

All Hail Breaks Loose

The steady drumming noise became louder, especially over the patio. The rocks that bounced off the roof onto the front lawn now looked to be about four or five inches wide. They had grown steadily in size over the past few hours. This was nothing like the simple dust storm we had been told to expect. The color of the falling debris changed from ash white to coal black.

After weeks of dust that came and went, the rocks that began to fall that night were at first the size of pebbles. Before they showed up we could still get out on occasion, although most people were in bunker mode by then. We kept in touch with our neighbors, making sure they were OK. Most were like us and had stored a year's supply of food in spite of the government order forbidding hoarding.

Something changed with those pebbles. Their impact was greater than the annoying dust. They hit the earth like hail in a summer thunderstorm. From the day they started we could no longer leave the house. They caused great damage as they hit, breaking windshields and filling up every open space, including the uncovered reservoirs. The water came out of the tap rust colored and stank. We had to start using our bottled water from the garage. Dad had several 50 gallon drums that he refilled every spring.

The electricity finally failed yesterday. We had been expecting it. Dad had to fire up the smaller generator to keep the freezer and fridge food cold. He had enough propane and fuel to make it last at least a few weeks. He had hid it from the government inspectors when they came by earlier in the month. They frowned at our food storage and were confiscating fuel from some of our neighbors who were foolish enough to not hide it. They said it was a sign of terrorism.

The first time they came they made dad open the weapons safe. Luckily all he had in there at the time was an old shotgun and a few shells. We helped dad build a closet with a hidden back wall and moved the heavy gun safe behind it. I wouldn't say dad was a nut when it came to collecting weapons, but with what was in there now we could hold off a small army for several days. The hardest part was getting enough ammo. It was crazy to think our own government was doing everything in their power to keep it off the market, but we waited and found good deals.

"Do you think we're going to need that?" I said to dad the last time we checked it just before the power failure. I had read stories on the Internet of people who believed the first thing to go in an emergency would be law and order. They pointed out that residents from certain parts of the city had already bragged they had their targets in mind. We lived in an area that was on their list. Why? We were just a regular middle-class neighborhood. We weren't rich.

"Bryce, you know your mother hates guns, but I can't think of any other way to keep the gangs from trying to take what they want." He opened the safe and looked over the collection of shotguns, rifles and handguns. The upper shelves were filled with boxes of ammunition.

"I only wish we had taken Abby to the range with us a few more times. You and Jason can handle yourselves, but if we get separated..." His voice trailed off. I can't imagine what he was thinking. Why would we not stick together?

Even with the power out, we had TV, phone and Internet. We were in a neighborhood where fiber had been run a few years earlier. The equipment hooked into a UPS unit and dad had plugged that into one of the generators. The fiber was all underground. The phone companies and Internet Providers still had power. Their buildings had been designed to keep things running even in the event of an earthquake. I imagined they were running on their big diesel generators now and wondered how much longer they would last.

The local news channels had gone off the air, the broadcasters and staff had probably gone home to be with their families. But the feed from some of the national sites was still up. We watched footage of the falling hail that looked similar to what we were seeing. It seemed to come in sheets, big sheets that lasted for hours then died down. One of the strangest videos I saw was from a station in Chicago that showed fire running in the streets when the hail got especially strong. I don't know why they called it hail. Those were rocks, which could only be meteorites.

The message boards on the forums were filled with theories about what was happening. One said that the fire came from raw petroleum that fell from the sky with the meteorites. It caught fire from the friction of falling through the atmosphere. Man, I sure hoped that was an isolated event but something told me it was probably happening wherever the hail was heaviest. The scientists they interviewed said not to worry, that there must be some other explanation. Why everyone knows that fire doesn't fall from the sky. It must be from the burst gas pipelines.

The din that night was terrifying. Abby and mom huddled under the big oak table in the dining room and cried. They placed pillows all around them to try to cut down on the noise but nothing could drown it out. The meteorites rained down on our neighborhood like artillery shells. Several of them made simultaneous direct hits on our large metal garden shed. It exploded in a cacophony of sounds of twisted metal and splintering wood. We watched the lawnmower jump up into the air and land on its side, the gas now leaking out all over the place.

Dad kept assuring us that the roof could handle the battering it was taking but I wasn't so sure. We had just replaced it a year or two ago and it was made of composite material so it was stronger than wood, but it wasn't designed to absorb twenty pound chunks of falling rock every few feet apart. As the night wore on, the intensity and strength of the rocks increased. First, our

porch roof splintered and shredded. Our upstairs bathroom opened to the sky when pieces of rock bent the pipes sticking out the roof first one way and then the other. And then, silence.

It was as if someone had turned off a switch. We could hear it still hitting the neighbors, then that stopped. We tracked the progress of silence as it moved down the street and across the valley. Dad and I looked out where the front window used to be at all the fires as far as the eye could see. It seems as though every third or fourth house had caught fire, either from the falling petroleum or from broken gas lines. Our neighbor's house down on the corner was already gone – smoldering embers was all that remained. Dad rushed out and ran toward the house. So did several other neighbors. I followed him, wading through the mounds of rocks and pebbles.

Dad called the names of our neighbors but there was no response. I hope they got out in time and got somewhere to safety. Mr. Johnson next door came panting up to where we stood, still wondering about the fate of Robert and Loraine who lived on the corner. They were an older couple whose kids lived in California and Idaho. At one time Robert had been the leader of our local church congregation. Now he was gone, or at least his house was.

“Don't see how they could have survived,” Mr. Johnson said. “The sheet of fire that fell on their house came with a rushing wind pushing it down like a blowtorch. I saw them open the front door but the rocks beat him to a bloody pulp.” Dad ran up to the front porch but quickly turned around, his hand covering his mouth. Mr Johnson continued, “He managed to crawl in to Loraine but I think they didn't get any farther than the entryway.”

Dad was angry. I could see it in his eyes. “Bryce, come with me. I need you and Jason to go find your uncle David. See if he's safe and bring him here to be with us.”

“But Dad,” I said, “David is in Colorado, or Washington or somewhere. Do you know where he is?” My uncle was a famous scientist who was the first to announce the coming planet.

He kept saying it was only a comet but as it got closer we could see how big it really was. I wonder why he didn't tell us the truth at the beginning. We hadn't heard from him in a few days.

"Your uncle is in Salt Lake today, or at least he was last night." You're going to have a hard time getting to him with the roads in the shape they are, so take plenty of water and food with you." I couldn't believe what dad was saying. "David's life may be in danger. A lot of people are going to blame him for not giving us better warning. He needs his family right now. Nobody will think to look for him down here."

"How did he get to Salt Lake?"

"It's a long story. He met someone who convinced him to come clean with what he knew but it was too late. His friend is from Salt Lake and took him there to meet some men who know a lot more about what is going on than he does. Let's just say David was getting an education."

"What if the meteorites start up again?"

"I think the worst is past. There may be a few scattered pockets left. You may have to duck under a bridge or an awning somewhere to protect the windshield but you should be OK." Dad put his hand on my shoulder, "I would go but need to stay with your mother and sister. Take a shotgun and a pistol for each of you. Will you go get your uncle for us?"

"Sure dad. Where will he be?" We walked back into our own house now.

"He's staying at a house up in the avenues. I'll get you the address. It's going to be hard to see with all the smoke and ash and we may be in for some earthquakes soon, so the quicker you can get him down here the better. Thanks son."

Jason and I backed the truck out of the garage and began the short trip to the avenues. In normal conditions we probably could have been there and back in less than an hour, but already

we were having to make serious detours around rock piles, massive holes in the road and burned out cars. The freeway was impossible so it was going to be side streets all the way, through some neighborhoods on the East side that I would not ordinarily go through in broad daylight. We had to travel with the headlights and the off-road light bars on. The smoke was thick everywhere.

We had been twisting and turning on side streets for nearly two hours, sometimes having to drive on people's lawns or through backyards when I was finally able to pull onto South Temple and turn west. The going got a little easier. There were actually ambulances and police cars on this street, most of them going the opposite way we were. In the directions dad gave me, I was supposed to turn north on the street just before the big church office building only the road was blocked. The big Eagle Gate had fallen to the ground. We got out to look for a way around.

Just at that moment, the ground gave way, or so it seemed. The earth began to tremble and shake from side to side. I tried to grab Jason but we both fell to the ground. The shaking was violent, alternating from side to side and then up and down. But the strange thing was the water which started gushing up out of the ground. I knew we were near city creek and that they had diverted it underground here but the water was coming up everywhere as far as we could see.

The heavy Eagle Gate, already on the ground was literally bouncing up into the air a few feet, staying there a moment and then the ground rushed up to meet it, bouncing it again, while the ground receded until the next bounce. It looked for a while like the heavy bronze gate was the only thing stable as everything around us jumped or swayed from side to side. The streets all now had major cracks in them, with water, mud and sand shooting up into the sky. The water came so fast that looking south, we began to see cars, furniture and parts of homes being swept down the street. The earth was rolling now but the water continued to shoot six feet skyward.

Our only hope for safety was to crawl northward up the avenues, which we did for the next hour while the earthquake subsided into irregular aftershocks, some jolting, some rolling. We finally made it to the subdivision where Uncle David was supposed to be and were surprised to see him on the street in front of the house which was our destination as if waiting for us.

He stood perfectly still, hands on hips, looking at us crawling up out of the mud, with a bemused look on his face. We struggled to our feet and held out our hands as if to shake his. No handshake from David. He embraced us both and slapped our backs in an obvious gesture of happiness to see us. “What took you so long? Your dad said you would be here hours ago.”

We looked at each other and then back at David. “Uh...we ran into a little trouble with the roads. I’m not sure if the truck is still there but if you’re ready, we’ll take you to it.”

David took each of us in one arm and began the walk down the avenue as if he knew exactly where the truck was parked. Indeed, it seems we were there in no time. Nobody had touched it and it looked to be still in perfectly good running order. We got in, started it up and began our trip back home. Jason and I looked at each other wondering at the turn of events, full of questions and anxious to hear what David had to say.

“Dad said you were in Washington a few days ago but now you’re here, “I said “What’s going on?” We weren’t that close to our uncle, only seeing him once or twice a year. We knew he was a scientist and travelled a lot for his work, but he rarely came to Salt Lake. We usually saw him when we went to visit him in Colorado, once in the summer and once in the winter.

“Well, you probably wouldn’t believe it, and it’s too long a story so I’ll save most of it for when we get to your home. In the meantime, just let me say one thing.” David looked at both of us with a mischievous grin on his face. “You haven’t seen anything yet. Just wait until that planet gets a little closer. You’re going to see things that will make your hair stand on end.”