

What do those lights look like to you?

THE LIGHTS appeared the night after Wilson's funeral. His big brother, Codell, tossed in the bed that the two had shared. It was all wrong, the empty bed. It didn't feel right; didn't sound right; didn't smell right. Everything that should've been, wasn't.

At the funeral, people he had never seen before looked at him. Adults hugged too tight. "We're so sorry." "We're praying for you." Everyone wore black.

Not black, however, but every color of the rainbow were the lights in the boys' bedroom. Through closed eyes Codell sensed light puncture the darkness of the room. When he opened his eyes, tiny, intensely colored lights flitted every which way above him. Unimaginable shades of red and violet pulsed and glowed. "MOM! MOM!"

His mother rushed into the bedroom. "What is it?!"

"What are those lights!?"

"What lights?"

"Those lights!"

"I don't see any lights, honey. I don't see any lights." She wrapped herself around him. "You're okay. You're safe with me. It's okay."

Codell relaxed in her arms. "They're gone. They disappeared."

"I didn't see anything, honey."

"They were at the top of the room, like flying Christmas lights, smaller."

A few nights later, the lights showed up again in the bedroom, and then a few nights after that in the living room. Codell was afraid of them. His mother took him to an eye doctor, who dilated his eyes and examined him. She had no explanation for the lights.

After church the following Sunday, they told their pastor. He had a quick and ready explanation: "Those are angels."

"Angels?"

"Angels. Everyone's been praying for you. People you don't even know."

"Angels?" repeated Codell's mother.

"Do you think he's lying?" said the pastor. "He was afraid. It was real. When you see something you've never seen before, something no one else sees, you're afraid and you can't fake it. That's what happens in the Bible every time anyone sees angels. They're afraid. You're special, young man. Praise the Lord, sister!"

"I thought angels were like giant birds," said Codell.

"Birds, eh?" said the pastor. "Birds of pray, maybe. Birds of prayer. They can look like birds if they want. They can take whatever form they want. Did you see a lot of them?"

"Yes. I don't know. They were fast."

"They're there for you, to reassure you, to put you at peace. Like your brother's at peace, now. Don't you feel reassured?"

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That night in bed, at some infinite time long before dawn, Codell woke from a shot of adrenalin. He lay on his back, tense, eyes open, scanning. The bedroom ceiling went opaque, translucent, and softened like a melting marshmallow. Through it, a human-looking creature, like the angels in pictures, sliced down through the ceiling, its huge white wings outstretched to slow itself, wings wafting a breeze through the entire room. He, or she, Codell couldn't tell which, knelt silently, odorlessly, at his bedside for the longest time. When it started to get light outside, the creature opened its wings and lifted itself up through the ceiling, the longest of its feathers brushing Codell's shoulders. He felt cold in the down-draft and pulled the covers over his head.

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