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Opening extract from

# Glitterwings Academy: New Girl

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'Oh, how beautiful!' breathed Twink Flutterby.

She tipped her head back to take in the glittering crystal cavern around her. The underground room sparkled with pinks and greens and blues. It was like being inside a diamond!

'Isn't it glimmery?' said Bimi Bluebell, her best friend. 'The Crystal Caverns are my favourite place in the world. It's so great to show them to you!'

'I love them!' Twink flew to Bimi's side and squeezed her hand. 'This is the best holiday ever, Bimi.'

The two fairies smiled warmly at each other. Both were second-year students at Glitterwings Academy, and had been best friends since their very first term. Now Twink was staying with Bimi's family over the holidays, and Bimi's dad had taken them to see the famous caverns.

'Shall we move on to the next cavern, girls?' he asked now, flying over to them from where he had been examining a cluster of crystals.

'Ooh, yes!' cried Bimi, giving a little skip. 'It's my favourite. Twink, just wait till you see it!'

Twink nodded, smiling shyly. She still felt just a little bit bashful around Mr Bluebell – he was the most handsome fairy she had ever seen. No wonder Bimi was so pretty, she thought, with a mother and father who both looked like they should be in petal mags!

The passageway between the caverns shimmered like a rainbow trapped in ice. Twink flitted down it with Bimi and her dad, gazing about her in awe.

'What's in there?' Twink asked suddenly. They were passing the entrance to a small chamber.

Peering inside, she could just make out a single large crystal, standing by itself on a stone pillar.

'Nothing for us,' said Bimi's father with a laugh, shepherding her onwards. 'It's a crystal that will show you your fortune, if you ask it.'

'*Really?*' gasped Twink, forgetting her shyness. 'But that's amazing!' She looked over her shoulder at the disappearing doorway.

'I think it sounds creepy,' said Bimi with a shudder. 'What if it showed you something awful?'

Her dad grinned. 'Well, they say it will show you exactly what will happen – if you look into it, that is. Best to stay away from that sort of magic, and just enjoy the crystals for their beauty. Look, Twink – the Grand Chamber!'

He motioned with a flourish as they entered the largest, most spectacular cave of all. Green and blue crystals sparkled down its walls like frozen waterfalls. A massive crystal sat in the centre of the tall chamber, reflecting the shimmering rainbow light around the room.

Twink exclaimed in delight . . . but part of her



was still thinking about the little room off the passageway. Could that crystal *really* tell you your fortune? What would it show her, if she asked it?

High up on the other side of the cavern, a guide was giving a flighted tour to a group of fairies.

'Shall we join them?' suggested Bimi's dad. The three of them took off, hovering on the edge of the group.

'This room is also known as the Singing Chamber,' the guide was saying, bobbing in the air before them. 'The crystals sing songs to each other, you see. If you all close your eyes and concentrate, you should be able to hear them.'

'This bit is really glimmery,' whispered Bimi in Twink's ear. 'You have to concentrate hard, though – it takes a while to hear anything.'

Twink shut her eyes along with the others . . . but after a moment she took a peek. Everyone was hovering with their eyes closed, straining to hear. Even the guide had his eyes shut.

Twink's heart pounded. Did she dare? No, she couldn't, she shouldn't . . . oh, but a crystal that

could tell her fortune! How could she resist *that*?

Before she could talk herself out of it, Twink plunged into a steep dive, slicing through the cavern like an arrow. In a flash, she had swooped through the doorway and was skimming down the passage, the wind whistling through her pink hair.

She landed at the entrance to the little chamber. Inside, the crystal gleamed on its stone stand. Twink hesitated. Did she really dare? But there was no time to lose; Bimi and her dad might see that she was missing at any moment! Twink flew into the room.

The crystal was an irregular shape, like an iceberg that sat balanced on its point. Twink edged up to it. She could see herself reflected in its many facets, her eyes wide and frightened.

Her voice came out in a strangled squeak. 'Um – would you show me my fortune, please?'

She stared anxiously into the crystal. Its facets gleamed coolly back at her. The seconds ticked past.

Finally Twink smiled and let out a breath. There had been nothing to it after all; Bimi's father had

only been joking. What an idiot she had been to fall for it!

She turned away to fly back to the others – and then stopped short. A swirling mist had appeared in the crystal's depths. Twink leaned forward, her heart beating wildly. The mist cleared, and an image came into view.

'Oh!' she cried. It was Glitterwings Academy!

The familiar oak tree sat on its grassy hill, its leaves ablaze with orange and yellow. Twink stared open-mouthed. There was no sound, but she could



see crowds of young fairies hovering about the tree, smiling and chatting to each other. It was so real!

As she watched, two more fairies flew up the hill: one with pink hair and one with blue. Twink gasped as she realised it was herself and Bimi. Then Bimi's father came into view, carrying their oak-leaf bags. Why, she was looking at tomorrow, the first day of the new autumn term!

An uncertain frown touched her face. But . . . why did she seem so unhappy?

The Twink in the crystal was flying slowly, with her head down. And Bimi's usual smile was gone. Instead, Twink's best friend had an exasperated grimace on her face. The two fairies flew side by side, not speaking to each other.

Twink's wings felt clammy as she gazed into the crystal. What was going on? Were she and Bimi going to have a quarrel?

The scene changed. Suddenly Twink saw Bimi talking and laughing with a fairy she didn't recognise: a very pretty fairy with curly lilac hair and purple wings. The Twink in the crystal hovered

nearby, looking left-out and miserable. As Twink watched, Bimi linked arms with the strange fairy and flew away with her, leaving the Twink in the crystal staring sadly after them.

Twink watched numbly, unable to believe what she was seeing.

Other scenes flashed into view, faster and faster. Bimi and the new girl were flying to class together, hovering side by side in the library, sitting next to each other in lessons. The new fairy even had Twink's usual bed beside Bimi in Peony Branch! And in every image, Twink saw herself on the sidelines, dejected and alone.

'Oh,' whispered Twink as the crystal finally went dark. The cavern felt icy-cold. 'Bimi will have a new best friend! She'll forget all about me . . .'

Then she shook herself. It *couldn't* be true! Bimi was the best friend in the world. 'I don't believe you,' she burst out to the crystal, clenching her fists. 'Bimi would *never* do that!'

The crystal sat silently on its pedestal, winking in the dim light.

Suddenly desperate to get away, Twink skimmed quickly from the room. Her thoughts tumbled like autumn leaves as she raced back to the Grand Chamber. *Of course* Bimi would never abandon her! Yet the images had looked so real . . . and hadn't Bimi's father said that the crystal would show you exactly what would happen?

*It must be true, then,* thought Twink, fighting tears as she flew into the cavern. *Oh, I wish I had never looked into it!* Mr Bluebell had been right to steer them past the crystal. Why hadn't she listened to him?

It felt like she had been gone for ages, but the group of hovering fairies were only just opening their eyes when Twink jetted up next to them. She tried to look relaxed, as if she had been there all along.

'A lovely song from the crystals, as always!' The guide looked as pleased as if he had sung it himself. 'And now, if you'll just follow me, I'll show you a most unusual formation . . .' The group began moving off.

'Wasn't that glimmery?' said Bimi. Her smile faded when she saw Twink's expression. 'What's wrong? Didn't you hear the song?'

Twink shrugged. 'Sort of. It was OK, I suppose.' She knew that if she tried to say anything else, she'd burst into tears.

Bimi's blue eyebrows rose in surprise. 'Oh! I thought you'd really like it.'

'I did! I said it was OK, didn't I?' Twink's throat felt like she had swallowed an acorn.

'Well, maybe crystal songs aren't everyone's cup of dew,' laughed Bimi's father. He put a hand on each of their shoulders, steering them from the cavern. 'Come on, girls – let's go and get a bite of seed cake in the Crystal Cafe.'

Bimi's family lived in a spreading butterfly bush, with sweet-smelling purple flowers dangling all about. It was nearing dusk as they returned, and Twink could see the small round windows at the bush's base glowing with a welcome golden light.

'Is everything all right?' whispered Bimi as they

flew through the front door. 'You seem really down.'

Twink managed a smile. 'Yes, of course! Sorry . . . I'm just tired.'

'I'm worn out, too,' said Bimi's dad with a yawn. 'You girls are exhausting! I'll be glad when you go back to school tomorrow, and I can have some peace and quiet.'

Twink knew he was only teasing, but at the mention of school her spirits dropped still further. She swallowed hard, dreading what might happen the next day.

When they ate dinner that night, Twink played with her food. She could feel Bimi watching her in growing bewilderment, but she couldn't help it. Over and over, she kept seeing the images of Bimi and the new girl in her mind, until she had no appetite at all.

'Would you like some nectar, Twink?' asked Mrs Bluebell, offering the pecan-shell pitcher. She was just as pretty as her daughter, with the same dark blue hair and unusual silver and gold wings, and always looked extremely stylish.

'Oh! Um . . . no, thank you,' stammered Twink, jolted from her thoughts. 'Sorry, I was just . . . thinking of school tomorrow.' She felt the tips of her pointed ears grow warm as Bimi gave her a searching look.

The Bluebell family's dining room was in the centre of the bush's trunk, and was perfectly circular, with a polished black stone table and elegant walnut-shell chairs. A large petal tapestry hung on the wall.

