



## **The Strange Gift of Gwendolyn Golden: The Night Flyer's Handbook**

*Philippa Dowding*

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**Shortlisted for the OLA Red Maple Award, 2015**

**SEQUEL NEWS: Everton Miles is Stranger than Me, Oct 2016**

*This morning, I woke up on the ceiling ...* So begins the strange story of Gwendolyn Golden. One perfectly ordinary day for no apparent reason, she wakes up floating around her room like one of her little brother's Batman balloons.

Puberty is weird enough. Everyone already thinks she's an oddball with anger issues because her father vanished in a mysterious storm one night when she was six. Then there are the mean, false rumours people are spreading about her at school. On top of all that, now she's a flying freak.

How can she tell her best friend or her mother? How can she live her life? After Gwendolyn almost meets disaster flying too high and too fast one night, help arrives from the most unexpected place. And stranger still? She's not alone.

## **The Strange Gift of Gwendolyn Golden: The Night Flyer's Handbook Details**

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Author : Philippa Dowding

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## **From Reader Review The Strange Gift of Gwendolyn Golden: The Night Flyer's Handbook for online ebook**

### **Jennybeast says**

Very nicely done exploration of the harder parts of being a young teenager with an out-of-control temper and mysterious new body developments (you know, like the ability to fly). Great for tweens and quite empowering.

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### **Sharlene says**

This book was received as the result of a First Reads giveaway.

I was really torn with this book at first as I wasn't sure what to make of it but as the tale began to unravel I was hooked.

Gwendolyn is a bit of a hot tempered main character. A bit eccentric perhaps but every bit a young teenager. She actually reminded me a bit of how my girls would act and think. With an interesting ability that makes the reader wonder if she will ever embrace who she was, is and will be. The end does leave the option for the author to pick it up again and make it into a series or to tie it off neatly...Well played!

This was a super easy read on one of my busiest stretches at work. This novel was the perfect book to start while doing this as the chapters are quite short and the story is very easy to follow and not get lost with.

It didn't have a huge conflict but the resolution was profound for young readers who feel everyone is against them or have lost a parent.

Fantastic editing rounded out the book for me.

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### **Margaret Bryant says**

Spunky and believable, Gwendolyn's gift is fun to imagine.

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### **Carrie Smith says**

Phillipa Dowding has written an intriguing and sensitive pre-teen children's novel, The Strange Gift of Gwendolyn Golden and it is a must add to home and public libraries.

The story is about Gwendolyn Golden who discovers she has the ability to fly. The story opens with Gwen floating at the top of her bedroom as she awakes one morning. 13 years old she is on the cusp of adulthood and she has challenges to deal with. She lives with her widowed mother and 7-year-old twin siblings and she juggles school, family, friends and puberty as she learns to deal with being a "Night Flyer", someone very

different from those around her.

Underlying the storyline the author focuses on problems 13-year-old girls face. Dowding deals with the angst of feeling different, the loss of a parent, sibling stresses. She also brings forward the issues of puberty, the change in relationships with boys and handling negative rumours about oneself. The author also touches on Gwen's reluctance to read with humour and fosters her developing attraction to books.

Within a very enjoyable read Dowding provides hope for Gwen and helps her work through her problems in a way the teen-cusp reader can relate to. The messages tied to the resolution includes the discovery that it is ok to be different, there are others just like you. As well it enhances the trust connection between parent and child.

Children have rough spots in their lives, as adults we don't always perceive the immensity or the intensity of issues kids are going through. This book is a wonderful choice for mid-school girls and could serve as bridge to broaden discussion about self awareness and interpersonal relationships.

I recommend it.

4 stars

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Also see other reviews at [www.ebooknews.ca](http://www.ebooknews.ca)

### **Jennifer Dance says**

Gwendolyn Golden wakes up with the ability to fly. As if adolescents don't have enough changes to deal with! Despite this new and strange gift, Gwendolyn is very down-to-earth and believable thanks to Dowding's ability to blend the real with the magical. I wonder if Dowding is telling us that Gwen's gift is no different from the gifts that many individual children have ... gifts which mark kids as different, thus making life difficult for them as they mature. This is a new twist on a 'growing-up' story that pre-teen girls will enjoy.

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### **Katarina says**

Poor Gwennie....she is getting hit from all sides.

As if puberty isn't bad enough to make your world fall apart, she also starts flying one night.

I really liked this book. I think it is a good book for young girls, who will identify with Gwendolyn as they themselves struggle to make sense of the world.

I'm not sure I like the ending. I supposed there will be a sequel, but I really want to know what she chose....the book ends in a cliff hanger.

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## **Wendy says**

Woven into "The Strange Gift of Gwendolyn Golden" which I won from Goodreads Giveaways is mystery, the paranormal and interpersonal relationships in the life of a thirteen year old. It begins when Gwennie Golden on the cusp of graduating from grade eight at Bass Creek Junior School finds herself floating above her bed one morning, but instead of feeling weird or frightened about it, she accepts it as just another part of the hormonal flux her body has had to deal with. What she will discover is that floating isn't that usual for Night Flyers and that's she not the only one gifted, but if she doesn't learn to control her flying she may never have a normal life.

Written as a first person narrative, the plot sparkles with wit and humour as Gwennie discovers not only her strange ability, but that growing up with an unusual gift can spark strange reactions from her friends and family. But, being different seems to strengthen the young heroine giving her the resilience to face her problems and the rumours at school. With sensitivity and creativity Philippa Dowding deals with issues like loss of a parent, puberty, bullying and changing relationships.

The characters are well-developed and fascinating; like Gwendolyn Imogen Golden, a short-tempered teen haunted by her father's unexplained disappearance. Insecure, and struggling not to draw attention to herself at school she's bullied by a grade nine girl and labelled by false rumours. Gwennie is obstinate, impetuous and drawn to her opposite in personality; to Jezebel, her best friend, a teen endowed with a sensible, unflappable personality and a kind, motherly streak. Mrs. Forest her mentor is steadfast, wise and brave sworn to protect Gwennie like her Watcher, McGovern Everett McGillis, a bottle collector who's faithful, trustworthy and dependable. Even Martin Evells an old friend who has a crush on her is protective and caring, even after she spurns him. Realistic with all their strengths and flaws, there is no end to the colourful characters in this book who add not only to the fun and laughter in Gwennie's life but also to her frustration, troubles, and to the danger that pursues her.

This is a story that will tickle the imagination of every reader and I highly recommend it to young teens.

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## **Shayna says**

I really did enjoy this book! At the beginning before i did even start reading i felt like i already wasn't going to like this book because of its concept. I was feeling like i wasn't really interested in the concept of a girl that can fly. But the way that the author executed this was really truly great and did end up making me interested in it as the book continued. It felt like it was really easy for me to get through because it wasn't a very long book but i felt as if the amount that was in this book was really just great because it wasn't to long or to short. Something that i would have changed about this book is that i wanted there to be more charter development on the peers of Gwen because i think that would have helped me to get to know her character better. overall i gave this book five stars because it was really easy to get through and i really did end up liking this story.

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### **Cassie Gutman (happybooklovers) says**

After reading the description (you know I do that after I read the book, not before), this book exceeds that description quite a bit. It sounds extremely juvenile in that blurb, but it's not the case with this book. While the age group was on the younger side (think before puberty), it was still a pretty cute and well-written book for that younger age.

Not only does Gwen have to worry about fitting in in middle school and dealing with her first party (and first crush), she's also got this problem of just floating randomly and not being able to control it. We don't actually know that people think she's an oddball with anger issues (I actually didn't get that at all), until something happens in the book, and then I think she has every right to be angry.

It moved along pretty quickly (I think a little more backstory on the character and what happened to her family in the past would have been helpful, it was kind of confusing when things were revealed), and the book overall had a nice pacing and cute quality to it.

Read When: This would be one I would buy for my younger cousins as they're growing up and getting ready to turn 10. It had that great early reader quality to it with a little bit of meaning that I think would be a really good one for that age group to read.

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### **Mikaila says**

The Strange Gift of Gwendolyn Golden is about a thirteen year old girl named Gwendolyn Golden who one day wakes up on her ceiling, strange right. Gwendolyn soon learns that she is not the only one who posses this "gift", and that there are others who watch over her. When she is close to death one day when she flies to high, one person, who she least expects, helps her along the way. There are many obstacles that Gwen has to face, from the death of her father to the rumors being spread about her through the whole town. Will she chose to listen, or stay true to herself.

I chose this book because of all the talk around it, The Strange Gift of Gwendolyn Golden is a Red Maple book, so I assumed that it would be great, and I was right. Amazing. I love this book because her flying is just a symbol for things that we face in every day life. Actually this whole story is. It is telling you that no matter what you have to face in life, no matter what anybody else thinks of you, you must stay true to yourself.

I am not going to lie, this book was a little hard to finish. Not because it was to big or was hard to read, just because it was a little slow for me. In other words, it was very calm and relaxed, there was no really exciting scenarios in this book. But I think that is what made it really good to read. Even though it was not all that exciting, I still really wanted to know how Gwendolyn wanted to do with her life, if she was going to let the rumors being spread or if she just going to brush it off. Plus sometimes it is good to take a break from all those mythical creatures and demons. That is why I finished The Strange Gift of Gwendolyn Golden.

This books is great for teenagers, I recommend you read it if you are being bullied or just have some trouble with life really. Because it definitely helped me. ENJOY!

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### **Randy says**

Gwennie Golden can fly. This bit of self discovery doesn't really help her figure things out. Like why did her father just up and disappear? Or why is Martin, her old childhood friend, so mean to her? Just when things begin to get worse, she discovers that there is truth to be discovered, and with the help of those who love her, she just might be able to work things out.

I picked this book up as it is one of this year's Red Maple nominees. Also, it is a book about humans who can fly. How could I resist?

I finished the book because there is a sweetness to the story. No great depth, but an overall good feeling. Perhaps it is similar to the feeling Gwennie gets when she flies?

I would recommend this to Alexa. I think she would like the tone in which the story is told.

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### **Suzy Wilson says**

This is an excellent coming of age story about Gwendolyn Golden, a girl who wakes up one day with her head bumping against the ceiling. As if life wasn't complicated enough with hormone-induced mood swings, the onset of puberty and trying to balance being just a little bit different from everyone else.

This is a story of an outsider who finds a place to belong.

I loved it and can only recommend it to all young readers. I will be giving a copy to my 12 year old. There is no greater endorsement than that. She is also a 'less-than-willing' reader. This should help change that.

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### **Shannon (Giraffe Days) says**

*This morning I wake up on the ceiling.*

Gwendolyn Golden lives with her mum and her much younger siblings, twins Christopher and Christine - or as she calls them, "the Chrissies" - and her fat beagle, Cassie. Gwendolyn is already going through a rough patch: now in grade eight, she's experienced changes brought on by puberty and is still dealing with the ongoing anger management problem that she's had since her dad disappeared during a storm before the twins were born. And now, on this fateful morning, she wakes up floating on the ceiling. Several mornings in a row, Gwen wakes up bumping gently against the ceiling and then against the screen window in her bedroom.

At first, Gwen has no control over it and her body threatens to float away during class - she worries about what might happen if she floated off into the sky while walking down the street. But soon, oblique comments made to her by two unlikely adults in her small town make her realise that she's not alone; and that, in fact, her ability to fly is something she inherited. Gwendolyn's coming-of-age journey will bring her up close to the truth of her new-found skill, and the decision of a lifetime.

It's a rough age, being thirteen, fourteen years old and in the thick of all the changes that come with adolescence. Gwen has the added issue of losing her father years ago under mysterious circumstances. This detail is initially provided more as insight into understanding her anger issues, than a plot point, but as you can guess it does turn out to be very pertinent to the plot. Yet despite Gwen's habit of blowing up at small provocations at school, she narrates her story with intelligent wit and more than a dash of irony. Like many teens, the character of Gwen is a precarious and sometimes volatile balance of childlike immaturity and wisdom, naïveté and insight, adolescent foolishness and glib artfulness. Gwen is on the cusp, and this is her coming-of-age story.

What I really admired, alongside the writing itself, was Dowding's ability to maintain this fine balance. She put Gwendolyn in situations that forced her to confront her issues, thus putting her on the path to maturity, without making her grow up too fast. Gwen was able to keep hold of her childhood; it just became richer. I'm reminded of one of my favourite characters who similarly embodies this fine line between childhood and maturity: Danny from Roald Dahl's *Danny the Champion of the World*.

There are times when Gwen's obstinateness and suspicious nature hold her back, but that too is something she must learn: trusting her instincts, but also how to turn to others and let herself be a child in the protection of adults. Another tricky line to straddle, in life as well as fiction. And it's not helped, in Gwen's case, by the fact that her body has taken on a life of her own. In the beginning I read Gwen's sense of alienation with her body as a figurative representation of puberty; later, I came to read it as fantasy enriched with that layer of organic human matter that makes fantasy, as a genre, so appealing to us.

As soon as my body is free, it floats lazily toward the ceiling, where it bounces around for a few minutes, then settles gently, bumping up and down against the ceiling tiles.

I realize that I'm now talking about my body like an "it," like it's no longer connected to the rest of me. But that's what it feels like. As if my body is totally in charge, and I'm just going along for the ride.

Which I guess I am.

This is very much Gwen's story, and while there are sub-plots and supporting characters who are relevant and interesting, they're not as vividly rendered as Gwen. Rather, because we see Gwen's world through her eyes, her understanding, her adolescent perspective, we get a true-to-type view of the people in her life. Gwen is fairly self-absorbed, at times judgemental, quick to react and not very curious about other people or how they're feeling. Not every teen is like that, or like that in the same way as Gwen, but it is part of Gwen's coming-of-age narration that her world view enlarges and she becomes more sympathetic and even empathetic of others. She still has a way to go, but it's a process that takes people years if not decades to learn.

I read this as a standalone novel, and while I'm not sure if it is one or not (I have since read that it's the first in a series but I don't know if that's true or not; I should just ask the author eh?), I loved it as a standalone book. It's kind of old-school, in that way, and maybe I'm traditional, but I loved the open-endedness to this story, and how Dowding created a fascinating layer to our world without removing the mystery and magic of it by explaining too much, thereby leaving plenty up to your own imagination. Dowding successfully balances humour and a touch of silliness with a dark menace that adds a macabre atmosphere to the story.

The decision that Gwen ultimately has to make can again be read metaphorically: in this pivotal time in a person's life, many decisions we make are there to stay with us the rest of our lives. To some extent, we are shaped during our adolescence. Gwen's decision is not merely about flying, but about how she will live her life. The ending can be viewed in several lights. It touches on genetics, and how these affect our lives, especially our future health and well-being. And it touches on the self: self-esteem, the creation of a personal identity, the need to be true to yourself, and the understanding that while the way others see you can deeply hurt you, you shouldn't let it shape you.

*The Strange Gift of Gwendolyn Golden* is the kind of coming-of-age story that resonates. Combining teen angst with magic and a dash of mystery creates a richly layered story, and Dowding presents a heroine that readers of all ages will surely be able to relate to. Humorous and touching, *The Strange Gift of Gwendolyn Golden* is like a finely-tuned musical instrument that, when thrummed, you feel in your very bones.

*My thanks to the publisher for a copy of this book via Netgalley.*

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### **Caroline says**

Gwendolyn (Gwen) Golden is trying to get through grade 8, but it's not as easy as she'd like! Ever since her dad died she's helped her mom raise her little brother and sister, who can be a big handful! And while her temper makes most kids at school wary of talking to her, she at least has one friend, Jez, who she can count on to be there for her (not like Martin Evells who used to be her friend but abandoned her when her dad died!)

Everything seems fine until she wakes up on the ceiling one morning and she has a new problem to worry about! Will she fly out the window and get lost in outer space? Will the kids at school find out and think she's even *more* of a freak? Jez seems supportive (though freaked out!), but Gwen can't tell anyone else. Not even her mom!! As she tries to get her new powers under control, she meets a couple of adults who hint about knowing she can fly, but don't say anything that would help. Old Mr. McGillies is especially frustrating when he calls her a "night flyer"! What does that even mean?!

Gwen is still trying to figure things out when she wakes up in the middle of the night with her head bumping against the window and an irresistible urge to go outside. Even though she's afraid, Gwen can't resist opening the window to find out what it is to be a "night flyer"!

Wow, this book really hooked me fast! Does a lovely coming-of-age story about a young girl with a strange gift finding her place in the world sound like a good read to you? Check this out! At times she feels as if she's alone with her powers, but she soon finds support in the unlikeliest of places, and, as strange as her powers are, she's not alone. This story is a lovely mix of fantasy within the real world. Definitely recommended to any kids (or adults!) who need a reminder that we should all embrace our abilities (no matter how strange).

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### **Vidya-BooksAreMagic says**

Another dose to my fun read craving.. To say the truth, if I had written this review just after reading this book, I would have give it 5 stars. But, now...

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Gwendolyn can fly. All of a sudden, she wakes up in the ceiling and she don't know how to face this. Is this normal when puberty hits? She feels already weird in the school, and is confused when this new ability shows up. Should she even tell this to her mother and her only best friend?

But, there were other people aware already about her abilities, although she has no idea how. And she soon learns she is a Night Flyer and there are people out to help her and things that will destroy her as well, just like they did her dad. Dealing with emotional problems of losing her dad and new found Flyer status, Gwendolyn is faced with situations, that she isn't ready to handle yet.

When I read the first few lines of the book, I couldn't pick another book. It's what a good middle grade book can be.

The easiness of the plot and the characters pulled me right in. The author could have done a better job at expanding the story though.

The inner voice of Gwen was hilarious and amusing to listen. The Midnight Summer's party was brought out well and I could just imagine the scene. And the scenes where she is scared of her flying right in the middle of a class or during a friend's party made me laugh. All these are the good parts.

The bad parts are that Gwen never seem to grow up. Even at the end of the book, I still feel like she is a kid; but that's okay, I can wait if she grows in the next novel at least. And the character development is not full. So, the readers cannot get more involved with them.

The writing has some problems. Considering this is the first book in the series, there could have been more explanations, instead of simple questions and answer format type manual. I want to know more about the fantasy part. It might have been exciting.

Gwendolyn is your regular kid, with anger management issues and problems with fitting in at school. Gwen hasn't grown much and don't act like a eighth grader; but come on, not all kids have the maturity to act right when a situation presents itself. And losing her dad might have everything to do with that.

I liked all the characters including the sweet shop and Gwen's sister and brother, but there is not a complete development of the characters' world. It makes it difficult for the readers to sustain them in memory.

**Strengths:** I liked it maybe because at recent times, I crave for more fun-filled easy reads than emotional ones. And I suppose that is the main strength.

**Weakness:** The slow pace and the improper character development may bore some of the audience.

#### **Final Verdict:**

Gwen's adventures is not your Harry Potter or Percy Jackson style adventures; but more like her dealing with life and her Flyer abilities. And if you like children's book, I will definitey recommend it to you. Adults, who are not into children's books, may find problem in liking it as much as I did. But, at least, you could read it to your kids. :) I had a good time with a middle grade novel after a long time.

*Note: There is one place where Gwen's crush tries to kiss her; but nothing happens.*

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More reviews at Books Are Magic.

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