

## Wings

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He was five, only, and in a situation he could not fully comprehend. There were toys as nice or nicer than his own. For the daily nap, he was given a rug not quite large enough to fully stretch out on but one which would nicely accommodate a fetal position. His teacher was young and pretty and kind and had all those qualities—he would later learn—generally absent in the general population of teachers. On this particular day, the sun poured in through the third story windows of the classroom, windows so large that four children could easily stand one on top of the other and still be able to see out. Near the table where he sat, a big, yellow, almost scratch-free toy truck was sitting one shelf off the floor. He strategically calculated it would be his when playtime came.

But now, his turn was coming. Teacher stood at the front of the classroom with her big pointer. The pointer was longer than he was, longer even than the tallest boy who sat in the back and never spoke. Teacher was calling out names, one by one. With each name, a child would rise from his or her table and walk to the front of the class. Teacher would then hand the pointer to the child: “Now, go point to your name.”

Across the top of the chalkboard Teacher had written all their names on poster paper in beautiful lettering. There was just enough room to fill the entire length of the board with names. As he watched the other children take their turns with the pointer, The Dreaded Feeling began to rise in him, starting, as usual, in his heart, then radiating out until it filled his entire chest—armpit to armpit, Adam’s apple to gut. The pressure in his chest was such that The Dreaded Feeling spilled out into the room, then out into the world, making the air thick and the hands on

the clock hanging above the names stick to the clock's face. His lungs strained to pull in oxygen. Heat radiated from his face. The tips of his ears were on fire. How was it done? How did the name show itself? Which graceful letters were his? He watched the other children take the pointer, walk up, point, return the pointer, be praised, and return to their seats smiling.

But on this particular day, with The Dreaded Feeling spilling out into the world, a giant angel suddenly appeared outside the classroom windows, screaming and beating its wings against the glass. Its great bulk pounded against the sides of the building. The building shook and the pounding sounded like thunder. Again and again the angel would wrap the building in its gigantic wings and shake it. Then it would turn loose and bang the walls and scream. What was it doing? It would kill itself if it didn't stop. What was it trying to say? Then, Teacher called his name.

As he walked past his yellow truck he felt like he was in a bubble, a space traveler, an impostor, and about to be found out. With that, he would be put to death—or worse. But there was no out. When he reached Teacher, she smiled, handed him the pointer, and told him to find his name. He dutifully took the pointer and walked past Teacher's desk. He took a moment to look at the beautiful lettering, the building all the while continuing to shake. He tried to balance himself. He had to buy time, so he walked as best he could to where the letters started on one end of the chalkboard, then slowly made his way to the other end, holding onto the chalk tray to steady himself. If there was only a clue, one clue, maybe it would find him. Then, when he was about to reach the other end of the chalkboard, the building stopped shaking. He looked back at the windows. The angel had pulled back from the building and was hovering, its great wings making slow, graceful, rhythmic motions through the air. He turned and looked up at the letters,

raised the pointer, and committed to an elegant cluster of script one cluster from the end.

“Good,” said Teacher.

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