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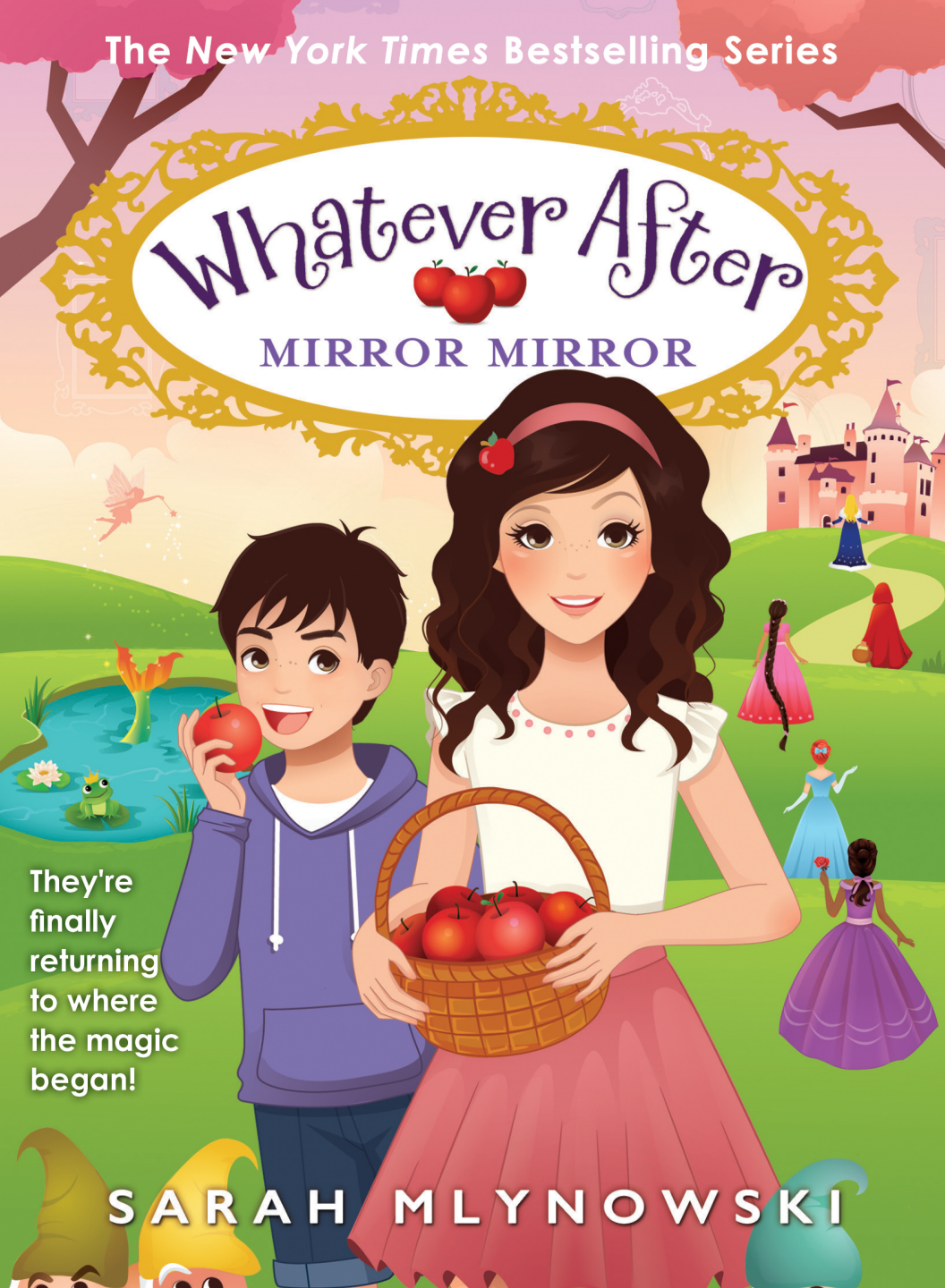
# Whatever After



MIRROR MIRROR

They're  
finally  
returning  
to where  
the magic  
began!

SARAH MLYNOWSKI



# Whatever After

MIRROR MIRROR

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The background of the entire cover is a light gray with a repeating pattern of various mirror frames. These frames include rectangular, oval, and ornate shapes, some with decorative scrollwork and others with simple lines. They are scattered across the page, creating a subtle, thematic backdrop.

# Whatever After

MIRROR MIRROR

SARAH MLYNOWSKI



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for emily eiden, the voice of abby! i am so lucky  
and so grateful for all your hard work—  
whatever after came to life for so many readers  
because of you. thank you. (sorry about  
bringing everyone back for this one...☺)

# chapter one



## Plot Twist

**W**e're finishing up dinner — burgers and fries with extra ketchup, my brother's favorite — when Mom says, “Abby. Jonah. We have something important we need to talk to you about.”

She gives my dad a meaningful look across the table.

I freeze.

Jonah, busy dipping the last French fry in ketchup, asks, “Are we going to Disney?”

Huh? We don't live near any of the Disney parks. And we definitely don't need to go to Disney to see fairy tale characters.

But that's a whole other story. I promise I'll get to it later.

Mom shakes her head. "It's not about a vacation."

"Okay . . ." I say tentatively. I take a sip of water, feeling a little nervous. Is it about summer camp? Tomorrow is the last day of school, and next week I'm supposed to go to camp at Green Acres with my besties, Frankie and Robin. And my sometimes bestie, Penny.

My dad clears his throat. "The thing is . . . your mom and I got a call. About us taking over a very successful law office. Back in . . . Naperville."

I almost spit out my drink. "Wait, what?" I ask, my heart racing. "Naperville? *Our* Naperville?"

"Yes," Dad says.

Jonah's eyes go wide. "We're moving back to Naperville?"

My mom hesitates. "Well . . . no. Maybe? We don't know."

I can't believe it. Naperville is where Jonah and I were born and where we lived before moving *here*, to Smithville. Less than a year ago! It took forever to find the best toppings at the frozen yogurt store and the best swing at the park. Never mind the best friends. And now we might be leaving?

"We haven't made any decisions yet," Dad adds quickly. "It's an incredible opportunity for us. But we know the last move wasn't easy. We want to discuss it as a family."

My head spins. Naperville! I try to steady my hands against the table.

Do I *want* to move back there? No. I'm happy here in Smithville. Really happy!

Sure, I was miserable when we first got here. We moved to Smithville right before the start of fifth grade. But then I met Frankie and Robin — and, yes, Penny — and they became my best friends. And I discovered the magic mirror in my basement . . .

I can't leave my best friends! I can't leave my magic mirror!

"I can't leave!" I cry, my throat closing up. "What about camp? What about, um, our basement?"

Dad frowns, looking confused. "We'd *probably* have a basement in our new house in Naperville," he says. "And you'd still go to Green Acres Day with your friends, Abby. The move wouldn't be until the end of the summer."

"And Sadie and Alexandra are in Naperville," my mom reminds me. "Don't forget about them."

Sadie and Alexandra were my best friends before I moved. "But I barely kept in touch with them," I say. "What if they don't want to be my friends anymore?" A lot changes in a year. Look at my life! Everything changed this year.

“It would be nice to be near Nana again,” Jonah says slowly.  
Oh. Right. Nana is in Naperville. And I miss her a lot.  
Like, a lot a lot.

On the other hand, how can I leave the magic mirror?

“Abby?” my mother says, putting her hand on my shoulder. “You okay?”

“I . . . I . . . don’t know.” Uncertainty twists through me.  
“I don’t want to leave my life here. But I guess I miss stuff in Naperville, too.”

“Jonah?” Dad asks.

My brother shrugs, mopping up the remaining ketchup on his plate with his index finger. “Either’s cool.”

He doesn’t seem fazed at all. How is he not fazed? This is a big deal. A really big deal! And Jonah has best friends here, too: Isaac and Ben.

“We don’t have to decide tonight, do we?” I ask, my voice breaking.

“No, no,” Mom says, shaking her head. “Of course not. We’re just putting it on the table, so to speak.”

I nod. Okay. It’s on the table. Right next to the now-empty plate of fries.

“Let’s all sleep on it and talk more tomorrow,” Mom adds.

\* \* \*

How in the world am I supposed to sleep with such a huge issue hanging over my head? Impossible! I toss and turn and turn and toss.

I wanted to call Frankie and Robin (and even Penny) right after dinner to tell them the news, but the lump in my throat was too big. I didn't think I could even speak the words — *I might be moving back to Naperville* — without crying.

I toss onto my right side. I can't move back to Naperville. Once you leave a place, you leave. You don't go back!

I toss onto my left side. But I'd love to see Nana every week.

I toss onto my stomach. But if we move to Naperville, I might never go into fairy tales again. That's the biggest problem of all.

See, here's the thing.

I really do have a magic mirror in my basement. And it's a really huge deal.

A long time ago, a fairy named Maryrose was cursed to be trapped inside that mirror.

Jonah and I discovered the mirror was magic by accident one night. Jonah banged into it while playing a game he'd invented called flying crocodile.

The first time he bumped into it, the mirror started to hiss.



Yes, hiss. He knocked on it, and the mirror turned purple. Yes, purple!

Why was he playing in the basement at 11:30 P.M. when he should have been sleeping? Unclear. Anyway. He ran upstairs to get me. Obviously, since I am only ten, I was asleep. But he woke me up and insisted I go downstairs with him, so I did, careful not to wake our parents.

Jonah knocked on the mirror again. It started hissing.

He knocked again. The glass turned purple.

The third time he knocked, the reflection started to swirl. And then it turned into a vacuum-like suction thing and slurped us both inside. It sucked up some of our parents' law books, too, which they luckily have not noticed are missing.

And we fell right into the story of *Snow White*. We messed things up for Snow at first — but then we fixed them. We made it back home, and the next time we knocked on the mirror, we got sent into the story of *Cinderella*. After that, *The Little Mermaid*. All year, we've been going through the mirror into different fairy tales. We never chose where we went. Maryrose would send us to stories she wanted us to fix. Eventually, we helped Maryrose escape the mirror, and now she's traveling around the fairy tale world with Tink, the fairy from *Peter Pan*.

I toss onto my back. Maybe we could take the magic mirror with us to Naperville. Sure, it came with our Smithville house, but it could be moved, couldn't it?

My covers suddenly feel like a weight. I push them off and tiptoe over to the jewelry box Nana gave me. The box shows drawings of fairy tale characters. After Jonah and I go inside a story, the characters on the box transform to show the changes we made.

Snow White, for instance, is wearing my lime-green pajamas. Cinderella's wearing a baker's hat. There's Sleeping Beauty. Rapunzel. The Snow Queen. Beauty. Princess Coco from *The Frog Prince*. Hansel and Gretel. All twelve of the dancing princesses. And more.

All the characters are wearing different outfits from the ones they started in.

Maybe there's nothing left for me to change in fairy tales. Maybe my work there is done.

But the only way to know for sure is to ask Maryrose.

## chapter two



### Anyone There?

●

I sneak down the hall into Jonah's room.

"Jonah! Jonah!" I whisper-yell, shaking him by the shoulder.

"Hmmbhagh," he mumbles, drool escaping his mouth.

"Wake up."

"Why?"

"Why do you think?" I ask. "We need to talk!"

Prince, our dog, wakes up from his spot on Jonah's rug. He wags his tail and tries to lick my leg, but I don't let him.

"Talk about what?" Jonah asks, still groggy.

"Seriously? About the move! About the mirror!"

He yawns and stretches his arms above his head. “Kay. What about the mirror?”

“Won’t you miss it?”

“Is it going somewhere?”

“Jonah. If we move, we won’t have the magic mirror anymore.”

“Couldn’t we take it with us?” he wonders.

“I don’t know. You’ve seen it. It’s pretty bolted to the wall. I’m not sure it will come off.”

He sits up. “Oh. I didn’t think about that.”

“Yeah.”

“But . . . we don’t *always* use the mirror to go into stories,” Jonah says. “We used pixie dust to get to Neverland. And didn’t you fall down a hole in a golf course when you went to Wonderland?”

“Yeah. But most of the time we go through the mirror. And remember what Nana told us?”

“No.”

“She had a portal to fairy tales when *she* was a kid, but then she moved and never found one again. And then she didn’t go into another fairy tale until she went through *our* mirror to follow us into the story of *Little Red Riding Hood!*”

“Right,” Jonah says. “So you’re thinking we should ask Maryrose?”

“Exactly,” I say.

I glance at Jonah’s clock. It changes color depending on the time of day — it turns green when he’s allowed to get out of bed. It is definitely still red now. It’s 11:50 P.M.

“We could try knocking at midnight,” I say. “But I don’t know if Maryrose will hear us. Since she’s no longer trapped in the mirror.”

Jonah nods.

“We’ll have to get her attention,” I say.

“Fireworks?” Jonah asks.

“What? No. Do you have fireworks?”

“No, I wish. Flashlight? Music? Yelling?”

“Maybe something more subtle? Something that won’t wake up our parents.” They don’t know about the magic. Our nana knows, of course. Penny knows, too, but not my other friends, even though they have gone into stories with me.

It was a whole thing.

“Let’s just try knocking at midnight,” I say.

“Okay,” Jonah says, wagging his eyebrows. “But I have an extra idea. Let’s go.”

My brother jumps out of bed. He’s wearing striped

navy-and-green pajamas. I'm wearing blue flannel pajama bottoms and an old Chicago Cubs shirt of my mom's. We're both barefoot, but there's no time to change that. Besides, we're only trying to communicate with Maryrose — we're not going into a fairy tale tonight.

Jonah opens his door, makes sure the coast is clear, and runs down the first flight of stairs. I follow, Prince at my heels. We actually got Prince from the story of *Sleeping Beauty*. Our parents didn't realize the adorable brown-and-white puppy who showed up was from a fairy tale, and they let us keep him. Now Prince comes with us into a lot of stories.

Jonah turns off into the kitchen. What is he doing? There's no time for the kitchen! Is he getting ketchup? He better not be getting ketchup.

I stand at the door and wave to him to move it, move it.

"*This* will get Maryrose's attention," he whispers. He holds up a tub of Nutella. "Have you tried it? Dad got it. It's so good!"

"Of course I've tried Nutella," I say. "But that's your plan?"

"It's a good plan! Doesn't Maryrose love peanut butter? This is chocolate peanut butter, basically."

He's not wrong. "Are you bringing crackers, too?" I ask.

“No, it’s better straight from the jar.” He holds up a spoon.

“Do you double-dip? You better not double-dip.”

“Um . . . no?”

“Jonah! Gross! But fine, let’s go, we’re running out of time.”

Holding the Nutella and the spoon, Jonah races down-stairs. Prince and I are right behind him. It must be almost midnight. Does the time even matter if we just want to talk to Maryrose? I don’t know! Everything is so confusing suddenly. The mirror! Maryrose! Where we should live!

I close the basement door behind us.

“Ready?” I ask.

Jonah gives me a thumbs-up.

Carefully, I knock on the mirror. Once.

“Maryrose,” I say. “We’re at the mirror. We need to talk to you.”

“We have snacks!” Jonah adds. “Have you tried Nutella? It’s like if peanut butter and chocolate had a baby, only the peanuts are hazelnuts, and you don’t even have to use it in a sandwich or with jelly. You can eat it straight from the jar if no grown-up is looking!”

Silence.

Prince barks.

“Maryrose?” I try again.



More silence.

But then . . . a purple glow! And Maryrose's face appears in the mirror.

Oh my gosh! She heard us. She's here!

Maryrose has long wavy brown hair, pale skin, and violet eyes. She looks like she's in her thirties, although I know she is hundreds of years old.

"Maryrose!" I cry. "Hi! I'm so glad you came. We really need to talk to you."

"Hello — I don't have a lot of time." Her image is a little shaky. "I'm trying to find Jax before . . . Well, he's up to no good."

"Oh, no," I say. Jax is an evil fairy who is always causing trouble. He's also Maryrose's cousin.

"I'm going to be unavailable any minute," Maryrose says, "so it's good you caught me. Is everything okay?"

"No, actually. We might be moving!" I say. "Back to Naperville."

"Oh, wow!" she says, her eyes widening.

"Can we take the mirror with us?" Jonah asks.

"I'm afraid you can't," Maryrose says. "The magic doesn't work like that."

"So if we move, we won't be able to go into fairy tales anymore?" I ask, feeling a wave of sadness. "What about

books, like *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*? A tornado took me there.”

“But the mirror was always nearby,” she says. “It will be much harder to travel into any kind of story from Naperville. I’m not sure I could get to you.”

Crumbs!

“Let me think about it,” Maryrose says. “There must be something I can do. But in case I can’t . . . Would you be willing to go on one more mission for me?”

“Of course,” Jonah says.

“Definitely,” I say.

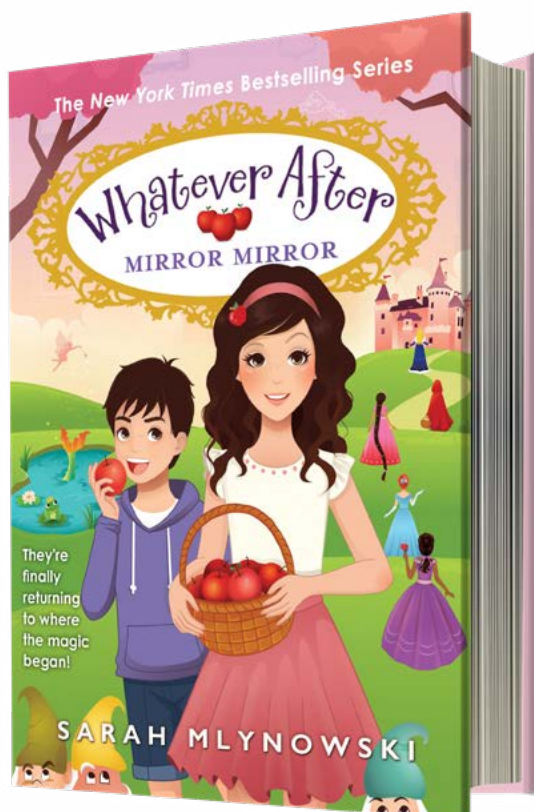
“Thank you!” she says, and her face gets a bit fuzzy.

“What’s the mission?” I ask. “And when do you need us to go?”

“Now!” she says.

Before I can ask another question, the mirror starts to swirl. And it sucks me, Jonah, and Prince inside.

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