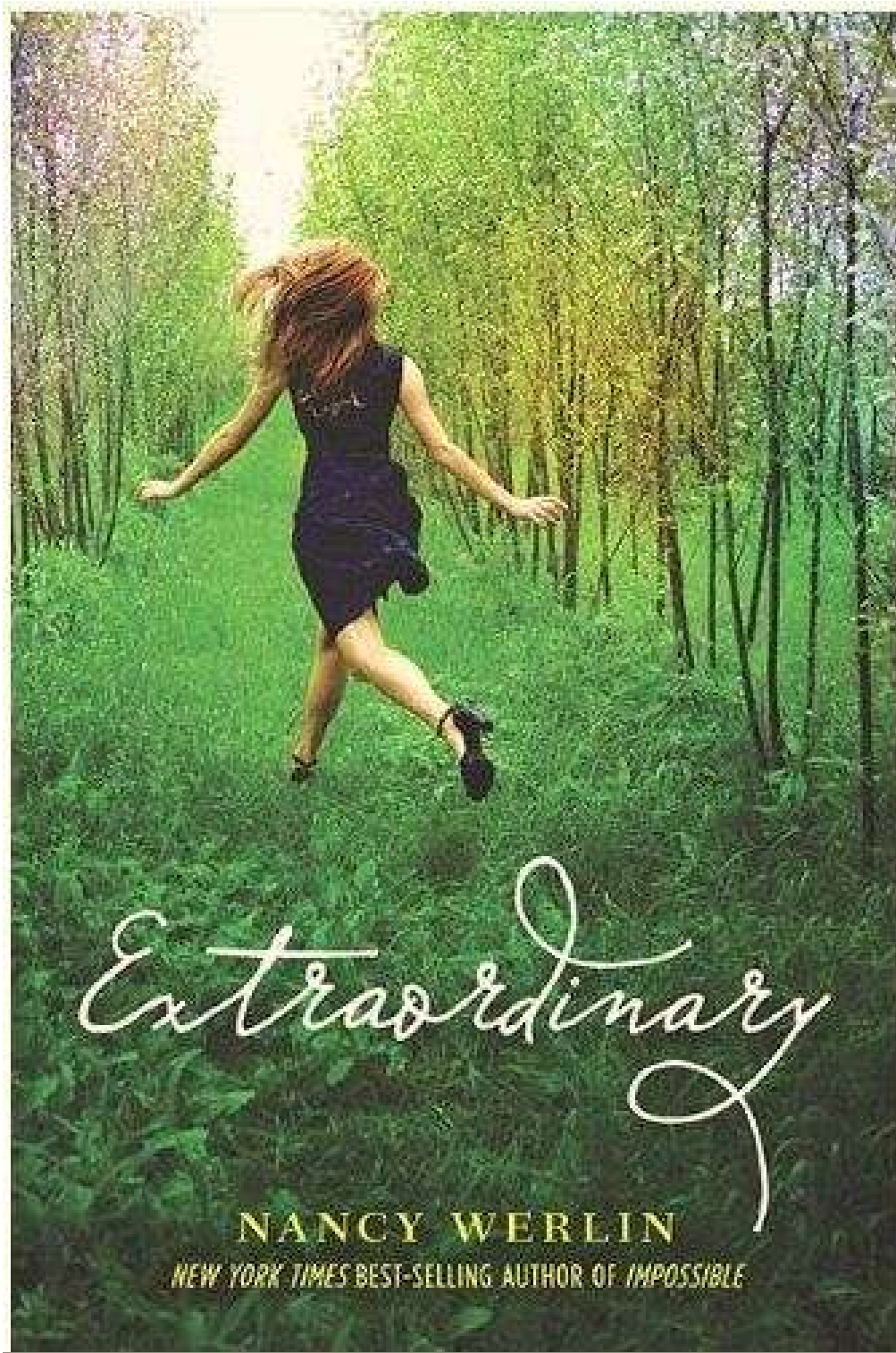


Preview of *Extraordinary*  
by Nancy Werlin



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This is a sample copy of the first two chapters of the book, for  
preview purposes only.

## *Conversation with the Faerie Queen, 1:*

“You are ready for your mission, then, little one?”

“Yes. Except that I am somewhat—I am sorry, Your Majesty. Yes, I am ready.”

“You are anxious. Naturally. It is a great deal of responsibility. But remember, your way has been prepared. The Tolliver woman will believe you to be her own human daughter, miraculously restored to her. Grief, depression, and loneliness have caused her to lose herself, so she will gratefully accept your guidance in all things, young though you are. Managing her will be easy for you; you will give her certain human medications to keep her under your influence, and you will use her money for all your needs in the human realm.”

“I understand. And the Rothschild girl?”

“The girl is of course your main focus. You will observe her at school. I need not tell you again that everything—*everything*—depends on her.”

“The stakes are high.”

“Frighteningly high, at this point. It is useless to deny it.”

“Thank you for your trust and confidence, Your Majesty. I am humbled by it.”

“Rise to your feet, child. Bid farewell to the court and, especially, to your older brother. He is proud of you for having been chosen—and he is jealous too. Ah, I see by the flare in his eyes that I am correct. But you shall show him and all our people that I have not made an error in placing our trust in his little sister.”

“Yes, Your Majesty. Perhaps I will be home again, successful, in just a few human weeks.”

“Even if it takes longer, we will manage. We have three or four years left, by human count.”

“I will succeed with the girl long, long before that!”

“Good. You were ever a ferocious sprout.”

## *Chapter 1.*

Phoebe Gutle Rothschild met Mallory Tolliver in seventh grade, during the second week of the new school year, in homeroom. Phoebe had had one of her horrific asthma attacks and couldn't start school on time, but her so-called friend had kept her in the loop about Mallory. She couldn't wait to talk about the peculiar new girl.

It was her clothing that marked Mallory out. "Every day," Colette Williams-White said to Phoebe, "she wears something weirder than the day before. Yesterday, she had on this huge old T-shirt, like she thought it was a dress. But she had it on backward, with the tag sticking out at her throat. I mean, who wouldn't notice they'd done that? And, you know what? It smelled. Or maybe that was her. Also, with it? High heels."

"Is she maybe, you know . . ." Phoebe paused, delicately. "Challenged?"

"She's in regular classes, and—no. Just no."

"Maybe she can't afford decent clothes?"

Colette shook her head decisively. "The shoes were Christian Louboutin, in this marigold color, with ankle straps. Flowers on the toes, which—I know!—sounds like too much, but trust me, it wasn't."

"Could she just be expressing—"

"Stop it, Phoebe, okay? Because, frankly? Not only are you wrong, but it's also really bitchy of you to keep arguing when I've met her and you haven't. Actually? It's bitchy *and* prissy, both."

Phoebe shut up.

Colette continued. “Mallory Tolliver is *not* making her own unique fashion statement. She just doesn’t care. It’s as if she throws on the first thing she finds every morning, in, like, somebody else’s closet.” Colette rolled her eyes. “And that somebody else, who owns the closet? Hate to say it? They’re really screwed up.”

Looking at the new girl now, Phoebe couldn’t help herself. She exchanged a quick, incredulous glance with Colette, who had been right. Then Phoebe’s gaze returned, compelled, to Mallory Tolliver.

Mallory stood at the back of the room between the windows and the last row of seats, in profile to Phoebe, looking outside toward the cars passing in the street below. She was under medium height, with long straw-colored hair that was desperately in need of a good conditioner, and she was plump, with a curiously pale face. She would have seemed perfectly ordinary, even forgettable, if not for her clothes. Today she was wearing something that looked scarily like a Disney Princess costume.

Phoebe’s brow furrowed, because Mallory’s outfit got stranger the longer you looked at it. It was in fact not what Phoebe had thought at first glance; not a pretty, poufy, Disney princess dress. The costume was flimsy and crude; it tied in back with strings and had obviously been intended to be worn on top of other, sturdier clothes. Possibly on Halloween. At first it had looked similar to Belle’s fabulous tiered yellow ball gown, but on closer examination, its color and shape were off. Also, the dress had a small pair of wings hanging down drearily in back. These feathery wings made it a *fairy* princess costume. A generic, tacky, cheap fairy princess.

Princess Mallory Markdown.

Phoebe caught herself a split second before she said the catty name out loud to Colette, who was gripping Phoebe's arm with one hand and had the heel of the other clapped to her mouth, her eyes alive with characteristic sharp malice. If she said the words to Colette, Phoebe knew, they would stick, and the new girl was in bad enough trouble already. The other girls were like a pack of circling wolves.

Phoebe was one of them. Or rather, she had been. However, after a long talk with her Nantucket friend, Benjamin Michaud, a few weeks ago during summer vacation, she had realized she didn't want to be, not anymore.

Benjamin hardly ever offered a direct opinion and would just listen and ask questions. And he was over a year younger and, being from Nantucket, knew nothing of the kind of big rich suburban middle school Phoebe went to, much less of the politics of girls and friendship. But talking with her summer friend had the ability to make Phoebe realize when she was worried. As she had gone on and on to him about her girlfriends at school, she had realized that she didn't like them, and—this was almost worse—that she didn't like herself when she was with them.

And if that made her prissy—if Colette was right about that too—well, so be it.

The problem was that Phoebe wasn't sure how to detach herself safely from her so-called friends. It had even seemed very possible that she would be a coward and do nothing, because she didn't want to be alone and friendless, and also, she really did fear Colette's sharp

tongue and her power. But as she looked at Mallory Tolliver in her awful costume, Phoebe suddenly understood that she was indeed going to step out of the pack. In fact, she was going to do it this very day. Somehow. She had to.

It was as if a tight constriction around her chest began to relax, and she caught a glimpse of the truth in a conversation she had overheard her parents having about her latest asthma attack. They had said her asthma got worse when she felt stressed or anxious.

Mallory had just shifted position, moving closer to the window. “My God,” Colette said to Phoebe, in a voice pitched for all to hear. “Look at the new girl now!”

Phoebe looked. Phoebe winced.

In the direct light from the window, Mallory’s dress had become partially transparent. She wore nothing beneath the cheap costume. Nothing at all. And, though she had not changed position, her shoulders stiffened, and Phoebe knew that of course she had heard Colette.

Phoebe scanned the room. Everybody was looking at Mallory, and a couple of the boys had their mouths open. “My God,” she muttered involuntarily to Colette. “Where’s her *mother*?”

Colette snickered approvingly—and simultaneously, Mallory Tolliver whipped around. But it was not to look at Colette. Instead, Mallory met Phoebe’s gaze, Phoebe’s only, instantly and directly. There was no mistaking the intelligence—and disdain—and pride—in her eyes.

There was something else there too; a tiny, unmistakable flicker of recognition.

Then, just as abruptly, Mallory turned away again. Her spine was straight as a post.

Phoebe never knew exactly what it was about Mallory that called to her so strongly. That straight back? That quick, proud look at Phoebe that held recognition? The intelligence in her face? The fear that she sensed in her, that moved her to sympathy?

I want to know that girl, she thought suddenly. I want to be friends with her. Not Colette. *Her*.

Out of nowhere, a plan came to Phoebe. It came with tidal-wave force and with the conviction and joy of a religious conversion.

Phoebe reached up and peeled Colette's hand off her arm. She walked away from her and up to the new girl.

She spoke to Mallory's back. "Hello. I'm Phoebe Rothschild. I haven't been here the last few days, but I know you're Mallory." She waited until Mallory turned. The girl's expression was now quite blank.

Phoebe nodded toward an empty desk beside Mallory's. "Is this seat free? Or did Mrs. Fraser assign seats and I should just go away and find mine?" She paused. Smiled. "Or maybe you don't want me sitting with you?"

For long seconds, Mallory didn't respond. Finally she shrugged. "This teacher lets us sit wherever we want." She had a low voice, a little flat. It was absolutely without an accent; certainly not the local Boston accent that Phoebe's mother, Catherine, said drove her crazy.

“But is it okay with you if I’m here?” Phoebe persisted. “It would be for the whole year. I’m a creature of habit.”

There was another brief silence before Mallory shrugged again. “It’s okay. Sit there.”

Phoebe sat. She examined her class schedule as if it were riveting reading. But she also stayed aware of Mallory, who continued to stand and look out the window.

Phoebe could feel the amazed stare not only of Colette Williams-White, but of her other satellites Emma Parry and Jacklyn Ivy Lurvey and Hannah Simons.

Good, she thought. Watch me befriend Mallory Tolliver. And think twice about targeting her, because you’ll have to do it to me too. And you won’t.

Without rushing, Phoebe cupped her chin in her hand and held Colette’s dangerous gaze. She felt herself breathing easily and deeply. Then she smiled.

I am a Rothschild, Phoebe thought, and as she watched Colette coolly, she knew Colette was thinking it too; that Colette never forgot it; that Phoebe’s amazing, storied family history, wealth, and power was the only reason that the borderline dorky Phoebe had ever been a desirable friend for Colette in the first place. Now, Phoebe realized, it would also get her free.

Why had she not realized this before? Why had she only felt it was a burden, being a Rothschild? Why had she wished to be ordinary? No matter. She could use it right now, and she would. Her

gaze on Colette's grew a little softer, kinder, but no less decisive. Good-bye, Phoebe thought. Good-bye.

It was so simple.

Colette's eyes dropped. She turned—stumbling a little—and sat down abruptly at her desk, her back to Phoebe.

But then things went right back to being complicated. Mallory did not sit down at the desk next to Phoebe's until the bell for the start of homeroom rang and everyone else sat down too. And Phoebe was full of urgent questions about the strange new girl. Was Mallory totally unaware of what had just happened? Did she at least realize she needed help? Surely she did.

Phoebe leaned toward Mallory and dropped her voice low. "Look. Mallory. You're not wearing the right clothes. I can help you. It'll be better here—easier for you, I mean—if you don't look so different from the other girls. Okay?"

Mallory didn't even look at Phoebe. Ten seconds passed. Phoebe waited. She thought about repeating herself, but did not. She knew Mallory had heard her.

An astounding thought occurred to Phoebe: Was she going to be refused?

No. No! Mallory Tolliver wouldn't be that stupid.

Would she?

Tension began to coil in Phoebe's stomach. She didn't look around for Colette. It was too late; she'd chosen her path and would not be forgiven. There was nothing to do but wait and see how

Mallory responded. And if this didn't work, she'd be friendless in the seventh grade.

Phoebe waited. She waited while Mrs. Fraser performed the business of homeroom. She waited through morning announcements. All the while, Mallory kept her face turned aside.

How had the balance of power in this weird girl-game shifted in mere minutes from Colette, and then—for one brief glorious moment of power and self-assurance—to Phoebe, but then to Mallory? Phoebe didn't know. She only knew that it had.

Finally Phoebe could no longer stand it. She leaned over and spoke again, even more quietly. She didn't think she sounded desperate, but she couldn't be sure. All her newly found Rothschild confidence had ebbed away again.

“Mallory? Please. Will you please be my friend?”

The bell rang to mark the end of homeroom.