

I was about to do it. I was about to fly. I peered over the edge. The trees looked so small I could smush them with my thumb and the people looked like ants. I was standing on top of Oliver's apartment building. The top of the building itself was stark and grey, completely devoid of color, but then I looked over the edge and there were so many colors I couldn't name them all. I wanted to jump into it. I had chosen this building because I knew how to get to the roof, and it was the tallest building I could think of in Plymouth, our little town in Wisconsin.

It was a sunny Monday morning, but not so sunny that it hurt your eyes and there were a few puffy little clouds in the sky. It was nearly the end of July, but it was only seventy-five degrees. It was the perfect day to fly.

I was determined to make it work this time. I tried it out of a tree about four weeks ago, but ended up falling, breaking my wrist, and bruising my tailbone. Not this time! Not only was my cast off, but I was higher up and wearing my new cape made out of my sister Susie's red prom dress. I had even scrawled my superhero name on the back, *Little Linda*. My cape will give me power! I hope Susie doesn't mind I used her dress. I don't think she will once she sees I used it to fly. She'll be proud of me and happy that her prom dress helped make it happen.

I was ready to make history. I was ready to have people notice Little Linda. I could see the newspaper headlines now, "*Little Linda's First Flight*."

"HELLOOOOOOO!" I screamed at the top of my lungs. There wasn't an echo back as I was expecting, but a woman with her baby in a stroller looked up curiously to see who had made all the noise. She glanced up but couldn't see me and continued on her way. No one ever paid much attention to me, even when I was screaming. Maybe if I could show them I could fly, they would pay attention.

Now I just have to jump

I was sitting at my kitchen table eating a messy peanut butter and jelly sandwich that I had managed to slap together. Someone had put the nearly-empty jar of peanut butter back in the cupboard so I was left with just a tiny bit of crusty, crumb-filled peanut butter. And because I had so little peanut butter, the peanut butter to jelly ratio of my sandwich was way off. The jelly was oozing out of my sandwich and a dollop went *plop* right onto my new pink

dress from Goodwill. Gosh darn it. I had really liked this dress. It poofed out from my hips and had butterfly buttons down the middle with a rounded collar.

It was rare that I ended up with a piece of clothing that I actually liked. I am the youngest of seven kids and always get the shabby, ripped-up hand-me-downs. Everything is always faded and threadbare by the time it gets to me, not to mention way out of style. There are only three girls in my family, including myself, so half of the clothes I receive are boyish and stained.

I was the caboose, the oopsie child. The last thing my parents wanted was another kid. They already had six to deal with: Jack, Susie, Alex, Alice, Theo, and Johnnie. And there's me, little Belinda, Linda for short. I am five years younger than my older brother Johnnie, compared to all of my other siblings who are each about a year apart.

Johnnie and I look a lot alike. We both have mousy brown hair, and round, green eyes, as opposed to the rest of our blonde, blue-eyed family.

Jack is about to head off for college. By some miracle, he got into Stanford and is going there to study law supposedly. He came home with a nice shiner the other night and won't tell anyone how he got it. It's starting to turn a sickly shade of green. Susie is the perfect child, the overachiever. Alex is the loud rebel. Alice is the quiet, observant one, always trying to stay out of everyone's way. Theo is just trying to find his place and Johnnie is the only one who acknowledges my existence. There may be a five-year gap but he's my best friend. He's only twelve but is already nearly as tall as my father and Jack, taller than Alex, about 5' 10. Johnnie makes sure I'm all right and don't get elbowed out of the way at the dinner table, which would happen on a daily basis if he didn't step in.

We live in a small town in Wisconsin called Plymouth. Our house is average, maybe on the smaller side. We have three bedrooms and three bathrooms. My parents get one room, the boys share a room, and the girls share a room. Let me tell you, three girls in one average-sized bedroom is not a walk in the park. The floor is a sea of dirty clothes. Susie tries her best to keep it neat and organized, but fails miserably. At least she keeps her bed made. She has all of her prospective college posters up. Yale, Stanford, and Harvard, oh my! Alice has all of her many books, mostly classics, on a gargantuan, oak bookshelf next to her bed. And then there's

me. I have every single superhero poster known to man plastered to my walls. Superman, Spiderman, Superwoman, Captain America, Mr. Incredible, you name it, I have it. I'm jealous of superheroes and all of their superpowers. Someday I will be a poster on my wall.

And then there was the Tree Accident. I needed to test my flying abilities, so I jumped out of a tree. Johnnie was the one who came to my rescue. He told my parents I had fallen when really, I had purposefully jumped.

Johnnie is the only one who knows that I have superpowers. It wouldn't take much for my parents to notice. I'm continuously babbling on about all of the latest comics I've read and that for my birthday, which passed unnoticed, by the way, with the exception of Johnnie of course, I would like a shiny, red cape. And because my birthday was forgotten, I had to take matters into my own hands and make a cape myself. Luckily, Susie had just bought a red, satin dress for prom. It was the perfect material for a cape. I had the idea that a cape would greatly increase my flying abilities.

I have always loved superheroes. I know I'm only seven, but I've been obsessed with them my whole life, or as long as I can remember anyways. I've devoured every comic I could get my hands on and memorized every detail about each individual superhero.

It all started when Johnnie began reading comic books. Once he was done reading, I would steal them and read them stealthily under my covers at night with a flashlight. I became so immersed in the stories and taken away by the adventure, I began to believe that I too had superpowers. I had created an entirely different persona from my own. I was just a small girl in a small town. *Little Linda* was still small, but her ambitions and actions were much bigger. *Little Linda* was going on adventures, saving lives and the whole world while *actual Linda* was tormented by her classmates and trying desperately to get her parent's attention.

I attended Washington Elementary School and was the outcast of the second grade. Even the teachers thought I was strange. I was constantly teased and mocked. I was avoided like the plague. "Linda sat on the swing? There's no way I'm sitting there!" They thought I was contagious or something. I wasn't sure what they thought they would catch, but they believed it nonetheless. The teachers were always asking, "Are you okay, Linda?"

And then there was the “Superpowers Incident.” There was a new girl at my school and she was treated much like I was, shunned and mocked, so I decided to befriend her. Her name was Ellie. She was from Atlanta and had a southern accent, the main target of our classmates’ mocking. She was a towhead and the shortest person in the grade. Each day she wore her hair in the same, thin pigtails. We became pretty close and I considered her my best friend, my first best friend ever. She liked comics just like I did, which was terrific, but not quite as much as I like them. The day after the Tree Accident, I came to school with my electric pink cast on my wrist. I told everyone that I had been climbing a tree and fell. I told everyone that story except Ellie. We were on the playground, sitting on the tire swing because spinning made Ellie feel sick. She still liked sitting on it. Don’t ask me why. She had already heard me tell my story of falling out of the tree, but she wanted some details. “How tall was the tree?” she asked, her eyes wide open.

And I decided to tell her the truth. “Well, I didn’t actually *fall*,” I admitted.

“What happened?! Did one of your siblings push you?” she replied, her eyes even wider.

“No...the thing is....well...I can *fly*,” I replied hesitantly.

“Huh? If you can fly, why did you fall?” Ellie retorted suspiciously.

“I was just practicing. I need to try again and gain some experience, but I can definitely do it.” I said earnestly.

“Linda, that’s silly.”

“It is not *silly*! I can really do it! Why don’t you believe me? You’re supposed to be my best friend.”

“Linda you are NOT a superhero. Don’t you get that?”

“Not yet, but I will be someday,” I said defensively.

“Linda, you’re weird. And I don’t wanna be friends with a weirdo. We aren’t best friends anymore.” I considered coming up with a retort about her southern accent, but I was too stunned to speak. And with that she stood up and walked away briskly, her pigtails bobbing with each step she took. I haven’t spoken to her since. She did me a favor by not telling the whole second grade about my superpowers. It would just give them one more reason to mock me, which was the last thing I needed.

I came home crying and naturally Johnnie was the one to comfort me. His friend Oliver was with him, but he told him that I needed his help. Oliver said he would go and wait outside. He went and climbed the tree that I had fallen out of and waited while I told Johnnie about my day's events. I explained to him how I had told Ellie our special secret because I thought she was my best friend and that she had betrayed our friendship by joining the "self-proclaimed populars."

Johnnie said, "You know what Linda? If she did that to you, she isn't worth your time."

"Really?" I asked.

"Really," he said reassuringly. "You can hang out with me and Oliver if you want. He's a nice guy," he added.

"Would he be okay with that?" I asked.

"I'm sure he will, but let me go talk to him real quick." He ran out the back door and Oliver jumped down from the tree with a certain agility I wish I possessed. I heard him say my name as well as Ellie's. I thought I also heard him say something that sounded like "ignorance is bliss." What was bliss? And what was ignorance for that matter? I hadn't the faintest idea and disregarded it.

Oliver and Johnnie walked over to me, both smiling. Oliver introduced himself and said, "Johnnie told me about your escapade involving the tree over there." I blushed and shot Johnnie a death stare, who simply shrugged in response. Why on earth did he tell him my secret? He had betrayed me just like Ellie.

Oliver added, "I can show you an even better view if you'd like."

"I guess that would be alright..." I replied.

"Then off to my house!" he said enthusiastically.

And we began the ten-block journey to Oliver's house. He lived near Plymouth Middle School, which both he and Johnnie attended. The whole way there he engaged me excitedly about all of the latest comics that had come out. It seemed that he too loved comics. We talked about how excited we were that a new Spiderman comic was scheduled to come out on Tuesday and how we would be the first in line to purchase it. Before I knew it, I had completely

forgotten about my awful day and losing my very first best friend my age, but I figured I had gained a new one in Oliver. I liked this boy very much.

Oliver then stopped abruptly in front of a simple, red brick, four-story apartment building and announced, "Home sweet home." I looked at him quizzically. We had walked all this way to look his boring apartment building? He noticed my confusion and added mysteriously, "The surprise is upstairs." Johnnie seemed to be in on this mysterious plan and insisted I go upstairs with them, so I followed dutifully. If Johnnie said so, I would do it.

Oliver led us up four flights of stairs. And then we stopped at an ominous black door. He reached under the floor mat, grabbed an old, rusty key, stuck it into the keyhole and said, "Just one last flight of stairs." I was confused yet again. We had already gone up four flights of stairs and the building was only four stories tall, but I followed without question. The stairway was steep, narrow, and dark. Finally after much anticipation, Oliver stopped and said, "Here's the surprise!" and opened the door at the top of the stairs dramatically.

All of a sudden there was a blinding light coming from the door. We stepped outside to find ourselves on the roof of his apartment building! We all stood and waited for our eyes to adjust. As I looked around the top of the building, everything looked grey and boring. I was momentarily disappointed, but the feeling passed quickly as I looked out over the edge of the building and saw the whole town. I was on top of the world!

Oliver asked, "Do you like it, Linda?" I simply nodded, at a complete loss for words. It was the best thing I had ever seen. Oliver smiled. We stayed up on the roof for a good hour. Oliver and Johnnie babbled on about the latest football game while I just paced around the perimeter of the roof.

I was interrupted when Johnnie said, "Linda, we should get going. It's nearly dinner time and mom will be angry if we're late." I highly doubted that mom would even notice if I didn't show up, but I said, "You're right. We should probably get going."

"What do you say to Oliver, Linda?" Johnnie asked.

"Thank you so so so so much, Oliver. I've never seen anything like this," I said, hugging him tightly around the waist.

“You’re very welcome, Linda. Come and find me anytime you want to come back up here,” he responded.

“I will,” I said earnestly. And with that Johnnie and I left and went home to leftover meatloaf. Ick.

And now here I am again on top of Oliver’s apartment building. I decided last night, right after we got back from Oliver’s, that his building would be the perfect place for me to try to fly again. I was so excited I could hardly sleep. I made a plan to wake up a little past six o’clock, before everyone was awake and sneak off to Oliver’s. I had packed my new red cape and my favorite Superman comic in my school backpack so it was ready to grab when I woke up in the morning. I walked to Oliver’s and arrived there at precisely six twenty-three. I climbed the many flights of stairs and found the rusty old key under the doormat, exactly where Oliver had left it and made my way to the roof. I was met again by the blinding sun at the top of the stairs and had to wait a moment for my eyes to adjust.

I hope that Oliver doesn’t mind I’m up here. He did say to ask him directly if I wanted to come back here, but I don’t think he will mind. He seemed like a nice boy. He and I will have so much to talk about once I successfully fly.

I paced around the perimeter of the roof, just as I had done the previous day. I opened my backpack and proudly put on my Little Linda cape. I thought it had turned out pretty well. The edges were a little jagged and the writing was a bit slanted, but still good for a seven year-old’s handiwork.

I slowly made my way to the edge of the roof. I put my toes on the edge and peered over the side of the building. Goodness, I could see everything from up here. I could see my own house with everyone still fast asleep. I could see Washington Elementary, which was deserted given it was summer. And if I squinted I could see the huge maple tree in my backyard that I had jumped out of just four weeks earlier during my first attempt to fly.

But this time it would be different! I was higher up, I had my Little Linda cape, and all the courage and confidence in the world. Johnnie believed in me and I believed in myself. I can do anything. I had a fleeting second of doubt. Maybe I couldn’t fly. Maybe I was just ordinary like everyone else. For all I know, I could jump off this building and go *splat*. But I pushed all of

those thoughts away and reminded myself that I was confident and courageous. I can do anything. I am going to be the first real human being to fly. Mom, Dad, Johnnie, and even Oliver will be so proud. I'll prove Ellie wrong!

I curled my toes around the edge of the roof, preparing to jump. I was going to make history. I was going to fly. And with that, I swung my arms back to gain momentum and pushed off the edge with my legs, using as much strength as I could muster and jumped.