

Whatever After

GOOD aS GOLD

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chapter three



Anyone Home?

Jonah? Prince? Is everyone okay?" I ask breathlessly.
Prince barks in my arms.

Jonah turns around and smiles. "That. Was. Awesome!"

"That was NOT awesome!" I yell. "We definitely should have been wearing helmets for that!"

Prince barks again in agreement. He's trembling a little in my arms, so I give him a cuddle.

My legs are a bit jelly-ish. I stand up carefully, holding Prince. Jonah hops off the skateboard, too.

"Hello?" I call out, looking around the empty living

room. “Anyone home? Sorry we . . . um, sledded in. I hope we didn’t damage your door!”

I can only imagine how my parents would react if two kids and a dog crashed through our front door without any warning.

No one responds.

“Hello?” I repeat.

Silence.

“I don’t think anyone’s home,” Jonah says.

I take a look at the door to see if we broke it. But I don’t think we did. It looks like we just pushed it open. Wind and hail are now blowing inside the living room.

Maybe this is the kind of town where people don’t lock their doors.

“We should go before someone gets home,” I say.

“Seriously, Abby?” Jonah asks. “Do you see what’s happening out there?”

He has a point. The hail is coming down even harder now, and we’re not remotely dressed for this weather.

At least we’re not all wet. We went so fast, the hail didn’t have a chance to soak us.

“It does look bad,” I admit, closing the door so that no more hail can come in.

“Yeah. We have nowhere else to go,” Jonah says. “And we’re two kids.” Prince barks. “And a dog,” Jonah adds, leaning forward to scratch Prince’s ears. “No one is going to mind us being in here to stay safe.”

“I guess . . .” I say. Whoever lives here is probably staying put wherever *they* are right now, too. We’ll be really careful and leave as soon as the bad weather stops and it’s safe to go.

I take a deep breath and set Prince down on the floor. He immediately starts nosing around the multicolored rug.

Now that I have a chance to get my bearings, I see that the living room is very stylish. There’s a big pink sofa with lots of pillows and framed paintings on the walls. The bookshelves hold pottery, like pretty vases and painted bowls. A big brick fireplace takes up almost one wall.

“Something smells really good,” Jonah says. He sniffs the air. So does Prince, and his tail wags happily.

I sniff. It *does* smell good. Sweet and earthy and maybe . . . like cinnamon?

Jonah, Prince, and I follow the scent to a big round table by the window. There are three empty chairs around the table, and *on* the table are three purple ceramic bowls with little white stars on the rims. Cute. Each bowl is full of yummy-smelling white mush.

“Oatmeal!” I say. Hmm. Is there a fairy tale about oatmeal?

“Yum,” Jonah says. And then he sticks his finger right in one of the bowls.

“Why are you always sticking your finger into bowls?” I ask. “What do you have against spoons? And don’t eat that. It could be poisoned.”

Jonah’s eyes widen and he lifts his finger out of the bowl. “Oops.”

I dip my nose close to one of the other bowls. I sniff again. Mmm. I love cinnamon. Even if I once had some trouble spelling the word.

“It doesn’t smell poisoned,” I say. Not that I know what poisoned oatmeal would smell like. I lean even closer to the bowl and take another deep sniff —

And I feel a little shove on the back of my head. Ahhh! My face is suddenly *IN* the bowl of warm mush.

What the *what?* I raise my head. My face is covered in oatmeal.

Jonah giggles. “Hah.”

“Jonah!” I yell.

“Sorry,” he says. But he’s still laughing. “It was too easy.”

On the wall across from the table is a small mirror. Too small to be a portal home, I think. But I catch a glimpse of my reflection. I have to admit I look pretty ridiculous with oatmeal all over my face. I can’t help but laugh, and I lick the side of my mouth.

“It could use a little brown sugar,” I say. “But it’s pretty good. And it doesn’t taste poisoned.”

Jonah grins and licks his oatmeal-covered finger.

I take one of the napkins and wipe my face. I hope whoever’s house this is won’t mind that we’ve eaten a tiny bit of their oatmeal and used one of their napkins.

But that’s all we’ll do. Promise.

I glance over at Prince.

Oh, *no!* He has his front paws on the table and his snout in the third bowl.

“No, Prince!” I cry, but our dog has already gobbled up that entire bowl of oatmeal.

I *really* hope whoever lives here won't mind.

Why would they leave their food out anyway? Seems odd. Were they in a hurry to go somewhere?

I notice for the first time that the three chairs around the table are different sizes: One is big, one is medium-sized, and one is small, like for a kid.

Same with the purple bowls. One big (and now empty, thanks to Prince). One medium-sized (with a finger swipe in it, thanks to Jonah). And the third one is small (with a face-sized dent in it, again thanks to Jonah).

And the three spoons. Yup, you guessed it. One big. One medium. And one small.

Three of everything. Different sizes.

That's ringing a bell.

"Hey, Abby, look at that," Jonah says, pointing to one of the framed paintings on the wall. "Do you think they live here?"

I turn to look. It's a nice illustration of a big bear, a medium-sized bear, and a baby bear — a cub — cuddled together and smiling, under the words THE BEAR FAMILY.

Bear family.

Three of everything.

One big. One medium. One small.
I gasp as my eyes widen. That's it!
It's not oatmeal in the bowls — it's porridge! Although
maybe porridge and oatmeal are the same thing?
“I know what fairy tale we're in!” I tell Jonah.