

SPECIAL EDITION #3

# Whatever After

ABBY IN NEVERLAND

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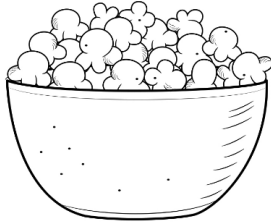
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# chapter one



No Cookies — or Popcorn — for You

This is not shaping up to be a great Friday night.

I'm flopped on the couch in the living room, feeling lonely and looking for something to watch on TV.

My best friend Robin is at a sleepover at her *other* best friend Penny's house. No, I was not invited. Yes, I would have liked to be invited, even though Penny is not my favorite person on the planet. She and Robin are making their own pizzas! And putting on cucumber-seaweed masks!

How fun does that sound?

My other best friend, Frankie, wasn't invited to Penny's sleepover, either. But she's busy with her dad's birthday dinner tonight.

"Ha! Got you!" I hear someone shout from the basement, followed by a loud THUMP.

I sit up. Oh, no. My little brother, Jonah, has his two best friends here for a sleepover (yes, my seven-year-old brother has more fun plans than I do tonight). The three boys are playing loudly in the basement, where they'll be sleeping.

"Jonah! Everything okay?" I call out.

"Yep!" he shouts back, sounding happy.

Good.

I'm a little worried about Jonah or one of his friends getting injured — they've been fighting with these giant toy swords. But I'm also worried about the magic mirror in our basement.

Yes, that's right. We have a magic mirror in our basement.

There is also currently a fairy sleeping upstairs in my bedroom.

The fairy, Maryrose, used to live inside the magic mirror. (Well, technically she was trapped in there.) But one day Jonah accidentally smashed into the mirror with his skateboard, and she escaped.

It's a long story.

So you can understand why I'm concerned about Jonah doing damage to the mirror again.

This is how the magic mirror works: If you knock on it three times at midnight, it turns into a swirling purple portal that takes you into different fairy tales. So far Jonah and I have visited fifteen fairy tales, from *Sleeping Beauty* to *Hansel and Gretel*. I've also been inside two books — *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* — but I didn't get to those stories through the magic mirror.

I hear another THUMP from the basement. I'm wondering if I should go downstairs to make sure the mirror is still

intact when the most delicious scent wafts toward me from the kitchen. Mmm. Mom has been baking butterscotch cookies. I know! I'll go grab some cookies and then come back to find a movie to watch on TV. This night is looking up.

I hurry into the kitchen, where Mom is taking the cookies out of the oven.

"Can I have one?" I ask, coming to stand right next to her.

"Not yet. They need to cool," she says a little testily. She has flour on one cheek and an oil stain on her apron.

Usually my dad is in charge of making dessert, but he's out of town this weekend for his college reunion. When Dad bakes, the kitchen stays pretty neat. Tonight, pots, pans, and plates from dinner are soaking in the sink, and spoons, spatulas, and flour spills are everywhere.

Hmm. What else could be a good snack? Ooh! My eyes land on the hot air popper on top of our fridge. *Popcorn*. Buttery, salty, yummy popcorn. Nothing goes better with a movie. Plus, I'm finally allowed to use the hot air popper by myself.

As Mom is transferring the cookies to a big plate, I wriggle past her to get the stepladder from the pantry.

“Abby!” my mom snaps. “What are you doing?”

“Making popcorn,” I explain, climbing up the stepladder to reach the hot air popper.

“*Now?*” my mom cries. “I just made cookies. You’re getting in the way.”

My cheeks turn hot. My mom doesn’t snap at me too often. Usually Jonah is the one getting on her nerves.

And right then, I hear feet thudding up the stairs from the basement. My brother and his friends, Isaac and Ben, come bursting into the kitchen, the three of them wearing pajamas and waving their toy swords. Jonah’s in his soccer pajamas; Isaac’s pajamas are printed with tiny dragons; and Ben’s pj’s have little pirates.

“The cookies are ready!” Jonah exclaims.

“Cook-ies, cook-ies, cook-ies!” Ben chants, thrusting his sword up in the air. Ben is the loudest of the three, which is saying something when Jonah is in the group.

Isaac, who always goes along with Ben, joins in the chant, and then Jonah does, too.

“Boys, quiet down,” Mom tells them, but they keep chanting.

“Cook-ies, cook-ies, cook-ies!”

Mom closes her eyes.

I take that opportunity to reach up and grab the hot air popper off the top of the fridge. As I step down off the step-ladder, Ben jabs his toy sword at Jonah’s belly.

Jonah darts backward . . .

And he bumps into me . . .

And my elbow knocks into the plate of butterscotch cookies and —

*Crash!*

The plate falls off the counter. It doesn’t break, but the warm-from-the-oven melty butterscotch cookies land all over the floor.

Crumbs.

(Literally.)



“Jonah! Abby!” my mom cries.

“It wasn’t my fault!” Jonah and I say at the same time.

Isaac and Ben can’t stop laughing.

Our dog, Prince, races into the kitchen and heads straight for the cookie mess. He starts gobbling away. With his floppy brown ears and furry little body, Prince is so cute that it’s hard to yell at him.

“Prince, no!” I say. He manages to steal a few more bites before trotting out of the room, his tail wagging.

“That’s it,” my mom snaps. “Everyone out! Jonah, take your friends back downstairs and go to sleep.”

“Aw, we can’t have those cookies?” Jonah asks, pointing at the mess.

“You want to eat the cookies off the floor?” I ask my brother. “Gross!”

Jonah shrugs. “Five-minute rule.”

“It’s a five-*second* rule, Jonah!” I say with a laugh.

“Jonah, downstairs,” Mom repeats sternly. Jonah motions

to Isaac and Ben and they reluctantly tromp back down to the basement with their swords.

“Be careful down there, Jonah!” I call, still thinking of the mirror.

Then Mom turns to me. “Abby, go upstairs to your room.”

“What?” I cry. “Why? It’s still early. I was about to make popcorn. And I can help clean up . . .”

“Abby, *upstairs*. Brush your teeth and go to bed. Now,” my mom orders before I can protest again. “I’ve had enough. I’m exhausted. No cookies. No popcorn. I’m calling it a night.”

I know that tone. There’s no arguing with that tone. But it’s so unfair! I didn’t do anything wrong. And now I can’t even watch a movie with popcorn. Or cookies.

I feel a small lump in my throat as I put down the hot air popper and hurry out of the kitchen. Mom is being so tough on me, for no reason!

I shut off the TV in the living room, then sulk my way upstairs. After I brush my teeth and wash up, I emerge from

the bathroom to find the whole house dark. I can hear Jonah and his friends giggling in the basement.

Before I go to my room, I knock on Mom's door and peek in to find her lying in bed, reading a book. I guess she really did call it a night.

“Yes, Abby?” she asks me, sounding annoyed.

I'm not even sure what I wanted to say, but it's clear Mom isn't thrilled to see me. “Nothing. Good night,” I huff.

I walk down the hall into my room and close the door behind me. My window is open a tiny crack and a warm breeze blows in. I change into a blue nightgown and then call out softly, “Maryrose?”

A purple mist drifts out from my jewelry box. And suddenly, Maryrose appears.

Maryrose has long, swirly brown hair and wears a flowy silver dress and silver shoes. It's hard to tell her age — she looks like she could be anywhere from twenty to forty — but she's actually hundreds of years old. Right now, she's the size of a

grown-up, but she can shrink down to a tiny size to fit inside my jewelry box, where she spends a lot of time sleeping.

My jewelry box has illustrations of fairy-tale characters painted on it, and the illustrations change whenever I change something in a fairy tale. So maybe the jewelry box is magic? I don't know.

I do know that Maryrose needs to sleep to regain her fairy strength. She also has a magic ruby that helps her. She's much stronger than she was when she first came out of the mirror, but not even close to one hundred percent full fairy power.

"Hi there, Abby," she says. "Everything okay?"

I sit down on my bed, frowning.

"No," I say. "My mom yelled at me and Jonah. And then she just went to bed. It's like she gave up on being a mom tonight."

"Sorry about that," Maryrose says, tucking a long strand of hair behind her ear. "I'm sure she didn't give up on being a mom."

"She basically did. And Jonah and I aren't bad kids! We behave. Most of the time. It's not that hard to be a mom, is

it? *And,*” I go on, feeling sorry for myself, “all my friends and even Jonah are doing fun things without me. This night was a bust.”

“Well, sometimes things get better when you least expect it,” Maryrose says.

Suddenly, something tiny and glowy darts in through the slightly open window. It looks like a yellow-and-orange sparkling swish.

Is it a firefly?

A bee?

I watch as it flies all around my room.

The sparkly swish lands on top of my dresser. I stand up and walk over to get a closer look — and gasp.

The sparkly swish has a tiny nose, a tiny mouth, a tiny chin . . . and a tiny face. A human face.

*What the what?*

“It’s a fairy!” Maryrose exclaims, coming over to stand beside me.

My eyes widen. *Another fairy?!*

This fairy has tan skin and pink hair in a high ponytail. Her eyes are onyx. She's wearing a silver jumpsuit with a bright pink belt and silver boots with tassels on the back. She has silver glitter on her eyelashes and sparkly silver gloss on her lips. She looks like a teenager, but who knows how old she really is.

And I have no idea if she's good or evil.

Trust me, there *are* evil fairies.

"Do you know her?" I ask Maryrose.

Maryrose shakes her head. "I can tell she's a fairy, but I don't recognize her. Hi," Maryrose says to the tiny fairy. "I'm Maryrose, and this is Abby. What's your name?"

"I'm Tink!" the fairy replies, in a voice that almost sounds like a bell. She zooms off my dresser and flies toward the ceiling. Sparkly orange-and-yellow dust follows in her wake, but the dust disappears before it can even land on my rug.

"Tink?" I repeat. That sounds familiar. A fairy named Tink. "Is that short for —"

"Tinkerbell," she says. She gives her hips a shake and more

yellow-and-orange fairy dust floats down and disappears.

Tinkerbell!

“I know you!” I cry. “Are you from Neverland?” I doubt there are two Tinkerbells, right?

“I am,” she says, eyeing me suspiciously. “You’ve heard of Neverland?”

“I have,” I say, not explaining any more. “Why are you here?” Story characters don’t usually come to me. I go to them.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see another figure hovering in the air outside my window. Not a tiny fairy like Tink.

A full-sized boy.

I turn to look at him. He’s about my age, ten-ish, with brown hair and big brown eyes. He’s wearing a green shirt, green pants, pointy brown boots, and a green felt cap decorated with leaves and twigs.

He waves at me and smiles.

Oh, wow. Wow wow wow.

If the fairy in my room is Tinkerbell, then the boy outside my window has got to be — the one, the only — Peter Pan.

