

TUESDAY 14TH SEPTEMBER

2:24pm Home

I've only got a few days of **F R E E D O M** before it's back to English and History and MATHS, *eurgh!* I'm not meeting Ash for ages, so I'm going to explore Little Spellshire. From what I saw when we drove through town the other day, it's nothing like where we used to live. I asked Dad if I could go on my own and he said of course I could because, if I was ever going to turn out to be a scientist, the more exploring I did the better. I was pretty sure I'd need to be better at actual science to be a scientist, but I didn't argue with him. NO IDEA what I want to 'turn out to be' but exploring is one of my MOST favourite things to do.

3:44pm Taffy Tallywick's Teashop

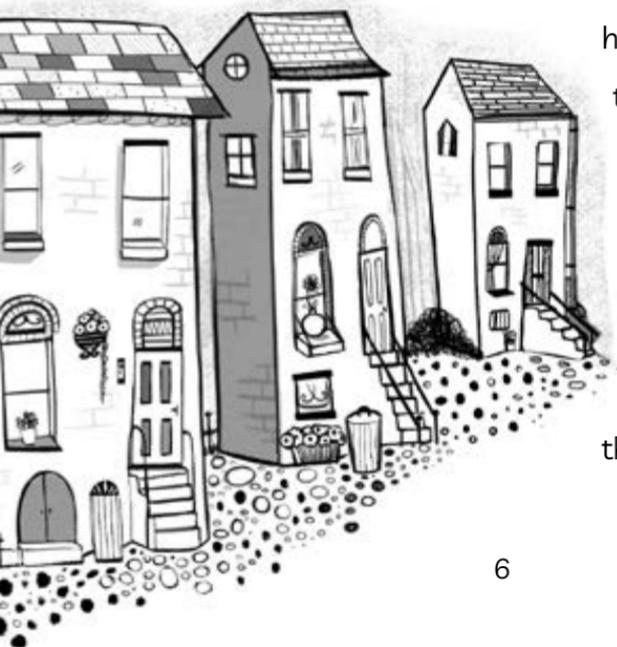
On the upside, I'm sitting writing this in a cosy teashop next to a fire with a little black kitten curled up on my lap. On the downside, unless this storm passes soon, I'm going to be seriously late meeting Ash.

I think it might have been a weeny bit of an understatement when I said Little Spellshire was nothing like where I used to live – it is very, EXCEEDINGLY, UNRECOGNIZABLY different.

For a start, it's **TINY!** Our house is at one end of Piggoty Lane and backs on to the path to the forest (that's my next place to explore), but at the other

end – past lots of ordinary little

houses like ours – the lane comes out on to a funny-shaped green all dotted with trees and pretty weeds called the Common – or



maybe the *UnCommon* depending on which sign you believe. There are hardly any people around and only a few cars (mostly orange and bubble-shaped for some strange reason), but there are gazillions of CATS – they're everywhere, curled round street lamps, chilling on postboxes and sleeping on the steps of the library.



All around are thatched cottages and wiggly old shops. The shops are NOT what I was hoping for. Most of them are ordinary, if a bit old-fashioned – like the greengrocer’s with its barrels of turnips and red apples outside and a butcher’s with gross dead things hanging in the window. But a few are more ... *peculiar*,

like MR RIGGLE’S EMPORIUM, which has a sign in its cloudy glass window saying *GET YOUR FRESH CUCKOO SPIT HERE!*

I didn’t go into Old Bertie’s Bookshop

because the old man peering at me from his perch on top of a teetering tower of cobwebby leather books scared me off and I obviously didn’t go into the pub either (it’s called *The Moon & Broomstick* and it’s so covered in ivy that it looks like it’s growing out of the ground).

Except for New Street, which is as straight as a ruler and lined mostly with modern houses, all the roads running off the UnCommon are twisty with more wonky old buildings. The **Academy** is at the



end of New Street so I saved that one for later and checked out the High Street. **Spellshire's Sensible Store** sells boring stuff like beans and bacon and bin bags, and there's a chemist's with a sign saying *REGULAR PRESCRIPTIONS ONLY* and a neat display of nit treatments. But my favourite was **Rhubarb & Custard** because, as well as selling newspapers, it has

SWEETS – a whole wall of them in big, old-fashioned, labelled jars.



And I might have found a pet shop too. I could see a couple of owls sitting on a branch suspended from the ceiling and a handful of frogs hopping over the counter, but just as I was rattling the handle to see if it was open, the sky went black, there was a peal of thunder so loud several startled cats fell out of trees and it started to POUR with rain.

*Like jelly beans but much FIZZIER.

**Like marshmallows but much FLUFFIER.

“Quick! In here!” The door of the only tearoom on the street flew open and an arm reached out and pulled me inside. “You’ll get soaked!”

Too late – I was already DRENCHED

– but the arm belonged to Taffy and her tearoom turned out to be a very nice place to shelter.

Especially when she brought me a hot chocolate and a big slice of millionaire’s shortbread *for free*. She was very smiley and didn’t do that *tut* thing because

I wasn’t grown up *and* she let me hang my coat and socks by the fireplace to dry out.

I’ve eaten all the shortbread, the kitten is purring and my socks are nearly dry, but it’s still TIPPING it down.

4:13pm

Good news – it’s finally stopped storming and, if I run fast, Ash might still be waiting at the **Academy**.



5:41pm Home

Just back from checking out MY NEW SCHOOL!

Unlike anything else I've seen in this place, the Academy is mega-modern, with lots of glass and steel and upbeat quotes about excellence stuck everywhere:

Believe To Achieve
In It For The Win

We Love League Tables, etc. etc. etc.

There are all-weather sports pitches that look AMAZING too! It's not as big as the secondary school I'd have gone to if we hadn't moved, but it's still sort of scary, especially because term's already started.

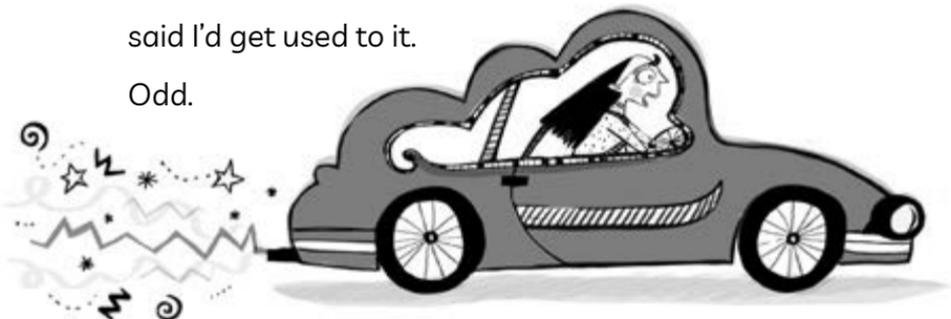


I told Ash I was nervous and he said he'd introduce me to all his friends. "You'll like it! It's just an ordinary school," he said, as if that was something to be very proud of.

I wanted to go and see the *other* school – the one called the School of Extraordinary Arts that I'd heard Mrs Namdar talking about – but Ash said we didn't have time because it's in the forest and it was getting late. It's true that the forest is very DARK and DEEP and TANGLY, but it's literally at the end of our gardens and it's not that late. I don't think that was Ash's only reason for not giving me a tour. He says the Academy is the only 'proper' school here and that I should forget about the other one. I don't know what he meant by that – maybe the schools have an epic rivalry like Arsenal and Spurs.

On the way home, I saw two more orange bubble cars with what looked like bright purple sparks coming out of their exhausts. Ash just shrugged and said I'd get used to it.

Odd.



7:32pm

Dad said Ash could stay for tea, but Ash had to go home and do his homework. It was probably for the best because tonight's menu was burnt



sausages with a side of custard creams. Dad might know everything there is to know about



thunder-snow, but he is a *disaster* in the kitchen.

Must add 'Learn to cook' to my list of **Things I Will ACHIEVE This Year Now I Have No Friends Only One Friend.**