

LIGHTNING IN THE LIVING ROOM

It started with a flash.

A green flash, as bright and quick as lightning, there and then gone again. It happened so quickly that Suzy wasn't sure she had seen anything at all, although she raised her head from her homework and looked about.

"What was that?" she asked.

"What was what, darling?" said her mother from the sofa, where she and Suzy's father were both sprawled in a heap, still in their work clothes.

Suzy frowned. "Did you see it, Dad?"

"See what, sweetheart?" Her father was hunched over his tablet, reading the news and muttering to himself about the state of the government.

"That green flash. Didn't either of you see it?"

"Hmmm," said her mother, shaking her braids loose whilst trying to stifle an enormous yawn.

Her father looked around the room in bleary-eyed confusion. "I didn't notice anything."

Suzy pressed her lips together. Perhaps it had been the TV? She peered over her mother's shoulder at the screen, but she was watching another costume drama – men with tall hats riding on horses in the countryside. No green flashes there.

"You've been overdoing the homework again," said her father, scratching at his unruly mop of ginger hair. "Give your eyes a rest and come and sit with us for a bit."

"I'm almost finished," Suzy said, and turned back to her workbook.

It was physics homework, and Suzy was good at physics. Actually, she was good at maths, but she preferred physics because it made the maths useful; it turned the numbers into real things that moved and made a difference. She couldn't understand why anyone would want to do plain old maths all by itself – solving equations was fun for a while, but all you ever ended up with was more numbers, and what were you supposed to do with them then? No, maths was just another way of filling up pieces of paper. Physics was where the action was.

The trouble was, she was starting to feel that liking physics so much made her a bit unusual, which wasn't a feeling she

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liked much. None of her friends shared her enthusiasm, and they had started to sneak little sideways glances at her in class whenever she gave the right answer or got her experiments to work properly. They never said anything, of course, and they weren't being rude exactly, but she had seen it in their eyes – it was the same look they sometimes gave Reginald, the boy with the dinosaur obsession, who, on the rare occasions someone engaged him in conversation, would talk about nothing else. It was a look that mixed pity with suspicion, as though she were the victim of some terrible affliction, and they were afraid it might be catching.

The thought made her pause, and lift her pen from the paper. The homework was pretty simple. Mr Marchwood, her teacher, had set ten questions on Newton's laws of motion. Suzy had actually finished them an hour ago, but her imagination had been sparked and she had carried on, testing herself to see how she could put the knowledge to use. How fast would a rocket need to fly to escape Earth's gravity? How long would it take at that speed to reach the moon? How much force would she need to get back?

She had taken up three extra pages of her book with her own questions, her workings-out spilling over into the margins. She was fairly confident she had the answers right, but would need Mr Marchwood to confirm them. She hoped he would; he had rolled his eyes the last time she had handed in her homework.

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"Suzy," he had sighed. "As if I didn't have enough work to do."

Her pen hovered over the page, the next question already forming in her mind. She looked back over her shoulder at her parents, who were now propped against each other, snoring gently. Tomorrow was Saturday – she had the whole weekend to work out more questions for herself, she decided. Perhaps her dad was right; if she was seeing green flashes that weren't there, her eyes probably needed a rest.

Suzy replaced the top of her pen, shut her homework book and stuffed them both back into her school bag.

She decided not to disturb her parents. "Goodnight," she whispered, as she padded across the room and out into the hall.



Her footsteps had faded upstairs before another green flash filled the living room. Then another. And another. Ribbons of green energy curled out of the air around the table where she had been working, probing down across her chair, as though searching for something. When they didn't find it, they flickered uncertainly for a few seconds before fizzling away into nothing. The green light faded.

Upstairs, Suzy brushed her teeth and prepared for bed, oblivious.