



Whatever After

if the SHOE FITS

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for my partners in crime, lauren myracle and emily jenkins.

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themselves in the Cinderella fairy tale — and that is when things start to go really wrong.

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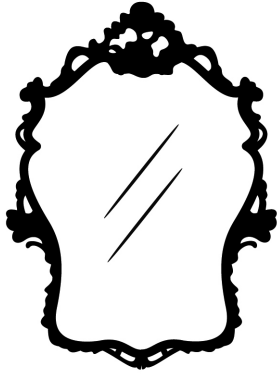
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* chapter one *



My Magic Mirror Might Be Broken

I have a magic mirror in my basement and I'm going to use it.
Jonah's hand hovers in front of the mirror. "Ready?"

"Oh, yes." I am definitely ready. I've been *trying* for three days. Four nights ago, Jonah and I accidentally got sucked through the mirror and landed in Snow White's fairy tale. Well, technically, we landed in the kingdom of Zamel. Rhymes with camel. That's where Snow White lives.

If I'd known we were going to Zamel, I never would have worn slippers and pajamas. I would have worn jeans, a cute sweater, and sneakers. But I didn't even know where we were until after we'd already messed up Snow's story.

But don't worry! Everything ended up fine. Different, but fine.

I did leave my slippers and pajamas at Snow's, though. The slippers were pretty beaten-up anyway, but the pajamas were my favorite pair. Snow borrowed them one night and loaned me a skirt and top. Getting my pajamas back isn't the only reason I want to visit Snow. I also want to know why Maryrose, the person who lives inside our magic mirror, sent me and Jonah there in the first place. There has to be a reason, right? And why did the magic mirror in Snow's bedroom tell us not to tell our parents about what happened?

Jonah and I decided to find out.

When we'd gone to Zamel, the mirror had sucked us inside at midnight, so the night after we got home, I set my alarm for 11:51 P.M. I put on jeans. A sweater. Sneakers. I woke up my little brother, Jonah. He put on jeans. A sweatshirt. Sneakers. We crept down the two flights to the basement and closed the door behind us.

Jonah knocked. Then he knocked again. Then he knocked once more. Three times, just like the first time.

But it didn't work.

We stood there, waiting, but nothing happened.

No swirling. No hissing. No opening up its big mirror mouth and swallowing us whole.

The next night we tried again. We got up close to midnight. Put on jeans. Sweatshirts. Sneakers. Crept down to the basement. Knocked and knocked again. Knocked a third time.

Nothing, nothing, nothing!

Tonight is Night Number Three. Everyone knows three's a charm. Especially when dealing with fairy tales.

So here I am. In the basement. Again.

Jonah's fist is up against the mirror. Again.

"Ready," I say. I brace myself. Here we go. It's going to work. I know it is.

Jonah knocks.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

No swirling, no hissing, no nothing.

I stomp my sneakered foot. "I don't get it!"

Jonah sighs in disappointment, and his skinny arm falls to his side. "Do you think it's broken?"

I peer at the antique mirror. It looks the same as it did when we first went through it. It's twice the size of me. The glass part

is clear and smooth. The frame is made of stone and decorated with carvings of small fairies with wings and wands. It's attached to the wall with heavy Frankenstein bolts. We just moved to Smithville — and into our new house — a few months ago, and the mirror came with the house. I used to think the mirror was creepy. I guess it's still kind of creepy.

But it's not *just* creepy. It's also fun. It's magic.

"It doesn't look broken," I say, seeing my brother and myself in the reflection. Jonah's brown hair is short and kind of a mess, standing up in different directions. Mine is shoulder-length and wavy, but still neat. "Let me try," I add.

I knock once. Twice. Three times.

The room is still.

"Hello? Maryrose? Are you there?" I know I said Maryrose lives inside the mirror, but truthfully, I'm not sure. All I know is that Maryrose has something to do with the mirror. I think. I really don't know much. I sigh. "Maybe we imagined the whole thing."

"No way," Jonah says. "We were there. I know we were. We met Snow! We ate her stew sandwiches! Yum. I wish Mom and Dad would make them one night for dinner."

I snort. First of all, Snow's stew sandwiches were gross. And second, the likelihood of Mom and Dad trying a new recipe these days is very unlikely. Like one in a bajillion. They haven't cooked in weeks. We've ordered pizza for the last two — no, make that three — nights in a row.

Don't get me wrong, I like pizza. What ten-year-old doesn't like pizza? What adult doesn't like pizza? Jonah LOVES pizza, even though he insists on dipping the crust in ketchup, which is totally gross. But three nights in a row is extreme. What happened to cooking? What happened to meat loaf? What happened to salad?

My parents used to cook all the time, before we moved to Smithville. They had time to cook then. Now they work all the time. They're lawyers and just started their own firm. I keep telling them I'm old enough to do the cooking, but they won't listen. Just because I nearly burned down our old house when I put my socks in the toaster ONE TIME. What can I say? I wanted toasty socks. They won't even let me near the washing machine, which makes no sense. Fine. I used too much detergent and turned the laundry room into a bubble bath, but also, only ONE TIME.

I yawn. "Let's go back to bed."

“But I want an adventure! Maybe the mirror can take us to other places, too. Like Africa! Or Mars! Or Buckingham Palace!”

“We’ve tried three times, Jonah. We can’t do this every night. We’re growing kids. We need our sleep.”

He twists his bottom lip. “Just one more try.”

I let him try one more time even though I KNOW it’s not going to work. I am three years older than he is. I know these things. And I’m right. Of course I’m right. I’m always right. I march him up the stairs, back up to the top floor, and steer him toward his room.

He kicks off his sneakers and plants his face on his bed.

Back in my room, as I change back into my second-favorite pair of pajamas, I can’t help but wonder if we really did imagine the whole thing.

But wait! My jewelry box is sitting on my dresser, and on the lid of my jewelry box are illustrations of fairy tale characters. Snow White is right between Cinderella and the Little Mermaid. Snow is definitely not wearing her puffy dress. She’s wearing my lime-green pajamas, which means it really *did* happen.

So why isn’t the mirror working?