



Whatever After

SPILL *the* BEANS

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ISBN 978-1-338-16299-8

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 21 22 23 24 25

Printed in the U.S.A. 40

This edition first printing 2021

chapter one



Face-plant

you 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.