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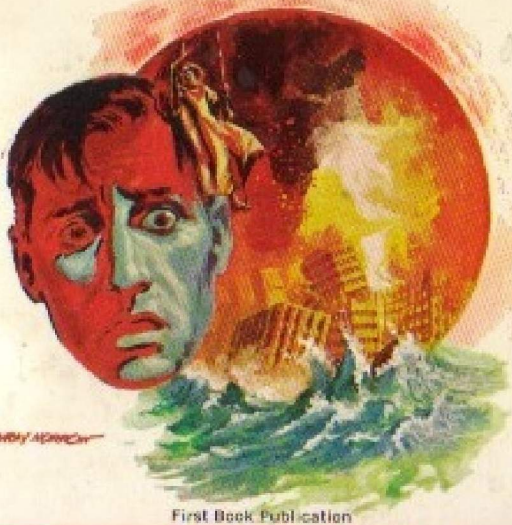
The day that California became . . .

THE SECOND ATLANTIS

Robert Moore Williams



First Book Publication

TOMORROW'S LOST CONTINENT

Once there was a fair continent under the sun of a forgotten past, the legendary Atlantis, seat of civilization, home of men who reached for the sky. And then—destruction, as the seas and the grounds opened up and swallowed it from the face of the world.

And now there is another such land of sun and aspirations, stretching along the coast of a mighty land, also reaching for the sky. And California, too, built upon a quake-torn geological rift, tottering on the edge of an implacable ocean, must wait its fate.

THE SECOND ATLANTIS is a minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour account of the Earth's most dreadful day of reckoning.

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS has been a prolific and highly rated author of science-fiction stories for several decades. His tales have appeared in virtually all the magazines in the field and he has been reprinted in many distinguished anthologies. He is a resident of California.

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THE SECOND ATLANTIS

Robert Moore Williams

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I

IT WAS NOT that there was no warning of the coming horror. If anything, there was too much warning. Sober scientists, checking the pressures in the earth's crust and measuring the mounting stresses in the vast fault system of Southern California, warned that the horror could come any day. Newspapers printed these predictions. Nobody seemed to listen. The astrologers warned of coming danger. Nobody paid any attention to them either. Cult leaders, making a living out of being prophets of doom, talked of catastrophe ahead and planned the building of places of refuge for those of their followers who paid their dues regularly.

So it was not that there was no warning of the day when the world would shake. It was that nobody listened.

Possibly historians and psychologists in the future will ponder the question of why men will sit in the shadow of coming death and will wait to be gulped down to destruction rather than take steps in advance to save their lives and the

lives of their families. Was it blind stupidity? Or was the blindness the action of karmic justice, a way to pay off by suffering and death the agony inflicted on others in some by-gone age? Or was it greed for another dollar that made so many men sit like the real estate agents, Mohammedan sharks facing the mecca in the Middle West as they sat with open mouths to wait for the next sucker to swim in from the east, that blinded men to coming death?

Perhaps it was all of these, perhaps there were other factors too. Perhaps many people tried to cling to the good they thought they had because they were afraid to make a big change in their lives. Many sorry things have been called good by men afraid to look beyond the limits of their own pastures. Perhaps many thought it better to stay and die rather than risk the unknown. Perhaps the biggest reason so many stayed in the shadow of death was the quite simple one that this coast seemed to them the end of the westering and that there was no place left on Earth to go.

For centuries the ancestors of the people piling up on the shores of the Pacific on the west coast of the United States had been moving westward. No one now knew what their homelands had once been, but they had come out of nearer Asia, and after moving across Europe during the span of centuries, they had jumped the Atlantic Ocean, and like lemmings following some long-lost migration route, they had crossed the continent of North America. "Go West, young man!" Horace Greeley had thundered at them in an earlier day. They had not needed this advice. Going west had become a habit with them. They knew only one thing, that if the Isles of the Blest, if the Pastures of Heaven existed anywhere on Earth, these places were somewhere to the west of wherever they were at any particular historical period.

These were the people of the westering! Their dreams of heaven, their hopes of paradise, were west!

When they found the shores of the Pacific Ocean, they

had reached the end of the westering. To the west of this place was a vast sea and scattered islands. Beyond this sea were the Japanese and the Chinese. To the people of the westering, heaven was not to be found on the ocean, and paradise for them was not an oriental garden inhabited by slant-eyed, thinly-clad beauties. Looking around them, they could clearly see that whatever else California was, it was not paradise. Perhaps, in time, something could be done to improve these deserts, but in the meantime many of them began to wonder if their vast, centuries-long migration westward had been less of a search for paradise and more of the keeping of a date with destiny to pay a karmic debt. Did they owe their lives to death and had they been searching for a place to discharge this obligation?

No one knew the answers to these questions. No one knew if the questions were anything except nonsense. All anyone knew was that a mass of humanity had piled itself high on the shores of the western sea and had sat down there, drooling like idiots, to wait for the death which they refused to believe was coming. In their wanderings, they had withstood famine, flood, pestilence, hurricane, drought, war, and other things. What could happen to those who had overcome so much?

There was warning of the coming horror.

Nobody listened.

Then the horror came.

And it was too late to listen.

The first shock came at 10:31 on a Sunday morning. Like a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, it was a little thing. Only sensitive people noticed it.

Susan Gray was one of those sensitive enough to feel the floor jolt. At age four, she was a bright-eyed, curious-minded, and exceedingly active young miss. Sitting on the floor, she felt it hit lightly against her bare bottom.

"Why is the floor shaking, Mommy?" she asked.

Since she hardly knew the meaning of fear, the bounce on her bottom was an interesting sensation instead of a source of concern.

When her mother did not answer, Susan looked up at her. Seeming not to have heard the question, her mother was standing still in the middle of the room. Susan had never seen her mother stand so still.

"Miriam! Why don't you answer me?" Susan said, in mock anger. She was imitating her father, using words and voice tones she had heard him use in speaking to her mother. Her mother's name was Miriam. Susan was the type of child who often called her mother by her first name.

Her mother was looking at a kind of white powder that seemed to be falling from the ceiling.

"What is that white stuff, Mommy?" Susan asked. "Is it snow?"

"No. No, dear," Miriam Gray answered.

The floor jumped again, harder this time.

"Mommy! The floor is bouncing!" Susan said. "And there's a big noise in the sky!"

Reaching down, Miriam Gray snatched the child in her arms. She screamed her husband's name—he was working on the lawn outside—and started toward the front door.

The white dust coming from the ceiling became a great slab of falling plaster which knocked both mother and child to the floor as it fell.

For the first time in her life, Susan Gray learned the meaning of fear.

On the lawn outside, Jim Gray was busy pulling devil grass out of the dichrondia, which had been certified to be weed-free. Jim Gray was an engineer employed in a space age plant located in Santa Monica, California. The plant was unique, its product was ideas, and its employees were brains

with advanced degrees from the nation's biggest universities. As one of these brains, Jim Gray belonged to a select group of men and women who were highly paid to sit around and think. For him, work was one round of continuous talk with fellow employees in their eternal search of new ideas, new weapons, new defenses, new ways to stay alive in a world building weapons much too fast. Indirectly, Uncle Sam picked up the tab for this whole plant. Most of the ideas produced here related to the national defense. Sometimes, as a by-product, ideas that had commercial application came into the brains who worked here. When this happened, the ideas were referred to plants already working in related lines, for engineering development.

Jim Gray had a dream job, that of a brain among brains.

The lawn in which Jim Gray was pulling devil grass was located in the Santa Monica mountains. Below it, a reasonable distance away, a freeway roared toward the San Fernando Valley. He owned the lawn in which he was pulling grass, the house and the two-car garage which were on it. He was not on top of the hill but he was up toward the top. He really had no ambition to live on top of the hill, with all the world looking up at you, and hating you because you looked down on them. Living on the slope above the herd was all right but it was not all right to be too far above them.

The brains at the plant had debated all of these ideas and had decided that the ideal spot for them to live was not on top of a hill—this was too exposed to an explosion in the sky—but was up the slope and near a freeway leading out of the area—in case the Big Bomb was reported on its way toward them.

Given his choice, or anything like his choice, Jim Gray was a peaceful man, kind to his family, considerate to his neighbors, a good friend, a poor enemy. He contributed generously to the community fund, he belonged to a beach club, and to a golf club. Once a week he played poker with his friends,

for modest stakes. His liquor cabinet was well stocked but this was strictly for friends who might drop in. Jim's drinking was limited to a martini before dinner. In his garage were two cars, a little darting foreign bug that he drove daily to the plant and a light-weight American car that his wife used in running to market or in taking Susan to the kindergarten or to the beach. Gray's bank account was comfortable and as long as the economy did not fall to pieces—or as long as peace was not really declared—he would live in a land fat with symbolic milk and honey.

Jim Gray was a nice guy, a kind-hearted man, a brilliant thinker. If he had a weakness in his thinking, it lay in the unconscious conclusion that intellectual brilliance would light the way for the kindness that would eventually inherit the earth. As he dug in his lawn for the tenacious devil grass, catastrophe was only another word which described something that might happen to somebody else, never to him or to his. Unconsciously, he assumed that some special dispensation of Providence always delivered the intellectual from evil. If an H-bomb was reported on its way to the West Coast, his own plans were made. If he was home when the warning came, he intended to put Susan and his wife into the car and to roll down the slope to the outbound freeway. By the time the bomb exploded, he would be out of the danger area. If he was at work when the warning came, his wife would put Susan into the family car and would carry out the plan without him, going directly to their cabin in the high desert where he would join them as soon as was possible. If an H-bomb was coming, his plant would get the earliest possible warning, one aim being to save the lives of the men and women of this plant. In rebuilding after a bomb, these people would be needed.

Jim Gray had no bomb-shelter at his hillside home. Nor did any employee of his particular plant. The neighbors

would be certain to notice the construction of such shelters. This would not be good for civilian morale.

All in all, the best total plan to protect the brains employed in this particular industry seemed to be to have a big bomb-shelter at the plant itself, to be used if warning time was short. If enough warning time was given, the employees would leave the plant, and after picking up their families, they would flee toward the desert. The chances were good that all of them would be out of range of everything except fall-out when the bomb exploded.

Jim Gray and his fellow employees were among the few people who had given serious thought to the possibility of an H-bomb explosion over the Los Angeles basin. Most people who lived in this area, already living lives of utter desperation in their subconscious minds, had hidden away in their already over-burdened subconscious basements, all thought of the H-bomb. Most people seemed to reason that the H-bomb was too horrible to think about.

Every resident of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 could be brought forward—if alive—to testify to the fallacy in this line of reasoning. Certainly the inhabitants of these two stricken cities had not thought about an atom bomb. They had not known that such a weapon had been invented—until it fell on them.

Privately, Jim Gray suspected that none of the escape plans devised by the plant brains to save themselves and their families were much good. If the Big Bomb came, it would likely be too late to put plans into operation, too late for running, too late for anything except dying. Any place was good enough for this.

But men felt better if they had a plan—even if the plan would not work. A part of their mind seemed to believe that even unworkable plans were real.

Jim Gray wasn't thinking about the coming of the bomb, or if it would come, or when. He was thinking about ways and

means of beating devil grass. Could the brains at the plant think of a poison spray that would kill devil grass and leave dichrondia unharmed? Jim Gray doubted that they could do this. Insecticides and pesticides and weed killers had put poison deep into the soil, into the waters, and into the air, until on a thousand watersheds, birds and worms and fish and little animals were dying. Flowing waters carried the death from the watersheds to the rivers. Death went downstream.

Shuddering at his own thoughts, Jim Gray turned his mind back to pulling devil grass. In the far-off distance was a vague roar, which he hardly noticed. In fact, when the roar moved closer and the ground began trembling, he hardly noticed it.

Then the roar became so loud he could not fail to notice it. Nor could he fail to notice the ground jumping under his knees. His first thought was for the safety of his family. His concern vanished when he realized thay were inside the house. It was guaranteed by the builder to be earthquake-proof.

Calling to his wife, he got to his feet. The ground promptly jumped out from under him and he fell on his face. He grabbed at the earth, to hold on to it, trying to scoop out hand-holds in the soft soil.

Panic was instantly in him, such fear as he had never known, panic that seemed to sweep up from his subconscious mind's winnowing of fearful incidents across many centuries. Never in his life had Jim Gray thought of himself as a fearful man. Nor had he been. He had not known such fear was in him or that it could erupt so suddenly and so violently out of nowhere. He was a kind man, an intellectual. Suddenly he perceived one reason he had become an intellectual—it was to escape this panic!

He thought—if his reactions as he tried to dig hand-holds in the earth could be called thinking—that the panic really

came from the roar that was in the air. Infants are frightened badly by sudden sounds. In this moment, he felt as if he was an infant suddenly struck by the biggest noise that had ever happened on this planet. The noise combined the roar of jets at take-off, the thunder of fast freight trains, the booming, rolling sound of great diesel trucks, the pounding on hard dirt of the hooves of a vast herd of stampeding cattle, all of these sounds were in this noise. In addition, there were other noises which were hard to identify. It seemed to Jim Gray that the earth suddenly had teeth and that it was gnashing them together. Hitting his eardrums as he tried to hold on to the jumping ground, it threatened to burst them. Hitting deeper areas, psychic areas where old memories are hidden, it seemed to flush echoes out of the past, memories of other days when this same roar had sounded and the earth had opened in great fissures and men had screamed and died, echoes out of forgotten catastrophes suffered when the earth was younger, of flood and of earthquake and of sudden death in days long gone.

The sound itself was so heavy it had the effect of a physical blow. It hurt his eardums, causing pain inside his head. He felt as if he was being hit by fists. He felt as if he were surrounded by a gang of midgets who were beating him with small hard fists and kicking him with shoes with pointed toes.

Dimly, above the roar, he heard his wife cry out inside the house. As he was trying to get to his feet, she came stumbling through the front door, carrying Susan. Reaching the edge of the lawn, a fissure a yard wide opened in front of her. Seeing the ground open, she tried to keep from putting her foot down. Losing her balance, she tossed the child over the fissure—to safety—and tried to leap the crack that had opened in the ground. The scream of the frightened child rose above the tumult in the air. Throwing himself for-

ward, Jim Gray caught his wife by the hand and pulled her out of the fissure.

As she reached safety, the ground closed again, without sound. Squatting on the ground, Jim Gray held his daughter in one arm, his wife in the other. He watched the spot where the fissure had closed, wondering if a new one would open beneath them to drop them down inside the earth and then to cover them again in graves that would never be found. He knew his wife was also staring at the scar the closing fissure had left behind it. He felt her clutch his arm and point across the lawn. Turning, he saw that another fissure had opened there. It closed quickly. He felt her fingers dig even deeper into his arm. Turning, he saw a rattlesnake on the lawn.

Where had it come from? A few years in the past these hills had been rattlesnake country. Builders with bulldozers and men with shovels had killed most of them. But a few had remained, hiding away on the rough patches of the hillsides, relics of an antediluvian world continuing to find a precarious existence at the very edge of the enormous industrial and cultural complex of Los Angeles.

The reptile had been driven crazy by the sound and by the jolting earth. Trying to find safety, it did not know which way to turn. For an instant, Jim Gray felt a sort of weird kinship with the snake. Like the humans, it was caught in the grip of forces it did not understand and which seemed to be unfrightened by the poison fangs it carried.

Seeing or perhaps sensing the presence of the three humans on the lawn, the snake moved toward them. The movement was not threatening, the snake did not seem to want to strike anybody. Instead it seemed to be seeking protection from the horror that had come upon the world, seeking safety among creatures that had been its deadly enemies since snakes first appeared upon the earth.

Jim Gray felt the shudder in his wife's body as she saw the snake, then he felt her relax. He knew she had fainted. The

thunder of quake in his ears, he watched the snake. He was too paralyzed, too busy trying to hold on to the shaking earth, to run from the snake or to strike at it. The thought in his mind was that when both species faced death from a shaking world, humans and snakes should declare a truce.

The snake came toward them. A fissure opened in the ground. It fell into the fissure. The ground closed. All that remained above the ground was the tail. The rattles added their little dry sound to the roar in the world.

Miriam Gray sighed and sat up in her husband's arm.

"Darling, there was a snake—" she began.

"It's gone," he said.

She spoke as if she had now forgotten both the snake and the earthquake. "Darling, there's a strange noise! And why is the earth shaking—"

A split second later, she was screaming.

Jim knew that fear was deep within her, the fear that comes when the earth twitches its hide—like an elephant shaking off an offending blow-fly—and seems to threaten to shake the whole human race from its surface.

The roar grew louder. It seemed to Jim Gray that the earth was offended by this tumult of sound and was throwing it skyward in an effort to be rid of such a horrible noise. The high sky would have none of this tumult. It repelled the sound, throwing it back to the planet from which it had come. Having got rid of this horror once, the earth did not wish it back.

It seemed to Jim Gray that earth and sky fought with each other to be rid of this grandfather of all noises, this roar of all roars, this tumult to end all tumults.

In his arms, he was aware that both his wife and his daughter were screaming, thus adding their little notes of terror to the tumult in the sky. He tried to comfort them. Neither could hear his voice. He held them close, and watched the

tail of the rattlesnake rattle slower and slower as the almost-buried reptile smothered to death.

Another fissure came across the lawn. He caught his breath. It went past him, missing him by feet, then closed again, making a thudding thump as it did so. The mad thought leaped into his mind that the earth was growing many mouths which it was using to snatch at the creatures which lived on its surface.

The roaring tumult grew louder and louder. Below him on the slope were other houses with TV antennae on the roofs. A high line that came across the top of the hill—and across the end of the house directly below him—crashed groundward. Sharp fingers of electricity became the blue streamers of electric arcs.

The house was on fire. Jim Gray could see the flames. Automatically, he listened for the sirens of the coming fire engines —only to realize with a start that the engines would not come unless someone called them.

He was not thinking clearly but at this moment he did not realize this. Dimly, he realized that he was the one to call the engines. If he did not call them . . .

Now he remembered that the inhabitants of San Francisco had always claimed that fire rather than earthquake had done the most damage to their city in the past catastrophe there. What if this one fire on the slope down below him got out of control? It was only one fire now, one house just starting to burn. If it was caught now . . .

He had to use force to release the grip of his wife's hands from around his neck. Susan was holding him almost as tightly, screaming, "Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!" at the top of her voice. When he finally induced her to let go, she grabbed her mother. As he crawled across the lawn, a fissure appeared under him. He felt the ground give way. Fortunately he was lying across the opening, and the fissure closed again.

Sweat was suddenly spurting all over his body. Running

like an ape, on his hands and knees, he entered his house. The place was choked with dust. He felt his way to the passage between the kitchen and the dining room, found the telphone in its alcove there, and lifted it from its cradle.

"Thwock, thunk, buzzzz!" went the phone. While he listened, the instrument went completely dead.

Very slowly, he slid the phone back on its cradle. Now he realized he had not been thinking clearly in assuming the fire in the house down the slope was the first and only fire. It might have been the first one to start. But each breath he took, a hundred others started. In the space of time he had needed to crawl across the lawn, perhaps a thousand fires had started in greater Los Angeles. Even if the automatic switching equipment on the telephone company had survived the jolting from the quake, it was swamped in the tens of thousands of calls trying to be made, not only to report fires but also to call the police stations and ascertain why the furniture was jumping around so.

As he slid the phone back into place, he saw the wild dance of the table in the dining room. The chairs had joined it. With the buffet, they were jumping up and down in some new dance step that they had apparently invented just this moment.

The house itself seemed to be threatening to leap from its foundation. Holes were appearing in the floor, in the walls, and for one brief instant, as a hole appeared in the roof, he got a glimpse of the sky.

He crawled back out of the house. Susan had been sick to her stomach while he had been gone. Miriam was trying to comfort the child. The mother looked as if she needed comfort herself.

The sky still roared, a muttering rumble that seemed to go up and down but which never ceased. The ground was still shaking but the fissures had ceased appearing in the lawn. Immediately below them, smoke was spurting upward. Be-

yond that was another and another. Others were starting on the hill beyond.

Somewhere a woman was screaming.

Suddenly the roar stopped. Suddenly the ground stopped shaking. The silence that followed made Jim Gray want to grab his ears.

"We've got to get out of here!" he heard his wife say.

He nodded. Lifting Susan in his arms, he helped his wife to her feet. Together, they hurried across the lawn to the side door of the garage. They were people with an evacuation plan ready to put into operation. True, the plan was intended to serve them if the Bomb was reported coming but it could also be used for other situations. All they needed to do was to throw the ever-ready supplies kept in the garage as part of the plan into the back seat of his wife's car, then roll down the hill to the freeway.

Jim helped his wife into the front seat.

"I'll drive," he said.

She nodded. As he was tossing the supplies into the back seat of the car, he felt the ground begin to tremble again.

"Hurry!" His wife's scream rose above the beginning rumble. "If we don't get out of here right away, we'll never get out."

The sleeping bags, the parcels of food, the water in sealed containers, the hatchet, the knives, the matches, the blankets, the canned heat for the tiny stove went into the back seat. The .38 was his own idea, not part of the official evacuation plan. If the bomb came, the population that remained alive could reasonably be expected to revert to the level of animal behavior. In this case, a gun might be handy.

The roar was in the sky again, the garage was creaking and popping when Jim turned the key in the car. The motor caught, then sputtered. For a wild second, Jim Gray wondered if the machines men had invented had joined the jolting earth in revolting against the human race. The tele-

phone had not worked. Now the car motor— He turned the key again, the starter whined, the motor caught. He rolled downhill out of the garage and on to what had been a winding, quiet, residential street.

It was a street of panic now. Fires were burning in houses on both sides of it. People were going crazy in the street. A woman was lying in the gutter. A second, wearing nothing except a pair of bright red slacks, was standing in the middle of the street screaming for help. Children of all ages had joined their parents in screaming. Their voices rose shrill and taut against the roar already in the sky. Jim had to swerve to avoid them. He made a tight right turn—and jammed on the brakes.

Two cars had collided on the turn, blocking the road. As Jim jammed on the brakes and jerked the front wheels to the left to avoid a crackup, a child ran into the street directly in front of him. He jerked the wheels back to the right—and crashed directly into the two cars that blocked the street.

He looked at his wife and daughter. They were shaken but uninjured. Miriam tried to smile at him. She also tried to give him comfort.

"It will be all right, Jim," she said. "Just have the garage send up a tow-truck—" Her face went paper-white as she realized what she had said. "I mean—"

He smiled back at her. "Thanks for trying, darling. Only I doubt if many tow-trucks will be running for several days."

"Then we had better start walking," she said.

"I've got a better idea," he said.

"What?"

"I'll borrow a car."

"Borrow? Who would lend—"

"Then I'll steal it," he answered, getting out of the car.

II

FINDING ED STAUNCHER still in bed, the first shock of the quake threw him to the floor. His first startled thought was that some of his companions of the night before had slipped into his apartment—the whole top floor of a skyscraper on top of one of the hills of Hollywood—and as a prank had pulled him out of bed.

Stauncher was a playboy. His father had made millions out of manufacturing steel fence posts in Sheboygan, Illinois. On the death of the old man, Ed had inherited the millions. Ed had no interest in steel fence posts. His interest was in blondes. At this moment, Ed was between wives, though the lovely chick who intended to be the fifth Mrs. Stauncher—and to take the fifth whack at the fence post bankroll—was working on him. Her lawyer had checked what was left of the Stauncher bankroll and had reported enough was left to be of interest to a girl in her declining years, which began to set in soon after twenty on Sunset Strip.

"Whoever you are, get away from me!" Stauncher yelled. "I never get up before noon and you know it."

He had no idea of the time of day. Vague memories of parking his car in the basement garage just after sunrise were in his mind. He had gone to bed without bothering to undress, his bedroom had light-proof curtains, and he did not know how long he had been asleep. All he knew was that the room was dark. He thought someone was with him.

Slowly he realized that he was alone, that no one had pulled him out of bed. He also realized that the floor was shaking and that the whole steel and concrete building was moaning as if in pain.

Sitting on the floor, he listened to the building moan. It

seemed to be twisting and writhing. He was curious about this sound but as yet he was unfrightened by it. Then the moan became a series of severe bumps and he realized what was happening. This brought the panic to the surface. Leaping to his feet, he found the light switch. He pressed it—and the darkness continued! There was horror in this fact.

All of his life, Ed Stauncher had been accustomed to press a button and have something happen as a result. A light came on, a motor started, a bell rang. Always something happened when a button was pushed. He had come to regard this relationship as a law of nature.

When he pushed a button to turn on the light and nothing happened, the fact shook him. Somewhere in his alcohol-fogged mind was the thought that if nature could change her mind, the whole human race was doomed.

He stumbled for the door that led to the small private lobby, found it, opened it. The lights were off here too but light was coming through windows set into the far wall. Outside, a kind of dull light was visible.

Pushing the button for the elevator, Stauncher went to the windows. Hollywood lay below him. To the west and farther away was Beverly Hills, west Los Angeles, and Santa Monica. The huge new housing development at Ocean Park was a finger on the skyline.

As Stauncher watched, a slow wave, like the swell of the sea, passed under this vast expanse of buildings. Like a wave coming in from the sea and lifting a sand castle built at low tide, this ground wave passed through the city. Like the wheel of juggernaut, it left destruction behind. Alike it lifted tall skyscrapers on Wilshire Boulevard and one-story private homes on adjoining streets, lifted them and dropped them in new positions. As this was happening, the earth moaned in growing pain.

Stauncher rushed back to the self-service elevator, to jab again at the call button. Looking up at the floor indicator,

he saw the elevator was stuck between the second and third floors.

"Jesus help me!" Stauncher gasped. Sinking to his knees for the first time in many years, he lifted his hands in prayer.

Many millions of times on this dreadful morning, the name of Jesus was called upon, even by those who had thought themselves to be completely self-sufficient. When catastrophe came, prayer suddenly regained its meaning as of old—the crying out for help by little men to whatever was their name for God. Catastrophe! Avalanche! Famine! Flood! Earthquake! Many times during thousand of years these westward moving peoples had faced these threats. From high mountins, the avalanche had come upon them, swollen rivers had drowned them, forest fires had burned them, drought had left the crops weak and locusts had destroyed what little had remained.

The people here on the west coast were children of catastrophe; they were the sons and the daughters of death and destruction. Here on this west coast, there was no enemy to come down upon them. To people who had followed the westering for so many centuries, just the absence of the enemy made any place a good land. California might be desert—and most of it was—but this did not matter. They could turn rivers from their courses, they could dig wells, they could lay channels of concrete around mountains and dig tunnels through mountain ranges, as long as the enemy did not come to destroy the irrigation systems. Here in California there was no enemy and the absence of the enemy made it a little like heaven.

But even so, there was catastrophe, there was earthquake. If the San Andreas fault let go, the rest of the vast fault system might follow. Millions could die before the land settled into forever uneasy rest.

Did the gods hate these people? Were they under an

ancient curse? Had they fought their way westward to find death waiting at the end of the westering? Were they really seeking death? Was this why they ignored so many warnings of coming catastrophe?

The earth wailed, the earth rang like a bell, the earth groaned inside itself. A growing roar and an increasing rumble, the sound was like a herd of cattle stampeding closer. The sound was like the grinding together of the jaws of giant who had teeth made of granite boulders.

"Fill her up, sir?" Bill Riley asked, grinning at the customer behind the wheel. Riley was a young man, a cheerful man, and a successful one. He owned the little service station where he worked. This made him his own boss.

"Put in a dollar's worth of high-test," the customer said. His voice was bitter, his manner gruff and blunt. Wiping sweat from his face, he continued speaking. "When's this damned heat wave going to break, is what I want to know."

"The paper says it is due to end today," Riley answered, cheerfully.

"It's earthquake weather, that's what it is," the customer grumbled.

"Let's hope not," Riley answered. "We don't need any earthquakes in west Los Angeles."

"They didn't need any in Alaska, either," the customer grunted. "But they got them just the same. More than a hundred people were killed up there. The property damage may run as high as a billion dollars!"

Riley whistled at the figure. "That much? We didn't pay that high a price when we bought Alaska from Russia."

The customer started to speak, then stopped. He looked at the sky. A frown appeared on his face. "Do you hear anything?" he asked.

"I—" Riley listened. "Yeah. There is something. It sounds

sort of as if Santa Monica is moaning to itself. What do you suppose it is?"

"I don't know," the customer said.

The sound was that of the earth gnashing its rock teeth together. Under the surface, billions of rock teeth ground against other billions of rock teeth, all in the jaws of giants.

"What is that noise?" Riley asked.

The customer's eyes enlarged with sudden fear. "It's an earthquake!" he said.

The customer looked wildly for a place of refuge, for a hiding place for his body, a hole to crawl into, a place to make his soul secure. There was no hiding place.

For scores of years the earth had been accumulating stresses deep below the surface. It had accumulated an enormous fault system which was both a product of the stresses and a kind of safety valve for them. It was a safety valve in the sense that little quakes were released through the fault system without much damage. But when the fault system grew rigid, when the little quakes were held in check, the stresses accumulated, and accumulated, and accumulated.

When this accumulation let go, all of it at once, the result was catastrophe.

"Have you got a bomb-shelter?" the customer demanded of Bill Riley.

"No, sir," Riley answered. "Say here on the driveway with me. We're safe here."

The roar grew louder. And louder. And louder. The ground jumped so heavily that both fell.

A fissure ripped through the driveway, opening a rent at least ten feet wide.

Both fell into it. Death was waiting for them there.

Mary Uller was a good woman. She had been a good woman all her life. If being a good woman—as she meant the words—had ever seemed short of a perfect life, she carefully

hid this thought from the world and from herself. She smiled at the world. She smiled on the way to church, in church, and on the way home from church. If she ever had a bad thought, a sexual thought, she buried it under a smile, confident that no one would find it hidden there. At work, where she was a secretary, if she made a mistake, she smiled as she corrected the error.

When the quake began, the smile faltered, slipped, and fell away. A scream was under it. Under the scream was panic. Fleeing from the very proper apartment building where she lived, she had lost her smile.

A piece of stone from the edge of the roof struck her on the head. It splashed brains all over the sidewalk.

This was the way they died that Sunday morning, under buildings that fell on top of them and in fissures where the earth opened up to gulp them down, in cars thaat went out of control and crashed, and in buildings toppled from their foundations and turned into traps. They also died of heart attacks as panic hit them too hard, and of various vascular accidents as over-loaded arteries exploded in brain tissue. As the fires got started, they died in the fires.

James Erasmus Glee was a man who slept under the Santa Monica pier. Glee was a wino, a bum—and a good man. There wasn't a hostile bone in his body, or a malicious thought in his mind, ever. He thought only good of people and of the world and of himself. He did not consider that the world, or any person in it, had misused him. He believed he drank wine because it was good for his stomach. He had no feeling that drinking wine was an escape from life, a way to hide from difficulties he could not face. The thinking of the modern schools in this area had not reached his strata of society. To him, wine was not an escape from life, it was a way to be alive, it was life itself.

Awakening in mid-morning, he had the comfortable knowledge that he had been drunk for two whole days, a result of finding a five dollar bill in the street. When his luck was bad, he did odd jobs such as moving boxes in exchange for a bottle of wine. Food he obtained from the back doors of restaurants or from garbage pails. Clothing he fished out of Good Will pick-up boxes.

Coming up from under the pier at mid-morning, he was vaguely aware that he was hungry but more acutely aware that he was thirsty. This was Sunday morning. The liquor stores were closed. This was a sad situation.

As he considered what could be done, the thought came into his mind that he could walk past several liquor stores and observe the window displays. This was not as good as having a gallon of wine but he knew from experience that it would help a little. There was a liquor store half-way up the narrow street that led up from the beach to the streets of Santa Monica.

He was standing in front of the store, staring hungrily at the display of whole gallons of wine in the window, when the first shock came.

Wrenched and twisted, the plate glass window broke into dozens of fragments. At the back of the store, burglar alarms buzzed angrily.

To James Erasmus Glee, it was like a dream coming true. Reaching through the window, he lifted a gallon of wine in each hand. Turning, he fled down the street back to the protection of the pier that jutted out over the waters of the bay.

He did not hear the roaring in the sky, he did not hear the shouts of alarm from frightened people, and as for the ground jumping beneath his feet, he was quite accustomed to this sort of behavior on the part of what other people regarded as firm earth. In his own mind, Glee was quite sure that God had heard his prayer and had given him two gallons of

wine. He was also sure that as a good man, he richly dedeserved it.

Propher the Prophet was deep in meditation when the quake began. What he was meditating on was the name of the winner in the last race at Agua Caliente this afternoon. On two unforgettable occasions, while in mediation, he had been given the name of a winner. Properly passed along by word of mouth, these two winners had been enough to make him rich, not because of the bets but because he had accumulated enough followers whose monthly dues to belong to his society amounted to a comfortable figure. Though his hope was to receive it, he had never been given the daily double in meditation. If he could get this, just once, besides collecting at the track, he could double the number of his followers who contributed two dollars each month to his well-being. If two dollars a month seems a small sum, when multiplied by five hnudred it becomes a good sum. When multiplied by a thousand, the result becomes a matter of great interest to the Internal Revenue Service.

To escape from the attentions of the IRS, Propher had incorporated as a church. Although he had a charter from the State of California to prove he was a church, the IRS had refused to recognize him as being entitled to tax exemption. Instead, the revenue service seemed to think he was a racket.

Whatever he was, church, racket, or prophet, Propher had rare psychic ability of some kind. He claimed he was divinely inspired, that God Almighty told him what was going to happen in horse races, and elsewhere, and hinted that occasionally God asked his advice before acting. For his monthly meetings of the faithful, he hired the biggest theater in Hollywood, appearing there in person. Weekly meetings were conducted by wire TV. Affluent members could even have their own private wired TV hookup.

Propher's speciality was predicting the races or the out-

come of any other sporting event. He was good enough at it—or divinely inspired enough—so that all bookmakers hated him, and had even made attempts on his life. His tip service, for which the faithful paid good money, was not divinely inspired, nor did he claim that it was. It was merely a list of the likely winners in various sporting events and was called *Propher Likes.* When he picked up a tip from psychic sources—in meditation—this went only to those of the faithful whom Propher wished to reward, to encourage, or to interest.

It was the hope of every person who paid two dollars a month for the tip service to be faithful enough to deserve a special tip some day.

As living quarters, Propher occupied the top floor of an eight-story hotel and apartment building in a fashionable area of west Los Angeles. The five lower floors of the building were occupied by Propher's staff, his close followers, and his servants. He occupied the eighth floor not only because it was safer from hidden marksmen who might wish to put a bullet through him but also because there was less smog up here, and less traffic noise. He had a special permit for private helicopter landings on the roof. Propher was an expert pilot. His own ship was always on the roof, ready to take off.

Propher had an excellent verbal knowledge of what is called metaphysics or occult science. He believed he was the reincarnation of a priest of ancient Atlantis, that mysterious land which is believed by some to have sunk in the middle of what is now the Atlantic Ocean thousands of years ago. One of his claims was that he had reincarnated in Los Angeles to protect his subjects of former days now also living again in this city from the fate which had overtaken them when Atlantis had sunk.

Needless to say, Propher never expected to have to back up his claim.

Propher wore a beard. Letting his hair grow long, he caught it in a circle of metal at the back. He wore a long robe like an ancient Roman and he carried a staff of polished wood about seven feet long. The staff had a metal knob on one end—useful for cracking heads—and a concealed knife blade in the other—useful in case of emergency.

When the first shock came, Propher was sitting in the lotus position—one of the postures of yoga—and was so deeply in the trance of autohypnosis that he did not feel in the tremor in the floor or hear the rumble in the sky. Nor did he hear the rush of feet as several of his faithful secretaries rushed into his meditation room and threw themselves prostrate on the floor in front of him.

"Great Propher, save us!" one of the women moaned.

Propher heard the words, vaguely. They served to rouse him. Coming out of trance, he groped for this staff lying on the floor beside him. Finding it, he took several deep breaths, to start the trance-sluggish blood stream into faster circulation and to get more oxygen into his system. He became aware that several of his favorite followers had entered his private meditation room. Anger rose in him.

"When I want women, I'll send for women. What the hell are you doing—"

For the first time, Propher was fully aware of the roar in the sky. Hearing this tumult of sound, it seemed to him that he was hearing an echo out of ancient days. His first bewildered thought was that he had heard this roar before, that he had felt the tremble in the floor in times before these. Before his inner sight flicked a vision of a city collapsing into ruin, of low flat-roofed buildings falling into streets jammed with terrified people. Beyond the city were fertile plains. Beyond the plains was the sea.

Propher did not know what city he was seeing with his inner sight. He suspected it was Atlantis and that his pretending to have lived in that long-lost city had some frag-

ment of truth in it somewhere. He knew the city was not Los Angeles. He knew it was like Los Angeles in one particular—it had been devastated by earthquake.

Ignoring his secretaries, he moved quickly to an adjoining room. The phone was dead, the radio was dead, the TV was dead. A small battery-operated transducer radio was operating, but it was producing only static. Apparently all Los Angeles radio stations were off the air.

Like Jim Gray, and the men from the think-factory, Propher was a man with a plan. Since his plan involved the use of his helicopter on the roof, he went quickly up the stairs. At the door which opened outward on the roof top, his secretaries caught up with him. Screaming at him to save them, they clutched at him. He yelled at them to run down the stairs to the street level and to get out of the building at once.

"Stop the earthquake!" one of them screamed at him. "You are our god."

Using the knobbed end of his staff, he struck this woman over the head, a savage blow that crunched her to the floor. As he struck at the others, they quailed away from him. Turning, he opened the door. Outside, he slammed the door shut.

Out here with no protection, the roar was deafening. He could see his helicopter dancing on the roof.

He got the motors going, got the vanes turning, got the ship into the air. The sky was murky, the air was filled with dust and with smoke, the sun was a red ball. Enormous air currents were in motion.

As he got the ship a hundred feet above the roof of the building, an air current caught it, sent it spinning out of control toward the Santa Monica mountains. Propher could not right it, he could not bring it back under control. Enormous air currents tossed it like a whirlwind playing with a

newspaper, tossing it high in the air, then letting it drop toward the earth.

The helicopter hit the top of a mountain ridge above a freeway where cars were playing leapfrog with each other. The crash opened a door. Propher fell out of the ship as it lay on its side on the mountain crest.

This was the day the earth shook, this was the day when evil men paid for their sins.

III

TO THE EARTHQUAKE, one man was as acceptable a victim as another man, one woman was as good as another woman. Along and above Sunset Strip, where beauty in butt and bust walked in the late afternoon hoping to catch the eye of a movie producer, were dozens of apartment houses. These perched on the steep hillsides. Some were supported on steel poles which left their backsides hanging out over nothing like Mexican women defecating into a ravine. This imitation of one of the worst features of the Hanging Gardens of Ancient Babylon was considered by the Hollywood hill apes to be the maximum utmost in modern architecture. The idea everywhere was that these apartment houses were perfectly safe.

The quake changed this idea. Fast. On and all, it tumbled such private homes and such apartments down toward the bottom of their canyon. Perhaps out of the hundreds of such examples of modern architecture that existed here in this happy land, one building was left standing after the first shock of the quake was over.

The big buildings located on the steep slope about that section of Sunset Boulevard called the Sunset Strip were filled, in the main, with tiny apartments, which included a pull-down bed, a kitchenette, a tiny bathroom. Usually three to four young women occupied these places, sleeping two on the pull-down bed, two on the sofa which made into a bed, splitting the exorbitant rentals between them. Occasionally the apartments were occupied by young men. Whether men or women, the occupants were the young hope-

fuls of the screen and of television, bit actors and actresses who had never been quite discovered, young writers who felt that a touch of the blood of Hemingway flowed in their veins, young executives trying to get their first shot as assistant director or producer. In this area, talent, real creative ability, were plentiful.

Leading busy night lives, most of the occupants of these buildings were asleep on a Sunday morning. Perhaps here and there a young woman with a date for lunch was stirring.

The earthquake dumped them out of bed. It rolled their buildings downhill. The whole mountain seemed to lean forward as if it were bowing in deep reverence to some ancient god of the planet that it saw coming toward it; then, at the sharp command of the god, the mountain returned to its former position like a soldier snapping to attention at the approach of his commmanding officer. The effect of this action was to dump buildings from its sides and from its top. Like a wet dog shaking water from its fur, the mountain seemed to shake itself as it snapped back to attention. Instead of shaking off water, the mountain shook off buildings. People inside these buildings woke up to find themselves on the floor. Then they found their building was rolling down the mountain and was crumbling into fragments of concrete, laths, and mortar. Few people escaped alive from their buildings this morning.

A mass of broken concrete, and broken bodies, became a river flowing down the side of the mountain. This river flowed over the buildings—cafés, little coffee shops, little all-night cabarets—on the upper side of Sunset Boulevard. It pushed these buildings into the street, then shoved them across the street and jammed them into the buildings on the lower side of the street. Giving way, these buildings joined the enormous river that was flowing down this mountain in the general direction of west Los Angeles and Beverly Hills.

The river would never reach these cities. Nor would it need to. They would have rivers of their own.

In a space of time measured at most in minutes, the world lost one of its most famous streets, Sunset Strip. With this it also lost the young talent congregated into this area.

Always, everywhere on earth, there would be churches as the impulse to worship found expression among men. And always at 10:31 on the morning of Sunday morning there would be worshippers.

In California at 10:31 on the morning of the day the earth shook those who still kept the ancient traditions were either already in the church of their choice or were on their way to it.

The quake did not seem to think that the people in churches were any more sanctified than the people who lived in and above Sunset Strip. It did not discriminate in favor of the church-goer. On the other hand, it did not discriminate against them. In past ages, and to some degree in this age, churches have been regarded as holy places, as areas of sanctuary. The earthquake did not give any credence to this idea.

In consequence, the quake pulled down churches with no more hesitancy than it showed in knocking over a poorly engineered and shabbily-built apartment house.

In most Protestant churches, as the quake struck, Sunday School was just finishing. This meant that the instruction given to children was ending and that the congregation was settling itself down in preparation for singing the hymns, for listening to the announcements from the pulpit, for the sermon on some phase of current social problems—perhaps also for a little nap.

Perhaps the earthquake considered that it was a sermon itself—and a rattling good one, a lesson long delayed. Perhaps it considered that it was a minister preaching a sermon, that it was calling the unrighteous to repentence, calling on

sinners to mend their ways. Possibly the quake thought of itself as the voice of the Lord, speaking in the awful day of judgment, a day that had been long, long delayed in Southern California, but which had come at last.

As it had done to Ed Stauncher, the quake threw Tommy Bolt out of bed. He hit in the middle of the floor of his bedroom, in a crouching position, but so fast were his reflexes, so alert was his whole mind to respond to danger, that as he was thrown from the bed, he snatched the pistol from under his pillow. When he hit in the middle of the floor, the gun was ready in his hand.

Tommy Bolt lived by the gun. He was almost the head of the Mafia in Los Angeles. Only one man, fat Sam Lamont, remained between him and the position as head of the Cosa Nostra for the city and for this region.

Tommy Bolt had started at the bottom of the criminal ladder. He had worked himself upward by killing everyone who stood in his way. This had been a very unusual accomplishment. Under ordinary circumstances, a Cosa Nostra wolf trying to work his way to the top is himself ambushed and shot down by the men above him, often before he has even realized he is a threat to their continued existence. Tommy Bolt had survived. This tells the whole story about him.

He did not hit the floor on his face, even when an earthquake had thrown him out of bed. He hit on his feet, then went quickly to a squatting position. He thought his enemies had exploded a bomb in the apartment under him, with the intention of killing him, or if this failed, of forcing him into the open where he would be gunned down by hidden killers waiting for him outside the building.

Split seconds later, when the building continued to shake, he realized that he was in an earthquake instead of a bombing attempt on his life. He knew instantly what he was

going to do. Knowing it, he did it. In his world, to be slow on the feet or slow in the head was to be dead.

He went through the door leading to the balcony outside his bedroom window.

Tommy Bolt lived in a small two-story apartment building that had been constructed during the boom period following World War II. The building had four apartments, two on the first floor and two on the second. Bolt was not big enough in the Mafia to own the building—this would come later, if he lived long enough—but he was big enough to rent all four apartments in the building. The three apartments he was not using, he sub-rented to allies he could trust. He did not dare take the chance of leaving occupancy of the other three apartments out of his control. If he did this, there was too big a chance that one of Lamont's men would rent a vacant space in this building. If this happened, he would walk through the back door some night, to be gunned down in his own apartment building. This had occurred too often in the history of the Mafia for Bolt to doubt that it could happen to him.

When he went through the door, he found himself on a small second-floor balcony surrounded by an iron guard rail.

Out here was a world filled with tumult, with sudden cries, with thumps and thunders.

Tommy Bolt was wearing pajamas. He had not paused to find and put on his shoes. He did not pause now. Catching the gun between powerful teeth, he grasped the iron rail of the balcony, swung his body over the side, lowered himself to the bottom of the balcony, and dropped from there to the ground, landing in the postage stamp sized lawn at the rear of the building.

Transfering the gun to his right hand, he crouched on the grass, a tall man with hair as black as night, a big man in scarlet pajamas trimmed in royal blue. He knew he was in an earthquake, he knew it was a bad one.

The single thought in his mind was whether or not Lamont's killers would take advantage of the opportunity to kill him given by the quake. Lamont's killers came when they were least expected. In an earthquake, who would expect killers?

Nobody except Tommy Bolt. This was one reason he was still alive. He expected the unanticipated.

A man ran from the back door of the adjoining apartment building. The fellow had lather on his face; he was wearing trousers and an undershirt. He was a stranger to Bolt.

Bolt gunned him down.

In Bolt's distorted mind, there were only two classes of people: friends and foes. Since he had not recognized this man as a friend, the fellow was a foe. There were no shades of gray in the world of Tommy Bolt. The world was all white, and friendly, or it was all black, and an enemy.

Bolt fired one shot. The man fleeing from death in an earthquake met death from a bullet. Tommy Bolt looked around for the next attacker.

In his mind, he was not a murderous aggressor, he was only defending himself against attack.

Under his feet, the ground was shaking. All around him, people were screaming. This did not concern him; in fact, he hardly noticed the tumult. In his mind was only one thought: that he should escape before Lamont's killers, who were lurking near at hand, he was sure, tried to take advantage of the confusion arising from the quake to kill him. Only when he was certain that none of Lamont's men were in sight did he run for his car in the garage at the back of the apartment building lot.

He jerked at the door, to swing it up and open. The door was stuck and would not budge. Looking up, he saw that the door had been twisted and pulled out of its overhead rollers by the quake. He knew then that he would not be able to get his car out of the garage.

This did not matter too much. The street outside his building was always full of parked cars. Somebody would be certain to be getting into one of them. He would take over the car. If the driver resisted . . . well, when Tommy Bolt wanted something, he wanted it. All his life he had taken anything he wanted from anybody who had it.

Running along the side of the apartment building, he reached the street. Cars were parked on the avenue. At this moment, they seemed to be going through some kind of a strange elephantine dance, to be bowing to each other in a weird cotillion that they had invented for themselves. Now and again a car would vanish completely. At other times, a car would seem to shrink in size. Bolt saw fissures opening and closing in the street. Like huge snakes, these fissures ran along the asphalt, gulping down cars at a single bite.

At the curb a man was trying to get into his dancing car. He had the door open. Moving quickly forward, Bolt hit this man over the head with the barrel of his gun. Knocked senseless, the motorist dropped to the ground. A fissure reached toward him in the asphalt, then stopped just before it reached the unconscious body. Bolt climbed behind the wheel, turned the key. The motor roared. He shoved the accelerator to the floorboard. Tires squealed on the asphalt. The car roared forward. Bolt pulled it into the street. Ahead of it a fissure appeared in the asphalt. Bolt spun the wheel to the right. The car went off the street, climbed an embankment, jerked the steering wheel from Bolt's grasp, turned back toward the asphalt and crashed into a parked car.

Bolt forced the door open, pulled himself from behind the wheel. A glance told him that this car would need major repairs to the front end before it would run again. He started walking.

The earth was full of noise; the air was full of dust and particles of sand that stung like small bees. A wind was rising. Panic rising in him now, Bolt knew he had to get

away from this area of apartment houses. Walking, he headed up toward the observatory and planetarium located on the mountain ridge in Griffith Park.

He was not alone. Thousands of others, driven from the vast complex of apartment buildings above Hollywood Boulevard, were moving toward the park. When they reached the edge of the park, they kept right on going. Perhaps there was safety on top of the mountains. Certainly there was none in the low-lands.

As he moved up a path in the park, Tommy Bolt caught a glimpse of a fat man waddling along ahead of him. Instantly, Bolt threw himself flat on the ground beside the path.

The fat man was Sam Lamont.

Although he could not see them, Tommy Bolt was certain that Lamont had at least two guards with him, both armed, and that Lamont had a gun in his pocket. Even if the mountains fell down, Lamont would have at least one guard. He would also have a gun.

As soon as Lamont had disappeared around a bend in the path, Bolt got to his feet. The ground was shaking, the earth was roaring, the sky was echoing the tumult down below. A vast thundering, bumping, booming noise came from the whole Los Angeles Basin.

Tommy Bolt hardly heard the roar in the earth, the echo in the sky, the thumping booms from behind him. His whole attention was concentrated on one idea—tomorrow he would be King of Los Angeles!

With Sam Lamont dead, there would be no one to dispute his leadership of the criminal family of this city.

Come tomorrow, he fully intended that Lamont would be dead.

IV

ALL OF JIM GRAY'S life had been devoted to thinking. In his childhood and during his teens, this activity had been called "daydreaming" and had been frowned upon by stern-faced adults who felt he must help them get on with the more serious work of the world. When he had become an adult himself and had finished college and had a doctor of science degree to back him, daydreaming was known by another name. Now it was called *thinking*. It was smiled on by stern-faced adults who thought thinking made easier the work of the world.

In all the daydreaming done in his childhood and in his teens, in all of the thinking done in his adult life, Jim Gray had never thought about stealing a car.

Now he had to steal a car. With his own car wrecked, he had to steal one if he was to get his wife and his daughter away from the horror of this shaking earth and this roaring sky.

To him at this moment, his reasoning seemed simple and logical.

Leaving Miriam and Susan, he went down the winding street. People screamed at him. He ignored them. People ran past him going down the street, people ran past him going up the street, people ran up and down the driveways on both sides of the street. He knew they were in a state of acute mental and emotional shock and were not really responsible for their actions.

It did not occur to him that he was in a similar state and was not responsible for his actions either. He did not realize

that in struggling to save the lives of his wife and his child, he had also regressed to the level of the animal.

Jim Gray saw a car sitting at the curb. With his head down on his chest as if he was taking a little nap, a man was sitting quietly in the driver's seat.

Jim shoved the .38 in the driver's face.

"I want to borrow your car, buddy!" he said.

The driver did not seem to hear the words; he did not seem to notice the gun in his face. He continued looking down.

"Get out before I shoot you!"

Still the driver did not move. Reaching into the car, Jim lifted the man's head. The driver's face was a pasty-white color. Turned slightly upward in their sockets, his eyes were open. Both the face and the eyes had a slightly surprised expression in them.

Something had happened to this man. He had been expecting it to happen. In consequence, he had not been surprised when it had happened. Perhaps he had been a little relieved.

"Oh!" Jim Gray said, understanding what had happened.

The man had died at the wheel of this car, probably of heart attack. Jim Gray pulled him from behind the wheel. He laid the man on his back on the nearest lawn, crossing his hands across his chest. The ground was throbbing and vibrating in such a way that the corpse began to move. Walking back to the car, Jim had the impression that a dead man was trying to follow him. He put this thought out of his mind and slid behind the wheel of the car.

The motor started, Jim turned the car. With a firm, two-handed grip on the steering wheel he returned to his wife and daughter. Not much time and no conversation were needed to transfer the supplies from his wrecked car to the automobile he had taken from the dead man. Miriam did not

ask him where he had gotten the car. He did not know how he would have answered if she had asked.

Jim saw that Miriam's face was white and her jaws were set. He knew she was in a state of shock. Susan seemed to have recovered her equilibrium faster than either of her parents. The child was frightened but she was also interested in what was going on, curious about the noises in the earth, about the thunders in the sky. Jim asked her what she was thinking.

"I don't see how the earth can shake so much and still hold together." the child answered.

"I don't understand it either," Jim answered.

The car jolted and swayed down the winding drive. Moving slowly, Jim took all possible precautions against accident. Behind them, on both sides of the winding drive that led down-hill, pillars of smoke were rising upward from burning homes. As the smoke reached the level of the top of the mountains, it was met by a strong wind blowing from the sea. The wind drove the smoke inland.

At this point, each burning house was sending up its own individual pillar of smoke. Jim wondered how long it would be before all of these pillars merged to become one black pall that would shut out the light of the sun. He knew the fires would spread. The only question was how fast this would happen.

Dodging cars driven by crazy drivers and dodging people going crazy, Jim Gray let the borrowed car slide down the winding drive, then turned on to a curving street that would take him over a small hill and then on to the on-ramp of the freeway leading across the Santa Monica mountains. Eventually the same freeway would take them across the San Fernando Valley and on into the desert country of interior California.

Reaching the top of the hill, he saw the freeway on his left and the on-ramp ahead of them. Hastily, he stopped

the car. Hell was on their left. Hell in a series of grinding thumps was directly ahead of them.

Every man and every woman who has ever driven a freeway in California has either heard or has imagined this series of grinding thumps. The sound can only come from one source: a series of tail-end collisions as one car tries to stop and is overtaken and run into by the car following directly behind.

Jim saw that this series of tail-end collisions had not come from the freeway—oddly, no traffic was moving there—but from the on-ramp toward which he was heading. The collisions had blocked the on-ramp. Down there, stunned people were trying to climb out of crumpled cars. The second car, its gasoline tank crumpled from the rear, was already on fire. In it, a woman was screaming. The door had jammed shut. The steering column had been driven backward and had trapped her in her own seat belt.

Jim saw why the first driver in this series of collisions had stopped so quickly. Directly in front of his car, between it and the on-lane of the freeway, a huge fissure had opened. When he had stopped, the car behind had hit him.

Jim looked toward the freeway. Here it rose in a long grade toward the crest of the Santa Monica mountains. Normally, at this hour on a Sunday, the in-bound lanes were jammed with cars heading toward the beaches and the out-bound lanes were jammed with cars heading toward the desert.

Now there was no traffic on the freeway. Cars were on it but they were not moving. Some seemed to be standing on their radiators with their rear wheels projecting into the air. Others were standing on their hind ends with their front wheels in the air. Others were vaguely visible.

Huge fissures had opened in the freeway. Cars had plunged into them. Some cars that had managed to stop and had tried to back away from fissures ahead had fallen into fissures

opening behind them. Some had fallen into fissures and had turned over. Others were on their sides. The fissures here were huge things, in some cases thirty to forty feet wide, big enough to gulp down a tractor pulling two trailer trucks. In some cases, the fissures had closed in part, acting like gigantic vises closing over the cars and the people trapped in them. Some of the fissures, like traps that had caught their prey, had closed almost completely. Others, like waiting traps, were still open. Many cars had been left on the freeway, deserted there by drivers unwilling to take the risk of driving them. Many of these drivers were clustered along the sides of the freeway, some walking, some standing still.

Jim did not doubt that these fissures, these gigantic cracks in the ground, existed at this moment all through this mountain area, perhaps through the whole region. Elsewhere the cracks were not noticed. On the freeway, however, they were plainly visible.

Beside him, Jim heard Miriam gasp at what she saw on the on-ramp and on the freeway.

"Those poor people hurt in all of those accidents! Who will take care of them?"

"God," Jim answered. "There's no one else."

Behind the car, brakes squealed. A solid thump followed. As the car coming from behind hit his borrowed car in the rear end, his car shot forward. The steering wheel jerked from his hands. The car went off the street and struck a stone retaining wall. He heard metal scream as the right fender crumpled.

"Are you hurt, either of you?" he spoke.

"No, no, no," both Miriam and Susan answered.

Jim slid out from under the wheel. Going around the car, he saw that the right wheel had a permanent skew and he knew this was the end of the road for this automobile. Behind him was profanity, the sounds of outrage from the driver of the car that had run into him.

"Why'd you stop right in the middle of the street?" the driver shouted. Coming toward Jim Gray, he was shaking his fist. Behind him, steam spurted from the crumpled radiator of his car.

"Damn you, you've wrecked my car!"

"Sorry," Jim answered. "You can sue me."

"Sue you? I need my car, not a law-suit against you." The driver was in his forties and was neatly but modestly dressed. "I've got a family out in the San Fernando Valley. I want to get out there and see if they're all right."

"I'm sorry I stopped in the middle of the street," Jim repeated. "But I don't think you could have used your car much farther anyhow." Jim gestured toward the blocked on-ramp and to the freeway.

The man's eyes followed the gesture of Jim's hand. Until now, the driver had apparently not really noticed the condition of the on-ramp and of the freeway. Now he saw what had happened and what was still happening. Anger went out of him like air going out of a pricked balloon.

"Good God!" he said. "My wife, my kids! His eyes came to Jim. "But I don't have to use the freeway. There are other streets—"

"They're blocked by accidents. Many have fissures in them deep enough to be graves for elephants."

"Oh," the man said. "What are you going to do? Your car is wrecked too?"

Jim nodded toward Miriam and Susan. They had gotten out of the car.

"We can still walk along the freeway," Jim said.

"There are fissures in it," the man protested.

"I know. But we can go around the ends of the fissures. If they are small, we can climb down one side and up the other. We will carry canteens of water, a blanket for each of us, and a little food—"

"You had all of that in your car?" the man questioned.

"Yes. It was part of an evacuation plan we had prepared for another purpose."

"Oh." The stranger thought about this. Sweat was on his face. He wiped it away. It came back. He wiped it away agin. Anger had gone from him, perhaps forever. Again and again, he shook his head. Suddenly he held out his hand.

"My name is Ed Smith. Mind if I walk with you?"

"Glad to have you," Jim said. He gave his name, then nodded toward Miriam and Susan. "My wife and daughter."

Miriam had doubts.

"Walk?" she said, protestingly. "I'm wearing these canvas shoes. And Susan is wearing those flimsy little patent leather pumps and that light dress."

"I know," Jim said.

"But it isn't far to our home. Wouldn't it be better if we returned and got stout shoes and good clothing?"

"It would be better," Jim answered. He gestured toward the hillside where they had lived. It was not quite visible from the spot where they were standing but he did not have to see the house to know what was happening there. Black smoke was climbing skyward, in twin columns. One column probably came from the house below them that had caught fire when the high line had collapsed on it. The second column almost certainly came from their home. As they watched the two columns joined and became a single black finger pointing at the sky. Other fingers were pointing skyward now. They climbed a short distance upward, then abruptly turned inward as the wind blowing inward from the sea caught them.

"Oh," Miriam said.

"We'll have to make do with what we've got," Jim said.

Miriam's eyes were on the columns of smoke rising in the sky.

She was biting her lips, choking off her own inner pain in an effort to keep her husband and her daughter from

knowing what she was feeling. Her home was burning. She wanted to run back there and beat out the flame with her bare hands. Beside her, her husband was getting blankets and canteens and food out of the car. He was talking to Ed Smith.

"I remember reading that in the fire following the San Francisco quake many years ago, the temperature from burning buildings reached over two thousand degrees," she heard Jim say.

"But at that temperature green vegetation will burst into flame; people won't be able to breathe," Smith said, horror, in his voice.

"If they stay down close to the ground, the temperature will be lower. Rising air will carry the heat upward very fast. In fact, this temperature will soon set up convection currents or rising air that will create hurricanes. And, of course, away from the vicinity of burning buildings, the temperature won't go that high. The open places will be relatively secure, if each individual can keep from going into panic—" Jim's voice trailed off as he considered how many people would be able to avoid panic under such conditions. He doubted if there would be very many.

"We had better find an open space," Smith said.

"That is one reason I suggested we use the freeway and walk," Jim said. "Burning shrubbery won't be too close on either side of the freeway and the freeway is not lined with buildings. Thus the temperatures won't get so high. Also, except for the fissures, the walking will be good."

"Are you sure it will be better in the Valley?" Smith questioned.

"I don't intend to stop in the Valley," Jim answered. "If our shoes hold up, I'm going beyond it."

"But by tomorrow the quake will be over," Smith said.

"You mean you hope it will be over. But will the fires be over?"

Smith's face tightened at this question.

"Also, I don't know how far this quake is going. When the ground is breaking up in fissures as it is doing, this means the area is lifting. If one area is lifting, another area is going down."

"But—" Miriam tried to protest.

"Honey, back there our home is burning," Jim answered.

"But friends will offer us a place to stay."

"In their burned homes? No. The best we can look forward to is spending several days in the open, then if it is at all possible, returning to be certain what has happened to our home. After that, we will plan further." He was quite matter-of-fact about all this.

"Jim, you sound so calm!" Miriam said.

"Well, I'm *not*," Jim answered.

Jim carried two blankets and the loaf of bread and the two-pound tin of cooked ham, with an opener. Miriam carried one blanket and one canteen. Susan insisted on carrying the second canteen on her shoulder. Jim slipped the powerful light in his pocket, plus the .38 and a big pocketknife. He had been wearing a jump suit when the quake began. Still wearing it, he was glad of the many big pockets in it.

"I don't see why you're bringing those blankets," Miriam said, wiping sweat from her face.

"We'll need them tonight," he answered.

"How long do quakes usually last?" Smith asked.

"There is no normal time, so far as I know," Jim answered. "It all depends on how much stress is accumulated and how fast the quake releases it. The release of the accumulated stress in one area produces additional stress in other adjoining areas, overloading them to the point where earth slippages may begin to occur there. These secondary slippages in turn can reflect back to the original area. This can go on for days. For months, there may be intermittent earth

shocks as the rock strata under the ground adjust to the new pressures on them."

"You're not very optimistic," Smith commented.

"I'm being factual," Jim answered. "Nobody seems to care much for facts. For instance, for years we have been warned that the danger of a truly devastating earthquake in this area was increasing each year. This is a fact. But it was not a popular fact and nobody paid any attention to it, including me."

They walked down the little rise and climbed the on-ramp to the freeway, moving around the line of tail-gated cars that had blocked entrance here. Two men were fighting over the accident, a woman was standing to one side, screaming as if her lungs were bursting. They skirted the edge of the fissure that had opened at the edge of the freeway. It looked like a ditch, a knife gash in the earth.

Seen from its own level, the freeway looked like an enormous stretch of rising road that went up and up and up as if it were challenging the summit of heaven. The roadway was no longer the smooth surface it had been, however. Now, at irregular intervals, the smooth surface had been forced into the air. It was as if great moles had been working under the freeway, piling up chunks of broken concrete and digging fissures.

At this moment, the ground was not shaking. Far under the surface were muttering sounds as if the earth giants down there had stopped chewing with their teeth of granite and were holding a conference to decide where they would next work. The thunder in the sky, the roaring tumult that had swept from horizon to horizon, that had leaped toward the summit of the sky and had been hurled back earthward by the horrified heavens, was mostly gone. As there were muttering sounds under the earth, there also seemed to be muttering sounds in the sky. There was a thin crackle in the air, the feeling of electric tension so high it was almost ready

to break down all insulating barriers and to leap as lightning across space. There were also the many sounds that fire makes, the thin crackle of climbing flames. There was also in the air the strangest sound that Jim Gray had ever heard. At first, he did not know what it was, then he realized it was the sound of human voices, thousands of them, perhaps millions of them, crying out, screaming, swearing, wailing, all at the same time. This formed a great ocean of sound. Over in the basin, in the whole area, was terror and horror and despair.

"So many are hurt!" Miriam said, drawing closer to her husband.

"I hear them," Jim answered.

"Are they badly hurt?" Susan asked.

"Yes, honey, very badly, many of them," Jim answered.

"Then I am sorry for them," the child said.

Ed Smith stumbled, caught himself, then stumbled again. "The ground is beginning to shake," he said.

V

"JESUS HELP ME, Jesus help me, Jesus help me. . . ." Ed Stauncher prayed, over and over again. The playboy was on his knees in the private lobby that led to the elevator, praying at the top of his voice for the salvation of his soul and the safety of his body. He had not prayed so much since he had been a child and had faced the prospect of a richly-deserved paternal spanking. In fact, he had not prayed at all, holding to the belief that prayer was for those who did not have millions of dollars.

Now, as if mocking him, it seemed to him that every time he spoke the name of Jesus, the building jolted heavier.

"Jesus!" Ed said.

Jump, went the building.

"Jesus . . ." Ed repeated.

Jolt, went the building.

This scared him more than the quake had when it had thrown him out of bed. Deep in his subconscious mind were dim memories of stories learned early in life of a vengeful god. Now, with the pressure of rising fear in him, these stories came back into his mind. Then he remembered the stairs.

Getting off his knees, fast, Stauncher headed for the stairs. He went down them so fast he was almost flying.

When he reached the bottom, Ed Stauncher was moving so fast he could hardly stop. He continued down the stairs to the underground garage, his purpose being to get one of his two cars kept there. Reaching the garage, he found it

filled with choking dust, falling plaster, and the fumes of gasoline.

Stauncher wanted the Royce but he caught a glimpse of it through the dust. It was against the far wall and would be hard to get out. The powerful Phantom was headed for the inclined ramp that led to the street outside. Coughing and sputtering, Ed Stauncher pulled his pajamas together at the throat and headed for the Phantom.

Before he reached the car, the rocking of the building pulled loose a steel I-beam directly above the automobile. With howls of tortured metal, stout bolts sheared off.

The I-beam fell directly on top of the Phantom. It broke the back of the car. Above the I-beam the floor sagged downward in a gaping hole. Chunks of broken concrete showered downward in an explosion of white dust.

Beyond the hole, up somewhere on the first floor above, a woman screamed violently.

Ed Stauncher backed away from the Phantom. With chunks of concrete falling around him, he found his way up the inclined ramp that led to the street outside. Reaching the street, he found pandemonium.

On this street was such a noise as neither Ed Stauncher nor any other man had ever heard before, such a noise as had never disturbed the air of the planet until this day. It was composed of many single noises, the shouts of alarmed men, the screams of frightened women, the wailing of scared children, the barking of shaken dogs. Coming down from the sky was weird thunder.

Ed Stauncher clapped his hands over his ears. Looking up, he saw the building was swaying. His first impression was that the structure was leaning toward him.

Then he realized that the building was falling. It was starting slowly but it was clearly beginning to fall. Inside it, reinforcing steel rods were breaking with sounds like cannon

shots. Great puffs of dust were leaping outward from exploding windows and crumbling walls.

At this point, Ed Stauncher made what could have been a fatal mistake. He tried to outrun the falling building. Around him others who had seen the falling building were attempting the same race.

As the building leaned over, ornamental stone work from its top began to skip out of place and to fall toward the ground. Some of these stones weighed hundreds of pounds, others were the size of bricks. They hit the asphalt of the street with sufficient force to bury themselves.

Stauncher, fleeing along the street, had the impression that the sky was throwing stones at him. On his left, he saw a stone strike a man. Instantly, the man became a bloody pulp, a tangle of red meat and protruding white bones, a skull with a hole in it that extended down into the chest cavity. The struck man did not cry out in pain. He had no vocal chords left. He was a red ruin that collapsed soundlessly down to the asphalt.

Suddenly Stauncher realized two things. One, that he was collapsing himself, two, that the falling stones were now hitting the asphalt street behind him. He knew then that he had out-run them. As he realized this, he went down. He had not been hit; he was not hurt; he had simply collapsed from fright and from over-exertion. His lungs moved in great panting gulps as he tried to get oxygen into his bloodstream; his heart felt as if it was going to jump from his chest. Getting a little strength back into his muscles, he looked back.

The building had broken in the middle. The top half had fallen against the bottom half. Steel beams had bent in great U-shapes but they were still holding the top half of the building from falling to the ground. Out of the windows of the top half of the building was coming a rain of broken glass and twisted frames, books, clocks, radios, chairs, bric-à-brac—and people. Those who had remained in the top

half of the building, thinking it quake-proof, were now falling toward the ground. Perhaps many of them, thinking it was better to die quickly than to face any longer this catastrophe that had come upon them on a Sunday morning, were jumping.

The sound of screaming was a thin, high ululation that never seemed to stop. It rose above the rumble in the earth and the thunder in the sky as ragged fragments of sound torn from tortured throats.

Lying on the asphalt, Ed Stauncher suddenly found he was screaming too, not only in sympathy with the others but also because of the terror in him. Under his body, he could feel the asphalt jumping and jolting and swaying. There was a screaming in the earth.

Dodging holes and fissures and wrecks, a car came along the street. It reminded Ed Stauncher that he ought not to be lying here. Getting to his feet, he saw that across the sidewalk was a small park with flowers growing around a fountain and a neatly clipped lawn. Stumbling into the little park, he let himself fall on the grass.

Under him the ground was jumping—and breaking into fissures. Ed Stauncher saw the first fissure come across the park. It made soft snapping sounds as it broke the roots of small shrubs and flowers. Now it was three inches wide, now it was a foot wide, now it was big enough to gulp down a man. Now the snapping sounds became gulping noises like an alligator swallowing its prey alive.

At this thought, Ed Stauncher screamed again. He was in such a state of mind and emotions that almost any thought would make him scream. He began to pray again.

Snapping grass roots, a fissure worked its way across the lawn toward him. He squealed like a small boy. The fissure missed him. Or he dodged it. In his mind was the thought that the fissure had been chasing him, to catch him and to gulp him down because of his sins. As a second fissure ap-

peared on the park lawn, he was sure it was sent from God to catch him. Getting to his feet, he fled back to the street.

Here were wrecked automobiles; here were people; here was panic. In this moment, it seemed to Ed Stauncher that the whole world had gone crazy. A few cars were trying to find their way along the street. Between the wrecks and the people there was little room for them. People filled the street. Like the beggars in the old nursery rhyme, some were in rags, some were in tags, and some wore velvet gowns. Some were in pajamas, some were in work clothes, some wore the special clothing uniform they kept for attending services on the Sabbath. Several women had apparently been sun bathing. They were still wearing shorts and halters. One was clad in a bikini. Presumably she had been on her way to the beach.

Under ordinary circumstances, a bikini-clad woman would have fascinated Ed Stauncher. Now he regarded the sight with repugnance.

To keep from looking at the bikini-clad young woman—she was very shapely, he saw, out of the corner of his eyes—he looked along the street toward the building where he had once lived. Bent in the middle like some strange hinge, the top was resting on the ground now. The top apartment, which Stauncher had occupied, had now become the ground floor apartment. His light-proof window shades were hanging outward now. Smoke was pushing past them.

"What if I were still in there?" he thought.

Stauncher was past the point where he could feel additional horror. Fear was exhausted in him. However, anger was still possible.

Looking at his beautiful top-floor apartment, at his marvelous play-pen, now turned upside down and starting to burn, Ed Stauncher suddenly found anger rising in him. He thought he was angry at the senseless destruction caused by

the quake: he also thought he was angry at crooked contractors who had substituted poor materials in place of good honest steel and concrete in the building.

"Damned stupid earthquake!" He shook his fist at the building he had once occupied. "Damn you!"

Beyond the broken building, Stauncher saw the vast Los Angeles basin reeling like a mirage seen in a heat wave. Again he had the impression that vast waves were rolling slowly across this enormous city. In his emotion-clogged state of mind, it did not occur to him that this was probably an illusion.

What was not an illusion or a mirage were the pillars of smoke now rising in the sky. These had not been in existence when he had first looked out of the window on the top floor of the building where he had lived. Dozens of them had come in existence in the hour or two that had passed since then. More were appearing all the time, each one reaching upward toward the sky like the black lead from a very long pencil. The sky was a sheet of paper upon which these pencils were going to write a tale of horror, of terror, and of death.

VI

UNDER THE Santa Monica pier, James Erasmus Glee sat with his back against a concrete abutment that supported the shore end of the long drive and walkway that ran out into the sea. Closed in on either side, a dark area was formed here. It was also closed to the sea side by a stout wire fence but digging under this fence was always easy.

This was his place of refuge, his hiding place, his sanctuary. When the world was too much with him this was his place of meditation where he could put the world back into its proper place. Here the law cameth not.

This noon, James Erasmus Glee was the only man under the end of the pier. This was good. This meant he would be able to drink two full gallons of rich red wine all by himself without being forced to share it with anyone.

Nobody under the pier! James Erasmus Glee was so pleased to be alone that he did not think it strange that the area under the pier was deserted. He had three quick drinks, then three more, than an additional three.

He was a three drinker. That is, if the supply was adequate, instead of stopping with the customary second drink, he went on and had a third. In his fogged mind, this was confused with the Trinity of the Christian religion, and he had "One for the Father, one for the Son, and one for the Holy Ghost."

"Here's to you, Holy Ghost," he said, lifting the jug for the third time.

Smacking his lips, he set the jug down. The second jug he had buried in the sand, so that if a friend found him

here, it would seem that he had only one jug. There was nc point in being a damned fool. Jugs were too hard to come by to give them away to the first friend who came along.

All during the noon hour, James Erasmus Glee sat in his dark, cool sanctuary. He thought the pier was creaking and groaning in a manner unusual to it but he paid little attention to this. Normally cars passed along overhead. If parking space was available, perhaps they parked at the far end, while their occupants went to the various fish restaurants built on heavy poles alongside the pier itself. Shooting galleries and fortune telling booths, plus boat rental services lined the pier on both sides.

From Glee's sanctuary, all that was visible was a forest of posts rising out of the wet sand and marching into the sea. He could also catch glimpses of the fishing boats at the far end of the pier. Even when he heard shouts rise from the top of the pier, he paid them little attention, except to wonder where so many people had got enough wine to make them hollering drunk. He also saw a car fall off the side of the pier.

"Drunk driver!" he thought. Indignation rose in him. Somebody was mocking the fair name of alcohol! "There ought to be a law against driving a car when you're drunk!" he said virtuously.

Heavy crashes sounded above him. He was drinking to the Son and hardly noticed them. When two other cars fell off the side of the pier at the fishing boat rental area, he was drinking to the Holy Ghost. He thought it would be impious to take his mind off the Holy Ghost to look at an automobile wreck.

Later, he noticed the pier was dancing in a rather strange way. He also noticed that the posts were swaying.

In the distance, he saw one of the little structures that housed a shooting gallery detach itself from the pier and fall into the sea. It did not make much of a splash. Later

he saw someone trying to climb one of the big posts that supported the pier. He assumed this was either the owner or the operator of the shooting gallery. Or perhaps it was some drunk who had fallen into the sea.

The man climbing the post had a rough time of it. He slipped back into the sea, then fought his way back up the post again, slipped once more, then was not seen again.

After the shooting gallery fell, one by one the other shops that were on the same side of the pier lost their footing and went down into the ocean. Fish-and-chip restaurants, souvenir shops, fishing tackle shops, the live bait place, the bar—the sight of the little bar falling into the sea cost Glee a real pang—all went down into the ocean.

For a time, swimmers screamed there. Some managed to reach the beach before collapsing on the sand.

"Here's to the Father," said James Erasmus Glee.

Swaying and rocking, the pier remained standing.

"Here's to the Son," said James Erasmus Glee.

Sometime during the middle of the afternoon he realized what the commotion was all about.

"By golly, it's an earthquake that knocked those stores down!" he exclaimed.

His first thought was to crawl out from under the end of the pier and to see what was happening up above. Near and far, people were screaming and the air was filled with tumult.

His second thought was to dig up the second jug and to start on it.

As to which thought he would carry into action, there was really no conflict. It was the second thought.

He dug up the jug.

"To hell with the earthquake," he said, beginning on the second jug.

To millions of people, this was a day of wrath in which an earthquake was destroying lives and property in such

staggering numbers and in such huge quantity that the mind reeled from thinking in such magnitudes.

Under the Santa Monica pier, a wino defied the quake to do its worst.

"Here's to the Holy Ghost," said James Erasmus Glee, as he began on the second jug.

VII

PROPHER THE PROPHET was a man with a fast reflex system functioning on both the muscular and the verbal levels. He could give you a quick answer in words, or on the muscular level, he could give you a quick poke in the eye. When he found himself falling out of a wrecked helicopter in the Santa Monica mountains, he made a quick grab at the edge of the door of the ship, caught it in powerful hands, and turned his body so that he struck the ground feet first. Hitting in a tumbler's roll, he let his body roll. When he got to his feet, he was unharmed. Above him, the rotor blades had stopped turning. He smelled raw gasoline. He did not have to be a prophet to know what was likely to happen when these fumes reached the hot motor. Reaching up, he retrieved his staff from the cabin, then beat a hasty retreat. He was no more than away from the ship before it puffed into flame from the gasoline fumes.

At the top of the slope was a barren area where weathered granite had appeared as an outcropping. No builder had as yet been able to gain clear title to this land, hence there was no castle on top of this mountain. Reaching the granite, Propher knew he was safe from the brush fire that would start from his wrecked helicopter.

Looking back, he saw that the blaze was already spreading from the crashed ship. Tongues of flame were snapping through the wild buckwheat bushes, through the cedar shrubs, through the sugar bushes. Under his feet, Propher could feel the earth shaking. In fact, it was shaking so badly he was having difficulty in keeping his footing. His long staff

gave him security, of a sort. Leaning on it, he looked down the mountain.

Before his eyes, falling away into the far distance, was the Los Angeles basin. From Santa Monica on the north, the basin swept in a vast curving semi-circle of cities along the mountains toward Hollywood, then dived downward toward the Civic Center of Los Angeles, then disappeared into the smog of more cities on the southern horizon.

At this moment, these cities were disappearing into more than smog, they were disappearing into a rising pall of smoke.

Staring at the scene of destruction below him, Propher the Prophet felt numbness come into his brain. He could not estimate how many people were already dead down there in the basin, nor could he guess how many more would die. Some things he could predict. But not this. The number was so great it numbed his mind.

One fact was sure: he was looking at the biggest disaster in human history. In California on this day, catastrophe was coming in Texas size.

It was Propher's guess that neither census-takers nor historians of the future would ever know how many people had perished in this quake and fire. As to the property loss, it would run as high as the national debt, in billions too high to count.

Propher wondered if the nation itself would survive this catastophe. The property loss alone would be big enough to send the whole nation into a financial tail-spin from which it would not recover in years, if at all. The whole world would feel the economic consequences of this tragedy. Because of this catastrophe, a whole nation would weep; the whole world would be made sad. Because so many had died here, so suddenly, everyone else on earth would feel a little less secure. This thing, this horror before his eyes, would make cowards the people of a whole planet.

Up the slope below him a buck deer followed by two does came bounding. Rabbits and squirrels were already passing. Birds in continuous wheeling flight were fleeing the basin and were flying over the crest of the Santa Monica mountains to seek refuge in the San Fernando Valley beyond.

Turning, Propher looked at the Valley. What he saw there made him sick inside. It was having its own private brand of hell. North Hollywood, Van Nuys, Canoga Park, Woodland Hills, Chatsworth, Northridge—he could see columns of smoke rising from each of these towns.

To his left, Propher could see the San Diego freeway between Santa Monica and the San Fernando Valley, twin ribbons of concrete which had once borne continuous streams of cars in both directions. Although cars were visible on it, they were not moving. Propher could see great holes in the freeway; he could see collapsed overpasses; he could see fissures that had split the concrete and the asphalt.

People were walking along the freeway toward the San Fernando Valley. In this moment, Propher sympathized with these walkers. As yet, they were few in number but his guess was that eventually they would become a great tide flowing from the Los Ageles basin to a refuge they hoped to find in the San Fernando Valley or beyond. With the freeways impassable, with the secondary roads and streets broken by fissures, with connecting streets jammed with wrecked cars, walking would be the only way anyone could escape from the hell's brew now coming to a boil in the basin.

Watching the thin line of walkers, Propher saw three plumes like ostrich feathers appear across his forehead. He knew what these plumes meant—that the gift of prophecy was to come to him. In the past, when these three plumes had appeared, he had been given the winners of forthcoming races and much else that he usually did not mention. Sometimes he had been given scenes out of the distant past. At other times, he had seen events that seemed to be happening

in far-away places of the earth. When he saw the three feathers appear inside his forehead, he knew he was going to see something.

As to the reason for the three feathers, he did not know. Nor did he know anything about the screen on which they appeared. It always seemed to him that his forehead opened like a round door, that the three plumes pulled aside, and that he looked out beyond this door to events, to places, to people that lay afar in time or in space. Usually what he saw did not correlate at all with what he wanted to see, or with what was happening around him. Many times when he had been desperately trying to foresee the outcome of a horse race, he had been forced instead to watch a nun practicing on an ancient musical instrument in some forgotten city of long ago.

As the three feathers appeared across the inside of his forehead, Propher planted his feet firmly on the weathered granite and set the end of his staff in the ground. When he was steady and secure, the three feathers seemed to fold outward and upward, disappearing into some stage setting that he had never been able to see. In this instant, Propher forgot the lines of people walking on the freeway, he forgot the thunder in the sky, and he also forgot what was happening in the Los Angeles basin behind him and in the San Fernando Valley before him.

A new scene appeared before his inner vision.

In this new scene he also watched refugees crawl in a long thin line from a stricken city, fleeing from death in a city to the safety they hoped to find in a valley, finding death was in the valley too. The city was a beautiful place. It too, was in a green valley. Beyond it volcanic mountains reared fanged peaks upward toward the sky.

Somehow, in his mind, Propher knew that this city had once existed, in old Atlantis, in the remote past—whether this past was remote ten thousand years or twenty thousand

Propher did not know or care. Propher did not for an instant think that this city was a delusion, a feverish creation of his own imagination driven beyond its limits by the stress of the earthquake and the crash of his helicopter. His imagination was in the picture, of course. It was the faculty that was recreating this city, but his imagination was not inventing the vision. The source of the city he was seeing lay in a memory of a real city he had once seen, a city of long ago and of far away. He also knew that what he was seeing had once happened, when the Atlantic Ocean, lapping other continents, had another and an older name.

The city before his inner vision was a jewel, a holy place, a city devoted to the arts and to healing and to the correlation between art and healing. Here in this city lived men who were devoted to the healing arts; here in this place were treatment processes that had perished from the earth when Atlantis died, arts which involved the use of color and of musical tones to knit together the higher, finer bodies of men who had become sick. In this city, those who had been sick worked in the surrounding fields during their period of convalescence. Here light from the sun was a part of healing, as well as gentle winds and warming waters. Around the jewel city, in the grain fields, were twisted towers that rose like strange ropes into the sky. Propher knew these towers were part of a complex system of collecting various energies from the great vault of heaven, including an energy that was prior to both electricity and magnetism. After being collected in these towers, the now-captive energy was led underground for storage in vast cells. Part of it was used for lighting, part for running strange machines, part in healing of the sick.

Looking at the jewel city seen in his vision, Propher felt pain rise in the region of his heart. He knew this pain came from love struggling upward there. In this city, if nowhere else, the citizens of old Atlantis were taught how to be better

people, how to be consciously aware not only of their own needs but also of the wants and the needs of others.

Propher knew he had helped plan and had helped build this jewel city of old Atlantis; he knew he had loved the city and the work done in it as he had loved nothing else on earth or in heaven.

He also knew that as he watched it destroyed in the old days, he had died too, there, in that catastrophe, simply because he did not choose to live after the city he had loved had been destroyed. His mind, his heart, his emotions had not wished to live after their living dream was gone down under the waters of the middle sea that later became called the Atlantic Ocean.

Why had this earthquake come to destroy a jewel city in the old Atlantis? There was little evil in this ancient land. The quake had not come as justice from the gods; it had not been the work of enemies.

For a time, in his vision, Propher raged at the quake, calling it blind, senseless destruction. The he raged at the gods who had sent the quake or who had allowed it to happen. Then he screamed at the earth fault that had slipped. All of his raging and all of his screaming did not stop or slow the destruction. It went on and on and on. Finally he collapsed, sobbing, on the high ground from which he had watched the destruction of the city.

He had died there, of watching dreams break up and become nothing.

Now the feathers folded back across his forehead, obscuring the vision of long ago. He found he was using his normal eyes again. Fled was the second sight, gone was the clairvoyance. Breathing deeply, he held himself erect on his staff. As his normal sight returned, he saw he was in the Santa Monica mountains. Memory returned with it. He saw that time had passed while he was watching the inner vision. Now the sun was completely hidden by black smoke. His

time sense told him that the middle of the afternoon had come.

The line of people on the freeway had grown thicker. From his height, these people looked like ants. No cars were being used but a few had bicycles or motor scooters which could be carried across or around the fissures. Propher saw one rider knocked off his bicycle, which was then taken away from him by the man who had knocked him from it.

He had raged at the destruction of the jewel city in the old time. He did not rage at the destruction of Los Angeles. Not that this did not hurt; it did hurt, but in a different way. Somehow, somewhere, in the centuries that had passed since he had lived in the jewel city of old Atlantis, he had learned that cities—and human bodies—came and went, and that the loss of any particular city—or any one body—did not matter much. There would be a pang in parting. This was all. No raging at the gods or at the whim of fate or at blind luck. Just a pang at parting, then the work of rebuilding in preparation for the long, long journey to the true home of man.

Propher the Prophet was not quite sure where this true home was located. But he knew it existed. And he knew that one day he and many others would reach it. To reach their true home was the purpose of the westering. Or *one* purpose.

Propher was alone on a mountain top in the late afternoon. The air was filled with smoke and foul odors. Down below he could dimly see the walkers on the freeway. Both inbound and outbound lanes were filled now, lanes and shoulders, by men who walked as if they knew desperation was close behind them.

If the smoke prevented clear seeing, there was nothing to prevent clear smelling. Getting a good whiff of what was in the wind, Propher almost vomited. The wind was loaded with the smell of old rubber burning, of leather, and paint, and feathers and wool—and with one other odor—the in-

describably foul stink that comes from burning human flesh.

The smell drove him from his mountain top. Picking his way with his staff through still-hot ground where flames had swept from his helicopter, Propher began to feel his way down toward the freeway. Between clouds of smoke, he could see that the freeway was filled to overflowing with humans, all walking, all fleeing from the Los Angeles Basin toward the San Fernando Valley.

From the death behind them they fled to the death ahead.

VIII

THE SIGHT of his bitter enemy, Sam Lamont, waddling along ahead of him was like a shot of dope to Tommy Bolt. Not that he was on the stuff. But he did have a shot now and then, mainly for kicks—he told himself—or when the going ahead was likely to be tough.

If he had known the earthquake was coming, he would have had a shot in advance to prepare himself. But he hadn't known. Nor had he known that he and Sam Lamont would both take refuge in Griffith Park.

Before he could put a bullet into the fat man's back, Lamont had waddled out of sight around a turn in the curving park path. Hurrying to catch up, Tommy Bolt found himself jostled by other people who were also using the path to escape the horror down below. They ran ahead of him, they pushed him off the path. Nobody seemed to recognize in him the next head of the Los Angeles criminal underworld. Nobody seemed to be aware that he was barefooted and was wearing scarlet pajamas trimmed in royal blue. Nobody seemed to notice the big gun he had in his hand.

Suddenly—in part because nobody even noticed him, in part for other reasons—Tommy Bolt was nothing. Without his realizing it was happening, the jolting earth, the thundering sky had shaken even his nerve.

Now, however, on this day when the earth was shaking and the sky was thundering with outraged sound, Tommy Bolt found himself pushed off a path. For a time, he stood beside the path clutching a useless gun in his hands. He

could hear his own teeth chattering in his mouth as fear rose higher and higher in him.

Tommy Bolt restored his courage by imagining what he would do to Sam Lamont when he overtook the Mafia head. He thought how Lamont would beg for mercy, how Lamont would plead for his life, how Lamont would offer him large sums of money and his choice of many beautiful women. He thought how he would tell Lamont how he would take the money and the women, take them because he would own them with Lamont dead.

These thoughts gave him the courage to return to the path. Lamont was not in sight; he did not know where the fat man had gone, but his guess was that the Mafia head was climbing to a higher place on the mountain side.

Behind Bolt, on the lower levels, was a continuous roar, a blast of thundering sound that never seemed to cease. Sweat was suddenly spurting from his skin. To him, this was a new sensation. In the past around him, it had always been the other fellow who did the sweating.

People rushed past him along the path. He realized they did not know where they were going or what they were doing. There was no real reason to assume there was greater safety to be found in the open spaces near the top of the mountains in Griffith Park than was to be found in any open space nearer the bottom of the hills. But people were climbing anyhow. Kicking and shoving at anyone moving slower than they, people were fighting their way toward the top of the mountain. It was panic that was driving them, panting for breath, toward the top of the mountains, that was putting energy into muscles unaccustomed to such loads, that was forcing circulatory systems beyond the constricted limits that civilization and laziness had put upon them.

Tommy Bolt saw some of the results of this over-exertion. Ahead of him, a fat woman collapsed abruptly. Her face was turning purple as he stepped over. Along the path to the

right and to the left were others, some dead, some still alive but unable to move because of vascular accidents. They called to him with piteous cries for help.

"Shut up and die!" he yelled at an elderly man who was trying to attract his attention.

"You got soft!" he screamed at a thin man dying on the path. "Now you gotta die!"

In the mind of Tommy Bolt there was a close correlation between softness and death. In his private world, to get soft was to die, to let an enemy off the hook was to set traps for yourself, to show sympathy was to make plans to cut your own throat. He lived in the world of the jungle.

Ahead of him, he glimpsed Sam Lamont!

The fat man had stopped to rest. Sitting on a patch of grass beside the path, Lamont had shed his coat and was mopping his face with a handkerchief.

Tommy Bolt fired one shot, fired it instantly. The bullet gave Lamont a new part in his hair. As the bullet hissed past him, Lamont caught a glimpse of Tommy Bolt on the path below.

Sam Lamont always gave the impression that he was fat and slow moving. He was large in size but there was little fat on his body, none at all on his head. If he had been thick-headed, he would have died under the gun of some Mafia gangster long before becoming the leader of the Los Angeles criminal family.

As the bullet snapped past him, Lamont grabbed his coat, jerked the gun from the side pocket, and fired an answering shot all in one motion.

Under normal circumstances, Sam Lamont was an excellent hand with a gun. He had to be this or he would never have lived long enough to become a criminal leader.

But this time he missed. As Tommy Bolt had missed. These were not ordinary circumstances, this was an earth-

quake. As the two fired, the gound was jumping, with the result that both men missed their target.

The same sudden jolt in the ground caused Bolt to lose his footing on the rising mountain path. He fell heavily. As he fell, he heard Lamont's gun snap a second bullet through the air above his head. He ducked to the side of the path, lost his footing again, and slid down a rocky slope a distance of perhaps ten feet. When he stopped sliding, he saw that a small ravine led upward. When heavy rains fell in these mountains, this ravine carried a flood of water downward. Now it was carrying boulders and small rocks that had been loosened from the slopes above and which were rolling and bounding down the watercourse.

Tommy Bolt had to scramble on all-fours to get up the side of the ravine and thus escape being buried alive in a rolling waterfall of rocks and boulders.

To Tommy Bolt, killing Sam Lamont was more important than the earthquake. To him, the quake was only a mad stage setting for the really important show, the death of Lamont. He slipped back to the path where he had seen the fat man. Lamont was not in sight. Tommy Bolt did not know whether his enemy had gone down the path, had gone up the path, or had left it entirely. Up above, rising over the noise of the quake, came the sharp bark of a pistol. The bullet passed within inches of Tommy Bolt's head. He threw himself to the ground.

The bullet told him that Sam Lamont had gone up the slope. The Mafia head was in hiding up there, waiting for Bolt to come to him.

Tommy Bolt knew from the sound the approximate spot from which the shot had been fired. About fifty yards ahead, a heavy clump of sugar bushes had found a footing on the side of the mountain. Lamont was probably hiding in these bushes.

While the earth shook, Tommy Bolt crept along the side

of the mountain toward the sugar bushes. It seemed to him that every wild creature that had ever existed in California was running loose in the park. A pack of wolves ran down the slope above him. He caught a glimpse of a lumbering monster that he was sure was a buffalo. Then he saw a black bear, then an African lion.

In his mind was the thought that the quake had jarred the gates of hell from their hinges and that the creatures of the dark lower regions of the earth were escaping upward. Later, he would realize that the quake had actually knocked down the fences, broken the gates, and had smashed the cunning barriers in the natural displays of the new zoo, freeing the wild animals held captive there.

The animals were in panic as deep as their human cousins.

None of this mattered to Tommy Bolt. All that concerned him, all that interested him, was the death of Sam Lamont.

Crawling along the slope, he came to the rear of the growth of sugar bushes. Here, he waited. The ground was shaking, rocks were rolling down the slope. Fortunately, there were no large boulders on the hill directly above, hence he did not have to face death from this cause. There were places in this area where boulders as big as trucks had smashed at jet plane speed into groups of people jammed into open spaces, to break arms and legs and bodies and heads with careless ease.

When Sam Lamont did not appear, Tommy Bolt crawled around a clump of cedars. Here he met Sam Lamont, also crawling, face to face.

IX

ALL AFTERNOON, while the earth was shaking, Jim Gray, his wife Miriam and his daughter Susan, and their new friend, Ed Smith, trudged along the freeway that led to the San Fernando Valley. The sky was filled with boiling clouds of greasy, black smoke, foul with the odor of burning oil, of burning houses, of burning bodies.

With Ed Smith, the Grays went along the outbound freeway. Flames in the scrub brush on both sides of the freeway made crackling sounds in the black smoke pall. Now and then the ground jolted suddenly, throwing them to the surface of the roadway. Sounds that seemed to come from the deep heart of the planet itself pushed surfaceward, with the result that the earth seemed to be a great animal groaning in pain here in this segment of stricken space. Down below, the earth giants were still busy, grinding molar against molar as they chewed up the world.

When they had started walking on the freeway, they had been almost alone. Now, by mid-afternoon, the freeway had become a great river of humans. Some walked as if they were in trance, not seeing from lusterless eyes. Some cried as they walked, thin wailing sounds like flute notes against the background of a dirge of pain. Others were so dry-eyed and so hard-faced that it seemed as if no tear would ever again roll down their cheeks.

The freeway walkers were people with one idea, to get away from the hell of the Los Angeles basin.

When they saw the San Fernando Valley, saw the plumes of flame rising upward there, saw the columns of black

smoke pushing toward the sky, they knew that this valley was not a place of refuge. They kept on walking anyhow. Like zombies, like people in deep hypnotic trance, they kept on doing whatever they were doing.

Ed Smith turned off on a smoke-filled ramp. Waving at the Grays, he went down toward the valley. The Grays continued walking. They made no comment on Ed Smith. He had come into their lives in an automobile crash, now he was leaving in a swirl of smoke. They knew they would never see him again.

Like the others on this freeway, the Grays were walking in a condition of semi-trance that enabled them to ignore thirst, hunger, and fatigue.

Ahead, people seemed to be piling up in a traffic jam. Walkers were coming up an on-ramp from the right. Mixed with those already present, these newcomers were filling the freeway to overflowing.

As the smoke lifted for a few seconds, Jim Gray saw what was happening.

"This is the clover-leaf intersection with the Ventura Freeway," he said. "We've got throngs of walkers coming from both directions on the Ventura Freeway. They're trying to get on the intersecting San Diego Freeway leading across the San Fernando Valley. The result is a human traffic jam."

He had often seen the freeways jammed with cars. This happened after every accident. But to see a four-leaf clover intersection jammed with humans packed so tightly together they could hardly move was a shocking sight. There were thousands of people here, perhaps tens of thousands.

Then, as the smoke shifted again, Jim Gray saw another thing that had happened here in the late afternoon of the day when the earth shook. These thousands of people, in this smoke-filled place, with panic just under the surface in all of them had made a wrong turn. Instead of arriving in both directions on the Ventura Freeway and turning across

the valley on the San Diego Freeway, they were blindly circling the intersection. No one was going anywhere except in a great circle.

"We'll have to go around," Jim Gray said to his wife.

The freeway had been good walking. Her face said she would have preferred to follow it but she went with him.

Following the direction Ed Smith had taken, he turned away from the freeway. A throng of people moving very slowly on the intersecting freeway blocked their passage.

"Let us through, please. Let us through!" Jim said. He moved boldly toward them. Pushing at each other, people made way for him. In the murky, smoke-filled dusk, they could not see who he was. To them he was a firm voice asking them to get out of the way. He was also a voice that seemed to know where it was going. This thought caught them. In the murk, Jim became aware of voices speaking to him.

"Do you know where to go, mister?" a man's voice asked.

"You got any ideas?"

"Do you know how to get out of there?"

"Mister, I'm lost!" a woman wailed. "Can you show me how to get home?"

"I'm as lost as you are," Jim answered. With Miriam and Susan following him, he shoved his way through the throng of people on the freeway. Sliding down an embankment, they found themselves on a street where people were not packed together sardine-tight. They moved along this street.

Darkness had fallen, black, thick, heavy with greasy smoke, the darkest dark Jim Gray had ever seen. From his shoulder pack, he took the powerful light. It made a fitful gleam. Other people also had lights going but most of the illumination came from a house burning down the street. Then another house caught on fire. As they neared the burning houses, Jim Gray found that unconsciously he was listening for the sound of sirens, the coming of the fire engines. With

a start he realized that the fire engines were not running here either.

What he heard in the distance was not the sound of sirens, it was a woman screaming, no new sound on this day in California. Moving past the burning houses, they saw that the occupants were frantically trying to get their possessions out of the buildings. Furniture, a TV set, and clothing were scattered on the lawns. Jim saw a man run from the second house with a TV set held high in both hands. Tripping, the man fell. Glass tinkled as the picture tube smashed. The man got slowly to his feet. Furiously, he began to kick the TV set.

"That poor man—" Miriam whispered.

"You can also say poor us," Jim answered. "Our house is gone by now."

"All of my beautiful china, melted!" Miriam whispered.

"Yes. And all of my books too," Jim said.

"What about my doll house, daddy?" Susan asked. The doll house had been her greatest joy. She had spent many hours contentedly playing in it.

"I'll build you another one," Jim said, hastily.

"Do you mean it has burned too?"

"Yes."

"Oh. But I loved it so much," the child said, wistfully.

"All I can say is that I will make you another one," Jim answered.

"Do you think you will ever be able to keep that promise?" Miriam asked.

"Why not?" Jim answered, defiantly. "I'm still alive."

She squeezed his arm. He hardly noticed it. True, he and his family were still alive. The problem in his mind was how to keep them alive during the night that he sensed was coming.

Here in the San Fernando Valley, the darkness was not fitfully illumined by huge fires that seemed to go on and on

for miles in each direction. As the smoke cloud shifted, blown by vagrant gusts that seemed to change direction each time they blew, the reflections of far-away fires could be seen against the black clouds of smoke. Jim Gray knew that what they had glimpsed as happening in the Los Angeles basin was being repeated here in the Valley. Here, also, the streets were clogged with wrecked cars. Here the ground had opened in great fissures. Here water mains had already burst; here reservoirs had poured their reserve supplies of water down ravines and gorges.

Other things had burst too.

Turning into a cross street, Jim found his feet were becoming sticky.

"Molasses!" Miriam said, sniffing.

Jim's light revealed the slow movement of a tide of sticky syrup toward them. "Tank cars filled with molasses must have been on a railroad siding near here," Jim said. "The quake turned the cars over and the syrup began oozing along the street. We'll go around the stuff."

Avoiding the molasses, Jim poked his way cautiously along side streets where fire had readily gutted the houses and had moved on, leaving ashes and piles of slowly-burning coals behind it.

"I'm hungry," Susan said suddenly. Her voice was that of a plaintive gnome whispering in the darkness. She had been a good child; she had been very much afraid, but she had walked with her parents without complaint. Now she was hungry.

"Oh, darling, I'm sorry!" Miriam said. "I—well, with everything happening—I completely forgot about eating. Of course you're hungry. You haven't had anything to eat since breakfast."

"There's a place ahead that looks as if it was once a shopping center. Probably a grocery store will be there," Jim said.

They moved toward the center. Once it had been a busy place with parking lines marked for many cars. In ruins now, fire had not yet started here. A huge dark sign said *FOOD.*

Leaving Miriam and Susan in the dark parking lot, Jim poked his way into what had once been a supermarket. The beam of Jim's light revealed chaos. The building itself had held together in spite of the quake but its contents had been strewn from wall to wall. Meat and bread and vegetables and car batteries and baby's rubber pants were mixed together.

Jim found two loaves of bread and an unburst gallon milk container. Near the dairy counter, squares of yellow cheese were on the floor. He filled his pockets with them.

In the middle of the parking area of this shopping center, architects had planned a little park, with grass and stone benches and three palm trees. A fissure had split the asphalt of the parking lot, then had closed after partly gulping down two cars that had been parked here when the quake began. The palm trees had been moved to this spot and had been sunk into holes dug for them. Two had fallen, the third was leaning and was about to fall.

In this little park, Miriam fed Susan bread and milk and little nibbles of yellow cheese. Jim accepted a sandwich. The bread was dry in his mouth, the cheese was tasteless. Even the milk had a strange taste about it. Jim forced himself to eat and to drink. Miriam busied herself with the remnants of the bread and cheese. Paper rattled as she rewrapped them.

"A sandwich would be good for you," Jim said gently.

"I'm not in the least hungry."

"I know. At least drink a little milk," he urged.

"But Jim—"

Finding her hand in the dark, he squeezed it. "Please try to eat at least a little. There is still tomorrow to think about. We will need all the strength we can find," he said.

"My stomach is tied in knots and I'm still too scared to eat," Miriam said.

"I know," Jim said. "But there is still tomorrow. Please."

He released her hand. In the darkness, he heard paper rattle as she reopened the bread. Little crunching sounds followed as she tried to eat.

Under his bottom, Jim felt the stone bench begin to vibrate stronger. Creaks and groans came from the wrecked buildings of the shopping center. Near them, on the asphalt, a heavy throbbing sounded.

"What—what is that noise?" Miriam whispered.

The flashlight revealed that the throbbing came from a heavy concrete bench that had been upset. Now it was resting on the asphalt. The increased vibrations in the earth was creating the throbbing. Rattling, bouncing up and down, the heavy bench seemed to develop legs of its own. It slid across the parking lot in a weird dance, then seemed to vanish.

"What happened to it?" Miriam asked.

"It fell into a fissure," Jim answered.

Miriam was quickly silent. He knew she was wondering what would happen if a fissure suddenly opened directly under them. To flee was madness. A fissure might open anywhere. To sit still was to wait to be gulped down.

Jim Gray did not doubt that every person in this whole vast region was thinking similar thoughts this night, wondering how to stay alive in an earthquake that went on, and on, and on.

In the shopping center he caught a glimpse of a sign which said *ELECTRONICS*. Telling Miriam and Susan to remain on the bench, he went to the shop. Inside was an enormous confusion of broken TV sets and radio receivers. He searched through this wreckage until he found a battery-powered mulit-wave radio receiver. A flick of the switch told him it was working. As he walked back to his wife and

daughter, he tried to tune the receiver. The air was filled with alarmed voices saying one word over and over again: "Earthquake."

Setting the powerful receiver on the stone bench, he tuned it carefully. Somewhere a station was broadcasting a symphony. As he listened, the music was interrupted by a voice speaking with a clipped British accent.

"We have no additional information at this time on the great earthquake and fire reported to be taking place on the western coast of the United States. As soon as we have further reports, we will interrupt our program to bring them to you."

The British accent went off and the symphony returned.

"That's an English station," Miriam said. "They've heard about the quake over there!"

"I imagine the news of this quake is all over the world," Jim answered. He checked the tuning of the receiver, discovered it was set to receive foreign broadcasts, re-set it to receive domestic stations. Radio reporters in the United States were much more excited than those abroad.

"We have a recent report from the pilot of a jet plane which came in from Hawaii to Los Angeles. The ship could not land at International Airport in Los Angeles but was forced to continue inland to New Mexico before a landing could be made. The pilot says that smoke is rising more than 40,000 feet into the air over Los Angeles and that it reaches inland from the stricken city a distance of at least 100 miles. He says he does not know how high the smoke actually went, that the ceiling of his jet plane was 40,000 feet, and that the smoke was higher than he could fly. He says that he could not see the ground anywhere in the Los Angeles basin, that all he could glimpse were bright tongues of flame reaching upward. He gives it as his impression that the whole city is burning!"

The news reporter's voice went into choked silence as he

realized the enormous meaning of the words he had just used. In human history, Rome had burned, London had burned, Chicago had burned. Now Los Angeles was burning.

The news reporter found his lost voice. "We regret that our TV stations have been unable to bring you actual scenes of the fire but the smoke extends so high and the updraft from the fires is so heavy that our camera-carrying helicopters are unable to enter the area. Even if they could fly over the stricken city, the smoke is so heavy that nothing could be seen. It seems to be true, however, from scattered, unconfirmed reports that earthquake damage extends from Santa Barbara on the north almost to San Diego on the south. This a distance of about 200 miles. In this area are hundreds of small cities, with Los Angeles being the main hub around which these communities center. In all of these communities, in all of these cities, damage must be heavy, but it is in the Los Angeles basin that the destruction seems to be the greatest. Let me repeat again that what I am saying here is in no sense official. However, it does reflect the best information we are able to gather. National guard units from all states west of the Mississippi River have been alerted for immediate air transportation to the scene of the disaster, to maintain order and to assist in the rescue work once the quake and the fires make this possible. All available rescue services from the Armed Forces, plus many from Canada and Mexico, are in the process of being transported to the scene by air." Again the voice of the news reporter went into choked silence. "Now if you will excuse me—I mean, I just can't go on— What I want to say is that I am transferring you to our newsroom in New York—"

Another voice came quickly over the speaker, the tight, taut voice of a trained reporter doing his utmost best to keep himself under control.

The second voice said, "The San Francisco earthquake and

fire of the early years of the century were only a small preview for this one. The quakes in Alaska and Japan during recent years cannot begin to compare with what has happened, and is continuing to happen in the Los Angeles area. This earthquake is off the top end of the scale used for measuring disturbances in the earth's crust. Nothing like it has ever been recorded."

"Wouldn't it be better if we found an empty house and spent the night there?" Miriam said when Jim had turned off the radio.

"And have the roof down on us before morning?" Jim answered. "No, thanks. We'll spend the night in the open, on the freeway or moving toward it. This night—this night—"

Like the radio announcers, his voice choked into silence. He could not say the words he knew he would need to describe the night he knew was coming.

He couldn't even think them.

X

OF ALL THE NIGHTS in the history of the earth, this was the worst.

The sequence of events was simple and direct. First the quake, then the fire.

During the Sunday night when fire was king, Jim and Miriam Gray and their daughter were part of the enormous serpent that moved eastward across the San Fernando Valley. This serpent was composed wholly of humans in flight. Most had come from the east. Now, against their wishes, they were returning toward their point of origin. They moved through a flame-lit night under boiling clouds of smoke and they moaned as they moved.

The moan was a sound that came from many throats, a wail, a cry of lament, a protest to heaven aginst the fate that had come upon them.

Sometime during the night, Propher the Prophet joined this serpent. To him, the moans of lamentation, the shaking earth, the tall tongues of flame leaping upward into a smoke-filled sky, the shaking ground, all were pages out of an old book, a twice-told tale that he had lived before, a vague and dusty racial memory of the horror that came by day, of the terror that came by night.

During the night, Ed Stauncher found his way to the serpent that moved eastward, reaching it after moving down the outbound Hollywood Freeway. He had been stuck for hours in the intersection where the moaners circled blindly, finally winning his freedom from it more by luck than by intention. Indeed, he had no idea where he was, except that

he was among a group of people who were walking and moaning and that he was walking and moaning with them. He was still wearing the pajamas he had had on when the quake had tossed him out of bed in the middle of Sunday morning—to him, this seemed so long ago he could hardly remember it—but he had stolen a pair of shoes from a dead man. With him was the bikini-clad young woman.

Well along toward morning, a tall man wearing scarlet pajamas, trimmed in royal blue, climbed the embankment to the freeway. He too, had found shoes. He was carrying a big cloth sack, he had no light, and he did not know were he was going.

This was the way Tommy Bolt joined the movement eastward.

Now and then he looked inside the sack; more often he felt inside it, to reassure himself about its contents. Each time he looked or felt inside the sack, and realized anew what was there, he burst into laughter.

In this mad night, Tommy Bolt was the only person who laughed.

When morning came, Jim Gray and his wife and daughter were across the San Fernando Valley. They were also dead tired.

"We had better stop and rest today," Miriam said. Her face was an etching done in charcoal, an etching with fatigue so deep in it that no amount of rest could erase it. Jim was equally tired. Susan was sleeping on her feet. During the night, by slipping off the freeway, they had rested like utterly exhausted children sleeping in each other's arms. At no time had they really been able to sleep. Always the ground had begun to shake again, always fire had come to drive them on.

Looking at his wife, Jim saw how tired she was. Gently, he moved her toward an on-ramp of the freeway. People in

exhausted sleep lined both sides of the ramp. As Jim helped his wife down the ramp, the earth jolted again, hard, giving a quick snap that seemed to come from directly under them.

Miriam tumbled to her knees.

"It's starting again!" she gasped.

Jim helped her to her feet. On both sides of the ramp, the sleepers stirred uneasily in response to the new jolt that had gone through the ground, then settled back to sleep. Most of them were utterly exhausted. The rumbling roar of the ground wave that followed the jolt failed to arouse them.

They breakfasted on the last of the milk and cheese he had taken from the supermarket the night before. Jim flipped on the portable radio he had taken from the electronics shop.

The voice of the announcer was that of a man on the verge of apoplexy.

"My God!" Jim gasped, as he caught the meaning of the words the announcer was using. Automatically, he looked westward. The horror that the radio was talking about was located there.

Across the San Fernando Valley, the Santa Monica mountains could be glimpsed through occasional breaks in the swirling clouds of smoke. The rumbling roar of the ground wave had come from this direction. Now, as Jim looked westward, the earth jolted again, harder this time, and the ground wave became louder. Now it was like the noise made by a muted tornado, now it had a harsh grumbling note in it as if grandfather earth giants were protesting some new move that was being forced upon them.

On the radio, the announcer was going crazy.

"We have an announcer in a helicopter over the Los Angeles basin. We don't know how long he will be able to stay there. He is taking the risk of his ship crashing. If the violent air currents there upset his ship, you'll hear him crash!"

The announcer paused for breath.

"But as long as he is in the air, you will get a first-hand report of utter devastation, which is what is now taking place in and around Los Angeles. . . ."

Jim flipped off the radio. He looked around. Perhaps half a mile distant to the east was a range of low hills. He pointed to them.

"If we can reach them, we'll be safe there," he said. In his heart he did not feel that he—or any other human being—would ever feel really safe again anywhere on earth.

XI

THE QUAKES BEGAN on a Sunday morning. Though not of the same intensity, the earth shocks continued all through Sunday night. Then the fire took over and became king. On Monday morning about seven o'clock a new ruler came into the Los Angeles basin.

The ocean. Monday was the day when the sea came. It was not that the water charged the land. Water was still water; it still remained in the lowest places. It was that the land became the lowest place.

The intensity of the earth shocks and the continual jolting had released part of the stresses finding expression in the San Andreas fault and in other similar ones of the enormous fault system of Southern California. As these stresses had been released, the continuing quakes had set up new and heavier stresses in other parts of the earth's crust, with the result that new and bigger faults had come quite suddenly into existence. These lines of cleavage had formed in such a way that a part of the earth's crust began to settle.

The land that began to settle included most of the Los Angeles basin. The line of cleavage began between Ocean Park and Santa Monica. Ocean Park went into the sea. Santa Monica settled a couple of feet, then seemed to stabilize and to take a new lease on the land. Extending inward, the line of cleavage followed Olympic Boulevard to the general vicinity of Sepulveda Street. Here it veered to the left, to the north, then continued inland straight up Wilshire Boulevard. On this street it went straight through Beverly Hills, then it turned to the left again and headed toward the

hills of Hollywood. These hills did not sink far enough to become islands, they simply slipped downward a few yards, enough to shake all buildings from their tops and from their sides. As the flatlands of the basin began to slip downward; the circling mountains, deprived of their supporting land masses, began to turn toward the sea, with the result that every building left standing to this point now began to lean like the famous Tower of Pisa. The mountains, the land itself into which their foundations had been driven, were being twisted. Under such conditions, the buildings erected on them simply had to fall.

Fall they did, like sand castles erased by an incoming tide.

School children of a later day would look at the map of this region and would wonder about the huge bite that had been taken out of the coastline. Inside the line of cleavage, the land subsided to sea level or lower. Outside the line of cleavage, there was subsidence but it stopped before reaching the level of the sea.

It was as if the beaches had suddenly moved inland.

Santa Monica was left relatively untouched and Pacific Palisades was left on top of its high sea cliffs. These towns suffered enormous damage, from the quakes and from the fires, but they did not sink into the sea. This catastrophe was reserved for what had been called the Los Angeles basin. Basin it had been, bay it became this morning. To the south of this region, the tract homes sprawling across the flatlands did not sink into the sea. The fire had already burned most of them.

The Palos Verdes hills became island tops. Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach, Redondo Beach, San Pedro, Wilmington, and Long Beach went down into the salty waters of the Pacific Ocean.

Seen on a map of the whole continent, the bite the ocean took would not seem very big. The coastline of North America would have hundreds of bigger bays. It would be

difficult to remember that this bay had once held one of the biggest cities of the United States.

This was the day when the land sunk, the day when the sea enlarged its ancient domain. This was the day when all the earth learned the deepest possible meaning for the word *catastrophe.*

The ground under the basin began to settle on Monday. It went down an inch at a time, a foot at a time; now and then, as the faults slipped and shoved their way to a new but still unstable balance of stresses, the land dropped five feet at a time. Since the whole basin was not much above sea level, the land did not have to fall very far to be under the sea.

As the land slipped, new faults came into existence, bringing new fissures into being. Some of these new fissures opened up into the sea, with the result that enormous masses of salt water dropped into them. The sound of the sea falling into these gaps was like heavy thunder, like violent cannon fire. Water began to surge in roaring tides along these fissures, widening them as it moved, taking great bits out of the ground on either side of the fissures, finding new cracks in the soil and exploring them, pouring water into the earth, gulping down small homes, swallowing apartment houses.

As the sea poured in, its additional weight forced the ground to sink faster, forced the earth's crust to tilt at a sharper angle, forced the mountains to bow deeper.

The normal work of the sea was to gnaw at the shore, to grind pebbles against rocks and sand against pebbles. To the sea, the shore must have been an enormous frustration, a huge bafflement. As long as the planet had lasted, the sea had tried to overcome the frustration of the land. It had chewed rocks into gravel and the gravel into sand and the sand into silt. It had sent vast clouds of moisture into the air as sky-borne paratroopers to drop their water inland where it would wash more of the land into the ocean. Be-

coming great rivers, this water had helped the sea gnaw at the land.

But in spite of all of these efforts, the land had succeeded in frustrating the sea. The great waters, however, had kept trying.

Now in the Los Angeles region the sea had the opportunity it had sought so long, the chance to take a huge bite out of the land.

With roaring crashes that were like triumphant thunder, the sea poured into the crevices, slapped furiously at the walls to widen them, roared along them at express-train speed, hit their ends and thundered again, spread out over the walls as they narrowed, dived down into the fissures and bored at the foundations of the city it was destroying.

The sea whooped as it worked; it shouted with all its ancient voices; it roared; it pounded; it made great hissing sounds; it undermined buildings and pulled them down into its watery arms; it picked up wooden structures and carried them on its surging waters. For many a century the sea had waited for its ancient brother, Earthquake, to lower the ground level so it could charge the land. Now the defenses of the land were down and the sea was releasing its long-frustrated energies.

Humans continued to exist in the Los Angeles basin. Those who had survived the quakes, who had evaded burning to death in the tremendous blazes, those who had had no way to escape, were still here. They had taken refuge on vacant lots, in parks, on lawns, on streets. The beaches were jammed with refugees who had thought to find safety from the fires by seeking the ocean. These were the first to drown.

The refugees from the fire had filled the beaches from low water mark up to the first row of houses. The first thought of most of these when they saw the sea coming in was that the tide was coming in. Then somebody shouted.

"Tidal wave!"

The cry sent them scrambling for the high places. They trampled each other to death as they tried to reach the top of the nearest hill. If there was no hill—and in these flat lands there usually wasn't—they tried to outrun the sea. This did not work. The sea came in over them as they ran.

During the preceding day and night, there had been horror, there had been terror, there had been panic. With all normal transportation blocked, with the freeways and the highways impassible, there had been no way of escape except by walking. Some had left the basin in this way but most had simply not had the strength to walk so far. They had given their legs away to the automobile and now when they had no cars, they had no legs either.

For the people living in the basin, this was the time for Noah's Ark. Only they lacked a Noah to point the way for them. It was doubtful if any ark built by human hands could have stayed afloat longer than a few minutes after being launched into the roaring flood pouring in from the sea.

Cannonading under the surface, sudden geysers spurted skyward, and great fissures opened for the roaring tides to pour through, the ground settling, jerking, jumping, thumping, bumping, rolling, twisting, enormous whirlpools coming suddenly into existence.

Up to this point, some of the tall buildings on Wilshire Boulevard had continued standing in defiance of the earth shocks. Gutted by flames, they had remained standing. After the fires had finished, thousands had sought refuge in them, thinking that the fact that the buildings were standing at all meant they were proof against further earthquake shocks.

These buildings were not proof against the sea, nor could they continue standing when their very foundations were settling under them. They went down like great dinosaurs

falling into the mud of vast prehistoric swamps. Water lapped along the crusted armor of their spines.

The people who had sought refuge in these buildings died like the dinosaurs, in muddy swamps. Their bones would lie where they had fallen until the planet was reshaped by some other race that would come after they had gone.

As the land started to sink and the sea began to come in, a wino asleep under the Santa Monica pier awakened from alcoholic slumber to find himself floundering in rising waters.

For an instant, he tried to swim. Then, as this effort became too much for him, the pier collapsed over his head.

Thus died Jams Erasmus Glee, as he would have wished, in a drunken stupor.

XII

ALL DURING this Monday morning when the sea was coming to claim the Los Angeles basin, Jim, Miriam and Susan Gray struggled to reach the low hills in the distance. They followed the streets of what had once been a small town here in the San Fernando Valley, a place of pleasant homes on circling drives.

All that remained of these little paradises were the circling drives. The houses, the garages, even the orange and lemon trees in the backyards, had all been turned into smoke and ashes. It was as if some black magician had passed this way and had waved his dark wand over a pleasant land, cursing it, pouring ashes over it.

Miriam looked at this land and pretended not to see it. Jim knew from the set expression on his wife's face that sometime this day they would have to find a resting place where they could stay several days. Susan walked like a little girl having a bad dream but determined to dream through the bad part in the hope that somewhere the dream would get better.

"You're a regular little soldier, honey," he told her.

"I'm mad, Daddy," she answered, glaring at him.

"What about, darling?" he asked, surprised.

"Nothing."

"Then why are you mad?"

"When I'm mad, I'm not scared. I'd rather be mad than scared," the child answered. "Also, as long as I stay mad, I can walk as fast as you and Mommy."

"Oh," he said, shocked. He glanced at his wife. Seeing his

look, she tried to smile, an effort that went aground on her smoke-and-dirt smudged face.

By noon, they had reached the first hill. By one o'clock, they were as near the top as they felt it was necessary to go. Around them were other hills. Below them, stretching away to the north and the south, they could catch glimpses of the San Fernando Valley. Seen between clouds of drifting smoke, the Valley looked a little like Dante's picture of the Inferno. In many places, new columns of very black smoke were boiling skyward. These marked oil storage depots newly caught. Other areas which had escaped the fire until now were beginning to burn. Here in the Valley, the quakes seemed to have done less damage, with the result that many of the big buildings, the department stores, the insurance company skyscrapers, the banks, were still standing. Most of these were fireproof.

Jim hardly dared look toward the Santa Monica mountains. He was afraid he would not find them visible but see the sea instead. Forcing himself to look, he gulped when he caught a glimpse of the mountains between clouds of drifting smoke. Now, from this hilltop, he could dimly hear a vast moaning sound that seemed to come from beyond the mountains seen across the Valley. Over there the earth was being tortured and was crying out in helpless pain.

He flicked on the battery-operated radio. The announcer had been changed, the frantic excitement was the same.

"While our reports are not as yet confirmed, it seems almost certain the information given us by our daring helicopter pilot that all—or almost all—of the Los Angeles basin has sunk or is sinking. Our pilot can only catch glimpses of what is below his ship. He can't land, he doesn't dare land. He says that water covers the whole basin and that there is enormous turmoil in this water, with rip tides running heavily. He says that some of the hilltops are now islands. Of course, he can say nothing about any individual who lived

in the basin but that his estimate is that the loss of life there has been almost total. Almost nobody who lived in the basin yesterday is alive today!"

The newcomer's voice broke into little puddles of muddy sound.

"Of course, this is not an official statement," he said, chokingly.

"Will the sea come and get us, Daddy?" Susan asked.

"No, honey," Jim answered quickly. "No. No, no! We're safe here on this side of the mountains."

"What if the mountains fall down, Daddy?" the child persisted.

"They won't, darling. We're safe here."

"Are we going to live here on this hill?" the child asked.

"We will stay here for a day or two, until we can find out what has happened in Los Angeles and in Santa—" He heard his voice falter as he tried to keep from revealing to the child that something might have happened to their home.

"In Santa Monica?" the child continued. "Are we going back to live in our house in the hills near Santa Monica?"

"Not right away, dear. I am sure the house has burned. But the foundations will be intact, and in time—"

"Jim, you're not thinking of trying to rebuild that house?" Miriam interrupted. "That would be—it would be utterly silly. You're only one man." Her voice was high and shrill and ear-grating.

"I was only thinking about it," Jim answered. "As to me being only one man, that's all anyone is—just one. But when several work together—"

The expression on Miriam's smoke and dirt-smudged face said she was sure he was out of his mind. It also said she had expected this to happen at any minute.

The idea that her husband was out of his mind was a projection of her own deep fear that she would go insane at

any moment. Ever since the quake had begun, she had had this fear.

"What if every house is destroyed?" she continued in a voice that was both demanding and challenging. "Everyone will have to rebuild his own house. Who will help you? And if you find someone to help, there will be no lumber, no cement, no gravel, no—" Her voice became a wail. "No food, no shelter—"

"I did not say I was going to do this; I said I was thinking about it," Jim answered. "Right now, I feel I'm lucky if I can even think. When the quakes stop, when the ground settles—"

"But Los Angeles is gone from the face of the earth! The radio just said so," Miriam said.

"We don't live in Los Angeles; we live in the mountains above Santa Monica," Jim answered. "The mountains are still there. You can look across the valley and see them right now."

Miriam looked at the mountains. To her at this moment, they seemed to exist in some other world, as peaks and as plateaus of horrible memories. She wished she could not see them.

"But our house is gone." she said.

"Darling, I did not say I was going to do anything right now." Jim repeated.

"But just food alone!" Miriam continued. "How would you eat?"

Jim pointed upward. "Right now that sky is black with smoke. As soon as the smoke clears, it will be black again, with helicopters bringing food, doctors, nurses, rescue workers, volunteer helpers of every kind. The whole sky will vibrate to the roar of engines as planes bring volunteer rescue workers. I don't doubt that this is the biggest catastrophe in all history. If I know my people, I know they will react by organizing the biggest rescue operation that ever took

place on this planet! Five million people will volunteer to come here and help clean up the mess made by the quake and by the fire. They won't wait for an act of Congress, nor will they wait to be told that life here is safe for them. They won't give a damn about the danger; they will recognize the need and will come to help."

His voice grew stronger as the vision caught him. He knew the heart of the land to which he belonged. It was as big as the continent itself. It would give and it would keep on giving. The only questions that would be asked would be how much and where?

Looking at him, Miriam seemed to find courage.

"Down at the plant, we spend most of our days trying to think of new and better ways to do what? To defend this land! We know what we have to defend—the biggest dream in human history, the biggest thing that ever happened in the world, a land where a man dare to try to become an individual, to think for himself, to learn how to direct his own life, his own destiny. Much of our time at the plant is spent thinking in terms of destruction, so many H-bombs on such and such a continent. So much warning time before the war-heads are over our continent. Our thinking has gone in the direction of warning time for our country, retaliation against any enemy or combination of enemies that may come against us. We have air fleets and surface fleets and striking forces and Polaris submarines. And right along with this has gone planning we thought we would never have to use, plans to pull back our striking forces and to use them for rescue work at home if an enemy attack succeeded in destroying one of our cities. You can bet that right now our fleets are heading home, to add their sailors and flyers and their marines to the rescue forces. And you can also bet that all of these will be as nothing in comparison to the common, ordinary citizens who will come here to work as unpaid volunteers. . . ."

His voice went into choked silence.

"Help?" he whispered. "As sure as I am an American, there will be help. The funeral sermons said for the dead will be drowned out by the hammers of volunteer workers building new homes for those who have remained alive. . . ."

Again his voice choked out. In his mind's eye, it seemed to him that he could see the day when the sky would be black with planes bringing the rescue workers he had talked about, bringing medicines, food, clothing, the ten thousand items a stricken land would need for rebuilding. He did not doubt that help would come. To help was the history of his people in the westering. In the past, if there had been an earthquake in Timbuctu, the nation had sent help. If a typhoon had struck the China Sea, American volunteer workers had gone there to help stricken fishing villages. If a landslide had buried a village in high Peru, volunteer workers had been on their way as soon as the news reached North America.

If this had been done for strangers, how much greater would be the response when the catastrophe was here in their own land! Hardly a county or a village in all the nation but had sent a son or a daughter to the West Coast. Now that catastrophe had come, there would be hardly a county or a village in all the nation that would not have a personal reason for sending helpers here.

As he talked, his wife settled herself down so that her back was resting against a stone ledge. Susan dropped her head in her mother's lap and went instantly to sleep. Jim Gray was quiet. His family was at rest. Now if he could only find some way to make his own feverish thoughts subside into quietness. . . .

All day long they remained near the top of the little hill. The rocky ledge against which they were resting was still shaking, now and then. Jim Gray looked often toward the Santa Monica mountains. They became the ramparts he

watched to decide his future. Each time he caught a glimpse of the tops of these hills through the smoke clouds, he felt a little safer, a little surer. But deep in his heart, he knew he would never feel really safe again. He dozed often, each time to awaken with a start and to look hastily toward the Santa Monica mountains, making certain they were still there, making certain the sea was not washing over or around them.

One time when he awakened a big man with tousled black hair was sitting a few feet below him. The big man wore scarlet pajamas trimmed in royal blue. In his hands he held a medium sized sack. Every so often he opened the sack to stare at its contents. Each time when he saw what was in the sack, he began to laugh at some private joke.

Looking at the big man, Jim squeezed his pocket to make certain the .38 was still there.

Curled up beside him now, with her head on his leg, Miriam made soft noises in her sleep. Lying within the protective arm of her mother, Susan moaned softly, audible noises that told of nightmares taking place in her inner world. Jim wondered if the child would be haunted all her life with memories of the earth shaking and of walking interminably along a freeway that seemed to go nowhere. Reaching down, he pulled a blanket over her.

Meanwhile, he kept an eye on the man with the sack. He did not like the looks of this fellow, and he intended to watch him but time and fatigue pulled at his eyes and he drifted into dreams without quite knowing that he had gone to sleep.

The dreams were nightmares. It seemed to him in these bad dreams that he was chained to a huge rock which shook like a great bowl of jelly.

With a start, he came out of the land of nightmares. He knew something had awakened him. His first thought was of the man with the sack. The fellow seemed to have done

nothing. Seeming unaware of his surroundings, the man was talking to something inside the sack.

Then Jim realized what had awakened him. The earth had done it. The earth had stopped shaking.

Around him, in the whole vast valley, was an uneasy silence. This had come when the earth had stopped shaking. It was as if the whole world were holding its breath lest the earth begin shaking again.

On Jim's right, at about the same level of the hill, a tall man leaned on a long staff which he had thrust into a rock crevice below him. The tall man stared across the valley in silence.

"Are the mountains still there?" Jim asked.

The tall man seemed to grasp his meaning. "Yes, they are still there," he answered. His voice was like a bell. "I'm watching them too."

Jim flicked on the radio.

"I regret to say that our helicopter reporter has apparently crashed," an announcer said. "We do not know what has happened to him. We have had no report from him in over two hours. However, other ships have now managed to get into the area. The latest reports, confirmed from many sources, is that the Los Angeles basin has vanished. It has disappeared. It is gone. It is no more."

Jim Gray looked again at the Santa Monica mountains.

"As I told you before, they're still there," the tall man said, without looking around.

The newscaster spoke again.

"Let me repeat, we have no report and no estimate on the number of casualties that have taken place in this earthquake, in this fire and land slippage. We don't know how many have died here. We don't know their names. We don't know where they lived. Probably no one will ever know the number of those who died here. But this much we know: very few have escaped alive, few could have escaped. There

wasn't time for it. This means that the casualty list will be almost as big as the total population of the area. . . ."

The hoarse voice choked itself into silence. It made two more attempts to continue, grating noises that tore the eardrums, then took itself off the air. Another voice quickly took its place.

"Secondary to the catastrophe in Los Angeles is the fact that the quakes there, plus the land subsidence, have set up enormous tidal waves which will strike with destructive violence on all the shores washed by the Pacific Ocean. Warnings have gone out to Hawaii, to Alaska, to South America, to Japan, and to all the islands of the south Pacific, to prepare for tidal waves. Ships at sea have been warned. Seemingly as far-away echoes of the great earthquake in the Los Angeles area, small quakes have appeared all along the western coast of North America. Mexico City has reported minor damage from small earth shocks. It was as if some giant had tossed a huge boulder into a quiet pool at Los Angeles. Ripples from this pool have spread in every direction. Railroad tracks have been displaced, mountains have suffered severe landslides, volcanos have erupted—"

This was part of the tale of destruction, as told by a frantic voice in some newsroom far from the scene. Keeping one eye on the man with the sack, Jim Gray listened. The voice of the announcer sounded as if his vocal chords had blisters on them.

"There is no question that this is the biggest catastrophe in human history. Whether you measure it in terms of loss of life or in terms of loss of property, it comes out as the biggest thing that ever happened. Sub-surface stresses that have been increasing for years, perhaps for centuries, perhaps for geological eras, have suddenly released in violent upheaval. Geologists have known for many years that a vast system of interlocking faults existed in Southern California. They knew that a slight slippage in one fault might set off

slippages in other faults and that these in turn might serve as triggers for other, unknown faults. Thus a chain reaction might come into existence which would set off earthquakes like hydrogen bombs. . . ."

Grating once too often, the vocal chords of this announcer became too hoarse for further use. Another voice took over the task of reporting, interpreting, and evaluating catastrophe. This voice was cool and calm. It was detached from the emotional impact of the scenes it was describing.

For an instant, Jim Gray hated the owner of this voice.

"At the present time, the earth shocks in this area have subsided," the voice said. "The earth is at rest. However, no geologist has been willing to predict how long this quietness will continue—"

Jim Gray switched off the radio.

Night came in a mixture of smoke, darkness, and confused, muffled sounds that seemed to have lost all normal meaning. In this confused time, a footfall was the step of a maniac moving in the darkness. Or so it seemed. Miriam and Susan awakened, Miriam to protest that she was not hungry, Susan to claim she was starving. The packs had tinned meat, bread, and rock-hard candy. These they ate in the darkness. The canteens still held enough water for this time. Tomorrow they would be dry. Tomorrow would be a time when they would have to find ways to find water, then to boil it before drinking. They ate in darkness.

Below them, the man with the sack could be heard muttering to himself. At the sound, Miriam clutched Jim's arm, asking whispered questions. He cautioned her to silence.

"I don't think he will bother us if we don't do anything to excite him."

"But he's insane! Do we have to spend a night here on a hillside with an insane man?"

"Right now, insanity is a disease that everyone has, the only difference being degree," Jim answered. He heard his

wife gasp, then she suggested in a whisper that they move to another place.

"And have him follow us when he sees our light?" Jim asked. "No. It's better that we remain here."

"You—do you still have that gun?"

"Yes," he answered.

Miriam was silent. Jim did not know whether she was thinking or was trying not to think. Off in the night a rumble sounded. She moved closer to her husband.

"Just a minor earth readjustment," Jim said. "We will have these minor quakes for months, for years, perhaps."

"Do you think the worst is over?" she questioned.

"For those living in the Los Angeles basin, the worst is certainly over," he answered.

All night long, with the .38 in his pocket where he could feel it, he drifted in and out of sleep. Below him he could hear the muttering of the man with the sack. The fellow seemed unaware that darkness had fallen. Now and then he laughed, a burst of ghoulish sound in this haunted darkness.

The earth seemed to groan as it turned; it seemed to twist, to writhe inwardly. Little soft jolts went through this rocky hill. Jim fancied that these little shocks came from the hands of a giant physician under the earth. This physician was shoving the blocks of the broken earth back into place—like broken bones being slipped back into position—then was giving them gentle little taps to settle them down. Jim knew this fantasy was not true but it made him feel better to think of the earth being mended and he treasured it for this reason.

When Jim awakened, which happened often, it was to stare into a black night that had no sight of any star anywhere in it, into a smoke-filled night which had strange sounds coming in from far distances. Once, when he awakened, the drifting smoke clouds in the sky had formed a pattern which left a temporary hole in it.

Through this hole he glimpsed the stars, glittering lights in the far-off infinities of space-time, sparkling in the quiet night as if nothing bad had ever happened on a planet called Earth. Jim felt like leaping to his feet and shouting with joy at the sight of the stars through the hole in the smoke clouds. He had not thought he would ever see them again. Now, glimpsing this way, they were like old, firm friends seen again after an absence of many days. When he slid back into sleep, he had an easier mind for having glimpsed the stars.

Dawn came over California. In this smoke-filled and now wretched land, few knew the sun was again in the sky. Jim Gray awakened. Around him others were stirring. To a man, to a woman, to a child, they had slept the restless sleep of utter exhaustion. Awakening, they were surprised to find themselves alive.

Jim Gray turned on the radio. Another voice was on the air. The news was not good—but it was not as bad as it could have been. Jim listened. He was cold, hungry, cramped, but he knew he had to make up his mind as to which of his many problems he would tackle first.

XIII

"AT LAST we have definite information on the extent of the destruction in the Los Angeles basin," the radio said. "Air force planes using camera equipment designed to take ground pictures through fog and smoke have returned with good photographs of the region. These are not only clear pictures, they have also been confirmed by other pictures taken by other planes on other flights. The news is—the news is—Well, it is not good."

This announcer was trying hard to be objective, to be matter-of-fact, and to report the news with calm detachment. He was finding this a difficult task.

"We regret to say that these pictures reveal clearly that the whole Los Angeles basin is now under the sea. . . ."

Miriam had awakened. As she heard the words coming over the radio, she tried to get closer to her husband.

"Oh God, why do such things happen?" she whispered.

Jim patted her gently. Susan stirred. Protecting the child from witnessing the misery of the mother, Miriam was instantly quiet.

"I can't answer that question," Jim said. "I don't know enough to answer it. This much is certain—all kinds of bad things happen to us humans. What happens does not matter as much as what we do about it. In other words, our reactions are the most important part."

"How can you react to an earthquake except by screaming and running?" Miriam asked.

"When it's happening, that's about all you can do. But when the quake is over, you can learn from it. You can learn

where your buildings were weak and how to make them stronger."

"Who can decide where to build a city? Cities just grow," Miriam protested.

"Maybe in the future we will have to learn how to plan their growth," Jim said. "As to where cities can be built, perhaps we will learn how to check the internal stresses of the earth and will know from this stress map which places are safe for cities, which are not."

Miriam was quiet. Jim knew she was as cold and cramped and as bitterly uncomfortable as he was but she was not mentioning it.

"But what are we going to do? I mean the three of us, right now, right this morning?" Her voice was a whisper in the smoke-blackened fog that drifted around the top of the hill.

Jim stared into the smoke and fog. He could hear voices talking in many places. Somewhere below him he could hear a muttering noise that he thought came from the man with the sack.

Jim ignored all of this. He was trying to make up his mind, trying to balance this risk against that safety, weighing this strength against that danger.

The voice of the newscaster had weakened. Now it came on again.

"The pictures reveal a new coastline. All of Santa Monica is above water. The town itself is a shambles from the fire but it is above the sea. Most of Ocean Park, just south of Santa Monica, is under the sea. The new coastline runs roughly along what was once Wilshire Boulevard. Much of Hollywood is gone into the ocean. Downtown Los Angeles is gone. The new coastline cuts sharply toward Long Beach. Most of this city is still above water."

The announcer cleared his throat.

"In many places, the land submergence has been for

only a few feet, with the result that the roofs of many buildings are out of the water. These are covered with people. . . ."

Jim flicked off the radio.

"The Santa Monica mountains did not sink," he said. "This means what is left of our home is still above the sea."

He spoke without knowing why he was speaking, without quite realizing the meaning of the words he had used. Behind and above him, he was vaguely aware of light in the sky. He thought it came from the sun though the solar orb was not yet visible through the smoke and fog. He was still trying to balance the forces rising in him, trying to bring these energies into a focus that would give him a sense of direction.

He flicked on the radio again.

"Seismologists say Los Angeles is now quiet, is free from quakes and from earth tremors. Geologists say that a period of readjustment will follow in which there will be small quakes but that in all probability, all major quakes are now finished. They feel that a long-time period of relative stability will follow for the whole west coast region. . . ."

During this period Jim Gray had managed to push his fears aside. In this split second, he had made up his mind. He flicked off the radio.

"I'm going back home," he said. He spoke the words calmly, with no undue emphasis on them. He heard his wife catch her breath.

"Of course, I will help you and Susan reach transportation so you can return to your parents' home. You will remain there until I can get an adequate shelter of some kind for you here. Then you can return again."

In his mind, the forces had reached a balance which included the maximum safety for his family and the maximum constructive effort from him.

"Jim!" Miriam sat up quickly and her voice was sharp as she spoke.

He saw again that her clothes were now rags and that her hands and her face were grimy with smoke and dirt. She had had no chance to wash her face since the quake began! Looking down, he saw that her canvas shoes had been pierced by sharp glass that had come from broken automobile headlights. He knew something of the pain that was in her.

In him was sympathy, a fellow-feeling—and something more. He loved this woman. When she was in pain, he suffered with her. He saw, also, the dirty face of their child, now rousing from sleep. How much he loved her, too. How much he wanted to save both from pain and from emotional suffering!

"Of course, I don't mean I'm going back to our house right now," he said hastily. "I'll take you two all of the way back to your parents' and I'll take a whole month to rest up—"

He saw that Miriam was trying to interrupt him, so he tried to talk louder and faster.

"The plant will be rebuilt somewhere in this area," he said. "The boys there don't know the meaning of failure! No doubt we will discover we have lost many of our key workers—"

"*Jim!*"

"As soon as I can return here and can get our house along toward rebuilding—" He was changing his plans as he talked but he hoped she would not notice.

"Do you think you can rebuild it alone?" Miriam asked.

"I said before I will have help."

"Who will help you? Who won't have the same problems you have? Who will have strength left over to help someone else?"

"Somebody." On this point, Jim remained purposively vague. "I don't know exactly who. There will be many who will volunteer."

"You must be out of your mind to even think of going back

into that place alone," Miriam said. Her voice was hard and firm and the expression in her eyes was completely new to him. He did not know the meaning of this expression. Was she finally losing her grip on reality? Considering the trauma she had been through, a nervous breakdown was possible, even probable.

"I don't think it will be so tough to return here," Jim said.

"Nobody but an idiot would even think of it, alone."

He did not like what she was saying. He liked even less where it might be leading. He tried to be reasonable. She persisted in being unreasonable. He told her to shut up.

She stared at him as if she did not believe her ears. "Jim! You've never spoken to me like that before in all our life together."

"You have never irritated me as you have now," Jim answered. He took a deep breath and tried to muster what little logic he felt was in him. "I'm not asking you to return with me at first; I'm only asking you to come back when it's safe."

"That's what I don't like!" she told him. She seemed to be looking at him and past him, as if there was something in this smoke- and fog-filled air that was catching her attention.

"But a man wants his wife to be safe!" Jim said.

"And a woman wants to know if her husband is safe," Miriam said.

"Mommy is right, daddy," Susan spoke. She seemed quite unperturbed by the dispute of her parents. "It's not enough to hear you over the telephone."

In dismay, he stared at his child.

"We need to be closer than that," Susan said. She nodded as if she had explained everything.

"But—" he whispered.

"We need to be close enough to see you and to feel you," the child continued.

"But we will only be separated a little while," he protested.

"Even a little while is too long," Susan said.

"Susan is right," Miriam said. She got to her feet and pointed toward the Santa Monica mountains.

"Our home is there," she said. "We'll all go help rebuild it."

"But you can't go with me!" he said.

"Why not?" Miriam asked.

"Because it will be dangerous!"

"Won't it be just as dangerous for you alone?" Miriam asked.

"Well— But you can't take a child—" he started to say.

"You can't leave me behind," Susan said. "I've been a good soldier. You said so yourself. I'll still be a good soldier."

He looked at Miriam. She was not looking at him but seemed to be looking beyond him. It seemed to him that she was not seeing him. As she began to speak, he realized she was not talking to him but was in earnest conversation with someone invisible to him.

"Miriam!" he said. "Miriam!"

She did not answer him. Indeed, she did not seem to hear him.

"No, grandmother. No. No. *No!*" Miriam was saying.

Jim turned quickly to look in the direction she was looking. The sun was higher now, though still not visible; the light was a little better. Smoke and fog still swirled around this hill but he could see clearly enough to be certain that Miriam was talking to an invisible person. In his mind was one thought—that as a result of the enormous stress of the earthquake, she had become insane. At this thought, flesh crawled all over Jim Gray's body. Nothing that had happened in the quake, the fire, or the radio reports of the sinking of the Los Angeles Basin had hit him as hard as the knowledge—or was it the fear?—that his wife had gone insane.

To her own way of thinking, she was not insane. She was merely watching a vision, an inward seeing, a thing of her own mind that was being presented with such reality that she took it to be real. Perhaps this vision had come as a result

of nerve exhaustion, of too much agony and too little rest, of fatigue that had become too heavy. She knew that every nerve in her body clamored for rest—months of it—and for an endless series of soaking hot tubs. She knew her husband fully intended to send her to a place where she could have all the hot tubs her tired body wanted, all the rest she needed.

She also knew she had no intention of going to this place where hot tubs existed. She could not go there because to do so would be to return East. Each time she tried to think of going East, each time she tried to say she would take Susan to the home of her parents, the image of her grandmother, in excellent likeness, rose in her mind. Her grandmother said just one word:

"Traitoress!"

The image and the word kept Miriam from returning. She knew her grandmother to be dead; she also knew that some people claimed to be able to hear messages from the spirit world. She did not know whether or not this was happening to her. The mechanics of the thing did not seem to be too important. What was important was the message that was being conveyed.

"Would you want to be safe while your man rebuilt your home without you?" her grandmother said.

It seemed to Miriam that this image of her grandmother was a composite thing, that it was made up not only of her memory of her dead grandmother but it was also made up of bits and pieces from other grandmothers farther back in the chain of life behind her, and that their experiences plus the wisdom they had gained was being communicated to her. She suspected these were the images of the women who had followed their men in the westering, who had walked with them across a thousand centuries, who had crossed Europe with them, who had crossed the Atlantic with them, then had

come across the North American continent with them to this coast where the westering ended—or ended temporarily.

"Would you be safe when your man faces danger alone?" these grandmothers said, all speaking in one voice and with one meaning. "What kind of a woman are you to think such thoughts. Are you our granddaughter or are you a child some cuckoo slipped into the nest?"

"There is danger for Susan and me here—" Miriam wailed.

"There has always been danger!" her grandmothers screamed in her mind. "There was danger when we crossed the Atlantic Ocean. Those tiny ships! The ocean was a watery waste filled to its very shores by the bones of men who had tried to cross it. This was real danger! Did we turn back because of it? Did we complain at the risk? We did not! If we had, you would not have come into existence. All we asked was to know where our men were going, so we could go with them!"

"But—" Miriam tried to say. Her grandmothers would have nothing to do with her talk.

"And those landings in Massachusetts, were they safe? They were not. Was a greeting committee waiting for us with hot tea and warm blankets, ready to take us to a good motel where we could have hot tubs? We were greeted by painted Indians who had never had a bath in their lives!"

Miriam Gray flinched from the impact of these inaudible words. She felt guilty about even wanting a bath when so many around her had little clothing and no food. She tried to tell her grandmothers how much their words hurt her. About this, they cared nothing.

She pleaded with her grandmothers, telling them how tired she was, how bloody and how blistered were her feet, how weak she was from hunger. They jeered at this talk. She wailed that it was true.

"So what if it is true?" her grandmothers screamed in her mind. "It was also true that the Atlantic was cold and deep!

When we started across this continent, it was true that Indians might scalp us. It was true that bad water might poison us. It was true that rattlesnakes might strike us. It was true we might die from starvation. If we had turned back because these dangers were true, how would California have gotten built? By people who rode here in Pullman cars, who came in airplanes? Who would have laid the rails? Who would have built the airports? If you walk westward with your man, it makes no difference if you leave bloody footprints behind you. You will then have been faithful to the westering. This is all that matters, that you shall be faithful to the westward movement."

Miriam tried to think about these words that were exploding in her mind. There was hope in them somewhere, if she could only find it. Her grandmothers sounded as if they meant what they said. But where was the hope she sensed? And back of all of this was what purpose? Why the westering? Why the trial? Why the struggle, why the long, long journey? Standing erect, she looked at her husband. He was staring at her from vastly confused eyes. His beard was black and heavy, his face was dirty. Hatless, his hair was tousled. Susan stood beside him. The child seemed to understand what was happening to her mother and to be unconcerned about it. Was Susan the next link in the chain? Miriam wondered. Beyond Susan were other links to come into existence? If so, was she destined to be a grandmother? Miriam thought. And as the composite grandmothers were now speaking in her mind, would she in some far future become a part of a voice speaking to some grandchild as yet lost in the mists of future time? What words would she speak to that child? Would they be bitter driving words, or would they be words of encouragement and good cheer?

"What words will the child deserve?" her grandmothers asked, in a voice that dripped acid.

"But I am afraid," Miriam whispered.

"We were afraid too," her grandmothers said, in a composite voice that was suddenly a little more gentle. "How much were we afraid! When the warwhoops came and the arrows whistled, we were afraid. When the drought came and the crops failed and the cattle and the horses died, we were afraid. When the rattlesnake buzzed in the tall grass."

"Is there no resting place from fear?" Miriam asked.

"Not behind you, there isn't. When you travel westward, there is no resting place from fear to the east of you," her grandmothers answered. "True, we have had resting places where we slipped our burdens to the ground for a while. We spent a century in this green valley, a lifetime on this fertile plain, two centuries beside that great river. Now and then we lived in peace for a whole generation. But this was unusual. If the barbarians did not come upon us, then the spirit awakened and drove us."

"Spirit?" Miriam questioned.

"The spirit of the peoples following the westering," her grandmothers answered. "Do you think the westward movement was an accident? It was not. What we called *spirit*—meaning what can only be described as a kind of god—moved us, led us, and if we stopped overlong beside this river ford where the fishing was good, the spirit drove us. Always it says four words: *Follow the setting sun!* It is the same spirit that brought us up from the world of the apes that moves us westward."

"From the land of the apes?" Miriam questioned. It seemed to her that this commingled image of her grandmothers in her mind had strange ideas.

"We are apes and the children of apes!" her grandmother answered. "Do you think that you are human just because you are wearing the hide of a human?" The laughter of the grandmothers was harsh and shrill. "All the hide gives you is the chance to take the heart and the mind of ape and make it into something better, into something human. The hide you

wear marks your present limits. If you use the opportunity thus given to improve the heart and the mind of the ape hidden inside you, then you will have taken a step toward the land where spirit means us to live eventually—the region of the summer stars."

"What?" Miriam gasped.

"In your mind has been the question of the reason of the westering, the why of it all," her grandmothers said. "This is the reason: In some far day the region of the summer stars will be our home. We are apes on our way to heaven!"

Triumph sounded in the blended voices of many grandmothers as they spoke of this, the far-off goal of their endeavor.

"We have been brought westward because it is here on the shores of this western sea that the first crude space ships will be built," her grandmothers continued. "The purpose of the westering is and always has been to reach this land, this California, where the first sky ships will come into existence. Here also, will come into existence the men fit to fly them."

Miriam felt still another question move into her mind but she did not ask it aloud.

"Do you think a quitter or a coward or a stupid man will fly these ships?" her grandmothers continued. "No. It will take men who have survived in spite of earthquake and fire to fly the ships that go starward. Another purpose of the difficulties of the westering was to weed out the weak and thus to create men fit to face the stars."

For an instant, the image Miriam was seeing in her mind left off its scolding and smiled.

"Child, we know far better than you the meaning of difficulties. We know what it means to walk on bloody feet. We know what it means to go hungry. Worse, we know what it means to let our children go hungry. All the meanings of the word catastrophe we know from experience across the ages. But we know also that this is the only way that men fit

to reach the stars can come into existence. You have a choice before you—to go west and become the mother of men, or to go east, and quit."

The image that had smiled turned stern again.

"Here is the goal," her grandmother said. "Look at it and make your decision."

The image of her grandmothers vanished. In its place in her mind a new image appeared—of all the stars in space, of all the planetary systems alive with their different life forms, of solitary suns in all their lonely splendor waiting for their planetary systems—for life—to come to them.

"This is the future of those who are faithful to the westering," her grandmothers whispered, in her mind. "That they shall live in the region of the summer stars. . . ."

Then the image slipped from her mind. She found she was looking at her husband. She saw again that his eyes held worry and that his face was covered with whiskers and smudged with dirt and with sweat. In appearance, he had come a great distance the neatly-dressed, brisk, alert young man who had gone to work at his special plant each morning.

She saw other things about her husband now—things she had missed before. She gave him a purpose for rebuilding her home, because she was the link he had chosen with the future of their race—she was his wife. Was she one who walked with him only when the path was smooth or did she walk when the path was rough? In addition, she saw he needed her because of the comfort that she gave him. Looking at him, she saw he was worrying about her, that he was deeply concerned about her. She asked him what was wrong.

"You were talking to someone who isn't—who wasn't here," he said uncomfortably.

"Yes," she said. "I was talking to pictures in my mind, pictures of my grandmothers."

She faced her husband. When she spoke her voice was quite calm.

"Susan and I are going to stay here with you," she said. As she spoke, she was aware that the eyes of her daughter suddenly were filled with life and joy. She realized now that the child had not wanted to return East.

She saw sudden light appear in Jim's tired eyes too. The smile that had started up came up again, a little stronger. But it was still a doubtful smile. The mind behind it had many reservations.

"Danger—" he began.

"Danger sharpens our minds," she answered. "Danger makes us."

The smile came up again, much stronger now. "I picked a good wife when I picked you," Jim said, smiling.

"It was I who did the picking," she answered. "I picked a good husband."

Then she did what she had wanted to do all along, she went into his arms. Susan tugged at them and they lifted her up and held her between them.

"Who were you talking to, Mommy?" Susan asked.

"Did you see them too, darling?"

"Yes."

"They were your grandmothers, honey," Miriam whispered. The child seemed instantly to understand. Later, Miriam would wonder about the miracle of understanding possessed by a child. At this moment, however, she was aware of a feeling, a definite impression that something far greater than they was upon them, was communicating with them, and was very subtly controlling them. She sensed that this *something* was the spirit of the race that had brought them westward. This *something* was coming to them now to help them recover from the incredible hardships that lay directly behind them. Because she had risen above the fear and above the pain and had made her own decision, this *something*

helped her, gave her additional strength, gave her subtle energy, gave her courage, and more than all else, gave her love.

Miriam was giddy with this knowledge. "We will rebuild our home," she said, in a voice that was suddenly loud and clear.

The smoke and the fog had lifted, and the little hill around them was literally covered with listening humans. They had sought refuge here during the night. Now they listened to Miriam talk.

Seeing this, she quickly drew closer to her husband. Sensing that she was afraid, he told her that these people were friends.

"When you live through an earthquake with anybody, you know him forever after," he answered.

Directly below her she saw a big man with a heavy sack in one hand. As she watched, she saw he held an automatic pistol in the other hand. Directly to her right was a man in pajamas. He was accompanied by a bikini-clad woman. Feet stirred above her. Turning, she saw a tall man rising on the top of the hill. Leaning on a long staff, the tall man was bowing to her. She wondered why.

"Thank you, lady, for the message," the tall man said. She stared at him in dismay, wondering what he meant. In her was the sense of powerful forces working on this hill.

"Sometimes, without knowing it, we are a channel for the spirit," the tall man continued. "You brought a message from the spirit of the whole Pacific Ocean, for those of us who have the guts to go back and face disaster and rebuild on the ruins of our wrecked cities. I also bring a message."

Around this hill many were listening, watching, wondering. Minutes before, they had been utterly tired, dejected, whipped, and beaten people. Now they had a little strength back in them.

"Some of you know me, most of you don't," the tall man

continued. "I am Propher the Prophet. Sometimes I was a lying prophet, but now and then the gift was on me, and I saw true. A minute ago the gift was on this lady. She saw true. Now the gift is on me. And I see true. What do I see?"

His voice was like a bell ringing loud and clear.

"If we go back into disaster, I see a new city rising on the shores of this western sea. From San Diego on the south it will stretch beyond the borders of Canada on the north, a city on ten thousand hills, a city waiting now for us to build it!"

There was something in the voice of this man that caught his listeners.

"Here each of us makes his choice," the bell-voice said. "If we go East, we go out of the picture of the future. We will know no more the spirit that has led us here. But if we return to our smashed and burned world, and rebuild it, then the city that we will build the biggest city the human race has ever known. Our swimming pool will be the whole Pacific Ocean and another swimming pool—will be the vast ocean of space itself!"

Listening, Miriam Gray caught her breath.

"We will swim in space itself," the bell-voice said. "We will make our home, eventually, in the region of the summer stars!"

To Miriam Gray the fact that this tall man used this phrase meant that something far bigger than either of them had been over this hill this morning, something that had inspired her and which now inspired this tall man. Back into her mind again came the vision she had seen before, the glimpse of great space, and of all the stars that sparkled there in the summer nights. The vision inspired her.

Around her, she could see others who felt the same way.

But not all were inspired. On Miriam's right, the man in pajamas, the man who was accompanied by the bikini-clad woman, had other plans.

"I'm Ed Stauncher and I want to go back East. Which way to the nearest airport?"

"That way, sir!" the staff of the tall man lifted to point in a specific direction. "Please go East, if that is your will."

Ed Stauncher went around the hill. The bikini-clad young woman was clinging to his arm.

Now a child's voice rose, in sudden surprise.

"Mommy! Look at that man down there! He's got another man's head in a sack!"

Jim and Miriam Gray realized that it was their daughter speaking. Turning, they saw that the big man wearing the scarlet pajamas trimmed in royal blue had opened the sack and had taken out its contents. The sack had contained the head of a man.

Now the big man lifted his bloody trophy aloft. "This is the head of Sam Lamont!" he screamed. "I'm going west with you—"

Jim Gray reached for the .38. This was a motion that Tommy Bolt had never failed to see. In his world, to fail to see another man reaching for a gun was to die. Bolt jerked up his own gun.

Propher's long wooden shaft with the knife projecting from the end of it went over Jim Gray's shoulder and continued downward. With the sword blade contained in the shaft released, the long staff made an excellent spear. The point of the blade struck Tommy Bolt just at the mid-section.

Tommy Bolt dropped his gun and grabbed the spear. Trying to pull it from his body, he collapsed before he could finish the job.

Propher the Prophet walked past Jim and Miriam Gray and retrieved his spear. He gestured toward the sky.

"We don't need any head hunters in the region of the summer stars," he said.

His gaze lifted to the Grays. Smiling, he bowed to them. His long staff, the spear retracted, swept in a circle around

his head, to end up pointing westward. All who saw this gesture—and no one missed it—grasped its meaning. Westward, then upward toward the summer stars. . . .

Jim and Miriam Gray and Susan walked with Propher the Prophet. Above them in the sky was the sound of motors. But smoke and fog were up there. Then the smoke and the fog began to lift and what was up there was revealed.

The sky was filled with helicopters, with dozens of them, with hundreds of the ships with the whirling wings. Up above them, circling like craft ready and waiting for orders, were hundreds of great troop carriers. Higher in the sky were vast jets.

Now when the smoke began to lift and the surface was revealed, the helicopters began to drop quickly toward the earth, finding fast landings in vacant lots and on deserted streets. One by one the great trooper carriers began to slip into a pattern. These did not land. From them suddenly blossomed long streamers of silk.

"Paratroopers!" Jim gasped. "They must have the whole United States Air Force up there, filled with troops, with doctors, with nurses!" Unbidden, his heart seemed to leap upward into his throat. Pride such as he had never known was suddenly rising in him.

When the troop carriers had finished their drops, the great jets began to come lower. From them came other chutes, carrying food, medicines.

The pride in Jim Gray grew and grew. He had known how his own people would react to disaster. Now he was seeing their reaction with his own eyes, hearing the beat of motors coming to help with his own ears.

"California is not the end of the road," Propher said softly. "It is only a stopping point for the night."

The eyes of the prophet seemed to look down thousands of years into the future as he spoke.

"When we walk west, we do not walk alone," he said softly.

This, then, was the end of the time when the earth shook, of the night when fire was king, of the day when the sea gobbled down a great chunk of the land. Those who lived through these horrors were people not likely to be stopped by earthquakes, by fire, or by land submergences. Nor was the nation likely to be stopped by such catastrophes. It was indeed, as if the whole nation was also a part of the westering, and that California was only the spear point of a vast westward movement. When the point of the spear was dulled, the whole nation rushed to help sharpen it again.

Perhaps, deep in their hearts, the people of the whole land knew secretly in their hearts that their future home really lay in the depths of space, in the region of the summer stars, and that the United States, and California, were only stop-overs for the night, in the long, long journey that the race makes.

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