

Dear [REDACTED],

It was so much fun to read your novel, [REDACTED]. As a reader, I enjoyed it, and as an editor, I can see a lot of potential for its marketability as a YA fantasy. To help you prepare your book even more for professional publication, I've included a list of ways the book can be improved, as well as some of its strengths. Whether you address the concerns that I bring up or not is your decision, but I've carefully considered each point and based them off of what is current in the publishing industry and what I've seen in YA and other novels, including other fairytale retellings.

- The beginning
 - Consider starting the book with chapter 2's scene, especially since it begins with that great first paragraph. Start the story with action—you can introduce Finn later. Also, it would make more sense for Skylar to startle Finn. Maybe they catch each other off guard. It would be so fun to see them actually *fight* when they first meet.
- Character voices
 - Skylar and Finn's voices—especially the ways they think—are very similar. Sometimes I have to refer back to the chapter title to see whose POV this is. I would suggest making a list of different ways characters' voices can be different and then assigning several to each character. I've been making a list myself; I can send it to you if you'd like.
- Characterization
 - Good job giving the characters their own character arcs.
 - Be careful: Luis seems more interesting than Finn a lot of the time. He's funnier and more unpredictable, and even without Finn's lisp, Luis's speaking voice is more distinctive. Finn shouldn't necessarily be funnier or more unpredictable than Luis, but he should have his own quirks that make him at least as interesting as Luis in his own way. If you don't make the main characters at least as interesting as the secondary characters, then the reader is going to wish that the story followed the secondary characters, or at least that Skylar would end up with Luis. (That wish crossed my mind more than once.)
 - What is Finn's biggest weakness? He seems almost a little too perfect—too nice, too obedient. When some of his temper came out, he became a little more interesting, partly because it showed that he's human. It would be great if the reader could see more of his imperfections. The same goes for Skylar. What are her imperfections? Maybe she's too cocky when it comes to stealing? Maybe she has a negative view of the world?
- Conflict
 - The conflict towards the end of the book is pretty good, but the beginning needs a lot more conflict. As a writer, you want to put your characters into tough situations and make them struggle. For instance, in the scene where Skylar is trying to steal the shoes, there's not much conflict because the reader already knows that Finn is going to catch her. However, even if the reader didn't know that Finn was waiting for her, the conflict could still be improved. For instance, you could show Skylar having a harder time than she anticipated with sneaking into the mansion. You could show her determination, and maybe her fear, and make us wonder what's so horrible about her stepfather that Skylar would do something like this. Maybe you could even show Skylar trying to climb even with the pain of a fresh bruise, a bruise from her stepfather's cane. Basically, show us more *conflict*, both outer and inner.
 - There's some really good conflict in chapter 9 between Skylar and Finn. It would make more sense if most of their early interactions were like that.
- Dialogue

- Often the dialogue is too upbeat and chipper. One example is the conversation between Skylar and Lily when Skylar is trying to steal the necklace. That dialogue has very little conflict in it, so it seems boring and unneeded. Here are some ways to avoid boring dialogue: (1) steer away from upbeat conversations unless there's already a strong, underlying current of conflict pulling the reader along (for example, if a main character is striking up a pleasant conversation with another person at a party, but the main character is avoiding someone else there); and (2) include quarrels, secrets, threats, tense (and relevant) stories, etc.
- Logic
 - Finn is really quick to ask Skylar to help him, and she's really quick to agree. Technically, they should be very suspicious of each other. And why would Finn be thinking about his lisp at that moment when he could gain some respect from his father for catching the robber? Also, if Finn has been lisping his whole life, why would he decide so suddenly that the robber could help him get over his lifelong impediment?
- Narrative
 - The showing can be improved in the book. For instance, instead of saying that Christine has been Skylar's best friend for X number of years, *show* them being best friends. Instead of having Finn talk about how dissatisfied his father is with him, *show* his father being dissatisfied. Instead of having Finn say that Skylar is really attractive, have him do something clumsy, lose his train of thought, or not be able to form a coherent sentence/thought.
- Plot
 - The plot was a bit ambiguous for a while. For a lot of the first half of the book, the reader will be wondering what the main plot is. Is it, "Will Skylar get the necklace?" Is it, "Will Finn fix his lisping?" Is it, "Will Finn be able to convince his father to really *see* him?" The main plot doesn't have to be introduced right in the first chapter (although if it can be, that's great), but it should be introduced earlier. It seems like the plot of the book is, "Will Skylar be able to escape her stepfather's clutches?" Please make sure you can explain the plot in one "Will they?" question, and then introduce that question within the first two—three, at the very most—chapters of the book.
 - The situations that characters find themselves in are often pretty funny. For instance, I laughed when Finn hid the jewelry around the house, because it was unexpected but genius (it also made me think of him as a more interesting person). If you could include a few more humorous situations and jokes, that would help reader interest to rise.
- Setting and descriptions
 - Most of the descriptions were very well done and helped to specify where the characters were and what the mood was. However, consider including more descriptions. It's better to have too many descriptions and then have to cut some out than to have too few descriptions. This world is a different one from what the reader is used to, so the reader wants to see and understand more of it. What makes the world interesting? What makes the people of the world interesting?
- Structure and pacing
 - The pacing in the first few chapters is slow. Increasing conflict—like adding more urgency and danger—will help with that. In general, the scenes' pacing should alternate between fast pacing (action/high conflict) and slow pacing (reaction/rest).
 - The climax is paced well and kept me on the edge of my seat. Besides the stepfather's monologuing, I don't think you need to change much about the climax.
- Subplots
 - The subplot about Trisland—and how that subplot is resolved—seems out of place in the story. For one thing, it was too easy for Luis to get Anton to talk—it seems like a high-ranking general

would be smart enough to know not to get drunk with Luis and risk revealing secrets. Also, it's not exactly clear why Anton did what he did on the coast. Please make sure that's explained more. What was he hoping to accomplish? How was it supposed to help him rise in the ranks?

- Tone
 - The tone throughout a lot of the book—especially the beginning—is light, but in some places it gets darker. For instance, in the scene where we first see Skylar meeting with Tick and Grell, the tone gets much heavier than in the chapters before that. It's the same with the scene where the stepfather whips Skylar. The tone should be more consistent throughout the book. Usually most of the scenes should be in the more serious tone with only a few scenes in the lighter tone. Increasing and adding more conflict should help with that.
- Voice
 - Your author voice is good. It's engaging, while not being over the top. And I like that you include sentence fragments and sentence variety.
 - Good job evoking the reader's emotions, like sadness and irritation (for instance, irritation with Finn's father).
- Other notes
 - The beginning of chapter 8 is so funny!
 - A lot of the characters' interactions are pretty fun.
 - If you couldn't tell, I love Luis!
 - Like I mentioned, the climax was really good.

Again, your book has a lot of potential. I would say my overall suggestion for improvement is to go a little more crazy with your imagination! Brainstorm, ask your kids for ideas, etc. I'm excited to see the great ways you'll think up for making your characters even more unique and memorable, for making your characters suffer [*insert evil author laugh*], and for making this book's world a place that readers would love to visit.

If you have any questions or concerns, I'm happy to discuss them.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Uchtyl