



FLAT EARTH

BY

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For my two boys and loving wife, thanks for the inspiration everyday

“A long time ago, people believed that the world is flat and the moon is made of green cheese. Some still do, to this day. The man on the moon is looking down and laughing.”

—Vera Nazarian.

CHAPTER ONE

In a clear blue sky, the moon watched over a baseball game in small town America. James gripped the bat between his hands, twisting and squeezing his fingers. His weight shifted from one foot to the other; his hips wiggled back and forth. The pitcher eyed the signs behind home plate and shook off the first two before nodding at the third, then slid his fingers along the seams of the ball in his leather mitt. Beads of sweat rolled down James' face from his soaked baseball cap as he readied himself for the pitch. He rocked back and forth at a slow, even pace, jaw clenched, waiting for the ball to be delivered.

The pitcher began his wind up, his left foot kicking up into the air as his body twisted to the right. James squinted, searching for the first sign of the ball. The pitcher's hand came down sharply over the top, releasing the ball with an intense spin. James' eyes picked it up immediately and watched it rocket toward him. Down the center the ball came, it was his last chance. His eyes fixated on the tiny ball as it rapidly approached, he swung.

Solid contact. His eyes never left the ball, continuing to follow it. The pitcher, now on the left side of the mound, ducked as it whizzed by his head. James continued his follow-through, then dropped the bat and began his run to first base. It was short-lived. The second baseman didn't even have to move and caught the line drive

with ease. James slowed his run as he heard the umpire yell, "Game over!"

James turned, dejected. He shuffled to the bench and was greeted by his catcher, Paul.

"Good start to the season I would say."

James kicked the dirt as he entered the dugout, his shoulders sagging, arms hanging limp. He took a seat next to Paul and aggressively flipped his bat to the ground then reached down for his cleats. His hands dug hard into the laces as he untied them.

"Would have been better if we won," James responded.

"Yes, but these guys won the championship last year. Only losing by three isn't too shabby," Paul replied.

James didn't want to hear any of it. The game was over and they lost. Not only that, there were two men on base; he could have tied up the game! James struggled with his competitive nature and this was one of those times. He continued packing his bat and glove and heard a sweet voice call his name. He glanced up to see a pretty brunette running toward him from the stands.

"James, James!" she called. "You did so well, 3 for 4, I believe, your hit in the fourth inning tied the game!"

It was his girlfriend, Carol. They'd grown up together, but were never really friends. Once girls stopped having cooties though, he felt much differently about her and they'd been dating for a few years now.

"Still lost," James responded, putting his head back down to concentrate on what he was doing.

"I know what will cheer you up, what say we go into

town and grab a milkshake?”

James couldn't stop himself from smiling back at Carol's glowing face. He rested his forearms on his knees as he answered, "Sure, I could go for some ice cream."

He finished removing his cleats and slipped on his hardy, brown leather boots.

"See you tomorrow at school," Paul said as he waved goodbye.

"See you at school," James replied, climbing out of the dugout and taking Carol's arm.

The two walked away from the field toward James' pickup truck.

"Strawberry, I think I'll get strawberry today, I've decided that's my favorite," Carol started. "What are you going to have James?"

"I don't know," he replied, still thinking of the outcome of the game.

He had a tendency to dwell on such things. His eyes stared, unseeing, at the ground as they approached his old beat-up 1940s pickup truck. He escorted Carol around the back of the truck where his tailgate lay open from the recent work on the farm. A few wheat stalks still remained and multiple well-used tools lay on top of them. They continued around to the passenger door. James opened it and the door made a squeal as the metal hinges rubbed on each other.

"Thank you, James," Carol stated, arm still interlocked with his.

She pulled him closer, then ran her finger up his chest

to his chin and slightly lifted it. Their eyes met, and James forgot what he had been thinking about. *Wow was she beautiful, with her pretty green eyes, soft tan skin, and light brown hair.* He felt lucky she would put up with him, especially when he was acting like a child.

"You played well, I enjoyed the game today, now let's forget about it and go get one of Sam's yummy shakes."

She leaned up and kissed him on the cheek. She was a bit shorter than him, most people were. At 6'2", he was the tallest kid in school. He gently helped her into the truck as the seats were hard and worn from years on the farm.

"Chocolate, I think today is a chocolate day."

"That's better," Carol beamed. "I like seeing you happy."

James shut the door then walked around the front of the pickup.

He really needed to fix up this old rig. A pretty girl like Carol shouldn't have to ride in such a jalopy. James opened the driver's door, which also squeaked, then hopped in.

"Anyone else going to Sam's?" he asked.

"Yes, I believe Missy, Margo and Barbara said they were going."

"Barbara, huh? That means Rich will be there."

Rich was the typical popular high school kid. His father was the mayor and Rich felt that his father's power trickled down to him. He wasn't necessarily mean or rude to James in particular, but his attitude was difficult to be around. James had been raised by two hard-working

wheat farmers and understood what it took to run an operation their size, long grueling hours of work. But Rich had everything handed to him and expected everyone to pander to him. They were both on the baseball team and James felt that he spent more than enough time dealing with Rich's ego on the ball field, let alone outside of the park.

James started the truck. As usual, it took a few attempts, but soon they were headed into town. The high school was on the west side of town and Sam's Diner was clear across on the east. It wasn't that far though. It was a small town, but James liked the size. He felt too many more people would make everything seem overly crowded. He was most content in small groups; crowds really made him feel uncomfortable. Carol, on the other hand, was the type of girl who loved everything and everyone. That was one of the things that attracted him to her. She always lit up the room and knew how to make sure everyone had a good time.

They proceeded through town, past the grocery store, the leather shop and the newly built Sears. The town had about twenty large buildings, but nothing taller than the Grand Hotel which towered five stories over Main Street. The streets were all cobblestone with small sidewalks on each side. As a kid, James loved going into town and riding over the bumps of the cobblestones. His father's truck didn't have a great suspension and would bounce like crazy.

Today that feeling came back to him. His father

had given him the truck to make the trips to school and handling the farm easier. James was starting to take over the farm as his father's health had taken a turn and their operation was one of the top producers for the town. Not only the town, but the whole county. Each year, more than three quarters of their wheat would ship out of town. No one wanted to find out what would happen if their farm struggled.

James continued down the road, past the local theater where he and Carol had gone on their first date. After months of getting up the courage, he had finally asked her out. It was your typical dinner and a movie. They ate at Giovanni's, a local Italian restaurant, and then went to see a horror flick that he couldn't have cared less about, but it got him closer to Carol.

"I guess we are the last ones here," Carol said as she noticed their friends' cars at the diner.

Sam's Diner. It was a neat little place that started its life as a railroad car. The current owner, Sam, bought it dirt cheap and converted it when the rail lines stopped. It was the local hangout for many of the high school kids, a great place for a burger and fries on the weekend. James pulled his truck into an empty spot next to a bright yellow Chrysler Windsor Highlander. James' eyebrows tightened as he saw it. He knew exactly who drove that car. He half thought of hitting it, but knew that no good would come of it.

"Oooh, its Rich's car, isn't it so pretty?" Carol chirped. "I really like yellow, it's my favorite color."

James' eyes tightened even more, then Carol grabbed his hand.

"We should get in there, I'm really craving that strawberry milkshake," Carol smiled up at James.

He quickly snapped out of his thoughts. "Sure let me get your door," he offered, jumping out of the truck. He made his way around the back, gallantly opened the door and gave a bow.

"You're so silly James, that's why I like you," Carol tittered at his overly embellished act.

He took her by the arm and they walked toward the door.

"Great game today. You almost had 'em." Will, one of the locals who loved baseball and watched every game, was standing in his usual spot outside the diner. Nobody really knew what he did for work, but you were sure to find him in one of two places, the ball field or the diner. He slipped a cigarette between his lips, pulled out a metal lighter, lit up the cigarette and offered one to James.

"No thank you, Mr. Will," James replied. That was another thing, no one knew Will's last name. Or at least, none of James' friends did.

They walked inside to a big "hello" from the man behind the counter sporting a soda jerk hat. Sam always worked Saturday nights and took pride in welcoming each customer. James glanced to his left and spotted their friends all sitting between a couple of booths. The girls wore twin set sweaters and below the knee length skirts. Margo's was smooth with a small black and white checkered

pattern while the other girls' were solid and pleated. Their saddle shoes kicked in time to "At the Hop" on the juke-box.

"James!" one of the boys called out. "Good to see that you finally made it. You played really well today."

James clenched his jaw. Carol had helped him put it out of his head momentarily, but now it was back.

Jason, their left-fielder, was very quick and batted above average, but he knew baseball as a career wasn't in the cards, he was more of a middle-of-the-road kind of guy. He was about 5' 9" with dark brown hair and a slim build. He sported a light blue button down shirt and pleated trousers with a brown leather belt hugging his hips. James and Carol approached the table.

"You know I don't like to relive our losses," he stated. "I had just put it out of my mind."

"Sorry boss," Jason replied.

He could get away with slips like that. Jason had been his best friend since they were ten and they'd been through a lot together.

"Yeah, too bad you couldn't get on base. I would have driven in the winning run."

It was Rich, and James had known there would be a comment of some sort coming from him. He shrugged it off and just shook his head, acting like it didn't bother him. He executed it poorly and everyone could tell. Just then, Sam walked up.

"Can I get you ladies and gents anything?"

The orders came flying in; a few burgers, fries, a

couple of milkshakes and they were all set.

“How’s the crop looking this year?” asked Tommy. He was very stout, short and stocky and, as the only lefty on the team, he naturally played first.

“It seems to have been a wet spring,” Barbara piped in.

“Why do you care?” sneered Rich.

He had been dating Barbara for a couple years now, but never treated her very nicely. James suspected she was trying to endure it for the prestige of dating Rich.

“Yes, it’s been wet which means—”

The door of the diner swung open and they heard Sam belt out his friendly “hello”. In walked three teenagers that James and his friends would rather not have seen anytime soon. The newcomers scanned the room, saw James and his friends and started heading that way. They were dressed in jeans and varsity jackets with a large “C” on the left side. They were part of the Colton Baseball team, the team they had just played. The reigning champions. They continued to walk toward the booths.

“Seems like you guys got a little better over the off season,” stated the tallest one, who stood slightly off to the side.

Rich stood up and faced them. “You bet we did. Wait until next game; we are going to clobber you.”

The big one, who quite frankly gave the impression that he spent all day lifting train cars and not a lot of time reading, gave a slight chuckle and pointed at his chest with his thumb, “We were only playing at half speed. There is no way any wheat farm boys from Eggerton are

gonna beat us.”

While none of them wanted to admit it, he did have a point. In the last five years, they had never beaten Colton, not once.

“Just you wait. This will be the year,” Rich retorted, starting to get a little heated. “You guys are so famous I don’t even know your names,” he continued.

The three stopped short of Rich, eyeing him from about a foot away.

“Are you going to let your girls play?” scoffed the third Colton player, a smarmy little pretty boy. “They could probably play better than you.”

Rich’s anger intensified, he was known to be a hothead. His hands formed into fists.

“She could hit a home run off of me,” he winked at Barbara.

Margo gasped. Rich cocked his fist back and began to swing, but James was too quick for him. He’d guessed what was about to happen and had the wits to make a move. He found himself behind Rich and quickly grabbed his arm.

“No need to get switched off over him,” he reassured Rich.

Rich rounded on him, eyes bulging, lips pressed so tightly together they’d paled. He shook off James’ grip, but knew that James was right and tried to calm himself down.

“You had your fun, you beat us on the field. Why don’t you head on out before something bad happens?”

James suggested to the three.

The pretty boy just snickered and turned to walk out, "Let's go boys; let them cry in their shakes. There's better food in Colton."

The three left the diner without another word, though the tall boy looked like he genuinely wanted to stay and talk about baseball.

"What were you thinking? Someday that anger of yours is going to get you in trouble," Jason admonished.

"What were they doing here in the first place?" Carol asked. "They knew you would be here, why would they come by and try to start trouble?"

"You know how the corn farmers are; think they're better than the rest of us," Rich answered. "They are just looking for trouble, and one day, I'll give it to them."

"Sit down," said James, fed up with Rich's shenanigans. "You would just get yourself switched off. You almost got yourself switched off today."

"Yes, you should be more careful," Barbara began.

"Oh give me a break, Barbara. Nothing would have happened to me. I've seen people switched off, it's only temporary."

With that, the food arrived. Sam brought it all out on a large silver platter and began setting each item on the table.

"Who had the strawberry shake? I believe it was you, Miss." He slid the large, clear, Y-shaped glass across the table to Carol.

"Oh, it's perfect, I love the cherry on top," she

brightened and immediately forgot about the altercation.

After the food arrived, the boys did very little talking. They were beat from the game and just thinking about getting their energy back. The girls on the other hand, started talking to each other about school, dresses and other trivial things. The boys did their best to ignore them and paid more attention to their food. Then Carol changed the conversation.

"My science teacher says there is a meteor shower tonight, should be fun, anyone want to watch it?"

"No, I'm too tired from the game," Jason replied.

"We are catching the new monster flick at the theater tonight," Rich announced, expecting a reaction as it was opening night and tickets were hard to come by. Reactions were faked or nonexistent because everyone knew he acquired them with his father's help.

"Rich got Margo and I tickets as well," stated Tom, their shy short stop, who hadn't said a word through the entire ordeal.

"Looks like it's just you and me kid," James said to Carol.

He was beat from the game, but knew she was really looking forward to seeing the stars; it was all she'd talked about on the drive to diner. As the meal wrapped up, everyone went their separate ways. James escorted Carol to the truck and helped her inside. He knew exactly where he was going to take her, far away from the town lights and the sky glow, where the stars shone much

brighter.

He started the truck and they headed down the road. Carol leaned over and put her head on his shoulder while they drove down the bumpy street. He smiled down at her and enjoyed her arm around his. No words were exchanged, they just drove.

CHAPTER TWO

James pulled the truck into his family's southernmost wheat field. It was the beginning of the season and the stalks were a mere 6" tall, about average height for an early season grow. He followed a dirt trail between two fields all the way to a large flat rock. He knew the spot well as he'd spent many summer nights watching the same stars as a boy.

"Here, grab a blanket." He pushed the pickup truck's seat forward to reveal a couple of plaid blankets rolled up behind it. "They'll cushion the hard ground and keep you from getting your skirt dirty."

Carol grabbed two blankets and James took her hand. He had never taken her to this spot before. As a matter of fact, he hadn't taken anyone to this particular spot before.

"Follow me," he guided her along the spring wheat field to his rock.

He climbed up and asked for the blankets. After spreading them out, he took her hand and helped her up. She had little trouble since she was pretty nimble herself. Once on the rock, they sat down facing west. Carol's eyes widened.

"Is that the wall?" she asked, her voice shaking slightly.

"Yes, but you don't have to worry. I've been much closer while harvesting our fields and never had any issues," James reassured, clasping her hand.

She took a deep, shaking breath. "Are you certain?"

James could see she was very anxious. He gently

placed his hand on her face and turned her toward him. Their eyes met, his voice as soft as his caress, "Trust me."

She nodded in agreement, but James, still sensing her fear, cajoled, "So, what did that old kook of a science teacher tell you about the meteor shower?"

"He is not a kook you silly, he's a very smart man, and I enjoy his classes, the stars are amazing all the way up there."

"So what's this shower all about?"

"It one happens once a year over a span of two days, lots of meteors to watch, but he said tonight would be the best night to see it."

"I wonder why that is?"

"Something about the way the Earth is tilted today, and where the meteors are coming from, and some other stuff, makes it the best."

"Huh."

Just then, the brightest shooting star they had ever seen gleamed through the sky.

"Wow, did you see that? He was right," James perked up.

"The tail on that one was so long, it was like a line of fire, trailing behind it!"

That was just the beginning. Soon another appeared, then another and in no time the sky was littered with them. They'd begun counting after the first couple, but realized it was futile to continue. Streak after streak continued to fill the sky. They lay still, hands clenched in disbelief. *Why hadn't they seen or heard of this before?* It

was quite the awe-inspiring sight, so close that they felt as though they could reach out and touch them. The show continued for over an hour and they watched as if it was the July 4th fireworks display. Then, as quickly as they multiplied, the meteor numbers started to fade until they were completely gone.

"That was quite the show," murmured James, who had said very little over the past hour except the occasional "Look at that one!"

"Mr. Johnston was right about the show," he continued, still staring at the sky. "You said it was supposed to happen for a couple of days?"

"That's what he said."

James, deep in thought, spun toward to her, "Why did it stop then? Wouldn't it continue for both days?"

"I'm not sure, he just said it would happen for two days, I'll ask him Monday at class."

"Well, it's getting late and I don't want your mother to worry about you, let alone your father. Wouldn't want him switching off the electricity on us. That would be really bad for our watering system."

"He wouldn't do that, probably just give you a stern talking to," she giggled.

"I don't want that, either. In fact, that might be worse."

Carol's father worked for the electric company. He was a hulk of a man who always seemed to be concentrating very hard on whatever he was doing, that's how James saw it. He grabbed the blankets then jumped off the

rock. After placing them on the ground, he twisted to catch her as she slid down. They walked to the truck, still searching the sky for more lights and dazzling comet tails, none came.

Settled in the truck, they headed to Carol's house. She lived on the north side of town, conveniently about a half of a mile from the power plant. Convenient for her father anyway. For James, it was quite the hike to get out there, but he didn't mind the time alone in the truck. His mind wandered from the night's events to his truck and he started wishing he had the funds to fix it up properly. He was pretty practical and knew that if he put a little money into it, the payback would be multiplied. He planned on keeping it as long as he could find parts for it and hoped it would run for a long time. His mind drifted off to another place, but he was brought back to reality when Carol gently placed her hand on his thigh.

"Thank you for the lovely evening, I really enjoyed it, and the spot you picked out was perfect, I'm sorry I was a bit nervous at first."

"I'm glad you liked it," James beamed. "I've never taken anyone there before; it's my favorite place to go relax and just think."

About this time, they arrived at Carol's home. It was late, but the lights were still on and they could see a shadow behind the window curtains. The house was a cute little three bedroom cottage with a wraparound porch, Victorian style decorations on the columns, and a turret on the left corner. There were only two other houses

within a mile and it bordered the Rangel wheat field.

"Mom must be waiting for me," Carol mused. "Dad is probably in bed, he tends to work early on weekends, and there have been more than a few power outages lately."

"Can I walk you to the door?"

"Sure, I'd like that."

They headed up to the house and stopped on the porch, still holding hands.

"How 'bout I pick you up for church tomorrow?" James asked.

"Sure, I'll be ready to go by eight, can you stop by then?"

"I most definitely can and look forward to it," he was always excited to spend time with her.

He had a great time with Carol and was glad he'd be able to take her to church in the morning. Just then, the door swung open, Carol's mother stood there with a look of panic on her face.

"There you are, my baby," she squealed as she jumped through the doorway to hug her daughter.

"Everything alright, Mom?" Carol's face transformed from amused to concerned; she'd never seen her mother so jumpy and distraught. "We're home at a decent hour."

"I know hon, but your father's been getting multiple calls tonight about power outages, and a few fires, some in town, so I was worried."

"I'm fine, Mom, James takes good care of me, I watched him play baseball then we went and watched the meteor shower after dinner."

"Oh, I saw some of that, never seen anything like it before," her mother loosened her hold just enough to look at both of them.

"Really?" James inquired.

"My science teacher, who is very smart, said it happens every year at this time, so it must be true."

"I don't know about that, I've seen a few shooting stars over the years, but never that many at once."

James looked at Carol, puzzled. *If this had occurred every year, how had she not seen it?* Carol's house was on the outskirts of town and the sky was fairly open. The only light pollution came from the power plant which sat with nearly all of its lights extinguished.

"I'm just glad you're home, let's get you inside for the night, thank you James for taking care of her."

"You're welcome Mrs. Grambling. My pleasure."

Carol left her mother's embrace, reached over and grabbed James and pulled him toward her. She pressed her lips against his cheek.

"Goodnight, James, see you tomorrow."

James blushed as he opened his eyes to see Mrs. Grambling smiling at the romantic sight. He was very shy about affection in public and was a little embarrassed at what Mrs. Grambling had just witnessed.

"See you in the morning," he managed, then turned and headed down the porch steps.

Carol waved to him as he pulled away from the house then shut the door behind her. Alone with his thoughts, James sped away to his house. He kept thinking about

what Carol's mother had said, that she had never seen so many shooting stars in one night. *Maybe she just didn't pay much attention to the skies or had typically gone to bed before they arrived. It was strange that they came and went so fast. If it's supposed to happen over two days was there more to come? Or was that it?* His mind continued to mull over things and eventually he found himself at home.

His house stood between two rows of trees planted by his father to reduce the wind that came over the fields in the fall. It would blow as hard as 50 mph, but only for a few days. The wind had caused plenty of issues with the house before the trees grew tall enough to protect it. James parked the truck and headed in the front door. It was a modest house, ranch style, with four bedrooms, an average sized kitchen and one bathroom. The lights were out. It was going to be an early morning on the farm. James quietly made his way to his bedroom and crawled under the covers, his mind still thinking about the night's events.

The next morning, James awoke to his father's quietly authoritative voice. "Good morning, James. Late night?"

James, still groggy from sleep, managed to spit out a grumbling, "Sort of."

"Well, we need you to gather the eggs for breakfast and then take a look at the machinery on #6 and run some tests on it."

"Sure thing, Father," he said as his limp arm slid off the bed.

On a normal day, he would have already been up fetching eggs, milking the cows, and watering the animals, but because of last night's events, he forgot to set his alarm. His father was a good man and seemed to understand that James was a high school boy, so he usually cut him some slack on the weekends. James dragged himself out of bed, threw on his overalls, then headed out to the barn to milk the cows and accomplish his other chores. Afterward, he walked into the kitchen to the smell of frying eggs and freshly cooked bacon.

"Morning, Mom," he greeted, seeing her working at the stove.

"Oh, good morning, honey. Did you have a late night?"

"Yeah," James yawned. "Carol and I watched the meteor shower after dinner at Sam's Diner."

"Meteor shower, was it nice? Haven't seen one of those in years."

James' nose and forehead scrunched, his lips pursed, "Did you see one last year at this time, Mom?"

"No, can't say I did. Matter of fact, I was probably your age the last time I saw a meteor shower. Not something that's very typical around here."

James went back to thinking about the evening as his mother served him scrambled eggs. *Strange. Neither Carol's mother nor his had seen a shower like that before, but Carol's teacher said it happened every year.* The gears continued to turn in his head, then a beam of sunlight flickered through the window causing James to squint.

“What time is it?” he blurted.

“It’s about 7:30. Why?”

“Gosh, I’m going to be late!”

James shoved in a mouthful of eggs then ran out grabbing some bacon on the way. “Thanks for breakfast Mom!”

He quickly headed to his closet and grabbed his best church clothes. They were his best because they were his only ones. Soon dressed, he headed out to the truck, hopped in and took off, kicking up dust along the way. He didn’t want to be late to pick up Carol, that wouldn’t go over very well. He sped down the roads with ease since it was still early on a Sunday morning. James arrived at her house about 5 minutes after eight, hopped out and jogged up the front steps. Before he even made the porch, Carol opened the door.

“Pushing it kind of close?” Carol teased. Her eyes were stern, but her lips were quirked.

“Sorry. I slept in. Had trouble falling asleep last night. You?”

“A little, my dad didn’t get home until very late, seems there were seven power outages in various parts of town.”

“Any word on the fires your mom mentioned last night?”

“Yes, my dad said that there was only one on the east side of town, something knocked out the power lines, the downed lines caught part of the Connor’s wheat fields on fire.”

James approached Carol, “Did they put it out?”

“Yes, my dad said it only burned about half an acre before the fire department was able to extinguish it.”

“That’s good,” said James as he reached for Carol’s hand. “Don’t want to be late for church. Let’s get going.”

They arrived at the church a few minutes before service began and headed inside. It was the only church in town and nearly everyone attended. A few people might miss due to work or sickness, but you could usually find everyone there. Carol and James had discussed their plan on the drive over, they were on a mission. Mr. Johnston would surely be at church and they had some questions for him. The service went as usual, singing, communion, and a fire and brimstone sermon, then finished with a prayer. Both Carol and James were distracted during the service and really picked up none of it. They were intent on finding Carol’s science teacher. Near the end of the sermon James spotted him four rows up and eight seats to the left. Upon the conclusion of the final prayer, they made a beeline for Mr. Johnston.

“That was a great game yesterday. You boys are showing promise.”

James was intercepted by Pete, one of the elders. He was an older gentleman with a balding pate of slick black hair. Also a farmer, he owned the property to the south of town.

“You going to play in college?” he asked, rocking heel to toe.

“I’m not sure yet,” James responded looking past him, eyes fixed on Carol’s science teacher.

Carol glanced back at James and saw him waving to keep following the teacher.

“Your father going to sell the farm if you do?” Pete continued.

His operation had the second largest producing farm behind James’ family and he had been trying to purchase it for a few years now.

“I don’t know.” James fidgeted, trying to be polite but wanting to get out of the conversation quickly. “You’ll have to ask him. It was nice talking to you, sir, but I have a few things I need to attend to.”

James broke away from the conversation only to be stopped by Rich. His eyes almost rolled. He knew this was not going to be a fun conversation.

“You guys should have joined us at the movie last night, it was spectacular, and so scary Barbara couldn’t stop holding me all night.”

James feigned interest, “That’s great.” He had played the game long enough to know things always ended badly if you were too short with Rich. “What are your plans for the day?” James quickly added, working on getting the conversation over with as soon as he could. His eyes shifted around watching everyone pack up and leave. He began rubbing his fingers together.

“Oh, not much. I think we might just cruise around town, maybe go check out old man Connor’s field. Heard he had a fire last night. You should come.”

“Sounds fun,” James said with a forced smile. “But I think Carol and I are just going to have lunch, then I

need to get back to my chores.”

“Sucks working on a farm. You should take that college scholarship to play ball and dump this place.”

“You know I can’t do that,” James’ eyebrows dropped into a scowl. “I hope you have fun cruising today. I need to go catch up to Carol.”

James headed toward the large double doors that led to the parking lot. Outside, he saw Mr. Johnston climbing into his car. Carol was standing beside the passenger door and it appeared as if they were finishing their conversation. James wasted no time and hurried over. He arrived as Mr. Johnston pulled away. Carol turned to him and smiled as if she had some news.

“What did he say? What did you ask him? Why hasn’t anyone seen this before?” he spat out question after question, his eyes intense, hands slightly raised leaning toward her.

“Slow down James,” Carol responded, giggling a little. “Just wait and I’ll tell you.”

“Ok, so what did he have to say?” he eased back a little.

“I’ll tell you on the drive, I’d like to go get lunch if that’s ok?”

“Sure,” James answered, pressing his lips together, his eyebrows slanted. He grabbed her hand and they headed to his pickup.

“Let’s go to Sam’s, they’re having a Sunday special today and I want to see what it is, plus our friends will probably be there and I want to show the girls my new

dress,” Carol suggested as she gazed at the scenery out the window of the truck.

“Sure, now what did he say?” James insisted. He didn’t hear a word she said after Sam’s. That was enough to get them started and to change the conversation to the matter at hand.

“Well, he told me that this happens every year, but this year is special because of the tilt of the Earth, that and the position of the sun makes the meteors appear to be closer than usual, he said this tilt hasn’t happened in fifty years and that’s why it seemed so spectacular.” Carol paused to take a breath. “But here’s the best part, tonight it will be even more brilliant than last night, that’s what he told me, although last night was supposed to be the best, but can we go to your rock and watch them again tonight?”

James glanced over at Carol and saw her pleading like a child with her hands clenched together, puppy dog eyes, the works. He knew she was playing around and that there was no way he would say no.

“Nope,” he tilted his chin up and looked away, his face stern. He watched Carol out of the side of his eye. “We have school tomorrow and I need my rest for classes.”

Carol pouted and just sat there with her mouth slightly open. James did his best to hold back a grin, but gave in quickly. “Just kidding, of course we can,” he answered, only to be punched multiple times in the shoulder by Carol’s petite hands.

“You big tease,” she said, playfully punching him

again. He was good at getting responses from her. Maybe he should have taken up acting class.

CHAPTER THREE

They arrived as the night before. As the sun set, they grabbed two blankets and headed for the rock.

"The wall still gives me the creeps," Carol shivered while James helped her up onto the rock.

"Don't worry about it. Once the show starts, you'll forget all about it."

They laid down to enjoy the last of the setting sun behind the colossal wall a couple thousand yards away from them. The orange ball descended, illuminating the sky in a beautiful assortment of pinks, reds and oranges. Carol fidgeted with her hands, trying to ignore the wall.

"This is the furthest west I've been," Carol admitted, turning her head to look at James.

"Well you can't go much further. I've only gone maybe another thousand yards." He pointed off into the distance. "Our field ends there, so for obvious reasons, I've never traveled any further." Keeping his voice even, he rambled a bit more, watching Carol's reactions, in an attempt to soothe her.

Then it began. The meteors cascaded to Earth, just as they had the night before. One fell, then another, and another and soon the sky was filled with them. James and Carol gazed in amazement. They could almost feel the meteors zipping by; they appeared even closer than the night before. A thunderous roar came from overhead and the ground shook. Carol grasped for James and pulled him close. They watched as a meteor barely cleared the wall.

"Did you see that?" Carol gasped as the roar continued above them. Just then, another meteor came hurtling over them. Carol held on tight to James. He tried to be brave, but inside he was scared too. *What was going on?* The meteors kept coming, amazingly missing the wall each time.

"Maybe we should go." Carol's voice was quick and James could see her breathing heavily.

"Where to? They're all around us!" James exclaimed above the noise, holding his hands over his ears.

They had never heard anything like that before, the rumble was low and rattled everything around them. James looked at his pickup truck. The whole thing was shaking and it looked like the bumper was about to pop off. He glanced around to see if it made more sense to stay or go.

"I think you're right. Let's get out of here."

James slid off the rock, spun around and waited for Carol to jump down to him. He caught her with ease and hurriedly set her down.

"Come on," he shouted as he grabbed her hand and dragged her to the truck.

They climbed into the truck in a rush. James attempted to start it, but no luck. Carol watched him, her face pale, lips quivering, eyes welling up.

"Come on, baby," he pleaded with the truck, frantically turning the key in the ignition, it failed to start.

The rumbling seemed to be getting louder as more meteors passed overhead. Carol hysterically looked

around; this was not the beautiful night she had expected.

“Third time’s a charm,” James let slip under his breath, this time pumping the gas.

The truck came alive. He threw it into reverse and began driving backward. After a couple dozen feet, he whipped it around to the right. Carol slid over and was now pressed into his side. She grasped him tightly as the truck spun around 180 degrees. In drive now, James stepped on the gas to accelerate. The little truck gave all it had, kicking dirt all over the place. His tools bounced around the bed then flew out in a trail behind them. He flicked his eyes up to the rearview mirror to see what he only could describe as an explosion. Dirt flew everywhere. It was in the distance and not an immediate threat, but he wasn’t taking any chances. He kept on the accelerator. The sky began to grow dim, but they weren’t sure if the rumbling was still going or if it was just his truck. He slowed down a bit. The sky continued to darken, but the rumbling was almost gone. He stopped the truck to regain his composure. Carol, who had been closing her eyes since the truck accelerated slowly opened them.

Shaking, Carol whispered, “Are you ok?”

“Yeah, I wasn’t expecting anything like that. You?”

James’ hands slipped off the wheel, partly due to sweat and partly because of the withdrawal of adrenaline. He had been working overtime to get them away from the threat and was now depleted.

“I love you, James,” Carol said grabbing him tightly.

He didn't know how to respond, she had never said such a thing to him before. He thought that he loved her, but was concerned that it was the near death experience talking.

"I love you, too," he gently responded, knowing that saying anything else would have crushed her. They sat in the pickup for a few minutes in silence, decompressing. In the distance, they could see the lights of town. James wondered how it had looked from there. *Had they seen the meteors and felt the ground rumbling?* James felt Carol give a slight shudder and saw that she had fallen asleep. The whole event must have completely taken it out of her.

"I'll take you home," he said more to himself than to Carol, knowing she couldn't hear him.

He shifted the truck into gear and inched forward. His mind was racing. *Did Mr. Johnston know this was going to happen? Was he just guessing? Where did he get his information?* Question after question popped into his head.

In no time he pulled up to Carol's house. He caressed her head and whispered, "Wake up sleepy head."

Carol came to very slowly.

"Where am I?" she asked almost instinctively and not quite awake.

"We're at your house. Let me help you up."

He gently pushed her upright then eased out his door. He ran around quickly and opened the passenger door with a loud squeak.

"Here, take my hand," he said offering it to her. She

stumbled along as he led her up to the porch. “Are you going to be alright?”

“Sure, goodnight James, thanks for saving me.”

She gave him a kiss on the cheek then headed inside.

The next morning, James awoke to his alarm clock clanging. He rolled over and shut it off. He had fallen asleep almost precisely when his head hit the pillow. He’d never had excitement like that before, if that’s what you wanted to call it. Football had some adrenaline packed play, and baseball was such a mental game he always slept well, but never like that. He peeled himself off of the sheets, stretched, then headed to do his chores.

After finishing, he arrived in the kitchen to the smell of fresh pancakes and hot syrup.

“Morning, James,” his mother said, still working at the stove. She didn’t even look behind her, somehow she always sensed when he was there. He sometimes felt freaked out by how good she was at it.

He took a seat at the table, “Morning, Mom.”

“Morning, son,” said his father as he sat reading the newspaper at the table, seemingly in his own world.

Trying to act like nothing much had happened, James replied, “Morning, Father. Anything good in the paper today?”

“Nah, just the typical Mayor election scandals and the farmer’s guild complaining about funding.”

“How’s that going by the way?” James queried, attempting to keep any questions off of him. “Pete asked me at church if you were planning on selling.”

James' father forced a laugh, "Selling? To that shyster? I'd rather burn my fields than sell to him. Did he ask if you were going to take that scholarship to college?"

"What are you talking about, Father?" James rebutted as if he had no clue what his father was talking about.

His father folded the paper down to peer over it at James, "This is a small town. Word travels."

James' chin dipped slightly. Slumping in his chair, rubbing the back of his neck, "I didn't want you to worry. I know you need me and can't handle the farm on your own."

"I can hire help if need be. Production's been good the past few years, provided the machines hold up. Don't you worry about us, we'll get by. Make the best decision for you. The farm will always be here, it's a necessity for life, and those things don't just disappear."

James' mom placed a stack of pancakes in front of him.

"Eat up, you need that fuel for your mind," she turned back to the stove. "How many pieces of sausage would you like?"

"Four please," James replied. He felt guilty for not telling them, but also blessed to have parents who seemed to understand his mind. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry for not telling you."

"Don't fret over it, sometimes we hurt the ones we love by trying to protect them. Just remember that in the future. Your mom and I knew that this would be a

possibility when we saw how gifted you were in sports. I thought it would be football, but of course your mother called it. Longer career in baseball too, so that's a good thing."

"I don't know if I'm going to take it," James spoke up. "I haven't accepted it yet."

"Well, you should," his father grabbed his cane and used it to stand up.

"Your youth will depart and, as I said before, this farm will remain. You only get one chance at an opportunity like that. It's the choices we make that guide us along our path. This one's a big one. Don't choose a path for the wrong reasons."

His father walked over to his mom, kissed her on the cheek then headed to the door.

"I'll be messing with those machines if you need me," he said as he walked over the threshold.

James sat there staring at his pancakes. *Why was life so difficult? And to add into the mix, what on Earth happened last night?*

"Eat up, you don't want to be late for school," James' mom insisted.

He finished up and headed to school.

James walked up the steps, still thinking about his decision. It was a fairly large school made of brick and sandstone; it always reminded him of a cathedral, the kind he had read about in books. It was the only school for miles and housed every grade from K through 12. The school was divided into four parts. Every three

grades, students moved to a different section. This was his senior year, then it was full time on the farm or off to college. College for most of the kids was a dream, only one out of every twenty would be selected to attend, and less than that ever got a scholarship. Prior to James, only one other kid in the past 10 years had been offered a scholarship, and he'd turned it down to stay on the farm. Farming was their life. Most of the classes they took revolved around growing crops, changing over the soils, re-fertilizing the ground, and not over-using it. Almost a quarter of the girls would work farms, too. Sometimes more if the boys were graduating in smaller numbers. But right now, James' mind was anywhere but on farming.

"James! What a weekend, how did the rest of Sunday go?"

"Hey, Jason." James was actually glad to see him. He could almost always help when James was struggling. "It was good, kind of weird, but good."

"Nice, that's good. Wait, what? Weird, what do you mean?" Jason's body straightened, realizing what he heard.

"Did you hear or see anything strange last night?" James' eyes darted around at the students passing by as they reached the top.

"There was some rumbling, but it just sounded like thunder."

"Did you see any clouds around?" James asked, one eyebrow raised, awaiting the response.

"No, well I don't think so. It was dark, hard to tell,

especially with the sky glow.”

Jason lived above the Rusty Nail Tavern in the middle of the town. His mother had owned the bar for as long as he could remember. James found it odd that the meteor shower wasn’t noticed in town.

“Has anyone mentioned lights in the sky or any noise other than thunder?”

They opened the doors and headed inside.

“No, can’t say that I’ve heard anyone talking. Why, did you see something?” Jason tilted his head slightly.

James wanted to tell him, but thought it better to keep it to himself. “Not really, I heard the growling of the thunder, but that was about it.”

“Oh, okay. I’ll see you at practice after school,” Jason said as he turned to go to class.

This was their last semester and they had split off into specialties based on aptitude tests they had taken as freshmen. James scored high in mechanics while Jason’s scores favored fertilizer research, so the last couple of months they only saw each other in the morning and after school. James felt they’d been growing apart because of it, but tried his best to keep up the appearance that nothing was wrong.

He grabbed his books then headed down the long corridor to his classroom. He passed through the doors and saw two large automated bailer machines.

“Ready to start the practical application?” his instructor brightened when he saw James enter the room.

Professor MacDunna really pushed James through

the course. Of the three students in the class, James was the best. Tim Connor and Rex Lutz were the other two. James always found it funny that only the direct descendants of the farmers made it into the mechanics course. He nodded back at Professor MacDunna. "Sure."

But he knew he would only be going through the motions that day; his mind was somewhere else. The day passed slowly. "James, did you hear what I just said?" was heard from the professor more than once as he noticed James wasn't paying attention. Soon enough, the bell rang.

"Don't forget to tell your fathers about the new update coming out next month," the professor insisted as the three packed up their books to leave class.

James just nodded and headed out the door. He made his way back down the hallway and, in the distance, could see Carol smiling, arms crossed against the books over her chest. She appeared to be no worse for wear and was sporting cute pig tails.

James spun one of the curls around his finger, "I like your hair."

"Thanks," she beamed.

"You seem to be doing well in light of last night's events."

"Events?" she frowned.

James cocked his head slightly, stopping with raised eyebrows.

"What do you remember about last night?"

"It was great, you sure know how to show a girl a good

time.”

“Be more specific.”

“What’s wrong, you don’t remember, you took me to your wheat field, we headed out to the large rock and watched the meteor shower.”

“And?”

“And it was amazing.”

Shaking his head from side to side, he insisted, “What happened next?”

“You took me home, James it was a lovely time, I really enjoyed it.” She took his hand in hers. “Everybody’s going to the diner, we should get going.”

“But, I have baseball practice,” he retorted.

“Didn’t Jason tell you, your coach gave you the day off, he had some things he needed to attend to.”

James was confused, but it wasn’t the first time they had a day off and frankly his mind wouldn’t have been on the game anyway.

“Sure, let’s go.”

They began walking toward the front of the school.

“So, nothing scared you last night?” he continued.

“Aside from you saying you loved me, no it was fun, I’m hoping there will be a meteor shower like that again someday soon.”

James felt the opposite. *He scared her by saying he loved her? She had said it first. Plus, being chased by meteors! How could she forget that? He hoped to never be in a crazy situation with meteor explosions ever again. What was going on?*

CHAPTER FOUR

They arrived at the diner and James helped Carol out of the truck. She tucked her hand around the crook of his elbow as they headed for the door. Will stood in his usual spot outside. He tossed a used butt on the ground then reached for another out of the small box he held.

He held one out toward James, "Cigarette?"

"No thanks Mr. Will," James replied, holding his hand up to wave off the offer as he continued toward the diner.

"Look in your field," Will whispered as James walked by.

He turned to see Will give him a wink, but James kept walking.

"There they are. What took you guys so long?" they heard come from their typical booths. Rich was being his loudmouth self.

"James' class let out late," Carol replied as they walked toward their seats.

"Sure it did," Rich jabbed. He seemed even more vocal than usual.

James was bursting inside to ask countless questions, but retained his composure.

"What did you guys do this weekend?" he asked.

"You know most of it. You were with us, except in the evenings," Rich shot back, sliding his arm around Barbara.

"So how was last night?" he rephrased.

Rich continued talking as if there wasn't anyone else

in the room, “Good. Didn’t do much, actually came back here and got late night burgers. How about you guys? Did you enjoy the lights in the sky?”

“You saw them?” James perked up.

“No. Carol said you guys went out to some field and watched some balls of light flying around.”

“They were meteors and they weren’t just flying around, they were streaking across the sky, it was beautiful,” Carol retorted.

“Whatever, I’m sure it was quite amazing, but the burgers were, too.” Rich began laughing at himself, and the others did, too. Though they were mainly laughing at him, not with him, but he didn’t see the difference.

“Did you guys hear any loud noises?” asked James.

“Just the sirens on Saturday night I think, when the fire broke out and the power outages started,” Jason chimed in.

James, who was leaning forward this whole time as if in a secret conversation, slumped back into his seat. *Had he dreamed the whole thing? He had never done drugs, so he didn’t think that was an option.*

Rich snickered, “What’s the matter, were you expecting a Wild West story?”

James decided to play it cool even though he wanted to tell them what actually happened, or what he thought had happened.

“No. I just heard a bunch of thunder last night and was wondering if you guys heard it, too.”

They all nodded their heads in agreement. James

wanted to say more, but left it at that. The waitress walked over and took their orders and the conversation turned to normal things; how hard the math test had been and what they were doing the next weekend. All the while, James couldn't get the scenario out of his head; it was such a crazy experience. *How could Carol have forgotten about the life threatening episode they had endured together?*

After a couple of hours of small talk, they trickled out of the diner. Carol and James were the last ones left.

"What's on your mind?" she asked, knowing his guard was down. She always did that to him.

He stared down at the table mentally connecting the scars in the Formica to create shapes.

"Lots of things," he muttered, slipping his hands into his pockets, trying to figure out how to respond.

"Like what?"

He tried to deflect. "Like taking the scholarship. My parents somehow found out about it."

"It's a small town, you know how people talk, there's always some bit of gossip going around."

"Thanks," he said flatly, looking over to see her smirking as if she knew what his father had said. "I know that it's a small town, but I only told a couple of my closest friends."

"You mean Jason, who gossips more than any girl I know."

"You've got a point, but I didn't think it would get back to them." He turned to stare out the window. "I

just owed them more.”

“You have given them everything, you work so hard fixing those machines, your father couldn’t run the farm without you.”

“I know that, and that’s why I don’t think I can take the scholarship.”

“James,” Carol began. “You know they would do anything for you, and want to see you happy, that’s what all parents want for their children.”

“You sound like a wise monk,” he responded. “You’re an old soul, and that’s part of what makes you so amazing.”

“I don’t know about old, well I just read a lot, and I did learn a thing or two in my psychology classes, you should take the scholarship, it’s what’s best for you, you know how scarce college is, let alone a scholarship.”

“I know. Sometimes I wish the decision could be made for me.”

“Let’s stay for a milkshake, that will cheer you up, chocolate?”

“Sure. Chocolate,” James said with a half-smile.

The next morning was the same. James woke up, did his chores then headed in for breakfast. His mind was still bouncing all over the place when suddenly, “look in your field” popped into his head. *What was Mr. Will talking about?* He scouted the fields almost every day. But the image of the wink burned in his mind. He normally ran a sweep of the fields on Saturday morning, but he couldn’t wait until then, so he decided to skip

school and check them today. He headed over to his truck and then remembered the race to escape the meteors. His tools had bounced out of the truck. He hadn't thought of searching yesterday as his head was spinning. He approached the truck and peeked into the rusty bed, empty. His tools were indeed missing.

If his scouting trip did nothing more than find his tools it would be a win. He needed those tools for repairing the machines and prepping them for the harvest. They were custom made, not easily replaced and not cheap. He headed out, taking his time. He wanted it to take all day; it would give him time to think as he had plenty going through his mind. James began on the northern side of their land, and worked his way in a zigzag pattern south, along paths they had cut for that purpose. Everything appeared as it should. He continued his pattern and reached the western edge of the field.

There it was. The wall. It had been some time since he had gone past the edge of their fields to the west. He forgot how imposing it was. It rose straight up from the ground and he guessed it was about 400 feet tall. It seemed to be made of a dark gray, almost black, metal with a matte texture on it. From this distance, the wall appeared smooth, but he had seen it through binoculars when he was younger and noticed it had grooves carved in a multitude of square and rectangular patterns. He shut off his truck and just stared at it, mesmerized.

The wall had been there longer than anyone who was alive knew, but then again, he imagined that if a person

lived past 70 they were lucky. The history books said it was built two hundred years ago. He had learned about it as a child, the time when most people are very inquisitive. Enough details were given to satisfy most children's curiosity, but they all eventually learned that it didn't help to question anything about the wall. As they grew, there were better things to do. His recent experiences made him begin to question things again. *What was on the other side of the wall?*

Sure, he knew the book answers. Amongst other things, it was said to have a defensive system should anyone ever get too close. He had never seen or heard of anyone attempting it, they were all too busy living their lives, but he remembered the fear in Carol's eyes when she realized how close they were to it that night on the rock. He came back to himself and realized he needed to continue his scouting.

James started the truck again and headed down the path. The trek continued. On the horizon, he could see the rock where they watched the meteor shower the past weekend. He initially wanted to head straight there, but composed himself and continued the pattern he had set up. In no time, he found himself at the rock. The blankets lay strewn on the ground. He stopped the truck and got out to pick them up. After placing them back behind the seats, he continued on foot toward the area where he thought he had parked the truck that night. His head swiveled from side to side, searching for any indication he'd made a hasty retreat.

Then he found it. Two large gouges in the ground where his tires would have dug in during their frenzied exit. He gazed east toward town and saw the path he took to exit the field and began to follow it. He started walking at first, then jogging and eventually running. Soon enough, he came upon his tools. They were all over the place and some of them would be too heavy to carry back to the truck. He piled them up and headed back to the truck. His mind raced. He was relieved that his memories of the event were correct, but in the same moment confused as to why Carol didn't remember. *Maybe her mind blocked it out due to the intensity of the chaos?*

He made it back to the truck quickly and headed for the tools. As he followed the path, he instinctively looked in his rear view mirror.

"The explosion," he said out loud without even realizing it.

He hurried to the tools, tossed them into the pickup then turned the truck in the direction of his best guess toward the impact area. He didn't see any of the meteors actually hit the ground, but they sure were coming close. He passed the rock and continued west toward the wall. His heart worked overtime as his anticipation grew. James continued on, but then slowed down; he was getting close to the edge of their field and still hadn't found anything yet. The truck slowed to a roll. The wall seemed larger than he remembered it. He came to a stop at the edge of their field. He looked northwest,

past the fields, toward the wall and saw nothing but wild grass standing about four inches tall. He then focused his attention to the southwest and finally spotted it; a small mound of disturbed earth showed above the grass. He wished he had those binoculars he'd had as a kid, but he'd given them away for some forgotten reason.

He hopped out of his truck and climbed into the bed. The view was better, but not quite good enough. He jumped up on the top of the cab then cupped his hand over his eyes and squinted. Sure enough, there was fresh dirt sitting on top of the grass probably a hundred yards past the field's edge. He really wished he had those binoculars. James sat down on the cab and just stared off into the distance at the wall. *Were the stories true? Would you be switched off if you approached it, or worse, killed?* His mind spun. He was wild with curiosity, but also trying to be cautious. *Curiosity killed the cat.* But the draw to see what was implanted in the ground was growing stronger inside him. Finally, he hopped off the truck.

I'll just take it slow. Our field technically goes another 50 yards on the map. It was true. His great, great, granddad had planted the fields 50 yards away from the actual plot line for fear of the wall. He hoped the map was correct. The impact zone looked to be another 25 yards or so. Still, he could get a closer look, hopefully come away fulfilled and then head back home. He began walking toward the fresh dirt, staring up at the ever more imposing wall. At this point, even with the naked eye he began to notice the grooves he remembered as a child.

He continued, warily, until he reached the boundary of his fields. He had guessed about right, the fresh dirt was now a mere 25 yards outside of the plot line.

James stood there, searching for any indication of what might resemble a meteor. He glanced back at his truck. *Maybe I can drive it over here and get a bird's eye view.* He quickly squashed that idea, deciding the risk was too great. He gazed up at the wall. *Wow, was it big from this vantage point.* James stared for a moment as he rubbed his chin, thinking. His eyes then shifted to the ground, his interest peaked. He had to see if there was really something there. He inched one foot forward past the line then carefully brought the other foot in front of it. *Two steps in. He wasn't switched off, so far so good.* He continued three steps, then four. His confidence grew as he moved forward. Ten steps and he was almost there. He could see a small crater about the size of half a basketball court. The earth had been pushed out on both sides, but the majority of it was to the west. The shower they had watched came from the east so this must have been the impact of one of the meteors. Initially, he thought maybe something had exploded, a power line perhaps. No one knew what was beyond the field. He looked into the hole and did a double-take. His head inched closer as he squinted and saw metal. Shiny metal, like chrome.