

## The Torn Sky

Like the others who have survived this long, I remember where I was the day the world ended. It happened so suddenly, and my world – the one with cars, and phones, and funny cat videos – it all turned to ash.

I was in Mrs. McMurtry's Physical Science class, not really listening as she reviewed the periodic table for our test the next day. I was far more interested in Clair, my desk partner and the girl my eighth-grade self was totally in love with. Every time Mrs. McMurtry turned to make another note on the board, Clair would lean over and whisper three words. I had to figure out what she was trying to say three words at a time without laughing, and without getting caught. It was our little game.

I had just leaned over as Clair cupped her hand to the side of my head, waiting for the soft caress of her breath on my ear, when the lights in the classroom blinked out. The windows shattered spraying me and my classmates with tiny shards of glass. A deafening roar shook the room, and I was suddenly thrown to the floor.

It took several moments for me to recover my bearings. My ears were ringing, and I could feel little pinpricks of pain on my hands and face. I remember looking up at the shimmering motes floating in the air, like sugar dust that swirls above a cotton candy machine and refracts the colors of a thousand twinkling carnival lights. Slowly the ringing gave way to the panicked screams of hundreds of pubescent voices, rolling over me in a wave.

As I picked myself up off the floor, everything seemed to move in slow motion. There were other students who had fallen like me. A few lay unmoving. Most were pushing and struggling against each other to get out of the classroom. A cacophony echoed into the room from the hallway outside the door. When I turned to look out the now glassless windows, I felt the panic of my peers rise in my own chest.

It was late afternoon, almost time for the sixth-period bell. The sun was bright in a cloudless sky. Below the sun, stretching across the brilliant, robins-egg blue, was a jagged, gaping rent that disappeared below the horizon. Its ragged edges made the sky look like a torn piece of cloth with tendrils of thread reaching toward each other as if it could become whole again, if only the separated pieces could touch.

A blackness within the gaping maw seemed to roil and churn. I took a step back, not quite able to grasp what I was seeing, and I tripped over something lying on the floor behind me.

It was a pair of yellow and green Asics running shoes. Clair's shoes. I had tripped over her legs. She lay there, unmoving, a small pool of blood on the floor beside her head. I forgot about the tear in the sky and rolled her onto her back.

"Clair!" I shouted, as I used my sleeve to wipe the blood from a gash in her forehead. "Clair! You have to wake up. Something bad is happening. C'mon! Clair. Please."

When I shook her by the shoulders, she flopped like one the rag dolls in my sister's collection. I looked around for something, or someone who could help. Maybe Mrs. McMurtry. I started to get up but slipped on a mixture of Clair's blood and the sparkling glass that now coated the science room.

I tried to think, tried to reason what I could do as I, once more, attempted to rise. My mind raced and I could feel my heart pounding as though it would jump right out of my chest.

The ground shook knocking me to the floor once again and a sound like a thousand train horns made me cover my ears and scream in agony. A thundering boom rolled over the building and the walls fell, burying me in darkness.