



EARTH FRIENDS

GREEN GARDEN

HOLLY WEBB

nosy
crow

Poppy smirked. “I think they do. And we’re going to make sure they remember her every day...”

When she got home from after-school club, Poppy sat down at the kitchen table with a pad and her favourite pencils, so she could tell her mum and dad about the filming and what Lily had said about her design.

“They said we could put a mural in as well,” Poppy explained. “We’ve got big walls all round the garden, so we can paint all of them! It’s a huge job,” she said happily.

“Is that what you’re drawing now?” her dad asked.

“Mm-hm. I want it to look like the garden goes on for much further than it really does, so I thought the mural could be mostly trees.”

“Nice,” her mum commented. “So it’ll look green even in winter as well.”

Poppy nodded, sketching branches and dabbling a haze of leaves over the top with her favourite watercolour pencils. Then she closed her eyes for a moment, remembering, and began to draw a slim figure in a flowing green dress, half hidden behind the trees. She added swirling brown-gold hair, dark, dark eyes and the high arched eyebrows she remembered from the portrait, and then sat back and smiled at her design. She needed to draw out a few more panels – there was quite a lot of wall – but this was the important one. When she was done, she’d get Dad to let her use the scanner, and then she could email it to Lily, who needed to order the special outdoor paint.

Ali and Elspeth and Lucy weren’t going to forget the Green Lady in a hurry.



Poppy and Izzy sat on either side of the little path that wound past the raised beds, carefully pressing broken china pieces into the cement. It had turned out that even with everyone in the school bringing in battered plates, they didn’t have enough for all the paths – mosaics took a lot more bits than Poppy had realised. But Lily had helpfully suggested making most of the paths in a mosaic of flat-topped pebbles, with just a ribbon of china bits running through them, and Poppy thought she was right. It would have been odd to have just one section of path covered in china pieces, and all the rest different. The really good thing was that the paths gave lots of people something to do. Almost everyone in the school had brought back the letters saying they wanted to help, even though it meant coming to school in the Easter holidays.

Poppy glanced up, looking round the garden. There were at least twenty people working on this path – they had to do it bit by bit or the cement dried before they got the pebbles in properly. And there were another fifteen or so painting the mural. Lily had drawn most of the outlines – Poppy had helped her a bit, but she wasn’t tall enough to reach the tops of the walls without a ladder, which meant it took ages if she tried to do the trees. But she hadn’t minded. She got to draw the more interesting bits at the bottom of the wall – rabbits, and a fantastic badger peering out between two trees that she was really pleased with. And, of course, the Green Lady. Once Lara and

Sophy and a couple of other girls from their class had finished that bit of the trees, Poppy was going to paint her. She was really looking forward to it. And not just because she wanted to see Ali's face when she spotted the ghost.

Poppy had actually wondered whether Ali and the others would bother turning up this weekend, as she was pretty sure gardening wasn't their thing. But of course, they were desperate to be on TV. All three of them were over on the other side of the garden making a path, or rather, chatting and pretending to work until the cameraman happened to look their way.

Poppy went back to pressing the china pieces into the cement, a small smile twisting the side of her mouth – a smile like Sophia's in the picture. It was funny. She'd made up the whole story, and of course there never had been a ghost, but Poppy almost believed in her now too. She was sure that the floaty, shimmery figure behind the trees was going to make the garden even more special. As though the Green Lady was going to watch over the garden. Poppy was sure that once she was painted into the mural, the garden would start to feel real, even though it didn't have any plants in it yet.

"Poppy, what's going here?" Lara called, pointing to the whitish patch where the Green Lady was waiting to be painted. "We're done with all the branches now, I think; there's just this bit left. It's going to be a person, isn't it? Who is she?"

Poppy got up and looked slowly along the wall. It wasn't perfect yet – there needed to be some plants, and the real fruit trees, to make the painted ones fit in. But already she could see that it was going to look brilliant.

"I can't believe you've done all those trees," she said happily to Lara and Sophy and the others. "Even the high bits. It looks amazing." Poppy ran her fingers over the Green Lady's bare face. "She's – she's like the spirit of the garden," she explained slowly. "I had a dream about her..." She glanced round at Lara, hoping that she didn't sound like a total fruit bat. She supposed most of the people in her class thought she was a bit mad anyway...

But Sophy only smiled, and traced a finger down the outlines of the green dress. It was as though she understood the magic of the green girl too.

"Nice." Lara nodded. Then she looked hopefully at Poppy. "Poppy, you know we're going to do trees all round the garden? There's loads and loads of them. I don't mind painting them all, it's fun, but, well, can we add just one thing?"

Poppy blinked. "Oh! Did you want a horse in it? I can't draw them, Lara. I would, but they're so difficult. I always get the legs wrong. I'd ask Lily for you, but she's not here today."

"I can draw them!" Sophy said excitedly. "We both can. Horses are the only thing we *can* draw. Just one? A small horse, just a pony really. Peeping out round the trees?"

Poppy hugged her quickly. "Of course you can. You've been painting trees all day. What colour horse?" She giggled, remembering the pink unicorns in her fairy palace drawings. But Lara and Sophy weren't into pretty fantasy horses at all. They immediately went off into a very serious discussion about greys, and chestnuts, and

which would look better in the wood, leaving Poppy to stand in front of the Green Lady, mixing just the right shade of paint.



“Poppy, just watch out for Ali, OK?” Izzy came up behind her and Poppy turned round, staring at her vaguely. She’d been painting the Green Lady for a while now, and she’d almost forgotten about the other people in the garden.

“What?” she murmured.

“Poppy! Wake up! Ali’s seen what you’re doing and she looks like she wants to strangle you right now! She’d probably even do it on camera.”

“Izzy’s right,” Emily muttered as she and Maya hurried over to join them. “She’s plotting something.”

Poppy eyed her painting sadly. “I thought this might keep her off our backs for a while.”

Emily shook her head. “I think the scare’s worn off her. It was a couple of weeks ago, after all.”

“She can only stop being mean for so long,” Maya sighed. “I suppose the painting just reminds her of looking stupid.”

Poppy shrugged. “I don’t care. I love it. And I’m not changing it!” she added fiercely, glaring at the others.

“Calm down! No one said you should!” Emily rolled her eyes.

“It would be awful to change her,” Maya said seriously. “All your paintings are amazing, Poppy, but there’s something special about this one. She’s so ... mysterious.”

“I know.” Poppy stepped back off the wooden edge of the raised bed, where she’d been balancing to paint, and took a few more steps backwards to see the whole wall properly. She shivered, her shoulders twitching with excitement. Maybe it was just because it was so *big* – but the wall looked fantastic.

“Wow, Poppy! That’s really beautiful.” Joe, the producer, came bounding over. “We need to get you standing right there for your piece to camera, I think. It’ll look great.”

“Piece to camera?” Poppy repeated, looking at him worriedly. No one had mentioned anything about that.

“Yes, just a short piece. About your ideas for the garden, how you’re feeling about seeing it built. That sort of thing.” He grinned at her. “That’s all right, isn’t it? You’ll be fine. Let’s get that set up for later on this afternoon, shall we? After lunch?” And he shot off again to organise somebody else.

“I don’t want to do a piece to camera!” Poppy wailed as soon as he was out of earshot. “Nobody said I had to talk about the garden! I just wanted to draw it!”

Maya burst out laughing and Poppy scowled at her. “It isn’t funny!”

“Yes, it is! Everyone else is desperate to get on camera and have a starring part in the TV programme, and you hate it!”

Poppy sighed. “You could pretend to be me...”

“Why don’t you want to?” Maya asked curiously.

“I don’t know. I suppose Mum and Dad would love it. I’m just not very good at explaining stuff I draw.” Poppy shook her head. “I’ll sound stupid.”

“Not as stupid as Cam Morris,” Emily said, shaking her head, and the others stared at her. “Oh, come on! He sounds mad half the time, the way he talks! Really, Poppy, compared to him everyone’s going to think you’re a genius.”

“My dad really likes his programmes,” Izzy said, sounding a bit put out.

“So? He still sounds a total prat when he’s going on and on. Like at Amberlake, when he was chuntering about gardens ‘lifting our lives out of the everyday’. It didn’t even make sense!”

Izzy sniggered. “I suppose so.”

“Exactly.” Emily nodded triumphantly. “Just don’t talk rubbish about how plants speak to your heart, Poppy, and you’ll be fine.”



Poppy stood in front of the painted wall, trying not to look as nervous as she felt. She couldn’t remember *any* of the stuff she was supposed to say.

“Are you all right, Poppy?” Mr Finlay asked her. “You’re a bit pale.”

“Just nervous,” Poppy said apologetically. “I keep forgetting my words. And I wish they’d hurry up. They keep fiddling about with the microphone and it makes me nervous.”

“Sorry!” Joe called. “Bit of a problem with the sound. Give us a minute!”

Mr Finlay smiled. “You’ll be fine, Poppy. Just tell them all the stuff you told me, about the different parts of the garden, and how you wanted it to be a place where everyone could see how amazing the world was, and how we had to look after it.”

Poppy nodded doubtfully. As long as she didn’t sound crazy, like Cam Morris. Mr Finlay hurried off to stop some of the boys throwing soil at each other, and Poppy stuck her hands in her hoodie pockets, trying to think of a way to make her garden sound interesting instead of mad. She wished she could have Izzy and Maya and Emily with her but the production team had shooed everyone out of the way. She was on her own.

“Poppy.”

Poppy glanced round and jumped back, almost falling into the raised bed. Ali was standing next to her, smiling. She looked poisonous.

“What?” Poppy asked, hating the way her voice wobbled.

“I wanted to say I’m sorry.” Ali nodded earnestly. “I shouldn’t have said you cheated. I know you didn’t. Well done. I know your design was the best.”

Poppy stared at her. She didn’t believe a word of it.

“And all the spell stuff – we shouldn’t have done that. And I can see why you thought it would be fun to scare us with your ghost story.” Ali smiled more.

Poppy looked at her nervously. What was all this about?

“So I brought you some chocolate. To say sorry.” Ali was smiling hugely now, showing her perfect little teeth. She stuffed something into Poppy’s pocket, and Poppy

flinched.

“Um. Thanks... I can’t eat it now. The filming – I have to talk.”

Ali’s mouth twisted crossly for a second, and then she was back smiling again. “Oh, sure. Don’t worry. Have it later.” And she slid away again, as quickly as she’d come.

“Ready, Poppy?” Joe called, and Poppy nodded doubtfully, trying to forget the weirdness of Ali and concentrate on what she had to say.

“OK. Now, don’t worry. Remember we can edit this, so if you say something wrong, just pause and then start again. But try to smile!”

Poppy smiled tightly and started to talk, hoping the words she needed would appear somehow. It helped having her Green Lady behind her.

“Hi, I’m Poppy, and I’m from Park Road School in Millford. We’re building a sensory garden, which I designed. It’s a bit like a medieval herb garden – that’s where I got some of my first ideas. But also I wanted it to be a garden that made people remember our planet and how amazing it is, and how we have to look after it...”

Poppy swallowed anxiously. Was that all she was meant to say? Had she missed something out? Nerves fluttered in her tummy as she tried to remember, and she jammed her hands in her hoodie pockets to stop herself twisting them together. She was so panicky that her hands felt itchy.

“I – um – designed a mural, because I wanted the garden to look bigger than it really is,” she added, pulling out one hand to wave at the wall behind her. Then she screamed. The itching wasn’t nerves. There was a massive brown and grey spider sitting on the back of her hand.

Even though Poppy loved the idea of using spider’s webs as a natural dressing for cuts, and she’d designed bug shelters for the garden, she didn’t actually like spiders all that much. And even someone who positively loved spiders would scream if they happened to find a huge one on their hand. She shook it frantically, but the spider clung on.

“Poppy, your pocket!” Izzy yelled, darting round the cameraman and running towards her. “They’re in your pocket!”

Poppy looked down in horror and saw other things climbing out of the pocket of her hoodie: other wriggly, leggy things. She screamed again, scrabbling madly at her zip with the other hand, and still trying to shake the spider off.

“It’s OK, Poppy.” Mr Finlay grabbed the spider – he actually just picked it up, Poppy saw, suddenly realising that he was the best teacher in the history of the world. He hurried away to the other end of the garden with it cupped in his hands.

Izzy was undoing Poppy’s zip, and Maya and Emily wrenched the hoodie off and then hugged her.

“Ali must have put them in my pocket,” Poppy sobbed. “She said it was chocolate.”

“That was Ali?” Mr Finlay snapped. Poppy hadn’t seen him come back. “Ali Morgan, get over here now! And you, Elspeth. And Lucy. All of you.”

“Oh, they’re in big trouble,” Emily said blissfully. “They’re dead.”