right, you girls, get up to the school now,' bellowed a voice. Mrs Lightwing, the first-year head and Flight teacher, buzzed through the crowd. 'It's getting late – time to get settled into your branches, and then dinner!'

'But, Mrs Lightwing, what *is* that thing?' called a fourth-year fairy.

Unexpectedly, Mrs Lightwing gave her a brief smile, and patted her sky-blue hair into place. 'You'll find out tonight! Come on now, girls, flitter-flutter.' She skimmed back up the hill as the students looked at each other.

'*What* is going on?' murmured Pix.

'I don't know,' said Zena, a tall fairy from their branch. 'But I'm dying to find out!'

Shoving aside thoughts of the ice pole, Twink nudged Bimi's wing with her own. 'Come on,' she whispered. 'Let's make sure we get our usual beds!'

'Oh, I almost forgot,' gasped Bimi. 'Wasps, we'd better hurry!'

Their wings a-blur, the two fairies sped up the hill ahead of the others. Circling around the tree, they dived through the great double doors of Glitterwings.

Inside, the school was like a tall tower filled with golden light, with dozens of branches shooting off in all different directions from the main trunk. Fairies flitted in and out of them like hummingbirds, as far up as the eye could see.

Twink and Bimi flew in quick spirals up the trunk, speeding past living branches and classrooms. About halfway up, they darted into a branch and landed with a hop at a bark doorway. A single yellow daffodil hung over the door.

'I think we're the first!' grinned Twink, breathing hard.

Bimi nodded, her eyes shining. 'Glimmery – we'll get our beds again!'

Twink pushed open the door. A long, cosy branch with green moss carpets and soft moss beds met her eyes, with a bright daffodil hanging over each one like a canopy. But Daffodil Branch wasn't empty after all. A fairy with lavender hair and pink wings lounged across one of the beds, reading a petal mag.

'Sooze!' Twink flitted into the branch with a startled laugh. Trust Sooze to be exactly where you didn't expect her!

Sooze jumped up. 'Hello, Opposite!' she cried, launching herself at Twink in a hug.

Twink had bright pink hair and lavender wings, the exact opposite of Sooze – hence the nickname.