

Tuesday night, July 10, 1984
Ruth Duck going away party, her house, Milwaukee

It was pouring down rain. Great bolts of lightning, thick and jagged, were searing the sky all around us as we drove to her house. They struck within blocks of our car, silently plunging to the earth.

As we dried off in the house, we heard the sirens go off: tornados had been sighted, get down to the basement. That we did, for one hour, eating our dinner.

When the all-clear was announced on the radio and tv, we headed back upstairs. To the east the sky was purple-black, and to the west, an eerie yellow-green, with a hazy sun poking beneath darker clouds. The sun reflected off the street, the cars below, offering a smoky yellow glow to all within its reach. We spotted a rainbow in the purple-black; it dripped rain while the sun shone.

We decided to take a better look at the rainbow, so we went outside. It was a perfect bow, and as we watched, another appeared directly above the first. The rainbow stretched from southeast to northeast, the direction the storm itself was taking. It shone against the purple sky, soft and colored, not stark but blended into the clouds.

Suddenly off the the north crackled seven or eight strands of lightning, all exploding in a bright center, like nerves to its ganglion. And then another bony hand of lightning stretched in front of us, directly beneath the rainbow.

Now I have seen lightning come vertically to the earth; I have seen it flash horizontally across the sky; I have seen it brighten the sky in great sheets; but I have never, ever seen lightning come straight at me. For that instant it came, neither vertical, nor horizontal, but like a three-D movie, straight for me---I could feel the ~~hair~~ soft hairs on my arms and neck tingle as it seemed to be absorbed by the electric lines directly above and in front of me.

This show was spectacular. I felt like I felt when I saw the sun setting over the pyramids in Egypt in February: filled with happy awe and wonder.

In front was the lightning show beneath the double rainbow

all against the purple-black sky. And behind us was the changing western sky, brilliant yellow, beneath the tumbling clouds. Walking for a better look, I saw huge rounded clouds, like great balls of cotton dipped from the sky into yellow-gold, twenty or thirty of them all bunched together sharing the same nectar
absorbing the same golden nectar.

The light bounced off the clouds and bathed the buildings in the same golden hue; beneath the dark purple lay golden-bricked homes, golden-green lawns, golden-brown garage doors.

Every time I turned to look for lightning, and then would turn west, the clouds would have reformed. Could I watch them do this, I thought? And then decided better, and to wait for each new scene rather than see the artist blend the materials.

The show took on a new scope when the southern sky began to deepen and fill with rain. The west was still filled with clouds carrying golden setting sun; the east was still blazing with lightning, purple black, but the south began to eat the rainbow until only 1/4 of it remained, as the southern sky moved in to open a new front in the heavenly battle.

Moving indoors, I listened to the group sing their songs and play their guitars. I danced with Brianna,. But every so often I would look to see how the west was doing, to be treated to layers of clouds, now in thick lines, bearing grays and golds and silvers and browns. And then there was the sandwich, sunlight thin-sliced between thick slices of dark clouds.

It was a heavenly battle: the light and gold of the west spoke its position of serenity, quiet, and peace. The southern clouds, massed in black-purple and unleashing its jagged blue lasers of lightning, bellowed its message that blowing and driving tempests were drawing near.

Were these two warring factions as separate as it seemed? Actually, no. Because the western forces had sent their messenger rainbow into the southern sky, a gesture of peace, a bow without an arrow. And the southern forces had assembled some large dark clouds in the west, clouds which while potentially dangerous, carried the mellow

golden garments of the western sky.

It is dark now. The sky is now unified, and it is pouring down rain. The fierce clouds have gone, the lasers have moved on, and the sun works in other lands. There is only the gentle sound of falling rain, drenching a dry earth, bringing life to the plants and the trees.

The field shall be littered in the morning with the losses of the night's battle: leaves torn from their branches, branches split from the trunks, great puddles of water covering plants in sunken land.

But it will be the sky that I will remember. At once, simultaneously bathed in golden light, crackling-blue lightning breaking the black sky, and a rainbow, linking the diametrically opposed forces in a bridge of reminder: that where there is fear and trembling, there can also be hope and peace; that the forces of chaos may be transformed one small section at a time, until it is permeated by a band of color that softens the darkness and cries joyously its message. While that will pass shortly, its gradual fading allows the human heart to memorize its form, its color, its position, and finally its message: that light shines in darkness, with the promise of redemption in the days to come.