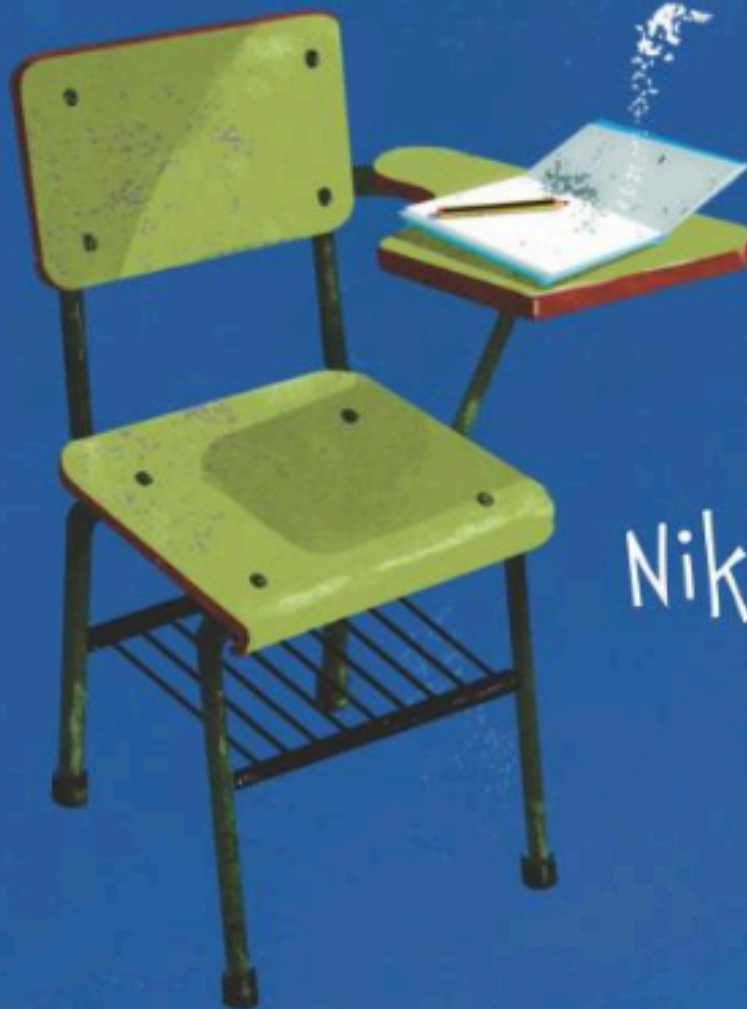


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Words with Wings



Nikki Grimes

Prologue

*Mom loves angels.
Their pink-cheeked faces
peek from pictures
on every wall
in every room.
So—surprise!
Mom decided to call me
Angel.
Dad said, “Enough already.”
He didn’t want his kid
named after some silly,
weak-looking chubby cherub.
He wanted
a strong name for his girl
to take out into the world.
Mom is stubborn, though.
She flipped through the Bible,
found a few fierce angels
and tried again.
“What about naming her
after Gabriel?
He was so fierce
people fainted
at the very sight of him.”
That’s all Dad
needed to hear.*

Two of a Kind

*Mom calls me
Daddy's Girl
'cause him and me,
we're both dreamers.
"Close your eyes," he used to say.
"Tell me what you see."
I'd say, "Sky, shooting stars,
rainbows wrapped
round the earth."
"Now, it's my turn.
I see: you and me
bundled up in silver space suits,
bouncing on the moon.
Race you!" he'd say.
And we'd laugh,
back before he moved
across the street
and we moved
across the city.*

*Our laughter
has a lot farther
to travel now.*

Summer Shift

We packed our bags in June.

*I braced for a summer
of impossible good-byes,
and the dread
of living without friends
ever again.*

*To chase away the fear,
I flipped through a dictionary,
plucked out the word hush
and thought about
the whisper of wind
rustling through leaves,
come next autumn,
and the silence of their falling.*

*Then I jumped into
a soft deep pile of them,
grabbed an armful
of red, gold, and
burnt-orange beauties,*

*tossed them into the air,
and I was all right again,
for a while,
and I went back to packing
for the move.*