

Whatever After
BEAUTY QUEEN



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#2: If the Shoe Fits

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#4: Dream On

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#7: Beauty Queen

#8: Once Upon a Frog



Whatever After
BEAUTY QUEEN

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Summary: Abby's first problem is that Jonah has lost all his memories of the magic
mirror and their adventures, so when they get sucked through into Beauty and the
Beast, he is unaware of the danger, and picks one of the Beast's roses—her second
problem is locating Beauty and performing a match-making miracle in order to recover
her brother, and still make it back to the real world before their parents miss them.

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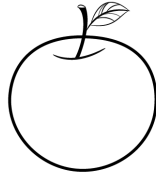
for

penny fransblow,
queen of librarians

and

gabriella dylan friedman,
princess and future reader

* chapter one *



Come Back, Memories, Come Back!

put on your sneakers.”

My brother, Jonah, hides under his covers. “Not again, Abby. It’s already midnight!”

“Yes, again,” I say. “And it’s not midnight yet. We still have three minutes.”

“But I don’t want to sneak into the basement again! I want to go back to sleep!”

“Do you remember anything about our magic mirror yet?” I ask, looming over his bed.

“No,” he says, his voice muffled. “Nothing.”

“Then you can’t go back to sleep. Let’s go, let’s go!”

Here's the thing.

We have a magic mirror in our basement.

And, at midnight, when we knock on it three times, the magic mirror sucks us inside and takes us into a fairy tale. Really. Well, first it turns purple, then it starts to hiss and swirl, and then it sucks us into a fairy tale.

The issue right now is that my brother doesn't believe that the mirror in the basement is magical. Which makes no sense because he has been through the magic mirror with me SIX times already. But the last time we went through, the fairy who lives inside the mirror — her name is Maryrose — hypnotized Jonah by accident.

He remembers everything else about his life — his name, my name, the fact that we live in Smithville — but he doesn't remember *any* of our trips.

At all.

Not even a little bit.

How sad is that?

We've had all these adventures and he has no clue about any of them. We hiked with Snow White! We baked brownies with Cinderella! He turned into a human Popsicle in the story of *The Snow Queen!* And he remembers nothing. NOTHING!

It makes me feel kind of lonely.

“Come on!” I whisper-yell. I can’t be too loud. My parents are sleeping. “Let’s go!”

I’m *really* hoping his memories come back once he sees the mirror in action.

Nothing else I’ve tried has worked. I made him wear his soccer cleats around the house. I was hoping he’d remember how wearing them had totally messed up Rapunzel’s hair and left me no choice but to give her an extreme haircut.

I fed him apples, hoping he’d remember meeting Snow White.

I even showed him the jewelry box in my room. The paintings on the box show what happens to all the fairy tale characters after we visit their stories. Like Rapunzel with her shorter hairdo.

But nothing has worked. He still has no memories of our adventures.

“When did you get so annoying?” my brother mutters as he climbs out of bed and smushes his feet into his sneakers.

Prince, our dog, nuzzles his nose against Jonah’s heel.

I ignore the question. “Are you wearing your watch?” I ask. A watch from home is the only way to keep track of the time when we’re in fairy tales.

“Yes,” he grumbles.

“Good. Follow me.” I head down the stairs to our basement.

“Quietly.”

I don’t want my parents to wake up. They don’t know about the magic mirror. Maryrose hypnotized *their* memories away on purpose. Plus, we promised them that we wouldn’t go into the basement at night, and I hate breaking promises. But what else can I do? I need Jonah to remember everything that happened and this is the only way. Also, going through the mirror is fun.

Prince follows right behind me. I can hear Jonah grumbling to himself behind Prince.

“Close the basement door,” I tell Jonah as we climb down the final flight of stairs.

He does. I motion for him to come closer and face the mirror.

The mirror is about twice the size of me. The frame is made of stone and decorated with carvings of small fairies with wings and wands. The glass part is clear and smooth, and inside we can see our reflections. My shoulder-length curly dark hair. My small, scrawny brother and his messy brown hair. Prince’s furry little body.

I knock on the mirror. Once. Twice. Three times.

I hold my breath.

Nothing happens.

No spinning. No purple. No hissing.

“Crumbs,” I mutter.

I’ve dragged Jonah down to the basement every night for the past week to knock on the mirror.

And Maryrose is still not letting us in.

Why not? I have no idea. Sometimes she’s picky like that. Sometimes she waits for us to wear certain outfits before letting us into the mirror, like pajamas that look like a kingdom’s flags. But she doesn’t tell us what she wants us to wear, and it’s hard to guess.

A few days ago, I wore ballet slippers in case she was hoping to bring us inside the story of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*. Today I have bread crumbs in my hoodie pocket in case she is thinking of taking us into *Hansel and Gretel*.

Between the bread crumbs and the ballet slippers and the apples, I have been working with a lot of different fairy tale props lately.

“Let me try one more time,” I tell my brother.

“No,” he says and scrunches up his face. “Enough. We don’t have a magic mirror!”

“Yes, we do! What time is it?”

“Twelve-oh-five,” Jonah says, glancing at his watch.

Double crumbs. “I guess it’s not happening tonight. It’s too late now.” I exhale a super-loud, super-annoyed sigh. “We’ll try again tomorrow.”

Prince paws the mirror. He gets it. He wants Jonah to remember, too, I can tell.

“Can’t we take a few nights off?” Jonah asks. “It’s Mom’s birthday on Wednesday. I don’t have a present for her yet.”

“You can share mine,” I say. I made a painting for my mother in art class. It’s of a vase of roses. Mom *loves* roses. I’m feeling guilty for sneaking around the house at night, and I hope that giving Mom something she really likes will make me feel better.

I’m pretty sure she’ll like the painting. It’s great. At least I think it’s great. I’ll know tomorrow when it’s dry.

“Let me try knocking *one more time*,” I say. “Just in case.”

“No, no, no,” Jonah says. “I don’t want to talk to mirrors anymore.”

“Just one more —”

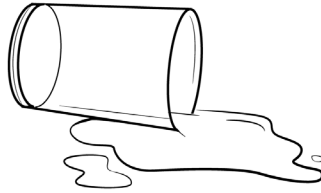
“No!” he snaps. “You’re starting to freak me out, Abby! We don’t have a magic mirror! If you don’t stop bugging me about it, I’m going to tell Mom and Dad you’ve gone crazy!”

“Wait, Jonah. Don’t go.” He has to remember! I need him to remember! “Let me get you a snack. Do you want another apple? A brownie? Or maybe a Popsicle?”

Prince wags his tail. Jonah blocks his ears and rushes up the stairs.

I guess he’s not hungry.

* chapter two *



Swoosh

The next day in art class, I discover I was wrong about my painting.

It did not come out great. It did not come out great at all.

I pick up my painting from the drying rack and slump down at the long table.

My roses do not look like roses. They look like red blobs. Red blobs that were dropped on the floor and then jumped on with Jonah's soccer cleats.

"Good try, Abby," Mrs. Becker tells me, standing over my shoulder.

Good try? GOOD TRY?

Everyone knows *good try* means *you have no talent*.

The truth is, she's right. I am not good at painting. Or drawing. Or anything involving clay, either.

Frankie, Robin, and Penny all sit down beside me.

Frankie and Robin are my best friends.

Penny is Robin's other best friend. She hugs Robin as often as she can. And I'm pretty sure she's forcing Robin to wear a super-high ponytail to school every day so the two of them can match. The other day at recess, she referred to them as "twinsies." Which, even with the ponytails, is impossible because Penny's hair is blond and Robin's is strawberry-blond, almost red. So there.

I prefer to wear a headband to school, thank you very much. And Frankie is wearing her dark hair back in two French braids. Frankie and I don't *need* to wear matching hairdos to prove we're best friends.

"Wow, Penny," Mrs. Becker says, interrupting my thoughts. "The detail in your painting is exquisite."

Exquisite? Really?

I look down at Penny's painting.

I gasp.

It *is* exquisite. Seriously. Her roses are red and bright and beautiful. Her painting looks like an ad for Mother's Day, if Mother's Day needed an ad.

"That's amazing," Robin coos to her.

"It really is," says Frankie. "Where did you learn to be such a great artist?"

I swallow the lump in my throat. Sure, Penny's good at art, but it's not like she's a superstar at *everything*.

"I've always loved to paint and draw," Penny says, dipping her paintbrush into her glass of water to clean it and wagging her ponytail from side to side. "It comes very naturally to me."

I roll my eyes. I can't help it.

Robin and Frankie spend the rest of class fawning over Penny the Great. Penny *the artiste*. Penny the Picasso.

Who cares if she's good at art and I'm not anyway? It's not like I want to be a painter when I grow up. I'm going to be a judge. And you definitely don't need to know how to paint roses to be a judge. You need to be smart and . . . judgy.

I spend the rest of class trying to salvage the blobby mess in front of me.

"I just have to sign it and I'm done," Penny says after a while.

She dips her brush in the black paint and writes her name with an annoying flourish.

“That painting could be worth a million dollars one day,” Robin says seriously.

I resist the urge to vomit. Although maybe if I threw up all over Penny’s precious painting, I wouldn’t have to look at it anymore?

Frankie and Robin pick up their paintings to put on the drying rack, but Penny leaves hers to set a minute longer. Then she goes to wash her hands at the sink near Mrs. Becker’s desk. I stay where I am and stare at my painting next to Penny’s.

I hate mine.

I love hers.

No. I hate hers.

Penny’s glass of water is really close to her painting.

Really close.

Too close.

And that’s when it happens. I knock the glass of water with my elbow.

On purpose.

Whoosh! Swoosh! The water gushes across Penny’s painting.

My heart stops. *What did I do?*

The colors mix. The paint runs. The petals melt into the leaves, which melt into the vase.

Oh no oh no oh no OH NOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Maybe nobody will notice?

I hear a loud shriek.

“MY PAINTING!”

Crumbs. She noticed.

Penny runs over to our table. “Help!” she cries. “There’s water all over my paper! I need paper towels! Help! My painting is drowning!”

Robin and Frankie rush to get napkins and we all quickly blot the painting. But it’s hopeless. When we remove the paper towels, all that’s left is a blob of colors. A blob that looks worse than my blobs. Much worse.

“My painting,” Penny whimpers.

“Poor Penny,” Robin says, giving her a big hug.

“It was so beautiful,” Frankie says, also giving her a hug.

“I’m so sorry,” Mrs. Becker says mournfully. “Maybe we can fix it. Let me find more paper towels.”

“I can’t believe it,” says Penny. She turns to me. “Abby, did you see what happened?”

My cheeks heat up. “I . . . um . . . It’s my fault. It was an accident. I knocked over your water. I’m sorry.”

“By accident?” Penny asks skeptically.

“Of course by accident,” I lie. “Why would I pour water on your painting on purpose?”

She looks at me with suspicion.

So do Robin and Frankie.

It wasn’t my fault! Okay, it was my fault, but not really, because Penny drove me to it with her *twinsies* and her perfect painting and her hogging my friend!

I feel sick.

What kind of person ruins someone else’s art project?

A horrible person.

Am I a horrible person?

I swallow the huge lump in my throat.

My verdict: Guilty as charged.