

## Chapter 1

# Superpowers

“If you could have a superpower, what would it be?”

Dressed up in a brightly-coloured costume with a blue cape, Miss Higgins was posing the question to both her class and Mr Jay’s as both groups of children crowded into one hot classroom together at the end of another lesson working on their ‘superheroes’ topic. It was a topic that had sparked great enthusiasm so far, from children and teachers alike. Mr Jay was sporting a navy cape over a teal all-in-one suit with a gadget belt, a mask and long yellow boots.

“I would definitely choose to fly!” suggested someone.

“I want to freeze time!” said another.

“I’d be invisible so I could spy on people or scare them!” laughed Benji.

“Interesting ideas,” Mr Jay smiled. “Although I’m not sure that’s such a kind choice, Benji. Perhaps you might think of what good your powers could be used for instead of spying and scaring people.”

Benji still thought being invisible would be a rather



funny power to have. Carefully and quietly, he reached his hand around the back of Freya and tapped her left shoulder. Instinctively, her head snapped to the left, and when she found no one there she looked back to her right to see Benji giggling.

“If I were invisible, I could do that all day and you’d have no idea who it was, even if I was standing right in front of you,” he whispered.

“You can be so annoying sometimes! I’d know it was you even if I couldn’t see you!” Freya retorted with a half-smile.

She was right. Benji had a mischievous streak that occasionally bordered on irritating, but the pair were good friends and always knew how to make each other laugh. They had been friends since they were toddlers, as they had always lived on the same street, often having adventures that were mainly concocted by Benji. Now, they hung around together at school even though they were in separate classes. Luckily, the two classes often paired up for topic lessons, and Benji liked to use this time to act daft with his friend.

After Benji’s class had returned to their own classroom and been sent out for lunch, he sidled back to Mr

Jay’s room to wait for Freya. As the children finally came rushing noisily through the door, grabbing coats and swinging lunchboxes, Mr Jay’s voice was almost drowned out as he called out,

“Slow down, you lot, no one needs to run, thank you!” Benji slid inside to hurry Freya along.

“Why are you always last?” he asked her with a grin.

Mr Jay answered him.

“Well, she was helping me to collect these topic books for a start. Thanks for your help, Freya. I appreciate it. Don’t be late out for lunch now, though.”

With no other children left inside the classroom, Benji waited even longer while Freya finished putting her own things away. Miss Higgins then strode in and asked why the pair were still not outside. The two teachers started to discuss how well the session had gone and what a success the superheroes topic had been. Benji kept a prying ear tuned in to their conversation as Freya finally readied herself to head out onto the playground.

“I’ve just had a message. I’ve got to dash. Can you cover

my lunchtime duty?” Mr Jay was asking Miss Higgins.

“Of course, no problem. To the rescue again, eh? Good luck! At least you’re already wearing the cape,” came her reply.

Intrigued, Benji peered over his shoulder as he followed Freya through the door. He just caught a glimpse of Mr Jay grabbing something shiny from his desk drawer and dropping it into a compartment of his gadget belt as he strode towards the exit. Where could he be going?

Benji’s inventive mind began to race. Mr Jay and Miss Higgins had been very keen on this ‘superheroes’ topic. And those costumes didn’t look like the type you just bought in a fancy-dress shop – they looked authentic. Now, Mr Jay was rushing off unexpectedly with something in his gadget belt to somewhere which required him to wear a cape.

An incredible idea began to form in Benji’s head.



## Chapter 2 Suspicion

Despite the things they had in common, the two friends had very different appearances. Benji, with his dark, frizzy hair and skin the colour of caramel, was the shorter of the pair. Freya stood a few inches taller, with fiery red hair and freckles scattered across her nose and cheeks. Their families had been friends for years before Freya and Benji were born, and they had grown up around each other.

“Don’t be so ridiculous!” Freya scoffed dismissively when Benji told her about his theory while walking home that afternoon.

“Just think about it for a moment,” he beseeched her. “Wouldn’t it be amazing? Our teachers could actually be superheroes! Like some secret crime-fighting duo or something! One of them is always dashing off here or there at lunchtimes or whenever they’re not teaching us.”

“Superheroes are just for comic books,” replied Freya.

“No, they’re not!” insisted Benji. “They just don’t like to be known by their secret identities. I even saw something on the news the other day. Some guy had run out of a shop after stealing a bunch of stuff from the shelves. The shop owner had phoned the police but thought the guy had already got away. Then the news reporter said police found the thief around the corner, tied up with all the stuff he had stolen right there next to him. There was a note stuck on his chest saying: ‘Stealing isn’t cool. Don’t be a dinkus.’ It wasn’t the police who had caught him, and the thief was so confused that he said he couldn’t even remember what happened.”

“‘Don’t be a dinkus’? That’s pretty funny. But it’s hardly likely to be Mr Jay or Miss Higgins, is it?” asked Freya.

“I’m telling you, I have a weird feeling about this,” said Benji.

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The next day, Freya hardly gave another thought to their conversation. Benji, on the other hand, was constantly on the lookout for clues. He kept a close watch on his teachers all morning, and he was rewarded at lunchtime: Miss Higgins received a phone call and Mr Jay gave her a friendly nod as she left.

“Your turn today!” Mr Jay said with a smile.

Both classes were combined again for the start of the afternoon while Mr Jay read the beginning of a story. The classes sat patiently, perched on tables and packed onto the carpet, and listened while they digested their lunch. After about 20 minutes, Miss Higgins returned quietly and sat at the side until they reached a suitable place to pause.

“We’ll leave it there for now,” Mr Jay decided, closing his copy of the book as they reached a place where two sections of the chapter were separated from each other by three asterisks. “Here’s a quick trivia question: does anyone know what these three asterisks are called,



where we just stopped reading?”

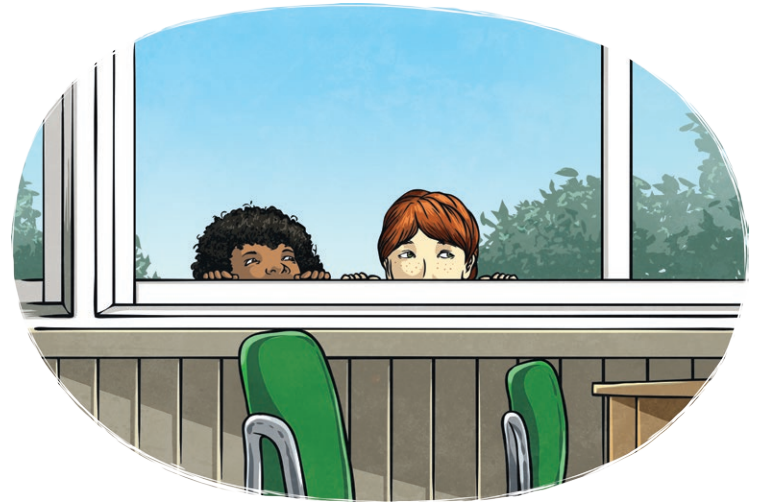
There was a short silence, and it became clear that this question was beyond the classes’ knowledge. Eventually, Miss Higgins raised her hand with a grin.

“Well, I know you already know!” Mr Jay laughed. “Go on then, Miss Higgins.”

“It’s a dinkus!” replied the other teacher.

“Indeed it is,” said Mr Jay. “A funny old name, rarely used nowadays, but I like it!”

Amidst the mass of children, two jaws dropped open in astonishment.



### Chapter 3

## Investigating

“I’m telling you, there’s only one way we can prove they’re hiding secret superhero identities. We need to spy on them.”

“You’re not really invisible like you wanted to be, you know, Benji! You’ll get found out and then what? You’ll probably get us both into trouble.”

Though Freya agreed that the ‘dinkus’ incident was peculiar, she wasn’t as keen to rush into an espionage mission as Benji was. However, it always seemed that no matter how much she put up a fight, she was

eventually persuaded to go along with her friend's hare-brained schemes. This time, she had to admit, part of her was beginning to wonder whether he was really onto something.

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Luckily, the two children lived just a few doors away from each other, not far from school. After the bell rang for home time, the pair raced back to their respective houses and each changed out of their uniform in record time. No more than 15 minutes after they'd walked out of the gates, they were pedalling furiously back towards school.

After tiptoeing around the outside of the building and avoiding the watchful eye of the caretaker, Mr Ficksbilder, Benji leaned his bike against a bush and silently summoned Freya over to where he was crouching low on the ground below Mr Jay's classroom window. Hidden between the building and the bushes outside, the two rose slowly from their squat positions just enough to peer over the window ledge and into the classroom. Inside, Mr Jay was sitting at his desk, partly obscured by the huge pile of science books that he was marking.

Again, Benji motioned with his hand for Freya to follow him, before moving in a very strange fashion along the ground next to the wall. He wasn't quite crawling, as his knees weren't touching the floor; it was more of a waddle, with his legs bent at the knee and his backside hovering a few centimetres from the floor. Freya couldn't help it; she thought he looked like a human frog! A laugh more like a snort burst out of her quicker than she could raise her hand to cover her mouth.

"Sssshhh!" Benji spun around with a frown.

Shoulders heaving up and down, biting down hard on her fist, Freya composed herself and followed her friend in comical stealth formation, pressed close to the wall but never rising high enough to be spotted through the low windows.

After what seemed like an hour, they reached the next classroom along: Miss Higgins' room. Once again, they raised their heads inch by inch and peered through the window, looking left and right. All was quiet and motionless. A ring of light around the edge of the door told them that a light in the classroom's store cupboard had been left on, but there was no sign of anyone. Freya imagined that the stacked chairs, empty pegs and piled

books of the classroom were breathing a silent sigh of relief as the dust settled after the long day.

Freya was just about to turn and tell Benji that she was going home when the light in the store cupboard flicked off, and the two watchers flinched like startled rabbits. As the door began to open, the children's eyes widened and they ducked slightly, torn between the desire to see and the fear of being seen.

The figure that emerged from the cupboard was a vision in teal, yellow and navy blue. Miss Higgins' plain dress and sensible shoes of the day were no longer visible: a long blue cape billowed around her whole body and her tall sunflower-yellow boots rapped the floor smartly. Freya and Benji looked at each other, their eyes like saucers. They had seen Miss Higgins' superhero costume before – but why would she be wearing it now? As they turned back to the window, the teacher tapped something into her phone, glanced at her watch and then in the blink of an eye, hurtled off out of sight with three quick, long paces. Whoosh! She was gone.