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REPORT FROM THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE IDENTIFICATION OF ANGELS

It's the joint hackled at the back
You should look for, a sure sign
Of angels like a roost of broody hens,
And that weird walk they have—
John Wayne with an egg up his butt.
No wonder the air is their element,
Even on those clumsy wings, with legs
Trailing like two stalks of celery
Softened for weeks in a kitchen bin. And listen
For that high-pitched voice, a boy soprano
Or tenor without nuts, not quite a comic opera
But close enough to give you fits.
And those messages they bring—Jesus,
Who would believe them! You can tell one
Just by the crazy sayings, the alien tips:
Get out of town before the whole place blows
To salt and ashes! Or even less welcome:
Forget about sex: the baby's in the bucket now.
You'll need this chart to pick
The Powers from the Seraphim or any rank
Within the nine orders from above—
The highest have the most muscles,
The best pecs, and something at the bottom
Like vestigial feet. And gowns go
In and out of fashion, this year
The Julius Caesar look, last year the mini,
A retrodress that does no favors for
Their bony knees. And haloes don't count;
Haloes are optional, like hats at a wedding.
And hair's a personal matter, each angel
In its own locks, from spit curls to butch,
And redheads with a full Rhonda Fleming.
Still, whatever the problem of matching up
A single sighting to a prototype,
It can't compare to nailing down
The name of every hellion: demons come
In infinite forms and more, though sometimes



Only as a scent in the rough dark,
Or a glow that glides
Like blood floating over gold, just enough
To make you cross yourself and stare.
Hard as it is to pin a tail on
Any devil you may meet, you should know that
Solemn promises of life beyond the grave
Are a dead giveaway.

