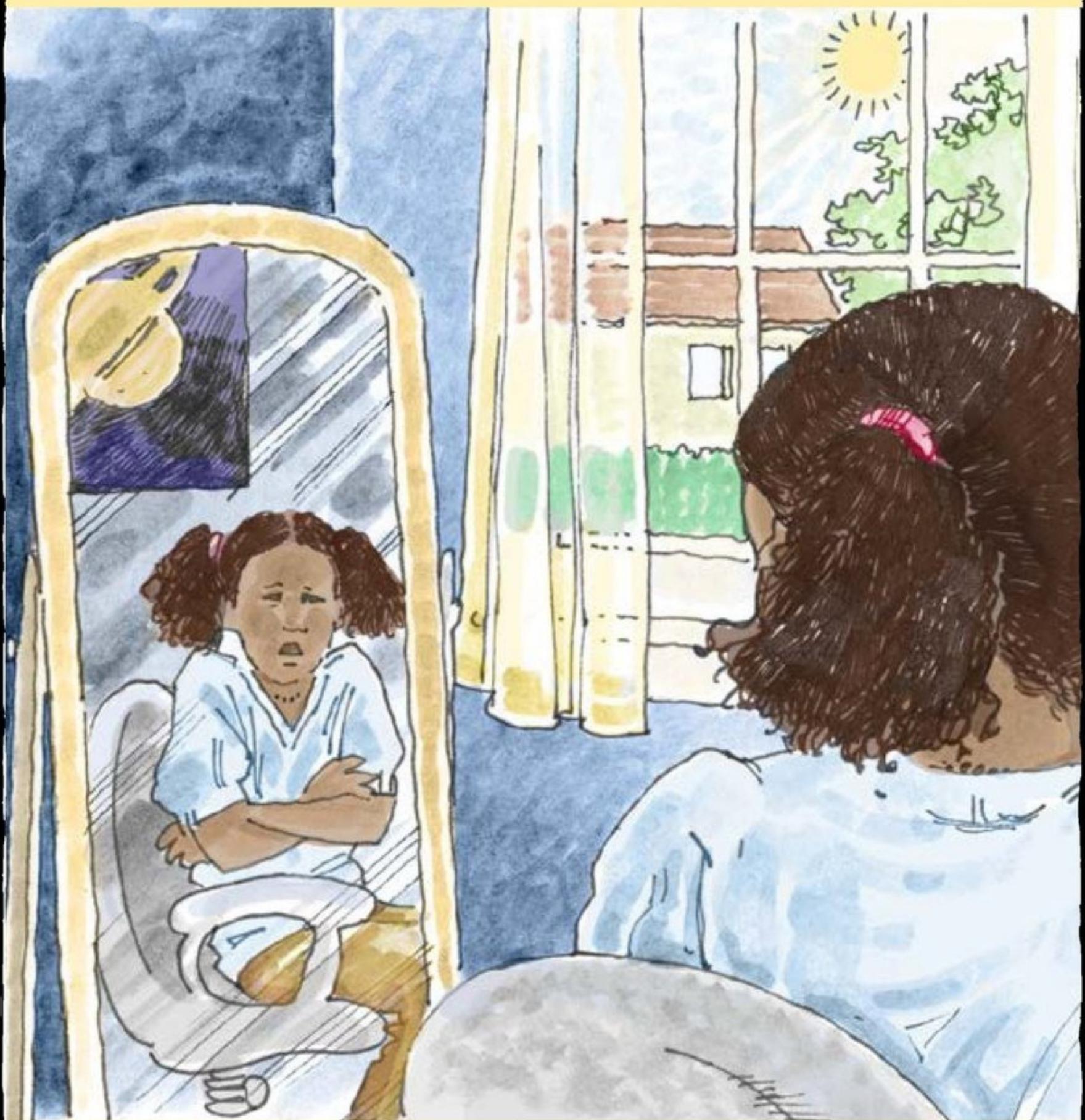


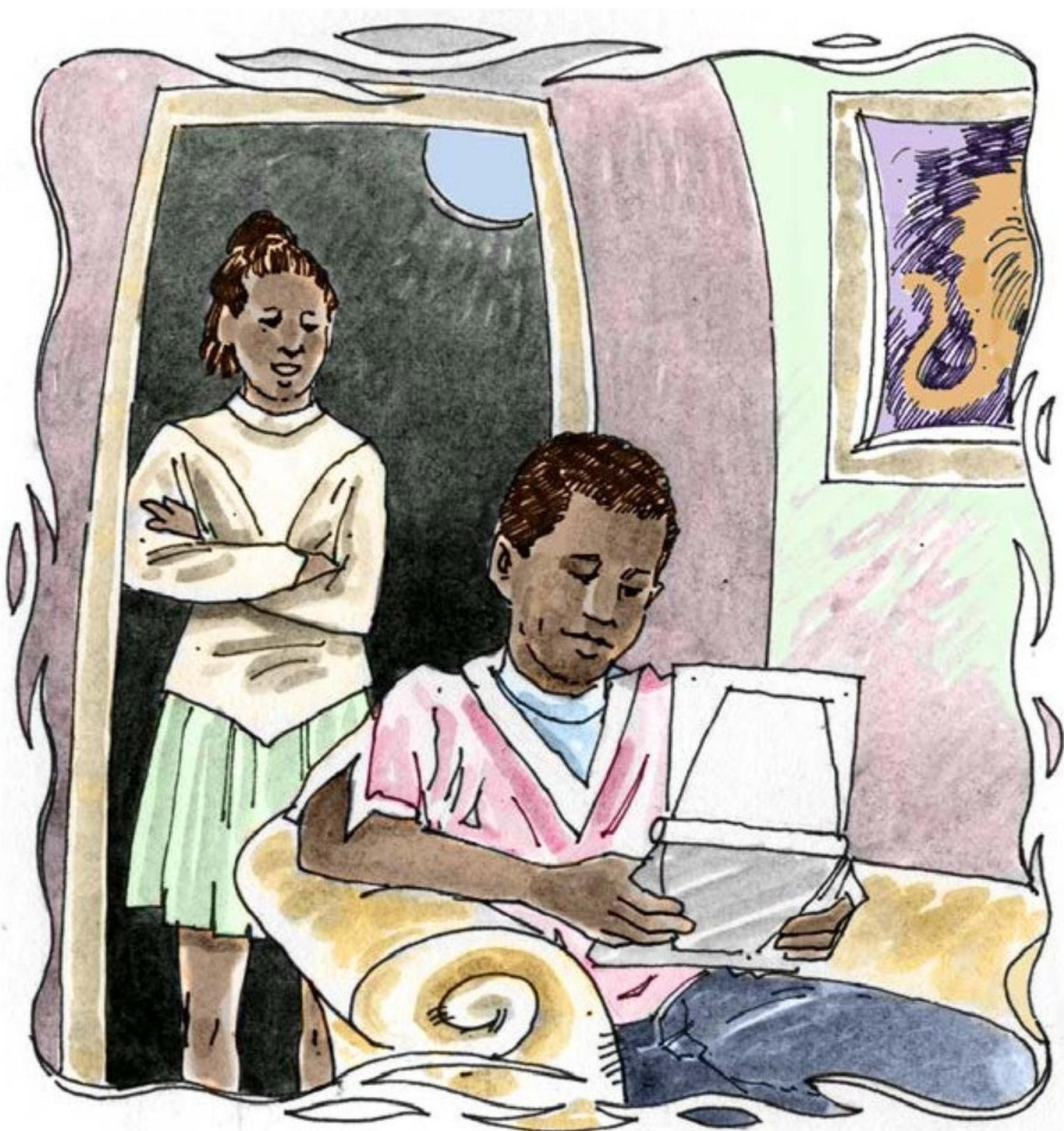
LEVELED BOOK • V

Mirroring Miranda



Written by Jeffrey B. Fuerst
Illustrated by Stephen Marchesi

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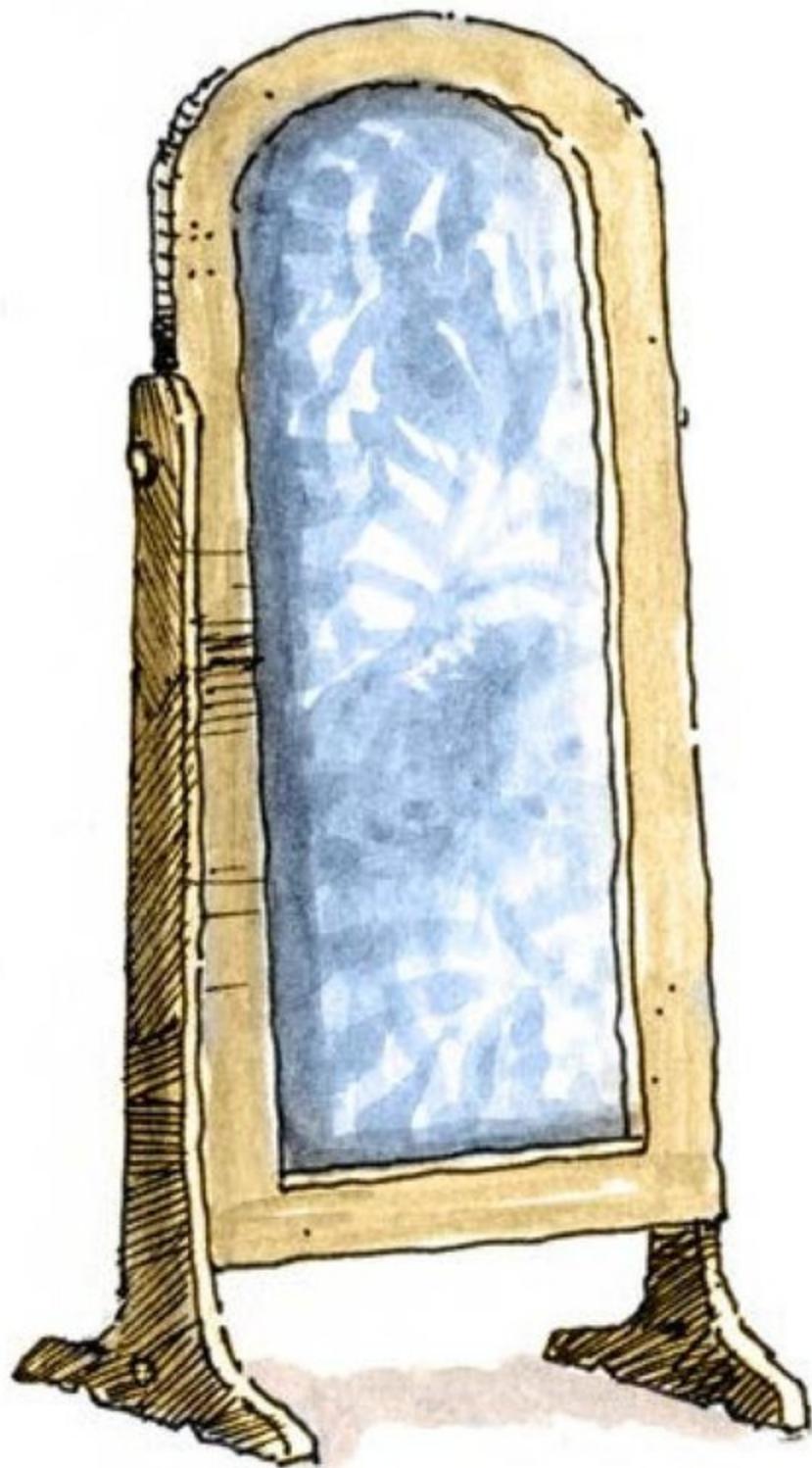


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Chapter 1

Miranda James looked long and hard at the twelve-year-old girl in the mirror. "This is the summer you are going to do it!" she said aloud. "You are going to write a **science fiction** story that will get published, and win the Hugo Award or the Nebula Award or maybe even both."

Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Robert Heinlein, Ursula K. Le Guin and all the great sci-fi, or SF, writers won these prestigious science fiction awards. The awards covered all types of fiction that used scientific, magical, or supernatural elements as part of their plots or settings, whether they were science fiction, **fantasy**, or horror stories. Miranda liked reading all three kinds of stories, but her favorite was sci-fi.

One day she hoped to become a must-read sci-fi author herself . She penciled-in her own name: James, between Heinlein and Le Guin on her alphabetized, must-read list of summer reading. Thinking about her future fame sent a cold shiver up her spine. But first, she had to write a good story.

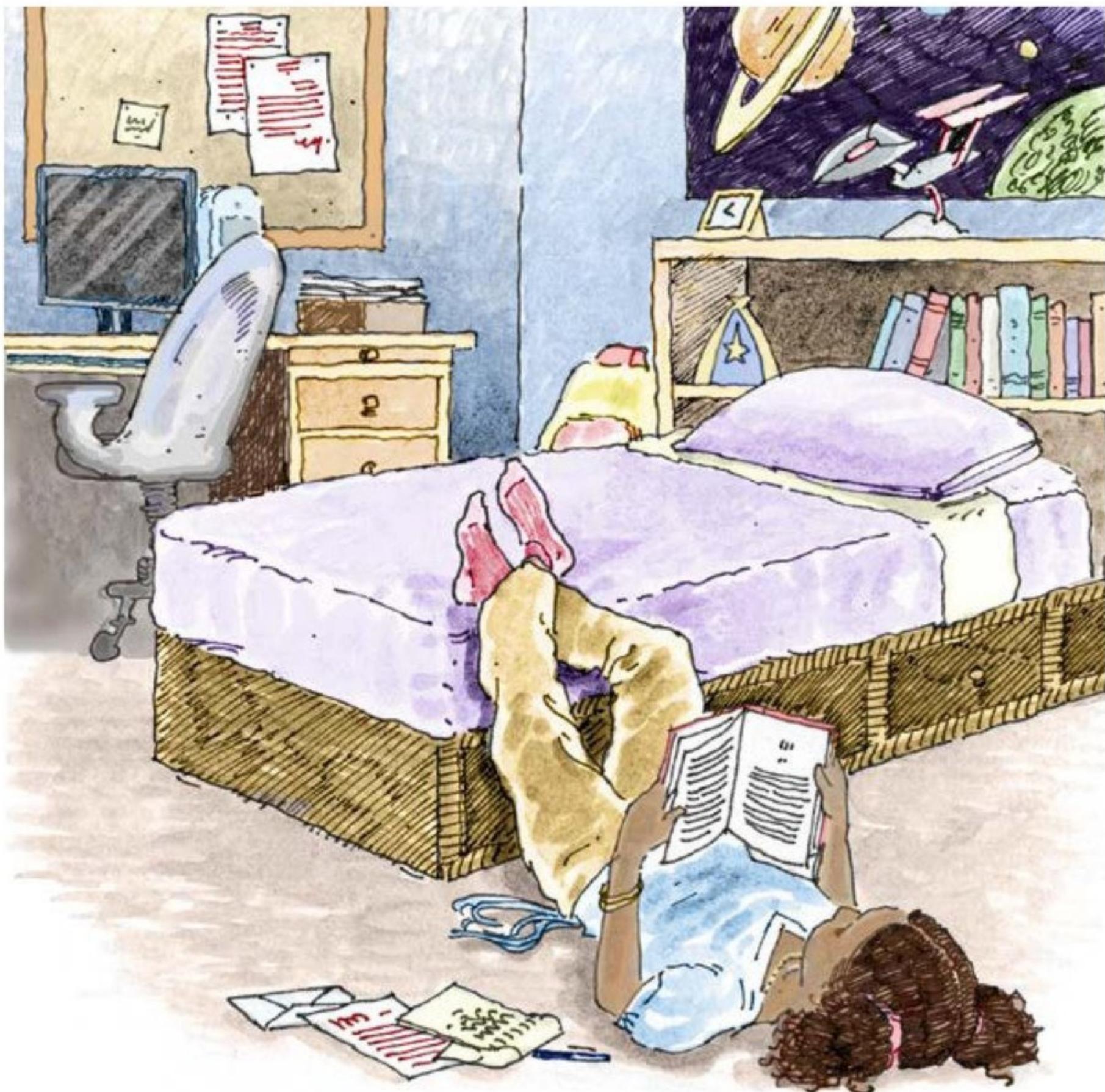


This would not be Miranda's first science fiction story. She had written seventeen other science fiction stories and submitted every one of them to her favorite sci-fi magazine, *Future Tense*. So what if she had received seventeen rejection letters? With each letter she had received an encouraging note back from the editor.

"Dear Sir/Madam: Thank you for your **submission**. However, it does not meet our publishing needs at this time. Good luck with your future efforts."

Miranda didn't care that they were rejection letters. The editor had said "good"! Strangely, when Miranda read the letter aloud and reached the word "good," she faintly heard it echo from her bedroom mirror. Or at least she thought she heard it. Either way, she took it as an encouraging sign and vowed to eat, sleep, breathe, and, most importantly, read science fiction all through the summer.





Although the list she had made of sci-fi authors was in alphabetical order, Miranda decided to read the authors in a **random** order. Randomness felt more like science fiction to her. As it turned out, she ended up reading a *different number of books by each author* by the end of the summer. In fact, Miranda *had read two books by C. J. Cherryh* and had learned a lot about Ms. Cherryh's sci-fi style. *They weren't the first books she read that summer, but she did end up reading more books written by women than by men.*



Chapter 2

“What are you doing in your room on this beautiful day?” asked her brother Harris, a senior in high school. “I hope you’re not talking to yourself again.”

“Maybe I am, and then again maybe the voice you heard was an android in the fourth dimension controlling your mind,” said Miranda. She had just started reading a book about androids—robots that look like humans. The day before, she finished a book set in the fourth dimension, which meant time was constantly shifting in a mind-freaky way. Next, she planned to read a book about an evil scientist who invents a ray gun that zombifies people so that he can take over the world.

"I'm taking the dog to the park to play fetch. Want to come?" asked Harris.

"You go. I have work to do," Miranda replied.

"Not another one of your ridiculous stories!" exclaimed Harris.

"They are not ridiculous! They are what we science fiction writers call '**cautionary** tales.'"

"Well, I hope it is better than the one about the mutant broccoli that grew so big it squished Milwaukee," teased Harris.

"It was a zucchini, for your information, and it was Cincinnati that got squashed! Don't you get it? Zucchini is a type of a squash. That is what we writers call a play on words. And because the greedy agribusiness overlords were using illegal fertilizer that accidentally got zapped with radioactive waste dumped on it by the corrupt politicians who ran the nuclear power plant, the zucchini grew so big it *squashed* them all. Tit-for-tat. We sci-fi writers call this an **allegory**."

"Well," spouted Harris, "if you feel like exercising something besides your overactive imagination, let me know. We nonwriters call this an invitation."

That Harris made her so mad! He told her to leave science fiction to boys; she should write stories about lost kittens, pink princesses, and wild horses. Miranda knew some girls who liked that romantic stuff, but it made her want to throw up. Still, Harris was right about getting exercise, so she reluctantly put aside her writing and rode her bike to the library. She checked out *an odd number of books by Ursula K. Le Guin*—“a female sci-fi and fantasy writer, thank you!” she said aloud to Harris, though Harris wasn’t anywhere around.

Miranda looked at her list of authors and now planned to read *more books by female sci-fi writers*. Plus, she figured that an odd number would be a good idea because odd was sort of weird, and she felt a weird story brewing inside of her.





Chapter 3

Dozens of tales rambled around James Miranda's brain, waiting to be put on paper. But the guys in his class laughed at him whenever he told them his stories about knights in shining armor saving damsels in distress. "No wonder," said his big sister. "That's girl stuff." But James's adventures also had wizards and trolls and ice-breathing dragons, he explained.



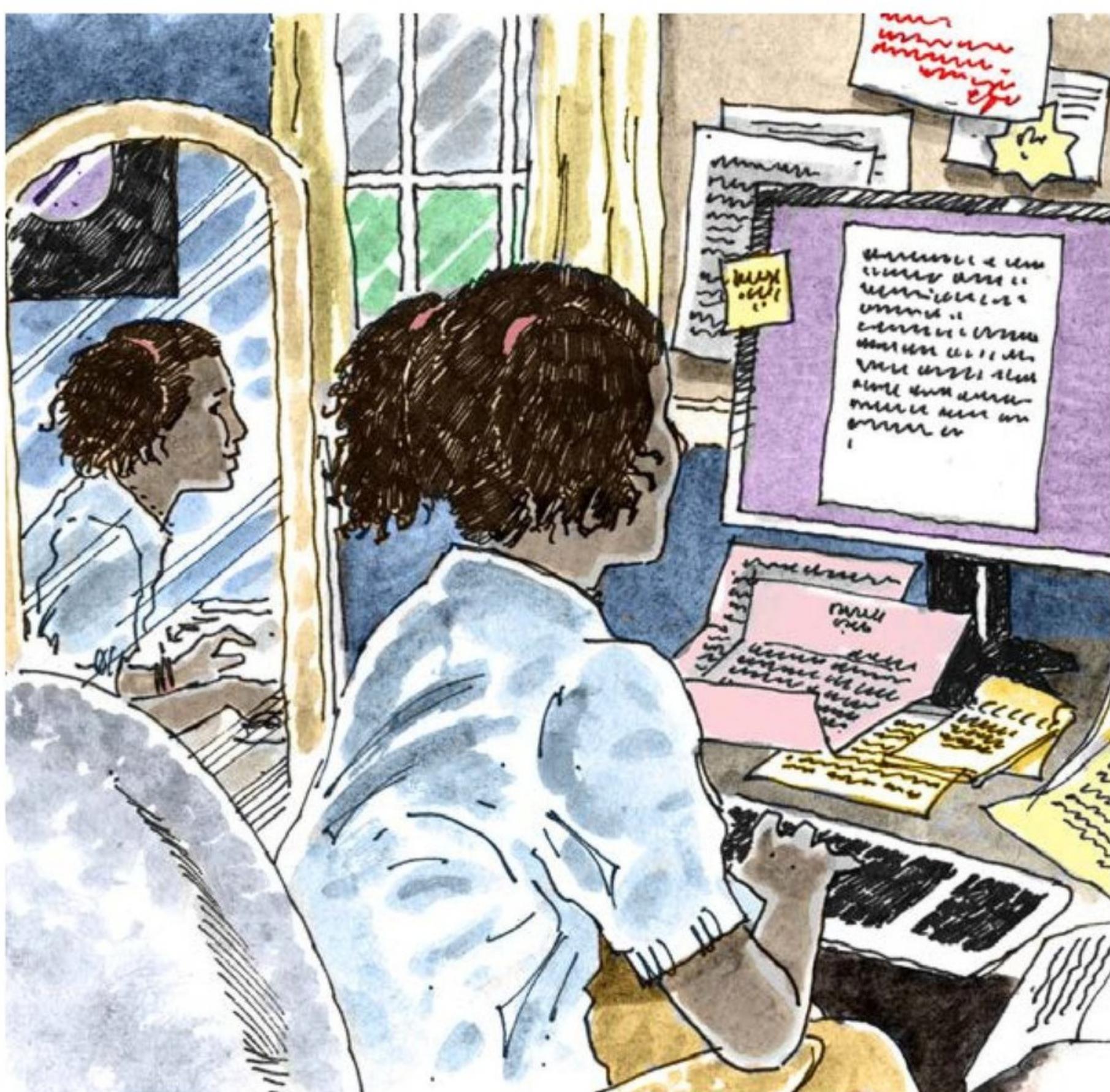
His sister didn't listen. She told him to get a life. Because if he had a life, he'd not only have fun, he'd have something real to write about.

James had plenty of fun writing his stories, thank you very much. One day, he'd be famous because of them, too. So he just kept writing what he felt he had to write. *They are good stories*, he heard the voice inside him say.

And then he would say aloud: "Good."

Reading all these science fiction books is definitely helping my writing, Miranda thought. So far, she especially enjoyed the space-travel books by Arthur C. Clarke. Too bad she had not read him first.

Clarke's books were considered "pure" science fiction. They were made-up stories, but based on scientific truths. His books looked at how real scientific discoveries could put people in situations where they had to make decisions that could change people's lives for the better—or worse.





"Heavy stuff," said Miranda aloud. Then she felt another chill come over her. At first she thought it came from her realization that in the best sci-fi, mastering science often meant power over nature—just not *human* nature. But it was not a tingly feeling she was feeling, it was an icy blast, as if she was standing in front of an air conditioner that had just turned on. Once again she was in front of the mirror in her room, her hot, air-conditionerless, fanless room.

Feeling creeped out, she reached out to touch the mirror. It was cold to her touch, colder than an ice cube, almost as cold as frozen carbon dioxide gas, which she had been researching to use in a story. When she touched the mirror with her index finger, it turned numb. If she hadn't flinched, Miranda was sure her finger would have stuck to the mirror!

Then Miranda tried a different experiment. She breathed on the mirror. It fogged up. That reminded Miranda of when she was younger, and would breathe onto the cold car window in winter. When it fogged up, which she now knew was caused by **condensation**, she'd write her name on the window, then watch the letters disappear as the fog **evaporated**. The cool part was that the letters in her name would reappear magically if she blew another warm breath on the same spot. Now she knew it wasn't magic that caused this, it was science.

What was strange now, however, was that this wasn't winter, there wasn't a car window, and when the fog evaporated from the mirror, Miranda could read her name as she had written it on her alphabetized reading list: James Miranda—last name first. But, she had not written her name that way on the mirror . . . she shivered again.





Chapter 4

Had Miranda written her name that way on the mirror a long time ago? To take her mind off this creepy feeling, Miranda picked up a book by *Roger Zelazny. He was the fourth sci-fi/fantasy author she would read that summer.* She studied his picture on the book jacket. The biographical notes said he had died a few years ago, and had often written about magic and fantasy worlds.

Miranda read late into the night. Her eyes burned, but she couldn't stop. She had to find out what happened to Zelazny's famous character, Prince Corwin of Amber.

Sometime around midnight, Miranda dozed off. She dreamed that a dark-haired boy in a tuxedo spoke to her from the mirror.

"You can do it," he said. "Just keep writing."

Miranda woke up in a cold sweat. "*Bong, bong,*" struck the grandfather clock in the dining room. *Two o'clock in the morning would be a good time for something spooky to happen in one of my stories*, Miranda said to herself as she reached for her journal to make some late-night notes. As she gazed at the mirror, another icy blast swooshed past her, and she froze momentarily. All of a sudden a face peered at her from what seemed like inside the mirror. "Oh my gosh! You're . . . Roger Zelazny!" she cried.





Chapter 5

Prince Saffron sheathed his sword and raised his shield. “Onward, Valiant,” he commanded, and his enormous, white steed took off at full gallop. Acitcratna, the ice-breathing dragon, had turned the princess into an ice sculpture.

“I’m not Zelazny Roger,” said the voice in the mirror. “But I, too, am a magnificent writer, and if you’ll excuse me, I have to go save a princess.”

Was Miranda still dreaming? “Ow!” she cried as she pinched herself. Nope, she was awake. Or was she in a nightmare in which she was dreaming she was awake?

Hadn't she read a story where something like that happened? She checked her notes. It could have been one of the books by *Octavia Butler*, *who was the third author she had read after reading five books by a different author.*

Maybe Harris was correct about her need to take a break from sci-fi. Then she realized what must be happening.

"All right, Harris," she said. "I know you are playing a trick on me. Ha-ha, you got me. You can come out now."

"My name isn't Harris," said the face in the mirror. "It is Miranda. James Miranda."





"James . . . Miranda? That's my name, too, but backward," said Miranda. "I'm Miranda James."

"I know," said the face in the mirror. The face belonged to a boy that seemed to be about twelve years old. In fact, the face looked like Miranda's—if she had been a boy.

"I've been trying to reach you," said James. "I sent you a message on the mirror, but my first attempt wasn't strong enough. Only my . . . our name made it through."

"James Miranda! On the mirror! So I wasn't making it up. It really happened."

"It is still happening," James said.

"Whoa! This is freaky. And awesome, just like a real science fiction story! You are me but in some bizarre parallel universe where things are backward or inside-out or . . ."

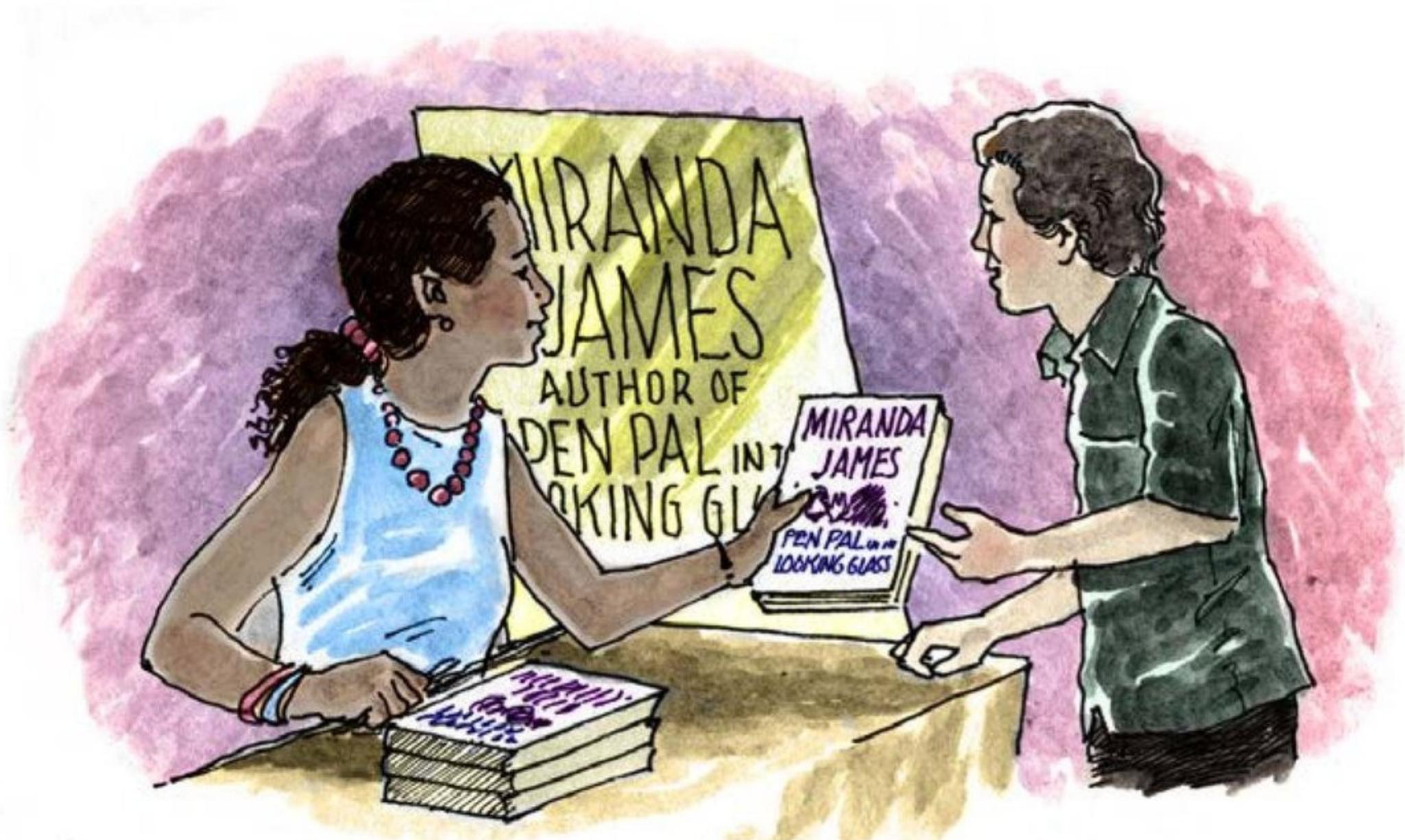
"Spirit twins is what we call them in my world," explained James. "Only a select few have them, which means that this is a rare gift." Then he explained about brain waves **intersecting** in a black hole in outer space, and why he had chosen to make himself known to Miranda, and how it would give him an actual true-life story of adventure to write.

Miranda was **enraptured** and took down everything James said. This was something no one was going to believe so she made sure she captured every word.



Epilogue

Miranda managed to capture the details of her talk with James in her journal, and the journal grew into a book. Her first book, *Pen Pal in the Looking Glass*, became a bestseller because the “mirror world” she wrote about was so believable. Miranda’s critics said that her story blended science with fiction in such a way that it was hard to tell where the science ended and the fiction began. As a published science-fiction writer, Miranda finally joined the ranks of other authors with big dreams and imaginations.



Glossary

allegory (<i>n.</i>)	a story in which the people, events, or things have hidden meanings (p. 9)
cautionary (<i>adj.</i>)	warning of danger (p. 9)
condensation (<i>n.</i>)	the process of changing from gas to liquid, such as water vapor to water (p. 15)
enraptured (<i>adj.</i>)	to be filled with great delight (p. 22)
evaporated (<i>v.</i>)	changed from liquid to gas (p. 15)
fantasy (<i>n.</i>)	a type of made-up story that uses magic or supernatural elements as the basis for its plot or setting (p. 5)
intersecting (<i>v.</i>)	cutting or crossing another object (p. 22)
random (<i>adj.</i>)	without any sort of order (p. 7)
reluctantly (<i>adv.</i>)	doing something unwillingly (p. 10)
science fiction (<i>n.</i>)	a type of made-up story that uses real or imagined scientific ideas as the basis for its plot or setting (p. 4)
submission (<i>n.</i>)	a work judged or reviewed by someone else (p. 6)

Logic Quiz

Miranda read 15 books by five authors on her summer vacation. Use the ***bold-italic*** clues in the text to find how many books she read by each author, and the order in which she read each author's books.

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Level V Leveled Book
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Illustrated by Stephen Marchesi

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Correlation

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DRA	40