

Belinda, **the girl who wouldn't wear her glasses.**



A children's story by Tom Ilvento
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There once was a girl named Belinda. She was 9 years old, very cute, with long black hair, eyes that were bright and alert, a perky little nose, and smile that would light a room. Belinda lived with her parents and her grandmother, along with a cat, two gerbils, and four fish. The cat watched over the fish and the gerbils, and Belinda watched over all of them. She was a good keeper of cats, a better keeper of gerbils (she played with her's constantly), and the best keeper of fish. She remembered to feed the fish every day, tend their water, clean their bowl every week, and protect them always from the cats (cats will be cats!). Belinda loved animals and some day wanted to be a animal doctor.

Belinda was especially fond of her grandmother. Her grandmother understood her better than anyone else, and always seemed to be there just to listen to her troubles, tell her stories of the past, and offer just the right amount of advice. She did not judge Belinda or scold her, she listened and told her stories. Each morning before school her grandmother combed her hair till it was silky smooth and shined brightly. Belinda felt lucky to have her grandmother close to her.

Belinda worked very hard at every thing she did. She was very good in school; a top student, and a very good reader. Once she started a book she could not put it down until she reached the last page. Most of the time she listened to her parents, she kept her room clean, made her bed nearly every day, and picked up after herself. Belinda never gave anyone any trouble. Well, she hardly gave any trouble except that for one thing; Belinda did not like to wear her glasses!

Not everyone is blessed with perfect vision. Belinda needed her glasses to see things that were far away. Otherwise objects looked fuzzy and out of focus. When Belinda put her glasses on everything looked sharper and clearer.

No one knew quite why she didn't like her glasses.

Did someone tease her at school?

Did she think they made her look different from the other children?

Did they bother her ears and nose to wear them for long periods of time?

No one could say for sure, and Belinda wouldn't tell either. No matter the reason, she refused to wear her glasses. Of course she wore them some of the time, but the first chance she got, Belinda took her glasses off. And she never wore them when she was away from her house or school.

Belinda had picked the glasses out herself and she chose a pair with red frames that were just right for her face - everyone told her so. The glasses gave her perfect vision and enabled her to see the blackboard at school, her friends at play, and her books when she read at night. Belinda would not wear them and fought her parents, her teachers, and her eye doctor. "I do not *need* my glasses," she said, emphasizing the word need. "I can see perfectly well without them!"

No matter how much her parents pleaded with her, and how much her teachers asked her to use them at school, she refused to wear her glasses! Belinda's friends also encouraged her to wear her glasses, but she still refused. She wouldn't even talk about it with her grandmother. Her grandmother never raised the topic, but Belinda was sure she wanted her to wear them too.

About this time there was a special trip planned for her class at school - a day at the zoo. Belinda was excited about the trip. She loved the zoo because there were so many different types of animals from so many different countries. The more rare and exotic the animal, the more fascinated Belinda became. There were llamas from South America, a Polar Bear from the Arctic, a red fox from England, a giant panda from China, an emu from Australia, and zebras from Africa. The zoo was a magical place for Belinda!



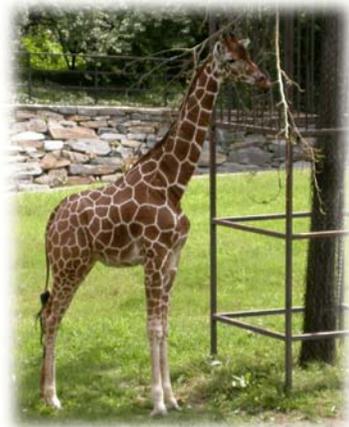
The rhino stands ready!

The children entered the zoo and immediately went toward their favorite animals. The first push was toward the African exhibit which had animals that roamed the plains - lions, elephants, rhinoceroses, giraffes, hippopotamuses, zebras, and antelope.



The lion sleeps in the sun.

Belinda noticed that she had trouble seeing the animals from a distance. Some animals were fuzzy and difficult to make out from a distance. Still, there was no mistaking an elephant or a giraffe. These were easy to spot and follow.



The giraffe stands tall.

When she looked at the elephant she wondered if it was an African elephant or an Asian elephant.



This elephant looks tired as it rests its trunk on the wall!

Belinda looked at the tip of the trunk to see if there was one finger or two. She could see clearly enough to tell, but she remembered to check the ears. The ears were large and in the shape of the African continent - it was an African elephant! Belinda laughed with the other children as they saw the elephant resting his trunk on the wall.

When the children came to the hippopotamus display, Belinda could not see the hippos. "All I see are two rocks in the water," Belinda told her friends. They smiled and said, "Belinda, those are the hippos!" "Can't you see the rest of them under the water?" After they pointed it out, Belinda could see the hippos under the water. "But, it wasn't that easy to see them," she thought to herself.



The Hippos are under the water!

Some of the other animals were difficult to see. The animals had natural protection to help them blend into the grasses or trees where they lived. Belinda had a hard time seeing the Cheetah hidden in the grass. The other children had to point him out to her. Can you see the Cheetah in the grass?



Can you see the Cheetah?

Belinda was sure the students were heading toward the monkey exhibit next - monkeys were always a favorite of her classmates. As they walked to the next exhibit area, Belinda saw a large wire cage with animals sitting in a tree with long tails. Although Belinda could not see the small animals clearly, she was sure that they were Spider monkeys. She called out, "Look at the monkeys," and Belinda laughed out loud in her excitement!



Are these monkeys?

The other children laughed as well, but not because of the monkeys. Belinda was mistaken - this was not Spider Monkeys. The cage held large parrots with long tails! Belinda could not see well enough from a distance to clearly see the difference! Once she got close enough she could see the parrots more clearly.

Belinda was wrong about the monkeys because she could not see well enough to tell the difference. She was embarrassed, but she was determined not to let the other children know. However, it was hard when people laugh at you. Even her best friends thought it was funny. They knew she couldn't see well enough to tell one animal from another. "Put on your glasses, Belinda" they called to her.

Belinda's face grew flushed and hot and she felt tears well up in her eyes. Fearing the other children would see her tears, Belinda ran. Her friends called out for her to wait, but Belinda did not stop. Belinda moved as fast and as far away as she could get from the other children. Without her glasses, and with tears in her eyes, she could not see very well. When she stopped she was in a part of the zoo she did not recognize. Some of the animals were walking in large natural areas, but she could not guess what they were. Belinda was confused. Belinda was lost!

Belinda sat on a bench feeling hot, hurt, and a little scared. She was a brave little girl, but even bravery had its limits. She fought back the tears and tried to think. "What should I do? I'm lost, but I can't let the other children see me like this." Slowly, tears fell down her cheeks.

Just then a young boy approached her and sat down next to her. "Why are you crying?" he asked. He said nothing else, but his face was friendly and very familiar to Belinda. She trusted him, though she didn't know why. Just then it all poured out of her - the story of her glasses, the confusion of the animals, the children's laughter and getting lost. It felt good to say the words and to share her story. The little boy did not laugh or make her feel foolish. He just listened.

Then he asked a simple question. "If you can put your glasses on then you can see better?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Do you have your glasses with you?" he asked again.

"Yes," she answered.

"Then put them on and come with me." That was all he said, and he got up and started to walk.

To her surprise, Belinda answered “Yes” again, took her glasses out of her knapsack, put them on, and followed the boy. Everything now was clearer to her. She could see the zoo signs for the different exhibits and the directions back to the monkey cages.

Now that she could see Belinda noticed she was in Bear Country! The large animals in the natural areas were bears - a Black Bear, a Polar Bear, a Giant Panda. She noticed the Giant Panda hiding in her den. She had missed her completely before she put on her glasses. She had missed so much by not wearing her glasses.



As they continued to walk she noticed all the animals she had missed - kangaroos, aardvarks, bears, falcons, otters, emus, Komodo Dragons, prairie dogs, and sea lions. Every type and shape of animal she could imagine, big and small, were there before her eyes to see. She could even see the prairie dogs kissing each other! The fuzzy view she was used to was replaced with a sharp images of what she loved most - animals. She had missed so much by not wearing her glasses!



Belinda and the boy soon found their way to the monkey cages and the other children. She saw her classmates huddled together with her teacher. The children looked anxious and they were searching for someone. When they saw Belinda they all called out to her and laughed. She ran to them and hugged her friends. They were so happy to see her and all their worries turned to laughter! Belinda's teacher was upset at first, but even he was happy that she had returned safely. All was forgiven and things were right again.

Belinda then turned to thank the boy for his help, but he was no where to be found. When she asked the other children about him, none could remember anyone else being with her. The little boy had vanished, and she never had the chance to thank him. As she thought about it, Belinda realized something odd about his visit. No matter how far away he was from her, no matter if she wore her glasses or not, she could always see him clearly. His face remained a clear picture in her mind.

From that time on Belinda kept her glasses close and wore them often. She didn't wear them all the time - few people with glasses do - but she no longer worried about how she looked with them on, or what others thought. She liked that she could see clearly, especially when she looked on the things that she loved most - her family, her pets, and her friends. She realized she had missed so much of things around her by not wearing her glasses.

One morning Belinda watched her grandmother's face as she combed her hair, and sensed that she understood what had happened to her at the zoo. She had never completely shared with her grandmother the story of the day at the zoo and of the little boy she had met. The boy said very little to Belinda, but she remembered every word he spoke and the effect they had on her.

When Belinda had finished telling her story her grandmother replied, "That sounds just like your grandfather. He was a man of few words, but when he spoke he went to the heart of the matter. He had a gift for knowing what was needed and how to make things right." Belinda could see the love and pride on her grandmother's face as she spoke of her grandfather.

Belinda had never met her grandfather. He died before she was born. At this moment she longed to know more about him and she begged her grandmother to share some stories. Her grandmother shared many stories from the past - how she met him, their life together, her father as a young child, and when her grandfather passed away. Some stories were happy and some were sad, but all were precious to Belinda. She suddenly felt very close to her grandfather.

Her grandmother went to her room and brought out a photo album of pictures of her grandfather. The pictures showed a kind and gentle man with a playful spirit. She saw him when he was younger, when he got married to her grandmother, when he was a father to Belinda's father, and as he got older. Belinda felt good to share this moment with her grandmother - she could tell her grandmother was proud and happy to talk about her husband.

Belinda was drawn to one of the pictures which showed her grandfather as a young boy. Belinda could not be completely sure, but her grandfather's picture looked so familiar to her. Suddenly Belinda gasped! Her grandfather's picture looked so much like the little boy at the zoo! "It is him," she thought to herself, "But how could this be?" She told her grandmother how much the picture looked like the boy at the zoo. Belinda was nearly in tears as she asked, "Grandmother, what does this mean?"

Belinda's grandmother smiled a secret smile. "It couldn't be," she said. "Your young friend must have been someone else. You must be mistaken." At that she put away the picture book and continued to comb Belinda's hair. The gentle rhythm of the brush and the kindness in her grandmother's hands soon calmed Belinda down. Still, she could not forget the little boy or how much he looked like her grandfather. And, the way her grandmother spoke, and the look on her face, left Belinda wondering for a long, long time.

