Dear

This little rock is a traveler of worlds, a visitor from outer space, now at home on the Earth. Feel the stone’s heft in your hand. Examine its surface contours, its sheen and luster. Does it feel cold? From what black depths of space did it come? Can you imagine how red-hot it burned on its descent through the atmosphere?

Factoid: What’s the difference between a meteor and a meteorite?

Meteors are shooting stars, particles of dust and cometary debris that burn up as they enter the atmosphere. Meteors were largely regarded as atmospheric in origin until the spectacular Leonid meteor storm of 1833 (pictured, right, as seen from Niagara Falls).

Meteorites are larger pieces that do not burn up completely as they descend through the atmosphere, but survive impact with the Earth. They may originate from cometary debris, but more often derive from asteroids or even from Mars or the Moon.

There was a time when scientists disbelieved that stones could fall from heaven. Indeed, one may ask: “How do I know that this stone is from the stars?” Wikipedia explains: “Throughout history, many first and second-hand reports of meteorites falling on and killing both humans and other animals abound, but none have been well documented. The first known modern case of a human hit by a space rock occurred on 30 November 1954 in Sylacauga, Alabama. There a 4 kg stone chondrite crashed through a roof and hit Ann Hodges in her living room after it bounced off her radio. She was badly bruised.”


**BRAVADO**

Have I not walked without an upward look
Of caution under stars that very well
Might not have missed me when they shot and fell?
It was a risk I had to take—and took.

You now hold in your hand one example of the heavens falling to Earth. Your meteorite fell during the daylight, with many eyewitnesses, on February 12, 1947, in the Sikhote-Alin Mountains near Primorye, Russia. It is one fragment from a massive fall estimated at 900,000 kg or 1,000 tons. The fall was commemorated in a Russian stamp in 1957. The fragments consist of 93% Fe, 5.9% Ni, 0.42% Co, 0.46% P, and 0.28 S, and are known as “stony-iron” meteorites.

Eye-witness accounts are often difficult to substantiate, and those inclined to doubt even the possibility of such events will not be persuaded by credible testimony regarding one particular instance. The dramatic Meteor Crater in Arizona was explained as originating from a subsurface gas explosion until Daniel Barringer defended the meteorite impact hypothesis in 1906. Similarly, when the asteroid-impact theory was proposed in 1980 to explain the extinction of dinosaurs, it was roundly scorned by scientists and even rejected by an editorial in the *New York Times* as no better than astrology!

In any case, most meteorites go undetected, disguised as ordinary stones....
C.S. Lewis, Poems (New York, 1964)

THE METEORITE

Among the hills a meteorite
Lies huge; and moss has overgrown,
And wind and rain with touches light
Made soft, the contours of the stone.

Thus easily can Earth digest
A cinder of sidereal fire,
And make the translunary guest
Thus native to an English shire.

Nor is it strange these wanderers
Find in her lap their fitting place,
For every particle that’s hers
Came at the first from outer space.

All that is Earth has once been sky;
Down from the Sun of old she came,
Or from some star that travelled by
Too close to his entangling flame.

Hence, if belated drops yet fall
From heaven, on these her plastic power
Still works as once it worked on all
The glad rush of the golden shower.


A STAR IN A STONE-BOAT

Never tell me that not one star of all
That slip from heaven at night and softly fall
Has been picked up with stones to build a wall.

Some laborer found one faded and stone cold,
And saving that its weight suggested gold,
And tugged it from his first too certain hold,
He noticed nothing in it to remark.

He was not used to handling stars thrown dark
And lifeless from an interrupted arc.
He did not recognize in that smooth coal
The one thing palpable beside the soul
To penetrate the air in which we roll....

Lewis and Frost acknowledge that most meteorites appear rather ordinary, going unrecognized for what they truly are. But on a larger scale, they also intimate that the meteorite is a pointer to something more. Lewis suggests that the entire Earth herself is of heavenly origin, created in a “glad rush of the golden shower.” And what is true of the meteorite and the Earth is also true of you.

We are stardust, we are golden,
We are caught in the devil's bargain,
And we got to get ourselves back to the garden.

Well, I came upon a child of God,
He was walking along the road.
And I asked him, Tell me, where are you going?
This he told me

We are stardust, we are golden,
We are billion year old carbon,
And we got to get ourselves back to the garden.

Well, then can I roam beside you?
I have come to lose the smog,
And I feel myself a cog in somethin' turning.
And maybe it's the time of year,
Yes and maybe it's the time of man.
And I don't know who I am,
But life is for learning.

We are stardust, we are golden,
We are billion year old carbon,
And we got to get ourselves back to the garden.

By the time we got to Woodstock,
We were half a million strong.
And everywhere was a song and a celebration.
And I dreamed I saw the bomber death planes.
Riding shotgun in the sky,
Turning into butterflies
Above our nation.

George MacDonald, “Baby” (1893)

When you feel ordinary and find it hard to believe who you truly are, hold this meteorite in your hand. It is a piece of the heavens, a fellow-traveler like you. As astronomers tell us, you are “star dust,” molded from the elements of former suns. According to the book of Genesis, you are made in the image of God, of more noble origin than any meteorite from outer space.

Where did you come from, baby dear?
Out of the everywhere into here.

Where did you get those eyes so blue?
Out of the sky as I came through.

What makes the light in them sparkle and spin?
Some of the starry twinkles left in.

Where did you get that little tear?
I found it waiting when I got here.

What makes your forehead so smooth and high?
A soft hand stroked it as I went by.

What makes your cheek like a warm white rose?
I saw something better than any one knows.
Whence that three-cornered smile of bliss?
Three angels gave me at once a kiss.

Where did you get this pearly ear?
God spoke, and it came out to hear.

Where did you get those arms and hands?
Love made itself into bonds and bands.

Feet, whence did you come, you darling things?
From the same box as the cherubs' wings.

How did they all just come to be you?
God thought about me, and so I grew.

But how did you come to us, you dear?
God thought about you, and so I am here.

In this holy season of Christmas we celebrate one who, like a divine meteorite, came to walk largely unrecognized on Earth, despite originating from a realm higher than the highest heaven....

Luci Shaw, *Listen to the Green* (Wheaton, 1971)

MARY'S SONG

Blue homespun and the bend of my breast
keep warm this small hot naked star
fallen to my arms. (Rest... you who have had so far to come.) Now nearness satisfies the body of God sweetly. Quiet he lies whose vigor hurled a universe. He sleeps whose eyelids have not closed before.

His breath (so slight it seems no breath at all) once ruffled the dark deeps to sprout a world.
Charmed by dove's voices, the whisper of straw, he dreams, hearing no music from his other spheres.
Breath, mouth, ears, eyes he is curtailed who overflowed all skies, all years.
Older than eternity, now he is new. Now native to earth as I am, nailed to my poor planet, caught that I might be free, blind in my womb to know my darkness ended, brought to this birth for me to be new-born, and for him to see me mended I must see him torn.

Richard Crashaw (1612-1649),
“The Nativity of Our Lord”

Welcome, all wonders in one sight!
Eternity shut in a span,
Summer in winter, day in night,
Heaven in earth, and God in man!
Great little One, whose all-embracing birth Lifts earth to Heaven, stoops Heav’n to earth.

I hope this little rock from space will be an inspiration as you contemplate the mysteries of our human existence, and most especially the joyous message of Christmas.

PEACE, Kerry and Candace Magruder and family
Advent 2009