



While visions of powerful superheroes dance around behind my eyes, and my imagination flies out of the room and around the whole world, yelling in the backyard interrupts my thoughts. At first it sounds only like teenagers chatting but it ramps up suddenly and something about the tone sends a chill down my spine. I roll off my bunk and lean against the open window nearby. The only staff is far away, out of hearing distance, and a small cluster of girls are near the house, shouting. At first their cluster is so tight I can't tell who is who, or what's happening, but then a dark haired girl named Jenny comes flying backwards out of the circle and lands on her back roughly. The group gets eerily quiet and two girls go to her aid, but she brushes them off and stands up on her own. Her defiance ignites a spark of admiration and respect in me. She walks back to the group, and two of her other friends are still standing there, mouths open, stunned. I think briefly of going down, but am intrigued and even impressed by Jenny's backbone. Sharon looks to be the one that pushed her. She's new and has been making trouble since day one, but I'm glad to see someone's over it and not afraid to stand up to her. Unfortunately Jenny is rewarded for her bravery with a slap. The slap shocks even me. It seems like the kind of thing an adult would do, a parent, not kids in a schoolyard still working their way up to that. Jenny is still recoiling from the impact when Sharon tears a silver chain roughly from her neck. Jenny shrieks and her friends spring into action. Watching them is the first time I've ever really longed for friends. There's something so passionate about their loyalty. They're no match for Sharon though. Hannah is tiny and delicate and goes down easily with a hard shove; Margaret, a little taller and sturdier takes a punch to the abdomen and ends up catching her breath on the brown grass. The other two just get mowed over as Sharon runs from them, shoving Jenny into the side of the building as she escapes. Then they're out of my sightline and so I race down the stairs barefoot to see if I can help.

Before I can get there however, Jenny comes running into the building in tears, her four girlfriends closely on her heels. She dashes past me into the sleeping room, her friends whispering as they follow. When they get to the room they're talking all at once and so fast and through so much screeching and tears that it's hard to understand what has happened. Sharon has apparently tossed the locket onto the roof of the building, which seems like some kind of backwards miracle, as the roof is quite high – very high actually. It would have had to catch some horrible fateful gust of wind to land on the roof. My heart sinks. I know there's no chance the staff will get it back. The one ladder in the shed is far too small to make it to the roof. I sit on the bed quietly watching Jenny, wishing I had acted faster, sooner, more bravely, as she had.

Her grief probably seems indulgent to some, maybe even to her friends trying to comfort her, they've all had tragedy and hard lives, or they wouldn't be here, but sitting on my bed I can't help putting my hand in my pocket and feeling my mother's silver I.D. bracelet that I'd taken the day she died, and ache for Jenny with my entire being. I feel the letters of my mother's name, which are now hard to make out from years of me touching the engraving in my hand unconsciously, as if it will help connect me to her. I know I have to do something for Jenny, even if it means breaking the rules. A superhero would behave this way; a hero helps whether the problem is great or small, even if it breaks the rules. And maybe some rules are different than others. Who says the rule about curfew should be more important than a rule about stealing? My mind hammers at the question and I feel deeply, alarmingly confused by it. But if I'm honest, my heart is racing, telling me there's certainly one that is more important. The women in the pages of the comic book speak to me in the same way I imagine my mother sometimes does, whispering at my greatness, a greatness that I can't believe in, let alone conceive of. But today, today something has clicked and I feel different. I feel sure that I'm the only one who can help Jenny.

That it's almost my destiny.

I wait until almost three in the morning. Jenny's muffled crying had died down into an exhausted sleep hours ago, but sometimes the staff stay up well past midnight and so I lie here, eyes wide open, plotting. Finally I throw back the covers and creep to the door in my t-shirt, jeans, and tennis shoes. It's raining outside, which is both good and bad. It will make it easier for me to go unnoticed with the sound of the rain, and with the cloudy sky obscuring the moon, but everything will be wet and slippery, and it will be very dark. I edge down the stairs and past the sleeping woman at the front desk. They're always asleep. I go out the side kitchen door, which is where the girls always go out when they aren't supposed to. By the time I get to the shed in the yard I'm soaked to the skin.

I try the door handle but it's locked. I rise up on my tiptoes and peek into the dusty window on the side and try opening that, but it's locked as well. I look back at the building, looming over me in the rain, all the windows dark, water falling off the roof in huge sheets.

It looks big.

I jiggle the handle again. And then I try something I've never tried before. I push on the handle with all my strength. The metal comes snapping off in my hand and the door swings open. I gape at the handle sitting there in my hand, my mouth half open in surprise. I lay the handle in the grass and mud, positioning it in such a way that it could have conceivably just broken and fallen off. Inside the mildew-scented shed I grab the ladder. If I'm lucky it will get me at least to the first floor, cutting a quarter of the distance. On the way out the door, with the metal ladder tucked under my arm, I take a flashlight, checking quickly that it works by accidentally shining it in my eyes and then seeing multi-colored spots for a full minute afterward.

So far I'm terrible at this.

When the starbursts of light clear from my vision I stand in the rain looking back at the building, it looks enormous to me now. Foreboding and dark and just, *huge*. I'd always thought of it as just some rather unimpressive stocky brick building. A little sad and run down, but not overly impressive. It's only four stories tall, but now it looks epic. It looks like the hardest thing to climb on earth, and I feel tiny, wet, and powerless.

I leave the ladder on the grass and head around to the short side of the house, where there are only two windows on each of the four floors. I had thought this would be the best place to climb since people are less likely to hear or see me, but looking at it now I realize that once I run out of ladder I will have absolutely nothing to grab hold of. The brick face is almost completely smooth, and in the rain, slick with wet, it's impossible.

As I head back to the ladder, my mind racing as to what my options are, I notice the corner of the building, which has bricks set out slightly from the wall. I don't know what they're called or why I've never noticed them before, but they are set almost like the tiniest of steps on the corner of the building. The lip is little more than half an inch, and wet like everything else, but at that moment, to me, it looks like a built-in brick ladder reaching all the way to the roof. I break into a huge smile, but rain hits me in my teeth and eyes and so I shake it off and get back to business.

I position the ladder next to the corner, along the short side, where I'm less likely to be heard, and climb up. Climbing the ladder takes two seconds and part of me wishes it took longer so that I won't have to start the hard part now. I push the flashlight deeper into my pocket and creep to the edge closest to the house corner. The ladder shifts in the mud under my feet. Damnit. I reach out with my right arm before the ladder can send me flailing into the yard, and position my fingers along the edge of the brick lip. I do the same with my left hand until I'm just hanging there about fifteen feet up, my feet dangling. I try to put my feet on the brick lip, but

it's far too small. It occurs to me now that I should have taken off my shoes. With my toes perhaps I could have gotten some grip on the tiny edge. I think about trying to get back on the ladder and taking my shoes off, but no sooner do I think it than the ladder starts to fall. I squint my eyes shut and grimace, anticipating the inevitable crash, but with everything so wet and mushy the sound is muffled, and the ladder, blissfully, doesn't close up on itself, which would surely be loud. Instead it just lays there ineffectively on its side. I think how lucky I just got, and then chide myself for celebrating while I'm hanging off the edge of a building, fifteen feet in the air, in the rain, by my fingertips.

In a way I'm not sure what to do now, as the task I've set for myself seems impossible, but all of a sudden my arms pull me and I'm going up. I'm pulling myself up! My arms do all the work as my legs dangle uselessly below me. I marvel at my arms, which seem to be on autopilot, just moving me up brick by brick. The next time I look down I'm at least three floors high and passing a bank of windows. It's funny because my arms feel like they belong more to me than I've ever felt in my life...kind of the way my legs feel when I run, and so I just let them do it. My arms and I are at the roof edge in no time, one hand in the metal gutter. Both my hands grasp at the gutter and pull me up and over the edge. The gutter gives a little, but holds.

I stand up on the roof as the rain bathes me and I feel like a whole new person. Like a person I always knew was lurking inside, but hadn't known how to talk to until now. It's amazing.

So now I just have to find a tiny silver locket in the rainy dark. No problem.

I turn on the flashlight and decide to just start circling the roof in concentric circles working towards the center. But just as I begin I slip on a loose shingle.

When the first one breaks free several more join it – sliding out from under me and taking me with it. I shoot off the edge of the roof and toward dark oblivion.

If I hadn't spent the last eleven years not speaking I know I would have screamed.

Instead I reach my hand out instinctively as I go over the edge, and I catch a couple more crappy shingles that crumble under my grasp. The gutter is my last hope, and I manage to snag it, but the weight of me falling is too much for it and it pulls away from the edge of the house with surprising speed. I think there's no way not to go down, but my body tells me otherwise. My weight swings with the motion of the detaching gutter and when the gutter bends back toward the building again I leverage myself up and back onto the roof, barely. Holy. Shit. That's the only thought in my head, about a thousand "holy shits."

The flashlight has rolled into an intact part of the gutter and when I slide over to retrieve it I see the locket and chain, further down the gutter, glistening in the flashlight's beam. I reach out and pocket it like a kid that just found the freaking Holy Grail. But as I stand up and survey the damage I've done I realize there is no way to get out of this without raising serious eyebrows. Part of the gutter is torn away from the building and at least two-dozen shingles have either broken or fallen off the house entirely. The damage will be visible from the yard. I look around for a solution. There's nothing. The building is like a lonely island in the yard, the nearest tree at least a hundred feet away. As I stand there, knowing I'm screwed, lightning strikes a warehouse down the street. I see it and am transfixed. Both because I've never seen lightning hit anything before, and also because it seems like something ridiculous out of a cartoon...lightning striking...like a light bulb suddenly appearing over my head.

I walk with to the chimney on the south side of the roof. There's a direct line between the chimney and where the shingles have crumbled and the gutter has torn. I position myself behind and slightly above the chimney. I bite my lip in horrible anticipation and strike my fist out at the bricks. It hurts like hell, but it does break apart. My hand is torn up and bleeding a little but I hit it a few more times anyway, trying my best to make the chimney look 'struck by lightning'. I

then position some of the bricks on the roof in a random falling pattern towards the gutter. I even jam two of the bricks into the gutter to make things look more feasible. Then I drop a few to the ground, making sure they hit the grass quietly and not the concrete loudly. Satisfied with my cover-up I head back to the side of the building where I came up, only to realize, like an idiot, that I have no way down.

I look around helplessly. I don't think even my amazing "auto-pilot" arms have the hand strength to get me back onto that lip. Would I survive the jump? It's four stories. If I survive, what would I break? Everything? Nothing? I sit down in the rain on the roof and draw my knees up to my chin. I bury my head against my knees for a moment, breathing deeply, trying to be smart. After a few minutes I stand up and carefully walk around the roof edge. The south side of the building is the softest, and wettest.

I'll jump from here.

I can't decide if I should run and jump off the roof, putting distance between the building, and myself or if I should just jump from a standing position on the edge. I chew my lip and then turn to the middle and before I can talk myself out of it I start running for the edge.

When my feet leave the roof it's the most alive I've felt since the accident.



I'm six blocks away and moving at a speed even I thought impossible when the police cars finally screech to a halt and I hear car doors slamming and guns being drawn. Now at a safe distance I put the necklace on and tuck it safely under my cat suit. I decide to run some more. It feels good, almost like I think flying might feel.

I fall asleep that night feeling more alive than ever before, my skin humming and my mouth smiling even when I don't want it to. I think I'm even smiling as I drift off, the necklace still around my neck even though it's frighteningly uncomfortable. My last thought is that everything is going to work out fine.

In the morning I wake very early, because Delia hated it when I did that, and throw on a sweatshirt over my cat suit before heading out for a celebratory breakfast. I realize halfway to the diner a few blocks away from my motel that I still have the diamond necklace on underneath my sweatshirt. The feel of the silver and diamonds grazing my neck is exciting and I smile like a kid with a giant lollipop. I slide into a big cushy booth and order a coffee. I've never had one before but it seems like the right thing to do – the grown up thing. I also order a juice and the “super grandest slam” breakfast. I'm not kidding, that's what it's called. Some play on *Denny's* I guess, but changed just enough to not get sued. Halfway through gorging myself, a waitress, not mine, but another one whose nametag reads *Felice*, comes by to refill my coffee. I nod even though I'd kind of hated the stuff, and as she pours it to the top I wince.

“Nice necklace,” she says casually. I look down and see that it has partially slipped out of the neck of my sweatshirt. I gulp down some pancakes.

“Uh. Thanks. It's my grandma's.”

“Uh-huh,” she says, walking away. Just as I'm getting ready to leave, the same woman, but now in street clothes, slides into the booth with me and drops a newspaper onto the table in front of me. She puts her finger on a front-page story, which appears to be an article on my robbery, complete with a small picture of my new necklace.

“I think we should talk,” she says, all steely-eyed. I try to remember I have superpowers and look right at her but say nothing. “You want to explain?” she asks.

“Not to you, bitch.” I'm happily surprised that this response shocks her.



“Bitch? You really wanna go there?” she asks, raising her voice. I decide that while I know I can kill her and maybe even everyone in the restaurant without breaking a sweat, I had warned myself just last night to be careful about these kinds of situations. It’s best to stay away from the authorities as long as possible. At least until I know what I’m really capable of.

“Sorry,” I mumble, choking on the words. “I’m leaving.” I throw a ten-dollar bill on the table to cover my meal and the tip. She grabs my arm as I get up and I sling it away from her powerfully. She’s more shocked at this than my ballsy comeback of a moment ago. “Don’t freaking touch me,” I hiss and walk out the front door. A block later I have practically forgotten about her when she sidles up beside me. She’s got dark hair and eyes and now that I’m standing I can see she’s shorter than me by nearly a foot and having trouble keeping pace with my long legs.

“You got the wrong idea honey,” she says, catching her breath.

“Oh really?”

“Yeah. I’m impressed. I mean not so much at your crappy choice of words and your obvious temperament issues, but you’re just a kid. Who are you working with to manage to snag that necklace...or did you just luck out and find it in the street somewhere...?” She lets her sentence dangle there in the air like a challenge and I turn on her, crossing my arms. I know the smart thing is to admit I found it, but what can I say, I’m pretty proud of my first score.

“What do you think?”

“I think maybe you’ve got some talent and I should introduce you to some friends of mine,” she says. I look at her hard, trying to read whether or not it’s a trap, but I can’t really tell. I’m not sure if it’s a good idea, but I’m also not sure I have anything to lose. I’m trying to figure out what I am, what I want to be doing, and what my life is going to be about, and if she and these friends of hers mess with me or double-cross me, I’ll just kill them and move on. As Delia always used to say, you don’t make an omelet without breaking a few eggs. Actually it had

always annoyed the crap out of me that she said that since she never freaking cooked and I would have happily eaten an omelet, but I'm starting to understand that maybe she wasn't talking about cooking. Felice hands me a card with the name of some Spanish restaurant I can't pronounce on the front. There's an address and a phone number. I raise an eyebrow at her and turn it over. On the back is her name and 10pm written in black ink.

"Just come," she says, turning and heading back to the restaurant as if she's in no hurry whatsoever. I watch her go and then crumple up the card and toss it over my shoulder.

But I've already memorized the address.