



# Whatever After

DREAM ON

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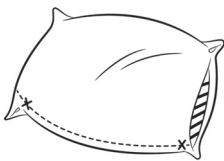
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## \* chapter one \*



### There Is No Sleeping at a Sleepover

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**I**t's Saturday night and my new best friend, Robin, is sleeping over.

We're in the basement. She's teaching me a dance routine her older sister showed her. Right kick, left kick, arms up, turn! We're practicing in the mirror. We're getting very good.

I am having my very first sleepover since I moved to Smithville.

I have my very first Smithville best friend.

I actually have two Smithville best friends, Robin *and* Frankie. But I'm allowed to invite only one person to sleep over

at a time since I have only one trundle bed. Also, according to Mom, two kids sleeping over is one too many. I'm going to have Frankie over next time.

I'm giddy. Which will make the "going to sleep" part of the sleepover a bit of a problem. But you're not really supposed to sleep at sleepovers, are you? You're supposed to stay up all night and whisper secrets. Also sneak into the kitchen and make s'mores if you have the ingredients, which I do. I bought them at the grocery store on Wednesday to prepare.

Anyway. There will be no sleeping at my sleepover. There will be only fun.

Suddenly, the lights in the basement flicker on and off.

"What is that?" Robin asks, looking around.

"I don't know," I say, getting a queasy feeling in my stomach. I shoot a nervous glance at the mirror. It's an antique, and about twice the size of me. The frame is made of stone and engraved with fairies and wands. Also, it's magic. (More on that in a sec.)

I hear my seven-year-old brother giggling from upstairs.

"Jonah!" I yell. "Stop playing with the lights!!"

The basement goes black.

“Turn that back on this second!” I holler. “Moooooooooom!  
Make him stop!”

The lights flick back on. There’s more giggling.

“Sorry my brother is so annoying,” I grumble.

Robin shrugs. “No prob. Little brothers are cute.”

Only someone *without* a little brother would call little brothers cute.

Robin has a ridiculously COOL older sister named Dalia.

Dalia teaches Robin dance routines, lets her borrow her hoop earrings, and shows her how to apply green eye shadow. Dalia does not flicker the lights to annoy her sister.

“Where were we?” I ask, getting back into position. I catch our reflection in the mirror. Robin’s hair is strawberry blonde and super curly. Dalia showed her how to scrunch it with gel. My brown hair is wavy and boring. Our pajamas are another example of the difference between us. Robin’s wearing funky black pajama bottoms and a sparkly top (they’re hand-me-downs from Dalia). My new pajamas are definitely cute — they have a dog paw-print pattern on them — but they look babyish next to Robin’s.

Robin notices I'm staring at our reflection and waves. She's wearing pastel-green nail polish. "There's something odd about the mirror, don't you think?" she asks, touching the mirror's smooth glass.

"What do you mean?" I ask, even though I agree. OF COURSE I agree.

Here's what I can tell you about our mirror:

- A fairy named Maryrose lives inside it.
- When you knock three times on it, the mirror starts to swirl and hiss and turn purple.
- It slurps you up and takes you into a fairy tale.

Calling the mirror odd is a BIG understatement.

Robin wrinkles her nose. "It's like it's watching us. It's a haunted mirror!"

I force out a squeaky laugh, then try to change the subject. "Are you hungry? I'm starving. Let's go upstairs. Do you like s'mores?"

"Of course," she says. "Who doesn't like s'mores? But I just want to call my sister first to say hi." She picks her cell up off the desk.

Robin takes her phone everywhere she goes. It's decorated in yellow sparkles. She has unlimited texting. Only a few of the kids in our class have cells, so it's not like she can text everyone, but she can text some people.

I can't text anyone.

I can't decorate our technology with sparkles.

I can't call anyone.

Well, I can call people on our house line, but I can't call them when I'm on the go. I can't call them from the car. I can't call from school. I can't call from the park.

I have no cell phone.

I wish I had a cell phone.

Frankie doesn't have a cell phone, either, but that doesn't make me feel better. And unlike me she has two younger brothers. TWO! Can you imagine? Two Jonahs? I shudder.

Cell phone or no cell phone, there is NO WAY I'm letting Robin hang out in the basement without me. Too risky with my magic mirror.

"The reception is terrible down here," I lie. "Come upstairs." Actually, I have NO IDEA if it's a lie or not because I HAVE NO

CELL PHONE. She follows me upstairs and I show her to the living room to make her call. “I’ll get started on the s’mores,” I say. “Come when you’re done.”

“Where’s Robin?” Mom asks when I reach the kitchen. She’s unloading the dishwasher.

“She’s making a call. On her *cell*.”

Mom just smiles.

I sit on the kitchen table and swing my legs. “Can I have a cell phone?”

Mom laughs and puts away a stack of plates. “No way.”

“But I need one,” I explain.

“You don’t need one,” she says. “You want one.”

“I want *and* need one.”

“Why do you need one?”

“To text! To keep in touch! So you know where I am at all times!”

Mom smirks. “I know where you are at all times.”

Clearly she doesn’t know about the magic mirror in the basement. (Or the way it has swooped me to Floom, Mustard, and Zamel.)



“You’ll get one —”

My heart leaps. “I will?”

“Yes. When you’re older.”

“Why can’t I have one *now*?”

She puts away the coffee mugs. “Because you’re too young. It’s not necessary now. Be a kid for a bit. You have your whole life to be tethered to technology. You don’t need to start in the fifth grade.”

When she says the word *tethered* I can’t help but imagine the game tetherball. My body is the pole, the string is my arm, and the ball is the cell phone. I would like to be tethered to a phone. As soon as possible. “When *can* I start?”

“We’ll talk about it again when you’re in middle school.”

“Middle school is so far away. Like a hundred years away,” I whine.

“Time goes fast,” Mom says. “Just enjoy it. Now let’s make s’mores.”

Time does not go fast *enough*, if you ask me. It goes super-duper slow. It feels like I’m going to be a kid forever. I can’t wait to be a grown-up. I have it all planned.

After elementary school I'll go to middle school, then high school, then college, then law school. Once I'm done with school, I'm going to be a lawyer and then I'm going to be a judge.

Judges definitely have their own cell phones.

I wonder if they text other judges when they're bored?

The s'mores are delicious. I make some for Jonah even though he asks if I can make his with ketchup. He's obsessed with ketchup. Obviously the answer to that is NO.

He eats them anyway, smacking his lips the whole time.

At nine thirty, Robin and I are in my room with the lights off. Robin is back on her phone. This time her mom called to say good night.

She's on her phone *a lot*. Which is totally understandable. If I had a cell phone, I'd be on it a lot, too.

"Yes, Mom," Robin says. She walks around the room as she chats. "Mom, it's *fine*." Pause. She stands by my dresser and fingers the rectangular jewelry box on my dresser. My *special* jewelry box.

Robin rolls her eyes. “I told her. I promise! Don’t worry! Love you! Bye!”

She hangs up and tosses the phone into the orange leather satchel that has all her stuff in it. I know the bag used to be Dalia’s.

“Everything okay?” I ask Robin. I really, really hope her mom didn’t tell her she has to come home.

“All good,” she says, and points to my jewelry box. “I love this.”

I flush with pleasure. “Thanks. My nana gave it to me.” My grandmother lives in Chicago and I miss her. I haven’t seen her in months. I was supposed to visit her last weekend. I was going to fly BY MYSELF. But then there was a huge storm and all the airports were having delays and Mom was afraid I would get stranded somewhere, so I wasn’t allowed to go.

Do you know what would make getting stranded in an airport easier? A cell phone.

But anyway. The fact that my nana gave me the jewelry box isn’t the only thing that makes it special.

“Who are the people on the box?” Robin asks.

And there you go.

“They’re fairy tale characters,” I say.

She peers closer. “Oh, yeah, there’s Sleeping Beauty sleeping, and Aladdin on a magic carpet. Is that Snow White? Why is she wearing pajamas?”

An excellent question.

Snow White *is* wearing pajamas on the jewelry box. Lime-green pajamas.

Specifically: *My* lime-green pajamas.

Why is Snow White wearing my lime-green pajamas?

She wasn’t always dressed like that. Obviously. But Jonah and I changed the ending of Snow White’s story when the mirror in our basement sucked us into her world.

All the fairy tale characters and their new endings appear on my jewelry box. And *only* on my jewelry box. Last week I flipped through the copy of *Fairy Tales* that we have in my school library — I mean media room, sorry — and the endings were the same as the originals.

But my jewelry box has the new endings.

I don’t tell Robin about this, though. Jonah and I are not supposed to tell anyone.

Even though I really, really want to.

“I don’t know why Snow White is wearing pajamas,” I fib.  
“It’s silly, I guess.”

Then I yawn. I don’t mean to. I want to stay up all night and keep talking.

Then Robin yawns. Which is not surprising because yawns are contagious.

She crawls into the trundle bed.

“Why don’t we just close our eyes for a sec?” I ask. “Then we’ll keep talking.”

“Okay,” Robin says. “Just for a sec.”

We’ll take a quick nap. And then we’ll have fun. So much fun. And more s’mores — I close my eyes — but not s’mores with ketchup.