

Barbara drank more of her water. “So, explain to me, darl, how this is going to work.”

“We’ll hold up the sheet and Charles will take photos.”

“You’re assuming he’ll see it, that it won’t be below the earth’s curve.”

“Yes.”

They were quiet for a minute while Marjory scratched a bite on her arm.

“I’m no scientist,” Barbara said, “but I know there’s something called refraction. Light can bend. Something about differences in temperatures. Mirages. Things far away can look higher or lower than they are.”

Marjory had begun to write her article in her head. The photo would speak for itself, of course. But she would write of their witness: *Mrs. Barbara Gunst of Australia, a dental expert, accompanied her hosts in the experiment and helped hold the sheet that was seen from a distance of three miles. Although previously a skeptic, she was now satisfied with proof that the earth was flat.* She would not mention that Barbara was her sister or was seeing a therapist. Mirages were covered elsewhere in their materials.

They sat quietly for several minutes. And then there it was—Charles’s flare. A little gray smoke, and then the bright light, like a shooting star, falling back. Their signal.

Marjory lifted her side of the sheet. Barbara held the other side. The bottom edge just touched the ground. They stretched it into the perfect king-size shape, seventy-six inches in height, eighty inches side to side.

“We look like a sail,” Barbara said. “Which, by the way, reminds me of that Captain Cook exhibit I went to. When some indigenous people first saw his ship, they thought it was coming out of the ocean, because at first they saw the top of the sail, and then more sail, and then the ship. So they called the first Europeans they’d ever seen ‘the underwater people.’ They thought they had come from under the water.”

Marjory imagined Charles zeroing in with his telephoto lens, now clicking the camera. Checking the altimeter, clicking the camera. Lining up the two posts. Measuring the white sheet with his eye. Accounting for the unevenness of the terrain, for the bushes in the path.

Who you gonna believe? Charles always said. *Your own eyes or the teachings of globalists who want to beat the divinity out of us with a dying myth?*

Barbara said, “So I guess there’s two explanations. Either objects disappear as they go over a horizon, if the earth is round, or objects go down into the ocean, if the earth is flat.”

Charles liked to argue the fine points; Marjory did not. Charles would have an explanation, and it would have something to do with Aristotle not understanding perspective. Her arm was tiring, so she traded arms without shifting the position of the sheet. Now she could see her sister better, and Barbara was frowning at her.

“You’ll see,” Marjory said. “You’ll see the photos soon enough.”

Now, the second flare, the one that meant their work was done, shot into the sky. In the seconds it took to gain its height and then burst into its dazzling fall, Marjory believed that she and her sister had never felt anything but love for one another. She believed that they had been loved by their parents, as she was now loved by Charles, and that some things could be unprovable truths, with or without the help of science or religion or therapists. She opened her hand and let go of the white sheet, just as the last light of the flare reached the earth.

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WILLIAM STANISICH

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Oil on canvas, 12 x 18 in



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