

Piper's Perfect Dream

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Student Reports



NAME: Clover

BRIGHT DAY: January 5

FAVORITE COLOR: Purple

INTERESTS: Music, painting, studying

WISH: To be the best songwriter and DJ on Starland

WHY CHOSEN: Clover has great self-discipline, patience, and willpower. She is creative, responsible, dependable, and extremely loyal.

WATCH OUT FOR: Clover can be hard to read and she is reserved with those she doesn't know. She's afraid to take risks and can be a wisecracker at times.

SCHOOL YEAR: Second

POWER CRYSTAL: Panthera

WISH PENDANT: Barrette



NAME: Adora

BRIGHT DAY: February 14

FAVORITE COLOR: Sky blue

INTERESTS: Science, thinking about the future and how she can make it better

WISH: To be the top fashion designer on Starland

WHY CHOSEN: Adora is clever and popular and cares about the world around her. She's a deep thinker.

WATCH OUT FOR: Adora can have her head in the clouds and be thinking about other things.

SCHOOL YEAR: Third

POWER CRYSTAL: Azurica

WISH PENDANT: Watch



NAME: Piper

BRIGHT DAY: March 4

FAVORITE COLOR: Seafoam green

INTERESTS: Composing poetry and writing in her dream journal

WISH: To become the best version of herself she can possibly be and to share that by writing books

WHY CHOSEN: Piper is giving, kind, and sensitive. She is very intuitive and aware.

WATCH OUT FOR: Piper can be dreamy, absentminded, and wishy-washy. She can also be moody and easily swayed by the opinions of others.

SCHOOL YEAR: Second

POWER CRYSTAL: Dreamalite

WISH PENDANT: Bracelets

Starling Academy



NAME: Astra

BRIGHT DAY: April 9

FAVORITE COLOR: Red

INTERESTS: Individual sports

WISH: To be the best athlete on Starland—to win!

WHY CHOSEN: Astra is energetic, brave, clever, and confident. She has boundless energy and is always direct and to the point.

WATCH OUT FOR: Astra is sometimes cocky, self-centered, condescending, and brash.

SCHOOL YEAR: Second

POWER CRYSTAL: Quarrelite

WISH PENDANT: Wristbands



NAME: Tessa

BRIGHT DAY: May 18

FAVORITE COLOR: Emerald green

INTERESTS: Food, flowers, love

WISH: To be successful enough that she can enjoy a life of luxury

WHY CHOSEN: Tessa is warm, charming, affectionate, trustworthy, and dependable. She has incredible drive and commitment.

WATCH OUT FOR: Tessa does not like to be rushed. She can be quite stubborn and often says no. She does not deal well with change and is prone to exaggeration. She can be easily sidetracked.

SCHOOL YEAR: Third

POWER CRYSTAL: Gossamer

WISH PENDANT: Brooch



NAME: Gemma

BRIGHT DAY: June 2

FAVORITE COLOR: Orange

INTERESTS: Sharing her thoughts about almost anything

WISH: To be valued for her opinions on everything

WHY CHOSEN: Gemma is friendly, easygoing, funny, extroverted, and social. She knows a little bit about everything.

WATCH OUT FOR: Gemma talks—a lot—and can be a little too honest sometimes and offend others. She can have a short attention span and can be superficial.

SCHOOL YEAR: First

POWER CRYSTAL: Scatterite

WISH PENDANT: Earrings

Student Reports



NAME: Cassie
BRIGHT DAY: July 6
FAVORITE COLOR: White
INTERESTS: Reading, crafting
WISH: To be more independent and confident and less fearful
WHY CHOSEN: Cassie is extremely imaginative and artistic. She is a voracious reader and is loyal, caring, and a good friend. She is very intuitive.
WATCH OUT FOR: Cassie can be distrustful, jealous, moody, and brooding.
SCHOOL YEAR: First
POWER CRYSTAL: Lunelite
WISH PENDANT: Glasses



NAME: Leona
BRIGHT DAY: August 16
FAVORITE COLOR: Gold
INTERESTS: Acting, performing, dressing up
WISH: To be the most famous pop star on Starland
WHY CHOSEN: Leona is confident, hardworking, generous, open-minded, optimistic, caring, and a strong leader.
WATCH OUT FOR: Leona can be vain, opinionated, selfish, bossy, dramatic, and stubborn and is prone to losing her temper.
SCHOOL YEAR: Third
POWER CRYSTAL: Glisten paw
WISH PENDANT: Cuff



NAME: Vega
BRIGHT DAY: September 1
FAVORITE COLOR: Blue
INTERESTS: Exercising, analyzing, cleaning, solving puzzles
WISH: To be the top student at Starling Academy
WHY CHOSEN: Vega is reliable, observant, organized, and very focused.
WATCH OUT FOR: Vega can be opinionated about everything, and she can be fussy, uptight, critical, arrogant, and easily embarrassed.
SCHOOL YEAR: Second
POWER CRYSTAL: Queezle
WISH PENDANT: Belt

Starling Academy



NAME: Libby

BRIGHT DAY: October 12

FAVORITE COLOR: Pink

INTERESTS: Helping others, interior design, art, dancing

WISH: To give everyone what they need—both on Starland and through wish granting on Wishworld

WHY CHOSEN: Libby is generous, articulate, gracious, diplomatic, and kind.

WATCH OUT FOR: Libby can be indecisive and may try too hard to please everyone.

SCHOOL YEAR: First

POWER CRYSTAL: Charmelite

WISH PENDANT: Necklace



NAME: Scarlet

BRIGHT DAY: November 3

FAVORITE COLOR: Black

INTERESTS: Crystal climbing (and other extreme sports), magic, thrill seeking

WISH: To live on Wishworld

WHY CHOSEN: Scarlet is confident, intense, passionate, magnetic, curious, and very brave.

WATCH OUT FOR: Scarlet is a loner and can alienate others by being secretive, arrogant, stubborn, and jealous.

SCHOOL YEAR: Third

POWER CRYSTAL: Ravenstone

WISH PENDANT: Boots



NAME: Sage

BRIGHT DAY: December 1

FAVORITE COLOR: Lavender

INTERESTS: Travel, adventure, telling stories, nature, and philosophy

WISH: To become the best Wish-Grantor Starland has ever seen

WHY CHOSEN: Sage is honest, adventurous, curious, optimistic, friendly, and relaxed.

WATCH OUT FOR: Sage has a quick temper! She can also be restless, irresponsible, and too trusting of others' opinions. She may jump to conclusions.

SCHOOL YEAR: First

POWER CRYSTAL: Lavenderite

WISH PENDANT: Necklace



Introduction

You take a deep breath, about to blow out the candles on your birthday cake. Clutching a coin in your fist, you get ready to toss it into the dancing waters of a fountain. You stare at your little brother as you each hold an end of a dried wishbone, about to pull. But what do you do first?

You make a wish, of course!

Ever wonder what happens right after you make that wish? *Not much*, you may be thinking.

Well, you'd be wrong.

Because something quite unexpected happens next. Each and every wish that is made becomes a glowing Wish Orb, invisible to the human eye. This undetectable orb zips through the air and into the heavens, on a one-way trip to the brightest star in the sky—a magnificent place called Starland. Starland is inhabited by Starlings, who look a lot like you and me, except they have a sparkly glow to their skin, and glittery hair in unique colors. And they have one more thing: magical powers. The Starlings use these powers to make good wishes come true, for when good wishes are granted, the result is positive energy. And the Starlings of Starland need this energy to keep their world running.

In case you are wondering, there are three kinds of Wish Orbs:

- 1) **GOOD WISH ORBS.** These wishes are positive and helpful and come from the heart. They are pretty and sparkly and are nurtured in climate-controlled Wish-Houses. They bloom into fantastical glowing orbs. When the time is right, they are presented to the appropriate Starling for wish fulfillment.
- 2) **BAD WISH ORBS.** These are for selfish, mean-spirited, or negative things. They don't sparkle

at all. They are immediately transported to a special containment center, as they are very dangerous and must not be granted.

- 3) IMPOSSIBLE WISH ORBS. These wishes are for things, like world peace and disease cures, that simply can't be granted by Starlings. These sparkle with an almost impossibly bright light and are taken to a special area of the Wish-House with tinted windows to contain the glare they produce. The hope is that one day they can be turned into good wishes the Starlings can help grant.

Starlings take their wish granting very seriously. There is a special school, called Starling Academy, that accepts only the best and brightest young Starling girls. They study hard for four years, and when they graduate, they are ready to start traveling to Wishworld to help grant wishes. For as long as anyone can remember, only graduates of wish-granting schools have ever been allowed to travel to Wishworld. But things have changed in a very big way.

Read on for the rest of the story. . . .

Prologue

STAR KINDNESS DAY GREETINGS

To: All My Darling Friends

From: Piper

Subject: Happy Star Kindness Day!

Happy Star Kindness Day,
A time to spread good cheer.
I'm sending this holo-text to say,
You glow, girls, all staryear.

With Love and Positivity,
Piper

P.S. Personal greetings to come!

To: Sage

From: Piper

Subject: Star Kindness Day Compliment

The first Star Darling to ride a star,
The first on a mission, traveling far.
You triumphed with your heart and glow,
Even gathering some energy flow.

To: Leona

From: Piper

Subject: Thinking of You on Star Kindness Day

The third to go to a faraway world,
You granted a wish, and energy swirled.
But on your way back to our land of light,
Your pendant turned as black as night.

“Why?” you asked, so sad and blue.
No one could answer, no one knew.
But do not fret, Leona dear,
You still rock, that much is clear.

To: Scarlet

From: Piper

Subject: Star Kindness Day Tidings

You had to leave the SD fold,
But you didn't give up, you were too bold.
You joined a mission with a regular Starling,
To prove you were a tried-and-true Darling.

But why did this happen at all?
Why did you take the fall?
Another question, another riddle,
But you stepped up to shine, no second fiddle.

You showed true grit
And even some wit.
My hat's off to you,
Glad you're back with the crew.

To: Cassie

From: Piper

Subject: An Affirmation on Star Kindness Day

Who knows what to do

When we're confused through and through?

You, sweet little Cassie, you always do.

And when you came back from a mission all spent?

The lights went out 100 percent.

But you stayed calm and cool and kept us together,

You figure things out, whenever, wherever.

CHAPTER 1

In her Little Dipper Dorm room, Piper finished her last holo-text. Then she swiped the screen on her Star-Zap to queue up all the messages. Star Kindness Day was the next day. A ceremony would be held in the morning, at precisely the moment the nighttime stars and the daytime sun could all be seen in the color-streaked sky.

It happened in the morning only once a staryear. And all over Starland, Starlings met in open areas to gaze at the sight. Light energy flowed. Everyone smiled. They exchanged positive messages then and for the rest of the starday—to loved ones, to strangers, and to everyone in between. Thoughtful compliments. Meaningful praise. Heartfelt affirmations. It was definitely Piper's favorite holiday.

At Starling Academy, all the students' messages would go out at once, while everyone gathered in the Star Quad before class. Piper checked her holo-texts one last time. She had her own holiday tradition: styling her compliments into poetry. What better way to get a loving message across, she felt, than using language that lifted the spirit, too?

That staryear, she'd worked especially hard on the poems. There had been many ups and downs for the Star Darlings. So much had happened already that year. All the SD missions—some successful, some not. So that day, of all days, Piper wanted her friends to feel good.

Finally pleased with her efforts, Piper tossed her Star-Zap onto a neat pile of pillows on the floor. She'd played around with poetry ideas for starweeks. *Should I use lightkus?* she'd wondered first.

That poetry originated from Lightku Isle, an isolated island with sandy, sparkling beaches, where the local Starlings spoke solely in those kinds of poems, spare and simple with only three lines of verse and seventeen syllables total.

How they managed this without even trying was a wonder to Piper. She herself strove for an effortless state of being on a stardaily basis. But the lightkus proved

too difficult and limiting. So Piper went with sunnets, rhyming poems that could be any length and meter but needed to include a source of light.

The last staryear, when Piper was a relatively new first-year student, the holiday hadn't gone quite the way she'd wanted. She had labored long and hard over those holo-texts then, too. She'd wanted to reach out to every single student at Starling Academy. She'd wanted each student to feel good after reading her text; appreciated, even loved, she'd hoped.

She wrote one epic poem but it turned out to be so long and so serious no one bothered reading it. A hot flash of energy coursed through Piper, just remembering it. She'd felt like crying for stardays after.

This staryear, she was determined to get it right. She decided to focus only on students she knew well, and that meant mostly the Star Darlings. She tried to make the poems fun and light, too. Zippy, you might say. No one would think Piper particularly zippy, she knew. She tended to move slowly and unhurriedly, taking in her surroundings to be fully in the moment. But of course she had her own inner energy. And maybe this year she would manage to get that across in her poetry.

Piper leaned back against her soft pillow, closed her

eyes, and visualized each of her friends' smiling faces as they read her special words of encouragement. Well, maybe Scarlet and Leona wouldn't exactly be smiling. Even with her failed mission well in the past and band rehearsals on again, Leona was just beginning to bounce back.

As for Scarlet, she'd had an amazing kind of mission. After being booted out of the Star Darlings, she'd brought back wish energy and basically saved her substitute SD, Ophelia, in the bargain.

Still, it was hard to get a read on Scarlet. Piper wasn't sure what the older Starling was really thinking. One thing was crystal clear, though: Scarlet didn't like rooming with Leona. And Leona felt the same about Scarlet. Even when those poisonous flowers were removed from the girls' dorm rooms so they couldn't spread negativity, those two just couldn't get along.

Yes, there was a lot happening at the academy, and on Starland itself. That recent blackout after Cassie's mission, for instance, had thrown everyone off balance. Even the teachers weren't immune. Headmistress Lady Stella, usually so calm and serene—and an inspiration to Piper—seemed a little edgy. And the head of admissions, Lady Cordial, was stammering and hemming and hawing more than usual.

Now, more than ever, everyone needed to be centered and positive. So really, this was the perfect time for Star Kindness Day.

As Piper thought about everything, her stomach did an unexpected flip. Maybe she should send a positive poem to herself! She stretched to pick up her Star-Zap without lifting her head, then tapped the self-holo-text feature.

Piper's picture popped up in the corner of the screen: a serene, faraway expression on her face, thin seafoam-green eyebrows matching long straight seafoam-green hair, and big green eyes looking into the distance.

For the holo-photo, Piper had pulled her hair back in a ponytail. The ends reached well below her waist. Her expression was as calm as when she swam in Luminous Lake. And that was how she wanted to feel now. Centered and peaceful and wonderfully relaxed. What poem would bring her that mind-set?

Like the calm at the center of the storm . . . Piper began writing. Then she paused. What rhymed with *storm*? *The Little Dipper Dorm*, where first and second years lived!

*Like the calm at the center of the storm,
Floating like a breeze through the Little Dipper Dorm.*

Again, Piper stopped to think.

With dreams as your guiding light . . .

(Piper was a big believer in dreams holding life truths.)

Your thoughts bring deep insight.

It wasn't her best work, Piper knew. But it was getting late and she was growing tired. Piper liked to get the most sleep possible. After all, it was the startime of day when the body and mind regrouped and reconnected. Sure, she'd had her regular afternoon nap, but sometimes that just wasn't enough.

Piper focused on dimming the lights, and a starsec later, the white light faded to a soft, comforting shade of green, conducive to optimal rest. Piper shared a room with Vega, but each girl's side was uniquely her own.

Piper knew Vega was getting ready for bed, too. But it felt like she had her own secluded space, far removed from her roommate and the hustle and bustle of school. Everything was soft and fluid here. There wasn't one sharp edge in sight.

Piper's water bed was round; her pillows (dozens of them) were round. Her feathery ocean-blue throw rug and matching comforter were round. Even her leafy green plants were in pretty round bowls. And each one

gave off a soothing scent that calmed and renewed her.

“Sleep tight, good night, don’t let the moonbugs bite,” Vega called out.

“Starry dreams,” Piper replied softly. She heard Vega opening and closing drawers, neatening everything into well-organized groups, and stacking holo-books in her orderly way. Everyone had their own sleep rituals, Piper knew, and she did admire the way Vega kept her side neat. A place for everything, and everything in its place.

Piper reached to the floor, scooping up another pillow—this one had turquoise tassels and a pattern of swirls—and tucking it behind her head. Then she realized with a start she was still wearing her day clothes: a long sleeveless dress made from glimmerworm silk. It could, in fact, pass as a nightgown. Piper’s day clothes weren’t all that different from her night ones. But Piper believed in the mind-body connection—in this case, changing clothes to change her frame of mind.

Piper slipped on a satiny nightgown, with buttons as soft as glowmoss running from top to bottom. Then she misted the room with essence of dramboozle, a natural herb that promoted sweet dreams and comforting sleep. Next in her bedtime ritual came the choosing of the sleep mask. That night she sifted through her basket of masks, choosing one that pictured a stand of gloak trees.

It showed a wonderful balance of strength and beauty, Piper thought.

Finally, Piper picked up her latest dream diary. She wanted to replay her last dream—the one from her afternoon nap. Frequently, those dreams were her most vivid. At night Piper listened to class lectures while she slept, studying in the efficient Starling method. And sometimes the professors' voices blended with her dreams in an oddly disconcerting way.

Once, she felt on the verge of a mighty epiphany—a revelation about the meaning of light. *What is the meaning of light?* was a question that had plagued Starling scholars for hydrongs and hydrongs of years. And the answer was about to be revealed. To her!

But just when Piper's thoughts were closing in on it, her Astral Accounting teacher's voice had interrupted, monotonously intoning the number 1,792. And Piper felt sure that wasn't the right answer.

But that afternoon's dream proceeded without numbers or facts or formulas: Piper was floating through space, traveling past planets and stars, when a Wishling girl with bright shiny eyes and an eager expression grabbed her hand. Suddenly, the scene shifted to the Crystal Mountains, the most beautiful in all of Starland, just across the lake from Starling Academy. It was a sight

Piper looked at with pleasure every starday. But now she was climbing a mountain, still holding hands with the girl. As she led the way up a trail, the lulling sound of keytar music echoed everywhere, and she laughed with pleasure as a flutterfocus landed on her shoulder. Another flutterfocus settled on the shoulder of the girl.

“It looks like a butterfly!” the girl said, as delighted as Piper. “But sparkly!”

“And they bring luck!” Piper answered. But with each step the girls took, more and more flutterfocuses circled them. Now the creatures seemed angry, baring enormous sharp teeth. “What’s going on?” the Wishling cried. She squeezed Piper’s hand, beginning to panic.

“I don’t know,” Piper said, keeping her voice calm. “These aren’t like flutterfocuses at all! They’re usually quite gentle, like all animals here!” Maybe if she could say something, do something, the flutterfocuses would return to their sweet, normal ways. “Concentrate,” Piper told herself, “concentrate. . . .”

Perhaps if they reached the plateau at the very top, edged with bright-colored bluebezel flowers, the flutterfocuses would settle down.

Meanwhile, she held tight to the girl, pulling her up step by step. And finally, there was the peak, just within reach. She opened her mouth to tell the girl, “We’re

there,” when a blinding light stopped her in her tracks.

“Oh, star apologies!” Vêga had said, turning off the room light with a quick glance. Vêga was very good at energy manipulation. But she wasn’t very good at realizing when Piper was sleeping.

Thinking about it now, Piper wondered why the dream, which had begun so well, had turned so unpleasant. She didn’t want to call it a nightmare. First of all, she’d dreamed it in the middle of the day! Second, Piper believed that even the scariest, darkest dreams held meaning and could bring enlightenment. Piper felt sure this dream meant something important.

A *Wishling* girl . . . a difficult journey filled with danger and decisions . . . It was obvious, Piper saw now.

“I’m going on the next *Wish Mission*,” she said aloud. It would be a successful mission, too, since in her dream, she and the girl had reached the mountain-top. Her smile faded slightly. Well, they had just about reached the top.

“What’s going on?” Vêga asked groggily, hearing Piper’s voice.

“Nothing,” Piper said quickly. Practical Vêga wasn’t one to believe in premonitions or dream symbols.

Once, while Vêga slept, Piper had tiptoed over to watch her face for signs of emotion as she dreamed. Vêga

had woken up and been totally creeped out to find Piper mere microns away and staring. The girls generally got along, and they were friends—not best friends, but friends. And it helped for Piper to keep her sometimes strange insights to herself. She didn't want to upset the delicate balance.

Now, thinking about balance, she decided on a new bedtime visualization. She pictured a scale she'd seen in Wishling History class. It had a pan on each side, and when they were balanced, the pans were level. Adding weight to one would lift the other higher.

In her mind's eye, Piper placed a pebble first on one pan, then the other, again and again, so the scale moved up and down in a rhythm. Piper felt her head nodding in the same motion as she drifted off into another dream. . . .



As soon as the first glimmer of morning light landed on Piper's face, she opened her eyes. It was Star Kindness Day! She had a sense of expectation; something was about to happen.

She glanced at her Star-Zap. A holo-text was just coming through from Astra: LET'S ALL MEET AT THE RADIANT RECREATION CENTER BEFORE BREAKFAST.

Piper half groaned. She loved going to the rec center for meditation class, but she doubted Astra wanted them all to sit still and think deeply. Most likely, she wanted to organize everyone for an early-morning star ball game. Well, Piper could be a good sport, so she made her way to the center, only to find the place deserted.

Then Leona holo-texted: I'M AT THE BAND SHELL. AREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO HAVE A PRE-BREAKFAST BAND REHEARSAL, WITH AN SD AUDIENCE?

Immediately, the Star-Zap beeped again with a message from Cassie: NO! WE'RE SUPPOSED TO MEET AT LUMINOUS LIBRARY!

Not knowing what to do, Piper went to the band shell, then to the library, then searched across the quad for the Star Darlings. But everywhere she went turned out to be wrong. Her Star-Zap beeped again and again, with message after message, louder and louder each time, until Piper shut it off with a flick of her wrist and realized she'd just turned off her alarm.

It was another dream.

Piper quickly entered it into her dream diary. She'd have to analyze it more, but it seemed to focus on mixed-up communications—not a good sign. Frowning, she looked toward Vega's part of the room.

"Are you going to the Celestial Café?" she called out.

Vega looked at her strangely. “Of course. It’s breakfast time.”

“Just making sure,” Piper said. “I still need to take a sparkle shower. So I’ll see you there.”

The sparkle shower made Piper’s skin and hair glimmer brighter, and she felt its energy like a gentle boost of power. But the dream lingered, making her feel somehow off-kilter. She couldn’t shake the feeling she’d show up at the cafeteria and everyone else would be having a special picnic breakfast at the orchard, or by the lake, or anywhere she wasn’t.

By then, Piper was already late. No one would be concerned, though. Piper was frequently the last to arrive. She often needed to go back to her room to retrieve a forgotten item. But sometimes it was simply because she liked to take her time. Even now she paused to add a few more notes to her diary, while the dream was still fresh in her mind. It always helped to get everything down in writing, though she could usually remember details for at least a double starweek.

Even as a young Starling in Wee Constellation School, Piper could tell her mom specifics of her dreams, right down to what color socks she wore. Starmazingly, her mom sometimes wore the same color socks in her own dreams—and their actions often matched, too.

It had been hard to make friends growing up in the Gloom Flats; there weren't many girls Piper's age. The homes were spread so far apart it didn't make sense to have a Cosmic Transporter linking houses. So Piper had always felt an extra-special close connection to her mother.

When her granddad completed his Cycle of Life, Piper and her mom both dreamed that Piper and her older brother moved in with their grandmother on the other side of town. It seemed it was meant to be. Besides, her mom and dad were busy giving meditation workshops throughout Starland. It made sense for Piper and Finn to stay with their grandma. And Piper loved her grandmother's home, a mysterious old house floozels from everything, with a musty attic filled with odds and ends and a basement that echoed with eerie noises in the middle of the night. Piper found it all oddly comforting, even if the kids from school refused to visit. But now she had more classmates living on her floor than there were Starlings in all of Gloom Flats. And at least some of them—the Star Darlings—were waiting for her at the café.



A few starmins later, Piper breezed into the dining area and slid into a seat at the Star Darlings' table. To Piper's way of thinking, their table had the best spot, right by the floor-to-ceiling window overlooking the Crystal Mountains. The others smiled at Piper. But they were too excited about Star Kindness Day to stop chattering and say hello.

Smiling back, Piper placed her order with the Bot-Bot waiter: starcakes with whipped beam. It arrived a starmin or two later, even quicker than usual. Already, the holiday seemed starmendously special.

Sage actually bounced in her chair, her wavy lavender hair flying. "I can't believe I don't have Lighterature today," she said with a giggle. "I stayed up so late writing an essay, 'Long Stardays' Journey into Light.' And I didn't even have to!" She giggled again.

Across the table, Adora nodded and mumbled something about missing Wishful Thinking class. At least Piper thought she said Wishful Thinking. Maybe she was really asking for a dishful of plinking, the delicious striped fruit that bounced like a ball, since the Bot-Bot hovered by her chair. Adora went on to say more, but Piper didn't catch a word.

She'd probably gotten some sparkles in her ear from

showering. She shook her head, and a bit of green glitter fell out. There, that was better. She was about to ask Adora to repeat herself when Clover flung her arms around her shoulders. "Piper!" she exclaimed.

Really, everyone was over the moon about this holiday, Piper thought. She dug a fork into the starcakes, then turned to Leona, who was sitting next to her.

"I'm going to race through the rest of breakfast so I can be closer-than-close to the stage for the ceremony," she was saying. Then she languidly picked up her spoon and slowly dipped it into her bowl of Sparkle-O's.

Piper sighed. Leona was being sarcastic again. She probably thought she didn't deserve compliments. It was sad, really, since before her mission Leona had lived for them. Piper believed the old saying "Don't judge a Starling until you've walked a floozel in her shoes." But she had difficulty understanding Leona's need for attention. Piper preferred to blend into the background if she could, to observe and understand her surroundings.

Tessa took a big swig of juice, then looked at the glass quizzically. "That's odd. It looks like glorange juice, but it tastes just like—"

"Mooncheese," said Piper.

"No, moonberries," said Tessa.

On the other side of the table, Scarlet stood up.

“Wish I could stay and compare moonberries and glorange juice.” She gave an exaggerated yawn. “But I have to get to the quad early for the ceremony.” She pulled a drumstick from her back pocket and flipped it in the air. Then she shot a look at Leona. “I’m the opening act.”

“What?” Leona called after her, but Scarlet was already skipping away.

All around them now, Starlings were scraping back their chairs and starting to leave. The cafeteria took on a charged atmosphere.

“Let’s all go,” Piper said.

Immediately, the Star Darlings jumped up to join the stream of students heading for the ceremony. Most walked in pairs, linking arms in the Starling way. Soon the grassy star-shaped quad was filled with students looking around expectantly.

Star Kindness Day was here at last!