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***In the Wings* by Elsbeth Edgar**

Publisher: Walker Books

RRP \$18.99

The challenges of college life, friendships, and personal choices are realistically depicted in this well-written novel for young adults. The author gives an insight into the concerns teenagers face as they move into the adult world and discover that their decisions can affect friends and family.

Ella longs to be in the college play but she suffers from stage fright and settles for being in the backstage crew. She enjoys designing and creating sets, although she secretly learns several of the parts and practices them at home when she is alone.

When one of the cast fails to turn up for rehearsal, the drama teacher calls on Ella to fill in and read the script for The Fairy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Taken by surprise, Ella is word perfect and performs superbly.

To her horror, she is given the part and her nerves kick in. Her anxiety is heightened by the realisation she will be on stage with the good-looking new boy, Sam. Although she isn't impressed by his aloof attitude, his presence makes her nervous. She can't fathom what lies behind his reserve and wonders at his mysterious past.

Ella's home life is also complicated. Her grandfather has recently come to live with the family and his flamboyant behaviour is unsettling - and embarrassing when her friends visit her at home. However, Ella realises she can learn quite a lot from him and he becomes a surprising ally.

The interaction and dialogue between the characters is convincing and reveals the angst young people face on a daily basis. How they react to the difficulties in their lives is also believable. Ella finds her way through a confusing range of emotions, makes mistakes, and develops strengths and self-awareness to help her on her journey to adulthood. An excellent read.

Reviewed by children's author Jean Bennett