



# The Unfairest of Them All

BY SHANNON HALE



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Summary: In the aftermath of Legacy Day, Raven Queen, reluctant leader of the Rebels, and Apple White, head of the Royals, work together when an Ever After High student, Maddie, gets in trouble, threatening all of their Happily Ever Afters.

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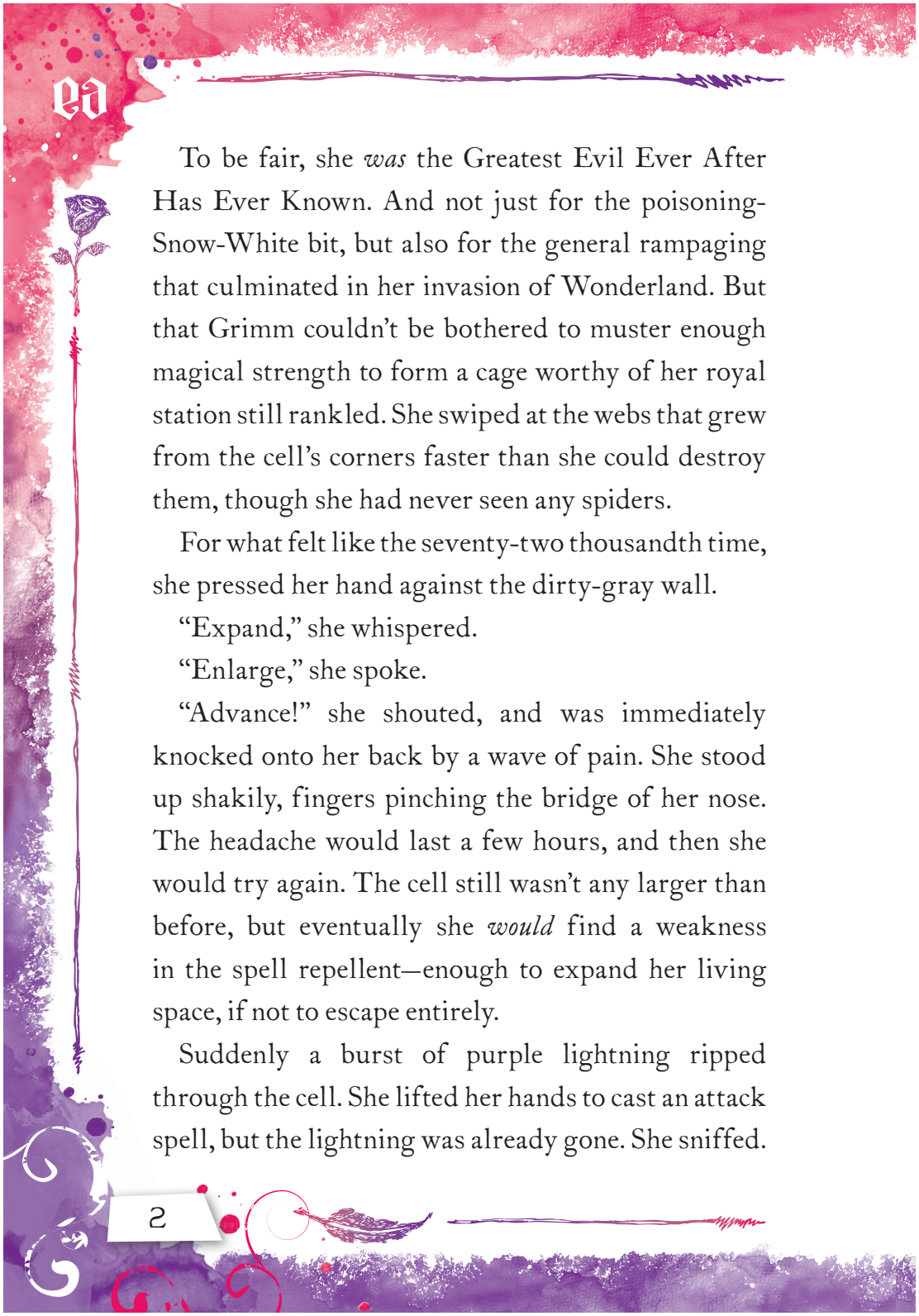


*A Very Evil*  
PROLOGUE



**I**F THE EVIL QUEEN HAD ONE WORD TO describe her living conditions, it would be *cramped*. If she had more than one word, she would add *intolerable*, *wretched*, and several others that well-trained Narrators choose to leave out of their tales.

Her cramped black glass cell was the *inside* of a magical mirror designed to hold only the greatest of terrors. Her eyes burned with violet flames at the memory of Milton Grimm and his petty magician pals ganging up to remove her from power.



To be fair, she *was* the Greatest Evil Ever After Has Ever Known. And not just for the poisoning-Snow-White bit, but also for the general rampaging that culminated in her invasion of Wonderland. But that Grimm couldn't be bothered to muster enough magical strength to form a cage worthy of her royal station still rankled. She swiped at the webs that grew from the cell's corners faster than she could destroy them, though she had never seen any spiders.

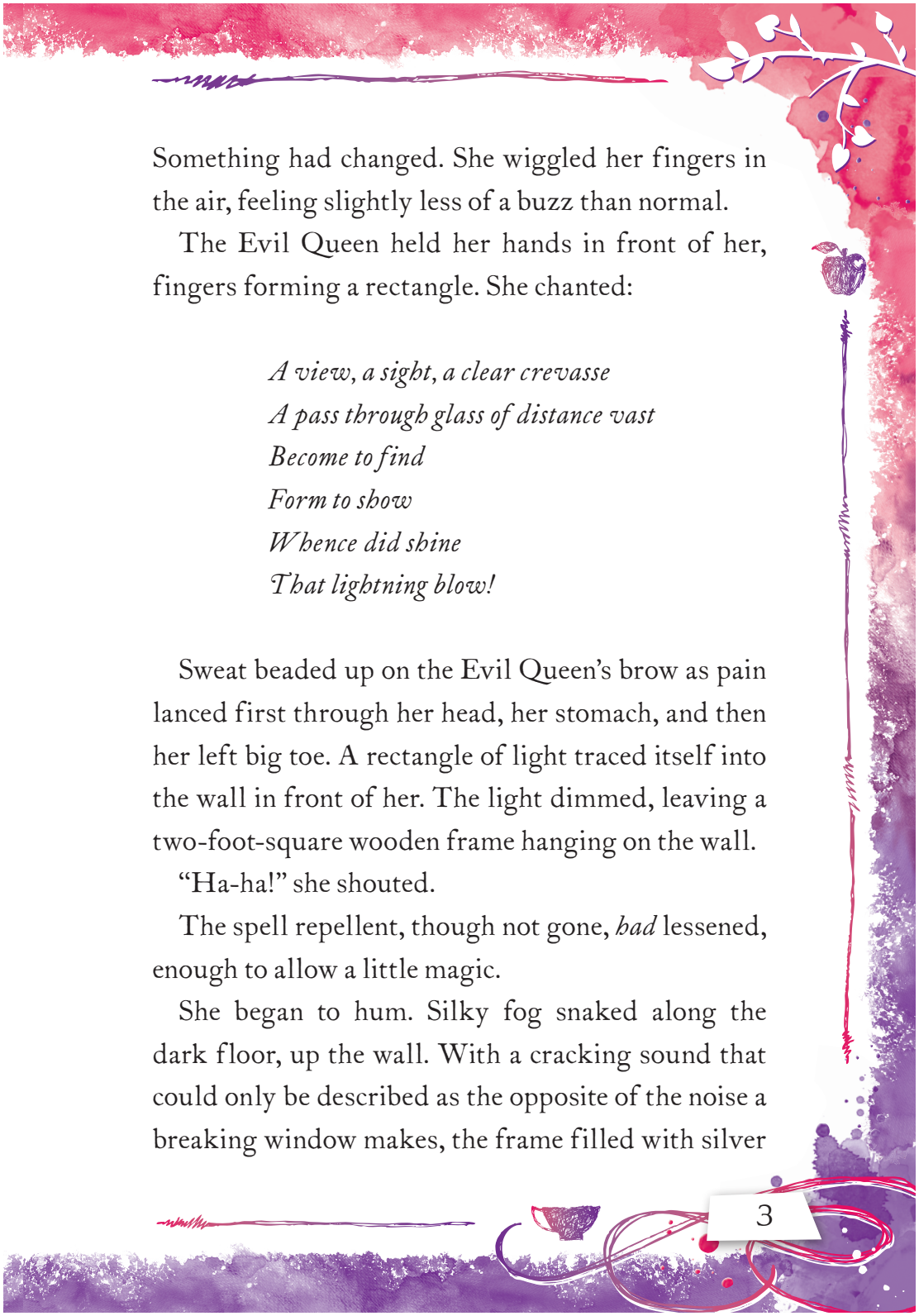
For what felt like the seventy-two thousandth time, she pressed her hand against the dirty-gray wall.

"Expand," she whispered.

"Enlarge," she spoke.

"Advance!" she shouted, and was immediately knocked onto her back by a wave of pain. She stood up shakily, fingers pinching the bridge of her nose. The headache would last a few hours, and then she would try again. The cell still wasn't any larger than before, but eventually she *would* find a weakness in the spell repellent—enough to expand her living space, if not to escape entirely.

Suddenly a burst of purple lightning ripped through the cell. She lifted her hands to cast an attack spell, but the lightning was already gone. She sniffed.



Something had changed. She wiggled her fingers in the air, feeling slightly less of a buzz than normal.

The Evil Queen held her hands in front of her, fingers forming a rectangle. She chanted:


*A view, a sight, a clear crevasse  
A pass through glass of distance vast  
Become to find  
Form to show  
Whence did shine  
That lightning blow!*

Sweat beaded up on the Evil Queen's brow as pain lanced first through her head, her stomach, and then her left big toe. A rectangle of light traced itself into the wall in front of her. The light dimmed, leaving a two-foot-square wooden frame hanging on the wall.

"Ha-ha!" she shouted.

The spell repellent, though not gone, *had* lessened, enough to allow a little magic.

She began to hum. Silky fog snaked along the dark floor, up the wall. With a cracking sound that could only be described as the opposite of the noise a breaking window makes, the frame filled with silver



glass. A real mirror at last! She inspected her face, noticing some of her black hairs had turned gray. She frowned and remembered that even her frown was beautiful.


With a few words and a flick of her hands (and a stabbing headache), the mirror's view deepened, and now she was spying through it onto the terrace courtyard of Ever After High. This was where the purple surge had come from?

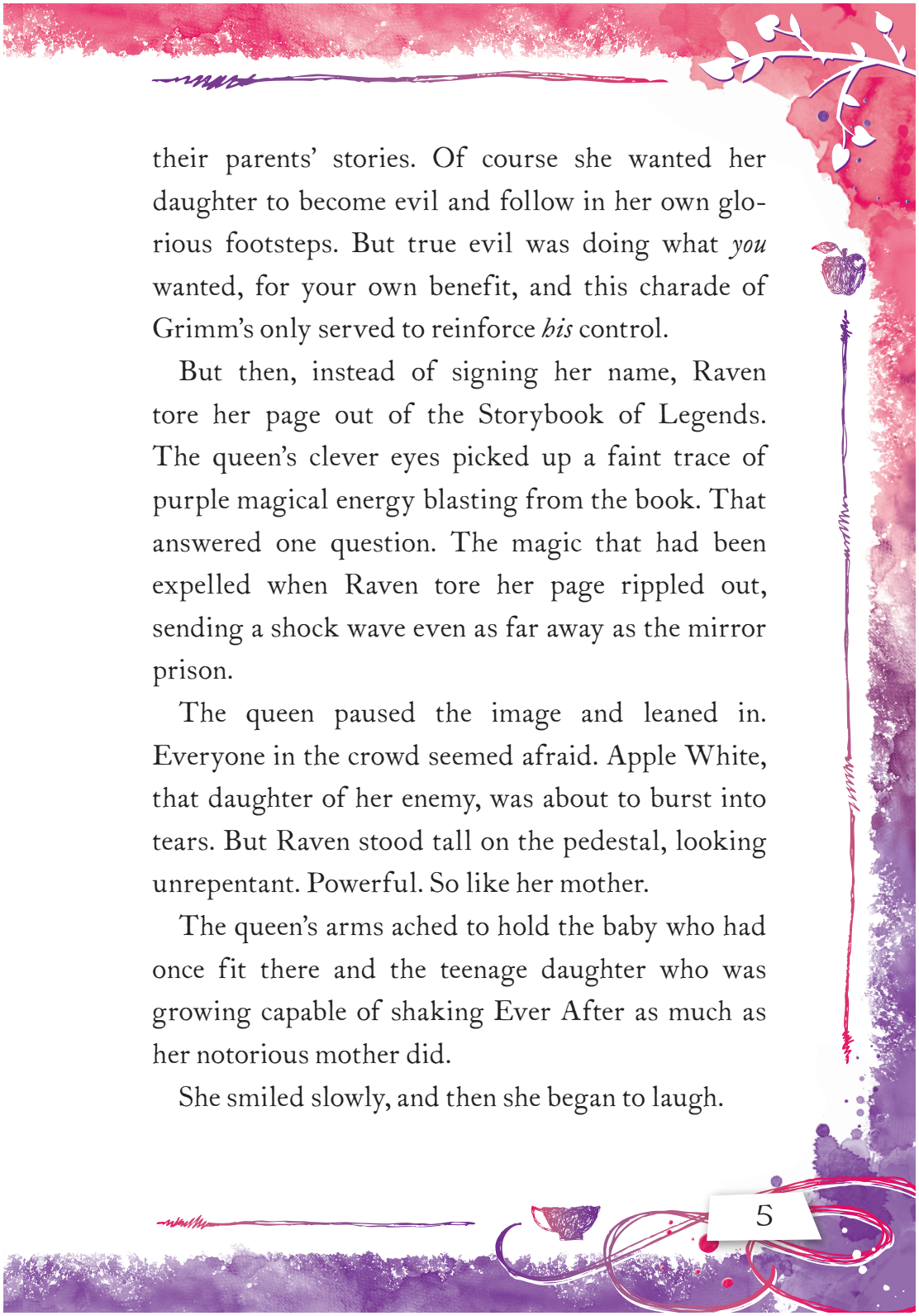
A crowd on the terrace was in a panic. Children and teachers, mouths open in shock and terror. The queen couldn't help but smile. This was the sort of scene she found insanely funny. She spotted her daughter, Raven, standing high on the pedestal. The Evil Queen touched the glass.

"Rewind, design, reverse," she chanted. The view froze, and then events began to go backward, until she whispered, "Stop, stay, play." Now the mirror replayed the events of moments before. Raven was approaching a large book posted on the podium.

"Ah," the queen said. "It must be Legacy Day."

She rolled her eyes. It was a rite of passage for all the children of famous fairytales to sign the Storybook of Legends and bind themselves to repeating





their parents' stories. Of course she wanted her daughter to become evil and follow in her own glorious footsteps. But true evil was doing what *you* wanted, for your own benefit, and this charade of Grimm's only served to reinforce *his* control.

But then, instead of signing her name, Raven tore her page out of the Storybook of Legends. The queen's clever eyes picked up a faint trace of purple magical energy blasting from the book. That answered one question. The magic that had been expelled when Raven tore her page rippled out, sending a shock wave even as far away as the mirror prison.

The queen paused the image and leaned in. Everyone in the crowd seemed afraid. Apple White, that daughter of her enemy, was about to burst into tears. But Raven stood tall on the pedestal, looking unrepentant. Powerful. So like her mother.

The queen's arms ached to hold the baby who had once fit there and the teenage daughter who was growing capable of shaking Ever After as much as her notorious mother did.

She smiled slowly, and then she began to laugh.



## CHAPTER 1


# A SPOONFUL OF PORRIDGE

**M**ORNING ONCE-UPONED ALL OVER EVER After. Bluebirds sang, roosters crowed, and pixies buzzed in the Enchanted Forest.

Against the walls of the great Ever After High, sunrise glared red. All was still but for the Track and Shield students out for a morning run—pursued by a horde of screaming imps, Coach Gingerbreadman’s latest tactic to get his team in shape.

In her dorm room, Apple White stood and stretched. Songbirds gathered on her windowsill



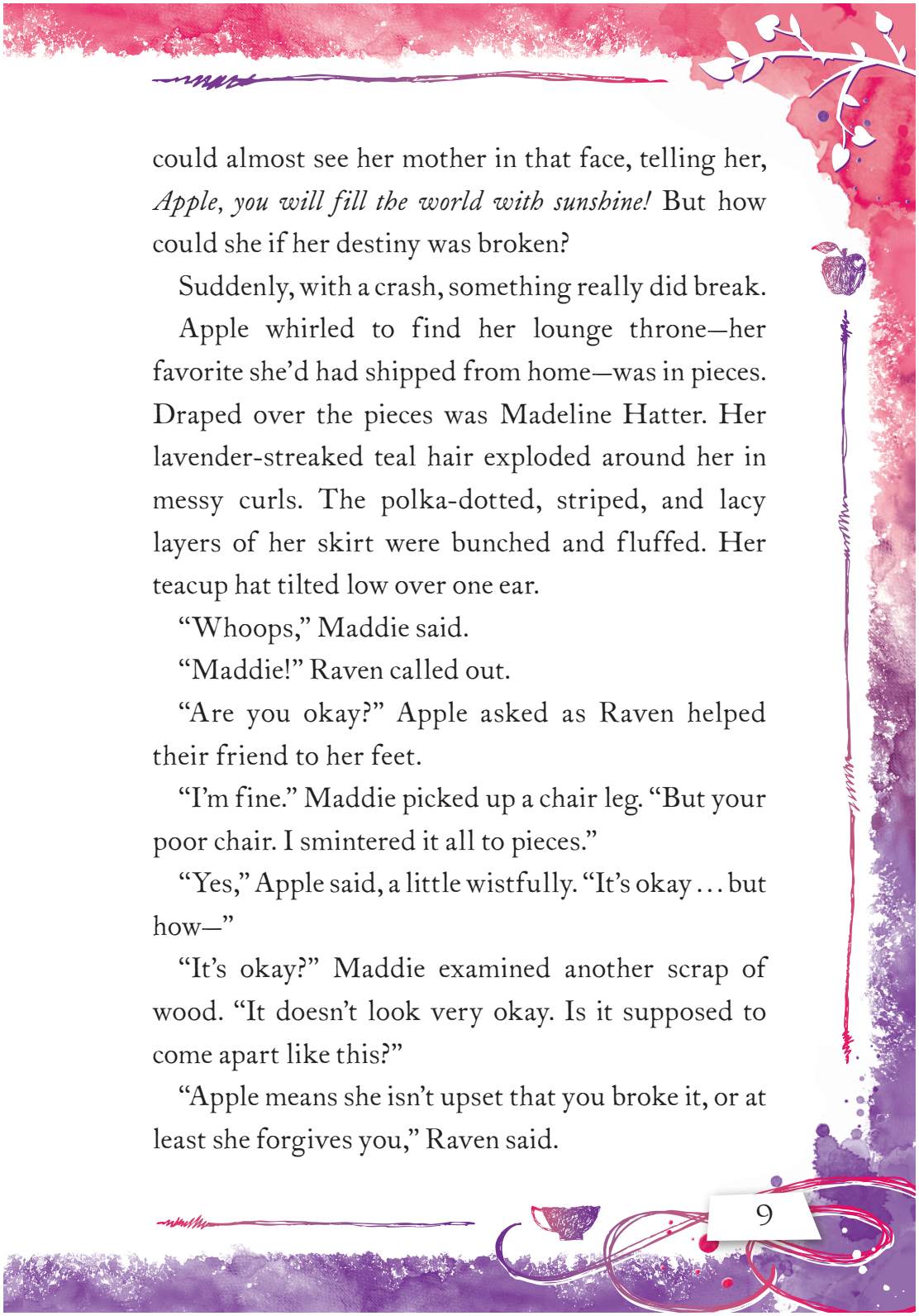


and chirped a morning song. She smiled at them but couldn't muster a song of her own to whistle back.

She put on her most somber red skirt and white blouse and the very least shiny of her gold belts. She looked at her roommate from the corner of her eye. Raven Queen was sitting on her bed, head down, her long black-and-purple hair falling over her face as she tied the laces on her knee-high boots. She looked sad. Instinctively, Apple searched for something cheery to say, but the words caught in her throat.

Yesterday Raven Queen had managed to do the most evil thing ever. No, scratch that, *worse* than evil. She was *supposed* to be evil. What Raven had done was just straight-up selfish. When she didn't sign the Storybook of Legends—and worse, tore out her page—she royally messed up not only Apple's Happily Ever After but everyone else's, too. She and Raven were supposed to grow up and become the next Snow White and Evil Queen, just as their mothers had been. But if Raven refused to be evil, then Apple would never flee the dark and scary Queen Castle, meet the dwarves, eat a poisoned apple, and wake up to a prince's kiss.

Apple stared at her reflection in the mirror. She



could almost see her mother in that face, telling her, *Apple, you will fill the world with sunshine!* But how could she if her destiny was broken?

Suddenly, with a crash, something really did break.

Apple whirled to find her lounge throne—her favorite she'd had shipped from home—was in pieces. Draped over the pieces was Madeline Hatter. Her lavender-streaked teal hair exploded around her in messy curls. The polka-dotted, striped, and lacy layers of her skirt were bunched and fluffed. Her teacup hat tilted low over one ear.

“Whoops,” Maddie said.

“Maddie!” Raven called out.

“Are you okay?” Apple asked as Raven helped their friend to her feet.

“I’m fine.” Maddie picked up a chair leg. “But your poor chair. I smintered it all to pieces.”

“Yes,” Apple said, a little wistfully. “It’s okay . . . but how—”

“It’s okay?” Maddie examined another scrap of wood. “It doesn’t look very okay. Is it supposed to come apart like this?”

“Apple means she isn’t upset that you broke it, or at least she forgives you,” Raven said.

Raven glanced uneasily at Apple.

“Oh, Raven,” said Maddie. “I can hear an ache crouching behind your tongue. The kind of ache an empty cup has for honey and tea, or a white rabbit has for a proper waistcoat—”

“Maddie...” Raven looked down.

“And like I ache for breakfast!” said Maddie. “Breakfast cures most everything—except chairs. I’m sorry, Apple.”

Maddie gave Apple a hug. She was shorter than Apple—one of the shortest girls in the school, and she stood on her toes to reach around her friend.

“I’ll try to fix it later,” said Maddie. “For now, we need to fix your empty stomachs. Let’s all have breakfast together.”


“Um...” said Apple, looking sideways at Raven.

“Er...” said Raven, peeking over at Apple. “I think Apple just needs some time to—”

“Excuse me?” said Apple. “You think *I* need time when you’re the one who—”

“*Breakfast!*” Maddie declared. “Breakfast first, and then you two will be chatty and smiley again.”

Maddie darted to their window, ready to leap. “Last one to the Castleteria is a rotten egg-man!”



“Whoa!” Apple said, grabbing Maddie’s arm.  
“What are you doing?”

“We could get there way faster by jumping,”  
Maddie said.

“We’re, like, four stories up,” Raven said.

“I *know*,” Maddie said. “That’s why going footwise  
on the stairs would take too long.”

“You jumped here all the way from your window,  
didn’t you?” Raven asked.

“I did, indeed,” Maddie said, beaming. “Couldn’t  
really see where I was going, though, so that’s why I  
splanch’d the chair.”

“I’m sorry to have to tell you this, Maddie,” Raven  
said, “because I know you can do impossible things  
when you don’t know they’re impossible yet, but that  
kind of jumping definitely is. Impossible. Apple and  
I would ‘splanch’ and ‘sminter’ just like the chair.”


“Toad droppings,” said Maddie. “Last time I do  
that, then. And it was so fun, too.”

Apple’s stomach grumbled.

“Aaaah!” Maddie yelled, hopping away from  
Apple.

Apple laughed. “I’m just hungry,” she said.

“I know! That’s why I shrieked, because, oddness



gracious, to go so long without food that your stomach yells at you! What, did you think I thought you had a monster in your tummy? Don't be silly." Maddie leaned over to Raven and loudly whispered, "*Does* she have a monster in her tummy?"

"No." Raven laughed.

"Then let's take care of our poor, starving Apple," Maddie said, grabbing each girl by the hand.

The three girls trundled out the door and down the stairs. The windows poured light as thick and yellow as fresh butter on the stones, yet Apple couldn't feel anything but dread. What was wrong with her?

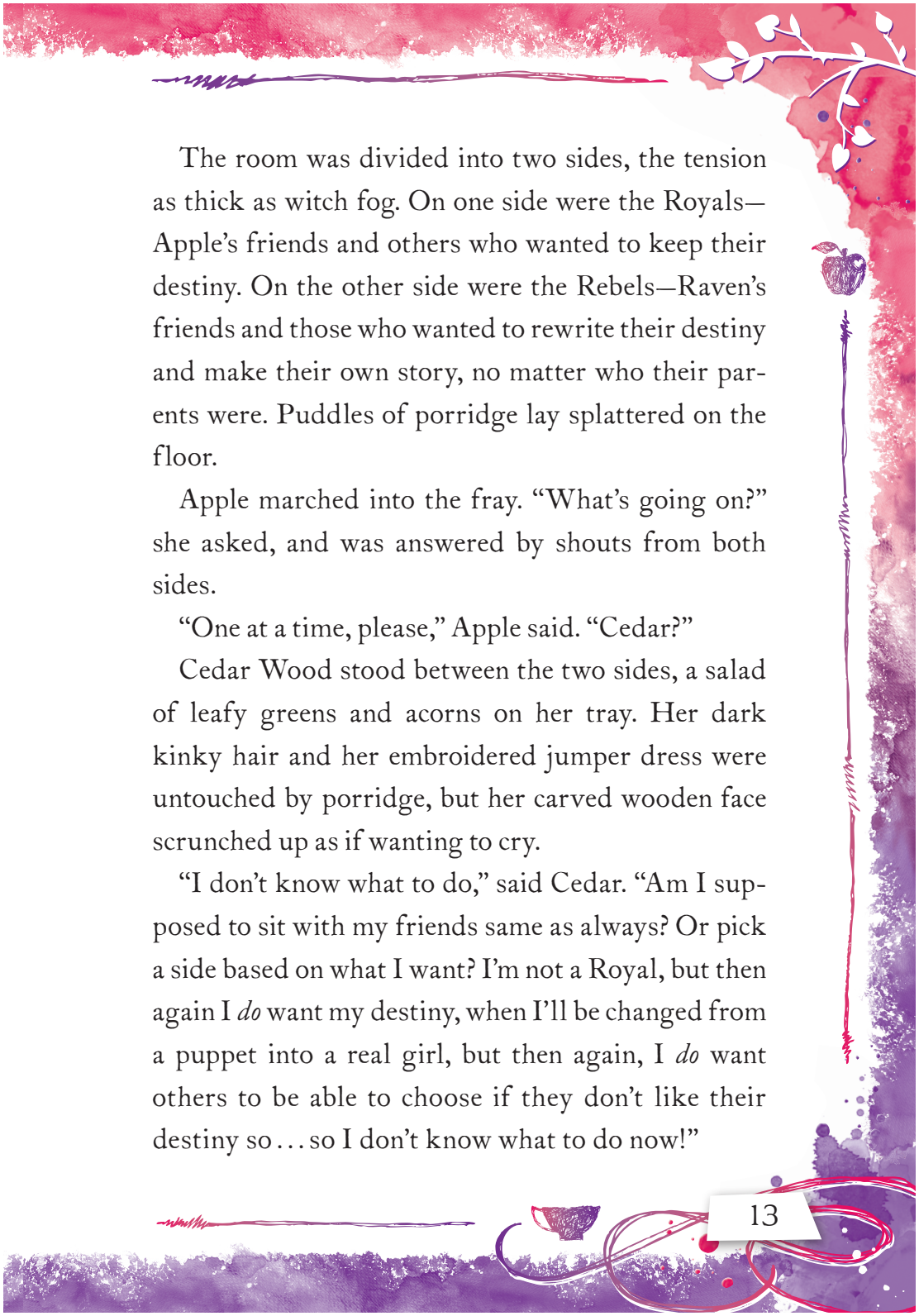
As they approached the Castleteria, the doors flung open. One of Sparrow Hood's Merry Men, hair thick with porridge, ran past.

"New hair treatment, Tucker?" Maddie asked, and got only grumbling in return.

"Hm. What do you think that was about?" Apple asked.

"It might actually have been a hair treatment," Raven said. "Tucker is terrified of turning bald like his dad."

They entered the Castleteria and saw how the Merry Man got his hair treatment.



The room was divided into two sides, the tension as thick as witch fog. On one side were the Royals—Apple’s friends and others who wanted to keep their destiny. On the other side were the Rebels—Raven’s friends and those who wanted to rewrite their destiny and make their own story, no matter who their parents were. Puddles of porridge lay splattered on the floor.

Apple marched into the fray. “What’s going on?” she asked, and was answered by shouts from both sides.

“One at a time, please,” Apple said. “Cedar?”

Cedar Wood stood between the two sides, a salad of leafy greens and acorns on her tray. Her dark kinky hair and her embroidered jumper dress were untouched by porridge, but her carved wooden face scrunched up as if wanting to cry.

“I don’t know what to do,” said Cedar. “Am I supposed to sit with my friends same as always? Or pick a side based on what I want? I’m not a Royal, but then again I *do* want my destiny, when I’ll be changed from a puppet into a real girl, but then again, I *do* want others to be able to choose if they don’t like their destiny so . . . so I don’t know what to do now!”

“Briar, what happened?” Apple asked.

Briar Beauty popped her head up from behind the custard platter she was using as a shield. Her wavy brown hair and rose-pink minidress were also porridge-free.

“They threw food at us,” she said. “So we retaliated. It was kind of hexciting!”


“They threw food first,” Sparrow Hood called from the opposite side. His green fedora dripped porridge into the quiver of arrows on his back.

“*Liar!*” screamed Duchess Swan, her pale face turning red. The white feathers in her cap and her ballet-style skirt ruffled up as if they were as annoyed as she was. She picked up an entire bunch of bananas and cocked her arm back, ready to throw.

“Easy, Duchess,” said Raven, stepping up beside Apple. On seeing Raven, a few of the Royals booed.

“You completely ruined our Legacy Day,” said Daring Charming, standing with one leg propped up on a bench. His golden hair was as dazzling in the morning sunlight as his spotless white jacket.

“Not to mention our Legacy Day *dance!*” said Briar. “It was more like a funeral than a party. I worked really hard planning it.”



“You did what you wanted without thinking of anyone else, didn’t you, Raven Queen?” said Daring.

“Nothing was just right,” Blondie Lockes said, shoulders slumped. A glob of porridge tangled in her fabulous golden ringlets. “Nothing at all.”

“I... I thought Raven was very brave,” said Cedar, taking a slow step toward the Rebels table.

“She doesn’t want to be all evil-y—is that so wrong?” said Maddie.

“Definitely not,” said Dexter Charming. He smiled at Raven. His brother Daring cleared his throat in warning, and Dexter looked down, adjusting his black-framed glasses. “I mean, this does pose some interesting philosophical questions. Raven’s choice not only affected her own destiny but everyone’s from the tale of Snow White, and so her actions keep expanding until—”

“We all have a destiny to fulfill,” said Briar. “If I have to sleep for a hundred years as Sleeping Beauty, Raven should suck it up and take her turn being the Evil Queen.”

“Yeah, look what happened when Raven’s mother went off script!” said Hopper Croakington. His burgundy brocade jacket was smeared with porridge,



though his freckled face and red hair remained clean. “She took over other fairytales and Wonderland, too, and was s-s-scary.”

Hopper began to shiver with fright and then—*pop!*—turned into a frog.

“You’re dangerous, Raven!” said Faybelle Thorn. She wore her cheerleading outfit, her midnight-blue hair in a high ponytail. “Stay the hex away from *my* fairytale—or else!”

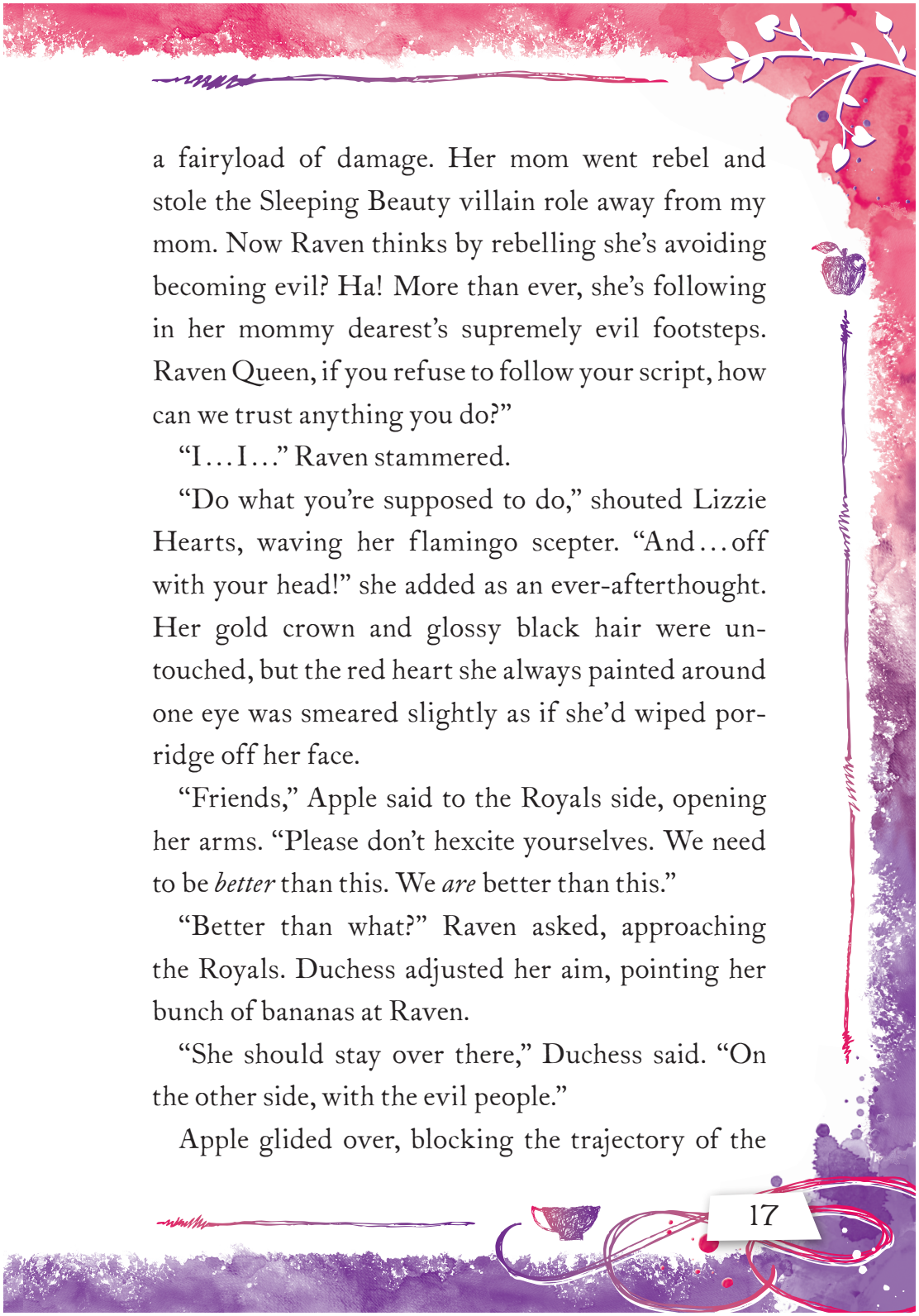
“Oh, stop all this huffing and puffing,” said Cerise Hood. She stood in the very back in the shadow of one of the Castleteria’s great pillar trees, draped in her red hood and cloak as always.

“Who is going to make me?” asked Faybelle. “You?”

Cerise reached up, as if to make sure her hood was on straight, and backed away.

Cupid flew down on white feathery wings from where she’d been hiding in the branches of the tree. She ran a hand over her dusty-pink hair. “Raven just followed her heart. I’d advise everyone to do the same.”

“Don’t be naive,” said Faybelle. “An Evil Queen who doesn’t follow her destiny to the letter will cause



a fairylload of damage. Her mom went rebel and stole the Sleeping Beauty villain role away from my mom. Now Raven thinks by rebelling she's avoiding becoming evil? Ha! More than ever, she's following in her mommy dearest's supremely evil footsteps. Raven Queen, if you refuse to follow your script, how can we trust anything you do?"

"I...I..." Raven stammered.

"Do what you're supposed to do," shouted Lizzie Hearts, waving her flamingo scepter. "And...off with your head!" she added as an ever-afterthought. Her gold crown and glossy black hair were untouched, but the red heart she always painted around one eye was smeared slightly as if she'd wiped porridge off her face.

"Friends," Apple said to the Royals side, opening her arms. "Please don't hexcite yourselves. We need to be *better* than this. We *are* better than this."

"Better than what?" Raven asked, approaching the Royals. Duchess adjusted her aim, pointing her bunch of bananas at Raven.

"She should stay over there," Duchess said. "On the other side, with the evil people."

Apple glided over, blocking the trajectory of the

bananas. “*Evil* is such a strong word, Duchess. Especially to use for everyone.” She gestured at a table of Rebels, where Cedar cautiously set down her tray. “I mean, would anyone really call Maddie evil? Mad, yes—”


“Why, thank you. That’s very kind,” said Maddie, sitting cross-legged on the tabletop.

“—but, evil? No. And Hunter? Everyone loves Hunter Huntsman.”

For some reason, Ashlynn Ella whimpered from the Royals table. She leaned over, her strawberry-blond hair hiding her face. Hunter stood up from his table. His hair was shaved on the sides of his head and the long part down the middle usually flopped over, but now, thick with porridge, it stood up like a Mohawk.

“Well, and what about Cerise?” Apple paused. It was hard to guess what was going on in that girl’s head, always skulking around in the shadow of her red hood. “*Abem*. Or...you know, Cedar? She’s not evil. Why, she’s the nicest puppet I’ve ever met.”

“That’s kind of an offensive term,” muttered Nathan Nutcracker, sitting on the edge of a table swinging his little wooden legs.



“Sorry, Nate,” Apple said. “I mean, the nicest *wooden person* I’ve ever met.”

“Well, *she’s* evil,” piped up Blondie, pointing at Raven.

“And she’s *supposed* to be evil,” Apple said. “Or at least be working toward that end. It seems silly to get so upset at someone who just made a mistake. Royals aren’t mean people, are we?”

Duchess lowered her bananas, and Briar shook her head.

“I think, in our hearts, we’re not really mad at anyone,” said Apple. “We’re just worried about what we’ll do now that Raven didn’t sign the Storybook of Legends.”

“Raven ruined Legacy Day for all of us!” Blondie yelled.

“She did not!” Cedar shouted back. “And I can’t lie!”

“Raven made a mistake.” Apple gestured to the Rebels side. “And they’re her friends and naturally want to support her. But I believe that they will come around to embrace their destinies again.”

“Wait,” Raven said. “Is that what you think? That I was just impulsive? That I...I slipped and



*accidentally* chose my own destiny and will go back on that choice any second now?”

“Of course!” Apple said, beaming. She faced the Rebels. “As president of the Royal Student Council, I mean, co-president . . .” She smiled at Maddie, who smiled back. She and Maddie had *both* been elected to the post, though that was taking some getting used to. Apple had always ruled alone. “I want you so-called Rebels to know you are still important to all of us here at Ever After High.” She opened her arms as if to hug them. “Do you hear that, Rebels? We don’t hate you! Not a bit! And we can be patient until you redecide to follow your destiny!”

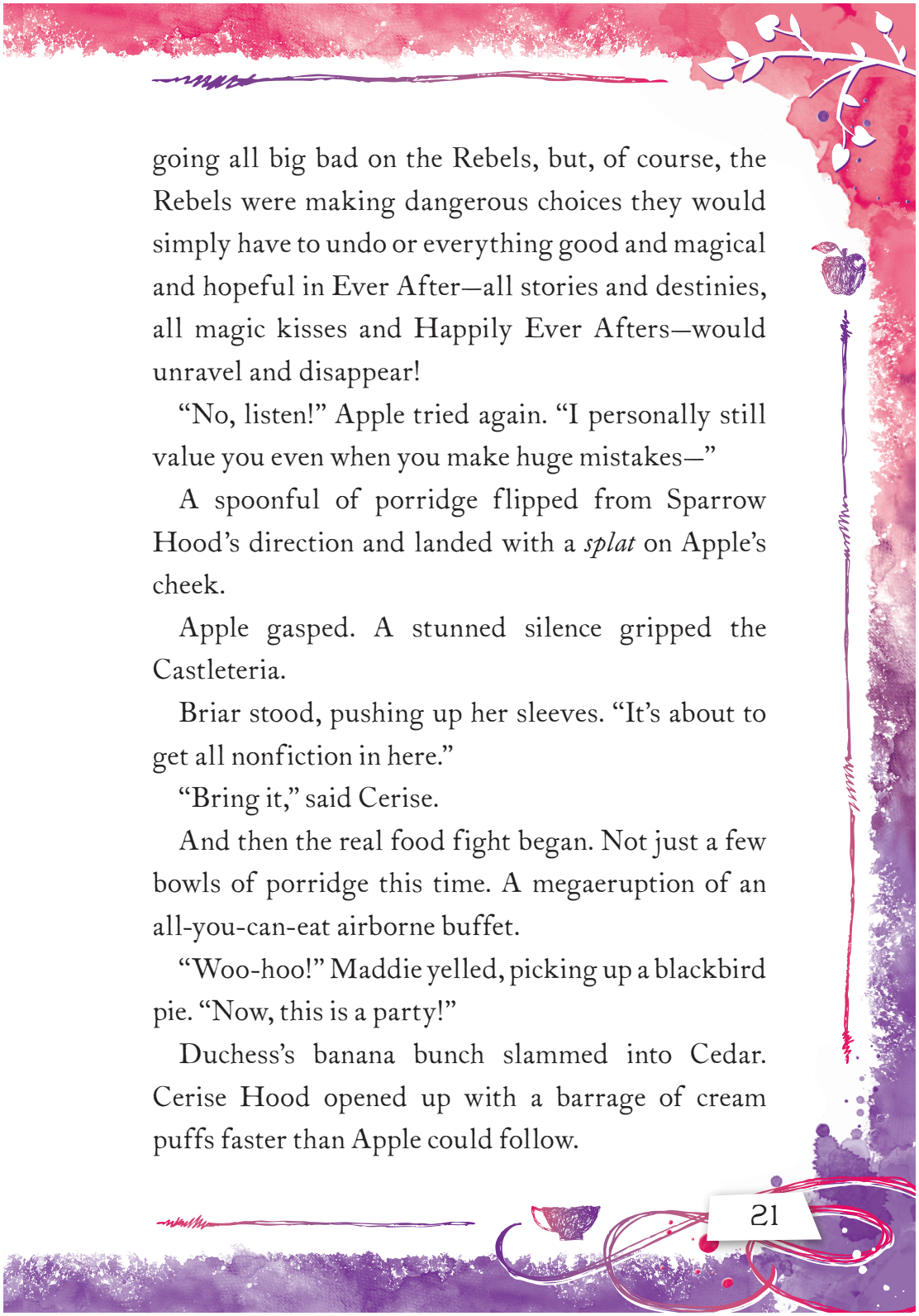
“I’m *not* following my destiny,” Raven said, folding her arms. “That’s the whole point. You know it isn’t fair to force me into being evil.”

“But it’s your destiny,” said Apple.

“It should be my *choice*,” said Raven.

Grumbles from both sides began to escalate into shouts.

Something was not right here. Apple was being reasonable. She was exuding kindness and sunshine, and yet the room seemed tenser and angrier than before she’d arrived. She didn’t want the Royals



going all big bad on the Rebels, but, of course, the Rebels were making dangerous choices they would simply have to undo or everything good and magical and hopeful in Ever After—all stories and destinies, all magic kisses and Happily Ever Afters—would unravel and disappear!

“No, listen!” Apple tried again. “I personally still value you even when you make huge mistakes—”

A spoonful of porridge flipped from Sparrow Hood’s direction and landed with a *splat* on Apple’s cheek.

Apple gasped. A stunned silence gripped the Castleteria.

Briar stood, pushing up her sleeves. “It’s about to get all nonfiction in here.”

“Bring it,” said Cerise.

And then the real food fight began. Not just a few bowls of porridge this time. A megaeruption of an all-you-can-eat airborne buffet.

“Woo-hoo!” Maddie yelled, picking up a blackbird pie. “Now, this is a party!”

Duchess’s banana bunch slammed into Cedar. Cerise Hood opened up with a barrage of cream puffs faster than Apple could follow.

Faybelle began to lead a cheer, her words creating a spell that sent food flying from her tray: “One, two, I’m glad I’m not you. Three, four, your aim is poor. Five, six—”

Someone chucked an entire peck of pickled peppers at her head.

Projectile hot cross buns flew past airborne pat-a-cakes, slamming into Rebels and Royals alike. Maddie stood on the table, laughing. An easy target, she was instantly covered in dripping eggs and gooey bean curd.

“How did... what *happened?*” Apple said, too stunned to move.

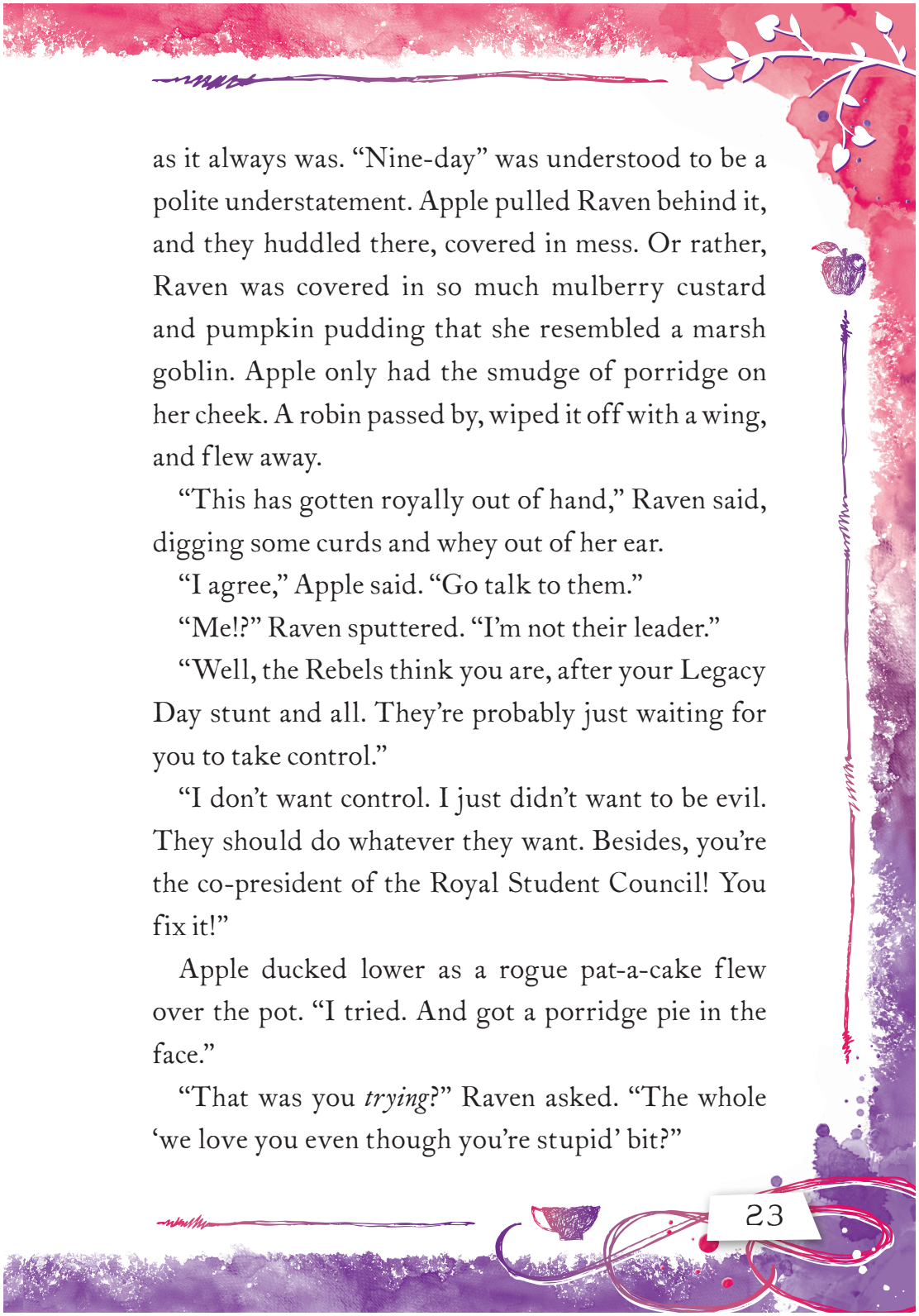
“Maybe it’s us,” said Raven. “Maybe it’s our fault.”

Apple nodded. Before they’d arrived, it’d been a little tense and a bit porridge-y. But Apple and Raven’s presence seemed to have thrown a lit match into a haystack.

“We’ve got to—” Raven started, but was interrupted by a large glob of custard striking her in the face.

“The pot!” Apple said.

In the middle of the food fight, the monstrous pot of nine-day-old peas porridge was left untouched,



as it always was. “Nine-day” was understood to be a polite understatement. Apple pulled Raven behind it, and they huddled there, covered in mess. Or rather, Raven was covered in so much mulberry custard and pumpkin pudding that she resembled a marsh goblin. Apple only had the smudge of porridge on her cheek. A robin passed by, wiped it off with a wing, and flew away.

“This has gotten royally out of hand,” Raven said, digging some curds and whey out of her ear.

“I agree,” Apple said. “Go talk to them.”

“Me!?” Raven sputtered. “I’m not their leader.”

“Well, the Rebels think you are, after your Legacy Day stunt and all. They’re probably just waiting for you to take control.”

“I don’t want control. I just didn’t want to be evil. They should do whatever they want. Besides, you’re the co-president of the Royal Student Council! You fix it!”

Apple ducked lower as a rogue pat-a-cake flew over the pot. “I tried. And got a porridge pie in the face.”

“That was you *trying*?” Raven asked. “The whole ‘we love you even though you’re stupid’ bit?”



“Well, I didn’t say ‘stupid,’ did I? That would have been rude.”

“Telling people that you don’t hate them is rude.”

“What? And telling them I do hate them would be polite? That’s just ridiculous!”

“No! It’s... you don’t understand,” said Raven.

“I’m really trying to understand, Raven,” said Apple. “But it’s hard to stay cheerful and positive when I see people destroying destinies and causing Happily Never Afters.”


“But... I didn’t... *UGH!*”

Raven dropped her head into her hands and slumped against the pea pot.

“Ouch, hot.” Raven scooted away.

Some liked it hot, Apple had heard. Some even liked it cold, though she had never met anyone personally. But what baffled her was that some actually liked it in the pot nine days old.

Peas porridge aside, everything seemed to be broken and backward. When there was a problem, Apple spoke, people listened, and it was fixed. Maybe what Raven had done on Legacy Day had broken more than just their story. What if it had



broken Apple? What if who she was and everything she could do were just . . . gone?

She peered over the pot. Hunter Huntsman had always sat with the Royals. After all, he played a part in the Snow White tale and roomed with Dexter Charming. But today he was sitting with the Rebels.

“Destiny is a prison!” he shouted, and threw a soy turkey sausage patty into the fray.

The patty struck Ashlynn Ella dead in the face. She looked up at him, tears trembling in her eyes as the patty slowly slid down her cheek. Hunter stepped back, his eyes wide with horror.

“Ash, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean—”


Her bottom lip trembled, and Ashlynn ran off, breaking into sobs. Hunter raced after her, as a personal-sized fairyberry pie smacked him in the back of his head. The sound of Ashlynn’s wails mixed with Hunter’s pleas broke Apple’s heart.

Suddenly Maddie appeared around the pot, cherries peppered in her mint-and-lavender curls.

“Why are you guys hiding?” she asked. “Come join the fun!”

“It’s not fun,” Raven said. “They’re angry and we don’t know what to do.”






“Don’t be silly,” said Maddie. “We used to have food fights in Wonderland regularly. Why, if a dinner party didn’t end with a food fight, the host might be downright insulted. Not a single food fight has occurred since I came to Ever After, and I was beginning to think no one had any manners. Wait for me!” she yelled, running back into the middle of it and getting splattered by a chunk of grits.

Maddie squealed with delight, but other voices yelled, raged, wailed, and even wept.

Apple felt an unfamiliar scowl on her face. This *was* her fault. She’d promised Headmaster Grimm she would persuade Raven to sign. But Apple had failed and let the entire school down.

As the future Snow White, one day Apple would be queen of her mother’s kingdom—that is, *if* she became Snow White. Apple knew she had to find a way to unite the school again and prove to herself she had what it took to be a great ruler. She stood up. It didn’t matter that she might be pelted with porridge or mashed with potatoes. Sometimes doing the right thing was hard... and potentially messy. But a good leader always did the right thing.



Apple stepped out from behind the pot. But just then, the Castleteria went eerily quiet.

Masses of porridge, curds and whey, pies, and meats of various sorts were floating, motionless, each food missile halted midway between hurler and target. Both sides, Royals and Rebels, stared with wonder and fear. The food in the air pulled itself into a floating sphere.

The food splatter on Raven unpeeled from her skin and unwound from her hair, flying off like metal filings toward a magnet. All the food in the room crept, slid, and floated into the sphere and then sloped to the floor in a heap.

“What is going on?” Blondie said. “Raven, are you doing that? It looks like evil doings.”

“It is,” whispered Baba Yaga, who was suddenly standing next to Blondie.

Blondie screamed. The school’s head of dark sorcery was short, her clothing ragged, her long gray hair snarled and stuck with tiny braids and bird bones.

“The food hurling is over,” Baba Yaga stated, and then screeched “*Detention!*” and slammed her staff

onto the ground. There was a flash, or rather, the opposite of a flash, a dark burping wave. Baba Yaga was gone, and the food was crawling onto itself and splitting into three large blobs standing on chicken-like legs.

“Food golems!” shrieked Gretel’s son, Gus, who had an expression on his face that kept switching between fear and joy.

“*Fab*, you are right, Gus,” said Hansel’s daughter, Helga. “Food golems. But do vee eat dem or run from dem?”

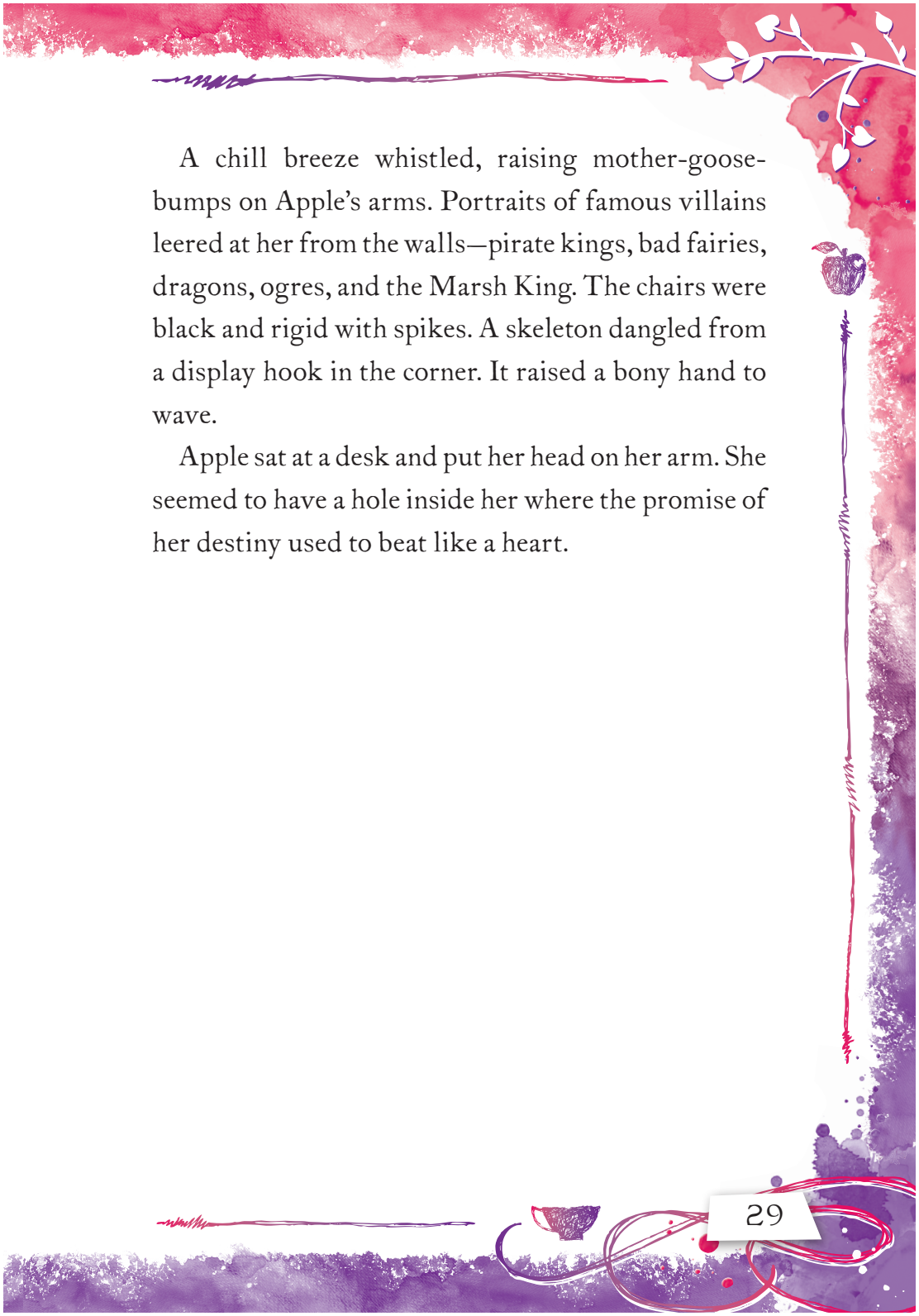
The food golems began to strut forward.

“Uh... I vote run,” said Briar.

But the food chickens herded the children, nudging them out of the Castleteria.

“But...but I’m Apple White,” Apple said, her voice quavering. “I should avoid detention at all costs. What will my mother think?”

The golems didn’t listen. And though starlings came to her rescue, attacking the golems and pecking at their cherry-tomato eyes and granola wings, the golems herded Apple toward the General Villainy classroom, same as everyone else.



A chill breeze whistled, raising mother-goose-bumps on Apple's arms. Portraits of famous villains leered at her from the walls—pirate kings, bad fairies, dragons, ogres, and the Marsh King. The chairs were black and rigid with spikes. A skeleton dangled from a display hook in the corner. It raised a bony hand to wave.

Apple sat at a desk and put her head on her arm. She seemed to have a hole inside her where the promise of her destiny used to beat like a heart.