

Sarah Mars

Lola Starryblossom

Believe in yourself!



Silbermund®

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Illustrations by Aicke-Wulf Linsner

Her heart was pounding like mad. She didn't hear a sound; that's how focused she was. It looked like the sun was winking at her through the trees. The light, captured in the morning dew that was clinging to the blades of grass, made the meadow twinkle. The wind lifted the tufts of her feathers ever so slightly, and she knew the moment had finally come to do something grand. This would be the day she would break her all-time record.

Viola slowly drew in a breath, gathered all the strength and joy she had inside and began to bob. The spring board was bending more and more and more with each bounce. Higher and higher she flew, stiff as a board, not even having to use her wings.

On the last bounce, as she stood still in mid-air, she knew she had gone as high as she could. Tilting her head slightly, she let herself fall, light as a feather, down, down, down. The blades of grass were getting nearer and nearer and she still hadn't even once flapped her wings. The ground was dangerously close when, at the very last moment, she spread her wings as far as she could, and, just a hair above the ground as her wing tips tickled the blades of grass, she started into a loop the loop, arching up elegantly and daringly. Suddenly Viola felt a stinging pain in her head and crashed. She had lost all control and landed quite roughly in the honeysuckle bushes of the garden islands.

She was still completely dazed, when she heard a voice say: "Are you ok? Here. Let me help you up."

Viola squinted and saw a tiny little blue bird that looked a lot like she did. She didn't say a word as he helped her to stand upright again.

"Cat got your tongue" he asked mischievously. "Well, maybe you just can't talk, but you are very daring, I have to say," he noted, rubbing his own head. "What happened?" asked Viola.

"Well, you collided with me, apparently," he answered with a playful grin on his face. "I'm just glad that nothing worse happened to me than bumping into you. How are you?" he asked again.

"I'm Viola and I'm fine. Nothing's broken, as far as I can tell," she said a bit icily. Once she really looked at him though, she instantly felt herself become lost in his eyes.



Time seemed to stand still. Such a feeling was completely new to her. She got all warm and fuzzy inside and her heart began to flutter. He didn't say anything either; the moment was frozen in time, when popped up a bright, friendly voice, broke the silence: "Hey you two! Are you ok? That was an almighty crash!" she said cheerfully.

Viola looked up sheepishly and then answered chirpily: "Good morning, Lola. I'm ... err, we're fine. I was caught up in the moment I suppose. You know how I love to surf on the wind."

"And who is your silent little friend there," Lola inquired with a wink and a nod. "That's ... hey, I don't even know your name," she said looking at him quizzically.

The little bird just stood there with his beak wide open. He didn't say a word, until Viola poked him. "Oh, sorry. My name is Nine and no answers, just a question" he said and paused a bit. "Who are YOU? Are you perhaps a fairy? Those wings, that look ... you look just like the fairies my grandmother always told me about. I've heard so much about fairies, but since I'd never seen one myself, I always thought they were just made up. Grownups are always making things up to keep us amused, or even to teach us some lessons. Am I right?" he asked.





Viola looked a little bit embarrassed and flew up to perch on Julia's shoulder. "Oh, I am curious now," beamed Lola, patting Nine on the back.

"Well, since Emma had done such good work in letting me know the most important details," Julia explained, "it was easy to find the perfect name for you. The name begins with a 'V', comes from Latin and can be traced back to the word 'vincere'. Vincere means 'to triumph'. This can be changed into a powerful name, Vincent, which means 'the Triumphant One'. I think a name like that would give such a small bird like you even more power. What do you think?" Julia asked the little Blue Tit.

Nine was spellbound by her voice; he concentrated on Julia, puffed up his chest and, with his eyes shining brightly, answered her confidently: "Yes! I like it!"

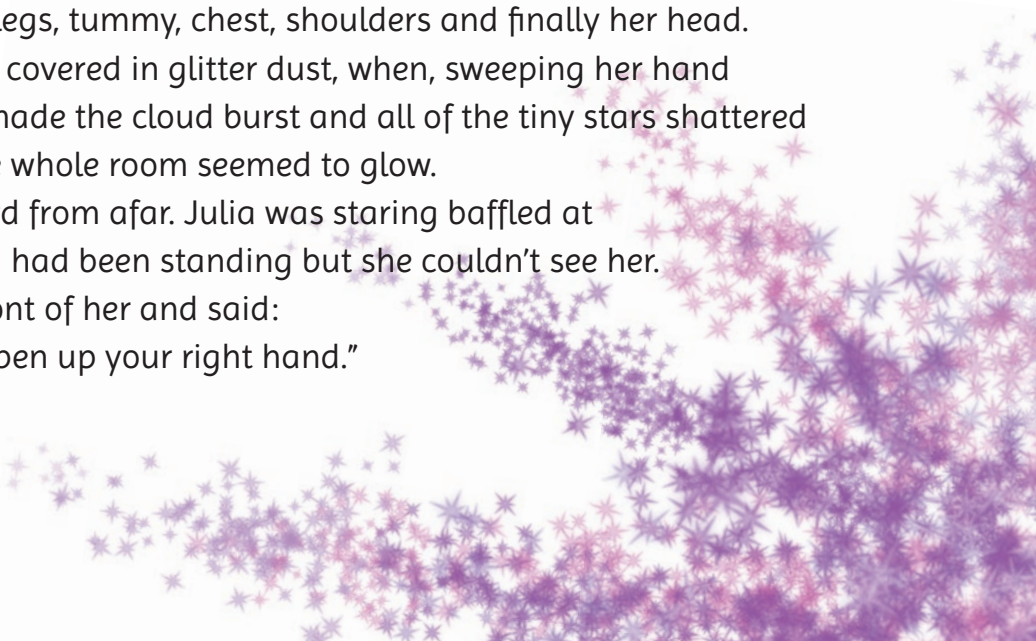
Viola smiled and cheekily chirped: "Well then, off we go to seek our triumph!"

Everything about the day just seemed to feel different to Emma. The tea tasted better, the roll tasted fresher, and the morning sun shined brighter. It seemed to say, "Good luck on your journey". Even though Emma would never have admitted it, she was a little bit anxious, because she had never spent the night away from her parents. But she knew if she said anything about her fears, her Mum would have been even more uncertain about her own decision. So she mustered up all her courage and tried to think about all the wonderful things Lola had told her about the fairy kingdom. Emma's curiosity was greater than her doubts, and soon it all felt right.

Suddenly Emma sprang out of her chair because she saw that Lola had just flown by the dining room window. Julia got a funny feeling in the pit of her stomach as she saw Emma standing there in the dining room with her rucksack. "Good morning, Julia," said Lola happily, "I'm going to wipe that worried look off your face in no time and replace it with confidence, believe you me!" In that moment, Viola flew in through the window, or rather she floated in. Viola landed on Emma's hand; the little girl gave her a kiss on the head and asked: "Are you all right Viola?"

"I'm just splendid. Vincent is coming by soon to pick me up. We're going on a picnic at the big oak tree near the river," beamed Viola. They all looked at each other knowingly: Viola was in love, from the top of her head to the tips of her wings.

Lola pointed at Emma and Viola and, turning to Julia, asked: "Isn't it sweet to see that tiny little bird perched on Emma's hand?" Julia nodded, with a questioning look on her face as Viola flew over and landed on Julia's shoulder. Lola rose in the air, twirled around a few times as the purple cloud of glitter got bigger and bigger. In a flash, she zoomed down to circle around Emma's feet, then her legs, tummy, chest, shoulders and finally her head. Emma was completely covered in glitter dust, when, sweeping her hand above her head, Lola made the cloud burst and all of the tiny stars shattered into nanoparticles. The whole room seemed to glow. A sneeze could be heard from afar. Julia was staring baffled at the place where Emma had been standing but she couldn't see her. Lola was floating in front of her and said: "Close your eyes and open up your right hand."





In a heartbeat, Julia opened her eyes to see her teeny-weeny daughter standing on her hand, she was just as tiny as Lola and cute as can be. Julia gave her a peck on the cheek and said: "Now it all makes sense and if Lola can make this happen to you, then she definitely is able to protect you. You look so sweet, Emma. How do you feel?"

Emma grinned and called out: "Great!" "She'll be able to fly on her own once we get to the fairy kingdom, but while we're here I'll have to hold her hand. I'm going to make us invisible now so that we can get to the gateway without being seen," Lola explained as Stefan walked in with Makita. Stefan was astonished when he saw Emma standing on Julia's hand. "That's incredible! How tiny you are! Now just don't stay like that," he joked. "It's time. Emma, say your goodbyes, we have to go," Lola insisted so that everyone wouldn't end up in tears. Emma's parents hugged their tiny girl as best they could.

Lola took Emma's hand, snapped her fingers and, poof! they disappeared.



"It's all right, stand still," she heard Lola saying to her. Now Emma could feel the hot air moving from her neck down the length of her body.

"What's going on?" she asked in an uneasy voice. "It's almost finished," said Lola. Emma grew more and more tense. She instinctively stretched her arms out in front of her as if to defend herself, when she suddenly felt something furry on the back of her hand. She jumped back with a shriek: "What is that?"



Magnus lay down shortly thereafter. Emma touched him for the first time. His fur was so soft and cuddly. They climbed up his paws, holding on to his fur so they wouldn't slip. Emma hoped she wasn't hurting him. The higher she climbed, the nicer it was. Magnus suddenly began to purr. Emma became misty-eyed at the warm sensation deep down inside. "Once our lynxes start purring, we know everything is going to be all right," beamed Lola.

When they reached Magnus' back, Emma lay down on her stomach and snuggled into his soft fur. "That is the most wonderful thing I've ever done," she delightfully exclaimed. Lola was watching her, amused and said: "We have to keep going. There's so much we'll want to see. I'll have to blindfold you again quickly."

That was no sooner said than done, when Emma felt like she had started floating. They then took a few more steps and seemed to be walking on clouds. Lola snapped her fingers once again, and Emma, regaining sight, could not believe her eyes.

They were standing on a rocky ridge, looking over a brightly shining landscape of hills, rivers, lakes, waterfalls and rainbows; countless shades of green infused with bursts of colour unlike anything seen before. It all looked peacefully beautiful and yet unreal. A pleasant smell wafted to her nose and seemed to seep into every cell of her body. It smelled of sun, water, fresh grass and sweet-smelling blossoms. "Can you really smell the sun?" Emma whispered to herself.

Lola rose a bit above Emma, then waved her hands to enclose Emma in a cloud of glitter making her sneeze.

"Let's fly," said Lola, moving away. "I'd like to introduce you to a few of the fairies. I'll show you our fairy school, because even we fairies, big and small, have things to learn." Lola took flight.

"Wait for me!" Emma cried. "You know I can't fly!"

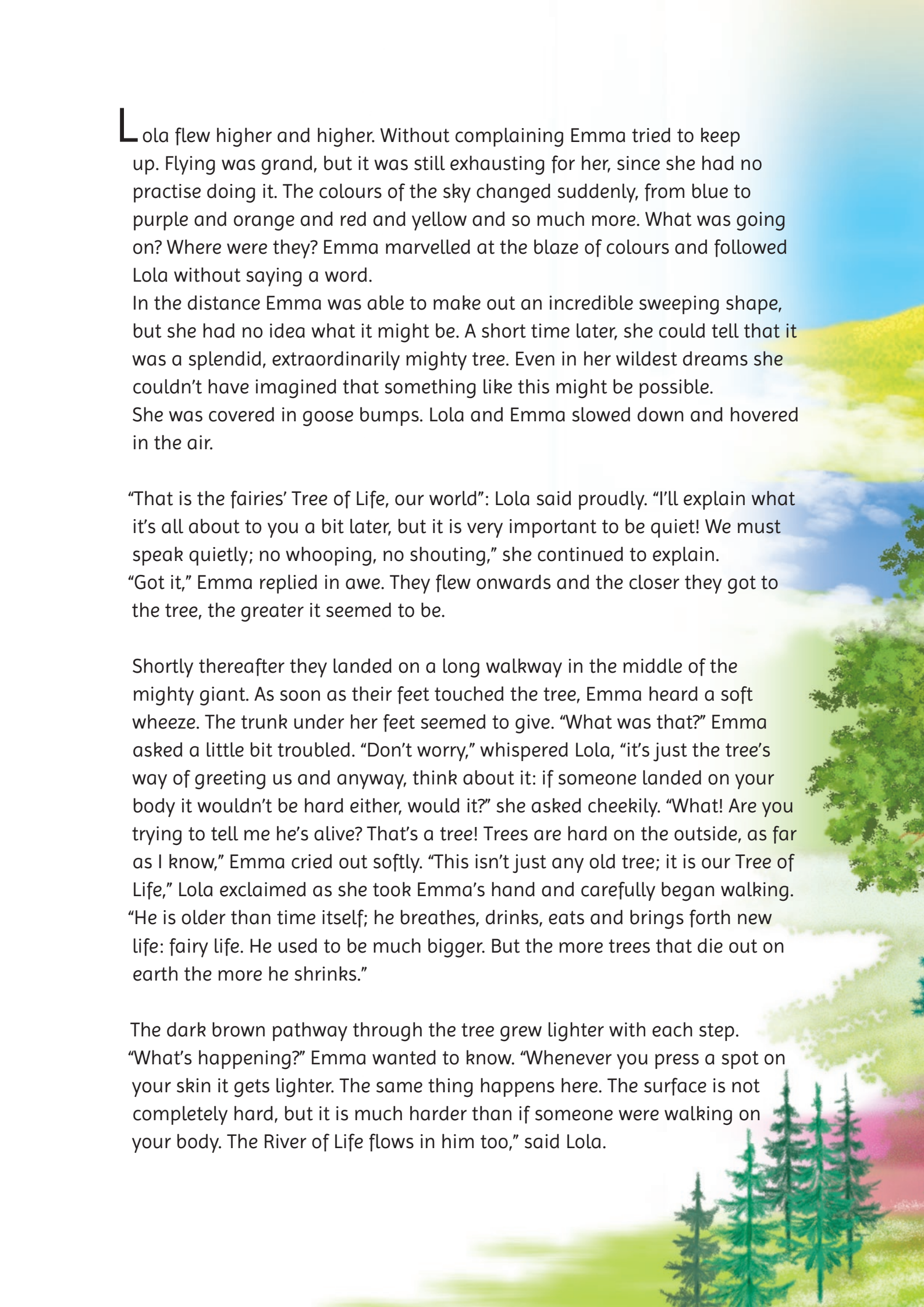
"But you can! Just concentrate and let's go! Believe in yourself," Lola called from high above her. "Fly like a bird," Emma thought to herself. "I can do this!" She closed her eyes, believed with her whole heart, raised both arms and ... flew!





High above, in the treetops there was a small platform with lots of blankets and cushions that looked like a meadow full of flowers. There were small blocks of wood that were used as tables. As soon as she sat down on one of the blossomy cushions, two fairies appeared from out of nowhere with tasty treats to eat and drink: fruits, vegetarian sandwiches, and colourful pralines that weren't made of chocolates, but instead had a tingly, refreshing fruit flavour. Emma felt like she was in paradise and strong as a tiger! Lola was enjoying Emma's expressions and was entertained by her appetite.

After they finished, Lola clapped her hands and took off into the air. Emma followed, curious as to what would happen next.



Lola flew higher and higher. Without complaining Emma tried to keep up. Flying was grand, but it was still exhausting for her, since she had no practise doing it. The colours of the sky changed suddenly, from blue to purple and orange and red and yellow and so much more. What was going on? Where were they? Emma marvelled at the blaze of colours and followed Lola without saying a word.

In the distance Emma was able to make out an incredible sweeping shape, but she had no idea what it might be. A short time later, she could tell that it was a splendid, extraordinarily mighty tree. Even in her wildest dreams she couldn't have imagined that something like this might be possible.

She was covered in goose bumps. Lola and Emma slowed down and hovered in the air.

"That is the fairies' Tree of Life, our world": Lola said proudly. "I'll explain what it's all about to you a bit later, but it is very important to be quiet! We must speak quietly; no whooping, no shouting," she continued to explain.

"Got it," Emma replied in awe. They flew onwards and the closer they got to the tree, the greater it seemed to be.

Shortly thereafter they landed on a long walkway in the middle of the mighty giant. As soon as their feet touched the tree, Emma heard a soft wheeze. The trunk under her feet seemed to give. "What was that?" Emma asked a little bit troubled. "Don't worry," whispered Lola, "it's just the tree's way of greeting us and anyway, think about it: if someone landed on your body it wouldn't be hard either, would it?" she asked cheekily. "What! Are you trying to tell me he's alive? That's a tree! Trees are hard on the outside, as far as I know," Emma cried out softly. "This isn't just any old tree; it is our Tree of Life," Lola exclaimed as she took Emma's hand and carefully began walking. "He is older than time itself; he breathes, drinks, eats and brings forth new life: fairy life. He used to be much bigger. But the more trees that die out on earth the more he shrinks."

The dark brown pathway through the tree grew lighter with each step.

"What's happening?" Emma wanted to know. "Whenever you press a spot on your skin it gets lighter. The same thing happens here. The surface is not completely hard, but it is much harder than if someone were walking on your body. The River of Life flows in him too," said Lola.



They tiptoed out of the hollow of the Tree of Life and found themselves on a raised platform outside. All at once Emma ran up to the trunk of the tree and hugged it. "Thank you so much, dear Tree," Emma whispered feeling as if she were a part of its being. Lola smiled gently, took Emma's hand knowingly and once they reached the edge of the platform, the two of them rose into the air. "What about the fairy pupils? Didn't we want to go and visit them?" asked Emma as they flew away from the tree. "We'll be back," Lola answered with a twinkle in her eye.

Emma saw a great lake in the distance as they were approaching. She looked at Lola but the fairy kept a straight face. Both landed on a colourful dock that had been painted to look like a real field of flowers. They walked to the end of the dock.

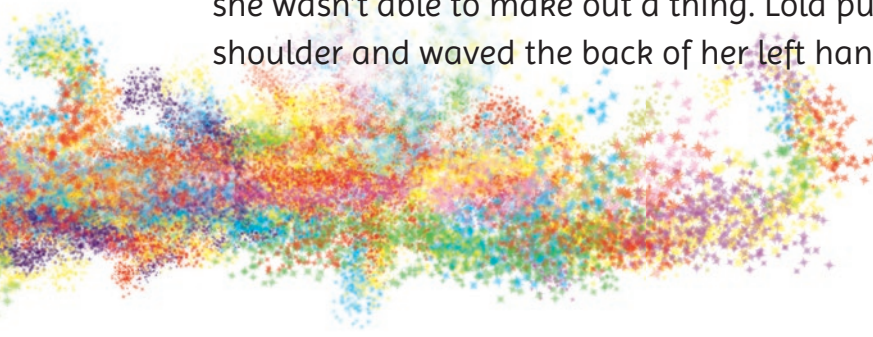
Emma saw a four-sided glass box poking a few inches out of the water and asked: "What is that, Lola? It looks like a floating aquarium."

Lola smiled impishly and said: "Then I guess you'll be feeling like a fish in an aquarium soon." "What?" Emma called out, startled. "Just calm down, my dear," Lola reassured her. "Oh no," Emma wailed, "but YOU don't know how afraid I am of water especially if I can't see the bottom! I'm not going in there," she whimpered and took a few steps back.

"Sometimes you have to overcome things in life and to do this you have to believe in yourself. There are ups and downs, fears and problems that we all have to deal with. The stronger you are on the inside, the easier it will be to handle everything. You are allowed to be afraid. The challenging part is getting past the fear. I have seen so many of our two-legged friends who have missed out on the best things in life because they were too afraid to try. If you can overcome your fear, you can draw strength from it.

It's always good to be careful; taking too many risks isn't always a good thing. But in this case, learning to swim without being afraid of the water can save your life. Believe in yourself, whatever you do! Do you hear me? That is one of the most essential things in life. Because if you don't, who will?" Lola implored.

Emma thought about what Lola had said as she stared at the aquarium. She slowly took a few steps forward to see if she could see the bottom, but she wasn't able to make out a thing. Lola put her right hand on Emma's left shoulder and waved the back of her left hand over the surface of the water.





“Where are we?” Emma asked. Instead of answering her, Lola took Emma’s hand and glided up the centre of the tree.

Once they reached the top, she dashed to the left, then climbed a bit higher, just high enough that they could see the cars on the roads that led around the park.

Emma spied a red double-decker bus and giggled: “We’re in London!” “Yes,” answered Lola, proud of having pulled off her surprise so well. “And the park we are in is called Hyde Park, home to some of the oldest trees in the city.”

“How did that happen?” Emma wanted to know. Lola turned back with Emma and as the two of them sat down on the branch, Lola said: “We use our gateways to travel all over the world. There’s only one fairy language, so we never have trouble understanding each other. The fairies who live in a certain country, or even those who have been reincarnated, can speak the language of the country they are living in as well, so we can understand the our two-legged friends. We help each other out and make sure that each of us is there for the others. There is no fierce competition for certain positions; we all just simply get along. For instance, if I wanted to move to London, there wouldn’t be any problems, because there are enough fairies here who would like to see other countries as well. And, if we’re honest, you can never have enough helping hands around. We all have different skills and talents. And we’re curious and want to learn new things. That’s why things are constantly changing as we refine our skills. So now let’s set down the safety rules for you while we are here. Tree gateways may only be opened by fairies. No unauthorized persons may see how that works. I trust you always to close your eyes whenever I ask you to.

Another thing that is important for you to know is that whenever we are in your world, you will not be able to fly by yourself.

It’s only the glitter dust, and my humble self, that can get you from A to B. That is why you must never let go of my hand. We’ll be flying fast, but since I’ve got you with me, we won’t be able to fly fast enough so as not to be seen. Which is why we must fly in stealth mode, practically invisible.

When they returned to the gateway, Emma closed her eyes. Inside the trunk of the mighty tree, the procedure was still the same; it just happened in a different place. Emma was curious where they would be going next.





Sarah Mars

lives and works in Austria, most of the time.

She worked as a journalist for newspapers, radio and television. Sarah is a proud mother, telling fantastic stories to her daughter every evening since the little girl was two. There are still many more heroes to be discovered.



Aicke-Wulf Linsner

lives and works in Germany.

The happy father of four daughters studied architecture before dedicating himself to graphic design. Along with comics, and commissioned work for advertising clients, he has created wondrously fascinating illustrations for children.



Lola Starryblossom has got her work cut out for her, for many things are changing and tests of courage are in the air.

The mystery surrounding Viola's parents is waiting to be solved. Julia and Stefan make a big decision. Will Emma be able to overcome her greatest fear? Will she believe in herself?

Lola and Emma are off on an extraordinary adventure with unexpected surprises that help them find the answers to all of these questions.

