



Ever After High



Madeline Hatter's
Story



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MADELINE HATTER WAS IN THE ENCHANTED Forest by sunrise, the best time of day to find charm blossoms. The vibrant pink flowers bloomed only in the morning, twirling on their stems toward the rising sun. Maddie added a few to her basket of wild peppermint, chamomile flowers, and dragon scales. A white rabbit paused nearby, sniffing some clover.

“How are you this sunny, shiny morning?” Maddie asked.

The rabbit sniffled and hopped away without a word. Maddie shook her head. The rabbits of Ever



After were just so impolite! Not even a “how do you do” or an “I’m late! I must be hopping!” And since leaving Wonderland, Maddie had yet to see a single rabbit wearing so much as a bow tie. Rabbits looked practically naked without bow ties.

Curiouser and curiouser. Maddie supposed she would never totally understand this nonsensical world outside Wonderland.

She hurried out of the forest, across the footbridge, around the grounds of Ever After High, and back into the Village of Book End. After a lazy summer, the main street of Book End was positively crowded. Tomorrow began a new school year at Ever After High, a boarding school for the teenage sons and daughters of fairytales. The first-year students arrived a day early in order to shop for clothes at the Gingerbread Boutique, shoes at the Glass Slipper, and MirrorPhones and MirrorPads at the Mirror Store. They wandered in groups or in pairs, but a few walked alone.

Just a year ago, Maddie had been one of the alone ones. Although she’d arrived in Book End with her father, a great deal of hats, and her pet dormouse, Earl Grey, she’d felt the absence of a good friend.

She checked her watch.

“Twenty-two hours, forty-seven minutes, and eighteen seconds to go!” she said to herself. Not long until her best friends till The End, Raven Queen and Cedar Wood, would return to Ever After High. At last! They both lived far, far away, and calls on the MirrorPhone just weren’t the same as a friend by your side.

Maddie tried to turn the absence of her friends into something positive—missing them made her even more excited to start her second year!

The second year was Legacy Year—when the students would sign the Storybook of Legends and magically bind themselves to reliving their parents’ fairytales. Maddie couldn’t wait. Who wouldn’t want to follow in her father’s hat-tastic footsteps?

When Maddie opened the door to the Mad Hatter of Wonderland’s Haberdashery & Tea Shoppe, a hiss of steam escaped, smelling of sugarplum biscuits and hot sweet tea. The place was crowded with first-year students taking a break from shopping. Teapots rattled and whistled on every table, creating a kind of music that made Maddie want to throw off her shoes and dance.

But first, she removed her tiny teacup hat and put on a basket hat bursting with live flowers. The price tag dangled rakishly over her forehead. She and her dad had made it a rule to always wear the merchandise.

Doors of different sizes and colors climbed up all the walls. A bright yellow door on the ceiling opened, and her father leaned down. While Maddie's mint-green hair was streaked with purple around her face, her father's was mint green streaked with white. Even upside down, his huge orange polka-dotted top hat remained firmly on his large head.

"Success?" asked the Mad Hatter.

Maddie nodded, holding up her basket of flowers and scales.

"Tea-riffic," he said.

He fell out the door, landing on a huge cushion on the floor. He hopped up and, in his stockinged feet, leaped like a gazelle through the shop and into the kitchen. Maddie was about to follow when a girl beside her said, "*Excuse me.*"

Her hair was red, and her cheeks were dusted with light brown freckles. She had a mouth that seemed to want to smile, but for some reason her lips were

tight. "I have been standing here for two entire minutes waiting for a seat."

"Oh!" said Maddie. "I'm so sorry. I think there's been some kind of misunderstanding." She leaned closer and whispered helpfully, "The seats here don't come to you. You have to walk over to them."

The girl's mouth gaped as if she was insulted. Maddie nodded sympathetically.

"I agree," Maddie said. "I've often thought that chairs that come to you are a hexcellent idea. Alas, it can't be helped. Ever After chairs have four good legs, but they just refuse to use them!"

The girl sputtered, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I feel the same way all the time!" said Maddie. "Especially on an upside-down kind of day like today. It's a last day and also a first day—last day of summer, your first day in Book End. Last day before school starts, first day of a new chapter. It's enough to make a girl feel like she's sitting on her head!"

Again, the girl seemed to want to smile but didn't. Maddie wondered what possible reason anyone could have for holding back a smile.

"If you haven't the manners to show me to a seat,

I'll do it myself." With a huff, the girl stalked over to an unoccupied table and yelled back to Maddie, "I want a cup of tea!"

"Tea-riffic!" said Maddie. "Dad has some lovely brews pipping and piping today—spritzle-fizzle tea, milkflower tea, chocolate-rhubarb-pumpkin-raspberry-dragon-fire tea—"

"Regular tea," said the girl. "That's what I drink at home, so that's what I'll have here."

"But—"

"I'm Clara Lear, you know."

Maddie stared blankly.

Clara Lear sighed. "Why doesn't anyone know my tale? My father is King Lear, and one day I'll be queen, so bring me what I ordered!"

"Er... regular tea isn't the sort of thing we brew," said Maddie. "Why, in Wonderland, the very idea of regular tea would make people laugh and laugh for days!"

Maddie smiled. Clara Lear did not.

"*Are we in Wonderland?*" Clara asked.

The question shocked Maddie into silence.

"I didn't think so," said Clara. "And a good thing, too. From what I know of Wonderland, it's just a

kingdom full of nonsense and singing and uselessness. If you don't brew regular tea in Wonderland, then that's definitely the kind I want."

Maddie just nodded and left, trying not to think too much about the horrible things Clara had said about her home.

Just like in the shop, the walls in the kitchen were covered with doors. The tea cupboard door was painted as pink as an elephant and was just as large. But the moment Maddie put her hand on the knob, the cupboard shrank to book-size.

"There it goes again, Dad!" she called.

"What, is that teakettle singing?" he called back from inside a copper door. "I'm certain there's just something inside it. Possibly a singing ferret. Or a singing bat. But definitely something that sings."

"No, the tea cupboard is shrinking."

"Ah, yes," said the Mad Hatter. He emerged from the copper door, two jars of honey in his arms. A few fat bees buzzed around his head. "Having another identity crisis. I can understand that. Is it a cup? Or a board? Excellent questions, both!"

Maddie opened the cupboard door and reached in her hand. She seemed to remember spying a packet

of regular tea in the back of the cupboard once, but her arm wasn't long enough to reach. Arms could be inconveniently short at times. So much trouble for regular tea!

Her father squinted down at the cupboard through his glasses.

"Can you manage to get inside it, Maddie, my girl?"

"I think I could almost get my head in," said Maddie.

"Wonderlandiful!" said her father.

"Of course, my head won't be much use without my shoulders."

"And the rest of you, too, I suppose. Yes, you're right. Having this and that attached to our heads does complicate things."

Then her father did something extraordinary.

Maddie laughed. "You frowned!" she said.

Her father snickered. "I did, didn't I? What an upside-down day."

So they both went over to the mirror on the wall, frowning and laughing at themselves and then trying to frown again. It was an excellent game, but it was soon interrupted by Clara shouting from her table.

"If I can't get any service here, I'll just give up on tea altogether and go elsewhere!"

Give up on tea? *Give up on tea?* Maddie had never heard of such a ridiculous idea in her life.

"Earl Grey!" Maddie called.

Her pet dormouse stuck his head out of a kettle, where he had been humming "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Shrew."

"Earl Grey, you sweetie little mousey, you, will you go on a bold and brave mouse quest?"

Moments later Earl Grey returned from inside the cupboard (which was neither a cup nor a board) triumphant, with a packet of tea in his paws.

"Thank you, Sir Mouse!" she said. He solemnly removed his top hat and bowed, and Maddie knighted him by touching each of his furry shoulders with a teaspoon. Earl Grey liked to be knighted exactly six times each day.

Maddie tore open the paper packet of regular tea and looked at the sad gray bag. It smelled like dirt. And not even nice, warm brown dirt full of fat, healthy worms and interesting bits of sparkly stones. No, like dusty dirt, the kind that was good for nothing but sweeping away.

Maddie frowned even though she wasn't looking in a mirror. This couldn't be what Clara Lear honestly wanted—or needed.

Maddie peeked through the kitchen door. All the tables were filled with groups of kids talking and laughing. But Clara sat alone, back stiff, eyes straight ahead. Maddie remembered her own loneliness before meeting Raven and Cedar. Just thinking about her friends made Maddie smile.

And suddenly she understood Clara Lear's tight lips. Maddie dropped the regular tea in the dustbin and went to fetch the brightest, happiest teapot she could find.

"Finally," said Clara as Maddie brought the pot to her table.

"It's not exactly what you ordered," said Maddie. "But I find on an upside-down kind of day, when your belly is full of thoughts and your head is full of butterflies, nothing quite puts things right like charm blossom tea. Watch..." She poured the lavender-colored tea into Clara's cup. "When you talk, the tea..." The liquid began to stir on its own, rippling and spinning, pale lavender blending into

peach and then orange. "It listens to your voice and becomes just the flavor you need."

Clara seemed too shocked to speak.

Maddie sat in the chair beside Clara, rested her chin on her hands, and smiled. "I started Ever After High last year, and I felt like the last teaspoon in the drawer. But then I met my best friend forever after, Raven Queen, and everything was as okay as pumpkin in pie. It will be for you, too. Especially since I put in extra honey."

Clara's posture slumped, just a little, and she looked into her cup of tea. "But my destiny isn't a very nice one, you know, even if I will be a queen. I become quite mean when I'm old, and what if the people at school don't like my fairytale, or my red hair, or me...?"

As she spoke, the tea turned a deep, deep purple. Clara lifted the cup and sipped. Her eyebrows rose.

The truth was, Maddie greatly enjoyed the upside-down kind of days. Especially because they always seemed to include a cup of warm tea with a great deal of honey.

The bell at the door rang, and a dark-haired girl

with blue wings entered, clutching her hands, her eyes nervously taking in the scene.

“Over here!” Maddie waved. “Clara Lear has room at her table, and an entire pot of charm blossom tea.”

“But...” Clara looked at Maddie, at the winged girl sitting down beside her, and again at Maddie. Suddenly her lips seemed to know what to do. They smiled. “We’ll need scones, then, and a pot of fairy-berry jam.”

“Coming right up!” said Maddie.

Maddie skipped back to the kitchen, where her father thrust a cup in her hands.

“A new brew,” he said, taking the scones and jam out to the table himself. “Fortune-teller tea. Give it a sip!”

The liquid was pink and smelled of strawberries, but when Maddie drank it, the flavor was deep and a little bitter, followed by a sudden burst of sweetness.

Her father returned. “Well?” he asked.

“It started out as black licorice and then melted into butterscotch,” she said.

“Oh, my girl, the tea is telling you that this is the

year to keep your ear to the ground and listen for surprises. Change is coming!”

Maddie’s stomach was full of thoughts and her head full of butterflies. She checked her watch again. She couldn’t wait for it all to begin.



New York Times bestselling author SHANNON HALE knew at age ten that it was her destiny to become a writer. She has quested deep into fairy tales in such enchanting books as *The Goose Girl*, *Book of a Thousand Days*, *Rapunzel's Revenge*, and Newbery Honor recipient *Princess Academy*. With the princely and valiant writer Dean Hale, Shannon coauthored four charming children, who are free to follow their own destinies. Just so long as they get to bed on time.



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