



## CHAPTER ONE THE APPEARANCE IN A HALLWAY

In the hallway of Aunt Joanna's house, there was a magic mirror.

Huge, gold-framed and mysterious, there it hung, looking innocent.

Ruby Pilgrim *glared* at it.



“Just look at that!” she said indignantly. “Sitting there like a lump of glass! Like it’s just – a reflecting thing or something!”

“It is a reflecting thing,” said her brother, Alex. “It’s just ... sometimes it’s a time-travelling thing as well.”

Because sometimes, the mirror showed another reflection, of another Applecott House in another time. Last summer, they’d gone back to 1912 and helped save a priceless golden cup. Ruby still hadn’t sorted out how she felt about that. She’d hated it and she’d loved it, all at the same time. It had been wonderful ... and really, really frightening. For quite a lot of it, she’d been certain they were going to be stuck in 1912 forever, and

would probably have to go and live in a workhouse or something and...

It still made her go cold to remember it.

But then at Christmas they’d come back to Applecott House, and this time they’d stepped back into 1872. They’d landed in a gloriously Victorian Christmas, with plum pudding, and ice skating on the lake, and charades. There’d been danger there, too, but most of it had been simply wonderful.

Ruby didn’t like to admit it, but she missed it. All this last year, in a busy, noisy secondary school in a little northern town, where the only things anyone seemed to care about was what sort of shoes you wore, and what sort of music you



liked, and who fancied who ... Ruby had found her thoughts tugging back again and again to that other time, where magic existed and wishes came true and girls her age wore pinafores and petticoats, and didn't have to worry about things like eyeliner and tweezers and shaving their legs. The past, though she would never have said so out loud, had been rather restful.

But now it was half-term. They'd come back to Aunt Joanna's house for their cousin's wedding, and were staying on a couple of days so that their parents could help Aunt Joanna with the repairs to the house. And this time...

This time, she kept looking at the glass, hoping it would change.

"I was so sure it would open again," she said. "But why would it? It's not like we're anyone special really, are we?"

"I suppose not," said Alex sadly.

They both looked back at the mirror.

Which was reflecting another room.

"Oh!" said Ruby.

The room in the mirror was, very definitely, not in Applecott House. It was clearly a much grander place, with blue walls and tall windows showing a large formal garden. There was an elaborate-looking fireplace behind it, with enormous golden candlesticks on the mantel. Ruby didn't have time to properly take this in, though, because all at once a person appeared in the frame.

It was a very, *very* superior-looking person, in a long, loose gown, of the sort that needs an awful lot of artifice to look natural. At least, Ruby supposed it did; the person had a very narrow waist, which *must* mean she was wearing a corset, and her hair, though loose-ish, was *elaborately* loose, with three curls hanging *here*, and a big bouffy bit *here*, and it was a very unnatural-looking greyish-white, as though someone had covered it in powder.

Her cap was complicated too, with lots of lacy bits, and there was more lace round her neck, and ribbons on her sleeves, and what looked like little roses on her shoes. She looked like a very rich person who had spent an hour this morning dressing herself up to look like a very expensive



milkmaid.

She appeared to be in a state of panic. She was shouting at someone outside the frame and pulling at them. Alex and Ruby couldn't hear what she said, but she seemed to be pleading with someone just out of sight. She stumbled backwards, and the person was revealed. He was a boy about Ruby's age or a little older, dressed in a blue suit complete with waistcoat, short, tight trousers that came to his knees, white stockings and blue shoes with shiny silver buckles. He had shaggy brown hair that touched his shoulders and he too looked terrified. He was shouting and crying hysterically. His hands flapped in the air in front of him and his mother grabbed them, pulling them down,



and then —

And then they stumbled sideways against the mirror.

And vanished.

“Where have they gone?” said Ruby. She scrambled off the window seat. “They should be here! Shouldn’t they? Shouldn’t they have come here? Where are they?”

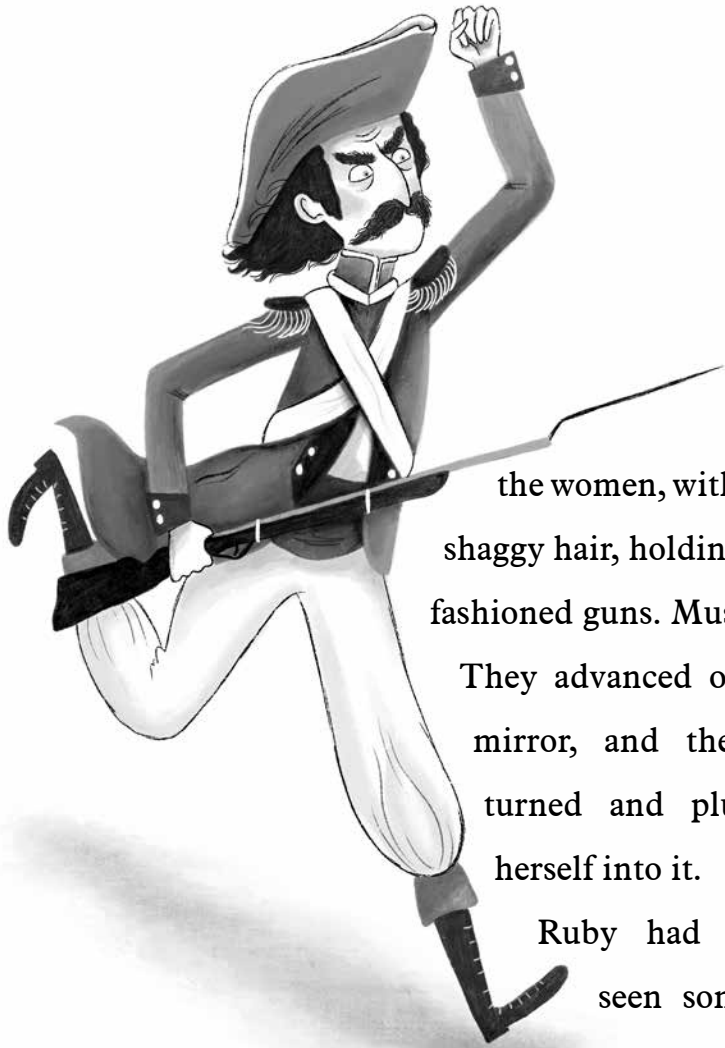
“How should I know?” said Alex. Then: “Look!”

Another person had appeared in the mirror. It was a girl who could have been anywhere from about fifteen to nineteen. She was dressed more simply, in a long, plain dress, and her hair, though curled, was less artfully arranged. She ran up to

the mirror and her eyes widened in shock. She could see them – Alex was sure of it. She was staring at *him*.

They both, almost without thinking, moved closer to the mirror – so close that they could have reached out and touched the girl if they’d wanted. It was strangely intimate, the three of them there looking so intently at each other, separated only by the glass. Ruby hardly dared to move in case the girl vanished. Who was she? What was happening?

And then, suddenly, the girl in the mirror flinched and looked back over her shoulder. There it was – the same look of terror on her face. Someone else was there – men, more roughly dressed than



the women, with long shaggy hair, holding old-fashioned guns. Muskets? They advanced on the mirror, and the girl turned and plunged herself into it.

Ruby had never seen someone come out of the mirror before. She drew

back in instinctive panic. The girl's arms and hands appeared, then her head, then her fingers gripped round their arms with unexpected vigour.

"Hey!" Ruby yelled. "What are you *doing*?"

But it was too late. Because now the mirror was sucking *them* in.

Ruby cried, "Let go!"

And then they landed on the floor with a *thump*.

"Ow!" said Alex.

"What did you do that for?" Ruby yelled.

She sat up, rubbing the back of her head. The three of them – Alex, Ruby and the young woman – were lying on a tiled floor in the hallway of what must be Applecott House. But how strange it looked!

Everything, except the basic shape of the room, was different. The windows were small and diamond-paned and there were many more of them; there were oil paintings on the wall and no furniture in the hallway at all, except for a small table with a little silver dish and a wide-brimmed black hat on it. The front doors looked different, and the door to the downstairs toilet was missing. There were no light fittings, not even for gas. No radiators (the room was rather cold). No plug sockets. Nothing looked familiar and the whole place looked *new*.

Applecott House was Georgian. It had looked old for as long as Alex could remember. Worn stonework on the outside walls of the house. Worn

paint on the back door (the front was kept nice for the guests at Aunt Joanna's bed and breakfast). Old glass, and old pipes, and old, smooth bannisters – old everything.

This house looked new. The walls were freshly papered with green wallpaper. The bannisters were clearly made of new wood, and so were the window frames. It was disorientating. It smelled of fresh autumn air, and candle wax, and wood polish, and smoke.

“Good Lord! What devilry is this? More of you!”

It was a man's voice. The children turned. Standing behind them – staring – were the grand woman and the boy from the mirror, looking, if

anything, grander and more overdressed than ever in person. Next to them, looking utterly astonished, was a short, stocky man, with red hair and the most extraordinary red side whiskers, like mad overgrown sideburns. He was youngish – perhaps early twenties – and not fat exactly, but his waistcoat was definitely too tight, and his stomach bulged out of the bottom. He was dressed entirely, completely in black, and his face was round and red and amiable, though his mouth was open in amazement.

The boy cried, “Mademoiselle Crouchman!” in a French accent, and the young woman, who was sitting on the floor next to Ruby, scrambled to feet, crying, “My lord! My lady!” Unlike the boy,

her voice sounded properly English, like she’d been speaking it all her life. “My apologies, sir, I do not believe we have been introduced.”

The whiskery man gave a brisk bow.

“Frederick Pilgrim at your service,” he said.

Alex and Ruby looked at each other. A Pilgrim! Family!

“I am – excuse me, madam, I am all astonishment. It is not usual in these parts for gentlefolk – or, indeed, any folk at all – to travel by means of a looking glass. What manner of creatures are you? If you be devils, I assure you I am a gentleman of the cloth, and I will undertake to cast you out by any means possible. Although –” and here he almost smiled – “I confess, I do know exactly know



how one performs an exorcism, the existence of demons not being a matter of much consequence in Suffolk.”

“Demons!” said the grand woman, drawing herself to her full height. She had the same French accent as the boy. “I assure you, sir, I am no demon. I am the Countess d’Allonette, and I demand you explain yourself at once. How came you to own my looking glass? To what purpose did you transport us here? Are you a part of this dreadful revolution? Explain yourself, I insist!”

“Oh!” said Ruby. “You’re the witch!” She grabbed Alex’s arm in excitement. “Don’t you remember? Aunt Joanna said a witch made the mirror magic to escape getting guillotined in the

French Revolution. She said this Countess was about to be arrested, and she just stepped into a mirror and disappeared!”

“A witch!” The Countess turned an icy expression on to Ruby. “I am a noblewoman of France, a country now sadly overrun by barbarians. What mean you by such remarks?”

“Well, *somebody* made the mirror magic,” said Alex. “And it wasn’t us.”

There was a small noise behind them. Alex turned. The young woman – Mademoiselle Crouchman – was clearing her throat.

“I beg your pardon, my lady,” she said. “But I believe it may have been me.”