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ONCE UPON A FROG



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#9: Genie in a Bottle



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ONCE UPON A FROG

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for the downtown bus kids!

priya dattilo, sofie dewan, margot eilian,  
alex goldsmith, natalie hecker,  
aidan rosenblatt, jared rosenblatt,  
bennett roy, henry saadi sheppard  
(and chloe swidler)

*we read and sing songs  
and think mad libs are fun.  
we bounce in our seats,  
and we love to chew gum.*

xoxo



# \* chapter one \*



Crabby Abby

Oh, Crabby Abby . . .”  
Ugh. I hate when he calls me that.

I look up from the book of Mad Libs on my lap to see Brandon Walters walking across the school yard toward me. Two minutes ago, I saw him spinning Luke Silver superfast on one of the tire swings. Luke was shouting, “Stop!” but Brandon kept spinning him faster and faster until Luke looked like he might throw up.

Did the recess monitor see this? No. Her view of the tire swings was blocked by a big group of kids playing four square.

So not only did Brandon not get in trouble, but now he’s right

here. I look back down and pretend I don't see his red hair and freckled face in front of me.

“What are you doing, Crabby Abby?”

My shoulders tense. What I'm doing is sitting on a bench with my friends, minding my own business. I glance back up. Even though it's winter, it's so sunny that I have to squint. Brandon fake-squints back at me. Who knows what he'll say or do?

This morning in class, I dropped my eraser, and Brandon kicked it across the room. Then he stuck his tongue out at me. All when our teacher wasn't looking, of course.

I glance at Frankie on my left and at Robin on my right. Both my best friends look equally worried. “We're doing Mad Libs, Brandon.”

Do I want to spend the last five minutes of recess listening to Brandon call me Crabby Abby? No, I do not. Frankie, Robin, and I have been working on this page for ten minutes, and there are only a few spaces left.

I decide to try and ignore him, and I stare at the blank space on the page. *The \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective) girl is sitting at the table eating a \_\_\_\_\_ (food) sandwich.* “Who has an adjective?” I ask. “That's a word that describes a noun.”



“I’ve got one,” Brandon says, looking at Robin. “Stupid! That’s S-T-U-P-I-D, for kids who aren’t that great at spelling.”

Robin blushes, and I give Brandon a dirty look. That was a shot at Robin, because she has to go to a writing tutor. But Robin is not stupid at all. She’s really smart. She’s one of the best scientists in our class.

“And another one,” Brandon adds, looking right at Frankie. “Four-eyed.” He cups his hands around his eyes, obviously making fun of Frankie’s glasses (which are totally cute, by the way). Then he laughs and slaps his knee. “I’m hilarious! Hey, that’s another adjective.”

“Is ‘annoying’ an adjective?” Robin snaps.

“How about ‘mean’?” Frankie suggests, fixing the barrette in her dark hair.

“Both work,” I say, narrowing my eyes at Brandon.

Brandon sticks out his tongue at all of us. “Let me see those Mad Libs,” he orders.

“No,” I say. “We’re in the middle of it.”

Instead of listening, Brandon reaches over and grabs the book from my hand.

“Hey!” I yell, jumping up. “Give it back!”

He smirks and holds the book above his head, which is way above mine.

When he finally lowers it, he says, “Ah . . . ah . . . ah . . . CHOO!” And sneezes all over my Mad Libs book.

“Gross!” Robin cries.

“So gross,” Frankie adds, wrinkling up her face.

*Gross* is definitely an adjective.

Brandon laughs. “You can have it back now, Crabby Abby,” he says, handing it to me.

UGGGGGGH. “Thanks but no thanks,” I grumble. Do I want his nasty germs all over my Mad Libs? No, I do not. I toss the book in the garbage. There was still one whole Mad Lib left, too.

“Do you want me to finish it for you?” Brandon asks. “How about, a *smelly* girl is sitting at a table eating a *snot* sandwich!” He laughs again. No one else finds it funny. Because it’s NOT. Thankfully, he turns around then and leaves, probably to go torment someone else.

“He’s such a jerk,” Robin mutters.

“He really is,” I say. He wasn’t always. At least, he was never this bad. But in the last few weeks, he’s called all the kids names, knocked over peoples’ food at lunch, and thrown balls over the fence at gym and recess.

Have we done anything to deserve it? No, we have not!

I am trying to take the high road and just ignore him. But sometimes I wish I had magic powers and could cast a spell on him.

Okay, I know that sounds unlikely. But I've seen people do it. Really.

See, I have a magic mirror in my basement. And when my little brother and I sneak downstairs at midnight and knock on the mirror three times, the mirror hisses, turns purple, and swirls. Then it sucks me and my little brother into fairy tales.

Also our dog, Prince.

Every time we go, Maryrose takes us into a different fairy tale. Maryose is the fairy who lives inside our mirror. At least we think she lives inside our mirror. We're not totally clear about her housing situation. Anyway, so far, she's taken us into the stories of *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Rapunzel*, *The Snow Queen*, and *Beauty and the Beast*. And in many of the fairy tales, there is someone, a fairy usually, who has magical powers and can turn people into all kinds of stuff.

Like a beast. Yup. I've seen it. I've BEEN it. Seriously — I've actually been turned into a beast. I had fur, I had claws, I had it all.

So when Brandon does something especially jerky, I imagine turning him into a beast. Or a rat. Or maybe an ant that I could step on.

I shake off that thought. No, I wouldn't step on him. But I might put him in a box with air holes and some grass or whatever ants eat and forget about him for a while.

The bell rings, and Frankie, Robin, and I line up. Ahead, I can hear Penny, Robin's other best friend, shouting, "Stop it, Brandon!"

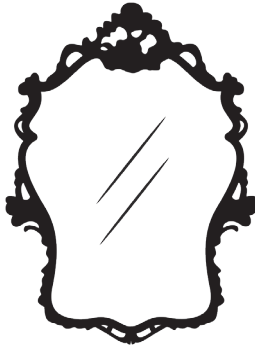
I lean out to see what he's doing. Brandon is stepping on the backs of Penny's shoes. One of her sneakers is half off her foot. Do I like that Robin has another best friend? No. Do I even LIKE Penny? No again. But should Brandon be bothering Penny? No, no, NO.

"You're such a pain!" Penny yells, moving her blond ponytail to the side. Brandon probably yanked it. She steps out of line and joins me, Frankie, and Robin near the end. "I've told on him twice," she says, "and the teachers never do anything!"

It's true. We might have to take matters into our own hands.

Maybe the next time I go through the mirror, I'll bring home a magic wand.

## \* chapter two \*



### Itchy Memories

I'm still irritated at the end of the day when my brother, Jonah, and I are standing outside school, waiting for our dad to pick us up.

It doesn't help when Brandon says, "Bye, Crabby Abby," as he strolls past me. He walks home from school by himself. Either his parents trust him to make his way home alone or they think he's awful, too, and are hoping he gets kidnapped.

"Crabby Abby!" Jonah repeats, laughing. Jonah is seven. Of course he finds that funny.

"Don't call me Crabby Abby," I mutter.

"But you *can* be crabby."

“Don’t call me that!” I repeat. Though I guess I *can* be crabby. But who doesn’t get crabby sometimes? Jonah definitely does.

“Okay, okay,” Jonah says. “But why was he teasing you?”

I watch as Brandon, his neon-yellow backpack over one shoulder, turns the corner. He’s finally out of sight. “Because he’s horrible,” I reply. “He sneezed all over my Mad Libs! On purpose! It was disgusting.”

Jonah gets the strange look on his face. It’s a look I’m getting used to. Like he’s watching a movie inside his head.

“Are you remembering something?” I ask.

Jonah nods.

When we were on our way home from *Beauty and the Beast*, Jonah was reverse hypnotized by the swirling mirror and got some of Maryrose’s memories. Yup. My brother has a fairy’s memories. In his brain. But he doesn’t remember everything all the time. He only remembers some stuff, when something he sees triggers a memory.

“When you said *sneezed on your Mad Libs*, I remembered something!” Jonah exclaims.

“What?” I ask excitedly. Who knew grimy snot germs on my Mad Libs could be a good thing?

“When Maryrose was little, Jax sneezed in her *face!*”  
Jonah says.

Jax is also a fairy, and he’s Maryrose’s cousin. He’s not very nice. Jonah and I met him in *Beauty and the Beast*.

Jonah scratches his head. Ever since the memories started coming, Jonah’s had a head itch. The itching gets worse when the memories pop up.

“And then,” Jonah goes on, his eyes wide, still scratching his head, “Maryrose got sick and had to spend two weeks in bed! Her bed was really cool. It floated just below the ceiling! She had to take a ladder up to it, and she had to use a slide to get down.”

“Just great,” I say with a sigh. “Another terrifically unhelpful memory.”

You’d think Jonah having some of Maryrose’s memories would be useful. Like maybe he could remember why Maryrose lives in our mirror. Or how Maryrose brings us into different fairy tales. Or *why* Maryrose brings us into different fairy tales.

But no. Instead, Jonah remembers useless information. Like how Maryrose’s cousin got her sick. And what her bed looked like.

Last week, a rip in Jonah's sweatshirt reminded him that Maryrose once ripped her scarf on a twig.

And eating a blueberry yogurt made him remember that Maryrose once had blueberry pie.

Those memories were of no help to us.

"Was this your first memory of the day?" I ask.

Jonah shakes his head, frowning. "I got one during math. I was counting on my fingers, and I remembered that Maryrose likes to ride a bike with no hands!"

"Huh? Why did you remember that?"

"I guess my fingers made me remember her hands. I don't know! It's not an exact science. But then Mr. Gordon called on me to answer a question about subtracting two digit numbers, and I realized I hadn't heard a word he'd said. I had to write him a note promising I would pay attention in class. Don't tell Mom or Dad."

Poor Jonah. This has been happening a lot these past two weeks. He even had an office detention because of "not listening." All because he has someone else's memories in his head. My parents had a big talk with him about paying attention and canceled a playdate as punishment. But it's not his fault.



“This is starting to not be that fun,” Jonah says. He scratches the back of his head again.

We haven’t been down to the mirror in two weeks. I’ve been avoiding Maryrose. I’m nervous that she won’t like the fact that Jonah has her memories. I mean, come on. I would hate it if someone had my memories! It’s creepy!

What if Maryrose decides she doesn’t want some kid running around with all of her memories? Sure, she seems nice so far, but how do we know she really *is* nice? We don’t!

Not all fairies are nice. That we *do* know.

But maybe I’m wrong. Maybe it’s a test. Maybe Maryrose is waiting to see if we’ll come to her and tell her the truth.

And Jonah does seem to be suffering . . .

“Let’s try to talk to Maryrose tonight,” I say, coming to a decision. “We’ll knock on the mirror to let her know we need to talk to her. But we won’t go *through* the mirror.”

We promised our parents we wouldn’t get out of bed in the middle of the night and “play” in the basement. And we keep our promises. At least we try to.

But we *have* to talk to Maryrose. Enough is enough! Jonah can’t fail second grade and get in trouble all the time because he has a fairy’s memories.

“Sounds good to me,” Jonah says. “You sure you don’t want to go through the mirror?”

Our dad pulls up and I wave to him. Then I nod at Jonah. “Yeah. We have to do our best to keep our promise. Just talking. No trips into fairy tales this time. For sure.”