

Whatever After
ONCE UPON A FROG

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* chapter one *



Crabby Abby

O h, 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.