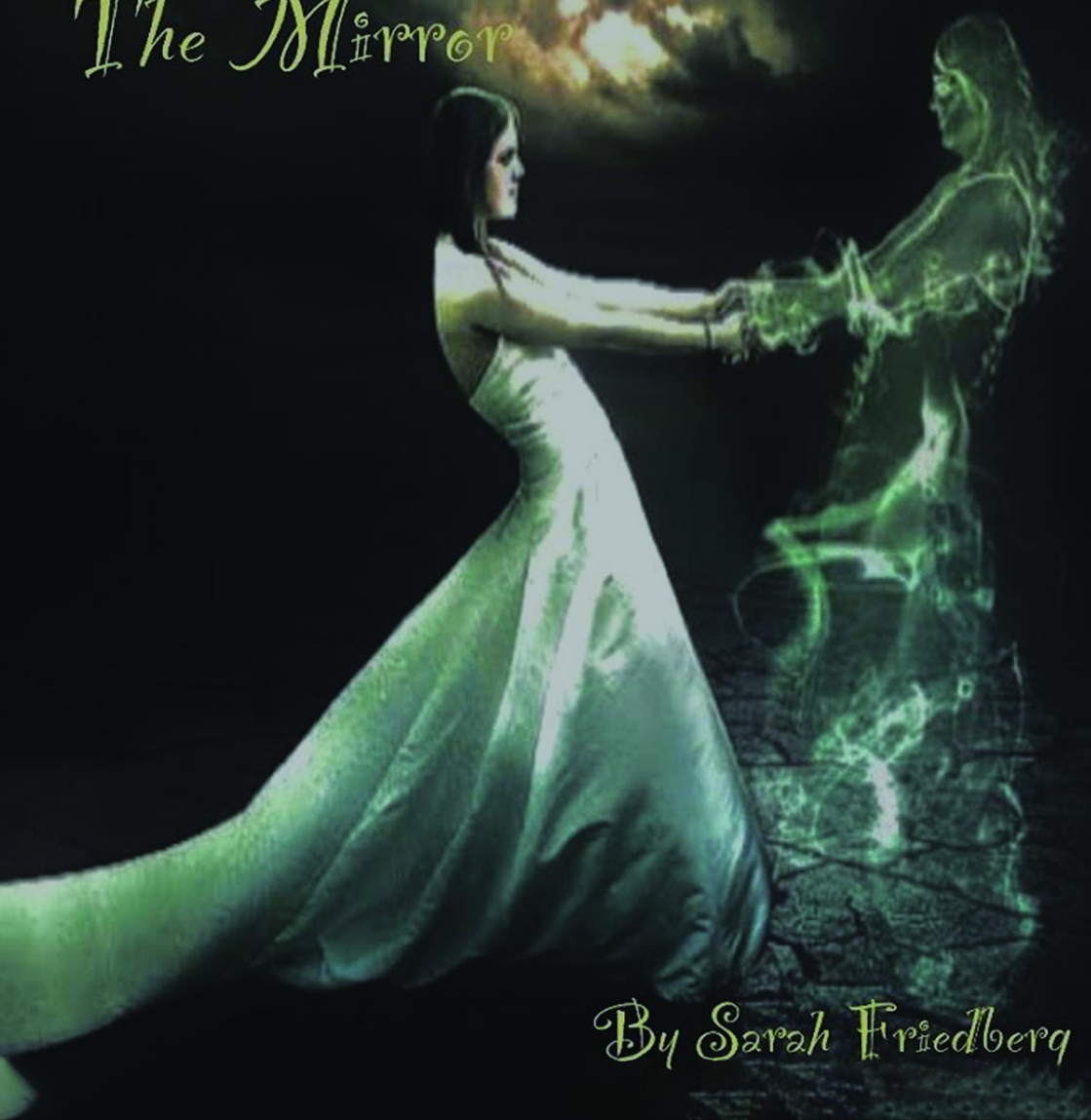


*The Girl Who Wished
Through
The Mirror*



By Sarah Friedberg

**THE GIRL WHO WISHED THROUGH
THE MIRROR**

Sarah Friedberg

The Girl Who Wished Through the Mirror

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For Diana

“Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them
all?”

The Evil Queen, in *Snow White*

Acknowledgments

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The Girl on Arden Road

Once upon a time... there lived a girl on Arden Road named Farah, and she wanted... *more*. She lived in a normal house, with a normal family, had normal grades, normal friends, normal everything. Everything was normal except her mind, because that was extraordinary. Extraordinary in the sense of imagination. Her mind could give her what life could not: an escape.

The girl read, escaping in wonderful words, those magical pages, which her mind could transform into *real* stories. Well, “real” in the sense that she could manipulate them, almost wrestling them away from the authors who created them. She could change and control them. In her mind – in her imagination – she had total control. Her mind would allow her to visit these stories, manipulating, changing, controlling them to her will. She had total control in her mind.



People like control. They like making choices, being in charge. The alternative is scary, that of being in the unknown. The unknown, the future, really scared Farah, because she had a dream—a dream of her happily-ever-after. But here, in her life right now, she didn't have control, she didn't know her future. "Dream big," they told her. But what if she dreamed too big? What if her happily-ever-after could never become real? So, she hid in her mind, her books, her stories, wishing for something which she didn't even know might ever exist.

It was a Tuesday, a beautiful March afternoon. The gloomy trees finally started to grow back their leaves. The flowers were out, especially the daffodils, and Farah loved daffodils. They were so effortlessly beautiful. Sometimes she wished she were a flower, beautiful by nature and not having to try. "It must be nice to wake up and just know you're beautiful . . ." she thought, walking by them.

The flowers – the daffodils -- were what everyone looks at. But flowers are more than just beautiful. They have meaning. They can say “I love you,” or “I’m sorry.” They can be the words you don’t know how to say. They were exceptionally pretty that day, as the colors added brightness to the day while Farah made her way home from school. She was walking, and the weather was lovely.



Time flew by and, before long, she arrived at her street, Arden Road. Oh, how she loved this street! It was the definition of perfect—lined with lanterns that gave off this soft comforting yellow glow, a quiet which gave nature an opportunity to sing its song. And the trees! They were so high and mighty, sheltering the street from the sun's gaze. She loved the sun and its warmth. On such days you can feel something. Maybe happiness, maybe sorrow. It didn’t matter because whatever it was, Farah wished it would stay. Forever.

The Voice

The girl was tired after her walk, and she just wanted to sleep. But she had work to do, so reluctantly she started writing, solving, reading whatever her teachers had assigned. It was exhausting, but – she felt -- this would get her closer to happily-ever-after. After a while, her mother called, “Sweetheart, dinner is ready, why don’t you come on down?” The girl complied. At the table were her parents -- mother and father, along with her siblings, Rebecca and John. It was normal that day, and everything seemed normal. As usual, everyone was drained from their day. Parents asked everyone how their day was, with Rebecca the only one who responded. Farah then asked for leave from the table, just like she did every night. She made her way upstairs, tired, aching to feel the comfort that only sleep could provide. But still, she felt off. Her head around this time of day was usually filled with thoughts, keeping her awake. But this day, there were no thoughts. Her mind was as silent as a mouse. Quietly, she made her way to bed, her head quiet . . . too quiet for comfort.

The quiet soon turned into pain, and the pain soon became unbearable. Her head felt like tiny needles were picking, pointing, entering her skull all at once. That pain increased, and soon those

needles became so hot that she could almost smell her flesh burning. But then, as soon as the feeling started, it stopped.

There was a window in front of her and, usually, as the lanterns came on, a soft light would appear as a bright yellow dot in the mirror. She focused on it now, trying to steady her confusion. But the dot was bigger today, different. She could feel that it was different. Then the light on the mirror suddenly just disappeared, and soon she was surrounded by darkness as the lights outside her window gave in to the dark. Then the dot appeared again, radiating its own light because the lanterns seemed no longer to be shining. She was told that before you die you see a bright light, leading to wherever you go when you pass. “I’m gonna die,” she whispered, as the light in the mirror grew bigger, brighter. The light grew faster, along with an eerie chant that engulfed the silence.



But, just like the pain in her head, as soon as it started it stopped. The lights turned back on, the dot in her mirror returned to normal, and the chant disappeared into the silence of the night. However, Farah was no longer alone. There was a shape seven feet away from her, illuminated by the soft, yellow glow from outside. The girl could not move. She thought, “this, this is where I will die, murdered by the stranger in the light.” She closed her eyes, awaiting her impending doom... but it never came. The stranger stared at her in silence, face hidden behind a black cloak. The room was as silent as her mind.



Breaking the silence, the girl asked, “Who are you, and what do you want?”

“I am Anwir, and I am here to help you,” the stranger replied.

“Help me?” the girl said with humor. “With what? What can you possibly help me with?”

“I can give you what you dream about, what you long for,” Anwir said with a compelling voice.

“Oh, and what’s that? What do I want, what do I dream about?”

“You want those dreams and thoughts to be real, you want that ending, that...happily-ever-after.” Anwir continued, “Let me help you. I promise you will get exactly what you want, and more.”

Farah was strong, but she could not find the strength to say No. It just seemed too good to be true. “Too good to be true” -- the phrase ran through her mind. She remembered from somewhere that “If it seems too good to be true, chances are it is.” She knew this little warning all too well, every time proving it right. Just this once, though, she hoped it was wrong. She responded, “You promise?”

“Yes, of course darling, everything you want!” All it took was a nod from Farah before Anwir was overjoyed. “Fantastic!” she shouted. “Before we begin, any last questions?”

“Your face, could I see your face?” Farah asked.

“Come now, we mustn't waste a minute,” Anwir declared, ignoring the girl's question. Pulling the girl before she could speak again, Anwir grabbed her arm, bringing them both into darkness.

Four Chrysanthemums for The Dead

Farah awoke, her sight still blurry from the brightness. She was disoriented, like after a deep sleep. The air felt somehow different. It made her feel like a stranger who was lost . . . somewhere. But surprisingly, she felt well-rested, which never happened after those sleepless nights of studying. She wondered what time it was and, looking for her phone, she reluctantly got out of bed. Her skin met the crisp air, causing the hairs on her body to stand up. Making her way to her phone, she froze as her finger tapped the screen. It read 8:32 AM, March 23. She had fallen asleep around 11 PM, on March 21. She had slept for two days!

Worry and confusion spread across her face like wildfire. Questions burned in her mind in an endless cycle. She needed to find her parents, her family. They had to have the answers to questions banging around in her head. She left her room hurriedly, not sparing herself a glance. She called out for her sister, only to be answered with silence. She tried for her brother, mother, and father, who all gave the same response: nothing. She sprinted downstairs, about to call for

help, when she noticed four chrysanthemums along with a note on her kitchen table. The note read:

Hello sweetheart, we are so sorry for your loss. We know how hard it is, losing your family. We apologize for not coming in person, but did send you these flowers (thought it was fitting). Anyhow, again we are so sorry, but life happens. Can't get everything you want after all!

Sincerely . . .

The girl could not move or breathe, as if her mind were paralyzed and unable to function. “Losing your family” – words that tauntingly echoed in her thoughts. She looked back to the chrysanthemums, and saw that there were four. There were four other people in her family. The note said that her family was gone, meaning that her family was dead.

Perfect

Farah felt alone. While sometimes she chose to be alone, this was different. This had happened to her, and was beyond her control, with no imagined characters at her beck and call. She felt sad, and soon the sadness turned into rage towards Anwir. “None of this would have happened if Anwir hadn’t shown up, It’s all her damn fault!” was the thought running through her head like a chant. But that rage was soon replaced by regret. She couldn’t help but wonder whether, if she hadn’t taken Anwir up on her deal, her family would still be alive. “How could I have been so selfish!” she scolded herself.

So many emotions assaulted her, too much for her to handle. She felt her hands shake uncontrollably. Her breathing became uneven. Sweat dripped down her forehead. “No, no, not again, not now, not here,” she whispered to herself, curling up into a ball, rocking back and forth, letting the tears roll down. But drowning in her sorrows did not make her unaware. She still saw that familiar shadow, cautiously approaching her as if she were its prey. Farah looked up, “Y-you, YOU DID THIS, YOU KILLED THEM, HOW DARE YOU, Y-YOU

MADE ME BELIEVE!” She released that bottled-up rage, hurt, and mistrust.

“Things come at a price, sweetheart, and you should know that. Besides, they were just holding you back, and needed to be dealt with,” Anwir calmly remarked.

“No, no, you're wrong, the deal's off, make it go away, I want them back,” the girl begged.

“Look in the mirror,” Anwir states numbly.

“What?”

“I said look in the mirror.”

“Why would I do . . .” Farah was interrupted as Anwir dragged her up the stairs into her room. She gasped when she saw herself. Skin that had been marred with pocks and pimples was clear. Her face was smooth and bright as a diamond. Her hair, long, healthy, and voluminous. Body as perfect as a princess. The girl of her dreams. She was the fairest of them all.

“See, didn't I tell you I would get you everything you wanted?” Anwir started, “ Your family couldn't have done this. All you must do is trust me,” she exclaimed.

“Do you promise?” the girl questioned guiltily

“I promise,” said Anwir, seemingly sincere. They fell into an uncomfortable silence, broken when Farah finally spoke.

“How’d you do it – I mean, fix me?”

“I made this mixture. It can fix anything imperfect on anyone. And it only took two days!”



Anwir said, “Come, we’re already behind, and it’s best we get going.”

“Go where, Anwir?” Farah got no response. Instead, Anwir grabbed her arm, pulling her into darkness once again.

“What's Princess Lilly?”

Farah was unsure how much time had passed. Or where she was. Or where Anwir was. She thought maybe, in the darkness, she had drifted off, and that maybe Anwir had let her sleep.

But she didn't have much time to wonder. She heard a soft voice, and a hand was shaking her awake -- “Hello” it whispered. “Are you alright?” The girl's eyes, wide open now, looked at the person in front of her. “Who are you?” she asked.

“I'm Mirage, but you can call me Mira if you'd like. Whatever you prefer,” the person said quietly, looking down at her shiny black shoes.

“Where am I? How did I get here?” the girl questioned in an unusually quiet tone.

“You are in my house. I found you asleep on the pavement, and my Pa helped carry you in.” Mira's eyes widened, “Oh God, I'm so sorry if I made you uncomfortable. I just didn't know what to do. I didn't want to leave you on the street, but I shouldn't have just taken

you. Oh, your family, they must be worried sick! Listen I can . . ."

Farah cut her off in mid-sentence.

"My family's dead. So, trust me, they're not worried. I have nowhere to go." Farah sounded deeply sad.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, you poor thing... I - I know what it feels like, to lose someone you love. I um, lost my mother a couple years ago. It's just me and Pa now." Mira tried to be strong, but still let a tear fall, and quickly wiped it so that Farah wouldn't see. Mira continued, "Ever since Ma died, all the kids at school ignored me. They said I was bad luck. It's been pretty lonely because Pa's always at work." She took a deep breath before continuing, "If you want, because we're both lonely -- maybe we could be lonely together?" She asked hopefully, finally meeting the girl's eyes.

Farah didn't have a lot of friends. They just came and went. No one ever *asked* to be her friend, so Mira's offer meant a lot. That feeling, the one that could be happiness – the one that she hoped would stay forever – might it be here with her new friend Mira? "Yeah," she said. "I'd like that, Mira."

Over the next few days, both girls grew close. You could even call them best friends. They walked, talked, laughed together. Mira was the definition of a perfect friend -- so kind and sweet, always there when you needed her. It felt nice, especially because Anwir was never since Farah started spending time with Mira.

One day, the girls were walking, enjoying each other's company in a comfortable silence. It was a calm day, with a soft breeze, sun behind the clouds, birds chirping. Farah was looking around when her eyes met Mira's fingers, the ring on her finger to be precise. "What kind of flower is that on your ring?"

"Oh, that is a Princess Lilly. They were my Ma's favorite because of what they symbolized," Mira said with a nostalgic look.

"What do they symbolize?" the girl asked, intrigued.

"I don't actually know. My Ma never told me. All I know is that she loved this flower, and this ring."



Then Farah said, "Maybe she had a book. We could go back to the house and see what it means."

“You really do have the best ideas!” said Mira. “I have the smartest and prettiest best friend in town!” Fighting off a twinge of jealousy by smiling, she suggested, “I’ll race you, on 3?”

“On 3”

Both chanted, “1, 2, 3!” They sprinted . . . until a hand grabbed Farah’s arm. Mira continued running, unaware, not looking back.

The Invitation

Farah turned, her eyes meeting with the familiar black cloak, its owner hidden under its protection. This was how she and Anwir always met -- Anwir would intrude, and suddenly interrupt. The girl was about to tell Anwir off for making Mira wait. But Mira was nowhere to be found, even though she had only been twenty feet away when Anwir grabbed the girl's arm.

Anwir never showed up when Farah and Mira were together, at least until this happened. She would wait until Farah went to bed -- that's when they'd speak. But during the few times they had spoken, Farah had learned some things about Anwir. First, Anwir never took off her cloak, never showed her face. Why? That was a mystery. Second, Anwir never took off her bracelet. Farah tried to convince Anwir to let her try it on, failing every time. Anwir's response was always "No, I won't take off my bracelet, so stop asking! It only fits my wrist, anyway!" Third, and obviously, Anwir was never seen by anyone other than Farah. Anwir would wait until the two of them were alone. No matter how much Farah pleaded for her to meet Mira, Anwir always refused.



The girl was the first to speak, “What do you need, Anwir? I need to get to Mira.”

“You need to go to a ball, and here’s your invitation,” Anwir said in a monotone. “Mira can join you as a plus-one. Your dresses are at her house. All you must do is to show up and look pretty. Trust me,” and she walked away.

Farah – unmoved by Anwir’s swift departure – shifted her focus to the invitation, which read:

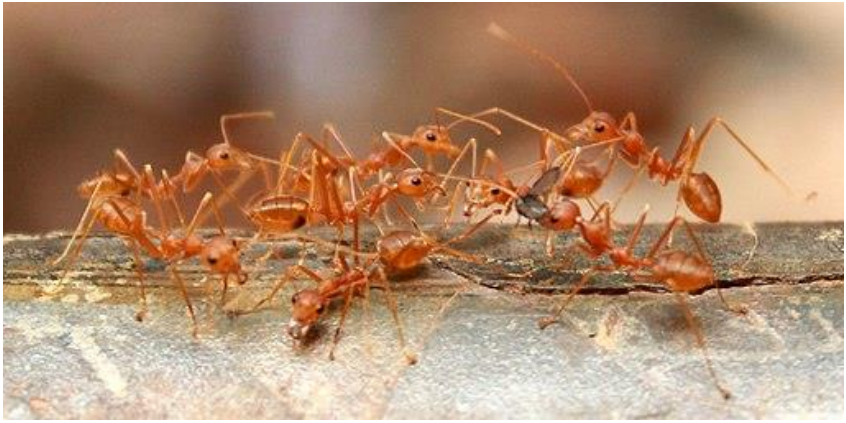
Dear whomever this concerns, you are invited to the ball of the Supremes, the highest classes of this town. Dress code is formal. To enter the ball, you must show this invitation to the guards at the front entrance. You may bring a plus-one. Thank you and see you at 11 PM sharp. Follow the lights to find the place where it is hosted.

Sincerely, Your Host

“Follow the lights” was probably the vaguest instruction the girl had ever read. Lost in thought, however, she forgot the time. It was already 7 PM, and she needed to hurry to Mira’s if they were to arrive on time. She ran as fast as she could, past the town center and the park where children played. But as she turned the block, she tripped, falling in a puddle, scraping her hands and knees. A burning sensation coursed through her. She felt pain. She kept her hands and knees still, which she hoped would reduce the pain. She lay on the ground, unable to move. “Maybe I could crawl to Mira’s house,” she thought. She tried to think of how to get out of this fix. The sky grew darker, and panic began to sink in. “What if I’m late? What if no one finds me?” ... her mind ran through endless possibilities of what could go wrong.

What pulled her out of this trance was the sound of tiny footsteps though, when she looked around, she saw nothing.

Then she looked down. She saw perhaps a hundred ants progressing towards her. She hated insects. They scared her, and she yelled at them to stop and freeze. The ants stopped, all at once, as if they had been waiting for her command. She sat there confused, watching. But then she realized she had a theory that needed testing. She commanded the ants, “If you can understand me, then please take me to my friend Mira’s house.” The ants stood there, not moving. Farah was dismayed, since she thought she’d just found a way to get to Mira’s.



But then her dismay was relieved. Hundreds of thousands of ants burst from the ground like a volcano. They marched towards the girl, tunneling under her, pushing her off the ground. Soon she was being conveyed towards the house.

“You look like a princess”

It was half past eight, and Farah had lost a lot of time due to her accident. Once she arrived at the house, Mira rushed towards her in a panic. “God, what happened to you!” she exclaimed.

“I tripped. I’m so sorry, Mira. We were invited to a ball, and I just ruined it for us. We might as well not go since we’ll be late.” Mira looked at her friend, confused.

“We’ll be on time, and you have nothing to worry about,” she reassured her friend. “But those cuts of yours, that’s what we should worry about. You stay right there while I get you something.” The girl couldn’t be more relieved. She wondered how she got so lucky. Mira was almost too good to be true.

Mira returned with a bottle of yellow liquid, which she urged Farah to drink. The girl was skeptical, but gave in. But as soon as that liquid touched her tongue, she regretted it. It tasted horribly -- like old socks, expired milk, and pickle juice combined. She gagged. But once the bottle was empty, the drink began to work. The girl’s cuts started tingling. It was an odd sensation, but then the cuts closed and the pain disappeared. Her skin went back to perfection. She watched in awe, filled with delight as she was her flawless self again.

The girls started to dress. Mira's gown was deep emerald green, the waist splashed with little jewels and the whole as sparkly as she was. It was ankle-length, so she could show off the matching heels. Farah's dress was simpler yet extravagant. It was plain white but beautifully layered, with the end pouffing outward, making it look grand. The dress was long, and brushed the floor as she walked. But this allowed her to wear comfortable flats. Mira put her own hair up in a bun, her only jewelry the flowered ring. She curled Farah's hair to perfection, showing off her simple pearl earrings.

Once her hair was done, Farah made her way to the mirror. She gasped, not recognizing herself. "You look like a princess," Mira said, as she stood behind her. Farah couldn't argue, since she really did look like a princess.



The chime of a clock brought both girls back to reality. They would be late. It was 15 minutes to eleven, and neither knew where to go because of those vague instructions. Still, they left the house . . . hopeful.

Mr. Fancy Pants

As they walked, the girl saw the lights, hundreds of candles giving off a soft glow, outlining the path to follow.

They soon arrived at a huge mansion, almost a block long. It was gorgeous, with an older, Victorian design. The outside was detailed with carvings of yellow roses – the color picking up the pigment on the stone. The stairs leading to the grand door were also beautifully detailed with the same flowers. The wooden door was huge. It looked unreal, like from an enchanted world.



As the girls made their way up the stairs, Farah's face paled. "The invitation!" she thought out loud. They wouldn't be allowed in if they didn't have the invitation. As the girl was about to tell Mira, it was too late, since she had already rung the bell. "Mira, we won't be allowed in if we don't have the invitation. I must have dropped it when I fell!"

"It's fine, we'll just tell the guard about our situation," Mira said reassuringly. The door opened, revealing a really intimidating man. He stood almost as tall as the door, arms bulging with muscles. Farah gulped. No way was she going to try reasoning with him. Mira had other plans, though. She approached the man, saying cheerfully, "Hello, sorry to bother you but my friend misplaced the invitation, so do you think we could convince you to let us in?" The scary man replied, "Of course, right this way. You certainly look like you're supposed to be here." Mira smiled at him, guiding Farah inside. The girl was too stunned to speak, so she didn't, allowing her friend to guide her into the house.

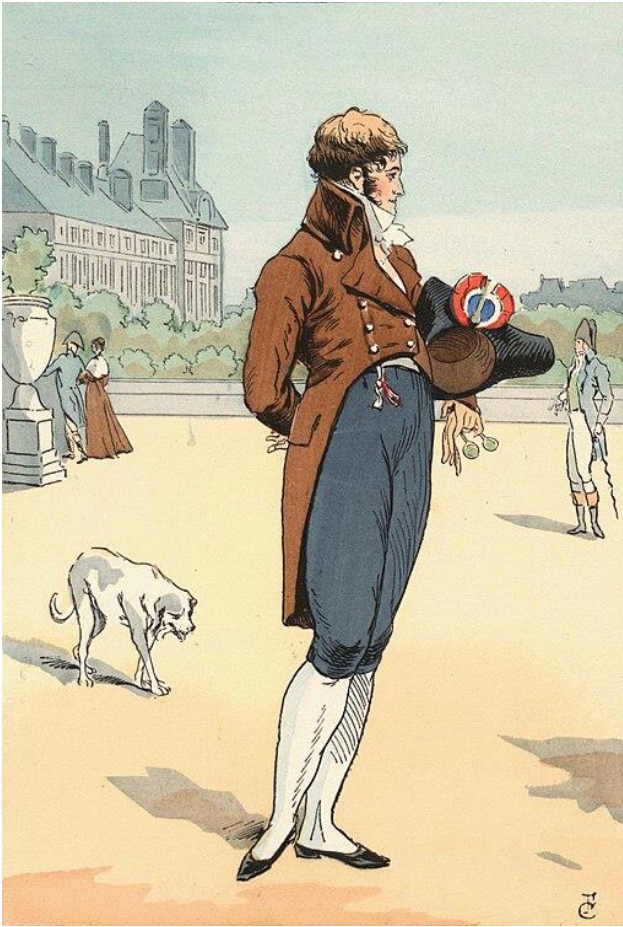
The interior was even more extravagant than the outside. The woodwork of the floors, like the walls, was encrusted with yellow roses. The room was filled with fancy people, in fancy dresses and suits. Farah felt like an outsider -- an imposter -- because she wasn't this type of fancy, extravagant person. Overwhelmed by her emotions, she excused herself, making her way toward a waitress to ask where the restroom was. The lady responded, "Hello lovely, yes, the women's restrooms. If you walk straight about twenty feet, you can turn left into a hallway, and the restroom is the first door you'll see." Before the girl could thank the woman, she walked away.

Farah followed the instructions, finding her destination. The restroom was huge, vanity mirrors lining one of the walls, along with two oversized couches against another wall. As she headed towards the couches, she felt a presence behind her . . . and in the mirror she saw that familiar black cloak. As the girl turned, Anwir broke the silence, “You must return to me at 2 a.m., no later. I’ll be in the woods near the house, and you must find me.”

“What? Why, Anwir?”

“Please, just promise me!” Anwir said urgently. Anwir had never sounded this peremptory. Farah became concerned, but did not ask questions. Instead, she just responded, “I promise, Anwir.” Worry left Anwir’s eyes, which returned to their usual, assured expression. Just like she always did, Anwir left, leaving Farah alone.

The girl did not stay in the restroom, which had become depressing. As she exited, she crashed into a big chest, causing her to fall and tear her dress. As she looked up to scold whoever caused this accident, her eyes met a pair of captivating ones. The stranger held out his hand, which she took, allowing him to pull her to her feet. She took in his outfit -- an expensive-looking suit, with dress shoes that looked equally expensive. His face was young. He was no older than she was. But she could sense wealth coming off him in waves. He looked like the definition of a fancy person. She was the first to speak, “Thanks for your help, Fancy Pants, but I must get going. My friend is waiting for me.”



But as she started walking away, Fancy Pants unexpectedly followed her. Once they made it to the ballroom, he took her arm, turning her to face him. “May I have this dance?” he beckoned. The girl smiled. “But of course!” she responded, taking up his English accent. They made their way to the dance floor, hand in hand. The music started. They swayed, twirling to the beat. But their time together didn't stop once they stopped dancing. They talked and talked, enjoying each other's company.

Farah felt comfortable with him, as he seemed to be with her. It felt like a spark shot through them every time their eyes met. . . call it love?

The clock struck

Farah was so deep in conversation that she lost track of the time. Her eyes glanced towards the clock in the ballroom, which read a quarter to two. She had fifteen minutes to find Mira, and then find Anwir in the woods. She quickly ran around the room, giving Fancy Pants a small goodbye, trying to look for her friend. She checked every hall, every room, before finally finding Mira in the garden. She grabbed her arm, pulling Mira into the woods alongside her. The girl started to shake as the clock chimed, signaling 2 a.m. Both girls were sprinting, until Mira stopped. “Mira? What are you doing? We need to go,” the girl begged while trying to pull Mira along. “I’ll explain later.”

Mira fell to her knees, whispering “I - I don't feel so good.” Farah’s eyes widened as she tried to pry her friend upwards. “Hey, you’re going to be okay, you’re going to be fine,” she tried to convince Mira, but more so herself. Mira held on to the girl’s arm, “Yeah, I’m going to be okay,” she sighed, before her eyes closed, the grip on Farah’s arm loosened, and she started to disintegrate, disappearing into little pieces that floated away in the breeze. “No, no, no, no! Please Mira, don’t do this, don’t leave me,” Farah shouted, hugging what was left

of her friend. But her shouting and pleading failed to stop what was happening. Her friend kept disappearing, floating away until all that the girl was hugging was herself.

Farah had just lost the only person who had stayed with her. Her arms continued shaking, along with the rest of her body, until a beautiful, amazing voice called for her: Fancy Pants.’ She was relieved. He would make everything better, she thought -- her knight in shining armor, her prince charming. Farah made her way to him. His arms were open, waiting to embrace her . . . that was, until he fell to the ground. “No, no, no, hey, don't you do this to me, don't dare close your eyes, Fancy Pants, I'm not going to lose you too.” Tears now blinded the girl’s eyes. Fancy Pants grabbed her face, his eyes beginning to droop, “I’m sorry, my love,” he whispered before his hand began disappearing along with the rest of his body.



“I was so close”

Farah couldn't move. Tears rushed down her cheeks, not stopping, flowing like a waterfall. “I was so close,” she thought. She had the looks, the friend, and finally the prince, her knight in shining armor. She tasted it, the feeling of being so close to what she had always dreamed of. All of that had now gone. Disappeared.

Farah felt a presence, a hand on her shoulder. Its owner whispered, “I told you. I told you to find me at two.” Anwir’s voice was practically mocking. But tears continued to spill from Farah’s eyes. “I was so close,” she whispered.

“Why are you crying? Anwir demanded, “This is your doing, you wanted this.”

The girl replied, “No, no I wanted things to go right, just once for things to stay perfect. You promised me that, you told me you would make it happen, and you lied. YOU LIED AND NOW THEY’RE DEAD!”

“Yes, I promised you something good, which I gave you. But I never said how long it would last. You assumed forever, but nothing

lasts forever,” Anwir scolded. She continued with “I gave you *my* promise, I made you pretty, gave you a best friend, a lover. I gave you parts of a happily-ever-after, because that's all there was to give. Even in books, happy endings are temporary. We read to relive them, to experience what – in reality – we can't have.” The girl couldn't talk. She was stunned. Anwir kept talking. “That's why those books end,” she said. If they continued, it would reveal that the endings everyone loves don't stay that way. They unravel, just like what happened to you. Nothing is ever just good. So, I lived up to my promise. You just didn't understand my promise.”

Farah remained silent. Anwir advanced toward her, holding the girl's hands with her own. The girl's eyes widened, “No, no please don't do this to me!” she begged, pulling Anwir closer. But Anwir pulled away.

“I know, I'm sorry.” And with that Anwir disappeared into the breeze like everyone else, like she was never actually there, vanishing like the prince, like Mira, like hope. The girl dropped to the ground, sobbing, cursing— cursing Anwir for letting her believe (or, at least, want to believe) that this time she would succeed, she would succeed forever.

Returning Home

Lost in thought, she almost didn't hear as her name was called -- "Farah?" she heard a girl shout. "Farah?" The voice grew closer. She saw the face of a student in her school named Dana. "I saw you wander into the woods a--" She saw the pools of water around Farah's eyes. "Hey, are you alright?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm okay, I just -- I just got lost in my mind, I'm okay, I'm okay. Dana remained unconvinced, but didn't push it.

"Let's get you home," Dana responded. "Your parents are waiting for you," she said, while guiding Farah out of the woods. But Farah stopped mid-step. "My parents?" she questioned. Confused. Dana replied, "Yes, your parents."

"They're at home?" Farah asked again. "Of course, they're at your home, where else would they be?" Dana asked. "Nowhere, nothing, of course they're home," Farah replied uncertainly, following Dana back to where she thought she would never return.

As they walked, Farah focused on Dana's ring, that familiar ring. She asked "I love your ring, what's that flower on it?"

“Oh, it’s just a flower my mother loves. She calls them princess lilies, but their real name is alstroemeria.” The girl mentally froze. “Why does she have Mira’s ring?” she asked herself. Lost in thought again, she almost didn’t hear Dana’s remark, “I like your bracelet.” “Bracelet?” Farah was confused because she didn’t have a bracelet. But then looking down at her wrist, there it was, the bracelet no one was allowed to touch, the one that would only fit Anwir. But Farah was wearing it. What this meant, she didn’t know. Honestly, she didn’t care, not anymore.

Dana dropped Farah at her house. Farah was now once again just the girl who lived on Arden Road, no longer a “princess” but just herself. Farah thanked Dana for everything, making her way to her parents. “I love you,” she whispered to them. Then embracing her siblings, she whispered “I love you.” She climbed upstairs, closing her tearful eyes.

And Ever After

This was not the last time Dana and Farah met. Every day, Dana would check on her, making sure her new friend was okay. Such acts of kindness kept Farah going. They reassured her that friendship was still possible. So slowly, Farah opened up to Dana. She became more trusting, more willing to share how she felt – even revealing what still frightened her. She realized that Dana was a forever-friend. You know when you first meet someone. You feel safe, comfortable. Small talk wasn't difficult. The two could talk for hours, but they could also be silent for hours. They met every day but, even if they hadn't talked for weeks, they could have picked up where they left off. When they met that night in the woods, Farah felt a “click” between her and Dana. That was when Farah knew that Dana would always be there for her. This was a real friendship, Farah thought.

Farah's life continued. The seasons passed. Her favorite was the deep of winter, when the snow falls hard and it's freezing to where you can't leave your house. She loved this season, because it slowed things down the way only cold could. She would feel at peace as a chill wind hit her face when she opened her bedroom window. She

could stare out that window for hours, watching the snow fall. It made everything a blur. Everything, of course, except those lanterns, whose soft yellow glow shone through the whiteness. Their glow reminded her that she wasn't lonely anymore. Farah knew that no matter what, the glow would always be there.

Now, Farah knew that if she ever lost herself in dreams again, Dana would bring her back to reality. Reality – this reality – was hardly perfect, but at least it wouldn't crumble away, leaving you aching for what you cannot have.

For a long time, Farah sought a happy, “fairytale” ending. But Anwir's warning – that you can only expect a partially happily-ever-after -- stayed with her. It seemed true. There were moments in Farah's life when she felt like she was living a fairytale, like when birds chirped or the wind blew in her face. But these moments were special because they came only rarely and didn't last. In fairytales, these moments don't end. But in the real world, they do.

Fairytales usually end in “And so so-and-so lived happily ever after.” But Farah just tried to live happily now. Because really – in reality -- there are no happily-ever-afters.



The Girl Who Wished Through The Mirror

"The Girl Who Wished Through the Mirror" is a fairy tale embedded in the story of a girl who comes to realize that fairy tales are not for real. It is romantic, but also -- finally -- a little poignant. It offers young people, and especially girls a way to think about their dreams realistically, while still holding onto what matters most. It is elegant, delicate, dreamy but, most of all, a charming tale about what girls wish for and what they can finally hold onto. It ponders what matters most to a girl coming of age. It demonstrates the need that we all have for honest friendship.

About the Author

Sarah Friedberg lives in Great Neck, New York, and attends the Portledge School in Locust Valley. She is fascinated by the porous border between dream and reality. In the real world, she loves to read and aspires to be a lawyer. She writes stories, takes long walks and -- like the girl who dreams through the mirror -- she allows her imagination to create the realities that she dreams about.



Sarah Friedberg