Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Olivia's First Term

Written by

Lyn Gardner

Published by

Nosy Crow Ltd

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Olivia's First Term

LYN GARDNER



For KJG, for everything

First published in the UK in 2011 by Nosy Crow Ltd
The Crow's Nest, 11 The Chandlery
50 Westminster Bridge Road
London, SE1 7QY, UK

Nosy Crow and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Nosy Crow Ltd

Text copyright © Lyn Gardner, 2011

The right of Lyn Gardner to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

A CIP catalogue record for this book will be available from the British Library

"Popular" From the Broadway musical *Wicked*
Music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz
Copyright © 2003 Grey Dog Music

All rights reserved

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, hired out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of Nosy Crow Ltd.

Printed and bound in the UK by Clays Ltd, St Ives Plc
Typeset by Tiger Media Ltd, Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire

Papers used by Nosy Crow are made from wood grown in sustainable forests.

ISBN: 978 0 85763 016 2

www.nosycrow.com



Chapter One

Olivia Marvell stood on the pavement in the pouring London rain. She screwed up her eyes as she lifted her face to the sky and the rain lashed down so hard it was like hundreds of tiny pinpricks. Olivia sighed. Even the weather had a grudge against her. She glanced at her dad, Jack, who since they had left the Tube station had been wrestling with an umbrella that kept being caught by the wind and turning itself inside out. The umbrella was clearly going to win. Jack looked as cold, wet and miserable on the outside as Olivia felt inside. She shivered. She hated London already; she had only been here for a few hours, and longed for the Italian late-summer sunshine that made you want to arch your back and stretch like a cat.

In one hand Olivia held a battered, bulging suitcase out of which poked a sodden, slightly muddy pyjama leg and the end of a thick wire; in the other she was holding the hand of Eel, her little sister. Eel hadn't been christened Eel, of course, but had acquired the nickname soon after birth because she was such a wriggly little thing, never still for a minute. She was jiggling around now, pulling on Olivia's hand, but Olivia only held on tighter.

"Cut it out, Eel! Anyone would think you were seven months old, not seven years," said Olivia irritably.

A few passers-by eyed them curiously, and one smartly dressed woman crossed over the road as if to avoid the raggle-taggle group.

"Bet she thinks that we're going to beg for money or mug her," muttered Olivia fiercely.

"You can't blame her," said Eel sadly, shaking her chestnut curls like a dog and spraying Olivia's face with more water. "We look rubbish. We probably pong too," she said, sniffing herself like a bloodhound. She was wrong about that, but they did look a mess. Olivia's hair was stuck damply to her face while Eel had a big smudge on her forehead and her

skirt was torn after an unfortunate encounter with the ticket barriers at the Tube station. Eel had never seen ticket barriers before and had decided she never wanted to see them again. They had appeared determined to gobble her up.

"Come on, girls," said Jack, abandoning his tussle with the umbrella. "We'll be soaked through if we stand here any longer. Let's just walk fast. It's not very far." They set off at a brisk pace, even though it made Jack limp badly, and as they turned the corner of the street, an imposing red-brick building came into view. At the front of the building a sign written in large black letters declared "The Swan Academy of Theatre and Dance". In smaller letters below it said "An academic and performing arts education for talented children aged 7–16". Underneath that was written in italics: *"Proprietor: Alicia Swan"*.

"Here we are," said Jack, coming to a halt opposite the building and dragging them into a shop doorway for shelter.

Olivia's mouth fell open as she read the sign, and then she turned to her father and said accusingly, "It's a *stage* school. You said that we were going to stay with our grandmother and

go to her school. You didn't tell us that she runs a *stage school*." Olivia spat out the words "stage school" as if they had a nasty taste.

Jack looked like a small boy who had just been caught with his fingers in the sweet jar. "Didn't I? I must have forgotten to mention it."

Olivia glared at him. "But you've always said that you hate all that fake theatre stuff, and so do we."

"Not me," piped up Eel. "I've always wanted to learn to dance but we've never stayed anywhere long enough to have lessons." She tried to do a little twirl and got tangled up with Olivia, who was still gripping her hand. "I'll be a great dancer. The bestest."

"You can't say bestest," said Olivia witheringly.

"I can if I want," said Eel, but she looked as if she might cry.

"I'm sure you'll be a fantastic dancer," said Jack soothingly, but Olivia detected a note of false cheerfulness in his tone.

"But what about me?" demanded Olivia. "I can't dance and I won't dance, and I don't want to go to stage school either. I want to stay with you and carry on walking the high-wire.

I'm a circus artist, not a stage-school brat."

Jack looked at his elder daughter, at her determined mouth and flashing eyes, and for a moment thought that his beloved wife, Toni, had suddenly come back to life. He shook his head sadly before swallowing hard and declaring a little too heartily, "Well, there is a choice. It's stage school or the orphanage run by a wicked old witch who eats children for breakfast."

"Well, I vote for stage school," said Eel, hopping from one leg to another, "and Livy will have to come too because she's superglued herself to me and is holding my hand so hard it hurts."

"That's because you can't be trusted!" said Olivia, the words exploding out of her mouth like a stuck cork suddenly released from the neck of a bottle. "It's all your fault that we're in this situation. If you hadn't. . ." She tailed off as she saw Eel and Jack's faces, white with shock. Olivia's anger evaporated as quickly as it had materialised and she burst into loud, guilty tears.

"Oh Eel, I didn't mean it! I'm really, really sorry," she sobbed. "I know it was an accident. It's just everything feels so miserable, and I'm

tired of pretending everything is all right when it's not."

Eel hugged her and said tearfully, "It's OK, Livy. But we've got to make the best of things." She moved her head close to Olivia's and whispered, "We've got to be as brave as llamas and very cheerful. For Dad's sake, cos he hardly ever smiles now."

"I think you mean lions, Eel. Llamas probably aren't that brave. But you're right, Dad is so sad and defeated all the time." And, as if somebody had turned on a hosepipe, Olivia's tears started flowing again.

"He looks just like my teddy bear looked after he accidentally got put in the washing machine on an extra-hot wash," replied Eel sadly. "If it was an accident," she added ominously.

"It's nobody's fault," said Jack firmly. "We've just had some bad luck, my lovelies, but our luck will change."

"Look," said Eel, sniffing and pointing at the sky, "it's changing already. It's stopped raining and the sun has come out. I might even dry out if Livy would only stop crying all over me." Olivia gave a wan smile and hiccupped.

"So, Liv, what's it to be: the orphanage or

stage school?" asked her father.

Olivia looked at Eel and Jack's expectant faces and felt more ashamed of her outburst than ever. She took a deep breath and whispered, "Stage school."

"That's lucky," said Eel with a grin, "because Dad is too old for an orphanage."

"I'm far too ancient for stage school, too," said Jack with a boyish laugh, but when Olivia caught his eye, he looked away guiltily.



Chapter Two

"What time is Granny Alicia expecting us all?" asked Olivia, licking the icing off a chocolate and raspberry cupcake.

"We'll be going across to the Swan soon, very soon," said Jack, looking at his watch.

"Why does it matter if we're a bit early?" asked Olivia, shrugging her shoulders.

"Your gran's a very busy woman," said Jack evasively. They were sitting in a café across the road from the Swan and opposite a large, boarded-up building that was next door to the stage school. Jack had produced a tattered five-pound note and some loose change from his pocket and suggested that they use the last of their money to go to the café to get warm. They were 10p short for the food and drinks but

the café owner was so charmed by Jack, and Eel's cheeky grin, that she even threw in a free espresso. Jack rewarded her with a dazzling smile that made him look young and carefree for a second.

Olivia had taken her little sister to the toilet to smarten up a bit. They still looked extremely shabby, but no longer quite so disreputable. Olivia had even managed to disguise the hole in Eel's skirt with a craftily placed safety pin.

The girls both had lemonade and cupcakes and Jack had positioned himself so he could watch out the window. A succession of cars were pulling up outside the Swan and dropping children off. The door of the café jangled and Olivia watched as a mother and daughter – who she thought looked like two blonde peas in a pod – came in, ordered hot chocolate and tea, and sat down. The girl, with fair hair, rosebud mouth, a tilt-tipped nose and startling blue eyes, was wearing leg warmers and a leotard with a short skirt on top. A pair of worn jazz shoes lay on top of some clothes in an open bag. Eel eyed the shoes with interest and hoped that she'd soon have a pair just like them, only newer and shinier.

Olivia glanced shyly at the girl, who she guessed was probably around twelve, the same age as her. The girl gave her a quick smile. She looked nice, thought Olivia, a bit like a doll she had loved when she was little. The girl was clearly a Swan pupil and Olivia wondered whether they might be in the same class and become friends. The girl's mother kept glancing at her watch so anxiously that she made Olivia think of the White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*.

"I'm terribly sorry, Georgia darling, but I really do have to go soon." The girl's mouth tightened as if she was struggling not to cry. The woman fumbled in her bag and brought out a small box, simply but beautifully wrapped. She pushed it towards her daughter. Eel nudged Olivia, and both of them watched what was going on at the next table while pretending that they were deeply engrossed in nibbling the remaining icing off their cakes.

"This is for you, Georgia." The girl's eyes widened in surprise. Eel craned her neck to get a better look.

"For me? It's not my birthday."

The woman smiled. "I know it's not, but it *is* an important day for you. Your first solo