

# Whatever After

SPILL *the* BEANS

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# chapter one



## Face-plant

**y**ou know when something is bothering you and you can't stop thinking about it?

Welcome to my life.

Right now, I'm sitting on the bleachers with my mom, watching my little brother's soccer game. Is the game distracting me from my troubles? It is not.

The Smithville Scooters (that's Jonah's team) are playing the Fryton Academy Wildcats. And even though it's sunny and breezy and my mom just bought me a pink lemonade punch from the snack bar, I can't stop thinking about

what happened at school earlier today. It's like a mosquito bite that won't stop itching me.

I sigh and slump in my seat. I take another sip of my pink lemonade.

My mom turns to me. "Are you okay, Abby? You seem kind of mopey."

"Frankie and Robin got into an argument," I explain. Frankie and Robin are my two best friends. "And they want me to pick sides."

My mom frowns. "That sounds tricky," she says. "Want to tell me what happened?"

On the field, the soccer players are chasing the ball. I see Jonah running with his teammates, and I hope he won't mind that I'm barely paying attention to what he's doing out there.

"Well," I tell my mom, "Frankie was invited to Daria's birthday party on Saturday night. Daria is new and she doesn't know that many people, so Frankie said she'd go."

"That's nice of Frankie," Mom says. She peers out at the field to check on Jonah, then looks back at me. "So what's the problem?"

I sigh again. "Frankie already had plans with Robin and me for Saturday night. FRAM night."

*FRA* stands for *Frankie, Robin, and Abby* (the *M* stands for *Movie*). The three of us even used to have matching necklaces that said *FRA*. But then Penny joined our group — she's Robin's other best friend. And then we became *FRAP*.

We started movie night two weeks ago, but so far it's just been me, Frankie, and Robin who can make it. Penny is always busy on Saturday nights. She has all these events to attend with her parents. Like weddings. Or a sweet sixteen. "We're a very popular family," Penny told us, with a flick of her blond ponytail. Which is totally fine by me. I'm thrilled that movie night can be the original three. *FRA* for the win!

"And you're upset that Frankie can't come this time?" Mom prods me.

I nod. "Yeah, but I'm not as upset as Robin is. She got really mad at Frankie."

I cringe at the memory of my two best friends facing off as we stood together in the school hallway after the last bell.

"A birthday party is only *ONCE* a year," Frankie had said to a frowning Robin. "Movie night is *EVERY* Saturday. So it's not a big deal if I miss it."

But Frankie missing movie night *IS* a big deal. We take turns hosting. I hosted the first week (because it was my idea),

then last weekend was Frankie's turn, and now it's Robin's. The host gets to pick the movie, too. We make a huge bowl of popcorn, and in another bowl, we mix together at least five different kinds of candy. Swedish Fish. Skittles. M&M's. Milk Duds. Junior Mints. YUM. Plus, we always have a pitcher of fruit punch. I LOVE movie night.

Frankie pushed her red glasses up on her nose and turned to me. "Tell Robin I'm right."

Robin tossed her curly strawberry-blond hair behind her shoulders and also turned to me. "Tell Frankie she already has plans and should honor them and not ditch us for BETTER plans."

"They're not better plans, they're just different," Frankie argued.

I wondered why I wasn't invited to the party. Although in this case, I was glad I wasn't. Too complicated.

"Uh, I . . . Well, um . . ." I said. I took a couple of steps backward. Of course I wanted Frankie to come to our movie night. But should she turn down an invitation to a birthday party? For a new girl in school?

What was the right or wrong answer? I had no idea.

Finally, I just said, “I have to go to Jonah’s soccer game!” and raced out of the school.

“What do you think?” I ask my mom now, as we sit side by side on the bleachers. I’m hoping she’ll tell me what to do. She’s really good at giving advice. She’s a lawyer, same as my dad. He’s working on a case today, which is why he couldn’t make Jonah’s game.

“What do *you* think?” Mom asks me.

Crumbs.

I wish I knew what to think. My friends’ argument is a tough case. But I want to be a judge when I grow up, so I should be able to crack tough cases.

“I think they’re both right,” I admit.

“Then tell them that,” my mom says. “That they both have a point and then let them work it out.”

I can’t imagine that going very smoothly. I frown and sip more lemonade.

My mom suddenly turns her attention back to the field. She sits up straight and crosses her fingers. “Come on, Jonah, you can do it,” she says under her breath.

I crane my neck to see. The soccer ball has been kicked

to Jonah, who is in scoring position. I cross my fingers, too, forgetting about Frankie and Robin for the moment. My little brother looks nervous as he aims his foot at the ball and —

Oh, no!

A kid on the opposing team just kicked the ball away from Jonah! He stole the ball!

“Aww,” my mother says, her shoulders falling. “Poor Jonah.”

Now Jonah is trying to stop the other team from kicking the ball into the Smithville Scooters’ goal. *Trying* is the key word. I cringe as my brother ends up tripping over his feet and landing face-first on the grass. And the ball goes straight into the Scooters’ goal.

Double crumbs.

“GO, WILDCATS!” a lady on the bleachers shouts through a megaphone, and her side cheers like crazy.

“I hope Jonah’s all right,” Mom says worriedly. We watch as Jonah pushes himself up and trudges into the team huddle the coach has called. At least he’s not hurt.

“I think it’s an ice cream kind of night,” my mom adds,

patting my knee. “Someone’s going to need some cheering up.”

“Oh, yeah,” I say. Jonah definitely needs some cheering up. So do I.

A few minutes later, the soccer game is over. The Wildcats have won, and everyone who was rooting for Smithville is in low spirits.

Jonah comes over to me and my mom, staring at the ground. He has dirt on his cheek and all over his uniform from his face-plant. “I’m the worst soccer player ever,” he tells us.

“You’re a very strong player, Jonah,” my mom says, giving him a hug. “And even strong players miss kicks. That’s all part of the game. Winning *and* losing.”

“Yeah, but I hate losing!” Jonah responds. “And everyone knows it’s my fault we lost. I messed up.” He looks down at the ground again, and I can see that his eyes are filled with tears.

“Let’s stop and get some ice cream for dessert,” Mom suggests gently, but Jonah shakes his head. When he’s refusing ice cream, you know it’s serious.

Suddenly, I have an idea. I know what will cheer Jonah up. And it's not ice cream.

It's a trip through our magic mirror.

You heard me right. I have a magic mirror. It's in the basement of our house. When Jonah and I knock on it three times at midnight, it takes us into a fairy tale.

If you think I'm kidding, I'm not. We've been inside twelve fairy tales already. *Cinderella*. *Hansel and Gretel*. *Little Red Riding Hood*. And those are just the highlights.

We never know which story we'll be visiting. Or why Maryrose — the fairy who is cursed to live inside our mirror — sends us there. But that's part of the fun.

Our parents don't know about the magic mirror. So Jonah and I can't visit it every single night. That would be too risky.

But we have to try tonight.

## chapter two



### How to Cheer Up Your Little Brother

**W**hen my alarm clock goes off a few minutes before midnight, I pop out of bed and quickly change from my pj's into a T-shirt, jeans, and a hoodie. I also put on my watch. My watch always tells us what time it is back home when we're inside a fairy tale. If it's a school night, we have to be back in Smithville by 7:00 A.M., when our parents come to wake us up.

I rush into Jonah's room. He's sprawled out on his bed, his curly brown hair sticking up all over the place. He always gets bedhead. Tonight, his mouth is turned into a frown even while he's asleep. Aww, poor Jonah.

“Hey,” I say, gently shaking his shoulder. “It’s mirror time. Wakey, wakey.”

“What?” Jonah grumbles, opening his eyes.

“It’s time to go,” I say.

“Where?” he asks.

“Where do you think?” I ask. “Into a fairy tale!”

“No,” he says, putting his pillow over his head. “I’m in a bad mood.”

“I know!” I say. “That’s why we’re going. To cheer you up.”

Jonah has done the same thing for me in the past. Nothing can distract you faster than a visit to a fairy tale.

And I’m still feeling down in the dumps about the Frankie-Robin fight, so I could use the distraction, too.

“*Nothing* will cheer me up,” Jonah insists. “Leave me alone.”

I remove the pillow from his face. “No. C’mon, it’ll be great.”

“It won’t. I don’t want to hang out with a grumpy princess right now.”

“What grumpy princess?” I ask. “When do we meet grumpy princesses?”

He sits up and waves his hands over his head. “We always meet grumpy princesses! The *Princess and the Frog* princess was grumpy. And the real princess from *The Princess and the Pea* was a spoiled brat.”

All right, he has a point.

“But we’ve met some amazing princesses,” I point out. “And non-princesses. What about Little Red? I know you liked Little Red . . .”

He blushes. “I did like Little Red.”

Jonah actually had a crush on Little Red! It was pretty cute, and I’m tempted to tease him about it. But I want to cheer him up now, not embarrass him.

“Maybe we’ll meet someone as awesome as Little Red,” I say. “Or, hey,” I add, struck by an idea. “Maybe we’ll meet Jack! From *Jack and the Beanstalk*!”

Jonah pouts. “We *never* get to meet Jack.”

*Jack and the Beanstalk* is Jonah’s all-time favorite fairy tale. Whenever we go through the mirror, Jonah always hopes we’ve landed in Jack’s story. But we haven’t — so far.

“Not *yet*,” I say. “But maybe tonight’s the night.”

“You’re just saying that.”

I shrug. “We won’t know unless we try. But we gotta move or we’ll miss the window.”

Jonah hesitates. “Fiiiiiiiine,” he says, finally getting out of bed. “But I’m not changing. It’s pj’s or bust.”

“Okay,” I say, grabbing his hoodie from the hook on his door. “But take this. Fairy tales can be chilly.”

“Prince,” Jonah whisper-calls. “Come on, boy.”

Our super-adorable dog, Prince, wakes up from where he was sleeping in the corner of Jonah’s room. He bounds over to us, tail wagging. Prince always comes with us into fairy tales. We found him in *Sleeping Beauty*, but that’s a whole other story.

Jonah and I tiptoe past our parents’ room and down the stairs. I grab my sneakers from the hall and throw my brother his. We lace them up and then hurry down the steps to the basement, Prince fast on our heels.

The mirror — it’s a little bigger than I am — is bolted to the wall. The frame is made out of stone and etched with fairies and wands. I study myself in the mirror: I also have bedhead, so I try to smooth my brown curls into place.

It’s time to knock.

“You can have the honors,” I tell Jonah.

“Whatever,” he says, his voice low and lacking enthusiasm. He knocks on the mirror. Once. It hisses. Twice. It turns purple. Three times. It starts to swirl.

“It’s working!” I cheer. “Hurrah!”

“Hurrah,” he mutters, rolling his eyes. “There’s no way we’re going to end up in *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Just saying.”

“Oh, hush. This is gonna be fun.” I take Jonah’s hand and squeeze it as we jump through.

*THUD.*

We land on a patch of hay in what seems to be a small barn. Its walls are made of weathered wood. And it definitely smells like a barn — like when you visit a petting zoo. I don’t see any animals, though.

Is there a barn in *Jack and the Beanstalk*?

Please let there be a barn in *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

Prince gets up and starts sniffing the one corral, which is empty. Jonah stands up and stretches and pulls hay off his pj’s. He sighs loudly. He’s clearly not cheered up yet.

Through the small window, light spills into the barn. I stand up to look outside. It’s daytime, but overcast and foggy.

“I bet you don’t see a beanstalk,” Jonah says grumpily.

“Um . . . I don’t,” I admit. All I can see is a very small house. It’s made of the same weathered brown wood as the barn and has a brick chimney on the roof. The house and barn are surrounded by a rickety brown fence and, beyond that, rolling green hills. “But we’re somewhere in the country. Beanstalks grow in the country!” I add hopefully.

Prince barks, as if he agrees.

Jonah groans. “Forget it. We’re definitely not in *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Maybe Maryrose can let us go back now — ”

*Moo! Moo!*

I freeze. A cow! I just heard a cow moo from somewhere outside! At least I think it was a cow. Nothing else makes a moo sound.

There is definitely a cow in *Jack and the Beanstalk*. It’s one of the most important parts of the story!

“Did you hear that, Jonah?” I ask excitedly. “Did you? It’s a cow! It mooed!”

“So what?” Jonah says, but there’s a teeny bit of interest in his voice.

I move around to the other end of the window, and I see something! Yes!

A skinny woman about my mom's age is sitting on a stool in front of a super-skinny brown cow. The woman is wearing a tattered gray dress and threadbare brown shoes. A yellow bandana is tied around her head and she's holding a tin pail under the cow.

"Come on, Princess Milka," the woman says to the cow. "Be a love and give us some milk, will ya?"

My eyes widen. "Jonah, come see!" I hiss, and he hurries over to join me by the window.

We watch the woman squeeze the cow's udders like I've seen farmers do at the state fair. I, personally, have never milked a cow. And I am not sure I ever want to.

"Is the cow named Princess Milka in *Jack and the Beanstalk*?" Jonah whispers.

I try to remember the story from when our nana read it to us. "Princess Milka doesn't sound familiar. But I don't know. There are a few versions of *Jack and the Beanstalk*," I say. I know the basic story, but I haven't read it in a while. Don't tell Jonah.

*Moo*, the cow says again. *Moooooooooooo*.

The woman sighs. “Not a drop of milk out of ya — for the seventh day in a row!” she groans. “Your milk was all we had to sell at the market for money. Now what’ll we do? We have no money and very little food left. I’ll have to sell you.”

“She’ll have to sell her!” I say to Jonah. “Did you hear that? That is exactly what happens in *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Exactly! Jack’s mom wants to sell the cow. That must be Jack’s mom.” I grab my brother’s arm. “Jonah, we’re in the story! We have to be!”

Jonah’s eyes are the size of saucers. “Are you sure?”

I don’t want to promise anything yet, but it seems VERY likely.

Then we both hear the woman say, “I’ll ask Jack to take you to the market, Princess Milka.”

JACK?

She said Jack!

Jonah and I gasp at the same time, and glance at each other. We did it! We’re in *Jack and the Beanstalk*. For real! Wahoo!

“I can’t believe it,” Jonah whispers. “We’re really here.”