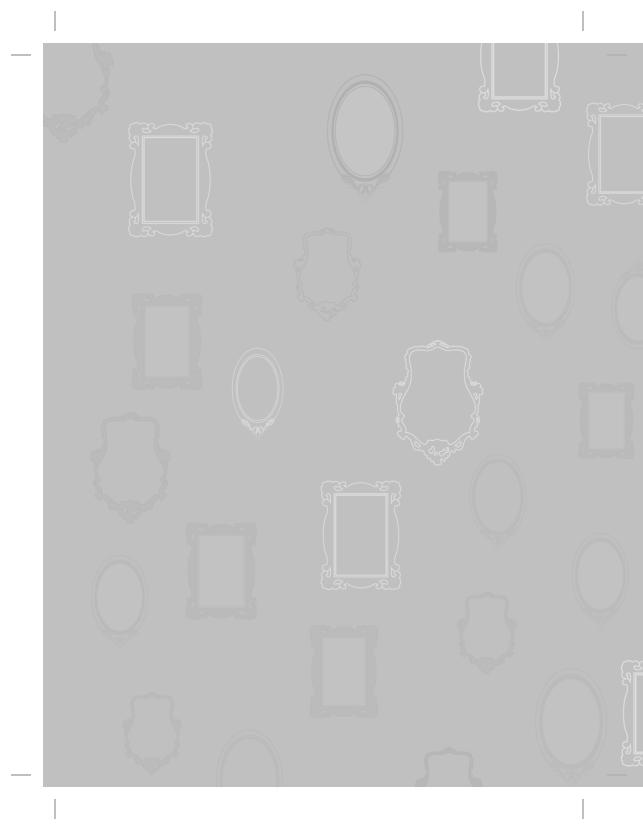
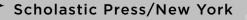
Whatever After DREAM ON





SARAH MLYNOWSKI



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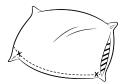
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Printed in the U.S.A. 23 First edition, January 2014 for my magical little family: chloe-bear, anabellers, and papa. you are a dream, come true.

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* chapter one *



There Is No Sleeping at a Sleepover

t's Saturday night and my new best friend, Robin, is sleeping over.

We're in the basement. She's teaching me a dance routine her older sister showed her. Right kick, left kick, arms up, turn! We're practicing in the mirror. We're getting very good.

I am having my very first sleepover since I moved to Smithville.

I have my very first Smithville best friend.

I actually have two Smithville best friends, Robin *and* Frankie. But I'm allowed to invite only one person to sleep over

at a time since I have only one trundle bed. Also, according to Mom, two kids sleeping over is one too many. I'm going to have Frankie over next time.

I'm giddy. Which will make the "going to sleep" part of the sleepover a bit of a problem. But you're not really supposed to sleep at sleepovers, are you? You're supposed to stay up all night and whisper secrets. Also sneak into the kitchen and make s'mores if you have the ingredients, which I do. I bought them at the grocery store on Wednesday to prepare.

Anyway. There will be no sleeping at my sleepover. There will be only fun.

Suddenly, the lights in the basement flicker on and off.

"What is that?" Robin asks, looking around.

"I don't know," I say, getting a queasy feeling in my stomach. I shoot a nervous glance at the mirror. It's an antique, and about twice the size of me. The frame is made of stone and engraved with fairies and wands. Also, it's magic. (More on that in a sec.)

I hear my seven-year-old brother giggling from upstairs.

"Jonah!" I yell. "Stop playing with the lights!!"

The basement goes black.

"Turn that back on this second!" I holler. "Moooooooom! Make him stop!"

The lights flick back on. There's more giggling.

"Sorry my brother is so annoying," I grumble.

Robin shrugs. "No prob. Little brothers are cute."

Only someone *without* a little brother would call little brothers cute.

Robin has a ridiculously COOL older sister named Dalia.

Dalia teaches Robin dance routines, lets her borrow her hoop earrings, and shows her how to apply green eye shadow. Dalia does not flicker the lights to annoy her sister.

"Where were we?" I ask, getting back into position. I catch our reflection in the mirror. Robin's hair is strawberry blonde and super curly. Dalia showed her how to scrunch it with gel. My brown hair is wavy and boring. Our pajamas are another example of the difference between us. Robin's wearing funky black pajama bottoms and a sparkly top (they're hand-me-downs from Dalia). My new pajamas are definitely cute — they have a dog paw-print pattern on them — but they look babyish next to Robin's.

Robin notices I'm staring at our reflection and waves. She's wearing pastel-green nail polish. "There's something odd about the mirror, don't you think?" she asks, touching the mirror's smooth glass.

"What do you mean?" I ask, even though I agree. OF COURSE I agree.

Here's what I can tell you about our mirror:

- A fairy named Maryrose lives inside it.
- When you knock three times on it, the mirror starts to swirl and hiss and turn purple.
- It slurps you up and takes you into a fairy tale.

Calling the mirror odd is a BIG understatement.

Robin wrinkles her nose. "It's like it's watching us. It's a haunted mirror!"

I force out a squeaky laugh, then try to change the subject. "Are you hungry? I'm starving. Let's go upstairs. Do you like s'mores?"

"Of course," she says. "Who doesn't like s'mores? But I just want to call my sister first to say hi." She picks her cell up off the desk.

Robin takes her phone everywhere she goes. It's decorated in yellow sparkles. She has unlimited texting. Only a few of the kids in our class have cells, so it's not like she can text everyone, but she can text some people.

I can't text anyone.

I can't decorate our technology with sparkles.

I can't call anyone.

Well, I can call people on our house line, but I can't call them when I'm on the go. I can't call them from the car. I can't call from school. I can't call from the park.

I have no cell phone.

I wish I had a cell phone.

Frankie doesn't have a cell phone, either, but that doesn't make me feel better. And unlike me she has two younger brothers. TWO! Can you imagine? Two Jonahs? I shudder.

Cell phone or no cell phone, there is NO WAY I'm letting Robin hang out in the basement without me. Too risky with my magic mirror.

"The reception is terrible down here," I lie. "Come upstairs."

Actually, I have NO IDEA if it's a lie or not because I HAVE NO

CELL PHONE. She follows me upstairs and I show her to the living room to make her call. "I'll get started on the s'mores," I say. "Come when you're done."

"Where's Robin?" Mom asks when I reach the kitchen. She's unloading the dishwasher.

"She's making a call. On her cell."

Mom just smiles.

I sit on the kitchen table and swing my legs. "Can I have a cell phone?"

Mom laughs and puts away a stack of plates. "No way."

"But I need one," I explain.

"You don't need one," she says. "You want one."

"I want and need one."

"Why do you need one?"

"To text! To keep in touch! So you know where I am at all times!"

Mom smirks. "I know where you are at all times."

Clearly she doesn't know about the magic mirror in the basement. (Or the way it has swooped me to Floom, Mustard, and Zamel.)

"You'll get one —"

My heart leaps. "I will?"

"Yes. When you're older."

"Why can't I have one now?"

She puts away the coffee mugs. "Because you're too young. It's not necessary now. Be a kid for a bit. You have your whole life to be tethered to technology. You don't need to start in the fifth grade."

When she says the word *tethered* I can't help but imagine the game tetherball. My body is the pole, the string is my arm, and the ball is the cell phone. I would like to be tethered to a phone. As soon as possible. "When *can* I start?"

"We'll talk about it again when you're in middle school."

"Middle school is so far away. Like a hundred years away," I whine.

"Time goes fast," Mom says. "Just enjoy it. Now let's make s'mores."

Time does not go fast *enough*, if you ask me. It goes superduper slow. It feels like I'm going to be a kid forever. I can't wait to be a grown-up. I have it all planned.

After elementary school I'll go to middle school, then high school, then college, then law school. Once I'm done with school, I'm going to be a lawyer and then I'm going to be a judge.

Judges definitely have their own cell phones.

I wonder if they text other judges when they're bored?

The s'mores are delicious. I make some for Jonah even though he asks if I can make his with ketchup. He's obsessed with ketchup. Obviously the answer to that is NO.

He eats them anyway, smacking his lips the whole time.

At nine thirty, Robin and I are in my room with the lights off. Robin is back on her phone. This time her mom called to say good night.

She's on her phone *a lot*. Which is totally understandable. If I had a cell phone, I'd be on it a lot, too.

"Yes, Mom," Robin says. She walks around the room as she chats. "Mom, it's *fine*." Pause. She stands by my dresser and fingers the rectangular jewelry box on my dresser. My *special* jewelry box.

Robin rolls her eyes. "I told her. I promise! Don't worry! Love you! Bye!"

She hangs up and tosses the phone into the orange leather satchel that has all her stuff in it. I know the bag used to be Dalia's.

"Everything okay?" I ask Robin. I really, really hope her mom didn't tell her she has to come home.

"All good," she says, and points to my jewelry box. "I love this."

I flush with pleasure. "Thanks. My nana gave it to me." My grandmother lives in Chicago and I miss her. I haven't seen her in months. I was supposed to visit her last weekend. I was going to fly BY MYSELF. But then there was a huge storm and all the airports were having delays and Mom was afraid I would get stranded somewhere, so I wasn't allowed to go.

Do you know what would make getting stranded in an airport easier? A cell phone.

But anyway. The fact that my nana gave me the jewelry box isn't the only thing that makes it special.

"Who are the people on the box?" Robin asks.

And there you go.

"They're fairy tale characters," I say.

She peers closer. "Oh, yeah, there's Sleeping Beauty sleeping, and Aladdin on a magic carpet. Is that Snow White? Why is she wearing pajamas?"

An excellent question.

Snow White *is* wearing pajamas on the jewelry box. Limegreen pajamas.

Specifically: My lime-green pajamas.

Why is Snow White wearing my lime-green pajamas?

She wasn't always dressed like that. Obviously. But Jonah and I changed the ending of Snow White's story when the mirror in our basement sucked us into her world.

All the fairy tale characters and their new endings appear on my jewelry box. And *only* on my jewelry box. Last week I flipped through the copy of *Fairy Tales* that we have in my school library — I mean media room, sorry — and the endings were the same as the originals.

But my jewelry box has the new endings.

I don't tell Robin about this, though. Jonah and I are not supposed to tell anyone.

Even though I really, really want to.

"I don't know why Snow White is wearing pajamas," I fib. "It's silly, I guess."

Then I yawn. I don't mean to. I want to stay up all night and keep talking.

Then Robin yawns. Which is not surprising because yawns are contagious.

She crawls into the trundle bed.

"Why don't we just close our eyes for a sec?" I ask. "Then we'll keep talking."

"Okay," Robin says. "Just for a sec."

We'll take a quick nap. And then we'll have fun. So much fun. And more s'mores — I close my eyes — but not s'mores with ketchup.

* chapter two *



Wide Awake

'm woken up by a loud creak.

I jump up in bed.

I twist to look at my alarm clock—it's eleven fifty-five at night. Crumbs. We weren't supposed to sleep for that long. We were just supposed to take a catnap!

I hear another creak. I look over at the trundle bed to see if Robin is still sleeping.

The trundle is bed is empty.

Huh?

Where is she?

I didn't imagine the sleepover, did I? Was it a dream? Was Robin really here?

I spot her orange leather bag on the floor.

Nope, she definitely was here and still is. But where?

Maybe she's hiding somewhere under the blankets? Jonah always used to hide under blankets during games of hide-and-seek. I jump out of my bed and toss her covers onto the floor.

Nope. No Robin.

Hmm.

Oh! My door is wide open. I definitely closed it before we went to sleep. Robin must be in the bathroom. I'm sure she'll be back any minute.

I'll just wait.

I sit on the edge of my bed.

I twiddle my thumbs.

And wait.

Still waiting.

She is taking an awful long time in the bathroom. I should make sure she's okay. I tiptoe out into the hall. The bathroom door is open and the light is off. She is not in the bathroom.

"Robin?" I whisper.

There's no answer.

"Robin!" I whisper again, although this time it's a little louder and not really a whisper.

Jonah's door flies opens. "Did you call me?" He's wearing Superman pajamas and holding some sort of electronic game in his hand.

"No," I tell him. "What are you doing up?"

"I was playing Karate Crocs. It's a new game about crocodiles that do karate." *CREAK*. "Did you hear that?" Jonah asks me, looking down the stairs. "That came from the basement."

It *did* sound like it came from the basement.

"I can't find Robin," I tell him. Could Robin be in the basement?

CREAK. That also came from the basement.

Why would Robin be in the basement? She wouldn't be! She's not in the basement! Then why am I starting to panic?

"I think she's in the basement," Jonah says.

Great.

I carefully climb down the two flights of stairs with Jonah close behind me.

When I open the basement door I hear another creak.

"Robin?" I call out. "Are you there?"

I hurry down the steps and spot her right away. She's walking around the room in her pajamas with a glazed expression on her face.

"Robin, is everything okay?" I ask. "What are you doing? Did you forget something down here?"

She doesn't answer. She just continues walking in a circle.

"Is she sleepwalking?" I wonder out loud.

Jonah rubs his eyes with the back of his hand. "Don't sleepwalkers keep their arms out? Like zombies? Maybe she's a zombie."

"Robin is not a zombie," I say. Though she does look a bit like a zombie.

"Maybe she turns into a zombie only at night," Jonah says. "And that's why you never knew."

"She does *not* turn into a zombie at night!" I insist. Still, shivers spread from my back to my fingers. "Robin, you're creeping us out! Talk to me!"

Instead of answering, Robin bumps right into the mirror.

The magic mirror.

I hear a low hissing sound. Ssssssssss.

Oh no oh no oh no. The mirror is waking up.

Robin takes a step back.

I reach for her even though she's freaking me out. But it's too late.

She bumps into the mirror again.

My whole body tenses as a warm purple light radiates from the mirror. If Robin hits the mirror one more time, it is going to suck her up and take her into a fairy tale. I CANNOT let that happen. I have to stop it!

"Maryrose, are you there?" I cry. "Are you listening? Please don't take my new best friend! STOP, ROBIN, STOP!"

I reach out to grab on to her again, but she steps forward and out of my grasp. It's too late.

Robin bumps into the mirror a third time.

First her reflection starts to swirl like it's been caught in a washing machine.

No, no, no!

Then the mirror turns into a vacuum, pulling Robin toward it. Finally, I manage to get a grip on her wrist.

"No! Don't go!" I shout. I feel like I can't breathe.

Jonah is holding on to the banister. I grab on to him with one hand, and on to Robin's wrist with the other. But it's like I'm playing tug-of-war and losing. Robin's right foot disappears inside the mirror first. Then her whole leg. Then half her face disappears inside.

It's too hard to hold on! I let go of her wrist, and the rest of Robin gets slurped by the mirror.

Getting my best friend swallowed into a fairy tale was so NOT part of my sleepover plan.

"Come on," I urge Jonah. "We have to go, too. We can't leave her alone in there. She's not even awake!"

Not that we have a choice. The mirror is already tugging us by our socks.

Speaking of socks, Jonah's have holes in them. I can see both his big toes. Why hasn't he thrown those out?

"Awesome! Let's go!" my brother calls out. His eyes are lit up with excitement. Unlike me, Jonah is always up for an adventure. But normally I'm excited about going into the mirror, too. I want to see more of the stories come to life. I want to find out the truth about Maryrose. Just not TONIGHT. It's sleepover night! Robin will never be allowed to come over again if she's poisoned by a witch or turned into a mouse while she's visiting my house.

"Where do you think we're gonna go?" Jonah asks. "Jack and the Beanstalk?"

"Why do you always think we're going to Jack and the Beanstalk?"

"Don't you want to meet a giant?" he asks, and lets go of the banister.

Before I can tell him that no, I do not, the mirror gives us a massive tug and we both get sucked inside.