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WINGS



Darling Linda,

I promise you there's nothing 'wrong' with me—nothing that hasn't been all your life—I'm *different* from you! Usually it's the parent not the child who howls about that. Maybe we've got it backwards because you're so like Mama part of you is her.

I know you're upset I've been gone. And why don't I even know how long? *Four days?* Are you kidding?

You don't believe me, do you? That I've just been gathering my plants like always.

Lin, is it me you worry about, or what everyone will say? Sorry. Sorry you're upset. Always sorry sorry sorry. But wouldn't change a hair for you—what am I saying? I can change—do change—hair skin and soul—

But not for you. Not for—never mind—let me tell you about flying! Not once-upon-a-time, Lin, but the real thing, like you told me in high school when you took lessons in that little tin can plane. (Nearly bit my tongue off to keep from saying NO! Oh you were hungry just to risk your neck.)

But real, actual flying isn't like airplanes: no engine, no noise. Not like our day or night dreams, either. Those fancies we share even when we can't share anything else. I think this is the part of you that's me—but I know you don't like that. "I'm myself, Ma," you always say. Yet when I say, "I'm myself, Lin," you make a face. *You're wild!* You flung that at me like a curse when you were hardly four. What did it mean to you? 'Wild!' Mama's word. In your little mouth—

And oh, Lin, I'm *wilder* than you ever imagined!

Flying. There's no frantic flapping or kicking, no diving and loop-the-looping. Flying—soaring—is . . .

Well, now I've got to it, I can't even name it, maybe there's not a word alive for it. Maybe *lightness*. A sudden bubbling up of—air. Nothingness. Air. You're air.

You feel your whole body change. You're ready to enter—what? Another world? A lump in your throat explodes—you go—up—the air a thing—a soft-hard solid under you and you are weightless. You're a leaf lying on air. Don't tense up! Or down you go!

So all you can do is squeeze your eyes shut and . . . leap. AND LET GO!

That's the word, let-go. Everything you think you know. Let. Go. The air takes you, breath and all. Takes you, flings you slow motion up up and out. Thought my heart would jump out of my mouth.

Then suddenly, your mind's been so locked on what's happening, your arms—wings—yes, *wings*—don't have them now, didn't have them when

you boiled out of here five minutes ago, and you never have to see this, so why not?—your *wings* are hot.

Then on fire. Chest is burning burning burning—where the big muscle is. And you can't help but scream, can't *wait* to get down.

Two minutes of heaven and you're screaming to get back down to earth. Only you've got no notion in the world how to do it. You're panting—easy easy easy—like LaMaze training, to keep from tensing up because you know you'll drop like lead if you do, so you're all relaxed up there, on fire, and you think, *I'll wake up*.

But I wasn't sleeping. And—then I knew I was going to die.

But suddenly again—you do these things fast or I guess not at all—you discover if you tilt your wings—try holding your arms out and rolling them forward to get the idea—you start going down. Slowly. No plummeting weight. You melt into moving air . . .

Open your feathers. Like spreading a hundred fingers. Little funny muscles all the way up to your armpits.

And tail—*oh!*

Magic. Only you hurt so bad you aren't thinking or enjoying. Like being on the bottom of the lake, with your lungs burning and knowing you don't have the air to kick to the top.

But I did. And hit the rock, fell bang on my breast, my nose. Just lay there, pulsing like an exhausted dog. And fear! Couldn't close my wings because they had gone dead. A coyote could have come and eaten me up there, I'd have had to let him. Coyotes can't climb, though.

Foxes can but foxes . . .

Scared. Let me tell you. Scared yellow. Bleached, blanched. Never never never again. Found myself with skin and arms and legs again and able to think. Had all that been real?

So tired I slept through the day and half the night, right there on the rock.

Writing this because it *is* a miracle. Can't *tell* you, darling Linda, not ever, you'd cart me away to the funny farm. And little Gabe's too young to stop you.

Answer me, daughter, why I love you, my soul cleaves so to you, and has since you were in my womb. And you're so afraid of me, repulsed by my 'wildness.' Flinch when I touch you, as if we didn't belong. As if you were Mama's child—the child she wanted, skipping right over me.

We've met only in dreams of the air.

And poor little Gabe, who loves me and is of me, the child wild as me—no more to my heart than a shadow.

Used to say to Mama, "I'll try to be the daughter you wanted." Used to think about you and weep to be the mama you wanted.

But—no more weeping now. 'Wrong with me?' Never felt so right! If I've got the guts—

Want to. Ache to—dive again off that rock. . . .

And vanish. Melt into wind.

Let go.

Oh let go . . . let go . . . let . . . go. . . .