

“It’d be my genie if we did,” said Alex.



The rest of the day passed the way days at Applecott House always passed. They walked into the village, and bought sweets at the Co-op. They picked blackberries from the garden and made a summer pudding for tea. They played a long game of Monopoly that ended, as usual, with Ruby owning half the board, and Alex nothing but two pound notes.

“To buy a cup of tea with,” said Ruby. “I’m charitable, me. I give to the homeless.”

“Huh,” said Alex.

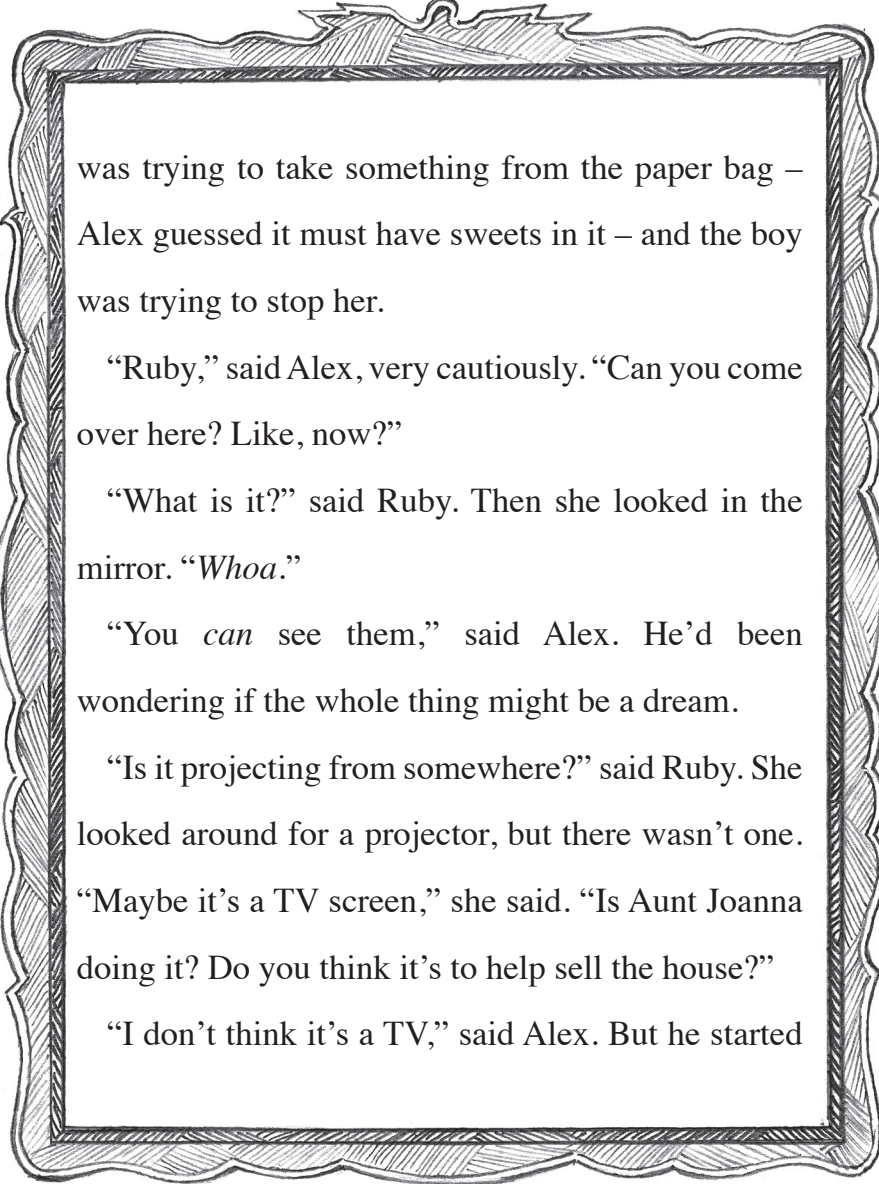
It wasn’t until they were going up to bed that he remembered the bottle. There it sat, on the hall table.

He picked it up, feeling vaguely guilty. Perhaps that dust *had* been something important.

“I wish you really were a genie,” he said sadly. Then he looked in the mirror, just in case there were any ghosts there tonight.

And there were.

In the mirror were two children. One was the same boy Alex had seen three years ago. Alex had grown, but the boy had stayed exactly the same age, only this time he was wearing a sailor suit and holding a paper bag. An older girl was standing beside him. The girl, who looked about thirteen, had long dark hair and a rabbit sort of face. She was wearing a blue dress, black stockings and a white pinafore. She



was trying to take something from the paper bag – Alex guessed it must have sweets in it – and the boy was trying to stop her.

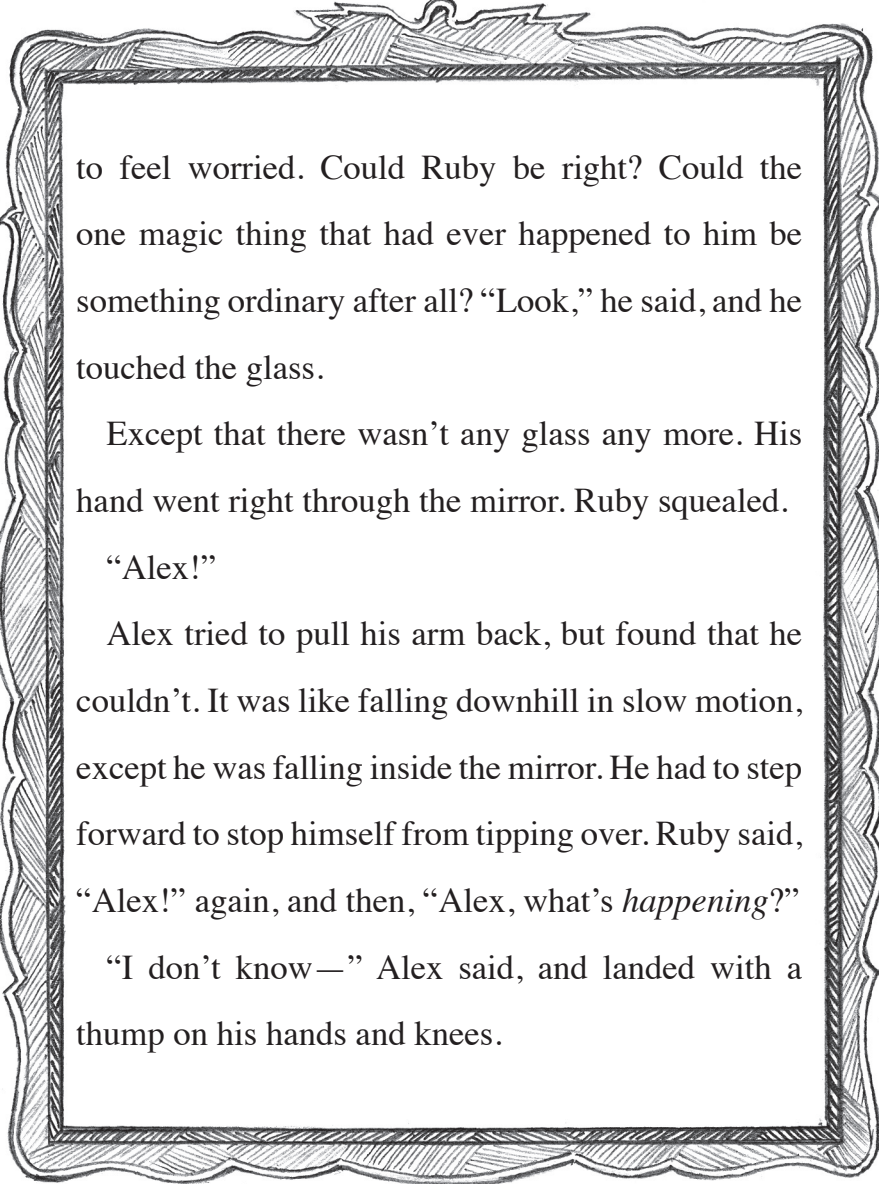
“Ruby,” said Alex, very cautiously. “Can you come over here? Like, now?”

“What is it?” said Ruby. Then she looked in the mirror. “*Whoa.*”

“You *can* see them,” said Alex. He’d been wondering if the whole thing might be a dream.

“Is it projecting from somewhere?” said Ruby. She looked around for a projector, but there wasn’t one. “Maybe it’s a TV screen,” she said. “Is Aunt Joanna doing it? Do you think it’s to help sell the house?”

“I don’t think it’s a TV,” said Alex. But he started



to feel worried. Could Ruby be right? Could the one magic thing that had ever happened to him be something ordinary after all? “Look,” he said, and he touched the glass.

Except that there wasn’t any glass any more. His hand went right through the mirror. Ruby squealed.

“Alex!”

Alex tried to pull his arm back, but found that he couldn’t. It was like falling downhill in slow motion, except he was falling inside the mirror. He had to step forward to stop himself from tipping over. Ruby said, “Alex!” again, and then, “Alex, what’s *happening?*”

“I don’t know—” Alex said, and landed with a thump on his hands and knees.

“Ow!” said Ruby, behind him.

Someone screamed.

Alex looked up. He was on the floor in Aunt Joanna’s hall, but everything was different. There was yellow and green striped wallpaper, and a white front door with coloured glass above it, and all the furniture was wrong. Standing in front of him were two children, who were both screaming. One was a girl with a rabbit face, and long, dark hair with a white ribbon in it.

The other was a boy in a sailor suit.



Chapter Two

THE HOUSE BEHIND THE MIRROR